

Nicaragua on the Edge

Sandinistas Hold International Solidarity Conference

by John Daniel — p.4



The Madrid Conference: Peace Talks or an Empty Show? 1 by Michael Warshawski	Steve Bloom Responds to a Reader: Is the Fight for Socialism Still Valid? 21
For the Conference or for Peace?..... 2 Statement of the Revolutionary Communist League	In Memory of Haskell Berman..... 25 by David Weiss
From Moscow: Workers' Democracy—the Alternative to the New Dictatorship..... 8	Ann Snipper Saluted at Memorial Meeting..... 25
The CPSU Died but Bolshevism Lives..... 9 by Aleksei Gusev	On the Unification Process 26 Resolution adopted by FIT National Plenum
U.S.-Soviet Workers Information Committee Holds First Public Meeting..... 11	Reexamining the Economic Program of the Left Opposition in the USSR— Part 1 28 by Barry M. Lituchy
The Current Struggle for Abortion Rights in the U.S.... 12 by Evelyn Sell	Notebooks for the Grandchildren 52. Love and Hatred 33 by Mikhail Baitalsky
Founding of Labor Party Advocates Sparks Discussion on the Left 16 by David Riehle	Letters..... 36

Who We Are

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

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.

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, No. 92, January 1992

Closing date December 8, 1991

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

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The Madrid Conference: Peace Talks or an Empty Show?

by Michael Warshawski

Michael Warshawski is a prominent member of the Revolutionary Communist League (Matspen), Israeli section of the Fourth International. This article is reprinted from News From Within (November 9, 1991), published by the Alternative Information Center.

While world public opinion is held fast by the television extravaganza taking place now in Madrid under American direction, the Israeli public finds it hard to believe that what is happening at the peace conference is an "historic event." There is nothing in the reaction of the Israeli public which might recall, even a bit, the excitement which accompanied Anwar al-Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. The public is divided between skepticism and the feeling that, once again, the nations of the world have got together to trap the Jews and endanger their future.

This attitude among the people has been deliberately created by the government, which not only does not believe in the conference nor want it to succeed, but has also decided to immunize the public from any delusion that peace between Israel, on the one hand, and the Palestinians, on the other, is on the way. It is symbolic that, on the advice of government ministers, the head of the government broadcasting authority gave an order not to play "peace songs" in the near future, "So as not to create euphoria" . . . and, indeed, there is no euphoria among the Israeli public. If not euphoria, what then? In this, of course, opinion is divided according to political outlook.

The Settlers—To Strengthen Shamir from the Right

Among the tens of thousands of people from the right, especially settlers from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights, who came to demonstrate in the City Square in Tel Aviv the night before Shamir's trip to the Spanish capital, only a minority had any doubt about the faithfulness of the prime minister to the Greater Land of Israel and the settlement enterprise. Most of those present—including government ministers and leaders in his party—know that Shamir belongs to the "national camp" and is no more moderate or yielding than Geula Cohen from Tehiah or than Rehav'am Ze'evi from the party of transfer.

"Peace for Peace" was the main slogan of the right-wing demonstration, and this is also the motto of Shamir in Madrid. "You don't sell your mother," screamed the settlers, and, in his speech in Madrid, Shamir answered them, "Who is talking about selling at all?" It is not accidental that, except for MK Geula Cohen, all the heads of the right congratulated Shamir on "his nationalistic and proud speech," and the delegation of the settlers which came to Madrid, as though to express a position different than that of the government, presented him with flowers as a sign of admiration.

The right in Israel understands the policy of Shamir exactly as it is: to gain time, to drag out the discussions for two-three years and, in the meantime, to establish dozens of new settlements and settle 200,000 Jews in them. And this is exactly the policy they want; as one of the spokesmen of the settlers, Aharon Domb said: "In the end, what we are talking about is playing for time. I need another three years in order to reach 200,000 people in Judea and

Samaria, and then they can have as many conferences as they want. No power in the world will evacuate that many people." Domb and Shamir are cut from the same cloth, and see eye to eye on the policy of Israel towards the peace conference.

The point of the demonstration was not to oppose Shamir, but to reinforce him, and to give him backing from his right wing. There is no reason to be surprised by an article published by the political correspondent of *Hadashot*, after the bitter argument within the Tehiah party on the issue of leaving the government if it decided to send a delegation to Madrid, according to which Shamir agreed with the ministers of the right wing parties that, as soon as issues arose on the agenda in which concessions were involved, they would leave the government, create a coalition crisis, and give Shamir an opportunity to call for new elections and, in this way, profit from at least another six months' grace.

Yitzhak Shamir's decision to put down the foreign minister, David Levy, and to head the Israeli delegation himself, and the composition of the delegation are in themselves the best evidence of the intention of the prime minister: to put together the champions of refusal, experts in self-protection by the "bunker" method, one of whose principal tasks will be to drive the enemy crazy by drawn-out speeches about the destiny of the Jewish people, and to gain more time by dragging in interminable procedural suggestions. And meanwhile—Sharon's bulldozers create a new geopolitical and demographic reality in the West Bank, in the hope of making any discussion of Israeli withdrawal absurd.

"The whole world is against us" is the refrain again in Israel, and this "whole world" includes, this time, not only the Syrian foreign minister or the head of the Jordanian delegation, but also President Bush and Secretary of State Baker. And the prime minister nurtures this attitude by statements such as "I don't have any illusions about the 'Arabs'," "nothing has changed, and we can only count on ourselves," etc. With this approach, one might have expected from the left that it would try to expose these plans of sabotage of Shamir and his delegation, and attack their policies and the prior conditions that they are putting before all the Arab delegations and especially before the Palestinians. However, in its decisive majority, the Israeli left is working in the opposite direction.

The Peace Camp—To Strengthen Shamir from the Left

From a casual referendum among those taking part in the mass demonstration which Peace Now and the Zionist left parties organized on October 26, it seemed that most of the participants weren't sure what they were demonstrating about. Some of them came to strengthen Shamir's hand, and some came to condemn him; for some this was a counterdemonstration against those of the

right-wing settlers, and for others it was a performance meant to show Shamir that he has someone to count on when, and if, he has trouble with the right. The message from the podium was, of course, more pointed, but not in the right direction. Instead of criticizing his policy and the composition of his delegation, most of the speakers gave Shamir their blessing and strengthened his hand on his way to Madrid.

Not a word was heard against the draconian conditions which Shamir's government had put before the Palestinians, no criticism was made of the contempt for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and there was no mention of what had been, until recently, the political position of the groups which organized the mass meeting: negotiations with the P.L.O., and support for the establishment of a Palestinian State in the Occupied Territories. The Israeli peace camp put itself on the side of Shamir and his policy, without any criticism, without any alternative. There are two reasons for this behavior of the mainstream peace movement: the first reason is the old and mistaken belief that it is always preferable to support the lesser evil, and, compared to Sharon and the refuseniks of the extreme right-wing parties, even Shamir stands as "a more progressive alternative" which should be supported and protected. The second reason is that same complete and principled identification with the policy of the American government which is understood, by the Zionist left, to be the main guarantor of world peace. "What is good for the American government is good for Israel," and, seeing that Bush and Baker ratified Shamir's plan and agreed to his conditions, there is no reason for the Israeli left to criticize their prime minister.

The support of Shamir by the Israeli left, both in the Knesset and on the street, without any meaningful criticism, grants the prime minister enormous room for maneuver: he can trust them as long as he believes that there is any place for negotiations in order to gain time and American support, and he can trust the right when he comes to the conclusion that the time has come to blow up the

conference, or, at least, to squeeze from the Arab and Palestinian delegations and/or the Americans further concessions.

It is unnecessary to add that, in such a situation, there is no symmetry between the critical support of Shamir's government from the right, and the critical support of the left: while the former are operating in complete symbiosis with the regime which supports their activities and sees eye to eye with them concerning national priorities, the peace camp is trying to forward its goals by riding on a horse which is going in the opposite direction. How pathetic were the congratulations of MK Yossi Sarid and others from the left for Shamir's speech in Madrid, especially on the background of the congratulations from the extreme right, which knew very well how to read the messages hidden in the speech, while the left refused to hear even what was obvious.

We are talking about a criminal desire not to see, which not only misleads the Jewish public and makes the way for deep disappointments, but also once again abandons the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories and the entire Palestinian people to their tragic solitude, opposite which stands a rejecting government which enjoys almost wall-to-wall support.

The Palestinians—Support Without Illusions

The decision of the Palestinian National Council to permit the delegation of the representatives of the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories to take part in the conference, in spite of the fact that the P.L.O. was removed from the process—at least openly—and in spite of the fact that any discussion of a withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and Palestinian sovereignty over these areas was removed from the agenda, and without there being any obligation on Israel's side to even freeze the present situation—caused great confusion.

At the beginning of the process, it seemed as though most of the Palestinian public opposed the draconian conditions which the

For the Conference or for Peace?

Statement of the Revolutionary Communist League (Matspen), October 10, 1991, from *The Other Front*, published by the Alternative Information Center.

If there are no surprises, the "Regional Peace Conference" will open with great pomp and fanfare in one week's time.

- Will this herald a beginning of the long-awaited withdrawal from the Occupied Territories?
- Will the Palestinians finally gain recognition of some part of their rights, and we ourselves gain exemption from the brutalizing military service in the Occupied Territories?
- Will there be, at the very least, a declaration of an end to the settlement policy?
- Will the priorities of the government change from armament and settlement to health, education, housing, and employment?
- Will the residents of the Territories finally be able to lead their lives as they see fit?

Everyone of us knows that there is only one answer to all of these questions: a decisive NO. The agreement of Shamir's government to take part in the opening sessions of the Madrid conference is clearly intended to play for time in order to perpetuate the occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, to complete the pilfering of lands and water in the Occupied Territories, and to establish tens of thousands of Jews: veteran citizens and new immigrants. Whoever tries to represent Shamir as having been coerced into beginning a process which will end in the return of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians is either mistaken or intends to mislead. Between his two deputies there is a division of work which is planned and coordinated. Levy is going to Madrid in order to allow Sharon to Judaize the West Bank and to try to create a new and irreversible demographic reality. . . .

It is incumbent on us to stand behind the following demands, since only these, in their emphasis on justice in the Palestinian issue, can put an end to the tooth-and-nail struggle between Israel and Palestine:

- No interference in the selection of the Palestinian negotiation team.
- The establishment of the principle of self-determination for all peoples as a key to any permanent solution.
- The establishment of the principle of withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and Palestinian sovereignty, as the central issues to be discussed at the peace conference.
- An immediate freeze to settlements and the expropriation of lands in the Occupied Territories.

These four demands make the difference between negotiations driving towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and between a conference aimed at perpetuating the occupation and the enmity between the two peoples of Israel/Palestine. In this sense, these demands do not merely express the rights of Palestinians: they are the only key to any true advance towards peace. □

Israelis and Americans set up for a Palestinian presence at the conference. In symposiums and in the Palestinian press, it seemed that Faisal Hussein and Hana Ashrawi were isolated from their people. However, the combination of two factors brought about some change in public opinion: on the one hand, the very fact of the process taking place, and its media nature which fascinated local public opinion, and, on the other hand, the enormous difficulties of the Intifada and the growing feeling that the opposition had nothing to offer.

There is no doubt that the local group of prominent figures, Faisal Hussein at its head, succeeded in its stubborn negotiations with James Baker in gaining the maximum possible, of course, within the framework of the ultimatums presented by Israel: the Palestinian delegation is identified by the whole world with the P.L.O., even if the organization must stay behind the scenes; the Palestinians appear as a delegation in every respect; Madrid turned into a podium for the Palestinian issue. The choice of Dr. Haidar Abed al-Shafi as the head of the delegation contributed considerably to the ability of large parts of the Palestinian public to identify with their delegation in Madrid: a mature man, with a faultless past, identified with the left and with the national movement for four decades, a brave man and straight as a ruler—there couldn't have been a better choice. The impressive appearance of the delegation, and the speech full of pride of Dr. Abed al-Shafi at the conference, made an additional contribution to the popular support of the process.

The marches in support of the negotiations express, without any doubt, the hope of many Palestinians in its success, but the hopes are hesitant, even minimalist. It is hard to find anyone who is convinced that the concessions made by the P.L.O. leadership will really justify themselves; even someone who does not oppose the process describes it as something sold from the start, and their hopes are limited to the expectation of freezing the present situation, and stopping the process of settlement. Also Dr. Abed al-Shafi warned, before his trip to Madrid, that "one mustn't have exaggerated hopes. We are going to the conference according to the conditions of the Israelis and the Americans." Dr. Sari Nusseibeh on his side, who was chosen for the delegation but decided to stay in Jerusalem, was even more severe, and claimed that one shouldn't expect any results, even if he is willing to give a chance to the process, if only in order to avoid saying "no" one more time.

The popular support of the Madrid conference is, then, a support without illusions and without enthusiasm, a kind of support without any alternative. In this sense, it is very symmetrical to the opposite feeling of those who object to the political process.

The Palestinians—Opposition Mixed with Hope

As we said, at the beginning of the process the voices which opposed the political course were dominant, and, in dozens of articles, leaflets, and arguments, the opposition put the supporters in a defensive position. Even in the groups identified with the central stream of the P.L.O. there were noisy refusals, and it seemed that the pair of Hussein-Ashrawi was completely isolated among their own people.

With the establishment of the delegation, the situation somewhat changed: the Communist Party and the Abed Rabu faction of the Democratic Front joined the delegation and, in this way, the opposition front was made up of supporters of the Popular Front and the Democratic Front (Hawatme) on one side, and Hamas on the other. In a joint leaflet, they point to the fact that the U.S. peace

plan is part of its policy in the entire region, which aims "to impose the American imperialist colonization of the region, to abort and strike the Arab and Islamic liberation and anti-imperialist movements, and to continue to reinforce its agents in the region." The American peace plan aims at "eliminating the Palestinian cause and emptying its content as an issue of national rights of the Palestinian people, and converting it to a demographic issue which can be resolved through autonomy linked to Israel or, in the best scenario, through formal Jordanian domination."

However, whoever talks with people identified with the opposition to the conference will very quickly feel that somewhere in the bottom of the heart of some of them, they are giving a chance to the Palestinian delegation to get some improvement in their situation for them. They also felt a rise in spirits when they saw, on their television screens, the dignified Palestinian delegation standing as equals in the corridors of the palace of the king of Spain, and there isn't much coverage for the cries to escalate the Intifada, which appear in the leaflets of the National Unified Leadership and of the opposition, when all the people are glued to their television sets.

And even more: the escalation of the Intifada entails, as a necessary condition, a strengthening of the stature of the United National Leadership. If the rumor is true, according to which following the breaking away of the Popular Front from the executive committee of the P.L.O., the Popular Front and the Democratic Front will break away from the United National Leadership, and will establish an alternative leadership of their own, then there will be reason to worry that, in place of an escalation of the struggle against the occupation, we will be witness to an inner-Palestinian struggle of dire consequences. A joint leaflet, signed by Fatah and the Popular Front, which was distributed recently in the Occupied Territories is aware of this, and calls in an unqualified way for the two sides to keep ranks, for a political argument with no violence, and for the continued functioning of the National Unified Leadership. On the other side, the violent confrontations between the supporters of the conference and its opposition (a few dozen wounded in the Gaza Strip) reveals the dangers of a split hidden in the present argument, and there is no doubt that this split would not be in the interests of either side.

* * *

As these lines are being written, the delegations are on their way home. Shamir can be satisfied: he has been congratulated from the left and the right, the media has congratulated him, and the conference is for the time being stuck in matters of procedure. The Palestinian delegation on its side has gained international recognition and considerable public approval, but it is also returning with nothing. The real challenge still lies ahead, and it can be summarized in one issue: the freezing of the settlements.

If the Palestinian delegation will fail in conditioning the continuation of the negotiations on the freeze of the settlements, then it will be clear that the opposition was correct. That is to say, that the very agreement of the Shamir government to go to Madrid was a trick whose only goal was to gain time while taking a symbolic loss (granting legitimacy to the half-official P.L.O. delegation) in order to further real gains on the ground, and to continue the process of the Judaization of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The coming weeks will give an answer to this critical question and will make the situation clear. □

Nicaragua on the Edge

by John Daniel

On October 18-20, 1991, I attended a conference in Managua called by the FSLN: the "Heroes and Martyrs of International Solidarity." For three days, over 200 solidarity activists from 27 nations discussed the state of international support for Nicaragua and participated in an extremely open dialogue with a majority of the members of the National Directorate of the FSLN, along with over 50 mid-level Sandinista leaders.

The conference discussion centered on a document offered by the FSLN, which explained their view of the current Nicaraguan situation:

In light of the recent changes on both a national and an international level, and recognizing the importance of the role played by the solidarity movement, the FSLN agreed unanimously during its First Congress to organize the first "Heroes and Martyrs of International Solidarity" Conference. The purpose of the conference is multifold, including: initiate an in-depth debate regarding the future of the Sandinista Revolution; reestablishing ties between our friends and our cause; and collectively elaborating alternative actions that would respond with creativity, intelligence and optimism to this new phase. [from the introduction]

The document explains some of the Sandinistas' views on the internal and international political situation:

This new order, unipolar militarily and multipolar economically, signifies the return of the inter-capitalistic dispute as the priority on the international agenda, relegating to second place the problems and conflicts of the developing world. The impact of this imperialist policy, in its race to impose its hegemony, has serious consequences for our countries in that the threat and the use of force have become more justifiable under the protection of the United Nations. What's more, the United Nations, by realigning itself more with U.S. foreign policy, has weakened International Law....

In order to implement their policies, the imperialists will have to count on



national alliances with the local bourgeoisie, bourgeoisies which have not themselves been capable of guiding their countries toward national development because they do not challenge the system.

The document also points out the role of Cuba:

Cuba, whose socialist model has demonstrated the difference between the options of freedom and dependency, has managed in thirty years to resolve problems that no other country on the continent subjected to imperialist subordination has been able to resolve in 500 years.

The threat directed towards Cuba is a threat directed towards the Sandinista Revolution and the struggles in El Salvador and Guatemala.

For the FSLN it is urgent that we call on the solidarity movement to defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination of Cuba....

And the document goes on to explain:

Since the elections of 1990, and the end of the military conflict, the rein-

tegration of various conflicting sectors of the population has created a highly polarized society.

This period represents a transition...preserving the fundamentals of the revolution and establishing an internal correlation of forces that will lead us towards the reacquisition of political power.

The recuperation of political power is fundamental for the nature of Sandinismo....

We need to rise above the traditional model for analyzing our reality, without seeing the situation as one of defeat, a step backward, or as revisionary, but instead, as a natural phase, revolutionary and dialectic in nature, of our struggle, for which it is necessary to act with both audacity and pragmatism. The principles of Sandinismo are determined by the final objectives of our struggle, in which are represented the aspirations of the majority of the population in our country.

The challenge is to anticipate the possible scenarios, and come out ahead, using all the methods and resources possible for our defense.

The document ends by adding an understanding that "... the international panorama is radically unfavorable." However, "The FSLN makes a call to the solidarity movement to join in the struggle to attain these objectives, and to defend a socialist path for Nicaragua."

In discussions at (and after) the conference, I heard how the recent First Congress of the FSLN showed that differing strategies still exist within the revolution's leadership. Three main currents exist, with some overlap between them. The biggest gulf seems to be between those who look to the '96 elections as the proper vehicle to retake the executive offices of the government and the more militant leadership of the FNT (National Workers' Federation, encompassing all Nicaraguan trade unions) and the trade unions who are bearing the brunt of the defense of the gains of the revolution. Another tendency that is harder to define and cuts across other issues is one which calls for more internal democracy within the FSLN.

Attending the conference provided an excellent opportunity to hear firsthand from FSLN National Directorate members—Daniel Ortega, Tomás Borge, Henry Ruiz, Sergio Ramirez, Luis Carnón, Bayardo Arce—as well as from mid-level Sandinistas, such as Omar Cabezas, Gladys Baez, and others. There were many important topics that were discussed, and it's certainly not possible to delve into them all in the space of one short article. Nonetheless, I will quote some of the speakers because they show a notable shift in the thinking of the Sandinista leadership since last year, especially concerning their "social pact" with the Chamorro administration.

Henry Ruiz: "The social pact with some in the government has come apart."

Daniel Ortega:

It's become fashionable these days to use the term "national consensus" as our objective. That is, to promote processes and projects that are acceptable to capitalism, to unite ourselves with imperialism. But we need to unite with the poor, the workers, the most oppressed, not to hide their needs under the banner of national consensus. . . .

Are we going to form a consensus with the forces of imperialism? Of course not. They are out to crush us. . .

We are not an electoral machine. We are not like the politicians in the U.S. who get taught how to smile, dress, and shake everyone's hand. They are taught to get along with everyone. We are not supposed to get along with everyone. We need to get along with the workers. We need to not get along with the Somocistas, those returning from Miami who want to reverse our revolutionary process. We must be clear about that.

Another topic being discussed is the crisis in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Tomás Borge:

Real socialism didn't exist in Eastern Europe; it was better for the people there to break with it! Now that we're finished with this false image, we can begin to create real socialism. . . . we must crush capitalism!

The conference delegates finally passed a number of resolutions promising continued support to Nicaragua, the revolution, and other national liberation struggles. The truth is, however, that the solidarity movement has suffered tremendous losses. International support to Nicaragua has dropped off dramatically over the last few years—almost as fast as Nicaragua has dropped from the mainstream news media. I found that the

only hopeful sign coming out of the meeting was that the FSLN leadership was sounding more militant and competent than it had in years.

The most depressing aspect of the current Nicaraguan reality is what lay outside of the "Centro Juvenil 'Olaf Palme' (former JS 19 school)" where the conference was held.

The Economic Crisis

The official estimate of unemployment in Nicaragua is now 58 percent. In Managua, pockets of unemployment in more marginalized neighborhoods reach 80 percent. Overall unemployment on the Atlantic Coast is over 75 percent.

This intolerable situation is a direct result of the Chamorro government's adherence to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) "Development Plan" for Nicaragua and the so-called "Neo-liberal Model." A general plan for all third world nations, the IMF's goal is to finance an economic recovery for the industrialized nations (and particularly the sluggish U.S.) by bleeding the impoverished and super-exploited third world nations of their last drop of liquid assets (some estimates are as high as \$42 billion/year from Latin America alone end up in U.S. banks).

The model relegates third world societies to fit a predetermined niche in the world economy, i.e., sources of raw materials, exotic agro-export, and cheap labor. This new model replaces the earlier attempts to establish national and regional markets, such as the earlier "Alliance for Progress," the "Central American Common Market," and the confused "Caribbean Initiative." It is a direct result of the recognition of the unprecedented depth of the world capitalist crisis and is a desperate attempt to turn the situation around. To accomplish this, the IMF must assure the destruction of local control over national markets both politically and economically. The banner of "free trade" is then raised over the rubble of self-determination.

In Nicaragua this involves Chamorro's attempt at privatizing not only the state sector, but also the cooperatives and, in the final analysis, the destruction of even the small peasant holdings and local businesses, because in varying degrees all these forms of property are obstacles to draining the last drop of economic resources from the country.

The attack comes in several forms, all of which have been adopted by the Chamorro government. The first was the slashing of government budgets for social services, including massive government layoffs, and cuts in everything from health care and food subsidies to road construction (there are some exceptions, for example, executive and legislative salaries. National As-

sembly members under the Sandinistas drew the equivalent of \$50 per month and under Chamorro they now take \$1,800 per month from the national treasury—ministry heads went from \$300/month to \$5,000/month. State subsidies have also been raised for major private agro-export growers. Only eight growers receive over 30 percent of such subsidies).

