

Information, Education, Discussion

BULLETIN in Defense of Marxism

Published by expelled members of the Socialist Workers Party, Fourth Internationalist Tendency

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BULLETIN in Defense of Marxism, No. 22, September 1985

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The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, founded by members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party because we opposed abandoning the Trotskyist principles and methods on which the SWP was founded and built for more than a half century.

Denied the right, specified in the SWP constitution and by Leninist norms, of a full and free discussion of all programmatic changes, we were subjected first to gag rules and slander and finally to wholesale expulsions. The present leadership has resorted to these bureaucratic methods in order to impose their revisionist political line upon the party without discussion or approval by the membership.

We are now forced to organize and conduct this discussion outside the SWP. Our aim is to encourage discussion and debate within the party by those seeking to defend revolutionary Marxism and to bring about our reinstatement in the party.

We firmly believe that the present leaders of the SWP cannot avoid that discussion through organizational measures and expulsions. The relevant issues will increasingly appear on the agenda as their new course comes into conflict with the reality of the class struggle in the U.S. and around the world.

"All members of the party must begin to study, completely dispassionately and with 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."

—V.I. Lenin, "The Party Crisis," Jan. 19, 1921

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THE SWP'S AUGUST 1985 CONVENTION

CRUCIAL FOR THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY

The SWP convention which is taking place August 10-15 is the third convention in a year. The last convention where minority opinions were expressed and voted on took place in August 1981. The SWP constitution stipulates that conventions must be held at least once every two years, but in 1983 the leadership canceled the convention due that year, and did not schedule another until 1984--after all known or suspected oppositionists and dissidents had been expelled from the party.

At the August 1984 and January 1985 conventions there were no delegates representing any minority positions. All the resolutions presented the positions of the Barnes leadership, and the votes adopting them were unanimous. The August 1985 convention was planned to continue this pattern.

The agenda for the convention proposed by the National Committee is:

1. State of the Farm Movement in the United States and Party Tasks
2. The Fight for Black Liberation Today
3. The State of the Unions and the Party's Industrial Union Fractions
4. Political Resolution: "Revolutionary Perspective and Leninist Continuity in the United States"
5. Organization Reports
6. Election of National Committee.

Reports have been presented in the internal bulletin for the points on the farm movement and the unions. The political resolution is the same one which was discussed and adopted at the last two party conventions, and has already been published in the Spring 1985 issue of New International.

NOT ON THE AGENDA

There is no point on this agenda for the convention delegates to consider the single most important question

facing the party at this time--what to do about the decision of the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International, which upheld the appeal of the expelled party members, and demanding by an overwhelming vote that we be readmitted to the SWP with full membership rights and responsibilities. The SWP convention, as the highest body of the party, has the responsibility to act on this question. The national convention in August 1984 voted to reject the appeals for reinstatement by the expelled. If it could act then, negatively, it can act now, affirmatively.

The convention should act to restore to membership all of the expelled who will pledge to abide by party discipline and majority rule. This would be one of the best party-building steps the convention could take, and it would very likely be popular with most party members, including those who have joined the SWP since the expulsions. It would also undoubtedly raise the party's prestige in the U.S. left generally, by setting a public example of its ability to correct an error instead of clinging to it at all costs.

The world congress decision provides an excellent framework for making this correction. Complying with its decision and readmitting the expelled would be warmly welcomed by the whole International and would undoubtedly restore some of the authority and prestige that the expulsions cost the party in their eyes.

SWP leaders and members who still feel that the expulsions were justified would not have to retract anything. All they would have to do is cite the world congress decision and say, "We obviously did not convince a majority of our world movement that the expulsions were necessary: in deference to their opinions we will comply with the congress decision and leave it to time and further experience to show what course was right." Such an approach would build a big reservoir of good will toward the SWP in the FI.

EFFECTS OF THE PURGE

The results of the expulsions have been quite injurious for the SWP. First of all, the party lost a significant layer of devoted and loyal activist members who could play an important role in expanding its influence in the mass movement and recruiting new members. Those members who remain have been intimidated and are now very cautious about voicing any criticism disliked by the leadership, no matter how well founded and moderate it may be.

SWP DISCUSSION ARTICLES			
For Con- vention of	No. of Bulletins	No. of Articles	No. of Pages
Aug. '81	26	239	921
Aug. '84	11	58	244
Jan. '85	5	25	132
Aug. '85	10	53	223

The party has been distracted, and continues to be distracted, from the work it should be doing in the union, antiwar, women's, Black, and Hispanic movements, because the expulsions were accompanied by the introduction of a siege mentality, which still exists and preoccupies the party with internal matters at the expense of outside work. Along with a large number of members, the party lost a considerable number of sympathizers, who could not see any justification or necessity for expulsion of people they knew to be loyal to the SWP and the FI.

The atmosphere in the party during the latest preconvention discussion is a direct result of the expulsions. This atmosphere is partly conveyed by the

figures showing continued reduction of participation by the membership in comparison with the typical level before the 1982-84 purge--when the members used to feel free to exchange their opinions and were not inhibited about making suggestions and criticisms.

Elsewhere on this page is a table showing the number of discussion bulletins, articles, and pages, printed in the typical year of 1981 and in the three discussion periods of the last year (1984-85). They demonstrate a drastic decline in written discussion by SWP members. The number of discussion articles has fallen from 239 (921 pages) in 1981 to 53 (223 pages) for the August 1985 convention. This year's total is even less than that recorded for the August 1984 convention, which, as already noted, did not take place until after all oppositionists had been expelled.

VIEWS OF THE EXPELLED

The Bulletin in Defense of Marxism has been a vehicle for the participation of expelled members in the present SWP discussion. For the past three issues we have published articles and commentary on the problems facing the convention. This includes the political resolution adopted by the second F.I.T. national conference in May, "Building the Revolutionary Party in the U.S. Today," which appeared in our last issue and is a response to the political resolution presented by the party leadership. The present issue continues with contributions to the discussion on a number of questions.

The closing date for articles for this issue of the Bulletin IDOM was before the opening of the convention itself. In our next issue, Number 23 dated October, we will include reports and analysis of the convention.

August 5, 1985

DIVERGENCES IN THE SWP LEADERSHIP TEAM?

by George Breitman

Something unusual is going on in the top echelons of the Barnes group in the leadership of the SWP. According to Information Bulletin No. 3 (July 1985), disputes have arisen over articles printed recently in the Militant and Intercontinental Press; the Political Committee has discussed differences over these articles; and, in the words of PC spokesperson Steve Clark, the PC "decided on the unusual step of placing sections from the May 30 and June 14 PC minutes in the internal bulletin prior to the convention for the information of the party." (p. 3)

For the last three years the leadership has been clamorous about the need to preserve the "confidentiality" of PC meetings. Prior to being expelled for his oppositional opinions, Frank Lovell was kicked off the PC in 1983 for allegedly breaching PC "confidentiality" when he wrote a letter about a PC meeting (to the members of the NC!). And representatives of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International were barred from NC meetings and national conventions for more than a year (1983-84) because they refused to pledge that they would abide by the newly instituted "confidentiality" norms. But this switch is only one of the unusual aspects of the latest development.

In the May 17 Militant Cindy Jaquith had an article about Reagan's embargo of Nicaragua and in the May 27 IP there was another article on the subject by Doug Jenness and Jaquith. The articles were both a lot like those on Nicaragua that readers of the SWP press have been subjected to for the last three years -- dogmatic, apocalyptic, and pessimistic; on the right side of the barricades, but foolish in some ways.

As a result, say the PC minutes excerpted in IB No. 3, national secretary Jack Barnes went to the PC, criticized the said articles for giving "a wrong line on how to present the U.S. imperialist war drive, and on the situation in Nicaragua," and called for them to be corrected. The excerpts contain only Barnes's views; if anyone presented another view, if anyone spoke in favor

of the Jenness-Jaquith articles, it is not reported in the excerpts. Barnes is not quoted as having mentioned Jenness or Jaquith by name, but Barnes's views must have prevailed, because in the July 22 IP appeared an article signed by Jenness and Jaquith, entitled "Protests can help block invasion of Nicaragua," in which they explicitly retract all the points in their May 27 article which Barnes had criticized and said had to be corrected. It should be added that this July 22 issue of IP went into the mails at the same time as Information Bulletin No. 3, so that SWP members received them around the same time.

Well, there's nothing unusual about newspapers or magazines having to correct errors in fact or analysis, and the above incident wouldn't be worth comment, except perhaps to note an improvement in the SWP press. But there are some special features to this incident, possibly more significant than the political corrections.

The Barnes leadership does not usually act the way it did in this case. Normally, when it thinks a mistake has been made in the press it calls the editors' attention to it in one way or another, sometimes through an informal meeting. It rarely brings such matters up at a PC meeting, and almost never puts them in print, even in PC minutes with their limited circulation. In this case they took it up formally in the PC, they instructed or encouraged Jenness and Jaquith to sign a public correction, and they arranged to inform the whole SWP membership about it by the "unusual step" of printing PC minutes excerpts in the Information Bulletin.

The Barnes group could have had the changes they wanted made in the press without telling the whole party membership that the changes were made by the PC even though they were signed by Jenness and Jaquith. To a certain extent, the latter are discredited and even humiliated by the procedure that was followed. Why? Jenness and Jaquith have always been staunch members of the Barnes group, and it is hard to conceive of them following an independent line. So why did the top leaders think it

necessary to undercut whatever authority Jenness and Jaquith had in the members' eyes? The way this correction was carried out is even more remarkable when we consider that the original article of Jenness and Jaquith contained no ideas which have not been expressed repeatedly -- both in the party press and internally -- over the last few years.

Jenness and Jaquith were not the only leaders held up to criticism in this unusual way. IB No. 3 also quotes from PC minutes where Mary-Alice Waters severely criticizes the coverage and analysis of the Philadelphia bombing and Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition which were printed in the May 24 and May 31 Militants. Her complaint is that these articles "tend (1) to exaggerate the role of and focus our attack on individual capitalist politicians who are Black, such as Mayor Wilson Goode and Jesse Jackson; and (2) to point to the 'illusions' in these individuals by Blacks and other working people as the major obstacle to an adequate working-class response to the policies of the capitalist government." (p.5)

Lack of space prevents discussion here of some of the complex issues raised in Waters's remarks. Anyhow, the relevant point is how she characterizes the Militant's alleged errors, which she lumps together with the criticisms of the Jenness-Jacquith articles made by Barnes at the same PC meeting. "In both cases," she says, "we have dealt with leftist and sectarian political errors or lack of political balance that can lead us to take our main fire off the capitalist class and their state." (p.6)

Leftist and sectarian political errors or lack of political balance -- that is just what many SWP members were expelled for saying about the Barnes group as a whole. So there must be some significance in the fact that some members of the Barnes group, including the editor of the Militant and the editor of Intercontinental Press, are now being blamed, in front of the whole party, for leftist and sectarian deviations. Perhaps the August convention will throw further light on this development.

July 28, 1985

LAST CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO WEISSMAN MEMORIAL FUND

The Fourth Internationalist Tendency launched a George Lavan Weissman Memorial Publishing Fund in May 1985 to honor this exceptional revolutionary by collecting \$10,000 to finance the continued publication of the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism and other F.I.T. literature.

As of August 8 we have received \$6,467 in contributions and \$800 in pledges for a total of \$7,267. The fund campaign will end on Labor Day (Sept. 2), and a final report will be presented in our October issue; this will include donations received through September 10. Please help us to reach our goal.

GEORGE LAVAN WEISSMAN MEMORIAL PUBLICATIONS FUND
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Please make checks payable to George Breitman

WATERS SHARES 'CREDIT' FOR SWP SPLIT WITH FARRELL DOBBS

by Chester Hofla

The political purge of the SWP, planned and carried out by the Barnes group (which calls the purge a "split"), has not turned out to be the glittering success the leadership had predicted. It is true that the purge succeeded in expelling a relatively large number of members (simply because they wanted to maintain principled positions long held by the SWP and the Fourth International on permanent revolution, political revolution, Stalinism, etc.) and that hundreds of others were pressured to resign or drop out.

But instead of strengthening the party, as was promised, the purge weakened it very much. Membership has fallen by half; SWP influence in the mass movements is lower than since the early 1960s; party morale is sagging; the leadership stridently commands the members to "turn outward" at the same time that it floods the members with long fetishistic injunctions on the primordial problem of how to elect a nominating commission at the next convention; and nobody can pretend that this situation will change soon. The groups organized by expelled members, who were supposed to be capitulating to capitalist pressure and would "fade away" once they had been ousted, have held their own or even gained ground. Worst of all, perhaps, is the fact that this year's world congress of the FI rejected the Barnesite fairy tales about "splitters" and "secret factionalists" and upheld the expelled members' appeals for reinstatement in the SWP. In fact, the purge was probably the major single factor contributing to the SWP's isolation and lack of influence at the world congress.

So it is not surprising that the Barnes group now would like to share some of the "credit" for the purge with others. That is obviously one of the many aims of the long report on "Preparing the Election of the National Committee" given by Mary-Alice Waters at the NC meeting in May (see SWP Information Bulletin, No. 2, June 1985).

