

Against the Current

a socialist quarterly magazine

Winter, 1984
\$2.50

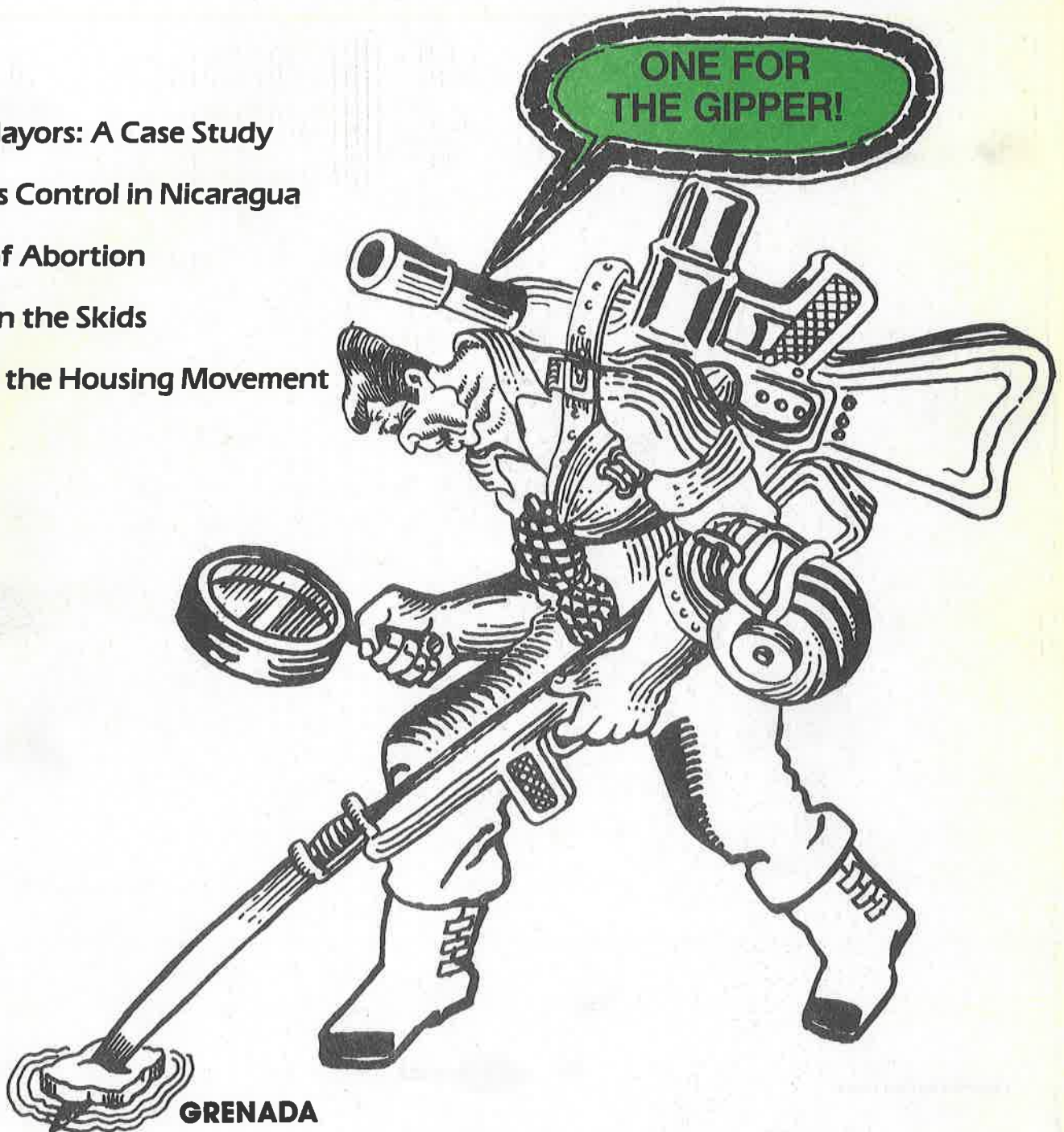
Black Mayors: A Case Study

Workers Control in Nicaragua

Ethics of Abortion

Labor on the Skids

Crisis in the Housing Movement





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Cover art by Carl Weiss.



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a socialist quarterly magazine sponsored by Workers Power

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Vol. 2, No. 4

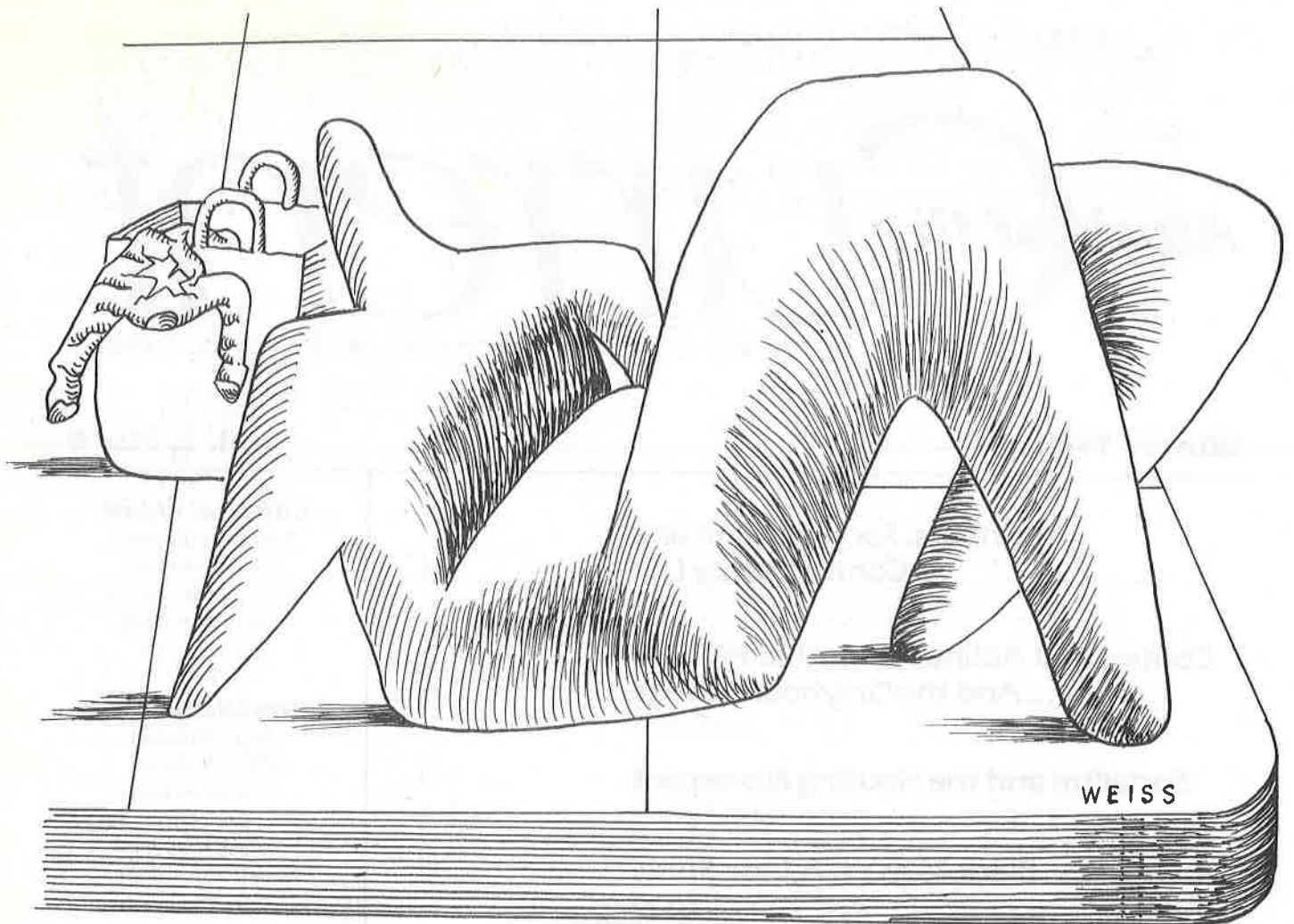
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HOMELESS "BAG LADY"

CARL WEISS / WITH A BOW TO HENRY MOORE

aesthetics, social realism, and contemporary life

by carl weiss*

To paraphrase George Lukacs' perception of social realism and the responsible artist—contemporary life should be depicted with the interplay of previous and present conditions. This should interact with the matter-of-fact doings and ambitions of ordinary people in their constant attempt to survive.

Consequently, it is critical that an artist such as Henry Moore use his magnificent innovative forms to depict *real* interactions of his humans with *real* conditions.

While the Moores vacantly place their humans (when they haven't copped out into pure abstractionism) in environs that are as socially relevant as the Pliocene Epoch, I suggest in my re-drawing of Moore, how his technique might be placed in the service of humans through social realism.

Moore titled his figure, "Reclining Figure Pointed 1979." There is absolutely nothing in his lithograph pointing to social relevance. Modified and retitled, "Homeless 'Bag Lady,'" depicts the huge numbers of unemployed, alienated homeless in the United States. (New York City *admits* to having 40,000 of them.) In the majority of cases, when individuals are unemployed for several months, the stresses that result cause psychoneurotic or psychotic behavior. This "unemployment effect" results whether homeless or not.

*Carl Weiss is the ATC staff artist.

John Russell, *The New York Times*' art critic, revels in the irresponsibility of the art world industry:

... there is an undeniable rightness in the image that greets us at the Tate Gallery in London, where an exhibition called "New Art" opened the other day and can be seen through Oct. 23.

... Among the English artists who were new to me, Rose Garrard made a particular impact with three paintings in which the sculptured frame suddenly gets the upper hand of the painted image. The painting with its cascading handguns and dreamy standing figure, is a prime example of this.

... Altogether, therefore, new art presents a predominantly playful place in London, and anguish, hatred, poverty, violence, alienation and political strife have been told to go away and come back another day.

Realistically, can we expect private enterprise media to opt for social realism? Except, of course, for an occasional tame house rebel to dutifully send out a mixed message about social realism ■

Continental
Airlines and
3 unions

Sept. 24

Company, filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, dismisses its 12,000 workers, then rehires 4,200 at wages 45 percent below previous levels. Pilots and attendants strike, though some cross picket lines.

Eastern Air Lines
and 3 unions

Sept. 27

Airline, implying it faces bankruptcy and telling employees they are "voting on your job," urges acceptance of a 15 percent wage cut. Union leadership rejects the request, but some employees petition for a vote.

THE NEW YORK TIMES



"The economy's going 'bankrupt'—hot dog!"

CONTINENTAL AIRLINES— ANOTHER **PATGO?**

by The Editors

Aspectre is facing the labor movement, one which threatens to transcend the attacks launched upon it to date. We have become accustomed to the corporations' demands for concessions as the way out of *their* crisis. And equally accustomed to union acquiescence. Up till now however, the corporate demand for concessions was not a complete break with the social contract—that "one-sided class war" as Fraser unashamedly described it. It was "merely" a demand for a revision of the *terms* of the contract. For the companies still preferred to work within the framework of the unions, trying, successfully in most cases, to get the union leaders to persuade or frighten the ranks into submission.

But the Continental Airlines "bankruptcy" strategy represents an escalation to a new level, a real break with the unions. Normally, under bankruptcy-11 proceedings, a moratorium is placed on a company's debts, and it continues to function. Continental has however expanded this right to defer its debt obliga-

tions to include union contracts! Under this legal cover it fired two-thirds of the staff and cut the salaries of the rest in half. Clearly a disaster faces the unions if, in the first place, Continental gets away with it. And if, secondly, the unions do not probe deeper into the causes of the crisis and come up with pro-labor solutions.

THE ATTACK CAN BE BEATEN BACK, and must be if the destruction of PATCO is not to be generalized. Success will require a mix of old and new strategies. FOR ONE, implement an old unused weapon in labor's armory—a single negotiations committee of all the unions. Incredible as it may seem, this does not yet exist at Continental. Doing so would also lay the groundwork for a single industrial union so badly needed in the industry. In the absence of such a structure, the possibility of separate deals with each union (at the expense of one another) will remain.

Secondly, the AFL-CIO must take a lesson from the Australian unions. *That* labor movement has, in an act of solidarity with the Continental unions, refused to service Continental flights. Something American unions have yet to do. Implementing this here may necessitate closing down the airports. But above all Continental must not be allowed to use them. (Had PATCO not been *allowed* to be destroyed, it would be a powerful element in such a strategy.)

Third, the AFL-CIO must use its shop floor muscle to demand an immediate emergency session of Congress to pass legislation outlawing the new use of bankruptcy laws. And not just to prevent breaking union contracts, but, as in the case of the Mansville corporation (maker of toxic gypsum), to prevent use of the bankruptcy act to get out from under consumer suits.

IT HAS BEEN DONE. Here in the U.S. In 1970, the post office workers went on a national strike (against the orders of the union leaderships). Nixon sent in troops to break the strike. But at the same time he was

compelled by the strike to push through emergency legislation, within days, which granted the strikers' demands. It is *that* precedent which must be generalized and enforced today.

Support of these demands in deeds must be enforced upon all labor's "friends" in Congress. Delay until after the elections will be fatal. It is regrettable that even the IAM, which is directly involved this time, is silent about any winning strategy.

BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE. The unions' response to date has been two fold. First, they are in court, charging improper use of the bankruptcy act. Can they really expect the court, especially the Nixon-Reagan Supreme Court to rule in their favor?

Secondly, the unions are blaming deregulation and calling for its reversal. But even if deregulation were feasible, is it desirable? Is it in the interest of Labor? A regulated, i.e., government protected quasi-monopoly, can lead to high-wage jobs for *some* workers. But it is just another variant of protectionism, whose real costs (higher plane and bus fares) are borne by other workers. (Greyhound is trying to bust its unions on the ground that deregulation lowered air rates to the point that bus fares cannot compete.) Is deregulation the solution for America's working people?

What is needed is to put the crisis of the Airline industry in the context of the overall crisis of the U.S. economy. What is needed is a working class, not a corporated-profit-oriented program for restoring the economic health of the U.S. economy. The AFL-CIO has refused to address this question as well ■

...AND THE GREYHOUND STRIKE

The disastrous retreat of the labor movement continues with the defeat of the Greyhound strike. The greyhound workers took a 14% wage cut and accepted other givebacks. As was demonstrated by the successful resistance of auto workers in the recent Chrysler strike and by teamsters in their recent rejection of further contract concessions, this retreat is far from necessary or inevitable. But, once again, as in the PATCO strike, the greyhound ranks fought, while an isolated and frightened union leadership capitulated with the tacit connivance of the entire labor movement.

What could have been done to win? In view of the climate of concessions and the dispersal of 12,000 Greyhound strikers throughout the country, the union could have won the strike only by securing the massive, active support of the rest of the union movement. Only if the labor movement demonstrated to the world, and to itself that another capitulation would not be tolerated, could it have defeated Greyhound President John Teets and his giant conglomerate. The only way to accomplish this was to organize the most wide ranging solidarity.

First and foremost, the union had to stop the buses. This would have required mass picketing at all the terminals. Since the union membership was so dispersed, the AFL-CIO would have had to provide much of the muscle to make such picketing effective. But had the AFL-CIO carried out this policy, it would surely have been slapped with court injunctions. What then? The unions would have had to ignore them. That was a precondition for victory.

In fact, the AFL-CIO leaders were so resigned to defeat that they would not go beyond the most perfunctory acts of solidarity. With one or two exceptions, they "could not" arrange mass marches or rallies; they "could not" organize a secondary boycott around the production facilities of the Greyhound conglomerate's non-bus operations; they "could not" force the politicians to close the terminals on the ground that the operation of the buses was unsafe. Even worse, one union, the UAW, actually helped break the strike. The UAW has organized the non-driving employees of Greyhound at some terminals. These employees were not told to respect the picket line. Instead, despite a growing awareness among the leaders of labor that a defeat at Greyhound, like the PATCO defeat, would be disastrous *even for them*, they were not able to respond with more than gestures and rhetoric. Like their peers in Britain—who recently sold out the printing workers strike—the AFL-CIO leaders shuddered at the very thought of confrontation and backed off without a fight, leaving the union to be defeated.

If there is anything to be learned from this debacle, surely it is that the labor leaders will not mobilize their ranks for a fightback, even though *they too* are hurt by the employer's onslaught. The belief that the official leadership (or its left wing), would necessarily fight back has been the central illusion of many socialists who function in the labor movement, especially among the staffers. It has been the view of these leftists that the officials "have no choice" but to organize resistance, for, if they do not, they will see their dues-base eroded. However, this argument is faulty, because it fails to take into account what the officials would actually have to do in order to stand up to the employers, the risks they would have to take, and the alternatives open to them.

In view of the pressure of profit and the employers' determination to recoup at the expense of the workers, the officials would have to organize titanic struggles to have a chance of succeeding at cases like Greyhound. It would be necessary to take violent and illegal action of all sorts just to begin to carry through effective strike action against scabs. Moreover, since *individual* workplaces and unions have great difficulty winning on their own, the officials would generally have to create the broadest solidarity; they would have to involve other unions; they would have to organize the unorganized; they would have to mobilize the unemployed.

Of course, confrontations are risky. But they have always been the price of victory. All these tactics and more, such as sit-down strikes, occupations, etc., were

necessary and were carried out in the 1930's just to win union recognition. But it should be noted that even in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the labor officialdom stood by and watched passively as their entire organizational *and dues base* was cut out from under them, as the employers implemented their union-busting American Plan. That is why, it *also* took a *new movement*, whose leadership was recruited almost entirely from outside the ranks of established officialdom to reverse this process of erosion and to organize the CIO through general strikes, sit-downs and all sorts of illegal and unofficial actions.

Things are no different today. The officials will continue as they have to accept what they hope will be limited losses in the hope that prosperity will be restored and they can resume their old deal with the capitalists.

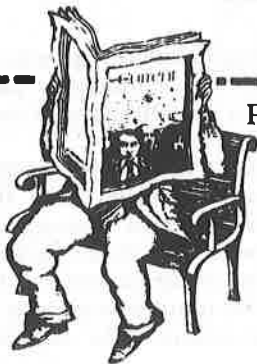
It can be argued of course that, when the ranks begin to resist and demonstrate their determination to act, *despite the leadership*, at least some of the current official leaders will respond—i.e., will "follow" the ranks. That may well be the case (though who needs such leaders). But even if it is the case, it ought to be clear to all of us on the left that in order to *initiate* resistance our focus must be on the organization of the ranks *independent of their leaders*. The new and difficult strategy required to win must be worked out and implemented through the rank and file. There is no other way■

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SOCIALISM & THE HOUSING MOVEMENT: LESSONS FROM BOSTON

by Kathy McAfee*



During the past decade the failure of capitalism in the U.S. to provide adequate housing for its own *working class* population has become increasingly obvious. One result has been a rising level of tenant and community activism. But many housing organizers, including socialists, have not understood the root causes of the housing crisis or have chosen, for ideological or tactical reasons, not to act on the basis of that understanding. We have approached the housing crisis as if it were a series of vaguely connected "housing issues," rather than as a fundamental aspect of the system's failure.

Meanwhile the crisis is deepening. Low-income people in the cities are forced to double-up or move away as a result of rent increases, abandonment, or arson. And not only low-income people are affected; in cities and

*Kathy McAfee is an activist in the housing movement in Boston, and the City Life Collective.

suburbs alike, the price of keeping a roof over one's head for many includes burdensome rent or mortgage payments, insecurity, neighborhood instability, and lowered expectations.

City officials point to showcase "revitalized" neighborhoods in an effort to distract attention from the spreading acres of weed-filled lots and boarded-up buildings. Closer inspection reveals that these pockets of prosperity have been carved out at the expense of the former residents and through the input of amounts of money and labor far beyond the means of the majority of city-dwellers.

These things are not temporary distortions, but are the inevitable outcome of capitalist logic applied to the housing market within the context of the broader crisis of capitalism. Because working people and unemployed have suffered declining real incomes—and thus decreased ability to pay for housing, housing investors find that it does not pay to build housing for them or

rent housing to them. Especially when the profits to be made from speculation, condominium conversion, arson for profit are so much more attractive.

Thus the roots of the housing crisis go deeper than Reaganism or recession. It will not disappear as a result of a change in the federal administration or an "upturn" in the economy. That is why we in City Life, a socialist organization with 10 years of experience in housing organizing in Boston, are convinced that we have to help point the way toward an alternative to the outmoded and destructive system of housing for profit: a socialist solution to the crisis that is concrete, credible, and worth fighting for.

The Housing Movement Today

Most housing activists in Boston and other cities have not begun to think in these terms (see below). They have been defensive in their tactics and self-conception. The demands and programs that have been put forward by housing organizers have usually been limited to measures to tax or restrict private investment in housing and commercial development rather than to replace it.

The kinds of solutions most commonly proposed fall into two main categories. Tenants are urged to lobby and vote for rent and eviction controls, regulation of condominium conversions, and other "renters' rights" measures. The versions of rent and condo controls usually called for would regulate the housing market to some extent. But at the same time, they are designed to protect the profitability of rental housing and avoid provoking disinvestment. Consequently, they are so moderate and limited in scope that they would benefit only a minority of tenants, mainly those with middle and high incomes. This kind of rent control, if it could be won in cities like Boston, would leave most working class tenants—the great majority of renters—still paying far more than they can afford for housing, and in the context of continuing disinvestment and abandonment.

The other kind of housing reform most often proposed involves various kinds of government subsidies, including expansion of Section 8-type rent subsidy programs and mortgage subsidies to promote home and condo ownership by low and moderate-income people. What programs of this nature boil down to is a form of welfare for landlords, developers, and bankers. They shore up the real estate industry and exacerbate inflation in the housing market. While the occupants of subsidized units may benefit, those benefits are paid for mainly by working class taxpayers, and the net effect is the redistribution of income upwards.

In short, while many people propose tinkering with the capitalist housing system, almost nobody has proposed a realistic way to begin to replace it. The slogan, "Housing for People, Not for Profit," seen on signs and banners at so many tenant rallies, remains undefined or even contradicted by the specific proposals supported by folks waving the banners.

Liberal Dilemmas

There are several reasons for this. First, many housing activists are not aware, or do not agree, that the commodity nature of housing is at the root of the current crisis. Imbued with capitalist assumptions and values, they cannot or do not want to imagine a real alternative. Others, including many socialists, are

committed to the goal of building a broad alliance of tenants of all classes, and believe it would be a strategic error to try to build mass support for an explicitly anti-capitalist program.

There are also many activists who remain within capitalist boundaries in their analysis and program simply because they feel it is unrealistic to try to push beyond these limits in the present political climate. If we cannot even win rent control, they reason, how can we win anti-capitalist housing reforms? They see the weakness of the tenants movements, the fading of liberalism, and the assertiveness of the ideological right, and conclude that only very mild reforms, directed at the worst "abuses" of the system but not challenging it, have a chance of being won.

In our view, this line of reasoning is self-defeating because it limits its sights to programmatic proposals so obviously inadequate that they scarcely seem worth fighting for. This approach is also short-sighted in that it fails to recognize the rate at which the current system is deteriorating, the growing sense of desperation among working class city residents, and their increasing openness to more radical alternatives, including socialist ones.

An Alternative

What we need to include in our program is the notion of "socialization of housing." Socialization can take more than one form, as will be shown below. The essential thing is that socialized housing cannot be bought and sold as a commodity on the private market. Its use-value as shelter, and not criteria of profitability, should determine how housing is built, maintained and distributed. This kind of program could provide the inspiration and sense of direction that most of the movements around housing currently lack. As conditions worsen, it will sound increasingly like plain common sense.

Of course, calling for socialized housing and achieving it are two very different things. The formulation of a strong socialist program will not eliminate the need to organize and fight our battles one by one. We will still need to win limited reforms at first, and in the process, build the working class organization, consciousness, and power that will be necessary to achieve more fundamental change.

But there is a crucial difference between organizing for reforms—such as rent subsidies—that reinforce the profit system, and those which are steps in the direction of getting profit out of housing: for example, public takeover and rehabilitation of tax-delinquent or substandard apartment buildings. Equally crucial is the difference between fighting for step-by-step victories as if these were ends in themselves, and fighting for the same reforms as part of a broader socialist program. For instance, if rent control were presented as *part* of an over-all plan to eliminate housing speculation and reverse the trend toward the destruction of urban neighborhoods, we could be much more effective in mobilizing support for rent control.

Lessons from Experience

City Life's position has evolved gradually as we have tried to analyze the successes and failures of 10 years of hard-fought battles over rent control, arson, and dis-

Against the Current

placement in Boston and the neighboring cities of Cambridge and Somerville.

But before summing up the successes and failures of the movements here, we need to understand the context in which these struggles have unfolded: the physical and economic transformation of Boston, in the planning stages since the post-WWII years, and begun in earnest in the mid-60s.

The Context

Over the past 15 years, Boston's housing market has been transformed in the wake of major public and private investment in so-called "revitalization": urban renewal, downtown redevelopment, and planned displacement and gentrification. The late 1960s saw the destruction of older factory and warehouse areas near the central city, and the demolition of entire working class neighborhoods to make way for luxury high-rise housing, government and commercial office towers, the expansion of elite medical and educational institutions, and the development of fancy shopping and entertainment districts. This redevelopment was seen by the ruling class of the city as central to the economic modernization of the region, including the replacement of many of the manufacturing industries with high-technology research and development, service industries (medicine, education, finance, insurance, real estate, and tourism), and the government infrastructure to support all of the above.

This transformation was accompanied by a restructuring of the labor market. Blue collar jobs at the middle and upper end of the working class pay scale were lost. These were replaced by a nearly equivalent number of mostly poorly-paid, non-unionized jobs in the service sector, plus a significant number of technical, professional, and managerial positions.

This change in the composition of the employed work force had an impact on the housing market: there were a lot more households in the city whose incomes were fixed or falling and who could not afford to pay increased housing costs. At the same time, there was a growing sector who could afford to pay more. The location of their jobs in the "new" downtown gave them added incentive to move to or remain living in the central city. It was this widening gap between these two sectors of the population—not some sudden change in the psyches of suburbanites—that was the basis of the "back to the city" movement and the displacement of the urban poor in downtown neighborhoods by the "gentry."

Of course, this gentrification was not the result of market forces alone. The trend was actively promoted by city government policies: the channeling of federal grants and subsidies into "upscale" areas, tax breaks and giveaways of public land and buildings to commercial and condominium developers, blockage by the city of low and moderate-income housing development by community-based groups, and the undermining of rent control.

In line with these priorities, City Hall has services to low income and especially minority neighborhoods. Schools have been closed and bus routes, health centers and other services withdrawn from communities where housing has deteriorated as a result of lower resident incomes, disinvestment by landlords, and redlining by mortgage lenders. Sufficient funds do not ex-

ist, the city claims, to keep street lights and traffic signals working or to board up vacant buildings in these neighborhoods. Meanwhile, over in gentryville, public funds are poured into plush amenities like gas lights and brick sidewalks.

For years, arson for profit has been tolerated by city officials and has taken place on a frightening scale in both kinds of neighborhoods. In disinvested areas, arson enables property owners to bail out by "selling to the insurance company." It also reduces the numbers of residents from population groups considered political and financial liabilities by the city government, and it clears land for future, profitable redevelopment. In areas that are undergoing gentrification, arson enables property owners to clear their buildings of tenants, especially those still covered by rent control, whose very presence reduces the market value of their buildings. (Small fires are a quicker and more reliable method of eviction than court procedures.)

As a result of all this, the "New Boston," with its gleaming skyscrapers, brownstone condos, and food boutiques, has its dark counterpart in the new "urban prairies": extensive burned-out blocks dotted by a few rotting buildings. Between these two extremes are the ailing but still alive residential neighborhoods, mostly on the outer edges of the city, where working class tenants and homeowners struggle to heat and maintain their houses while footing much of the bill for the city budget through their property taxes.

The Resistance

Boston residents have not accepted all this passively; they have fought back and resisted displacement, deterioration, and rising housing costs in many ways. Probably the most important, and certainly the most publicized aspect of this resistance has been the long battle in which rent control was won and then lost again.

During the period of 1970 to 1972, a coalition of Eastern Massachusetts tenants groups won passage of statewide rent control enabling legislation and the adoption of rent control in Brookline, Cambridge, Lynn, Boston, and Somerville. In Boston, the program covered all existing apartments except those in owner-occupied buildings with three units or less. It allowed landlords a "fair" profit based on the net income generated by the building in a standard base year prior to rent control, and established a limited number of "just causes" for which tenants could be legally evicted.

This version of rent control was in effect through 1975. The extent to which it kept rents down in Boston is debatable. Many landlords never registered their property with the Rent Control Board, and many gave rent increases without going through the required hearing process. Landlords able to hire lawyers and accountants usually had little difficulty getting the Rent Board to approve increases that brought their rents up to the level that the market at the time would bear. A gaping loophole in the regulations permitting de-control of "rehabilitated" apartments allowed enterprising landlords to de-control and empty entire buildings and even entire blocks.