Chamorro attempted, by executive order, the reversion of property back to its pre-1979 owners. This attempt, however, has to date been unsuccessful in the face of the highly organized Nicaraguan masses.

Chamorro successfully gained control over the local money supply by introducing a new currency supposedly tied to the U.S. dollar. Though the new bills (córdobas de oro) remain at approximately the ratio of 5 to 1, it has had the short-term positive effect of ending the intolerable inflation suffered over the last five years. Ending inflation, Chamorro-style, however, has meant a lack of sufficient credit to operate the local economy. This situation, of course, was the hidden intent of the new monetary policy. If the government couldn't hoard money (in the form of a national bank reserve) because of runaway inflation, it therefore couldn't hand this money over to the IMF. The need to end inflation was, for the Chamorro government, an expedient without altruistic motives.

The Reality

This method is actually part and parcel of the IMF's plan to regain control over the local economy. From the start, the IMF needed to stabilize the currency in order to amass enough dollars in the reserve of the central bank so that some of these funds could be siphoned off to U.S. banks. The success of this strategy can be seen in the fact that the Central Bank now has \$250 million in reserve (all earmarked for eventual deposit in the U.S.). This amount is four times what the FSLN government had to work with the first two years of the revolution. In accumulating the reserve, however, the Chamorro government has dried up credit in the country. This has caused bankruptcies and more unemployment in a country where 50 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty and 800,000 are officially unemployed. There are 21,000 fewer state jobs than under the Sandinistas, and the government now spends less than half of what the Sandinistas did on health and education during the height of the war. This year, because of budget cuts, 40,000 students were denied access to the universities. Credit limits and the flood of inexpensive foreign goods have ruined local production. Eighty percent of jobs in the country don't pay enough for workers to be active consumers of imports. This means that the destruction

of production for the internal market allows only 20 percent of the population to purchase the substituted import products.

In 1989, the Sandinista government was spending \$64 per capita for health. Chamorro's budget for 1992 only allocates \$13. Milk subsidies for schoolchildren have been stopped. In a country where 45,000 youth enter the workforce each year, there are dramatically fewer jobs. The country is in desperate need of new housing (at a rate of 20,000 new families a year) and is already 300,000 housing units short. However, Chamorro's budget does not allocate any funds for housing.

Chamorro's Power

For the masses supporting the Sandinista revolution, whatever moral authority Violeta Chamorro gained by being Pedro Joaquín's widow was rapidly lost by becoming a pawn of U.S. intervention in the 1980s. (Pedro Joaquín Chamorro was the editor of *La Prensa* and a leading critic of the Somoza dictatorship; he was assassinated in 1978 on orders from Somoza.) After Doña Violeta and others developed an anti-Sandinista editorial policy, the entire staff of *La Prensa* (including Pedro's brother) left the newspaper, under protest, in order to form *El Diario*. The CIA began the funding of *La Prensa* as an unofficial voice of the U.S. government in Nicaragua. Headlines such as "Revolution causes woman to give birth to live chicken" and "Libyan anti-aircraft fire on U.S. planes" (during the U.S. attack on Tripoli) came to be standard fare for what the U.S. government was calling the only newspaper in Nicaragua that told the truth.

Where Violeta's personal authority grew was with the Nicaraguan land-owning elite, who had indeed had problems with Somoza's heavy-handed use of power in Nicaragua. But they wanted to see, at most, a more level playing field for the elite families, certainly not a measure of power for the peasants whom they considered on a par with livestock. They feared the Sandinistas' pro-worker and peasant policies much more than U.S. domination and the subsequent loss of national sovereignty. For them, Chamorro became a conduit of respectability with the power of the U.S. government behind her.

During the 1980s Chamorro's ties to the contras (the U.S. armed counter-revolutionaries) were always indirect, through her relationship to the U.S. Contra leaders never fully accepted her role as defined by their U.S. masters. This inaugurated what might be termed an initial split among the counterrevolutionaries. Today this split is more complex, but it is still centered on the differences between the old landed elite, the old urban business sector identified with COSEP (Supreme

Council of Private Enterprise, the major organization of Nicaraguan capitalists), and the smaller fraction of the bourgeoisie that had been Somoza allies.

Contras and Recontras

The contras were originally formed out of what was left of Somoza's old National Guard that had, after the insurrection in 1979, fled to Honduras. A ragtag assortment of mercenaries, whose old motto had been "We live off the blood of the people," found a new patron in the CIA. As the U.S. escalated its attacks against the revolution, the contras became the main agent of U.S. power in Nicaragua (short of the real threat of direct U.S. intervention). As the economic situation of the peasants worsened (due mostly to the drastic fall in world prices for agricultural produce and the U.S. economic blockade), a definite percentage of those hardest hit became susceptible to the contras' anti-Sandinista propaganda and either joined the contras or became local supporters. As the peasant base of the contras swelled, internal contradictions grew apace. The regular peasant recruits grew to detest their ex-Somocista officers to the point where discipline was difficult to maintain. With low morale and an almost nonexistent military capacity, the contras' role had to be redefined by the CIA. Whether or not this was ever accomplished is a matter for debate as we shall see. The contras were held together and eventually reintegrated into formal Nicaraguan society. The shooting war all but ended.

The "recontras" (reintegrated contras) as a group, since the election, have had a dynamic all their own. That part which was once the old National Guard has lost its relevance for the old anti-Somoza landed elites (last year their former leader was assassinated in the parking lot of the Intercontinental Hotel after a meeting in which he was attempting to find a role in the right wing) and has disintegrated into mere individual banditry or small groups robbing local buses in rural areas. The majority, who were peasants, returned to find a government unwilling to provide them with land. They have once more become a part of the larger Nicaraguan reality which demands land reform. This reality puts them at odds with the Chamorro government's attempts to roll back the land reform policy of the Sandinistas.

A most compelling argument against the viability of the majority of the recontras was Godoy's attempt to form armed groups, or "Committees of National Salvation," during last year's strikes. Not only did the attempt fail, it showed that the recontras, on the whole, weren't interested.

State Institutions

After Chamorro's 1990 electoral victory, the UNO coalition of a dozen different political parties found itself in a difficult situation. They, along with Chamorro herself, now held offices inside institutions that had been products of the Sandinista revolution. These institutions, especially the army and police, were originally created as tools to serve the interests of the Nicaraguan masses and not the interests of the U.S. or the traditional ruling elite in Nicaragua.

This has presented real problems for the Chamorro administration and its policy of rolling back the gains of the Sandinista revolution.

Since Chamorro's government can't definitively rely on the army, it has decided to dismantle it altogether. The army's size has been reduced to less than 17,000 (the smallest in Latin America). The police have been equally unreliable, and therefore the mayors' offices (mostly in UNO hands) have been screaming for the formation of municipal police forces.

In order to illustrate this last point I offer the following story as told to me by the workers of "El Caracol"—a worker-run industry in Managua. This plant was originally confiscated in 1980 and has since been owned and operated by the workers themselves. This year the Chamorro government upheld a claim by the previous owner and legally transferred ownership back to him. However, the workers are still in charge because there is no one willing to throw them out of possession of the plant physically. All operations remain under control of the workers, and many told me they would rather die than give it up. One of Chamorro's actions was to freeze the workers' bank account (\$128,000). Later, a shipment of materials, purchased by the workers, arrived at Customs to be delivered to the plant, and some workers went to pick it up. A problem arose in that officially the plant is owned by the previous owner and the Customs supervisor (a Chamorro appointee) said the shipment was not the workers' property. Customs workers, however, loaded the shipment anyway, and the truckload was a few blocks from the plant when it was pulled over by the police. One worker was sent from the truck back to the plant, and the entire plant turned out to escort the truck laden with the shipment back inside the gate of the plant.

Also, during last year's strikes the courts sided with the workers. This has led to Chamorro's attacks on the system in the form of appointing additional judges, authorized by legislation from the National Assembly.

The National Assembly is recognized as a battleground by both sides and is one of

the state institutions where Chamorro has been more successful, if not totally so. However, the UNO coalition is a less than perfect advocate of consistent policy and the Sandinistas have, as the largest party by far, been able to slow the attack.

Of course, executive offices and ministry posts are in the hands of Chamorro and the UNO coalition, but among the staffs and employees of the various ministries there are still large numbers of revolutionaries. In the final analysis, the predominant power rests with the coercive structures of the state, namely, the army and national police, and these two key institutions are the most revolutionary of all Nicaraguan state institutions.

Revolutionary Power

At the heart of the defense of the social gains of the Sandinista revolution lie the masses themselves and their independent organizations. The CDSs (Sandinista Defense Committees) are reappearing and are organizing neighborhoods in defense of their rights to social services cut by the government. AMNLAE (Nicaraguan Women's Association) and other women's organizations are increasing their battles in defense of women's rights.

The highly organized union movement was the first to react when, in the summer of last year, it countered the initiation of Chamorro's policies with a highly successful nationwide strike that brought the country to a standstill. However, the strike only slowed the process and left the ultimate confrontation between Chamorro's

policies and the gains of the revolution to a later date. That date may not be far off and once again the power of the workers and their unions may be decisive.

The workers have arguably been the greatest benefactors of the revolution, and Chamorro policies have had an immediate impact. Highly organized, conscious, and extremely militant in defense of their rights, 200,000 strong (many of them armed), the trade unions in Nicaragua represent a substantial power.

"We train our membership not only in contract defense," said one FNT leader, "but also in military defense." In discussions with several groups of leaders from different industries, I was extremely impressed with how seriously they take the current situation. "We're in the process of testing our abilities," explained Marvin Cortez, head of international relations for UNE, the public employees' union. "We test our organization and strength at one workplace (by calling a one-day work stoppage) and then go on to another, always gauging the reactions."

Heading for a Showdown

These union leaders presented a sense of urgency unlike anything I've ever seen. Many were in desperate need of sleep because of the intense pace of activity in Managua. Small strikes broke out almost daily, and two days after I left the sugar workers went out on strike. I was reminded of last year's events when I watched strikes grow that eventually led to the raising of barricades throughout Nicaragua. The

major difference this year is the greater level of desperation on the part of the masses.

On November 9, the day after thousands in Managua had gathered to place flowers on the tomb of Carlos Fonseca in front of the National Palace, a bomb destroyed part of the tomb. Immediately people turned out to rebuild and guard the memorial. Hundreds later marched on the mayor's office and set it on fire.

One certain thing is that the current situation can't last. The struggle over the power of the state in Nicaragua will be settled shortly. Nicaraguan workers and their peasant allies must forge ahead in the battle for control of the state or they will suffer a devastating period of reaction. The signs are already evident. Across the road from the A.C. Sandino Airport lie working class neighborhoods where I heard one community leader say, "the major expense for this community is buying coffins for those who are starving to death."

As bad as things seem, there is still an incredible amount of power behind the revolution. The FSLN has a tried, tested, and able leadership. The army and police are still led by Sandinistas. The party (FSLN) has military resources (thousands of rifles and assorted small arms). There exists the ability to raise and arm the militias again. And not least are the unions, which at this point in time are positioned to defend the gains of the revolution. □

Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua

by Paul Le Blanc

This study offers a detailed analysis of the dynamics of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua, the socio-economic and historical background of the 1979 revolution and the political forces that were involved.

Published by the FIT
P.O. Box 1947
New York, NY 10009

George Chomalou 1929-1991

We regretfully report that George Chomalou of Cleveland, a leading member of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, died on December 4, 1991, following a severe illness. An obituary will appear in a future issue of the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*.

We print below additional accounts of and reaction to the August coup attempt in the Soviet Union. Last month's issue featured the article by Nikolai Preobrazhensky, "The First Skirmish: Observations from an Historical Vantage Point."

"Workers' Democracy—The Alternative to the New Dictatorship" is an editorial on the coup attempt which appeared in the September 2, 1991, issue of *Vperyod* (Forward), a newsletter published by the Socialist Workers Union in Moscow.

"The CPSU Died but Bolshevism Lives" by Aleksei Gusev, editor of *Vperyod*, appeared in the same newsletter. Aleksei participated in the demonstrations outside the "White House" in the aftermath of the coup attempt. Aleksei also participated in the small meeting of Trotskyists organized in August 1990, in Moscow. (See *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* No. 78 for a report on this meeting and his remarks there.) After that conference, Aleksei chose to affiliate with the conference organizers—the Workers Revolutionary Party and their "Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International," which considers itself a Trotskyist organization. (See correspondence in this regard in *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* No. 82.) The Socialist Workers Union is the group Aleksei has established. This is the second issue of its newsletter.

Workers' Democracy—the Alternative to the New Dictatorship

The attempt to seize power by top layers of the bureaucracy and military failed. The failed offensive launched by a decaying and dying Stalinism has ended. However, we must ask whether the causes that led to the establishment of this antipopular dictatorship, which in its brief existence managed to take several lives, have been resolved.

The first cause is the vital interest the ruling circles have in "order," that is, in directly suppressing the dissatisfaction of workers with the results of the policies the upper echelons are carrying out.

The consequences of decades of bureaucratic rule, worsened by the "market reforms," have left our economy on the verge of catastrophe. For the people, this has meant shortages of everything and high prices. One inevitable consequence has been the growth of social tension between millions of workers and the nomenklatura, which has successfully accumulated capital and transformed itself into a new bourgeoisie. There has been a surge of strikes and uprisings and the working class has begun to organize itself.

The authorities have responded by introducing the post of president—a ruler with the broadest powers—and by adopting legislation facilitating special police powers. The ideology of the "democrats" includes the need for an "enlightened dictatorship" for the period of transition to the market. International capital is also worried. This was expressed by the leaders of the seven industrially developed (imperialist) countries at a meeting in London which called upon Gorbachev to "liquidate the political instability," which threatens foreign investment in the USSR. What was needed was a "strong power."

So, on the night of August 19, the dictatorship arrived. True, precisely this form

of dictatorship could not expect any serious support. It was doomed before it started. To sum up its problem: it was a dictatorship whose hands were trembling. The forces that had organized the coup—the leadership of the KGB, the top levels of the union-wide governmental bureaucracy, and the old military-industrial complex plus the most conservative wing of the CPSU apparatus—one way or another were going to have to depart from the political scene. Their conspiracy represented a desperate attempt to forestall their inevitable historic burial. Their aspiration to prevent the collapse of the Stalinist empire, their terror in the face of the fatal decline of their own authority and influence, and their hope for the restoration of Andropov-type "discipline"—this is what inspired their basic program. Even the majority of the military bureaucracy refused to subordinate themselves to the State Committee for the State of Emergency [GKChP] and went over to the side of Yeltsin.

This is to be expected. Perestroika had already begun to show that the bureaucracy could no longer rule through the old totalitarian methods and needed to strengthen and legalize its privileges. The nomenklatura is looking for support in property relations, seeking to transform "nobody's" state property into "their own" private stockholdings. Simultaneously, it is interested in giving a "popular power" appearance to its rule in order to join the company of Western "democrats" without too much embarrassment. Thus, the majority of the bureaucrats as a social group preferred the "legal" and "market" Yeltsin to the dubious project of the Stalinist junta. It was not dictatorship in general that was defeated, only a dictator-

ship that did not express the true interests of the ruling layer.

After the overthrow and arrest of the GKChP, the need on the part of the authorities to use cruel and open repressive methods did not disappear. In reality, nothing has changed. The "triumph of the democrats" lies in the fact that power was shifted into the hands of the patriarchs of the "democratic" bureaucracy—ex-party apparatchiks like Yeltsin, Yakovlyev, Shevardnadze, and the others. Their political line remains as before: a course toward "free prices" (which means prices increasing several times over, plus hyperinflation), privatization (which means mass unemployment and depriving the workers of any possibility for controlling production), "strengthening the executive power" (which means autocratic rule by the president and his proteges on the local level).

Is this what the workers and students fought for at the barricades in Moscow, demonstrating that the people are no longer a "herd of sheep" which can be driven in any direction?¹

Ahead is a new social crisis. Again, "order" will require the use of tanks and armored personnel carriers. Those who today at meetings pledge their loyalty to the people will not have trembling hands when they sign the orders for imposition of their own special police measures. Reforms aimed against the workers cannot be implemented without establishing a dictatorial, repressive regime.

It is no accident that under the three-colored flag, so dear to today's "democrats," workers and peasants were once shot, hung, and whipped—and pogroms were organized. It is no accident that the "democratic" chiefs are so enamored with the hangman Stolypin, who became renowned for his "neckties," and

so respectful of the bloody general Pinochet. Compared to the future dictatorship, Yanayev's GKChP may seem relatively harmless!

Another factor that made possible the seizure of power by the putschist clique was the existence of an apparatus of repression that is divorced from the people and in opposition to them. Yazov and Kryuchkov had only to give the order and troops appeared in the streets of the cities. The troops could have easily swept aside the symbolic barricades that had been erected by those who gathered outside the "White House" and the KGB's special forces would have had no difficulty seizing the parliament. If they failed to do so, it is not because a sense of "officer's honor" had suddenly awakened in them. Where was this honor during the massacres in Tbilisi, Baku, and Vilnius?² Nor was it because "the people and the army were united."

It was simply that the officer-general caste, an integral part of the bureaucracy with the same needs as that social layer, was interested in dispersing the old-fashioned Stalinist gang. Has the military-police machinery ceased serving as an instrument through which the parasites who devour the national income can suppress workers? Does the KGB serve the people rather than the army and is now controlled from below? The answer to both questions is obvious: No.

The Committee on State Security [KGB] continues to be a secret department, and

soldiers are still disenfranchised automatons in the hands of the militaristic clique. Who can guarantee that tomorrow this instrument will not be turned, for example, against striking workers? Commander in Chief Yeltsin? But it is precisely from him that the order would come! As long as the organs of the KGB are not under the control of the people and as long as the army in the barracks is under the control of a group of generals, there will exist the threat of a new coup and a bloody regime.

What is to be done? How can we remove the very possibility that such a repressive anti-people dictatorship might be established?

Only by creating organs of control and power by the workers themselves can we prevent a new junta from coming to power. Only through these—our own—institutions will working people derive the possibility of implementing policies which really correspond to their interests.

Workers! Do not place your hopes on a "good president." Trust only yourselves. In the enterprises, elect workers' committees and create workers' militias. Demand a discussion and approval in the work collectives of all important proposed legislation before it can become law. Parliament must listen to the voices from the shop floor!

Soldiers! Create your own soldiers' councils, independent of the commanders, in your units, divisions, and formations. Sweep from positions of command and arrest any of the putschists' accomplices.

Establish contact with the local workers' organizations. Work for an end to compulsory military service and its replacement with militia detachments based on local production units.

The criminal secret police—the KGB—must be immediately liquidated and its archives opened! The "democratic" chiefs kept the people from taking decisive actions against the KGB because they need to retain this Stalinist apparatus. Moreover, some of them fear that documents showing their own former collaboration with the "organs" will be made public.

Down with the KGB! Destroy this machine of repression and murder!

A new dictatorship can grow up from the strengthening of presidential power. We must abolish this Bonapartist post and fully annul the legislation calling for special police measures! Demand the transfer of power on all levels to workers' councils and strike committees.

Long live workers' democracy! □

Notes

1. Yelena Bonner in a speech before the anti-coup protesters read from an internal government document in which the people were referred to contemptuously as a herd of sheep.

2. April 9, 1989, when 19 unarmed protesters were killed in Tbilisi; January 1990 when at least 130 were killed in Baku; January 1991 when at least 14 were killed in Vilnius.

The CPSU Died but Bolshevism Lives

by Aleksei Gusev

The events of August 19-21 marked the end of the history of the CPSU. It had become clear that this organization was no longer necessary to anyone.

It had not been necessary to the putschist leaders, who never even considered implementing their measures in the name of the party and who acted as if neither the Central Committee nor any other CPSU structures existed. The ordinary rank-and-file members didn't need it: none of them did anything when the activities of the party were "suspended." Even its own apparatus did not need the CPSU: the enterprising instructors and secretaries had already safeguarded their future by wisely investing party funds in business ventures or securing for themselves a seat on the stock exchange.

And, of course, the CPSU had long ago ceased to be necessary to millions of ordinary people, those whom the party officials plundered and cynically betrayed and who suffered poverty so the "communist" leaders could feed themselves from special distribution centers and ride around in black "Volgas."

The buildings belonging to the CPSU (there are more than 5,000 in Moscow!) have been sealed. The formerly all-powerful general

secretary, now a puppet of the ruling "democrats," ordered the Central Committee to disband. Gorbachev and Yeltsin—for a very long time highly placed party apparatchiks—hammered the last nail in the lid of the CPSU's coffin with their own hands.

The press, radio, and television of the new regime assure us that this is the "end of Bolshevism." They are also saying that the collapse of the bureaucratic system is the collapse of socialism. This is an obvious and primitive lie! It was not Bolshevism but the total repudiation of it that led the CPSU to its disgraceful end. It was not socialism that showed its bankruptcy but a distorted system of state totalitarianism, justly hated by the workers. These distortions are ever more fiercely advantageous to the "democrats," who aspire to replace one system of workers' oppression with another. Of course, why would they be interested in socialism, a society without exploitation, when the ownership options in the future monopolies have already been distributed and plans for unemployed workers to queue up in the job market are already in place.

A "democrat" like this, vehemently exposing the "Bolshevik CPSU," could hardly be expected to provide an intelligent demonstration that there was anything really Bolshevik in the Stalin-Brezhnev-Gorbachev party. The problem in doing so has nothing to do with the level of intelligence of the majority of the present-day "democrats." One cannot prove what simply isn't true.

The real Bolshevik party that led the workers revolution in 1917 had been destroyed by the Stalin clique by the middle of the 1920s. The Bolshevik-Leninists of the Opposition, who were not recon-

ciled to the establishment in the party of a dictatorship by an ignorant and anti-Marxist bureaucracy, were subjected to deportation, arrest, and later physical annihilation. After that time the CPSU in both an organizational and a programmatic sense became transformed into the direct opposite of the party of the Bolsheviks. Instead of party democracy, blind subordination to orders from the apparatus "chiefs" was firmly established. The role of the congresses was to approve the line of the leadership and of the "genius" general secretary. The suppressed party masses became no more than a tool in the hands of the small group of officials who were simultaneously the upper echelon of the state bureaucracy. The party lost its independent character and was integrated into the structure of a totalitarian state. In the years 1930-50, it was difficult to find any dividing line between the All-Union Communist Party (B) and the NKVD [secret police]. The party had disappeared as an independent political organization.

Nor did it experience a regeneration after the official repudiation of the "mistakes" linked with the "cult of personality" [during the

Khrushchev era]. The contemporary CPSU had become a machine for making careers. What the so-called "party" called its "program" could at best provoke laughter on the part of its members, including the very authors of that "program."

And with a straight face they try to present this as "Bolshevism"! What in reality formed the "theoretical" foundation for the CPSU's activities? A set of inventions like "socialism in one country," "a state of all the people," etc., etc. Marx and Lenin would have considered anyone who tried to ascribe such "theoretical" postulates to them an idiot.

Leon Trotsky expressed the relationship between revolutionary communism and the bureaucratic betrayers of the revolution this way: "A river of blood separated Stalinism from Bolshevism." Today Bolshevism is being reborn in the independent workers' movement and in socialist groups—even if they are still few in number. It is the Stalinist CPSU which is dead.

And not one worker mourns the loss. □

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U.S.-Soviet Workers Information Committee

The democratic openings in the former Soviet Union allow the workers and pro-socialist movements and activists for the first time since the 1920s to establish direct links, exchange information, and support one another in a spirit of true internationalism.

Workers, students, and intellectuals in the Soviet Union and its former republics have begun to form their own organizations to establish free and independent trade unions; to reverse the widespread environmental destruction; to publish their own newspapers, unearth and study the real history of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary period; and to enjoy national and cultural independence after decades of Stalinist repression.