A principal inspirer of the split, according to Waters's May 1985 version of party history, was ... Farrell Dobbs, national secretary from 1953 to 1972. He allegedly "always" told Waters, Barnes,

and presumably others, as far back as the early 1970s, that "when the party was finally able to begin to break out of the semi-sectarian existence imposed on us by our forced isolation from the labor movement, many of the cadres who would find it hardest to orient themselves politically to the working-class struggles of the 1980s would be those whose concept of union work derived from their experiences in the unions in the 1940s and 1950s. Some would become an obstacle to reknitting our communist continuity back through the Teamsters battles of the 1930s, and to relearning how a party of worker-Bolsheviks acts to lead the vanguard of our class." More than that: Dobbs "always knew" that this split was "inevitable." (p. 10)

Unfortunately, Dobbs died almost two years ago and therefore cannot comment on the role that Waters attributes to him. If he "always" knew and "always" said that a split was coming a dozen years before it came, he never warned the party about this danger in anything he said at any party convention or NC meeting and he never expressed these thoughts in writing. Some members will find it hard to believe that there was such a gap between what Dobbs thought and said to a few people and what he said to the party. Not everyone will accept Waters's word for it, and that is all they have been given.

Whatever Dobbs may or may not have thought in the 1970s about an eventual split, today it is the Barnes group that wants us to think of the purge as "inevitable." Here is how Waters develops the idea:

"Because of the strengths of the party leadership, we made it through the decade of the 1970s and into the 1980s before any section of older cadres tried to claim the mantle of age to justify refusal to be disciplined unless the majority did things their way, supposedly the 'old way.'

"It's important to bear in mind that the split that came to a head in 1982-83 was, in part, a split we had prevented year after year throughout the 1970s as we made the transition [to a younger] leadership and carried out the turn [to industry]. ... We split with a

layer of comrades who did not feel at home, or no longer felt at home [in the kind of proletarian party we set out to construct from our founding more than half a century ago]....

"When some individuals who left the party last year tried to turn it into an 'old timers' revolt, it was too late. The split that Farrell always knew was inevitable could no longer damage the party, because we had made the transition in leadership. We had carried through the turn before the split developed. The 'old timers' scam proved a fiasco, as the older cadres themselves divided and the bulk of the comrades over 50 remained with the party either as members or sympathizers." (pp. 9-10)

There are a number of problems with the way things are presented by Waters. The split in the party took place not over "concepts of union work" derived from the 1940s and '50s; nor over some sort of special privileges claimed by "old timers." The split occurred as a result of programmatic revisions bureaucratically imposed by the Barnes leadership. In addition, the large majority of those purged from the party were not from the older generation. They were younger members, who had been recruited in the 1960s and '70s.

Waters denies that there was "any split along generational lines." This is largely true, but the reason she has to deny it is because she herself has fueled the idea with her many references to the "older cadres" who "no longer felt at home" in a proletarian party, whose split efforts had to be prevented "year after year throughout the 1970s," who "tried to claim the mantle of age" in the 1980s, who "left" the party last year and tried to turn their "leaving" into an "old timers" revolt, etc.

Saying that the split was inevitable for more than ten years is another way of saying that there was little or no significance in the political differences that SWP oppositionists wanted to debate in 1982 and 1983 when the leadership made drastic public changes in party policy without membership discussion or convention decision. The Barnes group, which prohibited discussion of these differences inside the SWP, is at least consistent in minimizing them now.

Splits in a revolutionary party are unavoidable sometimes. But not always. Waters herself claims that split was prevented "year after year throughout the 1970s." Why then couldn't it be prevented in 1983-84? The reason suggested -- the existence of cadres "whose concept of union work derived from their

experiences in the unions in the 1940s and 1950s" -- is ludicrous on the face of it. In addition, such cadres were far fewer in the 1980s, when the purge was carried through, than they were in the 1970s, when split was averted year after year.

The inevitability of split in a revolutionary party can usually be verified in a very simple way. When both sides want to separate and there is no outside force capable of restraining one or both of them, a split usually cannot be prevented. Using this touchstone, let us see what the situation was inside the SWP in the 1980s:

The Barnes group, which says it was guided under Dobbs's tutelage by a sense of the inevitability of a split, decided that it could no longer be prevented, and proceeded to organize the purge. But the other side -- represented by four minority members of the NC, who organized themselves briefly as an Opposition Bloc in the NC before they were purged in 1983 -- denied that a split was necessary or would be progressive and fought for steps to prevent a split. The Barnes group vehemently rejected all such steps and drove ahead to accomplish the split before the opening of the party's next pre-convention discussion. When that discussion began, the members were presented with an accomplished fact -- oppositionists and dissidents were outside the party and anybody inside the party who echoed any of their views could not expect to remain a member for long.

The Barnes group -- and not some vague historic forces or destiny -- bears the responsibility for splitting and badly damaging the SWP. To the extent that a split was inevitable, it became inevitable because of the choices that the Barnes group made in the 1980s. Things would have developed differently, and better for the revolutionary party, if the Barnes group had permitted the members to discuss the proposed changes in party policy, instead of violating the party's traditions and foisting the new positions on the party without discussion. The leadership knew that this would provoke indignation and dissent among the more experienced members, and it provoked them deliberately in order to provide a basis for the purge.

The Waters report should also be understood as an attempt to refute the world congress decision that the purge was unjustified (and therefore not inevitable) and that the oppositionists should be reinstated in the SWP with full membership rights. □

MORE ON THE SWP PROGRAM FOR RADICALIZING FARMERS

by Christine Frank Onasch

Once again, the party ranks have another leadership document on the farm movement to mull over in preparation for this year's convention in August. This latest offering from the SWP National Committee, written by John Gaige and entitled "State of the Farm Movement and Party Tasks" (SWP Information Bulletin No. 1 in 1985), is a long document that is short on program and concrete tasks.

There is little disagreement among Fourth Internationalists in the United States over the general analysis of the capitalist crisis in agriculture or its devastating effect upon small family farmers. The main differences have been over program and party tasks. These have yet to be resolved satisfactorily. Since 1982, the Barnes leadership has developed a few refinements in its analysis of and program for the farmers' struggle which are only a slight improvement but do help to make their position more clear.

It appears that the SWP leadership is less hostile toward farmers' just demands for parity and a moratorium on farm foreclosures than they were two or three years ago, yet they still do not openly and wholeheartedly support them. These slight changes and adjustments have been made, of course, without acknowledgment.

One notable area where an alteration has been made is on the question of saving the family farmer or -- as they put it -- defending the working farmer from capitalist exploitation. At the 1982 Oberlin workshop, Doug Jenness stated very clearly that the downfall of the small producers is inevitable under capitalism and offered no means of reversing this relentless process. No doubt questions have been raised inside the party about this weak-kneed, "we-can't-do-anything-about-it" attitude and party documents have stated at least that the SWP is opposed to the demise of working farmers. The January 1985 political resolution states:

"The working class has a direct stake in the resistance of exploited farmers against this ruinous proletarianization. The larger the number of working farmers who succeed in this

struggle, the stronger will be the worker-farmer alliance, which is essential to the advance toward a socialist revolution in this country. The more solid this alliance, the easier it will be to feed and clothe the population in a socialist United States. And the firmer will be the foundation on which to increase farm output to meet the needs of working people worldwide.

"The goal of communists is not the transformation of exploited independent commodity producers into proletarians, either before or after the revolutionary conquest of power and expropriation of the bourgeoisie." ("Revolutionary Perspective and Leninist Continuity in the United States," New International, Spring 1985, p. 49)

A STEP FORWARD

Although the February 1982 plenum report by Doug Jenness spoke of the need to defend "the exploited farmer from big business and the banks," it also stated that "Our starting point for a working-class farm program is recognizing that capitalist rule is responsible for the plight of exploited, working farmers. No solution is possible short of replacing capitalist rule with a workers' and farmers' government." The most recent plenum report says, "Our starting point is the protection of exploited farming families -- a section of the exploited producers -- from the ravages of capitalism." This is a step forward. What concrete measures will be taken to do that is another matter. The difficulty lies in the party leadership acting on this idea.

The obstacle to doing this is their schematism, a typical example of which is to be found in Doug Jenness's article, "Forging a Fighting Worker-Farmer Alliance: The Answer to the Crisis of Working Farmers": "The revolutionary program for agriculture outlined in this article provides the framework in which the working-class vanguard can raise and effectively fight for a broad range of demands to protect farm workers and exploited farmers from the many effects they suffer from the workings of

the capitalist system. As more and more working farmers become convinced through their own experiences in struggle that capitalism cannot be reformed, they will burst beyond immediate demands such as price supports at 100 percent of parity toward joint action with the labor movement to demand a permanent debt moratorium, an end to the entire rents and mortgages system, and nationalization of the banks and of the food processing and marketing monopolies.

"An uncompromising struggle for these immediate and transitional demands, moreover, will lead increasing numbers of working people to one and the same conclusion -- that the workers and farmers need to forge a fighting alliance to overturn capitalist political rule, establish their own government, and expropriate the ruling families and all their holdings." (New International, Spring 1985, pp. 128-9)

This sounds like a cinch. Unfortunately, the program outlined in the article quoted is only a halfhearted presentation of immediate and transitional demands for farmers. On the question of farm prices Jenness criticizes past efforts of farmers to achieve fair prices through marketing coops which by and large failed because farmers did not receive the support of the labor movement.

Government price supports are no answer because they only benefit the big capitalist farmers. The demand for 100 percent of parity admittedly is a popular one, and according to Jenness, the labor movement should support this and other immediate demands to prevent the ruination of working farmers. He warns, however, that any bipartisan schemes "as a part of a policy for farmers as a whole, would end up giving a profit bonanza to a relatively small number of capitalist farmers at the expense of working farmers." As an alternative, socialists should point to the guaranteed income policy for farmers provided by the Cuban government.

The SWP recognizes the historical experience of farmers raising demands for nationalization of the railroads, grain elevators, and banks in order to reduce the costs of production. Attempts such as consumer coops to reduce the prices of goods and services which farmers need are also noted in the Jenness report. To combat high food prices for consumers and the lie that farmers' demands for a living income are their cause, the SWP leadership correctly calls for price committees elected by independent farmers, formed jointly with

workers organizations and consumer groups, to demand that the food monopolies open their books to public scrutiny. Committees of workers and farmers to examine the books of the big corporations are the answer to show that high prices for farmers are caused by monopoly price fixing, not workers demanding higher wages. This action can "lay the basis for a struggle to press the government to nationalize these big monopolies."

The call for 100 percent of parity, price committees, opening the books, and nationalizations are all correct and should be a prominent part of the party's propaganda campaign in order to help relieve the crisis farmers face and to show the way forward for militant farmers and workers who support their struggle.

Yet in the plenum report by John Gaige, the party ranks are not told how they can raise this program through sales, election campaigns, and forums, what they can do in their unions to build farmer-labor solidarity, how they can take farm issues into the anti-intervention movement linking the war in Central America with the farm crisis and raising the demands for Peace and Parity (Farms Not Arms), or how they can bring the transitional program to farmers and get the farm movement to adopt aspects of it.

ROUTINE, HO-HUM ENCOURAGEMENT

Instead, the branches are routinely encouraged in a ho-hum fashion to carry out a long list of activities such as holding forums on farm issues, doing farm work through their union fractions, traveling to the countryside to meet farm activists, selling copies and subscriptions to the party press, and conducting election campaigns that popularize the connection between the war against Nicaragua and the problems of farmers in this country. In addition, party bookstores should take bundles of The North American Farmer, and comrades should try to recruit exploited farmers, although it is not stated what specifically will be done to attract radicalizing farmers to the party.

The Jenness article states the need for a program that guarantees farm families a decent income and relief from indebtedness, but one has to ask how is the party actively putting forth these demands in the mass movements so that they have a positive impact?

One sometimes gets the feeling that the SWP leadership is still looking toward the moment when farmers make a

qualitative leap in consciousness without having to go through a process of struggle around immediate issues in order to come to anti-capitalist conclusions. For that reason, the Barnes leadership places programmatic emphasis on the workers' and farmers' government and the measures it will take to end the exploitation of farmers. The SWP leadership may fear a struggle for reforms and immediate relief because that would cause farmers to have illusions about capitalism's ability to correct its problems. Consequently it preaches to the party ranks that this is a preparatory period and little can be done at this time in order to diminish comrades' expectations for a continuing radicalization that can be led and influenced at the current stage of the struggle. Supposedly, great battles are ahead, yet little is done to prepare the party (in this preparatory period) to participate in these battles and help lead them.

This has a practical effect on what the party does to present its program, which can come out in a warped and distorted way. The sometimes sloppy and sectarian manner in which party ranks are prepared to do this work could be seen in the Twin Cities around an incident that occurred in the local April 20th coalition. The Twin Cities is considered by the national party leadership to be a model branch in doing farmers support work. Unfortunately, branch comrades did not conduct themselves in a model manner. They came into a meeting of the coalition supposedly representing Groundswell and claimed that that organization would not endorse the march on Washington unless the demand for Peace and Parity -- along with the popular sentiment to save the family farm -- was

included in the official coalition literature. As it later turned out Groundswell was completely misrepresented by the SWP and was willing to endorse the march without their demands in the literature.

The SWP was apparently adapting to conservative elements in Groundswell that wanted an excuse not to support the action. The party handed this ultimatum to the coalition after nearly 80 individual and organizational endorsements had been obtained around four clearly established demands which did not include farm issues. Other members of the coalition felt it was incorrect to add a new demand that had never been agreed upon by everyone only weeks before the demonstration was to take place. They argued that such an action violated the general principles of building a united front.

Fortunately, things were eventually straightened out with the leaders of Groundswell. A special leaflet was issued in support of farmers; farmers' demands were placed on the Minnesota contingent banner; and representatives were scheduled to speak in Washington at the rallies. It is doubtful whether SWP members ever realized the disruptive role the party played in this whole affair which caused a drain on the efforts of the coalition.

