

# In Defense of Marxism

\$3.00

## Labor Party Convention...



## ...and Issues It Will Face

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# Editors' Note: End the Blockade of Cuba!

The Clinton administration has seized on a murky incident — Cuban counterrevolutionary pilots from Florida violating Cuban air space and being shot down for it — as a pretext to tighten the blockade of Cuba. We demand instead that the blockade be lifted and urge our readers to do everything they can in support of the movement to end the blockade.

Our next issue will carry an article about Cuba by *BIDOM* founding editor Frank Lovell, who just returned from that country and who describes some fascinating, independent-minded currents he encountered. His report illustrates that life on the revolutionary island is anything but the drab, totalitarian nightmare usually depicted in the big money media. Also recently returned from Cuba are Maine pediatricians W.T. Whitney and Alison Whitney; their article on the need for a national health care program in the U.S. and what can be learned from the Cuban example will be in our next issue as well.

## Discussion on Labor Party

With the founding convention of a labor party coming up in early June, this March-April issue, for obvious reasons, features texts and reports on the growing labor party movement. We also feature discussion, both current and historical, on the labor party question. Not surprisingly, different points of view are found here, as presented by veterans of the labor and socialist movements, Bill Onasch and Ben Stone. Readers will undoubtedly consider these issues and decide what they think. We urge them to write in and let us know.

In addition to the labor party discussion, we continue our coverage of the struggles of workers and the oppressed in this country and elsewhere (Mexico, Russia, Ukraine, China, Croatia, Bosnia.). Readers are urged to show their support for the striking Detroit newspaper workers by boycotting *USA Today* and by subscribing to the *Detroit Sunday Journal*, the strikers' newspaper. (Send \$15 for three months to Detroit Sunday Journal, Attn: Mail Subscriptions, 3100 E. Jefferson, Detroit MI 48207.) A free 7-minute video on the strike, made by the strikers themselves, is available by writing to Roger Kerson, Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions, 150 Michigan Ave, Detroit MI 48226, or phone (313) 965-1478. The video can be used to help win support for this key battle of the American labor movement.

Also in regard to the labor movement in this country, we are printing some texts and materials in this issue from the Meeting the Challenge labor conference in the Twin Cities. The next issue will have an overall article on that conference by Melana Marchant. We hope to have new material in the next issue as well about two

significant figures in the American labor movement, and in the history of American Trotskyism, who recently died — Genora Dollinger and Ted Selander.

## Women's Day and Women's Rights

In connection with International Women's Day, March 8, our March-April issue includes a number of items relating to the ongoing struggle for women's rights. Most of these are from the March issue of *International Viewpoint*, monthly publication of the Fourth International, which carries a special "dossier" on the women's movement. (To subscribe to *IV*, see the ad elsewhere in this issue.)

Of particular interest is the interview with Julieta Hernandez, a Mexican Fourth Internationalist who has worked for years with indigenous Zapatista women in Chiapas. Three short items on activities in the United States indicate that the women's movement here continues to have wide support, with increasing links to labor and communities of color. A letter from an Okinawa trade union leader spotlights a tour by women from Okinawa to the United States and underlines the connection between labor, the women's movement, and the necessary international struggle against militarism and imperialism.

## Bizarre Charges Revived Against Trotsky

As we go to press, we are informed of an article in a forthcoming *New York Times Book Review* by the influential Richard Pipes, professor of Russian history at Harvard, adviser to the U.S. government on Russia policy, and supporter of the Yeltsin regime. Drawing on "revelations" in a recent book on Leon Trotsky by the late adviser to Yeltsin, Dmitry Volkogonov, Pipes revives unfounded charges that Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov (who were firm Marxist opponents of the methods of individual terror) advocated — the "assassination" of Joseph Stalin.

This was the very charge the Stalin regime used to stage the Moscow trials of 1936-38 and "justify" real murder and assassination of revolutionaries and labor activists on a scale of millions, both within the Soviet Union and internationally. The commission of inquiry into the Moscow Trials, headed by philosopher and educator John Dewey, explored this charge in 1937 and refuted it unconditionally. (For the investigations and conclusions of the Dewey Commission, see the two books *Case of Leon Trotsky* and *Not Guilty*.) It is strange, and a threatening sign for the labor and socialist movements in Russia, that such an old and long disproved accusation should resurface now, and from such an "authority," who undoubtedly knows better. In our next issue we hope to carry material on the substance and implications of this development.

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# Buchananism and the Jobs Issue

by George Saunders

One of the things the labor party to be founded in June will make clear is that it has nothing in common with the reactionary positions being expounded by Patrick Buchanan. Buchanan falsely claims to speak for working men and women and is using some legitimate working-class issues to support his racist, sexist, and anti-union agenda.

Buchanan poses as an "outsider," although he's been part of Washington politics for decades. Unlike Buchanan, the "Establishment" politicians try to pretend that the problems working class people are concerned with don't exist. The Republican frontrunner Bob Dole, when he was defeated in New Hampshire primarily as a result of Buchanan's demagoguery, commented lamely that he didn't realize jobs were an issue!

Buchanan is making use of an issue that cuts deeply into the lives of people who have to work for a living, who are only a paycheck or few away from hunger and homelessness, whose lives are being torn apart by the decisions of the well-heeled, made in the corporate boardrooms. Two years ago LPA stressed that "the central issue of our times," and "the major source of fear and insecurity," is "jobs, or more precisely, the lack of well-paying, secure jobs." (See the June 1994 issue of the *Labor Party Advocate*.)

As David Riehle, chairman of UTU Local 650 in the Twin Cities area, said in his remarks (reprinted elsewhere in this issue) opening a session of the Meeting the Challenge Conference: "You can open the newspaper in the morning and read, virtually on a daily basis, about the most recent job cuts — 3,000 here, 5,000 there, 44,000 at AT&T last month." That was at the beginning of February.

By the end of February you didn't even have to open a paper. It was all over the covers of the print media. For example, *Newsweek* on the cover of its February 26 issue had the photos of four top corporate executives, with a caption under each: "Robert C. Palmer, Digital — Cut 20,000 jobs," "Albert J. Dunlap, Scott — Cut 11,000 jobs," "Robert E. Allen, AT&T — Cut 40,000 jobs," "Louis V. Gerstner Jr., IBM — Cut 60,000 jobs." The *Newsweek* cover blared out: "CORPORATE KILLERS," then went on: "Wall Street Loves Layoffs. But the Public Is Scared as Hell. Is There a Better Way?"

Then for seven days running, March 3-9, the *New York Times* had a series starting on its front page every day. They call it "The Downsizing of America: A National Heartache."

In focusing (at last) on this issue of concern to millions, the *New York Times* series on "The Downsizing of America" seemed to touch a chord. It evoked a rash of letters, a dozen of which were published in the March 8 *Times*.

In one of them Lawrence R. Zeitlin, a time-study expert, or something on that order, "professor emeritus of organizational behavior," explained the realities of capitalism. "In 1993," he wrote, "the output of each full-time worker represented \$50,000 of the gross national product...the average labor component of this output is 60 percent, or \$30,000 a worker. Costs of materials and other business needs like advertising, distribution and administration are 30 percent, leaving only 10 percent, or \$5,000 a worker, for corporate gross profit."

However, if labor costs can be reduced by 10 percent while labor productivity can yet be maintained by improvements in selection, training or work design, and with all other costs remaining constant, gross profit increases by 60 percent. (Emphasis added.)

To increase profitability quickly, management can reduce labor costs most effectively by replacing older, higher-paid workers, by transferring production to lower labor cost areas, and by automation.

That is the heart of the matter. "To increase profitability quickly" workers are tossed on the scrap heap and replaced by speed-up, labor-saving machines, or super-exploitation in "lower labor cost areas."

At its core the system turns on profits for the few who own for a living at the expense of the many who work for a living. As the LPA flyer on "Why We Need a Worker-Based Political Party in the United States" points out, "In 1989, the richest 10% of families held 80% of all nonresidential real estate; 91% of all business assets; 85% of all stocks; and 94% of all bonds."

Bill Clinton, the "New Democrat," whose party no longer pretends that labor's interests

are of much concern, felt constrained to tip his hat to the fact that jobs *are* an issue — whether Bob Dole was aware of it or not.

Speaking at a high-tech plant in California on March 8, Clinton appealed to businessmen to *voluntarily* be more considerate of workers. Not a word about government acting in behalf of society as a whole to ensure a livelihood for the majority of its members who work for a living.

The very same day the stock market plunged, reflecting the attitudes of the very rich who own 85 percent or more of all stocks. Why did it plunge? Because the Labor Department reported a surprising *increase in jobs*. To the corporate elite, more jobs mean less profit, hence less value on their stocks, so in a panic stocks were sold. This is the mentality Clinton is appealing to, or pretending to. (Actually of course he and his "Democratic" Party are intimately tied with the ruling rich and do their bidding.)

People "hard hit by layoffs" responded to an opinion poll that was reported in the March 8 *New York Times*. They showed a clear understanding of where the real problem lies — something Clinton is trying to conceal with his appeal for businessmen to voluntarily act differently. When asked where they would place the blame for job loss, 60 percent chose "the economic system in this country." When asked if they were angry at both political parties, 69 percent said they were.

## LPA Leaders Comment on Jobs

This is a central issue that a labor party, genuinely representing the needs and concerns of working people, would provide an answer for.

In a talk before a couple of dozen supporters of Labor Party Advocates and interested persons in Phoenix on February 29, Tony Mazzocchi and Ernie Rousselle of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union talked about their concept of what needs to be done about jobs. And while they expressed no doubt at all that

*Continued on page 38*



# Pittston Strike Leader Dispatched to Detroit Newspaper Strike

by Charles Walker

The Pittston struggle had so electrified the nation's labor activists that they flocked into the region by the thousands either to help with the strike by getting arrested during civil-disobedience demonstrations or just to show their support.

— Ken Crowe, *Collision*

In September 1989, Eddie Burke of the United Mine Workers led 98 striking miners in the occupation of Pittston Coal Company's main coal-processing plant, the first American sit-down strike since World War II. Burke is widely credited with being the chief organizer of the strike's winning game plan. After the strike ended, Burke joined Ron Carey's campaign to win the presidency of the Teamsters, North America's largest private-sector union.

In January 1996, Burke was appointed by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney "to serve as overall coordinator and representative in charge of strike support programs in Detroit." According to Sweeney, Burke "will act as coordinator for all our programs in Detroit, not just those of the Teamsters." Burke's job is "to achieve the highest possible level of coordination among striking unions and within the Detroit and state-wide labor movement so that, together, we can win this important struggle for justice."

Burke's appointment is the best news for the Detroit strikers since before a judge handed down an injunction last September limiting pickets to ten strikers at the main joint printing plant of the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*.

## Corporate Campaign and Boycott Strategy

Since the injunction the striking unions have relied mainly on their corporate campaign and consumer boycott, while the dailies continue to publish. In January, the striking unions claimed more than 800 advertisers had pulled out of the struck papers. The Teamsters estimate that through 1996 the papers' total losses could total \$150 million after taxes.

According to one report: "The unions argue... that such massive losses far outweigh savings the companies could achieve through labor concessions, and that management's unwillingness to negotiate an end to the strike reflects simple anti-unionism rather than economic rationality." Nevertheless, the unions can't ignore that the papers say they have budgeted \$200 million

of red ink to wait out and wear down the strikers and win the war of attrition.

The scab *Detroit News* is taunting the unions, reminding them of the lost 1977 strike against the *Oakland Press* in nearby Pontiac, Michigan. "Union strategy for both strikes, 1977 and this year, was similar. Four months before the first strike, Kummer [now a Detroit Newspaper Guild official] and other union leaders organized an advertising and circulation boycott. Kummer vowed to intensify the boycott after the strike began by sending teams door-to-door urging subscribers to drop the paper — a tactic adopted in this year's strike." According to the *Detroit News*, "There never was a settlement [of the 1977 strike], most workers were replaced and the Newspaper Guild, Teamsters, and Printing and Graphics Communication unions were decertified."

## Old Guard Teamsters and Local Autonomy

Although the bulk of the original 2,600 strikers are Teamster members, Eddie Burke will have a tough time if he attempts to introduce a Pittston-type strategy into the Detroit strike. Burke will have to find a way around the local union autonomy that Detroit-area and regional Teamster officials are sure to use to block moves to democratize the strike in order to remobilize the strikers and their supporters to the pre-injunction level. Complicating the problem is that Detroit is the main base of James Hoffa, Jr., Carey's chief rival in the December 1996 election of international officers. As Carey's trouble-shooter, Burke will be a target for their factional opposition.

On the other hand, there are Detroit strikers and supporters who have learned the lessons of the Pittston strike and can be counted on to rally to any effort to turn the workers' walkout that began July 12, 1995, into a forceful strike.

## A Strategy of Mass Mobilization

In October, a major support group, the Labor/Community/Religious Coalition in Support of the Striking Newspaper Workers, which is recognized by the AFL-CIO, sent the striking unions three "recommendations regarding what we think should be done to bring the strike to a successful conclusion." The recommendations derive, in part, from the Pittston experience, in which, as the coalition statement said, "The

miners massed their forces, defied laws and injunctions, occupied a plant, conducted sympathy strikes and prevailed..."

The coalition stressed one point: "The strike by Detroit newspaper workers must be fought nationally. Unionists around the country should be urged to organize demonstrations in their communities at Gannett and Knight-Ridder facilities [the corporate owners of the struck dailies]. Plans should be launched without delay, in conjunction with the national AFL-CIO, for a massive labor march on Detroit.

"We need continuous marches, rallies, demonstrations, and especially mass picketing as the key strategy for winning the strike. We cannot allow the strike to be defeated by injunctions. The UMW, under John L. Lewis, won several strikes after ignoring injunctions. Civil rights marchers openly defied injunctions in the 1950s and 1960s in a successful effort to bring down the vicious Jim Crow laws." Finally, the coalition said that since all of the above may not be enough to win the strike, plans should be made for a "one-day work stoppage in support of the newspaper workers strike."

The coalition asserted: "There is no alternative to mass actions to win the strike. We are greatly concerned that if a consistent mass action strategy is not adopted, the newspaper workers strike will drag on and erode (which has happened to so many other strikes, particularly in the past two decades). That would be catastrophic for the newspaper workers who could lose their jobs, and it would be a disaster for the labor movement as a whole. But it doesn't have to happen. If a carefully thought through plan of action — the centerpiece of which must be mass mobilization — is adopted and put into play by a unified labor movement, the strike can be won."

A recent *Labor Notes* "Viewpoint" commentary concludes: "Above all, organized labor needs to treat the Detroit newspaper strike as a national strike that stops production and distribution, uniting the area's workers with workers from around the country. That's the perspective that will shift the relationship of forces in the strikers' favor. The labor movement has the resources to do the job. It must not suffer a failure of nerve." □

February 2, 1996

## Detroit Strikers Speak Out

# Text of Radio Interview with Leaders of Unity Victory Caucus

Following is the text of an interview by Roger Adams of Detroit radio station WDET with Unity Victory Caucus members Daymon Hartley (Newspaper Guild Local 22) and Rick Torres (Teamsters Local 372). For more information about the Unity Victory Caucus, call 810-625-3421.

**WDET:** The [Detroit News and Detroit Free Press] newspaper strike is now six months old. This week we're running a series on the strike at the half-year mark. In recent weeks, the six unions on strike at the papers have scaled down their emphasis on large-scale picketing, focusing instead on their continuing boycott of retailers who advertise in the papers, on their circulation boycott, and on publishing their own weekly newspaper, the *Detroit Sunday Journal*.

But as frustration grows over the length of the strike, one group of strikers is urging a return to more militant strike activities. In addition, they have criticized the leaders of the Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions for holding only a handful of joint union membership meetings during the strike and, in general, have called for more democratic input on strategy from rank-and-file members.

Two months ago they formed what they call the Unity Victory Caucus, claiming roughly 100 members. Among them are Daymon Hartley, who is on the Bargaining Committee for the Newspaper Guild Local 22, and Rick Torres, who's on the Bargaining Committee for the striking Teamsters union, Local 372. We spoke with both of them last week.

**Rick:** We want to work closely with the Council of Unions, but we just feel that they fail to properly address all the worries and the concerns of all the strikers, and we think that the strikers actually need more of a voice in the decision making of the Council.

**Daymon:** I got a call from Rick a couple of months ago, and he had called a couple of other strikers and invited us to get together and discuss his concerns about the direction of the strike. We got together, and we started to find out there were a lot of us that felt the same way. And we were, for the most part, the practical leaders of the strike — we were mid-level leadership.

So we went ahead and had our first meeting. We called it a steering committee, and we got a member and an alternate from all six striking unions [Newspaper Guild of Detroit Local 22, Teamsters Local 372, Teamsters Local 2040, Graphic Communications International Union Locals 13N and 289M, and Detroit Typographical Union Local 18]. We had a caucus organizer, and we at that point decided that one of the main things we needed to do was to go back to the North Plant and

start mass picketing. We had our first caucus meeting, and we had over 100 people show up. We went ahead and organized mass picketing at the North Plant. We had 250 people show up on a Saturday night, and we continued to try to do those types of activities.

Unfortunately, there were some members, I think, of the Council who didn't agree with us doing that, and they started to try to prevent us from doing those sorts of things.

**WDET:** The strike is six months old now and is entering its seventh month. Do you believe, with the way it's going currently, that the unions will win?

**Daymon:** I think it's real clear that we're kicking the company's ass. There's no doubt about it. The advertising boycott and the circulation boycott have been very successful. We're talking \$200 million that we know they've lost. How much longer can they go to their shareholders and say, "Yeah, we've replaced those union people, those lazy people, with our replacement workers. We've gotten the efficiencies we want, and we only lost \$200 million in four months. Wow! We can do this for a year and we'll only lose \$600 million!"

We know they can't do that forever. However, to have an ad boycott and a circulation boycott as the centerpiece of a strike, we feel is suicidal. It's very important and we've got to continue on that front, but we also have to work toward more militant and confrontational tactics.

**WDET:** So what kinds of things do you want to see then?

**Rick:** Well, first of all, I think that we need to be out in the public's eye more. We keep hearing repeatedly, "Is the strike still on?" The only way and the only time that the news media will come out to show what we're doing is if we're out there in mass. They're not going to come if myself and Daymon are the only ones out there. They're going to come out if there are two, three, four hundred people, one thousand people, two thousand people out at the plant and doing things. So I think we need to be more out in the public's eye.

I think we have to continue to educate the public on the abuses that the company is taking toward its workers, the stance that it's taking towards us. There are a lot of things going on. I think that the public fails to realize that this is more than just the newspaper strikers — that it's

going to the core of our society, to the rights that we all have as individuals to speak up and to fight for fair contracts and for fair treatment.

**WDET:** Why deal with these differences in strategy that you have with the leadership of the Council in this interview as opposed to in a meeting at the union hall, for instance. Why take it public?

**Daymon:** Well, I think that we want people to be very clear that strategically we are united. There are the six unions and the leadership — we are united, with the strategy being to win this strike and get a fair contract and win it for the labor movement. It's very clear that twenty-five hundred of us are never going to be able to win it by ourselves. And if we lose it, it won't just be a loss for us — it will be a loss for the entire labor movement.

Insofar as our attempts to do what they're talking about, they have not worked. They have failed, and we feel that the membership has to have a democratic voice. They have to be able to communicate to the Council leadership what differences mean which we may have in tactics. We're not attacking the ad boycott; we're not attacking the circulation boycott; we're not attacking the *Detroit Sunday Journal*. All of these are things that we support and continue to be active in and think are very important.

But there's another aspect to the strike, and we think that is shutting down production. So if anybody out there, including the company, thinks that this is a rift or this is something that's going to play into their hands, they're sadly mistaken. Democracy — rank-and-file participation — can only build our unity, it can't hurt our unity!

**Rick:** We consider this to be a war. The companies have declared war on us. They've hurt our families, they've hurt our positions in society. We take this very seriously. There are many fronts to a war. You need to be able to use them all.

**WDET:** I'd like to talk for a minute about the call for mass meetings. Why have there not been meetings where everybody is present?

**Rick:** I feel that the Council is really sensitive to a lot of people's frustrations right now. I think they feel that if we all got together we would cause them to do things that they may not be ready to do, that they may not want to do at this point in time.

*Continued on page 17*

# Staley Union Leaders Assess Defeat, Pledge Reform

by Mike McCallister

*The author is a member of the Executive Board, AFSCME Local 2412, and chair of Labor Party Advocates of South-Central Wisconsin, which meets at the Madison Labor Temple. For more information, e-mail [msmccall@students.wisc.edu](mailto:msmccall@students.wisc.edu)*

Madison, WI — The disappointment and anger was written in the voice of the “Road Warrior.”

“Me and my wife was arrested, pepper-gassed,” Dick Schable said tearfully. “We chained ourselves to the gate. We should’ve kept them out of the gate.”

The three-year contract struggle at corn-sweetener producer A.E. Staley in Decatur, Illinois, ended December 22 when members of United Paperworkers Local 7837 voted 286-226 to accept the company’s contract offer and return to work.

Under the new contract, however, fewer than half of the 762 union members locked out of their jobs in 1993 will have work to return to, and they get to work 12-hour rotating shifts under the tutelage of the scabs who permanently replaced them. By September 1997, the number drops to 250.

In a most unusual event, six leaders of the Staley union drove up to Madison, Wisconsin, to speak at a public meeting, assess the lessons learned, and pledge to stand firm.

A summary of the contract distributed at the meeting hits the “highlights” of the defeat: the company can subcontract work to non-union shops at will, the joint health and safety committee cannot inspect the plant for safety violations, there is no limit on hiring “temporary” workers with no benefits, workers can be forced to work 16-hour days, while supervisors can do union work to prevent overtime. Local leaders said the offer was not substantially different from the company’s original offer in 1993.

The unionists’ anger was mostly directed at what they called “the top of the house,” the leadership of the United Paperworkers International Union and the AFL-CIO.

Barrie Williams, who coordinated the local’s Adopt-a-Family program, said the international union “stood behind us — so far behind us we couldn’t see them.”

Dave Watts, president of the local for six years before losing his bid for re-election in December, said the international union and the AFL-CIO never supplied the resources needed for the local to win. “The company told us before the struggle even began that it was a war

of attrition,” he said. To beat multinational corporations, “it takes a national mobilization, a global mobilization.”

## “Just the Sound of the Wind”

Hopes were raised when the “New Voice” slate headed by John Sweeney swept to victory over Thomas Donahue, Lane Kirkland’s hand-picked successor, at last October’s AFL-CIO convention. Sweeney pledged to bring a new fighting spirit to the labor movement, and Staley was slated to be the showcase for the changes. Staley worker Dan Lane spoke to the convention, and local leaders were paraded around the convention floor to receive the accolades of the assembled union bureaucrats. Williams said he “knew how Custer must have felt. He thought he heard the cavalry coming, but it was just the sound of the wind.”

Sweeney pledged to assign 40 full-time organizers to Staley support, but the aid never materialized. “We waited and waited and waited,” Watts said, “but not a word from the AFL-CIO, not even ‘we ain’t got our shit together.’”

Most of the venom was directed at the UPIU leadership, particularly President Wayne Glenn. “I have no more regard for Adolf Hitler than I have for Wayne Glenn,” Mike Griffin said. Griffin coordinated the work of 87 Staley Support Groups across the country, producing a periodic newsletter, the “War Zone News,” to fire up the troops; he also handled media inquiries. The lockout battle “was not won by A.E. Staley, nor was it lost by Local 7837. It was betrayed by Wayne Glenn and his staff,” Griffin said.

On paper, the UPIU did not recommend approval of the contract, but forced a membership vote on the “new” company offer. In a Decatur radio interview just before the vote (a tape of the interview was replayed in Madison), Glenn’s executive assistant Gordon Brehm said, “We’ve grown used to 12-hour shifts in the paperworkers union. Our guys even like them now.” The offer contained “substantial improvement for the members,” Brehm said. Asked what would happen if the local rejected the offer, Brehm said, “I hate to even think about [that]. People are going to be told this is

their last opportunity in the foreseeable future to get this matter resolved.”

Since the new administration came into local office January 7, those unionists who refused to accept the company’s terms have been barred from union meetings, with police called twice to escort them out. Williams said the fighters felt like “criminals in our own union hall.”

Discussion focused on what might have been. Watts said that keeping scabs out of the plant was “at the top of our concerns,” but there were never enough people to carry it out. Watts noted that at the height of the War Zone battle, there were strikes going on at both Caterpillar and Bridgestone/Firestone plants in the Decatur area besides the Staley lockout.

But: “We couldn’t get 10,000 people out of 90,000 [residents] to shut the plant down.” Responding to a suggestion from the audience that a plant occupation could have been organized at one of the rallies held to bring supporters out from around the country, Watts said, “We thought about it. We never got those 10,000 people we needed.” Griffin did not think even plant occupations would have been effective, given the deep pockets of the Staley parent company Tate & Lyle, while Williams thought occupying Wall Street with 100,000 union supporters would have worked better.

In hindsight, organizing mass civil disobedience against injunctions banning mass picketing might have turned things around, Watts said. “I almost wish we’d given it that one hellacious try.”

The union leaders plan to organize a War Zone Labor Education Foundation to spread the word, support other union battles, and otherwise educate people on the meaning of the three-year lockout. They also urged people to continue to boycott Pepsi, Staley’s largest customer. Unionists should challenge their leaders, whatever side they took in the AFL-CIO election. Watts said, “If we don’t have a strategy to win, why do we pay dues?”

Though they are jobless, they all pledged support to the union movement. As Dick Schable said, “My heart will always be with the union.” □

February 1, 1996

# Partial Victory in Twin Cities Bus Strike

by Michael Livingston

**A** 20-day strike by public transit workers in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota) ended on October 28 after the union, Local 1005 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, voted overwhelmingly to approve the 27-month contract. Of the 1,643 voting members, 88 percent (1,450) followed the advice of their leadership and voted in favor of the contract. The strike was characterized by the government's drive to break the union, the lack of a strategy to win the strike by the union leadership, and a sudden reversal in the government's position in the face of a threatened Teamsters general strike and public outreach by rank-and-file members of the union.<sup>1</sup>

The causes and course of the strike suggest that many more attempts to break transit unions are in the works, and that effective response to these anti-union drives must involve the union's rank and file, the rest of the labor movement, and the general public.

The Twin Cities bus system is run by the Metropolitan Council Transit Organization (MCTO) under the authority of the Metropolitan Council, a body appointed by the state's governor. The MCTO and the union negotiated for eight months (since February 1995), making very little progress. From the beginning it was clear that the MCTO sought to break the union. The MCTO even rejected a proposal by the union to extend the current contract with *no* wage increases. The MCTO demanded so many concessions that they essentially forced the union out on strike against the will of the union leadership. The union leadership did little to prepare the local for a strike, even going so far as to defeat rank-and-file proposals to form a committee to prepare for a strike, hold public meetings to explain the union's side of the issue (which was not carried in the media prior to the strike), and organize a phone tree.<sup>2</sup>

Arnie Carlson, the Republican governor of Minnesota, took a hostile stance toward the strike from its inception. (In fact, it is unlikely that the MCTO would have tried to break the union without at least tacit support from Carlson.) At the beginning of the strike the governor called for binding arbitration and asserted that bus drivers should be reclassified as "essential employees," which would prohibit them from striking. The governor repeatedly characterized the transit workers as "featherbedders" and claimed that the state's efforts to eliminate featherbedding was at the core of the strike.

A crucial turning point in the strike occurred on October 18, nine days into the strike, when Governor Carlson announced that he had or-

dered transit officials to devise an interim transportation plan to use private buses, vans, and taxis (paid by vouchers) by Thanksgiving. The plan also would include the Minnesota National Guard "to provide security."

## Workers Take Action

Rank-and-file workers quickly responded to this proposal, which was clearly intended to break the union. Bus riders and drivers had planned a march from north and south Minneapolis and a rally in downtown Minneapolis for October 19. When the governor announced his plan the march organizers quickly made it the focus of their protest. The protest rally, which was organized by rank and filers, attracted over 400 strikers and riders.

The Teamsters also responded decisively. The office of Harold Yates, president of the Minnesota Teamsters Joint Council, was flooded with calls from angry teamsters. Some of the anger was directed against Yates himself, since he had secured the Teamsters endorsement for Carlson in the 1994 governor's race. On October 19, Yates called the mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul and told them that the Teamsters would strike if the interim plan went into effect. He asked the mayors if they were with him or against him. Both said they would support him. Yates then called Teamster leaders throughout the state. All vowed to strike in support of the transit workers, even though such a strike is illegal. Finally, Yates called the governor and warned him personally of a Teamster strike.

At a labor rally on October 22, Yates announced that the Teamsters would strike if the interim plan went into effect. Local 1005 president Arnie Entzel believes that other unions would have joined the statewide strike. In contrast, a Teamster official has privately told the author that Yates was responding to enormous rank-and-file pressure, but was bluffing the governor and had no intention of actually calling a strike.

If it was a bluff, Governor Carlson did not have the courage to call it. Instead, he responded immediately by changing course. He hastily set up a replacement negotiating team on October 19. Instead of trying to break the union, the management team now sought to negotiate a settlement. By October 23, the union and management had reached an agreement.

## The Agreement

In the agreement, union and management compromised on four issues: wages, part-time workers, benefits, and work rules. In the last

prestrike offer the union proposed a 3 percent raise and a 15-month contract; management proposed a 2 percent raise on ratification, with another 2 percent on August 1, 1996, and a 27-month contract. The union proposed keeping the level of part-time drivers at the present 20 percent of all drivers; management proposed raising the number of part-time drivers to 29 percent of the total. The union proposed no change in the benefit package, in which the MCTO pays 67 percent of the retirement health benefits for all employees; management wanted to deny retirement health benefits to all new employees and all current employees who retire with fewer than 10 years of service. The union wanted no changes in the work rules; management wanted greater power to set work rules and assign workers to jobs.

In compromising, the union accepted 24 percent part-time drivers, health benefits upon retirement for new employees if they complete 15 years of service, a 3 percent retroactive raise to May 1, 1995, and a 3 percent raise effective May 1, 1996, in a 15-month contract, and gave the MCTO greater power to set work rules subject to the conditions that the work rules "be reasonable" and that the management confer with the union before changing the work rules. The union gave up a great deal in this agreement. Management did not achieve its initial objective (to break the union) but forced some givebacks from the workers.

The less than favorable outcome of the Twin Cities bus strike can be compared to the outcome of another transit workers strike earlier in 1995, the fourteen-day strike in April 1995 of the Philadelphia transit workers. The 5,500 transit workers won a 9 percent raise over three years and improved pension and sick leave benefits. The major difference between the two strikes is that the Philadelphia transit workers sought to win public support and labor support as they shut down all subways, buses, trolleys, and light rail in a 5-county area affecting 400,000 commuters. The Philadelphia strike included community outreach and coalition building. Experiences in Philadelphia show that strikes by public transit workers can be won. Defeat (or only partial victory) is not inevitable.

The Twin Cities strike has had a positive effect on the rank and file of Local 1005, radicalizing and energizing a number of activists. For instance, after the strike a group from Local 1005 supported the workers at the University of Minnesota when the latter were involved in their own negotiations. It is also clear that the MCTO

*Continued on page 51*

1. All information in this article is taken from published accounts of the strike in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* unless otherwise noted.  
2. "Why We Voted to Strike," a leaflet prepared by ATU Local 1005 (no date). Speech by Charlie Borden, ATU 1005 activist at Meeting the Challenge Conference IV, February 3, 1996, St. Paul.

# Russian Miners and Teachers Strike

by Renfrey Clarke

The author of the following article writes regularly from Moscow for the Australian Green Left Weekly. This article and the accompanying one on the Ukrainian miners strike, both of which we have edited somewhat for style purposes, were posted on the "labr.cis" conference of the Institute for Global Communications network from the e-mail address: austgreen@glas.apc.org.

In late January, a powerful strike wave swept across Russia, involving close to three-quarters of a million workers. A massive stoppage by teachers was followed by an exceptionally large and well-coordinated strike by coal miners. Also downing tools were workers at Russia's largest plant for the manufacture of heavy earth-moving equipment. Air traffic controllers and workers at the ZIL truck plant in Moscow were also planning industrial action.

The most resounding blows have been dealt by the coal strike, the largest such action since the six-week stoppage in 1991 that fatally weakened the administration of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Almost all the recent strike activity has centered on the failure by enterprises and regional authorities to pay wages on time. During 1995 total wage arrears rose in real terms by close to 40 percent. Affecting many millions of workers, the pay shortfall was a prime reason for the defeat suffered by pro-government forces in the parliamentary elections on December 17. Alarmed for his prospects in the presidential election in June, Russian President Boris Yeltsin on January 16 sacked First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, implying strongly that he blamed Chubais for allowing non-payments to mount.

On January 30, as strikers moved into action, Yeltsin pledged to ensure that overdue wages were paid promptly. A special reserve fund, he promised, would be set up to prevent further delays in wage payments to workers in state enterprises and ministries. Among Russian trade unionists, however, there is little confidence that a change of rhetoric by Yeltsin will throw open the pay windows.

For one thing, money assigned by the federal government for wage payments usually has to make its way through other official and semi-official bodies before it reaches workers. The teachers, for example, are not paid directly by the federal government, but by provincial and republican administrations. Regional authorities often divert these funds to patch up their own structures. Or money may be held and lent out by corrupt local functionaries.

As of late January, unpaid salaries owed to schoolteachers reportedly amounted to US\$210 million, even though all central funds for the education system were supposedly being transferred to the regions on schedule. According to the English-language *Moscow Tribune*, Dep-

uty Prime Minister Vladimir Kinelyov, responsible for education and science, had "vowed to track down an allotted 1.7 trillion rubles (US \$361 million) from the federal education budget which was not received by local schools."

Similarly, state subsidies for the coal industry are administered through Rosugol, the state holding company that is a major shareholder in most mines. Investigations in recent years have found widespread corruption in coal industry management. Although government officials insist that all sums pledged to Rosugol for 1995 were handed over, in late January hundreds of thousands of miners had received little or no pay since October.

Supporters of the government argue that it is not to blame for most of the pay shortfalls, and that workers should direct their protests to other quarters. But this claim rings hollow. Federal authorities have done little to impose proper auditing procedures on the regional administrations and on Rosugol. Meanwhile, the claim by the central authorities to have paid out all the subsidies owed to the coal industry for 1995, even if technically true, is little better than deception. As *Izvestia* pointed out on February 2, delayed subsidy payments for three to four months of 1994 were met by the government out of funds provided for 1995. It is not surprising that the coal sector's wage funds began running dry several months before the end of last year.

In these circumstances, workers had no reason to hold back from striking, or from directing their demands at the federal government. The teachers' strike began on January 30 and continued for three days, with at least 225,000 education workers taking part. More than 4,000 schools across the country were shut. Leaders of the teachers' union have promised another, still larger stoppage in April if the government's pay promises are not kept.

In Russia's coalfields, the inability of mines to pay their workers had brought a desperate situation by late January. In Vorkuta in the Arctic, bread sales in the shops were running at half the levels of December. In other regions, miners were walking many kilometers to and from work because they could not afford buses.

On January 24 as many as a thousand miners gathered in an angry picket line outside the House of Government in Moscow, with slogans that included: "We can work on our knees, but we'll never live on our knees," and "Miners must not be hostages of reform!" Inside, gov-

ernment officials were meeting with leaders of the main miners' union, the Russian Union of Coal Industry Workers (Russian initials, PRUP).

The miners' key demands included a call for overall state support for the coal industry in 1996 of 10.4 trillion rubles (US\$2.2 billion), instead of the 7.4 trillion projected in the 1996 budget. Where mines were not being paid by their customers, the union argued, the coal enterprises should have the right to reserve 50 percent of available revenues for wage payments before being required to pay taxes.

For once, the government was having to listen seriously to unpaid workers. Significant areas of Russia still depend heavily on coal for their electricity and heating, and in various districts of Western Siberia and the Far East, the coal stockpiles at power stations were down to a few days' supply. On January 25 Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin met with PRUP chairperson Vitaly Budko, and pledged that the demand for 10.4 trillion rubles would be met. An initial 600 billion rubles would be made available by the end of January.

The miners' patience, however, had run out. Mere promises would no longer suffice; the strike would go ahead unless money for wages actually appeared. On January 31 Budko reported that no money had yet reached the mines' bank accounts. On February 1 mines began shutting down.

Observers quickly noted that the coal strike was more solid than any of the numerous stoppages in the industry since 1991. Close to half a million of Russia's 580,000 coal miners went out, and according to PRUP, 90 per cent of underground mines ceased operating.

The government was finally stirred to action. On February 1, money began reaching the mines. The pledge of increased funding was reaffirmed. Union leaders were presented with a detailed schedule for wage payments through June. Not all of the miners' demands were met; a call for measures to deal with non-payments by coal consumers went unanswered. Nevertheless, union leaders late on February 2 voted to call for an end to the strike. A decision was made to renew the stoppage from March 1 if the government was not fulfilling its promises.

Shaken by the miners' victory, Russian proponents of tight-money policies are now predicting with alarm that unpaid workers in many other areas of the economy will walk off the job. On February 3, the 18,000 employees of the



Promtraktor earth-moving equipment plant in Cheboksary on the Volga River were reported to be on strike, after not receiving wages since September.

Few workers in Russia have the economic leverage of the miners, and most of the battles for overdue wages will be far more difficult and drawn-out. But there are signs that very large numbers of workers have grasped the lesson of

the miners' experience: it is only through militant industrial and political struggle that the survival of whole workforces can be assured. □

February 7, 1996

## Ukrainian Miners Stage Massive Strike

by Renfrey Clarke

Coal miners in Ukraine returned to work on February 16 after one of the hardest-fought strikes seen in the former Soviet republic in recent years. The resumption of work followed an agreement by the government to negotiate with the miners on their demand for the payment of wages owed since October, and after an initial payout offer had been substantially increased.

