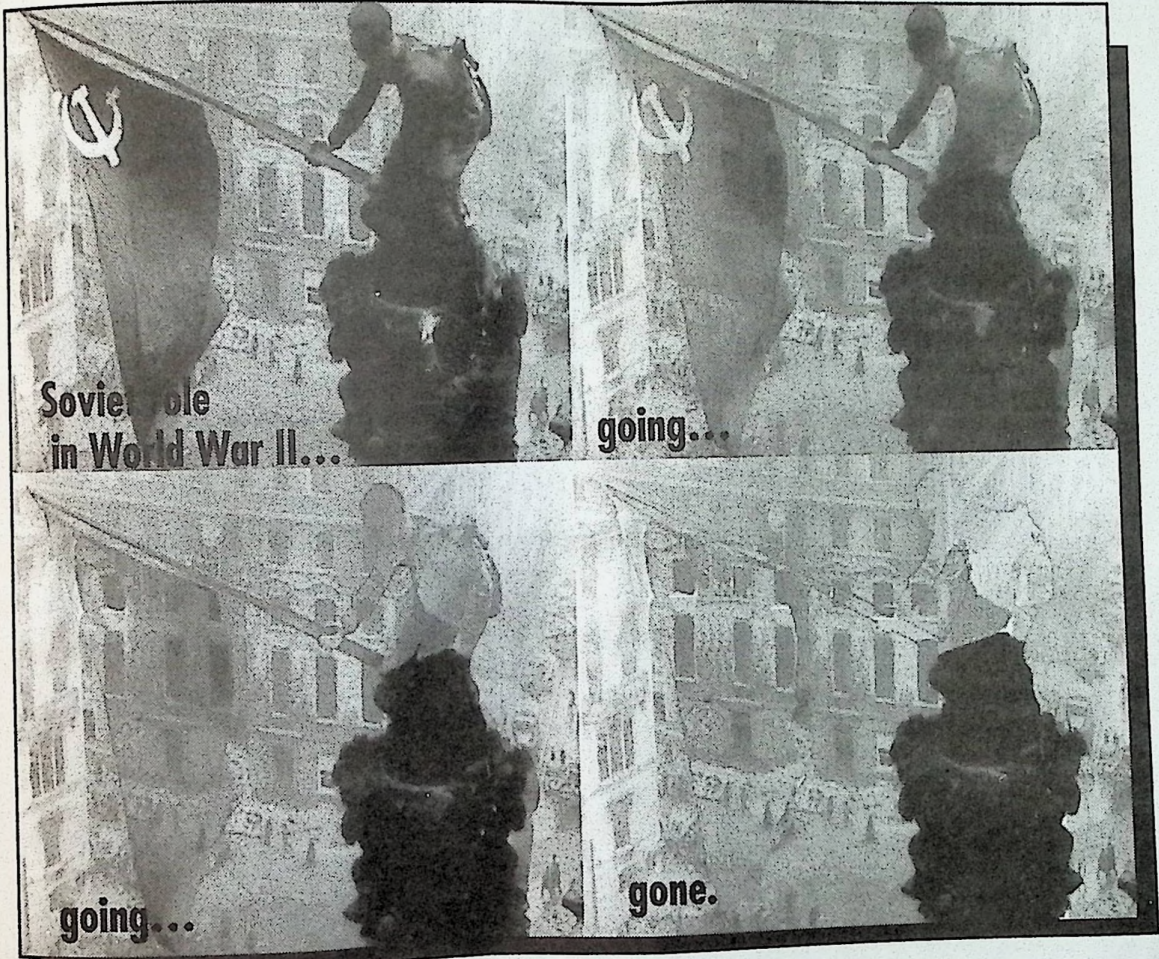


Political Affairs

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U.S. Imperialism Rewrites History



- The Truth about D-Day - *Hall*
- Racism & Unemployment - *Perlo*
- Fighting Racism - *CPUSA*

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The Truth About D-Day and the War vs. Fascism

Gus Hall

Things are not always what they seem. All too often in our class-driven society, those who own and rule decide what version of history is fit to print – to read, see and hear. Too often the “official story,” the version fashioned by bourgeois historians and politicians, is just that – a fabricated story that has nothing to do with historic reality, essence or truth. Rather, the “official story” most times has everything to do with ruling-class ideology and keeping the truth a secret from the people.

On June 6th there were many 50th anniversary observations of D-Day that were all reenactments of the “official story.” The celebrations were meant to reinforce a historic myth – that the Allied invasion of Normandy was the turning point of World War II, that the United States and Great Britain liberated Western Europe, and that D-Day was the beginning of the end of the fascist Axis, the smashing of Hitler Germany’s plans to conquer the world.

The manufactured appearance was that the Allied invasion of Normandy was the battle that turned the tide against Nazi Germany, the battle that ended Hitler’s illusions of conquest.

This was the content of all the reunions, parades and speeches, tributes and memorials to the D-Day war heroes. And of course that was also the content of all the media coverage. The D-Day events took over the TV, radio and newspaper headlines, feeding a steady diet of myths into the minds of millions of Americans.

Clinton and his entourage of image makers and speechwriters traveled to Europe to appear at some of the D-Day celebrations. At Normandy he delivered a speech to a reunion of veterans and their families. It was a speech that perpetuated this same historic myth, only it so magnified the U.S. role that it gave the impression that the United States was the world’s savior from fascism. It was meant to give the false impression that the U.S. won the war – as if there was no anti-fascist coalition and especially as if the Soviet Union was not even in the war. This speech was a travesty of truth and a crime against

the people of the Soviet Union who carried the main burden of the war.

It is strange that the first stop on Clinton’s D-Day tour was Italy, which was a partner in the fascist Axis. In his speech, Clinton congratulated the new Italian government, a government infested with fascists.

Then he visited the pope. What was the role of the Vatican during World War II? The fact is that the Vatican, the pope and the officialdom of the Catholic Church in most countries did not play a positive role in the war against fascism. In fact, the Vatican supported Mussolini and Hitler. And it was very much involved in the shameful business of saving and hiding fascist big shots after the war.

Since the truth about the church’s role has been kept a secret from the American people, Clinton’s choice of itinerary did not arouse the outrage it should have – the kind of public outrage expressed when Reagan visited the Bitburg cemetery in West Germany in 1983 to pay tribute to the fascist war dead.

As with so much in our capitalist society, history is molded to conform to the ideological contours of the ruling corporate elite – a class that fashions truth out of whole cloth as it suits their corporate interests. It does this as part of its efforts to perpetuate itself and preserve the class-driven system that guarantees its privileges, its ill-gotten riches, its class exploitation at home and its imperialist domination abroad.

The American people often accept the appearance of things because they are victims of the corporate-controlled media in which no lie is too low and no myth too outrageous to bolster the ideological edifice that supports the capitalist system.

Over the years – especially the Reagan-Bush years – the American working class and people have developed a deep distrust of government, of corporate America and the ruling rich, and of the mass media and a healthy cynicism towards mainstream politicians. The great disillusionment with Clinton only deepened these thought patterns.

Thus, the American people are today ready to hear the truth about the monstrous distortions of D-Day, about the war against fascism, the Big Lie and the Cold War.

The American people are ready to know why

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these myths have been created, repeated and embellished for 50 years. In the process of peeling away the layers of lies, the working class will learn not only the truth, but their stake in learning the truth. Exposing these myths reveals the real history of capitalism, fascism, imperialist rivalry and class warfare, working-class heroism, and the capitalist war against socialism.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ■ First, we, too, pay tribute to the fearless heroism of the maimed and martyred thousands who stormed the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944 to finally open the Second Front against fascism.

Second, the end result of World War II was the rescuing of humanity from fascist enslavement. Looking back after 50 years, this victory stands out in ever sharper focus because history's most serious challenge to social progress was crushed. The price of this victory was staggering. Over 50 million people killed; 22 million were Soviet citizens, 20 million were the victims of the Holocaust, the Nazi genocide against the Jewish people.

Indeed, humanity paid an almost incomprehensible price in death and devastation so that civilization and social progress could move ahead. The victory over fascism was one of the greatest and most progressive events in human history. That said, let us now set the historical record straight.

Prior to the outbreak of the war, perhaps the most pernicious and most widely spread lie is the portrayal of the German-Soviet pact as a sellout to Hitler. The fact is it was the last thing the Soviet Union wanted. It was a path they tried by all means to avoid.

Two Soviet leaders, Molotov and Litvinov, were set to work night and day for years trying to convince England, France and later the United States to join forces to defeat German fascism. Stalin made one proposal after another to forge an anti-fascist coalition.

Because the "Allies" kept breaking their word on the opening of the Second Front, Stalin had no choice. He had to buy time to build up the war industries and strengthen the Soviet armed forces. It was a short-lived deal that served the purpose of temporarily putting off the inevitable confrontation between the Soviet Union and fascist Germany.

The lies about the German-Soviet pact were part of the fascist campaign to link so-called "national socialism" with real socialism. In his speeches delivered at the 7th World Congress of the Communist International in July-August 1935, Georgi Dimitroff

definitively exposed why the fascists called the German brand of fascism "national socialism." He said, "The most reactionary variety of fascism is the German type of fascism. It has the effrontery to call itself national socialism, though having nothing in common with socialism." And further,

Why do the German fascists, those lackeys of the big bourgeoisie and moral enemies of socialism, represent themselves to the masses as "socialists," and depict their accession to power as a "revolution?" Because they try to exploit the faith in revolution, the urge towards socialism, which lives in the hearts of the broad masses of the toilers of Germany.¹

Defining the class character and role of German fascism, he said,

Hitler fascism is not only bourgeois nationalism, it is bestial chauvinism. It is a government system of political banditry, a system of provocation and torture practiced upon the working class and the revolutionary elements of the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. It is medieval barbarity and bestiality, it is unbridled aggression in relation to other nations and countries.²

There is no question that in those perilous days the Soviet Union faced the possibility of a U.S.-German-British-French-Italian-Japanese war against socialism. It was their plan to unify the capitalist countries against the Soviet Union and try, again, to carry out Churchill's edict to "strangle the socialist baby."

Because of this imperialist conspiracy, Britain, France and the United States were big factors in building up Hitler's war machine, and that is why they didn't want to enter the war against Hitler. If Hitler had not run amok, if he had stayed within the capitalist game plan, the world would be a very different place.

However, the Soviet-German pact put an end to the capitalist conspiracy for a world imperialist war against socialism, led by Hitler Germany. The conquest of Manchuria and most of China was Japan's contribution to the plans of a world capitalist alliance against socialism.

In the United States, the German-Soviet pact made a very difficult period even harder for our Party because, like the majority of the American people, some of us were misled by the virulent propaganda.

Even after the formation of the anti-fascist coalition, Britain and the U.S. were deeply influenced by the likes of Harry Truman who urged that the U.S.

should let the Germans and Russians kill each other off. How was it possible for the Soviet Union to do the impossible – to challenge and beat back the most formidable and ferocious war machine in history?

It was possible, because saving their socialist homeland was a sacred mission. It was the main motive force behind the valor and heroism of the Red Army and the Soviet people in a "Great Patriotic War" that cost the Soviet Union the deaths of so many of its people, destruction of thousands of its cities and towns, of farms and crops and the ruin of many basic industries.

The Soviet Union had to survive and build socialism under the most adverse circumstances – revolution, then civil war, then World War II. Once again, the Soviets were forced to defend their socialist homeland against the armed might of capitalism and imperialism. There is hardly a Soviet family that did not lose loved ones. They suffered the loss of some of their finest cadres and Communist leaders. On the other hand, aside from the terrible human cost, the United States came out of the war unscathed.

SECOND FRONT ■ All the D-Day celebration plans, invitations, speeches, parades and tributes left out the fact that it was the Red Army that made it possible for the Normandy invasion to succeed. They left out the truth that the Soviets had been fighting for two years when Churchill and Roosevelt were finally compelled to stop stalling and launch the allied invasion of Normandy, thus opening the Second Front.

However, the fact is that by the time the Second Front was opened in Europe, the Soviet Union had already delivered the decisive blow against the fascist hordes. The Soviets stopped the Nazis at Leningrad and at the gates of Moscow in terrible battles with huge losses of life and the near destruction of that great city.

At Kursk, the last major Nazi offensive, the Soviets delivered a stunning defeat, incapacitating Hitler's armies to the point where they could only retreat across Eastern Europe to the border of Berlin, where hundreds of thousands of Nazis took their decisive beating.

The fact is that it was the Red Army that finally defeated the fascist army at the gates of Berlin, losing 300,000 soldiers in that battle. Yet, unbelievably, the Berlin victory commemoration did not include Russia, nor was there any mention of the Red Army's decisive role in saving the city.

During May-June 1944, Stalin ordered a general offensive to occupy the German divisions on the Eastern Front to prevent them from throwing their full weight into stopping the landing on Normandy beach. It was the Red Army that launched an offensive against the German forces, a diversion that created the conditions to make the Allied landing possible.

In January 1945, during Hitler's counteroffensive, Eisenhower asked Stalin for help. Less than a week later, the Soviets launched another offensive along a thousand-mile front, pinning hundreds of German divisions on the Eastern Front, from the Baltics to the Carpathians, to help the American and British forces. Thousands of Red Army soldiers died in the battles.

On the critical issue of the Second Front, it is important to highlight why both the United States and Great Britain stalled for so long. First of all, Churchill anguished over the increased prestige of the Soviet Union with its skill of turning defense into counter-offensive, wherein the names of Stalingrad, Moscow and Leningrad evoked worldwide admiration.

And in the United States, there were those like Senator Harry Truman of Missouri who favored a war of exhaustion between the USSR and Germany.

The two years of stalling before the Second Front was finally opened revealed the underlying contradictions that kept appearing and disappearing, only to arise again – that the main aim of the capitalist countries was to destroy socialism in its infancy. However, it finally became clear to Great Britain and the U.S. that Hitler had no loyalties except to German monopoly capital. It was imperialist rivalries in the struggles to carve up the world that finally drove the capitalist countries to fight each other.

It is important to recognize the role of the Communist Party, USA in rallying the people for the Second Front. Throughout the war, in which 15,000 Communists enlisted, fought and died, the Party played a significant role in organizing the people for the Second Front.

In addition in Europe, the partisans and resistance fighters, mainly led by Communists, made a much bigger contribution in the war than is recognized or admitted. It was these fighters that liberated Paris before the Allied troops arrived.

THE REAL TURNING POINT ■ The turning point of World War II was not the Normandy invasion but the defeat of the fascist war machine at Stalingrad. The battle at Stalingrad was a monumental, superhu-

man effort by Soviet soldiers and civilians, who fought street by street, house by house, delivering the ultimately fatal blow to the million-strong Nazi army.

From that moment on, the Soviet forces were on the offensive and the Germans in retreat. From then on, the fate of Nazi Germany was sealed. It is a monstrous betrayal of history and the Soviet Union's valiant role in the war against fascism that all the 50th anniversary observations took place without a single word about the decisive role of the Soviet Union, the Red Army and the defeat of the fascist hordes at Stalingrad.

Why this betrayal? Because Stalingrad sent ripples of fear and loathing throughout the capitalist class, worldwide. They saw the necessity to defeat Germany, but just as important, they saw a challenge to their very existence in the Soviet defeat of the ferocious German war machine. The capitalist world feared that the Soviet Union would become the main military and political force in all of Europe.

The basic truth is that when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the war took on a new dimension. From the capitalist vantage point there was good reason for fear, because the Soviet victories made it possible for countries in Eastern Europe to rebuild and take a socialist path of reconstruction.

Furthermore, with the defeat of fascism, the pre-World War II Europe-based capitalist world was shattered. The old colonial empires were smashed and many new countries began the turn towards socialism.

At the same time, however, U.S. imperialism was able to take advantage of its fortunate set of circumstances and immediately began to rebuild the capitalist countries under its domination. Thus began the Cold War and the class contradiction took on a new dimension in the worldwide struggle between capitalism and socialism.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Cold War and anti-Communism were supposed to be over. Not for U.S. imperialism. Not as long as one socialist country still exists. Thus, as was its frustrated plan during World War II, total obliteration of existing socialism is still the elusive goal of the United States. It is the motive behind the blockade to strangle socialist Cuba, the slander against socialist Vietnam and the present threats of a new war against North Korea.

For example in one of the most outrageous lies of the celebrations, the liberal Sam Donaldson, reporting live from Normandy, called D-Day a "double celebration - the defeat of both fascism and Communism."

FASCISM - CAPITALISM IN THE RAW ■ The main essence of the Second World War was the defeat of German fascism. Yet there was not a single word uttered in all the 50th anniversary celebrations of D-Day to indicate what was behind the military victory against Germany.

Why is it that in all the tributes and speeches no one talked about what the war was really all about? The reason is because fascism is capitalism in the raw, in its most naked form. Fascism is capitalism stripped of all its human rights and bourgeois democratic trappings.

The monopoly corporations were the foundation, the roots of fascism. They made their biggest profits under fascism. At the same time, World War II is proof that corporate interests and national interests do not always coincide, that there are imperialist rivalries that sometimes supercede class interests.

The corporate interests in all the capitalist countries, including fascist Germany, were antagonistic to socialism and therefore anti-Soviet. The capitalist governments tried to maneuver around class interests and the class contradictions. These governments also tried to maneuver around the national interests of each country and class interests on a world scale.

Dimitroff put it most clearly and vividly at the Communist International: "... fascism in power is the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital."³ Thus, fascism is corporate rule by destroying unions and workers' rights. It is rule by brute force, the open terrorist rule of state-monopoly-capitalism. It is the elimination of all forms of democracy. It is the replacement of all democratic forms with a reign of terror, with a regime of political repression, mass murder, racism and anti-Semitism, and the outlawing of all political parties, especially the annihilation of Communist parties. In Germany, fascism was the smashing of all trade unions, the mass murder of Communists, and the Holocaust genocide.

The ultimate aim of fascism was that German monopoly corporations would conquer and enslave the world. The ultimate aim was to destroy socialism and to put the world under the Nazi boot.

The capitalist countries responded in contradictory ways because the monopoly corporations of capitalism were to one extent or another in agreement with many of the aims of German fascism. They agreed with the aim of destroying socialism and therefore with Hitler's anti-Soviet policies. They were

in agreement with the policies of destroying the trade unions. They were enthusiastically in support of destroying Communist and socialist parties. They saw the need to destroy democratic forms because they also have always feared any kind of people's power.