So much for putting Peace and Parity into effect. There is room, obviously, for considerable improvement in the application of the party's agrarian program. Hopefully, the party ranks will see this and take corrective action at or after the coming convention in Oberlin.

July 1985

TROTSKY ON DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Dialectics and materialism are the basic elements in the Marxist cognition of the world. But this does not mean at all that they can be applied to any sphere of knowledge, like an ever-ready master key. Dialectics cannot be imposed upon facts; it has to be deduced from facts, from their nature and development. Only painstaking work on a vast amount of material enabled Marx to advance the dialectical system of economics to the conception of value as social labor. Marx's historical works were constructed in the same way, and even his newspaper articles likewise. Dialectical materialism can be applied to new

spheres of knowledge only by mastering them from within. The purging of bourgeois science presupposes a mastery of bourgeois science. You will get nowhere with sweeping criticism or bald commands. Learning and application here go hand in hand with critical reworking. We have the method, but there is enough work for generations to do.

--From Leon Trotsky's 1926 article, "Culture and Socialism," Problems of Everyday Life and Other Writings on Culture and Science, Monad Press, 1977, p. 233

SWP LEADER EXPLAINS RETREAT ON FALL ACTION PROPOSAL

by Stuart Brown

SWP Information Bulletin No. 3 in 1985, dated July, contains a number of excerpts from minutes of SWP Political Committee meetings held on May 30 and June 14. The unusual step of publishing these for the information of the entire party was taken, according to the introduction to the bulletin, because there were a number of questions on which "it is not possible to prepare more extensive articles or reports."

Among the items covered is a report by Thabo on "Perspectives for Antiwar Coalition Actions." In this report, Thabo attempts to explain the reasons for the shift in position by the SWP concerning the necessity for the national April Actions Coalition (the organization that initiated the marches which took place on April 20 in Washington D.C. and other cities) to call for nationally coordinated local demonstrations in the fall.

After April 20 the SWP strongly urged the national coalition to take responsibility for calling another round of demonstrations in the fall. Articles in the Militant repeatedly pointed to the need for such actions. At a meeting of the national steering committee of the April Actions Coalition held on May 30, the representative of the Young Socialist Alliance was one of two representatives of national organizations (the other was the delegate from the Continuations Committee of the Emergency National Conference Against U.S. Intervention in Central America/the Caribbean) to vote in favor of calling nationally coordinated local demonstrations in the fall.

Then, shortly after this meeting of the national coalition--where the opposition to this perspective of most of the established national April Actions Coalition leaders became evident--the YSA and SWP changed their position. At the June 29 meeting of the national steering committee they voted against the motion for fall actions.

Thabo explains: "We largely stood apart from these other forces at the [May 30] meeting, even though the Administrative Committee proposal actually presented an excellent framework for coordinated fall actions by local coalitions,

and even a perspective for a spring 1986 national demonstration. We also made the error of not approaching this proposal objectively, on its face, instead of reading into it some unspoken motive by its sponsors to undermine the coalition and prevent fall actions."

Thabo continued by explaining that the task is "to help organize the kind of united actions in the streets that April 20 indicated are possible today, and that open up the possibilities in the working-class movement and the unions that we began to take advantage of in building April 20.

"That can only be done by starting with the coalition of forces that made possible the success of the April 20 actions; that's where the authority lies -- and should lie -- to build ongoing actions."

The arguments presented by Thabo might seem logical and reasonable to someone who has had little real experience in the actual development of the April 20 demonstrations and the subsequent discussions within the national and local coalitions, and who is completely unfamiliar with the strategic disagreements which actually underlie the dispute about calling a fall action. These strategic disagreements are what will determine whether the proposal finally adopted by the national steering committee--with the support of the SWP--will provide "an excellent framework for coordinated fall actions by local coalitions" as Thabo asserts, or will in fact undermine the building of a united movement. The actual development of events has already shed some light on this matter.

Thabo argues as if the dispute within the April Actions Coalition was a simple disagreement over the best way to build a united mass movement in the streets against Reagan's war policies. In fact, however, the real debate is over whether to undertake that project at all, or to put the primary focus on such things as civil disobedience, lobbying, and working within the Democratic Party.

The forces which called the April 20 Action did so with the greatest initial reluctance. Twice during the course

of building it they proposed to call it off--on the grounds that there was too little support. This sort of pessimistic assessment could not have been the result of any objective reading of the mood of the American people or the response which the call for the demonstration was actually generating. It reflected, instead, the subjective hesitations over a mass action perspective which these leaders have traditionally felt. The main national organizations which called April 20 have generally followed a different line in building the movement.

Nevertheless, because a call for the demonstration had actually been issued, and building work was taking place in many localities, it was not possible for the reluctant national leaders to call off the action. There was too much outraged protest at the idea. But after the demonstration was over, the hesitations of the April Actions leaders concerning a mass action perspective came to the fore again.

Using the same arguments they had raised earlier--that the time wasn't propitious for another national mobilization, that the national organization was too weak, etc.--they argued against calling fall actions. Instead they adopted a motion to transform themselves from a coalition into a network, to simply share information, and to support actions already called by other forces for the fall.

Does this provide "an excellent framework for coordinated fall actions by local coalitions," as Thabo asserts? The fact is that none of the fall actions endorsed by the national steering committee provides both a mass action focus and a central demand in opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America. Yet these two elements are essential for a "framework for coordinated fall actions by local coalitions" which revolutionary Marxists could wholeheartedly endorse.

The demonstrations included in the fall calendar are not being planned or organized by the national coalition or by local coalitions. No matter how worthy they may be in and of themselves, they do not provide the basis for local coalitions to stay together. The groups and activists involved in building April 20 do not need the local coalitions to build these fall demonstrations, they can simply join whatever committees are building the specific action on a local scale that they are interested in.

In fact, the actual results of the national April Actions decision has been the effective dissolution of local co-

alitions (in places like New York and Boston) or decisions to place them in mothballs to await plans for the spring of 1985 (see letter by Evelyn Sell in this issue of the Bulletin IDOM regarding Los Angeles). In no city where the national decision for the local coalitions to refrain from calling a local action has been implemented has this resulted in the strengthening of activity by the local coalition.

There are exceptions to the decline of local coalitions. They have occurred in the few cities -- Cleveland, Minneapolis-St. Paul -- where a decision has been made to go ahead with local fall actions despite the lack of a coordinated national call. This battle -- to continue to build real united front coalitions in cities across the country which can unite the broadest forces in mass action against the war plans of the U.S. government--will continue over the summer in many cities. It is a battle much more likely to be won if the SWP will throw its forces onto the proper side, instead of retreating in the name of keeping together "the coalition of forces that built April 20."

It is certainly important to keep the coalition together if this is possible. But it must be done on the basis of a mass action, U.S. Hands Off Central America perspective. We stress the necessary political basis of the coalition from the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism, because it is no less important than the question of unity. Yet this side of the formula is completely missing from Thabo's report.

SLANDERS AGAINST THE ENC

Part of Thabo's report contains what can only be characterized as a deliberate repetition of slanderous accusations made against the Second Emergency National Conference Against U.S. Intervention in Central America/the Caribbean by those opposed to a mass action perspective within the movement as a whole. Thabo asserts: "The forces that have called this conference are following a deadend sectarian course, counterposing themselves and their conference to the actual coalition of forces that built the April 20 actions around the country....We want nothing to do with the efforts by its organizers to come up with a 'fall date' to counterpose to those already called and that they intend to use as 'leverage' in bargaining with the Peace, Jobs and Justice Coalition."

The SWP leadership should know that these charges are completely false. Far

from counterposing itself to the coalition of forces that built the April 20 actions, supporters of the ENC were some of the best builders of these coalitions--on both a national and local level. In many cities they initiated and played leading roles in the local coalitions.

The resolutions adopted by the Second Emergency National Conference made no pretense of speaking for the movement as a whole, but simply adopted proposals for fall actions to be taken to the national steering committee of the April Actions Coalition. (Thabo attended this conference and is well aware of what happened there--though it occurred after his report to the PC. To our knowledge no effort has been made to correct the erroneous information previously presented.)

Finally, it was not the forces from the ENC who "counterposed" the idea of nationally coordinated fall actions called by the authoritative national coalition to the calendar of events proposed by the Administrative Committee. Supporters of the ENC at the June 29 meeting voted for the Administrative Committee's proposals. It was supporters of the Administrative Committee who insisted that these things were counterposed, and voted against the proposal for calling fall demonstrations.

The history of the struggle to build a broad united front movement in this country in opposition to the government's war policies demonstrates that it will be absolutely essential to consciously and actively organize the portion of that movement that understands the programmatic basis for unity--mass action, U.S. hands off--and is able to fight for it in a principled manner. Organizing this wing is not counterposed to the absolute necessity of joining with broader forces in order to build an effective movement. This is something the SWP used to understand.

It is this combined task--fighting for unity of the broader movement while at the same time fighting for a correct political outlook--that the ENC is attempting to advance, and the fact that there are not yet extremely broad forces which understand and agree with this project does not make it any less essential. There is an important vanguard layer, especially from the trade union movement but also from other areas, which can already be involved in this

fight. Laying a political and organizational groundwork now can be decisive for the future evolution of the mass movement against the war policies of the U.S. government.

APRIL 26, 1986

According to Thabo's report, significant weight was given by the SWP leadership to the April Actions Coalition's call for a national mobilization in the spring of 1986. This is certainly important. But it is an error to believe that this vote means a demonstration will actually take place, or that the character of the demonstration--which has so far been left indeterminate--will advance an independent movement.

Just as with April 20 itself, where the simple call for the demonstration did not guarantee that one would actually occur, it is quite likely that the spring 1986 action will also depend on the outcome of a struggle within the coalition. We can expect that this battle will include the political program which the national coalition should follow--assuming it does continue in existence and does proceed to build another spring action.

The fact is that most of those organizations which make up the national Administrative Committee--whose authority is now clearly established--believe that the movement should orient itself toward the Jesse Jackson "rainbow coalition" wing of the Democratic Party. By the spring of 1986, the pressures on these elements resulting from the November 1986 congressional elections may well mean an effort to orient away from any kind of truly independent mass action and to downplay issues--like Central America--which might prove embarrassing to liberal Democrats.

All of this points, once again, toward the need for the revolutionary party in the U.S. today to chart an independent course, developing its own perspectives within the movement, and refusing to compromise its principled stand in the interest of some ephemeral "unity." We must pursue unity, to be sure, but only a unity which does not compromise the interests of working people in the United States and of our fellow workers and other oppressed in Central America, the Caribbean, South Africa, and throughout the world.

July 29, 1985

'SINGLE-ISSUE' VERSUS 'MULTI-ISSUE' COALITIONS

by Tom Barrett

There is a point you raise in your letter to which I would like to respond -- not because what you say is wrong, so much as it leaves out a lot. You say, "The whole idea is to bring together a broad coalition that can attack the general problems facing the country today -- and put the emphasis on the links between 'foreign policy' issues and bread and butter issues at home.

"I think that only by building a coalition around a program that attack[s] these issues as a whole, rather than focusing exclusively on any one of them, be it Central America, arms, or the attack on living standards at home, can we win. Of course, such a coalition will have tactical targets, which will change as conditions do. If such a coalition had existed in the spring, a natural focus would have been South Africa. But the key task is to bring a broad coalition into being. No single-issue group has the strength to succeed."

The debate on "single-issue" versus "multi-issue" coalitions has been going on for over fifteen years now. To a great extent, I think it has always been a false debate, masking the real issues around which activists have disagreed. It is a false debate because in fact neither a "single-issue" or "multi-issue" strategy is a winning strategy -- by itself. In my opinion both kinds of organizations are necessary: organizations based around a complete analysis of society and a program for changing it and organizations whose focus is more limited -- to one or a few related questions. You are right: no single-issue group has the strength to succeed, at least not beyond its limited goals. However, no group based around a complete program is able to achieve the kind of broad unity needed to win the battles with which we are now faced. What is required is that people work together

[This is excerpted from a letter written to an activist in the Nuclear Freeze movement. Tom Barrett is a supporter of the Emergency National Council Against U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean, and a trade unionist active in the anti-intervention movement in New Jersey.]

where there is need for united action and agreement on what should be done.

It seems sensible enough, but it is amazing how little it is understood: the reason organizations exist is to do something as a group. Outside of religion there is not much use in organizations which get together just because of common beliefs--if they are not willing to act on them. ... The thing that defines an organization is its goal. What does it set out to do? How does it propose to go about doing it?

Different political groups have different answers to those questions, based on how they see society. Some think that our basic social structure is good, but somehow the wrong people have gotten into positions of power. They propose to put new people into those same positions. Others think that the social structure is rotten and that the whole thing needs to be replaced with a new one. Still others see no reason to be concerned with society as a whole, but with only the sector of society to which they belong -- be it a particular trade in the working class, a racial minority, women or something else. We can--and should--debate our different analyses and try to convince each other. However, ... even among people who have the same basic approach to social change there can be profound disagreement--in 1968 I can remember the anger I felt as a McCarthy volunteer toward Robert Kennedy for what I considered splitting the peace vote in the Democratic primaries. And we are all-too-aware of the deep disagreements among groups who claim to be working for revolution. These problems are not going to go away any time soon.

