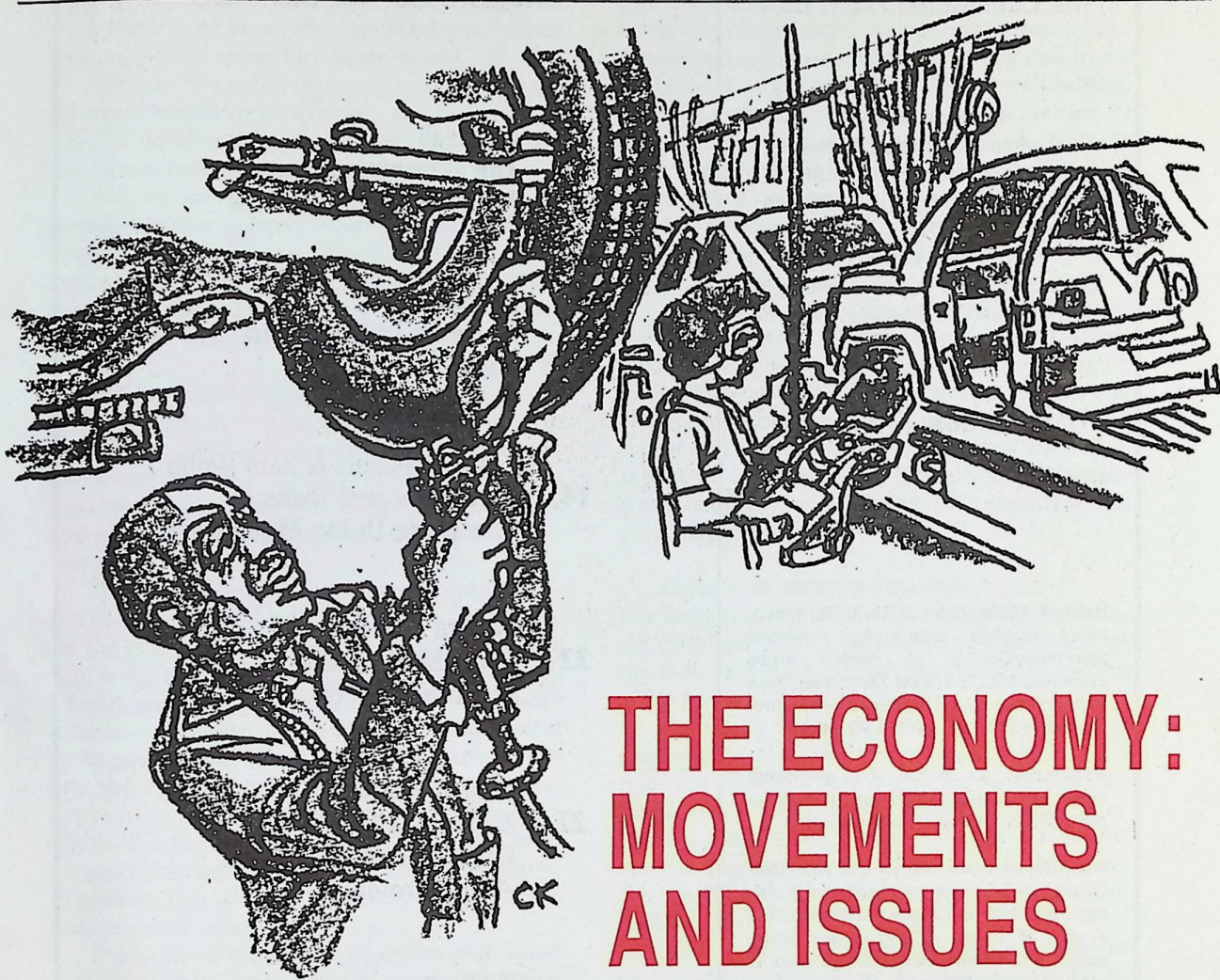


# Political Affairs

JOURNAL OF MARXIST THOUGHT

AUGUST 1990 \$1



## THE ECONOMY: MOVEMENTS AND ISSUES

Gus Hall

**ON THE WORLD  
YOUTH MOVEMENT**  
Joe Sims

**POTENTIALS IN THE  
LABOR MOVEMENT**  
G. Mevers & S. Webb

**SOCIALIST UPHEAVALS  
AND THE U.S. LEFT**  
Kendra Alexander

# *Political Affairs*

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

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

**Subscription rates:** \$10 for one year (Individuals); \$15 for one year (Institutions); foreign subscriptions: Canada and Mexico, \$11 a year; all others, \$12.50 a year; single issues, \$1. Second class postage paid at post office in Bellmawr, NJ. *Postmaster* Send changes of address to: Political Affairs, 235 West 23 St., New York, NY 10011.

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# The Economic Scene: Movements and Issues

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GUS HALL

DEVELOPMENTS AROUND THE WORLD, INCLUDING in the socialist world, are important and interesting and, of course, of great concern to us. But our main focus must be on the fast-developing crises breaking out all around us, in our world.

We will be judged primarily not by what we say about world developments, but by what we say and do about the accelerating problems we face here at home.

Yes, we are internationalists. But our first responsibility, our primary allegiance, and greatest attention must be concentrated on the developments in our own country and their impact on our own people. This is where our creative energies must be focused

## THE 'QUIET DEPRESSION'

While the cyclical economic crisis has not yet broken out, the "quiet depression" I wrote about two years ago has continued to deepen. It is based on longer-range factors and therefore takes into consideration the long-term steady deterioration.

The overall decay and corruption of capitalism continues. As the economy sinks, as people see the great shift in wealth from the poor to the rich, as the corruption in high places, like the S&L scandal, remains in the headlines, more and more Americans become disillusioned and distrustful of the government and therefore more anti-corporate and anti-monopoly. The roots of the "quiet depression" are in the longer-range factors. Within the last ten years, the workers' share of the products they produce fell from 30 percent to 25 percent. This is the source of the highest profits and corporate salaries in history.

The years of economic stagnation and "quiet depression" have been years of staggering social polarization, years of zooming super-profits and wealth, on the one hand and rapidly spreading

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This is an extract from a report made by Gus Hall, National Chairman CPUSA, to a National Committee meeting, on August 4, 1990.

poverty, declines in real wages, a steady rise in homelessness and hunger, eroding social and health services on the other.

It is an ironic twist that the infamous Donald Trump real-estate interest fiasco is now cast in the same mold as the federal government's budgets. Trump has to deal with interest payments on a \$3 billion dollar debt. And the federal government has to deal with interest payments on a \$3 trillion dollar debt that grows at the rate of \$170 billion a year. The corporate Trumps and the government agencies borrow and spend and the hole gets deeper and deeper.

The American public, according to the latest Gallup Poll, now cites the federal budget deficit as frequently as illegal drugs, which dominated the public's agenda for more than a year, as one of the most important problems confronting the country. The public increasingly views the deficit as a factor in cutting their living standards, especially because the Administration uses it to cut programs and increase taxes.

## ECONOMIC SCREWS TIGHTEN

The economic screws are tightening on the working class and people, particularly in the major areas that, to a great degree, determine the quality of life for most American families.

Especially in the past few months, the bad economic news has been spread all over the front pages of *The New York Times*, in headlines like "Data Verify Economy's Malaise: 16 States In or Near a Recession," and "In New England, Hardest Recession in U.S. Takes Hold," and "Home Builders See Recession and Blame the Savings Crisis."

Let's look behind the headlines for a moment to see what they mean in terms of a shift in wealth and the quality of life. The shift in income from the poorest 60 million to the richest 5 million has been \$150 billion per year for the past 15 years. The richest 5 million have a combined income of one trillion. In per capita income, the richest have 50 times the income of the poorest.

Gross corporate profits last year were \$1 tril-

lion, 500 billion. This means a windfall for corporate executives who get an average of \$250,000 a year. The average annual family income of the richest one percent is \$404,566, plus benefits, expense accounts, bonuses and million dollar pensions – 50 percent higher than the Japanese and 90 percent higher than British and German executives.

And because of the lopsided loophole tax laws, Corporate America pays a measly 22 percent of the total taxes, while working America carries the biggest burden – 52 percent.

On the workingclass side of the ledger, workers got average wage increases of one to two percent for 1989, with the cost of living rising at 8 percent a year, which means a net loss of about 7 percent. Real wages are on a slow, steady decline. Average income for those working is \$20,000-\$32,000, with Black families making 60 percent of white families – the biggest gap since the '60s.

The average family income of the poorest 10 percent of Americans fell 10.5 percent between 1977 and 1987, while the average family income of the wealthiest 1 percent rose 74.2 percent. At the same time, health insurance benefits are being cut, pension funds are being invaded, taxes and prices are rising, welfare and social services are being slashed and workers are under tremendous pressure to make even more concessions " to make America competitive."

Full-time women workers earn 65 percent of men's wages. And 43 percent of women workers are in jobs paying below poverty wage.

Over the past 15 years, the real wages of young male workers have declined 25 percent, even more for female workers. And among African American male workers, it's 50 percent, and even more for African American female workers. The rise of sweat shops illegally hiring child labor, under working conditions as severe as the '30s, makes the situation for young working Americans even worse. Twenty percent of all children grow up in poverty; 39 percent of the millions in poverty are under 18; 45 percent are African Americans and 40 percent are Hispanics.

The number of Mexican American families living in poverty increased to 26 percent in 1989. Almost 39 percent of Puerto Rican families live in poverty, with an unemployment rate, according to official statistics, of nearly 10 percent. In Puerto Rico itself, the unemployment rate is close to 50 percent.

With the real poverty level for a family of four at \$20,000, sixty million Americans are now living in poverty, 15 million are unemployed. Now, every week, 300,000 are filing new unemployment claims.

I have given extensive figures because they prove that there has been a drastic and extensive erosion in the overall quality of life – especially for African Americans and other nationally oppressed people, for women and youth.

An understanding of the impact of this marked decline should determine our focus, our tactics and our program of struggle for the '90s.

And what is the government's response: Blame the " federal deficit." Their recipe is: Cut the deficit by raising taxes on working people and by cutting social programs and services.

Reading Democrat Dan Rostenkowski's lips, Bush renounced his " no new taxes" campaign promise. Now *The New York Times* warns, "It wouldn't take much to throw the stagnant economy into recession," and spells out a recipe for a mix of "taxes and cuts" – all on the backs of the people. The remedy, they say, is " a 5 percent excise tax on gasoline, and higher "sin" taxes on alcohol and tobacco."

Taking their cue from the President and his congressional cohorts, states and cities have already begun putting this recipe into the frying pan with new state and city taxes. These new federal, state and local taxes will most likely make this the year of the biggest tax ripoff in U.S. history.

Anti-tax movements are springing up across New Jersey and other states as they pass new tax laws.

The results of the Reagan-Bush " revolution" are still taking their toll on the people. And there is no end in sight under the Bush Administration.

Kevin Phillips, author of *The Politics of Rich and Poor*, a conservative Republican who is now on the best seller list and talk show circuit, is the new standard bearer of the bankrupt Democrats, looking for a way out of their self-made dilemma. Phillips' book details the suffering inflicted upon the working class during the Reagan years, while the fat cats lived it up with their newly under-taxed incomes. Phillips says, "So many Americans are making so much money as a result of the 'Reagan Revolution' that the term millionaire became meaningless." Phillips predicts a "populist counterrevolution, if Democratic politicians jump

on the bandwagon."

Tom Wicker, in a *New York Times* column, tore into the new Bush Administration's recent report announcing a decision against any major new programs or strategy to combat poverty:

Earlier this month, Bush's Domestic Policy Council decided that Bush should embark on no new programs or strategies to reduce poverty in America. Instead, a White House official remarked jovially, the Administration would "keep playing with the same old toys. But let's paint them a little shinier."

Reporting that over 20 million are suffering from hunger, one out of every twelve, 39 percent of them children under 18, *The New York Times* applauds the charitable groups springing up all over the country, which are collecting leftovers from restaurants, bakeries, supermarkets, and airlines to supplement the meager pork, rice and beans that the government wants "to paint a little shinier." And, all donors are immune from liability if people get sick or die from contaminated food under a "good samaritan" law enacted by all states in 1981.

Companies have no "financial incentive," the *Times* says, "to donate food because the IRS does not allow tax deductions for such donations, which it considers to be one step from the garbage pail." That's capitalism for you!

As the crises take hold, are we responding? Are we organizing and/or joining in the existing community movements of the homeless, the housing movement, the fight for free, quality health care? Are we responding fast enough to the increase in racist violence and the sharpening racist edge of the economic crises?

Are we on the ground floor of the October 3rd, "Health Care Action Day," just announced by the AFL-CIO's National Jobs With Justice Coalition?

We should hear about our contributions to these struggles at this meeting. Yes, let us "show and tell."

### **BACKROAD S TO PROFITS**

To add to the hundreds of billions in direct profits, monopoly capital, in collusion with the government, has forced open new backroads for plunder of the people.

● The Savings and Loan swindle is but one of the new backroad routes to grab off more billions.

On the S&L route at least \$500 billion, a half trillion dollars, will be passed from the people to the filthy rich. The S&L scandal is just one of the stops on this new backroad to profits.

The S&L bailout is the fruit of an unprecedented experiment in capitalist deregulation, the greed of profiteering predators and a corruption-saturated government. Deregulation of the nation's savings and loan industry, which was ostensibly established to make it possible for ordinary families to buy homes, has been transformed by Carter, Reagan and Bush into a trillion dollar federally insured gambling casino, where unscrupulous insiders become sure winners, with a government-guaranteed license to steal. And the only sure losers are the U.S. taxpayers. It has turned into the largest transfer of wealth in the history of our country - from the working people to the rich. The Bush bailout is inching over \$500 billion and will cost every U.S. citizen at least \$3,000.

