

# In Defense of Marxism

\$3.00

## Downsizing: Causes and Consequences

by Frank Lovell

Also:

Discussion on Labor Party Program

Public Workers Victory in Canada

Changes in French Trade Unions

Discussion on British Labour Party

Shake-ups in Mexican Labor Movement



The Unrelenting  
Genora Dollinger  
(1913-1995)

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## Editors' Note: Historic Founding of Labor Party

This issue focuses on the Labor Party founding convention. Our feature story, "Downsizing: Causes and Consequences," deals with the main issue facing American workers and their families: jobs at livable wages, an issue taken up as a central plank in the proposed draft platform of the Labor Party (which we reprint for our readers' information). In upcoming contract talks, the United Auto Workers, like most unions, faces a battle to preserve secure, well-paying jobs — as Elaine Bernard describes in her article.

Besides the proposed draft platform of the Labor Party, as presented to the Executive Committee of Labor Party Advocates (LPA) in March, we are reprinting several other proposals submitted to LPA's platform or constitution subcommittees, as well as discussion articles relating to these proposals.

Many other articles deal with problems facing the U.S. labor movement: Bill Onasch takes up questions raised by the AFL-CIO endorsement of Clinton. Tom Barrett has a humorous review of a book on Clinton's last election campaign. Charles Walker reports on developments in the Teamsters on the eve of their crucial convention (mid-July). Melana Marchant reports on ways workers have found to fight back and win, as told to the fourth annual Meeting the Challenge Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Also, in memory of Genora Johnson Dollinger, whose Women's Emergency Brigade helped win the Flint sit-down strike of 1936-37, we print her December 1994 speech on the need to build LPA and the Labor Party, along with several tributes to her.

News of significant changes in the labor movements of other countries — Canada, Mexico, France, Britain — is also covered here. We think those attending the Labor Party convention will find such news of interest. This includes international labor solidarity for striking dock workers in Liverpool, England. Also discussion around the British Labour Party and the new Socialist Labour Party being formed in Britain.

Barry Weisleder contributes an inspiring account of the victory by public service workers in Canada against the Gingrich-type government of Ontario. For more information on major class struggle developments in Canada, including in the New Democratic Party, Canada's labor party, readers are urged to obtain copies of the Spring-Summer issue of the Canadian paper *Socialist Action* from which Weisleder's article comes. (For the address, see the article by Ellen Ramsay on the British Labour Party.)

Major changes in the French labor movement are described in the article by Christopher Aguiton and the interview with Michael Löwy. A related article on "Trade Union Mutation" in France, by Dominique Mezzi, appears in the May issue of *International Viewpoint*, which we urge readers to obtain. (In the U.S., send your check, payable to *IV*, to PO Box 1824, New York, NY 10009.) In our next issue, we hope to carry more on the radicalizing union movement in France, perhaps including Mezzi's article.

As the November-December strike wave in France showed, the fightback by workers in

Europe strengthens the fightback by workers in North America (whether in Canada, Mexico, or the U.S.). Reports of new strikes and demonstrations in France and Germany as we go to press are signs that labor is on the march again internationally. Labor party activists will want to stay in touch with these developments, which we will continue to cover.

Two articles in this issue describe changes in the Mexican labor movement. (We reprint them from *International Viewpoint* for April.) The great significance of these changes was seen on May 1, when the 21 unions in the new and more independent "Forum" movement, along with others, defied the official leadership of Mexico's main (government-dominated) labor confederation and called for workers to march in the streets on May Day. An enormous outpouring resulted — in protest against the government's austerity policies — with estimates ranging from 250,000 to one million marchers.

In our next issue, we hope to have more on Mexican trade union struggles against government domination and repression, including a report from the *Dispatcher*, newspaper of the ILWU (International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union), one of the unions sponsoring the Labor Party convention.

This issue contains three articles dealing with Cuba. One, by medical professionals W.I. and Alison Whitney, compares the need for a universal health care system in this country (something the Labor Party platform stands for) with Cuba's success in creating such a system. A second article, by novelist Alice Walker, opposes the inhuman cruelties of the U.S. blockade of Cuba. In the third, Frank Lovell describes the complex and interesting things he found on a recent visit to Cuba. (We hope to print in our next issue a transcript of a conversation members of his group had with Cuban philosopher Juan Antonio Blanco, including Blanco's rejection of the notion of "socialism in one country.")

Other international coverage in this issue deals with workers' concerns and struggles, and the conditions working people face, in Nigeria, Ireland, China, and Russia. In particular, the maneuvers of the pro-business, anti-worker government of Boris Yeltsin in Russia need to be understood as that country approaches a critical presidential election in June — unless that election is canceled on some pretext by the Yeltsin regime.

Finally, and of no small significance, Joe Auciello takes up a work by the late adviser to Yeltsin, former Soviet General Dmitri Volkogonov — that is, Volkogonov's biography of Leon Trotsky. As Auciello suggests, the truth about Trotsky's life (not to be found in Volkogonov's book) and a familiarity with the concepts and methods that great revolutionary stood for are still of vital importance for anyone seriously interested in fundamental social change in late 20th century America. In a future issue we hope to reprint and comment on Trotsky's discussions with American radicals and union leaders in the late 1930s on the subject of — a labor party in the U.S.!

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# What We Could Do With That Fifteen Cents

by Bill Onasch

For the first time in its 41-year history, the AFL-CIO held a special convention in March. The official theme of the convention was "America Needs a Raise!" "We're going to tell the truth about the wage and wealth gap in this country, and frankly, that is what this is all about," federation president John Sweeney said. "This political year isn't about a lack of money. No, this is about who gets the money."

Delegates approved a resolution that declared: "Loaded with debt and threatened by downsizing, outsourcing and a growing pool of low-wage, no-benefit contingent labor, American workers are frustrated, anxious and angry. Incredibly, it is against this backdrop that conservative members of Congress have launched a broad assault against federal laws and agencies which enhance wages and income security, protect worker health and safety, create and improve jobs, and defend the rights of workers to form and join unions."

Union leaders present continued the militant style of expression that became dominant at the regular convention last October that shook up federation policies and leadership. Ron Carey, president of the Teamsters, said, "We're here to take on one of the most important challenges in the history of the labor movement — to reach out to each and every union member and get them involved in our fight to reclaim America."

"This is a fight the labor movement cannot afford to lose," said AFGE President John N. Sturdivant. "With this program, we'll be in their faces and on their cases."

AFSCME President Gerald W. McEntee, chairman of the Executive Council's Political Education Committee, predicted that "this marks the first day when the sleeping giant starts to move. Our enemy can hear our footsteps."

The gathering had been billed in advance in the *AFL-CIO News* as "an unprecedented effort to mobilize working Americans around key political issues that affect their lives and their children's future." When Sweeney predicted a "base of working people will hold elected officials accountable, regardless of party, and inject workers' rights and values into our national debate — this year and next year and the next," one might have hoped he was referring to the Labor Party founding convention coming up in Cleveland. But it turned out there was little mention of the Labor Party idea at the AFL conclave. There were two principal objectives in this "unprecedented effort": to give early federation endorsement to Clinton's reelection effort; and to approve establishing a \$35-million fund for election "education" activities.

The assembled leaders began the tough job of selling Clinton to working people. Federation Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka led off by claiming "we're doing things differently when

it comes to politics. The decision to endorse Clinton came after extensive use of focus groups and polling of union members to ensure the federation was responding to the wishes of members."

"The labor movement needs a strong, decent, caring individual as president," said Steelworkers President George Becker.

"Who do you think will hear the whimper of a hungry child?" asked Pat Lehman, a leader of the big Boeing Machinists' local in Wichita, Kansas, "gloom-and-doom Dole or Bill Clinton? Clinton isn't perfect, but he stays with us," she said.

"The only hope of stopping the 'Robin Hood in reverse' policies of the Republicans, who take from the poor to give to the rich, is to make union members aware of the issues," declared UFCW president Douglas Dority.

With Vice President Al Gore on hand to gratefully accept, the convention overwhelmingly approved endorsement of the Democrat standard-bearers. Only the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union — a union with a long radical history only recently admitted to the AFL-CIO — dissented, along with Teamsters President Ron Carey (see box). They favored more bargaining with Clinton before sealing the deal. Several unions abstained on the grounds that they had to complete an internal process before signing on.

Gore, the man who "reinvented" 200,000 federal workers out of their jobs, told the delegates: "You have picked the perfect moment to launch your comeback in the United States of America. You are on the move and we are on the move with you."

## How Clinton Will Get Union Money

The lion's share of the \$35 million fund will come from a special one-year assessment of fifteen cents per-capita per month on the U.S. membership of all affiliates. The rest was pledged from the general funds of the federation and a few of the wealthiest national unions.

The bulk of the \$35 million is earmarked for TV spots focusing on key issues for labor. Most of these will appear in 75 targeted congressional districts where the federation hopes to unseat Republicans. (A handful of Democrats are also on the "hit list.") Some of the money will be used to train and deploy hundreds of full-time organizers, and thousands of volunteers in the field, to educate and turn out union members on election day.

The scope and scale of the approved federation efforts are unprecedented and this has alarmed the Republicans. House Speaker Newt Gingrich called labor's campaign "the most blatant, overt attempt to intimidate and buy Congress. I do not know of any time in Ameri-

## TDU Paper Reports Carey Not Voting to Endorse Clinton

The April issue of *Convoy Dispatch*, the newspaper of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), stressed that the vote to endorse Clinton at the AFL-CIO special convention was not unanimous. As *Convoy Dispatch* reported:

"The Teamsters and the Longshoremen voted not to endorse. Ron Carey was quoted by Reuters news service as wanting to delay the measure until the Teamster membership could be consulted and to demonstrate the International union's continuing concern over NAFTA and other trade measures. 'I think to make an endorsement at this time, without more meat on the bone, is a mistake,' Carey said."

can history that a single group has announced the scale of effort that Sweeney is now announcing at the AFL-CIO." Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour bitterly complained, "'Boss' Sweeney and the presidents of the federation's 78 unions have begun an unprecedented assault against our majorities in the House and the Senate."

Even before the convention the GOP was smarting from the impact of labor on a special Senate election in Oregon where a Democrat pulled off a surprise victory. They have filed complaints with the Federal Election Office charging illegal use of union money in campaigns. The Republican-controlled House Oversight Committee is also conducting an investigation of union campaign practices.

Employer groups are also nervously responding. The Chamber of Commerce has established a Center on the 21st Century Workplace; the Heritage Foundation has a Union Watch Project; and the Small Business Survival Foundation has begun a *Labor Watch* newsletter — all to track and try to counter labor political organizing efforts.

Of course even if you throw in the \$40 million in labor PAC funds — which can be given directly to candidates — labor will still fall far short of the bosses' financial impact on the elections. There is no way the workers' organizations can compete dollar for dollar in any contest with Big Business. But as Steve Forbes, and other rich men with giant political egos, have learned, the biggest spenders don't always win.

The Republican concern is no doubt justified. Labor's commitment of funds and organizers

*Continued on page 6*



# Carey's Reelection Campaign Needs Turnaround

by Charles Walker

Now is the test. Our mission is to take the enormous resources of this union and give them new direction and new purpose...

— Ron Carey, 1992 Inaugural Speech

On March 1, Ron Carey announced that he had appointed a new campaign manager and several key campaign coordinators. Carey didn't say so, but the new appointments represent a house cleaning at central campaign headquarters. Not one of the staff members appointed last fall was kept on.

The fired staff was just not doing its job. Relations with the field were mediocre, at best. Supporters grumbled about poor communications and little practical support for their local delegate races for July's Teamster convention. An important delegate race was lost in Chicago and another in Seattle, apparently because local Carey supporters were out-organized by the James R. Hoffa, Jr., forces aided by old-guard support from outside the local unions.

The staff shake-up comes too late to materially affect the balance of power at the convention, which has the constitutional authority to strip Carey of real power, should he win the popular vote in December. If Hoffa Jr. wins, he's likely to call a special convention to restore, if necessary, the president's authority, to raise dues, and to pay off his old-guard supporters by reestablishing the multiple salaries, pensions, and perks Carey abolished.

At the 1991 convention, the old-guard majority voted to strip rank-and-file members of their rights to directly elect convention delegates and international union officers. Those rights were part of a consent decree signed by the old guard to escape prosecution for racketeering. (Since taking office, Carey has placed 60 local unions in trusteeship, many for being "mob influenced.") The members retain their voting rights for now due to a ruling by the union's federal overseers.

It seems unlikely that Carey ever had a chance to win a majority of delegates at this summer's convention. Of the international union's 600 locals, many will not have contested elections. Probably a majority of the contested elections will take place where Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) have members or influence. But TDU has never been a presence in a majority of local unions, at any one time.

In the 600 local unions, fewer than half of the principal officers have endorsed Carey's plan to finance a \$200 a week strike fund with a \$2.00 a month dues increase. No one is counting on this minority of principal officers to back Carey

all the way at the convention or in the general election

## Work-Site Campaigning Needed

For two years prior to the 1991 election, the relatively unknown Carey campaigned each weekend, traveling to every state, some several times. Sometimes Carey found himself talking with members who couldn't remember the last time their business agent dropped in at the work site, even to visit. Aided by TDU and few others, Carey mounted a prolonged grass-roots effort that necessarily banked on hard work, not money.

This election Carey is in much better shape to take a grass-roots campaign to job sites, truck stops, and union halls. This time he has a full slate of 26 candidates who can reach the membership much more frequently than Carey did by himself. And campaign finances are definitely improved over 1991, when Carey was relying on \$5 and \$10 donations from his rank-and-file supporters to battle against millionaire candidates. Also Carey now has an important base of supporters besides his TDU allies.

Nevertheless, Carey and his slate have yet to put together a coordinated campaign that's reaching the ordinary member. And unlike five years ago, most campaigning to date has not stressed visits to work sites, but rather campaign meetings and rallies.

Since taking office, Carey has made a strong showing: he wiped out privileges worth \$15 million to a regional autocratic upper crust; called on 165,000 Teamsters to strike over a job safety issue, in defiance of a court injunction; and led the first national freight strike in 15 years. Nevertheless, the rank-and-file anxiety that gave Carey the anti-incumbent vote in 1991 is as prevalent among Teamsters today as in the working class as a whole.

Carey has not addressed that anxious mood head on, nor has he fought the entrenched bureaucracy over his need to speak face to face with the bulk of the Teamster membership. In large part, Carey has been hobbled by his own policy of extending the olive branch to the mainstream Teamster bureaucracy, in order to make the union work, to "get things done"; and in part, because he seems to think that the bureaucracy is capable of self-reform, provided it's prodded, scolded, and occasionally disciplined. For instance, Carey initiated a rank-and-file volunteer organizing program — but channeled it through the local unions, largely controlled by anti-rank-and-file officials.

## The Anti-Incumbent Mood

Hoffa Jr. is sure to benefit from the anti-incumbent mood, but not necessarily to the same extent that Carey did in 1991. The liability of the Hoffa name and its connection with crime and personal corruption (Hoffa's wife owned a trucking company) may offset the members' memory of the better economic times that coincided with the elder Hoffa's term of office, when an expanding postwar economy made bringing home the bacon relatively easy. And the militant union traditions from the 1930s and '40s were still relatively strong.

Hoffa Jr. may benefit from Carey's proposal to raise dues to fund a realistic level of strike pay. Hoffa says that members can have the \$200 a week strike pay without a dues increase, by using \$2.00 of the \$3.90 the international receives monthly from each member's dues. No doubt Hoffa Jr.'s alternative will appeal to a "no new taxes" sentiment as well as to anti-incumbent moods. Indeed, an earlier membership referendum on a larger dues increase proposal by Carey was soundly defeated, at the urging of a majority of the union's officialdom. Hoffa's strike fund proposal to cut the international's operating dues income in half would, in effect, give the old-guard veto power over Carey's ability to take on the bosses and open up the union to increased rank-and-file participation.

The dues issue illustrates what Carey could do to increase his chances of winning the election. If he returns to his 1991 face-to-face style of campaigning and if he addresses the economic anxiety of the ordinary worker with a vision of a tough international union leadership willing to fight the bosses over local contracts, not just the national ones, and willing to take on local union officers who get in the way, then Carey is likely to win over shop-floor leaders who feel too weak to take on the local union officials. These job-site leaders are not always shop stewards, but they probably outnumber TDU's activists. The shop-floor opinion makers are a gear that can turn the larger wheel that is the Teamster membership. Campaign booklets and flyers don't vote.

Carey, his slate, staff, and supporters must campaign as though the election is theirs to lose, with a program to transform the Teamsters union into a weapon that the working members believe in and fight for. □

March 28, 1996



# Teamsters Slam the Door on Bosses

by Charles Walker

Do you want a union that stands up to employers and won't back down? Or do you want a union that sneaks into bed with employers whenever the payoff price is right?

— Ron Carey, addressing 1,200 supporters in Manhattan, April 11, 1996

In a sharp break with past practice, corporate representatives will not be invited to the July 1996 Teamsters convention. For decades, Teamster bureaucrats welcomed and feted the major delivery, freight, and brewing employers at their convention, the union's highest body. "This convention is going to be about challenging corporate greed," declared Teamsters President Ron Carey, "not about schmoozing with management over drinks. The place to talk with employers is across the negotiating table, not in the halls of our own convention."

At the 1991 convention, a delegate pointed to UPS [United Parcel Service] bosses in the back of the hall, who were lobbying against a motion to give members the right to vote on regional additions to master contracts. Nevertheless, the old-guard delegates easily defeated a motion to exclude employers from future conventions. According to Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), "Neither the employers nor Junior Hoffa are happy with the new policy. Ian Hunter, executive director of the National Auto Transporters Labor Division, responded to Carey by claiming he wanted to attend 'for educational purposes.' Richard Leebove, spokesman for Junior [Hoffa], also criticized the new policy, calling it a 'cover-up.'" Leebove is a past spokesman for Lyndon LaRouche, a fringe ultra-rightist.

## Convention Issues

Carey has released a partial list of controversial convention issues, all of which require amending the union's constitution:

1. "Since 1992, the International Union has established 61 temporary trusteeships to remove mob influence or other corruption in local unions. Should that [constitutional] authority be maintained or taken away?"

Carey can count on old-guard appeals to the convention to overturn his rulings aimed at disciplining corrupt officials. The convention majority has the authority to overrule the union's president, although of course that was never a problem for Dave Beck, Jimmy Hoffa Sr., or Jackie Presser, three of Carey's more notorious predecessors.

2. "Dozens of outrageous multiple salaries and pensions have been abolished in the past four years. Should the Teamsters Constitution be changed to eliminate this problem at all levels of the union?"

The extra salaries occur at levels above the local unions, where only officials meet and vote. Carey wiped out \$125 million in multiple salaries and costly privileges paid to a handful of regional Teamster chieftains. But if multiple salaries were eliminated throughout the union, that would dwarf Carey's previous reforms. The proposal is sure to cost Carey some votes, however, from the "uncommitted delegates" that both sides may need for a convention majority.

3. "In the most recent contract negotiations with UPS, the freight industry, and the carhaul companies, some local union officials refused to distribute updates for the membership faxed out by the Teamsters national negotiating committees. Many local union officials also refused to support the UPS one-day safety strike in February 1994.

"Should the Teamsters Constitution be changed to stop local union officials from siding with the employers instead of the Teamster membership during contract negotiations or strikes?"

Since taking office, Carey has been plagued, though not always stymied, by sections of the officialdom that are akin to a Fifth Column, doing the bosses' dirty work from the inside. They've scabbed on strikes, sabotaged communications, and some have left the union one day, only to pop up with a management title and salary the next day.

## In Convention Delegate Elections: Carey Still Lagging

In early May, the final tallies of the delegate elections were being held up because of some election protests and rerun elections ordered by the federal elections officer. Partial results indicate that Carey is far stronger than he was in 1991, when he had only 15 percent of the delegates. However, the Carey slate is still lagging behind Hoffa Jr. in the central, western, and some southern states. In some areas Carey's strength has been significantly bulked up by officers switching to his side. That's why Carey leads Hoffa Jr. in the eastern states and in Canada and may be tied with him in California.

However, Carey must contend with the reality that half or more of the Teamsters' nearly 600 local unions will not have contested delegate elections. In the main, those locals will be represented by officials supporting or leaning toward Hoffa Jr., who claims a 2-1 delegate advantage over Carey. The Carey campaign staff won't announce its estimate of delegate strength before the balloting is completed. Teamsters for a Democratic Union has no consensus, but some leaders put Hoffa ahead of Carey by 100 delegates

with 350 of the 1900 delegates "uncommitted."

No one should expect Carey to win over enough "uncommitted" delegates to offset Hoffa Jr.'s virtually built-in advantage among officials. Carey's challenge is to keep the Hoffa Jr. forces from crippling his power through amendments to the union's constitution — and then to win the membership vote in November. Carey's opponents intend to strip the international union's leadership of the right to call strikes, select bargaining committees for national strikes, and put corrupt locals in trusteeship. Even the authority to appoint convention committees and to chair conventions would be taken from the democratically elected international officers.

Should Hoffa Jr. succeed in gutting Carey's constitutional power and go on to win November's unionwide referendum, then he's likely to call a special convention. That would be a device to restore the presidential power, eliminate Carey's freeze on officers' extra pensions, and raise the members' dues to allow the local unions to increase their per capita payments to the international union. This despite his campaign pledge, matching Carey's, not to raise dues.

At the 1991 convention, old-guard delegates voted to take away the rank and file's right to directly elect convention delegates, a right contained in the consent decree signed by the old guard to escape federal prosecution for racketeering. The union's federal overseers blocked implementation of this decision to deny democratic voting rights to members. Ultimately, the meaning of the consent decree is a matter of interpretation by the overseers and the courts, so it's not clear whether Hoffa Jr. and his backers actually could return the Teamster bureaucracy to its "good old days." □

May 12, 1996



"Our productivity is up 23%... just enough to keep up with management foul-ups."



## Fourth Meeting the Challenge Conference

# Theatre and Speakers Inspire Labor Audience

by Melana Marchant

The first weekend of February was bitterly cold in St. Paul, Minnesota, but that didn't stop almost four hundred union members and supporters from turning out for the fourth annual Meeting the Challenge Conference at Macalester College on Friday and Saturday, February 2-3. The conference was sponsored by the Meeting the Challenge Committee, self-described as "committed to strengthening the labor movement through education, community outreach, and solidarity."

The conference started out on Friday evening February 2 with a slide show called "Stolen Dreams" by Dr. David Parker, a documentary photographer who has traveled around the world capturing on film the horrors of child labor. The slide show was followed by a live performance of "The Spirit of Iqbal," performed by the Solidarity Kids Theatre, written by Howard Kling of the Labor Education Service at the University of Minnesota, and produced by Greg Poferi of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU).

The play was dedicated to the life of Iqbal, a young Pakistani boy who was assassinated after speaking out against child slavery in the rug-making industry. Children of all ages and backgrounds from union families portrayed child laborers picking jasmine blossoms for perfume in 14-hour shifts, sewing clothing in garment industry sweatshops, harvesting garlic in California, chained to looms making rugs — all eventually imprisoned for speaking out against the abuse and then liberated by those who cared enough to take action.

The production, dramatized with masks, puppets, and special effects, was later videotaped to be shared with those who couldn't attend. (To obtain a copy of the video, contact Howard Kling, Labor Education Service, University of Minnesota, Management and Economics Building, 4th Floor, 271 Nineteenth Avenue S., Minneapolis, MN 55455.)

As in previous years, both the Solidarity Kids Theatre performance and the conference itself were endorsed and financially supported by dozens of local unions, central labor bodies, and regional labor federations.

Saturday's portion of the conference was filled with panel discussions and workshops. Last month's *BIDOM* reprinted texts of introductory remarks by Professor Peter Rachleff, Dave Riehle, and Kathy Kleckner. This article will focus on what was said by the speakers themselves.

### Corporate Re-Engineering and Labor's Response

The first panel, on Saturday morning, "Corporate Re-Engineering and Labor's Response,"

featured Daymon Hartley, member of the Bargaining Committee of the Newspaper Guild at the *Detroit Free Press*; Dave Poklinkoski, president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 2304 at Madison Gas and Electric in Wisconsin; Tom Truhler, local chairman of the Transportation Communications Union Local 593 on the Burlington Northern Railroad in St. Paul, Minnesota; and Rick Sather, steward with Teamsters Local 638 at the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*.

Daymon Hartley, representing only one of six local unions involved in a life-and-death struggle against the Knight-Ridder and Gannett corporations in the Detroit newspaper strike, quoted Malcolm X frequently after explaining that, at first, the strikers tried to use the example of Martin Luther King, Jr., in appealing to the consciences of their employers, who were trying to extract major concessions from the union workers. No one at the time dreamed how large the fight would get, but Hartley and others are fighting now to protect \$30-50,000 per year jobs "so my 16-week-old son doesn't have to fight the fight," starting from zero.

Unions at the *Detroit Free Press*, said Hartley, have been embattled by outsourcing, automation, electronics, robots, and demands for concessions in wages and health care benefits despite the fact that the newspaper showed a \$6 million profit. He stressed that the 2,500 union workers "don't have a prayer" unless the leaders of the AFL-CIO "walk the talk" and call for a national march on Detroit, so that the newspaper corporations can feel "the wrath of workers nationwide." Unions can't afford any more Caterpillars or Staleys (where long and hard-fought union battles were lost), because "if we're defeated in Detroit, we'll be back to ground zero from the 1930s." Hartley urged those in attendance to buy subscriptions to the *Detroit Sunday Journal*, which is put out by the striking workers and which by February had already achieved a circulation of 30,000. (Send \$15 for three months to Detroit Sunday Journal, Attn: Mail Subscriptions, 3100 E. Jefferson, Detroit MI 48207.)

Dave Poklinkoski differentiated between union activists and *active unionists*, who are the future of the labor movement. He described major attempts in the electric utility industry to deregulate, as was done in the telephone industry. Under deregulation, consumers would choose their utility company. This started in California and has now spread to Wisconsin, and to some extent to Iowa and Minnesota as well. This deregulation has led to the loss of 20-40 percent of union membership and, for those who remain in the union, a loss of 20-40

percent in wages and benefits. What's necessary to fight deregulation is horizontal organizing, broad campaigns that involve unions (16 percent of the labor force) as an integral part of the communities. The unions, he said, "will be ravaged" if the danger of deregulation is not recognized.

### Fighting Deregulation

According to Poklinkoski, the dangers of deregulation include: (1) cost shifting from large industrial customers to regular rate payers; (2) less reliable service; (3) less public input; and (4) more environmental damage. The "stakeholders," therefore, are unions, rate payers, and environmentalists, who in Wisconsin and other affected states, are forming broad-based coalitions opposed to deregulation. In addition to the above groups, co-ops, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the farmers' union, and small businesses have jointly held public hearings and press conferences and have reached out to the community through county boards and city councils. Because of the impetus of deregulation, he warned, such activities should be addressed at the national level.

Tom Truhler discussed the history of mergers and takeovers in the rail industry and the resulting negative impact of those changes on rail workers. He detailed the valiant effort of union leaders to gain job protections for their members and criticized politicians who didn't support them in their fight. He reminded rail union members: "Together, we are the union and we must be the building blocks with which leaders can build a solid foundation and walls of strength." Rail workers had gotten the attention of politicians through a creative use of billboards, rallies, letter-writing campaigns, meetings at union halls to which politicians were invited, and threats to picket their events if they didn't listen.

Truhler also focused on the importance of union strength through internal union democracy, honesty, sincerity, and integrity, adding that we need unity now more than ever, along with a sense of the ability to win: "If you think you're beaten, you are."

### "When We're Screwed We Multiply"

Rick Sather talked about organizing in the shops. (In one week he sold 28 T-shirts reading "Bosses beware! When we're screwed we multiply.") Apparently the red color and the text must have bothered the boss, because the workers were no longer allowed to wear them openly after more than twenty people showed up with them on. Rick also stressed the importance of getting the labor movement into the history books and educating children on labor issues.

The second panel, "The Corporate Agenda Targets Public Services," included Bruce Clark,



president of the Iowa State Postal Workers Union in Dubuque, Iowa; Charlie Borden, a rank-and-file member of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1005 in Minneapolis-St. Paul; Jan Alswager, Minnesota Federation of Teachers; and Joe Burns, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 1164 at the University of Minnesota Hospital.

Bruce Clark described how a watershed strike by the American Postal Workers Union in 1970 showed the collective power of unions and consolidated nine unions into four. He condemned attacks on the public sector work force as being anti-woman and racist, because it's in the public sector that the wage differential between different groups of workers is the lowest. Clark described the efforts begun in 1991 by a core of activists who discussed the need to form one postal union. The first national meeting in Detroit in 1993 formed Workers for One Postal Union, which has participated in demonstrations, marches in Washington, and led a rank-and-file struggle to develop unity through struggle from the bottom up without relying on leaders.

### "This Is a Class Society"

Clark made it very clear that "there's an army marching against us, and we have to march back. This is a class society. That doesn't say anything about what your politics are; it's just true. It's US versus THEM." If the news media were telling the truth, he said, about the situation facing workers, they would report an "unemployment front" moving in. He ended: "We need to go out and kick ass!"

Charlie Borden, a part-time bus driver with the Metropolitan Council Transit Operations (MCTO) and a recent graduate of Macalester College, spoke of ATU Local 1005's battles in a strike last fall. (See last month's *BIDOM* for a more complete account of the strike.) The strike galvanized members who had not been active in the past, drawing them into creative actions and community outreach, including a Community Walk for Transit, which began in two transit-dependent neighborhoods in Minneapolis and converged downtown for a demonstration of over 400 people, union members and transit users together. The strike also improved the relationship between the union's rank and file and its leadership.

Charlie expressed the sentiment that "the community was totally on our side... I felt loved... It gave us different views of what was possible and planted seeds for the future." He noted that there are no longer any illusions about the MCTO or Governor Carlson, who appoints the members of this body that oversees public transit, and called for the MCTO to be an elected body. A climate must be built within the union to do community outreach, he concluded, to combat efforts toward privatizing portions of the public transit system in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Jan Alswager of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers explained that in the public school system in the state, SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] scores have been rising for five years in a

row. "We have the lowest dropout rate," he said, "the highest graduation rate, and the highest daily attendance."

### Voucher System Undermines Public Schools

Yet Minnesota Governor Carlson was trying to push a "voucher" system for scholarships to private schools that would result in a diversion of tax dollars from public schools and the children who rely on them, resulting in greater stratification of society instead of the development of mutual understanding and respect. Other issues affected by the voucher system would be teacher licensing, tenure, and merit pay — in other words, this is an attack on unions and wages. "If we value an education system for all young people and for the community, we must keep our public schools strong," said Alswager.

Joe Burns, president of AFSCME Local 1164, told of the serious battles going on at the University of Minnesota, where workers have been fighting for fair contracts by using research teams, ads in the campus paper, rallies, a public relations team, and the organization and mobilization of members. These workers are faced with the same demands by the administration for "flexibility and competitiveness," anti-union buzz words used in both private and public sector bargaining.

After the union held solid and won a contract without a proposed wage freeze, it finds itself facing a major war over the planned privatization of the University of Minnesota Hospital through its sale to Fairview Corporation. This is the largest privatization attempt in the history of Minnesota — a potential economic disaster that could result in loss of wages and benefits to public sector workers and threaten their retirement security, not to mention the loss to the taxpayers of a valuable site for medical education and research and a facility that offers care to the poor.

### Management's Divide-and-Conquer Strategy

The Saturday afternoon panel addressed "Management's Strategy of Divide and Conquer" and was introduced by Gladys McKenzie, business agent with AFSCME Council 6. She brought onto the dais some of those in the labor movement who are "waiting to be discovered" — women, Asians, and Blacks, for example.

Shirley Muelken, business agent for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 789, Twin Cities, detailed her local's campaign to fight a non-union grocery store with "a gazillion dollars" by utilizing the members' talents and energies to reach out to the neighborhood through a door-to-door distribution of the union's *Mac-Groveland Neighborhood News*, outreach to other unions, and daily picketing of the Whole Foods store. As a result of these activities, Whole Foods had less than half the sales it had projected. Muelken concluded: "We can't do it alone, but we can do it together. Take on the big guys and make a difference."

Mary Harrigan, organizer for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

(IBEW), Midwest Region, told of an organizing drive in the small northern town of Hibbing, in Minnesota's iron range, where more than 300 workers in a manufacturing plant had wages so low they were collecting food stamps, even though the company's profits had soared 300 percent. At one time the plant had employed 350 electricians, and only one was a woman. Now there are 700 members, half of them women.

Several organizing drives had been attempted at the plant, some by the Steel Workers. This last organizing drive used house calls, talks around picnic tables, and videos of workers talking with co-workers.

### Union Organizers Introduced at "Iron World"

Mona Ott, a volunteer organizer, spoke of the enthusiasm in the campaign and thanked the International for its support. The campaign resulted in TV coverage, a band at the mining industry theme park "Iron World" introducing union organizers, a street dance, a safety survey, and union supporters carrying banners in a parade and throwing candy. All this led to a successful conclusion of the drive and a post-victory road sign on a busy street reading "Congratulations! HICO employees — IBEW — voted yes for union."

Ly Fu Vang, a Laotian native and president of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), Twin Cities chapter, explained some of the challenges of organizing unions among Asians, some of whom grew up under governments of royalty (Laos had a king until 1975), where social relations were vertical. APALA is more than two years old, and a little over one year old in Minnesota. Ly quoted a Laotian proverb in closing: "One stick can be broken easily. Once you form a bundle, nobody can break you."