Meanwhile, there is a war on. "Our" government is supporting forces carrying out violence against the peasants and workers in both Nicaragua and El Salvador. Of course, the threat of the direct involvement of U.S. troops is one which should be taken seriously, but even if that doesn't happen poor people are being killed in both those countries by North American bullets. Reagan's cheap victory in Grenada prompted many to conclude that the "Vietnam syndrome" is dead, that the U.S. government will no

longer be afraid to intervene militarily where it sees fit. We all have the responsibility to see that any attempt by Washington to impose its will either by direct force or by proxy will meet resistance at home. We have an obligation to put aside our differences on other things and work together where we can agree. Does that mean only Central America? Well, no, it does not necessarily mean that at all. My opinion is that there was sufficiently broad agreement around the four demands of April 20 -- U.S. Out of Central America, Money for Jobs Not War, End U.S. Support to Apartheid, and End the Nuclear Arms Race -- to organize an effective action coalition. The April 20 demonstrations were certainly a success, and a success on which we have an obligation to build.

When I look back on my own experience, I really can't recall a coalition which was purely "single-issue" -- even those which were attacked for being just that. In 1970, for example, in the aftermath of the Jordanian civil war, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam added "No U.S. Troops to the Mideast" to its demands. The National Peace Action Coalition, of which the SMC was a part, included opposition to the draft and to nuclear testing as part of its program, and in its local actions of November 1971 did not hesitate to include a strong protest against the Amchitka nuclear test, which occurred on the same day as the demonstrations. In some areas local coalitions ran into trouble from the right-wing Libertarian Party, which accused them of not being "truly single issue." Maybe they weren't entirely, but the important thing is that they were able to focus on issues related to war and take action.

ACTION

Of course, a few things have changed in the decade since the Vietnam war ended. One of the things which has impressed me the most has been the willingness of much broader sections of the labor movement to take action around social issues than was the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Working people in greater numbers are making the connection between the economic insecurity they -- I should say we -- face every day and the government's mad preoccupation with preparations for war. I think that is a connection which the anti-intervention movement has to make and around which activists can easily unite. The important thing is to maintain focus so that we can mobilize people in action....

Even when we do decide to put aside our differences and work together, we still face the thorny question of what are we going to do? What are the most effective ways to act against Washington's war drive in Central America and its complicity with the white supremacist regime in South Africa? Here we have to take a serious, long-range look at what we have accomplished so far and what remains to be done.

It is clear to me that the people who have nothing to gain and everything to lose from war are the people who can be relied on to fight to end it, that is working people, especially Black and Hispanic working people. They are the ones who would be forced into combat. They actually have -- and, to a certain extent, know they have -- more in common with their so-called "enemies," whether in Latin America or Africa, than with those ordering them to put their lives on the line. As for the politicians -- the April 20 demonstration paid a quick dividend when Congress cut off funds to the contras; however, we saw how quickly they changed their tune. Furthermore, I, for one, could not tell any difference between Mondale's and Reagan's positions on Central America or South Africa.

We have to recognize, however, that those of us who belong to activist groups of any kind are very small in number compared to the thousands who can and must be organized to oppose Washington's war drive. Most of the people we need to reach have been too busy living day to day, finding jobs and working at them, taking care of children, trying to make the most of too little money, and so forth, to come to any analysis of society or to gain a lot of experience in political activity. Think about it: next time you're discussing Central America with fellow activists notice how often the word "imperialist" is used. Now, in fact, what the U.S. is doing is imperialistic. But that is simply not going to be understood by most of the people we're trying to reach, at least not yet. Another example: I personally support the Nicaraguan revolution and hope to see a similar revolution in El Salvador. I think that revolution has to be defended. But a lot of working people who don't want to see us involved in a war in Central America have not come to that conclusion. We have to move beyond simply organizing those who are already political activists. If I can borrow Mother Jones magazine's masthead slogan, we need an antiwar coalition "for the rest of us."

That not only has an effect on the issues around which we can organize, but

what kind of action we take. What I think of lobbying should be clear -- I don't think it's very useful. Civil disobedience and economic boycotts can be effective in the right conditions. The Montgomery bus boycott, the UFW grape boycott, and the sit-ins and Freedom Rides are good examples. Another good example is the Sanctuary Movement, which is actually saving Central American lives. However, in most cases right now, I don't think that these kinds of actions are enough. They do not sufficiently reach beyond the already committed political people and involve working people in great numbers. People are not in general ready to break the law and get arrested over Central America and South Africa, and they should not be written off as "not committed enough" for that reason. By organizing and involving people in mass demonstrations like April 20 they may become convinced to take more effective action -- such as the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's refusal to load ships bound for El Salvador. As people become willing to take action like that, of course, the politicians start to understand that the cost of war is getting too high....

THE 'REAL' DEBATE

All this is fairly simple logic, and no one can really argue with it. But that isn't really what the argument is about. The real debate, actually, is whether or not to build mass demonstrations which can involve thousands of people, demonstrations which begin to raise the question of the working class's real power. I certainly don't have a problem with that, and I don't think you do, either, but those who don't want the existing political system threatened do have a problem with it. I'm thinking specifically of the liberal politicians. They are scared to death of any political movement which is beyond their control, and they will do anything to derail it. I, for one, am not opposed to elected officials participating in demonstrations for peace in Central America or against apartheid or nuclear weapons or any other good reason to demonstrate. However, I am opposed to ... giving up direct action in favor of electing these gentlemen and ladies to office. I am also opposed to their having any disproportionate influence in policy-making in the movements against war in Central America or against apartheid.

What that means in reality is that ... when it comes time to march in the

streets what we have to do is broaden the numbers of people involved in decision-making as well. It's good to involve union officials. It's better to involve union rank-and-file members in addition. It's good that radical and activist organizations participate in coalitions. It's better that people who have no titles and are only representing themselves also participate. And the way I see it their opinions are no less valid or important.

Whether a coalition is organized around a single issue or several is not really important. The important thing is that it seek to bring in people who are not activists and get them to be active. We can't go writing people off who aren't committed enough to get arrested, who aren't sure they support the Sandinistas, or who don't yet understand the connections among racism, sexism, unemployment, and Washington's foreign policy. Central America and South Africa are trouble spots in the world which are on people's minds, and they have to be addressed now. I don't think very many people who oppose U.S. involvement in Central America are in favor of apartheid, so I don't see a problem in building action around both issues, but if we try to get too far ahead of where people's consciousness is we're going to run into trouble.

Building coalitions is not good just in itself. What's good is getting large numbers to take action. The most effective way to organize that is through coalitions in which decisions are democratic, in which membership is non-exclusionary, and in which action around one or a few clearly defined demands is the focus. That is the perspective of the Emergency National Council Against Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean, which was formed last June in Minneapolis. I think we should all participate in it. □

**George Lavan Weissman's
Last Three Articles
85c**

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF REVOLUTIONARY THEORY

by Paul Le Blanc

In a defense of the revisionist course of the Socialist Workers Party leadership, Doug Jenness has asserted that the Communist Manifesto provided "the general approach of the Bolsheviks in Russia. It wasn't new or original, but it did the job." To demonstrate this, he asks us to substitute "Russia" for "Germany" in a passage from the Manifesto. This operation appears to give a certain plausibility to his assertion -- if we remain on a somewhat generic, abstract, ahistorical level. Crass revisionism is thus draped in the robe of ultraorthodoxy. This is good. It helps to make us suspicious of ultra-orthodoxy, which is alien to Marxism.

In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels describe capitalism in this way: "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.... Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air."

In spite of this, an approach relevant in 1847 is just as relevant in 1917 and in our own time as well, Doug Jenness assures us. In a sense, of course, he is right. The "general approach" of the Bolsheviks was fully consistent with that of the Communist Manifesto. On the other hand, there was a 70-year interval in which all that was solid melted into air -- the transformation several times over of the world capitalist economy, of world politics, of the shape and character of the working class, of the labor movement, etc. And in the 67 years since 1917, similar transformations have occurred. Although the "general approach" of Marxism has remained constant throughout, many specifics have necessarily changed -- and quantity has, not surprisingly, been transformed into quality. Marxism in 1917 was necessarily

different from Marxism in 1847, and it must necessarily be different in our own time. Without the development of "new and original" components, Marxism would be dead. Jenness's ultraorthodoxy -- which is a polemical device to denigrate certain troublesome contributions by Leon Trotsky -- is a shallow piece of business. If taken seriously, it leads nowhere except to sectarian irrelevance.

A "utilitarian" Marxism utilized to justify policies arrived at through pragmatic considerations, a diluted Marxism in which critical-minded and revolutionary perspectives are quietly sloughed off as "impractical," and a static Marxism which is not utilized to encompass new realities -- all are revisionist in the sense that they diverge fundamentally from the methodology of Karl Marx. Doug Jenness and his co-thinkers have the distinction of developing such a three-dimensional revisionism.

Trotsky insisted that revolutionary perspectives must be based on "facts throwing light on the real situation and not of general formulas that might be applied equally well to Paris or Honolulu." He might have added: not general formulas that might be applied equally well to various countries in 1847, 1917, or 1984. Marxism must be somewhat better than that.

1. REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM

In 1923, Leon Trotsky pointed out that "Marxism is a method of historical analysis, of political orientation, and not a mass of decisions prepared in advance. Leninism is the application of this method in the conditions of an exceptional historical epoch." We can add that Trotskyism was, first of all, a further application of Marxism (and thus Leninism) in the period extending from the late 1920s to 1940. What Trotsky says about Marxism and Leninism obviously applies to Trotskyism as well.

"The simple appeal to tradition," Trotsky continued, "never decided anything. As a matter of fact, with each new turn, it is not a question of searching in tradition and discovering there a non-existing reply, but of

profiting from all the experience of the party to find by oneself a new solution suitable to the situation and, by doing so, enriching tradition." This can be illustrated quite simply. By the 1880s, the basic works of Marx and Engels had been completed. Yet by the 1930s there had been several fundamental transformations in the world capitalist economy, in the size and composition of the working class, and in the character of the labor and socialist movements -- transformations in some ways as profound as those in the 50-year period from the 1830s to the 1880s. (The same might be said of the 50-year period encompassing 1930-1980.) If revolutionary theory had failed to transform itself, through its most serious-minded partisans such as Luxemburg, Lenin, and Trotsky, then it would have become increasingly irrelevant.

"It may," Trotsky emphasized, "even be put more sharply: Leninism consists in being courageously free from conservative retrospection, from being bound by precedent, purely formal references and quotations." Theory -- the systematic elaboration of past lessons -- must be used as a tool to help us develop an in-depth understanding of new lessons, new realities, new possibilities, and new tasks. If instead it is used as a catalogue of ready-made schemas which "frees" us from the difficult responsibility of developing such an in-depth understanding, of developing our own new solutions suitable to our situation, then it changes from revolutionary theory into "orthodox" dogma.

"Leninism cannot be conceived of without theoretical breadth, without a critical analysis of the material bases of the political process," Trotsky wrote. Theoretical breadth implies several things. One is a refusal to confine oneself to standard frameworks and interpretations, an inclination toward freshness, creativity, audacity. It also implies a refusal to confine oneself to the works of safely (and narrowly) "orthodox" theorists. If we examine Lenin's bibliography for his 1914 essay "Karl Marx," for example, we see that he refers us to a rich variety of works not only by Marx and Engels, but by many different (including faithful, innovative, critical, and hostile) interpreters and commentators. For his work on imperialism, he drew not simply from the "classic" texts, but also from analyses by a liberal non-Marxist (Hobson) and a Marxist theorist tainted with revisionism and reformism (Hilferding), as well as empirical data.

No less important is the necessity

of integrating the experience of one's own city, region, and country in the present period with the experience of the workers, the oppressed, and revolutionary militants throughout the world and placing this all in historical context.

Theoretical breadth also suggests an inclination to go beyond strictly "utilitarian" justifications of current, and often pragmatically arrived-at, party policies. (In fact, the policies of the revolutionary party should flow from the audacious but serious-minded application of revolutionary theory.) It also indicates an inclination to view questions historically and in a manner which traces the interrelationship between politics, social forces, and economic developments. This leads to what Trotsky referred to as the necessity of

A comprehensive study of Trotsky's perspectives on the revolutionary party, its purpose, and its organizational norms.



LEON TROTSKY
and the
ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES
of the
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

By Dianne Feeley, Paul Le Blanc, and Tom Twiss

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"a critical analysis of the material bases of the political process." Certainly Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia and Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism are examples of this. Our analyses of the political process, including the burning question of "what to do next," must be grounded in up-to-date and searching examinations

of present-day capitalism, of the character and experience of the working class, etc.

Trotsky went on to say: "The weapon of Marxian investigation must be constantly sharpened and applied. It is precisely in this that tradition consists, and not in the substitution of a formal reference or of an accidental quotation. Least of all can Leninism be reconciled with ideological superficiality and theoretical slovenliness." We cannot afford the luxury of sectarian arrogance parading as knowledge. This coincides with the well-known comment of Frederick Engels: "The materialist conception of history has a lot of them [dangerous friends] nowadays, to whom it serves as an excuse for not studying history. Just as Marx used to say, commenting on the French 'Marxists' of the late seventies: 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist.'" The dogmatized, flattened-out, superficial understanding of Marxist theory, wherever it exists, must be replaced by a more modest, and therefore more thoroughgoing and critical-minded coming-to-grips with our theoretical heritage. More than this, that theoretical heritage must be deepened and enriched by utilizing (and developing) it in the investigation of the realities of our own time.

Nor can this be allowed to degenerate into abstract or academic contemplation, for as Trotsky pointed out: "Leninism is, first of all, realism, the highest qualitative and quantitative appreciation of reality, from the standpoint of revolutionary action." This gives a cutting-edge and vibrancy to our investigation of reality and is the spark, the fire, and the glow of our theoretical work.

