Information, Education, Discussion

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

No. 76
July-August 1990
$3.00

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.

"*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.

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, No. 76, July-August 1990
Closing date June 6, 1990
Send correspondence and subscriptions to BULLETIN IDOM, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10009.

To subscribe to *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism,* send $24 for 12 monthly issues or $15 for 6 issues to Bulletin IDOM, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10009. Back issues are $3.00 each.

Gorbachev Forced to Retreat on Economic Plans
Soviet Masses Intervene

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

"The ruling party which enjoys a monopoly in the Soviet Union is the political machine of the bureaucracy, which in reality has something to lose and nothing more to gain. It wishes to preserve the 'nourishing soil' for itself alone." Leon Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed, p. 270.*

It is to preserve this "nourishing soil for itself alone" that the parasitic bureaucratic caste in the Kremlin has launched the economic reforms of perestroika. Never have the contradictions between the interests of this caste and the interests of the workers and peasants in the USSR been more obvious.

What the bureaucracy is trying to do today to serve its own interests not only disregards the immediate and urgent needs of the masses but is to be implemented at their expense. Not a single economic policy that has been initiated as part of perestroika is directed at solving the massive social problems. As a consequence, the swelling mass consciousness that there is a conflict of interests between the bureaucrats and the masses has now become the chief crisis facing the rulers.

Under the repressive rule of Stalin and his successors it was the Marxist movement abroad, led by Trotsky until his assassination in 1940, that articulated and tried to explain this conflict of interests between the bureaucratic caste and the working masses. The Stalin terror in the USSR and abroad was aimed at crushing any such voice. Now, however, through the openings the rulers themselves have been forced to allow, this situation is changing. All over the USSR massive movements are coming into sharp conflict with the present system.

Economic Reforms Delayed

The announcement by Mikhail Gorbachev's key advisers on April 24 that they had decided, for the time being, to rule out substantial market reforms is a result of this development. Commonly referred to as "shock therapy," because of the wrenching effect it would have on the living standard of the working people, the announcement of the program of reforms had been expected soon. (See box on page 2.)

However, even if partially delayed, such reforms were not repudiated. On May 25, Prime Minister Ryzhkov announced that *parts* of the bureaucracy's new economic plan would, in fact, be implemented. The price of bread is to triple July 1. And on January 1, 1991, the wholesale and retail prices of food and numerous consumer items will be increased. The announcement prompted a wave of panic buying that emptied the shops of even the poorest quality food items.

Despite the widespread unpopularity of these economic reforms, the bureaucracy desperately needs to implement them, among other reasons, in order to attract Western capital. The Stalinist rulers now view this as their salvation. As Kremlin minister of finance Valentin Pavlov said in April:

> We are interested in inviting foreign capital, because structural change calls above all for reorganizing the engineering sector. . . . By inviting foreign capital we should also be able to open up the production of consumer goods this year and next, because our potential foreign partners have the production capacity, manpower, and material resources to enable us to increase production at home.
>
> We are prepared to give them an opportunity to build production capacity on our territory and use our materials and workforce. We are prepared to sell them some of our enterprises which must be rebuilt or upgraded. We are also prepared to set up joint ventures and joint stock societies.[1]

Western capital, however, has not been overly enthusiastic about this offer under the present conditions. As of January

Socialist Workers Party Breaks Relations with the Fourth International

As we go to press we have received word that the leadership of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, along with its international cothinkers in Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, Australia, and Iceland, has written a letter to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, formally severing all fraternal relations. In our next issue we will carry a fuller report and analysis of this important development.

1, 1990, four years into perestroika, there were 1,274 joint ventures registered with the Ministry of Finance, 90 percent of which include Western capitalist investment. But only 184 were operating and only 92 of them were in serious business. Of these, one-third were in trade, tourism, and light industry; one-third were in consultant and research and development projects. Only 5 percent involved engineering and manufacturing and only 4.4 percent were in agricultural and food processing enterprises.[2] This is only a drop in the bucket compared to what the bureaucracy needs.

Why is capital holding back?

First of all, the economic infrastructure of the USSR – communication and transportation – is in a serious state of deterioration due to neglect. In addition, the dire shortage of a multitude of goods causes endless inconvenience and difficulties for virtually every enterprise.

But the principal obstacles are the non-convertibility of the ruble and the capitalists' uncertainty that they can rely on a stable workforce. If the ruble is not convertible, foreign capitalists cannot take their profits out of the country. And unless they can be relatively sure of their ability to exploit a compliant workforce capitalists will not invest. Unfortunately for the plans of the bureaucracy, popular anger over shortages of housing, fuel, basic food, clothing, and consumer items have caused massive strikes and popular rebellions.

Therefore, instituting a convertible ruble and precipitating a rapid inflation is not a reasonable option for the bureaucracy at the present time. Even without this, the fighting mood of the masses is growing each day.

Gorbachev vs. Soviet Working Class

The working class in the Soviet Union – the largest in the world – is becoming an active historic force again after the long decades of Stalinist terror. It is hard to see how the bureaucrats will survive for long. The imperialists remember what the Stalinist bureaucrats do not – that the factories, land, and resources of the USSR which the bureaucracy is peddling are not really the bureaucracy's to sell. Therefore they do not offer a secure environment for investment. This is the fatal flaw in the bureaucracy's plan. The rightful owners – the "workforce" that bureaucracy is telling foreign capital it can "use" – is beginning at long last to assert a claim to its birthright.

When the Stalinist apparatus got Gorbachev elected as president in March (though with only 59 percent of the vote in the Supreme Soviet, even running unopposed), he acquired extraordinary powers. These would formally permit him to send troops against popular explosions that could reasonably be expected to emerge when he administered the "shock treatment." The vote in the Supreme Soviet, they hoped, could give Gorbachev at least the appearance of a popular mandate for such measures, which he could not get from the Communist Party itself.

The Communist Party's popularity is low and falling. A poll published in the weekly *Ogonyok* in late 1989 showed that only 22 percent trusted the CP, while 43 percent said they trusted Gorbachev. The ratings of both are surely lower by now. However, Gorbachev's relatively higher popularity helps explain the bureaucracy's presidential maneuver – to put some distance between Gorbachev and the party.

However, the maneuver, like others of recent years, did not work so well. While Gorbachev asserted his commitment to taking the "painful" economic measures in his inauguration speech March 15, already by April 20, Aleksandr Yakovlev, a key Kremlin spokesman, was breaking the news: "The shock therapy that people are talking so much about will not happen." One of Gorbachev's key economic advisers and proponent of market reforms in the Kremlin, Nikolai Petrakov, explained the big difference between the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki in Poland and the Gorbachev government: "The Mazowiecki government's program, even if it is bitter medicine, is implemented on the basis of a social consensus. The situation in our society is completely different. . . . The opposition to market reforms is coming this time not from government ministries, but from politicians who play on the moods of the masses."

By all indications these moods are widespread.

The bureaucracy seems to have no other option if it is to maintain itself and pull society out of the stagnation and crises which it has itself created except a bailout by imperialism. Through the market reform measures the Kremlin hopes to attract capital in a controlled way that allows the bureaucracy to still preserve its political-social domination and the accompanying privileges. Additional pain and hardship for the majority is a small price to pay, from the bureaucracy's point of view. They just hope that the masses will keep quiet and not disrupt the process. When a chief Kremlin economist like Leonid Abalkin, the deputy premier of the USSR says: "We must make sacrifices, it has been shown that there is no other way,"[3] he does not include the bureaucracy in his "we." He means the workers and peasants of the USSR.

The development of the reforms shows the limit to the new era of "democratization" and "openness." The team of economists who drew up the plan had been in "virtual seclusion, attempting to finalize what amounts to the rewriting of most of the laws governing economic activity"[4]

Gorbachev referred to the set of reforms as "the greatest turn since the October revolution," and he is not really exaggerating too much. Certainly, statements coming from

Proposed Economic Reforms

Gorbachev's proposed economic measures included: price reform – which means allowing the price of scarce consumer items to be regulated by demand and not fixed by the government; "anti-monopoly" legislation, the precise meaning of which is not at all clear; legislation to encourage foreign investment; wage controls; ending government control over wholesale trade; "de-statization" or selling by the bureaucracy of the nationalized property it does not own. The bureaucrats are trying to persuade the workers and peasants to buy apartments, land, and resources that legally belong to the workers and peasants already; foreigners are also being solicited as buyers.

The measures would raise the prices of electricity, energy, iron and steel; institute new tax laws; delete Article 40 of the Soviet constitution that guarantees workers the right to a job; and set up soup kitchens. (While soup kitchens are certainly needed, their inclusion in the proposed measures is the same as an admission that things will get even worse.)

the Kremlin these days represent an open departure from the proclaimed commitment to socialism that inspired the October revolution, and which even past Stalinist rulers always used in an effort to legitimatize their actual abuse of power.

The bureaucrats know that they have few allies outside the apparatus. Abalkin stated they were looking for "bold people with initiative who have the spirit of entrepreneurship. We will rely on them." Those "bold people" include former black-marketeers who have made huge profits in the "shadow economy," selling goods in short supply at high prices. They are often obtained through theft from public enterprises. These are the types who have not infrequently become the cooperative and restaurant owners who are earning popular disdain for "profiting on the people's misery."

Vladislav Shatalin, a member of Gorbachev's new council of advisers, when he announced the postponement of the price reforms, stated that there would be no improvements in consumer goods supply for two to three years, and no major pro-market bills would be put before the Supreme Soviet until the fall session.[5] When referring to the bureaucracy's plan to sell land in the cities, Shatalin derided those who fear "that the land will be bought by the agents of the shadow economy. Those who fear wolves should not go into the forest." However, it is the wolves who have opened the road.

Growing Social Struggles

Major social struggles are in progress throughout the USSR. *Moskovskiye Novosti,* in issue No. 7 dated February 18, 1990, estimated that there are between 2 and 3 thousand social organizations in the USSR with roughly 2.5 million members. However, this figure does not begin to tell the story of the massive movements that are already taking place.

Here are some of the key developments:

- The mobilizations in the Caucasus – in Azerbaijan and Armenia, with total populations of over 10 million people – around demands for political, economic, and nationalist issues threaten continued control by the Kremlin's trusted apparatchiks. In their efforts to protect their power structure, the local bosses, with the complicity of the top rulers, organized massive firings and goon squad terror, pitting one nationality against another and creating hundreds of thousands of refugees. These provocateur activities were then used as the pretext for the dispatch of tens of thousands of troops by the central government into the region in January, resulting in the death and injury of hundreds of civilians. The main leaders of the Azeri and Armenian movements were arrested; martial law was instituted and occupation troops remain in place. The population has responded with strikes and demonstrations despite the bans; the strikes are in support of the demand for the withdrawal of troops and an end to martial law, as well as for basic democratic rights in the region. The strikes have continued throughout the spring in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and in the Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabagh. There is no end in sight.

No local elections were even held in the Azerbaijan or Armenian republics in February and March, when Union-wide local elections were supposed to take place. In mid-April, 150,000 protested in the main square of Yerevan, the Armenian capital, after a valve explosion in a local chemical plant released poison gas into the atmosphere. The plant is part of an industrial complex in the city that has caused drastic health problems and has been the focus of on-going protests. Although the regime announced earlier this year that the complex would be closed, it is still in operation. On May 3, tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Yerevan to demand independence from Moscow. The old Armenian Supreme Soviet was even forced to approve a measure suspending the draft of Armenian men into the Soviet army, according to reports from the unofficial news agency Interfax of May 3. In late May, when the Armenian parliament was planning to accede to popular pressure and to hold elections in the Armenian Republic and in Nagorno-Karabagh, additional Ministry of Interior troops were sent in. In a series of troop attacks on protestors starting May 27, at least 22 Armenians were killed.

Azerbaijan produces five percent of the oil and 60 percent of the oil-drilling equipment in the USSR. The strikes there have had a ripple effect throughout the USSR's oil industry, leading to other production crises and strikes, as we will see below.

- There is a massive struggle for democratic rights and independence in the Baltic, involving the majority of populations numbering over 8 million. These have so far not been militarily suppressed, though the economic blockade of Lithuania has caused serious hardships. Similar steps are threatened against Latvia and Estonia.

- However, like the Caucasian republics, the Central Asian republics have not been so fortunate. Thousands of Ministry of Interior troops were sent into the Tadzhik capital Dushanbe in mid-February as a response to demonstrations of tens of thousands, mostly unemployed youth, demanding jobs and housing.

According to the *MN* of March 11, 1990, 41 million people in the USSR earn under 78 rubles per month, which is the official minimum income to survive. The highest rate of poverty is in the Central Asian republics, with Tadzhik having the highest rate: 58.6 percent of its approximately 5.1 million people. The area has been long neglected by the Kremlin's planners. The housing situation is a good indicator: once on the waiting list for space, a family must expect to wait more than ten years for a place to live.

In February in Dushanbe, demonstrations of tens of thousands proclaimed "Yes to restructuring! No to the bureaucrats!" and proceeded to indicate just what they expected the restructuring to mean: the resignation of all the republic's party, state, and trade union officials; all the proceeds from the sale of the republic's cotton to be spent to satisfy the social needs of the Tadzhik population; emergency measures from the central government to supply the region with jobs, food, housing, and a variety of consumer goods that are in extremely short supply; the removal of the central government's troops; and complete autonomy for the republic. A nationalist movement in 1989, led by the Tadzhikistan Writers Union, won the right for the Tadzhik language to be declared the official language of the republic.

Nearly 40 people were killed when troops invaded Dushanbe and the surrounding region and fired on unarmed protestors from armored vehicles. By February 15, the Dushanbe city CP boss, the chairman of the presidium of the republic's Supreme Soviet, and the republic's prime minister had been forced to resign. The mass unrest and the troop occupations have continued.

• Popular discontent with the shortages and stagnation led to a wave of protests for the removal of corrupt local bureaucrats, the abolition of their privileges, and improved living conditions in cities across the Soviet Union in January and February. In Vladivostok, on February 14, a mass protest demanded the resignation of the entire CP and trade union leadership of the region. Similar demonstrations occurred in Sverdlovsk and Novgorod in the Russian Republic; throughout Ukraine in the cities of Lviv, Uzhgorod, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zhitomir, Chernigov, Ulyanovsk, Khmelnitsky, Voroshilovgrad, and the mining center of Donetsk. The Donetsk demonstrations were interrupted by a deadly mining accident, a tragedy that only emphasized the continuing grievances of the coal miners. More than ten thousand workers have died in the mines over the past nine years according to a report in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in the summer of 1989.

'Justice' Trade Union Resolution

The following is an abridged text of a draft resolution, prepared by members of the editorial board of the Leningrad-based independent trade union periodical Rubicon on the eve of the congress of independent workers' movements in the Soviet Union held in Novokuznetsk in Western Siberia April 29-May 2, 1990. The Draft Resolution will be published in the upcoming issue of Rubicon, a periodical published by the independent trade union "Justice."

The present leadership of the country has openly taken a course toward implementing in the near future market economic reforms. In connection with this, there is open talk about the inevitability of price hikes (by at least two to three times), the inevitability of a decline in the standard of living, mass closing of enterprises, and many millions of unemployed. Gorbachev and his circle—people who have led the country into a blind alley—now assert that the "shock therapy" they are proposing is the only possible course, without any alternatives; that the worsening of the lives of the people is inevitable; and that they must suffer one more time for the sake of a bright future.

We are decisively against such a policy—against reforms from which the working people and veterans of labor will suffer....

We demand that wages, pensions, subsidies to the poor and invalids, and stipends be increased in accordance with the increase in the cost of living. This should be calculated monthly on the basis of the cost-of-living index; moreover, this index should be assessed not by government institutions but by an independent institution. Ordinary toilers and pensioners must be guaranteed full compensation for the cost-of-living increases.

We are against any privileges for anyone whatsoever except for those laboring in particularly oppressive conditions. All goods must be acquired by honest labor. The privileges of the apparatus are immoral, even more so now when the lives of the people are getting worse and worse.

We are against the scandalous increase last year of the salaries of the party and state bureaucracy....

We are against inequality in the distribution of food from the central supplies. Moscow, Leningrad, and smaller cities, the center and the heartland should be supplied on an equal basis. If it is impossible to fully provide the required basic food products, food rationing cards should be introduced so that every citizen is guaranteed at least a minimum supply....

If the leadership of the country begins to implement its plans for shock therapy, millions of people will be heaved out of the gates of the enterprises. Because of this threat it is necessary to immediately develop a state program for guaranteeing full employment. Such a program must include as a minimum:

- the official obligation of the state to support employment of the population at no less than the present level;
- an all-Union program and local programs for opening new production facilities or retooling those that exist—in those places where enterprises, shops, and divisions are closed;
- a similar program of retraining so workers can become qualified in a new field;
- payment of unemployment benefits in connection with the economic reforms for no less than one year at the same rate as the worker's wages.

Measures to fight against unemployment must include:

1. The possibility of a real choice by workers of their new profession or place of work....
2. Where old production facilities are closed, new ones should be opened. The people should not have to go away to seek a new job.... This is all the more urgent considering our acute housing crisis.
3. Enterprises where the unemployed go to work should be granted a tax advantage.
4. If the unemployed need to move to a new place so as to have work, they must be guaranteed a place to live.

We are against those reforms which lead to the enrichment of a few and the growing impoverishment of the majority, toward the appearance at one pole of society of a handful of new masters of life and at the other of still disenfranchised beasts of burden. The sale of the people's enterprises to private individuals, the creation of a class of new capitalists will not lead the country out of the crisis.

We are not against the creation of a productive private sector, based on the labor of the owners of the sector themselves and their families, particularly in the service sector, public eating facilities, and agriculture. We decisively oppose the sale of stocks from state property, created by the labor of the people, into the hands of businessmen. Money "makes" even more and more money without any kind of labor investment on the part of the stockholder.

In the case of necessity and given a clearly expressed approval by the majority of the work collective of the enterprise, shares can be sold to its members. Naturally, the director and the cleaning woman, the rank-and-file engineer and the shop official, those who are single and those with many children do not have equal opportunity to purchase stocks.... Therefore, it is necessary to establish a ceiling, a limit on the number of shares of stocks that a worker of an enterprise can acquire.

We are against legal and semilegal transfers of the people's property into the de facto property of representatives of the nomenklatura and economic administration, no matter under what pretext it may occur (fake cooperatives, leasing to a director, controlling blocks of shares, etc.).

"The old" privileges—that depended on one's position—must not be replaced with "new" privileges, based on the size of one's wallet. We are decisively for maintaining and improving the free, universal health care, free education, for guaranteeing equal opportunities to all children, for equality of all citizens before the law....

We reject infringement on the rights of the workers' collectives and their organs of self-management.... Their authority needs to be made real and widened, not curtailed!... The workers are not outsiders at the enterprise, not simply the workforce, not objects of an alien will, but full-fledged citizens and co-masters. Organs of self-administration must function in all forms of enterprises independently of the forms of property and the branch of the national economy.

In the Moldavian capital of Kishinev, tens of thousands echoed these demands in mid-February. The same types of protests occurred in the Belorussian Republic where 50,000 protested in Mogilev, demanding the resignation of the entire leadership of the party and government in the republic. This was in addition to on-going mobilizations of tens of thousands in the capital, Minsk, and in the regions of nuclear contamination, demanding aid to and resettlement of hundreds of thousands affected by the contamination from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster that occurred in 1986.

"It's a revolution!" explained Mirbobo Rahimov, member of a provisional committee representing the popular movement in Tadzhikistan. While that was not strictly true, it was surely a sign of things to come.

● On January 1, 1990, the Kremlin instituted increases of 25 to 110 percent in the prices of diesel fuel, electricity, and transport. Within one month, the widespread opposition to the measures forced even the Stalinist-controlled All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) to oppose the measure and in the name of the workers of the steel, cement, timber, metal, and chemical industries to threaten to strike if they were not rescinded.

In a letter to the Council of Ministers, the AUCCTU stated that if the increases were not annulled, many

There should be democratically elected representatives of the workers on all levels of the economic administration: from the shops and enterprises to the State Planning Commission and the Council of Ministers.

We are witnessing the growth of antiworker tendencies in labor legislation. Particularly in the enterprises with new forms of management (leased property, etc.), the effectiveness of the Labor Code is being rescinded. To all intents and purposes, a workday and workweek of unlimited length are being legalized. In connection with this, it is necessary to take into account that our labor legislation itself is indeed far from perfect; and the number of enterprises of the new type is going to snowball. Thus, in the near future, millions more workers will be deprived of any defense....

We speak out for (as a minimum) the strictest observation of the existing labor legislation in the enterprises of all types of property and under all forms of management. The greatest conquest of the working class—the 8-hour workday—must be strictly respected; its revision is impermissible, no matter what pretext may be advanced....

We express our solidarity with the struggle of the miners— the vanguard detachment of the Soviet working class—who had the courage to be the first to seize the weapon of the mass strike. We are for the democratization of the law adopted last year about strikes; the sphere of workers who have the right to strike must be significantly widened, discriminatory restrictions must be removed, and the procedure for initiating a strike must be simplified.

The entire experience of recent years has again shown convincingly that the structure of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) neither expresses the interests of the workers nor defends them. In labor conflicts the official trade unions have taken the side of the administration (at best) or remained aloof. We support the creation of new, independent trade unions not linked with the administration of the enterprises or with the party-state apparatus.

We are for the total democratization of the country....

Having made himself the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and then president, Gorbachev has delegated to himself immense power of a type that no one has possessed since the time of Nicholas II. We are against a regime of personal power in principle, even more so if the president is appointed by antidemocratic means, and if that person is a creature of the nomenklatura, having throughout his entire career been at the service of Khrushchev and Brezhnev; and if he is an unpopular figure who, having been in power for five years, carries the bulk of the responsibility for the economic breakdown and the eruptions of international conflicts.

What we need is not a father-tsar but a democratic soviet republic. The most important government decisions must not be made according to the whim of a single ruler, ... but before the eyes of all the people.

The working class is the absolute majority of the population. But among the sixteen members of the presidential council the working class (and working people in general) is "represented" by only one person, V.A. Yarin—a worker who has been incorporated into the bureaucracy, closely linked with the United Front of Workers and other organizations of the apparatus—a man no workers empowered to represent them.

The composition of the present Congress of People's Deputies does not adequately express the will of the electors, the will of the people.

First, one-third of it consists of so-called deputies from the bureaucratized "public organizations," installed outside the general election process. This applies above all to the party one-hundred headed by Gorbachev, who appointed themselves as deputies.

Second, in many, if not in the majority of the territorial divisions, the spring 1989 elections were conducted with flagrant violations of democratic norms (sometimes even without alternative candidates).

Third, over the past year, the objective situation and the attitudes of the people have changed so rapidly, and these changes are so significant, that the deputies, chosen a year ago frequently do not reflect the views and attitudes of their electors today.

Therefore, we believe that as soon as possible new elections to the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR should be held under genuinely democratic conditions, on a multiparty basis, and according to the principle: one person, one vote....

We support the right of every people to decide their own fate, the right of the population of any territory to democratic self-determination—within the boundaries of the USSR or outside it. By the same token, the democratic right to self- determination must also be guaranteed to minorities living together inside a given territory.

Democracy should not stop at the factory gates. Workers must have the right and opportunity to engage in political work inside the enterprises.... Therefore, we are against the demagogic proposals to "depoliticize" the enterprises. This plays into the hands of those who fear independent political activity by workers.

All trade and socio-political organizations of workers in an enterprise must have equal rights, equal opportunities, equal access to the means of mass information, and the right to carry on visible agitation. The activity of the organizations of the CPSU in the enterprises must not be financed from enterprise funds. The party organizations themselves must pay for facilities, electricity, wages to staff and technical workers, etc., from their own coffers.

Practice shows that the activity of the workers' movement does not get adequate coverage in the mass media, either in the official media or frequently in the informal media as well. Structures that fear an independent workers' movement sometimes ignore the workers' struggles and more often manipulate the facts, interpreting them only as it serves their own interests. We consider the creation of an independent workers' information agency to be an urgent necessity.

The events of the recent period have confirmed once again the long-known truth: The working class can uphold its rights only with its own efforts....

At the present time there is no political force in the country that has placed at the top of its priorities the struggle for the interests of the workers. Therefore, we consider the task of the day the creation of an independent political organization expressing the class interests of the working class and of all hired labor....

We are in solidarity with all those who are fighting for democracy in the country. We respect the memory and ideas of those who fought for the rights and interests of workers. Among them: the revolutionaries of all tendencies during the time of tsarism, the revolution, and the civil war; the heroes of Kronstadt (1921) and Novocherkassk (1962); the fighters of the "workers' opposition" and the anti-Stalinist party oppositions; the participants in the democratic movements of the 1960-80 period, and others.

We call upon all who support (in whole or in principle) the positions outlined here to join us. ●

enterprises would be forced to "use the law of the USSR on the procedure for resolving labor conflicts" – the union bureaucrats apparently find it difficult to even use the word "strike."

The problem with the price increase was that the enterprises were forced to pay them even though their budgets were not increased. Therefore, many (42 out of 72 cement factories, for example, according to the official trade union newspaper *Trud*) faced big losses or bankruptcy. Since under the new cost-accounting system – *khozraschet* – the workers' pay issupposed to come out of the enterprise's profits, this meant pay cuts.

In the face of this threat, the Council of Ministers retreated and the fuel and transport price hikes were withdrawn.

● According to government statistics released in late March, during January and February, 9 million workdays had been lost due to strikes and uprisings, which meant an average of 200,000 workers not showing up for work each day.[6] This figure exceeded the figure for the entire year of 1989, when 7.3 million workdays were lost, with an average of 30,000 on strike each day.

Furthermore, fuel production was down – oil by 4 percent and coal by 6 percent – and overall industrial output was off by 1 percent. A large part of the crisis was attributable to the rebellion in the Caucasus. The strikes in Azerbaijan not only halt the oil and petro-chemical industries in the Baku region and reconstruction of earthquake-shattered Armenia. Many other industries are affected.

● On March 10, *Tyumenskaya Pravda* printed an open letter to the chairman of the Council of Ministers and the chairman of the AUCCTU from the leader of the Tyumen regional committee of the officially controlled Oil and Gas Workers Trade Union, representing around 700,000 members, threatening to "stop work" on April 1 if their repeated demands were not met.

The Tyumen region in Western Siberia produces 60 percent of the USSR's oil, and is the largest oil-producing region in the world. Popular unrest there had led to a rebellion by local party supporters in January, forcing the entire top echelon of the CP leadership to resign.[7] Oil workers further to the west, in Surgut, had seized the headquarters of the CP and the local government in mid-February to protest the bad working conditions and the lack of decent food and basic services.

MN of April 1 devoted its centerfold to the Tyumen crisis. It listed the six demands and "positions" of key figures in the trade union and the government. The report showed the bankruptcy of the solutions offered by the Kremlin – or rather, that they have no real solutions at all.

The workers are protesting the government's freeze on investment in the region, the shortage of promised pipes and drilling equipment, and poor living conditions.