They finally supported the war against fascism because German fascism became a threat to their corporate national interests. How did this come about?

During the pre-war period and for a long period during the war, world imperialism, including monopoly circles of the United States, England and France, saw the fascist Axis as the shock troops in the struggle to destroy socialism.

In fact, the monopoly circles of the United States, England and France encouraged and financed the buildup of the forces of German and Italian fascism. This was clearly evident in the Munich Agreements. These were policies of appeasing fascism. These policies were a reflection of their common basic class interests. The policies based on antagonism toward the Soviet Union reflected the basic contradiction between the two main classes – the capitalist class and the working class.

As German fascism grew stronger, its appetite grew bigger. It became a challenge to its imperialist rivals. As German fascism grew, the other capitalist powers were forced to face two contradictions – the basic contradiction between the two classes and the contradiction between the imperialist powers.

It is important to keep in mind that while the imperialist powers never relinquished or forgot the main class contradiction, they were forced by the set of circumstances to pursue a policy that, for a crucial moment, coincided with the world struggle against the most reactionary force: fascism.

Understanding the motivation of different class interests – how and why these different class interests coincide, without, however, having any illusions about the nature and aims of the capitalist forces at such moments – is of great importance. The U.S., England and France fought in an anti-imperialist, anti-racist war. However, this does not make them anti-imperialist or anti-racist.

For example, the Marshall Plan was and still is heralded as a massive U.S. giveaway, a helping hand to the war-torn lands. The Marshall Plan was designed and executed to take advantage of the greatly weakened European states at a moment when the victor, the United States, had become stronger.

The Marshall Plan was a successfully executed

conspiracy by corporate America to take over as much as possible of European resources. U.S. corporations and banks became the dominant partners in the European industries. Funds from the U.S. government found their way into the coffers of U.S. corporations. The only war-devastated countries who were spared imperialist plunder and domination were the East European countries that were saved by the Soviet Union.

U.S. imperialism restructured the capitalist world behind an aggressive policy, in an attempt to resolve the main class contradiction in its favor. This was the aim of the Cold War and the virulent anti-Soviet policies. U.S. imperialism was out to build a worldwide anti-socialist, anti-liberation movement coalition, under its leadership. The war against Vietnam and all the other acts of interference and aggression were part of this policy.

WHY SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT? ■ There are many reasons to set the historic record straight. Not the least of which is the truth. This is important because lies about the role of the Soviet Union saturated the reporting of the war. After the war the lies continued and grew. Big Lie anti-Communism was behind most of the post-war actions of the capitalist nations.

Silence is the way bourgeois historians handle the large number of leading Nazis who were spared a Nuremberg trial and instead sent for safe keeping to one or another South American country and the United States, with the aid of U.S. government agencies. When the war was over the United States, Great Britain and France set up agencies, with a special secret mission and plenty of money to buy new identities, to hide, and transport thousands of Nazis to friendly countries for safe keeping. Among other uses, the U.S. put many Nazi scientists to work on making a hydrogen bomb and other weapons of mass destruction, a job the fascists were uniquely suited for.

Silence is also how they handled one of the great U.S. outrages of the war that occurred when a ship overflowing with Jewish refugees fleeing fascism tried to dock in the U.S. The Roosevelt administration refused to give them sanctuary and turned them back – to certain death at the hands of the Nazis. This inhuman act of cruelty and anti-Semitism was in keeping with the friendly relations between the U.S. and fascist Germany at the time.

After the war, it was the socialist Soviet Union that first proposed in the United Nations the creation of a Jewish homeland for the Jewish refugees

who survived the death camps and who were scattered throughout Europe.

It was another historic betrayal, that in all the speeches about the victory over fascism, no one mentioned the fascist death camps and the Holocaust. The enormity of the crime of genocide was simply omitted, just as the Nazi slaughter of the Communists, trade unionists and Soviet people were not mentioned. But silence speaks volumes.

Silence is yet another means of dealing with racism during this period. Another infamous part of the history of World War II – and another omission in the D-Day observances, is the racist nature of the U.S. armed forces. It was an abomination that African American soldiers were forced to fight in segregated units. They were largely forbidden to fly planes, drive tanks or rise through the ranks to become officers.

In typical racist fashion, African Americans were assigned to the most terrible tasks of collecting the bodies of dead soldiers and cleaning up the battlefield. They were limited to driving trucks and keeping the fighting units supplied. These racist practices went on unchallenged throughout the war.

Although there were between 1,500 and 2,000 Black soldiers who landed in Normandy on D-Day, none of them were allowed to play combat roles. Even returning African American soldiers were packed into segregated railroad cars and returned to segregated cities. Others traveled in passenger trains that also carried German prisoners of war to safe havens in the United States.

Revealing the truth enables us to reveal the essence of World War II: the main contradiction between the capitalist and the socialist systems and the class struggle between the working class and the capitalist class worldwide. It was this main contradiction that delivered Germany to the Hitlerites. It was anti-Communism that gave birth to Hitler. German capitalists like Krupps and I.G. Farben saw Hitler as their champion.

When Hitler came to power, the U.S. capitalist class had no reason to challenge German fascism. The monopoly corporations were in basic agreement with the main aims and methods of the Nazi regime. Corporate America was no stranger to racism, anti-Semitism, anti-unionism and anti-Communism.

It was only when German imperialism threatened the national and corporate interests of England and France that Churchill, Chamberlain and much later Roosevelt, began to worry.

When Hitler attacked the first country of social-

ism, it qualitatively changed the war from a defense of bourgeois democracy into a war to save revolutionary socialism. That is why the Soviet Union seemed to summon up superhuman strength and resolve – because they were not about to surrender their new working-class power, or abandon the world, to the likes of Hitler or the fascist Axis. This drove fear and loathing into the hearts of the allied countries. They feared that a strong Soviet state could tip the balance of power even more than Hitlerism.

The allied countries were doubly worried about this because in both France and Italy the Communist parties were very strong. Because the Communists led the resistance against fascism, the Allies feared that the Communist parties would become the dominant political power after the war. If the Red Army had liberated France and England, the world would be a different place today.

In this post-Cold War world, the class struggle rages on. Capitalism is in crisis the world over. Socialism is beginning its comeback, especially in the electoral arenas – in Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Slovenia, Poland, eastern Germany, the Ukraine, Lithuania and other former Soviet republics. And, of course, in South Africa the end of apartheid opens the path for a socialist transition. These developments strike fear in the hearts of the capitalists, especially U.S. capitalism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. imperialism has lost its ideological smokescreen for plunder, conquest and domination.

The rewriting of world history is an integral part of the ideological war against socialism. It is a massive propaganda and disinformation campaign to erase all historical memory of the Soviet Union as an ally, in fact as the decisive force in defending democracy and civilization against Hitler fascism.

In the United States, it is very important to unravel the historic myths, to expose them and explain them, because in so doing we tear away the manufactured appearance and lay bare the essence of the main contradictions in the world. The working class needs to be conscious of its historic role in the forefront of all the social and political movements of the day. This enables it to better carry out its future role as the final liberator of humanity from capitalist exploitation, oppression, racism, poverty and war. □

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1. George Dimitroff, *United Front Against Fascism*, New Century Publishers, 7th edition, October 1950, pp. 6-7.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
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Racism and Unemployment

Vic Perlo

By the 1970s, the ruling class of the United States had lost its unchallenged supremacy in the capitalist world. The country was afflicted by a long-lasting, complex structural crisis, which successively featured the shattering of the basic industrial core of the Midwest and its conversion into a "rust bowl," financial crises, most dramatically expressed in the \$500 billion S&L debacle, and currently the major "downsizing" of almost all major U.S. corporations, involving the permanent layoff of millions of workers.

This structural, systemic crisis has continued through several of the cyclical crises and recoveries that are "normal" features of the capitalist economic system, each devastating the lives of many workers, farmers and small business people.

Given the political balance of forces in the country, the capitalist class has put the entire burden of the structural crisis on the working class, while continuing to pile up profits and wealth. A major aspect of this burden is unemployment.

In many ways unemployment is far worse than revealed by the official statistics. So long as the U.S. economy was on a long-term uptrend, there was some opportunity for many unemployed workers to get their jobs back after a certain period, depending, among other factors, on the stage of the business cycle. It is true, however, that even at the best of times millions of lives were disrupted or devastated by unemployment and the resultant woes: going hungry, getting into debt, losing homes, etc. However, in general most unemployed workers would get back their old jobs or another in roughly the same line of work. Now that is no longer true.

One reason is that even in the best situation, unemployment lasts longer than in earlier decades. The *Economic Report* of the President's Council of Economic Advisors (Bush's swan song) issued in January 1983, explained this in the following way:

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... the effect of the 1990-91 recession and subsequent slow growth period on labor markets was more severe than the absolute change in employment or the unemployment rate indicated. The unemployment rate peaked at 7.7 percent ... 15 months after the end of the recession. Typically, the unemployment rate hits its peak an average of only 3 months after the end of a recession. ... In addition, the percentage of unemployed who lost their job permanently rather than being temporarily laid off, reached its highest point on record, eroding workers' long-term job security and limiting prospects for the quick rebound in employment that usually occurs during a recovery.¹

This crisis of the system has involved a long-term increase in the level and the rate of unemployment. There was an increase from 2.9 million in the 1950s and 3.5 million in the 1960s, to 8.3 million in the 1980s.

The official measure of unemployment is always understated. Under pressure from labor, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) regularly publishes a somewhat more realistic figure, taking into account underemployment and those whom the Bureau calls "discouraged workers." That total came to 13.7 million in 1992 instead of the 9.4 million "official" figure. Beginning this year the BLS is making a trivial correction in its methods, adding a few hundred thousand to its count of the unemployed. Progressive researchers have long shown that actual unemployment is double or more the official published figure.

During the great crisis of the 1930s, the struggle of millions against unemployment – organized and led by Communists – raised the understanding of people that unemployment is a byproduct of capitalism. World War II greatly reduced the level of unemployment to exceptionally low levels and industrial unions, established after bitter battles in the basic industries, were determined to prevent a return to high unemployment rates. Moreover, the victory of the Soviet Union and the spread of socialism – with the attendant full employment – terrified capitalists with the fear that mass unemployment would inspire U.S. workers to turn toward socialism.

Philip Murray, then president of the CIO, said in 1950: "Five million [unemployed] is menacing

Seven million is depression. Eleven million is riots and bloodshed."²

SAVING CAPITALISM ■ Murray, whose opportunist policies and collaboration with anti-Communist witch hunts contributed much to weakening the trade union movement, was speaking as a loyal supporter of capitalism. His reference to "riots and bloodshed" expressed his opposition to militant working-class actions against unemployment. But the fear was real. Reflecting this perceived threat, President Harry Truman asserted:

In 1932, the private enterprise system was close to collapse. There was real danger that the American people might turn to some other system. If we are to win the struggle between freedom and communism, we must be sure that we never let such a depression happen again.³

Within weeks, Truman averted the "danger" by launching the war against Korea, which reduced unemployment to low levels for the remainder of his term.

British millionaire economist John Maynard Keynes, whose influence remains to this day, led that school of establishment theoreticians who considered government intervention to alleviate the evils of capitalism necessary to save it. He recognized, "The outstanding faults of the economic society in which we live are its failure to provide for full employment and its arbitrary and inequitable distri-

bution of wealth and income."⁴

However, his position was contradictory. He also warned that reforms were desirable only to the extent that they did not disturb the capitalists' "incentive" to invest and produce, with due regard for the "nerves and hysteria and even the digestion" of the capitalist class.

Thirty years later, rightist opposition to Keynesianism was formulated by Milton Friedman, the American professor and presidential advisor, who wrote: "What kind of society isn't structured on greed? The problem of social organization is how to set up an arrangement under which greed will do the least harm."⁵

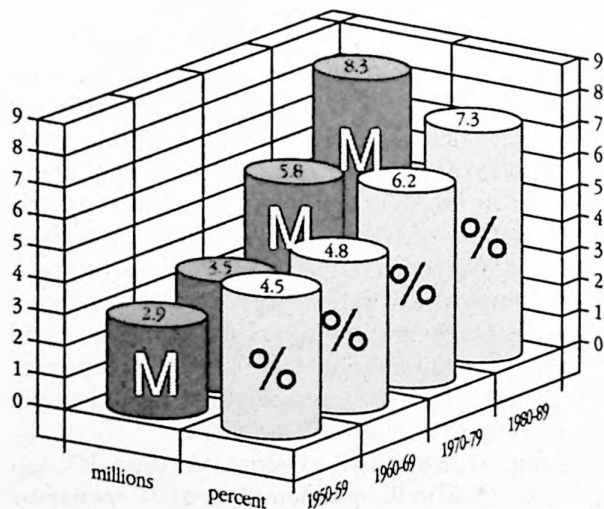
But in a period of working-class militancy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved measures of a Keynesian variety, broadly speaking, including Social Security, minimum wages, and the right to organize. After World War II, he promised the American people a better life, and in his 1944 "Economic Bill of Rights," his first declaration was that every person who is able and willing to work has the right to a job at decent wages, regardless of race, color or religion. However, after his death Congress failed to implement Roosevelt's pledge. In deference to public opinion, however, it enacted a vague "Employment Act" which had no operative substance and was soon forgotten.

Throughout the history of capitalism in the U.S. racism has given an especially sharp edge to unemployment. In Roosevelt's time, 75 percent of the African American population lived in the Jim Crow South, largely as rightless sharecroppers and farm laborers. During this period until the close of the Second World War, important demographic changes were occurring in the African American population as hundreds of thousands moved north in search of jobs and a better life. The industrial working-class character of the African American people began to assume increasing importance. The Latino population in the United States, though growing, was still small.

Communists made a unique contribution in the struggle for progressive labor policies raising the issue of the divisive role of racism and fighting for Black/white working-class unity. The unemployed council movement during this era was of particular importance.

By the 1970s, after the decisive activities of African Americans and their allies in the two previous decades, the pervasive evil of unemployment's

Unemployment by Decades
1950s through 1980s



unique racist edge could no longer be ignored or treated as a minor issue. And with the expansion of the Latino population, subject to many of the ills of the African Americans, everyone involved – politicians, trade union officials, capitalists – have had to acknowledge that the super-unemployment of oppressed peoples is a major, cruel feature of U.S. capitalism. In this regard, this writer wrote in 1975:

Today we have to say that economic discrimination against Blacks is the nation's number one economic problem. No economic problem affecting the majority of the population can be solved or significantly eased unless the solution includes a vast improvement in the economic situation of Black people and substantial reduction of the discrimination against them.⁶

Measures required to combat racism must be combined with struggles for effective programs that will better conditions for all American workers, including actions to reduce unemployment of white workers. It's important to stress the fact that intensified racial discrimination has seriously harmed the situation of white workers and counter all claims that white workers gain from discrimination against Blacks, Latinos, Native American Indians and Asians.

RACIST PATTERNS ■ Black workers have always been victims of the "last to be hired; first to be fired" practice. Employers, permeated with racist ideology, are reluctant to hire African Americans, especially Black men. To survive, Black men are forced, many times, to take jobs at lower wages, doing dangerous or unhealthy work, and employers reap vast superprofits.

The unemployment rate among Black workers until the 1980s has typically been double that of white workers. In recent years, it has more often been 2.5 times that of white workers.

The same racist pattern imposes especially high rates of unemployment on Hispanics, Native Americans, and some sections of Asian Americans.

Between the 1970s and the 1980s, the unemployment rate of white workers rose a little less than 1 percentage point – serious enough – but it went up 4.5 percentage points (about 40 percent) for Black workers, reaching depression proportions with an average of 15.3 percent. There was a dramatic widening of the unemployment gap affecting African Americans during the 1980s, when the Reagan-Bush administrations added an overt racist

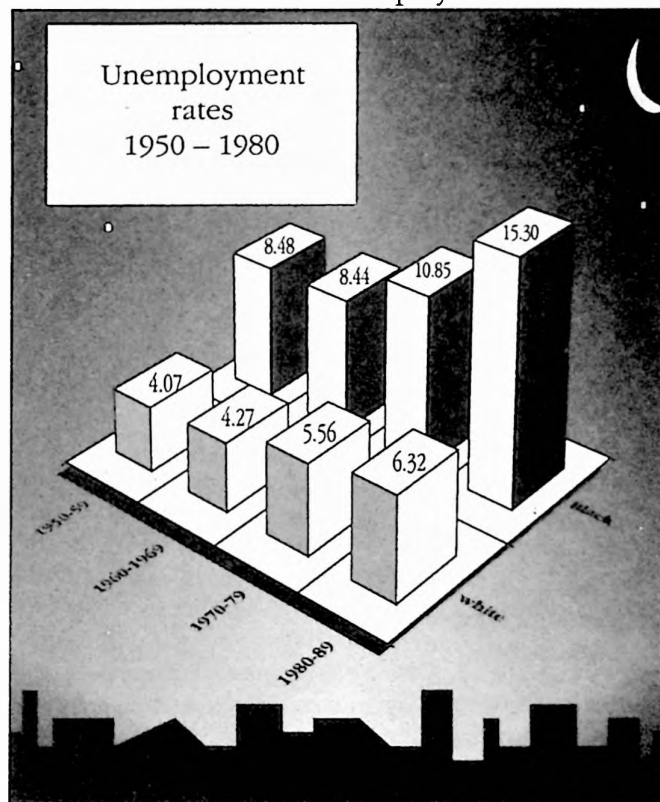
offensive to their all-out offensive against the entire working class.

The ratio of Black to white unemployment rates for five-year intervals increased as follows:

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 1971-1975 | 2.12 |
| 1976-1980 | 2.30 |
| 1981-1985 | 2.32 |
| 1986-1990 | 2.46 |

U.S. government statistics wrongly included Hispanics in unemployment rates for whites, tending to raise the actual rates of unemployment for white workers above their real figures. Thus, the rate for non-Hispanic white workers is roughly one-half of a percentage point less than published figures which include Hispanics with other whites. This effect has been increasing with the rise in the Hispanic population. As a result, the ratio of Black to non-Hispanic white unemployment was approximately 2.64 times, rather than the 2.46 times shown in the above table.

