Information, Education, Discussion Bulletin

In Defense of Marxism

No. 98
July-August 1992
$3.00

Who Fueled the Fires in Los Angeles County?

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by Evelyn Sell

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Who We Are

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

FIT members and supporters are involved in a broad range of working class struggles and protest movements in the U.S. We are activists in unions, women's rights groups, antiracist organizations, coalitions opposed to U.S. intervention, student formations, and lesbian and gay rights campaigns. We help organize support for oppressed groups here and abroad—such as those challenging apartheid in South Africa and bureaucratic rule in China, Eastern Europe, and the former USSR. We participate in the global struggle of working people and their allies through our ties with the world organization of revolutionary socialists—the Fourth International.

The FIT was created in the winter of 1984 by members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party because they opposed abandoning the Trotskyist principles and methods on which the SWP was founded and built for more than half a century. We tried to win the SWP back to a revolutionary Marxist perspective, and called for the reunification of Fourth Internationalists in the U.S. through readmission to the party of all who had been expelled in the anti-Trotskyist purge. The SWP formally severed fraternal relations with the Fourth International in June of 1990. Our central task now is to reconstitute a united U.S. sympathizing section of the Fourth International from among all those in this country who remain loyal to the FI's program and organization as well as through the recruitment of workers, students, Blacks, women, and other activists who can be won to a revolutionary internationalist outlook.

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Bulletin In Defense of Marxism, No. 98, July-August 1992
Closing date June 8, 1992
Send correspondence and subscriptions to BULLETIN IDOM, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10009.

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Indexed in the Alternative Press Index

Who Fueled the Fires in Los Angeles County?

by Evelyn Sell

The acrid smell of flames blanketing Los Angeles County has been matched by the stink raised about who is to blame for the events following the "not guilty" verdicts in the trial of the four Anglo cops who severely beat Rodney King. Major finger-pointing has been directed at the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), at the Democratic Party, and at the lack of moral values.

Los Angeles Police

"Where were the police?" This question was immediately asked by residents in the affected communities, government officials, local and national media, and television viewers who watched—for hours—the setting of fires, the removal of items from stores, and the physical assaults broadcast from television news helicopters hovering over the South-Central intersection where outrage over the verdicts was first expressed. Police Chief Gates was denounced because, while this was happening, he was attending an event to raise funds for the campaign against Proposition F, a police reform measure on the ballot for the June 2 election. Chief Gates responded with countercharges: the police were inhibited by criticisms about their use of force; the LAPD was understaffed, under-equipped, and under-budgeted; and a field lieutenant was at fault because he withdrew police cars from the intersection and then did not redeploy police to the area.

The Police Commission has begun an investigation, headed by former FBI Director William H. Webster, to determine the facts and evaluate the performance and judgments of the LAPD. Much has already been reported by the media: 12 of the department's 18 patrol captains were involved in a training seminar while the trial verdicts were expected; both before and during the post-trial events, complete chaos reigned within the command structure—for example, normal weekly staff meetings had been suspended during the four weeks prior to the verdicts, and lower level officers had not received training nor a plan for dealing with possible problems following the trial; officers were told to go home after their regular shifts ended, and there was about a four-hour delay in calling a tactical alert to begin mobilizing LAPD forces. Even after the mobilization began, the top officer at the main command post couldn't get phones hooked up; motorcycle police were told to leave their vehicles near the Police Academy and were transported on buses to South Los Angeles—where they were stranded; other officers reported being shifted around from one part of the city to another without ever getting onto the streets. An LAPD video shows police sitting in the command center, laughing, and chatting calmly—while the 911 emergency lines were clogged with calls from people reporting fires, attacks, and serious problems.

On the other hand, the LAPD was very well organized in collaborating with the Immigration and Naturalization Service—contrary to official LAPD policy! Many hundreds of Latinos were arrested and 700 were deported to Mexico and Central America. On the pretext of searching for "looted goods," police and INS agents went into an apartment in a neighborhood popluated largely by Central Americans. After turning the place upside down and finding no stolen items, they demanded to see the occupants' immigration papers. A resident who could not produce the proper document was taken into INS custody. Day laborers, waiting on street corners for employers, were arrested by cops and taken directly to the INS office in the federal building. The joint operation was so well organized that the INS set up a special substation in a police headquarters to process persons detained by the cops. Los Angeles police turned more than 200 foreign-born persons over to the INS for possible deportation. Latinos arrested during neighborhood sweeps were denied access to legal counsel, mistreated, and pressured into signing repatriation agreements.

Role of Police in U.S. Society

The LAPD's paralysis during the early hours of the state of emergency was in stark contrast to its normal and well-regulated performance. Like all police departments around the country, the LAPD functions as an occupation force in communities of oppressed minorities and working class neighborhoods. The cops' role is to keep the lid clamped down tightly on challenges to the ruling elite. Most beatings, shootings, and arrests receive no public notice. But here are several well-known cases from the last several years. Striking janitors and their supporters were beaten and arrested by police when they demonstrated in 1990. Operation Hammer, a massive military-style show of force initiated in 1988, carried out sweeps of Black neighborhoods in 1990, which resulted in the arrests of over 25,000 youths—but less

than 1,500 were actually charged with a criminal offense. Tens of thousands of additional young African Americans were detained and hassled merely on a cop's judgment that they looked like they *might* have committed a crime in the past, or *might* be inclined to do so in the *future*. In June 1991, a coalition of civil rights and public interest lawyers filed a class action lawsuit against the LAPD for police dog attacks on more than 900 persons—mostly African Americans and Latinos—many of whom were bitten and/or mauled by K9 unit animals. Several weeks later, federal criminal civil rights charges were filed against an LAPD cop who fractured the skull of a Latino teen-ager and illegally arrested him. Gay rights activists, protesting Governor Wilson's veto of a bill banning discrimination against homosexuals, were beaten and arrested in 1991.

The racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes of LAPD cops were detailed extensively following the 1991 beating of Rodney King. Harassment of Blacks and Latinos is an everyday fact of life. Any one of the reactions provoked by these incidents could literally blow the lid off the seething resentments and angers which boil beneath the surface of "normal" city life. For the most part, the LAPD has fulfilled its repressive role and, in doing so, has helped fuel the kind of explosion which took place from April 29 through May 3. And when a local police department is not sufficient to stifle the inevitable revolt, the ruling class calls out its other resources: the National Guard, federal agencies, and—if necessary—Army troops and the Marines.

Yes, blame must be placed on the police for its long-term and continuing role within capitalist society.

Los Angeles is now officially "back to normal," and the cops are back to "business as usual." The May 28 *Los Angeles Times* published an account by an African American woman who described an incident she and her husband witnessed two weeks earlier. They saw 15-20 police cars driving slowly down the street, two other patrol cars had cordoned off the block with flares, and a police helicopter was flying overhead. All of this aggressiveness was aimed at a group of Black youths who had just left a nearby skating rink. The woman wrote, "They were herding a group of children down my street, like cattle. . . . I went to the police to ask them what had caused them to bring out such force on that Friday night." The answer was: we "escorted the gangsters who hang out at the skating rink back to South-Central." The day after she spoke about this on National Public Radio, three cops showed up at her home to investigate an anonymous tip that there were stolen refrigerators inside! Not finding anything, the officers apologized for the inconvenience and left.

Bush Blames Democratic Party

President Bush flew into Los Angeles on May 6 and spent 40 hours meeting with officials and community leaders, touring some devastated areas, and speaking to a group of young people. The president's projected aid package is obviously inadequate to cope with either the immediate or long-range needs in Los Angeles: a $19 million anti-crime and anti-poverty grant and $600 million in federal loans and grants to help rebuild businesses.

Using the opportunity to score a few election year hits against the Democratic Party, Bush "suggested that the riots point up the failure of the Great Society programs of the '60s and '70s" (*Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1992). President Johnson's anti-poverty campaign was a response to the pressures exerted by the massive protest movements and fermenting radicalization which started with the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, the civil rights struggles of Blacks, the emergence of a Chicano liberation movement, the free speech and students' rights movement, the rise of an organized feminist movement, the beginnings of lesbian and gay rights struggles, and the continuing mobilization of activists opposed to the Vietnam War. None of the Great Society programs were sufficient solutions to the basic problems of U.S. society—and the failures of these projects is the joint responsibility of both Democrats and Republicans.

Even Bush has to acknowledge the value of one Great Society project, Head Start—the only anti-poverty program he wants to fund at a higher level than before. I have firsthand knowledge of the erosion of this effort to help preschool children and their families; from 1965 until early in 1972 I was involved in Michigan and Texas Head Start programs first as a teacher and then as the director of one of the largest early childhood development programs in the country. For the first year, we had funds for an excellent teacher-child ratio, many support personnel in the classroom, nutritious and tasty breakfasts and lunches, medical and psychological services, social welfare for both children and parents, classroom equipment and materials, and field trips. After that propitious beginning, however, classroom staff was cut back, health and social services were reduced, and other features of the program were weakened during the Johnson and Carter administrations and also during the Nixon and Ford administrations. Even at its best, Head Start was never available for all children who needed the program. And the cuts it has suffered since its inception give an indication of the real reason for the "failure" of such efforts over the past 25 years.

President Bush conveniently ignores the role of Republican administrations in slashing and/or demolishing anti-poverty programs, Aid to Families of Dependent Children, and other parts of the "social safety net." He consciously says nothing about the many thousands of disabled children and adults who were denied federal benefits they were legally entitled to receive. And to give all of the devils their due, the impoverishment of the population blossomed and grew while Democratic politicians held majorities in the U.S. Congress.

There is an enormous and growing gulf between the overwhelming majority of the population and the tiny minority in the upper stratosphere of U.S. society. The Federal Reserve Board released figures in January comparing family financial worth in 1989. The bottom 20 percent earned less than $10,000 while the top 20 percent made $50,000 and up. The word "up" includes multi-millionaires and billionaires—which means that the accumulation of wealth by a very tiny percentage is even greater than the bare figures revealed. The reported trend over the last ten years—according to *government* reports—is for the rich to get richer, the poor to get poorer, and the middle layers to stagnate. During this ten-year period, white family incomes and worth climbed *upwards* while Black and Latino families were pushed further down the economic ladder. Other studies show that Native Americans are the most poverty-stricken section of the population.

Since the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling which was supposed to end school segregation, millions of students continue to receive separate and unequal education. During the 1980s, segregation actually increased for African Americans. According to a report by the National School Board Association, "Hispanics are now significantly more segregated than blacks." Recent rulings from the Supreme Court offer conditons for terminating current desegregation plans—providing more weapons aimed at education for oppressed racial and ethnic minorities.

Unemployment and job insecurity are impacting growing numbers of U.S. working people. About 25 million were unemployed at some point in 1991—that amounted to 20 percent of the labor force! At the end of last year, there were 8.9 million jobless persons, a figure very close to the previous record of nine million out of work in January 1984. And there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Cost-cutting plans involving job losses are already taking place or have been announced by many employers including General Motors, Chevron Corporation, IBM,

Woolworth Corporation, and Sears, Roebuck and Company.

The often-used term "working poor" describes those who live at or below the official poverty level—even though they have jobs, even though families include two wage earners, and even though people are holding down two and sometimes three jobs to make ends meet. To include the "working poor" in employment statistics hides the fact that they cannot subsist on minimum wage pay scales or cutrate incomes. Every day, for example, 2,000 U.S. families lose their homes through foreclosures.

A vivid account of this kind of situation was presented in a January 7 television program entitled "Minimum Wages: The New Economy." Investigative reporter Bill Moyers focused on Milwaukee, a city considered to have a *good* local economy—but a city where 60,000 workers compete for 8,000 job openings.

Gulf Between Poverty and Prosperity

California is called "the golden state" and Los Angeles is supposed to be a "la-la land" of lighthearted beach fun and film fantasy. But the area is plagued with some of the highest unemployment and underemployment rates in the nation, public school systems are at the bottom of the national listing, and the gap between the most wealthy and the most impoverished grew wider during the 1980s. Over the last decade, 1.3 percent of children under 18 years lived in poverty. The number of poor families increased by 28 percent; poor families headed by females rose to 32 percent. The number of elderly people living in poverty increased by 21 percent. The gulf between rich and poor is particularly striking in Los Angeles County. In every category—education, income, employment—South Los Angeles is below the city and the county averages.

The number of homeless in Los Angeles County has continued to increase—in fact, the city is being called the homeless capital of the U.S. Between 1980 and 1988, the cost of renting a small apartment rose by 110 percent. According to the 1990 census, half of the renters and a third of the homeowners in Los Angeles County were spending more than 30 percent of their incomes on shelter. Out of the almost 38,500 currently living on the streets, over 11,000 are children.

Bush is trying to make political hay out of the increasing misery underlying the recent Los Angeles county explosion. Yes, the inadequate Democratic Party programs of the 1960s and '70s deserve to be blamed—along with the Republican cutback policies of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. Both major capitalist-controlled parties share the blame for the Los Angeles events.

Murphy Brown and Moral Values

In a carefully prepared speech, delivered in San Francisco on May 19, Vice President Quayle said that the "lawless social anarchy" in Los Angeles was "directly related to the breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility, and social order in too many areas of our society." He cited statistics about African Americans showing sharp increases in illegitimacy and crime rates and noted that the poverty rate for families headed by a single mother is six times higher than the rate for families headed by married couples. He declared, "The intergenerational poverty that troubles us so much today is predominately a poverty of values." Pointing to the May 11 episode of one of the country's most popular sitcoms, the vice president said, "It doesn't help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown—a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman—mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another 'life style choice.' Marriage is probably the best anti-poverty program there is. . . . Even though our cultural leaders in Hollywood, network TV, the national newspapers routinely jeer at [moral values]. I think most of us in this room know that some things are good, and other things are wrong."

On the surface placing blame on a fictional television character seems silly and provides fodder for many comedians' jokes. But Quayle's remarks about Murphy Brown were aimed at serious political targets: the women's rights movement and the Black liberation struggle. This was a deliberate attempt to rally conservative and right-wing forces behind Bush's lackluster presidential campaign as well as a tactic to divert attention away from the real underlying problems which plague U.S. society.

Quayle's intent came through loud and clear. "Murphy Brown" creator Diane English immediately stated, "If the vice president thinks it's disgraceful for an unmarried woman to bear a child and if he believes that a woman cannot adequately raise a child without a father, then he'd better make sure abortion remains safe and legal." When Quayle spoke about morality and family values to a group of South-Central Los Angeles junior high students on May 20, a 14-year-old challenged him with the question, "What would you prefer? A single mom, or a dad who gets drunk and beats your mom?" Other students voiced anger because they recognized the insult directed at them and their single mothers.

Bush administration spokespersons initially endorsed the vice president's remarks and then attempted to dampen the negative reactions to the attack on single mothers. Marlin Fitzwater, for example, agreed with Quayle and then said that having the baby instead of an abortion was a "responsible decision," and that "The 'Murphy Brown' show is an excellent show." At first, Bush tried to duck the issue by saying he preferred two-parent families and didn't want to "get into the details of a very popular television show." But the president quickly returned to his previous stress on "family values."

Quayle, repeating his attacks against women and African Americans, lashed out at the "cultural elite" who criticized his comments on family values and told U.S. Air Force Academy graduates on May 27: "Children born out of wedlock are more likely to live in poverty, more likely to have trouble in school, and more prone to delinquency than those who are raised by two parents. These are facts, not opinions." According to Quayle, the role of government is to create a good environment for families by focusing on values such as hard work, integrity, and personal responsibility. The vice president's anti-poverty solutions included a call for "dismantling" the welfare system, making work or school attendance a condition for receiving benefits, and more emphasis on "a tough law-and-order policy."

The Democratic Party front-runner for president, Governor Bill Clinton, tried to present himself as a real alternative but didn't offer anything substantially different from his Republican counterparts. He criticized Quayle's "Murphy Brown" speech as "cynical" because "it ignores the relationship of our family problems to our national economic decline." However, his own proposals fall far short of what's needed by families and, in fact, place him in the same ballpark with the Republicans. Speaking in Cleveland on May 21, Clinton said that strains on family life were at the "core" of the nation's problems and that government alone cannot reverse worrisome trends in U.S. family life. Although he attacked President Bush for failing to take appropriate actions to help families, Clinton's approach is very similar to his opponent's: require welfare recipients to take public service employment after two years; and encourage states to experiment with programs to reduce out-of-wedlock births among welfare recipients, for example, by paying teenagers not to get pregnant and by denying additional benefits to women who have children while on public relief. Following the Los Angeles

events Clinton spoke about the "culture of poverty" among the poor which has contributed to the crisis in the inner cities, agreed that family values are "under fire" from the popular culture, and explained, "Like any parent, I'm troubled by the gratuitous violence and sex and mixed moral signals on television."

U.S. Families Pushed into Poverty

While attempting to divert attention from real problems and genuine solutions, Quayle's "Murphy Brown" speech helped throw a spotlight on significant crises in U.S. society.

The U.S. is the *only* major nation in the world without a family policy—a clear demonstration of bipartisan opposition to national health care, support systems for children and parents, parental leaves from jobs for the care of sick children and for pregnancy, child care programs, and so on. According to Quayle, individual businesses, not government, should decide on matters such as a family leave policy.

The numbers of single parents and working mothers are continually reaching new levels. Half of all marriages in this country end in divorce. African American children are three times more likely than whites to live in a single-parent household. A 1988 census report stated that 40 percent of African American families were headed by a woman alone; almost half of these families lived below the poverty level and six percent of Black families were headed by a man alone. A growing number of Latino families are headed by women alone; 48 percent of these families live below the poverty line.

Almost 60 percent of married women with children under six years of age are now working—out of economic necessity because their husbands cannot earn enough to support a family or because fathers default on child support payments. Unlike Murphy Brown (who is a highly-paid television reporter and is cushioned from most shocks of everyday life by a strong circle of friends and colleagues), the majority of single mothers and their children are forced to cope with horrific difficulties. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 1990, that only half of the 5 million women awarded child support the previous year actually received full payment. Partial suport was received by one-quarter and the rest got nothing. In Los Angeles County, for example, a local task force estimates that 237,000 parents do not fulfill their child support obligations.

Working class men may not be able to meet child support responsibilities because of unemployment or low wages. But one delinquent parent contributed a half-million dollars at a recent "President's Dinner" which raised $9 million for Republican congressional candidates. When the man's two former wives saw a photo of their ex-husband sitting next to Bush they sent a plea to the president to give them some of that half-million to pay child support owed by this wealthy father. As of May 22, GOP officials were consulting with lawyers about the mothers' request.

It's obvious what most families need: jobs; adequate wages; a raise in the current minimum wage rate; full health insurance; affordable housing; and childcare facilities. None—*none*—of these absolutely vital needs have received federal legislative approval or survived a presidential veto. On May 15, nearly 300 persons, most of them immigrant workers from various labor unions, attended a hearing held by the California Industrial Welfare Commission and complained about the minimum wage rate of $4.25 an hour. A family composed of a worker, earning the minimum rate, a wife, and one child falls 24 percent below the federal poverty standard. A family of four subsisting on a minimum wage salary drops 38 percent below the federal standard. It is estimated that 750,000 workers in the state are paid at or near the minimum wage.

Role Models in High Places

Blaming women for the problems of society goes back to the Biblical story about Eve's crime resulting in the loss of paradise, runs through the supposed destruction of the moral fiber of the nation because the suffragists fought for the right to vote, and was revived when the feminist movement emerged in the late 1960s. Blacks, Latinos, Asians and other ethnic groups have been routinely blamed for a host of social ills. Politicians deplore the violence depicted in films and television programs. But simply watching or listening to news broadcasts provides a host of real-life criminals, looters, and violent attackers: President Nixon who was forced to resign the highest political office in the land because of his involvement in the Watergate crimes; the scorched earth policies in Vietnam pursued by U.S. military chiefs; the deliberate violation of laws by military officers, government officials, and businessmen involved in the Iran-Contra scandal; the invasion of Panama and the bombing of civilian areas during the gulf war; the junk bond kings and the savings and loans officials who stole billions; the elected officals who took advantage of the House of Representatives private bank; the defense contractors who sell $600 toilet seats to the Pentagon; the Los Angeles cops who assulted Rodney King with batons, feet, and a laser gun.

Yes, there's plenty of blame attached to authority figures in government, business, and the military who live by the traditional moral standards of the original rapacious capitalist entrepreneurs and their greedy successors.

The Stakes Are High for U.S. Imperialism

On May 29, during his second visit to Los Angeles after the fires were doused, President Bush delivered a stern message that "there should be no misunderstanding: Federal assistance offers no reward for rioting. Lawlessness cannot be explained away. It will not be excused. And it must be punished." He warned that the problems of the cities can't be fixed "with a simple increase in federal funds." Bush's remarks were designed to address both domestic and international concerns.

Bush's original front-runner status is in jeopardy. Again and again, polls have shown large numbers of the electorate so disgusted with and alienated from normal machine politics that they prefer "None of the Above" or cast their votes for Ross Perot or Pat Buchanan as a protest gesture. The election campaigns were already mired in the swamp of politics-as-usual when the explosion in Los Angeles County thrust critical problems into the forefront of people's consciousness. The rotten core of U.S. society was exposed for the whole world to see. This is an annoying difficulty and a huge embarrassment to the ruling elite who are determined to establish themselves as the masters of the planet.

Domestic peace is needed in order to be free to rampage around the world—economically, politically, militarily. A loss of control at home sends a message of weakness to competing capitalists in the world arena. The law-and-order theme sounded before the Los Angeles events, and now revived more vigorously than before, is espoused by both major capitalist parties. In addition to currying favor with conservative and right-wing voters, U.S. imperialists and their servants in government need to demonstrate their ability to rule their own turf as well as the entire world.

As long as capitalists maintain their system they will be forced to deal with the message spray-painted on a burned wall in South-Central Los Angeles: "It's not over yet." ❑

A National Call to a People's Progressive Convention

This convention is being called and organized by Ron Daniels and the Campaign for a New Tomorrow.

Every four years the Democratic and Republican Parties tell us that by electing one of their presidential candidates we will be making a real choice. Every four years we are bombarded by media campaigns that only the rich can afford. And every four years we hear the same promises and platitudes which seem to evaporate right after election day.

It has become clear to a majority of people in the United States that no matter which establishment party candidate for president wins, we will get at best the "lesser of two evils." We don't get what our country desperately needs. We need fundamental change in the economic and political structures of our society. A flawed presidential sweepstakes is a much too narrow prescription for solving our nation's ills. For no matter who wins, the quality our lives continues to deteriorate. We cannot depend on those in power to solve the problems of our society which are in the best interests of the American people. We must do it ourselves.

Therefore we are calling for people all over our country to come to Detroit (Ypsilanti), Michigan, on August 21-23, for a massive People's Progressive Convention. There we will proclaim that we no longer tolerate our disenfranchisement by those in power and we will take steps to unify into an ongoing, united, independent, permanent, grassroots movement. We will show the country and the world that in this election year, 1992, we are not only disgusted and angry at the corruption, hypocrisy, oppression, and injustice coming out of Washington, D.C., state and local governments, and the transnational corporate establishment. *We will take concrete steps to do something at this national gathering.*

Our Country Is in Deep Trouble

Under a Republican president and a Democratic-controlled Congress we have been experiencing a growing series of attacks on our rights, our interests, and our environment which are making life increasingly intolerable for everyone.

Things which have become part of the basic fabric of our way of life for most people—adequate food, clothing, shelter, transportation, education, health care—are now the source of many bitter choices. Which comes first: rent; utility bills; food; gas; a trip to the doctor; a new coat; or getting the kids' teeth fixed? The reality of poverty that many Africa Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, poor whites, and women have always had to deal with is becoming the reality for many more people. "Full employment" is a thing of the past as permanent, structural unemployment becomes a growing reality for increasing numbers of Americans who thought that they were economically secure. Particularly abused are low-income communities of color, especially young people of color. What future do they have to look forward to under this system?! Farmers continue to be thrown off the land; by the year 2000 there will be virtually *no* Black farmers. And all the while, the super-rich are getting richer and richer while for most of us our standard of living is going down.

Affirmative action programs, the right to abortion, basic civil and constitutional rights—all are seriously threatened. Plants are closing down and moving to other countries where labor is oppressed, cheap, and unorganized. Neighborhoods and even the very homes of working class people in the inner cities are being grabbed by real estate speculators with the backing and cooperation of banks and government. Our environment is in serious danger as the ozone hole grows, winters are the warmest on record as the greenhouse effect threatens our children's and grandchildren's future, and our air and water become increasingly dangerous. The scourge of AIDS continues unabated as the politicians sit back and act as if they can just continue with business as usual. The Klan, Nazis, and other hate groups are alive and well. Police brutality is a national epidemic with the Rodney King beating only the tip of a huge iceberg. And prison construction seems to be the only "growth industry" in the U.S.

And with collapse of the Soviet "evil empire," why do *both parties* continue to pour hundreds of billions of dollars down defense department rat holes? It is clear that the greatest threats to our national security are right here at home, in the board rooms of the giant corporations and banks and in the halls of government in Washington, D.C.

In order to maintain this state of affairs, those in power keep us weak and divided. They pit white people against people of color and immigrants, who are scapegoated for all the problems faced by working people. Similarly men are divided from women by portraying the struggle for equality as a "threat." Lesbians and gays are blamed for the corruption of "moral values," workers are blamed for inflation, farmers for food price increases, consumers for pollution, etc. The victims—the many—are blamed, and blame one another, while the real culprits, the monopoly corporations and their political servants, get off free.