● Leaders of last summer's coal miners' strikes in all three coalfields – the Donbass, the Kuzbass, and Vorkuta – walked out of a special congress of the coal industry on April 4, calling it "a congress of apparatchiks and employers." They announced that they were planning to form a new miners' union. The official trade union tops had packed the special congress and the strike leaders were not offered the right to speak. Furthermore, the strike leaders stated, the congress had passed new rules without consulting the miners and had failed to focus on the miners' social demands.

While the miners were promised tons of consumer goods – soap, warm winter clothes, and food products – by the Kremlin so they would halt their strikes last year, their living conditions have not improved.

A meeting of workers and strike leaders was scheduled to take place in the Kuzbass region around these issues on May 1. (See page 4 for a draft resolution prepared for the conference by an independent trade union "Justice" in Leningrad.)

● By mid-April, the increasing popular distress over existing conditions and fears aroused by rumors of the Kremlin's plans for "shock treatment" compelled even the tops of the AUCCTU to take a tough-sounding stance against the proposed reforms. On April 19, that body's new president announced that it would block any move toward a market economy that would cause unemployment and sacrifices by the lower-paid workers. He stated that 80 million Soviet citizens "experience material difficulties." The State Statistics Commission reported in *MN* No. 33 in 1989 that 30 percent of the population, or 80 million people, earned less than 100 rubles per month, "not enough to make ends meet."

The AUCCTU president, representing 140 million workers, demanded that the state guarantee the right to a job. Under the plan the government wanted to put into effect, government spokesmen estimated that unemployment could reach 10 million – a conservative figure since unemployment in Central Asia last year was 6 million.

The AUCCTU statement also specified that the government each year negotiate an agreement with the unions covering social and economic issues. He seemed to suggest that the union has no opposition in principle to market reforms per se, or to foreigners buying Soviet property. The AUCCTU congress that had previously been scheduled to take place in two years' time will be moved up to the fall.[8]

● By May Day, the official trade unions had been pushed a step further. In contrast to the past, this year's celebrations greeted government leaders with boos and cries of "shame" from their ranks. Trade unionists carried banners demanding a national referendum on any move toward a market economy, for union control over prices, and a state guarantee against the threat of joblessness. They cheered the contingents of flags from the Lithuanian Republic. Banners read "Down with the KGB," and "Socialism without democracy is like sausage without meat." The government contingent was virtually booed off the platform.

● *MN* No. 16, dated April 22, 1990, reported that the trade unions of Magadan, the far north and eastern territory of the USSR, warned the government that "they will summon the workers of the region to a general strike if the people of the north do not receive, by April 25, guarantees that they will be provided with the food and consumer goods necessary for normal preservation of life."

This region, where gold and other precious metals are mined, had goods delivered to it on a priority basis until 1988. Since then, however, it has received supplies far below what is needed. "Last year, the food delivered here was one-third

of what was planned, and of the 9,000 tons of meat that was supposed to have been delivered in the first three months of 1990, not one kilogram has arrived."

Against this backdrop of unfolding crises and social struggles, the bureaucracy's room to maneuver is being continually diminished. The economic measures the rulers are offering are not popular and have so far only worsened living conditions. The threat of price increases for basic food and consumer goods and more reliance on the market to determine prices has aroused fear, panic, and resentment – from Magadan to Minsk.

Trying to sell the market reforms to the people has become a frustrating job for the ruling apparatus. An article in the *Financial Times* April 25, entitled "Communists Blame Communism for Delay," described the anomaly. Kremlin economic adviser Nikolai Petrakov is deeply skeptical that the people will accept the reforms. He lamented to *Pravda*: "The Poles prefer high prices to empty counters [not strictly true]. In this country, all the opinion polls show quite the opposite. People accept rationing coupons and standing in line . . . but not price increases. Only some 30 percent are willing to support higher prices for the sake of better supply."

Gorbachev's press secretary Arkady Maslennikov says the people have had it too easy. "The situation is difficult because up to five years ago the people were used to the state taking care of all social aspects of their lives. This has a negative side. People knew they would get paid whatever they did." The *Financial Times* reporter concluded that, in fact, Gorbachev's reforms are sound. It is not that the Soviet people need a new leadership that represents working class interests. "It has been made clear what Mr. Gorbachev's problem is: he needs a new Soviet people."

The people have certainly gotten in the way so far, but not nearly so much as they can be expected to in the coming months. Boris Yeltsin, described as a "maverick" and "populist," who was elected in late May to the post of president of the Russian Republic parliament, has broad support primarily because he reflects, at least in part, some of these deep-felt sentiments. Yeltsin directs his fire at the "center" and bureaucratic privilege. He also calls for political pluralism and opposes the monopoly of power in the hands of the Communist Party.

Because Yeltsin was rebuked by the party rulers in the past and has remained something of a gadfly, he has earned some popular respect. It may even be that within the apparatus the differences between the "radical" Yeltsin and the "conservatives" – or even Gorbachev himself – are considered meaningful. His election may contain some of the popular dissatisfaction for a time, and help the bureaucracy postpone a confrontation until they can get a break from foreign capitalists.

However, Yeltsin's ideas for economic reform and his political motivation do not differ substantially from Gorbachev's. His goal is also to preserve the power and privileges of the ruling caste. He expressed this unabashedly in September 1990, when he made his "maverick" trip to the United States. His statements here reflect the pessimism of the bureaucratic caste, and why, conversely, revolutionary socialists have reason for optimism at this historic juncture:

Boris Yeltsin: [Gorbachev] considers me to be too radical. We have to do everything very carefully and cautiously but people are very impatient. They've been waiting for four years and they cannot wait another year.

Mr. Lehrer: They cannot wait another year? Something has to be done within a year?

Y: Yes.

L: If not, then what happens?

Y: A revolution from below will begin.

L: An armed revolution?

Y: No. Of course, I prefer it to be bloodless, without a civil war, a peaceful revolution, but from below. The movement has already started in the form of strikes and when the strikers take over in the area where they are, the order will have been established. That's a process that has already started.

L: What can be done to prevent this?

Y: There are some offers, some suggestions I would like, if I have a possibility to meet President Bush, I would like to tell those offers to him.

L: What kinds of things do you have in mind?

Y: Different things, mainly economical.

L: You mean you want help from the United States to solve the Soviet Union's economic problems?

Y: Yes, but so that American business does not suffer from it, but also gains from it.

L: What would the United States have to gain by helping Gorbachev and perestroika succeed?

Y: I think we have to start from the opposite. America and Americans will lose a lot if perestroika will fail. Then the whole world will be in a very bad shape.

L: Why?

Y: America included.

L: Why?

Y: Because it will involve all relations, economic, political, all spheres, everything.

L: If perestroika fails and this revolution happens in the Soviet Union, will it be a revolution of the conservatives, or will it be a revolution of the radicals like you? Who will end up running the Soviet Union when it's over with?

Y: The people will rule the country.[9] ●

Notes

1. *Financial Times*, April 5, 1990.
2. *FT*, Feb. 1, 1990.
3. *FT*, April 10.
4. *FT*, March 22, when some of the elements of the reforms were made public.
5. *FT*, April 23.
6. *FT*, March 27.
7. *FT*, Jan. 22.
8. *FT*, April 19.
9. from the transcript of an interview with Yeltsin on Public Television's MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour, September 11, 1989.

Union/Management Negotiations in Auto, 1990

by Frank Lovell

About 2,500 United Auto Workers (UAW) delegates and union staffers from General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler plants met in Kansas City May 19-22 to vote on union demands to be presented to the corporations when formal negotiations begin for a new three-year wage contract later this year. The current agreement, negotiated in 1987, expires September 14.

The union's National Bargaining Convention is a traditional part of the bargaining ritual in the auto industry. The truth is that top UAW officials are in continuous negotiations with the corporate giants and their district agents. By the time formal negotiations for a new contract begin each side at the "top bargaining table" is in general agreement on what the basic terms of the settlement will be. Limited areas of disagreement over specific language in the draft agreement are clearly defined and the shorelines of the "total wage pool" carefully marked before formal negotiations begin. The bargaining process involves a variety of elected union "bargaining teams" from different units of the Big Three corporations. The teams from the "targeted corporation"(usually GM or Ford) are the ones to watch. They meet in formal sessions with their management counterparts to try and thrash out differences over "past practices," shop-rules interpretations, job classifications, farming out work to nonunion contractors, and matters of this kind. Labor Day marks the beginning of the "final round" leading up to the expiration date of the old contract. It is then decided by the top negotiators whether to announce the settlement, extend negotiations, or strike the particular corporation that was chosen to conduct the negotiation for the industry.

When strikes have occurred, as has happened several times since the first labor-management cooperation pact was signed in 1948, they are confined to only one corporation and are not allowed to interfere with industry-wide production. Consequently the UAW has never been accused of "endangering the national economy," and government mediation agencies have never intervened. This, then, has been the unique history of wage negotiations in the auto industry. The pattern has been firmly established over the past 40 years. Many auto workers today can anticipate each successive step in the negotiations and look upon the process as hardly more than a cynical charade. But it is more, because behind the facade are the daily working lives of almost a half-million men and women in this huge industry. Its vast workforce is trained and disciplined by the cooperative efforts of union and management.

New Complications

This year the negotiations for new basic wage standards are complicated by the growing competition in the U.S. auto market of foreign products, the drive by U.S. corporations to reduce their domestic workforce, the failure of previous negotiations to satisfy the needs of auto workers and protect them against plant closings. Dissatisfaction with the current contract and the incumbent officialdom of the union has given rise to a broad-based opposition caucus called New Directions.

This caucus rallied its forces throughout the union and elected an impressive number of delegates to the National Bargaining Convention in Kansas City this year where they argued for the following demands:

1) guaranteed job security and an escalator clause for pensions to protect against inflation;

2) reduce working hours by taking back the paid personal holidays that were given up in the 1982 bargaining, plus higher pay for overtime and a ban on all overtime in plants with workers on layoff;

3) give local unions the right to strike over outsourcing (farming out work usually done in the plant) and subcontracting;

4) require automakers to include a specified amount of U.S. labor in vehicles built and sold in the U.S.;

5) require automakers who close plants to pay five years' full wages and benefits to displaced workers, and make "economic reparations" to affected communities.

These demands constitute a kind of program which rank-and-file union members are asked to endorse and vote for. The union administration, headed by International UAW president Owen Bieber and vice president Stephen Yokich (Bieber's indicated successor), responded with the predictable standard answer that such demands "tie the hands" of union negotiators who need "flexibility" to properly represent their members. They remind their followers that it was through flexible and imaginative negotiations that such benefits as the annual improvement factor in wages, the cost-of-living escalator clause, supplemental unemployment benefits, a comprehensive health plan, early retirement and pensions were won. But these gains which seemed satisfactory in past decades when the auto industry was expanding and the workforce needed protection mostly against seasonal layoffs are not suited to present problems that have developed as the domestic industrial workforce continues to shrink and auto production becomes internationalized. Faced with this new situation which began to create tensions within the established union-management partnership in the 1970s (Douglas Fraser, Bieber's immediate predecessor as International UAW president, resigned in 1978 from the national high level Labor-Management Group, warning that big business in this country had declared "class warfare"), neither of the contending factions in the UAW today have comprehensive answers to the new problems of auto workers, but the administration caucus is bent on holding the course against clear storm warnings.

A general sense that something is wrong, that the union has lost its ability to command the attention of the employers, is pervasive. It affects sectors of the union bureaucracy as well as the rank and file. The corporations now have a commanding position in labor-management relations because the union's philosophy of collaboration rests on the assumption that only a prosperous company can afford to provide adequately for the economic and social needs of its

employees. The auto corporations are complaining of hard times and a bleak future, though at the moment they are marking up high earnings and raising the salaries and bonuses of their already overpaid top executives. But negotiations for hourly wage scales and health care and pensions for the workers are conducted with an eye to the real and potential problems of management, not the desperate plight and social insecurity of the workforce.

UAW vice president Yokich, who heads the union's GM department, told a skilled trades bargaining convention in Detroit last March that any attempt to gear the rising cost of living to pension benefits for hourly rated employees is unacceptable because the corporation cannot afford the cost. He said rising pension benefits, if connected to the Consumer Price Index in the same way as wages are, would cost GM more than $6 hourly per worker which is more than all other demands combined in this round of negotiations. It is still not clear what the "other demands," if any, will be.

Chrysler Corporation, least profitable of the Big Three, has put in a bid to the union for help in resolving its health care costs. It claims it pays $700 million annually for health care bills and anticipates a 12 to 20 percent increase unless the union comes to the rescue with a new formula for covering this heavy expense. Although Chrysler has not yet demanded that workers pay for part of their own health insurance this has become a common take-away demand of major corporations in other industries. So far Chrysler claims only that its health care costs make up $4.10 of its average total labor cost of $33.16 an hour for each worker, not to be confused with the take-home pay of any working UAW member.

The management at Chrysler seems to be maneuvering for separate negotiations with the UAW, as in 1982 when the corporation faced bankruptcy. But UAW officials maintain that they intend to retain the industry-wide wages and benefits pattern. The National Bargaining Convention this year did not pick a "targeted corporation." That announcement is not expected until September.

At the Kansas City convention the union administration announced that its main goal in negotiations will be to halt the loss of jobs. The resolution that was adopted by an overwhelming majority said the union will demand ironclad job guarantees "covering every contingency." However, it went on to add that layoffs may occur "if the company's long-term financial viability is truly at risk as a result of conditions beyond its control."

Plant Closings

Plant closings swept the industry throughout the 1980s and the workforce dropped roughly a third during the decade. Since the 1987 contract negotiations which were supposed to address this problem almost 20,000 jobs have been lost. Under the formula applied at GM as a result of these negotiations the corporation was not allowed to close plants unless sales dropped to a level that made further production unprofitable. This did not alter the worldwide transformation of the industry nor stem the steady loss of jobs in the U.S. sector. Even as present negotiations around this issue get under way GM's departing president, Roger Smith, happily thanked the stockholders for his annual pension of $1.2 million for services rendered and assured them that as a result of corporate policies he helped introduce GM will be the first U.S. automaker to build cars in East Germany.

Investment of U.S. corporate capital in facilities abroad is not a GM monopoly, as is well known. Ford Motor Company earlier this year was the target of striking workers in its Mexican plants that produce major components for Ford vehicles sold in the world market. (See story on page 11.) The average wage of Mexican auto workers is $1.30 per hour as compared to some estimates as high as $36 hourly labor costs in this country. This figure includes fringe benefits such as health care and pensions in addition to wages. Mexican workers receive no fringe benefits. It is, therefore, not surprising that in order to remain profitable and maintain their "competitive edge" the giant U.S. auto corporations are in the forefront of the race to internationalize their productive capacity and take advantage of shifting consumer demands in all parts of the world.

Few in the top leadership of the UAW have any confidence in their ability to alter corporate policy in this respect. The most they hope for is guarantees (or promises) that the union rights of those who constitute the shrinking workforce in this country will continue to be recognized, and union-management collaboration will prevail.

None of this is openly talked about. But Douglas Fraser concedes that the trick in union-management cooperation, and in these particular contract negotiations, is to find "language aimed at reducing layoffs and lessening the impact when they occur." He finds it "interesting" that "automakers may be willing to guarantee workers' paychecks if they are allowed to reduce the workforce at will."

The corporations want more than this. And the UAW administration seems willing to grant contract language which in effect amounts to giving up workers' rights on the job in exchange for what will appear to be job security. This comes in the form of agreements at the plant level which give management "flexibility" in running the plant. This concession was first introduced at an idled plant in Fremont, California, when it was reopened several years ago as a joint venture betweeen GM and Toyota, known by its acronym NUMMI. Since then the NUMMI model has been introduced in some other facilities and UAW president Bieber has indicated this new "management technique" is acceptable to the union.

Workers who have experienced it find it unacceptable. One worker employed at a NUMMI-style plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, has been quoted as saying, "they don't need to lay you off when they can kill you off first."

Struggle for Union Leadership

The main thrust of contention between the UAW administration caucus and New Directions is the attitude of the union toward the corporations, whether union representatives should be more cooperative or more confrontational. Jerry Tucker, a former UAW district director and now the national organizer of the New Directions caucus, says the UAW needs "a strategy that pulls us from the grip of the corporate agenda, scraps the jointness arrangement, challenges the companies' investment decision making, and restores workplace democracy through solidarity." Whether this can be accomplished within the present organizational structure of the UAW as it has evolved since the

union was founded in 1935 is dubious. It is now an institution closely tied to the Democratic Party and other agencies of government, both nationally and locally. It has long-term commitments to the auto industry apart from the triennial contracts covering wages and other work-related matters. It is tied in with the AFL-CIO bureaucractic structure and its policies are influenced by the top officialdom of the national federation. And it commands a huge treasury with assets that, according to auditing reports, can be quickly converted to cash in the amount of $791.2 million. The day-to-day operations of this solidly established institution are far removed from the rank-and-file of the union.

At present the Bieber administration is trying to reduce the UAW's 800-member staff and eliminate some regional offices that are deemed "unprofitable." With the shrinking of the U.S. auto industry and loss of domestic jobs union membership has dropped accordingly. From about 1.5 million members in 1978 it is down to less than 900,000. Dues payments per member per month have been raised (even the voluntary monthly dues of retired members were doubled from $1 to $2), but not enough to pay the salaries and expenses of the top-heavy staff. It is estimated that the union spends $28.8 million more than it takes in annually. At least 70 staff jobs must be eliminated to balance the budget, besides other cuts. This is another hotly debated issue between the two caucuses, and may heat up. The administration caucus is accused of using its control of the apparatus to further tighten its bureaucratic grip. And besides this the opposition smells scandal attached to the salaries and expense accounts of some elements in the bureaucracy.

Both sides in the struggle for control of the union claim the heritage of Walter Reuther who was president of the union from 1947 until his death in a plane crash in 1970. Former UAW president Douglas Fraser (now professor of labor studies at Wayne State University in Detroit) says, "Walter Reuther, more than any other single individual, forged and molded the ideas and principles of the UAW. Those things became institutionalized, and now the institution forms people like Owen Bieber and Stephen Yokich as they come up through the ranks." Fraser is a loyal supporter of the institution and staunch defender of the administration caucus.

Victor Reuther, who was more prominent in the 1937 sitdown strikes than his younger brother Walter and remained a prominent UAW leader as one of the "Reuther brothers" until retirement, has a different understanding and recollection of the union's history than Fraser. Victor at 78 is an active participant in New Directions which he seeks to inspire with the crusading evangelism of the fledgling CIO movement of the 1930s, the image that Walter quite successfully sought to retain and project throughout his long tenure as UAW International president and briefly as president of the CIO.

Reuther's Legacy

The truth is that during the post-World War II years, under the administration of the Reuther caucus (in which Fraser played a prominent role), the UAW was transformed from the insurgent, membership-run, anti-employer organization it had been before the war (a truly working class, potentially revolutionary, industrial union) into a "progressive," machine-run, business-as-usual union. What distinguished Walter Reuther from the rest of the trade union bureaucracy (which in the postwar years was cast in the mold of George Meany) was his broader grasp of the social significance of the union movement. He continued for all his years to talk about "industrial democracy," "full employment," "universal health care," "economic and political equality for Negroes," "the disgraceful blemishes of poverty in our rich society," "the rights of all peoples in a free world," and all the other shibboleths of social democracy.

At the union level Walter Reuther endorsed "socialized medicine" as a desirable goal and argued that it could most quickly be won by forcing the auto corporations to pick up the tab for health care for workers in this industry. His reasoning was that the expense would convince the employers to join with the unions in demanding federal legislation for a national health care plan similar to that in Britain and Canada. This proved not to be the logic of events. The corporations are complaining about health care costs (as anticipated), but they want to shift the burden onto the workers—including the millions of poor and sick of this country who are left to die uncared for.

Another example of the "Reuther logic" was his support of the labor party idea when the UAW at its second convention in 1936 unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the formation of a national labor party. Reuther was among those who voted to reverse that decision before the convention adjourned, arguing that "now is not the time." For him the time never came, and meanwhile the U.S. Congress has enacted the most draconian antilabor legislation of all major industrial countries.

Walter Reuther was respected by all the "right people" in society and recognized in the capitalist news media as a "genuine social engineer," their highest tribute to his energetic support of the system and his idealism. He always managed to appear to be on the right side of every broad social struggle, such as the defense of civil liberties in the 1950s, the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and the antiwar movement and early feminist movement at the time of his death in 1970—even as he worked to undermine the effectiveness of all these movements.

The world in which Reuther rose to prominence in the union movement belongs to another era. Today's social and economic problems are vastly different than in his time. Reformers in the UAW will make little headway if they look to the past and try to copy Reuther's demagogy. If they are genuinely interested in a new direction for the UAW they can benefit from a careful study of the economic laws of capitalism and the principles of social change which he learned as a youth growing up in a socialist family where Marxism was taught. ●

Mexican Ford Workers in Day-to-Day Battle for Survival

*This article, reprinted from the **Union Advocate** in Minnesota, notes that the capitalist press has carried little news about the plight of Mexican auto workers under the repressive conditions in their country imposed by U.S. corporations. Likewise, there has been little news in the labor press here. The **Union Advocate** is an exception. Also the UAW Local 160 monthly publication, **Tech Engineer**, carried the story and the local organized a special meeting for Marco Antonio Jimenez in Detroit, April 19. Readers will be gratified to learn that **Labor Notes**, published in Detroit, has reported the response of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) to an appeal for help from the Mexican auto workers. When Jimenez spoke before the Ford Council of CAW the council took action: to raise money; conduct a membership educational campaign; pressure Ford to recognize the union rights of its Mexican workers; and press for reinstatement of 750 workers fired since January. This shows something of the difference between the union movement there and here in the U.S., between the CAW and UAW.*

St. Paul, May 7—Open the pages of any American newspaper, and it's possible to find an article on Solidarity union members in Poland, or striking coal miners in the Soviet Union. But chances are you won't read about Marco Antonio Jimenez.

Jimenez is one of several hundred union members waging a struggle for union rights in Mexico. Their story is receiving, little, if any, media attention. Jimenez and his fellow workers are under attack not only from a large multinational corporation, but in many cases by their own government and their own union. Several leaders have been arrested and one worker has been killed in an assault by company security guards.

As the situation has become more critical, the workers have fought back through strikes, demonstrations, and have taken more drastic measures such as blockading roads. Each time, promises are made to the workers, and each time they are broken.

The multinational corporation that has cut wages in half, eliminated the seniority system, and speeded up production for Jimenez and his co-workers is the Ford Motor Company.

Jimenez is speaking to union workers in the United States to explain the problems of workers in Mexico and why the actions of Ford represent a threat to the job security of American workers. Last month, he spoke to members of United Auto Workers Local 879 and at a public meeting sponsored by the Trades and Labor Assembly Speakers Club.

"My involvement comes from feeling as a human being—seeing what is happening in my country—and coming to the conclusion it is wrong," Jimenez said in an interview. "Workers produce great wealth, but they do not receive the benefits."

The Mexican workers are in a day-to-day fight for survival. But they are not alone, Jimenez said.

"We see it as part of a broader struggle by workers in Mexico, Canada, and the United States to defend our jobs, our contracts, and our working conditions," he said. "We want to help build an organized resistance. After all, we are one working class in the three countries."

Jimenez works at the Ford motor, auto, and truck assembly plant employing 3,800 workers at Cuautitlan, outside Mexico City. It is one of three Ford plants in Mexico, the other two near the border with the United States.

Twelve hundred workers in Hermosillo assemble cars for export to the United States and Canada. Eight hundred workers assemble engines at a factory in Chihuahua. The three plants are owned by Ford Motor Co. of Mexico, a wholly owned subsidiary of the U.S. conglomerate.

The current struggle began in 1987, when workers struck for an increase in wages. The company closed the plant, reopened with replacement workers, and cut pay and benefits by 50 percent.

In order to make the cuts, Ford reached an agreement with the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the largest union federation in Mexico. Workers in Cuautitlan felt betrayed, and called for union leadership that would really represent them.

In the ensuing months, the workers elected local union leadership, only to have them fired by the company. Ford also conducted more overnight "closings" and mass layoffs to get rid of union activists.

Appeals to the government were useless, Jimenez said.

"In Mexico, the government's policy is to let companies violate the law and break contracts," he said. The workers are caught in a vicious circle. The CTM union federation has close ties with the government, which in turn is closely allied with Ford.

As the workers' resistance continued, more union leaders were fired, including Jimenez. By late 1989, working conditions had become extremely poor. The assembly line was again speeded up. Jobs were eliminated for the workers who had filled positions in the assembly line so that others could eat lunch or go to the bathroom.

The last straw was the company's slashing of the year-end profit-sharing payment.

"The profit-sharing payments were greatly reduced although productivity had been significantly higher during that year," Jimenez said.

Workers struck in December 1989 to demand the payments. A committee of the fired union officers provided leadership from an office outside the plant. The committee led the workers in several actions, including blockading the major road from Mexico City to the north. The illegal blockades were conducted for up to two hours at a time to put pressure on the government to act.

On January 5, Jimenez and five other leaders arrived at the plant to distribute leaflets. They were met by a gang of thugs who attacked them. Thirty workers were beaten and six were taken away by police.

The thugs wore Ford identification badges and were using the CTM union office at the plant as their base of operation, Jimenez said.

As a result of the beatings, workers again shut down the plant for the rest of the day. The following Monday, when the first shift arrived, it was met by 300 of the thugs, many of them carrying guns. Seventy union activists were ordered to go to the office. On the way there, they were fired upon. One worker was killed and several others injured.

When Jimenez left Mexico to meet with union locals in the United States, the workers in Cuautitlan were putting on pressure for an investigation of the shooting and for democratic reform within the CTM. They also were waiting for Ford to make good on its promises regarding profit-sharing and working conditions and the rehiring of fired union leaders.

The workers in Mexico realize they need help to stop the constant erosion of their standard of living, Jimenez said. For that reason, they are asking American workers to write Ford and the Mexican government.

Jimenez made that appeal in the Twin Cities and to union locals in Toronto, Detroit, and St. Louis. But it also is an appeal to the self-interest of American workers.

The plant in Cuautitlan produces Ford pickups and Taurus, Topaz, Thunderbird, and Cougar cars, in competition with Ford plants in other parts of the world.

Workers at the Mexican plant earn $165 a month and have few benefits.

The American Labor Education Center, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., sponsored Jimenez's visit. Letters to support the workers should be sent to:

- The workers themselves, Movimiento Democratico de Trabajadores de la Ford, Doctor Lucio, 103, Edificio Orion A-4, Despacho 103, Mexico, DF, Mexico. Contributions also can be sent to this address.
- Ford Motor Co., Paseo de la Reforma 333, Col. Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, DF, 06500, Mexico.
- Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Los Pinos, Mexico, DF, Mexico.

The Crisis of the U.S. Union Movement—Part I

by Dave Riehle

At the end of November 1989, real wages in the United States were 8.1 percent below November 1979, according to the AFL-CIO. That decline does not take into account deep cuts in such things as unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, health care, social security, and many other social programs. The minimum wage has dropped to 35 percent of average earnings, an all-time low. In the recession of 1975, nearly 80 percent of jobless workers received benefits. Today the figure is 29 percent, also an all-time low.

