

# Political Affairs

Theoretical Journal, Communist Party USA, June 1996

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**FREE  
HEALTH  
CARE IS A  
HUMAN RIGHT  
and  
NOT FOR  
PROFIT!**

- **Defending Indefensible - Hall**
- **November Elections - Tyner**
- **Life of Lowenfels - Benesky**
- **Racism & Health - Weiss**
- **Fighting Kaiser - Bechtel**
- **International Notes**



# *Political Affairs*

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June 1996 Vol. 75 No. 6

- 1 Letter to Readers**
- 2 Defending the Indefensible**  
Gus Hall
- 9 '96 Elections**  
Jarvis Tyner
- 16 The Life of Walter Lowenfels**  
Phillip Bonosky
- 20 Workers Battle Health Care Giant**  
Marilyn Bechtel
- 24 Racism in Health Care**  
Lawrence Weiss
- 33 International Notes**
- 35 Bookends**

## Letter to Readers

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*Political Affairs* is a unique journal that deserves your financial support more than ever. Because we understand that times are rough and money is tight we want to try to convince you to put *Political Affairs* on the top of your shorter "giving" list this year. Here's why.

This has been a very special, history-making year for the Communist Party, USA and its journal. Some of you were part of the making of that history at the 26th National Convention in which the overwhelmingly working class, Black, Brown, Red and white delegates – 30 percent of whom are new members – witnessed the birth of a new, mass revolutionary party of socialism.

We hope you will agree with us that this makes the theoretical journal of the Communist Party, USA, even more important. Only in the pages of our journal can new readers, and especially new Communist readers, find insight and clarity about their new political and ideological home.

*Political Affairs* is the political, ideological and philosophical companion to the *People's Weekly World*. It deals with the same class questions and issues as our weekly newspaper. However, as a theoretical journal, *Political Affairs* gives these same issues and questions a probing, in-depth, scientific analysis that is impossible in the pages of a newspaper, especially a weekly newspaper.

For example, the *PWW* writes about all the struggles and movements in our country from a fiercely partisan, working-class point of view. It takes the side of workers in every class struggle with the corporations.

*PA's* longer articles allow it to get into the basics of capitalism itself. It puts the capitalist system under a Marxist-Leninist microscope to explain why the system doesn't work, why the people are getting poorer while the rich get richer and corporate profits soar.

We get behind the appearance to the essence of our (seemingly) chaotic, complex and contradictory socio-economic system in which people appear to be pulled and pushed around by uncontrollable, invisible forces that have stripped working people of job security and social support systems.

*Political Affairs* writers expose the underlying causes and forces and by so doing reveal the class enemy as not only visible and understandable, but also defeatable. It shows that just as there are laws of nature that govern the natural world, so, too, there are laws of social development that show the stages that all societies go through. And that just as feudalism gave way to capitalism, so, too, will dying capitalism set the stage for a revolutionary transformation to socialism.

For example, people are now making the connection between the issue of jobs and job security and the domination of our Congress by the ultra-right, the fascist fringe forces and the Contract on America. *PA* is the only magazine that shows why this is happening.

*PA* will also tell you why socialism is finding its way back into the hearts and minds of millions who were temporarily lulled into thinking that the capitalist road offered a short cut to easy street. Especially at the ballot box, they are waking to the reality that instead of the promised economic and social freedom, what they got was the "freedom" to be unemployed and even hungry. What they got was a devastating detour off the socialist track into a nightmare world of capitalist "reforms" that have brought mass unemployment, dire poverty, loss of all entitlements, crime and corruption.

We will follow the road back to socialism. We will discuss in future issues each country's unique path back to building socialism and rebuilding its Communist Party.

Of course, we'll cover, in depth, the crucial June elections in Russia. But we will write articles that portray our vision of socialism, USA and what it will be like living in a socialist society.

And indeed there is a radicalization process taking place in America. People now see the stakes in the coming elections. There is a new pattern of thinking, speaking out and protesting, a movement in a new progressive direction. We are confident that it is just such a growing national movement of electoral coalitions and alliances that will defeat the ultra-right not only in Congress, but on every level – local, state and federal.

continued on page 23

# Defending the Indefensible

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Gus Hall

There are scores of "Washington watchers" whose only occupation is to watch, record, analyze and put their "spin" on what they call the "theater of national politics." These "spin doctors" have recently published a spate of books – mainly big, expensive books – that are geared toward winning votes for either the Democratic or Republican parties, depending on the author's own political preference.

These "watchers" are politicians, journalists, lobbyists, legislators, presidential advisers, economists, sociologists, philosophers and, of course, ideologues.

With so much at stake in the coming elections, all kinds of experts and specialists are rushing to publish in order to influence people's thinking on issues and candidates. This is a writing season for marketing political/ideological books, mainly from the political right, but also from the liberal and progressive end of the spectrum. Just a glance at the non-fiction, "top ten" in Sunday's *New York Times Book Review* section reveals at least two or three such books.

There are almost daily announcements of new books, journals and studies, even new magazines. TV and radio talk show hosts, on the right and left, are giving these writers free publicity, if their politics are "politically correct."

For example one of the main issues affecting just about every man, woman and child is our crisis-ridden health care system. The debates swirling around this issue in official circles mainly focus on how to make the people pay more for less. In other words, how to make more profits for doctors, insurance companies, HMO's and hospitals. And, of course, provide less and worse medical and health care.

Haynes Johnson and David S. Broder, political journalists, just published a voluminous, 600-page study of the health care debate of 1993-94 entitled *The System, The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point*. In this book it is difficult to tell where

these writers come down politically, except undercover advocates of private enterprise. In spite of the book's title, which would seem to point to "the system" as the culprit, no such thing occurs. By system they mean the health care system.

At the end of the 600 pages, one comes away with some eyewitness descriptions of Congressional debates between the two sides, but nothing to sustain their stated conclusion that, "In this great test of the health care war the system failed the people it was designed to serve." And, "The health care failure shows a system at the point of breakdown."

"The system," they argue, "is characterized by a kind of chaos-theory complexity of competing pressures and interests that makes the passage of any legislation seem almost miraculous." That's a mouthful – of nothing! They even clean up Clinton's health care act with praise for his rightward move on other issues: "Even while failing on health care, Clinton was succeeding with NAFTA and with the crime bill."

With a plague on both your houses approach they cynically excuse the horrendous state of U.S. health care with, "Health care initiatives, from right, left and center, have a long history of failure. Less ambitious attempts were stymied in the Nixon, Carter and Reagan administrations."

The fact is that Johnson and Broder never really deal with the issue of health care at all. They skirt the issues, more interested in the "pageant of Washington and how it was played out during the health care war in political games on the Congressional battlefield."

**CAPITALISM DEFENDS THE INDEFENSIBLE** ■ The problem with this, and just about all these books, is that they are phony. They are phony because, while different authors approach the questions they deal with from different, even opposing, positions, they all wind up making excuses for the capitalist system that creates the crisis.

They are phony because they sometimes subtly and deviously, but always ultimately defend capitalism as "the best of all possible worlds."

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Gus Hall is the National Chairman of the CPUSA.

These writers are dishonest because there is no honest way to defend a system that claims to be for the people, but in reality is just the opposite.

Very few writers today – except Communists, Marxist-Leninists – reveal the essence of our society as it becomes more anti-human as the whole system falls deeper into crisis and decay.

There is no honest way to defend a system in which the rich get richer *because* the poor keep getting poorer. It is not possible to honestly defend a social system in which most of the working people live in daily fear of losing their job (if they have one), in which there is no security of any kind.

**A SYSTEM OF FAKERS AND THIEVES** ■ Fakery and deception are the only ways to defend a system in which 90 percent cannot make ends meet, while 10 percent hoard their wealth because they have much more than they could spend in a life time.

There can be no principled defense of an economic system in which 40 million are unemployed, work part-time or below minimum wage, in which two out of five children go to bed hungry and medical, dental, health, child care and education are beyond the reach of most.

The worst charlatans are those who deny the class struggle and even the existence of classes. They deny the racist and discriminatory practices of corporations for superprofits, and cover up racism as an instrument of divide-and-rule.

Anti-immigrant racism to harass, deport, jail, deny basic rights and services to Mexican workers (with and without papers) is covered up by racist writers and right-wing politicians like Pete Wilson who argue that immigrants take away jobs and services from U.S. citizens. The fact is that the anti-immigrant campaign and the racism and oppression against Chicano-Mexican-Americans, are forms of superprofits for the corporations to keep people from uniting and demanding decent jobs for everyone, like passage of the Martinez Bill.

The fakery of political pundits especially comes to the surface in dealing with issues like the soaring gas prices at the pump. Both parties try to mystify who the culprit is. But there is no mystery about who raised the gas prices. The thieves and fakers are the oil corporations and big distributors.

Jumping on the anti-tax bandwagon, right-wing Republicans Dole and Gingrich made a big stink about the 4.3 cents per gallon tax. They tried to use it as an election campaign gimmick, but it fell flat.

The Democrats proposed releasing some gas from the Alaska reserves to drive down the prices. It is hard to believe they don't know that releasing gas reserves stored in Alaska would also permit the corporations to continue price gouging. The Republicans and Democrats approach the issue differently but both are phony.

The very concept that corporations should have the right to raise prices when there is a shortage, for whatever reason, is a phony argument. It is outright fakery. Whether the shortage is real or manufactured does not matter. The gas tax may or may not be repealed, but the higher prices will most likely be permanent. All the talk about the tax repeal may just be a hoax to get working people used to the idea of higher gas prices.

Thus, both Democrats and Republicans use deceit to justify the price-gouging of the Mobils and Sunocos, and neither, of course, deals with the real culprit – corporate-capitalist greed and highway robbery.

It is vicious and cold-blooded to defend a corporate-ruled system that is trying to put over an all-out assault on the great majority of people living in these United States.

**"DOWNSIZING" EQUALS UPSIZING PROFITS** ■ U.S. capitalism is going through a process called "the downsizing of America." "Downsizing" is another of the many corporate code words to cover up an act of class warfare against millions of workers, laying them off under the guise of "becoming competitive," "consolidating to prevent bankruptcy," or "creating megamergers to save the monopolies" – all to reinforce the bottom line of the corporate investors.

Strip the ideological veneer and you expose the bare truth. There is no downsizing of production, nor of exploitation, or speedup. Downsizing simply means more production with less workers working harder, faster and longer. Downsizing equals higher profits with lower labor costs. And such exploitation of labor is the source of all surplus value (profits).

For the corporate heads who do the dirty work there are juicy rewards. For the most cold-blooded corporate killers the sweet smell of maximizing profits and throwing workers off the payroll is an incentive in itself.

But there are even bigger inducements. A typical case is Robert Allen, the head of AT&T, who

recently announced the layoff of 40,000 workers. Two weeks later Allen received a reward of \$6 million in salary, bonus and blue-chip stock. Needless to say, there is no way to honestly defend or justify such obscene practices.

Downsizing is so widespread, so pervasive, that it has injected permanent anxiety, stress and instability into the lives of every working-class family. Today, every worker lives in daily fear that his or her name may be in the next batch of pink slips. There is no longer any job security – of any kind, on any level – from the shop floor to the professional and office staffs.

**WHO'S TO BLAME FOR THE CRISIS?** ■ Who's to blame for the layoffs? The workers themselves, of course. In a page-one article in the *Sunday Times*, *Week in Review* section on May 12th, entitled, "We're Leaner, Meaner and Going Nowhere Faster," Louis Uchitelle, quoting resident economists from prestigious universities like MIT and Princeton to back up his blatantly false assertions, asks, "Why didn't layoffs and technology produce the benefits that Americans were promised for so long?"

Once again in defense of capitalism at the expense of workers, he answers, "Since the early '70s the productivity improvements have been small, in fact minuscule for nearly 25 years." False. Higher labor productivity, resulting from higher skills and efficiency but mainly in the form of killing speedup, has been going up at phenomenal rates, something like 40 percent per worker per year. Higher labor productivity of workers means higher profits for the corporations.

In this same article, Princeton, MIT and Federal Reserve economists use graphs and statistics to show that what is needed is a "labor productivity spurt." Translation: laying off more workers and squeezing higher productivity from the workers remaining in the plant. Downsizing means upsizing profits.

It is true we have periodic crises of what the industries call "overproduction." This doesn't mean too many cars are produced. It doesn't mean workers don't want or need cars. It *does* mean that too many cars are produced for the number of worker-consumers who can afford to buy them. Increasingly, workers are unable to buy the products they produce.

Together with downsizing, the latest form of

robbery is called "privatization." Privatization is touted by corporate America and its government lackeys as the solution for many of today's problems.

The idea is that to make institutions like public hospitals and jails and public services like Medicare viable and efficient, they should be turned over to private corporations to be run like a business. Most of the property and institutions already privatized are corporate takeovers of public and government properties.

The corporate and Contract forces want to take over and run for private profit all public facilities, as well as our natural resources public lands, forests, lakes, rivers, and preserves. They even have their greedy eyes on our water and public utility systems.

It is a phony argument that privatization of public property will better serve the public. It can never be better for the people to allow private investors and stockholders to take over a public property. It is a contradiction in terms. Privatization is another scheme to rob the people of everything that is publicly owned and run.

Corporate mergers are another form of robbery. The biggest corporations take over the smaller ones, and the losers are the stockholders of the smaller corporations. The mega-mergers of today are for domination of whole industries, even whole regions and countries, to control prices and availability of goods, to pay for politicians who do their bidding, to enlarge and expand the interconnections between the state and monopoly capital.

This massive accumulation and concentration of wealth and power is to perpetuate and expand the robbery of people, labor and resources, here and abroad. It is to perpetuate U.S. capitalism and imperialist plunder. That's why, in one way or another, all its defenders are phony.

**CAPITALISM WITHOUT ENTITLEMENTS** ■ Like downsizing and privatizing, another dirty game with phony players is being fought out over entitlements. The very word "entitlements" was coined to give the impression that the government generously granted these benefits of capitalism. On the contrary these are benefits that labor, the working class and people fought for and won in heated class battles over the course of 60 years.

These are programs that most Americans pay for through taxes and paycheck deductions. There-

fore, the people rightfully feel they are entitled to have such programs funded in every national budget. They include such life-support programs as Social Security, unemployment insurance, Medicare and Medicaid, public education, sanitation, transportation, postal service, and social services like welfare.

These are government-run and funded programs that people consider necessary and should be protected from cuts or elimination. They are safety-net programs that most of us, especially the younger generations, have come to take for granted as legacies from the struggles of their parents.

**SOLVING CRISIS ON BACKS OF WORKERS** ▣ However, as the crisis of capitalism deepens, as global competition spreads, as the overall quality of life deteriorates, corporate America is looking at new ways to force the people to bear the burden and bail out capitalism once again. Thus, eliminating entitlements is now seen by the ruling class as the only way they can solve the economic crisis in the interests of corporate America.

Like good lap dogs, the Gingrich Gang of 73 cut-throat Republicans who now dominate Congress, came up with the "Contract on America." And as a result every entitlement is on the chopping block. The strategy is "block grants," which is a throwback to "states rights." Gingrich and Dole took the lead in the campaign to shift these programs to the states, where they will wither away. Entitlement programs are the biggest issue in the '96 elections. They are the main targets in the Contract.

