

# Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

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by Steve Bloom

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## Who We Are

The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published monthly (except for a combined July-August issue) 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.

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*“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 Revolutionary Quality of Malcolm X

by Steve Bloom

When Malcolm X was alive and developing his revolutionary ideas in the last year of his life there were not many who declared their solidarity with him. He was slandered by the white power structure, hounded by his ex-comrades in the Nation of Islam (NOI), shunned by the "mainstream" civil rights leaders who came from a religious/pacifist milieu, and rejected even by most of those who claimed to be radicals and revolutionaries in the United States. (The Communist Party, for example, joined in the chorus at the time which branded him a "racist in reverse.") There were exceptions in those days — most notably the Socialist Workers Party which invited Malcolm to speak at its weekly forums and covered his activities in the pages of its newspaper, the *Militant* — but they were few and far between.

Today, almost a quarter century after his assassination, there are many who would embrace the legacy of Malcolm

X. That does not necessarily mean that there are more genuine revolutionary-minded people around today than there were during the mid-1960s. It is always easier for a dead revolutionary to become "popular" — because with the passage of time, as memories fade and as the individual in question is not around to defend himself/herself, the popularizers find it easier and easier to reinterpret words and actions to fit into their own particular schemes, even if those schemes are radically different from the original intention of the historical figures who are being cited. It is thereby possible for some very nonrevolutionary individuals to gain a bit of prestige by bathing in the glow of "revolutionary" ideas. Malcolm is not the only victim of this phenomenon in the twentieth century.

The purpose of this contribution is to try to examine the genuinely revolutionary kernel of Malcolm X's ideas — what

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## Editorial

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### Stop U.S. Aggression Against Libya

On January 4 two Libyan jets were shot down by U.S. planes from the aircraft carrier *John F. Kennedy*. According to American officials the incident occurred in international waters about 70 miles off the Libyan coast; the Libyan jets were armed and engaging in hostile maneuvers. In other words, it is claimed that the U.S. planes acted in self-defense.

Libya asserts otherwise — that its fighters were on an unarmed reconnaissance mission and were the victims of a premeditated U.S. attack. The incident follows weeks of provocative U.S. government accusations about a Libyan plant which is supposed to be designed to make chemical weapons.

But whether the U.S. planes acted in "self-defense" or not the entire incident is a prime example of the hypocritical policy of the U.S. imperialist government. Just suppose, for a moment, that the situation were

reversed, that a Libyan aircraft carrier had launched planes which shot down two U.S. jets off the coast of New York. Even if the event occurred in "international waters," it is not hard to imagine the jingoist hue and cry which would be raised by the White House and the Pentagon.

The simple fact is that incidents like this occur because, and only because, the U.S. considers that it has the right to take its military power anywhere it likes in the world. The reason it does so is to warn people in other countries that they had better not do anything which displeases this nation's rulers too much.

The U.S.-backed contra rebels committed untold war crimes in Nicaragua, as did the U.S. itself in Vietnam. The U.S. government is the only one in the world ever to unleash the horrors of nuclear weapons against a human target in Hiroshima and

Nagasaki. This country has long been a leader in research on chemical and biological weapons. And Washington remains completely mum about the efforts of its allies — such as Israel — to develop a nuclear capacity. It is therefore a complete sham when President Reagan targets Libya for its alleged construction of a chemical weapons plant.

Working people in the United States should give no credence to these accusations, and we should give no support to the attack on the two Libyan jets. It would be better for us if the entire U.S. fleet were brought back to U.S. waters, and the money spent to poke into the affairs of other peoples were used instead to improve our living conditions here at home — to eliminate homelessness, provide medical care, improve education, and undertake all the other tasks which are so desperately needed in our society today. ●

it was that set him off from every other Black leader of his time, and what he had in common with other revolutionaries of his day and in the past. If we are able to do this, then it won't be hard to look at those who today want to embrace Malcolm and sort out which of them represent a genuine continuity with the ideas of this important fighter (not very many) and which are simply trying to use his well-earned prestige to advance ends that Malcolm himself would have rejected out of hand.

### Program and Strategy

When we discuss the historical legacy of Malcolm X, the actual ideas, the program and strategy which he developed for the Black movement are an important element. This aspect of his thought went through a sharp change after his break with the Nation of Islam, and it is worth outlining the essential points which he began to develop:

- Self-reliance and a need to fight for Black self-interest.

Blacks cannot rely on anyone else to give them their liberation. It will not come from God; it will not be won as a result of a struggle by white liberals; nor will it come from the government or the power structure unless Blacks themselves mobilize for a genuine battle. This conviction, that Blacks must organize themselves politically and fight against their own oppression, was one of the most decisive questions in precipitating Malcolm's break from the NOI, which had a completely abstentionist position on political struggles.

- Blacks must maintain their independence from all institutions of the oppressor.

This flows from the question of self-reliance. The road to liberation does not lead through the Democratic Party, for example, but only through independent organizational forms which Blacks will create themselves to advance their own interests.

- Only a fundamental and revolutionary change in American society can guarantee liberation for the Black community.

This, again, flows logically from the first two points. The institutions of white America were set up to oppress and exploit Black people. These institutions are incapable of reforming themselves, and have to be changed into something qualitatively different. Malcolm put it in his own colorful way: "It's not possible for a chicken to lay a duck egg, or else it is certainly a revolutionary chicken."

- It is necessary to pinpoint capitalism as the root cause of racism.

This is also a question on which Malcolm went through a dramatic evolution in his last year. And while he began to clearly formulate the problem, he had not yet precisely developed the solution to it—socialism. This was hinted at before his death, but never fully explained.

- Blacks in North America must identify and solidarize with the revolutionary struggles of Blacks in Africa.

A developing internationalist consciousness was one of the points which differentiated Malcolm from other Black leaders in the U.S. The struggle of Black Africa against European imperialist domination helped him to see the overall role of capitalism as a worldwide force for the domination and impoverishment of the Black race. The formulation of "socialist" solutions by many of the Black African liberation movements—even if they differed substantially from what revolutionary Marxists would consider socialist—was an important element in Malcolm's initial thinking about this question.

- Malcolm was committed to democratic functioning of his organization and of the movement.

He made every effort to gather around him others who could help to think through the problems of building a militant Black liberation movement in the U.S. and around the world. He profoundly believed that the real strength of any such movement would flow not from the wisdom of its leaders—important as such wisdom was—but from the courage, conviction, and fighting capacity of its mass base. To develop this, the masses had to be educated to think for themselves and not to simply follow the dictates of official bodies. This too represented a sharp break from the traditions of the NOI, with the all-knowing and all-powerful Elijah Muhammad making every significant decision for the entire organization. More importantly, it represented a different approach than the one practiced by most other Black and radical organizations in the U.S. at the time.

All of these points represent a basically positive development of consciousness on the part of Malcolm and those who joined him after his break with the NOI. Most of these specific ideas remain to be conquered by the Black and other social movements in the U.S. But there is another feature of Malcolm's thought during this period which we also have to recognize. At best it was a neutral element, and at worst it had a negative impact. This was his continuing adherence to religious ideology as the basis for building an organization, the idea that his task was to create a genuine Islamic movement among American Blacks, as opposed to the fraudulent efforts of Elijah Muhammad and the NOI.

(I should note here that I am refraining from a discussion in this article of the question of Black nationalism. This is not because I don't think Malcolm was a consistent nationalist up until the end of his life. If we combine Malcolm's revolutionism with his appreciation of the need for the Black community to rely only on itself to resolve its problems, in my view, that is the essence of revolutionary Black nationalism. The problem is that there is a great deal of disagreement about such a definition, both within the Black community and within the radical movement as a whole. Malcolm himself did not use the term "Black nationalist" to describe himself, though I would argue that on this, as on so many other things, his approach was in a process of change and development.)

### Another Side to the Question

All of these basic strategic and programmatic points are *part* of Malcolm's legacy. And they are an important part for

activists today to study and learn. But I have put the word “part” in italics here because it is essential to stress that there is another side to a study of Malcolm X during the last year of his life — something which, in my view, is even more fundamental, and which is too often ignored.

If one simply looks at the specific ideas that were developed by Malcolm up to the time of his assassination, without also trying to see the *methodology* which he applied, then “Malcolm X Thought” will develop a character it never had in reality: It will become static and lifeless. The most important thing about Malcolm’s ideas was that they were in a process of rapid and profound evolution, an evolution which was cut short by an assassin’s bullet.

I can illustrate the importance of this point, perhaps, by making some observations about two other thinkers who are important to the history of the revolutionary Marxist movement: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Leon Trotsky. Many people approach these thinkers in a static way — looking solely at the specific set of ideas which they developed and which is contained in their written works, leaving out the social and historical context in which they came to their conclusions, and ignoring the *method of thinking* that allowed their thoughts to develop in the way that they did. Such an approach turns Lenin and Trotsky into simple icons of worship who can, in fact, enlighten us very little.

What would have happened, for example, if Lenin had been killed before April 1917, when he developed his famous “April Theses” that transformed the political strategy of the Bolshevik party? Before April Lenin had explained the class character of the Russian revolution as fundamentally bourgeois-democratic. Afterward he declared that it must be proletarian in its essence. Had Lenin not been around during the important events that followed the February revolution, had he been unable to present his new ideas to the party, “Leninism” would no doubt have come to be identified with his old theory, a theory that was developed on the basis of incomplete historical and personal experience and that was destined to be transformed as the Russian revolution of 1917 unfolded in life.

And what would our conception of Trotsky be today if, for example, he had been killed in the civil war which raged after that revolution? We would have had no generalization of the concept of permanent revolution, no analysis of the Stalinist bureaucracy which developed in the 1920s and ’30s, and no clear exposition of the transitional method of political analysis. At least, “Trotskyism” would not be identified with these things.

This is why it is so wrong to think of the legacy of Lenin and Trotsky as *simply* or *fundamentally* a legacy of ideas. Many who would genuinely like to be able to act like these great revolutionaries believe that if only they can memorize a series of words written down in books then they will be able to do so. But such an approach is completely utopian. There is much we can learn and adopt from the written works of Lenin and Trotsky, but the real problem is to learn to apply the same methods of analysis to today’s world, the same methods of thought which allowed them to create the body of writings they did.

I would submit that this is also true of Malcolm X, especially in the last year of his life. It is good to understand what

he was thinking. But it is even more important to understand why he was thinking it, what underlying force was causing him to change his approach so dramatically in the light of new experiences — because just as with Lenin in 1917 or Trotsky during the early years of the revolution, Malcolm X had not finished with his political development.

In general, ideas, at least important ones, are always in a process of growth. They are never fixed and static. We can see that this was true of the ideas presented by Lenin, Trotsky, and Malcolm. But Malcolm differs in one important respect from the other two — who lived long enough for us to reap substantial fruits from their most mature political thinking. Malcolm, by contrast, was killed during a time of rapid development, long before he had reached his most fruitful period, before he had come to a definitive political judgment on many matters.

Let’s take just one example of an area in which, it seems to me, Malcolm’s thought would probably have evolved considerably had he remained alive. His model for Black revolution was the African liberation struggles in countries like Ghana, the Congo, etc. But over the past 25 years the situation on that continent has changed considerably. No longer are these nations outright colonies of European imperialist powers struggling for national liberation, or else just emerging from colonial status. Many have now enjoyed a considerable period of formal independence, yet this has not reaped substantial benefits for the Black masses. Their economies remain completely subordinate to world imperialism. The “socialist” experiment in Ghana and other similar countries have proven to be a simulacrum of socialism, not the genuine article. These independent African countries are now class-stratified societies in their own right, with their own ruling elite that benefits from the exploitation of the masses as junior partners of the imperialists.

The revolutions that shook the African continent in the 1950s and ’60s haven’t solved the problem of Black liberation. Would Malcolm’s ideas on a model for liberation today, had he remained alive, be identical to those he expressed in the early 1960s? I tend to doubt it. Perhaps he would be more likely to take his inspiration from examples like Nicaragua, or Cuba, or Grenada before the Coard coup.

### An Uncompromising and Incorruptible Revolutionary Fighter

So it is necessary to look more profoundly at Malcolm X, if we are really to understand the legacy he left behind. A good place to start is with the two-word description that George Breitman used in the last paragraph of the introduction to his book *The Last Year of Malcolm X—Evolution of a Revolutionary*: “uncompromising” and “incorruptible.” I would only add that Malcolm had another essential ingredient; he was completely and totally honest, both with himself and with others. Malcolm was incapable of deceiving himself, or hiding his real views for reasons of what is often referred to as “political expediency.” Combined with all of this, he insisted on thinking for himself and urging everyone else to do the same.

I would say that there were two fundamental principles which guided Malcolm X. First, as a leader he had no goals in the struggle separate and apart from the objectives of the Black masses he was attempting to lead. Secondly, he understood that the complete liberation of Black people in the U.S. was the only legitimate objective of their fight, *and this could not be subordinated to anything else.*

In fact, the features of Malcolm's political makeup—his honesty, incorruptibility, and refusal to compromise the struggle—flowed directly from these two basic points. If you have no interests separate from those of the masses, and if you recognize that the welfare of the Black masses is the only legitimate goal of the struggle, then you have no reason to lie to those you are trying to lead, and no advantage in trying to deceive yourself. There is no reason to seek personal gain from leadership positions, and no temptation to compromise the struggle to advance some other agenda.

We can see these general features of Malcolm's commitment to the Black struggle at work in his break with the NOI. He gave up a secure and enviable position of respect and responsibility for a life of isolation and personal danger because he could not lie to himself about the flaws he discovered in Elijah Muhammad and his abstentionist, sectarian program for the Black masses. And once he had come to these inescapable (for him) conclusions about the NOI and its shortcomings, he could not bring himself to compromise his principles, play it safe, play politics in the organization. Instead he chose to openly explain his views and why they necessitated a split, despite the personal danger and hardship which he knew this would mean.

During the next year Malcolm did not hesitate to think, learn, draw new conclusions, and develop his thought. He always did so, however, on the basis of these same guiding principles. Such a principled stand by a leader of any oppressed group is extremely dangerous to the capitalist rulers of the U.S.A. And the danger was multiplied by Malcolm's eloquence and popularity within the Black community. That is why he was hunted down and killed.

### Malcolm's Methodology and Marxist Methodology

The revolutionary Marxist movement in the United States has long felt an affinity with Malcolm X. I mentioned the role of the SWP in helping to publicize his ideas while he was alive. After he died, Pathfinder Press was instrumental in the publication of his speeches. The fact that the SWP has now entered into a profound process of degeneration, the fact that the *Militant* is no longer the same newspaper which Malcolm praised in his speeches, doesn't detract in the least from this profound historical contribution which the SWP made in its support to and understanding of Malcolm X. Malcolm has always been, and always will be, an example for the revolutionary movement in the U.S. of the kind of leadership which the Black community in this country needs.

Of course, as I have said, there are many specific ideas which Malcolm developed (such as the need for political independence from the Democratic and Republican parties, for example) that are consistent with the views of revolutionary Marxism and that remain to be conquered by the Black masses, or even by a significant portion of the Black leader-

ship. But I would submit that the *primary* affinity we have had with Malcolm is not through any of these specific ideas, but through his basic method of approach to political leadership which I have tried to describe in this article.

There is a line in the *Communist Manifesto* which explains that communists "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole." This statement represents the same commitment to uncompromising honesty and incorruptibility that were the basic features of Malcolm X's political personality. And that commitment has been fulfilled in the life of every revolutionary worth her/his salt: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, James P. Cannon, and many, many others. It is this broad affinity of methodology, of revolutionary character if you will, that enabled our movement to identify with Malcolm even when we did *not* agree with him on specific elements of strategy or tactics. Great revolutionaries can be wrong, *but they are organically incapable of being untrue to themselves and to their struggles.* That's the most important part of the legacy which Malcolm X left to our own and to future generations. If we can understand this then we have come a long way toward a proper appreciation of Malcolm's ideas.

One other attribute which Malcolm shared with the great Marxist politicians is also worth noting. Breitman describes it as his "appeal to reason, even when appealing to the emotions." This flows, of course, from a common commitment to and reliance on an educated mass base which thinks for itself as the strength of the movement, rather than on leaders who make decisions for the rank and file.

### Black and Other Liberation Struggles Today

The value of studying Malcolm's methodology and applying it to today's struggles should be obvious. The Black community is the victim of stepped-up racist attacks and there is a renewed outcry against oppression. More and more the crisis of the capitalist system manifests itself in the form of increased poverty, unemployment or underemployment, homelessness, drug usage, etc., among Blacks. And it is not just Blacks who are affected by the ruling class attacks against workers and other oppressed layers of the population, but the union movement, women, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, and others.

It is worth looking at the specific ideas of Malcolm X to see which can be applied given these problems. But most important, we need a new crop of leaders who can begin to think and act like him— who will be uncompromising, completely honest with the masses and with themselves, and incorruptible. Without that, any specific *ideas* can be mutilated, distorted, and transformed into their opposite. We have all heard Malcolm's famous slogan, "By Any Means Necessary," used by those who, in 1988, advocated that Blacks get on the Jesse Jackson bandwagon. I think it is safe to say that Malcolm would not have agreed with this interpretation.

People like Malcolm X—clearheaded and farsighted people of honesty and integrity—don't come along very often. But we only need a few, in the right places at the right times. Such individuals can be instrumental in developing the

*(Continued on page 11)*

# Labor's Stake in the Fight Against Tier Plans

by Richard Scully

The U.S. labor movement experienced a major upsurge in the immediate post-World War II period.

With the end of hostilities abroad, patriotic appeals could no longer sustain support for cost-plus guaranteed profits for corporations and wage and job freezes for workers. The result was a tremendous strike wave in 1945-46, with 9,735 strikes, 8,070,000 strikers, and 154,000,000 workdays lost. In addition, there were several city-wide general strikes and joint mass demonstrations in defense of strikers. As described by Art Preis in his book *Labor's Giant Step*, "the American monopolies stood helpless before this awesome display of labor power." The workers gained significant wage increases as a result.

The transformation of the U.S. economy to peacetime production caused dislocation and unemployment for many workers. But there was an enormous backlog demand for consumer goods that had not been produced during the war and eventually, for the most part, these workers found jobs. The economy boomed along, interrupted by the usual dips and recessions which the innate contradictions of the capitalist market economy inevitably produce.

For the three decades that followed the end of World War II, the general direction of the U.S. economy was "up". Unions negotiated one wage increase after another, giving management in return an ever greater control of the workplace, often subjecting workers to unbearable speed-up. But the standard of living of union members rose steadily.

For the union bureaucracy, those were the good times. As workers' wages grew arithmetically, the bureaucrats' salaries increased astronomically. After the initial strike wave following the war, strikes were far less frequent. For the most part, gains were realized "peacefully" at the bargaining table.