U.S. workers' wages also continue to decline in relation to those of other industrialized countries, while labor productivity (the amount produced per worker per hour)—already the highest in the world—increased still further. From 1985 to 1988 unit labor costs for U.S. manufactured goods fell 0.4 percent, while unit labor costs for major competitors such as Japan and Germany rose 78 percent, Italy 63 percent, Sweden 62 percent, Britain 47 percent, and Canada 22 percent.

What all this shows, of course, is the tremendous success of the U.S. employers in their antiunion drive. The unions still exist, and that fact is one thing that has prevented the employers from moving as fast as they might have liked to. But without any significant exception, the U.S. union bureaucracy has conceded in advance the inevitability—and even the economic necessity and desirability—of going along with the employers' demands. Although there has been continuous resistance from the rank and file throughout the 1980s, the union bureaucrats have contained rank-and-file rebellions against the employers' offensive to isolated situations.

State of the Unions

Union membership is now around 16 percent of the workforce, down from a high of 36 percent in 1953. About one-third of union members are public employees. This means that less than 10 percent of workers in private industry are organized today. Union membership, in absolute numbers, has declined since 1975. In the 1950s there were an average of 352 strikes per year of 1,000 or more workers, involving an annual average of 1.6 million workers. In 1978 there were 219 such strikes. In 1980 there were 187. And in 1988 there were 40—involving 118,300 strikers.

Recently released figures for 1989 show 51 strikes of over 1,000 workers, with 452,000 workers participating, more than any year since 1983. However, the NYNEX strikes in New York and New England, involving 60,000 members of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), combined with strikes at three other major telephone companies, accounted for somewhat more than 40 percent of this total number of workers on strike. The second largest strike in terms of idling the most workers was the 49-day Boeing strike by the International Association of Machinists (IAM), involving 57,000 workers.

So slightly more than one-third of the 17 million days lost were caused by four disputes in the telephone industry, and the strike against Eastern Airlines accounted for an additional 30.4 percent of the lost days. It would be wishful thinking to conclude from these figures—as some have tried to do—that a reversal of the general downward trend is taking place. In fact, given the highly centralized and bureaucratic structure of the U.S. union movement, it is excluded that such a reversal can emerge simply from a change in union policy brought about through a molecular accumulation of workers' dissatisfaction. Such a change will only happen when the rising dissatisfaction and combativity becomes conscious of itself and organized, which in turn requires the participation of a class conscious minority able to win authority as active participants in living struggles *at each stage of development.*

In short, what is needed is an organized radical opposition that bases itself on a *systematic* alternative to the current bureaucratic policies—an alternative that involves the independent mobilization of the rank and file against the employers. Whether this vanguard will be assembled in any significant degree from the presently existing socialist and radical movement remains to be seen. But it will have to be assembled from somewhere. There can be no simple, spontaneous solution to the present problems of the U.S. trade union movement.

Failure of Business Unionism

It hardly needs to be said that the general decline in strike activity throughout the 1980s does not express widespread satisfaction by workers with their wages and conditions. Nor does it reflect discovery of new and more effective methods by which the unions can impose their demands on the employers.

In fact, there is deep and profound dissatisfaction and suppressed anger among U.S. workers today—especially among unionized workers who have a higher degree of consciousness about what has happened and what has been lost. Although the *number* of strikes has declined precipitously, the unwillingness to be reconciled with the current situation is expressed through *prolonged and bitter* strikes, which are infused with an anti-employer and antigovernment antagonism. In a number of cases, such as the strike by United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local P-9 in Austin, Minnesota, in 1985-86, there has also been a deep hostility toward the union bureaucracy.

A number of today's strikes are followed closely by large numbers of organized workers, and many have been characterized by demonstrative attempts on the part of the strikers and their organizations to reach out for solidarity. Examples in the recent past, in addition to the P-9 strike, are several strikes waged by the United Paperworkers International Union, the Pittston strike by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), the IAM strike against Eastern Airlines, and the Greyhound bus strike.

Unfortunately (with the partial exception of the Pittston strike) these events represent not only militancy and determination on the part of the workers, but also a complete default on the part of the bureaucratic upper strata of union leadership. Most strikes, including many that are never known outside of their own local areas, are essentially defeated within the first few weeks – by the importation of scabs and the unwillingness of the union bureaucracy to allow militant strike tactics in response. The top union officials refuse to call out other contingents of the labor movement in any kind of sympathy strikes or other solidarity actions, which would mean setting in motion an escalating confrontation with the employers and their government.

The bureaucrats, in control of huge union treasuries, let themselves partially off the hook in many cases by allowing these hopeless strikes to continue for months. They dole out relief payments to the workers who keep up token picket lines as the plants continue in full production. In some cases, such strikes are eventually settled – for the most part on terms demanded by the bosses at the beginning. And in many the employers prompt the scabs to petition for a National Labor Relations Board election to decertify the union. There have been a few positive exceptions to this pattern, but not many. Thus untold numbers of unions at smaller shops have been broken over the past ten years and prevailing wages driven down.

The same general factors are at work in the case of strikes by major unions or major segments of unions. The current leaders are unable to confront the employers' offensive or to put forward any perspective for effective struggle. *Events are uneven, but the general trend is clear* – wages, working conditions, and rights of all workers are being squeezed, step by step, to the level dictated by simple supply and demand in the labor market. There will always be exceptions. But the segment of the working class which enjoys a reasonable standard of living and some measure of security against old age, ill health, injury, and unemployment has been shrinking at an accelerated tempo throughout the 1980s. It is even shrinking faster than the decrease in union membership itself.

Attempt to Break Up Pattern Agreements

The breaking up of uniform national agreements between the unions and the bosses – referred to variously as "pattern agreements," "master agreements," etc. – has been the strategic underpinning of the employers' antiunion offensive during the 1980s, and has been spectacularly successful in many industries. It is largely overlooked in the various attempts to analyze the development of industrial unions in mass production industries that the creation of industry-wide uniform wage structures, more than anything else, cemented the gains won through the mass struggles of the 1930s.

The removal of the Chrysler workers from the United Auto Workers (UAW) national agreement in 1979 really opened the decade-long employer offensive against the historic gains of industrial unionism. As soon as one segment of the industry accepts a substandard agreement, the pressure on others to follow suit – and even to further undercut wages and working conditions – becomes highly intense. The bosses argue with each group of workers separately that they have to be able to compete with their competitor, who now pays lower wages, and the basis for playing off one union local against another in the battle for greater and greater concessions (a technique known as "whipsawing") has begun.

The UMWA strike against Pittston Mining Co. is a good example of an effort by the bosses along these lines, but in this case one that was only partially successful. Here we had a strike by local unions against a highly profitable multinational company – which was clearly acting in the interests of, and with the collaboration of, the coal industry as a whole. The company had decided to ruthlessly take on a *component* of the UMWA in isolation, directing enormous resources toward defeating it and taking it out of the national agreement with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA) – especially on the key issues of health care and pensions. It had the full cooperation of the judiciary, state police, capitalist media, etc. In this respect there was a high degree of similarity to the Hormel/P-9 strike. There can be no doubt that such an action – attempting to remove one component of a major union from a national, industry-wide agreement and impose concessions – is not the work of some maverick corporate cowboys. It was done in collaboration with the other major coal companies.

The Pacific Maritime Association, the key employer organization in the longshore industry, reported in 1986: "We continued in 1986 to see a slow but steady progress toward an improved labor environment. Dramatic and essential reductions were accomplished in offshore labor costs. A clear reversal of trends in longshore labor costs was accomplished in the East Coast and Gulf Coast ILA [International Longshore Association] settlements, although *a fragmented approach to bargaining was required to set this in motion"* (emphasis added). This simply means that they moved strategically to break up multiemployer multiunit pattern agreements, sign separate local contracts, and take on individual units of workers.

Unfortunately, union propaganda in situations from Hormel to Phelps Dodge, International Paper, Pittston, the airline industry, and others, has failed to effectively expose this not-so-secret phenomenon. It has relied on attempts to portray company policy as one imposed by unreasonable and arbitrary chief executive officers, appealing to the corporations for moderation. The unions have also drawn back (including during the Pittston strike) from the obvious conclusion that the only adequate response is to take the war against a particular, isolated local union to the entire industry.

Progressive Bureaucratic vs. Proletarian Methods of Struggle

Here we begin to get to the heart of the difference between even "progressive" bureaucratic leadership policies and genuine proletarian methods of struggle: *the massive, direct, and independent intervention of the rank and file.* This was exemplified in the decision of the UMWA rank and file to strike industry-wide in support of the Pittston walkout. Their decision was not fully backed up by the Trumka leadership, which eventually bowed to judicial threats and sent the miners back to work. Trumka did try to aid the spontaneous strike movement through the "memorial day" holidays that

the union was legally entitled to invoke, but he did not go beyond that token effort.

Pittston was, however, different from other recent strikes, such as Hormel. The UMWA international (unlike the UFCW) genuinely supported the local effort and threw its resources behind it. The Trumka leadership comes out of the democratic UMWA, unlike the corrupt and bureaucratic UFCW dues machine ruled over by William Wynn. The UMWA organized a widespread and well-orchestrated publicity campaign in support of the strike and – especially after reaffiliating with the AFL-CIO last year – got official union suppport, financial aid, and solidarity actions. These ranged from food caravans from Detroit to a sit-in at the county courthouse by high-ranking labor officials, including Lane Kirkland. The strikers, with the full support of the union, introduced nearly every tactic that has been discussed as a response to the antilabor offensive of the '80s, including the occupation of a key plant and successfully running an independent labor candidate, UMWA district president Jackie Stump, for state legislator.

But the tactic that more than any other clearly came out of the historic experience and initiative of the rank and file of the union was the solidarity strike early in the summer of 1989 by 47,000 miners in seven states. This, and not the carefully managed corporate campaigns, slick professional literature, or civil disobedience protests, came solely from the membership of the UMWA. And Trumka's acquiescence in the back-to-work orders issued by the courts clearly was a turning point in the strike. After this, no matter what imaginative and creative tactics were emplyed by the Pittston strikers, it was clear that the full power of the union was not going to be used to settle this conflict. It was essentially reduced to a war of attrition between the Pittston strikers and the corporation, with the BCOA and all the resources of the state standing behind the company.

In the last analysis, Trumka – the best of the international union leaders – has no perspective that is fundamentally different from that of Wynn, Kirkland, or any other element within the labor bureaucracy. None of them are prepared to confront the employers and their government with the full power of the rank and file, to rely with confidence on the capacity of that rank and file to carry the struggle through to the end. None of them believe that the workers can exist without the employers, and consequently, they accept the *inevitability* of concessions. What the workers can win, they believe, is limited by what the employers are prepared to give up without a serious struggle.

Effects of the Pittston Agreement

The UMWA and Pittston reached a tentative agreement, announced January 2, 1990. Yet for many weeks the union members were not informed of the terms. Trumka said ratification was delayed because of the union's insistence that all court fines against the strikers be dropped and the judge's refusal to suspend them. The failure to inform the membership about the tentative agreement – of which the company, the government, and the courts obviously knew the terms – is another indication that this leadership, like the rest, sees the rank and file as an adjunct to maneuvers conducted by the top officials.

It is, nevertheless, important to emphasize that a difference *does* exist between a leader like Trumka – who tries to act in the interests of the miners and, more significantly, is the product of a militant and democratic union – and those like Wynn – who are self-seeking and spineless in relation to the employers. But neither of these types is capable of carrying out a policy that relies on the independent mobilization of the union rank and file and the working class as a whole. Yet nothing else is capable of reversing the fortunes of the labor movement today.

The Pittston miners put up a magnificent fight, which undoubtedly helped to reach another layer of workers with the idea that it is necessary and possible to resist, use militant tactics, and reach out for broad support. They won a $1.20 per hour wage increase over three years. Pittston agreed to maintain pension benefits for miners who have retired since 1974 and to maintain 100 percent medical care for active and retired miners at the same level as the national agreement. The company also agreed to remain in the fund which provides health benefits to miners who retired before 1974 – but the union agreed to a lump-sum payment to that fund instead of payments based on hours worked, which will be a problem over time.

The war of attrition obviously was not simply one-sided in this case, and the resistance of the miners had an effect on the outcome. The company made some tactical retreats and some real concessions. But the union's gains are likely to be episodic, while the coal bosses as a whole made some strategic gains as a result of the strike. The union agreed to allow round-the-clock work and made concessions on health and pensions. This will make the highly profitable Pittston Coal Co. even more profitable. In a very short time it will mean that the BCOA, and other coal mining companies under union contract, will demand the same concessions. Pittston's withdrawal from some of the health and pension funds will weaken these funds, and they will come under attack – especially when the BCOA contract expires in three years.

Overall this agreement accelerates the centrifugal tendencies already in motion and tends to break up the national agreement. It therefore weakens the ability of the unionized miners to confront the coal bosses with the unified power of their entire organization. It also has an adverse effect on other industries where uniform national agreements are under attack.

The UMWA had 595,000 members in 1942, its peak year, and has only 65,000 active members today. That number will decline further if current trends are not reversed. Although total employment in the industry is also less than it was in the 1940s, the percentage of unionized mines has drastically decreased. There has been a vast expansion of coal production in the Western states, mostly nonunion, as well as expansion of nonunion operations in the traditional Eastern areas. The UMWA has no hope of organizing those mines unless it conducts a class-struggle policy that has the capacity to inspire the nonunion miners to become organized. And unless it can enforce a national pattern agreement, even union organization at some new mines would not reverse the downward spiral of wages and benefits. The bosses will extend the war of attrition against the UMWA, as the

stepped-up campaign of violence and harassment in West Virginia by the Massey Coal Co. indicates.

Eastern Airlines Strike

In the Eastern Airlines strike, the IAM (also led until recently by a so-called "progressive," William Winpisinger) first made idle threats to extend picketing to the rail industry. The IAM had a legal right to do this. But all talk of this was soon dropped, and the struggle limited to the operations controlled by Frank Lorenzo. Here again we have the failure of the international union leadership to extend its side of the battle to the industry as a whole. The corporate offensive against the Eastern workers, as with other specific detachments of unions in the airline and other industries, is clearly a conspiracy—with one corporation taking the lead, and others giving covert financial support. It is only fair that workers be allowed to mobilize *their* collective class power against this collective class power of the bosses.

That kind of argument, based on simple justice and equal rights, is never going to convince the government, the politicians, or the courts—which is why the union bureaucrats aren't inclined to follow its logic. But the organized workers are ready to support such action now, and wide sections of working people and others could be won over to support solidarity strikes and similar activities. The wide sympathy for the Eastern strike is an indication of this receptivity.

Such an offensive by labor would not be met passively by the employers and their institutions. A successful struggle would require the mobilization of wider and wider sections of the working class, the logic of which would be a political and economic confrontation with the government as a whole—with the control of things passing rapidly out of the hands of the union leadership. The union bureaucrats know *this* much, and that is why they will not even pass the threshold of such a confrontation. This sets the framework for settlement of any strike right from the beginning. It is the context of the Eastern strike, where the IAM leadership allows Lorenzo to continue operating Continental and his other properties, and cannibalizing the assets of Eastern—hoping that some favorable outcome will eventually emerge from the bankruptcy court.

In reality, what is emerging from bankruptcy court is a downsizing of Eastern that is not far removed from what Lorenzo's objectives were when the strike began 11 months ago. The pilots and flight attendants have called off their strike against the airline, and by November, Lorenzo had succeeded in reestablishing up to 800 daily flights. The outcome of a prolonged war of attrition cannot favor the strikers as some mistakenly believe. Here too, the objective of the employers *as a whole* is being met in significant part. It is being demonstrated that even a militant strike, successful for a period of time and winning wide support and solidarity within the labor movement, can be overcome as long as it is limited to one segment of the industry—especially when the union leadership has made it clear that they accept the fundamental premise of the employers: the rejection of industry-wide pattern bargaining. Without that, and without a corresponding commitment on the part of the union as a whole to take on the entire industry, "international" unions don't amount to much more than—at best—fraternal and benevolent societies for the relief of distressed members.

The next strike in the airline industry will take place against the backdrop of the Eastern experience. What confidence is there likely to be on the part of those workers that they can successfully hold out to maintain prevailing wages and conditions?

Boeing—A Somewhat Different Experience

The 1989 Boeing strike had a different character from the Pittston and Eastern strikes. The Seattle IAM District Lodge 751, a mighty dues-machine led by Tom Baker, a typical business unionist, has 57,000 members. Baker's business agents pick the 1,100 nonelected shop stewards. Boeing dominates the economy of the area, and has led the Seattle region through a succession of booms and busts. Right now Boeing has a tremendous backlog of orders, and employment is full. The strike was allowed to go on just long enough so that it would put pressure on a sufficient number of workers and produce a back-to-work vote. It also allowed Boeing to shift the blame for some of its backlog onto the strike.

Although Boeing operates in what is essentially a cost-plus industry, the company went after concessions anyway. It succeeded in scoring gains in all three major areas where employers are focusing today: health care insurance, lump-sum bonuses instead of wage increases, and speedup/job elimination—as well as multitiered wage settlements. These concessions were not given up without opposition on the part of a significant part of the workers, including a recommendation against them by the IAM international vice president Julian Ostro, who was assigned to the negotiations. He was promptly rebuked by the capitalist press in Seattle for interfering in the strike. This was a reversal of the principle invoked by the boss press, the courts, the NLRB, and labor "experts" during the Hormel strike when they declared that an international "parent" union had the full right, indeed the duty, to interfere in a strike when a local union proved recalcitrant. The real principle here, of course, was the right of the *employers* to interfere in the affairs of the unions.

Settlements similar to the Seattle Boeing pact were ratified later by IAM members at McDonnell Douglas and at Boeing in Wichita, Kansas. Both contained modest wage increases and lump-sum bonuses and maintained multitier wage schedules, in fact widening the existing gap between new hires and older workers. ●

[In the second part of this article we will look further at the development of proletarian methods of struggle, changing trends, and opposition currents within the union movement, as well as the necessary programmatic foundation for a genuine class struggle left wing of American labor today.]

The Continuing Scandal of Child Labor in U.S.

by Evelyn Sell

Violations of child labor laws in the United States were recently brought to public attention by NBC News. A two-part investigative report, entitled "Overworked, Underage," was broadcast on February 28 and March 1. The first segment looked at the abuse of child labor in factories. Video films showed female teenagers working in one of the 4,000 illegal garment sweatshops in New York City; other youngsters were shown delivering clothing items manufactured at home. Most teenage workers in the U.S. are employed in service industries, such as restaurants. They are not only paid super-low wages but are exposed to hazardous working conditions. For example, the program reported the case of a boy crushed to death by a supermarket boxing machine.

The second part of NBC'S report focused on child farm laborers. Reporter Andrea Mitchell explained that contractors own migrant workers' housing and will evict families if the children don't work. She noted that farm children have the worst injury rate of all U.S. workers, very high disease and mortality rates, and miss more school and have a higher dropout rate than any other group. The program featured a family of eleven, parents and nine children – the youngest five years old! – who earned a total of $14 for a full day's work in a Florida orange grove.

Dora Cruz, of the Good Samaritan Mission, told NBC that young farm workers suffer from skin conditions, reddened eyes, and other health problems because they work during pesticide sprayings. Cruz said, "You look at the children and some of these children never smile. The pain is so deep that they cannot smile. Those little kids, even if they are small, they are slaves in America." Her sympathetic attitude was not shared by government officials interviewed for the report. Instead of responding vigorously to child labor abuses, the Labor Department said it planned to launch a "public awareness" campaign using videos and public service announcements. Assistant Secretary of Labor William Brooks stated, "Our vision is that we're going to let the public know what child labor laws are about."

Perhaps embarrassment over the public airing of this limited "vision" prompted a departure from business-as-usual. Two weeks after the television program, Labor Secretary Elizabeth Dole announced that wages-and-hours compliance officers had conducted a three-day nationwide "sweep" of 3,776 employers to catch violations of child labor laws. In those few days, investigators found 11,000 violations – a figure which was almost half of *all* violations cited during the full year of 1989. A GFF Foods grocery store in Oklahoma employed children 12 and younger in after-school jobs prohibited by law. A Sizzler restaurant in Nebraska and an Arby's fast-food restaurant in New Mexico had youngsters under 16 working in hazardous conditions. The largest number of businesses initially cited were national and regional fast-food chains such as McDonald's, Taco Bell, Jack in the Box, and Burger King.

The Labor Department reported that child labor violations jumped from 9,836 in 1985 to 22,508 in 1989. Of course, these figures represent *recorded* cases – not the full extent of real violations. Statistics alone give only a hint of the problems involved in child labor today. At a March 16, 1990, congressional subcommittee hearing, a youth described how his leg was ripped off by a car wash dryer machine when he was 13 years old. The company was fined $400 for the loss of his leg.

There are currently 953 wage-and-hour compliance officers in the Labor Department and they usually go to workplaces in response to complaints – not to enforce laws or check on conditions. At the present time, there are *40* inspectors normally assigned to child labor on farms. This failure to seriously address already inadequate protective laws has been pursued over many decades by both Democratic and Republican administrations.

The issues involved in child labor are not new. The use of juvenile workers to increase profits is a practice as old as American business itself.

Child Labor in the Colonies and Early Industry

Child labor was introduced in 1619 when a group of youngsters was imported from the slums of London to work for the Virginia colonists. New World entrepreneurs repeatedly asked England to ship hundreds of boys and girls to help the labor-starved colonies. English children were lured by offers of candy or simply dragged on board ships bound for the colonies. When Samuel Slater built the first U.S. mill in 1791, his entire workforce consisted of seven boys and two girls, all under twelve years of age, who worked six days a week, fourteen hours a day. By 1801 Slater's mill operation had expanded to employ over one hundred children ranging in age from four to ten years.

As U.S. industry mushroomed, the demand for child workers increased dramatically. The new machines created by the Industrial Revolution required little strength, and adult male workers were scarce and expensive, so labor-hungry profit-oriented employers hired women and children. The use of children was so prevalent that nineteenth century inventors deliberately designed factory machines to suit the small size of young workers.

During the 1800s, significant numbers of children worked in coal mines, candy factories, truck gardens, berry fields, glass factories, canneries, and match factories. By 1820 over half of all factory workers were nine and ten years old, working an average of thirteen hours a day. In the steel mills,

children died of gas poisoning. Lung diseases destroyed them in the mines. The phosphorus used in making matches ate away their flesh. Tiny fingers and hands, so practical for darting into moving parts of mill machines, were cut off or mutilated.

In some industries, employers *required* the labor of children as a condition for hiring a parent. One of the rules posted in a South Carolina cotton mill stated: "All children, members of a family, above twelve years of age, shall work regularly in the mill, and shall not be excused from service therein without the consent of the superintendent for good cause."

In his autobiography, Samuel Gompers described conditions in the cigar industry during the 1870s: "The manufacturers bought or rented a block of tenements and subrented the apartments to cigar makers who with their families lived and worked in three or four rooms. . . . The whole family—old and young had to work in order to earn a livelihood—work early and late, Sunday as well as Monday." This "homework" system quickly spread to other industries, particularly clothing. (Today's farm contractors are continuing this tradition of tying housing to jobs, and requiring the entire family to work.)

In "The Bitter Cry of Children," John Spargo quotes the proprietor of a glass factory as saying, "If two men apply to me for work and one has one or two or three children and the other has none, I take the man with the children. I need the boys." Many glassblowers, determined to protect their own sons from the dangerous jobs assigned to juveniles, resorted to securing children from orphanages and immigrant families in order to gain employment.

Labor Struggles and Child Labor

Children remained an important labor resource as the United States entered the twentieth century. Cigar factories in the early 1900s earned the nickname "kindergartens" because of their numerous child workers. In 1910 almost one of every five children worked for wages. Juvenile employment was a key issue in some of the early battles between workers and bosses.

When New Jersey glassblowers went on strike in 1902, the forced labor of their children was one of their major complaints. The chief grievance of the Pennsylvania Cigarmakers Union focused on the practice of paying children $2.00-2.50 per thousand for making the same class of cigars as men receiving $7.50-8.00 per thousand. From its inception, the American Federation of Labor opposed employment of children under sixteen because their super-low earnings undercut adult pay levels.

Juvenile workers played an active role in early labor struggles. At the turn of the century, child coal miners were organized into "junior locals." The weekly union meeting was the great event in the lives of these young miners. They debated about wages, hours, and working conditions, and such discussions sometimes led to strikes.

Their sisters in the textile mills also asserted themselves through union actions. In 1903 *McClure's* magazine described how one textile strike was called by young unionists because a girl was being crippled from operating a treadle. That same year, the "children's march" of young textile workers caught the attention of the nation. In her autobiography, labor organizer Mother Jones provided the background for the dramatic event:

"In the spring of 1903 I went to Kensington, Pennsylvania, where seventy-five thousand textile workers were on strike. Of this number at least ten thousand were little children. The workers were striking for more pay and shorter hours. Every day little children came into Union Headquarters, some with their hands off, some with the thumb missing, some with their fingers off at the knuckle. They were stooped little things, round shouldered and skinny."

Mother Jones led a group of these children in a march from Philadelphia to Oyster Bay to confront President Theodore Roosevelt. Although they failed to meet with the president, they aroused favorable public attention. By holding meetings in cities along their route, they publicized the horrors of child labor and collected money for the textile strikers.

Such activities helped to inspire and sustain a vigorous social reform movement to combat the crippling effects of industrial employment on children's health and education. The outrage felt by many was expressed in crusader Sarah Cleghorn's famous short poem:

> The golf links lie so near the mill
> That almost every day
> The laboring children can look out
> And see the men at play.

Employers fought the unions, ignored the reformers, and hired even more children. The bosses were backed up by the U.S. Supreme Court which twice ruled federal child labor legislation unconstitutional. Child labor practices were not effectively challenged until the emergence of powerful unions in basic industries during the 1930s. The Fair Labor Standards Act, approved in 1938, limited the types, hours, and conditions of employment of children.

Employers Flout Federal and State Laws

Refusing to give up their cut-rate young workers, bosses have utilized loopholes in child labor regulations, and constantly pressure Congress to weaken provisions and allow exemptions. Thousands of employers simply ignore the law, safe in the knowledge that underage employees can't complain without losing their jobs, that government inspection hardly exists, and that punishment for violations is insignificant.

This state of affairs was summed up in front page headlines published in the March 30, 1971, issue of the *Wall Street Journal:* "More Companies Turn to Illegal Child Labor in Cost-Cutting Drive; Kids of 7 Get Sweat-Box Jobs, Rail Accident Kills Boy of 14, but Few Firms Are Punished." Examples in the article included: 33 underage youths employed to roll logs by a Maine company (one of the hazardous occupations prohibited by law); 340 minors illegally employed by a Pennsylvania-based chain of hamburger stands; minors under 16 making up half the work force of a Detroit motel-restaurant. One of the motel-restaurant owners explained, "Parents begged us to hire

children so they would know where they were at night." Behind that civic virtue excuse, the real reason slipped out: "Some 15-year-olds work harder than older youths because they know how lucky they are to have a job."

