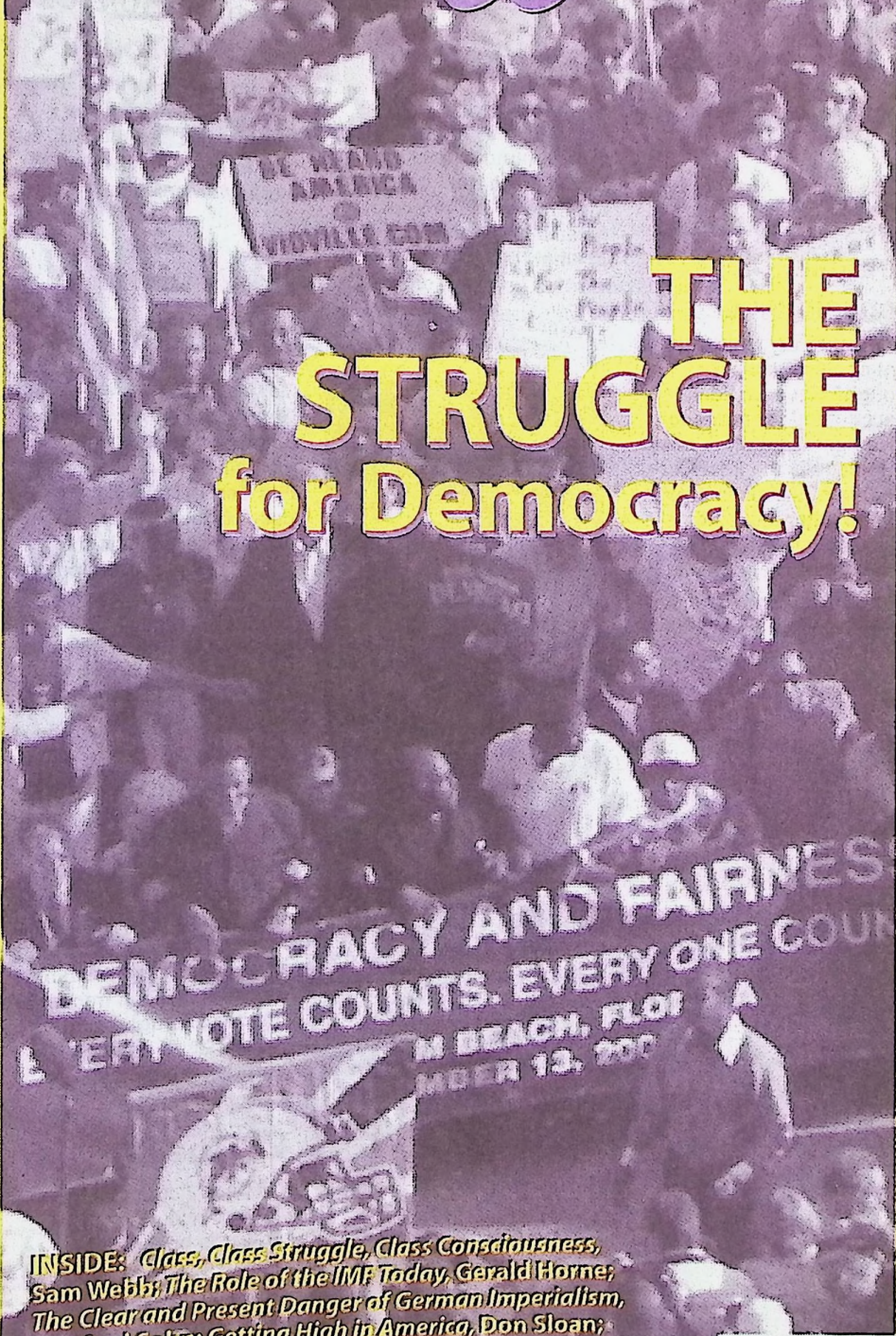
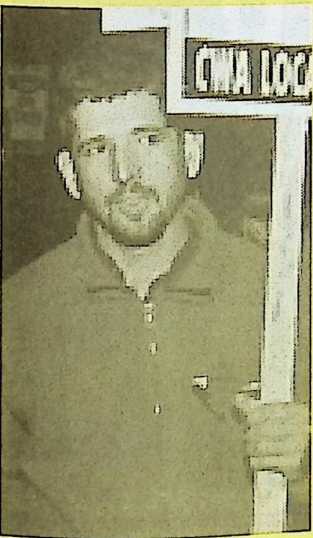


# political Affairs

Journal of the Communist Party  
www.cpusa.org/p

DECEMBER 2000

\$1.75



## THE STRUGGLE for Democracy!

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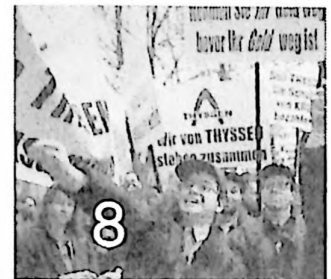
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**December 2000  
Volume 79 No. 12**

Political Affairs (ISSN 0032-3128) is published monthly except for combined September/October, by Political Affairs Publishers, Inc 235 West 23rd Street, New York, NY 10011 [This address is for all correspondence]. 212-989-4994.

Manuscripts are invited. If a manuscript return is requested, please enclose a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope.

Subscription Rate: \$18 for one year (individuals) \$27 for one year (institutions); foreign subscriptions: Canada and Mexico \$20 a year; all others on request; single issues, \$1.75. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send changes of address to: Political Affairs, 235 W. 23rd St, N.Y. N.Y. 10011

## Fighting for Democracy

Disenfranchisement of Florida voters is disenfranchisement of all voters. Despite the media spin, the presidential election crisis is not a battle between the two candidates. Rather at bottom it is an epic struggle between opposing class forces. At stake is the direction of democracy itself.

This is a struggle for the right of each voter to cast their ballot for the candidate of their choice and have that vote counted. Massive irregularities and racial profiling show the need for a re-vote in Florida. This is the only way that the will of the people can be known and realized.

A catalogue of complaints filed shows confusing ballots, refusal of election officials to explain ballots, refusal to provide replacement ballots, racial discrimination in the form of barriers to voting in predominantly Black and Puerto Rican precincts. The numbers involved equal at least 100,000 persons.

African American and senior voters came to the polls in large numbers based on the issues. They came out to defeat George W. Bush in part based on their experience with his brother Jeb Bush as Florida's governor. In separate studies, statistical analysis indicate the majority of voters whose votes were not counted or disqualified supported Al Gore, winner of the popular vote. The call for an investigation into violations of the Voting Rights Act and an investigation of the whole election process deserves full support.

The theft of an election threatens our democracy. The battle that every vote count is a battle to preserve hard-won rights fought for since the founding of our nation including the abolitionist, suffrage and the civil rights movement. That is why, bringing home the Battle in Seattle, ordinary voters are filling the streets in Florida demanding that their votes be counted.

The Bush forces claim that the people demanding their rights to vote are sore losers. But it is Bush's use of provocations and stalling and strong-arm tactics in the courts and in the streets who are really trying to block democracy. The people can stop the theft of the presidential election if there is a relentless outcry from communities across our nation and from the coalitions that joined together to bring out the vote in this crucial year.

A review of election laws is also called for, state by state, to open up the process, allow candidates to run on more than one line, allow proportional representation, election day voter registration, and elimination of the Electoral College.

The entrance of the Republican-dominated Supreme Court into the picture added to danger. To the Supreme Court is attributed an ideological or philosophical role above the partisan fray. However, the court's "impartiality" should fool no one as a quick glance at its decision to remand and recind the Florida Supreme Courts ruling reveals. Whatever the outcome, one this is sure: the outcome of the election will either be decided in the streets or in the suites. Mass pressure in defense of democracy is what's needed.

## The Washington Consensus

It has become increasingly apparent that the worldwide struggle against what has been called "globalization," is – in reality – a struggle against imperialism.

This was apparent in Seattle in 1999 when "turtles" (environmentalists) joined "Teamsters" (trade unionists) in protest against the World Trade Organization. As one droll wit put it, it was the coming together of the "greenies" and the "Sweeneys," the latter being a reference to the present leader of the AFL-CIO, whose leadership has dragged the trade union movement away from the torpor of the Lane Kirkland/George Meany years.

Anti-imperialism was also evident in April 2000 when these latter two forces were joined by thousands of youth and students in protest of the devastating policies of the U.S. dominated World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Any doubt about the nature of this trend was removed when thousands more marched in Prague chanting "Cancel the debt" while wielding placards that demanded "People Before Profits." These protesters, who hailed from the four corners of Europe and beyond, not to mention the Czech Republic itself, were demonstrating once more against IMF-WB policies, that have plunged developing nations into a morass of debt while consigning billions globally to the uncertain fate of surviving on less than \$2 a day.

That this riveting event was held in Prague was of particular meaning, for since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ouster of Communists from power in Eastern Europe Wall Street has been trumpeting the imagined virtues of the "Washington consensus" – privatization, deregulation, unleashing of market forces, destruction of socialism: in short, a pro-imperialist bacchanal.

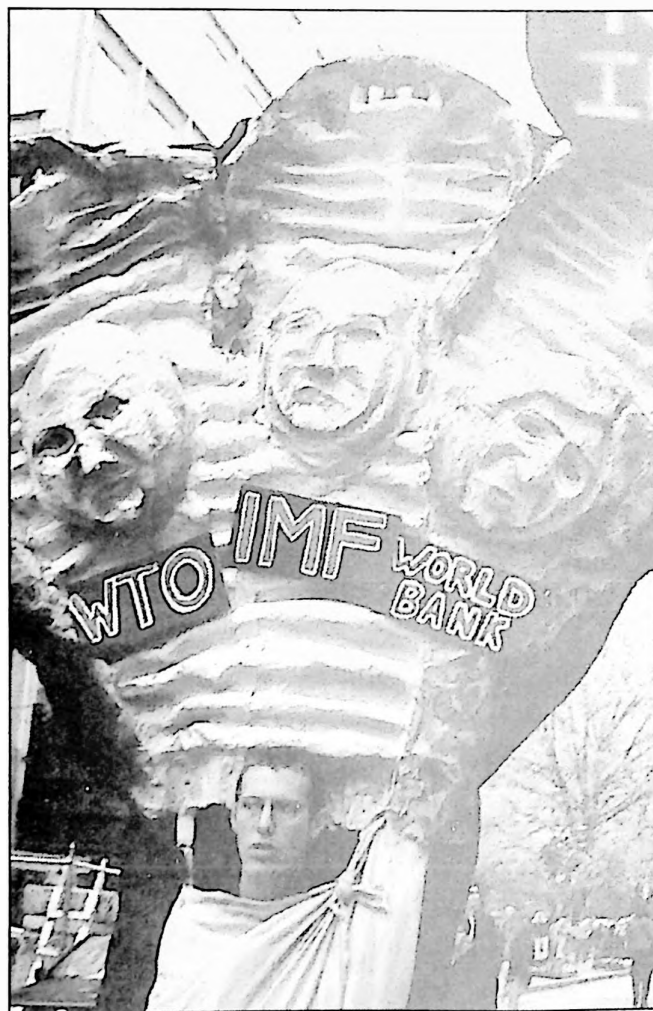
Yet, despite powerful organs of propaganda constantly bleating about the alleged advantages of capitalism, the proliferation of shrinking paychecks and empty stomachs has convinced more and more that this "Washington consensus" is simply unsustainable.

It is particularly notable that this wave of protest began in the U.S. itself, where the "Washington consensus" was launched. On the same day that thousands were marching in Prague, hundreds were in Hartford, Connecticut protesting the anti-labor policies of United Technologies which has allowed subcontractors to pay low wages to janitors. Also during this period rallies in the Boston area were aimed at pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, which has been accused of profiting on AIDS drugs even as infection rates rise in Africa and beyond. In San Francisco, scores marched carrying banners proclaiming "CitiBank: Rainforest Destroyer." In Denver and Indi-

anapolis many more gathered to protest the underwriting of World Bank bonds by Salomon Smith Barney, the Wall Street investment bank.

The overriding concern of these protests globally was a cancellation of the debt owed by developing nations to banks and governments in the leading capitalist nations. Others have endorsed the call of President Fidel Castro of Cuba who has recommended imposition of the "Tobin Tax;" named after the well-known Yale economist, this tax would be imposed on stock transactions and international capital flows and would be used for development, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Whatever the outcome of the events now unfolding in Washington, these issues will not go away and must be addressed in the coming year in the new wave of protests that are sure to greet the spring meetings of the World Bank and the IMF where a new anti-imperialist consensus is being forged.



