

1917

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International"

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOLSHEVIK TENDENCY

No. 19



1997



UPI/BETTMANN

Oust the Bureaucrats—Unchain the Unions!

American Labor Besieged

For the American media, from the most prestigious journals to the most shameless tabloids, one subject has traditionally been taboo: class—particularly class conflict. True, the existence of a largely black and Hispanic “underclass” has been admitted, its impoverished condition attributed to cultural defects and the drug trade. But everyone else—from the file clerk, working for mini-

imum wage, to the stockbroker or corporate executive—was said to be “middle class.”

This all-American mythology is far too useful to be dispensed with entirely. But, in the midst of the current bipartisan attack on the poor, various bourgeois commentators have begun to think about some of the long-term implications of class polarization. The 17 July 1995

Business Week cover story, "The Wage Squeeze" pointed out:

"Four years into a recovery, profits are at a 45-year high, unemployment remains relatively low, and the weak dollar has put foreign rivals on the defensive. Yet U.S. companies continue to drive down costs as if the economy were in a tailspin. Many are tearing up pay systems and job structures, replacing them with new ones that slice wage rates, slash raises, and subcontract work to lower-paying suppliers."

The editors worried that the success of business in driving down employees' living standards might ultimately lead to "chronically weak demand." Even worse, it could call the legitimacy of the system into question: "The sight of bulging corporate coffers co-existing with a continuous stagnation in Americans' living standards could become politically untenable."

With voter turnout at historic lows, and bribery of politicians more blatant than at any time since the "Gilded Age" at the end of the last century, liberal social commentators—including Kevin Phillips, John Kenneth Galbraith and Lester Thurow—have produced a number of books warning that social cohesion is threatened by the widening class divide. The upset victory scored by rightist demagogue, Pat Buchanan, in the February 1996 New Hampshire Republican primary, briefly alarmed the corporate elite. Suddenly the mass media was filled with stories about the anger and resentment bubbling beneath the surface of the supposed economic recovery. *Newsweek* ran a cover story on "Corporate Killers" (26 February 1996), while *Business Week* fretted:

"In the past few years...all but the most elite employees have landed in the same leaky boat. If they all come to stress their common fate more than their differences, it could spell trouble for corporations and politicians alike."
—*Ibid.*

These fears are well founded. For those whose income depends on paychecks rather than dividends, "recovery" has made things worse. Wages for production workers declined 12 percent between 1978 and 1995. According to a U.S. Census Bureau report, entitled "A Brief Look at Postwar U.S. Income Inequality," released in July 1996, the share of national income going to the top one fifth of U.S. households increased from 40.5 percent in 1968 to 46.9 today, while everyone else's share stagnated or declined. This same report revealed that the income of the rich grew more quickly under Clinton than at any other time in the post-war period, including the Reagan-Bush years.

As wages decline, working hours increase. Juliet Schor, a Harvard economist, has demonstrated that advances in technology and labor productivity during the past quarter century have not resulted in more leisure time, as widely predicted in the 1950s and 60s. On the contrary, the burden of work has increased: more family members are in the labor force, and each works longer hours. In 1990, 60 percent of married women were working outside the home, compared with about 30 percent in 1960; teenage participation in the workforce had jumped to 53.7 percent, a ten percent increase from twenty years earlier. The average worker, moreover, spends 163 more hours, the equivalent of one month per year, on the job than in 1969. And, for the most vulner-

able, especially immigrants, there has been a return to the horrors associated with the nineteenth century—sweatshops employing child labor, and even cases of involuntary servitude.

Every Day, In Every Way...

In the 1950s, American workers attained a level of consumption which would have been restricted to the ruling class in earlier times. Cars, household appliances, trips to Disneyland—it seemed to many that capitalism could "deliver the goods." The massive expansion of post-secondary education in the 1960s meant that, for the first time in history, a large proportion of working-class youth were able to attend college. Of course, even then, millions were left out of the "Affluent Society." But the prevailing liberal wisdom was that, with improved expertise, it was just a matter of time before these remaining "pockets of poverty" were eliminated.

Today, after two decades of declining real wages, and with a bipartisan assault on every government program that ameliorates social inequality, economic prospects for youth are considerably worse than they were for their parents. This phenomenon, unprecedented in American history, has explosive implications.

When Congress first started talking about balancing the federal budget at the expense of social spending, it was presented as something that would chiefly affect welfare recipients—who are identified in the public mind with blacks, Hispanics and immigrants. But with the ax now poised over Medicare and Social Security, it is becoming very clear, even to the politically backward, that the target is much broader. In New York City, which has often served as a testing ground for austerity schemes, recipients of public assistance, outfitted with bright orange vests, are being forced to sweep streets for less than \$2.50 an hour. By replacing unionized city

continued on page 17

Contents

American Labor Beseiged	1
S. Korea to the Brink	3
Ontario Labor vs. Tories	9
Trotskyism & Tactics	15
Defend Chicago Anti-Klan Three!	25
U.S. Labor Party	26
'Michael Collins' & Irish Freedom	38
Marxism, Feminism & Women's Liberation	40

1917

Editorial Board: J. Cullen, M. Hayes, B. Logan, T. Riley

Signed articles or letters do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the International Bolshevik Tendency.

Subscription: U.S. \$5/4 issues

Order from/pay to:

BT, Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn.,
Toronto, Canada M5C 1J0

closing date: 1 March 1997

Working Class Flexes Muscle

South Korea to the Brink



REUTERS

KCTU battle squads in action against police in Seoul

Just before dawn on 26 December 1996, four chartered buses carrying 154 legislators from South Korea's ruling New Korea Party (NKP) stopped in front of the country's National Assembly. The deputies disembarked, snuck into the legislative building, took their seats in the plenary hall, and, in just seven minutes, passed a barrage of legislation, which tightened the country's repressive labor laws, and restored the powers of the dreaded secret police. They then scurried back onto the buses and sped off in the early morning light.

This display of democracy in action produced a "historic" new labor law, which President Kim Young Sam assured citizens was necessary to "save the nation." But things worked out a little differently than the government had planned. The regime's cowardly maneuver set off a tidal wave of protest. Opposition legislators denounced the ruling party's move as a "coup d'état," and the country's legal experts and academics all agreed that it was blatantly unconstitutional.

More important, the "illegal" Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU or *minjunochong*) declared the legislation "null and void," and, within hours of the laws' passage, launched a general strike. By the end of

the first day, 150,000 workers were involved. The auto plants in Ulsan, heart of the Hyundai empire, fell silent, as did those of Kia Motors, Ssangyong Motors and Asia Motors. South Korea's three largest shipyards shut down. The country's export-driven economy began to grind to a halt.

Popular outrage was so intense that even the traditionally pro-government Federation of Korea Trade Unions (FKTU or *nochong*) was forced to participate. By the second day of the strike, some 150,000 FKTU workers from 486 worksites (10 percent of its total membership) were mobilized. This is highly significant because the FKTU's predecessor was created in the late 1940s by the Syngman Rhee dictatorship to compete with the militant, communist-influenced *Chonpyong* (National Korean Labor Council).

'Illegal and Unpatriotic'

The government's initial response was to try to crush the protests with brute force. In Seoul, on 28 December, riot police attacked a peaceful march of 20,000 workers and students, calling for the dissolution of the NKP government and nullification of the reactionary legisla-



KCTU strikers' headbands denounce reactionary labor legislation

tion. But police violence could not derail the strike movement, and by the end of the "first wave," the mobilizations included both public and private-sector workers, and participation was growing even among white-collar employees.

After a lull during the New Year holidays, a "second wave" of the general strike erupted that was even broader than the first. Workers from some of the traditionally conservative sectors began to join the strike; hospitals, radio and television stations, research institutes and even financial institutions were affected. There were also some instances where workers began to administer public services—for example, dispatching brigades to towns in the South Cholla province to assist people hit hard by a winter storm.

However, participation in the "second wave" was uneven. The FKTU's involvement was limited. The scope of the strike was also restricted by the KCTU leadership's decision to leave key departments in many companies on the job, and not to pull out public employees except for limited periods. The strike was therefore strongest in the export-oriented manufacturing sector.

Polls reported a solid majority in support of the general strike, despite the inconvenience it caused. Doctors', lawyers' and professors' associations, peasant organizations, Catholic priests and Buddhist monks all proclaimed the strike to be a legitimate exercise of democratic rights, and announced their refusal to accept the validity of the new laws. There was even a "Housewives' Proclamation" endorsing the strike.

The two main bourgeois opposition parties, the Na-

tional Congress for New Politics (NCNP) and the United Liberal Democrats (ULD), initially spurned offers to appear at union-organized rallies. But, as popular support grew, they eventually decided that it was safe to participate. With an eye on the upcoming presidential elections, they sloughed off NKP accusations that they were inciting "illegal and unpatriotic" behavior, and declared that they considered the strike entirely legal.

'Degenerating into Class Struggle'

Every day, in every city, crowds of sympathetic spectators joined uniformed workers in an open-ended, nationally coordinated protest. In Seoul, where the regime concentrated its forces, the police occasionally attacked demonstrators, but were often driven back by volleys of rocks and fire-bombs. In the rest of the country, the massive protests were peaceful, as the badly outnumbered police did not dare provoke the workers.

In the past, the government has been able to dispatch police from around the country to suppress strikes or demonstrations. Frequently the target has been in Ulsan, where the metalworkers have a reputation for being extremely combative. On occasion, the regime has employed military units to reinforce the police in massive field operations against these workers. But this time, the mobilizations were so large, and so widespread, that, for the most part, the police did not even try to suppress them. In some instances, where local police did attack the protests, they were overpowered by organized "workers' battle squads" composed of units from different workplaces.

As the strikes continued, the government feared that it was losing control of the situation. Prime Minister Lee Soo Sung warned striking public-sector workers that those who did not return to work would face harsh retribution. The Prosecutor General's office began issuing dozens of arrest warrants for union leaders. Lee Hong Goo, who is expected to be the ruling party's next presidential candidate, visited Cardinal Soo Hwan Kim, to get his approval for an assault on Myongdong Cathedral, where the KCTU leadership was headquartered. But the cardinal refused permission, and told Lee that the NKP had been wrong to circumvent the legislature.

After the police seized the KCTU headquarters and threatened to invade Myongdong Cathedral, the two union federations announced plans to escalate the strike. On 15 January, the "third wave" began. Huge rallies were held in every major center. Seventy percent of KCTU members walked off the job, along with 400,000 KCTU workers.

At this point the government began to panic. "The general strikes are degenerating into class struggle," squealed Choi Byong Kuk, head of the Public Security Department of the Prosecutor General's office, who announced that he possessed:

"evidence that North Korean propaganda broadcasts are instigating the working class to destroy the government' and that 'communist' propaganda had been found on the scene of the labor rallies. In reference to the subversive materials, the NKP said that the prosecution, police, and the NSPA [National Security Planning Agency, formerly known as the South Korean CIA] must ferret out impure factors."

—Korea Labor and Society Institute, 16 January

The police did not yet dare attack the KCTU's central leadership, but they began arresting second-tier leaders. In Seoul, 150 union militants were detained and interrogated. However, in some regions, the courts refused to co-operate with the regime. Both the Changwon district court in South Kyongsang province and the Taejon district court in South Chungchong province reportedly refused to execute arrest warrants for regional union leaders on the grounds that the new labor laws had not been shown to be constitutional. They said they would not act until there was a Supreme Court ruling on the matter.

KCTU Leaders Scuttle Strike

The regime's shrill denunciations of the strikers as pawns of North Korea had no effect, nor did repeated threats of the "imminent" and "inevitable" arrest of the KCTU leadership. Recognizing that his position had become untenable, President Kim Young Sam decided to change tack. On 21 January, he met with the leaders of the two main opposition parties, Kim Dae Jung of the NCNP and Kim Jong Pil of the ULD. While refusing to repeal the laws outright, he did suggest that he might revise them. Suddenly, the Prosecutor General's office announced it was dropping charges against 20 major trade-union leaders (although over 400 rank-and-file militants still face charges stemming from their strike activity).

In response to these "concessions," the KCTU leader-

ship called off the general strike, and announced it would restrict its protests to Wednesday work stoppages and Saturday rallies. These semi-weekly events were supposed to continue until the law was repealed, but in fact lasted only a single week. At the same time, the KCTU leaders threatened to resume the strike on 18 February, if by then the law had still not been revoked.

The union leadership dressed up its retreat as a new "fourth wave" of the struggle, and claimed that, "the nationwide strike will be more aggressive and will work towards the acceleration of labor's cause" (*Strike Urgent Report No. 20*, 31 January). To prepare this "aggressive" action, the union leaders proposed a petition campaign, and "promoted mandatory attendance [at work] and reserved [i.e., cancelled] the Wednesday demonstrations."

The weekly one-day work stoppages would have been meaningless anyway, because the unions had agreed to work overtime to make up for lost production. When 10,000 Hyundai employees worked an *extra 10 hours* after the end of their regular shift on 25 January, a union representative explained:

"The company's production losses from the strike amounted to substantial sums, and in view of the fact the company management has decided not to seek legal retributions against the union over the strike, we at the union have decided to do our share in making up for the losses by extending our work hours."

—Korea Herald, 28 January

Economic Restructuring & 'Flexible' Labor Laws

The Western media portrayed the strike as a relatively minor struggle over the issue of job security. While acknowledging that the labor legislation had been passed in an irregular manner, they described South Korea as a land where lifetime-guaranteed jobs had once been the norm, but which would now be forced to bring its labor policies into line with the "new realities" of the global marketplace. The revision of the labor code goes hand in hand with the dismantling of much of the state regulation and protectionism that have formed the basis of South Korea's economic policy for the past 30 years. These changes are a precondition for South Korea's acceptance by the OECD (Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development).

The KCTU was forged in the "Great Workers' Struggle"—a massive wave of strikes and popular protests that swept the country in 1987 and loosened the grip of the brutal military dictatorship. While the KCTU has remained officially illegal, it is an important factor in South Korean politics. Kim Young Sam's labor "reforms" were intended to give Korean capitalists more "flexibility" in exploiting workers while also weakening the unions.

The other part of the government's legislative package, the "reform" of the laws governing the political police, marks a sinister return to the days of the military dictatorship. Even the *New York Times* (25 February) acknowledged as much:

"When President Kim Young Sam, who had opposed the military-led governments that ruled South Korea for



KCTU leader Kwon Young Gil at Myongdong Cathedral

nearly 30 years, came into office in 1993, he weakened the security agency by subjecting it to parliamentary oversight and transferring enforcement of the key clause of the National Security Law to the police. Critics of the law welcomed those changes.

"But arrests under the law, which dropped after Mr. Kim took office, have been rising. In 1996 there were 464 cases, compared with 305 in 1992, the year before Mr. Kim came into office. A new law passed in December restores enforcement powers of the National Security Law to the intelligence agency."

PCIR Fails to Co-opt KCTU

The NKP resorted to its parliamentary coup only after previous attempts to get KCTU acquiescence to the regime's proposed labor law "reforms" had failed. In 1996 the supposedly illegal union was invited to nominate two of the five union representatives on the Presidential Commission on Industrial Relations (PCIR). The KCTU initially agreed to participate in the commission with the understanding that it would be granted legal recognition in return. The declared purpose of the PCIR was to promote "cooperation between employers and employees," and the KCTU's involvement undoubtedly reflected hopes that diplomacy would prove more effective than direct industrial action.

In June 1996, a wave of public-sector strikes, involving telephone, television and subway workers, demanded that fired union leaders be reinstated, and that the proposed labor code be scrapped. In July the powerful auto workers also went on strike, posing the possibility of a broad union offensive to smash the anti-labor laws. But the KCTU leadership, hoping to win significant gains through the government's commission, was unwilling to act. Once the government agreed to rehire the fired militants, the KCTU pressured its unions to settle quickly, so as not to alienate public opinion.

After prolonged, but ultimately fruitless, negotiations, the KCTU leaders eventually denounced the PCIR as no more than a front for the *chaebol* (industrial conglomerates), and withdrew. The commission's failure to co-opt the KCTU meant that it was of no further use to Kim Young Sam. When the PCIR finally submitted its report, the government ignored its recommendations, and wrote its own, more draconian, package of labor law

"reforms" which, among other things, delayed recognition of the KCTU for three more years. The ruling party's laws also made it easier for bosses to victimize striking workers, and to use scabs, while prohibiting workers fired during a strike, or those laid off or unemployed, from continuing to hold union membership. Penalties for "illegal" actions, like plant occupations, wildcats, or even slowdowns, were also sharply increased—in some cases by 2500 percent.

The new legislation also gave companies the right to lengthen the workweek from an average of 49 hours to 56 hours, before having to pay overtime. The law also attacked the rights of public-sector workers, particularly teachers, who are permitted "consultative" associations, but whose union, the Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union (NTU or *Chonkyojo*) remained banned. The new teachers' "associations" were prohibited from calling themselves trade unions.

KCTU: the Limits of Trade-Union Reformism

While willing to defy the government, the KCTU leadership's reformist trade-union perspective severely limited the political potential of the struggle. When Kim Young Sam flinched and offered a few minor concessions, such as dropping charges against the top union leaders and promising unspecified "revisions" to the labor law, the KCTU pulled the plug on the strike, arguing that to continue would lead to "isolation." During the strike, this same reformist impulse led the KCTU leadership to capitulate politically to the government's red-baiting campaign. They publicly denied any leftist involvement, appealed to left groups to refrain from distributing their literature at workers' rallies, and, on some occasions, reportedly used union security squads to suppress leftists distributing leaflets.

The KCTU leadership's political limitations were graphically illustrated by its response to the financial collapse of the Hanbo *chaebol*, under the weight of \$6 billion in bad debts. This is the latest, and most serious, in a series of bribery and corruption scandals that have plagued Kim Young Sam's government, and it has created a major political/economic crisis. Initial attempts to lay the blame on a few bad business moves and the rigidities of the labor market were blown apart when it was revealed that, even as Hanbo's financial crisis deepened, government officials had pressured the banks into extending billions of dollars in new loans.

So far, the chiefs of two major banks, legislators from both the ruling party and the opposition, the government's Home Affairs minister and one of Kim Young Sam's own sons have been implicated in the growing scandal. South Korean taxpayers are outraged that they are going to be stuck with the tab, and Kim Young Sam's approval rating has plummeted to 14 percent. On 25 February, the president appeared on national television to take responsibility for the debacle, and to apologize for the "agony and sorrow" it had caused. The next day, a newspaper poll reported that:

"79.9 percent of the respondents do not believe Kim will make good on his promise to get to the bottom of the Hanbo case and punish all those implicated..."

—*Korea Herald*, 27 February

Yet, when the Hanbo scandal first broke, the KCTU did no more than verbally condemn the government and demand the punishment of those responsible. Instead of pressing home the attack on the weakened government, the KCTU leadership abruptly called off its weekly Wednesday protest strikes. While they did not explicitly link this to the crisis of the government, the connection was clear enough:

"Behind the militant KCTU's decision to suspend the strike, according to labor experts, was the Hanbo financial scandal, which drew public attention away from the strike. Union leaders, they added, may have concluded that lengthy strikes would not prove helpful to labor groups as the strike is certain to draw less public attention. "KCTU leaders also seemed concerned about possible public antipathy resulting from a prolonged strike, since most citizens are now anxious about the prospect of an economic crisis linked to the Hanbo bankruptcy."

—*Korea Herald*, 30 January

The KCTU leaders invited Kim Young Sam's bourgeois opponents to participate in its forums, and refrained from criticizing them. Kim Dae Jung of the NCNP (who has lately been pushing his "conservative" credentials), and Kim Jong Pil of the ULD (who was a central figure in the Park Chung Hee military dictatorship), used the opportunity to make political capital out of their criticisms of the government's legislation. But their real grievance was that Kim Young Sam had not consulted them.

The opposition parties have shown their true colors now that they have been allowed to help draft a "revised" labor law. The ULD has ruled out any legalization of the underground teachers' union, the NTU. The more liberal NCNP is willing to consider legalization of the teachers' union, while withholding the right to strike. This prompted the NTU to occupy the offices of both opposition parties, and the KCTU has threatened renewed strikes to win union rights for them.

The KCTU leadership may hope that its association with the capitalist politicians will help it "legitimize" itself, but its failure to expose the anti-working-class character of the bourgeois opposition can only confuse union members and undermine the capacity of the workers' movement to advance its own independent class interests.