Responses Growing

But in spite of all these problems and the many obstacles placed in our path, something new is taking shape, emerging, struggling to be born. We see it being forged in the heat of principled commitment. We see it taking a tough and practical shape, emerging through organizations and groups all over the country. It is clear that across the country people have been fighting back, organizing to defend themselves against the lies and profit-taking that are getting more and more out of hand. There is probably more organizing at the grassroots of the society than at any time in the past 40 years.

While our struggles are many and our issues are numerous, we believe that the grassroots movements are inherently united because of the nature of the common enemy we face and the vision of a better life we struggle to hold onto. But we must make that unity real and practical so that we can bring about the major changes desperately needed in this country.

The most oppressed segments of our society, the Native and African Americans, Latinos, and Asian American peoples, must be empowered to play a central leadership role in a united movement for change. All successful social movements have been led by or involved significant elements of those communities. Therefore our goal is that the People's Progressive Convention will be fully 50 percent people of color. A new vision for our society must be a multi-cultural one.

We believe that a People's Progressive Convention this August 21-23, happening after the two establishment parties have had theirs, can show the country that *there is hope!* At the Convention we can put forward our own Declaration of Independence from a system which we have little, if any, real power to affect. We can learn about one another's organizing efforts to change unjust and oppressive conditions in our respective localities. We can find out

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Time Is Now for Independent Political Action

by Mary France

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Just as Rosa Parks decided one day that she would not give up her seat on that Alabama bus, I have decided that I will not give up my vote to a party or parties that don't serve or represent me. Sad to say, many of us continue going through the motions of rotating presidents hoping that things will get better. Maybe this one will give us a few less crumbs and that one a few more, but *crumbs* are *crumbs*. There is no fundamental difference between candidates and even the incremental difference is so minuscule it is barely noticeable. It is time we all stopped wasting our energies trying to be good Democrats. We have wasted eight years already waiting for Jesse to start a movement we could build upon. Unfortunately, Jesse is still trying to be a good Democrat.

Eight years ago I joined the National Committee for Independent Political Action because its purpose was to initiate and promote independent politics which could serve as an alternative to the "business as usual politics" of the Democrats and Republicans. Now I am profoundly convinced that we need a new party in this country that will speak to the needs of the masses, that will put people before profit. We need fundamental change, but *change* will never come as long as we continue to settle for the "lesser of two evils."

We must stop allowing ourselves to be manipulated by democratic rhetoric. The Democratic Party is an outmoded vehicle if we expect to realize the kind of progressive politics we need in order to survive. It is their capitulation to Reaganomics and Bushism that has created the deterioration and despair we are now experiencing.

Ron Daniels, independent candidate for president, has been crisscrossing the country using his candidacy as a vehicle for mass political education, building strategic alliances, and dialoguing with progressive forces as a way of beginning to build a movement that will be able to vie for power.

In Daniels's words, "The Democrats should be trying to organize the 91 million who didn't vote in '88. However, this does not interest them because they are in the back, hip, and front pockets of the same money interest which also buys and sells Republicans at leisure. The Democratic and Republican Parties are the same party with two branches. That is why engaging in politics as usual through them is a meaningless exercise."

Both established parties must share the blame for the economic crisis which grips the U.S. The fatal flaws of the U.S. economy were never more manifest than through the onslaught of Reaganism and Reaganomics—unabashed greed, corruption, and scandal, the complete militarization of the economy, and the gross mismanagement of the nation's resources, all in the interest of the minority of rich and super-rich individuals and giant corporations which rule this land. Workers, women, minorities, and the poor—the majority—were victimized to satisfy the whims and privileges of the minority."

In my humble opinion, looking at the Democratic and Republican Parties is like looking at different sides of the same coin; heads I lose, tails they win—a no-win situation. While we don't need a Bush or a Clinton, we don't need a Perot either. We are now shackled with three evils rather than two, and people are convincing themselves that because Perot is a new face he is somehow different from the others. Folks best beware; rushing to embrace Perot or anyone else for that matter without any scrutiny is very dangerous. People are so desperate and disillusioned and want change so badly they will unconditionally settle for anyone. We need a new independent party and an independent person who will speak to the needs of the masses.

What folks must understand is that we don't have to settle for less. We can look seriously at a candidate who is about fundamental change and use that candidacy to build for the future. Instead of worrying about the next four years, we should be aggressively working to build a movement and ultimately a new party that will usher in the kind of participatory democracy this country lacks, a democracy where people are engaged in the process of formulating policy, monitoring policy, engaged in taking over the government, and making government work in their behalf. We must not waste another four years and once again be faced with the lesser of two or three evils. Whoever wins this time, we will be the losers, for there will be no fundamental change.

Ron Daniels is right when he says that by exclusively pursuing an inside strategy, Jesse Jackson has sacrificed the potential leverage not only to pressure the Democrats but also to build a movement that could supplant the Democrats as the erstwhile "party of the people." The historical imperative for African Americans and the progressive movement is to move beyond the sterile constraints of the Democratic Party to build a vital and visionary new force for social transformation in American politics.

What the Perot campaign shows in a distorted form is that people are more open today to independent politics than ever before. We must not allow this opportunity to pass us by. What Jesse did not do with the Rainbow, we must now do with the Campaign for a New Tomorrow. We cannot afford to concern ourselves with the "lesser of two (or three) evils." What happens at the Republican or Democratic conventions really won't matter. We must go to our own People's Progressive Convention scheduled for August 21-23, in Michigan, and decide what we want for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

As an African American from the South who understands the blood and tears shed so Blacks could vote and as an educator who has preached time and again the importance of voting, I can hardly believe that I have come to a point where I will not vote if the only choices I have are Bush, Clinton, or Perot. But my vote is very important to me and I will not throw it away.

As an activist I have been on the front lines regarding issues of social and economic justice. I am sick and tired of having to fight for what ought to be god-given rights for all people. As a mother whose 21-year-old son was murdered on March 5, 1992, I am sick and tired of and disgusted with politicians playing politics while our children are being destroyed.

If we really want *change* we are going to have to make it happen, and the first step can be our letting established parties know that we don't have to vote for them and that we will no longer allow them to take us for granted. The struggle continues. ❑

The Myths Behind the Man

The question to ask about Ross Perot is not the one the mainstream media is asking, "Who is he?", but more importantly, "What does he represent?" In light of the fact that Ross Perot's candidacy is picking up steam, both the reality and the myth of what he represents must be explored.

At the heart of the Perot phenomenon is the realization by large numbers of people that the current electoral system does not work, and that politicians from both the Democratic and Republican Parties are unresponsive and unaccountable to the citizenry. Intuitively, people understand that Bush and Clinton are out of touch with the real needs and desires of working men and women. It is the questioning of a seemingly abstract political process, and the frustration that follows, that makes the self-avowed outsider so alluring. Common quotes from Perot supporters are: "I hate politicians. It's all lip service and no action. I want a doer. I don't know anything about Perot except that he's not a politician. That's enough for me," and "I don't know what Ross Perot is going to do about the inner cities, but he's a smart man. He'll figure it out. If you can make billions of dollars, you must be doing something right, yes?" (*The New York Times*, May 31, 1992). These embody an anger and frustration with the present two-tier system; the Democratic Party is no opposition, but merely the Republican's capitalist alter ego.

This mass disillusionment with the current political system is a positive step, but it was not created by the Perot campaign. Perot is simply taking advantage of it and there are negative aspects to this reality. Rallying around the ultimate of capitalists at a time of obvious capitalist crisis, Perot supporters reveal the immense amount of misinformation within the population and the lack of visible alternatives that seem realistic. People are projecting all of their hopes onto the "reluctant" candidate. In effect, Ross Perot is becoming all things to all people. With the conciliatory approach of the mainstream media, Perot has managed to flourish by not defining himself or his positions, but instead has let people think what they would like to about him.

Will the Perot bubble burst when the mystique around him fades? He says he's for the average American; who exactly does he mean? It's certainly not minorities or the poor when he proposed suspending their rights in order to conduct door to door search and seizures in entire neighborhoods. It's also not gays whom Perot said would not serve in his cabinet. Finally, it's not workers. Perot's vision of the workplace can be gauged by the way he has run his own company—Electronic Data Systems (EDS).

"And EDS was run in a rather fascistic manner: the strict rules about employees' clothing and facial hair; the credo that an employee must devote him/herself fully to the company; the way in which Perot was the corporation's father-leader" (*The Village Voice*, May 26, 1992).

Exploring the Perot "Phenomenon"

by Michael Batson

Myth number two is about Perot the self-made billionaire. In fact it was Medicare and Medicaid which made Perot a wealthy man. In 1965, while working part-time for Texas Blue Shield, he used public money to develop a computer system which could process the claims of Medicare and Medicaid patients. Once the system was developed Perot left Blue Shield and used it as the backbone of EDS.

Myth number three is his stand as a political outsider—someone against waste and special interests. The truth is that while he has not been a politician, he has certainly bought a few. Two blatant examples bear this out. The first was in 1972 when the Nixon administration, in the person of Elliot Richardson, head of the Health, Education and Welfare Department played a vital role in getting EDS a Medicare contract in Ohio and West Virginia at three times the cost of competitors' bids. In return two EDS executives donated $200,000 to the Nixon campaign. In 1987, the FAA approved a $25 million airport in Fort Worth on land owned by the Perot family. Early in the year the FAA had said that the project was too ambitious, that Perot should "compete fairly against other important projects in Texas and the nation" (*The New York Times*, May 29, 1992). However, after an exchange of money and back room meetings—$1,000 to Mayor Robert Bolen and $5,000 to House Speaker Jim Wright (who later resigned under the cloud of an ethics investigation in a money-for-favors deal)—the Alliance Airport was given high priority and was opened in December of 1989.

The fourth major myth is that Perot is a protagonist of democracy with his talk of electronic town meetings. But behind the scenes Perot tried to bypass international neutrality agreements in 1981, by buying an island in the Caribbean and using it as a trap to fight drug smugglers. It would have been the base of a profit making business, and scariest of all, it "would be operated by Perot-financed commandos." Behind the scenes in 1986, Perot was contributing as much as two million dollars to Lake Resources, a Swiss front company set up by Oliver North to funnel money in the Iran-Contra scandal. While no direct link has been made between Perot and the Contra effort, the deal is right in line with the "behind the backs of the American people" kind of maneuvers that Perot now denounces so loudly.

Perot is a "doer." The question is not "can he do?", but "What will he do?" This brings us back to the original question, "What does Ross Perot represent?" We see a movement beginning that does not reflect the reality of what is needed to change things for the benefit of the majority of people. Public support for Ross Perot represents what the Los Angeles riots, David Duke, and Pat Buchanan have already shown: a people frustrated, angry, afraid, and desperate, with no clear alternative, taking actions which can even be self-destructive. One positive result might well be the breakup of the two-party deadlock, creating the potential for genuine, independent (of the U.S. ruling class), grassroots political organization. Perot's campaign represents the beginning of a different kind of grassroots movement, however, that moves in the wrong direction. By involving people in political activity, many for the first time, the Perot supporters might eventually settle for a "well, at least he's our crook" mentality. Finding in Perot a "last hope," they might not let go even when his true colors show through.

On the bright side the opening up of the political process allows greater opportunities for genuine grassroots organizations—such as Labor Party Advocates, NOW's 21st Century Party, and the Ron Daniels campaign—to flourish. ❑

Needed: A Working Class Program for Mass Transit

by Bill Onasch

It is fashionable today to be "green," to care about the environment. Advertising agencies are busy promoting both environmentally friendly consumer products and environmentally aware candidates for office. And growing public consciousness of the environmental nightmares created by U.S. capitalism has led to some modest positive results here and there.

But there has been no meaningful progress in the single most critical area: transportation. Cars and trucks consume nearly two/thirds of the petroleum burned in the United States. Their internal combustion engines, though quite powerful, are inherently inefficient. The best of them can convert only about 20-25 percent of the heat energy they produce into useful mechanical energy. The wasted heat energy is a major source of carbon dioxide—a key ingredient in the "greenhouse effect." While car exhausts produce unwanted, smog-producing ground level ozone, leaking auto air conditioners are the single biggest culprit in depleting the vital ozone layer in the upper atmosphere. Despite relatively greater fuel efficiency in recent years, many new restrictions on car exhaust systems and filling station pumping procedures, we have seen mainly a change in the composition of air pollutants rather than any real reduction in pollution volume.

Exhaust emissions are far from the only threat to the environment linked to the proliferation of cars. Disposal of lead from discarded batteries is a major problem. Another challenge is what to do with worn-out tires. Each year waste motor oil finds its way into our water tables in quantities many times greater than the *Exxon Valdez* spill. The Environmental Protection Agency has also identified tens of thousands of gasoline storage units leaking into the water tables as well.

And, not least of all, is the tragedy of thousands of deaths, and tens of thousands of injuries, due to car wrecks every year. The cumulative toll of traffic fatalities is considerably greater than the combat death totals of U.S. involvement in four major wars in this century. Yet there are no parades, no memorials, dedicated to traffic victims. We have come to accept these preventable deaths and injuries as a natural part of our everyday lives.

There will never be a clean internal combustion engine. It is extremely unlikely that electric cars will ever prove to be a viable alternative to conventional propulsion. And, even if air pollution problems could be solved, traffic density problems, and uneven driving skills, would still lead to carnage on the road.

Transit in Decline

The only acceptable alternative to growing environmental destruction is replacement of reliance on individual cars by various forms of mass transit. But the trend of mass transit over the past half-century has been one of decline. Even present inadequate service levels are under renewed attack.

There was a modest comeback by public transit during the 1970s, but the Reagan-Bush years put transit into fast-reverse. During the years 1981-91, federal spending for highways increased 85 percent, aviation increased 131 percent, but spending for transit programs actually declined 5 percent.

The Bush administration seeks even deeper cuts. Last fall, Congress passed the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act* (ISTEA) with great hoopla. Transit was only a small part of this total package, but authority was granted for a modest increase in transit spending. Even this still drop-in-the-bucket measure has been given the axe in the administration's budget proposal. Bush wants to spend just under three billion dollars on transit this year—43 percent less than ISTEA provided and 19 percent less than what was actually spent last year. This level of spending will require deep cuts in existing transit services.

Hooking America on Car Dependency

Most "experts" ascribe the decline in transit to "America's love affair with the car." But this affair did not develop out of love at first sight. Dependency on the automobile came about as the result of decades of social policy promoted by the ruling class. The auto industry, along with its dependents in the oil, steel, rubber, and construction industries have come to play a dominant role in the U.S. ruling class much greater than their counterparts in other major capitalist countries. These elements view themselves not just as competitors to mass transit—they have proven themselves to be its energetic mortal enemy.

The United States was once among the world leaders in mass transit. New York City began developing a rail transit system in 1867, just three years after the first pioneering efforts in London. After the first electric streetcar was launched in Kansas City in 1889, trolley car networks blossomed in every town of any size. Mass transit use was a vital, integral part of urban life in the United States from the 1890s right up through World War II.

The development of the automobile during this same period did not have a qualitative impact on transit. As late as the Second World War many working class families did not have a car and multiple-car families were rare indeed. Even those families with cars still heavily used transit for at least part of commuting to work and school, shopping trips, and even during their leisure activities.

The post-World War II period saw a drastic decline in transit. But this was not because of some sudden infatuation with the motor car. The auto interests used both their clout in government and direct intervention in the transit industry to make urban Americans increasingly dependent on the automobile.

As World War II was drawing to a close, top capitalist planners saw unprecedented opportunities to satisfy pent-up consumer demands after 15 years of depression and war. With the demobilization of the armed forces, and the expected baby-boom, an acute housing shortage was anticipated.

Unlike the European capitalist countries, and also Japan, the U.S. did not have great population density and high land prices. Ruling class planners opted to create new suburbs rather than renovate and expand central cities. To facilitate their plans they needed the aid of the capitalist state.

Prior to World War II, federal government policy toward car and truck transportation was perceived as assistance primarily to rural areas. The first Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1916, in fact,

expressly forbid the use of any funds on urban road projects. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 reversed that policy. For the first time massive amounts of federal money was allocated to urban/suburban projects. This policy was greatly escalated with the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which established the Highway Trust Fund. This fund reimbursed states for 90 percent of the costs of the interstate highway system. This system, of course, not only connects major cities; it is also the core of the freeway systems that move cars within metropolitan areas.

This highway legislation, along with Veterans Administration and Federal Housing Administration mortgage guarantees, facilitated the mushrooming of auto-dependent suburbs in almost every metropolitan area. The auto and construction industries were to be central to the 25-year postwar economic boom.

The auto interests did not adopt a passive approach to the competition of transit. The Du Pont family, major holders in both General Motors and several GM suppliers, financed the takeover of a number of key transit companies across the country. Their aim was not to diversify their portfolio but rather to wreck these transit operations.

The new owners raised fares and cut service. They liquidated the highly efficient electric streetcar and trolley bus systems. (A bonus for them was the interim replacement of electric units with GM-built diesel buses.) They created a vicious circle: fare increases and service cuts led to declining passenger revenues which were used to justify more and more fare increases and service cuts. In a typical example, Kansas City, ridership on streetcars and buses declined 51 percent in the period from 1947-55. The contraction of the Kansas City transit workforce was even sharper—from 2,200 workers to 800.

This conscious wrecking policy was used to create the conditions for making the automobile a recognized social necessity. In all but a handful of the biggest cities, it eventually became impossible to lead a socially acceptable life-style without a car.

A Step Back from the Brink

By the mid-1960s, the private transit companies had brought transit to the brink of collapse in most major cities. (In a number of small and even medium-sized cities, transit did in fact disappear completely.) The auto interests would have been content to see its total demise. However, some sectors of the ruling class wanted to salvage a certain base core, mainly concerned with two categories:

1) The working poor, who will never be able to own a car. No capitalist fretted much about the conditions of these workers but their employers were concerned that they have some way to get to their minimum-wage jobs.

2) Those capitalists with interests in maintaining downtown areas for whom it was desirable to have rush-hour commuter bus service in order to keep employment in the face of ever-growing traffic jams and escalating parking costs.

In 1964, the Urban Mass Transportation Act was passed. This act established a national objective of preserving and expanding transit, as part of a balanced transportation policy, in cities with populations over 50,000—a worthy goal. But this goal has proven as elusive as the goal of full employment—first established by federal law in 1946.

As a result of this legislation, semipublic transit authorities were established in most major cities to try to salvage something from the shambles left by the private sector. In most cases they were able to stabilize a bare-bones system centered around weekday rush-hour service into downtown areas. In a few cities there was a modest rebound from the depths of the private sector wrecking period though nowhere did transit revive to anywhere near World War II levels.

These transit authorities, like all government agencies, operate in the interests of the capitalist class. They are usually run by an appointed board of representatives of various government units, local business executives, and token labor representatives. Sometimes they contract day-to-day management out to management-specialist firms who have no background in public transportation; they come in to run a business. These agencies are funded mainly through subsidies from various levels of government. Fares typically provide only 25-35 percent of operating expenses. This has made them a prime target for attacks from champions of fiscal responsibility and deregulation.

Transit Bosses Get Tougher

The transit authorities established in the 60s and 70s generally recognized the existing unions from the old private companies and maintained the workforce with its established level of wages, benefits, and working conditions. Federal grants providing subsidies also usually gave protection to union organization and conditions. Often the unions had to agree to give up the right to strike, and instead agree to binding arbitration, in these federal sidebars to their employer contracts, known as "13C" agreements. The major union in the industry—the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)—itself has long maintained the goal of arbitration. It in fact will not sanction strikes unless the employer refuses to arbitrate.

Assured of a steady base of dues-payers the leadership of the transit unions, for the most part, enjoyed a cozy relationship with the transit authorities management. They did little to protest further erosions in service.

But, just as in the private sector, the cozy days are now over. Transit unions are coming under increasing attack, both directly by their employers and indirectly by ruling class proponents of Reaganomics.

These attacks are being stepped up in the context of the troubled economy. Legislative bodies are becoming more and more tightfisted in appropriating grants for any social programs. Many authorities depend heavily on a share of local sales tax revenue—a dwindling source whenever retail sales decline or stagnate. Grow-

Annual Passenger Trips Per Person on Public Transit:

Moscow	678.2
Hong Kong	466.3
W. Berlin	394.5
London	284.4
Toronto	177.6
New York	121.5
Boston	79.9
Los Angeles	59.2
Detroit	14.7
Phoenix	9.1

Pollution Emitted from Typical Work Commutes in the U.S.:

Mode	Hydrocarbons	Carbon Monoxide	Nitrogen Oxides
(grams per 100 passenger-kilometers)			
Rapid rail	0.2	1	30
Light rail	0.2	2	43
Diesel bus	12.0	189	95
Car	130.0	934	128

Source: American Public Transit Association

ing unemployment has also contributed to lost passengers. Costs of new equipment, and fuel, continue to climb above the average rate of inflation.

Critics point to increased labor costs and declining labor productivity as a central problem in the industry. But this is deceiving. Transit wages in dollar amounts have indeed gone up but still have lagged behind the inflation rate—there has been no increase in real wages for more than a decade.

Labor productivity has gone down—but this has nothing to do with how hard transit employees work. Unlike in manufacturing, there have been no dramatic technological improvements in transit operations in many years. Transit productivity is measured in the numbers of passengers moved per hour. As passenger volume declines, and traffic congestion slows schedules, this productivity measure will likely continue to drop.

To offset labor costs, the transit employers have pressed the unions on several major fronts:

- Demands for increased use of part-time employees. Part-timers seldom get any benefits. Sometimes they are locked into a permanent two-tier wage structure.
- Elimination of cost-of-living protection during the life of a contract. This has become an almost universal demand within the industry.
- Proliferation of "minibus" service, placing small buses on less-traveled routes and paying drivers on these routes a substantially lower wage.
- Subcontracting out of maintenance work to nonunion shops paying substandard wages.

Transit employers have also taken to protracting contract negotiations far beyond the expiration of contracts and are resisting even arbitration. PAT officials in Pittsburgh are exempted by state law from binding arbitration and they rejected a fact-finder's recommendation for a new contract, to replace the one that expired last November with ATU Local 85, forcing a strike there. Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (ATA) has spent tens of thousands of precious transit dollars in legal fees—and forced ATU Local 1287 to do likewise—in a so far unsuccessful attempt to use the courts to nullify their contractual obligation to arbitrate. Kansas City transit workers have been without a contract for nearly three years.

Privatization Scams

But the ultimate challenge to the unions is coming more from Washington than the local transit authorities: the growing campaign for privatization—turning the systems, or large chunks of them, over to private, nonunion operators.

In 1984, in line with the Reagan administration's overall objectives of privatization and deregulation, the Urban Mass Transit Authority (UMTA) demanded that all federally funded transit authorities actively pursue private participation in their operations.

In addition to countless cockroach local operators, several national firms, such as Ryder and Mayflower, are eagerly pursuing transit business in a number of cities. Where privatization has taken place, so far mainly on a piecemeal basis, union workers have been replaced with workers earning less than half the union scale and receiving few, if any, benefits.

The bosses claim that the private sector can be more "competitive" and "efficient." They hope people will not remember that until less than 30 years ago the industry was dominated by the private sector. They ran it into the ground. That's why the transit authorities had to be established in the first place.

The theoretical justification for the UMTA's policy is that regular competitive bidding by entrepreneurs will produce greater efficiency and lower costs to the public than a bureaucratized public monopoly. But, just as in the airline industry since deregulation, experience has shown that initial competition is quickly replaced by ever-narrowing concentration.

A case in point is Westchester County, New York. This affluent area has let out all transit operations to competitive bidding since 1975. Initially there were 16 private companies involved, none carrying as much as a third of the system's passengers. A decade later only eight operators remained and the largest one was carrying 93 percent of all passengers. This dominant operator had a vehicle operating expense average per revenue hour only slightly less than the public, huge, and complex New York City system.

There is of course no magical secret to the supposed "efficiency" of the private sector. They will pay the same prices for equipment and fuel as the transit authorities. In addition they will be expected to return a competitive rate of profit to their investors—something the transit authorities don't have to do. There are basically only two areas in which the privateers can achieve any advantage over the present system: 1) possibly cutting corners on maintenance, with a resulting threat to passenger safety; 2) but mainly by paying drastically reduced wages to their workers.

Even this of course does not produce real efficiency. In the Kansas City area there has been a major experiment with privatization—the decision of Johnson County, Kansas, the Kansas City area equivalent to Westchester County, to opt out of the Kansas City ATA and contract out its bus service. Johnson County is the most affluent part of the metropolitan area with both the most exclusive residential suburbs and growing concentrations of corporate offices and high-tech service industries. Few residents of the county ride the bus but a lot of workers from the inner city must use the bus to work there. Since privatization, Johnson County Lines has had proportionally more service cuts, and higher fare increases, than the ATA system they opted out of.

Experience with privateers, usually companies also involved in school bus operations, shows that they have inferior records in safety and schedule standards. They have a much greater rate of turnover and absenteeism. This is explained by the miserable wages and paltry benefits paid by these "efficient" bosses. The best drivers and mechanics don't stay with them long.