As new scams hit the headlines day after day, more and more Americans are becoming enraged. Already, demonstrations have taken place in Chicago and other cities. Protest letter campaigns are being organized around the country. Are we part of this? Are we mobilizing existing forces and initiating "Stop the S&L Sellout" movements around the country?

The S&L ripoff is a two-tier robbery. The banks go bankrupt because the rich who run and own them steal billions. One example is the President's son who gave away billions to his closest business buddies. Of course Neil took \$200 million for himself. And then on TV, when asked about his dirty deals, with a sheepish look on his face, bragged, "It was a sweet deal."

Now for the second tier of the robbery. A typical example: An old, close friend of Bush bought fifteen of the bankrupt S&Ls, with billions in assets, with \$1,000 of his own money. How was he able to pull this off? Because another old business buddy of Bush made all the arrangements with all the right connections, and now takes the fifth amendment.

This second tier looting goes on day after day. And the debt the people have to pay keeps going up. The filthy rich, especially the Republican rich, are also simply stealing \$10 billion from HUD funds that were earmarked for housing the homeless. The rich Republicans get richer and the homeless will remain homeless.

And to top it all off, the government is guaranteeing the stolen loot in the bank accounts of the thieves. This is how it goes: There is currently \$4 trillion in all banks in the U.S. By law, only one-half should be insured. In practice, the government guarantees to pay all of it should a bank fail. This means the rich, who have huge, multiple accounts, well over \$100,000, get it all back. Of the S&L bailout cost of \$500 billion, \$250 billion is the total the government does not have to pay by law, but does because they can't stand to see the rich lose a penny. Of the \$3,000 each ordinary taxpayer will have to pay, \$1,500 of it is because of this government-guaranteed giveaway.

The only solution to this mess is to nationalize all the banks, round up the crooks and make the rich pay the half trillion dollars.

The initial backroad robbery was crafted by Reagan with his billions in tax gifts to the rich. Since then, trillions of the people's money have been siphoned off and more is on the way down the backroad route.

The new taxes, the \$500 billion payback debt on the S&L's, the interest payments on the \$3 trillion government debt, the millions stolen from HUD, and billions more, are all going back to the class that committed the robberies in the first place. And the Bush-Sununu plan is to turn over whatever money winds up in the "peace dividend" to the same highway robbers.

- The wave of mergers, takeovers and leveraged buyouts are also connected to the new level of exploitation and profiteering. The Reagan-Bush era has sharply accelerated the privatization and monopolization of industry and banking.

For example, the junk bond king, Michael Millken drew a \$500 million salary. The crooks who put together the Reynolds-Nabisco takeover took a \$5 billion "finders fee." And of course, the result was a jump in the price of cookies.

- There is no end to the gory stories of corporate gangsters who operate in and around the Reagan-Bush Administrations.

The latest is the one about Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve Board Chairman, who is the main man manipulating federal monies. It turns out that he used to be a full-time consultant to William Keating, the most notorious of the S&L racketeers. Greenspan was a full-time consultant and a key link in the Keating heist.

The billions stolen by way of this new backroad route are monies that are being taken out of

funds for health care, housing, education, child care and the environment.

The trillion dollar robbery by way of this new backroad route adds to the declining living standards. The people pay for it in taxes, lower wages, shabbier neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals.

It is clear that the Bush-corporate plan for the workers in the 90's era is more layoffs, more permanent unemployment, more wage cuts.

Typical is the GM case. GM has laid off 13 percent of its production workers. And the rate of layoffs will increase. But in its year-end statement, GM boasted, "We paid out \$2 billion to our stockholders." GM Chairman, Roger Smith is retiring in luxury with a pension of \$600,000, which was doubled to \$1,200,000 as a bonus for upping GM profits.

#### **DOUBLE JEOPARDY'S VICTIMS**

All working people are victims of this rapacious ruling class, but some 60 million African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian Americans are the victims of double jeopardy because racism and discrimination are heaped on top of their exploitation.

The median family incomes remain: white families, \$34,000; Hispanic families \$22,000, African Americans, \$13,666. Poverty rates are three to four times higher for African Americans and at least twice as high for Hispanic families. To this we have to add the pressures of racist violence and the segregation and threat of re-segregation of desegregated schools and neighborhoods.

The pattern of the new wave of layoffs is clearly racist. The new layoffs are in older plants and plants in the bigger cities. Each year, the number of African American high school graduates who cannot find jobs, increases. One-quarter of African American males are in jail or on probation – more than the number of African American males in college. The criminalization concept is the racist theory that rationalizes this genocidal pattern.

Tens of millions of people are trapped in the inner cities' poverty and slums, where the quality of life is below the crisis level and the decline is the sharpest; where unemployment reaches 80 percent; where everything costs more; where the infant mortality is higher than in Bangladesh; where Bush's so-called thousand points of light

do not penetrate.

What is needed is emergency action, emergency programs to bail out the inner cities, not the banks. What is needed is an inner-city bail-out tax on all corporations and banks. What is needed is a massive transfer of funds from the rich to massive reconstruction projects, housing construction, street repairs, new schools, hospitals, and child care centers. What is needed is for all forces to join in a struggle that will blast the government on all levels out of its racist, do-nothing ways. What is needed is some "new thinking," new kinds of action programs.

### **FARM AND RURAL CRISIS**

To the crises in the cities and urban areas, we have to add the deterioration of life on the farms and in rural areas.

Especially in the South and areas like Appalachia, poverty is increasing at an alarming rate. Life is becoming increasingly more primitive, with families living in ramshackle cabins, without heat, hot water or the simplest amenities of civilized life.

In fact, family farmers continue to rapidly disappear. Government subsidies supposedly designed to aid the family farm, in real life primarily benefit large agribusiness. Price controls which force agribusiness to pay farmers parity prices for products is the central demand of a wide, loose coalition of rural groups. It is as legitimate as workers' demands for wage increases. We should be actively involved with such groups as the North American Farm Alliance and the American Agricultural Movement.

### **WINNABLE STRUGGLES**

Whether there is an economic crisis or not, all signs indicate that, without struggle, the 1990s will be years of higher unemployment, higher taxes, higher rents and prices, higher homelessness and poverty, higher instances of racist violence, higher medical costs, higher tuition costs.

Without a struggle, there will be cuts in wages, pension payments, funds for education, child care and farm subsidies, and cuts in environmental cleanup.

Without a struggle, there will be some minimum cuts in military spending, but mainly in the production of some outdated military weapons. Without a struggle, these are only some of the areas where the Republicans and Democrats in Congress will agree to cuts.

Without a struggle, the tax increases will be on the people, as the new taxes in the cities and states already show.

It is around these issues that we should draft a specific program of struggle for the '90s. We should not only draft a program, but also a specific plan for a campaign that includes the building of broad united front forms, but also a Party campaign with advanced positions.

The program should include concrete measures for a national health care service, a national housing rights act, a program to put affirmative action programs on track, concrete programs for conversion. Our program must include specific proposals in the struggle for women's equality and a Party program for youth.

We should be raising demands such as: ► Bail out Communities, Not Banks ► Stop the Bush Bailout ► Nationalize the Banks! ► Free, quality Health Care for All! ► The Right to Abortion is a Human Right ► End Racism and Racist Violence – Now! ► Pass the 1990 Civil Rights Act ► Tax Profits, Not People ► Education is a Right, Not a Privilege ► Tax the Corporations! House the Homeless! Feed the Hungry! ► Conversion – The Peace Dividend Means More Jobs! ► End Government Corruption Now! ► Elect Working People to Congress in 1990 ► Save the Supreme Court!

These are the demands Americans are ready to fight for. They are issues people can be mobilized and activated around. And many are winnable. Are we doing it? ◻

# Currents in the World Youth Movement

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JOE SIMS

**T**HIS ARTICLE WILL TREAT OF TWO SUBJECTS: first, the results of the recent Executive Committee meeting of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), and, second, an assessment of impressions, gathered during participation in that event, of the situation in some socialist countries and in the international communist movement.

I want, at the outset, to underline the word *impressions* for the situation is still fluid and changing rapidly. Most parties and youth organizations have not drawn definitive conclusions and are not likely to do so for some time. Nevertheless, certain debates are coming to a close, some things have begun to settle, the air is clearer and through it one can discern the beginnings of clear and distinctive patterns. To this we will return later.

The Executive Committee of WFDY met, this year, at the Bogensee International Youth Center, near Berlin, from April 1st to 4th. The purpose of the meeting, in addition to its regular constitutional function of reviewing work over the past year, was to initiate the process of convening the Assembly of the Federation. It is held every four years and will take place this autumn. That this was the first meeting of the Federation since last year's events in Eastern Europe added considerable drama to the gathering.

As one might expect, there were severe pressures on the meeting, arising out of the situation confronting WFDY's member organizations in both East and West. These pressures, and responses to them, helped shape and frame the debate. There was, for instance, a strong tendency at the meeting that went in the direction of dispersion and dissolution. Some organizations, demoralized and shell-shocked by the upheavals, saw only extreme crisis and, despairing of a solution, called for dissolving the Federation. Still others argued that the solution to the Federation's problems lay in removing its anti-imperialist platform, thus hinting from another angle that WFDY, as presently conceived was largely irrelevant. These

proposals provoked considerable controversy, and an energetic and, at times, volatile discussion ensued. In the end, political sobriety triumphed, and reasoned and responsible proposals prevailed. WFDY was not liquidated and will continue to play an active role in the international youth and student movement, while renovating and revitalizing its program and structure. The process leading to this conclusion was at once intricate and revealing.

The discussion was framed within the context of the continuing renewal of the Federation, a process that began at the last Assembly in 1986. Briefly, this process seeks to overcome bureaucratic inertia by democratizing structure and lending a greater initiating and activist orientation. While much progress has been achieved in this regard, doubtless there remains a considerable way to go. The meeting therefore focused on how, within the context of the coming Assembly, this process could be accelerated and given a permanent character.

Underlying the exchange on concept and structure were principally two issues: first, should the expansion of breadth and diversity be achieved by removing the anti-imperialist character of WFDY? and second, would proposals to reduce by half the Executive Committee and Bureau enhance or restrict democracy and effectiveness? Points of view on the first issue were varied and at times in sharp contrast. Almost all present took the floor. At issue were questions relating to the role of WFDY, its character, platform, and their mutual interrelation. And behind this discussion, of course, was the issue of the unity of the Federation itself.

Opinions varied, and a cursory tracing of the lines of debate reveals an earnest attempt to answer the following questions: How could WFDY expand organizational diversity and pluralism of view? Should WFDY unite the left in the youth and student movements, or should a wider and more expansive concept be used? What should be the basis of unity – ideological orientation or a platform based on needs and interests? And finally, should anti-imperialist planks be included in the program or should global concerns such as

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Joe Sims is National Education Director of the Young Communist League USA.



peace, environment, health, etc., figure more prominently? The issues in the last question, as has too often been the case, were artificially juxtaposed and placed opposition.

An additional element in the discussion was the speeches of delegates from some socialist countries. These focused on what might be termed "technical" issues relating to organization, finances, and structure, but they scarcely touched on the more programmatic issues. Absent from their discourses were references to the main issues at stake. Many committed the sin of omission – that is, while not openly opposing anti-imperialist positions, the word was not mentioned. Thus, these speeches were, in a manner of speaking, de-ideologized.

#### **LEFT UNITY ONLY?**

Underlying these discourses was the proposition that the greatest obstacle to diversity was the Federation's "red" taint. The gist of it was: "If we would only change words, and alter our image, we'd achieve greater unity. Adorned with a political face lift, liberal, conservative and center forces would then rush to embrace us."

The idealism and naivete of this view, not withstanding, one was struck by yet another issue: It seemed that those who argued most fervently for diversity and pluralism, on the other hand, contended the Federation should unite only the left. Thus, behind projections of breadth were patently narrow and sectarian concepts of platform, organization, and the basis of unity. One was drawn to conclude that some had substituted one set of dogmas for another.

As might be expected, delegates from developing countries railed against what was perceived as an abandonment of their positions. It wasn't that they were opposed to pluralism and diversity; they simply refused to countenance its achievement at their loss. This prompted a fierce insistence that the anti-imperialist positions of the Federation be maintained.

It became increasingly clear as the debate went on that positions were growing increasingly extreme. Points of view were being counterposed drawing speakers of different persuasions to opposite poles. The unity of the meeting hinged on drawing together, on a principled basis, these seemingly irreconcilable positions.

That the world had reached an important turning point, a kind of midway mark between

old and new was not much in dispute. And it was generally agreed that the search for renewal and revitalization required a cognizance of what is new and developing. The fight for relevance demanded nothing less. A major stumbling block was the implicit denial of the old in the face of the newly emerging post-Cold War world. The existence of imperialism was manifestly part of that old and enduring reality.

The speaker from the Young Communist League USA, endeavored to grapple with these problems in a constructive and unifying manner. Arguing for the maintenance of an anti-imperialist posture, we suggested that such a stance need not be narrow and confining. Objectively, we stressed that all struggles of the world's young generation have an anti-imperialist content, be they peace, environment, jobs, racism, or the third world debt. Thus, these struggles need not be artificially counterposed. A broader platform for the Federation required an emphasis on needs, interests, and issues, instead of positing unity on the basis of political viewpoint – a solution which is not only impossible, but not desirable. Approaching the issue from this angle, we argued, would offer a wider principle for affiliation. Conceptualizing the Federation as a unity of the left was far too restrictive and binding.

The preceding set the stage for the discussion on structure that took place on a proposal by the Bureau of WFDY. It had two parts: first, to reduce the size of the Executive Committee by half, and second, to limit the number of organizations participating in the Bureau. The proposal also contained vague references to democratizing structure. How this was to be achieved, however, was not immediately clear. The names of both the Bureau and Executive would also be changed.