The right-wing advocates of the Contract use arguments like, "The government is too big, too bureaucratic, too intrusive, too corrupt and too poor."

The latest welfare hoax is the Wisconsin plan, being touted as a model for other states to copy. This is nothing but another scheme to limit and throw people off welfare.

The recent National Conference of Governors called for denying Medicaid to all poor children over the age of 12. What is it about 12-year olds that made the Governors decide that poor children over 12 don't need medical care anymore?

The governors' proposal and the Wisconsin welfare plan are examples of the fact that most of the states are partners in the state-monopoly conspiracy to make the people, especially the poorest and oppressed, pay for the multi-layered crises of a sys-

tem in decay.

There is a lot of phoniness on both sides. Both parties of capitalism want to cut. The Democrats want to make smaller cuts. The right-wing is throwing caution and public opinion to the wind, determined to cut up and do away with all the programs.

Trying to make points in the polls, Dole quit the Senate and is working to distance himself from Gingrich and his Congressional gang. But it isn't working, because Dole is just as reactionary in Chicago as he is on Capitol Hill. And besides, he just can't seem to help himself. Every time he opens his mouth on abortion, on welfare, on health care, he is "right" in step with his political pals in Congress.

The only way to save and preserve entitlements is to defeat the ultra-right forces in Congress with a mass, united people's movement, led by labor/community coalitions.

With consistent, militant pressure it will then be possible to force the new Congress to cancel the whole "Contract on America," restore the cuts and increase the social programs to meet the emergency needs created by the failure of the system itself.

**EXPOSING THE PHONY DEFENDERS** ▣ There is a lot of talk and debate that proclaims, "We are at the brink of self-destruction." This is Billy Graham's theme song. It is also the plaintive cry of philosophers, psychologists and sociologists.

But the "we" is never defined. And it is certainly never defined as "capitalism." We are led to believe by all the phonies that it is "we the people" who are to blame for our own self-destruction.

Books like Broder and Johnson's, *The System* never say what system. They simply state that "we are at the breaking point." They blame "the system" in the abstract, while defending the existing capitalist system.

It takes a lot of convoluted, and just plain twisted reasoning, to condemn a system and defend it at the same time. But defending and advocating capitalism is what phony ideologues do. The problem is that the real life crises of capitalism are making it harder and harder to defend a system that the people are now blaming for their suffering. The crimes and inherent flaws of capitalism cannot be covered up. The emperor has no clothes!

The process of rising profits and stocks while at

the same time wages fall and jobs disappear exposes the raw essence of capitalist exploitation. It reveals the basic contradiction in our system: human welfare and private corporate profits are irreconcilable opposites. They clash. That is what the class struggle is all about.

As people become more anti-corporate and class conscious, as the system keeps failing the people, the government plays a more direct role in guaranteeing corporate interests, profits and privileges. The tax laws and loopholes, the capital depreciation allowances, deregulation, government sponsors of strikebreaking and anti-union laws are prime examples of the role of the state in state-monopoly capitalism.

The "Contract on America" is the best example of how the state acts to preserve capitalism at the expense of the people.

There is a lot of phony talk about crime. Both parties and candidates of big business blame increasing crime on the people. But none of them talk about the criminal, racist capitalist system or the corporate killers who rob people of their livelihoods and even their lives with downsizing.

Working people and their families are the victims that corporate America prey on in as many ways as there are of making profits.

There is also lot of phony talk about the need for "role models." What the hypocrites will never admit is that the capitalist system is the worst of all "role models." How can a system that uses and abuses its people be "role models," except in a negative way?

**THE LESSER EVIL OR EXTREMELY EVIL** ■ Thus, because both Republicans and Democrats are defenders of capitalism, to one degree or another, they are phony. However, in the political and electoral arena there are some differences between them and these are very important to see. These differences are what people call "the lesser of two evils." Many voters make a choice based on that concept. The thinking is that when one of the evils becomes extremely evil, the other evil becomes more acceptable.

The serious rifts now rising to the surface within the Republican Party are caused by attempts of some to project a more moderate image, to distance themselves from the extremes of Gingrich and Co., when the polls are clearly showing that the extreme right-wing positions are unacceptable to the majori-

ty of people.

Dole just doesn't seem to be able to grasp this. Instead of moving to the left of Clinton, he insists on following his evil instincts, or his "right" miscalculations - for example on the abortion issue, on welfare and Medicare, etc.

Dole and Gingrich are the very worst of evils because they are leading the campaign to destroy all the social advances of the last 60 years. They are the worst evils because they are supporters of ideas and practices related to fascism that are inherent in the Contract. And fascism is the epitome of evil.

But all the rifts and the maneuvers are part of a phony political system that at best can offer only the "lesser of two evils." Capitalism is a system of deceit, fraud and outright thievery. Its phony defenders work overtime through the mass media, books and articles to convince the American people that it is a "by, for and of the people" system. Their answer to everything is, "Yes, there are problems, times are tough, but this is the best of all possible worlds."

But expensive propaganda campaigns do not work, because the system is not working for the majority. People have never been as anti-corporate, anti-government and anti-Congress. Class consciousness grows in tandem with the heating up of the class struggle and the realization by more and more workers that they are in a class war against their class enemy.

**BEAT BACK THE EXTREME EVIL** ■ Capitalism is in deep trouble as it careens from one crisis to another, trying to force the working class to bail it out - again. But capitalism will not die a natural death. When capitalism cannot pursue its aims with the old methods, it turns to new, more evil measures, like those under fascism. The "Contract" moves in that direction. That is why we have to defeat it and its defenders.

The takeover of our country by the ultra-right is not imminent or inevitable. In fact, the elements are beginning to fall into place that are laying the foundation for a winning battle in the electoral arena and a shift in the balance of power in Congress away from this extreme evil.

Labor is on the move all over the country, demonstrating in support of struggles like at Yale and Bridgestone-Firestone, organizing campaigns against right-wing Republicans and putting up pro-



labor Democrats that can defeat them. We will run independent and Communist candidates only in races that will not hurt the Democratic candidates running against ultra-right Republicans in Congress.

The '96 elections can be a historic victory over the right-wing and other pro-fascist forces. The November elections can be one of the most important in our history. We Americans will have an opportunity to rid our Congress of the Contract Republicans and their Democratic bedfellows, and beat back the extreme right wing.

Together with the new labor movement in coalition with people's movements and their communities, we can build a mighty, militant, united - Black, Brown, Red and white - mass protest movement.

With people's power we can demand and win not only a reversal of the "Contract," but new concessions from state monopoly capital that will put people back to work rebuilding our cities, towns and farms. With labor in the lead, we will be in a position to challenge the corporate robbers and force them to back down and get off our backs.

**SOCIALISM ON THE COMEBACK TRACK** ■ However, ultimately the only way to get capitalism off our backs finally and forever is to replace it with socialism. The corporate power structure knows that socialism is an alternative to capitalism. Some of them even see the handwriting on the wall. That is why U.S. state monopoly works worldwide to cripple the emerging movements to restore socialism.

Perhaps monopoly-capital worries more about this than almost anything else. What a blow it would be to world capitalism if the people in the ex-socialist countries vote out capitalism and bring back socialism, especially in Russia.

They are perhaps most anxious about the June elections in Russia. So they get the writers to produce books, newspaper and long magazine articles with dire warnings about the danger of a Communist comeback.

The *New York Times* leads in shifting to the right and returning to the old Cold War anti-Communism. For example, in a special Sunday, May 26th *Times Magazine* article by Alessandra Stanley, the reporter who did an FBI hatchet job on our Party, uses phrases like "the Red scare," and "the new Reds," to stir up the old Cold War atmosphere.

In this and other *Times* articles Stanley works slavishly at being a good "mediocre" ideological hack. Her main theme is, "What's dangerous about Gennadi Zyuganov is not that he's a secret Stalinist. It's that he's the last thing Russia needs right now: a mediocre apparatchik." And what does Russia need. Stanley's response: Yeltsin and capitalism, of course!

This reporter and many others are on assignment to churn out anti-Communist propaganda rehashing all the old Cold War lies. They are trying to prepare the American people for "the worst" the election and return of Communists to power, the restoration of socialism and the resurgence of the world revolutionary process.

**ANTI-COMMUNISM ON THE LEFT** ■ Unfortunately, there are also some phonies on the left who play into the hands and plans of the FBI, the CIA and the extreme right-wingers who are first and foremost anti-Communist and anti-socialism.

This is a moment when unity of all people's forces is critical to victory in struggles like the elections. Anti-communism is divisive. It holds back people's unity. It interferes with left unity.

It is impossible be an honest progressive, genuinely left, or pro any kind of socialist without recognizing the past and present contributions, or even the existence, of a growing Communist Party USA.

It is impossible to be a constructive force for people's unity in struggle and not include the Communist Party as an effective and influential force for unity and change.

It is impossible to be anti-Communist and left at the same time. It's impossible to be progressive and use, or allow others to use without response, the attacks on the Communist Party.

Left, progressive and liberal forces know that the Communist Party USA has taken the brunt of political repression, persecution and harassment since its founding in 1919. They know that whenever there is a stepped-up campaign against the Communists labor and the people's movements are also in danger.

Yet, in spite of this, the Party's growth, its increasing acceptance by the grassroots, and our new level of relationships with labor and people's movements, there are still especially some leaders of organizations, liberal politicians and individual progressives who are (to put it mildly) opportunistic

when it comes to resisting attacks against the Communist Party.

**MISUSING DR. KING'S LEGACY** ■ A recent example is the New York City Ombudsman, Mark Green's speech at the City Club, which was aired by the City University of New York Channel 75. Green has been a liberal all his political life and Communists have been very supportive of his election campaigns.

At the City Club he made a very hard-hitting speech against the ultra-right and the Contract. Unfortunately, in the middle of it he paraphrased Martin Luther King Jr as saying that the problem with Communism is that it does not respect the individual while the problem with capitalism is that it does not respect the social needs of all the people.

It was totally unnecessary, even out of context, for Green to throw in anti-Communism. We can only give an educated guess as to why he felt compelled to do so.

Perhaps Green felt he had to be a "little" anti-Communist because he was being a "lot" anti-right-wing and felt he had to soften his criticism.

The fact that he used King as a cover for his redbaiting and then cast King as an anti-Communist made his remarks all the more reprehensible.

Green knows full well that when King was assassinated, as he led the Memphis sanitation workers' struggle, he was moving rapidly towards a labor and class outlook on the struggle for equality. King had no use for anti-Communism. He saw it as a weapon to divide people's movements. Green does the legacy of King a grave injustice.

However, whatever the motive, it is dishonest and unprincipled for liberal and progressive politicians to engage in redbaiting. It is out of step with the temper of the times, the radicalization process and new patterns of thinking among the great majority. We know because we are out there.

We should all have learned from years of experience that giving in to anti-Communism, taking the path of least resistance and opportunism also hurts those who use it as well as the organizations and movements they represent.

This is even more true today when people from

practically every walk of life are actively searching for totally new, radical, more militant solutions to a social system they don't trust or believe in anymore. And many are finding a new political home in our Party.

On the international front, people are watching with great interest the failure of capitalism in the ex-socialist countries, the resurgence of socialist movements, the Communist Parties and the election of Communists. And they are making all the correct connections.

Thus, organizations like the Pacifica-WBAI radio stations, magazines like *Mother Jones*, politicians like Mark Green, and others who do some good work, will increasingly limit their potential and breadth so long as they refuse to acknowledge, to work with and include the views of Communists.

#### **LOST ILLUSIONS IN THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM** ■

Our working class and people have changed much over the past five years. Their bubble of job and survival security is burst. Attitudes and thought patterns have changed because people's lives have changed. One expression of this is the large numbers joining our Party and our new level of working relationships with labor and people's organizations.

Perhaps the most important factor in the changing attitudes is the lost illusions about capitalism, about bourgeois politics, about corporate America, monopoly-controlled government and its two old parties. This, together with the growth and interest, in the Communist Party and socialism, is striking fear into the heart of state monopoly capital.

These are times of great change. The Communist Party USA is adjusting and retooling to meet the new times. The U.S. working class and people will continue to gravitate toward our vision of socialism as an attractive, inevitable replacement for dying capitalism. People will continue to find their political home in the party of the working class and socialism, USA. And there is nothing phony about that. □

# The 1996 Elections: the People Can Win

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Jarvis Tyner

There is a lot at stake in 1996. The presidency is on the line, as well as the entire House of Representatives and 33 members of the U.S. Senate. Also, there are eleven gubernatorial races.

In his excellent pamphlet on "The Challenge of the November Elections," Gus Hall explains the task: "Ridding the U.S. Congress of the fascist-like wing of the Republican Party and its criminal Contract On America is the greatest challenge our people and our country face".

This election is crucial in terms of the direction of government policies. The right-wing Republicans already control the House, the Senate and the Supreme Court, and therefore have dominated the national political-legislative agenda for the last two years. If they extend their dominance to the White House, they will control all three branches of government. That means their neo-fascist program, "The Contract With America," will be on the fast track to total implementation.

The pro-corporate Contract and its main promoters, however, are extremely unpopular with the majority of the American people. This is the basis for a new movement in the country that can defeat the right in 1996. It is an anti-right-wing movement led by labor in alliance with civil rights, women, youth and students, seniors, and environmentalist forces. While it is advocating a vote for Clinton and Democrats for Congress, it is not a pro-Clinton or pro-Democratic Party movement. What's uniting the maximum number of diverse forces is a growing fear of the extreme right in our country and a determination to stop them from bringing about a new and more dangerous situation.

After the Contract, the Oklahoma City bombing, the exposé of the racist militias, along with growing economic insecurity, there is an anti-fascist mood growing in the country. If it is organized and brought to the polls on November 5th, not only can the ultra right be defeated, but a new era of pro-labor, anti-racist, progressive advancement can be

established.

It is understood by millions of American voters that if the ultra right sweeps all three branches of government, the nation will face worsening conditions: increased unemployment, poverty, hunger, homelessness, further setbacks in labor's rights and civil rights, the rights of women, the environment, health care, education and welfare, and the rights of youth, children and seniors.

On the other hand, the defeat of the ultra right and the election of a 105th Congress which will be more responsive to the people, a Congress that can pass the Martinez Jobs Bill, that can re-establish labor's legislative agenda and advance new legislation for civil rights, in defense of affirmative action, a Congress that could be forced to enact legislation that will reverse the damage being done by the Contract, will be a real victory for the people.

**VICTORY IS POSSIBLE IN NOVEMBER** ■ This year a major setback to the current policies of big business and U.S. imperialism must therefore be achieved by registering a stinging defeat to the ultra right at the polls. It will not be easy, but such a defeat is possible.

This election can result in a reversal of what happened in 1994, when the ultra-right Republicans won a majority of the House and Senate. They won by default because of the very low turnout of working-class and racially oppressed voters. In the House, the Gang of 73 right-wing freshmen were elected and Newt Gingrich became the speaker. He is the main force behind the "Contract With America."

This year, if Republicans have a net loss of twenty in the House, Newt Gingrich will be out as speaker. In the Senate, with a net loss of four, the Republicans will lose their majority control in that body.

Presently, the polls show President Clinton with a 20 point lead on Robert Dole, the likely Republican nominee. They also show a very negative rating for the Republican majority in Congress. There is a lot at stake and the right wing, with strong corporate

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support and virtually unlimited finances, is pulling out all stops to prevent the real possibility of a big defeat.