South Korean Left & the Strikes

Despite the regime's hysterical anti-communist propaganda, the organized left does not appear to have played a significant role in recent events. This is a consequence of a combination of intense police repression, and profound ideological disorientation. The 1991 collapse of the USSR shattered the once substantial "Marxist-Leninist" Stalinist formations, and has propelled their cadres in every conceivable political direction. The various groups clinging to the discredited *Juche* ideology of the ruling Stalinist regime in North Korea also played no role in the strike.

Many South Korean leftists and union militants have recently begun a serious discussion about the possibility of forming a workers' party. This sentiment is reflected in vague suggestions emanating from the KCTU leader-



DAEHAESAENG

April 1996: Police attack student rally at Yonsei campus protesting cop murder of law student No Soo Sok

ship about perhaps running an independent candidate for president, or standing in the next National Assembly elections, scheduled for 2000.

While the KCTU leadership has limited itself to calling for a populist "Citizens' Party," labor party advocacy groups, like the *Nojinchu* and the *Nojungnyon*, provide a forum for a variety of different views, ranging from social-democratic to subjectively revolutionary. But even the most moderate leftists suffer state repression in South Korea: in the last year alone, the police arrested 27 *Nojinchu* supporters. This outrage underscores the brutal fact that, under present political conditions, the only way to advance any kind of independent working-class politics is through underground activity. Naturally, this tends to undercut the appeal of social-democratic notions.

The International Socialists of South Korea (ISSK) presents itself as a revolutionary socialist alternative. Yet, its political record belies this claim. While abstractly advising workers to maintain complete political independence from the bourgeoisie, at election time, the ISSK regularly advocates a vote to one or another capitalist candidate. In the last presidential election, in 1992, the ISSK called for a vote to Kim Dae Jung. This proved too much for some ISSK members, prompting a section of the leading cadre to walk out.

In the 1995 Seoul mayoralty race the ISSK called for a vote to Cho Soon, who ran on the NCNP ticket. Since his election, Cho Soon has repeatedly ordered the riot police to attack striking workers and leftist demonstrators. He has also deployed scabs on numerous occasions, particularly against Seoul's militant subway workers.

Cho Soon is acting just like any other capitalist politician, which is why Marxists have always refused *on*

principle to vote for bourgeois candidates. For the "revolutionary" ISSK, however, the principle of working-class independence is just so much sectarian baggage. The ISSK rationalizes its political support for capitalist politicians on the grounds that workers have illusions in them, and that, if socialists refuse their support, they risk isolation. Instead of struggling to break the proletariat from its present backwardness, the ISSK capitulates to it.

This same opportunist impulse was evident in the ISSK's intervention in the recent general strike, when it absurdly called for a "presidential veto" of the labor law: "A concrete gain that we can get from the struggle is a presidential veto. In other words, we'll force them to give us a labor version of 6.29 declaration."

—[Korean] Socialist Worker, 29 December 1996

With hundreds of thousands of workers on strike to *scrap* the labor law and get rid of the government that introduced it, the ISSK could do no better than to call for...a veto by Kim Young Sam! (The "6.29 declaration" refers to former president Chun Doo Hwan's 1987 deal with the bourgeois opposition, granting direct presidential elections in order to demobilize the mass protests against the military dictatorship.)

Which Way Forward?

While the details of the final deal have yet to be worked out, the outline seems clear enough. The only union federation granted immediate legal recognition under the new law is the FKTU, but the KCTU seems almost certain to be legalized soon. The new labor bill is likely to make it a bit harder for bosses to lay off workers. But other demands, including repeal of the state "security" package, are not being addressed. The fact that the KCTU leadership is apparently willing to settle for such a meager return is hardly surprising, given that their objectives never went far beyond winning legal status for their federation.

The absence of any organized left-wing formation in the unions capable of challenging the leadership makes it likely that KCTU president, Kwon Young Gil, will be able to wear down rank-and-file resistance to a settlement tailored to the requirements of the bourgeois opposition. While the failure of the union leaders to wrest any significant concessions has to be seen as a political defeat, it is also clear that the government seriously underestimated the strength of the unions. If Kim Young Sam could do it all over again, he would no doubt have cancelled plans for the secret legislative session, and instead proceeded through the regular channels.

The government's breach of earlier promises to grant legal status for the KCTU left the union leadership no option but to resist. Yet, throughout the strike, one of the KCTU's main concerns was to limit the scope of the struggle. Strikes in the public sector were actively discouraged, as was the distribution of leftist literature. The union leadership's conservative role was also demonstrated by their efforts to replace production lost through strike action, as well as their patriotic decision to call off the protests in light of the Hanbo scandal.

While it has acted as a brake on the struggle, the

leadership thrown up by the South Korean workers' movement is not a hardened bureaucratic layer of the sort that run unions in the West. These are people who have undertaken, at considerable personal risk, to lead the struggle to assert the elementary democratic rights of working people. Yet, despite the contributions of its individual members, the KCTU leadership, operating within the parameters of militant trade unionism, lacks the political capacity to defeat the capitalists.

The widespread popular disgust with the cynicism and corruption of the government presents an opportunity for the unions to campaign for "opening the financial books" of the *chaebol* to representatives of the labor movement. A good place to start laying bare the roots of the sleaze endemic to South Korean capitalism would be with Hanbo.

Two of the key issues in the strike were the government's attempt to lengthen the workweek and to make it simpler for workers to be thrown onto the scrap heap. The unions should have countered with a campaign to *lower* the number of hours worked, and thereby expand employment. A serious struggle to reduce the average workweek from, for example, 49 to 35 hours, *at no loss in pay*, could be an effective way for the unions to reach out to the unemployed and unorganized workers, and bring them into the movement. In order to step forward as a contender for power, the working class must place itself at the head of the struggles of all the oppressed. A class-struggle leadership in the unions would therefore champion the interests of women, small farmers and "guest" workers from South Asia and Africa.

Many of the KCTU's official platform speakers at the January demonstrations raised the call to "Dissolve the *Chaebol!*" The *chaebol* are indeed the enemy, but it is not enough merely to "dissolve" them, i.e., to break them up into a welter of smaller capitalist concerns. The workers' movement must set itself the task of *nationalizing* these giant monopolies, *without compensation*, under workers' control.

During the general strike, tens of thousands of workers defied the state and the bosses. In many factories they organized effective "battle squads." This assertion of workers' power posed an implicit challenge to the capitalists' property rights and their monopoly of force. In future struggles, the next step for the workers would be to set up factory committees in order to assert their authority on the shop floor. The emergence of such committees would in turn lay the basis for the creation of delegated workers' councils at both local and regional levels. The creation of such organs would provide the organizational framework for workers' political power.

The struggle for power requires the creation of a revolutionary organization that unites the most advanced and committed militants on the basis of a program drawn from the best traditions of the Korean and international workers' movement. Only through forging a revolutionary Marxist party can the powerful Korean working class break the chains of capitalism in the South, dislodge the crumbling bureaucratic dictatorship in the North, and move forward through the revolutionary reunification of the Korean nation into the socialist future. ■

Ontario 'Days of Action' Resistance & Betrayal



Ontario riot cops confront striking civil servants, 18 March 1996

On Friday 25 October 1996, economic activity in Toronto, Canada's largest city, and financial capital, ground to a halt. The local labor movement shut down the city's transit system, which carries 600,000 passengers on a typical work day. But the predicted traffic jams did not materialize: downtown streets were almost deserted except for picketers. The next day a quarter of a million people marched on Queen's Park, the seat of the provincial government, in the largest political demonstration in Canadian history.

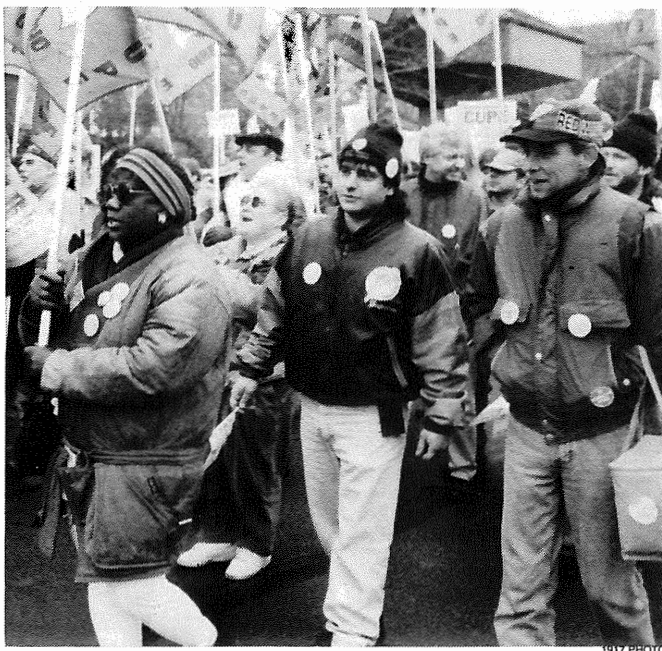
The Toronto "Days of Action" protest was the fifth in a series of city-wide shutdowns called in response to the policies of the Conservative government of Premier Mike Harris. In June 1995, Harris defeated the discredited social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP), waving the banner of a "Common Sense Revolution," based on tax and spending cuts. Since their election, the Tories have moved quickly: healthcare, education and social program spending have been slashed; environmental, labor and safety standards have been shredded; rent control has been essentially abolished; union rights have been curtailed; 12,000 provincial government employees have been laid off, while taxes on business have been reduced. The Harris government recently turned over the province's substantial investment in the now-profitable DeHavilland aircraft plant for a fraction of its

value to the private sector, and is announcing plans for similar give-away privatizations of the most profitable publicly owned corporations: Ontario Hydro and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO).

The "downsizing of government" has gone hand in hand with the strengthening of the state. With the government's centralizing "Omnibus" Act of 1995, traditional methods of co-opting dissident groups, through consultation and policy submissions, have simply been done away with, along with the niceties of parliamentary approval of legislation. Municipal governments that have displeased the Tories, in particular the City of Toronto, are being unilaterally disbanded, in a manner that recalls Margaret Thatcher's abolition of the Greater London Council in the 1980s. To centralize power further in the Ministry of Education, the number of school boards will be cut in half.

Ontario's jail system is being overhauled: social workers and rehabilitation programs are out, and high-tech mega-jails on the American model are in. The Harris government is gutting the toothless external review boards which have previously (however ineffectually) investigated complaints of police misconduct.

As always, the deadliest consequences of the increased climate of repression have been felt by minorities. Four people were gunned down by Toronto cops in



23 February 1996: Hamilton shut down for a day

1996, all non-white. In February, Toronto's "finest" murdered a mentally-ill Chinese man, who was trapped, alone, in the back of a bus. On 6 September 1995, three months after Harris' election, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) attacked a peaceful occupation by aboriginals of Ipperwash Provincial Park, fatally shooting unarmed protestor Dudley George. Harris denied all knowledge of the killing, but it has since been revealed that the murder came one day after a meeting between a high-ranking OPP officer and a group of senior Tories, including Deborah Hutton, one of Harris' chief advisers. The Tories have repeatedly turned down requests from George's family and a variety of civil-rights organizations for a public inquiry.

The generalized attack on working people has been accompanied by particularly brutal assaults on the poor. One of the Tories' most cherished programs is a version of the slave-labor "workfare" schemes proliferating in the United States. The Tories' proposal to download welfare costs onto municipalities, to be paid for through increased property taxes, sets the stage for future ugly middle-class "tax revolts," targeting welfare recipients.

Harris has stirred up hostility to the poor with a series of well-planned "gaffes," including labelling homelessness a "lifestyle choice" and blaming the increase in hungry schoolchildren on women who work rather than stay home. The supposedly liberal police chief of Metropolitan Toronto is calling for a new vagrancy law, and for a crackdown on the growing number of panhandlers on Toronto streets. Police spokesperson, Sergeant Marilyn McCann, explained that this was because of concerns that the increase in begging "must have some effect on business and the tourist industry in downtown Toronto" (*Toronto Star*, 12 January).

Not everyone is complaining about Harris. After eighteen months of the "Common Sense Revolution" and a soaring stock market, finance capital has decided to party. Bob Humphrey, president of the pricey Harry

Rosen menswear chain, speaks for those enjoying some of the "trickle down" from the current speculative bubble: "There's been an uptick downtown and everyone, the lawyers, the bankers and the brokers, are all feeling it. We sure hope our friends in the financial industry continue to do well" (*Toronto Star*, January 11).

Resistance to Harris: A Crisis of Leadership

The demagogic attacks on the poor and upward redistribution of wealth have reached a new intensity under Harris, but on many important questions, the Harris government is just continuing the legacy of its NDP predecessor. Bob Rae's government made austerity its top priority, trampled union contracts in the name of deficit reduction, and initiated attacks on "cheating" by welfare recipients and injured workers. Under the NDP, Ontario cops were permitted to upgrade their firearms from .38 caliber revolvers to high-caliber semi-automatics; Harris has followed through by permitting them to use deadly dum-dum bullets. In January, Dave Cooke, formerly the most senior minister in Rae's cabinet, resigned his seat as an NDP member of the provincial parliament to take a job as co-chair of the Tories' committee in charge of "restructuring" (i.e., gutting) education spending. Dismissing outraged squeals from NDP loyalists, Cooke blithely remarked:

"It's basically an opportunity to implement the restructuring of the system, an agenda which I think people will see is quite consistent with the agenda that I was involved in [as NDP education minister]—the reduction of school boards."

—*Toronto Star*, 24 January

While there is a certain consistency between Harris' policies and Rae's, what *is* new is the level of resistance. Before the Toronto action, four smaller Ontario cities—London, Hamilton, Kitchener and Peterborough—were successfully shut down. When Harris provoked a confrontation with the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union (OPSEU), he was surprised by the sudden militancy displayed by this traditionally conservative union. The combativity of OPSEU's rank and file saved their union from utter annihilation, despite the leadership's cowardly pre-strike concession of thousands of jobs.

The same pattern has characterized the resistance to the Tories so far: rank-and-file unionists have repeatedly demonstrated willingness to fight, but they are hobbled by misleadership. The union leadership recognizes that the Tories mean to do away with the post-war compromise worked out between capital and its labor lieutenants. They would like to stop Harris without permanently rupturing their ties with capital. But Harris' unwillingness to compromise has put them in a bind.

The contradiction between the bureaucracy's desire to protect its own existence and its aversion to a serious confrontation has produced vacillation and a deep split within the ranks of the union brass. On the one side, the NDP-boosters in the private-sector "pink paper" unions, led by the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), are chiefly concerned about keeping the mass movement from getting out of control. On the other side, the public-sector unions and the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), feel their very existence is threatened. The

changing configurations of bureaucratic alliance and intrigue have given the movement a bumpy development.

After more than 100,000 people turned out in the cold to demonstrate in Hamilton (the center of Canada's steel industry) on 23 February 1996, the union leadership decided to put the brakes on. The next two cities, Kitchener and Peterborough, each smaller than the last, were clearly chosen to wind the movement down. However, the union brass wanted something from Harris in return. Instead, in a secret meeting with Gord Wilson, leader of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and Basil "Buzz" Hargrove of the CAW, Harris refused all concessions, and, in a deliberate insult, had his Labour Minister, Elizabeth Witmer, announce that unionized employees would no longer be covered by minimum labor standards. In response, an angry Wilson, normally identified with the more conservative "pink paper" faction, announced the Toronto "Days of Action."

Toronto Shuts Down

The Toronto strike and protest were hugely successful. In September, the business mouthpieces were huffing and puffing about "illegality" and the dire consequences that would befall those who breached their sacred obligations to their bosses. But as the day drew near, momentum was building so rapidly that almost all major employers threw in the towel, and instructed their employees not even to try to report for work. When thousands of "illegal" pickets defied court injunctions, and turned out at transit depots across the city to enforce the shutdown of the subways, buses and streetcars, the civic authorities sputtered, but could do nothing.

The capitalist media were naturally uniformly hostile to the shutdown, but had considerable difficulty getting their "spin" straight. While raging that "union bosses" must be made to pay for holding the city hostage and causing untold economic damage, they simultaneously denied that anything significant had happened at all. Each daily paper did this in characteristic fashion: the rightist *Sun* ran as a headline "Toronto Yawns!"; the liberal *Star* underestimated the size of the crowd by a factor of three, and the haughty *Globe and Mail* relegated the country's largest-ever political demonstration to page ten. But the action was too large, and too popular, to be affected by the lies of the corporate propaganda machine, and the pollsters were soon reporting a sudden drop in Harris' approval ratings.

Yet the very success of the Toronto Days of Action highlighted the dilemma of the union misleaders. After shutting down Ontario's largest city, anything short of a province-wide strike would be anti-climactic. The pink paper unions (who have dragged their feet through all the Days of Action) publicly denounced the Toronto demonstration's organizers for refusing to invite the NDP onto the platform, and for "alienating" the populace through excessive militancy. The CAW and the public-sector unions responded by calling for yet more city-wide shutdowns, specifying that the details should be determined in conjunction with their "social movement partners," i.e., the various community and single-issue groups representing many of the sectors targeted

by the Tories. This move provided the "left" union leaders with a suitably progressive cover, while also permitting them to back away from responsibility for the success or failure of future events.

Failure came sooner than expected. Among the cities proposed was Sudbury, a strong union mining town in Northern Ontario, where the Tories are planning to close two hospitals. The Steel bureaucrats, who had not raised any objections when Sudbury was initially floated, waited until it was publicly announced, and then used their muscle in Sudbury to have the local labor council vote down the planned action. Steel's stab in the back was quickly followed by the surrender of the "progressive" unions.

The capitulation of big capital in the days leading up to the Toronto shutdown signaled that key sectors of the ruling class had begun to wonder if the benefits of Harris' "Revolution" were going to be worth the price. Those fears have been allayed by the display of cowardice, disarray and treachery by the union brass, and the Tories are once more on the offensive.

Leftists & the General Strike Demand

The ostensibly revolutionary left in Canada is small, but the massive mobilization of workers, and the sheer viciousness of the Tories, has presented an unusual opportunity for the "far left" to get a hearing for its ideas. Liberal newspaper columnist David Lewis Stein (a reformist cretin who as a youth reportedly had a brief flirtation with radical politics) is so worried about this prospect that, prior to both the Hamilton and Toronto actions, he was warning that "Trotskyites" turning up as "parasites" at the demonstrations might incite "violence" (*Toronto Star*, 24 February 1996 and 26 October 1996). Watching as hundreds of thousands of protesters marched past the Tory policy convention in Toronto, Harris commented that it was the work of "communists, Iraqis and Iranians"!

There was considerable openness to leftist literature and chants in Toronto. Slogans like "Hey, Mike, Hey Harris--We'll Shut You Down Like Paris!" and "City by City is Way Too Slow—Let's Shut Down Ontario!" originated by various left groups, were enthusiastically taken up by the crowd, and were even reported in the media. However, all attempts to organize effective opposition within the labor movement to the bureaucracy's policy of inactivity have so far proven abortive. In part, this is because the organized left has little presence within the unions. But it also reflects the programmatic weaknesses of the various organizations purporting to offer a revolutionary alternative to the union leaders and the NDP.

For example, while the International Socialists (IS) correctly call for a province-wide general strike to drive Harris out of office, they couple this with a plea to "pressure union leaders to act" on this perspective (*Socialist Worker*, 19 October 1996). Their attitude toward the union brass is doubtless complicated by the delicate relationship between their leading union supporter, Carolyn Egan, and the USWA bureaucracy. In her 30 November 1996 column in *Socialist Worker*, referring to the Sudbury betrayal, Egan had no criticism of Steel's

role, and instead blamed "labor and community organizations" for not first "consulting" the (USWA-dominated) Sudbury labor council!

While the IS intervention provides an example of right opportunism, the response of the Trotskyist League of Canada (TL—local franchise of James Robertson's Spartacist League/U.S.) is a caricature of sectarianism. Denouncing as "charlatans" all leftists who raise the general strike call in Ontario today, they compare the situation to the Italian workers' struggle against the Berlusconi government in 1994:

"In Italy two years ago the union misleaders called a number of 'days of action,' but kept the working class straitjacketed within a parliamentary framework. The Italian capitalists let the right-wing Berlusconi government be swept away. The result? Today Italy has the 'left-wing' Ulivo (Olive Tree) government, which was elected with the union leaders' fulsome support...and which is carrying out the same austerity policies as Berlusconi."