The mass media in the capitalist world manages to convey considerable information about the activities of top Kremlin figures, and of prominent pro-market politicians and economists. But little information is available to the broad public about the activities of forces in the working class and others raising social issues and problems that "the market" cannot resolve.

The goal of the U.S.-Soviet Workers Information Committee is to help overcome this problem by opening new channels of information and collaboration.

Who We Are

We are activists and representatives of organizations who support the fight for social justice in the United States and throughout the world.

We oppose all efforts by the U.S. government through direct military intervention or through agencies like the American Institute for Free Labor Development, the CIA, and CIA-organized covert armies and death squads, to suppress human rights and deny self-determination in the interest of maximizing corporate profits.

We support the struggles for women's liberation.

We support self-determination for all oppressed nationalities in the former USSR and throughout the world.

We support the struggle to preserve our environment from destruction caused by corporate greed.

What We Seek to Do

As such, we seek to learn more about and collaborate with like-minded activists and groups that are emerging in the former Soviet Union. Our activities will include:

- Soliciting and translating materials from the workers, pro-socialist, and national movements, circulating them and seeking to have them published.
- Organizing public meetings where pertinent issues can be discussed before as broad an audience as possible.
- Making available to collaborative groups and individuals in the former Soviet Union materials about the workers, democratic rights, and other social movements in the capitalist world, especially in the USA.
- Organizing visits and speaking engagements in the U.S. for activists from the former Soviet Union and visits to the former Soviet Union by left activists from the USA.
- Organizing timely campaigns to focus on specific issues that may require special attention.
- Raising funds from time to time to support particular publication or practical projects, either here or in the former Soviet Union.

We hope that you will join us in this effort.

For more information or to endorse and/or make a contribution to the work of this committee, write or call:

U.S.-Soviet Workers Information Committee
P.O. Box 1890, New York, NY 10009
(718) 636-5446

Worker Solidarity Committee Holds First Public Meeting

On Monday night, November 18, the U.S.-Soviet Workers Information Committee sponsored its first public event, a forum on the topic "Soviet Labor: The Development of an Independent Force." Over 150 attended the meeting which was held in an auditorium at the New School for Social Research in New York City.

The speakers were both from the Soviet Union: Boris Kagarlitsky, prominent pro-socialist activist in Moscow and founding member of the Socialist Party of Russia, who was elected as a deputy to the Moscow Soviet. His organization with the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions and the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists in September in Moscow launched an Initiative Committee for a Party of Labor that has now

set up branches in a number of cities. It is an important initiative that may add impetus to workers' organizing efforts against the bureaucracy's market reforms and price increases that are gutting the workers' standard of living.

Kagarlitsky, the author of several books that have been translated into English and published abroad—like *The Thinking Reed* and *Farewell Perestroika*, was in the United States delivering a series of lectures at the New York Marxist School.

The other speaker was Aleksandr Pantsov, a Doctor of History and senior research fellow at the Institute of the Problems of the Labor Movement and Comparative Political Science in Moscow. Pantsov, a sinologist, whose grandfather perished in Stalin's

camp, began reading the writings of Leon Trotsky when he came across them while doing research in China in 1987. Since that time he has become one of the most prominent defenders of Trotsky and his actions and ideas against those who have tried to continue the Stalinist campaign of vilification.*

*See for example, "Lev Davidovich Trotskii," that originally appeared in *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 5, 1990, but has been translated into English and published by the journal *Soviet Studies in History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Summer 1991; and "The New School of Falsification," published in two parts in *Marxist Monthly*, Vol. 3, Nos. 8 and 9, October and November 1990. This is a rough English translation of the Russian that appeared in *The Working Class and Modern Society*, Moscow, 1990.

The Current Struggle for Abortion Rights in the U.S.

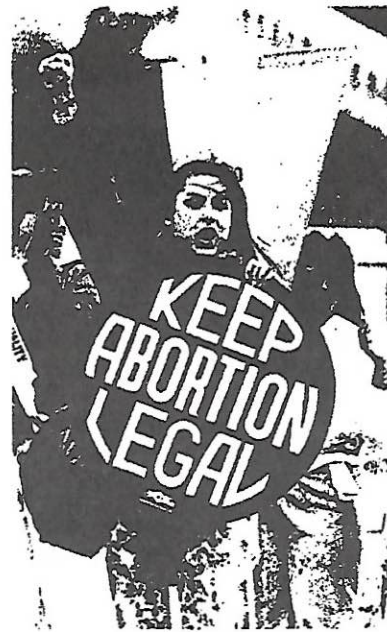
by Evelyn Sell

Today's efforts to preserve women's reproductive rights were set into motion by the July 3, 1989, U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding a Missouri law which severely restricted abortion availability. With their ruling in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, Inc.*, the majority of justices gave a clear signal of their willingness to approve limitations on abortion counseling and services. The Supreme Court stopped short of actually reversing the 1973 decision on *Roe v. Wade* but the justices have continued to chop away women's reproductive rights—with especially disastrous results for poor women, low-paid female workers, youths, and women of color.

- On June 25, 1990, the Supreme Court ruled that states can require minors to notify one or both parents or receive a judge's permission before obtaining an abortion.
- On May 23, 1991, by a 5-4 vote on *Rust v. Sullivan*, the justices upheld a government regulation prohibiting health care workers in federally funded family planning clinics from telling women that abortion is a medical option. The "gag rule" had an immediate impact on some 4,000 clinics serving about five million teenaged and poor women a year. The *Rust* decision was a particularly hard blow to women of color who make up over 30 percent of Title X patients using family planning clinics funded totally or partially by the federal government.
- On June 3, 1991, the Court approved the government's right to deny foreign aid funds to overseas health care groups that perform or counsel on abortions. In addition to affecting family planning projects in third world countries, the ban cut off funds to U.S. organizations which carry out programs around the world.

Like predators sniffing the scent of unprotected prey, anti-choice forces attacked with renewed vigor after the Supreme Court's 1989 ruling. A wide range of tactics were used to block women from obtaining abortions, to harass abortion rights supporters, and to undercut the majority's support for a woman's right to choose.

- Operation Rescue (called "Operation Oppress-You" by pro-choice activists) prevents women from receiving medical services, harasses clinic staffs, and assaults patients and pro-choice demonstrators. OR does not confine itself to terrorizing clinics. Many doctors no longer perform abortions due to OR's activities which include picketing physicians' homes and vandalizing doctors' offices.
- Husbands and boyfriends have been encouraged and helped to seek court orders to prevent women from obtaining abortions.
- Anti-choice groups reached across the ocean to stop shipments to U.S. medical researchers of RU486, a French-manufactured pill used in abortion procedures. The drug is also a potential treatment for a form of breast cancer, AIDS, and an endocrine disorder called Cushing's syndrome.
- About 2,000 fake abortion clinics were set up across the U.S. to scare women into continuing their pregnancies. Through misleading ads, the phony clinics suggested they offered abortions or related services. But women were confronted with so-called "counselors" who berated them as murderers, and women were forced to watch films sug-



- gesting they would bleed to death or lose the ability to bear children if they had an abortion.
- Opponents of legal abortion claimed a victory when American Telephone & Telegraph and Winn-Dixie supermarkets withdrew corporate financial support to Planned Parenthood.
 - Southern California businesses were pressured by foes of abortion to cancel meeting rooms reserved by local chapters of Planned Parenthood and the National Organization for Women (NOW).
 - The Chicago-based Americans United for Life mailed over 48,000 letters to lawyers urging them to oppose a policy endorsing a woman's right to choose adopted by the American Bar Association's governing body in February 1990. The ABA's House of Delegates, by a vote of 200 to 188, rejected the pro-choice position and approved a "neutral" position in August 1990.
 - Anti-abortion forces successfully pressured the AFL-CIO Executive Council to adopt a "neutral position" on a woman's right to choose. The National Right to Life Committee organized an aggressive letter-writing campaign urging that the labor body take no position on the abortion issue. Bulletin boards in some unionized work places displayed anti-choice posters distributed by the Ohio Right to Life Society. Roman Catholic church leaders publicly called on the AFL-CIO not to endorse a pro-choice position. Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York proposed that union members should be allowed to "send their [union] dues to the pro-life movement" if the labor leadership adopted a pro-choice position. Msgr. George Higgins wrote in his February 1, 1990, column: "If the [AFL-CIO] Executive Council adopts a pro-abortion resolution, it will radically disrupt the labor movement's solidarity and seriously distract from the essential role of protecting the economic rights and interests of the members." ["A Warning to the AFL-CIO," *Catholic New York*]
 - Bishop René Gracida excommunicated an abortion clinic director in a formal decree, stating, "Your cooperation in procuring abortions is a sin against God and humanity and the laws of the Roman Catholic Church." A statement by Cardinal O'Connor threatened Catholic politicians with excommunication if they supported abortion rights. The National Council of Catholic Bishops hired a public rela-

tions firm to design an offensive against abortion rights groups and to affect public policy on the issue.

- Rev. Donald Wildmon, executive director of the Mississippi-based American Family Association, took partial credit for forcing NBC to drastically discount its normal advertising rates during the airing of the TV film "Roe vs. Wade"—at a loss of about \$1 million for the network. Threatening a boycott of advertisers, Wildmon's organization targeted CBS's showing of "Absolute Strangers." The TV movie re-created a New York husband's fight against anti-choice groups trying to prevent a doctor-recommended abortion to help his comatose wife's recovery after an auto accident.
- Church-organized human "life chains"—some in the form of a cross—were staged by anti-choice demonstrators during October 1990 and 1991.
- Using a telephone hookup from the White House, President Bush addressed the 1990 and '91 rallies of the annual March for Life. He told the 1991 demonstrators to "make it your goal to keep this issue alive and predominant in Congress, the courts and in the minds of the American people." While these events were taking place in Washington, D.C., other abortion opponents marched, rallied, and held church-organized events around the U.S. Vice President Quayle spoke in person to the April 28, 1990, anti-abortion rally organized by the National Right to Life Committee, and Bush offered words of encouragement through a telephone message.
- During 1990–91, over a dozen pregnant women were charged with "fetal child abuse" or delivery of illegal drugs to a minor (that is, to a fetus through the umbilical cord). All of the prosecutions involved low-income women, most of whom were women of color. Claiming to be concerned over child welfare, seven states passed laws making drug use during pregnancy a crime, and have classified an infant born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome as an abused child. The far-reaching effects of the "fetal rights" concept are felt by men as well as women. For example, the ban on federal funding for medical studies using fetal tissue has affected research and treatment for Parkinson's disease, diabetes, epilepsy, Alzheimer's disease, and spinal cord injuries.

Webster Ruling Opens the Door

Anti-abortion lawmakers and lobbyists have sponsored a variety of bills ranging from a total ban on abortions to provisions designed to change public opinion. For example, they have proposed statutes which would bar sex-selection abortions—although only a tiny number of such abortions actually take place—in order to promote the idea that women seek the procedure for frivolous and morally repugnant reasons. In arguing for anti-abortion legislation, lawmakers use terms like "pre-born baby boys and girls" to implant mental pictures of living children being murdered by abortion procedures. At the federal level, a "human life amendment" has been proposed to define "personhood" as beginning with conception.

State legislatures hammer away at reproductive rights by passing laws to regulate medical facilities—making abortion accessibility difficult and more expensive—or through laws mandating spousal consent, a waiting period, or special conditions (rape, incest, endangering a woman's life) before a woman can obtain an abortion. Legislators in some states adopted statutes with the express aim of taking legal challenges to the Supreme Court in order to completely overturn *Roe v. Wade*. By the fall of 1991, several laws were making their way through lower courts as likely candidates for such a ruling (Guam, Louisiana, Utah, Pennsylvania).

What happened in Pennsylvania shows the seesaw situation in many parts of the U.S. where defenders of a woman's right to choose have been bounced from defeat to victory to defeat.

Pennsylvania legislators were the first to seize the opportunity presented by the Supreme Court's 1989 decision giving states broad powers to limit abortion rights. Before the *Webster* ruling, the Supreme Court struck down key sections of the state's 1982 abortion law, and in 1988 a federal judge blocked enforcement of a law requiring minors seeking abortions to get the consent of at least one parent or a court order. After *Webster*, however, a package of restrictive statutes were hurried through the legislative process. The Abortion Control Act contained provisions for a waiting period, criminalizing late abortions, and requiring medical tests and reporting procedures to discourage doctors from performing abortions. This is the way the "informed consent" section was described by abortion rights supporters: "Women would have to listen to anti-abortion lectures, then go home and wait a day before obtaining an abortion. Many women in Pennsylvania already have to travel hours from homes to obtain their abortions. A 24-hour waiting period makes their abortions much more expensive, and constitutes harassment of rural and poor women."

Feminists and their allies fought back in a variety of ways. Pennsylvanians for Choice, a statewide coalition of over 40 groups, organized a September 1989 rally and lobby day at the state capitol. Over 20 busloads from Philadelphia helped make this the largest lobby effort to date on any issue. The state affiliate of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) issued an "Action Alert" in October 1989 urging abortion rights supporters to protest the legislation through phone calls and letters. House parties were held for showings of the film "Abortion for Survival." Tables were set up to collect signatures on petitions, register pro-choice voters, and promote upcoming state and national demonstrations. The National Organization for Women Caravan for Women's Lives toured the state and helped recruit 91 women to run for state offices—hoping to replace legislators with supporters of women's rights. Feminist groups sprang up on cam-

Spring March for Reproductive Freedom

At its national conference in New York, the National Organization for Women (NOW) called for April 5, 1992, to be the largest march and rally on Washington, D.C., in U.S. history. The focus of the rally and march will be abortion rights and reproductive freedom emphasizing the disproportionate disadvantage that women of color bear when Medicaid funding is cut off and young women's reproductive rights are denied.

The October/November *National NOW Times* reports that action plans to build the march starting January include walkathons, vigils, rallies, and campus events. NOW chapters and campus activists are already checking out travel arrangements for buses, trains, and planes to Washington.

Patricia Ireland, NOW executive vice president, recently expressed what is likely common sentiment among women regarding issues affecting women's rights today: "George Bush and anti-women Congress members will feel the heat of the fire they have ignited under the women of this country. We will not be separated by classist and racist tactics that exclude young and low-income women from receiving safe legal abortions and full information about healthcare, we will not tolerate the domestic terrorism of Operation Rescue, and we will not accept a cap on damages for women who are sexually harassed and discriminated against in the workplace."

All Out for April 5!

puses—many with a specific focus on abortion, and others with a strong interest in pro-choice issues as well as other women's liberation concerns. Citywide coalitions fought the state's Abortion Control Act, and built the 1989 national action.

On November 12, 1989, Pennsylvanians participated in the massive national mobilization in Washington, D.C., organized by NOW to support abortion rights. University of Pennsylvania students made up one of the largest college contingents in the march and rally. The *Pittsburgh Press* reported (November 13, 1989): "About 110 people, most of them from the Pittsburgh black community, traveled to the rally on three buses sponsored by Women of Color for Reproductive Freedom." A founding member of the group told the reporter that African Americans have a special interest in the abortion rights movement because they are most often affected by cuts in funding for abortion and contraception, and, "When abortion was illegal, 64 percent of women who died from botched abortions were black."

The Abortion Control Act was signed by Pennsylvania's governor in November 1989, and a court challenge to most provisions was carried out by Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania and several women's clinics with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union. In January 1990—only five days before the effective date of the law—a federal judge issued an injunction against the 24-hour waiting period, the requirement that women had to notify their spouses before having an abortion, and other key sections. The injunction was appealed by the state, and went to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Abortion rights supporters continued to battle restrictive legislation. For example, Pennsylvania NOW organized an October 1990 rally and lobby day at the state capitol "To Keep Abortion Safe & Legal."

On October 21, 1991, a federal appeals court upheld most of the provisions in the Abortion Control Act—including requirements for a 24-hour waiting period and parental consent. The panel of three judges applied the approach of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who holds the view that courts should approve state abortion regulations which do not impose an "undue burden" or a "severe limitation" on a woman's right to end an early pregnancy. Her position is considered a "moderate" one compared to Justices Rehnquist and White, who favor upholding all state regulations—and who are expected to vote for a complete overturn of *Roe v. Wade* at the first opportunity. With the addition of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court bench, it is expected that a majority of 5–6 justices will require compulsory pregnancies or force women to return to back-alley butchers and coat hangers.

Commenting on the ruling in Pennsylvania, the attorney for Planned Parenthood and the clinics stated, "They have said *Roe v. Wade* is no longer the law." The general counsel for the National Right to Life Committee said, "We just want to get a case, any case, up there [to the Supreme Court] as soon as possible. I don't have a preference on which case goes first." If the Pennsylvania law is not the first to be heard by the Supreme Court, restrictive legislation from Louisiana, Guam, or Utah is waiting in the wings to take center stage in the drama being played out through the court system.

What Abortion Rights Forces Have Done, and What's Needed Now

Women's rights activists, galvanized by the Supreme Court's 1989 *Webster* ruling, have carried out a wide variety of actions and campaigns—at the local, state, and national levels—to protect hard-won reproductive rights. A new generation of young women and men have joined with veterans of the women's liberation movement in the fight against restrictive legislation, court rulings against a woman's right to choose, and attacks by Operation Rescue against women's health clinics. Women of color have organized themselves into activist groups and have participated in mobilizations and clinic defense. Union members have marched

in demonstrations, and a number of labor organizations have adopted resolutions supporting women's reproductive rights. Religious groups, civil libertarians, lesbian and gay rights activists, and others concerned with women's rights are involved in reproductive rights projects and events. The strength and determination of pro-choice forces have been shown over and over again.

- Outraged over the Supreme Court's *Webster* decision and over the lack of adequate support from politicians, delegates at the 1989 NOW National Conference adopted a "Declaration of Women's Political Independence," which led to the formation of an exploratory commission to investigate the possible creation of a new political party. The Commission for Responsive Democracy held hearings in seven major U.S. cities during 1990–91. On September 15, 1991, the commission voted to call for a new party, and to recommend that NOW provide leadership in bringing together broad forces to establish a new independent political party. This resolution was endorsed by the NOW National Board and will be presented to the 1992 National Conference.
- The largest abortion rights mobilization in U.S. history took place on November 12, 1989. Called into the streets by NOW, one million demonstrated in 150 cities. The largest rallies were held in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. Almost 20,000 students registered with NOW for the march and rally in the nation's capital. Fifteen unions were among the many national endorsers; thousands of union members, organized in contingents, helped fill the lawn facing the Lincoln Memorial. The outpouring of demonstrators was a powerful expression of the majority's support for a woman's right to choose.
- Defense of women's health clinics was carried out across the nation. Pro-choice demonstrators at clinics regularly outnumbered Operation Rescue blockaders, and trained escorts helped women enter facilities for a variety of services.
- Across the U.S., pro-choice activists engaged in numerous battles, including: fights against laws restricting abortion availability; efforts to preserve family planning programs in Title X of the Public Health Service Act; campaigns to expand birth control research and products; struggles to provide sex education in schools; and projects to secure U.S. research on and production of RU486. A variety of tactics were utilized: lawsuits, petitions, ballot initiatives and referenda, phone calls and letters, boycotts, large newspaper ads, meetings and conferences, public rallies, etc.
- Well-organized campaigning by feminists helped win elections for pro-choice candidates and helped defeat anti-abortion candidates and bills.

Immediately following the 1989 *Webster* ruling, abortion rights forces contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars plus invaluable energies to candidates who succeeded in winning governor's races in New Jersey and Virginia. In 1990, reacting to such election losses, a layer of Republicans defied the anti-abortion plank in the GOP national platform. Republicans for Choice was founded by Ann Stone, a direct-mail specialist for conservative causes. The 1991 Young Republican convention refused to endorse the GOP's anti-abortion plank. An all-out battle at the 1992 Republican national convention was promised by 75 Republicans who supported abortion rights.

Major feminist organizations devoted human and financial resources to election activities. For example, NOW's 1989 efforts in Florida helped prevent passage of legislation which would have crippled abortion accessibility for many women. In 1990, NOW's



president happily reported election victories for two female gubernatorial candidates, a woman elected as mayor of Washington, D.C., and 45 women elected to statewide offices around the country; in addition, anti-abortion ballot measures were defeated in Oregon and Nevada. NOW's "1991 Blueprint for Action" included plans to prevent passage of restrictive laws by state legislatures, to win codification of abortion rights by states, to recruit women candidates for elected state offices, and to pressure Congress to adopt the Freedom of Choice Act.

The Fund for the Feminist Majority highlighted Election Day 1990 as "an historic opportunity to change the state legislatures—those same male-dominated bodies which denied us the Equal Rights Amendment and which, if left unchallenged, will deny us our reproductive rights." In 1990 and 1991, Fund President Eleanor Smeal urged a change in the composition of state legislatures "by electing more and more feminists."

Defining itself as "the political arm of the pro-choice movement," NARAL explains it "has two mandates: to build a political infrastructure of pro-choice activists and voters to elect state and federal legislators, governors, and, ultimately, a President who will support and defend a woman's right to choose; and to defeat anti-choice legislation both in state legislatures and Congress."

Although pro-choice forces have had an electoral impact, abortion rights are in serious jeopardy as long as political action is confined to the two-party framework.

- Politicians elected on the basis of pro-choice statements failed to live up to their campaign pledges. For example, in the first election after the 1989 *Webster* decision, a California woman who was the only pro-choice Republican to run for state office became an assemblywoman with the help of feminist campaigning. But once elected, she refused to speak at a pro-choice event and voted against or abstained from measures involving reproductive rights.
- Although Democrats hold the majority in Congress, the Freedom of Choice Act has not been adopted. Introduced in 1989, this legislation would establish the underlying principles of *Roe v. Wade* and prohibit states from passing laws restricting the right to choose.
- A bipartisan coalition in a U.S. House of Representatives committee approved a measure that would have effectively overturned the "gag rule" imposed on medical care workers in clinics receiving federal funds. Abortion rights supporters celebrated. But five days later, the House Pro-

Choice Caucus backed off from pursuing this effort—explaining they lacked enough votes to override President Bush's expected veto and feared a voter backlash. The House voted in June 1991 for an appropriations bill which included the provision to thwart the "gag rule"—sure of a Bush veto. A few weeks later the same game was played in the U.S. Senate. Legislation to cancel the "gag rule" was passed, but, like thieves hiding in the night, the senators would not take a roll call vote. Senator Edward Kennedy (the darling of liberals and a supposed champion of women's rights) boasted, "Both the House and the Senate have now convincingly repudiated the Reagan-Bush Administration's gag rule regulations and reaffirmed the right of physicians to practice medicine without government censorship." *But the "gag rule" still lives!*

- In 1990, Democrats helped confirm David Souter as a Supreme Court justice. The first abortion-related case to be heard by Souter was *Rust v. Sullivan*, and he provided the needed fifth vote to uphold the "gag rule." When Souter was confirmed, NOW President Molly Yard explained: "our 'friends' on the Senate Judiciary Committee—those whose elections we have worked for and contributed to—did not press the nominee on the abortion rights question but were willing to approve him even though his answers to privacy rights were unclear. . . . To add further insult to injury, some committee members were openly contemptuous of feminists who appeared before them to argue against Souter's nomination!" In spite of feminist opposition to nominee Clarence Thomas in 1991, he won a place on the Supreme Court because 14 Democrats joined with Republicans to vote for confirmation.

As the saying goes: With "friends" like these, who needs enemies?!