The government continued to resist miners' demands for major new investment to revive the country's decaying, accident-prone coal industry. In this, the authorities took their cue from the International Monetary Fund, whose negotiators were holding talks with Ukrainian officials while the strike was at its height. Along with the World Bank, the IMF favors widespread mine closures in Ukraine.

In recent years, the miners have had to mount repeated struggles to force the government to sign over money to pay their wages, now reduced by inflation to the equivalent of US\$50-75 a month. A coal stoppage in 1993 forced then President Leonid Kravchuk to call an early election, which he lost. A further strike in December 1994 ended with the government agreeing to pay US\$270 million in wage arrears.

During 1995 the government drastically reduced its subsidies to money-losing mines, and drew up plans to close 38 pits employing 40,000 miners. Economists pointed out that the cost to the state of supporting large numbers of jobless miners would make it cheaper to keep the mines open. In the event, all of Ukraine's 250 or so coal mines have continued to operate. But as the government tries to meet insistent IMF demands for reductions in the state budget deficit, miners' wages have fallen repeatedly under the cost-cutters' axe.

By late January, the coal unions put the total unpaid wage bill at the equivalent of US\$122 million. Some disability payments to injured miners had not been paid since July.

The strike began on February 1, and quickly gathered strength. On the morning of February 2 a total of 142 mines, accounting for more than 70 percent of industry output, were reported to have shut down entirely. At almost all the remaining mines, workers were refusing to load coal for shipment. Trade union sources put the number of miners and other coal industry employees on strike as high as 800,000.

An impressive feature of the stoppage was the fact that it affected pits not just in the traditionally militant, mainly Russian-speaking

Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, but also the mines of Lviv Province in the Ukrainian-speaking west. On February 1 protest meetings in the Lviv Province coalfields drew a reported 15,000 participants.

On February 5, with the strike solid, some 1,000 delegates from mines throughout Ukraine gathered in the Donbass center of Donetsk and announced that the stoppage would continue until the government joined talks on settling the conflict. As well as payment of wages owed, the miners were demanding that the government pledge the equivalent of US\$1.5 billion in subsidies in order to renovate the industry.

The strikers had caught the government at a vulnerable moment. Ukraine during the first half of February was in the grip of the most sustained period of intensely cold weather since prewar times. Electricity production, dependent largely on accident-prone nuclear plants and imports of Russian oil and gas, was on the brink of collapse. If coal-fired generating plants were forced to cease operating for lack of fuel, widespread industrial shutdowns were inevitable — and the cost to government revenues could easily exceed that of meeting the miners' pay claims.

Accordingly, the government's offers to the miners began to creep upward. Initially, Deputy Prime Minister Vasyl Yevtukhov told parliament that the equivalent of US\$21 million had been allocated for paying miners' wages. Ministers stated that additional funds would have to come from outside the budget. Coal industry customers, including coking plants and electricity-generating plants, are said by the government to owe the mines a total of US\$320 million.

As the energy situation grew more critical, the government's financial possibilities seemed mysteriously to increase. On February 8, as 5,000 miners demonstrated in Donetsk, Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk was quoted as saying that the miners would get no more than the sum — put by him at the equivalent of US\$79 million — already pledged. This, however, was still less than two-thirds of the sum the miners were demanding as a minimum.

A few days later, the feared energy crunch arrived. On February 12 the Russian government cut off electricity sales after the frequency of the current in the Ukrainian network fell to critical levels. Extended blackouts followed in most areas of Ukraine. In the industrial center of Dnipropetrovsk electricity supplies were cut by 40 percent, forcing the closure of most plants.

By this time, threats and promises from the Ukrainian government had eroded the strike to the point where the miners were no longer capable of forcing a decisive victory. On February 13, union sources reported that 40 mines remained fully shut down, with workers in another 87 refusing to load coal.

The government's options were limited by an extensive solidarity movement that had arisen to support the miners. On February 14 it was reported that the Coordinating Council of Trade Unions of the Machine Building and Defense Complex, and the Association of Trade Unions of Basic Industrial Sectors, had called for an all-Ukraine protest action on February 21. This was to include a general one-hour stoppage, around demands that included fulfillment of the miners' claims.

Nevertheless, the miners were forced to drop their call for massive state support to the coal industry, and to limit their demands to the payment of wage arrears. On February 16, with 25 mines still fully on strike, the miners' leaders announced that they had decided to suspend the stoppage and take up a government offer of talks.

The miners' movement has emerged from another hard-fought conflict, with its militant traditions and popular backing recharged. For the government and the IMF, eager to see the implementation of a long list of anti-worker policies, the combativity in the mining centers presents an obstacle that will not be easily overcome. But the steady collapse of the Ukrainian coal industry places a question mark over the miners' longer-term prospects.

The output of Ukraine's coal mines fell by a further 11 percent in 1995, to a figure less than half that of 1990. Once a leading center of the Soviet coal industry, Ukraine is now a coal importer.

Meanwhile, the refusal of the government to invest in the coal industry has made work in the mines mortally hazardous. On February 18, three miners in the Donetsk region drowned when a cage was lowered into a shaft that had filled unexpectedly with water. The miners' deaths brought the number of fatalities in the Ukrainian mines this year to 43. Even as output has plunged in recent years, the death toll has risen.

Angry and desperate, the miners will be looking for real changes from the government if they are not to renew their struggles in the near future. □

February 21, 1996

# Fake Bankruptcies for State Enterprises in China?

by Leng Zhaosong and Zhao Shangmei

*This and the following article on industrial hazards in China are reprinted, with minor changes for reasons of style, from the February 29 issue of October Review, a mostly Chinese-language publication put out by Fourth Internationalists in Hong Kong. For subscription information, write G.P.O Box 10144, Hong Kong, or send e-mail to or@johk.com*

In the torrential tide of bankruptcies of enterprises in China, a new phenomenon of fake bankruptcies has arisen. The social base for this lies in the anxieties generated among workers over unemployment. According to the *People's Daily*, March 23, 1995, redundant workers in state-owned enterprises at the end of 1993 amounted to about 30 million, of which 15 million was idle redundancy, 15 million was hidden redundancy, and 5 million were still clinging on to a job but without work in enterprises which had virtually stopped production. In some state-owned enterprises, redundancy was 50 percent.

Furthermore, every year, another 8 million join the labor force in the cities and over 10 million join the labor force in the countryside.

A strong sense of frustration and insecurity prevails among workers. According to the *Workers' Daily*, January 11, 1996, dismissed workers face extreme hardship in both livelihood and family relations. On October 29, 1995, Shanghai city was shocked by the case of an outstanding high school student committing suicide because he was desperate about the several thousand yuan of university tuition fees which he could not afford; his mother was sent home [fired] in January 1995 and since then had received only a living subsidy of 60 yuan a month. In four enterprises in Zigong, Sichuan, there were 24 cases of divorce due to the wife having been sent home. In Chongqing City alone, in the past two years, the children of several thousand workers in extreme hardship had stopped going to school.

Under these circumstances, workers have a fervent wish to preserve the enterprises, which offers a broad social base for fake bankruptcies.

It is done in the following way: an enterprise verging on bankruptcy splits itself into two or several autonomously accounting legal entities, and all assets held by the old enterprise are transferred to the new one(s). The old enterprise, now an empty shell, declares bankruptcy, and fends off the creditors. This does not cost anything and there are no legal or political risks involved. Very often three parties take part in this exercise: the local government, the state-owned enterprise, and the work force.

Local governments have an interest in defending state-owned enterprises. Some even initiate or sponsor the fake bankruptcies. For instance, in Wuhan, the local government intervened and denied priority debt servicing to the creditor banks when nine enterprises declared their bankruptcy (*Financial Times*, December 25, 1995). In Yueyang City, all bankruptcy cases since 1993 have been handled by the local government, and the bank, as the largest creditor, has been excluded from the liquidation team (*Financial Times*, December 26, 1995).

In Nanchong city in Sichuan Province, the evaluation report on the bankruptcy of the city's polyamide fiber factory aroused the suspicion of the largest creditor, the Bank of China, but investigations and negotiations were of no avail. The Bank of China suffered a loss of over 200 million yuan in capital and interest in this case. When the local cadres talked of this case, it was explicitly pointed out that "our goal is to get rid of the bank debt but leave a beautiful factory for the people of Nanchong City" (*Financial Times*, December 25, 1995). In another notorious case, after a state-owned enterprise was sold by auction for 54 million yuan, 20 million yuan was held up by the local govern-

ment departments which had been responsible for running the factory, and the debt repayment rate was only 9 percent. A fight went on for a few months among the several government departments over the 20 million yuan (*Reform*, No.5 for 1995).

The enterprises also have an interest in the fake bankruptcies. Over one-third of state-owned enterprises in China are deep in debt, 80 percent of it being debt to banks. By declaring bankruptcy, the bank debts are written off and the enterprises still hold on to massive wealth. A starch factory in Zaiping County, Shandong Province, and a bicycle factory in Hubei Province both managed to get rid of their bank debts by declaring bankruptcy and then re-entered the competitive market with the same production scale, the same workers, and the same factory buildings (*Shandong Investment*, No.4 for 1995; *Financial Times*, December 25, 1995).

Workers in these enterprises have no reason to complain against these arrangements, since their main interest is to preserve their jobs. Some even obtain lucrative benefits from the fake bankruptcies. A certain bicycle factory, with its declaration of bankruptcy, not only got rid of the heavy bank debts and continued to operate but also gave out large amounts of "dismissal compensation" to its cadres and workers. Those who quit or retired obtained almost 50,000 yuan per person in terms of wages, medical fees, funeral fees, and consolation fees. Those who retained their jobs each also received two years' worth of "unemployment compensation" (*Society*, No.10 for 1995). □

## Industrial Hazards Raging in China

by Zhang Kai

On December 10, 1995, the *Workers' Daily* published an article "Workers appeal for legislation over protection of labor," which discussed the following situation:

A survey conducted by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions revealed that in recent years, over 90,000 people every year have died as a result of industrial, traffic, and fire accidents, with a direct economic loss of several billion yuan. Industrial hazards in coal mines, construction, metallurgy, the chemical fertilizer industry, and the fuel and machine industries

have not decreased. Among coal mine accidents, half occurred in state-owned coal mines.

Gas explosions have been rather serious in provinces such as Guizhou.

Despite the State Council regulation that enterprises should apply 10-20 percent of the fund for technological renewal to the area of improvement of labor conditions, few enterprises implement this. Lately this category has even been removed from the accounting system.

In the last decade, with polluting industries being subject to further control in advanced

countries, many have moved into China. The situation is especially serious in the Special Economic Zones (SEZ's). According to a sample survey of 7 foreign-owned factories in the Zhuhai SEZ in the latter half of 1994, the amount of benzene-toluene-xylene in the air was 8-10 times above state standards. In the Shenzhen SEZ, a health check-up conducted by the Baoan County health authorities on 2,000 women workers who were in frequent contact with triphenylmethane found that over 350 had their haemochrome below the lowest standard levels.

For six months in the spring and summer of 1994, an investigation team composed of health experts in Shenzhen conducted a general survey on all state-owned, collective, rural, foreign-owned, and individual enterprises and found that most enterprises operated with serious vices or poison. In the Shenzhen city area, 29 percent of enterprises, and in the Baoan and Longgang districts, 62.5 percent of enterprises, had either serious vices or poisoning or especially dangerous equipment (*Ming Pao*, October 28, 1994).

Similar conditions prevail in Fujian Province. *Ming Pao* for January 18-19, 1996, reported that in shoe factories in Putian, Quanzhou, Shishi, and Jinjiang, triphenylmethane-polluted air puts 230,000 women

workers at risk, and the lives of several million residents in these districts are also threatened by the polluted air emitted from the factories. In Xianyou County Hospital, since 1993, over 10 women workers from shoe factories have been diagnosed with leukemia, and over 20 with critical aplastic anemia; two women workers died soon after admission to the hospital.

It is reported that in a shoe factory, a set of cleansing facilities costs RMB 560,000 yuan (around US\$67,000), which would amount to an additional cost of 0.4 yuan per pair of shoes manufactured. Most factories refuse to install such facilities. For instance, the Taiwanese Factory Owners Association even threatened to move their factories out if they were forced to install such facilities. The drive for lowering

production costs and increasing competitiveness has caused investors to disregard the health and safety of workers.

Fire hazards remain a serious threat to workers' lives, since most factories have their workplace, workers' dormitory, and storehouse in the same building. After the notorious fire in the Zhili Toy Factory in Shenzhen in 1993, in which 87 workers burned to death, 61 workers died in a fire in the Gaofu Textile Factory in Fuzhou, 93 died in a fire in Yushan Textile Factory in Zhuhai in June 1994, and in September 1995, another 22 died in a rural factory in Shunde Township in Guangdong Province. □

February 12, 1996

## Collective Bargaining Saved in Croatia

Reprint of ICEM Update 7/February 1996

*The following report, edited slightly for style and clarification, is from the recently formed International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM). The ICEM Update No. 7, February 1996, was posted on the "labr.newslines" conference of the Institute for Global Communications.*

*This report indicates that with the subsiding of the struggle for national independence, class questions within each of the former Yugoslav territories are beginning to reassert themselves, including questions of struggle against privatization and domination by the giant multinational corporations and questions of international trade union solidarity.*

*Similar indications can be seen in the interview with Bosnian miners on p. 45 of this issue, where the question of independence for the trade unions, including political independence, is stressed.*

*(For more on the situation in former Yugoslavia, see the articles by Marilyn Vogt-Downey and George Saunders on pp. 42-48.)*

Collective bargaining is now set to take its rightful place in Croatian industry, following an important victory by oil workers' unions there. International trade union solidarity played an important part in the campaign.

At issue was an attempt by the national oil company INA to make its workers sign individual employment contracts before any bargaining began on a first collective agreement. Croatia is just beginning to set up "Western"-style employment structures, after the demise of the former Yugoslav self-management system in industry.

INA's strategy could have set a very dangerous precedent. With some 24,000 workers, INA is Croatia's biggest employer. It is currently up for privatization, as are most other major Croatian enterprises. In strategic sectors such as oil, the privatization drive was put on hold during the wars in former Yugoslavia. Now, it is being taken up with renewed vigor.

Under the new market system, employment contracts are supposed to be signed with each worker. This is required by new labor laws that came into force on January 1. However, if INA had succeeded in divorcing the individual contracts from a first collective agreement, it and other Croatian firms could then have tried to ditch collective bargaining altogether.

So "collective agreement first, then the contracts" was the slogan when oil workers' unions EKN and GNSiK launched a series of protests outside INA headquarters in Zagreb this past

December. At first, the company claimed it had no authority to negotiate. It told the unions that their proper bargaining partner was the oil ministry. But the government confirmed that INA management is indeed now responsible for bargaining.

On January 11, the unions staged another major demonstration. They are both affiliated to the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), which represents some 20 million energy and other workers worldwide. Taking part in the preparations for the rally was ICEM Central and Eastern Europe Coordinator Peter Schmitt. Together with EKN President Juric, GNSiK President Mucnjak, and the chairmen of the two unions' branches at INA, Schmitt spoke at the demonstration. He promised international trade union solidarity action if INA management persisted in its refusal to negotiate.

According to observers, the demonstration marked two important developments on the Croatian industrial scene. It was organized jointly by unions belonging to two different national confederations. And it received extensive and fairly sympathetic coverage in the Croatian media—including the state television, which had previously ignored trade union issues. With the new prospects for peace in former Yugoslavia, government pressure on the Croatian media appears to have eased slightly. The coverage included Schmitt's warning of the international consequences if INA's attitude did not change.

Shortly after the protest, the EKN met to draw up further bargaining strategies on the INA case. For this discussion, financial and other information about the company's future was urgently needed. This is where the ICEM's electronic networking came into its own. Within two hours, the Zagreb meeting received a detailed dossier on INA from the ICEM's researchers in Brussels.

As public criticism of INA mounted, the company management approached the unions for "talks about talks." These led to a first round of collective bargaining at the end of January, and a second round which begins today [February 6].

But if INA has now accepted the principle of collective bargaining, the negotiations themselves are likely to be tough. Management's initial offer, swiftly rejected by the unions, was below the minimum conditions prescribed by Croatian law. Hardly a shining example of good faith bargaining.

*"ICEM Update" is available by e-mail or fax. Individual news items can be supplied in other languages on request.*

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## Feminism and "Zapatismo"

# "Feminists Have Been Overtaken by the Zapatistas"

Interview with Julieta Hernandez

*Julieta Hernandez represented the "civic Zapatista" movement in the recent negotiations with the government. She was also a member of Democracia Radical, until recently the Mexican section of the Fourth International. Braulio Moro asked her about her work in Chiapas, and the relationship between feminism and "Zapatismo." The interview is taken, with minor style changes, from the March 1996 issue of International Viewpoint, monthly publication of the Fourth International.*

**Question:** What brought you to Chiapas?

**Answer:** Ten years ago, student and feminist militants like me did not know how to insert ourselves in the society. We wanted to leave the university milieu, and "do something" as a feminist movement, but we never knew what exactly. It was through contacts with the organizations of indigenous people ("Indians") that we were able to make our dream real. A handful of us who left the university with a burning desire to do work "at the base" were able to break out of the university elites and their discourse, and build something. On a class basis, not just as feminists!

I spent three years working with an indigenous women's organization. They were working in the villages. And they were involved in the Zapatista movement. This experience showed me that we were mistaken in the feminist movement, thinking that you could not talk to indigenous women about abortion and contraception, because their cultural milieu restricted the possibilities. When we began to talk to these women, they told us about their use of medicinal plants to provoke abortion. Many were interested in finding out about contraception (though some refused to discuss it, considering that it was women's role to give life and protect life, and particularly to protect their culture and ethnic group). We also realized that, if these women had ten children, it was because they knew they would lose three or four of them.

**Q.: So how did women end up in the Zapatista army?**

**A.:** It took ten years to establish the Zapatista army. During this time, we did more than just build a military organization in the forest. There was intense discussion on a range of questions, including the role of women in the common struggle. If women now form one-third of the Zapatista army, this shows that they have already integrated one of their rights: the right to participate in politics, and if necessary, in a war.

There were other factors, too. For example, a number of Christian "base communities" and nuns have been working for years to increase the self-consciousness of indigenous women.

After the uprising of January 1, 1994, women were massively present in the demonstrations for a ceasefire. In the towns and the EZLN base

communities, it is overwhelmingly women who manage day-to-day life.

It is important to continue building the feminist struggle. Women are present in other revolutions and social movements. But without a [women's] program, without their own demands. In Chiapas, we integrated this specific dimension from the very beginning.

Discussions among women in the EZLN from March 1993 onward led to the development of the "Revolutionary Law on Women," which was distributed at the end of January 1994. This mobilized us women from the towns. It was a real contribution to our way of looking at things, our expectations and our struggle.

The feminist movement was overtaken by the initiatives of Zapatista women! Just like the rest of the left.

Their demands seem simple. But they are fundamental. Declaring that a woman has the right to choose the man she will marry, and the

*Continued on page 47*

## Mexican Fourth International Group Merges with Zapatistas

*The following is taken, with minor style changes, from the March 1996 issue of International Viewpoint, monthly publication of the Fourth International. All quotations come from the Democracia Radical press release of February 23, 1996, "Sobre su participación en la formación del FZLN." The translation is by International Viewpoint. To contact Democracia Radical, send e-mail to 74174.1671@compuserve.com.*

Democracia Radical has dissolved itself into the new Zapatista National Liberation Front (FZLN). Leaders of the group told journalists in Mexico City (February 23, 1996) that "the echo which the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) has provoked on the Mexican left is not simply a 'nostalgic' response to its armed struggle," but a result of the fact that the Zapatistas come from "outside the state, from where they seek to establish a dialogue with civil society as a whole. Including with those sectors which do not at all share their point of view... with the aim of creating an alternative, democratic culture to that of the country's political regime."

"The EZLN has now decided to take a new step in the transition from a military-political force with a moral influence on important sectors of society toward the construction of a new type of political force, which will try to organize that part of Mexican society which finds itself outside the political system.

"This Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (FZLN) will also try to form a Broad Opposition Front ["Frente Amplio Opositor"], along with all those who are opposed to the Party-state, and in favor of a new social pact, based on the elaboration of a new Constitution.

"The militants of Democracia Radical have decided to participate in this struggle. We do so without renouncing our revolutionary socialist profile. But it should be

understood that we are moving toward the creation of a new identity, a kind of civil Zapatismo. This implies changes on our part, and on the part of our brothers [and sisters] in the EZLN.

"We are dissolving ourselves to create FZLN advocates committees [comités promotores del FZLN]. From there, we will join the new front as individuals. We are dissolving ourselves so as to enter into the new front on the same conditions as all other citizens. We are dissolving ourselves because we do not want the FZLN to become a pact between parties or political apparatuses.

"We have informed the Fourth International that we will no longer form part of that organization. This does not mean that we have abandoned our conviction of the necessity to create a mass, revolutionary International.

"We look forward to participating in the creation of something new and different. A force which will not seek a quota of power in the existing system. A force which will not organize currents of support for particular candidates in elections. A force which will refuse any kind of economic subsidy from the system. A new force which will struggle decisively against all kinds of exploitation and oppression. Which seeks to replace the virtual, illusory character of the state as representative of the community by an association of free men and women, freely associated.

# Louis Farrakhan Tours Africa and the Mideast — a Critical Response

by Joe Auciello

Visiting Iran as part of his “World Friendship Tour,” Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan spoke to a rally in the capital, Tehran, celebrating the 17th anniversary of that country’s Islamic revolution. According to the *New York Times* of February 22, Farrakhan denounced the United States as the “Great Satan,” and exclaimed: “God will destroy America by the hands of Muslims... God will not give Japan or Europe the honor of bringing down the United States; this is an honor God will bestow upon Muslims.” The *Times* reports that these quotes were taken from the Iranian press.

In Iraq, Minister Farrakhan toured hospitals and the al-Amiriya shelter where hundreds were killed in a U.S. bombing raid during the Gulf War. Farrakhan denounced the United Nations sanctions against Iraq as a “crime against humanity” and U.S. support for the sanctions as “a very wicked policy that must be stopped.” The *Final Call*, newspaper of the Nation of Islam, reported February 14 that an “estimated 500,000 children under age 5 have died” since the sanctions were imposed.

During his tour, Minister Farrakhan met with Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, South African President Nelson Mandela, President Hashemi Rafsanjani of Iran, and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, among others. According to Reuters dispatches of January 25 and 26, Libya intended to provide Farrakhan with up to a billion dollars to fund a Muslim lobby in the United States that would “play an important role in American political life and have weight in the U.S. elections.” Further, Qaddafi and Farrakhan were quoted as stressing “the need to work to support all the weak and oppressed in America... to stop the oppression being practised against them by the exploitative capitalist circles...” Qaddafi also pledged to support the Nation of Islam’s goal of establishing a separate Black state in America. Later reports from Libya indicate that money may not have been promised.

Farrakhan’s “World Friendship Tour” took him to more than twenty African and Middle Eastern nations. According to the February 14 *Final Call*, the purpose of the tour was “to spread... the good news of atonement and reconciliation that was experienced October 16, 1995, during the Million Man March on Washington, D.C., convened by Min. Farrakhan. Now the delegation had come to offer Oct. 16, 1996 and henceforth as World Atonement Day... Now the message was traveling across Africa through this delegation.”

Just four months after the Million Man March, the Nation of Islam leader is once again in the headlines. Once again, Minister Farrakhan

has provoked panic in the United States government, leading to denunciations by the State Department, Democratic and Republican members of Congress, and the White House.

The U.S. government was enraged with Farrakhan’s words and actions. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns stated: “to go overseas and to criticize the United States so severely in such blatant terms and in such wrong terms is really shameful and it’s inexcusable... I think it’s shameful that an American citizen, much less a major religious leader in the United States, would cavort with dictators like Qaddafi and the Iranian leadership” (*Boston Globe*, February 15). White House spokesman Mike McCurry referred to Farrakhan’s trip as a “thug-fest tour” and denounced him for meeting with “brutal dictators and leaders of... pariah states.”

Republican Representative Peter T. King and Democratic Representative Nita Lowey formally asked the State Department to revoke Farrakhan’s passport. Representative King has demanded a Congressional investigation into Farrakhan’s trip to determine whether passport and other federal laws were violated. Justice and State Department officials have reported that they are “looking into the matter” and that “they plan to question Farrakhan” upon his return to the United States.

The media thoroughly supported the government’s position and often censured Farrakhan in even more vehement tones. A *Boston Globe* columnist referred to Farrakhan as the “Minister of treason,” who is “offering aid and comfort to anti-American dictators,” concluding that he is a “traitor.”

A *Globe* editorial reiterated the “aid and comfort” line and approvingly quoted the State Department. *Time* magazine, in its February 26 issue, also accused Farrakhan of “providing aid and comfort to despots” and tried to destroy him politically. “...Farrakhan’s demonstrated eagerness to play ball with tyrants should alarm every black American still deluded by the hope that the uncritical acclaim Farrakhan has enjoyed since the Million Man March last October would somehow transform him into a model of enlightened leadership. To the contrary, Farrakhan is a hypocrite... With leaders like that, who needs enemies?” A *Wall Street Journal* editorial, typically, characterized Farrakhan in State Department terms and yearned for his arrest: “if he chooses to become a more active agent of international pirates he should by all means be hit with a warrant” (February 22). By comparison, the patronizing tone of *USA Today* seemed almost reasonable; they only complained that Farrakhan failed to appreciate “the nation’s common interests and values” and that, like a

wayward teenager, he “misplaced the notion that with freedom comes responsibility” (February 22).

Farrakhan was also attacked by the press in more subtle ways. The Associated Press reported a conflict between Farrakhan and Nelson Mandela (“Farrakhan is lectured on racism by Mandela”), but the body of the AP article contradicted that headline. Of this meeting, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported, instead, that Mandela “tentatively extended a welcome mat to the controversial Nation of Islam leader” (January 30).

Of course, the media failed to note that it is brazen hypocrisy for the U.S. government to condemn Minister Farrakhan for “cavorting with dictators.”

Such “cavorting” has long been the standard practice of U.S. foreign policy. The United States has supported and continues to support — politically, financially, militarily — dictators throughout the world. The only requirement is that dictatorial regimes must further the interests of United States policy and business. Has anyone forgotten, for instance, that the “madman” of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was formerly a U.S. ally when Iraq was at war with Iran?

Before “cavorting with dictators,” the United States has helped to put them in power, supporting the overthrow of less desirable leaders. Consider only a handful of well-known examples of U.S. government policy:

- the coup in August 1953 against Mossadeq in Iran, which brought the Shah to the throne;
- the 1954 military revolt, supplied and backed by the U.S., against the Arbenz regime in Guatemala;
- U.S. support to Batista in Cuba from the 1930s through the 1950s, and military support for the failed Bay of Pigs invasion against Fidel Castro in April 1961;
- support for the military coup that overthrew and then murdered President Diem of Vietnam in 1963;
- the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965;
- the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile in September 1973, which brought Pinochet to power;
- the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 to install a government favorable to its interests;
- the U.S. government attempts to kill Fidel Castro (“Operation Mongoose”), even entering into negotiations with the Mafia to get the murder done;
- U.S. government support for dictatorship and terror in El Salvador, and strangulation of the Sandinista revolution after the Nicaraguan dictator and U.S. ally, Somoza, was sent packing in July 1979.

Numerous other examples could be offered of the U.S. government supplying “aid and comfort” to dictatorial and repressive regimes in other countries.

*Continued on page 13*

# Israel's Terror Will Only Ignite More Violence

## Statement of Islamic Association for Palestine

*The IAP describes itself as "a national grassroots organization in the Muslim and Palestinian communities in America...dedicated to advancing a just and comprehensive solution" on the question of Palestine. The text has been edited somewhat for style and clarification. The IAP may be reached by mail at 5757 W. 95th St., Oak Lawn, Illinois 60453; phone (708) 636-7820.*

The Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP) condemns the wave of terror Israel has unleashed against the Palestinians in the occupied territories. By instituting a policy of collectively punishing the entire Palestinian population, the occupation authorities will only aggravate the same type of misery and consequent resentment which ignited the current cycle of violence.

In the first week of March, Israel imposed a siege on Gaza and the West Bank and instituted a full curfew in the more than 450 West Bank villages. Israel has sealed a number of houses in order to demolish them and closed various educational and charitable institutions. Also, the occupation authorities have arrested hundreds of Palestinians in the West Bank (some only for being relatives of suspects) and pressured the PA [Palestinian Authority, Arafat's police] into raiding numerous houses and mosques as well as the Islamic University in Gaza and arresting over 400 Palestinians.

Israel is violating the spirit and letter of its agreements with the PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organization], and its actions clearly prove that it still occupies the land [from which Israeli forces had supposedly withdrawn]. Israel does not give the Palestinians the same "security" that it asks for itself. After a Jewish militant murdered Yitzhak Rabin, neither was his home sealed nor his rabbis arrested, and after a Jewish

terrorist slaughtered 29 worshippers in [a mosque in] Hebron his family's home was not demolished, nor was his settlement placed under siege. Instead a shrine was allowed to be built in his memory.

The IAP criticizes the double standard and the biased, unjust policies adopted by America and the Western countries in this regard. According to a recent State Department report on human rights violations, Israel was among the worst offenders. Since the signing of the Oslo Agreement in September 1993 more than 270 Palestinians have been killed by the occupation authorities. Furthermore, rather than release political prisoners (as agreed upon with the PLO), the occupation authorities made more arrests and devised new means of torture which led to the deaths of three prisoners in the last two months alone. The Israelis also continued murdering unarmed Palestinians in the West Bank, undertaking bombing raids on Lebanese villages, resulting in the deaths of many civilians and children, and destroying Palestinians' homes and confiscating their property while building more Jewish settlements. In October, Israeli terrorists murdered the leader of Islamic Jihad in Europe, and in January they murdered Yahia Ayyash in Gaza. Also they have imposed frequent sieges in Gaza and the West Bank, causing a disaster for the Palestinian economy.

The Israeli terror and the silence and support

it receives from the Western world will not lead to a real and just peace, but will rather fuel short and long-term violent reactions throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds. History proves that injustice does not prevail, nor do nations forget their rights. The cycle of violence we are currently witnessing is a result of the thirty years of suffering which the two million Palestinians have endured under the Israeli occupation, during which time Palestinians have frequently been the targets of massacres and actions of official terrorism, with no freedom or dignity in their own land.

The IAP calls for the following:

- Israel to end its current wave of terror against the Palestinians.
- The U.S. government to stop sending aid to Israel, condemn its criminal actions, and promote a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue so as to end the occupation, allow all Palestinians the right to return to their homes, and establish freedom and democracy for all.
- The Palestinian Authority to stop helping the Israelis in destroying the unity of the Palestinians.
- The media and human rights organizations to expose the ugly face of the Israeli occupation and terror. □

March 8, 1996

## Afghanistan

# Kabul under Siege: What Are the Taliban?

by K. Govindan

*The author is a member of the International Socialist Group, British section of the Fourth International. The article was written for International Viewpoint.*

Kabul residents have taken to the streets in recent weeks demanding a stop to the air and artillery attacks on the Afghan capital by the anti-government Taliban forces.

These self-proclaimed theological scholars are the latest players in an arena already overcrowded with militia based on ethnic and denominational loyalties.

Despite their avowed mission to disarm other militias and end the civil war, the Taliban entered the scene with bursts of machine-gun fire rather than incantations from the Quran [Ko-

ran]. Wherever the Taliban have gained control, they have imposed harsh restrictions on women that include compulsory wearing of head-dress; removal of girls from schools; and forbidding waged work for women.

The latest round of fighting arises from Taliban frustration at the slow pace of the transfer of power from the Rabbani-Masood government to an all-party transitional administration.

Despite the simplistic propaganda in some left publications, this is no jihad waged under the banner of Islam and nationalism. Nor is it

"essentially" a U.S.-sponsored "contra" operation against "godless communists" and their client regime. It is a fight for political dominance between competing ethnic militias.

The capital is administered by (Persian-speaking) Tajiks like Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military strong-man Ahmad Shah Masood. The Taliban are mainly Pashtuns from the south of the country. Pashtuns, the country's largest ethnic group, also live in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province.

Militia leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a fel-

low Pashtun, has forged an uneasy alliance with the Taliban, to dislodge the current government. So has Rashid Dostam, the rebel leader of the Uzbek (Turkic) militia in the North of the country. Dostam was a general in the army of the "Communist" Najibullah regime.

He can count on his allies in the Central Asian state of Uzbekistan for arms and financial support. The Uzbek government fears the spread of Islamic fundamentalism into the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

India, Russia, and Tajikistan prefer to provide aid and military hardware for the Kabul government. One regional specialist summarized opinion in these countries in the following way: "All the mujahedeen are Muslim fundamentalists, but the Taliban are a loose cannon. If successful, they would spread their movement to Central Asia."

The U.S. government is more concerned with Iran's growing influence in Central Asia. And

since the Iranians back the Kabul regime, the U.S. has elected to back Kabul's enemies.

In the post-Cold War era Islam is often touted as the new bogeyman. In reality, imperialism has never been averse to using and funding Islamic groups when it needs to. In this little corner of the world they have been doing it for a long time. The Taliban are also being financed by America's traditional allies: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states. □

## Louis Farrakhan Tours Africa and the Mideast — a Critical Response

*Continued from page 11*

Farrakhan's "crime" does not really concern possible passport violations. Such a technicality only serves as a pretext for the government to attack him. Farrakhan's real offense is to turn the tables on the government, to reverse the accustomed order of things. He has powerfully denounced the U.S. government as the enemy of Third World peoples. By accepting and using money from Libya — if it is forthcoming — to promote the Muslim cause in North America, including in the 1996 elections, Farrakhan would be helping a foreign country do to the U.S. what the U.S. routinely does to foreign countries — interfere in their domestic politics.

To be criticized by members of the U.S. government is, for Minister Farrakhan, an opportunity to rally his supporters and deepen his influence. It's like giving the clean-up batter a slow, fat pitch over the middle of the plate. He knocks it out of the park for a home run. In his Saviour's Day speech on February 25 in Chicago, before thousands of supporters who had come from all over the country, Farrakhan challenged his critics: "Bring me before Congress!...It's time for a showdown anyway." Farrakhan scathingly attacked the government: "You ruin the world and you're angry. I know why you're angry — because you see it slipping from your grip. These damnable liars have cast first" (*Boston Globe*, February 26).

For all of Farrakhan's defiance and scorn, the government threats are real, and if the Justice Department goes forward, the consequences could be significant.

The government's legal threats against Minister Farrakhan are reminiscent of the successful campaign during the 1920s against Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey. Arrested by the Justice Department and convicted in the Federal courts on charges of mail fraud, Garvey, a Jamaican citizen, was sentenced to jail and later deported as an undesirable alien.

The organization he founded, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, never regained its membership or influence.

More recently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, through an informer, attempted to entice a daughter of Malcolm X, Qubilah Shabazz, to enter into an assassination plot against Minister Farrakhan. This scenario, designed to injure Farrakhan personally and/or politically, actually worked to his advantage when Farrakhan

seized the initiative to reach out to Qubilah Shabazz and her mother, Dr. Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X. Minister Farrakhan and Betty Shabazz appeared together at a fundraising rally for the Shabazz family in Harlem's Apollo Theater, and Dr. Shabazz was a featured speaker at the Million Man March.

While Farrakhan faces no threat of deportation, legal battles over the valid use of his passport, among other possible violations of federal laws, could drain the energy and finances of the Nation of Islam and cripple the organization, which reportedly suffers from fiscal trouble already.

Socialists in the United States should oppose any government frame-up against Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam no matter what form the attacks and accusations may take.

Nonetheless, as socialists, our position is not simply to support Minister Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam or any other form of Islam. As Marxists, we support the revolutionary mobilization of the working class, including Black workers and their allies in the Black community, against capitalism. With the Nation of Islam, we can criticize and fight together against a common enemy, but our goals are not the same. Our criticisms of the Nation of Islam have been the subject of an earlier article ("An Appraisal of the Significance of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam Today," *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, No. 125, May-June 1995), and need not be repeated here at length. But let it be clear that our defense of Minister Farrakhan against the U.S. government does not indicate a softening of our position on religion in general or Islam in particular, nor does it indicate agreement with all of Farrakhan's political positions or statements.

Minister Farrakhan's form of anti-imperialism is not the same as the socialists' criticism of capitalism and imperialism. Islam will not bring freedom or liberation to the working masses or other social groups who support it. In fact, support for Islam has led Farrakhan to minimize or apologize for oppressive policies against the working class in the Muslim nations he visited. In Nigeria, for example, where activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged, solidarity with Islam against the West put Farrakhan on the side of the military junta. There, Farrakhan argued that General Abacha needed more time — years — to bring back civilian rule. Writing in the December 1995 *International Viewpoint*, B.

Skanthakumar gave a more convincing argument: "Even two days is too long for this brute to remain in power."

It is one thing to meet with leaders of Islamic nations, gather information, and discuss issues of peace and responsibility, as Minister Farrakhan claimed he did on his trip. It is another thing entirely to speak out in favor of individual political leaders and their governments, as Farrakhan did throughout Africa and the Middle East. Randall Robinson, president of Trans-Africa Forum, was right to point out: "...the statements made on this trip in countries like Nigeria and Sudan... and the things that were said appear to make Minister Farrakhan an apologist for an authoritarian, corrupt and repressive regime" (*New York Times*, February 22).

Such statements by Minister Farrakhan allow the U.S. government to posture as a friend of freedom and democracy throughout the world, when past and present policies point to the opposite conclusion. Farrakhan's criticisms of the U.S. government, where they are correct, will be less convincing to at least some of those who have recently come to support him because of his gentle words for any political leader who may be of help to him.

