

Information, Education, Discussion

BULLETIN in Defense of Marxism

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Who We Are

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

The F.I.T. was created in the winter of 1984 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 half a century. Since our formation we have fought to win the party back to a revolutionary Marxist perspective and for our readmission to the SWP. In addition our members are active in the U.S. class struggle.

At the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International, the appeals of the F.I.T. and other expelled members were upheld, and the congress delegates demanded, by an overwhelming majority, that the SWP readmit those who had been purged. So far the SWP has refused to take any steps to comply with this decision.

“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 FIRESIDE SUMMIT

by David Williams

In spite of all the pious posturing of politicians and journalists, the world is no closer to peace after the Nov. 19-21 meeting between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet CP First Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, nor did very many seriously expect it would be. Reagan and Gorbachev reached no agreement on controlling the nuclear arms race--the one thing most often discussed as a goal of the summit conference--and if there was any discussion of Nicaragua, South Africa, or the Middle East no one is letting on. All they agreed on was a few improvements in U.S.-Soviet relations and to meet again next year. Considering the present abysmal state of U.S.-Soviet relations one can consider these agreements to be a step forward.

THE REAL DANGER OF WAR

Politicians and diplomats often say that nuclear war is "unthinkable." However, while they are "unthinking," the military brass is planning. War strategists in the Pentagon are not figuring out how to prevent nuclear war, but how to win it; their counterparts in the U.S.S.R. believe that a U.S. nuclear attack is a real possibility, for which they must prepare. If past history is any guide, the Soviets have good reason to be concerned.

Washington has consistently refused to reject first use of nuclear weapons, even though the Soviets have done so unilaterally. Reagan considers his "Strategic Defense Initiative"--the Star Wars plan to militarize outer space--to be nonnegotiable, and now the Thatcher government in Britain has joined him in this latest threat to world peace. The United States remains the only country which has ever used nuclear weapons, and Reagan himself defends that action.

The United States has surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases and has placed its Cruise missiles in Europe within easy striking distance of the U.S.S.R.'s major cities. U.S. submarines, against which counterforce (i.e., destroying the weapon before it can be

used) is nearly impossible, also carry nuclear warheads aimed at the Soviet Union. It is fashionable to accuse the Soviets of a "siege mentality," but one look at a world map shows clearly that Soviet fears are not unfounded. Reagan's "Evil Empire" rhetoric and his radio "joke" about "outlawing Russia forever" hardly inspire confidence in the U.S.'s peaceful intentions among the Soviet leaders, most of whom are old enough to remember the terrible suffering they endured during World War II.

REAGAN'S ALLIES AND FRIENDS

Opposition to the deployment of U.S. nuclear missiles has inspired the largest mass demonstrations in Europe since the end of the Vietnam War. These have been organized outside the framework of the traditional workers' parties and are, therefore, hard for the politicians and bureaucrats to control. While the peace movement has not as yet realized its full potential, Western European politicians are taking it very seriously. The bourgeois parties, as well as the Social Democrats, are concerned lest the mass mobilizations get out of their control.

Washington's European allies' concern was an important factor in Reagan's decision to go ahead with the summit conference. It remains to be seen whether the summit itself will have any effect on the peace movement, which has problems of its own. At any rate it was a small quid pro quo for Reagan to make after the West German decision to allow the deployment of Cruise missiles.

Within the Republican Party in the United States--and within the Reagan administration itself--there has also been a great deal of tension that goes beyond the usual intragovernment wrangling among the State Department, Defense Department, and White House. Especially since Reagan's reelection many of his supporters have been worried that his "Rambo" rhetoric may become a liability, creating problems for the Re-

publicans in 1986 and 1988. That has provoked a reaction from others in the administration, such as Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. Weinberger's well-publicized letter to Reagan, urging him to "stand firm" on Star Wars and other disputed issues, caused quite a stir in the press, both here and in the Soviet Union. Its real meaning is more difficult to assess, though one can be certain that the letter was in no way an act of "rebellion" on Weinberger's part. When asked if he had plans to fire the defense secretary, Reagan responded, "Hell, no."

IMAGE AND SUBSTANCE

Though it is clear that the summit conference was more image than substance, it was not entirely a public relations show. However, what substantive issues were discussed will probably never be disclosed. The Soviet bureaucrats are just as comfortable with secret negotiations as the imperialist politicians, and both regard the working masses with suspicion and hostility. Gorbachev is continuing in the Stalinist tradition of "peaceful coexistence," helping revolutionary movements around the world insofar as that helps him gain concessions from the imperialists. He

remains perfectly willing to betray them when they are no longer useful.

One can be certain that any discussion of the international battlegrounds --Central America, South Africa, Poland, the Arab-Persian Gulf, Palestine--took place within this framework. A serious problem faced by both Reagan and Gorbachev is that the revolutionary forces at work in these areas are more and more beyond Stalinist control.

Diplomacy--secret or public--cannot change the motive forces and contradictions of the world economy. There can be no negotiated settlement of the class struggle. The imperialists will exploit--not just because of moral failings, not just because of "greed," not just because of their lack of "enlightenment," but because it is required in order for them to make a profit.

There comes a time when workers and peasants can tolerate no more and enter on the course of revolution. All over the world new leaders are advancing as the authority of the Stalinist and Social Democratic bureaucracies crumbles. As the exploited throughout the world reject the misleadership of the bureaucrats, when a mass revolutionary international takes its place as the leader of the oppressed, all the summit conferences in the world will not save the imperialists and bureaucrats from the final settling of accounts. □

LILLIAN CURTISS

MITT SNIPPER

As we go to press we have learned about the deaths in Los Angeles of two comrades: Lillian Curtiss and Mitt Snipper. Lillian died on December 10 while in the hospital awaiting surgery for cancer. Mitt suffered a heart attack on December 9. Both Mitt and Lillian were long-standing members of the Socialist Workers Party who fell victim to the Barnes faction's political purge at the end of 1983. Both worked with the L.A. Local Organizing Committee of the F.I.T. as sympathizers. The next issue of the Bulletin IDOM will carry longer reports on their lives.

EMERGENCY NATIONAL COUNCIL PREPARES THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE

by Evelyn Sell

The Emergency National Council Against U.S. Intervention in Central America/The Caribbean (ENC) was formed at a national conference in Minnesota last June. Since that time it has been carrying out its activities within the context of an escalation of U.S. aggression against the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran peoples. The Council Executive Committee pointed out in an "Open Letter to the U.S. Anti-Intervention Movement," dated October 2, 1985.

"...The U.S. government is actively seeking to engineer a war against Nicaragua. The Reagan administration hopes that its operations in Honduras will pave the way for direct massive U.S. military intervention to overthrow the Sandinista government. Meanwhile the contra war expands, the air war against the Salvadoran people intensifies, support for the Guatemalan and Honduran dictatorships increases, and Costa Rica is forced to militarize." (For the full text of this letter see Bulletin IDOM, issue No. 24, November 1985.)

The Open Letter urges "the organizations which have led the fight against U.S. policies in Central America and the Caribbean over the past years" to take the lead in launching a national anti-intervention coalition which can organize broad-scale, coordinated protest actions.

Responses to this idea have come from activists and organizations in states all around the U.S., including Alabama, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. In Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia April Actions Coalition voted in November to endorse the Open Letter. A leading activist in Sacramento, California, wrote: "Hooray for you! I am absolutely delighted with your letter and I want to offer you every encouragement and to ask what I can do to support your goals."

The ENC has also published and circulated a bi-lingual brochure (English and Spanish) describing its program, purposes, and principles. The brochure explains, "All individuals and organizations agreeing with the Council's purpose and program may affiliate with it, regardless of other beliefs and

affiliations. Organizations affiliated with the Council have a voting representative on the national steering committee."

Among the organizations which have so far formally affiliated with the ENC are: United Furniture Workers of America, International Union, AFL-CIO; Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks (BRAC), lodge 1380; Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), Puget Sound Chapter; Southern California District Council ILWU; Toronto anti-intervention coalition; Honduran Task Force; Minnesota Labor Committee on Central America; Fourth Internationalist Tendency; Socialist Action; Socialist Labor Party; and Socialist Party, USA.

Individual affiliations to the ENC have come from activists in solidarity and anti-intervention groups, trade unionists, and persons involved in anti-apartheid formations. As a result of a letter sent to university colleagues across the country by Council Executive Committee member Sheldon Liss, affiliation cards were sent in from well-known professors and authors such as John Womack of Harvard University and E. Bradford Burns of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

Groups of ENC members are meeting in Cleveland, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, and Seattle. Council Coordinator Jerry Gordon has spoken to meetings in New York, Houston, and Pittsburgh to explain ENC views and perspectives. Coordinating Committee member Michael Livingston represented the ENC at a midwest conference of CISPES held in Chicago during November 1985. At the same time, Council members have remained active in labor, solidarity, and anti-intervention groups. Many ENC members played leading roles in helping to organize the anti-apartheid marches, rallies, and meetings which took place October 11-12, 1985.

Current activities include publicizing the third Emergency National Conference Against U.S. Intervention in Central America/The Caribbean. Registrations are already being sent in from activists across the country for this event which will be held in Los Angeles,

January 24-26. The conference will open with a "Labor Speaks Out" rally, and will include a Solidarity Program featuring presentations from representatives of the African National Congress and the FMLN-FDR, music, and poetry.

Conference sessions will hear update reports on the situation in Central America and the Caribbean, and on the anti-intervention and anti-apartheid movements in the U.S. An important point on the agenda will be the discussion and vote on various action proposals which will be submitted by groups and/or individuals addressing the question of how to mobilize Americans from all walks of life in mass action protests against U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean, and against U.S. support for South Africa's apartheid regime.

The conference and its decisions regarding activities take on added importance in light of the November 15th

decision of the Administrative Committee of the April Actions for Peace, Jobs and Justice not to issue a call for spring 1986 actions (see box).

While the U.S. government is increasingly aggressive in its interventionist policies and war moves in Central America and the Caribbean, the anti-intervention movement in this country remains fragmented and responds unevenly to steps such as the CIA's more active and public role in the contras' war against the Nicaraguan revolution and the Sandinista government. Faced with this situation, the ENC is pursuing its efforts to help forge unity of the anti-intervention movement, and to make sure that large numbers mobilize in actions against U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. For ENC materials and information write: Emergency National Council, P.O. Box 21672, Cleveland, Ohio 44121. □

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE APRIL ACTIONS COALITION?