AP Photo

# Class, Class Struggle, and Class Consciousness



Sam Webb

History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many-sided, more lively and "subtle" than even the best parties and the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes can ever imagine. (Lenin, *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, p. 76)

**W**e are living at a time marked by profound changes in the political, economic, and social landscape on a global level. It is, arguably, a new era in world development. These changes, as you would expect, bring with them new theoretical problems and challenges. In a fast changing world, the pat answer of yesterday is sometimes patently wrong today.

(continued on next page)

NO MUSIC  
IN CONTRACT  
FOR PAUL  
ROBICHEAU

18 YEARS  
NOTHING?  
NO WAY!

A QUALITY PAPER  
must give  
FAIR TREATMENT

NO \$  
RIGHTS

WE FATS!

Sam Webb is Chairman of the Communist Party. Responses to this article are encouraged.

Thus, a timely and fresh approach to questions of theory and ideology is imperative. Otherwise, the working-class and people's movements easily flounder and opportunities are missed.

The founders of scientific socialism never claimed that what they wrote was the last word on politics, economics, or ideology. They never viewed their theoretical innovations, immense as they were, as anything but a foundation for further analysis of a wide range of problems.

Lenin once said that Marxism is not a closed and inviolable system while Engels years earlier echoed a similar concern. "The materialistic conception of history," he wrote to a comrade,

has a lot of them nowadays, to whom it serves as an excuse for not studying history ... our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the manner of the Hegelian. All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be examined individually before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil law, aesthetic, philosophic, and religious views corresponding to them ... But instead too many of the younger Germans simply make use of the phrase historical materialism (and everything can be turned into a phrase) only in order to get their own relatively scanty historical knowledge ... constructed into a neat system as quickly as possible and then they deem themselves very tremendous. (Letter to C, Schmidt, August 5, 1890)

Marx, of course, shared Engels' view. These great minds appreciated the dynamic nature of world capitalism and insisted on creatively and constantly developing their insights and thinking in line with a changing world.

Never did they attempt to shoehorn facts to theory. Rather they elaborated and adjusted their theoretical constructs to illuminate a fluid and ever changing historical reality. And they did it eagerly and fearlessly.

In this regard, stiffly constructed concepts of class are never appropriate. That is particularly the case now when political, economic, and ideological life is so fluid, when new opportunities exist to strengthen working-class, multi-racial, and all people's unity.



AP photo

In order to clarify what is meant this article will discuss, in order, the class struggle, class exploitation and social democracy, class-consciousness, and finally the working class.

### Part 1: The Class struggle

"The history of all hitherto existing societies," wrote Marx and Engels, "is the history of class struggle." This profound observation by the founders of scientific socialism challenged conventional wisdom. Up until then, the historical process was seen as accidental and arbitrary. If human agency played any role in historical change, it turned on the actions of great personalities and dominant social classes.

Marx and Engels, by contrast, turned the historical process on its head. Constructing a new theoretical model, they persuasively argued that historical change was in large measure the outcome of the collective struggle of millions against their class oppressors rather than the result of either the whims of individuals perched at the top of the social structure or historical accidents.

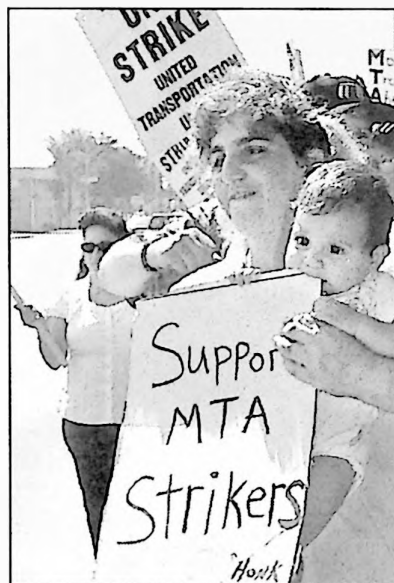
In doing so, Marx and Engels transformed, in the realm of theory, the exploited and oppressed from an inert mass into makers of history. This insight has provided hundreds of millions in every corner of the globe with a new way to understand and influence the historical process. And that is precisely what people have done, sometimes in dramatic ways, including in the U.S. where we have had our own moments when ordinary men and women stormed heaven.

With any new concept, however, there is always the danger of misinterpretation and oversimplification. And

there is no reason to think that this idea of Marx and Engels is safe from such dangers.

To be sure, the class struggle is the main thread in historical development, but it is not the only thread, it is not the only causal factor. The historical process is exceedingly complicated and other struggles leave their imprint on history's record as well.

In fact, the class struggle mingles with other social struggles and the



AP photo

Mom pickets outside MTA bus depot in LA during September strike.



relationship is complex and reciprocal. The relationship is not one way, with the class struggle always ruling the roost.

Only at a high level of theoretical abstraction does the class struggle appear in pure form, does it dance on the stage of history untouched and untainted by the world swirling around it. Closer to the ground, closer to the actual course of events, the class struggle is embedded in a complex social process in which it structures and is structured by other processes.

Just as nature abhors a vacuum, history abhors pure forms, the compartmentalization of social phenomena, neat lines of demarcation and static relationships. Let's face it, the historical process is messy.

Marx, Engels and Lenin particularly appreciated the entangling nature of historical development. If it were a choice between complexity and simplicity of explanation with regard to historical change, they almost always chose the former for fear that the latter concealed as much as it revealed.

They were suspicious of historical explanations that drained the historical process of variation, discounted new experience, and resisted the modification of theory under any circumstances. By and large, they never gave the same explanatory weight to the elegant phrases that appear in their writings that later Marxists and Marxist-Leninists did.

While acknowledging the primary role of the class struggle in the historical process, these theoretical giants allowed for novelty, embraced new experience, and altered their views to changing reality. Historical change for them was not reducible to some sanitized version of the class struggle.

"To imagine that social revolution," Lenin wrote,

is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all of its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, ... To imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up and says, "We are for socialism," and another army lines up somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism," and that will be social revolution ... Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is all about. (*The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up*)

And on another occasion, he said,

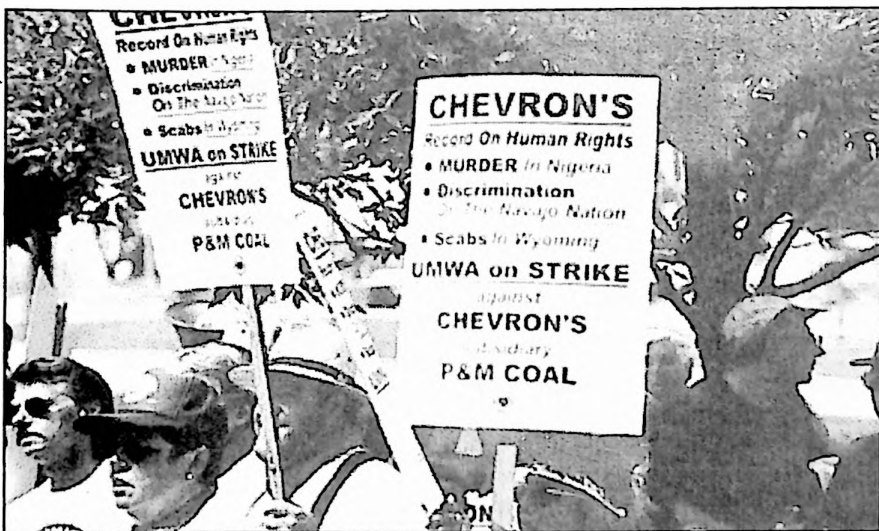
All nations will arrive at socialism – this is inevitable, but all will do so in not exactly the same way, each will contribute something of its own to some form of democracy, to some variety of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the varying rates of socialist transformation in the different aspects of social life. There is nothing more primitive from the viewpoint of theory or more ridiculous from that of practice, than to paint, "in the name of historical materialism", this aspect of the future in monotonous grey. (*A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*)

Such an approach to theory and ideology would suit us well today given the emergence of new political, economic, and ideological patterns, along with capitalist globalization and everything that comes in its train.

At Seattle and then in Washington a movement arose out of the anti-IMF and WTO demonstrations whose political potential is staggering.

To be sure, it's in its early stages, but already it embraces an incredibly broad array of forces. The forms of struggle employed are creative and varied. Its tone is militantly anti-corporate, and even anti-capitalist among some of its currents, particularly the youth. It thinks in global terms. And, labor is assuming a larger and larger role in this multi-layered, multi-level movement.

Of course, the movement does not have a single center. Its roots are not deep enough. Its programmatic demands are imprecise. The unique leading role of the working class and labor movement is not fully appreciated. And the enormous strength of the racially oppressed is not yet felt, a weakness that has to be overcome quickly.



Workers strike Chevron.

No matter how you look at this phenomenon, one thing is clear: it's going to test our theoretical and political creativity and flexibility like nothing else has for decades. How we measure up will go a long way in determining what our Party and the YCL will look like in a decade from now.

## Part 2: The Systemic Nature of the Class Struggle

In our view, the class struggle has its origins in material exploitative practices. It is traceable – sometimes directly, other times in more roundabout ways – to a system of exploitation.

The ceaseless accumulation of capital and the exploitation of wage labor are two sides of a single coin. And this inner urge is reinforced and sustained by competitive rivalry among competing capitals.

The "race to the bottom," a race that is the ratcheting downward wages and conditions of workers across the globe, is endemic to capitalism and the TNCs which are capitalism's main structural underpinning at this stage of its development.

Left to its own devices, capitalism's logic is to extend in a thousand ways through speedup, overtime, job combination, race and gender discrimination, and so forth the unpaid portion of the workday. Or to put it differently, its insatiable urge is to appropriate an every larger quantity of surplus labor from the working class worldwide.

After all, when it comes to exploitation, present-day capitalism has no boundaries. More than at any time in its history, it is nearly a universal system, even penetrating and exercising a considerable influence on the economic policies and life of the countries of socialism.

But its global dominance has not ushered in an era of peace and prosperity for the world's people. Indeed, mass impoverishment of hundreds of millions, widening race

and gender inequality, the ravaging of entire nations and regions, the explosion of child and contingent labor, the massive displacement of unionized workers from the production process, and intensified racism and national chauvinism are the hallmarks of unrestrained markets and global capitalism.

Given the exploitative nature of capitalism and its miserable effects, it's easy to agree with Marx.

"The main issue," he said in a speech to the Central Committee of the Communist League, "cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of existing society, but the foundation of a new one." (Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League, 1850)

That's sweet our ears but not surprisingly, social democratic and center forces in the working-class and democratic movements look at these matters differently.

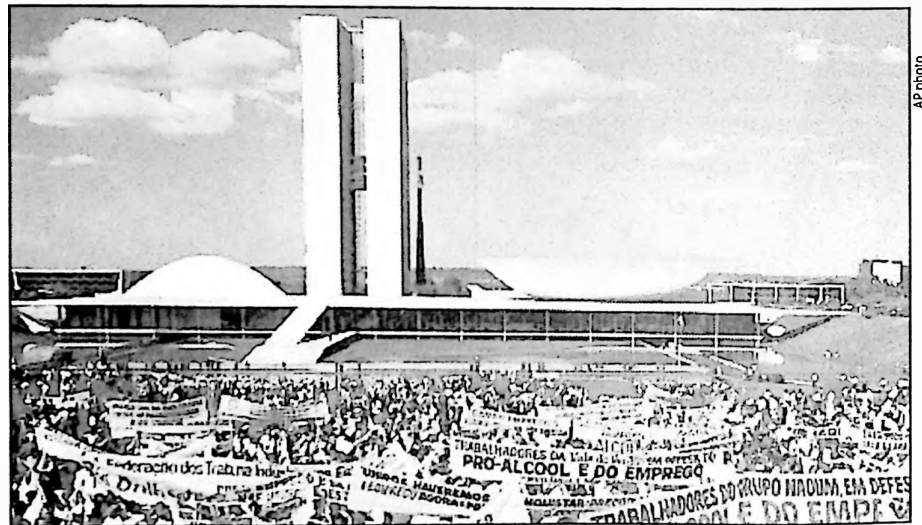
Exploitative practices, they would argue, exist, in fact on a growing scale. But they do not trace these practices to a system of exploitation, to systemic sources. Instead, social democratic and liberal ideologues blame myopic corporations that accent short-term profits and share-

holder capitalism, greedy business-people, and misguided public policy for the present predicament.