But all of this ended in the mid-1970s. The U.S. economy became afflicted with a chronic condition: stagnation. Even when the economy showed growth, it was not sufficient to absorb the new workers entering the workforce. And the cost of living continued to rise.

The employers faced intensified competition from foreign producers — particularly Japanese and West German — that threatened their rate of profit. (These countries, defeated by the U.S. and its allies in the war and prohibited from rearming, invested in the most modern advanced technology for producing consumer goods.) So the inevitable occurred: the employers not only resisted the unions' demands for further increases and improvements; they came in with their own shopping list of demands for concessions and take-backs.

One way, of course, to resolve the crisis which organized workers faced as a result of the employers' offensive was to mobilize the ranks and wage an all-out fight not only to protect existing rates and benefits, but to improve them.

But whereas the union bureaucracy was swept along by the 1945-46 strike wave, they beat a retreat in the mid-'70s and in the years since. The idea of mounting a real struggle against the employers to protect the workers' living standards was an option that the leadership, with rare exceptions, rejected. But they could not simply sit back, negotiate cuts and give-backs from one contract to the next, and still retain their lucrative positions, when faced with an increasingly rebellious membership.

## The Multi-tier 'Solution'

The labor officialdom's base of support was, of course, those workers employed at contract time. With inflationary pressures battering away at their rates and standards, and with cost of living increases an early casualty of the employer offensive, a way had to be found to protect the interests of this sector of the workforce. Enter the two-tier — later multi-tier — system.

A trade-off was arranged with the employers. In exchange for preserving or improving the rates and standards of those workers on the payroll, the employers were allowed to impose lower wages and benefits for workers to be hired in the future. Thus, the workers were divided, based on whether they were hired before or after the contract was signed.

The cuts were frequently deep. New hires working side-by-side with the older workers and doing exactly the same job were frequently paid as much as \$5 or \$6 an hour less. But that was only part of it. Their fringe benefits, such as health care, pensions, the number of holidays and length of vacations were inferior as well.

At the beginning it was a two-tier system. But when the next collective bargaining agreement was negotiated, a third tier was often added. Thus, workers employed before the earlier contract, workers hired after the earlier contract but before the later one, and workers hired after the latest agreement had different rates of pay and benefits.

This was all taking place at a time when the workforce was undergoing rapid change. Employers and labor bureaucrats collaborated in placing the burden of the chronic economic crisis on the backs of women, young workers and minorities who were entering the workforce and who bore the brunt of the multi-tier system.

Labor's principle of "equal pay for equal work" — once considered inviolable — was discarded. A new sub-class of union members was created — reminiscent of the Class A and Class B members of some of the old AFL unions when the CIO industrial unions were born.

According to a survey by the Bureau of National Affairs (*Collective Bargaining Negotiations and Contracts*), the tier

system was quite extensive. Unions negotiating such a system over the 1983-1987 period were the Teamsters with 34, Machinists with 22, Service Employees, transport workers and Steelworkers each with 17. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers had eight two-tier plans, matching the union's total for the previous four years.

Forty-four percent of all rail contracts responding to the survey contained some form of two-tier. Other industries that negotiated tier plans include miscellaneous manufacturing (33 percent), petroleum (25 percent), food (24 percent), airlines (20 percent), and wholesale and retail (20 percent).

By far the biggest union backer of the tier system is the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW). Its total for the 1983-87 period was 124. The disparity in rates for supermarket workers has become an embarrassment for union organizers for the UFCW and the entire labor movement.

In embracing the tier system, the UFCW's bureaucratic leadership was not initiating or innovating. In fact, they were building on their long-established pattern of sanctioning an underclass of workers with minimum wage rates and inferior benefits: part-timers. (The UFCW was the product of a 1979 merger between the Retail Clerks and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America. It was standard practice for both these unions to negotiate lesser rates and benefits for part-timers.) The pattern has proven destructive to full-time workers. The lower rates are a drag on their living standards and a peril to their jobs, as employers relentlessly press to increase the ratio of part-timers to full-timers.

### Fightback Against the Tier System

While the labor officialdom welcomed the tier system as a way of maintaining their dues base and avoiding conflict with the employers, they could not implement it by themselves. They had to sell it to the membership.

It was at this point that the bureaucrats proved their mettle as dependable lackeys of the corporations or, as Daniel DeLeon put it many years ago, "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class." They preached the futility of struggle, arguing that strikes are a weapon of the past. They systematically undermined the confidence of the rank and file in its capacity to use its collective strength and power. They appealed to the narrow and selfish instincts of their working members, urging them to "look out for your own interests" at the expense of those yet to be hired. They warned their members that if they did not agree to the tier system or grant the employers other concessions resulting in even steeper pay cuts, they would lose their jobs. And all too often the workers approved the tier system as a lesser evil.

Thus was created a deeply divided workforce, seething with anger and resentment, but fearful—a ripe target from which the bosses extracted one round of concessions after the other. All the workers employed under the tier system paid the price.

But to the dismay of the labor officialdom, the older and longer-term workers came to realize how inviting and special a target they had become. They had given their employer a financial incentive to engineer their own termination. They

discovered that "loyalty" counts for naught when profit is involved. Why should a boss keep a \$9-\$12 an hour worker when someone else will do the same job for \$3.40? Thus, the tier system proved a sure prescription for harassment, pressure, intimidation, and discipline directed against the older workers and calculated to drive them out of their jobs.

So large numbers of workers went through the experience of the tier system and decided it was not for them. It certainly found no favor with many of the system's immediate victims: the discriminated against and lower-paid young workers.

This writer learned of a recent meeting of several hundred workers who were considering a contract proposal negotiated and endorsed by their local union officers. The proposal was trumpeted as one without any concessions. But there was one small catch: it set up a third tier. The workers were already living with a second tier negotiated two contracts previously. This third tier, in addition to lower pay, provided for holiday and Sunday work at straight time (as opposed to double time), fewer holidays, and reduced employer contribution rates to the pension fund.

In short order the packed meeting hall reverberated with shouts, catcalls, and denunciations as one worker after the other took the floor to tear into the leadership for endorsing such a proposal. Older workers, who had passively submitted to the tier system years ago, made clear they had no intention of repeating that mistake. "I thought the union was supposed to be a team," one worker said. "What kind of a team can we be and how much strength can we have if we stick new employees with these kinds of conditions?"

Although the traditional words "solidarity" and "an injury to one is an injury to all" were not specifically spoken, they were the themes expressed over and over. Once the discussion was concluded—to the chagrin of the leadership, who warned that this was positively the company's last offer and its rejection meant that a strike was a certainty—the workers overwhelmingly voted down the contract proposal and authorized strike action. As it turned out, a better proposal was negotiated without a strike and without some of the worst features of the company's prior offer.

Opposition to the tier system is today widespread in labor's ranks. The Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) quotes the UFCW's William Olwell, director of the union's collective bargaining department, as saying the tier system is "very unpopular in the workplace and [his] union's membership wants them eliminated from contracts." Olwell attributed the unpopularity of such plans to the fact that employees working side by side are making different wages for doing the same work. The workers making the lower wages just "won't put up with it" any more, he said.

Workers are hitting the bricks rather than submit to the tier system without a fight. In late 1986 the Service Employees International Union conducted a bitter seven-week strike at Kaiser Foundation Hospitals in Northern California over the two-tier structure. Unfortunately, the union ultimately accepted it.

Despite such setbacks, the tier trend is apparently now in decline. Tier wage plans were included in 9 percent of all non-construction agreements reported in 1987, continuing a



drop in the number of such plans that began in 1986, according to a BNA study. In 1983 the figure was 5 percent, in 1984 it was 8 percent, in 1985 it was 11 percent, and in 1986 it was 10 percent.

Where the tier system remains part of contracts, unions are making a greater effort to convert them to temporary plans, rather than permanent plans. This means that while new workers may make substantially less for a fairly long period of time (ranging from one-and-a-half to five years), eventually they will "top out" at the same rate enjoyed by the older, long-term workers. Temporary tier plans have been far more prevalent in recent years than have the permanent tier plans.

There is also some relaxation of employer insistence on tier plans. The employers in certain cases had set wage levels so low that they could not find or retain workers. Companies like Giant Food in Washington, D.C., and Meijer in Michigan have favored eliminating or narrowing the tiers in recent contracts because they discovered their wage structures "had the effect of pricing retail food chains out of the labor market." (*Labor Relations Week*, 3/2/88)

### The Tier System Must Go

Thoughtful workers oppose tier plans on the basis of fundamental principles and pragmatic concerns. They know that a tier plan that discriminates against young and other

newly hired workers is another weapon employers use, along with race and sex discrimination, to divide and weaken the workforce. The cause of labor unity and effectiveness demands that such plans be thrown into the junk heap without delay.

But there are longer range considerations that also impel an assault against the tier scheme. As young workers join the ranks of the labor movement, their attitude toward their unions is determined primarily by how they fare on the job. If they are formed into a sub-class of workers that is barely able to earn even a marginal survival — all with the agreement and cooperation of "their" unions — they will feel a deep alienation and hostility toward those unions.

In tomorrow's big showdown battles between the corporate defenders of decaying capitalism and the working class, the attitude of the youth will be decisive. That was certainly the case in Germany, where the Nazis successfully attracted large numbers of alienated young people to their fascist banners. It could happen here.

Class conscious workers have a particular responsibility to promote the education and integration of young workers in the unions. Their energy, activism, and acceptance of responsibility are urgently needed if today's labor movement is to be rejuvenated and revitalized. A good place to start to gain their greater participation in the unions is an all-out fight now to put a total end to the reactionary tier system. ●

### NOW Continues Building April 9 Action

The October/November/December issue of the *National NOW Times* reports on building for the planned April 9 "March for Women's Equality/Women's Lives" in Washington D.C. According to Molly Yard, president of NOW, the response to the call has been even better than the one which greeted plans for the last major demonstration organized by NOW in 1986. "Initially there was resistance on the part of some national organizations to that march," she is reported to have said. "They essentially questioned the need for the march and, frankly, the tactic of using street actions in 1986. But

there's no resistance now. We have started contacting other organizations to get them involved, but many already have called on us. This time, there's no question as to the need for street action. If the people don't speak with one, loud voice, the opponents of legal abortion and of legal equality for women most assuredly will win, no matter how small a minority they represent."

Supporters of women's rights can only welcome this strategic conclusion on the part of NOW's leadership — even if it is based on their assessment of the impact of George Bush's victory. While the inconsistent record of

NOW on mass action is one of the reasons we have gone since 1986 with a mounting drive by anti-abortionists and only a feeble response from the women's movement, we can all hope that Yard's conclusions about what is needed will lead to the biggest possible mobilization on April 9, and will carry over so that this demonstration will prove to be only the opening of a renewed offensive by the women's movement in favor of free choice and of equality for women. The more activists who become involved in working to make April 9 a success along these lines, the more likely it is to happen.

## Trinidad in Crisis

by Lloyd D'Aguilar

*This is the first in a promised series of articles by Lloyd D'Aguilar on the situation in various countries of the Caribbean.*

The collapse of international oil prices has severely weakened many oil-producing countries, and one such affected country is the twin-island of Trinidad and Tobago, which depends on oil for 70 percent of its export earnings.

The Trinidad economy received a tremendous boost when oil prices quadrupled during the 1970s. Several lofty (though questionable) investment projects were undertaken and the economy generally appeared buoyant. The government (then headed by Eric Williams) was even in a position to make loans to her debt-stricken, non-oil-producing neighbors, Jamaica and Guyana.

But now that the decade of the '80s is marked by the fall of oil prices, things have predictably come crashing down.

Government revenue from oil has nearly been halved from US\$911 million in 1982 to US\$470 in 1986. This year's revenues are expected to further decline to US\$373 million!

To offset the decline in export earnings the country resorted to a feverish round of borrowing. The foreign debt is consequently a whopping US\$1.9 billion, climbing from US\$1.1 billion in 1982, and an almost negligible figure in the '70s.

The national treasury is now empty. According to the Central Bank's *Monthly Statistical Digest* for September 1988, foreign exchange reserves fell to a minus US\$220.2 million in July, which is a steep decline from the positive figure of US\$2 billion in 1982.

Prime Minister A.N.R. Robinson recently dramatized the seriousness of Trinidad's debt problem by spending an unprecedented month in Europe negotiating a rescheduling of the country's foreign debt. Debt service is expected to consume 29.8 percent of 1988 export earnings.

Sounding a lot like former prime minister Michael Manley of Jamaica—who castigated the International Monetary Fund and declared that Jamaica was “not for sale” just a few short months before signing an agreement with that institution—Prime Minister Robinson has just signed a \$470 million loan agreement with the IMF after having declared that any such agreement would cause the “ruin” of Trinidad.

Indeed, the government had already begun to carry out many IMF belt-tightening policies. The Trinidad dollar was devalued by 18 percent in August of this year, and it is rumored that one of the as yet undeclared conditions involved in the present agreement with the IMF is a further devaluation of 50 percent.

Devaluations are usually designed to achieve two objectives. The first is to stimulate exports by making them cheaper. In this case, the government is hoping to boost tourism and the non-oil manufacturing sector.

The second objective is to discourage imports by making them more expensive. But given Trinidad's heavy dependence on the importation of food, it is the poor who will be most affected by any new round of price increases. The August devaluation has already produced substantial increases in the price of most basic food items.

In an attempt to reduce the budget deficit the government has cut back on subsidies to state enterprises (which number more than 60); increased the charges for telephone, water, and electricity; and reduced the wages of a number of public sector workers, threatening to fire at least 6,000. In some cases workers have been receiving their wages late.

Public sector workers (numbering some 65,000) are particularly embittered by this aspect of the government's attempt to deal with the “national economic emergency.” Huge demonstrations have been staged by the major public sector unions, including the powerful Oilfield Workers Union, to protest the government's handling of the crisis.

The unions are on guard against any further deterioration in working conditions for their members since the unemployment rate is now 22 percent (some 109,000 people)—climbing from a low of 10 percent in 1982, and 17.56 percent in 1986.

The political repercussions for the two-year-old, four-party coalition government, National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), has been predictable. Recent opinion polls show that its popularity has plummeted and the opposition is calling for its resignation. In the words of the People's National Movement (PNM) opposition leader Patrick Manning, the government should resign because it has demonstrated “continuing incompetence in the management of the country's economic affairs.”

A far more serious long-term threat to the ruling party's chances for reelection is a recent split with its trade union wing—the United Labor Front, headed by Basdeo Panday.

The events which precipitated the split (charges that the party leadership is undemocratic) have now paled in comparison to the possible national consequences. Political observers argue that Panday not only represents an important segment of the labor force, sugar workers, but because these workers are mostly of East Indian extraction, as is Mr. Panday, it could set the stage for a return to the African/Indian rivalry of the '50s and '60s.

Mr. Panday, who is now in the process of forming a new party (following mass meetings in his home constituency) has gone to great lengths to explain that the split with NAR has nothing to do with African/Indian rivalry. In any event, party realignments are to be expected. There are indications, for

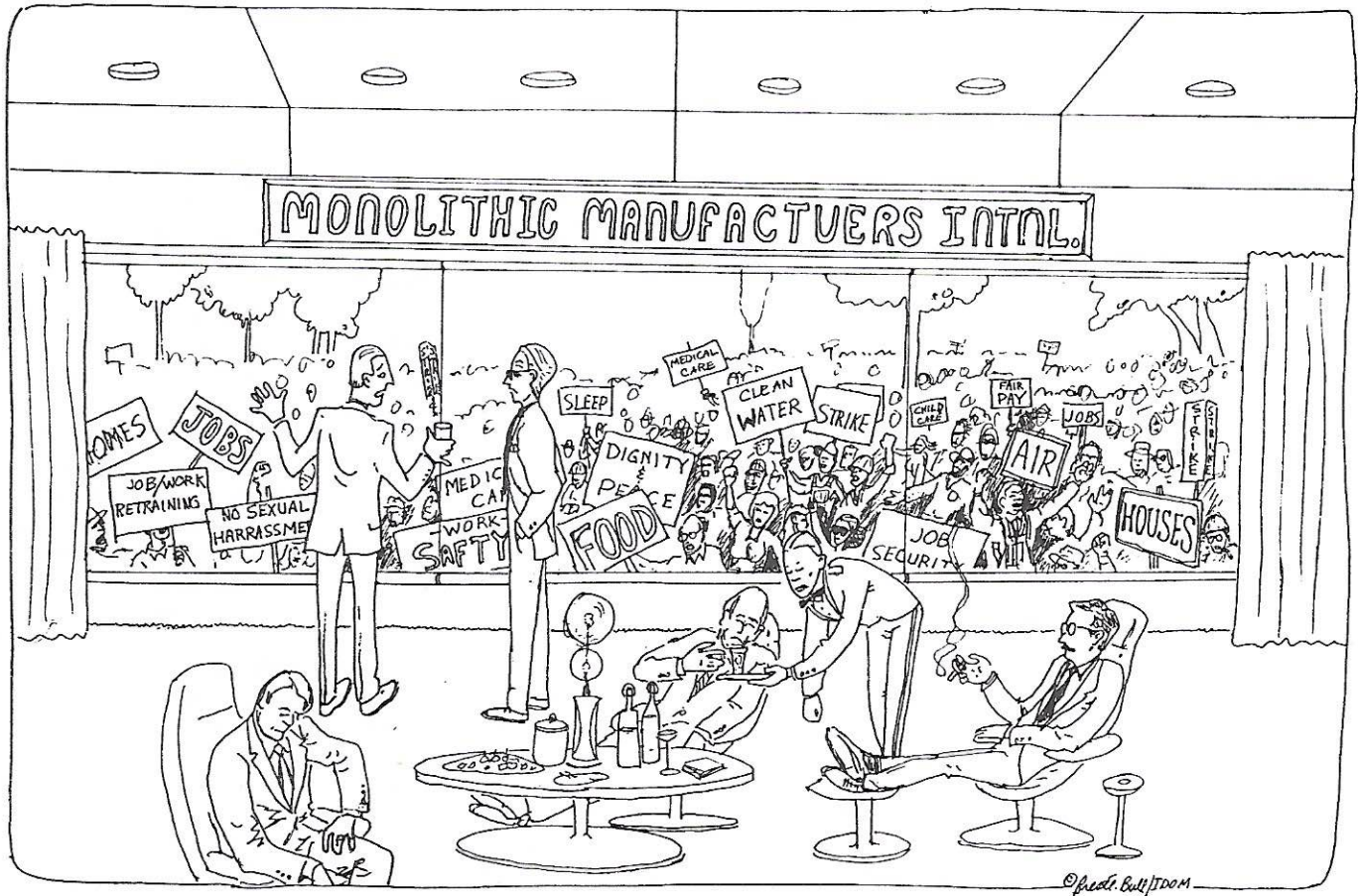
example, that the PNM, which lost in 1986 to a then united NAR, is willing to explore unity talks with the new Panday party.