—*Spartacist Canada*, Winter 1996/97

The lesson the TL draws from this is that a general strike is useless unless it leads to a direct struggle for state power. And since a struggle for state power cannot succeed without a mass revolutionary party standing at the head of a section of the working masses, then unionists should stoically endure rightist attacks until the happy day arrives when the genuine communists (i.e., the TL) are finally handed leadership of the movement! Missing from this lifeless schematism is the fact that it is only through their experiences in struggle that the masses of workers will come to reject their existing leaderships and adopt a new, revolutionary alternative.

The *Spartacist Canada* article complains that our leaflet (printed below) nowhere "address[es] the key question: the need to politically defeat and replace the pro-capitalist misleaders in order to achieve a workers' victory." Anyone who can read can see that the concluding paragraph does in fact call for a new workers' leadership with "revolutionary socialist" politics. But regardless of the TL's careless (or deliberately dishonest) characterization of our position, the key issue is their apparent failure to grasp that the *only* way for communists to "politically defeat and replace" the bureaucrats is by intervening in the actual class struggle to broaden and generalize it.

The masses want a general strike. The bureaucrats are afraid to initiate one. In this circumstance, the call for a general strike can both expose the bureaucrats' cowardice and demonstrate to militant workers (who may even be anti-communist) that, at least on this one question, the communists are right against their existing leaders. This is the only way that revolutionaries *can* begin the struggle to "politically defeat and replace" the misleaders. But it seems that *Spartacist Canada* imagines that leadership can be wrested from the reformists through sheer denunciation.

The objection that a victorious general strike against Harris would only lead to another pro-capitalist government is equally bizarre. Outside of the unlikely scenario of the explosive growth of a mass revolutionary party

that was able to take power, it is indeed likely that a general strike that brought down the Harris government would be followed by new elections, and an NDP, Liberal or some sort of coalition government. But winning such a powerful defensive victory through mass action would alter the entire political landscape, shift the axis of labor politics decisively to the left, and make it easier to win future struggles.

Spartacist Canada criticizes our observation that if the Tories were brought down through mass strike action, a subsequent government would be more cautious in attacking the gains of working people. If this were not true, the working class would never have won a single significant reform. Can anyone imagine that a massive explosion of working-class struggle that successfully unhorsed the most vicious government for 50 years, would not profoundly affect the framework of political life? Although *Spartacist Canada* does not make this explicit, perhaps the TL is really worried about the "danger" that winning a limited defensive victory might create reformist illusions. They need have no fear on that score, for the whole history of the socialist movement demonstrates that revolutionary sentiments grow much more quickly during times of mass struggles and partial victories than in periods of demoralization and defeat.

Reprinted below is the complete text of the IBT leaflet "For a 'Common Sense' General Strike!", distributed at the Toronto "Days of Action":

Metro's Days of Action, October 25 and 26, promise to be the biggest political mobilization in Ontario in living memory. Hundreds of thousands of people will be hitting the streets to protest the Tory government's attacks on unions, poor people and social programs.

The Tories' first victims were welfare recipients, whose social assistance payments were cut 22 percent a few months after Mike Harris came to power. Half a million kids in Ontario have less to eat as a result. Daycare workers, who average a paltry \$19,000 a year, are currently threatened with a 25 percent wage cut. Thousands of nurses and other hospital workers have already been laid off, as the government slashed healthcare by \$1.5 billion (despite election promises not to touch it). The Tories have chopped \$800 million from education and are announcing plans to cut another \$1 billion this year. Every social service agency has had its grants cut—including services to the disabled, children's aid, job training and battered women's shelters. Non-profit housing projects have been cancelled and rent controls gutted. Now the Tories are talking about introducing user fees in public schools and libraries, and giving rebates to rich people who send their kids to private schools.

The social service cuts and user fees are being pushed through to fund a tax cut that will disproportionately benefit the rich. (Two-thirds of the savings will go to those whose income is in the top 10 percent). Meanwhile the Harris government is proceeding to "get the government off the back" of the corporate sector by hacking health and safety regulations, lowering employment standards and loosening environmental protection. The projected privatization of Hydro and the LCBO, which

generate substantial operating surpluses every year, are eagerly anticipated by Bay Street speculators, as is a Tory plan to privatize the provision of water to consumers. Like the new Highway 407, this would be a “joint” project: the public will put up the money and assume responsibility for the debt while private investors run the operation and reap the profits.

Harris’ “Common Sense Revolution” is a blueprint for moving toward a rigidly stratified society, with a tiny elite on top; a layer of relatively secure professionals, entrepreneurs, managers and skilled technicians in the middle; and, at the bottom, a huge mass of desperately poor people without access to decent jobs, housing, education, medical care or hope.

Labor Must Defend the Poor: ‘An Injury to One is an Injury to All!’

The near-totalitarian regulation of the lives of Ontario’s welfare recipients under Harris is providing a testing ground for authoritarian measures to use against the broader population in the future. The NDP’s scandalous campaign against “welfare fraud,” and the opening of “snitch lines” for citizens to inform on their neighbors, has paved the way for Harris to introduce a single “universal ID card” and computerized fingerprint records for welfare recipients. In another example of the Harris government’s partnership with big business, the Royal Bank, Canada’s largest gang of financial pirates, is signing on to administer this sinister program.

The other prong in the Tories’ attack on welfare recipients is the introduction of “workfare.” This will cost a lot to administer, but Harris is willing to pay the price because he expects to use this slave labor force to displace unionized public-sector jobs and drive down the price of labor generally.

By attacking on all fronts at once, rather than eroding social gains through attrition like his predecessors, Harris has taken a risk: he knows that labor has the power to stop him, but he hopes that the suddenness and ferocity of these attacks will confuse and demoralize his victims.

The high degree of participation in the previous “days of action” demonstrates that there are a lot of rank-and-file unionists, unemployed workers, students, immigrants and members of oppressed minorities who understand what is at stake and are prepared to struggle. Yet the labor leadership has so far been extremely conservative in its response.

It’s Time to Raise the Stakes

The Metro action promises to be the biggest “Day of Action” so far, but a week ago the *Globe and Mail* (19 October) reported that the Tories were already sneering that, “the government will not be swayed by protests, no matter how large or effective.” That underlines the necessity of raising the level of struggle. Timid legalism and moral witness will not get results. But Harris *can* be beaten.

Last December, as workers in London were carrying out the first “day of action,” French workers were engaged in a powerful mobilization that paralyzed the country



IBT contingent on Toronto ‘Days of Action’ demo

for three weeks. The French government, which had tried to push through its own package of cuts in social programs, was ultimately forced to retreat, at least temporarily. The French union leadership let the government off the hook and permitted them to try again, but the lesson is clear: *mass militant resistance can defeat austerity attacks!*

This is not lost on the big capitalists, some of whom are becoming a bit nervous about the scope of the union mobilizations. Last Saturday’s *Globe and Mail* fretted:

“Trying to close down a city, almost unheard of in English-speaking Canada, is more usual in countries where politically motivated job actions are almost a way of life. “Until now, most Canadians have typically channelled their protests through the ballot box, rather than through extraparliamentary opposition.”

Most of Harris’ victims know that if we wait until the next election, it will be too late. The answer to a generalized capitalist attack is a generalized response: *i.e., a general strike to defend social programs*. The organized working class, particularly those concentrated in transport, mining, manufacturing and other key sectors, has the power to smash the Harris offensive. But we cannot expect the professional “labor statesmen” to run an effective general strike. Instead it should be organized and controlled by democratically elected strike committees in every workplace coordinated through delegated regional and provincial assemblies.

Some self-proclaimed Marxists, like the International Socialists, call for a general strike but treat it as essentially a matter of pressuring the union leadership to lead one. This ignores the fact that the union brass is a privileged layer of careerists whose interests and concerns are far removed from the workers they supposedly represent. Weaned on compromise and concessions, they have no appetite for the kind of fight necessary to defeat the Tory agenda. Another ostensibly Marxist group, the Trotskyist League (TL), makes the opposite error and argues *against* calling for a general strike on the grounds



Ontario Legislature, 26 October 1996: 250,000 protest Tory government attacks

1917 PHOTO

that doing so could promote illusions in the bureaucrats! Instead they modestly counterpose a call to build a "revolutionary workers party," i.e., themselves.

For a 'Common Sense' General Strike!

The union officials have initiated the "days of action" both to pressure the Tories and let their members blow off steam. In general they are a cowardly lot who instruct their base that any and all court injunctions must be obeyed. But in times like this, playing by the bosses' rules is suicidal. No important gain for labor was ever won in parliament or the courts. Every significant legal right, every real social reform has come as the result of *hard class struggle*. The 300 CAW members who got GM's attention last week by seizing their plant in Oshawa provided a graphic example of the kind of tactics we are going to have to use to beat Harris. Because if the Tory juggernaut is allowed to roll on much further we may soon be facing a capitalist assault on the very existence of the unions.

For years the union leadership has counselled participation in the parliamentary shell game. But when the NDP finally took over the government benches at Queen's Park in 1990, Bob Rae spent all his time trying to please Bay Street by attacking welfare recipients, cutting social services and finally imposing the infamous "Social Contract." With this legislation the social democrats ripped open union contracts and imposed wage cuts in an unprecedented attack on collective bargaining. The failure of the public-sector union leaderships to offer serious resistance to this assault demoralized union militants, emboldened labor's enemies and paved the way for Harris.

The union brass hope that if they can just hang on until the next election, they may get a government they can lunch with again. Yet both the Liberals and the NDP accept the "necessity" of rationalizing capitalism through austerity, privatization and deregulation: their differences are not so much over the direction but rather the speed with which Harris is moving, as well as the tactical wisdom of his inflammatory rhetoric. The Tory

"reforms" will form part of the status quo inherited by the next administration. Without significant popular unrest, any new Liberal, NDP or coalition government would probably leave them in place, as Chrétien did with Mulroney's GST. If, on the other hand, Harris is brought down through mass strike action, the government that replaces him will have to be a lot more cautious.

An aggressive campaign by organized labor can mobilize millions in an escalating series of actions, culminating in a general strike to smash the Tory offensive and bring down the Harris government. Such a struggle would reinvigorate the workers' movement across Canada and set a powerful example for our union brothers and sisters south of the border, who face similar attacks by their rulers.

The situation faced by Ontario workers is not unique. It is one front in a global struggle between capital and labor over the shape of the future. Working people will only finally escape the irrationalities of a competitive, market-driven system through creating a social order in which human need, not profit, determines what gets produced. This requires a leadership for the working class that is armed with a different *political* vision than that of the reformist union bureaucracy and its discredited parliamentary allies in the NDP. We in the International Bolshevik Tendency are committed to the long and difficult struggle to forge such a leadership—a revolutionary socialist party capable of leading a successful struggle to uproot the existing social order, expropriate the exploiters and reconstruct society on an egalitarian, socialist basis.

- **For a General Strike to Defeat the Tory Offensive!**
- **Reverse the Cuts—
Defend and Extend Social Programs!**
- **Jobs and Decent Housing for All!**
- **End Unemployment—
30 Hours Work for 40 Hours Pay!**
- **Expropriate the Exploiters—
Forward to a Workers' Government!**

General Strike Slogan—What It Is and How to Use It

Trotskyism & Tactics

Reprinted below are excerpts from an article, entitled "Why We Call for a General Strike in Britain Now," that originally appeared in the 1 March 1974 Workers Vanguard (WV), newspaper of the then-revolutionary Spartacist League/U.S. From Italy and France, to Greece, South Korea and even Canada, the question of how a revolutionary propaganda group should respond when objective circumstances require a generalized proletarian response to a generalized capitalist assault is posed once again. As WV argued, it is quite possible to imagine "partially successful general strikes." It is also possible that a general strike initiated over "limited, defensive aims" could develop in a way that requires revolutionaries to raise demands that will push the struggle onto the offensive. Today, the degenerated SL, in classic sectarian fashion, counterposes the call for construction of the "revolutionary party" to the demand for a general strike. In contrast, we stand by the Trotskyist position advanced in the following article.

A revolutionary policy for the current British crisis faces the following fundamental contradiction: since World War II, the ruling class has systematically pressed down the workers' living standards to the point that they are now the lowest in industrial West Europe. The [Conservative Prime Minister Edward] Heath government has intensified this oppression with a direct attack on the most basic power of the trade unions, the right to bargain for wages, with a hard state wage control policy (Phase Three)....There is an overwhelming objective and felt need to mobilize all the strength of the well organized and combative British labor movement to defend its interests against a brutal, reactionary government. This means a general strike.

However, a general strike poses the question of state power and can easily lead to a revolutionary situation. Marxists do not play at revolution. Today the leadership of the British labor movement is consciously anti-revolutionary and will betray a general strike if it seriously challenges capitalist state power....There is no way an insurrection could be victorious under the leadership of the current British labor tops...

Therefore we have a contradiction: the situation poses the need for a general strike, for mobilizing the entire organized working class to answer Heath's attacks; a general strike poses the question of power and can easily lead to a revolutionary situation; and the present sellout union and Labour Party/Communist Party leaders will betray a general strike if it challenges capitalist state power. What to do?

Taking account of the objective need for a general strike and the treacherous present leadership of the class, we have called for a general strike for *limited, defensive* aims centering on breaking the state wage controls and reversing the measures decreed to enforce them (e.g., the Tory lockout). However, the ruling class

can force the issue of state power by using the armed forces to break a general strike for limited objectives. Therefore, there are no demands, no tactics and no strategy that can *guarantee* the victory of a general strike in Britain today. Its leadership will liquidate it if it attains insurrectionary potential and may well sell out even before that point is reached. However, it would be the worst kind of scholastic passivity to argue that the workers must accept, without struggle, whatever the Tories do to them because their leaders might betray a general strike that could win. And it is the worst kind of social-democratic parliamentary cretinism to channel the workers' struggle against Heath mainly into electoral forms, as Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) is now doing.

A Revolutionary Minority in a General Strike

The task of revolutionaries in Britain today is to maximize the possibility of winning a general strike (and thereby defeating the bosses' attempts to load the costs of massive inflation onto the workers) under conditions where a successful insurrection is impossible given the strength of the reformist leadership of the mass workers organizations. This means trying to prevent the ruling class from uniting against the labor movement, neutralizing the middle classes so they do not act as strikebreakers and, most important, organizing the strike so that the rank and file can check and move to counter the class collaborationism of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and so that revolutionaries, however few in number, can maximize their influence on the course of events.

The British ruling class is by no means solidly supporting Heath's hard line against the miners, which reflects as much (if not more) the immediate needs of his regime as the long-term interests of British capitalism....The Liberal Party is not supporting Heath's actions, and grumbling has been heard among numerous Tory backbenchers as well. Given the divisions within the ruling class, a demonstration of determination and unity by the labor movement might well isolate Heath and force the government to capitulate.

The British middle class does not, in general, support the labor movement. This is indicated by the solid electoral base of the Tories and Liberals. General strike strategy should be geared to neutralize the middle class, preventing it from actively supporting the government. The strike should concentrate on shutting down industrial production and should avoid unnecessarily discomfiting and, therefore, antagonizing the middle classes. This means that essential public services (e.g., urban transport, hospitals) should be maintained, along with the distribution of consumer goods, for essentially political reasons—and a general strike *is* essentially political. (In this respect, somewhat different conditions

apply than to a purely contractual dispute, where the emphasis must be to shut down as much as possible of the revenue-producing units corresponding to the immediate enemy. But at some point even in a limited, defensive general strike it may be necessary to call a total work stoppage, for instance as a show of force against government use of troops.)

A general strike cannot at this point be organized in opposition to or over the heads of the TUC, the established union leadership. On the other hand it would be criminal for a revolutionary organization to accept, unchallenged, the leadership of the TUC—of proven, professional class collaborators—during a general strike. It is necessary to organize directing bodies for the general strike that would allow the masses to check and frustrate the policies of the TUC, that would go toward becoming a kind of dual power within the general strike movement.

A number of British left-wing organizations, notably the International Marxist Group (IMG), are calling for local councils of action that would presumably play that kind of role in a general strike. Unfortunately, councils of action, although they have appeared in past general strikes, at this time have no immediate prior existence, much less authority, in the British workers movement. A general strike cannot be based on organizations newly set up for that purpose by a handful of revolutionaries....

There do exist organizations within the British labor movement which are qualitatively more democratic and militant than the TUC and on which a general strike could be based. These are the shop stewards committees. In addition to demanding that the TUC should call a general strike, revolutionaries should agitate for a national conference of shop stewards committees in order to organize a general strike. Should a general strike occur, revolutionaries should seek to shift its central organizational base from the TUC to a national shop stewards organization, as well as calling for the formation of local shop stewards' committees to integrate the mass of the workers into the struggle. No less important than the fundamentally more democratic character of the shop stewards committees (as against the TUC) is that they are accessible to the cadre of a small revolutionary organization, whereas the TUC leadership is essentially selected from among demonstrated class traitors.

Insurrection and Leadership

In analyzing the British crisis in previous issues of *WV* we noted that the minuscule *Chartist* group is agitating for an insurrectionary general strike under the illusion that the existing leadership of the British labor movement could be pressured into leading it. The February *Chartist* contains a polemic against our article, "For a General Strike Against Tory Lockout!" (*WV* No. 36, 18 January [1974]), in which they assert that a general strike is inherently revolutionary and that our concept of a limited, defensive general strike is simultaneously reformist and adventurist. To prove their case, the *Chartist* quotes Trotsky in an attack on the French CP from *Whither France?* Trotsky writes:

"The entire history of the working class movement proves that every general strike, whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has an internal tendency to transform itself into an open revolutionary class, into a direct struggle for power.... Might not Thorez [head of the CP] perhaps retort that he had in mind not a real general strike, but a little strike, quite peaceful, just exactly suited to the personal requirements of the editors of *l'Humanité*?... The leaders of the proletariat must understand this internal logic of the general strike.... Politically this implies that from now on the leaders will continue to pose before the proletariat the task of the revolutionary conquest of power. If not they must not venture to speak of the general strike."

From this passage *Chartist* concludes that a call for a general strike is tantamount to a call for insurrection.

This passage is a polemic against the ostensibly revolutionary leader of a *mass* workers party. It is indeed criminal for the leadership of a *mass* party to call a general strike while ruling out the possibility of revolution, since the government may force the question of state power on the strikers. It would likewise be criminal for a small revolutionary propaganda group to call for a general strike initiated by the reformist labor bureaucracy if the strike were intended to be insurrectionary, or if no organizational measures were advocated to enable rank-and-file opposition to the TUC to check and move to counter the inevitable attempts to sell out the strike by the reformist misleaders. We call on the TUC to launch the general strike because we do not see this measure as a propaganda demand in the distant future but as the necessary tactic at this moment; today only the TUC could launch a general strike. And we call for a limited, defensive general strike, to be organized through shop stewards committees, in order not to guarantee in advance that the strike will be sold out by the treacherous TUC leaders. We obviously cannot guarantee that such a strike will be successful, only that it has a good chance of success.

Trotsky's most definitive analysis of the general strike is in his 1935 article "The ILP and the Fourth International." Here he deals with the general strike question from the standpoint of a revolutionary propaganda organization when the masses are firmly under reformist leadership, the situation of the French Trotskyists at that time. The views Trotsky presented here are quite different from the ones *Chartist* attributes to him:

"The working class masses want to struggle. But the leadership applies the brakes, hoodwinks and demoralizes the workers. A general strike can flare up just as the movements flared up in Toulon and Brest. Under these conditions, independently of its immediate result, a general strike will not of course be a 'putsch' but a necessary stage in the mass struggle, the necessary means for casting off the treachery of the leadership and for creating within the working class itself the *preliminary* conditions for a victorious uprising. In this sense the policy of the French Bolshevik-Leninists is entirely correct, who have advanced the slogan of general strike, and who explain the conditions for its victory." [our emphasis]

It is evident that Trotsky maintained the possibility of partially successful general strikes and the impossibility of a successful insurrection under reformist leadership. ■

American Labor...

continued from page 2

workers, "workfare" exerts downward pressure on all wages.

Sharp social inequality is, of course, not new in America. The ameliorative mechanisms of the "welfare state" have always been underdeveloped in the U.S. in comparison with its imperialist rivals. What is new is the *absolute* decline in real wages and living standards as a whole in a period of economic growth.