There is little disagreement, however, that even this weak form of rent control was a valuable weapon wherever *organized* tenants waged rent strikes or struggles for better conditions. Rent control protections and the

Rent Board hearing process gave tenants a greater sense of their own legitimacy and security in fighting back, without which many tenant organizing efforts would not have gotten off the ground. Many of these campaigns had significant results: evictions and rent increases were stopped and landlords were forced to make major repairs and even sign collective bargaining agreements with their tenants.

But the landlords against whom these victories were won were mainly representative of the old breed, who held on to their property for many years and made their profits mainly from rents. By the 1970s, many of these landlords were being replaced by another type for whom rental property ownership was primarily a tax shelter and/or a short-term, speculative investment. For them, income from rents was a minor consideration. They would rather switch—to condos—than fight.

By 1975, these modern landlords and their partners in banking and construction were able to dominate the political struggle over housing in the city and to pull the underpinnings out from rent and eviction controls. In 1975, Mayor Kevin White won his third term after a campaign in which he stressed his support for rent control. But almost immediately after his reelection, with a symphony of anti-rent control propaganda by the real estate industry in the background, White instituted a program of vacancy decontrol which allows rent control to be permanently lifted from apartments after the tenants have moved. This was simply the most politically expedient means of dividing tenants and killing rent control.

By this time the tide of speculation was already on the rise, and the demise of rent control opened the floodgates. Between 1976 and 1982, about 80% of the covered apartments were de-controlled. In areas undergoing gentrification, such as Jamaican Plain, rent increases of 300% to 500% over a few years time became common.

The Boston tenants movement, in the form of a city-wide coalition of neighborhood-based groups, fought the adoption of vacancy decontrol in 1975, and organized, in subsequent years, to resist the complete elimination of remaining rent control regulations. The tactics used have mainly been lobbying city councillors, petitions, press conferences, and testimony at public hearings. But the movement's impact was not great enough to prevent the re-election of overwhelmingly anti-rent control city councils in 1979 and 1981.

Rent control is not the only goal for which Boston residents have organized in their struggle against displacement. Tenant unions have been formed to fight bad conditions, condo conversions, and rent increases, with tactics ranging from legal suits and harassment of landlords through rent strikes, both legal and extra-legal. Neighborhood groups and city-wide coalitions have mounted campaigns and suits against the use of public resources (city funds, land, buildings, and federal grants) to promote luxury and commercial redevelopment. Community groups and individuals have attempted to save abandoned houses and apartment buildings through sweat-equity rehabilitation (using the residents' own labor). Community development corporations have sought state and federal funds for non-profit housing rehabilitation and development.

Residents of subsidized apartment developments have fought to prevent the federal government from completely abandoning HUD-owned and HUD-regulated multi-family projects. Public housing tenants have organized to resist the scandalous neglect of housing projects by the city. They have resisted the city's attempt to hand over to private developers projects on land now considered too valuable for poor people. Coalitions of working class renters and homeowners and progressive professionals have opposed the expansion of universities and medical institutions into surrounding neighborhoods, and have attempted to reverse disinvestment trends through anti-redlining legislation and the channeling of home mortgage interest subsidies into targeted neighborhoods.

The Results

Where do working class tenants and homeowners stand after the past ten years of struggle in Boston? For starters, a number of the worst slumlords have had their wings clipped or even been put out of business with the aid of rent strikes. Tenant unions in the neighborhoods of Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan—many of them organized with the help of City Life—have scored some impressive successes in stopping rent increases and evictions and preventing abandonment. To do so they have had to overcome barriers of language and race, landlord violence, and the bias of the courts in favor of property rights.

The combativeness and perseverance of these organized tenants point to the potential for a larger and more militant grassroots movement, especially among low-income tenants. Some veterans of these tenant unions have become dedicated and battle-wise activists, joining City Life committees as organizers, for example, and making links between tenant unions in different neighborhoods. But for the most part, tenant efforts have remained isolated from each other and focused on individual landlords.

Meanwhile, the community movements against institutional expansion have managed to hang on to a few footholds for working class housing in neighborhoods like Chinatown and Mission Hill; nevertheless, more units have been lost than have been saved or replaced. Public housing tenants have extracted some concessions but have not been able to reverse the overall trend toward further deterioration. Rent and eviction controls helped temporarily to slow the pace of displacement in some neighborhoods, but the majority of apartments have now been de-controlled and no significant restrictions on condo conversion have been won.

In neighborhoods where disinvestment is the dominant pattern, including most communities with a black or latino majority, conditions have grown steadily worse. A few dozen arsonists, most of them convicted as a result of detective work done by community activists, have served time in prison, but the arson wave continues unabated in low-income areas. The response of City Hall has been, "Knock 'em down before they burn down." City Life and neighborhood organizations have fought this policy—reminiscent of Vietnam, of destroying Boston in order to save it. We have succeeded in holding off the bulldozers in some neighborhoods, but the forces that generate abandonment

and make arson almost inevitable are still at play.

So, while the struggles to save existing working class housing have been impressive, we have still lost more than we have saved. Has more been accomplished by those who have focused on trying to increase the supply of affordable housing through anti-redlining campaigns, home mortgage subsidy programs, support for squatters, and sweat-equity rehabilitation programs? Measured in terms of benefits to low-income tenants and neighborhoods, the results have been as meagre as the gains made through the defensive struggles (though lack of space forbids documentation).

In a few cases, non-profit community development corporations (CDCs) have succeeded in building or rehabbing quality housing projects with low and moderate rents. The largest and best-known is Villa Victoria, a 500-unit development in Boston's South End. But most CDCs have failed to save or create any significant amount of affordable housing.

A number of churches and non-profit community groups developed low and moderate rent apartment complexes in the late '60s and early '70s under HUD 236 and 221d3 programs. Most of these projects were caught in the squeeze between rising costs and inadequate subsidies; many non-profit as well as for-profit owners defaulted on mortgage payments, with ownership of the projects reverting to HUD. In recent years, HUD has been rushing to get these projects back on the private market, offering them to investors on a silver, tax-sheltered platter. New owners of projects in "upscale" neighborhoods are being given the green light to raise rents and evict those who can't pay the increased. In projects where rents have been kept low by Section 8 rent subsidies from the pre-Reagan era, HUD allows landlords to minimize maintenance in order to keep profits up.

More recent attempts at non-profit housing development have been defeated by the pro-market, pro-gentrification orientation of the city, state, and federal government. Most would-be development groups have found that current HUD subsidy guidelines would at best enable them to produce a token number of low-cost units in predominantly market-rate or "moderate income" projects, with "moderate" defined in the \$30,000-\$40,000 income range.

What of the efforts to increase the housing supply in inner-city areas by channeling private investment in the form of home mortgage loans into targeted neighborhoods? In a few cases families who would not otherwise have been able to afford a house have received loans, but the *net effect* of these programs seems to have been an increase in the pace of housing price increases and a stimulus to gentrification.

Other groups have been sweat-equity rehabilitation as the key to getting inner-city housing into the hands of low and moderate income residents. But here again, those able to take advantage of this approach have been those who have started out with considerable resources. Most sweat-equity efforts *by people truly in need of housing*, whether in legal or extra-legal (squatting) situations have ended in failure; residents' incomes are simply too low to cover the costs of needed maintenance and repairs.

Although the material gains have been small, tenant union organizing, rent strikes, and rent control and

anti-condo agitation have helped to make housing one of the most hotly-contested issues in the city. As conversations in beauty parlors or barrooms quickly reveal, working class Bostonians remain upset and angry about the high cost and shortage of housing and particularly about the deterioration of neighborhoods.

Protests over rent increases, condo conversions, school closings, lack of garbage collection, threats to HUD-subsidized developments and to public housing projects, arson, and city auctions of property to profiteers continue to flare up like brushfires all over the city, and especially in Black and racially-mixed working class neighborhoods. In addition to this activism, there also exists substantial support for rent control, as a non-binding referendum recently demonstrated.

Weakness of Tenants' Movement

In spite of this apparent potential for growth, the tenants' movement in Boston today is weak and organizationally fragmented.

The failure of the tenants' movement in Boston cannot be measured solely or even primarily by its inability to stop displacement and the gentrification of the central city. After all, cities in nearly all the advanced capitalist countries are being reshaped in similar ways, and the movements against displacement in Paris and London have not had much more success than we have. There are also factors particular to Boston that may make it especially hard to build a strong city-wide movement here: the virtual ownership of city hall by real estate interests, the absence of strong labor and Black organizations, and the depth of racism in the city.

But of all the barriers that stand in the way of success for the tenants' movement in Boston (and not just in Boston alone), the greatest is the changing economics of urban real estate and the growing gap between the profit levels required by housing investors and the ability of tenants to pay rents necessary to provide those profits. It is the failure of the tenants' movement to come to grips with this reality that is at the root of its weakness.

Many housing activists are aware, of course, that it is harder to win material gains under today's conditions. But for the most part, their response to this realization has been one of strategic retreat, a decision—perhaps not always a conscious decision—to narrow the focus of their efforts and limit their goals to moderate, short-range proposals in the hope of at least cutting the movement's losses.

Toward a New Direction

For these reasons, we in City Life believe that only a bolder, more radical approach can carry us forward. The economic changes that have brought about a total sellers' market in housing and accelerated the destruction of housing and neighborhoods have drastically reduced the room for gains that might be achieved through regulation of the private market. The basis for "tenant power" as it existed in the late 60s and early 70s has been eroded. But these same changes have created the conditions—and the necessity—for a movement to save working class communities and housing by substituting public for private investment and collective for capitalist control.

To develop this alternative, much new ground must be broken on both a theoretical and practical level. By analyzing the arguments and tactics used by reformist tenant organizations in recent years, we can get a clearer picture of the implications of this approach and the assumptions on which it is based, and we can sketch the outlines of a more promising alternative.

(1) *In arguing for rent and condominium controls, reformist tenant leaders have failed to challenge the assumption that solutions to the housing crisis can and must be found within the boundaries of the housing for profit system. It is precisely this premise that needs to be refuted.*

During every round of the rent control battle in Boston and elsewhere in Massachusetts over the past 12 years, the PR men for the Rental Housing Association have told the same sad tale. "If rent and condo controls are adopted," they say, "We can't survive. Investment in Boston's housing will decline. Buildings will have to be abandoned."

In other words: "If you try to restrict our profits to the 8-10% level, we'll take our money and put it into something that will yield us 15-20%, like condominiums on Cape Code, tax-exempt bonds, or a silicon chip factory in Singapore," which is the kind of thing any rational capitalist would do.

When the liberal tenant organizations have gotten their turn in the ring, far too often their response has been to apologize for rent control.

"You've got it wrong," they say. "Rent control won't cause disinvestment, or at least the kind of rent control we're proposing won't. You can't *prove* rent control is the cause of abandonment. Anyway, we don't want to eliminate the 'fair' profits, only the 'exorbitant' ones. We've got nothing against the good, responsible landlords. It's those greedy, law-breaking types we want to get rid of."

In doing so, the tenants have conceded the most important points in the landlords' argument. They have accepted the notion that those who own the shelter of others have a right to profit from it. They have agreed that those profits must be protected, to some degree at least, so that landlords and bankers will continue to invest in housing. They have reinforced the assumption that holds up these arguments: that private investment is the only way housing can be developed, owned and maintained.

Once these premises have been established, the rest of the real estate industry's position flows logically from them. The landlords come across sounding hard-boiled but realistic, while the tenants' movement is left with little more than a moral plea against throwing old folks and children out on the street.

The irony is that the real estate industry argument could be demolished more easily if the tenants' movement were not afraid to challenge it head-on by refuting the claim that increased private investment is good for everyone. We need only look around us to see the

CITY LIFE HOUSING PLATFORM FOR BOSTON

Affordable housing in Boston is disappearing fast. Long-term residents are being displaced. Working class and minority communities are being uprooted. Badly-needed housing is being abandoned, torn down, or burned down. To address this immediate crisis, City Life calls for the following:

TO STOP DISPLACEMENT CAUSED BY RENT INCREASES AND CONDOMINIUM CONVERSIONS:

- 1) A stiff tax on profits made by speculation. This will discourage real estate "investors" from buying buildings cheap and reselling them at high prices with little or no improvements.
- 2) A ban on condominiums. Resident-owned housing cooperatives should be allowed, but must be regulated to prevent individual apartments from being re-sold at speculative prices.
- 3) Permanent, strong rent control, including:
 - coverage of all rental units.
 - a Rent Control Board composed of elected representatives of tenants, homeowners, and absentee landlords according to the proportion of the Boston population that each group makes up. Since two-thirds of city residents are tenants, two-thirds of the Board members would be tenants.
 - adequate funding and powers to guarantee enforcement of rent control rules.

TO PROTECT TENANTS ORGANIZING FOR BETTER CONDITIONS:

- 4) Recognition of the rights of tenants to form unions, to go on rent strike when landlords violate the law... and to win collective bargaining agreements with property owners.
- 5) Strict enforcement of the state Sanitary (housing) Code, especially in absentee-owned buildings.
- 6) Eviction controls to prevent landlords from evicting tenants in order to get higher rents or to stop tenants from defending their rights.

TO PROTECT WORKING CLASS HOMEOWNERS:

- 7) Grants and low-interest loans for weatherization and repairs to low and moderate-income homeowners.
- 8) An alternative to foreclosure for homeowners who can't make their mortgage payments. Instead of losing their homes, they should have the option of turning over title to their house to the Community Housing and Land Trust (see point 15). They would lose the right to sell their house, but could remain living in it for as long as they chose.

TO SAVE PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT-SUBSIDIZED HOUSING:

- 9) Upgrading of all public housing projects. No demolitions and no transfers of public housing projects to private developers or institutions.
- 10) No more sales of HUD-owned projects to profit-making landlords. Immediate foreclosure of government-subsidized projects whose owners fail to repay loans or to provide good maintenance and security at affordable rents.

TO END HOUSING DISCRIMINATION:

- 11) Adoption and enforcement of strong laws against discrimination by landlords and housing authorities on the basis of race, sex, sexual preference, number of children, or physical disability.

(CITY LIFE HOUSING PLATFORM continued)

TO SAVE HOUSING FROM ARSON, ABANDONMENT, AND DESTRUCTION BY SLUMLORDS:

- 12) No payment of fire insurance to absentee landlords except for the purpose of repairing fire-damaged buildings for the tenants who were there before the fire or for providing damages and comparable housing at the same or lower rents to tenants forced to move by fire.
- 13) No more auctions or sales of city-owned property to profit-making landlords or developers. Instead, this property should be transferred to the Community Housing and Land Trust (see point 15).
- 14) Takeover of the property of absentee landlords who repeatedly violate the law in any of the following ways:
 - committing arson
 - failing to make repairs
 - failing to provide heat and other services
 - failing to pay property taxes
 - failing to abide by rent control and eviction regulations

These buildings should then be transferred to the Community Housing and Land Trust.

TO REDEVELOP RUN-DOWN HOUSING AND VACANT BUILDINGS AND LAND TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS:

- 15) Establishment of a Community Housing and Land Trust for Boston with local Neighborhood Boards elected by the residents of each community. The CHLT Boards would have the power and the funds to:
 - transfer vacant houses to low and moderate-income owner occupants, along with full back tax abatements, low-interest loans, and technical re-hab assistance. In exchange, the new owners must agree to remain living in their houses, or if they move, to re-sell the house to the CHLT for a price that allows them to recover their cost but not make a profit.
 - transfer vacant or foreclosed buildings and land to tenant cooperatives or non-profit community development corporations, with safeguards to prevent any future re-sale for profit.
 - re-hab and operate buildings as community and tenant-controlled quality public housing.
- 16) Funds for protecting, repairing, and building affordable housing should be obtained by the following means:
 - replacement of taxes on residential property with a steeply graduated state income tax. Pending this, a tax should be collected on incomes over \$35,000 made in the city of Boston.
 - collection of the \$140 million in back property taxes owed to the city, with priority on collection from commercial property owners and absentee landlords.
 - elimination of property tax breaks now given by the city to profit-making corporations, universities, and hospitals.
 - federal funds to the city of Boston, which are now being used to promote development of luxury hotels, shopping areas, and other profit-making projects, should instead be spent to improve housing and neighborhoods for working class residents.

(continued on page 50)

BLACK MAYORS:

A Case Study

by Steve Zeluck

The phenomenon of Black mayors in large American cities, North and South, is no longer new. Indeed, it appears increasingly to approach some sort of political norm: Detroit, Atlanta, New Orleans, Birmingham, Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Newark, Los Angeles, Gary. At least some of these mayors have come to "power" because they expressed the desperate determination of Blacks to win equality and democratic rights. At the same time, these mayors have another thing in common. They come into office in cities most of which are in varying degrees of decline or crisis. Thoroughgoing studies of the actual impact of these new mayors have been few. But at least we have a detailed study of one case, that of Mayor Richard Hatcher, in Gary—a man who has been in office of 14 years, long enough to permit a useful review.*

The author, Ed Greer, is well credentialed for the job. An economist, long-time socialist activist, and for five years a top assistant to Hatcher. In making this study, Greer illuminates not just the Hatcher experience, but the problems facing most of the Black mayors, and their prospects for success. In passing, we also get a powerful reminder of the difference between *holding office* and having power.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Greer presents us first with a detailed, documented study of Hatcher policies (and their outcomes) in the spheres of tax policy, housing, the police and ecology. A few examples from each area must suffice.

TAXES: Central to any solution to the problems of Gary was increased revenue. In turn, the key to that was increasing the taxes on the huge U.S. Steel Gary Works. U.S. Steel pays \$29 million in city taxes, some 2/5 of the total city revenue of \$72 million. This fact was the core of Hatcher's campaign promises on fiscal matters.

On the face of it, the problem was simple. U.S. Steel has from its inception determined its own taxes, because the corporation alone determined the assessed value of the property. Of course, this was illegal. The city has the right to examine the books and property and thus determine the value. But . . . Similarly, the corporation is supposed to pay a tax of .5% on all new construction. That too is evaded in the same way. Despite the urging of Greer and others, Hatcher refused to enforce the law and is still trying to negotiate an "arrangement" with U.S. Steel (1979). According to Greer, Hatcher exhibits a continuous "unwillingness to engage in an all-out struggle against U.S. Steel." As a result, the city has been losing some \$30 million every year since Hatcher took office in 1967.

HOUSING: A main plank in Hatcher's campaign was, naturally, amelioration of the desperate housing situation in Gary. But after 15 years, Gary has lost 2,400 housing units. The sole weapon Hatcher has relied on has been Urban Renewal. He pursued this

course even though it is a well-established fact that such programs invariably result in less housing (because of the destruction which has to take place), particularly for the poor who are displaced in the name of "renewal."

Greer and others fought for amelioration of the housing situation through enforcement of the housing inspection codes and through use of laws permitting the city to compel landlords to repair inadequate housing. They failed (according to Greer) for two reasons. First, "because where the landlord is intransigent, it was essentially impossible to compel change despite what seemed like very favorable legislation." (2) Because "the mayor was reluctant to initiate a bitter confrontation with Gary's property-owning stratum, particularly in the absence of serious organized mass pressure for such action from the black community." Greer does not tell us that Hatcher discouraged such mobilization nor does Greer himself at any point in the book advocate it. "In short despite a radically different rhetoric, the actual performance of the Hatcher administration in housing enforcement was not very different from that under the machine."

POLICE: Greer is of the opinion that police repression and hasseling of Blacks have been significantly reduced under Hatcher. But Greer himself is careful to warn us not to "overestimate" both the fact and its significance. For in fact, we are told, crime, murder, theft, etc., which we all know are directed mostly against the Black community, have increased steadily at a rate little different from that in the other country ghettos. So things are worse though in Greer's opinion perhaps not as much worse as they might have been, absent Hatcher. The majority of the police in Gary are now Black. "Yet it is foolish to deny the continuation of a fundamentally repressive role of urban police."

Hatcher himself impeded real progress in police treatment of Blacks by his continued reliance on courts and commissions. He dropped his call for a Civilian Review Board. And during the ghetto riot of 1968, Hatcher did not hesitate to bring in the state police. In general, he took "the same steps that any white mayor would have taken. . . ."

ECOLOGY: In this area Hatcher simply continued the method and strategies applied in other areas. Despite his promises of new policies to bring clean air and water, he refused to confront the chief culprit, the US

*Big Steel, Black Politics & Corporate Power in Gary, by Ed Greer, Monthly Review Press.

Steel plant. In fact, the city absorbed \$1 million of the cost of US Steel's minimal response to the *Federal EPA rulings*, not Cary's.

WHY?

This distressing report on Gary is made even heavier by the fact that, like the very election of Black mayors, what happened in Gary after the election has *also* become a norm in many respects. Having come into office in the midst of the urban crisis, most of them have, like their white counterparts, followed a policy of welfare and service cuts (of which Blacks were of course the greatest victims). These cuts were in turn accompanied by the usually successful breaking of strikes of city employee unions. And, in the name of "realism," the new mayors have sought to make deals with the corporate establishments. In short, *in many respects*, they have behaved much like their white predecessors.

The questions naturally arise, Why, and What does this signify? Greer does of course point to the fact that the urban crisis is not solvable in isolation from a national policy of full employment and control of private capital. In their absence, the difference in life conditions resulting from Hatcher's election have, not surprisingly, been "too small to be noticeable."

Regrettably, Greer goes no further. Yet his own devastating critique of the Hatcher administration implicitly raises several issues which demand addressing.

(1) If Hatcher and the other mayors *express* Blacks' demand for equality, they also "*represent*" a new Black middle class elite out to get its share of the pie. For this stratum (administrators, small businessmen, public employees), the Black mayors are a modest success. The fact that this class interest is only a *partial* explanation for the conduct of the new mayors does not detract from its validity. Greer, who was at the center of events in Gary for several years, must be able to throw considerable light on this phenomenon. But he doesn't.

(2) If the urban crisis can only be addressed fundamentally on a national level, then what *can* (should) Black mayors do in these circumstances? More generally, wouldn't *socialist* municipal officials be faced with the same problems and difficulties?

Indeed they would. But with a difference to which Greer, as a socialist, should be more responsive than he is in this book. No socialist would (should) campaign for office in the illusion that his/her election would make the difference. Indeed the central strategy of a socialist (*during* the electoral campaign as well as *after*) would be to insist that the problem can be solved *even partially* only by the *direct organized* involvement of the working people, not just as *voters* (that is the meaning of *electoralism*) but as active participants in making changes. Thus, Hatcher made not even a gesture to organizing or even encouraging tenants unions which would (for a start) refuse to pay rent, and use the money to save the housing unit. Nor did he insist that the city exercise eminent domain to take over and distribute housing which landlords allowed to deteriorate or, provide loans for such renovation by the tenants, etc.

It is this *method*, applicable to other urban ills, which is central for socialists because only this can "work" today. Such experiences educate the working class, encourage it to act in its own name, give it self-

confidence, teach it how to confront the ruling class, in short, link elections to a *socialist working class perspective*. Separated from this method, the "practicality" of electoral politics, of Democratic Party politics, turns out to be utopian as far as the benefits for the vast majority of Blacks is concerned. (The Black middle class undoubtedly did make gains in Gary and elsewhere.) In contrast, socialist working class strategies offer both short run and long run alternatives and gains for the mass of Blacks and other working people. This working class mode of community action parallels the similar essential role of the rank and file organization in the unions.

If one could not expect this understanding from Hatcher, it is disappointing to find that Greer does not mention this alternative strategy to the one that failed in Gary, Atlanta, Detroit, Newark, and . . . Chicago?

(3) It is also regrettable that Greer does not address the other side of the electoralist coin, Hatcher's commitment to the Democratic Party. If the urban crisis can only be tackled on a national scale, is the Democratic Party the instrument to do it? Yet, it was Hatcher, more than any other Black politician (his authority was very great in 1972), who derailed the 1972 National Black Leadership Conference, by his impassioned plea to "give the Democratic Party one more chance."

(4) Lastly, reading this book, it is difficult to ignore the numerous parallels to Harold Washington in Chicago. On the one hand, there is an unquestionable sense in the entire Black community that their democratic rights will be more respected—that Blacks will have, to some extent really have, a better chance at fair treatment. In a very measurable sense, this will *certainly* be true for the Black middle class. At the same time, the sharp bourgeois limits of the Washington administration, limits from which it does not seek to free itself (or does not believe possible to do so), means that Blacks will continue to bear the burden of the social crisis in America and particularly of the *urban* crisis.

Furthermore, it is increasingly likely that Washington will follow the same strategy as Hatcher and the other Black mayors. And indeed, in the short space of six months Washington has: (1) Accepted a policy of austerity on social services and the corresponding job cuts. (2) Invited Rohatyn to be his financial advisor. This is the same Rohatyn who in New York City imposed austerity (30,000 job cuts) and *enforced* the austerity through an appointed committee of bankers, corporation executives and union leaders, who can veto financial outlays and union contracts. Chicago is clearly not ready for this "solution." But the invitation to Rohatyn is ominous. (3) Was "neutral" on the teachers strike. ("They deserve a raise, but there is no money".) Washington did not even use his great moral authority to oppose Jesse Jackson's PUSH urging the union to call off the strike. Washington did nothing to help the teachers. (4) He demobilized the one embryonic grassroots organization which survived the election, and has replaced the old machine by a new one of Blacks and austerity-oriented corporate liberals.

Above all, a strategy which rests for success on the mobilization of the Black (and white) workers remains as alien to Washington as it was to Hatcher. As a result, their initial anti-racist victories have led only to a dead-end ■

THE CHICAGO TEACHERS STRIKE

What we learned while school was out

BY DAN LABOTZ *

The schools were closed for 15 days during the recent strike by workers for the Chicago Board of Education—but that doesn't mean there wasn't any learning going on. The strike was the biggest civics class in recent Chicago history. The 38,000 workers on strike learned some very important lessons—about newspapers, politicians, community organizations, bankers and union bureaucrats, and not least about themselves.

The teachers and other workers who stood together with such splendid unity and militancy on the picket line ended the strike divided, demoralized, and defeated.

The Newspapers

That the newspapers were opposed to the strike can hardly be news. But very significantly the Black daily, the *Chicago Defender*, also attacked the strike by this almost half-black union. Thus the Oct. 4 *Defender* carried in three-inch headlines on its front page, "Mayor's allies see strike plot," and cited "supporters of the mayor" charging that "the city hall faction led by 10th Ward Ald. Edward Vrdolyak instigated the strike to embarrass the city and the mayor."

The story was a complete fabrication without any substantiation. Several figures quoted later denied making the statements attributed to them. It was concocted to sell papers and to divide the community and the strikers along racial lines—an objective it failed to achieve.

Progressives

Various "progressive" black organizations which had been involved in Mayor Harold Washington's campaign filed suit on Oct. 12, asking the U.S. District Court to "reopen the schools and take whatever action is required to staff the classrooms with educational personnel." The groups included Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH, Leon Finney's The Woodlawn Organization (TWO), Lu Palmer's Chicago Black United Communities (CBUC) and others.

The Black organizations argued that they were filing suit for the school children, but in reality they were defending their political relationship with Ruth Love and Mayor Washington. The union was defending the principles of smaller class size and decent working conditions so the teachers could teach, and fighting the fat in the bureaucrats' budget.

In the CTU's strike newspaper, dated October 17, it was reported that "at a meeting held with representatives of the plaintiffs and the CTU officers, staff, and attorneys, President Healey made it clear to them that

the Union does not believe the coalition [of black groups led by PUSH] is not taking sides. He told them that an injunction is a common tool used to break strikes and that the Union views their action as strike-breaking."

The unfortunate thing about the suit brought by the black groups was that most of the members of those organizations are black workers and many of them union members. The loss of the strike would weaken their unions, whether the Postal Workers or the Food and Commercial Workers, the Steelworkers or the Auto Workers. The loss of the teachers' strike could mean larger classes and longer hours for teachers which would hurt the quality of education. The PUSH, CBUC, TWO suit showed that the Black middle class leadership of those organizations, from Jesse Jackson to Leon Finney to Lu Palmer, was willing to sacrifice the interests of the black working class for their own political ambitions.

As a result, perhaps it is not surprising that while these "community organizations" filed their union busting suit, there was certainly no move among rank and file of the Black community in opposition to the teachers union. When the organizations attempted to create such a movement by organizing demonstrations to reopen the schools, they were a total flop.

The Mayor

Harold Washington was elected as a "progressive" with strong backing from the city's unionized workers, among them the Teachers Union and its members. He promised in his campaign to support unions and fight for jobs. When the strike broke out he took a position of nominal neutrality—but that in itself was already to break his promise to the workers who had elected him, for he didn't use the power of his office to help the workers.

If Washington was at all neutral, he was neutral on the side of management. Washington never tried to stop PUSH, TWO and CBUC from enjoining the teachers union in the courts—his moral authority could have stopped the strike-breaking attempts of Jackson, Palmer and Finney. He never tried to cool the race-baiting of the *Chicago Defender*—which he might easily have done. He didn't keep Slim Coleman from coming out against the majority black teachers' union.

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And, finally, Washington didn't stay out of the strike. He called for mediation and binding arbitration at a crucial time. And he loaned his special labor relations advisor, Richard Laner, to Ruth Love.

Laner is known as a shrewd, abrasive, pro-management lawyer who wins when he can without a strike. The settlement worked out in the teachers' defeat has all the earmarks of a Laner deal—delayed implementation of the pay increases, tradeoffs of benefits for wage increases, no coverage for the substitutes, etc. Washington has to take responsibility for Laner and for his role in the defeat of the union.