2. CHALLENGES FOR U.S. MARXISTS

In the United States, we are at the threshold of a new era. It is an era which holds immense promise for the flowering of a powerful mass movement for socialism. U.S. capitalism has entered a period of crisis -- both internally and internationally -- which it seeks to surmount, as it has surmounted previous crises, through a process of fundamental restructuring. Such periods generate mass radicalizations, and they also open up possibilities for revolutionary breakthroughs or nonrevolutionary restabilization. What the revolutionary left does or fails to do could be decisive in determining the outcome.

The crisis involves a worldwide economic downturn, a declining profit rate in certain basic industries, in-

creasing inflation and unemployment, cutbacks in previously won gains of the working class, the rise of working class discontent in "advanced" countries, and revolutionary ferment and upsurges in "underdeveloped" countries. The restabilization effort may involve (in addition to containment or even rollback drives against world revolution) a major restructuring of the capitalist economy, in the United States and on a world scale. Capitalist investment in heavy industry in the U.S. has declined, in the face of more profitable opportunities overseas and in the "high tech"/"soft-ware"/service sectors of the U.S. economy. One consequence of this internationalization process taking place in "third world" countries, which in Central America has helped to generate a revolutionary upheaval. In the United States, on the other hand, the strongest sectors of the American working class are being profoundly weakened.

The powerful industrial unions, established in a wave of radicalization and militancy in the depression decade of the 1930s, were conservatized during the post-World War II affluence of 1945 to 1972, but they were also able to establish relatively high living standards for their members. Now they find themselves increasingly without leverage. This is not simply because they have been disoriented by decades of class-collaborationism at the bargaining table and in politics, and not simply because they have been burdened by a top-heavy, shortsighted, bureaucratic apparatus. More than this, their membership base is being decimated by massive long-term layoffs, and the industries in which they have been rooted are in some cases being transformed so radically as to wipe out the bases of union power that rested on a now obsolete occupational structure.

A restructuring of the capitalist economy has taken place periodically in the history of the U.S., enhancing the power and profits of the wealthiest capitalists while at the same time having a profoundly disruptive and tragic impact for the majority of working people. Such developments have always generated massive upsurges of militancy and radicalism, which so far the ruling class has been able to defeat by mixtures of outright repression, playing on deep divisions among workers and the oppressed, and offering palliatives to the working class in the form of social reforms. It is an open question, however, whether the capitalists will be in

a position in the coming period to achieve such a stabilization.

Traditionally, the procapitalist Democratic Party has been able to maintain a mass voting base by posing as the champion of working people and oppressed groups. Over the past two decades, however, that voting base has been seriously eroded. Increasing numbers of people have seen that, despite the lofty rhetoric, the Democrats no less than the Republicans are committed to "solutions" which have little to offer the working class. This has, unfortunately, not led to independent political action but rather to cynicism and despair. It has also led to Republican victories in 1972, 1980, and 1984. The reformist leaderships of the unions and various social movements are committed to reversing this trend by 1) blaming all problems on Reagan and the Republicans, 2) suggesting that the Democrats can solve the problems, 3) asserting that workers and the oppressed can have a profound impact on national politics by registering to vote and giving back to the Democratic Party the necessary edge on election day to bring that party a decisive victory.

In 1984, the bulk of the U.S. labor movement and social movements, along with almost the entire left (the most significant exception being those influenced by Trotskyism), were drawn into the new reformist campaign to "dump Reagan" by working for Mondale. Although they have little to show for their efforts, most seem resistant to the idea that those efforts were not fruitful. Nor are they inclined to acknowledge the fact that, had Mondale won, the working class could have looked forward to being slapped across the face by the president only three times a week instead of five or six, and that Mondale would have simply given U.S. imperialism a more liberal image. Such prospects will never inspire a mass rejection of "Reaganism" but will bring dishonor to any leftist who endorses them. The fact remains that these elements, along with important sections of the working class, will continue to harbor illusions about the Democratic Party at least up through the 1988 presidential elections. Another good dose of Democratic Party rule may be necessary before enough working people will gain an adequate education on the need for a labor party.

On the other hand, even before that education is completed, the pressure of objective reality will continue to have a radicalizing impact. The unfolding of a "two-tier" economy in which the living standards of the middle-

income working class are relentlessly pushed down, the general assaults on the rights and dignity of working people and oppressed groups, and the devastating effects of an imperialist foreign policy provide the basis for the growth of struggles which cannot be contained within the present electoral arena. In general, we are entering a period in which significant advances in working class consciousness and radicalization are likely.

Another major factor feeding into such developments is the effect of earlier radicalization in the 1960s and early '70s. Many thousands of the 1960s youth generation were engaged in serious radical activity, and many millions were in one way or another affected by the social movements of that period. While some have de-radicalized during the "big chill" of the 1970s, when many romantic illusions withered away, the ferment of ideas and practical experience, the impact of the civil rights struggles, Vietnam, the new wave of feminism, and Watergate, left a significant residue in the consciousness of that generation. Some of these activists, seasoned with the passage of a decade (although in some cases having new reformist illusions), are active in the unions and social movements of our own time. This provides for the upcoming struggles a body of valuable experience that was largely absent when the "new left" took shape in the 1960s. Not the least of this reality is the fact that socialist and Marxist-influenced scholarship and analysis, often of high quality, have much greater influence in our colleges

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and intellectual life than at any time in the history of the United States.

Many left-of-center intellectuals and activists are under the influence of Social-Democratic and Stalinist popular-front orientations. If such an orientation dominates the upcoming radicalization, a reformist derailment will be the result, and a capitalist restabilization will be achieved -- though only as the prelude to a downward slide into barbarism brought on by imperialist war, perhaps militarist absolutism, perhaps nuclear holocaust. It is essential that the influence of a revolutionary Marxist current be advanced in order to ensure that the radicalization itself can move forward to a revolutionary socialist conclusion.

3. MARXIST EDUCATION

Our only hope of making a decisive contribution to a leftward shift in American political life will be to link impressive practical work in the class struggle, and in the intimately related struggles against imperialist war and all forms of oppression, with the kind of revolutionary Marxism that Trotsky described in 1923.

All of our theoretical work must be infused, first of all, with a spirit of the most serious engagement in the ongoing liberation struggles of the workers and the oppressed in the United States and throughout the world. This must not only be in the realm of ideas and words, but in actual, practical, ongoing work.

At the same time, however, our theoretical work must rise above the level of immediate struggles, in order to illuminate and guide such struggles.

An obvious first step, but really an ongoing task, is to deepen our understanding of Marxism -- the actual analyses and methodology of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, etc. This is especially important because of the combined neglect and distortions introduced by the Barnes regime in the educational work of the Socialist Workers Party. Of course, there are valuable lessons to be learned from Barnes on Marxist education. These lessons can be summed up under the heading of "how not to conduct Marxist education." This is true despite the lip service sometimes given to healthy educational attitudes. In describing the Lenin class series, for example, Steve Clark quite correctly observed: "Education is not indoctrination. Education is not teaching the party's line to the membership." In practice, however, things worked out differently.

Under Barnes there developed what some have called a "trickle-down" method of education. A select group of "insiders" dominated the theoretical turf, read (presumably) the Great Books, and interpreted it all for us in articles and talks. There was a tendency to look with thinly veiled amusement and contempt upon others who ventured into this realm. The rank and file was certainly encouraged to study the "basics," but not for the purpose of attaining the theoretical self-confidence necessary for genuine give-and-take with the "insiders."

There was also a "think correct thoughts" approach. A "correct understanding" was assumed to exist, an orthodoxy which the leadership was presumably steeped in. The purpose of education was to be able to give the "right answers" to the list of questions, made up in advance, that was distributed to members of one or another party class series. Often comrades would be afraid to ask their own questions because they might be "the wrong questions" -- demonstrating their ignorance, their failure to "get it," perhaps even (God forbid) a hidden disagreement with or deviation from "the correct understanding." When such prefabricated study questions passed out of fashion during the recent Lenin class series, there was still the understanding that every question had a "correct" answer which had been discovered by the party leadership. Proper education still was seen as a process of coming to understand and agree with the "correct answers." If so-called Marxist education becomes an exercise in how not to think critically, something is seriously wrong. The term "critical thinkers" became, under the Barnes regime, a humorous put-down. Marx, on the other hand, commanded: "Doubt everything."

A magnificent example of the "what to think" approach was offered by Jack Barnes himself. "If you're a Leninist," he told us, "what interests you most is not how much of an advance was marked by Bolshevism, but the extent to which the major problems of party-building and its connections to mass work are already there in Marx and Engels." The obvious corollary to this is: "Watch out! If you discover that somehow this doesn't interest you most, then you're not a Leninist." And if you happen to disagree with Barnes's interpretation, then you're really in bad shape.

There was also the unspoken commandment: "Marx-Engels-Lenin are never wrong." (Before 1980, of course, Trotsky was also part of this holy constellation.) Let us once again turn to Jack

Barnes: "Olga says she also intends to answer the frame-up of Marx and Engels around the national question that appears in many articles and books by 'experts'. Somehow the idea has gained currency that Marx and Engels were wrong on the national question and that was later turned around by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. But Lenin always said the opposite...." The logical consequence of this stance was the ludicrous defense by Olga Rodriguez and others of the U.S. war of conquest against Mexico in the 1840s. And the fact remains, despite Lenin's serious-minded determination to stress his continuity with Marx and Engels, that what he said on the national question was different (and more up-to-date, more consistent, better). We needn't rely on "experts." It's there for all to see in the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. What Barnes is resisting, and what we must embrace, is a conception of Marxism as an open and evolving body of thought which is accessible to mortals -- as opposed to a gift from the gods to theoretical high priests who will tell the rest of us what and how to think.

Tucked into the above Barnes quote, in his jibe against "experts," is another commonplace of the Barnes educational method: "We have nothing to learn from anybody else. We eat our Marx-Engels-Lenin raw." The stress on the importance of actually reading Marx, Engels, and Lenin is certainly correct. Nothing can take the place of that if one wants to grasp their ideas. But there is much of value in the biographies, historical accounts, and commentaries which help place the texts in context. If we use these as a supplement instead of a substitute, and if we ap-

proach them with critical minds, then the works of the much maligned "experts" (whether they embrace Marxism or are critical of it) can help us to develop a better understanding of our theory. This was certainly the approach of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, and others who dared to be critical-minded.

The Bolshevik party was not an ideological monolith. Different interpretations of Marx's thought jostled each other throughout its history before the triumph of Stalin. Lenin had many opinionated comrades -- Bogdanov, Riazanov, Bukharin, Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Kollontai, Preobrazhensky, Pokrovsky, and many more who contributed to a theoretical ferment that made the Bolshevik party great. That is a worthy model.

4. OUR WORK

The basic Marxist education that we carry on must be seen, however, not as an end in itself, but as a means for developing Marxism in our own time, finding new solutions suitable to the present situation. In very important ways, the world we live in is similar to that of the 1880s and the 1930s, but in very important ways it is different. In what ways is it similar and different, and what does this mean for our future work? We cannot afford to ignore such questions, nor can we afford superficial answers.

In what follows, I'd like to suggest a few areas in which we should apply and develop our theory. There are many more problems that require serious theoretical work than are indicated here, however.

What are the lessons to be learned

PERMANENT REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA

by Paul Le Blanc

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— From the preface by George Breitman.

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from the history of American capitalism and of the American working class? What is the answer to the old question "why is there no mass socialist movement in the U.S.?" Can we develop a careful historical materialist analysis which answers the old question in a way that will help us make it no longer true? If we are serious about our Marxism, this is precisely what we must do. And more.

What is the character of the present crisis of capitalism? Is the U.S. economy actually being "de-industrialized," as many analysts claim, and if so then what does this mean for the strategy and tactics of the class struggle in the coming period? After all, if such a de-industrialization is taking place, then no matter how hard certain sectors of the working class fight against concessions and class-collaboration (and no matter how successful union bureaucrats are in persuading the rank and file to accept concessions), the jobs of these sectors -- and the unions which cover those jobs -- will be wiped out. Is that what we're up against? If so, how extensive is it and what does it mean for our own work? To call for a sliding scale of wages and hours in such a case may be somewhat beside the point, and nationalizing under workers' control a hopelessly obsolete and inefficient plant may also not be an adequate solution. We must develop transitional demands based on current realities and present levels of consciousness; otherwise, our transitional demands will rust over like the devastated mills of the Mon Valley.

It may be that the de-industrialization thesis is overstated or fundamentally false, as some comrades suggest. If so, we have a responsibility to document that, to analyze what is happening, and to develop a practical revolutionary perspective on how the workers can actually deal with what is happening.

In Russia at a certain point the simple words "peace, bread, and land" became powerful transitional demands -- unrealizable under the actually existing capitalist system, but expressing the conscious will of the masses, something that they were fully prepared to fight for. What are similar transitional demands in the United States for our own time? To answer this question, we must have a serious Marxist analysis of the economy; of present-day political dynamics; and of the structure and composition and consciousness of the working class, in all of its occupational, regional, cultural, and ideological diversity. The effectiveness of the Bolsheviks' transitional strategy, tactics,

and demands to a large degree flowed from their development of detailed and concrete Marxist analyses of these and related questions. (Some of this theoretical work is reflected in the bibliographies at the end of each section of the Bolshevik classic The ABC of Communism by Bukharin and Preobrazhensky.) We must follow their example, thereby further developing and enriching Marxism.