The shrinkage of real wages is largely a consequence of the dramatic decline of organized labor. However reactionary and bureaucratic their leadership, unions are the only instruments that workers possess to advance and defend their collective interests. In 1945, unions represented 35.5 percent of the workforce (*New York Times*, 29 August 1995); today, only 15.5 percent is organized. In the private sector, the percentage has now dropped below ten.

The problems of the American labor movement cannot simply be attributed to the workings of blind market forces. They are the fruit of concessions, retreats, betrayals and capitulations by the union bureaucracy, stretching back more than fifty years. Even as organized labor reached its zenith in the mid-1950s, with tens of thousands of paid functionaries, 650 weekly publications and 17.5 million members, (most of whom had "never had it so good"), the seeds for the current impasse were being sown.

CIO: 'Labor's Giant Step'

The relative lack of class consciousness among American workers is usually attributed to a culture of individualism, as well as to the ethnic diversity of the proletariat. These factors also played a role in retarding the arrival of industrial unionism in America.

From the 1880s onward, repeated attempts to organize the semi- and unskilled on an industrial basis were beaten back by the bosses and their hired guns. While European workers attained an independent political existence well before World War I, their American counterparts did not assert their power until the mid-1930s, when a wave of strikes and factory occupations in the auto, rubber and steel industries created the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

Prior to this, the country's principal labor organizations were conservative craft unions. This narrow form of business unionism—personified by the long-time head of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Samuel Gompers—was limited to skilled workers who banded together for the exclusive purpose of driving up the wages in a particular trade. This craft focus went hand in hand with indifference to the larger interests of the working class. AFL unions routinely engaged in bitter jurisdictional disputes and scabbed on one another's strikes. They were particularly good representatives of what Lenin called the "aristocracy of labor," which identified its interests with those of the ruling class.

The impetus for the CIO came from an intensification of class struggle in 1934. Powerful, city-wide general

strikes erupted in Toledo, Minneapolis and San Francisco, each sparked by the struggles of local AFL unions, and led by "reds" of one description or another. In San Francisco, the Stalinized Communist Party (CP) was in the leadership, while the initiators of the Toledo and Minneapolis strikes later formed the smaller Trotskyist Workers Party.

One radical historian explained the connection between these struggles and the rise of the CIO:

"Communists, Trotskyists, Socialists, and Left-syndicalists organized and created the social movement that came to be identified with the CIO. Traditional unionists either moved left or were by-passed by a historic campaign for social justice and collective industry, a mass movement directed against industrial peonage.

"On Labor Day, 1934, with the shock waves of the labor revolt still reverberating across the nation, [United Mine Workers President] John L. Lewis, former Gompers protégé, declared that the AFL must adopt a policy of industrial unionism in the mass production industries."

—David Milton, *The Politics of U.S. Labor*, 1982

Saul Alinsky, Lewis' biographer and friend, confirmed this:

"Lewis watched the unrest and flareups of violence through the summer of 1934. He saw the [Trotskyist] Dunne Brothers in Minneapolis lead a general strike of truck drivers into a virtual civil war. Blood ran in Minneapolis.

"In San Francisco a general strike spearheaded by [Communist Party supporter] Harry Bridges' Longshoremen's Union paralyzed the great Western city for four days.

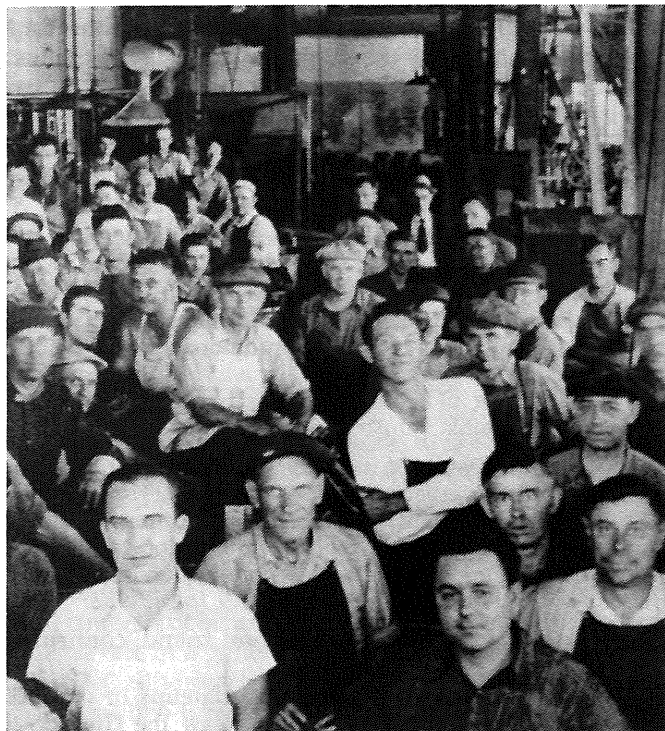
"Before that year was out, seven hundred thousand workers had struck. Lewis could read the revolutionary handwriting on the walls of American industry. He knew that the workers were seething and aching to be organized so they could strike back."

—John L. Lewis, *An Unauthorized Biography*, 1970

The formation of the CIO represented a radical break with craft unionism. For the first time, tens of thousands

Contact the International Bolshevik Tendency

New York	Box 385, Cooper Station New York, NY 10276 USA (212) 533- 9869
Bay Area	Box 31796 Oakland, CA 94604 USA (510) 261-4269
Toronto	Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn. Toronto, Canada M5C 1J0 (416) 461-6864
Auckland	Box 1753 Shortland Street Auckland, New Zealand
Wellington	Box 9671 Wellington, New Zealand (04) 382-8408
Hamburg Berlin	write to Berlin Gruppe Spartakus M. Martin, Postfach 210 254 10502 Berlin, Germany
Internet	ibt@babeuf.actrix.gem.nz



AMERICAN MOTORS CORPORATION

Toledo autoworkers sit in, 1937

of unskilled and semi-skilled workers were organized—not by craft, but by industry. This meant that all workers in the auto industry, for example—be they plumbers, carpenters, or assembly-line workers—belonged to the same union, and were covered by the same contract. Industrial unionism greatly enhanced the capacity for mass action and was hence a giant step forward.

Taming the CIO

The CIO's rise posed the possibility that American workers could act as an independent political force for their own class interests. However, the White House was occupied by Franklin Roosevelt, who deflected growing radical sentiment by posing as a "friend of labor." Crucial to Roosevelt's success was the role of the Communist Party, the hegemonic radical organization within the workers' movement, which was thoroughly committed to the popular-front policies of its master in the Kremlin, Joseph Stalin. In the U.S., this meant allying with traditional union leaders to channel the mass labor revolt that had created the CIO into the "New Deal Coalition" with the Democrats:

"it is highly unlikely that Lewis and Hillman [the central leaders of the CIO drive] could have so easily consolidated their control without aid from a third source, the Communist Party. Almost immediately after the stunning victory at Flint, [the 1937 sit-in spearheaded by CP cadres at General Motors] the CP began to...turn towards a new alliance with Lewis (and later, after Lewis's resignation in 1940 with [Philip] Murray and [Sidney] Hillman). Again it was a cold-blooded marriage of convenience: the bureaucratic integration of the CIO was an incomparably easier matter with Communist complicity, and Lewis also needed the kind of superb organizing talent which they seemed to possess in abundance. On the other side, the CP's turn toward Lewis, under the rising star of Earl

Browder, was a logical part of a broader maneuver to legitimize the Communists as the left-wing of the New Deal coalition. In time they would have to pay a terrible price at the hands of their erstwhile allies for this 'center-left coalition'. Meanwhile, the Party's work in the unions began to take on a totally new character as the exigencies of intra-bureaucratic struggle assumed priority over the defense of rank-and-file democracy or the creation of a mass socialist current in the unions."

—Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*

During the first years of the Second World War, the demand for labor far outstripped the supply, and the unions were in a position of considerable strength. The CIO used this opportunity to broaden its base by organizing key companies that had successfully resisted the earlier upsurge, including Ford, Goodyear and Bethlehem Steel.

The CIO leadership also agreed to suspend strike action in favor of compulsory arbitration by a "tripartite" War Labor Board, comprised of union, business and government representatives. In exchange for surrendering the strike weapon, the unions were given certain legal concessions: a "maintenance of membership" clause which prevented workers from leaving their union during the life of a contract, and a compulsory dues check-off, administered for the union by the employers. These measures were intended to stabilize the union bureaucracy by securing the position of established unions, and loosening the leadership's dependency on the membership.

John L. Lewis was alone among major union leaders in opposing the no-strike pledge. Speaking at a United Mine Workers' (UMW) conference in October 1942, he warned:

"that the labor movement was in danger of being taken over, horse, foot and artillery into 'the bureaucratic camp at Washington.' In their turn, union officials were in danger of becoming unofficial representatives of the Administration, disciplining the rank and file, and shifting from militant independence to pliant dependence upon the good will of the Government administrators. What would happen to the movement when the war was over?...Mr. Lewis thought this compulsory element in all dealings between government and labor would not only continue after the peace, unless it was strenuously opposed during the war, but would grow ominously greater."

—MacAlister Coleman, *Men and Coal*, 1943

Between the Stalin-Hitler pact in August 1939 and the Nazis' June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, the CP reversed its earlier popular-front policies, and denounced American imperialism and Roosevelt's war preparations. CPers actively supported workers who struck in defiance of their leaders. But when the USSR was invaded in June 1941, the CP did an abrupt about-face, and used its considerable influence, won through the heroic role played by its cadres on the front lines of the struggles of the 1930s, to help enforce the no-strike pledge. Acknowledging that the employers were raking in huge profits, CP leader Earl Browder nonetheless held that the working class had to be prepared to make the "main sacrifice" to win the war.

In mid-June 1941, Roosevelt used the U.S. Army to break a militant strike led by CPers at North American

Aviation in Inglewood, California. A week later the CP switched to its new "patriotic" pro-war line and, as a result, the Stalinists did not seriously campaign against the government's strikebreaking. For the remainder of the war, CPers were the most virulent enforcers of "labor peace." Daniel Guérin reports that during this period:

"Many employers did not hide the fact that their preferences went to trade-union leaders of Communist allegiance. A journalist writing for the Chamber of Commerce wrote that some employers directed their workers to unions controlled by the Communists, since they were more reasonable on matters of wages and working conditions and maintained more discipline among their members than 'anti-Communist' unions."

—100 Years of Labor in the USA, 1979

The hegemony of the Communist Party among leftists in the unions was reinforced when, in July 1941, the Roosevelt administration ordered the arrest of 29 leaders of the CP's most credible rival, the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), for violating the anti-communist Smith Act. The CP, which applauded the jailing of the Trotskyists, was itself to be attacked under the same statute a few years later.

The Trotskyists had established themselves as the dominant force in the Minneapolis labor movement, with a strong presence in Teamsters Local 544. From this base, they had taken the lead in organizing more than 200,000 truck drivers in the North Central District Drivers' Council, which stretched from Ohio to Nebraska, and accounted for more than half the entire Teamster membership.

Because of its powerful base in Minneapolis, the SWP, which opposed the no-strike pledge, was a potentially formidable opposition to the Roosevelt administration's war preparations. It was also seen as a threat by Daniel Tobin, national president of the Teamsters (who was Roosevelt's closest ally within the union bureaucracy). The federal indictment of the Trotskyists came in the midst of Tobin's assault on Local 544. Hundreds of union

goons, headed by Jimmy Hoffa, and assisted by both the trucking companies and the local police, attempted to forcibly wrest control of the local from its elected representatives. The leadership of Local 544 responded by jumping to the CIO, where Lewis' wing welcomed them with open arms.

The Trotskyists were convicted, and jailed, and Tobin was able to regain control of the Teamsters in the Midwest. Beginning in 1943, the miners staged repeated strikes, and turned out to be the only unionized workers to win substantial gains during the war. But they were not the only ones who were angry enough to act. In 1943 alone, according to Bert Cochran (*Labor and Communism*, 1977), more than half the members of the UAW participated in unauthorized walk-outs. In this situation, a competent revolutionary oppositional movement, rooted in the unions, could have quickly become a political factor of immense national importance.

The CP's role as the most vociferous opponent of class struggle fatally undermined its support among the most militant workers, and undercut its ability to resist the post-war red purge.

'Lions Led by Asses'

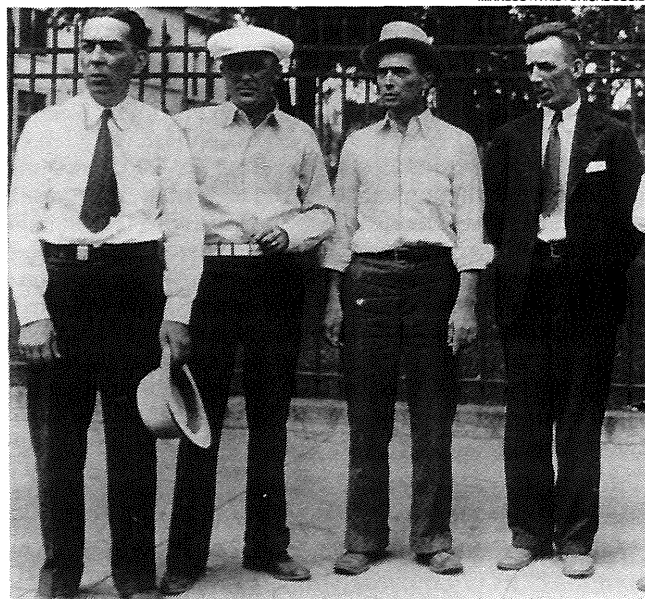
By the war's end, the deferred discontent of the workers burst forth in the biggest strike wave in American history, indeed in the history of the world up to that time. In 1945-46, while both the CIO chiefs and the Stalinists fulsomely declared their intention to maintain "industrial peace" in the post-war period, nearly five million workers were involved in work stoppages. City-wide general strikes took place across the country from Pittsburgh to Oakland.

The ruling class returned fire. President Harry Truman responded with sweeping strike-breaking legislation. In 1947, a newly elected Republican Congress proceeded to pass the most crippling anti-labor bill in U.S. history: the infamous Taft-Hartley Act. It created new and daunting obstacles to union organizing. Taft-Hartley gave the president the power to declare a "national emergency" in the event of major strikes, and to order strikers back to work for an eighty-day "cooling-off" period. In addition, it gave companies the right to sue unions in federal court for breach of contract (for example, for going on strike before a contract expired). It also allowed states to pass "right-to-work" laws outlawing the union shop, which 19 Southern, Western and Southwestern states promptly did. These laws forbade unions from acting as the exclusive bargaining agent for all workers in a given workplace; they could represent only those workers who chose, in the face of heavy employer intimidation, to join the union. Lastly, Taft-Hartley required all union officers to sign an oath swearing that they did not belong to the Communist Party or any other "subversive" organization.

"The Taft-Hartley Act codified the employers' aims of deradicalizing the CIO and of legally suppressing the most effective weapons of labor solidarity. It accomplished the former by imposing the requirement of anti-communist disclaimers for trade union officials, and the latter by outlawing sympathy strikes, supportive boycotts, wildcats and mass picketing....Recognizing the

Grant Dunne, Albert Goldman (SWP lawyer), Miles Dunne, Vincent Dunne: Minneapolis, 2 August 1934

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY





ACME NEWSPICTURES

Philadelphia, 1946: General Electric workers clash with cops trying to enforce injunction prohibiting mass pickets

gravity of the threat posed by the implementation of Taft-Hartley, Lewis's miners and the Communist-led United Electrical Workers immediately proposed a campaign of non-compliance augmented by mass mobilizations and, perhaps, even a general strike. Murray and the other CIO chieftains were thus confronted with [a] dilemma....

"In the event, however, they....chose to reconsolidate their shaken alliance with Truman and the national Democratic Party, allowing the CIO in the process to become an integral component of the administration's escalating anti-communist crusade."

—Davis, *op. cit.*

The abject prostration of the union chiefs prompted John L. Lewis to ask the 1947 AFL convention in San Francisco:

"is it true that the leaders of our movement are to be the first of our mighty hosts of eight million members to put their tails between their legs and run like cravens before the threat of the Taft-Hartley bill? I am reminded of the Biblical parable, 'Lions led by asses.'"

—quoted in "The Taft-Hartley Decade," Bert Cochran

Labor's Red Purge

Taft-Hartley set the stage for the purge of the union left, as the pro-capitalist "labor statesmen" who controlled the unions played a key role in the greatest reactionary offensive of the post-war era: the anti-communist

witchhunt. These purges were initiated by Harry Truman, in order, as he said, to "scare the hell out of the American people"—and win popular support for the newly unleashed Cold War crusade against the Soviet Union:

"The reluctance of the CIO mainstream to accept John L. Lewis's proposal for mass action against Taft-Hartley is more understandable when it is recognized that many of the same unions were actually exploiting the anti-communist provisions of the act to raid other left-led CIO unions. In 1948, the UAW launched major piratical forays against both the Farm Equipment Union and the United Electrical Workers (UE). After the 1949 expulsion of eleven allegedly Communist-controlled unions from the CIO, these raids turned into a cannibal feast. The most tragic case was the forced dismemberment of the UE, the third largest union in the CIO and traditionally one of the most militant. In 1948, the UE had been able to negotiate from a position of strength, representing all the workers in the electrical manufacturing industry; by 1953, after five years of raids...some *eighty* different unions had parcellized the UE's jurisdiction and were bargaining for a membership only half the size of the 1948 UE rank-and-file."

—Davis *op. cit.*

It was not mainly over trade-union issues that the red purge was conducted; by this time, the CP had become virtually indistinguishable from its anti-communist opponents in its organizational methods and in its policies

with respect to employers. Many CPers, it is true, had been militant and idealistic union organizers in the 1930s; they had played an important role in leading strikes, organizing the unemployed, and building the CIO. By the onset of the war, however, this had all changed. Like ordinary union bureaucrats, the CP attempted to exercise control over the unions it dominated by top-down organizational methods.

But unlike the other labor leaders, whose conservatism stemmed from pursuit of material advantage, the CP's first loyalty was to the Stalinist regime in the USSR. The CP initially attempted to ride out the witchhunt, voting in favor of a motion at the 1946 CIO convention declaring that the delegates:

"resent and reject efforts of the Communist Party or other political parties and their adherents to interfere in the affairs of the CIO. This convention serves notice that we will not tolerate such interference."

—cited in Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, 1977

In the end, it proved impossible to square support for the Cold War with fealty to Moscow. The CIO bigwigs, Philip Murray (who had replaced Lewis as CIO President in 1940) and Walter Reuther (the social-democratic head of the UAW) used support for the Marshall Plan, an American imperialist scheme for post-war European reconstruction, as a wedge with which to drive the CP out. They also made electoral support for Truman in the 1948 elections a loyalty test for all member unions. The CP backed Henry Wallace, Roosevelt's former vice president, who, for pragmatic reasons, opposed the Cold War drive.

To justify the purge, the CIO heads frequently pointed demagogically to the Stalinists' record of class collaboration:

"Having accepted the state-mediated collective bargaining principle, radical industrial unionists had few weapons with which to fight their more conservative trade union colleagues. When Matles, Emspak [leaders of the leftist United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE)] and Bridges [leader of the International Longshornmen's and Warehousemen's Union] attempted to fight back against the charge of being agents of Moscow with a counterattack based on the principle of rank-and-file class-conscious unionism, Reuther countered them on purely trade union grounds, arguing that the UE leaders had settled with General Motors in the great 1946 strike before the UAW was ready to settle."

—David Milton, *The Politics of U.S. Labor*, 1982

For all the crimes of the Stalinists, their Cold-War union persecutors were worse. The purge of the CP had profoundly reactionary consequences for the union movement. It destroyed the remaining elements of rank-and-file democracy that had survived from the stormy class struggles of the 1930s. The very presence of two major factions made the CIO the venue of political discussion and argument, despite the intentions of both the anti-communist bureaucrats and the Stalinists, thus creating a margin of maneuver for smaller leftist groups, including the Trotskyists.