While unionized transit workers may require twice the wages the privateers pay, their safety and schedule performance clearly demonstrates that a skilled, stable workforce is far more efficient by any objective standards. But, objective considerations aside, privatization remains a real threat.

Don't Show Anybody Your Check

Transit union officials understand the dangers of these attacks—especially privatization which would completely destroy their base. But in the main they have been reluctant to take any steps beyond lobbying "friends of labor" in public office. Their timidity sometimes verges on the bizarre. They often tell the ranks that it would be a mistake to raise a public fuss about these issues because if the public finds out how much transit workers earn they will side with the employers.

At one time decent wages and conditions were a source of pride in the union movement, the main argument used in convincing the unorganized and underpaid to become part of the movement. Today we are advised to keep the benefits of unionism secret lest our fellow workers become jealous.

It cannot be denied that there is a certain element of truth to the union bureaucracy's concerns. This is demonstrated in the lukewarm, at best, support striking transit workers in Pittsburgh are getting from organized labor, not to mention the working class as a whole. But the lion's share of the blame for this breakdown in solidarity must be assigned to the union bureaucracy who have preached the need for concessions. If you accept the bosses' arguments that times are tough, and that we must all accept

sacrifices if we are to continue to have jobs, then workers striking for higher wages, especially when they already earn better than average wages, will appear greedy and irresponsible. The bureaucrats find it easier to accept the present level of confusion among workers than to try to educate through the course of struggles.

Think Socially and Act Politically

Transit unions, even more than most unions, need to go beyond traditional business unionism if they are to survive. It will be impossible to maintain wages and conditions in a declining industry. The interests of transit workers can be advanced only through a broader social and political movement for mass transit. These interests coincide with the real interests of the working class as a whole, and the environmental movement. Transit unions are the best positioned force to lead a struggle for mass transit and have powerful potential allies.

But to do this means not only a break with business unionism but with business politics as well. Transit requires an enormous commitment of public funds. The two major parties are completely dominated by the capitalist class. While struggles may wring some reforms here and there from elected officials, no significant major party forces are going to take on the auto and oil interests in developing a new social policy for transportation. Only a working class-based party could be relied upon to consistently promote such a policy. The unions are presently the only genuine mass organizations of the working class. They constitute the natural launching pad for a new workers' party.

Toward a Working Class Program

It is impossible to develop a full-blown, detailed blueprint for developing mass transit at this stage. But there are some essential elements that must be included in any working class transit perspective:

• Transit must be seen as a vital social need and cannot be fairly measured from a cost-accounting approach. In assessing the value of transit we must look at tremendous advantages not easily quantified: safety, improvements in air quality, and even, eventually, potential indirect savings when money diverted from highway construction, insurance, car costs of all kinds, etc, etc., are factored in.

• Those presently dependent on cars will not be lured to using transit until there are qualitative improvements in service. Systems must be greatly expanded and there will undoubtedly be a transition period when these services will be underutilized. This is a price that will have to be paid in reversing decades-long patterns of transportation.

• Schemes such as car and van pools contribute little to easing the problems of auto-centered transportation. We need to develop rail transit systems, underground or elevated, for the biggest cities; electric-powered surface light rail vehicles and trolley buses for medium-density areas; natural gas powered buses and minibuses, for lighter traffic areas.

• To encourage the switch to transit use, fares should be eliminated or reduced to a nominal amount. Once effective alternatives are in place—and only then—financial penalties, in the form of taxes and user fees, should be placed on those who continue to drive personal cars.

• Transit policies on the local level should be determined by democratically elected boards of transit users and transit workers. These local boards would elect a national body to coordinate a national transit plan and standards.

• Making mass transit dominant in metropolitan areas will require a big expenditure. But, to put it in perspective, a tenfold increase in present transit subsidies would still be considerably less than what has been spent on bailing out the Savings & Loan industry. The money needed to finance transit expansion should come from those funds currently earmarked for new highway construction, and from the military budget.

• The social benefits of a switch from auto dependency to mass transit would be largely offset by economic collapse and mass unemployment if steps are not taken simultaneously to reorient the human and material resources currently tied to the auto and ancillary industries. Much of these resources would be absorbed by the construction, maintenance, and operation of expanded transit. But some will need to be redirected. The living standards of all affected workers have to be maintained until they are retrained and obtain other suitable employment. There is of course no lack of socially needed work: repair of infrastructure; environmental cleanup; construction of affordable quality housing, etc.

Only Socialism Can Complete the Project

This perspective will not be fully realized under capitalism. Only a democratically planned economy could make the kind of massive shift in social and economic priorities that I have described. But such a perspective, properly explained, will make sense to a lot of people today, and to the big majority in the future. Fighting for such reasonable perspectives is an important part of educating the working class about what genuine socialism means and why its achievement would not just be nice but is vital to the interests of the majority.

We of course can't wait until the victory of socialism to wage struggles around these issues. The transit unions have a responsibility today to forge coalitions with transit users, particularly in the inner-city communities who are most dependent on transit, to fight every threatened service cutback, every fare increase proposal. These coalitions can also be helpful to the unions in fighting attacks by the employers on wages and conditions and threats of privatization. Struggle is the best teacher and the coming period will be full of educational opportunities for those willing to learn. ❑

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Immigrant Workers: A Vital New Force for Unions

by Evelyn Sell

For many years, the announcers of "conventional wisdom" in the labor movement declared that immigrant workers could never be organized into unions because they would be too frightened by the bosses' threats to report them to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)—leading to deportations. These pronouncements have been weakened by recent developments in organizing immigrant workers involved in manufacturing, the garment industry, schools, hotels, and service jobs. The labor movement is being forced more and more to look for opportunities to unionize immigrant workers as a means of revitalizing its membership base and to protect once-secure workers who are now hit hard by the recession and the employers' anti-labor offensive.

Although immigrant workers have been unionized in various areas across the country, the situation in Southern California is of particular interest because of the high percentage of immigrant workers—mostly from Central America, Mexico, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Population changes involving racial and ethnic diversity have been swifter and more pronounced in California than anywhere else in the U.S.

In some respects, these changes prompted positive developments in the local labor movement. Experience and militancy was brought into U.S. job situations by many labor activists from Central America fleeing repression in their countries of birth. Salvadorans, for example, injected a new pro-union vitality into the Los Angeles area. Former Salvadoran union leaders and university students have become a major force in efforts to organize low-wage workers. Guatemalan and Honduran immigrants have also contributed organizational skills, union consciousness, and survival tactics learned from resisting anti-worker violence by police and death squads in their native lands.

Legal status was gained by many undocumented workers who applied for amnesty and permanent residency when the federal Immigration Reform and Control Act went into effect in 1987. Although national labor law allows undocumented workers to engage in union campaigns, the threat of deportation remains as a weapon of the bosses. But, as some cases show, this kind of terrorization is not as effective as in past years.

The current job situation in California is creating some contradictory effects. Unemployment rates are currently higher than for the rest of the states due to the recession, cutbacks in the defense and aerospace industry, and significant changes in capital investment. Job insecurity is mounting as the overall situation not only continues but escalates. On the one hand, these conditions have helped the bosses' normal divide-and-conquer approach of setting one group of workers against another; on the other hand, the growing equalization of misery among different sections of the working class combined with the militancy displayed by immigrant workers opens opportunities for cementing connections between skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed, and workers of different racial and ethnic groupings.

A February 24, 1992 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, describes the situation of an unemployed carpenter who was forced to join the groups of immigrant workers waiting on street corners for prospective employers to drive by and offer temporary jobs. For the first time, U.S.-born skilled Anglo workers are standing alongside immigrants from Central America and Mexico to compete for day-labor opportunities. A cite coordinator said he noticed this change about a year ago, and "Now we have to print our flyers in English." These newcomers include oil workers from Texas looking for a new start, skilled trades workers thrown out of work by the building bust, and marginally employable workers who are the first to be fired during economic hard times. "I never thought I'd be the one coming out here," exclaimed one out-of-work boilermaker who used to earn $14 an hour. One Mexican at a North Hollywood day-labor corner said with amazement, "Americans are coming here! Look at them, they're born here, they speak the language and they're looking for work here, too."

Although their shared problems have not reached the point of collective action, these workers are beginning to look at each other a little differently than before. And the labor movement needs to look at the situation creatively and aggressively. Although Southern California remains one of the leading manufacturing centers in the world, factory growth has been taking place within the "sweatshop economy," that is, in industries employing minimum-wage and low-skill workers rather than the traditional better-paid blue collar jobs.

One out of every five jobs are in factories—and that figure does not include the numbers in service industries employing computer technicians, printing firms, distributors, etc. Southern California plants produce a wide array of commodities ranging from basic nuts and bolts, to space vehicles, to guitar cases, to computers, to steam generators, and many other items. As of a year ago, Los Angeles led the nation in manufacturing employment—but the total number of factory workers has been continuously dropping from the all-time high of 925,000 in the late 1970s. The cutbacks have mostly taken place in industries which employ a skilled, well-paid labor force to produce "durable" items which are long-lasting and more expensive (for example, automobiles, metals, aircraft). Industrial expansion in recent years has involved light industry making "non-durable" goods such as clothes, paper, and other items which can be produced by lower-paid workers. This is the type of "sweatshop economy" which thrives on the exploitation of immigrant and undocumented workers.

Some union organizers have begun to take these changing conditions into account. The AFL-CIO's West Coast regional director, David Sickler, explained to a *Los Angeles Times* labor reporter that unions and immigrants are becoming "more comfortable" with each other. "It's where the new membership is," Sickler said, ". . . these are also the workers who want to organize first and the fastest." Sickler's pressure on the national AFL-CIO leaders is credited with bringing substantial financial resources into the Los Angeles area in order to develop a 3,000-

member association of immigrant workers that takes innovative organizing approaches to organizing the unorganized. The modest steps taken by several international labor unions have shown what can be done.

Immigrant Workers Join Machinists Union

At the end of 1990, in Southern California employees of American Racing Equipment Inc.—most of them Mexican immigrants—voted 655-403 in favor of affiliating with the International Association of Machinists. At their victory rally, the AFL-CIO's West Coast director told the workers, "There are millions of other workers watching what you've done today who'll take strength from this. This is a very historic day." During the contract talks that followed, one of the five members of the negotiating committee—a Mexican immigrant who had come to the U.S. four years earlier—said, "We're sure that others will follow this movement. We see some workers losing fear in some facilities. We can be an example. People from [nearby] plants are asking us questions, how they can organize. Once other workers out there see that they can get a good contract—once they see that we can—they will also struggle and fight."

The union campaign was prompted by the courageous actions of unorganized workers who engaged in a wildcat strike during the summer of 1990 to protest unsafe working conditions and the company's speedup demands. The three-day walkout virtually shut down production of aluminum wheels at the company's main plant. Management was forced to grant a wage increase—a highly unusual victory for a non-unionized work force. At this point, the IAM and the regional AFL-CIO office assigned a team of eight full-time organizers to solicit interest in petitioning the National Labor Relations Board for a certification election. The night the votes were counted, the IAM's western regional vice president stated, "These people had this thing won before they found us."

The wheel workers' unionization campaign was a genuine rank-and-file effort. Afternoon-shift workers, who left the plant at midnight, went directly to a storefront office a mile from their workplace. They sat for hours each night discussing strategy with the organizers, and reviewing on-the-job problems. Every Sunday morning for months, a 40-member committee met with the union organizers. One IAM organizer said, "I've been organizing 15 years and I've never seen a worker commitment like this."

The certification process, which proceeded more quickly than usual, succeeded in unionizing the largest manufacturing plant in the Los Angeles area in over twenty years. In September 1991, the first union contract was signed. The workers won a 12 percent wage increase through 1993, and improved medical benefits.

Other Militant Actions

The American Racing Equipment workers were not the only ones engaged in fightbacks during 1990-91. In August 1990, hundreds of Latino immigrant workers carried out demonstrations outside of several plants manufacturing gardening equipment. The actions were organized when the company announced it was closing without giving any severance pay. Many of the demonstrators had worked at the Chatsworth factory for ten or more years, and were demanding two weeks' severance pay for each year of employment to help their transition to other jobs. The workers at the Gerard facility had organized a union two years earlier but, not expecting a plant shutdown, had not thought of including a severance pay clause in their contract.

A *Los Angeles Times* article noted: "Immigrant workers have a reputation for being passive and exploitable, largely because of their fear of deportation if they are in the country illegally. However, representatives of workers at the two plants [Chatsworth and Gerard] said many are longtime residents who have qualified for eventual citizenship under recent federal immigration laws and are not afraid to stand up to their employers."

Another militant labor action was carried out in 1990, by teaching assistants employed by the Los Angeles Unified School District. Many who engaged in a twelve-day strike for a union contract were immigrants from Mexico and Latin American countries. Local 99 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) organized a series of "rolling strikes" which involved striking for three days at a time in areas largely populated by immigrant families. The 10,000 assistants employed by the school district received no guaranteed minimum hours per day, health benefits, sick leave, or paid holidays—although they performed an indispensable role as bilingual aides (translating lessons, correcting homework, helping students in many ways) in classrooms where over 90 languages are spoken by students. Most of the assistants (70 percent) were Latinas who had more interpersonal contact with children than teachers did.

After almost a year of negotiations and job actions, the teaching assistants won union recognition, a two-year contract, retroactive pay raises, paid days off, and some medical benefits.

Garment Industry Exploits Immigrant Workers

Immigrant workers involved in garment production are among the most oppressed employees in an industry which is notorious for its low wages, sweatshop conditions, and super-exploitation. In July 1990, for example, state labor investigators closed a garment factory in downtown Los Angeles where 100 Thai immigrants were working for less than the legal minimum wage. In addition, the factory was not only their workplace but the living dwelling for some Thai employees. An official with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (LGWU) said that the case "shows again that conditions are growing worse in the garment industry—an industry without a conscience." With only 2,000 union members out of 100,000 garment workers in Los Angeles, the ILGWU undertook some serious organizing efforts in 1990, including opening a service center in the downtown garment district, and doubling its organizing staff from ten to 20.

Bosses have utilized immigration laws in many different ways to victimize workers and to keep them from gaining union protection and benefits. For example, in the spring of 1990, Winnie Fashions took advantage of the temporary guest-worker section of federal immigration law in order to import 16 women from China. The company, located in a small city south of Los Angeles, claimed that local workers were not skilled enough to sew Army shirts ordered by the Pentagon. The ILGWU and groups working with immigrant workers protested that the company brought in the young women (most were in their early 20s) because their guest-worker status made them easier to exploit than the Latinas who operate most of the sewing machines in Los Angeles and garment factories. An investigation by the INS showed that the 16 women lived in a three-bedroom company-owned house, were paid $5 an hour, and had housing costs deducted from their paychecks. In another case, the owner of a Los Angeles garment factory charged 18 workers $2,500 each for filing their immigration applications. And, of course, the most obvious use of the INS is to terrorize workers with threats of deportation if they object to wages, working conditions, or treatment on the job.

During 1990, unions represented only about 5 percent of the garment workers in Southern California—a major production center for high-profit companies like L.A. Gear, Guess, and suppliers for department store chains such as J.C. Penny and Sears. Undocumented workers made up the major

part of the workforce—as they had done for many years, and as they do now. *Together*, the feminist student newspaper at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) explained in an article published in December, 1990: "The reality in Los Angeles is that most Latinas and Chicanas will enter the garment industry. It is the most popular option for these women.

"The lack of options and their undocumented status makes them especially vulnerable to exploitation. The largest and most frequent infringement of the law are the minimum wage violations. Some women do seek legal help . . . but for undocumented aliens, the risks of deportation far outweigh the benefits of taking a wage claim case to court.

"The abuses do not end with minimum wage infringements although this, by far, is the most common complaint. Other complaints range from sexual harassment, homework, child labor, and various health and safety violations.

"Homework—working at home without proper documentation of hours worked or wages paid—is very common. The practice of clocking in for eight hours and working 12 is prevalent throughout, said [ILGWU representative] Stansberry. Moreover it is completely untraceable and non-regulated. Eighty-hour workweeks are not uncommon, said Stansberry. At an estimated wage of $2.50 to $3.00 per hour, earnings for single mothers is well below the poverty line."

Heather Zakson, a service worker at Las Familias de Pueblo community center described cases involving child labor. Perla and her younger sister and brother, for example, lived with their mother in a tiny apartment directly above a row of sweatshops. A total of 23 persons shared the three small rooms, a common kitchen, and one bathroom. The women in these families "literally roll out of bed and into work downstairs in the shop. At home in the evening, they must work the double shift as well."

In March 1992, Central American and Mexican immigrant workers attracted media and public attention when they maintained a 24-hour vigil outside of a padlocked garment factory in Hollywood. This action was prompted when everyone's paychecks bounced the previous month, and then workers went to the factory and found that someone had removed much of the machinery, all of the business papers, the phone, and other items. The owner's son told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that his father had been forced into bankruptcy by the recession. The workers explained that they were owed a month's back wages and were blocking the removal of the only remaining collateral inside the factory: two dozen sewing machines. Maria Bonilla, one of the 22 workers involved, said that she and her husband were owed $1,800 in unpaid wages. Luz Dorival was owed $1,300 in wages. The on-the-spot organization of their protest included arranging a schedule for their vigil, and taking turns spending nights in a car parked in front of the building.

One of the nation's largest back-pay awards involving the garment industry was won by 19 Los Angeles garment workers denied minimum wages and overtime pay. Most of the plaintiffs were Thai immigrants, some were Latino. The civil suit was filed in 1990, after the workers had been fired for complaining publicly about being paid as little as $1 an hour, working over 70 hours a week with no overtime pay, and having paychecks withheld as "loans" to the company. The $805,676 judgment won in this case will probably never be paid by the defendants—many can't be located—but it helps publicize the fact that undocumented workers have legal standing to sue employers.

Justice for Janitors

Organized labor's historic role as a social movement has been revived in the national campaign by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to organize janitors in 15 cities. A senior organizer for SEIU, crediting union successes to the role played by immigrant workers, stated : "I don't think we would have made all the gains that we made without having had some of the experience that these folks from El Salvador and Guatemala have brought with them." As the SEIU's national organizing director put it: "A lot of people who are here have taken risks simply to get here. They have stronger political views, more courage." One immigrant, involved in the first big SEIU victory in the Los Angeles area, provided an example of the high union consciousness and militancy transferred from his birthplace to the U.S. In a November 1990 *Labor Action* article, Abraham Hernandez described how he had first become a unionist where he was a shoemaker in Honduras and had engaged in many strikes. Harassed and threatened by government agents (from a body like the U.S. FBI), he entered this country in 1981, became a janitor, and joined the union as soon as he heard about it. He was among the many workers beaten by police during the Justice for Janitors march in Century City described in the next paragraph.

A high point in the janitors' national struggle was Local 399's 1990 victory over International Service System, a nationwide cleaning company. When the company refused to grant union recognition, janitors in 13 Los Angeles area buildings went on strike, and gained broad community and labor support through public marches, street rallies, and outreach efforts. In June 1990, about 400 persons—including janitors, community supporters, and workers from other unions—marched through the complex of Century City office buildings. Their chants reflected both the social and economic character of their struggle: "The people united will never be defeated," and "Quatro y cinquenta no paga la renta." ["$4.50 an hour doesn't pay the rent."] They were attacked by about 100 police. Using their batons freely and viciously, the cops hurt about 90 marchers; 19 were seriously injured; of the two pregnant women beaten, one miscarried; one demonstrator's face was fractured, and another's jaw and skull were split; two people required stitches in their head. Despite this violence, the janitors were back on the streets within a few days—in large measure because of the role of workers who had faced up to such brutality in their Central American homelands and were prepared to fight on until their demands were met.

The police assault, which was broadcast frequently on television news programs, prompted condemnations from national labor leaders, community organizations, and a wide range of activist groups. New York union leaders threatened a strike by 5,000 janitors working for International Service System. The combination of the janitors' continued militancy and public outrage persuaded the company to sign a union contract.

Early in 1991, SEIU Local 399 capped a three-year battle with Bradford Building Service by winning an even larger contract settlement covering 800-1,000 janitors in about 75 buildings located in downtown Los Angeles, Hollywood, Glendale, Burbank, and the west side. The company had refused to discuss a union contract which would raise janitors' wages about $1 an hour and provide family health insurance for the first time for many of the workers. As part of its campaign, SEIU put pressure on the parent corporation which owned Bradford Building Service. Coordinated demonstrations were held at the parent corporation's buildings in Denver, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose. Bradford's President Larry Smith admitted he was instructed by the parent corporation to negotiate a settlement. This union victory meant that 90 percent of the buildings in downtown Los Angeles were covered by the new contract—in stark contrast to the 30 percent cleaned by unionized janitors in 1987.

During the 1980s, immigrants from Latin America had been employed at near-minimum wages by non-union contractors such as Bradford Building Service to

underbid unionized contractors. Janitors in Los Angeles were among the worst paid in the country. An article in the December 1990 issue of *Together*, a feminist students' newspaper at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), described the working conditions of Bradford Building Service's employee Maria Ventura who earned $4.25 an hour—less than half of the $10. 56 earned by the average New York janitor, and $9.36 by the average San Francisco janitor. Ventura, who worked for Bradford Building Service since she fled from El Salvador, joined the Justice for Janitors campaign in 1988, when the company cut the size—but not the workload—of the cleaning crew she was part of at that time. Because of her union organizing activities, Ventura and her fellow workers were threatened with the loss of their jobs if they attended a union rally. But Ventura and the other 11 Latina[o] co-workers refused to be intimidated by the boss or by "la migra." "All workers have the same rights," Ventura insisted, "whether citizens or not." It was this kind of fighting spirit that brought the union victory in 1991.

Central American women also played a vital role in gaining a contract with Premier Building Maintenance, a company with cleaning contracts for several major buildings in Westwood (where UCLA is located). The May 24, 1991 issue of the *Daily Bruin News* student newspaper published a photo of Rosa Ayala and her fellow workers marching from the West Los Angeles Federal Building to the area's highrise office district. Chanting, "We will not move" in Spanish and carrying Justice for Janitors signs with the slogan "L.A. Should Work for Everyone," the workers demanded a pay raise from $4.25 to $5.50 an hour, paid sick leave, family health insurance, and job security.

The impact of Latinas in the janitors' campaigns and actions was noted in an *Against the Current* article (July/August 1991 issue) by Dolores Trevizio, an activist in the Friends in Solidarity with Justice for Janitors. She explained that "women organizers have been central to the day-to-day organizing, as well as playing a key role in the tactical decisions involved in the various militant actions. One of the strike's pivotal organizers, for example, received her trade union experience in the streets of San Salvador. She is regarded as the local's military expert."

The December 1991 issue of *Labor Notes* carried an article about a demonstration by janitors outside the Bay Area home of Apple Computer's chief executive officer. SEIU Local 1877 organizer Jenny Roitman explained that Shine Building Maintenance, the non-union company under contract to Apple, violated health and safety standard laws as well as wage and hours laws. Many employees worked long hours without breaks and were compelled to work without pay during training periods which ran from a few days to several weeks. Janitorial employees worked without masks or gloves—and, lacking that protection from harsh cleaning chemicals, many suffered from eye, nose and skin irritations, rashes, and respiratory problems. SEIU's campaign was supported by more than 40 labor, community, and church organizations. The union's campaign included demonstrations, holding press conferences, testifying at a public hearing before the County Board of Supervisors, and filing lawsuits for sexual harassment and wage and hour violations.

In the spring of 1992, Local 1877 won union recognition. The maintenance company admitted it had spent almost $200,000 in the court fight and had lost half its business due to the union's community-supported campaign. SEIU organizers viewed this victory as a first step toward unionizing all janitorial services for Silicon Valley's high-tech companies.

Not All Efforts Are Successful

Not all job situations involving immigrant workers result in successful union campaigns. One of the most bitter labor disputes in recent years pitted mostly Latino cemetery workers against the powerful Roman Catholic diocese in Los Angeles. In 1988, the workers attempted to form a union. Out of 140 workers, all but 20 signed cards asking to be represented by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTU). Among their complaints was the fact that they were earning about $7 an hour compared to the average of $14.95 an hour earned by their counterparts in San Francisco Catholic cemeteries.

Archbishop Roger Mahoney proclaimed his support for the workers' "rights and protection [of federal labor law] to which they are entitled in this country." But Mahoney blocked a National Labor Relations Board election, then agreed to an election conducted by the California Mediation Service. In the year it took to set up this vote Mahoney waged an intense anti-union campaign. Despite demands that they act like "good" Catholics, the majority of cemetery workers voted in 1989 to be represented by the ACTU—the first time any of the archdiocese's 9,000 workers had taken such a stand. Mahoney asserted that the workers had been "coerced," refused to negotiate a contract, demanded and got an arbitration ruling (which upheld the pro-union workers), divided the workers by giving some of them pay raises, and fired pro-union workers on the basis that their activity was "inconsistent with the mission of the sacred ministry of Catholic cemeteries."

The surprising thing was that so many of the workers continued to fight for a union in the face of the pressures brought by one of the highest-ranking Catholics in the world (Mahoney became a cardinal during the course of this fight). It was not a big surprise when the mostly Catholic workers ended up in the fall of 1991, voting 92 to 43 against union representation.

Organize the Unorganized!