After the highly successful demonstrations on April 20, 1985, a broad discussion took place within the April Actions Coalition which called and coordinated those actions on a national scale. Many local coalitions around the country, along with the National Continuations Committee of the first Emergency National Conference Against U.S. Intervention in Central America/The Caribbean (which was a member of the National Steering Committee of the April Actions Coalition) urged that a new round of demonstrations be called for the fall. This, they argued, was objectively needed to combat U.S. war moves in Central America, and to continue the momentum necessary to build an ongoing mass movement in this country.

A majority of the National Steering Committee, however, opposed this course. They argued that before a new round of actions could be called it would be necessary to build up the base and organizational strength of the April Actions Coalition. This, they asserted, could be done by supporting a series of actions called by other groups in the fall. The national coalition would then come back together and sponsor actions in the spring of 1986.

Contrary to these predictions, the failure of the national April Actions

Coalition to call for fall actions resulted in the disappearance of almost all of the local coalitions which organized participation in April 20. A few remained active at a reduced level, or went "into limbo," with the expectation that a national call would be forthcoming for spring actions in 1986. Now, at a meeting held on November 15, the National Administrative Committee of the April Actions for Peace, Jobs, and Justice, has voted not to issue the call for spring demonstrations. They announced that perhaps an action might be called for fall 1986.

Those who had pinned their hopes on a national call from the April Actions Coalition deferred making any plans for a spring '86 action until it was issued. For example, the Mobilization for Peace, Jobs and Justice in the San Francisco Bay Area called a November 2, 1985 conference to "serve both an educational purpose and announce a call for another large Bay Area mobilization in April 1986." The conference was held, with close to 400 attending--but no call was made for a spring action. When some conference organizers were asked why the projected call was not issued, it was explained that they were waiting for the national call from the April Actions coalition.

**EMERGENCY NATIONAL CONFERENCE
AGAINST U.S. INTERVENTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA/THE CARIBBEAN
JANUARY 24-26, 1986 LOS ANGELES**

CONFERENCE PURPOSES: to educate; to make sure large numbers mobilize in actions against U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean; to further efforts to forge unity of the anti-intervention movement; and, to oppose apartheid in South Africa.

ORGANIZED BY: Emergency National Council
Against U.S. Intervention in Central America/The Caribbean

C O N F E R E N C E S C H E D U L E

All events and sessions held in the PARK PLAZA HOTEL, 607 So. Park View (between Wilshire Blvd. & 6th Street, facing MacArthur Park). *All meals served in Park Plaza Hotel. Spanish translation throughout. Child care available. \$10 registration includes Labor Speaks Out rally and Solidarity Program.

Public Rally --- Friday, January 24, 1986 at 7:30 p.m.

LABOR SPEAKS OUT AGAINST U.S. INTERVENTION AND AGAINST APARTHEID
(Initial list. Titles and organizational affiliations noted for identification only.)

David Arian, President, Southern California District Council ILWU
Miguel Gonzalez, Representative, Salvadoran Labor Center
Robert Massi, Member, UAW District 65, Distributive Workers Union
Barney Oursler, Coordinator, Mon Valley Unemployed Committee
Carey Schaye, International Representative, United Mine Workers of America
Rita Shaw, Member, BRAC Lodge 1380, and Puget Sound Chapter, Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)
John T. Williams, Past President, Teamsters Local 208

\$2.00 for those not registered for Conference.

Public Invited - Saturday, January 25, 1986 at 7:30 p.m.

S O L I D A R I T Y P R O G R A M

Representatives of African National Congress and FMLN-FDR
Music by **Mario and Martin**, Poetry by **Naomi Quiñonez** and **Julia Stein**
"Centroamérica Libre" by **Shock Battalion**

\$5.00 for those not registered for Conference.

C o n f e r e n c e S e s s i o n s

Saturday, January 25, 1986 from 8:00 a.m. until 7:30 p.m.

*BREAKFAST. Registration. Speakers on Central America & Caribbean, and on anti-apartheid and anti-intervention movements in U.S. Proposals for action.
*LUNCH. Workshops. Discussion and votes on action proposals. *DINNER.

Sunday, January 26, 1986 from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

*BREAKFAST. Registration. Plenary session with: Reports; Nominations and Elections. *LUNCH. Area meetings.

For further information, to register, contact:

Conference, P.O. Box 480598, Los Angeles, CA 90048
(213) 469-9983

EMERGENCY NATIONAL COUNCIL

Against U.S. Intervention In Central America/The Caribbean

PURPOSE

To educate and mobilize masses of Americans for urgently needed united actions in response to the emergency caused by U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean — with special emphasis on broadening the involvement of the trade union movement. Linking this struggle to the fight to end U.S. support for the apartheid regime in South Africa reinforces and strengthens both the anti-intervention and anti-apartheid movements.

PROGRAM

The Council supports the right of self-determination and demands an immediate end to U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean, and an end to U.S. support of South Africa's apartheid government. These demands must be related to U.S. intervention in other areas of the world and to the critical economic and social problems facing the American people. Union-busting, high unemployment, and discrimination against minorities and women go hand-in-hand with U.S. foreign policies that deny to peoples in other lands the right to decide for themselves what kind of society they wish to build.

PRINCIPLES

- 1. Mass action.* The most effective vehicle for mobilizing the largest number of people in support of the Council's program is periodic massive demonstrations in the streets. Such mobilizations reflect the anti-intervention movement's power and depth of support and give the diverse currents in the movement focus, visibility and the means of uniting in action. The Council is committed to building mass actions as its central activity.
- 2. Labor orientation.* Recognizing the decisive role that the organized labor movement can play in the realization of the Council's demands and the stake working people have in winning these demands, the Council at all times places special emphasis on mobilization of the trade union movement, including its rank-and-file members, while trying to win workers generally to the anti-intervention cause.
- 3. Democratic procedures.* All decisions at all levels of the organizational structure shall be arrived at strictly in accordance with democratic procedures.
- 4. Non-partisan.* The Council shall not endorse political parties or candidates for public office. It works to educate and mobilize support for its program on a non-partisan and independent basis.

All individuals and organizations agreeing with the Council's purpose and program may affiliate with it, regardless of other beliefs and affiliations. Organizations affiliated with the Council have a voting representative on the national steering committee.

EMERGENCY NATIONAL COUNCIL AGAINST U.S. INTERVENTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA/THE CARIBBEAN (PLEASE PRINT)	
Your Name _____	
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Telephone with area code _____	
Name of Organization _____	
Your Title/Position _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual affiliation. Enclosed is \$2 and/or <input type="checkbox"/> Organization affiliation. Enclosed is \$25.	
Signature _____	Date _____
Make checks payable to: Emergency National Council Mail to: P.O. Box 21672, Cleveland, Ohio 44121.	

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN CALLS MARCH 9 AND MARCH 16 DEMONSTRATIONS

by Diane Phillips

In July, the convention of the National Organization for Women (NOW) called a national march and rally for reproductive rights in Washington D.C. to take place on Sunday, March 9, 1986. A complementary march and demonstration is scheduled for Los Angeles, California, on March 16, which will protest two anti-choice referenda in California. These events represent the first national demonstrations that NOW has ever organized around abortion rights. Previously, local chapters had taken the initiative in organizing abortion rights rallies. NOW expects two hundred thousand people to attend these activities which is a bold estimate; but it can be achieved if enough energy and money are allocated to the events.

Eleanor Smeal has mistakenly stated that March 9 will be the first national abortion rights demonstration in American history. In fact, however, the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition organized national demonstrations in the early 1970s. The educational impact of these activities, though modest compared to antiwar turnouts during the same period, was a factor which led to the successful Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

Since the 1970s, the pro-choice movement has relied more on lobbying than mass actions. Some women became complacent about the Supreme Court decision. Many people hesitated to attend pro-choice rallies because they felt that the abortion issue was too personal, or the right wing had intimidated them through its mass actions.

NOW and the women's movement in general must continue to explain that precisely because abortion is a personal decision women (and men) must fight to prevent the government from legislating under what circumstances, if any, women can have abortions. Neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party have proven reliable allies for women.

(Nixon, Carter, and Reagan all opposed abortion.) Only truly independent mass actions will be effective.

ATTACKS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The anti-choice movement shrewdly recognizes the effectiveness of demonstrations. The anti-woman "right to life" movement wants to overturn the Roe vs. Wade decision which declared that women's right to choose was guaranteed by the constitutional right to privacy. Roe vs. Wade did have weaknesses--such as its overemphasis on consultation with the doctor, and the prohibition of abortion after twenty-four weeks except to save the life of the woman. Nevertheless, it was the most far-reaching abortion decision in American history. Under pressure from the activist right, the present Supreme Court may hear a challenge to Roe vs. Wade. The Justice Department, however, was denied the right to present oral arguments advocating its overturn.

Progressive people must prevent a return to the days when legal abortion was unavailable to most women. Thousands of women lost their lives or ruined their health because of abortions performed by profiteering butchers. Many others were so desperate that they mutilated themselves with self-induced abortions. Millions had to compromise their future in order to bear unwanted children. When women's actual lives are recognized as more important than the potential lives of fetuses there will be no chance for such events to reoccur. Only by out-mobilizing the right wing can we prevent a reversal of Roe vs. Wade and a return to these conditions.

Contraception is also under national attack. A House-Senate conference committee recently defeated an amendment to international reproductive planning appropriations which would reaffirm U.S. "commitment" to birth control. Nevertheless, the conference committee did reject approval of Reagan's "Mexico City Policy," which prohibits U.S. assistance to nongovernmental programs involved with abortion services and also forbids

Diane Phillips is a member of New York City NOW and an independent socialist feminist.

foreign governments to use U.S. money for abortions. Rejected at the same time was an amendment allowing Reagan to cut off allocations to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. Congress finally allocated two hundred and ninety million dollars in fiscal year 1986 for international reproductive planning, but with no specified policy, which leaves the Agency for International Development (AID) free to use the "Mexico City Policy."

On July 8, AID reversed its "informed consent" guidelines, so that American money now goes to organizations that advise women only on the rhythm method. These new policies represent a danger to the rights of women in other countries. In addition, Reagan may try to institute similar provisions in the United States under Title X, which regulates domestic reproductive services.

OVERPOPULATION?

NOW has taken up the international as well as national implications of reproductive rights. Unfortunately, Eleanor Smeal in recent NOW literature has implied that overpopulation is a major cause of impoverishment. While poor women (in the United States and abroad) may "choose" birth control since they cannot afford more children, both the cause and solution of poverty are more correctly linked to the ownership and distribution of industrial and agricultural resources than to "overpopulation."