Communists, along with other left, progressive and democratic forces need to be on an emergency footing to help guarantee what can be a tremendous victory.

Defeat of the ultra right at the polls will mean victory for the multiracial, multinational U.S. working class and the majority of Americans who must work for a living and are facing one of the most prolonged periods of economic and social instability in U.S. history.

**THE "CONTRACT ON AMERICA"** ■ Like politics in general, elections in the capitalist system do not operate outside of the class struggle. During election years, the conflict between the two main contending classes shifts to the voting booths. This is where the interests of the working class and the capitalist class will come into sharp conflict in 1996.

The "Contract With America," which is now more popularly known as the "Contract On America" is a comprehensive expression of the ruling-class policies today. It has little to do with "bringing back morality," "family values," lowering taxes or balancing the federal budget. Above all, the Contract is a massive attack on the economic well-being and political rights of the working class. Its goal is to keep the profits of the dominant U.S. corporations as high as possible in an era of increasing decay of world capitalism.

Evidence of the vile racist nature of the Contract attack can be seen in attacks on affirmative action, civil rights in general, the attack on immigrants, on the poorest, those without medical care, those on welfare, children of the poor, on the Medicare and Medicaid recipients, those living in public housing and those impoverished youth entrapped in the gang/drug life. The Contract means that all entitlements vital to the survival of the unemployed and under-employed working people are in jeopardy. If implemented, the Contract will deepen economic and racial polarization in the country. It will deepen the misery for millions of racial minorities as well as white working people who are the largest group of poor people in America. Racist scapegoating will surely be used to divert and divide the people. The dangers are very great if the Contract is fully or even mostly implemented. This is why it must be defeated in

1996.

While many Democrats, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), including Clinton, support many of its main components, the front-line fighters for this program are the ultra-right extremist Republicans, starting with the Gang of 73 in the House. The starting point to defeating the whole program is to defeat its most prominent proponents and that's what must be done in 1996.

If the Contract forces are defeated, it will create a positive atmosphere to advance all progressive causes, including the efforts to build third-party formations and political independence.

**GINGRICH'S SHARP DECLINE** ■ While a majority of Americans are concerned about the effectiveness of government deficits, the growth of violence and chaos in our society, immorality, corruption and wastefulness in government, they do not agree with the proposals contained in the Contract.

Newt Gingrich, its main author and proponent, is probably the most unpopular House speaker in U.S. history.

After the 1994 elections, Newt Gingrich, with the full support of the mass media, was riding high. Despite his extreme professorial arrogance, he was projected as some kind of "revolutionary" who was to lead the way to less taxes, less government and a balanced budget. Less than a year later he and his right-wing racist policies were despised by the overwhelming majority of the people. Today he is perhaps the most unpopular politician in America, especially after he engineered the shutdown of the government in order to force his cut-back proposals on the American people.

Presently, no Republican wants to campaign with Newt Gingrich, who is reported in some quarters as being very demoralized. His appearances in the media have been minimized. "Where is Newt?" asked one TV political commentator, who joked about how they may have to put Newt's picture on a milk carton.

But what's happening is no joke. It is the growing mass rejection of the ultra right by the people. There is a mass revulsion to their policies in government. There is also a fear of violence from the right. The alarm was sounded after the mass murder in Oklahoma City and the exposé of

the vast network of well-armed, right-wing, racist groups. These are terrorist groups, who in most cases are linked to, if not organized within or even by the U.S. military. This rejection comes from the understanding of the nature of fascism.

**THE ROLE OF LABOR** ▣ Molly Ivens, the popular Texas political commentator, made a profound observation last year when she said that the most important election in America will be the election of the leadership of the AFL-CIO. That election is having a profound effect on the total political climate in the country and is key to why it is possible to defeat Dole and the Gang of 73. That election, and what has happened since, is moving the entire electoral debate to the left. It shows the leading role of the working class when it is organized and fighting for its rights. It shows the great reservoir of strength and political power that lies in the U.S. labor movement.

Right now the right-wing agenda dominating the Republican presidential primaries has been eclipsed by the main slogan of the labor movement today: "America Needs a Raise." The demand for a raise in the minimum wage is the most popular issue today. It has put the Republicans on the defensive and has split their ranks. Anti-abortion positions, welfare reform, lowering taxes and the other right-wing issues have been pushed aside and issues related to the plight of working people are coming more to the fore. The "Stand for Children" action in Washington on June 1, the many strike struggles and mass demonstrations against racism, the cut-backs and the struggle for jobs, now being waged throughout the country, will put increasing pressure on the right.

Because labor's mobilization for the 1996 elections is on a higher level than it has been since the upsurge of the '30s and '40s, prospects for victory are much greater.

The most outstanding effort being conducted by organized labor is their highly coordinated campaign to register and educate working-class voters on the real issues. They are buying media time. They are putting one hundred organizers in each Congressional district. They have singled out certain districts for TV and radio ads, hitting hard on the class issues. They are exposing the right-wing extremists and mobilizing their ranks to be campaign workers, to phone-bank, to register and educate the voters and to be precinct workers. The

concentration districts are those where the worst of the gang of 73 are from; many of these districts are traditionally Democratic and were won by a very narrow margin. These ultra-right Republican freshmen incumbents are all vulnerable. The labor movement has already endorsed Clinton. Overall, the AFL-CIO is planning to raise \$35 million through volunteer contributions from the rank and file.

Organizations like Jobs with Justice, various labor-community coalitions, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) are all in gear to bring about the victory.

In addition to what the AFL-CIO is organizing nationally, individual unions are launching their own efforts on international and local levels on behalf of candidates they support. Most unions, with rare exception, have pledged to do all they can to defeat the right-wing extremists in November.

The fact that "Union Summer" is being organized by the AFL-CIO, putting thousands of organizers in the field to organize the unorganized, will have its impact on the elections. A number of unions, like UNITE, are engaged in aggressive organizing drives, especially in the South. All of this will contribute much to the effort to defeat the right and could be decisive in defeating the Republican efforts to sweep the South. When workers are in motion organizing for their rights, the level of class consciousness is raised.

In most of these efforts, there are coalitions of civil rights and labor organizations. In the battle for the South, the labor-civil rights coalition efforts can make the difference. The National Baptist Convention, the largest organization of Black churches, has formed a working alliance with the unions to help organize unorganized workers.

CBTU is organizing in a number of Congressional districts. They have set up training classes for election workers, to help elect friends of labor and defeat anti-labor candidates.

**THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTE** ▣ The African American vote remains a key swing vote in national elections. That is because it is located in the big cities, in the largest states, and tends to vote in a consistently pro-working class, liberal and anti-racist manner. Presently there are 22 million African Americans over the age of 18, about 12 per-

cent of the electorate. If the African American vote, in alliance with other key forces, is registered and comes to the polls in November, it can help guarantee Clinton's re-election and a defeat of the right in Congress. If the African American vote comes out in strength, it can help defeat a large number of the gang of 73, many of whom were elected in districts which contain a decisive minority of African American voters.

Organizations like the Rainbow Coalition are organizing national bus tours to mobilize and register and educate voters. The National Coalition on Black Voter Participation is also planning an aggressive voter registration and education campaign. They are working with CBTU, the A. Philip Randolph Institute and several predominantly Hispanic unions. The NAACP, under its new leadership, is also launching a voter registration drive. A number of the local groups set up after the Million Man March are also registering voters.

By a slight margin, the majority of African Americans now live in the South. This is a new progressive power base that is key to breaking the right-wing stranglehold in that region. The South is becoming the most industrialized region in the country. The African American and labor vote is gaining more importance as a result.

This is why there is a concerted attack against Black elected officials, especially in the South. Republicans are out to defeat the re-districting that produced so many additional African American members of Congress from below the Mason-Dixon line. This attack is part of a basic fight to prevent the bringing forth of a progressive majority of voters in this area of the country.

In North Carolina, the race for the U.S. Senate seat is very important in this regard. Harvey Gant defeated a wealthy businessman in the Democratic primary and will once again face arch right-winger Jesse Helms in November. The Gant campaign, with its tremendous support from labor and the African American community, has a fighting chance of defeating Helms, which would be a major setback for the right nationally. This race will also increase Clinton's chances of winning the state.

**THE LATINO AND WOMEN'S VOTE** ■ In the Southwest, in particular, the Mexican American vote is decisive to defeating the right.

The fact that in Texas, the Democratic ticket will

include Latino candidate, Victor Morales, for U.S. Senate will also help increase the possibility of mobilizing a powerful vote among Mexican Americans. Morales won the Democratic nomination, against the machine, with almost no money, campaigning all over the state, out of his pick-up truck. In California, the Mexican American vote can make the difference in that electoral vote-rich state.

Overall there are 18.6 million Latinos who are over 18 years old and, if fully registered and mobilized, they potentially could be 9 percent of the vote.

Out of a total of 189.5 million voting-age population, women constitute the majority. According to an Associated Press release (3/96), by November there will be about 102.2 million women over the age of 18, which is 52 percent of the total. Voting-age women outnumber voting-age men by 7.9 million. When women come out to vote they tend to vote more liberal. In an attempt to cut into the women's vote the Republicans have recently run a number of right-wing women candidates. Over all, however, they have not been able to reverse the main progressive trend among women voters. Alliances of labor, African Americans, women, youth and seniors will guarantee victory in November.

The maximum effort of all the organized progressive forces is needed to bring out the maximum vote against the right this year. A potential 15 million new voters could be added to the rolls under the "Motor Voter" law. The law requires that voter registration application blanks be issued along with drivers' licenses at Motor Vehicle Bureaus and other state agencies.

**GROWING REPUBLICAN DIVISION** ■ The recent polls and the developments among labor and its allies are causing panic in the ranks of the Republicans. There is fear that in unity, these forces will bring about an historic defeat.

This is why Haley Barbour, the chairman of the Republican Party, has been traveling around the country raising the alarm about the role of labor. They are claiming that labor is not being "fair" in its criticism of them and should not use members' money to defeat them. They are claiming to speak for the minority in the ranks of labor who are registered Democrats, but have voted for Republicans in recent elections. However, in the post-Kirkland AFL-CIO, the polls show that the so-called Reagan Democrats in their ranks were never that large in

the first place, and are currently less inclined to vote Republican.

The Republicans have been organizing secret meetings (no press allowed) with their corporate contributors, right-wing think tanks and activists, to raise the issue of labor's role in the elections and demanding larger contributions to defeat labor's role. Reports are they are getting more money than ever.

There seems to be no limit to Republican hypocrisy. The contributions they will receive from corporations are expected to be seven times what labor is spending to defeat them. And how is it possible that the party that injected the "Willie Horton" racist issue into the American body politic could accuse others of being "unfair?"

The new role of labor and its allies and the fact that Dole is so far behind in the polls has caused splits in the ranks of the Republicans. Some are for abandoning Dole in order to concentrate on the House and Senate. Others are afraid of the working class vote and are calling for the Republicans to support issues like a higher minimum wage. Most Republicans running for office, must distance themselves from Newt Gingrich, the Contract and the more open fascist-like Pat Buchanan if they want to win.

In the presidential race, some Republicans are acting like rats on a sinking ship, especially those in the fascist wing of that party.

The Dole resignation from the Senate is a major retreat from the earlier tactics. By resigning, he can distance himself from the Contract and Newt Gingrich. He can also shift campaigning from issues to "character."

**THE REPUBLICAN ELECTORAL STRATEGY** ■ The Republicans have a plan which they hope will win them more strength in Congress and possibly the White House as well.

The GOP is way behind in the polls right now. If the election were held today, Bill Clinton would defeat Dole by a wide margin. The Republicans may hold the Senate but would likely lose the 20 seats, or more, in the House.

Even with Perot in the race, Clinton would still win. Perot is not as big a factor this year as he was in 1992. In 1992 he took a large number of votes from George Bush. This year he will take from both Clinton and Dole, but mostly from Dole. The polls show the attitudes of the voters today, six months away

from the elections. There are no guarantees that these attitudes won't change.

The Republicans have not given up. They are working overtime. They are well financed. They are out to win a larger majority in the Congress, and the presidency. They are arguing that they will win the election. They are saying that so many Democratic veteran members of Congress are resigning this year that they will be able to hold their own in the Congress because they will be able to put up better quality candidates who will be well financed. They have other plans to discourage voter interest and registration, and therefore prevent a large turnout among Black, Latino and working-class voters. Some of this discouragement might come in the form of fake "political independence." But anything that seriously takes away from the defeat of the ultra right in the presidential and Congressional races this year is objectively in support of the Contract. The first criterion for political independence is to work to defeat the Contract.

The Republicans also argue that in the presidential race, while they are behind in the popular vote, they are much closer in electoral college votes and have a fighting chance to win in electoral votes. They are looking at swing states like New Jersey and Pennsylvania. They expect to sweep the South. They think they can win one or more of the major midwest industrial states. Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey all have Republican governors and Clinton didn't win those states by very large margins in 1992.

**NADER'S ROLE: DEFEAT CLINTON** ■ All these factors are why the Republicans welcome a well-known liberal like Ralph Nader running for president in California and perhaps in as many as 20 other states. With Perot in the race in 1992, Clinton won California with a plurality of 46 percent. Bush and Clinton were separated by 13 points. Nader, it is estimated could take 10-15 percent of the vote. Most of his support will come from liberal and left voters. California is the state with the largest number of electoral votes (54).

Communists are certainly for independent campaigns. We have and will continue to run independent campaigns. But this year, Ralph Nader is running the wrong campaign, for the wrong office, in the wrong states and in the wrong year. He should reconsider.

In U.S. bourgeois electoral politics there are no sure bets. All races will get tighter and more difficult as election day approaches. The fact that the majority of voters are opposed to the ultra right, does not necessarily mean that the majority will come out to vote.

In order to defeat the Gang of 73 each Congressional race must be looked at concretely and organized specifically in order to win. To defeat the ultra right will be a fight all the way. It will be won on the streets, door to door, in the union halls and in churches. While TV is important, it is not as crucial in Congressional races as in the presidential race.

Every effort must be made to find good, winning candidates. The 1994 election results showed that it was the aggressive liberal to progressive Democrats who ran on the issues who withstood the Republican tide, while the moderate to conservative Democrats went down to defeat. When voters could not see a clear distinction between candidates, they tended either to stay home or to vote for the more conservative candidate. The Democrats, Clinton above all, must understand there is no room in the American political spectrum for another Republican Party.

The defeats in 1994 were a repudiation of the policies of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the conservative wing of the Democratic Party. Keeping in mind the widespread feeling against Gingrich and the Contract, and the fear of right-wing extremism, winning candidates should be liberal to progressive, with a pro-labor program and a strong position against racism and right-wing extremism. This will bring out the voters needed to win. Clinton, above all, needs to remember this. He can't win if he is seen as a Democratic Party version of Newt Gingrich.

**THE GROWTH OF LABOR CANDIDATES** ■ There are signs of many more labor-based candidates running for office this year. More and more it's understood that labor has to have its own representatives in public office. Labor and pro-labor candidates are starting to come to the fore. There are candidates like Tom Fricano, regional director of the United Auto Workers Union (UAW), from Buffalo, New York, who is challenging Congressman Bill Paxson, a strong supporter of the Contract, who heads the Republican Congressional campaign committee. In New York City, labor is prepared to support a can-

didate to challenge Susan Molinari. In Iowa, there are two labor candidates, including an African American woman leader of the Communications Workers of America, who is running for Congress in the 2nd congressional district in Des Moines. Labor will be playing a major role in at least 30-40 congressional races.