The last speaker, was Jim Brown, organizer of the Carpenters District Council, who said that 115 years ago, all carpenters were in the union. No one was out until the 1950s-60s, when the union thought it was invincible because it had the industry 60-80 percent organized throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Now membership numbers and power have declined because of what Brown called counter-productive policies, like "exclusivity" (apparently a reference to policies toward minorities and women). The non-union sector has grown, the Carpenters Union lost 500 members a year between 1988 and 1996, and there are currently 4,500 non-union carpenters. The Carpenters and other building trades unions are now reaching out and organizing the unorganized.

Prior to the beginning of a number of workshops, a Solidarity Quilt was presented to a group of young college students from the College of St. Catherine's in St. Paul who had organized a campaign to protest sweatshop labor. The quilt itself, made up of labor solidarity T-shirts from various struggles, was only the first Solidarity Award. From now on, the presentation will be an annual part of the Meeting the Challenge Conference, an event that educates and inspires so many. □



# The Main Issue: Secure, Well-Paying Jobs

by Elaine Bernard

*Elaine Bernard is executive director of the Harvard Trade Union Program. This article is reprinted, with the author's permission, from the March 26 Boston Globe.*

It is not surprising that the recent walkout by unionized workers at General Motors Corporation drew significant media attention. Stagnating family income, falling wages, and growing economic insecurity have all taken their toll on American workers — at a time when strike activity is at an all-time low. But, with new leadership at the AFL-CIO and at many major unions, including the United Auto Workers, labor is showing a new willingness to challenge corporate power and reverse the decline in working people's standard of living.

At issue in last week's dispute in Dayton, Ohio, and in this summer's upcoming negotiations between the UAW and GM, is the company's demand to outsource more of its parts production to nonunion components manufacturers. The union, having conceded to some outsourcing in earlier collective agreements at GM, and in contracts with other major auto producers, is now trying to stop the job hemorrhaging.

Outsourcing — contracting out of work traditionally done inside the firm — is one of the main ways that large U.S. manufacturers are reducing the size of their work forces and contributing to the economic insecurity felt by many workers. For workers at GM, outsourcing means the elimination of well-paying union

jobs with pensions, health insurance, and long-term employment security. For the union and the work force it represents, the issue is not simply jobs but what type of jobs.

All Americans need to ask the question: who is responsible for assuring that there are not just jobs, but good jobs? The U.S. now has the most unequal distribution of income among the advanced industrial nations. And because of its highly restrictive labor laws, it has one of the lowest rates of unionization. The two are clearly linked.

While the Clinton administration is fast to take credit for creating 8.4 million jobs, it is reluctant to lay claim to the qualitative shift in employment. In this era of government downsizing and reduced public responsibility for employment and economic security, all solutions must come from the private sector. Yet the private sector does not appear to be prepared to assume the role of investor in the work force. Rather, even prosperous companies such as GM and AT&T are seeking to shed much of their work forces.

It's rather ironic to see the auto firms engage in this competitive race to lower working people's standard of living. It was Henry Ford's high-wage policy at the beginning of the century that put money in workers' pockets and

helped create the mass consumer market for cars. Yet today, these same companies are scrambling to outsource parts, reduce benefits, and further contribute to the 20-year decline in workers' paychecks. How long will it be before companies figure out that you cannot squeeze down the wages of producers without reducing the resources of consumers — as they are one and the same?

The GM strike shows that despite our highly restrictive labor law and its serious curtailment of the right to strike through the use of permanent replacement workers, unionized workers are still prepared to strike when good jobs are at stake. And with new "just-in-time" production methods that emphasize plants having minimal parts inventories on hand, 3,000 workers in a strategic location are capable of shutting down the country's largest auto producer within days.

Outsourcing is one of the most dangerous corporate restructuring trends for organized labor. It is a method of providing permanent replacement workers, off-site and even while a collective agreement is in force. In forcefully resisting further outsourcing at GM, the auto workers are not just fighting a battle over their jobs, but they are also fighting a battle over what type of economy we will have. □

## What We Could Do With That Fifteen Cents

*Continued from page 1*

may well contribute to the reelection of Clinton and return of at least the House of Representatives to Democrat control. But the question for workers must be "so what?" Clinton couldn't have been elected in 1992 without labor's support. The Democrats controlled the House for decades before being nosed out by Newt's freshmen in 1994. Is a return to the status of 1993 what we should be fighting for?

Should we support trade policies such as NAFTA and GATT? Clinton and the House Democrats did and do. Should we support a balanced federal budget in seven years, paid for by massive cutbacks in social programs? Clinton and the House Democrats do. Should we support "reinventing government" through privatization and reductions in government services? Clinton and the House Democrats do. Clinton has proposed cutbacks in Medicare and Medicaid in the last three budgets that he has submit-

ted. He has also proposed cuts in housing and mass transit. He has quibbled with Gingrich and Dole only over amounts and timing in his phony budget battle — never over substantive issues.

All of the problems facing working people today — ably summarized in the AFL-CIO's special convention resolution — have accelerated on Clinton's watch. During the same time the stock market has been shattering new records. CEO compensation has also skyrocketed. During the Nixon administration the ratio of CEO compensation to the wages of typical workers was 30-to-1. Under our "friend Bill" it has risen to more than 100-to-1. The hard-to-please *Wall Street Journal* wasn't kidding when they called this guy "the best friend of business in the White House in years." That's why the mainstream of the Fortune 500 capitalists will be joining all those labor organizers in hustling votes for him.

## Same Old Dead End

The new AFL-CIO leadership should be commended for the energy they have demonstrated. Their plans for fund-raising and building grassroots political networks are overdue steps in the right direction. But their continued subservience to one of the bosses' parties will lead us to the same dead end that their more lethargic predecessors used to take us to every two years.

It doesn't have to be that way. Hundreds of delegates will be gathering in Cleveland June 6-9 to launch a Labor Party to genuinely represent workers' interests. Many of the delegates will be paying their own way and will be free to speak their own mind. If they had that fifteen cents, and could put hundreds of organizers in the field, and advertise their views on TV, American politics could be altered very quickly. □



# OPSEU Strike Victory Shows Bosses Can Be Beaten

by Barry Weisleder

*This article is reprinted from the Spring-Summer 1996 issue (No. 4) of the Canadian newspaper Socialist Action. Barry Weisleder is an Executive Board member of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and president of OPSEU Local 595.*

The biggest strike in Ontario history produced an important victory for the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and the whole working class movement. Tens of thousands of women and men, most first-time picketers, held the line through the bitterest winter weather in years. Countless unions, community groups, and individuals extended generous solidarity at 3,000 picket locations across the huge province.

The key lesson of the 5-week long class conflict is that workers are ready to bolster their unions, stand up to the employers, and fight to bring down reactionary governments. All that's needed now is leadership, unity and mass strike action.

### Strength on the Line

The Conservative provincial government of Mike ("the Knife") Harris was guilty of major miscalculation, thinking that OPSEU, with its reputation for being weak and divided, and having won the right to strike only in 1994, would be a pushover. Tory Cabinet Minister and Management Board Chair Dave Johnson even threatened in advance to recruit thousands of outside strikebreakers to keep government ministries up and running as "normal." The aim clearly was to break the union. He quickly learned that he did not dare.

Johnson saw that the 66.6 percent vote (counted on February 18) to reject the government's last offer and provide a strike mandate, was no flash in the pan. From February 26 on, OPSEU picket lines were strong and well staffed. Of the 55,000 members legally eligible to strike, the overwhelming majority walked out and stayed out. Over 32,000 picketed in the second week and received the \$100 basic strike pay. The number of picketers declined only slightly. Less than 10 percent of members scabbed. The rest stayed home.

Although the extent of scabbing never approached serious proportions, it was important to strikers' morale to confront the scabs and to severely limit access to struck work sites. This led to unusual and often creative picketing tactics, including invasions of "privately owned" shopping malls, multi-use business complexes and public transit tunnels, and to the chagrin of private security forces and Ministry managers, the negotiation of unprecedented indoor picket-

ing protocols. Local police forces, also at war with the Tories over spending cuts, were friendly to OPSEU. They often declined to escort scabs through lines, and in many instances acted as benign mediators.

Of OPSEU's 67,000 members who work directly for the government (thousands of others work in the Broader Public Sector and community colleges), some 12,000 were deemed "essential and emergency." By agreement of the parties, they reported for work and 31 percent of their pay was placed in the strike fund.

### Tory Desperation Backfires

Visibly frustrated, the government tried to disrupt the strike by seeking numerous injunctions to limit or exclude pickets, and also attempted to force more workers into the ranks of those deemed "essential," including meat inspectors, snow plow operators, and jail guards. They failed in almost every such attempt.

Then on March 18 the Tories called out the Ontario Provincial Police riot squad, replete with Star Wars helmets, menacing shields and batons. The OPP proceeded to pummel OPSEU members and allies blocking Tory MPPs seeking access to the Legislature and nearby Queen's Park buildings for the re-opening of the parliamentary session. Repeated TV broadcast of the videotaped police violence proved to be a turning point in the strike.

The Tories had painted themselves into an ugly corner. They were forced by public opinion to soften their stance at the bargaining table. Yet even when central issues were finally resolved, the government still prolonged negotiation of the back to work protocol for days, hoping to crack the union's firm opposition to reprisals against strikers. The government particularly wanted to punish "essential" workers who refused inappropriate assignments. Again, to no avail, as OPSEU held tight to the end.

"Strikers Give Tories a Lesson in Toughness" was one front page headline in the March 30 *Toronto Star*. Columnist Thomas Walkom wrote, "A weak union taking on a vehemently anti-labour government not only survived. It even won a few concessions."

The government's "political agenda...suffered a setback," University of Toronto industrial relations professor John Kervin told the

*Globe and Mail*. OPSEU has set a standard for the rest of the labor movement, he observed.

Trying to put on a brave face, the government claims to have saved up to \$200 million during the strike. Conveniently, they neglect to mention the tens of millions it cost them in lost license and tax revenues, special security measures, managers' accommodation, feeding, and overtime, the huge work backlog, not to mention paying for the unproductive attendance of a few thousand scabs.

Dave Johnson's provocative April 3 announcement that "union members who tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to cross picket lines...are going to be paid anyway" reveals the regime's deep frustration over the strike result, and promises to further jack up the associated costs.

Moreover, there is the political "cost" to the ruling business class of a lost initiative, plus the emergence of a reinvigorated labor movement.

### Measurements of Union Victory

All things considered, there's little doubt that OPSEU's expenditure of over \$22 million on the strike was money well spent.

The first measurement of that fact is the new collective agreement itself. Without the strike it would have been impossible to improve on the severance, bumping rights, and retraining provisions in the employer's February 6 final offer. Without the strike there would be no greater protection for pensions, job classifications, and wages, and no new rights for unclassified (casual) employees.

Due to the strike, some protection for workers facing privatization was obtained. If a new private employer doesn't offer comparable terms and conditions, seniority, and service credits, workers can decline the transfer, get enhanced severance, and exercise bumping and retraining rights within the Ontario Public Service.

The strike forced the government to withdraw concession demands such as: short term layoffs, reduced call back, stand by, and on call rates, and changes to compressed work weeks. The strike won faster grievance handling, unreduced pensions for laid-off workers near early retirement age, limits on management rights, and enhanced dental coverage.

Clearly, the job security features in the new contract, ratified on March 31 by a 95 percent margin, do not stop the Tories from eliminating thousands of positions. The contract will, nonetheless, slow down the process, while making layoffs more costly and cumbersome to the employer.

Similarly, genuine successor rights (where privatized jobs retain union and contract protection), was not achieved. It would have taken sympathy strike action by other unions to force the Tory government to back down on successor rights and job cuts altogether.

### A Union is Born

The fundamental measure of success is the post-strike strength of the workers on the job and in society. OPSEU members returned to their

*Continued on page 17*



# Radicals Transform French Unions

by Christopher Aguiton

*Many leftists who joined the work force after 1968 have gradually left the major unions to create radical new ones. This article, by a leading member of the new union SUD, describes the movement which is transforming the French trade unions. (For more on this subject, see the interview with Michael Löwy elsewhere in this issue.) The present article was scheduled for the May issue of International Viewpoint (#277) and is also available in French from Inprecor at 100641.2324@compuserve.com.*

Most members of the public sector trade unions found themselves in the streets in December 1995, shoulder to shoulder: members of the CGT, the largest militant force, whose leaders have traditionally been very connected to the French Communist Party; members of Force Ouvrière (FO), a somewhat smaller movement, which identifies with the social democratic tradition.

Also present in the demonstrations and committees were members of independent unions, like FSU (education), SUD (Post Office and France Telecom), CRC (health), and the SNUI tax collectors' union. There were also opposition structures and sections from within the country's second largest federation, the Catholic-inspired CFDT.

The CFDT was once the union which was most in phase with the ideas of May 1968. But its more recent "repositioning" has led its leadership to strive to replace the FO as the government and employers' prime partner. CFDT leader Nicole Notat openly supported the government throughout the strike. She was joined by a number of small Christian and "professional" unions.

The paradox of the French trade union movement is that it has an important influence among working people — as the winter 1995 movement showed — but less than 10 percent of workers actually join a union. A percentage which continues to fall, even after the recent mobilizations.

SUD was born seven years ago, at La Poste (Post Office) and France Telecom, as a response to the bureaucratic repression by the union leadership of two very active sections of the CFDT, the Paris Post-Telecom section and the health sector. Frustrated and repressed militants created new unions called SUD (Solidarity, Unity, Democracy) at Post-Telecom, and CRC (Co-ordinate, Regroup, Construct) in the health sector.

Why did these expulsions take place? The union leadership apparently wanted to put a stop to the development of the left opposition inside the CFDT. At Post-Telecom, union bosses were also preparing an agreement with the government on the reform of the public statutes which established the post office and France Telecom as public utilities. This reform had been delayed by labor mobilization, and the Paris regional CFDT structure at Post-Telecom was strong and confident.

This was the general situation. But what caused the CFDT leadership to expel whole sections of the confederation was their determination to split away those sections where coordinations (directly elected and recallable

inter-union and inter-professional stewards' committees) had been established.

Coordinations first developed in 1986–88, as a way of overcoming the division of the union movement, and to bring together unionized and non-unionized strikers.

During the Autumn 1988 nurses' strike, coordinations allowed a very weakly unionized milieu to quickly discover the power of mass, unitary collective action. The Paris CFDT Health section was at the head of these coordinations. At about the same time, the CFDT at Post-Telecom built coordinations during a Post Office drivers strike.

SUD-PTT was created at the beginning of 1989. Geographically, we were confined to greater Paris (Île-de-France). Some CFDT oppositionists in other towns, notably Nancy and Lille, joined us, but they were few. Nine hundred of the 1,000 CFDT members who launched SUD were in Paris. A modest start for the union, considering that PTT then had over 500,000 employees! But among this initial 1,000 were most of the militants from the old CFDT section.

Three months later, SUD was put to the test, in national professional elections. SUD won almost 5 percent of the vote: over 20,000 votes for the new union. Results in the Paris region were even more impressive: 25 percent of voting Telecom workers in the capital chose SUD to represent them. These results gave SUD a national legitimacy, and the necessary structure, to begin building "a different kind of trade unionism."

## Rapid Growth

Seven years later, on the eve of the recent mobilizations, SUD won 14.5 percent of votes in professional elections at the Post Office, and 27 percent at France Telecom. We were now the second largest union at France Telecom, behind the CGT (32 percent) and ahead of both the CFDT (17 percent) and FO (15 percent).

SUD now counted 9,000 members, more than half outside the greater Paris region! We had an implantation in every region of the country.

Our growth is partly explained by very specific reasons: The Post Office and France Telecom are very centralized enterprises. The debates and decisions are national. Most agents are assigned to a Paris workplace at the start of their career, and later arrange a transfer to their region of origin. So any new union created in Paris is bound to have a national effect. And members in Paris are gradually transferred to other regions, taking the union's ideas with them.

Over the last seven years, most of the opposition structures in the CFDT came over to

SUD. More generally speaking, a whole generation came together in SUD-PTT. La Poste and France Telecom had recruited heavily in the 1970s, and thousands of left and far left militants had come into the enterprise. Most no longer had the same level of activity as before, but they shared a number of values which a union like SUD was able to express and defend.

Developments had also allowed employees to compare the different unions present in both utilities. The public charters of both bodies had been changed. Telecommunications had been liberalized, and competition introduced. A plan for privatizing France Telecom had been drawn up. In the mobilizations on all these issues, SUD played an important role. Particularly at France Telecom, SUD was the union which made possible a high enough degree of union unity to force the government to step back. At least so far.

The last specific factor behind SUD's rapid growth is the speed of technological evolution in the telecommunications sector, combined with liberalization, competition, and looming privatization. These changes have overturned established professional categories, including the exchange operators, who were traditionally strongly unionized. Such moves have led, in France and in other countries, to the subsequent growth of more radical unions.

## General Factors

The most obvious general factor behind our success is obviously the crisis in the CFDT. The rupture in the CFDT in the early 1980s transformed the union into the most right wing of France's large confederations — the preferred union of the employers, and of those workers who vote for the right wing parties.

In reaction, a structured left opposition had grown up, over almost 15 years, coming to represent 20–25 percent of CFDT members, and a majority of members in some national branches and regions. A network of experienced militants, with a common history.

This was the base which enabled us to build SUD, and give it a structure of experienced cadres in each region of France. A structure able to lead struggles, bring union branches to life, and to represent the personnel with management on a day-to-day basis.

But since day one, SUD has been a breath of hope for larger sectors of workers, including many people who had not previously been in the CFDT. In workplace elections, for example, SUD scores higher than the CFDT used to. In greater Paris, SUD represents 40 percent of France Telecom workers, and the CFDT repre-



sents barely 10 percent. Before SUD was born, the CFDT hardly collected 30 percent of votes!

The growing electoral support and membership is also a result of SUD's autonomy. In the 1970s, the Left Union (between the Socialist and Communist parties) and the general desire to change society led the trade union movement to organize a large number of general movements and wide-ranging days of action. Activities which only the confederations could initiate. But in the 1980s, union activity shrank back to the level of individual enterprises, or, at best, individual professional categories. The confederations were now often perceived as heavy, completely bureaucratic bodies. Many employees came to feel that the independent unions represented the work force better.

But this is still an inadequate explanation. Not all the autonomous trade unions enjoyed the same rapid growth as SUD. And none of them has had the same force of attraction outside its own professional milieu. SUD was perceived as a rupture with the sclerotic and institutional practices of the old unions. As an alternative.

Most unions reacted to the coordination movement by stressing the need to defend the prerogatives of the "representative" unions. But SUD adapted itself to these new forms of struggle. We totally accepted the democracy of this new movement, with its coordinations and its general assemblies.

And when the unemployed began to organize themselves, and establish autonomous groups, all the classic trade unions had a defensive reaction: rejecting, for one reason or another, any autonomous movement of the out-of-work. The CGT organized its own unemployed networks, FO and CFDT "supported" the new movement verbally, but failed to give it any real support. SUD and the other independent unions (CRC, SNUI) recognized that this was a genuine autonomous movement, with its own rhythms and demands. Its development corresponded to the situation: mass unemployment has become a stable part of the economy in countries like France.

Together with the CFDT opposition, the independent unions threw themselves into the construction of a federal movement, AC! (pronounced the same as *assez!* meaning "enough!", and standing for Agir contre le chômage, "act against unemployment"). In AC! the unemployed, those with precarious contracts, and trade union members work and act side by side.

The same story can be told where the defense of women's rights is concerned: SUD was one of the first trade unions to commit itself to building mobilizations like the large demonstration for reproductive rights on November 25, 1995.

Activities in the field, like these, combined with our approach to the general and global questions, marked SUD as the expression of a real rupture with the day-to-day activities of the big confederations. And they show the possibility of a deep and thorough renovation of trade unionism.

## Similar Unions

Alongside the significant development of SUD at the Post Office and France Telecom, similar unions have imposed themselves in other fields.

In the health sector, CRC, which was born at the same time as SUD, has not experienced our levels of rapid growth. CRC still represents less than 5 percent of health workers. But this is also because the trade union "world" in the health sector is very local: CRC has an impressive presence in the départements of the Paris regions. It is the largest union in two départements, and won 20 percent of the votes in the latest workplace elections at Assistance Publique in Paris.

Left-wing members of the CFDT who were expelled from the union in 1985 have built the SNPIT into the largest union at Air Inter, the domestic airline (now part of the Air France group). And the SUPPER union formed by expelled CFDT metalworkers at Thomson has become the largest union in a plant with almost 3,000 workers.

## Education

The independent union grouping FSU has different origins from SUD. It regroups teachers' unions which were already the main forces in their sector (lycée teachers) and new unions formed by minority groups in other sectors (primary school teachers). Together, they have created a new unionism in education, in a surprisingly short time. The FSU experience is another testimony to the need — and possibilities — for the renovation of trade unionism.

The experiences presented here are not conclusive enough to illustrate any "royal path" which would enable us to force the total renovation of French trade unionism. And we also have to consider all the partial successes — and therefore partial failures, and the whole range of "less impressive" results.

## SUD Since December 1995

The strikes of November and December 1995 represented a major trauma for the CFDT opposition. They were no longer in the position of opposing the general orientation of the confederation. They saw the CFDT leadership oppose itself, from day one, to the most important strike movement this country has known since May 1968.

The "class struggle" networks of CFDT militants threw themselves into the December movement completely. The question of whether or not to stay in the CFDT was obviously posed. Most of these left wing "teams" have decided, so far, to devote their energies to the internal struggle in CFDT. Their new newspaper *Tous ensemble* ("All Together") takes its name from the slogan of the December demonstrations.

A smaller number of these militants have decided that they can best continue the trade union struggle in other structures. After the December strike, some CFDT rail workers formed SUD-Rail, which presented itself in professional elections in March 1996. The results are better than those we enjoyed when we founded SUD-PTT. The dissident rail workers scored 5 percent nationally, and up to 28 percent

in the regions where they were able to present candidates. The union already has 2,000 members. Ingredients like this provide the basis for rapid growth in the coming years.

A range of trade union currents in other sectors have come to similar conclusions. SUD Education has recently been formed, again by dissidents from the CFDT education federation (SGEN). Several networks in the banking sector are trying to create SUD unions. There are similar initiatives in the private sector.

The choice to build SUD unions in a range of sectors is partly a response to the blockage of the trade union map after the November-December 1995 strikes. Two poles developed: those in and around the CFDT who opposed the strikes, and those who, despite their diverse practices and analyses, came together to support and advance the strikers' demands. Many militants wanted to see this second pole, CGT, FO, FSU, SUD, and the CFDT opposition, continue the struggle, and draw closer together, in opposition to the fragmentation of the French trade union movement.

FSU, SUD, SNUI, and the CFDT opposition have done much in the last few months to encourage all such tentative rapprochement. The results have been disappointing, because neither FO nor the CGT has been willing to follow the path of regroupment. FO is losing speed, caught between a "modernist" reformism a la CFDT and the radicalism of the other unions. The situation with the CGT is different. The union is gaining ground in professional elections, but its leadership hopes to continue to advance by playing the role of big leader. And by preferring alliances with FO and the CFDT, wherever possible, rather than with autonomous or minority forces.

## Which Way Forward?

The creation of SUD unions could represent a real gain for the French trade union movement. But we cannot pretend to solve all the problems facing the union movement.

In many sectors, SUD unions must work alongside other independent, combative unions: FSU in education, SNUI in the finance sector. These unions do not share the CFDT origins of most of those who launched the SUD unions. This is another reason why our rapprochement must go through a series of stages. But it would be absurd for these unions not to work together. And absurd not to think that, one day, we will do so in some common umbrella or framework organization. A similar situation exists in other sectors, where we meet regularly with militant teams of CGT activists, and those CFDT dissidents who have decided to stay in the confederation for the long-term fight. We see that we need to adopt a long-term line, working for the widest possible regroupment. This line must be addressed to all those trade union teams which want to defend workers demands, and which put themselves on the side of the wage earners. The task for "class struggle" militants in the trade unions is a dual one: renovate trade unionism, and regroup those who are willing to struggle! □



## French Strike Shows Collective Action Pays Off

# “We Are Coming Out of a Long Period of Defeats”

Interview with Michael Löwy

*Michael Löwy, research director in sociology at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, is the author and editor of several books, including *The Marxism of Che Guevara*, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, *Marxism in Latin America from 1909 to the Present*, and *On Changing the World*, among others. He has contributed to *New Left Review*, *Monthly Review*, *New German Critique*, *International Marxist Review*, and *Notebooks for Study and Research*. He is on the editorial board of *Against the Current* and *Actuel Marx*. Löwy, a long-time member of the Fourth International, visited Harvard University last April at the invitation of the Center for European Studies where he granted this interview.*

*The interview was conducted and transcribed by Joe Auciello, who thanks his friends for their invaluable assistance.*

**Question:** You were in Paris during the strike of December 1995. Could you give us your impressions of the events?

**Löwy:** The strikes were very impressive. Nothing like it had been seen since May 1968, but it was different than 1968, first of all because the students were not leading the movement. Clearly, the railroad workers were the vanguard of the movement. They were in the first ranks, carrying red torches which they would normally use for repair work at night. It was very impressive, creating a red cloud of smoke, followed by other railroad workers beating drums, leading a mass of people behind shouting, “Tous ensemble!” — “We are all together!”

The word “together” means all the different unions, the employed and unemployed, men and women, Black and white, or French and immigrant, and students, as well.

Some of the demonstrations, not in Paris, but in other cities like Marseilles, Toulouse, were the biggest since May 1968 and in some places the biggest demonstrations since the Popular Front in 1936.

**Question:** In the United States during the last several years there have been a number of battles in the transportation industries, rail, airlines, trucking. There have been defeats, but the strikers have shown great militancy. In France, why did the strike involve the transportation unions in particular?

**Löwy:** First, transportation workers are among the best organized and the most unionized. Second, they occupy a key position in the whole system; when transportation stops, everything stops. Third, the government’s so-called “reforms” were a direct attack against railroad workers.

Some of the government’s reforms affected other public sector workers, too. This created the possibility for a huge protest by public service workers. The transport workers were the spearhead of the movement, the best organized, the most militant. But they were not isolated. Behind them was a mass of workers in the public sector who were also under attack from

the government, so the rail workers were the vanguard of a much bigger wave. If no one but the railroad workers were involved in the strike, perhaps the government would have been able to crush it.

Also, a majority of public opinion supported the strikes. There is a strong feeling among the French population that public services are important and should be defended against privatization or any attempts to weaken those services.

**Question:** What do you think has been the result of the strike? Has there been an increase in unionization? How has the far left been affected by the strike?

**Löwy:** Well, the first point is that the government was forced to retreat — to some extent, not entirely. The direct attacks on the public transportation workers and on pension benefits were dropped. The attempt at partial privatization of the railroad was also abandoned. But on reform of health benefits and social security, the government was able to impose its will.

One reason for the government’s success was that on this issue the unions were split. One of the most important unions, the CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail, or French Democratic Confederation of Labor) — at least the leadership — supported the government’s position on health reform and the social security system. This stand provoked great dissatisfaction among the rank and file and had significant consequences. But in the first instance it provided the government with some support for their positions, and so they were able to impose them.

So it was a half victory, or a half defeat, as an immediate result. But the people felt it was a triumph, because for the first time in many years the government was forced to retreat.

**Question:** And everyone saw how it happened...

**Löwy:** Yes, exactly. People saw that collective action can have beneficial results. That was very important. In many European countries the strike was followed with much interest and sympathy because the same issues are emerging

everywhere in Europe. So it was a good sign that resistance pays off.

I don’t think the strike had an immediate political effect insofar as no political alternative to the government emerged. The political parties of the left [the Socialist Party and the Communist Party] had an extremely low profile. They supported the strike but did not take any active part in the movement. They did not call for the government to resign.

No political alternative was put forward — that was one of the main weaknesses of the movement. It was a social movement with a political content but with no direct political expression.

One important consequence was on the union level. Unions were reinforced, strengthened. In the union elections which were held the following month, the unions which supported the strike came out very well, but those who opposed, like the CFDT, lost many votes. Moreover, inside the CFDT, which is the second largest union in France after the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail — General Confederation of Labor), there emerged a left wing fighting against the leadership. Some people in this left wing decided they were fed up, and they left to create a more radical union, taking inspiration from a radical leftist union which exists already among postal workers called SUD (Solidarity, Unity, and Democracy). These were postal workers who had been expelled from the CFDT eight years before when they engaged in a strike which the CFDT leadership did not support. They have been very successful among mail workers. They are a renewed example of what used to be, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the most radical form of trade unionism. Many of its leaders come from a far left background: Trotskyists, anarchists, etc.

They have been an example for others, so that SUD unions are emerging elsewhere, first of all among the railroad workers in protest against the CFDT leadership who didn’t support the strike. Some of the people in the CFDT left to build an SUD union. In the elections which took place immediately after, they were quite successful. They didn’t have much time to prepare, but they received many votes and made a good



showing. Probably in the coming months or year a new confederation will emerge, next to CGT, CFDT, and FO (Force Ouvrière). The new confederation which will emerge will be SUD, where the revolutionary left will have a big influence.

But this was not a project of any group on the far left. Neither the anarchists, nor Lutte Ouvrière, nor the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) planned this. Their policies were to stick to the existing unions. It was the rank and file who said, "We are fed up!" So to some extent they were forced to follow their lead and build this new union.

**Question:** In a 1991 essay, "Where Now for Socialism?" [see *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, April 1992], you wrote that there was "not much room for optimism about the outcome of the struggle in the short run" but that, nonetheless, "socialism and communism... will remain alive as long as exploitation and oppression exist." Half a decade later, how would you assess the perspective outlined in this essay?

Löwy: I'm not very optimistic now either, but somehow I have the feeling that we are beginning to move out of this long period of defeats and retreat which started in the mid-1970s and has lasted quite a long time. Perhaps, I'm very cautious. But perhaps we are seeing the end of this long period and the beginning of a new upsurge of struggles in Europe and worldwide. One could compare it to 1960 in Europe and the United States after a long period of the Cold War. In 1960 things were beginning to change, but major events were still in the future. Now, important things have happened, but for the moment we are just at the beginning. So, that would be the most optimistic assessment I could make.

**Question:** Sometimes the early signs of change are more evident in the culture, among intellectuals, or in a student movement. Have you seen signs of this nature?

Löwy: Yes, in France, for instance — which is not more important than other places, but it's where I live — you see some signs of change in the political and cultural climate in relation to Marxism. From 1989 to 1994 we heard every day, every morning, every evening, Marx is dead. Marxism is finished. There were books, editorials, and so forth that went on and on insisting on the same cliché. In the last two years you can see the beginning of a change in the climate. Just to give a few examples: it is noteworthy that someone like Jacques Derrida, who never appeared especially as a Marxist, now writes a book about Marx [*Specters of Marx*, (Routledge, New York: 1994)].

Philosophically it is a very strange book. But politically it is a very clear statement in defense of Marx and sympathetic to communism, since the book is dedicated to Chris Hani, a South African Communist who was killed. So that's

something new. Considering the intellectual influence of Derrida, it's a significant change.

Another example. In September of last year we had in Paris an international conference about Marx. Guests and speakers were invited from around the world, Fredric Jameson, and Perry Anderson, for instance, in addition to a number of French intellectuals. It was organized by a journal called *Actuel Marx*, where I am one of the editors. Usually, when *Actuel Marx* organized a conference, fifty to seventy people would attend. Most of them would be Latin American or African. This time there were 1,500 in attendance. Of course, you could say that there were more notable speakers, but still it was an incredible change in scale.

All the newspapers gave wide coverage of this event. The right-wing newspapers were stunned; the left-wing papers were enthusiastic, of course. But everyone had to write about it; it was a serious political event.

So these are signs of the beginning of a change in the cultural climate in France. I don't know if similar signs are evident elsewhere... I would say yes, but at least in France it appears that we are probably entering a new period. This doesn't tell us much about the *outcome* of the struggles, but at least it shows that there is going to be the beginning of a struggle, which is a very welcome change.

Of course the union movement, the December strikes, also had a big impact on the cultural and political climate because ideas like class struggle, collective action, criticism of neo-liberal policies and dictatorship of the market — all of these topics again became the order of the day. Defense of public services, against privatization — these ideas were taboo a few years ago.

Among the intellectuals there was a very clear split. One group, some of them leftist, or ex-leftists, supported the CFDT leadership and the government's project to reform the health services. But that was before the strike. So they supported the government indirectly, through their support of a union leadership which supported the government. When the strike really began to gain momentum, another group of intellectuals called for support of the strikers, including people like Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Daniel Bensaïd, etc. There were debates on radio and television and in the newspapers between the two groups. For the first time this created a political debate among the intellectuals, and it showed the willingness of intellectuals to commit themselves to social struggle, which was also relatively new.

**Question:** The collapse of the Soviet Union has been a demoralizing influence, at least in the short term. How do you see the impact of the Soviet Union's demise in western Europe?

Löwy: The disappearance of the Soviet Union was at the same time the worst and the best thing that could have happened. The worst, because it gave the impression that socialism is finished, that capitalism is the only alternative, that Marx

is dead. A lot of people became demoralized and drifted away from political activity.

But, of course, the positive thing is that this terrible weight which we have had to carry for sixty years — Stalinism — dissolved. This created the possibility of talking about socialism, communism, and Marxism in new terms, without having to be identified with or tied to the Stalinist model.