It is clear to increasing numbers of abortion rights supporters that it is not enough to simply elect more women or to simply elect more "good" politicians. That does not guarantee the fulfillment of campaign speeches or private pledges. At the same time, it is obvious that politics is a key arena for the fight to protect and expand reproductive rights. But we need to break out of this two-party swamp which is suffocating us with "lesser evil" choices, expedient compromises, betrayals piled on top of broken promises, and cynical maneuvers designed to capture votes and funds and volunteer campaigners.

What we need is *independent political action*. Independent political action in the streets—with massive mobilizations like the ones held in 1989. And independent political action within the electoral and legislative process—as projected by the NOW Commission for Responsive Democracy, which called for a *new* party "dedicated to equality, social and economic justice, demilitarization and a healthy environment." This is *not* a projection for a "one-issue party" nor a "women's party" but a call to join with other forces in U.S. society whose needs are denied and frustrated by the two-party monopoly on political power.

Feminists can be prime movers in the transformation of U.S. politics. Add your voice to those now saying: We're not going to take this anymore! We choose to create a party of our own to fight for our needs and answerable to us! □

Founding of Labor Party Advocates Sparks Discussion on the Left

by David Riehle

The organization of Labor Party Advocates by Tony Mazzocchi, a longtime leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union, is the first sustained effort by any element of the labor movement outside of small radical groups to popularize the idea of a labor party based on the unions since the immediate post-World War II period.

Mazzocchi, probably not by coincidence, entered into the labor movement as a young activist in the CIO during that period, 1945-47, when unions carried out the biggest strike wave in U.S. history. At that time, labor party advocacy was widespread in the CIO, especially in the United Auto Workers, where it had been effectively advocated by Trotskyist auto workers. The UAW at that time had an official position in favor of a labor party, and many UAW locals had functioning labor party committees.

The inauguration of the Cold War and the McCarthyite political witch-hunt in the United States, which included a ferocious attack on radicals in the unions, coupled with relatively full employment and a steady rise in wages, brought an end to labor party agitation, as the CIO bureaucracy consolidated its grip on the mass industrial unions which had arisen out of the great proletarian upsurge of the 1930s.

Mazzocchi, who has held various international offices with the OCAW, including recently the post of secretary-treasurer, began raising the idea of a labor party throughout the 1980s as he saw the anti-union offensive of the employers roll back wages and organizational gains. Mazzocchi was a leading lobbyist for the trade unions, seeking support for various legislative goals among the members of the United States Congress, and saw earlier than most union officials the increasing unwillingness of the government to grant any further concessions to labor like those which had been characteristic of the 25-year postwar economic boom. Mazzocchi was particularly affected by the Democratic Party's sabotage of the labor law reform sought by the AFL-CIO union leadership in the late 1970s.

He utilized his position as a national official of OCAW to conduct scientific polls of the political attitudes of members

of various OCAW and other union locals over the last few years. The polls all consistently demonstrated a favorable response by a majority for the idea of a labor party, and considerably less support for the Democratic Party, which has been supported by the labor officialdom since the 1930s.

Mazzocchi reported that in 30 OCAW locals 65.7 percent responded "yes" to the statement: "Both parties (Democrat and Republican) care more about big business than working people."

To the question "Who best represents the interests of working people?" 49.7 percent responded "neither party," while the Democrats got 44.2 percent and the Republicans 4 percent.

The statement: "It's time for Labor to build a new independent party of working people" was affirmed by 52.8 percent, while 27.8 percent disagreed and 18.5 percent were "Not sure."

The age group which gave the highest support to the labor party proposal was the youngest, 25-34 years old.

Interestingly, the people conducting the LPA polls report that support for the Democrats is highest among union staff employees and officers, and lowest among the rank and file, which is where the highest degree of support for the labor party proposal is registered.

Mazzocchi has attempted to use the results of his polls to demonstrate that the labor party idea is readily grasped and supported by union rank and file.

Bolstered by this, and other positive responses to his proposal, Mazzocchi formally initiated the group "Labor Party Advocates" about a year ago.

As has been reported previously in *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* (Richard Scully, September 1991), Mazzocchi is basically projecting three things:

- Establish LPA "to educate the public about the need for a Labor Party in the U.S.," and to serve as an organizing committee for a new Labor Party.
- Membership open to all working people, and a steering committee consisting of elected union officials, from local officers on up.
- When LPA has about 1,000 steering committee members and around 100,000 dues-paying members,

Mazzocchi projects holding a founding convention.

LPA does not intend to run candidates for public office itself, nor does it attempt to impose restrictions on the political activity of supporters, including working within the two major parties.

As Scully said, "Mazzocchi is attempting to steer a course which will enable him to educate and organize for a labor party while avoiding premature confrontations with the union bureaucracy."

It is not difficult, of course, to find problems with Mazzocchi's speculative timetable, or the conception of a labor party that is implied in his projected method of organization. Many different variants of a "labor party" have been projected over time and by various components of the left and the labor movement in the U.S., some of which embodied class independence, and some of which were designed to prevent it. While Mazzocchi has some passing familiarity with this, he is mainly influenced in his conception of a labor party by the actually existing mass electoral parties supported by the unions in Britain, Canada, and Scandinavia. These Social Democratic parties, whether they call themselves "labor," "socialist," or "democratic," are organizationally independent of the capitalist parties, but reformist to the core. They have all supported imperialist foreign policies of their respective governments, and many times aided them in the imposition of austerity measures and other antilabor programs. They have in general expressed the political characteristics of the bureaucratic leaderships of the unions which provide their primary support.

Nevertheless, revolutionaries, particularly those from the Trotskyist tradition, have generally advocated participation in the mass working class parties, and urged that workers and the oppressed vote for them. This position was taken and developed by the founders of the Marxist movement and their successors.

The great labor upsurge of the 1880s in the United States produced mass working class phenomena. Prominent among them were the Knights of Labor, and electoral efforts such as the Henry George campaign for mayor of New York City and a wave of local labor party initiatives. Frederick Engels, in an often cited comment writing to German Marxists in the U.S. who held back from these developments, said that:

The first great step, of importance for every country entering the movement, is always the constitution of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers party. . . . That the first programme of this party is still confused and extremely deficient . . . are unavoidable evils but also merely transitory ones. The masses must have time and opportunity to develop, and they can have the opportunity only when they have a movement of their own—no matter in what form so long as it is their own movement—in which they are driven by their own mistakes and learn to profit by them. (Letter to F.A. Sorge, November 29, 1886.)

The incipient mass industrial organizations that arose in this period of ferment were defeated and dispersed, and mass independent political activity by American workers took place most notably through the Socialist Party, founded in 1901, until World War I, when it was eclipsed by new developments stimulated by the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Communist International in 1919.

In the period that followed the revolutionary workers movement in the U.S., located primarily in the American Communist Party, debated the labor party question intensely. The future founders of the American Trotskyist movement became the most consistent defenders of the Marxist position against a welter of opportunist and sectarian schemas.

James P. Cannon recalled that:

To start with, the left wing of American socialism had been traditionally rigid and doctrinaire on all questions—revolution *versus* reform, direct action *versus* parliamentary action, new unions *versus* the old craft unions, etc.

...

The first approach of the left wing to the question of the labor party was inflexibly sectarian and hostile. . . . I was a quite pronounced “right winger” in the early Communist Party, and I thought that people who were advocating a labor party were a hell of a long way out in front of the labor movement as I knew it in the Midwest. However, I must say that it never occurred to me at that time that we could be a part of the larger movement for a labor party and remain communists. Engels’ perspicacious letters on this very theme were unknown to me at the time. . . .

The theoretical justification for such a complicated tactic—conditional support of a *reformist* labor party by *revolutionists*—came originally from Lenin. I think it is indisputable that Lenin’s proposal to the British com-

munist that they should “urge the electors to vote for the labor candidate against the bourgeois candidate” in his pamphlet on *Left-Wing Communism*, and his later recommendation that the British Communist Party should seek affiliation to the British Labor Party, gave the first encouragement to the sponsors of a similar policy in this country, and marks the real origin of the policy. . . .

It seemed to us—after we had assimilated Lenin’s advice to the British—that this issue would make an excellent basis for a bloc with the more progressive wing of the trade-union movement, and open up new possibilities for the legitimization of the communists as a part of the American labor movement, the expansion of its contacts, etc. But I don’t think we would have argued the point if we had not been encouraged by Lenin’s explanation that revolutionists could critically support a reformist labor party, and even belong to it, without becoming reformists. (*The First Ten Years of American Communism* pp. 58–60.)

The *Platform of the Communist Opposition*, written by Cannon in 1929 and addressed to the Sixth National Convention of the CP, said:

The perspective of a labor party as a primary step in the political development of the American workers, adopted by the party in 1922 after a sharp struggle in the party and at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, holds good today. . . . The main base of the future labor party will be the new industrial unions formed in the coming struggles against the employers, the government, and the labor fakers and reformists.

As anticipated, new industrial unions did arise a few years after this was written, primarily in the form of the CIO. However, labor party possibilities were destroyed especially by the Popular Front policy inaugurated by the Comintern in 1935, which resulted in the American CP, a strong influence in the CIO, subordinating everything to support of Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.

The Socialist Workers Party, founded by American Trotskyists in 1938, affirmed its advocacy of a labor party:

We have always said that, confronted with a fully developed labor party, based on the trade unions, we would take a positive attitude toward it and most likely participate. We are now confronted with the necessity of concretizing this general point of view and taking a direct part in the presently

developing movement for a labor party and of working with all our strength to push it on the road to independence. (SWP National Committee Resolution, June 1938, from *The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and resolutions 1938-39*, edited by George Breitman.)

While strong labor party sentiment did develop in the unions, it was submerged in the tidal wave of patriotism and class collaboration engendered by the entry of the U.S. into the Second World War, and the unrelenting support of the Roosevelt administration by the CP, as well as the non-Stalinist majority of the union bureaucracy.

With the postwar labor upsurge, labor party prospects surged forward temporarily and then receded, and have lain dormant for the most part for the last 45 years, until Mazzocchi’s formation of LPA.

* * * * *

Most of the radical and socialist left has responded in a generally positive manner to Mazzocchi’s initiative with different mixtures of criticism and support—including the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, Socialist Action, Solidarity, and even the Communist Party. The most outstanding exception to this, it appears, is the present-day Socialist Workers Party.

The SWP’s paper, the *Militant*, devotes over a full page of its October 11, 1991, issue to an entirely negative assessment of LPA, and its endorsement by the national convention of the OCAW, held this August in Denver, Colorado.

The article, “Is OCAW’s ‘Labor Party Advocates’ a step toward independent political action?” is written by Joel Britton, who is identified as “an oil worker and member of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union. He was the Socialist Workers Party candidate for governor of California in 1990 and for Los Angeles mayor in 1989. Britton attended the recent OCAW convention.”

The answer to the question posed by the title of the article is clearly a resounding “No.”

The article is a kind of case-in-point of the type of sectarian hostility to complex developments in the real world that Engels, Lenin, and Cannon, among others, polemicized against in their writing on the labor party question.

Britton devotes most of his space to recapitulating the setbacks of the organized labor movement over the past decade, and the complicity of the Democratic and Republican parties in this offensive, and states that “breaking out of the union officialdom’s decades-long collaboration with and reliance on the twin parties of big

business means charting an independent political course for labor.”

This would be, he says, a “giant step for the labor movement,” and would “mark a fundamental shift, one that would necessarily come out of deepening struggles of working people and at least the beginning of the transformation of the unions into fighting instruments in the hands of the ranks.”

However, “A review of the political content and structure of the Labor Party Advocates reveals that it does not mark a step forward toward independent working class political action. This is true even though the union officials sponsoring it wrap their promotion of it in militant-style clothing.”

Further, it is revealed by Britton, “The impetus for this move by the OCAW officialdom comes not from pressure from the ranks but from the continuing blows being dealt to the unions and to their officialdoms by the employers and their government.”

“The officials,” Britton goes on to say, “are concerned not because of the beating working people are taking, but because their own social status, generous salaries, and perks flow from a healthy dues base and other forms of income that come with their positions. Falling union rolls threaten these privileges.”

After citing speeches made to the convention by Ralph Nader and former Texas agriculture commissioner Jim Hightower, Britton concludes:

It is these pressures from the ruling class, and not a rising rank-and-file movement or broader labor battles, that the union officialdom is responding to. . . . The OCAW convention proposals seek to reverse the fortunes of the labor tops, gaining more elbowroom for the left wing of the officialdom in the process.

For those who have been reading the *Militant* over the past decade, especially since the mass expulsions of all known Trotskyists from the SWP in 1983–84, one notable aspect to this article is that it is one of the very few in which the *Militant* has had anything critical to say about the “union officialdom.” Those of us who were around at the time remember that the *Militant* was almost entirely uncritical of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) “officialdom” over the course of the Local P-9 Hormel strike in Austin, Minn., as the bureaucracy with the aid of the federal courts, the state government, and others strangled this sparkling example of union democracy and independence.

The *Militant* reported uncritically and generally positively as the International Association of Machinists (IAM)

bureaucracy let the Eastern Airlines strike atrophy.

Almost all of its reporting of labor events has been noncommittal and uncritical, not much different than what you might get from a reasonably objective bourgeois newspaper.

I remember particularly that after the SWP abruptly told the leaders of UFCW Local P-9 in Austin that they were all washed up in March 1987, and should abandon their campaign to boycott the company’s products, the *Militant* then embraced with great hope the three or four bureaucratically directed local packinghouse strikes in the Midwest led by UFCW packinghouse director Lewie Anderson, the executioner of P-9, getting so gushy as to dub 1987 “The Year of the Packinghouse Worker.” After the strikes petered out, with some big setbacks, the *Militant* moved on to its hopeful coverage of the Eastern strike, expressing no criticism of the IAM bureaucrats “wrapping their promotion of it in militant-style clothing,” without giving it serious backing.

Now, when for the first time in four decades, the idea of a labor party is beginning to be disseminated in a systematic and organized way throughout some sections of the union movement, the *Militant* reacts with scorn and hostility, and, in a rare moment, rakes the “labor tops” over the coals—not for betraying the Hormel workers, or the Eastern workers, but for having the temerity to say something positive about a labor party, and to give it the weight and authority of an official act by the OCAW convention—a convention, which, after all, whatever its inadequacies, represents in some degree the rank and file of the union.

Members of the SWP as a matter of party policy do not run for any union posts, including steward, delegate, etc., even if urged by their co-workers. (Britton was attending the OCAW convention as an observer.)

This abstention-on-principle helps put the hostile reaction of the *Militant* in perspective. The leaders of the SWP are now and have been for some time simply one additional expression of a current of the radical working class movement which has found its expression in all times and places—one based on disappointment in the failure of the revolution to arrive on schedule and the failure of the workers to respond in the hoped-for time and place. It finds safe refuge in dogmatism and abstentionism, where its authority is unchallenged, and its methods never subjected to the test of experience.

Marx caricatured this abstentionism, upheld in his day by the anarchist followers of Bakunin:

The working class should not form its own political party—it must not under any pretext engage in political actions, because fighting the state means recognizing the state: that’s contrary to eternal principles. Workers should not go on strike because fighting for higher wages means recognizing that wages exist. That’s contrary to the eternal principles for the emancipation of the working class.

It is characterized by the *doctrinairism* which Cannon referred to as: “revolution *versus* reform, direct action *versus* parliamentary action, new unions *versus* the old craft unions, etc.”

Britton has his own version of this. In his article “continuing blows being dealt to the unions and to their officialdoms,” and “pressure from the ranks” are mutually exclusive. There is no suggestion in his disquisition that these factors may have a reciprocal relationship to each other. *Because* the union bureaucrats inevitably interpret the interests of the unions as identical with their own narrow and selfish interests, and *because* “the officials are concerned not because of the beating working people are taking, but because of their own social status,” anything which they initiate, such as LPA, must be no good.

One cannot help noting that although this action took place at a convention attended by 500 rank-and-file delegates, the possibility that it might have in some way expressed sentiment from the ranks is considered so remote that there is not even any discussion of it. In fact there is no reporting at all of anything the rank and file might have done or said at the convention. The article is entirely concerned with the actions of the top officials and those they invited to speak. It is flatly stated as a fact evidently requiring no proof that “pressure from the ranks” exerted no visible effect whatsoever on the convention, in spite of the unprecedented ill fortune of the union reported by the *Militant*.

In this bleak and pessimistic analysis is located the real source of the abstentionism of the SWP leadership, expressed so strongly in this article. Their political mood and psychology is driven by a deep disappointment in the failure of the workers to respond to the employers’ offensive in the way that this small group of radicals had hoped that they would, at the beginning of the antilabor offensive some ten to fifteen years ago, when party members recruited off college campuses were sent into the factories with the expectation that big struggles were imminent and that the party would grow rapidly. Disappointment in the failure of the actual course of events to conform to their arbitrary projections led them, in spite of themselves, to look else-

where for sources of change in the labor movement. This is why they were so hopeful about the so-called "strike offensive" led by Lewie Anderson and endorsed by the UFCW "officialdom," and about the IAM bureaucracy's endorsement of the prolonged Eastern strike. In fact all of the same arguments about the narrow and self-interested motivations of "labor tops" could have been marshaled with equal justification and with better effect in analyzing those phenomena, which were never criticized openly by the *Militant*.

Subjectively impelled because of their disappointment in the workers, in spite of their revolutionary political pretensions, to look fundamentally to the union bureaucracy for change, their reaction to the partial and contradictory steps in the direction of a labor party movement is one-sided and rejectionist, as though the union bureaucrats had let them down again. What else did they expect?

Given their abstentionism and preoccupation with individual recruitment to a small and shrinking political formation, they evince no interest at all in *intervening* in this development to influence it, in "taking a direct part in the presently developing *movement* for a labor party and of working with all our strength to push it on the road to independence," as the SWP said in 1938. Therefore there is no need for Britton to report on any views expressed by the rank-and-file delegates to the national convention of this rather democratic union. (The OCAW, for example, does not permit any full-time officers to serve on its International Executive Board, which is entirely composed of working rank-and-file members.)

To those who know the SWP's history, and the potential it had at the beginning of this period some ten years ago, this is sad and regrettable. However, life moves on, and the development of LPA, and subsequent labor party developments, will not be affected for good or bad by *ex cathedra* pronouncements from the demoralized leaders of this organization. Perhaps it can at least serve as a negative example.

There is an important question posed implicitly by the criticism voiced by Britton. It is the general question of how and through what medium positive change can be effected in the highly bureaucratized organizations of the working class in this country, uniformly committed to the utilization of reformist political methods, and how they can be transformed into "fighting instruments in the hands of the ranks" to use Britton's terminology.

All past history teaches us that this transformation must be a *process*, which develops in a highly complex and contradictory way, impelled *both* by changes in the objective situation and the fortunes

of the workers' organizations, *and* by the reaction of the rank and file, and the pressures they exert on the bureaucracy—implicitly and directly—and by the reciprocal influence of one upon the other. There is no Chinese wall between the membership and the bureaucracy of the unions, as anyone who knows anything about this can attest. There is a constant and reciprocal influence of one upon the other. This is true in all times and places. The problem is that in periods of relative rank-and-file passivity, and under conditions where great material resources are available to the bureaucracy without much control by the membership, the reciprocal influence is unequal, and the influence of the bureaucracy, which is a transmission belt for the influence of the ideology of the employers, is dominant. This is more or less what the situation has been for the last 50 years. But things are beginning to change. The declining fortunes of the unions as organizational apparatuses stem in large part from the setbacks delivered directly to their constituencies, the dues-paying rank and file. But at the same time this decline also undermines the self-confidence of the bureaucracy, stimulates various kinds of leadership crises and divisions, and opens up more elbowroom, not only for "the left wing of the officialdom" as Britton bemoans in the conclusion of his article, but more elbowroom for the rank and file. This is not hard to detect at the present time. It finds expression through various caucuses such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union and the New Directions group in the UAW, to name only two that have significant followings. Both are products of and take advantage of the relative political vacuum created by the crisis.

Britton's commentary about the goals of the "left wing of the officialdom" again presumes an element of the trade unions whose existence is so well established that there is no need to prove it through reference to past experience, or even to identify its present dimensions, membership, influence, or objectives, other than their evident need for "more elbowroom."

Of course it follows from the existence of a "left wing" that there must be a "right wing" whose leader Britton identifies as Lane Kirkland, the president of the AFL-CIO. It is therefore established that there are at least two contending groupings within the union officialdom, with objectives and methods that are different, and to some degree opposed to each other. Otherwise there would be no need for at least one of the wings to obtain "more elbowroom." It is also implicit in this characterization that the "left wing," needing "more elbowroom," must be functioning in an internal situation where the other, "right wing," has the upper hand. Britton in fact discloses

that the "left wing" has a program, although a "modest" one (by which he means one entirely insufficient and unworthy of support) and he indicates that it includes "a more progressive tax system, laws that make it easier to organize unions, equal and guaranteed health, pension, and education benefits, and a program of improved social service." Whether this is so modest or not under current conditions is open for discussion. But if this is the left wing's program, what is the right wing's program? Which one is better? What is Britton's program? Is it suggested that the rank and file should take no interest in the programs of the right and left wings of the officialdom of their organizations? Or that these programs, and the methods utilized to pursue them, are not influenced at all by the needs and aspirations of the rank and file? Or that the minority "left wing" of the union officialdom may under certain conditions seek support for its "modest program" among the rank and file, thereby, intentionally or not, setting into motion significantly broader forces, and opening up new opportunities for the *rank and file* to intervene in this process?

Why, it might be asked, does the union officialdom apparently have at least two wings, with methods and objectives which, it necessarily follows, must not be identical? Why doesn't the officialdom have one unified policy? Is it possible that this is because the union officialdom is subject to pressures which are exerted upon different segments of it with varying degrees of intensity and, that in fact, these segments respond unequally to these pressures? And is it not possible, or even probable, that at least some of these pressures are exerted, directly or indirectly, by the rank and file? The leadership of the unions, after all, has to periodically stand for reelection in order to continue enjoying their "social status, generous salaries, and perks" as Britton says. They must submit to this process not often enough, it is true, nor under sufficiently democratic conditions. But if the unions are in fact, in spite of their deficiencies, genuine workers' organizations, and not company unions, then their leadership must be formally selected by the membership, whether directly or indirectly, and surely some pressures from the rank and file must register on the officialdom. This possibility is excluded by Britton, who says several times, and categorically, that the impetus for the support of LPA comes, not from the rank and file, but from ruling class pressures alone.

James P. Cannon addressed the question of the complex and varying interrelationship of leadership and rank and file under changing social, political, and economic conditions in the context of the American labor movement in an article entitled "The

Communists and the 'Progressives,'" which reviewed developments among a segment of the labor leadership at that time. His analysis, although made many decades ago, and in a different social epoch, remains valid and instructive.

"These events," Cannon said, referring to the reformist program developed by certain "progressives" in and around the labor leadership on the eve of the Great Depression, "are not accidental":

They reflect in the first place the unmistakable growth of discontent of wide sections of the workers and their impulse to struggle against the present state of affairs. . . .

These progressives are weather-cocks, who reflect certain winds blowing in the labor movement. Their emergence now, with demands which connote militancy, is an indicator of the radicalization of the workers growing within the old unions as well as in the ranks of the unorganized masses. Their role, objectively speaking, is to express this radicalization in words, to harness it in action, and to head it off from any real collision with the capitalists and the AFL machine. . . .

The question whether they will succeed in stultifying the promising movements of the proximate future or whether the very movements of the workers they express and, to a certain extent, *help to create* [my emphasis] are developed in the direction of real class battles depends very much on the activities and tactics of the Communists. . . . And one of the most decisive aspects of these tactics is the question of our attitude toward the progressives and the movement which they indubitably express. . . .