There are also labor candidates running for State Assembly and local races as well. An outstanding example is UAW and CBTU leader Lew Moye, who is running for State Assembly in St. Louis.

Since Charles Hayes was defeated in 1992, there is no Congressperson who comes from the ranks of labor. This can be dramatically changed this year.

To win this fight will take hard work. It will be a difficult struggle on all fronts. The potential for victory against the right is there but it will take resources, organization and mobilization; above all, it will take unity of the democratic forces.

Labor Party Advocates' (LPA) successes show that labor representation is on the order of the day. To successfully build LPA requires an approach to electing representatives of labor to public office.

To defeat the Gang of 73, the full force of the labor-progressive community is needed, including those who are building the third-party movement. They must be part of this vital effort.

The fact that our electoral system is fundamentally undemocratic, that the winner takes all, that it is dominated by the two capitalist parties of big-business is no reason to sit out today's struggle. Losing is not an acceptable option for us.

**THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY** ■ In the April issue of *Political Affairs*, Sam Webb called on the Party to do its all in this vital struggle to defeat the right in 1996. We cannot be indifferent to what is happening to our class and people. Therefore, we are moving to an emergency footing in this struggle. No district, no club, no member of the CPUSA is exempt from this fight. Our efforts will help build unity and move labor and peoples' movements into action to stay the hand of reaction. We have no illusions in capitalism and capitalist politicians, but we reject the view that the worse things get, the better the prospects for revolutionary change. Difficult conditions do create anger, but it's an illusion to think that anger alone will lead to basic change.

This year we are not planning to run a presidential ticket. The time needed would take away from



the overall task of defeating the right. We are for running Communist candidates for local office. Presently there are discussions going on in a number of districts to put forward Party candidates this year. We will not run if it in any way interferes with the effort to defeat the Gang of 73. Running local candidates on the advanced program of the Communist Party is imperative to moving the whole process forward.

While not ruling out Congressional races, we are concentrating on local offices - for mayor, city council, state representative, county office and school board.

**COMMUNIST CAMPAIGN TACTICS** ■ One of the best examples is the campaign of Frank Soifer, the state chair of the Oregon District of the CPUSA. Soifer ran for mayor of Eugene, Oregon, under the slogan of "People and Nature before Profits." He is a retired union president and an active, visible figure in progressive politics in Eugene. He is receiving support from the voters and has built a campaign with Party and non Party participation. There have been a number of positive articles in the local press. Most important, he is getting out into the grass roots, helping to build unity and action against the ultra right, while bringing the message of the Communist Party directly to the people. As *Political Affairs* goes to press, with half the vote counted, Soifer has received 5 percent of the vote. We need many more such campaigns around the country to add the Communist plus to the anti-ultra-right campaign. This is an ideal basis for building the Party and the *People's Weekly World*.

Our party has a critical role to play, especially in exposing the right and helping to mobilize the left and progressive forces to help give initiative to the new majority movement against the ultra right.

In this regard, we are not afraid to describe the fascist-like danger we face. Gus Hall, in his excellent pamphlet, "The Challenge of the November Elections," put it this way: "Until now I have been resistant to using 'fascist' or even 'fascist-like.' But after giving this some thought and watching developments, I am now convinced that the fascist danger is inherent in the direction that Gingrich and his Gang of 73 are moving."

This pamphlet is a powerful weapon and should be in the hands of every rank-and-file worker, every local union president, every civil rights fighter, all who believe in democracy. It is necessary to sound the alarm to mobilize the people, and this pamphlet can help do that.

With the new radicalization in the country, the Communist Party, USA believes that if we act decisively in 1996, this fascist danger can be defeated.

**THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS TODAY** ■ To understand what we confront is to deal with reality. Politics do not come in nice neat packages and you simply pick the one you like. In increasing numbers, U.S. voters are becoming fed up with the two parties. At the same time, on a national level, the independent forces are not yet in a position to build a winning, progressive third party. Yet the outcome of these elections will affect these forces in a profoundly negative way if they choose to abstain from voting. In this election the stakes are too high. We cannot afford to abstain. We must enter the fray in a way that will move things forward, by voting against the most reactionary candidates. This will create the basis for pressure on the Democrats from the left.

At the same time, this will also create and renew some illusions in the Democrats which must be struggled against. The "lesser of two evils" phenomenon unfortunately, is built into U.S. capitalist politics. Understanding that most voters are fed up with the current electoral system, we still have to find ways to deal with this concept, at the same time we build a new, more democratic electoral system. It is a greater illusion to think that a mass progressive third electoral party is going to come into being, separate and apart from the struggle against reaction.

The gains of the 1996 elections can be propelled further forward in the 1997 and 1998 mayoral, congressional and gubernatorial elections.

The year 2000 will be another presidential election year with wide-open primaries.

By then, with continuing struggle, it is very possible that the independent forces will be strong enough to put forward a united third-party slate for president that could move the elections to the left. □

# The Life and Non-Death of Walter Lowenfels

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Phillip Bonosky

In a few months it will be a hundred years since Walter Lowenfels was born in 1897 in New York City. His life not only spanned this most diverse century, but actively embraced it. Lowenfels, "that poet," in the words of Louis Aragon, "of the bruised heart," stood amazed, amused – and then not so amused – at what he saw unfold before his eyes in the U.S. then later in France and the USSR and in the U.S. again.

The distance between halcyon days on the Left Bank in Paris in the 1920s, where he spent his youth in the after-glow of Dada, heated discussions on literary and artistic life with writers like Henry Miller, e.e. cummings, Louis Aragon and Paul Eulard, and his arrest "for conspiring to overthrow the government by force and violence" was a long one – but one he shared with an entire generation.

Lowenfels came to Communism, not out of a sense of unbearable oppression. In fact, with his family in the butter business, economic problems did not press on him. He came to Communism "to stay alive." He wrote much later in his "Coda:"

My integration to the working class and a Marxist outlook wasn't based on any temporary or fluctuating emotion or situation – such as unemployment, hunger, discrimination... To stay alive I was driven to find a way out of the graveyard toward which I saw our civilization headed.<sup>1</sup>

It was in Paris that he first encountered the real America. With fascism already a fact in Germany, all France was bracing itself for a similar thrust. In the great demonstrations of the Popular Front that was to block it, Lowenfels found himself marching not only under the slogans of the Popular Front, but with banners that read "Free the Scottsboro Youth." This was a reminder of the America he fled. Life as a poet, which Lowenfels consciously, not to say, self-consciously led, writing privately printed poems for a "couple of hundred readers" (becoming anxious if too many readers materialized) and reassuring himself that communicating with the elite was fame enough, left something unsatisfied after

all. It was not only as a Jew that Lowenfels reacted against the threat of fascism – though he could scarcely be unaware of the virulent anti-Semitism accompanying all fascist movements, including the Cagoulares in France – but as a poet. But protests against fascism had their naive side. The words of famous writers denouncing Hitler was not guaranteed to topple him. Goebbels showed his scorn for that kind of protest by burning all their books – and no avenging angel sent a thunderbolt down from heaven to annihilate him. What Lowenfels sensed was that the evil of fascism was a basic assertion of a power that could not be shamed, argued with or outwitted: it had passed outside the parameters of Christian-Judeo morality and was a pure, terminal distillation of class.

Compromise was impossible. At Munich, the fascists were given the bribe of Czechoslovakia and offered tolerance if only they turned toward the Soviet Union. The gamble was unsuccessful; tolerance was also impossible. It was a shock to intellectuals to realize that dead Beethoven and dead Goethe and dead Kant and dead Schopenhauer could not stay the hands of Death – that through their genius their commitment of Germany to a compassionate civilization no longer influenced the men in power. Bourgeois culture and morality had reached their limit. "Let me be your conscience," Hitler told the German people, "and in return I will give you French silk stockings, Ukrainian wheat, Polish sausages, lebensraum..." And the German middle class agreed. By 1936 Hitler could boast: "I have tried to give the German people peace inside the country. And now, three years [after coming to power], I can say the German people are internally the most satisfied in the world."

By 1936 his concentration camps were packed with anti-fascists, Communists, Social Democrats, thousands of them, and Germany stood on the verge of Kristalnacht when the Nazis opened the murderous campaign against the Jews as part of the "final solution." But, "the German people" were "satisfied."

France, under the leadership of the Communist Party, which had organized the Peoples Front, had shown that fascism could be stopped. Spain too, would be enveloped in fascist treachery. It had glo-

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riously fought against the fascists even though it was betrayed by its "friends," France, the U.S. and England, and went down to defeat. Only the Soviet Union, which alone had come to its defense on a world level, had the resources, both material and ideological, to stop Hitler.

Lowenfels, full of recently gained understanding, sensed early on the limits of the concept that art had no ideology nor was it a weapon in the political struggle. He understood that those who stuck to this position objectively aided fascism. Knowing this, he sought to align himself with the only force in society that was true – that had to oppose fascism – and that was the working class. He sensed his

limitations as an intellectual without shop and union experience and began to understand why intellectuals cannot be the basic revolutionary group. In our society they can always find alternatives that enable them to survive... The miners and steelworkers don't have alternatives; they must survive on the job...<sup>2</sup>

In 1937 Lowenfels published a book of poems whose subject matter already reflected his new concerns: *Steel, 1937*.

In this collection of poems about the Spanish Civil War and the CIO drive to organize Little Steel, I tried to carry on the technical discoveries I had made in Paris, and to apply them to the new social viewpoint that I had acquired, largely from books.<sup>3</sup>

But it failed.

I gave up verse entirely for 16 years. The inadequacy of the book convinced me that I couldn't make the switch as a writer until I made the switch as a person. We moved to Philadelphia and I began as a rank-and-filer to become active in the working-class and civil-rights movements.<sup>4</sup>

From writing obscure and elliptical verses for Left Bank esthetes, Lowenfels made a leap that must have seemed comparable to jumping across the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River.

What he "discovered" was that, say what you will, there is a connection between what you say and how you say it. It is one thing to write consciously for a "few hundred" who puzzle out your verse as though each word is part of a convoluted conundrum, and are delighted when they feel they've succeeded, and quite another thing to

write for a readership of several thousand who are not concerned with intricate verse schemes and can appreciate a direct and forthright style. In the ensuing years Lowenfels, when he resumed writing poetry, concluded his struggle was how to tell the truth without vulgarizing his art. He continued to feel that some of the "discoveries" he made about poetry in Paris could still be profitably applied to the facts he now encountered. He believed that everything was implicitly poetical, and no subject was too mean, too commonplace, or even too complicated to be outside poetry, including politics.

Here Lowenfels in a sense defied the art-for-art-sakers in their most sacred dens. Aren't art and politics absolute opposites? Oil and water? Doesn't one scream death to the other? Nevertheless, imperceptibly, he went on to publish a book called *The Poetry of my Politics* (1968). He wanted above all else to place poetry at the service of the struggle for a better world, not – as he might have been expected – a better world in general, but very specifically, the one already in existence in the USSR, and the one humanity was struggling to create. He wanted poets to be the "acknowledged" legislators of mankind – going beyond Shelley's "unacknowledged."

He wanted a poem to bite, to be alive, to act. He wanted the enemy of poetry to do his worst – to react. And he got his wish.

He had applied his new approach to poetry in several novel ways – one of them, literally, to pick up poems from the sidewalk, or in newspapers, or from letters, which he called his "found" poems. "I am trying to break through this language to get to the fireboxes," he begins one poem. He would incorporate in *American Voices*, lines from Willie McGee's last letter before he was executed:

*They are going to take my life  
to keep the Negro down in the South.  
Keep on fighting.*

*Spring raided our street,  
broke through the thin glass of daybreak,  
found houses asleep,  
neighbor's cyclamen bush  
redder than it was yesterday...*

Going on in his own original way, invoking the time-tested subjects of poetry through the ages – spring, flowers, daybreak, beauty, etc., and then

suddenly:

*Spring held open hearings on the Potomac,  
broadcast from the treetops:  
"peace is being born.*

And then came the "shocker:"

*Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio:  
"I can't help but shudder when the word cobalt  
no longer describes the shade of blue  
but conveys the idea of uncontrolled destruction"*

– Marion

It was a letter from Marion, a stranger to him, which Lowenfels incorporated bodily in his poem, transferring to poetry a device already used by painters, like Picasso, who pasted bits of cloth and newspaper on canvas and called it "collage." This was an instance of how Lowenfels tried to marry two art forms – painting and literature – into one composite called "montage," which was the artistic sum of unartistic and apparently unrelated facts. Soviet cinematographers adapted "montage" into their films, creating a technique still widely used today.

Well, your "average reader" wasn't prepared for this unconventional versifying. Brought up on lines such as "The boy stood on the burning deck, when all but he had fled" you might argue for "all but 'he'" or "all but 'him.'"

The lines which scanned perfectly were arranged in military formation and were strictly rhymed (no approximate rhymes – assonance – but exact rhymes). This couldn't possibly injure the feelings of a sainted soul. But Lowenfels wasn't out to scandalize a sainted soul. Being aware of monstrous crimes being committed in our name, he wanted to find a way of identifying the evil – the crime that dared not speak its name. He would speak it. And he would use the one means over which he felt he had some power – poetry. But this was at a time when poetry had all but been done to death in the hands of his own contemporaries like e.e. cummings and by others who believed that obscurity was the hallmark of talent, such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, whose poems required the knowledge of several foreign languages.

He tried. If he was not a complete success at least he succeeded in proving that form is distilled content and the mold made to shape a horse cannot be made to shape a man. You had to break the mold and shape

another one. The innovative forms he acquired in Paris could not be made to fit the lives of steelworkers and coalminers. Nevertheless, he persisted: "This love affair with ordinary things," he wrote a friend, "culminated in my approach to social revolution as another 'rites of Spring,' with working people carrying through the ritual burial of the old God and the birth of the new. What can be dirtier in the eyes of the established order than that?"<sup>5</sup>

Lowenfels' entry into the Communist Party was an extreme test for himself, as it was for literally thousands of artists of all kinds who "went Left." But it was also a test for the Party. It's no secret that some in the leadership couldn't make head nor tail of Lowenfels' verse. But whoever these leaders were, they had the wit to know that despite the fact that writing a poem isn't the same thing as writing a leaflet, nevertheless, the poet who writes a leaflet as though it were a poem, would quite possibly write a leaflet that moves people. In its own way this becomes literature. In the hundreds of shop papers written over the years under all kinds of conditions, legal and illegal, much of genuine Americana was written by anonymous Communists and remains uncelebrated in the hidden archives of our culture. Lowenfels aspired to be just that – a writer of anonymous shop papers which challenged corporate power.

Ironically, he was to be successful in this, not so much in his poetry, as in his prose, and in what some people consider less than literary – journalism. He wrote articles for the *Daily Worker* and its successors, *The Worker*, *The Daily World*, *The New Masses*, with opening lines like these:

Death has taken two more lives at the Glen Alden Coal Company. One of the victims never saw a coal mine; the other spent his life in them.