The purges stifled internal political debate; from that point on, the rank-and-file was depoliticized, and the only politics permitted were those of the bureaucracy. It became illegal for individuals belonging to "Communist



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

April 1948: John L. Lewis fined \$20,000 for breaking Federal anti-strike injunction, UMW fined \$1.5 million

organizations" to hold union office. Anyone who questioned the bureaucracy's support for the Cold War or the Democrats, criticized its refusal to fight racial segregation, or even proposed trade-union tactics slightly more militant than the leadership's, was red-baited and silenced. The capitalists understood, even if the small-minded labor bureaucrats did not, that the campaign to rid the unions of leftists would benefit only the employers. At the time of the AFL-CIO merger in the mid-1950s, when some bureaucrats began to talk about launching a massive new recruitment drive, *Fortune* magazine predicted that any such attempt would fail because there were not enough militant leftist cadres to carry it out!

On the international front, the bureaucracy not only offered slavish support for the Cold War, but actively collaborated with the State Department and the CIA in subverting leftist unions in Europe and the Third World. Labor officialdom had signed on as U.S. imperialism's junior partner.

Unions in U.S. Imperialism's 'Golden Age'

The 1950s and 60s are commonly viewed as a "golden age" for unionized workers in America. The major corporations had resigned themselves to the existence of the politically housebroken, legally hobbled unions that emerged from the post-war purges. They did not, as a rule, engage in union-busting, nor did they bring scabs in on a mass scale to break strikes. As a result, wages and benefits rose steadily. Between 1950 and 1965, average hourly earnings of production workers in manufacturing increased by 80 percent. The value of fringe benefits—pensions, health care, etc.—increased even more.

The steady rise in living standards exerted a conservatizing effect on American workers, many of whom imagined themselves to be joining the all-encompassing middle class. While there were almost as many days lost to strikes in the 1950s as in the 1930s, many improve-



PHOTOFEST

Los Angeles Chrysler plant, 1950: right-wing thugs attack leftist autoworker

ments were achieved without striking, and, with a few notable exceptions, the strikes that did occur were tightly controlled, top-down affairs—conducted at the bureaucrats' behest, only upon the expiration of contracts, and with scrupulous regard for capitalist legality.

The "golden age," however, was built on a foundation of sand. As long as U.S. imperialist hegemony was uncontested and profits were steadily increasing, the bourgeoisie could well afford to exchange higher wages and benefits for relative class peace. But, as this hegemony waned and economic prosperity began to erode, American workers would find that the celebrated post-war *quid pro quo* between labor and capital had all the while been sapping their capacity to fight back.

Democrats, Dixiecrats and Open Shops

One consequence of the union bureaucrats' alliance with the Democratic Party was the maintenance of the South as a bastion of the open shop. By the end of World War II, the South was the only region of the country largely untouched by industrial unionism. Organizing it was clearly the next logical step in consolidating labor's position on a national scale. In 1946, the CIO unveiled "Operation Dixie," billed as its most ambitious organizing campaign since 1936-37. The goal was to recruit a million Southern workers within a year. Four hundred organizers were sent south, backed by a million-dollar fund. Yet "Operation Dixie" fizzled, and by 1948 was, for all practical purposes, dead.

In part, the failure of the Southern organizing drive can be attributed to the deep divisions that the red purge opened in the CIO. By driving out those suspected of disloyalty to U.S. imperialism, the bureaucrats deprived the union movement of many of its most talented and motivated organizers. Even more important, the effort failed because the South could not be organized without

directly confronting the system of "separate but equal" racial segregation, which would have meant a direct confrontation with the Dixiecrats, an essential component of the Democratic Party.

In 1955, 40,000 blacks in Montgomery, Alabama launched a courageous bus boycott to protest racial discrimination. The boycott was maintained for over a year, but the AFL-CIO chiefs did nothing. While many dedicated union officials, as well as important national unions, were tossed out of the AFL and CIO for resisting the red purge, no action was ever taken, or even contemplated, against any of the numerous union affiliates that banned blacks from membership or otherwise discriminated against them.

The failure to organize the South meant that throughout the 1950s and 60s, employers who did not wish to take on the unions directly could quietly transfer their operations to one of the low-wage "open-shop" states south of the Mason-Dixon line. By the 1970s, the bureaucrats were finally forced to take notice, as more and more companies deserted the "rust belt" for the "sun belt," and union membership plummeted. But even then, few connected this development with the earlier betrayals.

The unionism that emerged during the 1950s and 60s operated entirely within the framework of capitalist ideology and institutions. This "business unionism" was encapsulated by George Meany (head of the newly fused AFL-CIO) in a December 1956 speech delivered to a convention of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM):

"I never went on strike in my life, never ran a strike in my life, never ordered anyone else to run a strike in my life, never had anything to do with a picket line...."

"In the final analysis, there is not a great difference between the things I stand for and the things that NAM leaders stand for. I stand for the profit system; I believe in the profit system. I believe it's a wonderful incentive. I believe in the free enterprise system completely."

—quoted in "No More Class War?" Harry Braverman

Under Meany's leadership, collective bargaining was limited to questions of pay and benefits, conceding to management the unchallenged right to run production as it saw fit. In many cases, unions accepted deals that tied wage gains to productivity. Bargaining was narrowly concerned with the sectional interests of the workers of a particular industry, without regard to the effects on other workers. As the duration of contracts lengthened, the bureaucrats became more numerous, more firmly entrenched and more generously compensated.

Under the principle of "Work Now—Grieve Later," contractual violations, which in the CIO's heyday had been countered with work stoppages, now became subject to a tortuous, multi-leveled bureaucratic grievance and arbitration procedure. Shop stewards and committeemen, who stood on the lowest rungs of union officialdom, began to see themselves as, in part, enforcers of the contract for the boss. The higher echelons of the bureaucratic apparatus increasingly came to view their main role as guardians of labor peace. Under these conditions, the ranks naturally began to perceive their unions not as organizations run by and accountable to them, but rather as well-oiled machines, pursuing aims removed from

their lives and struggles.

In the 1970s, the ruling class decided to rewrite the terms of the deal it had struck with the powerful unions a quarter of a century earlier. They had little to fear from a bureaucracy that did not want to fight. In 1975, when New York City teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, the banks demanded major concessions from municipal unions in return for a bailout. Sixty thousand city workers lost their jobs, and a wage freeze was imposed on the rest. This set the scene for concessionary bargaining by the UAW four years later, supposedly to save Chrysler from bankruptcy. Once concessions were given to Chrysler, GM and Ford followed suit. Demands for "give-backs" were soon heard everywhere. During the 1970s, consulting firms specializing in union busting reappeared on a large scale after an absence of four decades.

Attacks on the shop floor were matched by increasingly class-conscious capitalist activity in the political sphere:

"During the 1970s, business refined its ability to act as a class, submerging competitive instincts in favor of joint, cooperative action in the legislative arena. Rather than individual companies seeking only special favor in the award of a contract, in the dropping of an antitrust case, or in State Department assistance in gaining exclusive franchising rights in a foreign country, the dominant theme in the political strategy of business became a shared interest in the defeat of such bills as consumer protection and labor law reform, and in the enactment of favorable tax, regulatory, and anti-trust legislation. Competitive lobbying, particularly among defense contractors...remains a major factor in very specific decisions in Congress and within the executive branch....But the willingness of a host of business interests, many of them competing for the same markets in the private sector, to join together on larger issues before Congress and before the regulatory agencies has significantly altered the balance of power in Washington, providing, when such unity emerges, a single, immensely powerful voice for the business community."

—Thomas Byrne Edsall, *New Politics of Inequality*

Spearheading this development was the Business Roundtable, a "united front" of top corporate executives with deep pockets and an army of lawyers, economists and lobbyists. Formed in 1973, the Business Roundtable sought to further the common political purposes of its more than 1,000 major industrial, financial and commercial corporate members. It promoted political candidates with an agenda that has become all too familiar: weakening legal protection of labor and the environment; business tax "relief;" a tight monetary regime; deregulation of industry, transport and commerce; and massive reduction in social spending.

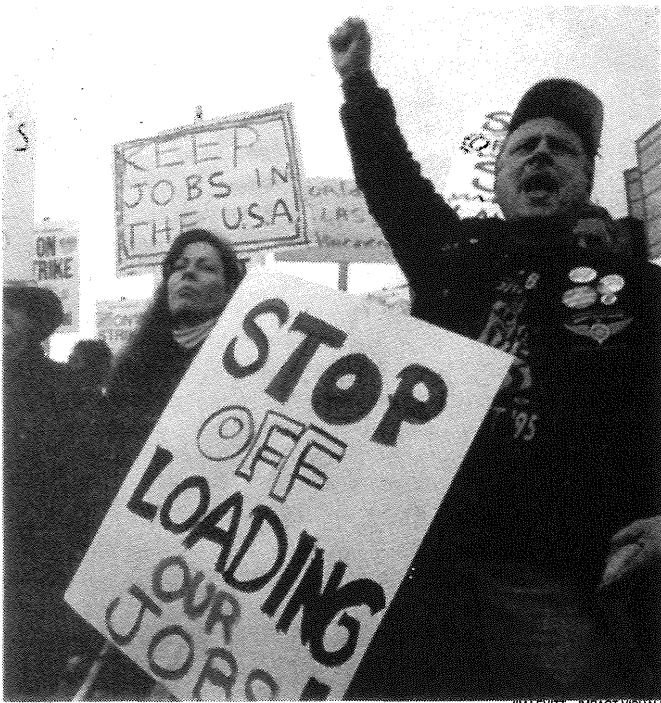
This capitalist offensive was a response to the end of the "American Century," which had begun with the victory of the Allies in World War II. The overhead expenses incurred by U.S. imperialism's long, losing war in Vietnam helped America's capitalist rivals to improve their competitive position. While in 1965, net after tax returns on corporate investment in the U.S. averaged nearly ten percent, by 1974 they had fallen to a little over four percent (cited in *The Great U-Turn*, by B. Harrison and B. Bluestone, 1988). During the 1970s, it became



Los Angeles, 1948 anti-draft demonstration: CP supports Henry Wallace's presidential campaign

increasingly difficult for U.S. capitalists to compete internationally. Their response was to cut wages and reconfigure economic policy to channel more wealth toward the top.

By the time Jimmy Carter was elected president in 1976, increased capitalist pressure and bribery were producing dividends. In an era when electoral success depends not on the urban political machines of yesteryear, but on spin doctors and sound bites, campaign costs have skyrocketed, and corporate money is more than ever the lifeblood of bourgeois politics. As senators and congressmen of both parties stood with their left hands outstretched for corporate contributions during the Carter years, they raised their right hands to defeat an increase in the minimum wage (1977), to defeat a labor law reform bill backed heavily by the AFL-CIO (1978), and to pass a tax bill that increased investment credits and lowered the capital gains tax (1978). Not only was a Democrat in the White House at this time, but both houses of Congress were also firmly under Democratic control. In *An Injury to All*, a 1987 study of the decline of U.S. unions, Kim Moody (a long-time left reformist who remains active in the labor movement), notes that Carter's Council of Economic Advisers advocated "devoting a larger share of our national output to business investment than has been characteristic of recent years." Moody concludes:



JIM LEVITT—IMPACT VISUALS

Boeing workers swallow poisonous protectionism

"The Carter years can be seen as the period of transition from the old postwar bipolar politics of Democrats (liberal) and Republicans (moderate to conservative) to a new right-of-center discourse largely shared by both parties. Not only had Democratic politicians in Congress and at the state level made a well-financed transition to the right, but the administration had provided a measure of political leadership in that direction. Carter, as a New South moderate, was a perfect candidate for the job since Sunbelt dominance played a role in this change. The business agenda was well on its way to completion before Ronald Reagan took office. Nowhere was the change more consistent than in government policy toward labor. As if to symbolize the transition, Carter's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) began a program of harassment of air traffic controllers on the job, and in 1980 formed the Management Strike Contingency Force twelve months before the expiration of the government's contract with the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO). It was this Strike Force that prepared the plan that Reagan put into effect in order to break PATCO in 1981."

Business Unionism's 'New' Face

The situation of American unions has become so dire that it has produced a little commotion in the normally serene precincts at the top of the labor bureaucracy. In October 1995, John Sweeney beat Tom Donahue in the first contested presidential election in the federation's history. Donahue was the loyal lieutenant of the AFL's former chief, 73-year-old Lane Kirkland, who had been forced by the executive into retirement. Sweeney, a fellow septuagenarian, was national head of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Now he poses as a more militant, activist alternative to the old regime. Upon assuming office, he hired 1,000 college students as organizers to go around the country during a much

publicized "Union Summer," and has lately been running a publicity campaign under the slogan "America Needs a Raise!"

Sweeney's win was greeted with cautious enthusiasm in the demoralized radical-liberal milieu. But it is not hard to see through the pretensions of this career bureaucrat, who waited until the eighth decade of his life to declare himself an instant "militant." Sweeney served for years under Kirkland on the AFL-CIO's executive board, and he watched, without a murmur of protest, as three of the most significant strikes of this decade—Bridgestone-Firestone, Staley and Caterpillar, all in the "war zone" of Decatur, Illinois—were betrayed by the bureaucracy.

As head of the SEIU, Sweeney was one of the most highly paid union officials in the country; yet, in addition to his regular salary, he collected a total of \$400,000 as an "executive adviser" to the New York SEIU local he had headed before winning the national presidency (*The Nation*, 25 November 1996). Gus Bevona, son of a Mafia "soldier," is Sweeney's handpicked successor in New York who "earns" an astronomical \$400,000 a year from the SEIU. When a rank-and-file New York SEIU member objected to a \$7 increase in union dues, Sweeney, in his capacity as "executive adviser," voted with Bevona and the rest of the board to hire a private detective to tail the dissident and his wife (*Village Voice*, 30 January 1996).

Last summer, when the Detroit Labor Council proposed a national march in solidarity with the workers of the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press*, who had been on strike for over a year, Sweeney did not respond. It was, after all, an election year, and the AFL-CIO's new top man was pulling out all the stops to keep a Democrat in the White House. The last thing he wanted was to embarrass Clinton with noisy street protests. In short, John Sweeney is a "militant" like Ross Perot is a "populist."

The succession fight among top AFL-CIO bureaucrats is not, however, entirely without significance. For years, the labor potentates sat with folded arms while unions were busted, because the fines incurred for the use of militant tactics were a bigger threat to their dues base than a lost shop here or there; for years, they refused to undertake new organizing efforts because the cost was greater than the added dues they could expect to collect from low-paid, service-industry workers. Now the chickens are coming home to roost.

The refusal of Clinton and the Democrats to make any serious effort on behalf of the "anti-scab" bill—the bureaucrats' pathetic, legalistic answer to union busting—was bad enough. But the crowning insult came in November 1993 when Clinton pulled out all the stops to push NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) through Congress. Once a key component of the Democratic Party coalition, "labor" has shrunk to an embarrassing "special interest" the Democrats are anxious to keep at a distance. How long could rank-and-file workers be counted on to take seriously a leadership that had lost the ability to broker even the flimsiest deals with the bosses and the government? Even the dullest bureaucrat realized that something had to be done.

Sweeney is that "something."

Sweeney's efforts on behalf of the Democrats in the 1996 elections, during which he squandered \$35 million and many thousands of hours of donated labor, demonstrate once again that the AFL-CIO's new regime has no intention of biting the hand that slaps it. The dynamic new perspectives that were alluded to during the contest with Donahue boil down to pressuring the Democrats a little harder. Commenting on the massive French public workers' strike in December 1995, Sweeney said that he hoped it wouldn't come to that in the U.S. But it *has* come to that—and worse; the difference is that the American working class has yet to get off its knees. To do so, it must break the grip of Sweeney and the rest of the corrupt labor parasites whose first and last loyalty is to the capitalist order.

Today, despite four years of economic "recovery," the unions remain on the defensive, and fear of unemployment pervades the workplace. The few strikes that do occur are usually defensive, and frequently broken by companies who hire scabs. Lump-sum payments instead of increases in base wage rates; temporary and part-time as opposed to permanent full-time jobs; outsourcing of union work to non-union companies; two-tier wage scales; concession bargaining; downsizing—these are the norm in the 1990s, as corporate profits and stock market values hit record highs.

Because the ruling class has conquered so many positions without a fight, the spirits of working people and the poor are at their lowest ebb since the onset of the Great Depression. Many have concluded that attempts to resist are futile.

French Workers Show the Way!

Yet, as the French bourgeoisie has been reminded, mass despair does not last forever. The French railway and underground workers who paralyzed the country for three weeks in November-December 1995, faced many of the same obstacles—a declining proportion of industrial workers, shrinking union membership, increased mobility of capital—usually cited to "prove"

that the situation of the U.S. working class is hopeless. Nevertheless, the French working class forced the government to scrap several key provisions of its austerity plan (see 1917 No. 18). Building upon this victory, French truckers went on strike in December 1996, blockading highways throughout the country, until employers finally gave in to their demand to lower their retirement age from 60 to 55—a concession already won by the railway workers.

In January, France's provincial bus and streetcar workers struck for one day to demand retirement at 55 as well. The idea is catching on. In fact, some unions are now pushing this demand as a way of alleviating high unemployment among the country's youth. This proposal horrifies the French bourgeoisie, because while it would create more jobs, it would create less profit. Retirement at 55 is not a defensive demand. It would mean an *improvement* in the quality of life for workers, both young and middle-aged—at the expense of capital. The fact that it has already been won by a section of the French working class, holds an important lesson for American workers: despite adverse conditions, the ongoing capitalist offensive *can* be resisted and, if successful, such resistance can in turn create the possibility of a counteroffensive.

During America's imperial heyday in the 1950s, the country's rulers could afford to keep workers in check with raises and benefits dispensed through the intermediary of a servile bureaucracy. The result was a working class that grew increasingly distant from its own traditions of struggle, and a union leadership which forgot how even to pretend to fight. Today, as a consequence, the ruling class, its empire much depleted, no longer feels it has to make any concessions at all and is determined to reverse labors' remaining gains. The fight to defend those gains must therefore increasingly call into question the legitimacy of the capitalist system itself. Victory depends on forging a working-class leadership, armed with a program of consistent class struggle, which connects the immediate defensive struggles of today with the historic necessity of socialist revolution. ■

Defend Chicago Anti-Klan Three!

On 29 June 1996 a militant, integrated demonstration aborted a Ku Klux Klan "white power" provocation in Chicago. The anti-fascist protest was initiated by the Spartacist League and supported by members of the League for the Revolutionary Party, News and Letters, Refuse and Resist and other anti-fascists. The KKK thugs were intercepted on their way to Daley Plaza and, when they threatened the demonstrators, they were dealt with firmly. At that point the Chicago cops appeared on the scene and proceeded to attack the anti-fascists. Eight demonstrators were arrested on a variety of bogus charges, including assaulting police. Charges have been dropped against five of the anti-fascists, but the remaining three are scheduled to go to trial on 5 May. They are Douglas Glass, a black worker; Gene Herson, labor coordinator of the Spartacist League's

Partisan Defense Committee; and Jeff Lyons of Refuse and Resist.

A wide variety of organizations and individuals, including Chicago-area locals of the United Steelworkers, United Auto Workers and Amalgamated Transit Union have endorsed the campaign to drop the charges against the Anti-Klan Three. The International Bolshevik Tendency has sent a letter protesting the arrests, as well as a contribution to the defense fund. We urge our readers to do likewise.

Send statements demanding that charges be dropped to Richard Devine, State's Attorney of Cook County, Richard J. Daley Center, 55 W. Randolph Street, Chicago, IL 60602. Donations (earmarked for defense of the Anti-Klan Three) can be sent to Partisan Defense Committee, PO Box 802867, Chicago, IL 60680-2867.

'Labor Party' Auxiliary for the Democrats Stillborn in the USA

One of the axioms of Marxism is that the working class needs its own political party, independent from those of the capitalists, in order to pursue its own historic interests. The American working class, despite episodes of sharp class struggle, has never managed to separate itself from the parties of the bosses. In the 1996 elections, the AFL-CIO squandered \$35 million on the anti-labor Democrats.

In recent years, a layer of trade-union bureaucrats has come to question the utility of the AFL-CIO's political loyalty to the Democrats, and has begun talking about organizing a labor party. In 1991 Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW) founded the Labor Party Advocates (LPA) to promote this idea. On 6 June 1996, some fourteen hundred delegates assembled in Cleveland, Ohio to launch the U.S. Labor Party (LP), promising to show American workers a "new organizing approach to politics."

