



## How the Concept of the Dual Nature of the African American Struggle Developed

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# Who We Are

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published by an independent collective of U.S. socialists who are in fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International, a worldwide organization of revolutionary socialists.

Supporters of this magazine may be involved in different socialist groups and/or in a broad range of working class struggles and protest movements in the U.S. These include unions and other labor organizations, women's rights groups, antiracist organizations, coalitions opposed to U.S. military intervention, gay and lesbian rights campaigns, civil liberties and human rights efforts. We support similar activities in all countries and participate in the global struggle of working people and their allies. Many of our activities are advanced through collaboration with other supporters of the Fourth International in countries around the world.

What we have in common is our commitment to the Fourth International's critical-minded and revolutionary Marxism, which in the twentieth century is represented by such figures as V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leon Trotsky. We also identify with the tradition of American Trotskyism represented by James P. Cannon and others. We favor the creation of a revolutionary working-class party, which can only emerge through the conscious efforts of many who are involved in the struggles of working people and the oppressed and who are dedicated to revolutionary socialist perspectives.

Through this magazine we seek to clarify the history, theory, and program of the Fourth International and the American Trotskyist tradition, discussing their application to the class struggle internationally and here in the United States. This vital task must be undertaken if we want to forge a political party in this country capable of bringing an end to the domination of the U.S. imperialist ruling class, establishing a working people's democracy and socialist society based on human need instead of private greed, in which the free development of each person becomes possible.

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is independent of any political organization. Not all U.S. revolutionaries who identify with the Fourth International are in a common organization. Not all of them participate in the publication of this journal. Supporters of this magazine are committed to comradely discussion and debate as well as practical political cooperation which can facilitate eventual organizational unity of all Fourth Internationalists in the United States. At the same time, we want to help promote a broad recombination of a class-conscious working class movement and, within this, a revolutionary socialist regroupment, in which perspectives of revolutionary Marxism, the Fourth International, and American Trotskyism will play a vital role.

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* will publish materials generally consistent with these perspectives, although it will seek to offer *discussion articles* providing different points of view within the revolutionary socialist spectrum. Signed articles do not necessarily express the views of anyone other than the author.

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## Editor's Note

This issue of the new, independent *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* begins with a succinct, incisive note on the recent U.S. elections — which represent a massive popular rejection of the bitter fruits of the Reagan-Bush era, but which also promise to pave the way for new popular disappointments and radicalization. As the interview with two organizers for the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union indicates, the problems of the U.S. economy are deep, and the ferment among the working-class majority is likely to spread.

One of the key aspects of the ferment and radicalization just referred to are the experiences and struggles within the African-American community. In this issue we are initiating a discussion of these experiences and struggles: Claire Cohen surveys the harsh economics of racism, while Ben Tupper's piece on rap music touches on a significant and militant cultural response; Evelyn Sell offers a substantial account of how revolutionary Marxists such as Leon Trotsky, C.L.R. James, George Breitman, and others have learned from and analyzed the dynamics of Black nationalism and African-American liberation struggles. Future issues of the magazine will continue the discussion and the crucial effort to develop a deeper understanding of these issues.

The vicious dynamics of capitalism and the struggles of workers

and the oppressed must be understood globally. Articles on Haiti, Iran, and what once was Yugoslavia contribute to this internationalist education and analysis. The terrible and complex tragedy of Yugoslavia — and the dangers posed by the reactionary and imperialist resurgence amid the chaos of collapsing bureaucratized "workers' states" — has been sharply posed by the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina: three different (and somewhat differing) perspectives are offered here from the world movement of revolutionary socialists organized into the Fourth International.

In addition, we are initiating in this issue what we hope will be a challenging and diverse series of articles focusing on the problems and opportunities facing the Fourth International and its various national sections; we begin with a general overview offered by Québécois comrade François Moreau, along with a specific analysis of difficulties in Peru by David Trujillo. Related to this is Dennis Brasky's review of the recent volume edited by Sarah Lovell, *The Struggle Inside the SWP, 1979–1983*, documenting one of the more recent crises of U.S. Trotskyism.

The 75th anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution of the Russian workers and peasants is commemorated with an analysis by Ernest Mandel, excerpted from his important new work *Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy*. □

## Election Reflects Capitalist Instability

by Bill Onasch

Little more than a year ago George Bush appeared to have a lock on a second term as president. Basking in chauvinistic pride over the Gulf War victory, claiming credit for the collapse of "communism" in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, Bush ran up the highest approval rating in the history of poll-taking. Leading opposition politicians, such as New York governor Mario Cuomo, wrote off 1992 as a hopeless cause — to be pursued by some sacrificial lamb — biding their time until 1996.

But Bush's invincibility proved to be as illusory as the pennant hopes of the New York Mets. Bush's popular vote total was one of the smallest percentages for an incumbent president in history, faring poorer than Herbert Hoover in the Great Depression election of 1932. How did Bush manage to squander his lead, allowing a man he characterized, not so inaccurately, as a "failed governor of a small state," to become the chief executive?

### The Economy Thing

"The economy" is cited as being Bush's downfall. Bush argued that the recession was very brief and mild and that the economy was in "recovery mode." And, within the definitions set by economists, that was quite true. But still consumer confidence continues to drop — and for good reason.

The restructuring of the U.S. economy,

particularly in the manufacturing sector, but increasingly in the service and transportation sectors as well, has not just caused substantial unemployment. Millions have had to find reemployment in much lower-paying jobs. Millions more, including many principal family breadwinners, have been forced into part-time work, with no health care or pension benefits.

Hardly a day goes by without some major company announcing further "downsizing." And many prominent companies have been forced into bankruptcy, some being totally liquidated. The S&L scandal has shaken confidence in the entire banking system. The dollar has taken a beating on financial markets. Cuts in interest rates have hurt retirees living on savings, while they have failed to stimulate investment or consumer buying. Even those who have not lost purchasing power, and have reasonably secure jobs, are diverting more of their incomes to debt retirement, or savings, rather than making big-ticket consumer purchases. All these factors make a much greater impression on the mass of voters than marginal increases in the Gross National Product or the Dow-Jones average.

### Appeal to Right Backfires

While the economy was undoubtedly of paramount importance Bush also alienated many voters by allowing the Republican conven-

tion and platform to be dominated by the right-wing lunatic fringe. A solid majority of voters are pro-choice and did not identify with the religious fanatics preaching bans on all abortions. This was demonstrated in Maryland where a ballot initiative prohibiting the state from interfering with a woman's right to an abortion passed by a 2-to-1 margin. Most did not sympathize with the open gay-bashing exhibited at the GOP parley. In Oregon an anti-gay ballot proposition was soundly trounced. And the attempt to characterize Clinton as unpatriotic because of his timid participation in teach-ins in Britain during the Vietnam war was probably also counter-productive.

Even Bush's claimed foreign policy victories appear hollow today. Saddam Hussein remains in power. The former "communist" countries, far from becoming prosperous democracies, seem to be disintegrating into chaos and civil war.

Bush's "trust" issue was seriously undermined by fresh evidence that he had lied about his own involvement in the Iran-contra affair.

### How Clinton Squeaked By

The dissatisfaction of the electorate with the state of the country under Bush did not automatically translate into enthusiasm for Clinton. Though Clinton piled up an impressive

win in the electoral college, he received the smallest popular vote percentage victory since Woodrow Wilson prevailed in a three-way fight with Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft in 1912. This graphically confirmed just how underwhelmed the voters were. The percentage of disaffected voters won by a billionaire egomaniac first-time candidate, with no real political base, shows how deep the disgust with politics as usual runs.

Clinton could not have pulled off his narrow win without big mobilizations from four crucial sectors — organized labor, Blacks, feminists, and student youth. These are components of the electorate least expected to vote. This time they turned out in record numbers, hoping to get some relief from the beating they have taken over the past 12 years from Reagan and Bush.

They responded to the urgings of their leaders to support Clinton as a better alternative. These leaders tended to ignore, or downplay, the fact that Clinton took great pains to explain that he was not like the old “tax and spend” Democrats.

Clinton offered no new social programs. Quite the contrary, he plans to drive people off the welfare rolls and has pledged to eliminate 100,000 government jobs. His administration’s record in Arkansas has not produced much positive results for working people. Nor should it be forgotten that many policies now associated with Reagan — such as deregulation, privatization, and budget cutbacks — actually began under the last Democrat in the White House, Jimmy Carter.

### **Disappointed Expectations Will Lead to New Struggles**

Nevertheless, the workers, students, and oppressed who have put Clinton into the White House now have some big expectations. They look forward to decent jobs being created and protected, affordable and available health care, improved educational and job opportunities for youth, defense of a woman’s right to choose, more action to curb AIDS, further strides in environmental protection — just to name a few areas where big promises have been made.

Their expectations are enhanced by the end of “Washington gridlock” — the Democrats now have undisputed control of both the legislative and executive branches.

But Clinton will be in no position to deliver. The problems of the economy are not simply the result of unwise governmental decisions that can be corrected with a new policy. The fundamental problems are inseparable from capitalism in its present stage of development. There can be no return to the “good old days” of the ’50s and ’60s when U.S. imperialism reigned supreme and could afford to throw some crumbs to the workers and provide a social safety net to maintain domestic peace.

U.S. capitalism today is irrevocably com-

mitted to a global strategy of competition with its imperialist rivals. More jobs will be moved “offshore,” and there will be more restructuring of American industries, more deregulation, more privatization. The result will be growing unemployment and underemployment and a further shift of wealth from the working class to the super-rich.

After perhaps a brief “honeymoon,” as workers and the oppressed come to realize they are in for more of the same, there will likely be a new upsurge of struggles manifested in strikes, demonstrations, and localized rebellions of the Los Angeles type.

### **Playing the Democrat Card Risky**

All things being equal, the ruling class prefers to govern more or less directly through the Republican Party, and George Herbert Walker Bush was, after all, one of their own. The Democrats are held in reserve as a loyal alternative, to be used when the Republicans become too discredited. Unfortunately for the bosses they have been forced to play the Democrat card earlier than they would have liked. If Clinton is forced into early confrontations there is no readily apparent safe alternative. The stability of the two-party system — one of the most successful features of U.S. capitalist rule — is being severely tested.

### **1992 — A Lost Opportunity**

Clearly millions were prepared to break with two-party politics. That is the explanation of the Perot phenomenon. Perot, who won 19 percent of the popular vote, had little to pre-

sent in terms of a clearly defined program other than some homilies about reducing the federal deficit. His attraction was that he presented an effective way of voting for “none of the above.” Those who have raised alarms about Perot representing a right-wing danger are hard put to explain why most of his supporters drifted to Clinton during Perot’s bizarre withdrawal from the campaign between July and October.

Perot filled a vacuum long sealed off by the class-collaborationist policies of the leaderships of the labor, civil rights, and feminist movements, who have remained pathetically committed to the Democrats. Had organized labor, especially in coalition with other social movements looking for change, chosen to field candidates against “politics as usual,” they would have undoubtedly had a considerable, perhaps even decisive impact. Under such circumstances it is doubtful that Perot would have attracted much interest.

Unfortunately, the movement for genuinely independent politics remains confined for now to a relatively small vanguard, forces such as Labor Party Advocates, the 21st Century Party, and the National People’s Progressive Network. These developments are important and deserve the continuing support of socialists. But if they are to go anywhere, they must find a way of building on the tremendous mass sentiment demonstrated in this election for breaking with the two parties. □

*November 4, 1992.*

Readers outside the U.S. may be as confused about arcane electoral procedures as most American voters are. Here are some miscellaneous facts about presidential elections.

Voters do not cast ballots for presidential candidates. Instead they vote for a slate of electors pledged to candidates. The electors meet and vote in December in their respective states. Their tally is sent to the president of the Senate, who reads the results to a joint session of congress. That is the actual formal election.

Each state is allocated the same number of electors as it has seats in both houses of congress. (The District of Columbia — Washington — has no seats in congress but in the last few elections has been given the same number of electors it would be entitled to if it were a state.)

Although electors are pledged to a candidate, they are free to change their mind and vote for someone else. This has happened on occasion but has never been decisive in the outcome of an election.

The candidate receiving the most popular votes in a state wins all of its electoral votes. This is what enabled Clinton to win a “landslide” in the electoral vote while

winning only 43 percent of the popular vote. H. Ross Perot, who won nearly a fifth of the popular vote, received no electoral votes.

If no candidate wins a majority in the electoral college the constitution provides for the House of Representatives to decide the winner. However, the strongest party in the House will not automatically prevail. The House is apportioned on the basis of population, but in determining a president, each state receives only one vote. California, which has 52 Representatives, would be on an equal footing with Montana, which has only one seat in the House. If a minority party has a majority of states — many of which are quite small — they can conceivably elect their candidate. The House of Representatives has selected the president three times in U.S. history. On each occasion the candidate with the biggest popular vote failed to be elected.

U.S. colonies, such as Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands, are not entitled to electoral votes in presidential elections. However, Puerto Ricans living on the mainland can register and vote where they live, and do so in large numbers.

# The Economic State of Black America

by Claire Cohen

The perspective of this article is that capitalism plays a major role in perpetuating both the economic and the institutionalized racist oppression of African Americans in U.S. society, and therefore that the African American community cannot gain complete liberation under capitalism. If this is so, then to be ultimately successful in achieving liberation, the Black struggle must incorporate a strong anticapitalist, class perspective; and to be ultimately successful in achieving democracy and economic justice for everyone, the larger class struggle must centrally incorporate a strong antiracist, multicultural perspective.

The present article will provide an overview, with facts and figures, of the socioeconomic state of Black America, as presented in *The State of Black America — 1991*, edited by the Urban League. It is essential for revolutionaries and activists to have an accurate grasp of the social and economic status of African Americans. On this basis we can develop a correct picture of the problems to be addressed in the African American community, formulate an effective strategy on what is to be done, and correct the destructive, racist myths that prevail not only in the white working class but also among African Americans themselves, other peoples of color, and society at large.

In a future article, we will offer an analysis of the current state of the African American struggle and its relationship to the socioeconomic realities of the Black community. Based on this, I will suggest future directions for the African American liberation struggle. I will also relate this to the wider struggle of the working class, indicating the role of the class struggle in the fight for Black liberation.

## The Economic Data

*The State of Black America*, basing itself on data from the U.S. Census Bureau from 1970 through 1989, provides an immense amount of information on per capita income, aggregate income, median income of persons, family income, household income, poverty trends, unemployment and employment trends, occupational distribution, weekly earnings, and wealth ownership. The data reveal a trend of “permanent” economic inequality for African Americans, in some instances worsening over the last two decades.

Although both aggregate and per capita income have risen steadily for both whites and Blacks between 1970 and 1989, the overall inequality gap between the races has not significantly improved. The ratio of Black per capita income fluctuates between 55 and

60 percent of white per capita income, with the percentage increasing slightly in times of good growth and decreasing slightly in bad times. In 1989, Blacks had an income deficit equal to \$6,149 for every man, woman, and child. The gap in aggregate income between Blacks and whites was \$186 billion. As bad as that may sound, these two measures — especially the per capita income — actually paint a more positive picture of economic well-being than really exists! This is because increases in the proportion of a population that is working and increases in the number of hours worked per week by individuals are not taken into account. So, for example, as the proportion of the population over fifteen years old and the proportion of women in the work force have increased, the per capita income has increased.

## The Impact of Racism and Sexism on Employment and Income

A look at the percentage of persons with incomes by race and sex also reveals economic inequality for African Americans, who are hurt economically by both racism and sexism.

The percentage of Black males fifteen years and older with incomes (ranging from 83.2 percent to 88.5 percent) has been consistently lower than white males fifteen years and older with incomes (ranging from 92.4 percent to 97.1 percent) between 1970 and 1989. In 1970, 72.7 percent of Black females fifteen years and older, and 65.8 percent of white females fifteen years and older received incomes, while the 1989 figures are 88.4 percent for Black females and 92.2 percent for white females. It is interesting to note that the proportion of white women receiving an income was 40 percent higher in 1989 than it was in 1970, while for Black women it was only 20 percent higher.

For all men, Black and white, there has been a significant drop in median income from the 1970s to the '80s. In constant dollars, Black men had a median income of \$13,341 for the 1970s but only \$11,964 for the 1980s, while white men had a median income of \$22,121 for the 1970s, which dropped to \$19,994 for the 1980s. For both groups of men, their highest median income for any year in the 1980s was lower than their lowest median income for any year in the 1970s. Throughout the two decades, Black men's median income ranged from 59.3 percent to 62.9 percent of white male median incomes.

From 1970 through 1989 the median in-

comes of all women increased, but Black women had only 90.5 percent of white women's median incomes in the 1970s and only 85.3 percent in the 1980s. In fact, by 1989, Black women's median income had dropped to 80.3% of white women's median income. Not surprisingly, women continue to make significantly less than men, regardless of race. In 1989 the hierarchy of median incomes was: white men — \$20,863; Black men — \$12,609; white women — \$9,812; Black women — \$7,875.

## Family Income

Black family median income peaked at \$20,690 in 1978, bottoming out at \$17,473 in 1982. It crept back up, but not all the way, reaching \$20,209 by 1989. This was still only 56.2 percent of white family median income (\$35,975) for that year. Indeed Black family median income, as a percentage of white family income, has been declining from its high of 61.3 percent in 1970. However, the picture for Black family median incomes is more complex if one looks at specific income groups.

Over the past two decades there has been an economic polarization of Black families. The proportion of Black families making over \$50,000 has risen from 6.7% to 13.8% from 1970 to 1989 (a 38 percent growth). On the other hand, the proportion of Black families making less than \$5,000 has increased from 8.4 percent to 11.2 percent (also a 38 percent growth). In 1989, 37 percent of Black families, and 10.3 percent of white families, received incomes of less than \$10,000. While the middle-income group (\$10,000 to \$50,000) shrank for both Blacks and whites during the 1980s, Blacks were significantly more likely to fall into poverty than whites and significantly less likely to climb into the higher income brackets.

It is also true that among the poorer sectors of the population, the gap is greater between Black and white families. Black family income in the lowest fifth income group is only 43.9 percent that of white family income (that is, for every dollar a white family makes, a Black family makes 43.9 cents). In the second lowest fifth income group, Black families have 51.9 percent of the income of white families. In the wealthiest 5 percent of the population, Black families have an income of 68.6 percent that of white families.

Measurements of poverty further illustrate the income inequalities between Blacks and whites. The U.S. Census Bureau classified 9.3 million Blacks (30.7 percent of the Black community) as being in poverty, as opposed

to 20.8 million whites (10 percent of all whites) in 1989. In that same year 43.2 percent of African American children were living in poverty, as opposed to only 14.1 percent of all white children. Among Black female-headed households, 46 percent lived in poverty, as opposed to 25 percent of white female-headed households. There is a bright spot here — as the income of women increases, the poverty rate for female-headed households has actually decreased (in 1970 the percentages being 58.8 percent and 31.4 percent, respectively, for Black and white female-headed households). The fact remains that African Americans are three times more likely to be in poverty than are whites.

### Income Structure, Occupational Categories, Education, Unemployment

If we turn our attention to occupational structure, we see that 62.3 percent of African Americans receive income from wages and salaries (compared with 65.1 percent of whites), 2.4 percent receive income from self-employment (compared with 7.9 percent of whites), 27.2 percent receive income from property (compared with 62.1% of whites), 15.4 percent receive incomes from Social Security (compared with 19.1 percent of whites), 8.1 percent receive incomes from public assistance (“welfare” — compared with 1.6 percent of whites), and 4.1 percent receive incomes from retirements and annuities (compared with 7.7 percent of whites). In all of the areas, white mean income is higher than Black. In wage and salary, Blacks earn 75 percent of the mean income of whites. The most equitable area is public assistance, where Blacks receive 96 percent of the mean income of what whites receive. The most inequitable area is property, where Blacks earn only 35 percent of what whites earn.

Of employed workers in 1989, Black males were only half as likely as white males to be employed in the five highest-paying occupational categories, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. On the other hand, they were significantly more likely to be employed in the five lowest-paying jobs. The situation is similar, but not as inequitable among Black and white females. The result is that in 1989 the median weekly earnings of African Americans is only 78 percent that of whites. Among males, it is 72 percent for Black men. Among females, it is 90 percent for Black women. Wage inequality has been increasing for

Black men since the late 1970s, for Black women since the early 1980s.

Although the disparity lessens with education, even highly educated Blacks are at an economic disadvantage compared to their white counterparts. In 1989, Blacks who didn’t finish high school earned 61.3 percent of the median income of white high school dropouts. Blacks with four years of college still earned only 77.7 percent of what white college graduates did.

When it comes to unemployment, Blacks seem to experience jobless rates from two to two-and-a-half times those of whites, even when age and sex are factored in. In 1989, the Black unemployment rate was 11 percent, compared with 4.7 percent for whites. In fact, throughout the last two decades the unemployment rate for Blacks has never dropped below double-digit figures.

Finally, if one looks at household wealth, the mean wealth of African American households is only 23 percent of the mean wealth of white households.

### The “Permanence” of Economic Racism

*The State of Black America* sums up the conclusions to be drawn from this data quite well and is worth quoting at length:

[The] absolute and relative economic status of African Americans is too low...[No] significant progress is being made to improve the status of blacks and to close the gaps. Thus, the disparities in all...measures of economic status have persisted at roughly the same level for the last two decades, and many indicators of inequality have drifted upwards during this period...

The consistency of these results...leads to one inescapable conclusion. The disadvantaged economic status of the African American population is a permanent feature of the American economy. The permanence

of this disadvantaged status implies that it is perpetuated by the normal operations of the American economy.

To be sure, there will be fluctuations in the absolute and relative status of blacks across the business cycle. Moreover, long-range secular growth might produce small improvements in the absolute position of African Americans. However...these changes will be relatively minor, and the dominant trend in the economic status of African Americans will be the permanence of absolute and relative economic deprivation....

[The] permanent poverty and inequality experienced by the African American population...merely reflects their low level of ownership of human capital and wealth, and the low level of ownership and/or control of business and other important economic institutions [i.e., the means of production]. As a result, African Americans have lacked the internal resources...to change their own situation. The American economic system has lacked the incentives to bring about the change.

### The Roots of Economic Racism

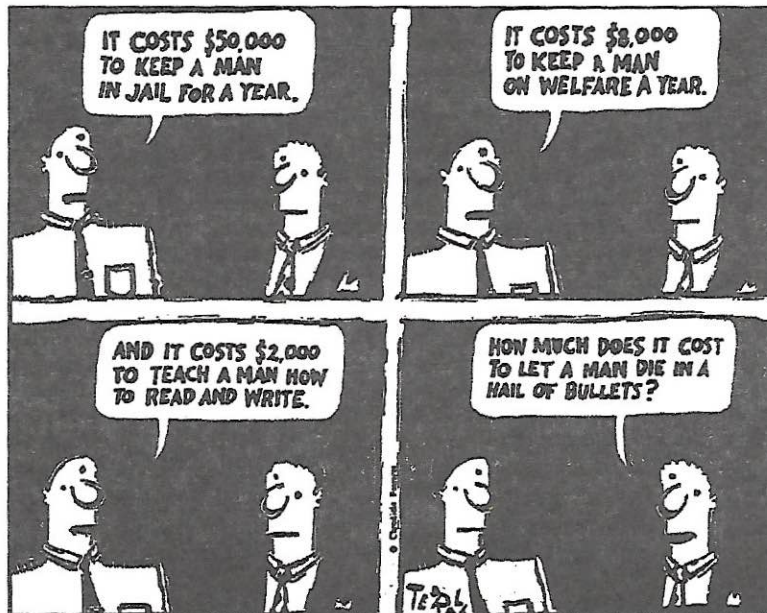
But the Urban League’s report does not take things to their logical conclusion. The report notes that the American economy (i.e., capitalism) perpetuates a “permanent disadvantaged status” as a product of its “normal operations.” It asserts that this “economic disadvantage” reflects the “low level of ownership of human capital and wealth” and the “low level [I would say the *lack*] of ownership and/or control” over the means of production. But then the report fails to take the next logical step.

Clearly, it is in the best interests of African Americans to fight to overturn this particular economic system and replace it with another system whose “normal operations” can provide us with economic well-being, a system that can provide us with the resources and the control of those resources, that will enable

us to progressively change our own situation for the better. *Socialism* is defined in this way: a system that places the economy in the hands of the people, subject to their democratic control, utilized to meet the needs of *all*.

It is easier to say that such a change is needed than it is to bring it about, of course. The roots of economic racism must be attacked if the African American liberation struggle is to advance to victory. But precisely how this can be done effectively is one of the most difficult questions facing us today. This will be the focus of my next article. □

November 6, 1992



# How the Concept of the Dual Nature of the African American Struggle Developed

by Evelyn Sell

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**T**his article is a contribution to improving our knowledge about and understanding of the development of a revolutionary socialist analysis of the role of the African American struggle within a social revolution in the United States. This is not a definitive or complete review of concepts, practical applications, and historical developments. The evolution of theory, program, and political activities stretches beyond the national borders of the United States, and reaches back over one hundred years ago when Marx presented a fundamental analysis of racist oppression in capitalist societies. In *Capital* (Volume I. Capitalistic Production) Marx documented and explained: that the root cause of the oppression of African Americans was the capitalists' exploitation of human labor; that African American and white workers are tied together by a common condition of exploitation by their capitalist rulers; that no section of the working class can break the grip of this exploitation unless *all* working people win their freedom; and, that racist prejudices served the needs of the ruling class to justify the super-exploitation of Blacks as well as to keep the working class divided and weakened. Underlining the interrelation between the struggle of African Americans and the working class as a whole, Marx wrote: "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation..."

This skeletal analysis and understanding was not sufficient to develop a fleshed-out program to address conditions in the U.S.

## Early Attitudes of the U.S. Socialist Movement

**W**hen we consider the socioeconomic differences which have existed between the races in this country, and when we take into account the pervasive racist conditioning in the U.S., it is not surprising that the socialist movement of the early 1900s had an extremely weak theoretical understanding and an even weaker practical program regarding African Americans. The prevailing attitude was that both the exploitation of all workers and racial oppression would be erased through the creation of a socialist society.

Within the Socialist Party, there was a wide range of personal and political attitudes. On one end of this spectrum, there was Victor Berger, who editorialized in his newspaper, the *Milwaukee Social Democratic Herald*, "There can be no doubt that the Negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race." On the other end of the spectrum, there was Eugene V. Debs, who was free of racial

prejudice himself but who explained, "We have nothing special to offer the Negro and we cannot make separate appeals to all the races. The Socialist Party is the party of the whole working class, regardless of color — the whole working class of the whole world.... When the working class has triumphed... the... race problem will forever disappear."