"Washington was effectively on the other side from the beginning," said George Schmidt, leader of the Substitutes United for Better Schools (SUBS) caucus of the CTU. "He didn't speak out against the attempt by Ruth Love and Operation PUSH to polarize the issue racially, even though he knew it was a pack of lies. Then when he brought in Laner and the issue of mediation he helped the Board and the School Finance Authority. He did those things because he lacked the political courage and perhaps the knowledge to stand up to the bond rating agencies who were threatening him behind the scenes."

A city hall insider, speaking at the Citizens Schools Committee dinner on October 13 while Washington listened, publicly said that the mayor had been told by Wall Street to stay out of the school strike or risk a further lowering of the city's credit rating.

Behind these threats lies the critical situation in which Chicago finds itself—a steady loss in industry and jobs; white flight to the suburbs which reduced revenue; and a relatively high-wage city bureaucracy. A successful teachers strike, a good salary settlement, threatened to overflow into all the other upcoming negotiations exacerbating an already difficult situation. In the face of these financial difficulties, the banks and bond holders could and did threaten the city with rising interest rates and problems about refunding of the debt. This is the situation which Washington inherited and to which he had to respond. Like it or not, he had only two alternatives: submit to the banks and bondholders and impose austerity (as did Mayor Young in Detroit and Koch in N.Y.), or organize a popular movement which will fight for alternative sources of funds, essentially tax the corporations.

Washington chose the first course. In the teachers' situation, Ruth Love played the up-front management role in the strike—and became the hated enemy of the teachers. The very mention of her name at the mass teachers' union meeting on October 21 attended by 9,000 teachers caused uproarious demonstrations against her.

The newspapers played up the conflict between the black School Superintendent Ruth Love and white union President Robert Healey—until CTU Vice-President Jacqueline Vaughn took the role of spokesperson for the teachers' union. But Love has little in common with Chicago's black community besides her color. Her \$120,000 a year salary alone sets her apart from the teachers who start at \$13,000.

The other management spokesperson was Sol Brandzel, former head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in Chicago, a labor bureaucrat who from a

lifetime in the union movement had learned only how to better fight the workers.

But behind Love and Brandzel were the interests of Chicago's major banks and corporations as represented by Jerome Van Gorkam, head of the Chicago School Finance Authority. Van Gorkam, himself the head of a major corporation who moonlights as Reagan's Assistant Secretary of State, had made it clear from the beginning that there would be no significant wage increases for teachers and that the Board had better seek take-aways from the workers.

The Union

The school board employees went into the strike with a coalition of 18 labor unions—27,000 members of the Chicago Teachers Union and 11,000 other workers, among them 4,000 lunch room employees and 3,500 custodial workers, and another couple of thousand building and trades members and Teamsters. It was the first general strike by all board workers.

The strike was tremendously successful on the picketline. Among the 25,000 teachers it was reported that there were only 160 scabs. The other unions also stood firm with no scabbing to speak of. The strike was not lost on the picketline by the rank and file—it was lost by the union bureaucrats in the negotiating rooms.

The real enemy within the Chicago Teachers Union turned out to be the president himself, Robert Healey. Healey, 53 years old, became active in the union in the mid-sixties, when he was a member of a radical caucus within the union. He became financial secretary when his group joined with the union leadership in 1968.

Healey was involved in the 1969 strike, and after becoming president of the union led its strikes in 1973, 1975, and 1980. It seems the main thing Healey has learned from those experiences is how to use radical rhetoric and the appeal to unity to hoodwink his own members.

During the 1980 strike, while Healey harangued against the "bloodsuckers" of the LaSalle Street financial district, he approved the creation by Governor Thompson and Mayor Byrne of the School Finance Authority, a board of corporate leaders under no democratic control which stands above the school board appointed by the Mayor.

During the strike, while Healey continually rallied the troops with a class struggle rhetoric about the workers fighting the bosses and the bankers, he also gave many signals that he intended to settle for pittance. As early as September 30, he said he would accept a 5 percent pay raise. Later, on October 5, he said he was seeking 10 percent—a demand made unbelievable by his earlier, lower figure. But even then he said the "bottom-line" was 5.5 percent! The strikers were told they were fighting for 10 percent, management was told he wanted 5 percent—all of which indicated Healey was prepared to settle for a lot less. And eventually he did—2.9 percent.

"The teachers won the strike, and Healey sold us out at the bargaining table," said George Schmidt of SUBS. "In order to get the contract passed he had to railroad it through with some of the most undemocratic methods in the history of the union."

The executive board, dominated by Healey's people, voted to accept the deal by 60 to 1, the only opponent

(continued on page 48)



WORKERS CONTROL IN NICARAGUA

by Gary Ruchwanger*

THE THREAT OF DECAPITALIZATION

The issue of workers management of industry under a socialist society, or one moving toward it, has long been an important concern for socialists. In what follows, I shall try to describe the actual state of workers self-management or other, lesser degrees of worker control in Nicaragua, and the special circumstances under which such tendencies arose.

In the initial Sandinista program for Nicaragua a heavy focus was placed, and remains, on a mixed economy. But the decision to retain capitalist enterprise conflicted at times with other goals of the revolution and of the mass movement. As a result, tensions arose and sections of the capitalist class began to fear that the Sandinistas aimed at the piecemeal destruction of all capitalist enterprise. What followed for these capitalists were concerted efforts to remove their capital from the country. The chief instrument for attaining this goal was "de-capitalization." This withdrawal in turn generated equally vigorous responses, in large part taken on the initiative of the workers themselves. In doing so, in responding to a *capitalist* initiative, a

potentially new, radical phase of the Nicaraguan revolution may have opened.

As the word indicates decapitalization is a mechanism by which capital is lost. It is the opposite of the accumulation of capital. A business or a country is being decapitalized when, for different reasons, it is losing its capital reserves or foreign exchange. Decapitalization of a business, therefore, means the loss of part of its productive capital, and thus impedes the continuation of production, not to speak of expansion.

"Decapitalization," to put it more forcefully, is like a strike by the bosses, who refuse to invest in their own enterprises.

There are countless ways to decapitalize a business. Some are obvious, while others are more subtle and difficult to prove. Some of the most common forms in which decapitalization has appeared in Nicaragua are:

- (1) Failure to cultivate the land, without justification.

*Gary Ruchwanger has lived in Nicaragua and is currently a governmental employee there. The editors apologize for the absence of the footnotes which were somehow misplaced. Inquiries about sources will be forwarded to the author in Nicaragua.

- (2) Failure to maintain equipment.
- (3) Reduction of the productive capacity of factories, without justification.
- (4) Taking machinery for production from the country.
- (5) Irresponsible reduction of the number of cattle head.
- (6) Failure to reinvest the profits that a business is generating.
- (7) Overpricing items on the invoice whose actual purchase price was much lower and selling products at a higher price than was recorded in the invoice. The difference in dollars remains outside the country in private accounts and the fixed invoices are entered into the banks, making detection difficult.
- (8) Failure to present to the Nicaraguan Central Bank payment received in foreign currency.¹

As the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie began to recognize the hegemony of the FSLN in the political and economic realm, decapitalization began to be felt in late 1979 and early 1980. In the opening months of that year revelations (by popular, mass organizations) of economic sabotage flooded in. The Plásticos Factory was accused of falsification of invoices and tax evasion; the U.S. multinational Sears of concealing capital and firing workers while continuing to secure loans from the National Development Bank; the SOVIPE engineering company of threatening to shut its plant because of an alleged lack of raw materials. Several companies were charged with undercutting their Nicaraguan businesses in favor of operations in other countries: Standard Steel was denounced for stockpiling raw materials in Guatemala and neglecting its Managua plant; the INCA metalworking concern of doing the same in Honduras; Sears of sending out capital and goods to Costa Rica and El Salvador.²

The San Martín slaughter house laid off 188 workers and announced it was closing for at least two months. The owners had already sent checks for more than 100,000 U.S. dollars to Miami and had withdrawn 7 million cordobas (10 cordobas = U.S. \$1) from the company accounts to buy more dollars on the black market. The IGOSA slaughterhouse sacked more than 300 workers after selling off 1500 manzanas (one manzana = 1.73 acres), two jeeps, three minibuses, two cars, and spare parts. The CST reported that 29,000 workers in Managua alone were not receiving the minimum wage levels laid down under the Somocista labor code, even before the Junta's June wage decree which was in turn ignored by hundreds of local employers.³

WORKERS CONTROL: WEAPON AGAINST DECAPITALIZATION

This capitalist sabotage provoked a strong reaction by the workers, the state, and the FSLN. In November 1979 the work force occupied the FANISA pharmaceutical plant. On the Atlantic Coast, 283 workers seized the Bluefields Manufacturing Corporation clothing factory, forcing management to improve working conditions. And in March 135 workers occupied Polymer SA, a local subsidiary of United Brands, to demand the full receipt of promised wage increases and the end of interference in union activity. Each takeover received full approval from the state, and the FSLN lauded the 29%

increase in output achieved by the POLYMER workers.

The most famous of all factory occupations was at the food-processing plant of El Caracol.⁴ In late November 1979 the Campos family, owners of the plant, had signed a contract with the union. After six weeks of management's failure to implement the pact, the workers struck and stopped production, but after intensive debate and self-criticism returned to work the same day. By February they had collected sufficient data to denounce management for economic crimes and connections with the counterrevolution. While most members of the Campos family had fled to Miami, two had remained behind in Managua with the specific task—according to the union at El Caracol—of decapitalizing the plant. On February 19 the workforce voted by a majority of 121 to 10 to occupy the factory. In their presentation to Commandante Carlos Nuñez, invited to a meeting the following day, the workers listed their allegations:

- Management refusal to stock sufficient raw materials, only ordering new stocks when existing ones were exhausted.
- Refusal to maintain machinery.
- Reductions in distribution of El Caracol products. The owners had begun to demand immediate payment on delivery from the *Supermercado del Pueblo* (People's Supermarket) where eight days' grace had previously been granted. Additionally, the owners had failed to maintain and repair company vehicles, automatically cutting distribution.
- Removing "unprofitable" vitamin additives from children's food products.
- A reduction to single-shift working.
- Dismissal of 28 workers.

The union independently initiated new industrial safety measures, management was locked out, and the first day of the work-in succeeded in raising production levels by 20%. A four-member Comisión de Vigilancia was set up and remained in the plant 24 hours a day to prevent physical sabotage. On the 21st the state intervened through the Procuraduría General de Justicia, and using emergency powers sealed off management offices for investigation. "To the FSLN," Black observes, "the messages of El Caracol and the simultaneous occupations of other Managua factories were clear. First, the independent initiatives of the working-class organizations and the policies of the state were converging rapidly. Second, the dividing line between 'patriotic businessmen' and the counter-revolutionary Right was becoming clearer."

Two weeks later, on March 2, 1980, in response to workers demands, Junta member Sergio Ramírez announced the new anti-decapitalization decree. It called for prosecution of anyone "who by action or omission employs deceitful or fraudulent means to remove from the country the fixed or circulating assets of enterprises (that is, the capital of such enterprises)."⁵ Those convicted under the law faced stiff fines and jail terms. Capitalists found guilty of economic sabotage also risked confiscation of their factories by the state.

Significantly, before the law was announced, the FSLN weekly *Poder Sandinista* stated that the workers' own initiatives were "as or more important than the legal measures taken to control the illegal practices of various unpatriotic businessmen."

THE FSLN later appealed for the implementation of "workers control . . . so as to prevent a halt in production or the destruction of enterprises by their owners or other reactionary forces . . ." ⁶ Indeed, every factory occupation has been used by the FSLN as a blueprint for workers' control of production as the most effective way of combating counter-revolutionary activity in the private sector. A week after the new anti-decapitalization decree was enacted, *Barricada* devoted a full page to detailed explanations of how decapitalization could be detected, to help other workers to follow the example of El Caracol. The extent of workers participation which this assumed, including access to a company's confidential records, convinced many members of the bourgeoisie that the law undermined traditional private sector prerogatives.

During the first half of 1981 "the class which knows about production" retaliated with a new wave of economic sabotage in the face of which the 1980 law proved to be ineffective. For that decree did not cover some of the most common forms of decapitalization such as distributing profits as dividends before the end of the year or excessive management salaries. Another problem was the extreme difficulty of proving that fixed or circulating assets had been taken out of the country. Yet another difficulty was the length of time it took to prove decapitalization. "Against decapitalization, confiscation," asserted Edgardo García, head of the ATC ⁷ at a news conference. "But timely—not just when there's nothing left but ruins, debts, and bankrupt enterprises."⁸

As a result both the ATC and the CST demanded that the new law include measures enabling labor to play the fundamental role in its implementation. Experiences in 1980–81 demonstrated the workers' ability to pursue investigations, file complaints, and take over production, even with limited resources.

On July 19, 1981, a new law against decapitalization was announced. This law enabled the government to intervene upon a complaint by the workers placing the enterprise under government control while the charges that capital is being removed from the country are investigated. In addition, the workers making the charge are to be protected against reprisals. The new law also adds to the list of practices that will be considered decapitalizing.

FIRST STEPS TOWARD WORKERS' CONTROL

The solution most frequently offered to the problem of decapitalization is workers' control. In the first two years of the revolutionary process "control" was used in the classic sense to denote workers' rights to inspect, or check the decisions initiated by management. Although control clearly implies a limitation to workers' sovereignty, it has evoked considerable annoyance on the part of the bourgeoisie. As Black observes: ". . . the private sector's nightmare is how long it will continue to monopolize knowledge about production, when all around it is the evidence of direct state support for worker control—a mixture of legislation, propaganda and specific structures for popular participation—and the correspondingly rapid increase in workers' consciousness."⁹

What are the specific structures for worker participation? Within the nationalized sector of the economy, the APP, workers are involved in plant administration through the participation of elected delegates on committees at both the production unit and plant levels. Also on the committees are administrators who stayed on the job after nationalization, and the plant manager. In the first year after the triumph most plants also had regular meetings of all the workers and administrators—AREs.

The AREs were scheduled to meet three times a year first for production planning, then for mid-year monitoring, and finally for evaluation and criticism. According to the CST, the ARE represented "the forum which guarantees that workers will know how an enterprise is being run. And the workers have the power to dismiss any administrator, whether on the grounds of inefficient management of the company or malpractice of workers."¹⁰ In each ARE, a production committee was elected, composed of representatives of the management (state or private), each sector of the plant, the executive of the trade union, and the CST. The first ARE was held at the large—6,300 workers—privately owned San Antonio sugar mill. It had been proposed by the workers in the political education school of the mill's CST affiliated union. At the assembly, a shaken management team headed by San Antonio's owners found itself being grilled by workers whose questions ranged from whether several fires had been accident or sabotage, to requesting further information on the state of the international sugar market, to demanding to know why replacement machinery was slow in arriving.¹¹

Although the AREs frequently generated worker self-confidence as they exercised their capacity to master the complexities of production, the long-term benefits of the assemblies should not be exaggerated. Writing in May 1981 Nathan Sevilla of the FSLN explained that the reactivation assemblies had actually had only a limited impact because many workers didn't understand the importance of participation on a day-to-day basis in decision making after the assemblies were over.

OBSTACLES TO WORKERS PARTICIPATION

The formation of workers' committees and assemblies and the elaboration of *gestión*—worker participation—has involved a dramatic break from the previously dominant capitalist mode of production. In gauging the role of the workers in the control of production the key question is whether in fact they grasp it as a dramatic break.

Workers' attitudes to participation in management, in any form, is determined by the values of their society and class. This attitude is closely linked to the workers' subjective relationship to the means of production and consequently work itself. In order to measure the ability or desire of workers to participate in management, the role played by work in their lives must be assessed.

Workers may relate to the means of production and work in different ways. Work may simply be a means of securing the income necessary to satisfy material or

status needs. It may provide a sense of fulfilment in the process of the job itself or in the status connected with it. Or, workers may grasp their own relationship to the means of production within the totality of economic, political, and social organization. All of these determining attitudes are to be found among workers in advanced capitalist countries.

In a society such as Nicaragua, where unemployment or underemployment has been the norm, the significance which work assumes is quite different from that in developed capitalist countries. For the unemployed under Somoza, the most menial job could mean survival. In such a context attempts to develop any form of trade-union consciousness faced formidable obstacles.

The struggle for employment and material survival, and the relative inability at this stage to grasp the economic system as a social totality are both crucial in their effect on the worker's attitude to self-management. *Gestion*, whether conceived as a form of production management or as the prototype of a socialist organization of economy and society, is not limited to the provision of employment and wages. It demands that the new managers, the workers, should be aware of a whole complex of economic and social problems. It implies not only that they are capable of solving these problems but also that they actively desire to do so. Self-management therefore demands a high level of class consciousness, an ability to grasp the meaning and content of class conflict.

In Nicaragua the majority of workers were, and still are, deeply immersed in an everyday struggle for material survival. This—together with the historical effects of low cultural development—places objective limitations on their ability to take on the tasks of administering production. And no one has any illusions about this fact; despite the will of the revolution's leadership, and the general desire of the workers to increase their participation in administration and planning, significant obstacles remain.

In a three-part *Barricada* series in May 1981 Ives Chaix of the FSLN cited some of the main obstacles: lack of confidence and unwillingness on the part of workers to challenge administrators, divisions within the working class, a fear of the rank-and-file on the part of some union leaders, indiscipline at work, and unfamiliarity with the technical side of production.

Chaix suggested a number of ways to counter these historic weaknesses within the working class. First, he proposed simple initial goals should be established and then made gradually more complex. Second, Chaix emphasized that workers must question the administration whenever there was something they didn't like or understand. Another suggestion was higher levels of organization and discipline in the working class, and more widespread use of democratic forms such as councils, section meetings, and plant meetings.

It is important to point out, however, that obstacles to workers' control in Nicaragua are not due solely to historic weaknesses of the workers. State appointed administrators have frequently resisted meaningful workers' input into management-level decision making. Although many administrators in the state sector are neophytes, with little or no administrative training

or experience, they are not immune to the elitest prejudices of their class position.

While state-sector administrators welcome workers' control in the realm of maintaining labor discipline and raising productivity, they sometimes ignore workers' proposals regarding the operations of the production process itself. An explicit complaint on this matter was recently registered by Carlos Salgado Membreno, General Secretary of the CGT-i:

Workers' participation should not be limited to problems such as productivity, savings, austerity, but it should also be extended to management-level decisions. Only in this way will workers be able to assume a greater responsibility for the entire operation. This is where we run into obstacles; there is even some opposition on the part of government administrators. Many times management decisions of the People's Industrial Corporation (COIP) or the APP cannot be questioned. By the very fact that they are management-level decisions, the workers have no voice. So what happens? Many times the workers reject the decisions. Why? Because first they're told to participate fully, to incorporate themselves completely in their work, but when the workers want to point out the faults in management, they find they're without voice or vote. When workers ask to participate in administrative management, it's because they see errors being committed. The administrators are not infallible.¹²

UPGRADING WORKER PARTICIPATION: THE PILOT PROJECT

The first important step toward confronting the various barriers to workers' participation was taken in June 1982. After intensive discussions between representatives of the CST and the COIP, a pilot project designed to increase the participation of workers in eight public sector enterprises was launched. According to Sergio Molino, COIP Director of Industrial Relations, the object of the plan is to "upgrade the level of workers' involvement from a mere audit level to one of greater knowledge and domination of the global problematic of the enterprise."¹³

How exactly is workers' participation in management conceived in this pilot project? Both CST and COIP officials agree that it should be on a "consultative and informing" level, independent of the unions' stage of development. The project therefore attempts to introduce a higher degree of workers' control in state enterprises; instead of merely checking management decisions, workers in these eight plants will help determine management objectives and, at the same time, see that the appropriate means are used to achieve them.¹⁴

There can be no doubt that the idea that working people should themselves decide about the fundamental matters relating to production is crucial to the plan. Rubén Ulloa, CST Secretary of Production, explained that the plan calls for workers to discuss with management production plans and goals, in other words the entire process of production—how much to produce, for whom to produce, and how to obtain raw materials. An Ulloa emphasized that "discussion" with manage-

Against the Current

ment includes the opportunity for workers to enrich or even revise production plans.

The mechanism used to implement the project is based on broadening the discussion of the production goals to the greatest number of workers in the production center and ensuring constant participation throughout the production cycle. Thus in the second half of 1982 the goals of the third and fourth quarters were discussed, first with the pre-existing Enterprise Committees, which are organs of collective management. They include the director of the enterprise, the plant department heads, and the union leadership.

The project began in June 1982 with the re-establishment of the annual production goals by the Enterprise Committee. It was then reviewed by the plant's Production Committee, a new body created by the pilot plan. This committee is made up of three union leaders, the members of the various union sections, and the plant manager and department heads. The Production Committee's task is to review production goals in order to improve or question them. The goals then are passed for discussion to the "Commitment Assemblies" made up of all the workers in the factory. Here the manager and union leaders set forth all the aspects relevant to meeting the production goals—supply problems, production costs, estimates of production efficiency, and so on. Workers are familiar with all aspects of the production process discussed in the Commitment Assemblies due to their previous participation in the earlier stages of review.

To guarantee continual worker involvement, the Enterprise and Production Committees meet every 15 days to review production goals, and the Commitment Assemblies continue to hold their sessions every month.

This project was started specifically in eight enterprises considered strategic to the economy; they are enterprises in the areas of food, metal mechanics, textiles, construction, and sanitation. These plants were also chosen because their workers have had previous experience in worker control, and their managers have displayed a genuine openness to the new revolutionary conception of administering the enterprises in the Area of People's Property.

What has been the reaction of the union to the pilot project? Last July, Nancy Aguirre Vargas, the General Secretary of the CST-affiliated union at TECNICA, Nicaragua's largest factory, gave the following account of her union's participation in the pilot plan:

In our factory there is still very little support from management for union participation in production. But that doesn't hold us back. Here there are worker comrades at the base who know the production process like the back of their hands; perhaps the administration doesn't know all that we know. And, in time, we're going to acquire even greater knowledge because the CST now provides all the workers with regular technical instruction.

We, the union executive committee, meet with management, that is, the enterprise committee meets. We discuss productivity goals for each month, the production problems which we have, and what interferes with the raising of production. We then meet with each union department and its leadership to hear the workers' problems

and concerns so that we can bring them up in the Production Committee.

The union executive committee is an organ of popular power because it represents all the workers of this enterprise. The administration has to listen to us and seriously analyze and discuss problems with us.¹⁵

More recently, in August 1983, the author visited Tecnica a second time. According to Companera Vargas, the General Secretary, the level of worker participation in the plant had doubled in the previous year. The bi-weekly Production Committees and monthly Commitment Assemblies had continued their functions. The Production Committee during 1982-83 had dealt with every aspect of factory administration, including reviewing and overseeing production accomplishments and mistakes, production goals, and supply shortages. And the results of the work carried out by the Production Committee were regularly reported to all the workers during the monthly Commitment Assembly gatherings.

In addition to participation in meetings regarding the factory's production process, the workers and technicians of Tecnica are receiving formal instruction intended to upgrade their general understanding of the textile industry, as well as to increase their specific job skills. Currently, ten workers are attending courses given by SINAFORP, a government-sponsored training program. Within the factory itself two classes are held regularly—one concerning mechanics, attended by 180 workers, and the other a technical theory course.

One technician present at the interview reported that the union members had participated significantly in the decision-making process in the factory. Their contributions at meetings, he claimed, included not only making suggestions to management concerning how to improve production, but also direct input in decisions affecting both specific and general aspects of the production process. He also pointed out that in those cases where the administrators or technicians have the last word regarding a production decision, the decision is conveyed to the workers in a respectful and educational manner: "We don't order people around here; we explain exactly why a decision was made. This is part of our educational process. In fact, our whole process in the factory is one large school for all of us."

It is, of course, too early to assess the results of this pilot project. Moreover, the project will not end with these eight concerns; it will continue with a larger number of factories that were not included in the first phase of the project due to organizational problems. The expansion of the pilot project can be expected to have a series of long-term effects that enhance the capabilities, determination, and power of the Nicaraguan working class.

This article has presented an overview of the role of the industrial working class in the Nicaraguan revolution, focusing on the Sandinista Workers Confederation. It is of course impossible in such a short paper to offer a comprehensive discussion and analysis of the struggle for raising production and augmenting worker participation in the production process. I hope, however, that the article will serve as a basis for an ongoing and expanded evaluation of workers' involvement in the Nicaraguan revolutionary process ■

EDITORS' POSTSCRIPT

Gary Ruchwanger's pioneering account of aspects of workers control in the Nicaraguan revolution opens what we hope will be an ongoing discussion in ATC on workers power and workers democracy in socialist revolutions. Focusing on one aspect of a complex revolutionary process, Gary's account, of necessity, raises many questions which it does not attempt to answer—questions which can be resolved fully only in the context of a broader analysis of the Nicaraguan revolution as a whole. Thus Gary writes at one point: "In gauging the role of the workers in the control of production, the key question is whether in fact they *grasp* it as a dramatic break." Or, as we would prefer to pose the issue—*do* the forms of workers control in Nicaragua *in fact constitute* a break, and in what ways and to what degree?

Gary's discussion is, understandably, confined to the question of workers' self-management at the *level of the enterprise*. But, of course, what happens at that level is massively affected by the economic policy decisions made by the government through the plan—specifically, what products are to be produced, for what purpose, and in what quantity. The government's decisions impose strict limits on what individual firms, especially in the nationalized section, can decide about their output and their labor process. To evaluate fully, therefore, the experiments in workers control which Gary discusses, it is necessary to know whether and in what ways the Nicaraguan workers can have an input into, or veto, or actually make decisions concerning the national production plan.

Socialists see the goal of revolution as a workers' self-managed economy and society: one in which the entire working class, through its factory and neighborhood committees or other institutions of direct workers democracy, decides upon the plan of production for the whole economy and helps to administer it. This is the meaning of workers' self-emancipation. No one but the working class can decide what is in the workers' interest or be counted on to act in the workers' interest; they must do this for themselves. For this reason the ultimate test for socialist revolutions in general and the Nicaraguan revolution in particular is the degree to which it has achieved, or is *moving toward*, workers' self-management of social production in the society at large.

Specifically does the FSLN see workers' self-management of the economy as a whole as the long-run goal of the Nicaraguan revolution? Is Nicaragua actually moving in that direction? In what way are the experiments in workers control which Gary discusses linked in theory and in practice to that goal? Lastly, in view of the fact that Nicaragua today has a mixed economy, to what degree do workers exert over-all control in the already nationalized sector as a whole?

Beyond the foregoing fundamental questions, Gary's contribution raises certain further important problems concerning the role of the working class in production in Nicaragua. Specifically, to what degree and in what way do the Nicaraguan workers actually *determine* production and control of the labor process *at the level of the firm*?

As Gary points out, in the period after the revolution, workers took part in managing their firms through electing representatives to the managerial committees which ran the firms. These committees almost always included a manager from the FSLN, as well as other managers, who presumably were not elected by the workers, but were in some way appointed (in the nationalized, as well as the private sector). Workers could *have a say* in management through their representatives on the board, but the workers could not actually tell the managers what to do or veto their decisions.

Where the AREs were set up, the workers gained, in addition, the opportunity to *participate* in the firms management through taking part in enterprise-wide assemblies. But these assemblies met only three times a year. The goal of the AREs was to elicit the workers' input, to educate them on technical questions, and to involve them in planning production. The AREs did *not* allow the workers to direct the operation of the firm nor do they set this as their goal. But it does appear that where the AREs were established, the workers gained an important element of control over production—the right to fire managers they did not approve of.

Finally, in the pilot project initiated in eight public sector enterprises, the workers tended to have much more continuous input into the management of the firms. In this way they seem to have achieved an even greater ability to limit what management did than workers elsewhere in the economy possessed. But even so, the *discussion* and *consultation* did not amount to what Gary calls sovereignty at the level of the enterprise.

We may therefore conclude that the experiments discussed by Gary offered workers means to *have an input* into management decisions and ways to *restrict* what the managers could do. Nevertheless, it was always a question only of "participation." In no case discussed by Gary did the workers gain the right and ability actually to *manage* production, even at the level of the enterprise. This was true even in the nationalized sector.

The fact is, as Gary points out, "State appointed administrators have frequently resisted meaningful worker input into management." Indeed, the testimony Gary presents from labor leaders and government representatives indicates that overcoming the managers' resistance to workers self-management of the enterprises (let alone the economy as a whole) will not be easy. Nevertheless, unless the administrators resistance is overcome, it will be all too easy to pervert the meaning of workers control in Nicaragua. The managers, under pressure to increase production at any cost, will tend to use "workers participation" and "workers control" solely to involve the workers in production so as to increase productivity. On the other hand, they will tend to limit real workers' managements, for this might compel them to take into account certain shop floor interests of the workers which could interfere with production.