In sum, Minister Farrakhan's world tour, like the man himself and the movement he leads, is a contradictory phenomena. To see only one side — either side — of that phenomenon, would lead to errors in understanding. For instance, those on the socialist left who thought Farrakhan was simply an expression of reactionary, capitalist policies, an echo of Clinton-Gingrich, will have a hard time explaining the reality that is unfolding in front of them. Those who looked to Farrakhan as the means to freedom and liberation must reconcile their hopes against his support for leaders who jail dissidents and rule by military force.

At this date it is not clear what exactly will occur next. It certainly is clear that the government would like to attack Farrakhan and put him out of the way. Whether this attack moves beyond words still remains to be seen.

There is no doubt, though, that Minister Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam will remain a potent force in Black America for a long time to come. □

March 3, 1996

## Okinawa Unionist Seeks U.S. Union Support

# Demands U.S. Military Bases — Out of Okinawa

## Letter of Yoichi Tha to San Francisco Labor Council

The following document, edited somewhat for style purposes, was posted February 3 on the "labr.global" conference of the Institute for Global Communications computer network.

From: Central Okinawa Council  
of Labor Unions  
17-14 Nakasone, Okinawa City  
Okinawa Prefecture 901-22-Japan  
Tel:098-938-3066 Fax:939-8152

To: Mr. Walter Johnson  
Secretary/Treasurer  
San Francisco Labor Council  
660 Howard St.  
San Francisco, CA

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As the Secretary-General of the Central Council of Labor Unions, I am happy to have the opportunity to request your support of our struggle regarding the problem of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

Our Central Okinawa Council is composed of 34 labor unions having a total membership of 13,000 members who are involved in the struggle to remove the vast U.S. bases, the majority of which are located in Central Okinawa. All Councils of Labor Unions throughout Okinawa Prefecture have joined together to establish the Okinawa Peace Movement Center. The labor unions' movement to remove the U.S. bases has continued for over 30 years. Included in our Council membership are elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, municipal workers, postal employees, government civil servants, private company employees, and Okinawa laborers working on the U.S. military bases. The removal of the U.S. bases from Okinawa is the common consensus of all labor unions in Okinawa.

The problem related to the U.S. military bases in Okinawa can be described as follows:

1. The majority of bases were built during the U.S. military occupation following the Battle of Okinawa 50 years ago and have continued to exist from that time until now. In addition, during the 1950s, Okinawa citizens' land was confiscated by force to build additional bases. This land has continued to be held by force against the wishes of the landowners for base use since that time. Many bases were built on the sites of several-hundred-year-old communities. For 50 years, many landowners have sought the return of the family homes that were taken from them by force.
2. The U.S. military bases are located only a fence away from local Okinawa communities. Since the U.S. helicopter and fighter jet

take-off and landing patterns are directly over residential areas, aircraft pass over these areas at low altitudes many times a day, emitting severe noise pollution. Over 900 local citizens are engaged in a court case over this aircraft sound problem. In the first level verdict, the court ordered the Japanese government to pay the plaintiffs around one billion yen (US\$10 million) in damages. According to the terms of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, the U.S. military is called upon to bear 75% of that amount.

3. While Okinawa Prefecture composes only 0.6% of the total area of Japan, Okinawa is

called on to endure the burden of 75% of all U.S. military facilities in Japan. U.S. military bases cover 20% of the land on the main island of Okinawa, hindering local development. For this reason, Okinawa Prefecture citizens are calling for the return of U.S. military base land.

4. Every year, two or three military aircraft crash and Okinawa citizens are killed by military vehicles. The crimes committed by U.S. military personnel continue, especially such brutal crimes as rape and robbery, in which U.S. military personnel commit four or five times as many crimes per population

### U.S. Bases Bring Problems Not Just in Okinawa

## What the New U.S. Military Base at Taszar Means for Hungary

"How are people in Kaposvar [the Hungarian provincial capital near Taszar] preparing to greet the Americans? 'We're building the brothels right now.'" That was one response the December 4 *New York Times* reported. [Our emphasis.] It came from "a waiter at a downtown pub."

A nightclub owner expanded on the same theme: "We hear that prostitutes are coming down from Budapest, and naturally organized crime will be moving in."

A pensioner in Taszar was quoted this way: "It's not good... Prices are sure to go up, and we don't know how the Americans will behave. Maybe they'll bring drugs. I have an 11-year-old grandson and I'm worried." [Emphasis added.]

The mayor of Kaposvar tried to be more upbeat, but he too expressed unease. "We're glad to be part of the peace process [sic]," he said, and observed that as recently as 1989 it would have been "quite unthinkable... seeing American troops in Hungary." But he added: "It's true that some people are worried. We don't know if the American soldiers drink beer the way we do — calmly, peacefully, quietly. All we can do is hope for the best."

In Taszar, the *Times* observed, "most people can hardly imagine what it will be like to live with the constant air traffic that will bring not just 20,000 American soldiers but

also more than 100 M1-A1 Abrams tanks, 200 Bradley fighting vehicles and scores of Apache and Blackhawk helicopters to their doorsteps."

"Intelligence agents and Defense Department specialists have taken over a lakeside hotel" near Taszar, said the *Times*. So the DIA is already at work.

Besides the prostitutes, there are other "camp followers." Planners from "Brown & Root Inc., the construction engineering company, are surveying the base and deciding what needs to be built there." What's good for Brown & Root is good for Bosnia.

"Other American companies that have served the army in places like Somalia and Haiti [emphasis added] are also arriving." The vultures are gathering.

For example, "Mark Kreesden of International American Products, a South Carolina-based food service company, was meeting with local meat producers as he prepared a bid for the Army catering."

"This is where the action is going to be," said Kreesden. "Everything is going to be run out of here." Like out of a pork barrel.

Local vultures won't be overlooked, the *Times* assures us. "Big Hungarian companies that specialize in food processing, construction, warehousing and freight forwarding are well positioned to profit from the American deployment..."



as Okinawa citizens. In addition, U.S. military personnel in Okinawa commit many more crimes than do their military counterparts in the U.S. or Europe. The very presence of U.S. military bases and personnel pose a major threat to the safety of Okinawa citizens. In 1995 alone, brutal crimes included the rape of a 12-year-old Okinawa girl by three U.S. military personnel, and the murder of a young woman by a 20-year-old U.S. Marine who struck her in the face with a hammer over and over again.

5. With 30,000 active-duty military personnel stationed on 42 military facilities in Okinawa, many military drills and training exercises are conducted on a regular basis on the land, the sea, and in the air directly adjacent to local communities, resulting in dangerous objects falling from the sky, forest fires breaking out, injuries resulting from live-ammunition drills adjacent to residential areas, and fully armed marching drills taking place through urban areas. Okinawa citizens have experienced such disturbances to their

daily lives as these military marches through their communities for the last 50 years.

Especially during the 1990s with the end of the Cold War, the movement calling for the withdrawal of U.S. military bases from the very small island of Okinawa to allow the land taken by force from Okinawa citizens to be returned and used for industrial and residential development has grown.

Under these circumstances, the abduction and rape of an elementary school girl by three U.S. military personnel in September 1995 provoked the anger of Okinawa Prefecture citizens.

Women's organizations, labor union, peace organizations, PTAs, and many other citizen groups held protest rallies and on October 21, 85,000 citizens out of the total Okinawa Prefecture population of 1,260,000 attended the Okinawa Prefecture citizens' protest rally.

Today the Japanese and U.S. governments are being pressured to formulate a policy to address the protest movement of the Okinawa Prefecture citizens, but until now, they have failed.

Responding to this obstinate situation, an Okinawa women's group is visiting four cities in the U.S. from February 3 to 17 to solicit the support of women's organizations and peace groups in achieving a solution to Okinawa's problem. We, the members of the Okinawan labor unions, support the efforts of the Women's Peace Caravan.

We long for the day when the U.S. bases are returned to the hands of the Okinawa citizens, the many American soldiers return to their own country, and the young Marines so far away from home no longer commit crimes and live miserable lives.

Since the Women's Peace Caravan is visiting San Francisco to meet with various groups, I am taking this opportunity to request the cooperation and support of the San Francisco Labor Council in achieving a solution to the problem of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

Sincerely yours,  
Yoichi Tha  
Secretary-General  
Central Okinawa Council of Labor Unions □

## Defending Abortion Rights in the U.S.

by Jacqueline Boyle

*The following article is from the March issue of International Viewpoint. It first appeared in the January issue of Socialist Action (3425 César Chávez St., San Francisco, California, 94110; one year, second class, \$8).*

Over 600 women and men gathered in downtown Boston recently to commemorate the first anniversary of the December 30, 1994, attack on the Planned Parenthood Health Center and Preterm Clinic in Brookline, Mass., which killed two and injured five workers. The event, which was organized by the National Organization for Women (NOW) in Massachusetts, renewed demands for safe, legal abortion available to all women.

Ellen Convisser, recent president of Massachusetts NOW, admitted that there was "some increase" in police protection of clinics after the shootings. But she also noted that (avowedly pro-choice) Massachusetts Governor William Weld's main attempt to address the issue has been to meet with Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law, an outspoken opponent of abortion rights. The cardinal called for a moratorium on anti-choice protesting outside clinics following the murders, but rescinded the ban some six months later.

The protests continue unabated, while Cardinal Law proclaims that both sides of the abortion debate must come together to "find common ground." "Where is the common ground?" Convisser asked, "when one out of five women in this country has no access to abortion?"

According to Convisser, legislative action over the past year will further restrict abortion access. Bills that have already been approved by Congress and are under review by the Senate include:

- A ban on a rarely used late-term abortion procedure.
- A measure that restores funding and accreditation to medical-training programs that do not teach abortion procedures.
- The so-called International Gag Rule, which blocks aid to international programs that provide abortion information and services.
- A ban on abortions for women at overseas military bases, even if they pay for the services themselves.
- A law denying insurance coverage for abortions for federal employees.

"There are tremendous attacks on us from all sides," said Convisser, but she stressed the sense of renewed purpose in the pro-choice movement over the past year. She reminded the audience that "not one progressive measure has occurred in a vacuum — it has always been pushed forward by a social movement."

Planned Parenthood clinic worker Susan Webber also emphasized the strengthened solidarity among the pro-choice community since the Brookline attacks. She urged the demonstrators to maintain a visible presence outside clinics.

Local 26 of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union has long been active in the pro-choice movement in Boston, providing facilities, phone banks, and transportation for activists. Its president, Dominic Bozzotto, reiterated Local 26's support. "We're a pro-choice union since

1981," Bozzotto said. "Women can never be free...if the most important part of that freedom — choice — cannot be exercised every day. We're not scared; we're not going to hide; we're in this fight until we win freedom of choice!"

A message of solidarity was also delivered by Diane Dujon, an activist for welfare rights in the Boston area. Dujon characterized welfare reform as "violence against women and children" and asserted that "this is not an attack on welfare recipients — it's an attack on the whole labor force. We must resist!"

Following the rally, an evening memorial service was held, as well as a candlelight vigil in which over 300 people lined Beacon Street between the two clinics.

The "One Year After" event was extremely successful in drawing participants together to commemorate those who have been killed or injured for their dedication to defending women's right to abortion. Even more important, the event succeeded in conveying a sense of hope, courage, and determination that will be sure to inspire further pro-choice action. As Marge Piercy concluded in her poem, "To Two Women Shot to Death in Brookline, Mass.," which she read at the rally: "We will make each other strong./ We will make each other safe./ There is no other monument." □

# “Fight the Right” March Slated for San Francisco

by Ann Menasche

*This article is also from the March issue of International Viewpoint.*

In response to attacks on affirmative action, particularly in California, the National Organization for Women (NOW) has initiated a call for a national demonstration in San Francisco on April 14. The “Fight the Right” March will demand that there be no retreat on affirmative action, and will address a broad range of feminist and progressive issues. Demands for economic justice include an end to the “war on poor women”; opposition to proposed funding cuts and restrictions on welfare for single mothers; support for abortion rights and reproductive freedom; opposition to racism; support for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights; and support for efforts to end violence against women.

This is an unprecedented opportunity to build strong alliances for affirmative action, for women’s rights, and against racism between the

(predominantly white) women’s movement and the civil rights movements of African Americans and other peoples of color. The March should help cement the alliance between NOW (the country’s largest women’s rights organization), organized labor, and the lesbian/gay rights movement.

The April 14 demonstration has already received broad endorsement from groups including the Rainbow Coalition, the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the National Welfare Rights Union. The march is backed by the California wing of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and trade unions in several states affiliated to the country’s AFL-CIO confederation. Numerous feminist, abortion rights, and lesbian/gay rights groups have also provided their endorsement.

Large, multiracial organizing meetings have been held in San Francisco, where representatives of labor, student groups, and organizations of people of color have met with NOW representatives to discuss plans for the March.

“This March will make clear that the feminist agenda is really about a return to community values,” NOW President Patricia Ireland recently wrote in a letter asking hundreds of organizations to endorse the March. “[A return to] the policies and politics that favor the needs of people over the profits of the corporations and the comforts of a few. People will understand that the right-wing politics of division and diversion serve only to short-change our country and our future.”

For more information call San Francisco (415) 436-9390 □

## Affirming Equality

### Conference on Women and Affirmative Action

*The following is based on a notice posted on the Institute for Global Communications computer network.*

An educational conference on women and affirmative action was held Sunday, March 10, at the Women’s Building in San Francisco. It was sponsored by the Women’s Building and the Women and Affirmative Action Coalition.

The panels and workshops were as follows:

- Affirmative Action, What’s in It for Women?
- Convincing Our Sisters — Answering the Hard Questions, and Winning Women to Affirmative Action
- Welfare, Poverty, and Affirmative Action
- Breaking Barriers, Women in the Workforce
- Making Links in Hard Times, Austerity, Layoffs, and the Defense of Affirmative Action
- Defeating the Politics of Scapegoating: Immigrants, Lesbians and Gays, and Affirmative Action
- Campus Women Organizing for Affirmative Action
- Strategies and Tactics for Defending Affirmative Action

- Building Bridges, Uniting Women across the Color Line.

Panel and workshop presenters and entertainment included the following:

- Aileen Hernandez, former NOW President & EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] Commissioner
- Eva Royale, United Farm Workers
- Karen Ripley, comedian
- Judy Fjell, folk singer
- Malika Saada, Family Rights and Dignity
- Judith Kertz, managing attorney, Equal Rights Advocates
- Ann Menasche, civil rights Attorney
- Nellie Wong, University of California Affirmative Action Officer
- Molly Martin, Tradeswomen, Inc.
- Kerry Newkirk, President, East Bay Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)
- Bennie Bridges, Exec. V.P., Local 1122, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)
- Lisa Maldonado, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- Elizabeth Toledo, State Coordinator, NOW

- Claudette Begin, East Bay NOW
- Octavia Kuransky, Aids Resource Center
- Caryn Brooks, East Bay NOW

The conference was endorsed by a wide range of individuals and organizations, including: the American Association of University Women; Ann Lehman, San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women; Assemblywoman Barbara Lee; Assemblywoman K. Jacqueline Speier; *Crossroads* magazine; East Bay Coalition of Labor Union Women; Elena Fetherston, editor of *Skin Deep: Women Writing on Color, Culture, and Identity*; Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez, Women of Color Resource Center; Gretchen Mackler, State Council, California Teachers Association; Jennie Bloebaum, aide to Keith Carson, Alameda County Supervisor; Kate Kendell, Legal Director, National Center for Lesbian Rights; League of Women Voters, San Francisco and Berkeley chapters; Local 2850, Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees Union; National Organization for Women, San Francisco and Oakland/East Bay; Northern California ACLU; Patricia Chang, Director, Women’s Foundation; Radical Women; Rene Salcido, La Raza Centro Legal; San Francisco Supervisor Mabel Teng; Socialist Action; and Solidarity.

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## Meeting the Challenge Conference

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# Rebuilding the Labor Movement

Introductory remarks by Peter Rachleff

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*These remarks, most of the text of a column in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, opened the fourth annual Meeting the Challenge Conference, which was held at Macalester College in St. Paul, February 2-3, 1996. Rachleff is a professor of history at Macalester, a member of Local 13 of the National Writers Union, and a leading labor activist.*

When we think of the labor movement, we usually think of local unions and national unions — the bodies that negotiate and sign contracts with employers. They're also the organizations that most union members see themselves as belonging to.

But when we try to understand how the labor movement has surged forward in the past — and how it might surge forward in the future — these organizational structures can serve as blinders that restrict our vision. Labor history suggests that horizontal networks, on an inter-union, regional basis, have underpinned the labor movement's major developments. Recent developments indicate that such horizontal networks are being reborn today.

In the 1820s and 1830s, skilled artisans confronting industrialization organized into city-wide "general trades unions" that sought to limit the spread of factories, establish legal limits for the length of the working day, and restrict the employment of children. These multi-trades organizations provided the basis for dozens of local labor parties, which ran candidates for diverse municipal positions.

Fifty years later, the Knights of Labor went beyond the earlier "general trades unions" by including not only workers from diverse trades but also unskilled workers, women, and work-

ers of color. At the heart of their organization were "district assemblies" that published labor newspapers; organized consumer boycotts, producers' cooperatives, drama troupes, and reading rooms; unionized the unorganized and waged broad campaigns for the eight-hour day. They also launched labor parties that were a force to reckon with from Richmond, Virginia, and Rutland, Vermont, to Milwaukee and Denver.

In 1910, the Industrial Workers of the World (or "Wobblies") relied on regional networks to organize unskilled laborers who frequently changed jobs, to fight restrictions on free speech and the right to assemble, and to support activities like song fests, plays, and parades.

Regional activism played a key role in the dramatic revival of the labor movement during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Nowhere was this more true than in Minnesota.

Starting in Austin the summer of 1933, the Independent Union of All Workers (IUAW) spread from 4,000 members in the Hormel plant to unionize every restaurant, bar, hotel, department store, barber and beauty shop in town, as well as truckers, construction workers, and public employees. As one group of workers entered the fold, they became a support group for the next group to organize. Based on this model of

community unionism, the IUAW spread to 13 cities in the Dakotas, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

The Teamsters followed a similar model. In 1934, activists organized a series of strikes in Minneapolis that broke the back of a deep-seated employer opposition and brought thousands of workers into the labor movement. Using Minneapolis as a base, they spread unionism from Fargo to Omaha.

The IUAW, Teamsters, and other labor organizations came together to provide the foundation for the Farmer-Labor Party. Between 1930 and 1938 they were the dominant political force in the state, electing mayors and city council members, state legislators, representatives to Congress, senators, and the governor. The Farmer-Laborites' progressive legislation became the model for much of the federal New Deal, including relief for the poor, jobs for the unemployed, protection for workers' rights to organize, and security for family farmers.

The labor movement has fallen a great distance since the heady days of the 1930s. The last two decades have seen the unionization of the American workforce fall to one worker in seven, while unions' influence in political and economic life has been reduced to a whisper.

New signs of life are appearing, however. Not surprisingly, some have emerged on a regional basis. Boycotts, support for picket lines, aid for striking workers' families, and encouragement for organizing have picked up.

Today and Saturday the Meeting the Challenge conference will explore "Rebuilding the Labor Movement in the Upper Midwest." Activists from all over the Midwest will discuss their recent experiences in confronting corporate reorganization, resisting public sector privatization, and organizing the unorganized.

The new relationships they are building among themselves will begin to build a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts — a lesson learned by earlier generations of American workers. □

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## Text of Radio Interview with Leaders of Unity Victory Caucus

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*Continued from page 3*

But I think that, as union members and union brothers and sisters, we have the right and we have the obligation to speak out on how we feel and how we feel that the strike is directed. I know a lot of people are frustrated, and it may be uncomfortable for them to be on the receiving end of things, but that's just part of having a democratic union, for its members to be able to stand and have the right to speak up.

**Daymon:** If you don't have democracy in the union, where do you have it? You don't have it on the job — you don't get to elect your bosses and so it's not even a moral question. It's just smart.

Recently, the [union] president at WCI Steel who won the strike in Warren, Ohio, came up here and talked to us, and one of the things that

he said was very important and crucial to winning the strike there was that when the new leaders emerged in that strike and anybody came up with ideas, they were receptive to those ideas. They would tell them, "OK, you run with those ideas. You got 'em, you organize 'em, you get it done." And he said they could not have won the strike without the concerted effort of those members. And we're saying the same thing.

**WDET:** Whatever happens in the strike, is this going to change the makeup of the leadership, of the six unions individually and the Council as a whole?

**Daymon:** Insofar as the leadership of the unions in the future, I don't want to get into the politics, but I would say that the Metro Council leaders that recognize the importance of chang-

ing the direction of the strike and succeed in doing that will probably be the ones that will still be in office a couple of years from now. Because nothing succeeds like success.

**WDET:** OK. Thank you both. Daymon Hartley and Rick Torres are on strike at Detroit newspapers. Hartley is a *Free Press* photographer. Torres is a truck driver with the Teamsters Local 372. Both are members of the Unity Victory Caucus.

The spokesman for the Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions declined our request to respond to the caucus's claims. Tomorrow we'll talk with recently retired *Detroit Free Press* publisher Neil Shine about the strike and about his 46 years with the newspaper. □

January 13, 1996

## Meeting the Challenge Conference

# “Our Speakers’ Message — The Class War Is Not One-Sided”

Introductory remarks by David Riehle

*These remarks, by the chairman of United Transportation Union Lodge 650, introduced the conference’s first panel.*

In 1978 Douglas Fraser, then head of the United Auto Workers union, wrote a letter reporting his decision to resign from what was called the Labor-Management Group. This was a nongovernmental body made up of eight major corporation executives and eight top-level union officials. The group was chaired by John Dunlop, a former secretary of labor, and its stated purpose was to “arrive at cooperative approaches” to issues such as unemployment, rising health care costs, inflation, and other matters of mutual concern. The group could not agree and fell apart.

In his resignation statement Fraser said: “I believe that the leaders of the business community... have chosen to wage a one-sided class war today in this country — a war against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old...”

“At virtually every level,” Fraser said, “I see a demand by business for docile government and unrestrained corporate individualism. Where industry once yearned for subservient unions, it now wants no unions at all.”

We are gathered here to consider the question: “How can labor fight the corporate agenda?” This question already contains the presumption that the agenda of the corporations is not good for labor. While this might seem to be a given, there is at least some part of the labor movement that seeks to convince us that the corporate agenda is, or can be, good for labor.

This idea is embodied in concepts such as “worker-management cooperation,” “jointness,” and other disguised speed-up schemes. The first Meeting the Challenge conference, in January 1993, was organized in large part to argue against this — to say that labor can defend the interests of its members only by organizing independently of the employers, and on the basis of what the workers need, not what the employers want.

This of course suggests that there is some conflict between what the workers need and what the employers want. If that’s not true, you would think that life would be getting better for working people, instead of worse. As I think we all know, by almost every measurement — jobs, health care, education, pensions — workers lives are getting worse. There is general agreement, among working people at least, that this is the first generation in many decades which

can expect that its children’s futures will be poorer than their own.

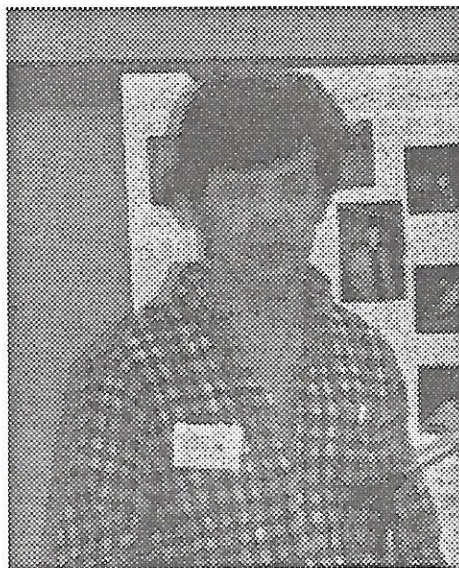
At the same time, corporations are getting richer and more arrogant as they merge, consolidate, and cut jobs and wages. You can open the newspaper in the morning and read, virtually on a daily basis, about the most recent job cuts — 3,000 here, 5,000 there, 44,000 at AT&T last month. And unlike even in the Great Depression, these job cuts are presented, not as failures of the system, but as successes! At the same time, private industry and government simultaneously repudiate any responsibility for the victims of their system.

Corporations openly proclaim that the idea of a lifetime job is outmoded, while government cuts benefits for the unemployed. Corporations steal pension funds while government seeks way to slash Social Security. Private employers provide inadequate or no health insurance while government slashes Medicare, Medicaid, and other safety net programs. Government, increasingly on a bipartisan basis, privatizes essential public services like transportation, education, health care, energy, utilities, even sewer and water systems, giving them away to greedy and incompetent private speculators, destroying tens of thousands of living-wage public sector jobs in the process. Where are people going to go, what are they going to do under these conditions? The truth is, there is no way out but to fight.

Douglas Fraser’s words — “one-sided class war” — ring even truer today than they did 18 years ago. Unions now include some 15 percent of the work force, down from 35 percent in the early 1950s. Strikes, the unions’ basic weapon of self-defense, are at a 50-year low. Last year there were only 345 strikes in the entire country, compared to 1,016 in 1985 and 3,005 in 1975. Is this because workers are more satisfied than they were in the 1950s and ’60s? Obviously not. This is one-sided class war.

This situation leads some people to conclude — as a result of either disappointment or wishful thinking — that unions are outmoded, finished, like dinosaurs. The organizers and sponsors of this conference don’t believe that this can or should be true. Working people have never accepted, and will not now accept, the erosion of their wages, security, and standard of life without a fight.

The picture of a one-sided class war is also one-sided. Local P-9 wasn’t a one-sided fight



David Riehle

— neither was Staley and neither is the Detroit newspaper strike. A one-sided war is mostly the result of leadership decisions — or indecision. Abraham Lincoln had a problem with generals who didn’t want to fight. He had to keep replacing them until he ended up with U.S. Grant. The American workers in the 1930s ended up with John L. Lewis. Maybe the AFL-CIO convention this past October was a beginning of the same process.

Unions are complex institutions. They have leaders, they have rank and file, they have histories, traditions — different pressures acting on them. What matters in the last analysis is that unions, whatever their defects, whatever their problems with hierarchies, bureaucracies, democracy, militancy, decisive action, are ultimately the authentic organizations of millions of working people. They are not static institutions. They will not stand still, and they are not standing still.

Our speakers today are an expression of the changes in the unions, the willingness of workers to struggle and to sacrifice to defend themselves, to engage in a two-sided class war. They come, so to speak, from the trenches. Their reports, taken together, ought to tell us that the class war is not one-sided, it is not over, and it will not be over until the rank and file have spoken the last word. □

## Meeting the Challenge Conference

# Understanding the Attack on Public Services and Workers

Introductory remarks by Kathy Kleckner

*These remarks, by the president of the University of Minnesota Clerical Workers Union, AFSCME Local 3800, introduced the next-to-last panel of the conference.*

**A**s we meet here today, at the Fourth Annual Meeting the Challenge Conference, we are facing unprecedented threats to our well-being. Many, if not all, of the public services most valuable and essential to us, such as Medicare, education, welfare, and Social Security, stand to be reduced and, for many of us, eliminated entirely. Corporate interests, hand in hand with politicians everywhere, are conducting a full-blown assault on the protections and services we need from our government.

Instead of a public discussion about *improving* and *expanding* the services that are seriously lacking for all of us, instead of government leaders working to establish universal health care or a really good mass transit system, we have been flooded with talk, hype, about budget problems, budget shortfalls, budget crises. We hear public officials saying, over and over, that the people of this city, state, or country “simply can no longer afford” public services and programs. It is really just like any employer saying that it cannot “afford” to pay decent wages. It is all part of the same agenda — the corporate agenda.

While the talk about spending cuts and balancing the budget sounds like the “fiscally responsible” thing to do, these goals are steeped in politics and are being carried out in the service of the few, the wealthy, *not* for the many, *not* for people like all of us here today.

The national debt is now over \$5 trillion. It is five times larger than when Ronald Reagan entered the White House just 15 years ago, in January 1981. We hear that the debt is now so large we must start feeling the pain of it. There is nothing else to be done, we are told, we must all pay and we must all sacrifice. Once again, as in everything, the powers that be are demanding that working people and the poor, the working poor, must pay the price and carry the burden.

At this point, just paying the *interest* on this debt is the largest expenditure in the federal budget. We spend more on this debt than anything else in the whole country. It is huge. It is being allowed to crowd out funding for all the benefits and services we need and want from our government.

Well, where did this debt come from? What are we being asked to sacrifice for? It is not complicated. The debt problem is primarily the result of two things: *one* is the enormous set of tax breaks and subsidies that the wealthy few have enjoyed, especially in the last 10–15 years; and *two* is massive military spending, which has really been nothing more than huge government handouts to defense contractors.

Even today the U.S. government has a larger military budget than the whole rest of the world combined. Our government spends more on weapons of destruction than the whole rest of the world, and this is *the same government* that says our public services must be cut.

As we continue our struggles to keep and improve public services, we must see this national debt problem for what it is: a primary symptom of a government that is serving the few at the expense of the many.

When we talk about the deficit we should be saying loud and clear that the *real* deficit in this country is a deficit in mass transit.

The real deficit in this country is the deficit in affordable and accessible day care for our children and in decent-paying jobs.

The real deficit in this country is in high-quality, accessible education for everyone and a peaceful, long retirement that everyone can look forward to with assurance that it will be there.

The real deficit in this country is in universal health care.

In terms of privatization, there is intense political pressure to attack the unionization level of public workers and drive down wages. Across the country, public workers have been the fastest organizing group of workers over the past 10 years. In Minnesota nearly 70 percent of all public workers are union. While only 20 percent of private sector workers are organized. This fact places public service workers in the cross hairs, a prime target of corporate interests as they pursue the elimination of unions.

As we know, unionization has fallen over the years in the private sector. They want to see the same in the public sector. Privatization is union busting and a very effective means to slash the wages and benefits of workers. In the name of

saving taxpayer dollars, privatization is driving down the quality of life for taxpayers everywhere and driving down the wage standard for everyone.

The struggle around privatization and public services is critically important to workers. It is a struggle that calls for unity and support across all kinds of groups of working class people. Issues around privatization and public service cutbacks must be focus points where union and non-union people connect and where the labor movement can show itself proudly to be the popular, broad-based force for progressive social change that it is. We need to be out with it, and explicit about it: the labor movement stands not only for high wages and seniority rights. The labor movement stands for a better life for everyone. That is our history, that is labor’s history, and more than ever, that must be our future.

The goals of organized labor must be openly and actively shared by all. In a recent Harris poll, put out by *Business Week*, the vast majority of Americans said they want our government to *guarantee* public services such as social security, nursing home care for the elderly, unemployment benefits, child care for the low-income mothers, and food stamps.

A majority of Americans even want the federal government to guarantee jobs for all. *Of course* these are the things people want from government. We want security. We want a healthy, well-cared-for community of people around us. That is what government is for and people know it.

So we are at a point in time when there is a tremendous contradiction between our interests and needs and the government’s corporate agenda. There is a gap between the government and the will of the people that is perhaps the widest it has ever been.

From out of this gap, working people can and must be mobilized, organized, to fight back against the attacks we are currently under.

We are happy to have as speakers here today members of the labor movement who have first-hand experience in the fightback against privatization and public service reductions. □

# Debt and Deficit: Propaganda and the Attack on the Working Class

by Michael Livingston

The author would like to thank Dr. Esmail Hosseinzadeh for helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article. All opinions, and any errors, are solely the author's.

The Republicans and Democrats have been relentlessly attacking the working class, transferring money to the capitalist class and destroying most of the programs that constitute a social wage for the vast majority of the U.S. population. The two capitalist parties appear driven by the shared belief that the huge national debt and the chronic federal budget deficit will destroy the U.S. economy. Much of the budget showdown between Clinton and the Republican Congress is a mere sideshow put on by both sides in an attempt to win popular support. While the sideshow unfolds before us, Clinton works in a "tacit alliance with the Republicans" to attack the working class. (See the article by Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon, "Clinton's tacit alliance with the Republicans to diminish government," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, January 15, 1996, p. A13.) As Cohen and Solomon observed:

Long ago, the president agreed to pursue a balanced budget while protecting huge Pentagon outlays, retaining corporate subsidies and ruling out substantial tax hikes for the wealthy. That leaves the rest of us to "sacrifice."

Sadly, but not unexpectedly, the capitalist media endlessly reassert the claim that a balanced budget is essential. Even the left press has failed to give much attention to this claim, the chief ideological justification for the most devastating government assault on the working class in this century. (For an important recent exception to this failure, see Edward S. Herman, "The Balanced Budget Ploy: The hidden agenda behind this propaganda campaign," *Z magazine*, February 1996, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 24-28. See also Bill Onasch, "The Great Budget Battle," *BIDOM*, February 1996.)

As Marx was fond of quoting, it is necessary to doubt everything. We should be especially doubtful of the reasons used to justify this intensified class war. I will argue that the national debt and the current budget deficits are not burning economic problems in this country and that instead the emphasis on these issues by both the Democrats and Republicans, the media, and the ruling class functions as a propaganda cam-

paign that serves to justify a massive one-sided attack on the majority of people in this country.

## Is the National Debt Crisis Real?

It would be fair to say that economists do not really agree on whether or not debt is bad. Classical Keynesian doctrine, for example, suggests that debt is good for the economy. Revolutionary socialists make critical use of mainstream economic theory and data, in the same way that Marx did, to help understand the world. We can draw from mainstream economics to show that the debt crisis is not real.

Robert Eisner, a prominent macroeconomist at Northwestern University, has made a strong case that this is not a real crisis.<sup>1</sup> Eisner lays out three arguments which together suggest that the national debt crisis is a hoax. First, the present system of measuring the debt is misleading because it does not take into account inflation. Second, the federal government does not distinguish between capital expenditures and operating expenditures (as all businesses do and most states do as well), while also failing to look at its own net worth. (The net worth of the federal government includes land, currency, machines, etc.) Third, the federal government has a number of different budgets, not all of which show deficits. To Eisner's three arguments we can add a fourth by Robert Heilbroner and Peter Bernstein.<sup>2</sup> Like Eisner, both are prominent mainstream economists who have argued that the debt crisis is not real. They argue that the debt must be looked at by comparing it to the national economy generated by the indebted country.

Inflation benefits the government (and others who are in debt) while the holders of the debt (the creditors) lose out. Eisner argues that "[f]or individuals, businesses, and government, it is the real debt — the debt after adjustment for inflation — that matters."<sup>3</sup> He illustrates this point with an example of consumer debt:

If we already owe \$100,000 on a mortgage loan on our home and then we borrow to spend \$5,000 more than our income, our total debt of course rises to \$105,000. But suppose, in the meantime, the value of a dollar has fallen 10 percent because of inflation. That, in effect, cuts

the real burden of our existing mortgage to \$90,000 just as surely as if, without inflation, we had somehow paid off \$10,000. Adding the \$5,000 of new borrowing gives us a new total debt of \$95,000. We started with a debt of \$100,000. Did our total debt then, in meaningful economic terms, or in constant purchasing power, rise by \$5,000 or fall by \$5,000?

But as our real debt declined, does it mean anything to say that we spend more than our income? Or should we rather recognize as part of our income the \$10,000 gain in the reduced real value of our debt? If we do, our spending was \$5,000 less than our income. We did not have a "deficit" of \$5,000. Instead, we had a surplus.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the official measures can show substantial yearly budget deficits while the real value of the national debt goes down.<sup>5</sup>

Eisner illustrates this paradox powerfully by using per capita debt in constant dollars. A summary of his figures (see Table 1) shows that real per capita debt has fallen dramatically between 1945 and 1984.<sup>6</sup> Even after the enormous budget deficits of Reagan's first term (which stimulated the economy and led to the so-called Reagan recovery), the real value of per capita debt in 1984 is almost half of what it was in 1945!

Table 1  
The Real Value of Per Capita Federal Debt, 1945-1984

Years	Mean Net Debt per Capita
1945-49	\$3,088
1950-54	\$2,144
1955-59	\$1,761
1960-64	\$1,615
1965-69	\$1,407
1970-74	\$1,242
1975-79	\$1,312
1980-84	\$1,571

The "tricks played by inflation," as Eisner terms this paradox, "suggest that our conventional measures of the budget deficit are devoid of much of their presumed economic relevance."<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of these misleading measures many policy makers and economists were misled into making poor policy decisions, for example, during the Carter administration. In terms of the current bipartisan drive to balance the budget in order to reduce the federal deficit, ignoring inflation leads to idiocy.

This idiocy is compounded because the discussion of the federal deficit ignores the issues of capital investment and net worth. Most businesses in the U.S. are also in debt, yet investors never focus mindlessly on debt without also looking at assets and net worth. If we were to look just at business debt, as we do at the national

1. Robert Eisner, *How Real Is the Federal Deficit?* New York: Free Press, 1986.

2. Robert L. Heilbroner and Peter L. Bernstein, *The Debt and the Deficit: False Alarms/Real Possibilities*, New York: Norton, 1989.

3. Eisner (1986), p. 10.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 21. Per capita debt is rounded to the nearest dollar. The per capita debt for each 5-year period was calculated by taking the mean of the yearly figures for each time interval.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

debt, most people would be amazed, for example, by the following data that Eisner cites:

At the end of 1952, gross federal debt held by the public was 62 percent of GNP, while the debt of nonfinancial business came to 32 percent... By 1979, the federal debt ratio had fallen by more than half, to 26.5 percent, but the business debt figure had risen to nearly double that, or 52 percent. By 1984 the federal debt held by the public had risen to almost 37 percent, but business debt was then 55 percent of GNP.<sup>8</sup>

Any sensible assessment of the national debt and deficit crisis would also examine federal assets and federal net worth. And this is precisely what Eisner and his coworkers have done.