What is also interesting is the big impact this has had on the Communist parties. They were the most affected; the social democrats and the revolutionary Marxists, the Trotskyists, were not affected too much because they did not identify themselves with the Stalinist model. But the Communist parties were deeply split. Some of them moved sharply to the right and became social democratic, as in Eastern Europe and also in Italy. Those who did not become social democrats underwent a kind of "de-Stalinization" which is still an ongoing process, far from finished, which has important consequences. It has led to movements like Rifondazione Comunista in Italy or Izquierda Unida in Spain which are behaving in a very different way from what used to be the Stalinist policy of the Communist movement. They are much more open and democratic, which is a very welcome change. This is beginning to take place in France, much later than in other countries, because Stalinism was much more rooted in the French Communist tradition. Still, there are already positive signs of change in France.

**Question:** Later this year you will be giving a talk on Ernest Mandel as a revolutionary humanist. Can you comment on the general outline of that presentation?

Löwy: There will be a conference in Amsterdam July 4-6 to honor and also debate the life and work of Ernest Mandel. I have been invited to take part, and I am going to give a talk on Mandel's revolutionary humanism. I have not yet written my paper, but the general outline would be that the question of Marxist humanism is a key element in Ernest Mandel's thinking and writing, including his political economy. His economic work is never concerned simply with abstract forces but is always related to questions of human suffering of the exploited and oppressed.

Another important point is that he considered political issues, be they ecological struggles, wars, or revolutions, always from a global viewpoint, related to the survival and emancipation of mankind as a whole. This is a broad perspective, world — historical, which permitted him to judge each event, each crisis, and situate it into a wider, human, universal context. This quality, I think, is very important. His work is not prisoner of a narrow standpoint, a narrow technical or tactical approach, but is formulated in a larger revolutionary humanist perspective.

There was very deeply imbedded in Mandel's viewpoint a faith in the possibility of revolutionary human emancipation. It was a strong belief which he knew could not be scientifically

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# Highlights of a Recent Trip to Cuba

by Frank Lovell

The author, founding editor of *BIDOM*, was in Cuba February 16–24 with a Global Exchange seminar titled “Cuba at a Crossroads.” He describes three aspects of the tour.

We visited a scale model (1:1000) of the city of Havana, which was very impressive. We were met at the entrance to the building that houses the model by Miguel Coyula, an architect and one of the assistant directors of the non-governmental organization Group for the Integrated Development of Havana.

I was as much impressed with Miguel Coyula as with the model. He is probably in his mid-fifties, having completed his studies in architecture in 1961, in the early years of the social revolution. He has a doctorate in technical sciences, and is a full professor of architecture as well as a popular essayist on urban and architectural design, public arts, and historical preservation.

The building that houses the scale model is a new structure, especially designed for this purpose. When Miguel met us in the main entrance he welcomed us and shook hands with each of us as he introduced himself. And right away he took us to a vantage point along one side of the model and began explaining how it was conceived and its purpose. It covers a large area, built in sections, larger, I think, than the floor space of a large Upper West Side New York apartment.

The only similar scale model is one of New York City, which he said he thinks is somewhere in Queens. I have enough curiosity to try and find it someday soon.

The Havana model is built in movable sections (49 sq. ft. each) on trucks and floor tracks so that any part of the model is easily accessible. While he was explaining any particular part of the city, he could spotlight a section or street or building with a remote control.

Miguel explained to us that Havana developed differently from many other cities, which continuously undergo demolition to make room for new buildings to serve new purposes. In Havana the city spread out around the bay as the population expanded. This model is designed to show the different historical phases in the city's growth and the changing architectural styles, from early Spanish to Soviet “realism.” One section along the Malacón has the big American-type casino hotels, built by the Mafia, Miguel said. Some of these are now being refurbished to suit the needs of Cuba's new tourist industry.

The growth of tourism and its inherent dangers to the socialist goals of the Cuban government was one of the subjects of his talk, and the problems encountered and mistakes made during Cuba's dependency on the Soviet Union was another. He thinks many mistakes were made in the 1970s and 1980s in deference to the “Soviet model,” and not only in architecture (the unrealistic goal of a sugar harvest of 10 million tons, for example).

He compared the Russian adaptation to so-called “market economics” with what the Cuban government is being forced to do. He said they want to try and avoid the catastrophic mistakes the Russians have made, and they hope to benefit from the Russians' mistakes. He said the Russians had the mistaken notion that all they needed was to get rid of the old “socialism,” introduce private enterprise, and all their problems would be solved. What they got was chaos, worse than what they had before, many now believe.

The Cubans are determined to introduce planning in urban development and government control along with private enterprise. No one thinks this will be easy, he said. But the scale model of the city makes new construction and city planning possible on a rational and understandable basis. Example: models of new buildings can be placed in their future setting to see exactly how they will look in relation to the rest of the environment.

Miguel also took us on a tour to one of the poorest sections of Havana to show us what his planning group is trying to do.

## Hotel Moka

I'll just say a few words about our trip to Sierra del Rosario (in Pinar del Rio province) and our two-day stay at Hotel Moka. This area is especially designed to promote Cuba's new tourist industry. There is a slick promotional guide to this “tourist complex” which the industry distributes. I am sure it is very different from the rest of Cuba. This is also tobacco country, so of course we were taken to a cigar factory where tourists can buy the finest cigars.

## Juan Antonio Blanco

The highlight of our tour, so far as I was concerned, was our meeting with Juan Antonio Blanco. He was very like the architect, Miguel Coyula. Both men seemed about the same age, early fifties; and they had similar mannerisms, a quiet, matter-of-fact way of talking. Both have traveled extensively outside Cuba, and both spoke flawless English.

We were scheduled to visit Blanco the first day we arrived in Cuba, in the evening. Our group was taken to his center for philosophic and ethical studies. It was in a high-rise building, an apartment house which once was very grand but now is in a bad state of disrepair. There were few lights in the foyer, and the elevators were not working on the first three floors. We climbed the three or four flights in the dark, and took the elevator to the penthouse. We found our way along a corridor from the elevator to a large, fairly well lighted reception room with very nice furniture and large French

windows leading onto a very large balcony overlooking the city, an especially beautiful view of the Malacón, with the sea splashing over the breakwater. Most of the people in our group were captivated by the view, and I don't know how long we stood there before being told that Blanco was ill and could not meet with us. We were promised that we would see him and that he would talk with us later on in our tour schedule.

And sure enough.

Blanco came to our hotel and met with us in one of the meeting rooms there one evening near the end of our tour. He apologized for not being able to see us when we arrived, but explained he had been suffering with a low-grade fever. He suggested that our meeting be more informal than usual and that he would try and answer questions.

Some of us had read his book *Talking About Revolution*, which is in the form of questions and answers. So we knew in general what to expect, and what kind of questions we could ask.

He made a few introductory remarks and I asked the first question: “What studies, if any, have been done to analyze and explain the sudden collapse of the Soviet economy?” He said that as yet there is no official “autopsy,” but that in Cuba, economists, sociologists, and philosophers have had to pay close attention to the consequences for Cuba of the Soviet collapse, the crisis it caused. He then went on to explain this crisis, reviewing the conflict between the Cuban view of socialism and that of the Soviet government and the pre-revolutionary Communist Party of Cuba. He said that before the revolution Che Guevara and Fidel Castro had developed a different understanding of how the revolution would succeed and what the future society would be.

In this summary review of social struggle and theory in Cuba, Blanco followed almost verbatim what is written in his book *Talking About Revolution* (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 1994; available from Global Exchange, 2017 Mission Street, Suite 303, San Francisco CA 94110).

“In the case of Cuba, it is more than a struggle for nationhood. There is a peculiarity in the ideology of our independence struggle as given to us both by Felix Varela, the priest, and José Martí, the major intellectual and protagonist of this struggle” (p. 10).

After the revolution in 1959 the U.S. tried to isolate and destroy the Cuban economy, and this forced the new Cuban government to seek economic assistance and protection from the Soviet Union. In doing so, it adapted to the “Soviet model” of top-down “socialism” and (bureaucratically run) “command economy.” The government bureaucracy grew monstrously, and a new concept of value was introduced to measure economic growth and industrial achievement.

What was this new concept of value?

Blanco says in his book it was “based on a stupid, theoretical concept of creating ‘values’ and fulfilling your yearly plan to create these values, instead of actually creating useful goods.”

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## Alice Walker Speaks Out:

# “Cuba Has Led the Way”

(reprint from *Third World Resurgence*)

The following is reprinted from the publication *Third World Resurgence* No. 42/43, with minor changes from British spelling or punctuation. Alice Walker is of course the outstanding American poet, novelist, critic, and essay writer who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for her novel *The Color Purple*.

My heart has been enlarged with hope, so many times, by the dignity and courage of the people, some of them my friends, from the small island country of Cuba. I have watched Cuban children grow out of poverty, backwardness, and disease, to become healthy, superbly trained, well-educated, articulate, and compassionate participants in world affairs.

From this materially bloated, spiritually impoverished country [the United States], where so many are homeless and starving, I've admired Cuba's struggle to share its meager resources so that all might stand proud. People around the world admire the Cuban people because they have exhibited an incredible love, active and sacrificing, for all — humans and planet — that is oppressed, all that suffers. Now, as Cuba suffers, we are called upon to act.

It is difficult to think of Cuba without also thinking of Fidel Castro. In fact, I cannot entirely do it, for I do not think of him at all as the demon he has been set up to be over the past 34 years. I recognize in Fidel Castro the Jesuit scholar and social-activist lawyer, the priest who finally picked up the gun.

However, what is more important is for us to remember that wars — whether waged through military strikes, as against Iraq, or through trade embargoes and blockades, as in the case of Cuba — are fought not against leaders, but against the

people, who may or may not even like the leader, and that children are the most devastated victims.

Thirteen years ago I first went to Cuba, and the radiant health, intelligence, generosity, and joyousness of the people made it a sacred place for me. Ironically, in a place where there was very little church, I felt the most God.

Having been born among the poorest, least powerful, most despised population of the United States, spoken to as if I were a dog asking to use a library or eat in a restaurant, the revelation that Black people, who make up between 40 and 60 percent of Cuba's population, and women, who make up half, can share in all the fruits of their labors, was a major gift Cuba gave to me, a major encouragement to struggle for equality and justice, and one I shall never forget.

I refuse to be responsible for the suffering and death of hundreds or thousands of Fidelitos and Fidelitas. My ego is not stroked by the thought of sick and hungry Cuban children dying in their tired, scared, ill mothers' arms. What gives me pleasure is the thought that all children everywhere can be safe from deliberate brutality and cruelty, deliberate enslavement, ignorance, and genocide.

Rather than envy — as I think the U.S. government does — and therefore despise Cuba for its dedication to the health of its citizens and its elevation of Black people, women, and the poor,

I believe it has important lessons to teach our gadget-rich but spiritually backward country. We look at the sound teeth, shining eyes, straight limbs, and strong minds of the Cuban people today and know that 34 years ago these same people would have been null and void. After 34 years of racism, sexism, poverty, assassinations, and despair in the United States, great numbers of my own generation — because of homelessness, joblessness, drugs — are certainly null and void.

I am far from blind to Cuba's imperfections. But one thing is clear: whatever its imperfections, in Cuba the poor have not been held in contempt — they have been empowered, which is different from being made wealthy in a capitalist sense, and more lasting. A healthy body, a well-trained mind, a sense of solidarity with one's people is harder to lose than a million dollars and offers more security. This empowerment of the poor — literacy, good health, adequate housing, freedom from ignorance — is the work of everyone of conscience in the coming century. Cuba has led the way, and is an object lesson to us. For if the poor are not empowered — by any means at their disposal — they will continue to be devoured by the rich. Just as women, if not empowered, will continue to be the slaves of men.

I have heard of rich Cubans in Miami (whose old money was no doubt made off the backs of slaves and the vulvas of women) and others who see Cuba as real estate. It is said that they intend to buy Cuba, as if it were still the North American-owned plantation it was before the revolution. This is obscene. What has been paid for in blood, tears, and back-breaking work by the people of Cuba cannot be bought, especially by the rich, white Cubans in Miami, or by those North American profiteers who raped Cuba shamelessly over hundreds of years, and who, returning to that land, would hardly recognize it. Certainly it would surprise them not to encounter any of their former slaves, serfs, drug addicts, and prostitutes. □

## Highlights of a Recent Trip to Cuba

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In his discussion with us Blanco gave an example of how this worked out in practice.

In the Soviet Union, they were measuring the productivity of a chair factory not by the number of chairs it made, or how comfortable those chairs were, or how cost-effective the factory was in producing them, but by — the total weight of the chairs! So you go to the Soviet Union and you need a crane to carry a chair, because they would make furniture as heavy as possible in order to “overfulfill” their yearly plan.

One of the funniest things in Cuba is that you could be driving along a highway and see a bridge built up on one side and on the other side, but nothing connecting them.

The construction group that did it probably successfully “completed its plan.” They probably even got an award for being good workers, for creating a lot of “value.”

Another irony of this Soviet model is that it

disregarded social needs. Under this system, things such as child care centers, schools, and hospitals — social services in general — were listed as unproductive expenditures and the orientation was to spend mainly in productive areas. So construction to meet social needs was disregarded, and we were accumulating more and more social problems in terms of lack of housing, child care centers, schools, hospitals, etc.” (p. 23).

Blanco said that this “Soviet model” was scrapped in 1984, that the present crisis (which he says is both structural and conjunctural) has forced the Cuban government to return to the revolutionary concept of 1959: that socialist society must be guided by ethical, economic, and spiritual concepts.

What was Cuba's condition as a result of the Soviet collapse?

The figures are dramatic. In 1989 we imported about 13 million tons of oil from the Soviet

Union; in 1992 we could only import 6 million tons. In 1989 we imported around \$8.4 billion worth of goods; by 1992 our import capacity plunged to \$2.2 billion. By 1992 we had only 30 percent of the resources for the sugar harvest that we had in 1989, so sugar production was the lowest in 30 years.

When we lost the trade with the [so-called] socialist bloc, not only did we lose our markets but we lost a kind of trade in which our prices were indexed to those of our trading partners. For example, if the price of oil went up, the price of sugar would go up as well, and the reverse was also true. At the beginning of the revolution, the international prices of oil and sugar were different from what they are today. In those days, with around one million tons of sugar you could buy about eight million tons of oil in the world market. But today we can only get 1.4 million tons of oil for that same one million tons of sugar (*Talking About Revolution*, p. 33). □



# Health Care: What Is To Be Done?

by W.T. Whitney, Jr., and Alison K. Whitney

*W.T. Whitney is a pediatrician and Alison Whitney a school nurse, both in South Paris, Maine.*

Readers may find it surprising that we begin this article on health care by talking about Cuba, with which the United States has been locked in conflict since the revolutionary government came to power in 1959. But health care represents one of the most striking differences between the two societies. On a recent trip to Cuba we took the opportunity to reflect upon our own health care system and to determine whether or not the Cuban experience has relevance to working for change in health care in the United States.

In January this year we visited Cuban hospitals, health centers, and schools as part of a delegation of pediatricians and pediatric nurses from all over the U.S. The purpose was to examine the effect of scarcity on the health of children and on the health system itself, and also to look at the impact of the U.S. embargo. Our findings will be used here as part of an inquiry into why the U.S. lacks a national health program.

In 1992 candidate Clinton promised reform, but the subsequent health care debate ended with a whimper and now is silent. Yet amply documented problems have not gone away.

## Comparison with Other Industrial Countries

U.S. health indicators are less favorable than those of many other industrialized countries. In 1993 infant mortality at 8.3 babies dying in the first year for every 1,000 births ranked 22nd in the world. The rate for Washington, D.C., in 1994 was 21.7; for several years Black infants have died at more than double the rate for white babies.

The U.S. trails most other developed countries in life expectancy, many of them by more than two years. White men here live almost 8 years longer than Black men. Only 40 percent of men in Harlem are alive at age 65, compared to 55 percent in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Access to health care in the U.S. is far from universal. Forty million people are uninsured, and physicians, more than a few, exclude Medicaid recipients from their care on the grounds of inadequate reimbursement. The result is our multi-tier system — no care, Chevrolet care, and Cadillac care.

Cost for our health care is exorbitant, consuming 14 percent of the gross national product (GNP), compared with 9 percent of Canada's GNP, and 6 percent of that in the United Kingdom (UK). Apologists claim that all that money pays for "the best health care in the world," a boast referring to technically advanced methods of care that in fact are available throughout the world.

Hospitals and patients pay for the world's highest-priced drugs and medical equipment. Hospitals labor — or thrive — under burdens of unnecessary beds, duplication of services, heavy marketing expenses, and a surfeit of well-paid administrators. U.S. medicine has a surplus of specialty physicians, many of whom have grown wealthy.

Nonclinical administrative costs are unmatched anywhere. Commercial insurance companies have recently come to dominate the private insurance market, and profit figures heavily into administrative costs of the insurance sector. Health insurance overhead now accounts for almost 1 percent of our GNP, compared to 0.1 percent of Canada's. The Massachusetts Blue Cross Blue Shield alone employs more administrative workers than the entire Canadian system. Administrative costs in general consume 24 percent of health spending in the U.S., 11 percent in Canada, and 6 percent in the UK.

## A Market-Directed Industry

With the advent of managed care and commercial HMOs ("health management organizations"), profit looms larger than ever. An article in the December 21, 1995, *New England Journal of Medicine* by Himmelstein reports that one HMO, which uses the name U.S. Health Care, "spends only 74.4% of its revenue on medical care: \$1 million a day goes to profits, adding to its \$1.2 billion cash reserve. Its CEO pocketed \$20 million in a single year."

Competition and profiteering affect quality of care. HMOs compete in part by means of limiting services. Physicians receive economic incentive to restrict tests, referrals, and hospi-

talizations of their patients, and doctors are pressured to see patients quickly.

Health care has become a market-directed industry. Managers and health care providers are preoccupied with productivity, costs, market share, and legal considerations, such as fear of malpractice suits. Many physicians feel compelled to earn large incomes because they enter practice overwhelmed by debt from having to pay for heavy educational expenses. They often desire to continue the well-to-do life style that they grew up with. (Few students from poor families go to medical school.) It is remarkable that with distractions like these so many physicians have retained their idealism.

## In Contrast: Health Care in Cuba

Cuba's task has been different. Rather than meddle with an established behemoth, it had to start a national health care system almost from scratch. Steadily for 36 years the revolutionary government has given priority to health care and has extended comprehensive services to the entire population, built hospitals, and expanded medical education. Despite living with shortages, Cubans continue to regard health care as an achievement of the revolution. (As such, it serves as an apt target for Washington's policy of making Cubans suffer in an attempt to provoke opposition.)

In 1960 the infant mortality rate in Cuba was 62 deaths per 1,000 births, and life expectancy was 64 years. Today the rates are 9.6 and 75.4, respectively. Cuba then had only one medical school, 6 nursing schools, and about 3,000 physicians. Now there are 24 medical schools, 34 nursing schools, 278 hospitals, and almost 60,000 physicians, one per 200 people. There

**Table 1**  
**Social Indicators for Selected Latin American Countries**

Country	Real GNP per capita (PPP\$ 1991)*	Adult Literacy Rate (1992)	Mean Years of Schooling (1992)	Life Expectancy (1992)	Under-5 Mortality per 1,000 (1992)	Population per Doctor (1990)	Daily Calorie Supply (% of Required) (avg. 1988-90)
Argentina	\$5,120	95.5	9.2	71.1	33	330	130
Bolivia	\$2,170	79.3	4.0	60.5	125	2,080	83
Brazil	\$5,240	82.1	4.0	65.8	75	670	114
Chile	\$7,060	93.8	7.8	71.9	20	2,170	104
Cuba	\$2,000	94.5	8.0	75.6	17	270	137
Dom. Rep.	\$3,080	84.3	4.3	67.0	75	930	100
Guatemala	\$3,180	56.4	4.1	64.0	75	2,270	101
Mexico	\$7,170	88.6	4.0	69.9	43	1,850	132
Peru	\$3,110	86.2	6.5	63.6	100	970	89

The figures presented are the most recent available.

Source: United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994*.

\* Real GNP in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) dollars is a measure which compares GNP across countries using purchasing power rather than exchange rates as conversion factors.



are 25,000 family doctor-nurse teams providing primary care for 95 percent of the population. Immunization is nearly universal. Specialty services include fetal surgery, prenatal diagnostics, complicated cardiac surgery, and both bone marrow and organ transplant. The high incidence of infectious disease rampant elsewhere in the developing world is foreign to Cuba.

The cost for all this is low compared to the United States, ranging from 6.5 percent of GNP in 1992 to 7.8 percent in 1994. Cuba pays much less per capita for health care than do other Latin American countries. Yet its health indicators far surpass those of its neighbors.

Cuban health statistics and cost structure approach those of the pace-setting nations — Canada, Japan, and the Western European countries. Cuba shares with them a history of aggressive advocacy for equitable health care by labor and other popular forces. Looking at the failure of reform in the U.S., Vicente Navarro notes that “the establishment of a national health program is related to the strength of the labor movement.” (Emphasis added.)

(See Vicente Navarro, *Dangerous to Your Health*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993.)

On this score, the U.S. flunks. Only 10 percent of private-sector employees are unionized, and only 38 percent of eligible voters took part in the 1994 national election.

The single payer system common to Cuba and to Canada will not alone serve as a panacea. Ontario and other provinces, plagued by pressures from the corporations to reduce government spending amidst economic downturn and corporate “downsizing,” are presently attempting to close hospitals and limit provider reimbursement. Where the market rules, health care must compete with other sectors of the economy.

### Health Care as a Right

Cuba, on the other hand, regards health care as a right, a pledge that is part of its constitution. The nation actually increased support for health care from 98.56 pesos per capita in 1990 to 105.34 in 1994 during a period of unmatched economic constraint — caused by the U.S. blockade and changed trade relations with the former Soviet bloc.

The national commitment to health care as a right for all seemed to be reflected in the humanitarian ideals of Cuban colleagues with whom we visited. In their view, the community has the duty to protect the well-being of the individual, especially the most vulnerable. The mother of a baby failing to gain weight, for example, receives support, education, and forthright advice from the family doctor, the nurse, and a member of the Federation of Cuban Women, who are her neighbors and who visit her at home. In Maine, few of our individualistic families would have tolerated such an intrusion, and anticipation of rejection might have frightened the helpers off.

Those who need the most, receive the most help. El Hogar Castellana, a remarkable school for retarded children and young adults, has extensive organic gardens, workshops, and programs in drama and music. Absent was the grieving over spending cuts for special education that we might have heard in Maine. Dr. Jorge Perez, director of the AIDS program in Cuba, a world-recognized expert, excused himself from our group to comfort, at the bedside, one of his terminally ill patients at the Pedro Kouri Institute. In Maine we might have readily accepted the cost-effective notion that a patient with AIDS should be allowed to die at home or in a hospice.

Health workers in Cuba believe that their skills need to be shared. More than from any other country, Cuban doctors and nurses have worked abroad. Since 1987, 13,300 children from Ukraine and other Eastern European countries have come to Cuba with their families for treatment of complicated illnesses, many of the children having been exposed to radiation after the Chernobyl accident.

Societal values have set the course for health care in Cuba — and, unfortunately, in the U.S. as well. Here poorly restrained self-interest fuels competition, and care has to jostle with empire building and defensiveness. In this setting efforts at reform offer at best new ways to divide up power and earnings.

For change to occur, the values of community and shared sacrifice that are found in Cuba will have to gain currency in the political life of the United States. That this road has not yet been

taken in our country accounts for the watershed differences between the two health systems.

Borrowing a phrase from the late Speaker of the House Tip O’Neil, we would conclude that indeed all health care is politics.

Certainly health care is too important to be left up to representatives of the health industry. Health care is a basic right due all people without discrimination. The people’s basic needs, including health care, will be met when those aware of their rights join together politically and work to bring about change.

### Further Reading

Charles Andrews, *Profit Fever: The Drive to Corporatize Health Care and How to Stop It*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995.

Himmelstein and Woolhandler, *The National Health Program Book*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994.

### What You Can Do

Learn more about universal health care and a national program that leaves out profit, contact groups working for these goals.

The following organizations are active in the effort to enhance North Americans’ understanding of Cuban political life, culture, economic problems. They also work toward supporting Cuban autonomy and ending the U.S. blockade. Through them you can arrange trips to Cuba, learn ways of aiding the Cuban health care system, and join with like-minded people to learn more or participate in political action.

- Cuba Information Project, 198 Broadway, Suite 800, NY, NY 10038; phone (212) 227-3422
- U.S.-Cuba Medical Project, 198 Broadway, Suite 800, NY, NY 10038; phone (212) 227-5270
- Center for Cuban Studies, 124 West 23rd Street, NY, NY 10011; phone (212) 242-0559
- Global Exchange, 2017 Mission Street, Room 303, San Francisco, California 94110; phone (415) 255-7296
- Let Cuba Live, PO Box 245, Brunswick, Maine 04011; phone (207) 725-1330 □

## “We Are Coming Out of a Long Period of Defeats”

*Continued from page 11*

demonstrated to the nth degree. So there is an element of faith in his thinking, not in the religious but in the rationalist meaning of the term. This faith in the potential for human emancipation is the reason for the optimism which pervaded all of his writings, sometimes excessively. This was one of the shortcomings, one of the problems with his writings, a some-

times excessive optimism. But this was also a strength insofar as it inspired his whole life as a committed revolutionary.

The famous statement of Gramsci, “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will” is the best approach. You need both. Sometimes Mandel’s wonderful optimism of the will spilled over into optimism of the intellect. You will find this kind of error in Trotsky, and in

Marx also. Usually their optimistic predictions were inaccurate, but their pessimistic predictions came true. But not always! To end on an optimistic note, remember that in January 1917 Lenin predicted that he would not live long enough to see a revolution in Russia. □



# Labor Realignment Opens Space for Initiatives "from Below"

by Dan La Botz

*This article is reprinted from Mexican Labor News and Analysis, Vol. I, No. 4, March 6, 1996.*

Leaders of the Mexican labor federations and labor unions have begun a process of political and organizational realignment which may open space for democratic workers' initiatives from below.

At the end of 1995, during a debate over the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)-government proposal to "reform" and in part privatize the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), a political split developed within the Congress of Labor (CT) between the long-dominant Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) and the young Federation of Unions of Goods and Services (FESEBES). While the CTM fundamentally supported the PRI's IMSS reform, FESEBES was more critical and helped to organize a large public demonstration against the PRI-government proposal.

Now the split has deepened, and the half-dozen unions which form FESEBES have been joined by a number of others to create a loose coalition of 21 labor unions, some members of the PRI-controlled Congress of Labor (CT), and some independent. FESEBES is led by Francisco Hernandez Juarez, head of the Mexican

Telephone Workers Union (STRM), a former radical who became labor's closest collaborator with former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Hernandez Juarez has been the leading Mexican advocate of a "new unionism" predicated upon union cooperation with the employers to increase productivity. He also played a key role in Salinas's privatization of TELMEX, the Mexican Telephone Company. But also in the 21-union coalition are unions such as the independent Union of Workers of the Metal, Steel and Iron Industry (STIMHCS), which is affiliated with the independent Authentic Labor Front (FAT). The new group is frequently referred to as the "Foro," or Forum, because of a number of public forums on labor and social issues which it has organized.

Veteran labor bureaucrat Fidel Velazquez is watching the unfolding reorganization of the Mexican labor bureaucracy from a hospital. Velazquez, who will be 96 years old in April, has played a leading role in the Mexican labor bureaucracy since the mid-1930s and has been the dominant figure since the late 1940s in the

PRI-government-controlled CTM. If prolonged illness or death removed Velazquez from the scene, a struggle for control of the CTM and the CT would immediately develop. Velazquez has promised in any case to step down in 1998.

Velazquez and other CTM leaders have criticized Hernandez Juarez, FESEBES, and now the Foro group as "those who seek to divide the labor movement," while calling upon the unions to maintain their "historic alliance" with the PRI. But it seems as if for the first time in decades, some section of the Mexican labor officialdom is now prepared to look for a new strategy. What that strategy will be is not yet clear.

One of the central questions facing the Foro group is whether or not to remain within the Congress of Labor (CT). Several of the Foro's 21 member unions are independent of both confederations. So far Hernandez Juarez, FESEBES, and the Foro have not laid out a clear program of action, but have confined themselves to a critique of positions taken by the CT and the CTM.

Some of the independent unions within the Foro group are also members of the independent and more radical "May 1st Inter-Union Coalition" which formed late last year. The May 1st coalition grew out of the 1995 May Day demonstrations in Mexico City and out of union solidarity with the 13,000 bus drivers who were fired when the government of the Federal District (Mexico City) privatized the Route 100 bus company.

Independent unions and democratic currents within the official unions see this realignment within the labor bureaucracy as opening up space for discussion and debate, and perhaps in the future for joint action. □

## Labor Union Strategies

by Manuel Garcia Urrutia M.

*The following article appeared in the Mexico City publication La Jornada, March 4, 1996. The translation is by Dan La Botz.*

Several labor union meetings took place during the last days of February and the first days of March which allow one to observe the arrangements and strategies which will determine the rise of a new labor unionism, to be worked out, in my opinion, between two hegemonic projects.

The first which stands out, was the celebration of the 119th Regular General Assembly of the National Council of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), marking its 60th anniversary. The meeting represented the collapse into senility of a kind of labor unionism which refuses to die, but which now has no place in the development of a modern, democratic and just Mexico. Three moments sum up the CTM meeting:

- the long applause for Fidel Velazquez, offered as homage to the system which he has served, accompanied by a presidential speech about the battered "historical alliance" [between the unions and the government], with special nostalgic reference to old union leaders who played their part in the deterioration of the population's living standards;
- the presence in the Assembly of the leading businessman from COPARMEX [the most conservative employers' organization], Carlos Abascal, asking that we give ourselves to the Virgin of Guadalupe — an implicit recognition of how bad things have gotten — and attempting to inaugurate, for the "n"th time, the "new labor culture,"

which is recognized in the speeches and agreements which are imposed upon us from on high, which have nothing to do with employer practice and the everyday reality which the workers live;

- the CTM's censure of organizations within the Congress of Labor (CT), which according to the CTM, are dividing the CT, with clear allusion to the Federation of Unions of Goods and Services [FESEBES]. This basically reflects the CTM leadership's interest in not being displaced from the leadership of Mexican labor unionism.

The CTM leadership has miscalculated. Because they will not be able to keep their leadership position in the labor movement with a strategy that is ever more docile, servile to the



government, tied to the state, isolated and corrupt. For there are other federations [CROC, CROM, etc.] which do that even better. It is union democracy, respect for differences of opinion within the union, and the development of wider social alliances, at both the national and international level, which will provide the basis for the union project which the country needs.

The second important recent meeting was the Third Forum of Labor Unionism before the Nation: Security and Social Justice, organized by 21 organizations with different histories, characteristics and perspectives, but which have as a common denominator: leaders who are representative, are elected, and have proposals for the challenges to the productivity of the nation. The drawing power of these unions, their key place in production and services, the richness of their analysis in confronting diverse problems — derived from their diverse composition — and their possibility of acting in a united, ma-

ture, and responsible way, not only represent a milestone for the labor movement in recent years but also aim at changing the correlation, shape, and hegemony of the historic leadership.

Recent weeks also saw a San Francisco meeting organized to discuss action against the transnational corporation Sprint, under the Labor Side Agreements of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Labor organizations attending from Mexico, the United States, and Canada have recognized the necessity of forming some regional labor union relationship to protect the interests of workers negatively affected by NAFTA. They also argue for a Social Compact which would include protection of the rights of migrant workers, independent of their legal status. A similar tri-national meeting in Cuernavaca shared concrete experiences of unity, action, and organization, involving union, environmental, and farmers groups which have been working together.

The conclusions of these international labor meetings laid out the challenges which the process of regional integration imposes: the construction of trustworthy partners in order to avoid actions such as that of the Teamsters in their opposition to Mexican truck drivers using the highways of the United States; the need to push, in the same direction, an alternative development strategy which gives meaning and priority to the social dimension of integration; and, last but not least, solidarity. Participants were also invited to the meeting against neo-liberalism which will take place in April in Chiapas.

These meetings are no longer closed to independent unions. The CTM monopoly has been broken. The Mexican unions which came to relate to their U.S. and Canadian counterparts share different visions of the national reality, and seek agreements on strategy between Mexican organizations. □

## OPSEU Strike Victory Shows Bosses Can Be Beaten

*Continued from page 7*

OPS work locations on April 1 with newfound skills, pride, and confidence. At many work place entrances members gathered, then marched in together singing "Solidarity Forever." Inside, scabs got such a cool reception that Dave Johnson issued a public statement on April 3 threatening to fire anyone who "harasses" strikebreakers. At post-strike celebrations held across the province, former picketers danced, sang, and pledged to step up their union and political involvement in the struggle against the Harris government.

OPSEU has gained a whole new layer of activists. The OPS offices, shops, institutions, plants, and vehicle yards will never be the same. Hundreds of new stewards are coming forward to strengthen the organization and presence of the union in the work place and in the larger community.

A union is born. Through the strike the new OPSEU won widespread respect across the labor movement. It has enormously raised public awareness. Mighty, mighty OPSEU has arrived.

### Hot Convention '96

The OPSEU Convention, April 18-20 in Toronto, will be more than a celebration of new power and solidarity. It will be the scene of some heated discussions about union priorities (in the face of a mountainous debt), about OPSEU's place in society (labor and political action), and about scabs.

The union's constitution permits locals to suspend or expel strikebreakers from membership (which most scabs won't mind, since they can keep their jobs, always had compulsory dues deducted, and rarely attended union meetings anyway).