The point is that the actual character of workers control is of supreme *practical* importance because of the critical conflicts which almost inevitably arise between workers and managers in a developing country like Nicaragua. The root of the conflicts lies in the fact that the different positions occupied by managers and workers with respect to control over production almost always leads to unequal sacrifices and unequal benefits from economic development. This is all the more likely in poorer countries. In one as poor as Nicaragua, economic growth is sure to be a high priority. But economic growth often involves the sacrifice of current consumption and leisure to investment in plant and machinery. The question which immediately poses itself is on what basis, and by what means, and to what extent the workers can be asked to consume less and work harder? Above all, who is in a position to ask this of them?

The FSLN has recognized that "Austerity must be the answer to a concrete problem and not an externally imposed principle" and that "Sacrifice itself must be given a class content" (Black, *Triumph of the People*, p. 29). This is an important insight. But in order to justify austerity or sacrifice, is not sufficient—although it is certainly desirable—for the leadership to make the workers aware of the precise problems which necessitate specific sacrifices. The working class must *also* be in a position to *make that decision itself*—to decide precisely for what end they agree to work harder or consume less, and precisely in what way and to what extent they wish to sacrifice. At the same time, the workers need to be in a position to insure that the additional increments to the social surplus which result from their sacrifices go to the ends for which they intended them—in particular, that the beneficiaries are those the workers themselves designate.

Unless the workers are able to exert this sort of self-determination, they will, sooner or later, intentionally or not, inevitably be subjected to an *imposed* austerity. The consequence (apart from short periods of crisis) will be the alienation of the workers from an interest in production, with catastrophic consequences both economic and political. Productivity will decline because of the workers' apathy and resistance; the revolution itself will lose its base of support; and there will, in the end, be a hardening of lines between workers and managers. Workers self-management is, therefore, not just desirable. It is indispensable for the success of the revolution. ■

The CURRENTS within the FMLN

by Robert Armstrong*



Today in El Salvador, the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) controls 25% of the country. It operates in 12 of 14 provinces. For three years it has maintained the initiative in its war with the Salvadoran army and in the last year has confounded U.S. counterinsurgency experts. It has been called the most effective guerrilla army in the history of Latin America. Yet, little has been written about the origins of the FMLN. What follows is a brief history of the Salvadoran Left and the tradition from which this remarkable organization arose.

The history of the Left in El Salvador is a history of

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almost constant repression and courageous sacrifice. Since the 1932 uprising and massacre when the fledgling Salvadoran Communist Party was almost wiped out, Salvadoran political life has been dominated by a virulent and brutal anti-communism, dubious of even

modest reforms. Anti-communism has often been complemented by overt support for fascism. General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, author of the 1932 massacre, flirted with Nazi Germany.¹ Even today many within the Salvadoran oligarchy and military openly express their admiration of Hitler and European fascism.

For more than 50 years, Left activists have faced the loss of jobs, the late night knock on the door, disappearance, torture and death. The present slaughter in El Salvador is only the past to the tenth degree. U.S. and European marxists and socialists can compare this experience only to the occupation struggles of World War II to grasp the sacrifice and commitment that a life on the Left in El Salvador has required.

The Tradition of the Salvadoran Communist Party

The principal tradition of the Salvadoran Left passes through the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS). Founded in 1930 by a group of urban-based artisans and intellectuals, the PCS, two years later, led what some historians have called the first communist uprising in the western hemisphere. In the decade of the 1920s, advocates of radical change in El Salvador were part of a political ferment that bubbled from Panama to the Rio Grande. Its yeast was the examples of the Mexican and Russian revolutions and the anti-Yanqui war in Nicaragua led by Augusto Sandino.

In 1929, the Great Depression had driven Salvadoran workers and peasants to the brink of starvation. The PCS, under the leadership of a Salvadoran who had served as one of Sandino's lieutenants, Farabundo Marti, risked its nascent organization to direct the popular frustration toward the overthrow of the regime. As is well known, the uprising was a failure; the repression that followed, a bloodbath.

How many died in 1932 is the subject of historical controversy although tradition has set the figure at 30,000. Among them was most of the leadership, cadre and supporters of the PCS. Those few who survived either in exile or deeply clandestine within El Salvador brooded on the disaster and developed a cautiousness of analysis and style that characterized the PCS for the next 50 years.

After the Matanza

If its own history taught the PCS to be cautious, its status as a fraternal party of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union re-enforced that character. Rebuilding itself after the fall of Martinez in 1944, it proceeded along orthodox lines, concentrating its energies on the tiny but growing urban proletariat.

In 1948, a new generation of military men, in alliance with some of the more visionary elements of the Salvadoran coffee bourgeoisie re-activated a project of economic and political modernization that had begun in the 1920s but was aborted by the Depression, the events of 1932 and the anti-industrial laws of General Martinez.² The PCS pledged its efforts toward organizing the proletariat that the new industrialization cre-

ated. It advocated the adoption of a Labor Code and strongly fought for the right to strike. Its efforts proved successful for urban workers, who became its base. But rural workers and the semi-proletarianized peasantry—which represented the majority of the Salvadoran workforce continued to be subjected to the caprices of the coffee barons and their enforcers, the National Guard.

With its success, the PCS again faced official repression. In the early 50's, its leaders were arrested, exiled, tortured and killed. The government created an alternative trade union federation to try to keep the effects of its industrialization project under its control. Nonetheless, at the end of the decade, by dint of good organizing and better security, the PCS had an established base within the trade union sector as well as within the univervisty community.

The Cuban Revolution and the Temptation of Armed Struggle

In El Salvador, as elsewhere throughout Latin America, the Cuban Revolution in 1959 challenged the orthodoxy of the traditional communist parties. The revolution had been won by guerrilla war based in the rural areas and not led by the Cuban communist party. All of these themes—armed struggle, an active role for the peasantry, the leadership of the communist party—would become major questions in El Salvador in the years that followed.

The United States perceived the Cuban revolution as a direct threat to its hegemony in Central America and the Caribbean and launched an ambitious program of economic and military aid to encourage investment by U.S. multi-national corporations. 1962 to 1967 was a brief period of prosperity in El Salvador. Greater U.S. attention was an important cause of the upturn.

For the Salvadoran Left, prosperity deferred the questions raised by the Cuban revolution until later in the decade when the "good times" began to fade. The principal focus of the work of the PCS continued to be the industrial proletariat whose numbers expanded with the growing presence of transnational industrial investment. Compelled always to work clandestinely, the party competed both with the pro-government labor federation (whose organizers were believed to be officially subsidized), and with a new effort sponsored by the AFL-CIO-supported American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD)—recently arrived in the mid-sixties—with more subtle schemes to de-politicize the workers' movement according to U.S. trade union models.

Seeking to extend its influence beyond the industrial working class to other sectors, the PCS entered electoral politics, gradually winning influence in two existing parties, the Party for Renovating Action (PAR) and then, after that party was outlawed, through the Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN). Its new strategy responded in large part to the increased political space that the Salvadoran ruling class opened as a result of the prosperity that the recently established Central American Common Market and greater U.S. aid and investment generated.

With more freedom, the political opposition increased its influence dramatically. The Christian Dem-

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ocratic Party, founded in 1960, built its membership yearly. By 1968, it controlled the country's three largest cities and stood within a couple of seats of control of the Assembly. In 1967, a group of intellectuals formed the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), a social democratic party, which despite its small size exercised significant influence.

In alliance with several progressive independent politicians, the PCS, enjoying its quasi-legal presence, was able to present a more radical analysis and program which demanded major economic, agrarian and educational reforms. It also was able to strengthen its ties with the Christian and social democrats and as a consequence to influence them to adopt more radical positions.

By 1967, the economic boom had begun to fizzle. A rash of strikes led both by PCS and non-PCS trade unions broke the fragile truce in the class struggle. Within the PCS, polemics sharpened between those who wanted to push the trade union struggle toward political confrontation with the government and a more traditionally cautious majority who feared that such steps would provoke the repression of the entire progressive movement, destroy the party's increasingly public presence and wreck its still tentative relations with the Christian and social democrats.

In the wave of strikes of 1967-68, the fear of repression was not unwarranted; there was a notable increase in governmental harassment of the unions and the death and disappearance of their leaders, including party members. Two members of the PCS, advocates of the more radical position, were murdered in 1968, undoubtedly by the Salvadoran National Guard.

The same radical minority within the PCS also pressured to develop an armed capability within the party, but characteristically that position was branded as adventurous and ultra-left by the majority. Unlike many Latin American communist parties, it was not the first time that the PCS had considered armed struggle. From 1958-1962, the Salvadoran government experienced a growing crisis of legitimacy that prompted a reformist coup d'etat in 1960, followed by a conservative counter-coup three months later. Only in 1962 with the election of Col. Julio Rivera did the Salvadoran ruling class restore its hegemony.

During that period the PCS first organized workers' committees to facilitate the opportunities for insurrection, and then, later, an armed guerrilla force. Rivera's election and the prosperity of the sixties forced the abandonment of this strategy in favor of trade union and electoral work.

By 1969, the PCS' dual strategy seemed likely to pay off. Opposition parties offered programs of radical reforms and felt confident that in the 1972 presidential election, victory could be theirs. And then came the war with Honduras.

A short but brutal encounter, the war had its roots in the tension between the Salvadoran and Honduran bourgeoisies and the latter's perception that the Salvadorans took unfair advantage of their greater industrial base and entrepreneurial skills to exploit the Honduran economy. The Salvadoran government (and military), concerned about its declining influence, fueled a soccer rivalry between the two countries into a full-blown jingoism. When the Honduran government be-

gan to persecute Salvadoran immigrant farmers and force them back to their already overcrowded homeland, war was inevitable.

The war fever and chauvinism that followed the militarily impressive invasion of Honduras in July 1969 and the five-day war that followed had its desired effect. The prestige of the ruling National Conciliation Party, led by the military and the oligarchy, was restored. The next year, it annihilated the opposition in municipal and assembly elections.

Another Tradition on the Left

Before examining the crisis that the Honduran war provoked within the Salvadoran Left, it is essential to consider another, albeit younger, Left tradition, from which in the period that followed the Honduran war, many of the elements that gave rise to the Salvadoran revolution derive.

Concentrating for so many years in the industrial sector, the impact of the PCS among the peasantry and rural workers, in the vastly expanded public sector and within the religious community was negligible. Its student work suffered from a post-graduate fall in enthusiasm once the student activist faced the difficulties of survival as an adult communist.

The principal beneficiaries of the discontent of these other sectors and of the greater opportunity for political participation in the 1960s were the Christian Democrats. Their appeal lay in their criticism of the existing order, their promises of change, their coherence as a party and their roots in Catholic Christian teaching.

The Catholic church in El Salvador is a poor church; it has neither money nor land. Even before the late Archbishop Oscar A. Romero, his predecessor, Archbishop Chavez y Gonzalez steered a decidedly liberal course. Vatican II, the development of liberation theology and the Bishops' Declaration at Medellin, Colombia in 1968 all found sympathetic advocates both among the hierarchy and at the parish levels of the church. In the 1970s as a consequence of the growing impact of the Jesuit community in El Salvador and the increasing participation of diocesan clergy in the preaching of the social gospel, a quite radical Christian activism came to share influence with Salvadoran Christian Democracy, whose popular mystique suffered from its failure to confront adequately the crisis of the Honduran War, the election of 1972 or the repression that followed.

Post-Mortem on the Honduran War: Birth of a New Left

The crisis of the Honduran war and the resurgence of the National Conciliation Party had a profound effect across the entire spectrum of progressive politics. Most notably, it split the Salvadoran Communist Party. Asserting a nationalist position, the PCS actively supported the war with Honduras. The radical minority which had chafed under the majority's cautiousness denounced the endorsement as an expedient betrayal of the working classes of both El Salvador and Honduras. The position was an opportunistic maneuver, they charged, to prevent a loss of influence with the other opposition parties and among chauvinistic elements within the union movement. It was the last straw.

Within months, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, then the PCS' general secretary and most vocal advocate of the radical position, resigned and with a handful of followers set out to explore armed strategies of revolution.

Among left-wing supporters of the Christian Democrats and certain independents, especially among university students, there was a similar conviction that a radical break with the past was needed. Rejecting the accepted wisdom promoted by the PCS that guerrilla war was impossible in El Salvador, they set forth, as so many had done already, to follow the example of Che.

Conditions for Revolution

In the early 1970s the contradictions of Salvadoran society grew more acute. The Salvadoran-Honduran War was the *coup de grace* to the ambitious development plans of the 1960s. Even before the war the rapid economic growth of the early years of the 60s showed signs of stagnation. Developmentalist schemes for national industrialization and the expansion of trade through the Central American Common Market floundered. Tariff barriers were imposed that violated earlier agreements for free trade; demand even in the enlarged common market was saturated.

Politically, the economic crisis laid the basis for a revival of the electoral opposition. A year after the war, the official party's shortlived popularity was once again challenged by the now united efforts of the three major opposition parties: the Christian Democrats, the social democrats and the PCS-dominated UDN, organized as the UNO coalition (National Opposition Union). They prepared for the 1972 presidential election with the belief that for the first time in Salvadoran history the opposition was strong enough, united enough and organized enough to win.

To assure its survival in the emerging crisis, the Salvadoran ruling class meanwhile prepared a new political-economic project to replace the failed model of the 60s. Economically, the new project sought greater integration with world markets, especially for local industry, and de-emphasized trade with Central America. New infrastructure was built; a free trade zone was created; investment laws were liberalized. Building tourism became a national goal. Full-page ads were taken in major U.S. newspapers, touting El Salvador's infrastructure, its enthusiasm to attract international capital and its cheap and docile workforce.

At the same time, the world economic crisis provoked steady increases in the cost of basic necessities. Growing competition for Salvadoran coffee, cotton and cane kept wages disproportionately low for the thousands of Salvadoran peasants and rural workers who earn their survival at the harvest.

Politically, the continuing ferment, begun in the 1960s, belied the claims of a docile workforce. When the 1972 election came, as expected, the opposition won but then was robbed of its victory by blatant and open fraud. The Salvadoran ruling class was reverting to form. After an abortive coup by progressive military officers trying to re-instate the stolen victory of the reformers, the Salvadoran government clamped down with a vengeance, exiling important opposition leaders, closing the national university, selectively eliminating particularly obstreperous leaders of the workers and peasants movements.

It is in this crisis that the leadership of the Left in El

Salvador passes from the PCS to a New Left from whose work the Salvadoran revolution is born.

Facing Failure: Response to the Crisis

From 1972 to 1974 the Salvadoran Left faced this crisis not only with the knowledge of the failure of the electoral strategy but of the historic failures in Latin America of both Chile and the children of Che. In the former situation, the Left had built a powerful mass movement for which there was no military protection. For the dozens of guerilla *focos*, however, there had been no mass base.

Four new organizations emerged to take up the challenge. All of them defined themselves as marxist; all stood to the left of the PCS and all melded political organizing with armed struggle. They were

1. *The Popular Forces of Liberation—Farabundo Marti (FPL)*—Founded in 1970, it was led by Salvador Cayetano Carpio and those of the PCS who had left the party after the dispute over the war with Honduras. Its strategy for revolutionary victory was prolonged people's war, as practiced by the Vietnamese. It emphasized organizing in all oppressed sectors and was particularly effective in organizing in the rural areas. Among the industrial proletariat it worked to create its own labor federation, concentrating in existing unions and also organizing the unorganized in those industries which had been attracted by the new development schemes of the 1970s. It also established close ties with religious people and was the most successful in creating the largest multi-sectoral coalition of the oppressed (the popular organization) to which all of the New Left groups aspired, the People's Revolutionary Bloc (BPR). During the 70s, its armed capacity was used primarily as a self-defense force to defend and retaliate on behalf of the member organizations of the BPR in their political struggles.
2. *The People's Revolutionary Army (ERP)*—Founded in 1971, it initially was a federation of different groups, all of which had decided that armed struggle was necessary. It brought together dissident Christian Democrats, independents and, later, disgruntled members of the PCS, notably, Roque Dalton, the great Salvadoran poet and intellectual. Its early history was stormy as its various organizations attempted to create a single, disciplined force. Currently, its head is Joaquin Villalobos, regarded as a brilliant military strategist and now, probably, the most important leader of the FMLN. Its strategy of revolution is insurrection, believing that the revolutionary's task is to create the conditions that will lead to a mass uprising. Always characterized by pronounced tendency toward a military response, the leadership of the ERP has been particularly important in the current phase of the struggle when the military mode predominates. In the 70s its military strategy was focussed on the harassment of the armed forces. Its mass organization—also organized along multi-sectoral lines—was the People's Leagues 28th of February (LP-28), which was most successful in rural areas in the eastern part of the country, among the market women and with students. The ERP also has had influence within the Salvadoran

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armed forces; two of its present commanders defected from the Salvadoran army in 1981. It has the largest number of women in its top command of the five member organizations of the FMLN.

3. *The National Resistance (RN)*—Founded in 1975, after a bitter split within the ERP that led to the death of Roque Dalton, the RN initially attempted to build a multi-sectoral coalition as its vehicle for mass participation. Less successful than the FPL in that attempt, it re-thought its strategy and concentrated its work within the industrial working class in the cities. Working through its popular organization, FAPU, its organizing effort in that sector in the late 70s was extremely successful, giving them control of unions responsible for the key productive sectors of the industrial economy, particularly electrical power and transportation. In 1980, they controlled the largest of the trade union federations, FENAS-TRAS. Although its emphasis on the urban proletariat was the most classical conception of the struggle among the New Left organizations, the RN did not abandon armed struggle, concentrating that resource in harassing the Salvadoran bourgeoisie with boldly executed kidnappings of members of the Salvadoran oligarchy and the international business community. Its present head is Ferman Cienfuegos.
4. *The Central American Revolutionary Workers Party (PRTC)*—Founded in 1976 from the split in the ERP a year earlier, the PRTC emerged only in 1979. Often mischaracterized as Trotskyist, the PRTC had spent the years 1976–1979 organizing political parties in several Central American countries. Its members believed that ultimately the crisis of each country in Central America reflected a regional crisis and required a regional solution. During that period it operated under regional leadership and organized clandestinely in the various countries. In El Salvador, it operated in several sectors, and in 1979, its efforts emerged as the mass organization, the Movement of Popular Liberation. As a condition of its participation in the FMLN, the PRTC now operates autonomously of its former regional structure. Its principal leader is Roberto Róca.

Characteristics of the New Left

Writing retrospectively and in a few words, one loses the dialectic of the struggle both within Salvadoran society and on the Left and, especially, the uncertainty with which it went forward. These four groups displaced the PCS from its traditional and expected position as the vanguard of the revolution. They shaped the growing revolution in El Salvador according to no one's orthodoxy. They combined theory and practice in creative and dynamic tension and defied the conventional wisdoms about what could and couldn't, should and shouldn't be done. In the process they quarrelled among themselves and within themselves often with bitter sectarianism. Their courage in the face of a brutal enemy was part of their mystique. Many died; more took up the struggle. Their most remarkable accomplishment was how they touched and changed the silent and watchful thousands who had never dared consider themselves anything more than *los brutos*, the wretched of the earth, and how these many touched and changed them.

Despite differences in analysis, strategy and capability, the four groups share many strategic elements in common, that, indeed, was the source of much of their competition. First, of course, was their rejection of the electoral path as a possible avenue of change. The 1972 electoral fraud had cinched it. Fair elections were impossible in El Salvador.

Second was the incorporation of armed struggle and, more generally, a repertoire of illegal actions (from painting the walls of the city to demonstrations to occupation of buildings to kidnappings) into every-day revolutionary strategy. Leaders talked of the multi-lateral struggle, fought on all fronts with all methods. They called themselves political-military organizations to emphasize the dual nature of their activity.

Third was an attention to the peasantry and rural workers, *el campo*, where the majority of Salvadoran working people live. Since the 1960s, conditions of life there had worsened rapidly. In 1960, 12% of the rural population was landless; by 1975, 40% had no land. Beside this rural proletariat, Salvadoran peasants struggled to survive in a semi-proletarianized existence. Their tiny corn fields could not support them, and each October they went to the harvests to earn what they needed to survive for the rest of the year.

Fourth, the groups generally continued and expanded organizing work among industrial workers both in existing unions and among unorganized sectors. But most importantly, they reached out to other sectors, not only workers in the rural areas but also teachers, students, people within the religious community, to professionals. Generally, theirs was a politics of the oppressed. The popular organization became the predominant mode of organization: a multi-sectored coalition of groups which elaborated a common agenda and shared their collective resources to fight the daily struggles of each sector. Peasants and rural workers joined the picket lines at the factory; students helped teachers fight for better pay; factory workers supported shanty-town communities in their efforts to get running water.

Fifth, they were explicit in their call for radical social change, talking in surprisingly open terms about the need for a revolutionary government, about how socialism would replace the inequities of Salvadoran capitalism.

Among themselves there were other polemics. The most fundamental disagreement was over the character of Salvadoran society and the Salvadoran state in the 1970s. Both the RN/FAPU and the ERP/LP-28 shared with the PCS a view that fascist elements were taking control (or had taken control) of the state apparatus. They saw that in the struggle of the oppressed to overthrow the existing order some members of a national bourgeoisie could be an important ally. Within the military they identified similar nationalist elements and tried to educate and organize among both soldiers and officers. Their work encouraged alliances with these sectors as a necessary part of the mass struggle.

The FPL/BPR rejected the characterization of the state as fascist, calling it fascist-like (*fascistoide*). The Salvadoran government had the brutal characteristics of European fascism, but the reactionary sectors of Salvadoran capitalism from which fascism grew were too integrally tied to imperialism, especially U.S. impe-

rialism, to operate in a way that made the term relevant. Further the state enjoyed no mass support of any enduring character. Fascism was not a term that was useful in describing El Salvador.

Similarly, the FPL/BPR saw no national bourgeoisie or sector of the military that was not corrupted by imperialism. There might be individuals, but any cross-class alliance was impossible. The revolution would be made on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance, and other oppressed sectors would be subordinate to its hegemony.

The second major area of disagreement came over the appropriate revolutionary strategy. There were two fundamental positions: prolonged people's war and insurrection. The FPL/BPR advocated the position of prolonged people's war. As noted, they were profoundly influenced by the Vietnamese. They structured their practice to prepare for prolonged struggle, including the eventual intervention of the United States. But "people's war," they meant that the oppressed sectors must become antagonists of the system, incorporated in a war whose tactics included legal and illegal, non-violent and violent, political and military means.

Practically, its strategy meant that the FPL/BPR were determined organizers. Since virtually everybody was oppressed and unorganized, virtually everyone had to be "incorporated" (*incorporado*). Victory was assured when all of the oppressed sectors were organized and prepared to fight—though that struggle were to endure for 30 years. In the process, much effort was placed on transforming the *incorporados* into a counter-hegemonic force to the dominance of the oligarchy and its institutions through the development of their own—to borrow Gramsci's notion—pre-figurative institutions and revolutionary counter-culture. New styles of organization and new social relations within those organizations offered experimental opportunities to practice the post-revolutionary society (e.g., they demanded a radical change in the *machista* style of male-female relations).

The RN/FAPU and the ERP/LP-28 (and later, after its commitment to armed struggle, the Salvadoran Communist Party) followed a more traditional view, "the art of insurrection," as Marx called it. The task of the revolutionary was to create the conditions for mass insurrection. Engaging in the people's struggles, of course, was a fundamental prerequisite. In the case of the RN (whose strength was in the industrial working class), the strike was the preferred weapon along with the harassment of the bourgeoisie. The ERP/LP-28 favored the provocation and harassment of the armed forces.

In the often intense polemics, advocates of insurrection argued that the advocates of prolonged people's war were so busy organizing that they missed the moment to act. The response was that unless the greatest number were "incorporated," the revolution would never withstand the counter-attack of U.S. imperialism.

The FMLN Is Formed

In November 1980, the FMLN came into existence. Today its members include the FPL, the ERP, the RN, the PRTC and the PCS. The PCS had reevaluated its 1979 position and abandoned the alliance with the Christian Democrats. Its leader, Shafik Jorge Handal,

made a public self-criticism of its failure to understand both the nature of the political situation in El Salvador and the role that the other organizations had played in advancing the revolution. In 1980 the PCS took up armed struggle.

Over the last three years the five organizations have grown closer together and have discovered that their unity is not a thing but a process. It requires enormous work, good will, patience, political maturity and trust. It has not been an easy process. From 1980 on, the character of the revolution in El Salvador changed. The repression—brutal and horrible beyond adequate recounting—destroyed the popular organizations. Many of their younger members joined the armed struggle, now almost exclusively the principal character of the revolution.

The Left today—the FMLN—is different from what it was even in 1980. The debates have not ceased, though the areas of disagreement are fewer. The war closed the space that allowed a more easy mass participation, and what the effects of the military style on democratic participation are still unclear. The "liberated zones" have become the occasions for the pre-figurative experiments in the creation of the new El Salvador, but fewer people now have access to that experience.

Revolutions are complex events. What I cannot show is the dialectic of theory and practice, how theory shaped practice, how practice altered the theory. Part of the complexity comes from the variety of experiences which must be considered, not only those of the organizations of the FMLN but of Guillermo Ungo's social democrats and Ruben Zamora's Christian democrats, both of which organizations are essential to the political and diplomatic work of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) and are integral elements of the revolutionary process.

One asks which of the groups had the "correct line." Some years ago, I might have offered an opinion. Now I am not sure. First, it is a question that can be answered only when victory is won. Second, I am more and more inclined to believe that each had a part of the "correct line," including the PCS whose long-term alliance with the Christian and social democrats and determination to find some way to escape its outlaw status mitigated in important sectors the virulent anti-communism that pervades Salvadoran society.

For the U.S. Left meanwhile, there are, of course, no easy lessons. I have purposely tried to avoid characterizing the revolutionary debate in the theoretical categories of classical Marxism. Something is happening in Central America that first must be described before it is characterized. The U.S. Left often is too quick to judge the revolutions in the Third World by standards that are not relevant to what actually is happening.

What the Salvadoran Left does say to us in the United States is almost banal in its generality. But perhaps, it bears repeating.

1. Time and energy must be spent analyzing the character of one's society and the nature of the state using the tools that Marxism—in its many late 20th Century guises—offers.

2. Organizing must speak to the needs of the people.
3. Patience, political maturity and trust are essential for Left unity.

4. A certain amount of humility is due the process of

revolution itself. The revolution is more than what the revolutionaries do.

As I wrote in my book, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution* (co-author, Janet Shenk), El Salvador has taught me this lesson:

"A revolution is a rush of life through a crack in the appearance of things. It roars forward; it staggers; it ambles. It is no one's careful plan or, if so, only in retrospect.

"In this century, there are those who have declared themselves revolutionaries. The best of them are scientists. They are humble before the phenomenon which they study and of which they are a part. They are men and women who see a more equitable, more just society as possible on this planet. And they struggle to make that vision real, trying not to destroy it in the agony and fight to win.

"They make mistakes, sometimes so terrible that forgiveness may be impossible and self-criticism hollow. In such moments, those who share their hope feel the deep pain, the sadness and despair of being without

hope, of being no better than the world is today, of being no more able to heal the pain than those who inflict it.

"Revolutionaries talk about objectives, strategies, timing and tactics. They often disagree until events prove one or the other right or wrong. And when it is once again possible to agree, those differences, those unwanted legacies of distrust often interfere.

"But a revolution is not made by revolutionaries. The revolutionary only guides it, explains it, leads it, tries to channel it toward clear and rational ends. In the end, it is the people who make a revolution."³

¹ On General Martínez, see Thomas Anderson, *Matanza* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972); also, Roque Dalton, *Las Historias Prohibidas del Pulgarcito* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1974).

² Martínez attributed the 1932 uprising to an alliance of urban industrial workers and the peasantry. Therefore, he passed legislation that made industrialization virtually impossible.

³ Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1982).

A SPLIT IN THE FMLN

by R. Armstrong

In mid-December, 1983, a group calling itself the Revolutionary Workers Movement—Salvador Cayetano Carpio (MOR) broke away from the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL). At issue were the decisions taken by the FPL in the Seventh Revolutionary Council of the organization in August of that year. Specifically, the FPL pledged itself to building the FMLN as the vanguard of the Salvadoran revolution, abandoning its previous position that it (the FPL) was the vanguard of the FMLN. It agreed to consider political alliances with what it called members of the non-oligarchic bourgeoisie and committed itself to negotiations as an essential element of its revolutionary strategy. All of these positions moved the FPL closer to the other four organizations of the FMLN.

After the meeting some members of the organization opposed this new direction and affirmed former FPL positions regarding its vanguard role in the FMLN, eschewing alliances with any sector of the Salvadoran bourgeoisie and promoting negotiations as a tactical, not a strategic, principle. Composed primarily of urban guerrilla units in San Salvador, they have formed the MOR.

But behind these immediate issues lies a deeper crisis, the consequence of the murder last April of the second-in-command of the FPL, Anaya Melida Montes (nom-de-guerre: Ana Maria), and the subsequent suicide of the founder and principal leader of the FPL, Salvador Cayetano Carpio (nom-de-guerre: Marcial).

In a long and frank communique in mid-December, the FPL confirmed rumors that had circulated repeatedly since the tragic events that Carpio had planned and ordered the murder of Melida Montes. According to the communique, Carpio's influence within the FPL had been waning for over a year, due particularly to his intransigent insistence on the vanguard role of himself and the FPL within the FMLN. The result had been the increasing isolation of the FPL from the other revolutionary organizations and growing dissatisfaction among members of the FPL leadership with Carpio's political rigidity.