For the moment, however, the issue uppermost in the minds of Trinidadians is what to do about a deteriorating economic situation. With the IMF about to enter the picture, and knowing the havoc this created with the Jamaican economy, the mood is pessimistic. No one is offering any solutions. The best the government can say is that after three more years of belt-tightening, things will improve. According to William Demas, governor of the Central Bank, "It is a question of no cure without pain. . . . I have my own criticisms of the IMF like many from Third World countries, but I see no alternative around."

The situation in Trinidad is also not without interest to the rest of the non-oil-producing Caribbean. Many questions loom, such as: Where have all the billions of oil dollars gone? Why was the attempt at developing an industrial base not more successful? Is it the lesson that Caribbean industrialization is impossible and dependence inevitable?

It is not to be forgotten that after spending millions of dollars to build a steel plant, for example, the steel lobby in the U.S. fought to keep Trinidad steel out of the U.S. market, thereby proving how one-sided is the gospel of free trade.

Other questions are sure to multiply, but with the undoing of the Caribbean's heretofore most stable economy, predictions are that a more united approach is likely to be adopted to the problems of debt, trade, and aid. The Caribbean cannot ignore its common colonial past, after all. ●



What on earth do those people want?

# The Radicalizing Effect of the New York City Public Schools

by Anna Goodman

I have always considered myself a socialist. But I never felt compelled to join any kind of socialist organization. I have been going to demonstrations (antiwar, pro-ERA, anti-apartheid, etc.) since I was a small child. Both of my parents are radicals and I had grown up around leftist ideas. A socialist revolution always seemed to me a scientific, logical, and humanistic approach to most of society's problems. Yet somehow I never felt strongly enough about the idea of a socialist world to feel that I myself had to work toward building one.

Then I became a teacher in the New York City public school system. It was a turning point in my political life. Before I entered the system I knew, of course, that it had decayed, and that there was little support for children or teachers. But nothing had prepared me for what I now know is the systematic destruction of poor and working class children that is taking place there.

Upon graduating from college in June 1987 I applied for a temporary license from the NYC Board of Education, which should ideally take six weeks to process. However, I and several thousand other applicants had to wait at least five months before we received our licenses because of a bureaucratic foul-up. I therefore did not start teaching my kindergarten class until the end of October. Since I missed the beginning of the school year, I also missed what is called "teachers choice," where the teacher is allowed to order supplies for the classroom. I did not have, and never received, even basic things such as paper and crayons. Not only did I lack these necessities, the children's bathrooms sometimes did not have running water—and never had toilet paper. There were not enough desks in my classroom to accommodate all of the children, and the desks I did have were not kindergarten size, but were extras from various classes throughout the school. The chairs were so large that the children often fell out of them.

From a developmental and educational standpoint, of course, five-year-old children should not be expected to sit at desks all day and receive direct instruction from a teacher. The room should be set up in learning centers so that students are allowed to explore and make decisions for themselves, according to their own interests and their individual learning pace. I was not able to create this type of situation, however, even though it is the atmosphere that the NY Board of Education curriculum guide outlines, since I did not have anything to put in my "centers" (puzzles, books, art supplies, etc.). I tried to make up for the lack of supplies by bringing in things from home, picking through the rubbish, and buying things myself—which was difficult since I didn't receive a paycheck until my fifth week of work (it is not unusual for

new teachers to wait up to six months before they receive their first paycheck).

I also faced other problems. For example, I was the designated "bilingual" teacher (since that was the only kindergarten position available) though I did not speak Spanish. My class was made up of children that the other kindergarten teachers did not want because they had behavioral problems, and new students came in unexpectedly almost every day. Some of these children lived in welfare hotels and most of them were supported by welfare. They came from single parent homes, and in many cases were the children of drug addicts.

In college we were taught that the first year of teaching is always the hardest. But my district—in the South Bronx—placed many additional obstacles in the way that are not talked about in education courses. I took a job in that part of the city for idealistic reasons. I naively thought that my dedication and desire would be strong enough to overcome the problems I knew I would face. After two months of teaching, however, I left—and I left with great sadness for the children I was leaving behind. I felt like I was abandoning them just as society had done, but I knew I had to leave because the alternative was to turn into a kind of person whom I would find repulsive, and who in any case would be unable to help the children in that school.

In order to survive in such a system teachers have to learn to believe things that I refuse to accept, like "most of these children are unteachable." That is what is said to rationalize the fact that most of the students aren't learning. The only alternative that most can conceive of would be to believe that they can't teach, so they choose to accept the idea that the students are at fault. And of course the school administration repeats this notion in order to let itself off the hook. But I knew better. In reality it is a total lack of support by society for education that makes it almost impossible for either teachers or students to succeed in a place like the South Bronx.

When I asked my principal for help he would give me a "pep talk" and tell me not to be a quitter. When I talked to other teachers most of them said simply that the children were "animals," incapable of learning. Everyone told me that I was too nice, that I smiled too much. Sometimes out of desperation I would take their advice and try not to be so "nice," but I always regretted it and sank deeper into depression. I eventually became ill, lost my voice, and left.

There has been a lot of discussion recently about what is to be done to remedy the condition that our educational system finds itself in. Commissions are set up to do studies about new teacher licensing procedures, innovative curriculums, a

return to the "old system," greater parental involvement, more teacher accountability; the list of remedies goes on. Many of these suggestions have merit, but they do not touch on the most fundamental issue—the need for a massive transfusion of money and social resources into the public educational system. When I look back at my experience and try to determine the single factor that would have made the biggest difference in my staying, it is money. Not a higher salary (which teachers certainly deserve) but money that would allow schools to provide students and teachers with an environment where learning can actually take place.

If the system was properly funded, I could have had at least one assistant in my room, instead of trying to teach 25 children by myself. And I would not have had to spend all of my time trying to maintain order in the classroom, a result of the children's boredom since we had no materials with which we could do anything meaningful. I could have spent some of my free time planning lessons and activities instead of sweeping and scrubbing the floors (with supplies that I had to purchase myself), since the janitor never once cleaned my room or emptied the garbage. (It wasn't in his contract.) Of course the kind of money and resources that are really needed to repair the school system in an area like the South Bronx will never be allocated without a massive social struggle. Education for these children is simply not a priority in our capitalist society—they are a disposable commodity as far as the ruling class of this country is concerned.

To determine where our country's real priorities are one needs only to look at where the tax dollars go—and it's not into education. The only way that our educational system will ever improve is if we force a change in those priorities so the

needs of working people are put first. That's why a call to adequately fund our educational system is an effective transitional slogan. It helps to illuminate the actual agenda of our politicians and their government. Why is it that the educational budget is continually being cut, if education is such an important issue in our country? Why is it that Congress and President Reagan can give a huge allocation for the bombing and destruction of schools in a country like Nicaragua, if education and the well-being of children around the world are important to us? These are questions that can only be answered meaningfully from a socialist perspective, and the problems can only be truly solved by a socialist revolution.

I have not given up on teaching altogether. I am now working in a private school. I am getting paid half of what I was getting in the public system—but the job is less stressful, and we do have toilet paper. I am hoping to go back to the public schools after I get a little more experience in a situation where I can in fact teach. Perhaps I will be able to translate some of what I am learning about teaching into the public system once I feel more confident about myself as a teacher, and function more effectively as a person who understands that teachers have to fight against the entire educational establishment if we are really going to accomplish our educational goals.

The change I have made in my life that makes the most difference and makes me most hopeful, however, is that I have now joined a revolutionary socialist organization—the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. Through the F.I.T. I am working with other people who share my view of the need for a socialist revolution, and what that will mean for the future of children everywhere. ●

*Malcolm (Continued from page 4)*

kind of broad revolutionary leadership which can show how to struggle effectively, to win a few battles today, and begin to set the stage for the final showdown with this racist capitalist system. We can be completely confident that within the Black communities, in the organizations of other oppressed nationalities, among workers, within the feminist movement, on college campuses, and in every single corner

of this society which is touched by the oppressive force of capitalism a new leadership layer is being forged which can be instrumental in recapturing the genuine legacy of Malcolm X. That legacy will inevitably prove too powerful to be killed by the assassin's bullet that murdered the man himself, and too powerful as well to be rendered harmless by those who attempt to distort his ideas beyond recognition. ●

# The Trail of Tears and Radical Consciousness in the United States

by Jack Bresee

The recent reenactment of the infamous “Trail of Tears”—the name given to the forced evacuation of the Cherokee tribe from Tennessee to Oklahoma in 1938-39—was a major media event, mostly for white people. One woman who participated from Rolla, Missouri, was shown on the local TV coverage there: “I am here,” she beamed, “because my great-great-grandfather was a major in the army accompanying the Cherokees.” Accompanying?! It never occurred to her, apparently, that some shame might be attached to that family heritage. If she had attended a memorial service for Holocaust victims would she have been so cheerful about claiming a grandfather who was a major in the SS guarding Auschwitz? Four thousand Native Americans died on the Trail of Tears.

The commemorative march—comprised mostly of white history buffs—has gotten coverage from the bourgeois press, *The Guardian*, *The Peoples’ Daily World*, and others. (See article in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 57.) As of this writing the *Militant* has not had a word about it—though that paper has given extensive coverage to Indian causes such as trials involving Native Americans, and carried an extensive interview with Leonard Peltier from Leavenworth Penitentiary. But despite this attention to causes associated with Indian activism in North America, very few non-Indians (including radicals and socialists) have been able to grasp the real dynamic of the Native American movement today.

“As the domestic social movement in America fractured on the Vietnam war,” writes Vine Deloria, Jr., (*Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*, University of Texas Press, 1985)

and the new ideology of the Third World began to emerge, Indians were regarded by left-wing ideologues as an integral part of the movement. The uncompromising ideology of Indian nationalism, which appeared to reject Western society, seems to many Third Worlders an indication that Indians were ready to join in a major movement to reform the American social and political order.

Imagining, therefore, that the coming Indian movement was an offshoot of the developments of the sixties, the New Left welcomed Indian activists at its rallies, included Indians in the roll call of the oppressed, and sought Indian endorsement for its schemes of fundamental reform. The Indian activist learned the language of social protest, mastered the complicated handshakes used by the revolutionary elect, and began to raise funds for their activities. But the funding sources which were pouring money into the new fad of

“self-determination” for minority groups were often astounded to learn that the Indians were not planning to share the continent with their oppressed brothers once the revolution was over. Hell, no. The Indians were planning on taking the continent back and kicking out all the Black, Chicano, Anglo, and Asian brothers who had made the whole thing possible.

If at this point the reader is thinking “give me a break, let’s get back to reality,” then I have demonstrated the relevant point. While socialists may be more sympathetic than others to the plight of Indians in this country, they too have historically misunderstood the long-term thinking of aboriginal people. It is hard for them to believe that Native Americans may not see the programs of revolutionary groups as representing the ultimate summary of Native people’s hopes and aspirations. Most radicals seek to shape the Native struggles along lines consistent with their own programs and conceptions. But that won’t work. And it shouldn’t. For Native Americans, like many other aboriginal people, can’t have their battles explained or defined by anyone else.

Again in the words of Deloria: “For the most part, Indians have not accepted the mythology of the American past which interprets American history as a sanitized merging of diverse peoples to form a homogeneous union. The ties to tribal heritage are too strong, the abuses of the past and present too vivid, and the memory of freedom too lasting for many Indians. A substantial number of reservation Indians see the white man as little more than a passing episode in a tribal history which spans millennia. The white man may be the most destructive influence which the tribe encountered, but he is still not regarded as a permanent fixture on the continent.”

Thus, many Natives saw the U.S. government’s war against Vietnam as similar to the war the U.S. government waged—and is still waging—against them. It was not a political war *per se*—but genocide, a war to destroy or enslave a people and erase their culture. To that end, the victory of the Vietnamese people was not so much a victory for socialism as one episode in a continuing war for self-determination which is thousands of years running. The struggle of Native Americans now and in the past is part of that same war.

It seems, however, that revolutionists have a blind and deaf spot when it comes to seeing what aboriginal people are doing, or hearing what they are saying. When these people speak of their religious beliefs, or when they seek a material way of life which seems contrary to the material standards which most people in capitalist America take for granted, do

revolutionaries really understand what they are talking about? Or are they viewed as somehow just a little naive and in need of a bit more political maturity?

This is an important problem to understand in the United States of America if we are serious about making a revolution here. We should not believe that we, through our greater culture and knowledge, will be somehow immune to the kinds of problems which the Sandinistas faced with the Indians of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. The FSLN began with the idea that the obvious benefits of the revolution for the poor and oppressed masses of Nicaragua would, by itself, enable them to automatically carry through their program on the Atlantic Coast as they were doing in the rest of Nicaragua. But the traditions, values, experiences, problems, and consciousness in that part of the country was completely different, since it was shaped by a completely different social and cultural reality. A real revolution has to live with such contradictory realities, which do not necessarily fit all of the nice neat programmatic formulations that can be written down on paper.

It is one of the great strengths of the Sandinistas that they have been able to adjust to the actual reality of Nicaragua's East Coast, and to shape their revolution to take account of its distinct national features. When Daniel Ortega sits on the National Palace steps and passes out gifts, paid for by the government, to children celebrating the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is not cynicism which is motivating him. That's just the way things work in Nicaragua, in spite of the objections that might be raised by some "orthodox" Christians or "orthodox" Marxists. That kind of creative thinking is what U.S. revolutionaries will need if they want to effectively relate to and support the U.S. Indian movement.

Another interesting question is the role of Native American women. Most see themselves as Indians first, and would reject the feminist notion that they should identify with other women. That's not necessarily an indication of backward attitudes. Native American women simply do not share the legacy of oppression by males that has existed in other cultures:

In some tribes, Indian women had considerable power, and in a number of groups they were supreme. In many cases they had a higher position in their society than did women in other societies and voted long before any other women of the world did so. They could be the equals of men as warriors, and many Indian women were as famous in war as they were strong in council. . . . Women were cared for and protected by men, but they were the property owners. Not only did they own the fields, but the crops, the flocks, and the herds. They owned all household goods and the house itself.

Women could be guides, interpreters, and scouts—even negotiators for peace. They could be medicine women and chiefs. There are numbers of such women throughout Indian history. (Marion E. Gridley, *American Indian Women*, Hawthorn Books, 1974)

Most revolutionary thought is based on an appreciation of Western philosophy, in particular Hegel and Marx. Indians may not see this collection of ideas as the consummation of intellectual activity up to the present time. In fact, as Deloria explains, "in their declaration of independence, the Oglala Sioux spoke to the world about freedom for all aboriginal people from the tyranny of Western European thought, values, and interpretation of man's experience."

It should not be hard to see why it would be difficult for Marxists to fit the Indian experience and the Indian struggle into their own philosophical framework. We are dealing with two completely different points of view. But why should either point of view have to prevail, even if it were possible for one to do so? In the dialectic of the real world Indians and Marxists will have to find an interface for their ideas, the parameters of which cannot be defined on the basis of preconceived schemas. Here again we can cite the hopeful example from Nicaragua. Marxists can, and must, learn to work with Native Americans *in a mutually profitable association*, and vice versa. There is no other way for our struggle to be victorious. ●

*Jack Bresee works with the Southwest Missouri Indian Center in Springfield, Missouri.*

# Conversations in the USSR

## Diary of a Trip (part 1)

by David Seppo

*The following is a slightly edited version of a diary of conversations, observations, and reflections that I kept last spring and summer while on an academic exchange in the Soviet Union, mostly in Moscow. Although the limitations of such a personal record are obvious, I have decided to publish it in the hope that the reader will find it of interest, while drawing his or her own conclusions. I am a Marxist and I teach mathematics. I am fluent in Russian and over the past few years I have made several trips to the Soviet Union.*

*[This report will be continued in the next issue.]*

**May 25:** First impressions. The customs check was surprisingly light. Unlike in previous visits, printed materials and even computer diskettes were not checked. I was asked only about my video cassettes which showed up on the X-ray machine, and when I said they were blank, I was waved on. On the other hand, the cafeteria in the Hotel of the Academy of Sciences has not changed at all since my stay in 1985: there has been a certain rise in prices, but the limited variety and often dubious quality of the food haven't changed. And yet, according to the young woman sent to meet me at the airport, this is a much better than average "buffet."

This woman graduated two years ago from the Modern Languages Institute. She has a three-and-a-half-year-old son and an actor husband, who earns only 100 rubles a month.<sup>1</sup> Life is very hard, she complains. The miserly child allocation is practically meaningless when a child's outfit costs 60 rubles. As for the supply of food, it has not improved. She and her husband live with her parents, and her grandmother looks after her son while she works. She has no faith in the perestroika.

The system is no good: "there is no owner,"<sup>2</sup> and a person's salary is guaranteed regardless of the effort furnished or the results. She experienced this while working in a research institute. What is needed is competition among enterprises, but that is an absurdity when property is public. I offered that democracy could make people real collective owners of the economy and thus perhaps change their attitudes and behavior. She grants that there is a certain logic to this, but the Soviet Union is too large and its population too diverse for democracy to have this effect. In any case, democracy requires at least two parties, and the existing totalitarian system would never allow that. Socialism is a utopian idea. Soviet history, she offers, is the sad outcome of an attempt to realize this idea.

At the beginning of the Gorbachev regime, she enjoyed the liberalization of the media and the arts. But why do they constantly write about the thirties and Stalin? Of course, what happened then helps to explain why democracy is so hard to achieve now. But isn't there also a contemporary world? Besides, many emigre publications are better. She has no confidence in the permanence even of these political changes:

those who speak out now will suffer in the likely event that the winds change. As if to underline this, she abruptly ends our conversation when someone sits down at the next table.

**May 28:** In front of the gates to Gorky Park some people, members of one of the so-called informal organizations, were collecting signatures protesting the rejection by Moscow party authorities of Afanasyev and other liberals as delegates to the forthcoming party conference. The less-than-democratic nature of the elections to a conference that is supposed to introduce democratic reform is hardly encouraging.<sup>3</sup> But it is cheering to see the hundreds of people—especially young people and even border guards celebrating "Border Guard Day"—stopping to read the posters and then signing the petition without the slightest hesitation.