Feminists must clearly differentiate themselves from reactionary population alarmists who advocate sterilization abuse and coerced abortions (and contraception) for poor and Third World women. At the national convention NOW leaders stated clearly that feminists supported choice, not racist "zero population growth" schemes. Unfortunately, national NOW still has not supported a thirty-day-waiting-period guideline to prevent sterilization abuse in this country, on the grounds that such a provision restricts choice.

NOW does advocate Medicaid funding for abortions, so that all American women can have a choice. Federal Medicaid funds are not now allocated for abortions because of the Hyde amendment. Therefore, abortions are unavailable for most poor women. Some states, however, do provide money for Medicaid abortions out of state funds.

Reproductive rights raise other issues: freedom of religion and separation of church and state. For the Amer-

ican government to side with a religious position of the male-dominated Catholic and fundamentalist hierarchies, against the religious and ideological beliefs of the majority, threatens religious liberty and freedom of conscience. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the National Coalition of American Nuns are just a few of the many religious bodies which support choice.

One must also take the religious rationale of many anti-choice people with a grain of salt. A section of the anti-abortion movement commits terrorist actions, and would forbid all abortion (even to save the life of the woman). These people want to outlaw contraception and oppose sexual freedom.

ALL OUT!

The greatest possible turnout on March 9 and 16 is needed to defeat the right-wing challenge to women's rights. The assembly for the march in Washington will be on the Mall beginning at 10:00 A.M., with a march to the Lincoln Memorial and a rally there. While the demonstration is a NOW event, other women's groups, unions, and organizations based in the Black, Asian, Latina, and Native American communities will be contacted. Everyone who supports reproductive choice should attend. □



NEW YORK NOW MOBILIZES

New York NOW intends to send at least fifty buses to the Washington D.C. March 9 demonstration. It is urging people to participate in the NOW phone bank, and in outreach to other groups and to the general public. Bus tickets will cost \$25.00 round trip, with some subsidized tickets for low-income people. The New York City NOW chapter is also participating in a local pro-choice coalition which will sponsor a noon-time demonstration opposite St. Patrick's Cathedral on January 22, the anniversary of Roe vs. Wade.



ROSA LUXEMBURG'S CONCEPTION OF 'SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM'

by Michael Lowy

Translation and Introduction by Paul Le Blanc

INTRODUCTION

The following essay by Michael Lowy has much to say to activists of today on the nature of revolutionary Marxism and the Leninist organizational perspective which logically flows from it. Readers may be familiar with Lowy's important study The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development, the Theory of Permanent Revolution (London: Verso, 1981). The present essay on Rosa Luxemburg is very much within that framework.

Along with Lenin and Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg was one of the most creative Marxists of the early 20th century. A major political leader, she also did important theoretical work on the economics of imperialism, on the relationship of reform to revolution, on the concept of the mass strike, on the relation of socialist parties and trade unions, on the question of war and revolutionary internationalism, and more. Michael Lowy's stimulating and provocative essay focuses on the significance of a phrase she used in 1915--socialism or barbarism. The purpose of this introduction is to offer a brief sketch of the historical context which Lowy assumes the reader is familiar with.

In 1889, the Labor and Socialist International (the Second International) was established, the heir of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International of 1864-76) which Karl Marx had helped to create. An international federation of working class socialist parties, the Second International was predominantly European in its composition, since mass-based and powerful socialist parties existed primarily on that continent in this period. The most influential of these parties was the Social-Democratic Party of Germany, which drew considerable inspiration from the works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. After Engels's death in 1895, the leading theoreticians of

the German Social Democracy were Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, both of whom sought to develop and popularize Marxist ideas.

Within the German socialist movement, however, a significant current developed which moved away from the revolutionary socialist perspectives of Marxism. This current counterposed the gradual accumulation of reforms to the goal of socialist revolution, arguing that a moderate "evolutionary socialism" could peacefully reform capitalism out of existence. By 1899, Eduard Bernstein himself had broken with Marxism and became the major theoretician of this "revisionist" current. His friend Karl Kautsky remained a defender of "orthodox Marxism" and came to be the most influential exponent of Marx's ideas in the world. Although a majority of the German Social Democracy formally adhered to Kautsky's interpretations it became increasingly evident after 1905 that even this majority was affected by reformist inclinations in its ongoing political activity.

At the close of the 19th century, Rosa Luxemburg was a rising young leader of the German Social Democracy's revolutionary wing. It was she who mounted the first major defense of Marxism against Bernstein's revisionist critique. It was also she (along with others in the party's left wing such as Anton Pannekoek) who later began to challenge some of Kautsky's seemingly "orthodox Marxist" justifications for reformist practices that were cropping up throughout the labor and socialist movements. She became one of the most important and capable theorists, writers, and orators of the revolutionary left. In 1914, when the First World War erupted, she was one of the few prominent socialist leaders who wasn't swept along in the high-tide of patriotic hysteria. The Second Inter-

national collapsed as most of its member parties decided to support the war policies of their respective capitalist governments.

Luxemburg helped to form the revolutionary socialist Spartacus League, which was slandered and persecuted both by the leadership of the Social-Democratic Party and by the German government. Luxemburg herself was imprisoned. But the influence of the Spartacus League grew as increasing numbers of German working people became disillusioned with the war. Although Luxemburg had originally disagreed sharply with Lenin over his conception of a highly centralized revolutionary party (she wrote a famous polemic against it in 1904), she enthusiastically supported the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, while approaching it, as everything else, with an independent and critical intellect. Although she is commonly depicted as an anti-Leninist "spontaneist," in 1918 she helped to found the German Communist Party. Unfortunately, she and Karl Liebknecht were murdered by a right-wing "death squad" during revolutionary events of 1919, depriving the embryonic group of its two most capable and popular leaders. This also weakened the Communist (Third) International, estab-

lished under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky in the same year.

In the present essay, Michael Lowy offers a challenging interpretation of Luxemburg's views, an interpretation influenced both by the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky and by the diverse tradition of what has come to be known as "Western Marxism." Among the thinkers in this tradition that Lowy draws on here are Georg Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann. Two critical works on "Western Marxism" are Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism (London: New Left Books, 1976), and George Novack, Polemics in Marxist Philosophy (New York: Monad Press, 1978).

This essay, originally entitled "The Methodological Significance of the Formulation 'Socialism or Barbarism,'" is translated from Michael Lowy, Dialectique et Revolution, essais de sociologie et d'histoire du marxisme (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1973). The translation has been corrected by the author himself. A word on footnotes: for the reader's convenience, I have taken the liberty of converting most of Lowy's primarily non-English-language references into their English-language counterparts. The subheads were added by the editors.

Paul Le Blanc

Is socialism the inevitable and necessary product of economically determined historical development, or is it only a moral choice, an ideal of Justice and Liberty? This "dilemma of impotence" between the fatalism of pure laws and the ethic of pure intentions [1] arose within the German Social Democracy before 1914. It was transcended -- in the dialectical sense: "Aufheben"* -- by

*Aufheben is a German word which the philosopher Hegel converted into an important category in his dialectics. As he pointed out, "this word has two meanings; it means to 'keep' or 'preserve' as well as to 'put a stop to'..." (G.W.F. Hegel, Science of Logic, quoted in Henri Lefebvre Dialectical Materialism, London: Jonathan Cape, 1968, p. 35). It implies transcending or overcoming a thought or reality in a higher synthesis. -- Trans.

--but also preserving--

Rosa Luxemburg, precisely through the expression, in the Junius Brochure of 1915, of the famous formulation "socialism or barbarism." In this sense, Paul Frolich was correct in writing that this brochure (whatever the errors and deficiencies criticized by Lenin) "is more than a historic document: it is the thread of Ariadne in the labyrinth of our times." [2] We will attempt to trace the methodological meaning of this phrase, a meaning which seems to us of essential importance for Marxist thought, but which has not always been sufficiently understood and evaluated.

For Bernstein, after his "revision" of Marxism in The Premises of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy (1899), socialism no longer had an objective, material base in the contradictions of capitalism and in the class struggle. (In fact, the negation of

these phenomena is exactly the central theme of his book.) He therefore sought another basis, which could only be ethical: the eternal moral principles, Right, Justice. It is in this sense that the concluding chapter of his book ("Kant Without Cant") can be understood, where he opposes Kant to "materialism" and to the "scorn for the ideal" of official Social-Democratic thought. These morals are quite evidently ahistorical and above social classes. For Bernstein, in effect, "the sublime ethics of Kant" is "at the base of actions eternally and universally human"; to seek there the expression of something so coarse and vulgar as the class interests of the exalted bourgeoisie was in his opinion simply "folly." [3]

In Reform or Revolution (1899) Rosa Luxemburg replied to the "father of revisionism" with a passionate and rigorous demonstration of the profoundly contradictory character of capitalist development. Socialism proceeded from economic necessity and by no means from the "principle of justice, ... the old war horse on which the reformers of the earth have rocked for ages." [4]

Yet, in the heat of the argument, Rosa didn't fully escape the temptation of "revolutionary fatalism": for example, insisting in the first section of the anti-Bernstein pamphlet that the anarchy of the capitalist system "leads inevitably to its ruin," that the collapse of the capitalist system is the inevitable result of its insurmountable contradictions, and that the class consciousness of the proletariat is only "the simple intellectual reflection of the growing contradictions of capitalism and of its approaching decline." [5] Most certainly, even in this document, which is her most "determinist" work, Rosa insists on the fact that the tactic of the Social Democracy in no way consisted of waiting for the development of the antagonisms, but of being "guided by the direction of this development, once it is ascertained, and inferring from this direction what consequences are necessary for the political struggle." [6] Yet the conscious intervention of the Social Democracy remains, in a certain sense, an "auxiliary" element, a "stimulant" to a process which is, in any case, objectively necessary and inevitable.

If "optimistic fatalism" is to Rosa Luxemburg in 1899 a temptation, for Karl Kautsky, on the contrary, it constitutes the central axis of his entire world-view. The thought of Kautsky is the product of a marvelously successful fusion between the illuminist metaphysic

of progress, Social-Darwinist evolutionism [7] and pseudo "orthodox Marxist" determinism. This amalgam exercised a profound influence on German Social Democracy, making Kautsky the doctrinaire "Pope" of the party and of the Second International. This was not only due to the undeniable talent of its author, but also and especially to a certain historic conjuncture, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, a period in which the Social Democracy saw, with extraordinary regularity, an expansion of its adherents and its voting base.