Led by Melida Montes, the younger leadership pressed for greater flexibility and a more comradely relationship with the other political-military organizations. In January 1983, the Central Committee of the FPL unanimously approved the new position. Apparently with considerable reservation, Carpio, as head of the FPL signed the document, and it was prepared for submission to the meeting of the Revolutionary Council to be held later in 1983.

In March, according to the present FPL leadership, Carpio, conspiring with another member of the Central Committee, ordered and planned the murder of his long-time colleague, telling his co-conspirator that Melida Montes had betrayed the revolution. On April 6, she was stabbed 83 times by a military unit of the FPL acting under Carpio's orders while asleep at her temporary home in Managua.

It is still too early to assess the impact of these events. Politically the FPL appears to be relatively strong and unified after the split. The breakaway MOR is small in number and enjoys only very limited support in El Salvador or internationally. The other organizations of the FMLN are supporting the FPL and view its new line and the exposure of Carpio as a positive step in strengthening the revolution.

Yet these events are profoundly disturbing. There is a mythic quality to them. How it will end is far from clear. The sons join the mother to end patriarchy; the father kills the mother; the sons expose the father. There is its troubling commentary on the marxist-leninist Left, the recurring theme of political fratricide: Stalin/Trotsky, Mao/LinBiao; Roque Dalton in El Salvador and who and how many others in what seems an inescapable determinism.

Much remains to know; much remains to be said■



DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO ABORTION:

A RESPONSE TO HOLMSTROM

by Jeffrey H. Reiman *

Although I heartily endorse Nancy Holmstrom's dual aim of defending women's right to abortion and of insisting that Marxists ought to attend to the moral dimensions of such issues, I think that in her essay "The Morality of Abortion" (*Against the Current*, Spring 1983, pp. 18–22), she states the argument for the right to abortion in a way that leads to consequences that are morally wrong and that would likely be unacceptable to the Marxist feminist audience she is addressing. As I understand it, her argument is this:

1. Since fetuses lack such properties as "the ability to feel and to understand" (p. 19) or "the possession of purposes, goals, projects" (p. 20) that characterize human beings, a fetus is not a human being, any more than an acorn is an oak tree. At best, a fetus is a *potential* human being.
2. It can't be that we are obligated to actualize all potential human beings, since this would forbid, not only contraception, but even abstinence, since every sperm and every ovum is a potential human being.
3. From 1 and 2, it follows that, though the fact that the fetus is a potential human being has some moral significance, it cannot be asserted that the fetus has rights comparable to those possessed by actual human beings.
4. Since a woman is an actual human being, the existence of her right to control her body is incontrovertible.
5. From 3 and 4, where the life of the fetus conflicts with the woman's exercise of control over her body, "moral primacy [goes] to the woman's needs over the needs of her fetus" (p. 20). Thus a pregnant woman has the right to abort the fetus within her.

The problem with this argument is that it makes a woman's right to abortion dependent on the level of medical technology that has been achieved. As soon as "viability" (the point at which the fetus could survive outside its mother's womb) is reached, conflict between the fetus's life and the woman's control over her body is no longer unavoidable—the fetus could be removed and develop into a human being while the woman no longer had to carry it. Recognizing this, Holmstrom asks whether women's right to abortion could "change if technology permitted a fetus to be viable outside a woman very early in pregnancy." And her answer is:

At present the woman's decision to abort necessarily has the consequence that the potentiality of the fetus to become a human being is not actualized. Abortion is feticide. But suppose the woman's decision as to whether or not to keep the fetus in her body could be separated from the issue of whether or not the fetus could develop into a human being. Then, in my opinion, women would still have the exclusive right on the former question but probably not on the latter [p. 21].

In short, as soon as it is possible to remove the fetus without killing it, a woman only has the right to do the former, and (probably) not the latter. This means that what Holmstrom is defending is *not* a woman's right to abortion, but her right to evict unwanted tenants from her womb. As long as such eviction can only be accomplished by killing the fetus, then the right to eviction entails the right to abortion. But as soon as the

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Against the Current

fetus can be viable outside the mother's womb, the mother has only a right to eviction and no longer a right to abortion.

I contend that the argument for a woman's right to abortion can be made in a way that leaves the right intact up to the point of birth. Before doing this, however, let me suggest why Holmstrom's argument is unsatisfactory. First of all, Holmstrom's argument lends support to those abortion foes who have urged legislation requiring that, in every legal abortion where the fetus can be saved, it must be. This is a kind of "second front" tactic used by abortion foes to discourage legal abortions. Were this strategy to succeed, it would have a chilling effect on pro-abortion doctors, since they would continually have to fear being charged with murder after any abortion.

Second, there is in principle no limit to how soon after conception medical technology will be able to remove a living fetus from the womb and sustain it. Currently fetuses removed after about five months of pregnancy can survive. But, given the already-available technology involved in rearing testtube babies and the already-available technology involved in micro-surgery, there is no reason to doubt that before long it will be possible to remove and sustain a fetus right after conception. Holmstrom's position implies that, were this to happen, there would no longer be a right to abortion at all—only a right to eviction. A woman considering terminating her pregnancy, then, would have only two alternatives: either keeping the fetus in her own womb; or having the fetus removed, nurtured in a laboratory and given up either to adoption or institutional rearing. And this would in effect reduce women's control over their bodies by making the emotional and/or financial costs of terminating pregnancy prohibitive, at least for some. At least some women, who would have chosen abortion, would be discouraged from terminating their pregnancies if they knew that, as a consequence, their fetus would be brought up in a laboratory and raised by others. Further, if a woman got pregnant voluntarily (i.e., neither as a result of rape or of failed but honestly attempted birth control), she could hardly expect the rest of society to foot the enormous costs involved in removing her fetus and sustaining it in a laboratory for nine months. Thus she would probably have (at least) to share the costs, and this too would discourage some women from terminating their pregnancies. Things would not be much different under socialism, since as long as any society has limited resources, it is not likely to cheerfully forego the enjoyment of some substantial chunk of those resources to pay for the nurturance of unwanted fetuses voluntarily conceived.

In sum, Holmstrom's argument is unsatisfactory because it lends support to an anti-abortion tactic used by abortion foes unable to get abortions outlawed, and because it has the potential consequence of reducing the very ability of women to control their bodies that leads Holmstrom to defend the right to abortion in the first place.

The problem with Holmstrom's argument enters when she takes pains to show that her view does not lead to the justification of infanticide. Since newborn infants lack the same properties of understanding and goals (etc.) that fetuses lack, they too are only potential

human beings. As such, if fetuses can be killed, then so can infants, unless some important moral distinction can be adduced to draw the line between fetuses and infants. Since, on one hand, Holmstrom holds that the potentiality to become a human being has some moral significance, but not enough to give the fetus a right against abortion; and on the other hand, she wants to show that "the justification of abortion does *not* entail a justification of infanticide" (p. 21), the only strategy available to her is to draw the moral line between fetuses and infants on the basis of the biological dependence of the former on the mother. Holmstrom writes that "There is a clear difference between an infant and a fetus: An infant is not so uniquely connected and dependent on one particular person as is a fetus. Others can take care of it. That provides a basis for saying that women should have the right to abortion but not to infanticide" (p. 21). And of course, it is just by this move that she must conclude that as soon as the fetus is no longer dependent on the mother, she loses the right to abort it.

In my view, Holmstrom goes wrong because she assumes, at least implicitly, that it is because human beings have unique value that they have a right to life. From this it seems to follow that potential human beings have some (though lesser) value and thus some (though weak) right to life. Hence, abortion is justified only when the life of the fetus comes into conflict with something of sufficient moral value to "outweigh" the lesser value and thus weak right to life of the fetus, and this something is the mother's right to control her body. When the mother's control over her body is no longer in conflict with the life of her offspring, the value of the offspring, fetus or infant, is not outweighed, and thus stands as a reason to prohibit the killing of viable fetuses or newborn infants. And this saves Holmstrom from justifying infanticide, but only at the costs indicated earlier.

But arguing that human beings have a right to life because of their unique value confuses reasons for promoting the continuation of the human species in general with reasons for granting any particular human being a right to life. To see this, consider that promotion of the unique value of human beings can only imply one of two alternative moral duties: Either we must maximize this value by maximizing the number of human beings, or we must keep some adequate "amount" of this value in existence by maintaining a sufficient number of human beings alive. The first of these alternatives would rule out abortion, contraception and abstinence, and probably decent life as we know it, thus it can be safely rejected. But the second alternative bestows no right to life on any particular human being as long as he or she can be replaced by another, thereby leaving unchanged the overall "amount" of the unique value of human beings. Thus the right to life of any particular human being—actual or potential—cannot be justified by the unique value of human life.

What then justifies granting particular individuals the right to life, even when they can be replaced by other particular living beings? Regarding a particular developed human being who knows that he or she is a particular living being, the answer is clear: The right to life protects against a loss that is clearly terrible to

that being. In short, we grant particular human beings the right to life, not because of the unique value of human beings, but to protect them against a fate that is awful to them. And it is awful to them not because they are human beings, but because they are human beings who know that they are particular living beings, and who know therefore that their death is, for them, the loss of everything. But a fetus does not yet know that it is a particular living being, and thus to end its life (painlessly) is to impose a loss that *to that fetus* is indistinguishable from its never having lived at all. And here, the fetus's potentiality means nothing. The potentiality to develop into a creature that is vulnerable to terrible loss is not vulnerability to that loss in a lesser degree—it is not being vulnerable to that loss at all. Thus the fact that the fetus is a potential human being provides no grounds for even a weak right to life for any particular fetus. This is not to say that "never having lived" represents no loss at all for a fetus. It is a loss, but not one terrible enough to warrant the protection of a right to life. It is the same loss "suffered" by all the infinite number of possible "people" had they been conceived, but weren't. To see this difference, consider what the loss of your life now would mean to you, compared to the loss "you" suffered in the eighteenth century by not being born.

The point at which it becomes rational to protect any particular living being is the point at which the loss of its life becomes a terrible loss to it. This is why Holmstrom could have made her argument simply by pointing to the fetus's lack of understanding and goals (etc.), since it is precisely such properties as these that mark a creature who recognizes itself as a particular living being, and thus, for whom, its death is a terrible loss. And since, in this respect, potentiality counts for nothing, the fetus's potentiality to be a human being gives it no (even weak) right to life. Thus the fetus's lack of these properties is sufficient to support a woman's right to abortion up to the moment of birth. (This incidentally also explains why there is no contradiction in defending abortion while condemning capital punishment—the latter imposes a much more terrible loss than the former.)

I contend, although I shall not argue it here, that it is on just such grounds as these that a materialist (and thus a Marxist) ought to resolve problems about the right to life. Now it is true that on these grounds infanticide is permitted. But this is really less hard to swallow than it seems, for two main reasons. First of all, if possession of the properties indicated above justify protecting the life of a creature with those properties because of the terribleness of the loss that its death is to such a creature, then the fact that newborn infants lack those properties in just the same way as fetuses or sperms or ova means that it really is no more terrible loss (to the creature itself) to end the life of a newborn infant than of a fetus or a sperm or an ovum. Second, though infanticide is permitted, there are other moral reasons for restricting its practice much more strictly than the practice of abortion or contraception. That is, even though to the infant the loss of its life is no graver than the loss of its life is to the fetus, killing infants has enough potential negative consequences (such as weakening reverence for human life, or tampering with deepseated instinctive responses of affection for the

newly born) that it should only be done under necessity (for group survival, or to prevent a life of pain and suffering). Moreover, with the right to abortion secure, the availability of contraception and the improvement of amniocentesis would mean that the cases of justifiable infanticide would be very few. In short, if the right to abortion is based strictly on the fact that the fetus does not possess those characteristics that make it rational to protect its particular life, then women have a right to abortion that is not hostage to developments in medical technology; and though infanticide is thereby justified as well, it is only justified under rather extreme circumstances.

This way of defending the right to abortion avoids some other unfortunate implications to which Holmstrom's defense leads. Since she implicitly assumes that potential human beings have a weak right to life, she can only justify abortion by placing ultimate moral weight on the biological dependence of the fetus on the mother. This leads Holmstrom to maintain that "the biological relation of a woman to a fetus, in my opinion, gives women the moral right to an abortion under all social-historical conditions" (p. 21). And, while she allows that a democratic society might decide to limit the number of children its members had, she maintains that it would always be wrong to force a pregnant woman to have an abortion—although she allows that such a woman might rightly be required to do extra work for the child. Now, though I think that under almost all circumstances, women have the right to an abortion and society lacks the right to force an abortion on an unwilling woman, Holmstrom's absolutism on these issues is indefensible. It seems that a society whose population was so small that it teetered on the brink of extinction (or faced destruction by a larger neighbor) might well require its members to try to have a certain number of children each or to have as many as they could or at least to have the ones they conceived. If a society can require its members to defend it even at the risk of death, it seems unreasonable to think that conditions of social survival could not justify the lesser infringement involved in forcing a woman to carry an unwanted child to term. Similarly, if society could only support a fixed number of people such that beyond that number existing people would begin to starve or suffer malnutrition (even with the extra work that women who wanted more children might do), then again it seems unreasonable to assume that such a society could not require its pregnant women to have abortions. Moreover, if by amniocentesis it were determined that a particular fetus was going to develop into a terribly deformed human being such that its life would likely be one of constant misery, a rational and humane society might insist that the fetus be aborted in order to prevent a miserable life before it reached self-consciousness and could no longer justly be killed. And it seems to me that if the mother opposed the abortion, it could be rightly forced upon her to defend the child against a life of suffering. These limits on the right to abortion do not, however, substantially weaken the right. Indeed, the very extremity of the conditions under which a woman could justly be forced to have or not to have an abortion against her will testifies to the strength of her right to abortion. ■

RESPONSE TO REIMAN

by Nancy Holmstrom

The morality of abortion involves many thorny philosophical and emotional issues. I am grateful to Reiman for pursuing these questions further and allowing me the opportunity to clarify my views. In addition to arguing that my views are not morally wrong and do not lead to harmful conclusions, I will argue that what he takes to be a stronger defense of women's rights is actually quite problematic.

I argued that a woman has the exclusive right to decide whether to have an abortion because 1) women's ability to control if and when they have children is essential to their self determination and freedom, 2) no one is affected by a particular pregnancy or birth as predictably and profoundly as the individual woman who has it, 3) a foetus is completely and uniquely dependent on a woman, and 4) a foetus is not a person. If, due to developments in medical technology, the third point were no longer true, i.e. if the issue of whether a woman kept a foetus in her body could be separated from the issue of whether the foetus could become a human being, then I suggested that a woman would probably not have the exclusive right to decide the latter question. Reiman attacks me on this point but he does not tell us why she should have this right except to warn that "pro-lifers" might try to capitalize on my position.

The question whether a human foetus is allowed to develop into a human being has moral significance. I did not say—and it does not follow—that the foetus has any, even weak right to life—the position Reiman attributes to me. In fact I said something quite different: "... the moral significance of the foetus' potential to become a person (given certain conditions) lies in the value we place on persons. The potentiality in itself—i.e. independent of people's valuation of what it may become—does not give it moral rights." Thus our support for voluntary abortions and opposition to forced abortions rest on the different desires of the woman in the two cases. The foetus' status is the same.

Therefore just because a foetus *could* develop into a human being outside a woman does not mean it *should*. This depends on *our* needs and values. If society wanted all the human beings that aborted foetuses could become and was able to develop foetuses outside a woman (quite an unlikely combination of historical circumstances!), the decision to do so could be democratically made. An individual woman who did not want a baby would be under no obligation to develop the foetus outside her body any more than inside. If only a small number of additional human beings were desired, for example for infertile people who wanted a baby, those foetuses could be randomly chosen or donated by women who aborted. While some women would find this an upsetting idea, others would find it a very positive one.

It is a cheap shot for Reiman to accuse me of not defending women's right to abortion but rather their right to eviction of a foetus from their womb. Thus far in history eviction from a woman's body has meant the death of the foetus and the meaning of "abortion" includes both these ideas. If it became possible to separate the two, who knows how the meaning of "abortion" would change. Reiman assumes that "abortion" must always mean foeticide. I believe that most of us

who want the right to abortion want the right to expel an unwanted foetus from our bodies and to have no responsibility for it; foeticide is at present simply the unavoidable consequence of this.

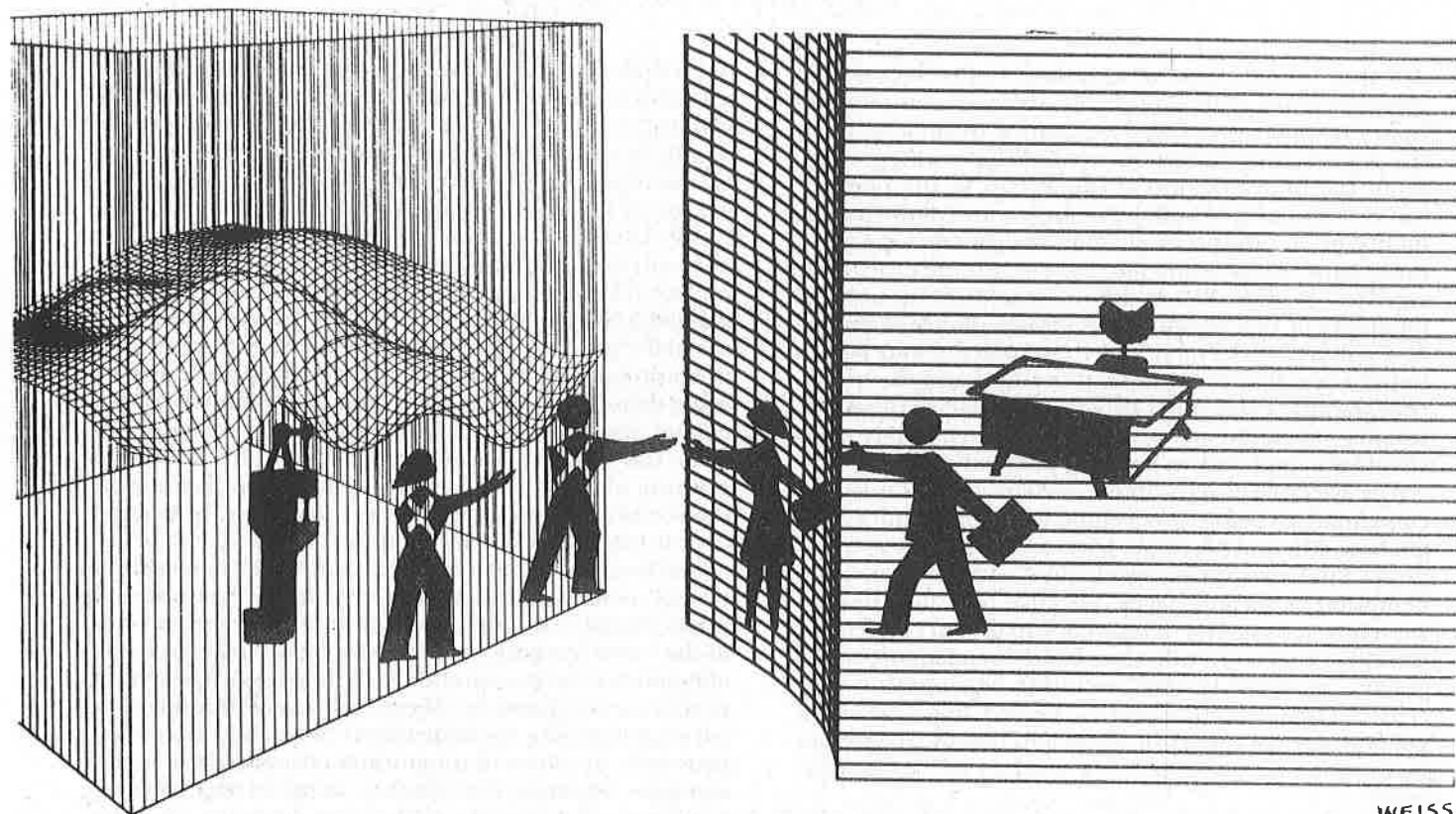
The anti-abortionist's strategy of linking the justification of abortion with the justification of infanticide is a very powerful strategy—emotionally if not logically. If abortion is really the same as infanticide, abortion would be a lot more difficult to justify. It is important, therefore, to separate the two. I did this by arguing that since a woman's exclusive right to decide whether or not to abort depends on the foetus being uniquely dependent on her, it does not follow that she has the right to kill her baby; others can take care of it, i.e. she does not have the exclusive right to decide the moral question of infanticide.

While I did not address the moral question of infanticide in my article, I assumed that most people shared my moral intuition that infanticide is not the same as abortion. However, this does not mean that infanticide could never be justified. Unless one is an absolute pacifist one believes that there are conditions under which it is justified to kill someone—of whatever age. However, these are very special and extreme circumstances. While I agree with Reiman that the lack of understanding and goals gives an infant less claim on life than an adult, that does not settle the question against infants. Adults as well as infants can be dangerous to others, very unhappy, helpless, etc. Under some conditions it could be more warranted to kill some adult, under others an infant.

Our emotions and moral convictions reflect our social and material conditions. If conditions were so dire that any unproductive person threatened group survival, we would probably feel quite differently about many kinds of people than we do now. But under present conditions we think of infants as human beings with a right to life. I see no reason to reject this as Reiman seems to by referring to infants as merely "potential human beings." How does he decide which adults are actually human beings?

In addition to criticizing me for not defending women's right to abortion, Reiman also criticizes me for being too absolutistic in defending their rights. Our disagreement brings up issues of individual rights under socialism. I suggested that "the biological relation of a woman to a foetus... gives women the moral right to an abortion under all socio-historical conditions." Reiman rejects this and argues that in certain extreme circumstances society could "require its members" to have children or require pregnant women to have abortions. I am not convinced. While I would agree in the abstract that nothing is absolute, I think there are some things that are so important and circumstances in which they would not apply are so unlikely that they can be spoken of as absolute. An individual woman's

(continued on page 53)



WEISS

A NEW MIDDLE CLASS



by Charles Post*

Since the early twentieth century, especially since the close of the second world war, the number of wage-earning, non-productive, mental and supervisory employees has increased astronomically in the advanced capitalist countries. The rapid growth in the number of technicians, foremen, teachers, social workers, middle and high level office employees, etc., compared with the slower growth in the number of workers actually producing goods and services poses a number of problems for revolutionary socialists. First, what is this new group? Is it a strata of the working class? A social layer outside of social classes? A new class? Second, what is the relationship of this social group to the industrial working class? Are they potential or actual allies, or are they enemies of the class that Marxists view as the leading force in the struggle for socialism? Finally, how do revolutionary socialists participate and relate to the struggles of this group in practice?

These questions are not simply "academic" fancies for left intellectuals. They should be of urgent interest to all socialist militants in the U.S. today. The revolutionary left in this country has been isolated from the industrial working class for nearly four decades. The

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defeat of the CIO wave of industrial militancy and the concomitant purge of socialists and communists from the unions produced an historic divorce between the left and the traditional core of the working class. From the radicalization of the 1960's to the present, the vast majority of both left activists and of the participants in the mass social movements (anti-war/anti-imperialist, women and gay, etc.)—with the crucial exception of the black liberation movement—are members of this strata of employees. Its class nature and political trajectory, and the problems and potentials for an alliance between this strata and the industrial working class must be addressed by every revolutionary socialist who seeks to consciously and effectively intervene in ongoing political struggle.

It is necessary to establish certain ground-rules for class analysis before proceeding to examine and evaluate how different Marxists have addressed these questions. First, we must reject any "common-sensical" definition of social classes. Because our "experience" somehow tells us that a given occupational category is working class or middle class is not an adequate mode of class analysis. Instead, we must begin with a concept of class relations that is derived from the more general Marxist theory of social and historical development. Second, class is not a product of "consciousness."

Classes are defined structurally and objectively in terms of the relationships which human beings enter into with one another *independently and without regard to the consciousness of those relationships*. Finally, the purported social "function(s)" of a group do not define its position in the class structure. Instead the places human beings occupy in the production of material conditions (goods and services) define the class structure. These social relations of production consist of relations of property in, and effective control over the means of production; which in turn define the nature of surplus-labor extraction in a given society.

"New Working Class"

Possibly the most popular and influential attempt to define this new layer of advanced capitalism claims that most members of this group are part of the working class. There are a number of variants of the "new working class" thesis, Ernest Mandel's being one of the most theoretically rigorous.¹ Mandel begins by rejecting any attempt to restrict the working class to those who produce surplus-value. Instead, he asserts that all those who are economically compelled to sell their labor-power in order to reproduce themselves are part of the working class. According to Mandel:

Included in the proletariat, then, are not only manual industrial workers, but all unproductive wage-laborers who are subject to the same fundamental constraints: non-ownership of means of production; lack of direct access to the means of livelihood . . . insufficient money to purchase the means of livelihood without more or less continuous sale of labor-power. Thus, all those strata whose salary levels *permit* accumulation of capital in addition to a "normal" standard of living are excluded from the proletariat.²

The "new working class" argument's simplicity is the source of both its appeal and its conceptual problems. The class structure of advanced capitalism is reduced basically to workers and capitalists, apparently realiz-

ing the Marxist prediction of the gradual proletarianization of all "middle strata." Thus, the vast majority of people in the advanced capitalist countries become members of the class capable of leading the struggle for socialism. However, defining the working class simply as all those who depend on wages for their livelihood raises very serious theoretical problems. In this notion, the forms and magnitudes of income tend to replace relationships in production as the basic criteria for social classes. While separation or possession of the means of production seems to be a central element in this argument, its proponents recognize that certain wage-earners (whose *income* is large enough to allow capital accumulation or long or medium term escape from the labor market) must be excluded from the working class. Thus, income, rather than position in the social relations of production, becomes the central determinant of class place and membership.

The theoretical slippage into an income based definition of social classes can have very important political implications. Although Mandel and some proponents of the "new working class" thesis firmly reject any social-democratic interpretation of this thesis, the definition of social classes by income can serve as a theoretical underpinning for reformism. Once class is defined primarily in terms of magnitude of income, the class struggle becomes the conflict between unequal income groups, rather than the structurally antagonistic relation between exploiters and exploited. Once class struggle is presented as the struggle between the "wage earning class" and the capitalist class, then the slippage to a confrontation between "rich" and "poor" and the demand for income redistribution, rather than the revolutionary transformation of the social relations of production, is not far away. Further, the broad definition of the working class as all wage-earners eliminates rather than directly confronts the problem of class alliances. The class alliances necessary to capital's struggle to maintain its class rule or the workers' struggle for socialism are conveniently relegated to "non-questions."

"Contradictory Class Locations"

Many Marxists, aware of these and other problems associated with the "new working class" thesis, have attempted to conceptualize this strata as neither proletarian nor bourgeois. In other words, many analysts have sought to locate these employees outside of, or "between" the fundamental classes of capitalist society.³ However, there is no agreement among these socialists on how best to conceptualize the place of this group in the class structure. This group is viewed as: a *new* class basically in contradiction with the working class, or a new "middle class" with structural antagonisms with *both* labor and capital, or even as occupying some special "contradictory location" in the class structure. As a result of this conceptual confusion, there is little consensus on the possibilities or conditions for an alliance between this group and the working class.

One of the most influential formulations on the left presents these employees as part of neither the working nor capitalist classes, but not constituting a new and distinct social class either. While the theoreticians of the European Communist parties are forceful advocates of the "new middle strata" argument, Erik Olin

Wright's analysis of "contradictory locations" in the class structure of late capitalism is both better known in the US and more theoretically elaborated.⁴ According to Wright, three sets of relations define social classes in a capitalist society: legal ownership, economic ownership (control over *what* is produced) and possession (control over *how* things are produced). On the one hand, the capitalist class has complete and full legal and economic ownership and possession of the means of production and labor process; and, on the other, the working class has absolutely no legal or economic ownership or possession. Those strata that possess partial legal or economic ownership (low and middle level managers and scientific and technical personnel in product development) or partial possession (supervisors and scientific and technical personnel in production technique) fall outside either capital or labor, but lack the internal coherence to constitute a new social class. Finally, the occupants of these "contradictory locations" in the capitalist class structure are in antagonistic relations with both the capitalist and working classes.

The "middle strata/contradictory class locations" thesis is superior to the "new working class" thesis. Basing social classes on the relations which constitute the capitalist production process, this argument avoids the "new working class" thesis' problem of fusing classes with income groups. However, the "middle strata/contradictory class locations" theory has its own problems. The notion that a social group or strata can exist outside of a definite social class contradicts the Marxist conception that all "strata" are part of classes defined by the social relations of production. This theoretical ambiguity, combined with claims that the transformation of the capitalist labor-process is proceeding in the uni-linear direction of "de-skilling," leads to certain problematic political implications. "De-skilling" and the relative impoverishment of this stratum purportedly pushes this group either directly into the working class or to a political situation where it has no alternative but to ally itself with the working class. In short, the theoretical unclarity of this thesis leads it, like the "new working class" thesis to assume away the problem of the alliances the working class must forge in its struggle for socialism.