In the end Patrick O. Landrine's name made the financial pages. The passing of this young Duquesne steel worker occupied a paragraph on page 15 of the Pittsburgh Press. By the merest chance, his death coincided with the annual financial statement of his employer, the U.S. Steel Corporation.... You will not find him posted above, among the imposing figures of the world's largest steel producer. He is not named in the extra dividends. He occupies no place in the 'accelerated depreciation.'<sup>6</sup>

Lowenfels, from time to time, had complained to correspondent friends about being ignored by the

Establishment critics and publishers, suggesting that one of the reasons might have been that

in my work the juxtaposition of ideas and scientific adventures of words take the place of the sex description in other books. I am the ideological counterpoint of the writer whose work is often banned by the censor as 'pornographic.' Perhaps the unforgivable sin was that I saw the common experience of our time as a poem.<sup>7</sup>

Not noticed publicly. But noticed! One day in July, 1953:

I was sitting at my desk in the enclosed porch of our cottage in the woods, working on a poem. Suddenly floodlights and shouts broke through the darkness and the silence. Eight men, pointing revolvers, converged on my typewriter as if it were a machine-gun emplacement. It was 2 A.M., July 23, 1953.

It was a most successful raid; I haven't yet recovered from the surprise. In the years that followed I was never even able to figure out what the FBI expected to find. If they were arresting me for my sonnets I might have understood, and so might others. [But this irony was wasted on the semi-literate FBI agents! - PB] But for editing the *Pennsylvania Worker*? For sitting through hundreds of meetings? The Department of Justice should have advanced bearing medals, not guns.

A large part of my adult life has been spent trying to overthrow, not only the government, but the universe. I thought I had the ideal weapon - the word.... I and my fellow defendants were tried for somebody else's words - and not words in poems, either. The words used against me at our trial were prose passages from Karl Marx and his decedents.

The witnesses the prosecution put on the stand against us were former Communists who had become informers and agents for the FBI at a fair rate of pay. They testified about meetings they had attended, who was present, and what was really meant by what had been said. Their smoothest fabrications couldn't overcome the dullness of their narratives. It is hard enough to understand dialectics and how social changes take place throughout history, and what Marx and Engels and Lenin really meant. In the verbiage of the witnesses, Marxist thought and terminology became such a long-drawn-out gobbledygook of "proletariat," "cadres," etc., that I turned to Ben W., one of my co-defendants, and observed: 'This jury is going to find us guilty of having endured boredom and convict us of talking nonsense.' And so they did.<sup>8</sup>

So they did - making them eligible for at least five years in prison. In the weeks Lowenfels was held awaiting bail and trial he learned to stuff bread pellets into his ears to shut out the never-ending radio noise. Fortunately Lowenfels was spared when a Superior Court released him and the others after six months "for lack of evidence."

"Evidence" there was - loads of it, all manufactured in the busy forgery rooms of the FBI (then, as now). But the courts could not bring themselves to admit openly what was clear to anyone who bothered to look - the "law" was a fraud, the witnesses were frauds (paid stool pigeons), the prosecuting attorneys, all panting to become district attorneys, and the juries, combed and re-combed by the FBI, were a cowed and frightened lot. They were certain that if they brought in a verdict of "not guilty," the FBI would see to it that they were next in the defendant's dock. The jurists felt it was their patriotic duty to convict Communists, regardless of the evidence. They were like the jurors in New York City at the Smith Act trial who would have voted to convict the Statue of Liberty of blocking traffic in the harbor if the government prosecutor, backed by the government judge, had indicated that they wished them to.

Lowenfels continued writing "subversive" verse, remarkably positive and optimistic for all that, and I well remember him at meetings, interrupting himself by pulling out a small bottle or flask and taking a liberal swig of whiskey in the middle of his or anybody else's argument, explaining, when he bothered to explain, that he was merely obeying doctor's orders: the whiskey helped his damaged heart.

In 1976 he died looking ahead at life. Death, like a muggger, had to assault him from behind - much like the government itself. □

#### Notes

1. Walter Lowenfels, *The Portable Walter Lowenfels*, International Publishers, New York, 1968.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

# Workers Battle Health-Care Giant

Marilyn Bechtel

For many months, health care workers at California's Kaiser Permanente have been locked in an increasingly bitter struggle with the country's largest HMO. At issue is Kaiser's escalating departure from its original focus on providing quality care to patients through a prepaid, non-profit structure, costing less than traditional fee-for-service care.

Kaiser, citing pressure from competing for-profit HMOs, claims it must close hospitals, reduce services, change its traditional provision of services through its own facilities by doctors and other health workers it employs directly, and extract take-aways from its 30,000 workers statewide.

For a number of years, issues of health coverage have been toward the top of the agenda in union negotiations. Many strikes have been fought over preserving workers' health benefits and preventing their destruction in corporate cutback drives. Now it is clear that organized labor is waging a major campaign around Kaiser, as part of the AFL-CIO's new fightback strategy to protect and expand workers' economic and social benefits.

The labor movement is waging a two-pronged struggle with the health care giant. On the one hand, the workers at more than 150 Kaiser health care facilities in California are in the midst of a sharp battle over new contracts, with Kaiser pressing for big givebacks while the workers are demanding the return of quality care, insisting on a voice in patient care and striving to protect their union jobs, wages, benefits and conditions.

On the other hand, the AFL-CIO and its Industrial Union Department (IUD) have embarked on a long-term campaign to turn the direction of Kaiser's corporate strategy away from aping the for-profit HMOs and back toward its original program of providing low-cost, quality care. An IUD spokesperson said recently that along with the national labor federation's wholehearted support for the health workers' contract struggles, the long-term campaign does not depend on the outcome of the current negotia-

tions.

There are two reasons for this union spotlight on Kaiser. The giant company, now 50 years old, is the country's oldest and biggest HMO. In addition, Kaiser historically was built with the support of the organized labor movement, and even today about half of Kaiser's subscribers nationwide are members of union households.

In a time when health care has become largely dominated by giant corporations – most openly seeking to make the greatest possible profits from this vital service to human beings – the struggle around Kaiser must also be seen in the broader context of the U.S. people's struggle to preserve and expand human rights and to achieve democratic control of the resources vital to realizing those human rights.

In this election year, this broad struggle for quality health care as a human right is also inextricably linked to the drive to defeat the Republican ultra right at the polls and the struggle to preserve and expand health care entitlements, including Medicare and Medicaid.

The importance of Kaiser to California's health care picture is shown by the fact that 4.8 million state residents – or one in seven of those who have health coverage – receive their health care through Kaiser. In 1994 Kaiser reported that its market share in California equaled that of its five top competitors combined. California is also crucial to Kaiser: about 70 percent of its membership is in the state. Nationwide the company has 6.6 million subscribers in 16 states and the District of Columbia. Of these, about 2.5 million are in northern California and 2.2 million in southern California.

In its California operation, Kaiser employs some 30,000 medical, technical, clerical, dietary and housekeeping workers. Most are represented by three Service Employees International Union (SEIU) locals, Local 250 in northern California with 14,000 Kaiser workers, Local 399 in southern California with 10,000 workers, and Local 535 statewide among psychiatric nurses and psychologists.

In April, the three SEIU locals formed a "Unity Pact" to coordinate bargaining for their united

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objectives and to achieve a common contract expiration date. Some Kaiser workers are also represented by Office and Professional Employees, MEBA/Engineers and Scientists of California, and ILWU Local 6.

**ATTACK ON QUALITY HEALTH CARE** ■ Internal memos obtained by reporters at the *San Francisco Chronicle* reveal Kaiser's plans and goals, such as cutting expenses by at least 5 percent per year per patient for the next five years, and such claims as 42 percent of admissions might have been avoidable and 57 percent of hospital stays were unnecessarily long. In other moves, Kaiser would send total hip and knee replacement patients home, instead of to a nursing home, after their hospitalization, while stays for normal childbirths would drop from a day and a half to less than a day. This is a common HMO proposal, but so unpopular that both national and state legislation has been framed to ban it.

Kaiser is also shifting to more visits with nurses instead of doctors, cutting overall hospital admissions, and trying out new programs such as group appointments for patients with chronic ailments. The corporation has also said it plans to close a number of hospitals and other facilities.

Early this year it announced plans to shift some in-patient care to community hospitals in both southern and northern California. It has already closed some in-patient facilities in San Francisco and is considering closings in Oakland, Richmond, Sacramento and Redwood City. Sunset Hospital in Los Angeles, Kaiser's premier in-patient facility there, is threatened with closing.

Major construction programs at five hospitals in southern California are on hold, including Panorama City, Los Angeles Medical Center, Fontana, Harbor City and Bellflower. Plans to build a large new facility in Emeryville – subject of an earlier intense struggle with the City of Oakland – have now been abandoned.

In addition, Kaiser is negotiating to have some of its patients treated in facilities run by other HMOs and to service some patients who subscribe to other HMOs – a sharp shift from its one-time boast that it provided "care under one roof." Consumer and union analysts point out that "the whole managed care industry is in a race for the bottom on health quality," and observe that Kaiser, though it is non-profit, is acting just like the for-profit HMOs. (While the Kaiser Health Plan is non-profit, the Permanente Medical Groups, made up of Kaiser's

physicians, are for-profit groups.)

Kaiser workers in northern California have been without a contract since last October 28. The union has rejected Kaiser's takeaway proposals, including a three-year wage freeze, health plan take-aways for current and retired workers, and major take-aways on job security issues, including such items as the right to lay off workers based on one written warning or a poor evaluation. Kaiser also proposes a requirement of 25 years' service instead of 15 before Kaiser pays for full retirement benefits.

In southern California, Kaiser's contract with Local 399 members expired in April. Here, too, the union has rejected the HMO's proposed five-year contract with a wage freeze the first year and wage cuts of 2.5 percent in each of the succeeding four years. Kaiser is also demanding unprecedented co-payments for medical services and prescriptions, providing no protection against subcontracting and calling for new restrictions on the processing of grievances.

Since December 1994, Kaiser has been in negotiations for a first contract with Local 535.

The SEIU locals have been building up pressure on the company through a series of increasingly militant and lively demonstrations, with particular focus on facilities in the Greater Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas. Not only Kaiser workers have been participating, but also members of other unions and community supporters. Among the demonstrators were also many Kaiser subscribers.

Demonstrations in Pasadena and Oakland on May Day – the choice of date was surely no accident – focused on corporate headquarters and top regional and statewide management.

After a rally and a march through downtown Pasadena to Kaiser's southern California headquarters, over 1,000 demonstrators broke through barriers onto Kaiser property to hold a second rally and ultimately force company executives to meet with a union delegation.

In Oakland more than 500 protesters chanted outside, as a group of workers and union leaders entered the regional headquarters demanding to meet with top management. The demonstrators later surged through the lobby of the company's main corporate headquarters before hanging a banner over the building's front entrance and taping to the wall a copy of the petition demanding public hearings which the union and a coalition of supporters had just filed with the state Department of Corpora-

tions.

The unions also held a statewide one-day strike of over 150 Kaiser out-patient facilities throughout the state on May 30, with protests and picketing, focused on the cutback plans. The labor movement's long-term strategy is aimed at "saving" Kaiser, which is one of the few organized HMOs in a largely non-union field.

At its international convention in April, the Service Employees International Union established Kaiser as one of its three top national priorities for the coming period, along with Hillhaven and Beverly Nursing Homes.

Kaiser is also a high priority for the national labor federation itself. The AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department has prepared a strategy for coordinated bargaining and is working with the Strategic Approaches Committee of the Executive Council on other approaches.

The priority the federation gives the Kaiser struggle is also shown by the direct involvement of AFL-CIO president John Sweeney in talks with top Kaiser management, as well as in the workers' contract struggles.

Touring California in March to address the issues around Kaiser, Sweeney emphasized in stops in Los Angeles, San Diego and Oakland that "We're going to renovate the HMO that labor built." "What's behind all this?" Sweeney asked in remarks to the Oakland City Council:

Kaiser has decided to re-invent itself by discarding years of traditional practices ... to compete in the health care marketplace by cutting costs at the expense of quality patient care ... and by denying decent wages, benefits and working conditions to its employees, the men and women who deliver that care. They call what they are doing restructuring. We call it 'destruction of patient care.'

Sweeney called Kaiser chairman David Lawrence's declaration that workers would never have a voice in patient care, a sign of "profound disrespect" for the workers and their union. Sweeney, SEIU International President Stern and others often cite the organized labor movement's role in helping Kaiser become a successful health care giant.

The AFL-CIO Executive Council has called on workers to link the power of unions buying Kaiser's services with the power of the organized Kaiser workers. The Council's statement said,

The labor movement must develop standards that address our members' concerns about the quality in health care delivery, including access to services, patient satisfaction with health plans and consumer protection and education. The AFL-CIO at all levels must take the leadership role in assisting unions and the community on holding health plans accountable for providing affordable, quality care.

A conference in Sacramento in May, parallel with the California labor federation's legislative conference, dealt with issues of managed care and restructuring of the health care industry, with heavy emphasis on Kaiser. IUD spokespersons indicated that regional meetings will be held around the state in the coming period.

At the conference, SEIU's David Chu, speaking on behalf of the Industrial Union Department, presented a comprehensive discussion of Kaiser's financial health, concluding that despite the HMO's protestations about the need to correct negative trends, "overall, Kaiser is still one of the strongest and biggest organizations in the country." Chu noted that Kaiser dominates the market in almost every region where it operates.

The HMO's costs have been higher than those of its competitors, but in recent years it has succeeded in lowering them significantly, Chu said. Though Kaiser's "profit margin" has dropped in recent years, he said, it is still higher than competitors' pre-tax margins over the last five years (Kaiser, because of its non-profit status, is exempt from many sales, property and income taxes). Chu said:

The union wants to see Kaiser retain its position as a high quality provider of care. It does not want Kaiser to become a broker of care. The rapid industrialization of the health care market is affecting all participants. Changes over the last decade have caused Kaiser to react similarly to for-profit HMOs. We feel we can aid Kaiser in its efforts to reform itself, to address the challenges of the health care market. We want Kaiser to demonstrate how workers and physicians working towards a common goal can provide higher quality, more efficient care than if they follow mandates from administrators ... The union seeks an opportunity to show that non-profit care is better care.

**RETURN TO UNION ROOTS** ■ A Kaiser Permanente returning to its union-oriented "roots," in the partnership with its union workforce that SEIU envi-



sions, could deal a devastating blow to the degradation of health care by the for-profit HMOs. Such a victory for SEIU would be an important gain in the struggle to curb their rapacious practices, which are causing unneeded suffering and premature deaths on an ever-increasing scale.

But as long as health care is dominated by corporate entities, even though operating in a "non-profit" mode, quality universal health care as a human right for everyone in our country will remain beyond the horizon. As pointed out by the Communist Party USA's National Health Commission:

There is no solution to the health care crisis that can in any way involve profit-making in health care. A totally profit-free health care system can be achieved through a progressively financed and democratically controlled health care system.

The Commission went on to point out that along the way to achieving a democratically controlled national health service, many issues need to be addressed, including profit-gouging and hospital restructuring under "managed care." A victory for SEIU in its struggle with Kaiser can be a significant part of that process. □

### letter, continued from page 1

In the May issue Gus Hall described this radicalization process in our country and how the Communist Party and its journal are taking a fresh look and adjusting to all that is new and emerging.

With a focus on the elections we will write about the developments in building movements to defeat the ultra-right and elect independent, working class, minority and women candidates. We will bring you the latest on Communist races.