Most violations reported for 1971 were in recreational facilities, retail and service industries, and advertising distributors. Nine-year-old children were found working in construction, manufacturing, and retail and service jobs. Children ranging from eleven to fifteen years of age were found working ten to fourteen hours a day. When his facility was being checked, a fireworks manufacturer tried to hide 46 juvenile workers who ranged in age from nine to seventeen years. They assembled firecrackers, and made and mixed explosive ingredients. A retail food chain employed over 300 minors, many under sixteen, to operate power-driven meat-cutting machines and band saws.

In 1979 a special state task force investigated the exploitation of immigrant workers in Southern California. Over 600 citations were issued for violations of state child labor laws; half involved the garment industry, the other half involved fast-food outlets. Ten years later, Latino and Asian immigrant families were still being victimized. State labor inspectors documented a widespread pattern of severe abuses in the Southern California garment industry during 1989. One case involved a garment worker whose employment began when he was seven years old. Helping his mother produce designer clothing for a major Los Angeles junior sportswear label, he worked every day after school until at least 9:00 p.m. and all day Saturday. He fell so far behind in school that he was demoted a grade. His ten- and fourteen-year-old sisters also worked in the family's small apartment for over forty hours a week to earn wages averaging about $1.45 an hour. The sweatshop owner who employed the family signed a consent decree to repay almost $23,000 in minimum and overtime wages owed to the family—but the business was closed and the family didn't receive a penny. This and similar cases were only "the tip of the iceberg," according to California's labor commissioner. It was estimated that about half of the approximately 400 garment contractors in Orange County were giving piecework to home employees—in violation of federal and state labor laws.

In 1985 the U.S. Department of Labor and state labor commissioners across the country investigated firms that exploited children who sell door-to-door (other than sales by Little Leaguers, Girl Scouts, other youth groups or newspaper carriers). The description of the situation of these "kiddy peddlers" sounded like scenes from a Dickens novel. Crew leaders gathered up children from poor neighborhoods, drove the youngsters long distances from home, and threatened to abandon them if they didn't sell enough candy.

According to official government figures, illegal employment of children increased by more than 50 percent in 1987. In 1989 there were five times as many *recorded* violations of federal child labor laws as ten years before. And *discovered* violations in 1990 already show an upward trend from last year.

Legalizing Discrimination

Court action against employers violating child labor laws has been rare. Most are given a warning which boils down to, "Don't do it again." Government leniency has been compounded by repeated campaigns by the Labor Department and the White House to make it legal to pay young workers less than older ones. In a report made public in 1973, the Labor Department proposed a separate minimum wage for young workers. Calling this a "youth differential," the White House urged Congress to enact a two-tiered scale which would allow employers to hire young workers at $1.60 an hour while adults would get $2.30 an hour. Although this was presented as a means to combat juvenile delinquency and help youths in poverty and minority families, it was clear that impoverished and minority youth would *not* be helped by such a scheme. Only the employers would benefit from driving down wage levels, and squeezing extra profits from workers whose age puts them at the bottom of the heap when it comes to earnings and working conditions. A subminimum youth wage would be a windfall for employers already hiring young workers anyway.

In 1981 the U.S. Senate considered a proposal to allow employers to pay workers between sixteen and twenty years of age a minimum wage of $2.52 an hour—instead of the legal minimum of $3.35. Supporters of this change argued that a lower minimum would open job opportunities for youth in low-income and nonwhite families, would keep young people from taking drugs or engaging in crimes, and would build teenagers' sense of responsibility and self-worth. The president of the Los Angeles Urban League refuted such claims by pointing out:

"Lowering the minimum wage for youth would not in and of itself create new jobs in substantial numbers—and this is what is needed most. . . . Another deficiency of the subminimum-wage proposition is that it provides no guarantee of accessibility to jobs for inner-city youth. While they are locked into the ghetto and barrio, the jobs are elsewhere, increasingly in suburbia.

". . . The final point to be made against the subminimum-wage scheme is that those unethical employers who wish to replace adult workers—many of whom have families to feed—with lower-paid teenage workers will be able to do so. Under the guise of offering opportunities to youth, some exploiters will use this excuse to bump older workers with limited skills at the job entry level. This could create an unhealthy competition between teenage and adult workers."

Similar arguments were presented by Sol Chaikin of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union during a 1984 attempt to set a subminimum wage for youths. The ILGWU spokesperson noted that the effects of such a lower wage would be devastating in inner-city areas where large numbers of low-wage-earning adults live and work.

To date, efforts to establish an across-the-board "youth differential" have been beaten back—but the current minimum wage law ($3.80 per hour) allows bosses to pay $3.35 an hour to teenage "trainees" employed in their first job. *Illegal* lower wages for juvenile workers exist around the U.S. And the employers, aided by politicians, attack on other fronts. In 1981, for example, the Reagan administration

announced a partial lifting of the 40-year ban on industrial work in the home. AFL-CIO research director Rudy Oswald denounced the move, stating: "It renews the danger for the same child-labor abuses which existed so extensively prior to the ban on home-work imposed under the Fair Labor Standards Act in the early 1940s." The secretary of labor was forced to back down in the face of strong opposition from labor and children's rights advocates.

The rise of powerful unions in the 1930s eliminated child labor in many industries, and today's still-potent labor movement can exert counterpressures to the employers' campaigns to legalize abusive juvenile labor practices. But child labor persists in scandalous proportions in agriculture where union organization remains weak to this day.

Child Labor in Agriculture

In 1974 Congress approved regulations making it illegal for children under twelve to work in the fields. When the 1974 summer harvest drew near, strawberry growers in Washington and Oregon complained that they would lose millions of dollars if they could not pursue their regular practice of hiring youngsters to harvest their crops. They estimated that 35 percent of their workforce would be affected by the new law. Their arguments persuaded a federal court to grant a temporary injunction to stop enforcement of the regulation.

Following up on this temporary victory, Northwest growers pressured legislators to change the law permanently. East Coast congresspersons were lobbied by Maine potato farmers who claimed that their crops could not be brought in without the help of students. Responding to the persistent pressures from growers, Congress amended the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1977 to allow children under twelve to work in the fields.

The legal hiring of youngsters was opposed by a spokesperson for a migrant workers' lobby because growers would not hire adults who were available and needed the work. Ruth Jordan, of the National Consumers League, described the health and safety dangers for very young children—including exposure to pesticides and increased numbers of "finger-mashings, scalpings and decapitations." But the Carter administration obliged the growers by establishing procedures for granting waivers to permit the legal employment of children under twelve. Of course, *illegal* use of youngsters was widespread.

Why were growers so insistent on utilizing very young workers? Simple arithmetic. The Labor Department reported in 1971 that more than one-fourth of the seasonal farm workforce (about 800,000) were children under sixteen; almost half were between ten and thirteen. In states such as Washington and Louisiana children made up as much as 75 percent of the seasonal farm workforce. In Oregon over 50 percent of the bean crop harvested in the late 1970s was the result of juvenile workers under fourteen earning an average of forty cents an hour. The 1975 potato crop in Maine was gathered by more than 15,000 children aged five and older. Take hundreds of thousands of child harvesters across the U.S. and multiply that number by the cut-rate wages they receive—and it equals superprofits for agribusiness.

To listen to the growers, you would never know they were motivated by anything so crude as money. In Louisiana, where children made up as much as 75 percent of the seasonal farm labor force, growers claimed that without the youngsters the crops would rot in the fields and migrant family income would suffer. A 1972 experiment exposed that fraud. The National Committee on the Education of Migrant Children got the Labor Department to enforce child labor laws in one parish. The results? The crop was satisfactorily harvested by unemployed adults hired at higher wages than the children had been earning.

In 1990, growers told NBC reporters that hiring youngsters was necessary due to labor shortages, and that paying legal minimum wages would force production costs to go up and result in higher prices for consumers. But these claims were refuted by Michael Durando, spokesperson for the California Grape and Tree Fruit League. In the March 1st NBC television broadcast, Durando stated that California growers were able to maintain an adequate adult labor supply, pay the minimum wage, and still compete effectively with other states such as Texas and Florida.

Three-hundred-year-old arguments are being used to justify child labor in the fields and orchards. It is claimed that farm work helps develop healthy bodies and good moral character. The truth is that agriculture is one of the three most hazardous industries in the U.S. Dangerous machines are constant threats. Crippling and fatal accidents are frequent. The specific examples revealed in the early 1970s were gruesome: a twelve-year-old girl getting her ponytail caught in a potato-digging machine which ripped off her scalp, ears, eyelids, and cheeks; a five-year-old mangled and killed in a feed conveyor; a four-year-old boy having his right arm ripped off when it got caught in a corn auger. Today's farms are even more mechanized and dangerous.

Farm work induces long-term health problems. In the mid-1970s, the American Friends Service Committee reported that the life expectancy of a child born into a Mexican-American migrant family in Washington state was only 38 years. A significant factor in this is the effects of pesticides—ever-present in farm work, and often sprayed on fields and workers alike from low-flying aircraft. The Salud Medical Clinic in Tulare, California, found pesticide poisoning in almost 50 percent of the migrant children studied in the late 1960s. In 1975 newspapers reported the continuing pesticide problems afflicting agricultural workers. One article featured the case of nine-year-old Jimmy Brooks who died of chemical pneumonitis. He had been working in a New Jersey tomato field while an adjoining area was being treated with insecticide by a crop-sprayer. Despite such publicity, health and safety problems continued throughout the 1980s—and still persist as shown in the NBC investigative report broadcast on March 1, 1990.

The physical dangers to young farm workers are matched by the educational handicaps they carry with them throughout their lives. They are consistently below normal grade levels for their age—when they can get into school at all. Material presented at congressional hearings in 1971 noted that the median number of years of education for U.S. adults was 12.1 years but for Anglo migrants it was 10 years, and for Mexican-American migrants it was 5.4 years. Al-

though various states boasted of special schools for migrant children, these facilities were often open only six months a year, and segregated migrants from other children. In a typical pattern, children worked in the field from 6:00 a.m. until noon or 1:00 p.m., ate lunch, and then attended classes until late afternoon. The latest reports show that young farm workers have a higher dropout rate and miss more school than any other group.

Organizing Farm Workers' Unions

The disastrous results of child labor in agriculture are well-documented. The remedies are obvious: higher wages for adult farm workers so that parents are not forced to make their children labor in the fields and orchards; childcare centers for children of migrant workers; adequate farm inspections to uncover all illegal hiring practices; severe punishment of violators with money fines which can be used to help finance housing, schooling, and health needs of workers and their families. These improvements will not come from politicians or government officials. What happened in California shows that organizing a strong farm workers' union is the key to improving conditions for farm workers' families.

The United Farm Workers of America (UFW) campaigned vigorously for passage of a state ballot initiative in 1976 to strengthen California's farm labor law. A large UFW poster, demanding "Stop child labor," featured the photo of a twelve-year-old girl working in 108-degree weather, and paid 35 cents for a bag containing 40 pounds of onions. She was shown transferring onions from a discarded pesticide can into a bag.

The normal curtain of invisibility thrown over child labor in the fields was lifted in the summer of 1980 during union representation elections. Children as young as six voted in elections hastily called by the state to ease tensions in a strike against producers of 90 percent of the nation's garlic crop. Inspired by this labor action, strikes spread to other crops, resulting in the largest farm workers' strike of the year. Growers suddenly became very concerned over child labor laws which bar children under twelve from working. They claimed the youngsters could not vote because they were in the fields illegally. A state agent explained, "It may be against the law for the children to work in the fields, but they do, and there is no law against them voting in these elections."

Carrying UFW flags, the child laborers walked through the fields to the polling booths. The large number of juvenile workers was revealed when they lined up with their parents to vote for the UFW. After winning union recognition, an interim settlement brought substantial wage gains.

As a result of UFW strength, California has the best labor laws in the country covering agricultural workers. The weakening of the UFW in recent years has led to diminished protection for farm workers, and the continued super-exploitation of child labor in fields and orchards.

Child Labor in Different Kinds of Societies

The long history of child labor in the U.S. shows that youngsters have been employed in order to cut costs, maintain a more docile labor force, and lower the wage standards of adult workers. The best defense working people have against the bosses' schemes is to eliminate child labor in the cities and on the farms. And the way to abolish the super-exploitation of juvenile workers is to establish and maintain strong labor organizations.

But child labor does not have to be exploitative and destructive of young people's health, safety, and education – as it is in capitalist societies. There could be many benefits in involving youth in the productive life of society. The artificial separation between work and education could be erased. The economic dependence of children on parents could be dissolved. The nonperson status of young people could be transformed. In order to create more positive relations between juveniles and adults, we need to transform our present profit-driven society with a world organized to satisfy people's needs and to respect human rights. ●

Correction

There were two errors in the translation of Ernest Mandel's interview from *Inprecor* in the last issue of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism:*

- 1) Page 28, left-hand column, the paragraph that begins "The second requirement would be. . . ." The second sentence should read: "Therefore, it is not a question of 6 billion dollars a year, but 60 or 100 billion dollars per year in the growth of 'East-West exchanges.'"
- 2) Page 29, right-hand column, the first sentence immediately after the subhead "Neither bureaucratic despotism nor the dictatorship of the market!" should read: "The third factor, the most important, is the lack of revolutionary leadership and of a precise understanding concerning objectives."

The Workers' Organization for Socialist Action was founded recently in Cape Town, South Africa. Dr. Neville Alexander, former Robben Island prisoner, is chairperson and Ms. Jean Pease is general secretary of the new organization. A member of WOSA who was in the United States this spring made the following documents available to the ***Bulletin in Defense of Marxism.***

Founding Resolution of the Workers' Organization for Socialist Action

We, at the Founding Conference of the Workers' Organization for Socialist Action, on this day, April 14, 1990, in Cape Town, South Africa

NOTING THAT:

1. The interests of the working class, and the oppressed and exploited masses in general, can best be advanced and defended in a consistent manner through the creation of an independent political organization of the working class, and
2. The resurgence of mass struggles, the ever-increasing participation and radicalization of both rural and urban masses, and the era of reform and negotiation, all create opportunities and dangers. This lends enormous urgency to the task of forming and building a socialist organization.

RESOLVE to found and build a national unitary organization based on the following principles:

1. The organization shall strive to have a clear socialist perspective, and shall be rooted in the working class and its struggles.
2. Only through its self-organization and activity can the working class bring about socialist transformation. By implication, we reject all reformist roads to socialism.
3. The organization shall place working class interests in the forefront of its struggle against all forms of class, racial, and sexual oppression and exploitation.
4. The organization will give support to national liberation organizations insofar as they advance the struggle against oppression and exploitation, but will at all times strive to put forward working class interests in the struggle. It is committed to the tactic of the united front to enable it to act in a manner that places the interests of the working class first on its agenda.
5. The organization shall be based on discipline, cohesion, and collective functioning, developed through democratic debate.
6. The organization shall actively build and support all structures and organizations of the working class and the oppressed by striving to give leadership which assists in building the self-confidence, combativity, and class consciousness of the working class in its fight against exploitation and oppression.
7. Internationalism is a fundamental principle of socialism since capitalism is an international system. Consequently, socialism cannot be built in one country. The struggle for socialism is therefore a worldwide struggle in which the organization recognizes that its struggle is linked to the struggles of oppressed and exploited people throughout the world and commits itself to support and defend working class organizations in all countries.

Proposed Resolution on Negotiations

It is clear that secret negotiations between the government and the ANC [African National Congress] have already begun. The various meetings between Mandela and senior ministers of the government, the meetings with government officials and members of the ANC abroad, and the forthcoming three-day meeting between a government delegation and a senior delegation of the ANC point to this.

For the government the strategy of negotiations represents a decisive initiative to win the time and space to extract itself from the economic, social, and political crisis that the system of apartheid is in.

It is unclear what the ANC and SACP [South African Communist Party], who support a negotiated settlement, expect to gain from negotiations. It is obvious that negotiations cannot deliver the transfer of power from the minority to the oppressed masses.

The balance of forces between the government and the liberation movement is still starkly in favor of the government. Although the regime faces a deep economic crisis which makes it vulnerable to international pressure, power is firmly entrenched in its hands. The state institutions rest on a secure and stable basis of the majority of whites. Racism has served to insulate state structures from the struggles of the oppressed. The mass struggles over the last few years have managed to stretch the capacity of the state to rule in the old way.

While the government is prepared to get rid of most of the racial laws on the statute books, such as the Group Areas Act and even the Population Registration Act, they are not ready to hand over power to the majority. The government could reintegrate the bantustans into South Africa and may even formally introduce some form of universal franchise. However the government will not grant majority rule. They will insist on some form of minority rights or veto for the whites. This is necessary to ensure that economic wealth and

privilege remain in the hands of the white capitalist class and their class allies.

Negotiations with the government cannot deliver the national democratic demands, never mind the social or proletarian demands, that have come to occupy a central place in the liberation struggle. If a negotiated settlement were to occur this would mean that the representatives of the liberation movement would have to compromise on these central demands. Such a settlement could not deliver a non-racial unitary SA/Azania. This the ANC and Mandela have already begun to concede by expressing their willingness to consider minority rights, the shift away from nationalization of major industries, and even viewing separate white schooling as something that can be conceded. If De Klerk moved in the direction of granting majority rule, his social base, the white electorate, would desert him and he and or his party would be replaced by someone who would continue to guarantee white power albeit under new forms.

The African National Congress and the SACP have embarked on a major initiative both nationally and internationally to bring about a negotiated settlement with the government. They believe that the depth of the economic crisis, the current balance of class forces, the international pressure for a peaceful settlement, coming as it does in the context of the drive by the USSR to make peace with Western imperialism, create enough pressure on the SA government to force it to negotiate a non-racial democratic political settlement.

This position has become the dominant view in the UDF [United Democratic Front], COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions], and in their affiliates. However amongst their grassroots supporters the support for negotiations is contradictory. While a substantial section of the masses hold out great hope (illusions) in negotiations bringing about democracy and relieving the wretchedness of their lives, the more militant sections of the working class and the youth are deeply suspicious of negotiations with the government. We see this in the waves of spontaneous struggles that have exploded in the bantustans and in the townships of the country and the growth of the PAC [Pan-Africanist Congress], which has taken a very militant antinegotiations stance.

Our position is quite clear.

In our political education for our cadre and in our propaganda we need to explain that a negotiated settlement cannot result in majority rule. We need to explain that in order to win national liberation, it requires the working class leading the struggle, to overthrow the state, establish workers' power, take over the control of the heights of the economy under the democratic control of workers' councils.

But to counterpose socialist revolution to negotiations, when in the current period the maturing of a revolutionary situation is still remote, is meaningless for the mass of workers. Whereas in the 1984-87 period there were elements of a revolutionary situation just beginning to develop, the present period is one in which the state has managed to stabilize itself. Socialist revolution is not at the moment on the immediate agenda of the struggle. Counterposing socialist revolution to negotiations will only make sense to a small number of socialist activists in the movement.

Our agitation and our general political intervention must act as a bridge between the present consciousness of the masses and the program of our organization.

Thus, given the relationship of forces between the masses and the state and the relationship of forces between the left and the Congress movement, our agitation cannot be directed on the need for socialist revolution. We need to intervene in the real events of the moment and allow the taking up of discussions and united front tasks with all those looking for a solution. Our agitation must be oriented to advancing mass struggles through which the working class can learn from these experiences that negotiations are not in their class interest. Whereas those who have committed themselves to negotiations are embarrassed by the mass strikes, demonstrations, and uprisings that are sweeping the country and are at pains to demobilize the masses out of fear that it will destabilize negotiations, we need to be seen to be defending these struggles.

On the present negotiations we ought to call for a parliament of the oppressed where all the mass and political organizations will be represented on the basis of representation from rank-and-file structures. Before that happens no organization can claim the right to begin negotiations with the government and speak in the name of all of us. Defending a spirit of unity and democracy means beginning by accepting discussion and the political plurality of the struggle.

We counterpose to the strategy of negotiations a non-negotiable fight for:

- One person one vote without any restrictions, the right of veto and "guarantees." On this basis the immediate formation of a single electoral body including the population in the bantustans.
- Immediate abolition of all racial legislation, e.g., the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act, etc.
- Dismantling of the repressive forces and fascist groups.
- Dismantling of the bantustans.
- Agrarian reform that allows distribution and the nationalization of the big landholdings.
- The nationalization of the banks and mines.
- The right of veto for the unions, over hiring, redundancies, working conditions, and industrial restructuring.

To strengthen the position of the working class we must pursue:

- The building of NACTU [National Council of Trade Unions] and COSATU, towards unification in a single confederation.
- Democracy and plurality of viewpoints in the trade union movement.
- Rebuilding the civic associations on a unitary democratic basis, federated nationally on the basis of rank-and-file representation.
- The independence of the trade union movement in relation to all political forces. ●

Nicaragua and Revolutionary Marxism

by Paul Le Blanc

Lloyd D'Aguilar's assessment of "Nicaragua and the Pitfall of a Mixed Economy," in his polemic of the same name in last month's issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism,* confronts the Fourth Internationalist Tendency with a sharp critique of our analysis of the Sandinist regime which held power from 1979 to 1990.

It is impossible to build a revolutionary socialist movement in the United States on the basis of a hazy understanding of the question in a far more revolutionary situation. If we settle for either "sectarian ignorance" or "opportunist tail-ending" in the face of revolutionary realities in Nicaragua, then we will be ill-prepared to provide adequate leadership in our own revolutionary struggles of the future.

Not restricting himself to the specifics of Nicaragua, D'Aguilar criticizes us for pessimistically rejecting the possibility of socialist revolutions in the third world, scolding us for adopting a position close to that of the moderate-socialist Mensheviks of Russia who argued, against the revolutionary Bolsheviks, that the working class must not try to take power in an economically underdeveloped country. He sees us as turning our backs on the lessons of the Russian Revolution, and also as converting Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution into a theory of revolution by stages (democratic revolution now, socialist revolution "later"). He urges us to recognize that the Cuban revolution's rapid elimination of capitalism in the early 1960s shows the way forward for Nicaragua today.

The short answer to this is that we do not deny the possibility of socialist revolutions in third world countries, nor do we agree with the Menshevik notion that the working class shouldn't take power in such countries. To the contrary – but the revolutions won't lead to socialism and the workers cannot hold on to power *unless they are aided by revolutions taking place elsewhere.* For this reason we give much greater stress than do our critics to the *practical necessity* of revolutionary internationalism. We embrace the "Russian model" of revolution, as developed by the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, but think we have to understand it more fully. Related to this, we view the theory of permanent revolution not as an abstract schema which looks the same everywhere, and which dictates precisely the same strategy everywhere, but as a description of broad revolutionary dynamics which take on historically specific forms shaped by national peculiarities. The Russian experience of 1917-27 must look different from that of Nicaragua in 1979-89. The "Cuban road" was also historically specific. The Nicaraguans have had much to learn from both the Cuban and Russian experiences, but they have been compelled to seek their own distinctive path.

We are not content to leave it at that, however, because Lloyd D'Aguilar's critique provides a genuine opportunity to further develop our analysis through a discussion with a valued comrade.

The willingness to discuss differences on important political issues is essential for genuine revolutionaries and – now more than ever – is a necessary part of the process of building a revolutionary party in the United States. All Fourth Internationalist currents should seek to encourage such discussion.

It is especially important for us to understand and learn from such events as the electoral defeat of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua. Coming to an adequate understanding is a collective process in which sharp but comradely debate can play a key role.

Mistaken Notions

D'Aguilar accuses us of giving "uncritical support" to the Sandinistas and of slipping into "mindless cheerleading." This is wrong. We have supported the Sandinistas with our eyes open, critical optic nerves intact. If he reexamines what we have written, from *Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua,* published by the FIT in 1984, down to my report to the FIT National Organizing Committee plenum, published in the April 1990 issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism,* he will be reminded of the fact that we have expressed a number of criticisms. In this response to him he will also find a critical-minded assessment of Nicaragua's revolutionary vanguard, the FSLN.

The real problem that this comrade has with us is *not* that we have been uncritical, but that we happen to disagree with a specific and more fundamental criticism of the FSLN advanced by comrades in the organization Socialist Action (SA), most fully in Alan Benjamin's book *Nicaragua, Dynamics of an Unfinished Revolution.*

This more fundamental criticism advanced against the Sandinistas is that they were wrong to maintain a mixed economy instead of, as D'Aguilar puts it, introducing "socialist measures as a means of strengthening the revolution." He feels that "the Sandinista decision not to deepen the revolution as Cuba did" meant "setting the stage for their electoral demise." He goes further than this when he writes (restating the views of the SA comrades): "To ask what the Sandinistas could have done differently is to raise the question of whether they represented the historical interests of the workers and peasants, given the fact that they had the power to create a society which reflected those interests." Lloyd D'Aguilar quotes with apparent approval the Socialist Action call for "a new political party in Nicaragua based on the historic program of the Fourth International which will provide an alternative to the mistaken policies of the Sandinista leadership."

This critique is full of mistaken notions which, if implemented, could be fatal to the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua and elsewhere. For Trotskyists it is especially important to correct these ideas because they are advanced under the banner of an ill-conceived "orthodox" Trotskyism. Although he demonstrates greater political maturity than SA simply because he wants to have a serious *discussion* of the

Since the Inauguration of Chamorro

This article was completed just before the mass strike which shook Nicaragua in the middle of May. Before looking at this strike, it may also be useful to take note of an article by James Petras, "Roots of the FSLN's Defeat," in the May/June 1990 issue of *Against the Current*. Perhaps in spite of himself, the author offers partial corroboration of our own analysis of the present nature of the Nicaraguan state, as well as a valuable insight whose logic brings us directly to a consideration of the May strike.

Petras is a Marxist scholar whose outlook was shaped, in part, by the Trotskyist movement to which he once belonged. An internationally respected authority on revolution and counter-revolution in Latin America, what he has to say always merits serious consideration, even when he's wrong. After the Sandinistas took power in 1979, for example, he wrote in the October issue of *Monthly Review* a lucid and informative analysis in which, nonetheless, he told his readers that power was being turned over by the FSLN to bourgeois modernizers—an assessment which he himself was soon compelled to abandon. Despite this, his writings on Nicaragua remain a valuable resource.

"The electoral results were tragic, not only for Nicaragua and Central America, but for progressive forces everywhere," he writes in *Against the Current*, and he makes it clear that he blames the FSLN. Petras combines the type of critical observations which we have made here with more severe judgments such as those Lloyd D'Aguilar has advanced, presenting what appears to be an uncompromising left-wing indictment of Sandinista policies (also taking pot- shots at unnamed "overseas theoreticians"). The February elections constitute a "political debacle" which is simply the culmination of the Sandinistas' "disorderly retreat" in the face of imperialist pressure since the mid-1980s. At the conclusion of his article, however, readers will find him backpedaling: "The electoral outcome in Nicaragua is a temporary and partial setback in the larger historical process." He explains:

> In world-historical perspective, the socialist revolution will not end with the electoral defeat of the Ortega regime. Even in Nicaragua *the struggle for state power is far from resolved.* The bourgeoisie has gained a portion of power, namely control over the political regime. *The working class and urban and rural poor are still the dominant force in civil society,* through the mass organizations *and in the state,* through the popular army, judiciary and police. (Emphases added.)