Only the annual convention, however, has the power to hit scabs financially. One way to do this is by raising dues across the OPS, and

reimbursing the difference to members who did not scab. Some will argue that this is administratively difficult to do. But haven't we proven our ability to overcome greater challenges, like conducting a strike with thousands of picket lines? Failure to try to tax back at least some of the ill-gotten gains of OPS traitors would be a breach of good faith with all strikers, and would undermine future solidarity.

In addition, the convention should review some aspects of union functioning. During the strike many members wanted the Executive Board to meet and to deal with pressing issues, like the proposal to raise strike pay. But Board meetings were suspended; two short telephone conferences were a very poor substitute; decision making was centralized in the hands of the president and non-elected senior staff. Members deserve a more democratic and responsive leadership structure.

In terms of policy, the union frequently explained that the strike was not about money; it was about defending public services and fairness to all. But alongside this message was the oft stated position that layoffs are unavoidable; that our real mission is to ensure "a soft landing" for its victims.

Unfortunately, this mixed message undercut our commitment to fight the attack on public services in principle. Worse, it conceded ideological ground to Harris's "Common Sense Revolution." The truth is, there's no need or justification for cuts and layoffs. Public services should be expanded, not cut back. The problem is not expenditure; it's revenue. It's a question of jobs, interest rates and corporate taxes.

### On to the General Strike to Bring Down the Tories

The OPSEU strike, the biggest labor walkout in Ontario history, was both a shining example and a missed opportunity. It showed that working

people are ready to fight, including those previously considered timid and conservative. It also revealed a labor leadership that's, at best, hesitant, or worse, just praying for salvation at the next election.

But the rank and file have a better idea, inspired by the example of the workers of France last fall and winter: "Hey Mike, hey Harris, we'll shut you down like Paris." It's echoed in the most popular slogan of the OPSEU strike rallies, the chant most often heard at the marches and demonstrations around Queen's Park: "Hey Mike, hey Mike, How'd you like a general strike?"

Urgently needed is an action plan that builds on the victory of the OPSEU strike. Not just another one-city, one-day shutdown protest. But an all-out, all-sector, province-wide general strike that targets the reversal of all the cuts and all the attacks on human and democratic rights.

With the infamous 3-year Social Contract now at an end, the collective agreements of nearly a million public sector workers are up for renewal. Municipal workers, hospital workers, teachers, firefighters, bus and subway drivers, hydro employees, and many others could soon be hitting the bricks. Auto workers are also getting ready to take on the auto giants.

No one should fight alone. Together we can win big. All for one, and one for all. That too is the lesson of the OPSEU strike.

On April 19, tens of thousands of workers will be mobilized in strike and protest action across Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge. From there the clarion call should go out that the general strike to bring down the Tories is labor's next step. □



# Repression Intensifies in Nigeria

by Michael Livingston

On November 10, 1995, the renowned Nigerian poet and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) were hanged by the Nigerian government. Saro-Wiwa and the others, who came to be known collectively as the Ogoni Nine, were convicted on trumped up charges that were fabricated by the government in a trial that violated virtually all standards of fairness and impartiality.

The murder of the Ogoni Nine is part of a larger pattern of political repression which serves the interests of transnational oil corporations. Since the end of the Nigerian oil workers strike in September 1994 (see *BIDOM* #121), the regime of General Sani Abacha has systematically killed and imprisoned opponents. In addition to the well known case of the Ogoni Nine:

- General Sani Abacha continues to hold Frank Kokori, the general secretary of the oil workers union NUPENG, and three other union leaders in jail. No charges have been made against them and no trial has been held.
- General Abacha sent troops and tanks into the streets of major Nigerian cities on June 12, 1995, the anniversary of the 1993 national elections. Troops stopped and searched civilians and made arbitrary arrests in an effort to prevent protests.
- General Abacha continues to hold Moshood Abiola, the candidate elected president in the 1993 elections, in prison without charges or trial. International observers considered the election free and fair. However, the electoral process was heavily controlled by the military, so that the Nigerian people were presented with only limited, pro-capitalist choices.
- General Abacha has conducted large-scale purges of the military, alleging that elements within it were plotting against him. Between 60 and 80 noncommissioned officers have been executed and 40 other senior officers and civilians (mostly former officers) were tried. Among the forty senior officers, 23 have been sentenced to death and others, including a former general and military dictator, Olusegun Obasanjo (who ruled from 1976 to 1979), and his ex-deputy, General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, have been sentenced to life in prison.

In Nigeria's 36-year history as an independent state, General Obasanjo is the only military dictator to ever peacefully turn over power to a democratically elected civilian government. General Obasanjo is currently head of the National Unity Organization, a moderate opposition group. General Yar'Adua was a vo-

cal critic of the military regime and as a member of the Constitutional Conference had called for a transition to civilian rule by 1996. The Constitutional Conference had been set up by General Abacha to legitimize his rule through a lengthy process of "preparing the country for a transition to civilian rule," a common ruse in Nigerian politics to prolong the term of office of the current dictator.

- Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, the chair of the Campaign for Democracy, another significant opposition group, was sentenced to 15 years in prison on fabricated charges that he participated in plotting against General Sani Abacha. Dr. Ransome-Kuti is in failing health.
- Between late July and mid-September 1995 at least 78 people were shot in public executions by soldiers. In a September execution of 18, soldiers shot the driver who brought the prisoners to the execution grounds "by accident."
- Chief Alfred Oritsewehimi Rewane, age 79, was shot in Lagos. The chief, a veteran nationalist leader, had denounced the military's plan to stay in power for at least three more years.
- Ledun Mitee, vice president of the MOSOP was re-arrested on January 4, 1996. Mitee had been arrested and charged along with Saro-Wiwa, the president of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, last year. He was later acquitted. Mitee and 18 other Ogoni activists face charges that could result in their executions. In response to international pressure, the Nigerian government has postponed their trials for the time being.
- In early February Alex Ibru, publisher of the anti-government newspaper *The Guardian* (Lagos), was shot several times in the head by unidentified gunmen. Ibru, who has been harshly critical of General Abacha's dictatorship, survived the attack and was reported by relatives to be in stable condition.
- In April 1996 government troops tried to thwart a UN investigation of human rights abuses. Troops surrounded the hotel where the investigators were to meet with family members of the Ogoni Nine and other Ogoni activists. Most of those allowed to enter arrived in Nigerian government vehicles.

General Abacha's pattern of intensifying repression against the political leadership of all forces who oppose him occurs against a backdrop of generalized oppression of the Nigerian masses. Since the imposition of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986, a large number of

anti-SAP protests, some planned and others spontaneous, have been violently repressed. For instance, shortly after a peaceful demonstration against the SAP in 1986, police invaded the campus of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria and shot students and visitors on sight. More than 40 were killed, numerous more were wounded. The massacre of the students provoked rioting on other college campuses throughout Nigeria. In May and June 1989, uprisings occurred in the major cities of the south (Lagos, Bendel, and Port-Harcourt). The military killed over 400 people during these protests, which were virtually ignored in the Western media. A protest held at the University of Benin on August 18 and 19, 1994, was violently smashed by police, who shot anyone they could find.

The Ogoni people, who live in the oil-rich region of southeastern Nigeria, have been especially hard hit. Since 1993 an estimated 2,000 Ogoni have been killed by the Nigerian military, 80,000 displaced, and 27 Ogoni villages destroyed.

The Nigerian people are caught between the rock of repression and the hard place of economic immiseration. Once the most promising economy in Africa, with the largest working class of any sub-Saharan African country, Nigerians now live in ever increasing poverty. Currently a meningitis epidemic is sweeping western Africa, and Nigeria has been especially hard hit by the epidemic. As of mid-March 1996, 3,386 people had already died, most of them younger than 14.

## The Execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa

The hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni activist leaders reveals the brutality of the Nigerian dictatorship and the oil interests that it serves. In May 1994, four pro-government Ogoni tribal chiefs were murdered. Saro-Wiwa, who was under military escort at the time, was charged with "instigating" the crime. Initially, Saro-Wiwa and four others were charged. Later an additional 29 Ogoni activists were indicted by the Nigerian government in the hopes that the "small fry" (the prosecution's term) would try to save themselves by incriminating Saro-Wiwa. None of the defendants did so, however, and international pressure forced the Nigerian government to release all but nine of the charged activists. In the trial, which lasted one day (October 31, 1995), the nine were denied their choice of defense lawyers, and motions to try each case separately were also denied. Thus the prosecution was able to try all nine concurrently and appoint the defense lawyers.

Prominent participants in the trial were two colonels, Paul Okuntimo and Hammid Ibrahim Ali, who spearhead the government's campaign to suppress the MOSOP. Most Ogonis believe that the government itself was responsible for the murder of the four chiefs and there has been no evidence presented to show that Saro-Wiwa or his organization were responsible. International observers characterized the proceedings



as unjust and legally flawed; the hanging as judicial murder.

We cannot understand the trial of the Ogoni Nine without understanding the political aims of the MOSOP and the role of oil in Nigeria, especially in Rivers State, the home of the 500,000 Ogoni people (one of Nigeria's 250 ethnic groups). MOSOP was founded four years ago by Saro-Wiwa and others to fight the environmental devastation and immiseration inflicted on the Ogoni people by Shell Oil. Shell produces 150,000 barrels of oil per day in Ogoni (the area of Rivers State where the Ogoni people live).

If the Ogoni people received a fair share of the oil revenue, they would be reasonably well off, possibly as well off as the people of Kuwait. Instead the oil industry has thrust them into unbearable poverty. The oil pipelines that crisscross the area reduce the available farmland. Frequent oil spills poison the soil, making it infertile, and pollute the rivers, making the water undrinkable and killing fish. This devastation provoked frequent spontaneous acts of sabotage of Shell installations and occasional attacks against Shell employees. Shell responded by calling in the Nigerian military to engage in "wasting operations" against the Ogoni people. These wasting operations have resulted in thousands of Ogoni deaths (see above) and are ongoing. The Ogoni people currently live under military occupation.

Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People demanded that the pollution caused by oil extraction be cleaned up, that the Ogoni's be compensated for the environmental damages, and that the Ogoni people receive a fair share of the oil revenue. They also campaigned for greater autonomy from the Nigerian central government. Saro-Wiwa had some success in his efforts. For instance, he succeeded in getting the United Nations Unrepresented People's Organization to adopt the Ogoni as a repressed indigenous people. His efforts also brought international attention to the plight of the Ogoni people and earned them the support of such environmental groups as Greenpeace. The Nigerian military dictatorship targeted Saro-Wiwa because he threatened the interests of Shell and the oil transnationals, the true masters of the Nigerian military.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was a tireless fighter for the rights of his people and a defender of their environment. He will inspire the Nigerian people for a long time to come. All of us should take heart from his example and his words: "Truth is powerful and always victorious. It may lose sometime, but only for a while."

### Western Response

The execution of the Ogoni Nine on November 10, 1995, coincided with the opening of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Auckland, New Zealand. The Commonwealth is made up of 52 countries, most of the former colonies of Great Britain. At the time that Ken Saro-Wiwa was being hanged, the heads of the governments that make up the Commonwealth were having dinner with

Queen Elizabeth. The news of the hanging reached Auckland just as the heads of state were preparing to leave for a retreat to discuss new rules for policing human rights and democracy.

While many of the Commonwealth governments had pleaded for clemency and expressed shock and outrage at the hangings, the leaders of these capitalist countries showed their true colors. A few leaders, such as President Nelson Mandela of South Africa and President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, argued for immediate and outright expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth. President Mandela called for an international oil embargo of Nigeria as well. The other heads of state argued against strong action. Ultimately, they suspended Nigeria and fashioned a resolution calling on Nigeria to free the 43 prisoners held on coup plot charges and to reform itself within two years or face expulsion from the Commonwealth. Such a mild slap on the wrist has been effectively ignored by the Nigerian generals.

Interestingly, the main capitalist countries have directed most of their efforts toward saving the lives of General Obasanjo and General Yar'Adua. Until his arrest, General Obasanjo was an important player in his country's oil industry, frequently negotiating crude contracts and fuel oil supply contracts. Both generals are perceived as moderate opposition figures friendly to the interests of the oil companies. In the event of the collapse of the Abacha dictatorship or a crisis within the Nigerian military, such moderate, pro-oil opposition leaders would be crucial to the defense of capitalist interests in Nigeria.

The Clinton administration has mostly talked tough while shying away from decisive action. Over the last couple years, the Clinton administration has withdrawn its ambassador, suspended Nigeria's applications for financial credits, tightened the granting of visas to Nigerians with ties to General Abacha, and refused to sell weapons to Nigeria. Such steps have had little impact, however. In early December the U.S., along with its European allies and South Africa, cosponsored a UN resolution condemning the Nigerian government. In all, 98 countries voted in favor of the resolution, 12 voted against, 42 countries abstained, and another 33 stayed away. At the time of the vote, the *New York Times* reported that the Clinton administration, having threatened to punish Nigeria, is stumped about how to proceed. According to the *Times*, the "State Department has yet to develop a coherent strategy that does not encompass sanctions." The implication, of course, is that sanctions are out of the question, as they would hurt U.S. business interests in Nigeria.

Behind the Clinton administration's inaction, a policy debate is taking place. The National Security Council wants to pursue a tough policy, including oil sanctions and freezing the ruling generals' assets, while the State Department follows the line of the oil industry and wishes to adopt an essentially hands-off policy that seeks to conciliate the generals and oil companies.

The Abacha dictatorship responded with a public relations campaign aimed at averting

international isolation. The campaign has so far included a half-page ad in the Johannesburg (South Africa) *Sunday Times* and a two-page ad in the *New York Times*.

### The Unmaking of the State

The nation state in Africa is in serious trouble and the current crisis in Nigeria exemplifies much of what is happening on the continent. Many of the nations of Africa are being torn apart in much the same way that the former Yugoslavia was. The economic basis of the state is being undermined by IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs and the increasingly transnational character of capitalism.

For example, an IMF Structural Adjustment Program forces a government to privatize government assets, selling off those assets to transnational capital and the local elites at a fraction of their value. Privatization and other aspects of the IMF plans make it difficult for the state to provide services to the population and patronage and profit to the local elite.

Furthermore, many of the African states, whose borders and populations were decided by their former colonial rulers, are multinational states. As the economic basis of the state declines, local ruling elites use ethnic differences in their competition for resources. Many of the African states have military dictatorships — the military acting as the agent of transnational capital and the local comprador class, as well as the national bourgeoisie. The power of these military dictatorships to safeguard domestic order and the interests of capital is itself undermined by the erosion of the economic basis of the state. This pattern is found all over Africa. Besides the cases of Liberia, Rwanda, and Nigeria, one finds similar developments in countries such as Zaire, where an almost continuous crisis exists of low-level warfare, famine, and deprivation, and in Kenya, which is following a path similar to Nigeria, as well as in the Central African Republic, Congo, Togo, and Sierra Leone.

Debate exists within the core capitalist countries as to the proper response to this disintegration of the state in Africa. Many Western governments take a hands-off approach as long as the profits of the transnationals are not hurt. When profits or potential profits are threatened (as in Somalia), the West intervenes, usually in the guise of offering humanitarian relief.

### Grassroots Protest Actions against Nigerian Repression

A number of small-scale protest actions have taken place since the end of the oil workers strike. In May 1995, Randall Robinson (the president of TransAfrica) and ten other labor and community leaders were arrested for blocking the gates of the Nigerian embassy in Washington, D.C. Human rights groups launched a campaign to save Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni activists. This campaign included a sit-in at Shell headquarters in New York.

On December 13, 1995, TransAfrica sent a letter to President Clinton urging him to impose

*Continued on page 21*



# Russia Faces Financial Meltdown

by Renfrey Clarke

In the run-up to the December 1995 parliamentary elections the widespread failure by the government of Russian President Boris Yeltsin to pay wages on time helped doom the pro-government "Our Home Is Russia" electoral bloc to a humiliating defeat.

In the aftermath of the parliamentary elections, opinion surveys were showing Yeltsin's confidence rating at less than 10 percent. Early in 1996, government leaders were faced with survey findings which suggested that Communist Party of the Russian Federation leader Gennady Zyuganov would easily outpoll Yeltsin in the June presidential vote. The result was the abandonment by the government of any attempt at coherent financial policy making, and the complete subordination of economic strategy to the goal of getting Yeltsin re-elected.

Recognizing the non-payment of wages and pensions as the core of his electoral problems, Yeltsin pledged that all state wage and pension debts would be paid by the end of March. As one of the means of achieving this, other areas of state spending were plundered. The journal *Expert* observed on April 29:

In practice, the government has been living since February under an emergency budget with a single protected item — expenditure on wages. All other programs have been severely cut. Thus in January-March expenditure in the social-cultural sphere was two-thirds of the sum designated for the first quarter, spending on science was barely more than half, and financing of the federal investment program had effectively not started.

Partly as a result of Yeltsin's efforts to buy himself victory in the June 16 elections, Russia in coming months is due to experience its most severe financial shocks since the policies of "reform" began to be implemented in January 1992.

This situation has arisen because the government has borrowed money in such quantities and at such high interest rates that a straightforward servicing of the public debt is now impossible. When the time comes in the late summer and autumn to repay the heaviest of these borrowings, the government can be expected to mount a savage offensive against the living standards of the mass of the Russian population. Only in this way, government spokespeople will argue, can a total collapse of state finances be avoided.

The looming financial cataclysm in Russia is no mystery to Western economic pundits. Russian bankers as well are in gloomy agreement that some such "meltdown" is inevitable. But

with one exception — an article in the April 19 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the favorite newspaper of the Moscow intelligentsia — the Russian media have refused to take up the issue of how Yeltsin's pre-election largesse is to be paid for. Debate on this topic has been tacitly suppressed, as news editors have recognized that the current president would have little chance of re-election if the true prospects facing ordinary Russians after the polls were widely known.

The "reform" policies followed by Russia's new capitalist elite have never been distinguished by theoretical coherence, or by success in practice. Instead of pursuing the strategy — implemented with remarkable success by the Chinese in the 1980s — of retaining a planned state sector of large-scale industry and complementing it with the development of small and medium cooperatives and private businesses, Russia's "reformers" have insisted on near-blanket privatization and the imposing of monetarist "shock therapy." The result has been a crash of industrial production to little more than half 1990 levels, and inflation since 1991 of thousands of percent.

The crisis of "reform," clearly evident by 1993, was followed by desperate and often haphazard attempts at "stabilization." As part of this effort, the government swore off funding its deficits with credits from the State Bank — an inflationary practice which had amounted to the state borrowing from itself.

Instead, loans were to be contracted abroad, and funds sought from Russian banks and other enterprises through the creation of a securities market. To make lending to the government an attractive proposition, short-term securities were offered to Russian businesses at extraordinary rates of interest, sometimes above 100 percent per year in real terms.

### Policies Praised in the West

The Russian government's program of borrowing was praised in the West as an antidote to inflation. However, it had the effect of making lending to the government a far more secure and profitable option for Russian enterprises than investing in production. Investment rates continued to shrink, and output in the economy to slide.

Meanwhile, serious economists were comparing the super-profitable securities market to the "pyramid schemes" which had appeared in Russia in the early 1990s, flourished briefly and spectacularly, then collapsed, taking with them the savings of millions of small investors. With production in the economy declining, and the

tax base shrinking along with it, the only way the government could redeem its securities was by selling still more of them. Eventually, potential lenders would run out of money, or their confidence would crack.

In the spring of 1995, responding to demands from international lenders that inflation be curbed at all costs, the Russian authorities began another ill-conceived maneuver. This was to use foreign loan funds to intervene in the currency market, bringing about a dramatic strengthening of the ruble. While this helped reduce inflation — in recent times, to less than 3 percent per month — Russian products lost their competitiveness on foreign markets. Imported consumer goods, which many Russians found affordable for the first time, drove many local products from the Russian market.

The result, from the final months of 1995, was a marked acceleration of the decline in output. Enterprises ceased paying wages, then taxes. State finances deteriorated alarmingly. Monthly budget revenue fell from an average of 15.4 percent of Gross Domestic Product in August-October 1995 to 8.3 percent in January-February 1996. The budget deficit swelled; in the first quarter of 1996 it amounted to 28 trillion rubles (about US\$5.6 billion) instead of a planned 19 trillion. By increasing the budget deficit, the government's strong-ruble policies were creating an inflationary dynamic at least as powerful as the one they were designed to suppress.

At least in major cities, the presence of affordable imported goods created the illusion of prosperity in the run-up to the December 1995 parliamentary elections. But then the problem of unpaid wages became acute, followed by the new policy of paying wages to the detriment of all other areas.

Maintaining the cuts in non-wage areas will be impossible over the longer term. After the June elections, some balance will have to be restored — and wages and pensions will again cease to be paid. Meanwhile, the underlying problems have been greatly exacerbated by the other method, apart from cuts in state programs, that the Yeltsin government has used to boost real incomes in the pre-election months: a huge increase in its borrowing on the securities market, to more than US\$4 billion per month.

By the first months of 1996, the ability of the securities market to supply the quantities of money the government was demanding was already near its limit. Interest rates had to be raised accordingly. From an annualized figure of 79 percent on January 31, the rate paid by the government on six-month securities rose to 126 percent on March 27.

On this latter date, the government's financial pyramid suffered its first collapse. Despite the fantastic interest rates, the government failed to sell almost a quarter of the securities it attempted to place. The market had been exhausted.

Facing catastrophe, the government desperately sought emergency loans from Germany and France, in addition to the US\$10 billion already promised by the International Monetary



Fund. Germany quickly supplied US\$2 billion, and France US\$700 million. But even this extra money could only calm the Russian financial scene for a few weeks.

The government continued desperately trying to borrow. On April 17, with annualized interest rates at 166 percent, the market for short-term state securities suffered another failure. The government could persuade lenders to take up only about 60 percent of US\$1.2 billion in six-month securities on offer. In financial terms, this was the equivalent of slamming into a brick wall.

The catastrophe on the Russian financial markets made headlines around the world, receiving extensive coverage in newspapers like the *Wall Street Journal*. In Russia, however, the news passed with scarcely a whisper.

Even without paying most budget-sector wages after June, the Russian government will still face an acute financial dilemma in the mid-summer. A recent estimate puts the monthly repayments on short-term securities after July at 25–30 trillion rubles, currently equivalent to US\$5–6 billion. To provide a comparison, the average monthly repayment in the second half of 1995 was 9.4 trillion. Current tax revenues in real terms are barely half what they were in the autumn of 1995, and there is no possibility of raising the necessary sums on the now profoundly shaken securities market. The conclusion is inescapable: the government will not be able to pay off the full value of its debts, and

will meet its formal obligations only through some fiscal sleight-of-hand.

When governments are insolvent, they have a variety of escape routes not available to individual citizens. The chief one of these is to allow the currency to inflate, and to pay off creditors in devalued monetary units. The only eventuality which might save the Russian government from having to use this tactic would be if international lending agencies were to pledge tens of billions of dollars in new loan funds — something which is clearly impossible.

### Workers to Bear the Burden

The main burden of accelerated inflation will be borne by Russia's workers, whose wages — if paid at all — will be worth less. Higher inflation, meanwhile, will be accompanied by devaluation of the ruble against other currencies. This will also slash living standards, by raising the prices of the imported consumer goods on which Russia's big cities now mainly subsist.

The situation which is now shaping up in the Russian economy comes as no surprise to the Russian government or to the country's financial elite. What Russia's rulers evidently failed to anticipate was that the debt pyramid would splinter in March and April, instead of after the presidential elections, as had been planned. Whether a major assault on living standards can now be put off until after mid-June, and Yeltsin's electoral prospects saved, remains to be seen.

### Chaos Inescapable — New Course Needed

No matter who wins the June elections, Russia is doomed to enter a new maelstrom of economic chaos that will include rapid price rises, a renewed fall in mass purchasing power and hence in demand on the internal market, and fresh declines in investment and output. There is nothing conjectural about these prospects; they are the ineluctable result of decisions taken long ago. It must be stressed that while Yeltsin's pre-election handouts have brought forward the day of reckoning, the limits of the securities market were bound to be reached soon in any case.

It is time, therefore, to bluntly refute the lie that the policies which the international credit agencies have dictated, and which the Russian rulers have put in place, are correct and necessary. The evidence is now conclusive that the Yeltsin regime implemented the wrong reforms, in the interests of the wrong people. When these policies were selected, options which had been shown in practice to have far more potential were passed up. Amid a new spiral of collapse, the workers and poor in Russia face the task of outlining a fundamentally different political and economic course, and of developing the forces that can put it into practice. □

May 8, 1996

## Repression Intensifies in Nigeria

*Continued from page 19*

economic sanctions, including an oil embargo, a freeze on the generals' assets abroad, and prohibition of all new investment. The letter pointed out that President Mandela of South Africa had urged Clinton to impose sanctions. Among the 54 signers of the letter were African American political leaders such as Coretta Scott King, Jesse Jackson, David Dinkins, Mary Frances Berry, and most members of the Congressional Black Caucus, prominent African American intellectuals, such as Maya Angelou, Robert Townsend, and John Hope Franklin, and African American trade unionists such as William Lucy, president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

The signers of the TransAfrica letter criticize President Clinton's condemnation of Nigeria, writing that "the condemnation, however, was largely empty of any action that Nigeria's ruling generals would respect. Put simply, absent the imposition of economic sanctions, including, among other measures, an oil embargo, a freeze of the generals' assets abroad and a prohibition of any new investment, Nigeria will not be turned from its course of self-destruction." A bit later they write: "The steps you [Clinton] have taken thus far are of limited usefulness."

In addition to TransAfrica, Greenpeace has taken a leadership role in urging Clinton to embargo Nigerian oil. Greenpeace got involved because of the enormous environmental destruction of the Niger Delta and the Ogoni people, destruction caused by Shell Oil. The national office of Greenpeace has some useful educational materials that activists may order.

These efforts have been both laudable and important, but they have not been sufficient. More, much more, is needed than these essentially small-scale efforts. Only an ongoing campaign based in the labor movement and African American community will successfully support the efforts of the Nigerian peoples.

### Embargo Nigeria, Boycott Shell

The Nigerian working class and oppressed minorities need a massive international campaign to support their struggles. Such a campaign must be especially active and massive in the U.S., the market for 50 percent of Nigeria's oil. As we saw with the international movement against apartheid in South Africa, such an international campaign can be crucial to the success of the Nigerian people's struggles.

In the U.S., the two central demands of those who wish to support the Nigerian people should

be to embargo Nigerian oil and boycott Shell. In addition, we should demand that all political prisoners be released, that human and democratic rights be respected, and that the Nigerian generals' assets held in the U.S. be frozen.

The labor movement has a crucial role to play in such a campaign. Support from the labor movement, with its resources and high level of organization, combined with the support of African American organizations, with their resources and skills, will provide the foundation upon which broad labor-community coalitions can form. These coalitions must both educate the general public about what is happening in Nigeria and why, and organize a massive, politically independent effort to boycott Shell and embargo Nigerian oil.

Imperialism is grinding the very life out of the Nigerian people. The Nigerian military dictatorship, serving the interests of transnational capital, mercilessly represses all efforts at change, all striving for justice. We must work with our brothers and sisters in Nigeria against the common enemy, the giant oil companies and other multinational corporations. If not us, who? If not now, when? □

April 29, 1996



# The Present Situation in Ireland

by Gerry Foley

*The following was posted on the Institute for Global Communications computer network on March 29 this year. It is reprinted from Socialist Action, the monthly newspaper of Socialist Action, one of the U.S. sympathizing groups of the Fourth International. To subscribe, send \$8 for one year to SA, 3425 César Chávez St., San Francisco CA 94110*

On February 9 this year the Irish Republican Army (IRA) ended a cease-fire that had been in effect since September 1, 1994. The announcement was followed immediately by the detonation of a major bomb in London's Canary Wharf area. Subsequently, IRA volunteers have planted other smaller bombs at various points in the British capital.

Eighteen months ago, the IRA cease-fire opened up the Irish peace process. That was a process of seeking a solution to the Northern Irish conflict through negotiations among all parties concerned, including Sinn Féin — the political organization of the militant nationalist Irish Republican Movement — and the Irish government itself, along with the British government and the pro-British parties in Northern Ireland.

The "peace process" strategy of the Republicans was based on an alliance of all Irish nationalist parties, including bourgeois forces such as the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP; actually a bourgeois nationalist party) and the Dublin government. It was aimed at forcing the British to make concessions in the direction of equal rights for the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland and of developing cross-border links between the two parts of Ireland. The initiation of the IRA bombing campaign reflects the crisis that this strategy has entered.

On March 22, I interviewed Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, a leading spokesperson for the last quarter century of the various mass movements that have developed against the system of British domination in Northern Ireland. I asked her for her assessment of this crisis. She has not had an opportunity to review the edited text of the following interview.

— Gerry Foley

**Socialist Action: Why did the cease-fire break down?**

**Bernadette Devlin McAliskey:** There are two main causes. First, you have an external one. The cease-fire was called with the belief that within some definable period of time it would bring about some form of dialogue that would involve Sinn Féin in direct negotiations with the British government. And 18 months later that had not happened.

Second, there was an internal reason for the breakdown of the cease-fire. I don't see it so much as a breakdown as a calculated decision by the leadership of the IRA.

If you go back to the announcement of the cease-fire, it was received with great enthusiasm by the Republican rank and file. It was presented as a victory. Basically, people went along with this out of loyalty to the leadership. This was despite the fact that at no stage had the rank and file, indeed anybody in the organization below the leadership, had any knowledge of the long-term negotiations that led to the cease-fire.

There was a belief in the initial stages that a breakthrough had been made through a secret agreement. But that was not true. In fairness to the Republican leadership, Gerry Adams [president of Sinn Féin] and others said at the time that there was no secret deal.

Yet the thing did not make sense to the people unless there had been a secret deal. And so you went from one theory and expectation to another, with people hanging in and hanging in, and then disillusion starting to set in.

So, I think finally the leadership took a calculated risk in the Canary Wharf bombing in order to reassert its own authority within its military ranks. In my opinion, they made the assessment that if they did not move at that time they were heading toward a real possibility that some element of their own organization or people who had drifted away from it would, out of frustration, make some military move on their own.

The bomb was a spectacular warning shot over the bow of the British. Canary Wharf is a prestigious area. It had a lot of [class?] glass. And on a Friday evening, with due care and attention, they would have hoped not to have killed anybody. But you end up with a major bomb and two people dead. And, of course, politically it is impossible to tell where breaking the cease-fire will lead.

**SA: In the United States, the result of Canary Wharf and the subsequent bombings seems to be general confusion. Nobody really knows what the Republicans are doing, whether peace is on, or a new military campaign is on, and so the effect of it is that everybody is just standing back.**

**BDM:** That's not any different here. The Canary Wharf bombing might have resolved an immediate tension within their own military organization. But the Republicans remain caught up in the logic of the process they started.

As far as the public is concerned, they shifted the aim of the Republican movement from a 32-county Ireland (socialist or otherwise) to all-party peace talks for an agreed Ireland. And the IRA cease-fire was called on that basis.

So people are confused about what the Republicans are doing, since they must have known that a return to military actions would not get them back to the table easily without their being confronted again with the whole issue that was brought up at the beginning — that is, nonviolence and decommissioning [disarming of the IRA].

Now, of course, the Republicans have got their date for their all-party peace talks [on condition that the IRA renew the cease-fire]. But they haven't come up with a new cease-fire, so people are confused as to what their goal at this point is, as to what their strategy is.

**SA: An editorial in the "Andersonstown News" [the main community newspaper in Republican West Belfast] a few months ago was very interesting. It said that it didn't do any good to get people out to demonstrate for vague demands such as peace talks; that it would make a lot more sense to get them out to campaign for concrete demands. What did that reflect?**

**BDM:** It reflected a very real discontent within the broad Republican movement. Following the H-Block hunger strikes of 1980-81, you had the IRA as the military representation of the struggle, and Sinn Féin as its electoral representation. But at the community level, you had all kinds of people working on an economic agenda, a social agenda, a political agenda, and a human rights agenda.

The lines weren't clearly drawn between who was in what section of that movement, and so some Sinn Féiners were involved in the mass organization work; some people in the mass organizations may have been in the IRA.

But once the Republican movement got into secret negotiations and was putting that forward as the Sinn Féin party position, there didn't seem to be a strategy for continuing that broad grass-roots movement. Everything revolved around decommissioning or not decommissioning, a date for all-party peace talks, the shape of the table, and so on.

So people started to worry that the issue of basic human rights, the issue of discrimination in employment, and all sorts of broader issues, such as minimum wage legislation, the extension of the European 48-hour workweek, women's issues, all the issues that had been a vibrant part of the life of the community, were being sidelined.

Sinn Féin were taking people out onto the streets to demand all-party peace talks now, when in fact prisoners were still being denied their basic rights, and at the same time, the grass



roots, not knowing what the strategy was, were paralyzed, prevented from acting independently of Sinn Féin because they didn't want to be rocking the boat.

There were a number of demonstrations that characteristically, in Northern Irish conditions, led to confrontations with the police, because the police arrived and beat people up. Then, Sinn Féin's allies in the SDLP and the Irish government would call on them to stop this form of "irresponsible protest." Their argument was that we were now into negotiations, and people had to understand that such matters were the business of political parties and political leaders.

**SA:** There was a very ominous article in the *New York Times* recently claiming that somebody had done a poll indicating that a majority of the Catholics would accept internment [mass roundup and arbitrary imprisonment at the pleasure of the state of all known and suspected Republican activists] for the sake of peace.