Eisner constructs government balance sheets which show the market values or estimated replacement costs of all tangible and financial assets as well as liabilities. Two shocking conclusions pop out at you from Eisner's analysis. First, while total liabilities grew during the 1970s, total assets grew considerably more during that same period.<sup>9</sup> Thus net worth increased substantially during this period. Second, much of the deficit was accounted for by investment in capital goods. The federal government, unlike business and most states, does not keep separate capital and current accounts. If it did, the capital account would include outlays which yield long-term benefits, including money spent on construction, equipment, inventory investment, research and development, and education and training. As Eisner points out, much of each year's budget deficit can be accounted for by investment.

Eisner concludes, in a perhaps overstated fashion: "When we add the inflation adjustments discussed earlier and relate all this to growth of population and the economy, we may easily have no deficit at all."<sup>10</sup>

While the national debt and federal budget deficits are real, they are overstated and exaggerated in order to serve as an ideological justification for the Democrats and Republicans merciless attack on the American people.

A third argument is that there are a variety of budgets, not all of which show deficits. The budget which is in deficit, the budget talked about by Congress, the president, and the media, is the "unified budget." The unified budget "is a consolidated account of the expenditures and receipts of all the federal departments and agencies, and the outlays and receipts of trust funds. These last include the major social security funds, federal employee and railroad retirement funds, the highway trust fund, and a number of others."<sup>11</sup>

Focus on the unified budget hides important issues. For example, throughout the 1980s, the various social trust funds had surpluses of many billions of dollars. These surpluses were used to cover deficits generated by the military buildup and to pay for the growth in interest payments due to the military buildup.<sup>12</sup> Excluding these surpluses from the unified budget would have revealed even greater budget deficits than were apparent during the Reagan and Bush administrations and the source of those deficits: military spending and tax cuts for the rich and their corporations. If a corporation had stolen from the workers' pension fund to purchase equipment and give bonuses to executives, that corporation would have violated the law. The Democrats and Republicans feel free to rob the workers' social funds at every turn. No law stops them.

At present, the social trust funds still run a surplus — a surplus which would swell if the federal government had any intention of paying back the \$400 billion it has "borrowed." There is a threat to these funds from the growing cost of medical treatment. The proper way to address this threat is not to cut benefits from these funds or to privatize them, as some Republicans are now suggesting. The solution lies with a national health care system that benefits people, not corporations.<sup>13</sup>

The focus on the unified budget also permits the Democrats and Republicans to balance the budget by selling off national assets at bargain basement prices. The unified budget provides a cover for what in plain English would be called looting. It's looting of the national wealth by the wealthy, but it's looting nevertheless.

As individuals we always think of our debt in terms of our income (as well as our assets — though, unfortunately, most of us don't have many assets). So too with the national debt. Heilbroner and Bernstein have done this for the national debt by using the gross national product, a rough measure of national income. Here's what they find:

The national debt was a considerably larger proportion of our GNP in the 1950s and 1960s than it is today. Actually, in 1952 the ratio of debt to GNP had already greatly declined from its war-swollen level of 1945, when the net debt of the government was bigger by ten percent than total GNP.<sup>14</sup>

In 1952, the debt was 63 percent of the GNP. By 1972, that had dropped to 28 percent. After eight years of Reagan, the debt was 43 percent of the GNP.<sup>15</sup>

Taking into account all four factors — the effects of inflation; the growth of federal assets and net worth; the substantial budget surpluses in some of the significant budgets other than the unified budget; and the relative size of the national debt compared to the national economy — we are forced to one inescapable conclusion: the federal deficits and national debt are simply not that big!

### Is the National Debt Bad?

Federal deficits and the national debt are not necessarily bad. Eisner, for instance, has defended the classical Keynesian position that deficits are good for a capitalist economy. He makes three arguments in support of this proposition. First, government debt is someone else's wealth. Second, deficits (as measured in real dollars) can be shown to be linked with growth in the U.S. economy. And third, deficits can also be shown to be linked to growth in the economies of other core capitalist states.

The U.S. debt is owned primarily by — people in the United States! As of 1984, the last year for which Eisner had data, U.S. government agencies and trust funds, together with the Federal Reserve Bank, held 27.1 percent of the debt. Foreign governments, individuals, and corporations, in contrast, held 11.6 percent of the debt. The remainder was held by Americans or American banks, money market funds, insurance companies, or other U.S. corporations.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. debt is thus a part of the ruling class's wealth, or as Eisner puts it, "public deficits... create private surpluses."<sup>17</sup>

Deficit spending creates a redistributive dynamic which transfers tax dollars, paid in the main by working class Americans, to the wealthy and their corporations. For this redistributive dynamic to transfer real wealth to the wealthy, however, interest rates must be low, so that the holders of the debt do not suffer from the effects of inflation on their holdings. This is one of the sources of the mainstream media's obsession with inflation (as opposed to an emphasis on wages or jobs, for example). The ruling class must have a compelling reason to abandon this upward redistribution, as it appears to be doing. As I will argue below, they do indeed have a compelling reason.

By failing to adequately measure debts and deficits, economists have made a mistake common in the social sciences — they have built their theories upon mismeasured phenomena. In the fluid social world that is the domain of the social sciences, accurate measurement is difficult and theories built upon mismeasured phe-

*Continued on page 39*

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 28.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–30.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 34. Also see Herman (1996), p. 25.

13. Herman (1996), p. 26.

14. Heilbroner and Bernstein (1989), p. 42.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Eisner (1986), p. 42.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

# "The Time Has Come to End Business as Usual"

by Jed Dodd

*Jed Dodd is general chairman of the Pennsylvania Federation of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE). Following is the text of his presentation at labor party platform hearings sponsored by New Jersey LPA at the Rutgers University Labor Education Center on November 11, 1995. Subheads have been added.*

Brothers and Sisters:

The BMWE is one of 11 craft unions that collectively represent approximately 200,000 railroad workers in the United States and Canada. Our particular union represents the men and women who build and maintain the nation's railroad tracks, buildings, bridges, and overhead catenary systems. We perform tough, hard, dangerous work. We work night and day, in the pouring rain, snowstorms, and blizzards to insure that the freight vital to our country moves across the railroad and passengers reach their destinations on time.

Management often complains that our work rules are unproductive, and the media repeats their lies about featherbedding. One of these tough unproductive rules is the rule that requires management to provide 5 days advance notice before abolishing our positions. While management takes their golden parachutes to economic paradise we wait for our 40 hour notice.

Working conditions for our production workers resemble those conditions often attributed to migrant workers. Our production workers work far from home and live in camp cars, which are sheds on flatcars that provide sleeping bunks to live in along the railroad track. Most of our production workers are lucky if they get to work 8 months a year.



Jed Dodd

Since 1986, 98 of our members nationally have been killed working on the railroad. They have been slaughtered on management's altar of production. Forty-five of these individuals were struck and killed by moving trains, for which the dead employee was provided no advance warning that the train was coming. Since 1989

there have been 2,400 accidents which involved men and machinery being hit by trains or track equipment. Clinton's Federal Railroad Administration has refused to issue a regulation that requires employees who work on the railroad be given advance warning that a train is coming. Recently we struck Conrail over these condi-

### LPA News Roundup: AFGE Backs LPA

## Fifth National Union Supports Labor Party

As momentum builds toward the founding convention called by Labor Party Advocates, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) became the fifth national union to support this effort. The first national union was the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), which started the ball rolling at its national convention in August 1991. The United Electrical Workers (UE) soon added its support, and in July 1994, a third union, the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE), signed on. [See the speech by Jed Dodd, a BMWE leader, on this page.] In August 1995 the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) became the fourth national endorser, and is now joined by the fifth, the AFGE.

As reported in the January-February 1996 *Labor Party Advocate*, the National Executive Council of AFGE by a vote of 14-3 authorized "our Local leaders to get involved with the local Labor Party chapters across the country" and "resolved...that representatives of the NEC participate in the Labor Party Convention to be held in Cleveland in June 1996."

Also, over the past five years a number of regional labor bodies have endorsed LPA, especially in California — for example, the California State Council of Carpenters; the California Association of Nurses; the San Francisco Labor Council; the San Francisco Building Trades Council; the Santa Cruz County Central Labor Council; and the Santa Barbara/San Luis Obispo Building and Construction Trades Council.

Other regional bodies backing LPA include the New Jersey Industrial Union Council; the Midstate (New York) Central Labor Council; the White River Central Labor Council, South Central Indiana; Butler County (Penn.) United Labor Council; and South

Central Federation of Labor, Madison, Wisconsin.

A 20,000-member Teamsters local in Chicago, the second largest in the Teamsters union, recently voted to endorse LPA, as did two locals of the United Transportation Union (UTU) in Minnesota, as well as a rail union in the Seattle area. Among the dozens of other local unions that have endorsed are: Carpenters Local 1359, Toledo, Ohio; Teamsters Local 922, Washington, D.C.; UTU Local 1402, Collinsville, Ill.; GCIU Local 15N, Columbus, Ohio; SEIU Local R14-164, Bexar County, Texas; IAM Local 1746A, Southington, Conn.; Teamsters Local 877, Linden, NJ; NALC Branch 936, High Point, NC; GCIU Local 546M, Cleveland, Ohio; AFSCME Local 634, Madison, Wis.; District 1199 (SEIU); HERE Local 217, Hartford, Conn.; CWA Local 1033, Trenton, NJ; and many, many more.

As an example of the kind of resolutions being adopted by union locals, and the kind of arguments for a labor party being made within organized labor, we are reprinting three documents: an article from the publication of the 5,000-member Bakery Workers Local 19 in Cleveland, written by Barbara Walden, the local's president; the text of the resolution passed by Local 19 in support of LPA; and the text of the speech made at LPA hearings in New Jersey in November by Jed Dodd, president of the Pennsylvania Federation of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees. (While Jed Dodd's speech is similar to others he has given, the later sections on Clinton's National Mediation Board are new, and especially telling.) We also reprint an appeal to artists, writers, and other cultural workers to participate in the labor party founding convention.



## Artists' Appeal for a Labor Party

*This appeal was issued by the Cultural Action Committee of the Industrial Union Council of New Jersey (CAC, IUC, NJ), AFL-CIO. For More Information, Phone: (908) 220-1472, or Fax: (908) 296-1325.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,  
A historic opportunity is opening for artists concerned with the future of art and labor.

On June 6-9, over a thousand working-class leaders and activists will converge on Cleveland, Ohio, for the founding convention of a labor party in the United States. The convention is called by Labor Party Advocates (LPA.)

LPA is firmly rooted in the trade-union movement. It has the endorsement and active support of several important international unions and numerous district, state, and local labor organizations, representing hundreds of thousands of workers.

Our goal is a party which will challenge the employers' two parties in the streets, in the workplace, and at the ballot box.

The formation of a labor party would mark a watershed for the progressive forces of this country. It would provide a vehicle to address the struggles for international solidarity, for women's rights, for the rights of oppressed peoples, immigrant workers and others marginalized or demonized by the capitalist class. It would mark the rebirth of class-consciousness and a rekindling of the vision of a world of peace and justice.

As artists and cultural workers, we have a special responsibility to help illuminate that future. The formation of a labor party would provide an opportunity for the organic linking of the struggles of workers and artists in a way not seen in decades. It would mark an impetus for lively and critical art-making.

We issue this appeal to all painters, writers, poets, designers, architects, musicians, sculptors, film and video makers, actors, critics — to all artists and cultural activists without exception. Join us for a special convening of artists in Cleveland, to help shape a cultural agenda, along with the convention itself. Perhaps we can initiate actions which will inspire new generations of artists to use

their art as a weapon for the transformation of society.

In Solidarity,

Mike Alewitz, Labor Art & Mural Project,  
CAC, IUC, NJ

Rudolf Baranik, Artist, New York, NY

Elise Bryant, Artistic Director, Labor  
Theatre Project, Ann Arbor, MI

Brett Butler, "Grace Under Fire," Studio  
City, CA

David Craven, Art History Dept., University  
of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM

Thiago DeMello, Composer, Musician, New  
York, NY

Dagoberto Gilb, Writer, Carpenter, El Paso,  
TX

J. R. Horne, Actor, President, NY AFTRA,  
New York, NY

Gary Huck, Cartoonist, UE;  
Huck-Konopacki Cartoons, Pittsburgh, PA

Tom Juravich, Labor Center, University of  
MA, Amherst, MA

Charley King, Musician, AFM, CT

Mike Konopacki, Cartoonist,  
Huck-Konopacki Cartoons, Madison, WI

Lucy Lippard, Author and Critic,  
Albuquerque, NM

John McCutcheon, Musician, AFM, VA

Betsy Salkind, Nat'l Chair, AFTRA/SAG  
Comedians Caucus, CA

Pete Seeger, Beacon, NY

May Stevens, Artist, New York, NY

Rachel Weiss, Art Institute of Chicago,  
Chicago, IL

tions, and a federal judge ordered us back to work after 12 hours. We earn our money with our sweat and our blood.

I am the chairman of the Pennsylvania Federation, which represents those workers who are employed by Conrail, Amtrak, parts of the CSX System, and several smaller railroads in the Northeast. Our name does not come from the state of Pennsylvania but rather from the former Pennsylvania Railroad, and our jurisdiction covers the 14 states in the Northeast and Midwest that once composed the Pennsylvania Railroad. Our union is over 100 years old and has always been considered an extremely conservative and traditional business union.

At our last international convention in July 1994, my international union became the third

union in the country to endorse Labor Party Advocates. After intense debate a majority of delegates expressed their disgust with the two-party system — with the Democratic Party in particular — and voted to have our union join Labor Party Advocates.

### The Republican Congress and the Democrats' Record

Despite this success, however, I am really depressed today, speaking here in front of you. The world has come apart. You all know the source of my depression — our shared grief. The Republican Party has taken over control of both Houses of Congress. The Democrats, labor's "great friends," are in disarray. President Clinton is on the ropes. The new order is now

in power. A one-sided class war has been declared, and the shrill voice of capital is demanding that we surrender our dignity, run for the hills, get jobs at McDonalds, and decertify our unions. Grand Wizard Gingrich and his new Republicans have instituted a new dress code in Congress. Congressmen and women will now be required to wear sheets and hoods when they debate the finer points of the new order.

Seriously, do you realize what this new Republican-dominated Congress might do? They might not pass the striker replacement bill. They might try to eliminate the Railroad Retirement System, which provides railroad workers with benefits greater than Social Security at an extra cost to our members and our employers and no extra cost to the government. They might intervene in a railroad strike and order us back to work under horrible conditions — at a real wage loss — despite massive productivity increases on the part of our members and despite the fact that we could win the strike and secure our fair share of the value we produce. They might even wholesale the American working class and pass NAFTA or GATT. They might eliminate Amtrak. And so on — and so on. Why, they might not even provide United States citizens with a health care plan.

I realize I am painting a horrible picture. But the picture I am painting is a Democratic Party picture. All of the atrocities I have just described have all occurred during Congressional sessions in which both Houses were controlled by Democrats. Most of them occurred while a Democrat was president of the United States.

There are still things left for the Republicans to go after — and they will. But one of the reasons I am up here today — one reason that I am a dyed-in-the-wool supporter of Labor Party Advocates — is that I have seen what our "friends," the deregulating, free market, restructuring, strike-breaking, privatization-happy Democrats are willing to do to our membership. And what they are willing to do — what they have done — is not very different from what the Republicans have done and will do. It is the difference between dying from a heart attack or dying slowly from cancer. Or to put it more fundamentally it is the difference between shit and diarrhea.

Both parties represent wealth in this country. The only time we have increased our portion of the value that we produce is when we fight them in the streets. And the only time we are going to get anything valuable from Congress is when a majority of the members in both Houses support an agenda which benefits the working people and the poor of the United States — an agenda that will be adopted by Labor Party Advocates and followed by millions of hard-working Americans.

### Not an Ideological Question

Please do not misunderstand me. The idea of a third party or Labor Party is not an ideological question for me or the members of my union, but simply an empirical question. My job is to represent the membership and lead them through collective action to improve our work-

ing lives and increase our share of the value we produce. It is not to run around spouting ideological pipe dreams. If the Democrats provided a framework in which the union could grow and advance the material conditions and rights of our membership we would be stalwart defenders of the Democratic Party. I would apply this standard equally to the Republican Party. I believe that it is still very important to apply this standard to individual politicians of all parties.

We need some objective criteria by which to measure the relative impact of the two parties as they affect the political process that affects us. These standards should include: matters that directly impact upon our memberships in particular and directly impact upon poor and working people in general; expansion of rights to organize and level the playing field between labor and capital so that the material conditions for labor can advance; reducing the chance of war and eliminating racism and sexism and the effects that these cancers have on the ability of the working class to unite and advance economically. When these standards are applied to both of the major parties they fail to varying degrees in every respect.

Under Jimmy Carter we learned what happens when we have a Democratic President and a Democratic House and Senate. Labor law reform that was designed to level the playing field between labor and capital was defeated in Jimmy Carter's administration. Real wages continued to decline under Jimmy Carter's administration. The foundation for the deregulation of the railroad industry was laid under Jimmy Carter's administration. This legislation was supported through the Senate by the great Democrat and "friend of labor," Ted Kennedy.

In 1979 under a regulated rail environment there were 600,000 rail workers in the United States. Now there are less than 200,000. Four hundred thousand decent, hard-working Americans lost their jobs in deregulation schemes sponsored by the Democrats and initiated when the Democrats had control of both the White House and Congress.

When Reagan came along we learned what happens when the Republicans control the White House and the Senate. We witnessed the brutalization of PATCO. We saw tax relief that restructured the wealth of the country to insure that the rich receive larger percentages of the country's value at the expense of working people and the poor. We saw a massive military buildup and a massive assault on civil rights and civil liberties. When our union struck in 1991 and was locked out in 1992, it took a proactive Democratic Congress to cooperate with President Bush to order us back to work and crush our collective bargaining struggle. The working lives of our members were destroyed because of Democratic Party collusion with the Republican administration. Regardless of what party has been in power, real wages and the standard of living for all working Americans has declined for 25 years.

What changed when the Democrats won control of the House, Senate, and White House

under Bill Clinton? Every day that Bill Clinton was on the campaign trail he would state that those in the top 1 percent of personal net worth in this country had been able to double their share of value under the Republican White House at the expense of the bottom 70 percent. We have not heard the Democratic President say this once since the day he was elected to office. When push comes to shove we have seen time and time again, a majority of both the Democratic and Republican parties unite to destroy the fundamental rights of the American working class and to participate in the material disintegration of our living standards to benefit the few and the powerful.

In my union we have people in Washington, D.C., who function as lobbyists for my members. Most of them are good people — committed to uplifting the living conditions of my membership. But unfortunately they get so caught up in the process that they lose sight of the big picture. There was a time in history when U.S. workers had the right to organize and fight under law. There was a time in U.S. history when railroad workers could strike and would not be immediately ordered back to work. There was a time in U.S. history when our members knew they had secure jobs that paid union wages and when the U.S. government *encouraged* union membership. Those days are gone, despite the fact that both Houses of Congress have been controlled by the Democrats almost continuously since 1948.

We have allowed our benefits and our rights to erode to such a degree that we don't even remember what we had and that when we had it, it wasn't enough. But our lobbyists keep telling us to back the Democrats blindly — because we still have more to lose. The voices of collaboration and continuous compromise in our unions do not realize the simple fact that we lost the ability to properly advance our conditions twenty years ago.

### **Industry Deregulated but Labor Still Regulated**

Our industry has been deregulated at a tremendous cost to our members. Although the industry has been deregulated, the labor relations process continues to remain highly regulated. The politicians have no problem permitting railroad management to loot the assets of our physical plants and to compete in the free market with the other transportation modes, but they simply will not permit labor the same rights to compete in the marketplace that they have granted capital.

We must bargain under the auspices of the Railway Labor Act, which is administered by the National Mediation Board. Under President Bush the NMB was used to promote the interests of railroad management and to prevent rail labor from obtaining decent collective bargaining agreements. On Conrail we were literally in mediation for three years. During the first two years of mediation the NMB only called two meetings. The law permits the government to literally trample upon our collective bargaining rights. We are not permitted to legally strike

when in mediation. We were not released from mediation and permitted to strike until we seized the offices of the National Mediation Board with 200 of our members from across the Conrail and Amtrak systems. When we were released from mediation and finally permitted to strike, President Bush ordered us to stay at work and appointed an Emergency Board that recommended a contract that reduced real wages and devastated working conditions. Rail management then locked out all of the rail unions nationally from one coast to the other coast. Management held the country hostage in a nationwide lockout until a Democratic-controlled Congress passed legislation that stripped us of our right to strike a single management locally and forced us to accept unacceptable contracts.

### **Rail Mediation under Clinton**

We had some hopes that President Clinton's National Mediation Board would be less hostile to rail labor than President Bush's National Mediation Board. We were particularly hopeful when President Clinton appointed Ernest Dubester to head the NMB. Ernest Dubester is the former Deputy Legislative Director for the AFL-CIO. On November 1, 1994, we served our contract demands on Conrail to be effective January 1, 1995. On November 1, 1994, Conrail sued us in Federal District Court in Washington, D.C., to require us to participate in multi-employer bargaining against our will.

This is an issue that we are almost certain to win one day because the law supports our position that such arrangements need to be consensual and not forced onto either party. However, this legal hocus pocus does result in tremendous delay as we work our way through the courts. This delay only benefits Conrail management. Currently Conrail, like most of the major railroads in the United States, is earning about \$1.6 million a day. Every day that Conrail does not have to make an agreement is another day that Conrail does not have to bargain over the distribution of this money.

We do not wish to participate in multi-employer bargaining because we think it is far less likely that Congress will intervene in a specific dispute on one rail carrier. It is guaranteed that Congress will intervene in a national dispute that involves most of the major railroads in the United States. In the present political framework, government intervention means that we will not obtain the contract that we could obtain if the government simply stayed out of our disputes.

Naturally Conrail has refused to come to the collective bargaining table. On January 3, 1995, we requested mediation from the former Deputy Legislative Director of the AFL-CIO. President Clinton's "reformer" refused to docket our case for mediation. He stated he could not remain neutral in the eyes of rail management if he granted mediation of the objections to Conrail's legal position.

We have a right to suspend negotiations under the Railway Labor Act and if the NMB does not intervene in ten days and proffer mediation,

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# The Case for an American Labor Party

by Barbara Walden

*This article is reprinted from the official publication of Bakers Local 19 in Cleveland, Ohio. The author is president of the local.*

**W**hen the idea of joining a labor-based political party was proposed to me, my reaction was, "Great — where do I sign?" I thought anyone who believes in the labor movement would react the same way, but I was wrong. There seems to be some sort of stigma attached to the idea of a worker-based political party, a fear of being labeled communist or socialist. Have we forgotten that those were the very names applied to the early trade unionists by those who hated to see their absolute control of people's working lives slipping away? If those early fighters for workers' rights had been scared off by a little name-calling, where would working people, and our standard of living, be today?

I think we have to ignore that kind of name calling and concentrate on the idea — is it a

good one or isn't it? Are we happy with what goes on in Washington or aren't we?

Trade policies such as NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] and GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] have been passed over the strenuous objections of labor, which foresaw massive losses of American jobs and downward pressure on our standard of living. Subsequent events have shown that labor was right. The right of American workers to strike, earned with their very blood, has been lost for all practical purposes. Agencies such as OSHA [Occupational Health and Safety Administration], which protects worker safety, and the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board], which enforces worker rights, are in danger of being budgeted out of existence. And even as American workers become more

productive, their real wages continue to decline. All this while corporate profits rise to record levels.

Am I saying that labor has no friends among the Democrats or the Republicans? No, just that there aren't enough of them, and that the system is too far under the control of corporate interests for them to change it from within. I believe the change has to come from outside, in the form of a new party committed to the belief that the economy should serve the people, not that the people should serve the economy.

I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on this. Please call or write to me at the union office. □

## Resolution In Favor of a Labor-Based Political Party

**Whereas** in June of 1996, Cleveland will be the site of the founding convention of a new, labor-based political party; and

**Whereas** this convention is being organized by LABOR PARTY ADVOCATES, a national education group dedicated to spreading the idea of the need to create a new, labor-based political party to push for the needs of American workers in the political arena; and

**Whereas** this convention has, to date, been endorsed by four international unions, and numerous state and local unions; and

**Whereas** at this founding convention, the structure and platform of the new political party will be debated and decided democratically; and

**Whereas** the officers, Executive Board, and members of BC&T [Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco] Local No. 19 are concerned about the continuing de-

terioration of organized labor's influence in the political debate that will determine the future of our country; and

**Whereas** we see the decline in the standard of living of the average American and the growing concentration of wealth in an ever-smaller percentage of the population as ominous signs for the future; and

**Whereas** unions and working Americans in general are under increasing attack as conservative forces seek to weaken basic worker rights and protections such as the right to organize and the right to safe working conditions; and

**Whereas** this development cannot be stemmed without a clear and forceful effort on the part of organized labor in the political arena; and

**Whereas** the lack of commitment on the part of the two major parties to the rights and long-term interests of working Americans leave us with the conviction that the time has come for union mem-

bers and other working Americans to support the creation of an alternative political movement which will clearly represent the interests of the vast majority of Americans and be responsive to them;

**Now therefore be it resolved** that the officers, Executive Board, and members of BC&T Local 19 go on record as endorsing and supporting Labor Party Advocates' call for a founding convention of a labor-based political party to be held in Cleveland in June of 1996; and

**Be it further resolved** that the officers, Executive Board, and members of BC&T Local 19 go on record as urging the General Executive Board of the Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers International Union to endorse and support the June 1996 convention.

**Adopted unanimously by the Executive Board of Bakers' Local Union No. 19 this 20th day of January, 1996.**

*Barbara Walden, President*

## Discussion

# LPA Should Be the Major Focus for All Socialists

by Bill Onasch

*The author is president of the Kansas City area chapter of Labor Party Advocates, and recent candidate in his local of the Amalgamated Transit Union.*

**T**he labor party question has been hotly debated among revolutionary socialists in this country almost from the beginning. I won't attempt here to review all the arguments and their history. For now I'll just say that I identify with the tradition that argues that:

- Because of various historical factors, which led to trade union consciousness far outpacing political class consciousness, the creation of a mass party based on the organized labor movement is a likely development in the radicalization of the U.S. working class.
- This can be a highly progressive break with capitalist politics — even if initially the party has a less than revolutionary program and is dominated by the labor bureaucracy.
- Revolutionary socialists should be active in advocating and building such a party while trying to shape its program, strategy and tactics, and structure.

I have been promoting this traditional perspective for over thirty years but only rarely experienced any glimmers of interest. In 1967 the Twin Cities branch of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) distributed a leaflet calling for a labor party to a mass demonstration of railroad shop craft workers in St Paul. The shop craft federation, then locked in battle with the Johnson administration, liked the leaflet and requested permission to reprint it under their name. We waived our copyright protection and allowed them to do so, but nothing much came of it.

In 1977 I introduced a labor party resolution at the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers (UE) national convention. It was adopted unanimously with great applause, but again nothing practical developed. Until very recently the labor party has been pretty much a propaganda slogan, one of many good ideas that we advance that are embraced by only a handful of radicalizing workers and youth.

### Significance of LPA

When Tony Mazzocchi first advanced the LPA idea I was careful not to get my hopes up. And for the first couple of years, it didn't seem to be getting off the ground. But over the past couple of years — since the defeat around NAFTA — some fresh forces have begun to come around LPA, and real activity and serious discussion is being generated.

Clearly Labor Party Advocates is the most significant show of support for a labor party in the United States since the 1945-47 upsurge. LPA is not yet a genuine mass organization and it is far from certain that this particular initiative will succeed in actually launching a viable labor party. At this point it is quite fragile, and vulnerable to attacks from both right and left. But the endorsement

of five international unions, dozens of locals and central labor bodies, and the adherence of a few thousand individual members is a promising beginning. It is time to shift from propaganda to agitation.

*In my opinion, there is no more important task for U.S. socialists today than building LPA.*

### A Gathering Place for Class-Struggle Left Wing of Labor Movement

LPA is important because of its premise of establishing a party based on the working class — a fundamental prerequisite for working class emancipation that has eluded many generations. It is also acting as a gathering spot for a class-struggle left wing — a fragmented constituency that was a centerpiece of the SWP's strategy before that party's degeneration.

This class-struggle left wing is by no means simply the members of the various left groups. Some political leftists are part of it; others, even if union members, are not. I'm talking about militant unionists who are not only eager to take on their own employer but who are beginning to understand the need for wider solidarity, who are prepared to do whatever is necessary to win justice for workers. The kind of people who, over the past decade, put places like Austin, Minnesota, Watsonville, California, and Decatur, Illinois, on the map.

There are others who became motivated around NAFTA, recognize the need for international solidarity, and have established links with working people in Mexico and elsewhere. We can convince these fighters of the need for political organization. But we also need to create a suitable organization that can attract and unify these various individuals and networks.

### Now Needed: Patient Pedagogy, Not Evangelical Zeal

Among this layer is a great deal of uneven and combined development. Relying on their individual experiences, they race ahead in some areas while remaining backward in others. We need to be sensitive to this. Nor are all components of LPA part of the

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Bill Onasch

## Discussion

# What Should Come Out of Our Founding Convention?

by Bill Onasch

*The following article is reprinted from the January, 1996, newsletter of Kansas City Area Labor Party Advocates.*

**T**his June hundreds of delegates from across the country will gather in Cleveland to launch a Labor Party. What will this new party look like? What will it stand for? What will it do? These most basic of questions are yet to be resolved. They will be addressed in spirited discussions in the local chapters and within union bodies. Ultimately, after further debates at the convention, they will be decided by the delegates. It is time for us to start focusing on our objectives for this convention.

### Electoral Politics

Certainly the party that emerges out of Cleveland won't much resemble the Democrats or Republicans. The differences will be mostly good. We want a new kind of party that works for, and is run by labor instead of for and by the bosses.

But we should also be sober about our immediate prospects. The major parties are powerful, well-financed vote-hustling machines. Their whole purpose, and inner dynamics, revolve around the election cycle. For 130 years they have succeeded in freezing out any serious competitors. While political and social changes can sometimes come abruptly and unexpectedly, we have to face the fact that it is unlikely we will be able to mount a credible electoral challenge to the bosses' parties any time soon.

So far LPA has had a strict policy of neither running nor endorsing candidates for office. The leaders who took the initiative in forming LPA mostly want to maintain that policy. I would agree with that perspective — for the short term. Although the two major parties are principally electoral machines, politics is certainly much more than just elections. There are non-electoral political groups that exercise considerable influence — the Christian Coalition and United We Stand America, for example. While we won't have much in common with such pro-business groups, we can learn something from their tactics, which have helped determine the political agenda and frame the terms of debate in this country.

The main tasks of the fledgling Labor Party should be to educate, agitate, and organize around a political program for the working class. We need to create a realistic vision of the way things could be better in our society while starting to build a structure capable of fighting to make that vision a reality.

There are plenty of things we can do outside elections — public meetings; leaflet distributions; radio and TV talk show appearances and commercials; write letters to publications; send out speakers to organizations; issue position papers; [hold] demonstrations; picnics, concerts and dances for fun and profit — the list can go on and on.

In the long term, we will want to challenge the bosses' parties through elections as well, so we can win the power necessary to implement our program. It is true that if we run for office prematurely we will be seen as just another "fringe group." But it is also

just as true that if we say we will never run candidates, we will not be taken seriously as a political alternative.

One of the guest speakers at our February conference compared LPA to a union organizing drive. That's a good analogy. Our organizers have found some interest and even picked up some authorization cards. Our founding convention should map out the campaigns needed to win at least the sympathy, if not active participation, of a majority. So far we have won over only a small percentage of the organized labor movement and, of course, the majority of the working class is unorganized. We're a long way from being ready for an election. We need to train for the marathon — not the 100-meter dash.

Some will ask, "If we don't run or endorse candidates, what will we do at election time this November?" Some of our members will, with clenched teeth, vote for Clinton as a "lesser evil." Others will express a protest by voting for one of the many "alternative" candidates, who span the spectrum from far-left to far-right. Many, perhaps a majority, will conclude that there is no good reason to vote for any of the above and will skip the whole process.

Personally, I will probably opt for #2 and cast some kind of protest vote. But I don't pretend that any of these options will have much practical effect on anything. We should try to take advantage of the election season by getting out our ideas, contrasting them to the other parties, and recruiting new members. We shouldn't get too distracted by the appeal for votes.

### Our Platform

So far we have not only stayed out of elections. We also do not have any official positions on any issues. Developing a platform is probably the single most important job for our convention. This is how we will define who we are and where we want to go.

There is hardly any conceivable issue that doesn't affect the working class in one way or another. But I think it would be a mistake to try to deal with every issue in our founding platform. We should begin with some priorities that we have general agreement on within LPA and that will strike a popular chord among working people. As our party matures, and gains credibility, we can begin to broaden the scope of issues to take up.

Some issues we should avoid like the plague — gun control, for example. This complex and highly-charged topic has attracted the strangest political bedfellows on both sides. We should leave it alone, at least for the present.

Instead we should focus on those questions that affect living standards, job security, workplace conditions. We need to deal with health care and secure retirement. We must address the challenges to our environment. We require a program for educating our kids and training and retraining workers in a restructured economy. And we must squarely confront the challenges of race and sex divisions.

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# Labor Party Advocates: Where Do We Stand?

by Ben Stone

*The author is a retired member of the International Brotherhood of Painters and Decorators.*

The debate around Labor Party Advocates (LPA) is taking place on two levels. One, among a minority of the trade union officialdom, particularly the lower level bureaucracy, who feel pressured by their rank and file to take a stand in favor of a Labor Party, and two, among those who are already committed to the idea of a Labor Party in the here and now. This author belongs to the latter group. There could be said to be a third level; those who are either ambivalent or strictly negative about a Labor Party at this time. This level includes those who believe that only a mass upsurge provides the proper launching grounds for a Labor Party. Let us start our analysis with a review of this category.

The "mass upsurge" advocates seem to ignore the fact that no mass upsurge in the past has actually launched a Labor Party on a national basis, and while a mass upsurge is eminently desirable, it just has not happened that way. In addition, there is something sectarian about insisting that *only* a mass upsurge must precede the formation of a Labor Party. What we do have in the here and now is the initiative taken by Tony Mazzocchi, one of the leaders of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), in forming Labor Party Advocates (LPA) as a precursor to a Labor Party. On the initiative of Mazzocchi and other OCAW leaders, the OCAW convention in August 1991 voted to start LPA. This effort was supported by some other labor officials, especially in the San Francisco Bay area.

Now LPA has advanced to the point where a founding convention has been set for the actual formation of a Labor Party June 6-9 in Cleveland, Ohio. This will then be a historic development in the history of the labor movement in the United States. It will mark the first time in the labor movement's history that a national party of labor will be formed in this country.

The critics of LPA say that Tony Mazzocchi is himself a trade union bureaucrat who rules from the top down and who will not tolerate those who differ with him and that he will be especially vigilant against "left wingers." Even if this were true, Tony Mazzocchi and his fellow labor officials will not be the Labor Party. There will be many present at the founding convention who will bring their own ideas and proposals. A democratic discussion of program is projected for this founding convention. The convention will not be dominated by 100% hand-raisers who will be Mazzocchi robots. There will be many delegates (they are projecting 1,000 delegates at least) who will be angry, rebellious workers, with their own ideas, in-

cluding a readiness for a decisive break with the Democratic Party.

A foretaste of this kind of wide-ranging discussion and decision making to be expected at the convention was seen in some recent pre-convention actions. On December 2, 1995, the LPA Executive Committee (appointed by Mazzocchi) met in Cleveland, Ohio, and adopted changes in the convention rules that demonstrated they were responding to the rank and file. In fact, some members of the Executive Committee are rank-and-file trade unionists or local union leaders who have recently come from the ranks and are in close touch with the ranks. In March of this year the NEC will meet to discuss the adoption of a political platform. All the actions of the NEC are subject to the decisions made at the June convention.

In order to ensure that there is the best possible outcome at the convention, it is necessary that those who consider themselves the most advanced workers be present at the convention, participate in its deliberations, and influence its direction to whatever degree is possible. That would be far better than to keep carping at whatever weaknesses this newborn baby will have.

The critics of LPA and the Labor Party to be formed should clearly lay out their objections. It is not enough to say that it is imperfect and has a number of weaknesses. That is a generalization which is true of most, if not all, organizations. What we do have right now is a Labor Party which is about to be launched under fairly good auspices (OCAW plus four other international unions — UE, BMW, ILGWU, and AFGE — plus a number of regional labor formations and numerous union locals). As of June 6-9, 1996, it will have its official birth. We ask the critics, where do you stand on this development? Are you going to join or are you going to stand aside?

### The Trade Union Bureaucracy

Let's get back to the trade union bureaucracy and what its reaction is to the LPA and a Labor Party. It goes without saying that the top trade union bureaucracy is opposed to anything that leads to a break with the Democratic Party, with which they have a long tradition of close collaboration (since the era of Roosevelt's New Deal). They are invariably delegates to the Democratic Party conventions, where they sit cheek by jowl with the Democratic politicians. So there is little to expect from those quarters.

But again, things are not the same today as they were just a few short years ago. The shake-up at the last AFL-CIO convention in October of 1995, where Lane Kirkland's handpicked

successor, Tom Donahue, was beaten by John Sweeney, was a notable example of the change that has taken place.

It was notable in that it marked the first time in forty years that there was a change in the top leadership of the AFL-CIO. Also, the overwhelming majority at the convention voted in favor of organizing the unorganized and supplying the money and resources to implement that resolution. That was certainly not the case at previous conventions. This development in the AFL-CIO, together with the objective social conditions in the country at large, with the great cynicism which is pervasive among the general population, augurs well for the Labor Party's future.

Not that John Sweeney and the top labor bureaucracy can be expected to change their stripes. They have labored in the vineyard of Democratic politics too long to break with the past. But like Tony Mazzocchi, they too may feel compelled to respond to the pressures of the worsening situation labor faces. We can anticipate that a struggle may develop within the newly formed Labor Party between conservative trade union bureaucrats (who will join the Labor Party only to try to control it) and class struggle fighters who will want to adopt a radical agenda, clearly distinguishing the Labor Party from the two major bourgeois parties.