"Professional-Managerial Class"

Barbara and John Ehrenreich's analysis of the "Professional-Managerial Class" (PMC) is a definite advance over both the "new working class" and "new middle strata" arguments.⁵ The salaried mental laborers produced during twentieth century capitalist development constitute a new social class distinct from both capital and labor. The distinguishing characteristics of the PMC are its non-ownership of objects and instruments of production and its function in reproducing capitalist class relations both economically and culturally. According to the Ehrenreichs, the PMC is a class committed to the "rationalization" of capitalism. In other words, the PMC functions and views itself as mediating the struggle between the capitalist and working classes. The PMC struggled in the early twentieth century to force the capitalists to "rationalize" capitalism through the restructuring of "self-destructive" competition, reorganization of production on a "scientific basis" (Taylorism), creation of an enlarged finan-

cial and service sector and granting certain concessions to mollify and pacify the working class. Simultaneously, the PMC struggled to expropriate certain productive skills and cultural knowledge from the working class. Specifically, the PMC expanded as new places were created in the class structure through the de-skilling of productive workers (technicians, supervisors, lower and medium level managers and supervisors, etc.) and the destruction of working class cultural institutions (teachers, social workers, etc.). Thus, a new class, distinct from labor and capital, was created, characterized by its appropriation of knowledge and skill (monopolization of mental labor) from the working class.

The Ehrenreichs' analysis of the PMC theory is superior to the "middle strata/contradictory class locations" thesis in its identification of this group as a new and distinct social class. However, the Ehrenreichs' method for identifying classes poses new theoretical problems. The Ehrenreichs define class primarily in terms of a group's *function* in the production and reproduction process, rather than *in relation to other classes*. This slip into the conceptual universe of bourgeois social science (where all social phenomena are identified with a purported "function") tends to undermine the Ehrenreichs' ability to identify the necessary, *structural antagonisms* between the PMC and other social classes. By defining the PMC as the class responsible for the economic and cultural reproduction of capital's domination over labor, they are hard pressed to locate *any* structural contradiction between the PMC and the capitalist class. As a result, when they turn to the strategic and political implications of their analysis, the Ehrenreichs can envision only radicalized *individual* members of the PMC entering into an alliance with the working class. Thus, the Ehrenreichs' functional definition of the PMC prevents them from recognizing any objective conflicts between the PMC and capital which would create the conditions for an alliance between the proletariat and large segments of the PMC.

"New Middle Class"

Nicos Poulantzas offers us an analysis that overcomes most of the major theoretical and political problems associated with the other arguments.⁶ He attempts to collapse non-productive, supervisory and mental laborers into the same class as the traditional petty-bourgeoisie of small producers and shopkeepers. Poulantzas' theory of social classes thus places these employees within capitalist social relations of production in structural contradiction with both capital and labor. In sum, Poulantzas' approach allows us to understand the contradictory location and politics of this social group in a manner clearer than in other analyses.

Poulantzas begins with an examination of the economic, political and ideological relations that constitute capitalist social relations of production. The economic aspect of capitalist social relations of production consists of the relation between productive and unproductive labor, between labor that produces surplus-value and labor that does not. While a generally acceptable Marxist definition of productive labor does not exist, we view all labor exchanged against capital and involved in the social production of commodities

(whether in the form of "material objects" or "services") as productive labor.⁷ Whatever definition of productive labor is adopted, the importance of the productive/unproductive labor relation in the analysis of social classes in a capitalist society cannot be underestimated. The production and appropriation of surplus labor in the form of surplus-value distinguish capitalism from all other forms of social labor. Similarly, the production and appropriation of surplus-value define the *specific, objective* and *structural* antagonism between the working class and capitalist class. Put another way, it is the production and appropriation of surplus-value that *demarkate* and *differentiate* capitalist exploitation and the basic features of the capital-labor struggle from all other class relations and forms of class struggle in a capitalist society.

Of course political and ideological relations exist *alongside* the economic relations. The political aspects of capitalist *production* are the "authority relations" that exist at the point of production, specifically, the relations of supervision and management involved in the organization and direction of the capitalist labor-process. The ideological aspect of capitalist production relations is the relation of mental to manual labor. Like the relation between productive and unproductive labor, the mental/manual labor relation has eluded precise definition. For our purposes, the mental/manual division of labor is the relation between the conceptualization and execution of specific tasks in capitalist production. In other words, mental laborers possess "specialized knowledge" (scientific-technical knowledge applied to capitalist production, knowledge of capitalist law and state regulations, the "rituals of know-how"/the rituals of ruling, etc.) and conceptualize tasks; while manual laborers are generally excluded from this "knowledge" and are limited to the execution of tasks.

The economic, political and ideological components of capitalist production relations define the structural locations of the working class, capitalist class and new middle class. Productive, manual and non-supervisory labor defines the working class; while the bourgeoisie is defined by non-productive (specifically, the appropriation of surplus-value), mental and managerial labor. The capitalist and working classes are defined in antagonistic relation to one another: one as the class that produces, the other as the class that appropriates surplus-value; one as the class that performs productive tasks conceptualized and organized by the other. The antagonistic relation of the capitalist and working classes in the capitalist production process makes them the "fundamental classes" of capitalist society—the only classes capable of organizing or reorganizing society in "their own image" and the classes around whom all other classes define their position in the class struggle.

But the process of capitalist development, in particular the intensification of relative surplus-value production and the development of mass consumption in the twentieth century,⁸ produced new openings, spaces "between capital and labor." On the one hand, the reorganization of the capitalist labor process ("assembly-line," application of science to production, growth of banking and commercial capital) created new spaces for low-level foremen and supervisors, "quality control-

lers," technicians and clerical employees. On the other hand, the reorganization of consumption (privatized residence for the unionized sectors of the working class, growth of public education and social services) created new spaces for salesmen and retail employees, teachers, social workers and low level government bureaucrats.

The proliferation and growth of these occupational categories created a new middle class with structural antagonisms as well as commonalities with both the capitalist and working classes. The new middle class shares with the working class a common subordination to capital. Specifically, the new middle class is *exploited* (it performs unpaid labor for capital, labor beyond that needed to create an equivalent to its wage), although in a different *manner* than the working class (no production of surplus-value), and is *subjected* to capitalist organization and conceptualization of production. These structural commonalities with labor define the new middle class' antagonisms with capital. But this class is simultaneously differentiated from the working class and shares certain common structural positions with capital. The new middle class shares in capital's political and ideological domination over labor through its role in the supervision of labor-power and its partial possession of "specialized knowledge"/limited participation in the conceptualization of capitalist production.

Poulantzas' attempt to conceptually merge this new social class with the traditional petty-bourgeoisie mars his otherwise insightful analysis. Based on the *correct* observation that the new middle class plays a similar role to the traditional petty-bourgeoisie in the class struggle in capitalist countries, Poulantzas erroneously presents this class as a fraction of the petty-bourgeoisie. Certain similarities in the structural positions of the old petty-bourgeoisie and new middle class (isolation from the dominant capitalist class relations, continual social differentiation, fragmented labor processes, etc.) make them both "middle class" and produce similar roles in the class struggle. However, small producers and retailers and salaried non-productive, mental and supervisory personnel must be placed in two separate classes because they are defined by two different forms of social labor. On the one hand, petty-commodity production defines the traditional petty-bourgeoisie; and, on the other, late capitalist production precipitated the new middle class. In sum, while both classes act in a very similar manner on the political terrain—as "swing classes" between the working and capitalist classes—their different positions in the social relations of production make them two distinct social classes.

The Ambiguous Politics in the New Middle Class

The development and crisis of late capitalism have had a profound impact on the new middle class. While late capitalist development has swelled the size of this class, it has also divided it and polarized a large segment of the new middle class toward the working class. First, the application of "scientific management" to, and the introduction of new machinery in the non-productive sectors of the capitalist economy (offices,

banks, government bureaucracy) and the "de-skilling" of scientific and technical employees⁹ have routinized much of mental labor. Large segments of the mental labor force are finding their work, which once combined the tasks of conception and execution, increasingly alienating. Over all conceptualization has become the prerogative of the upper levels of the new middle class and the bourgeoisie, leaving the bulk of the new middle class employees to perform routine detail work. Second, the crisis of late capitalism has produced a "fiscal crisis" of the capitalist state apparatus, which employs a large segment of the new middle class.¹⁰ These employees are directly affected by the reorganization of the state in general and the dismantling of social services and educational programs in particular.

These economic factors alone will not guarantee the establishment, form and stability of an alliance between the working class and the new middle class. The historical conjuncture of the struggle between the working and capitalist classes shapes and determines the new middle class' alliances and forms of political class struggle. In other words, the politics of the new middle class should be analyzed in the same manner that Marxists have analyzed the politics of the traditional petty-bourgeoisie.¹¹

Although either the petty-bourgeoisie or the new middle class can emerge as an independent social force in the political class struggle (the example of mass fascist movements before they come to power should serve as a reminder of this reality), *neither* class can constitute itself as a ruling class. As a result, the middle classes must enter into alliances with one of the "fundamental" classes of capitalist society (the capitalist or working class) to achieve a partial fulfillment of their class goals. However, these alliances are neither permanent nor without conflict. The middle classes, as the cases of Chile in 1970-73 and Germany in 1923-33 make clear, are "swing classes," often shifting allegiance between the working and capitalist classes. The political clarity and level of organization—the relative class capacity and position—of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in a given historical conjuncture ultimately determine which "fundamental" social class these middle classes will ally themselves with.

The petty bourgeoisie and new middle class have most often been allied with the capitalist class. The middle classes see in the bourgeoisie (especially in periods of working class division and disorganization) an ally securely in power, who can maintain the middle classes' position vis-a-vis the working class. The capitalist class, with its superior political and ideological resources as a ruling class, appeals to the middle classes' fear of proletarianization and its belief in the class neutrality of political power and the state apparatus. The historically specific struggles and relations of forces between capital and labor determine the varied forms of the bourgeoisie's alliances with the middle classes, forms which have ranged from bourgeois democracy to fascism. The alliance between the capitalist class and the petty bourgeoisie and/or new middle class allows capital, the numerically smallest class in capitalist society, to obtain political and ideological support and legitimation from a numerically large (perhaps the largest) class in its struggle to maintain its class domination.

New Middle Class and the Working Class

History also provides important examples of alliances between the working class and the middle classes. In periods of profound political crisis, when unified and organized working class struggle has undermined capitalist rule, alliances between the working class and the middle classes have forged under the leadership of the working class. The most successful example of such an alliance was the Russian Revolution of 1917, where the urban workers gained the support of the mass of the rural petty producers in its struggle for state power. Other examples of this type of working class-petty bourgeois/new middle class alliance were the German Revolution of 1918-23 and the May-June events of 1968. These latter examples demonstrate the highly unstable nature of the "revolutionary" form of the alliance between the workers and middle classes. As Trotsky pointed out in his writings on German fascism, the maintenance of a revolutionary class alliance necessitates the working class' completion of its struggle for political power and the initiation for the construction of socialism. Failing a successful socialist revolution, their erstwhile petty-bourgeois and new middle class allies will "swing back" to some form of an alliance with the capitalist class; ranging from mass electoral support for Gaullism through most of the 1970's to the rise of fascism in the late 1920's in Germany.

The historically most common form of an alliance between the working class and the middle classes has been a "reformist" one: social democracy. In this form of the alliance of the classes subordinated to capital, the middle classes assume political leadership. More precisely, the petty bourgeoisie and/or new middle class and the labor bureaucracy, a strata of the working class, provides the political program and strategy for the working class. The labor bureaucracy and the middle classes share a common respect for the capitalist *status quo*. The labor bureaucracy seeks to maintain a minimal level of working class self-organization (the trade unions in particular) in order to maintain the institutional basis for its privileges, while attempting to avoid direct and militant confrontations with capital which could jeopardize the existence of these institutions. The petty-bourgeoisie and the new middle class seek to tap the strength of the organized working class to obtain concessions from capital which they could not obtain through independent struggle, while seeking to contain anticapitalist struggles within a framework that challenges neither the capitalist state nor the capitalist accumulation of capital.

Together, the labor bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeoisie and/or new middle class constitute what Lenin and others have called the "transmission belt" of bourgeois politics and ideology into the working class. Middle and capitalist class ideology in the social democratic workers movement is manifested in the notion that the capitalist state is a neutral instrumentality which either capital or labor can wield to their own ends, the idea that the grossest inequities and periodic crises of capitalism can be eliminated by limited state ownership of industry, collaboration between capital and labor in the operation of capitalist firms, capitalist

state social welfare and "counter-cyclical" policies. The stability and success of a social democratic alliance between the working and middle classes have been historically linked to capital's ability to grant concession to the workers and their allies. In other words, it has historically been periods of capitalist and political stability that have been most conducive to the growth and stability of social democracy.

Implications for Current Analysis and Practice

The position of the new middle class in contemporary US politics is very complex and poses many problems for revolutionary socialists. On the one hand, segments of the petty-bourgeoisie and new middle class have swung to the "new right." Alongside sections of the white, male and unionized working class, a large chunk of the new middle class has opted for an uneasy alliance with sections of capital on a program of racism, sexism, homophobia, and "cheap government." On the other hand, segments of the new middle class (teachers, professors, social workers and other state sector middle class employees radicalized during the 1960's and early 1970's) provide the social basis for a new social democracy in the US. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) organizes an alliance between this fraction of the new middle class and the "left leaning" trade union bureaucrats (Wimpinger, Fraser, *et al.*) on a program of "neo-Keynesianism" (counter-cyclical "state planning"), "Economic Democracy" (worker/union buyouts of bankrupt capitalist firms, "co-management," etc.) and the transformation of the Democratic Party into a working class party.

Neither of these political alternatives has much viability today. The middle class sectors of the "new right" have found the Reagan administration a profoundly disappointing experience. Their capitalist allies, despite rhetorical adherence to "pro-family," "anti-busing" and "low taxes," have failed to deliver any major capitalist state policies banning abortions, stopping busing for school integration or actually lowering taxes on the new middle class. The new social democracy will prove to be an equally disappointing experience for those sectors of the new middle class seeking an alliance with the working class. The social democratic organizations in the US have no mass base in the working class and have come into existence in a period of capitalist economic stagnation and crisis. DSA's opposition to rank and file initiatives in the unions (a necessary condition for their continued collaboration with the trade union leadership) and the development of movements outside the point of production which are independent of the Democratic Party and the state apparatus (i.e., which reject calls of "Vote for X" and "We can work with city hall") will prevent the social democracy from recruiting radicalizing workers to its ranks. DSA's opposition to the development of an anti-capitalist movement of the workers and oppressed minorities, women, gay people, etc. in favor of a futile attempt to "transform" the Democratic Party will prevent the realization of its minimal program of reforms. In this period of capitalist crisis, we are already seeing increased social-democratic support for "mild" social service austerity and trade union concessions.¹²

What are the basic outlines for a strategy to forge a non-social democratic alliance between the working class and new middle class in what is obviously a non-revolutionary situation in the US today? How does our analysis of the new middle class' structural location and contemporary politics affect the practice of revolutionary socialists? We must be continually conscious that we are attempting to construct an *alliance* between two social classes and not simply forge the *unity* of the working class. In other words, revolutionary socialists must bear in mind that the new middle class has interests that are both in contradiction and in common with the working class. While workers and new middle class people can and do struggle together against the capitalist class, there will be tensions and antagonisms because of the new middle class' participation in the political and ideological domination (supervisory and mental labor) of the working class. Thus, when such conflicts emerge in a bloc between the classes subordinated to capital, revolutionary socialists have to be able to present a strategy that simultaneously defends the workers' position and maintains the alliance with the new middle class.

To be more concrete, let's examine some of the problems and possibilities involved in socialist organizing among two groups of middle class employees: primary and secondary school teachers and social workers.¹³ Teachers and social workers have been two of the most important fractions of the new middle class that have adopted working class forms of organization, the industrial union. Teachers and social workers in New York and other localities have organized with working class employees (maintenance and other productive state-sector workers) in the same unions. Additionally, the student radicalization of the 1960's and early 1970's produced a large layer of socialist and radical teachers and social workers who have played an important role in making many locals of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the Social Service Employees Union (SSEU) into centers of economic militancy and opposition to racism, sexism and militarism. While the unionization and militancy of teachers and social workers are illustrations of the possibilities of an alliance between the new middle class and the working class, other developments demonstrate that this alliance is not without problems. Unionized teachers and social workers are still mental laborers involved in socializing working class youth to capitalist discipline and administering unemployed and underemployed workers. As a result, they are often in antagonistic relations with their working class clientele.

One well-known example of the conflict between unionized middle class employees and segments of the working class was the 1968 United Federation of Teachers (UFT) strike. The UFT leadership and most of the rank and file teachers struck to defend their privileges as mental laborers against the New York black and Latin working class communities' demand for a role in the administration of their children's education. Unlike racist strikes by white workers, the teachers were not fighting to preserve a privileged position in the labor market. Rather than struggling to exclude blacks and Latins from employment as teachers, the

UFT fought to exclude black and Latin workers from a role in running the educational system. According to the UFT, the teachers and administrations alone were capable of running the schools because of their exclusive possession of certain "specialized knowledge." The "unqualified" parents (all manual laborers) of New York's working class ghettos and barrios had to be prevented from interfering with the "professionals" exercise of their authority in the class room. Similarly, elitist and paternalistic relations characteristic of encounters between mental and manual laborers often mark the relations between social workers and their working class clients.

The unionization of the new middle class employees is a crucial, but alone insufficient condition for the establishment of a fighting alliance between the working and new middle classes. Revolutionary socialists working among such employees thus attempt not only to organize these employees in the same manner as workers (militant, rank and file-run industrial unions), but seek to raise these employees' consciousness of the need to overcome the divisions between themselves and the working class. Revolutionary socialist teachers and social workers should take the lead in popularizing the critique of capitalist education and social welfare among their co-employees, and should elaborate a program that practically challenges the mental-manual division of labor. For example, socialist teachers

should initiate and support struggles for parent/community control of schools in working class neighborhoods, continually attacking the notion that the knowledge necessary to running the schools is so "specialized" to be either alien or inaccessible to working class parents. Similarly, socialist social workers have to raise the demands to both restore and expand social services and to include the unemployed and underemployed in the administration of the social welfare apparatus. Thus, revolutionary socialists working among new middle class employees face a dual task: on the one hand, of organizing such employees in the manner we seek to organize all laborers and, on the other, to continually attempt to undermine new middle class domination over the working class

Ultimately the success of such a strategy for an alliance under the leadership of the working class requires a unified, militant and politicized working class movement. Only when the working class can present itself as a political alternative to the capitalist class will it be able to unite behind it all "intermediary" social classes. As the very existence of ATC testifies, the building of such a working class movement is neither simple nor straight-forward. Hopefully, this essay will advance the discussion of revolutionary socialist strategy in the US by reasserting the importance of the problem of class alliances in the existence and survival of capitalism and in the struggle for socialism ■

FOOTNOTES

* I would like to thank the editorial committee of *Against the Current* for their comradely criticisms and suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay. Of course, they are not responsible for anything argued here.

¹ Serge Mallet. *Essays on the New Working Class* (New York: Telos Press, 1975); E. Mandel. "Introduction," in K. Marx. *Capital II* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 46-57; Robert Schaeffer and James Weinstein. "Between the Lines," in P. Walker (ed.) *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End Press, 1979).

² Mandel, "Introduction," p. 47.

³ Our rejection of the "new working class" thesis does mean that we see the working class as either a minority or very small majority to the population in most advanced capitalist countries. However, this in no way implies that the working class is no longer the social agent leading the struggle for socialism. Instead, our conception of classes in contemporary capitalism should reaffirm the centrality of the working class in the struggle for socialism, while drawing revolutionary socialists' attention to the problems of winning non-working class oppressed groups to socialist politics.

⁴ Erik O. Wright. "The Class Structure of Advanced Capitalist Societies," in *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: New Left Books, 1978); P. Boccara (ed.), *Le Capitalisme Monopoliste d'etat* (Paris, 1971); V. Cheparkov (ed.), *State Monopoly Capitalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969).

⁵ John and Barbara Ehrenreich. "The Professional-Managerial Class," in Walker, (ed.) *Between Labor and Capital*.

⁶ Poulantzas presents a fully developed analysis of social classes and the new middle class/"new petty bourgeoisie" in "Social Classes and Their Extended Reproduction," and "The Petty Bourgeoisie, Traditional and New," in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975). A succinct summary of his views is presented in Poulantzas, "The New Petty Bourgeoisie," *Insurgent Sociologist* 9, 1 (Summer 1979).

⁷ See: E. Mandel, "Introduction," pp. 38-46.

⁸ See M. Aglietta. *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The U.S. Experience* (London: New Left Books, 1979); E. Mandel. *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975).

⁷, 1 (1969). Comrade Zeluck does not necessarily agree with

the conclusions presented here.

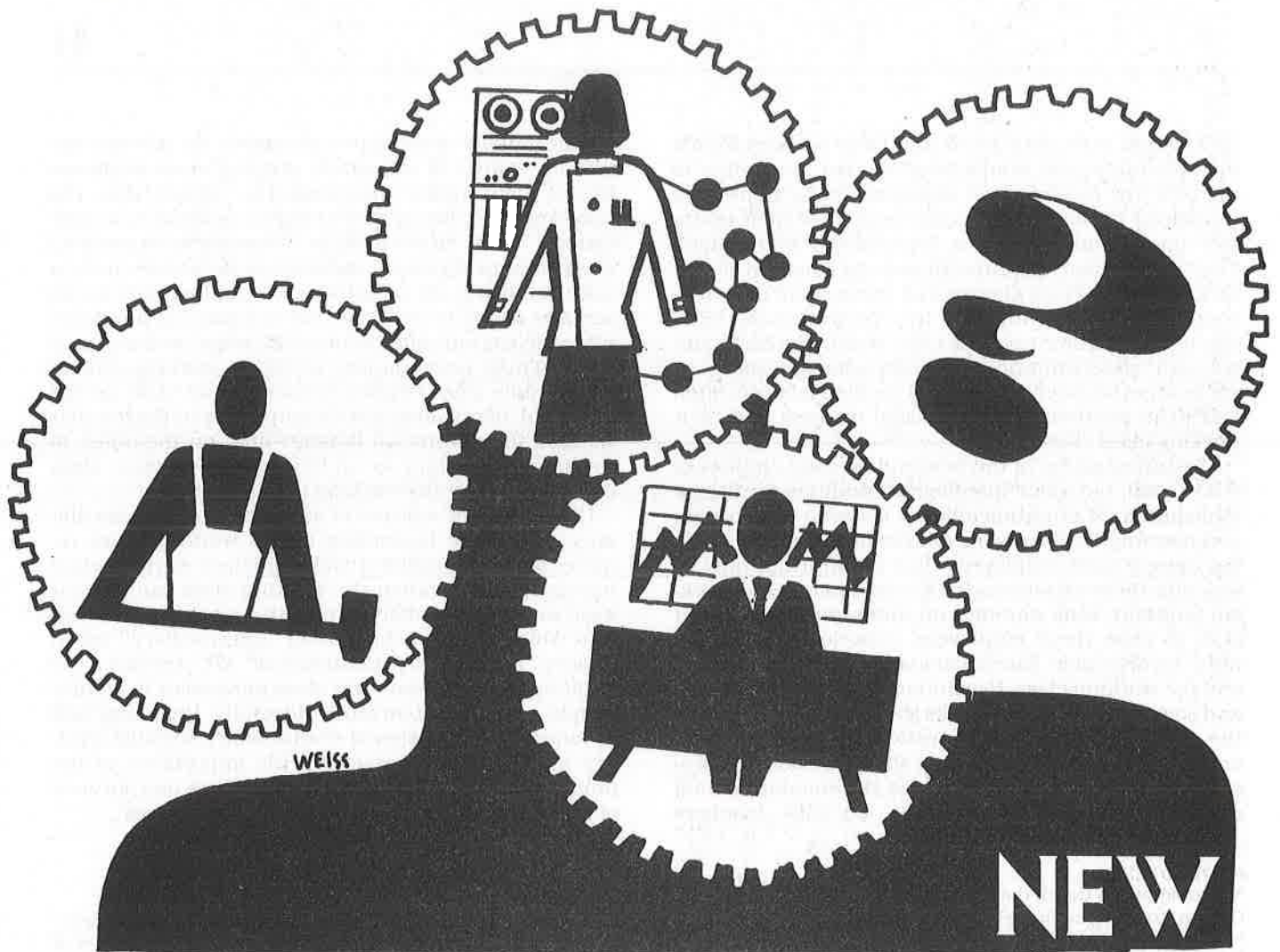
⁹ The routinization of mental labor is described in H. Braverman. *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 293-374.

¹⁰ It would be a serious error to view all employees of the capitalist state apparatus as members of the new middle class. A large portion of state employees (sanitation workers, postal workers, transport and electrical facility workers, workers in nationalized industries, etc.) are productive, manual and non-supervisory workers. Only those employees who are unproductive, mental or supervisory laborers are part of the new middle class. Thus, as we shall see below, the state sector provides many opportunities for forging alliances between workers and new middle class employees.

¹¹ Much of the following analysis is based upon Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970). It should be noted that Trotsky was not only one of the few post-Lenin marxists to seriously analyze the politics of the petty bourgeoisie, but was one of the first twentieth century marxists to identify the new middle class as a class distinct from both capital and labor. In fact, Trotsky prefigured Poulantzas' analysis in his *History of the Russian Revolution*: "It must not be forgotten that the question is here of a new capitalist type of petty-bourgeoisie, of industrial, commercial and bank clerks, the functionaries of capital . . . and the workers' bureaucracy . . . in whose name the well-known German social democrat Edward Bernstein undertook at the end of the last century a revision of the revolutionary conceptions of Marx." (London: Sphere Books, 1967), I:166 (Emphasis added-C.P.)

¹² For more complete treatments of the social democracy's prospects today, and an analysis of the failure of social-democratic strategies (especially the transformation of the Democratic party into a labor party), see: Robert Brenner, "A New Social Democracy?" *Against the Current* 1, 1 (Fall 1980); Mike Davis, "American Labor: The New Deal Heritage," *Against the Current* 1, 3 (Summer 1981).

¹³ For much of what follows, I am indebted to numerous discussions with Steve Zeluck, and to reading his essay, "The UFT Strike: A Blow Against Teacher Unionism," *New Politics*



MIDDLE CLASS OR WORKING CLASS?

by Peter Meiksins *

As the twentieth century has progressed, increasing numbers of the socialist "orthodoxies" of the nineteenth century have been called into question. One of these pertains to the concept of class. The traditional socialist view of capitalist social structure was relatively simple. Capitalist society, according to this view, *tended* to divide into two classes (industrial workers and capitalists) who were locked in mortal combat. Out of this conflict, the industrial working class, which constituted the vast majority, would triumph over the much smaller group of capitalists, and create a socialist society devoid of class divisions.

This analysis, however, has become increasingly difficult to sustain in the twentieth century. The industrial working class is no longer (if it ever was) the majority in most capitalist countries and there has appeared a wide variety of intermediate strata, composed of clerks, professionals, administrators, technicians and so on. One need not be a proponent of the view that the industrial worker is an endangered species¹ to realize that socialist theory needs to analyze the nature and future role of these strata if socialism is to remain relevant to the countries of the developed West.

This article, like the preceding one by Charles Post to

which it is partly a response, is an attempt to stimulate discussion of the role of the "new middle class" in socialist politics. It begins by briefly considering some of the issues involved in determining the class character of these strata: are they by nature the opponents, the potential allies, or even a part of the traditional working class? It is the contention of this article that most socialist analyses of the "new middle class" (including that advocated by Post) are unsatisfactory—in their place, it proposes a rather different assessment of these strata. Finally, some of the important political conclusions of this re-assessment will be briefly sketched out in the concluding section of this article.

Marxism and the "New Middle Class"

Marx's fundamental insight was that classes are about conflict—they are not, as much academic sociol-

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ogy seems to suggest, static analytical categories. Marx quite clearly indicated that, under capitalism, the two major classes, workers and capitalists, were irreconcilably in conflict as a result of the exploitative relationship between them. The problem for contemporary observers, however, is how to apply this dichotomous class analysis to today's capitalist society, which appears to include far more than just workers and capitalists. A number of attempts have been made to "update" Marxist theory to account for the complexities of contemporary class structure. It will not be possible here to consider the many interesting issues raised in this debate; however, it is necessary briefly to discuss the general theses that have been advanced in order to point to their shortcomings and to underline the need to re-think the Marxist approach.

While a great variety of neo-Marxist approaches to the analysis of the "new middle class" exists, it is probably sufficient for our purposes here to focus on the three influential "schools" of thought discussed by Post. These are the "new class" theory, including the "professional-managerial class" (PMC) hypothesis proposed by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, Erik Olin Wright's discussion of contradictory class locations, and the work of Nicos Poulantzas.