A few hours later, there was a demonstration in the center of Moscow on the same theme, also organized by the informals. It began small but eventually gathered at least 400 people. The slogans on the posters attacked bureaucratic rule and demanded "All power to the soviets!" The crowd sang "Boldly Comrades, In Step!" and other revolutionary songs. In contrast to Poland, the socialist revolution here is a real part of the cultural heritage of the people. (This is probably less true for the intelligentsia, which tends to equate revolution with bloodshed and chaos and to see in the revolution itself the roots of Stalinism.) Several speakers protested against the new provisional rules governing demonstrations and public meetings. The police were present, but remained largely passive, though some entered into political discussions with the demonstrators. This was obviously a new experience for them.

**June 1:** I spoke to D, a well-known sociologist and journalist. He strongly favors a "radical" market reform. (It is often hard to see where, in this conception, a "radical" market reform ends and the effective restoration of capitalism begins.) The existing system, he argues, fosters parasitical dependency (*izhdivenchestvo*). It privileges the workers, a large part of whom, especially the unskilled 40 percent, oppose reform. I ask him if he really considers it a privilege to spend eight hours a day standing in front of a



lathe in a filthy shop. My own impression from conversations with workers is that they would like to do a good day's work and earn a decent wage for it, but that the disorganization reigning in the factories makes this impossible. This is probably true, D replies, but people have a split personality: one part of them wants to work conscientiously, but the other is content with the existing guarantees, however minimal, that require little initiative or effort.

Generally, he feels things are so bad that only market rationality and discipline can help. If there's a social price to pay, so be it. Given these views, it is hardly surprising that he never utters the word democracy. He speaks rather of a state based upon the rule of law (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*), which is rather more than what exists now but less than democracy.

T is a sociologist at the same institute. He finds himself very much under attack from his colleagues in the social sciences for his support for a basically egalitarian social policy, though he is certain that his views are close to those of the ordinary people. As for the privileges of the bureaucratic stratum, including the special health system, these have not really been touched, and the topic has lost much of its previous prominence in the press. Yeltsin's speech at the October Central Committee plenum, that cost him his job as Moscow first secretary, hit precisely at these privileges. That speech has never been published, but a document I saw that purports to be a resume of the speech qualifies the banquet awaiting the Central Committee members after the session as a disgrace and insult to the country's workers, suffering under eternal food "deficits."

T amazed me with his detailed, and, to my view, accurate, knowledge of Soviet history of the 1920s and '30s and his defense of Trotsky, at least as a historical figure. But, curiously, he is not a supporter of popular democracy, at least not for the present. First, he says, we need to democratize the party, which will be the conscious vanguard. Given the past, the Soviet people are not yet ready for democracy.

When I ask what makes him think that the 20-odd million party members, for the most part recruited during the "period of stagnation,"<sup>4</sup> are any more conscious than the rest of the population, he replies: Of course, not the party as it is now! But he really cannot explain how the party could be rebuilt and by whom.

T is one of the very rare social scientists who supports the existing economic system, though he does not say this directly. He rejects the current idealization of NEP and expresses his dislike for its current designation of the existing system as "command-administrative." What counts, he says, is the kind of people you have running it. Under Brezhnev it became feudalized and was racked with corruption. From his words, one could deduce that only a technical correction is needed. T's position is weakened by his failure to deal seriously with the issue of economic management and, specifically, with property relations. His argument is limited to the distribution of consumer goods and services, while a Marxist analysis would see this as tributary to the more fundamental question of the distribution of the means of production. In response to my question, T answers that one cannot really find specific class or group interests behind the different reform projects.

**June 3:** I had supper at Sasha's, a skilled worker-activist in a leading electronics factory. Wages have not changed in his shop. True, output norms have risen, but so have the piece rates. As for the new laws providing for democracy in the enterprise, management has the situation well in hand. Besides, workers do not see their interest in assuming responsibility for management in the existing circumstances.

Trade unions are another matter, but they continue, as before, to defend management interests against the workers. Attempts to subordinate the union to the workers' interests meet with repression or more indirect forms of pressure on the part of management. But the workers are not without means of defense. For example, they will work to rule, refuse overtime, write tons of letters to every conceivable authority, work seven hours instead of eight, or, finally, strike. It is generally enough that only one shop take action for production in the entire factory to be brought to a halt.

The perestroika, he concludes, hasn't changed much for the workers. There has been some speedup, but that's all so far.

**June 5:** I attended a conference of the informal organizations or clubs called as part of the "all-national discussion" of the theses for the party conference. Its goal is to work out a common set of reform proposals to be sent to the organizers of that conference. It had official authorization and was held in the new "Palace of Youth" with about 500 people present. Each club was allotted 20 minutes to speak. For five hours, with only a 30-minute break, club spokesperson after club spokesperson took the floor and laid out the group's program and demands. It is to continue next week.

All the speakers seemed very radical in their attacks against bureaucratic rule and demands for full democracy. But the speeches were curiously abstract. No one seriously addressed the need to mobilize the population behind these demands. Someone did suggest going to the factories to report the results of this meeting. But no one saw how this could practically be done. The question of economic reform was given short shrift, though practically everybody appeared to support enterprise autonomy and the introduction of market relations. True, one speaker called for the establishment, under the reformed system, of provincial economic authorities.

Listening to the speakers, it was often difficult to see basic programmatic differences among the clubs. Most are more or less overtly socialist. The few that were not did not say so openly. There wasn't a single woman among the speakers. About a quarter of the audience was women.

**June 8:** A few socialists from Western countries who happened to be in Moscow met today with representatives of an anarchist club, "Obshchina," and a couple of other activists to explore the possibility of an international conference. The evening was a total loss. It was impossible to get anyone to explain who exactly would be issuing the invitation and what the contents and aims of the conference were to be, other than some sort of meeting of "leftists" and "activists."

The anarchists finally proposed that it discuss alternative programs of socialism. I asked them if at this point it made sense to expend their limited energies on such a project,

when right here in Moscow they had first-rate social scientists who could present and debate different programs of economic and political reform relevant to the Soviet context, in a way that no one living in the West could. But they dismissed all social scientists as right wing. I then suggested they drop the idea and use this energy to help organize a feminist club, since there aren't any, and women are obviously the worst off section of Soviet society. To this I received the reply that the woman question is purely demographic. Was this a joke? Probably not. Dima, who has lived a number of years in the West, told me the other day that to win the heart of a Soviet woman it is enough simply to treat her like a full-fledged person, so rare and surprising is such an attitude among Soviet men.

Before leaving, Igor, whom I have known for several years, took me aside to explain that it does not really matter what the conference is about as long as it happens. It will make a lot of publicity for the clubs and give them a big boost. At the national conference of clubs held last year in Moscow one heard all sorts of nonsense, but the clubs really took off after that. Igor represents the opportunistic wing of the movement. For him, building the movement is the key thing; its programmatic basis matters little. Well, the club movement in Moscow is two years old and has still not overcome its marginality: it lacks a social base.

**June 9:** I attended a seminar on the informal movement organized by the club "Socialist Initiative," which generally represents the left—and more principled—wing of the movement. When the main speaker, a Marxist philosopher and party member, came to the subject of the working class, he said that there is none. It is too heterogeneous and essentially *déclassé*. The workers see their basic interest as working less and earning more. It has not budged yet, and he is not optimistic for the near future. So far (in Moscow?) only the students have mobilized—a few thousands during the Yeltsin affair—and the intellectuals in the informal movement. He seems to see this movement as the hope, at least for the near future.

One wonders—if the working class is so heterogeneous, how can one make such sweeping generalizations about it? I am getting tired of hearing intellectuals spout these clichés about workers. There is more than a little contempt in them.

Later I spoke with Yulya, an eighteen-year-old woman, whom I met at the conference of the informals. She is studying youth gangs in her spare time and hopes to enter the university to study sociology. In typical intellectual fashion, she feels that the revolution that gave power to the "masses" is at fault in the unfortunate development of the Soviet system. She does not see another revolution as desirable, even a peaceful one along the lines of Poland 1980-81. Yet she says she is for democracy. Maybe she means "rule of law"—with an important advisory role for intellectuals? She is very much for the proliferation of cooperatives as a form of economic organization that can create the needed sense of ownership.

As for the local youth gang, which is recruited mainly from working class youths, they are patriots and really do believe that the goal of Soviet history is communism. This fits, in a way, with the essay I just read by one of the participants in the workers' uprising in Novochoerkassk in 1962. They

marched into town singing revolutionary songs and shouting: Make way for the working class! Yet, Novochoerkassk had no revolutionary tradition—it had been a cossack center with no industry until the 1930s. The songs and class consciousness, according to the author, came from the educational system and movies as well as from the workers' common situation.

Yulya offered two related reasons why there were so few women in the informal movement, and especially among the leaders. First, women had much less free time than men, even if they are single and without children: they want to dress and look nice, and that takes a lot of time, especially given the dearth of quality clothes and cosmetics in the stores. But secondly, men generally do not take women seriously, particularly when it comes to politics. That is why women hesitate to speak at meetings. But if they do decide to speak, they had better be elegant if they want to get the men's attention. Yulya herself does not use makeup or try to dress particularly well, but she admires Marina, one of the rare women who does speak at meetings and who is always very elegant.

**June 12:** Today was the second installment of the conference of informal groups, this time in the Hall of the Energy Workers. It made the same rather dismal impression as the first, except for two speakers. One, representing a workers' group, criticized the others for the abstract nature of their proposals. He called for concrete demands such as the creation of regional trade unions, the economic and social maintenance of children, rejection of the retail price reform.

The other was a visitor from a Leningrad club, who criticized the very goal of the conference: to send a document with reform proposals as a sort of solicitation to the party conference. That conference won't decide anything of importance. What will be crucial is the balance of political forces after the party conference. The aim of any document produced by this conference, he argued, should be propagandistic—to help clarify the consciousness of ordinary people and to arouse them to action.

A major dispute broke out over the creation of a "popular front": should it include all or only socialist clubs? Some, like the "Democratic Union," favor the restoration of capitalism, though they don't say this directly. The anarchists and the more opportunistic wing insisted on a "broad" movement; the Marxists in "Socialist Initiative" insisted that there can be no compromise on principle. Each side accused the other of dishonest tactics. The issue was not resolved, though the conference did adopt a rather incoherent document containing over thirty reform proposals.

I left the conference with the Leningrader and some of the anarchists. The Leningrader insisted on the need to concretize the demands, to take them to the people, to mobilize them. As an example, he proposed a petition calling for the restoration of the party maximum.<sup>5</sup> The petition could even begin with a quote from Lenin. Workers would sign with both hands and at the same time they would become aware that there is a movement that takes up issues close to them. The only chance of achieving democracy is to create a balance of forces favorable to the people, not by appealing to party con-

ferences. The anarchists remained skeptical. They want a "direct" struggle for democracy and fail to see the logic of such tactics. One of them suggested that the issue wait till the fall, since many people are out of town. Is this true also of the workers?

Afterwards, I went off on my own with the Leningrader. He feels the struggle is a long-term one that will not achieve victory until a new bout of reaction, perhaps not a severe one, but akin to what followed the Khrushchev liberalization. That's why he wants to draw high school students into the movement — to prepare for the next wave. He doesn't see the clubs as very serious in their work. They don't realize that the entire conference today could have been arrested and no one but the immediate families would have noticed. They are blinded by their self-importance and absorbed in abstract discussions of democracy.

Just look at the document, he says. One of the theses calls for an elected president. They want a new dictator; it's the personality cult all over again. And thirty-odd points that no workers will bother to read, when four or five simple demands would do: all power to the soviets; an end to bureaucratic privilege; an economic reform decided democratically by the soviets that safeguards the interests of the working class. To these one could perhaps add some concrete conditions.

After the conference I also spoke very briefly with P, a sociologist who recently published a co-authored article arguing that what ails Soviet society is not socialism, as many (intellectuals?) believe, since there has never been socialism in Russia. The problem is the absence of socialism, and the task of the perestroika is to build it. This means a social revolution. She remarked how such views place her among a tiny minority of intellectuals. The article itself was considerably watered down by the journal's editors.

June 13: I visited Grisha and Vera, workers at a plastics factory. Grisha, a loader, told how the loaders recently went about winning a raise. The ten loaders, who earned 160 rubles, decided to ask management for a raise. The director replied that it was impossible, and the loaders began an "Italian" or slowdown strike. Where before one loader would go out with a truck to make a delivery, now two and three would go, with the result that there were often no loaders left at the plant. Management responded by hiring temporary loaders from a city agency. In response, five of the factory's loaders left to find work elsewhere. The others eventually got a 20-ruble raise. This is a typical scenario for a wage dispute in a Soviet factory, where chronic labor shortage is the rule.

The loaders' wage consists of the basic wage plus a payment if the load arrives without unaccounted-for loss plus the coefficient of labor participation. The loaders are organized into a brigade and they are theoretically paid a collective wage that the brigadier distributes among them, in part according to how well each works. In reality, the coefficient of labor participation means that those who were guilty of discipline infraction — drunkenness, absence, or lateness — are docked and this amount is distributed among the others. But, says Grisha, it is not really the incentive to a better work effort that it is supposed to be: if a worker is not guilty of any major violations of discipline, he is guaranteed

his wage, no matter what effort he puts into his work. The brigade is thus essentially a disciplinary tool for management. Grisha concludes that nothing has changed here since the perestroika.

Vera works as a sorter. She and the other women carry 15-kilo and more loads by hand all day under the open sky in all weather. Management distributes milk (which Soviets seem to feel has antitoxic properties) free to all workers, in view of the harmful conditions at the factory. Before this, Vera worked many years at a galvanizing factory that makes badges. She worked standing in rubber galoshes on a floor covered in noxious puddles. Because of "harmfulness," this work made her eligible for pension at age 45, though she still works.

Grisha was sentenced twice for political crimes. The first time was in 1963, when he and four other workers posted leaflets attacking Khrushchev's regime. The Novocherkassk events were not an isolated phenomenon. This workers' opposition thus began several years before the appearance of intellectual dissidence. This is something to keep in mind when listening to intellectuals talk of the passivity and undeveloped consciousness of the workers.

June 14: I was supposed to talk with M, a well-known sociologist of the working class, but she was called away at the last minute to an urgent meeting. Her husband, Boris, asked me to come in anyway.

He is an economist specializing in developing countries. When I first met him three years ago, he was extremely critical of the regime and of communism. He seems to have mellowed quite a bit and even come around to supporting Gorbachev.

He has just returned from a trip to the Soviet Far East, where he gave a series of popular talks for the "Znanie Society." This is "voluntary" public work that intellectuals are called upon to do, though in this case, at least, he went quite willingly. He was curious to see the mood in this region. He was struck by two things:

- 1) the very strong mistrust and skepticism toward the perestroika, since nothing has changed in the people's material situation, unless it has got worse. (By contrast, most intellectuals, especially the academics and specialists in institutes, seem to have abandoned their former oppositional attitudes — rarely if ever translated into action — together with Sakharov.)

- 2) the very strong anger at the persistence of bureaucratic privilege, such as the construction of housing for officials and of government buildings while many ordinary people still wait in line for individual apartments. In fact, today's *Pravda* carries an article about special housing going up for high bureaucrats while Afghanistan veterans remain out in the cold.

Boris, too, considers himself a democrat, but when the discussion becomes concrete, his reticence about giving power back to the people begins to show. In his younger days he protested against the invasion of Hungary and suffered for it.

June 15: I spoke today with L, another leading labor sociologist, whose writings in the Brezhnev period invariably demonstrated the objective economic need for democratiza-

tion, at least on the enterprise level. To argue in print for democracy on the state level was impossible. Now he sees things differently. He asks me what I think democracy is. I answer that it is the rule of the people, when the people as a whole decides together the questions that vitally affect their lives. L shakes his head. My definition permits mob rule and oppression of the minority. Such rule by the crowd (okhlok-ratiya) can degenerate into anarchy, leading by way of reaction to the emergence of a strong state. This, in L's view, is what happened in Russia after 1917. Democracy is a very difficult thing to achieve. He emphasizes the need for horizontal links among people, for mediating organizations between the individual and the state. Exclusively vertical relations, i.e., atomized individuals directly facing the state, is the formula for totalitarianism. (Shades of the "theory of mass society.") Democracy in the Soviet Union can only be achieved by stages, and it could take years. His vision is clearly that of "Western-style democracy," i.e., one where the mass of the population does not participate in deciding the basic questions of public life, what liberal theory likes to call the "plurality of elites" or "polyarchy." This is a system that ensures the people the right, to paraphrase Marx, to elect every few years the people that will ensure the conditions of their oppression.

Like many social scientists, L has begun to dabble in history, seeking support for his current political positions. He believes that the centralized planned economy, the "command" system, inevitably leads to dictatorship and terror. NEP, under which market relations predominated, did not guarantee a democratic evolution of the Soviet state, but at least it created a basis for it. This is why he is for a radical market reform, as the only basis for democracy.

L agrees that most of the people are for democracy but against the market reform. (He says that this is also Yeltsin's position.) He too claims that 40 percent of the workers, the unskilled, have no future under the reform. When I ask how you can carry out such a reform if both the bureaucracy and the people oppose it, he looks me in the eye and finally comes clean: Yes, it requires a Cavaignac.<sup>6</sup> A rather paradoxical position: a firm, dictatorial hand is necessary to create the basis for an eventual democratization. Sounds familiar. Like sociologist T, who holds an opposing view on the economic reform, he does not feel one can explain the different political reform trends by class or group interests.

After L, I spoke with K, an economist at the same institute. She studies automation and its effect on the working class. K is in her early 60s, a very strong woman. She has raised her children on her own, attained a high academic degree, and obviously loves her work. She disagrees with the claim that 40 percent of the workers are somehow doomed by reform. It is true that unskilled workers in their 40s and 50s generally lack the education to retrain, but there are so many unskilled jobs around now that are unfilled that these people have nothing to fear for the rest of their working lives. As for the young workers, they all have high school education and are suffering in their current unskilled work — they want interesting, skilled work and would gladly retrain. In her comparative study of worker attitudes to technological change in capitalist and Soviet-type systems, she found that while Western workers feared such change, Soviet workers wel-

comed it. In this respect, Soviet workers expressed greater confidence in tomorrow.

K is opposed to any reform that would undermine existing social guarantees and increase inequality. She objects to the way guarantees and efficiency are so often opposed to each other by economists. Just getting rid of bureaucratic privilege and the underground millionaires would be a big step forward. K likes the Leningrader's idea of demanding the restoration of the party maximum. It would be an extremely popular and beneficial measure. Equality is important because it is the basis for genuine social solidarity, it creates a commitment to collective goals because one has the confidence that the value one creates will be justly distributed. She speaks with enthusiasm of the spirit of the 1930s and of her youth. She is not nostalgic about Stalin but in those days, she says, we at least had the ideals of socialism. Now all they talk about is economic efficiency and growth.