The Democrats and Republicans are aptly termed Tweedledee and Tweedledum. Their democratic masks are increasingly slipping off, revealing to the public the true face of their commitment to the corporate agenda. For these twin parties of big business, profits and the interests of the corporations come first. "The public be damned!" is now their battle cry. The sooner the public understands this the better.

One other objective worth discussing is the necessity of bringing together under the roof of the Labor Party (in addition to the trade unions, which have the money and resources) all the elements of our society that are the most oppressed, people of color, Latinos, Asians, women, the youth, the elderly, and of course, the homeless and helpless. Homelessness, in particular, is the ultimate expression of the cruelty of capitalist society. No human being should be forced to beg, or sleep in the streets, in the richest country in the world. It must be one of the objectives of the Labor Party to change that forever.

In order to carry out that humanitarian mandate, the Labor Party will have to unite and include all the elements of society that are broadly termed — the working class. □

February 12, 1996

# Formation of Labor Party Advocates Sparked Discussion on the Left

by David Riehle

*This article is reprinted from the January 1992 issue of our magazine. It seems to us that it fully retains its relevance four years later as we approach the labor party founding convention.*

The organization of Labor Party Advocates by Tony Mazzocchi, a longtime leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union, is the first sustained effort by any element of the labor movement outside of small radical groups to popularize the idea of a labor party based on the unions since the immediate post-World War II period.

Mazzocchi, probably not by coincidence, entered into the labor movement as a young activist in the CIO during that period, 1945-47, when unions carried out the biggest strike wave in U.S. history. At that time, labor party advocacy was widespread in the CIO, especially in the United Auto Workers, where it had been effectively advocated by Trotskyist auto workers. The UAW at that time had an official position in favor of a labor party, and many UAW locals had functioning labor party committees.

The inauguration of the Cold War and the McCarthyite political witch-hunt in the United States, which included a ferocious attack on radicals in the unions, coupled with relatively full employment and a steady rise in wages, brought an end to labor party agitation, as the CIO bureaucracy consolidated its grip on the mass industrial unions which had arisen out of the great proletarian upsurge of the 1930s.

Mazzocchi, who has held various international offices with the OCAW, including recently the post of secretary-treasurer, began raising the idea of a labor party throughout the 1980s as he saw the anti-union offensive of the employers roll back wages and organizational gains. Mazzocchi was a leading lobbyist for the trade unions, seeking support for various legislative goals among the members of the United States Congress, and saw earlier than most union officials the increasing unwillingness of the government to grant any further concessions to labor like those which had been characteristic of the 25-year postwar economic boom. Mazzocchi was particularly affected by the Democratic Party's sabotage of the labor law reform sought by the AFL-CIO union leadership in the late 1970s.

He utilized his position as a national official of OCAW to conduct scientific polls of the political attitudes of members of various OCAW and other union locals over the last few years. The polls all consistently demonstrated a favorable response by a majority for the idea of a labor party, and considerably less support for

the Democratic Party, which has been supported by the labor officialdom since the 1930s.

Mazzocchi reported that in 30 OCAW locals 65.7 percent responded "yes" to the statement: "Both parties (Democrat and Republican) care more about big business than working people."

To the question "Who best represents the interests of working people?" 49.7 percent responded "neither party," while the Democrats got 44.2 percent and the Republicans 4 percent.

The statement: "It's time for Labor to build a new independent party of working people" was affirmed by 52.8 percent, while 27.8 percent disagreed and 18.5 percent were "Not sure."

The age group which gave the highest support to the labor party proposal was the youngest, 25-34 years old.

Interestingly, the people conducting the LPA polls report that support for the Democrats is highest among union staff employees and officers, and lowest among the rank and file, which is where the highest degree of support for the labor party proposal is registered.

Mazzocchi has attempted to use the results of his polls to demonstrate that the labor party idea is readily grasped and supported by union rank and file.

Bolstered by this, and other positive responses to his proposal, Mazzocchi formally initiated the group "Labor Party Advocates" about a year ago.

As has been reported previously in *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* (Richard Scully, September 1991), Mazzocchi is basically projecting three things:

- Establish LPA "to educate the public about the need for a Labor Party in the U.S.," and to serve as an organizing committee for a new Labor Party.
- Membership open to all working people, and a steering committee consisting of elected union officials, from local officers on up.
- When LPA has about 1,000 steering committee members and around 100,000 dues-paying members, Mazzocchi projects holding a founding convention.

LPA does not intend to run candidates for public office itself, nor does it attempt to impose restrictions on the political activity of support-

ers, including working within the two major parties.

As Scully said, "Mazzocchi is attempting to steer a course which will enable him to educate and organize for a labor party while avoiding premature confrontations with the union bureaucracy."

It is not difficult, of course, to find problems with Mazzocchi's speculative timetable, or the conception of a labor party that is implied in his projected method of organization. Many different variants of a "labor party" have been projected over time and by various components of the left and the labor movement in the U.S., some of which embodied class independence, and some of which were designed to prevent it. While Mazzocchi has some passing familiarity with this, he is mainly influenced in his conception of a labor party by the actually existing mass electoral parties supported by the unions in Britain, Canada, and Scandinavia. These Social Democratic parties, whether they call themselves "labor," "socialist," or "democratic," are organizationally independent of the capitalist parties, but reformist to the core. They have all supported imperialist foreign policies of their respective governments, and many times aided them in the imposition of austerity measures and other antilabor programs. They have in general expressed the political characteristics of the bureaucratic leaderships of the unions which provide their primary support.

Nevertheless, revolutionaries, particularly those from the Trotskyist tradition, have generally advocated participation in the mass working class parties, and urged that workers and the oppressed vote for them. This position was taken and developed by the founders of the Marxist movement and their successors.

The great labor upsurge of the 1880s in the United States produced mass working class phenomena. Prominent among them were the Knights of Labor, and electoral efforts such as the Henry George campaign for mayor of New York City and a wave of local labor party initiatives. Frederick Engels, in an often cited comment writing to German Marxists in the U.S. who held back from these developments, said:

The first great step, of importance for every country entering the movement, is always the constitution of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a

distinct workers party....That the first programme of this party is still confused and extremely deficient...are unavoidable evils but also merely transitory ones. The masses must have time and opportunity to develop, and they can have the opportunity only when they have a movement of their own — no matter in what form so long as it is their own movement — in which they are driven by their own mistakes and learn to profit by them. [Letter to F.A. Sorge, November 29, 1886.]

The incipient mass industrial organizations that arose in this period of ferment were defeated and dispersed, and mass independent political activity by American workers took place most notably through the Socialist Party, founded in 1901, until World War I, when it was eclipsed by new developments stimulated by the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Communist International in 1919.

In the period that followed the revolutionary workers movement in the U.S., located primarily in the American Communist Party, debated the labor party question intensely. The future founders of the American Trotskyist movement became the most consistent defenders of the Marxist position against a welter of opportunist and sectarian schemas.

As James P. Cannon recalled:

To start with, the left wing of American socialism had been traditionally rigid and doctrinaire on all questions of — revolution versus reform, direct action versus parliamentary action, new unions versus the old craft unions, etc....

The first approach of the left wing to the question of the labor party was inflexibly sectarian and hostile...I was a quite pronounced "right winger" in the early Communist Party, and I thought that people who were advocating a labor party were a hell of a long way out in front of the labor movement as I knew it in the Midwest. However, I must say that it never occurred to me at that time that we could be a part of the larger movement for a labor party and remain communists. Engels' perspicacious letters on this very theme were unknown to me at the time...

The theoretical justification for such a complicated tactic — conditional support of a reformist labor party by revolutionists — came originally from Lenin. I think it is indisputable that Lenin's proposal to the British communists that they should "urge the electors to vote for the labor candidate against the bourgeois candidate" in his pamphlet on *Left-Wing Communism*, and his later recommendation that the British Communist Party should seek affiliation to the British Labor Party, gave the first encouragement to the sponsors of a similar policy in this country, and marks the real origin of the policy...

It seemed to us — after we had assimilated Lenin's advice to the British — that this issue would make an excellent basis for a bloc with the more progressive wing of the trade-union movement, and open up new possibilities for the legitimization of the communists as a part of the American labor movement, the expansion of its contacts, etc. But I don't think we would have argued the point if we had not been encouraged by Lenin's explanation that revolutionists could critically support a reformist labor party, and even belong to it, without becoming reformists.

(*The First Ten Years of American Communism*, pp. 58–60.)

The *Platform of the Communist Opposition*, written by Cannon in 1929 and addressed to the Sixth National Convention of the CP, said:

The perspective of a labor party as a primary step in the political development of the American workers, adopted by the party in 1922 after a sharp struggle in the party and at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, holds good today...The main base of the future labor party will be the new industrial unions formed in the coming struggles against the employers, the government, and the labor fakery and reformists.

As anticipated, new industrial unions did arise a few years after this was written, primarily in the form of the CIO. However, labor party possibilities were destroyed especially by the "Popular Front" policy inaugurated by the Comintern in 1935, which resulted in the American CP, a strong influence in the CIO, subordinating everything to support of Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.

The Socialist Workers Party, founded by American Trotskyists in 1938, affirmed its advocacy of a labor party:

We have always said that, confronted with a fully developed labor party, based on the trade unions, we would take a positive attitude toward it and most likely participate. We are now confronted with the necessity of concretizing this general point of view and taking a direct part in the presently developing movement for a labor party and of working with all our strength to push it on the road to independence. [SWP National Committee Resolution, June 1938, from *The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and Resolutions, 1938–39*, edited by George Breitman.]

While strong labor party sentiment did develop in the unions, it was submerged in the tidal wave of patriotism and class collaboration engendered by the entry of the U.S. into the Second World War, and the unrelenting support of the Roosevelt administration by the CP, as well as the non-Stalinist majority of the union bureaucracy.

With the postwar labor upsurge, labor party prospects surged forward temporarily and then receded, and have lain dormant for the most part for the last 45 years, until Mazzocchi's formation of LPA.

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Most of the radical and socialist left has responded in a generally positive manner to Mazzocchi's initiative with different mixtures of criticism and support — including the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, Socialist Action, Solidarity, and even the Communist Party. The most outstanding exception to this, it appears, is the present-day Socialist Workers Party.

The SWP's paper, the *Militant*, devotes over a full page of its October 11, 1991, issue to an entirely negative assessment of LPA, and its endorsement by the national convention of the OCAW, held this August in Denver, Colorado.

The article, "Is OCAW's 'Labor Party Advocates' a step toward independent political action?" is written by Joel Britton, who is identified as "an oil worker and member of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union. He was the Socialist Workers Party candidate for governor of California in 1990 and for Los Angeles mayor in 1989. Britton attended the recent OCAW convention."

The answer to the question posed by the title of the article is clearly a resounding "No."

The article is a kind of case-in-point of the type of sectarian hostility to complex developments in the real world that Engels, Lenin, and Cannon, among others, polemicized against in their writing on the labor party question.

Britton devotes most of his space to recapitulating the setbacks of the organized labor movement over the past decade, and the complicity of the Democratic and Republican parties in this offensive, and states that "breaking out of the union officialdom's decades-long collaboration with and reliance on the twin parties of big business means charting an independent political course for labor."

This would be, he says, a "giant step for the labor movement," and would "mark a fundamental shift, one that would necessarily come out of deepening struggles of working people and at least the beginning of the transformation of the unions into fighting instruments in the hands of the ranks."

However, "A review of the political content and structure of the Labor Party Advocates reveals that it does not mark a step forward toward independent working class political action. This is true even though the union officials sponsoring it wrap their promotion of it in militant-style clothing."

Further, it is revealed by Britton, "The impetus for this move by the OCAW officialdom comes not from pressure from the ranks but from the continuing blows being dealt to the unions and to their officialdoms by the employers and their government."

"The officials," Britton goes on to say, "are concerned not because of the beating working people are taking, but because their own social status, generous salaries, and perks flow from a healthy dues base and other forms of income that come with their positions. Falling union rolls threaten these privileges."

After citing speeches made to the convention by Ralph Nader and former Texas agriculture commissioner Jim Hightower, Britton concludes:

It is these pressures from the ruling class, and not a rising rank-and-file movement or broader labor battles, that the union officialdom is responding to...The OCAW convention proposals seek to reverse the fortunes of the labor tops, gaining more elbowroom for the left wing of the officialdom in the process.

For those who have been reading the *Militant* over the past decade, especially since the mass expulsions of all known Trotskyists from the SWP in 1983–84, one notable aspect to this article is that it is one of the very few in which the *Militant* has had anything critical to say



about the "union officialdom." Those of us who were around at the time remember that the *Militant* was almost entirely uncritical of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) "officialdom" over the course of the Local P-9 Hormel strike in Austin, Minn., as the bureaucracy with the aid of the federal courts, the state government, and others strangled this sparkling example of union democracy and independence.

The *Militant* reported uncritically and generally positively as the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy let the Eastern Airlines strike atrophy.

Almost all of its reporting of labor events has been noncommittal and uncritical, not much different than what you might get from a reasonably objective bourgeois newspaper.

I remember particularly that after the SWP abruptly told the leaders of UFCW Local P-9 in Austin that they were all washed up in March 1987, and should abandon their campaign to boycott the company's products, the *Militant* then embraced with great hope the three or four bureaucratically directed local packinghouse strikes in the Midwest led by UFCW packinghouse director Lewie Anderson, the executioner of P-9, getting so gushy as to dub 1987 "The Year of the Packinghouse Worker." After the strikes petered out, with some big setbacks, the *Militant* moved on to its hopeful coverage of the Eastern strike, expressing no criticism of the IAM bureaucrats "wrapping their promotion of it in militant-style clothing," without giving it serious backing.

Now, when for the first time in four decades, the idea of a labor party is beginning to be disseminated in a systematic and organized way throughout some sections of the union movement, the *Militant* reacts with scorn and hostility, and, in a rare moment, rakes the "labor tops" over the coals — not for betraying the Hormel workers, or the Eastern workers, but for having the temerity to say something positive about a labor party, and to give it the weight and authority of an official act by the OCAW convention — a convention, which, after all, whatever its inadequacies, represents in some degree the rank and file of the union.

Members of the SWP as a matter of party policy do not run for any union posts, including steward, delegate, etc., even if urged by their co-workers. (Britton was attending the OCAW convention as an observer.)

This abstention-on-principle helps put the hostile reaction of the *Militant* in perspective. The leaders of the SWP are now and have been for some time simply one additional expression of a current of the radical working class movement which has found its expression in all times and places — one based on disappointment in the failure of the revolution to arrive on schedule and the failure of the workers to respond in the hoped-for time and place. It finds safe refuge in dogmatism and abstentionism, where its authority is unchallenged, and its methods never subjected to the test of experience.

Marx caricatured this abstentionism, upheld in his day by the anarchist followers of Bakunin:

The working class should not form its own political party — it must not under any pretext engage in political actions, because fighting the state means recognizing the state: that's contrary to eternal principles. Workers should not go on strike because fighting for higher wages means recognizing that wages exist. That's contrary to the eternal principles for the emancipation of the working class.

It is characterized by the *doctrinairism* which Cannon referred to as: "revolution versus reform, direct action versus parliamentary action, new unions versus the old craft unions, etc."

Britton has his own version of this. In his article "continuing blows being dealt to the unions and to their officialdoms," and "pressure from the ranks" are mutually exclusive. There is no suggestion in his disquisition that these factors may have a reciprocal relationship to each other. *Because* the union bureaucrats inevitably interpret the interests of the unions as identical with their own narrow and selfish interests, and *because* "the officials are concerned not because of the beating working people are taking, but because of their own social status," anything which they initiate, such as LPA, must be no good.

One cannot help noting that although this action [the launching of LPA] took place at a convention attended by 500 rank-and-file delegates, the possibility that it might have in some way expressed sentiment from the ranks is considered so remote that there is not even any discussion of it. In fact there is no reporting at all of anything the rank and file might have done or said at the convention. The article is entirely concerned with the actions of the top officials and those they invited to speak. It is flatly stated as a fact evidently requiring no proof that "pressure from the ranks" exerted no visible effect whatsoever on the convention, in spite of the unprecedented ill fortune of the unions reported by the *Militant*.

In this bleak and pessimistic analysis is located the real source of the abstentionism of the SWP leadership, expressed so strongly in this article. Their political mood and psychology is driven by a deep disappointment in the failure of the workers to respond to the employers' offensive in the way that this small group of radicals had hoped that they would, at the beginning of the antilabor offensive some ten to fifteen years ago, when party members recruited off college campuses were sent into the factories with the expectation that big struggles were imminent and that the party would grow rapidly. Disappointment in the failure of the actual course of events to conform to their arbitrary projections led them, in spite of themselves, to look elsewhere for sources of change in the labor movement. This is why they were so hopeful about the so-called "strike offensive" led by Lewie Anderson and endorsed by the UFCW "officialdom," and about the IAM bureaucracy's endorsement of the prolonged Eastern strike.

In fact all of the same arguments about the narrow and self-interested motivations of "la-

bor tops" could have been marshaled with equal justification and with better effect in analyzing those phenomena, which were never criticized openly by the *Militant*.

Subjectively impelled because of their disappointment in the workers, in spite of their revolutionary political pretensions, to look fundamentally to the union bureaucracy for change, their reaction to the partial and contradictory steps in the direction of a labor party movement is one-sided and rejectionist, as though the union bureaucrats had let them down again. What else did they expect?

Given their abstentionism and preoccupation with individual recruitment to a small and shrinking political formation, they evince no interest at all in *intervening* in this development to influence it, in "taking a direct part in the presently developing *movement* for a labor party and of working with all our strength to push it on the road to independence," as the SWP said in 1938. Therefore there is no need for Britton to report on any views expressed by the rank-and-file delegates to the national convention of this rather democratic union. (The OCAW, for example, does not permit any full-time officers to serve on its International Executive Board, which is entirely composed of working rank-and-file members.)

To those who know the SWP's history, and the potential it had at the beginning of this period some ten years ago, this is sad and regrettable. However, life moves on, and the development of LPA, and subsequent labor party developments, will not be affected for good or bad by *ex cathedra* pronouncements from the demoralized leaders of this organization. Perhaps it can at least serve as a negative example.

There is an important question posed implicitly by the criticism voiced by Britton. It is the general question of how and through what medium positive change can be effected in the highly bureaucratized organizations of the working class in this country, uniformly committed to the utilization of reformist political methods, and how they can be transformed into "fighting instruments in the hands of the ranks" to use Britton's terminology.

All past history teaches us that this transformation must be a *process*, which develops in a highly complex and contradictory way, impelled *both* by changes in the objective situation and the fortunes of the workers' organizations, *and* by the reaction of the rank and file, and the pressures they exert on the bureaucracy — implicitly and directly — and by the reciprocal influence of one upon the other. There is no Chinese wall between the membership and the bureaucracy of the unions, as anyone who knows anything about this can attest. There is a constant and reciprocal influence of one upon the other. This is true in all times and places. The problem is that in periods of relative rank-and-file passivity, and under conditions where great material resources are available to the bureaucracy without much control by the membership, the reciprocal influence is unequal, and the influence of the bureaucracy, which is a transmis-

sion belt for the influence of the ideology of the employers, is dominant.

This is more or less what the situation has been for the last 50 years. But things are beginning to change. The declining fortunes of the unions as organizational apparatuses stem in large part from the setbacks delivered directly to their constituencies, the dues-paying rank and file. But at the same time this decline also undermines the self-confidence of the bureaucracy, stimulates various kinds of leadership crises and divisions, and opens up more elbowroom, not only for "the left wing of the officialdom" as Britton bemoans in the conclusion of his article, but more elbowroom for the rank and file. This is not hard to detect at the present time. It finds expression through various caucuses such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union and the New Directions group in the UAW, to name only two that have significant followings. Both are products of and take advantage of the relative political vacuum created by the crisis.

Britton's commentary about the goals of the "left wing of the officialdom" again presumes an element of the trade unions whose existence is so well established that there is no need to prove it through reference to past experience, or even to identify its present dimensions, membership, influence, or objectives, other than their evident need for "more elbowroom."

Of course it follows from the existence of a "left wing" that there must be a "right wing" whose leader Britton identifies as Lane Kirkland, the president of the AFL-CIO. It is therefore established that there are at least two contending groupings within the union officialdom, with objectives and methods that are different, and to some degree opposed to each other. Otherwise there would be no need for at least one of the wings to obtain "more elbowroom." It is also implicit in this characterization that the "left wing," needing "more elbowroom," must be functioning in an internal situation where the other, "right wing," has the upper hand. Britton in fact discloses that the "left wing" has a program, although a "modest" one (by which he means one entirely insufficient and unworthy of support) and he indicates that it includes "a more progressive tax system, laws that make it easier to organize unions, equal and guaranteed health, pension, and education benefits, and a program of improved social service." Whether this is so modest or not under current conditions is open for discussion. But if this is the left wing's program, what is the right wing's program? Which one is better? What is Britton's program? Is it suggested that the rank and file should take no interest in the programs of the right and left wings of the officialdom of their organizations? Or that these programs, and the methods utilized to pursue them, are not influenced at all by the needs and aspirations of the rank and file? Or that the minority "left wing" of the union officialdom may under certain conditions seek support for its "modest program" among the rank and file, thereby, intentionally or not, setting

into motion significantly broader forces, and opening up new opportunities for the *rank and file* to intervene in this process?

Why, it might be asked, does the union officialdom apparently have at least two wings, with methods and objectives which, it necessarily follows, must not be identical? Why doesn't the officialdom have one unified policy? Is it possible that this is because the union officialdom is subject to pressures which are exerted upon different segments of it with varying degrees of intensity and that, in fact, these segments respond unequally to these pressures? And is it not possible, or even probable, that at least some of these pressures are exerted, directly or indirectly, by the rank and file? The leadership of the unions, after all, has to periodically stand for reelection in order to continue enjoying its "social status, generous salaries, and perks," as Britton says. They must submit to this process not often enough, it is true, nor under sufficiently democratic conditions. But if the unions are in fact, in spite of their deficiencies, genuine workers' organizations, and not company unions, then their leadership must be formally selected by the membership, whether directly or indirectly, and surely some pressures from the rank and file must register on the officialdom. This possibility is excluded by Britton, who says several times, and categorically, that the impetus for the support of LPA comes, not from the rank and file, but from ruling class pressures alone.

James P. Cannon addressed the question of the complex and varying interrelationship of leadership and rank and file under changing social, political, and economic conditions in the context of the American labor movement in an article entitled "The Communists and the 'Progressives,'" which reviewed developments among a segment of the labor leadership at that time. His analysis, although made many decades ago, and in a different social epoch, remains valid and instructive.

"These events," Cannon said, referring to the reformist program developed by certain "progressives" in and around the labor leadership on the eve of the Great Depression, "are not accidental":

They reflect in the first place the unmistakable growth of discontent of wide sections of the workers and their impulse to struggle against the present state of affairs....

These progressives are weathercocks, who reflect certain winds blowing in the labor movement. Their emergence now, with demands which connote militancy, is an indicator of the radicalization of the workers growing within the old unions as well as in the ranks of the unorganized masses. Their role, objectively speaking, is to express this radicalization in words, to harness it in action, and to head it off from any real collision with the capitalists and the AFL machine....

The question whether they will succeed in stultifying the promising movements of the proximate future or whether the very movements of the workers they express and, to a certain extent, *help to create* [my emphasis] are developed in the direction of real class battles depends very much on the activities and tactics

of the Communists.... And one of the most decisive aspects of these tactics is the question of our attitude toward the progressives and the movement which they indubitably express....

We are not done with the progressives. On the contrary, the question of our attitude towards them and relations with them will take on a tenfold greater significance in the coming period of mass struggles than in the period behind us.

Cannon then criticized those who, as he said, utilized the tactic of "straight-out denunciation and [artificially pose the tactic of] completely independent struggle."

They see the progressive leaders only as individuals and roundly denounce them as fakers. They fail now, as before, to see the movement of workers they express and, to a certain extent, represent. And that [the movement] is the most important and decisive thing for the Communists.

"The question" Cannon said, is not

what the reformists will do when the fight grows hot — that should be known in advance — but how can the Communists best develop the struggles of the workers and expand their influence. It is from this standpoint that we must evaluate our past experience with the progressives and draw conclusions for the future....

Did we get our influence among the miners and eventually gain the leadership of a great mass movement in 1928 by having nothing to do with the progressives? Quite the contrary... It was the bloc with Brophy [a dissident UMW leader] and other progressives which gave us access to the masses of miners, who at that time were not "revolutionary miners who have nothing but contempt for such spineless quitters" but admirers of these same Brophys. It was the prestige of Brophy and others, and the confidence the miners had in them primarily, that gave the movement its wide basis at the start. (James P. Cannon, *The Left Opposition in the U.S., 1928-31.*)

While Labor Party Advocates is and will remain for the foreseeable future a propagandistic effort in the unions, it is one that takes place on a far wider scale than past efforts to disseminate the labor party idea by tiny aggregations of socialists, precisely because an element of the union officialdom is impelled by the current crisis to look for alternatives. Since this idea is being revived for the first time in many decades among union activists, it is inevitable that there will be many different conceptions of what this should be and what it can become. Mazzocchi's projections are only one of many, and what is important at this point is not whatever castles in the air are being built about future conventions representing 100,000 dues-paying LPA members but the fact that this idea is getting a hearing, and a favorable response, among real, indigenous, rank-and-file trade unionists, and even that actual trade union functioning committees are being established to advocate the idea. So much the better that it is brought forward at the convention of a significant and influential industrial union like the OCAW, endorsed and treated seriously, whatever the reformist illusions of OCAW leaders.

Tangible steps toward independent political action by labor may very well not arise directly

from LPA — my opinion is that they won't, that it is more likely that some union somewhere, some AFL-CIO central body somewhere, will run some candidates, as was almost done by the Communication Workers of America in New Jersey this year. Although that was a false start, starts — false and otherwise — are impelled by real pressures.

The labor party idea is organic and natural to the trade union movement, and only the stifling and pervasive reaction imposed on the unions over the past decades has prevented it from coming forth. It has to be kept in mind that the source of the momentum inexorably driving this idea forward is precisely the declining wages, legal rights, organization, and prospects for the future of the working class, as well as the blows being rained down on the unions. Coupled with this, and a necessary part of it, is the increasing distance taken from organized labor by the

Democratic Party, and in fact by the government as a whole, expressing a general consensus of the ruling class. As Mazzocchi frequently points out, the last real piece of prolabor legislation, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, came in the Nixon administration.

The totality of this affects the unions at every level. The lives of working people, their moods, and their aspirations all have an impact. These are, after all, authentic working class organizations, whatever their deficiencies, and however distorted. The power of the labor party idea is exactly that it is adaptable to these far from ideal circumstances. It is a *transitional* idea, one that takes a powerful principle, that of the political independence of the working class, and adapts it to a form that corresponds to the current consciousness and organization of the working class. It follows as a matter of course that its actual realization will incorporate, to some de-

gree, all of the characteristics of the actually existing working class—illusions, prejudices, superstitions, etc. etc., as well as embodying the workers' will to struggle for a better life. For revolutionaries a labor party is no panacea. It merely creates a more favorable arena to explain the necessity for the workers to transform this society into a new and better one. How much more persuasive and tangible is the idea of the workers creating a new world when they have their own party. That was what Engels tried to explain to his sectarian German American comrades in the Socialist Labor Party in 1886. Britton's doleful lament on LPA merely emphasizes that the lesson is always fresh.

Is Labor Party Advocates a step toward independent political action? Of course it is. More to the point, it is an opportunity. □

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## From the Arsenal of Marxism

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# Implications of the Labor Party

by James P. Cannon

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*The following article was written over forty years ago, in 1954, and printed in **The Militant** of April 26 that year. The Socialist Workers Party, of which Cannon was honorary chairman, was campaigning then, in the era of the Cold War anti-Communist witch hunt, for the formation of a labor party to fight against McCarthyism, which the SWP saw as incipient fascism. Some references to the particular situation at that time have been omitted, so that the pertinence for today of the author's line of argument stands out more clearly.*

**T**he formal launching of an Independent Labor Party, the indicated next step in the preliminary mobilization of the American working class... will hit this country like a bomb exploding in all directions. It will not only blow up the traditional two-party system in this country and bring about a basic realignment in the general field of American politics. It will also mark the beginning of a great shake-up in the labor movement itself. The second result will be no less important than the first, and it should be counted on.

Under the present system the political stage is occupied by two rival capitalist parties, which in reality represent two different factions of the ruling class. The workers play merely the part of a chorus in the wings and have no speaking part on the stage. The formation of a labor party will change all that at one stroke. The struggle of capitalist factions for control of the government will be subordinated to the struggle of classes, represented by class parties. That is the real meaning of politics anyway.

The political realignment, brought about by the appearance of a labor party on the scene, cannot fail to have profound repercussions inside the labor movement. There will be a great change there too. The break of the trade-union movement with capitalist politics will coincide

with the rise of big opposition to the present official leadership. This rank-and-file opposition movement will most likely take shape in the struggle for a labor party, and be identified with it.

To imagine that the present official leaders can make the great shift from the Democratic Party to independent labor politics, and maintain their leadership smoothly in an entirely new and different situation, requires one to overlook the basic causes which will force them to make this shift. That is, the radicalization of the rank and file and their revolt against the old policy. No matter how it is formally brought about, a labor party will be the product of a radical upsurge in the ranks of the trade unionists. The more the officialdom resists the great change, the stronger will grow the sentiment for a different leadership. Even if the present leaders sponsor the labor party at the start, they will be under strong criticism for their tardiness. The real movement for a labor party, which will come from below, will begin to throw up an alternative leadership in the course of its development.

The demand for a labor party implies the demand for a more adequate [labor] leadership; and the actual formation of a labor party, under

the auspices of the present official leadership, would only accelerate the struggle under more favorable conditions. As revolutionists, we advocate the formation of a labor party with this perspective in mind.

It is true that the simple fact of the formation of a labor party, by itself, would have a profound influence in speeding up radical and even revolutionary developments. But those who are satisfied with that might as well retire from the field and let the automatic process take care of everything. The automatic process will not take care of anything except to guarantee defeats. The conscious revolutionists, however few their numbers may be in the beginning, are a *part of the process*. [Emphasis added.] their part is to help the process along by telling the whole truth. The fight for a labor party is bound up with the fight to cleanse the labor movement of a crooked and treacherous leadership, and cannot be separated from it. Those radicals and ex-radicals who are willing to settle for a labor party, leaving the question of program and leadership unmentioned, are simply inventing a formula for their own betrayal.

It is not permissible for revolutionists to pass themselves off as mere advocates of a labor party, pure and simple, like any labor faker who devotes Sunday sermons to this idea. A labor party headed by the present official labor skates, without a program of class struggle, would be a sitting duck... That's the truth of the matter, and advocacy of a labor party isn't worth much if it leaves this truth unsaid. Large numbers of trade-union militants know this as well as we do. They know that the present official leaders are no good for a real fight on any front, and that they have to be thrown out before there can be any serious thought of a showdown [with the employer class]...

Those militants who know the score on this ought to organize themselves in order to conduct their struggle more effectively. This organization of the class conscious workers can only take the form of a revolutionary party. There is no substitute for that... □

# The Case for an Independent Labor Party

by Farrell Dobbs

*This and the following article first appeared in 1967 in the Militant, newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). At that time the SWP was still a revolutionary Trotskyist organization actively involved in mass movements. Farrell Dobbs, a leader of the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strikes, and of the movement that from 1934 to 1940 transformed the Teamsters into the largest U.S. industrial union (see his 4-volume series Teamster Rebellion, Teamster Power, Teamster Politics, and Teamster Bureaucracy), was national chairman of the SWP at the time this was written.*

Unlike “new left” theoreticians, who consider labor incapable of forming its own independent party, many union bureaucrats know that the step could be taken at any time. On occasion some labor officials even talk openly about such a perspective. They do so only to throw a scare into liberal capitalist politicians, who are equally aware of the unions’ capacity to shape an independent political course.

When it comes to passing from the word to the deed, the bureaucrats always draw back, arguing that now is not the time for a labor party. They persist in clinging to the nineteenth-century political mentality of Samuel Gompers, founder of the AFL.

Gompers laid down a basic line of pure-and-simple trade unionism, designed to build a wage-conscious instead of a class-conscious movement. Labor’s interests were identified with those of capital. This meant *de facto* acceptance of the trickle-down process whereby profits come first and the workers get leftovers. The line required union business agents to show moderation, respectability, and statesmanship in their relations with capitalists; it also called for a no-strike clause in collective bargaining agreements and the arbitration of any and all grievances.

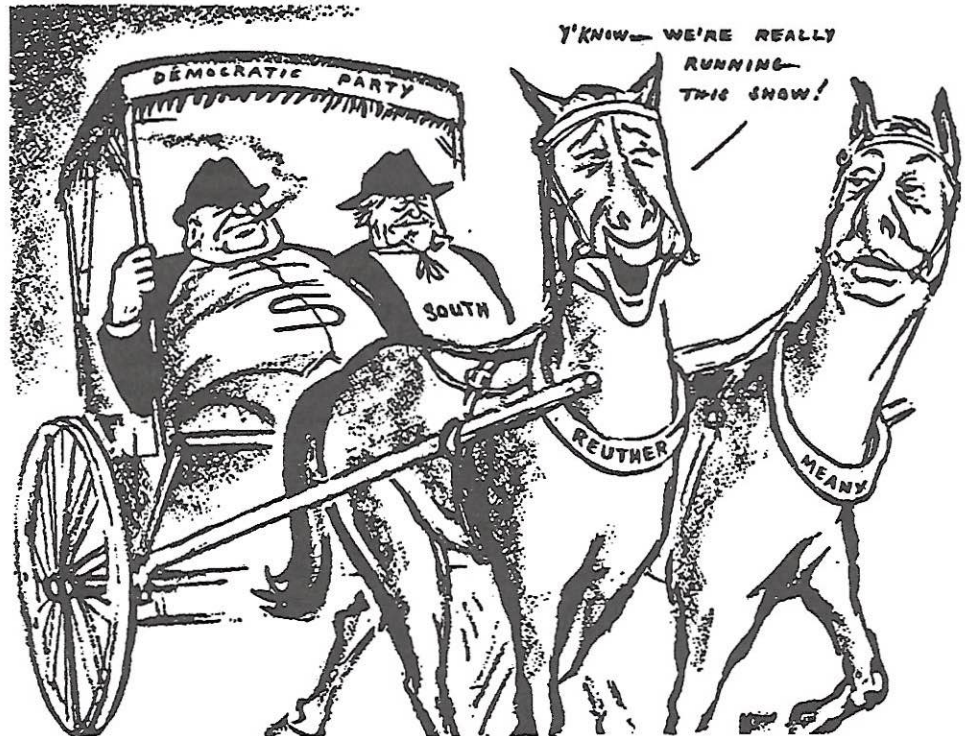
Politically the workers were subordinated to capitalist rule through a tactic defined as “rewarding friends and punishing enemies” among capitalist politicians. In practice this added up to horse-trading the labor vote between Democrats and Republicans.

### Gompers’s AFL

Gompers deliberately based the AFL on skilled craftsmen, who were in a relatively favorable position as workers to exact wage concessions from the capitalists. Less-privileged sections of the class were more or less ignored. As a result a majority of the workers remained atomized organizationally, and history was to prove the AFL an obstacle to unionization of the class as a whole.

During the labor upsurge of the 1930s, stimulated by deep economic depression, the defects of craft unionism became glaringly obvious. Finally, the AFL had to be bypassed before the workers in basic industry could be organized in the necessary industrial form. The organizational turn came through a minority split from the AFL, led by John L. Lewis, who initiated the building of the CIO.

With this step the composition of organized labor underwent a decisive change, and the



CIO, based on mass production workers, became potentially the most powerful class force in the country. Also new was the fact that union labor was now up against the strongest section of the capitalist class, the giant monopoly corporations and the bankers who stand behind them. The CIO ranks were ready for battle, and they backed Lewis to the hilt as he led them in militant strikes for union recognition and collective bargaining agreements. At that point, however, Lewis stopped short.

Politically he tied the CIO to Gompers’s basic line of substituting reliance on capitalist politicians for use of the workers’ power. Having a bigger problem than Gompers faced, Lewis also had a larger hope. He dreamed of winning the cooperation of the capitalist government in the fight against the monopoly corporations. That in turn led him to modify Gompers’s tactical methods.

Lewis turned away from political bartering between the two capitalist parties, shifting to faction politics within one of the parties through what has since been known as the labor-Democratic coalition. The Democrats were cho-

sen as the popularly accepted party of reform, whereas the Republicans are generally looked upon as the party of the status quo. To initiate the tactical shift, Lewis set up an extra-union formation called Labor’s Non-Partisan League. The LNPL was masqueraded as a step toward independent labor political action, but its real function was to serve as a political vehicle for union support to Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats in the 1936 presidential elections.

Development of Lewis’s political line coincided with adoption by the Communist Party of the “people’s front” turn decreed at the 1935 Congress of the Stalinized Comintern. The changed CP policy, falsely represented as a modernization of Lenin’s principles in shaping working-class united fronts, had as its aim to mislead the workers into crossing class lines in politics. In the 1936 elections the CP ran a presidential candidate, who gave left-handed support to the Democrats by campaigning against the Republicans. At the same time the CP hacks in the CIO more openly joined hands with Lewis in the LNPL.

The Socialist Party also ran its own candidate for president in 1936 and, unlike the CP, continued to do so until 1956. Meanwhile, social democrats inside the unions supported the LNPL tactical ruse. Little by little thereafter the whole social democracy shifted in that general political direction, and today they are deeply enmeshed as a body in Democratic Party politics.

In 1936 the CP and social democrats had a problem with CIO members whose radical background made support of capitalist politicians a repugnant thing, especially in the case of New York garment workers. To get around the difficulty, they organized the American Labor Party in New York state as a special arm of the LNPL. The step was taken to trick the workers into thinking they had their own party.