Ehrenreich

The Ehrenreichs give two reasons for designating portions of the new intermediate strata as a "new class"; they point, first of all, to their non-ownership of the means of production and, secondly, to their role in the *reproduction* of capitalist social relations. By the latter, they are referring to the fact that many members of this "new class" either produce and propagate ideology (as in the case of teachers, social workers, media people, etc.) or (as in the case of engineers or administrators) design and administer production processes that have built into them important social control mechanisms. Post takes the Ehrenreichs to task for failing to identify a basis for conflict between this group and the bourgeoisie. In fact, the Ehrenreichs clearly indicate the basis for conflict between the PMC and the bourgeoisie in pointing to the former's employee status. Members of the PMC, like *all* employees, are exposed to various kinds of conflict with the owners of the means of production.

However, the Ehrenreichs are less successful in substantiating their claim that there is a class conflict between the PMC and the *working class*. In essence, they point to the PMC's role in reproducing capitalist social relations as the basis for such a conflict. Yet, as Post correctly argues, this is to confuse a group's *function* with its *class position*. It may be that the activities of teachers or engineers or administrators in capitalist society are sometimes inimical to the interests of industrial workers. But, the same may be said of the seeming short-run conflict between the interests of most workers and those of munitions workers or public sector workers whose wages are paid for by the working class as a whole. Short-run conflicts of interest *within* a class are all too common. One must be careful not to assume that a group of workers is in a different class simply because of a distinctive function. The only other argument which the Ehrenreichs employ in positing a class distinction between the PMC and the

working class is to point to their relative privilege. Yet, this is to retreat to the superficial type of class theory employed by academic sociology. In short, while the Ehrenreichs point to some important sociological differences between the PMC and the "working class," they do not succeed in showing that there is a *class* barrier between them.

Wright

A second approach to the class analysis of the "new middle class" focuses on the question of "control." The leading exponent of this school—Erik Olin Wright—argues that these strata are not fully bourgeois, proletarian or petty bourgeois because they have partial degrees of control over either the means of production, the labor process, or investment. For example, Wright indicates that certain skilled workers have partial control over the labor process in the sense that they have not been fully "de-skilled" and are thus between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. Similarly, managers and technocrats, because they too have not been de-skilled and because they possess a certain amount of decision-making authority, are in a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Wright concludes that groups such as these are "objectively torn between class forces."

Wright is undoubtedly correct in arguing that degrees of autonomy or supervisory authority may contribute to a particular group of workers' sense of being different, but is he justified in seeing these as constitutive of partial class barriers? In other words, does a sense of being different mean that one is *in fact* different? Wright's argument to this effect is severely weakened by the fact that his analysis is static. That is, instead of focusing on the conflict-producing relations among different groups, he argues that it is the possession of certain characteristics (i.e., control) that is the basis for class in capitalist society. Given the long history of struggles over workers' control, skill, etc., we must ask him, where is the line to be drawn? How much control does one have to have (5%, 10%, 20%?) to be excluded from the working class? And, is all control conflictual control over others?

Equally important, Wright tends to make too little of the fact that the vast majority of those he regards as occupying contradictory class locations share with the "working class" their status as employees who do not control the means of production (obviously, a small number of higher managers are a different matter). Wright seems to feel that this shared characteristic of non-control is *overridden* by the fact that certain workers are in *partial* control over various aspects of their jobs. Yet, is it the case that a moderate amount of control over one's job is of such great importance that it creates an overriding, organic, fundamental and therefore permanent conflict of interest among various categories of working people *in spite of the fact* that they are all wage-laborers? It is conceivable that conflict may develop between semi-autonomous craft workers and unskilled workers over their different degrees of authority, privilege, etc. But, these are short-term, temporary conflicts that can be overcome. *Class* conflicts are far more fundamental than this. In sum, Wright's analysis, like the Ehrenreichs', points to important sociological differences among various types of

workers; but, it fails to provide an adequate justification for regarding these differences as constitutive of class.

Poulantzas

The final approach we need to consider is that developed by Nicos Poulantzas, and argued, in slightly modified form, in the preceding article by Charles Post. This approach offers us a "new middle class" based on the important Marxist distinctions between supervisory and non-supervisory labor, mental and manual labor, and productive and unproductive labor.² Poulantzas and Post argue that only those workers who perform productive, manual, non-supervisory labor may be considered part of the working class. All those remaining workers who are not capitalists, but who perform unproductive, mental and/or supervisory labor, fall into a new middle class between the bourgeoisie and the working class. How adequate is this as a class analysis? Let us look at each of Poulantzas' distinctions in turn.

To begin with, there are serious problems with equating the distinction between productive and unproductive labor with a class distinction. Marx's analysis of productive laborers in capitalist society emphasizes that they are exploited in the sense that they produce surplus-value. Unproductive laborers, in contrast, produce no surplus-value. Yet, many of them are exploited. Thus, salaried unproductive workers, like their productive counterparts, are paid only for their labor-power, not for the actual amount of labor they perform. While this does not produce surplus-value, since the labor is not embodied in commodities, it *does* constitute exploitation. Productive and unproductive salaried workers alike are in a similar relation to their employers—both are in conflict with them because the latter have a permanent interest in keeping their wages down. Just as commercial or banking capital differs from industrial capital while remaining capital, so do salaried unproductive workers differ from productive workers while remaining workers.³

Similar difficulties arise when one attempts to use the mental/manual labor distinction as the basis for class analysis. As anyone familiar with Braverman's work will know, the increasing separation of mental and manual labor (i.e., the assignment of the two kinds of work to separate individuals) is the result of a long historical process. Briefly, the specialized mental labor that is now performed by such workers as engineers was once performed, in an earlier, less developed form, by the same workers who performed manual labor (i.e., craft workers). As the capitalist labor process has evolved, the two types of labor have increasingly been assigned to different, specialized workers. The question we need to answer is whether this division of labor—the separation of mental and manual labor—signifies the creation of a new middle class.

On the whole, it would appear that Poulantzas and Post are wrong to argue that it does. After all, when both types of labor were performed by the same worker there was no question of his/her belonging simultaneously to two different classes. Moreover, Marx provides us with a superior, alternative analysis of the mental/manual split. He argues that, under contemporary capitalism, the production of commodities is increas-

ingly performed not by individuals but by large numbers of workers, some mental, some manual, working within what he calls a collective labor process. Marx is aware that there may be hostility between the two types of labor, especially since the labor process is not arranged co-operatively (as it might be), but as a hierarchy, with mental labor in a position of relative authority. Nevertheless, this does not alter the fact that mental laborers, too, are wage-laborers and are part of the collective labor process which is collectively exploited by capital.

This critique leads us to Poulantzas' and Post's final distinction—that between supervisory and non-supervisory labor. Here, too, we are confronted with an important sociological distinction, but one which it appears on reflection to be inaccurate to classify as a class distinction. The problem with Poulantzas' and Post's argument is that most of the people who perform supervisory labor, with the exception of very high managers, are wage-laborers. Indeed, a significant component of their work consists of what Marx called the labor of co-ordination—i.e., "managerial" labor that would be necessary in even a non-exploitative mode of production—which is clearly part of what even Poulantzas would consider to be productive labor. But, even where they are not performing this type of work, most supervisors are what Marx referred to as "a special kind of wage-laborer," to whom a certain, limited amount of authority has been delegated by capital. It would be foolish to ignore the important conflicts that can arise between supervisory and non-supervisory laborers. Yet, it is far worse to overlook the importance of their shared status as wage-laborers by postulating the existence of a class barrier between them.

To sum up, Poulantzas and Post point to a number of important aspects of contemporary social stratification. However, they fail to provide us with a satisfactory class analysis of the "new middle class."

Different Interests?

The common thread running through all of these approaches to contemporary class structure is their attempt to establish that the "working class" and the "new middle class" have different interests. The success or failure of their arguments hinges on this issue, for it is only by positing these different interests that they can argue that there is "class" conflict between these two groups. The question for us, then, is whether in fact they succeed in establishing that these different interests exist, or more precisely, whether those that do are irreconcilable and organic, as are the differences of interest between capital and wage-labor. Wright points to the different interests generated by "control"; Poulantzas to those engendered by unproductiveness, supervisory responsibilities and mental labor; and the Ehrenreichs to those produced by the privileges and social functions of the PMC. How adequate are these analyses of class interests?

There is a sense in which one could say that these two groups have different interests. For example, one might wish to say that unproductive laborers have an interest in the exploitation of productive laborers inasmuch as the former's wages are drawn from the surplus-value produced by the latter. Or, one could sug-

gest that mental or supervisory workers have an interest in the continued subordination and "de-skilling" of industrial workers because they are conditions for their superior privileged position. Yet, what are we saying by pointing to these differences of interest? We are saying that, *as long as present social conditions persist*, these two groups have certain different interests, *in the short term*.

But, there is another sense in which their interests are far from incompatible. They share an antagonism to their employer, in whose interest it is to keep both of their wages down. This argument can be applied to virtually all of the "privileged" new middle class groups. In the long run, the triumph of socialism is in the interest of *both* these groups and the traditional working class, for it would enable them all to live more comfortable and rewarding lives. It might mean the end of dramatic differences in power, income and prestige—but, in a society where everyone has enough and where everyone has a fulfilling role to play, such differences would cease to have much meaning.

The same cannot be said, however, of the conflict of interest between wage-labor and capital. This cannot be treated as a short-term conflict that can be transcended in the long run. There is *no* sense in which the advent of socialism is in the interest of the capitalist, for it would mean the abolition of exploitation, privilege and status themselves. While one can, under socialism, satisfy the desires of those who are now privileged wage-laborers (perhaps better than under capitalism, in the long run), there is no way to satisfy the desires of the capitalist under socialism. In sum, there is a clear, irreconcilable conflict of interest between wage-labor and capital. The analyses we have been discussing do not succeed in identifying a similarly irreconcilable conflict between the "new middle class" and the traditional working class.

A further general point emerges from this discussion. To defend their arguments, all of the theorists under review must assume that the working class is a relatively homogeneous group, characterized by a low level of internal differentiation or stratification. It is worth noting, however, that this assumption is a relatively new one for Marxist social theory.⁴ Socialists have generally been willing to include within the working class groups as diverse as highly skilled craftspeople and unskilled laborers, because they shared the status of wage-laborer. Moreover, they have been willing to do so in spite of a very substantial status gap between the two groups (e.g., the so-called "labor aristocracy" of the late nineteenth century). Even all parties to the system of inside contracting of the late nineteenth century (in which craft workers "hired" assistants to help them complete the job they had contracted to do) were considered part of the same class. Admittedly, the relationship between, say, an engineer and an assembly line worker is not reducible to that between a nineteenth-century craftsman and his/her assistants. Nevertheless, it remains true that the fact of heterogeneity, or even the subordination of one group to another, does not *in itself* mean that the two groups are members of different classes. It is at least worth considering, in other words, whether the hypothesis of an internally stratified working class composed of all kinds of wage-laborers does not explain

contemporary reality better than do the theories we have been discussing.

An Alternative Approach

The preceding discussion has identified some of the limitations inherent in various "new middle class" theories. An alternative approach is needed. What would such an alternative look like? The one suggested here involves the reinstatement of the notion that the principal determinant of class is exploitative relations of production—in the case of capitalist society, the relationship between wage-labor and capital.

How do the intermediate groups we have been discussing fit into the traditional Marxist schema? The vast majority of them, as has already been suggested, are wage-laborers, obliged to sell their labor-power to capital in exchange for a wage. As such, they, like industrial workers, are in a relation of conflict with their employers. True, some of them—say, for example, engineers—may earn much higher wages and have a variety of other "privileges." Yet, as anyone familiar with the history of the engineering profession will know, this does not immunize them from conflict with capital. On the contrary, engineers, too, enter into conflict with their employers over familiar issues such as employment security, work conditions, and even income. And, these conflicts have the same cause as do those experienced by more subordinate wage-laborers.⁵ This is not to suggest that there are no important differences among various types of worker. Indeed, we need to be very sensitive to the real differences that do exist. What is being suggested here is that the vast majority of the so-called "new middle class" shares with the traditional working class a relationship of conflict with capital that is *precisely the basis for class formation in capitalist society*. As such, only the very few who may be truly said to own or control (fully, not in Wright's partial ways) the means of production, or who are in career paths that will lead them to such a position may be "disqualified" as potential members of the working class.

In essence, what we are saying is that, as capitalist society has evolved, the category of wage-labor has become more and more internally differentiated. There are a variety of developments behind this differentiation—they include the increasing split between mental and manual labor in industry, the vast expansion of capitalist commerce and banking, and the spread of capitalist enterprise beyond industry to what Marx called "the non-material sphere" (i.e., services). This has meant the expansion of wage-labor, as capitalist relations have spread to areas of the economy they previously had not penetrated. It has also meant the increased differentiation of the working class and new forms of hierarchy among workers. Any expectation that the category of wage-labor would become homogeneous in the foreseeable future has been effectively laid to rest.

Class Formation

However, because the working class is both stratified and diverse, we are forced to see the process of class formation in a new light. Most of the theories under consideration here have little or nothing to say about

how classes are formed. Instead, they focus on the static question of what are the "objective" determinants of class.⁶ Once this has been done, the problem of class formation becomes "simply" one of making the "objective" working class subjectively conscious of itself as a class—i.e., aware of its objective unity and its antagonism to the capitalist class that exploits it. And in the process it must overcome various illusions, mystifications, etc. that capital creates to shatter working class unity. Such an approach may be roughly tolerable if one assumes a homogeneous working class. But, if one believes that the working class is internally stratified, then the process of class formation becomes far more complex. For, now, the organization of the working class is no longer simply the process of making a well-defined group conscious of itself. Rather, it involves the actual re-structuring of "objective" relationships among the members of the class—the overcoming of the real barriers to unity presented by a class' internal diversity and stratification.

In short, socialists need to abandon the view that the process of class formation follows easily or automatically from the "objective" determinants of class. For, even in the case of a homogeneous working class, there is no immediate, automatic relationship between the conflicts inherent in capitalist relations of production and the actual process of class formation. Rather, these conflicts merely *set in motion* that process. The actual formation of classes is, in a real sense, contingent, not automatic. Thus, socialists have long been familiar with the various obstacles that can be placed in the path of working class organization—i.e., the mystifications of bourgeois ideology, the repressive force of the State, the ability of the capitalist class to "play off" one group of workers against another. To all of these must be added yet another particularly powerful obstacle—the fact that the category of wage-labor is not homogeneous.

The Formation of the Working Class

If the working class does not enter the world fully formed, what should we expect the end-product of this process of class formation to look like? Since class formation is an *historical* process, its outcome is never given precisely in advance. However, a few general points may help us better to understand the process. First, one should not expect all members of a particular occupation to wind up on the same side of the class divide. A number of occupations, especially the so-called "professions," are internally stratified. It is hardly likely that a Wall Street lawyer and a legal aid attorney would take the same side if capitalist society were to truly polarize into well-organized classes. Second, and more important, we should not expect the outlines of an actual class formation to coincide exactly with the outlines of the "objective" category of wage-labor. All wage-laborers experience the "pressures" inherent in capitalist production relations; but there are a variety of historical contingencies that may encourage this or that wage-laborer, or group of wage-laborers, to resist the "logic" of these pressures.

It should also be remembered that capitalists take advantage of the internal differentiation of wage-labor

to consolidate their hegemony. Confronted by the disunity of the working class, capitalists actively seek to drive wedges between its various parts. Thus, through the manner in which they organize the labor process, through the ideologies they create, and through a variety of other methods, attempts are made to *widen* the already existing breach between mental and manual labor. Similarly, efforts are made to persuade workers that the status differences among them are real and meaningful, and that the privileges of one are conditional upon the suffering of the other. All of this should serve to remind us that the process of class formation does not occur in a vacuum; it must take place in the context of a constant struggle by the dominant class to block class formation.

De-Skilling

Two remarks need to be made in connection with the argument that large portions of the "new" intermediate strata are potentially part of the working class. First, we need to be clear regarding the role played by the process of "de-skilling" in the constitution of the working class. Many observers (including Post) have pointed out that substantial numbers of "new middle class" occupations, including relatively elite ones such as engineers, have gone through a process of de-skilling analogous to that undergone earlier by blue-collar workers. Some have gone further, arguing that, in being de-skilled, these workers have become proletarian.⁷ This, however, is to miss the point entirely. For, it is only because these workers were wage-laborers *already* that they could be de-skilled. Only someone who sells his or her labor-power to capital, and therefore does not possess the means of production, would lack control of the labor process such that s/he could be de-skilled. *De-skilling, then, is a symptom, not a cause of proletarian status.* Nor should we expect that all or most wage-laborers in capitalist society will eventually be de-skilled, making the working class more or less homogeneous. All wage-laborers are certainly *exposed* to this process, but the historical tendency has been for new strata of highly skilled workers to be created as old ones are de-skilled. (This was the case, for example, with turn-of-the-century skilled metalworkers, whose demise was concomitant with the vast growth of the occupation of tool-and-die-maker.)

Intellectuals as Workers?

The second remark needing to be made at this point pertains to the stratum often referred to as the intelligentsia. This stratum has often been discussed, in socialist writings, as a small but separate group which was part of neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie. Most of them were to be expected to side with the bourgeoisie for a variety of reasons; but, it was anticipated that a few would "detach themselves" from the ruling class and play an important role in the working class movement.

This analysis made some kind of sense for nineteenth-century capitalism. At that time, the intelligentsia was a relatively small group composed largely of people of high social origin (which helps to explain why they tended to side with the ruling class). In the twentieth century, this group has become rather differ-

ent. As a result of some of the processes we have been discussing, there has occurred a kind of "massification" of the intelligentsia—it has become a very large group indeed, involving a significant proportion of the population. Moreover, it is no longer a distinct, elite group—as part of the expansion process, vast numbers of these workers have been transformed into wage-laborers submerged in corporate and other bureaucracies. The traditional elite intelligentsia—i.e., the very top professionals tied to the ruling class—still exists. But, beneath it there is a mass of "lesser" intellectuals who in a real sense have more in common with the average worker than they do with their top professional "colleagues." In sum, the bulk of the intelligentsia has become *part* of the category of wage-labor, hence, potentially, part of the broad working class movement.

Political Implications

How we define the class nature of the intermediate strata is not simply a matter of *theoretical* importance. If one views them as members of an intermediate class who also are in conflict with capital, then they may be treated as potential *allies*. But, if one agrees with the analysis proposed here, then these "intermediate" groups become more than allies—they are unambiguously part of the working class movement. A political strategy which is defined by alliances with a "new middle class" as distinct from one of overcoming *intra-class* differences is likely to be ineffective, for this approach does not attempt to resolve the differences among the various strata, or attempt to make these strata see the need to change themselves.

An important example of the difference between an alliance strategy and one which focuses on forging class unity can be seen in the politics of contemporary social democracy, for whom an alliance with the so-called "new middle class" is central. Such parties pursue a strategy of creating a mass *electoral* movement which seeks to attain its goals exclusively by winning a majority of the votes in Parliament. Consequently, in the name of the need for an alliance, chiefly with the "new middle class," in order to "win," they become the advocates of cautious, innocuous policies whose principal virtue is that they are relatively inoffensive to large numbers of voters and thus might gain adherents from various groups whose interests are perceived as being inevitably different.

But, such a strategy, which avoids as much as possible mass mobilization and organization, does little to forge the unity which the working class lacks and desperately needs. Instead, this strategy accepts the divisions as givens and appeals to a diverse group of people primarily on issues where they already presumably agree (papering over the areas of conflict and disagreement). This strategy fails to do anything to break down the real divisions and conflicts within the working class. Thus, a general appeal will be made to both the "elite" engineers and "subordinate" line workers (perhaps on general questions such as inflation). But, no attempt is made to bring these two very different groups (not classes) together; to encourage them to re-define their relationship as one of cooperation rather than of super- and sub-ordination. To repeat, contemporary social democracy makes no attempt to unify

the working class. Yet it is only such a united class that can advance a truly socialist perspective.

A similar critique may be made of the political strategy of Eurocommunism. The big Eurocommunist parties of France and Italy do pay somewhat more attention to mobilization and organization than does contemporary social democracy, but they, too, are hamstrung by their alliance strategy. Thus, their attempt to forge the so-called "anti-monopoly" bloc does very little to overcome the important conflicts and differences among the various components of the bloc. (Not to mention the fact that it proposes to bring together groups whose interests, in the *long* term, probably are incompatible—e.g., factory workers and small employers.)

These strategies of allying the "new middle class" and the "working class" are not satisfactory. Yet, it would be equally, if not more foolish to retreat to a strategy which saw only the traditional working class as part of a unified socialist working class movement.⁸ On the contrary, the central problem for contemporary socialism is to devise strategies which can overcome the differences *within* the working class (i.e., unify the intermediate strata and the blue collar workers, not simply ally them). This is a problem which certainly predates the coming into existence of the new white collar, professional layers of the working class. But, it is no longer just a problem of overcoming the differences between skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed. To these unresolved difficulties one must now add the new problems which flow from divisions between mental and manual workers, the ideology of professionalism, the problems posed by supervisory workers, and by the relations between public and private sector workers. How this diverse class can be moved toward unity, and in that process become a class in the full meaning of the term, is clearly beyond the necessary limits of this essay. But, the very fact that several millions of these workers are now in the union movement at least represents an encouraging start.

It is, of course, one thing to declare the need for a strategy to develop a unified working class, and another actually to put it into practice. Many questions need to be answered (e.g., how to get workers to stop thinking in terms of status considerations; what types of organization are appropriate to such a strategy) before such a strategy will become a reality. If we are to succeed, however, in developing a viable socialist strategy for late capitalism, the basic theme of this paper will have to be taken seriously. Socialists must drop the antiquated view of the working class to which they have held for so long and begin to recognize that capitalist social structure and the contemporary working class are far more complex than previously thought. In particular, socialists must stop acquiescing in the interpretations of social structure that those who dominate society have developed in order to *prevent* the rise of socialism. Instead, socialists should *attack* capital's categories and seek to build the kind of united, but diverse class that is essential to the realization of the socialist project■

FOOTNOTES

¹ It has become quite common, in the recent economic crisis, to hear speculation about the demise of industrial labor. Yet, even in the United States, blue collar workers remain a sub-

stantial proportion of the labor force (around 33%); and, it is unlikely that the much-touted robotics revolution will reduce this proportion dramatically, since it is expensive, confined to assembly line industries, and applicable only to certain jobs.

² A great deal of confusion has arisen regarding Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Productiveness does not, as some analysts have suggested, have anything to do with usefulness. Rather, productive labor under capitalism refers to labor that produces surplus-value for capital. For extended discussions of these concepts, see Ian Gough, "Productive and Unproductive Labor in Marx," *New Left Review* 76 (November-December 1972); and Peter Meiksins, "Productive and Unproductive Labor and Marx's Theory of Class," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 13:3 (Fall 1981).

³ It is also important to note, since Poulantzas seems to feel that only workers who produce material commodities can be considered productive, that Marx argued that service work could be productive as well. For an example of his several discussions of service labor, see the analysis of capitalist organization in the "non-material sphere" in *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), pp. 411-12.

⁴ Although Marx did give it some support in his periodic remarks regarding the tendency of capitalism to reduce all workers to more or less the same condition.

⁵ The significance of the fact that few engineers are unionized is reduced when one realizes that, until 1960, almost no teachers belonged to unions either. Today, at least 2 million are enrolled.

⁶ Even here the static quality of their analyses is compounded by the willingness of "new class" theorists to pass over the traditional Marxist criteria for defining classes (relationship to the means of production). This is not wrong *per se*. But, the criteria they propose to *substitute* are not an improvement. They fail to demonstrate that there is an irreconcilable conflict of interest between the "working class" and the "new middle class." Hence their analyses represent a retreat to academic class analysis—they, too, draw class barriers arbitrarily. As a result, they eliminate the chief virtue of the Marxist analysis of class; i.e., its ability to account for the *existence* of classes.

⁷ This position is argued in Christian Baudelot, et al., *La Petite Bourgeoisie en France* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1974).

⁸ Thus, in rejecting alliance strategies, one has to be careful not to fall into the opposite error—that of excluding the "new middle class" from the socialist project, a strategy we may call here "workerism." In the name of opposing the pollution of the workers' movement, workerists would restrict the term "working class" to either the industrial working class or to wage-earners who are fully subordinate and/or "de-skilled." The difficulties with this view are evident. First, like the alliance strategy, it merely postpones the task of creating some kind of cooperative relationship between the two groups. Secondly, the working class is reduced to a minority by this self-limiting definition. Consequently, quite apart from making the task of social revolution more difficult, it would have a negative effect on the prospects for a *democratic* socialist society.

TEACHERS STRIKE (continued from page 17)

being a member of the opposition SUBS-TAC caucus. Healey didn't hesitate to call the lone hold-out every name in the book, and even prevented him from leaving the room with a copy of the contract to show the members.

When the 800-member House of Delegates met to vote on the proposed settlement, Healey allowed only questions and ruled out all debate. When the opposition tried to speak, he gavelled them out of order and shouted them down. The vote by the members was conducted immediately thereafter, without adequate information about the terms of the settlement and with a very low voter turnout among CTU members. The vote passed the House of Delegates and the membership by about 3 to 1.

The Opposition

The only opposition within the Chicago Teachers Union for some time had been the SUBS caucus, which publishes *Substance*. SUBS has consistently attacked the school board for its bloated bureaucracy and its discrimination against black students. It has taken up other issues, from Red Squad spying to U.S. foreign policy, in a forthright way that has won the respect of the union membership. SUBS has more recently been joined by and allied with a group of full-time teachers in the Teachers Action Caucus (TAC) who share approximately the same politics.

These caucuses had a tremendous responsibility in the strike; they were the only voice of consistent opposition to the School Finance Authority, to the School Board, and the only critics of Healey with any organized presence. Much to their credit, when Healey tried to ram-rod his settlement, SUBS and TAC put out 8,000 leaflets. The first one said, "Vote No If You Don't Know," the second said, "Vote No! Did We Strike Three Weeks for 3 Percent?" The groups hardly had time to

get their literature on the street before the voting began, and they didn't have enough members and literature to hit all the voting places before the voting ended.

While the SUBS/TAC group worked hard in the last few hours of the strike to try to stop Healey's capitulation, they failed to find a way earlier to create a strong independent organization within the strike movement which clearly understood that Healey was preparing for a sell-out—something they all suspected all along he would do.

It is certainly not an easy thing to do. Healey used the radical rhetoric of unity before the onslaught of the school board to quiet all dissent. Despite their hard work, SUBS and TAC never found a way to pressure Healey into making the members' successful strike victorious at the bargaining table—nor to rally enough support to push some other element forward to prevent the sellout.

That's their job when the contract—and possibly the strike—takes place next year. They have to build their own independent organization within the union, even in the midst of a strike, to criticize the leadership even while loyal to the union, and to argue that unity of action by no means implies unanimity of opinion.

Fianlly, the School Finance Authority, the School Board, and the Superintendent, the Mayor and the Black organizations like PUSH, TWO and CBUC, all argued that there was no money for a raise for teachers. The union leadership and the opposition both argued that money for raises could come out of the bloated bureaucracy of the school system. The truth is that money for a raise for teachers must come out of a battle with the banks behind the Finance Authority, and to win that battle in the next strike there will have to be a broader coalition of city unions and workers and it will have to become a political fight. The teachers, other city workers and the real community have to teach the banks a thing or two■

THE NEW CLASS WAR

Frances Fox Piven
and Richard A. Cloward
Pantheon, N.Y. 1981

A REVIEW
by Steve Leigh

The authors of *Regulating the Poor* and *Poor People's Movements* have written a very timely analysis of the history and future of social programs in the U.S. and to a lesser degree Europe. It starts with Reagan's attack on the welfare state and explains the reason for the attack: welfare programs create a floor under the wage levels of the employed labor force. The owners of industry realize that they need to undermine this floor in order to lower wages and raise profits.

Piven and Cloward locate the fight over "Subsistence Rights" in the whole history of capitalism. They show how this economic system was born in force—not just against Africans and Native Americans but also against European peasants. It was only by tearing them from the land and away from their traditional right to subsistence that a "free" labor force was created. People would only work for a wage when there was no other option. The authors detail very well the various government policies from vagrancy laws to welfare measures that were designed to eliminate other sources of support besides wage labor, as well as the struggles against these policies.

Their analysis is that welfare, "Poor Relief," etc., were only granted in response to fights by large numbers of people—riots, insurrections, etc. When these struggles died down, so did the governmental aid to the poor. By the late 1800's, under the pressure of industrial capitalists, poor relief had virtually disappeared in the U.S. But since the 30's, they feel that the pattern of only granting benefits under the pressure of riots and rebellions has stopped. Instead they feel a new pattern of *permanent* welfare has emerged. In spite of the current attacks by Reagan and friends, over the long term welfare benefits are likely to increase. The main reason for this change, we are told, is that there is now a whole bureaucracy devoted to social welfare and willing to defend those programs. This resulted in a "democratization" of the American government.

Piven and Cloward's new book is good in exposing the reason for the attack on welfare and placing welfare in the history of the capitalist economic system.

However, its optimistic predictions about the future are less helpful. Their optimistic view is primarily based on the supposed "democratization" of the American governmental structure. They say that the present situation "confronts big business with a crisis of power whose dimensions are comparable to the earlier struggle by capital to win control of the state from the . . . landed classes." In other words, the capitalists no longer control the state! Presumably working people now control it or can with a little effort. They present little evidence for this contention except the growth of a welfare bureaucracy and benefits in the 60's and 70's, which they earlier admit came from massive struggles.