She grants that people are born with different and unequal capacities. Talent and merit should be rewarded, but these rewards should not be such as to create qualitative socioeconomic differences in the society. She points out that Soviet people have been streaming into intellectual jobs, even though they do not pay well. In any case, the people themselves should decide how much differentiation they want. At present, the reform is being promulgated from above and such questions are not seriously debated.

Unlike the others I have spoken to, K does not hedge her support for democracy. This is probably not unrelated to her views on the economic reform. After all, the radical marketeers realize that genuine democracy is incompatible with the realization of their reform. K, on the other hand, says the people should be able to freely choose those leaders whose positions correspond to their interests. Authoritarian rule leads to voluntarism and extreme policies. With democracy, the people can weigh the merits of alternative policies and then make an enlightened choice. They can also learn from their errors.

The weekly *Semya* (Family) today devotes two full pages to the proposed retail price reform. All the letters received oppose it. One of them recalls the reform under Khrushchev: all the money the state gained was subsequently squandered on harebrained schemes that left the population worse off than before. Given the historical experience with "reform," any measures, however justified, that call for sacrifice will meet strong opposition unless there are guarantees. But the only real guarantee is democracy: the people themselves must decide what reform is needed and be able to supervise its promulgation. But there is no sign of the regime going for this. A current joke asks what the relationship is between democracy and democratization? (The latter is the term most often used to describe the regime's political reforms.) Answer: the same as between canal and canalization (kanalizatsiya = sewage system).

June 16: I was over at Viktor and Alina's today. They told me some interesting stories. Alina was walking the other day in the center of Moscow with a friend, whose husband is a member of the editorial staff of *Vechernyaya Moskva*. Alina was hungry, and her friend offered to take her into the cafeteria in the building where her husband works. This

building also houses editorial staffs of four other dailies. According to Alina, this "cafeteria" is practically of the same standard as that in the Kremlin: the food is of good quality, well above that found in ordinary cafeterias, there are all kinds of "deficit" goods on sale, and the prices are below those in government stores. I wonder if this helps to explain why the press has been treading lightly on bureaucratic privilege.

It has been very hot and sticky the last few days. Yesterday evening Viktor and Alina decided to take a walk in their working class district. They soon came upon a line of women in front of a movie theater. The women had found out that the "deficit" "bird's milk" cake was available here. Actually, a festive gathering of deputies to the district soviet was being held in the theater, and the cake was for them. But the woman guarding the door had told those outside that if any cakes remained, they would be able to purchase them. And so the women waited in the sweltering heat, with scarcely a grumble, while every now and then a delegate would be seen leaving the theater, carrying his "bird's milk," discreetly wrapped in brown paper. On their way home about an hour later, Viktor and Alina passed by the theater again. It had just been announced that the delegates would be viewing a two-part movie. Yet the women did not leave. No one tried to mobilize the crowd to storm the theater. There were also no men waiting.

Yesterday, *Pravda* carried an article praising a family farm (based on long-term rental contract). The family was shown as hardworking, thrifty, resourceful. Yet practically everyone else, from their neighbors working on the adjacent state farm to the bureaucrat and the Moscow philistine, can only ask out of malicious envy: How much are they making? But I wonder if this is necessarily envy? Could it not also, at least in some cases, reflect basic egalitarian values? Many of the articles on the market reform give the distinct impression that their authors believe the market, and it alone, guarantees just distribution: it rewards those who work hard and punishes those who do not. I guess that means that under capitalism all the rich are deserving and the poor are lazy and profligate. This is, after all, the claim of classical liberal ideology.

Despite what many radical marketeers say, the deep popular mistrust of this claim is not due to an unwillingness to work hard: the workers I have met all complain that they are not working at full capacity. The main reason is that the supply of raw materials and semimanufactured goods is poorly organized. The workers are generally on piece rates and this "underloading" means that wages are below what they could theoretically be. According to Tanya, who works in an engineering factory, this is one of the most common sources of dissatisfaction in her shop. The official norm is

two lathes per worker, but even this is not always achieved. In fact, if the supply problem were resolved, each woman could and would gladly tend up to four lathes, if, of course, wages rose commensurately. Management at all levels — and most social scientists — rail against the workers' indiscipline and lack of initiative. From the workers' point of view this is so much demagoguery, when the real problem is management's inability to organize production efficiently.

**June 18:** The fighting among Moscow's informals over which groups to include in the popular front continues. One of the leaders of the Marxist club explained to me that to include non-socialist groups would, in fact, make the front narrower, not broader. This is because the ordinary people are socialists; they, unlike most intellectuals, are Marxists-Leninists, in their own way, and revere "Uncle Lenin." They see the existing system as having moved away from the original principles. If the popular front, because of the presence of anti-socialist elements, has to water down its content and limit its discussion to what type of parliamentary system is best, it will never acquire a mass base.

This makes a lot of sense. Still, I can't help wondering how close in practice, as opposed to theory, this group itself is to the ordinary people. It has raised some questions about the economic reform, but its members, too, seem to give the issue rather short shrift and lack a clearly worked out position.

The question of empowering the soviets has become a major theme in the press. Generally, I am told that things have opened up to a hitherto unknown degree since April, when *Pravda*, after a month's silence, published its strong reply to the Stalinist letter by Nina Andreeva that appeared in *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. Many, if not most, editors, and intellectuals generally, took the publication of her letter as a signal that official policy had changed, and no paper, except for *Moscow News* (in many ways, the most outspoken) had dared criticize it until the authoritative *Pravda* gave the signal. This shows how fragile the freedoms, all granted from above — not won from below — are.

## NOTES

1. The average wage in the Soviet Union is 220 rubles a month, but 35 percent of the population earn less than 100 rubles. A recent article in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* qualified this as a poverty wage.

2. This common expression means that people at all levels do not feel any responsibility for the results of their own work or for that of their enterprise or institution.

3. As a result of this and other popular pressure, Afanasyev and the other liberals were eventually included among the Moscow delegation.

4. The term used in the press to refer to the Brezhnev period.

5. This was the maximum salary of party officials in Lenin's time, set at the level of the wages of a skilled worker.

6. A French general who crushed the popular revolution of 1848.

# On the Rehabilitation of Sergei Sedov

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

On November 22, 1988, the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* featured on page 3 of its 6-page issue for that Tuesday a half-page, six column-wide feature article "Protection by Law: How the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the USSR Has Reviewed Appeals," by Yu. Feofanov. After recounting examples of a number of contemporary cases that show the courts exhibiting a certain independent role in guaranteeing justice, in the last of the six columns, third paragraph from the end of the article, we find this:

"Among [the appeals] were appeals of sentences of the 1930s. I will, for pure informational purposes, relate a few. Rehabilitated was Tatyana Ivanovna Kameneva (Averyanova). August 13, 1937, she was sentenced to be shot and on that same day, the sentence was carried out. 'In the period of the preliminary investigation,' the appeal said, 'she was subjected to a long, exhausting interrogation, during which she lost consciousness, and was deprived of sleep and food.' And despite these circumstances, she refused to admit to the charges. Charges were removed from Sergei Lvovich Sedov, son of L.D. Trotsky: he was condemned to a five-year sentence in 1935 but in 1937 he was executed. The stigma enemy of the people was removed from Nadezhda Mikhailovna Lukinoy Bukharina [Bukharin's first wife]. According to testimony of A.M. Larina [Bukharin's third wife, who was with him when he was arrested], she had turned in her party card when she learned about the arrest and conviction of Nikolai Ivanovich, her former husband.

"I have named only three persons, although the list of those who have been rehabilitated is long. One would like to speak about the cruelty with which a scoundrel tormented de-

fenseless and innocent victims. But I will refrain from doing so; people have already spoken more and better than I could do."

This must be a classic example of "short shrift." Such terse and lone announcements, typical of Stalinist "journalism," also announced the rehabilitations of the victims of the Moscow trials, but at least in a news article devoted solely to that topic. One is tempted to commend the reporter for the *New York Times*, where the rehabilitation of Sergei Sedov made headline news, for careful reading of the Soviet press except for stating the article appeared November 21 when it actually appeared November 22.

Sergei L. Sedov was the younger son of Leon Trotsky and his wife Natalya Sedova. His rehabilitation and the rehabilitation of Tatyana Ivanovna and Nadezhda Mikhailovna are historic milestones. The husbands of both women, Old Bolsheviks shot after the first and third Moscow trials, were rehabilitated months ago. Sergei's father, of course, remains the premier victim of the Stalinist campaign of slander and historical falsification.

Sergei was born in 1908 in Vienna and had arrived in Russia in May 1917 with Trotsky and his family. Although he had lived in the midst of the October Bolshevik Revolution and the epoch-making events in its aftermath, Sergei, unlike Trotsky's other three children, never became interested in political activity. He directed his energies into a variety of endeavors and ultimately exhibited unusual talent which he pursued in mathematics and science.

When Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party and then, in January 1928, from Moscow, Sergei accom-

## Moscow Admits Stalin's Guilt in Trotsky's Murder

As we go to press, Reuters reports from Moscow that a prominent Soviet historian has revealed in a widely read weekly paper Stalin's responsibility for the murder of Leon Trotsky. N. Vasetsky, writing in *Literary Gazette*, stated "Either he himself [Stalin] took the decision or he let his entourage know that it was time to put an end to Trotsky." As a senior historian well placed within the bureaucracy, Vasetsky undoubtedly has access to archive material never revealed beyond a tiny

privileged layer. He names Colonel Leonid Eitingon as the NKVD (forerunner of the KGB, the Soviet secret police) organizer of Trotsky's assassination in 1940. According to Vasetsky, Eitingon recruited and trained Ramon Mercader who succeeded in killing Trotsky during an interview in Trotsky's study after earlier machine-gun attacks on Trotsky's house had failed.

Mercader, apprehended by Trotsky's bodyguards, served twenty years in a Mexican prison. After his

release, Mercader lived in Prague and Moscow. He reportedly received the award of *Hero of the Soviet Union*. He died in Havana in 1978 and his remains were buried in a cemetery near Moscow.

Until the glasnost period, the bureaucracy had consistently denied any responsibility for Trotsky's death, cynically claiming he had been killed by one of his own disillusioned followers.

panied the family part of the way on the train to Central Asia but left to return to pursue his studies in Moscow. When Trotsky was being expelled from the Soviet Union in January 1929, Sergei was allowed to accompany his family during the final stretch of that dramatic train trip to the Black Sea port. However, Sergei again chose to remain in Moscow and not follow his parents into exile abroad. He wanted to pursue his academic work. It was conceivable that his abstention from political activity and the contributions he would make to society through his professional endeavors would shield him from political reprisals.

After he bid farewell to his family as they went into foreign exile, he maintained contact with them through correspondence with his mother about his health, work, and other non-political topics. But he was never to see them again.

His last letters to his mother were written in December 1934, in the days immediately after the assassination of Kirov, when the bureaucracy undertook a campaign of terror signaled by mass arrests and summary executions. While he was not specific about his concerns, the tone of these last two letters indicated that he lived in a fearful atmosphere. "My general situation is very grave, graver than one could imagine," he wrote. (For a record of the unsuccessful and anguished efforts of his parents to locate their son, see Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*.) After that letter, despite repeated inquiries and international appeals, his parents never heard from Sergei again.

Since then, fifty-four years have passed. There is still no official information as to what happened to Sergei. On the basis of accounts such as the one by Joseph Berger on page 22, however, it would appear that Sergei was removed from his post at the Higher Technological Institute in Moscow where he was a lecturer and arrested in 1935. After he refused to repudiate his father and his ideas, Sergei was exiled to the Krasnoyarsk region where he worked as an engineer until the fall of 1936.

As the first Moscow show trial opened in August 1936, as part of the intensified campaign of mass repression, Sergei was again arrested. He ended up at the Vorkuta forced-labor camp in the far North, one of the camp points to which all Trotskyist prisoners were being assembled. While there, he had the opportunity to meet those who were co-thinkers of his father and supporters of the Opposition's program, many of whom had already spent ten years in the camps. He participated in the three-month-long hunger strike organized by Trotskyists at Vorkuta and other camps. This hunger strike has historic importance for several reasons: Not only was it one of the few examples from that period of prisoners organized from a revolutionary point of view to defend themselves as prisoners from the humiliation of the bureaucrats' jailkeepers, but it was one of the few public protests in the world to the first Moscow trial of August 1936, where Zinoviev, Kamenev, and other prominent Bolshevik leaders were framed up and shot.

Realizing that the apparatus would try to humiliate them before it murdered them, the prisoners, led by the Trotskyists, organized and called a hunger strike demanding basic workers' rights with respect to their work in the Vorkuta mines and the right to be recognized as political prisoners. And they won their demands.

Sergei's participation in the hunger strike not only inspired the other participants but reflected the impact that the ideological devotion of these Left Oppositionists had on him, as Berger reports.

Several points need to be noted here. In addition to Sergei's information, Berger's account of the hunger strike and the mass executions that followed it are based on other materials, most notably a report by a certain M.B. that appeared in the Menshevik newspaper *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik* in 1961. (The complete text of this account appears in *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition*, ed. by George Saunders, Monad Press, distributed by Pathfinder Press, NY, 1974; and *Stalinist Legacy*, ed. by Tariq Ali, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1984.)

Further, Mikhail Baitalsky was also being held at Vorkuta camp at that time of the hunger strike and executions. His *Notebooks for the Grandchildren*, currently being serialized in the pages of this magazine, was written primarily to tell future generations of Soviet youth about these executions of his friends who were Trotskyists, and who represented the ideas and spirit of the October Revolution that the bureaucracy hoped to bury. M.B.'s account of these events, by far the most complete, what we have from Sergei via Berger, and Baitalsky's testimony are among the few accounts that have remained of this historic crime against the world workers' movement. They vary on several points, some more important than others. Until the files of the secret police are opened to the public and glasnost allows the full story to be unearthed, we will be forced to rely on the testimony of the few participants and witnesses who managed to survive and dared to pass their story on.

Sergei's execution in 1937 left only one of Trotsky's four children alive. His two daughters, both from his first marriage to Aleksandra Sokolovskaya, and both ardent supporters of the Left Opposition's program, had perished: Nina had succumbed to consumption in 1928, her health drastically undermined due to the persecution of her family. Zina, who with her son Seva had joined her father and Natalya in exile in Turkey in 1931, committed suicide in Berlin in January 1933. Her suicide was at least in part due to severe depression brought on by the announcement by the bureaucrats in Moscow of a new regulation that would have made it impossible for her to ever again see the daughter she had been forced to leave behind in the Soviet Union. (On February 20, 1932, the Stalinist rulers deprived Trotsky of his Soviet citizenship and his right ever to return to the USSR. This included his relatives in exile.) Adding to the misfortunes incurred by the daughters, the husbands of both Nina and Zina had been arrested in 1928 for their support to the Left Opposition and they perished in the camps.

Sokolovskaya, who had in her youth helped recruit Trotsky to Marxist ideas and who had been exiled with him to Siberia in 1901, was also arrested in 1935 and her fate, as well as the fate of her grandchildren and the grandchildren of Trotsky and Sedova who had been left in her care remained unknown until very recently.

Leon Sedov, the older son of Trotsky and Natalya, who was a devoted Bolshevik-Leninist and his father's right hand in exile, was to speak with his brother Sergei for the last time in January 1933 from Berlin immediately after Zina's suicide

when he was miraculously able to make telephone contact with Sergei to relay the tragic news. Leon Sedov, who was a vital link between Trotsky and the political world under Trotsky's difficult conditions of exile, and who had escaped several attempts by the Stalinist secret police on his life, died under suspicious circumstances in a Paris hospital in February 1938 on the eve of the third Moscow trial. The hand of the bureaucrats' murderous agents was strongly suspected. The truth about this too remains buried in the Kremlin's secret police files, still far from the open air of glasnost.

It is noteworthy that among those who were shot during the mass executions at Vorkuta was Rosa Smirnov, the wife of Ivan Smirnov, a Bolshevik leader who had been one of the first supporters of the Left Opposition's program in 1923 and a defendant shot after the first Moscow trial. His daughter, according to Baitalsky, was also among those executed. As Baitalsky notes, in order to eradicate the Opposition, Stalin was forced "to root them out all the way to their daughters" and one might add "and their sons" as well, as Sergei's story shows.

The rehabilitation of Sergei, along with the rehabilitation of the wives of other opponents of Stalin, is a welcome historic development. However, despite the progress, Leon

Trotsky himself has still not been rehabilitated and Stalinist fabricated slanders against him continue to appear in the Soviet press as a way of prejudicing the unknowing against his ideas. Mikhail Gorbachev's blithe assertion (in his speech on the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution in November 1987), which he most likely hoped his listeners would assume came from Lenin's Testament, had Lenin describe Trotsky as "an excessively self-assured politician who always vacillated and cheated." This is still, essentially, the official line, despite the fact that some of the worst slanders emanating from the now discredited Moscow trials have had to be repudiated. (Lenin did state in his Testament that Trotsky has "displayed excessive self-assurance" but not that Trotsky vacillated and cheated. It should be noted that Lenin's Testament is still not readily available in the USSR so people cannot see for themselves that Gorbachev was lying.)

Reports like those of Berger and Baitalsky point to the historic need for the total rehabilitation of all the victims of the bureaucracy's counterrevolutionary repression, and the publication of all the banned writings—including those of Leon Trotsky, Leon Sedov, Ivan Smirnov, Khristian Rakovsky, and other supporters of the Left Opposition. These must be made available to all the Soviet people in all the languages of the Soviet Union. ●

## From the Arsenal of Marxism

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# A Chance Encounter with Sergei Sedov

by Joseph Berger

*Joseph Berger, a founder of the Communist Party of Palestine and a member of the Mid-East Division of the Communist International, spent 23 years in Stalin's prisons and camps before he was freed and rehabilitated in 1956. We reprint here major excerpts from the account in his book *Nothing but the Truth* (John Day Co., NY, 1971.).*

I met Trotsky's son Sergei in 1937. We were both waiting to be interrogated in the Lubyanka. The waiting-rooms were small bare cells known as "kennels." Normally each prisoner had a kennel to himself but the Lubyanka was overworked, busy officials rang each other up in search of a place for their charges, and sometimes two were made to share. Thus we spent several hours together one night in February.

For me it was a memorable meeting. Sergei had recently been brought back from Vorkuta. His case had been reopened and he took a gloomy view of his prospects. My own seemed little better, and before long I was in fact sentenced to death. But for some reason Sergei said he had an intuition I would survive, and he gave me a message for his parents, should I ever see them.