But, as its founding conference revealed, there is nothing new about this "Labor Party" except the label. It is a party which discourages political discussion, which raises no criticisms of the corrupt, anti-communist labor bureaucrats who have driven the unions into the ground, and which signals its intent to continue to support the "lesser evil" Democrats.

The LP conference was tightly controlled by a handful of top union officials. The OCAW and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union (UE) predominated, but other unions were also represented, including the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE), the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), the California Nurses Association (CNA), the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), and the United Mine Workers (UMW).

The conference was run in the heavy-handed manner of a typical union convention. Its organizers were intent on limiting substantive political discussion. Voting was heavily weighted to favour the union leaderships, with each casting 100 votes. In order to ensure their control, both OCAW and UE had scheduled conferences in Cleveland to overlap with the "Labor Party" launch.

During the proceedings, attempts from the floor to introduce ideas different from those of the top table were routinely snuffed. Even the ILWU leadership was initially rebuffed when, in an attempt to give the LP (and itself) a little left cover, it put forward a motion proposing that this "Labor Party" might consider contesting some state and local elections. The chair simply refused to permit consideration of the motion. When the ILWU delegation threatened to walk out, OCAW President Bob Wages stepped in and proposed a "Democracy Hour" to let the ILWU present its proposal. After some discussion, the motion was soundly defeated, and the convention



STEVE CAGAN—IMPACT VISUALS

Bob Wages addresses Cleveland conference

agreed to postpone consideration of running candidates until 1998.

Democratic Party Advocates

The issue of running candidates is so sensitive because to do so would imply running *against* the Democrats, something that the union brass is strictly opposed to. James Weinstein's report on the conference in the social-democratic journal, *In These Times*, approvingly reported remarks from a delegate in defense of the leadership's policy:

"The non-electoral policy proposed by the leadership, he added, was designed to 'avoid a head-on clash with the main body of the labor movement.' And that is a necessity, if the Labor Party is to grow...."

—quoted by *In Defense of Marxism*, July 1996

Marilyn Vogt-Downey reported the informed speculation of some ostensible Marxists at the conference who: "feared that the ban on electoral politics was no more than the product of a deal worked out between Tony Mazzocchi and John Sweeney (president of the AFL-CIO) along the following lines: Sweeney would agree not to attack the Labor Party if the Labor Party would agree not to run candidates or attack Sweeney for squandering AFL-CIO money and resources by backing Clinton and other Democrats."

The delicate balancing act involved in calling for an "independent" workers' party while not repudiating the Democrats, has produced all kinds of contortions. At the AFL-CIO's 1996 annual meeting a few months prior to the official Labor Party launch, Bob Wages ducked out when the vote to endorse Bill Clinton came up.

The conference call explicitly assured the union tops that signing on with the LPA would *not* mean a break with the Democrats:

"Finally, Labor Party Advocates is strictly non-electoral for another very practical reason. Many of us have worked

long and hard to establish good relationships with existing parties. We need these connections if we are going to represent the interests of working people in the present political system."

—LPA Conference Call

The LPA organizers invited Jerry Brown, former Democratic governor of California (and advocate of a reactionary flat tax scheme), as a keynote speaker. John Sturdivant, president of the AFGE, who sits on *both* the National Democratic Committee and the LP's Interim National Council, was reported by *Workers' World* (20 June 1996) as saying, "his union's endorsement does not mean it is splitting from the Democrats or from the AFL-CIO's commitment to Clinton." Finally, as if to underline the point, the Cleveland conference soundly *defeated* a motion repudiating support to either Democrats or Republicans.

Star-Spangled 'Socialists'

Only those who are wilfully blind can miss the political significance of all this. Yet, while the Labor Party is invisible to most American workers, it is enthusiastically embraced by many leftists, including the remnants of the Communist Party, as well as by an assortment of Trotskyoid reformists associated with journals such as *Labor Notes*, *Labor Militant*, *Solidarity* and *In Defense of Marxism*. Despite nuancial differences, they all agree that the Labor Party constitutes a bold step forward by a section of the labor establishment. This demonstrates once again that opportunists can find a "progressive" dynamic in almost anything.

The LP's overtly pro-Democratic Party stance is paralleled by the timidity of its paper program. The conference *defeated* a motion by the California Nurses Association that, "[t]he Labor Party supports safe, legal abortion and believes it is a woman's private decision." At a time when even the Democrats explicitly endorse a woman's right to abortion, the Labor Party voted it down, on the grounds that it would be "divisive," and instead hid behind an ambiguous statement in favor of full access to "reproductive services."

As might be expected from a would-be labor auxiliary of the Democrats, the conference reeked of American imperial patriotism. It opened with the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner," and went on to approve a call for "adequate national defense"! A reformist proposal to trim military spending by 50 percent was defeated, while the conference endorsed a chauvinist call for economic sanctions against countries guilty of "unfair" la-

bor practices. This thinly-disguised protectionism rests on a presumption that the State Department, which has spent decades combating militant unions throughout the Third World, can somehow be transformed into the champion of the workers in the sweatshops of its neocolonies.

Neither does the LP program make any pretence of opposition to capitalist rule domestically. While expressing a mild preference for "protecting the public sector from corporate attack," it doesn't even hint at nationalizations, or any other infringement of capitalist property rights. In short, this is a "labor" program based on the proposition that, given proper regulatory oversight, corporate America can be transformed into the servant of working people at home and abroad.

The LP program does allude to the fact that immigrants, blacks and other minorities face daily violence from police, *La Migra*, as well as freelance racists. But it offers no proposals for how to meet such attacks. There is no mention of the need to uphold the fundamental right of self-defence for the oppressed, nor does it advocate labor-minority defense guards to combat racist terrorism. Instead, the LP program merely affirms "support [for] affirmative action and anti-discrimination programs to take away the bosses' power to divide and conquer." Thus, once again, the LP preaches reliance on the capitalist state, whose armed thugs are the main agents of racist terror in the U.S.

'Outlawing' Unemployment: A Legalistic Hoax

The Labor Party program includes a bevy of standard social-democratic calls for higher taxes on the rich, increased funding for social programs, free medicare and post-secondary education, and other supportable reforms. The most "radical" plank in the platform, and the one which its leftist apologists are most enthusiastic about, is the call for a constitutional amendment to "guarantee everyone a job at a living wage." Like many reformists before them, the Labor Party bureaucrats imagine, or pretend to imagine, that with enough pressure, prayer and popular support, they will somehow be able to wrest the state machine away from the capitalists, and turn it into a tool for advancing the interests of the oppressed and exploited.

Capitalism requires a "reserve army of the unemployed," as Marx referred to it, to keep wages down and to discipline the working class. In the past, the U.S. Congress has occasionally passed toothless "full employment" bills, but none of them had any effect. A "constitutional amendment" would be no different. The LP leaders are a bit vague about how they plan to gain the votes of two-thirds of the corporate hirelings in Congress, as well as majorities in three-quarters of the state legislatures, required to pass a constitutional amendment. The only hint we have seen so far is contained in the second issue of *Labor Party Press*, which talks about promoting the idea with a wave of "press conferences" and "workshops."

The emergence of a genuine independent labor-party movement among U.S. unionists would be an enormously important political development. But it will only

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Vol. 6, No. 2/3

Essays on Revolutionary Marxism in Britain and Ireland from the 1930s to the 1960s

Send order to: Socialist Platform Ltd., BCM 7646,
London WC1N 3XX, England
(£3.95 per issue, £1.50 for postage)



Eugene Debs campaigning for the Socialist Party during the 1904 presidential elections. In 1900 Debs wrote:
***'The differences between the Republican and Democratic parties involve no issue, no principle in which the working class have any interest...
 '...every workingman who has intelligence enough to understand the interest of his class... will once and for all time sever his relations with them both'***

occur in the context of a rising curve of class struggle resulting in a political revolt against the bosses, and a break with the labor aristocracy's tradition of electoral support to the Democratic Party. This "Labor Party" is not a response to the demands of an insurgent rank and file, but rather the top-down creation of a section of the existing labor establishment, who want to increase their political leverage and raise the price of their support to the Democrats.

Various leftist apologists for the LP have compared it to the early Socialist Party under Eugene Debs. But the comparison is false. Debs began his political career as an advocate of industrial unionism, and a leader of the American Railway Union, and was sent to jail in 1894 for defying the first anti-union injunction ever handed down in the U.S. While in jail, Debs came to the realization that it was not possible to achieve social justice for working people within the framework of capitalism. So he became a socialist.

Despite his political shortcomings (particularly a failure to understand the importance of championing the special demands of the oppressed, and an inability to assimilate the lessons of the Bolshevik experience), Eugene Debs was always very clear that the bosses, their political parties and their cops were on the *other* side of the class line. He was not afraid to take on unpopular causes: he defended the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World ("Wobblies"), embraced the Russian Revolution, and was thrown in jail for opposing American imperialism's involvement in World War I.

In 1920 Debs won almost a million votes running for president as a socialist against the bosses' parties. While

the SP under Debs evidently lacked the capacity to lead a revolution in America, it *did* at least represent an expression of independent working-class politics. Workers who voted for Debs understood that they were casting a vote against capitalist rule.

The Labor Party hatched in Cleveland last year stands in an altogether different tradition. Its political lineage can be traced to the American Labour Party (ALP) of New York, which was created to channel the votes of socialist-minded workers to the Democrats. Art Preis, an American Trotskyist militant in the 1930s, explained the origins of the ALP:

"In the spring of 1936 AFL Teamsters President Daniel J. Tobin, a leading opponent of the Lewis-led CIO, had been reappointed by Roosevelt's campaign manager James Farley to head the Democratic Party's National Labor Committee. Fearful that this might place the CIO at a disadvantage, John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, David Dubinsky, and other leaders of the CIO set up Labor's Non-Partisan League [LNPL] to mobilize the working-class vote for Roosevelt, thereby expecting to win his grateful reciprocity.

"...The phrase 'Non-Partisan' emphasized not merely that the new organization claimed no permanent ties with either of the two major parties, but that it was open to membership of all unions of whatever faction. Fifty-nine international unions did, in fact, join the LNPL in 1936, most of them not adherents of the CIO tendency. The LNPL raised the then enormous sum of more than \$1,500,000 for Roosevelt's 1936 campaign....

"The New York State section of the LNPL was set up in the form of a separate labor party with its own line on the ballot.... They [the leaders of the LNPL] knew that in New York hundreds of thousands of workers would refuse to mark the ballot or pull the lever for any capitalist party. The American Labor party of New York State was organized on July 16, 1936 to get these workers to vote for Roosevelt on an independent party line."

—*Labor's Giant Step*

The ALP nominated Roosevelt as *its* candidate for the election, so his name appeared on the ALP line on the ballot, as well as on the Democratic line. The left-liberal *Nation* (8 July 1996) quotes Bob Wages as proposing exactly the same approach for the LP in the future:

"If we remain non-electoral for the near future, and have discussions that leave room for fusion candidates, running on both our line and the Democrats, I think other unions will be interested."

A vote for the ALP was a vote for the Democrats, the party of racism and imperialist war. This, not the tradition of Eugene Debs, is the prototype of the Labor Party launched in Cleveland.

American workers desperately need their own party, one that is based on the fundamental proposition that their interests are diametrically *opposed* to those of corporate America. While the LP no doubt includes activists who favor independent working class politics, no one in the leadership has evinced any desire to break with the Democrats. A party to represent working people must take a side in every class struggle, and uphold the interests of *all* those exploited and oppressed by capitalism. The U.S. "Labor Party" of Mazzocchi, Wages and the other bureaucrats, is *not* such a workers' party, but a labor auxiliary for the Democrats. As such, it is part of the problem, not part of the solution. ■

Feminism...

continued from page 40

male genital mutilation in Africa, female infanticide in Asia, and the imposition of the veil in the Islamic world. Yet while feminist analysis is often useful in raising awareness of the pervasiveness of sexism in capitalist society, it typically fails to make a connection between male supremacy and the system of class domination which underlies it.

Marxists maintain that class conflict is the motor force of history, and reject the notion that there are irreconcilable differences between the interests of men and women. But we do not deny that men are the agents of women's oppression, or that, within the framework of existing social relations, men "benefit" from it, both in material and psychological terms. Yet the benefits that most men derive from women's inequality are petty, hollow and transitory, and the costs that accompany them are substantial.

Job-trusting and female exclusionism, undervaluation of traditionally "female" work, and sex-based pay differentials, while appearing to benefit the men who are better paid and have more job security, in fact exert downward pressure on wages generally. This phenomenon was explained by Frieda Miller, director of the U.S. Women's Bureau shortly after the Second World War:

"It is an axiom of wage theory that when large numbers of workers can be hired at lower rates of pay than those prevailing at any given time, the competition of such persons for jobs results either in the displacement of the higher paid workers or in the acceptance of lower rates by those workers. Over a period of time this pressure tends to depress all wage levels, and unless this normal course is averted by direct action it results eventually in lower levels of earning for all, with a resulting reduction in purchasing power and in standards of living. Because of their new war-born training and skills, women are, as never before, in a position to be used by unscrupulous employers as wage cutters."

—U.S. Women's Bureau *Bulletin* No. 224, 1948 (quoted by Nancy Reeves in "Women at Work," in *American Labor in Mid-Passage*, 1959)

The same applies to wage discrimination against immigrants, youth, racial minorities, or any other sector of the workforce. In addition to lowering wage rates, male chauvinism—like racism, nationalism, homophobia and other backward ideologies—obscures the mechanisms of social control, and divides those at the bottom against each other, thereby providing a bulwark for a hierarchial and intrinsically oppressive social system.

The Marxist strategy of uniting all those exploited and oppressed by capitalism is sharply counterposed to the reactionary utopia of a universal "sisterhood," uniting women across class lines. While it is true that female oppression is a trans-class phenomenon that affects all women, not merely those who are poor or working-class, the degree of oppression and its consequences are qualitatively different for members of different social classes. The privileges and material benefits enjoyed by ruling-class women give them a powerful interest in preserving the existing social order. Their pampered

existence is paid for by the superexploitation of their "sisters" in Third World sweatshops. The only way in which female unity can be built across class lines is by subordinating the interests of poor, black and working-class women to those of their bourgeois "sisters."

Origins of 'Second Wave' Feminism

Today's feminists often refer to themselves as belonging to the "Second Wave"—"First Wave" feminists were those who fought for access to higher education, equal property rights and the vote prior to the First World War. "Second Wave" feminism is often dated from the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan's 1963 bestseller, which contrasted the ideology of "femininity" with the reality of women's lives. In 1966 Friedan founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), a liberal women's rights organization, based on professional and career women, committed to "bring[ing] women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now...." NOW remains the largest feminist organization in the U.S., but its appeal is limited by its role as a pressure group and unofficial Democratic Party auxiliary.

Another, more radical, strain of contemporary feminism emerged from the American "Women's Liberation Movement" of the late 1960s. Many prominent leaders of the New Left women's movement were veterans of the earlier Civil Rights Movement against racial segregation in the Southern states. They were among the thousands of idealistic youth who had gone South to participate in the "Freedom Summers" of the mid-1960s, and were radicalized through exposure to the brutal realities of American capitalism.

By the late 1960s, many women in the New Left began to complain that their male comrades' rhetorical advocacy of liberation, equality and solidarity contrasted sharply with their experiences in the "movement." These feelings were articulated by Marlene Dixon, a young radical sociology professor:

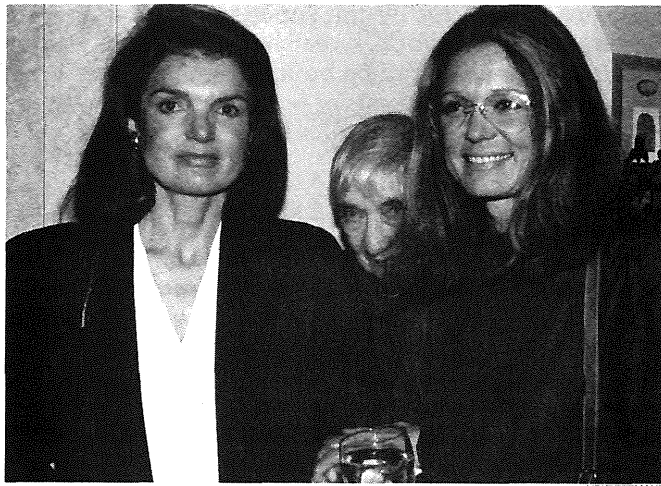
"Young women have increasingly rebelled not only against passivity and dependency in their relationships but also against the notion that they must function as sexual objects, being defined in purely sexual rather than human terms, and being forced to package and sell themselves as commodities on the sex market."

"The very stereotypes that express the society's belief in the biological inferiority of women recall the images used to justify the oppression of blacks. The nature of women, like that of slaves, is depicted as dependent, incapable of reasoned thought, childlike in its simplicity and warmth, martyred in the role of mother, and mystical in the role of sexual partner. In its benevolent form, the inferior position of women results in paternalism; in its malevolent form, a domestic tyranny which can be unbelievably brutal."

—"Why Women's Liberation?," *Ramparts*, December 1969

Gloria Steinem: Sisterhood & the CIA

In the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement, a division emerged between those who saw the fight for female equality as one aspect of a broader



Jackie Kennedy lunching with Gloria Steinem

struggle against all oppression, and those who emphasized female solidarity and the necessity to remain organizationally and politically "autonomous" from other social forces.

While many early leaders of the "Second Wave" had had their initial political experience in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, others had less honorable pasts. Gloria Steinem, the original editor of *Ms.*, America's largest-circulation feminist magazine, had worked with the CIA in the 1950s. She was involved in the operation of a front group "which financed Americans attending world youth festivals largely dominated by the Soviet Union." According to Sheila Tobias, an unwitting participant on one such trip (who later taught women's studies at Cornell University), the CIA:

"was interested in spying on the American delegates to find out who in the United States was a Trotskyite or Communist. So we were a front, as it turned out."

—Marcia Cohen, *The Sisterhood* 1988

When Steinem's past eventually came to light, she opted to brazen it out:

"When the CIA funding of the agency Gloria had cofounded back in the late fifties was exposed in the press, she admitted that the organization received funds from the CIA, denied being an agent of the CIA, and dismissed those Helsinki youth conferences as 'the CIA's finest hour.'"

—*Ibid.*

Only the more militant feminists, like the Boston-based "Redstockings," (whose leader Roxanne Dunbar was a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement) denounced Steinem for her CIA involvement. For the most part, the issue of her connection to the leading agency of imperialist counterrevolution was ignored, or dismissed as irrelevant, by mainstream feminists. This in itself says a great deal about the politics of "sisterhood."

Radical Feminism & Biological Determinism

Another feminist who began her political career in the Civil Rights Movement was Shulamith Firestone. In her 1970 book, *The Dialectic of Sex*, she attempted to provide a theoretical basis for radical feminism by arguing that the subordination of women was biological, not social-

historical, in origin. The sexual division of humanity into "two distinct biological classes" was, she said, the origin of all other social divisions. Mimicking Marx, she wrote: "The sexual-reproductive organization of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of economic, juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period."

If the root of women's oppression lay in anatomy, Firestone reasoned, then the solution must lie in technology—increased control over contraception and, ultimately, gestation outside the womb. Firestone maintained that hers was a "materialist" analysis. It was a materialism of sorts, to be sure, but a crudely biological one. While she envisaged a historical resolution to female oppression, the solutions she offered were utopian and ultimately apolitical. Her book has remained influential—perhaps because she was one of the first to take the radical feminist view that biology is destiny to a logical conclusion.

While not endorsing Firestone's solutions, the 1970 "Redstockings Manifesto" agreed with the assertion that women are a class:

"Women are an oppressed class....We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-oriented. Men have controlled all political, economic and cultural institutions and backed up this control with physical force. They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. *All men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. *All men* have oppressed women....We will not ask what is 'revolutionary' or 'reformist,' only what is good for women."

—"Redstockings Manifesto," in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, 1970

Radical feminist arguments parallel those of the most reactionary socio-biologists, who claim that social inequality is "in our genes," and, therefore, attempts to fight it are futile. Radical feminists frequently argue for separatism, and some go so far as to suggest that women who continue to sleep with the "enemy" must be regarded with suspicion. In *Lesbian Nation: the Feminist Solution* (1973), Jill Johnson asserted that:

"The sexual satisfaction of the woman independently of the man is the *sine qua non* of the feminist revolution....