We are not done with the progressives. On the contrary, the question of our attitude towards them and relations with them will take on a tenfold greater significance in the coming period of mass struggles than in the period behind us.

Cannon then criticized those who, as he said, utilized the tactic of "straight-out denunciation and [artificially pose the tactic of] completely independent struggle."

They see the progressive leaders only as individuals and roundly denounce them as fakers. They fail now, as before, to see the movement of workers they express and, to a certain extent, represent. And that [the movement] is the most important and decisive thing for the Communists.

"The question" Cannon said, is not

what the reformists will do when the fight grows hot—that should be known in advance—but how can the Communists best develop the struggles of the workers and expand their influence. It is from this standpoint that we must evaluate our past experience with the progressives and draw conclusions for the future. . . .

Did we get our influence among the miners and eventually gain the leadership of a great mass movement in 1928 by having nothing to do with the progressives? Quite the contrary. . . . It was the bloc with Brophy [a dissident UMW leader] and other progressives which gave us access to the masses of miners, who at that time were not "revolutionary miners who have nothing but contempt for such spineless quitters" but admirers of these same Brophys. It was the prestige of Brophy and others, and the confidence the miners had in them primarily, that gave the movement its wide basis at the start. (James P. Cannon, *The Left Opposition in the U.S. 1928-31*.)

While Labor Party Advocates is and will remain for the foreseeable future a propagandistic effort in the unions, it is one that takes place on a far wider scale than past efforts to disseminate the labor party idea by tiny aggregations of socialists, precisely because an element of the union officialdom is impelled by the current crisis to look for alternatives. Since this idea is being revived for the first time in many decades among union activists it is inevitable that there will be many different conceptions of what this should be and what it can become. Mazzocchi's projections are only one of many, and what is important at this point is not whatever castles in the air are being built about future conventions representing 100,000 dues-paying LPA members but the fact that this idea is getting a hearing, and a favorable response, among real, indigenous, rank-and-file trade unionists, and even that actual trade union functioning committees are being established to advocate the idea. So much the better that it is brought forward at the convention of a significant and influential industrial union like the OCAW, endorsed and treated seriously, whatever the reformist illusions of OCAW leaders.

Tangible steps toward independent political action by labor may very well not arise directly from LPA—my opinion is that they won't, that it is more likely that some union somewhere, some AFL-CIO central body somewhere, will run some candidates, as was almost done by the

Communication Workers of America in New Jersey this year. Although that was a false start, starts—false and otherwise—are impelled by real pressures.

The labor party idea is organic and natural to the trade union movement, and only the stifling and pervasive reaction imposed on the unions over the past decades has prevented it from coming forth. It has to be kept in mind that the source of the momentum inexorably driving this idea forward is precisely the declining wages, legal rights, organization, and prospects for the future of the working class, as well as the blows being rained down on the unions. Coupled with this, and a necessary part of it, is the increasing distance taken from organized labor by the Democratic Party, and in fact by the government as a whole, expressing a general consensus of the ruling class. As Mazzocchi frequently points out, the last real piece of prolabor legislation, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, came in the Nixon administration.

The totality of this affects the unions at every level. The lives of working people, their moods, and their aspirations all have an impact. These are, after all, authentic working class organizations, whatever their deficiencies, and however distorted. The power of the labor party idea is exactly that it is adaptable to these far from ideal circumstances. It is a *transitional* idea, one that takes a powerful principle, that of the political independence of the working class, and adapts it to a form that corresponds to the current consciousness and organization of the working class. It follows as a matter of course that its actual realization will incorporate, to some degree, all of the characteristics of the actually existing working class—illusions, prejudices, superstitions, etc. etc., as well as embodying the workers' will to struggle for a better life. For revolutionaries a labor party is no panacea. It merely creates a more favorable arena to explain the necessity for the workers to transform this society into a new and better one. How much more persuasive and tangible is the idea of the workers creating a new world when they have their own party. That was what Engels tried to explain to his sectarian German American comrades in the Socialist Labor Party in 1886. Britton's doleful lament on LPA merely emphasizes that the lesson is always fresh.

Is Labor Party Advocates a step toward independent political action? Of course it is. More to the point, it is an opportunity. □

Is the Fight for Socialism Still Valid?

Dear Steve,

It was a pleasure being with you and the rest of the FITers at your educational conference in July. I learned a lot about socialism and I've been discussing the concepts with my labor friends back home and they have responded. I'd like to share with you some of the responses and get your reaction. My labor union friend says:

1. Socialism doesn't work. People all over the globe are rejecting it for capitalism, maybe not as hard core a capitalism as we have in the U.S., but they are tired of standing in long lines for a loaf of bread, not having a choice of consumer products, enduring the bureaucratic inefficiencies of a planned economy and they are opting for private ownership of the means of production.

2. It may be, as Bill Onasch says in his pamphlet, *Organizing for Socialism*, that a tiny elite of capitalist families now control every important area of decision making, but you revolutionary socialists only want to replace that capitalist elite with your own microscopic socialist elite. You people are a miniscule, frustrated, intellectual cabal who don't give a damn about the Joe Sixpack working class guy but only want power for yourselves so that you can be the ones to control the working class. The working class already rejected your program back in the thirties when unions were being organized and you wanted to radicalize the movement by having the workers take over the industries. Workers then opted for the more moderate road (you would call it accommodation) of working within the capitalist system to change it rather than tearing it down and replacing it with socialism.

3. To achieve the kind of revolution you call for would mean another civil war bloodbath in this country because the capitalists will not give up the power without a tremendous fight. Are you willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of lives to abolish capitalism?

4. Even a socialist system where the workers own the means of production won't work. Onasch says, "the working class itself—not some bureaucracy—would plan, decide, and administer. . . ." But what's to prevent the ruling working class from becoming bureaucratic?

Socialists can't be trusted any more than anyone else in power. If there were a labor "congress" made up of democratically elected representatives from all the "industries," human nature is such that power struggles would develop. There will always be those who want more (regardless if *you* think what they're getting is enough) and who are willing to buy, cheat, bribe, steal, bully, intimidate, and kill their way to get and retain power.

Say, for example, a floor boss has the authority to decide who gets the easy jobs and who gets the lousy ones (everything can't be decided by committee or election). He takes care of certain people who take care of him by getting him elected (by hook or by crook) as an industry representative. You know how this kind of stuff works. Most people are not altruistic enough to risk their necks or jobs or anything to correct abuses of power. So the floor boss gets "elected" to the labor congress. In fact, the labor congress would be made up of the same types who seek power today.

I don't want to carry this too far but you get the picture: corruption, bureaucracy, abuse of power. Perhaps a representative particularly adept at molding public opinion, who has access to the media, makes a grab for power. He has supporters who seize or control arms and forcefully legitimize his hold on power. He convinces people his way is best for the country. He kicks out those

who oppose him and installs his cronies. His lock on power strengthens. He becomes dictator. Dictatorships/bureaucracy have always triumphed before when socialism was attempted. Isn't one or the other likely to emerge again from the aftermath of a revolution? And wouldn't that be worse than capitalism?

5. The working class—that class which socialists want to "free"—believes in capitalism and does not believe in socialism. Workers don't care about owning the factories, they just want a fair wage and some security when the economy takes one of its inevitable downturns. Sure, nobody likes the downturns of capitalism, sure the capitalists take too much profit, but it's a helluva lot more likely that the capitalists and government can be persuaded (or forced through legislation) to give up enough of their profit to make life decent for all workers (reformed capitalism) than it is that the workers of the world will revolt and establish a peace loving, democratic, and just economic and political system based on utopian socialistic principles.

OK Steve—that's it in a nutshell. I'm sure you've heard it all before. I don't know how the FIT and Socialist Labor Party coincide in their philosophies, but some of the industrial labor congress stuff comes from them. It's the only concrete scenario I've been exposed to.

Courtney Garton, Annapolis, MD

Dear Courtney,

The questions you pose in your letter are, as you say, raised often by those who do not understand, or who do not agree with, what we in the revolutionary Marxist movement are trying to accomplish. Today in the USA that includes most people. The large majority, most of the time, has only a limited vision—one that doesn't reach very far beyond the obvious possibilities of their present existence. They haven't discovered that their ideas can, in fact, break with the ideology developed by the wealthy elite which presently rules our society. They go around repeating popular myths—believing that, in so doing, they are somehow explaining profound truths.

This general problem is compounded today. With the downfall of the bureaucratic Stalinist (not "socialist") regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the propaganda machine has been turned up to full volume, crowing about the "death of socialism." It is not surprising that this has had a significant impact on many people.

Don't be upset if logic alone doesn't convince most of these folks that an alternative is possible. Deeply held prejudices, such as the ones you describe, are often immune to logic. But even such prejudices *can* be overcome—with time, and a little hard experience about what this system has in store for working people (more on this process in response to your question number 5).

If we could go back and take a poll shortly before any one of the great revolutions in human history, we would probably find that most people considered "human nature" to be contrary to the goals of any crackpot they knew who might be advocating revolution. How many active abolitionists were there in the United States, for example, in the 1830s and 1840s? How many people during that time considered Blacks "naturally" inferior to whites? (Even most of those who were *against* slavery thought this was true!) How many people would have told you, at the beginning of the 18th century, before the American and French revolutions, that it was obvious a republican form of government couldn't work?

No one who simply repeats society's prevailing ideas at any given moment—and who therefore accepts that it is impossible, or undesirable, to change the status quo—has ever succeeded in making a revolution. Yet revolutions have been made repeatedly throughout history, precisely because there are always more far-sighted individuals who refuse to accept present reality and dedicate themselves to the fight for something better. We, revolutionary socialists, though there are not many of us in the United States today, like to think of ourselves as playing that role

within this oppressive, capitalist society. Only time will tell whether we are right.

Of course, we alone will not—indeed cannot—make a revolution. That requires a real mass movement, of which we will be only one part, hopefully a leading part. We reject any idea of a minority *imposing* revolutionary change on the majority. So our perspectives are predicated on a *change* in the way people think and act.

With these general comments in mind, let's look at the specific questions your friend is posing:

Question No. 1: This is, in some ways, the easiest problem you raise. At the same time it is one of the most difficult. The easy part is to explain that no one has rejected socialism because socialism has never existed anywhere in the world, certainly not in Eastern Europe and the USSR. The hard part is making people understand that this is true.

For decades the ruling cliques in these countries declared that they were socialist. The Western imperialist powers, anxious to discredit socialism, said the same thing. So entire generations of working people around the world grew up assuming it was really true. No one told them anything different.

The Trotskyist movement, however, has always rejected this claim. We understood that socialism, as the term was used by Marx and Engels, and even by Lenin and the Bolsheviks when they overthrew the tsarist government in Russia, always meant a system which could produce a higher standard of living than capitalism. Because of this it would also be far more democratic than any capitalist country could hope to be—providing a great burst of creative energy from a liberated working class.

In 1917 no Bolshevik believed that they could build such a socialist society if their revolution remained limited to the territories of the old tsarist empire. They understood that the future of real *socialism* in the USSR—that is, the ability of the Soviet power to provide a qualitative improvement in the standard of living for the average citizen—depended on help coming to them from working people in Germany, or some other advanced industrial country. That would require successful revolutions in these other countries.

The failure of the German revolution during the first half of the 1920s resulted in the isolation of the new Soviet state. It meant that the USSR was condemned to remain underdeveloped economically for an extended period. To call this socialism was in fact to make a mockery of the ideas of every socialist up to that time.

But that did not stop Stalin from usurping the “socialist” label and placing it on a still poverty-stricken USSR. This was part of his overall effort to justify something quite different from the rule of working people that socialists had always stood for. Stalin imposed a dictatorship of the newly emerging bureaucracy in the USSR, its domination *over* the workers. By falsely claiming that this was “socialism” he was trying to neutralize opposition to his rule. But in order to get away with that claim, to redefine “socialism” in this way, it was not sufficient merely to issue a proclamation; Stalin also had to murder tens of thousands of real socialist cadre—fighters in the Bolshevik party—along with millions of ordinary working people. Stalin's tremendous propaganda apparatus, which included not only the facilities at his disposal in the USSR but the loyal services of massive Communist parties in countries throughout the world, was able during the course of the next few decades to transform the meaning of the word “socialism” in the minds of most people.

The voice of the Trotskyist movement was much weaker. We have been unable to effectively combat this popular misconception about socialism. But clarity is still essential: what is being rejected by the working people in Eastern Europe and the USSR is not socialism, but its Stalinist, bureaucratic caricature. That is the fact of the matter, no matter what these workers, or anyone else, may say about it.

It is important to note that the present rejection by workers in Eastern Europe and the USSR of anything that even goes by the name “socialist” was not an *inevitable* outcome of their rejecting Stalinism. As recently as 1968, when the famous “Prague Spring” rebellion took place in Czechoslovakia, the slogan raised by the opposition was “Socialism with a Human Face.” Despite their hatred of the bureaucrats, working people in Eastern Europe were then still able to recognize the progressive character which socialist economic measures could have, provided they were liberated from their Stalinist encrustation.

But something happened in the intervening 20 years to change that perception. The bureaucratic system, which at first merely *slowed down* a positive economic growth which was made possible by nationalized industry and economic planning, in the late 1970s and early '80s began to become an *absolute brake* on economic development—completely halting and in some cases reversing it. At that point the tangible advantages that even this distorted “socialism” had during an earlier period disappeared. The masses, reacting empirically as they inevitably do, began to reject any idea of socialism whatsoever.

Had an independent workers' movement developed and become strong enough to actually overthrow the Stalinist political regimes *before* this economic turn took place, then the ideological outcome of the antibureaucratic upsurge would, in all likelihood, have been quite different from what we see today.

Question No. 2: Much of the answer to this question should already be clear based on the last point. Revolutionary socialists don't want to replace the present, ruling capitalist elite with our own “microscopic socialist elite.” To think this is true is, in reality, to make the same mistake of confusing Stalinism with socialism.

In the end, working people as a whole will have to judge the intentions of *any* revolutionary group (whether we are working to advance some sectarian self-interest or the general interests of workers and other oppressed people) on the basis of our actions, of what we do in life. Those of us in the FIT, and in general groups around the world that are part of the Fourth International, are more than willing to put ourselves through that test. We will let the masses, and history, decide whether we have anything positive to offer the collective struggle.

I might add that your friend's comments do not reveal much understanding about the history of the U.S. union movement in the thirties. Factory takeovers, which were first used during the sit-down strikes that brought victory to the United Auto Workers, did not originate as part of the program of some revolutionary group. This tactic was, in fact, discovered by the workers themselves. Only later was it adopted by revolutionists as an example of one powerful weapon which could be used against the capitalists.

Though it is an oversimplification, let us for the sake of argument accept your friend's assertion that after this initial period of militant organization, U.S. workers opted for a more moderate road, took a reformist approach, rather than choosing a revolutionary strategy. What has been the result of this choice?

For a while, perhaps even up until the end of the 1960s, one might have been able to argue, on a strictly empirical basis, that the U.S. working class had chosen correctly. By cooperating with the capitalists the workers' movement as a whole seemed able to improve the general standard of living in this country (though not without exceptions, and not without its ups and downs).

But what about the longer-range effects? In the 1970s and '80s the living standards of American workers have been substantially eroded. The strength of the union movement now stands at its lowest level in decades. Workers have been unable to find effective methods for countering growing cutbacks or increased demands for givebacks.

All of this is a *direct* result of the “more moderate” strategy for labor advocated by your friend. This policy has resulted in a mostly

passive union membership—certainly throughout the 1950s and '60s, and to a large extent even today—which in turn permitted the increased stranglehold over these organizations by a top-heavy bureaucratic structure. There are increasing signs that many unionists are now seriously questioning the traditional “moderate” approach (advocated most of all by the bureaucrats) of collaboration with the bosses, that they are beginning to consider once again the value of a more militant, class struggle strategy. We believe that struggles along these lines will, once they begin in earnest, allow a renewed revolutionary consciousness to develop among significant sections of the U.S. working class—though we cannot project any specific timetable for when this will happen.

Question No. 3: The way this is posed prejudices the reply. Is there a price in suffering and human lives which will inevitably have to be paid if we make a socialist revolution in the U.S.? Yes, that is undeniable. But what is the alternative? Can it be said that there is *no such price* to be paid if we decide *not* to make a revolution?

In the 1930s U.S. “workers opted for the more moderate road.” We thereby avoided a “bloodbath” here. As a result there has, literally, been a constant series of bloodbaths in other countries.

What was the cost in lives and human suffering, for example, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? In Korea? In Vietnam? In Iraq? And I mention only some of those places where U.S. imperialism killed directly with its own armed forces. What has been the cost in human suffering and lives where this government simply supplied arms so that others could do the killing: to the contras in Nicaragua (and to Somoza before them), to the Zionists in Palestine, to Pinochet in Chile, to the Duvaliers in Haiti, Batista in Cuba, Marcos in the Philippines, the shah of Iran, through Israel to the apartheid government in South Africa, etc., etc.? The list is almost unending.

What price in misery and death did the world pay as a result of the failure of the German workers, in particular, to make a socialist revolution during the 1920s? Millions of murdered Jews is only the best-known atrocity. All of the second imperialist slaughter might well have been avoided had the German revolution succeeded. (And that is aside from the effect which this failure had in terms of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, which I have already discussed.)

And, even beyond the question of military force and outright mass murder, what is the price in lives and human suffering of the grinding poverty that exists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—a poverty imposed by the imperialist governments through their domination of the world market, and dramatically intensified during the past decade by a debt bondage enforced through such *capitalist* institutions as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. How many children die in these countries each day from preventable diseases? How many people starve, while farmers in the U.S. are subsidized not to grow crops?

This international bloodbath, this almost inconceivable international horror, is your real balance sheet of the survival of capitalism on a world scale. And it will continue as long as capitalism does. How do we compare this ongoing slaughter to the cost of making a socialist revolution in the U.S.? This is a question which you might want to pose to your friend.

The more decisive and resolute we are in our revolutionary activity, the *less* will be the cost of a revolution in this country. That, too, is an important lesson of history. A timid fight will embolden the reactionary forces and generate far more casualties than a decisive struggle. Capitulation will bring about the greatest suffering. The fight cannot be avoided. The only question is whether we will measure up to the tasks that history has set for us and carry forward to victory, thereby creating a system that will have no need to torture and murder people in every corner of the globe simply in order to keep itself in power.

Question No. 4: What about the problem of bureaucratism? The answer here is a bit more complicated. On one level we might say that, at least based on the record of *our wing* of the socialist movement, the Trotskyist wing, we have consistently fought against bureaucratism—in the USSR, Eastern Europe, China, and similar countries, as well as in trade unions wherever we are active. The political organizations that are part of the Fourth International, and our world movement as a whole, are marked by our democratic functioning.

But I grant that this is not necessarily convincing. Even if we ourselves are well intentioned, what is to keep others, who are not so well intentioned, from usurping power? And what is to keep us from degenerating once we have achieved a measure of power?

The real answer here is that the perspective of socialist revolution is based on a continuing process of mobilization and political activity by the overwhelming majority of working people. Without this, there is indeed no guarantee against bureaucratism. But we are optimistic that, after a revolution in the U.S., we can create a system in which the masses will remain active participants—keeping the scoundrels out, or turning them out whenever we discover that they are, indeed, scoundrels.

It is interesting, from this point of view, to look again at what happened in the USSR. The Russian Revolution, like any real socialist revolution, was a tremendous upsurge of working people acting for themselves. The Soviets were real workers’ councils, rapidly and democratically responding to changes in sentiment at the level of individual factories, military garrisons, etc. It took a period of years—a period in which the counterrevolution intervened to grind down the masses through a civil war, and through military intervention by every imperialist country in the world, a time during which the productive capacity of the country sank to abysmally low levels—before a process of demoralization set in and this democracy in the Soviets ceased to function. Even then, as I already mentioned, Stalin had to murder tens of thousands of real Bolshevik cadre who were ready to fight for a restoration of workers’ democracy before his dictatorship became firmly entrenched.

In the United States conditions will be far better for maintaining the democratic functioning of workers’ councils—or whatever other mass decision-making bodies develop in the course of our revolutionary struggle. (The Trotskyist movement’s general conceptions are more flexible here than what I would characterize as the schematic notions of the SLP about an “industrial labor congress.” We believe that every revolution tends to create its own, often unique, forms of mass organization, and that these are unlikely to correspond to blueprints drawn up in advance by revolutionaries.) In the U.S. we already begin on the basis of one of the world’s most technologically advanced economies—a far cry from the backwardness and poverty of tsarist Russia. When we make our revolution, it is unlikely that any other nation will be willing to risk an invasion, given the military capacity of the United States and the mobilization of our population that will already be taking place as a result of the revolution. More likely, our action will be a trigger that sets off a wave of revolutionary struggles in other countries which still remain under capitalist rule.

Once we have established a workers’ government in the U.S. we will be able to take some immediate steps to guard against the usurping of power by those who would maneuver bureaucratically in the way you describe. For example, we probably could—by putting all of our productive capacity to full use, employing those now unemployed, and eliminating sectors of the economy that are pure waste from a social point of view (Wall Street, most of the insurance industry, the military, advertising, etc.)—almost immediately cut the work week in half and dramatically increase real wages. This would be only the beginning of a continual process of improving living standards for *all* of the population (except, of course, for those who presently live in luxury without doing any

work whatsoever). In addition there would be a vast improvement in the social wage—national health care, social security, etc.

The bureaucratic tendencies your friend describes are not nurtured in such an atmosphere. If everyone can begin to sense, very concretely, that by all of us working together we can all get ahead together, there is far less stimulus for those who “want more than they are getting” to “buy, cheat, bribe, steal, bully, intimidate, and kill their way to get and retain power.” The development of bureaucrats whose goal is to grab privileges for themselves is typical of our society, and of any society where only a few can “get ahead,” and those few have to do so at the expense of everyone else. That is why the bureaucracy in Russia gained such a stranglehold after the revolution—because of the vast scarcity of basic consumer goods that existed in Russia in the 1920s and ’30s. Some individuals could guarantee a sufficient supply for themselves if they made bureaucratic alliances with others.

So we reject the rather pessimistic notion that the triumph of bureaucracy is *inherent* in the socialist revolution. Rather, we try to analyze the specific reasons why the bureaucracy triumphed in the USSR as it did, so we can avoid anything similar after a socialist revolution in the USA or any other country.

There can also be certain institutional safeguards against bureaucratism. For example, if being elected a representative to the government does not entail any privileges—no increase in salary, shorter work time, or other perks—but only a lot of hard work and self-sacrifice, then a different kind of person is likely to be attracted to running for office than the self-serving types we are so used to today.

Changing Times:

The year 1991 recorded significant social and economic changes. It should be noted that socialist candidates in municipal election primaries in two major U.S. cities defeated a capitalist party candidate and scored well in the run-offs. The first was in Salt Lake City, Utah, where Nancy Boyasko, the Socialist Workers Party candidate for City Council in District Four, came in second to the incumbent Republican Alan Hardman. The Democratic Party contender, Wyllis Dorman, ran far behind. Hardman received 1,332 votes, Boyasko 924, and Dorman 281. The primary was held October 8. In the run-off on November 5 Boyasko lost to Hardman but her vote total went up to 1,547 as against Hardman’s 2,085.

The other municipal election was in Seattle, Washington, where voting for City Council positions is citywide. There the candidate of the Freedom Socialist Party, Yolanda Alaniz, ran second to the Democratic Party incumbent for position #5 on the City Council in the September 17 primary. She received 9 percent of the total vote. The combined percentage of Alaniz’s vote and the Socialist Workers Party candidate running for the same position in the primary was 14 percent. In the run-off on November 5 Alaniz increased her vote to 24,429; about 20 percent of the total.