KAUTSKY: PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION IS 'INEVITABLE'

To Kautsky the problematic of revolutionary initiative tends to disappear, to the profit of the "bronze laws which determine the necessary transformation of society." In his most important book, The Road to Power (1909), he insists several times on the idea that the proletarian revolution is "irresistible" and "inevitable" and "as irresistible and inevitable as the unceasing development of capitalism," which leads to this amazing conclusion, in that remarkable and transparent phrase which sums up admirably his whole passive vision of history: "The socialist party is a revolutionary party, but not a revolution-making party. We know that it is just as little in our power to create this revolution as it is in the power of our opponents to prevent it. It is no part of our work to instigate a revolution or to prepare the way for it." [8]

It is especially beginning with the Russian revolution of 1905 that Rosa Luxemburg began to differ politically with Kautsky and to criticize more and more the "rigid and fatalist" conception of Marxism which consists of "waiting with folded arms for the dialectic of history to bear us its ripe fruits." [9] From 1909-13, her polemic with Kautsky on the mass strike crystallized the theoretical divergences latent within the orthodox Marxist current of the German Social Democracy. The principal object of Rosa's critique seemed to be the purely parliamentary character of the "strategy of attrition" extolled by Kautsky. But at a more profound level, it is the whole "passive radicalism" of Kautsky (in the words of Pannekoek), his pseudo-revolutionary fatalism which is put into question by Rosa. Faced with this waiting-theory, of which the ob-

stinate belief in the "inevitable" electoral-parliamentary victory was one of the political manifestations, Rosa developed her strategy of the mass strike founded on the principle of conscious intervention: "The task of Social Democracy and of its leaders is not to be dragged by events, but to be consciously ahead of them, to have an overall view of the trend of events and to shorten the period of development by conscious action, and to accelerate its progress." [10]

THE ROLE OF THE PROLETARIAT

Still, before 1914 the break with Kautsky and with "socialist fatalism" isn't complete. As the passage that we've cited shows, there was for Rosa a "course of evolution," of which it's only a question of "shortening" and "hastening." It was necessary for there to be the catastrophe of August 4, 1914, the shameful capitulation of the German Social Democracy to the Kaiser's war policy, the dislocation of the International, and the enrollment of the proletarian masses in that immense fratricidal massacre called "the First World War" in order to shake Rosa's deep-rooted conviction in the necessary and "irresistible" coming of socialism. It was to overcome this trauma that Rosa Luxemburg wrote, in 1915, in the Junius Brochure, that remarkably revolutionary formula (in both the theoretical and political sense): "socialism or barbarism." That is to say: there is not one single "direction of development," one single "course of evolution," but several. And the role of the proletariat, led by its party, is not simply to "support" or to "shorten" or to "accelerate" the historical process, but to decide it:

"Man does not make history arbitrarily, but he makes history nevertheless. ... The final victory of the socialist proletariat ... will never be accomplished if the material conditions that have been built up by past development don't flash with the sparkling animation of the conscious will of the great popular masses. ... Frederick Engels once said: Capitalist society faces a dilemma, either an advance to socialism or a reversion to barbarism.

... We stand today, as Frederick Engels prophesied more than a generation ago, before the awful proposition: either the triumph of imperialism and the destruction of all culture, and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery; or, the victory of socialism, that is, the conscious struggle of the international prole-

tariat against imperialism, against its methods, against war. This is the dilemma of world history, its inevitable choice, whose scales are trembling in the balance awaiting the decision of the proletariat." [11]

What is the origin in Marxist thought of the formula "socialism or barbarism"?

Marx, in the first sentence of the Manifesto, emphasizes that the class struggle has ended each time "either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes." It is probably this sentence which inspired Rosa Luxemburg when she spoke of the downfall of civilization in ancient Rome as preceding the return to barbarism. But there is not, to our knowledge, any indication in all the works of Marx that this alternative, which he presented in the Manifesto as the record of a past occurrence, might be for him valid also as a possibility for the future.

THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

As for the phrase from Engels to which Rosa Luxemburg makes reference: it is evidently a passage from Anti-Duhring (published in 1877, which was almost 40 years before Rosa was writing) that she attempted to reconstruct from memory (not having access in prison to her Marxist library). Here then is the text of Engels where for the first time the idea of socialism appears as an alternative in a great historic dilemma:

"...it is because both the productive forces created by the modern capitalist mode of production and also the system of distribution of goods established by it have come into burning contradiction with that mode of production itself, and in fact to such a degree that, if the whole of modern society is not to perish, a revolution of the mode of production and distribution must take place, a revolution which will put an end to all class divisions." [12]

The difference between the text of Rosa Luxemburg and that of Engels is evident: 1) Engels poses the problem above all in economic terms, Rosa in political terms. 2) Engels doesn't raise the question of the social forces which will be able to decide one solution or another: the whole text only sets the stage for forces and relations of production. Rosa on the other hand emphasizes that it is the conscious intervention of the proletariat which will be "tilting the balance" to one side or the other. 3) One frankly has the impression that the choice posed by Engels is

rather rhetorical, that it is more a question of demonstrating ad absurdum the necessity of socialism rather than a real choice between socialism and the "perishing of modern society."

It seems therefore that, in the last analysis, it was Rosa Luxemburg herself who (while inspired by Engels) had, for the first time, explicitly posed socialism as being not the "inevitable" product of historical necessity, but as an objective historical possibility. In this sense, the phrase "socialism or barbarism" means that, in history, the dice aren't cast: the "final victory" or the defeat of the proletariat are not decided in advance, by the "bronze laws" of economic determinism, but depend also on the conscious action, on the revolutionary will of the proletariat.

What is the meaning of "barbarism" in the Luxemburgian phrase? For Rosa, the world war itself was a sporadic form of the relapse into barbarism, the destruction of civilization. It is, to be sure, undeniable that for an entire generation, in Germany and in Europe, the forecast of Rosa revealed itself to be tragically correct: the failure of the socialist revolution in 1919 led in the final analysis to the triumph of Nazi barbarism and the Second World War.

SOCIALISM: ONE POSSIBILITY

However, in our view, the methodologically essential element in the phrase of the Junius Brochure is not that barbarism is offered as the only alternative to socialism, but the very principle of an historical choice, the very principle of "open" history, in which socialism is one possibility among others. The important, theoretically decisive element in the formula is not the "barbarism" but the "socialism or...."

Is it the case that Rosa Luxemburg reverted to Bernstein's position, to the abstract moralist conception of socialism as simply an ethical option, as a "pure" ideal whose sole foundation was the "will-o-the-wisp" called "the Eternal Principles of Justice"? In reality, the position of Rosa in 1915 is distinguished from, or rather diametrically opposed to, that of neo-Kantian revisionism by two crucial aspects:

1. Socialism is not for Rosa the ideal of "absolute" humanism and above the classes, but that of a class morality, of a proletarian humanism, of an ethic situated in the point of view of the revolutionary proletariat.

2. Above all, socialism is for Rosa

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an objective possibility, that is to say founded on reality itself, on the internal contradictions of capitalism, on the crises, and on the antagonism of class interests. There are socio-economic conditions which determine, in the last instance, and in the long run, socialism as an objective possibility. It is these which mark the limits of the scope of what is possible: socialism is a real possibility at the end of the 19th century, but it was not in the 16th century, in the epoch of Thomas Munzer. Men make their own history, but they make it within the framework of the given conditions.

This category of objective possibility is eminently dialectical. Hegel employs it to criticize Kant (real possibility as opposed to formal possibility) and Marx utilizes it in his doctoral thesis in order to distinguish between the philosophy of nature of Democritus and Epicurus: "Abstract possibility ... is the direct antipode of real possibility. The latter is restricted within sharp boundaries, as is the intellect; the former is unbounded, as is the imagination." Real possibility seeks to prove the reality of its object; for abstract possibility it is necessary simply that the object be conceivable.[13]

It is therefore because there are objective contradictions in the capitalist system and because it corresponds to the objective interests of the proletariat that socialism is a real possibility. It is the infrastructure, the concrete historical conditions, that determine which possibilities are real; but the choice between diverse objective possibilities depends on the consciousness, on the will, and on the action of human beings.

THE CONSCIOUS INTERVENTION OF THE MASSES

Revolutionary practice, the subjective factor, the conscious intervention of the masses guided by their vanguard now gain a whole other status in the theoretical system of Rosa: it is no longer a question of a secondary element which is able to "support" or "accelerate" the "irresistible" march of society. It is no longer a question of the rhythm but of the direction of the historical process. The "sparkling animation of the conscious will" is no longer a simple "auxiliary" factor but that which has the final word, that which is decisive. [14]

It is only now, in 1915, that the thought of Rosa becomes truly coherent. If one accepts the Kautskyan premise of the inevitability of socialism, it is difficult to escape a "waiting" and passive political logic. To the extent that Rosa only justified her theses on revolutionary intervention by the need for "acceleration" of that which was in any case inevitable, it was easy for Kautsky to denounce her strategy as "rebellious impatience." The definitive methodological rupture between Rosa Luxemburg and Kautsky only produces itself in 1915, through the phrase "socialism or barbarism." [15]

WAR OR PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

A similar theoretical evolution can be found in Lenin and Trotsky: under the traumatic impact of the failure of the Second International, Lenin broke not only on the political level but also on the methodological level with Kautsky (of whom he had until then considered himself a disciple). He discovered in 1914-15 the Hegelian dialectic (the Philosophical Notebooks) and transcended the vulgarly evolutionist materialism of Kautsky and Plekhanov -- a transcendence which constitutes the methodological premise of the April Theses of 1917. [16] As for Trotsky: in his early writings such as Our Political Tasks (1904), he proclaimed himself convinced not only of "the inevitable growth of the political party of the proletariat, but also of the inevitable victory of the ideas of revolutionary socialism within the Party" [17] (our emphasis). This naive fatalist hope was to be cruelly disappointed in August 1914.... Several months after the beginning of the world war, in a pamphlet published in Germany, The War and the International (1914) -- and which was perhaps read by Rosa Luxemburg -- Trotsky already posed the problem in

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entirely different terms: "the capitalist world is confronted with the following choice: either permanent war ... or the proletarian revolution." [18] The methodological principle is the same as the Luxemburgian phrase, but the alternative is different, and no less realistic, in the light of the historical experience of the last fifty years (two world wars, two U.S. wars in Asia, etc.).

In attributing to conscious will and to action the determining role in the decision of the historical process, Rosa Luxemburg in no way denied that this will and this action are conditioned by the entire previous historical development, by "the material conditions that have been built up by the past." It is a question though of recognizing in the subjective factor, in the sphere of consciousness, at the level of political intervention, their partial autonomy, their specificity, their "internal logic," and their proper efficacy.