"Until all women are lesbians there will be no true political revolution."

Socialism & Sexism

In a 1970 essay entitled "The Main Enemy," Christine Delphy presented a version of "radical feminism based on Marxist principles" in which men (not capitalism) were identified as the main enemy (reprinted in *Close to Home*, 1984). Delphy asserted that, without an independent women's revolution, even in a post-capitalist workers' state, men would still have a material interest in seeing women perform the bulk of domestic chores.

The notion that women's oppression would continue to be a feature of life under socialism seemed obvious to those New Left radicals who viewed the economically backward, nationally isolated, deformed workers' states of Cuba, China, North Vietnam, North Korea and Albania as functioning socialist societies. While women made very important gains everywhere capitalist rule had been overthrown (a fact dramatically underlined by the devastating effects on women of capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet bloc), the parasitic (and overwhelmingly male) ruling bureaucracy in these Stalinist police states promoted women's "natural" role as breeder, mother and homemaker. Leon Trotsky pointed out in *The Revolution Betrayed* that the Stalinist apparatus was an *obstacle* to the development of socialism, and criticized "the social interest of the ruling stratum in the deepening of bourgeois law" in connection with its attempts to prop up the "socialist" family.

Feminist pessimism regarding the prospects for women under socialism (as opposed to under Stalinism) reflects an inability to comprehend the *historical* origins of women's oppression. It also reveals a failure to appreciate the immense possibilities for reordering social priorities, and transforming every aspect of human relations, that socialism would open up through the elimination of material scarcity. The revolutionary expropriation of the productive forces, and the establishment of a global planned economy, would ensure that the most basic conditions for existence (food, shelter, employment, basic healthcare and education) could be guaranteed for every person on the planet.

Within a few generations, the socialization of production could afford all citizens a quality of life and a degree of economic independence enjoyed today only by the elite. Access to holiday resorts, summer camps, sporting, cultural and educational facilities, and other institutions currently beyond the means of most people, would immensely enrich the lives of the majority of the population. As society escapes the tyranny of the market, which only promotes activities that produce private profit, people will have an increasingly broad range of choices about how to arrange their lives. Domestic labor could be reduced substantially by the social provision of high-quality childcare, restaurants and laundries. Eventually, as the competitiveness, anxiety and insecurity of life under capitalism recedes into the distant past, social behavior will be transformed.

The provision of the material conditions for a fulfilling personal life for all, impossible under the dictates of profit maximization, would simply be a rational choice for a planned economy. Just as investing in publicly subsidized immunization programs and sewage systems benefit all members of society, the assurance of a safe, secure and productive existence for each individual will improve the quality of life for all, by eliminating many of the causes of anti-social behavior, mental illness and disease.

It might be objected that even among the existing elite, who already enjoy material abundance, men oppress women. Marxists recognize that even though it ultimately reflects the material interests of particular social classes, ideology also has a certain relative auton-

omy. The general condition of women as unpaid child-minders and domestic workers can only be justified within the framework of a sexist worldview that negatively affects all women, including those of the capitalist class.

The effects of these ideas and social practices will not immediately or automatically disappear when the conditions which gave rise to them are overturned. There will have to be an ideological and cultural struggle against the legacy of backwardness and ignorance bequeathed by the past. But where class society reinforces and promotes male supremacy, racism, etc., at every turn, in an egalitarian world, where everyone is assured of a comfortable and secure existence, the eradication of prejudice will finally be a realizable project.

Socialist Feminism: Ephemeral Half-Way House

The radical feminism of Firestone, the Redstockings and Delphy represented one wing of the Women's Liberation Movement of the early 1970s. At the other end of the spectrum, hundreds of the best militants joined various ostensibly Marxist-Leninist organizations. Those who fell somewhere in between often identified themselves as "socialist feminists." This current, which ultimately proved to be an ephemeral half-way house, was influential throughout the 1970s, particularly in Britain. Rejecting the biological determinism of radical feminism, the socialist feminists ruminated about developing a "dual systems" model, which would treat capitalism and "patriarchy" as separate but equal foes. The desirability of a "dual systems" analysis was widely accepted by socialist feminists, but difficulties arose in coming up with a plausible explanation of exactly how these two supposedly discrete but parallel systems of oppression interacted. Another tricky problem was how an analysis of racism, "ageism" and the various other forms of social oppression could be integrated into the "dual" capitalism/patriarchy model.

Nor could socialist feminists agree as to how exactly the system of "patriarchy" should be defined, or what caused it: male brutishness? jealousy? womb-envy and a consequent male obsession with maintaining strict control over women's reproductive functions? language? psycho-sexual structures? material privileges? The list is extensive, and different theorists of patriarchy highlighted or combined all of the foregoing and more.

The political activity of the socialist feminists, to the extent that there was any, generally had a more pro-working class tilt than that of the radical feminists, but was otherwise broadly similar. Marxists have traditionally favored the creation of socialist women's organizations, linked to the working class and other movements of the oppressed through the agency of a revolutionary party comprised of the most dedicated and conscious militants from every sector. Such a woman's movement would be "autonomous" from the reformists, the capitalists and the trade-union misleaders, but it would be organizationally and politically linked to the communist vanguard. Socialist feminists, by contrast, share the radical feminists' insistence that only an *autonomous*



UP/BETTMANN

White segregationists harass black student at Little Rock Central High School in 1957

women's movement (i.e., one that is entirely separate from organizations that include men) could wage a serious struggle for female liberation.

But this too presented problems when applied to the real world. It is impossible to conceive of any movement attempting to launch a serious challenge to capitalist rule without attempting to mobilize the support of every possible element among the exploited and oppressed. To exclude half of the population from the outset, simply on the basis of sex, would guarantee defeat. Moreover, if one seeks to distinguish between friends and enemies primarily on the basis of their sex, then what attitude should be adopted toward women who join right-wing movements, or who sign up to be scabs or cops? And what of the female members of the ruling class itself? They would hardly seem to be natural allies in the struggle for feminist socialism.

Some radical feminists attempted to "solve" such problems by simply declaring that women who act like men (i.e., behave in a piggish fashion) are not *really* women at all. But this was not an option for socialist feminists, who aspired to develop a more scientific worldview. A decade after the collapse of the socialist-feminist movement, Lise Vogel, one of its more thoughtful exponents, republished an essay that had first appeared in 1981 entitled "Marxism and Feminism:

Unhappy Marriage, Trial Separation or Something Else?" In the original version, Vogel had danced around the thorny question of how to treat female class enemies, but in the 1995 version she bit the bullet:

"Socialist feminists maintain, against some opinions on the left, that women can be successfully organized, and they emphasize the need for organizations that include women from all sectors of society....It is precisely the specific character of women's situation that requires their separate organization. Here socialist feminists frequently find themselves in opposition to much of the tradition of socialist theory and practice. Socialist-feminist theory takes on the essential task of developing a framework that can guide the process of organizing women from different classes and sectors into an autonomous women's movement."

—Lise Vogel, *Women Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism*, 1995

With this, Vogel (a red-diaper baby who 30 years earlier had gone down South as a Civil Rights worker) as much as admitted that it is impossible to reconcile "feminism" and "socialism"—two fundamentally counterposed ideologies—with a hyphen.

While Marxists derided the class-collaborationist implications of the socialist-feminist call for women to "unite," the radical feminists attacked them from the other direction as "male-identified politicians." Catharine MacKinnon, a prominent American radical-feminist theorist, and Andrea Dworkin's collaborator, put her finger on the fundamental political contradiction of socialist feminism:

"Attempts to create a synthesis between marxism and feminism, termed socialist-feminism, have recognized neither the separate integrity of each theory nor the depth of the antagonism between them."

—*Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, 1989

Socialist feminism decomposed as a political movement because the incoherence of its postulates prevented its adherents from developing either a program, or an organization, capable of engaging in serious social struggle. In the real world, there is simply no political space between the program of female solidarity across class lines and that of proletarian solidarity across sex lines. For example, socialist feminists would agree that working women shoulder the principal burden of cuts to social programs. Pro-capitalist governments of every political stripe claim that the state can no longer afford to bear the costs of looking after children, the elderly or the sick; instead, these are to be the responsibility of the "family," i.e., primarily women. So who would be the natural constituency to fight against these cuts? Bourgeois women generally support government austerity and the resulting redistribution of wealth. Their primary concern is not to overburden the private accumulation of capital with the public funding of social need. On the other hand, working-class men are natural allies in the fight against cuts to daycare subsidies, old-age pensions, medicare, and so on, because these are programs that benefit them.

Today, among trendy left academics, analyzing male supremacy within the framework of a materialist perspective is passé; Marxism is frequently dismissed as irrelevant, its place taken by the "post-modernism" of Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Michel

Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. While sometimes identified broadly with the political left, the post-modernists in fact represent a return to the reactionary historical pessimism of Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Jurgen Habermas aptly characterized as the "dialectician of the Counter-Enlightenment." Post-modernism has provided the pseudo-theoretical backdrop for a new brand of apolitical leftist conservatism that rejects the idea, central to both the Enlightenment and Marxism, that society can be remade on the basis of human reason: a bankrupt "humanist" notion according to the post-structuralists and post-modernists! Michèle Barrett, once an influential British exponent of "socialist feminism," is an example of this "descent into discourse." In the introduction to the 1988 reissue of her 1980 book, *Women's Oppression Today*, she wrote that:

"the discourse of post-modernism is premised on an explicit and argued denial of the kind of grand political projects that both 'socialism' and 'feminism' by definition are....The arguments of post-modernism already represent, I think, a key position around which feminist theoretical work in the future is likely to revolve. Undoubtedly, this is where the book would begin, were I writing it today."

'Cultural Feminism' & the Rejection of Politics

Many feminists in the imperialist countries have retreated into an attempt to escape the sexism of mainstream society through the creation of a female counter-culture involving theater, music, "herstory" and literature. The growth of "cultural feminism" in the late 1970s was reflected in the growing popularity of writers who contrasted supposedly female values of caring, sharing and emotional warmth with the "male" characteristics of greed, aggression, ego and lust. Unlike the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s—which brought many aspects of women's oppression from the private into the public realm for the first time—the cultural-feminist high priestesses of the 1990s invoke "The Goddess" in order to repackage traditional notions of feminine essence, which they peddle with talk of "empowerment."

The "herstory" industry provides an example of this political regression. In 1970, when a leading journal of the American women's movement published a special issue on "Women in History," its cover proclaimed:

"Our history has been stolen from us. Our heroes died in childbirth, from peritonitis[,] overwork[,] oppression[,] from bottled-up rage. Our geniuses were never taught to read or write."

—*Women: A Journal of Liberation*, Spring 1970.

Contemporary "herstorians," like Dale Spender, reject this, and assert instead that male historians have written important women artists, writers, scientists and philosophers out of history:

"when we assert that the reason for women's absence [from the historical record] is not women, but men, that it is not that women have not contributed, but that men have 'doctored the records', reality undergoes a remarkable change"

—*Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them*, 1982

While the study of contributions by women in the past can certainly inspire those engaged in struggle to-

day, the attempt to prettify the ugly truth can only undercut the urgency of bringing down the social order responsible for the perpetuation of female oppression. The relegation of women to the "private" sphere of domestic labor meant their exclusion, in all but a few cases, from the opportunity to be major participants in the historic developments of their time. The emphasis on women's exclusion from the history books only serves to trivialize the extent of the injury.

The cultural feminists preach abstinence from, rather than engagement in, political activity, on the grounds that it must inevitably involve entering the male domain:

"tokenism—which is commonly guised as Equal Rights, and which yields token victories—deflects and short-circuits gynergy, so that female power, galvanized under deceptive slogans of sisterhood, is swallowed by The Fraternity. This method of vampirizing the Female Self saps women by giving illusions of partial success...."

"Thus tokenism is insidiously destructive of sisterhood, for it distorts the warrior aspect of Amazon bonding both by magnifying it and by minimizing it. It magnifies the importance of 'fighting back' to the extent of making it devour the transcendent be-ing of sisterhood, reducing it to a copy of comradeship. At the same time, it minimizes the Amazon warrior aspect by containing it, misdirecting and shortcircuiting the struggle."

—Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 1978

The very concept of oppression, as well as the need to struggle against it, are derided as "male" notions to be transcended:

"The point is not to save society or to focus on escape (which is backward-looking) but to release the Spring of be-ing....Left undisturbed, we are free to find our own concordance, to hear our own harmony, the harmony of the spheres."

—*Ibid.*

This reactionary drivel is a feminist restatement of the political demoralization that propelled thousands of petty-bourgeois baby boomers from the New Left to the New Age.

As the material progress of women has stalled, the feminist celebrants of passivity and political abstention promise salvation in some world other than the one in which real suffering occurs. There is a certain logic to this, for if women's oppression derives from an eternal and unchanging disparity between the nature of the sexes, there is little reason to expect to see any significant change whatever you do. So instead of participating in the struggle to transform the institutions and social relationships that determine consciousness, New-Age feminists exhort women to embark on a personal spiritual journey to an inner space. Mary Daly advises that the road to psychic fulfilment can be found through discussions with other women in which language is "co-opted" and male "meanings" subverted:

"Breaking the bonds/bars of phallocracy requires breaking through to radiant powers of words, so that by releasing words, we can release our Selves."

—*Pure Lust*, 1984

While imagining themselves embarked on a daring feminist rethink of the entire course of human existence,



EDMUND B. GIRARD—LIFE

Volunteer women firefighters in U.S. during WW II

the cultural feminists, in reality, merely reflect the conservative trends currently popular with the bourgeois intelligentsia. The new feminism embraces many of the key features of "post-modernism," including an idealist focus on language and "discourse," and a belittling of the significance of political and economic activity.

'Women's Work'

Even those feminists who have not entirely given up on political activity have abandoned the anti-capitalist rhetoric of the early 1970s. Many are engaged in operating abortion clinics, rape crisis centers and women's shelters. Such services are certainly beneficial to those women who have access to them, and afford those providing them with the satisfaction of doing something "practical." However, they only address the effects, not the roots, of women's oppression.

Some feminists are also involved in campaigns to increase female representation in non-traditional jobs in skilled trades, the professions and corporate management. While this has created opportunities for a few, and helped break down some stereotypes, it has had little effect on the conditions faced by the majority of women, who remain stuck in traditionally "female" employment.

Much has been made of the narrowing of the male/female wage gap in the U.S. in recent years: between 1955 and 1991 wages for women working full-time rose from 64 percent to 70 percent of those of men. But this is largely a result of the decline in male wages due to the shrinkage of unionized blue-collar jobs. Marxists sup-

port women's struggles for equal pay and equal access to all job categories, while recognizing that the resilience of sexual bias in the capitalist labor process will prevent women from achieving true equality.

In most cases there is no objective basis for designating jobs as "male" or "female." The only important distinction between the sexes in terms of their capacity for work is that men are, on average, physically stronger than women. Yet among men, jobs requiring physical strength are not particularly highly rewarded—skill, dexterity, mental and organizational ability count for much more. The reason that business executives, doctors and airline pilots are predominantly male, while secretaries, nurses and flight attendants are usually female, has a great deal to do with prevailing sexist social attitudes, and nothing to do with any disparity in ability. In her 1959 essay, Nancy Reeves provided a striking example of the arbitrary character of "male" and "female" work:

"in the [American] Midwest, cornhuskers are traditionally women, while trimmers are almost always men. In the Far West, the reverse is true."

The male-supremacist tilt in capitalist society is so pervasive, and so flexible, that even when women gain entry to previously all-male occupations, new barriers, both overt and covert, soon appear:

"In 1973 only 8 percent of law degrees [in the U.S.] were awarded to women. By 1990 the percentage had risen to 42 percent. This is a sizeable feminization of a prestigious profession. Women, however, are overrepresented among the less-well-paying jobs in law, such as jobs in legal clinics, and appear not to rise to the top even in the most lucrative area of large law firms."

—Joyce P. Jacobsen, *The Economics of Gender*, 1994

The same phenomenon is observable in business:

"Studies by Columbia and Stanford Universities of women MBAs [Master of Business Administration] show that starting salaries are similar between the sexes, but that seven years out the door, the women are 40 percent behind the men."

—*Ibid.*

Even among librarians, one of the very few "female" professions, a disproportionate percentage of the top jobs (senior administrative positions in major research libraries) are held by men. Jacobsen notes that it is:

"difficult to find an example of a truly integrated occupation, where the proportion of women closely matches their representation in the workforce, where the rate of change in the sex ratio is small, and where women are not ghettoized."

Occupations that have changed over time from the domain of one sex to that of the other provide another indication of the systemic nature of the problem. One of the few jobs that has shifted from "female" to "male" is delivering babies. In 1910 midwives delivered half of all babies in the U.S., but by 1970, this figure had dropped to less than one percent. When childbirth became something that took place in hospitals under the supervision of (predominantly male) doctors, the status and remuneration for this work rose dramatically.

Conversely, when jobs shift from males to females, the result is a decline in both status and money:

"Although there were almost no women bank tellers before World War II, over 90 percent of tellers were female in 1980. Meanwhile, salaries and career-advancement possibilities dropped precipitously. Clerical professions, in general, were predominantly male when they first came into existence in large numbers as the industrial revolution generated more need for paper processors: all these occupations are now female-dominated and generally considered to be the female ghetto of jobs."

—*Ibid.*

One of the most spectacular examples of a woman breaking into a traditionally male job category was Margaret Thatcher's ascension to the office of Britain's prime minister. There is no question that the "Iron Lady" made her way to the top by besting her male competitors, yet it is also well known that under her rule British working people and the poor (who are, of course, disproportionately female) faced attacks of unprecedented viciousness. Thatcher's success may have undercut various male supremacist assumptions, and inspired a handful of ambitious British girls to reach for the top, but the real lesson her career holds is that the basis of social oppression lies in the inner logic of the capitalist system, not in the sex of those who operate its levers.

Anti-Porn Feminists

Among the most directly political (and most reactionary) initiatives undertaken by radical feminists in recent years is the campaign to ban sexually explicit material (see "Pornography, Capitalism & Censorship," 1917 No. 13). Despite occasional disclaimers that they do not share the prudishness of the right-wing family-values crowd, anti-porn feminists have willingly joined forces with the bigots who want to criminalize abortion, persecute homosexuals, and prohibit the teaching of evolution and sex education in schools. In many jurisdictions where law enforcement authorities have played up the "pro-woman" angle in defense of state censorship, the main targets of anti-pornography sweeps have been the gay and lesbian population.

Feminists who advocate censorship argue that women's oppression is the product of an unchanging male identity centered on an inherently brutal sexuality. Andrea Dworkin, the queen of America's pro-censorship feminists, claims that "sex and murder are fused in the male consciousness, so that one without the immanent possibility of the other is unthinkable and impossible" ("Taking Action," in *Take Back the Night*, 1980). Pornography should be banned, therefore, as a manifestation of this "male consciousness."

Besides pro-censorship feminists, there are also "pro-motherhood" feminists, who are distinguished by their obsession with the development of new reproductive technologies. The "Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering," launched in 1984, holds that the central issue for women is the campaign against developments in artificial insemination and *in vitro* fertilization. Where Shulamith Firestone imagined that advances in reproductive technology would pave the way to female liberation, these paranoids see it as the potential site of a new kind of enslavement:

"Much as we turn from consideration of a nuclear aftermath, we turn from seeing a future where children are neither borne nor born or where women are forced to bear only sons and to slaughter their foetal daughters. Chinese and Indian women are already trudging this path. The future of women as a group is at stake and we need to ensure that we have thoroughly considered all possibilities before endorsing technology which could mean the death of the female."

—Robyn Rowland, in *Man-Made Women*, 1987

Like their "anti-porn" sisters, Rowland and other "pro-motherhood" advocates have not been coy about climbing into bed with the traditional right: "feminists may have to consider alignments with strange pillow-friends: right-wing women perhaps" (*Ibid.*). Rowland's "pillow-friends" include the avowed racist Enoch Powell. In 1985, when Powell introduced his (unsuccessful) "Unborn Children Protection Bill," to ban embryo research and severely restrict *in vitro* fertilization, Rowland spoke at a press conference in his support (see Marge Berer's "Breeding Conspiracies and the New Reproductive Technologies," in *Trouble and Strife*, Summer 1986).