Precisely.

Petras adds: "Attempts by the new [Chamorro] regime to purge the state and repress the popular organizations are likely to provoke a crisis, conflict and possibly ignite a civil war." This also corresponds precisely to our analysis. What we did not expect, to be quite frank, was that there would be such a rapid confirmation as has been provided by the mass strike of the public workers. "Many Nicaraguans had come to believe that a confrontation between the Sandinista leadership and Mrs. Chamorro's Government was only a matter of time," *New York Times* correspondent Mark Uhlig reported. "But many, including senior Sandinista leaders, appeared to be taken off guard by the timing of the current dispute, which appears to have been pressed forward in large part by government leaders in an attempt to face down Sandinista labor strength while the new Government still enjoys a burst of post-inauguration popularity." ("Strikes Testing Chamorro's Rule: Sandinistas Defy Ultimatum and Expand Stoppages," *New York Times,* May 16, 1990.)

There were two issues in question. One issue was the desire of workers to make good on Chamorro's promise that their standard of living would improve when "good relations" with the United States were reestablished—a desire taking the form of union demands for a 200 percent pay increase to partially make up for the ravages of inflation. The other issue was the decision of Chamorro to begin dismantling earlier FSLN-passed laws—in this case a civil service law designed to protect state workers' jobs (that at the same time maintained Sandinista influence in the state apparatus). The FSLN public employees union began to resist this attempt to purge government jobs and overturn the law, first with a work slowdown, then with a strike. Chamorro's minister of labor, Francisco Rosales Argüello, took a tough "no negotiations" line, declared the strike illegal, and threatened massive firings.

Far from being intimidated, well over half of the 150,000 government workers mobilized in the week-long strike, and they were joined by other workers as well, bringing Managua to a halt as they picketed, marched, rallied, and occupied government buildings. According to May 16th reports on National Public Radio, among those involved in the militant protest were many workers who had voted for Chamorro, now expressing anger that they were being betrayed. *New York Times* reporter Uhlig commented that "the Chamorro Government appeared to have authority over the large, Sandinista-trained national police force, whose loyalties are considered a crucial variable in the current standoff." But according to National Public Radio, the police were affected by the strikers' appeals for solidarity: "We're Sandinistas! You're Sandinistas too!" Uhlig acknowledged that "the Government apparently made no attempt to test the limits of its control because the police did not try to eject the crowds of Sandinista workers who occupied the buildings, chanting slogans such as 'Not one step back!' and 'Violeta, start packing your bags!'" Meanwhile, the FSLN-established courts invalidated the government's effort to characterize the strike as illegal. "The situation appeared stalemated," Uhlig commented, "leaving vital government services at a standstill and Sandinista strikers defiant." This defiance was reinforced by the fact that, while the government may have been "stalemated," the workers were in the process of winning.

The Chamorro regime finally backed down, agreeing to negotiate. The crisis was quickly resolved: the workers settled for only a 100 percent pay increase; the government halted its effort (for now) to junk the Sandinista civil service law. The workers and the FSLN came out of the conflict stronger than before. Yet it was recognized that this was merely the first round. A new crisis loomed ahead. "The new Government is also approaching a potentially explosive challenge when a June 10 deadline arrives for the demobilization of the Nicaraguan rebels," Uhlig pointed out just before the strike ended. "Contra leaders, denouncing the strike, have begun suggesting that they will not disarm if Mrs. Chamorro proves unable to face down the Sandinista-led job action." ("Chamorro Opens Talks in Strike, Little Progress Is Reported as the Walkout Paralyzes Nicaraguan Capital," *New York Times,* May 17, 1990.)

The Chamorro current is caught between its fear, on the one hand, of the contras (many of whom are brutal killers who feel little loyalty to a regime which is insufficiently reactionary) and, on the other hand, its fear of the organized power of Nicaragua's working people under Sandinist influence. In the short term, she must choose to be aligned with one or the other. If she maintains the choice against the contras (which seems to be the meaning of her decision to keep Humberto Ortega as head of the Sandinista People's Army), then the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie will remain divided—something the top FSLN leadership clearly hopes for and has sought to encourage.

The question which has been sharply posed by the May strike, however, is whether the tentative Chamorro-FSLN alliance is viable, given the existing class tensions and the obvious passion of the Chamorro regime to transform the Nicaraguan state into one which unambiguously has a bourgeois character. Sectors of the Sandinistas and the working class have demonstrated that they will not tolerate such a transformation. This could throw the Chamorro current into the abyss of reaction, setting the stage for civil war and possible U.S. military intervention.

Paul Le Blanc
May 18

differences, D'Aguilar himself falls into an all-too-easy method of some SA comrades in his polemic.

They believe they have The Truth, on the basis of which they are intent upon building The Revolutionary Party. Yet The Truth on which they base themselves sometimes involves schematic, mechanistic summaries of what Marxism means, what Lenin and Trotsky thought, what the Bolsheviks did, etc. These summaries are expressed with great self-assurance but, upon serious examination, consist of poorly documented and mistaken understandings of the history and theory of the Marxist movement. D'Aguilar dismisses our analysis which challenges these "orthodox" generalizations as "an academic exercise," and "nothing but tail-endism, or Trotskyist Menshevism." But such name-calling adds little weight to his political position which is based on two irredeemably mistaken notions: 1) that it adequately reflects Nicaraguan realities, and 2) that it accurately reflects the revolutionary approach of Leon Trotsky.

Let's take a closer look at these two questions.

Nicaraguan Realities

In past works we have focused considerable attention on a discussion of Nicaraguan realities, offering more statistical data and other documentation than D'Aguilar seems to find palatable. In a second edition of *Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua,* we intend to offer even more. Here we will restrict ourselves to a couple of points. In doing this, we will focus attention on the serious approach of revolutionaries whose analyses were similar to those of the SA comrades but who, after a closer look at the realities, have developed views closer to our own.

A left-wing British scholar named James Dunkerley wrote a useful book in 1982 entitled *The Long War, Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador,* along with an essay on the same topic in the fine 1983 anthology *Crisis in the Caribbean.* Dunkerley noted that the victory of the FSLN in Nicaragua had established a model for revolutionaries throughout the region. He questioned the value of this model, since he saw the FSLN regime as "authentically petty bourgeois in its Jacobinism, populism and *dirigisme* [statism], anti-capitalist in spirit, but under the pressure of the native bourgeoisie and the international banks on the one hand, and the workers and poor peasants on the other, forever oscillating between the two, and, up until now, continuing to guarantee capitalist property relations." He saw the Sandinistas following a Stalinist-influenced model involving "a cross-class alliance for the consummation of a popular democratic program combined with an implied stagist strategy towards the achievement of socialism."[1] After further research, however, Dunkerley moved beyond this SA-type perspective.

In his invaluable 1988 work, *Power in the Isthmus, A Political History of Modern Central America,* Dunkerley offers a far more sophisticated analysis which notes that within the FSLN one could find different currents reflecting "the varying politico-military projects of Leninists, Castroists and Social Democrats." He goes on to argue that the specific nature of Nicaragua's class structure (the substantial proportion of the population constituted by an impoverished urban "petty bourgeois" layer – semiproletarianized street vendors, informal service workers, etc. – and radicalized peasantry which were both "far from instinctively dedicated to collectivism") had a moderating impact on FSLN pronouncements: "Hence, whilst the Sandinista catechism insisted that only the workers and peasants would 'go all the way' (by implication, to socialism), socialism appeared only twice in the FSLN reunification agreement of March 1979, and its public use after the revolution was largely limited to urban working-class circles, where it was a traditional motif of syndicalism."[2]

Dunkerley notes that "the pattern of production and ownership since 1979 corresponds to neither a simple 'mixed economy' with a judicious and stable balance between public and private sectors nor a relentless advance of collectivization. . . . However, although the stated policy of the FSLN is not 'socialist,' it is explicitly founded upon the removal of political power from the bourgeoisie and dedicated to maintaining the conditions for profitability only insofar as these correspond to continued investment and production." He adds: "Both these factors have engendered a loss of confidence with the bourgeoisie and encouraged a widespread conviction that its existence is highly precarious and determined largely by the imperative of sustaining output in a period of acute crisis rather than by any genuine commitment on the part of the FSLN to a mixed economy." Dunkerley points out that the "the FSLN does publicly attach itself to the cause of socialism," but adds that it talks about only a gradual transition – and even this "with demonstrable caution."[3] He concludes:

> The post-1983 experience underscored in increasingly severe fashion the fragility of radical change in a small and backward economy. Since this was kept relatively "open" after 1979 Washington experienced little difficulty in making it "scream" just as it had destabilized the Chilean economy under *Unidad Popular.* The Sandinistas and their advisers had studied that experience very carefully but it was beyond their power to do anything more than mitigate the efforts of an assault that eroded the socio-economic reforms of 1979-82 and reduced the popular goodwill they had established.[4]

D'Aguilar responds that they should have deepened the revolution "as Cuba did." Alan Benjamin elaborates on the same point in "The Essential Lessons of the Nicaraguan Revolution" (*Socialist Action,* April 1990, p. 11): "The Sandinista revolution went only half way; it failed to follow the example of the Cuban revolution, which showed that to achieve genuine national independence it was necessary to go all the way – that is, to combine the revolution of national liberation against imperialism with the social revolution against capitalism." The Cuban revolution, unlike the Nicaraguan, eliminated capitalism through rapid and sweeping expropriations.

The problem with this is succinctly highlighted by our comrades who publish the excellent British magazine *Socialist Outlook.* We should point out that in last October's issue of the magazine, Benjamin's book was given a very positive review. In the April 1990 lead editorial, on the other hand, the *Socialist Outlook* comrades offer this sober assessment of the electoral defeat which capably underscores the essentials:

> Finally worn down by war and unconvinced that the Sandinistas could offer an economic future to match [bourgeois candidate] Violeta Chamorro's beguiling promises of renewed U.S. trade and aid, a majority of the Nicaraguan electorate became sufficiently demoralized to vote for the UNO coalition [of Chamorro].
>
> Fidel Castro from the outset advised the Sandinistas *not* to try to build a new Cuba, but simply to build "a new Nicaragua." There is no doubt that in the very different world conditions of 1979-90, the option of a 1960s-style "Cuban road," dependent as Castro has always been on Soviet aid, was never on offer to the FSLN, even had they wished to follow it.

If Comrade D'Aguilar, comrades of SA, or others have any idea of how the Nicaraguans can successfully take the "Cuban road" under such dramatically different international circumstances (i.e., without substantial material back-up from the USSR and Eastern Europe), they should share this information. Until they do, it will be difficult to take seriously their particular "solution" to the crisis facing the Nicaraguan revolution. This hardly means that the FSLN should never have taken power, simply that having done so they could not simply use Cuban economic blueprints to advance the revolution. They had to do the best they could under the quite different international circumstances. And they did pretty well – even if not perfectly.

Although the FSLN lost the election, the Nicaraguan revolution is not yet defeated. The future struggles of Nicaragua's working masses will be decisive in deciding the country's future (see box on recent developments in Nicaragua on p. 24). In our opinion, the FSLN remains the best force to lead this struggle. We favor Nicaraguan revolutionaries considering the ideas and finally embracing the program of the Fourth International, but anyone who does so belongs in the revolutionary vanguard – the Sandinista National Liberation Front. The FSLN is by no means a monolithic organization: the diverse perspectives of its cadres (which we have noted before) are reflected in post-election discussions and activity, and such diversity is a strength as the FSLN seeks to test and adjust to the complex new realities.

I have argued that the FSLN could not have won the election by nationalizing the economy. D'Aguilar challenges: "I would only ask why, if [Le Blanc] thinks it was not worth it for the Sandinistas to fight to hold on to power, would it be worth it now for them to fight for power as an 'oppositional' force. What new insight or perspective does he think that the Sandinistas now have to offer the Nicaraguan masses."

It is unfortunate that the comrade chooses to pose the question so badly. I have never denied that it was "worth it" for the Sandinistas to fight to hold on to power. They *did* fight to do precisely that, and all of us in the FIT supported them to the best of our abilities. But – for reasons to be more fully examined later in this article – the FSLN realized that an attempt to "strengthen the revolution" by moving forward to "socialism" would not have resulted in socialism and would have actually weakened the revolution further. This fact should not cause us to forget that the FSLN regime was committed to the removal of political power from the bourgeoisie (its very existence represented the negation of bourgeois political power), that it was committed to the working masses assuming greater and greater power in society, and that it was committed to policies that would advance the goal of effecting a transition to socialism. The FSLN was *qualitatively different* from the present Chamorro regime, which is committed to empowering the bourgeoisie at the expense of the working masses. The new government seeks the permanent triumph of a capitalist system through which profits for a few will be secured by the degradation and exploitation of the great majority.

The fact remains, however, that *until working class revolutions triumph in other countries* (especially in more industrially advanced countries), socialism is not one of the things that the Sandinistas will be able to offer to the working people of Nicaragua. This is why revolutionary internationalism is not a generous afterthought but rather a centerpiece of our strategic orientation, for Nicaragua as much as anywhere else. I would add that to be a revolutionary socialist does *not* mean demanding simply "socialism or death." It means fighting for reforms and "momentary interests of the working class," as the *Communist Manifesto* urges us to do, while at the same time representing and advancing the future of the liberation movement. It means struggling against imperialism and capitalist oppression, for immediate and democratic demands in the interests of the workers and the oppressed, with a perspective that integrates these efforts into a worldwide struggle for socialist democracy. This should be the perspective which Nicaraguan revolutionaries (and also U.S. revolutionaries) put forward to the majority of working people.

'Orthodox Trotskyism'

We have already addressed some of the theoretical questions raised by D'Aguilar in "Reflections on Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua" (*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 75). But the comrades deserve a more direct and complete response. He expresses concern for my "orthodox Trotskyist" soul, when he writes:

> What is even more disturbing is that Le Blanc proceeds to blame the "premature leap into a nationalized economy" for the erosion of workers' democracy and the bureaucratization of the Soviet state. It is surprising that someone as orthodox as Le Blanc, for the sake of defending the Sandinistas, should now be revising standard Trotskyist explanation for the rise of Stalinism and bureaucratism by offering this mono-causal explanation.

I think attentive readers of my original article "Understanding the Nicaraguan Revolution" (*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 67) will find that my explanation of Stalinism is not really "mono-causal." In fact, there are *three* causes on which I would focus in explaining the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. There are even more than three, but the focus on these can help to orient us for now. They are 1) the isolation of the Russian Revolution combined with 2) the backwardness and disintegration of the Russian economy and 3) the *perhaps unavoidable* (in the Russian case) premature leap into a nationalized economy.

1. On the first point, Trotsky is our guide: "Let us remember the prognosis of the Bolsheviks, not only on the eve of the October Revolution but years before. The specific alignment of forces in the national and international field can enable the proletariat to seize power first in a backward country such as Russia. But the same alignment of forces proves beforehand that *without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries* the workers' government in Russia will not survive. Left to itself the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate."[5] Contrary to what D'Aguilar suggests at one point, this is hardly an example of "Trotskyist *Menshevism,*" whatever that means, but could more accurately be called Leninist-Trotskyism.

2. D'Aguilar complains about "counterposing" this internationalist concern of Trotsky's to "the introduction of socialist measures" in an industrially backward country, but in this he doesn't stand on the terrain of Trotskyist "orthodoxy." In *The Revolution Betrayed,* Trotsky offers this quotation from the young Marx: "A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of communism], because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive." Trotsky comments that this "provides an indispensable theoretical key to the . . . difficulties and sickness of the Soviet regime. On the historic basis of destitution, aggravated by the destructions of the imperialist and civil wars, the 'struggle for individual existence' not only did not disappear the day after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and not only did not abate in the succeeding years, but, on the contrary, assumed at times an unheard-of ferocity." In an industrially backward country, without the assistance of socialist revolutions in more industrialized countries, so-called "socialist measures" do not yield socialism. Trotsky stresses that we must draw our understanding of the bureaucratized Soviet state "from the backwardness and isolatedness of the country."[6]

3. But there is an additional factor, which deserves more extended discussion here. Victor Serge wrote about it lucidly in the late 1920s, while a Left Oppositionist in the Soviet Union. His classic account *Year One of the Russian Revolution,* published in Paris in 1930, describes the resistance by Lenin, Trotsky, and the majority leadership of the Bolshevik party to pressures from many workers and also from the Left Communist faction inside the party "who advocated the most radical economic measures" – sweeping expropriations which would replace capitalism with a nationalized planned economy under workers' democratic management. This was seen as premature and utterly utopian under the conditions prevailing in the new Soviet Republic, and Lenin and Trotsky instead sought to maintain a mixed economy – with a state sector and private sector – until socialist revolutions in advanced industrial countries came to the rescue of the Soviet Republic. But the dual threat of foreign intervention and civil war caused them to conclude, finally, that their more moderate course had become untenable, because capitalists in charge of significant economic resources could work for the triumph of the revolution's enemies. Nationalizations were utilized as a mechanism for self-defense.

If Lenin and Trotsky decided this was necessary for Russia, asks D'Aguilar at one point, why shouldn't the same be true for Nicaragua? Because not every *tactic* adopted by the Bolsheviks in one specific conjuncture should be generalized into a *principle* for all situations. What may be a painful necessity in one crisis can be impossible or disastrous in another. Even in the embattled Soviet Republic, this desperate policy not only helped to save the revolution, but *at the same time* also helped to undermine it. "This expropriation of industry, verging ever closer to a total nationalization, placed an increasingly numerous population of workers within the responsibility of the Socialist State," Serge wrote, "and compelled it hastily to establish a body of functionaries, managers and administrators who could not be recruited straight away from among the working class. The bureaucracy was born, and was rapidly becoming a threat."[7]

Far from refuting this analysis, Trotsky elaborated on it in *The Revolution Betrayed.* "The first three years after the revolution were a period of overt and cruel civil war," he explained. "Economic life was wholly subjected to the needs of the front. . . . Military communism was, in essence, the systematic regimentation of consumption in a besieged fortress." But illusions quickly developed, similar to those of, for example, the SA comrades. Trotsky continued: "It is necessary to acknowledge, however, that in its original conception it pursued broader aims. The Soviet government hoped and strove to develop these methods of regimentation directly into a system of planned economy in distribution as well as production. In other words, from 'military communism' it hoped gradually, but without destroying the system, to arrive at genuine communism." Trotsky tells us that "the utopian hopes of the epoch of military communism came in later for a cruel, and in many respects just, criticism." He adds that "in its first period, the Soviet regime was undoubtedly far more equalitarian and less bureaucratic than now [1936]. But that was an equality of general poverty. The resources of the country were so scant that there was no opportunity to separate out from the masses of the population any broad privileged strata. At the same time the 'equalizing' character of wages, destroying personal interestedness, became a brake upon the development of the productive forces."[8]

The (in this case) unavoidable calamity of premature nationalizations in the period of war communism made military sense, but economically constituted a disaster which had political ramifications. "Democracy had been narrowed in proportion as difficulties increased," explained Trotsky. "In the beginning, the party had wished and hoped to preserve freedom of political struggle within the framework of the Soviets. The civil war introduced stern amendments into this calculation. The opposition parties were forbidden one after the other." At the same time, democracy within the Bolshevik party was also severely curtailed, and this "proved perfectly suited to the taste of the bureaucracy, which had then begun to approach the inner life of the party exclusively from the viewpoint of convenience in administration."[9] In a classic passage from *The Revolution Betrayed,* Trotsky offered this key insight:

> The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of

each against all. When there is enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy. It "knows" who is to get something and who has to wait.[10]

To advance production it became necessary to allow economic inequalities in order to create incentives – yet this further strengthened the bureaucracy. A New Economic Policy, reintroducing the market economy and small-scale capitalist production, became a necessary corrective to undo the damage of war communism. As the economy improved, the privileges and power of the bureaucracy also grew. At the end of the 1920s, the bureaucracy under Stalin shifted to implement "socialist measures," the replacing of the New Economic Policy with forced collectivization of the land and rapid industrialization. This was utilized to enhance the privileged bureaucracy's authoritarian stranglehold over society.

Another cause of Stalinism which many have stressed involves the undemocratic precedents established by the Bolsheviks during the early civil war period. "It is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the juridical point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian system," Trotsky commented. "But the reason for this development lies neither in Bolshevism nor in the prohibition of other parties as a temporary war measure, but in the number of defeats of the proletariat in Europe and Asia."[11] This surely has relevance for Nicaragua. While the Sandinistas were able to resist the creation of a "juridical point of departure" for totalitarianism, instead maintaining political pluralism and democratic freedoms, the fact remains that the failure of revolutions in other countries blocked the forward development of the Nicaraguan revolution. A serious examination of the experience of the USSR should make us skeptical of the assertion that a Sandinista variant of war communism would have enabled the Nicaraguans to overcome this obstacle.

Important as the experience of the Russian Revolution is for serious Marxists, it is important for us to be able to apply our perspective critically to new realities. It is instructive to see how Trotsky himself did this in Latin America during the final years of his life.

Trotsky on Revolution in Latin America

On November 4, 1938, Trotsky and other Fourth Internationalists who had gathered in Coyoacán began a far-ranging discussion of "Latin American Problems." One of the participants, Charles Curtiss, began with the comment that "comrades in Mexico, in Puerto Rico, in Cuba, and in other regions, such as I have been able to observe, have an extremely mechanical approach to the problems of permanent revolution." Complaining that "they take an idea, [and] tear it out of its context," he stressed: "Emphasis should be placed upon the study of each concrete case, not upon abstractions only but upon each concrete case." Trotsky commented: "Yes, I believe that Comrade Curtiss is right. The question is of tremendous importance; and schematism of the formula of permanent revolution can become and does become from time to time extremely dangerous to our movement in Latin America."[12]

To understand Trotsky's thinking, it may be best to focus on the case of Mexico, about which he commented at length during 1939. He was dealing with a country which (unlike Nicaragua) had not experienced a proletarian revolution, but his comments obviously were also meant to have a broader application.

Trotsky observed that Mexico was an industrially backward country in which foreign capital plays a decisive role, "hence the relative weakness of the *national* bourgeoisie in relation to the *national* proletariat." This gave the Mexican government a "Bonapartist character" as it veered between foreign and domestic capital, and "between the weak national bourgeoisie and the relatively powerful proletariat."[13]

The government under the radical-nationalist President Lázaro Cárdenas had chosen the second, more radical course: it carried out expropriations of the railroads and the oil industries, with the state assuming the role of capitalist in these two nationalized sectors but at the same time seeking to enhance the living standards and the participation of the organized working class. Trotsky noted that "in a semi-colonial country state capitalism finds itself under the heavy pressure of private foreign capital and of its governments, and cannot maintain itself without the active support of the workers." In addition to the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the radical-nationalist state apparatus, Trotsky stressed the importance of the majority of Mexico's population subsisting in the rural villages, and he saw their liberation as central to the larger revolutionary struggle: "The large parasitic or semiparasitic landed proprietors, the economic and political domination of the landowners over the peasants, forced agricultural labor, the quasi-patriarchal sharecropping system, which is fundamentally equivalent to slavery – these are the things that must be definitively liquidated in the shortest possible time."[14]

Mexican revolutionary socialists, and the Mexican working class as a whole, in Trotsky's opinion, should make common cause with the revolutionary policies of the radical-nationalist government, while at the same time maintaining their own political independence: "In the agrarian question we support the expropriations. That does not signify, of course, that we support the national bourgeoisie. In every case where it is a direct fight against the foreign imperialists or their reactionary fascist agents, we give revolutionary support, preserving the full political independence of our organization, of our program, of our party, and the full freedom of our criticism."[15] In Trotsky's opinion, the struggle for a workers' revolution in such a context must be rooted *not in appeals for socialism,* but in appeals to carry through the democratic struggle:

> The working class of Mexico participates, cannot help but participate, in the movement, in the struggle for independence of the country, for the democratization of the agrarian relations, and so on. In this way the proletariat can come to power before the independence of Mexico is assured and the agrarian relations are reorganized. Then the workers' government can become an instrument in order to resolve these questions.

It can occur; possibly it will occur. But it is necessary to lead, to guide the workers—issuing from the democratic tasks to the taking of power. Not to pose an abstract socialist dictatorship to the real needs and desires of the masses, but starting from these daily struggles to oppose the national bourgeoisie on the basis of the workers' needs, winning the leadership of the workers and gaining power.[16]

What do we see here? Trotsky calls for the working class to take power (i.e., what is sometimes labeled "dictatorship of the proletariat"), but he makes a distinction between this and a socialized economy (what he calls here a "socialist dictatorship"). He goes on to underscore this point with bold strokes:

The questions of the conquest of power and of socialism should . . . be concretized. The first question is the conquest of power by the workers' party in Mexico and the other advanced Latin American countries. The second question is that of building socialism. Of course, it would be more difficult for Mexico to build socialism than for Russia. Yet it is not at all excluded that the Mexican workers may conquer power before the workers of the United States if the workers of the United States continue to be as slow as they are now. . . . We must encourage them in this direction.

But that does not signify that they will build their own socialism. They will resolve to fight against American imperialism and they will, of course, reorganize the agrarian conditions of the country and abolish the perfidious and parasitic society which plays a tremendous role in these countries, giving the power to the workers' and peasants' soviets and fighting against the imperialists. *The future will depend upon events in the United States and the whole world.* [Emphases added.][17]

The sentences which we have emphasized throw into question the seemingly more radical orientation advanced by such comrades of Socialist Action as Alan Benjamin, whom Lloyd D'Aguilar has cited so approvingly. "Following a revolutionary upheaval in underdeveloped societies, the period of time between the transition from private to nationalized property tends to be short," Benjamin tells us, because, for example, Nicaraguan capitalists and their imperialist allies are unable to tolerate the challenge to their profits posed by "the need of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants to rationally plan production to meet their own needs."[18] Thus, bourgeois property relations will be swept aside, according to these comrades, and replaced by a *nationalized economy under the democratic control of the working people, with rational planning to meet human needs.* The formulation we've just stressed is simply a restatement of Benjamin's own words, and it also constitutes the definition of a *socialist* economy.

Not necessarily, says Trotsky. The ability of the working people in a country such as Nicaragua to move forward to socialism will depend upon much more than the class dynamics inside that country. It will depend upon the advance of the revolutionary class struggle in other countries. This flows from Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and helps us make sense of the Nicaraguan experience. "There were two fundamental propositions in the theory of permanent revolution," Trotsky explained in 1928. "First, that despite the historical backwardness of Russia, the revolution can transfer the power into the hands of the Russian proletariat before the proletariat of advanced countries is able to attain it." This also happened in Nicaragua in 1979-80. "Secondly, that the way out of those contradictions which will befall the proletarian dictatorship in a backward country, surrounded by a world of capitalist enemies, will be found on the arena of world revolution."[19] This also has been true for Nicaragua.

Does this mean that Trotsky discourages Latin American revolutionary socialists from struggling to free their countries from imperialist oppression and capitalist exploitation? No, we have seen that he says "we must encourage them in this direction." He favors the working class taking political power, and with this power much can be done for the benefit of working people. But a socialist economy cannot be realized in such a country until working class revolutions triumph elsewhere. Until that time, Trotsky seems to favor a revolutionary variant of the mixed economy.