It was in this discussion that tendencies moving in the direction of dissolution were most strongly felt. Proposals varied: one delegation called for dissolving and refounding the Federation; another offered a proposal to elect individuals to the Bureau and Executive Committee instead of organizations; still another, lamenting a supposed financial and political crisis, claimed there was no solution.

These suggestions were given gentle but firm rebuff and the original proposal of the Bureau to consider changing the names and function of the governing bodies was adopted with some amendments. It should be added that this discus-

sion was organized around a conceptual paper drafted by the Bureau. This document was extremely negative in tone. It was at times ahistorical in analysis and smacked of anti-communist and anti-Soviet influences.

In the discussion on the document, important political and ideological positions were needlessly ceded. For example, one paragraph dealt with the history of the Federation and blamed communists for a self-imposed isolation. The narrow composition of WFDY was thus presented as a desired and conscious thing, the result of a quest for ideological purity. Similarly, the document accused WFDY of blindly following the policies of the "East Bloc" and a host of other political sins.

The U.S. YCL delegation and others argued for a more balanced approach, citing positives as well as negatives, maintaining, for instance, that the history of the Federation had to take into account the Cold War, the withdrawal of liberal and liberal left forces, and subsequent attempts to isolate it. These proposals were agreed to and a more palatable and politically honest document was produced.

In the end, the conclusion of the conference was quite successful and was characterized by a high level of unity and a marked willingness to compromise in order to move the process forward. The Federation will continue functioning and enjoys a firm commitment from member organizations to maintain it. The meeting adjourned on a unified note thereby laying a sound basis for the coming Assembly.

#### **THE ISSUE AT STAKE**

The meeting of the Federation, of course, took place against the backdrop of developments in the Eastern European socialist countries. And, needless to say, these events exerted no small influence on the discussion. The youth organizations of the Eastern European countries played a big role in the life of WFDY and changes in outlook and orientation made themselves felt. Most of the Young Communist Leagues and socialist youth unions had undergone profound transformations in the recent past and all were quite involved in the upheavals. Thus, the obvious questions on everyone's lips were: "What happened? Why? What was the outlook for the future?"

Answers given to these questions were startling. Events look quite different there than they appear from this side of the ocean; issues

have a different hue; and the debate has a different tone. Many issues, which one thought were being hotly debated, are not much under discussion anymore. Similarly, the topics debated and political postures adopted by different forces were quite different than one had been led to believe.

The dust kicked up in the political storms of the past period are beginning to settle and certain clear patterns are beginning to emerge. It was clear, for example, that a certain differentiation process has taken place and that this process is largely over.

We are generally under the impression that the struggle and debate was a contest between conservatives and liberals, between orthodoxy and radicals, or between Stalinist and anti-Stalinist forces. Developments point, however, in another direction. Increasingly it is becoming evident that this process was not a debate between would-be reformers and old thinkers clinging to tradition, but a struggle between those who had left Marxist positions and who agitated for liquidation and dispersion, and those who remain, fighting for the political, organizational, and ideological integrity, and identity of the communist movement. At stake was the very integrity and existence of the Communist and Workers parties and their youth organizations; at stake was the very existence of socialism.

In the opinion of comrades from several countries, an aspect of what occurred both before, during, and after the events in Eastern Europe was the following:

Certain forces in several parties, standing on the platform of what they considered "new thinking",\* began to agitate for what they called "the renewal of the Parties." They launched an attack on the history of the movement, the concept of democratic centralism, the idea of existing socialism, the validity of Marxism-Leninism, and they sought to recast the platform of the parties in their own image. This process occurred in a several countries, including but not limited to Denmark, Finland, West Germany, and, of course, the Eastern European countries. In most cases these forces have already left the parties – some

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\* The intention here is not to call into question the positive results of new thinking in Soviet foreign policy, the benefit of which is self-evident, but rather a classless, one-sided, narrow interpretation of it, the logical outcome of which leads to the abandonment of Marxism.

as in the case of West Germany have gone off into the Greens and the Social Democrats, others have exited from political life.

### **A PATTERN OF LIQUIDATION**

A certain pattern is emerging: The first target was the youth organizations. The aim was, first, to ideologically confuse and disarm; second, to set them against and separate them from the Parties; third, to split the Parties themselves; and, finally, to dissolve. This was the case in the FRG with the Socialist Working Youth (SDAJ) and the German Communist Party, and, in Greece, with the Communist Youth of Greece (KNE) and Communist Party of Greece (KKE), and in Canada with the Young Communist League and the Communist Party of Canada.

In the socialist countries the pattern is even sharper. It is growing increasingly difficult to view these developments as "renewal and democratization." Manifestly, they are assuming forms of counter-revolution. Here too, the youth and students, and their organizations were in the first line of attack. In Hungary, the split and dissolution of the Party was preceded by the liquidation of the Communist Youth Union and then Party shop clubs.

In Czechoslovakia, the Socialist Youth Union (SSM) helped lead demonstrations against the Party. The November 17th rally, which began as a protest against police beating of students, was turned into a protest against the government. It was called by SSM who then allowed it to become a focal point of the opposition. They participated in the Round Table, at a certain point lost control of events, and then dissolved. In the GDR, the Free German Youth (FDJ), in the pages of their newspaper, led the campaign against Honecker, again lost control of events, and then suffered an almost complete collapse (they dropped from over 2 million members to 13,000).

In the Soviet Union, some forces are attempting to use the Komsomol as a battering ram against the Communist Party and successfully pushed it to call for a round table to discuss dismantling the Soviet system of government. At their recent Congress, Leninism was removed from the YCL constitution as part of the organization's self-definition. The Komsomol is now founded on Marxism, modern socialist thought and humanism.

A certain "monkey see, monkey do" process

was set in motion. In several countries, the YCLs or socialist youth unions were liquidated, and what are being called non-political youth organizations were formed in their place. These organizations are conceived of as apolitical in character and have no relation with the workingclass movement, the trade unions, or the communist parties. In Bulgaria, the Dimitroff Komsomol is now called Democratic Youth; in Czechoslovakia, SSM is now called the Youth Union; in Hungary, the Communist Youth Union is now called the Democratic Youth Union.

Nevertheless, the situation is beginning to settle here too and Communist forces are regrouping. In the GDR, FDJ, has maintained its socialist outlook, and, in a powerful example to the world, has decided to keep its name, and is fighting back. They initiated a national youth council in which all youth organizations sit and are struggling for a democratic and socialist alternative to absorption into a greater Germany. In Czechoslovakia, a new YCL was recently founded in association with the Communist Party; in Hungary the Socialist Workers Party has the intention to help refound the Communist Youth Union; and in Bulgaria, the Socialist Party has included within its program and constitution an intention to reestablish its youth organization. And finally, the Congress of Komsomol, while complicated and contradictory, resisted pressures to dissolve, and maintained its name and alliance with the Communist Party.

Similar processes are underway in many of the youth organizations in Western Europe. For example, in West Germany, SDAJ, having experienced a split, is now rebuilding and regrouping on a Marxist-Leninist basis. The forces which left have proved unable to find an independent organizational expression for their political tendency. In Greece, young communists loyal to the Communist Party have held a Congress and are rebuilding KNE. Those who departed, attacking the Party and its electoral policy from the left, are attempting to find an independent political expression. So far they remain unsuccessful. The situations in other countries remain ambiguous and largely unresolved.

After much consideration, it is extremely difficult to give a positive assessment of these developments or to see them as a healthy occurrence. This process seems hardly one of renewal. It rather has taken on aspects of a political sub-

terfuge, an ideological Trojan Horse thrust into the heart of the communist movement in an attempt to dismantle, dismember and disarm. Thus, on the basis of a campaign against conservatism and Stalinism, fierce political, ideological, and psychological warfare was directed against the parties and their youth organizations.

How then is one to assess and explain these dramatic developments? Prudence dictates that it be done very carefully – with deliberation and attention to detail. Each case must be weighed and examined on its own merits, with an eye toward seeking out and identifying what was decisive in precipitating every development. The impulse and self-movement must be found in each particular set of circumstances, in each country. All vary in a number of important details. Only in such a context can they be seen in their interrelation, only then can comparisons be made and general conclusions drawn.

#### **FOR FURTHER THOUGHT**

An exhaustive analysis and distillation of this experience is beyond the scope of this essay. For the reasons given above, and because most parties and organizations concerned have yet to draw definitive conclusions, one can only suggest tentative estimates and point to areas that are in need of further elaboration.

With this in mind, the following is suggested for further thought:

The workingclass movement and the Communist Parties have always attached special significance to what is called the “youth question.” Most communist and workers parties have established youth and student organizations and through them carry out work among the young generation. The youth organizations were always viewed as a “reserve” of the parties, an important auxiliary through and by means of which young people would be molded in a socialist outlook and the parties ranks replenished. YCLs were always organizationally independent, but accepted ideological and political guidance from the party.

Youth organizations have been conceived of as broad and diverse and, therefore, in theory at least, would be larger than the parties themselves. In practice however, this has obtained only in socialist countries where “generational” (i.e., encompassing almost an entire generation) organizations were created. Communist youth organizations in the capitalist countries, on the oth-

er hand, have always been substantially smaller than the parties themselves.

The emergence of similar problems in youth organizations in both capitalist and socialist countries point to serious theoretical and practical deficiencies in this area. It is beyond dispute, for example, that in the midst of the political and ideological storms of the past period, the youth organizations became detached from their anchor in the parties and became an unwitting instrument in the struggle to sink the Parties themselves. The repetition of a similar pattern in several countries is suggestive of a number of things.

While it is true that special importance was attributed to the youth question, it is also true that sections of the Communist movement have always remained rather ambivalent. Many have argued, for example, that while Communist Parties are an indispensable requirement, a necessary condition for advance along the road of workingclass power and the victory of socialism, no such rule is applicable to youth organizations. Their existence, then, becomes a luxury, the plausibility of which changes according to time, place, circumstance, and needs. This view, laced with pragmatism, has had considerable influence in the USA, and is not without adherents elsewhere.

On the other hand, some parties devote considerable resources to the youth movement, seeing it as one of the principal means by which they would build their influence in the working class and guarantee the future of the parties themselves. Noteworthy in this regard is the experience of the Communist Parties of Greece and France. The CPG, since the Polytechnic student uprising in the early 1970s (which led to the overthrow of fascism), devoted enormous resources to KNE and gave decisive political and material support to the development of a movement around their magazine *Odigitis* and its Festival (which draws 1 million participants a year).

The French party, as recently as 1988, in a decision of its Central Committee, called on the entire party to turn to the young generation, and took a number of political and administrative measures to guarantee this. As a result, the Party and MCJF, recruited 18,000 new members at last fall's *Festival L' Humanite*.

That two significant organizations, SDAJ and KNE, became victims of what appears to be a larger design, is cause for great concern. Significantly, ideological questions played no

small role in their ungluing. As alluded to above, the prior leadership of SDAJ, took their ideological cues from the Greens and others of dubious philosophical background. In Greece, a misplaced, misguided, and rather bizarre theory – postulating “the exhaustion of the impulse of the October revolution” – led KNE to the outer limits of reality into an ideological no mans land where they stand alone, pure and separate, from the Party, the working class, and the main developments in the Greek left as expressed in the Coalition of the Left and Progress.

Wherein lies the reason for these developments? Could it be that the Parties paid too little attention to adequate theoretical and ideological work? Could it be that they failed in precisely what Lenin described as their chief task among the youth, that of “molding a socialist outlook?” Is it conceivable that the leadership of these organizations, after having achieved stunning successes, became too confident and self-assured, and, displaying the typical impatience and arrogance of youth, began to slowly but surely distance themselves from the parties? And is it not possible that these organizations, strong vigorous, full of youthful enthusiasm like Achilles of Grecian lore, were not also afflicted with the same curse, the same vulnerable heel? And is it not within the realm of probability that our political and ideological adversaries did not fail to notice these weaknesses and seized upon them with all the means at their disposal?

#### **IN THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES**

The sources of difficulty confronting youth organizations in the socialist countries are, of course, very different. Here attention has to be paid not only to theoretical and ideological work, but also to the concept, structure, and role played by these organizations themselves. In addition, an adequate treatment of these complex issues must also examine educational policy, the ability of political structures to represent and satisfy youth concerns, and the economic and social opportunities available to young people.

Clearly, several important issues are at stake including: the proper balance and relationship between the Parties and the youth organizations – including the problems of party guidance and organizational independence; the relationship between type of organization and the content of policy; and, finally, tensions between organiza-

tional form, ideology, and strategic aspects of united front policy in the youth and student movement.

Certainly it was the case that youth policy in these countries did not develop in a vacuum, but was formed in the crucible of their attempts to build a new society on the ashes of the second World War. Construction and rebuilding in the face of the Cold War and imperialist encirclement required political policy and organizational forms capable of mobilizing an entire society. Thus, the Communist Parties formulated the concept of generational youth organizations – broad, diverse fronts of young people, incorporating almost all who were coming of age in each country. These organizations were initially conceived of as broad democratic formations with left leadership.

At a certain juncture these generational organizations proved untenable. While perhaps necessary during initial stages in the construction of socialism, it became increasingly evident, as these societies developed and became more complex, that a single organizational form could not possibly represent and satisfy the needs of an entire generation. As socialism expands, deepens, and develops, and the population attains greater culture and education, the need for democratic expression expands correspondingly. Diversity of interest, orientation, political persuasion, religious outlook, all required specific organizational expression. The socialist and communist youth organizations proved incapable of achieving this.

Moreover, it appears that what began as a mobilizing factor, in fact, turned into its opposite and became an obstacle to further development. Rather than serving to motivate and encourage participation, these organizations became an object of rebellion among certain sections of the young generation .