Susan Faludi's 'Backlash'

The center of gravity of the feminist milieu has moved rightward since the 1970s, but many feminists still identify themselves with the left, and many have sharply opposed the anti-porn crusade and the various other adaptations to the right. One of the most influential feminist books of the 1990s, Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991), documents a decade of "pro-family" reaction and asks:

"If women are now so equal, why are they much more likely to be poor, especially in retirement? ... Why does the average working woman, in both the UK and the US, still earn only just over two-thirds what men do for the same work?"

"If women are so 'free', why are their reproductive freedoms in greater jeopardy today than a decade earlier? Why do women who want to postpone childbearing now have fewer options than 10 years ago?"

These are not the sort of questions that the capitalist media addresses, as Faludi points out. Her book provides a wealth of examples of how "public opinion" is manufactured and manipulated, in order to isolate women who dare aspire to social equality.

Faludi is critical of feminists who reject political activity in pursuit of "personal growth," and clearly endorses a perspective of collective action. Yet she is unable either to explain the origins of the reactionary developments she decries, or to propose a program to resist them. Instead, she presents the backlash as a regrettable, but perhaps inevitable, part of some great cycle of existence:

"A backlash against women's rights is nothing new. Indeed, it is a recurring phenomenon: it returns every time women begin to make some headway towards equality, a seemingly inevitable early frost to the brief flowerings of feminism. The progress of women's rights in our culture, unlike other forms of "progress," has always been strangely reversible," American literature scholar Ann Douglas has observed."

The gains won by women in the 1960s and 1970s were a direct product of political struggle. But concessions granted under the pressure of mass political mobilizations are subject to reversal when a different configuration of social forces arises. The struggle for female equality, like the battle against racism and other forms of social oppression, can never be finally victorious within the framework of capitalist society, because the maintenance of privilege and inequality is an inevitable corollary to the predominance of private ownership of the means of production.

The most glaring shortcoming of Faludi's book is her tendency to treat the backlash against women's rights in isolation. The campaign against women's rights in America is only one front in an all-sided reactionary assault. The propaganda techniques which Faludi describes so well have also been routinely employed against others targeted by the ruling class—from welfare recipients, to unionists, to Saddam Hussein.

In a footnote to her description of international resistance to the anti-abortion "Operation Rescue" fanatics, Faludi notes: "New Zealand saw clashes in 1989 outside a Wellington clinic when a Rescue squad arrived to find 30 women already there and intent on allowing women in." Contrary to Faludi's information, the clinic's defenders on that day included both men and women (including some of our New Zealand comrades). Our supporters played a major role in organizing the ongoing defense of the Parkview clinic through "Choice"—a militant, non-exclusionist "rapid response" network, open to everyone prepared to defend abortion rights. One of the lessons of this work was the importance of drawing the line *politically*, rather than on the basis of sex, in the fight for women's rights.

Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

The relegation of women to the household has historically permitted many issues of women's rights to be dismissed as merely "personal" concerns. The Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s saw a proliferation of "consciousness-raising groups," which explored the varied ways that women had internalized their oppression as personal concerns and the extent to which society treats the subordination of women as a "natural" condition of existence.

Legal and institutional restrictions on access to abortion, birth control, healthcare, childcare and employment are all clearly overtly "political" questions. But women's oppression also encompasses the deeply rooted psychological and social attitudes and presumptions resulting from thousands of years of male domination. Girls learn early in life that they cannot aspire to everything that boys can. Misogynist assumptions are so deeply embedded in our culture that many aspects of women's oppression are virtually invisible, even to people committed to the struggle for women's liberation. For example, when feminists proposed the introduction of gender-neutral language (e.g., the use of "chairperson" instead of "chairman," or "Ms." instead of "Miss" and "Mrs.") some left-wing Marxist publications proved



OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Columbus, Ohio 1941: striking Timken workers address 'sister' trying to cross picket line

more resistant than the mainstream bourgeois press.

Many women's lives are stunted and deformed by sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence at the hands of men. While it takes place between individuals, such pathological behavior, like other manifestations of female oppression, are *social* problems. They cannot be eliminated until the social system which produces and, at a certain level, encourages them, is replaced by one that creates the material conditions for the emergence of a culture imbued with fundamentally different values.

Women's liberation cannot be achieved within the arena of one's own personal life. It is not enough to share domestic labor more equitably within the family—what is necessary is that childcare, housecleaning, meal preparation, etc., be transformed from *individual* to *social* responsibilities. But this is not possible short of the total reconstruction of society—the replacement of capitalist anarchy with a socialist planned economy administered by the producers themselves.

Just as the liberation of women is inextricably linked to the outcome of the class struggle, so too the fate of any social revolution depends on the participation and support of poor and working-class women. As Karl Marx remarked in a 12 December 1868 letter to Ludwig Kugelmann: "Everyone who knows anything of history also knows that great social revolutions are impossible without the feminine ferment." Revolutionaries must actively participate in social struggles to defend and advance female equality. It is also necessary to promote the development of female leaders within the socialist movement. For it is only through participation in a struggle to turn the world upside down that women can open the road to their own emancipation and create the material circumstances for eradicating hunger, exploitation, poverty and the effects of thousands of years of male supremacy. This is a goal worth struggling for. ■

Women's Oppression—Not in Our Genes

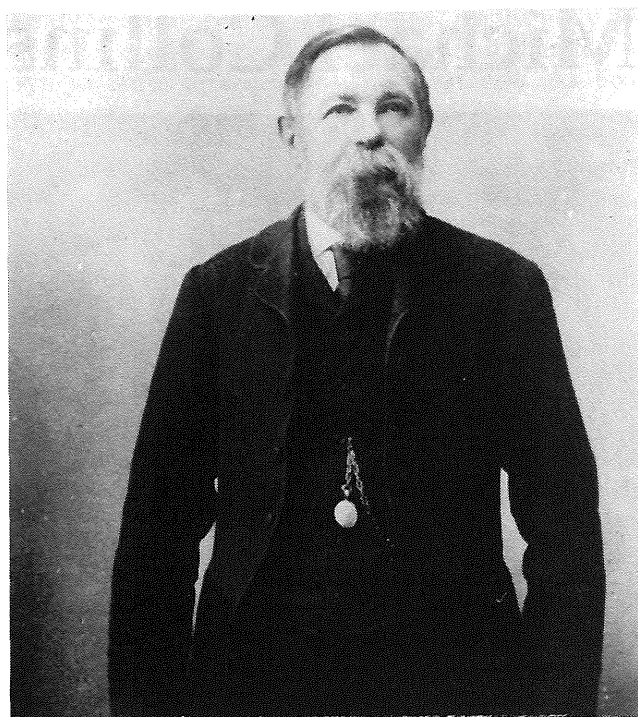
Female oppression, the most universal and deeply rooted form of social oppression, is characteristic of capitalist society, yet unlike racial oppression, predates capitalism. In his groundbreaking 1884 study, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Frederick Engels observed that in societies based chiefly on hunting and gathering, where all members of the tribe worked, and all property was owned communally, women did not have second-class status. He noted further that the subordination of women arose alongside the development of distinct social classes based on private property. The conclusion that Engels drew from this is that male supremacy, which in varying forms has characterized all known civilizations, is not the product of hard-wired biological distinctions between the sexes, but rather a historically-determined phenomenon.

Women's unique capacity for childbearing and nursing gave rise to a natural division of labor along sex lines in primitive society, but this distinction did not automatically translate into lesser status. Only with the advent of class society were women gradually excluded from full participation in larger political/economic activity and relegated to the household. While the form, extent and intensity of women's oppression has varied among different societies, and in different historical periods, it has always been closely linked to women's role in the reproduction of the next generation. This, in turn, is ultimately shaped by the requirements of the prevailing mode of production and its accompanying social structure.

The subjugation of women under the capitalist "free market" is rooted in their central role in the family as unpaid providers of the domestic services necessary for the maintenance of society. These functions include primary responsibility for food, clothing and cleaning; for the care of the very young, the aged and the sick; and for meeting the varied emotional and psychological needs of all the members of the household. The family provides these services more cheaply for the ruling class (both in economic and political terms) than any alternative. The need to maintain the family as the basic unit of class-divided societies thus constitutes the *material basis* for the subordination of women.

When Engels was writing, the investigation of primitive human societies was in its infancy, and the empirical material upon which his account is based was limited and, in some important respects, mistaken. But this does not detract from the importance of his observation that women's oppression is a social creation. Until relatively recently, most bourgeois social scientists viewed male dominance as a universal norm, and generally presumed it to have a biological basis. Yet over the past several decades, many anthropologists have begun to accept the idea that for tens of thousands of years, hunter-gatherer societies existed that were essentially sex-egalitarian.

This clearly has far-reaching political implications, but only rarely makes its way into the mass media. One



Frederick Engels

exception was the 29 March 1994 *New York Times*, which ran a short piece entitled "Sexes Equal on South Sea Isle," discussing the work of Dr. Maria Lepowsky, an anthropology professor at the University of Wisconsin. In her 1993 book, *Fruit of the Motherland*, Lepowsky described Vanatinai, an isolated island southeast of New Guinea, where there is "no ideology of male superiority and no male coercive power or formal authority over women." On Vanatinai:

"There is a large amount of overlap between the roles and activities of women and men, with women occupying public, prestige-generating roles. Women share control of the production and the distribution of valued goods, and they inherit property. Women as well as men participate in the exchange of valuables, they organize feasts, they officiate at important rituals such as those for yam planting or healing, they counsel their kinfolk, they speak out and are listened to in public meetings, they possess valuable magical knowledge, and they work side by side in most subsistence activities."

The prominent role played by women on the island is said to be "*taubwaragha*," which translates as "the way of the ancestors." On Vanatinai, males are expected to help with childcare, and even the language is gender-neutral—there are no pronouns like "he" or "she." In the conclusion to her book, Lepowsky comments:

"The Vanatinai example suggests that sexual equality is facilitated by an overall ethic of respect for and equal treatment of all categories of individuals, the decentralization of political power, and inclusion of all categories of persons (for example, women, and ethnic minorities) in public positions of authority....The example of Vanatinai shows that the subjugation of women by men is not a human universal, and it is not inevitable."

From the Easter Rising to Partition: 'Michael Collins' & Irish Freedom



Liam Neeson as Michael Collins

THE GEFFEN CO.

Neil Jordan's film "Michael Collins" opens with a dramatic recreation of the last, desperate hours of the 1916 Easter Rising, as Padraic Pearse's Irish Volunteers and James Connolly's Citizen Army vainly attempted to fight off encircling British forces amid the ruins of Dublin's General Post Office.

The film has brought forth howls of indignation from the British press. One reason for this reaction is Jordan's graphic depiction of the brutality of British colonialism. Another is that, while taking a few artistic liberties with details of historical fact, the film tells the story of how Collins—a veteran of Easter Week, the principal post-1916 IRA leader, and a self-described "yob from West Cork"—led an audacious guerrilla campaign from 1919 to 1921 that fought the British state to a stalemate. We see a relatively small band of rebels, enjoying popular support, but armed only with rudimentary weapons and a will to victory, bringing to terms what was then the mightiest empire on earth. In today's post-Cold War world, where all political initiatives are assumed to come from the top down, such things are not supposed to happen—or ever to have happened.

The film shows how Collins succeeded in penetrating Dublin Castle, the headquarters of British rule, by recruiting a member of the Criminal Intelligence Division

(a.k.a. the "murder gang"); how a team of crack British agents, dispatched to Dublin in November 1920 to counter growing IRA success, were shot in their hotel rooms by Collins' men shortly after their arrival; and how, later that same day, in reprisal, the British opened fire randomly at a football match, killing a dozen civilians. The perpetrators of this massacre were the "Black and Tans," a band of lumpenized ex-servicemen and criminals, recruited to suppress the rebellion. (Ordinary British soldiers were deemed insufficiently brutal and depraved.) We also see Collins, then the most wanted man in Ireland, jaunting openly through the streets of Dublin on his bicycle, making fools of British intelligence. There are certain historical facts that Britain's rulers would simply prefer to see forgotten—especially in light of the recent breakdown of the Irish "peace process," and the partial resumption of military operations by the present-day IRA.

Jordan is less enlightening in his interpretation of the civil war that followed independence. After having gone as far as they thought possible on the military front, the IRA sent a delegation, headed by Collins, to London to negotiate with the British government. The result was a treaty that created a 26-county Irish Free State in the south—with dominion status in the British empire—and the six-county Northern Ireland mini-state that exists to this day. Collins remarked that, by putting his name to the treaty, he was signing his own death warrant.

Indeed he was. The proposed treaty deeply divided the IRA and the newly created Irish parliament (the *Dáil Éireann*). The principal point of contention was not partition, but the oath of loyalty that the Irish government was required to swear to the British crown. A narrow majority, with Collins as its chief representative, supported the treaty. When the anti-treaty forces (or "irregulars") seized Dublin's main municipal offices (the Four Courts) in 1922, British Prime Minister Lloyd George threatened total war on Ireland unless the "Free Staters" drove them out. This they did, with armored cars borrowed from the British. Ireland then witnessed the traumatic spectacle of the two factions, which less than a year earlier had fought shoulder to shoulder against the British empire, murdering one another in a brutal fratricidal war—of which Collins himself was the most famous victim. He was killed in an ambush by irregulars while on military patrol in his native County Cork. He was 31 years old, and left behind an ambiguous legacy.

Collins now figures in the annals of Irish nationalism, on the one hand, as the bold, swashbuckling captain of the only one of many Irish rebellions that was not defeated. On the other hand, he is the "traitor who bargained and sold," the man responsible for the partition which, in Republican eyes, remains the source of all of Ireland's ills.

Jordan presents the conflict over the treaty as one between Collins, the realist and peacemaker, and his chief rival, Eamon de Valera, president of the *Dáil*, and future head of the Irish government. De Valera is depicted as an opportunist, who believes that a settlement with Britain is inevitable, but seeks to avoid responsibility for it. He refuses to go to the negotiating table in London and sends Collins instead. When Collins returns, "Dev" cynically exploits anti-treaty sentiment to enhance his own prestige at Collins' expense. Jordan even suggests that de Valera connived in Collins' assassination.

That de Valera was indeed an opportunist is amply demonstrated by the fact that, within a few years, he had laid down arms and later went on to head the government of the state he had denounced. He even persecuted those who still held out for a 32-county republic. But the civil war cannot be understood simply as the result of a conflict between two individuals, as Jordan's film might suggest to the historically uninformed. Nor were all opponents of the treaty opportunists like de Valera. Most saw themselves as fighting to preserve unsullied the goal that nationalists had striven for since the time of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen at the end of the eighteenth century: a totally independent and integral Irish Republic. Several anti-treaty leaders—Cathal Brugha, Liam Mellows, Rory O'Connor—were among the bravest and most honorable of the IRA chiefs.

Moreover, the Free State brought into being by the treaty was hardly a paradigm of human progress. Its cause was embraced by all those forces—capitalists, landlords, the Catholic hierarchy—who wished to end the independence struggle as quickly as possible because they feared the undercurrent of social radicalism it had nurtured.

Like any mass struggle against oppression, the war of independence stirred the hopes and energies of the most exploited sectors of the population. It was also, in its own way, part of the revolutionary wave that swept Europe in the aftermath of World War I and the October Revolution. The more militant elements of the IRA, and of the masses in general, were not unaware of Lenin's defense of the Easter Rising at a time when the social patriots of the Second International were denouncing it as a senseless putsch. Nor did they fail to notice that Trotsky—with the eyes of the world riveted upon him as he negotiated with the German general staff at Brest Litovsk—championed the cause of Ireland's freedom. There was, in fact, widespread sympathy for the Russian Revolution in Ireland at the time.

In the land-hungry south and west, there was also a conscious attempt to follow the Russian example, as poor farmers conducted strikes and sit-ins throughout 1919-23; and in Limerick and elsewhere they even called their organizations "soviets." In Dublin and in smaller cities, the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, founded by James Larkin, and subsequently headed by Ireland's preeminent socialist revolutionary, James Connolly, experienced a resurgence. According to one historian, R.F. Foster, "by 1921 the cause of labour was threat-

ening in many areas to displace that of the republic" (*Modern Ireland*, 1988).

Yet, despite the inchoate radicalism of some anti-treaty elements, the "irregulars" were chiefly petty bourgeois in composition and ideology, and therefore unsympathetic to working-class demands. As Foster recounts:

"On both sides of the Treaty divide, the reaction of conservative rural nationalism was predictably hostile to the Labour renaissance. By 1922 IRA Volunteers were being used in some areas as strike-breakers: recovering cattle driven away by rebellious labourers in Meath, protecting non-unionized workers from attack, and acting as arbitrators for lower farm wages in Clare."

Lenin, whose views on the national question were influenced by Connolly, argued in favor of the right to self-determination because he saw national oppression as an obstacle to class consciousness among the oppressed of colonially subject nations. The hatred of the masses for their foreign rulers, he argued, obscured the role of their home-grown exploiters. Many landlords and capitalists are viewed as—and in fact are—imperialist collaborators. But others, by donning nationalist colors, can successfully pose as friends of the oppressed. Only by throwing off the colonial yoke can the masses see their native exploiters for what they are. This is why the proletariat of oppressed nations must take the lead in the struggle against imperialism.

The Irish masses, however, lacked proletarian leadership. In the south, the working class was negligible. In the more industrialized north, workers were (and are) divided along Catholic/Protestant lines. Protestants do not generally view themselves as part of the Irish nation. The IRA, in Collins' time as well as our own, has always acted as if the Protestants did not exist, arguing that all problems will be solved once the British leave.

The absence of proletarian leadership has had tragic consequences. Although the Irish masses were among the most downtrodden in Western Europe, the national question always eclipsed the class question in their consciousness. At those historic moments—and there have been several in the past century—when class struggles began to overshadow the national question, rebellious workers and peasants were invariably brought back into line with the aid of nationalism. By preaching all-class unity in the interests of patriotic struggle, the IRA created the basis for a particularly reactionary 26-county state ruled by a single class—the Irish bourgeoisie.

By evoking the blood and strife in which that state was born, Neil Jordan has produced a film in many ways reminiscent of Gilo Pontecorvo's more ambitious 1966 classic, "The Battle of Algiers," which reenacts the struggle against French colonialism that led to the creation of contemporary Algeria. While both these struggles ended in the creation of bourgeois states, these states were nevertheless brought into being by ordinary people, willing to stand up to their oppressors. If the results of their struggles were ultimately disappointing, their courage and their sacrifice will always be a source of inspiration. ■

Marxism, Feminism & Women's Liberation



Despite all the international conferences and "universal declarations" in favor of female equality, the lives of most women around the world remain confined by prejudice and social oppression. The means by which male supremacy is enforced vary considerably from one society to another (and between social classes within each society), but everywhere men are taught to regard themselves as superior, and women are taught to accept this. Very few women have access to power and privilege except via their connection to a man. Most women in the paid labor force are subject to the double burden of domestic and wage slavery. According to the United Nations, women perform two-thirds of the world's work, and produce about 45 percent of the world's food—yet they receive merely ten percent of the income, and own only one percent of the property (cited by Marilyn French in *The War Against Women*, 1992).

From its inception, the Marxist movement has championed female equality and women's rights, while regarding women's oppression (like racial, national and other forms of special oppression) as something that cannot be eradicated without overturning the capitalist social system that nurtures and sustains it. Marxists assert that women's liberation is bound up with the struggle against capitalism because, in the final analysis,

sexual oppression serves the *material interests* of the ruling class (see box on page 37).

While Marxists and feminists often find themselves on the same side in struggles for women's rights, they hold two fundamentally incompatible worldviews. Feminism is an ideology premised on the idea that the fundamental division in human society is between the sexes, rather than between social classes. Feminist ideologues consequently see the struggle for female equality as separate from the fight for socialism, which many dismiss as merely an alternative form of "patriarchal" rule.

In the past several decades, feminist writers and academics have drawn attention to the variety and extent of male supremacist practices in contemporary society. They have described the mechanisms by which female subordination is inculcated, normalized and reinforced through everything from fairy tales to television advertising. Feminists have taken the lead in exposing many of the pathological manifestations of sexism in private life: from sexual harassment to rape and domestic violence. Prior to the resurgence of the women's movement in the late 1960s, these issues received little attention from either liberal or leftist social critics. Feminists have also been active in international campaigns against fe-

continued on page 29