**BDM:** Sinn Féin was an integral part of creating a dynamic that they cannot control. They created the slogan "give peace a chance." They created the initial demand for peace talks. But they had no basis for determining or even having an influence on which issues those peace talks would take up, because they were allowing the Irish government to play their hand for them.

So, on the one side, they have actually disempowered — not intentionally — but this momentum has disempowered the Republican community, who are confused about what's happening. On the opposite side, they empowered a whole layer of people who are now very active against them. They have empowered a very broad spectrum of Irish America [that is, the Irish American politicians and bourgeois institutions] whose interest is in peace at any price, and they certainly have opened up the way for a lot of propaganda by the southern state.

So in this context, the rulers can justify internment on the basis of terms of "what else can you do?" when the Republicans have a date for peace talks, when everybody in the country is wearing white ribbons, when they're even talking about holding a referendum here for peace.

**SA:** So, what can be done?

**BDM:** It's a very difficult position. My difficulty, quite honestly, is that I have a hard time comprehending how the Republicans could fail to see how deep the water was that they were getting into. The first step in was failing to reject decisively the parameters of the Downing St. Declaration [the British document that prepared the way for the cease-fire; it talked about self-determination for the Irish but limited this right

to the framework of Northern Ireland, where there is a built-in pro-British majority].

Finally, the Republicans said they were opposed to it, but by that time they had already been working within its framework for six months.

I think that the Republicans have gotten themselves in an irreversible position. I don't believe that a return to military operations is an effective option. I think that if they go back to military operations within the climate that they themselves were a party to creating, then military defeat, for the first time in 15 years, becomes a very real possibility.

**SA:** But what about a return to mass campaigns?

**BDM:** The real question, of course, is how do you build the mass campaigns within the current context, because the fundamental context that we're looking at is that there is still an expectation on the part of the broad base of the nationalist community that the present negotiations, when they get started, will somehow lead to a peaceful and fair settlement.

Now, that is not the case. What is very clear from all of those talks is that we are looking at the solution which the British put forward in 1972, some kind of power sharing between the two power blocs [nationalist and Unionist], a referendum to determine the balance between the populations every 10 or 15 years, and such economic and commercial cross-border trade links as are required by the end of the century economic necessities of the European Union. No more and no less. That is what we are going to get, and we are in no position at this point to prevent that happening.

**SA:** What about the discussion in the Republican movement? They have an ard-fheis [convention] this weekend and there have been some critical letters in the last issue or so of "Republican News" [the Sinn Féin weekly paper].

**BDM:** Over the past 18 months, the problem has been the stifling of discussion. Within the broad movement, not just Sinn Féin as a party, that has led to a lot of hostility. This logic is not unfamiliar to yourself and the socialist movement in America. When people are unable or unwilling to defend their position politically they defend it by making attacks on the personality of the individual who is challenging their political position.

There's been a lot of that kind of thing, which we not have seen since the 1970s. And that has been quite painful for people who have struggled over 25 years together. The net effect has been that people simply do not discuss their differences. What is basically happening is that

people who become disillusioned, or begin to see that the thing's not working, just walk away.

In order to ensure that they can put on a good show for the British-American media, Sinn Féin has to mobilize their troops. And so, all the people who are totally loyal to the leadership, regardless of the debate, will be brought to the ard-fheis. But that in turn denies the leadership any real feedback as to what's happening in its grass roots.

**SA:** So, it's a show conference you're expecting.

**BDM:** Yeah. And the difficulty of that is that while it may be tactically necessary, it denies the leadership the collective wisdom that comes out of debate.

In my opinion, the Republicans are making a serious misjudgment of their importance to the "peace process." The whole momentum has reached a point where if the IRA does not produce a cease-fire, Sinn Féin will not be allowed into the all-party talks. But if Sinn Féin is left out of the all-party talks, that will not be a big obstacle because the Irish government and the SDLP will go on ahead and negotiate without them.

Alternatively, if there is a cease-fire, Sinn Féin will go into the talks, but at some point they have to walk out of them or buy into the agenda [i.e., a revamped version of the status quo] and take responsibility for it.

**SA:** Do you see no way out of the impasse?

**BDM:** I think that the way forward is first of all to make an honest assessment of where we are. I think we should hang onto the cease-fire. The special repressive legislation is still on the books, but we can initiate mass action and continue campaigning against that. If we don't go back to war, there's less chance of everybody being slaughtered. And therefore, there will be people to take the campaign forward.

I think Sinn Féin should get out of the "peace process." Our presence in this process can do nothing to affect it. Our campaign should be based upon ensuring that whatever mechanics they put on this country, we will demand equality of citizenship. As long as we are citizens here, we will demand equal opportunity, we will demand our national identity, we will demand our fundamental human rights, and begin to build a political campaign around that.

I think we can begin to build a political movement raising fundamental social, class, and national issues, and one that is free to do that because it is not tied to the apron strings of the Irish government and the Hibernian [bourgeois nationalist] alliance. □



# Worldwide Support for Striking Liverpool Dockers

## Interview with Strikers' Representatives

The following is a somewhat expanded version, with minor editorial changes, of an article that appeared in the April issue of *International Viewpoint*, monthly publication of the Fourth International.

**D**ockers (longshoremen) in the British port of Liverpool have been on strike since September 1995, when Torside Ltd sacked its 80 workers, in an attempt to reintroduce casual labor for the loading and unloading of ships. A further 350 dockers of the semi-public Merseyside Dock and Harbour Company and 12 workers from a smaller company called Nelson Freight were sacked when they refused to cross a picket line established by the Torside workers.

This dispute is unofficial under Britain's restrictive labor legislation, because the dockers did not hold a ballot before announcing strike action. If the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) recognizes the dispute, it risks the sequestration (confiscation) of its funds.

The outstanding solidarity of dockers round the world, in resistance to attempts to reintroduce the horrors of casual labor, has brought this "local" dispute to the center of attention among militants everywhere.

Messages of support and donations to the strikers' hardship fund should be sent to "Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards Committee," c/o Jim Davies, Secretary/Treasurer, MDSSC, 19 Scorton St., Liverpool L6 4AS.

Glenn Voris interviewed Tony Nelson, shop steward in charge of picketing, Jimmy Nolan, chairman of the Mersey Docks Shop Stewards Committee, and Terry Teague, shop steward in charge of International Relations.

Glenn Voris, the interviewer, is secretary of the St. Helens Trade Union Council (TUC), vice president of Merseyside Country Association of Trade Union Councils, coordinator of St. Helens TUC Community Resource Centre, and member of the Northwest Regional Council of the TUC.

**Question: How strong is the mood among the strikers?**

**Tony Nelson:** The picketing of the docks used to start every day at 6:00 am. We were disrupting the port, but the port police and the Merseyside police gradually became used to the routine. They were ready for us. So we changed tactics. Now we picket for only 1-2 hours, at a different time every day. This has so far caught the police unprepared. We stop the port completely for two hours every day. About 150 men take part in each picket. Spirits are still high.

**Jimmy Nolan:** The general feeling of the men is that we won't go back to work until every sacked worker is reinstated with full trade union recognition. And the proposed introduction of casual labor must be scrapped.

## West Coast Solidarity with Liverpool Dockers

According to *BIDOM* supporter Sean Maloney, former president of the Seattle local of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), representatives of the striking Liverpool dockers visited ILWU locals in April in the San Francisco Bay area, as well as Portland, Oregon; Seattle and Tacoma, Washington; and Vancouver, Canada. The ILWU locals, both clerks and longshoremen, in those cities voted several thousand dollars each as solidarity donations and assessed themselves additional amounts per week for the duration of the strike — meaning more thousands in aid to the Liverpool strikers as the weeks go by.

According to an April 20 notice on the Institute for Graphic Communications (IGC) computer network, the Liverpool dockers visited the Los Angeles area and received similar material expressions of international labor solidarity.

Earlier a representative of the ILWU had attended an international conference in Liverpool in support of the striking dock workers. As the IGC notice reported:

The ILWU [on the West Coast] as well as the ILA [International Longshoreman's Association??] on the East Coast have backed the dockers from Liverpool whenever they have put up a picket line...

West Coast dockers have also come under increasing attack with efforts to open up non-union port operations and the busting of [longshore unions] in Mexico. The Mexican government with the support of the U.S.

has privatized the ports and locked up the union halls in Veracruz and other cities. The shipping companies hope to break the back of the ILWU by setting up a scab shipping operation in Mexico and undercutting the unionized ports on [the West Coast of the U.S.] and British Columbia, Canada...

At an international dock workers conference [in Liverpool] on February 17-22, dockers from throughout the world met and set up an international network to build support for the Liverpool dockers and back each other up in their international battles against privatization and casualization.

The "shape up," which historically has been used by the shipping companies and ship owners, has made a comeback throughout the world, and the international response to the defense of the Liverpool dockers seems to be growing evidence that dockers worldwide are seeing a much greater need for direct international solidarity.

**Messages of Support Can Be Sent by Fax to 44-151-298-1044.**

Checks and Postal Orders should be made out to Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Committee and sent to J. Davies, Secretary-Treasurer, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool, L6 4AS United Kingdom.

For more information and the online edition of the "Dockers Charter," the World Web (WWW) page address is: <http://www.gn.apc.org/labournet/docks/>

The striking dockers slogan is "The World Is Our Picket Line."

The twelve shop stewards, and another 40 dockers regularly speak to meetings up and down the country. Over 2,100 meetings so far!

**Q: How has the union leadership supported you?**

**Jimmy Nolan:** Because of the Tory Anti-Trade Union laws, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) hasn't yet supported us officially. They are too worried about their funds being confiscated. But the leadership has organized a hardship fund. We want this to become a regular commitment, so that the strikers receive hardship money every week. So that they don't end up on their knees.

We have been demanding that the leadership campaign vigorously, and resist all the anti-trade union laws. But our arguments have fallen on deaf ears.

The TGWU leadership neither recommended management's latest offer nor opposed it. They strongly urged us to hold a ballot, to see what the men thought of the management offer. So we did. We wanted to prove — to the union leadership as well as management — that support was as strong as on day one. We were proved right.

**Q: The anti-trade union laws introduced by successive Conservative governments have proved the biggest single obstacle to this struggle. What can the unions do to defeat these laws?**

**Jimmy Nolan:** These are political laws, introduced by the Tories and the bosses to strangle trade unions, and prevent workers from taking solidarity action. If Labour leader Tony Blair is elected, I don't see him scrapping these laws.



# Serious Crime in China: Result of Growing Gap Between Rich and Poor

by Zhang Kai

The following article is reprinted, with minor editorial changes, from the April 30 issue of *October Review*, a Fourth Internationalist magazine published in Hong Kong.

Serious crimes are on the rampage in China. The situation has not improved despite repeated resolutions from the central government to combat crime, and despite the heavy use of death penalties to intimidate criminals.

The murder of Li Peiyao, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), caused further alarm in the party leadership. Li was murdered in early 1996 by one of his bodyguards, who attempted to rob him of his money. On February 19, the State Council issued another resolution in which it was acknowledged that "the question of social order is still very acute. Crimes and other breaches of peace and order are on the increase. In many regions, the masses live in insecurity."

Some figures can indicate the situation. It was reported that criminal cases tried at the first level totaled 209,600 in 1980-81; they rose to 246,000 in 1985, then to 389,597 in 1989 (an increase of 25 percent over the previous year), to 480,914 in 1994 (an increase of 20 percent over the previous year), and 496,082 in 1995. This means an increase of 137 percent in 14 years. The number of convicts rose from 277,000 in 1985, to 482,658 in 1989, to 545,162 in 1995. Of those convicted in 1995, 274,914 were described as constituting serious threats to social security, and 173,718 of them were sentenced to over 5 years' imprisonment, life imprisonment, or the death penalty.

In the recent NPC meeting, although the NPC used to be a rubber stamp, the work report of the Supreme People's Court was endorsed by only an 80 percent vote, and the work report of the Supreme People's Procuratorate by a 70 percent vote.

Jiang Zemin, party general secretary, was reported to have delivered a speech to party

members at the NPC and the Consultative Committee stating that the severity of the situation was unprecedented. In the capital, which used to boast of better law and order, the situation was also worsening, and in one day alone, there were four robbery murders (*Ming Pao*, March 3).

In the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ), robberies on the road are particularly serious. According to a survey by a Hong Kong journal, 20 percent of Hong Kong visitors to Shenzhen that were interviewed have been robbed or pickpocketed. The Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court announced in a recent report that in 1995, the number of criminal cases and the number of people convicted increased 33 and 35 percent respectively over 1994; 58.3 percent of those convicted were sentenced to over 5 years' imprisonment, life imprisonment, or death.

Deteriorating social order is a reflection and result of social polarization. One effect of the market reform is the wide discrepancy between the rich and the poor. The State Statistics Bureau's report on March 1 acknowledged the "continuous inflation of prices of basic necessities" and the "decline in real income for a section of the people who lead a rather difficult life."

Indeed, as pointed out by Dong Fureng, a researcher of the Economics Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, about half of all the county governments throughout China operate on a deficit, many civil servants and teachers cannot get their pay on time, quite a substantial number of factories have stopped production and workers cannot get their wages, and in many places, workers have resorted to petitioning or demonstrating because of difficult living conditions (*Ming Pao*, March 7).

According to a nationwide social survey conducted by an institution under the State Structural Reform Committee, 66.9 percent of those interviewed felt that their family's living standard in the past year had not improved or had declined. Their greatest preferences were for an increase in income (76.9 percent) and for greater social order (74.9 percent). The greatest worries were further inflation of prices, worsening of social order, and social unrest (*Ming Pao*, April 2).

Similar sentiments were expressed by some deputies to the NPC. The NPC delegation from the SEZs in Guangdong Province summarized the root cause of social disorder as "polarization between the rich and the poor." Wu Bo, the chief of the Shantou Municipal People's Congress, said that justice officers in his region were pessimistic about social disorder, and that the primary reason was the growing discrepancy in wealth. In Shantou City alone, there are over 30 billionaires, and on the other hand, more people have fallen into poverty and unemployment.

The government has basically resorted to severe penalties, and robbers or rapists have been sentenced to capital punishment, though by law they should have only got prison terms. Wu Bo expressed his views: "The central government pledges to resolve the question of crime, but the basic problem is to deal with the question of the polarization between the rich and the poor. Otherwise, what use is there to talk about the problem year after year?"

Corruption and crime are the products of the market reform carried out by the autocratic bureaucracy. The vicious cycle cannot stop without a radical change in the structural problem. □

April 12, 1996

The only way to defeat them is by the working class itself resisting. This means overcoming our fear of mass unemployment. Building a mass grass roots movement, based on a national shop stewards' organization. And trying to force the leaders of each trade union to break these political laws.

**Q.:** You have received tremendous support from abroad.

**Terry Teague:** Four weeks into the dispute we visited dockers in Bilbao, Spain. That is the destination of many of the containers which sail from Liverpool. We were very disappointed that the union leadership in Bilbao refused to let us

meet rank-and-file dockers inside the port. But they did promise regular financial support, and go-slows whenever containers from Liverpool arrived.

Then we visited Stockholm, Sweden. We hadn't received an official invitation from the dockers' union, but the dockers themselves were brilliant. The union leadership organized meetings with the rank and file, all of which were very well attended.

The Swedish dockers not only pledged regular financial support. They agreed not to handle any containers coming from or destined for Liverpool. And we agreed to maintain regular contacts. We came home in very high spirits.

Two delegates from the strikers then visited Montreal, Canada, while two others headed for Sydney, Australia. Support in both cities was tremendous. There were mass meetings in all parts of both ports. The Australian and Québec dockers promised regular financial support, overtime bans and go-slows, and a 24-hour strike whenever a ship arrives from or leaves for Liverpool. There are cargoes rotting at sea outside both ports!

Montreal dockers also organized a meeting with one of the container ship companies, but unfortunately there were no concrete results. In both places, the highlight was certainly the con-

*Continued on page 31*



# Downsizing: Causes and Consequences

by Frank Lovell

**W**hat has come to be called “corporate downsizing,” meaning the firing of as many workers as company executives think possible in order to raise profits, is a current subject of debate in the mass media, and is likely to become a campaign issue in the general election this year.

In its Sunday edition (March 3, 1996), the *New York Times* began a series of seven articles titled “The Downsizing of America,” in which a team of reporters explored the effects of corporate downsizing on the financial, social, and political institutions (and on so-called traditional moral values and some perceived tribal mores) in this country.

At the conclusion of the series (March 9, 1996) comments were published from four people prominent in politics (Democratic Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey), in urban planning (Professor Saskia Sassen at Columbia University), in sociology (Professor William Julius Wilson at the University of Chicago), and in the corporate structure (Chairman and CEO Bill Gates of Microsoft Corporation). Their different answers to the jobs problem reflected the job specialty of each respondent.

Politician Bradley said, “...the need to involve employees in dealing with the future — even a frightening future — should be obvious.”

City planner Sassen said, “We are a culture that still views unemployment only as an individual failure.” She wonders, “Can you reinvent a role for the government — at the global level and in community initiatives — to rebuild the communities that have been shattered by all this downsizing?”

Sociologist Wilson explained, “Policies to enhance economic growth and reduce unemployment will do little to increase the job prospects of low wage workers, especially in inner cities. The jobs problem for inner-city workers cannot be addressed without considering public-sector employment as a last resort. We should be talking about work not done now — collecting trash twice a week, opening libraries on Saturdays and evenings, supervising municipal parks and playgrounds to promote safety and build communities.” He thinks, “If you describe these as putting America back to work, it will be supported, even if it means increasing taxes.”

Capitalist Gates said, “Entire professions and industries will fade. But new ones will flourish. The net result is that more gets done, raising the overall standard of living in the long run.”

## A Discussion Begins

Thus began a discussion fraught with seemingly high hopes and bogged down in a sense of fear. The promoters of this discussion do not yet know where it is likely to lead or if it can be safely controlled. The *Times* announced that its series of articles, with related coverage, is available on that newspaper’s two computer services: on the Worldwide Web at <http://www.nytimes.com/downsize>; and on America Online, @times. It invites reader

participation by e-mail to [downsize@nytimes.com](mailto:downsize@nytimes.com). Times Books is distributing an expanded version of the downsizing series.

In some quarters, the *Times*’s efforts were hailed as a journalistic breakthrough. Several TV programs noted the appearance in the print media of the “controversial” jobs issue, occasionally offering a few pacifying sound bites. But the main response came from business and investment sources.

## Is Job Loss a “Myth”?

An initial attack, launched by H. Erich Heinemann, an economic research analyst, appeared on the Op-Ed page of the *Times* (March 25, 1996), “The Downsizing Myth.” Heinemann argued that during the past five years economic expansion accounted for about 8 million new civilian jobs. “And contrary to the reports about managerial downsizing, half the new jobs have been classified as managerial or professional,” he said. He acknowledged that “cut-backs at large companies like AT&T are painful.” But blue-collar workers especially should console themselves with the fact that over the years, “production jobs in manufacturing have held steady at about 12.6 million — almost the same number as in 1946.”

No mention here of the millions more in the workforce since 1946, nor of the population growth over the past half century.

Heinemann goes on to assert that real wages are on the rise, and that consumer spending “for goods and services per hour worked” has risen about 1 percent per year since the mid-1970s. Any impression to the contrary is based on figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics “which are misleading.” This part of his contention is true, but not in the way he claims.

His conclusion, similar to what Bill Gates thinks, is that social and economic transition “is painful, but it is the slow growth in living standards that is the country’s main economic problem.” He says, “The only reliable solution to the slow pace of upsizing is more investment and more productivity.” According to Heinemann, “That’s what the politicians should be working on.”

## Hidden Motives?

A more balanced critique of the *Times*’s series on downsizing, reviewing the general interest in this subject in recent years, appeared in the April 22, 1996, issue of the *New Yorker* magazine. The author, John Cassidy, disputes some of the data in the *Times* series and questions its timing and worth as news reportage. He says *Business Week* magazine reported in 1982 (14 years ago) that “SIGMA Corp....has embarked on a drastic downsizing” involving 4,000 job cuts. This downsizing practice has continued steadily and is now corporate policy. So what is new (and newsworthy) in the *Times*’s series? The implication is that the *Times* editors had hidden motives for running this series at this time.

Cassidy mentions some suspicious coincidences. “A couple of weeks after the series appeared,” he notes, “the White House interagency group that coordinates economic policy decided to





"Some day, my boy, all this will be yours to downsize."

undertake a study of downsizing, and President Clinton made a speech in Cincinnati on 'corporate citizenship.' Robert Reich, the Labor Secretary, floated the idea of tax breaks for companies that eschew layoffs or retain their workers for other jobs." It appeared as if the Clinton administration might be preparing to make corporate downsizing and high unemployment a campaign issue in the presidential race.

## Disagreements in Clinton Administration

But Cassidy discovered that the administration is not of one mind. "The Council of Economic Advisers [CEA] and the Labor Department plan to issue a joint report by the end of this month [April]," he said. "According to Dr. Joseph Stiglitz, the C.E.A. chairman, the report is intended to 'correct a number of misguided perceptions which, however they got created, do distort the public debate.'" Stiglitz disagrees that downsizing is an economic problem and is quoted by Cassidy as saying, "From my perspective, the process of downsizing is in some senses healthy for the economy." Nothing is said about social and political consequences. Or how healthy lack of jobs may be for laid-off workers.

Cassidy goes on to report the findings in the early 1920s of the noted economist Joseph Schumpeter: "Capitalism...is by nature a form or method of economic change and not only never is but never can be stationary." He says, "Schumpeter called the competitive process, 'creative destruction,' and identified it as 'the essential fact about capitalism.'" This feature of the capitalist mode of production was identified and explained by Marx long before Schumpeter. Again, in Cassidy's account, the consequences of "creative destruction" remain absent except for the assertion that the economy benefits.

## Quarreling over Job Loss Statistics

In seeking to discredit the findings of the *Times* reporters, Cassidy discovered that the Bureau of Labor Statistics has no reliable figures for aggregate job losses since the end of 1993. "The *Times* team faced a tough choice," Cassidy said. "Either the writers could stop their analysis at the end of 1993 and admit ignorance of more recent trends or they could try to construct their own figures for the ensuing years." They estimated, on the basis of available data, 3.34 million job losses in 1994 and 3.26 million in 1995. These numbers added to Labor Department figures for earlier years totaled 43 million jobs lost since 1979.

Cassidy had no trouble finding experts to dispute these estimates. CEA Chairman Joseph Stiglitz at the White House, a former economics professor, was one. He is quoted as stating his agreement with Cassidy that "the *Times*' estimate for 1994 and 1995 should be taken with a grain of salt." Henry Farber at Princeton University is also quoted to discredit the *Times*'s report. His research, according to Cassidy, "finds a moderate increase in displacement rates." Robert Hall, a Stanford University economist, has found that "longer-term job stability increased slightly in the 1980s and early 1990s relative to the 1970s."

The conclusion after all this number crunching is that nothing much here is new, a case of business as usual. Capitalism is inherently dynamic, sometimes chaotic. Cassidy ends his review with a quotation from Labor Secretary Reich. "Obviously, companies sometimes have to lay off workers," Reich said. "The real issue is: Do you regard them as costs or as assets?" Reich's view of the ensuing debate is that government must find a way to overcome stagnant wages and rising inequality. "By focusing on one epiphenomenon, downsizing, you may lose sight of the important question," he said. This may become the stance of the Clinton administration for campaign purposes this fall.

## Using Job Loss as a Campaign Issue

An early indication of how the vote-catching net will be cast is the proposed tax legislation introduced April 15 in the U.S. Senate by Edward Kennedy (D-MA). Senator Kennedy's bill would discontinue tax deductions for interest paid on the financing of corporate mergers and takeovers. He explained, "In the 1980s it was commonplace for financiers to borrow the funds to make the acquisition with the express intent of selling off the asset and casting off the workers to raise the money to pay back the debt."

Other features of the bill would strengthen antitrust legislation and require stockbrokers to notify the Securities and Exchange Commission of any stock acquisition that plans layoffs or plant closings. Kennedy said the purpose is to protect the "interest of workers and local communities." He said, "The 'quiet depression' facing American workers is the central economic, social and political issue of 1996. When the economy is wrong, nothing else is right."

The Republican majority in Congress will not allow bills of this kind to be heard, but they serve as talking points on the campaign trail, promises of what the Democrats will do if they win a majority in the next Congress. All this comes under the general heading of "campaign promises" soon forgotten after the votes are counted.

## NAM Says Everything's Fine

The National Association of Manufacturers, mainly a lobbying organization which looks out for the interests of Big Business generally and manufacturing companies in particular, weighed in for the battle over jobs lost and profits gained with its own statistical analysis of what is really happening in America. On April 18 the NAM issued a report in Washington which declared, "There is one overriding, fundamental truth about the U.S. economy. It has created millions of new jobs over the last 25 years — 8.4 million since 1992 — and at the same time it has raised average compensation for a rapidly growing work force." The report said, "Other industrialized countries in recent decades have done one or the other, none, aside from the United States, can claim to have done both."

This report is based entirely on available data, mostly from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It faults these statistics, claiming that the Bureau's standard of measuring inflation is inaccurate. The rate of inflation is flatter than reported by the Bureau, and real wages are therefore higher than government reports indicate, the NAM report says. It says workers have no cause for worry over wages but should be concerned about high taxes and slow economic growth. The report defends high salaries for corporate executives on the grounds that they have made U.S. industry more efficient in recent years and consequently more competitive in the world market. Evidently corporate executives are unfairly blamed for the plight of unemployed workers. "Much of what is said about the plight of workers is inflammatory, demagogic, or flat out wrong," said NAM president Jerry Jasinoski.



Quarreling over statistics is common among those who seek to avoid class contradictions and basic human relations in capitalist society. John Cassidy tries to demonstrate that reporters for the *New York Times* made wrong estimates of the number of jobs lost in the past two years. The NAM claims the Bureau of Labor Statistics puts out false information on the rate of inflation. The NAM's charge is not new, and over the years it has forced the Bureau to revise its market basket measurement for the cost of living. During the Nixon and Carter administrations in the late 1960s and 1970s the Bureau revised its standard for measuring inflation so that its reports began showing a lower rate of inflation. At that time union wage scales were geared to the rising rate of inflation based on the Bureau's reports. The manipulation of the Bureau's measurements helped keep wages and social security payments in check. It forced working-class shoppers to buy fewer goods and lowered their standard of living.

## Index of Spendable Earnings

Partisan politics within the two-party system guides the activities of all government agencies, regulating the scope and range of their activities. A forthcoming book by the late David Gordon will show how this system works to the benefit of the corporate rich and the impoverishment of the working class. Material from that book appears in an article by Gordon in the current issue of *Dissent* magazine (Spring 1996), "Underpaid Workers, Bloated Corporations." Gordon demonstrates that "more and more U.S. workers have been enduring steady downward pressure on their hourly take-home pay." And his data are convincing evidence that this has been going on since the mid-1970s. He says the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics kept track of the living standards of the average American worker with published data on *spendable earnings* from the days of the Great Depression until the Reagan administration. "But in 1981 the Reagan administration discontinued the index, citing conceptual and measurement problems."

In the absence of an official government record, Gordon and his associates at the New School for Social Research in New York City set up and maintained through the years since 1981 the only reliable index of real spendable hourly earnings. Shortly before his death this year Gordon was able to chart the level of average real spendable earnings for production and nonsupervisory employees in the United States from 1948 to 1994.

"The data show a clear pattern," he wrote. "The average worker's real after-tax pay grew rapidly through the mid-1960s. Its growth then slowed, with some fluctuation, until the early 1970s. After a postwar peak in 1972, our measure of earnings declined fairly steadily, through the rest of the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the recovery from the recession of 1990-1991, real spendable hourly earnings were lower in 1994 than they had been in the business-cycle trough of 1990."

"It's not just that the pace of real wage growth for the vast majority of workers has slowed," Gordon said. "Real hourly take-home pay has been declining for years." This is the real life story of nearly every hourly wage earner who has been steadily employed since 1972. Most are thankful that they had steady employment for so many years, and that they are still on the job. Many now wonder how much longer that job will last.

## Causes of the Steady Decline in Wages

What caused this steady decline in wages? Gordon's research convinced him that there is a causal relation between this and the steady increase in the number of supervisory employees as well as the bloated million-dollars-a-year incomes of corporate executives. Certainly this is a factor in the decline of wages during

periods of economic prosperity. Gordon calls it "the bureaucratic burden" of the U.S. productive apparatus, unlike that in all other highly industrialized economies.

"In 1994, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 17.3 million private nonfarm employees worked in nonproduction and supervisory jobs — mostly as managers and supervisors at all levels of the corporate hierarchy." Gordon notes that this was "almost as many employees as those working in the entire public sector, in all occupations at all levels of government."

"At least as stunning," he says, "is the amount of money we pay to cover the salaries and benefits of those executives and supervisors. In 1994 nonproduction and supervisory employees in the private nonfarm sector were paid \$1.3 trillion in total compensation. This accounted for almost a quarter of all national income. Twenty cents of every dollar we paid for goods and services went to cover the salaries and benefits of the corporate bureaucracy."

One of the arguments of the National Association of Manufacturers and other apologists for the profligacy of Big Business is that the high cost of production in the U.S. renders American-made goods noncompetitive in the world market. They say wages are the only variable factor in production costs; therefore, to be competitive in the world market wages must be lowered.

But Gordon shows that for the 20-year period, 1973-1993, U.S. wages remained almost constant, rising less than one-third of one percent (0.3) whereas wages in 11 other major industrial nations rose from three times to more than ten times that rate during the same 20-year span. The other nations surveyed were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Britain). Of those, the lowest wage gain was in Canada, only 1 percent. But this was three times that in the U.S. The highest was in Germany (3.1 percent), in Britain 2.8 percent, in Italy 2.6 percent, in France 2.5 percent, in Belgium 2.5 percent, in Japan 2.2 percent, in Norway 1.8, in Sweden 1.6 percent, etc.

Gordon left a short list of recommendations to overcome the growing inequity between rich and poor in the U.S.: (1) a sharp increase in the minimum wage (surely this needs to be much more than the miserly 90¢ per hour raise by July 4, 1997, from \$4.25 to \$5.15, offered by the Clinton administration and haggled over by the Republican majority in the present Congress); (2) basic changes in labor law to recognize the right of workers to organize unions and make union organizing less restricted; (3) investment incentives (through the tax system and special investment banks similar to a scheme in the Kennedy Bill now before the U.S. Senate) to benefit "firms with more democratic labor relations and less top-heavy systems of corporate management."

## A Debate That Distracts from Basic Needs

One purpose of the "downsizing debate" (if it gains a prominent place among the "issues" that will be debated in the 1996 general election) appears to be to obfuscate the jobs and wages questions and hide the suffering of unemployed wage workers. To debate the advantages and disadvantages of "downsizing" bloated corporations so as to make U.S.-made goods more competitive abroad is to distract from the social responsibility of a self-proclaimed democratic government to safeguard political rights and insure satisfaction of basic human needs for all members of society.

For a better understanding of what the present reactionary trend in government to lift legal controls ("deregulation") of privately owned industry and privately managed financing means in terms of its social and political consequences it is useful to listen to what some of the victims are saying.



## How Job Loss Affected Decatur

A recent issue of *The Nation* magazine (April 8, 1996) carried an article on "what downsizing has done" in Decatur, Illinois, where strikes at the A.E. Staley wet-milling plant, the Caterpillar factory, and the Bridgestone/Firestone rubber plant were broken and company policies instituted, resulting in drastic reduction in the size of that town's employed workforce. Union militants were fired or refused to return to work under onerous conditions. The author of the *Nation* article, Marc Cooper, a union sympathizer, interviewed some of these workers and described the new political attitudes among them.

Cooper also vents his own political sympathies and antipathies. Writing about the causes of the Decatur strikes, he says that the strikers "when confronted with the humiliations inflicted by their

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**"Americans are ripe for a third party, and it would be a shame if the labor movement doesn't give it to them. The problem is we get split up over side issues: guns, race, abortion...when your job is on the line..."**

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employers,...challenged the very mechanisms of order and control that mark all our lives." He went on to say, "for those who care to notice," that the strikers "offered up solutions that took them breathtakingly beyond the nostrums and platitudes of 'empowerment' that recently bubbled up: Michael Lerner's flabby 'politics of meaning,' sociologist Robert Putnam's turned-on-its head thesis that the decline of community interaction makes civic society impossible, the pleadings of Robert Reich that factory workers should start computer classes ('Tell that to the 40,000 laid-off AT&T managers,' says one UAW Caterpillar activist) or the homey Hints from Hillary compiled in *It Takes a Village*."

Cooper's musings were surely conditioned by the circumstances of his interviews and by those being interviewed. "It's always going to be us and them," one militant said. Another is quoted as saying, "Labor has to rebuild America, but in a broad-based coalition. First we have to rebuild the labor movement. Americans are ripe for a third party, and it would be a shame if the labor movement doesn't give it to them. The problem is we get split up over side issues: guns, race, abortion. Then when your job is on the line, it hits you like a ton of bricks how you've been led around."

Two leaders of the long, grueling Staley strike, Dave Watts and Mike Griffin, went to work for Labor Party Advocates shortly after their strike collapsed. They, along with several other strike militants, constituted the hardy band of Road Warriors that traveled across the country, explaining the strike and appealing for support. This contributed to their political education and radicalization. No Road Warrior will ever forget that experience and its educational impact.