Through that scheme they were dragged into voting for Roosevelt on the ALP slate and, by means of a device called "fusion candidates," support was similarly garnered for other capitalist politicians running for key offices. In secondary instances token ALP candidates were put up to maintain a façade of political independence as a party. In time radical workers thus ensnared became disoriented into acceptance of the class-collaborationist political line.

### "New Left" Thinkers

Some "new left" thinkers see in this phase of labor history little more than a sign that many radicals felt compelled to change their ideology. They put one-sided emphasis on capitalism's ability to allow a few social concessions. On that premise a conclusion is reached that the shift in ideology came about primarily because the "old left" had no strategy of opposition to absorption in a liberal consensus.

Revolutionary socialist criticism of labor's misleaders for crossing class political lines is discounted as conceptually dubious. Advocacy of an independent class-based political course is dismissed as narrow and doctrinaire. If "new lefters" holding these views are not trying to warp reality to fit their own preconceived notions, it can only be said that they fail to understand the meaning of history.

Getting back to the realities of the situation, by 1937 Lewis began to react in his own way to contradictions stemming from labor's support of the Democrats. A key factor was Roosevelt's repudiation of a CIO strike in steel. That year Lewis publicly suggested the possibility of labor and the farmers building a political alliance through their own party.

The CP reacted by starting a campaign to put the CIO on record for re-election of Roosevelt to a third term in the presidency. When a resolution to that effect was introduced at the 1938 CIO convention, Lewis ruled it out of order. Then, in January 1940, he openly denounced Roosevelt and the Democrats, charging that they had "broken faith" with the workers.

By that time the CIO was solidly entrenched in basic industry. Its ranks had been tested and tempered in strike battles, and bad experiences with the Democrats had taught them some political lessons. As a result millions of workers hopefully looked for Lewis to follow up his denunciation of Roosevelt with a call for a labor

party. But he proved incapable of rising to the occasion.

In the 1940 presidential elections Lewis called for support to the Republican candidate, Wendell L. Willkie. He warned the union membership that failure to follow his advice would be taken as a repudiation of his leadership and, if Willkie was defeated, he would resign as head of the CIO. He did resign after the CIO ranks, left with only a lesser-evil choice between capitalist politicians, disregarded Lewis's appeal and helped re-elect Roosevelt.

It should be noted in passing that with the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939 the CP had begun another of its zigzags in policy. In 1940 the CP ran its own presidential candidate, who gave veiled support to Willkie by campaigning against Roosevelt. A year later Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and overnight the CP swung back to support of Roosevelt and of U.S. imperialism in World War II. Since then the CP has never put up its own presidential candidate, nor has it ever gone beyond running an occasional token candidate for minor public office. It has stuck to its "people's front" line down to this day.

Another thread in labor political history that requires tracing concerns unions that stayed with the AFL in the split of the 1930s. They were slower than the CIO to make a tactical shift to the labor-Democratic coalition. Even though most AFL unions supported Roosevelt, they still tended in elections for lesser public offices to switch back and forth between Democrats and Republicans. Meanwhile several factors began to impel them toward general acceptance of the CIO tactical line.

After the split a few AFL unions started to compete with the CIO in basic industry. To the extent that they succeeded the composition of these unions began to change, and the top officials found themselves up against problems similar to those Lewis faced in launching the CIO. This pushed them toward acceptance of Lewis's initial political tactics. AFL bureaucrats, who had feared that Lewis was precipitating a labor party, to which they were opposed, also began to take note that their counterparts in the CIO appeared to have warded off that possibility. Passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 — and then the 1952 election of Eisenhower as a Republican president — finally prepared the AFL bureaucrats generally for cooperation with the CIO in the labor-Democratic coalition.

As usual, they had things hindside to. For the first time since the main sections of the union movements threw their support to the Democrats, the Republicans had captured the White House. It showed that organized labor was losing any capacity to influence national politics and that the situation would continue to deteriorate until the unions formed their own independent party. Instead of taking that course, the bureaucrats of the AFL and CIO decided to combine their forces in support of the Democrats.

Toward that end they merged the two federations in 1955, subordinating other differences to their common political aims. The main object was to put the Democrats back in power. In return they hoped to wheedle the softening of

anti-labor laws and the passage of some New Deal-type social legislation.

In 1958 the union bureaucrats hailed the election of a predominantly Democratic Congress, from which they expected some payment for their support. They got the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin Act. Under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, following Eisenhower's second term in office, new highs were set in government strikebreaking. The few social measures passed in Congress boiled down to meaningless tokenism and gradualism, failing utterly to meet pressing mass needs. Between them, Kennedy and Johnson plunged the nation deeply into a war of aggression against the Vietnamese.

Until the fall of 1966 the union officials nevertheless thought they were riding high politically. They had been buoyed up by the 1964 Democratic landslide, resulting from a combination of anti-Goldwater sentiment and Johnson's demagoguery. Great hopes were pinned on Johnson and the reinforced liberal bloc in Congress. Then came the post-election double-cross of every section of the mass movement.

In the unions' case the Democrats reneged on their promise to repeal Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act empowering states to pass anti-union laws. Congress was in the process of enacting a special law to break the 1966 airline strike when it was settled. Democrats were calling for a general stiffening of anti-labor laws. Modest union proposals for improvement of the federal minimum wage law were drastically whittled down. Congress pigeonholed labor demands for increased unemployment compensation.

This sorry performance in office backfired on the Democrats in the 1966 elections. Many labor-backed candidates went down to defeat, as the Republicans scored a major comeback in Congress and in state and local elections. True to form, the union bureaucrats blamed everything but their false political line.

They said that a swing from the party in power had to be expected in an off-year election; that Johnson had hurt the Democrats by dismantling the organization built up by John F. Kennedy; and as a result the Republicans were able to do a better campaign job. In short, the bureaucrats talked about trivia, avoiding frank recognition of the voters' anger over the duplicity of the Democrats.

Despite everything, a majority of union members continued to vote for the Democrats, rather than support Republicans. At the same time, the biggest percentage since the AFL-CIO merger cast their votes for some Republican candidates. What one bureaucrat called a "sullen reaction" of union members to official policy testifies to the growing alienation of rank-and-file workers from the labor-Democratic coalition.

The relative homogeneity of the labor vote, which has existed since the 1930s, is beginning to break down. Prolonged adherence to the political tactics laid down by Lewis in forming the CIO has reflected the inherent tendency among workers, especially those engaged in mass production, to vote as a class bloc. When disenfranchised workers now begin to seek a way to express themselves through lesser-evil choices

between Democrats and Republicans, it can mean only one thing. They are being prepared by political experience for a return in higher form to political action as a class bloc through their own independent party.

In the face of this objective reality the union officials offer the ranks nothing but more of the same. Stick with the Democrats, they urge. Concentrate on holding what we've got. Rely on the hard core of liberal Congressmen and lobby individual Republicans and Southern Democrats on specific issues. Count on Johnson because he needs us, without us, he wouldn't have anybody.

The real political situation is that Johnson and the liberals will seek tactical advantage from the existence of a strengthened coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats. They will use it as an alibi and a cover for a further general policy shift to the right, including harsher measures against the unions. At the same time they will go through meaningless motions to pretend consideration of actions to build a "Great Society." On the whole they will do little, while talking a lot, out of both sides of their mouths, in a bid for votes in the 1968 elections.

### Labor's "Friends"

Such a course is dictated for labor's political "friends" by the basic aims and needs of the capitalist class. Increasingly critical problems facing the ruling class are reflected in the present state of the Vietnam war and the repercussions here at home. That is why the capitalist government is preparing new blows against labor, aiming to further cripple use of the strike weapon and extend the exercise of direct police powers within the workers' own organizations.

These basic objectives are included in the general orders issued to all politicians within the two-party system through which the capitalists rule the country. That accounts for the prolonged and sharpening attack on labor carried out by a sequence of Democratic and Republican administrations. The trend reveals the true character of the Democrats as agents of the ruling class. It shows the futility of labor seeking Democratic help against the big corporations, or the lesser capitalist fry either.

The record is full of evidence that the anti-labor assault can't be warded off by acts of appeasement. Every union concession is taken as

evidence that increased capitalist pressure can force new capitulations. Step by step the unions are being stripped of their ability to talk the only language that capitalists understand — the language of power.

History has repudiated the union bureaucrats — and along with them the social democrats and Communist Party leaders — in their policy of crossing class lines in politics. The false policy can't be rehabilitated by "new left" schemes to dress up class collaboration in the garb of "new politics" or "social unionism" or "radical constituencies." Nothing more will be accomplished than to help the union misleaders keep the workers tied to capitalist politics.

The "new left" devices are strikingly similar to Walter Reuther's quack "realignment" remedy for labor's political ills. He wants to get all the reactionaries together in the Republican Party and assemble all the liberals in the Democratic Party. It adds up to a typical piece of Reuther "planning," whereby he seeks to perpetuate the labor-Democratic coalition.

George Meany and other officials from old-line AFL craft unions are showing a different tactical inclination. They are saying that labor could be more effective if it had less intimate relations with the Democrats. This understatement of the situation doesn't mean that they entertain notions of a break with capitalist politics. They are simply veering back toward the original Gompers line of political horse trading between the Democrats and Republicans. They even did some trading of the kind during the 1966 elections.

Meany's tactics won't work any better than Reuther's. In both cases they merely reflect the floundering of the whole union bureaucracy in their deepening political crisis. Their situation is becoming so difficult that they are ready to try almost anything, except take the labor party road.

It is no accident that the whole union bureaucracy is united in opposition to black power advocates within the civil rights movement. They are especially venomous against those who advocate an independent black party. These black militants are accused of conspiring to defeat labor's liberal "friends" at the polls.

The union officials are worried that emphasis on black power might lead to posing the ques-

tion of labor power. They fear that the rise of an independent black party would accelerate labor party sentiment in the unions. On both counts there are grounds for such apprehensions because what the bureaucrats shrink away from is exactly what must come to pass.

Pure-and-simple trade unionism has run its course. Objectively it was outmoded with the unionization of basic industry in the 1930s. Since then every major labor struggle has quickly assumed a political character, as Lewis seemed to anticipate. However, Lewis's hope of getting government help against the corporations wasn't realized. Instead, the capitalist political "friends" intervened against labor in every class showdown. And today, with the capitalists steadily tightening the screws on the unions, the workers stand disarmed politically.

These iron facts underlie the restiveness now evident in the union ranks. Although the present rise of rank-and-file militancy centers on defensive actions over economic issues and job conditions, there is more to it than meets the eye. The workers are beginning with a one-armed fight at the union level because their political arm is still paralyzed.

In coming struggles they will learn new political lessons from capitalist arrogance and hostile government interventions. The process will be helped along by intensified use of the unpopular Vietnam war as a pretext for strike-breaking. Accompanying this will be the adverse impact of the war itself on the workers' social needs. The consequences are already tentatively indicated by the support some unionists are now giving to the antiwar movement.

On top of this the government is repeatedly caught lying to the people, and evidence mounts that it is shot through with internal corruption. The impact of these combined factors is leading to the development of anti-capitalist political moods in the union ranks. A meaningful sign of the trend was the action of West Coast locals of the Machinists union in raising the question of a labor party during the government attack on the airline strike.

Beneath these surface manifestations of a shift in working-class political moods lie a series of factors showing the power of the unions to take the lead in organizing anti-capitalist political action, all of which merit close study. □

## What Should Come Out of Our Founding Convention?

*Continued from page 27*

Whatever platform document is produced by the convention should be brief — something that can be read by the average person in one sitting — and in plain language. It should concisely state what we basically favor and not attempt a detailed analysis, or offer sample legislation. We can supplement and amplify our basic planks through position papers, pamphlets, articles, speeches, videos, etc., as our organization puts some flesh on our bones.

### Our Structure

I'm a firm believer in rank-and-file democracy. But I also consider substance more important than form. We should not get hung up, as people

forming new groups often do, on debating elaborate proposals that are ideally democratic in the abstract, but frequently unrealistic to maintain in action. We need to mold a diverse collection of unions and individual members into an organization that can really work. Without being babes-in-the-woods, there needs to be a certain level of trust and mutual respect. Without that good faith the best constitutions and bylaws are worthless.

A Labor Party needs to be securely based on organized labor. While we could quibble over this or that ratio, I think the representation provisions for the founding convention are fair enough. Unions with tens of thousands of mem-

bers are entitled to more of a say than chapters with dozens of members.

But the chapters will play an indispensable role in the day-to-day activities of the Labor Party. Many LPA members are in unions where a hostile leadership will block endorsement and official participation for the present. And the chapters will be the principal source for winning unorganized, unemployed, and retired workers to the party. In many areas they will also help coordinate local activities of endorsing unions. Chapters need substantial representation in any national, state, or regional structures established by the convention. □

# Labor's Role in Social Change

by Farrell Dobbs

The labor upsurge of the 1930s remained confined within the industrial sphere for several reasons. It was a major leap just to bring the hitherto unorganized mass production workers together in the CIO and, in a series of fierce battles, to consolidate the union power on the job. In addition, a general belief prevailed that working-class problems could be solved by economic means and through union action alone.

Class consciousness lagged behind political reality, being limited pretty much to matters involving worker-employer relations in the plants. There was little knowledge among workers of the fundamental mechanics of the capitalist system. They neither understood the means available to the ruling class for undermining the union power, nor did they grasp the vital importance of class control over the government.

Illusions that definitive gains could be made by fighting for reforms under capitalism laid the workers open to political disorientation. The process was implemented by capitalist ability to make limited concessions through union contracts and in the form of social legislation. All this enabled the union leaders, social democrats, and Communist Party officials to lead the workers astray politically. They were steered into the swamp of capitalist politics by way of misguided reliance on the Democratic Party.

Substitution of dependence on capitalist politicians for use of the workers' power, in turn, paved the way for bureaucratization of the CIO. Coming alongside the long-entrenched dictatorial rule over the AFL, this brought general strangulation of rank-and-file democracy within the unions. A witchhunt against radical unionists followed and, as a further means to impose conformity in the ranks, the bureaucrats ganged up with employers against dissident workers generally. There were two primary objectives involved: at all hazards to keep union members straitjacketed in class collaborationism; and to prevent the rank and file from intervening to bring union policy more into line with working-class needs.

After years of success in that endeavor, helped along by conditions of relative economic prosperity, the union bureaucrats are now running into some tough sledding. Discontent is growing in the union ranks as official policy falls more and more out of gear with the workers' needs. In an effort to get out of the resulting bind, the top officials pushed through the AFL-CIO merger in 1955. The aim was to resuscitate outlived official policy, not to fuse the union ranks for struggle in defense of working-class interests.

### Reuther-Meany Rift

Failure to solve the problem through organizational measures alone is shown by current development of the Reuther-Meany rift within the AFL-CIO. Like the merger 12 years ago, the present dispute at the top of the union hierarchy centers on tactical measures so far as the principles are concerned, rather than bearing evidence of any meaningful trend toward a change in policy.

At the outset Reuther appeared inclined to help keep the dispute confined within the AFL-CIO Executive Council. Since then he has altered his approach in the direction of an open confrontation with the Meany wing of the bureaucracy. It does not seem excluded that he might pull the UAW out of the AFL-CIO.

As matters presently stand, however, such a course by Reuther would lack the justification that existed when John L. Lewis split from the AFL in the 1930s. A major policy issue was then involved. Industrial unions, embracing all workers in a plant as a united body, were needed to organize basic industry. Hard-core craft unionists in the AFL opposed the change in organizational form, insisting that mass production workers have their ranks carved up into a series of separate craft units. Lewis first made his fight within the AFL on the clear-cut policy issue of industrial unionism. He organized a split only when it became apparent that the AFL majority could not be budged on the issue. What followed proved the correctness of the split over this matter of policy.

### Declining Strength

Although basic changes in AFL-CIO policy are urgently needed today, Reuther hasn't qualified himself for leadership in that direction. He has tried to create a false appearance that he does so qualify by striking a demagogic pose in admitting the obvious: the AFL-CIO has been declining in strength and effectiveness; dissatisfaction with the leadership is growing in the ranks; and many outside the unions look upon the AFL-CIO as an upholder of the status quo.

Behind that façade of disarming frankness, Reuther merely dresses up in modified language the basic line he still clings to in common with the rest of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy: support to imperialist foreign policy; acquiescence in restrictions on the right to strike and government intervention into internal union affairs; opposition to the advocates of black power; and continued adherence to capitalist politics. In short, Reuther does not emulate the positive side of Lewis's course in clearly posing at least one

major policy issue, as was done on the question of industrial vs. craft organization. He continues instead to perpetuate Lewis's political blunder in tying labor to the Democratic Party.

Note should also be taken of Reuther's complaint about Meany's dictatorial methods as head of the AFL-CIO. Put into context with his own conduct inside the UAW, it shows that Reuther wants to have it both ways. How else explain his recent gangup with General Motors for a strikebreaking attack against UAW Local 549 in Mansfield, Ohio? To paraphrase a notorious remark once made by a GM executive, it seems that what's good for Walter Reuther is good for the labor movement.

Meaningful steps toward necessary changes in union policy must begin with open recognition of the heavy price paid for labor's entrapment in capitalist politics. It has included the slaughters of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars; perpetuation of second-class citizenship for minority peoples; grave erosion of civil liberties; poverty for many workers and growing threats to living standards and job security for all; tearing down of union conditions won through struggle; corporation arrogance and government attacks on workers' organizations.

These evils are producing a steady rise of political ferment throughout the country. One consequence has been the unprecedented growth of a militant antiwar movement in the U.S. during a shooting war. Another result is appearance of the black power tendency. A comparable trend is now starting to develop within the unions; and to understand its fundamental significance, one must grasp the dynamics of labor struggle and the social power residing in the working class.

Prior to the social explosion of the 1930s, the workers had been relatively passive for years. AFL officials of the day gave organized labor, to the extent that it existed, an image no less unpretty than that now imparted to the AFL-CIO by the ruling bureaucracy. Many an "expert" was pronouncing the whole working class socially impotent. Then, like a bolt from the blue, the seemingly docile wage slaves confounded their detractors by launching a sweeping revolt.

### Can't See Ahead

Today's "experts" say it can't occur again because higher living standards won through the unions have tamed the workers to capitalist rule. Failing to perceive that attempts to overcome mounting capitalist difficulties at labor's expense are undermining the present social equilibrium, they miss the significance of the developing class antagonisms. They also mistake the conjunctural decline in union strength relative to the total labor force as evidence of fatal and incurable labor weakness. It happens, though, that such calamity howling has nothing to do with the real situation.

Despite weaknesses imposed upon them by bureaucratic misrule, the workers are no longer so atomized organizationally as they were at the beginning of the 1930s. The present union

structure constitutes an adequate base from which to launch independent political action, parallel to intensified struggle within industry. Class morale is high. U.S. labor has never experienced a devastating defeat. Strikes have been lost and the workers have been disoriented and double-crossed, but they have never been beaten down to the point of being cowed as a class. They retain full capacity to move massively — and swiftly — as coming events stir them into action.

The tempo of labor developments will be determined largely by the interplay of capitalist foreign and domestic policy. U.S. imperialism is running into ever-deeper trouble in its efforts to dominate the world and exploit it for the benefit of the capitalists who rule this country. Although domestic resources are being taxed increasingly to sustain the foreign policy, a comparable degree of capitalist crisis has not yet developed here at home. Social tensions are mounting, but the capitalists still have sufficient means to grant some token economic and social concessions designed to mollify mass unrest. As a result there will be various degrees of confusion in the developing social conflict, a process already reflected in the nuances of political change shown by the 1966 election and its aftermath.

### Coalition Weakening

A widening pattern of voter shifts back and forth between Democrats and Republicans has appeared, showing that the two-party system is losing internal stability. More concretely, it reflects a breakdown of the broad coalition around the Democratic Party. While this is a danger signal to the capitalists, their rule through the two-party monopoly is not yet in peril. Misleaders in the mass movement can still keep the ranks tied to capitalist politics, but the job is getting tougher for them.

Under pressures of their class crisis, all capitalist politicians are moving steadily to the right in their policies. Liberals are turning “moderate” and conservatives more openly reactionary. As a result, people disturbed about the status quo have a narrowing choice in trying to influence policy by casting a lesser-evil vote. This is causing some to grope toward a new political course, but their growing distrust of capitalist politicians has not yet overcome illusions that existing social ills can be corrected by reforming capitalism.

A characteristic example is the “new left” brand of politics. It adds up to nothing more than

a left-liberal revolt against the Democratic Party’s policy shift to the right. Programmatically, the “new left” advocates middle-class type reforms that in no way represent a break with capitalist politics. Tactically, the line remains one of maneuvering to oust the present leadership of the Democratic Party on the naive assumption that the party could thus be transformed. With their present illusions about liberals — and their general dependence on middle class forces — any break “new lefters” might undertake from the Democrats would most likely lead in the direction of trying to form a third capitalist party.

### Progressive Party

A preview of the self-defeating results of the latter course was given by a Communist Party adventure in 1948. At that time the Progressive Party — a third capitalist party — was formed to run a liberal politician, Henry Wallace, for president. Wallace criticized the cold-war policy then taking shape through Democratic-Republican bipartisanship, but in accepting nomination he stressed his defense of the capitalist system. When the Korean war began two years later Wallace quit the PP and backed the bipartisan war policy. Thereafter the PP withered on the vine.

In assessing this episode, theoreticians of the “new left” do not reject the notion of forming a capitalist third party, they simply criticize the CP for poor tactical timing. Not enough liberals were ready for it, they argue, and anyway the effort could not succeed without major support from labor. Their whole approach is one of counseling reliance on liberal politicians, which has been proven a false course, whether it takes the form of a labor-Democratic coalition or a third capitalist party.

Liberalism is rooted in the middle ground between the two main classes standing at the opposite poles of capitalist property relations, i.e., labor and big business. Its line is one of social reforms, so long as any measures undertaken are subordinated to preservation of the capitalist system. Liberals fear stormy mass movements and seek to substitute themselves for the masses in dealing with social issues. To the extent that they succeed, a false impression of their strength is created, especially when liberals are backed by the power of labor. Since that support is used to subordinate the masses to big capital, political independence from the ruling class can exist only in opposition to the liberals.

A step in the right direction has been projected by those who advocate independent black political action. It is implicitly anti-capitalist in character because of the class composition of the Negro minority. As a people they are mainly workers, thus representing the most oppressed national minority and the most militant section of the working class. They are also the most oppressed, exploited, and downtrodden members of the class, whose demands in a large sense give expression to needs of all workers, black and white. Any steps they take to organize an independent party for themselves will provide impetus toward building an independent party for the class as a whole.

### First Stage

Independent labor political action will likely begin around a program of reforms under the existing system. A vital new factor will nevertheless have been added to the social struggle because of the working-class composition of a union-based party opposed to the capitalist parties. At the present historic stage, prolonged conditions feeding reform illusions within a labor party are ruled out. New experiences will speed radicalization of the party ranks at a relatively fast pace. As an instrument capable of quickly mobilizing presently unorganized sectors of the working class, a labor party will be able to bring the whole weight of the class to bear against the capitalist overlords through new and higher forms of struggle in both the industrial and political spheres.

In the process labor will be able to assume general leadership of all who are oppressed and exploited under capitalism. Fraternal cooperation between a labor party and any independent black political formation could be quickly established. Working farmers would come to identify their interests with those of labor. Instead of having capitalist ideology pumped into the labor movement by way of middle class elements, working-class criteria would penetrate into at least the lower strata of the middle class, drawing them toward support of anti-capitalist political action under labor’s leadership. Misbegotten reliance on liberal politicians would be scrapped. The way would be open for the workers and their allies to orient toward a struggle for governmental power.

Realization of that perspective entails the problem of shaping a working-class leadership capable of going all the way in a showdown fight with the capitalists. □

## Buchananism and the Jobs Issue

*Continued from page 1*

Buchanan is an enemy of working people, a pro-corporation politician just as much as Dole, Forbes (the “capitalist tool”), or Clinton — or Perot, let’s not forget that corporate billionaire — Buchanan’s demagoguery illustrates that anyone who speaks out boldly on this issue of concern to the vast majority, to millions of Americans, will get a response.

As Mazzocchi has said repeatedly, If labor doesn’t fill the vacuum the anti-worker right wing will.

At the Phoenix meeting, Mazzocchi approached the question this way: Politics, he said, has somehow come to be defined as electing people. But the definition of politics is much broader than that.

“We will not be going into the electoral arena

for some very practical reasons that a lot of people outside the labor movement don’t understand. First of all, we’re regulated by Taft-Hartley. [Federal electoral activity by labor unions is restricted under the Taft-Hartley act.] We wouldn’t be able to use COPE funds to any appreciable degree...”

He expected that a labor party would hold back from electoral action “until such time as



we have built a mass base, with plenty of members and a sufficient cash flow.”

In the meantime “we think we can do what the right has done very effectively, and that is, change the whole tone of the national debate.”

He said it’s a shame to see Buchanan carrying the torch for issues on which organized labor should be seen as the main champion, but then “God works in strange ways.”

“It’s been our contention all the while that there’s a major vacuum out there. If we didn’t fill it, the right would fill it.”

Mazzocchi referred to a kind of “populist economic protectionism with fascist undertones. And they’re not so much undertones any more. They’re pretty explicit.” Buchanan may not make it, he said, but “Buchananism” would be a continuing threat.

“A lot of us have been thinking about program,” he said. He sees the need for “articulation of the necessity for a social wage.” The French, he said, were recently involved in a most destructive kind of strike, in a major urban area. The strikes really tied Paris up. People were angry. But the strikers had 55–60 percent support simply because they were defending the rights of everyone, social security, the social safety net. It was they, the unions, “who first established these benefit structures.”

In the United States, said Mazzocchi, “I think we’ll be the ones who will articulate this notion.” He spoke further on the notion of a social wage: Everyone in the nation should be entitled to a paid vacation. When an Italian worker comes to work he or she is automatically entitled to four weeks. We have to take so-called

benefits out of bargaining and make them the nation’s responsibility, he said. Things like vacation time, pensions, health care, a whole series of things. And part of that is education. We need to educate around these notions. That’s the way we’re going to define politics.

Mazzocchi went on:

I happen to be one of those — I don’t mean to be rude, but when I hear people talking about creating jobs I sort of doze off, because I don’t believe it. As long as you’re not a boss to define what a job is, you cannot produce jobs.

And I think Americans have just a very vague idea of the rate of rationalization [of jobs] going on in the work force. You have to redefine what work is, and also articulate that.

I may be the oldest person in the room but I remember a time when we did that very successfully. There weren’t jobs so we just put the name “job” on something else. I remember guys receiving two-thirds of an average wage for spending their time on the beach. This was a reality.

“The labor party,” he continued, “must articulate a vision that addresses the concerns of every person, especially in this disastrous economy.” Most people who are working, he said, see themselves in a precarious situation. This is the first generation in which many working families realize that it’ll probably be worse for their kids. This is not a distant reality.

“So,” he went on, “the vision of a labor party has got to be broad and all-encompassing. We’ve got to organize around that vision. To have a program that animates tens of thousands of people.

“We’ve put a Call out where we carefully

explain a lot of the things that we think belong on labor’s political agenda. We’ve been very successful in the strategy of keeping hostile elements off our back,” not being accused of belonging to the lunatic fringe.

“We’re going to have to have a whole program — including the right to organize, the right to carry out all sorts of activities.” He said the program must be bold.

“We really want to push, and pull the whole movement along. I think the ranks are ready to fight. They’re ready to fight. There’s got to be some mechanism to make it possible.”

Ernie Rousselle spoke along similar lines. He said, “We want a party not just for labor unions but for all working people. The only reason we’re doing it through the labor organizations is that we have the facilities to bring this thing together. Certainly we want everybody who works involved in the process.”

Organized labor negotiates at the tables, he said, “but every time you negotiate a contract — you may be negotiating for 500 members, but anywhere from 1,500 to 2–3,000 people who are unorganized get the benefits that you’ve just negotiated at the table. And I think everybody around us knows that.

“We’ve got one plant down in Louisiana in the middle of 8 or 9 different [non-union] corporations. Whatever we’ve got at that plant, every other company gives it to its employees. Not because they want to give it to ’em. They give it to ’em because they want to keep the union out.” □

## Debt and Deficit: Propaganda and the Attack on the Working Class

*Continued from page 21*

nomena are common. In psychology, for instance, a whole specialty — psychometrics — has grown up concerned with measurement. Eisner’s critique is significant because he shows how most mainstream political approaches to the economy are based on tainted data.

Using his more accurate measures of debt and deficit, Eisner attacks two propositions of conservative political dogma — the belief that the national debt has slowed the rate of economic growth in the U.S., and the parallel belief that other core capitalist countries that have outperformed the U.S. economically have done so because they have a smaller debt.

The analysis of the effects of debt and deficit spending on the U.S. economy shows clearly that, when there is not full employment (meaning only 1 or 2 percent unemployment) and when there is unused capacity, real deficits

stimulate demand, raise output, and lower unemployment.<sup>18</sup>

The adjustment for inflation shows that those core capitalist countries that had real budget deficits, such as Japan, which had the largest deficit after adjustment for inflation, showed the highest growth rates. Those countries that showed balanced budgets or actual surpluses after the adjustment for inflation, such as the United Kingdom, showed the lowest growth rates.<sup>19</sup>

### The Consequences of a Balanced Budget

The likely consequences of a balanced budget are crystal clear. Eisner writes that “[a]ction to reduce a deficit in the face of unemployment is likely to make the unemployment worse.”<sup>20</sup>

The current budget cuts will probably drive up the unemployment rate several percentage points. At the same time corporations can expect increased profits as real wages fall.

In addition, the current budget cuts remove much of the social safety net. This safety net has partially protected the working class from the cyclical ravages of capitalism and has curtailed capital’s ability to drive down our wages and living standards. For most of capitalism’s history, there was an unemployment-wages trade-off: when unemployment went up, wage increases went down. The institution of income-support programs during the Great Society period changed this relationship. The safety net provided by AFDC, WIC, extended social security benefits, and other programs that aided the most impoverished and exploited members of the working class, broke the unemployment-wages trade-off. Starting in the late 1960s, when unemployment first reached 6 percent in the post-World War II era, wage rates did not drop. This pattern continued until the early 1970s. Unemployment increased, but wage rates did not fall. As a consequence of this pattern:

18. For a summary of Eisner’s findings, see *Ibid.*, pp. 112–113. His complete analysis can be found in chapters 8 and 9 (pp. 78–113). Of special interest is his finding that deficit spending does not “crowd out” private investment but “crowds in” (increases) such investment. Of equal significance is his finding that deficit spending has a “leakage effect”: deficit spending increases our trade deficit and increases imports. As a consequence, some of the benefits of deficit spending in one nation’s economy leak out to other nations, stimulating their economic growth while lessening the favorable impact on the economy that runs the deficit.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 114–128.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

mainstream economists... began to recognize that income maintenance programs had weakened capital's ability to depress wages by the traditional means of intensifying economic insecurity. Unemployment thus lost some of its terrors, both for the unemployed and for those still working. In effect, social programs altered the terms of struggle between capital and labor.<sup>21</sup>

The bipartisan effort to balance the budget is thus a triple whammy for the working class: it will drive up unemployment, strip the working class of its social safety net, and drive down wages.

### Goebbels Law and the Debt Hoax

The "debt crisis" is an example of the Big Lie, a massive untruth told and retold endlessly until the majority of people accept it unquestioningly. The chief function of this Big Lie is to justify a massive attack on the working class and on government programs that benefit the working class.

Two very different questions must be addressed concerning this Big Lie. First, why do many Americans believe the justification for this attack on their living standards? Second, why do politicians and members of the ruling class believe it to be true, as in fact many of them do?

Conservative ideologists inveighed against the debt throughout this century. When President Kennedy proposed a \$10 billion deficit to stimulate the economy in 1963:

The proposal was met with cries of horror and consternation. A popular evangelist was moved to [denounce] deficit spending as "the greatest moral danger facing this country at the moment." The chairman of the House Appropriations Committee warned that deficits led inexorably to the debauchment of the currency. The *New York Times* senior Washington correspondent spoke ominously of a grim reckoning ahead.<sup>22</sup>

Policy makers did not take such rantings seriously, however, and continued to follow the practices established during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration of using deficit spending to stimulate the economy by raising aggregate demand. Because policy makers did not take deficit spending seriously, the media gave scant attention to the moans of the debt doomsayers.

This changed in 1980 with the election of Reagan. Reagan's election represented a shift by both parties to the right and a new consensus among policy makers. That consensus, overturning almost 50 years of economic experience and theory, was that debt and deficit were the root of our problems. The media now gave frequent and uncritical coverage to the debt doomsayers, who included President Reagan himself. By 1988 public opinion had shifted to reflect this media coverage. A *Los Angeles Times Mirror* poll conducted shortly after

Bush's election asked voters to identify the single issue that should be the Bush administration's top priority. The hands-down winner was "reduce the deficit" with 44 percent support. "Protect American jobs from foreign competition" finished second with 20 percent, followed by "strengthen programs that help families" with 15 percent, "negotiate further arms reductions with the USSR" with 12 percent, and finally, "improve protection of the environment" with 8 percent.<sup>23</sup>

This sea change in public opinion (from virtually no public concern about the national debt prior to 1980 except among arch-conservatives to mass concern as reflected in the opinion polls) must be understood in the context of the psychology of public opinion. This psychology can be expressed in a few simple laws: the law of the 24-hour day, and Goebbels law.

The law of the 24-hour day, developed by David Fan, is a set of common sense notions, without which we cannot understand public opinion. We all have limited experiences and hence have opinions about things for which we have no direct experience but must rely on information from other sources. Most of the time we cannot think very deeply about this information because we do not have expertise in the area and, more importantly, do not have the time to think deeply and develop expertise. Each of us has a lot to do, and no matter how smart and how efficient we are, there are still only 24 hours in a day. Thus most people, for most issues, will base their opinions on the preponderance of the most readily available information, and they will not think too carefully about that information, because they haven't got the time.<sup>24</sup>

The law of the 24-hour day ties in with a second law, first articulated by Hitler and his propaganda chief Goebbels. This law, which I call Goebbels law after the first person to apply it successfully on a mass scale, is technically known within psychology as "the validity effect." The validity effect is the finding that the more an idea is repeated (even the basest and biggest of lies), the more the idea is believed to be true. Hence mere repetition produces belief in the information.<sup>25</sup>

The law of the 24-hour day and Goebbels law together explain the finding of David Fan and others that public opinion can be predicted (usually within 3 percentage points) over a long period of time if you know merely the extent of media coverage for and against an issue (say, the deficit is bad vs. the deficit is not bad) and the level of opinion when the media coverage started.<sup>26</sup>

In dealing with the flood of information

about a multitude of issues, people react in a reasonable way: they simply weigh the information and form a judgment based on that weighing for things that they don't have a lot of time to think about. When an issue becomes of central concern to them, they spend more time thinking about it and analyzing the information, but there are only 24 hours in the day, and most people must concentrate their time and efforts on paying their bills and putting food on the table. Not an easy task in our society.

In addition, the effectiveness of the Big Lie depends on the lie's having some connection to the experiences of the people to whom it is told. The lie must appear reasonable, given the people's previous beliefs and experiences, and it must be connected to their daily experiences. Part of the effectiveness of the debt hoax and deficit deceit is that we all know that personal debt is devastating. And most of us have experienced it. When we are told that the national debt cripples the economy (in the same way that consumer debt has plagued most of us) we can also connect the lie to our experiences of falling wages, increasing unemployment, and McJobs.

McJobs!

An example of this connection between national debt and personal economic crisis is cited by Eisner:

There was a telling moment during the 1992 presidential campaign, in the pivotal second debate at Richmond. An earnest woman in the audience asked President Bush how "the debt" affected him personally...

President Bush looked perplexed. He indicated that he did not understand the question. He was stumped....

The moderator Carole Simpson, with quick insight, came to the rescue. She suggested to the questioner that what she had in mind was how the recession and accompanying hard times affected the president personally, and the questioner nodded appreciatively.

Debt is something that on a personal level we all see as a burden. If we lose our jobs, we may have to borrow to keep food on the table or pay the rent. Debt and hard times to that questioner were synonymous.<sup>27</sup>

And so too for most of us.

One of the main contradictions about propaganda is that it is at the same time powerful and weak. Propaganda often and in general shapes most people's attitudes and actions most of the time, yet its power can disappear overnight or be broken like glass. As soon as the media stop beating the drum for debt, public support for the debt issue as the number one issue declines. When people are given a choice (as they generally are not) between reducing unemployment

21. Richard A. Cloward and Francis Fox Piven, "A Class Analysis of Welfare," *Monthly Review*, February 1993, pp. 29-30.

22. Heilbroner and Bernstein, p. 13.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

24. David Fan, *Predictions of Public Opinion from the Mass Media: Computer Content Analysis and Mathematical Modeling*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988.

25. Discussion of the validity effect can be found in several textbooks used in introductory psychology classes. For example, see Carol Tavris and Carole Wade, *Perspectives in Psychology*, New York: HarperCollins, 1995, pp. 360-361.

26. David Fan (1988).

27. Robert Eisner, *The Misunderstood Economy: What Counts and How to Count It*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1994, p. 2.

and reducing the national debt, they overwhelmingly select the former. For instance, in a Gallup Poll conducted shortly before President Clinton's first State of the Union speech, people were actually given a choice by pollsters who asked, "Which is more important, creating jobs or reducing the deficit?" After a decade of intense ruling class propaganda, 65 percent of the respondents said jobs, 28 percent said reducing the deficit.<sup>28</sup>

Yet another indication of the weakness of propaganda is the ad taken out in five major U.S. papers on December 19, 1995. It covered two full pages in the first section of the *New York Times* and was signed by the chief executive officers (CEOs) of 91 of the largest U.S. corporations. In an interview on National Public Radio, John Snow, one of the signers, who is both the CEO of CSX Corp. and chairman of the Business Roundtable, claimed that the ads, which urged both Republicans and Democrats to balance the budget, were needed to create a political constituency for a balanced budget. After all these years of pro-balanced budget propaganda these businessmen felt it was necessary to regenerate public opinion in support of balanced budget efforts.