While acknowledging adversarial relations between capital and labor, they claim that disputes can be resolved within the framework of capitalism, albeit in a more benign and worker-friendly capitalism than the present one. Labor, they say, should have a seat at the table and the playing field should be level. In short, the class struggle in their eyes is episodic and accidental rather than a permanent, organic, and fundamental feature of capitalist society.

This ideological fault line distinguishing Communist and other left forces from social democratic and center currents within the labor movement (and other movements for that matter) should not preclude unity of action around issues of common concern however.

Our main enemy is not social democracy. In fact, we need a more nuanced attitude toward social democrats in the labor movement. Today's social democratic and social democratic influenced trade unionists are not the same as the social democratic elements that inhabited the top floors of the House of Labor during the Cold War years. The latter were right social democrats – virulently anti-Communist, implacably



Workers rally in Brazilia, Brazil. Thousands gathered to protest cuts in government subsidies to the sugar cane industry.





Protesters march and chant in Washington against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

class collaborationist, and deeply racist and male supremacist.

Until recently, however, we had a tendency to lump the different tendencies of social democracy together into one reactionary, monolithic and unchanging heap. Such attitudes tended to obscure differences within social democracy that in the end count for a lot from the standpoint of class and democratic struggles against the TNCs and the extreme right.

This habit of lumping had its origins in the sectarian policies of Communist movement in its formative period. But that error was given an extended lease of life in 1928 when Stalin announced his class against class policy.

Given the prestige of the Soviet Party and of Stalin himself, the young Communist movement pursued their sectarian policies with a new vigor to the point where social democrats were turned into social fascists. And this policy continued until the time of the 7th World Congress. At that historic gathering Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitroff, taking a diametrically different position from the previous policy, argued for unity with social democratic workers and their leaders who were, he maintained, changing under the weight of the fascist threat and the worldwide economic crisis.

We should carefully study Dimitroff's speech, especially in light of the changes taking place in labor's ranks, including among social demo-

cratic minded leaders and workers. Under the impact of globalization and the assault of the extreme right, this section of the labor movement is shedding not all at once, but shedding nonetheless, concepts that held them back from mass struggle.

This shift is dramatically enlarging the possibilities for broad unity and radical change. Already, the struggle for economic justice, for racial and gender equality, for immigrant rights and cross border solidarity, for a revitalized labor movement are on a higher ground.

Moreover this shift is also widening the opportunities for Communists to make unique contributions to the class struggle, provided, of course, that we quickly adjust our tactics to the new conditions and currents of struggle.

### Part 3: Class Consciousness

Class-consciousness is a cause and consequence of the class struggle. It is as much a way of acting as it is a way of thinking. It is made and unmade. It is not a hereditary trait, but rather it is constructed in the course of struggle.

Class-consciousness is not a neat and tidy concept. Class conscious workers have a lot of rough edges. Even contradictory ideas co-habit in the their heads, but the main thing is what ideas dominate at any given moment.

Class-consciousness does not inexorably follow from one's position in a social system of production. If it did, then socialist revolution would have happened a long time ago.

We did not invent class-consciousness anymore than we invented fresh winds in the labor

movement. Yes, we had a hand – and a unique hand at that – in its formation, but we are not the only hands stirring the pot. Class-consciousness is conditioned by other objective and subjective factors as well.

The working class itself, to borrow a phrase from E. P. Thompson, the great British historian, has a hand in its own making. Between social being and social consciousness is the realm of struggle. And in this realm – not apart from but in close connection with the Communist and left forces – the working class makes itself into a social force, capable of leading a broad people's movement and contending for political power.

In this regard, did Lenin short-change the working class in *What Is To Be Done* when he wrote that the working class by its own efforts could only develop trade union consciousness? This seems too stiff, not open ended enough for me. A few years later his formulation is more expansive.

"The working class" he writes, "is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic [meaning socialist minded in the context of pre-Revolutionary Russia] and more than 10 years of Social Democracy [meaning the Communist and socialist movement] has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness."

On another occasion, Lenin has this to say regarding the political capacities of the working class, "Marxism differs from all other socialist theories in the remarkable way that it combines complete scientific sobriety in the analysis of the objective state of affairs ... with the most emphatic recognition of the revolutionary energy, revolutionary creative genius, and revolutionary initiative of the masses..."

Now no one should think that I'm suggesting that we suspend our efforts to deepen and extend the class and socialist consciousness of the U.S working class. To the contrary, such efforts are crucial if the working class and labor movement is to secure through dint of effort its position as a

leader of the people's movements at every stage of struggle.

What I am suggesting, however, is that no one should underestimate the political and fighting capacities of our nation's multi-racial, multi-national, male-female working people. Experience tells us that the U.S. working class brings its own understandings, insights, know-how and sensibilities to class and democratic battles. It is a quick learner and an able teacher.

I never liked the concept that says that the working class is the motor of the revolutionary movement and the Party its leader. Such a mechanical construction, which, as you probably recall, was contained in book that we discussed in a recently is not only mistaken, but harmful. It implies that the Party is detached from the working-class movement rather than an integral and militant section of this movement.

Moreover, it can easily lead to huge mistakes and distortions at every phase of the class struggle, including in the building of socialism.

#### **Part 4: The Working Class and Concentration**

In the *Communist Manifesto*, it says, "the only really revolutionary class is the proletariat." What should we infer from this passage? Are Marx and Engels suggesting that no other social grouping has revolutionary potential? Are they saying that coalition politics and socialism are incompatible? Are they arguing that only our nation's working people are going to board the bus of Bill of Rights socialism?

I suppose that a new reader of Marx might draw this conclusion from the passage above. But it would be mistaken interpretation of Marx and Engels. In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels write that the "lower middle class is becoming revolutionary in view of its impending transfer into the proletariat."

Many years later in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx assails LaSalle, its author, for writing that apart from the working class, all other groupings in society are, but "one reactionary mass."

Marx says that this is "nonsense." He goes on to write, "Has one [LaSalle] proclaimed to the artisans, small manufacturers, and peasants during the last elections: relative to the working class, you ... form only one reactionary mass?"

For Marx the struggle for democracy and socialism consists in winning allies to the side of the working class. Lenin was perhaps even more emphatic about the absolute necessity of this. Do we have a similar strategic point of view? Do we envision that the winning of socialism will be a labor-led coalition affair?

For good reasons, we do. For one thing, the opportunities for broad coalitions have seldom been better. One of the notable features of the past few decades is the growth of new social movements. To labor's traditional strategic allies like, for example, the African American, Latino, Asian, and

Native American Indian peoples, we have to add a broad array of social groupings that are emerging as new political actors on the stage of struggle at home and abroad.

For another thing, there is no other path that will steer us to socialism. Whoever thinks that these gigantic concentrations of economic and political power now bestriding the entire globe can be successfully challenged by the working class on its own is seriously mistaken and does damage to the socialist cause. Of course, the converse is equally true (and we have to convince other social forces of this), no serious assault on the TNCs and their system of capitalism stands a ghost's chance without the working class assuming a leading position in such a struggle.

In any event, we must develop broad and elastic concepts of struggle. This is where politics begins in this new century.

Now some might think that the growth of the working-class and people's movement is the prelude to the burial of our policy of concentration on mass production workers. This, however, would be a hasty and wrong conclusion.

Our focus on mass production workers is a viable and necessary policy – indeed more viable and necessary. But like everything else, it has to adapt itself to new developments, namely, the extreme right danger, the upsurge in the labor and people's movement, the new stage of global imperialism, the unevenness of the economic expansion, the new racist offensive, the feminization of poverty, the changing composition of the working class, and so forth.

Our concentration policy, therefore, should not be narrowly conceived. We should not see mass production workers leading an insular existence. Instead we should see this section of our class mingling with their class brothers and sisters at Boeing, marching in New York against police brutality, lobbying California governor Gray Davis to support the Caesar Chavez holiday, rallying in Washington for women's right to choose, and walking shoulder to shoulder with student, environmental, and other activists. In short, workers in mass production industries should help to lead a much wider movement for radical change in conditions that are new and unique.

To express it differently, mass production workers, to quote Lenin, who seemed to have always something trenchant to say, "should fight with all the greater energy and enthusiasm for the cause of the whole people, at the head of the whole people."

This brings me to the end. I don't know if I have convinced you of the need for less stiff concepts of class. But maybe that is not the most important thing anyway. Perhaps the most important thing is that we are all stimulated to think about these questions even if we don't see eye to eye. ■



Gerald Horne

**"Down  
with the  
IMF!"**  
they shouted.

**"Cancel  
the  
Debt!"**  
they yelled.

**W**hen protesters descended on Prague in late September 2000 to protest the gathering of the International Monetary, World Bank and Group of Seven Finance Ministers, little did they realize what ordeal awaited. No doubt some had swallowed the flowery propaganda about Czech President Vaclav Havel, who has been portrayed in the bourgeois press as a combination of Shakespeare and Martin Luther King, Jr. These protesters instead received a rude surprise from the thousands of police and soldiers – many trained by the U.S. authorities, particularly the FBI – who amassed in this city of priceless baroque and gothic architecture, now marred by graffiti that makes 1970s era Bronx subway cars seem immaculate by comparison.

This incongruity of the authorities' passive attitude toward the defacing of buildings and their fierce approach to those militantly confronting the alienation, disaffection and growing poverty that spurs such defacing was never so clear as on the final day of this august meeting of financial vampires. Protesters were marching through the streets by the thousands chanting slogans in various languages about the crushing debt burden that is suffocating the billions enduring on less than \$2 per day. They had arrived in this capital city from the four corners of the globe but with the heaviest representation coming from Germany and Prague itself. Trade unions were well-represented, particularly construction workers. The Czech authorities, thoroughly briefed by their U.S. "handlers," had moved early on to block entire train loads of protesters arriving from Italy.

They were on their way to the building where these economic royalists were meeting, intending to surround it, intending to insure that their voices – which had been muted by a mostly compliant local press – would be heard. It was later revealed that the ranks of the demonstrators had been infiltrated with police provocateurs; it was they, no doubt, who began breaking windows and engaging in other acts that provided an

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*Gerald Horne is a contributing editor of PA and represented the journal during the Prague meetings and protests.*



eagerly awaited excuse for police action.

The chief window breakers, who did their work fully on camera, were large males, fully masked and apparently unmolested.

It did not take long for flailing batons and pounding fists – both wielded by the 11,000 plus police and soldiers – to begin flying: they did their dirty work with an apparent grim satisfaction.

The tribulations of the protesters did not end there. They were arrested and dragged to cold and musty, medieval prison cells. There they were deprived of food and the adequate health care so desperately needed. Their attorneys and defenders compared what befell these protesters to “FBI COINTELPRO” tactics, a reference to the now discredited and exposed disruptive programs engineered beginning in the 1950s against Communists and anti-war and civil rights activists in the U.S.

It was stressed that that in 1996 the FBI asked and got billions from Congress to *double* the number of its permanent presences from around 23 world capitals to 46. Prague was prominent among the cities on the new list and the “consultatio” of the new Prague base with the Czech police is well-known. Imperialism is not only exporting capital but its homegrown tactics of repression as well.

Thus, a protest against a stultifying class inequality perforce was transformed into a protest against police misconduct. Yet, despite the sly and cruel tactics of the authorities the essential message of the protesters could not be squelched: the “structural adjustment” programs promoted by the IMF and their patrons in Washington, which leads to slashing of health and education expenditures in return for usurious loans, is a prescription for disaster and must be resisted by progressive humanity.

This protest gathered steam in late 1999 in Seattle when human rights activists and trade unionists joined on a common platform against the World Trade Organization and their perpetual aim of placing profits before people. The protests continued in Washington, D.C. in April 2000 when the IMF, again, was meeting. The protests at the national conventions of the Republic Party in Philadelphia and the Democratic Party in Los Angeles – both in August 2000 – were, in a sense, part of what has been characterized as an “anti-globalization” (anti-imperialist is probably more accurate) wave.

Thus, the protest in Prague was simply a continuation of what has become a worldwide uprising against imperialism and its acolytes.

This protest seems to grow with every passing day and, as protest organizers see it, will be gathering steam and force.