## Decatur Fight Led Some to Socialism

Marc Cooper lets the Road Warriors speak for themselves. Watts says, "Personally I'm a socialist now..." But quickly adds, "Don't get me wrong. I was brought up a Catholic, a capitalist, and like anybody else I want to be comfortable. But capitalism just leaves too many people out." Another says, "Before I got into this I thought socialists had horns on their heads. I mean, back in the fifties that's why my dad and I built a bomb shelter. But having traveled across the country on this campaign I worked with all kinds of people in all kinds of places. I'd never heard of Joe Hill 'til someone took me and showed me where he was executed. Someone else showed me where the Pinkertons shot down union workers. Gary and I were in Chicago one night; we wind up at the

Eugene Debs Dinner and there we are sitting at the gay rights table!" He said, "These are things I never thought of before. And now I realize I also have socialist beliefs. Who would have guessed?"

These expressions of political class consciousness are hardly typical. They are the conscious reflections of a vanguard group, trying to understand and explain what their unique strike experience taught them.

## Others Not So Clear

Cooper interviewed other strikers, also victims of plant management "downsizing." These strikers worked at a semi-trailer assembly plant a few miles from Decatur, and never thought "their" company would follow the Staley example. But that happened, and at the time of the interviews they were on strike, trying to defend their previous conditions of work and rates of pay. They were also trying to understand what was happening politically, and why it was happening to them.

Cooper observed sharp differences between them and the Staley strikers. "Many of the Trailmobile workers

seem to be ten years or so younger than their counterparts at Staley," he wrote. "The Staley workers were old enough to rescue some of their family union history. But the younger workers at Trailmobile, coming of age in the eighties and more likely to have heard of Beavis and Butt-head rather than John L. Lewis or Walter Reuther, seemed blinded by the lockout."

Those interviewed expressed radical political sentiments. "One worker called for a nationwide general strike preceded by 'a million man march on Wall Street.'" And others thought Ross Perot might be good for the country and for them. "He's a self-made millionaire, he's for the working man... maybe he could buy Trailmobile and clean it up for us." Others liked Buchanan. Xenophobia was rife among them: "Send the Mexicans back to Mexico and bar Asian capitalists from owning plants like Trailmobile." Some strikers and other workers in the area were attracted to a local fundamentalist sect. Because, according to one acolyte, "Pastor has taught us the value of teamwork. Individuals are powerless. He has taught us that in union there is strength."

## Groping for Working-Class Identity

The changing social consciousness of workers in different circumstances, of different generations, and with different backgrounds has a common denominator. It is the radical rejection of mainstream employing class ideology and blind groping for working-class identity. The voices of the Staley Road Warriors, including that of Marc Cooper, are unheard in the publicized debate on "Downsizing." But the effects of this so-called downsizing process will inevitably change the political consciousness of millions of workers, whose actions will drastically alter existing class relations and political trends in this country. Some will move more to rightward; others will adopt a left, labor-oriented course, as many Road Warriors and others in and around Labor Party Advocates have.

The U.S. ruling class and its pliant politicians and media mind molders seem determined to limit debate on what they choose to call "downsizing" to mere quibbling over the meaning of official government statistics on the rate of inflation, the rate of rising wages, and the rate of unemployment. The danger for them in such a limited (almost mindless) discussion is that at some point the validity of the methods used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in determining all these "rates" may be called into question. But that



is preferable, apparently, to a more penetrating investigation and serious discussion of the causes of economic stagnation and social dislocation. Such a study is not alien to their needs at the moment. And such a study was made five years ago.

### **“America: What Went Wrong?”**

In October 1991 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a series of nine articles on the faltering economy and its social impact. The series was titled *America: what went wrong?* and was written by Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele. Subsequently an expanded version of the series appeared in book form under the same title, published by Andrews and McNeel, a Universal Press Syndicate Co., Kansas City (first printing March 1992). This book is in print and can be ordered from the publishers at 4900 Main Street, Kansas City, MO 64112. The authors were awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

It is curious that this book, widely acclaimed a few years ago, is unmentioned in the publicity attending the “Downsizing” debate. Every chapter is relevant, with chapter and section titles indicating the content: (1) Dismantling the Middle Class (rigging the game; casualties of the New Economic Order; downward mobility; life on the expense account; an indifferent Congress; Wall Street’s greatest accomplishments) (2) Losing Out to Mexico (“What are we going to do now?”; Rush to the border) (3) Shifting Taxes — from them to you (The Magic Wand; Middle-Class Squeeze; Legalized Loan-sharking; Runaway Write-offs; Tax Breaks for Fraud) (4) The Lucrative Business of Bankruptcy (\$500-an-Hour Jobs; Bankrupted by Debt; Paper Jobs) (5) The Foreign Connection (Global Economy; Exporting Jobs; Global Money men — Beyond the Law) (6) The High Cost of Deregulation (Wrecking Industries and Lives; Struggling to Survive; the Deregulation Bandwagon — and Its Victims) (7) Playing Russian Roulette with Health Insurance (End of the American Dream; Losing Health Benefits in Bankruptcy; Death of a Department Store; Fifty Years Old and Out of Work) (8) Simplicity Pattern — Irresistible to Raiders (The Raiders Attack; The Trouble Starts; Tax Gimmicks and Givebacks; Manufacturing Plants Everywhere) (9) The Disappearing Pensions (A Frightening Future; The Pension Raiders; Junk Pensions; Dream Pensions) (10) The Political Connection (Investing in Capitol Hill; Caring for the Privileged; Destructive Debt; How a Tax Break Was Saved). There is a prologue: “The Changing Face of America.” And an Epilogue: “Rewriting the Government Rule Book.”

Looking through the listing of these ten chapter headings and their subheadings should prompt an injured victim to suspect that what may appear to be the inevitable result of spectacular technological advances in this new age of computerization and “blind market pressures” is in fact crooked manipulation of the monetary

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**“The answer, being slowly formulated by the few, is some form of political action on their part (as opposed to remaining passive or inactive and asking others to solve their problems for them).”**

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system at all levels by the banking institutions and government agencies that were originally established to guard against fraud. A random example from the text provides a brief description of one facet of the system and how it works:

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**“The changing social consciousness of workers in different circumstances, of different generations, and with different backgrounds has a common denominator. It is the radical rejection of mainstream employing class ideology and blind groping for working-class identity.”**

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#### **\$500-an-Hour Jobs**

It was May 22, 1990, Rosalind Webb’s last day of work after more than thirty years at the Bonwit Teller store in downtown Philadelphia. The store was one of fourteen Bonwit branches that were closing after Bonwit’s parent company filed for bankruptcy protection.

That morning, Rosalind Webb did what she customarily did — she boarded the No. 48 bus near her home in North Philadelphia and rode twenty-five minutes to her job in the shipping department of the store.

Somewhere aloft, Wilhelm Mallory, Steven Hochberg and Peter Dealy did what they customarily did, too. Mallory flew from San Diego to New York, and billed a client \$250 an hour for his travel. His associate Dealy flew from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, and billed \$300 an hour. Hochberg flew from New York to Atlanta and charged \$150 an hour for his time in the air.

What kind of work warrants such fees for sitting in an airplane? The same kind that charges \$225 an hour for Richard Schmid to pack and unpack boxes.

Mallory, Dealy, Hochberg, Schmid — they are all in a business that reorganizes companies and puts people like Rosalind Webb out of work. The bankruptcy business. It pays well. [p. 67]

The above quotation, contrasting the personal lives of the victim and the victimizers in the downsizing process, is one of the many reasons why the contents of this revealing book by Bartlett and Steele, only five years old, finds not even an echo in the current debate on corporate downsizing.

#### **Deregulation: Both Parties to Blame**

Another reason why the book is largely ignored today is its exposé of bipartisan support in recent years of government deregulation of industry and banking, a contributing cause of the deepening economic and social crisis. The following excerpts are examples:

It seemed that everyone in Washington was caught up in deregulatory fever from the mid-1970s on. It was a new concept that backers said would yield enormous economic benefits for the nation.

When President Carter signed the airline deregulation bill in 1978 he said: “It will also mean less government interference in the regulation of an increasingly prosperous airline industry.”

When Congress adopted trucking deregulation in 1980, Herbert E. Harris II, a Democratic congressman from Virginia, hailed it as a victory over red tape: “The reform of trucking regulations will significantly reduce the current excesses of government regulation that prevent free market conditions from guiding the trucking industry toward more efficient pricing decisions that benefit shippers, carriers and consumers.”

Using language that sounded very much like the speeches that Reagan administration officials would make later in the 1980s, [Senator] Kennedy described the [1980] Motor Carrier Act as “a significant victory” in the “ongoing battle to...reform and reduce needless federal regulation of business...It means less government interference with industry...and more freedom for individual firms to conduct their business in the way they think best. It’ll mean more opportunities, new jobs.”

When President Reagan signed the law deregulating the savings and loan industry in 1982, he said it would make thrifts a “stronger, more effective force.” He added: “This bill...represents the first



step in our administration's comprehensive program of financial deregulation. It provides a long-term solution for troubled thrift institutions." [p. 118]

Authors Bartlett and Steele say that Kennedy was half right in his predictions for the trucking industry. "New jobs were created — at low wages." As for Reagan's optimistic prediction in the case of "troubled thrift institutions," every informed person now knows that deregulation prepared the way for the bankrupting of these institutions by unscrupulous money sharks and cost the taxpayers billions of dollars.

## A Book Short on Solutions

*America: what went wrong?* is a very informative book, a useful contribution to a clear, uncluttered picture of the problem. But it is short (almost totally silent) on solutions. In their "Epilogue: Rewriting the Government Rule Book," the authors say, "It is, of course, easy to come up with a list of potential legislative initiatives that would create a level economic playing field for everyone and thereby reverse the decline of the middle class."

Their studies show, of course, that this would be a futile effort because the governmental structure of this country does not provide for it and will not allow it. They remained optimistic, however, to the end. Their conclusion (quoting an anonymous reader): "To the extent that federal policy, rather than impersonal economic factors, is responsible for the hardships our citizens are suffering, there is reason to hope for better... We make those policies through our elected representatives. What we make, we can unmake."

This evasion leaves unanswered all the pertinent questions. To be sure, "impersonal economic factors" are a very big part of the problems in today's global economy. What are these factors? How will they be identified?

And then there is the questions about the "we" in the above quotation. Who is this? Is it eligible voters? Potential voters? Or only those voters who go to the polls and cast ballots? And what about our "elected representatives"? Whom do they represent? Bankers and bosses? Or workers and farmers? Do these two social classes, capitalists and wage earners, have common economic interests? Are their interests (social and economic) fairly represented under the two-party system of government?

## Worldwide Support for Striking Liverpool Dockers

*Continued from page 25*

tact with the rank and file. Our two delegates in Sydney spoke to 21 meetings!

The longshoremen's unions in America picked up our dispute on the Internet! They sent \$5,000 and messages of support before we even visited New York. After our meetings, they agreed to block any ship loading or unloading Liverpool cargo, in all the major ports of the USA, Atlantic and Pacific sides!

This forced Atlantic Containers Ltd, the major customer of Liverpool docks, to meet and discuss with us. Their vice president, Conrad Dezaggo, later said that "unless the dispute in Liverpool is concluded with a satisfactory agreement between both parties" his company would look to move its ships to another British port. He set a deadline of January 15.

This forced The Merseyside Dock and Harbour Company to the negotiating table — for

the first time since the dispute started. This resulted in the offer we put to ballot on February 8. Management proposed 40 reinstatements, and a 25,000-pound payoff (with 30,000 pounds in pension rights) for the other 310. Eighty-five percent of the 350 sacked workers rejected this offer. We will now go back to New York, and ask Atlantic Containers Ltd to honor their words, and not use Liverpool port.

After our visit to the U.S., we drew up a list of where Liverpool trade goes to. On the basis of this analysis we sent delegates to visit dockers in Italy, Greece, Israel, France, and New Zealand. Dockers in all these countries have sent regular cash donations, organized go-slows, and implemented overtime bans.

When we think about the warmth and solidarity we have met everywhere, we realize that we should have concentrated on getting international support right at the beginning of the

movement, rather than going "all out" for national support.

**Q.: Can you still win?**

**Jimmy Nolan:** If support from dockers abroad continues, we strongly believe that we will win this dispute. But we continue to fight for industrial democracy in Britain, and the repeal of all anti-trade union laws. We are also demanding that the British government honor and implement 1989 legislation which, in principle, protects the employment and working conditions within the MDHC. The government is the largest shareholder in the company, and it should behave in a responsible manner. The share price has dropped from £4.85 to £4.05 since the dispute started! □

March 8, 1996

## How Will Proposed Reforms Be Won?

Evasion of these essential questions is implicit in most of the partial answers to the overall social malaise that today afflicts the world. This is also true of suggestions for transitory solutions to social problems in the U.S. caused in part by corporate downsizing. The three suggestions offered by David Gordon in his *Dissent* article, for example, a sharp increase in minimum hourly wages, substantial changes in labor law, and investment incentives to fair-minded firms with democratic labor relations, do not address the practical question: how can such reforms be won?

It now appears as if a different answer is beginning to emerge in the form of actions being taken by a sector of the organized labor movement, supported and encouraged to some extent by various radical elements, to found a labor party to speak for working people. This is different from previous efforts in that it does not begin with a list of reforms that a sympathetic Congress should enact.

## Action Plan Must Start with Workers' Needs

It starts instead with the needs of working people (and others who suffer the effects of corporate downsizing), and asks: what can we workers do to satisfy our present needs? This was the inarticulate sentiment among the workers in Decatur, Illinois, interviewed by Marc Cooper. It found expression in the fact that two central leaders of the defeated Staley strike are helping to organize a union-based labor party. That was their answer to a question that has only recently occurred as an imperative to millions of workers: what can we do?

Relatively few have as yet discovered an answer, or what they think is the key to a more comprehensive solution to the growing social crisis: and that answer, being slowly formulated by the few, is some form of political action on their part (as opposed to remaining passive or inactive and asking others to solve their problems for them). What organizational form this will take and how it will be expressed through meaningful political activity will result in large part from decisions taken at the founding convention of the Labor Party in Cleveland, Ohio, June 6-9, 1996. □



# A Preliminary Assessment of Scargill's Socialist Labour Party

by Archibald O'Reilly

*The following article by a British supporter of our magazine represents one of several views among revolutionary socialist in Britain. In future issues we hope to present other views on the British Labour Party and on this attempt to build an alternative to the left of it.*

The Socialist Labour Party is in the process of formation. It has existed for a couple of months. It is time to make a preliminary assessment of this party, its class nature and political character. The Socialist Alliance has also been set up in many cities in Scotland and England. This consists of people who want a new alternative party but who are unwilling to resign from their existing socialist organizations and who would prefer a federal structure for a new party which would allow these organizations to affiliate. The Socialist Alliance network also embraces independent socialists who do not like the way the SLP constitution was unilaterally drawn up. What could be done to unify the SLP and the Socialist Alliance network?

### Is the Time Right?

Firstly, it has been argued that it is the wrong time to found a new alternative party to Labour because the class struggle is at a low ebb. It is additionally argued that the working class would not receive it favorably since it would split the vote and might contribute to a victory by the Conservatives at the general elections.

The first argument, that the SLP is being founded at a time of low ebb in the class struggle, is a misunderstanding of the dynamics of the class struggle. Trotsky, in *Where Is Britain Going?* pointed to the tendency, in British labor history, of the trade union struggle and struggle on the political plane to alternate. When a period of trade union militancy is exhausted, the emphasis shifts to the political plane through either the revitalization of existing working class parties, or else the creation of new ones, and vice versa. Trotsky, for example, pointed to the fact that when the Chartist movement, a political movement, was exhausted, the emphasis subsequently turned to trade unionism. The reverse process could be seen when, after "Black Friday," which marked the defeat of the industrial strike wave stimulated by the Russian Revolution in the early 1920s, the attention of the masses was turned to the political plane — "the Labour Party grew as if out of the earth itself," to use Trotsky's phrase. (See Leon Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, New Park edition, vol. 2, pp. 8–11.)

The defeat of the next wave of industrial struggle represented by the General Strike in

1926 led to a period of dramatically declining strike figures and mass unemployment, not greatly dissimilar to our own period in the '90s. In the early 1930s, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) split from the Labour Party, not in a period of rising strikes and ascending class struggle, but in the middle of a downturn. The demise of the ILP was not because this was the "wrong time" to set up a new party, but because of the political mistakes of its centrist leaders.

The second argument, that the working class will be hostile to the SLP because it undercuts the prospects for a Labour victory in the coming general election, is really an expression of adaptation to the prejudices of reformist workers. What about the minority of more advanced workers who increasingly recognize that the election of a Blair government will solve nothing? Shouldn't we, given the small size of the far left, be trying to pay more attention to this layer? Shouldn't we be attempting to regroup this more advanced sector of the vanguard, utilizing the rare opportunity represented by the SLP/Socialist Alliance? Revolutionary socialists are not concerned with winning general elections at this stage of their development in Britain. We can urge tactical caution on the SLP and do all we can to avoid split votes which let the Tories or the Liberals in. But we have to take risks and test the water, otherwise we do ourselves a disservice. Our job, at this stage of our development, is to build a substantial revolutionary working class vanguard party by regrouping the most militant sectors of the broad workers' vanguard, not collapsing into the parliamentary cretinism at the feet of the wooden tops of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

### What Is the Political Character of the British SLP?

Scargill's initial proposal *Future Strategy for the Left* stated:

If a Socialist Labour Party is established it should commit itself to fight every Parliamentary seat — on the principle that *Parliament is but one element of democracy*, a body in which expression must be given to the political philosophy and issues advanced by our class....

Today, radical opposition in Britain is not by the Labour and trade union movement, but by groupings such as those which defeated the Poll Tax, the anti-motorway and animal rights bodies,

Greenpeace and other anti-nuclear campaigners, and those fighting against open-cast mining.

These are the new voices of protest and direct action, reminding us that *only through direct action — including industrial action — and defiance of unjust laws can we achieve real advance*, whilst a moribund Labour Party and trade union hierarchy pleads with citizens to accept and submit to those unjust laws....

A Socialist Labour Party would be able to *galvanise mass opposition to injustice, inequality and environmental destruction*, and build the fight for a Socialist Britain. [Emphasis added — A.O.]

It is clear that such statements are not compatible with a characterization of the SLP as simply a reformist, or even a left-reformist, party. But neither is it a revolutionary party. Its strategy is neither simply a parliamentary one nor one based on the class struggle. It talks about both in the same breath. The question is, which is decisive: "industrial action" and "galvanizing the masses" or — elections?

For a revolutionary party, class struggle and revolutionary action is the strategy and elections are a tactic subordinate to the strategy. For a left reformist party elections are the strategy and "extra-parliamentary action" is a tactic subordinate to the strategy of electoralism. Is the working class to be used as a stage army to be wheeled on and off depending on whether MPs or trade union leaders need it to exert *temporary* pressure on the employers or government? Reformist leaders often use such pressure to strengthen their hands during negotiations to secure reforms within capitalism. Or is working class action the main and *permanently* appropriate (not temporary) means for securing its own interests through its own militant activity? In the case of such a revolutionary strategy, Parliament is used merely as a platform for promoting greater industrial action with no illusions in parliamentary activity as a vehicle for legislating socialism.

The ILP in 1933, not long after its break from the Labour Party, hammered out a program in which parliamentary struggle was secondary to a campaign of industrial agitation. This is what needs to be clarified in relation to the SLP strategy today. The ILP and the SLP are examples of *centrism*, i.e., organizations somewhere between reform and revolution. The job of the far left is to push it in the direction of consistently revolutionary politics.

### The Social Basis and Composition of the SLP

While the constitution of the SLP allows for affiliation by trade unions at the national, regional, and local level, it has not succeeded in gaining much in the way of such affiliations at the present time. But it is early days yet. It is not clear what the relation is officially with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) at the national level. Scargill's base in the union is obviously supporting the SLP. Locally, some area NUM organizations have affiliated, although it is not clear to what extent this has happened. Lancashire area NUM appears to



have affiliated, but this means little, since it hardly exists except for a handful of full-time NUM officials. There are no pits left in Lancashire. The NUM national membership amounts to less than 10,000 members. The only other possible affiliation appears to be the small oil rig workers union (OILC). Half of the executive body of the railworkers union (RMT) appears to be supportive of the SLP, thanks, it would seem, to the work of RMT executive member and leading SLP member Patrick Sikorski. It is rumored that there have been debates about the SLP in the large public sector union called UNISON, but there is no evidence of any moves to affiliate nationally or locally.

The composition of the membership would appear to be a mixture of ex-Labour members and ex-far left people with some new independents from single-issue campaigns. It is a mixture of manual and white collar workers. The average age is post-youth. There are no figures on the size of the current membership. However, the SLP national office has apparently been flooded with applications. It seems reasonable that there might be a couple of thousand members by May when the SLP will be officially and publicly launched.

### The SLP Constitution and the Internal Regime

The constitution was drawn up by an inner circle of Scargill's supporters. This was then presented as a *fait accompli* to a later, wider meeting of interested individuals and far left groups. They were told by Scargill to "take it or leave it." The most controversial aspect of the constitution was the clause forbidding membership to individuals belonging to any other political organization. This was consciously designed to exclude Trotskyists, especially the Militant tendency, whom Scargill clearly did not want in the party. Presumably he feared that they would swamp the organization. He obviously wants to build up a base of members loyal to himself. Whether the SLP will later change its policy toward the Militant tendency will probably depend on how big the party becomes. If it does become a sizable party, Scargill may feel he can absorb Militant Labour. Another possibility is an electoral pact or coalition with Militant Labour/Socialist Alliance. It will be difficult for the SLP to ignore Militant Labour in Scotland, since it has a strong electoral base in Glasgow and Militant candidates have gotten bigger percentages of the vote on several occasions than the SLP got at Hemsworth (see below).

The SLP constitution attempts to set out a framework for an alternative Labour party linked organically to the trade unions. Affiliated trade unions are to be represented at the national and local level on the party bodies. The constitution also provides for a women's section, a Black section, and a youth section, each with representation on the National Executive Committee and with the right to submit motions to the annual conference. These sections will also have representation on local bodies of the party,

## A Disagreement with O'Reilly's Assessment of the British Socialist Labour Party

While we do not claim to be thoroughly informed about the situation in the British labor movement, it seems to us that the information provided in the accompanying article by Archibald O'Reilly gives sufficient reason to disagree with the author's main conclusions.

In our opinion, there is no tactic which can substitute for the method of going to the working class where it is, earning its trust, and advancing transitional demands, which correspond with the existing level of working-class consciousness but at the same time point toward a more fundamental challenge to the existing economic, social, and political system.

Based on what O'Reilly reports, rank-and-file workers are not the primary component of the SLP or the Socialist Alliance movement. Even in Scargill's home base, the author tells us, the workers remained loyal to the Labour Party. As has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt in country after country, regroupment for its own sake among disillusioned baby-boom generation radicals is a strategy which feels good but accomplishes little. It's a poor substitute for a thorough analysis of why the right wing has gained dominance of the Labour Party and what a winning strategy for defeating that right wing would be.

The author's flawed logic is indicated especially by his suggestion that immediately on splitting from the Labour Party, the SLP militants should re-enter it! If there is productive work to be done in the Labour Party, why devote smaller forces to it than are involved now? It seems to us that the SLP,

which apparently has only "a couple of thousand members," cannot have enough of an impact on British politics to attract a significant following in the working class.

The real battle remains inside organized labor as a whole, including inside the British Labour Party, inside the Canadian labor party (the NDP), etc. And for us in the United States, the most important task is to get a labor party established and win the rest of organized — and unorganized — labor to support it. At this preliminary stage it would be wrong to try to set an agenda equivalent to a maximum program of socialist revolution, and certainly wrong to contend for any kind of false dominance by the "far left."

Whatever leadership revolutionary socialists can provide in this beginning period must be based on their solid work in building the labor party movement and advancing the present struggles of the working class in a transitional direction — toward raising consciousness of the need for independent working class political action, class solidarity, the separate needs and interests of workers and their allies in the population, as distinct from the needs and interests of the employers. Revolutionary socialists can help to identify and win the immediate struggles that can most readily be won in the interests of the working class, thus strengthening and encouraging workers and their allies for a broader fight in their own interests, ultimately challenging the capitalist system itself as they come to see that this system cannot meet their needs and does not serve their interests.

— Tom Barrett and George Saunders

although the constitution does not appear to mention workplace branches.

### The Hemsworth Election

The SLP stood a candidate in the Hemsworth parliamentary election. It did so with no organization on the ground, only two weeks after the formation of the party had been announced to the press and with a campaign that began only two weeks before the election took place. People from all over the country volunteered to canvass. Militant Labour offered its services to Scargill, who accepted their offer to canvass, and relations improved as a result.

The SLP won just over a thousand votes, or 5.4 percent of the vote, with a low turnout. Labour won easily, with 15,000 votes. The Liberals and Tories only got marginally more votes than the SLP, which came in fourth. The result was neither a humiliating joke vote nor a brilliant success, but it was a respectable performance considering the late start and the fact that the SLP was not an established party. The SLP vote was comparable to that of with the two

established bourgeois parties. However, the fact that the constituency was in a mining area of Scargill's home base was something of an embarrassment.

The fact that the vote was comparable with two of the established parties means that the SLP can continue to build on this result and look forward to future respectable votes. Militant Labour has shown that this can be achieved elsewhere. But it also shows that Labour still has a well entrenched social base in the unions and the working class. The organic links with the trade unions have been weakened, but not broken. The SLP will not replace the Labour Party overnight. It will be a party of the working-class vanguard, not a mass workers' party, for some time to come.

The election result also highlights the need for the SLP to build Labour Party fractions (i.e., a minority of the SLP with dual membership in the Labour Party). The SLP is as yet only a small split from the Labour Party, whose left wing has collapsed. Many recruits to the Socialist Labour Party are expelled or lapsed Labour Party mem-



bers disillusioned by setbacks. *Ultimately the SLP needs to provoke a much deeper split in the future.*

SLP fractions in the Labour Party, established via the trade union-Labour Party link, will be an essential vehicle for this. At the moment, this will be very difficult, if not impossible, because of the right-wing mood and repressive atmosphere in the Labour Party. But it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that this might change in the future as it did in the early 1980s in a context of Labour left revival.

This is where the ILP went wrong. *While correctly breaking away from the Labour Party, it was necessary to immediately turn back towards it.* But the ILP ignored the Labour Party. This was a key reason for its eventual demise.

The SLP ignores the Labour Party at its own peril. It is still too big and too central (in a negative way) to working class life. The SLP can grow only at the expense of the Labour Party. At the present time, Labour Party fractions will not be popular with SLP members, who, as we have said, are either fed up ex-Labour Party members or ex-members of far left groups, many of whom have always had a sectarian approach to the Labour Party. The mood inside the SLP and the Socialist alliance network will only change to the extent that the Labour left revives (as it may well do) and the possibilities of productive Labour Party fraction work become more promising. It may even be necessary for the SLP/Socialist Alliance to

re-enter the Labour Party lock, stock, and barrel if the circumstances and opportunities demand it. The avoidance of sectarianism and *tactical flexibility* are of utmost importance in this regard.

### Delusions of Grandeur?

There is a danger of delusions of grandeur in the way the SLP constitution sets out a framework for an alternative Labour Party, seemingly anticipating that national trade unions are going to affiliate overnight. Local branches may well try to do so, but they might also risk expulsion by their national union if they do. It has been argued by some that this could lead to the danger of red unionism. But there is a big difference between a conscious policy of splitting unions on the part of the left (as the Communist parties did during the ultra-left "third period" of Comintern policy in the early 1930s), and a policy of defending the democratic right of local trade unions to affiliate to whichever party they choose, while resisting such expulsions and trying to achieve readmission. That is to say, defending democracy and the unity of the trade unions. In such a scenario, the responsibility for splitting would rest clearly with the trade union bureaucrats, not the SLP/SA. Hopefully the latter approach will prevail.

### Conclusion

The SLP is an important development for the British left. The fact that a sector of the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy, small and weak though it is, has sponsored a new workers party creates a potentially far-reaching opportunity

for the left. Scargill still has a lot of authority among the most militant sectors of the broad workers vanguard, among advanced workers who know that the election of Blair will solve nothing. The year-long miners strike was defeated, but the memory lives on of the bitter resistance of the NUM, led by Scargill, to the decimation of the coal mining industry. The people who are attracted to the SLP see in Scargill the heroic resistance of the miners to Thatcher and the butchering of a whole industry.

Some sectors of the far left used to speak, in the early 1970s, about a "vacuum on the left" which they would supposedly fill. There are a lot of very fed-up ex-Labour Party members and an awful lot of ex-members of the SWP (the largest political group in the country?), Militant Labour, the International Marxist Group [former British section of the Fourth International], etc., etc., who are all looking for a home. The SLP/Socialist Alliance is the obvious place. The SLP/Socialist Alliance has enormous potential. If the Labour Party goes for a Lib-Lab coalition it could really be important, standing against Liberal candidates in constituencies where Labour stands down, for example. If the Labour Party is elected to office and attacks the working class — as it will — the SLP could be well placed to capitalize on this. Let us all hope that Scargill does not blow his chances by overplaying his bureaucratic hand and alienating his potential supporters before the SLP even gets going. □

## British Labour Party Heading to the Right

by Ellen L. Ramsay

*This article has been abridged, and slightly edited, from the Spring-Summer 1996 issue (No. 4) of Socialist Action (Canada). To subscribe, send a donation to SA at 517 College St., Room 234, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6G 4A2.*

As in Canada, parliamentary labor parties in many countries have made a historic march to the right in a search for votes. At the same time, the actual membership in these parties has fallen to historic lows. Now we are beginning to see parliamentary alternatives to these parties being attempted. In New Zealand, a coalition party — bringing together trade unionists, Greens, and Maori people — has been fielded in two elections. In Spain, a United Left has been formed with a coalition between Socialists, Communists, and Greens.

The situation in Britain is no different. With about a year until the next general election — where it is generally assumed (rightly or wrongly) that the Labour Party will form the next government — a poll by the left publication *Red Pepper* has indicated that over two million people in Britain consider themselves to the left of the Labour Party. This is not surprising considering 16 years of Tory rule, high unemployment, and poverty [— with the Labour Party doing little or nothing about it].

As in Canada, many loyal trade unionists have been ripping up their Labour Party cards. There has been a steady departure of dedicated socialists from the Labour Party for many decades, not least due to active expulsions of party leftists.

Outside Labour in Britain, the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) was launched this past year by Arthur Scargill, a leader of the Mineworkers, and its first electoral candidate has stood in a by-election. Within Britain, conditions are developing that could see a possible socialist alternative emerging that is based on organized labor and the working class, but inviting social movement activists involved in anti-racist, feminist, gay rights, and environmental struggles to participate.

### Labour Party's Lack of Response to Tory Offensive

Despite the realities of anti-union legislation, widespread layoffs, privatization, and cuts in social services, the Labour Party has proceeded on its rightward march. The most significant

development at this year's Labour Party Conference, from the viewpoint of organized labor, was the reduction of the union block vote from 70 to 50 percent. This marks a significant point in the party leadership's offensive to build the so-called "New Labour Party" (as party leader Tony Blair calls it) based on individual members rather than mass union representation.

This move erodes the fundamental principle of a party built on working class membership through the representation of organized labor. But it comes as no surprise to those who have watched the rightward progression of the party over the last several decades.

Last year, with the removal of Clause 4 (calling for public ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of goods and services), the Blair leadership ended Labour's formal, constitutional commitment to renationalizing privatized industries. Many socialists saw this clause as the last constitutional element defending the principles of socialism.



This year, the Labour Party executive reneged on its policy to renationalize the railways. [In the last three years, 750 jobs *each month* were lost as part of the process of privatization of the railways (a total of 24,750 jobs so far.) Jimmy Knapp, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport Union asked the Labour Party to commit itself to the renationalization of the railways within twelve months of the general election. Instead the National Executive Committee introduced a compromise policy to renationalize the railways "as soon as possible," without any time commitment. This, despite a recent poll suggesting that not only does 57 percent of the electorate want the railways renationalized but even 46 percent of Tory voters want this.

A major controversy erupted around proposed minimum wage legislation. (Britain does not have a set minimum wage.) Amid heated debate, the Labour Party National Executive actually omitted to set a specific minimum wage (although the Trades Union Congress proposed 4.15 pounds per hour). The large Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), which had previously demanded a specified wage, capitulated when it was offered two seats on a tripartite Low Pay Commission to be set up by a future Labour Party in office.

As usual, major aspects of party policy were revealed in budget proposals. Blair called for a "social chapter" in the European Union and a "Contract with Britain." Both are designed to keep wages low in accordance with the demands of the European Union and international capital. The "social chapter" and "contract" are the Labour Party's equivalent of the Ontario NDP's "Social Contract" between business and labor. In other words, it is the party's announcement to the business community that when it is in power it will intervene between business and the unions to keep wages down and lower public sector spending.

Blair's language in financial matters is little different from the Tories' — full of references to "monetary and fiscal discipline," "fairness in competition," and various forms of "partnership" between labor and business. Blair's "social chapter" has been endorsed by John Monks, general secretary of the TUC (Trades Union Congress) — the British equivalent of the Canadian Labour Congress.

Within the past few months there has been further publicity by Blair about a new "stakeholding" society, a concept which originates in the language of employee-shareholding schemes. In an attempt not to offend voters with the threat of increased taxes, the Labour Party has proposed to divert 20 billion pounds (\$44 billion) in shareholder money from electricity sales toward youth unemployment. An incentive of 75 pounds (\$167) per week would be given to employers who take on the long-term unemployed. This is essentially a hand-out to employers to exploit the unemployed in temporary, low-paid jobs. On the crucial pension front, Blair reneged on the party's former com-

mitment to a livable state pension and replaced it with a "minimum standard" of living based on a combination of private and public pensions.