Racially and nationally oppressed peoples are an increasing proportion of the working class. They accounted for one-sixth of the total in the early 1970s but grew to one-fourth in 1993. The following table shows the increase in employment of "minori-



ties" since 1972, the earliest year for which detailed data are available.

| Race | Employment (Millions) | | Percent |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------|---------|
| | 1972 | 1993 | |
| Blacks | 7.8 | 12.1 | 55 |
| Hispanics | 3.7 | 9.3 | 151 |
| Asians & Native Americans | 1.1 | 4.4 | 300 |
| All Minorities | 12.6 | 25.8 | 105 |

Thus the total number more than doubled and increased from 15.2 percent of the total number of workers employed in 1972 to 21.6 percent in 1993. However, these figures include self-employed and capitalists as well as workers. The proportion of capitalists is much smaller among Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans than among whites. So the oppressed peoples account for at least 25 percent of employed wage and salary earners. It is clear from the table that Latino people and Asian Americans, and to a lesser extent Native Americans are growing rapidly, increasing the multi-racial, multi-national character of the working class.

GROWTH OF MULTI-RACIAL WORKING CLASS ■ The Black share in total jobs has grown slowly from 9.5 percent in 1972 to 10.1 percent in 1993. The very rapid rise in the Hispanic and Asian American working population increases the potential strength of multi-national, multi-racial unity within a working-class united front. It also increases the potential – and actuality – of capitalist class attempts to arouse rivalry and competition for jobs among the different races and ethnic groups of oppressed peoples. Data for 1993 are presented in Table 1.

| Race | Unemployed | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| | Number (thousands) | % of labor force |
| Total | 8,734 | 6.8 |
| White | 6,547 | 6.0 |
| Non Hispanic white | 5,498 | 5.5 |
| Black | 1,796 | 12.9 |
| Hispanics | 1,104 | 10.8 |
| Asian & Native American | 381 | 8.0 |

Data for non-Hispanic whites are the author's estimates, but are consistent with published economic data. Separate figures for unemployment of

Asian Americans and Native Americans are not available for 1993. However, other sources indicate that the unemployment rate for Asian Americans is only a little higher than for whites, while the unemployment rate for Native Americans is close to that of Blacks.

Hispanic workers suffer from severe discrimination. Typically, over the period considered, unemployment rates have been somewhat lower than for African Americans, but higher than for whites.

However, the loose use of the term "Hispanic" to categorize these workers is itself problematic and tends to obscure the situation confronting workers from different countries and racial and national backgrounds. For example, among Latinos the Mexican American unemployment rate is close to 11 percent. The Puerto Rican rate is 12.8 percent. Unemployment for Cubans is 7.8 percent.

In addition these statistics can be misleading and have to be weighed carefully. For example, in 1992, a higher percentage of Hispanic men were counted in the labor force than the corresponding percentage of white men. And even with the higher unemployment rates among Latino males, the percentage who actually had jobs was the same as that for white males, 71 percent, as compared with only 59 percent among Black men.⁷

However, these figures reveal only one side of the picture. The percentage of Latino women who have jobs is lower than that of either Black or white women, and an especially high proportion of Hispanic men and women are employed in very low-wage industries. Low wages and slave-like conditions for immigrant workers are especially sharp. So poverty is nearly as acute among Latinos as among African Americans.

A new system of measurement introduced by the Labor Department in 1994 sharply increased the levels and rates of Black and Hispanic unemployment, as well as the differential rate of unemployment as compared with the unemployment of white workers.

RACE, GENDER & UNEMPLOYMENT ■ Historically, because of the low wages paid Black men, relatively more Black women than white women worked for wages. During the post-World War II period, there has been a rapid rise in the proportion of women who work, from one-third to one-half of all women. (That figure includes elderly women and teenagers still in school). By 1992, three-fourths of all women

in the 25-54 age range were in the labor force.⁸

Women who were forced to stay home while their husbands worked and supported the family have become a distinct minority. This development has occurred because of women's campaigns for equal rights and the crisis of everyday living facing working-class families.

A major factor in these changes has been employers' substitution of women for men at lower wages. Thus, while the proportion of women working went up from 33 percent to 50 percent, the proportion of men working fell from 82 percent to 71 percent. The increase of women overbalanced the decrease of men, so that overall there was a modest rise in the proportion of all adults working.

But that was not true of the African American population. Because of racism, Black women were not able to break into the labor force as readily as white women, so the increase in the percentage of Black women working was moderate. As a result, while the proportion of Black women working exceeded the proportion of white women by a wide margin in the 1950s and 1960s, by the 1990s the proportion of white women with jobs was higher.

Over the same period, the percentage of Black

men with jobs plummeted, dropping much faster than the percentage among white men. By the 1980s, only 60 percent of all Black men had jobs, compared with 72 percent of white men.

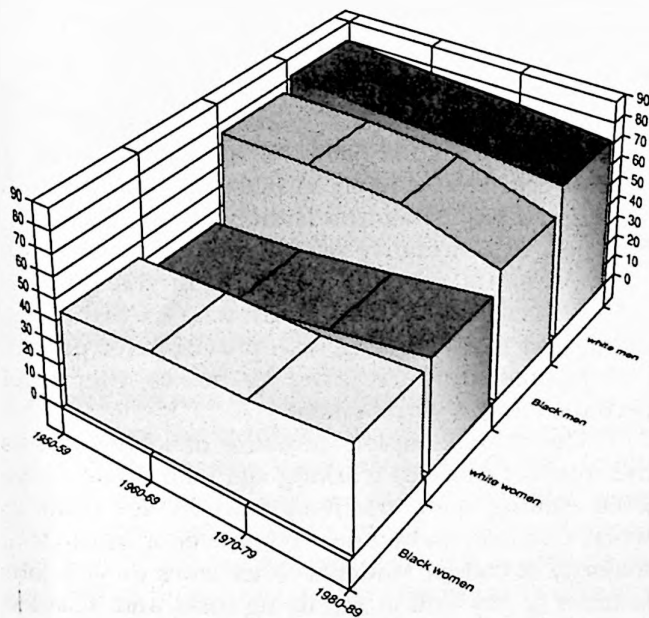
There are some specific reasons for this decline not wholly connected with racism: the decline of industrial employment in the North where many African American men had found jobs, the decline in the traditional forms of southern agriculture, another area of employment – although under terrible conditions – of Black men. But the principal causes have involved racial discrimination. Among the most important of these causes are the intensification of outright racism, which reversed the meagre job gains resulting from the Civil Rights struggles and legislation and the mass arrest and imprisonment of young Black men, which kept many in prison and left many more with records that employers used against hiring them. Media propaganda, especially TV and Hollywood has played a major role in promoting racism. It has been used to instill a fear of Black males among the white population, a strategy used with terrible impact in the election campaigns of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, and in New York City's mayoralty election by overt racist and reactionary right-winger, Rudolph Guiliani, whose racist crime-scare tactics and personal slanders against Mayor Dinkins led to victory.

The upshot has been a decline over the decades in the overall proportion of African Americans employed, from 58 percent to 56 percent, while the proportion of whites rose from 56 percent to 61 percent.

The corresponding increase in joblessness among African Americans – going far beyond the rise in official data – has given rise to deepening impoverishment of large sections of the African American population. Another important result was that by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the number of Black women employed exceeded the number of Black men holding jobs. And considering the low wages received by so many Black workers, this seriously weakened "normal" family structures among the Black population. There was corresponding demoralization among whites, but the extent of single parent families was much higher among African Americans, making them a target of racist propaganda.

Indeed, a special feature of U.S. racism in the employment arena is that more Black women are employed than Black men. This is due to many factors including the generally lower wages paid

Percent of men and women
Employed by Race
1950s through 1980s



women, the effects of the industrial crisis where more Black men were employed and the special racist criminalization of young Black men. Many Black women are now employed, in the service industry in clerical jobs as bank tellers, at checkout counters, etc., which are generally low-paid and with little benefits.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT ■ A particularly tragic feature of modern American life is the joblessness and overall economic insecurity afflicting youth. The impact on African American and Latino youth is greatest by a wide margin, destroying lives and preventing millions from ever realizing their potential.

The chart below shows youth unemployment by percentage, understated because BLS estimates are lower than the actual number of jobless youth who want and need jobs.

Among teenage youth, white males had an unemployment rate of about 19 percent, African American men 42 percent, and Hispanic men 27 percent. Rates for teenage women were slightly lower. Among men in their early 20s, the white unemployment rate was a bit over 10 percent, the Black rate 25 percent, and the Latino rate, 14 percent. Again, rates for women were a bit less.

Looking at it another way, 46 percent of white male teenagers had jobs, but only 24 percent of

Black teenagers; relatively half as many. Among youth in their early 20s (20-24), 77 percent of the white as compared with 57 percent of the African American had jobs, that is, 43 percent of young Black men in their early 20s were not employed, whether counted as jobless or not.

Today the importance of education for employment, and a college education for a decent job, is a fact of life. Of white youth 16-24, 21.8 percent were enrolled in college in 1992, compared with 16.4 percent of Black youth, a significant gap but not as great as it was some decades ago. But when it comes to getting a degree, the difference becomes great. Nine percent of the white youth compared with only 3 percent of Black youth actually graduated from college, and a college degree has proven essential for obtaining a good job with adequate salary and potential for advancement.⁹

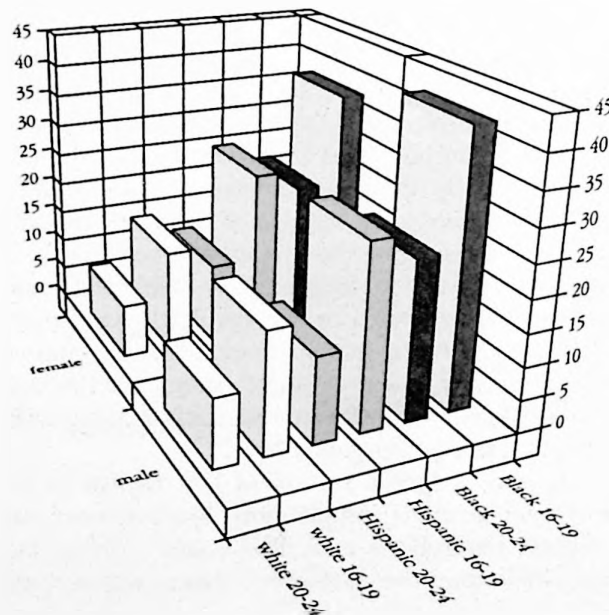
Among youth who dropped out of college without getting a degree, the disparity is also vast. For white youth the unemployment rate was 7.4 percent, not much lower than that for white college graduates, although the jobs were not as good. But for Black youth who did not complete college, the unemployment rate jumped to 20.4 percent.¹⁰

Most students who come from working-class and middle-income families cannot afford all of the costs of a college education without taking part-time jobs. In fact, 60 percent of white college students were counted as being in the labor force, and of them, 7.5 percent were among the unemployed. But among Black college students, who certainly needed the income more, only 44 percent were included in the labor force and of them, 19 percent were without jobs.

These data confirm the urgent need for affirmative action measures that guarantee access to full scholarship funds for Black college students, along with a vast increase in the availability of such funds for all students, regardless of race or sex. And included in affirmative action programs for Black workers, special consideration is required to guarantee access to jobs for Black youth who are just entering the job market, along with provision for protection against arbitrary firing by bosses after brief periods of token employment.

The most complete measure of joblessness is the count of those of working age who do not have jobs. Among men, relatively few do not want to work, or prefer to be idle. Today even a substantial majority of college students either work or seek jobs in order to pay tuition and living costs, and disabled

Youth Unemployment Rates
by age, race, and sex, 1992



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men are struggling for the facilities necessary to make employment possible and for affirmative action to aid them in getting jobs.

Detailed analysis reveals the enormous gap between Black and white joblessness. According to the minimal, official account of unemployment in 1992, 7 percent of white men and 15 percent of Black men (16 years and over), were unemployed – a gap of 8 percentage points.

But if a full count of joblessness were made – considering as unemployed all jobless males 16 and over – it turns out that 29 percent of white men and 41 percent of Black men were jobless. The gap has widened to 12 percentage points.

However, there is a distortion here: retirees constitute the major group of men no longer wanting or needing jobs. Hence it is more realistic to consider unemployment among males aged 16-64. Exclusion of older men from the population base affects whites much more than Blacks, simply because the overall impact of racism so seriously shortens the lives of African Americans and especially Black men. So it turns out that the proportion of jobless white men aged 16-64 is 19 percent, against 35 percent of Black men. By now the gap is 16 percentage points, double that reported in the official BLS count of unemployment.

Nor does this tell the whole story. Government employment statistics are based on the civilian non-institutional population. But with the jail and prison populations having doubled over the past decade, this factor has become a significant omission, especially with respect to Black men who constitute close to one-half of all male prisoners. (Female prisoners are relatively few.) Prisoners, of course, are jobless in the most basic sense, even though many work at virtually unpaid forced labor. The large number of imprisoned Black men contribute significantly to the poverty of the African American community. If prisoners are included in the 16-64 year population, it turns out that 20 percent of white men are jobless, compared with virtually twice that proportion – 39 percent of Black men. Now the gap is a horrendous 19 percentage points, or 95 percent.

RECENT TRENDS ■ The BLS count of unemployment is based on the number of workers who are jobless in a given survey week each month. It doesn't include those who have a job that particular week, but not the rest of the month. The unemployment figure reported for the year 1992, 9.4 million, is the average of those who had no jobs in the twelve sur-

vey weeks of that year. But the same 9.4 million were not jobless each month, many workers were unemployed some months and not others, while some were unemployed all year.

BLS also conducted a survey asking people about their work experience for the whole year. They found that 21.4 million workers were unemployed at some time during 1992, more than twice the average 9.4 million. That 21.4 million came to 15.8 percent of the number with jobs or who were looking for work, that is, those who were in the labor force part or all of the year. And 15.8 percent is more than twice the official "average" unemployment rate of 7.4 percent. Moreover, more than half of the 21.4 million workers, 11.6 million, were unemployed for a long time, from 15 weeks up to the entire year.

Even a few weeks without a job is enough to put a worker behind on monthly payments on a car, rent, or mortgage. Millions of families have lost their cars which are so necessary in hunting for a job, and getting to work if one is found. Many have been evicted or forced to move, to "double up" or join the ranks of the homeless.

These more inclusive BLS data show that unemployment hit more men than women, and, as expected, Black and Hispanic workers more than white workers. In 1992, 18 percent of men and 14 percent of women workers were unemployed to some extent during the year: white males 17 percent, African American and Latino men 25 percent. Also, the average length of unemployment was longer for Black and Hispanic job seekers – more than one-fifth of the Black job seekers were unemployed through-

Unemployment Gap
between white and Black men
Four Measures, 1992



out the year compared with one-tenth of white workers.¹¹

Two observations are prompted by these data. First, they should dispel any illusions that white workers gain from or are protected by the super-unemployment inflicted on African Americans and Latinos. When 10.5 million, or 17 percent of all white males sustain unemployment during a single year, this has to be recognized as an outrage inflicted on the entire population, not only on minorities.

Second, the jobless rate of African American workers, by the same measurement, was 1.5 times that of white workers. However, Black workers were unemployed for longer periods so that the number of weeks Blacks were without jobs was twice that of whites. That is similar to the ratio of the official unemployment rates. But an important factor is that Black and Hispanic workers and their families, for the most part, have far less financial reserves, if any, to fall back on through periods of unemployment.

Another BLS study was a "longitudinal survey," which followed the careers of young men for 12 years, from their 19th to their 30th birthdays. The results highlight the instability, the insecurity of economic life for the U.S. working class: the average worker held seven different jobs during this 12-year period, about the same for men and women, for whites and Blacks.

But there were big differences in the extent of unemployment during these 12 years. Among white

men, 8 percent had jobs for six years or less of the 12-year span, but one-third of the Blacks had this very low job record. And 55 percent of the white males, but only 24 percent of the Black men had jobs for 11-12 years, that is for all or most of the period. Latino workers also experienced significant unemployment.¹²

INDUSTRIAL CRISIS ■ Specific examples show more graphically than statistics the effects of racist employment policies in all economic environments.

Job opportunities for African American men have dwindled in the past decade, especially in the Midwestern "rust belt" and other areas of deindustrialization, despite some rise in economic activity as a result of growth in a variety of non-manufacturing and some selected manufacturing establishments. In some Midwestern areas that were among the most depressed in the early 1980s were better-off a decade later. In these areas previously laid-off whites were able to get new jobs. Also, white youth entering the labor force were able to get jobs, but not Black men, not even as "last to be hired." Too many are doomed, never to be hired.

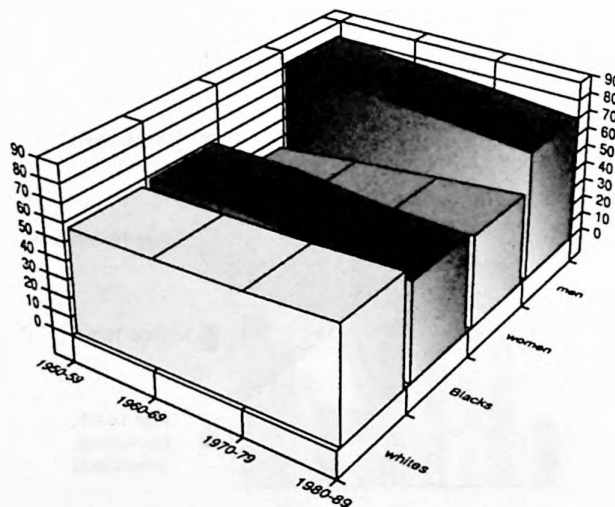
In fact, many African Americans have been forced to migrate to other parts of the country, notably to the South. Although social and economic discrimination is extreme there, too, Blacks may find some employment, even though in the worst jobs.

Milwaukee is a case in point. A city one-third Black, it is "hypersegregated" according to a University of Chicago study. In 1980, a year marking the beginning of a cyclical downturn, the white employment rate was 5.3 percent, the Black rate, 17.0 percent. In 1989, the peak of the Reagan boomlet, white unemployment in Milwaukee was 3.8 percent, as close to full employment as capitalism ever gets, except in all-out wartime. But the Black unemployment rate was up to 20.1 percent. While the Black population was half that of whites, there were three times as many African Americans as whites who were jobless.

Part of the reason was the shift in economic structure. According to a *New York Times* report, Milwaukee was "flourishing" during the 1960s and 1970s and Blacks got jobs in the expanding manufacturing base, helped by Civil Rights legislation and strong unions, which reduced discrimination.