Unfortunately, the latest protest in this vein did not receive sufficient attention. In November 2000 in Cincinnati, Ohio the meeting of the TransAtlantic Dialogue (TABD) was greeted with a raucous demonstration.

What is the TABD? It is a grouping of leading corporate executives from transnational corporations in the U.S. and Europe: their mission is to boost trade and investment in each other’s regions and around the world, particularly through pushing the kinds of deregulatory schemes that aroused so much outrage in Seattle.

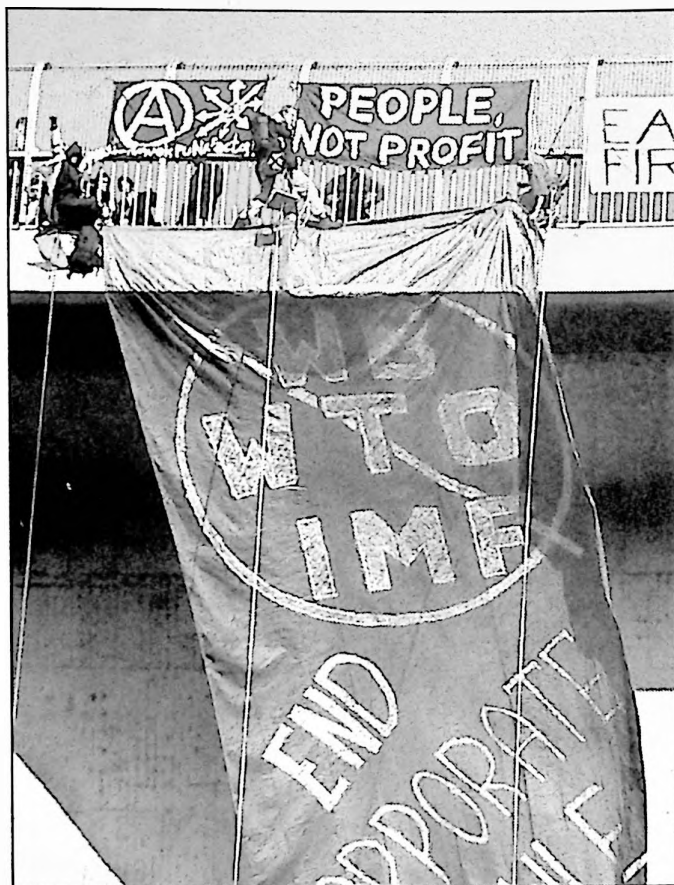
TABD, for example, argues that the U.S. product liability system – which allows those injured by defective tires and other dangerous consumer items to receive compensation in court – is a “serious impediment to transatlantic trade and investment.”

Once again, the repetitive message is proclaimed: “Profits before People.”

And, once again, protesters amassed to shout a resounding, “No.”

These protests will continue. Already demonstrations have been announced for Quebec in the spring when the “free traders” will be meeting, on May Day, and in the early fall when the IMF will be gathering again in Washington.

It is certain that these protests will continue, and continue to grow, for the message proclaimed – cancel the debt and alleviate poverty – will not be silenced until justice prevails. ■



Above: Prague conference center.

## Protests Against IMF come to Czech Republic



Gerald Horne

By Gerald Horne

The sun was casting an autumnal glow on the priceless array of baroque and gothic architecture that graces Prague. This pleasant weather was fortuitous for the thousands of protesters of plans of the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) who, along with the Finance Ministers of the Group of Seven (i.e., the leading capitalist nations), had come to this European metropolis in September to set policy for the global economy.

Trade unionists, environmentalists and human rights activists assembled, shouting "Death to the IMF," carrying placards with the inscription "Cancel the Debt" protesting that billions continue to exist on less than \$2 per day.

This demonstration was a continuation of global

protests that began in Seattle in 1999 when thousands assembled and continued in Washington, D.C., in April 2000.

It is striking that these actions were initiated in the U.S., the nation that is said – by some – to be the principal beneficiary of what is euphemistically called "globalization," an updated form of imperialism feasting in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Progressive forces are well aware that real wages have been declining for decades and hunger and homelessness continue. They recognize the economy may be "booming" for "dot-com" billionaires and real-estate moguls while the rest exist from paycheck to paycheck.

When thousands marched in Prague, a rally took place in Boston aimed at pharmaceutical giant Pfizer,

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which has been accused of profiting on its AIDS drugs as infection rates skyrocket in certain African nations. "My country is being destroyed by AIDS, my country is sinking under the weight of the debt," lamented Reverend Tsitsi Moyo of Zimbabwe.

Over 3000 miles away in Portland, Oregon, even more marched through the downtown area, protesting rapacious environmental policies that are making life unsustainable. In Denver and Indianapolis, scores of protesters gathered outside the offices of the Citicorp bank in protest of their underwriting of World Bank bonds.

When the director of the IMF, the German bureaucrat Horst Kohler, arrived in South Africa before the Prague meeting, activists told him that he was not welcome. They pointed out the IMF made loans to the apartheid regime during the 1970s and 1980s and demanded that this U.S.-dominated collection agency make reparations to their country, now reeling from unemployment and AIDS.

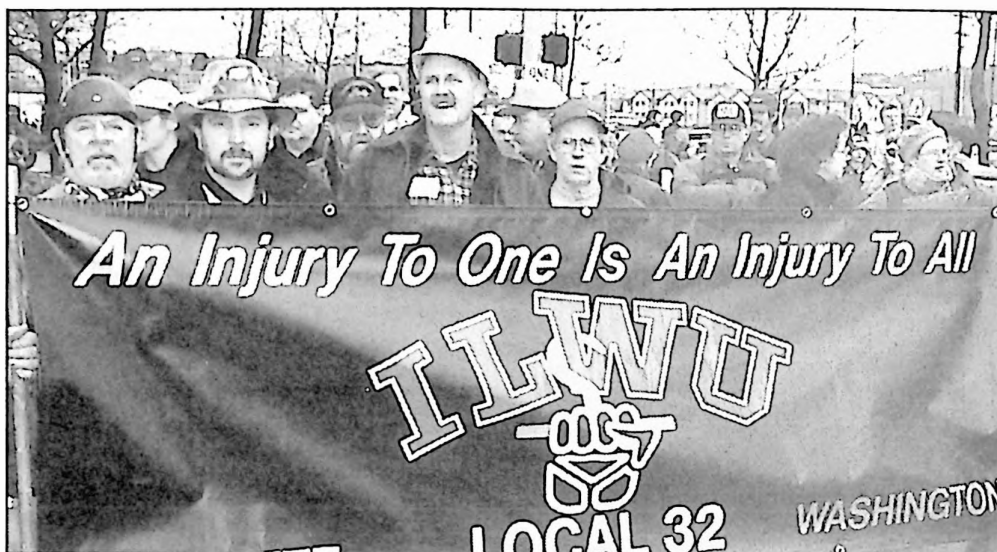
This global protest is an indication that the IMF and World Bank have become a symbol of U.S. imperialism – a hegemony that is increasingly being challenged.

### Neo-colonialism in Eastern Europe

Prague was an appropriate site for this sustained effort. Since the ouster of Communists, unemployment has increased dramatically, along with discrimination targeting ethnic minorities. This is why the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and its fraternal youth wing were in the forefront of these protests. Dr. Hassan Charfo, head of the International Department of the Communist Party, declared that the "IMF and the World Bank interfere in the internal political and economic affairs of developing and former socialist countries, while [imposing] policy 'recommendations' ... in the interests of the transnational monopolies..."

With barely concealed anger, Dr. Charfo censured the "present social-democrat government" and its

cult of blind market forces, which has resulted in half a million unemployed, destruction of our industry and agriculture, falling living standards, deteriorating education and health care and widening of the gap between the poor



The mass involvement of significant trade union participation is a new feature of the anti-globalization movement.

and the rich.

"Our struggle against ... the IMF and World Bank," he proclaimed, "is ... a struggle against neo-colonialism in our country."

The finger of accusation has not been pointed at the IMF and World Bank by Czech Communists alone. In Ecuador, progressive forces are irate that an IMF proposal recommends by November 1, 2000, that the government should raise the price of cooking gas by 80 percent, eliminate 26,000 jobs and halve real wages by 50 percent. It was demanded that the government transfer ownership of its water system to foreign operators and grant British Petroleum the right to build a oil pipeline over the Andes. "In all," concluded the *London Observer* of October 8, 2000, "the IMF's 167 loan conditions look less like an assistance plan and more like ... a financial coup d'etat."

How did Ecuador, a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a nation of vast natural and human resources, arrive at such a point?

In 1983 the IMF forced the government to take over the soured private debts owed by Ecuador's elite to foreign banks. For this bailout, Ecuador borrowed \$1.5 bil-



The paper chains, symbolizing the burden of debt on developing nations, were made by a bus load of demonstrators on their way to the Jubilee 2000 in D.C.

AP photo

Joseph Pettigrew



school subsidies were abolished, fees introduced, and the demand for children's labor as herders increased, school attendance declined 25 percent. This has been accompanied by decreasing rates of literacy. The IMF's demand for deregulation and privatization has not contemplated fully the impact of the destruction of public education. Worse, they thought about it and have decided that ignorance is more compatible with imperialism than education.

### Impact on Environment

Though the IMF has been particularly bad for workers and education, the environment itself may be the ultimate victim of its policies. Their demands for government spending cuts inevitably target agencies dealing with the environment. Relaxation of environmental standards is viewed as a way to attract investors, particularly in extractive industries, e.g. mining and lumber. A case study of Guyana – the English speaking nation on the northern coast of South America – by Friends of the Earth revealed that IMF-imposed budget constraints led to decreased funding for the environment ministry, thereby weakening the government's capacity to enforce existing environmental regulations. Simultaneously, the IMF was encouraging the government to increase timber exports and grant concessions to private companies. Regulations were relaxed and unprecedented large concessions were granted to private developers. Lax regulations and reduced enforcement led to increased clear cutting and environmental degradation.

The IMF has been as harmful to the health of humans as it has been toxic for the health of the planet. Governments with overwhelming foreign debt payment obligations must slash what they might otherwise allocate to the health-care sector, including funds that may be used for HIV/AIDS prevention. Second, export earnings that go to ser-

vice foreign debts are not available to pay for imports of pharmaceuticals, equipment or other products. Thus, when the World Bank mandated that Kenya impose charges of U.S. \$2.15 for STD clinic services, attendance fell 35 to 60 percent, with similar results throughout the undeveloped world.

Interviewed by Robert Weissman, Njoki Njoroge Njehu of Kenya recalled the days before this disaster fell: "When I was a young girl growing up near Nairobi," she recalled, "Kenyatta Hospital was the pride of East and Central Africa – a sophisticated regional center of care like, say, the Washington Hospital Center."

Then the IMF and World Bank arrived on the scene with their nostrums about "structural adjustment" of the economy.

"When I visited my aunt there in 1997," she continued ruefully,

she was sharing a bed with another patient. Most wards have no beds because of lack of resources, and all the beds had two people in them. Guards used to check visitors to prevent them from bringing food in from the outside; now the guards are gone and if you don't bring food your relatives simply won't eat. My aunt was lucky. The dollars I



As demonstrators protested at the Prague meeting, workers in several U.S. cities went on strike on job related concerns.



*Teamsters demonstrating at WTO meet.*

brought with me could buy the medications she was prescribed and which we had to purchase elsewhere and bring back to the hospital for the nurse to administer. Not everyone has relatives in the U.S. or can get to Kenyatta, the best public hospital in Kenya – which is far from being one of the poorest African countries.

In 1981, there were ten thousand people for every doctor in Kenya; by 1994 that ratio had gone up to nearly 22,000 people for every doctor. In Uganda just to our west, there were 661 people for every hospital bed in 1981 while in 1994 there were 1092 for every bed. In Ghana, a country often touted as an example of how structural adjustment can work, the percentage of infants with low birth weight has gone from 5 percent in 1988 to 17 percent in the period of 1992-1995.

In short the IMF and World Bank are killing the planet and the humans that inhabit it.

And those that survive this genocidal, ecocidal regime are then subjected to the ultimate deprivation: starvation. According to the World

Bank, food security should be achieved through trade liberalization, increasing imports, raising foreign exchange through exports and investing in agricultural technologies which are input intensive. Hence, the bank has made governments provide agricultural supports, credit and extension services only if farmers switch from producing traditional staples, such as corn, wheat and local grains, to produce for export – cut flowers, for example. As a result, Zimbabwe – once a major food exporter to south-central Africa – has cultivated increasing sections of its valuable arable land for the growing of flowers that are shipped to Western Europe for the aesthetic benefit of (primarily) the wealthy.