A new attitude came from revolutionaries whose experience and political training evolved outside U.S. society: from the Russian Bolsheviks, Leon Trotsky, and C.L.R. James.

The Bolsheviks, who had carried through the Russian Revolution of 1917 and who had established the first workers' state in the world, had a deep concern for and a program directed toward oppressed nations and national minorities. They recognized the importance of winning these oppressed groupings as powerful and necessary allies of working-class struggles. They appreciated the potential of oppressed nations and minorities for playing a key role in revolutionary situations. This outlook took root in U.S. political soil after the Communist Party was formed in this country as a result of a 1919 split in the Socialist Party. The Bolsheviks immediately took on the task of teaching their new U.S. comrades how to analyze the special problems and strengths of Black workers, encouraged U.S. revolutionaries to make special efforts to recruit African American members, and urged U.S. Communists to wage special fights for the rights of this oppressed minority.

As a result of repeated proddings along these lines, the Communist Party USA (CP) learned to look at African Americans as a doubly victimized section of U.S. society: super-exploited as pariahs of the working class and further abused as an oppressed minority. So, for the first time in this country, a revolutionary socialist organization seriously raised "the Negro question" as an integral part of its policies and practices.

## The Beginnings of the Trotskyist Tradition and Practice

**T**his new viewpoint was part of the political capital of the tiny group condemned as Trotskyists and expelled from the CP in 1928. During the ten years that followed, however, Trotskyists did not express this attitude about oppressed nationalities in any significant programmatic or practical form. In explaining this lack of attention, I am not trying to excuse this weakness but am attempting to indicate the difficult process involved in the development of revolutionary theory and practice.

For the first five years after their expulsion from the CP (1928–33), U.S. Trotskyists organized themselves as the Communist League of America (CLA) and functioned as an outlaw faction of

the CP. The CLA's primary pursuits were: trying to regain membership in the CP, fighting to reform the CP's political positions, and attempting to recruit out of the CP. Because the CLA was directing its attentions toward the CP, and because there were no important differences between the two organizations on "the Negro question," the League did not develop a rounded program relating to the African American situation and struggle.

The thinking and discussion on these matters which did take place during this initial five-year period were molded by the intense focus on what the CP was doing and saying. For example, in February 1933, Arne Swabeck (a founding member of the CLA) met with Trotsky, who was then in exile in Turkey. One of their discussions centered on the question of self-determination for Blacks in the U.S.

At that time, there were 12 million African Americans in this country. Seventy-nine percent lived in the South and worked mainly as small farmers and sharecroppers. Those African Americans who lived in the North were concentrated in large urban centers, worked in industry, and were excluded from or segregated in the labor organizations then in existence. During the early 1920s, Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa movement had mobilized the largest Black mass movement ever seen in the U.S., but this movement had collapsed by the time Trotsky and Swabeck held their meetings.

The CP was building up a record of being a fighting organization spearheading struggles against race prejudice in the labor movement and in society generally. Some of the outstanding CP campaigns during the early '30s were: the defense of the nine Black men on trial in Scottsboro, Alabama; successes in breaking down color lines in the Southern textile strikes; and, running an African American for U.S. Vice-President — the first time such a thing had been done. These healthy activities were carried out *in spite of* the official program of the CP which reflected the "Third Period" ultraleftism of the Comintern (Communist International). The Stalinists in Moscow had decided that the main slogan in the U.S. South must be self-determination for Negroes. The CPUSA, therefore, called for the creation of a Negro republic in the Southern states known as the Black Belt, and began publishing maps showing the exact boundaries of this proposed new nation. At the height of their ultraleft period, the CPUSA went even further and called for a Negro Soviet Republic.

Some comments on why this approach was inappropriate. True self-determination means that an oppressed people decides *for itself*. This is far different from *advocating* a separate nation, *describing* the exact territory for a separate nation, and *defining*

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**“True self-determination means that an oppressed people decides *for itself*. This is far different from *advocating* a separate nation, *describing* the exact territory for a separate nation, and *defining* the nature of the state to be established by an oppressed minority. Such an approach is quite different from a principled defense of the *right* of self-determination.”**

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the nature of the state to be established by an oppressed minority. Such an approach is quite different from a principled defense of the *right* of self-determination.

In reading over the discussion between Trotsky and Swabeck, it is clear that the CLA's thinking on this question was both theoretically inconsistent and heavily influenced by its reactions to the CP line. The CLA doubted that the CP slogan for self-determination could effectively win approval by the African American masses in the U.S. According to Swabeck, Negroes were assimilated and Americanized, and their original traditions had been virtually erased by their experiences in this country. His conclusion was that Negroes wanted equality and not a separate state. Swabeck questioned whether the concept of self-determination could even be applied within the American situation. He pointed to the dispersal of Negroes out of the South and the lack of a distinctively different culture or religion. The CLA had concluded that it was impossible to regard the American Negroes as a national minority, and felt they should be characterized as a racial minority; therefore, the correct main slogan should be "social, political, and economic equality for the Negroes." It was feared that a slogan of

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**“Trotsky said that the essential thing to consider was the question of *consciousness*, that is, what Negroes were struggling to gain, what they desired.”**

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self-determination would lead away from the class struggle because it would appeal most to the Black petty-bourgeoisie, whereas a slogan for equality leads directly to the class basis for the oppression of Blacks.

Swabeck asked Trotsky, "How must we view the position of the American Negro: As a national minority or as a racial minority? This is of the greatest importance for our program."

In his response, Trotsky said that the essential thing to consider was the question of *consciousness*, that is, what Negroes were struggling to gain, what they desired. Trotsky's view was that Negroes were a race, not a nation, but he pointed out that nations grow out of racial materials given certain conditions, and in the United States the unrelenting suppression of Negroes "pushed them toward a political and national unity."

On the use of slogans, Trotsky saw no contradiction in the CLA supporting the right to self-determination and, at the same time, calling for equality. Agreeing that the CP's advocacy of a separate state was incorrect, Trotsky said it was a revolutionary duty to support the right to self-determination, and a revolutionary obligation to defend that right if and when Negroes themselves asked for it. He expressed special concern that the U.S. comrades take an aggressive attitude in challenging the racist prejudices of white workers and in advancing reform demands directed at racist practices. Trotsky's final comment was, "The Negro question is of enormous importance for America. The League must undertake a serious discussion of this question, perhaps in an internal bulletin."

That serious discussion did not take place for about five years. Shortly after Swabeck met with Trotsky, it was decided that the CP was beyond reform and it was necessary to build a new international organization and a new revolutionary party in the



United States. The League turned away from activities directed primarily at the CP and turned toward workers just beginning to radicalize. At that point, the CLA was very small, had meager resources, and was excluded from those areas of political life where the Stalinists were active. In particular, the CP had a virtual monopoly on political work within the African American community.

A look at the table of contents in James P. Cannon's "The History of American Trotskyism" gives a brief overview of the mass work that was carried out during 1933–38: the Paterson, New Jersey, silk workers' strike; the hotel workers' strike in New York City; the Minneapolis coal yard and truck drivers' strikes; the Auto-Lite strike in Toledo, Ohio. Trotskyists were involved in class struggle situations where they had members and contacts — and the plain historical fact was that those particular situations did not include Black workers.

The defense cases Trotskyists carried out were dictated by the political necessities of international events: exposing the frame-up nature of the Moscow Trials against Russian Bolsheviks, the Trotsky Defense Committee, and support for the Spanish Civil War. In this area of political activity, again, "the Negro question" was not a key feature.

Party-building efforts from 1933 to 1938 embraced unity with A.J. Muste's American Workers Party, the launching of the Workers Party, internal debates and splits (such as with the Abern clique and the Oehlerites), and the entry into the Socialist Party (known as the "French turn"). Here again, the specific party-building opportunities available at the time did not include significant numbers of Blacks or issues directly related to African American needs. However, the situation began to change in small but significant ways.

### Important Changes, Serious Steps

At the time the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) was launched, in January 1938, some of the branches were able to report some modest beginnings in recruiting African Americans from the unemployed movement and from industry. The SWP's increased activities among Black workers highlighted the need for theo-



C.L.R. James

retical clarification, programmatic statements, and propaganda literature. Just at this juncture, C.L.R. James arrived in the U.S.

James (usually identified as "J. Meyer" or "J. Johnson" in SWP literature and documents) was a Black intellectual, born in the West Indies, who was a leader of the Fourth International in England. His arrival in the U.S. coincided with and stimulated the SWP's interest in "the Negro question" and activity among African Americans. In preparation for the 1939 SWP National Convention, James traveled around the country talking with Negro intellectuals and political activists. On the basis of what he learned about the general situation of U.S. African Americans and the particular developments in various organizations, he prepared notes to serve as the basis for discussions with Trotsky, who was then living in Mexico.

Important changes had taken place between the time of Swabek's 1933 meeting with Trotsky in Turkey and these meetings in 1939. Although 70 percent of the U.S. Black population still lived and worked in the South, the birth of the CIO unions had brought hundreds of thousands of Northern Blacks into the organized labor movement. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal promises had attracted African Americans into the Democratic Party, breaking up the traditional allegiance to the Republican Party established during the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. The reputation of the Communist Party USA among Blacks had suffered as a result of its opportunistic flip-flops and sellouts. For example, African Americans were affected by the CP's betrayal of the Scottsboro defendants and by the knowledge that Stalin sold oil to fascist dictator Mussolini during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. As a result of such events, the CPUSA lost thousands of its Black members. In New York state, 80 percent of the party's African American members left the CP.

With that objective political situation in mind, a delegation of SWP leaders, led by C.L.R. James, met with Trotsky in April 1939. Their first discussion dealt with the still unresolved attitude of U.S. Trotskyists on self-determination. James proposed: "(1) That we are for the right of self-determination. (2) If some demand should arise among the Negroes for the right of self-determination, we should support it. (3) We do not go out of our way to raise this slogan and place an unnecessary barrier between ourselves and socialism. (4) An investigation should be made into these movements: the one led by Garvey, the movement for the 49th state, the movement centering around Liberia. Find out what groups of the population supported them and on this basis come to some opinion as to how far there is any demand among the Negroes for self-determination."

Trotsky agreed with these concrete proposals, but he had a more open mind on the possible development of nationalist sentiments than James, who made it clear that he did not believe that the majority of Negroes wanted or would ever want a separate state. Trotsky speculated about various situations in which the demand for a separate state might be raised. James saw the demand for a Negro state "as a step backward so far as a socialist society is concerned." Trotsky had an opposite reaction; he said, "To fight for the possibility of realizing an independent state is a sign of great moral and political awakening. It would be a tremendous revolutionary step. This ascendancy would immediately have the best economic consequences."

The second and third discussion dealt with James's proposal that the party take the initiative in creating a Negro organization that would serve to politically educate and help mobilize Negroes in struggles to win equality.

During the second discussion, Trotsky made these sharply critical remarks about the SWP's attitude:

It is very disquieting to find that until now the party has done almost nothing in this field. It has not published a book, a pamphlet, leaflets, nor even any articles in the *New International* [magazine]. Two comrades who compiled a book on the question, a serious work, remained isolated. That book is not published, nor are even quotations from it published. It is not a good sign. It is a bad sign. The characteristic thing about the American workers' parties, trade-union organizations, and so on, was their aristocratic character. It is the basis of opportunism. The skilled workers who feel set in the capitalist society help the bourgeois class to hold the Negroes and the unskilled workers down to a very low scale. Our party is not safe from degeneration if it remains a place for intellectuals, semi-intellectuals, skilled workers, and Jewish workers who build a very close milieu which is almost isolated from the genuine masses. Under these conditions our party cannot develop — it will degenerate.... We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class.

The transcripts of these discussions in Mexico were printed and circulated throughout the SWP as part of the discussion leading up to the 1939 National Convention. The delegates elected a 12-member Committee on Negro Work to prepare resolutions and recommendations for action.

The resolution "The SWP and Negro Work" (covering party education, recruitment, and projections for creating a new militant Negro organization) was adopted without opposition. The resolution incorporated the basic lesson learned from the Russian Bolsheviks: African Americans suffer both the general difficulties common to all workers and special problems arising from racial discrimination. The resolution also contained Trotsky's views about the degenerative effects of a failure to pay adequate attention to the African American struggle. Noting that the SWP had to contend with race relations poisoned by capitalism and by the pernicious politics of the CPUSA, the resolution recognized that the nationalist tendencies of Blacks had been fortified and that, more than ever, Negroes desired to create their own organizations under their own leaders. African American members of the SWP were, therefore, instructed to take the initiative and collaborate with militant Negroes to form a mass organization devoted to the struggle for Negro rights.

A second resolution, entitled "The Right of Self-Determination and the Negro in the United States of North America," was heavily influenced by the discussions with Trotsky and included these points made by him during the meetings in Mexico:

- Given the past centuries of racism, it is entirely possible that the first awakening to political activity could take the form of the demand for a separate state.
- In keeping with the Leninist position on self-determination, the SWP pledged itself to support such a demand in every way possible.
- It is wrong to advocate a separate state for Negroes (as the CP was doing) because this denies the very essence of self-determination, that is, the right of an oppressed people to decide their own destiny.

All but two members of the Committee on Negro Work approved this resolution. Each presented a minority report to the convention and received a little support for their positions. One minority reporter agreed with the general line of the resolution but wanted to add sections calling more attention to the dangers of

self-determination serving reactionary demands. The other minority had more serious disagreements and wanted to delete sections of the resolution stating positive attitudes toward demands for a separate state. This would not be the last time substantial disagreements would be raised within the SWP regarding the African American struggle.

The convention voted to approve the resolution as the basis for a final draft to be completed by the incoming National Committee. The delegates, also, approved a motion to instruct the incoming National Committee to prepare a general resolution on "the Negro question" in the U.S. as soon as possible. This basic documents was not forthcoming for another nine years.

## New Conditions Created During World War II

Two months after the 1939 SWP convention, World War II exploded in Europe, precipitating an intense internal faction fight in the SWP. C.L.R. James was among the 40 percent of the membership who split from the party in 1940. That same year, Trotsky was murdered by a Stalinist agent. The following year, many SWP leaders were put on trial and convicted for alleged violations of the Smith Act; sentencing took place the same day the U.S. Congress declared war. Several years were spent in an unsuccessful fight to reverse the convictions. Those were some of the major developments which hindered the SWP from carrying out the mandate of the 1939 convention to draft a basic document.

The objective situation changed dramatically during the war. Blacks flooded into the Northern urban centers to meet the needs of war industries and poured into the ranks of the armed forces to fulfill draft requirements. Spurred by the acute contrast between being utilized in the "fight for democracy" and the discrimination they experienced at work and in the armed services, Blacks repeatedly raised demands and held demonstrations for equal rights and treatment. The Black struggle became — and continued to be — a central feature of the SWP's political activities.

The SWP's first pamphlet on the Negro struggle was printed at the end of 1939, and in the next ten years the party published more pamphlets on that subject than on any other. The lack of a basic document did not stop the SWP from tackling the issues — from the general and historical to the immediate and practical. The party's defense campaigns matched deeds with words. The SWP was the only political group to join with Black organizations to defend 15 African American sailors court-martialed in 1940 for protesting segregation in the Navy. In 1942, the SWP played a leading role in defense efforts for Black sharecropper Odell Waller, who was legally lynched by the state of Virginia for acting in self-defense against his white landlord. In 1946, the party organized a campaign against the Ku Klux Klan after a Black family was burned to death in Fontana, California. During that same year, the SWP was involved in a fight against police brutality; the victims were the Ferguson brothers of Freeport, New York. A successful campaign to free James Hickman from a Chicago prison took place in 1947; Hickman had killed his landlord in the belief that the man was responsible for the death of Hickman's children in a slum fire.

A key test for all groups claiming to support African American rights was the March on Washington Movement. In January 1941 A. Philip Randolph, a leading Black trade unionist in the U.S., called for 10,000 Negroes to march in the nation's capital on July 1 to demand an end to discrimination in employment and to segregation in the armed services. This was the first time in U.S. history that such an event was proposed. March committees,

which only Blacks could join, were set up in many cities; meetings were held; outdoor rallies and poster walks took place, and buttons were sold by the thousands. Although pressures were exerted to get the July 1 march called off, government figures failed to block the movement — forcing President Roosevelt to appoint the first Committee on Fair Employment Practices. But many in the Black community continued to demand that plans go forward for the march.

When Pearl Harbor was bombed and the U.S. officially entered World War II, leading African Americans argued in favor of full support for the war effort and urged fellow Blacks to set aside their demands during the national emergency. The struggle for equal rights did not completely disappear, however, and throughout the war many African Americans waged what they called the “Double V for Victory” campaign: victory against racist Jim Crow and victory against the Axis powers. The March on Washington Movement mobilized and expressed this ongoing demand during the early 1940s. The high point of its activities took place during 1942 when it organized huge rallies in major cities such as New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. A combination of factors led to the decline of the movement after 1943.

Based on its analysis of the vanguard role of African Americans in revolutionary struggle and its commitment to battles against racism, the SWP supported the demands of the March on Washington Movement, publicized its plans and activities, and urged everyone to help make the march and subsequent projects successful. The party argued against those who told Blacks to wait until the “crisis of democracy” was resolved. The SWP disputed the claim that African Americans must prove their loyalty and then, after the war was over, they would be treated fairly. While wholeheartedly supporting the struggle against racism, the party criticized the March leadership, first of all, because of the lack of rank-and-file decision-making, and second of all, for the limited demands and caving-in decisions of the leadership.

The SWP presented a program for pursuing the antiracist struggle during a wartime situation. For those war industries refusing to hire Blacks, the party called on the government to take over the plants and facilities and put them under the management of workers’ committees based on no racial discrimination. In place of the completely segregated armed forces, the SWP proposed military training under the control of the trade unions and based on full equality for African Americans. The party also called for the formation of an independent labor party pledged to fight for Negro rights.

In sharp contrast to the SWP’s activities and demands, the CP flip-flopped from opposing U.S. involvement in the war (during the Stalin-Hitler Pact) to all-out fervent support for the war after Germany invaded the Soviet Union. According to the CP, any disruption of the war effort was a blow against the USSR and a favor to Hitler; since Negro demands for equality could only serve to hamper the war effort, such campaigns had to stop until the Allied powers were victorious. These treacherous reversals caused the CP to lose support in the Black community.

The SWP, on the other hand, gained considerable respect for its uncompromising consistency in the struggle against racism. By the end of 1946 about one-fifth of the party’s membership was Black. With this experience of expanded involvement in the struggle, the party decided to hold an extensive discussion of the theoretical and practical aspects of the issues. C.L.R. James, who had rejoined the SWP in 1947, again played a leading role. He drafted the resolution for the 1948 National Convention and was

the reporter to the convention. The general line of the resolution was approved by the delegates, and the text was referred to the party for further discussion. The final version was adopted in February 1950 and published in the May/June 1950 issue of the *Fourth International* magazine, an issue completely devoted to articles on African Americans in the U.S.

Entitled “Negro Liberation through Revolutionary Socialism,” the document opened with the SWP’s basic position; the first paragraphs stated:

Next to the emancipation of the working class from capitalism, the liberation of the Negro people from their degradation is the paramount problem of American society. These two social problems are integrally united. The only road to freedom for the workers, and to equality for the Negroes, is through their common struggle for the abolition of capitalism.

The Negro people in all aspects of their social and cultural life are part of the American people. At the same time it must be recognized that the Negro struggle is not identical with the proletarian movement toward socialism. It exists as a distinct movement of an

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**“The Negro question in the United States represents a unique combination of the struggle for democracy by an oppressed minority with the working-class struggle for socialism.”**

**— C.L.R. James**

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oppressed minority within the country, possessing its own historical origins, special characteristics, forms of development and methods of action. The economic, political, social, and cultural degradation of the Negro people below the levels of even the most exploited layers of the working class places them in an exceptional position and impels them to play an exceptional role within the social structure of American capitalism. The Negro question in the United States represents a unique combination of the struggle for democracy by an oppressed minority with the working-class struggle for socialism. The revolutionary party must take this dual nature of the Negro movement as the starting point for its theoretical and practical conclusions on this problem.

... Under the banner of Negro rights, the movement of the Negro people is rendered most sensitive and responsive to social tensions. It acts as a spur in precipitating struggles for elementary democratic rights; it unmasks the class nature of the capitalist state; it helps educate the working class to the reactionary role of bourgeois democracy and the need to wage merciless struggle against it; and propels into action the major political forces of the nation and the organized labor movement.

On the basis of what was happening in the U.S. at that time, the document stated, “There is now growing up an embryo ‘nation within the nation.’”

Self-determination, which had been a central feature of previous discussions, was dealt with very briefly because the SWP still held the position adopted in 1939 that it supported the right to self-determination. The resolution merely noted that the rising national consciousness “thus far aims solely at acquiring enough force and momentum to break down the barriers that exclude Negroes from American society, showing few signs of aiming at national separatism.”

## The Post-War Period

With the conclusion of World War II, the U.S. government launched its Cold War abroad and its witchhunt at home — creating severe difficulties for all radical groups. The hot war in Korea added to the repressive atmosphere of the 1950s. The post-World War II economy allowed concessions to the working class which eased the tensions built up during the war, and which further solidified the conservatism of the labor leadership. The combination of these and other new conditions affected the SWP in important ways. The party was not able to adequately integrate the large group of new members who had joined during 1944–46; almost all of these recruits dropped out by the late '40s. Then in the early 1950s, an internal faction fight broke out which caused a split in 1953, further reducing the ranks of the party.

The question of self-determination once again surfaced as a point of contention in 1954 when Dick Fraser raised objections to the party's fundamental characterization of the Black struggle. Reading Fraser's two bulletins (the first dated August 1954 and the second dated August 1955) and George Breitman's answer (in a bulletin dated September 1954) is like going over the ground covered by Trotsky, Swabeck, and C.L.R. James during the 1930s — only with much more detailed information, more extensive argumentation, and more concrete experience to cite.

Here is a summary of Fraser's major disagreements with the SWP's analysis and program:

He argued that the Leninist concepts of the role of oppressed nations could not be applied to American Negroes. They could not be considered a nation nor an embryo nation nor a possible future nation if one used any materialist criteria such as historical background, cultural expressions, or economic relations. In terms of their historical background, African Americans were forcibly torn away from any ties which could have formed the framework for nationhood. They came from many different tribes in Africa and were deliberately mixed up by the slaveholders so that specific tribal identities were lost. They were denied the use of their own languages and were forced to speak the American language, thereby completely losing their native African modes of communication. They were not allowed to practice their original religions but were compelled to adopt the dominant American religions. The end result of this process was to make Negroes the most American of all the peoples who came to this country. In terms of cultural expressions, the forms developed by African Americans did not remain theirs but became fused with and modified by the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. For example, jazz, originally an independent Negro form of music, became a part of general American musical culture and is viewed as American music.

Finally, quoting from Fraser's 1955 bulletin: "The Negro question is not a national question because it lacks the fundamental groundwork for the development of nationalism; an independent system of commodity exchange, or to be more precise, a mode of life which would make possible the emergence of such a system." According to Fraser, a nation serves as a unit of commodity exchange, and national oppression exists where the right of a commodity to fulfill its normal economic function is suppressed. Obviously, Fraser pointed out, the dispersal of Blacks throughout the U.S. economy and the lack of a distinctive Negro economic unit precludes the evolution of a Black nation.

What about the question of consciousness, which Trotsky felt was so important? Fraser claimed that the SWP's position confused *race* consciousness with *national* consciousness. Race con-

sciousness among Negroes, Fraser explained, is "primarily their consciousness of the desire for equality..." He wrote that race pride is a means of justifying the demand for full equality and that this "consciousness of equality and the willingness to struggle to achieve equality, is the political equivalent of the national consciousness of oppressed nations and of the class consciousness of the working class." Fraser alleged that it had been historically determined that equality was the goal of the African American struggle in the U.S. and that this insistence on equality is the way Negroes express their right to assimilate into U.S. society.

According to Fraser, the two poles of the struggle in the U.S. have been and will continue to be: assimilation versus separatism. Fraser considered assimilation demands and actions as progressive, healthy, and leading in a revolutionary direction. Fraser's view was that separatism had always been and will always be counterrevolutionary and petty-bourgeois. This is so because the separatist doctrine was used by racists and conservative Black leaders to accommodate to racism and to preserve segregation. The only way that the masses of African Americans could adopt a separatist attitude would be if they suffer a terrible defeat which isolates them from the rest of the working class and confuses them as to their real interests and needs.

The crux of the problem in the U.S., Fraser explained, is not the national question but the race question, that is, "a matter of discrimination because of skin color, and that's all." Therefore, he concluded, the only correct program for a revolutionary party is: "immediate and unconditional economic, political and social equality." The SWP must "reject and condemn every proposal for the solution of the Negro question through racial separation, whether it be the vicious segregationism of the bosses' doctrine of 'separate but equal' or the more subtle program of the Communist Party for 'self-determination' for the Negro people. Both of these can only buttress the basic social system of Jim Crow whose main pillar of support is segregation."

Fraser said the SWP's 1948 resolution was based on a false application of Lenin's concepts on oppressed nations to the situation of Negroes in the U.S., and this incorrect theoretical approach led the party to adopt a wrong slogan (support to the right of self-determination) and a wrong strategy (instructing Black SWP members to join all-Negro organizations like the March on Washington Committees and to pursue the Black struggle as their prime political activity).

George Breitman's answer to Fraser recapitulated the approach developed by the SWP on the basis of the discussions with Trotsky, expressed the party's growing familiarity with Black history, and reflected the SWP's increased involvement within the living struggle.

In his response, Breitman pointed out that, in the sense that the term is commonly used and understood, Blacks in the U.S. are an oppressed racial minority rather than a nation. Whether they become an oppressed national minority depends on the course of both the general class struggle and the specific struggles of African Americans. At the present time (mid-1950s), Blacks want equality within U.S. society and are fighting for equality rather than for the creation of an independent and separate state. However, there are national aspects to the struggle, and the party will support efforts to create an independent state if that is what Blacks decide to do. This does not signify that the SWP advocates the creation of such a state; what the party advocates is the right of African Americans to determine their own destiny.

Breitman explained that the forces which had created an “embryo nation within the nation” continued to operate in the years since the party had adopted the 1948 resolution; the facts of life confirmed that the Black community was increasingly becoming more compact, more solid, more united, and more distinct. This national identity was taking form at the same time African Americans were being integrated into the urbanized, industrialized working class. To put it another way, as the Black struggle exhibited more similarities with classical nationalist movements in Europe, the Black struggle also assumed a more important role in classical workers’ struggles.