In both cities the socialist candidates campaigned hard for socialist solutions to the economic and social problems of this country. Neither tried to camouflage her socialist principles. Boyasko was criticized by her opponent and the local press for raising “non-local” issues, and for her socialist perspective. She responded, “The problems facing working people in Salt Lake are not unique” and campaigned “to build unity and solidarity among working people to fight for a better world.”

In Seattle the Yolanda Alaniz campaign committee claimed several firsts: first socialist and first Chicana to make it into Seattle’s general election; first socialist candidate in Seattle’s history to win labor union endorsements, 3 local unions and 9 top union officials; first socialist campaign in the country ever to win public matching funds, and without disclosure of donors’ names.

Whatever else may be said about these campaigns, they are proof that several thousand voters are not afraid of the socialist label, and are dissatisfied with the capitalist alternative. □

Of course, no one can deny that bureaucratic tendencies might arise under conditions of increasing well-being for all. But they will certainly be far weaker, and much more easily dealt with by the workers as a whole. And remember, a working class which has already gone through the experience of making a revolution in the U.S.—something that will require a massive upsurge and participation by millions upon millions of people—will gain a new and profound sense of its own strength. Such people become transformed. They are not likely, after discovering that by their own efforts they have been able to overthrow the most powerful ruling class the world has ever known, to just sit back and passively submit to domination by a few petty bureaucrats. With newfound rights to defend and far more time put at their disposal through the decrease in the workday to actively participate in politics, the likelihood of a sufficient layer of the masses remaining active enough to guard against a bureaucratic threat after an American socialist revolution seems pretty good to me.

Question No. 5: I have already suggested the answer to this question. I cannot argue with your friend’s statements about what most workers in the U.S. want today. The problem is (and this will become increasingly obvious as we go through more and more experiences with a capitalist system in crisis) that it will be impossible for the U.S. ruling class to continue satisfying these wants for a sufficient number of people.

Already the attacks on our standard of living—on wages and social services—have begun to generate severe discontent in many sectors of the population. And that attack has only begun. The time when a wealthy capitalism in the United States had sufficient resources to provide a constant trickle of benefits in order to satisfy its own working class has come to an end. A different period has begun, one in which we will see an intensifying international competition, forcing the rulers of this country to try to further drive down living standards simply to ensure their own survival.

It is also worth pointing out, in this context, that even during the best decades of the ’50s and ’60s, U.S. capitalists were *never* persuaded “to give up enough of their profit to make life decent for *all* workers (reformed capitalism).” Of course many workers in the U.S. lived reasonably well during those years, and many continue to do so today. But that has never been true for the majority of Blacks and other oppressed nationalities. Immigrant workers in this country have always had to labor under especially brutal conditions. And if we go beyond our borders—to talk about workers in Mexico, the Philippines, Malaysia, and many other countries where they are savagely exploited by U.S. multinational firms, the popular myth of a “benevolent” U.S. capitalism becomes considerably tarnished indeed.

If it is true that the U.S. economic system can continue to provide for the basic needs of the majority of its working people, then there will never be a socialist revolution in this country. But as Marxists we have had the benefit of studying the workings of capitalism and its history. What we learn tells us that such a system cannot indefinitely provide a “fair wage and some security” for its working people. The time is probably not so far in the future when this will begin to become obvious to broader and broader layers. And when that happens, people’s consciousness can change quickly. The idea of socialist revolution here will no longer seem so strange.

So what people think today is not decisive for us. Dramatic transformations in mass consciousness have happened before, and they will happen again. The task for revolutionary socialists in the United States and around the world is to avoid succumbing to the present right-wing ideological offensive, to make sure we are as ready as we can be to help that transformation in consciousness along when it does start to take place, and to help working people find an appropriate strategic and tactical approach which can lead them to victory in their present and future struggles.

Steve Bloom, New York

In Memory of Haskell Berman

by David Weiss

Haskell Berman, leader of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in Philadelphia since its inception in 1984, died of a sudden heart attack on November 20, 1991. He was sixty-nine years old.

Haskell was born in Brooklyn on March 21, 1922. He was educated in Baltimore schools and entered the armed service on February 25, 1944. Our paths crossed in 1945 in World War II when he was in the navy and I was in the army both attending an electronics training course. From the beginning Haskell argued vociferously as he has through the years. I was a member of the Socialist Workers Party and he had recently left the Hashomer Hatzair—a left-wing Zionist youth group. Before serving in the Pacific theater as electrician's mate second class, Haskell became a Trotskyist and after his discharge in February 1946 we arranged a public forum for him in New York City entitled "Eye-Witness Account of the Indonesian Revolution."

In my remarks at the memorial meeting held on December 1 in Philadelphia, I stressed his embodiment of three elements—the unremitting daily concrete class struggle in its manifold aspects; the lineage of this struggle at every stage to the next development of socialist consciousness; and the passion and warmth which was felt by all who knew him. In addition he was what one comrade called with friendly laughter—a maverick—in the good sense, i.e., independent in his think-

ing, not afraid to be wrong, but disciplined in action.

Excerpts from notes by John Kovach, a recent member of the FIT in Philadelphia who organized and chaired the memorial meeting, tell us: "Attendance at the meeting reflected Haskell's spirit of working with a broad range of local progressive groups: well over 100 people from labor organizations, peace and justice groups, and left political organizations were present. It was held at the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) DC #33 building where Haskell had spent much time at union-sponsored meetings dealing with the problem of privatization of city services in Philadelphia. Speakers at the memorial meeting included a representative from the AFSCME local, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers which Haskell had been a member of, as well as leaders from various Philadelphia groups that Haskell worked with over the past 40 years."

The meeting opened with comments by Paul Le Blanc, national coordinator of the FIT, who described how he was inspired by Haskell and his then wife, Naomi, 20 years ago by their "idealism, experience, commitment, independent-mindedness, thoughtfulness, and warmth, as comrades, and by their political collaboration and balance."

How, after the death of Naomi, Haskell had to "find his own balance" and the "immense good fortune of finding companion-

ship, love, and happiness with Florence" who was "warm, outgoing, and very much her own person" but "accepting Haskell's politics in part because she understood that this was an integral part of what Haskell was."

How, after his expulsion from the SWP, "Haskell struggled in extremely difficult circumstances for the continued relevance and growth of the distinctive revolutionary current of which he was a part in Philadelphia."

On the somewhat critical side Le Blanc said, "Sometimes it was possible to take what Haskell was doing in the wrong way. Sometimes his own impatience and frustration could get in the way of his communicating often useful criticisms and concerns." Le Blanc related that sometimes when the phone rang in his house in Pittsburgh he exclaimed "Oh no! Maybe it's Haskell who's calling up to yell at me . . . to give me a hard time. A couple of times I yelled back. We later had to call each other up to apologize. Like a close relative, like family, as comrades over time we were able to do better than that, partly because I realized that Haskell's motives were pure—constructive. Sometimes Haskell was right. Even when Haskell was wrong he was generally putting his finger on a piece of the truth, sometimes a piece of the truth that I didn't want to deal with."

"I loved him . . . a loss . . . and it hurts."

(Continued on inside back cover)

Ann Snipper Saluted at Memorial Meeting

Friends, comrades, and activists attended a November 23 memorial meeting in Los Angeles to celebrate the life and accomplishments of Ann Charloff Snipper. The gathering was organized by longtime close friend Walter Lippmann, who wrote the article about Ann Snipper published in the November issue of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*. Lippmann prepared an attractive display which illustrated some of Ann's political activities covering over 50 years, beginning in 1929 when she joined the Young People's Socialist League at the age of 16. For example, there were materials showing her work as a key organizer of the West Coast Vacation School, an important event of the

Socialist Workers Party during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Ann's more recent participation in the feminist movement was described by women who had been involved with her in abortion rights and clinic defense actions. Dave Gooler, coordinator of the Los Angeles local organizing committee of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, spoke at length about his personal and political relationship with Ann. The respect she had gained from various radical organizations was expressed by members of the Socialist Party, Socialist Action, and Solidarity. A number of messages were read from FIT comrades in other parts of the country, and some recorded remarks by feminist and

political activists were played to the gathering.

The FIT National Organizing Committee, at its November plenum, voted to send the following message: "We are grieved by the death of our comrade Ann. She was a revolutionary Marxist for 61 years—a founding member of the Socialist Workers Party in 1938 and of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in 1984. During all this time she contributed her talents and energy to the revolutionary Marxist movement and to the struggles of working people in North America. She stayed true to the ideals of her youth. We salute her life as we grieve her death." □

On the Unification Process

(Resolution approved by a majority of the
FIT National Organizing Committee
at November 1991 plenum)

1) In our declaration, “For the Reconstitution of a United Movement of the Fourth International in the U.S.”—approved after the Fourth Internationalist Tendency’s September 1990 national conference and based on the decision adopted there—the FIT formally stated the following with regard to the three groups in this country that remain fraternally affiliated with the FI: “We have had big differences over important questions such as our assessment of the Nicaraguan revolution and the FSLN, how to interpret events in Eastern Europe and the USSR, and what attitude to take toward other left currents in the U.S. or toward the majority of the Fourth International. These differences can, however, coexist within a common Leninist organization, since they are not of a principled nature.”

There is nothing which has happened since this declaration was issued which ought to compel us to change that assessment. The mutual adherence of ourselves, Socialist Action, and the FI Caucus of Solidarity to the broad programmatic perspectives of the FI, and our continued mutual participation in the internal life of our world movement, represent a reasonable basis to assume—in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary—that a sufficient common programmatic framework exists for us to be members of the same national organization, just as we remain fraternal members of the same international one.

2) The process we began a year ago has not moved forward as rapidly as we might have liked. But in some ways it has advanced more rapidly than might reasonably have been expected. Differences existed among those ejected from the Socialist Workers Party in the early 1980s, which gave rise to SA, FIT, and the FI Caucus of Solidarity. These differences had seven years to harden between the initial founding of SA in October 1983 and the time of our declaration. The underlying questions have never been adequately discussed or clarified. Each of the three currents has drawn a positive balance sheet about its own efforts during this period of time. It would be utopian, therefore, to think that simply *declaring the need for unity* could be sufficient to *actually bring it about*.

3) Nevertheless, making our declaration and beginning efforts to engage SA and Solidarity (since any fusion with the FI Caucus clearly means fusion with Solidarity) in discussion around it has yielded positive benefits. We now have a more concrete and detailed understanding of the problems involved in a unification than we did at the time of our 1990 national conference. We have also stimulated a discussion well beyond our own ranks, and even beyond the ranks of those who are formally affiliated with the three FI groups. (See in particular on this point the declaration of the Milwaukee Revolutionary Socialist Group in the October issue of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*.) And all three groups have been confronted with the necessity to articulate their views and perspectives in a more rounded and concrete manner. We are far ahead of where we were a year ago—as a direct result of the initiative taken by the FIT.

4) The results of our reunification efforts up to now lead us to the inescapable conclusion that *unless something dramatic changes in the attitudes of either Socialist Action or Solidarity* there can be no *immediate* possibility of bringing about a fusion with one or the other of them—at least not one that would be acceptable to the FIT. (At the same time we note that the last year has been marked by rapid and dramatic changes in the situation. New developments, which might force us to change this assessment, are possible at any time.)

A) In the case of Socialist Action the primary obstacle to fusion remains a sectarian concept of party building which prevails within their organization (the notion, borrowed from the Barnesite SWP, that the party ought to function as a monolithic faction, and that *any* disagreement, even the most minor, with the leadership of that faction constitutes a threat to the unity of the party), and their requirement that we accept this approach to “democratic centralism” in order to fuse with them in a common organization. It had seemed to us that there might be some progress in this area after the SA leadership adopted a new formulation in their organizational proposal at the 1991 world congress—accepting members of FIT and the FI Caucus of Solidarity as “individual members” of the FI (to the extent this is compatible with U.S. law), even if we did not agree to join SA on its own terms.

We decided to accept this change at face value, and propose a process to the SA leadership which, in the end, could create a *new* organization, something that would supersede both SA and FIT, incorporate other Fourth Internationalists not now affiliated with either of our groups, and represent a far better alternative than the simple sum of our two parts. At first it seemed that the SA leadership was willing to proceed on the basis of this proposal. They even expressed a formal acceptance of it in July. However, when it came time to begin the practical tasks of implementation things broke down. This revealed an underlying truth—that there had, in fact, been no significant rethinking on SA’s part of their approach to building *themselves* (that is, their particular faction, with its peculiar form of faction discipline) as “the party.” Their only objective during our entire discussion had been “absorbing” the FIT and digesting us as part of that party-building work. They did not really want to think seriously about the problems we were raising or the possible solution we were proposing.

If any further confirmation of this were needed, it appears in the form of the draft political resolution presented by the SA leadership in July 1991 (that is, *well after* their discussions with us about what kind of fusion process to engage in were under way). It described the objective of SA, since 1984, as favoring “the FIT reentering SA [an erroneous formulation since the FIT was never formally part of SA] on exactly the same terms as we together demanded from the SWP majority.” They affirmed that this remains their goal today, and stated that they had seen “in recent weeks . . . a small but significant shift in the FIT’s stance. While the FIT stubbornly continues to take umbrage at the proposition that they rejoin SA [same mistake] as indicated above, they appear to have *moved to a position that could lead in the end to that result*” (emphasis added).

Clearly, the SA leadership failed to understand that we were, in fact, proposing something qualitatively different. Until they do understand this, and until they prove willing to discuss it with us (even if they continue to disagree with it), there will be

very limited prospects for a fusion between our two organizations.

B) The problem with Solidarity also revolves around their self-definition, and whether this allows for a current like ours to become part of their organization while still maintaining *our own* political integrity. We have known from the beginning that Solidarity as a whole rejects becoming a “disciplined,” “Leninist,” “combat,” “vanguard” (pick one or all of the above) organization. But there is nothing unprincipled for a current like our own, which sees itself as actively working to construct such a Leninist vanguard (in the best sense of that term) to be part of a broader, looser, grouping of revolutionary activists. This has happened in the past, with mutual benefit for all, but it requires a *mutual effort* on the part of both the Leninist grouping and the broader organization—to think through and structure their relationship.

It would clearly be possible for us, tomorrow, to join Solidarity on its own terms (just as we could join SA on its terms), renouncing our ideas about building a disciplined Leninist organization. But we could not do this without abandoning principles and perspectives which are fundamental to the FIT. What has been, and what remains, unclear is whether the leadership and/or membership of Solidarity will ever be willing to allow us to become part of their organization *without our being required in advance to give up our point of view* (or our ability to act, which in this case amounts to the same thing) on such an all-important question.

Once again, it boils down to the Solidarity comrades coming to understand that they have to engage in a serious discussion about *our* conception of unity and the fusion process, and *our* views about a revolutionary organization—even if they don’t necessarily agree with us about it—before we will be able to make any real progress toward fusion.

C) We reject making a choice as things stand now between SA’s sectarianism in the name of “Leninism” and Solidarity’s rejection of “Leninism” in the name of combating sectarianism—a choice that each of these groups, in its own way, has demanded of us *as a prerequisite even to further discussions* about fusion. In the article which they submitted to the November issue of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, the Solidarity Political Committee poses things clearly enough from their own point of view: “There is a clear choice to be made [by the FIT], 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 they develop a similar thought: “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.”

We disagree with the two choices as posed here. Our alternative to what we perceive as a severe lack of genuine revolutionary party-building work by Solidarity is not “a single-tendenced Trotskyist sect,” nor “fake Bolshevik posturing and commandism.” Rather, we advocate a *real, flexible, democratic as well as centralist* Bolshevik functioning—the kind we have tried to practice in the FIT—and a multi-tendenced, living revolutionary organization which still strives for programmatic and theoretical clarity and unity in action. Our

task is to continue to urge both SA and Solidarity to recognize this as at least a *legitimate idea for discussion*. Once they do so, it might well become possible to make rapid progress toward fusion with either one of them, even if substantial disagreements remain on this and other matters.

5) Therefore, while rejecting fusion on the basis of things as they stand now, we must continue to pursue an *active and vigorous* campaign of *discussion* and *common activity* to whatever extent is possible with *both* SA and Solidarity to help lay the basis for overcoming our present situation. This is something that we should work on not only through the leaderships of these organizations, but also with their rank-and-file members. It is essential to keep in mind that, like the FIT, neither SA nor Solidarity represent monolithic blocs—not on the question of their own organizational concepts, nor in terms of relations with us. Our goal is to continue to clarify, define, and advance our *collective* understanding of the problems that exist in order to create the atmosphere for a *collective* effort to overcome them. We consider this to be an elementary responsibility—to *actively* work to advance the objective of a unified section of the FI in the United States as outlined in the resolution we ourselves proposed (the essence of which was adopted) at the 1991 world congress of the FI. It is also our hope that this will involve a still broader unity with other revolutionaries. Short-term unification of FI forces may not be possible, but a medium-to-long range process certainly is, and a fruitful outcome would be a big step forward for our overall party-building efforts in the USA.

Even if no reunification of the three existing tendencies ever comes about as a result of our present efforts, we are sure that a principled pursuit of this by the FIT will help to clarify the real obstacles that stand in its way, posing clear choices for *all* those who are involved in the discussion—including not only members of FIT, SA, and Solidarity, but a number of other individuals and groups which can and should be involved in reconstituting a genuine U.S. sympathizing section of the FI.

Recognizing that new developments could create new possibilities for relatively rapid fusion with either SA or Solidarity, we will seek to help bring about precisely such developments through persistent, comradely, creative initiatives. We also recognize the significant differences between SA and Solidarity and perceive that on certain questions one organization is closer to us, while on other questions the other organization is closer to us. Therefore, our initiatives will need to be flexible, sometimes tailored differently in regard to each of the other organizations. While circumstances may result in our earlier unification with either SA or Solidarity, we intend to maintain our active commitment to the unity of all Fourth Internationalists in the United States and, beyond that, our commitment to close cooperation among and eventual unity of all revolutionary socialists.

6) At the same time that we pursue our effort at reunifying FI forces in this country, we reemphasize the need to strengthen and build the FIT, its institutions, public activity, participation in the class struggle, publications, etc. This is a top priority for us. It is not separate and apart from our objective of regrouping revolutionary socialist working class forces in the U.S. Rather, it is a key ingredient in helping to achieve that objective. □

Reexamining the Economic Program of the Left Opposition in the USSR—Part 1

by Barry M. Lituchy

*The following is the first installment of an article which will be published in several parts. It is the expanded and edited text of a presentation given as part of a panel titled "The Ideas of Leon Trotsky" at the FIT educational conference in Pittsburgh last July. (See *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* No. 88 for a full report on that conference.)*

One of the richest legacies we possess as revolutionary socialists and Marxists is the economic program of the Left Opposition. Today there are many people—including some Marxists—who seem to think that socialism has "a black eye." Well, that's false. The economic programs implemented by Stalin and his successors in the Soviet Union, and those implemented in other countries with similar Stalinist misleaderships, have had very little to do with the economic ideas put forward by the Left Opposition in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. It is our enemies—Stalinists as well as capitalists—who have been trying for decades (and are now stepping up their efforts) to confuse the two.

Notice that I refer to the economic program of the Left Opposition and not to the economic ideas or program of Leon Trotsky. Yes, we are Trotskyists because it is impossible to build a revolutionary Marxist program or organization in the world today without building it on the basis of Trotsky's unique contributions to the revolutionary socialist movement in the 1930s—specifically his analysis of Stalinism and his contributions to the creation of the Fourth International. But the economic program worked out by the Left Opposition in the 1920s was based on the contributions of numerous individuals. Our tradition, our political and cultural legacy, is far richer than we tend to give it credit for. If we fail to disseminate these ideas and this tradition to masses of people, we have truly failed to fight effectively for socialism.

The Left Opposition developed a transitional program for building a socialist economy in the Soviet Union based on the prevailing economic and political conditions in the world at that time. Naturally, that program has always been suppressed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and by Communist parties around the world, because it remains a powerful indictment of and weapon against that very party and its ruinous policies. Of course,

we can understand why this is so: because to admit that there actually was a rational socialist alternative to the violent, forced collectivization of agriculture and to the harebrained "superindustrialist" five-year plans of Stalin would be to acknowledge the fraud which today blames socialism itself for the crisis. And we should not be surprised that the capitalist world and its cultural establishment have conspired, along with the Stalinists and their allies, to silence our movement's ideas. The capitalist world and its media have pointed to the Soviet Union, to China, and to Poland in order to say: "See! That's socialism! . . . and it don't work!"

But that was not socialism.

Vital Question for Today

This presentation is not only an introduction to the real Marxist economic program put forward by the Left Opposition for the transition from capitalism to socialism in the Soviet Union; it is also a plea to study these ideas and disseminate them.

This presentation is an historical overview of how that economic program came about, of some of the basic concepts involved in it, and also of some of the concrete, practical proposals that could have been implemented in the Soviet Union, in contrast to the policies of Stalin.

But this is not simply a matter of historical concern—this discussion, these ideas, are of immediate practical importance in the world today. They offer an economic vision and alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism that is as viable today as it was 60 years ago.

Not only that, but when we study the economic program of the Left Opposition we begin to see the past, the present, and the future in the way a revolutionary needs to. First of all, we can see how Stalin's economic system came about (I call it a system because it was certainly never a program—it was a completely opportunistic, short-term, moment by moment empirical approach to economic decision

making). Next, we can see what has happened in the Stalinist countries to this day, including what Gorbachev and the current crop of Stalinists (the last generation we hope) are trying to do and what's wrong with their approach. And, finally, we can begin to see—as we all need to see—what a transition from our present, capitalist economy to a socialist one would entail. If we are to educate and win over the working people of this country and of the world to the ideas of socialism, then this discussion—of what is socialism and how to get there—is going to be at the very center of our effort.

Let's first talk a little bit about the historical background that gave rise to the economic ideas of the Left Opposition, and which, in fact, gave rise to the Left Opposition itself—because it is no exaggeration at all to say that the economic debate that began in the early twenties was a primary and direct reason that the Left Opposition was created. The Left Opposition began as an opposition group against certain policies, and ended up as the historical opposition in the Soviet Union to both Stalin and to the degeneration of the revolution.

Postrevolutionary Russia and the NEP

Basically we can say that there were three contemporary conditions which shaped the economic program of the Left Opposition: first, the troubles and shortcomings associated with the economic policy then in use, called the New Economic Policy (NEP); second, a growing recognition and discussion about the need for the Soviet Union to industrialize itself—this was called the great Industrialization Debate; and, third, the evolving political struggle by the Left Opposition against Stalin's grab for power and the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolutionary government in the Soviet Union, a struggle which began in earnest in 1924.

After the first successful socialist revolution in history in 1917 there was naturally a great deal of political optimism. World War I was still raging, and some very real revolutionary situations existed in Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Finland, and even in Britain, as well as elsewhere in Europe. Of course, Lenin understood that it was not the job of professional revolutionaries "to make revolutions." Lenin's conception of the role of the revolutionary party was based on the *eventuality* of a revolution, and the party's ability to provide political leadership during such a period, in Russia. Revolutions themselves occur only when there is a deep national crisis that involves all strata of society, the economy, and the ruling parties and institutions; not only do the oppressed classes begin to fight the system in such a period, but even the ruling class realizes that it cannot (and will not) carry on as before. While the ruling class tried to exploit imperialist rivalries as a means of preserving their rule prior to 1914, the war which resulted from these rivalries further destabilized the old social order in Europe and greatly accelerated the collapse of that system in Russia.