While many difficulties continue to hamper the unionization of immigrant workers, recent experiences in Southern California clearly show the potential for labor organizing in an increasingly important section of the working class. It is true that immigration patterns and job situations in California have unique features—but there are other areas of the country where comparable (not identical) conditions exist, and where organizing efforts have taken place. El Paso garment workers (mostly Mexican immigrant women) won their first union contract in December 1991. Immigrant workers in the chili fields of New Mexico won a contract in 1991 after wildcat strikes, work stoppages, and demonstrations. Haitian, West African, and Central American immigrants in New York's garment industry carried out the first strike in the ILGWU's "Campaign for Justice"; a contract was not gained; the fighting spirit of the workers was not matched by the union leadership which focused on legal and political tactics. The Justice for Janitors campaign continues in cities scattered across the U.S.

There are now exciting new opportunities to organize the unorganized—if the labor movement responds appropriately to the battles undertaken by immigrant workers and erases out-dated notions about the impossibility of unionizing undocumented workers. ❑

What Is Happening in Cuba?

by Michael Frank

Recently I was able to spend two weeks in Cuba as a participant in a seminar organized by the U.S./Cuba Labor Exchange. My first impression on arriving in the country was that the buildings and material infrastructure of the society are deteriorating, but that the people look good; healthy, well-nourished, well-dressed, and in good spirits. Havana, an architecturally beautiful city, is sorely in need of repair and a paint job. But there is no homelessness. In contrast I thought of New York City with its magnificent skyscrapers and homeless people sleeping in the streets. The priority of the Cuban government is the maintenance of nutrition, health, education, social services, and housing. The economic difficulties have led to a strict rationing of basic foods. But the maintenance of the social gains of the revolution, despite the 30-year U.S. blockade and the drastic reduction of trade with the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, is an impressive achievement.

The Economic Situation

The economic situation is extremely difficult. About 85 percent of Cuban trade was with the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. There is a severe shortage of petroleum and bicycles are replacing cars and public transportation on a mass scale. The bikes are imported from China and assembled in Havana's shipyards. Cuba is beginning to manufacture its own bikes, but only at the rate of 100 per month. The main thoroughfares and autoroutes are crowded with cyclists.

The lack of fuel has reduced transportation and travel from one part of the country to another. This has created a problem since agricultural produce for Havana's two million people comes in from the provinces. To economize on fuel and shorten the transport of food to the city, agriculture is being developed in the surrounding areas and volunteers are being mobilized to work in the fields. Ox-drawn plows are replacing tractors throughout the country.

The fuel shortage has idled many of Cuba's factories, while others are operating on a part-time basis. The total output of the country's enterprises has fallen by 50 percent, but laid-off workers are still receiving a high percentage of their previous salaries.

Since the revolution the Cubans have developed remarkable adaptive capacities which are serving them well in the current period. For example, all of the American cars in Cuba date from 1959, or earlier, as a result of the trade embargo. It's amazing that these old Hudsons, Buicks, Edsels, Chevys, and Pontiacs from the '40s and '50s are still running. The Cubans have developed special techniques to repair the engine blocks and they machine down auto parts imported from Eastern Europe to fit the American cars.

To compensate for the reduction in trade with the former Soviet block, the government is trying to expand commercial relations with the Latin American countries. It is also making a significant investment in tourism in an attempt to obtain much needed foreign exchange. "World class" resort hotels are being developed and I saw tourists from France, Germany, England, Canada, and Latin America.

The pharmaceutical industry is also being developed. Cuba is now producing and exporting an anti-cholesterol drug with no side effects, which incidentally is not available to the U.S. population because of the embargo.

But these efforts have not offset the loss of trade due to the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes in the East. The economy continues to decline and this will eventually erode the social base of the revolution.

May Day in Havana

For the present, however, broad popular support for the regime and the institutions of Cuban society appears to be holding.

The May Day celebration in Havana was spectacular. Over a million people participated. And hundreds of thousands more celebrated in other parts of the country; in Camaguey, Guantanamo, and Santiago de Cuba. The demonstration in Havana was the largest that I have seen since the antiwar marches in Washington, D.C., and this in a country with only a fraction of the population of the U.S. An American living and working in Havana said it was the largest May Day demonstration he had seen since he arrived in 1982.

Leading the march were workers from various sectors—health, construction, branches of industry—carrying homemade floats depicting their trades. Next came a bicycle contingent of 100,000 people, all ringing their bells. The armed forces were also on bicycles, riding in formation and saluting, with light artillery attached to the backs of their bikes. As they passed, the master of ceremonies announced, "This is one part of our defense, the armed forces. The other part is the people in arms!" Some 1.5 million people possess arms and have been trained to use them, out of a population of ten million.

Then there were dancers in showy costumes and women in Carmen Miranda outfits swaying to the rhythms of Afro-Cuban music. Then came the children with their tricycles and wagons, and the M.C. shouted, "The children, the future of our country!"

For three solid hours, from the seats behind the speakers podium in the Plaza of the Revolution, we watched wave after wave of marchers. The overall impression was of a joyous and spontaneous event, as opposed to the films I had seen of stiff and formal May Day processions in the Soviet Union.

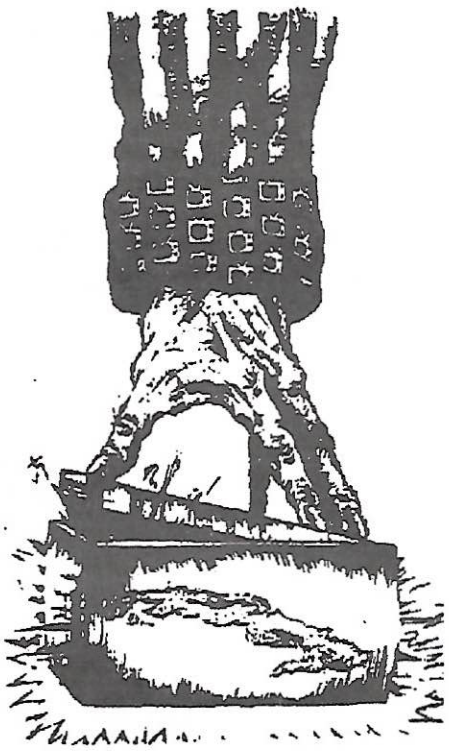
There were no police or first aid stations, nor were any necessary as the people displayed a remarkable self-discipline. Volunteer marshals helped guide this mass of humanity through the plaza. In general, Cuban society is lightly policed as there is virtually no street crime.

Many of the May Day participants had lived through the overthrow of Batista and have benefited from the transformation of Cuban society. What we were witnessing was a living revolution and an impressive show of solidarity and strength.

Nationalism

This march was both a commemoration of Workers Day and more broadly a national day of celebration. This was reflected in the banners and symbols. The were a few hammers and sickles, some *Socialismo o Muerte* (socialism or death) signs, and other political slogans, but most marchers carried Cuban flags or palm branches.

In this regard it is useful to recall that the Cuban revolution was the culmination of a long struggle for national independence, first from Spain, then from the United States. The overthrow of Batista, the smashing of his army, and the expropriation of American firms were measures taken in the struggle to achieve national independence. In June 1960, American oil companies in Cuba refused to refine crude oil that had been purchased from the USSR at a cheaper price. As a sovereign nation, Cuba had the right to go anywhere on the world market for the best price for its imports and was not obligated to buy its oil from the United States. The revolutionary government responded to the refusal to refine the oil by seizing the refineries. The U.S. government retaliated by suspending the importation of Cuban sugar. The Cubans in turn seized the sugar mills. At each step taken by the government in defense of the national interest the island roared its approval.



The social transformations that followed the overthrow of Batista were an expression and assertion of national independence, not an affront against it, as was the case to some extent with the social transformations in Eastern Europe. The Cuban revolution is rooted and anchored in a different way.

This permanent revolution dynamic—in which the tasks of the bourgeois revolution and the achievement of national independence in a country dominated by imperialism require socialist measures—has resulted in the intertwining and identification of nationalism and social transformation in mass popular consciousness. This is a strength of the Cuban revolution, one which gives it a specific character and helps to account for its survival in the wake of the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes of the East.

A second major strength is the social gains in health care, housing, education, childcare, and the strong commitment to social equality, even if this operates at a very modest economic level.

Youth

If these are some of the strengths that have sustained the revolution to this point, the Cuban youth represent an Achilles heel that could undermine the system in the future. Young people make up half of the population, and it was my impression that a significant section of the youth have weak identification with and commitment to the revolution.

There is a classical sociological phenomenon operating in Cuba. The commitment of the older generations, who experienced the difference in living standards before and after the revolution, appears firm. The younger generations, on the other hand, were born into the social gains, take the subsistence floor for granted, and aspire to the consumption model projected by the United States. Although the young people are adequately clothed, they may have only one pair of shoes every two years and one colored t-shirt, and not in the style they want. They feel frustrated.

Many of the young men are involved in the black market, which appears to be extensive. We could not go for a walk without being approached to change money or buy or sell various items. And the development of the tourist industry is aggravating the frustration. The youth do not have access to the discos, night clubs, and shops which are reserved for tourists. They long to express themselves as youth, and for them Cuban society is drab.

There is also an absence of political causes that could stimulate young people's idealism. Revolution does not appear to be on the agenda throughout the world, and for the youth the revolutionary rhetoric of the regime sounds hollow. "They've been talking like that for 30 years," one young man said.

Young men resent the two years of obligatory military service, which they see as spartan, austere, and a waste of their youth. They tend to blame the regime rather than the U.S. blockade for their frustrations. This makes them very sensitive to any sign of privilege in Cuban society. "We never see the kids of the high state officials," another young man commented. This, incidentally, was a very telling remark.

The most disaffected of the youth, a tiny minority to be sure, float out of Havana on inner tubes and try to reach Key West. The problem of the youth is recognized by the Cuban leadership, but they seem to be at a loss to address it.

Neither Stalinism Nor Workers' Democracy

We had the opportunity to meet with and question the leadership of the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (Workers Central Union of Cuba, the trade union federation) in addition to union

leaders and workers in various enterprises. One of my main interests on this trip was to understand the role and functions of unions in Cuban society. But it was not easy to get a clear idea of this. After considerable discussion, it appeared to me that the unions have a combination of functions; to solve problems at the worksite and improve productivity, to politically educate the workers, to monitor the performance of management, and to represent workers' interests and improve working conditions.

Union representatives are elected, and there is no automatic dues checkoff. Workers voluntarily hand deliver their dues. This is one of the ways in which union leaders are kept accountable and the channels of communication kept open.

Workers do not have the right to choose, hire, and directly remove managers. Managers are centrally appointed, but workers can pressure the ministry and the union federation to have managers removed. And this seems to happen often enough. Workers, we were told, are able to take their complaints to the "proper bodies." Individual workers will sometimes write complaints denouncing managers. If the workers' complaints are deemed valid, the manager is removed. The main reasons for the removal of managers are inefficiency and corruption.

I noticed marked differences in workers' behavior in different worksites. In some organizations there was a pattern of deference and workers would rise when the director entered the room. In the shipyards, on the other hand, machinists who were playing dominoes on their break barely looked up when managers passed through the area.

Workers do not determine the production norms, which are set by the relevant ministry. But they are able to challenge and press for modification of norms which they feel are unreasonable.

To summarize, workers do not have direct control and decision-making power in the enterprises or for the economy as a whole. They do, however, have significant room to maneuver. They are able to exert pressure and effect changes. They do have input.

The trade union leadership is responsive to the ranks. But there is a particular conception of leadership that is pervasive in Cuba. Cuban leaders, in general, see themselves as the upholders, guarantors, and bearers of the revolutionary process. They attempt to win, and succeed in winning, the support of the workers. They do this by allowing and encouraging a certain degree of participation. They listen and respond, but within a paternalistic framework.

Nevertheless, this openness and responsiveness of the leadership to the masses is another strength and distinguishing characteristic of the Cuban revolution. On the other hand, there is no conception and no perspective of self-management, of the workers themselves making the major economic and social decisions, of the workers themselves shaping and constructing the society. The Cuban conception of socialism is limited.

Cuba is neither a Stalinist society with 100 percent, top-down, bureaucratic decision making, nor is it a workers' democracy where the workers themselves, the associated producers, make the economic and social choices. It is something in between these two poles, which historically has tended to shift toward one end or the other, but within certain limits.

Cuban union leaders talk a lot about problems of workers' productivity, lack of discipline, and low morale. But these problems are seen as falling within the realm of social psychology and individual motivation, having nothing to do with the overall structural context of power, control, and decision making.

I had an interesting conversation in this regard with a professor of management from the University of Havana. He was interested in familiarizing himself with the bourgeois social science literature on industrial psychology. "We understand political economy and the macro reality," he said, "but we don't understand small group process, group psychology. We don't know how to motivate people." In considering problems of worker productivity and motivation, Cuban leaders tend, in the manner of bourgeois social thought, to separate the micro and macro levels of reality.

Although there is a need for workers' democracy, its institutionalization would be difficult given the work regime and the number of hours in the Cuban workweek. Factory workers work eight hours a day, six days a week. Some have alternate Saturdays off. Workers in mini-brigades doing construction work ten hours a day, six days a week. And agricultural volunteers work ten hours a day for thirteen consecutive days, then have two days off. This is not to say that movement in the direction of workers' democracy is not indicated. It is, given the problems of productivity and morale. But a complete realization of workers' democracy would require a higher material base, a shorter workweek, an extension of the revolution to developed capitalist countries that could provide material aid, etc.

For ideas of workers' democracy to emerge there would have to be space for competing political currents to articulate their views, and groups of workers would have to respond and take up these ideas. Unfortunately, this is not on the agenda in Cuba today. Yet movement in the direction of workers' democracy and political pluralism would enable the country to effectively counter imperialist propaganda, contribute to the solution of a major problem facing the international workers and socialist movement, improve the productivity and morale of its workers, and engage the youth.

Initiatives in this area cannot be expected from the Castro leadership which, after all, supported the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the crushing of the Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc, and the crushing of the student protests in Tiananmen Square. These movements toward socialist democracy were seen by Castro as counterrevolutionary.

The Cuban leadership and masses were therefore not prepared to understand the collapse of the bureaucratized workers' states in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The Cubans were shocked, and the reaction in the country is still one of incredulity and disgust. But the leadership cannot explain the phenomenon because it has no comprehension of the origin and nature of Stalinism as a system. And it cannot understand how the crushing of the movements for socialist democracy affected mass consciousness and led to the demise of the bureaucratized workers' states. It cannot help the workers to understand these events. Yet despite the collapse of these systems and the serious limitations of political understanding in Cuba, the morale of the leadership and the masses has not been broken.

Women

Women have certainly progressed as a result of the revolution, but the advances have been uneven. In some sectors, such as health and education, women are completely integrated into the workforce. In other areas, the shipyards for example, there is a sharp gender division of labor and women are confined to clerical work. At the meetings we attended it was always the women who served the snacks and drinks. Of the 25 members of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, only three are women.

Cuba has a very high divorce rate, and this is seen as a social problem. But in fact it is an indication of women's progress, since social gains such as the right to work and free health care have made women less economically dependent on men and more able to separate.

It was my impression, from comments and innuendo, that there is a strong macho component in Cuban culture that has yet to be overcome.

Racism

Institutionalized racism seems to have been eradicated in Cuba. The leadership bodies we met were always of mixed color. And the racial composition of the Central Committee reflects that of society as a whole. Couples we passed on the street were of every possible color combination. The elimination of racist patterns of behavior is another achievement of the Cuban revolution.

Homosexuality

Revolutionary Cuba 's record on homosexuality, on the other hand, has not been exemplary. With this in mind, I posed the following question to an official from the Ministry of Health who was speaking on sex education: "When I was an adolescent in the United States sex education was just being introduced. The only relations depicted were those between men and women. Today, in some parts of the country, relations between men and relations between women are also presented as part of the normal range of human sexual behavior. But this is only as a result of the struggles waged by gay and lesbian people. In Cuba, as part of sex education, do you depict the entire range of sexual behavior, or do you consider that only heterosexual relations are normal and should be used as illustrations?" The answer was that only examples of heterosexual behavior are used and that homosexuality is considered abnormal. However, according to the official, there are no laws prohibiting homosexual behavior and homosexuals are fully integrated into the neighborhoods and the workplaces.

On the issues of women's equality and homosexual oppression, it seemed to me that the level of consciousness is higher in the United States than in post-revolutionary Cuba as a result of the struggles waged by the women's movement and gay rights movement. This confirms once again that although the oppression of specific groups is linked to and functional for the maintenance of capitalist social relations, the oppression is not automatically eliminated when these relations are overturned. An ongoing struggle is required if equality is to be achieved.

The Pressing Need for Solidarity

With the U.S. blockade against Cuba, as with most areas of U.S. foreign policy, if the truth were widely known the policy could not be implemented. If the working people in this country had a clear understanding of the social gains of the Cuban workers it would be difficult to maintain the trade embargo. Cubans enjoy the right to work, free health care, free education up to and including the university level, a life expectancy higher than in the Black ghettos in the United States, and the maintenance of nutrition and housing for the entire population; gains for which we are still fighting. And this has been achieved with only a fraction of the resources that are available in this country. It is in the objective interest of the majority of the American people that the Cuban revolution survive.

Now more than ever we need a strong Cuba solidarity movement to educate working people about the accomplishments of the Cuban revolution, to stay the hand of imperialism that is lusting to wipe this society off the map, to lift the trade embargo, to remove the base at Guantanamo, and give this revolution the breathing space it needs to develop in the healthiest way. ❑

Labor Seminar in Cuba

The next U.S./Cuba Labor Seminar is scheduled for November 7-14, 1992 (one week) and November 7-21, 1992 (two weeks). If you are interested in attending or endorsing the seminar contact:

U.S./Cuba Labor Exchange
P.O. Box 39188
Redford, MI 48239
or call: (313) 836-3752.

Cuban Trade Unionists to Tour U.S.

The U.S./Cuba Labor Exchange is sponsoring the U.S. tour of three trade unionists from Cuba. The secretary generals of the light industry workers trade union and the public workers trade union in Santiago de Cuba, in addition to a member of the foreign relations division of the Central Trade Union of Cuba will visit 15 cities during September and early October. Please contact the Exchange for more details.

An Ambiguous Legacy

Michael Manley and the Limitations of Reformism

by Lloyd D'Aguilar

Jamaica might be a small insignificant island in the geopolitical scheme of things but when its prime minister resigned in March, the world took notice as if it mattered that Michael Manley would no longer be a political figure on the world stage. Memories are still strong of the turbulent '70s when Manley, along with Fidel Castro, was considered one of the foremost champions of third world causes.

Manley thus becomes an enigmatic figure to those who find it difficult to reconcile his radical posturing of the '70s with his '90s conversion to the politics of fiscal conservatism. What such observers fail to recognize is that Manley is merely reflecting the change of the last two decades in the balance of forces between the neo-colonies and the imperialist countries.

Manley has proven to be the classic bourgeois nationalist who is only prepared for a limited confrontation with imperialism. Such a struggle inevitably requires the unleashing of the independent power of the masses. But Manley has instead been more concerned with coopting the Jamaican revolutionary movement in the interest of extending the political life of the ruling class. He ends his political career with such a contribution, so recognized by the ruling class. Even George Bush and Jim Baker have been moved to hail him as an extraordinary statesman.

In the 1970s Manley attracted international attention as one of the leading and most articulate advocates of the *New International Economic Order*. He put forward arguments akin to those adduced by Marxist economists to show how unequal exchange worked to the advantage of imperialist countries while keeping the third world in a perpetual state of underdevelopment. (He would many times demonstrate the concept by showing how it took progressively more and more tons of sugar to buy one tractor... thus ensuring development for those who produce the tractor and underdevelopment for the producers of sugar.)

This attempt to articulate the problem was part of a two-pronged approach. The first was an appeal to the self-interested morality of the imperialists. In other words: *act fair by your subjects and in return they will be loyal and shun the road of rebellion.* In his book *Up The Down Escalator* Manley calls it "managing the system in the interest of justice."

The second aspect was the advocacy of producer cartels which could be used as a "stick" to force the imperialists to renegotiate a new relationship in the terms of trade. Jamaica's position as one of the leading producers of bauxite was used to spearhead the formation of the International Bauxite Association (IBA) (now defunct and never effective because Australia refused to identify with such "third world" tactics).

At international forums such as the *Non-Aligned Movement* his voice would be heard loud and clear speaking up for the plight of South Africans struggling against apartheid. He was among the first Caribbean leaders to help break Cuba's diplomatic isolation in the region by opening up diplomatic relations. He strongly supported Cuba's military assistance to the (MPLA) in its fight against the CIA/South African-backed UNITA. For this he would earn the enmity of Washington where there was fear of radicalization spreading throughout the Caribbean. Before the decade was out other radical regimes would emerge such as Grenada and Nicaragua—i.e. right in the U.S. backyard.

Domestic Policy

The basis of the seemingly anti-imperialist policy of the Manley government stemmed from a realization that internally consessions had to be made to the poor. The Puerto Rican model of development (i.e. "industrialization by invitation") had run its course. There was no further "development" to be gained along such lines since the investment pattern of the multinational corporations suggested that they were more interested in maintaining the neo-colonies as producers of primary products, not in promoting balanced industrialization.

The balance sheet was already available in terms of what had been accomplished in Cuba as opposed to Puerto Rico, or in those other Latin American and Caribbean countries where such a strategy was applied. Cuba had by no means achieved autonomous development but its accomplishments in the field of social welfare was impressive enough. Puerto Rico by contrast had a structural unemployment rate of at least 30 percent; health and education standards were not comparable to Cuba's; it was the welfare system and the emigration outlet to the United States which seemed to prevent a more serious breakdown of the system. Jamaica could not depend on the benevolence of the United States to solve its problems.

Internally, the local capitalists were clearly not capable of being the "engine of growth." Their dependence on foreign corporations was symptomatic of what was wrong with the Jamaican economy. A strong state (borrowing on the experiences of the "socialist" countries) was felt to be needed to direct new development efforts that would begin with taking control of national resources.

The first priority for the new People's National Party (PNP) government in 1972 was to renegotiate the existing contracts and arrangements with the multinational corporations that con-

trolled Jamaica's bauxite. Bauxite, followed by tourism, was of course the country's chief earner of foreign exchange.

Considerable new revenue was gained from the imposition of a a levy on these companies. This increased revenue was the basis upon which the PNP could finance a number of reforms which they consequently carried out. These reforms were presented as part of a plan to establish a "democratic socialist" society. The reforms included free education, public works programs to ease the high unemployment situation, a minimum wage, and maternity leave. Idle lands were leased to small and landless farmers.

The financing of the reforms was to come as well from the revenue to be gained (hopefully) from a series of other nationalizations aimed at gaining control of the "commanding heights" of the economy. Hotels, banks, utility companies, and a 51 percent interest in the bauxite companies constituted some of the nationalizations.

But this nationalization program would not prove to be very effective. It was carried out in the mold of classic bourgeois nationalizations where the owners, whether local or foreign, were given generous compensations. The state became saddled with debts which were not justified because many of these companies had already recouped much more than the book value of their investments. What was more important to Manley was to be able to boast that "democratic socialism" was not communism because owners were always compensated when their property was taken over.

These nationalized companies were in turn run like private corporations, i.e. according to the law of value. The new management used their position to engage in their own capital accumulation. As a consequence the capitalist base has been somewhat widened and now we are seeing the emergence of a new layer of capitalists (black in complexion) to challenge or complement the old white, expatriate or "brown" capitalist class. In any event, for one reason or another, most of these acquired enterprsies failed to make any profits and had to be supported by the national budget.

There was a lot of rhetoric about "workers' participation," but the working class as a whole had little control over the capital accumulation binge by the *nouveau bourgeoisie*. Volumes could be written about the lifestyles of these capitalists who send their earnings to safe havens in the U.S. or in Switzerland, and who have great appetites for expensive imports and profligate lifestyles.

The Achilles heel of the reformist experiment was that the economy continued to remain export-oriented and structurally dependent on the world market for capital, food, technology, etc. For example, bauxite and tourism accounted for more than 80 percent of foreign exchange earnings. And the terms of trade would soon worsen for these items; tourism because of adverse foreign publicity and bauxite because of a combination of market conditions and political spite on the part of the bauxite multinationals. (Bauxite production declined precipitously soon after the imposition of the levy because, according to the companies, there was a fall in demand. But Australia, with an inferior grade of bauxite, would inexplicably show a dramatic increase in its production.)

As luck would also have it the price of imported oil (on which the economy is totally dependent) quadrupled, putting a severe strain on disposable foreign exchange earnings.

The resulting shortfall in foreign exchange earnings made it impossible for the government to continue the policy of deficit budget financing. It was left with no choice but to sign an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (in 1977) in order to have foreign exchange to import the country's basic needs. This was the beginning of the end for the PNP and its reforms.

The IMF moved swiftly to dictate fiscal policy. Under IMF management social experimentation stopped. Subsidies of basic food items for the poor was ended. Price controls were lifted. And inflation soared as a result of numerous currency devaluations. By the time the PNP predictably lost the elections in 1980 the masses were worse off economically than they were when Manley and his party came to power in 1972.

There have been at least three governments since 1980 and none have been able to shake the IMF's iron-fisted control over the country's fiscal and economic affairs.