Today the bank is strengthening its control over developing nations' trade policies by promoting "coherence" between the policies of the Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These three horsemen of death hope to extend their fatal grip even further, if progressive forces do not respond effectively – and angrily.

It is evident that the experience of many developing nations pursuing

these "big bang" agricultural policies has been disastrous. From the Philippines to Costa Rica, high-input industrial agriculture based on imported technologies and knowledge has often led to bankruptcy of the poorest farmers who have not been able to repay their debts as input costs – seeds, pesticides and fertilizers – have risen, while prices have fallen. Poor farmers have also been made to bear the brunt of all the risks – weather, unstable prices, fluctuating supplies, pest infestations and inappropriate technologies. Furthermore, large amounts of pesticides have degraded the lands and this has led to chemical-resistant pests, so that farmers have found themselves on an escalating "pesticide treadmill," where larger and larger amounts (and hence costs) are needed to attain the same yields.

At the same time, the opening of developing nation markets has led to the flooding of their markets with

Deficit spending or "priming the pump" was created to arrest the inevitable downturns of capitalism. With the rise of conservatism and the retreat of socialism, the new slogan of a Wall Street busily looting the globe became "Bankers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your Keynes!"

cheap subsidized cereals from the European Union and U.S. particularly. This has depressed prices in developing countries and forced many farmers to the brink of poverty. In this part of the world, where cereals constitute 52 percent of dietary supplies, per capita production has fallen for the majority of these nations between 1980 and 1998 (see [www.focusweb.org](http://www.focusweb.org)). Then there are the health problems associated with pesticide use – such as acute poisonings, cancer and disruption of the neurological, endocrine and immune systems – which are all exacerbated by malnutrition.

If this sad scenario were not bad enough, consider that despite preaching sanctimoniously about “transparency” and the like, the World Bank particularly is a sink of corruption. Annually, this bloated bureaucracy spends billions on contracts for engineering services and the like in the U.S., EU and Japan. A host of specialized lobbying firms have grown up to help companies win these deals – many started by former World Bank staffers – in a revolving door system that makes Washington’s version of this corrupt practice seem tame by comparison. Consultancy contracts for World Bank financed projects absorb 10 percent of the Bank’s \$25 billion in lending and are particularly prone to corruption, partly because they are not subject to international advertisement and competitive bidding. Thus, the funds designed allegedly to alleviate poverty are being diverted for three-martini lunches, limousines and tasseled loafers for an already prosperous group of lobbyists.

The unavoidable question has arisen: what is to be done? Of course the struggle for socialism is the ultimate solution, but the path to it will be paved by some of the far-reaching reforms proposed by Cuban leader Fidel Castro, most recently at his address in Havana in April 2000 to the South Summit of developing nations.

Like those who marched in Prague, President Castro has demanded a cancellation of the debt “owed” by developing nations. After all, the U.S. has forgiven debts owed by the UK stemming from World War II. The Cuban leader has observed that the “United States itself, when it occupied Cuba 100 years ago, put forward the doctrine of “odious debts” (debts imposed on a people without its consent and by the use of armed force did not have to be paid by the successor government) so as not to have to assume the debts contracted by Cuba with the Spanish government.”

Castro has also called for creation of a debtors’ club, just as creditors are organized. He has demanded the cancellation of the private debt of those countries with a per capita GDP lower than U.S. \$2000. Of course, he has demanded compensation for the “profound economic and social imbalances provoked in their countries as a result of the policies they have been forced to implement in order to manage the external debt.”

The Cuban leader has called for the imposition of a “minimum 1 percent [tax]” on “speculative financial

transactions ... which would permit the creation of a large indispensable fund – in the excess of \$1 trillion every year – to promote a real sustainable and comprehensible development in the Third World.” Named after the renowned Yale economist James Tobin, the “Tobin Tax” is attracting ever larger numbers of supporters worldwide.

In Congress, legislation has been introduced that would bar the IMF and World Bank from imposing “user fees” on education and health-care, which have pushed these basic necessities beyond the reach of millions in developing nations.

Progressives are also demanding that – at a minimum – minutes of IMF Board meetings should be made available expeditiously and that Board votes should be made public. In other words, the IMF, which traipses around the world demanding “transparency,” should take its own advice.

Moreover, the U.S., which wields undue power and influence in both the IMF and World Bank, should see this role reduced; i.e. these institutions should be democratized.

Fortunately, such forward looking practices are not dependent on the alleged good wishes of the IMF and World Bank themselves. The marching masses in Prague and Seattle are the ultimate guarantor for the proposition that Washington will be compelled to move away from poverty creation and move toward poverty alleviation. ■



Protesters display posters as they protest the World Trade Organization, WTO, in Geneva, Switzerland, on Sunday June 25, 2000.



# The Clear and Present Danger of German Imperialism

Manfred Sohn

**W**ithout a doubt, today's Germany, a member of NATO, is a firm part of the imperialist G7 bloc that economically and politically dominates the planet.

World opinion has it that the "German danger" that led to both World War I and World War II is not presently a factor, but within the German left there are growing concerns of a rebirth.

A look at some of Germany's demography will be useful for a foreign reader to realize the size of the country today.

After the reunification with the former German Democratic Republic in 1990, Germany became a unified state of 357,000 square km and 82 million inhabitants, of whom 91 percent are Germans. The remaining are mostly from the southern countries of Europe and Turkey. After Germany's defeat in 1945, it became the third biggest economy in the world and easily the largest in Europe. Together with France, Germany is the core of the new "Euroland" with a single currency in eleven countries. It possesses the strongest army in Europe, although officially lacking atomic weaponry.

At the beginning of the last century, along with the U.S., Germany was the fastest growing capitalist country, competing more and more with the British empire. The contradiction of growing economic and military power on the one hand and very little international political

influence on the other, as compared with both with Britain and France was a principle factor leading to World War I (WW I). The entry of the USA into that terrible conflict decided the outcome in favor of Britain, France and their allies. Germany recovered and the war that began in 1939, World War II (WW II), had two purposes – a second attempt to win WW I and establish itself as a leading European nation with worldwide stature, and to erase the



German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

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danger of a socialist alternative to the capitalistic system, developing in Russia. Germany was again beaten, and again recovered, although this time it needed more time than after WW I, and took a very great part in destroying the socialist attempts in Eastern Europe.

It is now the dominant power, especially in the former socialist bloc countries of Europe like the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Belarus and in the Balkans.

It now enjoys a stronger position than ever. However, it must be remembered that the great weight of history is no longer in Europe. In 1900 by all indications Europe's influence on world economic developments was much greater than today. Asia, especially China, Japan and India are growing. It appears that the most significant confrontations in world politics in the 21st century will no longer be between Britain and Germany or between Germany and USA, but between the growing economic weight of Asian countries.

But let's look at the old still mighty continent of Europe. What was at the core of what happened during the 20th century? Central to answering this question are issues Lenin described while explaining the three great imperialist blocs of those days:

We see three areas of highly developed capitalism (high development of means of transport, of trade and of industry): the Central European, the British and the American areas. Among these are three states which dominate the world: Germany, Great Britain, the United States. Imperialistic rivalry and the struggle between these countries have become extremely keen because Germany has only an insignificant area and few colonies; the creation of Central Europe is still a matter for the future, it is being born in the midst of a desperate struggle. (*Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* Chapter VII).

Written in 1916, this "desperate struggle" was WW I. This German attempt failed, but what is the situation in Europe now? Economically, it is as Lenin suggested: the creation of "Central Europe." And German capital is surely the master of this area. The former British empire was

the real loser of the past 50 years – its influence is dwindling still. An important indication is that the pound, once the main currency of the world from the end of the Napoleonic wars until 1914 has now become only

the currency of one part of the world.

Britain must now decide if its currency in the coming decades is to be a junior partner of the U.S. dollar or to join the Euro, which in actuality is the Deutsche mark.

But what is the result of this for the future?

Before we can make our own conclusions, a discussion of many complicated questions is required. The most important questions are as follows:

Does globalization prevent the imperialist powers from competing with one another in the arms trade? The history of capitalism is the history of the world establishing itself as an economic unit. This process took about 200 years and was foreseen in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In modern times, this is accelerated because of rapid means of transport, e.g., airlines, the invention of wireless communication, the power of modern computers, etc.

There are many examples of their use in modern history. The first wave came with the creation of the steam engine and mechanical spinning mills. The second was the creation of the railways. In the mid-19th century, there were about 5000 railway companies in the U.S. alone, compared to the great number of today. How many will exist only 50 years in the future? This insurgence portends great hopes that the future will be bright and that this transportation and communication connection of the world, never before seen on this scale, would lead to world peace forever.

However, what we can learn from history? Robert Shiller of Yale University recently published a price earnings ratio of America's S&P 500 over 120 years (*The Economist*, September 23rd 2000; "The New Economy Survey, p. 21)." The prices of railway companies' shares rose until the big crash of 1902/04. This led to a worldwide crisis in Britain and elsewhere in the world. The hopes of world unification died. The contradictions of the imperialist powers sharpened and led to WW I.

A very similar movement is seen two decades later. The boom of electricity, telephones, radio and cars gave impetus to a more interconnected world and the hope of an ever rising economy. The result was a higher than ever peak of stock values, especially of those companies that were producing electronic commodities. This era ended



Serbian opposition leader Vojislav Kostunica holds an AK-47 while visiting the Kosovo Serb village of Mokra Gora.

AP photo

AP photo



Demonstration in Germany.

It appears that the most significant confrontations in world politics in the 21st century will no longer be between Britain and Germany or between Germany and USA, but between the growing economic weight of Asian countries.

in October 1929, as you know.

Economically, the result was the destruction of the overdrawn value of shares – in other words the crash – and unemployment. Politically, the main result was (like the period from 1902 to 1914) the rise of contradictions between the main capitalist powers, leading to WW II.

In the fall of 2000, *The Economist* noted, "Prices now are higher in relation to profits than they have ever been before." A crash is inevitable. Because we are still living during a period of unequal development between capitalist countries, a contradictions between them will continue. And like the crash 100 years ago that destroyed the railways as the "joints" connecting the leading capitalist countries, the economic debacle 50 years ago destroyed the cables linking the world at that time. This same concern threatens to destroy the Internet and e-mail communication of today, not forever of course, but as a hope of an ever

peaceful interconnected capitalist world.

Is the USA so strong there is no real danger of an escalating war? In *PA* of July 2000, Scott Marshall wrote,

Not even at the end of World War II was U.S. imperialism in such an unchallenged position as top dog of world imperialism.

Today, while inter-imperialistic rivalry is still very much a feature of globalization, there is no serious challenge of U.S. military might ... Also it is clear that even a one-world superpower with unchallenged military superiority does not mean an end to war dangers. We only need to look at the military destruction rained down on the Balkans, the continued bombing of Iraq or Vieques to see the danger.

This unbridled U.S. power is a totally new feature of globalization. While it is most clear in the military arena, U.S. domination of globalization is apparent in trade and in the

institutions of global governance like the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank.

I understand Marshall's point but I do have some questions. First I agree completely that military superiority does not mean an end to the dangers of war. The wars we called "little," as opposed to the "great wars" like WW I and WW II, were easily as catastrophic to the people who suffered as much or more.

However, is U.S. superiority really so great?

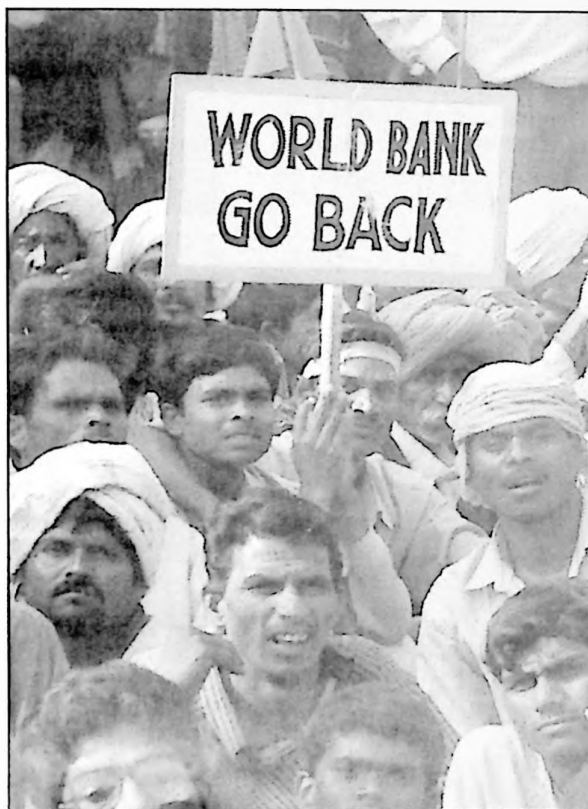
In that same light, it serves no purpose to debate which of the Communist parties: the U.S. British or German, is fighting the more dangerous imperialism. Our struggle is against the same enemy.