The historic norm has been that nationalist movements have gone through different stages before reaching the demand for independence. For example, the American colonists demanded equal rights with English citizens before they demanded independence from Great Britain. This may hold true for the Black struggle as well, Breitman noted. African Americans are demanding equality — not a separate state — but the SWP’s opinion was that the final stage had not yet been reached in this process. The Black struggle was still evolving, and one likely variant for the future was that Blacks might desire an independent state. That desire is not automatically counterrevolutionary. Both the demand for equality through integration and the demand for a separate state impel Blacks to fight against the capitalist system because capitalism ferociously resists both goals. So there is no contradiction in a revolutionary party supporting and working for equality and supporting the right of self-determination. Rather than seeing the two poles of struggle as assimilation versus separatism, the SWP saw an opposition between reformist adaptation to oppression and militant actions against oppression.

That was the SWP’s position in the mid-1950s when a momentous new stage opened up with the emergence of the civil rights movement.

### **From 1955 Through the 1960s**

**T**he 1955 lynch-murder of young Emmett Till sparked a huge wave of massive protests in the North and West. Immediately following these actions, African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, launched their bus boycott movement. In 1959, national attention centered on Blacks organizing a self-defense group in Monroe, North Carolina (under the leadership of Robert Williams).

The Southern sit-ins began in 1960. The Freedom Rides were launched in 1961. New organizations, formed by young people and more militant than the established civil rights groups, were founded; the most notable were the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). In 1963, the whole world was shocked by scenes of police brutality against African American demonstrators in Birmingham, Alabama, who were beaten and attacked by police dogs and fire hoses. The protests, sympathy rallies, and actions across the U.S. were the largest since the 1955 protests against the lynching of Emmett Till. The most massive marches for civil rights in U.S. history (up until that time) were held during 1963: a record-breaking 250,000 in Detroit, and then half a million in the national mobilization in Washington, D.C. (where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I have a dream” speech). During that year, Blacks participated in nearly 2,000 recorded actions in 40 states and the nation’s capital; about 10,000 demonstrators were arrested. In addition to marches, rallies, and picketing, African

Americans engaged in sit-ins, sleep-ins, shop-ins, traffic tie-ups, and other forms of protest actions.

The self-mobilization of Black communities across the country included the 1964 rent strike in New York City’s Harlem, and boycotts of school systems in New York City and Chicago. In addition to school boycotts in other Northern cities, there were protests over school districting, teacher placement and hiring, racist textbooks, and inadequate school facilities. “Community control of the schools” became the focus of battles in major cities such as New York and Detroit. Numerous demonstrations were organized in the fight against employment discrimination, the lack of voting rights, police brutality, and refusals to serve Blacks in stores and restaurants.

The first Black uprisings took place during 1964 in seven Northern cities. The Watts Rebellion and the three-day Chicago revolt took place in the summer of 1965. Ghettos across the country exploded during the summer of 1966, including in Florida, Cleveland, Omaha (Nebraska), Chicago, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Providence (Rhode Island), Atlanta (Georgia), Dayton (Ohio), Waukegan (Illinois), and three cities in Michigan. During the opening days of the 1967 summer, a police attack on a group of 50 women holding a “silent vigil” in a Boston welfare office touched off a full-scale ghetto eruption. The revolt in Newark, New Jersey, was on a larger scale. In July 1967, the Detroit Uprising took place — the largest, longest, and most significant of the 1960s rebellions. Unlike Southern actions, which were directed against Jim Crow laws and specific problems, the urban rebellions were generalized revolts against the totality of ghetto life.

The Deacons for Defense and Justice emerged in 1964 and captured national attention during 1965. Organized initially to provide armed defense for civil rights activists from CORE, Blacks in Jonesboro, Louisiana, decided to form an ongoing self-defense group in order to provide the protection which was not forthcoming by the established law enforcement agencies. Without firing a shot, the mere existence of the Deacons insured better treatment for Blacks arrested for minor law violations. The Deacons patrolled Black neighborhoods, defended civil rights workers engaged in voter registration and employment opportunities campaigns, and expanded into other Louisiana towns as well as into other Southern states. It was estimated that there were 50–55 chapters in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi in 1965. Support groups in the North were active in publicizing these activities and in raising funds for the chapters.

The struggle during the 1960s also produced political action organizations which promoted the self-mobilization and self-determination of African Americans. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was launched in April 1964 by a coalition of civil rights groups. Although it was a racially integrated group, the MFDP was predominantly Black, and its goal was to achieve the demands of the Black community. Denied representation at the 1964 Democratic Party convention, the MFDP held a statewide “freedom vote.” Ballot boxes were set up in barbershops, restaurants, churches, and automobiles. Almost 70,000 Blacks from 56 of the state’s 82 counties voted, and in 37 of those counties, there were more MFDP ballots cast than were recorded in the official November 3 election. A well-organized campaign to challenge the seating of the “legally” elected all-white Mississippi Congressmen was then conducted, and on the opening day of Congress a roll call vote on the Mississippi representatives was forced onto the House membership. These,

and subsequent activities, marked a revolt against the business-as-usual political machines.

In the North, the formation of the Michigan Freedom Now Party (FNP) marked a genuinely independent movement completely outside of the twin major parties of capitalism. The Michigan FNP called for independent Black political action, aligned itself “with

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**“Key features during the 1960s were: the dynamic rise of the independent liberation movement for Freedom Now, the self-mobilization of African Americans across the country, the strength of the demands for “Black control of the Black community,” and the influence of Black nationalist concepts and slogans — especially as expressed and developed by Malcolm X.”**

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all liberation movements throughout the world,” and demanded fundamental change — not reforms. Although they were not experienced in organizing a petition campaign and an election campaign, party activists were able to secure ballot status and fielded 37 candidates for state and national offices. The FNP was confronted with hostility from the traditional white power structure, the pro-Democratic Party Black leadership, and left-wing groupings such as the Communist Party. FNP members were denounced as “racists in reverse” because they insisted on an all-Black organization. They were accused of trying to split the Black vote so that racists could win office.

Struggles in Alabama during 1965 over voter registration and schools led to the formation of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in 1966. More widely known as the Black Panther Party (because it used that animal as its ballot symbol) the party was completely independent of the Democratic and Republican parties, and carried out a campaign to win control of county offices. (This was a different group with different goals than the Black Panther Party which was later organized in Oakland, California, as a social movement rather than as an electoral vehicle.) Vehemently denounced by the media and many prominent African American leaders because of its opposition to the two major parties, the Lowndes County Black Panther Party received 40 percent of the vote in the November 1966 election. Over the next few years, it continued attempts to organize the Black community but then merged with the Democratic Party in 1969.

Key features during the 1960s were: the dynamic rise of the independent liberation movement for Freedom Now, the self-mobilization of African Americans across the country, the strength of the demands for “Black control of the Black community,” and the influence of Black nationalist concepts and slogans — especially as expressed and developed by Malcolm X.

### **Self-Determination, the Concept of the Combined Revolution**

**A** “correct” theory does not automatically lead to appropriate political activities. The SWP was challenged to implement

programmatic understandings within the living struggle with its complicated and fast-paced developments, new forms of organization, specific slogans, wide-ranging tactics, and competing leaderships and strategies. Although not perfect in every respect and at all moments, the SWP implemented the theoretical and programmatic foundations laid down over many years. Understanding the essence of self-determination sensitized the SWP to respond positively to the demand, “Black control of the Black community!” — a call which was heard in regard to schools, policing neighborhoods, and controlling vital services in areas where African Americans lived and worked. Basing itself on an analysis of the dual nature of the Black liberation struggle, the SWP was prepared to support the independent development of African American organizations and activities.

Here are some examples from articles, resolutions, and documents published by the SWP. The approach is consistent over the years, harmonizes with the basic analysis adopted earlier, and takes into account real-life events, conditions, and demands.

1956 SWP National Convention resolution, “The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality”

The recent civil rights battles have proven in life the class struggle principle — that mass pressure is the only means to wrest significant reforms from the ruling class. Far from appeasing the Negro people, the legal reforms and other concessions thus far granted have become the starting point for broader struggles and more militant methods aimed at translating legal victories into living realities....

The process [of replacing the reformist leadership of the mass movement with a revolutionary socialist leadership] can be helped along through a transitional program leading toward fusion of the civil rights movement with the class struggle for socialism. This program takes as its point of departure the independent character of the Negro movement as a minority struggle for democratic reforms under capitalism, focusing special attention on the need for labor to support the struggle. Organized labor should be in the forefront of the fight for such civil rights legislation as the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] with teeth in it, anti-lynch laws, poll tax repeal and measures to protect the voting rights of colored people. Labor should give militant backing to demands for Presidential enforcement of Negro rights, including the use of federal troops against the white supremacists where tactical conditions warrant such a demand. [There was a heated dispute within the SWP in 1955–56 over the party’s support to the demand for federal troops to enforce civil rights.]

Revolutionary socialists are confronted with complex educational tasks in connection with the civil rights struggle. It is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the historical, theoretical and practical aspects of the fight for Negro equality in its independent character as a movement for democratic reforms under capitalism, a movement which under conditions of capitalist decay has a profoundly revolutionary character. Similar knowledge is needed of the history, theory and practice of the working class struggle as developed across the years. In addition the class conscious militant must have a firm grasp of the interconnection between these two movements and the manner in which they may be fused into a common struggle to resolve their mutual problems.

1964 article by George Breitman published in *The Militant* newspaper, “The Need and Result of Independence.”

Why do genuine Marxists take this position [supporting independence of the Negro struggle]? Why do we advocate that the Negro movement must be independent, *even of the SWP*? Because the history of Negro oppression in this country has been such that the more independent the Negro movement becomes, the more revolutionary it becomes. And the more revolutionary the Negro movement becomes, the better it is for *all* revolutionists, white and

black. The radicalization of the Negroes cannot help stimulating radicalization among whites too....

We believe that the sooner the Negro movement becomes completely "undominated" (that is, the sooner it becomes completely independent and revolutionary), the sooner it will approach and accept the ideas and policies that the Marxists have reached; and that the process of ever-growing independence will in the end inevitably lead it, as the result of its own experiences, toward close collaboration with other revolutionary forces, including the SWP.

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**— George Breitman**

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That kind of fraternal relation, rather than domination, is the only one worth having, and it is the only one we seek....

We expect [the Negro movement] to be an integral part of the revolution, before, during and after the winning of power, until it, the Negro movement, is satisfied that racism is abolished beyond the possibility of return.

What we think is this: Historical conditions, yes "laws," have placed the Negro movement in a vanguard position — in the leadership of the mass struggle to change society socially, politically and economically. Its radicalization marks the opening stage of the revolution that will accomplish these changes. As this revolution continues and develops, the whole political structure will begin to come apart, and other forces will be drawn into the revolution, for and against. Which side wins will depend on which draws the strongest support from the as yet uncommitted and inactive majority....

The SWP's well-known position in favor of Negro independence of course applies with full force to black political action. For many years we have endorsed and supported independent Negro candidates running against the capitalist party candidates. To support such candidates when they band together in a party of their own [Freedom Now Party], and to defend their right to do so in their own way, is only an extension of our long-held position, and comes almost automatically for us.

1967 "The National Question and the Black Liberation Struggle in the United States," by George Breitman in the book *50 Years of World Revolution 1917-1967: An International Symposium*.

The most momentous of these movements [of oppressed nationalities] in the capitalist lands is the liberation struggle of more than 22,000,000 Afro-Americans.

Although their movement for self-determination springs from the racism and disabilities they suffer under the white-supremacist monopolist regime in the United States, it has been fed and fostered by the example of the colonial

revolutions, which have in turn found inspiration in the October Revolution. It is immediately and consciously connected with the ongoing efforts of the peoples on the African continent to cast off foreign domination and take charge of their own affairs. In this sense, the struggle of the black masses for emancipation and equality on North American soil today is linked with the revolutions of the oppressed nationalities arising from the October Revolution and the ideas of the Bolsheviks on this question, which have sunk so deeply into the minds of oppressed peoples everywhere over the past half century....

The massive uprisings of Afro-Americans in Newark, Detroit, and scores of other cities during the summer of 1967 have focused world attention upon the black liberation struggle in the United States. What is the nature of this movement, what are its principal problems and its prospects?

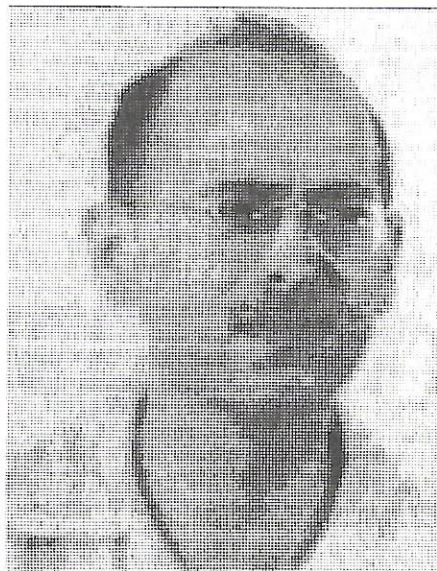
Even though most of its leaders and participants do not yet think in such terms, the black revolts should be viewed within the dynamics of the unfolding socialist revolution in the United States. The strivings for equality and freedom by 22,000,000 black people directly oppressed by the foremost capitalist power are more than justified on their own account. But the fact that this part of the population almost all belongs to the working class and is largely located in the core of the country's biggest cities, including its national capital, gives exceptional importance to its increasingly bitter and violent collisions with the American ruling class. As the uprisings certify, black people constitute the most combative and advanced section of the anti-capitalist forces within the heartland of world imperialism....

The black liberation struggle in the United States has a two-sided character. Most liberals and many pseudo-Marxists go astray by failing to understand its duality. As the drive of an oppressed racial minority bent on self-determination, freedom, and human rights, it is first of all a popular movement with a nationalist and democratic mainspring. But it is much more than that. The Afro-American struggle is not a peasant movement for agrarian reform in a backward country. It is the upheaval of superexploited workers crowded into city slums who are victims of intolerable conditions of life and labor in the richest and most advanced capitalism. They constitute the backbone of the industrial reserve army of U.S. monopoly capitalism.

This combined character of their struggle, which is both national-democratic in its demands and proletarian-socialist in tendency, endows it with doubly explosive force. The black rebels are so many time bombs planted in the vital centers of the capitalist colossus....

Malcolm [X] was the herald of the black nationalist ferment in the black community. This nationalism is the product of the system of racism, segregation and discrimination which has been an integral part of American capitalist civilization from its birth and which, despite lavish promises, has not been essentially mitigated in recent decades. The growing consciousness among Afro-Americans of their status as a distinctive group with its own interests and objectives has been intensified by the independence struggles in Africa and the colonial revolution and sharpened by the glaring and growing contrast between their own conditions and those of white Americans. The ghettos serve to unite them physically, economically, psychologically, and culturally.

At the present time, black nationalism is more of a mood than an organized force. It is highly diversified in its manifestations, which range all the way from advocacy of a separate nation to searches for the special values of "negritude," from proponents of black business ownership



George Breitman

*Continued on page 32*

# Angry Poetry of Black Rebellion: The Politics of Rap

by Ben Tupper

*Editor's Note: It is impossible to have a sense of the urban realities of African American life today without taking into account the phenomenon of rap music. Powerful forces in the United States, including Bill Clinton and others associated with the incoming presidential administration, have reacted against this cultural challenge with visible hostility—while the quite different powerful forces that exploded in the Los Angeles rebellion tend to see this music as an expression of their own thoughts and moods. A shorter version of this article appeared under the title "The Politics of Rap and Gangsterism" in the Fall 1992 issue of Left Turn, a youth publication of Solidarity. (Subscriptions are \$2.50 for four issues—send to Left Turn, 7012 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, MI 48210.) Another revolutionary socialist discussion of rap can be found in a stimulating article "Rap Music and the Elections—Cop Killers or Killer Cops?" by Zbigniew Kowalewski and Silvere Chabot in the October 1992 issue of Socialist Action. (Subscriptions are \$3.00 for 6 months, \$8.00 for one year—send to Socialist Action, 3425 Army Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.)*

...and all y'all dope dealers — your as bad as the dope dealers, cuz ya kill us — you got rich when you started slinging dope — but you aint built us a supermarket so we can spend our money with the blacks — to busy buying gold and Cadillacs — that's what you're doing with the money that you're raising — exploiting us like the caucasian did for 400 years — I got 400 tears for 400 peers — died last year from gang related crimes — that's why I got gang related rhymes...  
— Ice Cube

The purpose of this article is to look at the various politics of rap artists and gangs as they relate to Afro-centrism, antiracism, anti-capitalism, violence, and misogyny.

I want to emphasize that this is by no means an exhaustive study of rap or gangs, but only a conversion of ideas and attitudes as expressed in the musical format to a written textual format. I will put special emphasis on music coming from Los Angeles, specifically South Central. I will include other important rap artists who come from around the country. The most effective way of interpreting these messages remains via the music, as beats and rhythms say a lot that words cannot. This text should be seen as a lesser substitute for those who do not have the time, money, or interest to purchase large numbers of C.D.'s, but who have interest in the politics of rap and gangsterism. With this introduction, we begin to look into the various issues that rap deals with, and which groups are saying what.

## Afro-centrism and Antiracism in Rap Music

...i Want Science, Not Silence, But Science — Scientific fact about black — the board of education acts if its only reality is a Tom, Dick, and Harry — so you learn your black history as questions and answers — every question but the Black Panthers — Timbuktu existed when the caveman existed — so then why isn't this listed...near the Tigris and Euphrates valley in Asia lies the garden of Eden where Adam became a father to humanity — now don't get mad at me — but according to facts, this seems as fantasy — because

man, the most ancient man — was found thousands of years before Adam began — and where he was found again they can't laugh at ya — right dead smack in Africa...  
— Boogie Down Productions (BDP)

This subject is rap's most powerful feature, as many rap artists emphasize the need to combat white supremacy in all its manifestations. Rap artists such as BDP and Public Enemy have ferreted out the institutional forms of racism in the classroom, courtroom, and media room. The result is a developed understanding of how invisible racism works and can be combated. These messages have played an important role in motivating thousands of youth to organize for goals such as reform of school curriculum.

...mental pictures, stereotypes of fake history — reinforces mystery — and when mystery is reinforced — that only means that knowledge has been lost ... it seems to me that in school there is ebony — African history should be pumped up steadily but its not ... insulting to a black mentality, a black way of life, or a jet black family...  
— BDP

The attacks on racism come from various fronts. While some artists look at the big picture, others lay personal attacks against agents of the state — namely the police. This is a common theme in music from South Central Los Angeles, specifically from groups like N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude), Ice-T, or Ice Cube.

These groups openly discuss their current or past gang affiliations, and also best reflect the life style and habits of gangsterism in South Central. The expressions of anti-racism in South Central are predominantly reflections of the racism they are subjected to. A common theme is police harassment and shootings of friends or "homies." Rap artists from South Central speak frequently of their desires to kill, injure, or humiliate the police force and agents of the state.

...this pig worked at the station — this pig killed my homeboy — so the fucking pig went on a vacation — this pig worked for the mafia — making some money on crack —

but this little pig got caught so when he gets to the pen its all about the payback — cuz once he gets to the pen they wont provide the pig with the bullet proof vest — to protect him from some mad nigger who he shot while placed under arrest...  
— Cypress Hill

Various groups, such as X-Clan, Public Enemy, BDP, or Paris, utilize a creative expression of Afro-centrism that relies heavily on a cultural, historical, and political approach to organize against America's racism. Using frequent references to Africa and Black political organizing in the U.S. (such as the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam), these artists use music as a substitute teacher of sorts for youth denied access to their history of rebellion. One song from Paris recites the goals, politics, and ten-point program of the Black Panther Party.

Resistance to racism can range from tips about avoiding the draft, to understanding the role of drugs and alcohol as a weapon against Black communities, violent resistance and response to police abuses, and knowing the history of Black resistance to both European and American white supremacy. It should be stated that these expressions do not always rest on solid revolutionary foundations, and that some are based on religious claims to the superiority of Blacks over whites. However, in sum total, these expressions have educated hundreds of thousands of youths to the depth of the racist structures of "Amerikkka." Interestingly enough, it has been estimated that up to 50 percent of some rap record sales are to white audiences. Thousands of suburban kids are being raised on the cultural and political expressions of African Americans. One must ask what the long-term implications will be of a white generation brought up singing "I'm Black and I'm proud" and "Fight the Power."

## Anticapitalist and Socialist Theory in Rap

... so black check time and tempo — revolution has never been simple — follow the path



of Mao and Fanon — just build your mind and we'll soon make progress...

— Paris

There is very little discussion of socialism in traditional, white academic language in rap music. However, there are many examples of artists expressing rejections of the competitive and destructive nature of capitalism. Artists such as Paris, BDP, Disposable Heroes of Hip Hop, or Consolidated are at the vanguard of attacks on the nature of capitalism.

The weakness is that most of these critiques come across more as complaints, and are underdeveloped (“if we only had a Black president”, or “if we buy Black, then everything will get better”).

...I pay taxes that they never give back — do I have to sell me a whole lot of crack — for decent shelter and clothes on my back — or should I just wait for help from Bush, or Jesse Jackson and Operation Push — if you ask me the whole system needs a douche...

— Ice Cube

Equally problematic is the lack of discussion by many artists in these lyrics of an alternative that could replace the capitalist system. The listener is left feeling angry at the current system, with no developed idea drawn from the music, of what to replace it with.

## Violence

...I been to jail more times than you have probably been in school — shot at — shot back — hit — seen my buddies killed — that's the foundation upon the raps of Ice-T are built...

— Ice-T

Violence is a common theme in rap music, especially coming from L.A. It is a very powerful reflection of the violent conditions young people are confronted with growing up in an oppressed and depressed community. While violent heavily armed gangs are not inherently a negative entity, the lack of radical politicization of these forces has resulted in a self-destructive frenzy of young men and women killing each other over the limited available resources of the ghetto.

This gang violence has been glorified by many artists. The culture, clothing, and lingo have become hot sellers to the music industry. Groups such as N.W.A. have opted for these types of messages to promote violence and the mythology of the “gangsta,” and in turn are paid large sums of money from happy record companies who profit from the ultra-violent, misogynistic, popular message.

On the other hand, various artists like BDP, Ice-T, Ice Cube, and Public Enemy have

crossed over from the “gangsta” message to a position of critique of the self-destructive violence. The result is an evolving group of ex-“gangstas” who are redefining gangsterism with a touch of political savvy. This approach has been characterized by an analysis of the violence and its causes — not the rival gang, but racism, alcoholism, low self-esteem, poverty, and drugs.

The divide between the two groups of thought is growing, as certain artists continue developing a revolutionary theory of rap without leaving behind the violent rage, nor abandoning the culture of gangsterism. Instead, they are redirecting the violence in their music and life away from each other and toward the racist structures of the society. One should be optimistic at these developments, but remember that the music is combating decades of self-destructive behavior and the never ending supply of new artists whose music reflects and promotes the glorification of self-destruction.

Seeds are being planted in fertile but volatile ground for the construction and development of politicized gangs and radical organizations in America's cities.

## Misogyny in Rap Music

...all I saw was Ice Cube in court — paying the game of child support — and I thought deep about giving up the money — what I need to do is kick the bitch in the tummy...

— Ice Cube

Rap music emulates society's patriarchal values with a lyrical ferocity that reproduces the oppressive ideas and myths about women. This backward ideology has been the most serious flaw of enlightened artists who speak to the problems of racism and classism, yet glorify and contribute to the commodification of women's bodies and violence against women.

An important development has occurred in the last few years of rap. The first is the rise of many female rappers such as Queen Latifah, Sister Souljah, M.C. Lyte, and Nikki D. These artists have spoken to the need for solidarity between women, the need to resist sexist violence, demand respect, and fight together in the antiracist struggle. These women have also used what has traditionally been a male weapon — the crude verbalization of sex and sexual activities at the expense of the other sex. While one can see the limitations and problems with reproducing the power game of conquest and control as it relates to sex (instead of building up mutual respect and solidarity between partners), it is a liberating tool for women to use the same language and crude metaphors in their lyrics

to speak of male weakness, fallibility, and female control.

...his tongue was hanging out like a dog in heat — I refuse to play the role so I snatched the raw meat — took him to a hotel and whipped the pussy on his ass — while he was working up a sweat I just laughed — slapped him on the back and said its time to go...dent you know I dent care about a man — true enough I did him, he was fiending — Damn!...

— Nikki D.

## Conclusion: What to Do

Socialists need to have a better understanding and familiarity with the politics and culture of rap and gangsterism. The impact these two forces are having on young people today rivals that of the 1960s musical influence on that era. Ignorance and misunderstanding of rap (and gangsterism as it is shaped by rap) on the part of the revolutionary left is a great mistake. The potential for socialist-feminist agitation within these communities is tremendous, as the rejection of the capitalist racist order has left many people asking and demanding “what's next?!” What it takes on our part is a general familiarity and respect for the breakthrough of various leaders of the rap and gang community. How we as political activists go about building such contacts and communication, and expand existing contacts, is beyond the goal of this piece.

In conclusion I will make a few recommendations for people who are interested in exploring the musical expression of rap and gangsterism further. The following represent the best examples of the various types and politics of rap discussed already that are worth purchasing and studying:

- “Edutainment” by Boogie Down Productions: emphasis on antiracist and Afrocentric philosophy
- “The Devil Made Me Do It” by Paris: heavy emphasis on radical history of Black organizing
- “Death Certificate” by Ice Cube: good example of L.A. gang-related music that is moving toward the politicized sphere of radical rap, but that is still heavily sexist
- “Cypress Hill” by Cypress Hill: NYC “gangsta” music that exemplifies the popular self-destructive violent message
- Anything from Queen Latifah or Sister Souljah for the feminist side of rap music... □

# Update on Haiti

by Daniel Simidor

July 28 marks the 77th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Haiti. Historians often speak of the Monroe Doctrine to justify that act of international aggression. It is true that U.S. imperialism seized the opportunity during and after the First World War, at a time when the European powers were either fighting each other or licking their wounds, to enforce its own claim of hegemony over the entire region. Thus the Woodrow Wilson administration also invaded the Dominican Republic in 1916. In fact, the U.S. invaded 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean between 1898 and 1925.