The Bolsheviks showed the world what a revolutionary workers' party could do under these conditions of societal collapse and world war. First, they showed that *there was an alternative to the barbarism of imperialist war* in which millions of working people murder each other simply for the benefit of the rich. What this meant concretely in 1917 was that *the very salvation of humanity depended upon the revolutionary struggle of the working class against their own ruling class*. Secondly, by forging political alliances between industrial workers and other oppressed groups, the Bolsheviks helped the industrial working class assume leadership of the revolution, of society, and eventually of state power. Thus, the Bolshevik-led revolution produced in this period a tremendous optimism, energy, and hope that socialist revolutions and a new and better world were fast approaching.

Therefore, it was only natural for some people to get a little carried away with all of this and to expect socialism to happen overnight. This optimism was reflected even in some of the economic policies that were implemented in the period shortly after the revolution (known as War Communism because of the belief that the transition period to socialism would be immediate and based on the radical economic policies implemented during the civil war) such as direct workers' control of all factories and businesses, the expropriation of all agricultural and other surplus production for the workers, and so on. Working people just took everything,

and that was good; but some people thought that that was all there was to socialism and, of course, that was not the case.

The main factor which was determining the economic policies of the Soviet Union in the years from the time of the revolution until March 1921 was not socialism, but civil war and the military invasion of the Soviet Union by over a dozen imperialist countries—including the United States—who could not tolerate the existence of a socialist government on the face of the earth. Consequently, during the period of War Communism, the primary economic and political objective was simply the survival of the revolution in Russia. The Soviet Union experienced terrible economic and human devastation. But once the Communists beat back the counterrevolution and the imperialist armies by the end of 1920, it was then possible to begin the process of, first, rebuilding the country from devastation and, then, laying the basis for a socialist economy.

As a result of the practical experience with War Communism, the Bolsheviks were forced to conclude that their present policies would be unable to resolve the economic difficulties faced by the country. A direct leap to the socialist reorganization of society was unrealistic. A different approach, one which recognized the real contradictions that existed both domestically and internationally, was needed.

Thus, in April of 1921 the Bolsheviks initiated the NEP. The overriding objective of NEP was to initiate the transition to a socialist economy by creating real conditions for a normal economic life—which had been shattered by the civil war and by Russia's participation in the world war before that. NEP would continue to be a useful policy only so long as it served to facilitate this transition.

The primary emphasis of NEP was on the recovery of agriculture and the peasant market. This was never meant to deny the necessity of international revolution and the integration of the Russian economy into a European-wide socialist economy for the long-term economic development of the Soviet Union. NEP was a temporary measure to bring about the economic recovery of Russia in the meantime. This recovery was rightly seen as an essential first step in the reconstruction of industrial production. Lenin, for example, stressed in his "Tax In Kind" article that the first task of the Soviet regime in the coming years was "to improve the conditions of the peasantry and to increase their productive forces."

Why the peasantry and not the workers? Because in order to improve

the conditions of the workers, grain and fuel are required. The correct policy of the proletariat, which is exercising its dictatorship in a small-peasant country, is to obtain grain in exchange for the manufactured goods the peasant requires....¹

Basically, this meant allowing the peasantry to engage in their business in a capitalist-market context, so that the cities and the nationalized industrial sector would get what they needed from them through a trade in industrial commodities, which would encourage the peasants to produce in order to meet their own objectives as consumers.

What was NEP? In Lenin's view, NEP was a temporary economic program to be "measured in decades"; a step backward toward capitalism in order to take, later, two steps forward in the transition to socialist economy.² NEP was an economic policy which combined the laws of the marketplace and private enterprise with those of a centralized state-run economy. In this mixed economy agriculture was overwhelmingly privately owned, as was small-scale manufacturing and many other small commercial enterprises. But these small, private individual producers had to compete and trade in an open market with larger state-owned or worker cooperative enterprises.

NEP also assured that the largest and most important economic enterprises, including heavy industry, transportation, banking, and foreign trade, were nationalized and remained under the direct control of the state's "Supreme Economic Council" (VSNKh), which was at the time the most important economic institution in the country and the central institution for the beginning of what was to become economic planning. At this point, economic planning was limited to the use of investment and distribution statistics in nationalized heavy industry which were known as "control figures," as well as a limited system of budgetary and credit controls managed by the People's Commissariat of Finance.

So within this economic system or structure the dictatorship of the proletariat was able to retain a position of strength from what Lenin called "the commanding heights" of the economy. The government could thereby lay the basis for the transition to a socialist economy while allowing the full flourishing of small-scale capitalism. It also provided the economic conditions necessary for maintaining the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry and for permitting the socialist government to further its agenda with the peaceful support of the majority of the population. But such a policy proved impossible to maintain

forever, or even “for decades” as Lenin had originally projected. We shall soon see the reasons why.

By 1925 about 80 percent of industrial production was either in the hands of the state or worker cooperatives, while around 96 percent of agriculture was privately owned. 1926 statistics show that in terms of the total value of production the “socialist sector” (or the state- and cooperative-run enterprises) accounted for about 62 percent of the total value of commodities produced by the Soviet economy, while the capitalist sector accounted for about 38 percent.³ This gives us a basic picture of the Soviet economy in the period from 1921 to 1927.

Achievements of NEP

NEP was to a certain extent very successful from both an economic and political standpoint, even though it had shortcomings so severe that it eventually had to be abandoned. Its strengths were, first of all, the rapid restoration of what still remained of the pre-civil war and prerevolutionary Russian economy to levels at or even above those achieved before World War I.⁴ Secondly, it also helped to generate social peace and mobilize political support for the socialist government from a majority of the country’s population—both in the cities and in the countryside. Let me briefly explain what this second achievement of NEP meant since it is central to the whole debate within the Communist Party on how to build socialism in Russia.

The Communists had a considerable reserve of goodwill from the majority of the peasantry after 1917 on account of the fact that the Bolsheviks liquidated the land-owning aristocracy, capitalist landowners, and the tsarist state, which together owned and received some sort of rent on most of the land in the country. In effect, the peasantry were given formal title to the land that their families had worked for generations. However, during the civil war against the counterrevolutionary and imperialist armies, the government was compelled to institute policies of forced requisitioning of food from the peasantry in order to supply the Red Army and the urban proletariat with basic necessities. When the civil war ended and these policies were not immediately suspended—as undoubtedly they should have been—both urban workers and peasants began to protest their continuation, leading to strikes in Petrograd and even a sailors’ mutiny at the strategic Kronstadt naval base outside of Petrograd.

What lay behind the institution of NEP was not only a desire to move toward socialism and restore the economy, but also

the political necessity to work out a strategic compromise or alliance—in the form of an economic policy—between the socialist government and minority urban working class population on the one side, and the majority peasant population and small time capitalists on the other. This alliance known as the *smychka* succeeded in reestablishing friendly and productive economic cooperation between the government and the peasantry—primarily by getting rid of its food requisitioning policy and replacing it with the “tax in kind” on agricultural goods that allowed the peasants to buy and sell on a capitalist market basis.

The Limitations of NEP

What were the shortcomings of this policy which were so serious that the Soviet Union couldn’t maintain itself on a diet of NEP forever? The basic problem was that NEP, by itself, ultimately failed to provide for either the level or the pace of industrial expansion that was necessary to meet the demands of a newly prosperous countryside, and to ensure the survival of a socialist government in the Soviet Union encircled by a hostile capitalist world. These were two clear practical dangers that NEP was leading toward.

If the Soviet Union did not industrialize, either with the help of successful revolutionary regimes in Western Europe or else on its own, and thereby begin to provide for its basic military and economic needs, it would eventually and most assuredly be crushed by the imperialist world around it—either through a renewed attempt at outright invasion (which did, indeed, happen in 1941), or else through an economic blockade and sabotage, creating the basis for internal counterrevolution. The capitalist world had already initiated this policy by isolating the Soviet Union economically and politically from its very beginnings in ways similar to what the U.S. has been doing to Cuba for the past 30 years. We must recognize that then such a policy was a preliminary act of war just as it is today.

The second danger was that NEP was greatly improving the lot and increasing the numbers of well-off peasants and small capitalists, while not doing nearly as much to improve the lot or expand the numbers of industrial workers on whom the Communist Party depended for political support. NEP was creating a well-off and conservative bourgeoisie of its own at the expense of the working class—including the poorer peasantry—and in effect strengthening the forces of the marketplace and capitalism in the Soviet Union while digging the grave of the socialist government.

Actually, by 1923 Trotsky and many other leading Communists already realized that NEP was providing an economic setting far more favorable to the recovery of agricultural rather than industrial production. For example, while the agricultural surplus harvested and brought to market in 1923 achieved 60 percent of its prewar level, industrial production was only 35 percent of what it was before the war.⁵

The industrial recovery could not keep pace with the rural recovery for several reasons. Some of these are obvious, such as the much larger size of the rural population, along with the ever-present supply of land and natural resources for farming. But another handicap for the recovery of Soviet industry was the fact that it had to take place on the basis of a worn-out prewar technology and industrial plant, with accompanying high operating costs and low worker productivity. These resulted in low output.⁶

This relative shortage of industrial goods compared to agricultural goods, within the market context of NEP, combined with the withholding of a portion of industrial output by the trust and syndicate monopolies, led to a dramatic inversion of industrial and agricultural prices, with agricultural products becoming very cheap and industrial goods extremely expensive.⁷ Trotsky was one of the first people to study this problem and nicknamed it the “scissors crisis” because of the diagonally opposite directions in which industrial and agricultural prices were moving on a statistical graph. Similar economic crises have been called this by economic historians ever since.

This situation had a snowballing effect. The opening of the scissors—that is, the growing disparity between industrial and agricultural prices—caused the Soviet peasantry to turn away increasingly from the Soviet market in protest against an inadequate supply of affordable consumer goods. This was no small problem since the peasantry still accounted for 84 percent of the population in 1924.⁸ It led to a drop in both the sale and production of agricultural goods, which in turn led to a decline in state revenues as a result of a glut of unsold industrial products. And this decline in state revenues, in turn, effectively halted further industrial expansion.

In fact, by 1925 NEP was increasingly unable to provide a sufficient and stable supply of consumer goods to the population of both town and country despite an increase in production. This “goods famine,” *tovarni golod*, as it was called, was partly the result of an inept pricing policy after the scissors crisis (the government stubbornly refused to raise certain prices despite a rise in incomes) which contributed to the chronic shortage of in-

dustrial goods for exchange with the rural population. All of this, in turn, created an unnecessary repressed inflationary situation⁹ which undermined the government's own attempts to create greater incentives for the marketing of output by the peasantry. Thus, by 1926 the rate of industrial and agricultural growth slowed to a near standstill, and the possibility of maintaining stable economic growth between urban and rural sectors was spinning out of control.¹⁰

Debate in the Party Leadership

Meanwhile, the top political leadership of the party and state, which after Lenin's death consisted of Stalin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev and then later Stalin and Bukharin, was struggling to maintain its hold on power—in the face of growing economic difficulties, and in the face of a cogent economic critique of NEP and proposals for change by the Left Opposition, which were gaining popularity. Eventually, it became apparent to some that those who held power, above all Stalin, were willing to pay any price to hold onto it—including the destruction of any and all traditions of party democracy and revolutionary goals, as well as of any communist who refused to get out of their way.

Partly to prove that the ideas of the Left Opposition were wrong, and faced with the economic dilemmas just discussed, Stalin moved the Soviet economy toward an even friendlier and more supportive policy toward the peasantry (for example, allowing the wealthiest peasants to own more land and hire agricultural laborers), a policy symbolized by Bukharin's famous dictum to the better-off peasants, known as "kulaks": "Enrich yourselves!"

But Stalin still had to strangle the voice of opposition to these policies from within the Communist Party in order to defend his power. And Stalin and those who supported him introduced every corrupt and dirty political trick they could dig up to slander and delegitimize the influence and authority of all those who favored the policies of the Left Opposition. This began in earnest in 1924, around the time that Lenin died, with the single most important and popular individual and leader of that opposition, Trotsky.

Interestingly, it was Zinoviev who initiated what was to become an official campaign both against the Left Opposition and Trotsky as an individual. Because Trotsky argued for greater emphasis on industrial expansion and economic planning, Zinoviev and Stalin used their power to denounce Trotsky as being anti-peasant, elitist, bourgeois, and incompetent. Above all, said Zinoviev,

Trotsky overlooked the needs of agriculture. He has no feeling for the real economic relations in Russia. This is due to a psychological factor which cannot be left out of account.¹¹

So we can see how the Left Opposition began primarily as a faction supporting a particular economic program, but was rapidly forced to become an oppositional tendency within the Communist Party, fighting for the very survival of the politics and principles of revolutionary Marxism and of the revolution itself. The first expression of their existence as an organized tendency—the famous "Platform of the 46"—focused on both the question of internal democracy in the party and economic policy.

Before we go into the basic ideas and proposals of the Left Opposition let's first look a little at why its leaders—specifically Trotsky and Evgenii Preobrazhensky—considered industrialization, and consequently economic planning, so important.

While it is true that the Left Opposition recognized that the continuation of NEP would provide for some sort of industrial expansion, they did not believe it would provide enough industrial growth—either in terms of a sufficient ratio to agricultural growth, or fast enough in terms of the objective needs of industry itself—to facilitate investments in greater industrialization. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Left's economic proposals did not envision the complete elimination of the market, but rather retained many of the market aspects of NEP as a framework for extending "the planning principle" to all sectors of the economy, thus enabling the socialized or state sector to transcend or overtake market production.¹²

On the other hand, it is also true that even the most economically conservative leaders of the party, namely Bukharin and Stalin (until he made his infamous "left turn" and ditched Bukharin) never denied the fundamental importance of industrialization for the development of a socialist society. But they also believed that a slow pace (even a "snail's pace" as Bukharin put it)—or in other words a pace no faster than market forces would allow—could satisfy the political, economic, and military needs of the Soviet Union. Of course, such a market-oriented program was never really implemented. If it had been there is little doubt that it would have proven fatal to the Russian Revolution by the late 1930s—by which time the Soviet Union would have had to face the rise of fascism in Europe without an industrial base to defend itself.

So at the top of the list of reasons for a program of faster industrialization we

might put the need for economic and technological independence from the capitalist countries as a prerequisite for military defense of the revolution against imperialist aggression. The Bolsheviks had already traded vast amounts of Soviet territory to the German imperialists in 1918 in order to create a breathing space of several years of peace from German invasion. But the Bolsheviks had to use that time wisely in order to build up their military defenses in order to fight off the inevitable imperialist aggressions to come.

Another pressing reason for industrialization was that, even without foreign military intervention, the Soviet economy still faced the immediate problems of economic isolation and the resulting scarcity of consumer and other goods. It needed to rebuild its own economy and industrial base, provide its own tools, machinery, and technology, and so on. In particular, it needed to build heavy industry. Without industry—particularly heavy industry—other sectors of the economy simply could not develop, like transportation, communications, and even agriculture itself. Greater mechanization of agriculture was needed not only to increase agricultural output, but to make collective farming more attractive than private farming to the millions of poor peasants, who would be unable to afford their own machinery outside of a collective, and who might not otherwise rally to the support of the Bolshevik regime if it was offered no alternative to poverty.

There was also the need, already discussed, for the Soviet government to prevent the capitalist sector of the economy and market forces from growing faster than the socialist sector. After all, NEP was designed to serve as a policy for facilitating a transition to a socialist economic system of ever greater prosperity based on workers' democracy and social planning of production, not as a take-off for capitalist forces in the Soviet Union and a degeneration of Russia back into the imperialist world economy. This meant that the country also needed to change its demographics or socio-economic character from an overwhelmingly agricultural and peasant population to one that consisted primarily of industrial workers. NEP, on the other hand, led in the opposite direction toward the benefiting of the richer peasants and capitalists, and offering little basis for increasing the weight or power of the working class. In fact it was encouraging many poorer peasants to strive to become capitalists, not supporters of socialism.

Furthermore, the Left Opposition viewed industrialization as integral to the growth of socialist enterprises, of their production, and of worker self-management. Only industrialization could provide

the context for collective decision making and make worker cooperatives feasible. The key was to provide mechanisms by which workers would enter into such enterprises freely as an assertion of their own interests. And this could only be done by making the socialized sectors economically attractive and preferable to capitalist enterprises by providing them with the most advanced technical assets and financial advantages.¹³ This could not be accomplished without modernizing and building up the socialist sector faster than the capitalist sector and providing it with the energy and wealth to attract workers to socialism.

Finally, another argument for industrialization was the anxiety and potential danger inherent in the political relationship between the town and country, the *smychka*. As was just mentioned, a policy of industrialization would improve the balance of social forces and, consequently, lessen the political pressures involved in trying to safeguard this alliance between two classes with conflicting economic and political aspirations. Of course, industrialization also risked making a difficult situation and alliance untenable. Clearly, NEP had given the wealthier peasantry what it had wanted: more private land, a free market, the right to hire laborers, and a higher standard of living. But what the NEP farmer had received and wanted more of was not socialism, but capitalism. Likewise, the poor and middle class farmers (the *bednyaks* and *serednyaks*) were striving to become more like the kulaks, with large private farms, not members of a collective farm. Even when they had allied themselves with the government during the civil war to form the *kombedy*, requisitioning and seizing the land of kulaks, they had done so not out of a desire to establish socialist farming, but to enhance their own private landholdings.¹⁴

NEP was not only leading to a growth of capitalist tendencies at the expense of socialism, it was also widening the gulf between the interests of the two allies in the *smychka*, the peasantry and the proletariat, perhaps creating an unbridgeable gulf that could no longer permit bold initiatives to

develop industry without creating massive social and political unrest. The Left Opposition also understood, as had Lenin, that the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry had to be defended not just against the hostile forces within the Soviet Union, but also against the still more dangerous, hostile forces within the world economy. Within this larger circle of forces to which the proletarian dictatorship was exposed, the international bourgeoisie was still the overwhelmingly dominant and ruling class. As such it would continue to use all of the sources at its disposal either to crush the Soviet government militarily, or to undo the critical alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry through economic pressures aimed at destabilizing Soviet society.

The Left argued that because of these growing internal and external pressures on the *smychka*, the longer the government waited the more difficult industrialization would become. However, their arguments never advocated forced collectivization. They were focused instead on the need to build voluntary cooperation based on self-interest and rational economic planning.

Thus, by the mid-1920s economic debates within the Communist Party about NEP were focusing more and more on what was the best way to safeguard the political relationship between the Soviet government and the peasantry while expanding industry and socialism. Bukharin called this the "accursed problem," although he himself did not see it being resolved through a rapid buildup of industrial capacity. All of the arguments made by the Left for a more rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union pointed out different areas of weakness inherent to the NEP system and offered compelling reasons for its abandonment.

Then, during the fall of 1927, the NEP system faced a series of crises from which it would not recover. By this time the Stalinist leadership had not only lost all confidence in the policies of NEP, it had even begun to publicly lament its failure to institute some of the projects recommended earlier by the Left (though, of course, not acknowledging the source of these ideas).

Next month we will outline some of the proposals for a new industrializing policy presented by the Left Opposition of the Communist Party prior to 1927. □

Notes

(For complete book descriptions see the bibliography which will be published with the last installment of this article.)

1. V.I. Lenin, "Tax in Kind," *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress, 1952), p. 539.

2. The first idea is found in the article "Better Fewer But Better," while the latter is expressed in his "Tax In Kind," both in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 33, p. 135.

3. Leon Trotsky, "Toward Capitalism or Socialism?" in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-1925), pp. 321, 332-334.

4. Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, p. 94.

5. Maurice Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development Since 1917*, pp.161-2.

6. For a good statistical analysis of the gross investment in and depreciation of capital stock in Soviet industry from 1913 to 1924 see Alexander Erlich, *The Soviet Industrialization Debates 1924-1928*, pp. 104-107.

7. Toward the end of 1922 state industry began to organize syndicates to systematize the sale of its goods. The stockpiling of these products by the syndicates is discussed in some detail in Roger Munting, *The Economic Development of the USSR*, p. 55.

8. V. P. Danilov, *Rural Russia Under the New Regime*, pp.38-40.

9. "Repressed inflation" occurs when price controls not only keep down prices but also prevent an exchange of value or trade in the economy. In this case a better policy would have been to raise the prices of industrial products in order to account for higher incomes in the countryside, and to allow more agricultural products to come to market.

10. Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, p.139; Roger Munting, *The Economic Development of the USSR*, p. 78.

11. E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum 1923-1924*, pp. 336-337.

12. Part of Trotsky's speech at the twelfth party congress in 1923 is quoted in Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, p. 143.

13. In one of his last articles Lenin too had called for mechanization and cooperation as two prerequisites for future agricultural development. V. I. Lenin, "On Co-Operation," *Collected Works*, vol. 33.

14. Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, p.133. *Kombedy* was the acronym for the *Komitety Bednoty* (Committees for Poor Peasants).

Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

52. Love and Hatred

In telling about my experiences, I have taken the risk of confessing to many things. So I will go ahead and admit one thing more: I think differently now than I did when I started writing these notebooks about several matters, including some connected with my Jewishness. Of course, not for one minute do I repudiate it. But I am now trying to examine the issue in a broader light, understanding the links between insults to my national feelings and insults to me personally. I consider my national feelings one side of my human feelings.

I am reading Lenin's article "On the National Pride of the Great Russians." He writes: "We are filled with feelings of national pride because the great Russian nation *also* created a revolutionary class, also proved that it was capable of giving humanity a great model of struggle for freedom and socialism." Do you know what I want to draw attention to here? To the object of Lenin's national pride. It was not in the historic brilliance of the Russians, although their greatness is widely recognized. Nor the consummate warrior Suvorov, nor Popov and Mozhaisky nor even Kutuzov and Rayevsky,¹ nor the Russian patriots nor the feudal serfs who defended Russia against Napoleon with their bare hands. Lenin does not talk about them.

He is proud that the Russian people produced Radishchev, the Dekabrist,² and declassed intellectuals of the 1970s. He is proud that the great Russian nation also (he emphasized this word) produced a model for struggle for freedom. He was not proud of those features that distinguished one nation from another but precisely of those features which are present in all people, large and small, which bring them closer and draw them together.

My grandchildren are just as much Russian as Jewish, and Lenin's article is addressed to them too. They have a right to be proud of the Dekabrist and the Ulyanov brothers. But they can also be proud of their Jewishness. Beginning with Spinoza, Marx, and Heine and continuing to Trotsky, Litvinov, and Volodarsky and all

the way to thousands and thousands of fearless fighters who battled for the revolution and fought the fascists. My fathers and brothers did not disgrace themselves. They also provided a model of struggle for freedom and socialism. They also fought in the Warsaw ghetto; and this is also a model because freedom for humanity without freedom for its minority populations is nothing but empty words.

It is possible that I am mistaken, but I feel this way: love for one's homeland is above all love for humanity. All landscapes are dear to me, from the south to the north. But the people there are even more important—two people: one gave birth to me and nourished me with the milk of unprecedented and eternal resistance; the other took my hand and plunged me into the baptismal urn of the revolution. My real godfather was the Russian people and not the "godfather" in the forced labor camps.

True devotion to one's people better than anything else helps a person understand how someone else feels. This also works the other way round: those who better understand other people are also more capable of loving their own. The legend about Hiawatha³ is like all legends that many peoples have, but what is necessary is to be able to comprehend and realize what it is that distinguishes Hiawatha from Kalevala⁴ and the Russian epic about Ilya Murovets from the legend about Samson.

The soul of a people are their legends and their books if they have them like my people do. There is no reason to consider them sacred. On the contrary, the more you find what is "earthly" in them, the better you will understand their author. This, by the way, has been very helpful to archeologists who are unexpectedly corroborating what vicious ignoramuses prefer to dismiss as legend. The ancient books of the Jews, which date from three thousand years ago, do not, of course, depict the complete character of today's people any more than the *Iliad* depicts today's Greeks. But for me to repudiate fruits of knowledge like "Song of Songs" and "Ecclesiastes" is as unworthy an act as

it would be for contemporary Greeks to repudiate Homer and the Acropolis.