We will continue to reflect and analyze the struggles and organizing efforts of the working class and its new AFL-CIO leadership as it becomes more and more involved in the elections.

*Political Affairs* works to give its readers a partisan, in-depth class analysis that sees everything from a class struggle point of view. There is no other magazine that has such a distinction.

We will write about the people's struggles and movements against the intensified racism and racist violence, the anti-immigrant campaigns, the regression in civil and human rights.

So in these turbulent times of radical change in thought patterns and militant actions to fight back and go on the offensive, *Political Affairs* should be where working people and activists can readily pick it up, preferably in their mail boxes, but also on newsstands and stores all over this country.

At *Political Affairs* we believe that thousands more would enjoy reading our Party's theoretical journal. We believe many are ready to study the working-class science of Marxism-Leninism to help them understand the fast-changing events and com-

plex developments. *PA* can become for them a guide to action and organization.

So why then don't we have a readership of many thousands and a support base to match? Part of the answer is we simply don't have the finances, the sales and promotional staff to reach out, to advertise our magazine, to put it on the newsstands, into stores or to conduct big direct mail campaigns.

In addition, because of our bigger Party readership, because people are becoming radicalized every day, our *PA* editorial board is discussing ways to upgrade the magazine both in content and in form, so that it can better reflect what is new, especially in the thought patterns, the politics and ideological outlook of masses.

Because we use theory as a guide to practice, we want to better reflect how the new trends are being transformed into people's struggles and movements. We would value having your ideas on the kinds of improvements you would like to see.

But we can't make such changes in content or design without the financial help of readers and supporters like yourself who understand the radicalization process taking hold among our class and people, and see the need for a journal of Marxist Leninist thought and the role and contributions of the Communist Party.

The future of our journal very much depends on our ability to convince people like you that *Political Affairs* should become a factor in the radicalization process and the progressive trends taking hold in our country today. With thanks, in advance, for your support, we look forward to publishing a much bigger and better Communist journal. □

# Racism in Health Care

Lawrence D. Weiss

Pervasive racism is one of the hallmarks of American history. The theft of the land and all its resources was accomplished with the racist justification that Native Americans were no better and were often worse than the beasts found in the untamed wilderness. Their lot was to be hunted down and destroyed in a genocidal fury that accompanied the expropriation of North America by small and big-time capitalists. Racism justified the immeasurably brutal destruction of whole nations in Africa by the slave trade, and the creation of a slave economy in much of North America. Racism has since justified the exploitation of Asian labor gangs to build the great railroads in America's West, the theft of the vast Southwest from Mexico and the subsequent exploitation of Mexicans and other Latin American workers in industry and agriculture throughout the United States. Thus, it should come as no surprise that public health, personal health, and the institution of medical care all continue to bear the heavy, ugly burden of racism.

**BRIEF HISTORY** ■ Until the 1960s there was overt discrimination against African American physicians and patients by white-dominated hospitals and associated white physicians. While the most extreme discrimination predominated in the southern and border states, there was significant discrimination in health care institutions across the nation. African American physicians could not admit their patients to "white" hospitals, nor could they gain hospital privileges in these hospitals. As a result they were effectively barred from practicing medicine in white hospitals. In addition, white hospitals for the most part simply ignored conditions.

African Americans and some white entrepreneurs founded at least 200 hospitals since the 1800s, featuring African American physicians and support people serving African American

patients in their own communities. The historical importance of these institutions can hardly be overstated. They trained and gave experience to many African American workers, professionals and entrepreneurs.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the relatively few Black physicians and the underfinanced Black hospitals could adequately serve only a fraction of the Black population in need. African Americans isolated in rural areas found it particularly difficult to gain access to health care.

Ironically, as a result of civil rights victories eliminating overt discrimination in many health care facilities in the 1960s, formerly Black hospitals faced an extremely difficult situation. In effect, one of their main historical reasons for existence appeared to have evaporated. Black hospitals lost the struggle for Black physicians and patients as these streamed to the wealthier formerly all-white hospitals. Black hospitals were increasingly financially squeezed by the growing poverty of the inner-city patients they served. In 1944 there were at least 124 Black hospitals, but only eight remained by the end of 1989. All the rest had been closed or had been merged with formerly all-white institutions.<sup>2</sup>

From the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s federal Hill-Burton grants disbursed about \$2 billion to establish a network of acute-care hospitals across America. While the federal program prohibited discrimination in facilities by Hill-Burton on the basis of "race, creed, or color," there was a widely used provision which allowed for the construction of separate health care facilities for African Americans if such facilities were "of like quality." In reality, however, facilities for African Americans were often separate but were rarely equal to those of whites. By the end of 1962, 89 "racially exclusive" facilities in 14 southern and border states had received \$37 million in Hill-Burton for construction or remodeling. In North Carolina, for example, in the mid-1960s Hill-Burton funds had constructed 27 hospitals exclusively for whites, and only four for Blacks. In Charlotte, the state's largest city, the major hospital reserved 437 beds

Lawrence D. Weiss is a sociologist. This is an abridged version of the chapter in *Economics of Racism II, The Roots of Inequality, USA*, Victor Perlo, International Publishers, New York 1996.

for whites and only 30 for Blacks despite the fact that nearly a quarter of the city's population was Black).<sup>3</sup>

Segregation of hospitals and nursing homes was extensive in the north as well. A mid-1950s study of hospital and nursing segregation in Chicago found that over half of all patients in the county public hospital were Black, but less than one percent of the patients in area private hospitals were Black, despite the fact that nearly half of the city's Black population had hospital insurance. A mid-1960s study of hospitals in Buffalo found rampant discrimination.

**THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE FOR ACCESS** ■ David B. Smith identifies five social processes he considers primarily responsible for largely eliminating segregation in health care facilities by the end of the 1960s:

1. World War II, which weakened Jim Crow ideology in the United States because it was similar to Nazi ideology of racial superiority;

2. The Cold War with the Soviet Union which heightened the international awareness of racist discrimination in the U.S., embarrassing the federal government;

3. The Civil Rights movement;

4. The expansion of health care programs at the federal level after World War II;

5. The strong growth of the national economy in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

Of all these factors, the civil rights movement was the only one that specifically mobilized organizations and large groups of people to fight racism and discrimination in medical facilities. One of the key organizations in this struggle was the National Medical Association (NMA), founded just before the turn of the century when Jim Crow racism had reached its peak in the South. The NMA was composed of about 60 medical societies scattered across the nation. These societies were started by African American physicians who had been excluded from white-dominated state medical societies that made up the national constituency of the American Medical Association (AMA). During the 1930s and 1940s NMA's struggle against discrimination focused on the racist exclusion of African Americans from AMA-affiliated state medical societies and from most segregated hospitals. The NMA Good Will Committee was formed in 1938 to try to fight

racism in the AMA and its constituent state societies by friendly persuasion. The Committee's first significant victory came a couple of years later when it convinced the AMA to leave off the special notation "(Col.)" after every "colored" physician in the AMA directory. A decade later the Committee influenced the AMA to pass a weak resolution requesting AMA-affiliated state medical societies to "study" the question of racist exclusionary practices. This watered-down concession was probably a political move to try to wean the NMA away from supporting the Truman administration's proposal for a national health insurance program, adamantly opposed by the AMA. During the late 1940s the NMA urged the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) to adopt a resolution against racist discrimination in medical school admissions. In its annual meetings the AAMC repeatedly refused to do so; however, about this same time the Legal Defense Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took a couple of cases to the Supreme Court which resulted in the admission of African Americans into medical schools in Arkansas and Texas.

In 1953 the NMA and the NAACP formally joined forces to establish the NAACP National Health Program. The Program's strategy had two components: the first was to try to convince hospitals to voluntarily eliminate segregation and exclusion of African American physicians, and the second was to build legal cases against those hospitals that refused. A series of annual national conferences beginning in the late 1950s jointly held by NMA and NAACP focused on the issue of ending segregation in medical facilities. These goals were adopted by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, "due in part to the strong support that the NMA, in contrast to the AMA, had provided in the early 1960s to pending Medicare legislation."<sup>5</sup> A series of suits brought by the NAACP and NMA in the late 1950s and early 1960s against hospitals made the case that, since they accepted Hill-Burton funds, they could not discriminate under the "due-process, equal-protection provisions of the U.S. Constitution." A 1963 victory in the U.S. Court of Appeals for one of those cases resulted in the issuance of new, more stringent anti-discrimination language by the Surgeon General for health care facilities receiving Hill-Burton funds. A year later the his-

toric Civil Rights Act passed which prohibited discrimination based on "race" for any entity receiving federal financial assistance - which included most hospitals in the U.S. In 1964 the Johnson administration held a widely attended conference to encourage the private health care facilities to desegregate according to the law. The following year Medicare and Medicaid legislation passed which required any facility accepting money from either program to comply with civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination based on "race." This tied both physician and hospital revenue to the elimination of discriminatory practices - an important carrot along with the punitive legal stick.

By the end of 1966 the staff of the Office of Equal Health Opportunity in the Public Health Service had grown to 600 persons. Thousands of hospitals had been reviewed for compliance with the Medicare anti-discrimination provisions. A couple of years later the acting director of the Office for Civil rights reported that 97 percent of all hospitals in the U.S. were committed to provide nondiscriminatory services. Civil Rights groups argued that the federal government was glossing over its duty to enforce the law, and should withhold funds from many certified hospitals to comply with the civil rights provisions. However, on the whole, most hospitals eliminated overt discriminatory practices to comply with federal regulations.

On another front, discriminatory practices in nursing homes were barely affected by the civil rights advances of the 1960s. In the mid-1980s an elderly white person was 1.36 times more likely than an elderly African American to be a resident of a nursing home. Over half of all nursing home payments came from Medicaid. African Americans accounted for 31 percent of Medicaid recipients, but only 8 percent of the recipients of Medicaid in skilled nursing homes. Across the nation there is a geographic pattern in the distribution of long-term care facilities. States and counties with higher proportions of white residents have higher proportions of nursing home beds. Various studies tend to point to discrimination as the principal cause of these gross discrepancies:

A large proportion of the Medicaid dollars for nursing-home care, intended to provide access to the poor without regard to race, actually provides a catastrophic long-

term insurance benefit to the white middle class.<sup>6</sup>

The NMA remained very active through the latter half of the 1960s and into the 1970s. It continued to work with the NAACP as well as with many of the newer activist civil rights organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In addition the NMA became extremely active as a lobbying organization for civil rights legislation and for progressive health care reforms, often at odds with the AMA. After the murder of three civil rights workers in 1964, NMA provided dozens of medical workers to serve in the South with civil rights organizations. Many of these medical professionals joined the Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR), which by 1966 had various health workers established in branches in 30 northern facilities as well as in the south. By the early 1970s MCHR had ceased to have much of a national political presence, but in its heyday it

managed significant initiatives in the North that included establishing child health programs for ghetto neighborhoods, protest marches against discrimination in local hospitals, and support for recruiting Black and Hispanic youth into medical work fields.<sup>7</sup>

On another front in the late 1960s African American physicians of the NMA in conjunction with progressive whites used funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to establish over 100 neighborhood comprehensive health centers targeting public health and individual medical needs of low-income minority communities.

Despite some successes in the areas of civil rights and health care, and the delivery of better health care services in some minority communities, the health of African Americans as a people began to enter a critical stage. As a result, in 1976 Atlanta University convened the W.E.B. Du Bois Conference, a national meeting of scholars from various fields to address the serious and growing problem of the health status of African Americans and the lack of adequate health care facilities in their communities. NMA physicians warned against health care reform in the shape of a monolithic health insurance bureaucracy, arguing that such a sys-

tem would not serve the needs of the poor and the inner-city ghettos. Instead, NMA members argued for an expansion of Medicaid which was more directly pertinent to low-income communities.

In the 1980s, under the conservative Reagan administration, free-market health care emerged as the ideology buttressing the medical-industrial complex. NMA African American physicians and other progressive health care activists argued that market medicine responds to well-insured individuals rather than groups of people (such as African Americans) with shorter life spans, higher rates of chronic diseases and incapacitating disabilities, and minimal protection from infectious diseases.

In 1984 the NMA published a series of studies documenting serious problems with the health care system as a whole, and specific health problems among African Americans focusing on the "wide disparity in the health of Black and white Americans: Black Americans show higher maternal and infant mortality rates, lower life expectancy, and higher death rates linked to cardiovascular disease and cancer."<sup>8</sup>

The following year the Department of Health and Human Services released a report compiled by a task force of high-ranking federal officials. The "Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health" documented the failure of the health care system to eliminate differences in mortality and illness based on skin color and ethnicity. The report noted that African Americans were experiencing nearly 60,000 preventable deaths annually compared to the white population, due in large part to "cancer, cardiovascular disease and stroke, substance abuse, diabetes, homicides and accidents and infant mortality."<sup>9</sup> A couple of years later, the AIDS epidemic hit African American communities with a vengeance. A massively inadequate health care system was entirely unprepared for yet another health care crisis in minority communities. In 1991, Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, Secretary of Health and Human Services in the Bush administration, summarized the situation in a brief article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*:

I contend that there is clear, demonstrable evidence of discrimination and racism in our health care system. For

example, each year since 1984, while the health status of the general population has increased, Black health status has actually declined. This decline is not in one or two categories it is across the board.

Even the conservative AMA admits that racism continues to play a significant role in explaining persistent differences in health care access and treatment between whites and minorities.<sup>10</sup>

#### **MINORITIES AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE** ▢

The issue of access to health care among minorities is inextricably tied to the fact that minorities are vastly under-represented in the higher-level health professions. In 1991, for example, only 3.2 percent of all physicians were Black, 3.4 percent of pharmacists were Black and a mere 1.5 percent of all dentists were Black despite the fact that African Americans represent well over 12 percent of the total population.<sup>11</sup> A history of overt racism and institutional discrimination are responsible for both discrimination in access and in the health professions. Moreover, since minority physicians tend to practice in minority communities, there is a direct relationship between lack of access and the under-representation of minorities in the upper tiers of the health professions.

African Americans are nearly twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to lack health insurance, and Hispanics are nearly two and one-half times as likely not to have health insurance.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these minorities are losing their health insurance coverage at a faster rate than non-Hispanic whites. Despite the fact that African Americans and Hispanics together accounted for a bit more than 20 percent of the total population, between 1977 and 1987 these minorities accounted for over half the increase in the number of uninsured Americans. In the ten-year period beginning with 1977, the percent of uninsured whites climbed from 12 percent to 15 percent, but uninsured African Americans grew from 18 percent to 25 percent, and Hispanics from 20 percent to a shocking 35 percent. A national survey found that 86 percent of those in fair or poor health who were covered by health insurance saw a physician in a one-year period, while only 63 percent of those not insured but in fair or poor health saw a physi-

cian. The uninsured have significantly less access, and minorities are much more likely to be uninsured.<sup>13</sup>

Bill Clinton, in his campaign for the Presidency in 1992, promised universal health insurance coverage. His administration set up a bureaucracy to draft appropriate legislation, which became bogged down by pressures from and attempts to satisfy various sectors of the private health industry, its providers and financial intermediaries. The experience of Canada and various European countries providing centrally financed universal coverage was ignored, as were progressive United States groups urging a "single payer" system for our country.