However, I would like to ask why and how did U.S. imperialism lose the war in Vietnam as described by Don Sloan in *PA* of May 2000? And what of the thunderstorm that was the Gulf-War, yet another U.S.

military adventure but fought with money from Europe and Japan. And Kosovo? The Americans did the fighting, but the main currency in Kosovo now is the "Deutsche mark" and not U.S. dollars (USD) nor British pounds. The new president in Yugoslavia may have been installed also by U.S. diplomacy, but he is a declared enemy of the U.S. and friend of Europe and Germany.

Has that all happened by accident? Don Sloan wrote concerning Vietnam: "A leaning back into history conjures up another event that took place a century before – the American Civil War of 1861-5. Just as the groundwork for Vietnam was laid almost 20 years before our armed intervention, the

AP photo



India demands World Bank go home.



lion. The IMF dictated price hikes for electricity and other necessities. Like a doctor who prescribes remedies that are give his patient a negative reaction, the IMF continues to "recommend conditionalities" for loans to strapped governments that mandate layoffs, fees for health and education services, deregulation and privatization.

The IMF and WB were formed in 1944 to allegedly fund postwar reconstruction and development projects and to lend hard currency to nations facing balance of payments deficits. After the USSR's role as a counterweight to U.S. imperialism disappeared, the international bourgeoisie has been turning the screws even tighter against various nations through the imposition of draconian conditions for obtaining loans.

Then, the ideas of the British economist John Maynard Keynes (pronounced canes) were introduced in the capitalist world. Deficit spending or "priming the pump" was created to arrest the inevitable downturns of capitalism. With the rise of conservatism and the retreat of socialism, the new slogan of a Wall Street busily looting the globe became: "Bankers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your Keynes!"

### Targeting labor

Labor has become a major target – and victim – of the IMF. Labor was fierce in its opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and led the charge in Seattle. Just as NAFTA facilitates runaway shops south of the border, the IMF "globalizes" this phenomenon, making it easier for corporations to move anywhere. This puts enormous downward pressure on wages and working conditions. The IMF forces governments to rewrite their laws to benefit foreign investors as NAFTA does in Mexico. The IMF pressures countries to produce for

export instead of domestic markets. This causes a glut on world markets, driving down prices, forcing "dumping" and downward pressure on wages and working conditions. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions – once an instrument of the Cold War policy of the U.S. – has been a stern critic of both the IMF and World Bank.

The IMF has adopted "labor market flexibility" – reading deregulation – as the way to encourage foreign investment and make countries more "competitive." This leads to the abolition of minimum wage and collective bargaining laws, the poor end up working longer hours for less pay. Underpaid workers have little purchasing power, shrinking the economy for small and medium sized businesses. Workers in industrialized nations also suffer. Forced to compete with cheap labor from developing countries, they face a decline in demand for consumer goods destined for those poorer countries. They are forced to pay more for education and health care as a result.

### Effect on ex-socialist countries

In Kyrgyzstan, formerly of the USSR, expenditure on health and education has fallen approximately 50 percent since 1993 due to IMF pressure. Thus, imposing fees for medical treatment or school attendance has been part of a strategy to reduce public expenditure on social services. Parents are compelled to provide children's books and stationery and contribute to school maintenance while patients must provide their own medications.

This is ironic since subsidized drug prescriptions was a major issue in the 2000 elections in the U.S.

Official exemptions for poor families and for certain vulnerable groups, seen by donors as guaranteeing the poverty-stricken access to key social services, are often poorly designed and not implemented in practice, as service staffs demand additional or informal payments, administrators find exemptions too bureaucratic and people become ashamed to claim their exemptions.

In Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, privatization and decentralization have left some public services in the hands of local authorities. With no budget to run pre-schools and a limited tax base and a mandate to sell or "privatize" assets, many schools have been sold to private investors for commercial use or other development. By 1996 there were approximately one-third the number of pre-schools compared to 1991.

In Mongolia, where extensive



*Cuba has proposed implementing the Torbin tax that would be levied against transnational corporate profits helping relieve poor countries of the debt burden.*

AP photo



Children in the former GDR.

development do not lead to war in times of uniform growth. The lesson of history is that the danger for mankind begins with the slump on the stock market. What is the situation here? The political and military superiority of the USA from 1950 to 2000 gave its ruling class the ability to finance its power machine with money of other countries. But the result is a high level of indebtedness in nearly all sectors of the U.S. economy.

That is why the danger of an economic crash is much greater in America than in Europe. The September 23rd, *Economist* in its survey of the new economic market wrote,

A crash in share prices would make a serious if temporary dent in America's economy, even though the underlying economics benefits if it would continue. Stock markets in many other economies are overvalued too, but a bursting of the bubble would claim many more victims in America than in Japan or Europe, partly because far more people own shares and partly because in recent years American households and companies have borrowed huge sums in the expectation that share prices will continue to climb. Sooner or later they are likely to discover their mistake.

power brokers in America worked as early as 1840 before the cannons roared at Fort Sumpter." That is accurate history and the challenge for Marxist scientists is to find the traces to war before the "cannons" are roaring.

There is no doubting England was the leading military superpower in 1890. Its navy ruled the seas, its currency was the world's currency. This was also the situation during the so-called "Boxer War" in 1899, when seven imperialist powers contained the Chinese people in their fight for freedom. But at that very time, Rosa Luxemburg – one of the era's great Marxists in Europe – saw the coming of the great wars. While both the political and military framework of those days was dominated by England, the economic power shifted slowly but clearly from Great Britain to Germany. Contradictions of those kinds are historically short-lived.

What is the situation today? The gross domestic product of USA in 1950 was 1019 billion USD.

That was nearly ten times as those of Japan (106 billion USD) and nearly the same as that in Western Europe (1079 billion USD). Over 40 years later the figures were: 3861 bil-

lion in the USA, 1681 billion in Japan, and 4875 billion in Western Europe.

On the other hand, the trade balance of USA has now reached a minus of \$412 billion (October 2000), while the EURO 11 have a plus 24 billion and Japan a plus of 126 billion in USD.

On the surface, there is no change concerning the power of the U.S. However, the important point is that the basis for the world's economy is shifting. The contradictions growing out of the unevenness of capitalistic



demonstrators stand in front of police before a shareholders meeting of IG Farben in Frankfurt.

AP photo

## What about the contradictions within Europe?

The important point is that the economic powers of Europe will only become political powers when Europe is united. This is not only the aim but indeed the main problem of German capital. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the progress that was made during the last three decades with the euro. The three most important capitalist countries of the continent – Germany, France and Italy – will be closely linked like never before in European history since the time of the Roman Empire. The euro will be the strongest currency of the world, surpassing the dollar by many fold. It will have one central bank with common laws of duty, exchange and other economic issues.

And the headquarters will be in Frankfurt. This is happening at full speed. It remains to be seen if Britain will join the continent and adopt the euro as its currency. The other important open issue is whether the former socialist states of Eastern Europe will affiliate.

Today the position of the German-dominated capital in Europe, reached without war, is stronger than it was in the dawn of WW I in 1910 or in the middle of WW II in 1940.

Marshall's words ring true: "In the past few months the European Union made noise about setting up an independent military setting for its forces. And while there is nervous chatter in Europe voicing fears about U.S. plans to establish an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system, there is no real challenge." This "independent military structure" is not yet operational as it should not be before finishing the unity of a common currency, the integration of Eastern Europe and, maybe, England.

Europe thinks in terms of generations, not in months or even in years or decades. The lesson Germany learned from WW I and II, (one European war in two parts), was to first rule economically and then militarily. In this perspective, the steps of history become clear: the Montan-Union, the Bonn-Paris axis, EWG, EU and now the euro. The military step will come, although not yet. Preparations are being made. Elder U.S. Army officers will recall the beginning of armament of the "Bundeswehr" started with American weapons. First the Germans abolished the dependence on tanks (Leopard I), then on aircraft (Tornado instead of Starfighter and Phantom) and finally the creation of the European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company (EADS).

We must now look to the various developments of capitalism today.



AP photo

The hope – and the political aim of all Communist parties in Europe – is to fight the common currency as the main steps to a European superpower that will one day become a military superpower. The fight of the Danish people against their banking authorities on the question of joining the common currency and the same in Britain shows that this opposition against the euro is not yet lost. One of the main thrusts of all progressive organizations in Europe is to prevent the unity of the financial conglomerates and to build the unity of the people.

This is a special task for the German left, remembering what the founder of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) said before he was killed by the counter-revolution in 1919: "The main enemy is the enemy in our own country!" ■





# Getting High in America

Don Sloan

**O**ne score and twelve years ago, the world's first documented case of AIDS was clinically diagnosed, waiting another decade for confirmation. The Pandora's Box that became the HIV epidemic of the 1980s gave the developed world a new medical obsession. The syndrome has not yielded a cure, not unexpected in that there has never been a cure for a viral disease. But extensive research these past 20 years have given us a wealth of information about many other disease syndromes from hepatitis to herpes.

The AIDS epidemic in the U.S. became tied to the crisis in Africa, and Haiti. Haiti was later discounted as a source. But no association became more vivid than the association of AIDS with street drug use in America and the rest of the industrialized world. Indeed, it is impossible to deal with the AIDS outbreak without first coming to grips with the problems of intravenous drug use (IVDU).

HIV, by the decade of the '90s, settled down into being an epidemic largely related to drugs, which replaced the male homosexual community as a source. The vast bulk of all new cases in the U.S. since the latter half of the '80s are attributed to the intravenous drug use, and that has held since.

The street drug problem in America is a product of class oppression and its near synonym, racism. Capitalism's need for economic scapegoating in order to survive

has used various techniques. The treatment of the desperately poor fits into this category. It is no wonder that the ruling class-controlled government have applied their machinery in every way possible to be a partner to the worldwide drug cartel. There is every reason to believe that U.S. manipulations in Nicaragua, Colombia, other nations of South America and even the Middle East have been tied to narcotics entrepreneurs.

Throughout history, diseases of poverty, particularly the contagious ones, have shared one sine qua non – those who suffer the most are those who do not earn or inherit enough wealth to afford adequate shelter, food, clothing, medical care, hygiene and education and the gainful employment that follows.

A firm grip on history offer keys to the elimination or containment of disease. We can ignore history; we cannot escape its consequences.

### A walk down Gin Lane

Few historians have ever explicated the dependence of the poor on psychoactive drugs as memorably as the British artist, William Hogarth (1697-1764). Over two centuries have passed since this son of a poor London school-teacher exposed the human impacts of the precursor of cocaine and alcohol in his immortal *Gin Lane*.

With the assistance of the literature of Charles Dickens and others' history reminds us that it would take 200 years before the economic, environmental and social con-

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ditions that all combined to sentence the urban working poor to *Gin Lane* lifestyles would be alleviated enough to convert *Gin Lane* if not to Buena Vista then to the council houses of the British public housing projects. Alcohol never lost its lure. It remains, by far, the most widely used pleasure-providing agent in the world. Sadly, worldwide statistics report yearly increases in use, with the starting age getting younger and younger. It dwarfs all other street drugs combined and accounts for the majority of drug-related morbidity and mortality.

Though not the first, Sigmund Freud, was known to employ cocaine in practice. The leaf had been used by other European physicians since 1860. It was used to treat tuberculosis, known as consumption, asthma, gastritis and even syphilis. The treatment list is endless. Conventional wisdom has it that an early mistake about cocaine being a non-addictive drug was made by a young Freud at the start of his career in 1884. Like so many other stories from the past, this bit of history has a few grains of solid facts with some added fancy. It was Dr. Freud and his disciples who induced our own Ulysses S. Grant to imbibe copious doses of the Mariani, a non-alcoholic stimulant, as an analgesic. The aging ex-president was in the throes of a spreading cancer, later similar to Freud himself, and was intent on completing his memoirs before his death so that his wife would benefit from the financial rewards of a projected best seller. (Mark Twain, convinced of the potential, financed the project to the

point of his own bankruptcy when the book was a literary and commercial failure. Both the widow Grant and Samuel Clemens died in poverty).