Trotsky made the point that, in discussing agrarian policy, "a certain technological development, at least on an elementary level, should precede collectivization and not follow it." This preliminary technological development would mean the production of farm machinery, fertilizer, railroads, and industry in general. "Where will the necessary means [for this industrial development] come from?" Trotsky asked. Noting that "the country is poor," he concluded: "It needs foreign capital. . . . Considerable international capital is seeking areas of investment at the present time, even where only a modest (but sure) return is possible. Turning one's back on foreign capital and speaking of collectivization and industrialization is mere intoxication with words."[20]

Trotsky offered no blueprints for how much of the economy should be in the state sector, how much in the private sector, etc. He did express a preference for "industrial concessions . . . in the form of mixed corporations, i.e., enterprises in which the government participates (holding 10 percent, 25 percent, 51 percent of the stock, according to the circumstances) and writes into the contracts the option of buying out the rest of the stock after a certain period of time." Such government participation would facilitate the training of native engineers and administrators under those of the capitalist enterprises of other countries, and "the period fixed in the contract before the optional buying out of the enterprise would create the necessary confidence among capital investors." Trotsky recalled that such industrial concessions had been embraced after the Bolshevik revolution: "Lenin accorded great importance to these concessions for the economic development of the country and for the technical and administrative education of Soviet personnel." While Trotsky felt "it would be almost suicidal to close the doors to foreign capital," he also argued that it would be necessary to defend the workers' interests by building strong but at the same time genuinely democratic trade unions: "It is necessary to protect the working class not only

against the excesses of capitalist exploitation but against the abuses of the labor bureaucracy as well."[21]

A regime based on the political hegemony of the working class, carrying out democratic reforms (including land reforms beneficial to the peasants), at the same time advancing economic development in cooperation with capitalist entrepreneurs (including foreign investors), while encouraging democratic mass organizations, such as trade unions, that will defend the immediate interests of working people – this was Trotsky's prescription for such Latin American countries as Mexico (and, we can assume, Nicaragua). Such an approach "may seem embued with a very moderate, almost conservative spirit," Trotsky admitted, but he argued that "our point of view is more realistic and at the same time more revolutionary."[22]

This general orientation seems to correspond to much of what the Sandinistas did in Nicaragua. And yet their experience, including the recent electoral defeat, brings us face-to-face with new questions.

Could the Sandinistas Have Done Better?

It is undeniable that the Sandinistas could have done better. Of course, the same could certainly be said of the Bolsheviks – and on some questions it could be argued that the Sandinistas did better than the Bolsheviks. The fact remains, however, that the Sandinistas made mistakes. Some of these were addressed by us *before* the elections, but further examination will be fruitful.

Before discussing this point, it is important to make another: it is not clear, even had the Sandinistas made no mistakes at all, that they could have won the 1990 election. If the FSLN won the election, most Nicaraguans understood, then the continuation of economic hardship and threat of military conflict would probably be guaranteed by the U.S. government. After ten years of Sandinista rule, the standard of living was down to 1940 levels, and continued military conscription made it clear that the Sandinistas felt peace was not at hand. "Everything Will Be Better," the FSLN electoral slogan promised. Certainly the Sandinistas could have done better in choosing a slogan, because everyone (supporters no less than opponents) knew that if Daniel Ortega was elected president then at least some things would get worse.

For reasons already discussed (and dismissed but never refuted, unfortunately, by Lloyd D'Aguilar or Alan Benjamin), it was impossible for the problems of the Nicaraguan economy to be solved through nationalizations under the democratic planning of the workers. "We would like to have socialism now," Orlando Núñez told me in early January. "But we have to realize the limits on the national economy. The technological, commercial, financial resources, and the 'know-how' that we would need don't exist inside Nicaragua. That is why we consider this criticism doctrinaire – it doesn't give us much help." Working under Jaime Wheelock on agrarian reform, Núñez coauthored (with Roger Burbach) the important work *Fire in the Americas* which declared that "Nicaragua's bold defiance demonstrates why it is both possible and imperative for the left to seize the initiative in the Americas."[23] A revolutionary internationalist and uncompromising Marxist, he is as much a "Menshevik" as Leon Trotsky.

As we have seen, the belief that there is some Leninist-Trotskyist categorical imperative against a mixed economy happens to be an illusion. On the other hand, it *is* possible to raise critical questions about some FSLN economic policies while accepting the general mixed economy framework. Thus a former advisor to the FSLN Carlos Vilas argued that the situation of Nicaraguan working people could be improved if government policies sought to induce the economy to meet internal consumer demands instead of allowing these to be sacrificed to meet the requirements of the traditional agro-export economy. He also called for the implementation of "some kind of physical, or worker rationing,...[giving] serious attention to health care, to education, to food for children who are after all the next generation of revolutionary Nicaraguans."[24]

While arguments and counterarguments can be made around such tactical prescriptions, it is more difficult to argue over criticisms against material privileges accumulated by some FSLN members. It should be remembered that under Lenin the Bolsheviks in power established a "party maximum" – a strict limit on the income, consumer goods, living quarters, etc., that party members were allowed. No Bolshevik should have more than the maximum of what a well-paid skilled worker could earn. Securing such material privileges for family members and friends was similarly prohibited in Lenin's party. This helped to limit inequality, corruption, demoralization, resentments. It greatly enhanced the moral authority of Bolshevik cadres among the workers and peasants. The absence of such a strict, publicly acknowledged "party maximum" for FSLN cadres allowed the development of a corrupting self-indulgence among some (by no means all), and this made the Sandinistas vulnerable to hostile propaganda and to the erosion of some popular support.

Revolutionary Democracy?

The poverty which generated such inequalities, just like the limitations on social justice imposed by the mixed economy, cannot be overcome in a single country. Only the extension of the revolution to other countries will open up such a possibility, and yet this did not mean that the Nicaraguan revolution would be compelled to stagnate. "We would like to have revolutions in all parts of the world," Orlando Núñez told me, "but we don't wait for that in order to keep making our own revolution, and our survival is part of the struggle. We are advancing in political democratization. That is also a form of advancing the revolution." He made specific reference to the 1990 elections, which he believed the FSLN would win, and yet his vision went beyond that. His own thinking is spelled out in *Fire in the Americas,* reviewed at length in the June 1988 issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism.* Some of his comrades, as we shall see, elaborated meaningfully on this question of making Nicaraguan democracy deeper and more radical.

But it is precisely on this issue of the changing nature of democracy under the Sandinistas that sharp questions must be raised. In a study published in 1988, a political scientist named David Close wrote that "though the Sandinista state adheres to neither the Marxist-Leninist nor the liberal-pluralist model, its machinery and practices bear more resemblance to the latter, while its original aims were closer

to the former."[25] This development represented a shift on the part of the FSLN.

In the early years of Sandinist rule, the mass organizations—trade unions and peasant organizations, women's and youth organizations, a vital network of neighborhood committees, groups representing ethnic minorities—played a key role in the revolutionary process, and they were a decisive component in the Council of State, a consultative body which helped shape the country's social, economic, and political policies.

After 1984, however, the Council of State was replaced by a more powerful legislature, the National Assembly, in which the mass organizations had no role to play. To a large extent they fell apart. Inasmuch as they survived, there was a strong tendency for the mass organizations to function as relatively undemocratic entities which carried out decisions made by the FSLN leadership. This was justified by the need to mobilize the masses for defense of the revolution in the face of very real counterrevolutionary and imperialist threats. Regardless of the reason, the Sandinist revolution increasingly lost its character as the expression of dynamic popular organizations, instead deriving "a considerable part of its legitimacy from electoral and constitutional sources," in the words of David Close, who added that "the development of new government machinery since 1984 and the apparent evolution of new relationships with the mass organizations . . . may presage further dramatic changes in the political system of Sandinista Nicaragua."[26] Close seems to have been implying that the FSLN might be deradicalized, however, not voted out of office.

This raises, in turn, another question. James Petras has criticized the Sandinistas for "the decision to endanger the revolutionary process by calling elections in the midst of war and economic disintegration." He writes: "They organized elections on the terrain created by the counterrevolution. For the Sandinistas the elections were an attempt to end the war and begin development. But they should have ended the war and begun reconstruction before holding an election." To refuse to hold elections, however, certainly would not have enhanced their popular support. But the way in which the FSLN election campaign was run is another matter. One journalist noted that the FSLN sought "to play down its revolutionary image, focusing attention on the personal appeal of Mr. Ortega and of the main opposition candidate, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro." Another journalist described Daniel Ortega's campaigning: "For the Sandinistas the message was that, following Ortega's inevitable reelection, '*Todo sera mejor*'—'Everything will be better.' The speeches usually lasted about fifteen minutes, and then the loudspeakers switched to salsa music, while Ortega threw autographed baseballs out to the crowd."[27] Obviously this was not sufficient to mobilize an electoral victory for the FSLN.

In fact, there was some resentment about the money being spent on all these autographed baseballs, the pro-Ortega baseball caps and T-shirts, and (while I was there in early January) the free toys being distributed by FSLN campaigners to children in the barrios. The attempt to run a U.S.-style election campaign seems to have been ill-advised, especially since the U.S.-supported Chamorro campaign could hardly be outmaneuvered on this terrain. In a perceptive and informative article on the elections, Holly Sklar reports that the Sandinistas spent $6.5 million on the campaign, "made up largely of in-kind donations from Western European organizations and Sandinista revenues from party dues and enterprises such as the newspaper *Barricada*," while Chamorro's UNO coalition—in addition to enjoying the generous backing of the country's still substantial business community—was bolstered by $12.5 million contributed by the U.S. government-backed National Endowment for Democracy.[28]

Traditional bourgeois politics tends to flatten the democratic process into the most superficial electoral campaigning, with bright slogans and flashy images and, at best, an oversimplification of issues. This has little to do with the profoundly radical vision of an authentic democracy, advanced by the Sandinistas from the earliest days of the revolution, involving the people in decision making and meaningful participation in all aspects of Nicaragua's political, economic, and cultural life. To the extent that radical democracy gives way to traditional electioneering, the hand of the bourgeoisie is naturally strengthened. Authentic working class democracy should by no means be counterposed to allegedly "bourgeois" political pluralism and elections—but without a sufficient involvement of working people in shaping the decisions which affect their lives, it is easier for capitalists and imperialism to manipulate democratic forms for their own purposes.

On the other hand, it should be noted that there was certainly more to the election campaign than this. The three daily newspapers were filled with sharp exchanges and with substantial interviews, commentaries, and polemics. Every night on television representatives of the contending parties debated the issues; in the barrios and workplaces FSLN militants talked at length with neighbors and coworkers.

The fundamental problem, however, was not the superficiality of some of the campaigning nor the fact that elections were even being held. Nor does the fundamental problem arise from the FSLN decision to base some of its legitimacy on constitutional and electoral sources (there is certainly nothing wrong with this in and of itself), nor even from the failure to insert the mass organizations into the structure of the state.

But the decline of the mass organizations as vibrant, internally democratic, relatively autonomous components of Nicaraguan political life has seriously weakened the revolutionary process as well as the strength of the FSLN. It is significant, however, that prominent Sandinistas whom I interviewed before the 1990 election were making precisely the same point.

Lessons for the Future

The director of the FSLN's National Institute for Social and Economic Investigations, Francisco Lopez, explained to me—as had Orlando Núñez—that the political rule of the working people had been established by the Sandinist revolution only to a limited extent. First of all, political power *had* been taken away from the bourgeoisie. Second, a regime had been established which was committed to defending the interests of the working people. Third, there were aspects of the political process (including the 1990

elections) that allowed working people to have important input. But, Lopez stressed, Nicaraguan working people did not actually have the instruments of state power in their hands in the way that Marx and Engels had suggested in the *Communist Manifesto* or that Lenin had discussed in *The State and Revolution*. He believed that the revolution's future depended on the progress made toward securing such radical democracy, and he viewed the mass organizations as the key: "I believe that the whole electoral process creates the possibility of conditions for peace that will give to our mass organizations, including the trade unions, the possibility of taking a qualitative step forward: enhancing their authority and initiative, so that they are not functioning simply as transmission belts from the FSLN to the workers. They must become a force which really defends the whole revolutionary process, not just defending what the government policies happen to be. We believe there will be a qualitative step forward."

Sofia Montenegro, a veteran FSLN militant who writes for *Barricada*, elaborated on the need to revitalize the revolution. "I think that the organization, even more than has already been done, has to be democratized—but not by cliche," she told me. "For me, more and more, building a democratic way of thinking is not a matter of hearing a lecture. It is deeper, more profound than that—something that builds, a socialization process. It is necessary to have a process of electing our leadership on all levels of responsibility: from the base, to the middle, to the top. We believe that this creates legitimacy."

One of Nicaragua's leading feminists, she explained how her feminism interlinked with her Marxism and her commitment to the FSLN, making more general points about the revolutionary process:

> At first you have to free the whole nation in order to have space to free ourselves. And that is exactly what has been happening. There are no chances for reform unless you inscribe yourself in the broad movement of the revolution, and then everyone fights for their particular interests: the Indians for theirs, women for theirs, the peasants for theirs—everyone. Obviously I have learned from Leninism. The idea I always had of Leninism is the capacity to organize, the validity of which we have proven. . . . You have a double relation here—members of the [FSLN] party and revolutionaries, and at the same time feminists. . . . If we can put also some Leninism into feminist ideas, we have some potential here. We have been creatures of the [Sandinista National Liberation] Front, were born from the Front, we have learned the skills, we have learned how to fight. This experience we can now put to use in dealing with the other problems, which are more complex.

Montenegro stressed: "I reserve the right to make errors, because the ones who make errors are the ones that do something. We are entitled to make mistakes, because these teach us lessons." Referring to the disastrous blunders of the FSLN on the Atlantic Coast, especially in regard to the Miskitos, Sumus, and Ramas, she commented: "One of the biggest mistakes of the revolution was painful, and after being so painful a fight, there was a lesson . . . a principle that has become part of our ideology and a principle in our Constitution: unity within diversity, just the idea to respect someone who is different and has the right to be different. It is a marvelous idea, but it never came naturally, not to anyone, because it is not within our culture. This nation has been declared pluralistic, ethnically pluralistic."

She went on to generalize: "What is good for the Indians is good for the women too. To learn to understand this means that it is valid for homosexuals, just as it is valid for Indians. It is valid for different cultures, colors, anything—and slowly, slowly it is permeating the mentality of the Nicaraguans." Montenegro focused especially on the struggle for women's rights, including the ongoing struggle for women's control over their own bodies and reproductive freedom, and for economic and cultural changes that would allow all women to develop as free and full human beings. She stressed that the liberation of women was also essential for the liberation of men, which made men potential allies, and which interlinked the feminist struggle and the larger revolutionary struggle.

Such a process she saw as central to the forward movement of the revolution: different sectors of the population struggling for specific demands that would further their own liberation, within the context of the broader revolutionary struggle. "That for me is the real socialism or democratization. Now if you have four idiots from a political party participating in an election—anyone could do that, including Cristiani [in El Salvador]. But the other thing is even more important: the whole view of people's life, of the universe of the people, is affecting not three or four individuals, but is affecting the whole nation about the way you see the world. This is marvelous, this is fascinating. For me, that is the real thing. I just put out that as an example, but there are thousands of things like that."

It is certainly the case that such increasing democratization, the most radical and thoroughgoing democracy and pluralism, are at the heart of advancing the revolution and creating socialism. But this inevitably creates a profound tension in the revolutionary process in a country such as Nicaragua. The triumph of the FSLN and of the revolutionary struggle must be grounded in the struggle for this very radical democracy. But such democracy—to be true to itself, to enable the people to be truly empowered and materially to make possible a life of dignity for all—must increasingly take hold of the economy. Such democracy must grow over into the collective control of the resources and industries on which all of society depends. This need pushes against imperialism, against capitalism, and also against the mixed economy. It is a need which pushes against the harsh objective realities which make the ultimate triumph of the revolution impossible so long as it is confined within the borders of this economically limited and vulnerable country.

While there is much that can be done to advance the revolution before socialism is achieved, therefore, we come back to the point which we have been making again and again: the cause of revolutionary internationalism must also be advanced in order to make possible the much needed triumph of socialism. A primary form of solidarity with the

Some Provisions of the Nicaraguan Constitution

- In the section on the national economy, Article 98 states: "The principal economic function of the state is to promote the country's material development, overcome the inherited backwardness and dependence of the economy, improve the country's standard of living and create a more just distribution of wealth." Article 99 states: "The state directs and plans the national economy to guarantee the protection of the interests of the majority and the promotion of socio-economic progress...." Article 101 states: "Workers and other productive sectors have the right to participate in the creation, execution and control of economic plans." Placing the *mixed economy* in this context, Article 103 states: "The state guarantees the democratic coexistence of public, private, cooperative, associative and communal property; all these form parts of the mixed economy, are subject to the overriding interests of the nation and fulfill a social function."
- In the section on agrarian reform, Article 106 states: "Agrarian reform is the fundamental instrument for achieving a just distribution of land and an effective means for revolutionary transformation, national development and the social progress of Nicaragua. The state guarantees the development of the agrarian reform program, to fulfilling the historic demands of the peasants." Article 107 states: "Agrarian reform shall abolish landed estates, rentism, inefficient production and the exploitation of peasants. It shall promote forms of ownership compatible with the economic and social objectives of the nation, as established in this Constitution." Article 111 states: "The peasants and other productive sectors have the right to participate, through their own organizations, in establishing the policies of agrarian transformation."
- In the section on the national defense, Article 93 states: "The Nicaraguan people have the right to arm themselves in defense of their sovereignty, independence and revolutionary gains. It is the duty of the state to direct, organize and arm the people to guarantee this right." Article 95 states: "The Sandinista Popular Army has a national character and must protect, respect and obey this Political Constitution...."

(The constitution is available from the United States Department of State, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs—with substantial introductory comments by anonymous State Department spokespeople who were positively livid over the nature of this document. Refer to *The Sandinista Constitution,* publication 9523. For a more sympathetic commentary on its significance by a left-wing U.S. law professor see Jules Lobel, "The New Nicaraguan Constitution: Uniting Participatory and Representative Democracy," *Monthly Review,* December 1987.)

Nicaraguan revolution is to struggle for the growth of powerful revolutionary socialist movements in other countries.

Will Working People's Power Be Overthrown or Deepened?

If the dictatorship of the proletariat (the "political sway," or hegemony, of Nicaragua's working people) can be said to have been established by the Sandinist revolution, does the election of the bourgeois opposition mean that it has simply succumbed under a snowstorm of ballots? Can political rule be switched from one class to another so easily? Or do we say, rather nonsensically, that the dictatorship of the proletariat now has bourgeois leadership? These are questions which anyone taking Marxist theory seriously must come to grips with in the new situation.

It is worth noting that outgoing FSLN President Daniel Ortega has continued to stress, after the inauguration of Violeta Chamorro, that the elections and the transition of governments take place "*within* the framework of the Nicaraguan constitution."[29] This is the remarkable document whose development absorbed a considerable amount of FSLN attention between the 1984 elections and the constitution's final implementation at the beginning of 1987. As its preamble states, it stands "for the establishment of the legal framework to protect and preserve the achievements of the Revolution and the building of a new society dedicated to the elimination of all forms of exploitation and to the achievement of economic, political and social equality for all Nicaraguans and absolute respect for human rights." To grasp the significance of the Sandinistas' repeated stress on the centrality of this constitution, it is worth examining some of its provisions (see box on this page). Some might say that these are simply words on paper, but they define part of the present legal framework for the political struggle in Nicaragua.

There is also the fact that the FSLN, with 40 percent of the National Assembly seats, is the single largest party in the country, with the most substantial number of cadres and the most highly organized popular base. There is the fact that the FSLN continues to be the dominant influence in the Sandinista Popular Army. There is the fact that a concerted effort by the FSLN is underway to revitalize the mass organizations.

On the other hand, there presently appears to be a three-way split among the bourgeois political forces: a section around Violeta Chamorro seeking, for the time being, cooperation with the Sandinistas; a section which seeks sharp confrontation with the FSLN in order to roll back its influence and dismantle the radical gains of the revolution as quickly as possible; and the death-squad contingent, represented by those contra elements which have filtered back into the country hoping to retain their arms and terrorize the populace in order to establish a more reactionary balance of power in Nicaragua.

Despite the electoral defeat, the Sandinist revolution, including the political hegemony of Nicaragua's working people, has not been dismantled. This is precisely what the bourgeoisie would like to do, but it is divided on how to achieve this.

At present, such things as the provisions of the Nicaraguan constitution—how to interpret them, how to implement (or

(Continued on page 40)

Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

41. The Cunning Machine of the Secret Judicial Sessions

In our unit near Moscow I once worked on construction. We had to hurriedly erect an annex for the laboratory and they pulled us from the workshops and assigned us to wheelbarrows. The prisoners in the camp called the wheelbarrow "the OSO machine – two handles and one wheel." The OSO, if you remember, was the Special Session that passed judgment on us in secret. The mechanism of the OSO moved slowly constructing the cases against us. On the situation at hand, a new military commander, an experienced specialist in reeducation, Captain Smirennikov, was appointed to oversee the construction project. He lengthened our workday – that was the only alternative he could think of. The thinking of our official was held up by one wheel.

In the camps, with minor exceptions (like our sharashka) we were fed rotten potatoes, coarse barley chaff, and salted cod. This created the impression that they were getting by cheaply. In the state budget, approved by the Supreme Soviet, expenses for the maintenance of the camp (or income, if they were profitable) were not fixed for the scrutiny of the broad mass of the electorate, but even a schoolboy could figure it out. The captain could imagine that he was squeezing more from the prisoners than it cost to maintain himself and his innumerable colleagues. However, given the paltry productivity of camp labor, this was not possible, even if we had worked sixteen hours a day.

The captain was a small, stout little man with a pig-like profile, a squealing voice, and an impudent look in his colorless bloated eyes. He was filled to the brim with stupidity, on the surface of which floated a defensive layer of cunning. When he seethed with rage, which to our everlasting guilt happened not infrequently, the stupidity splashed through this surface.

On the day in question, he almost had a stroke, we angered him so. He had been ordered – or perhaps it was his own idea – to widen the prohibited zone. The prohibited zone was the broad strip of land between the inside and outside rows of wire entanglements. It was plowed and harrowed conscientiously but not to sow anything good. They often fluffed up the surface with rakes. Then, if anyone were to run way, tracks would be left on the soft soil.

It is easier to broaden a prohibited zone into the yard rather than into the street. Smirennikov wanted to move the posts of the inside row of wire, replace the ones that had grown rotten and again install the wire. He sent for additional sentries, stationed them along the row of posts, snatched us from other work, and ordered: "Let's go!"

It was all done with incredible speed. "C'mon! C'mon!" resounded from all sides. Smirennikov shouted, the sergeant of the convoy shouted, the officers of the guard crew shouted. The head of operations appeared on the scene, shouting threateningly.

Someone tried to say: "We are building our own prison!" Mr. Operations and the captain both ran up to him. Smirennikov turned purple and began waving his fists and squealing: "To the punishment cell! To the punishment cell!" But Mr. Operations raised a hand in the gesture of a Biblical prophet and thundered like Isaiah, with a sprinkling of distinctly un-Biblical words:

"So you want a new term added on, you so-and-so, you sons-o'-bitches," etc. "Get digging!"

And we obediently took up the shovels. Many of us had been in the party many years. Many, many of us had been at the front and had looked death in the eye. Why was it that a fellow who wasn't afraid of death there is afraid of it here? Is it not because here he sensed the futility of such a sacrifice? We were surrounded by such indifference, such an unwillingness to think of all that prison meant. Would your death arouse anyone? Will it help anyone?

We were well aware that the first person who threw down his shovel would get no less than a ten-year term. And for some it will be more: everything depends on the report of the head of operations. Meanwhile, for the sake of his own career, for that end only, so as to receive praise, he must write florid reports, rich with color. It will be a report with the words "subversive activity," "sabotage," "resistance," and one or two, selected from the list absolutely arbitrarily, will

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.

receive as a warning a tough measure. If the common criminals strike, they will get only the punishment cell. Their strike does not have a political character attached to it. But ours?

We silently replanted the posts. We worked slowly. The Mr. Fidget sentries had to put on gloves and stretch the barbed wire. We unrolled the coils without looking one another in the eye. We were fortifying the prison.

It was 1950. We understood many things, a great many things indeed; but still not enough for our own good or for society's. We gave one of the sentry officers the nickname "Not n'uff." That was how he said "there are not enough" if he didn't end up with the right number of prisoners after a roll call. So wasn't it that we and our society had "not n'uff" of something?

We will recall what it was like outside the prison. Is it possible Karakhanov's friends or workers knowing Nina Lasovoy or writers familiar with Parets Markish, is it possible that in 1950 they still believed that those condemned were condemned justly? Did there really not exist for every person outside the prison zones of prohibited thought – zones which they fortified themselves and persistently widened for themselves? Zones of soil onto which one will hardly take one timid step without leaving an imprint? Then, spying these tracks, the authorities will immediately announce a search, find what they want, and put you away.

We walked along the main alley of the scientific Potemkin camp village – Aleksandr, Yefim, and I. Prisoners were capable of daydreaming about more than just their freedom. One can be sure that the forty-five hired technician-lieutenants and engineer- captains who worked with us at the unit as our managers did not touch on our themes in their friendly conversations. In fact, did many people in those dangerous times speak with each other in a friendly way? That was the epoch of friendships for effect, not real ones, of friendships with an informer's notebook in one's pocket. Moveover, the moral justification had been prepared beforehand.

Our free laborers talked about the shops they managed, but mainly about items that they bought, about dachas, football, and promotions. Out of vigilance, they were silent about party matters at home and in the meetings spoke only about some newspaper thoughts in the newspaper's words. They have an understanding that when they meet next time at someone's house, when drinking, that the first toast should go to Comrade Stalin. They even start off an evening party at their homes celebrating the birth of a child with the toast "Thank you, Comrade Stalin!" so everyone will see how devoted they are. The happy little papa raised his goblet, offering his thanks for the child to the Universal Father.

There was another widely used all-encompassing slogan: "Life has become better, comrades; life has become more joyful." This was a quotation from one of Stalin's speeches. No one had been able to improve on it or alter it. Thus the whole thing was written out on artistic placards and beautifully ornamented the walls of the camp barracks. At Vorkuta, in camp no. 12, on both sides of the path leading to the watchtower, stood screens with slogans. The camp's ruling official considered graphic agitation an important part of his work. Besides that, the screens looked good and arriving officialdom commended our major. However, he did not suspect that his own figure, his belly, and his red nose were also graphic agitation, and very convincing, for the sacred slogan: "Thank you, Comrade Stalin."

Every day, going to work and returning from it, accompanied by vicious, handsome, well-cared-for German shepherds, we read the words of the leader directed at us: "Life has become better, comrades; life has become more joyful."