He was about twenty-eight, a shortish, spare young man with a round face and a moustache. Unlike his brother, he had never taken the slightest interest in politics—he had even refused to join the Komsomol. He had a passion for

books and was addicted to the circus. As a child, he had once run away and joined a travelling circus.

His relations were naturally worried by his irresponsible ways and even pointed out that they could damage his father's career. But he remained incorrigible. When his father found himself in the Opposition, he thought it only proved how right he himself had been in his bored indifference to the regime. He did well at school but hesitated a long time over the choice of a career. In the end, he was trained as an architect.

When Trotsky was exiled in 1929, Stalin—in one of his unpredictable moments of generosity—allowed him to take his family and even his archives abroad. Sergei heard the news in some provincial town where he was working. He received an anxious message from his parents. Trotsky took the blackest possible view of the situation in Russia and foresaw the fate of all those who were connected with him. "Think of the worst possible thing you can imagine and multiply it by ten,"



he said to the friends who saw him off from Odessa. But Sergei was at the time in love with a girl who was unwilling to leave her family, and he refused to follow his parents abroad.

For a time it seemed as though his father's fears for him had been groundless. Not only did he escape the purges of the early thirties, but family friends who still had some influence found him a job. Only in 1935, after the murder of Kirov, was he summoned by the authorities and asked to make a public repudiation of his father. They explained that he had only to tell the truth—he had never got on with his parents or shared their views, and he had not accompanied them into exile. All he need add was that he now regarded them as enemies of their country. He refused on the grounds that he had always been apolitical—this was the reason for his differences with his father—and he would certainly not join in hounding him now. He lost his job but was not arrested until some months later.

Brought to Moscow in the autumn of 1936, he immediately went on hunger strike as a protest against his arrest. But the investigation was completed within ten days. He was sentenced to five years in a labor camp.<sup>1</sup> In December, he arrived in Vorkuta and for the first time found himself among followers of his father. They filled him with admiration.

While the great majority had “capitulated,” there remained a hard core of uncompromising Trotskyists, most of them in prisons and camps. They and their families had been rounded up in the preceding months and concentrated in three large camps—Kolyma, Vorkuta, and Norilsk. Sergei gave me the first news I received of those in Vorkuta.

I was not surprised at the impression they had made on him. I had met several since my arrest. Most of those I knew were intellectuals to whom Trotsky's views—less cut and dried than Lenin's—had appealed from early on. The majority were experienced revolutionaries who had fought in the civil war but had joined the Opposition in the early twenties. A larger proportion than in other parties were members of national minorities, but all of them were fiery internationalists, intolerant of the very idea of local or Soviet nationalism and scarcely able to grasp the concept of nation. Had the term “rootless cosmopolitans” been invented by then, it would certainly have been applied to the Trotskyists.<sup>2</sup>

Purists, they feared the contamination of their doctrine above all else in the world. This had been the greatest obstacle to their cooperation with other groups and, even in the camp, they tended to keep to themselves. They had inherited this attitude from Trotsky. Lenin could be hard or flexible as it suited him. But Trotsky, even in exile, with almost every door shut in his face, could still use his time and his brilliant gifts on venomous polemics with Western socialist leaders. When I accused the Trotskyists of sectarianism, they said that what mattered was to “keep the banner unsullied.”

Their fanaticism antagonized the majority of prisoners, and even those whom it attracted were not always made welcome. But their gloomy courage was proof against all temptations and threats.

I remember a former leader of the Armenian Komsomol. He had received a three-year sentence which ran out in 1937. Every prisoner's identity card bore the date of his release. One day, to my horror, he took out his card and, calmly smil-

ing, altered the date from 1937 to 1987. He explained that he did not of course expect to be alive by then, but that as long as he lived he would remain a Trotskyist and would therefore have to stay in prison. Stalin was right, according to his lights, to keep the Trotskyists locked up. As for them, all they had to do now was to bear witness by suffering and dying for the truth.

When I told such people that, as politicians, they were “opting out of history,” they replied: “That's what every opportunist tells us.”

Sergei found the conditions in the camp abominable, but his companions gave him a warm welcome for his father's sake and were themselves heartened by his presence. He remained as uninterested in their political and economic views as before, but he spoke with veneration of their independence of spirit and could even say that the weeks he had spent among them had been “the happiest in his life.” He wanted his parents to hear about their friends and of his own change of heart, and his mother particularly to know that he was sorry for all the anxiety he had given her and that he was determined to die with dignity. He was shot a few weeks later. I was released in time to write to his mother but not to see her—she died before I reached Paris in 1962.

I heard more about Sergei from a friend of his who had had the same interrogator. When he asked for news of him, the official said: “If his father sends a wagon-full of gold we might let him go.” But this was only a cruel joke. No such offer was made to Trotsky, and Sergei's fate must already have been decided when—perhaps in order to deprive his friends of the moral comfort of having a Trotsky among them—he was brought back from Vorkuta.

Many years were to pass before the world outside heard anything about their last, heroic stand and their death in the Northern forests. The main facts were published in *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik* in New York (No. 10/11, 1961). I can only add the details I was able to piece together from the stories of Sergei and a few prisoners I met much later. That the extermination of the Trotskyists was decided on and carefully planned in Moscow is shown by the fact that the same system was followed in all three camps. But I heard more about Vorkuta than the other two.

There, in the autumn of 1936, the Trotskyists put certain demands to the authorities, such as to be allowed to live with their families and lodged separately from the criminals (whenever the political and criminal prisoners were mixed, persecution by the criminals was an added torment for the “politicals”). They insisted that the conditions generally were more degrading than in any jail in a capitalist country.

The authorities refused and threatened them with reprisals. Then in October, the Trotskyists with their wives and children declared a mass hunger strike. With the onset of the Siberian winter and in conditions deliberately planned to break them, this needed almost superhuman courage.

A few sympathizers joined them. Other prisoners, bribed by an extra slice of bread a day or broken by the threat of sharing the fate of the Trotskyists, or even out of “conviction” (I met a few such people), were induced to side with the authorities—this is perhaps the blackest side of the affair. The camp radio broadcast speeches by former politicians who had arrived at a position curiously similar to

that of some of Stalin's apologists even today. Stalin was the man of destiny. His victory was a historical necessity. Obedience to his will was a sacred duty to Lenin. Judged "objectively" — whether they knew it or not — those who opposed him were "enemy agents."

The Trotskyists added to their stock of jokes. One gaunt hunger striker meeting another would ask: "Why are you so gloomy?" The other replied: "The Gestapo haven't sent me my allowance yet."

The strike was kept up for three months. Even the children persisted, although the strike leaders begged the mothers to stop them because the sight was intolerable to the men.

Most of the strikers survived. Some were forcibly fed. Usually a man can do without water as well as food for about ten days. If he drinks, he can last out several weeks and, if he is forcibly fed, for five or six months, though his health is ruined. (Note: I held a long hunger strike twice, once for 44 days and once for 56. — J.B.) Camp doctors boasted that no striker died in hospital; in fact, the hopeless cases were discharged and died a few days later.

After three months nearly all the strikers' demands were suddenly granted. A minority still refused to compromise but they were overruled. When, a fortnight later, all the concessions were withdrawn, it was too late to begin again, though some tried. The camp authorities justified their trick on the grounds that a successful strike would have made discipline impossible.

The end came in the summer of 1937. A troika (a special investigation commission of three people) arrived from Moscow. The Trotskyists were put on special work and lodged at the brick factory. Some were put through a new and more severe interrogation.

One day in the autumn, the brick factory was cordoned off by special guards. The prisoners were given two days' rations and their transfer to another camp was announced. This was astonishing news as by then the weather had virtually cut off all links with the rest of the world.

All that was known at Vorkuta for some time was that the Trotskyists — in their rags and with their two days' rations — were marched off into the forest at night, and that two days later the guards returned with only a few prisoners who had been included by mistake. But from them the news gradually leaked out.

A day's march away, the convoy came on a set of temporary shacks. There the prisoners were locked up. Their names were checked against a list and then, group by group, they were called out and machine-gunned. Some struggled,

#### Correction:

In our last issue, on page 20, a technical error appeared. In the panel discussion, "Glasnost and Perestroika — The USSR Today," three lines of the comments by Gerry Foley were inadvertently interposed between the introduction and the remarks by Marilyn Vogt-Downey. (The same three lines also appeared on page 26, where they belonged.)

We apologize to our readers for any confusion this may have created.

shouted slogans, and fought the guards to the last. The guards, as was usual on such occasions, were half-drunk.

When it was over, the guards poured paraffin over the bodies and the rags and set them alight. For a long time the bonfire burned deep in the forest.

The camp commanders were notified of the names of a number of people who had been shot as bandits, saboteurs, or Trotskyist counterrevolutionaries. A few bandits had in fact been included, as well as a number of Trotskyists who had recanted long before.

This was the first massacre on such a scale — others were to follow during and after the war. By the end of 1937 hardly a member of the Trotskyist cadres was left in the three camps — only a few individuals were spared for special reasons.

The tracks were carefully covered up, for Stalin wanted to be able to rewrite history as well as make it. As secretly as the Trotskyists, the heads of the troikas which had condemned them, as well as members of the execution squads, were shot in 1938. The few who escaped by chance were those who had left the service.

In 1939 came the turn of Yezhov, whose orders they had carried out and by whose order most of them had died. The only announcement was of his transfer to another post, but he vanished completely. ●

#### NOTES

1. The *Izvestia* report states Sergei was arrested and sentenced to five years in 1935.

2. The Left Oppositionists were strong supporters of the rights of non-Russian nationalities which, before the revolution, had been oppressed by the tsar. The Bolsheviks, under Lenin and Trotsky's leadership, adhered strictly to a policy of equal rights for all nationalities in the USSR after 1917, but after Stalin gained control of the government his policies began again to reflect the influence of Great Russian chauvinism.

# Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

## 28. Tents for the Condemned

They brought us to Usa and herded us into a large tent that was two widths of canvas that had been sewn together at one time but were now ripped and patched. There were two rooms of two-tiered, continuous plank beds made of fresh, unfinished boards. The tent was for punishment; you weren't taken out to go to work or to go anywhere.

At both ends of the passageway that stretched down the middle of the tent, along its entire length, stood an iron barrel stove. It burned day and night, but our hats—we slept in our peajackets and hats—froze to the pillows. The stove also served as the source of light. In order to search for lice in your shirt, you sat right next to the fire. There was an easier way: heat the shirt until it was almost ready to melt. But there was the danger then that your shirt might burn along with the lice. The criminals never worried about that; nothing was easier than to steal another shirt from a counterrevolutionary. There were almost as many politicals as common criminals.

Why had they brought us here? What goes on in the camp behind these canvas walls? What will happen to each of us half an hour from now?

Facing the entrance, about ten steps from it, stood the watchtower. Crawling out of the tent to take care of our needs, we called to the guard: "Won't be a minute!" and he answered "Go ahead!" But we were not allowed beyond the corner of the tent where the guard might lose sight of us. The beneficent north froze everything and covered it with a sheet of white.

The short day's twilight was barely long enough to serve us our food. It was served once a day, during that half hour when there was but a glimmer of light outside, right there by the entrance next to where the piles were. They served it on

plywood boards; one held the slimy pieces of boiled salt fish and the other the rations of bread—400 grams. You weren't allowed to take any extra for another comrade: what if he should suddenly die? So standing in line for food were the half-dead living.

They counted our heads and shoved a dinner in our hands. Freezing, you would rush back into the tent. Some ate in the dark, others (the intelligent ones) lit a chip of wood from their plank bed. We didn't get to wash our faces too often and when our hands got sticky from the fish, we simply wiped them on our clothes. Volunteers to get out in the air with a sled and barrel for the water were not hard to find, but this happened only once each day, four people at a time, and an escort went behind them and would not let them speak to anyone they met. We never got news from outside.

No officials of any kind came inside the tent and we had full equality and the freedom to choose what we did. The criminals knew only one activity—playing cards. They usually played at night and slept during the day. They played for rations, sometimes for the next week's rations. They also played for the felt boots and jackets of their counterrevolutionary neighbors. During the night, the loser had to steal from the altar boy, as the criminals scornfully called all who were not like them, the item that had been lost by the altar boy in absentia, and give it to the winner. For nonpayment of a debt, you got a beating with an iron poker. I saw one such reprisal. Everyone looked on in silence while a *pakhan* [criminal leader] administered justice upon the violator of the law. It was not advisable to interfere. If an altar boy intervened, he got beaten too. The youth was already lying motionless. Then, one of us could no longer take it and tore a board from his plank bed.

*In 1977, a manuscript totaling hundreds of pages arrived in this country from the Soviet Union—the memoirs of Mikhail Baitalsky, who was in his middle 70s at the time and living in Moscow. His work consists of a series of nine "notebooks" which describe his life as a Ukrainian Jewish revolutionary militant. He narrates how, as a teenager inspired by the October revolution, he joined the Communist Youth, tells about his participation in the Red Army during the Civil War years that followed 1917, his disenchantment with the developing bureaucracy under Stalin, and his subsequent experiences in Stalin's prison camps. To the very end of his life Baitalsky remained devoted to the ideals of the October revolution. He says that he is writing "for the grandchildren" so that they can know the truth of the revolution's early years.*

*The first installment and an introduction by the translator, Marilyn Vogt-Downey, appeared in Bulletin IDOM No. 36, December 1986.*

"You son of a bitch, if you don't stop at once, I'll kill you right here and now!"

Out of breath, the *pakhan* crawled into his bunk. Others revived the kid.

The counterrevolutionaries did not play cards. Having available a piece of board about a fourth of a meter wide, they tried to live lying down. My neighbor, until only recently an oblast prosecutor, had a tattered blanket that no *urka* [common criminal] wanted to win. We wrapped ourselves up in it over everything else that we had on. The prisoner-prosecutor had been in a tsarist prison, too; he had joined the party long before October 1917. He knew a handful of poems and sang the ballads of Vertinsky.

Between me and the rear canvas of the tent, there was a place for one person that no one occupied: snow blew in through a tear in the ice-covered canvas.

Next to the prosecutor were several comrades united by a deeply felt necessity to defend their bags which had not yet been emptied out like those of the Vorkuta elders. These comrades had only recently been brought here from Armenia. The fight for the bags ended in a victory for organizational ability and strength of will over the anarchist attacks of the *urkas*.

But we never had a chance to become friends: The Armenians were all summoned at the same time with their things. We thought they were being sent to the pit; we ourselves longed to end up there.

People were often summoned with their things. Two or three times a week, a khaki [guard] appeared at the door, called for people named on a list, and led them away. Where to? We didn't know. But they were being called to be shot.

The unseen hand of death was groping among us, while we hungrily gnawed on our piece of salted fish, confident to the last minute that we should eat up what we can for now and live one more day and one more night. Tomorrow, again, will come the piece of fish and another day will pass. And finally they will summon you and you'll end up at the mine. There, at least, they serve hot soup.

Such a winter as that one I have never known. In the middle of the mute, vast nights, illuminated by the northern lights, one could hear only the voice of the guard. In clear weather, that is when a snowstorm did not blind him, he shouted: "Come on, you can go another ten paces out!"

From our tent that winter, about one-half were called out. At the brick factory where Grisha, Maksimchik, and many other friends of mine were held, there were two such tents. Each one could hold on the two-tiered plank bunks about 120 people if you packed them close together. But more than 200 had been crowded into each tent and the prisoners had to take turns using the bunks; some lay down on the bunks half the day while the others stood crowded together in the passageway. After 12 hours, they changed places. They were fed, like us, once a day.

Alongside the two big tents, there were several smaller ones. About 900 people, if not more, had been assembled at the brickworks. Everyone there, except seven or eight "*religiosniks*," had been members of the Communist Party not long ago, having joined the party before the revolution or in the first years after it.

As early as August 1937, Barabanov, an official of the

Vorkuta camp, with Grigorevich, an official of the Cheka division of the Pechora camps, toured all the "work details," that is, the camp points at Vorkuta, and selected the brick factory as the place most appropriate for mass executions. In September, they began bringing convoys of those designated for execution — Grisha was in the first convoy, the very one we had met on the shore of the Yun-Yaga river and stood together with for a few minutes.

The first to be sentenced to death were all those who had taken part in the hunger strike, around 400 people. After that, about the same number of those who had been caught in various offenses; for example, Sema Lipenzon, who had refused to steal goods for the criminal *pakhan*. The provincial troika handed down the sentences: Grigorevich; Kashketin, the plenipotentiary from Moscow (he was the troika's chairman); and the official of the Cheka operations section of Vorkuta camp, Chuchelov. On January 25, 1938, Kashketin flew in from Moscow with the sanctioned list of those designated for death.

But they did not begin the executions until March 1, although all throughout February, they "clarified" what was taking place and made certain psychological preparations. It went on mainly during the nights — night was the favorite time for the apparatus of Stalin. The "door" of the tent opens (plank doors were installed in the tents), they call out three or four prisoners — all from Kharkov, people who had known Kashketin before from his work in Ukraine. Kashketin sat in the guard's office.

"Radziminsky," he says, "you know me from Kharkov, right?"

"I do," Radziminsky answers.

"That means you know that I never tell a lie. Don't think that what is involved here concerns terms of confinement. What is involved is the lives of all of you. We are going to shoot you, crack you all open like nuts. Go back to your place in the tent and tell everyone!"

But back in the tent, they did not believe Radziminsky. It could not be that they would shoot everyone! Some even laughed, surprised that anyone was ready even for a minute to believe Kashketin.

On one of the first days of February, at four in the morning, they summoned more than two dozen people with their things and led them away. Among them was Vitya Krainy, an old Odessa Komsomol member with whom I had recently been in the isolator right here at the brick factory. We had not seen each other for ten or twelve years and we had managed to spend only a few days together in the isolator. Those taken away included also Vladimir Kossior, an Old Bolshevik, brother of the well-known Stanislav Kossior, former longtime secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee. Although the Kossior brothers had extremely divergent views, this did not prevent Stalin from killing Stanislav after he had murdered Vladimir.

Among those designated for execution was a party member named Iokheles. He said that he had known Kashketin as a kid and they had studied together and been friends during their childhood. Kashketin called many in for a conversation, but never Iokheles. He never exhibited a desire to speak with a friend from childhood whom his inexorable duty forced him to send to death. And what kind of feelings could

have guided all the Kashketins and Chuchelovs?

After the first group of prisoners had been led away, the tents lived for about three days on very diverse conjectures. Until February 5, no one was summoned, but from then on, they began to take away about five persons per day. Rumor had it that they were being taken to Vorkuta ("to the pit," as was usually said then), where a new prison had recently been built; and that the people being summoned were being transferred there. Evidently, the first convoy, which included Kossior and Krainy, had been sent there.