All ancient books of the most ancient people are full of religious myths and priestly rules. The myth about stealing fire is also a religious story about nonexistent gods; but we repeat Prometheus's name as a symbol, because of his marvelous exploits. And isn't the tale about Samson also marvelous, when he punished the slave masters at the cost of his own life? What about the legend of Moses in the Talmud? He, son of the slave Jochebed, was found by the pharaoh's daughter in the reeds of the Nile and grew up in the king's palace. They predicted to the pharaoh that the foundling child would deprive him of his kingdom. In order to verify the prediction, the pharaoh ordered that two bowls be placed before the child—one containing jewels and gold and the other burning coals. If he reached for the jewels, that meant he wanted to be king and should be killed. The child grabbed the hot coals and, burning his fingers, stuck them in his mouth. That is why Moses had a speech defect.

The friends of my youth personified this model of ardent youth who rejected gold and chose the hot coals. It would be foolish for me to be boastful about the exploits of Pugachev. But I can speak with authority about prison convoys made up of such ardent enthusiasts, walking along Vladimir Street in convicts clothes. And when the subject of the civil war comes up, or the Red Army, or defense of the revolution—on these subjects I can honestly admit my people took part even if the Mr. Fidgets try to keep this quiet in the works they write. Oh, how they try!

My pride has nothing in common with stupid theories of superiority. It is not boasting nor is it a priority topic. It is only as natural as the pride of the Great Russians. If my people had not sacrificed so much, we would be different—most likely, worse for it. We learned to sympathize with the oppressed. I know myself that the cry: "Why are you crawling like a kike?" upset me a great deal. But what makes me ashamed is thinking who I was when I

dined in the "Prague" restaurant.⁵ Surely, I am not alone in understanding this. The work of the Mr. Fidgets—in the camps or in literature—produced final results contrary to what they had planned.

* * *

Early one September morning, I traveled from Halchik to Pyatigorsk.⁶ From the window of the bus, the dark, jagged edges of the Caucasus mountains were discernible in the violet western sky. The road goes north. The rising sun appeared on the right and behind the bus I saw only a wide strip of sky and mountains. As it became lighter, the clouds—tinged in light grey and lilac—moved apart. Only far to the right at their very lowest edge did they still move in a dense mass, as if they were smoke from an unseen bonfire: the fire cannot yet be seen, hidden as it is in the very depths of the brushwood, flitting along the lower tiers like barely distinguishable orange lizards; then up over the clumps of pine trees, catching up, pushing, and enveloping one another, rolling and circling into greyish-brown spheres of smoke. Thus did the grey mountains roll all along the ridge.

Dawn ascended a little higher behind us. And suddenly, in one barely noticeable instant, it was as if the picture broke in two and a long, straight but jagged rift lay from south to north, like a wide river dividing the sky from the mountains. It was bright blue, as is seen in the southern sky but never in the skies of the north.

The dazzlingly bright blue river with its jagged shores flowed into the morning sky. On one of its shores, white clouds with lilac edges appear; on the other side is the mountain ridge now bathed in light. The dark eddies from the unseen fire emit a little light and then are scattered and stretch out to the rolling clouds, like a fluttering and whimsically woven scarf made of a fine, translucent cloth, rose-white and grey.

But the grey with every second, with every curve in the highway along which the bus travels, acquired ever deeper shades of rose. The cloud scarfs intertwined and became entangled in one another, and the upper shore of the deep-blue river became more and more rose-colored and violet. The sky river drifted wider and wider but the other shore, now illuminated by the sun, was transformed into a strange, unusual sight. The end of the ridge that went on into the distance was clearly visible as white mountains divided by the dark shadows of canyons. But the part of the mountain ridge right in front of me did not reach as far as the mountains. I decided not to question the person next to me about this, and there is hardly anyone who could have explained what I saw anyway: high on the snowy slope, blocking out everything else from my view, stood rows and ledges of houses, only houses. Maybe what I was seeing was

a mountain settlement. In the rays of the sunrise, shrouded in a silver cloud, they lost their ordinary features and took on fantastic dimensions. I could distinguish white walls, shining from the sun, and the dark spots of windows and doors, with red, ridged roofs.

The vision shimmered in the haze. Despite its phantasmal quality, it did not look to me like the desert mirages I had read about. The houses were not hanging in thin air but stood on a mountain slope. All that was improbable was the size of the houses. However, in the mountain air, this could have somehow been due to a peculiarity in the way the light rays were refracting.

The silver haze grew more transparent, the houses came more clearly into view but they did not get smaller. It seemed to me that I saw emerging from the houses—having just awakened—the ancient warriors Narts, the inhabitants of these free mountain territories since the earliest times. Turning to the rising star, they said their morning prayer and with god's blessing set out to attend to their daily ancient knightly affairs.

The deep blue river widened, swallowing up its cloudy banks. Then it seemed that the clouds, like pebbles, were scattered and instantly lost in the celestial stream. The sun was already beating on the windows on the right side of the bus. The bus turned and went into a hollow, and the vision could be seen no more.

I can still see it before me, marvelous and impossible to truly describe. The inhabitants of these mountains see this every morning. The good sun awakens them as dawn breaks. Does that sky mean little to people? When will they understand the voice of beauty?

These mountain settlements and possibly the ones that I saw were settled by the Balkars for centuries. After they were deported the sky remained blue, but the people changed: hatred was awakened inside them. It seems that these days nothing is easier than to arouse national hatred. Imperialism is somewhere abroad, and its "accomplices" are right here. And—something very important for those who sow such hatred—these accomplices are visible to all; familiar to everyone; here, there, and everywhere.

My friend Yefem Mendelyevich—still called Mendelyevich—having served his term in the camps, least of all wasted those years. He did not try to become a stooge for the warden, penciling denunciations while others were wielding shovels. Using simple words, he defended his human dignity the only way he could: by not looking for easy jobs. By doing this, even by only making it his aim, he upheld the dignity of all his people. He was a fierce

opponent of Zionism—simply an honest man.

Much new has been generated on this question. In the years of my youth, Eduard Bagritsky could make his hero Josef Kogan, who smiled in the face of death, straightening his glasses. But time passed and Nikita Sergeyevich began making allusions to "rootless people" and told a strange story about a certain Kogan who allegedly served as the translator in the staff of Hitler's General Paulus and was captured near Stalingrad.

This tale was refuted in a book by a German writer Aleksandr Klug, composed exclusively of documents. It is called *Description of a Battle*. According to the documents, Kogan the translator was not in the Paulus staff. Here, for example, is an entry: "24/1. Capitan Von N., who knows Russian, was again summoned to the staff headquarters of the army and received like a duke. They offered him coffee, cigarettes, and French cognac. The captain will be on the army staff as a translator." But perhaps captain Von N. is really the Jew Kogan, cleverly disguised as a German nobleman?

Millions of people read in the newspapers the extremely authoritative speech about the translator Kogan and, naturally, believed it. However, very few people in our country read the book by the German writer—and even fewer noticed these lines about captain Von N. The impression created by the unproven slander still remains.

I am in no way claiming that Jews are all angels. There were some who, in order to save their skin, agreed to commit treason or to become informers. But it is impossible not to compare the poet Bagritsky's attitude toward Kogan with that of the general secretary of the Central Committee of the party, Khrushchev.

If your people are slighted (whether openly or not), but you pretend that it does not concern you or your children, then you are a slave and a nonentity. Therefore, I do not have the right to ignore this problem and not respond to the insulters. My feeling of national dignity, particularly when insulted, is inseparable from my feeling of human dignity. Patriotism, if you think about it, is inseparable from this feeling.

Heinrich Heine was baptized during his youth which in those days meant a renunciation of his Jewishness. But when the turbid froth of anti-Semitism rose up on a wave of reaction, the great poet was not afraid to turn to a Jewish theme and wrote his *Donya Klara*, *Dispsute*, *Yeguda ben Halevi*, and other brilliant works. To stand up for those who are being insulted is the duty of every honorable person—particularly writers, be they Russian, Jewish, or Turkish. Neither Nazym Khikmet nor Paustovsky could walk on by if they saw

that someone was being trampled in the mud.

* * *

My modest garden with its few apple trees always sets me to thinking about the heavenly garden of Adam and the fruit of knowledge; and the wheelbarrow in which I haul manure and dirt never lets me forget about purgatory and hell. Heaven, of course, was in the tropics. That is where the liana vine grew.

I believe that my grandchildren are better able than I was at their age to cope with the forest where the adroit and tenacious liana winds around the heavenly trees bearing life and knowledge. Isn't it the same with a lie? Since it does not have its own straight and stable trunk, it winds itself around the mighty tree of truth. But the liana never becomes a part of the tree no matter how much it pretends. It has its own roots. It strangles the tree which it winds around. It can grow to be more luxuriant than the tree. But it cannot replace it.

In my youth I was poorly prepared to cope with lies for the simple reason that I barely knew what they were. Perhaps it makes sense to say how I arrived at my youthful truth. I was only 14 when the February revolution occurred. To my circle of childhood friends it seemed like a miracle: suddenly the tsar was gone; suddenly meetings began to take place where anyone could speak who wanted to and—what seemed most remarkable of all to us—suddenly we could continue our studies. The longtime dream of my parents came true: I was accepted into the only government gymnasium in the district.

During tsarist times, Jews were accepted into institutions of learning according to a "percentage norm": ten percent, no more, of students in a government gymnasium at each location could be Jewish. No secret was made of this. The stupid tsarist government was not able to hide from the outside world what anyone with the slightest intelligence would have tried to hide. Perhaps they understood that you can't cover things up when that is impossible. (You can't hide a knife in a burlap sack.)

The Chernovo township was not much different from any small village—remote, neglected, out of touch with the larger life of the country. We, the children of that little place, could not, of course, understand the meaning of events. But we were enchanted by the very word "revolution."

Our group included several boys and girls, linked by friendship, neighborhood, and childhood love. We organized a reading circle for self-education.

In the spring of 1917, no organizers came to our township or even to the district center Ananyev. And if they had come, they would not have visited us, mere teenagers. We hotly discussed the brochures that

began appearing in abundance at that time: "The Tsar of Famine" by A.N. Bach, "The Betrayed by Appetite" by Lafargue, articles by Plekhanov, "The Communist Manifesto." This is an accurate list of works in our circle's "library," as we loudly called it.

We did not have the works of Lenin and *Pravda* did not reach us. We heard the slogans of the Bolsheviks more often than not from soldiers of the crumbling tsarist army who happened to be passing through. These people, with no axe to grind, not particularly literate readers, carried into the woods the unembellished truth which alone—as opposed to a lie—is a cohesive whole, according to the excellent definition of Anatole France.

In the evenings we often strolled about as a group. We had not yet paired off. I was secretly in love with Zhenya, a girl with clear grey eyes. In the village school, where my education began, we shared a desk. She was able with unusual directness to say something to the teacher that would make him stop in his tracks. She would blurt out:

"You are lying!" and blush till tears came to her eyes. She died not long ago and I had not seen her for 40 years but in old age she remained as pure, transparent, and naively truthful as she had been in childhood. If all people were like Zhenya, life would be very uncomfortable. But if no people like her were left, life would not be worth living. She is one of those righteous souls who holds humanity together.

Our self-study circle had no elections, no chairman, and no program. We simply sought our place in the world. Our friendship, like a tree, died in the winter when we went away to our own special schools. But in the summer we met up again, read, and argued. Our circle survived three years. Then came the years when power in our country was constantly changing hands. Waves of forces of the cossack chiefs, Petlyura, Makhno, and Denikin rolled over our land.⁷ For our grandchildren, this history is vaguely familiar. But for us, it meant a constant threat of death. All these one-day-power wonders had one goal in common: to kill the Jews. The Jewish pogroms were an unflinching feature of the activities of all of them.

Father and I worked all night. In the yard, under a canopy of reeds, we had several loads of hay from the past summer. Father figured out how to make a refuge inside them. We built a deep cave in the hay with a narrow hole to enter through. Mama with my sisters and my younger brother crawled into our hay hideout and after they were inside, father and I crawled in blocking the entrance with more hay. There we would sit all day and then all night. Father would crawl out from time to time to find out what

was going on and then return. We spoke only in whispers. Our throats became dry from the dust. Father would not allow us to cough. None of the little ones ever cried. Polya was then six years old.

In the summer of 1919, we used our hay hideout several times; and each time, after the bandits had fled the township, we learned that one family had a father killed or another had lost two daughters.

In the autumn, I left for Ananyev. I remember during one of the changes of power, under Petlyura, a terrible massacre took place there. The father, mother, and younger sisters of one of my classmates in the gymnasium, Katsnelson, were killed. In Balta during that same week, there was another bloody pogrom. A Jewish self-defense detachment had returned the enemy fire several times; but the men did not have experience or enough weapons. The detachment perished to the last man. Then the conquerors rushed into the houses and cut down the women and old men.

Why do I relate these details? After all, theories about the suffering of the Jews, according to the explanation of the candidate of doctoral science Kuchko as well as the Hitler police collaborator Ghatyuk, is a harmful and false theory invented by Zionists in order to seize control of the world.

The Red Army approached Odessa. Soviet power was established in Ananyev very early in 1920. The rest you know.

[Next month: "Very Ordinary Honesty"]

Notes

1. A.V. Suvorov, M.I. Kutuzov, and N.N. Rayevsky were Russian military heroes in the wars against the Turkish and Napoleonic forces. A.S. Popov is claimed by Russians to have invented radio communications (1895) before G. Marconi did. A.F. Mozhaisky (1825-1890) was a Russian investigator and inventor.

2. A.N. Radishchev was a Russian philosopher and poet whose "Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow" (1790) exposing the inhumanity of serfdom and autocratic rule led to his arrest and imprisonment. He was one of the first to advocate the revolutionary transformation of Russia and inspired the democrats and revolutionaries of the 19th century. He committed suicide in 1802.

3. Hiawatha, a legendary chief of the Onondaga Indians of North America, is credited with the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy.

4. A Finnish national epic.

5. This is a reference to the time during the years after Baitalsky's first arrest in 1929, when he was freed because he decided to join the ranks of those opposed to Stalin who repudiated their views. Baitalsky as a journalist got to eat at special dining rooms for the apparatchiks.

6. A town in southern Russia.

7. Simon Petlyura and Lt. General Anton Denikin fought against the Bolshevik and revolutionary forces in the civil war. The partisan forces headed by Nestor Makhno fought with the Bolsheviks against the forces of Petlyura, Denikin, the Whites, and the Germans.

Letters

Why a Letter to the U.S. CP?

The November 1991 issue of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* contained "An Open Letter to the Communist Party USA." As the letter correctly stated, our differences with the CPUSA are longstanding and deep. The CP has supported bureaucratic rule in the USSR from the Stalin era to the present, and while the party still praises Gorbachev, its National Board initially decided "to neither condemn nor condone" the coup. The CP's role in domestic politics has not been any better. While denouncing Trotskyists (and other revolutionaries) as "fascists," it has endorsed Democratic Party candidates.

It is true that the Fourth Internationalist Tendency can work alongside the CP in united front activities on such matters as solidarity with Cuba, advocating independent labor political action, antiracist and anti-apartheid work, and women's liberation. Nevertheless, an open letter is not the way to go about forging united front action. We are not going to convince the CP, with our polite letter, to engage in effective work on any of these struggles. The problem is not simply that ill feelings have kept the CP from working in united fronts with us. Rather, the CP has consistently opposed cooperation with genuine revolutionaries because that would jeopardize its foul deal with the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie—a deal which has lasted for the better part of five decades. It is not going to change this strategy because of our letter.

This said, all that such an open letter does is make it appear that we have some sort of fraternal relationship with the CP—an unsavory partner to say the least—and to confuse people who are attracted to socialist ideas. (As if not enough people associated revolutionary socialism with Stalinism!) It would be about as useful to write an open letter to Jesse Jackson. He, after all, has also shown sympathy with Cuba, opposition to racism and apartheid, and support for women's liberation. Moreover, he has a mass following, something which the CP gravely lacks. We would not do this because it would strengthen progressive struggles in the United States not one iota and would send a confusing political message. The same holds true for this open letter to the CP.

If there are individual members of the CP who are moving towards revolutionary politics and who are known to the FIT, they should be approached as individuals. This open letter must send a very confusing message to them. Furthermore, if there are CP members unknown to the FIT gravitating towards revolutionary socialism, this does not justify the open letter. After all, there are probably members of the Democratic Party who are moving towards revolutionary socialist ideas. We hope the FIT is not planning any open letters to that party.

We cannot make public chatter with groups like the CP and expect it to get us one step further towards revolution.

We have our work cut out for us in this country, where the working class movement is so weak and fragmented. But we cannot allow ourselves to be daunted by the task. Only uncompromising and principled struggle will get us anywhere. We should stop looking for shortcuts.

Alejandro Reuss and Tom Garvey
Boston

FIT National Coordinators Reply

Before responding to the specific points raised by readers Alejandro Reuss and Tom Garvey, we want to clarify the reason for publishing and circulating the "Open Letter to the Communist Party USA."

The worldwide crisis of Stalinism has triggered upheavals in Communist parties throughout the world. Communist Party members, some of whom have spent a lifetime uncritically singing the praises of the Soviet bureaucracy, now discover that the totalitarian

system they presided over has been repudiated by the very masses of workers the system was supposed to benefit. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the East European satellite Stalinist regimes has convinced Communist Party members here and in other countries that the ideology which guided their political activity is utterly bankrupt.

So what do they do? Members of the Communist Party are going off in a number of different directions. Some, utterly demoralized by events, have simply given up political activity. Others are finding their way to social democracy. Still others are searching for new vehicles through which they can express their aspirations for social progress and a socialist transformation of society.

The Fourth Internationalist Tendency is keenly interested in this development because we are committed to effecting a regroupment of revolutionary socialists in the U.S. on a platform of principle. We see the Communist Party as a party in flux, with diverse—and conflicting—wings and tendencies. We seek to win as many healthy elements among these as possible to the Trotskyist program.

Readers Reuss and Garvey have a static concept of the Communist Party. Regarding our call for united front actions involving members of the Communist Party, they argue "the CP has consistently opposed cooperation with genuine revolutionaries."

Yes, that is true. But is it necessarily true for all time to come? Isn't it possible that events will effect a change in consciousness, at least among some CP members? And shouldn't this at least be put to a test?

Reuss and Garvey acknowledge that the FIT *can* work alongside the CP in united front activities. It seems contradictory for them to couple that statement with others effectively writing off the CP and its members without our making every effort to include them in united fronts. (The CP, after all, remains a relatively large and one of the most influential radical organizations in the United States.)

Reuss and Garvey also complain that our "Open Letter" makes it appear "that we have some sort of fraternal relationship with the CP." Nothing in the "Open Letter" justifies such a conclusion. To the contrary, we state, "In the past, bitter differences between the Communist Party and Trotskyists over the Soviet Union have been a significant barrier to forging united fronts, even around issues where we agree." Whether or not this changes remains to be seen. But one thing is clear: the FIT and the CP will never have a "fraternal relationship" unless and until the latter breaks definitively with Stalinism.

Finally, Reuss and Garvey contend that the FIT should approach members of the CP who are moving toward revolutionary politics as individuals rather than address the party as a whole. We see no reason to counterpose one against the other. Individual Communist Party members should, of course, be approached and talked with. But this does not preclude addressing the party itself.

There is a reason for this. The FIT holds open the possibility that in the course of the highly divisive and factional struggle which is today wracking the Communist Party, a grouping could emerge which would find its way to revolutionary socialism. If that should happen, and if the comrades involved should choose to wage a fight *within* the CP to win the party to their position, so much the better.

To be sure, we see a differentiation occurring in the ranks of the CP. The discussion leading up to its December 6–8, 1991, convention makes clear that the top leadership remains in the old Stalinist mold. In distributing the "Open Letter" at the CP convention, FITers took pains to reach rank-and-file delegates. The response was friendly and interested, even though FIT members made clear they were Trotskyists. Things are changing. They will undoubtedly change even more. □

Other speakers included: a local Solidarity organizer; the facilitator of the Philadelphia Marxist School where Haskell had instructed classes over the past five years; an organizer from ACT for Peace in the Middle East who praised Haskell's work with that group over the past year when he served on the group's coordinating committee.

Haskell had also worked with the local chapter of NOW and did education work with the Philadelphia Committee for Marxist Education and the local teachers' union, and played an active organizing role in the Progressive Unity Council and the Labor Community Forum.

In addition Haskell found time to write articles and book reviews for the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* on local and international subjects. Quite an impressive if not amazing array of activities for one person, even as listed in bare outline. Others fleshed it out a little. For example, the Philadelphia local organizer of Solidarity spoke in part as follows:

"Regretfully, we in Solidarity locally had known Haskell for only a relatively short time. . . . Although we had been in common struggles before—against privatization of city workers' jobs, against U.S. policy in Central America—it was not until the local effort against the Gulf war that we first collaborated in a meaningful way. During the war drive he was tireless in his work on the antiwar committees, never missing a meeting—and never passing up the opportunity to talk to folks about the war. I can remember him passing out leaflets and discussing the ground war with passers-by for hours in freezing cold temperature. And I remember his political

guts—from the simple, but uncommon act of placing an antiwar bumpersticker on his car, to daring to distribute a call for left unity at a local Communist Party event. Most recently he worked with our small committee to organize a benefit for the victims of the murderous fire at the poultry processing plant in Hamlet, NC.

"But perhaps the most moving moment I shared was the night before he entered the hospital for the last time. Facing a most serious operation . . . foremost in his mind was whether there was something more either he or his comrades should do to make the Hamlet benefit event a success.

"Politically I'll miss his straightforward and earnest efforts to clarify the positions of his organization, as FIT and Solidarity undertook discussions regarding our common work and goals.

"Let the fighting spirit of the man live on in each of us!"

Especially memorable among the speakers was the voice of the veteran Trotskyist Regina Shoemaker who declared in part: "As I listen to the kind and admiring things being said and looking at the faces here today it is obvious that our loss is being shared by many people from a variety of labor organizations and social causes. But some who are not here today I believe will be recalling perhaps some disagreement on policy in the antiwar work of last year and some will have pause for thought as they remember that Haskell always gave principled reasons for the things he proposed and could never be accused of a vanity trip or just wanting his own way.

. . .

"Lately Haskell's fondest hope was that we find a way to bring about unification of

the several Fourth Internationalist groups which currently function separately in the United States. Haskell knew that we needed to dispel fears of possible undemocratic control or influence in any type of merger, but it was his dream that this could eventually be accomplished.

"Haskell's death was not only untimely but cruel. Haskell was cut down when he had so many ambitious plans including the class he was teaching on *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*. His death was very cruel for his wife, Florence, who was totally unprepared to lose him and for whom we feel great sympathy.

"He was a variety of things to many people. A husband, a friend, a colleague, a comrade, and a collaborator. Haskell was my comrade but also a good friend who tried to help with personal problems where he could."

The last time I spoke with Haskell was just before he entered the hospital. I asked about his condition which he described briefly as "not bad" and turned our conversation to political and organizational matters. He said that two new members had recently joined the FIT and were very capable, able to lead classes and organize activities. He then plunged into the political situation in regard to the central task of reconstituting a united section of adherents of the Fourth International in the U.S.

He saw the development of the Milwaukee Revolutionary Socialist Group (made up mostly of former members of the Barnesite SWP) as highly symptomatic. He was urgent, practical, hopeful!

I can hear him now. □

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