Since 1979, although the city lost 47,000 manufacturing jobs, it gained 130,000 non-manufacturing jobs. But Black workers, just as able as white to

Percent of Adults Employed
1950 to 1980



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adapt to and be trained for the new types of jobs, were never given a chance. An ex-Army sergeant, 28 year old Anthony Hoskins, is an example: "He has applied at businesses around the city... K Mart, Mc Donalds, Wisconsin Bell, Harley Davison. Usually he never hears from them. And if he does, he is told that he does not have the skills they are looking for."¹³

These companies were hiring, but only white workers. Said Hoskins: "I'm in an endless cycle. How am I going to get qualifications if I never get a chance? You got 16, 17 year old white kids working and here I am, a grown man, an Army veteran, and I can't get a damn job."

Capitalist society regards veteran status as a legitimate basis for priority in hiring, reduction of real estate taxes, and other forms of affirmative action, the much maligned "quotas." But not for African Americans. The reporter, Isabel Wilkerson, writes that white manufacturing workers who were laid off can usually get other jobs in the white part of the city, where new businesses spring up:

Such jobs have generally not appeared in Black sections. ... Black men stand idle on street corners, blocks from the breweries and factories that used to employ them, while well-dressed white-collar workers sell insurance or computers out of some of those same factories, now converted into office parks.¹⁴

But Black men are not hired for the salesmen's jobs, or as stock handlers, store managers and other retail jobs generally set aside for men.

Most of the jobs that were filled during the Milwaukee upsurge required no more than a high school education. And most of the African American men who could not get jobs, the story indicated, did have a high school diploma. It is clear that the overwhelming reason for the appalling Milwaukee situation was, is and remains crude employer racism.

Further, since most of the unemployed Black men live in the hypersegregated ghettos of the city, their lack of a job deprives those areas of their purchasing power in the shops and ends their ability to pay rent or to pay the taxes needed to fund schools. Thus the cumulative deterioration of the housing, education and health conditions of African Americans is directly connected with their racist exclusion from employment.

Part of the reason for the critical unemployment situation is the decline in unionization, and part is the racism that has kept unions from effective affir-

mative action programs, and for refusing to modify seniority systems to guarantee against disproportionate layoffs of Black workers.

RACE AND HIRING PRACTICES ■ An important study of employer racism in Chicago was made in 1988-89 by Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn M. Neckerman. The authors state:

Despite blacks' disproportionate representation in the urban underclass, however defined, analysis of inner-city joblessness seldom consider racism or discrimination as a significant cause. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, for example, William Julius Wilson explains increased rates of inner-city unemployment as a consequence of other social or economic developments.¹⁵

That is, according to this view, Black unemployment and poverty are due to a combination of objective developments from which they just happen to be on the receiving end. Kirschenman and Neckerman disagree. They consider that race is one of a complex of motives influencing employers' hiring practices. They interviewed 185 Chicago and Cook County employers, asking a standard set of questions and presenting situations designed to bring out the bosses' attitudes. The employers didn't beat round the bush – they felt no shame at their racism. "Thus we were overwhelmed by the degree to which Chicago employers felt comfortable talking with us – in a situation where the temptation would be to conceal rather than reveal – in a negative manner about Blacks."

While generally bad-mouthing the working class as a whole, the bosses were blunt in their criminalization of Black workers:

Common among the traits listed were that workers were unskilled, uneducated, illiterate, dishonest, lacking initiative, unmotivated, involved with drugs and gangs, did not understand work, had no personal charm, were unstable, lacked a work ethic, and had no family life or role models.

The authors noted that employers used gross discrimination against Blacks in employment practices:

Far more widespread were the use of recruiting and screening techniques to help select 'good' workers. For instance, employers relied more heavily on referrals from

employees, which tend to reproduce the traits and characteristics of the current work force ... a dramatic increase in the use of referral bonuses in the past few years, or employers targeted newspaper ads to particular neighborhoods or ethnic groups. ...¹⁶

DISCRIMINATION AND MONOPOLY ■ Another example of gross racist practices in employment is the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T). AT&T before its breakup into regional companies, was the country's largest employer with more than a million workers. It was conspicuous for its racist policies. Before World War II, fewer than one percent of its employees were Black, and were exclusively in cleanup positions. Even with the huge World War II labor demand and the post-war activity, Black employment at AT&T reached only 1.3 percent by 1950, although Civil Rights struggles forced a certain change so that by 1990 10 percent of its workers were African American.

A special detailed report by the EEOC in 1972 revealed the limited, special character of AT&T's employment practices at that time. Blacks were almost totally excluded from the top craft jobs of Switchman, Cable Splicer, PBX Installer-Repairman, etc:

The exclusion of Blacks from skilled craft employment is more complete in the telephone industry than in industry generally. In the New York area, the percentage of Blacks in telephone company craft jobs was less than one-third the percentage of Blacks in craft jobs in all industries. In Jacksonville, Florida, in 1967 there was not a single Black in a telephone company craft job. ...¹⁷

But for low-end jobs, the telephone company hired mainly Black women so that 79 percent of its Black employees were women, overwhelmingly in operator jobs (as against 53 percent of white employees). The operator job was "horrendous," and the terrible conditions were "converting the Traffic Department (where operators worked), from simply a 'nunnery' into a 'ghetto nunnery,'" according to the EEOC report. The personnel vice president of the Bell Companies, Walter Straley, explained:

What a telephone company needs to know about its labor market [is] who is available for work paying as little as \$4,000 to \$5,000 a year. ... It is just a plain fact that in today's world, telephone company wages are more in line with Black expectations, and the tighter the labor market, the more this is true.¹⁸

What Straley left out, of course, is that the "need" for workers at such low wages reflected the company's successful drive for ever-higher monopoly superprofits.

As a result of the breakup of AT&T into regional companies, racist hiring practices in that particular branch of communications has become less acute. But nationwide, discrimination and racist attitudes remain intense, so that the differential unemployment rate against Blacks has increased. In fact, telephone company unemployment is rising rapidly. NYNEX, operating in the New York metropolitan area, having slashed employment from near 100,000 in 1988 to 75,000 in 1993, announced its intention to cut jobs a further 22 percent, to under 60,000.¹⁹

Similar cuts were announced by other telephone companies. And, as in other industries, the African American workers losing these jobs will have the hardest time finding alternative employment.

Government actions to reduce unemployment, in general, remain more necessary than ever. However, measures to provide jobs for, and to end job discrimination against African Americans, Latinos and other oppressed peoples should have top priority. Unions and people's organizations that pressure the government and campaign for jobs, must demand an end to employment discrimination, especially in relation to Blacks, against whom racism is most severe. Indeed, the viciousness of racism against African Americans in hiring practices as in other areas of life, is unique. No agenda directed towards reducing racism and approaching equality can avoid the struggle for an effective, enforced affirmative action program.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ■ Experience proves that the doctrine of a "level playing field" is a means of preserving full discrimination against African Americans. Employers could and did claim they were hiring "the most qualified," but it happened that the most qualified, in their view, were never Black. Civil Rights laws therefore called for specific measures to overcome the effects of racism as reflected in grossly inadequate educational opportunities, inferior location in relation to job opportunities, lack of work experience, etc.

Thus the "affirmative action" program was evolved to ensure that Black workers could get jobs regardless of the prejudices of employers and despite the handicaps faced by minority job appli-

cants. A similar approach was taken with regard to integration of housing, allocation of contracts to African American small businesses, acceptance in schools, etc.

To be meaningful, affirmative action requires a quantitative content. For example, if Black employment in a given company was 2 percent in a city where African Americans constituted 20 percent of the population, Blacks would have to be favored in hiring until their share of jobs reached 20 percent. This result could be achieved by allocating, for example, 50 percent of new hires to Blacks until there was parity. In fact, such formulas have been used used, although rarely.

Aside from such specific formulas, large corporations were called on to submit reports to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC), showing improvement in the overall racial composition of their employees. Many large corporations complied, but generally in ways that fudged the actual minimal gains of Blacks. Thus employment of women and minorities might be lumped in a single category.

Of course, better employment of women was and is desirable, but the trend has been in that direction for some time, since it fits in with employers' objective to get workers at lower wages. But a single designation, minorities, which does not differentiate between various races and ethnic groups, covered up the practice of employing skilled professionals and technicians from Asia, at salaries below the norm for those occupations, instead of hiring African Americans for the jobs.

ATTACK ON QUOTAS ■ During the 1980s and early 1990s, establishment politicians and publicists, with Democrats soon joining the Republican instigators, launched a campaign against "quotas," that is, the numerical goals and requirements needed for effective affirmative action. The critics claimed that quotas were a form of "reverse discrimination" against whites.

However, quotas simply ensure additional employment of more Blacks along with employment of whites. Affirmative action does not call for firing white workers to make room for Black workers. But modifications would be required in seniority cases where layoffs take place and affirmative action measures are needed to prevent the disproportionate firing of Black workers. The effective implementation of such a program will strengthen the job situation of all workers.

What the attacks on "quotas" ignore is the fact that quotas, or equivalent restrictions favoring one group over another, are common features of American life. Prestigious colleges favor graduates of private preparatory schools and specific high schools for admission over other high schools, notably urban schools with high percentages of Black graduates. And historically, negative quotas, *numeris clausis*, placed a ceiling on admission of Jews to many colleges, and a limit on Blacks to a mere token.

Long operating in the United States has been the most powerful quota system, that based on social registers and exclusive private clubs. Their members are limited to the wealthiest families, mainly those with inherited fortunes. And most typically, they are of West European, Protestant extraction, the background from which almost all U.S. presidents and current monopoly capitalist CEOs are drawn. Not only do these exclusive membership assemblages' admittance requirements automatically disqualify African Americans, Latinos, and Asians but most also specifically bar Jews.

The most detailed study of just who are members of this "upper class" – which in a very real sense controls the U.S. economy, its propaganda apparatus, and its government – is G. William Domhoff's *Who Rules America?* At the time of this work, the core of the ruling class constituted 38,000 families with 108,000 individuals listed in the social registers of 12 major cities. Also, and largely overlapping, were graduates of about 20 private prep schools and a similar number of "very exclusive" gentlemen's clubs, as well as of the "Ivy League" colleges.²⁰ This select group has given us presidents, key cabinet and diplomatic postings, and CIA directors. And its funding buys the members of Congress. In addition, trusted members and employees of the ruling elite are given paid leave from their corporations to "serve" in state and local government posts as mayors, legislators, etc.

The racism shown by these "WASP-only" enclaves of the elite was dramatized by the case of an African American businessman who applied for membership in four New Orleans "social clubs." When he was turned down by all four, he sued. The case, early in 1984, was in the hands of Judge Harry Mentz. Mentz is a member of the largest and most powerful New Orleans club whose 575 members really run the city. In the last analysis it determines who is to be hired and who is to be

fired – and this in a city with a majority African American population.

The hypocrisy of the opponents of affirmative action is highlighted by Bill Clinton in the following case: he continues the Reagan-Bush practices of effective opposition to affirmative action quotas for employment of minorities, but is engaged in a bitter dispute with the French government over the U.S. demand that France set guaranteed quotas of imports of U.S. high tech products.

The issue of quotas must be faced head-on and fought for, not only by advocates of equality for African Americans, but by trade unions, community organizations, independent and progressive political parties and groups. Racist employment practices are a prime, potent weapon of the capitalists in their anti-labor offensive. Until this problem is solved, no substantial progress can be made by positive forces, nor can big-business attacks be countered. But wide recognition of the blatant hypocrisy of the bigots who condemn affirmative action while cherishing their own "quota" systems, could be an important tool.

The political mobilization required to win an effective affirmative action program will inevitably be connected with a whole set of progressive measures that will generate and guarantee jobs in all sectors for the working population.

CONCLUSION ■ Joblessness is a crime perpetrated by the U.S. capitalist class against the American working class. And the trend has been markedly upward since the end of World War II.

The burden on the African American people especially – but also on Latinos, on Native Americans, and on some sections of the Asian-origin population – is decisively most severe, reflecting the inordinate racism of U.S. capitalism.

As a result of the Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, laws were enacted requiring employers, private and public, to reduce discrimination in employing Blacks, women, disabled persons, and other "minorities."

Two relevant agencies were set up, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Contract Compliance Programs (OCCP). The EEOC had jurisdiction over companies with 100 employees or more (later extended to include companies with 15 or more workers), but in practice its activities focused almost exclusively on large companies. The intent was to encourage employers to implement affirmative action pro-

grams. However, actual government effectiveness was limited by:

- Constant lawsuits challenging the principal of affirmative action, with conflicting court decisions varying with the political winds;

- Trivial appropriation of funds and – in the case of the EEOC – no enforcement powers, so that influence has been limited to exhortation;

- Since 1980, the use of racism as a major, and at times decisive, political weapon of right-wing politicians, with virtually no white establishment politicians publicly defending effective affirmative action.

The initiatives of supporters, such as the Congressional Black Caucus, the Hispanic Caucus, and the Progressive Caucus in Congress and increasingly numerous independent local officials are valuable. But in the last analysis the solution must be forced by the mass mobilization of Americans on a scale vastly greater than that of the powerful Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s – a united mass mobilization of white, African American, Latino, Native American, Asian-origin peoples, men and women, youth and seniors, disabled and abled, employed and jobless. □

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The Fight Against Racism Today

Editor's Note: This discussion article was prepared by the National Board of the Communist Party. Readers are encouraged to respond to the concepts and problems raised in it. Responses can be handwritten, typed or can be put on a computer disk. Comments can be from 3000 to 6000 words. If you don't like to write put your thoughts on a tape and send it in. Let us know what you think.

This educational discussion aims to raise the level of understanding and stimulate militant action of our Party in the fight against racism.

The fight against racism is an immediate and urgent challenge to our Party. To meet this challenge, we are undertaking a new level of collective ideological struggle within the Party to deepen our working-class approach to this struggle.

We need an updated assessment of where the class and people's movements are in the fight against racism, of the specific expressions of the increased level of racism and its impact on the class struggle. There are many new developments, the significance of which has not yet been fully grasped. A full collective discussion will make clearer our picture of how mass thought patterns and class consciousness are being influenced by the increased use of racism by the ruling class, a full discussion of our Party's collective experience in the fight against racism will improve our practical work and initiative.

The discussion should strengthen understanding of what is needed to build the strongest, broadest unity to help the movements go on the offensive.

The document discusses the following areas:

- what are the main features of the ruling class' increased promotion of racism;
- how does the increase in racism relate to the systemic crisis of capitalism;
- what are the key issues in the fight against racism today;
- what are the basics of our Marxist-Leninist analysis and approach;
- what is the Party's role on this critical fight.

EFFECT OF SYSTEMIC CRISIS ▣ The deepening of capitalism's systemic crisis combined with the legacy of 12 years of Reagan-Bush's unprecedentedly racist offensive, which has been extended and deepened by the Clinton administration, have brought about a dramatic increase in the effects of racism. The fact that there are still some illusions about the nature of this administration has made it more difficult to fight in some ways.

The increase in racism must be placed in the context of the crisis of capitalism – because it is the capitalist class which benefits from racism, using it to divide and to confuse the people about the reasons for the economic and social crisis of the system. Because the system is in crisis, there is an increase in the intensity and complexity of the ongoing ideological war on class unity and the principles and practice of equality.

The racist use of the crime issue, rising racist and police violence, deepening segregation, criminalization, attacks on immigrants, increasing poverty, homelessness and unemployment, an increase in stereotypes in the mass media, and environmental racism all indicate the depth of the crisis.

These tendencies must be seen within the context of the intensification of the class struggle. Corporate "downsizing" and mass layoffs in industry have led to an overall decline in the living standards of the working class, especially its racially and nationally oppressed components, and have exacerbated the growth of racism. These things are directly connected.

Capitalism's systemic crisis adds a whole new dimension to these problems. "Downsizing" and mass layoffs have wiped out many of the past gains against discrimination in the workplace. As the economic crisis deepens, new forms of economic racism are making themselves felt.

Massive unemployment, poverty and homelessness are its most direct and vivid result. Unemployment rates among African American, Latino, and Asian workers are twice those of whites, long-term unemployment is also particularly severe. A large percent of the homeless are Black and Latino. Economic racism's hideousness is particularly seen in

its impact on Black and Latino children, close to half of whom live in poverty.

A key feature of the intensification of racism in this period is the level and quality of segregation. Segregation has accelerated rather than declined and has become sharper, characterized by deep poverty and extremely poor conditions of life. This is cause for closer examination of the significance of segregation today, not only as a by-product of economic factors but as a deliberate corporate and governmental policy, with far-reaching implications.

From the reservation system – formal, legalized segregation – to the Black and Latino inner city ghettos, segregation is a result of monopoly capitalism's drive for super-profits.

It is the result of corporate and governmental policies including red-lining and the Reagan and Bush administrations' cuts in housing and urban spending, which have resulted in the devastation of inner city neighborhoods. The attack on federal funding for building and maintaining public housing has brought terrible results; added to this is the Clinton administration's callously racist – and telling – proposal to use HUD monies to build prisons.

Racial and class segregation has produced a segregated school system, and contributed to the sharp downward slide in the quality of education received by Black and Latino children all over the country. The privatization of public education is worsening this problem and creating new inequalities.

The crisis of segregation facing all racially and nationally oppressed and especially African Americans is a direct result of the structural crisis of the late 70s and 80s and the corporate downsizing of the 90s. These ghettos and barrios must be understood as an essential aspect of the special oppression of these peoples – class, racial, and national – and a means of controlling and cutting these communities off from the rest of society, and of physically dividing the working class.

New studies point to what is termed "hypersegregation" of African Americans in the nation's largest industrial cities – LA, Houston, Newark, Chicago, Detroit, New York, Cleveland, Philadelphia, cities in which the structural crisis and long-term and generational unemployment have been sharpest. By hypersegregation is meant the geographic, political, economic and cultural isolation of these communities. This hypersegregation reveals that racism directed at African Americans has a

unique quality and has reached a new and unprecedented stage.

Economic racism is also related to the crisis of the cities, where most ghettos and barrios are located. As basic industries move out, services are allowed to decline, streets fall apart, bridges crumble. Here the drug crisis continues unabated, infant mortality rates zoom to levels above those in the Third World, and diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis rage almost out of control. Here the communities are in a virtual state of siege as racist police departments, under the pretext of fighting drugs, terrorize and intimidate. Here Black and Brown youth are routinely rounded up in sweeps, and have filled the nation's jails and prisons to the point of overflow, with 35 percent of African American youth either in jail or under the control of the criminal justice system.