In addition, developments pose a larger problem. What began as a quest for democratic organizational expression of young people engaged in purposeful civic and patriotic endeavors, as these societies developed, became something quite different. As socialist construction deepened, the coalition aspects of these organizations narrowed and were rendered ostensibly superfluous. Youth organizations took on an increasingly ideological character and became in fact, if not in name, communist in content and character. Because possibilities for forming other organizations were limited, young people of different ideological persua-

sions had nowhere else to go. Add to this bureaucracy and formalism, and the development of an increasingly complicated political situation became almost inevitable.

Clearly, confusion reigned regarding youth policy. Certainly, socialism and the goal of "molding the socialist outlook" of young people required and continues to require a special and necessary role for communist forms of organization among the youth. The fact that all of the parties have taken decisions to refound YCLs in the countries of Eastern Europe is suggestive. However, this cannot and should not preclude the existence of other democratic forms of organizations in the youth movement. To unite these trends in a broad, loose coalition is one thing, to include them in a single formation with an ideological mission is something else altogether.

Yet another subject worthy of continuing thought is the relation between the Party and the youth organizations with regard to size, party guidance and organizational independence. Under conditions of socialism, the possibility of YCLs being larger than the parties is enhanced considerably. That this is not an artificial creation grafted on the youth body politic, but a healthy and natural outgrowth of a strong socialist society is proven by the Soviet Union where the Komsomol enjoys a membership of 30 million as compared to 20 million in the CPSU (Komsomol lost 10 million members in the last period, during a "settling" in which many new youth organizations were formed).

Notwithstanding this natural occurrence, it appears that distortions in the concept of generational organizations, coupled with excessive formalism, led to artificial extensions of membership. Opportunism (both in its Marxist and general sense), and careerism took on exaggerated forms. This, coupled with political and ideological brittleness, led to an extreme decay of confidence. Similarly, it appears that party guidance was often replaced by distinctly administrative methods of work. Thus, the process of liquidation of the YCLs was accompanied by calls for the independence of the newly formed "non-political" youth organizations.

If unacceptably deadening and dreary amongst adults, dogmatism and formalism is deadly and incurably destructive among young people. The art of party ideological and political guidance of the YCLs, free of dogmatism but full

of creativity, flexibility and patience, therefore, is raised as one of the most challenging issues raised by recent developments. Inattention and inadequacy of political attitude to the young generation is fraught with dangers for the socialist movement.

One is led to conclude the permanent need for communist forms in name, content, and character. Their existence should in no way preclude or substitute for more diverse forms, the necessity of which is equally proven. Any attempt to do so can result in tragic consequences. Yet, neither can broader organizations substitute for communist forms, without which the task of character building, molding a socialist outlook, and developing a disciplined fighting spirit become impossible. Life demands a proper balance between each and a principled, democratic and workingclass approach to all. Political life has proven that neither is mutually exclusive but each must become a mutually reinforcing aspect of a successful communist approach to the youth question.

#### **LESSONS LEARNED**

A correct approach to the youth and student movement does not come naturally, but only emerges as the product of a deepened understanding of the role of workingclass forms of organization in general. It is not immediately evident that youth organizations are needed in the workingclass movement, and their role, character, and function, as is abundantly clear, are in dire need of greater refinement.

Nevertheless, enough information is available to draw the following estimates: Workingclass forms of organization acquire a permanent character so long as the class enemy exists and seeks to perpetuate its rule. There is ample evidence that this is true not only for the party but in the youth movement as well. Communist forms of organization, far from diminishing in current conditions, have escalated dramatically in importance. Thus, it is apparent that in this post-Cold war, yet largely still imperialist world, these laws of organization and dissolution have acquired a universal character.

While the events in the eastern European socialist countries cannot be solely reduced to the intrigues of imperialism, and, without doubt, had internal sources as well, we would be remiss, if not irresponsible, to neglect to note that the communist youth organizations and party clubs in

factories, universities, and other sectors of society came under direct fire – and not by accident. Their liquidation was seen as a necessary condition for counter-revolution and revolt. The reason is self evident: Who has won the working people and the youth, and, particularly in the midst of upheavals, the workingclass youth, has won the war.

That what was once called revisionism and opportunism arose as a definite trend in today's developments, is similarly no accident and should evoke no surprise. Almost half a century ago, during the Browder period, the script for this modern day drama was written. Then too, the dissolution of the Communist Party was preceded by that of the YCL, followed in turn, by party shop clubs. One is well-reminded of Marx's classic caution,

Hegel remarks that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. (*The 18th Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte.*)

One should not conclude, however, that such crises are unavoidable. Primitive fatalism has no place here. The experience of the Communist youth movement in a number of countries, including our own, is suggestive in this regard.

#### **THE YCL USA**

In many respects, the U.S. Young Communist League's experience stands in sharp contrast to the experiences described above. Rather than collapsing and suffering a loss in membership and influence, the YCL is experiencing a steady growth in size and influence. Instead of retreating in ideological and political disarray, the League is sustaining a sure and dogged advance.

This modest but steady growth is exemplified by an increase in membership of approximately one third in the past year. The YCL conducted a successful recruitment campaign during the Winston Enrollment Drive and has continued to enroll fresh recruits. Central to this success has been rigorous and aggressive educational work, designed to consolidate and deepen the theoretical and ideological understanding of our membership. An important gauge of the substantial increase in YCL influence is its ability to hold public positions in a number of national and regional youth and student organizations, and its

initiating a series of student strikes and sit-ins during the past period.

The importance of this lesson should not be lost on the Communist movement and in the left generally. The League's experience is not the result of a peculiar brand of American youth exceptionalism. On the contrary, the League's ability to tap into the broad but deepening left sentiment is indicative of what portends for the Party. The thought patterns of the young generation reflect, albeit more sharply and more dramatically, what exists in the minds of their parents.

Thus, the most important issue before the Party and the left at this juncture is: Will they have the political will and the theoretical clarity to take advantage of the opportunity that the moment is presenting, and draw, in time, the appropriate lessons? That a crisis emerged in the world movement is indisputable. But it is equally indisputable that an important turning point in overcoming the crisis has been reached. At this moment, the fight for Marxism, for the Communist Party and the YCL emerges as the most important of all questions facing the workingclass movement. In this regard, in the midst of a great crisis, the founder of the modern Communist movement wrote:

It is precisely because Marxism is not a lifeless dogma, not a completed, ready-made, immutable doctrine, but a living guide to action, that it was bound to reflect the astonishingly abrupt change in the conditions of social life. That change was reflected in the profound disintegration and disunity, in every manner of vacillation, in short in a very serious internal crisis in Marxism....

Nothing is more important than to rally all Marxists who have realized the profundity of the crisis and the necessity of combatting it, for defense of the theoretical basis of Marxism and its fundamental propositions, that are being distorted from diametrically opposite sides...Therefore to understand the reasons for the inevitability of this disintegration at this present time and to close their ranks for consistent struggle against this disintegration is, in the most direct and precise meaning of the term, the task of the day for Marxists. (V.I. Lenin, "Introduction" to *Marx-Engels-Marxism*)

In the present moment much depends on whether we heed this advice and make use of our own valuable and infinitely rich experience. □

# Potentials and Tasks in the Trade Union Movement

GEORGE MEYERS AND SAM WEBB

**T**here has been little let up in the intensity of the class struggle since the 1988 election. The Bush administration, notwithstanding some differences in style and tactics with its predecessor, pursues a policy course which is in essence anti-labor, anti-people, and racist. Working hand in glove with big corporations, Bush's domestic policies aim to further reduce living standards, eliminate jobs, and reverse gains won in the struggle against racism and discrimination.

Like Reagan, Bush also prefers a "union free environment." This shared attitude towards the trade unions prompted the associate editor of the *Arkansas Gazette* to observe, "Reagan was anti-union out of ignorance, mostly. Bush was born to the part."

In the early '80s, the White House and corporate executives exploited the economic crisis to shift wealth on an unparalleled scale from the hands of the exploited and oppressed to the bank accounts of the corporations and the super-rich.

In the '90s, Bush's support of capital gains tax relief and veto of the minimum wage and parental leave bills show that he will follow similar tactics to those of his predecessor, especially with the economy heading downward, following a very uneven and fragile recovery.

The extent of the economic downturn could easily be deepened and lengthened because of a number of destabilizing factors. Among the most significant are the tremendous accumulation of debt, the long term decline in real wages, and the growing competitive rivalry among capitalist countries. Already, layoffs and plant closings are climbing in the midwest, especially in the defense, auto, and other durable industries, as cyclical and longer range economic developments interact to slow down the economy. Some midwestern states, according to official estimates, are in the midst of a recession. And bankruptcies of financial institutions and businesses continue.

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This article is based on a report to the National Board of the Communist Party USA. George Meyers is chairman and Sam Webb is secretary of the Party's Labor Commission.

Moreover, many economists predict that the service sector, which absorbed a significant number of displaced workers from the manufacturing sector, will grow at a much slower pace in the '90s. Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Lester Thurow, for instance, claims that some of the service industries, like financial services and health care, are reaching their employment growth limits.

Yet the Bush administration has made it clear that there will be no peace dividend for the people's needs. The administration's priorities are new weapons systems and reducing the budget deficit.

But this policy is unacceptable to the American people. As contradictory as developments are in the world, it is clear that the country is haltingly entering a new era requiring new relationships on an international level and new priorities at home. No longer is the rationale for spending hundreds of billions of dollars for deadly weapons plausible. Instead, evolving conditions in the world arena present the opportunity to redirect monies from the military budget to a peace budget crafted to solve the serious economic, social, and environmental problems at home and assist in the solution of serious global problems.

This will take mass action and mobilization. It will take organization and unity. It will take a labor-led all people's front to curb the war drive of the arms manufacturers and the military industrial complex. Neither moralistic appeals nor plain common sense will persuade them to convert to peacetime production.

## IMPORTANT STRIKES

The victory of the Pittston miners in the late winter of this year continues the uneven, yet upward, trajectory of the labor movement.

Since the settlement between the Pittston Company and the United Mine Workers(UMWA), 9,000 Greyhound workers have hit the bricks. They rejected Greyhound President Fred Currey's demands for subcontracting current routes and for new wage concessions. They also refused to



be intimidated by scabs.

Now into the sixth month of the strike, Greyhound is suffering big financial losses and is operating far below full capacity. In June, Greyhound filed for bankruptcy. As in many other strikes these days, the union is fighting for its life as well as against wage cuts and demands for other concessions.

Increasingly, strike support solidarity is the dividing line separating victory from defeat. As a consequence, labor should do everything it can to extend support to Greyhound workers and to spread the boycott of Greyhound bus lines.

In New York, for example, there have been some major labor actions, but they are neither frequent enough nor big enough. The same could be said about the consumer boycott. The clergy and community organizations must be enlisted to promote the boycott more actively.

After more than a year, Eastern workers remain on strike. The removal of Lorenzo and appointment of a new trustee opens up a window of opportunity for the Eastern workers. But it is no reason for any letup in solidarity support. In fact, labor has to push for stepped-up demonstrations and picket lines because of the new situation. In the longer term, industry-wide bargaining, grassroots mobilization, and independent political action are vital requirements for arresting the corporate offensive in the airlines industry.

In nearly every city, also, there are local strikes. In Chicago, for example, there are three major strikes now in progress.

#### **BILLS TO BACK**

Without diminishing direct solidarity support for striking workers, left and progressive forces in labor should give priority attention to a new congressional bill which would prohibit scabs from becoming permanent replacements in a strike dispute. Introduced by Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH) in the Senate and William Clay (D-MO) in the House, the Workplace Fairness Bill (S 211-HR 3936), notwithstanding some limitations, represents a big step forward for organized workers and, we would add, unorganized workers as well.

According to the AFL-CIO, nearly one third of newly organized bargaining units are unable to win a first contract, usually because of employer threat or actual use of scabs as permanent replacements. This is the case with the Circuit Wise

strike in North Haven, Conn. These workers, who assemble circuit boards for the Ford Motor company, have been on strike for nearly a year, and deserve the full support of the United Automobile Workers and the entire labor movement.

From reading the labor press around the country, it appears that this bill has become a legislative priority for significant sections of labor and the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO. It would seem natural for the solidarity committees, which sprang up in the '80s, to give the Metzenbaum-Clay bill special attention.

Some immediate steps to be undertaken might include: passage of resolutions in every local union and central labor council endorsing the call of International Woodworkers of America for a national job action in support of the bill; articles on the bill in the labor press; a labor lobby of Congress; distribution of petitions or postcards in every workplace and on picket lines; meetings with community organizations; making the bill a prominent part of Labor Day actions; soliciting a commitment of support from every candidate running for office; and, not least, enlisting the backing of the unemployed.

The strike experience of the '80s makes this last step imperative. Despite government statistics, substantial numbers of workers are unemployed and underemployed in the country. Many are living in poverty, and desperately seeking work. Not only does the existence of this pool of unemployed workers weaken the bargaining posture of the unionized sector, but a few of these workers, out of desperation, become strikebreaking fodder in the hands of big business.

Thus, initiatives by organized labor to organize the unemployed are badly needed. They would complement the current legislative struggle for the passage of the anti-scab bill.

The public response to the anti-scab bill, we believe, will be extremely supportive. The bill can tap the increasing public support of labor revealed in public opinion polls. Many people will correctly see the bill as a human rights issue.

#### **THE LABOR RAINBOW**

Broad coalitions also are coming together on issues like health care, economic conversion, the peace dividend, civil rights, and independent political action. Some are citywide, while others are statewide and national in scope. Most are loosely

organized formations. One example is the Labor Rainbow. In May, prominent national and local labor leaders gathered in Atlanta under the auspices of the Reverend Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition. Participants included Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU) President Jack Sheinkman, UMWA President Richard Trumka and 1199 President Dennis Rivera.