The conservative climate which now exists internationally could therefore be said to be a result of the Jamaica scenario playing itself out in many other countries. Nationalist governments which emerged out of the anti-colonial struggles of the fifties and sixties were to find that if they decided not to live by balanced budgets, then there was also a limit to how far state capitalist policies could be used to redress poverty and distorted social structures. In most cases the resulting failures have created the opportunity for the IMF to step in and redirect social and even political policies.

In some cases there were those who decided to cling to power through repression despite the bankruptcy of their policies and loss of support among the masses. Their only claim to legitimacy was their belief in "socialism" and "revolution," rather than whether their actions reflected the real aspirations of the masses.

Ruling Class Resistance to Reforms

Only time would convince those disdainful of theoretical analysis that Manley's experiment was destined to fail if he refused (and that he would not) move beyond the confines of bourgeois politics. In the Jamaican context there were at least three elements working to derail "democratic socialism." One was, of course, the IMF; the second was the adverse terms of trade; and the third was a combination of an economic strike by elements of the local capitalists and the determination of the opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) to topple the government by violence if necessary. There was indication that the CIA might have had a hand in the outbreak of violence and the sudden availability of sophisticated weapons.

The PNP took no meaningful action against capital flight and business shutdowns. In some cases capitalists were allowed to dismantle their factories and take them abroad. Once again this was a result of respecting private property at all costs.

As far as the violence was concerned the best defense that the PNP could offer was to declare a state of emergency. This in turn unleashed a new wave of violence by the security forces

against the very same communities which the PNP would have had to depend on for their self-defense had a real civil war broken out. When all is taken into consideration it is clear that Manley was not prepared to seriously fight the right-wing challenge when he himself knew that the charges of his government being communist were false. He would much rather have surrendered.

Manley's Political Background

It is not possible in this short essay to trace Manley's ideological evolution in detail. This would be necessary to show the mixture of pragmatism and cunning in his political makeup. A few things ought to be said however, about the conditions which existed when Manley made his entrance into political life and helped shape his political posturing. Manley assumed the presidency of the PNP in 1969 at a time of fierce national debate about the relevance of "black power" to Jamaica's political situation. Black power was threatening enough in a society where 95 percent of the population is of African descent while the economy is controlled by a handful of whites, expatriates, and local "browns." This debate also spawned discussions about the relevance of Marxist solutions since it is almost impossible to talk about race without dealing with the class question. Manley and the PNP were aware that they could only ignore this question to their peril.

Some historians have argued (denied by Manley) that his father, Norman Manley (who was president of the PNP until 1969), had sent for him in England in 1952 to help rebuild the party's trade union base which had been lost following his expulsion of its left wing in that same year. The younger Manley is credited in any event with responding to the call. With the financial help of the United Steel Workers of America (CIA connected?) a new union base in the form of the National Workers Union (NWU) was created.

This trade union activity thus allowed Manley to develop a more intimate connection with the working class than most politicians. It allowed him to speak with more seeming compassion about their needs. But until 1974 when the PNP declared itself "democratic socialist," Manley was not known to have had any particular socialist sympathies. He had several times polemicized in the party's newspaper against the expelled left. He was quoted soon after the PNP 1972 victory as saying that "socialism" as an ideology had no meaning. Called upon to defend his new-found love for "democratic socialism" in 1974, he said quite bluntly that the "alternative to democratic socialism is bloody revolution." Clearly Manley wished to spare Jamaica and the world a revolution.

Confusion of the Jamaican Left

Though Manley's commitment to social change was questionable, he was able to use his personal charm and charisma to win the support of the left. He was considerably aided in this effort at cooptation by the Castro regime. In 1975, at the meeting of Caribbean and Latin American Communist Parties held in Cuba, a new line was taken that progressive anti-imperialist governments such as the PNP should be supported by revolutionary and left organizations. The Moscow-oriented Workers Party of Jamaica (WPJ) was in attendance and dutifully changed its position from opposition to "critical support" for the Manley regime. In addition, Fidel Castro came to Jamaica at the invitation of Manley in 1977 and before tens of thousands of people declared his support for Manley.

The economic crisis in the country was too severe and neither the rhetoric of socialism, nor the fresh memories of reforms, now dissipated, could prevent the PNP from being massively rejected at the polls in 1980.

In the intervening period (1980-1989) Manley had plenty of time to reflect on the lessons of his party's rule. He came to the conclusion that it is the market after all which is the most efficient producer of goods and services. He decided that there is nothing to be gained by antagonizing the United States. Relations with Castro have since cooled considerably.

But the market strategy is also not working out for the new 1990s PNP government. Its commitment to the market is so thorough that it has not only privatized almost every last government owned enterpise, but has also removed the trading of foreign exchange from the hands of the central bank and turned it over to the commercial banks.

This policy, implemented last September, has seen a free fall of the Jamaican dollar—now trading at 24 Jamaican dollars to one U.S., instead of eight to one then. Inflation is consequently runnning at over 80 percent compounded by the economy's heavy dependence on imports.

The effect on the working class has been devastating. According to a recent UN report this policy has created one of the sharpest single declines in the standard of living in the world over the past year. This policy, if nothing else, has severely reduced the PNP's chances of winning the next general elections. According to recent polls the PNP is trailing the opposition JLP and would likely lose if elections were held now.

Manley's intellectual influence on the politics of the PNP will thus be long lasting. His successor, P.J. Patterson, a lawyer, has already said there will be no change of policy.

While Manley will always be associated with modern liberalism in Jamaica, his role in history is more likely to be measured by whether his declared intention and consequent failure to "dismantle" capitalism, was a result of naivete or a calculated move to head off the seeds of revolution.

Manley's comment after a recent meeting with Bush that he has "a lot in common" with the President, symbolically represents his retreat from earlier attempts to portray U.S. imperialism as the main obstacle to growth and development in third world countries.

Manley's ambiguous legacy represents a case study for those who are looking for a way to seriously challenge the Western disorder that began 500 years ago when Columbus stumbled into the region. ❑

May 20, 1992

Behind the Military Repression in Thailand

by Paul Petitjean

The Thai army likes to present itself as the upholder of the nation's values—above the private interests that concern the world of business and free from the corruption of everyday politics. The massacre in Bangkok of dozens—probably hundreds—of people in the course of the big pro-democracy demonstrations of May 17-20, 1992, has once more shown what such pretensions are really worth.

These dramatic days also highlighted the acute crisis of the regime which had been concealed for a time by the euphoria of economic growth between 1987 and 1990. While the new urban middle classes have yet to find a place in the existing political structures, the political role of the armed forces is being challenged and lucrative alliances between high-ranking officers and corrupt politicians are under threat.

It is as yet impossible to precisely measure the impact of this crisis on the country's economic development, on the international position of the government, which is involved in the settlement of the Sino-Indochinese conflicts, or on the rebirth of popular movements which were hard hit by the previous massacres in 1976, and the sweeping repression that followed.

Thanks to the massive spread of videos, Thai citizens were able to see with their own eyes what they already knew, but which government censorship had kept off the television screens; the extreme violence of the repression during those three dark days of May 1992. They saw soldiers armed with M-16 assault rifles firing in bursts into an unarmed crowd, kicking and stamping on prisoners; the wounded or dead laid out on the ground.

The Royal Hotel, turned into an improvised hospital, was invaded and the victims torn from the hands of their helpers, the rooms searched, and mass arrests made of those who had sought refuge there. The number of victims cannot be known. At the end of May, the government admitted to 50 dead, but it is estimated that a thousand people are missing. The press has published pages and pages listing the names of people sought by family and friends.

Witnesses also watched while the army loaded trucks full of bodies to be taken away and hidden, as they did in 1976, and elite marksmen took aim at the leaders of demonstrations.

These events leave little doubt about the determination of the military chiefs to repeat their successful scenario of 16 years ago, provoking a bloodbath in order to bring the movement to an end within a few hours, terrorize and decapitate the opposition, and consolidate their grip on power.

Fifteen months passed between the "cold" coup d'etat of February 23, 1991, and the massacre of May 1992.

In February 1991, a military group known as Ro-So-Cho, led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon, overthrew the civilian government of Chatichai Choonhavan in the name of the struggle against corruption and the "parliamentary dictatorship" of the corrupt parties. Concerned about its image the junta promised elections for the start of 1992, set up a commission of inquiry entrusted with thoroughly investigating the previous regime's betrayal of its mandate, and appointed a government mainly made up of "competent technocrats."

It also, however, pushed ahead with creating instruments to ensure the army's enduring political influence. It established an obedient parliament to adopt a new constitution enshrining a semi-elective regime; this includes a 270-member Senate, nominated by the junta, which has significant powers such as taking part in votes of no confidence, alongside the elected 360-member Parliament. It created a new party, the Samakkhi Tham, and won over or placed trustworthy men at the head of the civilian parties such as the Party of Social Action and the Chart Thai ("Thai Nation") of the ousted Prime Minister Chatichai.

The junta was able for a time to benefit from the previous government's unpopularity, but the prospect of a long period of military control aroused resistance. At the end of 1991, the junta was obliged to amend its draft constitution, but this was not enough to pacify its critics. The moral credit of the military high command was eroding fast. Apart from its evident will to cling to power, it had toned down its anti-corruption campaign to better negotiate a coalition government. Backstairs maneuvering ended after the March 22 election with the formation of a bloc with a military majority of five parties including the Samakkhi Tham (79 seats), the Chart Thai (74 seats), and the Party of Social Action (31 seats). Suchinda, now prime minister, met the demands of these parties by bringing into the government 11 people who his own commission of inquiry had accused of betrayal of trust.

However, the three main opposition parties succeeded in winning more than 150 seats; 72 for the New Aspiration led by former Commander in Chief Chavalit Yongchaiyut, 44 for the Democratic Party, and 41 for the Palang Daharma ("Buddhist Virtue") of the ascetic ex-general and former governor of Bangkok, Chamlong Srimuang.

The crisis rapidly came to a head over the issue of the appointment of a non-elected prime minister (as the constitution allows "if the situation demands it"). The nomination to the post on April 7, 1992, of General Suchinda, the commander in chief of the army, symbolizing military domination, was the final straw. On April 20, 50,000 people held a demonstration in Bangkok and on May 4, the charismatic leader of the Buddhist Virtue Party, Chamlong, went on hunger strike. Now there were between 100 and 150,000 protesters in the streets of the capital.

During the bloody days that followed, the high command made its choice: it would cling on at all costs and strike as hard as it had to to do this. The coalition government offered a compromise but then withdrew it. The General-Prime Minister Suchinda made an inflammatory speech, threatening the democratic movement with violent reprisals, making a barely disguised accusation that Chavalit, the architect of the counterinsurrection policies of the 1980s, was himself a communist and claiming that Chamlong wanted to harm Buddhism, the state religion. He also claimed that the demonstrators wanted to attack the royal family. Communism, like insulting Buddhism or the royal family, is a capital offense in Thailand. This speech thus gave the justification for the bloodbath to come.

The democratic movement responded swiftly; the demonstrations resumed, this time with 150 to 200,000 people. On May 17, the confrontations began. A police station was set on fire, Chamlong was arrested, and the army opened fire.

In the minds of the militant generation of the 1970s, the May 1992 events evoked the sad memory of the killings on the campus of Thammassat University on October 6, 1976. Indeed, the high command wanted a repeat of the same scenario, in the hope of breaking the back of the movement in a few hours at the cost of hundreds of deaths. However, this time the mobilization continued, upsetting the military's expectations and sharpening conflicts within the regime, until, on the night of May 20 and 21, the king broke his silence on television to impose a compromise between Suchinda and Chamlong. The former undertook to release the arrested, the latter to put a stop to the street demonstrations. This is, in fact, just what happened on October 14, 1973, when the army wanted to forcibly disperse a huge student and popular demonstration against the military dictatorship. After two days of confrontation, the king intervened to force the generals to surrender the reigns of power.

The comparison between 1973, 1976, and 1992, is illuminating from several angles, both in terms of the similarities and the differences. Let us first of all note some continuities apart from the use of a bloodbath, the persistence of military rule, and the role of the royal palace. Today, as before, the army is at the center of the crisis. The 1976 massacre was the prelude to the reestablishment of the military regime that had been overthrown three years prior. That of 1992, coming little more than a year after the 1991 coup, is intended to institutionalize military control.

This is not simply a matter of the armed forces "taking power." For the past 60 years they have been entrenched within the institutional structures, a situation with which there are no strict comparisons in the region apart from Indonesia. The story began in 1932, when a coalition of officers, bureaucrats, and liberal academics overthrew the absolute monarchy to replace it with a constitutional monarchy. A year later the military turned on their erstwhile allies and kept power for themselves for decades.

This has had the effect of leaving the Thai political landscape littered with ex-generals. Most prime ministers have been active or retired generals. This was true of Prem Tinsulanonda, prime minister from 1980 to 1988, and currently one of the influential "private advisers" of the king and of Chatichai Choonhavan who succeeded him from 1988 until the 1991 coup. Then there is Suchinda, the head of the present junta, who became prime minister after the elections of March this year and finally Somboom Rahong, the governmental parties' new candidate. Just as symptomatically, the two main official opposition personalities are also former generals—Chamlong, who inspired the May demonstrations and Chavalit, nominated head of the parliamentary opposition by the king.

Traditionally the military takes certain key ministries, including defense, internal affairs, and foreign affairs. They directly or indirectly control, via the state, a significant part of the country's television and radio. On top of their family ties with business, they have other ways of enriching themselves through heading nationalized enterprises, control of banks, exactions on export revenues, and commissions on arms purchases (as is the case with Suchinda).

Factional conflicts in the army have an impact on the whole political system and play a role in the present crisis. General Suchinda, now 58 years-old, graduated in 1953 from the Chulachamklao military academy. He finished his studies in the USA, saw action in Vietnam, and worked in Washington where he cemented his friendships in the Pentagon. When he became prime minister he controlled the whole military hierarchy with his graduation class, the "class five" of about 130 officers, including his brother-in-law, General Issarapong Noonpakdi, head of the army and air marshal Kaset Rojananin, who succeeded him as head of the armed forces. The situation is made volatile by the fact that the high-ranking officers from classes three and four resent the monopoly on power of class five, while even within the latter there are competitive tensions.

The Thai system of power is based on a balance and a certain level of interchange between business circles, the summits of the administrative bureaucracy, the higher officer corps, and the royal family. The balance is renewed through a perpetual round of unstable alliances and overlapping relations of patronage.

Although stripped of most of its formal power, the royal family has carefully cultivated its real power. The latter is not so much a function of its fortune (which is, however, substantial, particularly in land and property) as of its sanctified authority. The legitimacy of this 200-year-old dynasty was never undermined by the humiliations of colonization as in neighboring countries.

Thailand, located between French-controlled Indochina and English-controlled Malaysia, exploited interimperialist competition to avoid becoming a direct colony with all the political, ideological, and social traumas that would have meant. The royal family understands the modern world perfectly well, but it also knows how to use patronage, religion, traditional ceremonies, and legislation—all relayed on the television—to underpin its moral authority. Even today, the crime of *lese majesty* (for example, making a joke about a member of the royal family) is punishable by death.

The king is, however, far from being all powerful. He has to know how to compromise in light of the balance of forces. The royal family is itself often divided, but plays a full part in political life. Little can be done in Thailand without the formal agreement of the palace. The king steps in to solve crises, in 1973, against the generals in power, in 1976, by tacitly supporting a coup, or by imposing a compromise as in 1992.

The military remains entrenched at the heart of the regime and the authority of the royal family is intact. But the country is changing. The current crisis has shown that social change is having a growing political impact, as was already perceptible twenty years ago at the time of the student mobilizations. Running against the tide of economic development, the alliance between the army and the bourgeoisie seems increasingly hard to maintain. Since 1973, the system of patronage between senior officers and business people have dissolved. The bourgeoisie, socially stronger, wants to give most formal power to the civilian parliament, cutting back the prerogatives of the military. The latter, however, is not inclined to go back to barracks; this was the basic reason for the 1991 coup.

The mixed bag of urban forces described as middle class also feels itself less powerful than in the past. It does not feel represented either by the traditional clientelist parties nor the military. The Party of Buddhist Virtue, led by ascetic Chamlong, in sober peasant garb and known as "Mister Clean" on account of his struggle against corruption, won 32 of Bangkok's 35 seats at recent elections.

The democratic movement—which is not restricted to the capital—that has come to the fore in recent months is complex. Shantytown dwellers took part in the demonstrations and one often found technical high school students, known as the "mobsters," forming motorcycle columns and launching attacks on soldiers using iron bars and Molotov cocktails—not without being disowned by the leaders of the movement.

The Confederation for Democracy, embodied in Chamlong, brings together academics, students, unionists, members of liberal professions, human rights defense groups, non-governmental organizations, religious communities, and so on.

Reflecting the sociological changes in the country—growing urbanization (Bangkok has ten million of the country's 55 million inhabitants), explosive development of the service sector, including tourism, development of education, and so on —the democratic mobilizations of 1991-92 have borne the stamp of the middle class. But political factors are also important, and it is here perhaps that the deepest differences between the crisis of 1973, 1976, and 1992, are to be found.

Although somewhat later than in the neighboring countries, the 1973 uprising in Thailand violently revealed an overall social crisis, combining strictly national elements—the crisis of the regime, of political references, of the agrarian social structure, and so on—and the impact of the imperialist war in Indochina which had transformed the kingdom into a land air base and a holiday camp for GIs. The fall of the dictatorship set free a considerable democratic potential for popular self-organization; the student movement naturally turned towards the new workers' unions and peasant associations. Despite its political and organizational weakness, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) enjoyed great moral prestige.

The 1976 coup d'etat did not only represent the military's desire to regain power, it also had a clear counterrevolutionary significance, that of halting the development of a new generation of the radical left far more able than the traditional leadership of the CPT—old and mostly in exile in China—to understand and inspire the struggles of contemporary Thailand. Thousands of students and worker and peasant cadres then fled the repression to join the communist guerrilla movement.

The new dictatorship proved unable to smash the revolutionary—at least before the CPT entered into crisis on its own account, unable to politically integrate new forces or break the umbilical cord with Beijing in response to the Sino-Indochinese conflict of 1979-80. In the mid-1980s, the CPT disappeared as a real political force under the impact of its own internal crisis, the Thai government's counterinsurrection policy, and the unfavorable development of the international situation.

The militant generation of the 1970s disintegrated, although some turned to humanitarian and social activity. The military regained control of many unions and the independent peasant movement became weaker. The organized political left was thus absent from the scene during the current crisis. Indeed this has been one of its distinguishing features, despite General Suchinda's rantings about the hand of communism, which he clearly felt was sufficient reason to murder several hundred people. The void on the left is filled by outfits such as General Chamlong's. But it is quite possible that the 1990s will see a resumption of social, worker, and rural struggles. Will these allow a reformation of an organized left? And what lessons will the new militant generation, which has just gone through a bloody test, draw?

General Suchinda has had to resign as prime minister. In two readings Parliament has voted through four constitutional amendments limiting the power of the military—the prime minister must be an elected representative, the Senate will no longer take part in no confidence votes, the president of the National Assembly will be that of the Parliament not the Senate and the second annual sitting of the Assembly will deal with all questions. It requires a vote at a third sitting, planned for June 10, to finally make these amendments law.

However, the governmental five-party coalition has not yet broken up. They have even provocatively proposed another general, Somboom Rahong, leader of the Chart Thai party, for prime minister. The parliamentary opposition has rejected his candidacy and there is talk of a possible dissolution of the Assembly. The most serious remaining issue is that of the reaction of the army brass. One hundred ninety senior officers met in Bangkok on May 28, among them the heads of all the country's military regions, to reaffirm their support to the high command.

Far from trying to make amends, the army violently rejected the condemnations directed at it. General Kaset even claimed that "certain forces" wanted to destroy the military institution and cause chaos. The kingdom has again been subjected to the threat of a coup should the opposition try to gain too much out of the situation or should the self-amnesty of those responsible for the massacre be challenged.

Before resigning Suchinda prepared an amnesty decree, signed by the king, for all the protagonists of the bloody days of May 17-20. This was at once an insult to the demonstrators, who had done nothing to apologize for, and a scandal insofar as it lets off the butchers responsible for the killings. It is an unacceptable maneuver, which tries to put an equal sign between the victims and the murderer and put those in power beyond the law. ❑

Understanding the National Struggle in Georgia (Part 2)

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

The circumstances surrounding the overthrow of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in the Georgian Republic are of immense importance from the point of view of understanding the dynamic of the nationalities struggles in the former USSR. They deserve special attention in addition because of their implications for the rest of the democratic rights movements considering the relationship of forces with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of imperialism's "New World Order."

Part 1 of this article in Bulletin In Defense of Marxism, No. 97, described the background of Gamsakhurdia—one of the two most prominent democratic rights dissidents in Georgia during the Brezhnev period who became Georgia's first popularly elected president in May 1992—and Eduard Shevardnadze, head of the KGB in Georgia and its Communist Party chief during that same period. It also described the immediate circumstances surrounding Shevardnadze's ceremonious arrival in Georgia in March 1992, after Gamsakhurdia's violent overthrow in January.

Part 2 examines the circumstances that transpired from November 1990 when Gamsakhurdia was elected head of the newly elected Georgian Supreme Soviet, or Parliament, and the destabilization campaign aimed at his removal.

On November 28, 1990, the government of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, a predominantly Ossetian enclave inside the Georgian Republic, declared itself a republic and independent from Georgia. On December 11, the Georgian Parliament voted unanimously to abolish the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. Of the 100,000 inhabitants of this region nearly 66 percent are Ossetian and 29 percent Georgians.

The population of Georgia is roughly 5.5 million and includes two other subdivisions, the Abkhaz region on the Black Sea coast and the Adzhar region in the southwest. The Ossetians are of Persian ancestry.

Addressing Parliament on December 11, 1990, Gamsakhurdia, according to *Moscow News* (*MN*), December 23, 1990, stated that the establishment of the region in 1921, had been a maneuver to make the Georgians there a minority in their own region. While supporting the abolition of the region as a separate political unit, he promised to promote the development of Ossetian language, education and culture, and to insure that the region had broad autonomy. There is no reason to suppose that he did not mean this.

The overwhelming consensus of the Georgian Parliament was that the declaration of sovereignty had been instigated by the Kremlin as a means of insuring that the region would not remain a part of an independent Georgia.

The chairman of the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet, Toreza Kulumbegov, justified the move by stating that Georgia did not support Gorbachev's new Treaty of Union while the population of South Ossetia did and that South Ossetia wanted to remain in a union with Russia. There is, however, no indication that this represented the broad popular sentiment of the Ossetian population. The old apparatchiks still remained in place there.

What followed is a very peculiar course of events which is difficult to unravel because it is difficult to find reliable sources.

Moscow News reported that the violence began there on December 12, when three people were killed and two wounded by automatic weapons fire in Tskhinvali, capital of South Ossetia. The dead appear to have been Georgian officials.

That day the Presidium of the Georgian Supreme Soviet declared martial law in the South Ossetian capital and another district. Troops of the Kremlin's Ministry of Internal Affairs were stationed in the region and took up positions.

Gorbachev declared the decision of the Georgian Parliament to abolish the South Ossetian Autonomous Region null and void and the USSR Supreme Soviet appealed to the South Ossetian parliament to withdraw its declaration of sovereignty.

On December 16, South Ossetian deputies declared they were ready to negotiate the issue and asked for martial law to be extended to the entire region and for more Kremlin troops.

On December 17, Gamsakhurdia and the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Georgia, Tengiz Sigua—who was later involved in Gamsakhurdia's violent overthrow—demanded that the Kremlin troops establish order in South Ossetia.

The Georgian government imposed an economic blockade around the South Ossetian region and sent in its own troops. The Kremlin sent more troops too. On January 4, Gorbachev ordered all troops except those of the Kremlin to withdraw, but they did not and nothing happened as a result.

What has followed since then has been a bloody conflict that by December 1991, had left 400 Ossetians dead, more than 500 women, children, and old people wounded, "hundreds" taken hostage, 102 population centers destroyed, and tens of thousands of South Ossetian refugees in either North Ossetia or other regions of Georgia.

The devastation of the region has been worsened by an economic blockade imposed by the Georgian government and an earthquake that struck at the end of April 1991. The region was left without electricity, communications, fuel or other supplies for over a year with all production at a standstill.

Much of the blame for the South Ossetian crisis has been laid on Gamsakhurdia. However, it is obvious that this is not totally justified. The entire conflict had very cloudy origins. The decision to abolish the region as a political entity was unanimously adopted by the Georgian Parliament; and there were certainly forces at work on several sides of the issue in the region that reflected the interests of the old bureaucratic structures and local bosses who were not about to give up their fiefdoms.

Gamsakhurdia had become head of the old state with much of the political and police apparatus of the old Stalinist order still in place. He could not have singlehandedly disposed of the rival military forces nor launched a war to destroy South Ossetia.

Gamsakhurdia has consistently maintained that the entire conflict may have been the result of a power play by the Stalinist apparatus, which it may well have been. Obviously, he need not have responded as he did by sanctioning the military offensive against the Ossetians. A more skillful and experienced political leader may have known how to turn the power play back against its organizers. Perhaps he did try. In any case, the Kremlin has been able to use the South Ossetian events against the Georgian independence movement and to discredit Georgian nationalism. Moreover, it is not at all clear that Gamsakhurdia could have stopped the conflict even if he had wanted to.