An example of their belief that big business no longer controls the state is the failure of economic policy. They feel that the government has been paralyzed by an inability to pursue either a clear pro-worker pol-

icy (inflation) or a clear pro-business policy (depression to drive down wages). In my view this paralysis comes from the insoluble nature of the economic crisis. There is no capitalist solution that can fix the economy, raise profit rates and start a new economic growth boom. This is why the capitalists themselves are so divided on economic policy, and why the government bounces from one policy to another.

Their analysis ignores the consistent pattern of government pursuance of corporate interests under Republicans and Democrats—from Viet Nam to Iran to El Salvador; from Carter's budget cuts to Reagan's. Of course reforms can be and have been won from the state by mass struggle—but not because we somehow control the state.

"Democratization" is also belied by the continual hierarchical control of the state from the top. Its leading figures have consistently come from the ranks of the corporations under Carter, Reagan and previous presidents. Its court system and bureaucracy are staffed at the top with people from upper class backgrounds. The list could go on. The main thing is that political and economic power continue to go together. As long as the economy is not democratic neither will the state be.

The problem with Piven and Cloward's analysis is not just theoretical. It can lead to an unworkable strategy. Although not clearly spelled out, the strategy seems to be for us to take over the present state and use it for our purposes. We can gradually limit the power of the corporations and make them socially accountable. In fact, whenever this policy has been pursued with vigor, it has failed, often disastrously. In 1970 in Chile, "Socialist" Allende was elected president. He started a policy of vigorous reform of the economy while leaving the government structure intact. By 1973, the capitalists, army and U.S. government became afraid of the mass struggle that Allende's election had unleashed. They showed clearly who still controlled the state apparatus with the bloody coup of September 1973.

But Piven and Cloward assure us that this cannot happen here. "Democracy can no longer be contained and it cannot be stamped out either." Their strategy of using the state rather than dismantling it, and reforming capitalism rather than abolishing it, can lead to disaster as it did in Chile.

Their belief in using the state to reform the economy is based on their overestimation of the power of the state. Given the increasing internationalization of the world economy, each government is less and less able

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HOUSING MOVEMENT

(continued from page 13)

result of rising investment and increased property values: most of us can no longer afford to live in the areas where this has occurred. And in the few cases where private investment, leveraged by public funds, has resulted in low and moderate-rent housing, this has been possible only because working class taxpayers have subsidized real estate profits from these projects. Private investment is the heart of the problem, not the key to the solution.

The fact is, any form of rent control strong enough to keep the average rent in Boston down to a level affordable by the average Boston renter—never mind the really poor—would have to cause a significant reduction in rental housing profits. Certainly this would lead many if not most landlords who own housing for investment purposes to look elsewhere for a better return. In short, any version of rent control strong enough to be worth fighting for *will* cause some amount of disinvestment.

What would happen if the tenants' movement, instead of denying this reality, proclaimed it, and presented it as an opportunity to take first steps toward getting housing out of the hands of private capitalists? What if our attitude were, "The landlords say rent control will put them out of business? Well, if they can't provide decent housing at rents we can afford, why should we allow them to remain in business? Let's start working on a better way to run housing."

(2) *The programmatic proposals of the tenants' movement have been primarily defensive ones. Instead, campaigns for defensive measures like rent control must be accompanied by positive proposals for saving and increasing the supply of affordable housing—i.e., how housing can be developed and maintained by something other than investment for profit.*

Many city folks already understand, on a gut level at least, that effective rent control is incompatible with continued profitability of real estate, but no one has yet presented them with any alternative to the devil's choice between higher rents and increased abandonment. The tenant movement's inability to do this has made it hard for us to make a convincing argument that rent control can benefit *all* working class residents of this city.

A working class homeowner, or even a tenant who is not facing imminent loss of her own apartment, can easily see that the only neighborhoods where streets are being repaired, schools kept open, and housing maintained are those where landlords and banks are investing and housing costs are going up. That same individual may realize that the price of this investment is the displacement of one class of residents by another. She may feel terrible about the fact that her less fortunate friends and neighbors are being forced to move away. Yet it is perfectly rational for her to expect that the adoption of rent control will increase the likelihood that the apartment building across the street may be abandoned.

Until we can show her another choice between deterioration and gentrification we will not be able to persuade her to become an active supporter of rent con-

trol. As important as rent control is, it makes sense only as part of a broader program that addresses the issues of neighborhood decay and the housing shortage.

The general outline of a national plan for gradual socialization of existing housing and development of new housing on a non-profit basis has been laid out by Chester Hartman and Michael Stone in _____. In *City Life* we are working on how to apply a similar approach to Boston.

City Life's Housing Platform for Boston focuses on housing issues around which there is already a great deal of organizing, struggle, and public update. It proposes steps which, in the case of each issue, would take the housing involved *in the direction* of de-commodification (see program appended). In itself it would not achieve full socialization, which of course is impossible in the context of a capitalist-controlled government, financial system, and labor market. But all the measures contained in it would be steps toward decreased control and ownership by private landlords and financial institutions, and increased collective, non-profit ownership and/or control by tenants, community residents, and the public.

For example, along with strong rent and eviction controls, the Platform calls for the rights of tenants to form unions and sign collective bargaining agreements with landlords, and for determination by local residents of development plans for city-owned and tax-foreclosed buildings and land. The reason these proposals are included is not that tenant and community control are solutions in themselves. These demands are there because they provide specific, short-range goals that working class people can fight for while building our power to win more far-reaching measures. Organizing by tenant unions to prevent condo conversions and by community groups to block luxury development projects can help—and have helped—to hold the line against speculation in strategic neighborhoods while providing a focal point from which to expand our organizing.

Our Platform calls for increased resources for existing public housing, for foreclosure and permanent public ownership of HUD-subsidized developments, and for support for non-profit, community-based housing development and low-equity cooperatives. We talk about the measures not as a way of filling the gaps left by the private market but as steps toward the socialization of all housing. We describe our goal as a tenant-controlled, publicly-owned and financed housing, but we see other forms of collective, non-profit ownership (except where co-op conversions drive out low-income tenants) as steps in the right direction.

A more radical measure in the Platform aimed at the same goal is the proposal for a city-financed, democratically-controlled agency (The Community Housing and Land Trust) with the power to take over a certain number of absentee-owned apartment buildings per year, primarily buildings in substandard condition or in tax arrears. With funds from taxes on speculation profits and other sources, the buildings would be rehabilitated and operated as public housing or low-equity co-ops. This proposal is an essential component of any plan for strong rent control, which is bound to be met with threatened or actual disinvestment by landlords.

By offering an alternative to abandonment, such a plan would also increase the incentive for tenants to form unions and struggle for control of their buildings. (Under current conditions, successful organizing sometimes results in landlord abandonment and leaves tenants worse off than before.) This proposal, along with an accompanying demand to stop all transfers of public, HUD, and city-owned housing and land to the private market, begins to present the concept of socialization in a concrete form.

The Platform contains no measure to increase individual home ownership. By proposing the extension of rent control to owner-occupied two and three-family houses, it aims to make investment in home ownership ("let your tenants pay your rent") less profitable. At the same time it recognizes that many working class homeowners are hard-pressed, and calls for grants and loans for weatherization and repairs by low and moderate-income home owners.

Also included is a proposal to give home owners who are unable to afford mortgage and maintenance costs and are therefore facing the loss of their homes the option of turning over title to their houses to a public agency. They would forfeit the right to sell their house for profit but would retain the right to remain living there. The intention here is to separate the negative aspects of home ownership (the burden of debt and the temptation to exploit one's tenants) from the socially positive aspects (security of tenure and the incentive to improve one's home). Rather than saying "everyone should have a chance to own a house"—an impossible goal—we say, everyone, whether they live in a house or apartment, must have the right to secure tenure and decent conditions.

The Platform does not contain any proposals that would aid bankers and housing investors, such as home mortgage subsidies, loans to profit-making developers for low-income housing construction, or Section 8-type rent subsidies. These kinds of programs underwrite the power and profits of the real estate industry in the guise of aiding low and moderate income people. They create increased public debts that must be paid for by current and future generations of workers.

Radical vs. Reform

The essential difference between City Life's and a social democratic approach is not whether or not we fight for reform—all the proposals in our Platform are of course reforms. Rather, the differences lie: (1) in the kinds of reforms we support (only those which promote public or non-profit ownership and control and none which subsidize private capital; (2) in whether the reforms are presented at ends in themselves or as steps toward socialism and working class power; and (3) in the way in which we believe those reforms can be won (in response to pressure from below and not through top down legislative or administrative measures). Those who stand to gain by our program must be prepared to resist landlord counterattacks—threats of large scale housing abandonment, foreclosures, bank refusals to back municipal bonds, and redbaiting and predictions of doom by the mass media. Unless they are prepared for this and ready to respond with increased struggle, the reforms will not remain on the books for long, or will simply remain unenforced. In

fact, this is a moot point since our program will not be adopted *except* in response to a mass movement committed to direct action not just voting—actions which erode the power of real estate interests at the grass roots level and disrupt the pro-capitalist consensus.

The MTO

Unfortunately, the lessons of this experience seem to have been forgotten by the leaders of the rent and condominium control movements in Massachusetts and Boston today. This is particularly true of the Massachusetts Tenants Organization (MTO), a group launched three years ago by members of the Democratic Socialist of America. MTO is trying to unite a loose coalition of tenants unions and neighborhood groups behind its campaign for legislative housing reforms, but its goals and methods are precisely those which failed so badly over the past decade.

It may make sense—as one element of a broader strategy—for a strong housing movement to endorse or sponsor candidates and legislation as MTO proposes. But it will not be possible to *build* a strong housing movement by focusing primarily on the electoral process and short-term gains while steering close to the ideological mainstream. On the contrary, this approach creates and reinforces illusions about what can be won at the ballot box. It is based on the idea that power in this society flows from political office, when in reality, the questions of who holds office and what policies they set are *reflections* of power relations in the society as a whole. We will not be able to get a better performance out of elected officials even if we get "our own" into office, until we are able to challenge this power at the top with the countervailing power of a movement that exerts pressure for change from below.

Workers in the 1880s and '90s did not win the right to strike by lobbying their congressmen. The labor movement of the 1930s and '40s won legal backing only *after* taking direct, extra-legal action that threatened the bosses' power at its source, the site of production. If the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s had confined itself to tactics like those of MTO, Jim Crow would still reign in the South. Just as in the past, we will be able to change the laws that oppress us only by building a movement that makes the enforcement of unjust laws impossible.

Similarly, the early 1970s, when the tenants' movement fought to save rent control in Massachusetts, was a time of rent strikes, eviction blockings, and militant, disruptive demonstrations. It was the effect of this kind of direct action and the fear that the situation might get out of hand, more than the reasoned testimony of experts or the pleas of suffering constituents, that influenced state and city lawmakers to extend rent control. This was most dramatically evident in the battle to win rent control in Cambridge in 1969.

The proposals in City Life's Platform for Boston are only the first steps toward socialization. It is the growth of the movement that will make it possible first to imagine and later to win more far-reaching changes. Meanwhile it is important to present very concrete, although limited, goals and demands because they give a way to struggle for their own interests *now*, and in the process to develop the consciousness and power that will make socialization possible.

The Cross-Class Alliance:

A corollary of the strictly legal, reformist approach is the concept of "tenant power" based on a cross-class alliance of renters as an interest group. What is needed instead is a movement which has as its priority the needs of working class tenants and homeowners.

The cross-class alliance strategy is based on the assumption that in the area of housing, middle-income and high-income renters have the same basic interests as low-income renters. More than that, the middle class tenants are seen as the motive force, the engine that drives the coalition, because they can provide more votes, funds, connections, and skills.

The assumption that renters of all classes have similar interests is valid only to a very limited extent. High-income and moderate-income tenants stand to gain from moderate rent, eviction, and condo restrictions that give them more bargaining power with landlords and keep rents low enough to allow them more to spend on their "lifestyle," or to save for a downpayment on a house or condo. These tenants want to avoid extreme or sudden rent increases; nevertheless, they can afford to pay rents high enough to keep supplying their landlords with profits. It is these people who have been the main beneficiaries of the kind of moderate to weak rent controls that were won in Boston in 1972 and more recently in a number of California and New Jersey cities.

It would be naive to expect middle class renters to go out on a limb and risk their own immediate gains for the interests of the greater majority of tenants, who can benefit significantly only from much stronger versions of rent control and other anti-capitalist reforms that must accompany strong rent control. This is especially true when those middle class tenants have been appealed to by the movement in terms of their individual, immediate economic interests alone. Furthermore, the very skills and resources that make middle class tenants so valuable to campaigns for moderate rent control also put them in a strong position to limit and control the campaigns.

In City Life we are attempting to base our program and organizing strategy on the needs of people whose housing problems cannot be solved by rent control alone. This is not only because they are the majority, but also because their interests lie in collective, non-capitalist solutions.

A Multi-Racial Housing Movement

In order to establish the basis for a multi-racial, working class housing movement, connections must be made in both theory and in practice between the situation of public and private housing tenants, and between "renters rights" and other housing issues, such as arson and abandonment.

The organizations and coalitions which have led the struggles for rent control since 1975 have been predominantly white, and have seldom succeeded in getting groups from the Black, Latino, and Chinese communities actively involved. The reason for this is not that people of color have nothing to gain from rent control and condo restrictions. But it is other issues—deterioration of public housing, the threat to HUD-sponsored low-income developments, arson, and aban-

donment—that have been seen by people of color as posing the greatest immediate threat to their homes and communities, which have provoked them into taking action.

For the most part, the predominantly white tenant groups have not given direct support to these struggles. They have not accompanied their calls for rent control with proposals that speak to the problems of disinvestment and they have tried to steer clear of supposedly "divisive" issues such as public housing. This is not only because of racism and the fact that tenants in many neighborhoods are out of touch with the housing problems that affect minority communities. It is also because these problems require more radical solutions than most tenant organizations have been willing to endorse or even to conceive of. This is a loss to the white tenant groups, because there is a great deal they could gain by allying more closely with people of color, whose hard experience has led them to see more clearly the need for militancy and for more fundamental change.

Is Socialization a "Turn-off"?

There are many academic experts who agree with City Life that socialization of housing is necessary, but who will not say so except to other members of the elite inner circle of experts and organizers. Ordinary folks they assume, are incapable of understanding a socialist program and wouldn't support it if they did understand it.

Our experience suggests something quite different. Whenever we have presented our ideas about socialization and the steps to get there from here, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. When the alternative is continued devastation and insecurity, socialization does not appear to be a utopian fantasy or a threat to the American way of life. Most city folks do not need to be convinced that radical changes are needed—only that they are winnable and workable. People whose own housing prospects under the current system are bleak are most enthusiastic about the idea of socialized housing: tenants who have been "condo-ed out" more than once, homeowners who are unemployed and fear foreclosure; organized tenants who discover their landlord would rather walk away than put money into repairs. As housing options narrow, more people will find themselves in a position where a plan for increased public investment and socialization offers the only alternative to worse housing than they had before or to homelessness.

For these people, the kinds of questions and doubts about our proposals that people express are usually very pragmatic: How would this plan apply to the lot across the street? How can we wring these concessions out of the landlords and the government? How will tenant and community control of publicly-owned housing work? Where do we begin?

~ If we make it our conscious goal, we can help people engaged in organizing around rent control, in tenant unions, against arson and abandonment, etc., to understand their own situation in terms of the overall housing crisis and the broader crisis of capitalism. We can also show them that something better is possible, and that their own efforts are helping to make it more possible. This knowledge in itself helps make people

feel stronger and better able to keep fighting when victories seem distant or small. This is one way that having a socialist program helps to strengthen the movement. It also provides a framework for alliances among people struggling around different kinds of housing issues, and a set of guidelines to help people formulate their specific goals and demands.

It is only through the process of direct organizing that we will be able to build the power to win our larger goal. Every instance of people fighting to save a building or parcel of land can help us to build this power, especially when we win. But even when we lose, our power can grow, if in the process of struggle, people get better organized, gain skills and confidence and a better understanding of the system and the need to change it. It is our job as socialists to see that the organization gets built, the skills developed, and the con-

nections made.

Building the housing movement from the bottom up is not an end in itself. Socialization of housing—like socialism in general—can only go so far without a transformation of social relationships. The elimination of control by those who own housing for profit is only the precondition for this transformation. For socialization to work well, residents of buildings and blocks need to develop a sense of mutual support and responsibility and learn to work collectively. It is through the process of common struggle that this sense of community is developed or rediscovered. It is a gradual and uneven process, but it really does occur. All of us in *City Life* would surely have lost heart if we did not see ourselves and the people in the buildings and neighborhoods where we organize going through changes of this kind as we work and struggle together ■

HOLMSTROM (continued from page 34)

right to control her reproduction seems to me probably of this order—but women's right to collectively control their reproduction seems *clearly* of this order.

Not all "members" of society carry and bear children; only women do. Reiman is insufficiently sensitive to the burden and pain of a woman who is forced to have a child she does not want or to have an abortion when she wants a child. How exactly does Reiman think that society could *require* women to have children or not to have children? Women have proven throughout history how desperately they desire to decide this question for themselves. What could justify the kind of coercion and repression that would be necessary to enforce society's "requirement"? If women's real interests as to whether or not to have children were not in conflict with those of the rest of society, then most women's desires or at least actions would probably be in accord as well—or could be brought into accord by social pressure, moral suasion and material incentives. The cases where these would not work would be too insignificant to do much damage.

More problematic is if there is a genuine conflict of individual and group interests. For example, the Chi-

nese government has been trying to keep down population but without great success and at times has resorted to forced abortions. Would Reiman approve of this? The fact is that it is in the peasants' interests to have more children because children can help them more than the government can (given the still backward state of the economy). Since Chinese government policy is not democratically determined we do not know for sure how the majority of the population would assess their interests. If, however—hypothetically—there were a democratic socialist society with a significant minority whose interests regarding children were different from those of the majority and who could not be persuaded by non-coercive means, it seems to me that it would still be worse, on the whole, to coerce the women of the minority to have children or have abortions than it would be for society to have too many or too few. Ultimately, I think each woman ought to be allowed to decide. At minimum, however, only the women of the society should make the decision. Only they could appreciate both the profound importance to each individual woman of controlling her reproduction as well as the needs of the rest of society ■

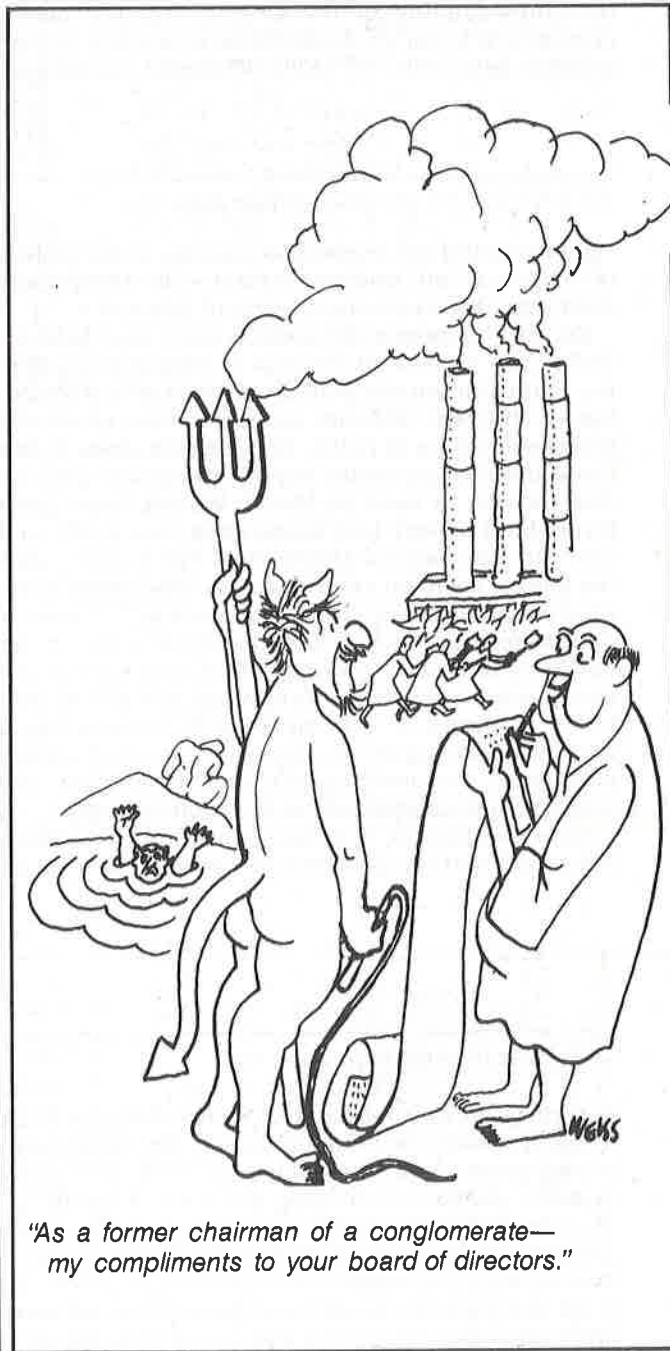
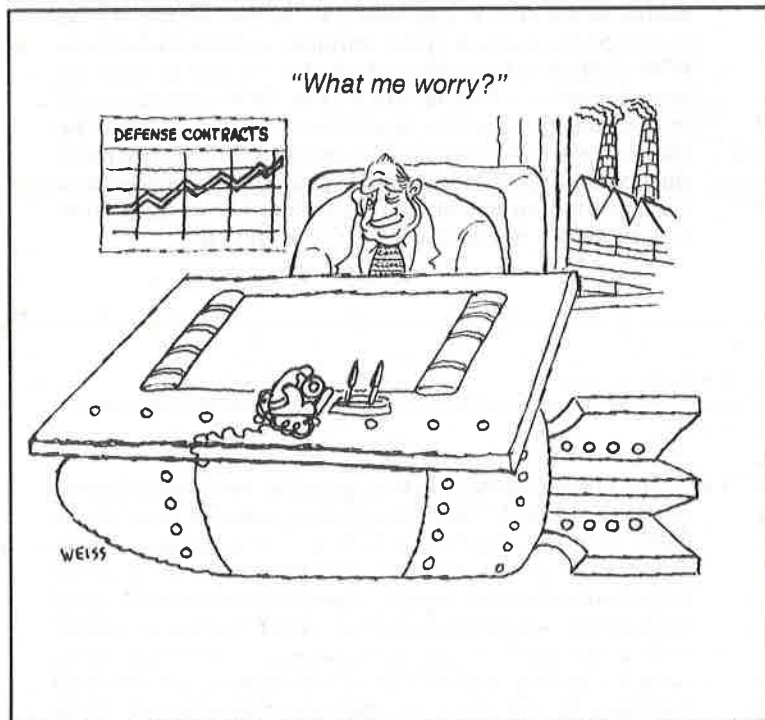
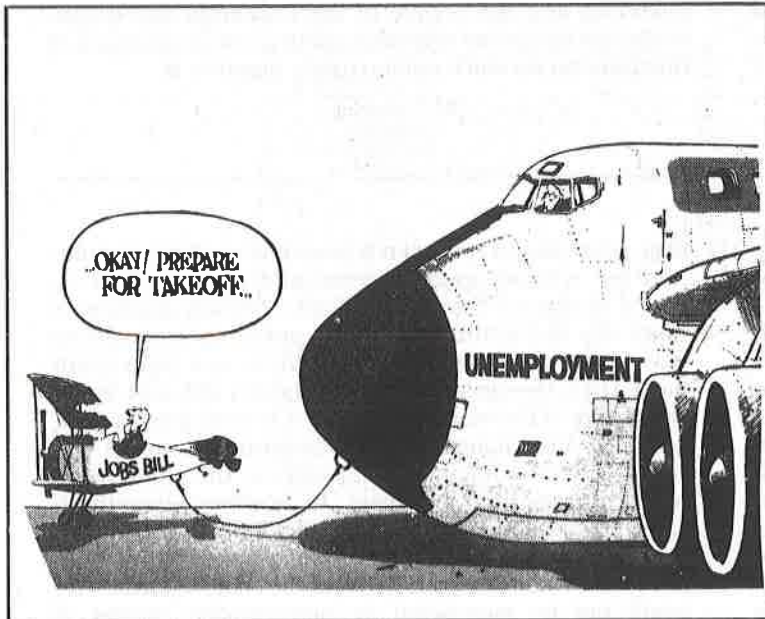
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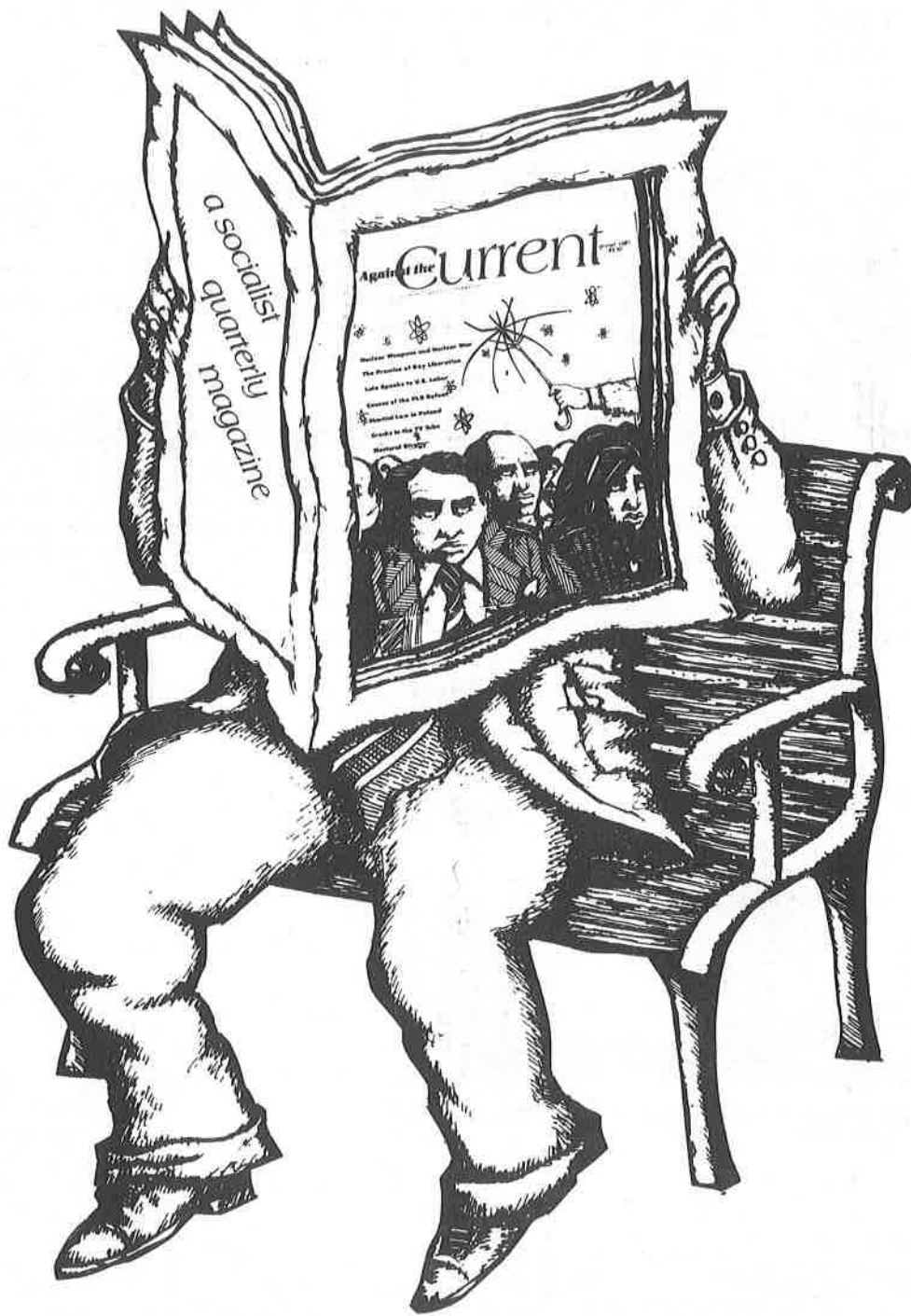
to control its own national economy. Even in Poland where the state owns the economy, the international banks more and more dictate economic policy. Reagan's policies of reducing the costs of capital (government regulation, welfare etc.) are not aberrations. They are likely to be the wave of the future as the economic crisis gets more severe and each nation competes to create the most favorable climate for capital investment (low wages, low taxes, etc.). Contrary to the authors' analysis, we are likely to see a return to the old pattern of welfare benefits only granted under pressure.

The choice we have before us is not the gentle reform that Piven and Cloward suggest. Instead it is either to suffer continual declines in living standards and welfare (not to speak of wars and the threat of nuclear annihilation) punctuated by temporary victories—or to replace the whole competitive world market economy with a new system based on rational democratic planning for human needs. Under capitalism, the rich will continue to run the state and use it against us. If we wish to change that situation we'll have to take power ourselves and abolish capitalism and the various states that serve it ■



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