Now, it appears to us that this understanding of the subjective factor, will and consciousness, is precisely one of the basic methodological principles of Lenin's theory of the party, the foundation of his polemic with the Econ-

omists and the Mensheviks. Thus, in spite of all the undeniable differences that existed even after 1915 between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, on the subject of the party/masses problematic there was a real rapprochement, as much in practice (constitution of the Spartacus League) as in theory: The Junius Brochure explicitly proclaims that the revolutionary intervention of the proletariat "seizes the helm of society" to take it "in the direction of Social Democracy." And, of course, it is not a question of the old Social-Democratic International which had failed miserably in 1914, but of a "new workers' International, which will take into its own hands the leadership and coordination of the revolutionary class struggle against imperialism." [19] The significant evolution of the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg on this subject are revealed by a symptomatic fact: in a letter to Rosa in 1916, Karl Liebknecht criticized her concept of the International as "too mechanically centralist," with "too much 'discipline', too little spontaneity" -- a distant and paradoxical echo of the criticisms that Rosa herself had made in another context, addressed to Lenin. [20] □

NOTES

1. Cf. Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 39.
2. Paul Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 222. [According to Greek mythology, Ariadne was a woman who gave a ball of thread to the Athenian hero Theseus; with this thread he would be able to find his way out of the labyrinth which contained the murderous, cannibalistic monster, the Minotaur.--Trans.]
3. Cf. article of Bernstein in defense of the neo-Kantian Vorlander and against the "folly" of the leftist Pannekoek, in Dokumente des Sozialismus III, p. 487.
4. Rosa Luxemburg, "Reform or Revolution," in Mary-Alice Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 73.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 41.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
7. Kautsky had in his youth been an ardent disciple of Darwin, and still in his last work, The Materialist Conception of History (1927), he proclaims that his goal is to find the laws which are common "to the evolution of humans, animals and plants." Cf. Erich Mathias, "Kautsky und der kautskyanismus," Marxismusstudien, 2, 1957, p. 153.
8. Karl Kautsky, The Road to Power (Chicago: Samuel A. Bloch, 1909), p. 50. Cf. also the Erfurt Program of the German Social-Democratic Party (1891), drafted by Kautsky and presenting socialism as a "naturnotwendiges Ziel," a goal resulting from "natural necessity."
9. Discussion at the 1907 Congress of the International at Stuttgart, in Lelio Basso, "Introduzione," in Rosa Luxemburg, Scritti Politici (Rome: Riuniti, 1967), p. 85.
10. Article of 1913 by Rosa Luxemburg against Kautsky's "strategy of attrition," in Frolich, op. cit., p. 143.
11. Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 269. [This translation has been modified somewhat on the basis of Lowy's own translation. -- "rans.]

12. Frederick Engels, Anti-Duhring (New York: International Publishers, 1966), p. 174, our emphasis. Cf. also p. 183: "its own productive powers have grown beyond its control, and, as with the force of a law of Nature, are driving the whole of bourgeois society forward to ruin or revolution."
13. Karl Marx, "Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Collected Works, Volume 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 44. According to Lukacs in History and Class Consciousness [p. 79], the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat appears precisely under the conceptual form of an objective possibility.
14. Cf. Lelio Basso, op. cit., p. 48.
15. In 1915, Rosa's faith in the future of humanity consequently appeared somewhat like the Pascalian wager: risk, possibility of failure, hope of success, in a "game" in which one engages one's life for a transcendent value. The difference with Pascal, of course, being: a) the content of that value, and b) its objective foundation for Rosa Luxemburg. On this subject see Lucien Goldmann, The Hidden God (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 300-302, which compares the Pascalian wager with the Marxist wager.
16. On this subject see Michael Lowy, "From the Great Logic of Hegel to the Finland Station of Petrograd," Critique #6, Spring 1976. [In the April Theses of 1917, Lenin indicated the need for the Russian revolution not to pause at its bourgeois-democratic stage, but to be transformed into a proletarian-socialist revolution. This constituted a dramatic shift in Lenin's thinking and a bold challenge to Russian Marxist "orthodoxy." -- Trans.]
17. Leon Trotsky, Our Political Tasks (London: New Park, 1980), p. 123.
18. In The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology (New York: Dell, 1964), p. 79.
19. Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 330.
20. Karl Liebknecht, "A Rosa Luxemburg -- Remarques a propre de son projet de theses pour le groupe 'Internationale,'" in Partisans no. 45, January 1969, p. 113.

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USES AND ABUSES OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

by Steve Bloom

Today, among those who consider themselves revolutionary Marxists, there is a broad consensus which accepts the Leninist organizational method known as democratic centralism. Nevertheless, a wide diversity of thought remains about what this concept means and how it should be applied.

Historically, of course, there was not always such agreement that democratic centralism was a correct approach for the Marxist movement. Before the Russian revolution of 1917 a great debate raged about what organizational methods should be adopted. Only in Russia, where Lenin led the Bolshevik party, was the principle of democratic centralism adopted and applied. And even in Russia, a revolutionary of the stature of Trotsky rejected Lenin's organizational concepts until the revolution of 1917 demonstrated their validity in the test of great events.

Those events also proved decisive for others around the world, and since 1917 the acceptance and application of democratic centralism has been a dividing line between revolutionaries and reformists of all stripes; it is considered by most to be as much a part of Marxism as its economic and sociological analyses of capitalist society. Unfortunately, like Marxist economics and sociology, democratic centralism is far more often caricatured and abused than correctly understood and applied.

BUREAUCRATIC METHODS

The Stalinist Communist parties around the world are guilty of the most obvious and grotesque abuse of this concept. They elevate the centralist side of the formula to predominance, and completely suppress democracy--not only in their party organization but in the workers' states where they hold governmental power. This is necessary because these parties do not really represent the working class. They uphold the interests of bureaucratic castes which rule in the deformed and degenerated workers' states, and want to maintain

their parasitic hold on the economies of those countries.

It is this, and not any desire to advance the cause of the socialist revolution, which dictates the policies of this social layer and that of its political representatives. They cannot allow genuine democratic debate or discussion in any area of social or political life, since in such a discussion the genuine voice of the oppressed and exploited would have an opportunity to be heard. This, in turn, would expose the bureaucracy's gigantic deception--its claim to be the real inheritor of the traditions of Marx, Engels, and Lenin--a deception on which the Stalinists depend to maintain their grip on power.

The bureaucracy's rejection of democracy is not a matter of a bad policy or mistaken choice. It is an iron necessity, dictated by the fact that it lacks a sufficient mass base to defend itself in an open and free contest of social forces. Genuine representatives of the working class would face no such difficulties.

A MISTAKEN POSITION

Yet there are those who remain committed to revolutionary objectives and the fight to advance the interests of the workers and other oppressed and exploited, who nevertheless accept Stalinist organizational methods--or major aspects of them--as genuine Leninism. In this case, we are dealing with a mistake, though it is a serious one. It should not be hard to understand why such a mistake might be made. The dominance of Stalinist ideology in the international workers movement and the eclipse of genuine Leninism for decades following the degeneration of the Russian revolution have obscured many aspects of a correct proletarian policy.

The most prominent of those who have this misunderstanding are the Cuban Communist Party and other forces which make up the Castroist current on an international scale. There are also groups which evolved in many countries

as part of the worldwide radicalization of the 1960s and '70s. The ability of such forces to overcome their misunderstandings about the proper relationship between democracy and centralism within the Leninist formula will be of great importance for their future evolution.

AN OPPOSITE ERROR

There is an opposite error--one generally made in reaction to the bureaucratic caricature of democratic centralism--which consists in rejecting or downgrading the centralist side of the formula, treating this as if it were merely an afterthought. Such an approach by those who consider themselves Leninists is much less common than the first, the bureaucratic error, simply because most of those who react against Stalinist organizational methods accept the claim that these represent genuine Leninism, and decide to reject Leninism altogether.

FORMALISM AND SCHEMATISM

Yet another type of mistake, and quite a prevalent one, is to treat democratic centralism in a purely schematic way--as if it were a cookbook recipe good for all times and places. Not infrequently, those who take this point of view have a similar approach toward other aspects of Marxism--looking at past practice as if it were some kind of prearranged blueprint for what we should do in the present. These are the types who try to defend their positions with long and numerous quotations from the classics.

But that is completely sterile. Marxism is not a set of rules and regulations. Past practice is not to be understood in order to be slavishly reconstructed, but rather so we can learn the method by which political and organizational problems were resolved in the past and use that method to solve our own problems in a creative way.

There have never been two party-building situations which were identical in all respects, or even in major respects. Democratic centralism must be able to accomplish its task of knitting together a revolutionary vanguard under different degrees of legality or clandestinity, facing different objective conditions, for different sizes of groups, with different levels of theoretical training, different types of experiences, different amounts of common tradition, different levels of involvement in the class struggle and agreement

on basic issues, etc. etc. At every stage of building the Leninist party it must be asked: How do all these factors affect us? What constraints do they place on our organizational functioning? What kinds of discussions are necessary? What kind of common campaigns are possible or not possible?

No genuine Leninist leadership can base itself upon what it would like to be true in this regard--some idealized model of "the party"--if its desires don't correspond to the actual reality of the situation. If it tries to function organizationally on the basis of simple rote learning, or artificial and abstract timetables which don't correspond to the needs of the organization, it can only have a destructive effect.

A UNIFIED DIALECTICAL CONCEPT

Those who don't really understand this aspect of democratic centralism--or of the Marxist method in general--frequently treat the two sides of the Leninist organizational formula as if they were separate quantities, to be considered independently of one another. This, too, is a serious mistake. Democracy and centralism are two opposite poles of a unified concept, each of which is dependent upon the other for real meaning.

Those who belong to the revolutionary party submit to its discipline voluntarily. There is no legal force compelling anyone to become, or remain, a member. This makes it absolutely essential for everyone who is a member to feel that they are part of the political discussions which lead to the formation of program and policy for the party.

Through such a process their loyalty is increased and their willingness to submit their individual interests to the collective effort is forged. No one feels as if they are carrying out the arbitrary orders of self-appointed "leaders." In this sense, democracy in the party is a prerequisite for centralized action.

At the same time, no genuine proletarian revolutionist is interested in wasting time with discussions if those discussions don't lead to decisions and the decisions don't lead to action by the organization. In this sense, centralized action by the party is the prerequisite to real democracy--democracy in which the decisions of the majority have meaning and are carried out in an effective manner. The reality is that the democratic and the centralist

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By Dianne Feeley, Paul Le Blanc, and Tom Twiss

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sides of the Leninist formula complement and reinforce one another, and are indivisible.