In late March 1991, Russian President Boris Yeltsin met with Gamsakhurdia on the border of the disputed region and signed an agreement that by May 10, a joint military force would be established to "disarm all illegal formations in South Ossetia," to quickly begin joined efforts to bring the refugees home and compensate them for damages, to recognize Georgian sovereignty, and to recognize the Georgian government's right to install its own local officials, and to withdraw the central government's troops from "former" South Ossetia.[1]

The South Ossetians were not represented at the meeting. The agreement was similar to the one Yeltsin made to allegedly resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh in October 1991. In both cases, it was meaningless.

The Georgian government had refused to take part in the much heralded union-wide referendum on the preservation of the Soviet

Union on March 17, 1991. However, on March 31, the Georgian government sponsored its own referendum. In it, the people of Georgia voted overwhelmingly in favor when asked: "Do you agree that the state of independence of Georgia should be restructured on the basis of the independence act of May 26, 1918?" Of the 90 percent of the eligible voters who turned out to vote, 98 percent voted "yes."

The "independence act" of May 26, 1918, was a tactical ploy by anti-democratic (and anti-Bolshevik) Menshevik forces—who had no popular mandate—to accommodate the German government; and in no sense did it lead to an independent or democratic Georgia. The 1918 "independence" declaration merely laid the political basis for the occupation of the Georgian region by German military forces aimed at crushing the Bolshevik government and the worker and peasant movements.[2]

However, the popular vote for the referendum in 1991, indicated that the mass sentiment was for independence from Russia. Joining in the vote for independence were 80 percent of the Armenians, Azeris, Greeks, and other non-Georgians residing in the republic. The referendum was not held in South Ossetia because the local authorities refused to participate.

Gorbachev rejected the Georgian vote claiming that the plebiscite was unconstitutional. As the war in South Ossetia raged on, Gamsakhurdia declared that those who took up arms against the Georgian State would not be considered Georgian citizens.[3]

As the spring 1991 strike wave that began in the coal-mining regions of Ukraine, Siberia, and Vorkuta spread to shut down the Belorussian Republic and other regions after the April 2 price increases, Gamsakhurdia declared his support for the strikes. On April 15, the Georgian Parliament elected Gamsakhurdia its chairman by a unanimous vote and gave him broad powers over the army to form a government and to appoint local prefects to replace the old CP apparatus—similar powers had been given to Yeltsin by the Russian Parliament and before that to Gorbachev by the USSR Supreme Soviet.

On April 16, as the Kremlin was preparing to declare the strikes illegal, Gamsakhurdia called for Georgian railway, port, and factory workers to strike in solidarity with the other striking workers for withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Georgian Republic and for recognition of Georgian independence. Many workers responded to his call, according to *MN*, April 21, 1991.

Georgia, with Armenia and Moldova, refused to participate in the secret "dacha" meeting on April 23, of nine heads of republics with Gorbachev at Novoye Ogareva to try to break the strikes.

Gamsakhurdia throughout this period appears to have maintained and enjoyed wide popularity.

The popular elections for president were held in May 1991. Gamsakhurdia got nearly 87 percent of the vote. It should be noted that this overwhelming vote represented a genuine popular mandate unlike the overwhelming majorities won by ex-Communist Party chiefs like Karimov in Uzbekistan, Mutalibov in Azerbaijan, or Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan. Not only were there a multitude of parties and candidates in the Georgian elections, but Gamsakhurdia ran in opposition to the old apparatus and against it. By the time of the elections, however, Gamsakhurdia had distinct enemies and they had already begun to mobilize.

Moscow News dated March 10, 1991, provides an example of the type of reporting that had begun. In reviewing Georgian events, *MN* simply repeated a rumor circulating about Gamsakhurdia without supporting or refuting it. This method was used widely by the central press to contribute to unrest and panic in Armenia and Azerbaijan when masses of people fled their homes: "One hears the direct but unproven charge against the head of the Georgian Parliament [Gamsakhurdia] of links with the KGB."

Further, the article stated that some were saying that, "The new regime is more intolerant than the old one was, and writers [which ones?] agree." It reported that the Communist Party press had been closed and some opposition press as well.

The forces pitted against Gamsakhurdia ranged from the Communist Party to such formations as the National Democratic Party of Georgia (NDPG), the National Congress (NC), and "Mkhedrioni" (the "Horsemen").

"Mkhedrioni" had armed detachments in many regions of Georgia who attacked and threatened opponents—including parliamentary deputies—and refused to recognize the government's authority or disarm. They contributed to the escalating atmosphere of violence in the republic that created popular alarm.[4]

Like *MN*, the central government press began almost from the eruption of the conflict in South Ossetia to blame it on Gamsakhurdia. The U.S. government-financed Radio Liberty broadcasts repeated such charges and included others about his alleged "dictatorship." Gamsakhurdia became so angry with reporters from the central government press, Radio Liberty, and unofficial weekly *Express-Khronika* (*EK*) for persistently repeating such charges that he first refused to provide them with official information and then threatened them with arrest.

By the time of the May elections *EK*, printed in Moscow and edited by former dissident Aleksandr Podrabinek, was referring to Gamsakhurdia as a "dictator," giving obvious support to his opponents like Georgi Chanturia, who was chairman of the NDPG and a member of the presidium of the National Congress, and Dzaba Ioseliani, leader of the "Mkhedrioni" who by that time was imprisoned along with 60 "Mkhedrioni" gang members if the *EK* report can be believed.

Chanturia and Ioseliani were both to join the military junta that overthrew Gamsakhurdia.

EK itself reported that a leader of the Christian Democratic Alliance, Irakliya Kakabadze, charged on Georgian television that *EK* transmits false information.[5]

According to *EK*, Gamsakhurdia also claimed that the NDPG and the NC were planning an armed uprising to overthrow him in May during the presidential campaign. *EK* said there were demonstrations organized by the NDPG and the NC against Gamsakhurdia's "dictatorship." In one case it reported Gamsakhurdia's opponents in the NDPG and NC had mobilized some 7,000 protesters to demand the release of political prisoners said to number 79 by May 21.

Gamsakhurdia called out the newly-formed National Guard—organized and headed by Tengiz Kitovani, who a few months later used the Guard against Gamsakhurdia—and tried to mobilize the police to defend the government.

He accused the NC of relaying false information to the West. He also accused Radio Liberty of broadcasting false information. On May 27, he expelled two Radio Liberty reporters from a press conference, accused them of relaying misinformation, and declared that if they continued to do this he would raise criminal charges against them.

On June 13, he charged *Izvestia*, which persistently described him as dictatorial and distorted his statements, with slander and blocked the newspaper's circulation.

Various hunger strikes were organized by the NC, "Mkhedrioni," and their supporters against Gamsakhurdia and the Georgian Parliament between December 1990 and June 1991. National Congress and NDPG members were apparently on a hunger strike in prison.

There was an ominous report in *EK* of June 4, 1991, of a meeting of the NDPG which was greeted by a Ukrainian named Anatoly Lupinos who called for the rebirth of an Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABBN). That this retrograde, contemptible organization could have any credibility among either Georgians or Ukrainians, let alone the Russians who reported it, is an indication of the depth of the ignorance and political crisis among those peoples.

ABBN, an emigre organization of deposed Nazi collaborators, landlords, clerics, royalty, and nobility, tries to appeal to and mobilize those peoples nationally oppressed by Stalinism in an "anti-Bolshevik" struggle through which these former exploiters hope to get their property, power, and privileges back. Such are the types Trotsky surely had in mind when he spoke in April 1939, of forces that "must not be allowed within artillery range of the labor movement."[6]

It is clear from its coverage that the main *EK* reporter, Irina Sarishvili, was anything but "neutral" about Gamsakhurdia. She was an NDPG partisan and even participated in NDPG meetings.

In an effort to stop the slander of Gamsakhurdia, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia on May 23, adopted a law which established fines or terms of forced labor for political slander. Newspaper editors were to get a six-year term and the newspaper would be fined 25,000 rubles for a similar violation. Repeat violators would be closed.

On June 8, the NDPG at its Fourth Congress called for the creation of a National Democratic Alliance against Gamsakhurdia and seemed to be interested in and discuss little else except their opposition to him personally.

What was it that they opposed about Gamsakhurdia?

It was not the war against South Ossetia. Chanturia stated at a July 9 press conference called to condemn Gamsakhurdia, "I want you to understand me correctly; there is no South Ossetia. That area is Georgia. The Kremlin is using South Ossetian extremists against us."

In fact, several South Ossetians interviewed on Georgian television claimed that it was Gamsakhurdia's opponents who were responsible for additional troops being sent to South Ossetia.

Furthermore, on March 8, 1991, Gamsakhurdia even organized a convoy of some 60 busloads of Ossetians from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to go to Tskhinvali to try to open peace talks. However, the convoy was not allowed to pass through Georgia's own checkpoints en route. It was only allowed to return to Tbilisi, in fact, thanks to Gamsakhurdia's personal intervention.[7]

Perhaps the "opposition"—the corrupt local bureaucrats and their mafia-type colleagues as well as the proponents of privatization and market reforms in Moscow and abroad—had other concerns. It is likely they were not pleased with Gamsakhurdia's refusal to close ranks with Gorbachev and Yeltsin against the workers' strikes in the spring or with his refusal, along with the Estonian government, to support in mid-May, Gorbachev's "New Plan" to attract imperialist funds and an invitation from Bush for Gorbachev to the G-7 meetings in London that summer.

Perhaps the old bosses and their new imperialist financiers were not pleased with Gamsakhurdia's statement to the Georgian Supreme Soviet July 25, 1991, reported in *EK*, July 30, 1992, under the headline "Gamsakhurdia Is for the Preservation of 'Elements of Socialism.'" He said that, "There was no need to fully reject socialist ideas since capitalism without socialism produces anarchy and that after privatization, controls will need to be introduced. The best way forward is the convergence of capitalism and socialism." This was not the Kremlin's line.

Gamsakhurdia was very skeptical about the August 1991 attempted coup in Moscow. He declared that if it were genuine and not some sort of ploy, it was a "reactionary" offensive aimed above all at republics like Georgia where some semblance of democracy and independence had been won.[8]

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, however, fearing a move against him, he tried to take control of the newly-formed National Guard from Tengiz Kitovani. Kitovani defied Gamsakhurdia's orders and "went into hiding with rebel soldiers."[9] Gamsakhurdia's Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua soon thereafter resigned.

It was in August that the political opposition to him appears to have shifted to armed rebellion.

In early September, Georgian police apparently opened fire on a protest demonstration in Tbilisi wounding 20. Gamsakhurdia denied he had ordered the police to shoot but this incident was added to the case being built against him in the bourgeois and Soviet press.[10]

On September 15, as the crisis mounted, Georgi Chanturia of the NDPG and NC was arrested. On September 26, the armed "opposition" occupied the TV and radio studios and surrounded government buildings. Kitovani's "rebel" National Guard forces were "camped" outside Tbilisi with their arms. Gamsakhurdia was in the government house guarded by 1,000 police, guardsmen, and armed civilians.[11]

In late September, with opposition activity apparently spreading to the campuses, Gamsakhurdia replaced the rector at Tbilisi University and postponed the opening of the campus. At the same time, as propaganda against him in the central government newspapers and broadcasts escalated, he cut off radio and television broadcasts from Moscow and ended the distribution of Moscow newspapers.

What is curious about these episodes is why Gamsakhurdia did not call in, or why no Geogian military commanders ordered in, some of the thousands of Georgian troops that were fighting in South Ossetia to defend Gamsakhurdia against Kitovani's National Guard. After all, this was a popularly-elected, legal government under military attack from mutinous troops. It would appear that even the threat of a large defense force would have cooled the enthusiasm of some of the mutineer forces.

Was it that Gamsakhurdia really had no control over these troops? Who are they? Who do they represent? Who specifically had command over them? Are they simply mercenaries for local party and mafia bosses? Gamsakhurdia certainly had little control over Kitovani's National Guard. If he had so little control over the troops' accusations against him for the crimes the troops are committing in South Ossetia fall apart.

Nor did Gamsakhurdia seem able to effectively mobilize his supporters to isolate and repel the opposition.

When the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic declared independence on November 2, and Yeltsin tried to send troops against it, Gamsakhurdia condemned Yeltsin's lawlessness and supported that republic's independence claim.

In mid-November Gamsakhurdia refused to join Gorbachev and the heads of eight former republics to please imperialist lenders by pledging to shoulder a portion of the Kremlin's $80 billion foreign debt. On November 26, Gamsakhurdia refused to attend a meeting called by Gorbachev to form a Union of Sovereign States; and in December, Georgia was the only former republic outside the Baltic to refuse to join the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Georgia had, however, been named among the former republics that was planning to lift price controls and subsidies January 2, 1992. Whether Gamsakhurdia would have actually done this we will never know.

On the evening of December 21, the opposition's rebel army, headed by Tengiz Kitovani and Gamsakhurdia's former Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, closed off all roads to the capital and launched their military attack on Gamsakhurdia, holed up with supporters in the basement of a government building. Central government troops still stationed there remained "neutral."

On December 26, the Chechen-Ingush government offered to help Gamsakhurdia and actually sent its defense minister and ten bodyguards, but they were forbidden upon landing by the Georgian coup-makers to leave their plane.

Pro-Gamsakhurdia protesters, when they tried to mobilize, were repeatedly dispersed with gunfire. According to the wire services, when students at Tbilisi University tried to mobilize, the "rebels" stormed the campus.

On December 27, the coup-makers stormed the KGB prison and released Chanturia and "Horsemen" leader Dzaba Ioseliani and other prisoners. Some 150 "Mkhedrioni" ("Horsemen") quickly materialized with submachine guns to defend a rally where both men spoke.[12]

By December 29, some key Gamsakhurdia aides succumbed to the pressure and defected to the coup-makers and called on Gamsakhurdia to resign. As cease-fires failed and fires raged out of control, hundreds of Tbilisi residents fled for their lives.

It was not until December 30—nine days after the attack began—that several "detachments" of the perhaps 10,000 Georgian "militants" massed around the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali decided they were "loyal" to Gamsakhurdia and "rushed to Tbilisi."[13]

Meanwhile, with the legal government under siege from a heavily-armed band of mercenaries—which is what Kitovani's military force really was—the rest of the Georgian "militants" kept South Ossetia

under siege at the end of the year using large caliber machine guns and grenade throwers to hold back holiday relief trucks intended for what was left of the beleaguered Tskhinvali population.

Gamsakhurdia called the attack on him "a coup by the Tbilisi mafia and former communists."

"They are receiving both weapons and support from Moscow as well as from all the criminals and mafiosi in Georgia," he stated.[14]

This assessment sounded more and more accurate as the situation unfolded.

How could this violence be justified?

Justifications conveyed by the bourgeois media from the conspirators were as follows:

- That Gamsakhurdia had refused to denounce the August coup attempt and censored deputies who did. Gamsakhurdia's position on the coup was stated above. That he "censored" deputies who condemned the coup seems like a spurious charge. Moreover, there are other means short of a coup d'etat for resisting such measures when they occur.
- Gamsakhurdia took over the KGB and used 85 prefects to impose "absolute rule" and attempted to rule without parliament. If Gamsakhurdia took over the KGB he gained little personal protection from it. He appears to have had little, if any, help from the Georgian internal security organs in effectively defending himself from the escalating violence since August. Where he imposed his own "prefects," he was replacing old party bosses which surely ruffled some powerful feathers. However, Yeltsin has done the same thing. If it is wrong for Gamsakhurdia to do, it is also wrong for Yeltsin to do. Further, just how Gamsakhurdia could be blamed for "attempting to rule without parliament" when parliament had given him executive powers to act without parliamental approval is a mystery.
- Gamsakhurdia "refused to heed others' opinions," appointing unsuitable and incompetent ministers and closing newspapers and television stations.

The origins of those charges relating to the media have already been discussed. Appointing incompetent and unsuitable ministers is not a crime. I am sure that Gamsakhurdia more than anyone regrets having appointed Tengiz Sigua as prime minister, for example. Everyone refuses from time to time to heed "others' opinions." That is hardly justifiable grounds for violent overthrow.

In short, these explanations were a bluff. They are empty charges that could only be believed by a willing accomplice or a downright fool.

Yet the major bourgeois press and wire services across the board failed to seriously challenge the right of these armed attackers to overthrow Gamsakhurdia and accepted uncritically the coup-makers charges against Gamsakhurdia. The explanation for the coup usually boiled down to a simple sentence: After winning elections by an overwhelming vote in May, Gamsakhurdia has fallen out of favor with "some" who claim that he was "trying to impose a dictatorship." Some version of this explanation accompanied every report on the coup's progress.

The sympathy of the bourgeois press with the coup-makers is graphically conveyed in the coverage by the Reuters wire service January 3, 1992, of the incident when gunmen for the coup-makers fired pointblank into crowd of unarmed demonstrators killing at least two and wounding at least 27:

> [The shooting] "appeared to have been an attempt at intimadation that went tragically wrong. . . . About half a dozen gunmen emerged from three saloon cars and fired shots over the heads of about 2,000 demonstrators—a tactic that had been used at a previous protest." [But then,] "the gunmen advanced too close to the crowd and did not reckon with about 40 protesters who pelted them with stones. . . . Possibly in panic, they lowered the barrels of their guns and fired pointblank at the demonstration."

Such sympathetic reporting is usually reserved by bourgeois reporters for troops who are carrying out imperialism's dirty work.

However, the *Financial Times* reporter Neil Buckley on January 6, offered a more plausible explanation for the coup: After winning 87 percent of the popular vote, Gamsakhurdia "broke his election promises to liberalize the economy and allow private ownership of land." Or otherwise stated, a greedy few who still had access to armaments and the media, were able to destabilize and outmaneuver this former dissident, popularly-elected president who proved unable to effectively resist them.

The early morning of January 7, 1992, after 60 highly-trained troops abandoned him, Gamsakhurdia fled with some supporters.

The triumphant coup-makers—Kitovani, Sigua, Chanturia, and Ioseliani—assumed power as a military council, declared marshal law, and banned demonstrations. So much for their commitment to democracy.

That the coup-makers were anything but democratic—the names of the parties they headed notwithstanding—was best stated by Chanturia on January 7, "Chanturia, sitting at a table laden with roast chicken, cheese, and bread, looked to the future and called for the creation of a constitutional monarchy," Reuters reported.

"Jorge Bagration de Mukhrani, head of the exiled Georgian royal family who lives in Spain has said he is willing to preside over a monarchy in the divided republics," Reuters continued. This monarchy had ruled Georgia until 1801(!) when the Russian tsar took over.

Could the Bagration de Mukhrani family and friends have been in on this coup plot? And who with them?

Certainly it did not take Reuters long to find them after their 191 years in exile! Who do you think helped Reuters find them? In fact, what sane person would have even considered such an option?

Also expressing to Reuters an immediate readiness to return to Georgia to take power immediately after Gamsakhurdia was forced to flee was Eduard Shevardnadze about whom Reuters said, "Many Georgians associate him with repressive tactics used against dissidents . . . in the 1970s and are wary about welcoming him back."

On January 9, realizing that their claim to power was rather thin, the new Military Council, through Sigua, tried to justify overthrowing Gamsakhurdia by claiming he was "mentally ill." To their everlasting shame they brought forth as evidence the three diagnoses of Stalinist pseudo-physicians who frequently made such rulings to justify placing Stalinism's critics in psychiatric hospitals.[15]

Sigua also claimed that Gamsakhurdia embezzled a billion rubles; hardly believable. Georgia is broke and was broke when Gamsakhurdia came to power. Anyway, during their coup, the Georgian National Bank had burned to the ground so these gangster coup-makers could have no evidence to support this charge.

Gamsakhurdia with his supporters went first to Armenia and then, by mid-January returned to Georgia. There were daily protests against the coup in Tbilisi with Kitovani mobilizing his goons periodically to go after Gamsakhurdia's supporters who gathered in various places, especially in western Georgia, to resist the military government's forces or defend Gamsakhurdia's.

On January 20, the Military Council vowed to continue to use force against the Ossetian separatists while most areas of Georgia were without electricity altogether and the capital's residents, left with the ruins of battle, had electricity only six hours each day.[16]

Also, and most important, the military rulers on that day announced they would accelerate the pace of "land reform" and privatization. In other words, they and their friends plan to grab as much as they can.

At the end of January, the military rulers lifted price controls and prices skyrocketed overnight.

In mid-February, according to a *Washington Post* report of February 17, Georgian journalists were reporting that members of the Military

Council had received aid from former Communist Party politicians close to Shevardnadze, whom "some consider a criminal." By then Shevardnadze had indicated that he would accept nomination for president of Georgia on the "Democratic Union" ticket.

Although by late February, Gamsakhurdia, who had surfaced at last in Grozny, capital of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, and was still prepared to fight for his right to return and his supporters were still carrying out periodic attacks in Georgia, had not been able to seriously challenge the hold of the new Military Council.

However, the fact that the Military Council was forced to prolong the state of emergency March 3, on the eve of Shevardnadze's return, indicates that they are far from secure in their posts.

On March 3, the Military Council also announced its plans to dissolve itself in favor of a special State Council which, like the Military Council, would be the "supreme organ of power, with executive functions and the right to issue decrees."

The Military Council, of course, would appoint the new State Council's leading members. Tengiz Sigua would be the prime minister. Other Military Council leaders would also join the new State Council "paving the way for the military council to step down," as Reuters delicately phrased it.

On March 7, 1992, Eduard Shevardnadze and his entourage arrived in Georgia to resume control.[17]

On March 10, a decree was read on the radio announcing the Military Council's dissolution and the formation of the State Council. Shevardnaze was named provisional leader of Georgia. (This is the same Shevardnadze, readers will recall, who resigned with such flourish from Gorbachev's government in December 1991, claiming he feared a dictatorship was on the horizon.) Ioseliani was made Shevardnadze's deputy. The decree explained that, "Only after we . . . demonstrate to the civilized world our resolve to build a democratic society will the West actively support us," [or in other words prove that Georgia is safe for imperialist exploitation].

On March 13, Georgia officially applied for membership in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and it also officially agreed to shoulder a share of the former Soviet Union's debt to imperialist lenders.

Speaking from Grozny on March 12, Gamsakhurdia reiterated his views about the coup: "The bloody events in Georgia were inspired by former partocrats [party bureaucrats], the communist mafia, and bands of criminals who, relying on armed forces of the former USSR, are trying to turn Georgia into a sphere of influence of the modernized Russian empire against the will of the Georgian people."[18]

Those who overthrew him had no shortage of arms and ammunition. CIS troops remain in large numbers in Georgia as well as in Armenia and Azerbaijan and are a source of munitions if nothing else.

But the circle of conspirators is undoubtedly larger than Gamsakhurdia states. Shevardnadze had made friends in high imperialist circles. Could this be the reason that the bourgeois press was so sympathetic to Gamsakhurdia's opponents when they violently overthrew him?

Of particular importance, however, is the attitude of socialists, especially Russian socialists, toward such events.

There has been a marked tendency among Russian socialists to abstain from supporting the nationalist struggles of the non- Russians rather than to support them. Lip service in support of the "right to self-determination" is not enough. Nor is it sufficient to take the attitude of "a plague on both your houses" with respect to either the conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh or especially the conflict in Georgia. This is precisely the attitude that the media in Russia and the media in the capitalist states want people to adopt. This simplistic notion is no substitute for hard investigation, of which still more is obviously needed.

A blithe dismissal of the Georgian crisis as a consequence of insane nationalist rivalry—which has been the attitude of many Russian and other socialists—blinds one to an examination of the real economic and political forces at work. As Marxists know well from examinations of history, beneath the so-called "nationalist" wars of Europe and elsewhere were deep-going economic conflicts of which nationalism was only an ideological banner.

However history may ultimately judge Gamsakhurdia—and undoubtedly there is much to criticize about his performance—the campaign to discredit and overthrow him had much less to do with him and his mistakes than with the aspirations of a few to control the resources belonging to the many. Unfortunately, few activists have taken the time and the trouble to investigate this.

To paraphrase Trotsky writing about Ukraine in 1939:

> When the Georgian problem became aggravated earlier this year, the voices of Marxists and socialists were not heard at all; but the voices of the clericals and nationalist reactionaries were loud enough. This means that the proletarian vanguard has let the . . . national movement slip out of its hands. . . .[19]

There has been no indication to date as to the ongoing response of the Georgian working class to the events of the past year and a half, although these events profoundly affect them. It appears that they did support Gamsakhurdia's strike call in April 1991. Some have apparently mobilized for his return. What are they doing and saying?

Now the old bureaucrat-mafia clique, with Shevardnadze again at its head, is back in charge of Georgia with imperialism preparing to consider its wares. While new struggles are clearly on the horizon, the new relationship of forces does not bode well for the Georgian working people or their quest for independence. This can only present an even greater challenge to the Russian working class and its vanguard.

Notes

1. *Moscow News*, No. 13, March 31, 1991.

2. See Leon Trotsky, *Social Democracy and the Wars of Intervention, Russia 1918-1921*, New Park Publications, London, 1975, for the best political examination of this period.

3. *The New York Times*, April 1, 1991.

4. *Zarya Vostoka*, December 6, 1990. An example of the prevailing atmosphere of violence was when the president of the Adzhar region was wounded in early May 1991. He was sitting in a meeting in his office when his vice president burst in and opened fire with a machine gun.