The joint meeting was very noteworthy:

- First, it continued the growing and maturing relations between labor and Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition. What flowered beautifully in the 1988 election campaign has continued to blossom into a powerful force for progress, with each influencing the other in a positive way.

- Second, the Atlanta gathering revealed broad areas for joint activities and mass action. Inspired by an organizing blitz across the South by Jackson and Sheinkman, the gathering singled out for special attention a major effort to organize workers and register new voters in the South. A march through rural Georgia was suggested as a kickoff for the organizing campaign.

The importance of this decision to the working class and broad democratic movement cannot be underscored enough. It's no secret that the South, despite some dramatic changes, remains an important, perhaps decisive, base for political reaction and racism. On the other hand, a coordinated campaign to unionize the South would affect nearly every front of struggle in the region and nationally.

- Third, the Atlanta meeting extended and deepened the alliance between labor and the African-American community. Indeed, the meeting was perhaps its most advanced expression to date.

- Finally, the meeting offers fresh evidence of the essential soundness of our assessments with respect to the new trends in the labor movement and the relations between labor and the African-American people.

As for followup, labor activists and Rainbow supporters should discuss possibilities for joint action at the local level on a broad range of issues not limited to, but certainly including, the organizing initiative in the South. It goes without saying that the extension and consolidation of this coalition will exercise a substantial influence on the direction of politics in the '90s.

Calls in labor circles for a national march are

becoming more frequent too. The most recent comes from Jesse Jackson, speaking to 20,000 health care workers at a rally in Albany, New York. Earlier in June, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) convention issued a similar appeal at its national convention.

Last spring, a delegate to the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO convention introduced a motion calling for a national action in Washington, DC. It was greeted with enthusiastic applause and welcomed by the president of the state federation, though not formally endorsed. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees President Gerald McEntee also proposed a national march on Washington in order to compel congressional action on national health care legislation. These calls create new openings for the left and progressives in labor to popularize and win support for a march.

Organizing the unorganized is also on labor's action agenda. Many unions and the Industrial Union Department are now devoting far more resources to this task. The United Electrical Workers, for example, has a very innovative campaign under way in Erie, Pa. The UAW organized a big plant in the South last year. Not surprisingly, the media barely carried a word about it. Quite a contrast to its treatment of the union's defeat at the Nissan plant in Tennessee.

The level of organizing activity, of course, is not enough to match the ongoing relative decline in union membership (the AFL-CIO reports that 87,000 workers were organized into unions in 1989). At the same time, it signifies a new level of concern and activity by organized labor. Left and center forces in the labor movement should be an integral part of this effort, as they were in the '30s, and help to extend it.

Another front of struggle for the labor movement is in the legislative-political action arena. As labor's struggles, and as new political forces flow into the political arena, its significance as a decisive field of struggle grows.

In addition to the civil rights and anti-scab bills, the continuation of sanctions against apartheid South Africa and for child care legislation are sure to be on the Congressional calendar. Still in the committee stage are a number of bills on economic conversion. The best is the Economic Conversion and Revitalization Act (HR 101), introduced by Rep. Ted Weiss (D-NY). And, finally, the nomination of David Souter for the Supreme

Court promises to be a key battle in the Senate this fall.

And, of course, the 1990 elections are upon us. The AFL-CIO has targeted 500 state legislative seats nationwide. These seats are considered pivotal to assuring fair redistricting and reapportionment. The labor movement has also selected several priority races for the U.S. House and Senate. Of special significance is the Senate race in North Carolina where Harvey Gantt, an African American, is running against ultra-right Republican incumbent Jesse Helms. Three other key Senate races, according to the AFL-CIO, are in Michigan, Indiana, and Iowa.

As before, labor's involvement is indispensable. Through its own political action forms, labor can activate its members; help effect joint electoral action with the African-American people and its other allies; project issues into the campaign; and, if it is not too late, run labor candidates for local office.

Perhaps progressive and left forces in labor might also consider organizing meetings or conferences in the fall on political action in the '90s. Labor legislators, like Charles Hayes or Jackie Stump, could be invited to keynote.

#### **COMMUNISTS' ROLE**

The labor movement is in a period of upsurge and activity. It's not uniform, nor is everything positive, but it is way ahead of where it was at the beginning of the last decade and it's moving in a left direction.

Mass sentiments are very fluid. The rank and file is looking for militant leadership. The concern for unity is strongly felt. And, new forms of struggle and organization are emerging. The strike solidarity committees, born amidst the life-and-death strikes of the Reagan years and nurtured by the left in labor, are an example of the latter.

On some issues, trade unionists take left positions. On other issues, their position is not as advanced. On still other issues, their thinking has not fully crystallized and it changes under the impact of objective developments and/or grassroots initiatives. Like the civil rights movement of the 60s, the labor upsurge takes place on different levels, expresses itself through many forms, and focuses on a wide range of issues.

In this situation, our role in the labor movement is to stimulate, activate, energize, and con-

solidate the broad currents in labor, isolate the most brazen class collaborationists, and, all the while, raise the movement to a higher level. This has always been the policy of our Party.

Of course, our emphasis in this broad labor front is on grassroots action, initiative, and forms of organization. This stems from the fact that rank and file action is a key strand in moving labor at other levels and in carving out new inroads into monopoly power.

Our emphasis on the grassroots, however, is not in contradiction to initiatives at other levels of the trade union structure. The two complement each other.

For instance, rank and file support for a national march on Washington was instrumental in the AFL-CIO's decision to call for Solidarity Day in 1981. And, in turn, the Federation's call for a march in Washington helped to broaden the action and guarantee its success.

As already mentioned, there is growing talk of another labor action in Washington. But it won't come out of thin air anymore than the first Solidarity Day did. It will take pressure from below, from the rank and file, from local unions and central labor bodies.

The truth is that a national march would shake up the Bush administration and the Congress, change the political atmosphere in the country, and strengthen the people's hand in the 1992 elections. It would bring together and coordinate many separate struggles. While these struggles are all very good, they are unable by themselves to become a force capable of reversing the policies of the Bush administration and the transnational corporations.

Consider the struggle for national health care legislation. The movement is very broad and mass sentiment is overwhelmingly for it, but unless the movement coalesces on a national level and then fights to move the country as a whole, it will be extremely difficult to pass such advanced health care legislation in the Congress.

As a result, seeing no prospects for the passage of health care legislation at the national level, individual unions will begin to go off in different directions, looking for compromise solutions and alternatives at the state level.

We should speak as soon as possible to prominent trade union leaders and the leaders of mass organizations urging them to support a march; we should urge the passage of resolutions

in every local union and central labor body; and we should use every opportunity to popularize the call for a national march.

Deepening the class understanding of workers is another dimension of our work in labor's struggles. Mass thought patterns are shifting in a left direction, but they will not continue to move in that direction without a struggle for higher levels of class consciousness. Objective processes alone will not do it. Indeed, there are enormous and relentless ideological pressures which move in the other direction. They not only come from monopoly and the media which it controls, but also from some within the working class movement.

Since the early '80s, new insidious forms of class partnership, like *team concept*, have been introduced in many of the mass production industries with the agreement of the top union leadership. Without going into the many tactical questions surrounding the building of a movement in the workplace to combat these schemes, one thing is apparent: convincing propaganda is necessary. To be effective, it has to offer an alternative to class partnership policies, as well as expose its roots and consequences.

Workers, we're sure, would appreciate a thoughtful reply to those who say that competitive pressures from overseas companies compel the workers to forego any substantial improvements in their wages and conditions. Such a reply would give them ammunition with which to fight class collaborationist ideas and schemes.

In this regard, an important instrument is the *People's Daily World*. We also have to make a new push on leaflets, shop papers, and left publications.

Hearing this, some say, 'Yes, propaganda and agitation are necessary, but let's not act as if we have all the answers for the complex problems facing the U.S. working class.' We agree with that, but we would add that we never said that we had a lock on the truth, that wisdom begins and ends with us.

At the same time, no one should conclude that we have no answers, no solutions to the problems confronting the working class in its struggles against monopoly power. We don't have to act like the new kid on the block.

We are a working class and workingclass led revolutionary party which has over 70 years' experience and achievements in the class struggle.

While we don't want to flaunt this wonderful asset, we should not underestimate its value either. We should take pride in it and use this storehouse of experience for today's struggles.

### **CLASS UNITY**

The struggle for class unity is at the center of our leadership role in the struggles of our working class and people. If there is one lesson which millions have learned in some measure or another in the decades of the '80s, it is that no victory can be won, let alone secured, without class and all people's unity.

In New York, for example, all people's unity compelled the powerful bargaining council of hospital administrators to reach an agreement with 45,000 hospital workers. Similarly, the election of David Dinkins shortly thereafter received a major impetus from a broad coalition of forces. At the center of both coalitions was the labor-African American alliance.

In other cities and on other picket lines, similar coalitions have won important victories against reaction and racism.

What is noteworthy is that these unity trends take shape despite an observable increase in racism. The intensification of racism emanates from capitalism's inner drive for maximum corporate profits and adds billions of dollars to the profits of the giant corporations. It occurs in close connection with the radical shift in the policies of the federal government and the restructuring of the U.S. economy and workforce. It is an integral feature of an overall monopoly assault against the working class and people. And it impacts particularly hard on the African American and other racially oppressed people. This is readily seen in the auto industry where the status of Black auto workers has deteriorated more rapidly than that of other auto workers. For example, Detroit, which is a majority African American city, can claim only three major auto plants, a dramatic change from only 10 years ago when about a dozen large auto facilities were operating in the city. The model lines in some shops were phased out completely and production in others was shifted to different locations.

Some of these new plants are located in suburbs, often beyond commuting distance for urban workers. The Mazda plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, for example, is approximately 35 miles from Detroit.

Other plants are found in rural areas, including in the South. The new General Motors Saturn plant is in Springhill, Tenn. Some of the newly built Japanese transplants are also located in rural areas. In fact, it seems that the Japanese auto companies have a southern strategy vis-a-vis their investment and plant location decisions.

Not only are these plants largely inaccessible to African-American and other workers in the traditional auto centers, but each auto company also carefully screens its new employees to weed out union minded workers of all nationalities and races.

Supplier plants, following the lead of the Big Three, are also locating in suburban and rural areas.

As bad as the crisis has been for Black auto workers, it would have been worse, but for the UAW's fight for transfer rights for displaced auto workers living in older auto centers to plants in nearby suburbs. The next generation of Black workers, however, wrongly referred to as a "Black underclass", will not have that advantage.

Nor will they have the advantage of seeking first-time employment in an industry with an abundance of semi-skilled jobs. Instead, longer range developments in the industry – globalization of production, new technology, outsourcing and labor intensification, and sharpening competitive rivalries – have severed to some degree the link between production and job levels. In other words, a pick-up of activity in the auto industry does not automatically translate into more jobs.

Coincident with the rapid and steep decline in the status of Black auto workers, the conditions of other auto workers have also worsened though not to the same degree.

This presents a major challenge to the labor movement. Needed is a program of action that will address both the special problems of Black auto workers and the overall problems of workers in the industry

Some elements of such a program are: the elimination of overtime and shortening of the work week with no cut in pay; economic conversion to a peacetime economy; massive aid to the cities; a nationally coordinated organizing drive; the outlawing of racist propaganda and violence; and, of course, affirmative action laws and goals in the industry and every area of life.

History shows that such struggles are winnable. What it does not answer is whether

such victories can be won today. In our opinion, they can. While we do not underestimate the obstacles to unity in the present period, we can say with some confidence that the new level of unity, forged in the struggles of the '80s, can serve as a springboard for still greater unity and victories in the '90s.

Such a view implicitly takes exception to estimates that suggest that white workers in their majority are reactionary, backward, and racist. These estimates do not correspond to the reality manifested on the picket lines, in plant closing struggles, and at the ballot box.

Nor do they correspond to the tremendous welcome accorded to African National Congress Deputy Chairman Nelson Mandela by the labor movement. In concert with African American leaders, labor helped to finance, organize, and fill the arenas where Mandela spoke. Such a welcome by U.S. workers and their leaders would have been unlikely a decade ago! It is reflective of the shift in thinking which has occurred among all sections of the working class, including among white workers.

White workers are not one homogeneous mass. Some are part of the right current in labor. Others are part of the center current. And still others are a part of the left which is multi-racial and multi-national. If this is not the case, then how do we account for the miners and labor leaders like former Machinists' President William Wimpisinger, Miners' President Richard Trumka, and others. Are they exceptions to the rule or part of a broad multi-racial, multi-national, male-female current in labor which is moving in a left direction.

We would say the latter. Further, we are of the opinion that such an estimate opens up vistas for bold initiatives to fight for equality and class unity.

#### **A CHICAGO MEETING**

Forty Communist trade unionists from many unions and several midwest states attended a recent meeting of the Party's Labor Commission, in Chicago. Some were elected union leaders and others were rank and file activists. They reflected the multi-racial and multi-national, male and female makeup of the U.S. working class. They came from manufacturing and service industries.

The discussion was thoughtful, concrete, and constructive. Experiences were exchanged and

lessons were drawn. They provided a sense of direction for the period ahead. The spirit was upbeat and confident.

The meeting's deliberations allow us to draw some tentative conclusions with respect to work in the labor movement. One is that Party trade unionists in the midwest are active participants in labor's struggles. It was evident from the discussion that they energetically try to utilize the new openings in the labor movement to unify, extend, deepen, and impart a more organized character to the class struggle. Nearly everyone who spoke mentioned initiatives which they had taken in their local unions or other labor formations. Some of the best experiences were related to the strike solidarity movement.