But the U.S. invasion of Haiti also took place at a crucial moment in Haitian history. It took place at a time when the traditional Haitian dominant classes were losing their grip on power. Peasant guerrillas, known as Cacos, unable to seize and hold power for themselves, had made it impossible for any central government to function. Six new governments came to power in the four years prior to the Marines' landing. Civil unrest spread from the North, the traditional bastion of the Cacos, to the rest of the country and to the capital, Port-au-Prince. The Wilson administration sent in the Marines supposedly to restore order after the *Dechoukaj* (uprooting) of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, who had ordered and personally directed the massacre of more than 200 political prisoners, in a desperate bid to remain in power.

The people of Port-au-Prince reacted quickly to the news of the massacre: they went into the national palace, grabbed Vilbrun Guillaume, who was hiding in the nearby French Embassy, and put him to death. The bourgeois press in *this* country, oblivious to the routine lynching of Black people in the South during the same period, reacted with typical hypocrisy and decried the people as thugs and savages. In my opinion, Vilbrun Guillaume Sam got what he deserved; the rest was propaganda to justify the invasion. The week of July 28, 1915, was a busy week which sealed a long period in Haitian history. It also launched a new one that is finally coming to an end, if a new U.S. invasion does not take place soon to prolong it.

Haitian history can be divided into three main periods: the colonial period, which began with Christopher Columbus's landing in 1492 and ended with the victory of the Haitian war of independence in 1803; the formative years, from 1804 to 1915; and the contemporary period, from the U.S. invasion to today. One thing runs as a constant throughout this long history: the land question. The Cacos, from the first decade of the

19th century until they were effectively wiped out by the Marines, fought with one goal in mind: land. The peasants who form the backbone of the resistance in Haiti today put their lives on the line with one thing in mind: land. The land question was also at the heart of the colonial period, whether people were fighting against slavery or for independence. The question that comes to mind then is: what is the difference between fighting for land and fighting for political power?

Mao Zedong is often quoted as saying that "political power comes out of the barrel of a gun." But he also emphasized that war is the continuation of politics by other means, and that politics should always be in control of the gun and not the other way around. The Haitian peasants have been fighting for land for more than 200 years. But except for brief and intermittent periods between 1805 and 1850, they never developed a clear political program for seizing and controlling power, either independently or in conjunction with the urban poor. They never developed the two magic weapons of an independent political program and an independent revolutionary party to lead their guns to victory. Instead, they joined one bourgeois party after another, they fought under the leadership of reactionary generals and feudal chiefs, who betrayed them the minute they assumed power. Without revolutionary leadership and a political program of their own, the Caco guerrillas became little more than mercenaries, and the poor and landless peasants little more than cannon fodder in a two-century-old battle between the feudal landlord class on the one hand and the rising merchant and bureaucratic bourgeoisie on the other.

The masses of poor peasants — the former slaves — fought for eleven years under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture to abolish slavery and put in place an independent state of their own. But when Toussaint came to power, instead of implementing the simple but revolutionary program of his supporters, land to the tiller, he chose instead to preserve the structure of the big plantations. He even restored the French plantation owners who had fled the island during the General Slave Uprising of 1791–1793. He also put in place a new system of agrarian corporativism whereby the former slaves were forced to remain on the plantations under threat of physical punishment and imprisonment. The feudal system that exists in Haiti today goes back in fact to the new constitution written by Toussaint in 1801. Toussaint's ideas of growth, prosperity, and development were based on the production and export of sugar,

indigo, and coffee, the three biggest sources of revenue during the 18th century.

By a curious coincidence, I heard President Aristide over the radio this past weekend referring admiringly to the wealth that colonial Haiti produced in 1789. He said that Haiti — then known as St. Domingue — was responsible for more than one-third of the world production of coffee, and if we could do it then, why can't we do it now. That got me worrying, primarily because I think that Aristide is about to repeat the same mistake Toussaint made 200 years ago. One should be mindful of Marx's saying about history repeating itself a second time as a farce. Toussaint sacrificed the people in the interest of growth; and in the end, when the French came back against him, he was forced to capitulate. He had not only lost the undying support of the bulk of the people, he had himself lost faith in them as the real source of power.

When Aristide was running for president in 1990, a now defunct group called the July 28 Coalition published a pamphlet to warn that Aristide would not last as president unless he moved immediately to satisfy the four main demands of the popular movement which brought him to power. Land reform, the most basic and fundamental demand of the Haitian masses since 1801, was one of the key decisions that Aristide had to put into effect, while he still had the tactical advantage over his opponents. The president failed to use this advantage, opting instead for the dream of uniting the whole of Haitian society under his command. He only succeeded, of course, in distancing himself from his real supporters, allowing the dominant classes enough time to regroup themselves and to strike against him.

Today, Marc Bazin, Washington's favorite political figure on the scene, has been appointed prime minister of Haiti by the coup leaders. The Bush administration is now able to return to business as usual with its traditional allies and protégés. But due to the conditions of the crisis in Haiti, their victory is at best tentative, and the imperialists in Washington know it. It is still possible for Aristide to turn the table against them, though he seems to have resolved not to call on the masses for direct action.

The Bush administration has already announced its intention to intervene militarily in Haiti, under the cover of a multinational force, to short-circuit or to crush any attempt at armed resistance or insurrection against the illegal regime now in power. So we seem to have come full circle to yet another major crisis in Haitian society and to another impending foreign occupation of that country. The remaining space will provide a brief overview of the crisis, the main actors involved, and perhaps some ways to help bring change in Haiti.

Any materialist reading of the situation in Haiti over the past seven years points to a profound revolutionary crisis which provides

great opportunities for change, but also grave dangers of further imperialist aggression against the people. This crisis takes on dramatic social, political, and economic overtones, but at its core, it is a structural crisis, a crisis in the relations of production in Haitian society. A mere change of government cannot solve the crisis, nor will the so-called politics of growth and economic development that Mr. Bazin is likely to evoke during his interim illegal government. The conditions under which feudal society has produced and exchanged since 1801 have become obsolete. The feudal organization of agriculture and industry and the feudal relations of property are no longer compatible with the reality of today's productive forces in Haiti. The method, organization, and the relationships that connect people in the production of value will have to be revolutionized in order to find a real solution. The crisis in Haiti is not just a crisis of government or bourgeois democracy; nor is it one of the cyclical crises of overproduction that plague capitalist economies in the industrialized world.

Haiti is one of very few countries where revolution is on the agenda today. But outside of Haiti, this is a very well-kept secret. Perception of Haiti is limited to four stereotypes: AIDS, boat people, Papa Doc, and voodoo. It is true that the political situation in Haiti has been in the news over the past seven years. But the image we are often left with is one of senseless violence, crowds out of control, people fleeing poverty, and a vague feeling of pity for a people so utterly victimized, impoverished, and oppressed. These negative perceptions have a lot to do with the general indifference toward revolution in Haiti. And that's why programs such as this [public forum in Manhattan] are very important to help throw aside the distortions and the lies affecting Haiti.

Haiti is not only a dependent country oppressed by U.S. imperialism; it is also one of this hemisphere's poorest countries. Its economy has traditionally relied on subsistence farming and the production of coffee as the main source of foreign exchange. The lives of the vast majority are controlled by a small class of feudal landowners and a handful of merchant capitalists in the import/export sector. Exploitation takes place at both the point of production and of distribution. A heavy tribute is extracted from the poor peasants in the combined form of rent, produce, taxes, free labor, loan shark interest, and lopsided exchange. Not even a small fraction of this stolen wealth ever goes back to the countryside, whether as low interest loans or basic services. The country's agricultural system has fallen into decay, so much so that the land can no longer support the economic survival of the people. While the most productive and irrigated lands remain under the control of the big landowners, the poor and landless peasants have to force a living out of the depleted hillsides, on smaller and smaller plots of

eroded land. The point here is not that the land is too poor to feed its inhabitants, but that the backward social relations imposed by the dominant classes are in contradiction with the people's interest and their survival.

The crisis in the relations of production has also given rise to a severe political crisis that U.S. imperialism cannot resolve. The traditional ruling classes can no longer maintain their domination over the country. And the people no longer accept their rule, but fight instead to establish political institutions that serve the interests of the poor.

In addition, world public opinion, George Bush's New World Order notwithstanding, strongly favors the politics of radical change in Haiti. The international situation is on the side of the people of Haiti, and that's a very important element of a favorable revolutionary situation in any country. Haiti's challenge is to transform this revolutionary situation into successful revolutionary struggle.

The past six years have been a period of intense struggle for the people. Grassroots organizing has given rise to dozens of neighborhood committees, peasant cooperatives, youth groups, trade unions, women's organizations, among others. This mass movement has been nonviolent and decentralized, overall, and by its very nature unable to uproot the Duvalierist system still entrenched in every structure of Haitian society. Nationally, revolutionary struggle implies a leap from the present mass nonviolent and decentralized forms of organization to more disciplined and centralized ones. The Duvaliers' legacy of terror and the country's endemic poverty and isolation explain in part the slow emergence of viable revolutionary organizations.

It is conceivable, however, that a mass insurrection will take place in the near future without Aristide's consent and without organized revolutionary leadership.

Finally, what can people in this country do to help the situation in Haiti? If we are to remain truthful to Marx's saying that the point is not only to understand the world but to actually change it, we must begin seriously to pay some attention to the question of active solidarity with the struggle in Haiti.

Concrete solidarity work in regard to Haiti begins with a principled stand for the unconditional return to power of the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. But while upholding Aristide's right to continue his electoral mandate unconditionally, solidarity efforts in this country must strive to develop channels of communication with the popular movement in Haiti, on a nonsectarian basis.

Political support is the first and most urgent form of solidarity generally requested by grassroots organizations in Haiti. This requires up-to-date information on the political situation in the country, a sound understanding of the political orientation, the objectives, and the needs of the organizations in question, and the ability to respond quickly and

forcefully in cases of political repression and other acts of aggression against the people. The solidarity initiative must begin work, almost immediately and on a continuous basis thereafter, to establish links with the progressive and liberal sectors in the United States. Trade unions, student associations, churches, minority forums, elected officials, advocacy groups, and support organizations in general should receive particular attention. Funding requests from Haiti should also be anticipated. Any prospect of meeting those needs depends on the ability to develop organic links with the Haitian community here.

We must also work to establish a second front against U.S. military intervention in Haiti, right here in this country. U.S. military intervention is on the agenda for Haiti in the coming period. The question is not if, but when. Historically, the U.S. government has never sent troops to invade countries under the rule of client regimes, but it is almost certain that U.S. troops, under the cover of a multinational force, will land in Haiti to prevent the people from taking over power. Haitians in the U.S. will certainly mobilize against foreign aggression at home, but alone they are unlikely to succeed. Iranian students, with a smaller community base, were able to mobilize in the 1970s to counter detrimental U.S. policy vis-à-vis their country. The Grenada and Panama invasions show, however, that the government in Washington is more skillful today in controlling the media to deflect or delay public scrutiny in periods of conflict.

Any campaign against U.S. military intervention in Haiti must promote the idea of Haitian solutions to Haitian problems. We must not wait, however, for direct intervention before we spring into action: our outrage then will be too little, too late. The point is to prevent the U.S. from going in by exposing and opposing their current harmful policies against Haiti. The main opponent and the main target of invading troops will be the membership of the grassroots movement who will be selected for annihilation through military destruction of the shantytowns, surgical strikes, and political assassinations. The solidarity effort must closely monitor Washington's actions toward Haiti, expose them broadly among Haitians and non-Haitians here, and develop effective means to combat them. This is a major part of the groundwork toward building a second front against imperialist intervention in Haiti.

Haiti is a dependent country under the heel of U.S. imperialism. Its struggle for liberation must be waged in a global context. Its victory will not be just a local accomplishment. Haiti represents a concentration of some of the worst contradictions in world politics today. What happens there is likely to influence events throughout the area, and may very well have repercussions worldwide. This is a strong reason for progressive people to get involved in this solidarity effort. □

# The Fight for a Union: For Dignity and Job Security

[We print the following interview as an indication of what's going on in the American working class today and of what can be done in the union movement. We interviewed two socialist activists, Kathleen O'Nan and Dave Campbell, who in September this year took part in a successful drive for union recognition at the Chevron oil refinery in Philadelphia. Dave has been a member of Local 1-547, Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW) for nineteen years; he works at the El Segundo refinery near Los Angeles, where he is a chief steward and member of the Executive Board. Kathleen is a former member of Local 1-547 at El Segundo, and remains an active supporter of the union. She was asked by OCAW to be part of the Philadelphia organizing team.]

**Q:** Could you give some background on how this organizing drive got started and how you were involved?

**Kathleen (K):** The refinery in Philadelphia, which is now owned by Chevron, had been a Gulf refinery. It's eighty years old. In the last eleven years this is the fifth organizing drive to try to bring a union in. Obviously, the first four had failed. OCAW decided to change its tactics in attempting to organize this time. Employees of Chevron at Philadelphia had asked the union to come in, and it came in in a big way. They sent several international representatives to Philadelphia. The president of the OCAW local at the British Petroleum refinery at Philadelphia, Local 8-234, to which the employees now belong — it has become an amalgamated local, with members from more than one location — led one layer of the leadership. But rank and file organizers from three other refineries were sent in as well. Dave Campbell from El Segundo, Clyde Williams from Richmond, California, and Ruell Parker from Port Arthur, Texas, were chosen because they had all been leaders of organizing drives within their own locals, all of which had been open shops.

## The El Segundo Example

The El Segundo refinery, for instance, had an eighteen month organizing drive a few years ago where they went from 43 percent union membership to the 100 percent union membership they have at present. Richmond is in the process of a similar drive. It has gone from roughly 40 percent to roughly 80 percent membership and it's still continuing to gain members. Port Arthur is in a similar situation. Dave was one of the initiators of this drive and was the head of the drive in El Segundo.

The El Segundo drive has been the model for other refineries, not only in Richmond and the Bay Area but in Salt Lake as well. These trade union militants were sent to help provide leadership for the organizing drive in Philadelphia, which won with an astounding number of people turning out for the vote: 439 people were eligible to vote, and 430 actually voted, which is 98 percent. The percentage of those voting for the union was 62.4. For a refinery that had lost this vote four times in the past eleven years this is very good.

**Q:** Could you explain why you think the drive was successful this time? I'm curious about two aspects. The economic crisis is

becoming so severe that people are more willing to listen to an alternative. To what degree do you think that was a contributing factor? The other aspect I'm curious about is what you did in this drive that was different from before.

**Dave (D):** Well, I think that there is a kind of dichotomy in people's levels of consciousness. I had expected to find some real militant people in the plant. There were a few on the organizing committee; one person that comes to mind in particular is Jack McGinley, but the vast majority of workers in Philadelphia had a lot of fear. I heard one story about a supervisor physically assaulting a worker. The matter was brought to management's attention and the supervisor was just given the day off with pay. This occurred during the drive. One of the company's lines of attack against the union was to portray the union organizers as outsiders, and another was that we (the union) would provoke a strike. These things played to their fears. We couldn't, at least with the general membership, come out with a real militant fight-back type program because their level of consciousness just wasn't there yet. The point that we tried to emphasize was that OCAW-organized refineries in the Chevron chain would be able to back up their efforts to get a contract, which is the truth.

## The Company's Velvet Glove

At one point the company, specifically general manager Jerry Moffitt, came out with a so-called fact sheet stating that the company had a terrible relationship with the union in other locations. This sheet was circulated by the union at the other locations, and local managements at El Segundo, Port Arthur, and Richmond were confronted with these statements. At all these locations the company has put the velvet glove over the iron fist, so to speak, to try and counter organizing efforts. The potential was raised of exposing their intentions in front of the membership and the company decided to tell Moffitt to cool that line of attack. He later came out with another "fact sheet" that in effect said, "Oh, yes. The company does have a good relationship with OCAW at these other locations, but it wouldn't here." We countered that by asking the workers at Philadelphia, "Are you people so different? Why can't you enjoy the same working conditions that we enjoy? Why do you have to be treated differently? Why does

this general manager have to be different from the rest of them?"

We started at El Segundo with an internal organizing campaign, which was done on a very open program of rejecting reliance on grievances and arbitration. The company would continually attack our contract, over and over again, and force us to go into arbitration. In my view, arbitration compromises the contract. The selection process for arbitrators leads to professional compromisers. I came to the conclusion that that was a bunch of horse-shit, and that the way to fight in the plant was to use shop floor tactics whenever possible. And so the organizing campaign at El Segundo was done on that basis; that we go back to building the type of union that existed in the '30s and '40s, where we would not rely on outsiders to solve our problems, but fight inside the plant. At any rate, it was largely successful. In fact, it was so successful that even though our contract was 45 days behind the other major refineries we exceeded the national pattern by over a dollar an hour.

## The Organizing Model

These circumstances created an opening in which other Chevron plants represented by OCAW were asking their officers and officials how this had happened. Why did El Segundo get more? This gave us an opening to go to those locals and explain how we did it. As our international representative said at a meeting of the Martinez, California, Local 1-5 in Richmond: "The day that whoever you elect to be your union negotiator can give a thumbs down, and production does go down, is the day your bosses will listen to you."

That message was carried to the Chevron workers at Richmond. We sent seventeen rank and file members of our local up there. We also helped organize a Unical petrochemical plant in Alaska. As a result of these experiences the international has adopted the process that happened at El Segundo, what they call the "organizing model" of unionism as opposed to the "service model," which was basically a union functioning like an insurance company. We clearly reject that business unionism and opt for the organizing model. The international has recently written major articles in their paper about this type of program. Additionally in the Alaska campaign we learned how to conduct what is called a blitz campaign. This is a campaign where you send in as many people as you can, rent a bunch of cars, do a lot of house calling, and

try to organize quicker than the company can hire high-priced antiunion lawyers to counter the campaign. As a result of these things, the international decided, despite the fact that four attempts to unionize workers in Philadelphia had gone down the tubes in the last eleven years, to spend some money and conduct the election campaign with the help of rank and filers from other locations who the Philadelphia employees would identify with more. It's harder to portray us as being outsiders; we have had success at building something at our own plants.

**K:** I'd like to add that the organizing committee in Philadelphia did have resistance initially to some of the more direct militant ideas of the rank and file organizers from the other locations. In my opinion, a large part of it was not only fear, but lack of experience. They had to learn from these organizers from three successful drives and had to think about the outreach tactics. Once they understood these tactics they welcomed them. These same people had gone through four failures in the last eleven years. Most of the people on the organizing committee had been involved in those failures and they knew that something else had to be done. They did not know what.

I was there two and half weeks before the election date, Dave got there three and a half weeks before, and that first two weeks for Dave, one week for me, was very, very frustrating. Then they began to see the light. It took some time and patience to explain things to them. I also want to add that the issues surrounding why they wanted a union had very little to do with economics. Their salaries were equitable within the refinery business, but job security was not.

### Arbitrary Layoffs

Layoffs occur in an arbitrary fashion at an unorganized plant. For instance, instead of reassigning employees when a department is shut down, those employees are laid off. One whole department was wiped out in Philly recently, and more than fifty people lost their jobs. The same department, a division of marketing, was closed down in El Segundo, Richmond, and Port Arthur. None of those employees lost their jobs. They were reassigned within each refinery, with no loss of pay or seniority. This was a big plus for people, and the Philly workers wanted to enjoy the same job security.

Another issue was health and safety. This was a very high priority. There were blatant examples of illegal actions in the Philadelphia refinery. Just to mention one: a lab technician was asked by her supervisor to clean up spilled mercury by hand. She refused because this was contrary to her training on handling hazardous materials. He then ordered her to clean it up by hand and she still refused. At this point he ordered her to vacuum up the mercury! This is not an uncommon type of incident. Refinery workers deal with materials that are highly dangerous not

only to their own immediate health and safety but also to the community. In an unorganized plant, a worker has no say in regard to what is safe and unsafe. They're supposed to do whatever the bosses tell them or else lose their jobs.

### Our Dignity as Workers

So, those two issues were the most important ones to these workers. One of the people in the drive used a good phrase, "We need a union, and we're willing to pay our dues to a union, not only for job insurance but to assure our dignity as human beings and as workers."

**D:** The point that was made was that while they were receiving union-scale pay and benefits, there was actually a clause in their employee handbook that said that Chevron could terminate their employment at will. We told them, "We OCAW-represented Chevron employees pay dues to gain job security and dignity. Although you enjoy the same pay level and benefits, you people have paid with the loss of job security and dignity. Which way would you rather pay? With dues? Or with dignity and job security?" The economics really didn't enter into this drive as much as those other things. The fact that there had been several very arbitrary terminations among some people who were very popular in the plant caused others to think, "Gee, it doesn't matter how good a job I do. If I run across some supervisor who wants to double-cross me, the jig is up." This job security factor, I think, was a decisive one for these employees.

**Q:** You have said that the organizing committee put out a publication in which the employees could make statements as to why they thought the union was necessary.

**K:** Instead of putting out an OCAW publication or leaflet, the organizing committee decided to put out a twice-weekly newsletter called *One Voice*, which was made up of statements by employees on why they thought people should vote for the union. The statements ranged from general ones on why unions are important and good to very personal and specific incidents that had occurred on the job and how management would not be able to treat an individual worker as poorly, unfairly, and unjustly had there been a union.

### Spouse's Letters

When I got to Philadelphia I began to work with spouses of workers and female employees. There are only eight female employees in what is now the bargaining unit. There are a lot of spouses. Initially, most of the men felt that their wives wouldn't be interested in writing anything or making a statement, and that fellow workers wouldn't be interested in reading them if they did. Both these things were the exact opposite of the truth.

When I called spouses, and in this case it was wives, the response was immediate and

strong. Even when the letters started coming in, most of the men felt that this was all nice and sweet, but nobody would want to read them. When we leafleted the refinery at 5 a.m. we got an enormous response. People were really thrilled to see that somebody was viewing this as a family matter, which, of course, it is. To give a very small example, I will read from the heart of one letter. This woman is Theresa Westenberger, who I think wrote the first wives' letter. She writes: "Six months ago did Chevron ask what you wanted and try to work with you about it? Or did you just get a pat on the head and were told they'll look into it and found it was lost in the shuffle? Does Philly Chevron have the same rules and regulations as all Chevrons? Does Chevron let you know all of their policies and benefits that other Chevron refineries have? We have had four chances to vote for a union. This is your fifth and last chance. A no vote shows management everything is fine. Vote yes for the union."

### Leafletting for the Union

**Q:** How much circulation did this letter get?

**K:** Every single employee received every edition of *One Voice*.

**D:** We leafleted at the front gates. We advised the organizing committee that while the gates could be covered by just two people, one thing we were trying to do was to make our presence felt. In any organizing effort there's always some solid yes votes and some solid no votes; people who are either with the union on principle or against the union on principle. There are also people who are in between, who are ambivalent and undecided and who are going to be looking at who's winning. We emphasized to the committee as the campaign progressed that we had to get more and more people out there to leaflet. The two mornings before the vote we had 75-100 people at the gates passing out leaflets. We heard several people come through the gates say that the sight was awesome to them.

Another critical thing was that this was right before one of their "captive audience" meetings. Each employee was required to go to one of these meetings. These meetings turned out to be a disaster for the company. The organizing committee had initially thought to boycott the meetings, but we explained to them that they could be disciplined for not going, that they were in effect being paid to go, as the meetings were on company time. We told them we wanted them to go and went over with them questions that they should ask. At all but the last meeting we had our people challenge management virtually the entire time. At the very last meeting one of the guys from the organizing committee got up and said, "This is a bunch of bullshit. I can't take it anymore. I'm walking out." He walked out and 49 other people walked out

with him. So, that was the end of that "captive audience" meeting.

A week before the vote we conducted a button campaign. We told the people on the organizing committee that the union supporters had to wear a button to show that they were a solid yes and had the courage to show the boss they were union supporters. Toward the end of the campaign the majority of the employees were wearing the button. We got more support out of some units than we thought we'd have. The buttons, like the leafletting, were a demonstration of the unions' visibility and presence.

### A Supervisor's Fist

**Q:** Tell me about the incident where the supervisor hit the employee.

**D:** A maintenance worker was up on a tall column, a tower, working on a manway. The supervisor took a manlift up to that deck and, reaching across the rail of the manlift and across the rail of the platform of the tower, punched the maintenance man in the mouth. It was unprovoked. Apparently he wasn't happy with what the employee had done or whatever. Not only is it dangerous to punch someone, but they were 30 feet off the ground and if someone had fallen over the rail there is a good chance that he would have been killed.

**K:** Not only was this a criminal act, but it raises again the question of what rights supervisors have over employees in an unorganized situation.

**D:** At the time I was told the story I was outraged because that was the very reason that workers for Standard Oil in Bayonne, NJ had struck twice in the early 1900s [back before unions organized the Rockefellers' oil business]. Chevron is a descendant of Standard Oil. Here we were less than 200 miles from Bayonne, NJ and so many years later Standard Oil was still doing this kind of thing!

**Q:** Was that one of the reasons people voted for the union?

**D:** That was one of the reasons. The primary reason was that two very popular employees had been grossly mistreated before this particular drive. One in particular, from the standpoint of a co-worker was a super conscientious person. His job assignment at the time was a scale house operator, which is basically someone who weighs in trucks as they go in and out of

the refinery to determine how much product is being sold or bought. Somehow there was a contract oil-hauling company that managed to steal some oil from the refinery. It was clearly not the scale house operator's fault. In fact, the same oil hauler had also stolen oil from the British Petroleum (BP) refinery. The scale house operator at the BP refinery, who is an OCAW member, was not disciplined precisely because it was not his fault. The oil hauler had figured out a way to bypass the security system. The Chevron corporate people in San Francisco apparently told their Philadelphia refinery, "Give us a body to blame." This man was the low man on the totem pole and was used as a sacrificial lamb. His suspension without pay outraged employees.

### \$1 Million in Gasoline

**K:** He was accused of conspiring to steal one million dollars worth of gasoline. There were no criminal charges brought against him. Obviously, if anybody was truly suspect of conspiring to steal one million dollars from anybody, criminal charges would have been brought in a flash. He and his wife met with several attorneys, as well as the NLRB, and they all said that without a contract there was nothing they could do.

**D:** Another individual's termination was excessive in light of the infraction committed. At his plant there are smoking posts, which are permitted places where employees can go have a cigarette or cigar or whatever. It is common, in the wintertime particularly, for people to pull up alongside the smoking post in their car or truck and have a cigarette. Even

supervisors do it. A worker, even though it was not winter, pulled up alongside of the smoking post and lit a cigarette. The maintenance manager saw him and terminated him. Yes, he did violate the work rule. Other people, including managers, have violated the work rule too. Maybe a reprimand would have been acceptable, but termination was excessive. Once again, there was a similar incident at the BP local, where three people were caught smoking in an unauthorized area. Two of them were union members; one was a supervisor. The two union people were suspended for a short time. That was all. The supervisor was terminated.