5. The information that follows from *Ekspress-Khronika* appeared in issue Nos. 22 (dated May 28, 1991) through 31 (dated July 30, 1991), 109649 Moscow, P.O. Box 9.

6. Leon Trotsky, *The Ukrainian Question*, April 22, 1939, contained in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1938-39)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1974, p. 306.

7. *MN*, March 17, 1991.

8. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 22, 1991.

9. *NYT*, September 11, 1991.

10. *NYT*, September 23, 1991.

11. *NYT*, September 26, 1991.

12. OTC, December 27, 1991.

13. OTC, December 30, 1991.

14. *Financial Times*, January 3, 1992.

15. *FT*, January 9, 1992.

16. Reuters, January 20, 1992.

17. See *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, No. 97, June 1992.

18. Reuters, March 12, 1992.

19. *Independence of the Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads*, July 30, 1939, contained in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939-40)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1977, p. 47.

Detroit Shoppers Spurn Cheap Groceries in Support of Kroger Strikers

This article has been reprinted from the June 1992 issue of ***Labor Notes****.*

In southeastern Michigan, the Kroger supermarket chain is offering shoppers some fabulous deals: chicken legs for 29 cents a pound, milk for 99 cents a gallon, margarine for 19 cents a pound, and a free pound of coffee.

There's only one catch: you have to cross a picket line to get these bargains.

For the most part, shoppers have declined the offer.

On April 12, the first day of the United Food and Commercial Workers' strike, Kroger stores were virtually empty.

While some shoppers have trickled back since, the company is clearly doing only a fraction of its normal business. The union estimates 20 percent.

The 7,000 clerks, cashiers, and meat cutters—members of UFCW Local 876—have not received a raise since 1981. A two-tier wage system pays workers hired before 1987 about $10.37 an hour; new hires earn as little as $4.50.

The union says Kroger wants to run the company on part-time help. Local 876 says that 86 percent of the company's workers were full-time in 1987, compared to only 36 percent this year.

That has put the typical Kroger worker's pay more than $3,000 under the government's poverty level for an urban family. Nearly 23 percent earn $5.04 an hour or less. And more than 40 percent have no health insurance.

One group is not doing too badly. Kroger is paying scabs $7.30 an hour—well above what it normally pays starting workers.

The company has offered $1.50 raise over three and a half years. But it also wants concessions: among them the return of 10 vacation days per year, and a reduction in the number of employees eligible for dependent health coverage. It would achieve the latter by requiring part-timers to average 40 hours a week to get this benefit, while limiting their weekly hours to a maximum of 36.

"Where Will They Work?"

"America is disappearing piece by piece," said striker Kent Fehribach, a 25-year veteran of Kroger who was walking a picket line for the first time in his work life. "If we're not out here another chunk will be gone.

"It's not for myself that I'm on strike," Fehribach added. "I'm on strike for my two children. How can I send them to college? Where will they work? With all the jobs going to Mexico and companies trying to break unions like Caterpillar, where will they work?"

Many of the strikers are older women who have worked at Kroger for more than 30 years. Fifty-three percent are women; many of them single mothers who support families.

Bill Salliote, a Kroger worker for six years, said that before Kroger took over the supermarket chain where he worked, "I used to work 40 to 48 hours per week, make $10 per hour, and I had health care benefits.

"Now I work 20 to 40 hours per week. I never know from week to week how many hours I'll work. I have two kids, no health care benefits for them, a mortgage to pay and they took away two dollars an hour in pay. The only benefit I have: emergency medical care for my self. You have to fall out sick in the street to use it."

Community Support

Given the poor climate for organized labor nationwide, it seems likely that Kroger underestimated the amount of support workers would get from shoppers and others in the community.

The company may also have judged the union incapable of putting up a good fight. Local 876 has been known more for exorbitant officer salaries, nepotism, and allegations of election fraud than for militant unionism. Indeed the local's past concessionary contracts are one reason why its members are in such dire straits today.

But the local with the help of organizers from other parts of the country, has held demonstrations and rallies and has organized a variety of support groups—women, students, retirees, religious organizations and community groups.

The student support group has translated materials into Arabic for use in Detroit's large Middle Eastern communities.

The Local is also seeking the support of the other 110,00 Kroger workers the UFCW represents. Union officials from 28 UFCW Kroger locals were scheduled to travel to Michigan to discuss strategy. They are planning a demonstration at Kroger headquarters in Cincinnati during the company's annual meeting. ❑

Safeway Boycott Saves Teamster Jobs

Northern California Teamsters have defeated the worst aspects of a union-busting plan at the giant Safeway grocery chain.

The company has built a giant $100 billion distribution center in the town of Tracy to replace existing facilities in Richmond and Freemont. Safeway said it had contracted with Specialized Distribution Management Inc. to run the new center on a non-union basis. None of the 800 truck drivers or warehouse workers from the closed centers were guaranteed jobs in Tracy, SDMI said. Those who were hired would take pay cuts of up to $5 an hour.

The union formed a labor-community group called the Coalition to Stop Safeway, which gradually stepped up pressure. They began an effective consumer boycott of 50 Northern California stores in February, which the union estimated cut business at some stores by 30 to 40 percent. In late March, the boycott was extended to most cities in the western states.

The existing contract was set to expire May 1, and a strike was possible at that time. Workers also confronted Safeway Chairman Peter Magowan at a congressional hearing in San Francisco, April 19.

These activities apparently convinced Safeway it would be better to settle than fight. Safeway agreed to give employees severance pay, while SDMI agreed to hire them all at their existing rate of pay and to recognize the union.

The victory is not complete because many serious takeaway demands on issues such as pension contributions, vacations, sick days, and retiree benefits will be submitted to binding arbitration.

Unequal Education in an Unequal Society

Savage Inequalities, by Jonathan Kozol. Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1991. 262 pages, $20.

Reviewed by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

Jonathan Kozol talks about a report by the Public Education Association of New York regarding the present system of education in our city:

"Classes for the emotionally handicapped, neurologically impaired, learning disabled and educable mentally retarded are disproportionately black. . . . Classes for the speech, language, and hearing impaired are disproportionately Hispanic."

Kozol goes on: "Citywide, the association adds, fewer than ten percent of children slotted in these special tracks will graduate from school. Nationwide, black children are three times as likely as white children to be placed in classes for the mentally retarded but only half as likely to be placed in classes for the gifted: a well-known statistic that should long since have aroused a sense of utter shame in our society. Most shameful is the fact that no such outrage can be stirred in New York City."

Kozol shows that the *Brown v. the Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling in 1954 has been nullified in practice. This landmark decision recognized the right of all U.S. citizens to have equal opportunity to education. The Court held that schools segregated on the basis of race were inherently unequal and violated the right to equal protection under the law guaranteed by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Kozol dates its death to another Supreme Court ruling in March 1973, which decided that the U.S. Constitution really does not concern itself with education as a right.

The "equal protection" clause of the 14th Amendment, according to the Court's majority opinion in 1973, "does not require absolute equality." With this decision, a class-action suit in San Antonio, Texas, was thrown out. The suit charged that vast inequalities in education in different communities was due to vast inequalities of wealth. Such inequalities, the suit held, violated the Constitution. A lower court had ruled in the suit's favor. This lower court's decision would have forced states to pass laws to correct this situation.

Moreover, in *de facto* reversing the 1954 decision, the policymakers are not even claiming to be trying to revive the discredited but long-prevailing presumptions of the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson* where the Court held that "separate but equal" facilities were constitutional.

In this book Kozol is looking at the changes in the quality of education that have transpired since his 1968 Boston investigation chronicled in the book, *Death at an Early Age.* He visited schools from East St. Louis to Chicago to Boston, from St. Antonia, Mississippi, to New York City, and more. What he has found and documented is systematic decay reflecting the existence of racial apartheid in our country. It also reflects the consequences of the conclusion obviously arrived at by those who currently hold power that inner-city schools need be no more than "a repository for a nonwhite population that is now regarded as expendable."

The decay has not only been a result of the *de facto* reversal of the 1954 Supreme Court decision. That decision was in reality a reflection of the political mood of those in power in the country at the time: the deplorable conditions for the Black population as a result of segregated schools were too embarrassing to the U.S. government internationally. Having emerged from World War II as a major world power, the U.S. based its international and domestic policies on rabid anti-communism. It could hardly be convincing in its rhetorical declamations of concern for "liberty, democracy, and equality" with such a social sore as blatant racial segregation. Moreover, the rulers of the nation felt they could afford to grant certain legal concessions. It was not until the emergence of the powerful civil rights movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, of course, that a real social force compelled a real recognition of legal equality for Blacks.

The decay of the conditions in our schools that Kozol describes are a result of the changed political and economic situation in our country since that time.

A number of larger factors coincided to reverse the hopeful trends that were initiated by the civil rights movement. Kozol does not discuss these.

They include a decline of the relative competitive edge U.S. capital had on a world scale until the rise of competition in West Germany and Japan. This competitive financial edge allowed the nation's ruling corporate elites to placate burgeoning social forces by some extensive programs of social spending, including for education.

There has also been a decline in the militancy of the movements for social change, including the civil rights and Black liberation movements that played such a prominent role in pushing for social advancements throughout the 1960s. And one has to include, as a key contributing element, the effectiveness of the U.S. government's Cointelpro operations to disrupt and discredit these social movements, particularly the Black movement, whose leaders and organizations were targeted for destruction. Some of the activists framed up as a result of these Cointelpro operations are still in prisons today, including Albert Washington, Herman Bell, and Anthony Bottom.

Instead of increased government funding to meet the increasing needs of Black (and other) communities, "cutbacks" became the byword for social spending since the mid-1970s. This has led to gutting social programs due to lack of government funds of all kinds.

These cutbacks coincided with the decline in the capitalist economy on a world scale over the past decade and a half which brought rising levels of unemployment, lower wages, union busting, and declines in the memberships of trade unions. More and more people needed help to meet their basic human needs. But the help that existed was reduced or taken away. There has been a growing impoverishment that has hit the most disadvantaged the hardest and simultaneously created millions of new "disadvantaged."

Kozol addresses not only the effects of the cutbacks on the quality of education but also on the quality of the life of those who are to be educated. Central Harlem, for example, has an "infant death rate that is the same as Malaysia." In East Harlem, it is even worse: "42 per thousand." "A child's chance of surviving to age five are better in Bangladesh than in East Harlem," according to a New Jersey senator.

"In the South Bronx . . . 531 infants of 1,000 require neonatal hospitalization—a remarkable statistic that portends high rates of retardation and brain damage."

He notes the fact that many of the poorest communities are situated next to chemical plants or other hazardous sites that have damaged their residents' health and sapped their vitality; the parents of youth who attend the wretched schools in these neighborhoods are themselves victims of the same uncaring system. Most are jobless because the industries that polluted the environment have since moved to areas of the world where labor is cheaper. In most cases, as well, these parents are demoralized and undereducated as a result of the system's past injustices. They are unable to exert influence on the situation.

The book opens with an examinaton of the schools in East St. Louis. It is a terrible environment that any rational and humane society would not allow to exist. The economic and environmental crises there have been exacerbated by the practice of corporate giants—Monsanto, Cerro Copper, and Big River Zinc. When establishing plants there the "incorporate towns" around the plants, towns "which are self-governed and exempt, therefore, from supervision by [East St. Louis] health agencies. . . . Basically there's no one living in some of these so-called towns. . . . It provides tax shelter and immunity from jurisdiction of authorities." That's all.

Because these plants polluted and ruined the environment with impunity before they closed their doors some years back, the neighborhoods contain serious health hazards. One dried-up river bed is so contaminated from plant dumping that simply the friction from the wheels of a child's bike traveling over it causes combustion.

Kozol spends considerable time on the conditions of the schools in New York City, the Bronx, for example, particularly in District 10, which is really *de facto* two districts. It contains PS 261 and PS 79—both overcrowded, understaffed, falling apart, with few supplies, no playgrounds and no fresh air—for poor Blacks and Hispanics (the latter in a barely converted roller-skating rink with virtually no windows). The same District 10, however, also has PS 24 in Riverdale where the white and wealthier children have twice the space, half the student/teacher ratio, abundant supplies and programs, and a broad array of facilities.

It is all about money and the way schools get it. Schools, Kozol explains, appear to get their funds from property taxes based on something called the "foundation program" that dates from the 1920s. As a result, districts fund themselves by taxing the property in their district according to their own plan, with the state and federal governments allegedly stepping in to insure that severe inequalities do not occur. But this is not effective.

As a result, while New York City spends about $5,585 per student per year, a rich neighborhood—like Jericho, New York—spends $11,325. While the dropout rate in New York appears to be nearly 50 percent, the dropout rate in Jericho is "zero."

It is no surprise that Jericho high school prepares students well for college—the best colleges in the country. However, only a tiny minority of the students who manage to make it through the entire four years of high school in New York City are prepared for any college at all, let alone the Ivy League schools. The prevailing inequalities—as Kozol points out—thus institutionally preclude any possibility that the white students graduating from the better high schools will have to compete to any significant degree with Black high school graduates for admission to such universities.

Since the 1980s, the government and its educators and conservative foundations have been trying to convince the public that money is not the solution to the problem of poor-quality education in inner-city and other decaying schools in our country. They assert this because they do not want to increase funding to the schools where the poor working class populations and unemployed or underemployed working class—now shattered by poverty—live.

Kozol's book is a fitting response to this argument. If money is not the answer, he explains, then why don't these rich and the politicians who defend the rich agree to send their children to the lower-funded public schools. This way they could prove their sincerity.

George Bush—one who argues that more money for education is not the solution—himself attended an exclusive private school that presently spends $11,000 per year on each pupil. One is expected to believe that Bush could have gotten just as good an education in Paterson, New Jersey, for example, where the funding per student per year is a mere $4,422.

Here are the conditions that would have greeted Bush each day:

> The city is so short of space that four elementary schools now occupy abandoned factories. Children at one wood-frame elementary school, which has no cafeteria or indoor space for recreation, eat lunch in a section of the boiler room. A bathroom houses reading classes. Science labs in the high schools have no microscopes; sinks do not work; the class enrollment is too high for lab capacity. At Paterson's Kennedy High School, there is one physics section for 2,200 high school students.

This is only one of many such "public schools" that Kozol describes.

It is not some new technique for "restructuring" the existing facilities or more "magnet schools" or improvements in "teacher competency"—current buzzwords emerging from ruling circles and their academies—that will solve the immense problems, Kozol points out. Nor is the much publicized "choice" approach calculated to provide higher quality education for the millions of youth who need it. As Kozol states: "Many are left consigned to places no one would 'choose' if he had any choice at all."

Nor can one attribute the dreadful shortages and lack of repairs in the schools to "bureaucratic red tape." The system can do what it wants to when it wants to—when corporate profits are involved—Kozol points out. If the system fails our inner-city youth, it is because this failure is part of the plan. Or as Kozol puts it: "When the School Board [as in New York] hires just *one* woman to retrieve 400 missing [truant] children from the streets of North Bronx, we may reasonably conclude that it does not particularly desire to find them."

Nor does Kozol have confidence in the corporate "school partners" who have been the major beneficiaries of the corporate tax breaks that have led to declining school budgets. Nor are Black or Hispanic administrators the answer. In fact, he says that there are three reasons they are the rulers' choice to more effectively preserve the system of apartheid we have. They protect the white society from charges of racism; and they "offer enforcement, since a black official is expected to be even more severe in putting down unrest than white officials."

Moreover, they offer a convenient scapegoat for a system programmed to produce failures, as has already been repeatedly demonstrated. (In fact, he provides a startling picture of the toll such a post took on Chancellor Richard Green, the previous head of the New York City school system, that may have contributed to his sudden death.)

Kozol reveals aspects of the "special education" system—facilities to guarantee equal opportunity to education for exceptional and "learning impaired" students who were also guaranteed equal education as a result of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.

The opening paragraphs here discuss the consequences of the current tracking system. The poverty, medical deficiencies, dental neglect, unstable and often unhappy living conditions resulting from depressed and economically desperate families, not to mention the blight in the Black and Hispanic communities caused by narcotics, create millions of youth who are "academically deficient," "brain damaged," or "learning disabled." Many who manage to reach elementary school relatively unscathed get "soiled" in the early years of school by poorly funded, neglected,

and failure-oriented conditions of "public education" that are wasting our youth's human potential and killing their spirit.

"A first-year English teacher at [a] high school in the Bronx calls me . . . : 'I've got five classes—42 in each! We have no textbooks yet. I'm using my old textbook from the seventh grade. They're doing construction all around me so the noise is quite amazing. They're actually *drilling* in the hall outside my room. I have more kids than desks in all five classes. . . . '

"The other teachers tell her that the problem will resolve itself. 'Half the students will be gone by Christmastime.'. . . 'I don't understand why people in New York permit this,'" she says.

All beginning teachers in New York State schools are compelled to get six credits in "special education" in order to be certified. Does that not show that the system cares about helping the "learning impaired" students?

The fact remains that there is a serious degree of hypocrisy involved here. New York State or New York City or the Board of Education—none of the officials of whom send their children to public schools one could safely venture to guess—pretend to care about the children with "learning disabilities" while they simultaneously create more of them each day by depriving the inner-city schools of needed funds.

Would so many "learning disabled" exist if all the students went to George Bush's school—Phillips Academy in Andover? (George is by no means a model human being—he can't even write his own speeches. But he is not unemployed or homeless and seems to have a very comfortable life.) Of course, there are children with learning disabilities among the rich and their friends. But they find ample services to assist them and they do not as a rule end up illiterate and destitute.

Regarding a visit to Mary McLeod Bethune School in North Lawndale, a kindergarten in one of the poorest Chicago neighborhoods, Kozol remarks: "I stand at the door and look at the children, most of whom are sitting at a table now to have their milk. Nine years from now, most of these children will go on to Manley High School, an enormous, ugly building just a block away that has a graduation rate of only 38 percent. Twelve years from now, by junior year of high school, if the neighborhood statistics hold true for these children, 14 of these 23 boys and girls will have dropped out of school. Fourteen years from now, four of these kids, at most, will go to college. Eighteen years from now, one of those four may graduate from college, but three of the 12 boys in this kindergarten will already have spent time in prison."

The grim statistics and accounts Kozol presents document a situation that should have teachers—as well as parents—in a state of alarm.

All the material that Kozol presents brings into fresh focus what the teacher's role should be in society. After all, who better than teachers know what is really going on (or not going on) in the classrooms? Yet why is it that teachers remain apparently oblivious to the devastation of lives that they preside over each day? Have they, also, been too beaten down by the system to raise their voices? Are they afraid of supervisors? Kozol noted that the teachers in the converted roller-skating rink would admit the conditions there were appalling only after they were out of the building and in the street.

The United Federation of Teachers—in fact—has since 1975 remained passive in the face of the gutting of the school budgets.

There are solutions to these problems. Kozol is pessimistic because he feels that the rich or richer communities will have to give up something so that the poorer can have more—not a hopeful picture. But that is not necessarily true.

Economist Robert Fitch is among a number of those who have researched the "budget crisis" of New York City and has found that it is not true that "there is no money." The problem is that over the past decade the tax structure has been altered in favor of corporations and the very wealthy, thus depriving the city of millions of dollars. There is plenty of money. It is simply remaining in the pockets of the rich.

Fitch has developed a set of solutions that—if implemented—would not only restore the budget to the pre-"cutback" levels, but would also allow the sales tax, which puts inordinate pressure on the poor, to be eliminated.

1. Raise the personal income tax on those with incomes over $100,000. Based on 1988 returns this represents the top 2.5 percent of the income earners.
2. Tax business services, not consumer necessities.
3. Tax land, not structures.
4. Take away developers' tax exemptions.
5. Tax private universities.

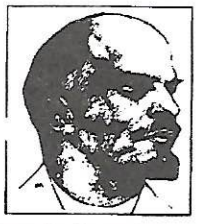
"When you add the amounts raised and saved on all five points and figure in the elimination of the sales tax on clothing and other consumer necessities the total is $1.4 billion. That just happens to be the size of the official budget gap." (See text of Fitch's speech "The New York City Fiscal Crisis" delivered in New York City December 14, 1990, and printed in *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism,* No. 82, February 1991.)

The Communications Workers of America was among the unions which had taken up Fitch's approach by early 1991. However, to date, it has not been forcefully advanced or part of the public discussion.

The crises Kozol describes are, of course, nationwide. New York City is but one example. Not only should the UFT take up a program like the one Fitch presented. All trade unions have an interest in ending these "savage inequalities" in education that reflect the more "savage inequalities" of life in capitalist America. Those involved in the initiatives for a new political party for working people would also do well to consider including such a program.

Kozol's book is a useful tool to help mobilize these forces and others that alone have the power to reverse the evermore savage economic and political "cutbacks" that the ruling class, its politicians in the two major parties, and its courts have been imposing. ❑

LENIN AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY



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Comments on Steve Bloom's Review of Sam Farber's *Before Stalinism*

by J. David Edelstein

It is tempting to some modern-day socialists to put themselves in the boots of the Bolsheviks, and in effect, refight the ditch-by-ditch battles of 1917-1923, while identifying with the Bolsheviks in their often extreme situations. This is not necessarily "wrong," but a more fruitful approach is to use our hindsight to learn from this—to generalize, to generate some theoretical insights.[1]

Perhaps the most important generalization, in my view, is that once on the slippery slope of major limitations on workers' and people's democracy, an evolutionary return to workers' democracy is very unlikely. This is largely because the wielders of power—the presumably "vanguard" party, the governmental administration, and the industrial bureaucrats—view themselves as indispensable, and soon begin to exercise power in their own behalf. It doesn't take all that long before the socialist idealists among them no longer predominate, and the ruling group becomes the core of a new ruling class.

In other words, the fundamental basis of worker's power, in a socialist state, is the *active exercise of that power* by the workers at all levels of society, from the workplace and community to the national government. But such power cannot be exercised directly, by individuals or small groups of workers, except with respect to their immediate job situations. What is required is a number of structures through which this power can be exercised, such as factory committees and unions, and some forms of local and national democratic, representative government. It is true, as Bloom says, that democratic structures ("institutions")[2] cannot "guarantee" workers' democracy, but they are indispensable, as are civil rights and liberties.

To say this in another way, the "property form" of nationalized major industries and banks is not enough. We have learned that such nationalization can also be the basis for a new class ruling over the working class, as I would characterize the situation in the former Soviet and Eastern European societies, and in present-day China, for example. Lenin was wrong in arguing thus for one-man management in industry at the 1920 Congress of the Communist Party:

> The victorious proletariat has abolished property, has completely annulled it—and *therein* lies its domination as a class. The prime thing is the question of property. As soon as the question of property was settled practically, the domination of the class was assured (emphasis in original) (Farber's book, p. 74).[3]

This idea, along with the justification for the dictatorship of the proletariat being exercised through the dictatorship of the party (to be discussed below), affected much more than the developments in the Soviet Union; it remained the dominant theme of "Marxist Leninism" throughout the world until at least 1990, and in some countries through today.

What I personally found of the greatest value in *Before Stalinism* is the *specifics* on the degree and types of repression by the party in power, even after the end of the civil war. The power of the factory committees, the unions, and the soviets was lost to the party. Arrested persons did not have the right of habeas corpus, nor did they have the right to choose their own lawyers. Punishment could be used against people (with Lenin's endorsement) "who are not even suspected of having been actually involved in carrying out, or helping to carry out, any specific acts against the revolutionary government. Instead, what made these people victims of punishment was that they were thought to share with the possible suspects a common political ideology, party or class membership, or even ethnicity."[4]

A minor example in Bolshevik trade union policy:

> . . . the Eleventh Congress of the Communist Party (27 March-2 April 1922), the last at which Lenin actually participated, . . . resolved that the secretaries and chairmen of the central committees of the unions must be party members of long standing, i.e. since before the revolution. . . . Furthermore, the Congress decided that party members could be coopted rather than elected to union office (Farber, p. 87).

Bloom quotes Marcel Liebman (*Leninism Under Lenin*) favorably concerning his description of the post-civil war situation in the Soviet Union (from 1921): "Soviet democracy, born of the upsurge of the masses and the Bolshevik victory, had, as a result of defeats and isolation, finally ceased to exist." In justification for this, Bloom argues that "Lenin and the Bolsheviks felt they had no alternative but to create a one-party state to defend the revolution because objective conditions made it impossible for the working class to remain active and mobilized, and this was the prerequisite for continued Soviet rule" (p. 32). Bloom is of course saying that since there was "no alternative" (and Farber could not provide a "convincing alternative"), the continuation of the one-party dictatorship was justified. (The nature and extent of the repression accompanying this one-party dictatorship—Farber's most useful contribution to the discussion, from my perspective—is not gone into.)

Bloom goes to extremes in rationalizing this one-party dictatorship. For example:

> How "democratic" would it have been to hold an election to renew soviets in 1921 or 1922, and determine the composition of a new government based on the result? How, for example, would such democracy measure the missing "votes" of the hundreds of thousands of fighters for the revolution . . . who perished at the front during the civil war itself? . . . How do we adjust for the dispersal of the working class, for poverty, even famine [etc.]? Under such conditions, the desire of the Bolsheviks to hold onto power—far from representing a negation of their belief in democracy—can reasonably be interpreted as a firm commitment to a broader fulfillment of the democratic referendum that had taken place during the 1917 revolution (p. 33).