Prolonged deal-making between the White House and Congressional leaders in 1994 gutted the inadequate Clinton proposals and ended up with no live proposal for significant reform. However, the struggle for a single payer system continues on a state-by-state basis, with prospects for significant breakthroughs in some states.

While Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans would benefit from government financed health coverage, none of the existing proposals, including single-payer formulas, specifically provide for the elimination of the existing many-sided racial discrimination. Meanwhile, under the guise of "budget balancing," government benefits through Medicaid, Medicare and other health programs through which sections of the minority population benefit are being slashed.

When seeking health care, Hispanics are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to use hospital outpatient clinics or emergency rooms, and African Americans are more than three times as likely. As these minorities progressively lose health insurance coverage, they often have nowhere else to turn but the emergency room for health care. While their acute care needs are more or less met in this manner, emergency rooms and clinics cannot provide the continuity of care necessary for adequate, comprehensive health care, particularly for the chronically ill. On average, under 10 percent of non-Hispanic whites wait more than an hour to be seen by a health care provider, but proportionally twice as many Hispanics and African Americans wait at least one hour. Long waits act as a deterrent to seeking needed care, and put these patients at higher risk for leaving the health care facility before receiving

care. Long waits may also be one of the factors which have contributed to a serious decline in recent years of physician visits by African Americans. In 1982, 80 percent of all African Americans saw a physician at least once during the year. By 1987 only 63 percent had seen a physician in that year. Even after waiting for long periods of time, language barriers may put Hispanics and other minorities who may speak little or no English at a serious disadvantage in the physician's office. A study of Medicaid sites in seven states that represent nearly 85 percent of the total Hispanic population in the United States found that a third of these sites had no special services to help monolingual Hispanic patients.<sup>14</sup>

Commenting on differences in mammography use according to income and education, Lawrence Bergner of the National Cancer Institute has expressed concern that simply expanding mammography programs (and by implication any health care service) without specifically targeting the under served population simply results in larger gaps based on income and education. In addition he critiques the pejorative "blame the victim" implication made by some health planners and educators who fail to reach their target populations.<sup>15</sup>

**DIFFERENTIAL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE** ■ A recent study looked at a 5 percent national sample of Medicare enrollees aged 65 and older in order to examine Black-white differences in the use of 32 medical procedures and diagnostic tests by the elderly. Altogether they examined the records of 1,200,000 enrollees.

The 32 procedures included diagnostic services such as exercise stress test, mammogram and chest radiograph; and restorative medical procedures such as coronary bypass surgery, cataract extraction with lens insertion, and total hip replacement. Overall, "whites ... were more likely than Blacks to receive 23 of the 32 study services ... and for many of these services the racial differences in use were substantial."<sup>16</sup>

The researchers also looked at the question of the use of newer or higher technology services compared to older or lower technology services. They found that whites were more likely to receive the newer, high-tech services compared to Blacks.

Another issue is the content of health education offered by the providers of women's health

care. The question is important given well-documented higher rates of infant mortality and prematurity among African American babies. The researchers looked at a sample of 8,310 women from the 1988 National Maternal and Infant Health Survey. Here's what they found:

The present study suggests that large numbers of women of all races do not receive sufficient health behavior modification information as part of the content of their prenatal care. In particular, Black women are more likely not to receive health behavior advice that could reduce their chances of having an adverse pregnancy outcome.<sup>17</sup>

Researchers have looked at the hypothesis that health differences in later life between African Americans and whites are a function of socioeconomic status. Their sample included most African Americans and whites over 55 years of age in the 1984 national Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), totaling 848 African Americans and 8,955 whites. A simple description of the health status and health care utilization by African Americans and whites in this study indicates that African Americans fare worse on every measure. For example, on the more subjective measures, such as the self-rating of current health, nearly 60 percent of African American respondents rate their health fair or poor, whereas a bit more than a third of the whites rated their health fair or poor.<sup>18</sup>

Another study reviewed the literature concerning long-term care institutionalization rates among African Americans and whites. They were particularly interested in determining which of three theories contributed the most to understanding patterns of institutionalization among African Americans. The "double jeopardy" theory explains the greater poverty, morbidity, and mortality among African American elderly who also face cumulative adverse effects of a lifetime of racism. The "age as leveler" theory focuses on the concept that differences between African American and white elderly narrow compared to prior times in the life cycle due to income supports and public insurance such as Social Security and Medicare. The third theory involves alleged cultural differences which lead African Americans to shun long-term care in favor of care by friends and family.

The available evidence indicates that African Americans are much less likely than non-Hispanic whites to be institutionalized in long-term care facili-

ties. In 1963 African American elderly were only 37 percent as likely as whites to be institutionalized. The corresponding figure climbed to 46 percent in 1969 and 65 percent in 1985. The big spurt after the early 1960s was the result of Medicare legislation passed at that time, which pays for long-term care for the indigent elderly. Studies show that nursing homes serving African Americans are more likely to be segregated, and more likely to be of lower quality than those serving the white elderly despite the fact that numerous studies indicate that African American elderly are sicker and more disabled than white elderly.<sup>19</sup>

The authors point out that the consequences of pervasive poverty have a negative impact on health and quality of life. They note that a person's ability to make use of Medicare benefits is "dependent upon one's ability to pay premiums and co-payments. For poor and near-poor aged, this can mean being deprived of the right to use Medicare benefits."<sup>20</sup>

**HISPANIC ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE** ■ Socioeconomic factors play a major role in limiting Hispanic access to health care; however, there are important differences among various Hispanic peoples. Mexicans comprise about 62 percent of the roughly 20 million Hispanics in the United States. Puerto Ricans comprise 13 percent, Cubans 5 percent, Central and South Americans 12 percent, and other Hispanics 8 percent. As a group, Hispanics are overrepresented in low-income inner-city urban areas. All Hispanic groups suffer from lower average levels of education compared to non-Hispanic whites. For example, 15.4 percent of Mexican-Americans over 25 years of age, and 10.3 percent of Puerto Ricans, have had less than five years of schooling compared to non-Hispanic whites, with only two percent. All Hispanic groups except for Cubans are significantly underrepresented among occupations such as managerial/professional and technical/sales. Mexicans are particularly disadvantaged because nine percent are employed in the seasonal, low-income, hazardous farming sector. In the late 1980s the median Hispanic family income was 36 percent less than the median income of non-Hispanic whites, and Hispanics were 2.5 times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to lack either private or public health insurance.<sup>21</sup>

The underrepresentation of Hispanic health

care providers is a contributing obstacle to health care access. While Hispanics comprise about ten percent of the total population, between 2.2 and 3.0 percent of dentists, registered nurses, therapists and pharmacists are of Hispanic origin. Interestingly, about 5.4 percent of all physicians are Hispanics, but many of these trained outside the United States and subsequently immigrated. Hispanic students, particularly Mexican students, are still very under-represented in American medical schools.<sup>22</sup>

Mexicans are not only the most numerous of the Hispanics, but also suffer from some of the most onerous access difficulties. A significant number of Mexicans live along the U.S.-Mexican border. There they suffer disproportionately from hazardous waste contamination, air and water pollution as well as a serious paucity of affordable and available health care facilities. Over 110,000 Mexicans live in *colonias* in Texas, unincorporated areas lacking basic sanitation facilities and running water. California has legislated particularly draconian measures for limiting access to need-based services such as Medicaid for Mexican immigrants.<sup>23</sup>

**FOCUS ON MIGRANT FARM WORKERS** ■ Perhaps Mexican migrant farm workers as a group suffer more than any other significant Hispanic sub-group from a combination of an unhealthy environment plus serious obstacles to health care access. There are an estimated 1.5-2.5 million hired farm workers in the United States. Migrant farm workers are a subpopulation of these, characterized by seasonal travel and temporary residence as they harvest the nation's fruits and vegetables. Typical migrant farm workers are young married Mexican couples and their children. Estimates of the total number of migrant farmworkers range from one to four million people, with some of the estimates including entire families instead of just adult workers. For well over a century migrant farmworkers have suffered a host of deprivations and abuses, largely outside the view and attention of the public. Graphic investigative journalism and monographs were published in the 1940s and periodically thereafter, exposing the plight of migrant farm-workers. Beginning in the 1960s a smattering of laws and programs were established to address some of the most serious social problems faced by migrant farmworkers, but they have had minimal impact in the fields where migrants work and in the shacks where they live.<sup>24</sup> Struggles of the United Farm

Workers Union (not coincidentally also dating back to the 1960s) for better working and living conditions, improved occupational safety and health, and adequate compensation have resulted in some victories and a nationwide struggle in unity with them. However, results have been insufficient and in some cases relatively short-lived due to massive, ongoing corporate resistance.

The socioeconomic profile of migrant farmworkers represents the first of a series of obstacles to health care access. A 1990 nationwide survey of migrant farmworkers found that median family income ranged from \$7,500 to \$10,000 annually, with the result that half the families had incomes below the poverty level. In addition, Social Security Administration (SSA) studies show that agricultural employers are three times as likely as other employers to underreport, or not report employee earnings at all. The result is that migrant farmworkers do not receive Social Security benefits including retirement, disability, and survivors' insurance; or receive lower benefit amounts than those to which they are entitled. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) provides financial support to eligible low-income persons who are aged, blind or disabled. Rural non-English speaking persons, such as migrant farmworkers, are at particularly high risk for not knowing about SSI benefits and eligibility, and underutilizing this source of financial support. Only 20 percent of migrant farmworkers surveyed had any health insurance coverage whatsoever from employers.<sup>25</sup>

The working and living environments of migrant farmworker families are inordinately hazardous. The most recent nationwide study of migrant farmworker housing, done in 1980, estimated that there was enough housing for only about one-third of the migrant workers. A more recent study looking at Washington, Oregon and California came up with a similar conclusion, but did not include dependents who travel with the migrant farmworkers. Researchers from the General Accounting Office (GAO) reported:

In 1989, deficient and overcrowded housing conditions appeared to be common for hired farmworkers, especially migrants. Numerous studies tell of migrant farmworkers living in shacks, barns, old school buses, and other seriously substandard dwellings. A family may have to sleep on a dirt floor in a 1-room house with no furniture, running water or electricity.<sup>26</sup>



Exposure to poisonous pesticides is probably the most significant single health hazard faced by migrant farmworkers and their families. After innumerable repeated pesticide poisonings suffered by farmworkers, the Environmental Protection Agency began to update its standards, but to date the situation has not improved very much. During 1990, the EPA found 633 violations of pesticide regulations, but levied only 42 fines. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has enacted important regulations requiring supervisors to give farmworkers training, information and protection relating to pesticide safety. OSHA, however, has deferred jurisdiction to EPA over worker exposure to agricultural chemicals, so OSHA's ability to protect farmworkers is moot.<sup>27</sup>

Most importantly, EPA itself does not know if thousands of widely used pesticides are safe even if used with "appropriate measures for protection." They are currently gathering safety data on thousands of older types of pesticides which were never carefully tested, but estimate that their research will last into the next millennium. Exposures to pesticide can cause permanent damage or death from acute exposure, but also may lead to cancer, birth defects, neuropsychological conditions, and a host of lesser irritations and medical problems. The EPA estimates that there are 300,000 acute illnesses each year due to pesticide exposure.<sup>28</sup>

Migrant farmworkers are commonly deprived of the most rudimentary personal hygiene facilities. OSHA regulations require farms with 11 or more workers to provide uncontaminated drinking water, hand-washing facilities and toilets. Nevertheless, a 1990 national survey found nearly one-third of all the farmworkers lacked one or more basic sanitation facilities.<sup>29</sup>

The children of migrant farmworkers are at particular risk for a variety of health problems, in large part because children frequently work or play in dangerous, pesticide-sprayed fields. Despite the lax regulations for child labor on farms, an estimated 100,000 minors a year are illegally employed on American farms. Federal regulators who enforce child labor laws inspect less than two percent of workplaces annually, and fines levied average a bit over \$200 per incident. All agree that these token fines do not deter employers from illegally employing minors. As a practical matter about one-third of farmworkers surveyed in a multistate survey had children working in the fields. In a 1990 study in western New York, one-

third of all the migrant children working on farms had been injured during the year. Nationally 300 children and adolescents are known to have died in the course of farm work between 1979 and 1983.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, migrant farmworkers and their families suffer from some very direct barriers to health care access. Only a fraction of them have private health insurance, as mentioned earlier. As many as 50 percent of all migrant farmworkers are undocumented workers; i.e., they cannot work legally in this country. As a result they are also prohibited from using Medicaid. Those who qualify for Medicaid are often blocked from using it due to 45-day processing periods imposed by many states. By the time the migrant is eligible, he or she is long gone from the state. A federally funded network of migrant health clinics is a primary source of health care for migrant farmworkers and their families, but due to Department of Health and Human Services budget constraints (or perhaps priorities), the clinics actually serve less than 15 percent of the nation's migrant farmworkers.<sup>31</sup>

**SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION** ▢ Due to limitations of space, some important issues were only touched upon, and others were left out completely. Some minorities, Native Americans for example, and some Asian minorities, such as Cambodians or Vietnamese, suffer serious lack of access to health care as well as a host of other socioeconomic problems exacerbated by racism and institutional discrimination. The question of environmental racism has not been addressed in this discussion, but it is crucial to a full understanding of the health status of minorities. A number of studies in recent years find that hazardous waste dumps and seriously polluting industries tend to be concentrated in minority communities. During the early 1990s, the Department of Energy targeted Native American reservations as sites for burial of nuclear wastes, offered large sums of cash, employment, and perks to desperately poor communities.

Sociologists make the distinction between institutional discrimination and prejudice. Prejudice involves beliefs that people of color, women, Catholics, etc. are inherently inferior in one or more ways. Prejudice often leads to discriminatory behavior, singling out people by race, for example, in order to deprive them of jobs, promotions, the right to live in a particular neighborhood or to deprive them of life itself. Preju-

diced racists are generally obvious, but institutionalized discrimination is much more difficult to perceive. Institutional discrimination involves the everyday functioning of a social institution with the consequences of racial (or other) discrimination, but without the apparent intent of prejudice. For example, a hospital located in an urban center may close the emergency room because too many uninsured minorities are using it without reimbursing the hospital. Hospital administrators would claim they closed the emergency room because they were losing too much money, not because of prejudice. The result, however, is the further decline of health care accessibility for minorities. Another very important aspect of racism: its deliberate ideological use in the struggle against labor. Hospital administrators use racism to break nursing strikes, and politicians shilling for big business use racism to win cuts in Medicaid funding. The struggle against racism is often simultaneous with the struggle against capital.

Personal health status, public health and medical care in the United States all suffer from widespread institutionalized discrimination, personal prejudice and the ideological uses of racism. The long struggle against racism and institutionalized discrimination in health care has been bravely fought and successfully waged by civil rights activists of all colors, organized labor and minority health professionals who have suffered discrimination by white-dominated health care institutions. The struggle, which dates back well into the last century, has borne some fruit but cannot rest. Racism in all its forms is intensifying as the structural crisis of advanced capitalism wreaks havoc among the social institutions upon which wage earners, the unemployed, and the retired rely. Health care is central to life itself. Future struggles against racism are certain to organize around this most important social institution. □

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#### **PHILIPPINES**

Dozens of journalists picketed the presidential palace on April 30th demanding an investigation into the murder two months earlier of Ferdinand Reyes, editor of the *Press Freedom* newspaper. He was the fifth journalist killed since President Ramos took office in June, 1992. At least 34 other journalists were killed during the 1986-1993 administration of Corazon Aquino. Thirty-two other journalists were killed during the dictatorial rule of Ferdinand Marcos according to the Federation of Media Workers. Antonio Nieva, president of the Prague-based International Organization of Journalists, said that although Marcos' repressive regime has ended, threats against journalists have worsened.