In conclusion, the 15-year-long repetition of the Big Lie has (temporarily) convinced a majority of Americans that the national debt is a serious problem. When the relentless repetition of that lie subsides, the popular support for debt reduction decreases. When given a meaningful choice between jobs and debt reduction, most Americans, wisely, select jobs. Support for debt reduction is wide, but also paper-tissue thin. It is nowhere near as strong as the ruling class would like. The only reason this lie has not been shredded (it keeps falling apart by itself) is that there has been no political force with both the strength and political independence from the ruling class to confront it. Such a force can only come out of the labor movement. (Possibly the labor party to be founded in Cleveland this coming June can be such a force.)

### Root Causes

Some members of the ruling elite understand that the debt crisis is indeed a hoax, but many do not. Such monstrous ignorance by the ruling class is rarely unmotivated, so we must turn to our second question: Why do politicians and members of the ruling class believe the debt hoax, as in fact many of them appear to do? What motivates their ignorance?

The short answer is self-interest, or more specifically, the capitalists' efforts to maximize profits. Beginning in the early 1970s worldwide, capitalism entered a period of economic stagnation characterized by declining rates of profits.

Corporations sought to respond on two levels to this crisis, on the level of the corporation itself and on the level of the government's macroeconomic policy. On the level of the corporation,

companies increasingly tried to break unions, "downsize" and "re-engineer" their workforce, make increasing use of temporary workers, speed up production, increase overtime (instead of hiring more workers), and use automation. On the level of macroeconomic policy, the ruling class favored the general features of Reaganomics, a set of policies also supported by the majority of Democrats. Reaganomics, which we now see as not unique to the Reagan administration but as the general approach favored by the ruling class, includes shifting the tax burden away from corporations and the wealthy to the rest of the population, increasing subsidies for corporations, reducing human services and services of all kinds to the working majority, and reducing costs to corporations by eliminating environmental, health, and safety regulations that benefit the American people.

Essentially then, the capitalist have followed the same strategy in the corporate halls and government offices: to increase profits by reducing costs through a relentless attack on working people.

Another effort to increase their wealth is the capitalists' efforts to slow inflation. Inflation reduces the real value of the debt held by ruling class individuals and entities, as noted above. By balancing the budget, the ruling class expects to reduce inflation and preserve the value of its financial holdings.

In his National Public Radio interview where he discussed the newspaper ads urging passage of a balanced budget, John Snow argued that a balanced budget was needed to slow inflation and help keep American corporations profitable. For those with ears to hear, his meaning was inescapable. Balance the budget on the backs of the working class to protect the financial holdings of the wealthy. Balance the budget on the backs of the working class so that corporations can "lower labor costs." Balance the budget on the backs of the working class so that capitalism can grind our living standards into the dust of a Third World shantytown. Balance the budget, the ad said, or "the party's over. No matter which Party you're in."

The policy pursued by the U.S. ruling class is similar to the policy pursued by virtually all ruling classes in the core capitalist countries. The recent strike wave in France, for example, must be seen in the context of the French and European capitalists' efforts to reduce costs by driving down the social wage and the individual wages of the French people. Likewise, the IMF and core capitalist countries have tried to impose similar macroeconomic policies on countries of the periphery. This is often done through the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) on countries saddled with foreign debt.

In addition, the process of globalization of capital (the ease with which capital can flow over the entire world, the ease of communication and transportation, ability to establish manufacturing facilities virtually anywhere in

the world) makes it easy for capitalists to play one country (or region or city) against another in the "race to the bottom," the competition to keep jobs by lowering corporate costs and giving corporations subsidies. Heads the capitalists win, tails we lose.

### A Way Out Of the Budget Impasse?

The rabid pursuit of a balanced budget by the Democrats and Republicans constitutes a massive attack on the bottom 90 percent of people in this country who make up the working class and oppressed, a one-sided, no-holds-barred class war. The purported national debt crisis furnishes the justification for that war, a justification used to confuse and disorient us, to make us all passively accept this attack on our well-being.

Marxists will have little interest per se in either balancing the budget or running a budget deficit (as the Keynesians would have us do) to save capitalism. But we are interested in what happens to the oppressed and exploited. Thus budget questions are of importance to us and we would neither favor nor oppose deficits on principle. Instead we would generally oppose deficits because of the resultant transfer of money from working people to the wealthy. But we would balance this against gains in employment, the social wage, and the standard of living of the vast majority. In practice this means we oppose all deficits that result from tax breaks to the rich and their corporations, expenditures for corporate welfare, and military expenditures, which serve both as a tool for foreign intervention in the interests of the U.S. capital class and as a form of corporate welfare. We favor all expenditures, even in cases where they result in deficits, that benefit and strengthen working and oppressed people. These include expenditures for worker health and safety, social security, education, medical care, and of course money for children, the poor, the homeless, and the unemployed. These expenditures benefit all segments of the working class defined at its broadest.

As a first step here in the U.S., we must organize against all efforts to cut the social wage, balance the budget, and hurt the working class. This will include work within the unions and in the community. Essential to this process will be a labor party that defends the interests of working people and is not befuddled by the phoney national debt crisis. While both necessary and essential, a labor party by itself is not sufficient for a successful fightback. We also need independent labor-community coalitions, tireless efforts to organize the unorganized, and a mass action strategy. Finally, the effort must be worldwide in thought and deed. Solidarity and coordination with all people everywhere who struggle against the same capitalist policy is essential. After all, in the global capitalist economy of the late 20th century, the old labor slogan is truer than ever: "An injury to one is an injury to all." □

February 26, 1996

28. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

# Class Origins of the Present Situation in Former Yugoslavia

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

*The following is based on a presentation made as part of a panel at the New York Marxist School March 1, 1996, on the subject "U.S. Intervention in Bosnia: Implications for the Left." Other panelists were Ralph DiGia and David McReynolds of the War Resisters League and David Wilson of the Weekly News Update on the Americas. The meeting was sponsored by the New York City Committees of Correspondence Peace and Solidarity Task Force.*

My remarks will be divided into three parts: Some theoretical concerns in assessing the background to the present situation; a review of key events from 1983 to mid-1991 in the process which led to the war and the current peace settlement; and some conclusions concerning the present situation and where to go from here.

First on theory. To understand what has happened, it is essential to apply a Marxist understanding. Otherwise, you can't make sense of the horrible conflicts. Was the "ethnic cleansing" because of age-old ethnic conflicts or long-standing grudges since World War II? Or was it a war to stop the spread of Islamic fundamentalism or to attain justice for the long-suffering Serbian people?

To examine the issue, we need to look first at what Yugoslavia was, to define the class relations of the state in that multinational federation, its Communist Party (called the League of Communists), and its economy.

Toward these ends, I refer you to Leon Trotsky's remarkable book *The Revolution Betrayed*. Although Trotsky was discussing the Soviet Union up to 1936 when the book was completed, the analysis fully applies to Yugoslavia since 1945. Study particularly Chapter 4: "The Struggle for Productivity of Labor." Socialism — and Yugoslavia called itself socialist — has a scientific basis; after all, Marxism seeks to apply the scientific method. Socialism, as Trotsky explains, assumes an economy with a higher rate of productivity than has been achieved in the most advanced capitalist countries. A fully socialist society assumes the elimination of scarcity. It assumes the liberation of humanity from the need to work, with vast amounts of productive leisure; socialism assumes with all this the withering away of the state as the arbiter among social groups competing for scarce resources.

None of this characterized Yugoslavia. Although there had been a genuine popular revolution under the leadership of Tito and the Communist Party in 1945, which overthrew capitalism and began the transition toward socialism, the workers had obviously not been able to achieve a fully socialist society.

## Impossibility of Socialism in One Country

They could not have done this by themselves within the limits of a single country — even a

multinational federation, and even if the workers had really controlled political power in Yugoslavia and utilized their scarce resources in a way that was most egalitarian, which of course was not the case. Revolutionary Yugoslavia could not have achieved socialism by itself, no matter how superior it was to the semi-feudal capitalist regimes that preceded it in terms of, for example, the social gains provided for the masses of workers and peasants. Socialism cannot be achieved through totalitarian rule; a political revolution by the workers was necessary to retake the political power. Socialism cannot be achieved in a country that is economically isolated, with a currency that is not even convertible (even if that measure must sometimes be temporarily necessary for a workers state). Socialism cannot be achieved in one relatively underdeveloped country; a fully socialist society requires all the resources — technological, material, financial, etc. — of successful revolutions by workers in at least several of the most developed capitalist countries.

There have unfortunately not been any successful proletarian revolutions in the developed capitalist countries for a variety of reasons — which is the major problem facing all of humanity.

Yet, ultimately, without the aid of workers governments in the most advanced countries, it is inevitable that progress toward creating a more just, socialist society in a relatively backward country will be reversed. The powerful forces of the world capitalist market, particularly of global finance capital, with its superiority in technological methods of production, will ultimately prevail. Lenin and Trotsky took this for granted in connection with the Russian revolution. Trotsky explains this very well. What he explained and predicted in this regard in *Revolution Betrayed* has been confirmed by events. I urge everyone to read that book.

(To sum up, then, we can make some theoretical generalizations about Yugoslavia that also apply to the other workers states, in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The Yugoslav revolution was *contradictory* in character. The genuine overthrow of capitalism and beginnings of a transition toward socialism were marred and offset by bureaucratic deformation, which was present from the start because of the Stalinist origins of the Yugoslav CP leadership. (Stalinism in theory and practice favored special privileges for the bureaucracy.) What was the class

character of the Tito regime? The regime was in the hands of a privileged bureaucracy (a distinct social stratum, petty bourgeois in character, a caste rather than a class, which rested on socialized property but at the same time stood in contradiction to it). This was a multinational country and society in transition, in the midst of a world in transition; a contradictory battle went on, and still goes on, between class forces heading in opposite directions, forward toward socialism and backward toward capitalism. Trotsky's writings, especially *Revolution Betrayed* — far more than Milovan Djilas's *New Class*, incidentally — can help us understand the nature of this contradictory social formation.)

From the outset, the Balkan regions that formed Yugoslavia suffered from isolation, only worsened by the split with the Stalin regime in the Kremlin in 1948; they also suffered from technological backwardness.

## Rise of "Market Socialism" in Yugoslavia

Following an initial period of strong economic centralism (bureaucratically decided by the League of Communists), despite the workers committees that were established by the Tito government in the enterprises (committees that really controlled little), the Yugoslav economy came to rely strongly on market mechanisms. The contradictory term "market socialism," in fact, came into use primarily to describe the system put into place by Yugoslavia's 1965 economic reforms.

The Yugoslav economy was characterized by extreme inequities from region to region; extremely primitive production technology, particularly in the agricultural sector, where farmers still commonly used horse-drawn carts in modern times; and a primitive infrastructure. Major economic problems eventually led to considerable borrowing from foreign capital. After Tito's death, in 1980, Yugoslavia had a debt to imperialist lenders of \$20 billion.

Despite serious worker rebellions against poverty and injustice in Kosovo province in 1981 — which were repressed brutally by the police forces of the central government in Belgrade — the Yugoslav federal government turned to the IMF for loans and to reschedule debt payments. To get such financial assistance, the Yugoslav government began in 1983 to impose IMF-dictated reforms that did not improve, but drastically worsened the standard of living for the masses of workers and peasants.

## Role of the IMF

As many of us are aware by now, the austerity measures the IMF dictates to debtor nations who want financial help are calculated to ensure that a country balances its budget so it can have funds to repay foreign lenders (to very briefly summarize what the IMF does). This means that the debtor country must reduce expenditures, that is, end subsidies to "unprofitable enterprises" (no matter how socially necessary they may be), remove ceilings on prices which keep food, fuel, and other vital consumer goods af-

fordable for most people (to allow these prices to seek their true "market" level), freeze wages (increases in which are considered "inflationary"), and of course, privatize factories and other means of production and public service.

These IMF policies mean plant and mine closures, declining industrial output, rising food and fuel costs, rising inflation (which the IMF seems, nevertheless, to always want to reduce), and unemployment. Such policies also produce mass dissatisfaction and protests. These escalated in Yugoslavia after 1983 as the party and government continued to deepen IMF-dictated "reforms" despite all the hardships they were causing.

By mid-1986 and 1987 tens of thousands of workers (of all nationalities) in the factories, mines, and fields joined together in protests throughout the Yugoslav republics, frequently invading government buildings, shouting such things as: "Down with the red bourgeoisie," "We want bread," "Out with the thieves," and — my favorite one, by women protesting outside the main government building in Titograd — "Shame on you!"

Workers of all nationalities protested together: Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Montenegrins, Hungarians, etc. The government's policies were seriously hurting them all.

### **1987: Bureaucracy in Serbia Adopts Chauvinism to Divert Mass Protests**

However, as the crisis deepened in 1986 and 1987, with the input of some of Serbia's prominent intellectuals, a section of Serbia's ruling Communist Party (the League of Communists of Serbia — LCS) made a conscious decision to adopt Serbian chauvinism as a means of diverting mass protests, an ideology that suited the special interests of the privileged party bureaucracy.

The turning point came during ongoing mass unrest in Kosovo province in 1987. Yugoslavia, which was about the size of Colorado, had a population of some 23 million. It had six republics — Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina — and two autonomous provinces — Vojvodina and Kosovo — both in the republic of Serbia. The Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo, whose 1.9 million population was about 82 percent Albanian, was the poorest region in Yugoslavia. In 1980, the unemployment level in Kosovo was around 20 percent — ten times higher than in Slovenia, the most prosperous republic. The economic reforms had made life even worse in Kosovo province and the population opposed the reforms and wanted a say in how to reverse them and improve their standard of living.

The Serbian government responded, as before, with police repression. Hundreds of students, workers, and intellectuals had been arrested in 1981 and many were still in prison. In 1987 the Serbian government brought renewed police force to bear. However, something new had been added.

### **Rise of Serbian "Communist" Milosevic**

Slobodan Milosevic, who became Serbian party chief in 1986, responded to the protests that had virtually shut down Kosovo province, by making a trip to Kosovo — to speak to the Serbian minority (some 10 percent of the province's population)! On this historic occasion, April 27, 1987, at Kosovo Polje — the organizing center for the Serbian nationalists in Kosovo — Milosevic inaugurated his bid for control of the League of Communists of Serbia, and of Yugoslavia as a whole, by staking his future and the future of a section of the (increasingly insecure) bureaucratic apparatus which he sought to represent — staking the future on a campaign of blatant Serbian chauvinism. Appealing to emotions, fears, and ignorance, Milosevic proclaimed himself the champion of the Slav, especially Serbian, "victims of history," who were depicted as being threatened by the non-Slav Albanians in Kosovo.

So began a campaign to create a new official ideology, based on a memorandum from the Serbian Academy of Sciences drafted the year before. It put forward this myth — that the Serbs as a people were besieged victims throughout history, who must now take a stand. Class differences were forgotten; they were superseded by national differences. This bourgeois nationalist type of ideology suited the material interests of the ruling Serbian bureaucracy, which sought to redirect popular anger away from itself and nursed high hopes of getting rich in the new expansion of the market.

Thus, the ruling bureaucratic caste, particularly in Serbia, already having maintained a comfortable niche in an economy fraught with inequities leading to high levels of unemployment and want, had made two decisions that further removed it from dependence on the working class — the decision to implement IMF reforms and the decision to resort to Slav, and soon strictly Serbian, chauvinism to bolster its rule.

### **Anti-Albanian Campaign**

A barrage of anti-Albanian propaganda began in the media: claiming that the Albanians were out to take over the country through rapid procreation; that the Albanians in Kosovo were controlled by agents of Albania's Hoxha regime and were seeking to break away from Yugoslavia and become part of Albania, taking all the province's ("Serbia's") wealth and resources with them, fabricating "incidents" of violence by Albanians against Serbians, etc. Meanwhile, the real violence going on was the violent repression of Kosovo's Albanian population by the police forces of the Milosevic regime. A state of siege was imposed on Kosovo province; Albanian schools, radio, and newspapers were closed; Albanians were removed from positions of authority throughout the enterprises and institutions of the province. While a mass media campaign whipped up anti-Albanian fears, mass demonstrations promoting Serbian nationalism were orchestrated throughout Serbia. Protests by workers against the economic re-

forms were channeled in Serbian chauvinist, anti-Albanian directions.

All this seriously undercut worker unity while it gave the government a free hand to repress the Kosovo workers struggle for democratic rights.

### **Milosevic Purges the Serbian "Communist" Party**

Throughout 1987 and into 1988 this was followed by a number of measures to tighten the control of the Milosevic wing of the Serbian party bureaucracy and, consequently, Serbian hegemony in the Yugoslav federation.

1. During the period April-October 1987, there was a purge of the Serbian party leadership. First those who sought a political liberalization in the party were expelled, then even those who had been aligned with Milosevic, like former Serbian LC chief Ivan Stambolic, were first removed from positions of authority and then expelled from the party. Some have likened those leaders expelled in Yugoslavia by the Milosevic faction in 1987 to the Left Opposition led by Leon Trotsky expelled from the Communist Party in the Soviet Union in 1927 by the Stalin faction.

The similarities, however, are limited. Although those expelled in 1987 in Yugoslavia opposed Milosevic's totalitarian methods for consolidating power, they had no alternative economic program directed toward strengthening the political power of the industrial working class and no orientation toward furthering revolutionary developments internationally, both of which were key to the program of the Left Opposition.

2. Supporters of Milosevic organized a putsch in the other autonomous province of the Serbian republic, Vojvodina, putting in power a group loyal to the Milosevic leadership.

3. A similar overthrow initiated in November 1987 and completed in January 1988 established a government in the republic of Montenegro that was loyal to the Milosevic leadership.

### **Milosevic's Serbian-Chauvinist Faction Gains Control of Yugoslav Presidency**

What these two putsches meant was that with the repression in Kosovo, where docile figures were now in power, Milosevic's faction of the Serbian League of Communists now controlled four of the eight votes on the Yugoslavia Federal Presidency. These maneuvers, along with the officially sponsored Serbian chauvinist campaigns, raised understandable fears among the masses of workers, peasants, students, and intellectuals as well as in the governing apparatuses of the non-Serb republics — Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia.

As the austerity reforms continued, industrial production dropped and thousands of workers were swept into poverty. The inflation rate in Yugoslavia as a whole rose from 200 percent in early 1988 to 2,000 percent by the end of 1989, i.e., it rose tenfold in less than two years.

## 1989 Miners Strike in Kosovo

In February 1989, 1,000 zinc miners in Kosovo went on a hunger strike underground for eight days demanding democratic rights in their province, which the Milosevic regime was now reducing to a status less than a municipality, removing even the docile Albanian officials. The miners, supported by a general strike throughout the province as well as by working class and popular forces throughout Yugoslavia, were tricked by false promises into ending their struggle only to find that the strike leaders and hundreds of others were arrested when the strike ended. A state of siege was imposed on the province by the Milosevic leadership.

While this prolonged the life of the Serbian section of the ruling caste, it only worsened the political climate in the country.

The market reforms were leading to economic disintegration; the economic disintegration was leading to the disintegration of the Communist parties, which were not so much political parties as institutions for maintaining economic control and guaranteeing the privileges of the officialdom.

## Pro-Market "Communist" Leaderships vs. the Workers

It is important to note that *all* the leaderships of the Communist parties — the Leagues of Communists in all the republics — supported the market reforms dictated by the IMF. The only progressive currents that made themselves felt against these "reforms" were protesting workers and others, who demanded the ouster of the bureaucrats imposing the reforms; masses of workers, students, and intellectuals protested — in Kosovo throughout the 1980s and into the '90s; in Slovenia in 1988-89; and even in Serbia in 1989, 1990, and in early 1991, all demanding democratic rights and an end to market reforms. (In December 1989, for example, 650,000 workers marched in Belgrade demanding an end to the market reforms.)

It is obvious that those heading the "Communist" bureaucracy in Serbia and in the other republics were benefiting from the market reforms and planned to prosper under them. Otherwise, they would have been part of the opposition to the reforms. However, in truth, the only alternative is for workers to take control, which for most of the bureaucrats would mean removal from posts of authority and privilege.

Meanwhile, the Milosevic regime in Serbia — through repression and the carefully orchestrated campaign of Serbian chauvinism — was redirecting and disorienting the workers struggles, and ultimately, driving the republics apart. It is important to note that throughout the campaign of repression against the Albanians in Kosovo, the other republican leaderships did not resist, even though workers, students, and intellectuals throughout Slovenia, Croatia, and elsewhere supported the struggle of the Albanians in Kosovo for their rights. The Yugoslav Federal Assembly and Federal Presidency continued to support the repression.

## Multiparty Elections in 1989

However, the market reforms and economic "restructuring," along with the rising menace of the officially sponsored orgy of Serbian chauvinism, fed centrifugal movements in the other republics. In 1989 this resulted in a decision to hold multiparty elections throughout Yugoslavia. (Remember, this was the year that the Stalinist bureaucratic regimes collapsed throughout Eastern Europe.) The further result, as the dynamic deepened, was that declarations of independence were made by all the newly elected non-Serb governments — in Croatia and Slovenia in June 1991, followed by similar declarations in Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At the beginning of 1991, Milosevic announced that, should the other republics declare independence, the Belgrade government would be obliged to take sufficient land upon which to unite all of Yugoslavia's 8.5 million Serbs. Such language was intended to justify land-grabbing operations which were already being prepared in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As the Croatian Republic headed further toward sovereignty and then independence, the anti-Albanian propaganda out of Belgrade was supplemented by tales of Croatian fascists and Ustashe (as if all Croats were committed to fascist terror against Serbs), while the newly elected president of Bosnia, Alija Izetbegovic, a Muslim, was said to have plans to turn Bosnia-Herzegovina into an Islamic fundamentalist state, force all Serbian women to wear veils, etc.

## June 1991: Slovenia and Croatia Declare Independence; Milosevic Answers with Massive, Violent Aggression

The day after Slovenia declared independence on June 26, 1991, the Yugoslav federal army invaded that republic. Since mid-1990, the Serbian government and Yugoslav federal army had backed paramilitary forces to set up surrogate governments representing allegedly besieged Serb minorities in both Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina had no armies of their own to defend themselves against the heavily armed paramilitary squads, backed by the tanks and air power of the Milosevic-dominated federal army. Even the tiny Territorial Defense Units, which had been instituted under the Tito regime, had been disarmed by order of the Belgrade government. The Serbian ruling clique probably calculated that with its obvious military advantage — the Yugoslav federal army was one of the strongest in Eastern Europe — military victories would be swift.

From August to November 1991, the forces backed by the Milosevic regime took over one-third of the Croatian republic's territory (while only 12 percent of the population of the Croatian republic was Serbian), destroying entire cities, such as Vukovar, creating half a million refugees, and leaving 10,000 dead by December 1991. Only in August 1995, were Croatian military forces able to take back much of this territory, although a section of Slavonia on the

eastern edge of the Croatian Republic is still claimed and occupied by Serbian government forces, and is supposed to be returned to Croatia as a result of the 1995 Dayton peace accords.

In January 1992, the European Community recognized the independence declarations of the Slovenian and Croatian governments. On April 7, the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina — which had been declared by its government in October 1991 — was recognized by the European Community. On the next day, Serbian paramilitary forces fired on civilian demonstrators in the streets of Sarajevo (pop. 400,000), thus beginning the siege of that city, which lasted until October 1995, causing over 9,000 deaths, mostly civilians killed by Serbian snipers.

## Milosevic Wars, Not in the Interests of Serbian Workers

What has all this achieved and where will it lead? The aggression against Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina by the bureaucratic Stalinist ruling clique headed by Milosevic, under its newly fabricated Serbian chauvinist garb — as well as its aggression in Kosovo and Vojvodina — is not in the interests of the Serbian workers. As a result of the market reforms, the war, and the economic sanctions against Serbia implemented by the United Nations Security Council and its allies, by the end of 1993 the inflation rate in Serbia had reached 300 million percent, the highest in world history. Almost all industry in Serbia, except for that connected with the war effort, had been closed down. All but a tiny handful of very rich war profiteers and black marketeers are barely surviving.

Not only have some 250,000 died or been severely wounded in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but 2.5 million people have become refugees, and in most cases their homes and even whole villages and towns now lie in rubble with no functioning infrastructure.

The economy, not only of Serbia but, of course, of Bosnia-Herzegovina is in shambles; the war has turned it into the poorest country in Europe. Approximately 80 percent of the population of the Muslim-Croat Federation established by the Dayton peace accords lives at least partly on humanitarian handouts. The average per capita income has fallen 80 percent from what it was in 1990; industrial output is 5 percent of what it was in 1990. Electricity, transport, sewage and water systems are in shambles.

The Dayton accords sanction the seizures of land in Bosnia-Herzegovina by both Croatian and Serbian military forces and the partition of that republic.

## Capitalist Powers Gain Military Foothold in the Former Yugoslav Workers State

Not only will 60,000 foreign troops occupy the land (divided into three zones, American, British, and French, just like the occupation zones in West Germany after World War II); all economic decisions for Bosnia's future are now being made by capitalist powers and their economic institutions in London, Washington, and Paris. Even

the president of the new state bank that will be set up in Sarajevo as a result of the Dayton accords will apparently be appointed by the IMF — which is dominated by U.S. finance capital.

The process we have witnessed, along with all its other horrors, such as systematic land grabs, plunder, burning, mass rape and mass murder, was the ugly face of the capitalist counter-revolution. All the imperialist powers had to do was wait and watch it happen. Now they militarily intervene. The presence of 20,000 U.S. troops on the former Bosnia-Herzegovina republic is the culmination of the process I have

briefly summarized, which has been going on since the early 1980s. It was hastened greatly by the decision of the Serbian Stalinist leadership to turn to Serbian chauvinism to divide and rule — to save their skins and their privileges at the expense of the vast majority, and in the process destroying Yugoslavia.

### **The Only Way Out: Independent, International Working Class Organization and Struggle**

Only the workers, organized independently in their own class interests, can turn the situation

around. In the current economic disarray, this will be very difficult but it is already beginning to happen, and as it does, we must be prepared to lend support.

Most of all, however, we must look to our own historic responsibility — we must organize here, to assert the independent interests of the working class and its allies, and ultimately to overthrow the rule of the capitalist class and establish workers control right here in the United States.

But that would be the subject of another presentation. □

## **International Workers Aid Interview**

# **Bosnian Trade Unionists Prepare for Peace**

*Danish International Workers Aid (IWA) member Vagn Rasmussen interviewed Omer Kamperovic, president of the Miners Union in the Tuzla region; Muhammed Gutic, president of the union at the Kreka mine; and Marinko Jakovac, mining engineer (who also served as translator).*

*Note: The miners' union in Tuzla had 18,000 members before the war. Today it has 11,500, of which only 3,800 are in (almost) regular work. About 5,200 are in the army, and 2,500 are "on the waiting list" for reintegration in the mine. In other words, unemployed.*

*British mine workers, remembering the solidarity of Tuzla miners during the year-long miners strike in 1984–85, launched an initiative which developed into Workers Aid and International Workers Aid (IWA). In November 1993 an IWA convoy broke the 6-month blockade of Tuzla. Since then, the organization has delivered more than 300 tons of foodstuffs, which have been distributed through the miners' union.*

*This interview is taken, with minor style changes, from the March 1996 issue of International Viewpoint, monthly publication of the Fourth International. Free trial electronic (e-mail) subscription now available. Printed copy airmail subscriptions from £22/\$60 a year. Write to: International Viewpoint magazine, BP85, 75522 Paris cedex 11, France. Fax +33.1.43792961. E-mail R6.1443@compuserve.com.*

**Question: What do you think about the "peace accords" and the deployment of NATO troops in Bosnia?**

**Marinko:** It is good that the killing will stop. But we expect a lot of trouble. We are not prepared for the arrival of 20,000 troops. They will bring the problems which armies of occupation always bring: drugs, alcoholism, prostitution and other forms of criminality, AIDS and so on. We are trying to prepare ourselves, but there is not much we can do.

**Muhammed:** Peace came at the right time. This is absolutely not a just peace. But it is good that the weapons will be quiet now. Many of our members joined the army. Many were killed, even more wounded. At the beginning they had to fight with insufficient weaponry. It will be very difficult to continue the struggle.

**Q.: What is the prospect for real peace?**

**Muhammed:** The war has destroyed all normal economic relations across Bosnia, and in most of former Yugoslavia. Much depends on whether we can make things run normally again. Tuzla coal is very clean. Before the war we sold much of it to the territory now occupied by the Chetniks (Bosnian Serb militia). But people there still need coal. And we need to sell coal.

If economic ties are re-established, many of the problems will more or less solve themselves. People will realize how dependent we are on each other. We will start a dynamic which will be important for peace.

**Marinko:** We will have big problems with the people who are now serving in the army, once they are no longer needed there. They will receive about 400 DEM per month: not in money but in script (coupons) which will entitle them to tools, which will help them start producing.

**Omer:** Real peace means carrying the peace agreements through to the end. For instance, by punishment of all war criminals. We must put names and addresses on all the terrible crimes which have been committed. If we do not do this, there is the risk that some people will put the blame on whole nationalities, instead of concrete individuals. Refugees must all be guaranteed a safe return to their own homes. And there must be free, democratic elections.

**Q.: What about the role of the trade unions?**

**Omer:** The trade unions must learn to fight for their real role in society. We must be independent of all political parties. This does not mean that unions should not have an opinion about what is going on in society as a whole. And our members should, of course, be allowed

to be organized politically. But the union as such must be independent.

We are afraid that many things will change for the worse if peace really comes. We will see an influx of foreign capital, which will try to buy some of our industry and close the rest.

In Croatia we can already see the results of privatization. Many people end up in the street. To work in an industry owned by all society is better than to work in a private factory. You feel more sure that you have a job.

We have no great experience of dealing with private capital. We have a lot of things to learn in this respect from the workers' movement in Western Europe.

We have recently visited Denmark and Sweden, and talked to trade union leaders, and to the Kiruna coal miners in Sweden. These miners were convinced that industries like mining should be owned by the state. We should fight for that here too. In Britain, we learned from miners there about how the National Coal Board [a public sector monopoly] bought cheap coal from Poland during the 1994 strike. We can learn a lot from West European miners. We hope to organize an international trade union conference here in Tuzla, to learn from the experience of others. We also want to establish a trade union school, to educate our members. □

# Some Complications of the National Question in Yugoslavia — and Russia

by George Saunders

The sectarians simply ignore the fact that the national struggle [is] one of the most labyrinthine and complex but at the same time extremely important forms of the class struggle... [Emphasis added.]

—Leon Trotsky<sup>1</sup>

The Yugoslav revolution asserted its national identity, its fight for sovereignty, against the combined plans of Churchill and Stalin, who intended to divide the territory 50-50 between spheres of influence for British imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy. The Yugoslav Communist Party bureaucracy under Tito, leading an armed mass movement based among the workers and peasants of all the main nationalities of Yugoslavia, defended the sovereignty of this multinational territory against both imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy.<sup>2</sup>

In asserting itself against capitalism, imperialism, and the class collaborationism of the Soviet bureaucracy, the Yugoslav revolution of 1944–46 was highly progressive; that's why the Fourth Internationalists (e.g., the young Ernest Mandel) were fired up over the Yugoslav revolution; it was the first mass-based revolution to take power out of the maelstrom of World War II, setting an example that they hoped would spread to the rest of Europe — and it almost did.

There were mass movements in Greece, Italy, France, and elsewhere in the wake of World War II that objectively had the strength to take power, but subjectively they were dominated by the Soviet bureaucracy's strategy of seeking a class collaborationist deal with imperialism rather than a class struggle approach of extending and expanding the proletarian revolution into the more advanced countries. Today France and Italy are part of the G-7, the group of the world's seven wealthiest capitalist powers; they could fairly easily have become workers states if the armed, mass-based, worker-led Resistance movements had striven for power to replace the collapsed fascist governments. With workers governments in power in relatively advanced countries the whole course of the world revolution could have gone differently. Instead, the Stalinist leadership's policies prevailed: the Italian and French CPs collaborated with imperialism, helping re-establish bourgeois governments (Marshal Badoglio and his successors in Italy, De Gaulle in France).

In the late 1940s and after, the Fourth Internationalists were also right to defend and support the Tito leadership in its break with Stalin

and to mobilize aid for Yugoslavia. But the Tito leadership stopped short of an internationalist revolutionary response to the challenges created by the break with Stalin; it, too, eventually chose collaboration with imperialism instead of the more difficult road of looking to alliances with revolutionary movements internationally; it also chose alliance with the colonial bourgeoisie (in the "non-aligned" movement) rather than with fighting mass movements in the colonial countries or among workers in the advanced capitalist countries. The Titoist bureaucracy began to seriously compromise the national sovereignty of the Yugoslav federation, increasing its dependence on the world market, placing it more at the mercy of anarchic market forces and opening it up to penetration by finance capital, specifically the International Monetary Fund, the organ of U.S. and other Western banks.

The Tito leadership also stopped short of proletarian democracy internally, although it partially mobilized the masses against the threat from the Soviet bureaucracy and gained broader popular support internally by establishing workers councils with local autonomy and allowing peasants to retain their farms, rather than follow the Soviet model of forced collectivization.

Nevertheless, the privileges of bureaucratic rule were retained, with a police regime little different from the one in the USSR organized to jealously defend bureaucratic privilege. (In 1968 participants in the student rebellion in Yugoslavia coined the term "red bourgeoisie" for the privileged bureaucrats of the monopoly party — the Yugoslav League of Communists.) A cult was built up around the bureaucracy's supreme arbiter, Tito, that was little different from the cults of Stalin, Mao, Kim Il Sung, Enver Hoxha, etc. The same laws were operating — a privileged bureaucracy existing in contradiction to the socialized economic base requires massive police repression and the bizarre cult of the leader who is above criticism and resolves all problems by fiat. (Similar regimes arise in trade union bureaucracies under capitalism, e.g., the old guard Teamsters, Shanker in the AFT, etc., in contradiction to the needs of the rank and file, the associated producers.)

Internally the bureaucratic Tito regime wasn't able to handle the complex national composition of the Yugoslav federation in any way but arbitrarily, by police methods, and with an eye to gains for the privileged bureaucracy. In

the bureaucracies of the police, the military, and the government apparatus Serbs were allowed to have a dominant, privileged position relative to the other nationalities — Croat, Slovene, Bosniak (Muslim), Macedonian, Hungarian (in Vojvodina), and Albanian (in Kosovo). (In a similar way, in the Soviet Union, the Stalinist bureaucracy relied on a Great Russian element which historically had enjoyed a privileged position relative to other nationalities in the Muscovite tsars' prisonhouse of nations.)

The new "socialist" bureaucracy, by allowing the historically privileged national element to keep or reassert its privileges, created a base of support for itself, a relatively narrow base to be sure, but one consistently oriented toward privilege rather than toward egalitarianism. The mistreatment of the Kosovo Albanians became a glaring expression of this almost colonialist entrenchment of privilege on a national basis — that is, to the benefit of members of the dominant national group, in this case the Serbs, or more precisely, a petty bourgeois, bureaucratic stratum of the Serb population.

How explain the absence among the Serb proletariat of any organized current with a revolutionary egalitarian and internationalist outlook? We answer that question with another: How could such a current arise or persist in the face of the near-totalitarian police regime? Especially when Stalinist traditions came to dominate the Yugoslav party from the late 1920s on, and when there was no strong countervailing force internationally. After World War II, when anti-fascist movements, backed by the Soviet army, came to power in almost all countries of Eastern Europe, there was a move toward a federation of all "socialist" countries of the Balkans, or talk of such a move, but it was cut short and repressed by Stalin in a series of witch-hunt trials in the late 1940s that accompanied the Kremlin's anti-Tito (and renewed anti-Trotskyist) campaign.

There was a flare-up of anti-bureaucratic revolution in Poland and Hungary in 1956; and a positive international context arose around 1968, the effort to create a "socialism with a human face" through the Prague Spring of 1968, together with the international movement against the U.S. imperialist war in Indochina, the international youth radicalization of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the May-June student and worker rebellion in France. All this did find an echo in Eastern Europe (the Polish and

1. "Independence of the Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads" in *Writings of Leon Trotsky [1939–40]*, New York, 1973, p. 50.

2. Yugoslavia was first created, as a capitalist state under a Serbian monarch, out of remnants of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires as part of the Versailles settlement dictated by the victorious imperialist powers in the aftermath of World War I.



Yugoslav student rebellions of '68, the "Croatian spring" of '71). These trends helped create some political space in Eastern Europe for currents to arise that openly fought for proletarian democracy and revolutionary internationalism. Unfortunately, they didn't last long.

Genuine revolutionary forces, such as the Fourth International, were small, and their influence limited. The workers movement in the West was dominated by Stalinist, Social Democratic, or business unionist bureaucrats. Experience so far has shown that in relatively backward countries trying to make the transition from capitalism to socialism under leaderships that come out of the school of Stalinism, given their political training and outlook of "building socialism in separate countries" instead of orienting toward international revolution, a totalitarian type of police regime seems almost inevitably to arise, along with the rule of a privileged bureaucratic stratum. Inequality and unfair treatment among different nationalities is one of the many defects that result from such a regime. In Yugoslavia, with its complicated mix of nationalities, and history of cruel and bloody conflicts among them, this defect ended up becoming a terribly explosive charge.

The brutal war of aggression since 1991 by the Milosevic regime, with its chauvinist allies among Bosnian and Croatian Serbs, can be traced back to developments in 1987 when Milosevic gained control of the ruling party by promoting a Serb chauvinist campaign. (These developments are described in more detail in the article by Marilyn Vogt-Downey elsewhere in this issue.)