The tea concoction was the idea of Corsican chemist Angelo Mariani. In 1863, he introduced Vin Mariani, an infusion of coca leaves in good Bordeaux wine. Elixir Mariani was made with alcohol; Pastilles Mariani were lozenges made with pure cocaine infused into sugar candies. They became an instant worldwide success.

The roster of pleased users of Vin Mariani ranged from Pope Leo XIII, the Russian czar, Jules Verne, Emile Zola, Sarah Bernhardt, and, on this side of the ocean, inventor Thomas Alva Edison. By 1865, the U.S. was the world's biggest market for just about all of the Mariani products.

From our 1776 revolution to the violent outbreak of AIDS in 1981, we experienced the advent of cocaine and the opiates that, at first sold and advertised legally, were to make the United States of America the most drug-ridden of all the industrial nations in the world. Not until the passage of the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914 was the sale of cocaine and heroin made illegal without prescription.

There have been many vague peaks and troughs of drug usage in American history, but two dramatically stamp our past. In the 19th century, it was the Civil War that turned hundreds of thousands of former soldiers into people dependent upon the opiates and the coca leaf. Their families became inundated as well because all the best-selling family health tonics had, as their active ingredients, alcohol plus opium and, quite often, cocaine. The bottle labels even recommended half doses for children.

As the war between the states went on, the opium alkaloids from the poppy plant were used by thousands of soldiers from both sides as a cure for the pains of musket wounds as well as diarrhea, malaria, syphilis and other disasters of war. The newly invented hypodermic syringe was used to administer yet another opium derivative: morphine.

After the war, millions of doses of legal opium drugs were purchased over the counter in drug stores, mainly to meet the needs of the addicted ex-soldiers. This also found its way into health preparations laced with opium and cocaine, swallowed by unsuspecting consumers who liked their effects. That is, until the first federal food and drug act of 1906 outlawed the narcotics in tonics and soda fountain drinks.

### Cocaine

Other famous, or infamous, personalities dot the history of drug use in America. It was Abe Lincoln's Surgeon General, 275 pound William Alexander Hammond, who oversaw the mass amounts of cocaine and morphine on the battlefields and is credited with convincing Sigmund Freud in Vienna of its nonaddictive qualities. Hammond's controversial and speckled career includes being court

Children's Aids Quilt



martialed by Secretary of War Edward Stanton after the Fords Theatre assassination, only to be reinstated a decade or so later by President Rutherford B. Hayes in one of the most dramatic court fights in history.

Hammond defended his wartime narcotics use to the end. He insisted that their analgesic and mood regulator value far outweighed their reputation as a street pleasure drug. With Freud on his side, the battle over the addictive qualities of cocaine and morphine raged. Freud's classmate, Viennese ophthalmologist Karl Koller, used cocaine successfully as an eye anesthetic and when it became the sensation of the medical world, Freud labeled his colleague, Coca Koller. In an amusing coincidence, it was less than a decade later that an Atlanta druggist, James Pemberton, toying with a Mariani brew of his own, came up with a sugary syrup of cocaine and kola that he marketed as a drink for menstrual cramps and other women's problems. His trademark, Coca-Cola, has since made soft drink history. It was not until 1906 when the federal food and drug act outlawed cocaine and replaced it with caffeine.

### Morphine

Morphine had been in the medical use since 1803. This often used sedative and analgesic was also considered non-addictive and it was used in all forms from pills to injections after the hypodermic syringe came into popular use. It was also used on the battlefields of the Civil War, either as a painkiller or a cure for those for whom cocaine didn't work. More than quarter million soldier addicts were sent back to civilian life in the North and South and America started its infatuation with street narcotics. History repeated itself a century later.

By 1898, the Merck Company in Germany picked up the gauntlet and advised morphine for a myriad of medical indications, from menstrual cramps to whooping cough. It entered the U.S. in 1910 until its ban in 1920, when its addictive potentials were accepted. IG Farben, the mega-German chemical empire and other pharmaceuticals in Germany put a moratorium on its production, but its legacies have survived their efforts. The users, in order to soothe their needs, turned to illicit sources of morphine sulfate, and, tragically, a chemical offshoot of morphine sulfate was developed - it was called heroin. Criminal gangs took it from there and the rest is history.

In the 20th century, the Vietnam War did for the cocaine and heroin industries what the Civil War accomplished exactly 100 years earlier. From that illegal and ill-fated escapade in Indo China, we mustered out upwards of 550,000 hard-core addicts and users back into bankrupt inner cities without schools, health care facilities or jobs. They came back instead to a population that ignored them out of the guilt for having sent them there in the first place. This legacy is still haunting us a quarter century later.



*Molly Nash, holds a candle at the Candlelight Vigil of Hope and Remembrance. The vigil was to honor and remember those whose lives were lost or injured as the result of alcohol-related crashes.*

History, despite fashionable statements to the contrary, does not repeat itself exactly, at least not all the time. The Gin Lanes of the earlier years of the Industrial Revolution were, in the end, curtailed by steady jobs at reasonable living wages that proliferated as domestic industries expanded. In the American inner cities of today, the precise sites where AIDS makes headlines, the prognosis is not that promising. Literacy now means the ability to read about the chronic and burgeoning flight of well-paying American factory jobs and even the factories themselves to Europe, Asia and Latin America, thanks to NAFTA, GATT, the MIA and the WTO.

It will take more than telling the jobless of the inner cities, who no longer have hopes of any decent future, to Just Say No! to drugs, which was the Reagan administration's sole contribution to the national problem. It will take more than enacting death penalties against pushers, which are probably unconstitutional or breaking diplomatic relations with the world's alleged drug-exporting nations. Our financial and arms supports under the guise of controlling the drug trade are coincidentally to those nations with whom America's corporate barons have interlocking directorates and investments. Those in political and corporate disfavor merely become demonized by the "drug-runner" label. American "designer" drugs, compounded in suburban cellars and garages, are meeting the demands for euphoric highs along with imported heroin and cocaine. The calling for drug-czars and other campaign rhetoric are still very much in vogue.

### Coming to grips with history

Bringing an end to our drug problems will take coming to grips with that history. Artists like Hogarth and novelists like Zola have been telling us about the costs to the rest of us that are contained in the despair and hopelessness generated by endless poverty.

It will take the renewal of human hopes to solve the



crisis. These hopes were written into a half century of social programs. The former Reagan Administration spent eight years eviscerating these programs, which have still not been restored. Hungry children, hopeless adolescents, homeless families and foreclosed-on farmers do not lead to social stability. In Hogarth's day they augured for gin; in Zola's time for prostitution; in our era they portend a world of heroin and cocaine.

The new century brought about a new phase of the war on drugs. But in effect, it only meant more police, more narcotics agents and more terror in the inner city neighborhoods. The numbers also are revealing. Government figures indicate that of the 1.5 million arrested last year for drug law violations, 75 percent were for possession and the rest for production and sales.

Another side bar to the "war on drugs" in this election year involves the recent grant of a \$1.5 billion for Colombian aid, allegedly to go after the drug lords and traders. In fact, the moneys are funneled to arms manufacturers here and abroad to supply local police bands with weaponry to control the Colombian peasants to make the region safe for foreign investments, including U.S. oil cartels which both candidates Bush and Gore have in their personal stock portfolios.

A surfing of the Internet reveals some telltale facts about the drug trade today. International drug commerce estimated at close to \$500 billion, making it the largest single product business in the world. UN reports are clear as to the enormous mark up in illicit drugs; a kilo of raw opium, the seed of all morphine and heroin, costs less than \$100 in the field to almost \$300,000 when it hits the streets of our inner cities. There is no way to know what percentage drug shipments is intercepted. Certainly, it is likely to be minor in scope. The rate of profits is so high that legal confiscations do not make a dent. When there are shortages of street supply, the dealers simply up the

ante, and the profit remains as secure as ever.

There is no way to avoid the issue of racism in dealing with the problems of street drugs in the western world, especially the U.S. Myth has it that the addicts of America are Black. And while the impoverished Black population is over represented, most of all serious users in the country are white. Who gets caught and locked up is another matter. The figures, then, are racially telling.

Using current statistics from the Department of Justice, 70 percent of all U.S. prisoners are either drug offenders or regular users before incarceration. There are now more Americans doing jail time than in the active armed forces. Only twelve percent of legal drugs users are Black Americans, matching their ratio in the general population. However, they account for almost 40 percentage of those arrested for drug violations. The three-strikes-and-you're-out dictums of the Reagan, Bush and Clinton "war on drugs" have accentuated this disproportion.

Some educators and politicians and media commentators advocate the legalization of narcotic street drugs, so that they could be as freely sold as they were in the country between the Civil War and World War I. This, they asserted, would end our drug problems. These are the same people who still insist that our 18th amendment prohibition was an abysmal failure because it opened the floods to bootleggers of illegal booze, despite all facts to the contrary. Congressman Charles Rangel (D,NY) commented in an angry Op Ed *New York Times* piece, "The problem of drug abuse will not go away just because of legalization. For too long we have ignored the root cause, failing to see the connection between drugs, hopelessness and despair." During the 1980s, the then Vice-President George Bush told a Milwaukee high school assembly that when it came to "the flow of drugs" the reason is demand, not just the supply side. As president, he listened to

those hardcore advocates of a tough drug czar and the death penalty. But they all might better listen to history – and ask themselves the real causes of street drugs in America if a solution is ever to be found and implemented.

Historians and other social scientists already know a good deal about those basic causes. Doctors of the poor have long ago discovered what Rangel clearly described and what Marxist social thinkers have been advocating for over 100 years. The sociology that urges the legalization of hardcore street drugs is as demeaning as it gets. The bourgeoisie, in its occupation to deal with drug issue, continues to deny its seed. Its clamor to legalize is but a call to give the working class its drugs in one form or another so as to eschew the reasons behind the socioeconomic cesspools it has created. It also assumes that by handing out the drugs, at taxpayers expense, the addicts will not have to resort to a life of street crime. It is a variation of the Reagan Just Say No!, and that "war on drugs" which means a war on the users who are the victims. Legalizing street drugs does not make their effects on human behavior any more benign.

The first of the lessons we derive from history can well alter our national slogans and shibboleths. Instead of "Just Say No!" to drugs that blame the victims, we might try Remember Gin Lane! which puts the onus where it belongs – on the economics of global capitalism.

The immediate answers to drugs on our streets are obvious: a change in priorities from military invasions like Vietnam, Kosovo, Desert Storm and Nicaragua, S & L bailouts and Star War programs to inner city reconstruction, schools, universal health care, mass transit and the jobs that would follow. The lessons of history, when ignored, become the imperatives of national suicide. The words of Karl Marx are worth repeating if the first time in history is a tragedy, the second time is a farce. ■

# The Big Job: The Working Class Poetry of Robert Edwards



Chris Butters

*This is the Big Job,  
the high bridge to the future, never finished.  
See the cities of the Americas,  
of Africa and Asia, of Europe and Down Under, mate  
my people built it all, every working color of us;  
our labor, our genius, our patience with the stone.*

*The seven wonders of the world  
are all in a days work to us.  
Babel was an outhouse, Notre Dame a closet,  
the skyscrapers are toothpicks and the Pyramids  
bricks in a fireplace where we warm our feet,  
compared to what we'll raise and span.*

*Women and men, we need your steel.  
Your feet are the foundations, your arms the girders,  
your talents the rivets and mortar.  
Bring everything you have, we need it all because*

*it is ourselves. we make  
the earthquake-proof human highway,  
carrying our children and their imaginations  
to skies beyond our last nail.*

*The weather and the official press  
are always against us - I like the odds!*

*And I don't know about the dead,  
but we'll make enough noise to wake the living!*

**T**his is a poem by Robert Edwards that *Political Affairs* was proud to publish in these pages last year. Edwards' work, including his new book *Fragments From A Graffitied Wall*, just out from Partisan Press, is an important contribution to the tradition of working-class poetry.