So February passed. March 1, in the morning, a khaki entered the tent with a list in his hands. He stood in the middle of the tent so that the curious could look over his shoulder at the list. There were 50 names on it, 25 from each tent. The paper was headed "Crew to be sent to the 'Capital' mine." Those called were lined up, ordered to lay down their things in the snow, and led away.

An hour later, another list of 50 names was read: "Crew for the pits." And another hour later, a third list: "Convoy for Vorkuta-Vom" (i.e., the Usa, as we called it). While the farewells and the usual pre-convoy confusion was going on, the guard managed to carry away somewhere all the prisoners' things that, as per their orders, had been laid in the snow. The people remaining in the tents were issued bread and began their usual day with the usual concerns of those still living: bread, bad soup, guesses, and rumors.

Kashketin's assistant began to come into the tents with surprising frequency, lending credibility to talk of more convoys. Only a month ago, Kashketin threatened to crack us all open and now suddenly they were promising us more convoys, to the pit, to Usa. But suddenly, new people were brought in: from the pit, from Usa. We began asking them what they knew about those who had been sent there, from the brickworks, in three convoys. They answered: "We know nothing; no convoys came to us from here, either March 1 or later."

What had happened to those 150 people?

It was only then that the prisoners in the tents learned the fate of their comrades taken away March 1. Meanwhile, at the pit, in the new prison, the prisoners learned about the executions the day after they occurred. One of the 150 who had been taken away "to the next stage," Baranov, told them. He was the only one of the doomed to come out alive; the convoy could not "turn him over" to death because of an incorrectly listed name.

The convoy, he said, was taken to the Third Police Post. That was the name for the way station of the narrow-gauge Usa-Vorkuta railroad, the same one from which we carried on our shoulders loads for the brickworks, located about one and a half kilometers away. (In the winter when the tracks were blocked with snow, the train did not run and the way station was empty.) The khakis, who were hired civilian guards, had led the prisoners there; then they had transferred the prisoners, according to names on a list, to another, military, convoy.

Here I must note that what Baranov called a military convoy was most likely a special team whose special duty was executions such as these. After reaching the way station, they were taken no farther, many told me. As to the weapon used for the executions, one can surmise based on the circumstan-

ces that all three "convoys" of condemned, 50 people each, left the brick factory at intervals of no more than one hour. They could not have been executed one at a time, but only by machine gun. Many also confirmed this to me. With such a method, not all are killed immediately and the executioners finish off the wounded. In all likelihood, they were not buried very deeply but perhaps were simply covered with snow. In March, the ground there is hard as a rock. To dig a grave in it for several hundred people with the technology then available in Vorkuta, a pick and shovel, would be such hard work that it would have required a squad of thirty or forty strong and healthy workers, working for more than one day. Such an undertaking could not have occurred without word getting out. And there is no way that the condemned, who had been starved until they were half-dead, could have dug their own graves.

I now continue with Baranov's story. When during the "receiving-turning over" procedure it transpired that Baranov's last name on the list of those being turned over did not coincide with the one on the list of those being received, the commanding officer, obviously not wanting to cause alarm in the tent, since this could delay his work, did what he was supposed to do, and came up with a plan: he ordered the incorrectly listed prisoner to the pit until the situation could be straightened out. A khaki led Baranov away. Along the road he told Baranov:

"Well, Baranov, you're a lucky guy! You will live."

And thus it became clear to Baranov what was taking place at the way station.

Baranov lived another 26 days. They shot him in prison. On what days the next mass executions took place at the brickworks, I have not been able to establish clearly. I only know that one of them was on March 8. This was recorded as the date of death of Grisha in the documents on his rehabilitation. Apparently, by March 27, there was no longer anyone to kill at the brick factory and on that day they shot those who were in the prison at the pit: V. Kossior, V. Krainy, and many others who throughout the month of March had been summoned from the tents in small groups. They were taken to the Vorkuta prison for special interrogations.

That prison had a hitherto unprecedented regime. The people brought to it had to remove their boots before entering. Beyond that point, they had to go stocking-footed or in their foot-bindings, and carry their boots. It was almost as cold inside the prison as it was in the street. All the buttons on outer and underclothing were cut off.

Afterward, they were taken one by one into the office of the prison official Manokhin and he said in a muffled voice:

"You, prisoner, have been brought to a military prison. You are allowed to converse here only in low tones. All the administration's orders must be carried out without question. For the slightest infraction, you will be punished without mercy. Have you understood me? Then, go!"

In the prison, an oppressive silence greeted new prisoners, even though the prison was completely full. In response to a "hello," one heard a terrified "Shhh!" from all sides. "Shhh!" "Don't make a sound, for God's sake!" "Be quiet!"

These people had already experienced for themselves this new prison regime. The main instrument for maintaining order here was the punishment cell or the *kartser*. The right

to sentence someone to time in the *kartser* belonged to Manokhin, Chuchelov, and Kashketin — the latter could give up to five days. After that he let you out to a normal cell for one night and again gave you a five-day term. The *kartser* was a big and totally empty place without plank beds or a stove. The temperature there was the same as outdoors — 20 or 30 degrees below zero. After all, this was the Arctic zone and it could get as cold as 50 below. A person thrown into the *kartser* had one chance for survival: to run — run, not walk! — back and forth without stopping. To run for five days straight without a single minute of sleep.

One could stop for only a minute or two, resting one's forehead against the wall (but never one's back); after that, it was the non-stop circling again. Where could a person who had already lived for six months on the starvation rations issued to those who don't work, get the strength to do this?

It happened more than once that a person would lose all strength and fall to the floor. A guard would then come in and tie him hand and foot: "You want to lie down, then do it right!" Tied up, no one could last long in that cold. He would begin to ask to be untied and promise never to lie down again. But they would leave him tied up on the floor that way for an hour or two. He would get up with frost-bitten hands and feet. Chuchelov thought up this torture; and such were the methods of investigation used on those brought there from whom special testimony was sought.

In the *kartser*, you got 200 grams of bread and a mug of cold water each day. To the new arrivals, it seemed unthinkable to drink icy water in such cold, and they would give it to an "old resident," who would drink it greedily. But by the next day, the new arrival had become convinced that it is more difficult to go without water than without bread.

Now, let us try to figure out how many days in the *kartser* those called from the tents in the first days of February, and killed March 27, were made to endure. Vitya Krainy and Vladimir Kossior got five days, then five more days, and then another five days. I have been told the name of still another man subjected to particularly cruel torture: Poznansky, Trotsky's former secretary.<sup>1</sup> They tortured him demanding some special confessions. Stalin wanted to get as much material as he could discrediting Trotsky and he hoped to obtain these materials mainly in the torture chambers, punishment cells, and prisons.

To the honor of those tortured, it must be said that the hangmen obtained little from them. At the disposal of the Stalinist historians there is not one document that could throw the slightest shadow of dishonor on any of the supporters of the various oppositions murdered by Stalin, while all of Stalin's henchmen have their arms in blood to their elbows.

After March 27, when the Vorkuta special prison had been virtually emptied out, there remained in the cells only a few "*religiosniks*," who had been tried separately, and several women. On May 8, they shot the women. Among them was Rosa Smirnov, wife of one of the most prominent oppositionists, the Old Bolshevik Ivan Nikitich Smirnov, and their daughter Olya. They totally rooted out the opposition, all the way to the daughters. Stalin's bloody vengeance went beyond any such incidents previously known. The women were not led away very far; they were shot right by the prison

wall. The silent Vorkuta tundra knows a great deal!

By spring, there was no one left at the brickworks and the common criminals who were part of "the services" (i.e., the cooks and the kitchen workers) were transferred to the pit, with strict orders to keep their mouths shut.

I knew one of them well, a Belorussian collective farm worker Malinovsky, who was in camp "in accordance with a decree." At the brickworks, he kept the kitchen stove hot and pulled the tanks of bad soup to the tents. He revealed many things to me. Tears would stream down his face and he would wipe them away with the dirty sleeve of his peajacket. He was afraid to talk inside the barracks and we went outside, where he quietly told me what he had seen. He whispered the name Kashketin in my ear.

The rest I learned from people who had been in the barracks and at Vorkuta's special prison and had by some miracle survived. One of them is alive today.

That year, the revolution began its third decade.

In the spring of that year, emergency convoys made up according to special lists went from camp points located below along the river — from Kochmes, Abeza, Sivaya Maska, and other places — to Vorkuta. They walked there driven along by special guards. But some guards were not able to get some of the prisoners across the melting rivers and they did not soon learn why there had been such a hurry. They were being rushed to execution. Those who were able to arrive in time were shot. That same year, several months later, shouts were heard from a window of the Kotlass prison:

"Tell the people that I am Kashketin! I am the one who shot all the enemies of the people at Vorkuta! Tell the people!"

Of course, Kashketin was carrying out the clearly outlined orders of his boss, who also had orders from above. Such authorized people were sent to all the camps and prisons where there were political prisoners. They carried out a secret purge of the party with machine guns in their hands. And "when the Moors had done their duty," they were charged with exceeding their authority and shot.<sup>2</sup> Some of those who were unjustly accused — an extremely insignificant number — have been rehabilitated and have returned home, where they keep the same deadly silence as those who are still in the tundra. But they have extolled Stalin, attributing to him the fact that they were freed. They make good heroes for works rehabilitating Stalin.

The Vorkuta executions pale before those at Kolyma. Vorkuta was a small camp. And it is possible that Kashketin and Chuchelov did not work as well as Pavlov and Garanin, those who executed the Kolyma prisoners.

An expression has appeared abroad: white-collar murderers. But isn't this term applicable in our country? Didn't we have them? And don't we really know the name of the main one?

The high priest of the ancient Aztecs, I have read, himself cut up for sacrifice to the gods captured enemies. At the top of a hill, by the entrance to the temple, there stood the sacrificial cup, a huge stone vessel. The captives, bound hand and foot, were dragged by the followers of the cult, up the stone steps from the bottom of the hill in an interrupted line. Having dragged a victim to the vessel, they turn his head down and the high priest, armed with a sacrificial knife, in

one movement cut open the captive's abdomen and then quickly thrust his hand toward the heart — living, throbbing, quivering — cut it from the victim's chest while it was still beating, and threw it into the vessel. The gods craved the blood of living hearts.

To do this to a thousand captives required considerable effort to be expended by the high priest. In the twentieth century, this was done on a grander scale and the technology was correspondingly higher. It was not a crude bloody knife that was used but a civilized pencil, of the same red color. The murderer never saw his victims and never heard their screams before they died. Sitting at his desk, with a pipe between his teeth, he contemplated statistical indicators. The

stone steps of the Butyrka investigation temple were surrounded by wide, metal gates so that none of the captives would try to jump from the upper floors and thus deprive the high priest of a lawful victim, formalized on paper and marked with a red pencil. The gods needed living hearts.

[Next month: "Borya Elisavetsky."]

## NOTES

1. I. Poznansky and N. Sermuks, two of Trotsky's secretaries, accompanied him on the forcible deportation to Central Asia in 1928 but were arrested en route and disappeared.

2. The saying goes: "When the Moor has done his duty, let him go."

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# Max Goldman (1905-1988)

by Evelyn Sell

Max Goldman joined the Young Communist League in 1927, decided to leave the Communist Party in 1929 because of his disagreement with its Stalinist policies and practices, became a member of the Communist League of America (the Trotskyist opposition organization), and was a founding member of the Socialist Workers Party and a lifelong supporter of the Fourth International. A victim of the 1983-84 purge by the Barnes faction in the SWP, Max became a founding member of Solidarity and then, after a split in that group, was a founding member of Solidarity, in which he was active until his death from a heart attack on December 2, 1988.

Born in Poland in 1905, Max was eight years old when his parents emigrated to the United States. The pain and problems of capitalist America deeply affected him as a youth — the exploitation of his father who was a needle trades worker, his experiences growing up in a tenement on Manhattan's Lower East Side and then in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, and having to leave school in order to get a job to help support his four younger brothers and sisters who were born in this country. First employed as an errand boy, Max's work life was repeatedly interrupted by capitalist economic crises and government harassment.

Although he could not go beyond the eighth grade, Max's passion for learning made him a voracious reader and prompted him to take non-credit night classes at New York City College where he studied philosophy, history, and literature. He particularly enjoyed attending the Yiddish theater, which flourished in New York at that time, and reading Yiddish literature. While searching through bookstores Max came upon socialist materials and immediately responded to this vision of a humane and rational society.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s Max's abilities as an organizer and speaker made him a mass leader of the unemployed. In a 1977 class for the Los Angeles local of the SWP, Max described the role of the unemployed in the historic Minneapolis Teamsters' strike of 1934:

"The principal ally of the teamsters was the unemployed. Here we have a unique experience. Nowhere else in the country in the 1930s was there such a relationship between the employed and the unemployed as in Minneapolis. The unemployed became a *section* of the union [Federal Workers Section]. . . . The unemployed in Minneapolis and the surrounding area were like no unemployed anywhere else because they did not consider themselves unemployed stiffly just drifting along, but as union members. They belonged to the most powerful, the most militant, and the most viable organization in the area. . . . During the two strikes in 1934, and in all the strikes afterwards, they were part of the army that

the teamsters had in their constant struggle against the bosses, the labor bureaucracy, and the political machine that developed in that period. In fact, when the Federal Workers Section was busted in the 1939 WPA [Works Progress Administration] strike, the front line protecting the General Drivers' Union were battered down and the bosses and the politicians could then aim their guns at the teamsters."

As the organizer and an elected officer of the Federal Workers Section of Local 574, and as a leading activist of the Communist League of America, Max was a prime target of the boss-controlled legal system. In 1939, 134 WPA strikers were arraigned in a federal court and Max, sentenced to a year and a day, was sent to the federal prison in Sandstone, Minnesota. After his release he was put on trial again, along with 17 other leaders of the SWP and the Minneapolis Teamsters' local, charged with violating the Smith Act. Max returned to Sandstone to serve a 16-month sentence.

Nothing the bosses threw at him stopped Max from pursuing political activity. At a December 23, 1988, memorial meeting in Los Angeles, fellow Solidarity member Theodore Edwards said, "I see him before me now, together with [his wife] Shevi, in the front rank of an antiwar demonstration of a few hundred marching down Hoover St. toward USC. And that was in the days when the gusanos were organized and were led by the FBI to physically break up demonstrations as well as attack antiwar headquarters and [SWP] party headquarters with guns and bombs. And I also remember Max, who was a septuagenarian, together with Shevi, marching in a pro-choice demonstration. . . ."

Solidarity leader Andrea Hauptman noted that, in his last few weeks of life, Max was working on classes to teach younger comrades the lessons of working class struggles.

Paul Montauk, who represented the SWP at the memorial meeting, focused on Max's leadership role in the 1930s struggles in Minneapolis, and urged people to learn more about Max by reading Farrell Dobbs's books about the teamsters.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International saluted Max's political accomplishments in a message read at the memorial meeting. Letters and messages from comrades and friends pointed out Max's personal characteristics of kindness, caring for other people, consideration, and bravery.

Shevi Goldman provided insights into Max's life that were not well known. For example, the fact that he wrote poetry. She concluded by telling the gathering that he often said in his later years that, "he marched to the music of his youth and that is what kept him on the path toward the goal of building a better world for all." ●



## Fifty Years of the Fourth International

*International Marxist Review*, Autumn 1988, P.E.C., Paris. \$5.00.

Reviewed by Frank Lovell

The Autumn 1988 issue of *International Marxist Review*, a three-times-a-year publication of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, surveys the political course of working class struggles throughout the world during the past half century. The purpose is to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the FI, founded September 3, 1938.

The *IMR* is produced in conjunction with *Quatrième Internationale*, the French-language theoretical journal of the FI; both are published in Paris. Much of the material in the English publication is translated from the original French. But *IMR* also features analytical articles and reviews by authors from the English-speaking sections of the FI. This special 143-page anniversary issue, for example, carries an article by Alan Wald, a member in this country of the Fourth International Caucus of Solidarity and a frequent contributor to Solidarity's bimonthly magazine *Against the Current*, on the influence of U.S. Trotskyism among New York intellectuals of the 1930s. It also includes a review of Ernest Mandel's essay, *The Place of Marxism in History*, by Paul Le Blanc. Le Blanc is a leading member of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in the North American Trotskyist movement and a contributing editor of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.

A substantive article by two leaders of the French section, Daniel Bensaïd and Alain Krivine, provides a new and profoundly different view of May 1968 in Paris from the flood of retrospective accounts marking the twentieth anniversary of "the year of revolt." An article by Michael Löwy is cautiously optimistic about what he sees as "the possibility of a new departure, or a renaissance of international solidarity on different bases, in a word, of a *new internationalism*." Livio Maitan, a central leader of the FI since World War II, outlines some of the difficulties in the period 1948-68. Also included are two programmatic documents, one adopted by the French section in 1969 and the other by the Mexican section in 1978. They record a marked change in the world political outlook over that 10-year span. A brief statement by Trotsky, hailing the founding of the FI, reaffirms confidence in the workers of the world to unite and topple capitalist exploitation and bureaucratic oppression, and to rebuild the world. It also calls attention to a unique addition by the FI to the perspectives and strategy of world revolution:

Henceforth the Fourth International stands face to face with the tasks of the mass movement. The transitional program is a reflection of this important turn. Its significance lies in this, that instead of providing an a priori theoretical plan, it draws the balance of the al-

ready accumulated experience of our national sections and on the basis of this experience opens up broader international perspectives.

Thus major events in the history of the FI are covered in the contents of this special issue of *IMR*, from the founding conference through the postwar crises, and into the present need to participate in current actions of workers of all nations.

The article by Ernest Mandel, "The reasons for founding the Fourth International and why they remain valid today," is, according to *IMR*'s editors, "the framework of this issue." The rest of this review is confined almost entirely to a discussion of Mandel's contribution.

He undertakes the necessary task of explaining the historic reasons for the founding of the Fourth International. He also answers most of the serious critics of the Marxist movement since World War II, and in doing so argues convincingly that all the compelling reasons for the founding of the FI fifty years ago apply with equal validity and greater urgency today.

His argumentation necessarily draws upon the history of revolutionary developments in the post-World War II period and confronts the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of this epoch. He challenges the bourgeois enemies of Marxism, and its false disciples as well.

### Historic Mandates

What were the reasons for the founding of the Fourth International?