**K:** I'd like to go back to the spouses' letters. The spouse of the man who was accused of stealing one million dollars worth of product had been very, very opposed to unions for years. This incident with her husband woke her up. She wrote a very lengthy, excellent letter, which I'll just quote the very end of. This appeared in *One Voice* and was circulated to the employees. The letter describes what they went through trying to find redress for this situation. The letter ends in this way: "Several months ago I wanted my husband to be a 'company man.' Take those special jobs, work that overtime, kiss up a little. You'll get noticed. Stay clear of the union. You don't need to pay somebody to protect your job. Wrong, wrong, wrong! It cost us \$2,500 and several lawyers to tell us, 'Without union representation Chevron can do this to you and you can do nothing about it.'"

### QWL and Company Cooperation

**Q:** What about the relationship between the union and Chevron at other locations?

**D:** Like I said before, the company was putting a velvet glove over an iron fist. As a result of the organizing efforts at El Segundo and Richmond they were basically forced to try and demobilize the unions' drive by offering a "cooperative." This is really a "quality of work life" (QWL) type of program. We studied Mike Parker's book *Inside the Circle* and opted for the "watchdogging" method. [See Mike Parker, *Inside the Circle: A Union Guide to QWL*, a Labor Notes Book, Boston: South End Press, 1985.] When the proposals for a "co-op" came we insisted that the union membership select its representatives on these committees to be equal in number with manage-

SEPTEMBER 3, 1992  
Chevron  
PHILADELPHIA, PA

# ONE VOICE...

**Welcome to the 90's...**  
I recently heard someone from management refer to the DCS project as bringing the Philadelphia refinery into the "90's".  
We as employees of the Philly refinery need to bring ourselves and our way of thinking into the 90's. We should stop being fearful of, and intimidated by management. We need to change our old attitude of "hurrah for me, and the hell with you".  
We now have an opportunity to unite as one voice, to have a say in our futures here at Chevron. We can become united with workers at refineries in our area and across the country. So let's develop a new attitude and come together as "ONE" into the "90's". VOTE YES ON SEPT. 10 & 11

*Rick Wright*

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**A WIFE SPEAKS UP:**  
Chevron Corporation pledges to "Be Better Than the Best" and nowhere is this more evident than at the Phila. Refinery. Consistent excellent performance by operators and maintenance workers has kept the refinery profitable and competitive through even the harshest of economic times. It would stand to reason that a workforce like this would be held in high regard and a great source of pride. But in Philly it is just the opposite.  
How can the employees and their families trust and believe management, especially in matters of safety and health, when it is clear we are viewed with indifference.  
Whether for good or bad, it's time for a change. vote yes!

*Nancy Parker*

The organizing committee's semiweekly publication *One Voice*.

ment's and that decisions be made by consensus. In other words, one person can veto a project. We also have our people reporting to the membership what the discussions are on these committees. When we get into situations like the one in Philadelphia, we say to the company, "OK, look, you want this cooperative relationship with OCAW. In Philadelphia you're badmouthing OCAW. If you continue to badmouth us, we're going to pull out of this 'cooperative' now." That's the kind of pressure that was exerted on them in El Segundo and Richmond. This forced them to direct their attack more onto BP rather than the rest of the Chevron chain.

### Electing Supervisors

As a result of the cooperative at El Segundo, we do a lot of things which I guess would be considered unusual elsewhere, such as nominating and electing supervisors. When we explained this to the people in Philadelphia they were really dumbfounded.

**Q:** If the company proposes somebody as supervisor, you can veto it?

**D:** Yes. In fact, before the "coop" came we functionally did that anyway. We just wouldn't be cooperative if somebody didn't want to play ball with us, but came on through and started pushing us around. We went into an uncooperative mode and would just not do what they told us to do. Now, with the "cooperative" the fact that we can elect and veto supervisors is simply recognition of what we were doing in fact before it came in. We work with the company at El Segundo and Richmond on environmental situations. In California there is a great deal of pressure on companies to act in an environmentally safe manner, which is in our interest, too. So, as long as they go along with what we consider the environmentally safe thing to do, and are truly cooperative in health and safety issues, then we are willing to go before these various commissions and say that we believe that Chevron is doing the right thing. But if they don't do the right thing environmentally or healthwise, we say we're backing out of this deal. There were a lot of issues like this in the background which forced the company in Philadelphia not to take the typical tactics that they would have in the past. This strengthened our hand. These were elements that we pointed out to the people in Philadelphia, things we could use to help them get a contract without having to strike. We don't see that a strike is necessary in Philadelphia.

**Q:** When will that contract come up?

**D:** All of the big refineries' contracts expire between February 1 and mid-March 1993. One of the international representatives assigned to Philadelphia, who is perhaps the best union organizer I have ever met, Kevin Geddes, is also OCAW's coordinator for

Chevron negotiations, so it's going to be very clear to Chevron that none of us are going to settle until Philadelphia is taken care of. The membership of Philadelphia will elect their own stewards and do their own negotiating. The members will come up with proposals on local issues. In the meantime there is going to be a National Oil Bargaining Policy Conference to determine minimum wage and benefit demands. There will also be a Chevron coordinating meeting to determine proposals on company-wide policies and benefits. Coming out of those three processes the Chevron Philly people will make a proposal to management. Of course, negotiations are a two-way street; they'll say yes and no and maybe, etc. etc. They may come in with their own proposals. But I think it's pretty clear that the rest of us are not going to settle until Philadelphia is resolved, because if Philadelphia is forced to strike for their first contract, it would not be in our interest. We're going to make sure that we're in a position to back them up. The company won't just be taking on Philadelphia; they're going to have to take on everybody. Philadelphia needs a chance to organize a solid union.

### There Are Victories

**K:** The mainstream media portray the unions as going down the tubes and we only hear the bad stories. There are many bad stories that are the truth. But if you read publications put out by certain internationals like the OCAW *Reporter*, the UAW publication *Solidarity*, and the mine workers' periodical, you see that where militant tactics have been adopted, militant things are happening. There are victories going on all around the country. One central publication you can really learn a lot from is *Labor Notes* in Detroit. This victory at Philadelphia is one of the important victory stories of this year. Another one happened at the same time at the Seabrook nuclear facility in New Hampshire. There the union was voted in by something like 133 to 88. This is a significant victory. In the Chevron chain, there is only one facility left that is not unionized. It is in Pascagoula, Mississippi. We have every reason to hope that in the next several months we will be there to help organize. Certainly the international will be there.

**Q:** How many Black workers are at the Philadelphia refinery?

**D:** I don't know the exact number, but they are a small percentage. At first we had virtually no contact with Black workers, other than giving them leaflets, until the arrival of Clyde Williams. Clyde is the union chairman of the Chevron Richmond group. He is Black, a very good speaker, a very boisterous speaker, and very, very pro union. He got up and spoke at some meetings that we had at a hotel near the refinery and a couple of Black employees had come. As a result of them going

back to the plant and telling other Black workers to listen to Clyde Williams speak we picked up quite a bit of support from Blacks. Clyde is also president of the Chevron coordinating council, which is the coordinating body of all the OCAW-organized Chevron refineries, even though he still works at a plant. I think it is important for Black people to see that a Black person can not only have a voice and a vote but can be a leader.

**K:** Another important thing that was done for the drive were videotapes that were made by employees in El Segundo, Richmond, and Salt Lake. In these tapes rank and file workers urged people to vote yes and stated why they thought that it was important to be in a union. These were very personal appeals, and very effective. There were Blacks and women on those videotapes.

### Women Workers

Something else noteworthy was that within the BP group, of the active members that we met, the highest number were women. They only have 34 women in the refinery there, and a high percentage of them are very active. We had good discussions among women and Blacks. Once they decide to join a union, they are often among the most militant because they have the most to gain and the least to lose. They understand from their own life experiences that to survive in this world you can't rely on bosses or companies. You have to rely on your own will and collective experience and group solidarity.

There are eight women at the Chevron Philly refinery. Two of them are on extended sick leave, and another was retired the week of the vote. Their biggest concern was job security. They wanted to know what the union could do to help them keep their jobs. They know, as women in a job field that is traditionally male, that while companies hire women — due to constant pressure to hire minorities and women — they don't do anything to make sure that women remain. They generally do the opposite, saying that they keep trying to hire women, but women just won't stay. The reason they don't is that they're treated differently and unfairly. They also have to fight against the prejudice of co-workers at times. One of the things that a union can do, and that OCAW does, is explain to workers that these divisions of racism and sexism are antiunion, that these are tools of the bosses to divide workers and we can't fall for that. At El Segundo, where I used to work, I encountered tremendous prejudice from male co-workers as well as tremendous pressure from the company to leave. Without the union, no woman can survive in that atmosphere for very long and feel that it's OK to go to work, feel secure about having a job and feel safe on the job. □

## Introduction to Documents on Yugoslavia

A number of important issues are raised for revolutionary Marxists by the complex situation in former Yugoslavia. Many of them are addressed, with varying emphases and from differing vantage points, in the following three documents, which we publish for the information of our readers.

U.S. opponents of imperialist intervention must above all be alert to the danger, or likelihood, that troops being sent into former Yugoslavia, allegedly to protect the airlift of food and supplies to the people of Sarajevo, will be used to promote the policies of the capitalist great powers and help carry out the restoration of capitalism in that area. We must firmly oppose imperialist policies pursued under the guise of the United Nations or the European Community, just as we did in the Persian Gulf war.

The experience in Nicaragua also makes us suspicious even of "humanitarian aid" when it's under the control of the imperialist governments, or their proxy — the UN. At the same time we must demand that the borders of the wealthy countries be opened up for all refugees from the war in former Yugoslavia.

The primary source of the slaughter and destruction under way in the area since 1991 is the Greater Serbia policy (dominant-nation chauvinism) adopted by the Serbian wing of the privileged bureaucracy of former Yugoslavia, the wing headed by Slobodan Milosevic. Within the Titoist bureaucracy Serbs dominated the military and the central state apparatus (just as Great Russians did in the USSR).

Under Titoism, the Yugoslav variant of rule by a privileged bureaucratic caste, or Stalinism, there was national oppression of the Kosovo Albanians, the Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians, Macedonians, and Hungarians of Vojvodina. (For the historical background, especially since the turn of the century, see Gerry Foley's

informative two-part series in the September and October issues of the newspaper *Socialist Action*.) Is the "nationalism" of the non-Serbian peoples to blame for the present war? Are they wrong in their effort to break free from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia? Are they separatists, extremists, even fascists, in alliance with imperialism? Is that the source of the problem, or is theirs a historically unavoidable and justified rebellion against the nationalism of the oppressor (in this case, the Serb-dominated military-bureaucratic machine)? These are some of the questions addressed in the present documents, along with the question of the Leninist policy on nationalities and the right of nations to self-determination and how that policy applies in this situation?

In addition to the national conflicts, there is an economic and social crisis in former Yugoslavia, as throughout Eastern Europe. The economic problems have their source in the social conflict between ordinary working people and the privileged bureaucracy, a conflict expressed in strikes and the formation of independent trade unions; the general corruption and mismanagement of the bureaucracy; the historical backwardness of this part of the world vis-à-vis the advanced capitalist countries, and the consequent pressures of the world market dominated by big capital — that is, the impossibility of building a fully socialist society in one country or even in one region; and, finally, the absence of workers democracy and genuine self-management, despite the Titoist maneuver of allowing "workers' councils" on the local level since the 1950s.

What can revolutionary Marxists do in the face of the grisly slaughter and "ethnic cleansing" in this area? The first step is to seek to understand the driving forces in the situation. Without that, no realistic solution can be proposed. These documents should be a help in achieving that understanding.

## Resolution on the Breakup of Ex-Yugoslavia and the National Struggles

by Hudson

*The following is based on an International Socialist Group (U.K.) Central Committee resolution and an editorial appearing in the ISG journal Socialist Outlook.*

For the first time since the Second World War, there are concentration camps in Europe, and as many as 30,000 people have been killed. In Bosnia alone, two million people have been driven from their homes with 630,000 refugees crossing into Croatia, and there is a growing fear that 300,000–400,000 people could die of cold and starvation this winter. But it was not inevitable that the crisis of Titoism should have resulted in this political and human catastrophe — brutal civil war and "ethnic cleansing."

The roots of the crisis are complex. However, it is clear that big tensions developed between the various republics over the allocation of economic resources during the last years of Yugoslavia in the 1980s. This was compounded by the effect of growing

economic crisis. The result was a revival within the republics, especially Slovenia and Croatia, of a desire for self-determination. The republics, although not identical to ethnic groupings which were often geographically dispersed, were based loosely on historically formed nationalities, e.g., Serbian, Croatian, and Macedonian. Bosnia is somewhat different, being the most "ethnically" mixed of these republics. In particular it contains a large Muslim population.

In a historical sense the disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia into bloody inter-ethnic and religious wars is the result of the failure of Titoism and Stalinism to resolve the complex national and economic questions which, in a combined way, are a part of the tasks of a genuinely socialist revolution.

Despite the (theoretical) equality granted to the republics and nationalities (with the notable exception of the Kosovo Albanians) by the relatively progressive 1974 Constitution, the economic crisis, the absence of genuine proletarian democracy, and a bureaucratic caste which in practice denied the right of self-determination, resulted in terrible failure. The process of disintegration was accelerated by the collapse of Stalinism in the ex-Soviet Union.

At the very heart of this issue lies the fundamental question of workers' democracy. The historical problems of multinational, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious states, such as Yugoslavia, could only be resolved on the basis of the widest socialist democracy.



In the depth of its crisis, the bureaucracy in Serbia threw up the Slobodan Milosevic leadership, which has more in common with traditional Stalinist policy and with Chetnik nationalism, than with the supposed federative aims of Tito.

Civil war between these republics was not determined by the growing desire for self-determination, which should have been resolved in a democratic manner, but by the reactionary political developments within Serbia, the largest of the republics, which also contained the federal capital and was the center of the bureaucratic state machine. As Yugoslavia sank deeper into economic, social, and political crisis, the dominant Serbian wing of the Yugoslav League of Communists, led by Milosevic, transformed itself into the "Socialist" party, and decided on a very precise program for keeping as much territory as possible under its control and itself in power: the regeneration of Great Serb nationalism. The Milosevic clique opposed the legitimate demands of Slovenia and Croatia for self-government and prepared to maintain the federal structures by force. The real turning point in this process, however, was not the declaration of independence by Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, but the military-police offensive by Milosevic against the ethnic Albanian population of the Serbian province of Kosovo, which was a preparation for the reactionary war of oppression against the other republics.

Thus the civil war resulted not from some unexplained or spontaneous outbreak of ethnic hostilities between the peoples of ex-Yugoslavia, but from a reactionary policy promoted by a dominant sector of the bureaucracy, which exploited the unresolved national tensions for its own ends.

Milosevic and the federal army chiefs made a tactical withdrawal from Slovenia in order to concentrate its offensive against Croatia. Once Croatian areas had been conquered, the process of "ethnic cleansing" began. Thousands of Croats were slaughtered and driven from their homes after the six-month siege of Vukovar. The subsequent attack on Bosnia was a logical consequence of the "Greater Serbia" project. Ultra-right, racist Serbian forces were stirred up and unleashed inside Bosnia: irregular forces, which have since perpetrated unspeakable atrocities against Bosnian Muslims and Croats. This was a particular tragedy in a republic in which Serbs, Croats, and Muslims had lived together in peace for decades.

It was the denial of self-determination combined with Milosevic's Greater Serbian expansionism which forced the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, led by Alija Izetbegovic, to declare independence. Then, in order to divide the Bosnian forces, the reactionary Serbian bands deepened the conflict into not merely one of an "ethnic" character, but a communalist/religious war.

*Confronted by these reactionary nation-*

*alist assaults by Serbian forces on Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and other ethnic minorities, our movement can have only one possible response — the defense of self-determination against Greater Serbian chauvinism and against the "ethnic cleansing." This can only mean extending support to the struggle of the Croatian, Bosnian, and other peoples against the aggression, despite the character of their present leaderships.*

Ex-Communist bureaucrat Franjo Tudjman, president of Croatia, is of course a reactionary, procapitalist, nationalist, and there is a tendency for the reactionary "ethnic" policy of Milosevic to fuel its mirror opposite in Croatia and elsewhere. In the absence of an independent working-class political force, right-wing and neo-fascist brigades have come forward to defend Croatia from the Serbian forces — thus gaining some credibility in the eyes of sections of the masses. We must clearly oppose a tit-for-tat response to atrocities of right-wing militias and call for independent working-class organization.

Tudjman's attitude to the Serbian assault on Bosnia-Herzegovina has also been determined by narrow nationalism. Thus, although a formal ally of Bosnia, Tudjman sanctioned the creation of "Herceg-Bosna," the *de facto* linking up of Croat areas in Bosnia and their incorporation into Croatian territory. As a result, Croatia is making itself complicit in the carve-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina, breaking the tenuous Croat-Bosnian alliance against the Serbian assault. We should be opposed to this policy and defend the integrity of the existing republics until such time as a democratic process can resolve the complex issues of borders.

The attitude of imperialism to this conflict is pragmatic and, of course, determined by self-interest, and can only have reactionary consequences. At first, the majority of the imperialist bourgeoisie favored the maintenance of a unitary Yugoslavia. For a time they opposed the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. It was only under the influence of German imperialism, which wishes to integrate these areas into its sphere of influence, that they changed policy. However, the imperialists still refuse to recognize the rights of the people of Kosovo and Macedonia. In particular, the Greek government not only adamantly refuses to recognize the existence of Macedonia, for obvious reasons, but has used the issue as a pretext for a clampdown on its own political opponents.

Taking advantage of world public opinion, which is horrified by the slaughter and the ethnic cleansing and which therefore demands humanitarian aid, imperialism has become more engaged. Utilizing the United Nations, a limited airlift of foodstuffs has been organized as part of a cynical attempt to show concern. Meanwhile, it continues to impose an embargo on arms, which of course adversely affects Bosnia most of all. It has several options open to it, but it seems unlik-

ly at present (although this could change) that imperialism intends to engage in a major war against Serbia in the name of defending the oppressed peoples. Without giving political support to the UN operation, which includes the escalating use of troops, we should nonetheless demand increased aid be sent to Bosnia by all means available, but without political conditions or outside military involvement. In general, we should be opposed to any imperialist intervention in the region.

The current imperialist support for the cantonization of Bosnia-Herzegovina can only encourage Milosevic's aim of incorporating as much as possible of Bosnian territory into his Greater Serbia. It could have only one possible outcome — an extension of the policy of "ethnic cleansing."

Consequently, in order that Bosnia and Croatia can defend themselves, we call for the *ending of the imperialist embargo*, whose primary effect is to limit the flow of weapons to the oppressed peoples in their self-defense against Serbia. The Bosnians need guns as well as bread.

In the face of these developments, there is only one possible response from the Fourth International — a defensist attitude toward Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (and any other republic or ethnic group which is attacked), and the defense of the rights of all minorities. A socialist program would be for a federation, but a federation on the basis of equality and self-determination for its constituent republics. Any attempt to impose a federation by military force is both reactionary and doomed to failure on the long term, and we should oppose it. When such a conflict is transformed into a war of national oppression and racist "ethnic cleansing," it is paramount that the Fourth International stand clearly for the struggle of the oppressed peoples.

A defensist attitude in relation to Croatia and Bosnia, i.e., unconditional but critical support, and aid in their struggle for democratic and national rights (including the right to arms), does not mean extending political support to the existing regimes in these republics. However difficult it might be at present, our movement is for the emergence of an independent workers' movement within all the republics.

Our movement must give support to the creation of independent socialist oppositions within the ex-Yugoslav republics who defend the democratic rights of all minorities, support the right to self-determination and self-government but at the same time subscribe to an internationalist perspective. This means understanding that the road to self-determination and nationhood can only be fully achieved in the modern world if it is seen as a step toward a new socialist federation and the unity of the peoples. However difficult this may seem today, socialist and working-class forces must strive to lead the nationalities and ethnic minorities toward these

combined national, democratic, and socialist goals.

Our movement must hold onto three guiding principles if we are not to flounder in the minefields created by the rise of nationalism: the right to self-determination of nations,

which includes the right to self-government; second, opposition to reactionary nationalism, i.e., all ideas of ethnic/racial purity (this means a vigorous defense of the democratic rights of all minorities within the state); third, for class independence and the building of

international working-class solidarity and unity.

We should clearly demand and campaign for the *right of all refugees from ex-Yugoslavia to enter the country of their choice.* □

# The Bosnian War: What Is to Be Done?

## Resolution of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International

*The following resolution on the continuing war in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was adopted at the October 1992 meeting of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.*

Sarajevo symbolizes the possibility that the Serb, Croat, and Muslim communities can live together, as they have done in Bosnia-Herzegovina (B-H) for centuries. The resistance of this city's mixed population is crucial for the survival of a multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina and for reversing the process of "ethnic cleansing" in the new states emerging from the Yugoslav crisis, particularly in Serbia.

This is why the Serb nationalists, led by Radovan Karadzic, after having proclaimed a Serbian Autonomous Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to build a Greater Serbia, want to break the back of Sarajevo's resistance by laying siege to the city and destroying its unity.

This is also why, in spite of the formal proclamations of alliance between the Croatian government and Bosnia President Alija Izetbegovic, the Croat nationalists in B-H led by Mate Boban are allowing the strangulation of Sarajevo, because they too, in agreement with Karadzic, have "liberated" "their" Croat state of Herzeg-Bosna.

Serb and Croat nationalists, in proportion to their different weight in the Bosnia population, have reached an understanding for the dismantling of B-H in favor of the Serbian and Croatian republics. Both willingly sound the false alarm of a Bosnian "Islamic Republic"; both ignore the fact that secular currents are today dominant among the Muslims of this republic.

The Muslims, along with the mixed populations of the cities, are today the main victims of this dismantling and of the massacres. They are opposed to the shared goal of the Croat and Serb nationalists which is also behind the project of dividing B-H into ethnic "cantons."

The support given until now to this orientation by the European Community (EC) and the United Nations (UN) authorities and the exclusion of the antiwar movements and anti-nationalist parties who asked to be heard at their "peace conference" bears witness to the logic of the imperialist powers who dominate these institutions; a logic that cares little for the real interests of the people's concerned.

The shifting, unprincipled, and irresponsible positions that these powers have taken since the beginning of the crisis also illustrate the same narrow defense of the dominant state's interests.

### Military Intervention

This is the kind of logic that would prevail if the imperialist powers intervened militarily. Therefore we must oppose any imperialist military intervention by the EC or UN. A foreign military intervention in Serbia would harm the opposition to Milosevic without hindering the activities of the paramilitary groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It would not eliminate the causes of the war.

As for an intervention in Bosnia, it would enmesh itself in a guerrilla war without any clear battle lines, with every possibility of letting loose a "Balkan storm." A murderous quagmire and not peace would be the reality.

Nor can we accept a situation where the presence of UN forces consolidates the relation of forces and the logic of "ethnic cleansing" perpetrated by the Serb and Croat paramilitary factions with the complicity of the Serbian and Croatian governments.

The only solution is the development of multiethnic civil and social resistance to reactionary policies and to every kind of ethnic and religious discrimination, be it Serb, Croat, or Muslim. Above all, the Great Serbian nationalism that threatens to ignite Kosovo and its Croat counterpart that threatens to "settle" by force the resistance of Croatian Serbs must be politically defeated. There can be no progressive outcome to the crisis and no durable peace without solutions negotiated by the parties themselves, guaranteeing that no one asserts a right to self-determination by denying it to others through the creation of ethnically "pure" nation-states.

### Four Priorities

We have four priorities in this situation:

1. Taking into account the pivotal role of the political situation in Serbia and the central responsibility of the Greater Serbia project for the current war we must multiply our ties with and support for the peace forces

in Serbia. We must support the antiwar movement and the deserters, inviting their spokespeople to our countries; we must support the student peace movement and the independent union; we must support the independent Serbia media (especially Vreme, Borba, and Radio '92), and we must give material aid to counter the harmful effects on these movements of the embargo against Serbia.

2. We must support, above all through the establishment of "twin cities" all the communities, cities, and villages of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia that declare themselves zones of peace and resist the logic of "ethnic cleansing." We should campaign to help multiethnic and multinational movements find means of expression (free radios, conferences, open access to TV, concerts for peace...). We should support the Interethnic Forum by publicizing its analyses and its charters of rights and freedoms.

We should note the planned Conference of Municipalities for Peace in Skopje (Macedonia) on November 6-9.

3. We must mount a political campaign against the dismantling of Bosnia-Herzegovina, against the logic of ethnic cantons, and for the disarmament of all Serb and Croat paramilitary forces which support this logic, a campaign for the maximum of political and material aid to all multiethnic resistance and for breaking the isolation of Sarajevo.

We should campaign for the revelation of everything to do with the detention camps and for an international tribunal of independent personalities on the crimes related to "ethnic cleansing."

4. We must aid the refugees in the countries to which they flee and in the republics of ex-Yugoslavia, focusing on aid for voluntary return of refugees to their homes and on legal and physical protection for those who want to resist "ethnic cleansing."

November 9, the day of antiracist action, is an opportunity for marches and support initiatives for Sarajevo's resistance to "ethnic cleansing." □

# The War in Yugoslavia, the Right of Self-Determination, and Greek Nationalism

The following is a translation of an article that appeared in *Spartakos*, published by the OKDE, Greek section of the Fourth International. The English version that was sent to *BIDOM* has been edited somewhat for style and readability, particularly in cases where the meaning was not clear.

## The Erosion of Yugoslavia

1. The fall of former Yugoslavia into the murderous deadlock of war and massacres can be regarded as a special variant of the decomposition of the Stalinist regimes. Because of the lack of political revolution and of socialist democracy, it is proceeding toward authentic capitalist restoration with all its consequences: a rise in social inequality, competition for profits, elimination of the last remnants of social solidarity, political-ideological retrenchment of layers of the bureaucracy around military machines capable of supporting capitalist accumulation, mythical “national unification” of parts of the population as a basis for a bourgeois nation-state, etc. Before having established themselves as a real class, the ambitious future bourgeoisies know that they will have to be based on certain relationships of forces. This is a lesson they were taught by the experience of recent years, when they were integrated into the international capitalist system and followed the orders of today’s “peacemakers,” the International Monetary Fund, the OECD states, etc., which step by step paved the way for the dissolution of the fabric of Yugoslav society.