This entire contribution has tended to focus on the application of Marxism to "the American question." If we are unable to tackle that, we are failing to assume our primary responsibility to the world socialist revolution -- advancing the revolutionary struggle in our own country. At the same time, of course, we recognize that it is an integral part of an international process. We can't understand it if we fail to have some sense of the present-day realities and dynamics of the class struggle on a world scale. This too is a realm in which we must do serious theoretical work. And here, also, there are new developments over the past five decades -- and some much more recent -- which can be comprehended not by attempting to force them into old frameworks, but only by extending our theoretical framework to encompass new phenomena, enriching our theoretical heritage with vital new lessons. Marxism must not be reverently embalmed, it must continue to live and grow through interaction with complex and changing reality. □

SOURCES OF QUOTATIONS

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POSITIVE USES OF THE FORMULA "WORKERS' AND FARMERS' GOVERNMENT"

by Frank Lovell

The question of the "workers' and farmers' government" with its long history in the revolutionary Marxist movement was introduced by the Barnes faction in the Socialist Workers Party early in its campaign against Trotskyism, shortly after the 1981 SWP convention. The purpose, we now know, was to smuggle into the SWP's program and principles adaptations to the Stalinist "two-stage" theory of revolution under the guise of a Bolshevik slogan.

The Russian Bolsheviks called for a workers' and peasants' government in their agitation against Kerensky's Provisional Government in 1917. After the October revolution it became a popular designation of the new government, used interchangeably with "dictatorship of the proletariat." Trotsky endorsed the popular formulation. He recognized it as a useful weapon in the struggle to transform society from capitalism to socialism, provided the concept is properly understood and the slogan is given a revolutionary content.

When Trotsky drafted the central programmatic document of the Fourth International in 1938, The Transitional Program, he wrote: "The slogan, 'workers' and farmers' government,' is thus acceptable to us only in the sense that it had in 1917 with the Bolsheviks, i.e., as an anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist slogan, but in no case in that 'democratic' sense which later the epigones gave it, transforming it from a bridge to socialist revolution into the chief barrier upon its path."

STALINIST USAGE

The Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union distorted the meaning of this slogan and used it in their campaign to slander and discredit Trotsky

Previous contributions to this continuing discussion of the workers' and farmers' government concept appeared in articles by Steve Bloom and Paul Le Blanc in Nos. 17 (April) and 18 (May) of this bulletin. Readers are invited to submit articles or letters expressing their views.

in 1923. Sixty years later the Barnes sycophants are trying to duplicate the original distortion, for different reasons, to suit their own shortsighted purposes. It is therefore necessary to sort out the different uses that are being made of the slogan and the concept in the ideological struggle being waged by the Barnesite revisionists in the Fourth International.

At a meeting of the International Executive Committee of the FI in May 1982 a document, "For a Workers' and Farmers' Government in the United States," was submitted by Barnes with the announcement that it was intended for pre-congress discussion and would be brought to a vote at the forthcoming world congress of the FI. This document had already been adopted by the SWP National Committee at its March 1982 plenum. The Barnesite leadership of the SWP later asserted that this question overshadowed all others and demanded that it be a separate point on the congress agenda with top priority.

When the twice-postponed national convention of the SWP was finally held in August 1984 the special importance and esoteric interpretation attached to the workers' and farmers' government concept by the party's factional leadership was revealed and endorsed. The SWP constitution was changed to read that the purpose of the party is "to educate and organize the working class in order to establish a workers' and farmers' government, which will abolish capitalism in the United States and join in the worldwide struggle for socialism." This version replaced the previous one that said the purpose of the party was to educate and organize the working class "for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a workers government to achieve socialism." The change is subtle and the difference requires explanation. The fact is that there is no substantive difference because both formulations declare the goal of the party to be the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. The difference is in the implied manner in which this will be accomplished, and the implication is subject to interpretation. The question

is why the Barnesites attach such inordinate importance to this change.

Larry Seigle, writing for the Barnesites (SWP Information Bulletin No. 2, May 1984) said, "A major factor leading to the NC proposal to change the party's governmental slogan was our deepening attention to and involvement in struggles of exploited farmers in the United States." This was an obvious

A pamphlet about an issue debated in the FI between its 1979 and 1985 congresses

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dodge. The real reason was far removed from Seigle's "major factor."

Barnes reported to the 1984 SWP convention that a more correct understanding of the revolutionary process was involved, that the capitalist state can be replaced only in stages and the first stage is necessarily a popular government based on an alliance of workers and farmers. His report (published in New International, Spring 1985) stated that all successful anticapitalist revolutions, beginning with the October revolution in Russia in 1917, shows that the first stage is always a workers' and farmers' government which then proceeds to reorganize the economy and establish a workers' state. Trotsky was quoted on the insuperable problems of "War Communism" and the necessary retreat in 1922 by the Bolsheviks to the restoration of capitalist modes of production under the New Economic Policy.

This distended presentation of the workers' and farmers' government concept to describe the historically necessary

stages in the revolutionary transfer of power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat had several purposes: 1) to give the impression that the reporter was well versed in Marxist theory by quoting Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and contemporaries who describe themselves as "Marxist-Leninists"; 2) to define the present government of Nicaragua and to praise the Sandinista leaders for their profound understanding of the laws of historical development; 3) by implication to misrepresent and denigrate Trotsky and the theory of permanent revolution; and 4) to remind the heads of state in Cuba, and other "revolutionists of action," that the Barnes faction in control of the SWP should no longer be called "Trotskyites."

From the start of the anti-Trotsky campaign in the SWP the question of the governmental slogan, "For a Workers' and Farmers' Government," was linked to Lenin's prerevolutionary formula, "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry." In this way, by returning to the early prerevolutionary debates in the Russian Social Democratic Party of the 1903-1912 period, the Barnesites sought to counterpose the methodology of Lenin to that of Trotsky.

In the history of the SWP and the Fourth International the workers' and farmers' government concept has served useful educational and theoretical purposes. In 1938 when Trotsky included a section on this concept in his draft of the Transitional Program, explaining its formulation and use in the early days of the Communist International, his purpose was to emphasize the necessary alliance of workers and peasants upon which the soviet power rested initially.

Later when the Stalinist bureaucracy began to undermine the soviets it introduced the workers' and farmers' government in a different way, as the governmental form for Lenin's outmoded and discarded formula, "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." The purpose then, as today, was to create a "Trotskyite" smokescreen to hide the revisionism of Marxist theory.

HANSEN'S AND CANNON'S VIEWS

In the early post-World War II period the workers' and farmers' government concept, as it had been explained by Trotsky, was used by Joseph Hansen (and also Cannon to a lesser extent) to try and understand and explain the successful colonial revolutions, beginning with the Chinese. Trotsky had written that a workers' and farmers' government could take power under exceptional cir-

cumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.) without a revolutionary working class party in the leadership. He foresaw the possibility that "petty-bourgeois parties including the Stalinists may go further than they themselves wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie." This happened in China in 1949.

At a meeting of the SWP National Committee in 1955 Cannon spoke about the course of the Chinese revolution which by that time had thrown off the imperialist yoke, expropriated the capitalists, and established a badly deformed workers' state (SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 17, No. 1, 1956). He said, "The slogan of the workers and peasants government, formulated by Trotsky in the Transitional Program . . . was conceived as a transitional regime that could lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat, but not as the dictatorship of the proletariat itself. That could be realized only if and when the program would turn revolutionary and the expropriation of the capitalists would be put on the order of the day." That happened in China, too.


Joseph Hansen used this concept of the workers' and farmers' government as a concomitant of the theory of permanent revolution to explain the events in Cuba. He said the test of the Cuban revolution was passed in the political struggle within the government during August-October 1960, "when industries were nationalized throughout the entire island." That was when the Cubans rid themselves of U.S. economic controls and established the dictatorship of the proletariat, a qualitatively different kind of workers' and farmers' government than had existed before the expropriations. This transformation was of short duration, as Trotsky had believed it would be.

The workers' and farmers' government as understood by Hansen was more than an episode or brief stage in the revolutionary process. It was a facet of the broader transitional concept of permanent revolution which revealed theoretically that the democratic aspirations of the bourgeois revolution can be achieved by colonial peoples in the

epoch of imperialism only through the victory of the working class in the struggle for socialist goals. The validity of this theory, formulated by Trotsky in 1905, was confirmed by history first in Russia and again in China, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and most recently in Nicaragua.

The curiously twisted version of the "workers' and farmers' government" formula that was introduced by the Barnes faction in 1982 finally came before the 1985 world congress of the FI. It had circulated in the sections of the FI for almost three years during the pre-congress discussion, and by the time of the congress was generally recognized as a fraud.

The point on the congress agenda where it was debated was "Permanent Revolution/Workers' and Farmers' Government." Barnes did not choose to present his thesis. The substitute reporter for the Barnes faction forgot all about what was claimed to be the latest contribution to Marxist theory inherent in this thesis. He confined his remarks to the importance of an alliance of workers and farmers in the coming American revolution. The importance of such an alliance was accepted unanimously by the congress, but the thesis was rejected overwhelmingly. □



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WHAT IS AN 'ANTI-IMPERIALIST' REVOLUTION?

'Intercontinental Press' on Ghana and Burkina

by Steve Bloom

Anyone who has been following the recent coverage by Ernest Harsch in Intercontinental Press (some of which has also appeared in the Militant) of Ghana and Burkina-Faso has had to cope with a perplexing array of terminological characterizations. Events in these countries have been variably described with formulas like, "anti-imperialist upsurge," "revolutionary process," and "popular revolution." The leaders of the Ghanaian government have been consistently referred to as "a group of anti-imperialist and left-wing soldiers and political activists." The governments in Ghana and Burkina are contrasted with "pro-imperialist regimes in neighboring countries."

What does this mean? What is this thing called an "anti-imperialist upsurge" and simultaneously a "popular revolution" led by "a group of anti-imperialist soldiers"? What is the class character of the anti-imperialist revolution? How does it relate to the bourgeois-democratic revolution? The proletarian revolution? These are important, even basic, questions. Harsch and the SWP leave them unanswered, an ambiguity which is completely unacceptable for an organization claiming to be the best defenders of Leninism in the Fourth International today.

Our curiosity concerning the precise scientific meaning of Harsch's approach is aroused even more because of the use of similar terminology in the SWP's writings after the Iranian revolution which overthrew the shah. The Militant and IP consistently referred to the Khomeini government in Iran as an "anti-imperialist regime." In that case the characterization of "anti-imperialist" was a serious error. It was being used to describe a reactionary and counter-revolutionary bourgeois government which happened to come into conflict with U.S. imperialism as a result of the role played by Khomeini in the overthrow of the shah and the continuing upsurge of the Iranian masses which Khomeini had to accommodate himself to.

Calling such a government "anti-imperialist" constituted an impermissible expression of political confidence in it. The SWP leadership formally ac-

knowledged this in a report by Cindy Jaquith approved by the February-March 1982 SWP National Committee plenum, and pledged themselves to make a correction. (Although this specific terminology did disappear after this, the substance of the party's political analysis of the Khomeini regime remained unaltered, and serious political errors continued to be committed.)

In the cases of Ghana and Burkina the situation is not the same as in Iran. The governments which have emerged in these countries do not appear to be actively pursuing a counterrevolutionary course. On the contrary, they are, on the whole, encouraging the development of the mass movement and basing themselves on it. Harsch's use of the term "anti-imperialist" in this case has not been applied to the government directly, but to the ideological perspectives of individual leaders and the objectives of the masses.

Nevertheless, all is not well, and we are impelled to ask some questions. Why does Harsch choose to describe things in such a vague and imprecise way? Why doesn't he explain what he is talking about, what he thinks is happening in class terms? Why is there little or no analysis of how the revolutions in Burkina and Ghana can move forward? The answer is not hard to figure out. Harsch cannot clearly define the class nature of his "anti-imperialist" "popular revolution" without revealing the utter bankruptcy of the SWP's current theoretical retreat from revolutionary Marxism and from the theory of permanent revolution.

In fact, though Harsch's characterizations of developments in Ghana and Burkina do not constitute the same kind of major political error as the similar terminological approach to the Iranian government, they nevertheless reflect an identical process of fuzzy and imprecise thinking which allowed the errors on Iran to occur. Harsch's articles reflect a theoretical methodology which is completely alien to revolutionary Marxism.

What the current revolutionary developments in Ghana and Burkina-Faso illustrate once again is that there can be no theoretical or programmatic dis-

inction between an anti-imperialist revolution and a proletarian revolution. If these are not one and the same thing, then there can be no revolution at all or, more precisely, the attempt at "anti-imperialist" revolution either will be crushed or will degenerate into a renewed dependence on the very imperialist system it set out to combat.

Harsch and the press of the SWP cannot acknowledge this basic fact of life, because to do so confirms the fundamental kernel of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution--a theory the present leadership of the party has been trying to deny since 1981. But they also cannot go so far as to assert some other character for their "anti-imperialist" "popular revolution"--because to do that would require going all the way over to the Stalinist-Menshevik theory of stages--something the SWP leadership has also been careful to avoid up to now. The result? Ernest Harsch and the party press say nothing. They introduce a new category, the "anti-imperialist upsurge," and (to be sure) point out some of its contradictions. But they cannot give us any class definition of this phenomenon or of its characteristics without falling into a hopeless theoretical muddle.

SORTING THINGS OUT

If we can accept the factual reality of events in these countries as presented by Harsch, and we see no reason to doubt his accuracy on this level, they reflect a pattern of revolution not at all typical of the "Bolshevik model." That will no doubt be confusing to some, but it is important not to simply look on the surface of things--we must examine their substance. I won't take the time here to outline the course of developments as documented by Harsch, but would urge those interested to read his articles, which began to appear in IP in early April. Also relevant to the development of his and the SWP's analysis is Harsch's article in the July International Socialist Review, "Nkrumah: his legacy for Ghana's struggle against imperialism."