The slogans and toasts reminded me of a page from my childhood. I will approach the forbidden window, let Mr. Fidget hiss all he wants![1]

According to the legend I was taught as a child, the first people God created were Adam and Eve. God settled them in heaven, in the Garden of Eden. Two trees grew there: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God allowed them to eat the fruit from the tree of life, but strictly forbade them to touch the fruit from the tree of knowledge. And the people were innocent and naked, like children. Of course, they were also happy because they knew neither evil nor doubts nor disbelief nor skepticism.

In the 1930s and 1940s our children were taught a similar legend. It was not at all distinguished from the Biblical legend by its authenticity but by the attitude toward it on the part of adults. If during my childhood I had told the teacher in my little town that I had doubts about the historic authenticity of this legend, he would have smiled and the next day told my father: "Your son is a rather precocious lad."

But let my son try to make the same declaration to his teachers in the Moscow middle school! They would not have smiled, but begun to tremble, sure that an inquiry would begin the next day over where the schoolboy had learned such words: Was it at the Pioneer organization? The pedagogical council? At the party organization of the factory where the parents work? Everywhere the inquiry: Who told him this? The word "truth" here is understood only to be the truth about who told him, that is to say, the truth as established by the investigators. Who incited the boy to doubt the formula which he had learned in kindergarten: "Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood"?

Adam and Eve lived in the kindergarten of Eden. In place of a mama and papa, they had an all-knowing God. Above their heads the wind howled in the enchanted tree of knowledge. However, they enjoyed only its deep shadow.

In the farthest corner of heaven, where Adam and Eve rarely cast a glance, worked a filthy, shabby snake who had once upon a time been handsome, winged, and bold. In the distant, forgotten past, he had been an angel, but God cast him into an abyss for attempting to slander the celestial reality and invoking the name of Satan, the devil and demon. The archangel judges, his brothers of yesterday, without hesitating measured out for him the whole spool, twenty-five light years, in cosmic terms. In the big bear/little bear constellation camp, the snake was used for physical labor – in the camp's logbook appeared the sacred letters "TFT." Perhaps you are aware that the alphabet of the language of the Bible contains only letters signifying consonants and the reader has to guess the vowels.

Therefore, the letters TFT could mean tefta – for heavy physical labor – or tufta – for imitation of work. The snake

worked without tufta. One time the Lord, the master of heaven and hell, committed a blunder: he sent the snake to dig in the ground in the Garden of Eden.

Hearing cheerful voices, the snake raised his head and saw a man and a woman frolicking in the garden, not embarrassed by their nakedness and not noticing how beautiful they were, ripe for love and bliss, but still like children because the Lord alone decided for them what they could and could not know.

The poor loathsome snake with his wretched dirty-gray wings could not tear his eyes away from the human beauty. He rushed at the people, stretching out his hook-shaped, gnarled hands.

Eve was not frightened. She had a woman's heart, which does not know how to placidly bear anyone's distress and which in times of misfortune unexpectedly becomes strong and fearless. She asked: "Who are you, poor devil, and what brought you to us?"

The snake hastily and in a confused way (he was afraid of the sentry angel who was following on his heels) revealed to Eve the secret of the tree of knowledge.

The girl, then, tore an apple from the forbidden tree. She took a bite and handed it to Adam – since such is the way of women: They eat a small bite and give the larger portion to the child and the man, who is in fact also her child.

The sentry angel, flashing his sword, rushed up to him but it was too late. The people knew good, looked at one another and for the first time had a sense of their beauty. At the same time they also knew evil, watching in horror as the archangel put chains on the snake and kicked him with his white feet.

And that day the cunning Satan quietly rejoiced in his dark soul, freezing in a punishment cell on a Polar Star. He had completed his mission in life. And God also appointed a sentry armed with a sword to watch after Adam and Eve.

Let the guards of heaven hate it
This spirit of searching and doubts;
Let them be satisfied with those skimpy truths
That have tormented my ears for years;
But I remember: the sentry angel cast
the truth at us not from on high,
But here, under this dark, low roof
Among the trampled graves,
Among the hypocritical
and solemn promises of evil,
Truth, in the hearts of the simple
and trusting souls, covered with blood,
has flourished.

* * *

Again I have begun to talk about truth and again I must return to our good old camp not far from Moscow with its widened prohibited zone, where my tracks are now clearly visible on the newly raked earth. The majority of our free workers lived there next to us in a solid, departmental building on the other side of the camp fence. I was never present at their holiday tables but every Monday I had the chance to hear them recall their evening drinking bouts. We, the happy prisoners, lived ready for anything and were above such worldly concerns. We talked about Plekhanov's views of Ivan the Terrible (they were strongly at variance with the views of Stalin, and his scholars and movie actors), about Lermontov's poetry and Gribachev's verses, about the technology of evolvement gearing and about the gears of Stalin's machine in the camp. We were not surprised that a blockhead like engineer-captain Puzentsov, one of our officials, defended a doctoral dissertation: he "took advantage of" the work of a group of imprisoned engineers who were under his command. I remembered Bukharin's remark: "Don't give a single manuscript to Koba [Stalin]. He will steal it without fail and present it as his own." My friends laughed until they had tears in their eyes over this commonality of method.

Another of our little workers, even more inventive than Puzentsov, engineer-captain Feoken, who said "hiar" instead of "here," copied from advertisements in foreign journals the description of diodes and palmed them off as his own rationalization proposal (he got paid for it!) to Puzentsov; while Puzentsov hid the description in one of his safes and the models for diodes in another. Then before leaving his office, he made sure that both were carefully sealed shut. State secrets!

The free workers, those of lower rank, were plainly rude with us, despite instructions, particularly the older ones. They guessed what kind of "criminals" we were. But then service in the camps had not managed to become a profession, putting its stamp on their psychology and their way of thinking. No other profession leaves such a mark on the one who has it as this one.

Only one zealous servant was sharply distinguished by the way he treated the prisoners, an official of the machine shop, whose name was – one friend never wanted to call him anything else – Svolochnikov.[2] My joiner's bench was about ten steps from his desk, and I was in a good position to observe this child of the epoch. It looked like he had not a necktie but a reddish-blue turkey craw under his chin. He never departed by a hair from instructions! With us, he spoke through clenched teeth, but when telephoning to higher-ups, he spoke melodiously with a sweet tenor voice: "This is Svolochnikov here bothering you." And he smiled into the receiver. The other free workers were dry and businesslike in his presence, but after he removed himself importantly, his red-blue craw swinging in cadence, they began to speak in normal tones. One said to me:

"The guy we see is the real one; he would sell out his father and mother."

Did such types really exist? However, it was not only totally rotten types who served and it was not only the totally good who perished. Stalinism needed unprincipled, obedient people, and believing young people, and narrow-minded dolts. Moreover, it did not need them for long periods of time but only until they had been totally used up. Even very intelligent but not overly scrupulous people were good for secretaries, assistants, for "learned Jews around the governor," as it was expressed at one time. And in a great, perhaps overwhelming, number of cases it needed people who were what you get when young believers become elderly. And they are the outcome of a scheme Lysenko thundered about for decades and about which the newspapers were tirelessly making noise: "Oats are transformed into wild oats."

In its application to vegetables, this theory was rubbish. But in the human sphere, something similar was possible. Quantitative changes accumulate, and suddenly, after supper, it is revealed: You lie down for a nap as premium-grade oats and you wake up common oats. Characteristic evidence of the metamorphosis in a man is a total loss of the ability to observe oneself from the outside. The hero Apuliya even in the form of a donkey did not lose this ability and described in detail his transformation. Stalin's people, not changing on the outside, did not notice the changes that occurred on the inside.

Not able to observe themselves, the wild oats continue with redoubled ardor to assert that they are golden oats and that you are a weed. And the worse he is able to see himself, the stronger his conviction that the only one who has a right to judge him is he himself. He knows who he is! He leaves everything to himself, and whoever doubts this is himself a weed. Indeed, he still possesses some traits of the former golden oats: He is a fine fellow, ready to fight to the death for what seem to him to be his convictions; he works and works, you see, regardless of how hungry he is! He goes on, flaunting his communist interior – the same communist interior that Lieutenant Ramensky spoke about. Well, the lieutenant was a fine fellow, after all. And many of those who served in the cavalry squadrons for the education, training, and safeguarding of the masses, were superb people, themselves trained and educated in an atmosphere that lavishly rewarded idolatry with their special caste position.

However, the caste demands certain things. Volodya Ramensky loved his native land and risked his life fighting in the war. Therefore, is the wild oats really less rooted in the soil on which it grew than the golden oats? Is this really what distinguishes it?

* * *

In the main alley we talked about poetry and about its links to the harsh prose of life. Our auto plant engineer, an agent of American-Zionist intelligence, said: "In the camp the people are cramped; but there is plenty of room for ideas."

Having heard my first poetic opus, Aleksandr announced:

"This poetry should be preserved for posterity; they should know how we thought."

"If we were at sea," I answered, "we could seal it in a bottle. Then you have one chance in a million that someone would fish it out."

"I know the theory of probabilities," Aleksandr retorted, "but one chance in a million is better than none. I will design an iron pencil case with a lid that seals hermetically. I will say the cunning machine needs it and they will turn it out for me. I will take it to the residential zone, we will seal it up and bury it. Future construction workers will find it."

The plan was a good one, but it required that some sort of narrative about us be written. An unpolished lyric would not do; we needed diary notes. I convinced Aleksandr. I know that the people are writing and sealing many bottles for posterity. The theory of probability is on the side of truth.

For both Aleksandr and Yefim, it was the first time they had ended up in camp. On the day they were arrested, their party cards had been taken away. Both were engineers: one a talented designer, the other a shop official at a plant near Moscow. They had not been denounced by anyone but simply seized because their names were on a list. It was impossible to purge only one auto plant. The case concocted against them was absurd nonsense, but they got ten years each. The absence of materials for "a tasty little case," the term used by my investigator, did not stop anyone. If, in an extreme situation, a case could not be built based directly on a certain article [of the criminal code], they could do it "through [article] 17" or "through 19," i.e., complicity or intention. I know of several people who received a term for "intending" to betray the native land. They began to pin this on the "nationalists" after the war, and this crime came into vogue. Most often it was applied to Ukrainian and Jewish nationalism. I never heard of one case involving Russian nationalism.

Other "isms" began to be habitually used as well. For example, the "ism" of extreme curiosity of the type shown by the young soldier I met in the Krasnodar prison. It cost nothing to get a term for an unfortunate question. You asked: Isn't it true that in the first edition of the *Small Soviet Encyclopedia* the following lines were printed that were removed from subsequent editions: "The passport system was the most important instrument of police ascendancy and of the taxation policy in the so-called police state"? If this verbal explanation did not have relevance to the passport system introduced in the Soviet state in 1932, why was it removed? In fact, the removal is a sign of admission!

Your question implies a malicious "ism." Ten years!

[Next month: *"The Cunning Machine . . . "* (Cont.)]

Notes

1. This is a reference to an earlier description of prison life, in which the guards, called "Mr. Fidgets" because they forbade noise and activity, did not allow the prisoners to approach the windows to look out.
2. *Svoloch* means scum, swine, dregs, etc.

The French Revolution Survives Another Attack:

A Critical Look at Simon Schama's *Citizens*

Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution, by Simon Schama. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1989. Illus. 948 pp.

Reviewed by Morris Slavin

Robespierre used to chide his moderate opponents of "wanting a revolution without a revolution." Simon Schama wants no revolution at all. In "shaking off the mythology of the revolution" (see the interview by Mervyn Rothstein in the *New York Times,* April 27, 1989), Schama has created his own mythology. He admits that he does not believe in a "pure objectivity"—what historian does? But the reader has the right to expect of him a fair treatment of the revolutionaries in the real circumstances of a profound social and political crisis. Unfortunately, as Thomas Paine said of Edmund Burke, "He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird."

Schama sees the Revolution as a series of scandalous events. In this respect his narrative is a sensational story. He seldom looks at the events from the revolutionaries' point of view and never with sympathy for them. Instead, he judges the movement from the victims' outlook. But the latter are not the Girondins, Enragés, Hébertistes, or Jacobins of the left, but, rather, the Malesherbes, the Neckers, and the Talleyrands. In addition, his book is badly skewed. The text is 875 pages long, but the fall of the Bastille does not begin until page 369. Part IV, entitled "Virtue and Death," which covers the most important, and in some respects, the most meaningful developments for our own times, is a mere 170 pages. Yet, this portion attempts to recite the dramatic events from the winter of 1793 through the fall of Robespierre in the summer of 1794. He has little to say on Robespierre and the Great Committees, and nothing but an "Epilogue" after 9 Thermidor. As for his view on revolutions in general, he writes that "asking for the impossible is a good definition of a revolution" (p. 322). This tells us more about the author's approach, however, than it does about his subject.

Let us examine the text in more detail. Schama, like so many of his "revisionist" contemporaries, never doubts that the Old Regime was "modern," or "bourgeois," but that in any case, it was no longer feudal. Yet, there are numerous references to the seigneurial system, to feudal dues, to labor obligations (corvées), and to other traditional feudal exactions throughout his text. (See, for example, pp. 433, 434, 435, 437, and the feudal privileges surrendered on August 4, 1789, by the National Assembly, p. 438.) He quotes with approval a conservative French historian, Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, that "a noble was nothing more than a successful bourgeois" (p. 116), then contradicts himself by writing that "The one thing the Constituent Assembly was manifestly *not* was *bourgeois*" (p. 478, his emphasis). But if the Assembly was not bourgeois it must have been noble. (We can assume it is not necessary to demonstrate that it was not sans-culotte or peasant.) Still, how could it have been noble when, according to him, a noble was only a bourgeois?

Moreover, he ignores Louis XVI's famous speech three weeks before the fall of the Bastille (23 June 1789). "All property without exception," said the king, "shall be respected at all times, and His Majesty expressly includes under the name of property the tithes . . . *feudal and seigneurial rights and duties* [my emphasis], and, in general, all rights and prerogatives, useful or honorary, connected with lands and *fiefs,* or appertaining to persons." Yet, Schama would have us believe that the Old Regime was "bourgeois."

Unlike many historians who find the Old Regime full of archaic and irrational customs and practices (see Montesquieu's *The Persian Letters* as an example), Schama argues that the French elite "was fluid and heterogeneous" (p. 117), that the term "Old Regime" is a misnomer (p. 118), and that at the very heart of this elite was "a capitalist nobility" (p. 118). He is convinced that "a literary conspiracy" existed, which he calls "the Figaro syndrome" ignored by modern historians, that helped bring down the misnamed Old Regime by people who did not really understand the ideas they were promulgating (p. 175). And in a complete reversal of the many studies done on Louis XVI, Schama sees him as "lively" (not at all phlegmatic), and concerned with public business (p. 188).

Schama is convinced, moreover, that the social *structure* did not cause the Revolution but that social *issues* did. Yet, in listing the issues that allegedly caused it he cannot avoid mentioning the structure (see pp. 293-294). Indeed, how can social issues exist without a structure to give them form? Until the advent of the "revisionists," historians always believed that one reason we call the events of 1789 a "social revolution" is precisely because one social class, loosely termed the "bourgeoisie" replaced another, the "nobility" (the upper echelons of the Church were, with hardly an exception, noble). Schama, on the contrary, argues that no significant transfer of social power occurred, except for its loss by the Church. But if there was no transfer of power why did so many nobles emigrate? And why were "aristos" so execrated? Was the "Restoration" limited to the return of the Bourbons alone?

The trend, writes the author, was from "nobles to notables." And who were the latter? He replies as follows: "As landowners, state functionaries, departmental ad-

Morris Slavin, a longtime socialist and professor emeritus of history at Youngstown State University, is a noted authority on the French Revolution.

ministrators, and professional judges and doctors, bankers and manufacturers, they constituted a knot of influence and power that would effectively dominate French society for the next century" (p. 521). But these are "bourgeois" within the meaning of the term. And the real question is not if they dominated the century after the Revolution (no one doubts this), but did they dominate French society the century preceding the Revolution? Of course, bourgeois property forms, and relations based on them, were beginning to dominate the economic life of the country decades before the Revolution, but the bourgeoisie was still the Third Estate and, as such, faced discrimination from the upper two Estates. Furthermore, if Schama can demonstrate that a seigneurial estate, encumbered and limited by the law of entail and primogeniture, worked by unfree labor, is no different from a landed estate that can be bought, sold, or split up, in short, to use a Marxist term, is a "commodity," then, indeed, there is no difference between nobles and notables.

Although Schama is interested in symbols (literary and pictorial), and even blames the Romantic movement for encouraging the revolutionaries for stressing "passion over Reason" (p. 861) and going from "euphoria to terror" (p. 354), he cannot see the Bastille as a symbol of despotism. Instead, he repeats that old cliche that only seven prisoners were inside its walls when it was successfully besieged by what conservative historians still call "the mob." (The concept of "crowd," incidentally, is foreign to Schama as well.) The fact that this structure by its high and thick walls, the gunpowder stored in its vaults, and the Swiss garrison dominated the neighborhood of Saint-Antoine is ignored. More important, its fall led to the successful organization of municipal bodies throughout France, dominated by the *bourgeoisie,* as well as to the evolution of the National Guard from the *bourgeois militia.* These two developments destroyed the possibility of the king's military intervention against the newly formed National Assembly. But our author sees nothing of this. Instead, he speaks of "Gothic fantasies" enhancing the responsibilities of "despotism" (p. 487). Schama's quotation marks around the latter term means that he denies its existence.

Moreover, he is at pain to demonstrate throughout his narrative that it was violence that characterized the Revolution and "made the Revolution possible in the first place" (p. 436). Violence, according to him, "was the Revolution's source of collective energy," and it was "what made the Revolution revolutionary." And again: "Bloodshed was not the unfortunate by-product of revolution, it was the source of its energy" (p. 615). Furthermore, in a statement that could have made Burke blush Schama pronounces that "The Terror was merely 1789 with a higher body count" (p. 447).

Two days after the storming of the Bastille the Duke of Dorset, England's ambassador to France, wrote a well-known report to his government praising "The regularity and determined conduct of the populace" and concluding that "the greatest revolution has been affected with, comparatively speaking, if the magnitude of the event is considered, the loss of very few lives." Schama is surely acquainted with this famous letter, as is every student of the Revolution, but to admit such evidence by an objective observer outside France is to undermine his thesis of "violence" or the "politics of paranoia" (p. 436).

Schama finds in the September massacres proof, yet again, of his thesis that the Revolution "depende[d] on organized killing to accomplish political ends" (p. 637). He excoriates Pierre Caron, who wrote the definitive study of this tragic event, as being guilty "of intellectual cowardice and moral self-delusion" (p. 631). And in an exhortation to such historians, he writes: "To those who insist that to prosecute is not the historian's job, one may reply that neither is a selective forgetfulness practiced in the interests of scholarly decorum" (p. 632). One can only agree—but as Robert Burns wrote, "O wad some power the giftie gie us / To see oursel's as ithers see us!"

Schama finds Talleyrand a model of maturity and good sense in rejecting the "extremes" of both right and left. Among the "extremes" of the latter are Thomas Paine's proposals for a "welfare state." What can one say to an author who thinks that Paine was extreme when he suggested that it was better to make the lives of the "one hundred forty thousand aged persons" in England more comfortable than to waste "a million a year of public money" on the king? It's a little late to defend the civilized proposals advocated by Thomas Paine for old age, unemployment benefits, and insurance against illness.

Nor is Schama against violence per se. He finds Charlotte Corday admirable, a heroine in every sense of the word, and he relishes the way she carried out her assassination of Marat. As for the latter, our historian despises him because of his "sanguinary hysterics," his glorification of "rudeness," and his effort to displease as many people as possible in order to demonstrate his "integrity" (pp. 661, 729-741). But if Marat was only a jealous, envious, rude person it is difficult to account for his popularity among so many thousands of ordinary people, not only among the revolutionaries.

Marat is not the only revolutionary who earns Schama's displeasure. He finds Robespierre equally unattractive, a "Missionary of Virtue" (p. 834). In characterizing Jean Baptiste Cloots (who called himself Anacharsis) as "bizarre" and among the "lunatics and thugs" of the left, Schama makes a profound error (pp. 808, 816). It would be difficult to find a gentler and a more devoted French patriot (despite his Prussian and noble birth) than Cloots. He became a victim of French chauvinism and died in the frame-up of the Cordeliers leaders. As for the Hébertistes dying on the guillotine like "cowards without balls" (p. 816), with the exception of Hébert himself, all died with courage and dignity. Besides, this stress on how revolutionaries and their adversaries died is too often overemphasized when the more important question should be put—how did they live? Moreover, it is strange that our author, who has so much compassion and concern for the conservative and moderate victims of the Terror, has none for the more radical spokesmen of the sans-culottes.

Schama concludes his book with the feminist revolutionary, Théroigne de Mericourt, in the mental institution of Salpetrière. A sketch of her disturbed and pathetic visage is the last illustration in the book. Since our author is keen on symbols it is obvious that Théroigne's end is a fitting close to the Revolution as well. Still, it is regrettable that such a

capable historian as Schama, whose style and expression are enviable, who can tell a fascinating story with verve and drama, and who rivets the reader's attention on the narrative should be so prejudiced against the Revolution. Why is this so?

Like the rest of us, Schama is a product of our reactionary century. We are aware, of course, that its revolutions turned out badly. The hopes aroused by the Russian Revolution and by Social Democracy turned into Stalinism and Hitlerism, respectively. The French Revolution, too, failed to establish the reign of "Virtue." Goya's famous painting, "The Dream of Reason Brings Forth Monsters," reminds us that between dreams and nightmares there is a thin line. Yet, the recent events from Beijing to Moscow are proof, yet again, that humanity continues to dream and to strive for liberty, equality, and fraternity. These noble ideals of the French Revolution will continue to inspire men and women everywhere. In this respect the Revolution lives on. ●

Nicaragua *(Continued from page 33)*

not implement) them—constitute a contested terrain. The class struggle in Nicaragua will now become more intense. This complex and difficult struggle will test the FSLN, the different currents within it, its leaders, its capacity for continuing to provide revolutionary leadership to the working people of Nicaragua. There are presently different, conflicting centers of authority and power in Nicaragua, and soon one or the other will establish its predominance. What will be most important is not ballots or constitutions or tactical maneuvers or even the qualities of the revolutionary vanguard (although this is a decisive factor in the equation), but the elemental struggle of social classes. And the outcome of that struggle will determine whether or not the political rule of the working people is eliminated or, instead, deepened and strengthened.

For socialist activists, in the United States especially, our revolutionary internationalism must assume the very material form (to which we all can contribute, regardless of disagreements on how to analyze the Nicaraguan revolution) of building a widespread consciousness and an effective movement opposing U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. In addition to this, however, our revolutionary internationalism must compel us to keep learning from the *continuing* Nicaraguan revolution—learning with critical minds intact, to be sure, but *learning*, as opposed to criticizing the revolution for being insufficiently "orthodox." And as we do such things as these, if we do them right, we will be helping to lay the groundwork for the serious revolutionary socialist movement which we must build here and beyond, in order to secure the triumph of working people in Nicaragua, the United States, and all countries. ●

May 12, 1990

Notes:

1. James Dunkerley, *The Long War, Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador* (London: Verso, 1982), p. 119; James Dunkerley, "Class Structure and Socialist Strategy in El Salvador," *Crisis in the Caribbean*, ed. by Fitzroy Ambursley and Robin Cohen (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 127, 128.
2. James Dunkerley, *Power in the Isthmus, A Political History of Modern Central America* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 241, 242, 245.
3. Ibid., pp. 292-293, 295.
4. Ibid., pp. 309, 311.
5. Leon Trotsky, "Stalinism and Bolshevism," *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936-37*, ed. by Naomi Allen and George Breitman (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), pp. 420-421.
6. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1965), p. 56.
7. Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 353.
8. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 21, 22, 23, 112.
9. Ibid., pp. 96, 97.
10. Ibid., p. 112.
11. Trotsky, "Stalinism and Bolshevism," *Writings, 1936-37*, p. 426.
12. "Latin American Problems: A Transcript," *Writings of Leon Trotsky, Supplement 1934-40*, ed. by George Breitman (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1979), pp. 782, 783.
13. Leon Trotsky, "Nationalized Industry and Workers' Management," *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938-39*, ed. by Naomi Allen and George Breitman (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), p. 326.
14. Leon Trotsky, "On Mexico's Second Six Year Plan," in ibid., pp. 223-224. My thanks to Dave Riehle for drawing my attention to this text, which also motivated me to locate other material by Trotsky on Latin America.
15. "Latin American Problems," *Writings of Leon Trotsky, Supplement 1934-40*, p. 785.
16. Ibid., p. 784.
17. Ibid., pp. 785-786.
18. Alan Benjamin, *Nicaragua, Dynamics of an Unfinished Revolution* (San Francisco: Walnut Publishing Co., 1989), p. 94.
19. Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 40.
20. "On Mexico's Second Six Year Plan," *Writings, 1938-9*, p. 226.
21. Ibid., pp. 226-227.
22. Ibid., p. 228.
23. Roger Burbach and Orlando Núñez, *Fire in the Americas: Forging a Revolutionary Agenda* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 1.
24. Alexander Cockburn (interviewing Carlos Vilas), "Who Whom? The Sandinistas and the Economy," *Zeta Magazine*, December 1988, pp. 24, 25.
25. David Close, *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), p. 144.
26. Ibid. A similar point is made by a British Trotskyist, Will McMahon, "Tough lessons from election defeat," *Socialist Outlook*, April 1990: "In the enthusiasm of the moment the elections of 1984 were greeted as the realization of socialist democracy. Yet, on reflection, the FSLN did not take the opportunity to build a genuine socialist democracy but instituted a liberal democratic system of rule....The mass involvement essential to socialist democracy did not exist. Thus when mass dissatisfaction began to blow up into a political storm the FSLN neither saw nor heard it coming until it was too late." Of course, it's possible to overstate this point, and a comrade of McMahon's has complained: "Will is quite wrong to put so much emphasis on the FSLN being out of touch with the people. We should have an ideal of socialist democracy, and see how the Sandinistas' example compared with it; but we must also learn how the Sandinistas maintained such a high level of mass participation in such difficult conditions." (Gareth Mostyn, "Wrong lessons from Sandinista defeat?" *Socialist Outlook*, May 1990). Mostyn adds: "Anyone who has tried to build democratic structures, whether in a union, a Labor Party, or a mass campaign will be familiar with the problems. Getting regular attendance of more than 30 percent even for shop floor issues . . . can be difficult. Will's article unfairly suggests that the FSLN deliberately held back democracy."
27. James Petras, "Flawed strategies planted seeds of Sandinista defeat," *In These Times*, March 21-27, 1990, p. 16; Mark Uhlig, "Ortega on the Campaign Trail," *New York Times*, February 14, 1990, p. 3; Alma Guillermoprieto, "Letter From Managua," *The New Yorker*, March 26, 1990, p. 88.
28. Holly Sklar, "Many Nicaraguan Voters Cry Uncle," *Zeta Magazine*, April 1990, pp. 17-18.
29. Daniel Ortega, "Why We Sandinistas Lost the Election," *Newsday*, April 26, 1990, p. 79.