As Vogt-Downey points out, the emergence of the Milosevic regime based on an expansionist, Serb-chauvinist policy was initially expressed in the crushing of the national democratic movement among the Kosovo Albanians. Milosevic presented himself as defender of the "historic rights" of Serbs in Kosovo, which actually meant reasserting their national privileges as a minority in that province. The Milosevic wing of the bureaucracy used this demagogic and chauvinist campaign to take over leadership of

the Yugoslav party apparatus, which after Tito's death had been floundering in uncertainty, facing an economic crisis and growing worker militancy and protests. Soon the aim of a Greater Serbia was floated (the incorporation of Serb-populated areas of Croatia and Bosnia into Serbia, as well as of Macedonia and any other territory that could be grabbed; also, an end to autonomy for non-Serbs in Vojvodina as well as in Kosovo). The ultimate aim was total Serb domination of the Yugoslav federation. (How else explain the attempt to stop the secession of Slovenia, where hardly any Serbs lived?)

Finally, it is worth noting that what the Milosevic regime did in Vukovar (destruction of an entire city) and other parts of Croatia, and in Zvornik, Srebrenica, and other parts of Bosnia (Sarajevo almost), is no different from what the Yeltsin regime is doing in Chechnya. Revolutionary socialists oppose Western imperialist intervention in the former Yugoslav federation, but at the same time we need to oppose both regimes, Yeltsin's and Milosevic's, as bearing prime responsibility for wars of national oppression that are in essence no different from the criminal wars of imperialism.

(The following resolution on the war in Chechnya — calling for "Russian Troops Out Now!" — could as well be applied to Bosnia — but there the slogan would be "Serb and NATO Troops Out Now!")

### Stop the War in Chechnya — Russian Troops Out Now!

(This resolution, reprinted from *International Viewpoint* with some editing for style and clarification, was adopted in Copenhagen on February 17, 1996, by the Steering Committee of the Socialistisk Arbejderparti [Socialist Workers Party], Danish section of the Fourth International.)

The war in Chechnya has now been going on for more than 14 months. More than 40,000 soldiers, both Russian and Chechen, have been killed, and 100,000 wounded; the number of civilian victims is unknown. Out of a population of 1.5 million, 400,000 have been forced to flee

from war zones, from destroyed towns and villages. All economic life has been halted, and the railroad line to Dagestan and Azerbaijan still doesn't function.

The war is in every way bloody and unjust, and both the Russian and the Chechen people are taken hostage by it.

Negotiations have been tried, but with no result. The ending of the war cannot await negotiations between a Russian government that is responsible for the war and the dubious regime of Dudayev.

The only way forward, toward an ending of the war, is an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Russian troops from Chechnya. Based on this demand, a peace movement must be built, in Russia as well as internationally, and pressure must be brought to bear on all political forces in Russia, to make them support this demand.

All loan-giving to the Russian government from IMF and other international credit institutions must be halted, until the troops have been pulled out. All loan-giving to the present Russian government in reality is support to the bloody and unjust war.

The main dividing line in Russian politics today is between the opponents of the war, and the more or less expressed supporters of continuing the war. The development of the Russian left wing has to be judged by whether it promotes resistance to the war or not.

- We urge all parties, talking in the name of the working class and democracy, to mobilize their members and supporters for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Russian troops.
- We urge all opponents of the war in Russia to unite in a broad movement, aside from any disagreements they might have concerning socio-economic and political systems.
- We eagerly defend the democratic rights of all opponents of war to put forward their views.

Only by putting an end to the war in Chechnya can the Russian Federation send a message of peace to its neighbors within and outside of the former Soviet Union, and start the peaceful reconstruction of its economy for the benefit of the broad people. □

## "Feminists Have Been Overtaken by the Zapatistas"

*Continued from page 10*

age at which she will marry, decide how many children she will have, participate in politics, join the army — these are themes which mobilize in the rural communities and have a real impact in the towns.

For example, in San Cristóbal, there are many women's groups which are against violence. Others work with indigenous women, who are frightened of violence, but reluctant to talk about the problem. The adoption of the "Revolutionary Law on Women" provoked a convergence of all the women's groups, and all the individual feminists, in order to get hold of the law, to discuss it and to distribute it. A very stimulating period. A dynamic developed whereby we began to seek real consensus, in

order to give force to the movement, and generate new initiatives.

This was what led us to propose amendments to Article 4 of the Constitution, which mentions the rights of the Indian peoples, and guarantees "respect for communal customs." We said we agreed with respect for those customs which did not affect our rights as women! And we began asking women which customs they wanted to maintain and "have respected," and which they would rather see fade away. This was a very interesting period of reflection, and a process which should continue.

**Q:** Has the Zapatista movement really had an influence on the life of indigenous women?

**A.:** The Zapatista movement has enabled women to put forward a series of questions:

- Traditionally, women have not been able to inherit the right to work the land which they cultivate. They work alongside the men, but are excluded from the division of land. Zapatista women have done a lot of work promoting the right of women to work on and inherit the land.
- Traditionally, women who left their husbands (or were thrown out) were obliged to return to their parents' house. The conjugal home was automatically conferred on the husband.
- Zapatista women also decreed a total ban on alcohol in the base communities and the liberated zones. They justify this as a

measure to protect themselves against the violence of drunken men.

- As regards women's right to control their own fertility, the women of the EZLN have ensured that condoms are made available. Men in the EZLN have become accustomed to their use. We recommend women soldiers to avoid having children. Those who wish to do so usually leave the army, and return to their village. Once the children are old enough, their mothers return to their posts in the army.

The Women's Commission [in San Andrés after October 1994] was the most radical part of our negotiations with the government. Women did not just insist on the people's right to the land they live and work on. They expanded the land question to include notions of territorial autonomy, and control over processes which threaten the environment. Women in the region

are clearly the most conscious about the environment we live in, and about ecological questions in general.

Of course, reality is far from perfect. Most of our male comrades were silent when a member of the Zapatista Commission was killed by her husband, a member of our Civil Assembly. But the new values we are promoting are being integrated into the movement. They are challenging the day-to-day practice of the men, the leaders, the peasants and the mestizos (non-Indians, mainly town dwellers).

The Zapatistas really put a lot of emphasis on women's struggle. They recognize women's strength. And women's ability not just to struggle for their specific demands, but for our global demands. This is why they give women's struggle such priority. In this sense, we can speak of a female vanguard in the EZLN. These women comrades do not just challenge the Zapatista leadership over issues of macho militancy.

The essence of their work is their appeal to all the women of Mexico.

**Q.: And the institutional framework for this work?**

**A.:** For the moment, neither of the [Zapatista-inspired] women's structures [Women's Assembly, National Convention of Women] actually meets. This is partly because some women follow their personal ambitions, rather than seeking consensus. And partly because the government's low intensity war has attacked all our structures and social "spaces." This has somewhat shaken our unity, particularly among the women.

What we must do now is rebuild these structures, and reclaim the "spaces" we have created. This is one of the things those of us in Democracia Radical will be trying to do in the coming months. □

## LPA Should Be the Major Focus for All Socialists

*Continued from page 26*

class-struggle left wing. Many are more traditionally-minded officials; some are opportunistic labor fakers. This is a situation that calls for patient pedagogy, not evangelical zeal.

The content of the platform for the new Labor Party is a secondary question. It certainly will not be a comprehensive revolutionary document. It is enough that it point in the right direction, and set a framework for further useful discussion and debate.

In the accompanying article, reprinted from the Kansas City chapter's newsletter, I indicate what I think we should try to accomplish at the founding convention: a viable class-based organization, an arena for discussion, a facilitator of actions. These goals can appear quite modest. But if realized, this can prove to be a historic turning point in the U.S. class struggle.

### Record of Left Organizations on LPA

What is the nominal vanguard of our class doing to realize the potential of LPA? Unfortunately, while individual socialists are playing leading roles in LPA, organized socialist currents have performed miserably.

The most active promoter of the labor party historically — the Socialist Workers Party — has completely blown off LPA. Socialist Action, while claiming to represent the best traditions of the SWP, has a similar position to that of the degenerated SWP. While some members of the even smaller Trotskyist groups have played a good role in building LPA, their organizations generally have a sectarian "entryist" orientation, often squabbling over revolutionary rhetoric and secondary organizational questions.

The Communist Party is keeping a foot in LPA but is dressing up its traditional class-collaborationist approach with talk of "fusion tickets" and "cross-endorsing." Committees of Correspondence members have flirted with LPA in some areas but appear to have lost interest already, looking instead to build "populist-citizen-green" electoral campaigns this year.

The organization that I have been part of, Solidarity, has a number of comrades doing some good LPA work, including some on the LPA National Executive Committee. But there has been absolutely no communication, much less direction, among this potential fraction. And among the ranks of Solidarity, LPA is seen as just one of many worthy initiatives in "IPA" [independent political action]. I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that Solidarity, by not being part of the solution, is also part of the problem.

Historically, socialists played a vital part in building the organized labor movement. As numerically weak as it was, the revolutionary left played an indispensable role in the success of the mass movement against the Vietnam war. To a lesser, but still important, extent it was also instrumental in the formative stages of the modern feminist movement and in the more limited, but nevertheless impressive, achievements of the Central America and anti-Gulf War movements. The lack of such coordinated efforts by revolutionary socialists today deprives the fledgling labor party of urgently needed support.

### Common Discussion and Coordinated Efforts by Socialists Needed

I don't think this is an arrogant attitude. I'm

modest enough to acknowledge that socialists don't have a monopoly on wisdom and can in fact learn much from activists without ideology. But too many lessons of our history show that without an influential class-conscious vanguard — providing analysis, program, strategic and tactical advice, as well as a hard-working, disciplined intervention in day-to-day activities — working class movements generally either collapse or degenerate into deformed caricatures of their original mission.

Of course this is one of the traditional arguments for the need for a revolutionary vanguard party. We don't have one of those and are not likely to have one anytime soon. I'm not trying to start yet another regroupment effort. But what I would like to see tested is whether it is possible for those socialists already active in LPA — regardless of current affiliation or non-affiliation — to at least have some common discussion of problems, and maybe even coordinate some of our efforts on a national level. Erecting a healthy Labor Party's Big Tent could help reunify a fractured left.

If we let the present opening for a Labor Party slip away, another may be a long time coming. Without a Labor Party the right wing is sure to capitalize on discontent. And the failure of this effort will also impact the organized left, already in crisis.

As we prepare for the critical Founding Convention, it is time for all socialists to throw themselves into the LPA movement. □

## A Case for Courage

# Conrad Joseph Lynn (1908–1995)

by Michael Steven Smith

Cancer claimed Conrad Lynn, who passed away last November in his bungalow home in rural Rockland County north of New York City. He was 87 years old and had been an extraordinary movement lawyer, political thinker, and activist since he joined the Young Communist League as a student at Syracuse University in 1928.

He intended entering the church but became a minister with a different mission. "Understand this about my father," his son Alexander said as he memorialized him, "he was a communist." His communism was like that of the early Christian church in that it stemmed "from humans having a sense of responsibility for one another."

Conrad had been a founder of both the National Lawyers Guild and the National Conference of Black Lawyers. Several hundred friends, fellow lawyers, judges, family members, and comrades joined him today at a magnificent memorial meeting at City College in New York City.

Judge Bruce Wright said he was "a one-man civil rights movement long before it became popular, long before others joined in it. Although he was of small stature Conrad had the heart of a lion." He laughed heartily with eyes smiling behind thick glasses. And he laughed a lot. Though only 5 feet 4 inches tall, Conrad had large, muscled, athletic legs. Until nearly the end he sprinted for exercise rather than jogging and he insisted on cutting his own firewood, his motto being "a man who chops his own wood is warmed twice by the fire." He read widely and all the time.

Conversation with Conrad was "an event," as his friends and family recalled. He laced his observations with quotes ranging from Kipling and Longfellow to C.L.R. James and Franz Fanon...and, of course the Bible. His fascinating autobiography is entitled *There Is a Fountain*, a line from an old Protestant hymn. He devoured newspapers and was current with the global and local political situation. He talked politics in Harlem with Adam Powell, Paul Robeson, and especially his friend Malcolm X. Conrad shared with Malcolm a revolutionary internationalist view of the world and met with him regularly. He saw Malcolm developing politically, an evolution for which Conrad believed he was assassinated.

Speaking of his accomplishments, Heywood Burns recalled that "the litany goes back six decades." He recounted some of Conrad's battles.

In 1943, on behalf of his brother, Samuel, Conrad brought the first suit to desegregate the United States Army. At that time Black people were consigned to menial jobs, like Conrad, who spent weeks shoveling out the latrine.

Samuel Lynn, Lt. Colonel USAF Retired, told the meeting that "Conrad realized that the political and corporate leaders of America never accepted the release from slavery of African Americans."

Although Conrad lost the Army suit, Heywood recounted that Conrad helped organize and participate in the first freedom ride to desegregate interstate travel and accommodations in 1947 (fourteen years before the better known freedom rides of 1961 took on Jim Crow). Conrad was the first person arrested in Virginia when he hung strong, refusing to move, sitting in the front seat of a bus in the teeth of a mob of angry whites and Southern cops. He was arrested and convicted, not for riding in the front, but for disorderly conduct, a conviction which was reversed on appeal after the bus driver testified that Conrad was not disorderly.

Burns spoke of Conrad defending the heroic Puerto Rican independistas Lolita Lebrón and Albizu Campos. Lebrón, who had participated in an armed attack on Congress, sent a message to the meeting affirming that "Conrad was a great man for whom I felt a very great affection."

Conrad defended Black Panther victims of New York City's notorious Red Squad.

During the same period he was active in the movement against the war in Vietnam, representing draft resisters, frequently speaking at campuses and meetings, and even traveling illegally to North Vietnam as an investigator for the prestigious and influential Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal.

One of the best-known cases Conrad Lynn was associated with was the case of the Harlem Six, which he tried together with his friend Bill Kunstler, who died a month before Conrad. The six were Black teenagers falsely convicted of murder in the 1960s and vindicated only after an eight-year legal battle.

Conrad was the chief lawyer in the infamous 1958 "Kissing Case," which became an international scandal. Two Monroe County, North Carolina, African American children ages 8 and 10 were convicted and imprisoned for being kissed on the cheek by a white child. Monroe County was and is controlled by the Jesse Helms family. The children were terrorized and scarred for life. Conrad took an appeal of their case, which was lost. It was only by the intervention of Eleanor Roosevelt, who cried when Conrad told her what happened, that the children were freed.

Conrad Lynn's last political act was to help organize persons from conservative Rockland County to go to the nation's capital to participate in the Million Man March. The group decided

to call itself the "Conrad Lynn Brigade for Social Justice" in honor of Conrad, who was too sick to go himself.

Conrad's friend, Edmund Gordon described the brigade at the memorial meeting.

When about 250 of us, friends and neighbors from Rockland County, arrived in Washington and joined that mass of humanity — both genders, diverse ethnic groups, various religious beliefs, different sexual orientations, different political beliefs and affiliations — gathered there in the spirit of reconciliation, atonement, and responsibility, we knew that we had become a part of a renewed and powerful human struggle. We knew that Conrad's spirit and we were in the right place. We were convinced that our efforts at organizing and to advance and maintain social justice must continue.

Although Conrad was in various political parties over his lifetime, his activity was mostly outside of a party framework. He quietly left the Young Communist League where he was a member as a student at Syracuse University in the late 1920s. He could not abide their "Black Belt" theory which called for a separate Black country in the American South. From family ties he said he knew the mind of the Southern Black and thought that the Moscow-inspired plan to be wholly impractical.

A few years later in New York City he joined the parent of the YCL, the Communist Party, only to quit it several years later in the late 1930s. The Trinidad oil workers were on strike but the CP's solidarity was less than lukewarm so as not to upset its Popular Front alliance with Roosevelt. Conrad, always the internationalist, quit. Then the CP held a trial and expelled him.

Conrad was next briefly in the SWP but left, writing that he thought it to be "doctrinaire." He supported the SWP and came to its defense in the 1941 Smith Act prosecution. Lynn wrote about how Paul Robeson, an enthusiastic supporter of the government's case, later came over to Conrad saying that he had made a mistake.

Conrad was a great admirer of C.L.R. James and was for a while in the milieu of the Workers Party. He drifted away, he reports, when a Workers Party leader expressed support of the Rapp-Cordet Committee's persecution of teachers in New York City who were members of the Communist Party. Many of them were driven out of education.

Conrad was consistently nonsectarian. He worked closely with the SWP in the late 1950s supporting Robert Williams, the intransigent and courageous Black leader in Monroe County, North Carolina.

Like the the SWP, he was quick to support independent Black political action and was an enthusiastic leader of the New York branch of the Freedom Now Party.

Conrad is survived by his wife Yolanda, his three children, Suzanne, Alexander, and Gabrielle, and his grandchildren. Contributions to carry on his work may be made to the Conrad Lynn Memorial Fund, 6 Dogwood Place, Pomona, New York 10970.

January 27, 1996

# The Death of Michel Raptis (Pablo), 1911–1996

by Livio Maitan

Livio Maitan is a leading member of the Fourth International, and of the left wing within the Italian Party of Communist Refoundation. The following article, slightly edited for style purposes, is reprinted from the March 1996 issue of *International Viewpoint*.

Michel Raptis became involved in the struggles of the Greek workers' movement at a young age. From the early 1930s on he played a key role in the construction of anti-capitalist and anti-Stalinist organizations, in collaboration with Pantelis Piliopoulos, that lucid and courageous revolutionary Marxist leader, shot by the Italian fascists in 1943.

Raptis found himself in his country's prisons on several occasions, and was obliged to spend a large part of his life in exile, mainly in France. It was in France, in September 1938, using the pseudonym Speros, that he participated in the founding conference of the Fourth International. He stayed in France during the Nazi occupation, dedicating himself to an extremely dangerous underground struggle to reorganize the Trotskyist movement in Europe, after it had been ravaged by repression. It was in these war years that Michel began to play a major role in the International. A role that would be his for another two decades.

From 1948 to 1960, as a member of the International Secretariat, I had the chance to become familiar with Michel's activities, to observe his development, and, in our fraternal relations, to appreciate all his qualities. Each of us has a number of friends and comrades who have contributed to our development, to the key choices we make in our lives. For me, looking back after 30 years, I can only conclude that I learned a lot from Michel Raptis. I consider that his qualities were best in evidence in the 1950s. Particularly his capacity to understand quickly the essence of a changing situation. To know when we should redirect our aim, and when we should redirect our strategy. And to put into practice, without hesitation, the result of new analysis and new generalizations.

For example, Michel was certainly one of the first to stress the full importance of the rupture between Stalin and the Yugoslav leader Tito. One of the first to respond when the Korean war started, rejecting any "equidistance" between the two sides. One of the first to help revolutionary Marxists understand the importance of the populist movements in Latin America, such as Peronism in Argentina.

It was Raptis who stressed, after 1951–52, the need for revolutionary militants, particularly in capitalist Europe, to avoid any "propagandist" deviation. He argued for an entryist orientation toward the Communist Parties, which were profoundly Stalinist at that time. In other words, he argued for such policies as would permit us to avoid separating ourselves from the actually existing workers' movement, and make it possible to seize and exploit, from inside, any contradictions which began to ripen.

And it was Michel's contribution which enabled the Fourth International to rapidly sketch an analysis of changes in the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin. (See his editorial in the April 1953 issue of *Quatrième Internationale*.)

It was Michel's articles and reports, in the later 1950s, which most clearly stressed the capital importance of the new rise in the colonial revolution. Even at the price, in my opinion, of underestimating the potential of the workers' movement in some European countries.

Michel's best writing also dates from this period. Take his numerous articles in the press of the International, above all those, mostly signed M. Pablo or Jean-Paul Martin, in *Quatrième Internationale*. Or his contribution to the history of the first 20 years of the Fourth International. Or his reports to our World Congresses and the sessions of the International Executive Committee. And his books: *Capitalisme ou socialisme, la guerre qui vient* (1952), *Dictature du prolétariat, démocratie, socialisme* (1957), and *Impressions et problèmes de la révolution algérienne* (1962).

We should not forget either his May 1960 text on women's liberation. Many readers may judge now, after more than a quarter century of reflections and feminist initiatives, that this work is partly obsolete, and criticizable in a number of respects. But it had the merit of being the first text to bring a series of crucial problems to the attention of revolutionary Marxists.

Michel was directly involved, from the beginning, in a multi-faceted solidarity with the Algerian revolution. He was arrested in June 1960 in Amsterdam, together with another International Secretariat member, Sal Santen, and accused of having prepared false papers and

forged banknotes. A wide solidarity movement developed around the world during his detention, and during his trial in 1961.

The appeal launched by Jean-Paul Sartre and signed, among others, by Simone de Beauvoir and the Brazilian writer Jorge Amado was a central part of this campaign. Michel was finally sentenced to 15 months imprisonment, and liberated at the end of his trial. He took refuge in Morocco. After the victory of the revolution he moved to Algiers, where he collaborated with Ahmed Ben Bella's government.

He rejoined the leading bodies of the International after his release from prison. His report on the Algerian revolution was one of the most moving moments of the 1963 world congress.

Nevertheless, something was broken between us. Michel began a minority struggle, which led to a rupture in 1964–65. Following this split, he led a revolutionary Marxist current outside the Fourth International.

A few years ago, he wanted to rejoin the International, the historical importance of which he had never disputed, along with his current. We came to an agreement but, for various reasons, including the situation of the revolutionary Marxist movement in Greece, and important differences of opinion on the approach one should take to the war in former Yugoslavia, the agreement was not applied in his personal case.

It is for historians of the international workers' movement in the 20th century to judge Michel Raptis's activities and publications, and that of all the others who have participated in what was and is our common purpose. All I can say today is that I will never forget his tireless contribution to the revolutionary struggle. □

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## "The Time Has Come to End Business as Usual"

*Continued from page 24*

then we have a legal right to strike. When the NMB chairman refused to grant our request for mediation we suspended conferences and prepared to strike Conrail. When we suspended conferences and threatened to strike Conrail, President Clinton's NMB chairman imposed mediation on us.

The imposition of mediation effectively prevents us from legally striking to obtain a new contract. When it is not in management's interest to grant mediation NMB Chairman Dubester will not grant mediation. When it is in management's interest to grant mediation the NMB chairman will grant mediation. Like George Bush's Mediation Board, President Clinton's Mediation Board assigned a mediator only last month, has called only a couple of meetings with rail management, and continues to hold us hostage as they support Conrail's strategy of delay to avoid negotiating a contract that they can clearly afford to pay.

President Clinton and his Democratic Party state that if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be properly recognized and rewarded. Let me tell you, if you play by the rules that the two parties have established for us in rail labor, you will lose every time. It has come time to break some rules.

### If Labor Doesn't Act, the Right Wing Will

Other options, like that offered by Ross Perot, are forming to challenge the dominance of the two parties, and our members will support them if we do not organize legitimate alternatives. Ross Perot, a billionaire who earned his profits fighting unions at EDS and exploiting the value produced by his own employees, garnered 19 million votes in the last presidential election. This is despite the fact that his program, when you could figure out what it was, opposed the objective interests of the American worker. We do not need a third representative of the wealthy to provide the alternative to the two parties of wealth. Our memberships will also look to the newly forming right-wing parties and organizations for leadership if we do not provide an alternative to the present political situation.

Today we are in a struggle for our very survival as a labor movement. Only 12 percent of the workers in private industry are organized. Time after time we see our legislative initiatives foiled regardless of which party is in power. Organized management is systematically attempting to relocate to Third World countries, where super-exploited workers earn one-tenth of what our members earn. Then the Democrats

and Republicans inform us that we are in a deadly global competition with the exploited Third World workers, and we must reduce our living standards in order to compete with them. But it doesn't matter how much we give up, because we simply cannot compete with workers earning one-tenth of what we earn and whose unionization drives face violent government oppression.

### Time to Fight Back with Labor's Own Party

Brothers and Sisters, the time has come to fight back. The time has come to end business as usual. We have watched the Democrats and the Republicans steal from us for too long and then tax us to bail out the corrupt Savings and Loans. I am sick of watching the Republicans make suggestions such as eliminating Amtrak and Labor Protections and Railroad Retirement while they control the White House — and be unsuccessful in achieving legislation to do this because the Democrats control the Congress — only to see the Democrats attempt to adopt the same proposals when they control both Houses of Congress and the White House. I am sick of having no organized political voice representing the millions of working people in this country.

It is clear that workers need a viable, effective political organization dedicated to advancing the bread and butter issues of the working class and to advance the civil and collective bargaining rights of all workers. Our agenda is not even on the table of either of the major political parties and is largely ignored by the current political process. An effective organization of our own can force the other two parties to address our agenda as we advance and organize our own agenda.

### Democratic Congress Broke Rail Strike...

In 1991 all of rail labor struck because rail management refused to provide us with a reasonable share of the massive productivity increases we produced and the immense profits they enjoyed as a result of those productivity increases. Despite the fact that both Houses of Congress were under Democratic Party control, they ordered us back to work in 16 hours and imposed a real wage decrease and onerous working conditions on our members. One year later, one rail union struck one carrier, and rail management locked out every railroad worker in the United States.

Our Democratic Party "friends," led by Ted Kennedy in the Senate and John Dingell and Speaker Foley in the House then ordered us

back to work, despite the fact that we were locked out, and passed legislation mandating binding arbitration. Despite the fact that we could have won a local strike, Congress, under the complete control of the Democrats, ordered us back to work and destroyed the working lives of thousands of railroad workers. Al Swift, the Democratic Chairman of the House Transportation Subcommittee that prepared the strike-breaking legislation, has been well rewarded for his efforts in behalf of railroad management. He is now the vice president of Government Affairs for the Burlington Northern railroad.

### ...A Labor Party Congress Would Not

At our last convention we passed a resolution directing our International President to defy the law and maintain the strike if Congress orders us back to work. I know that the Democratic Party will view such action as a violation of law and move to have us thrown in jail for defying Congress. I know, too, that the Republican Party will view such action as a violation of law and move to have us thrown in jail for defying Congress. A true political representative of the American working people would stand on the strike lines with us and be the first to sit in the jailhouse beside us if the alternative is to compromise the legitimate interests of American workers against our employers. These are the politicians that we need to represent Labor Party Advocates. If a majority of politicians in Congress were dependent on Labor Party Advocates in order to win elections, would congress even move to order us back to work? I think not.

Brothers and Sisters, in addition to massive street action, we need a political organization that clearly supports the majority of people in the United States. We need — we must have — Labor Party Advocates. And we must build it into the strongest possible political organization as rapidly as possible. Without a response such as Labor Party Advocates, we cannot reverse management's one-sided class war in this country, which is designed to eliminate the union wage, union benefits, decent, safe working conditions, and our civil and economic rights. Without a response such as Labor Party Advocates, we cannot fulfill the responsibilities we accept when we accept the honor of holding union office. Thank you, Brothers and Sisters. I look forward to seeing you at our founding convention in June 1996 and working with you to build Labor Party Advocates as an alternative political movement for American working people. □

*November 11, 1995*

## Partial Victory in Twin Cities Bus Strike

*Continued from page 5*

is continuing to push ahead with plans to privatize public transportation.

### Why the Attack on Public Transit?

Why is the government bent on destroying the transit unions, downsizing public transit, and privatizing them? The answer begins in the

1920s.<sup>3</sup> The great depression of 1929 was precipitated by a crisis of overproduction, the productive capacity of capital exceeding demand. As demand fell capital sought to cut costs by

# Letters

## From a Retired Auto Worker

It's been quite some time since I've written... Yesterday, my 83rd birthday, was a day to remember...

I enjoyed your review on the New York Labor Day Parade [*BIDOM* October-November 1995]. I think, as you do, about the telltale signs (even though some are small) that there is a beginning of a new awakening among the workers. How could it be otherwise?

I have always stood for a Labor Party. In the bleak days of the recent past I was satisfied to have lived to see this occur. There were times when I suspected I would never see it. But my bones feel better now, even if I miss it, because I sense a movement in this direction from a number of currents, the LPA being the most encouraging.

Once the working class finds this avenue of struggle it opens up a field that is now denied the class-conscious revolutionary socialist to advance transitional demands, thereby winning recruits for the revolutionary van-

guard. But this will take time, and time is something that will not become exhausted.

Fred Valle  
Detroit

## From a Supporter in Scotland

I can see from the *Bulletin* [*IDOM*] that the LPA is continuing to slowly gather strength. The remarks you quote from the *Wall Street Journal* are indicative. Ironically, as the USA sees the possible emergence of a union-based Labor Party, the Labour Party here continues its drift toward becoming another mainstream bourgeois party. I read... that Arthur Scargill, the leader of the now much diminished Mineworkers, is proposing to establish a new party, the Socialist Labour Party, next May. This seems to me to be premature and unlikely to gain significant support. It does, however, reflect a certain mood amongst the left and some politically advanced workers.

Thinking about the evolution of the Labour Party, there is a certain analogy between it

and the former Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy, at least a significant section of it, decided that there was no alternative for them but to embrace capitalism more or less fully. In a similar vein, the current leadership of the Labour Party are attempting to resolve the contradiction between Labour's working-class base, and its bourgeois leadership and program, decisively in favor of the latter. My feeling is that they haven't yet succeeded and that it is too soon to talk about a new mass party.

But that doesn't mean that they can't ever succeed, and the left must remain alert to this possibility. Scargill appears to be saying that the decisive issue is programmatic, that now that the Labour Party has dumped Clause IV [for nationalization of major industry, banks, etc.], it's all over. However, the [British] Labour Party, in practice, has always had a lousy programme. More important is the structure of the party and its connections to the broader trade union movement. If the leadership succeed in changing this, then the left may well have to reconsider its position.

Iain Gault  
Glasgow

utilizing technology to increase productivity, by laying people off, and by expanding credit and intensifying demand. Technological improvements and layoffs only further decreased demand, and consumer credit expanded beyond the ability of most consumers to meet their obligations. In October 1929, fewer than one million Americans were unemployed. By March 1933, the number of unemployed had skyrocketed to 15 million. The New Deal response was to seek to raise aggregate demand through government deficit spending. This included government public works programs, programs to build infrastructure such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and Boulder and Grand Coulee dams, and programs which protected Americans from poverty while also (and most importantly from the standpoint of the capitalists) increasing consumer demand. The most successful of this latter type of program was the Social Security Act of 1935.

Efforts to raise aggregate demand proved incapable of overcoming the endemic weakness of the capitalist system. Only the Second World War, with its enormous consumption of human and material resources and then the enormous destruction of those resources (and the productive capacity of half the industrialized world) proved capable of lifting the system out of depression.

In the postwar world the U.S. government continued to create aggregate demand through vast government spending. Much of this money went to finance the maintenance of the military-industrial complex, but infrastructure (such as the interstate highway system) and human services (such as the Great Society programs) also received funding. By 1975, total government spending (local, state, and federal) reached 33.2 percent of GNP, compared to 12 percent of GNP in 1929.

The massive intervention by the state to raise aggregate demand also resulted in changes within the working class itself. By 1975, over "19 percent of all U.S. workers had jobs in the public sector, making the government the largest employer in the United States."<sup>4</sup>

Late in the Carter administration government efforts at intervention to raise aggregate demand started to shift toward a policy that more directly benefited the ruling class. Under the former policy, the ruling class was the primary beneficiary, but the working class also benefited through social programs and services that formed part of their social wage. The shift has been toward a policy that strips the working class of its social wage while at the same time shifting the tax burden so that it falls more heavily on the working class. Thus the working class gets less and pays more relative to the

ruling class, which gets more and pays less. This shift is nearing completion with the bipartisan efforts to balance the federal budget by 2002 and will have profound affects on all of us.

Over the next 7 years, public sector employees will be subject to a devastating onslaught as money for services that benefit the vast majority in this country get transferred to the ruling class. Government will reduce some services and seek to reduce labor costs in others. In still other situations, the authorities will seek to privatize services so that they can become a source of corporate profit. Privatization also provides government with a way to reduce services and labor costs.

Public mass transit will be hard hit. In the recent transportation appropriations bill signed by Clinton, funding for highway construction was increased (benefiting real estate interests and construction companies) while federal aid to operate mass transit was cut 44 percent, from \$710 million to \$400 million.<sup>5</sup> This cut will force most cities to reduce services and increase fares, or to reduce their labor costs, or both. The losers will be the working class, both the transit workers, the people who use mass transit, and the environment. □

February 29, 1996

3. See Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, New York: Putnam, 1995, especially pp. 29-33.

4. *Ibid.* p. 33.

5. See "GOP quietly winning smaller fights," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 26, 1995, p. A4. (Reprinted from the *Los Angeles Times*.)

# An Appeal to All Readers and Supporters of Bulletin IDOM

You look forward eagerly to each new issue of *Bulletin IDOM*. There is nothing quite like it among the many newspapers and magazines attempting to propagate the ideas of revolutionary socialism. Of first importance: it is on the extreme left without being sectarian. Where else could you find such a stimulating mix of news and discussion articles? You can't quite put your finger on what it is that makes it so outstanding. Is it because of its reports on activity in the labor movement on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific? Is it because sometimes issues are hotly debated? Or the fact that there may be two or more different opinions put forward about the same piece of news? Or because the editorial viewpoints concretize what you have been thinking? Even if it is none of the above and you have your own particular reasons for liking the magazine, we ask you now to concretely show your support in two ways:

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Information, Education, Discussion Bulletin

## In Defense of Marxism

### Who We Are

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published by an independent collective of U.S. socialists who are in fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International, a worldwide organization of revolutionary socialists.

Supporters of this magazine may be involved in different socialist groups and/or in a broad range of working class struggles and protest movements in the U.S. These include unions and other labor organizations, women's rights groups, antiracist organizations, coalitions opposed to U.S. military intervention, gay and lesbian rights campaigns, civil liberties and human rights efforts. We support similar activities in all countries and participate in the global struggle of working people and their allies. Many of our activities are advanced through collaboration with other supporters of the Fourth International in countries around the world.

What we have in common is our commitment to the Fourth International's critical-minded and revolutionary Marxism, which in the twentieth century is represented by such figures as V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leon Trotsky. We also identify with the tradition of American Trotskyism represented by James P. Cannon and others. We favor the creation of a revolutionary working-class party, which can only emerge through the conscious efforts of many who are involved in the struggles of working people and the oppressed and who are dedicated to revolutionary socialist perspectives.

Through this magazine we seek to clarify the history, theory and program of the Fourth

International and the American Trotskyist tradition, discussing their application to the class struggle 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, establishing a working people's democracy and socialist society based on human need instead of private greed, in which the free development of each person becomes possible.

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is independent of any political organization. Not all U.S. revolutionaries who identify with the Fourth International are in a common organization. Not all of them participate in the publication of this journal. Supporters of this magazine are committed to comradely discussion and debate as well as practical political cooperation which can facilitate eventual organizational unity of all Fourth Internationalists in the United States. At the same time, we want to help promote a broad recomposition of a class-conscious working class movement and, within this, a revolutionary socialist regroupment, in which perspectives of revolutionary Marxism, the Fourth International, and American Trotskyism will play a vital role.

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* will publish materials generally consistent with these perspectives, although it will seek to offer *discussion articles* providing different points of view within the revolutionary socialist spectrum. Signed articles do not necessarily express the views of anyone other than the author.

# Why We Need a Worker-Based Political Party in the United States

**1. Taxation policies benefit the wealthy and corporations.** For more than 30 years, members of Congress and presidents — Democrats and Republicans alike — have enacted one law after another to create two tax systems: one for the rich and powerful and another one for the rest of us. For example, in 1953 millionaires paid 49% of their income in taxes (combined federal income tax and social security); in 1991, they paid 27%. In 1953, middle income families paid taxes at a rate of 11%; in 1991 they paid 18%. In addition, in the 1950s the corporate share of total U.S. taxes collected averaged 39%, while individuals contributed 61% of the total. By the 1980s, the corporate share had fallen to 17%, while individuals' share had risen to 83%.

**2. Corporate profits are booming and we're out of work!** With profits at an all-time high, AT&T laid off 40,000 workers in January of 1996. On the heels of record first quarter '95 profits, Mobil laid off 4,700 people. Wall Street rewards companies for cutting jobs.

**3. Real wages are falling.** In 1973, production and non-supervisory workers (that's 80% of all workers) averaged

\$10.81 an hour. By 1993, the average fell to \$9 an hour. That's a 17% drop in earnings!

**4. We're working longer hours to make ends meet.** The U.S. business strategy is to use contingent workers or overtime to avoid the cost of hiring and training new workers. At a time when nearly 9 million people can't find jobs, other Americans are putting in the most overtime since the government started keeping records.

**5. The corporate elite profit at our expense.** In 1980 the average CEO pay was 41 times the average worker's wages. By 1993, CEOs paid themselves 149 times the average worker.

**6. Jobs for middle-income Americans have been destroyed.** The economy produced about 7 million new jobs since 1988 — but almost all of these new jobs are either at the very top of the income scale or at the very bottom.

**7. Manpower is now the country's largest employer.** Temporary jobs expanded by 211% between 1970 and 1990, compared with 54% for all employment.

**8. The rich are really rich.** In 1989, the richest 10% of families held 80% of all nonresidential real estate; 91% of all business assets; 85% of all stocks; and 94% of all bonds.

**9. Money talks in electoral politics.** Many different individuals, companies, and PACs gave money to congressional campaigns in 1991-92, but business outspent other groups by a wide margin, investing more than \$295 million in its favorite candidates.

**10. Health insurance, a pension — what's that?** More and more workers are saying goodbye to benefits as employers eliminate health and retirement benefits. Two-thirds of the private sector workforce (over 60 million people) have no private pension plan. Half of all Americans have no retirement plan. More than half of the 40 million uninsured Americans are employed.

**11. On NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], Clinton bought the votes to cost us 300,000 jobs.** Before the peso crisis in 1993-94, we suffered a net loss of 10,000 jobs. After the peso devaluation, it is conservatively estimated that 300,000 U.S. jobs have been lost as of 1995. □

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