These can be summarized as follows: 1) The capitalist mode of production had exhausted its progressive potential early in this century, and the contradictions inherent in the system brought on the disastrous First World War in 1914. 2) The explosive character of capitalist economy disrupts and destabilizes social relations within the system. But massive uprisings by the workers and other oppressed peoples of the world in this epoch of capitalist decay, unlike all previous social revolutions in history, can only achieve their goals through *conscious* determination to reorganize society on the basis of a socially planned economy. 3) The first victorious working class revolution which occurred in tsarist Russia in 1917 gave way in the first ten years of its existence to the monstrous Stalinist bureaucracy which subverted all the initial social gains, thus creating the basis for mass rebellions against the new social strata of bureaucratic overlords. 4) The rise of the Soviet bureaucracy poisoned the ideological wellsprings of class consciousness and international solidarity within the working class movement, in much the same way as the trade union bureaucracy and social democratic politicians in the advanced capitalist countries. The necessary corrective was the creation of a new revolu-

tionary organization which would embody the whole historical experience of the world proletariat. 5) The growing internationalism of the productive forces precludes the possibility of building socialism in a single country or group of countries. An international vanguard organization of the working class is essential. The ultimate success of socialism can be achieved only with the overturn of the capitalist mode of production worldwide, as foreseen by Trotsky in his theory of permanent revolution.

"We are convinced," says Mandel, "these five key problems of the 20th century show the necessity for the Fourth International, for a new revolutionary International of the proletariat. Finding a solution to these five problems is just as crucial as it was 50 years ago."

Most of these problems, of course, were also present at the founding of the Communist International in 1919, seventy years ago. What happened in the intervening years (from 1919 to 1938) was the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and the destruction of the Communist International. This was something new within the working class movement, similar to the labor bureaucracies in capitalist countries but *quantitatively* different, immeasurably more immense (and more monstrous) in all respects.

One of the main tasks at the founding conference of the FI was to explain the Stalinist phenomenon and relate the revolutionary struggle for Soviet democracy to the struggle for power in the capitalist world. This was accomplished in the basic document adopted by the delegates, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution). This programmatic document is the summation of experiences of the Marxist movement in Russia and efforts by the Communist International to extend the gains of the 1917 victory, and of Trotsky's ideological struggle (which began in collaboration with Lenin in 1922) against the reactionary Soviet bureaucracy.

### World Crisis

Gathering war clouds cast their shadow over the birth of the FI. The advent of World War II in 1939 was destined to change the world in ways not anticipated by Trotsky and his supporters. Does this mean, then, that the program and perspective of the Fourth International are outmoded? Mandel addresses this question at the outset of his survey, as follows:

The First and Second Internationals corresponded to the need for wage earners' class independence. This remains a key task of the class struggle as long as capitalism exists, as vital today as it was 125 or 90 years ago. The Third [Communist] International combined that need with the aim of a revolutionary overthrow of international capitalism in the imperialist epoch. Today this is as burning a task as it was in 1914 or 1919.

The founding of the Fourth International corresponds to historical reality on an international scale of similar nature. We have to examine in a scientific way, without personal or "generational" impatience, disappointment or discouragement, whether these historic needs are as real today as they were 50 years ago.

From this historical grounding Mandel proceeds to examine current problems and related questions. Capitalism on a world scale has vastly expanded, in the wake of devastation and suffering wrought by World War II, in a way unimagined by Marxist economists. Does this mean that the contradictions inherent within the capitalist mode of production have been resolved? In response to this there is universal agreement among enemies and defenders of capitalism alike that the system is fraught with more severe crises on more fronts than ever before. Environmental destruction, human suffering and mass starvation in many parts of the world, aggressive wars by imperialist nations (especially U.S. imperialism), are the unmanageable and intolerable results of capitalist expansion and the socially explosive forces that accompany it.

The Soviet economy, opposed and hampered by world imperialism, survived World War II and was able to rebuild and develop the planned productive apparatus so as to become one of the most formidable military powers, second only to the U.S. But there, too, the economy stagnated and is today in severe crisis, seemingly unable to produce for the socially required needs of its well-educated and technologically advanced populace. And yet the Soviet bureaucracy remains in control and shows signs of trying to adapt to the capitalist-style market as a means of raising industrial production and improving the quality of life. Does this invalidate the Marxist contention that socialized planning is superior to capitalist anarchy? And does it disprove Trotsky's prediction that the unstable Soviet bureaucracy would be swept aside by the political revolution of the Soviet working class?

These are questions yet to be decisively answered in life. But Mandel argues that post-World War II history to date, instead of confounding and refuting Marxism, has confirmed Trotsky's basic analysis. The problems of this society will be resolved and the world's woes will begin to be constructively addressed only when the working class in the advanced industrial countries destroys capitalism. The alternative for humanity is socialism or death. Mandel says:

Few lucid men and women doubt that a new "adaptation" [to capitalist crises] by world war, by the irresponsible development of technology, by the super-exploitation of the Third World, by the erosion of civil liberties (torture is already institutionalized in more than 50 countries), would threaten not only civilization but the physical survival of the human race.

He is also mindful that capitalist greed is irrational and drives the world to disaster.

In the four decades since World War II there have been almost continuous revolutionary outbreaks: beginning in Italy (1944-45); Vietnam (1945-75); Greece (1945); Yugoslavia (1948); China (1949); Korea (1950); East Germany (1953); Hungary and Poland (1956); Cuba (1959); Algeria (1962); Czechoslovakia (1966-69); Nicaragua and Grenada (1979); Iran (1979); Poland (1980-81). This is a partial list of revolutionary uprisings. Some successfully liberated society from capitalist control as in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and the tiny island of Grenada. Others were aborted by misleaders or crushed by military might, as was the fate of Grenada after its short-lived success. In the states

of Eastern Europe only the popular revolution in Yugoslavia succeeded in retaining its independence from the oppressive control of the Soviet bureaucracy. Elsewhere in those countries within the Soviet sphere of influence mass protests and social uprisings were crushed. In all cases the FI and its national sections supported these popular mass uprisings. In no instance was the FI and its national sections in the leadership. Where Trotskyists were influential in mass movements, they were hunted down by agents of the reactionary state power or by Stalinist assassins, as in China and Vietnam.

### Persecution of FI

At the moment of its founding Trotsky hailed the FI as "A Great Achievement." He observed that the revolutionary Marxist movement at that historical juncture, "subjected to persecutions no other political tendency in world history has in all likelihood suffered, has again given proof of its power." He went on to explain why this was so, in light of world politics at the time. He concluded his brief summary with a prediction: "The Fourth International is now the only international organization which not only takes clearly into account the driving forces of the imperialist epoch, but is armed with a system of transitional demands capable of uniting the masses for a revolutionary struggle for power. . . . Brought to the extreme pitch of exasperation and indignation, the masses will find no other leadership than that offered them by the Fourth International."

Fifty years later the FI is the only revolutionary working class organization that has survived. All other attempts to create an international association of workers' organizations and state-sponsored institutions in opposition to imperialism have failed. Furthermore, all these other attempts—some encouraged by Chairman Mao's regime in China and by his admirers abroad, and others directly influenced by the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union—have disappeared without leaving any record of their origins or historic objectives. Only the FI has retained its programmatic goals and recorded its struggles to achieve them. In these struggles (including its underground resistance against fascism during World War II) the Trotskyist cadres again suffered physical losses and political defeats, but in every instance they have been able to regroup their forces.

It is plain that Mandel is anxious to tackle current problems rather than review past difficulties and mistakes. He takes up the current debate on the dubious future of capitalism (and of life on planet earth if capitalism endures); on the leadership role of the modern working class in the struggle against the evils of capitalism; on the value and limitations of struggles for social reforms by environmentalists, radical pacifists, and others seeking to eliminate the most threatening evils of capitalism; on the inability of the bureaucracy in the deformed workers' states to institutionalize workers' democracy; on the extent and limits of revolutionary gains since World War II in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, and Nicaragua; and finally, on what constitutes "the challenge of internationalism" in today's world and how the victims of imperialism will respond.

But within the sections of the FI and among its sympathizers there remains an important unsettled question,

combining the residue of the pernicious influence of Stalinist ideology in the radical movement with the affinity of the 1960s radicalization to the Cuban revolution. In 1979 a challenge to Marxism was germinating within the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, the strongest section of the FI at its founding conference and now a sympathizing section. The majority leadership that represented the generation of the 1960s radicalization had, by 1981, concluded that prospects of social revolution in the U.S. were bleak and future opportunities were brightest in the Caribbean and Central America, most especially Cuba. By 1983, this majority, under the leadership of SWP national secretary Jack Barnes, was convinced that Fidel Castro was the leader of world revolution. Barnes announced that Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was a tragic mistake, and embarked on a fantastic scheme to construct a "new international" on the Cuban model in opposition to the FI.

This situation cannot long be tolerated by the leadership and national sections of the FI without contributing to the undermining of the FI's organizational structure and ideological vitality. The challenge of the Barnesites must be exposed and repudiated. Mandel hints at this problem in his references to the revolutionary developments in Cuba and Nicaragua when he raises the question: "could these cases be repeated and thereby pose the question of the emergence of a new revolutionary leadership of the proletariat on a world scale in quite new terms?" The question remains unanswered as if waiting for history to decide.

All previous challenges to the basic Marxist program of Trotskyism and the FI have been confronted and defeated ideologically, and the record clearly established for the future health of the revolutionary movement: in the 1939-40 debate with Shachtman-Burnham, Trotsky's polemics are available in the book *In Defense of Marxism* and Cannon's contributions are in a companion volume *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*; in the 1953 debate with Cochran-Clarke (which was an extension in the U.S. of the 1953 split in the International to which Mandel refers), the record is published in the form of Cannon's speeches and correspondence on this "biggest crisis" under the title *Speeches to the Party*; and the 1969-79 differences over the guerrilla warfare orientation of a majority of the FI at that time is documented in the writings of Joseph Hansen, *The Leninist Strategy of Party Building* (The Debate on Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America). These are crucial stages in the modern history of Marxism, filled with valuable lessons for those who aspire to organize and lead the coming struggles for power.

### Pitfalls and Prospects

These coming struggles are what Mandel looks to and seeks to prepare the FI for. He examines the present complex political situation with impressive factual information at his command and better analytical equipment than the "experts" in the capitalist camp. He cautions impatient revolutionists to be wary of illusory shortcuts to political influence and state power. With this comes further advice from experiences of the past. "Once again," Mandel says, "we need to understand and approach this real [mass] movement without pre-established schemas that are claimed to be valid

for every country. We should look at what develops in each concrete case in terms of the real forces and opportunities to go forward in the building of new revolutionary leaderships of the proletariat. We have to take into account the specificity of the workers' movement, the mass movement and the class struggle in each country. No particular tactic should be rejected in advance — as long as the tactic does not disarm revolutionaries in their historic task of winning the majority of the working class to the fight to overthrow the bourgeois state and capitalism." All good advice. But the last phrase is decisive. Understanding what *not* to do is a necessary prerequisite to discovering what must be done.

What are the prospects for world revolution?

Mandel argues that there is a tendency within the working class to break out of the straightjacket of established reformist organizations, such as: "the emergence of the Workers Party in Brazil, a mass-based, class-based socialist party with a programmatic orientation to the socialist revolution; the mass trade unionization of Black workers in South Africa; and the rallying of the majority of the Polish proletariat for a time within the ranks of the independent trade union Solidarnosc (and then after its illegalization by the Jaruzelski dictatorship, identifying with it). These three formations," he says, "already influence millions of workers. One of their features is support for internal democracy and self-organization qualitatively superior to that of the SPs and CPs."

Mandel sees this as a long-term trend, finding expression in several widely separated cultures and countries. He says, "On a more modest scale a similar process is taking place in several Central American countries, in Mexico, the Philippines, Peru and Denmark."

This is followed by a discursive observation having to do with conscious intervention in the historical process and regroupment of radical organizations. "Although regroupments of the still small far-left forces which have a certain weight in the trade union movement and in the 'new social movements' in certain European countries do not come into the same category, they do indicate that *something comparable* [emphasis added] is becoming possible in several countries. Everything indicates that countries like South Korea, several Eastern European countries, even Argentina could go through similar developments."

Mandel warns that angry denunciations of trade union bureaucrats and reformist labor politicians are not sufficient to break the allegiance of workers to their traditional unions and parties. "While such denunciation is correct and necessary," he says, "it must be combined with a *united front tactic* intelligently applied by the revolutionary forces." To what end? "In this way the revolutionaries will be seen as a resolutely unitary political tendency on all the questions and objectives of the masses' central struggles — in fact it must be *the most unitary of all currents*."

In this passage Mandel may seem, to some readers, to be urging a general formula for revolutionary strategy and tactics which elsewhere in his article he specifically and repeatedly warns against. But he is clearly addressing an important question that *does* have general applicability in any situation where the leadership of the masses is in the hands of reformist forces. It is generally recognized that the united front tactic is useful and necessary in the mass movement.

The vast majority of workers is sympathetic to the idea that the incumbent leadership and opposition tendencies in the unions (or other working class organizations) must unite in specific actions against the employing class, in strikes and political demonstrations.

But experience has shown that issuing a call "for united front action against the enemy class" is also insufficient, as Mandel is quick to recognize and emphasize: "*The building of mass revolutionary parties can in the last analysis only result from the real working-class movement, combined with an adequate intervention by revolutionaries.*"

### The Mexican Lesson

What constitutes "adequate intervention by revolutionaries" is the immediate question which must always be answered. In the recent instance of the presidential election in Mexico the Stalinists and others in the radical movement urged a "united front" of all left-wing parties, the idea being that they should unite behind a single candidate in order to strengthen their forces in the electoral arena. Those who opposed this proposal were not seen initially as "the most unitary of all currents." But in the course of the campaign it developed that this particular "united front" was conceived as a way to unite the radical parties behind the lesser-evil bourgeois candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. The Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), Mexican section of the FI, and its presidential candidate Rosario Ibarra de Piedra correctly rejected this course. It was the only party that represented the interests of the Mexican workers and peasants in the election campaign and sought to unite the working class in its own independent organizations against the oppressive government of the capitalist class. The PRT has gained new respect and new members in the working class as a result.

This experience is a prime example of Mandel's contention that the sections of the FI, while participating in the tasks required for the recomposition of the workers' movement, must concentrate on building Trotskyist parties that are prepared to take on the responsibilities of *government by the working class*.

### The Long-Term Trend

Mandel argues that a transformation is in process within the working class and among all the exploited and oppressed throughout the world, brought on by the internationalization of human productive forces. At the present juncture this process has reached, he says, "*an intermediary situation characterized by a predominantly halfway political class-consciousness.*"

His overview of post-World War II history, from the standpoint of the industrial working class, is clear and unequivocal (and indisputable):

Now while there have been big class struggle movements at different times over the last decades involving the key sectors of the working class of some important countries (France, Italy, Great Britain, Brazil, Spain, Poland, Argentina, partially Mexico, just to list the main

ones), some of the main armies of the world working class are absent from the political scene: in the USA, USSR and to a large extent Germany and Japan. If the proletariat of these key countries either developed an independent political movement or even engaged in strong mass struggles—which in present conditions could scarcely be safely channeled by the traditional apparatuses—it would turn upside down the scope, pace and content of the process of recomposition of the international workers' movement.

He specifically rejects the idea that this process “can lead spontaneously and automatically to the re-emergence of a real universal internationalism of the sort seen in the first years of the Comintern (less the hyper-centralization and the tactical errors). . . .” He is convinced to the contrary: “There will be no new mass revolutionary International without the continued building of the Fourth International, even if the former will not be a simple growth out of the latter but will come out of wide-ranging regroupments.”

If this is true what, then, is on the order of the day?

Mandel concludes that the solution is essentially the same as in 1938, that only the working class can solve the crisis of humanity, and that to fulfill its historic mission the working

class must create its own revolutionary party. And the key to building such a party is the transitional program of the Fourth International. What remains is for the national sections and the international leadership of the FI to master the transitional method and apply the program to the present highly charged political situation.

As noted at the beginning of this brief review of the Mandel contribution, the *IMR* editors present it as “the framework” of the special 50th anniversary issue of the magazine. It is more. It is an imaginative and provocative contribution, which can provide the framework for careful study and sober discussion within the sections of the FI and in the world movement as a whole on immediate tasks and perspectives. This special issue of *IMR* ought to be required reading for every member and supporter of the radical working class movement. The contents of the magazine will surely induce inquisitive workers to read further.

I would only add the one qualification that readers may find it hard to get around the many distracting typographical errors in the magazine. Since in all other respects the editors have done such an admirable job, it is a shame that this work should be flawed for want of a proofreader. ●

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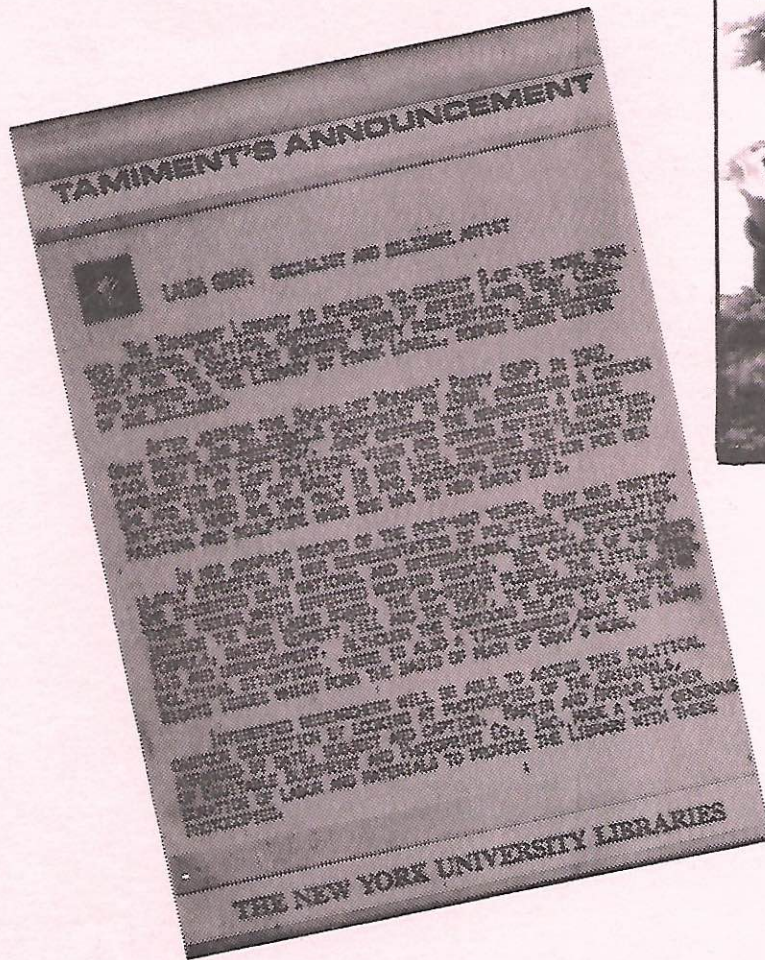
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