The first thing one can say about Edwards' poetry is these are poems written of, by and for the working class. There are many poets who lean on the working class to describe this or that aspect of life as it is lived in the 21st century, but few who base a body of work upon such an historic outlook.

Fewer still have learned their craft as well and write with such exuberance and imagination, at the same time as they take our side.

We think of Brecht, Neruda, Hikmet, Mayakovsky, Dalton in this country, we think of Tom McGrath, and Amiri Baraka, among others. Edwards work is fiercely polemical, howlingly funny, tenderly lyrical and frequently "beautiful." It is also explicitly Marxist poetry. Some would see this as narrowing, but it actually gives his books a sweep, depth and historical resonance that most poetry doesn't have.

Edwards poems have grown organically out of the class struggle of the last 20 years. His first collection *Radio Venceremos* was published in 1991 and defended the Nicaraguan revolution, at the same time as it explored the hidden connections to the U.S. class struggle. Edwards, *The Death of Communism* was published by Partisan Press

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in 1998. At a time when U.S. imperialism was hailing the destruction of the Soviet workers state as evidence of the "death of Communism," it contained a ringing reaffirmation of the international socialist project.

As a Marxist, he believes that working people have the knowledge, experience and vision to rule society. As a cultural activist, he knows that the construction of a living working-class culture, of which his poems are a current, is an indispensable component of any successful struggle for socialism.

Edwards poems are proof of the power of culture to nourish us whether in good times or bad. In his poem "South Africa," he describes Black miners striking in solidarity with the struggle against apartheid:

*The miners fold their arms  
Machinery  
of oppression  
stops.  
The soles of the dancers feet are placed  
on the wide drum of the earth.  
The Many become One  
in the rhythms of one song.  
Thousands of fists upraised  
become one fist,  
making dust of apartheid  
in a Black dawn,  
brighter than any before!*



"Fish or Cut Bait," on the other hand, was written in the aftermath of the defeat of the Soviet workers state. Speaking in a voice of almost classical simplicity, the poet counsels patience and the long view of history to class-

struggle activists.

*You see the wall come tumbling down,  
the Red Star trampled in the dust,  
and look as if you've eaten a sour sky.*

*On the ranches of Profit Margin,  
the good old boys are having a grand shindig  
and Bar-B-Q, crowing and whooping  
and shooting their pistols in the air.*

*And now you think  
they've got us running through the weeds  
with our asses on fire?*

*It's times like these that I go fishing  
so grab a pole and come along!*

*Who cares if the lake is dry.  
It'll be full of fish  
by the time we set our lines out true.*

Edwards latest poems from *Fragments From a Graffiti-tied Wall* extend his achievement. Largely written in the '90s, they take place against the backdrop of the U.S. imperialist "new world order," as well as stepped-up attacks against the U.S. working class. In the *Death of Communism*, Edwards wrote that in the post-Soviet era "all the world's currencies flow into one sea of trade whose bottom line is salt to thirsty, riptide to the unemployed." In this latest book, Edwards uses his knowledge of Greek mythology to give a name to this imperialism. It is called Erysichthon.

*Because he would devour the world and be death,  
Erysichthon was cursed by Demeter with  
insatiable hunger,  
Driven insane by appetite, he sold his daughter for food,  
dragging all he could into his mouth,  
until he broke his teeth on rocks,  
until he tore the meat from his own bones  
and dying drank his own blood down.*

*Like you, America. Like you.  
(Erysichthon)*

He also writes of attacks against the working class closer to home. "Progress, Holidays & the Official Story," is a poem about the unprovoked police shooting of an unarmed African-American on the streets of his hometown, Seattle. It is also a poetry report on the state of Black America 30 years after the assassination of Dr. King. Edwards writes of

*a rainy  
Martin Luther King Day, when the Republicans*



*and Business interests are working overtime  
to destroy affirmative action and roll back  
Civil Rights here in America while shipping  
decent jobs overseas to military dictatorships  
where labor is cheap and kept that way by torture,  
intimidation and selective "disappearance."*

The poem details the official police "investigation" of the killing, and the usual exoneration. It closes with the devastating lines,

*All charges were dropped against the officer,  
and back pay was ordered for his time on suspension.*

*Oh, Martin. The road is longer than anyone dreamed.*

Edwards' books frequently contain a poem or two that are destined to be classics for the working-class movement. *Fragments* is no exception. "When Newt Gingrich Speaks" belongs this election year in the backpacks of all activists seeking to beat back the ultra-right, as part of the struggle for political independence of the working class.

*Custer rides out of Newt Gingrich's mouth,  
at the head of the 7th Cavalry,  
looking for Wounded Knee and Sand Creek.*

*Lucky Lindy flies out of Newt Gingrich's mouth,  
bearing the gift  
of Henry Ford's autographed picture to Hitler.*

*And if it's not Newt,  
then it is Newt,  
or the reincarnation of Newt,  
who has told us or tells us or will always tell us  
that Light is Darkness blocking  
our advance into the past.*

*Cold stones make the best bed and a roll of barbed wire  
the softest pillow. Thirst  
can only satisfied with sand, and the bread  
takeneth from our mouths is a blessingeth  
unto our tables, whatever & ever, amen.*

*When Newt Gingrich speaks,  
we have people to fear and hate again, and the world is rich  
with enemies.*

*Look, you can see their faces now,  
lit by the first of burning books.*

Readers expecting a bare, stripped down language commonly associated with the "socialist realist" poets (at least in this country) of the 1930s will be surprised by the lush language, exuberance and wild humor. In fact,

Edwards has more in common with Latin American and Soviet writers like Neruda, Vallejo and Mayakovsky than his U.S. antecedents. For instance, in his new book, Edwards uses jumpcuts and abrupt shifts in narrative and tone to describe poignantly the landscape of Cuba before Fidel.

*It was a hurricane  
behind the sunglasses of the National Guardsmen  
smoking a cigar  
while holding a smoking gun.*

*It was snake eyes, and a Manhattan stirred with  
a syringe,  
and penthouses, and kids eating dirt,  
and bloody sunsets, tequila sunrises, and midnight  
marengo under palm trees by a luminous pool.*

*It was the splash of a body  
being rolled off a yacht.*

*It was a picture postcard church  
full of old women wearing black and lighting candles  
for their disappearing sons and daughters.*

*It was a priest blessing a jeep.*

*(Cuba Before Fidel)*

But his big subject in *Fragments from a Graffitied Wall* is America. Perhaps this is best seen in his long tour de force "Highways." This is a beautiful poem. Its lines capture the music of the land as the narrator moves through a kaleidoscope of small town and backstreet from ocean to ocean. We think of Jack Kerouac's epic novel *On the Road*. But Edwards sees more than the beats ever did. This is a country not just of "lumber towns" and "salty towns of the sundown sea," but of "trucks loaded with the vengeance of imperialism," and "histories of the fist at every crossroad" enough to break a "prairie full of hearts."

And if he recognizes the beast of imperialism, during the course of the poem he also comes to identify his dream with a "restless rainbow tribe," rooted in the fabric of the country and its people. In this sense, "Highways" is beautiful like the Woody Guthrie classic song *This Land is Your Land*. But it is a beauty that includes all of its verses, *from the redwood forests and Gulf-stream waters, to the history of working people's struggle that lies just behind the surface of Guthrie's largely suppressed final verse against private property.*

*I've pulled over and dozed away the rain  
under your overpasses,  
and when I awoke, I held a dream in my arms*



ularize the concept of a "Socialism USA." As I understand it, this seeks to promote a socialism that builds on the indigenous radical traditions of American working people. When the definitive anthology is published of people's poetry that has emanated from this tradition, I believe Edwards poems "Erysichthon" and "Highways" will take their rightful places in it. The poems closes:

*the last of the autumn light  
catches the one red leaf hanging on the maple  
outside my window one leaf waving  
in the north wind like a hand,*

*a flag,*

*a poem on fire,*

*and somewhere,*

*I swear,*

*an owl leaves a branch*

*and the dream is loose.*

In other poems Edwards makes clear that any successful struggle against Erysichthon and the realization of the dreams of the "rainbow tribe" can only be achieved through the militant struggle of the working class, nationally and internationally.

Partisan Press is to be commended and supported for publishing this important book of poetry .It is available from P.O. Box 11417, Norfolk, VA 23517 for \$6.00 (postage paid). Editors Al Markowitz and Mary Franke, are also the publishers of the fine working-class quarterly, Blue Collar Review.

Today, as in the '30s, there is a need for cultural workers to not just expose the media blackout on working class and oppressed voices but to develop our own working-class cultural institutions. Edwards, in addition to being an excellent working- class poet, is also to be commended for his long-time work as a small press editor in this regard. He recently has announced plans to relaunch his poetry magazine *Pemmican* as a cyberzine, open to cutting edge working-class poetry. PA readers can reach him at Pemmican, PO Box 262, Kirkland, WA 8083 ■

*tight so tight believing  
all of us or none, believing that America will rise  
into itself, climbing its prayers  
into the promise of the morning. Yes,  
I have seen the sleeping face of that dream  
in your restless rainbow tribe  
as they struggled in their labor and against  
the hatred or indifference of the rich  
and their own scabs and traitors.*

*Wherever I awoke, I held a dream in my arms,  
rocking it in the cradle of my ribs*

*a dream that could not wake up.*

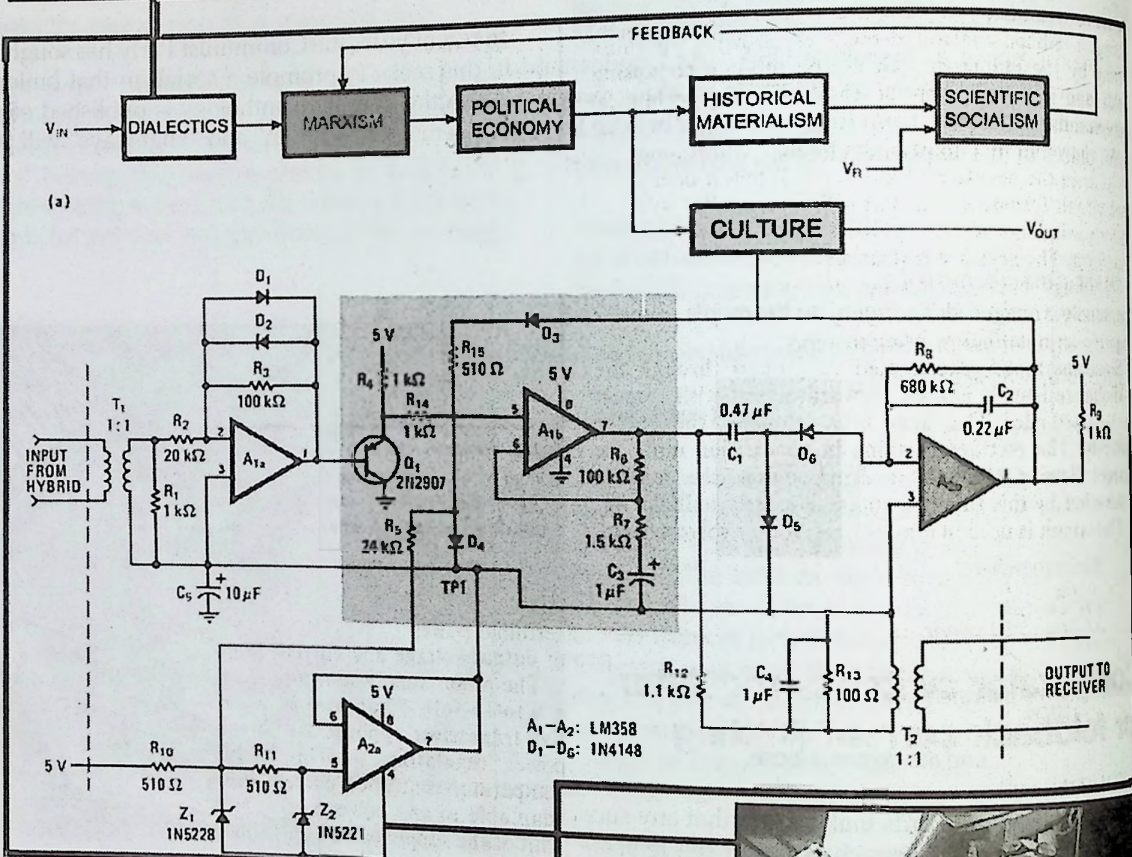




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**OUTPUT**