For Black and Brown people, racism means shorter, less healthy, less-valued lives.

ASSAULT ON CIVIL RIGHTS ■ Directly connected to this is the ruling class' sharpened attack all down the line on civil rights. Reagan-appointed judges dominate the courts; existing civil rights laws are weak and are not enforced; affirmative action has suffered from a prolonged ideological attack on the very idea of it, and especially on the concepts of quotas and timetables, based on the false notion that discrimination is a thing of the past. The dropping of the nomination of Lani Guinier is illustrative of the Clinton administration's betrayal of civil rights.

Voting rights are under severe attack. The Supreme Court's overturning of the North Carolina Congressional district created to insure greater representation has elevated to the status of law the concept that the "civil rights of whites" are violated by the Voting Rights Act's remedies to make up for past discrimination.

In fact affirmative action is under a two-edged assault. On the one side, there is an almost complete undermining of its legal and political foundations by the right-wing Supreme Court which has rendered decisions claiming that certain forms of affirmative action are unconstitutional. On the other is the elimination of the intended effects of affirmative action in industry by the new rounds of layoffs. As recent studies indicate, these layoffs are having a profound impact on all racially and nationally oppressed workers; on Latinos, Asians, Native American Indians and especially African Ameri-

cans.

The increase in racism must be seen in the context of the crisis of capitalism and its drive to maintain the \$225 billion of super-profits based on the difference in wages paid to African American, Latino, and Asian workers as compared to whites for the same work.

The wholesale attempt to eliminate social programs like Social Security, welfare, and unemployment benefits, and the creation of a new "contingent" work force, many of whom are Black, Brown and women have led to the re-emergence of concepts that the racially and nationally oppressed are social pariahs beyond hope and that "money should not be wasted on them." Coupled with this ideological assault is Clinton's new crime bill which is a new and dangerous legal instrument for the creation of capitalism without entitlements.

This assault is aimed in particularly sharp ways at women of color, who are blamed for the problems of the community in general and of the youth in particular. The reality is the low wages received by Black and Latina women workers, and the extremely high rates of poverty – two-thirds of Puerto Rican households headed by women are poor. The Clinton administration's attack on welfare is aimed at racially and nationally oppressed women and their families, and exposes the hypocrisy of talk of "family values" by the administration.

INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM ■ Racism is ruling-class ideology and is the concept and practice of white supremacy. It is the practice of discrimination and oppression based on skin color, physical characteristics, continent of origin and culture. It has its origins as a justification for slavery and the conquest of the Americas. From the beginning, slavery in the United States was tied to the development and growth of capitalism. Founded on the sale and ownership of human beings on the basis of their physical characteristics and color, its purpose was the exploitation of unpaid labor for super profits. As chattels, Africans were hunted like animals, transported to the "New World," and then sold on the auction block like beasts of burden. In like manner Native American Indians were exterminated on a massive scale.

Moral and intellectual rationales were invented to justify this kidnapping, sale, enslavement and genocide against human beings. As an ideology, racism provided the moral and intellectual under-

pinnings of slavery, the westward expansion of colonialism and the seizure of half of Mexico. Thus the purpose of this doctrine was, and still is, to put forward ideas and theories founded on the myth that people of color are inherently inferior.

Almost 130 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the legacy of slavery remains. It is embedded in and influences every aspect of social, economic and political life. This is what is meant by institutionalized racism.

Institutionalized racism is the combined economic, political, social, cultural, legal, ideological and other structures that exist to maintain the system of inequality.

As a set of institutions, racism is infused in the very foundations of our society and is inseparable from the economic foundations of U.S. capitalist society. The racist wage gap is a most fundamental feature: both in terms of the superprofits produced by the superexploitation of racially oppressed workers, and the additional extra profits created by the fact that racism divides and weakens the working class and drags down wages for all workers.

A SPECIAL SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION ■ Racism must be understood as a special system of oppression dependent on the capitalist economic relationships on which it is based. At the same time racism has additional features and structures in economic and social and political life and affects the thought patterns of millions. Because of this, the solution to racist oppression rests on dismantling its structures in society and in the economy.

Institutionalized racism has economic, social, political, ideological and cultural forms, and denies equality, justice and dignity to all people of color. Because its roots are in capitalism's drive to maximize profits, and in the history of U.S. capitalism's development, racism has an especially sharp impact on racially and nationally oppressed workers.

The forms and impact of racism are expressed for each group in different ways: on African American workers, who in the last recession experienced the greatest job loss on a national average and who are "hyper-segregated" in the nation's largest cities; on Mexican and Mexican American workers, who because of the closing of industries in which they were heavily concentrated in the Southwest experience high unemployment and who are harassed and persecuted related to their status; on Puerto Rican workers, whose families suffer from the highest

rates of poverty and whose children drop out of school at the highest rate; on Native American Indian workers in the cities and especially on the reservations, among whom unemployment, a much lower-than-average life expectancy and poor health care are the norm; and on Asian workers, who are forced to work in slavery-like conditions in sweat shops and many of whom are undocumented.

The expressions and forms of racism directed against each of the racially and nationally oppressed need to be closely examined, as well as the specifics of the fight for unity in a given situation.

For example, the closing of factories has had an especially severe impact on African American workers, a large percentage of whom are concentrated in industry. In the latest recession Black workers were the only segment of the work-force to experience a net job loss. Complicating the racist pattern in layoffs are new company-imposed literacy test-like regulations, which have resulted in further layoffs of Black workers who avoided layoffs by having sufficient seniority. Unable to pass the tests and with apprenticeship programs gone since the early 80s, these workers have been forced out of their jobs in large numbers, even in the steel industry, where the consent decrees of the 1970s represented progress for African American workers. Today these agreements are having the effect of further job losses for Black workers, who because of the last-hired, first-fired phenomenon tend to have less plant-wide seniority.

An important feature of racism's new forms is the new vigor of the anti-immigrant campaign, aimed at Mexican, other Latino, and Asian workers. This campaign places the blame for unemployment, government budget deficits, etc, on immigration. It is an old idea, but was given new attention in the battle around NAFTA, and was aimed particularly at Mexican workers and Mexican Americans. It aims to strip people of basic political, social and economic rights. There is a rise in police and border patrol brutality. The campaigns for "English Only," and against bilingualism are part of the attack on the rights and culture of Latinos, Asians and other immigrants.

Anti-Arab racism is flagrantly promoted in the media and in popular culture. Hysteria and hostility towards Arab peoples have been deliberately and systematically whipped up, particularly around the time of the Gulf War, and since. It has been used especially to create diversions, though temporary,

from attention to the real problems of the U.S. working class. The promotion of jingoism, of great nation chauvinism, is also part of the sharpening and updating of the old ruling class tactic of divide and conquer. As well, anti-Semitism fits into this overall picture of fostering division and wrong concepts of who is to blame for the economic crisis. The decision of the Clinton administration to reverse its policy on Haitian refugees is an essential part of the campaign against immigrants in general.

A difficult and dangerous problem which has also sharpened in this period is the pitting of oppressed nationalities against one another. The ruling class and its media paint a picture of widespread and deepening antagonisms between peoples, and the notion that equality and unity are not possible. Building unity of all racially and nationally oppressed is a key part of the fight for the interests of the whole class.

SIMILARITY OF OPPRESSION ■ The differing forms of racial oppression against people of color has in no way mitigated the similarity of their oppression. Racism gives a common character to their status within the U.S. Hence, their emancipation, irrespective of nationality, is dependent upon a common and united struggle of all working people against racism.

In this regard the struggle against economic racism has a particular importance. The fight against it must be the foundation of any campaign for real equality. In situations in which close to half the African American and Latino populations live at or near the poverty line, the fight for equality for these victims of the crisis must be the point of departure for full equality for racially and nationally peoples as a whole.

In his report to the Communist Party's Mid-term Conference, Comrade Hall said,

Poverty and racism have become a deadly twosome. Thus, there can be no effective fight against racism without a struggle against poverty. And there can be no effective fight against poverty without taking on the struggle against racism and for equality. Such a guiding principle is necessary in the struggle for working-class unity.

This is the basis for the Conference call for an all-out campaign for jobs and equality, launched and promoted by our Party. The fight for a massive federal jobs program, with strong affirmative action provisions, and for

new, stronger Civil Rights laws, is the basis for unity in this period. It will be the proving ground for commitment to the fight for equality and against racism.

The racism that appeared during Clinton's election campaign has now emerged full-blown after less than one year in office. Part and parcel of Clinton's caving in to pressure from the right has been capitulation to racism, from the abandonment of the Guinier nomination to the "anti-crime" campaign, which is essentially a call for "jails, not jobs." It is a call to establish a new legal basis for monopoly capitalism in the 21st century, a capitalism where workers have no benefits and Black and Brown workers no rights. The Clinton administration has come out more and more openly as the spokesperson for the policies of the transnational corporations.

It is ominous that the president who was elected on the basis of rejection of Reagan-Bush policies made the kind of arrogant and overtly racist speech that Clinton did in Memphis in November at a national meeting of Black ministers.

Perhaps the most unashamedly racist speech by a president, or any public official, was Clinton's "off-the-cuff, straight-from-the-heart" speech in which he lamented the "great crisis of the spirit that is gripping America today." Using codewords and themes such as "personal responsibility," "family stability" and "family pathologies," he reverted to the old themes of blaming the victims, revealing a president deeply infected with racism. This address will go down in history as infamous, reviving the oldest and worst racist stereotypes, bigotry and ignorance.

Underlying this speech is the ruling class' attitude about the special conditions racism has created. It was an attack on the gains of the civil rights battles, cynically abusing the memory and legacy of Martin Luther King. The speech was a most audacious expression of the false notion that the problems of crime and violence are due to a "lack of family values." This problem, the president insisted, causes murder and mayhem to occur in the country's ghettos and barrios with "reckless abandonment." In other words, Black people are totally out of control and must be restrained by any means necessary. This concept reflects the ruling class' attempt to "criminalize" an entire people on the basis of race, and has very dangerous implications, including that it is a justification for police brutality and

racist vigilantism.

Not satisfied with his Memphis performance he shortly afterwards traveled to Los Angeles, where he put forth the same ideas directed at the Mexican American community, this time invoking the image of Cesar Chavez. Clinton's racist anti-crime campaign has been matched by California's right-wing Governor Wilson, who has called for building more prisons as a priority.

Clinton's speeches are aimed to divert and confuse, to point the finger away from monopoly capital, which is in fact responsible for the deterioration of the neighborhoods and standard of living of African American and other racially oppressed people, and especially their working-class component. His message was quite clear: don't look to the government to solve these problems, don't look to the obvious reasons – joblessness and poverty, racism and discrimination – for crime, drugs and violence.

Clinton's statement that, "unless we do something about crime ... we will not be able to repair this country" is a cover for government inaction on the economic crisis, when in fact what is required is a massive federal jobs program, legislation to enforce and strengthen affirmative action, a new Civil Rights Act, strengthening labor's rights, and laws which cut into monopoly profits (increasing corporate taxes, shorter work week, increase in the minimum wage, etc.).

Most importantly Clinton's overt racism in his Memphis speech gives the green light to racist forces around the country – this is racism led by the president. It must not be forgotten that Perot's United We Stand America, Pat Buchanan and the even more reactionary fundamentalist fanatic fringe like Robertson's Christian Coalition are working feverishly to cash in as the patience of disillusioned Clinton supporters gives way to anger. By resorting to racism himself, the President is adding fuel to these ultra-right fires.

FOREIGN POLICY ■ The blatant racism of the president is also revealed in his militarist foreign policy. Racism is being used – along with its evil twin, anti-Communism – to justify aggressive actions in pursuit of a world "safe" for corporate profiteering. The administration has wrapped itself in a mantle of militarism and racist arrogance, from Somalia to Haiti, to North Korea, acting on the one superpower premise.

U.S. imperialism has justified its muscle flexing and aggressive actions towards Somalia and Haiti using a thinly veiled racist rationale – that the people of those countries have reached a state of barbarism and anarchy and are incapable of governing themselves. Implied and at times even stated is the idea that these countries have problems because the people are less “civilized.” Covered up is the fact that the U.S. itself armed and trained Duvalier’s regime and had a hand in Somalia as well.

The concept of “nation-building” is also a thinly disguised cover-up of imperialism’s intent to control other countries. The notion that the U.S. needs “win-win” capability – to be able to fight and win two wars at once – is crude in its arrogance. Anti-Communism and racism shaped the recent confrontation with North Korea over the issue of nuclear weapons, in which the U.S. not only claimed to have the right to decide which countries can develop such weapons, but threatened to use them.

There are obvious similarities between these developments in the foreign policy arena and the administration’s domestic policy: between the concept that the solution to the massive social and economic problems at home is more police and more prisons, while internationally, U.S. imperialism openly announces its intention to use military force to impose “order” wherever necessary to protect corporate interests.

THE LABOR MOVEMENT ■ The intensification of racism goes hand in hand with the overall offensive of monopoly. The two are interwoven and interact with one another in economic, political and social life. From the standpoint of monopoly capital they are but two sides of a single policy whose aim is not only to add billions to the year-end profit statements of the capitalist class, but also to slow down and reverse the new trends towards multi-racial working-class and all-people’s unity that are so evident today. The growing strength and future potential of these trends has not been missed in the corporate boardrooms nor by the well-paid image makers of monopoly capital.

While the overall offensive of monopoly capital has driven down the living standards of the working class with a disproportionate and heavy burden falling upon the victims of racial and national oppression, its other class aim of busting up multi-

racial, multi-national working class and people’s unity, has proved more elusive.

Indeed, the greatest progress in the fight against racism has been among the working class. Black, Brown, and white working-class unity has mushroomed. It is deeper and broader today. It expresses itself through a variety of issues and forms as well as in diverse arenas.

It most forcefully expresses itself around economic issues and in the economic arena. And in the recent struggle against NAFTA multi-racial, multi-national unity took a new leap and reached a new level. The ideological fog of white and great power chauvinism which has been lessening over the past decade was blown away in no small measure. This occurred among substantial sections of the labor movement.

Likewise, the coalition and alliance relationships between labor and the racially and nationally oppressed also have emerged in a new way. The labor-African American alliance, playing as it has a pivotal role at many turning points in the nation’s development, has moved to a new stage as reflected by the August 28th demonstration for Jobs, Peace, and Justice, the first major challenge to the Clinton administration.

Similarly, the relations between labor and the Mexican American people and other movements of the racially and nationally oppressed have also moved to higher ground. In this, the role of Mexican American workers has given a fresh and dynamic impulse to both labor and the labor-community alliance.

The new level of Black, Brown, and white unity is the ground for new initiatives, for a counteroffensive against monopoly, for a winning struggle against the transnational corporations and the Clinton administration.

Of course, this process of unification did not happen overnight, but rather has been molded by subjective as well as objective processes. Needless to say, it has not been without snags and detours, even setbacks along way.

Nonetheless, the fact is that the struggle against NAFTA brings the struggle for multi-racial working-class and people’s unity to a new stage. In doing so, it presents new opportunities in the labor movement in terms of the struggle against racism and for full equality.

The most important and enduring spinoff of the NAFTA fight was the growth of class consciousness.

A worker who is coming to think in class terms more easily understands the interconnection between the class struggle and the struggle against racism. A worker who sees the profit drive of the transnational corporations as the cause of the systemic economic crisis can be more easily convinced of the need for special measures to address the racist patterns of layoffs. A worker who is beginning to understand the nature of class exploitation is more apt to see the special system of exploitation and oppression directed against Black and Brown workers as well as the common class interests of all workers.

In short, the growth of class consciousness is the force field to protect against influences of white chauvinism and racist ideology. It is the ideological backdrop to raise still higher the anti-racist sentiment and understanding among white workers. And, most importantly, it is the springboard from which new, bold initiatives against racism and for equality can be launched.

STRUGGLE FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ■ In the center of labor's struggles for jobs, health care, housing, and other urgent needs should be found the issue of affirmative action. It is an indispensable element in the fight for multi-racial and all-people's unity. And without Black, Brown, and white unity victory against monopoly capital is impossible.

But it won't be easy. The struggle for affirmative action, and the ruling class assault on it, has been fierce precisely because it lies at the intersection of the struggle against class and racial oppression, against exploitation and super-exploitation.

Over the past two decades the labor movement has taken principled positions on affirmative action. It has become a more effective and active fighter against racism. But more needs to be done both because of the systemic nature of the economic crisis and because of the ruling class assault on affirmative action.

At the same time, the new anti-racist thought patterns among workers make possible the upping of the ante in the fight against racism and for Black, Brown, and white working-class unity. They make possible a new boldness in terms of moving the labor movement more and more in the center of this struggle.

There are new problems because of the systemic nature of crisis. Our discussion should examine what adjustments can be made in layoffs so that the

biggest burden does not fall on racially and nationally oppressed workers as it currently does. The main principle is to make the company pay and fight for solutions that preserve class unity. The fight for affirmative action must be closely connected to other radical proposals, such as a shorter work week with no cut in pay.

We should assert that the fight for affirmative action in the labor movement is necessary to class unity, that it is a class issue as well as a democratic issue.

Our discussion should also examine how to elevate the role of the labor movement in the fight against police brutality, housing discrimination, immigrant rights, and the dismantlement of public education to mention a few issues. Here too we should discuss the racist dimension of these issues, show how their roots lie in the system of capitalism and its new stage of crisis, and come up with concrete initiatives.

The fight for class unity must also take up unity between the trade union movement and the unemployed giving special attention to the racist pattern in layoffs. The Jobs and Equality Campaign takes on special importance in relation to this issue.

We should examine as well the connection between the fight for the full equality of African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, Asians, Arabs and other racially and nationally oppressed peoples with the question of the rights of labor, as both are restricted and suppressed by monopoly capital. And we should do it keeping in mind the new level of class consciousness among workers.

Finally, we should probe how to better connect the self and class interests of white workers to the fight against racism and for equality. How can we convince white workers that fighting racism is necessary not simply because it is morally correct, but because it hinders the cause of the whole working class, and distorts and disfigures the whole society.

We should also find better arguments to demonstrate that the fight against racism is in the self-interest of white workers, showing that it holds down the wages of all workers and creates obstacles to trade union and class unity. In this regard it should be emphasized that white workers have a special responsibility to step up the fight. This special responsibility has to be linked to mutual self-interest of different sections of the working class, that the

emancipation of each section depends on united struggle of against all forms of bigotry and discrimination.