Sam Randall (1914-1990)

Sam Randall died May 30 in the Kingsbrook hospital in Brooklyn, New York, after a long illness diagnosed as Alzheimer's disease. He was 76 years old. The immediate cause of death was given as pneumonia and heart failure. He was a member of the Trotskyist movement from his youth until incapacitated by the disease that eventually killed him.

As the son of immigrant parents, Sam learned early in life that the vast majority of those who migrated to this country never found the promised land. Sam grew up in the Hebrew Orphanage Asylum at 137th and Amsterdam Ave. in Manhattan. This is where his education began, which in a formal sense was meager. But he learned to read well. He also developed artistic talents, attracted attention as a promising sculptor, and was awarded a small scholarship.

During these formative years Sam was influenced by older boys in the orphanage who were preparing to face the outside world, then in the grip of the Great Depression. Some were influenced by the Young Communist League, already a thoroughly Stalinized organization but still permeated with dissident ideology. Within the small world of the orphanage a variety of radical literature was available. Sam later recalled almost continuous arguments and debates about the conflicting views of the various radical organizations and independent publications. The *Modern Monthly*, edited by V. E. Calverton, was one of the magazines he liked to read because it published different points of view.

By the time of the Moscow trials in 1936 Sam had been pushed out of the orphanage and forced to make his way in the overcrowded labor market. But it was these trials that occupied his thoughts more than his personal plight. He sensed that something evil was at large in the Soviet Union which he was not then able to identify as Stalinism but seemed to him to have something in common with fascism in Germany. He began to learn more about Trotsky's struggle against the twin evils of the time, Hitlerism and Stalinism.

Much of Sam's early political education came from lectures and debates in the radical centers and meeting halls in New York where he listened to prominent representatives of different political currents: Max Lerner, Norman Thomas, Calverton, Jay Lovestone, A. J. Muste, Max Shachtman, and others. One of the few prominent speakers he did not hear during this period was James P. Cannon whom he later came to admire above all others.

As the boys left the orphanage they were provided with some sort of job to get them started on their own. It was Sam's lot to be awarded a "position" as messenger to a Wall Street brokerage firm, which didn't last long. Eventually he made his way to California by hitchhiking, a common mode of travel in those days. He found a job near Los Angeles at the Douglas airplane factory, at the time of the early CIO. Strikes were breaking out everywhere, many poorly organized. Douglas was no exception and the strike was soon defeated. But Sam met some Trotskyists who were trying to salvage something from the strike. He joined the Los Angeles Trotskyists who were then in the Socialist Party.

After the founding of the Socialist Workers Party in 1938 Sam returned to his native New York and decided to go to sea, first as a member of the Sailors Union of the Pacific and shortly thereafter as a member of the Seafarers International Union. He very quickly became recognized in the SIU as a knowledgeable unionist and capable organizer, and for a time he was urged by the relatively inexperienced officials of the union to remain ashore to help unionize some still uncontrolled maverick shipping companies. This was in the early days of World War II, when the Roosevelt administration was preparing to enter the war. And already at that early stage the government was intervening to "keep the ships sailing." Sam's suggestions on how to conduct job actions, which inspired confidence among the sailors to stand up for their rights, and at the same time to fend off the intervention of the Coast Guard and other government agencies, won the respect of everyone involved. At the regular Monday night membership meetings of the SIU in New York Sam was often elected to chair or to serve as recording secretary. But he could never be induced to take a job on the union payroll, and he never tried to explain this aversion.

Sam was on a ship when Pearl Harbor was attacked, or shipped out soon after. It may have been on that trip that he was taken ill with malaria in Durban, South Africa. He had met members of the South African Trotskyist movement, one of them a doctor. He had Sam taken from the medical facility provided by the shipping company agent and moved to a proper hospital. Later during a long period of recovery and recuperation Sam lived with his South African comrades. When he returned to the U.S. he brought back publications and other documents of the movement there which had become isolated from Europe and America because of the war. He reported that the main topic of internal discussion was the 1939-40 debate in the U.S. section of the Trotskyist movement over the class nature of the Soviet Union. This gave Sam an opportunity to review the main arguments of Cannon and Trotsky in defense of the Soviet Union as a deformed workers' state, and undoubtedly contributed to his further education. Sam was a firm supporter of the Cannon/Trotsky position and had a good understanding of the basic principles of Marxism that they explained and defended. It was during these debates that he came to appreciate Cannon as an educator and his talent as an orator.

Back in the U.S. Sam had no desire to become a war hero, nor a casualty. Ships were being sunk up and down the Atlantic coast, and during the first year of U.S. at war—1942—most of the prewar merchant fleet was lost to German submarines. Sometime in 1942 Sam enrolled in the merchant marine officers training school, and remained there through part of 1943. He received a second mate's license, and for the last phase of the war served as navigating officer. His sea

experience prepared him better than the inexperienced wartime captains he served under and in at least one instance personal relations on the bridge were unpleasant. Sam said the particular captain in question had been a corporate executive and had a license to sail his private yacht.

His trips as ship's navigator were transatlantic, carrying troops and war materiel, and his main interest was in making contacts with the war-scattered cadres of the Fourth International. He managed to find leading Trotskyists in Belgium who had survived the Nazi occupation and he returned with underground papers that were published by them and reports of the reorganization of Trotskyist forces in Europe.

When the war ended Sam left the bridge, threw away his officer's uniform, and returned to the fo'c'sle where he was more comfortable. In 1945 he shipped out of New York on a trip that he thought would return in a month to six weeks. He was gone for a year during which time the ship was used to transship U.S. lend-lease materiel (locomotive engines and other heavy equipment) from the Persian Gulf to China, spending weeks off-loading in Tsingtao. It was there that Sam heard the early rumblings of the Chinese revolution.

Sam was an able-bodied seaman and the union delegate on this ship. He paid off in San Francisco in September 1946 and was surprised to learn from the SWP branch organizer there that he had been elected by the seamen's branch in New York as a delegate to the party convention which was held that year in Chicago. This was testimony to Sam's standing in the maritime fraction which at that time had more than a hundred members and was second in size only to the auto fraction. Sam thought he was poorly qualified to be a convention delegate because he had been so long out of the country, had not participated in preconvention discussion, and was not familiar with the debates and differences in the leading bodies of the party. But he managed to find his way through the documents by the time he reached Chicago.

His long "round-the-world" trip was the last time he sailed as an SIU member, and his last trip on deck. He joined the National Maritime Union in 1946 and began sailing as an electrician in the engine department. The next three years were very exciting for Sam, the time when he felt he was most useful and most productive, and when he was most satisfied with himself. He sailed on the transatlantic troop convoys and passenger ships which carried large crews, and he was popular with the seamen in all departments. Very often he was elected to represent the engine department on the ships' union committees where he defended the rights and interests of all crew members and moderated the antagonisms that frequently developed among the different departments. He was an effective socialist agitator and had such an engaging manner that he seemed to be what a socialist ought to be. His personal relations with his shipmates and party comrades suited his socialist message of a peaceful egalitarian society. He regularly brought new recruits to the Socialist Workers Party and sold the party's books and pamphlets aboard ship.

Sam took naturally to union politics and was active in the faction struggles that developed in the NMU, quickly detecting who the phonies were in the emerging caucuses as they struggled for control of the union. This brought him into close association with Tom Kerry, leader of the SWP's maritime fraction in the NMU. Tom and Sam worked well together and at this time Sam formed warm personal ties to Tom and Karoline Kerry that endured for many years. An incident in the union struggles they occasionally reminisced about was when the NMU's president Joseph Curran and his gang, conspiring with agents of the U.S. Maritime Commission and the Coast Guard, set a trap for all union militants by introducing a resolution to outlaw "communists" in the union. A roll call vote was demanded. All who voted against the resolution were on record as "communists" and the Coast Guard canceled their seamen's papers. They were automatically out of a job and out of the union. Sam sensed the trap right away and simply left the meeting. He slipped through the Coast Guard screen, and continued sailing for another year or so. But shipboard life was different and the union had changed.

The industry underwent drastic transformation in the early 1950s. Sam easily found shoreside work. As a seaman Sam retained the family name on his birth certificate, Samuel Shatkovnik, which attached to his seaman's passport, able seaman's papers, navigating license, trip discharges, etc. After he stopped sailing he had his name changed legally to Barnett. But to all his comrades in the Trotskyist movement he was always Sam Randall. He adapted well to life ashore, got a highly skilled job with a marine repair company, and was sent as a troubleshooter to ports on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts wherever turbo-electric-powered ships needed repairs.

During the 1960s Sam continued his support of SWP campaigns, and was especially active in and financially supportive of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, the civil rights movement, and the antiwar movement. During this period of his life he met Ruth Schein, who had been attracted to the Trotskyist movement as a result of the Cuban revolution, for several years his comrade and companion. Ruth was associated with Reba and Joe Hansen in the publication of *World Outlook* and prior to that had worked on the *Militant* when George Weissman was editor. Upon learning of Sam's death Ruth recalled that he seemed to have an infallible political instinct, always able to detect the main conflicting class forces at work. She said, "He had a way of analyzing complicated political problems and explaining them in workers' language." For those who equate "workers' language" with profanity this may sound strange, especially if they happened to know Sam. He did not smoke or drink and never used profanity. He was always neatly dressed, convivial, and polite to everyone, and at parties enjoyed dancing.

Despite his early years in the orphanage and his years of sailing and living away from New York, Sam felt close to his sister and brother-in-law, Matty and Bob Appel. They were his family. They looked after him in the long years of his illness, devoting themselves to his care.

Some who knew Sam thought he was a "loner," a man who made his own decisions and never tried to involve others in the problems he had. We don't know about that. What is known is that Sam had no personal ambitions. He never sought to become a leader, not in the unions nor in the SWP. He may have thought the working class movement would be better off with fewer "leaders" of the kind he saw at close range, in the unions especially. ●

Frank Lovell

Malcolm X Commemorative Day Celebration

The first Malcolm X Commemorative Day Celebration in Pittsburgh on May 19 was a great success. Between 600 and 1,000 predominantly African-American people attended the event, most from Pittsburgh, but some from as far away as West Virginia.

The program started with a short movie, *Struggle for Freedom*, for those who arrived early. There were several short speeches about the legacy of Malcolm X and how it should inspire African-Americans today to unite and revive the struggle. There was also a "unity ceremony" in which all African-American community leaders present were invited onto the stage to make a pledge "to unite in the spirit of Malcolm X" to further the struggle of the African-American community for power and "self-determination."

There were also many cultural acts, including a poetry reading by South African refugee Dennis Brutus, several political numbers by local rap groups, and a dramatized collage of Malcolm's speeches by the Kuntu Repertory Theater.

Many expressed the hope that we would make this an annual event. Over six hundred persons signed petitions affirming their support for a Malcolm X commemorative holiday in the Black community (despite the fact that there was no one directing people over to the petition table to sign). People of all ages, ideological persuasions, and social classes attended.

Despite its success, there were some weaknesses in the program. There was not enough clarity on what Malcolm meant by "unity," "self-determination," "power," and other terms. Because speakers tended to be vague and imprecise on this, the revolutionary perspective of Malcolm's message was obscured—if not lost on many people.

After the program, the Pittsburgh Malcolm X Commemorative Committee planned to meet again to discuss this event and where we go from here in reviving the revolutionary spirit of Malcolm during this, the "Year of Malcolm X."

Claire Cohen
Pittsburgh

Marxism and Religion

The exchange of letters on religion between Scully and Huebner (*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, May 1990) were interesting, but suffered from abstractness and one-sidedness.

Scully identified the absolutely negative character of religion with the contradictory nature of liberation theology's humanism. This implies a static approach to possible emergence of secularism as a result of class struggle. She says "the humanist and progressive impulses of liberation theologians . . . [at] best can offer . . . consolation . . . at worst . . . a passive response to oppression."

As Huebner correctly observes, "Marx himself is much more dialectical." For a rich discussion see Paul Siegel's masterpiece, *The Meek and the Militant*.

Huebner's correction should be concretized with respect to Latin American liberation theology. Christian doctrine preaches original sin, and therefore acceptance of earthly misery. Liberation theology speaks of earthly salvation and participation in the class struggle. This is an internal contradiction which Marxists must recognize as having secularist implications.

Nat Simon
Miami

Interest in Socialism and the Nationalities Question

I always enjoy reading the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* and wish it were larger and had more articles. An article on the tactic to follow in the USSR on the seceding countries would be appropriate just now. We naturally support self-determination of national minorities, including the right to secede from the oppressor nation as in the case of Lithuanian independence. But how do we tie this in with the class needs of the Russian workers, and with the united working class struggle for socialism or with the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe?

This question of reconciling our socialist goals with nationalist aspirations gains urgency especially when it appears that the seceding nations are moving in the direction of capitalism. What can be done to tie the nationalist struggle to a return to socialism? Is there anything here that reminds us of our subordination of the struggle against Stalinism to the military defense of the Soviet Union during World War II? Of course there is some similarity in the two situations, the invasion of the German armies in 1941 and the present intrusion of the imperialist "market economy." But precisely what are the similarities? If the system of planned economy (one of the basic gains of the 1917 October revolution) is overturned the resulting social system will not be very different than if Hitler's armies had been victorious. That's why an article that addresses this problem would come in handy.

Fred Valle
Detroit

David Dinkins, Black Independence, and Zionism

I read with interest the article by Lloyd D'Aguilar "New York City Election Poses Challenge for Black and Working Class Movements" in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, Jan. 1990. The article contained informative data about both David Dinkins and about the decaying social conditions in New York City for which neither Dinkins nor his campaign offered any solutions.

I was troubled, however, by two aspects of the article.

First, nowhere in the article does Lloyd discuss the inherent problem of the Dinkins campaign—that he volunteered himself as a candidate for a political party with a capitalist program, that is, one which accepts that capitalist property rights, mechanisms, and profits must be respected and that satisfying human needs comes second. Except for a brief reference to Dinkins as "trapped within the logic of private property"—in the article's final paragraph—the reader is left to assume that Lloyd believes that Dinkins's opportunist and irresponsible behavior is no more than an endemic feature of all politicians and their machines. Is that Lloyd's view? Does Lloyd believe that a candidate running on a working class or socialist ticket would also become corrupt and irresponsible by the very fact of participating in the political process?

My second concern, and an even more disturbing one, is that Lloyd seemed to equate Jewish and Zionist: "Dinkins's position on Jewish issues did not hurt either." Lloyd then lists some ways Dinkins sought in Lloyd's opinion to win Jewish support. He lumps together both Dinkins's moves to dissociate himself from anti-Semitic remarks of Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan and Dinkins's explicit support for Zionism and the State of Israel. But it was not really Jews per se that Dinkins was trying to reassure by his professions of supporting the State of Israel; there are Jews who oppose both the State of Israel and Zionism and support the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination.

It was the Democratic Party tops and the capitalist financiers that Dinkins was addressing with such statements and pledges.

The Zionists would have us falsely equate Zionism and Judaism. They would have us falsely equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. The corporate media perpetuate this mythology because Israel is a military outpost of capitalist interests in the Middle East, their first defense against the Arab revolution, and a willing conduit to assist the U.S. government's counter-revolutionary activities internationally.

The Stalinist rulers in the Kremlin also equate Judaism and Zionism and seek to use the legitimate opposition of the Soviet public against Zionist aggression and its crimes against the Palestinians—to the extent that they are informed about it—to serve the Kremlin's anti-Semitism. Jews who oppose the government's anti-Semitic policies are accused by the rulers of being Zionists so as to discredit their just appeals. Sometimes, dissidents who are not even Jewish were told they'd best leave the country—for the State of Israel—so the Kremlin could accuse them of being Zionist even though they weren't.

Capitalist and bipartisan support for arming and maintaining the State of Israel has made it difficult to publicize Israel's atrocities, above all against the Palestinians. It has made it difficult to expose the State of Israel's counterrevolutionary policies abroad, often working hand in hand with racist and anti-Semitic forces against Jews and all who seek a more humane society where they presently live and who do not want to abandon their homeland in order to go live in the homeland of the Palestinians. However, many people, including progressive whites and Blacks—Jewish and non-Jewish—understand many of these truths.

Whether or not he intended to, Lloyd obfuscated this important issue and, even worse, helped perpetuate the current mythology.

I believe that in the future the magazine should be more careful to provide clarity on both of these issues.

Marilyn Vogt-Downey
New York

D'Aguilar Responds to Vogt-Downey

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to some of the points in Marilyn Vogt-Downey's current letter to the *Bulletin in*

Defense of Marxism, "David Dinkins, Black Independence, and Zionism." The thrust of Marilyn's letter is to criticize what she finds are some "troubling aspects" in my January 1990 article "New York City Election Poses Challenge for Black and Working Class Movements."

I am being taken to task for not pointing out David Dinkins's "opportunist and irresponsible behavior" in volunteering himself as a candidate for a "political party with a capitalist program."

The only thing I can say in defense to this rather grave sounding charge is that since I did not consider Dinkins as anything but a bourgeois politician, it did not occur to me that he should have been labeled "opportunist" or "irresponsible." In running on the Democratic Party ticket Dinkins was only following his natural class instincts.

The fact that the Black population might have had illusions in voting for him because of his race is another matter but I think it is only fair to say that the article stated very explicitly that Dinkins had nothing positive to offer the Black electorate, nor did he have any solutions to the economic and social problems of the city. I am thus a little curious as to whether Marilyn saw Dinkins as more than a bourgeois politician. It seems as if she feels that he has betrayed his class? Or perhaps she wanted me to extoll the virtues of some candidate who was "running on a working class or socialist ticket." If this is the problem that Marilyn has with the article then she is dealing with another article that needs to be written – not with the one written by me.

On the other "disturbing" question of Jewish issues I must confess that I somehow feel like I am being baited. Marilyn accuses me of equating "Jewish and Zionist" (sic) and, by logical extension, of helping to perpetuate anti-Semitic mythology. The basis of this threadbare contention is my sin of saying that in contradistinction to Jessie Jackson who supports the creation of a Palestinian state, Dinkins tried to ingratiate himself with Jewish voters by declaring his support for the State of Israel.

First of all, let me reassure Marilyn that I do not believe all Jews are Zionists. But this does not contradict my impression that Republican and Democratic politicians are correct in their perception that they are more likely to find favor among a majority of Jewish voters by declaring their support for the State of Israel than in supporting a Palestinian state or the PLO. I hardly see how one could accuse me of perpetuating anti-Semitic mythology by simply reporting what appears to be a fact of life in U.S. politics.

If Marilyn can show that Jewish voters no longer accept the Israel vs. Palestinian question as defined by bourgeois politicians, then I will gladly thank her for setting me straight on that score. In any event, it is one thing to point out that electoral politics appeals to the lowest common denominator, and another to blame me for shortcomings there might be in any specific Jewish movement which seeks, according to Marilyn, "a more humane society where they presently live and who do not want to abandon *their homeland* (my emphasis) in order to go live in the homeland of the Palestinians." Indeed, since Marilyn is trying so desperately to demonstrate her distance from Zionism, she needs to explain her usage of the term "homeland" as it applies to Jews. Her usage of the term sounds very much as if she is claiming some *natural right* of Jews to this "homeland." The Palestinian resistance movement has been militarily forced to recognize the de facto existence of the State of Israel, but I am sure it would be hard to find a Palestinian who today would give much credence to the Judaic claim to Palestine. It is this aspect of Marilyn's letter which I find disturbing and which needs clarification.

In conclusion, let me repeat that to be of Jewish descent does not make one a Zionist. But I would not go so far, unlike Marilyn, to say that there is no case that could be made for a connection between Judaism and Zionism. Judaism like Christianity or Islam can be, and is more often than not, used to support reactionary political ends. This does not mean, however, that one condones repressing the practice of these religions, though one would be unequivocally opposed to their reactionary political manifestations.

It is apparent that Marilyn is seeing things in my article that perhaps are more the result of her own lack of clarity on the question of "David Dinkins, Black Independence, and Zionism."

Lloyd D'Aguilar
New York

Once Again on the Eastern Strike

In responding to my letter on the Eastern Airlines strike (*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, No. 74) Bill Onasch maintains that even if Eastern is defeated in its plan to bust the union and make the company another Continental, and even if Eastern is driven out of business, Lorenzo would still be the winner and the union the loser, since the workers would not get their jobs back. I disagree.

Protecting workers' jobs is a central priority in any struggle against an employer. Preserving working conditions and living standards won through prior struggles is also a priority. What happens when an employer forces a choice between these priorities? Assume, for example, the existence of a multicompany association which conducts coordinated bargaining with a union. A breakaway employer repudiates the master agreement and insists on negotiating separately with the union. Its aim is to break the union, replace the existing workforce, and hire new workers at drastically reduced wages and benefits. So it makes outrageous and patently unacceptable demands, forcing the union out on strike. The strike is effective and the company goes out of business. Given the union's alternatives – abject surrender without a struggle resulting in the destruction of the standards of workers employed by the other companies in the association, or fighting the breakaway company and putting an end to its existence – the latter would certainly be a victory. This would be so despite the strike's having taken its toll among the workers, an unavoidable and inevitable occurrence so long as the capitalist system exists.

What could the union achieve in the case of Eastern? Onasch offers contradictory answers to this question. On the one hand, he implies that it could have won a quick, clearcut victory at the outset. On the other hand, he seems to believe that not much could be won at all.

First, he says: "The tragedy of the Eastern strike is that it didn't have to be a war of attrition with Lorenzo's bankrupt company. The unions involved had every legal right to tie up all of the nation's airlines and railroads. The might of all organized labor would have been brought to bear on behalf of the embattled Eastern workers. The relationship of forces would have been reversed."

I emphatically agree with Onasch that the unions should have extended their picket lines in the way he states. But it does not necessarily follow from this that a "war of attrition" with Eastern would thereby have been avoided. The workers' "legal right" to picket would have vanished overnight. The Bush administration had legislation prepared illegalizing secondary picketing, which is currently allowed under the Railway Labor Act. The U.S. Congress made up of Democrats and Republicans would have enacted the legislation in nothing flat. Injunctions forbidding the picketing would have issued in a hurry.

Given the control of the labor movement today by the class collaborationist bureaucratic leadership, and the reluctance of workers under that leadership to conduct illegal strike support activity which could cost them their jobs, and perhaps their freedom, Onasch's scenario, while undoubtedly the preferred course, would not have unfolded the way he projects it. So a "war of attrition" against Eastern would in all probability have ensued anyway.

Taking the other side of the argument – that Eastern's striking workers could win little or nothing from the company – Onasch writes:

> Lorenzo probably never intended to make a go of Eastern. He has ripped off Eastern for just about all he can. When he has devoured the last morsel he'll step aside and let the creditors pick over the bones of the carcass.

But that does not accurately reflect Lorenzo's objective. His perspective has been and remains building a leaner, meaner, union-free company. The union's aim has been to prevent this at all costs.

Onasch worries that if Eastern is liquidated, precluding the workers' reemployment by the company, this will have a "chilling effect on union militancy." But other workers forced out on strike, such as at Greyhound, have expressed admiration for the endurance and militancy being shown by the Eastern workers. The Eastern strike is more likely to inspire than to "chill."

As this is written, the outcome of the Eastern strike remains undecided, including the question of whether the company will be liquidated. The union and the trustee for Eastern appointed by the bankruptcy court are in negotiations. The union is seeking to get its members back to work and to negotiate a contract it can live with. The picket lines remain up and they continue to command the support of the entire labor movement.

Richard Scully
New York

[For a different assessment of the effects of the Eastern strike on the labor movement see the article, "The Crisis of the U.S. Union Movement," by Dave Riehle on page 12.]

FIT DIRECTORY

- Bay Area: P.O. Box 971, Berkeley, CA 94701
- Baltimore: Sarah Springer, 3203 N. Charles St. #203, Baltimore, MD 21218
- Boston: Mary Scully, 56 Prince St. #3, Boston, MA 02113
- Cincinnati: Kate Curry, 1136 Franklin Ave., Apt 1, Cincinnati, OH 45237
- Cleveland: P.O. Box 18874, Cleveland, OH 44118-0874
- Kansas City: P.O. Box 30127 Plaza Station, Kansas City, MO 64112
- Los Angeles: P.O. Box 480410, Los Angeles, CA 90048
- New York: P.O. Box 1947, New York, NY 10009
- Pacific Northwest: P.O. Box 17512, Seattle, WA 98107-1212
- Philadelphia: P.O. Box 28838, Philadelphia, PA 19151
- Pittsburgh: Paul Le Blanc, 357 Gross St., Pittsburgh, PA 15224
- Twin Cities: P.O. Box 14444, University Station, Minneapolis, MN 55414

BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS FROM THE FIT

Upheaval in China! by Tom Barrett and Xiao Dian $1.00

A Tribute to George Breitman: Writer, Organizer, Revolutionary, Edited by Naomi Allen and Sarah Lovell $5.00

* * * * *

MATERIALS FOR A HISTORY OF TROTSKYISM IN THE UNITED STATES:

Trotskyism in America, the First Fifty Years, by Paul Le Blanc $3.50

Organizational Principles and Practices, Edited with an introduction by Evelyn Sell $3.50

Revolutionary Traditions of American Trotskyism, Edited with an introduction by Paul Le Blanc $5.00

* * * * *

The Rocky Road to the Fourth International, 1933-38, by George Breitman $1.50

Organizing for Socialism: The Fourth Internationalist Tendency—Who we are, What we stand for, by Bill Onasch $1.00

Trends in the Economy—Marxist Analyses of Capitalism in the Late 1980s, by Carol McAllister, Steve Bloom, and Ernest Mandel $3.00

Don't Strangle the Party, by James P. Cannon $1.25

American Elections and the Issues Facing Working People, by Paul Le Blanc, Bill Onasch, Tom Barrett, and Evelyn Sell $5.00

Leon Trotsky and the Organizational Principles of the Revolutionary Party, by Paul Le Blanc, Dianne Feeley, and Tom Twiss $5.00

Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua, by Paul Le Blanc $3.00

A Year of Decision for U.S. Labor—The Hormel Strike and Beyond, by Dave Riehle and Frank Lovell $2.50

Order from:
FIT, P.O. Box 1947,
New York, NY 10009

The Trenton Siege by the Army of Unoccupation, by George Breitman $1.75

The Transitional Program—Forging a Revolutionary Agenda for the United States, by Evelyn Sell, Steve Bloom, and Frank Lovell, Introduction by Paul Le Blanc $4.00

Platform of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency $.75

Permanent Revolution, Combined Revolution, and Black Liberation in the United States, by Larry Stewart $1.25

Our Bodies! Our Choice! The Fight for Reproductive Rights, by Evelyn Sell $1.00

New:
***Fighting for Women's Rights in the 1990s,* by Claire Cohen, Carol McAllister, Gayle Swann, and Evelyn Sell $1.00**

"Paul Le Blanc's book represents an excellent analysis of the development of Lenin's conception of the revolutionary party, from its inception until the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution."—Ernest Mandel

Lenin and the Revolutionary Party

by Paul Le Blanc

Regular price (hardcover only) $55.00; Special 20 percent reduction for readers of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism:*

$44.00

Order from: FIT, PO Box 1947, New York, NY 10009