2. Those who want to interpret the march of former Yugoslavia into the slaughter and especially the ambitions for independence of the populations as the result of *diabolic imperialist plans*, end up not only in the defense of existing repressive forces, like those of Milosevic, but also underestimate the depth of the capitalist intervention. This intervention means not just ideological support for certain elements in the bureaucracy or political-military support for certain political figures. It means primarily the development of bourgeoisies equipped with political-military apparatuses and founded on an economic-judicial base. The dynamics of capitalist restoration means inevitably, as is always true in the development of a bourgeois state, an *expansionist totalitarianism* on the part of the incipient national bourgeois classes, the geographic expansion of the state along with annihilation of national, linguistic, cultural, etc., differences within that state.

3. Thus, the specific process of decomposition of the bureaucratic structure in former Yugoslavia is characteristic: the lack of centralized workers’ democracy meant that decentralization took the path of commercialization, with oppressive bureaucratic cen-

tralism acting as the driving centrifugal force. The rise of Great Serbianism under Milosevic as an answer to the deadlocks of the bureaucracy meant that the central state apparatus was used for Serbian expansion (in Kosovo, Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia) based on a background of decades of Serbian hegemony in the central state apparatus and exclusion of other nationalities from that apparatus. This was an inevitably expansionist attempt at “national clarification,” which made clear to the non-Serbian populations that this state would never be theirs. On the contrary, it was a great danger to them — both to their culture and to their actual physical existence.

## Imperialist Intervention

4. Therefore, the so-called peace initiatives on the part of the capitalist community must be characterized at least as hypocrisy, not only because one-sided development and inequality are preconditions for the unfolding of the profit system, but more concretely because from the abstract principle called “sovereignty of the Yugoslav state” to the proposal for “ethnic cantons” in Bosnia, the imperialist centers have taken everything into account except the wishes of the people. When, for example, the “national” gangs not only of the Serbs (the “federal” army, Babic, Karadzic...) but also of the Croats (“Croatian Democratic Federation” of Bosnia, military groups of Parugas) are drowning Sarajevo in blood, in order to destroy the Bosnians as a people who dared to express their peaceful will for coexistence, what does Lord Carrington propose but the same version of “cantoning”? The private gangs simply took over the violent realization of what the so-called peacemakers expected to happen: the disappearance of the differences and the launching of national unity in the only way the capitalist building of societies knows — massacres of the population, violent expulsions and “exchanges” of populations, embargoes, and national hatred.

5. The capitalist “peace initiatives” are also hypocrisy because they pretend to solve a problem when in fact they make the situation worse, firstly by the embargo and then by taking steps toward direct military intervention by imperialist forces. It’s obvious that poverty and misery lead to slaughters, and that the starvation of the people, as the example of Iraq shows, is never sufficient pressure on a leadership which doesn’t give a damn for its population — the imperialists

and Milosevic being exactly the same in this respect! There is even less regard for the needs of the population since the local Serb military leaders such as Karadzic have gained a certain independence from their “daddy” Milosevic.

It’s hypocrisy, too, when the imperialists themselves, who monopolize the right to decide whom they want to kill by starvation, use the law of the stronger, classifying the murderous gangs into “good” or “bad” according to their own interests. The embargo which the great powers of NATO and other countries decided to impose on Serbia, as well as any forthcoming international imperialist intervention for so-called pacification purposes, is not only hypocritical, but is murderous to the people, because it will turn against them, as the “New Order” which was applied in Iraq shows. Furthermore, a direct imperialist intervention can only lead to the sharpening of the conflicts and more massacres. Not only will it not solve any problem of the peoples of former Yugoslavia; it will multiply them. This is especially true because the various imperialist military machines are not humanist institutions but paid instruments of the states and are to a certain degree uncontrolled in carrying through their missions. The fire started by the Serbian military machine will be fanned to an even greater flame by imperialist intervention.

## The Right of Self-Determination

6. The only realistic prospect for a way out of the present barbaric slaughter is to reject the logic that looks for solutions in military machines, impersonal market mechanisms, and myths about national essence and substance, instead of looking at the real needs of the existing human beings in former Yugoslavia. The self-determination of the populations is their only possibility of meeting their own needs, deciding their own form of political rule and way of life. The totalitarian logic of the IMF, the military apparatus of Milosevic, the private gangs of Serbia and Croatia, and the threatening military involvement of imperialism — all are aimed at depriving the population of the possibility of self-determination. They are being pushed into splitting apart, if not into slaughtering one another, with the result that they are kept under the control of profit, of political authoritarianism, and of militarization.

7. The workers’ and socialist movements are obliged to support all the concerned peoples

against any attempt at imposing on them politically and militarily the conditions of their existence. The case of Yugoslavia proves in the clearest way the correctness of the Leninist theory of nationalities, which regards the centrifugal tendencies as results of political oppression and not simply of cultural differences or economic inequalities.

*The recognition of the right of national self-determination, including the right of state secession, is the only way to neutralize the poison of nationalism. An abstract internationalism denying the right of self-determination, referring to impersonal principles, defends ruling totalitarianisms and despises the feelings and opinions of the people themselves. Because no socialist perspective, no liberation, no emancipation can be achieved against the will of the people. Socialism must be free or it cannot exist. Thus, any attempt to deny the right of self-determination in the name of "progress" or "socialism" or of any other good or bad ideal, means nothing else but the perpetuation of a repressive society which treats human beings as simple objects.*

8. The only criterion for the legitimate realization of these rights (self-determination, including state secession) is the will of the (vast) majority of the population in a certain territory. Self-determination is a democratic right which — like all democratic rights — cannot be viewed in purely juridical or formal terms. In any case, it cannot be used to justify or perpetuate economic exploitation, cultural annihilation, or political oppression of a population, by claiming that such things are the right of a "majority." Contrary to this interpretation, the right of self-determination is aimed at abolishing all sorts of oppression in favor of the emancipation of the population itself.

In any case we defend to the last the right of a population to decide freely for themselves, and we support them in carrying through any of their aspirations even if our own estimation does not agree with their decision. In general, we support international solutions against regional and national isolation, and we fight for democratic and socialist federations everywhere.

But precisely the recognition of free self-determination is the only way to overcome nationalist prejudices as soon as possible. Feelings of distrust, hatred, and hostility can be overcome only on the basis of absolute independence and free choice. The experience of national oppression was painfully obvious in many countries under Stalinist rule and cannot be eliminated today by a simple declaration of "international socialist principle." The overcoming of national conflicts and the internationalization of a population, especially if nationally mixed, cannot be achieved by abstract declarations for equality, etc. The right of self-determination of all parts of the population is the precondition if suspicions, discrimination, and oppression are to be abolished.

Thus, the right of self-determination is the very essence of a conception which is aimed at extinguishing national hatred, racism, and oppression of national and other minorities, which are the hallmarks of the traditional "nation-state."

### Nationalism in Former Yugoslavia

9. The KKE (GCP) [the party of the Greek Stalinists] and PASOK [the party of the Greek Social Democrats] have insisted or still insist on abstract principles, such as "the sovereignty of Yugoslavia" or "the inviolability of borders," and they do so at the expense of self-determination and the right of secession — as in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and in Slavic Macedonia — with the justification that secessionist movements are instigated by imperialism, or with theoretical arguments about what a nation is or should be, or with reference to certain abstract ideas of "socialism," "progress," "peace," and so on. But such arguments are only an adaptation to dominant-nation chauvinism and racism — be it Great Russian, Great Serbian, or Great Greek. Any future peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the Balkans can only be achieved after the elimination of political compulsion and conflict in the relations among the different nations. This would mean that the free self-determination of all peoples would have to be ensured as a minimum guarantee against any expansionist or totalitarian logic.

10. The war of conquest and destruction carried out by the Serbian regime, first against the Slovenes and later against the Croats, was aimed at the elimination of their productive potential and at the expulsion and killing of Croats in order to "ethnically cleanse" certain areas and to annex them to Serbia — (one third of Croatian territory is still occupied by Serbs). This proved most strikingly that the Croat population was right when it decided for secession from Milosevic's murderous state. No "neutrality" can be justified in this war. The right to self-determination of the Croatian people and the right of self-defense as well as the defense of the Croatian territory derive directly from the right of self-determination and the recognition of Croatia's state independence, regardless of the nature of the existing Croatian regime.

11. Whoever wants to camouflage the Serbian aggression by referring to alleged imperialist instigation of the non-Serbian peoples, not only does not understand the specific dynamics of the Yugoslav Stalinist regime's evolution, but cultivates above all a bureaucratic police perception of history, according to which the people themselves are irrelevant. This interpretation cannot explain why the non-Serbian peoples succumb to the alleged "instigation." It ignores the brutalities of the troops against the people and creates the illusion that a society can survive in contradiction to the will of its population.

Even worse, it revives the classical racist theory that blames the people for the crimes of the political institutions. The Croats, for example, are light-mindedly described as "fascists," as if a big part or even the majority could be labeled with this word. This is not even correct for the epoch of German occupation during World War II. Those who slaughtered about 800,000 Serbs, Muslims, Jews, and Gypsies were not *the* Croatian people, but a state elite, the Ustashi, who collaborated with the Nazis. Tudjman's regime is not fascist, but stems partly from the old Yugoslav bureaucracy. Today it undoubtedly shows procapitalist tendencies like almost all present Eastern European regimes, including the one in Belgrade. No qualitative difference exists between the (Croatian and Serbian) regimes. They even converge in the way they treat their minorities and in their expansionist desires, as shown in Bosnia by the intervention of Croatian armed gangs as well as Serbian ones. All these several private or state gangs, consisting of mercenaries and adventurers, fascists and nationalists, have in common warfare against the Yugoslav people in order to impose a solution including the expansion of their respective "national" centers.

12. The tormented land of Bosnia-Herzegovina is a very characteristic case of the impasse resulting from dominant-nation chauvinism. The Bosnians (Muslims, Serbs, Croats, Yugoslavs) are a population who wanted to rid themselves of Serbian rule, precisely because the people had nothing to divide in relation to their families, their houses, their land. But Milosevic's Great-Serbianism first, and the private gangs later, under cover of the national theories of the Europeans, started cutting the Bosnian population into "national" slices. They ignored the elementary rights of the people and began a massacre whose end is not predictable. The argument that the Serbian minority needed to be "protected" even before negotiations about the peaceful settlement of the problem could begin, revealed itself as a simple pretext. The Serbian population, living among and in the closest proximity



with their Croat and Muslim neighbors, have paid and will have to pay the price.

13. The Albanians of Kosovo have suffered the longest under military rule by the Serbian state. Their right of self-determination (including state secession, unification with Albania, or whatever they want) must be recognized, as against the position of the Belgrade leadership. It appears that the Serbian leadership would not hesitate even to commit genocide, a prospect which becomes more likely under the present circumstances of imperialist embargo and starvation, because the military leadership will have to turn the discontent of the Serbian population against some external "enemy."

### Greek Imperialism

14. Greek imperialism has decided to strangle culturally, economically, politically, and later perhaps militarily, a whole population, that of Slavic Macedonia. For this purpose, which is one of a classic imperialist type, it has not only assured the "solidarity" of the other members of the European imperialist gang, but it has succeeded in winning the support of broad layers of the Greek population, disorienting, betraying, and trapping them, especially with the active help of the big reformist parties, PASOK and KKE. We are confronted with a racism which wants to reserve privileged rights for the "Greeks" at the expense of the "Slavs," etc., and which suppresses the democratic rights of national minorities in Greece as bluntly as possible. In the present period even the most elementary democratic rights, like that of free expression, are being eliminated by the national "steamroller." Furthermore, military involvement by Greece either as part of an imperialist alliance or alone cannot be excluded. Revolutionary Marxists have to struggle against Greek nationalism and its totalitarian racism, both internally (minorities, democratic rights, ideological myths) and externally (imperialist strangulation and humiliation of Slavic Macedonia, and any future demand for territory from Albania).

15. The most crucial problem for the Greek workers' movement is how to fight the chauvinism which is cultivated systematically by the big reformist organizations. Regardless of some slight differences, all of them share the Stalinist and Menshevik view that the nation is a suprahistorical entity having rights that can be imposed on particular human beings. They dismiss the nationalism of oppressed peoples as the products of "imperialist instigation," and this police philosophy leads them today to support the dominant-nation chauvinism of the advocates of a Greater Serbia and a Greater Greece. The prospect they propose — either in the shape of national Greek aspirations or of an imperialist world conference (UN) on the Balkans — ignores

the existing populations and leaves the way open for political suppression on a national basis. National minorities in Greece are most directly affected by this nationalist deviation, which accepts and reinforces the political alienation of parts of the population (Slavs, Turks, Pomacs, etc). Despite their declarations on human rights — which we have to use in order to push parts of the people in an antinationalist direction — they accept and take part in the hysteria which identifies every "member of a different race," "stranger," or "heretic" as an agent of the enemies of "Hellenism."

16. Greek imperialism seeks to forbid the people of Slavic Macedonia to decide independently what they want to be and to do. Therefore, it has declared an ideological war against independent Macedonia, a war which is expanding from political declarations (nonrecognition) to economic embargoes — eventually leading to economic strangulation, if not ultimately military intervention. In this war, *Greek imperialism must be defeated*. Otherwise it will remain a permanent dangerous focal point and the Greek population itself its constant target. The ideological bombardment which the Greeks have to endure in the present period and the parallel militarization of life, the violation of human rights, and the imposition of austerity on the working class must be countered by all possible means.

17. Like all nations, the Slavomacedonians have the right of self-determination, of having their own independent state, and they must be supported unconditionally in this decision, especially by their "richer" neighboring country of Greece. The historical "discussion" on the "nationality" of the ancient Macedonians is absolutely meaningless in relation to this point. What is at stake is the possibility of human beings and of populations to decide freely for themselves. And under no circumstances do the several states — especially not the Greek state — or the "historians" have the right to deny their independence.

18. Greek nationalism, like all aggressive nationalisms, presents its imperialist politics as defense against an external menace. It insists on the word "Macedonia" as a Greek copyright, whose use by "non-Greeks" constitutes a threat. Apart from the obvious stupidity of this "analysis," it can only reinforce the political position of Greek and Slavomacedonian ultranationalists — expressed, for example, in the "war of the maps." The crucial question remains whether the Greek and Slavic peoples of Macedonia have the right and the possibility of deciding for themselves their identity, without being influenced by the violence of the stronger. The ideology of expansionist "liberation" can be

overcome only on the basis of free self-determination. The Slavomacedonians and not the Greek government have the right to choose their name. The Greek workers' movement is obliged to demand that the Greek government recognize at once and unconditionally the Republic of Macedonia and to provide it with unconditional aid.

### Regarding National Minorities and Racism

19. Revolutionary Marxists must defend uncompromisingly all the rights of minorities in their own country. The Greek state increasingly violates these rights. It prohibits certain citizens their nationality, e.g., the Turkish minority, and in the case of the Slavomacedonians tries obstinately to forbid the use of their mother tongue, arguing that their language is nonexistent. Political parties in Greece are being asked to agree that "there are no Slavomacedonians in Greece," but only "people with two languages," and that there exist not Turks but only "Muslims." This apartheid-type policy, which divides citizens into those who possess the dominant nationality and language and those who are condemned to have neither language nor identity and sometimes no religion, constitutes a crude form of repression against the minorities and a mortal threat to their future existence.

20. The imperialist arrogance of the Greeks who impose terms and identities on other nationalities, making aggressive use of their own political and economic advantages, is based on the internal conception of the Greek state and its practices of imposing national, ideological, linguistic, and religious "unity" and of eliminating differences. The Greek workers' and socialist movements have to declare openly and struggle implacably for the following points:

a) All the cultural and human rights of all the citizens in this country. This includes the freedom of language, religion, and nationality.

b) Self-determination for all the peoples of the Greek state to decide freely for themselves. This means abolishing Greek apartheid, which divides citizens into different categories.

c) Rejection of any forcibly imposed national integration; the acceptance of national differences as a source of cultural wealth for the country.

d) Free unification of all the peoples of the Balkan peninsula in a socialist, multilingual, and multinational confederation as an integral part of a Europe of the working people. □

June 1992

# The Fourth International Today: New Developments, New Challenges

by François Moreau

*This article is reprinted from the April 1992 issue of **La Gauche**, newspaper of **Gauche Socialiste**, published in Québec, and has been translated from the French by Michael Frank. The author is a leader of **Gauche Socialiste**, Canadian section of the Fourth International.*

**T**he fall of the Stalinist regimes in the East is causing a complete restructuring of the political map of the left such as it has existed for the last 60 years, with profound consequences for the construction of a revolutionary alternative.

Indeed one can say that since the thirties there have existed three international currents in the left, of unequal size, but which found expression on all continents and in numerous countries: Social Democracy, Stalinism, and Trotskyism. Certainly there have been other currents like Castroism which have taken on great importance in given countries or regions at certain times, but they have not been able to establish themselves permanently as distinct currents on the international level.

## Well-Defined Territories

**O**f course these different currents were all engaged in a violent ideological struggle against each other, but this struggle did not call into question their very existence. In effect, each current occupied a clearly delimited political space within which it could develop, sheltered by high ideological walls which protected it from rival currents. Stalinism led a permanent poison campaign against the “counterrevolutionary Trotskyists,” “agents of imperialism,” in order to ostracize the Trotskyist current and prevent its positions from even being considered and judged on their merits. That is how entire generations of militants who passed through the Stalinist school could violently reject Trotskyism without knowing anything about it. This was accomplished on the basis of pure lies hammered away ad nauseam by Stalinist parties, and made possible by their superior material resources which came in large measure from their respective national capitals, directly or indirectly.

However, the Stalinist currents were also subjected to blows by the Social Democracy, which could rely on more powerful capitals, those of the imperialist world. While situating itself to the left of the bosses’ parties, the Social Democracy leaned on the “democratic” bourgeois states for support and on the dominant liberal ideology to stigmatize Stalinism by exploiting to the hilt the bureaucratic reality of the single-party regimes, widely and rightly rejected by the masses of the developed capitalist countries.

The Trotskyist current found itself therefore doubly ostracized, first by Stalinism as a supposedly counterrevolutionary current, and then by the Social Democracy and bourgeois ideology in general as a revolutionary current supposedly sharing the responsibility for the existence of totalitarian regimes, although it had itself been the victim of those regimes. In fact, Trotskyism had suffered a veritable campaign of physical extermination on the part of Stalinism (and fascism) during the thirties and forties. It then passed through the bleak period of the fifties to experience a

significant growth in the sixties and seventies. But it remained a minority current of the workers’ movement. In short, it was a question of quantitative and not qualitative changes. In the large picture the map of the political left remained the same.

It is true that the Fourth International has lost ground since the end of the seventies, which is hardly surprising. But one should not exaggerate this loss, as certain people have a tendency to do. The Fourth International remains in fact stronger than ever before in its history, except for a peak period in the middle of the seventies. With the recent adhesion of the NSSP (New Socialist Party) of Sri Lanka, about 3,000 members strong, it is even possible that the next world congress planned for 1994 will surpass the previous high point. But this is not crucial. What is essential is that we face up to the deep recomposition which is changing the context for the construction of the International. The walls that have separated the territories of the different currents for 60 years are in the process of crumbling.

## The Trajectory of Maoism

**T**he pro-Chinese Stalinist current was the first to experience an existential crisis at the end of the seventies when Beijing’s turn to the right deflated the revolutionary idealization on which Maoism was based. Groups, some of which were very important, collapsed almost from one day to the next, and not only in Québec. Today there remain only a few scattered bastions that still define themselves as pro-Chinese. One part of this current sidestepped the crisis by rallying to Albania after 1977 as the new socialist fatherland, but their grace period is now coming to an end with the fall of the Albanian Workers Party regime.

The former Maoist currents and organizations therefore have to redefine themselves and, having done this, reconsider their attitude in regard to the Fourth International. In several countries this has led to a fusion of partisans of the Fourth International with a formerly Maoist organization, for example, in Germany in 1986 and in the Spanish State in 1991. Even the principal trade union federations of these countries sent greetings to the founding congress of the Left Alternative, something which doesn’t happen every day. Two thousand people attended this Congress. In Norway, an important group of Maoist origins has now opened the pages of its daily to partisans of the Fourth International as regular collaborators. Only a few years ago this would have been unimaginable.

But it is in Senegal that the most spectacular results have been achieved with the fusion of groups having Maoist and Trotskyist origins. More than a thousand delegates participated in the founding congress of the new party which has declared its political solidarity with the Fourth International. It is ironic to see certain

ex-Maoists (or current Maoists), in speaking of the dissolution of sections in Spain or in Senegal, reproach these fusions with the FI. In this they join the doctrinaire Trotskyists. For our part, we would look favorably on two, three, or several "dissolutions" following the Senegalese model. It is a victory for us to have overcome the heritage of sectarianism and anti-Trotskyism, created with so much energy and for such a long time by the Stalinist current.

### The End of the Soviet Model

As for the pro-Moscow current, the disappearance of the Motherland and of the former ruling party in the USSR has destroyed the foundation on which it was built. In fact the real difference between the pro-Moscow Communist parties and the Social Democratic parties was not that the first were revolutionary and the second reformist. The pro-Moscow Communist parties have not been revolutionary since the thirties, and even their reformism has significantly weakened with the passage of time. The real difference was the ultimate loyalty of the Social Democracy to its own bourgeois state, while the Communist parties maintained an element of loyalty toward and dependence on Moscow. They remained, therefore, suspect in bourgeois opinion, which contributed to the maintenance of their leftist image. With the disappearance of the USSR and the CPSU, the Communist parties are forced to redefine themselves, which has led several down the path of disintegration. Those which can count on an apparatus and on a mass base are maintaining themselves better, but their own political space is disappearing, because there is no place for two Social Democratic parties in the same country, and that place is already taken. The only country where the former Communist party can hope to supplant the Social Democracy in the occupation of the same space is probably Italy, but the official conversion of the Italian Communist Party to reformism has already provoked an important split-off of its left and the creation of the Movement of Communist Refoundation, 100,000 members strong. The Italian section of the Fourth International has decided to participate in this movement as an organized current, and several of our comrades have been elected to its leadership. This has given our current a larger-than-ever arena in which to advance its positions.

### New Currents

One also sees new forms of political expression of the workers' movement, which are taking a mass character, appearing in several countries. The most important example of this type is without doubt the Workers Party of Brazil, which has become a reference point for virtually all the semi-industrialized countries, from South Africa to Korea. While all the mass workers' parties have been either social democratic or communist (and then Stalinist) for 100 years, the PT is a class party born out of the struggles of the workers' movement and engaged in a democratic process of defining its program and strategy. In fact, the comrades of the Fourth International figure among the founders of the PT and form the second most important tendency within it after that of the leadership, with 12 percent of the votes at the time of the last congress. And this in a party of 600,000 members. Without doubt this is the most important influence that the FI has ever enjoyed. However, there are those who snub their nose at the PT and at the work of our comrades within it as if it were better to remain on the outside in an "independent" organization competing with the PT. But this is truly to make a fetish of organization. What counts is

the struggle for the program and not the vehicle through which the struggle is conducted. If there is no possibility of revolutionary regroupment nor a mass, political workers' movement in which we can participate, then the only thing we can do is construct a small, independent, revolutionary organization openly based on the program of the Fourth International, like Gauche Socialiste. But we should not make a virtue out of a necessity and decree that in all circumstances this is the only admissible way to construct the revolutionary party. Lenin, at least, was not of this opinion when he proposed adhesion of the English Communists to the Labor Party in 1921. However, it was a congealed, reformist, and counterrevolutionary party, different from the PT today or from the Movement of Communist Refoundation in Italy.

At a time when the frontiers which separated the currents of the workers' movement for 60 years are being redefined on a world scale, we should not turn in on ourselves and remain apart from these recompositions if we have the opportunity to participate in them and influence them. This so-called revolutionary intransigence constitutes in reality an attitude which is at bottom conservative, the wish to keep one's little territory protected instead of going to fight on the terrain where the cleavages of the future are being defined. Fortunately the Fourth International resolutely rejects this pseudo-intransigence which is in fact fear. It is ready to take the risk of participating in the realignments in process, ready to learn from the experience of others, and convinced that the necessity of the revolutionary International and the validity of the fundamental elements of its program will also become apparent to other currents who are honestly searching their way amidst the debris left by the old currents who dominated the scene for too long. □

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# The Revolutionary Marxist Movement in Peru

by David Trujillo

*This presentation was given to the final national conference of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in September 1992.*

In 1977 Peru was experiencing a military dictatorship. The workers movement put forward an economic-political initiative which forced the dictatorship to call for elections to a Constituent Assembly, which as we all know is a demand contained in the original text of the Transitional Program, applicable to countries where the struggle for democracy has a revolutionary dynamic.

At that time those who called themselves Trotskyists in Peru were a mere handful, no more than a few dozen militants. Even those forces were scattered among Healyites, Lambertists, Posadistas, and Morenistas, as well as the nucleus of comrades of the PRT who belonged to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

This division reflected the state of other left currents in Peru, which were ridiculously divided into about fifty parties. At that time we had an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the validity of our program. Along with Morenista and some Maoist currents, we put together a broad based, class struggle electoral front — an action bloc — known as the FOCEP. This alliance was greatly boosted by the historic popularity enjoyed by our comrade Hugo Blanco. It offered the left and the Peruvian proletariat the historic opportunity to become a real political force, capable of struggling for state power against the bourgeoisie. In the 1979 elections the FOCEP won 32 percent of the national vote.

As a result it was possible to exert an important degree of pressure from within the Constituent Assembly, despite the predominance of bourgeois forces. This fact was reflected in the Assembly's ratification of the right of the people to organize an insurrection against all forms of dictatorship and recognition of the idea that wealth must be the product of one's own labor.

Following the Constituent Assembly, a new national election campaign began, which represented a new test for our forces. The left was divided into two blocs, between those willing to challenge the ruling class parties on their own terrain and those who rejected any possibility of electoral participation. This second position was adopted by the most sectarian Maoists currents from which Shining Path emerged.

Among those who favored participation there were a number of key differences. The reformist currents simply wished to adapt to the rules of the game set down by the bour-

geois state. There were also revolutionaries, who came out of a broad spectrum of left currents. They shared a desire to search for the unity needed to seriously dispute state power.

Among the Trotskyist forces a debate emerged over whether we should simply unite ourselves, to defend the ideological purity of our own church, or seriously take up the challenge facing the revolutionary left as a whole.