It would seem that in both of these African nations--though with some variation--a similar process of political ferment was set in motion by a governmental takeover conducted by lower-ranking military officers. Such a governmental change, in and of itself, would not constitute a revolution of any kind as the term is generally understood by the Marxist movement. What makes events in both of these countries impor-

tant for us is that the change in government initiated by a wing of the military was followed by a genuine and deep-going radicalization and mobilization of the oppressed masses. This, indeed, is the stuff of revolutions.

The answer to the question of whether or not a genuine revolutionary process is taking place in Ghana and Burkina depends not fundamentally on the actions of the military officers who engineered the change in the government, but on the actions of the masses of workers and farmers who have mobilized independently in defense of their own interests. It is also, of course, important to try to determine the actual relationship of the new government to this upsurge of the masses. We can then draw a rounded picture of the overall revolutionary process.

The typical Leninist model of revolution is quite different from what has happened here. Ordinarily we see a change in the makeup of governmental power flowing from and dependent on an insurrectionary uprising of the masses. Without this kind of mass movement a governmental change has no substance. But as with any theoretical model it is important to understand this as a general rule, something to serve as a guide to conscious revolutionaries, rather than as an absolute requirement which must be fulfilled in all cases.

Of course, the reasons for understanding and maintaining this general expectation about the revolutionary process should be obvious. A revolutionary vanguard which commits a putschist error and attempts to take power over the heads of the masses, when they are not prepared for such action, will simply find itself isolated and unable to hold onto power against the inevitable reaction of the old ruling classes (even if it should initially succeed in taking power, or a piece of it). Nevertheless, events in at least one country, Grenada, have demonstrated that it is possible for a scenario to occur whereby revolutionary forces first seize power, and immediately proceed to rally the masses in revolutionary self-defense of the new regime.

The fact that such an occurrence is possible--as represented by Grenada--does not mean that the revolutionary Marxist movement should throw away its hard-won theoretical appreciation of the relationship between the mass movement and the vanguard party. It simply means that we can acknowledge life to be full of far more variations and complexities than theory will ever anticipate. That is a general truth relating to every

science, and probably most of all to the science of revolutionary Marxism. The fact that Grenada varied so dramatically from our expectations made it difficult at first to see what was happening there--that a process of proletarian revolution, spearheaded by the Bishop government, was taking place. But with Grenada under our belt it should be easier to look objectively at Ghana and Burkina.

It should be clear at least that a process of revolutionary self-organization of the masses has begun since, and as a direct result of, the governmental takeovers led by Jerry Rawlings in Ghana and Thomas Sankara in Burkina. It is also clear that the new governments are, at least in part, outwardly sympathetic toward the aspirations of the masses and supportive of their efforts to organize and fight for their demands.

A CONTRADICTIONARY REALITY

But the situation remains contradictory. While the new governments seem to be sympathetic to the masses, they also do not yet have a program which is capable of actually breaking the hold of imperialism and moving these revolutions forward. Here we come to the element which is missing from Harsch's analysis, but which is the most crucial one for us. Harsch acknowledges some of the contradictions, but he hesitates to draw the obvious and necessary conclusions.

The contrast between what is needed and what exists is most striking in Ghana. Here the new regime continues to rest on a wing of the old neocolonial military apparatus, which remains fundamentally unchanged. Simultaneously there has been the formation of independent mass organizations, "People's Defense Committees," which provide the possibility of establishing an alternative. In Burkina the process of replacing the old army with a new one based on the mobilized masses is far more advanced.

Both leaderships suffer from a limited ideological perspective. Again, there are important differences. Sankara, and the other forces which are allied with his regime, locate themselves consciously within the communist tradition of the workers' movement. Like many others who do so, they accept some of the distortions of that tradition which have resulted from the domination of the international workers' movement by Stalinism for several decades. This includes the concept of a stage of "democratic and popular" revolution which is counterposed to the socialist revolution. The ideology of the central Gha-

naian leadership seems to be much more closely akin to a classical revolutionary nationalist perspective.

Although an extensive land reform is being implemented in Burkina, no such program yet exists in Ghana, and there have also been no decisive moves by the new governments in either country to break out of the crippling cycle of dependence on the world imperialist marketplace. Respect for bourgeois property rights has not been violated, though some steps have been taken to curb the worst abuses of corruption and profiteering which plague most neocolonial economies.

Without beginning to take genuine measures against the prerogatives of the domestic bourgeoisie and the imperialists, the Ghanaian and Burkinabe revolutions cannot advance. They will end up either with the new governments compromising their "anti-imperialism" in the interests of "practicality," or with the overthrow of the new governments in the manner of Algeria or Chile.

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MASSES

We can assume in all of this that the support given by Rawlings and Sankara to the aspirations of the workers and farmers is genuine. This may turn out not to be true--we have seen more than one case of cynical manipulation of the mass movement by "leftist" neocolonial bourgeois regimes utilizing populist and even Marxist rhetoric in attempting to consolidate their own power. But there is no reason to assume any lack of sincerity at this point on the part of the main leaderships in Ghana and Burkina.

At the same time we have also seen no lack of well-meaning leaders in the semicolonial world, who fail to meet the test of events because they never comprehend the need to rely solely on the revolutionary masses--on the independent mobilized power of the workers and poor farmers--and that by doing so they will inevitably arouse the hostility of all the imperialist countries and the entire native bourgeoisie. It is necessary to "go all the way" with the workers and oppressed masses; there can be no middle ground.

This conflict--between the workers and poor farmers and the old ruling classes--can be postponed (and it is in the interests of the revolution to postpone it at times), but it cannot be avoided. It frequently cannot even be postponed for long, and in any event preparations for it are decisive. There is a fine line between attempting to put off such a definitive confrontation

while the strength of the revolutionary forces is mobilized to its fullest extent, and attempting to avoid it altogether through unprincipled compromise. But that distinction is a crucial one for the future of any revolution, and the ability to prepare for and meet this challenge is one of the great tests of any leadership that succeeds in conquering power in the name of advancing the interests of the workers and farmers.

Whether the governments in Ghana and Burkina are able to meet this test successfully remains to be seen. It is certainly possible that they will go through a political evolution as a result of their experiences which will lead to the necessary practical conclusions. This will require committing themselves to the path of the socialist transformation of society. We have seen such an evolution of revolutionary leaderships before. But it is also possible that these revolutions will simply lead to another variant of a bourgeois neo-colonial government as the upsurge of the masses loses steam and the leaders proceed to compromise, or that Sankara and Rawlings will be overthrown. These are the only available choices.

As Che Guevara said in drawing his conclusions from the experience of the Cuban revolution, "Either socialist revolution or a caricature of revolution." We might translate these words as "either permanent revolution, or no revolution at all." This is the obvious conclusion which any revolutionary Marxist must draw from reading the facts of events in Burkina and Ghana as reported by Harsch.

Harsch himself does not and cannot explain this. As a result he fails completely at one of the fundamental tasks of revolutionary Marxist journalism. His writing is purely descriptive. He can describe some of the different points of view of individuals within the governments; he discusses the outlooks of various groups within the population as a whole; he presents the objective problems facing the fight for economic independence from imperialism. But it is as if each fact, each point of view, is simply being placed in a museum case for examination.

From the point of view of getting facts about the situation we can certainly find such reporting useful. But the job of a revolutionary is not simply to describe what is happening in the world. Our objective is to help enrich our understanding of what path must be pursued in order to change the world. Toward this goal Harsch offers nothing.

The SWP has abandoned the historical lessons of the permanent revolution, which alone provides a guide to advancing the revolution in the colonial and semicolonial world. Harsch, then, is left without a compass. He is unable to locate himself within the revolutionary process unfolding in Ghana and Burkina, and as a consequence finds himself unable to provide any sort of guide for others.

August 8, 1985

CRISIS IN THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

An Answer to Jack Barnes

BY CLIFF CONNER

F.I.T., P. O. Box 1947
New York, N.Y. 10009

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P.O. Box 1947, New York, N.Y. 10009

CLASS STRUGGLE IN IRAN

'Revolutionary' Government Versus Working Class

by David Williams

Events in Iran since the revolution of 1979 have created dilemma after dilemma for leftists who prefer slogans and schemas to serious analysis. The revolution's contradictory results have inspired two opposite responses -- both equally erroneous. The first response is to see the many negative consequences of Khomeini's coming to power and to reject the Iranian revolution, and even, in some cases, revolution in general. The second response is to put blinders on and to ignore the openly counterrevolutionary character of the current government, to ignore the distinctions between the regime of Khomeini and the movement which brought him to power, and to ignore reality itself -- the terrible repression, the death and destruction brought about by the seemingly endless war with Iraq, and the wretched economic conditions faced by the Iranian workers, peasants, and urban poor.

The leadership of the Socialist Workers Party in the United States, together with the international faction which agrees with it, is guilty of the second response. While it claims not to support Khomeini its "opposition" is qualified at best. It says and does nothing to defend the anti-Shah revolutionaries who have become the government's victims. It continues to support Iran in its war with Iraq, a war which has long ceased to defend the revolution of 1979. It confuses the government's anti-U.S. rhetoric with genuine anti-imperialism.

Such erroneous thinking is not very useful to the Iranian workers. One may call the government "revolutionary" or "anti-imperialist" or any number of things, but to the working class of Iran the government is the "enemy." In this context, the SWP's clinging to a line which has clearly failed the test of practice is a serious disservice to the people of Iran and to revolutionists throughout the world. The Iranian people are looking for new leadership, for they have lost faith in the leaders of 1979. Mass struggle, with its clearly revolutionary logic, is the only option available, and the working class is increasingly resorting to struggle against both their employers and their government.

The May 13, 1985, issue of Intercontinental Press reported on one such workers' struggle, a strike of construction workers at the Isfahan steel plant. The article is of value to revolutionists because it gives us some straight news. A strike took place, and we can read about it in IP. That is no small service, for accurate news from Iran is hard to get. One can trust neither the word of the government and the official Iranian press nor the reports one reads in the big-business media. The reporting by author Ali Sahand is often quite good, but the facts he presents contradict a number of the conclusions he draws. The deficiencies of his article, in this respect, point to the continuing disorientation caused by the SWP's approach to Iran.

A MISLEADING DESCRIPTION

Before Sahand begins his report on the strike itself he gives us a background description of Isfahan and its recent history. While one can point to no outright inaccuracies, his description is not very helpful and at times is misleading.

Sahand says, "Isfahan ... is the only Iranian city where a solid majority of the population is working-class." One is curious how censuses are taken in Iran and where Sahand gets the figures to support such a claim. Isfahan is indeed a large city, with a powerful proletariat. However, it is not the only one. Shiraz has significant petrochemical and electronics plants; Abadan is a center of oil refining, and, as any student of Iranian history should know, the center of proletarian revolutionary action has traditionally been the Azarbaijani capital, Tabriz. Tehran itself has important industries. Indeed, the Shah's "modernization" program of the 1960s and 1970s created his gravediggers by bringing tens of thousands of Iranians into the industrial working class in nearly every city, not only Isfahan.

One can conclude from Sahand's statement that outside of Isfahan Iran's proletariat is not very important or powerful, but such a conclusion would be false and, most likely, not intended by

the author. At the time of the revolution Iran's population was more proletarian than was Russia's in 1917. The revolution of 1979 was an urban revolution, in which the working class played the decisive role. The Isfahani workers, as Sahand says, were in the forefront, but they were not alone.

Sahand says, "Isfahan has provided the largest contingents for the baseej who make up many of the troops." Participation in the baseej and the Revolutionary Guards (pasdaran) is not any indication of revolutionary consciousness. The baseej is the volunteer corps in the war against Iraq, a war which has ceased to be in the interests of the workers and peasants of either Iran or Iraq but instead drains the lifeblood of both countries. The pasdaran as well, as Sahand indicates later in the article, are hardly a revolutionary force. They are the armed militia of the government and its main weapon against proletarian struggle. Mention of the baseej and pasdaran only serves to confuse the readers, for the Isfahani working class is more militant than one might interpret from Sahand's statements.

THE GOVERNMENT AS STRIKEBREAKER

The large industrial plants in Iran were built during the Shah's reign as state-owned industries, capitalized by oil revenues. Equipment and technology were imported from imperialist countries, especially the United States. The Isfahan steel plant, the subject of Sahand's article, is no exception. In the 1976-77 period Iran's economic growth slowed and inflation soared. That economic downturn was a key factor in bringing on the revolution of 1979. Iran's economy has not recovered, but instead has gotten significantly worse, as the oil glut, the Iraqi war, and the U.S. policy of economic strangulation have taken their toll. The government continues to defend capitalist control of Iran's economy and to make great concessions to the imperialist powers in exchange for arms to fight Iraq. Iran's oil policy is an important factor in the worldwide oil glut. It has been reported that Britain, one of Iran's chief suppliers of war materiel, has simply moved in to fill the place vacated by the United States after the fall of the Shah.

Consequently class relations remain much as they were when the Shah was in power, with one important exception: the counterrevolutionary government which holds power today came out of the revo-

lution. It was put in power by the revolution and has proceeded to destroy the revolution. It did not come to power by defeating the working class in direct combat. The Iranian people were robbed of their victory by deceit, not defeated in class confrontation. Therefore, the bourgeoisie and its government face a working class which knows it can win a fight. The workers' problem is confusion over who are their friends and enemies, since their trust was betrayed by Khomeini. It is this confusion -- or lack of leadership -- which has given Khomeini and his henchmen the time to dismantle the gains of the revolution and physically eliminate the most militant of the revolutionaries.