SOME RECENT EXPERIENCE

With this background in mind, it is useful to look at the organizational abuses by the SWP leadership, beginning in 1981, which led to the purge of the party, and the impact of these events on our world movement--the Fourth International. Discussing this organizational side of the present crisis in its own terms is important because it has a dynamic of its own which needs to be understood. But in discussing it we must always keep in mind that these organizational questions remain purely secondary in the broader scheme of things. They are subordinate to the overall political debate. In a real sense, they were created by the political debate itself--since the need for the SWP leadership to begin to rely on bureaucratic organizational methods flowed from their effort to change the program of the party without submitting their new theories to a discussion by the rank and file. And the purge of the SWP, in turn, laid the basis for all of the organizational problems faced by the Fourth International in dealing with the situation that resulted.

It should not be hard for those who are familiar with the events which led to the purge of oppositionists from the SWP to recognize the kinds of misrepresentations of Bolshevik organizational norms which were used by the Barnes leadership to justify its actions to the party. These have been well documented in past issues of the Bulletin IDOM. The leadership brutally wrenched a caricatured notion of "discipline" apart from its democratic prerequisite, and insisted that, despite the abuses of authority committed by leaders who began to proclaim their rejection of Trotskyism publicly in the party press, party members who disagreed with this and the rank and file of the party as a whole had no right to discuss or try to reverse the new course.

The Barnes leadership falsely insisted on an abstract schema, whereby no discussion among the rank and file was permitted between preconvention periods (and then proceeded to postpone the regularly scheduled convention). They twisted the record of past organizational debates in order to "prove" that this was "the norm"--ignoring the fact that it is also "the norm" for the leadership to introduce changes of line during a

preconvention period so they can be discussed and voted on by the entire party. They insisted that Bolshevik organization meant abiding by a set of abstract rules and regulations which they applied without regard to the concrete needs of the party in relation to the class struggle or its own internal contradictions. And these were the actions by the SWP leadership which led to the completely unprincipled and unnecessary split imposed on the organization.

INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

The purge of loyal Fourth Internationalists from the SWP then posed problems on an international level. The expelled SWP members appealed their case to the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International which, by an overwhelming majority, voted to "demand" that the SWP readmit them to full membership. The SWP, however, has so far refused to take any step in this direction, and continues its policy of excluding the expelled even from public meetings sponsored by the party.

At the August 1985 convention of the SWP, the fraternal delegate from the United Secretariat was asked by Jack Barnes to explain his view of the world congress decisions upholding the appeals of the expelled. Were these "orders" which, if the SWP were not faced with reactionary legislation making it illegal to maintain formal membership in the FI, would be "binding" on the party, or were they merely "recommendations" to the party? The very terms in which this question was posed demonstrates the most profound lack of understanding about the meaning of democratic centralism on an international scale.

The present SWP leadership has long insisted that democratic centralism cannot function internationally in the same way that it does for a national section. This is true in an important sense. It is far more difficult to forge the kind of unity in terms of experience, confidence in a leadership, programmatic homogeneity, etc. on an international scale. Obviously, if we understand democratic centralism correctly, this imposes serious constraints on the actual organizational measures which can be taken by the International.

But the Barnes leadership uses this truth to hide an equally important reality. In another sense, there is no fundamental difference between national and international democratic centralism, because the same basic interaction be-

tween the two sides of the formula continues to exist at all levels.

The Fourth International, like the national section, must be able to forge the most profound loyalty and dedication of its component parts. It does this, in large measure, through a process of democratic discussion and the greatest possible input in arriving at common decisions. The national sections of the FI are, like the individuals who make up a national party, associated with it voluntarily. There is no legal force by which the FI--or a national section for that matter--can impose "orders" on any of its components.

At the same time, the ability of the International to maintain its unity also depends on its capacity to act effectively in carrying out decisions. Just as for a national section, so too for the International, democracy loses all meaning if it doesn't lead to unified action for a common goal. This poses certain constraints on each of the component parts of the FI if they are interested in maintaining its unity.

The SWP is not, formally, a member of the FI, but if it takes its relationship with others in our world movement seriously, it is duty bound to have the same attitude toward the decisions of the highest body of the FI as if it were. These decisions have the same force on an international scale as the decisions of an SWP convention should have on the party as a whole--not in a schematic sense implied in Barnes's question about "orders," but in the political sense that the failure of the SWP to carry out the decisions of the world congress poses the same problem for the FI which would be posed for the SWP if a branch of the party refused to carry out a decision of its convention.

What would be the consequences of such an action by a party branch? Suppose a branch which disagreed with the national political line of the party had expelled all of its members who agreed with that line? Suppose, further, that these expelled members had appealed to the national convention which upheld their appeal? The branch, however,

continued to refuse to admit them to meetings or even allow them to attend forums or enter the local headquarters; what should be done?

It would be wrong to give an automatic response--that the party would expel the branch. Expulsion would certainly be a reasonable action, but by no means an absolute requirement. Democratic centralism, as we have seen, is not a set of rules and regulations (crimes and punishments) which are to be applied no matter what the political context might be. Above all, the political requirement of maintaining clarity on fundamental programmatic issues in any dispute within the Bolshevik movement should be followed, and a wide degree of organizational latitude is appropriate toward that end.

At this stage in the evolution of the political discussion in the FI it is completely correct for the International leadership to place the necessity of political clarification first, with organizational issues in a secondary category. But it would be wrong for the SWP to conclude from this that it can simply thumb its nose at the decisions of the majority of the FI without this having the most profound consequences, both within the United States and for the SWP's relationship to the rest of the FI.

The actions of the party--refusing to carry out the decisions of the world congress and maintaining its exclusionary policy against those who are part of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, Socialist Action, and Socialist Unity (the organizations formed by expelled members in the U.S.)--threaten the very foundation of the revolutionary party on an international scale, just as the actions of our mythical SWP branch would threaten the foundations of democratic centralism on a national level. Ultimately, this contradiction will have to be resolved; and the longer the SWP continues with its factional course, the more unfavorable the final resolution of that contradiction will turn out to be for the party. □

SIMPLISTIC ANSWERS IN THE DEBATE ON CENTRAL AMERICA

by Tom Barrett

The October 1985 issue of Socialist Action inaugurates a theoretical supplement entitled, "International Outlook." This is a big step forward for Socialist Action, which, until now, has been weak on the theoretical side. Among the articles published in this new supplement is an edited version of a resolution adopted by the Socialist Action national convention, held in November 1984, on the eve of the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International. Its title is "The stakes in the debate on Central America." The title is not a very good one, for the article is simply an exposition of Socialist Action's views on the Central American revolution, and has little to do with what is "at stake" in the current debate. Polemical articles, however, often have titles having to do with "the stakes," reflecting more habit than actual thought. This entire document falls into that category: it is an exposition of hard, inflexible positions which are consistent and clear on paper, but have very little value when applied to the living class struggle.

The resolution makes a number of correct statements of fact, such as, "...the weaknesses of Castroism...take the form of serious theoretical and programmatic gaps and errors (for example on the nature of Stalinism or the role of the neocolonial capitalist class) which result from the specific historical conditions in which the Cuban revolution took place." However, Socialist Action is hindered in responding to the weaknesses of the organizations which are programmatically inspired by the Cuban Communist Party. SA is hindered by a simplistic--and therefore wrong--understanding of permanent revolution and by abstract and rigid concepts related to alliances in the class struggle. The Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Salvadoran revolutionary leaderships do not have the luxury of easy answers. In El Salvador there is a revolutionary civil war to be won. In Nicaragua and Cuba there are not only revolutions to be defended, there are economies to be run, within the context of a world econ-

omy dominated by imperialism. People have to be fed, clothed, housed, and kept healthy. This is a monumental task in an underdeveloped country in peacetime; under the war conditions imposed by the United States the difficulty is beyond imagining.

In no way does this mean that the revolutionary leaders of Central America and the Caribbean should be beyond criticism. However, before one contrasts their actions against some kind of revolutionary checklist, as SA tends to do, it is necessary to examine the conditions that motivate them and what they hope to achieve. One may then conclude that they are making a mistake (people do that) though one may also conclude that they are making necessary adjustments under the circumstances. Our concern is not to prove ourselves right; it is to help the revolution and its leadership move forward.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION: REALITY VS. ABSTRACTION

The authors of Socialist Action's resolution say, "In the age of imperialism there can be no road to national liberation except through a process of workers' revolution--of socialist revolution." That is true as a summation of one important element of the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution. However, the road to national liberation--even through a process of workers' revolution--is not always (indeed, not usually) a straight or simple one. The workers who make the workers' revolution are for the most part not educated in the school of Marxism; in underdeveloped countries they tend not to be educated in any school at all except the school of capitalist oppression.

The workers and peasants (or farmers) of any country have a healthy distrust of politicians' talk. Questions of economic theory always take a back seat to the reality of wages, prices, and availability of goods. Consequent-

ly, a revolutionary leadership has to make economic decisions, including decisions related to the nationalization of property, based on the actual state of the economy, the consciousness of the workers and peasants, and their cultural level, rather than on textbook theories. Theory, as Engels said, is not dogma but a guide to action. Theory helps the revolutionist to understand; it is no substitute for the revolutionist's own judgment. Theory is a guide to action, but theory and action are not the same thing and should not be confused. Ma-

terial reality always takes priority over theory.

The authors of SA's resolution show an incomplete understanding of permanent revolution. They state, "A decisive showdown is shaping up that must end either in the overthrow of the still dominant economic power of the capitalists and the creation of a workers' state resting on nationalized property, or in the defeat of the revolution.

"This is the question of permanent revolution as it has always been understood by the world Trotskyist movement."

DOCUMENTS FROM THE STRUGGLE IN THE SWP AND THE FI

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

Theses on the Workers' and Farmers' Government

by the Fourth Internationalist Caucus

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The Workers' and Farmers' Government and the Socialist Revolution

by Steve Bloom

The Cuban Revolution, The Castroist Current, and the Fourth International

Resolution of the International Executive Committee,
adopted May 1981

Why We Oppose the SWP's New Line on Castroism

by Steve Bloom

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

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Such a statement is true as far as it goes, but the key element of timing, which is all-important in a situation like that in Nicaragua, is missing. There is a difference between the conquest of state power by the working class and the establishment of socialist property forms, that is, nationalized industry, state monopoly of foreign trade, collectivized agriculture, and so forth. Socialist property forms are, of course, the primary goal of the working class revolution. Furthermore, the continued existence of private ownership of the means of production creates dangers for a workers' government.