### The Labour Left

Inside the British Labour Party, there has traditionally been a variety of groups representing the left and putting forward left policy to counter the rightward march of the party (for example, the Socialist Campaign Group). Unfortunately the left inside has declined — not least because of the party purges of the 1980s and '90s. Nonetheless, they launched a bid to defend Clause 4 in 1994 and this year tried to oppose the further erosion of the trade union link. At the current time there is a very serious struggle going on to retain the affirmative action policy for the selection of women candidates. (Currently only 38 out of 270 Labour MP's are women.)

In this context the left — on the inside and outside of the Labour Party — is considering its options. As in Canada, discussions of an alternative party were launched by unionists around the TUC annual convention and at the Labour Party Special Conference and Annual Convention.

The right wing of the Labour Party is calling for the party ranks to be maintained as the next general election approaches. Attempts to put forward a left agenda inside or outside the party are attacked as "anti-Labour" when in reality these bids are within the basic framework of electoral socialism.

### The Socialist Labour Party

Following the Labour Party Special Conference in April 1995 and the Labour Party Annual Conference in October last year, Arthur Scargill produced a document entitled "Future Strategy for the Labor Left: A Discussion Paper." In this paper he stated that now, with the removal of Clause 4, the British Labour Party is indistinguishable from other social democratic parties. He proposed that an alternative party be created, and in February 1996, Brenda Nixon ran as the first Socialist Labour Party candidate in a by-election in Hemsworth. (Turnout in this Labour Party stronghold was 39.5 percent of registered voters: of those, Labour received 71.9 percent, Conservatives 8.8 percent, and Liberal-Democrats 6.9 percent; Socialist Labour came in fourth with 5.4 percent.)

The SLP has scheduled national meetings throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and plans a formal inaugural conference in May. A full slate of candidates is expected to be fielded for the next general election. Tony Blair and his followers seem to be taking the threat from the SLP seriously, as indeed they probably should, if the Hemsworth result is any indication of working class sentiment.

Members of Canada's New Democratic Party may find the constitution of the Socialist Labour Party interesting. It has similarities to the original Regina Manifesto. For example, the Objects [or Purposes] in Clause 4(3) include the call "to abolish Capitalism and replace it with a Socialist system whose institutions represent

and are democratically controlled by and accountable to the people as a whole."

Other clauses call for:

- the redistribution of wealth, a free health service, free education, and full employment;
- the abolition of the House of Lords (similar to the Senate);
- the creation of a clean and safe environment;
- women's equality;
- equality of all people of color and all national groups; and
- the ending of discrimination against disabled people.

Other clauses state that the party is committed to "cooperate with trade unions and other kindred organizations" and to cooperate with all socialist organizations that wish to promote a higher standard of economic and social life and promote peace and human rights throughout the world. One very important facet of the constitution is the commitment to the Union Bloc vote [i.e., that trade unions are ensured a certain block of votes based on the number of union members] and the primacy of working class affiliation as the basis of party democracy.

This new development in British politics — and others like it around the world — provides a glimpse of new directions where working people are saying no to capitalism, unemployment, and the deterioration of social services. Socialist Action (Canada) welcomes new initiatives so long as they are based on the principles of worker self-organization and so long as it is realized that socialism cannot be achieved through the parliamentary system. There is no parliamentary road to socialism. It is through practical everyday struggle within the institutions of the working class that workers will gain the self-confidence and skills to bring about real change, which we in Socialist Action hope will lead to the emergence of a truly human, socialist society and the ending of global oppression. □

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# Unions at Labor Party Convention May Represent More Than Two Million Workers

by George Saunders

In the weeks before the Labor Party founding convention, support for it continued to grow. The United Mine Workers, for example, mailed out information about the convention to all its locals.

A potential breakthrough toward support from one of the largest AFL-CIO unions also occurred. At the convention of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which represents 1.1 million members, a new, more militant leadership slate was elected, headed by new SEIU President Andrew Stern.

At the SEIU convention Bob Wages, speaking for LPA, debated supporters of the Democrats and Republicans; his position won the overwhelming support of delegates. The new leadership announced it would be sending a delegation of observers to the Labor Party convention in Cleveland June 6-9.

Thus, where the *Labor Party Advocate* newsletter for March-April featured the headline "Endorsing Unions Now Represent One Million Workers" — now, with the SEIU presence, that could be changed to "Unions at Labor Party Convention May Represent More Than Two Million Workers."

At the same time — such are the contradictions of the present situation — the SEIU convention voted to endorse Clinton. Most of the labor leadership feels obliged to support what they see as the lesser evil in the 1996 election.

The SEIU of course was AFL-CIO President John Sweeney's union before he defeated Lane Kirkland's sidekick and successor, Tom Donahue, for the top post in the labor federation. The SEIU, with its innovative tactics (such as the Justice for Janitors campaign) reaching out to organize oppressed minorities and women, has become the fastest growing union in the country. It was that example of "do something" unionism that spurred AFL-CIO delegates to vote Sweeney in with the aim of breathing new life into the labor federation.

On the morning of June 7, during the second day of the Labor Party convention, as it turns out, Sweeney will be speaking in Cleveland — not at the convention, but at the City Club, a Town Hall type forum. An AFL-CIO event featuring Sweeney will also be held in Cleveland the afternoon of June 7. The Cleveland AFL-CIO Federation of Labor (equivalent of a central labor council) earlier endorsed LPA and the labor party convention.

There are indications that the new AFL-CIO leadership has a benevolently neutral attitude toward the incipient Labor Party; they may view it as a good thing to have a labor party in formation — as a pressure on the Democrats. If

the Democrats again fail to produce for labor, despite the AFL-CIO tops' all-out support for Clinton, labor will have a party of its own to turn to, or at least they can threaten to.

As Teamsters legislative director William Hamilton put it, "The convention could be a useful forum for people to talk about a beginning." (See Diane Lewis, "Upcoming convention to launch national labor party," *Boston Globe*, May 13.)

### Sweeney Supports Gay Conference

In another sign of the changed mood, or changing style, of the AFL-CIO leadership, Sweeney expressed support for a conference of gay, lesbian, and bisexual trade unionists, Pride at Work, to be held in San Francisco at the end of June. He sent a contribution of \$2,500 to help defray conference expenses, and issued a public statement urging all affiliated national and international unions and state and central labor councils to support the conference.

Pride At Work co-chair Howard Wallace is an organizer with SEIU Local 250, the largest union in Northern California, and is a veteran of labor organizing that dates back to the early 1970s. Pride at Work expects several hundred labor union organizers, rank and file members, executives, and others from around the country to attend the two days of conferences and workshops that will be held June 29-30 in San Francisco. For further information contact (202) 667-8237 or (415) 441-2500. (Source: May 2 article from the *Bay Area Reporter* posted on the IGC computer network.)

### Other Support for LPA

There were other signs of growing support as the convention neared. The Executive Board of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 876, representing about 18,000 workers in the Detroit area, voted to send two delegates to the convention. The Toledo, Ohio, Labor Council, AFL-CIO, voted to send an observer. Two union locals in Madison, Wisconsin, one of teachers, the other of office workers, added their names as LPA endorsers. And stewards in Teamsters Local 705 in Chicago, representing 12,000 workers, the second largest local in the Teamsters union, which has endorsed LPA, expressed a desire to attend the convention, according to the March-April *Labor Party Advocate*.

The statewide Arizona Teamsters, Local 104, representing over 7,000 workers, also voted to endorse LPA. News of the Arizona Teamsters endorsement came as Dave Campbell, president of the Metro Los Angeles chapter of LPA, was about to speak on LPA at the Teamsters Local 104 hall in Phoenix on April 20. Local 104 is

also sending a 15-member pro-Carey delegation to the Teamsters convention in Philadelphia in July, and several of those pro-Carey delegates were at Campbell's talk, some signing up to join the Arizona LPA chapter.

### A Strategy for After the Convention

Dave Campbell, speaking for LPA in Phoenix, Tucson, and Casa Grande, Arizona, outlined his views on how to build the Labor Party after the convention. Top priority is to win over the rest of organized labor. Unions supporting LPA now represent only 1 million out of 16 million. The full strength of the union movement — and of unorganized workers and others — is needed to make the Labor Party a real alternative.

Besides publicizing the labor party and winning more union endorsements, Campbell advocated teach-ins, labor-student-community meetings, demonstrations, etc., to rally support for some of the main demands in the platform — such as universal health care, a livable minimum wage, repeal of Taft-Hartley, a shorter work week, and so on.

On the question of remaining non-electoral for now Campbell had three strong arguments. (1) Building a party is like organizing in a plant: the first step is to mobilize workers around their own issues. You don't elect a negotiating committee before mobilizing the workers. Without the power of the organized membership behind them, the negotiators can't win anything. The same would be true of political representatives. (2) Most workers will follow the lesser-evil road until they see that the Labor Party is strong enough to win, so running candidates right away can't be effective. We also don't want to get into a premature confrontation with the rest of the AFL-CIO, which we can't win. (3) Running local candidates can't change anything because decisions are made on a global level; local officials simply end up administering the decisions made elsewhere, where the real power is. So running local campaigns shouldn't be as high a priority as building a mass party nationwide. We don't yet have the forces or resources to run meaningful electoral campaigns.

Dave Campbell is a union leader from the rank and file. He is secretary-treasurer of OCAW's largest local (3,600 members), representing two oil refineries in the Los Angeles area. He is also a member of LPA's interim Executive Committee. The outlook he represents, both militant and level-headed, should be supported; it is the surest way for the tremendous potential of a labor party, at last coming into existence in the United States, to be successfully realized. □



# Principles of a Labor Party Program

Drafted by Adolph Reed and Howard Botwinick

*The following draft platform was presented to the Labor Party Advocates Executive Committee for discussion in March. As we understand, a modified variant of this draft will be presented by the Executive Committee for discussion and vote at the upcoming Labor Party founding convention.*

### Introductory Memo from Les Leopold, Labor Institute

The ideas in the draft agenda are informed, in large part, by the “Corporate Power and the American Dream” workshops we [the Labor Institute] conducted for LPA chapters and unions around the country. Over the past year 35 of these workshops have taken place involving over 1,200 participants. These workshops have been conducted by rank-and-file worker-trainers from the OCAW. The curriculum was written by the Labor Institute. Each workshop provided ample opportunity for the participants to react to the game plan of Corporate America and to design their own proposals. Variations on these themes contained in the draft agenda came up again and again in these workshops. [For a copy of the workbook “Corporate Power and the American Dream,” write the Labor Institute, 853 Broadway, Room 2014, New York NY 10003; or phone (212) 674-3322.]

Perhaps the central theme growing from these workshops is that working people are fed up with all versions of “trickle-down” — liberal and conservative. Folks are tired of hearing about what is “good for the economy” when it is so clear that there is a disconnect between what is good for the economy and what is good for working people. The fact that layoffs make stocks go up and lower unemployment makes the market crash typifies this corporate/worker split in the economy. Clearly, there is widespread alienation from economic proposals that attempt to “grow” the economy for the benefit of us all.

Therefore, the proposals that are most popular are those that directly attack the jobs problem through such methods as drastically increasing the minimum wage, reducing work time and guaranteeing annual incomes to halt downward mobility. To be sure, the corporate trickle-down concepts are rejected. But there seems to be little support for liberal trickle-down either. [Like rebuilding the infrastructure (or reconversion) and hoping it will create jobs (but how much of the money for infrastructure rebuilding actually ends up in workers’ pockets as opposed to the owners of capital?), or let’s retrain workers for the new jobs (what jobs?) or let’s work on micro-capitalist investments to help create regional high-wage jobs (are those jobs new or do they just come from someplace else?).]

What is most clear from all of these workshops is that workers are desperately seeking

solutions to job insecurity. They know they are a pink slip away from ruin. They sense there are not enough jobs to go around, and that Corporate America will never create enough. They see their kids still living at home working at low-paying jobs and likely to do less well than the previous generation. As a result they want proposals that help working people directly — that create and protect decent, secure jobs and benefits for all those willing and able to work. (By the way, these workshops also suggest that the AFL-CIO slogan “America Needs a Raise” only hits part of the problem. “America Needs Secure Jobs at Livable Wages” is more like it.)

If these workshops tell us anything at all they tell us to make bold proposals which directly benefit working people. They are begging us to be defiant and bold in our demands on Corporate America. Hopefully, the LPA agenda will meet those expectations.

### Text of Draft: “A Call for Economic Justice”

**1. A Constitutional Right to a Job at a Livable Wage.** We want to work. We need to work. In a modern economy, we must work to feed, clothe, and house ourselves and our families. But there are not enough decent jobs to go around. Nearly one out of four Americans is either unemployed, working part-time but wanting to work full-time, or is working full-time at poverty wages. And this is not our fault; it stems from a conscious corporate attack on Americans’ living standards and at least twenty years of government policies that have encouraged and supported it.

After World War II, Congress, recognizing the need to generate jobs for all, passed the Full Employment Act. Thirty years later, when the postwar boom collapsed, the jobs problem again was acknowledged in the Humphrey-Hawkins legislation. However, Corporate America, through its army of pliable politicians, has made a mockery of those pieces of legislation. Today again, we need full and decent employment for all. This time, however, we must push beyond the reach of the corporate giants. We need to instill the right to a livelihood into the heart of our constitution through an amendment that states clearly that each person willing and able to work shall be assured the right to a job at a livable wage. The official “poverty level” is now \$14,000 a year for a family of four. We therefore propose that \$10 an hour (\$20,000

a year), indexed to inflation in the future, is a reasonable benchmark for a truly livable wage.

Since the Great Depression, the public sector has played a vital role helping to fill the employment gap that the private sector has repeatedly failed to bridge. As the last twenty years of cuts in public spending have painfully shown, there is much socially useful and necessary work that only government can be relied on to do. A responsible and accountable government would train and employ people to tend to pressing common needs such as environmental protection, building and staffing publicly funded, high quality day care centers and public schools, and rebuilding mass transit systems and inner cities. In sharp contrast to Democratic and Republican proposals for “welfare reform,” we also demand that such jobs should not be treated as contingent or make-work, or as a cheaper alternative to unionized labor. Let us be very clear. We are calling for permanent, unionized employment in a revitalized public sector that focuses, as government should, on meeting public needs.

**2. An Income Stability Fund to End Downward Mobility for Working People.** Tens of millions of workers are being downsized. Middle-income jobs are being ripped out of the economy. As the Four Horsemen of the Workplace (automation, downsizing, globalization, and the shift to temporary workers) destroy full-time jobs, millions of us are being forced to accept jobs at outrageously reduced wages and under demeaning, brutal, and unsafe conditions — while corporate wealth increases wildly. Supposedly in the name of modernizing the economy, American workers are experiencing steadily declining wages and benefits even as productivity increases. We are losing a substantial portion of our incomes through no fault of our own. We must put an end to this downward spiral by forcing corporations to subsidize the wages of those dislocated workers who find jobs at lower wages.

We propose replacing unemployment insurance with an Income Stability Fund to provide full wage subsidies for dislocated workers. Financed by those corporations that are doing the downsizing, these subsidies would make up the difference between the wages of the destroyed job and the wages of the new job. (The subsidy could be capped at \$25,000 per year, with a maximum total income of \$50,000 which would prevent the fund from being used up by highly paid downwardly mobile corporate executives.



Coupled with a guaranteed job at approximately \$20,000 per year, the \$25,000 subsidized cap for laid off workers would mean everyone earning less than \$45,000 — about \$21.50 per hour — would lose no income due to a layoff.)

**3. Free Higher Education for All.** Open access to education is a basic foundation of a democratic society. We propose that each of us be able to go to school as far as our abilities can carry us. Such schooling would extend throughout our lifetimes and provide us with the ability to upgrade our skills and knowledge and to explore our interests. Like the GI Bill of Rights, tuition would be free, and each citizen would receive a minimum livable wage for attending. In effect, school for adults would be the equivalent of work.

**4. Basic Human Benefits for All.** Every citizen needs a package of benefits to survive in the modern world. Everyone needs health care, paid vacations, paid family leave, and affordable day care. We propose that such benefits apply to all working people regardless of whether they work part-time or full-time. Such benefits should include the following:

- a minimum of 20 paid vacation days in addition to paid federal holidays
- national health insurance provided by a single-payer national system that eliminates the obscene profiteering of the health insurance industry
- up to six months family leave for childbirth and the caring of ill relatives at full pay, with gradually reduced pay for up to another six months
- low-cost, subsidized day care for all who need it.

Almost all the advanced industrial nations already provide such basic human benefits. However, these benefits are now being ratcheted down to the far lower standards being set in the United States. It is time to end this race to the bottom and bring our quality of life up to those European standards.

(Special attention must be paid to the new structure of the health care system and the enormous profiteering by the corporations involved in the new wave of HMO-type networks. The Labor Party should commit itself to placing national limits on corporate domination, control, and profits within such structures, in addition to calling for single-payer financing.)

**Shorter Work Time.** In order to create more jobs and to create more leisure time to enjoy life we need to reduce the number of hours we work. As it is, we work longer hours than any other workforce in the world. We therefore propose to:

- shorten the work week to 35 hours with double-time and time-off compensation for overtime (one hour off for every two hours worked) in order to discourage employers from using overtime as a way to cut back on the number of workers;
- mandate one year paid leave for every seven years worked. Such a system of

sabbaticals would allow more workers to enter into existing jobs;

- encourage shorter work careers by providing early retirement after 30 years of work.

(This would create more work opportunities for younger workers entering the workforce.)

**6. Justice in International Trade.** Corporate America and its fleet of politicians claim free trade is good for us. We are all supposed to benefit from an open, international economy. We agree up to a point. One of the most important ingredients of genuinely fair trade is protection of the rights of all workers. We refuse to accept the idea of “free” trade that pits us

against workers who get paid pennies a day, work in horrid conditions, and enjoy no legal rights. We refuse to accept the idea of “free” trade that pits us against industries that pollute their workers and the ecosystem. We reject the idea of “free” trade that has our work subcontracted by Corporate America to areas of the world where labor is essentially “unfree.” Contrary to the corporate free trade agenda, we believe in trading freely with all trading partners who adhere to basic minimum labor, health, safety, and environmental standards. We also strongly reject narrowly nationalist solutions to trade that scapegoat our fellow workers in other countries. We believe in trading partners who

## Proposed Amendment to Labor Party Draft Constitution

From: Frank Lovell, LPA convention delegate, Metro Chapter, New York City, May 6, 1996

To: The constitution committee (commissioned to prepare a draft constitution for consideration and vote at the LPA founding convention, Cleveland, Ohio, June 6-9, 1996):

On “Draft Constitution of the Labor Party of America (March 20, 1996),” I propose the following change:

### “Article II (line 6)

#### “Purpose

“The purpose of the labor party shall be to educate and help to organize the working class of the United States of America in order to transform the political structure of this country in such a way as to guarantee working men and women their own independent voice in government.”

If the above draft substitute Article II is agreed to by the constitution committee, it would then replace the article on membership, which would become Article III. And the numbers on the following articles would change accordingly, the last one becoming Article X (instead of IX), Labor Party Youth.

It seems to me most natural that the labor party constitution, having stated the name of the organization, should immediately follow this with a statement of purpose. This is no small matter. The future of the organization depends very largely upon its clarity of purpose and the ability of its governing bodies to explain its goals and implement practical steps of achievement.

Education is the key to future success because little can be gained without the conscious participation of broad sectors of the working class in independent political action. Political consciousness develops only through education, the

result of experience and training. Workers are suffering unforgettable experiences these days at the hands of downsizers in government and in private industry. But this experience must be explained in light of labor history to be properly understood. And for this understanding to become meaningful in terms of economic and political organization the AFL-CO and LPA must find ways to mobilize the millions of victimized workers in their own self-defense.

At this juncture in the history of the American union movement since World War II, nothing can be more important than an intensive educational campaign directed mainly to the organized sector of the working class, i.e., the established unions. LPA should be prepared, coming out of its founding convention, to launch such an educational campaign.

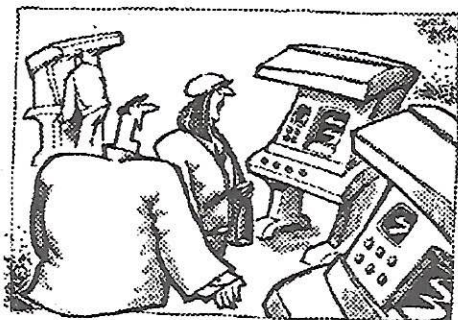
Convention discussion ought to make clear that LPA, in its formative stage, is primarily an educational institution. Its main task at this time is to educate a broad sector of the union movement in the urgent need of independent political action by the working people of this country, independent of and opposed to the two-party system, the parties controlled by corporate wealth. How this educational campaign will be organized should be the central task of the convention.

I believe it will be useful if the LPA organizing staff makes this the topic of its keynote speaker and arranges for talks on methods of education by union organizers, labor historians, leaders of African American and other minorities, and of women’s organizations, as well as prominent women and Black educators.

*In solidarity,  
Frank Lovell,*

*LPA membership #1170*





"You're in luck. We have two openings, so I'm hiring you for both of them."

adhere to basic minimum labor, health, safety, and environmental standards.

Therefore, we propose that seriously restrictive tariffs be placed on all goods produced in workplaces where such minimum standards are not met and in countries that do not, as a minimum, support the International Labor Organization's Conventions governing the rights of labor. Because our government's foreign and military policies have often undermined the position of all workers by propping up dictatorial, antilabor regimes, we further propose that the United States government condition all future military and foreign aid on the above-mentioned ILO Conventions.

To begin the process of establishing a just global economy, we call for an international labor commission to establish, in concert with other labor parties, governments, and movements, reasonable and effective minimal standards for a Global Social Charter.

**7. An End to Corporate Welfare as We Know It.** Our welfare system is a disgrace. The disgrace starts at the top. Today much of Corporate America is living on welfare in the form of tax breaks and direct government subsidies. State governments dole out billions in "incentives" to lure businesses from other states or to keep theirs from going. The federal government doles out even more as corporations pour millions into the campaign coffers of both parties. This Labor Party opposes all forms of welfare for corporations and the rich. We support an end to corporate tax breaks and subsidies that have seriously undermined the progressive intent of our tax system. We further support the reestablishment of strong national standards for labor rights and the environment so that corporations can no longer force our states and cities into a brutal competition for jobs at any cost. It's time to end the war between the states that leads only to a domestic race to the bottom.

To divert us from the estimated \$200 billion a year corporate welfare ripoff, the two parties aim their fire at the poor on low-income welfare (which amounts to less than one-third of what corporations take from the treasury). Our constitutional amendment guaranteeing each person a job at a decent living wage, coupled with

free education, plus the provision for basic human needs, will truly end the demeaning and stigmatized low-income welfare as we know it. That's what we call welfare reform.

**8. Getting the Wealthy to Pay Their Share.** The best kept secret in America is the staggering amount of wealth that has been pumped into the hands of a tiny elite. From 1983 to 1989 alone the top one-half percent (0.5%) of all families increased their wealth by over \$1.45 trillion. At the same time the national debt increased by \$1.49 trillion. What a coincidence! The combination of massive tax breaks for the rich, corporate welfare, and the full-scale corporate attack on working people and their unions led to this enormous redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top. Never before has so much money drifted into the hands of so few people. Now Corporate America wants us to pay back the debt that they created. Even worse, they and the politicians who work for them, are cynically using their carefully constructed deficits as an excuse to roll back all of the social programs and protective legislation that the labor movement has fought for since the late 1800s. We say no. Not now, not ever.

Instead we need to reclaim what is rightfully ours through a just and simplified tax system. Rather than taxing the middle- and low-income working people to pay for corporate welfare, we need to affirm the principle of a progressive tax system that concentrates the burden on those most capable of paying it. Rich individuals and corporations are able to amass wealth in part because of laws and public policies that assist them — for instance, direct and indirect subsidies, government contracts, use of public infrastructure. Progressive taxation not only is a way to ensure that they compensate the society for the benefits they receive from it; it also does the important democratic work of limiting great concentrations of wealth and their corrupting effects.

In his first six years in office, Ronald Reagan, with the collaboration of the Democratic majorities in Congress, destroyed most of the progressivity in our tax system by reducing the top tax rate from 70% down to an incredible 28%. Meanwhile, the total tax burden (state and federal) for the bottom fifth of income earners increased by 16%. It is high time to restore those progressive tax rates on the super-rich and drastically reduce our dependence on regressive property and sales taxes that hit working people hardest. Following the lead of many European countries, we must also institute a wealth tax on the super-rich — say, those individuals who have amassed over \$1 million in net worth (assets minus debts). A small tax on such wealth (in addition to a progressive income tax) would allow the nation to reclaim some of the wealth taken by the super-rich over the last two decades and provide an income base for free education, health care, and jobs. We are all willing to pay our share to build a just economy, provided that the super-rich pay their fair share. (Over the

next year we will set up a Labor Party Tax Reform Commission to work out the details.)

**9. The Right to a Union.** The only way to gain enough power to fight Corporate America is to allow working people to form unions. But right now, the playing field is badly tilted against working people. Fairness requires that the Bill of Rights in the Constitution be extended to the workplace. We should have the right to free speech and the right to assemble at work. We should be able to organize without fear of dismissal. No replacement workers of any kind should take our jobs when we are on strike. Scabbing should be made illegal, and the Taft-Hartley Act must be repealed. In short, we need to remove all the obstacles that make it difficult if not impossible for working people to organize their own unions.

**10. An Environmentally Just Transition.** Corporate America is also shattering the fragile balance between humans and nature. Today, the largest corporations are by far the largest polluters. The Labor Party realizes that major changes in what is produced and how it is produced will have to take place in order to protect public health and the natural environment. We also realize that the needed changes in production may cause dislocation for workers in environmentally sensitive industries. We support the idea of a just transition from toxic to non-toxic production, provided that the dislocated workers suffer no net loss of income during the transformation. One group of workers should not have to sacrifice their livelihoods in order that all of us may benefit. Our proposals to guarantee jobs and to end downward mobility are a way out of the jobs vs. environment debacle. In the meantime, we need a specialized transition fund that compensates displaced workers and their communities for jobs lost due to environmental transition. Such a transition should be financed by taxes targeted at polluting industries.

**11. Genuine Equality of Opportunity.** We recognize that an integral element of economic justice is the guarantee of equal access to the society's benefits for all its members. Just as we oppose suppression of the rights of working people internationally, we also oppose all practices that suppress the rights and opportunities of American workers through discrimination or scapegoating.

Therefore, within our program that makes a firm commitment to decent jobs for all working people, we support vigorous enforcement of existing anti-discrimination legislation. This includes affirmative action, which was developed historically as a policy of last resort when reliance on the "good faith" efforts of employers to break down entrenched patterns of racial and gender segregation had repeatedly and unequivocally failed. □

March 23-24, 1996



# Proposals for Labor Party Program

by Jerry Gordon

**A** "Call to the Founding Convention of the Labor Party of the United States" (to be held in Cleveland June 6-9, 1996) has been sent out by the national office of Labor Party Advocates. It makes reference to jobs sent to exploited lands abroad, the tax burden on working people, layoffs, scab herding to break strikes, NAFTA, GATT, health care, labor law reform, and pension and education benefits.

These are among the burning issues which must be the centerpiece of a labor party program.

At the same time there are five additional platform planks being circulated by the Workers Unity Network (WUN) in draft form. These take up the questions of support for the Black freedom movement, organizing the South, women's rights, international labor solidarity, and independent working class political action. The WUN, at its January 6, 1996, meeting in Cleveland voted to circulate these proposals. All of these, in the Network's view, are *basic working class issues* which a labor party must address in a resolute and forceful way.

A narrowly drawn economist platform, which ignores the plight of specially oppressed sectors of the working class and fails to champion their needs, will impede the ability of the labor party to get off the ground and rally the most exploited workers to its banner.

WUN holds that the only way to counter the multinational corporations' assault against workers' living standards and right to organize around the globe is through international labor solidarity.

Finally, WUN advocates a complete break with the bosses' parties and the running of independent working class candidates, where a sufficient base exists, in support of the program to be adopted at the June convention. Such candidacies would initially be on a local level but the objective would be to eventually run candidates at all levels as part of a many-sided struggle to win political power for the working class in this country.

The five proposed platform planks were discussed by WUN members over the past several weeks and were adopted with amendments at the network's April 7 meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina.

May 2, 1996

### Resolution on Political Action

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will initiate and participate in many forms of political action in support of its program, including mass rallies, marches, demonstrations, strike solidarity ac-

tions, picketing, ballot initiatives, and referenda; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party, where appropriate, will also run candidates for public office — local, state, and national. All such candidates must run on the basis of the Party's program and be accountable to the Party's membership both for the conduct of the campaign and as officeholders if elected. The Party's membership will democratically decide all major questions affecting the campaign; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Continuations Committee to be elected by this convention will establish criteria for running candidates for public office, subject to review and change by the National Council once that Council is established. Labor Party electoral campaigns which meet these criteria will receive organizational and material support from the Labor Party nationally; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will not endorse or give its support to any candidate for public office running as a Democrat, Republican, candidate of Perot's party, or candidate of any of the bosses' parties.

### Resolution on the Black Freedom Movement

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will seek and build concrete forms of unity with the Black Freedom Movement and other movements of oppressed nationalities within the USA. This unity process would take the form of joint campaigns, alliances on major issues, and joint educational projects; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will make a concerted effort to educate and organize its trade union members on the importance of Organizing the South and unity with the African American community in the building of the national trade union movement; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will support and actively organize campaigns which challenge anti-affirmative action public and corporate policies; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will work to defeat all efforts which seek to dismantle and destroy majority Black Congressional Districts; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will support African American candidates from those Districts who uphold and endorse a pro-labor and progressive program; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will actively seek and endorse candidates from the African American community and other communities of oppressed nationalities to run for office on Labor Party Platforms within those communities of oppressed nationalities; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will work in alliance wherever possible with independent political parties and political formations which emerge from the African American and other communities of oppressed nationalities to challenge public and corporate policies that uphold a chauvinist, racist, sexist, and anti-working class program.

### Resolution on Organizing the South

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will support all efforts to build a dynamic labor movement in the South; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will build the Labor Party movement and platform among the unorganized workers in the most oppressed sectors of the labor movement in the South through alliances with indigenous worker organizations, community groups, and southern local unions where they exist; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will support the Organize The South Solidarity Campaign aimed at building a broad coalition of worker organizations, unions, and community groups to struggle around common demands to empower workers against corporate exploitation and for social change; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will support all forms of political action and programs for ballot initiatives, referenda, and platforms aimed at overturning the right to work laws and help to enact new laws which support labor and trade union organizing and protect workers' rights in the South and elsewhere where such changes are needed; and be it further

**Resolved:** The Labor Party will support movements in the South demanding a living wage for all workers and other social movements which challenge corporate and social policies aimed at lowering the general standard of living for all working people.

### Resolution on Women's Rights

**Whereas:** A labor party representing working people and the overwhelming majority should commit itself to gender equality and to the full emancipation of women; now therefore be it

**Resolved:** The Labor Party stands for:



- (a) an end to all discrimination in employment, including job segregation and pay inequity
- (b) equal pay for comparable work, as an initial step in developing a more equitable system for the evaluation and compensation of all forms of work
- (c) affirmative action for women and people of color, in both hiring and promotion, along with implementation of a policy of full employment
- (d) gender and racial equity in educational institutions and programs, and in funding for such programs and their students, at all levels from preschools to universities
- (e) an end to all forms of violence against women, including rape, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment in the workplace and in schools
- (f) freedom of sexual orientation and choice, and an end to all forms of discrimination against and harassment of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals
- (g) full reproductive freedom, including the right to abortion and to safe, effective contraception as part of comprehensive health care supported by nationally funded universal health insurance
- (h) an end to forced sterilization, coercive use of contraceptives such as Norplant, and the criminalization of pregnancy (e.g., incarceration of pregnant drug users) with the provision of economic, social, and medical supports to address problems that affect pregnant women and their children
- (i) provision of research funds, medical training, and direct care services that address the special health care needs of women, e.g., in relation to reproductive health, breast cancer, osteoporosis, and AIDS
- (j) federally funded, community controlled, quality child care programs
- (k) federally mandated parental and family leave policies that provide for a continuation of income and sufficient leave for childbirth and the care of infants, the elderly, and sick or disabled family members, with encouragement for both men and women to share such responsibilities
- (l) income support (or a guaranteed annual income) for persons caring for young children or who otherwise cannot engage in paid employment, as part of the overall development of a just and equitable system of public welfare
- (m) resources for community development to create and maintain economic, social, and physical environments that support human life and foster human community and crea-

tivity for women, men, and children; and be it further

**Resolved:** In terms of its own functioning, the Labor Party will insure:

- (a) gender balance and the promotion of women's leadership at all levels of the Party and within all Party structures
- (b) internal Party vehicles in the form of caucuses, committees, or commissions for the self-organization of women in general or of particular groups of women — e.g., on the basis of race/ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation — if they so choose to constitute themselves
- (c) inclusion of the experiences, concerns, and demands of women in all their diversity in the analysis of all issues and the development of all platform positions.