#### **NORWAY**

Norway's North Sea oil output was cut 40 percent when 750 members of the Federation of Oil Workers struck May 4th in support of the month-long strike of building construction workers' demands that four construction companies open negotiations with the strikers.

#### **BELGIUM**

The European Union (EU) warned the United States government against trying to block EU trade with Iran and Libya. This followed EU's request on May 3rd for formal consultations with the U.S. at the World Trade Organization, a first step toward calling a dispute panel over U.S. sanctions on Cuba.

#### **CHINA**

Opening the first year of the ninth five-year plan (1996-2000) the State Statistical Service reported that industrial output in the first two months increased by 17 percent over the same period last year. Light industry output rose 16.9 percent for a total value of \$35.2 billion at 1990 constant prices while heavy industry rose by 17.4 percent to stand at \$42.4 billion. State industries generated \$34.8 billion in prod-

ucts. Collectively-owned enterprises produced \$26.8 billion in products and industries of other ownership produced \$15.2 billion.

The *China Daily* newspaper reports that some new Chinese-language editions of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin have been printed and published by the People's Publishing House.

#### **GERMANY**

Unions representing 3.2 million government workers broke off negotiations on May 7th when the government refused to budge from its wage-freeze stand. The union is demanding a 4.5 percent wage increase. So far this year, wage increases haven't exceeded 2 percent in the private sector.

#### **CHILE**

Workers at the Chuquicamata copper mine, the world's second largest, walked off the job in May after rejecting an offer of a 3 percent pay raise. The strikers told the state-owned company they would not settle for anything less than 4 percent.

#### **EGYPT**

Forty-three African nations signed the Treaty of Pelindabs on April 11th. The treaty declares Africa a nuclear-free continent and pledges not to build or stockpile nuclear weapons on the continent and the islands around it. The treaty is named after the birthplace of the nuclear arsenal which South Africa later dismantled.

#### **CAMBODIA**

Cambodian Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh strongly denounced the U.S. government for placing Cambodia among the 21 nations which support drug trafficking. Ranariddh said the United States should be placed at the head of the list of countries which stimulate drug trafficking, since it is the world's number one drug market.

### **AUSTRIA**

Over 40,000 students took to the streets in April to protest against the new government's austerity policies. Government support to higher education is slated to be slashed. Lecturers face a 15 to 20 percent cut in pay. Students are now expected to pay for projects which were of no cost to them before. The cuts will trigger mass layoffs in the public sector and beyond.

### **AUSTRALIA**

The CIA-run military base in Pine Gap will increase its workforce by 10 to 15 percent above its present level of 700, the deputy commander announced in mid-March. While the U.S. and Australian governments remain silent as to the cause, it is believed that Pine Gap's expansion is part of the accelerated arms race in ballistic and anti-ballistic missiles as well as the proliferation in communications technology for heightened spying on other countries.

### **INDONESIA**

5,000 striking shoe workers marched on the national parliament on May 10 to demand that the company, PT Indomulti Intilndustri, conform to labor regulations which require that workers be paid for 30 days a month rather than the old 26 days.

### **SOUTH KOREA**

Overseas investment by South Korea totalled \$1.46 billion in the first quarter of this year, a 55 percent increase over the same time last year. While its investments expanded all over the world, Asia remained its favored zone, with South Korean companies accounting for just over 50 percent of the total invested in the first three months this year.

### **PALESTINE**

Broadening the base of his self-rule government, president Yassir Arafat announced the appointment of 26 members of his cabinet. It includes Bashir Barghuti, head of the Palestine People's Party.

### **US CHINA POLICY**

Unreported in the monopoly-controlled media, Senator Dianne Feinstein made an important speech in the U.S. Senate in April. Among other things, she said: "Today, as an export power, China is where Japan was in 1980, the 11th largest exporter in the world and it is growing much more rapidly than Japan was growing."

Criticizing what she called the double standard in American foreign policy toward China, she said it is important to recognize the role played by the media in this process:

Almost everything we read, hear or see in the American press about China is negative... The most blatant example of this unbalanced reportage of China was evident when the State Department released its human rights report last month. The coverage of the section on China was 100 percent negative... I am deeply troubled by what can only be described as America's blind eye when in fact dramatic changes have taken place over the last 20 years and these changes have by their very nature opened the door to major improvements in human rights... Ten percent annual growth rate promotes rapid change.... Americans need to recognize this.

### **PERU**

The opening session on May 8 of the Second International Gold Symposium was told that in 1995 the vast majority of the \$2.7 billion spent world-wide on gold and base-metal exploration went to Latin America. Ronald Cambre, chairman of the U.S. monopoly, Newmont Mining, told the symposium that in Peru, the fastest growing gold producer in Latin America, investment increased by 182 percent in the past two years. In Argentina it increased by 100 percent, 73 percent in Ecuador, 35 percent in Bolivia and 30 percent in Chile. The largest gold mine in South America is Yanacocha in Peru. Newmont Mining is the main owner. Since 1992, 80 foreign and local companies have staked mining claims covering 37 million acres. World-wide, gold demand has been exceeding supply by 20 percent.

*International Department, CPUSA*

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*Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, by Michael K. Honey, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 364 pp.

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Despite a relative boom in studies of working-class struggles and the left in the 1930s and 1940s, the story of the trade union movement in the South during that period remains, for the most part, one of labor's untold stories. While Michael Honey's *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* focuses only upon Memphis, Tennessee, it provides an account of an important hub of labor activity in the 1930s and 1940s valuable to activists and academics (and academics who are activists). And like Robin Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe*, a history of the Communist Party of Alabama during the Great Depression, it also suggests how rich the field of Southern labor and left history is for further scholarly work.

The early chapters of *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* describe the growth of industry and an industrial working class in Memphis during the early 20th century. One of the notable features of this development was the increasingly large number of African American industrial workers concentrated in the dirtiest, most dangerous, and lowest paying jobs. This growth was preceded by the establishment of a rigid racial segregation after the end of Reconstruction in the late 19th century, leading to a labor system dividing Black from white, men from women. Honey also tells of early attempts of industrial workers in Memphis to organize. These attempts were made in the face of the political machine of Edward H. Crump which held the city in a virtual dictatorship, the fanatically anti-union employers who backed Crump including both local Southern-based employers as well as Northern-based employers (such as Firestone), the right-wing and racist leadership of the American Federation of Labor (which collaborated with the Crump machine), and a system of racism that infected many white workers dividing them from potential African American allies. Not surprisingly these early attempts mostly failed, often under the pressure of

violent police and vigilante repression. While African American workers were the victims of the most extreme police and vigilante violence, white workers and progressives, such as the United Auto Workers organizer Norman Smith, who tried to build industrial unions or challenge the Crump machine in any way, were harassed, beaten, and/or run out of town. Similarly, early activities of the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA) and other left forces in East Tennessee were also brutally broken up. The influence of the Crump machine in state and national Democratic party politics prevented any intervention by the Roosevelt Administration, which depended on Southern votes to stay in power.

The situation in Memphis did not change significantly until 1939 when a strike of mostly white riverboat workers organized by the Congress of Industrial Organization's (CIO) National Maritime Union (NMU) and of mostly African American longshoremen in the AFL's International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) mounted a successful strike in the port towns of the Mississippi River. The Memphis river front was a crucial site of the strike which marked the first time that African American and white workers cooperated in a large-scale labor struggle on a more or less equal basis. While the gains and the progressive leadership of the Black Memphis ILA locals (there was a separate local for white longshoremen), were largely wiped out by a combination of repression by the Crump machine and betrayal by the Memphis AFL leadership and a corrupt national ILA leadership, the strike established the NMU as a center of CIO activity in west Tennessee. The strike also demonstrated the potential of biracial labor organizing in Memphis as well as the limitations of working within the structure of the old AFL craft unions dominated by a racist and right-wing clique.

Honey goes on to detail the successes, and failures, of the CIO in Memphis which had organized 30,000 workers by the middle 1940s. These successes were due largely to a new realization by increasing numbers of white workers that they would be unable to successfully confront employers without Black workers, to the enthusiastic support of African

American workers who saw the CIO not only as a means to improve wages and working conditions but also to win basic civil rights denied to them under Jim Crow, and to a new union leadership which emphasized the necessity of Black and white unity. As Honey points out, the sparkplugs of this new movement were the left-led unions, particularly the NMU and the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCA-PAWA) – which later became the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (FTA) and the organized left, especially the CPUSA. It was the left, and the CPUSA in particular, that was committed to organizing industrial workers, militant class-conscious trade unionism, and Black-white unity. Not only were the left-led unions the most effective organizers in the CIO, but their solidarity was vital to the success of other unions. At the same time, the CPUSA policy of Popular Front coalition building allowed the CIO left to construct successful alliances with center forces, and even right forces at times, within the labor movement and the broader Memphis community. The connection of the Memphis CIO to the national and to broad progressive movements gave the local Memphis unions a leverage with the Roosevelt administration that was able to restrain the Crump machine to a certain extent.

The failures of the CIO, which would become magnified in the post-World War II era, were caused for the most part by the continued opposition of the Crump machine and Memphis employers to the CIO, the efforts of the AFL to undermine the CIO, and the influence of racism, male supremacy, and anti-Communism in the CIO. While a number of white workers who joined or worked closely with the CPUSA became militantly anti-racist, many white workers willing to struggle against employers with African American workers were not ready to support full social equality for African Americans and expected Black workers to play a secondary role. Even in the more progressive Memphis unions, African Americans were rarely elected to union office unless the membership was overwhelmingly Black. Women workers played an important and militant role in a number of the CIO strikes and organizing drives, but were also largely excluded from union office and union staff positions. As the 1940s wore on, anti-Communism played an increasingly large role in the Memphis CIO and the national CIO – for example, the right-wing, and all-white, Memphis unit of the Newspaper Guild led the

attack that destroyed the progressive national leadership of the Guild.

The final chapters of Honey's book describe the Cold War breakdown of the CIO's left-center coalition locally and nationally, the failure of the CIO's Operation Dixie (a major drive to organize the South), the repression of the CIO left, and the decline of the labor movement in Memphis. The Cold War era featured the rise of a right-center leadership within the CIO, a retreat from militant biracial union organizing. The Communists and other progressives who had played a major role in building the CIO were driven from their unions, workplaces, and, in many cases, from Memphis itself. Mirroring the situation in the national CIO, those unions which refused to cooperate with the McCarthyite spirit, such as the FTA, were driven from the CIO and destroyed by government repression and "raiding" by hostile CIO and AFL unions. Racist repression and an appeal to white supremacy among white workers was a notable feature of this era. The results for the trade union movement and for workers were disastrous. When the national AFL and CIO merged in 1955, the combined AFL and CIO membership of Greater Memphis was a little more than half what it had been in 1948; the surviving unions in Memphis would stagnate until the 1960s. Many Memphis unions were resegregated; in others the concerns of African American workers were put on the back burner and much of what Black union leadership existed was destroyed.

Despite this bleak picture of the Cold War destruction of the CIO left and the rise of a class collaborationist and often racist leadership within the Memphis CIO (and later AFL-CIO) leadership, Honey is far from negative in his assessment of the legacies of the CIO struggles of the 1930s and 1940s. He traces a line between the struggles of Black and white workers in the 1930s and 1940s to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly as embodied in Martin Luther King's efforts (which cost him his life) to aid striking African American sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968. The union battles of the 1930s trained and inspired a large number of African American union activists who continued to battle for equal rights, union democracy, and improved wages and working conditions well into the 1970s and 1980s when the old industrial plants of Memphis were mostly closed (provoking new struggles). Even during the 1950s, it was a

coalition of the labor movement and the African American community (for a variety of reasons mostly relating to the needs of the Crump machine, a much higher percentage of African Americans were able to vote in Memphis than was generally true in the South) that largely destroyed what remained of the old Democratic Party machine after Edward Crump's death and elected more progressive city and state officials. Honey does not gloss over the difficulties of multi-racial organizing in the South and the influence of racism and anti-Communism on white workers. But at the same time, he does convincingly demonstrate how even Black workers who had encountered racism from white workers as well as bosses could be convinced of the possibility of a multi-racial labor movement which would speak to their needs and aspirations and how even white workers saturated with the most racist ideas imaginable could be convinced of the necessity of a multi-racial labor movement in order to improve their own working and living conditions.

Honey's book has the virtue of being written by an academic who is a former community organizer and so approaches his subject in a practical, straightforward way while supporting his arguments with abundant, and pertinent research. I have only a couple of reservations about the book. While Honey credits the left in general, and the CPUSA in particular, with playing a crucial role in the organizing of the CIO in Memphis, there is little discussion of how the CPUSA functioned locally as an organization and how the local work of CPUSA related to its national concerns except in a very general and off-hand way. Like many of the new "revisionist" histories of the Communist left, Honey focuses on individual CPUSA members, such as W.E. "Red" Davis, without considering how the work of Party activists might have flowed from the CPUSA as a whole.

This is not to dismiss or downgrade the role of local Party leaders and rank-and-file members like Davis, but to suggest that what made the CPUSA such a powerful force, even where it was few in numbers (as it was in Memphis where it contained only a small part of the statewide CPUSA membership), was that it was more than a collection of activists. Of course, one can go overboard (as do the most anti-Communist historians such as Theodore Draper and Harvey Klehr) and suggest that the CPUSA was essentially a monolithic organization

carrying out Soviet foreign policy rather than addressing local conditions and local needs, but it seems to me that there remains a tremendous underestimation in the work of even most progressive historians of the ideological and organizational role of the CPUSA as whole. There is also a related tendency in Honey's work, much less pronounced than in many "revisionist" historians, to attribute problems of the CIO left in Memphis (often correctly) to failings of the national CPUSA and its leadership, but to consider the successes of the CIO left in Memphis as due to the activities of various individuals. In my view, an approach which examines the dialectical relationship between the local rank and file of the Communist left, the local CPUSA leadership, and the national CPUSA organization and leadership would be more productive. Such an approach would not have to gloss over problems, such as the inevitable contradictions between the views of the national CPUSA center in New York and the actual conditions in Memphis, but would make clearer why the CPUSA and the left was able to play the role that it did during the Popular Front (and why the left was unable to do so before the 1930s). For example, the various developments of Communist thinking on the "National Question" and what was known then as "Negro Liberation" – not to mention the strategy of the Popular Front itself – which took place in the world Communist movement and in the CPUSA nationally are of vital importance in understanding what enabled the CPUSA to play the role that it did in Memphis and other centers throughout the South.

However, despite these shortcomings *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* is one of the most important contributions to Labor Studies and African American Studies of the last ten years (or twenty years for that matter). It tells a story in a readable way that is of interest not only to academics, but also to labor and community activists who are struggling to build a successful multi-racial and multi-national fightback against the attacks of the right-wing (as embodied in Congress' Gang of 73) on the American people. It also stands as an example of a much-needed and mostly untold history of American workers in the South and across the United States. □

J Behrens

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