1993 ELECTIONS ■ Racism had a serious impact on the recent elections, serving to divert and confuse an electorate which is angry, worried about jobs and insecure about the future. Playing on this economic distress, and to deal with the fact that there is growing sentiment that something is deeply wrong with the system, the ruling class used racism to create the perception that the problem is crime and violence, that the criminals are Black and Brown people, especially youth.

This sharpened use of racism weakened the necessary coalitions and key elected officials were defeated in several states and cities. In New York City, a stepped up racist drive of ultra-right forces grouped around the Guiliani candidacy pushed the idea that Mayor Dinkins' administration was incompetent and had not addressed crime. The charge of incompetence was deeply racist in origin and inspiration. On the issue of crime it was implied that Dinkins was weak because he is African American; ignored was the fact that the crime rate actually went down during his administration. The issue of crime and violence was pushed to the fore in the election debate, with the facts falling victim to hysteria and fear.

The November elections demonstrated how critical unity is in the electoral arena; our role is to show that these defeats hurt the working class as a whole, and not just Black and Brown people; and that to make any legislative gains in terms of jobs, labor's rights, against privatization, etc, we must increase the representation of Black, Latino and labor elected officials at all levels of government.

There were also positive trends in the elections, with growing recognition that the key to victories of independent and progressive campaigns is the alliance of labor, Mexican American, African American, Puerto Rican and other racially and nationally oppressed peoples.

Under capitalism there is constant anti-working-class ideological pressure. The ruling class pushes ideas that weaken unity, and deny, distort or erase working-class history. The main weapons in its arsenal are racism and anti-Communism.

Our discussion should examine what are the trends and developments in mass thought patterns around this question. How has the heightened racist

drive affected people's thinking specifically and on what issues? How can masses be moved in a positive direction in the fight against racism?

The multi-racial, multi-national working class and indeed the country and the entire people face a dilemma: the essence of which is that there is a desire to act but an inability to do so. There is a crisis of inaction in the fight against racism. One reason for this crisis of inaction is a continuing double standard and blame-the-victim concept, which stem from an as yet insufficient understanding of the systemic source of racism.

MASS THOUGHT PATTERNS ■ Most whites accept the notion that racism is morally wrong. And moral arguments can be powerful weapons in the fight against it. From this standpoint it is important to take people where they are and build on these achievements. How can we build on this desire to act?

As a result of the Civil Rights movement and the struggles for equality, important progress has been made in countering the worst influences of outright racism in people's thinking. A majority of Americans support and believe in racial equality. A majority of white people oppose racism as they understand it. Among white workers there is substantial recognition of the commonality of labor's rights and the struggle for equality of all racially oppressed people. Together with Black, Latino, Asian and Arab workers, this constitutes a powerful anti-racist majority sentiment in the country.

This sentiment must be activized and turned into a powerful stream of struggle in combatting the new growth of racism. It must be the basis of launching new powerful blows at the system of racist institutions and the monopoly capitalist economic system which undergirds it. It must be tapped into in the unfolding of the Campaign for Jobs and Equality and a new Civil Rights Act.

The struggle to change mass thought patterns in an anti-racist direction is an important aspect of the ideological forms of the class struggle. It can help move the working class and other strata in an anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist, pro-working class, and pro-democratic direction. It can help deepen class consciousness and assist in the emergence of socialist consciousness.

While basing the fight against racism on the premise of majority support for these goals recognition must be made of trends that move in the oppo-

site direction. The ultra-right has regrouped after Bush's defeat and won significant victories in the past elections. The Christian evangelical right, the Catholic church, and the forces around Perot are conducting campaigns aimed at increasing racism's influence, using the crime issue, and targeting multi-culturalism in education and Rainbow curriculum.

As with all other problems and struggles, it is absolutely essential that we have a class perspective on the struggle against racism. In the broad movements, in which there are anti-racist sentiments and activity, there are classless concepts of racism which don't get at the root cause and the necessary kinds of solutions. One expression is the idea that white workers are more racist than other sections of the white population, which ignores the history of and relationship between the fight for equality and the labor movement, and denies the material basis and necessity for working-class unity of Black, Brown and white. And, it is in the labor movement where we see the greatest progress and most significant developments in the struggle against racism in the last period.

MASS MEDIA ■ The most powerful form for the dissemination of racism are the mass media and popular culture, both of which are controlled by the ruling class, and which impact on how people develop their understanding of and attitude towards people of other nationalities and cultures. Racist portrayals of the racially and nationally oppressed are at new levels, and there has been an erosion in the gains made in this area during the Civil Rights period. Modern-day minstrels have appeared on T.V. and racist images of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Native American Indians are frequently aired. There is an attempt to convince the American people that racism in comedy is acceptable, as demonstrated by the recent white actor appearing in black face.

People have to be helped to see that what is shown on television, portrayed in movies, and played on the radio are related to the system of racism, and not separate and apart from what's happening in the economy and in society generally. Communists can bring a class analysis to the public debate on whether what is found in music and on television simply reflects reality or helps to create it.

For example, there is a relationship between the struggle around NAFTA, heightened anti-immi-

grant propaganda and the idea that corporations should be allowed to move to wherever they can make the greatest profit, as well as the fact that Congress recently funded an extension in unemployment benefits by cutting disability payments for immigrants.

The Party can help people see and understand these relationships, and the systemic character of the problems. There is debate, coming from many points on the political spectrum, as to whether or not there are solutions. Can racism be eliminated, can equality ever be achieved? Some have put forward the idea of the permanence of racism and have expressed concern that nothing can be done about it.

Our Party's ability to provide answers to this most basic question is absolutely essential.

Marxism-Leninism is more, rather than less, necessary and useful to provide basic answers. At a moment when masses are searching for the way out of this economic crisis, we must find ways to show that it is the system of capitalism that is in crisis, that the problem lies with capitalism's putting "profit before people." Likewise on the question of the cause of and solutions to racism. Our analysis of racism's roots in exploitative class relations of capitalist society is key, both to pointing to ways to fight racism and for equality, and to build class unity so that we can make the fundamental change that is necessary to solve basic problems.

We are confident that there can be victories in the fight against racism and for equality, because we see the basis for unity against racism among all working people. The fight against racism and for class unity is integrally related to the struggle for socialism. These questions are linked to the very laws and nature of capitalism.

The relationship between class and racial oppression under capitalism is the key point around which working-class unity is being built. Such unity is the foundation and the glue for the kinds of broad movements which are leading the fight for economic justice.

Just as we struggle today to defend and expand the economic and democratic rights of the working class, while we point to the capitalist system as the root of the problems, likewise we insist on a special struggle for equality and against racism for only on this basis can the entire class be united. At the same time we show that only when the basis for division

and antagonisms is eliminated, can equality be fully realized.

The fight against racism is related to the struggle for socialism not only because socialism is the ultimate solution to racism and discrimination, but because socialism will only be won by a strong, united, fighting working class, Black, Brown and white, leading the whole people.

INFLUENCES ON THE PARTY ■ The struggle against the influences of racism within the Party is an ongoing struggle, but at certain moments requires even more attention and collective effort. The increase in the promotion of racism by the ruling class in this period means just that.

A correct approach to the struggle against racism must flow from our class analysis. The main task is to elevate the level of understanding and struggle against the racist ruling class offensive.

How we approach the question of racism's impact on our Party is very important. Struggle against influences of racism must unify and strengthen and aim to improve the clubs' atmosphere, inner life and activity. It must be in the context of activity, of involvement in struggles of people, and in responding to events.

Influences of racism in the Party take different forms. Because it is so directly part of the country's experience all whites are to one extent or another influenced by it. The first step in the fight against the influences of racism is to recognize it. It cannot be fought against if it is not seen. Developing a capacity for self-criticism is a most important weapon in this fight.

The main expression of the influence of racism in the Party is reflected in weaknesses or failure to take responsibility and initiative in the fight against racism.

Insensitivity on the part of white comrades reflects itself in various forms: in the failure to accept leadership from African American, Latino, and Native American Indian comrades – this is particularly so with regard to minority women; in placing standards for leadership on them that either exceed or fall below that of whites; in failures to consult or follow the standards of collective leadership where minority comrades are concerned; and in failing to fight for Black, white, Brown unity and composition in Party collectives. These problems weaken collectivity, and feed individualism and go-it-alone attitudes.

Another expression of the influences of racism is insensitivity to the dignity, intelligence, self-respect, and national culture of racially and nationally oppressed comrades. Insensitivity most often comes to the surface during tense situations, and can take the form of curtness, impatience, talking in an angry tone, or shouting. In its most gross form it is also reflected in making racially disparaging statements about other peoples and cultures.

Expressions of outright insensitivity increase when there isn't struggle, and when the level of racism in the society generally have sharpened. Insensitivity reflects an underlying attitude of white superiority. It is expressed in disrespectful or arrogant treatment of racially oppressed comrades. Insensitivity is not only a matter of personal behavior, but is a reflection of lack of understanding of the crucial nature of racism in our society, its damage to the cause of the whole working class, its pervasive nature, and as well the fact that it can be beaten.

Any and all forms of chauvinistic behavior against racially and nationally oppressed comrades is destructive of the essential Black-Brown-white unity of our Party, and is unacceptable.

PATERNALISM ■ Paternalism is another expression of racism's influences in the Party, and is one of the biggest problems because it may not be as obvious. Paternalism reflects an attitude of superiority, and a lack of understanding that equality is necessary for the whole class to advance, that the fight for equality is necessary to the fight for socialism, that Party unity is essential. Paternalism is destructive because it is phony. Paternalism damages collectivity and weakens one's ability to effectively struggle.

Paternalism corrupts both the white comrades who express it and the comrades at the receiving end, it is an opportunist approach to fighting racism, and inhibits political growth, ideological development and real unity.

Paternalism is exhibited in situations in which racially and nationally oppressed comrades are treated with condescension. It can take the form of ingratiating oneself to minority comrades; expressing the belief that racially oppressed comrades are beyond criticism; in having good relations with minority comrades when they agree with you, but condemning them when they do not. Paternalism is reflected in excessive praise, hanging on every word, and "missionary-like" tendencies to work

only among the racially and nationally oppressed.

In our discussion, we should concretely examine expressions of the influences of racism, to deepen white comrades' understanding of the objective basis for the fight against racism and for unity. The concept that it is a special responsibility of white Communists to take initiative in the fight against racism and to build anti-racist sentiment among white people, is an important one.

Both paternalism and insensitivity most often reflect attitudes of white superiority that comrades may not be conscious of. The struggle must be on the basis of confidence that these weaknesses can be recognized and overcome, in an atmosphere which is at once conducive to raising such criticisms as well as helping comrades to grow.

The fight against all forms of the influences of racism is important in yet another respect: people join the Communist Party because they expect a higher level of understanding and conduct. They expect higher ideological and moral standards than what they see in society generally. And so it should be. In this regard manifestations of influences of racism are particularly harmful and must be consistently dealt with.

In the leadership of the Party, the struggle for the highest working-class standards on this question is even more important. Every leading Communist should consider as their own the fight for the most comradely, respectful, equal relations among Black, Brown and white in the collectives of the Party.

The atmosphere in this discussion should be comradely and objective, and help comrades to grow in their understanding of racism and our Party's role. The discussion should contribute to an atmosphere in the Party in which people of all racial and national backgrounds are comfortable and work as equals.

PARTY'S TRADITIONS AND ROLE ■ The Party is unique in that it bases its fight against racism on its working-class Marxist-Leninist science. Our Communist plus and understanding of the class source of the struggle against racism and for equality enables us to play a unique role in the fight against racism in all of its many forms and for multi-racial, multi-national unity. This fight requires constant vigilance and the maintenance of high working-class standards. Consistent application of this principle and deep involvement in struggle will enable the Party to make yet another

historic contribution in the fight against racism today.

The Communist Party has always been identified and identified itself with the fight for equality and against racism. A principled and consistent approach to this fight is a fundamental premise of Communist politics and ideology. In a sense, it is part of our Party's birthright, one of the main reasons for its founding by Socialist Party members who rejected its opportunist and ultimately chauvinistic approach to the fight against racism and for equality, and declared that this fight was essential to the class struggle and the working class' fight against capitalism.

From the fight to organize the industrial unions, the defense of the victims of legal lynchings such as in the Scottsboro case, the organizing of sharecroppers in the South, to the Civil Rights movement, our Party has a long and proud history. Communists have helped organize and mobilize masses in the fight against racism, and raise the level of understanding of racism's roots in the capitalist system and its role in dividing the working class and hobbling struggle.

Perhaps most important is our Communist conviction that unity is necessary, and our confidence that it is possible.

As part of the discussion we should look at how to elevate the fight against racism in the movements in which we are active, how to build the Jobs and Equality campaign, but as well, what specific campaigns against racism the Party and YCL could help initiate.

For example, on the question of the use of racist symbols by professional sports teams: the Party could help spark a movement, for which there would be mass support, and which could make a big contribution to the public debate about racism and the fight for equality. We should initiate a new campaign to outlaw racism: racist acts, statements, and attempts to undermine or not enforce existing laws. A central thrust of the Jobs and Equality campaign and the call for a new Civil Rights act must be to reassert the call for outlawing racism.

This Party-wide discussion will make an important contribution to a collective updating and refreshing of our approach, and to a greater level of activity and involvement in the struggle against racism, and for equality and unity of our multi-racial, multi-national working class. □

Socialist Realism in the Eyes of David Siqueiros

Phil Stein

Editor's Note: From the time he took part in the famous student's strike of the San Carlos Academy in Mexico at the age of fifteen, David Alfaro Siqueiros remained throughout his life committed to the working class. He was born in Santa Rosalia de Camargo, Chihuahua on December 29, 1896 and died in Cuernavaca, Morelos, January 6, 1974. His long and prolific painting career had known many interruptions. Beginning with the Mexican revolution, there were the years of union organizing, the time spent as a soldier in the Spanish Civil War, and the years spent in jail, a victim of political repression. Through it all, Siqueiros struggled to create a modern realism in painting. In 1932, in Los Angeles, he innovated the use of the cement fresco and the spray gun for fine art. He developed a whole theory of mural painting that derived from the moving spectator and that unified composition over disappearing picture planes.

In 1950, for his artistic achievement he was awarded the first prize at the Venice Biennial. In 1960 he was imprisoned for a period of four years, the reasons were political and the crime was called "Social Dissolution," a law that has since been abolished. On his release from prison at age 68, he proceeded to create two mural masterpieces, the Mexican Revolution, in the Chapultepec Castle, and remarkably, the world's largest mural, The March of Humanity, in the Siqueiros Polyforum. Siqueiros was the leader of the Mexican Mural Movement and responsible through the years for its cohesiveness, vitality, and strength.

Siqueiros was a member of the Communist Party for most of his life. He organized and led the miner's union of Jalisco, founded the Confederation Sindical Latinoamericana (The Confederation of Latin American Trade Unions), served as member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and was at one time its General Secretary. Outlined below are some of the great artist's views on realism and art.

As nominal head of the Front of Revolutionary Painters, Siqueiros next attempted to bring art into the district where the working poor lived. He organized an exhibit, which he called the "Salon of

May," and quite unlike its French namesake, it was presented in a storefront gallery in the neighborhood of the people's Lagunilla Market. More than twenty-five artists participated, with paintings that expressed the theme of the show: "Mexican Art for National Independence and Peace, and Against Poverty."

The work that Siqueiros contributed was awesome. A large painting, 2.5 by 1.5 meters, bore the title *The Good Neighbor, or How Truman Helps the Mexican People*. Depicted with a fiendish smile on his face, Truman grips the chains that are wound around the wrists of a kneeling naked Indian. Forcing the Indian to his knees with one hand, Truman holds high a packet of dollars in the other. A machine gun is slung on the victim's shoulder and both are surrounded by a pool of blood.

Unremittingly political in theme, and without question unacceptable in the mercantile art establishment, the painting was a technical and aesthetic masterpiece, rivaling the great bloody Christs of the Renaissance. The theme itself was a direct response to Truman's attempt at the time to buy off Mexico with a \$3 billion inducement to join the United States in a military pact to defend the American continent against aggression. In February of 1952, President Alemlin agreed to hold talks with the United States, provoking the National Council of the Partisans of Peace, of which Siqueiros was a member, to mount a great protest. At that time Siqueiros's painting of Truman was reproduced on the front page of Lombardo Tolodano's newspaper, *El Popular*.

To promote the Salon of May exhibit, Siqueiros produced two handbills. The first, "Picasso and Us," exploited the fact that Picasso had painted a work against the Korean War. When a reproduction of that painting reached Mexico, Siqueiros sent Picasso a telegram congratulating him and welcoming him to the side of the social realists. Picasso's powerful painting, *Massacre in Korea*, is a relatively literal depiction of a firing squad of mechanical soldiers executing a group of naked women and children. Siqueiros's handbill read:

Excerpted from Phil Stein's forthcoming book, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works*.

Has Pablo Picasso – the most important abstractionist painter of the School of Paris – entered the road of political new-realism, which has been the character of our modern Mexican painting for the last thirty years?

If this be the case, does such a stance by Picasso constitute a new personal modality, or is it rather a part of a general current in Paris and Europe that is the consequence of instability in all aspects of social life?

Visit the exhibition, Salon of May. You will see there the most recent work of Picasso, *Massacre in Korea* exhibited this past month of May in Paris.¹

On view in Mexico's Salon of May was only a small black-and-white newspaper reproduction of the Picasso, but even amid the larger politically compatible Mexican paintings, its significance was not lost.

The second handbill was an announcement that Siqueiros would give a lecture at the Salon the day the exhibit was to close, and the subject was: "The Judgment of the People on our Political Painting."

Is it possible to judge modern Mexican painting without pointing simultaneously to the social process in which it unfolds and was produced?

Is it possible at the same time to analyze it without judging the full political history of the workers' movement of our country, especially that which in the last fifteen years is referred to as governmental proletarianism and collaborative Marxism, that is, Marxism outside the Communist Party?