The bourgeoisie is not as inclined to risk its capital if it cannot defend its interests with state power. It will therefore attempt to sabotage the economy and reestablish its own power. A good example can be seen in the history of Russia between 1921 and 1928. The New Economic Policy (NEP) restored private enterprise in large sections of the Russian economy. However, the state remained firmly in the hands of the working class. It remained, in Marxist terms, a proletarian dictatorship. Even the limited concessions which the Soviet workers' state made to private enterprise in the NEP created a dangerous situation for the Soviet economy and state.

The Nicaraguan businessmen are today doing what they can to undermine the Sandinistas and reestablish a bourgeois state. The situation cannot last indefinitely. It is even possible that the Sandinistas have made an error in maintaining the "mixed economy" for this long. However, that does not alter the fact of the revolution. The bourgeois state has been smashed; conscious revolutionary socialists have hegemony in the new Nicaraguan state, and the process of permanent revolution is moving forward. It is not moving forward in an even line at a constant rate, but it is moving forward. If the leadership of the revolution finds that errors have been made, it is capable of correcting them.

In one sense, the theory of permanent revolution can be understood as a "theory" in the same way that the germ theory of disease is a "theory." Both are in fact the way things happen in the real world. The alternative to permanent revolution is not "revolution by stages," "workers' and farmers' government," "new democracy," "democratic dictatorship," or any other theoretical abstraction. The alternative to permanent revolution is no revolution at all.

The theory of permanent revolution explains that in underdeveloped countries national liberation and economic development can only be carried out completely under the dictatorship of the proletariat. That means nothing more nor less than the working class holding state power. It is our view--and the view of the majority of the Fourth International--that the working class holds state power in Nicaragua, and that the process of permanent revolution is moving forward there. It must do so at its own pace, which cannot be dictated by North American Marxists basing themselves on learned texts.

THE MAJORITY POSITION IN THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Socialist Action has as its main polemical target the majority of the Fourth International. The resolution states, "While we are confident that the Fourth International (FI), unlike the SWP in the grip of the Barnes faction, is completely capable of regaining its balance, the United Secretariat (USec) majority is showing evidence of a similar course toward adaptation." It cites the central resolutions of the 1985 World Congress, "The Present Stage of Building the Fourth International" and "The Central American Revolution" as evidence of the FI's deviation.

This approach has things the wrong way around. The political line of the SWP leadership is the most serious threat to the programmatic foundation of the Fourth International in a generation. To underestimate it or ignore it will have serious consequences. It has to be fought on all levels of the revolutionary Marxist movement. In fact, far from an "adaptation" along the lines of the false program of the SWP leadership, "The Present Stage of Building the Fourth International" is a head-on attack against it and does an excellent job of immunizing the ranks of the revolutionary Marxist movement against the liquidationist disease which has infected the SWP. Obviously, those who oppose Jack Barnes's revisionist attack on Trotskyism are not politically monolithic, but that should not be an obstacle to a united defense of the Fourth International's programmatic conquests. Whatever disagreements there may be, the FI majority is defending its program against Barnes and his supporters and Barnes is the main threat to the FI right now.

The first objection SA presents to the resolution "The Central American Revolution" is on the question of the "Government of Broad Participation" (GAP), put forward as a demand by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front and Revolutionary Democratic Front (FMLN-FDR) of El Salvador. Lest readers be misled by the SA resolution, no such coalition exists. No section of the Salvadoran bourgeoisie has agreed to any kind of GAP. The GAP is essentially a collection of democratic demands, the acceptance of which could lead, according to the FMLN-FDR, to an end to the fighting and the formation of a new government.

The democratic demands presented in the GAP proposal are:

• destroy the repressive apparatus;

• dissolve the security police, the death squads and their political organisation, the ARENA party;

• send home the North American advisors, stop the military intervention and aid as well as all arms supplies in the country;

• after a full inquiry bring the civilians and military personnel responsible for genocide, political crimes, torture, kidnappings, violations of individual rights, to justice;

• restore all democratic rights;

• (a series) of fundamental social and economic reforms in order to transform existing structures" (quoted in the Twelfth World Congress resolution on Central America, reprinted in International Viewpoint, special issue, p. 103).

What is Socialist Action's problem with these demands? They should consider first what it would take to meet them and second what the effect of meet-

ing these demands would be on Salvadoran society.

What really has raised Socialist Action's hackles is the following: "This process must end up in the organisation of a single national army, formed by the FMLN forces and the armed forces of the present government after they have been purged. The FMLN and government forces will keep their arms until the end of negotiations..."

"Representatives of the workers' movement, of the peasants', teachers', professional associations, white-collar workers, university organisations, political parties, private property owners, the FMLN and the reconstructed armed forces must be in this government.

"The oligarchy, sectors and personalities and sectors opposed to the objectives of this government or proposing the maintenance of the dictatorship will be excluded from this government.

"No single force will dominate this government, all the social and political forces in favour of the overthrow of the oligarchy's regime, of the reestablishment of national sovereignty and independence and of private property and foreign investment not contradicting society's interests will be represented in it" (ibid. p. 103, emphasis added).

This statement does not shout "Proletarian Revolution!" However, the people to whom the Salvadoran revolutionists are appealing are more interested in an end to poverty and dictatorship than in economic theories. That means that economic and political theory has to be translated into an agitational program which can win mass support in El Salvador and which can help create and organize international opposition to U.S. intervention. Think for a minute: what would be the effect of purging the

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existing Salvadoran army of pro-dictatorship officers? What would be left? Would it be so bad to merge those soldiers and officers with the FMLN-FDR forces into a new army? And isn't the FMLN-FDR call for this kind of "merged" armed forces an effective way to appeal to the Salvadoran soldiers, noncommissioned officers and junior officers to come over to the revolution?

The bottom line, however, is that "the FMLN-FDR's offer of negotiations is not a substitute for military action, it goes hand in hand with it" (ibid., p. 103, emphasis in original). The FMLN-FDR has not laid down its arms; it continues the military struggle against the bourgeois state, and that struggle has a logic of its own, as history demonstrates. There is no disagreement among revolutionary Marxists that the FMLN-FDR has programmatic shortcomings. However, they are, for the most part, genuine revolutionists. Whatever class-collaborationist forces are part of the leadership of the Salvadoran revolution, they have not succeeded in derailing it, and this is critical for us.

The Fourth International is not a church: program begins and ends with the proletarian revolution--making it, defending it, extending it--both before and after the seizure of power within a single country. Our understanding of the FMLN-FDR has to begin with the fact that they are at the head of an ongoing revolution.

BUILDING THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

The Fourth International will be built--in all countries, including El Salvador and Nicaragua--by political collaboration and dialogue with revolutionary leaders who have earned their leadership position, not by sterile criticism from the sidelines. It will be built by winning genuine revolutionists to its ranks--and in El Salvador and Nicaragua genuine revolutionists are today correctly participating in the struggles which are led by the FMLN-FDR and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), respectively.

If we consider these organizations to be revolutionary, not Stalinist, not Social-Democratic, not bourgeois liberal, not petty-bourgeois radical, we have to conclude that the Fourth International cannot be built in opposition to them. Our aim should not be to replace the existing leaderships with Trotskyist leaderships; rather it should be to win them, and the masses who are the backbone of the revolutionary process, to

political unity with the Fourth International. We cannot do that by "talking at" them. True political dialogue means listening as well as talking; it also means working together in common action.

The resolution, "The Present Stage of Building the Fourth International," explains: "Less than ever can we see the passage from today's Fourth International to the mass revolutionary International as a nice straight road, as the linear growth of an International that already exists in miniaturised version. Movement in that direction will mean all sorts of intermediary initiatives and stages.... The Fourth International certainly has a lot to do with a programme but just as much as this programme it has to do with the reality, activity and social implantation of its sections" (International Viewpoint, special issue, p. 43).

The Fourth International's forces are quite small in the international workers' movement. Thousands of workers, peasants, and students are taking action against oppression without ever having heard of the Fourth International or its program. It is inevitable that revolutionary organizations will come into existence and even rise to the leadership of mass struggles without coming into contact with us. It is also inevitable that they will have learned a thing or two in their experience. If we expect to win them to the Fourth International by convincing them that we know everything and they know nothing we are condemning ourselves to permanent isolation.

That would be just as big a mistake as the one the Socialist Workers Party leadership is making--deciding that the Cubans and Sandinistas know everything and the Trotskyist movement knows nothing, and that the programmatic acquisitions of over fifty years are of no value. That will neither build a revolutionary party nor earn respect from any revolutionists, including the Cubans and Nicaraguans.

Looking for easy answers to difficult questions won't build a revolutionary party, no matter how dedicated its activists. A hard, inflexible position towards a living revolution is the first step towards simon-pure sectarianism, and it has been the death of many promising revolutionary organizations since the beginning of the twentieth century. "The stakes in the debate on Central America" does little to clarify the real problems facing revolutionists either in Central America itself or in the rest of the world. □

CANADIAN TROTSKYISTS CONSOLIDATE ORGANIZATION

by Bill Onasch

The rebuilding of the Canadian Trotskyist movement took a big step forward with the founding convention of the Alliance for Socialist Action held in Toronto on the weekend of November 22-24. The convention culminated a process begun a year ago at a conference of local collectives and individuals from across English Canada held in Winnipeg. The Winnipeg conference called on Trotskyists driven out of the Canadian section of the Fourth International (the Revolutionary Workers League) to begin a discussion with the aim of uniting the fragmented revolutionary forces into a new organization with ties to the Fourth International.

Over the past year several discussion bulletins were published and local collectives collaborated on a number of practical projects. The 1985 World Congress of the FI authorized the United Secretariat to establish relations with the ASA after their program and organization had been established at a founding convention. The ASA also cemented close working relations with Gauche Socialiste, a sympathizing organization of the FI in Quebec.

Delegates from Toronto, Winnipeg,

Edmonton, and Vancouver participated in the lively discussions at the convention. Groups in Hamilton, Saskatoon, Calgary, and Moose Jaw, who were unable to attend the Toronto convention, are expected to become part of the new organization. Observers from the United Secretariat of the FI, the Canadian RWL, the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, Gauche Socialiste, and American Fourth Internationalist opposition groups--Fourth Internationalist Tendency, Socialist Action, and Socialist Unity--all gave greetings.