Our sectarianism carried the day and at a key conjuncture, when revolutionaries had a serious opportunity to take power, FOCEP fragmented. We ran separately in the elections with disastrous consequences and lost credibility before the masses.

The end result was the emergence of Shining Path and its terrorist war which has contributed to the death of 25,000 people, including many honest left militants and leaders of the mass movement, over the last 12 years.

As a result, we of the PRT (Peruvian section of the Fourth International) which had until then seen its ranks grow, with thousands coming to our headquarters seeking direction — quickly became a small handful of demoralized militants.

In the following years we found ourselves between the rock of the Shining Path (which among other actions killed one of our key trade-union party leaders Roberto Charra) and the hard place of state repression. We took up a discussion seven years ago over whether to go into the PUM (United Mariateguist Party) or to remain a separate group. This discussion led to a split. A very small grouping around Hugo Blanco joined the PUM while another small nucleus continued to work as the PRT.

Our comrades inside the PUM continue to consider themselves Trotskyists and have managed to modestly boost their influence inside the PUM. Those who remained outside continue to exist as a small, ineffectual group.

In these last seven years the mass move-

ment has experienced setbacks and a deep ebb. The failure of the left to offer a viable united alternative at a decisive moment, as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union, have contributed to a situation today in which many have developed illusions in bourgeois "liberalism" and the government of Alberto Fujimori.

As we can see, the Peruvian "debacle" dates back to 1980 when a sectarian conception of defending Trotskyist programmatic clarity led us to miss the opportunity to achieve the unity of the revolutionary left, losing an historic opportunity that would not repeat itself and at the same time losing many comrades even to the ranks of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA).

As a result of this mistake our later participation in the PUM lacked any major significance; the same could be said of the work of the comrades who remained outside.

The lesson we must draw is that when the masses begin to rebel it is necessary to work to achieve revolutionary left unity as part of the fight for power, for socialist democracy. We must avoid the trap, fueled by Stalinism, of the idea of the single, perfect, totalitarian party.

It is my hope and I am confident that the experience undertaken by the FIT in joining Solidarity will contribute to the struggle of the working class for socialism

Long live the Fourth International! □



Peruvian peasant union demonstration, about 1965



# The Uprising of the Urban Poor and the Policies of the Iranian Regime

by M. Razi

*The following article is translated from issue No. 11 of **Workers' Socialist Notebooks**, a journal of Iranian Revolutionary Socialists published in London, which deals with current historical and political issues facing the vanguard of the Iranian working class.*

In the wake of the oil workers' strike and the following demonstrations and riots in Chahar Mahal Bakhtiari and Khorramabad, the cities of Shiraz and Mashad witnessed major uprisings in late May. The recent rebellions clearly reflect a new and tangibly different phase in the struggles of the Iranian working class.

The unique feature of the Mashad riot was the intensity of the mass protest against the institutions and organs of the capitalist regime. Two youths were killed when the residents of the "out of boundary" shantytown of Kooye Tollab, near Mashad, stood up against the regime's bulldozers and an army support unit sent to destroy their homes. The slum-dwellers took up the two bodies and carried them in a demonstration toward Tabrassi Boulevard. Gradually thousands joined the demonstration, and the streets came under the control of the demonstrators. Major government offices such as the offices of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Tax Office, banks, and police stations were occupied and burnt down by the people. Mullahs were seen fleeing the area, and the security forces were only capable of regaining control of the town well after midnight.

The next day, the wave of arrests and executions started. Four people charged with "inciting riots" were executed immediately. Thousands were arrested. After a few days of silence, the government-controlled press was forced to admit that riots had taken place. Initially, the leaders of the regime tried to blame the incident on a "handful of criminals and ruffians." After a few weeks, however, when news of this and riots in other cities spread throughout the world, the government had to admit that the "criminals had duped large sections of the population into following them." During Friday prayers on June 2, Rafsanjani<sup>1</sup> called on government officials to deal with the most urgent demands of the people, "so that the criminals can't find any excuses."

Following the recent upheavals, the ruling faction, the Rafsanjani-Khameneii clique, has been forced to change some aspects of its

internal policy. In July, Ali Khameneii, speaking to militia leaders, called on the "Hezbollah"<sup>2</sup> to intervene in politics. The resignation of Khatemi, the "moderate" minister of culture and Islamic guidance, was accepted by Rafsanjani, and a supporter of the "radical faction" was put in his place. From late July the Islamic militia has started a major widespread attack on "badly veiled women" in the streets of Tehran.

Following widespread corruption and bribery among the pasdaran [revolutionary guards], the government recently replaced them with Islamic militia mainly recruited from the provinces. These "mobilization forces of resistance" have been let loose on the people, especially women.

The recent events in Iran highlight a few points: firstly, the economic crisis facing the regime is so severe that even if the Rafsanjani clique gains full control, the initial stages of economic reconstruction will take many years.

On the one hand, war damage, runaway inflation, unemployment, and on the other, the speed with which the regime has turned toward imperialism's policies (calling for huge loans from the IMF and an open door policy toward foreign investment), together with mismanagement, internal conflict, and chaos, has put the government in a position where it cannot respond to the specific problems facing Iranian society.

The main aim of the Rafsanjani clique is a return to "the Shah's golden era." Achieving this aim, however, might prove more difficult. Gaining a majority in the Majles,<sup>3</sup> and making a few deals with George Bush, will not help to solve Iran's severe economic crisis overnight. As long as periodic crises paralyze imperialist countries, an Iran under the

rule of a capitalist regime will suffer long-term economic recession.

The economic crisis has also left its mark on agriculture: food and agricultural imports have increased by \$6 billion over the last year. The migration of the peasants to the cities has risen, and the population is growing at a frightening rate. The number of the urban poor living in shantytowns is increasing daily, and their day-to-day problems remain unresolved — housing, unemployment, lack of food, and so on. The majority of the population in Iran have become increasingly poorer, while a few are getting richer. The recent uprisings of the urban poor are reflections of this situation. The Iranian people have had enough and blame the capitalist regime for society's problems. The events that led to the recent riots were merely opportunities for expressing dissatisfaction with the capitalist regime, and this is no more than the beginning of mass struggles.

Secondly, the "moderate" faction, contrary to the beliefs of some opposition forces (the social democrats of the Fedayeen Majority and the Tudeh Party, the royalists and the "republicans" who hoped to come to some



1. Hashemi Rafsanjani, president of Iran since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini.

2. "Party of God."

3. The Iranian parliament.

agreement with the Rafsanjani regime), is not very different from the so-called "radical" faction. The two factions of the regime are far more worried about the people's struggles than their internal differences. In the face of popular opposition the "moderate" faction became "hardline" overnight and called on the Hezbollah to suppress the "criminals and undesirable elements" who had caused trouble and temporarily forgot their "liberal" allies. The "hardliners" can also become moderate for a short time. However, the two factions of the regime are united in their determination to suppress the people and to defend the interests of capitalists. Their only difference lies in the preferred "style" of organizing a capitalist economy: one faction favors a revival of modern capitalism, similar to that of the Shah, the other faction favors a clerical (semi-feudal) type.

The present maneuvers of the Rafsanjani

faction, however, should not be seen as a true conversion to the "hardline" faction. There is no policy reversal; the royalists, the supporters of the Tudeh Party, and the Fedayeen Majority can rest assured! The recent "radicalism" of the Rafsanjani-Khamenei faction is a temporary measure, necessary because of the gravity of the situation. If the regime had not taken such severe repressive measures, its existence would have been seriously threatened. The Rafsanjani regime cannot fight back a popular uprising with a few technocrats, capitalists, and royalists who have recently returned to Iran — it needs the criminals of Hezbollah. Amidst all the problems, the brief reconciliation between the two factions was a necessary tactical measure which will not jeopardize the general situation and the policy of rapprochement with the West.

Thirdly, the uprising of the urban poor was against the entire system (irrespective of fac-

tion). The popular struggle on such a scale, and only a few weeks after the elections for the Majles (which according to the government attracted just fifty percent of the population) shows the lack of confidence in the present regime and makes a mockery of the government's claims of popular support. The recent protests, so soon after the oil workers' strike, herald the start of a new stage in the struggles of the Iranian workers and toilers against the capitalist regime.

The brief success of the uprising in Mashad proves the importance of organizing and forming workers' and toilers' organizations. The experience of the recent riots demonstrates the necessity of forming clandestine local committees, together with their coordination and expansion, in preparation for the forthcoming mass struggles to overthrow the capitalist regime in Iran. □

August 7, 1992

## How the Concept of the Dual Nature of the African American Struggle Developed

Continued from page 13

to revolutionary disciples of the Malcolm X school and black Marxists....

Black nationalism is often confused with separatism, though the two are not identical. Separatism is only one facet, one trend, and as yet a minor one, in the broad and agitated stream of Afro-American nationalism. It is an ultimate option which has yet to be adopted by the black masses. Whether or not they will ever choose to exercise their right to territorial division and autonomy depends upon the further development of American history....

Despite its vast promise, the movement at its present stage is subjected to heavy handicaps which hold back its progress. Its activities are spasmodic, uncentralized, and localized. They need to be unified, better coordinated, and more consciously and systematically directed on a national scale. Unfortunately, the movement does not yet have any authoritative leadership with a program capable of welding militant cadres together and helping them organize the masses.

The main defect of the liberation forces is the absence of an independent black political party, no matter what its name, which could mobilize and lead the people against the two capitalist parties, both on the electoral field and in mass actions against the evils of the system they uphold and administer.

### The Need for Continuing Analyses and Programmatic Development

Although written twenty-five years ago, Breitman's point about the need for independent Black political action remains valid today — and is recognized by increasing numbers of African Americans. The concept of the combined character of the African

American struggle, explained and re-explained over the years, provides a solid foundation for understanding today's realities and requirements. But we need to continue the process of theoretical growth, refinement, and expansion demonstrated by the record presented in this article. Rather than existing as a static and finished product, the concept of the dual nature of the Black struggle is a work-in-progress — challenging each generation of revolutionary activists to enrich this political heritage with new experiences and insights. □

September 27, 1992

### Suggested Readings in Chronological Order

"Critical Remarks on the National Question," "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Theses)," "The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up," by V.I. Lenin, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968

*Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*; Merit Publishers 1967

"The Right of Self-Determination and the Negro in the United States of North America," (SWP resolution) and "The SWP and Negro Work," (SWP resolution) in the book *The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and resolutions 1938-39*; Monad Press 1982

*The Class-Struggle Road to Negro Equality* (SWP resolution); Pioneer Publishers 1957

*Labor Party and Freedom Now Party*, by Tom Kerry; Pioneer Publishers 1963

*Marxism and the Negro Struggle*, by Harold Cruse, George Breitman, Clifton DeBerry; Merit Publishers 1965

*How a Minority Can Change Society: The Real Poten-*

*tial of the Afro-American Struggle*, by George Breitman; Pathfinder Press 1965

*The Black Panther Party*, with speech by John Hulet, interview with Stokely Carmichael, report from Lowndes County; Merit Publishers 1966

"The National Question and the Black Liberation Struggle in the United States," by George Breitman in the book *50 Years of World Revolution 1917-1967: An International Symposium*; Merit Publishers 1968

*Should the U.S. Be Partitioned*, a symposium with Robert S. Browne and Robert Vernon; Merit Publishers 1968

*The Case for a Black Party* (SWP resolution), published by Socialist Workers Party and distributed by Merit Publishers 1968

*Black Nationalism and Socialism*, by George Breitman and George Novack, Merit Publishers 1968

"The Combined Character of the Coming American Revolution," by Derrick Morrison in the book *Towards an American Socialist Revolution*; Pathfinder Press 1971

"Perspectives and Lessons of the New Radicalization," SWP resolution in the book *A Revolutionary Strategy for the 70s*; Pathfinder Press 1972

"A Transitional Program for Black Liberation," (1972) in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, by Leon Trotsky; Pathfinder Press 1973

"The Fight for Black Liberation: the Current Stage and Its Tasks" (SWP resolution); and "Socialists and the Struggle Against Racism," by Tony Thomas in the book *Prospects for Socialism in America*; Pathfinder Press 1976

*Independent Black Political Action 1954-78, Education for Socialists*; Pathfinder Press 1982

From Mississippi to Boston: the demand for troops to enforce civil rights (articles from 1955-74); *Education for Socialists*; SWP National Education Department 1975

# Was the October Revolution Justified?

by Ernest Mandel

*The following is excerpted from the author's excellent new work **Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy**, Verso Books, 1992.*

## The Social Division of Labor, the State, and Scarcity

The withering away of the state and of social classes — which Marx and Engels saw as parallel processes — presupposes a level of the forces of production such that scarcity can be overcome and individuals are enabled to achieve their full development. Under such circumstances, it is no longer inevitable that individuals will be subject to the tyranny of the *social* division of labor. Or, to paraphrase Engels, the “common affairs of society” can henceforth be conducted by *all men and women* and no longer by a *special apparatus*.

Only the immense increase of the productive forces attained by modern industry has made it possible to distribute labor among all members of society without exception, and thereby to limit the labor-time of each individual member to such an extent that all have enough free time left to take part in the general — both theoretical and practical — affairs of society.

Engels explicitly asserts that these “common affairs of society” include all those functions which, in a class society, are performed by the state. The withering away of the state is thus a return to the performance of these functions by society itself, without any need for a specialized apparatus, or bureaucracy.

In *The German Ideology* (1845–46) Marx and Engels had already grasped that a prerequisite for communism was “a great increase” and “universal development of the productive forces,” because “without it want is merely made general, and with destitution the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced...” It follows from this fundamental thesis of historical materialism that the absence of socialism (that is, the first, lower stage of communism) in the Soviet Union and other such societies is attributable to three material causes: (1) the inadequate level of development of the productive forces; (2) the isolation of these societies from the hegemonic industrial nations; and (3) the renewed struggle for the satisfaction of material needs, with its inevitable consequences in a return to “all the old filthy business.”

Trotsky expressed this most clearly in *The Revolution Betrayed*:

If the state does not die away but grows more and more despotic, if the plenipotentiaries of the working class become bureaucratized and the bureaucracy rises above the new society, this is not for some secondary reasons like the psychological relics of the past, etc., but is the result of the iron necessity to give birth to and support a privileged minority so long as it is impossible to guarantee genuine equality....The basis of the bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each

against all. When there are enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come when they want to. When there are few goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy. It “knows” who is to get something and who has to wait.

The state, as the organ which oversees and conducts the “common affairs of society” (that is, accumulation of part of the social surplus product, military affairs, enforcement of the rules governing cohabitation between citizens, creation and maintenance of the infrastructure, etc.), as distinct from the immediate economic activity of production and distribution, is embodied in special apparatuses which, as Engels shows in *Anti-Dühring*, conquer their own autonomy in society, becoming its masters rather than its servants.

In this sense, the state has always performed a dual function: it guarantees the rule of the ruling class over the exploited classes, and it assures the general interests of the ruling class as against the private interests of its members. This is true for all stable class societies, but above all for capitalism where private economic interests are much more compelling. Private capitalists cannot, for example, effectively assume the role of a central bank, because they cannot make abstraction from their private interests. State bureaucracies, unlike those of private slaveowners, feudal lords, or capitalist entrepreneurs, act through a rigid system of formal, hierarchically organized rules, regardless of the immediate effect



Leon Trotsky during the Soviet Civil War (1918–21)

these might have upon the personnel who adhere to them. The rules can be changed only by collective decision of the ruling class. Failure to apply them would not be part of "the game": it would be due to such factors as the corruption or incompetence of individual functionaries. The army, with its iron "regulations" and chain of command and its insistence on blind obedience, is an admittedly caricatural model of the state bureaucracy. It is supposed to be completely detached from the quest for pecuniary advantage, and although plunder and corruption have accompanied the rise to eminence of armies in all class societies, the ruling classes have normally been able to help keep these "excesses" under control.

With an insight astonishingly close to Marxism, Hegel recognized in *fixed income* and *security of tenure* the material basis of the bureaucracy. These he opposed to the fluctuating income and insecurity of "civil society" (that is, the basic classes of bourgeois society). If one adds, as Hegel did, the *hierarchical* nature of the bureaucracy (that is, the prospect of rising income through promotion), then one has indeed discovered the three distinctive social pillars of the bureaucracy, as distinct from those of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

But the social situation of the bureaucracy is not defined only by its difference from the social classes surrounding it. It is also determined by its simultaneous immersion in "civil society." When Hegel magnifies and exalts the "disinterested" character of the state functionary (based upon guaranteed income and security of tenure!), he seems to forget that in a society ruled by wealth the power of attraction of money, and hence of corruption, is quite formidable. Especially in the upper echelons, state functionaries will tend to discover myriad ways of becoming part of the "egoistic," profit-hungry bourgeois class. We might say that the specificity of the Soviet bureaucracy lies precisely in the fact that it is immersed in a society in which money wealth, and private wealth in general, though not absent, play a qualitatively smaller role than in either bourgeois, feudal, or mature slaveowning society, or in the classical societies of the "Asiatic mode of production."

Be this as it may, it is obvious that the state did not even begin to wither away in the Soviet Union. On the contrary, it continued to expand as a powerful independent force set up over society as a whole, and the CPSU leadership — as we can see as late as the Party program of 1986 — quite openly advocated its further strengthening. The Soviet experience of bureaucratization reflected not only historical backwardness but also deep social tensions, far removed from a classless society. The management of these contradictions required the existence and hypertrophy of the organs of the state, that is, the bureaucracy. As Engels put it: "The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without... Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel."

Revolutionary Marxists do not accuse the Stalinist faction and its successors in power of having "caused" the monstrous growth of the state and the bureaucracy through their "betrayals" or "political errors." In fact, the opposite is the case. Revolutionary Marxists explain the victory, the political line, and the ideology of the Stalinist faction and its successors by reference to the material and social conditions outlined above. The reproaches that may be directed against them, insofar as reproaches serve any purpose within the context of scientific socialism, are the following:

1. They conceal social reality and breed "false consciousness" by offering special ideological justification for the bureaucracy. Through this departure from Marxism and the historical-materialist interpretation of society, they deceive the working class of their own country and the world at large and give great assistance to the international bourgeoisie and its ideologues.
2. In the name of "communism" and "Marxism," they unleashed large-scale processes of exploitation and oppression of workers, young people, peasants, women, and national minorities, all of which constituted a crime against socialism and the proletariat.
3. Their policies have in practice led to conditions which, far from limiting shortages and bureaucratic excesses to a minimum, have greatly encouraged their development. They have thus not acted, and are not acting, in the interests of socialism and of the proletariat as a class, but have subordinated these interests to the particular ones of the privileged bureaucracy.

This Marxist analysis of the hypertrophy of state and bureaucracy in the Soviet Union poses a crucial historical question. Were not the Mensheviks right after all when, in opposition to Lenin and Trotsky, they opposed the October Revolution on the grounds that Russia was not ripe for socialism and that any attempt to "leap over" the development of capitalism was "voluntarist" and "Blanquist"? Was the Russian Revolution not a historical mistake if, as the post-1945 development of the productive forces has shown, capitalism had not yet realized all its economic potential on a world scale?

The reply to this question is that the *process of socialist world revolution* must be distinguished from the illusion of completing

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the construction of a socialist society in one country. Without a doubt, Russia was not “ripe” for the establishment of such a society, and until 1924 this view was shared by all revolutionary Marxists, not only Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Lukács, Gramsci, Thalheimer, Korsch, or Radek, but also Stalin himself. And yet *the world* was ripe for socialism. This distinction and this certainty had already been explained by Engels in *Anti-Dühring*, and what was true in 1878 was incomparably truer in 1917.

Now, the appropriation of the means of production by the workers’ state is a *political* act linked not only to the already prevailing material conditions but also to the existing political and subjective conditions. Basing himself on the discovery of the law of uneven and combined development, Trotsky was able to predict as early as 1905–6 that, *in the framework of the imperialist world*, the proletariat of a less developed country like Russia could utilize a unique combination of socio-economic backwardness and political maturity to overthrow the state power of capital before anything similar took place in the more developed industrial nations.

At one and the same time, imperialism hampers the full development both of the objective conditions for socialism in the backward countries (that is, the complete development of capitalism) and of the subjective conditions for socialism in the highly industrialized countries (that is, the full development of proletarian class consciousness). It is precisely the combination of these two processes that determines the concrete form of the world socialist revolution. This may *begin* in countries like Russia but will lead to the full development of a socialist society only if it is extended to the industrially most advanced nations. The whole tragedy of the twentieth century is contained in this prognosis.

That the October Revolution was indeed a driving force of the world socialist revolution, and not simply a means toward the “development of socialism in one country,” was from the outset the historical justification assigned to it by Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, and their comrades. Let us just listen for a moment to Luxemburg:

Let the German government socialists cry that the rule of the Bolsheviks in Russia is a distorted expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. If it was or is such, that is only because it is a product of the behavior of the German proletariat, in itself a distorted expression of the socialist class struggle. All of us are subject to the laws of history, and it is only internationally that the socialist order of society can be realized. The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of the historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat would be a miracle. What *is* in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescences in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a question of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world: they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hütten: “I have dared.”

The First World War, which exacerbated the internal contradictions of imperialism and of the capitalist mode of production, issued in a virtually uninterrupted series of revolutions. Although these received considerable impetus from the Russian October and the founding of the Soviet state, they constituted a *real world process* that carried with it a prospect of revolutionary victory in industrially advanced countries like Germany, Austria, Italy, and Finland. During this period the possibility of achieving socialism on a world scale was progressing, in spite of the impossibility of realizing socialism in Russia. The October Revolution is thus, historically speaking, fully justified.

The Russian Revolution was a conflict of massive social forces unleashed in an elemental way which could not be controlled by moderate or “reasonable” liberal conciliators. In this extreme polarization the real alternative was not liberal democracy or “Bolshevik dictatorship,” but rather dictatorship of the proletariat or a murderous dictatorship of an extreme right-wing, semi-fascist nature. Thus, the Ukrainian counterrevolutionary Petlyura, by no means the most right-wing of the political leaders active in the civil war, killed a hundred thousand Jews during pogroms in 1919 — the greatest number of victims of right-wing terror until Hitler’s extermination camps. Even before the October Revolution could occur, there was General Kornilov’s attempted *coup d’état*, when the counterrevolutionaries were prepared to bring the German army to occupy Petrograd. This would have led to a massacre of the Petrograd proletariat, some idea of which can be gained from the bloodbath perpetrated by German militarism and the Mannerheim forces in the Finnish civil war.

We do not need to speculate on the price that would have been paid if the October Revolution had not taken place — historians who carefully add up the costs of revolution almost never take such “counter-factuals” into account. What we can base ourselves on, however, is the tragic example of Germany. When the German revolution broke out in 1918, social democracy tried to crush it with the help of the Reichswehr and the Freikorps — the nuclei of the future SA and SS — thereby unleashing a process of gradual counterrevolution that would eventually culminate in Hitler’s taking of power in 1933 and the loss of tens of millions of lives. We can say that the price of a victorious socialist revolution in 1918 would have been incomparably lower, and that the Stalinist degeneration of Russia, with its huge costs, would therefore also have been avoided. The historical balance-sheet thus eloquently confirms the legitimacy of the October Revolution in the light of Germany’s alternative path.

As to the adaptability of international capitalism expressed in the new “long wave” of economic development after the Second World War, it has been paid for at a tremendous price: 20 million deaths as a result of the first war; 80 million as a result of the second war; and an even greater number due to 140 “local wars,” Third World misery, and various technological disasters since 1945. Does this not prove the correctness of the Marxist thesis that, unlike in the pre-1914 period, the negative results of capitalism now far outstrip its positive effects? Again: is not the price humankind has paid for not realizing world revolution incomparably higher than the costs of that revolution would have been? □

# What Happened in the SWP?

*The Struggle Inside the Socialist Workers Party 1979–1983*, edited by Sarah Lovell. Published by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, New York, 1992. 328 pages, \$10.00.

Reviewed by Dennis Brasky

By the late 1920s the Stalin faction in the Soviet Communist Party emerged triumphant. This was due not to the persuasiveness of its political arguments but to the power of the party apparatus, which it controlled, and its undemocratic practices. A key factor was the routinism and lack of critical thought existing throughout the party. Clearly this wasn't the same group of people that made the revolution ten years earlier.

The supporters of Trotsky were expelled from the CPs of the world without having a chance to explain their positions in an open debate. Many CPers were undoubtedly disturbed by this situation but they went along out of blind faith in the leadership.

The Trotskyist movement learned from the degeneration of the Communist International and based itself firmly on certain theoretical and political principles. In the U.S. the Socialist Workers Party upheld these principles against immense pressures after its founding in 1938. It became the strongest section and a mainstay of the international Trotskyist movement, the Fourth International.

But there were insidious forces working against this party, forces that worked so slowly that most members including the leadership didn't notice until it became too late. Quantitative change became qualitative by the early 1980s when the leadership renounced and denounced the party's almost 60-year history. It did so while expelling Trotskyists, just as the CPUSA did in 1928.

How could a small group of centrally situated functionaries manage to usurp control of the party apparatus without the elected National Committee being fully aware of what was happening? What prompted these people to carry out an operation that contradicted their past training and behavior? Why did the opposition fail to win a majority?

The need for a Marxist analysis of this development is as great as it was in 1928 when it had to be explained how the USSR and Third International degenerated. Today with the collapse of "real existing socialism" cynicism has taken hold of much of the left. Some lay the blame for this mess on the "utopianism" of Marxism. Others see the concept of a democratic-centralist vanguard party as original sin, Leninism containing the seeds of Stalinism. Precious lessons of the

class struggles of this century, gained at great expense and suffering, are in danger of being discarded as useless baggage. In order not to have to start from scratch and repeat the errors of the past as well as to someday influence the class struggle, the Trotskyist movement must be able to explain the whys and hows. Hence the importance of this book, the first of a three-volume series entitled "In Defense of American Trotskyism." The series is a compilation of documents written by a minority in the party's leadership that defended the historic program of Trotskyism.

In 1979 the central leadership of the SWP, led by national secretary Jack Barnes, started to lose confidence in the party's principles. They gradually moved away from its theoretical foundations and internal democratic life. But it's not accurate to place all the blame on one individual or a small group. A Marxist analysis takes into primary consideration what came before Barnes and company to pave the way for this about-face, and must explain why it was successful.

As Frank Lovell, a leader of the minority, explains in his introduction, the Barnes leadership inherited a series of negative practices toward dissent in the party. The combination of witch-hunt, government spies, and low level of activity in the 1950s all combined to create a situation where the party's NC lost its role as a consulting and advisory institution and became a rubber stamp for its subordinate committee, the Political Committee. This had a stultifying effect on the party as a whole. It discouraged political initiative, critical thinking, and honest debate.