Another conclusion which we can draw is that Party activists in the labor movement are fully involved in existing trade union struggles and formations, like Jobs with Justice, CBTU, Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), New Directions, Central Labor Councils, etc. At the same time, Communist trade unionists are also helping to establish and consolidate new forms

In Chicago, for instance, trade union comrades helped to initiate a strike solidarity committee which is left-led and able to move other sections of the labor movement. Its role in the Pittston strike was outstanding. Of equal importance, after the conclusion of the strike, the committee decided to continue to function as a center which can respond to strike situations, fight for labor's right and mobilize the labor movement and its allies.

Still another conclusion from our deliberations is that we play an initiating and constructive role in the fight for equality and against racism. In every state represented, comrades spoke of initiatives which they had taken in support of the Civil Rights Act of 1990. One of the earliest resolutions passed was in a midwest steel mill. A recent one was at a state convention of the American Federation of Teachers. And there have been others adopted, as well, through initiatives of Communist trade unionists.

Party trade union activists in auto and steel have also played an important role in fighting for greater Black representation in the unions' leadership structure, and for affirmative action.

Comrades active in local chapters of CBTU and in the building trades have been instrumental in affirmative action struggles in three major

midwest cities, too. Of course, none of the participants was satisfied with our present level of work in the fight for equality and against racism. Appreciating the strategic role of Black-white unity and aware of the new forms of racism, the general consensus was that the struggle for equality and against racism has to be upgraded and more effectively integrated into our work.

A final conclusion which we can draw from our discussion in Chicago is that we influence to one degree or another the character of many of labor's struggles, particularly at the grassroots and at the local level. Numerous examples were mentioned of our role in helping to draw new forces and give continuity to struggles.

Moreover, our influence goes beyond helping to solve immediate tactical matters. We also help to deepen class consciousness and we press for more fundamental solutions. In this connection, it was mentioned at the meeting that an auto program authored by the auto commission of the CPUSA, was distributed at the UAW Collective Bargaining Convention.

While noting these successes, it was also apparent to nearly everyone at the regional meeting that there is still plenty of room for improvement in our work.

● First: We need to coordinate our work better. One could argue that that is always the case. And it is. Today, however, it has special import: thought patterns are fluid, the new currents are broad, the issues and concerns are varied, the forms of struggle are diverse, and the problems facing the working class are new and complex.

Hence, how to focus on issues and organizational formations where we can make our maximum contribution and which move the whole struggle forward is a big challenge. While we have not solved the problem fully, the new regional labor committees and other forms of communication with Communist trade unionists in the workplace help us a great deal.

● Second: Our industrial concentration work is another area of our work which calls for improvement. To do that, we need to examine some of the following questions: What are the key concentration shops and communities? Do we have a plan of work for each of these shops which includes party and press building goals? Is there adequate cadre assigned to fulfilling the concentration tasks? How do other comrades and clubs participate in the concentration work? Does the

leadership periodically review the work? How can the national center and labor commission be more helpful? What is the relationship between industrial concentration and the struggle for equality and against racism? between industrial concentration and the fight for class and all-people's unity? between industrial concentration and the changing structure of the working class?

The aim of such an examination should be to upgrade and adjust our industrial concentration work to new and changing conditions. From our point of view, the policy of industrial concentration, though needing updating, retains its general validity. Obviously, a discussion will evoke a range of opinions, but hasty conclusions should be avoided, especially those which rest on a cursory analysis or frustration stemming from the slowness in recruiting mass production workers.

Another area in which there is room for improvement relates to the consolidation of left and left center forms of organization. Generally speaking, our main, though not exclusive, emphasis on consolidating the left around issues and through existing as well as new forms at the grassroots, is sound.

With regard to existing forms of organization, we should, for example, examine concretely how forward-looking trade unionists can coordinate their work in labor formations like central labor councils, CBTU, CLUW, Jobs with Justice, the Labor Rainbow, etc. While these are not left labor organizations, it is a fact that they play a progressive role in the labor movement.

As for new forms of organization, they have to be adapted to the current situation in the labor movement if they are to have any staying power. The mechanical duplication of rank and file forms, for example, which sprang up in the '60s and '70s is not necessarily appropriate for today. The situation has to be studied concretely.

No one should understand this to mean that we are de-emphasizing the role of the rank and file or rank-and-file formations. Such a conclusion

would be erroneous. It would confuse form with content. The active involvement of the union membership in all phases of the workers' struggle is a condition for any basic challenge to monopoly power and profits. But, forms of organization and tactics generally have to adjust to changing conditions at the rank-and-file and other levels of the trade union movement.

In recent months there have been numerous discussions among leading trade unionists concerning the need for a left formation in the labor movement which would bring together the broad left sentiment on a national level. While there is general agreement that there is such a need, the exact shape and program of action of such a formation requires further discussion. In the meantime, we are of the opinion that city and state wide left labor structures are not only feasible, but constitute a firm underpinning for a national labor formation.

● Third: Improving our Party and press building activities is imperative. While its true that there are new questions and problems which we have to examine, they should not prevent us from initiatives to build a bigger press and Party. Nor should we forget that labor's biggest advances coincided with the period when the Communist Party was a mass and significant force within the labor movement.

● Finally: We need to continue to examine some of the new questions emerging in the contemporary class struggle. Some are worker buy-outs and employee stock ownership plans, globalization of production and trade, the changing structure of the working class, the trends toward unity, new forms of racism and discrimination, independent political action.

Clearly, there is a big agenda ahead for the labor movement. We are confident, based on the regional meeting in Chicago, that Communist unionists will make even greater contributions to the realization of that agenda in the '90s. □

# Socialist Upheaval and the U.S. Left

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KENDRA ALEXANDER

**T**HE DRAMATIC AND FAST-PACED EVENTS taking place in the Socialist world, in one country after another, leave little time for calm reflection and realistic and objective analysis, much less for reasoned conclusions about the implications for the left in our country.

Yet what has been so clearly and painfully shown in the last year, is that the mass democratic upsurge of the peoples of this world will not wait. Either we seize this moment and develop strategic goals and tactical approaches that place us in the center of the democratic upsurge in our country, or we will find ourselves sidelined and marginalized with little influence and few troops.

Therefore, this conference offers a unique opportunity for an exchange of views and experiences on the basis of equality, mutual respect, objectivity, cooperation and optimism. The moment is conducive for removing past practices of mutual recrimination and infighting, scoring points, and allegations of who is phony and who is not.

This exchange does not require the abandoning of principles, mainly because the assumptions underlying many long-held views are being tested by life, new information, and greater maturity. We on the left can all benefit from this process. But most importantly, our ability to forge united common action together with and in the interest of the exploited and oppressed in our country can lay the basis for building a much larger, stronger and more radical left, which is so urgently needed in the period ahead.

Comrade Joe Slovo, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, had the political courage to ask the question, "Has Socialism Failed?" His penetrating analysis is contained in a pamphlet now being debated in the SACP. His conclusion is that: "The fault lies with us, not with Socialism." I share this perspective.

Looking back, it is crystal clear that Socialism and the Communist and workers' movement have come a long, long way in just 70 years.

There were truly historic sacrifices and historic achievements:

> The birth of the first Socialist state in 1917 under conditions of extreme backwardness and a lack of democratic political traditions, isolation from the rest of the world, economic siege and the constant threat and actuality of armed intervention.

> The defeat of fascism during World War II, the victories of the peoples of Cuba and Vietnam.

> The developments of national liberation movements throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, contributed to immensely by the rendering of material, political and moral aid from the Socialist community of nations.

SOCIALISM, FOR THE MOST PART, HAS PROVIDED FOR its peoples full employment, universal and free health care, child care, and educational gains that are now under tremendous assault as some socialist countries move from socialist to capitalist economies, leaving millions unemployed in countries like Poland, Hungary and the GDR.

And, without question, socialism, especially in the Soviet Union, has provided the main impetus for ending the nuclear arms race, and the cold war. Socialism has provided a vision of a world at peace, without hunger, racism, national oppression and exploitation. This is still a vision worth fighting for.

Looking back, it is just as clear that neither socialism nor the world Communist movement have progressed as far as once thought; that socialists and Communists are fallible and capable of serious mistakes; and they tended toward dogmatism and sectarianism and a near-fatal underestimation of democracy.

The processes of perestroika and democratization begun five years ago in the Soviet Union have unleashed powerful political forces which have at times pulled in opposite directions. It is undeniable, however, that these two processes represent a major turning point in world history.

The draft program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union characterizes the essence of perestroika in the following way:

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This was a speech by Kendra Alexander, chairwoman of the Northern California Communist Party, delivered to a conference, July 7, 1990, at the University of California Berkeley.



First of all, we are breaking with the authoritarian bureaucratic system which is incompatible with Socialist principles. Our ideal is a humane, democratic Socialism. Having embarked on the road of revolutionary changes, it is necessary to discard completely the fetters of the past that hinder our movement towards this objective.

While reaffirming faithfulness to the creative spirit of the materialist world outlook and the dialectic methodology of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and being guided by it, we resolutely reject ideological blinders, dogmatism and intolerance towards different views and ideas.

For all the complications and upheavals, perestroika has had a liberating effect on Soviet society, on the world Communist movement, on the world as a whole. Socialism's image is changing as the Soviet Union struggles to transform its society, and humanize its character, content, and mission.

We on the left should applaud these developments while at the same time recognizing that the upheavals of the past period have laid to rest once and for all the idea that there is one model for the construction and development of Socialism.

This recognition, for us in the United States, in fact necessitates the full mastery of our own country's history, traditions, cultural and contemporary political processes.

We must pay far more attention to the national specifics and peculiarities of the United States. Historically, most of the left, including my party, has sought to artificially apply other models, experiences or methods, from Bolshevism to Maoism to Western European Social Democracy. There are valuable lessons to be learned from all these experiences. But we have not yet fully developed a concrete theory of revolution for the United States. That is the awesome task that lies before us.

Stalinism imposed an administrative, command style of leadership on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was duplicated by most Socialist countries and Communist Parties throughout the world. While it is true that these methods and this style of leadership grew out of conditions of extreme isolation and the constant threat of military intervention against the newly-born Soviet Socialist state, Lenin himself, in 1923,

alerted the Soviet Party about three things: the need to combat nationalism; the importance of fighting oppressive bureaucracy in the Party; and the urgency of following his recommendation to remove Stalin as General Secretary. Lenin's warning went unheeded and Stalinism's command style sunk deep roots into the Party and the fabric of Soviet life, thus resulting in an increasing underestimation of democracy as a method of leadership, of rule and of struggle.

We, the left, the Communist Party of the United States, and indeed the Communist and Socialist movements of the world must restore democracy to its rightful place. The days of the omnipotent, all-knowing leader are gone. We must learn anew that only through democratic discussion and debate, drawing on the widest possible experiences can we hope to develop strategies and tactics that correspond to the level of consciousness of the people of the United States, and help expand their consciousness further and further.

The struggle for democracy in our own country, in my opinion, has long been underestimated. There has been a rigid dividing line between bourgeois democracy and Socialist democracy. The classical description of bourgeois democracy was an oversimplification and tended to underestimate the historic achievement of the working class and peoples' struggles in imposing and defending aspects of a real democratic culture on the capitalist state. This democratic culture must not disappear but rather needs to be expanded under true socialism.

The peoples of our country, workers, African Americans, other racially and nationally oppressed, women, youth, students, civil libertarians, and intellectuals have constantly struggled to expand the democratic terrain on which we live, work and fight. At times these struggles have been of a truly revolutionary character. This extends from the Abolitionist Movement of the 1850s to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, to the fight for the 1990 Civil Rights Restoration Act now before Congress. It stretches from the Women's Suffragist Movement to the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment to the present struggle for choice and equal pay for comparable work now being waged by women across our country. This encompasses the early struggles of organizing unorganized workers, ending racist hiring patterns, the fight for the right to

strike and to bargain collectively to the present struggles against union busting, speed-up, overtime and renewed efforts to organize low-paid non-union workers.

Just as surely as these democratic struggles continuously unfold, so too does the opposition of the ruling class mount. We often find ourselves fighting again battles once won. But there is a strong democratic current in the U.S. people and as each democratic battle is fought, won or lost, new struggles and new forces emerge. In its essence, this was the impulse which gave rise to the Rainbow Coalition and the unprecedented presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988 of Jesse Jackson. Seven million voters, including 3 million whites, cast their ballots for a Black man expounding a platform calling for the empowerment of the people, and the expansion of the democratic rights of workers, African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, women and youth.

Many on the left, including my Party, were slow to recognize the immense importance of this development. Many were critical of Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition for their involvement in the Democratic Party.

And some missed the point altogether.

It is my estimate that the democratic upsurge which I have attempted to describe cannot be contained in a preordained direction. It has and it will continue to break out in many forms affecting governmental bodies, corporations, churches, unions, mass organizations and political parties. Already this impulse has given rise to a struggle within the Democratic Party over direction and constituencies. It has simultaneously impelled mass forces to take a new look at political independence from the two-party system, as witness the recent NOW convention resolution calling for a study of the feasibility of the development of a third party. Jack Henning, head of the California State AFL-CIO has repeatedly raised the question of the need for a Labor Party. Are these two approaches mutually exclusive? At this juncture, I don't think so. Tactical or even strategic differences on this question, at this stage of development, do not preclude common united action on a host of economic, political and social issues confronting the people of our country and the world. Another lesson to be learned in this period is that the main prerequisite for organized struggle is unity in action, not uniformity of thought.

Perhaps the greatest recent example of the power of this kind of united action was the U.S. reception accorded Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress. In part, this reception was in response to the magnificence of Mandela himself, his steadfast commitment, dedication, and principle in opposition to apartheid that 27 years in prison could not daunt. But in large measure the response was built on the ground right here in the USA. Through long years of marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, petitions, lobbying, boycotting, and voting, the movement reached all segments of our society. The left played a crucial role in this development.