Sahand describes the first attack by the government against the construction workers at the Isfahan steel plant -- a successful attempt to lay off 5,000 workers. The government and every organization in support of the government opposed the workers. At the top of the list was the Islamic Association (anjoman) in the plant. (The anjomans were created as a government alternative to the workers councils [shoras], which were established during the revolution.) Sahand writes, "The Islamic Association in the plant backed the government lay-off plan. Islamic Associations in other factories also supported the government and slandered the construction workers as 'U.S. agents' when they threatened to strike." The war, as well, was used as an excuse for strikebreaking. "Management argued that in a time of war, any kind of labor opposition is treason," writes Sahand.

By November 1984 the class lines were clearly drawn. The construction workers had learned from their isolation of three years earlier and made a successful effort to win the support of the steel production and other workers. But the position of the government had not changed. It called in the army to occupy the plant. When the workers were able to

The Iranian Revolution and the Dangers That Threaten It

by Steve Bloom and Frank Lovell

\$1.00

F.I.T., P.O. Box 1947, N.Y., N.Y. 10009

convince soldiers of the justice of their demands, the provincial governor threatened to mobilize "the hezbollah masses" to crush them.

The editors of IP, in an attempt to explain the meaning of hezbollah (literally "the party of God"), have included a footnote which creates confusion rather than clarity. It states, "Since the 1979 revolution, 'hezbollah' demonstrations have been organized by supporters of the government to harass or physically attack Iranians protesting some aspect of official policy. Those mobilized for 'hezbollah' actions are usually unemployed youth or semiproletarians, many of whom support the revolution." In fact, the hezbollahis have more in common with the fascist goon squads than with supporters of revolution. They have been the battering ram for the Khomeini government's counter-revolutionary measures. The hezbollahis have been the ones to harass unveiled women, to beat up suspected "communists" and "atheists" and to break strikes. They have even in many cases overstepped their political role and used violence simply to extort money in the manner of common street criminals -- which is what they basically are.

The Revolutionary Guards were brought in, and they arrested the twelve leaders of the strike and beat them severely. While the strikers were able to win over enlisted soldiers, Sahand gives no evidence that the pasdaran wavered in their counterrevolutionary mission.

THE GOVERNMENT FORCED TO BACK DOWN

Nevertheless, the campaign of the construction workers to win support from other sections of the working class had a tremendous effect. The governor was forced to accept their key demand -- that they be rehired under a permanent contract. The Islamic anjomans put out a statement saying, "We give the governor our full support in rehiring the striking workers." The best the government and clergy could do in the situation was to save face. The speech of Ayatollah Taheri described by Sahand was a recognition that the government could not defeat the strike in direct confrontation and had to reach a compro-

mise. The strikers' response was to demand a written statement that they were not laid off; the governor had to accept that demand. The strikers went back to work having forced the management and the government to back down. It was an important victory.

In his report of the news blackout surrounding the dispute Sahand correctly notes that the government media as well as the proimperialist media worked together to isolate the strikers. It is true -- the imperialist radio stations which broadcast from outside the country have no more interest than the government in the spread of labor solidarity. However, Sahand does not draw conclusions consistent with the facts he himself has presented. One can conclude only one thing from the events of the Isfahani construction workers' strike: that the so-called "revolutionary" government and the working class are on opposite sides, and that the government and world imperialism are united against the working class. It may be a mistake to say, as some left organizations do, that "the revolution is dead"; however, it is equally wrong to conclude that the revolution remains in power. The government of Khomeini is a counterrevolutionary one. If the revolution is not dead, it is not for lack of effort by the current government.

The confusion of Sahand's political perspective is epitomized by his final paragraph: "Once again the workers showed that they can fight the imperialists and, if they feel the necessity, defend their own rights." In fact, there is no distinction. Ultimately, the only real fight against the imperialists is socialist revolution, bringing all the oppressed people together under proletarian leadership. The only way workers can defend their rights is to fight against the imperialists; the only way to fight against the imperialists is to defend the workers' rights. A strategy, such as the one Sahand seems to support, of subordinating class struggle to support to the "anti-imperialist camp" is not a winning strategy. It contributes to the crisis of leadership rather than to its solution. The Isfahan strike set an example of struggle; it is important that revolutionary leaders draw the right conclusions from it. □

THE SWP, THE F.I.T., AND THE GERARDO NEBBIA CASE

by the National Organizing Committee of the F.I.T.

INTRODUCTION: Since the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party has continued to make an issue of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency's handling of the Gerardo Nebbia case. According to information we have received, members and supporters of the party have been informed that this is the main obstacle to our reintegration into the SWP. For this reason, the National Organizing Committee of the F.I.T. adopts the following statement. We ask that it be submitted to the delegates to the August 1985 SWP convention:

I) The SWP leadership has justifiably objected to the headline in the table of contents of Bulletin in Defense of Marxism No. 4, March 1984, which characterized their handling of Nebbia's expulsion as "A Page from the FBI's Book on Standard Frame-Up Procedure." The interpretation which can be given to the headline--that the SWP leadership was consciously utilizing police methods to sabotage the party--was not intended, but publishing it was still a serious error. It should never have appeared in print.

We concur with the statement made by our fraternal delegate to the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International on this matter, the full text of which reads: "I recognize that the title on the original article in the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism on the Nebbia case didn't accurately capture the content of the article and was an error. We regret any misunderstanding which may have resulted. We have always defended the SWP leadership against the charge of being FBI agents, and no such charge was intended or implied in the article or the headline."

II) We nevertheless maintain the substantive findings of our tendency in the Nebbia case--that the party leadership did not proceed according to the proletarian norms and traditions of our movement regarding charges that a member is an agent. We believe that an objective assessment of the events surrounding Nebbia's expulsion from the SWP, his membership in the F.I.T., and his subse-

quent expulsion from our tendency indicates that the leadership of the party must take a major share of responsibility for any problems which have arisen. We specifically call attention to the following:

A) When Nebbia was first expelled the membership of the party was denied any facts, and was asked to accept the findings and actions of the Political Committee on pure faith. Such an approach to the expulsion of a member on the charge of being an agent--or any other charge for that matter--is completely unprecedented. The consequences of this sort of action, and the proper conclusion that objective comrades must take in the face of it, were spelled out in the initial "Report on the Expulsion of Gerardo Nebbia," adopted by the F.I.T. National Organizing Committee in March 1984 (see Bulletin IDOM No. 4, p. 24).

That report explained that the SWP leadership had the responsibility to "prove its charges against Comrade Nebbia, or withdraw them." Had the party PC explained the basis of its action at the time Nebbia was expelled, as it should have done, much of the subsequent difficulty connected with this case could have been avoided.

B) In response to the F.I.T.'s demand to see the evidence on which the SWP Political Committee had based its expulsion of Nebbia, an SWP Internal Information Bulletin was published in April 1984, containing the relevant documents and an account of how the party leaders had come to their conclusions in the case. On the basis of this bulletin it became clear that the SWP Control Commission and PC had acted solely on the unsubstantiated word of a single comrade--Nebbia's sister--who said she had found certain documents in Nebbia's house and that the handwriting confirmed they had been written by her brother. No effort was made by the SWP PC to verify these assertions.

Acting to expel a member on the basis of the unsubstantiated accusation of another comrade, no matter how trustworthy that second comrade has proven to be in the past, is an extremely dangerous precedent to set. This truth is not

altered by the fact that in this particular case the authenticity of the evidence against Nebbia was verified by a later investigation carried out by the F.I.T. The approach adopted by the SWP PC in this situation could well open up the party to frame-ups and victimizations if similar charges are made by agents (who will usually make it their business to appear as "reliable" and "loyal" comrades), or by other unscrupulous individuals.

C) After verifying that the evidence presented by Nebbia's sister was authentic, the F.I.T. concluded and declared publicly that his expulsion from the party had been justified. He was also expelled from our organization. However, we reaffirm our conclusion that the extreme charge that Nebbia was an "agent of the Healyite disruption campaign" against the SWP, though consistent with the evidence cited is not proven by it (see "Gerardo Nebbia Expelled from the F.I.T.", Bulletin IDOM No. 12).

III) The SWP leadership, basing itself on the error made by the Bulletin IDOM in printing the headline in question, and combining this with distortions and falsifications of the concrete

actions taken by the F.I.T. in the Nebbia case, has carried on a major campaign in the Fourth International and among the SWP rank and file to discredit our tendency--even going so far at one point as to demand our expulsion from the Fourth International. But it has never published for the party ranks the actual texts of the reports adopted by our tendency on this question. This is true despite the fact that we made our F.I.T. Information Bulletin entitled "The Gerardo Nebbia Case" available to the party, with the specific request that it be distributed to the membership. The only things that most party members have had the opportunity to find out about the F.I.T.'s actions in the Nebbia case are 1) the single quote from the headline in the table of contents of Bulletin IDOM No. 4 (which has been repeated over and over by the party leadership) and 2) distorted reports in the party's Information Bulletin.

This does not provide an objective, informed basis for judgment by the party members. It simply utilizes the Nebbia case as an excuse for avoiding the necessary political discussion on the theoretical and programmatic issues in dispute between us.

August 2, 1985

LETTERS

'MILITANT' NO LONGER ACCURATE

For many years I looked forward to each new issue of the Militant with the assurance that I would find out what was happening in the struggles of working people, oppressed minorities, women, youth, and those fighting against U.S. government intervention around the world. Now I find the Militant is no longer an accurate source of information. For example, in the July 12 issue, it is reported, "Some coalitions, such as those in Baltimore and Los Angeles, have already begun working with anti-apartheid groups in their cities to plan the October 11 activities."

I am a member of the Administrative Committee of the Los Angeles April 20 Coalition, secretary of the coalition, and a participant in every meeting it has held. I know that--far from the coalition in Los Angeles "working with anti-apartheid groups" to plan the national day of protest on October 11--the Administrative Committee by majority vote opposed any activity for the coali-

tion for the summer and fall. The majority voted to have the coalition function as a "network" until all of the fall activities were concluded -- and every single SWP and YSA member at the meeting voted for that motion.

SWPers suggested that the coalition help build an anti-intervention contingent in the October 11 protest action but the majority of the Administrative Committee opposed any coalition activity at all. This decision was made at the July 2 meeting of the Administrative Committee--one day before the closing news date for the Militant. Obviously, the SWPers knew what they planned to propose, and assumed they would convince the meeting. They passed along a "crystal ball" version which then wound up being presented by the Militant as fact.

A week after this meeting of the Administrative Committee in Los Angeles, the entire coalition met. Here the question of the coalition itself calling and organizing a mass action in the fall was hotly debated -- with the SWPers and YSAers arguing against a fall action and

dropping any suggestion that the coalition as such work with the anti-apartheid groups in the Los Angeles area to plan the October 11 activities.

It was announced at this coalition meeting (as it had been reported a week earlier at the Administrative Committee meeting) that anti-apartheid groups had already planned the October 11 action and related events. Everyone was urged to support those activities, and others planned by various groups, which the coalition agreed to do. It was perfectly clear, however, that participants in the coalition would be "supporters" and not fellow planners or organizers of these events. This was one of the reasons that the majority of people at the coalition meeting voted to have the coalition itself sponsor a fall action.

Readers of the Militant outside of Los Angeles would have no way of knowing that the simple one-sentence statement of "fact" in the July 12 issue actually covered up what really happened in the coalition. As I read what is happening in other cities, I find myself asking, "Is that really true?"

Evelyn Sell
Los Angeles

P.S. As I was preparing to send off the above letter I read the editorial on page 14 of the July 19 Militant headlined, "Reagan's terrorism frame-up." The last sentence includes another false statement: "One way we can fight back is to participate in the coalitions that are organizing for the fall antiwar and anti-apartheid actions called by the April Actions Coalition for Peace, Jobs and Justice" (emphasis added).

The SWP knows better. The national April Actions Coalition for Peace, Jobs and Justice has refused to call any actions for the fall. The SWP was present at the June 29 national steering committee meeting where this decision was made, and members of the party voted for it. The April Actions Coalition simply endorsed actions that had already been called by others. Apparently the SWP feels it is necessary to cover up for the default of the April Actions leaders in refusing to build a new round of demonstrations against U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean this fall--a default in which the SWP is, unfortunately, complicit.

F.I.T.'S POLITICAL RESOLUTION

I didn't find the "economic," opening, passage [of the F.I.T.'s political resolution] of much use in the sense of it being other than routine phraseology. It wasn't "wrong" but it wasn't correctly phrased. There is no mention of the rivals in the capitalist world, the predominance of the military elements in the budgets, and one might suspect a contradiction between the decline and the hegemony of American capitalism. But don't take me amiss: in the field of theory yours is the only worthwhile reading I come across these days.

Subscriber
United Kingdom

I happened to read the F.I.T.'s political resolution and the SWP's political resolution on the same weekend, and it was quite an educational experience to read them almost side to side. I recommend that others do the same if they want to decide who has departed from the positions that everybody in the SWP used to have ten or twelve years ago, when I was a member.

Subscriber
New York

LENIN ON DUTIES OF MEMBERS

I am glad to see you reprinting in every issue Lenin's 1921 statement on the duty of party members to study internal party controversies and demand documentation instead of the word of party leaders. I hope SWP members will take it to heart.

Lenin expressed this idea not once, but many times. For example, here is what he wrote in 1913 in an article on "Controversial Issues":

"Every worker who himself wants to examine seriously the controversial questions of the Party, who wants to decide these questions for himself, must first of all assimilate this truth, making an independent study and verification of these Party decisions and of the liquidator arguments. Only those who carefully study, ponder over and reach an independent decision on the problems and the fate of their Party deserve to be called Party members and builders of the workers' party." (Collected Works, vol. 19, p. 159)

An independent decider

F.I.T. DIRECTORY

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