In short, once the people had supported the Bolsheviks in 1917, they couldn't renege in 1922; they had to be stuck with

them, like it or not. Again, what was involved in *enforcing* this "fulfillment of the democratic referendum" of 1917? Repression, as treated by Bloom, is an abstraction which one argues about theoretically.

While Lenin's and the Bolsheviks *theoretical* statements on the dictatorship of the proletariat via the party are of secondary importance, as compared to actual practice, they are of some relevance. Bloom suggests that Lenin's 1919 statement, "Yes, the dictatorship of one party!," must be considered in context, as conjunctural rather than general and theoretical, and in the light of the Bolsheviks' difficult circumstances. He also argues that, even if we do accept it as "a new, general theoretical conclusion . . . it is absolutely false to look for some imagined continuity with Lenin's previous outlook" (p. 31). Two points here: first, and most important, it is clear that Trotsky and other Bolsheviks while in power did not shrink from such a general, *theoretical* acceptance of a one-party dictatorship as the vehicle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and indeed proclaimed it while Lenin was still fully capable of contradicting them (democracy and bourgeois democracy often being confused in the process).

Second, it simply isn't true that "it is absolutely false to look for some imagined continuity with Lenin's previous outlook" (p. 31). Hal Draper has shown that Kautsky and Plekhanov, leading Marxists who began writing before Lenin, and Lenin himself, misconstrued Marx's concept of "the dictatorship of the proletariat," and accepted the idea that this would be through the dictatorship of the party.[5] Lenin may have at times formulated things differently, but seems never to have explicitly rejected this idea, and to have returned to it after the Russian revolution. In addition, his approach to a workers' state was typically anti-institutional. For example, he stated in 1906, concerning the "dictatorship of the revolutionary people":

> The scientific term "dictatorship" means nothing more nor less than authority untrammeled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force.[6]

Draper commented, "This definition of 'dictatorship' was going to be held and expounded by Lenin for a long time. . . ."

Lenin also stated that the dictatorship of the revolutionary people "is exercised, not by the whole people, but by the revolutionary people who, however, do not shun the whole people. . . ." Draper comments that the category "revolutionary people" "obviously stands for the revolutionary party."[7]

What can one make of all this, in terms of what actually happened to the Russian Revolution? Farber sums up in part:

> It was in the context of the Bolsheviks' general tendency to have a relatively narrow social base, combined with the serious economic difficulties and sharply declining support confronting them in early 1918, that certain democratically flawed *predispositions* of mainstream Bolshevism degenerated into an outright indifference if not hostility to democracy. In particular, one specific "flaw" of the Leninist view of democracy became quite decisive, and considerably facilitated the subsequent evolution to a clear anti-democratic position. I am referring to the ambiguous status of majority rule in the political theory of the Bolshevik mainstream, as compared for example with the views of Rosa Luxemburg on the matter (p. 212; emphasis in original).

Yes, a socialist democracy—a socialist state—was not sustainable for very long without a socialist revolution in Western Europe, as Bloom says. But no options to a one-party dictatorship? This dictatorship was bad enough in itself under Lenin, and evolved rather quickly and relatively smoothly into Stalinism. No options to a one-party dictatorship *over* the working class and peasantry? The world is still paying the price for the degeneration of the Bolshevik socialist party, the particular way in which the revolution degenerated, and the discrediting of the very idea of socialism. Would a majority coalition with the other socialist parties—let us assume resulting in an eventual restoration of capitalism after various struggles—have been worse? The strategy of such a coalition would have been no more of a gamble than holding onto power by dictatorial means, but might have bought time with the possibility of salvaging something for the revolutionary socialist movement—at the very least its credibility as a proponent of workers' democracy.[8,9] ❑

Notes

1. Review entitled *How Should History Judge Lenin and the Russian Revolution?*, *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, No. 94, pp. 27-34. Farber's book was published by Verso (London and New York), 1990.

2. Bloom seems to think of "institutions" in terms of constitutions and legal codes, whereas institutions are better considered as well-established practices often prescribed by law. His statement, "The only safeguard against bureaucracy is the continued mobilization of the revolutionary mass movement" (p. 34), is not only a gross exaggeration, it fails to take into consideration that masses have never, and cannot remain indefinitely in a state of high "continued mobilization." Democratic practice, to achieve some continuity, has to become the "normal" social practice—that is, accepted and routinized to some extent.

3. Lenin expressed a similiar idea as early as 1918. In reply to Martov's (Menshevik Internationalist) argument that the union's freedom of organization should be protected, as well as his denunciation of Lenin's call for piecework, etc. in April 1918, Lenin stated: "This view . . . is utterly wrong, because the defense of the workers' interests was the task of the unions under capitalism, but since power has passed to the hands of the proletariat, the state itself, in its essence the workers' state, defends the workers' interests" (cited in V.N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 86, translated from a Russian source).

4. Quoted from Farber's defense of his book in Solidarity Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 10, February 1992, pp. 4-5.

5. See Draper's *The "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" from Marx to Lenin*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1987, especially Ch. 4.

6. Op. cit., p. 90.

7. Op. cit., p. 92.

8. Farber suggests that, to begin with, all political parties and groups willing to accept the Soviet government could have been legalized and allowed to run slates in elections, and other aspects of repression lifted, no later than 1922 (pp. 205-208). If the electoral strength of the social democratic and populist parties gained greatly, the Bolsheviks could have then entered into negotiations with them, which might have led to power-sharing or—if necessary—the Bolsheviks leaving the government altogether. Bloom characterizes this unfairly when he says that Farber proposes it "as some democratic rosetta stone with the potential to overcome the profound effects of defeat and demoralization on the part of the population" (p. 32). Farber presented it as "a bold policy and a gamble." But al least it was a *democratic* gamble.

9. On Bloom's impugning of Farber's "scholarship": Yes, some secondary sources were used for quotes from Lenin (I didn't count them), but the bibliography includes 28 works by Lenin. There are 46 works cited which I can recognize as authored by Bolsheviks (plus a couple of sympathizers) who participated in the events discussed, plus a couple of Soviet or Bolshevik documents. Furthermore, some of the other works cited are by historians whose "primary" data are obscure documents (i.e., election data, minutes of meetings). Finally, there are 37 pages of footnotes in all; overwhelmingly bibliographic rather than commentary, and the bibliography runs to 18 pages. Bloom's attack based on scholarship is unwarranted.

In Defense of the Socialist Gamble

by Roy Rollin

Yes, it is indeed "tempting to some modern-day socialists to put themselves in the boots of the Bolsheviks. . . ." More often than not, such "socialists" are to be found in the ranks of self-styled "vanguards" who have an ample amount of time to "refight the ditch by ditch battles" of yesterday because they are nowhere to be found in the struggles of today. This type of "identification with the Bolsheviks in their often extreme situations" provides a peculiar psychological cement that helps bind together the sectarian faithful.

On the other hand, there are those who are so in tune with present-day reality that they get swept off their feet by every passing mood. For the "reality" of today is Bush's "New World Order," the "end of history," and the collapse of "communism"—transmitted to the left by way of the "new realism" and the "Leninism leads to Stalinism" school. Many demoralized and disillusioned ex-radicals have fallen into line behind this train of thought. But they will be of little use in interpreting the world, let alone changing it—any more than those who are off storming the Winter Palace in their wet dreams.

J. David Edelstein is clearly not a demoralized or disillusioned ex-radical, any more than Steve Bloom is a sectarian trying to refight the Russian Revolution. Edelstein is honestly concerned about using our "hindsight . . . to generalize, to generate some theoretical insights." Unfortunately his contribution to the debate surrounding Samuel Farber's *Before Stalinism* seems to be influenced by many of the same arguments utilized by those promoting today's atmosphere of anti-communism. He seems to display little, if any, understanding of the realities that confronted the Bolsheviks—on the national or the international terrain—during the period of the Russian Revolution's greatest difficulty.

Not only does Edelstein abstract and obscure various concepts from their specific socio-economic context but he displays a rather selective ignorance when it comes to the evolution of Lenin's and Trotsky's thought. He also paints an equally discriminating (against the facts, that is) picture of the course of Soviet history. At bottom, Edelstein's argument, like that of Farber, is underlayed with an extreme subjectivism and idealism; what Bloom's review accurately characterized as an attempt to find "some democratic rosetta stone" in order to overcome all the evils that the "flawed predispositions of mainstream Bolshevism" were allegedly responsible for—regardless of the actual objective circumstances which affected their formulation, evaluation, and outcome.

No revolutionary Marxist, least of all an ostensible Leninist, would take issue with Edelstein's statement that "the fundamental basis of workers' power . . . is the active exercise of that power by the workers at all levels of society. . . ." Indeed, the pages of Lenin's *State and Revolution* as well as many of his polemics with the parliamentary cretins of the Second International resonate with these very ideas. The real question for Marxists, however, remains: was there a material basis for such power in a backward, devastated, and isolated peasant Russia during the period following the end of the civil war—regardless of how many "structures" and "institutions" there may or may not have been to safeguard it. To answer yes to that question is to imbue these abstractions with a mysterious power that is capable of existing above and apart from concrete circumstances (subjective as well as objective, since the two are in constant interaction).

Yes, we agree with Edelstein when he explains, "it is true, as Bloom says, that democratic structures ('institutions') cannot 'guarantee' workers' democracy, but they are indispensable, as are civil rights and liberties." This, however, ignores the central question that has to be answered *about the Russian Revolution:* what was primary and what was secondary in the disappearance of workers' democracy in Russia? What was cause and what was effect?

Farber argues, and Edelstein agrees, that the *primary* cause was Lenin's failure to pay sufficient attention to democratic forms and structures. Bloom says it was the complete lack of aid to the Russian Revolution from the west and the lack of necessary material pre-conditions for workers' (or socialist) democracy. If Farber and Edelstein are right then Lenin and "mainstream Bolshevism" can indeed be blamed for the failure of democracy. If Bloom is right then they cannot. So we can formulate the real question that a historian of the period has to answer: "is it true that workers' democracy in Russia failed because of the absence of formal institutions, or did democracy fail due to more powerful historical and social forces, which in turn led to a lack of such institutions?"

Farber and Edelstein never even consider the implications of this second possibility. But it has an impact on them nonetheless. Edelstein has to acknowledge this fundamental problem by the beginning of his concluding paragraph when he states that "socialist democracy was not sustainable for very long without a socialist revolution in Western Europe . . ." Yet this finds no practical consequence in his analysis and he still winds up his article with a ringing endorsement of Farber's call, in hindsight, for "a democratic gamble" on the part of the Bolsheviks: "a majority coalition with the other socialist parties . . . power-sharing or, if necessary, the Bolsheviks leaving the government altogether . . ." This is portrayed as a lesser evil to "the degeneration of the Bolshevik . . . party, (and) the particular way in which the revolution degenerated . . ."

"Would such a coalition . . . have been worse?" and would it have "result(ed) in a restoration of capitalism?" ponders Edelstein. But the questions answer themselves if we look at the actual program and *practice* of the "other socialist parties" Edelstein and Farber apparently have in mind. They were the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs), whose mechanistic mode of materialism had already determined that the October revolution was a miscarriage of history from the outset—since it bypassed the "necessary" stage of capitalist development and bourgeois parliamentary democracy. These "other socialist parties" translated such theoretical proclivities into support for the Whites and the foreign interventionists precisely because they *desired* "a restoration of capitalism" that would place "history" back on its proper course.

Also revealing is Edelstein's and Farber's speculation about whether it would have been a lesser evil for the Bol-

sheviks to surrender power. Two problems present themselves here. The first is what would have happened in Russia, and the second deals with the international reality.

On the question of Russia itself we should be clear: there was no immediate alternative to the Bolsheviks holding onto power except a bloody tidal wave of reaction—as the outcome of triumphant counterrevolution elsewhere (Germany, Finland, Hungary, etc.) proved in practice.

Insofar as the international plane is concerned, there was no way for Lenin and the Bolsheviks to know, in 1921, that the German revolution would not come to their aid within a reasonable period. In fact, the giving up of Bolshevik power would have been a very demoralizing blow for the international proletariat; becoming in its own right a major factor inhibiting the spread of revolution to other countries—which still seemed possible in the early 1920s.

Historical hindsight might be useful if it is applied as Edelstein suggests, to draw lessons for the future. If, however, it is used merely to denounce those involved in a historical struggle because they could not foresee the future, it has no value whatsoever. Yet nothing more than this is involved when Edelstein declares: "The world is still paying the price for the degeneration of the Bolshevik socialist party, the particular way in which the revolution degenerated, and the discrediting of the very idea of socialism"—as if Lenin should have been able to foresee any of this in 1921, or even earlier.

Instead of revolution in Germany, the "other socialist part(y)"—the Social Democracy—drowned it in blood. They succeeded where the Russian reformists had failed and insured the isolation of Soviet Russia. That isolation, rather than some "flawed predisposition of mainstream Bolshevism" accounts in large part for the "degree and type of repression by the party in power even *after* the end of the civil war" (emphasis added). Farber and Edelstein completely ignore this international reality. By doing so they trap themselves in an insular framework which, in the last analysis, has a great deal in common with the theory of "socialism in a single country." Both theories insist on looking for some solution applicable to Russia apart from and in isolation from the international class struggle. But that is impossible. For the revolution was soon in full-scale retreat—not just in Russia, but on a world, or at least a European-wide, scale. There was no sign of the outside aid the Bolshevik's *internationalist* perspective had, in 1917, considered absolutely essential to the future of the Russian Revolution.

None of this, of course, should be interpreted as giving a blank check in hindsight to the Bolsheviks or uncritically endorsing any and every act of repression carried out during and/or after the close of the civil war. Nor should revolutionary Marxists elevate necessity into a virtue. *But it remains essential for revolutionary Marxists to recognize and confront necessity when it confronts them.*

Certainly the Bolsheviks made some theoretical errors during the civil war years. Edelstein and Farber readily cite them, for example, the idea that "as soon as the question of property was settled practically, the domination of the class was assured." Edelstein asserts: "This idea, along with the justification for the dictatorship of the proletariat being exercised through the dictatorship of the party . . . remained the dominant theme of 'Marxist Leninism' throughout the world until at least 1990, and in some countries through today."

But Farber and Edelstein make a logical leap that isn't supported by any evidence. And by putting the words "Marxist Leninism" in quotes Edelstein indicates that he is well aware of this fact. He has simply not stopped to think the problem through. Just because certain things "remained the dominant theme of 'Marxist Leninism'" does not mean that Lenin and "mainstream Bolshevism" can be held responsible. Stalinism became the agent which codified those theoretical errors of the civil war period, as well as a series of completely original ideological monstrosities, all in the name of "Marxist Leninism." But Stalinism represented a complete break with Leninism in terms of both theory and practice despite its claims, and we are under no obligation to credit its pretensions.

The real continuity of Leninism and mainstream Bolshevism in the 1920s—Trotsky and the Left Opposition—eventually broke decisively with the false theoretical generalizations of the civil war period as Farber himself acknowledges. They fought against both the institutionalization of old errors and the introduction of new distortions in the name of "Leninism." Edelstein has conveniently chosen to overlook this development.

He also ignores the fate of those Trotskyists and others who died in the Gulag when he baldly asserts that the "dictatorship . . . evolved rather quickly and relatively smoothly into Stalinism." "Quickly and smoothly," that is, over the bones and through the blood of nearly all those in the central leadership of the Bolshevik party at the time of the October revolution. This is what happened to "mainstream Bolshevism." It was destroyed in a bloody battle—fighting *against* dictatorship, *against* the usurpation of the workers by the bureaucracy. It did not evolve into Stalinism, not "quickly and smoothly," or any other way.

The real historical tragedy is that all of these militants failed to realize the scope of the danger represented by Stalinism at the same time. Instead they drew their conclusions and undertook the struggle in a piecemeal fashion and were defeated relatively easily.

Of all those individuals and tendencies which did fight Stalinism, it was Trotsky and the Left Opposition who not only embodied the best in the Bolshevik tradition, but who were the most uncompromising and consistent opponents of Stalinism, and who alone provided a programmatic alternative within the classical Marxist tradition. This was the real "option to a one-party dictatorship over the working class and peasantry"—not some top-down coalition with miserable bankrupts like the Mensheviks and SRs. No one else had a program to combat the rise of Stalinism outside of "a restoration of capitalism." Why is *this* option, represented by the Left Opposition, completely left out of comrade Edelstein's analysis?

Edelstein objects when Bloom says that the key "safeguard against bureaucracy is the continued mobilization of the revolutionary mass movement" precisely through "institutions" of workers' democracy "such as factory committees and unions" and above all else, soviets or workers' councils. In reply he argues that this constitutes "a gross exaggeration (since) it fails to take into consideration that masses have never, and cannot, remain indefinitely in a state of high 'continued mobilization'"! But this objection removes the problem from its essential socio- economic context.

Obviously masses cannot be "continuously mobilized" in a situation of desperation when making ends meet in order just to survive is on the order of the day for most of them. This was clearly the situation in Russia in 1921. The kind of "continuous mobilization" that revolutionary Marxists have in mind—the "active exercise of power by the workers"—requires a dramatic reduction in the work day, which in turn requires a relatively high development of the productive forces. This makes it possible for the masses to actually *participate* in both politics and in the democratic management of the economy. Since such a relationship of people to the productive process has never existed in the history of the world, the historical failure of masses to remain mobilized is hardly a decisive argument.

Such a situation could not have been brought about in Russia simply through the construction of some legal code or the writing of a constitution—no matter how much historical hindsight we might bring to bear on the subject—given the grinding poverty

that confronted the revolution. Only aid from the international proletariat, both inspiring the Russian masses and enabling their country to overcome its backwardness more rapidly, could have decisively changed what happened to the Bolsheviks and to the Soviet Union.

Edelstein's subjectivism is clearly revealed in his discussion of Bolshevism's original sin, the "dictatorship of the proletariat via the party." Rather than place "this idea" in relation "to actual practice"—that is, within the context of revolution and civil war—we are told, yet again, only this time by a revolutionary Marxist, that these developments are rooted in the "'flaw' of the Leninist view of democracy" allegedly inherited from Kautsky and Plekhanov.

Edelstein bases these contentions on a few second-hand quotes culled from Hal Draper's *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat from Marx to Lenin*. Indeed his whole argument is lifted scissors and paste from Draper, who had once been a staunch defender of Bolshevism against the "new realists" of his day, but by the time of his death was repeating the same arguments he had earlier dismissed. The same methodology of abstractionism and subjectivism seems to go with the turf. For if we examine the actual context of the quotations cited they take on a meaning rather different than what Draper and Edelstein give them.

For example, Lenin's reference to the revolutionary dictatorship being the work of "revolutionary activists" rather than that of the people as a whole is an observation about the *actually existing patterns of development* of the class struggle in Russia in 1905, not a recipe for (or an after-the-fact legitimization of) the party usurping power for itself. He bases his conclusions on the uneven level of struggle and consciousness exhibited by the masses.

Likewise, Plekhanov, citing Cromwell, at the famous 1903 conference that laid the basis for the Bolshevik-Menshevik split did indeed, call for the dispersal of any elected assembly that obstructed the progress of the revolution. And of course, the Bolsheviks proceeded to do just that in 1918, with the Constituent Assembly. Both Plekhanov in theory and Lenin in practice explained that the defense of the revolution was the supreme law. But this idea did not originate with either Plekhanov or Lenin. Both based themselves on the lessons Marx had drawn from the experiences of the Paris Commune in 1871. Afterall, it was Marx who had urged the commune—which in reality was a dictatorship of one city as well as of the proletariat—to disperse the reactionary National Assembly of Thiers, which had been elected by nationwide universal suffrage and clearly embodied the democratic counterrevolution. So if there is a continuity in theory and practice it is from Marx to Lenin, with Plekhanov—who became a Menshevik—jumping ship in mid-passage. This, of course, upsets the whole apple cart of the anti-Leninists.

The imagined continuity from Plekhanov to Lenin simply isn't there. For what Edelstein omits is the sharp break that took place between Lenin's Bolshevism and both the reformism of Plekhanov and the centrism of Kautsky. The theoretical and programmatic expressions of this, which are many, simply reflect the profound break *in practice* between those (like Kautsky and Plekhanov) who dreaded the self-activity of the masses, and those (like Luxemburg, Lenin, and Trotsky) who saw that activity as essential to the fulfillment of the socialist perspective. After all, even Hal Draper, who Edelstein cites often and favorably, ranked Lenin and Trotsky amongst those who championed what he dubbed "socialism from below," whereas the "Marxism" of the Second International was for good reason to be found in the "socialism from above" school—alongside its bureaucratic brethren from the Stalinized Third International.

It was Lenin and Trotsky who incorporated the idea of the soviets, taught to them by the revolutionary workers of all of the Russias, into the program of revolutionary Marxism. In the same way Marx and Engels learned from the Paris Commune—as the political form through which the economic emancipation of labor could take place. How on earth, or even in the lofty realm of "ideas," does this methodology compare to the parliamentary cretinism of a Kautsky, or to Plekhanov's "they should never have taken up arms" school of thought?

It was Kautsky and Plekhanov who shared Edelstein's fetishism for "institutions." And when their institutions were put into practice in Germany in 1918-19, by Kautsky's cohort in the "other socialist party," no one can deny that "democracy and bourgeois democracy (were) confused in the process." For it was under the banner of the democratic counterrevolution that the German workers were beheaded just as the Parisians had been in 1848 and 1871, and just as the Portuguese would be in 1975.

Edelstein seems to be fixated upon a subjectivist conspiracy theory in which all of the evils of the Russian Revolution originate in the pages of *What Is To Be Done*, or even before that in the mind of Robespierre. This renders him incapable of seeing how, let alone understanding why, the materialist dialectician Lenin related to the mass movement and its struggles in the way he did—as both pupil and as teacher.

So "what can one make of all this, in terms of what actually happened to the Russian Revolution?" Simply this: that Lenin's Bolshevism broke with the mechanistic materialism that underlay the "Marxism" of Kautsky and Plekhanov and the labor bureaucracy they spoke for. It was a break in *practice* as well as in theory, taking the *socialist* "gamble" that Trotsky had already foreseen in his theory of permanent revolution. As no less an observer than Rosa Luxemburg stated at the time, this was entirely to their credit. Revolutionary Marxists should continue to share that assessment rather than carving out niches as advocates of the "new realism" under the not so new guiding star of "Leninism leading to Stalinism." That too, is a "slippery slope" which we would all be well advised to avoid.

The 1990s is not the first time that the ideologists of the bourgeoisie have declared "Leninism," "socialism," and "communism" to be at best irrelevant relics of the past and at worst totalitarian fountainheads of all that is evil. Many on the left, who blow this way and that with the dominant winds of bourgeois and petty bourgeois "public opinion," inevitably chime their agreement. Yet with every uprising of the exploited and oppressed there also arises an interest in Lenin, Trotsky, and the fate of the Russian Revolution that goes way beyond the confines of academic debate and discussion. For, as Marcel Liebman concluded in his masterly study, *Leninism Under Lenin:*

> If Stalinism is Leninism *plus* administrative tyranny and *plus* bureaucratic terror, it is also Leninism *minus* dialectics. It is thus Leninism *impoverished* by being deprived of that leaven which has made it, even in its mistakes, and in spite of its failures, one of the richest sources of inspiration in the fight for socialism, one of the most fruitful contributions to men's struggle for their emancipation. ❑

American Indians Challenge U.S. Sports Establishment

During the 1992 baseball and football season sports will become a legal battleground for American Indians in their continuing struggle for human dignity. In addition to other protests marking 500 years of genocide, chattel-slavery, rape, pillage, and the most abased and abasing racism—ever since Christopher Columbus "discovered the new world"—1992 will be remembered as the year when Chief Archie Fire Lame Deer of the Lakota Sioux filed suit against the Kansas City Chiefs. His goal is not to force the team to change its name, but to alter the behavior of fans and players during games and at events connected with the organization. Indians are concerned with such things as the "Tomahawk Chop" of Atlanta Braves fame, or the use of "mascots" based on ignorant and racist Hollywood stereotyping.

Speaking early this year in Springfield, Missouri, Lame Deer said that such behavior was "a slap in the face toward Indians." He pledged to "shut down sports teams" in response if that is necessary to persuade them.

While Lame Deer's suit might seem like a small step, it is a beginning. A victory would mean eliminating this particularly prevalent form of racist stereotyping. It would be on a par with the victory won by Blacks when Hollywood films stopped including such characters as Stepin Fetchit, or Amos 'n Andy (prominent in productions as late as the 1950s; the same period when Tonto served faithfully as the Lone Ranger's sidekick).

We must assault the institutionalized racism represented by such images which the corporate and government power uses to keep working people in the USA divided. This country must be forced to appreciate Indians as real, contemporary, and intelligent people entitled to determine their future for themselves.

Jack Bresee
Springfield, Missouri

People's Progressive Convention *(Continued from page 5)*

about important organizing efforts underway to increase our ability to win victories and to move towards a truly democratic government and economy. We can build the mutual support and trust among our diverse movements which is so essential if we are to realize the strength created through unity. And we can discuss possible future actions to show our strength and bring about change.

The time is ripe; the need is great. Let's join together to make the People's Progressive Convention the historic, powerful event that it can be! ❑

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