We should be proud of our contribution and draw the necessary lessons for the struggles ahead.

Has Marxism-Leninism outlived its usefulness? Is there now the need for the development of a new methodology of struggle? Karl Marx wrote in the first volume of *Capital*, 'The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in the mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and the looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of Black skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of Capitalist production.'

V.I. Lenin, when asked what he would add to Marx's call 'Workers of the world, unite,' said he would say, 'Workers and oppressed peoples of the world, unite.'

Marxism-Leninism seeks an end to exploitation and oppression. It is a particular way of thinking about humanity and the universe. It sees only change as permanent, contradiction as fundamental and the negation of antagonisms as the driving force in existence. Both observations remain valid today.

Marxism is a social science, but unlike the physical sciences, one and one do not always add up to two.. Marxism is a methodology, a way of looking at the objective laws of social development and designing methods of struggle that correspond to the reality of conditions that give rise to struggle.

The point is, Marx insisted, not simply to understand the world, but to change it.

There have been serious distortions of Marxism. Stalinism violated the very essence of the creative methodology of Marxism by the codification and ossification of certain basic princi-

ples, ruling out flexibility and creative thought based on changing conditions in a constantly changing world. Remember, Marx himself said only change is permanent.

Just as Lenin added oppressed peoples to the Marxist body of thought during the age of the dawning of world imperialism, we Marxists today must courageously and creatively seek new ways to solve new and old problems.

With all its past distortions, Marxism remains a liberating science for the exploited and the oppressed. To paraphrase what Nelson Mandela said in responding to the question of the character of the post-apartheid economy: "Call it what you will, the responsibility is to redistribute the wealth."

Right now they have it all and we have none.

In looking ahead to the future configuration of the world revolutionary process, the left in our country must admit bluntly and frankly that we are too small. We must examine honestly why the organized left has failed to grow while at the same time, broad and loosely defined left and progressive movements have burst forth on the U.S. scene in huge numbers with real influence.

For my Party's part, some of the answers can be gleaned from problems I have discussed earlier. Dogmatism and sectarianism have affected us as well. For example, in the 1960s and early 1970s we correctly foresaw the entry of large numbers of women into the working class. Our analysis was correctly based on new levels of exploitation of women at the point of production. But we elevated this truth to the status of dogma. Therefore we were slow to see that the oppression of women was many-sided and that male supremacy was deeply imbedded in the fabric of our lives. This restricted view kept us from fully supporting the Equal Rights Amendment for too many years. It constricted our participation in what is today a powerful movement for the emancipation of women in all spheres of economic, social and political life. It left us marginalized, with a few notable exceptions, Angela Davis is the most well-known, at a time when we should be completely involved, contributing our analysis and championing the special interest of nationally and racially oppressed and working women.

A dogmatic view of the relationship of social movements to exploitation also clouded our view of the moral imperative to support and defend the rights of gays and Lesbians against intoler-

ance and discrimination — a clouded view that many of us are determined to change.

Sectarianism as well has affected our analysis and participation in the burgeoning democratic upsurge in our country. Over the last five to seven years, we have increasingly restricted our view of class and social forces only through the prism of the Communist Party. We began to see struggle as only that which we ourselves initiated. We have not adequately taken into account the ideas and activity of others. We have often acted on the belief that there is only one truth, when in reality, many truths must be taken into account in developing strategy and tactics.

These have been difficult and painful lessons to confront. But the process of renewal and reinvigoration goes on. Many of the problems and concerns I have raised will continue to be debated in our leadership and in our ranks.

There are many basic strengths we draw on in our continuing search for new and better methods of struggle. We are proud of our unwavering commitment to the interest of the working class and the nationally and racially oppressed.

We consider our view of the interconnectedness of class and national oppression as a historic contribution to understanding the economic and political processes at play in our land. This basic understanding has led us, we believe, to the correct formulation of the Labor-African American alliance as the cornerstone of all social and economic progress. We have been unrelenting in our efforts to build international working class solidarity from our struggle against fascism in Spain, where many of our members fought and died, to Cuba, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Panama. We fully support the struggle of Palestinians for self-determination and a national homeland.

We defended Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Amilcar Cabral in Guinea Bissau, and Maurice Bishop in Grenada. We organized in support of Angola and Mozambique against Portuguese colonialism, and later South African and U.S. intervention after victory was won. We have been instrumental in the movement against apartheid in South Africa. We worked tirelessly against the U.S. war against the Vietnamese people. We are confident in our firm position that our job is to stay the hand of U.S. imperialism and build solidarity actions in our country with the struggling peoples of the world.

We are firm believers in the Marxist notion

that the working class is the motor force of history. Consequently, our activity is focused on bettering the condition of working people, ending the racist divisions among them, helping to organize the millions of unorganized, and expanding their political understanding and consciousness about their central role in the economy and society as a whole. We believe in the interdependence of the working class and human values, and see no contradiction between the two.

As I said in the beginning of my remarks, this exchange of views among the left can only benefit all of us.

The left is challenged today, however, to not only discuss our politics and positions but to find new, non-sectarian forms of struggle that allow working people to expand their democratic aspirations, anti-monopoly sentiment, and fighting spirit.

The left is challenged to expand our base and influence. But this can only happen if we understand that the left does not arise out of ideas alone. The left arises out of conditions of capitalist oppression, exploitation and injustice. We must ask ourselves if these conditions have disappeared, have stayed the same, or are getting worse. I believe an objective examination will reveal that the conditions have gotten worse.

Poverty, hunger, homelessness, lack of adequate health care and education, declining living standards, growing unemployment, anti-labor laws, and union-busting, combined with a vicious ideological ruling class assault which describes large segments of the African-American commu-

nity as the underclass with inborn criminal tendencies should force us to recognize that we must close the widening gap between word and deed. It is not enough to chronicle the worsening conditions. We must roll up our sleeves and get to work.

The democratic upsurge needs the left. It needs our ideas, our analysis, organizational skills, commitment and principles. These movements and struggles need to better understand the relationship between the struggle to save the ecological balance of nature to the struggle to save Black children from poverty, hunger and hopelessness.

These movements and struggles need to better understand the relationship between stopping the nuclear arms race and converting military production to peacetime production in order to maintain jobs for working people.

These movements need to better understand the relationship between the struggle for the expansion of democratic rights, and the struggle to organize into unions the millions of unorganized, low-paid, minority and women workers.

The challenge to the left today is to understand that: Yes, Socialism is in crisis. But as Marx showed, a crisis is not only a crisis, it is the resolution of contradictions leading to a crisis.

Our challenge is to find the forms, methods of struggle and decisive issues which will help resolve the crisis in favor of a future of peace and equality that ends exploitation, national oppression, racism, sexism, homophobia, and injustice. A future of humane, democratic socialism. □

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**Correction:** In the July 1990 PA, there are the following corrections to be made in Ben Riskin's "A Malignant Growth in A Healthy Body": Page 24, 1st col., 1st paragraph - The last two sentences are a direct quotation; Page 25, 1st col., last sentence, "CIO" should be CIA; and, Page 25, 2nd col., the last sentence of the Shanker quotation should read, "Whether it's how fair the tax structure is, or how strong the labor movement is, what kind of social programs we have, you name it - nothing else matters if the free world loses the conflict with the Soviet Union."

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## A New Wave of Environmental Concern

VIRGINIA BRODINE

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Barry Commoner, *Making Peace with the Planet*. Pantheon Books, New York, 1990, \$19.95.

Peter Borelli, Ed. *Crossroads: Environmental Priorities for the Future*. Island Press, Washington, DC, 1988, \$17.95.

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It is fitting that Barry Commoner's new book should appear close to Earth Day, 1990, for his *The Closing Circle*, published shortly after the first %o Earth Day, educated many participants in that event to both the basic science and the economic and political implications of the environmental crisis. The combination of science, profound humanism, democratic principles and lucid prose that made *The Closing Circle* so influential marks *Making Peace with the Planet* as well, and is needed again. There is a new wave of environmental concern, a swelling in the ranks of the environmental movement, but uncertainty about direction, a shifting in philosophical approaches and political strategies.

Commoner has had an unusual role in U.S. scientific and political life. As a founder and leader of the St. Louis Citizens' Committee for Nuclear Information and the national Scientists' Institute for Public Information in the fifties, he was instrumental in breaking the barrier of silence about the hazards of fallout from atmospheric nuclear testing.

In the sixties, he moved from his specialty as a plant physiologist into a wider field of environmental science, establishing the Center for the Biology of Natural Systems (CBNS).

Originally at Washington University in St. Louis, CBNS is now at Queens College in New York. It has been engaged, among many other things, in such questions as how organic farms compare with conventional ones, and why trash incinerators emit dioxins.

Increasingly active in politics, Commoner headed the Citizens Party ticket in 1980, and was part of the Jesse Jackson team in 1988. He has always believed that citizens need to understand the science that is relevant to public issues. He

has a remarkable ability to fill that need clearly, without esoteric formulae, without being ponderous or patronizing to his lay readers. His attacks on those who misuse science to deceive or confuse the public are a pleasure to read, for his logic and data go to their target on the wings of wit.

The thesis of *Making Peace with the Planet* is that we humans live in two worlds: the natural world and the man-made world, the ecosphere and the technosphere, that these two worlds are at war and that there can be no winner. Electing to fight on either side puts us in an anti-people position. On one side, we would be throwing out the science and technology which has the potential (though not presently the practice) to make life better for the world's people. On the other, we would be destroying the environment without which humanity cannot live.

What Commoner tells us to do is redesign the technosphere with both nature and human society in mind. He claims that the technology is already available and that the transition is possible, though acknowledging that the task is formidable.

This is a book that deserves both a wide and a careful reading and much discussion. It deals with matters of vital importance, as much to trade unionists and peace activists as to environmentalists, and in fact to all who live and breathe.

Commoner denies that environmental degradation is created by an imbalance between the earth's limited resources and the growing human population. To try to accomplish population control for its own sake appears, in any case, to be ineffectual. The root of the problem is in poverty, he declares, and the cost of increasing the standard of living of developing countries to the point that would motivate a voluntary reduction in birth rate is small enough to be "a much neglected global bargain."

Nor does he blame individual consumers for environmental problems, an approach that was all too prevalent on Earth Day 1990. Rather, he finds that flaw in the production system, and par-

ticularly in changes in that system since World War II.

He points out that "in every case...the change of production technology...is initiated by the producer and is governed by the producer's interests. In the U.S. economy, the motivation that exclusively governs such investment decisions is increased profit and market share." (80) In particular, he faults "the private desire for maximizing short-term profits." (101)

The book does not attempt to deal in depth with all our environmental problems. Rather it focuses on what Commoner sees as the failure of the effort of the past twenty years to control pollution, the cost of that failure, and the need to prevent pollution by stopping it at the source rather than trying to control it. Then he goes on to the economics and politics of redesigning the technosphere for that purpose.

Along the way, he discusses what he calls "instructive examples" of his various points.

The best of these are in the chapter on "Preventing the Trash Crisis." It is essential reading for any citizen involved in fighting against a landfill or trash-burning incinerator, or for a recycling program.

Commoner has few kind words for the big Washington-based environmental organizations, which he says are "locked into the strategy of control which generates the disputes over standards that give these organizations their arena of action." In spite of their successes in legislation and litigation, he finds the environment little better off in some areas, worse in others.

Commoner points out that all too many environmentalists are avoiding the real source of environmental degradation in the operation of the profit system. He calls for attention to the necessary but difficult task of working to uproot "the conviction, deeply imbedded in American society, that the decisions that determine what is produced and by what technological means ought to remain in private, generally corporate hands."

The old line organizations instead try to "adjust the goals of environmentalism to the reality of Washington politics," while the bioregionalists seek an ecologically harmonious way of life without confronting the economic and political obstacles in the way of achieving it.

Commoner sees a different kind of environmentalism in the grassroots groups that have been developing around community issues. In

this arena, he says,

The polluters are directly confronted by the polluted, from children with birth defects at Love Canal to householders with dirty laundry downwind from an incinerator. Banded together in an ad hoc committee under an acronym such as STOP, RAGE, WASTE, the local residents fight not for improved standards of exposure, but for no exposure at all. Their preferred standard of exposure is zero. They want pollution prevented rather than controlled. (180)

Along with the national federation of such groups, the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, and the National Toxics Campaign, he gives high marks to Greenpeace and to the Public Interest Research Groups organized by Ralph Nader.

Nevertheless, even a vastly strengthened movement united around zero exposure cannot deal with corporate strength and political power alone. Commoner finds the possibility for a path to political and ecological power :

...[In the] wave after wave of popular, issue-oriented movements: for civil rights, against nuclear weapons testing, for women's, gay and lesbian rights; against the war in Vietnam, for the environment; against nuclear power and for solar energy; for world peace. (133)

While they have failed to translate the millions of votes they represent into electoral power and have been consigned to the "political ghetto reserved for special interests" he believes their time has come, and that "taken together and added to the much older labor movement" they offer our greatest hope. The key, he suggests, can be found in Martin Luther King's perception that racial discrimination must be traced to its origins in the economic and political system and thereby linked to other social issues with a similar origin.

*Making Peace with the Planet* is an effort to do for environmental degradation what King did for racial discrimination, trace it to its roots, and in doing so, to illuminate the path all these social movements must take.

Is the environmental movement ready for this message? Many of the ideas expressed in *Making Peace* were developed in speeches given around the country and published in a *New Yorker* article which was reprinted in *Crossroads*. In fact, the *New Yorker* article was one factor leading to the

assembling of the other essays and the publication of Peter Borrelli's collection. *Crossroads* draws on a number of environmental leaders for their perspectives on the state of the environment and the future of the movement, and, therefore, provides a tentative answer to our question.