A large spirited public solidarity rally was held in conjunction with the convention. Livio Maitan, one of the central leaders of the Fourth International, spoke about new trends in the class struggle in Europe and Latin America. Other speakers included leaders of the pro-choice, South Africa, and Palestinian solidarity movements, Gauche Socialiste, and Bill Onasch of the F.I.T. representing Fourth Internationalists in the United States.

The ASA plans to soon launch a newspaper, Socialist Challenge, and to intervene in the class struggle across English Canada. □

DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

A Report from the Political Rights Defense Fund

[We are reprinting below the text of a letter dated December 1985 sent out by the Political Rights Defense Fund over the signature of Holbrook Mahn, national coordinator of the PRDF. The letter discusses the present status of three important legal cases: The Socialist Workers Party vs. Attorney General, Hector Marroquin's fight for political asylum in the U.S., and the suit against the SWP by Alan Gelfand in Los Angeles. All supporters of democratic rights in the U.S. and internationally should support the SWP's efforts in these cases. Readers of the Bulletin IDOM who want to respond to the appeal in the letter for financial aid may send it to PRDF, Box 649, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10003.]

CIA, INS and other government agencies from spying on and disrupting the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). It also asks that the court rule unconstitutional two key thought-control laws, the Smith Act and the Voorhis Act, as well as the sections of the Immigration and Nationality Act that discriminate against the foreign-born on the basis of their political affiliation.

In the course of the lawsuit, the government has put forward the position that it has the "right" to outlaw political ideas -- and to penalize opponents of government policy through secret "investigations," burglaries, wiretapping and bugging, informer programs, poison-pen letters, and other disruption operations. In its post-trial brief, the government argued that its forty-year disruption effort against the SWP and the YSA was justified by the fact that the SWP and YSA advocate "a political ideology that was, as a policy matter, deemed inimical to the good order of the country." In short, that their only crime is their ideas.

Dear Friend,

Today, we all confront a concerted drive by the Reagan administration to roll back civil liberties. These government efforts are unfolding unfettered by any clear legal restrictions on the activities of the FBI, CIA, and other government thought-control police agencies. Unfortunately, this offensive is receiving back-handed support from Federal Judge Thomas Griesa. For over three years, Judge Griesa has refused to issue a ruling on the historic case Socialist Workers Party vs. Attorney General. A positive ruling in this case -- the landmark legal effort to curb government spying and disruption against those who exercise First Amendment rights -- would place severe obstacles in the way of the efforts of the Reagan administration to cut away at our rights.

Socialist Workers Party vs. Attorney General, sponsored and supported by the Political Rights Defense Fund, seeks a permanent injunction barring the FBI,

CIVIL LIBERTIES UNDER ATTACK

Ever since the Reagan administration took office, we have witnessed a systematic campaign against the historic gains of the civil rights, women's, and antiwar movements. Attorney General Meese's efforts to "reinterpret" the Constitution, the attempted victimization of sanctuary movement activists, attacks on desegregation and abortion rights, along with the consistent denial of visas to those who oppose U.S. foreign policy are particularly ominous for First Amendment rights. A clear goal of the Reagan administration is to stifle the growing opposition to U.S. support for the apartheid regime in South Africa and deepening U.S. intervention in Central America.

A favorable ruling in the SWP case would set an important precedent reaffirming the constitutional protection of

free speech and exercise of political rights.

The fact that Judge Griesa has not ruled on this case is detrimental not only to the plaintiffs but to the First Amendment rights of everybody. PRDF attorneys are now collaborating with noted constitutional rights attorney Leonard Boudin to develop a strategy to attempt to gain a decision in this lawsuit.

MARROQUIN CASE STALLED

Griesa's unwillingness to rule is also adversely affecting Hector Marroquin, who has been fighting the government's efforts to deport him for over eight years. As the enclosed letters from the Congressional Black and Hispanic Caucuses detail, Marroquin applied for a permanent residence visa in June 1983 and was cleared for the last step in the process -- an interview with the U.S. Consul General in Toronto -- in December 1984. Appointments for such interviews are normally granted within two months, but Marroquin's attorney was told by an officer at the consulate that Marroquin's is a "special" case. Marroquin still has not been given an appointment, a year later, and consular officers say it will take "a long time."

Marroquin is fully eligible for a visa. What makes his case "special" is that he is a member of the SWP. The only grounds the Reagan administration conceivably could use to deny Marroquin's visa application is the witch-hunt McCarran-Walter Act. This thought-control legislation from the 1950s is one that the SWP vs. Attorney General lawsuit is asking the court to rule unconstitutional.

A favorable ruling by Griesa on this issue would not only help Marroquin in his fight to remain in the U.S., but would also set a crucial precedent for others. Margaret Randall, the noted author of such works as Sandino's Daughters, Christians in the Nicaraguan Revolution, and Cuban Women Now, is locked in a similar fight against deportation because the U.S. government does not approve of her books and ideas.

JUDGE THREATENS FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS

Yet another PRDF case is also bottled up by judicial inaction. Following a March 1983 trial in a lawsuit brought by an opponent of the SWP designed to disrupt the organization and drain it of its resources, Judge Marianne Pfaelzer stated from the bench that she had decided to rule in the SWP's favor. By accepting jurisdiction over the lawsuit in the first place, Pfaelzer had asserted the right of a court to intervene in a free political association and determine membership and policy questions -- a serious threat in itself to the First Amendment. Now nearly three years since the end of the trial, Pfaelzer has yet to issue a decision.

In light of the Reagan administration's deepening offensive against political rights, there is one particular ominous side to this case remaining open. At the end of the trial, government attorneys asked the judge to make a finding far beyond the scope of the case and issue a ruling giving blanket approval to the government's whole informer program. This question hangs open as does the entire case. PRDF attorneys are also planning to take steps to end Pfaelzer's inaction.

PRDF was formed 13 years ago to help raise funds and gain publicity for the historic SWP vs. Attorney General case. The government's strategy has been to drag out litigation, to try and drain PRDF of its resources. They also hope that delay, coupled with Reagan's efforts to push politics to the right, will pressure the courts to rule unfavorably on the SWP case. The lack of decisions by the courts has the same effect -- to deny justice and to cause the expenses of carrying these cases to mount. Throughout our cases we have had to depend upon you to sustain our efforts. We have reached another important stage. We need to mount the pressure, both in and out of the courts, to win rulings in our cases, so that justice deferred does not become justice denied. We are asking you to be generous in making a tax-deductible contribution to PRDF to help in its efforts to protect the First Amendment rights of all of us.

□

OOPS!

I read Naomi Allen's article (A "Suppressed" Document by Leon Trotsky) in Issue No. 24 with great interest. Especially since I had recently come across an old SWP discussion bulletin in which Doug Jenness appeared to agree with Trotsky's assessment of the incorrect theoretical "training" of the Bolsheviks because of Lenin's polemics against the theory of permanent revolution (Doug Jenness, "Facts About the Bolshevik Party," SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 29, No. 26, August 1971, p. 9). Here's what Jenness said back then:

"The February Revolution [of 1917] found the Bolshevik Party considerably weakened by the wartime repression. Nearly all the primary leaders of the party were in exile or in prison, and the party was generally unprepared for the gigantic events. Even more important, for years before the February Revolution, the cadres of the Bolshevik Party had been taught by Lenin that the Russian Revolution would usher in the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. This theory assumed that the workers and peasants together would lead the bourgeois revolution and establish a democratic capitalist state. Trotsky, since 1905, had predicted that the next Russian revolution would be led by the working class and would establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin sharply polemicized against Trotsky's view, and the Bolshevik Party was trained to oppose Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution in favor of the "democratic dictatorship" formulation.

It is no wonder, then, that the secondary leaders of the party were caught off-guard in February. Although the "democratic dictatorship" Lenin had described never appeared, many of the Bolsheviks supported the capitalist Provisional Government on the grounds that it was the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. This was the position the party was taking when Lenin returned in April 1917.

Lenin opposed support to the Provisional Government and called for a Soviet government -- that is, a government of the workers and peasants. At first only a minority held his viewpoint, but by the late April party conference he had won a majority of the party to this perspective."

An ex-member

ANOTHER 'EXCLUSION' ABSURDITY

I enjoyed your "Questions and Answers About the SWP's 'Exclusion Policy'" in the October issue because it effectively highlighted some of the absurdities and contradictions in the SWP leadership's rationale for this despicable policy.

But you omitted one contradiction that is definitely worth including. The same SWP leaders who bar expelled members from crossing the threshold of halls they rent for public meetings made a motion at the world congress of the Fourth International in February for the congress and the FI to recognize the Fourth Internationalist Tendency and Socialist Action as sympathizing groups of the FI.

They are willing to let the victims of their political purge be accepted as their comrades in the FI at the same time that they castigate you as provocateurs who cannot be allowed onto SWP premises. Isn't that their biggest contradiction and doesn't it speak volumes about their real attitude to the FI?

R.B.

CAPITALISM'S BEST NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Historically, being white and male in the U.S. meant being on the top rungs of the economic ladder. That's beginning to change, according to the latest census report. During the period 1976-84 the median white male's income declined 22 percent. Inflation-adjusted to 1984 dollars that means slipping from \$21,175 to \$16,467. This was not due to inflation nor to a drop in the gross national product; the GNP actually went up 26 percent after correcting for inflation.

Here's one explanation offered by Lester C. Thurlow, Professor of Management and Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge: "In the midst of an economic boom the average white male was being crunched economically.

"If one asks why this is happening, there is an obvious answer. American white males typically earn their living precisely in the areas -- farming and

manufacturing--where the American economy is being hammered by foreign competition. Farming is on the edge of bankruptcy and manufacturing is not far behind because of the overvalued dollar and America's inability to compete on world markets.

"When one reads about 4-million American jobs that are being lost in the \$150-billion trade deficit expected for 1985, one is reading about the loss of farm and manufacturing markets -- and the loss of white male jobs.

"For much of the rest of the population there have been offsetting factors. Between 1978 and 1984 the number of blue-collar workers on American payrolls declined by 2 million, but the number of white-collar and service workers rose by 11 million. Many of those new white-collar jobs were female jobs and most were low paying relative to what white males had previously been earning. The net result is an expansion of total employment and total job opportunities but a contraction in precisely the types of jobs that had previously led to relatively good incomes for white males."

White male workers are finding out what Blacks, Latinos, women, and other groups at the bottom of the economic ladder have known for a long time: the best that capitalism has to offer is not good enough.

Evelyn Sell



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- *Resolving the International Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership Today* by four suspended NC members (8/83)
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