The party took on additional negative organizational practices, such as the PC in New York selecting branch organizers rather than developing leaders from the field. Branches ceased to be political units of the party and became extensions of the SWP national office where all political decisions were made.

Formally speaking the party was democratic but in reality it was fast becoming a top-down structure. This could happen only with a passive membership, one that had basically given the leadership a blank check.

In the early 1970s the movement against the war in Southeast Asia was where the political action was. There were mass marches of hundreds of thousands and the polls showed a majority of people opposing the war. The SWP and the Young Socialist Alliance played a leading role in this movement and most recruitment was from this arena. The movement for abortion rights was starting and some of its best fighters also joined.

The party leadership and the ranks were filled with optimism. In a few more years it looked like the SWP would be bigger and more influential than ever before; the left alternative to the CPUSA!

Then came 1973, the year of two great victories, and the drying up of the source of most recruitment. In January, Nixon was forced to sign the peace accords with Vietnam ending the U.S. military's destruction of Southeast Asia. That same month, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* ruled that women had a right to control their own bodies. Euphoric, many feminists saw no need for continued social activism.

There was no panic in the party. Watergate was breaking out, Nixon was gone by August 1974, and there was mass cynicism about all aspects of the bourgeois government. In 1976 the party ran its most successful presidential campaign and the SWP/YSA recruited 700 people. Its weekly newspaper the *Militant* had an expanding circulation and Pathfinder Press was churning out books and pamphlets.

But most of these 700 new members didn't stay. The leadership grew impatient and started to look for greener pastures.

The struggle over busing to achieve equal educational opportunity for the Black community in Boston was seen by the party leadership as the start of a national movement. It would be, they hoped, the new source of recruitment. But it didn't happen, so something else had to be done. By 1977–78 it was schematically decided that because of the ruling class's escalating attacks on living standards the workers would soon begin to fight back, becoming more militant and radical. If so, the SWP had to be there. This analysis was and is true for the long run, but the Barnes leadership badly overestimated the pace of changing consciousness.

There were important developments in the class, most notably Steelworkers Fight Back and the Miners for Democracy, but the Barnesites clearly got carried away. Soon the *Militant* was telling its readers that the workers (in 1978) were "more open to the ideas of revolutionary socialists than at any time in this century." They forgot that this is a century where the CP had about 100,000 members and perhaps one million sympathizers; a century where a revolutionary socialist named Debs received almost one million votes for president!

There was no empirical evidence to confirm these wild claims but everyone wanted to believe it so they did. Branches of the party were reorganized. Instead of 30 to 50 people in a branch united in any city, now there were two or three smaller ones. The party had to be everywhere because the workers were about to come knocking at the door.

And so the SWP made a "turn" to the working class. Soon the turn was to be "deepened," followed by a "turn within the turn." There was a lot of pressure on members to get jobs in basic industry so as to "talk socialism"

with the workers. The leadership felt that students and white-collar employees could become blue-collar workers and understand working class life simply by getting a factory job. This error was compounded by the policy of shifting members around from job to job and city to city "as if they were back on campus selling socialist literature and preparing for the next big street demonstration" (from the introduction).

Anyone who balked at or questioned this overly optimistic assessment was accused of harboring petty-bourgeois doubts about the revolutionary potential of the proletariat! It was at this time that a number of people who had been dedicated, active members for about a decade (this writer for one) decided to leave. We couldn't put our finger on it but the party was becoming weird, an oddity even to those workers who were sympathetic to our political program.

The results of the turn were disappointing. Not only did workers not join up but experienced members continued to leave a party that was increasingly out of touch with political realities. The leadership response was not to honestly assess the damage and correct the course but to recoil inward and abstain from other struggles such as the fight to pass the Equal Rights Amendment, the nuclear freeze movement, and the movement in solidarity with the struggles in Central America.

By 1979, the Barnes team decided Cuba and the Castro-inspired revolutionary movement in Central America was the new greener pasture for both the SWP and the FI. The 1979 SWP convention passed a resolution by a vote of 121 to 1 saying that, despite some errors and contradictions, Castroism was an unqualifiedly revolutionary movement.

The only opposing vote was by George Breitman, former editor of the *Militant*, and a central leader of the party for over thirty years. In Breitman's view Castroism was a centrist tendency, vacillating between revolution and Stalinist reformism.

Where the majority report sees only an undeviating and remarkable consistency of Cuban policy and practice extending over twenty years...objective analysis I think shows that the Cuban leadership has veered right and left many times....

The majority report praises them for never bending, never buckling, etc. But whose class interests does Castroism serve when it fights against workers' democracy in Cuba, as it has done for twenty years?...When it backed the Kremlin's invasion of Czechoslovakia?...When it supported Torrijos in Panama at the very same time that its troops were fighting those of the imperialists in Africa?

The Barnesite position was only starting to evolve in 1979. Two years later it became clearer to more of the experienced members that this was an adaptation to Castroism and a move away from positions that the party had held for decades. These members were now asking "what was really behind the proposal to characterize Castroism as unquali-

fiedly revolutionary?"

By 1981 the SWP leadership was looking for a bigger home. Successful revolutions in Nicaragua and Grenada had come to power in 1979 and Barnes and company had gotten it into their heads that they could actually be part of a new Castro-led international movement that would dwarf the Fourth International. All they had to do was de-Trotskyize the SWP and FI so that it would be more palatable to Fidel!

There's a bumper sticker that says, "The Bible said it, I believe it, that settles it!" That mentality has no place in the revolutionary movement. Marx told his co-thinkers to "doubt everything," hold nothing as sacred and unchanging. When new developments occur in the world and the old positions don't adequately explain them it becomes necessary to revise or even to replace them. This is true for all sciences: astronomy, physics, chemistry — and scientific socialism.

The minority in the SWP didn't object to anyone daring to criticize and doubt the validity and relevance of Trotskyism. What they objected to was the dishonest and secretive way that it was done. A full discussion by the membership was blocked and the opposition was slandered. Trotskyism wasn't defeated in an open political debate; the new agenda was dishonestly sneaked in.

During the 1981 SWP convention the leadership was asked point-blank if it was considering an abandonment of Trotskyism. The answer was a categorical no. Only a few weeks later it was obvious that this was an outright lie. Not openly, but secretly and in piecemeal fashion, the Barnesites revealed their new political agenda to the party.

Immediately after the convention "Lenin classes" were held with the goal of resurrecting Lenin's pre-1917 theory of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. The Barnesites counterposed this to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution which was now dismissed as irrelevant and even ultraleft. No one had a chance to vote for or against this at the convention, or even to discuss it. Those party members who wanted to study Lenin's theoretical evolution during the 1917 revolution, especially the significance of his struggle in April of that year against the majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee, were denounced as disrupters and ruled out of order.

In November 1981 Doug Jenness, a longtime faithful supporter of Barnes in the party leadership, wrote an article in the party's theoretical journal, the *International Socialist Review*, openly hailing the theory of the democratic dictatorship as the theoretical basis of the Russian Revolution. Protests were made but were rejected by the leadership on the grounds that this was just a "personal" view. When Les Evans, a longtime party leader, wrote a rebuttal article expressing a different "personal" viewpoint (the half-century-old position of our movement) it wasn't pub-

lished. A proposal was made for an internal literary discussion open to the entire membership, a discussion that would have had immense educational value. The Barnesites rejected this proposal. They clearly lacked confidence in an honest clash of ideas. Their attempt to throw overboard the hard-fought foundations of our movement could only succeed if the membership heard one side — theirs.

And so, an adaptation to the weak side of Castroism led to an adaptation to Stalinism. When revolution was successful in Iran in 1979 the party's analysis in the *Militant* began to reflect the idea that the class struggle inside Iran was a secondary factor, while the struggle between imperialism and the Khomeini regime was primary. This was outright plagiarism of the Maoist doctrine of primary and secondary contradictions which was the ideological justification for China's decades of support to neocolonial bourgeois regimes. An opposite conclusion flowed from an understanding of permanent revolution, which saw the struggle for the Iranian socialist revolution as primary because it was the only possible solution to the domination of imperialism. Our support to the military defense of the neocolonial bourgeois regime under imperialist attack — a completely necessary task — is subordinate to our class struggle perspectives as revolutionary Marxists. In Iran these perspectives were:

1. defense and extension of democratic rights;
2. support for the economic struggles of the workers;
3. support for the right of self-determination of the Kurds and the other oppressed nationalities;
4. fight for a thoroughgoing land reform for the peasantry;
5. unequivocal opposition to Iraq's war, including support for an army of independently organized workers and peasants; no confidence in the bourgeois regime's war plans.

The failure to put forward these perspectives disoriented the Iranian Trotskyists, putting them in some cases in the same camp as the counterrevolution. This was a *déjà vu* of the tragedy of the Chinese revolution of 1925–27. The defeat in China was where the Trotskyist critique of the theory of the democratic dictatorship was first elaborated. It has served as a bedrock for our movement internationally ever since. The Barnesites weren't seeking to replace our position with something better but with a doctrine that proved itself to be bankrupt, in China in 1925–27, and many times since.

The political revolution in Poland in 1980 was a graphic confirmation of the validity of the Trotskyist movement's program for the Stalinist workers' states. The question of who would rule, the workers or the bureaucrats, was on the agenda.

As with Iran, the SWP leadership had a "primary and secondary" view of the Polish situation. Poland was in the camp of the workers' states so the emphasis was on the danger of imperialist counterrevolution, not solidarizing with the Polish working class. The SWP abstained from the movement to defend Solidarnosc, claiming that it was led by reactionaries or their dupes. This was an abdication of leadership responsibility. Trotskyists, by their half-century of principled anti-Stalinism, were the legitimate champions of the Polish workers but Barnes and company abandoned the movement of support to the right-wingers and union bureaucrats!

This was also the direct result of adapting to Castroism. In 1968 the biggest single programmatic difference between Castroism and Trotskyism was over the political revolution against Stalinism. Our movement was open and honest about this. We supported the Czech and Slovak workers and students when they said, "Leninism yes, Stalinism no!" Castro on the other hand supported the Kremlin's tanks. In 1968 the *Militant* analyzed the revolution in Czechoslovakia from a Trotskyist perspective, but in 1981 things were explained from a Castroist point of view. Now the *Militant* didn't even mention the phrase "political revolution."

The Barnesites idealized and glossed over the political, theoretical, and organizational weaknesses of the Castro government, such as the absence of socialist democracy in the Cuban CP or Cuban society at large. In a resolution offered to the 1979 World Congress of the FI, Barry Sheppard argued for the SWP that sometimes under conditions of civil war or foreign military intervention "restrictions on the rights to political organization and in some extreme cases even on expression of opinions may well be necessary." By implication this was a defense and excuse for political power in Cuba residing with the one legal party and the one legal faction of that party, Fidel's faction.

This was alien to the spirit of Lenin's party. "The intellectual life of Bolshevism at the very heaviest period of the civil war was boiling like a spring. In all the corridors of the party and the state apparatus, including the army, discussion was raging about everything and especially about military problems" (Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*). The FI majority's resolution on "Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" was in line with this approach.

From late 1981 to 1983, frame-ups and expulsions had a profound effect upon the internal life of the party. This of course was just what the Barnes faction wanted. Not only did they seek to rid themselves of potential opposition supporters but also to poison the atmosphere for any honest discussion of differences. They sought to prejudice the ranks against the views of the opposition before the opposition had a chance to speak for itself.

Nineteen twenty-eight all over again!

Members were kept unaware of this because their knowledge had been restricted to what was happening in their own branch. Such restriction was now the official policy. The May 1983 plenum of the National Committee voted to uphold a number of expulsions but not report these expulsions to the membership! Plenum reports to the branches were thus censored, an unprecedented violation of SWP organizational norms.

"The foundation of party democracy," wrote Trotsky, "is timely and complete information available to all members."

"All talk of party democracy," wrote James P. Cannon, "in the face of suppression on all sides and the wholesale expulsion of comrades for their views is a swindle." This tradition of the SWP was now an impediment to the plans of the Barnesites.

The highest decision-making body of the party was the national convention, to be held at least every two years. The Barnesites decided to postpone the 1983 convention.

The U.S. Trotskyist movement had faced conditions before that weren't very conducive for holding national conventions; extreme harassment and financial deprivation in the 1930s, government imprisonment of the central leadership in 1944, the witch-hunt of the 1950s, yet never had the normal rhythm of party democracy ever been disrupted. "Where there's a will, there's a way." Holding a national convention wasn't merely an organizational/logistical matter, it was first and foremost a political matter, especially in a time of such strong political differences. The reasons for the postponement were clearly a pretext. The goal was to gain more time to demoralize people and get them to leave as well as to drive out any remaining opposition. They wanted to avoid any open discussion of differences at all costs.

The leadership of a Leninist party has a right and a duty to regulate the internal life of the party. But the Barnesites sought to smother the party's internal life. They sought to ban ideological groupings within the party by branding them as undisciplined and disloyal. This practice is not new for Stalinist groups, but it was unheard of for Trotskyists.

"Without temporary ideological groupings," wrote Trotsky, "the ideological life of the party is unthinkable." (*Third International After Lenin*)

"And indeed," he later added, "how could a genuinely revolutionary organization, setting itself the task of overthrowing the world and uniting under its banner the most audacious iconoclasts, fighters and insurgents, live and develop without intellectual conflicts, without groupings and temporary factional formations?" (*Revolution Betrayed*)

In their draft resolution submitted to the August 1983 plenum the leaders of the opposition wrote, "It is, of course, correct to say that under ordinary circumstances it is normal (i.e., a norm) for internal party groupings

to dissolve after the end of a discussion and for new internal groupings to wait until regularly constituted discussion periods. But these are norms, not rigid laws carved in stone; and it could not be otherwise. It is also normal for the party leadership to present its thinking on all major questions to the party as a whole during the course of the regularly constituted discussion period and not wait for the day after the close of the convention to launch a major revision of our basic program. It is this abnormal action by the central party leadership which created the necessity for the reopening of discussion and the pressure for the formation of internal groupings in the party in an abnormal fashion. The adamant refusal of the majority leadership to recognize this fact... demonstrates its complete default as a Leninist leadership."

And so, the Trotskyists were expelled. Some rushed to build a new and improved SWP, while others patiently fought for readmission, discussion, and the theoretical clarification that was a prerequisite for political action. Over eight years later the U.S. Trotskyist movement still hasn't really recovered. Different perspectives after expulsion have led us down different roads. Our predicament is part of the quandary that the rest of the left faces.

Revolutionaries are human; we make mistakes. But it is necessary to put individual and organizational egos aside and learn from those mistakes. The history of the class struggle in this century has shown that theoretical and political mistakes, if left uncorrected, can lead to terrible defeats and suffering. That is why this book is so important. Only by a scrupulously honest discussion of all points of view can we understand and correct ourselves. For many this will be a painfully difficult process. Resigning from a party or being expelled is one thing; making a methodological break with the past is quite another.

Lenin once said, "All members of the party must begin to study, completely dispassionately and with the utmost honesty, first the essence of the differences and second, the course of the dispute in the party.... It is necessary to study both the one and the other, unfailingly demanding the most exact printed documents, open to verification by all sides. Whoever believes things simply on someone else's say-so is a hopeless idiot, to be dismissed with a wave of the hand."

The socialist revolution in the U.S. will require a party of people who think for themselves, who are open-minded to new developments and new ideas, people who don't blindly follow leaders and aren't afraid to "doubt everything." We won't need hand-raisers or "hopeless idiots." We don't have all the right answers, but by struggling to understand our past we gain experience and insight. In this way we will find the right road. The publication of this book is one more step in that direction. □



# Letters

## Michael Zinzun on the Los Angeles Uprising

"This was no riot, it was a rebellion, an uprising of an oppressed people."

Michael Zinzun has lived in the Los Angeles area most of his life, and is a well-known organizer of numerous political events and community action projects. Since 1976, he has led the Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA), and the night the policemen who beat Rodney King were acquitted led a demonstration at the LAPD headquarters.

Four hundred cops were kept at the Parker Center headquarters while South Central erupted in anger, Zinzun told a few dozen Milwaukeeans at the Peace Action Center, 1001 E. Keefe Ave., recently.

Zinzun has a political history not unlike former Milwaukee Alderman Michael McGee; former Black Panther, activist against police brutality, and general hostility to politics-as-usual. "I know how to talk the most shit," he says. The similarities stop there.

He has the special distinction of being a victim of repeated police harassment and attacks — both by the LAPD and by the police in Pasadena, where Zinzun lives. In 1986, while intervening against the beating of another local resident, a flashlight blow shattered the optic nerve in his left eye. He won a \$1.2 million suit against the Pasadena police and city, but still superglues the soles of his shoes. He claims, "I can see clearer now with one eye than I could with two."

While proud of his community, he downplays his own role. The coalition gets all the credit when he claims that the boundaries of the rebellion coincide with the areas where CAPA does its organizing.

He showed an episode of his cable access show, "Message to the Grass Roots," which detailed the case against the LAPD, as well as the officers who beat King. "There's one thing about (the officers' defense) I agree with," he said. "The prosecution kept trying to demonstrate that this was an aberration, and the cops couldn't understand. They said they were following standard procedure."

He didn't come to talk about what happened, however. His focus was on what to do next. He said South Central is now organizing to have a say in its rebuilding.

When Mayor Tom Bradley brought Peter Ueberroth in to supervise the rebuilding, Zinzun was horrified. "We are opposed to him coming in and treating us like we were stocks and bonds," he said.

CAPA has its own rebuilding program. Rather than creating enterprise zones in the

community to give outside entrepreneurs tax breaks to settle there, Zinzun calls for "cooperative zones," where the community itself can democratically decide what to produce in the community.

The unemployed and homeless should be hired at union wages to rebuild the city, he said. Unless the unions are directly involved in the project, new jobs will just be controlled by the "Big Three — McDonald's, Burger King, and Taco Bell."

Zinzun's anger was directed mostly at a new federal program aimed at central cities all over the country (including Madison) — "Operation Weed and Seed."

"The Black community are the weeds, and Quayle is the seed," Zinzun said.

A Justice Department memo outlining the program puts federal prosecutors in charge of trying drug-related and violent offenders in federal court, "where they will be subject to pretrial detention, a speedy trial, and mandatory minimum sentences."

The American Civil Liberties Union of Washington state, in a letter to Seattle's mayor opposing "Weed and Seed," notes: "Included in the program's 'suppression strategy' are so-called street sweeps. Street sweeps always 'sweep' up innocent persons in an attempt to take wrongdoers into custody. A street sweep approach to society's problems transforms our neighborhoods into virtual martial law zones."

Zinzun said CAPA will call a national conference on police abuse in Los Angeles sometime next winter ("a good time to come to Los Angeles," he said). He hopes it will adopt a strategy of demanding independent civilian police review boards across the country to deal with brutality complaints. So far, most review boards do not have their own investigators, or sufficient clout to effectively deal with the problem.

"We want a board with the teeth to chew their asses off, not gum them to death," he said.

Will there be another uprising in the near future? Zinzun said it might take time but watch out for the third strike if the Ueberroth rebuilding plan fails, and if Police Chief Daryl Gates somehow stays on [note: Gates was forced to retire, and the new head of the LAPD is Willie L. Williams, formerly chief cop in Philadelphia].

"If the young men involved in the Denny incident (the white trucker beaten in the rebellion) get life without parole, that could be the last straw," he said.

*Mike McCallister  
Milwaukee, WI*

## Liked Issue No. 100

I'd like to start off by offering my congratulations on your 100th issue. I felt it was an outstanding collection of articles that will be as valuable to refer to years from now as it is today. My only regret is that the graphs within Anwar Shaikh's article are not clearer and perhaps a bit larger.

With the 1992 presidential elections over at last, it goes without saying that except for a few of the faces changing — and Martin Luther King Day finally being approved by referendum here in Arizona — things will generally remain the same, as far as the health and well-being of capitalism is concerned. This capitalist society has seen to it that there is no room for an alternative to its two-party system. Even a candidate with an extra \$60 million to get his message out, not to mention a socialist or other alternative candidate, is looked upon with skepticism thanks to the media and their effect on many people. The lack of a real alternative in this election, however, does not constitute a defeat for socialism any more than the events of the recent past in the former Soviet Union.

I think that as socialists we ought to be more alert to opportunities, especially at times like these. Just the success that Ross Perot had and the sizable increase in voter turnout this year demonstrate a heightened sense of awareness. People have had enough of a minute percentage of the population making decisions that directly affect their lives, usually for the worse. But we know all that. My point is that all of us who consider ourselves revolutionary socialists can take advantage of current events to get our message out. People are looking for alternatives *now*. As time goes by without finding any they become more complacent. Politicians will promise them things and they will wait hopefully for these things to come about because they feel helpless; they don't know what else to do.

Now is the time for socialists to act like the vanguard we hope to be. A lot of the energy we spend fighting among ourselves within the revolutionary socialist movement is negative energy. Let's use our energy positively. Through magazines like BIDOM, pamphlets, newspapers, forums, union work, organizations like Labor Party Advocates, and just plain old individual contact we can take many examples from what has transpired during these elections to show people that capitalism does not have their best interests at heart. This isn't easy. People have been brainwashed for generations with phrases like "government by the people" and "the American dream,"

etc. One example that springs to mind is that as Bush was giving his speech congratulating Clinton on winning the election he pledged Clinton "a smooth transition of power" and promised to support him. There you have it. The power lies in the presidency, as they see it, not with the people.

One more thing. I feel we should take advantage of a lesson no matter where it comes from. I'm speaking of Ross Perot's talent for clarity. In his "infomercials" he was armed with figures, statistics, and information which, when presented in his manner of plain speaking and using graphs, charts, and memorable slogans, gave people something they could sink their teeth into. People need facts to make an informed choice or decision. Rhetoric won't do it. We can't preach *at* people. We are so fortunate to have as examples the achievements of such extraordinary socialists of the past as Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Debs, Cannon, etc. But there are living examples we can use today to reach people in a manner that they can relate to their own lives and turn their feelings of hopelessness and fear for the future into feelings of hope that will create a working class that is a force to be reckoned with.

Lee DeNoyer  
Tucson, Arizona

#### From a Reader in Russia

[Following are major excerpts from a letter sent from St. Petersburg to Marilyn Vogt-Downey and dated July 2, 1992.]

We get your magazine [BIDOM] regularly. Thank you very much indeed! Events in our country are developing quicker than one could imagine. We are entering into a specific Russian capitalism created by Yeltsin and Gaidar. The actions of Yeltsin and other former leaders of the nomenklatura [the privileged officialdom of the Stalinist system] perfectly illustrate the fact that they have never been real communists. They wore the masks of communists and now they have taken them off. There have been no communists in power since the 1920s in our country.

What about the political activity of the population? People are shocked by the new economic situation. There is no use speaking about living standards. There is no standard of living at all. Prices have risen by 40-70 times over those of last year. Salaries have risen by only 5-10 times. Teachers and doctors under "Stalin's socialism" (meaning the entire period since the 1920s) were always among the poorest of the population. But they could exist. Now it has become impossible for them. On the other hand, people are tired of politics, parties, and slogans. They have only one thing in mind: how to survive in the new circumstances while acting individually. They have not yet understood that this is impossible.

The Left is too weak for words (genuine left forces, not Stalinists). There are many groups called parties in Russia but they are not real parties yet. They lack the main thing: a scientific understanding of "what

is to be done." We believe we have to preserve Marxist tradition and try to proclaim our ideas (it is rather difficult now) and prepare for the creation of a genuine Marxist party.

... We would very much like to know whether we can find a way to cooperate... What about this idea?

After 1985 a process of restoring the genuine history of the Bolshevik party began to take place. Now this process has been stopped. In this connection the process of the historical rehabilitation of Trotsky has been stopped too. The publication of his books, "My Life" and others, were very important, but for wide sections of the population Trotsky is still a bogeyman.

We have an idea — create a Trotsky museum in Leningrad. (The Lenin museum at the Marble Palace was closed this February. The Lenin memorial museum at Smolny is preserved under nomenklatura direction.) What about asking all the Trotskyist organizations and groups in different countries to help in the creation of such a museum? It could be the museum of the modern revolutionary movement. The exhibition could reflect all its currents and directions. What do you think about this?...

Natalya, Vladimir, and Konstantin  
"Contemporary Marxist Thought" Alliance

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This book consists of selected documents mostly produced by a political tendency that was organized in the Socialist Workers Party to defend and advance the revolutionary perspectives of Trotskyism. This tendency, which began to develop in the party in 1979, waged a struggle inside the Socialist Workers Party until the expulsion of its adherents in 1984, when they established a new group called the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. Also represented here are oppositionists who became prominent in other groups — Socialist Action and the Fourth International Caucus of Solidarity. Included are materials produced by two of the oldest and most prestigious veterans in the SWP, Tom Kerry and George Breitman. A substantial introductory essay by Frank Lovell, "The Meaning of the Struggle Inside the Socialist Workers Party," provides valuable background information and places the volume in a larger historical perspective.

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**Volume Two:**

***Revolutionary Principles and Working-Class Democracy***

*edited by Paul Le Blanc, 412 pages (1992) — \$12.00*

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This book focuses on the waves of expulsions which hit the Socialist Workers Party from 1981 through 1984. It provides an inspiring record — and reaffirmation — of the revolutionary ideas and commitments of those who were being forced out of the organization to which many had given "the whole of their lives." Also included are: substantial pieces by SWP leaders Jack Barnes and Larry Seigle defending the expulsions; a critique by representatives of the Fourth International; letters and a talk by pioneer Trotskyist James P. Cannon, originally published under the title *Don't Strangle the Party*. A substantial introductory essay by Paul Le Blanc, "Leninism in the United States and the Decline of the Socialist Workers Party," relates the 1981-84 experience to broader questions of "the vanguard party" and Leninism, the history and character of American Trotskyism, the development of the U.S. working class, and the realities of world politics in the 20th century.

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This book consists of eight documents. The longest, written in 1983 by Paul Le Blanc and Dianne Feeley, is entitled "In Defense of Revolutionary Continuity" — a response to SWP leader Jack Barnes's attack on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Also included are: the founding platform of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency; a lengthy 1988 analysis of the SWP by Frank Lovell and Paul Le Blanc; and two major documents produced by the FIT when the Socialist Workers Party formally broke from the Fourth International in 1990. The volume concludes with three documents dealing with the need for unity among revolutionary socialists in the United States.

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