Can this painting, our modern Mexican painting, reach a third stage of greater perfection, a stage of Socialist Realism, supported by a workers' movement that is destroyed and almost inert?²

The Salon of May fulfilled its objective and was a great success. During the two weeks it was open, some 30,000 working-class and poor people entered the storefront gallery. These were not the art-buying public, no paintings were sold, but this had not been the object of the show. The humble souls who flocked to the show inscribed innumerable comments of gratitude in the gallery notebook and left tiny amounts of money that helped defray expenses.

Siqueiros and the Communist Party (which shared in organizing the event) were well satisfied with the experiment, but Siqueiros wrote an overall critique, *Notes for a Critical Examination*, which he addressed to the Central Committee of the Party. In it he pointed out that the PCM, as the vanguard of

the working class, was obligated to orient artists, not only those in the ranks but non-members as well, to the problems of creating "Socialist Realism that would inspire our national culture, even before the defeat of capitalism."⁴

Of the paintings, Siqueiros expressed satisfaction with the level of realism the exhibit had produced, and explained just how close to Marxist political theories he believed art should be. In general, he found too many works had weaknesses in their lack of aesthetic quality, beauty and political content. After 30 years of the Mexican Movement, he found the results disheartening. The role of the Communist Party, he held, must be to encourage the further development of the modern Mexican school of art, especially murals and printmaking "for within the bourgeois world, this school is one of the highest and most advanced exponents of the national aspiration of the people in their struggle for economic, political and cultural independence."⁵

Siqueiros stressed that the Party must assist art to advance. He considered it a shortcoming that in no case had the Soviet Union been presented as the bulwark and leader of the world struggle for peace, nor had the significance of the Chinese Revolution been considered. The political and social restlessness of the radical painters did not compensate for their generally low level of political awareness. He noted the abundant negativeness and confusion in the paintings, and said that the artists were isolated from the life of the popular masses. Also, he found the theme the Party had selected too vague and abstract, making concrete solutions difficult.

Added to political deficiencies were problems of the cohesion of form and content. From the beginning, he pointed out, the movement had experienced contradictions between practice and the theoretical base, and he urged the Party to promote discussions among the artists of all styles to solve this problem. It was understood that an art for the people had to be made, yet the social-aesthetic path had been all but abandoned. This, Siqueiros explained, was caused by the economic dependence of painting on the bourgeoisie, which

consolidating itself as a class, divorced itself from the program of the Mexican Revolution and gradually pulled painting into its camp, converting it, as it did with all natural and human products, into articles to be bought and sold, causing immediate corruption. This social crushing

was not recognized or corrected by the working class, for by not moving closer to the artists, they did not create an economic base that would permit Mexican art to fulfill its popular social function and create the cultural forms of Socialism.⁶

More precisely, what he considered to be the failures of the artists were the repetitious use of symbols, an excess of intellectualism, and religious mysticism – all confused and understood only by a small minority. Siqueiros advised artists to go back and

find the essence of reality and then, only when they were able to communicate with clarity their message to the people, can they resort to the symbol. [Also offending] an abuse of formalism the most notable tendencies were Epicureanism, cubist derivations, archaism, primitivism, as well as bestial deformities, dehumanization of the figure, and other social and cultural contaminations of the bourgeoisie.⁷

Delving deeply into the innumerable flaws, at least as he saw them, Siqueiros raised the point of static anti-dialectic conceptions that failed to show life in its developing form which is the premise of social realism. Thus, for him, most of the works of the Salon of May were incomplete, giving little hope and producing negative results. He did point out that socialist realism was not

a happy Socialist ending. Nothing could be further from what socialist realism asks of an authentic work of art, since as an expression of the revolutionary class resolving contradictions by means of class struggle, it is of no use to demagogically falsify reality in art nor to apply mechanical slogans from outside.

In consequence, the positive feeling ought to arise from within the artist, to sense and interpret forms, to transform social history, whether in a scene, a figure or a landscape, and at times for this a gesture or an attitude is sufficient to make the contradiction in the struggle felt.

Confusion also exists in believing that in order to make revolutionary art the artist must depict only the negative, the brutal, or simply objective reality. This lack of resolve has produced the existentialists and the many badly oriented artists and spectators. Contrary to being a revolutionary position, it is ... depressing and reactionary.

The mission of all great art is to encourage humanity

to struggle to reach a future of real happiness. The art of socialist realism, with its feet firmly planted in the reality of daily living, sees the future with a romantic, heroic and passionate vigor that is the product of historic determinism and not the result of a decadent romanticism that is false and utopian.

We consider it a shortcoming, which persists from the period of the founding of Modern Mexican School of Painting, to use almost exclusively the theme of the peasant presenting the Mexico of today as a homogeneous mass of peasants.

This fixation is indicative of a lack of knowledge of Mexican social evolution. New forces have developed, and even though the peasants continue to be numerically greater, the working class has been able to show its strength, and its intervention is a qualitatively superior and greater determining factor in the revolutionary struggle of the country.

The artist attracted to the beauty of the peasant tradition sees the past with a feeling of nostalgia derived from a reactionary position and forgets the rising of a new life, which is felt to be hostile and deprived of enchantment. This effects a creative impotence; the artist must produce poetry with the new materials, both social and physical. The proletariat and its function as the producers of the elements of life, offers the artist a new rich, complex, and strong world with which to dominantly complete their vision of a dynamic Mexico.⁸

Siqueiros attempted to educate his Party to the necessity of active support for an art movement that had already played an important role in the country's social development and that had a strong political potential. He ended his critique with a number of concrete proposals, which included the Communist Party sponsoring exhibitions throughout the country of paintings that would educate politically; Party-led meetings of artists to discuss and solve their problems; and the formation by the PCM of an artists' organization and workshop, geared to serve the struggle of the masses and develop an independent popular market.

To achieve revolutionary ends and further develop a new realism, Siqueiros hoped to raise the Party's consciousness and draw from it a better understanding of the political role of the arts, and thus its greater cooperation. However, in the end his challenge was not fully comprehended, so alone, in his own work, he continued to pioneer and solve the problems he raised. □

The Man With the Clenched Fist

Philip Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works*, International Publishers, N.Y., 1994, 402 pp. \$29.95 paper, \$49.50 cloth.

I am a citizen artist, not a Bohemian. I don't believe in a world where each artist is a little god, each one with his own philosophy, each one with his own little kitchen to fry his abstract ham and eggs. The only bad painting is the one dominated by the individual ego. In Europe a private market has determined a private art ... Here our art is for an audience of millions. Easel paintings whisper to a private few. Murals shout to the public.¹

— David Alvaro Siqueiros

This was the code and the practice of David Alvaro Siqueiros the preeminent Mexican painter whose art was intimately related to his militant Communist life and activities.

Together with Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and others, Siqueiros led in the founding of the modern Mexican mural movement, the most important event in the history of art since the Italian Renaissance. This mural development was an outgrowth of the Mexican Revolution of the early 20th century, the uprising of the peasantry against poverty, domestic tyranny and U.S. imperialist aggression, a great titanic struggle, whose leaders included Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa.

Siqueiros was a convinced Communist whose life was a virtual textbook of political involvement on many fronts. He was a leader of the Mexican Revolution, an outstanding trade unionist and a founder of the Communist Party, at one time serving as its General-Secretary. He fought against the betrayal of the revolution's aims by its misleaders, often denouncing them to their faces, including Mexico's presidents. Siqueiros was a working-class internationalist and was a firm supporter of the Soviet Union, and during the anti-fascist Civil War

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in Spain, was made a colonel in the Republican army. He was active in the fight against the frameup of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, and against the anti-Communist war in Korea and Vietnam. An international figure and a hero-artist of the Latin American masses, he was imprisoned many times for his political views and actions. No prison cell however could hold back the great power and influence of his art and the enormity of his political legacy.

This and much more is the subject of a new book, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works* by Philip Stein. The author is an artist who spent a decade working with Siqueiros, and who has maintained ties to the family ever since. *Siqueiros: His Life and Works* is a work of painstaking research and personal experience, a biography of the artist and the political history that shaped his life, written from a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint. The book goes into specific detail about mural painting and its relationship to architecture as conceived by Siqueiros, as well as giving a technical account of mural materials and production methods.

EARLY YEARS ■ Of all the leading Mexican muralists, Siqueiros was the most politically active, and he actually abandoned painting altogether from 1925 to 1930, devoting full time to political work. However he began to advocate a new revolutionary art for Mexico as early as 1911, when at the age of 15 he led a student strike which broke out at the San Carlos Academy where he was studying. The politically motivated student rebellion against oppressive social orthodoxy in art and education inspired Siqueiros to search for a new way to paint. He believed the mural was the best form of art that could stir the masses through political action. The murals he produced were seen and admired by millions of workers and peasants. In Mexico, more people see mural art in one day than go to museums and art galleries in a year combined.

Stein indicates that by 1924 Siqueiros was a leading Communist who worked with the discontented workers and peasants. He was the editor of *El Macheta*, the newspaper of the Mexican Communist Party and introduced powerful black-and-white

political graphics in its pages which acted like posters and political caricatures, tools used in working-class struggles. He became an influential labor leader and organizer and in 1927 called for a general strike to protest the death sentences pronounced against Saco and Vencetti in the U.S.

Siqueiros: His Life and Works sketches the story of Siqueiros life and shows how in 1930 when the Communist Party was outlawed by a reactionary regime he was arrested and imprisoned for six months. In 1932, hounded by the police and unable to work in Mexico, he became an exile in Montevideo where he painted and helped organize the Writers and Artists League of Uruguay. The author describes how Siqueiros then found his way to Los Angeles, where he was subsequently expelled for his politics. He later managed to come to New York City where he produced art works that supported the working class and the struggles of the U.S. Communist Party.

The book goes on to detail how in the 1960s when the Cold War infested Mexico, Siqueiros a figure of international repute, was again arrested this time on trumped up charges of "social dissolution." This caused worldwide protest from workers, intellectuals, and prominent figures creating a quandary for the Mexican government. President Lopez Monteyos was compelled to visit him in his prison cell hoping to reach a diplomatic compromise, but the artist stood by his principles and refused. Finally, the government was forced to release him. He went on to produce great works of art and involve himself in political struggles to the end of his life.

DEVELOPMENT OF MURALS ■ As presented by Stein in this important biography, the mural is seen as a form of graphic architecture, monumentally composed, thematically social, a visual emblem of class history and struggle. Many of the Siqueiros murals are described in the book, and his greatest and most imposing is *The March of Humanity*, executed in the 1960s. This enormous work portrays the advance of the people throughout their long history, employing religious motifs as symbols of a non-spiritual and secular reality. *The March of Humanity* is a masterpiece of artistic and architectural integration and a supreme example of class-inspired aesthetics.

The most spectacular artist of his time, he blended mythology and folklore together with surrealist and symbolic imagery in a social realist synthesis. He searched for new forms and novel techniques,

using photography and airbrushing to create special effects. Like Orozco and Rivera, the might of his art conveyed an enormous impact. His painting style was grandiose, with sweeping brushwork and dramatic contrasts of light and shade. The art of Siqueiros sometimes possessed the biting power of a caricature elevated to the scale of a bigger-than-life mural. There was distortion of figure, exaggeration, simplification and even semi-abstraction of composition. It was imaginatively organized into a pictorial wholeness and given vitality by an underlying draughtmanship that held all the graphic elements in rein.

SOCIALIST REALISM ■ The author argues that Siqueiros advocated a new realism in art, by which he meant the use of new forms, techniques and materials that would be suited to express the modern class struggle. He believed that updating the class struggle in art demanded a corresponding updating of artistic methods. While he admired the modern school of Parisian painting for its formal freedom and creativity as a reaction against the static systems of post-renaissance academicism, he opposed all aspects of this art that turned to ivory tower explorations for self-gratification. Put simply, Siqueiros worked to develop a new form that could be put at the service of progressive social content, and not form for its own sake.

Stein relates an interesting story in this regard. In campaigning for a new realism in art, Siqueiros went to Moscow in 1928, where together with Diego Rivera and Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, he met with Joseph Stalin to argue his case. Siqueiros urged that a revolutionary art be developed in the new workers' state, warning against the harmful effects of academicism and conventionalism in Soviet society. His views were backed by Mayakovsky as they related to the fields of poetry and literature. Stalin took their points, but he countered with a contradictory problem, saying that artistic revolutions do not happen parallel with political revolutions, observing that each stage in the history of art continued "drinking from the fountain of the civilization that had been destroyed." Stalin then asked,

Where are the real roots of this new art that you want for the new Soviet world? In the present formalism or vanguardism of Western Europe? Is it from there that we should start to realize our own? It seems to me that the academism Mayakovsky so eloquently fights, like the for-

malism he so eloquently defends, corresponds, though in different ways, to the moribund capitalist world?

The discussion revealed the nagging problem of how form relates to content, a question that affects art to this very day. While Mayakovsky was probably unconvinced by Stalin's viewpoint, the more astute Siqueiros saw the contradiction more clearly, and it gave him pause to reflect.

Stalin, who was not an art expert was expressing the method of Marxism as he understood it at the time. He saw the new socialist realism in art to be inherent in the traditional way of painting and he felt the threat to this traditionalism was coming from the abstract modernisms of the *avante garde* artists in the Soviet Union. Stalin and others could not see that socialist realist art could flourish with new forms and methods that borrowed aspects of abstract modernism as means for more imaginative expression, though there was no evidence of this in 1928. Mayakovsky leaned more to abstract imagery in literature and poetry where formal dynamics sometimes overwhelmed the social impact of writing.

But Siqueiros was looking for something quite different. He wanted to upgrade the visual power of modern social realism which he had already been doing in his painting. It represented, a three-way difference of view, with Stalin defending artistic academicism, Mayakovsky endorsing modern formalism and Siqueiros trying to form a bridge between both approaches. In time, as Soviet socialist realism matured art became less doctrinaire and more fluid in painting, film, literature, theatre and music.

FREEDOM AND ART □ Philip Stein's book discusses many of these questions and is a refreshing tonic, especially for artists today. It is an affirmation of the artist's highest purpose, as a tribune and not as a mere dissident or a recluse. Contemporary bourgeois aesthetic theory asserts that the artist is independent from society and from personal social responsibility. Bourgeois theory goes on to "privatize" the human aesthetic, insulating it against what it sees as a world of hopelessness, a conglomeration of discordant spiritual conditions caught up in a swirl of anarchy. This kind of aesthetic insulation fundamentally reduces the artist to creative impotency and poverty of emotional forces. No significant work in the history of art was ever created by

any artist who considered himself to be free of the social imperatives and the progressive ideas of the period.

Siqueiros's theory of art stands in sharp contrast to idealist aesthetics that constantly promote "absolute" and "unfettered" creative freedom under capitalism, where the artist is supposed to create an art independent from outside considerations. However, when in the entire history of art, present day society included, has there ever existed "absolute" freedom, completely autonomous from the practices of class society? Marx and Engels denounced the anarchistic notions of bourgeois freedom where the isolated individual may be a symbol of absolute independence. Marx constantly hammered home the point that man is a social being, and therefore all manifestations of life, even if they are not directly collective, carried on in company with others, are nevertheless evidence of life in society. "Man's individual and species life are not different, however much – and this is inevitable – the mode of existence of the individual is a more particular, or more general mode of the life of the species."³

As described in *Siqueiros: His Life and Works*, for the great Mexican artist as for all revolutionary artists, true freedom is therefore social in nature, and it can be effectively realized only within the framework of society and via society. Only within the collective can the individual have the means to develop full human potential (art), and consequently, only within the collective is personal freedom possible. Of course, real freedom in art is possible only in a society free from exploitation, social injustice, national and racial oppression, and the fury of blind economic forces. But art cannot wait to be liberated from its capitalist shackles. Siqueiros showed the way, and like Siqueiros, the artist must be part of the broad working-class fight for economic and social betterment, and in that process of struggle, a more effective art will arise.

Capitalism has absorbed art into a whirlpool of market relations, with destructive consequences. Freedom? The idea is ludicrous. Capitalist market relations have brought forth the most monstrous and subtle dictatorship ever visited upon art – the dictatorship of capital. In establishment circles, the question of artistic freedom is approached in a purely abstract and a social manner, and the actual conditions in which the artist lives and works is ignored. What is stressed is freedom from restraint,

an old concept dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries, when the emerging mercantile capitalist class fought against the restraints imposed on it by the monarchy in the form of taxes, levies and duties. Marx and Engels saw it differently. They saw true freedom as the recognition of historic necessity, and the conscious decision to act.

Real freedom for artists is the obligation to work in the interests of the working class and the people. That is artistic necessity. In an oppressive society, the artist is free when art is created against oppression. This is the significance of David Alfaro Siqueiros. As Lenin remarked, "The freedom of art lies in the fact that art serves not the satiated and bored bourgeoisie who suffer from fatty degeneration, but the millions of working people, the flower of the country, its strength and its future."⁴

ART AND NECESSITY ■ The artist who recognizes the primary obligation to create in the people's interests has already grasped the recognition of historic necessity, and is free in the best sense of the word. Such an artist has also become morally responsible. The freedom to produce socially conscious art is by its very nature a moral decision, dictated by objective social conditions. Irresponsible and self-serving actions reveal, not a free artist, but an unconscious slave, and what is more, the most pathetic of slaves, an artist who has been deceived into thinking that he/she is free.

Nevertheless, as Siqueiros understood, the aesthetic variables in art cannot be so easily classified as "good" or "bad" vis-a-vis their social and political characteristics only. Art is influenced by subjective factors not immediately related to concrete social circumstances, and this is also true of our aesthetic responses, they are fluid. Marx writes in the preface of his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*:

With the change in the economic foundations, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformation we must always distinguish between the material changes in the economic conditions of production, changes which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic, in short, ideological forms, in which human beings become conscious of this conflict and fight it out to an issue.

This shows that ideological formations linger on long after their material foundations are abolished. It explains the aesthetic paradox of art and what is possible in the real world, as shown in the Siqueiros meeting with Stalin, referred to earlier.

CULTURE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ■ Siqueiros's art was great and had a profoundly revolutionary dimension because it was linked to great revolutionary movement. Explosive breakthroughs in art were possible in Mexico, because of this social movement.

Mexico was fundamentally a peasant nation with a long tradition of Indian cultures whose art was totemic, abstract and holistic; that is, it possessed an art that embraced the whole people. There was not much intrusion of bourgeois art in Mexico, because developed capitalism did not yet exist there. Therefore, in the leap to peasant revolution, the stage was set for a people's art to blossom, an art that carried within it harmonious echoes of the past. Siqueiros, Rivera and Orozco were able to fashion an art that was modern, yet at one with the people in its form and substance.