Peter Berle, National Audubon president, says flatly that "Barry Commoner is wrong, when he argues that environmental regulation has been ineffective." He points out, quite correctly, that without the environmental effort of the past 20 years and the amount of pollution control achieved, "quality of life and the state of the environment in the United States would be far worse, if not intolerable." But this begs the question of whether going for the jugular – the sources of pollution – could make life more than just tolerable. As to the future, Berle will be content to "manage" it by affecting voting habits and management decisions.

Huey Johnson, former Secretary for Natural Resources in California confuses rhetoric with reality: "From corporate chiefs to school children, the (environmental) concern is becoming unanimous." He is ready to say that "the movement has been largely victorious."

However, there is an overriding impression in the book of change in the air, of frustration with how far short of its goals the movement has fallen, of a search for a common purpose. And this purpose certainly cannot be defined by consensus around the lowest common denominator, as in the 1985 *An Environmental Agenda for the Future*. This agenda was produced by the "Group of Ten," chief executive officers of the Environmental Defense Fund, Environmental Policy Institute, Friends of the Earth, Izaak Walton League, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Audubon Society, National Parks and Conservation Association, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society. Borrelli's opening essay cites:

A widely held public belief that the government's approach to toxics relied too heavily on technical fixes instead of prevention. ... People are simply fed up with government's handling of the problem...with the entire regulatory approach, which has led to pitched battles with industry over one chemical after another. (11)

People are becoming active in their own backyards, working on one problem of pollution or resource mismanagement. This leads to the

recognition of a hundred others and a need for some tie that will bind them together. The new wave of environmentalism springs also from the discovery by the media of global warming and the hole in the ozone layer. A world problem needs a world approach, which seems beyond the capacity of a grassroots group. Both these trends are carrying people in large numbers into support for the most visible national groups – Greenpeace, yes, but also the big ten of the *Environmental Agenda*.

This suggests that Commoner is probably too quick to say the movement is "split in two" and to write off the older part. Local leaders of Audubon and Sierra Club participate in coalitions at the grassroots. These and other organizations sometimes give expert help to local campaigns. The Natural Resources Defense Council joined with the Soviet Academy of Science in a nuclear test-site project in both countries, and now the two are working together on alternative energy.

It is true that most environmental leaders, even when they are ready to raise the banner of prevention, do not, in *Crossroads* at least, show a willingness to carry it down what Commoner calls the "hard path" of building the essential coalitions and tackling the profit system in which the environmental problem is embedded.

Gus Speth, president of the World Resources Institute, agrees that pollution is "high and rising," that "more of the same" in environmental action will not be enough. "More fundamental changes will be needed." But his economic program goes only to creating efficient economic incentives and disincentives and making the market mechanism work better.

Nevertheless, unlike Republican administrations, the more things change in the ranks of social movements, the more they begin to differ. Both the pressure from within and the activity of the new grassroots groups will have their affect.

Lois Gibbs, of Love Canal fame, now executive director of Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, writing with Karen Stults, a CCHW research associate, focuses on the need to build a political base of support, and says,

There are only two sources of real power, people and money. Since we will never be able to muster the kind of money-based power the polluters have, we should focus on the most effective ways to build people power. (245)

In this connection, Janet Welsh Brown, a senior associate at the World Resources Institute, points to one of the ironies of U.S. political life. Although the Washington staffs of national environmental organizations, and, it must be added, the majority of their members, are still mostly white, well-educated and middle class, the Congressmen with the best environmental voting records are those of the Black Caucus. This, by the way, parallels the situation in the organized peace movement.

Perhaps it is a reflection of – on the side of the Black Caucus’s constituents – the increasing African-American participation in environmental struggles at the grassroots which Brown notes. Perhaps as well, it is the generally higher level of disenchantment with things as they are that is prevalent in the lower reaches of the economic scale and particularly among African Americans and Latin Americans who have been excluded from power. And on the Congressional side, a recognition of Lois Gibbs’ insight: Knowing they will never be elected or reelected by outspending opponents, Black Caucus members tend to stay close to the other source of power – their people.

It is almost certainly futile to try to redress the racial imbalance in the organized environmental and peace movements by recruiting African Americans into the established organizations. It would be more to the point for largely white groups to follow the lead of Black political activity and Congressional accountability.

It is surely no accident that although all of the writers in *Crossroads* are white, one of the most impassioned again turns to Martin Luther King for guidance and inspiration.

Michael Frome, a faculty member at Western Washington University, says that King “saw three major evils — racism, poverty, and militarism — and found them integrally linked, one with the other.” Frome adds the degraded environment as a fourth major evil, “also joined with the others.”

He shows how environmental laws tend to wind up legitimizing the evil they are designed to control, whether the target is stripmining or logging. They then set standards and set up a bureaucracy to enforce them as best it can. He sees a need for the courage to stand up against money and the power of politics and institutions.

Frome quotes the Pope as saying “We need more than social reformers” but rather than the Pope’s call for “saints” Frome suggests that we need revolutionaries, “not to commit violent acts, but to press society to reorder its priorities.”

The only essayist in *Crossroads* who dares utter the word “capitalism” is Richard Booth, a lawyer and associate professor at Cornell. He levels a “plague on both your houses,” stating that both socialist and capitalist systems “encourage us to exploit and despoil the environment for short term gains.” He does, however, face the facts of property and production and the need to “join environmental protection efforts and human rights protection efforts as indivisible parts of a unified strategy for forging a viable world.”

Commoner, too, notes that neither the Soviet Union nor any other country yet provides an institutional example of social governance for environmental purposes. He sees in the Soviet Union both hope in the openness and public environmental activity of glasnost and danger in the move toward a market economy where private production decisions may, as in U.S. capitalism, conflict with “the social interest in environmental quality.”

He adds:

In a genuine socialist economy where production decisions – in keeping with that ideology – are supposed to be under social governance and therefore could include environmental factors, this conflict need not arise. (223)

Both countries are indeed at a crossroads — as is the whole world. Which path is taken will depend only in small part on the presently constituted environmental movements. How deeply environmental concerns become embedded in all social issues movements and whether they succeed in coming together will tell the story.

This brief look at the climate of acceptance for the ideas in *Making Peace with the Planet* would be incomplete without a glance at the reaction of corporate America, as reflected in *Fortune* magazine. Unable to respond in a reasonable manner, the *Fortune* review resorts, to our amusement, though hardly our amazement, to the old Scrooge outcry, “Bah, humbug!” □



# A Life Too Long Untold

PHILLIP BONOSKY

Vito Marcantonio, *Radical Politician, 1902-1954* by Gerald Meyer, State University of New York Press, 1989, 288 p, \$49.50 (cloth), \$16.95 (paper).

When any (caught) corrupt government official, spoiled priest, or Hollywood star who can prove that he-she had occupied more beds than any other single person since memory, has a book produced about him (her) with what seems instantaneous speed, it should come with some surprise that no (serious) book about a man who has done more for ordinary humanity than a whole menagerie of charitable foundations has appeared since his death in 1954 –until now. Still, the silence that followed the death of Vito Marcantonio – now almost 30 years gone — was no accident. A kind of malicious, institutionalized McCarthyism had followed him beyond the grave – even to where "a brochure for Woodlawn Cemetery mentions among the famous people buried there, John McCullagh, the first chief of police (of New York) – but not Marcantonio" (184)

Indeed, nobody expressed this baleful hatred more than Cardinal Spellman who refused to give Marcantonio – a lifelong Catholic – a Catholic burial. When the Pentagon Cardinal, who had made it repeatedly clear that he was ready to bless wiping out the entire socialist world, died himself, the flags of the city were ordered flown at half-staff, presumably in mourning.

And yet, over 20,000 people viewed Marcantonio's bier as he lay in state in a funeral home in Italian Harlem. One indignant Catholic wrote Spellman: "The cruelty of your decision is only exceeded by its stupidity..." At his death, thousands of New Yorkers, and not only New Yorkers, felt an acute sense of personal loss. In every sense of the word, Marcantonio was truly a people's representative, and his life remains a model of just what that really means.

At his death, a few pharisaical comments appeared in the press which had all-but-lynched him as a fighter (and an effective fighter) for the rights of minorities, workers, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, women, welfare, the poor, the down-and-out. He earned the hatred of the entire Poll Tax South (and their northern Republican allies) espe-

cially in the case when, in 1945, against all the odds, he managed to get through the House a law to abolish the poll tax. He had already incurred their undying enmity for his successful fight for the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), which helped abolish discrimination in jobs on the grounds of race, sex, and national origin. He also was instrumental in making it possible for soldiers in some states to vote without paying a poll tax.

There was hardly a battle for human rights during his entire political career, 14 years in Congress and many years out, that he was not a vital part of. He was often in an absolute minority (especially as a representative of the American Labor Party) in Congress, and yet he was so resourceful a tactician that he was able to manipulate contending forces in Congress in so astute a way that his effect seemed far, far out of proportion to his lack of evident power.

In fact, to the outraged Poll Taxers his influence seemed demonic. When Marcantonio's anti-poll tax bill passed the House in 1942, Representative Cox, of Georgia, cried:

I salute you sir...for at last having obtained the burning ambition which you carry in your soul of becoming for a moment in your life master of the House. You bring it, sir, to its knees. (60)

In Cox's eyes the 251 Congressmen who voted to end the poll tax were on their knees. But the brave ones who stood up were the 105 Congressmen who voted to continue the Poll Tax! Nevertheless, the Bill was killed in the Senate by the deadly combination of poll-tax Senators and northern Republicans. So hated was Marcantonio by the southern Bourbons that Senator Bilbo (Democrat of Mississippi, later refused seating in the Senate), who had once addressed a correspondence as "Dear Dago," wrote to him:

It is through you and your gang, and I dare say, many of them are gangsters, from the sin-soaked Communist seditious of the great metropolis of New York that practically all the rotten, crackpot Communist legislative schemes are being thrown into the Congressional mill...The main purpose is to arouse en-

mitics and antagonisms, hatred and animosities – that is the stock in trade of all Communists in America. (134)

This included Franklin D. Roosevelt. for Marcantonio was a staunch New Dealer and often met personally with Roosevelt. He was, at the same time, so popular in his Harlem 18th district (later gerrymandered) that in his last full election (1944) he won the primaries for the nomination of all three parties – Democrat, Republican and American Labor. If ever a man was elected by acclamation that was Marcantonio. (Only Adam Clayton Powell equalled this feat, and Benjamin J. Davis and Peter V. Cacchione came close to it).

Nor was his activity confined to work in Congress. Outside of Congress, he served as attorney in the defense of 82-year-old W.E.B. DuBois (recently publicly hailed by Nelson Mandela) when he was charged by the government, in 1951, as an "agent of a foreign power" for his role in launching the Stockholm Peace Petition. As attorney for victims of the Smith Act and the Subversive Activities Control Board, Marcantonio was instrumental in exposing government spies and informers. His destruction of Herbert Philbrick ("I Led Three Lives") on the witness stand where he had to answer truthfully or be held for perjury is a classic of its own.

Few men, in fact, led as productive and dedicated a life as did this man of Italian descent whose courage and integrity raised him high above the run-of-the-mill politicians of his (or our) day. And yet, ironically enough, the Italian conventional community shunned identification with Marcantonio who was building up a positive image for it, in contrast to the gangster-ridden image a la the "Mafia".

And why? – "Because he was a Communist!" Actually, Marcantonio was not, factually, a Communist Party member. But he believed in the working class, the "common people," in their striving for justice and a better life which he saw had to lead to socialism. In this the Communists agreed with him. In fact, Marcantonio's beliefs were shared in America by millions and worldwide by additional millions. To hold such beliefs was not strange, and needed no special explanation. Not to hold them in the depression era and amid the rise of fascism when only the socialist USSR stood as a barrier to its worldwide triumph — that did not need explanation!

Meyer's approach to Marcantonio's relationship with the Communist Party suffers from what he feels is the need for a lawyer-like defense, some special pleading, making allowances as though for one with a crippling ailment. This is due to the lingering McCarthyism in all scholarship, which has managed to establish anti-Communism as the norm, and any defense of it as needing defense itself.

But the fact is that, for at least a decade-and-a-half, in Marcantonio's time, alliances of liberal, Left and radical forces with the Communist Party, were common. Indeed, there was many a politician who sought that alliance for the help the Communists could give them (their names are really legion). What needs explanation and a smart lawyer's defense is the policy which succeeded in destroying many of the gains of labor and democracy in the post-war '40s and '50s, and not that policy which fought to preserve and extend them.

Meyers' intent is to be "fair" about Marcantonio's relationship to the Party, and compared to others who have dealt with the same subject, he is far beyond them. But still his treatment suffers somewhat from the taint of a kind of vestigial mcCarthyism in small letters.

Curiously enough, though almost every part of Marc's life is dealt with in detail, the very center of his life – his years in Congress – are almost untouched. No explanation is given. And yet it was in Congress that Marcantonio did yeoman's work as part of the progressive coalition. Indeed, it was because of his initiative that one of the most horrendous industrial crimes of the century – the Gauley Bridge Hawks Nest disaster of the 1930 in which over 400 tunnel diggers (mostly Black) were killed, mainly from breathing in pure silica, was exposed. So little public and newspaper attention was given to this enormous crime that it remained unmentioned for years until the *New Masses* and Marcantonio opened it in 1935.

More books on Marcantonio are needed. Books, too, on others with whom he worked – Representatives Jerry O'Connell, John Bernard, Caroline O'Day, Lee Geyer, Thomas Amilie, Maury Maverick, and many, many others who made up the core of dedicated New Dealers whose recognition by America has been long delayed, but whose influence as true representatives of the people remains a model which since has never,, or very rarely, been matched. □



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