This, or anything similar, did not prove possible in the developed capitalist states where art was affected by an industrialized culture, and where it became a commodity like any other commodity. As a product for the market, art became subject to changing fads and tastes, often manipulated by the ruling elite for profit purposes. Unlike Mexico, in these countries art was far removed from the cultural and aesthetic needs of the people. The growing influence of a petty-bourgeois intelligentsia acted to completely separate art from mass comprehension, as it became totally obscure and intangible. The middle-class intelligentsia, now in effective control of popular culture, dictates its character and direction in the service of the capitalist class.

But class division always results in class contradiction – in this case, cultural and aesthetic contradiction. Much art of the past and present, in reflecting social conditions, could not help but be fertilized by the presence and the contributions of the people, no matter what the point of view of the artist. The best artistic expressions of the past, in one way or another, always disclosed the reality of class divisions and antagonisms, whether in mysticism, magic, romanticism or classicism. It is a matter of proper materialist analysis to reveal this, but little has been done in this field for many years. Today's

growing social awareness and experience makes it possible for more people to see through the fog of capitalist-induced obfuscation. More are able to see in the present cultural decay the seeds of tomorrow, and are turning from the nihilistic and narcissistic concentration on the "self" to the self-freeing collective action which alone guarantee the true growth of one and all.

The real history of art has yet to be learned, and the method of Marxism-Leninism is our best teaching guide. Bourgeois critics and educators in art, have willfully misstated the meaning of Marxism-Leninism here, distorting it into a mechanical doctrine that is concerned only with working-class political affairs. They make of it a narrow utilitarian and dogmatic dictum, assuming for themselves the mantle of true representatives and spokesmen for culture and art. These "experts," and there are many, extol the virtues of individualism as the high point of modern civilization, and they pound away at it with the tenacity of politicians on the campaign trail. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, "Individualism as an end point in art is the last refuge of a scoundrel." Or as David Alfaro Siqueiros put it "The only bad painting is the one dominated by the individual ego."

MARXISM AND CULTURE ■ Marxism respects cultural traditions, but it recognizes that the continuity of art is not linear or smooth. It is interrupted to one degree or another when the evolving new productive forces in the economy destroy the existing productive relations, the class relations of production. Thus what remains is only a formal relationship between the old and the new art. There is only a formal relationship between the art of Antiquity, Feudalism, Capitalism and Socialism. The meaning and the substance changed but the forms lingered on. Throughout these epochs, the outer cast of art, its formal structure, was absorbed, all or in part, by the new society from the old. Only by understanding the historical art process dialectically, as a process of evolution, interruption and contradiction, is it possible to fully grasp the meaning of what is called art appreciation in the schools.

Siqueiros understood that Marxism doesn't merely observe or analyze. It is partisan, and it fights for the advance of a working-class progressive culture, fully cognizant of the zigs and zags inherent in this ideological and emotional sphere,

not unlike the general economic and political changes in society. The artist who takes up the cause of people in his/her art, does so out of a repudiation of capitalism, and a deep sense of social responsibility. However, for the full flowering of progressive social art to take place the artist must overcome a difficult obstacle – the problem of understanding the nature and life of those who work, both as a class and as individuals of that class. Only when this is realized can art portray the working class with depth. And this was Siqueiros's great legacy.

In television, film, literature, theatre and painting, the worker is hardly ever depicted honestly, and whenever shown we see only a schematic and superficial image. This is a by-product of the capitalist dictatorship over art. The struggle to change this is a struggle for working-class truth, against bourgeois prejudice and middle-class pseudo-realism.

CONCLUSION ■ David Alfaro Siqueiros, as a dedicated people's artist, is an extraordinary example for us all. He has set the standard for what art is and should be for all artists. Siqueiros was a Communist throughout his adult life, although he had a long and difficult relationship with the Mexican Communist Party, mainly over art and policy questions. His volatile style sometimes added to his problems, and he left the Party for a number of years, although never in spirit or belief. After he rejoined, it was said of him, "He was at all times, and to the last moment of his life, absolutely a Communist." As he himself often said, "If my Party, for any wrong reason, would throw me out, if they threw me out the door, I would come back in the window."⁵

This was a man of his time and of ours, and the new book on Siqueiros is a valuable addition to progressive biography. □

Norman Goldberg

Reference Notes

1. *Newsweek Magazine*, October 28th, 1957, p. 100.
2. Philip Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works*, International Publishers Co., N.Y. 1994, p. 60.
3. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961, p. 105.
4. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, pp. 48-49.
5. Stein, op. cit, p. 358.

Letter to the South African Communist Party

Dear Comrades,

First, we want to congratulate the South African Communist Party, the African National Congress and the South African people on the recent election of a government led by Nelson Mandela and the historic step towards freedom which it represents. The members of the Communist Party, USA celebrate this development and share with millions of people around the world the excitement and deep satisfaction brought by your victory in the struggle against apartheid. The events in South Africa have tremendous significance for the struggles our Party is engaged in, against U.S. imperialism and racism, and for equality, economic justice, democracy and socialism.

Our peoples and our Parties have a special history and relationship, marked by close fraternal ties, particularly between our National Chair Gus Hall and our late National Chair, Henry Winston, and the leaders of your Party. We were therefore surprised and dismayed to see that General Secretary Charles Nqakula is due to address an upcoming meeting sponsored by an anti-Communist group, the Committee of Correspondence (CoC), in July in Chicago.

Among those listed on the advertisement for Comrade Nqakula's appearance are people who have denounced and slandered the Communist Party USA – repeatedly, publicly, in the bourgeois media, here and abroad. The CoC was set up by former members of the CPUSA, who first organized a faction within the Party and attempted to destroy it, and then quit when they were defeated at the 25th Convention in 1991. We must assume that your Party is not aware of the anti-Communist nature of the CoC and its anti-Communist Party origins.

Perhaps at no other moment in the history of the struggle for socialism and the emancipation of the working class has international solidarity between Communist parties been as important as it is now. It is up to all of us to refute the bourgeoisie's new Big Lie – that socialism and Communism are dead – and we can help each other to do that. Evidence of the CoC's attitude towards this propaganda is that among the questions to be discussed at the Chicago

event is the "worldwide collapse of socialism." We don't put it that way, nor does your Party, we're quite sure.

Because we believe that these bonds are essential, and because of the special nature of the relationship between our Party and yours, we are writing to express our deep concern about Comrade Nqakula's scheduled appearance at this event.

Although we know that no small part of the aim and impact of groupings like the Committee of Correspondence is to divert us from the struggle in the real world, we feel compelled to set the record straight, about the CoC and its leading figures. These are the facts.

Since its inception, the CoC has proven incapable of participating in the struggles of the U.S. working class for jobs, equality, and against racism and the devastating impact of the economic crisis of capitalism. They have, however, been very busy on the international level, working mainly to circulate falsehoods about the CPUSA. They have widely disseminated their distorted version of the events which led to their leaving our Party, and their own role, past and present, including in a slanderous interview with Charlene Mitchell which appeared in the *African Communist*, unfortunately.

One of the worst examples of the anti-Communism of these ex-Communists is a lengthy article in *Crossroads* magazine by Michael Meyerson, which was so appreciated by the ruling class that the ultra-right *Washington Times* reprinted it in March of 1992. In this article, he repeats every anti-Communist slander in the book, and then adds a few of his own: "unspoken, except in embarrassed whispers, was the issue of the love – in party circles – that dare not speak its name: that of money and power." And "no one deserves the remnants of the CPUSA. It has simply exhausted its potential; it is a spent force. The party ... will be run by time-servers and the political equivalent of religious fundamentalists."

We need not point out that such attacks on the CPUSA are, objectively, attacks on Communist parties everywhere.

The CoC and its spokespersons have been among the most vocal in declaring that the CPUSA

is defunct or at best irrelevant, at times outdoing even the right wing. In fact they began spreading this lie even before they finally quit, taking their crusade against the Party and its leadership to the bourgeois media, spreading crude, anti-Communist lies. One of the most absurd examples – but representative in its viciousness and the fact that it was written by an ex-Party leader – is the letter by Jay Schaffner (a CoC leader) to his parents, also former Party members. In this widely circulated letter, which has been posted for public access on the computer network, Schaffner wrote, "I can only be thankful that we did not have socialism in the United States ... if we did the mockery of the socialist principle would have been on a par with that of Pol Pot in Kampuchea. Needless to say, with these bastards [the CPUSA leadership] in power, your son would have long been dead, and probably also my children and wife, and you too, my parents." Absurd, yes, but about on the level of the McCarthyite ravings of the 1950s; of the Reagans and Bothas of this world, and most definitely intended to do damage.

Most of the CoC leadership are former members and leaders of our Party who were followers of Gorbachev's classless "new thinking," and who wanted to take over the leadership of the CPUSA and eliminate or thoroughly dilute the Party's Marxist-Leninist ideology and politics, grounding in the working class, and advocacy of socialism. Under a blatantly phony cover of a call for democracy and openness, this grouping fought hard for its anti-working-class, non-Marxist positions, in Party pre-convention discussions and through secretive, factional and anti-democratic channels which they created at the expense of the democratically-elected bodies and democratically-arrived at decisions of the Party.

The CoC is a thoroughly petty-bourgeois phenomenon, a fact proven both by its confused politics and (lack of) organizational approach, as well as the composition of its members and leaders. It was a fact revealed in the course of the internal struggle in our Party before the Convention, which centered around the question of the role of the working class and the class struggle.

The interview with Charlene Mitchell contains the most vicious of the lies the ex-Communists are pushing: that, as the interviewer put it, "the tensions within the party [were] related to the race question;" that there were differences between Comrade Winston and Comrade Hall, and that upon Winston's death, weaknesses surfaced in relation to Party

democracy and the approach to the struggle against racism. Implied is that Winston was "with" the membership, and Hall was not. This is a complete distortion of the relationship between these two leaders, who worked together as a working-class team, and the role played by Winston, a great African American revolutionary, whose legacy is cherished and studied by our Party.

These are slanders so outrageous that Winston's widow, Fern Winston, who is a member of our National Board, felt compelled to write a letter of protest to the *African Communist*. They are outrageous slanders because the truth about Winston is exactly the opposite: he was a staunch Communist who always upheld the revolutionary, working-class line of the Party, and who always stood strongly and spoke clearly against factionalism. He was part of and helped build the united, Black-white leadership of our Party, and opposed any and all attempts to damage that precious unity.

What did happen was that Mitchell and the right opportunist grouping in the Party leadership attempted to use Winston's untimely passing to push the agenda that he had always fought against.

Much of their campaign against the Party, before and since the 25th Convention, has been based on the falsehood that the problems represented a "split along racial lines;" that the Party had abandoned the struggle against racism, and that most of the racially oppressed members left after the Convention. These are truly despicable falsehoods, despicable because of the tremendous role played by Communists in fighting racism and for class unity, which is part of the historic record; despicable because their campaign in fact hobbled the Party during that period.

It is despicable because it was a main weapon in their efforts to destroy the Communist Party, USA, whose role in building Black-white-Latino unity, and analysis of the class roots of racism are absolutely essential to victories in the class struggle in our country.

Proof of the fact that the differences in the Party were profoundly *political* and *ideological* is the fact that the majority of the African American and other racially and nationally oppressed membership not only stayed, but stayed and fought, to defend their revolutionary Party and its Marxist-Leninist line. Furthermore, since the convention, the largest group of new recruits to the Party, proportionately, are racially and nationally oppressed people. On the

other hand, the CoC, according to an article by one of its own members "has not been able to attract significant numbers of activists of color, especially young activists of color."

The factionalists' cynical use of the charge of racism against the Communist Party is unforgivable – and yet they continue to spread this lie.

The other big difference had to do with the factionalists' claim that they simply wanted more democracy, and that they were for unity. On this we must say that the leadership of our Party made many, many efforts, over several years, to find ways to build unity and to struggle through political differences. Many democratic innovations, both organizational and political, were proposed and implemented by the leadership in that preconvention period. And after the convention, there were more efforts to build bridges with those who had left the Party. These overtures were made because we understand that this has been a very difficult period for the Communist movement, and disorienting for many honest people, and because we have kept our "eyes on the prize" of building maximum unity in the fight against reaction and for a socialist USA.

Probably even the factionalists would agree that this preconvention period was one of the most hotly debated and discussed in our Party's history, in many different publications, and at scores of meetings on every level. But they lost this debate when their right opportunist positions and the individuals who expressed them were voted down by the working-class membership of our Party at the 25th Convention. This membership, although angered and saddened by the events in the socialist world, recognized that more than ever, capitalism is a disaster for working people in our country; that the class struggle goes on and the Communist Party is necessary to the victory of the working class.

Rather than abandoning socialism, (as did the faint-hearted elements who left the Party, and have spent the last several years discussing "what went wrong" in the Soviet Union at a time when conditions are terribly wrong and getting worse for our people), our members have prepared themselves to be effective fighters for socialism under the new conditions with which history has presented us.

Meanwhile, the CoC has spent its time attacking the CPUSA and engaging in endless discussion about what kind of organization they want to become. They have not become involved in the struggles for the rights of our embattled working

class and people.

An organization report given just a few months ago to the CoC's National Organizing Committee states that, unlike "other organizations, many feel that the CoC is not doing something, that it is not focused." It goes on, "the CoC [is] in political and organizational flux at the local level, without a clear national program of activities or identity" and "we still need to find and clarify our vision and realize that from our experience and dialogue we will craft this, there is no 'shining path.'"

In addition to the former Party leaders who comprise the CoC, there are others, ranging from right social democrats to all manner of Trotskyites and other anti-Communists. And although we're sure that some honest left people have been attracted to the CoC, the low level of activity and high level of political confusion, not to mention the deadening and corrosive impact of the anti-Communism of its leaders, have made the organization completely ineffectual.

Perhaps the most incriminating fact, which exposes a key reason why these individuals didn't simply leave the Communist Party when they abandoned their Marxist-Leninist principles, is that some are engaged in outright thievery of Party funds and property. Since early 1992, we have been involved in numerous lawsuits, involving millions of dollars, against former Party leaders who are attempting to steal money and property which belongs to the CPUSA. They have also been pressuring Party veterans to cut the Party out of their wills.

Our Party has long had the practice of arranging for money to be left to the Party in the names of trusted Party leaders, due to the remnants of the McCarthyite political atmosphere and anti-Communist legal barriers. A number of the ex-Communists in the CoC have kept such money for themselves and for the CoC. Other cases involve property, including Party buildings and bookstores. They have defended this thievery with everything from hypocritical, twisted reasoning (e.g., "if the person who left this money to the Party were alive, they would leave it to the CoC"), to lies and outright anti-Communism.

In one battle over property in California in which the issues were clear-cut (the two corporations in question were set up by the Party), Charlene Mitchell and others defended their indefensible dishonesty and thievery by directly playing to anti-Communist myths. In their court testimony they charged that the Party is totally undemocratic, with a top-down structure in which the membership has

no say. They lied about the substance and spirit of the 25th Convention, portraying themselves as innocent victims of a dictatorial clique. Their legal defense included questioning Party leaders about whether they advocate violence against the government, a charge which has been the ideological centerpiece of anti-Communism and the persecution of the Party and the left in our country for decades.

Whatever honest individuals might have been attracted to the CoC, in the main, it is an organization and leadership thoroughly tainted with an anti-Communism based on ideological collapse, political dishonesty and simple greed.

Finally, just a few words about our Party and its membership. The quantity and viciousness of the slander levelled against us is inversely related to what is the real truth about the CPUSA: that ours is a revolutionary working-class Party, Black, Latino, Native American Indian, Asian and white; composed of men and women who are fighters and leaders in every arena of struggle. We are a party with a tremendous 75 year history, and a vibrant, growing present.

The factionalists lost their bid to de-rail our Party because our membership held on to their Marxist-Leninist principles, which have been confirmed and developed by rich and varied experience in practical struggle.

Our Party has been involved – even through the bitter and exhausting factional period – on practically every issue and front of struggle: in strike struggles and strike solidarity; building the fight against NAFTA; organizing the movement against homelessness; in the fight against the growing racism of the U.S. ruling class and its attempt to turn back the clock on civil rights and equality; in the anti-imperialist movements.

Communist Party members and leaders stand out and are respected wherever they are active, be it in neighborhood organizations, in the labor movement, in coalitions. The Party runs candidates for public office and is helping initiate and build mass movements for jobs. Our weekly press and our theoretical journal have published continuously since our Convention, and make very important contributions, clarifying the issues and helping build movements of struggle.

Finally, our activity in the anti-apartheid movement has been consistent, beginning with the outstanding contribution of Henry Winston, who was the initiator of the mandatory, comprehensive sanc-

tions movement in our country. This work has included building solidarity between the U.S. and South African trade union movements, and solidarity with the SACP; most recently, with the speaking tour organized by our paper for the late Chris Hani in 1990 and for Moses Mahbida in the early 1980s.

The CPUSA and our Young Communist League are extremely active, and we are growing rapidly, with large numbers of African Americans and Latinos among these mainly working-class new members. Many of the people who left during and after the factional struggle have been drawn to the Party by its activity, and are re-joining.

Such renegade groups as the Committee of Correspondence have appeared in many countries, as a result of internal struggles within the Communist Parties over ideological and other questions. In many cases – certainly in our own – these factional struggles were sharpened and even assisted by the enemy.

In your country you have had long experience with those claiming to be true-er revolutionaries, more democratic democrats, etc. You know as we do that the ruling class encourages and promotes these developments to sow disunity in the people's movements, and that they have never ceased to try to strangle the parties of socialism.

The CoC is simply another example of the old phenomenon of small, break-away groups which have come and gone over the years in every country. Nor are their politics – such as they exist – anything new or particularly significant.

As one of their main aims is to sow and foster disunity, our Party has publicly declared that we will not give any kind of support for such groups – anywhere – recognizing the importance of the solidarity and unity of the Communist movement.

Being apprised of these facts, we believe that you will not put the prestige and honor of the heroic South African Communist Party at the service of this unprincipled group, and we are sure that Comrade Nqakula will reconsider and not attend the Chicago meeting. At this new historical moment, so full of possibilities as well as new challenges, let us take the opportunity to strengthen our Parties fraternal relations and common cause, the fight against imperialism and for socialism. With warmest fraternal regards,

For the National Board, CPUSA
Gus Hall,
National Chair

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