### **Resolution on International Labor Solidarity**

**Whereas:** Only labor unions (currently constituted in the main within nation states with regional and local subdivisions and divided by industry, craft, and competing national pressures) possess sufficient social weight and consciousness to prevent absolute domination of the workplace and inordinate influence over organs and instrumentalities of general society by transnational corporations and monopoly capital; and

**Whereas:** The Labor Party counterposes a program of international labor solidarity against the monopoly power of multinationals and the elites who direct them in support of the struggles of working people around the world; now, therefore, be it

**Resolved:** The Labor Party stands for:

- recognizing the autonomy, independence, and self-organizational rights of trade unions in all countries
- raising the living standards of workers of all nations by their instruments of struggle, their trade union organizations
- trade policies enforcing international labor standards that ban child labor, guarantee collective bargaining rights, ensure worker health and safety and regulate the environmental impacts of development
- recognition that the struggles of women and oppressed minorities for freedom and equality are integral in the exercise of basic trade union rights
- opposition to military and economic interventionism in other countries by the U.S. or any other government to protect the interests of the multinational corporations and banks at the expense of the living

standards and freedoms of the working class in those other countries

- supporting the right of workers to seek work and to enjoy full citizenship rights wherever they are working, regardless of their immigration status, age, sex, or race, by initiating and supporting militant, independent working class action to defend immigrant workers, regardless of documentation, from intimidation and abuse by right-wing movements and law enforcement agencies
- exchange of and free access to standard, internationally recognized technical and statistical information concerning activities and production by multinational corporations
- support of and material assistance to the confederated efforts by international bodies of labor in forwarding cross-border organizing and coordinated bargaining with multinational corporations, as well as other organizational work, such as education, training, and the exchange of information, with the goal of raising wages and working conditions abroad to the level of those in the United States (and higher)
- recognizing and insuring the right of individual citizens to travel freely and associate with whom they choose; and be it further

**Resolved:** In terms of specific policies within the United States, the Labor Party calls for:

- abolition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank through international working class action
- the complete cessation of government funding for Cold War agencies of intervention and ideology, including the Agency for International Development (AID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the African-American Labor Center, the Asian-American Free Labor Institute, and the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI), and the panoply of government radio stations
- the establishment of strong international connections among organized labor groups and other organizations of the working class, independent of their respective governments, for the purpose of furthering international labor solidarity
- abrogating U.S. participation in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and repeal of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) legislation, based on the recognition that these treaties violate basic trade union rights of workers in the subject countries. □



# Broad Consensus Will Be in the Best Interests of Labor Party Convention

by Tom Barrett and George Saunders

The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* represents a current within the American socialist movement, as defined by the "Who We Are" statement which appears on the inside back cover of our magazine. Within that current, however, there are often diverse opinions on what course of action to recommend to the broader labor movement or other movements for social change. While there is rather broad agreement among *BIDOM* supporters to participate in and build Labor Party Advocates (LPA) and the labor party founding convention in Cleveland, Ohio, there is a diversity of ideas among us on how that support should be expressed.

Such diversity is in most cases a positive thing. When everyone's ideas are heard and everyone has a chance to participate in decision making, the best possible decision can be reached. Often, however, compromise and consensus, rather than sharp confrontation over disagreements, bring about more effective results. The art of political leadership often consists in knowing when to speak out and stand firm for a political position and when to compromise in the interests of the broadest unity in action.

In our opinion, the actual formation of a labor party based on U.S. trade unions representing a million or more workers is far more important than any programmatic positions that may initially be adopted by the new party. A convention atmosphere that is constructive, forward-looking, and outward-looking, not turned inward, will contribute much to the fledgling party's success.

This brings us to the five resolutions being circulated by the Workers Unity Network (WUN), which are reprinted in this issue for the information of our readers, together with introductory remarks by Jerry Gordon, secretary of the WUN. The WUN is a loose network of more than 100 unionists and social activists united around several key planks with which we, too, agree: independent working class political action, defense of women's rights and the rights of oppressed nationalities, the importance of leadership by women workers and workers of color, the importance of organizing the South, the importance of labor solidarity, both nationally and internationally.

An important part of the WUN is made up of members of Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), an organization of militant trade unionists and social activists based mainly in the South, especially North Carolina. (See past issues of *BIDOM*, where we have regularly published

materials by BWFJ leaders, reported on BWFJ activities, reviewed BWFJ publications, or reprinted articles from *Justice Speaks*, the monthly newspaper of BWFJ.)

One of the WUN resolutions reflects the BWFJ's "Organize the South" campaign, which rightly calls on the AFL-CIO leadership to follow through on the idea of increased union organizing efforts in the South and Southwest. This was implied in Section I of the "New Voice for American Workers" program. (The "New Voice" wing of the AFL-CIO, led by John Sweeney, Richard Trunka, and Linda Chavez-Thompson, is now of course the federation's national leadership.) Section I of the "New Voice" program was headed "We must organize at a pace and scale that is unprecedented." It included this proposal — "Create a Sunbelt Organizing Fund to underwrite union [organizing] efforts in the South and the Sunbelt."

The states of the South and Southwest are mostly "right to work" states, and a major

unionizing drive in those areas would almost inevitably include a campaign to overturn the "right to work" (for less) laws in those states. A successful union organizing drive would be a major step toward reversing the low-wage, "cheap labor" conditions in that part of the country. The "sunbelt" covers as many as 17 of the 50 states, with a substantial part of the U.S. population, including a high proportion of African Americans and Latinos.

Support for the perspective of organizing in the South is common, however, to both opponents and backers of LPA. Adopting a resolution on this point at the June convention will add little, especially since LPA is in no position to carry it out.

There is a great deal in the WUN proposals that is likely to win broad support — probably even consensus — among the participants in the June convention. Even so, it would be better, if possible, that such proposals come through the existing leadership of LPA — its Executive

## Contribution to Labor Party Platform Discussion

### All of Us Together Are the Working Class

The most serious deficiency that many people will see in the draft program — and something which has been sharply raised in more than one discussion I have heard — is the failure of the draft Labor Party platform to address issues of systematic discrimination and oppression based on race, gender, etc. It is a problem that is addressed in only a general way in point 11. And since that is the last point in the draft, this gives the impression of an afterthought that has been tacked on.

Numerous critics have posed the question of whether the new Labor Party will not be seen primarily as an organization of white male workers, blind to the situation and needs of those in the working class who are not "white" or male.

Obviously, no Labor Party will be worth much unless it is a champion of equal rights for all, opposing all forms of special oppression, a party which includes and defends every segment of the very diverse American working class. It must be animated by the old ideal of the labor movement that "an injury to one is an injury to all," and by a clearly stated

commitment to the kind of "economic justice" that involves an all-inclusive democracy.

This should be emphasized at the very beginning of the program, in order to forestall serious criticism, but perhaps even more importantly, to state broadly and decisively — as a clarion call to all working people — what the Labor Party stands for.

I therefore propose that something such as the following be added as the *first point* in the Labor Party's platform:

**1. Real democracy includes all of us.** The working class is the great majority of people in the United States. It includes industrial workers, service workers, professional workers, unemployed and retired workers, and their families. It includes people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, women as well as men. We favor full rights for all, and we will tolerate no oppression or discrimination based on race, gender, or other differences. All of us together are the working class majority and should shape the future, share the responsibilities, and fully enjoy the benefits of our society.

— Paul Le Blanc



Committee. That would enable good proposals to win broader support. It would set the right priority: cooperation and collaboration in building this labor party, a party which can truly represent working people in politics and government. Getting this party established, winning as many labor organizations as possible to support it, and building it to a level of strength at which, in the future, it can challenge the bosses' parties with a reasonable chance of success — these are far and away the most important tasks before Labor Party Advocates at this time. Struggles over programmatic questions are less important *at this time*.

The draft "Principles of a Labor Party Program" takes up certain basic issues that virtually all working people are concerned with. Something along that line could be adopted as a general statement of what the Labor Party stands for, with more specific questions being left open, to be decided later.

Organization of factional formations to intervene in the LPA development around issues like these is premature, in our opinion.

It would be best if the essence of the WUN proposals — recognition of the specially oppressed status of women and people of color within the work force, the need to organize the South, and to promote international labor solidarity — were included in the programmatic recommendations coming out of the LPA Executive Committee.

But even if the essence of those proposals is *not* included in the LPA EC recommendations, it would still be better, in our opinion, if the WUN proposals were not *counterposed* to those of the LPA leadership. An untimely fight over program would set a tone of internal power struggle rather than unity in action, a tone which would not be lost on those who are new to political or social activism.

There will be broad consensus at the convention that this party must be *inclusive* of working women and working people of color. The important thing will be translating that policy into real organizing work after the convention has concluded. The act of the labor party's reaching out to women's organizations, African American organizations, Latino groups, etc., will mean far more than paper resolutions. The new AFL-CIO leadership of Sweeney, Trumka, and Chavez-Thompson has made a point of acknowledging ethnic and gender diversity in the work force and has included a larger percentage of women, African Americans, and Latinos in official posts in the AFL-CIO. There is no reason to believe that Tony Mazzocchi and the rest of the labor party leadership will be any less inclusive than the AFL-CIO leadership.

Speaking of Mazzocchi, whatever the opinions of his critics, without the work that he and some of his fellow union leaders have done we would not at this time be electing delegates to the labor party's founding convention. The founding of a labor party will be a giant step forward in class consciousness and a giant step away from class-collaborationist politics.

A few comments are in order on Jerry Gordon's introduction to the WUN resolutions. He says of the five platform planks being circulated by the Workers Unity Network.

All of these, in the Network's view, are *basic working class issues* [emphasis in original] which a labor party *must address* [emphasis added] in a resolute and forceful way.

But what happens if the new labor party does *not* "resolutely address" those issues? Would it be unable to approach the millions of working people in this country who feel unrepresented by the existing political parties and candidates with a party in their workplaces and communities which can and will represent them? Would it be unable to ask union locals for their support — both political and financial? Would it be unable to convince influential labor leaders to give their endorsement, with all the legitimacy and authority which that confers? Would it be unable to participate in activity in support of strikes and locked-out workers (including on the international level)? Would it be unable to bring pressure to bear on Congress and state or local government in support of measures which protect and improve workers' rights and living standards (including those of women workers and workers of color)?

To ask these rhetorical questions is to answer them. These are the kinds of *real* tasks that will confront the *real* labor party after its convention adjourns. These tasks, not the passing of resolutions, are the key to the politics of the present situation. Support to the labor party should not be conditional on its putting its stamp of approval on particular resolutions, however laudable the ideas they express.

Jerry Gordon also writes, "Finally, WUN advocates a complete break with the bosses' parties and the running of independent working-class candidates, where a sufficient base exists...."

The labor party convention will not take this step. This is quite clear. Among the most dedicated builders of Labor Party Advocates are respected labor leaders on both the local and international levels who will be supporting Democrats, including Bill Clinton for president, in the 1996 elections. No one is proposing that the new labor party endorse Clinton — or anyone — but it will be completely counterproductive to insist that the party actively *oppose* Clinton or require its supporters *not* to support him. That would narrow the party's base so drastically that it might never get off the ground.

In our view, calling on workers to vote for Democrats *hurts* the labor party's ability to organize and grow. But can the party *exclude* authoritative labor leaders who have made a serious commitment to building a political alternative to the Democrats? That would also be counterproductive. The only possible policy at this time is to allow labor party supporters to vote as their conscience (and consciousness) dictates and for those of us who disagree with giving any support at any time to either of the

employers' parties to patiently explain why we hold this view.

Working people in local areas will not need to be told to run independent working-class candidates for office when that becomes a realistic option. Seeking to pass a motion to this effect can serve no positive purpose. At this point there is no significant component of the labor movement that is convinced of the premise of this motion. The labor party idea itself is supported so far by only a small minority of the trade unions. The major support for this motion will come from leftist sectarians seeking to "expose" Mazzocchi in order to rally their members around a retrograde "left opposition" within LPA.

Some small groups have become involved in Labor Party Advocates with the aim of waging a power struggle against that "arch-bureaucrat" Mazzocchi. Such behavior from these misguided individuals is to some extent inevitable and must be considered part of the political landscape as the working class begins to develop a new militant political leadership.

It would be unfair to number the Workers Unity Network within the sterile sniping chorus chanting the litany of LPA's inadequacies. However, *because* of Jerry Gordon's and other WUN members' well-earned authority in the trade union movement, the nitwit sectarians will seek to utilize WUN's proposals for their own narrow purposes.

If this alliance polarizes some sort of convention discussion, with debate over the proposals characterized by hostility toward the LPA leaders, it will only serve to unnecessarily discredit the content of these proposals. As Bill Onasch pointed out in "LPA Should Be the Major Focus for All Socialists," on page 24 of our previous issue, "organized socialist currents have performed miserably" when it comes to supporting and building Labor Party Advocates. The atomized remnants of the American socialist movement and the youth radicalization of a quarter century ago, unable to break from their "politically correct" in-groups, are not where we should be looking for allies to help build the labor party movement.

We need to find workers who are enthusiastic about carrying the labor party message to everyone who has ever punched a clock, changed a diaper, or shaped up. A united and optimistic labor party will be able to convince the ranks of labor as well as skeptical local and international labor officials that it is a viable political alternative, a far better investment for Committee on Political Education money than the Democrats have proven to be. A strategy of consensus-building will be far more effective in bringing that about than will be a strategy of confrontation. It is our hope that the Workers Unity Network will agree. □

May 19, 1996



## Building the Labor Party

# “This Is the Time — And We’re Going to Do It!”

speech by Genora Dollinger to Los Angeles LPA

**Introductory Remarks by Dave Campbell:** Before we begin the question-and-answer discussion period, I’d like to introduce Genora Dollinger.

If it had not been for Genora, there might not be a UAW [United Auto Workers union] today. And that’s not according to me. That’s according to the founders of the UAW, Victor and Walter Reuther, and others. Genora was recently inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame. [For more information, see obituary by Sol Dollinger, on facing page.] She was a founder of the Women’s Emergency Brigade in the 1936–37 sitdown strike in Flint, Michigan, which was instrumental in winning that strike. That strike not only put the UAW on the map but inspired working people throughout the country, sparking the uprise of the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations].

**Genora Dollinger:** After listening to Tony [Mazzocchi, the previous speaker,] I feel that this is like an old-time revival meeting. So I’m going to start out that way.

“In the beginning was the word.” And that word was “Organize!” Over 50 years ago the industrial workers of America were not organized. And they heard that message, they took it, and they sat down across the country in plant after plant. And we became known as the CIO, that great powerful union movement which accomplished so much in its beginnings.

I was part of that. I was there when the UAW was born — in Flint, Michigan. And we took on the greatest corporation in all the world, General Motors.

And through 44 days of violent struggle, and with many wonderful contributions and techniques that were thought of and brought forth by the workers, we won that strike. And after that strike was won, then came Ford and then came Chrysler. And then came the rubber workers, the glass workers, and the steel workers. And we saw this sweep across the country.

And we can do it again! We’re at the point where we’re on the battlefield again. Every time we get a new notice from some corporation — the public services or something like that — they’re raising our rates, they’re raising our insurance, everything that we have to pay. And we’re getting that without the compensation of our wages being raised.

So this is the time. And I feel it as strongly as Tony Mazzocchi.

And it’s necessary! — if we’re going to save, not just the workers, but to save our country and what it stands for.

## Introduction to Speech by Genora Dollinger

In memory of Genora Dollinger, who died October 11, 1995, we are printing this slightly edited transcript of the speech she gave to a forum on December 2, 1994, sponsored by the Metro Los Angeles Chapter of Labor Party Advocates. Genora was the next speaker after LPA founder Tony Mazzocchi.

The transcript is taken from a video of the forum, an informative and inspiring discussion on “Why We Need an Independent Labor Party.” The video is available for \$10 from Justice Vision, 1425 West 12th Street, #262, Los Angeles, California 90015; phone (213) 747-6345; phone orders welcome; catalogue available. Our thanks to Kathleen O’Nan and Dave Campbell for making this available to *BIDOM*.

Readers are also referred to the interview with Genora Dollinger, “The Role of Women, and of Radicals, in the First Sit-Down Strikes,” in *BIDOM*, No. 123, March 1995. The interview was conducted by Kathleen O’Nan and was printed together with a brief introduction by O’Nan. Some corrections of factual errors that appeared in the interview are noted in *BIDOM*, No. 126, July-August 1995.

I talked to Victor Reuther about Tony coming out here for one of our first meetings, and how proud I was, and I asked if he would like to send a message. I wanted him to send a little type-written speech or something that we could read.

### Until We Get a Labor Party

But unfortunately, Victor Reuther is in the period that many of the oldtimers are in. His wife [Sophie] has a terminal illness. She’s in the last stages, and his mind is filled with too many other things. But he said, “You can tell the people of California that until we get a labor party in this country, the traditional route of workers struggle for protection will not be met. Until we get back into our historical role that we were organized for, our needs will not be met — until we get a labor party.”

Now, I got this little card from the Washington office of Labor Party Advocates. How many of you got it? It says, “Now more than ever.” And I looked at the picture on the front and what did I see? I saw another local from my town of Flint, Michigan, the Buick Local 599, on strike again against General Motors. This time it took them 4 days. They got the company in a critical position. It took them 4 days. And they won that strike. And that was not with the help of the International union.

But the president of this local [Dave Yettaw] happens to be a person who believes in Labor Party Advocates. He is a man who is for labor. He is not one that is for making deals on the side. And that is the way our union movement used to be.

We thought that when we got the right to bargain for our wages and our job conditions, for our health protection and all of the other

things that we needed, we thought we had them now, by law and by custom and by design and everything else, where they couldn’t move, that we were protected. But we’re finding out that we’re not protected.

### NAFTA Shows We’re No Longer Protected

And I think probably the most serious notice of that was given when NAFTA was passed, and “our” administration in Washington, “our” labor secretary, went out and campaigned for this terrible, terrible piece of legislation. To take the jobs of our American workers, send them over the border, and exploit the people in the other countries at one-tenth, one-fifteenth, of the wages our people are getting here.

They not only brought down the wages of American workers but they are trying very hard to keep those unions there down at a level where they don’t have a decent life to live.

So when I got this card and I saw the Buick local in my home town of Flint at the front of this great big strike [demonstration] with a big sign going across saying “Join Labor Party Advocates,” I was so pleased because this is for workers, talking to us all over the country.

And it’s going to catch on. When I walked in here tonight I knew that we’ve got some elements in our chapter already, here in southern California, that mean business — because I’ve run across them in other aspects of labor union involvement. And they mean business. When they say they want to work, they’re going to do it.

Now some of them, who are perhaps a little younger than I am, will have to work a little harder to make up for me.

*Continued on page 51*



# The Unrelenting Genora Dollinger

by Sol Dollinger

*Genora Johnson Dollinger, a leader of the Women's Emergency Brigade during the 1937 sitdown strikes against General Motors in Flint, Michigan, died October 11 in Los Angeles at the age of 82. This tribute by her husband Sol first appeared in *Against the Current*, January-February 1996.*

Genora Johnson Dollinger was called the Joan of Arc of labor for her role in the Flint sitdown strikes of 1937. At the age of 23 she organized the Women's Auxiliary of the United Automobile Workers union and the Women's Emergency Brigade. The latter were armed with clubs in defense of the sitdowners from the hired Pinkerton strikebreakers, the plant police of General Motors, and the Flint City Police dominated by the corporation. Her militant actions were the subject of two award-winning documentaries: *The Great Sitdown Strike*, made by BBC; and the Academy Award nominated documentary *Babies and Banners*.

Genora was born April 20, 1913, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where her mother took her to give birth, but the family residence was in Flint. In 1931 she became a charter member of the newly organized Flint Socialist Party, which was later to play a pre-eminent role in the leadership of the sitdown strikes.

Her first husband, Kermit Johnson, was the only member of the 1937 citywide strike committee working in the historic Flint Plant Four of Chevrolet. He conceived the stratagem for the capture of the engine plant with a diversionary tactic centered on Plant Nine of the huge General Motors complex. This proposal was originally rejected by Walter Reuther and other leaders of the Socialist Party. It was Genora's stubborn, unrelenting insistence in support of the taking of Plant Four that overcame the opposition's hesitancy. The capture of Plant Four

has been described as the greatest strike strategy in the history of American labor. It resulted in a social revolution in capital and labor relations in the United States.

In 1938-39 Genora helped organize the first unemployed union affiliated with the UAW and served as its secretary. During the war she dodged the blacklist by moving to Detroit. She was employed by Briggs.

In 1945 she was vice-chair of the shop at Stewards Body and elected to a committee to investigate the physical beatings meted out to prominent members of the local union.

She became the third victim of a lead pipe attack while asleep in bed. Six years later the Senator Kefauver Crime Committee confirmed that the beating of five Briggs workers and the shooting of Walter and Victor Reuther were instigated by well-known Detroit corporate officials in collusion with the Mafia.

Genora joined the Socialist Workers Party in late 1938, and was a founding member of the American Socialist Union in 1953. She was also a charter member of Labor Party Advocates.

From 1960 to 1966 Genora was the Development Director of the Michigan American Civil Liberties Union. She was one of the first presidents of Women for Peace, an anti-Vietnam war organization, and while in office, enlisted most of Detroit's union leaders into public opposition to the war.

In 1977 she was invited by the officers of the union and GM to attend the fortieth anniversary



Genora and Sol Dollinger

banquet celebration of the sitdown strikes and the winning of union recognition. Always the stormy petrel, Genora flew to Detroit to denounce the union leaders for their participation in the love fest as an example of "tuxedo unionism."

In October 1994 Genora was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Michigan Women's Historical Center in Lansing. On her induction, Victor and Sophie Reuther wrote, "Genora is of the great tradition of Mother Jones, who in an earlier generation was to the Mine Workers what Genora became to the Auto Workers. A living legend in her own time!"

Genora was one of the foremothers of the women's liberation movement. She is survived by her husband, Sol, son Ronald, granddaughter Danielle Genora, and grandson Kenneth Vincent. □

## A Personal Memory and Tribute to Genora Johnson Dollinger

by Evelyn Sell

Shortly after I joined the Socialist Workers Party Youth Group in Detroit during the summer of 1948, the youth organizer told me, "You've got to meet Genora!" I didn't know who Genora was, didn't know about the historic 1937 sitdown strike at General Motors, and didn't know about the crucial leadership role she had played in this momentous labor struggle. For me, the weekend visit to the Flint, Michigan, SWP branch was just one of the many exciting events in my very new life as a socialist activist. I can still remember that trip to Flint — sitting in the back of a borrowed

truck, singing revolutionary songs, talking about the Marxist classic we were studying at the time. By the time I climbed down from the back of the truck, Genora was outside the branch headquarters, shaking hands, welcoming us. I was struck by her personal warmth and vivacity, and immediately felt as if I had known her — and liked her — for years.

After a tour of the headquarters, the young men played ping-pong and visited with SWP branch members. Genora drew me outside and spent the evening talking with me. Her words inspired me to commit myself even more deeply

to the working-class struggle and the revolutionary socialist movement. Her encouragement as well as her own personal example motivated me to stretch beyond the modest expectations I had for my own contributions to the revolutionary movement. Her message during our first meeting remains with me to this day: be everything you can possibly be; don't set any limits on yourself because you are a woman, and don't let anyone else limit you because you're a woman.

Hearing firsthand about her own experiences, I began to appreciate not only Genora's place in history but women's significance in the



development of this country. Like everyone else, I had been educated in a society which lauded male heroes and consigned women to supportive roles; for example, Betsy Ross sewed the flag but men liberated the colonies! Genora represented the first true female hero I learned about, and it was amazing to see her small figure and bright-eyed cheerfulness while I listened to her descriptions of how she organized labor struggles, how she was beaten by company goons, and how she suffered personal tragedies, yet persevered in her unwavering efforts to make a better life for working people.

She wasn't someone to place on a pedestal for sterile admiration but a living-and-breathing human being with tremendous courage and dedication. I credit Genora with opening my mind and firing up personal characteristics which have made me a better human being. There have been other significant influences in my life, male as well as female, but Genora represents one of the most powerful in sustaining me throughout my adult years.

My respect for Genora's accomplishments and my gratitude for her encouragement to me continued regardless of political differences which developed and separated us organizationally. I'm sorry that other young women won't have the opportunity to be heartened by personal interaction with her, but I am glad that her achievements — and her indomitable spirit —

## Studs Terkel on Genora Dollinger

*The following passage, quoted from Studs Terkel, appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, October 27, 1995. Terkel, who was in San Francisco for an "authors lunch," was interviewed by the Chronicle's book editor Patricia Holt.*

I'm sitting at the bedside of Genora Johnson Dollinger, age 80. She's on her third pacemaker and it's not working. There's a battalion of pills surrounding her. She's in such failing health she doesn't think she's going to make it — in fact, she died a short time later.

I said, "Genora, it's Christmas season, 1936, in Flint, Michigan." And Genora, this weary, dying invalid becomes a 23-year-old girl. She sits up in bed and says, "I was on the roof of that sound truck...calling for women to come down and cross the police lines," and she takes me back to the famous General Motors sit-down strike of 1936[-37], when the CIO and UAW were being organized. The workers, some women

among them, [sat] in that GM plant for 44 days and the cops [were] trying to get them out.

Genora says, "The police have thrown tear gas into the plant to smoke out the guys. I want the women to break some windows so people can breathe the air. One woman tries to cross, when a cop grabs her by the coat, but she just walks out of the arms, leaving him holding her coat. Then another woman follows, and in the end we win the strike. We were finally recognized as human beings."

With that, Genora falls back on the pillows, and a few seconds later, she says, "For crying out loud, this should be a better world than it is."

are recorded in books and films ("With Babies and Banners: The Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade," a 1979 documentary nominated for an Academy Award; "The Great Sitdown Strike," a BBC documentary) so that

women can continue to learn from and be inspired by her. □

October 16, 1995

# Genora Dollinger — A Strong, Clear-Thinking, Outspoken Woman

by Jean Tussey

The following notice of the death of Genora Johnson Dollinger appeared in the *AFL-CIO News* for November 6, 1995, on p. 15, under the heading "Newsmakers."

Genora Johnson Dollinger, organizer of the UAW's Women's Brigade during the famous General Motors sit-down strike at Flint, Mich., in 1936-37, died in California. She was 82.

Dollinger was 23 when she organized the brigade to feed and support UAW strikers, who started their sit-in at GM's Fisher Body plant on Christmas Day, 1936. The strike ended 44 days later after the "Battle of the Overpass," when GM recognized the UAW. Dollinger and four other brigade members blocked the Fisher Body plant, putting themselves between the workers and GM's officials [sic].

After being blacklisted in Flint, she moved to Detroit and became a leader in a UAW unit. She was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Michigan Women's Historical Center in Lansing last year.

Survivors include her husband, Sol Dollinger, son Ronald and two grandchildren.

This notice in the *AFL-CIO News* brought back memories for me. Genora and I were both

active in the Socialist Workers Party in the latter half of the 1940s. We were also both active in the labor movement, although in different parts of the country. But when we met at SWP conventions, national committee meetings, or trade union conferences, there was an instant rapport. I remember enjoying hearing her speak out with her views on problems facing American workers, at a time when not many women did. We were of the same generation, and co-thinkers.

Genora always impressed me as a strong, clear-thinking, outspoken woman — unpretentious, and with a sense of humor. That's why it was particularly painful to witness the traumatic effect on Genora of the tragic accident in which two of her sons were killed in 1951. I don't recall seeing her after that. But after she recovered, and resumed her life and activities with her family, in the women's movement, etc., I followed her career with pride and pleasure. □

## UNION JOBS MEAN



## A BETTER COMMUNITY

Illustration by Carole Simpson



# The Volkogonov School of Falsification

Dmitri Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary*, translated and edited by Harold Shukman (Free Press, New York: 1996), 524 pp., \$32.50.

Reviewed by Joe Auciello

Leon Trotsky is a figure of such historical importance that he has acquired a hefty shelf of secondary literature, in addition to the many volumes of his own writings kept in print at exorbitant prices by Pathfinder Press. There are, by now, first and second rate biographies (including a pictorial biography and a biography intended for high school students), memoirs by former comrades, such as Jean van Heijenoort and Albert Glotzer, a biography/memoir from Victor Serge and Trotsky's second wife, Natalia Sedova, critical studies from Stalinist, Maoist, social democratic, state capitalist, and Fourth Internationalist perspectives, and academic studies of various merit. What's more, this short list refers only to works published in English and does not even include the analyses and histories of Trotskyism as a political movement. In brief, there is nothing brief about the many thousands of pages written about Leon Trotsky in the 56 years since his assassination.

To make a claim for readers' attention, Dmitri Volkogonov's book on Trotsky must elbow aside other works which precede it, including the trilogy written by Isaac Deutscher, "Trotsky's best biographer," in Volkogonov's words. Is a new biography about a life already so thoroughly analyzed really necessary? Reviewers, with the exception of Daniel Singer in the *Nation*, have answered in the affirmative, with a mild to exuberant "yes." [See accompanying article.] Unfortunately, most of the reviewers are wrong. This new biography is the least useful source of information about Trotsky that one could find, at least since the publication of Stalin's *Short Course [History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]* — that notorious compendium of official lies. Volkogonov's book abounds with errors of common sense, judgment, politics, and history. Hardly a page is free of mistake, misquote, or malicious musing.

Published in Russia in 1992, Dmitri Volkogonov's biography of Leon Trotsky, according to its editor and translator, sold about a million copies. In a country where information about Trotsky is relatively scant and new, some sort of argument can be made for the appearance of this book, at least by a publisher looking for a profit. Anyone seeking a truthful account of the life of this great revolutionary would be disappointed.

In the West, where information about Trotsky is available for those who wish to find it, the publishing of this book serves no useful purpose. It was translated and printed simply because, as Sir Edmund Hillary said in another context, it was there. The editor makes his claims for the book on the fact of

the author's access to previously closed NKVD files and the author's nationality — Western readers may now acquire a Russian point of view about Trotsky.

For all of Volkogonov's access to Soviet files, little in the way of new or valuable information is revealed. Archives are not as essential with a subject like Trotsky, who was exiled from the USSR prior to the worst repression and who wrote and published extensively himself. *The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, edited by David Cotterill and published in 1994 by Pluto Press, is an example of how previously unpublished material complements but does not seriously alter the historical record.

A far graver concern in the case of Volkogonov is that he uses his sources tendentiously, twisting facts to fit a predetermined thesis. Finally, even assuming that one book spoke for all Russians, what in Volkogonov's perspective is distinctive? What analysis does he make that has not been made before? Neither the editor nor the biography itself answer these questions.

But lack of originality may be a virtue, at least to the academics and historians who have written the reviews. Volkogonov criticizes Trotsky — and through him the Russian Revolution and Marxism — in familiar ways. The thesis of the present work is familiar from Volkogonov's other biographies and from decades of cold-war historiography. Once again we are told that Bolshevism is evil and wrong, that revolution inevitably leads to repression and totalitarianism, and that society can only be reformed by adherence to universal human values. The Russian Revolution was allegedly a disaster because "it is impossible to achieve justice by placing one class above others." Blinded by Marxist ideology and their own vanity — Volkogonov argues — Lenin, along with Trotsky, created a society that gave rise to Stalin. And if Trotsky had succeeded Lenin? No matter — the fate of Russia would have been the same.

[For Marxist perspectives on Volkogonov's previous work, a biography of Lenin, see "An Unsatisfactory Biography of Lenin" in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, July-August 1995 and the March and April 1996 issues of *Socialist Action* for a more thorough study by Paul Siegel.]

The Trotsky who emerges from Volkogonov's biography is a self-righteous political fanatic, a utopian with bloody hands, a selfish and vainglorious man who is ultimately trapped and killed by the bureaucratic terror machine he did so much to build. To create this image Volkogonov must thoroughly misread and distort Trotsky's work and words, as is obvious from his treatment of the published sources. It brings to mind a remark of Lenin's: "Decades of political struggle taught me to regard honesty in opponents as a rare exception."

Volkogonov is a biographer of questionable authenticity in matters large and small. He claims that Trotsky, as commander of the Red Army during the Russian civil war, traveled on a well-protected special train and was always accompanied by numerous bodyguards who attended to his personal comforts. He quotes without comment a member of Trotsky's secretariat who refers to the supposedly large number of Trotsky's bodyguards and states, "he was something of a coward." Volkogonov contributes to that impression in a number of ways. Only later does he acknowledge that opponents of the revolution targeted Lenin and Trotsky for assassination and that Lenin himself was shot. Hundreds of pages later he mentions that members of Trotsky's family were held as hostages by the counterrevolutionary White army. The biographer draws no conclusions from these facts. Trotsky was invariably close to or present at the front lines; a less biased author would point out that the presence of guards and machine-guns were only sensible precautions in the midst of war. But Volkogonov will not allow for that obvious interpretation.

Volkogonov is also harshly critical of what he takes to be Trotsky's conceit. He quotes a laudatory article written during the Russian civil war and faults Trotsky because "he did not make an effort to curtail such panegyrics in the press which was under his control. Dedication to the revolutionary idea did not prevent him from being vain, from posturing before the mirror of history." But a dozen pages later Trotsky does just as Volkogonov would have him do. When an excessively complimentary article about Trotsky appeared in the military press, Trotsky sent a memo to the editor saying that such writing was "highly inappropriate" and requesting that personalities should be kept out "as far as possible." Volkogonov, far from satisfied, does not reverse or amend his earlier judgment. Instead, he steps up the personal attack. Making an effort to curtail panegyrics in the press only proves that "Trotsky had no need of petty flattery, having long been used to thinking in terms of epochs and continents."

These are, in themselves, small points, but repeated page after page for hundreds of pages, innuendoes and remarks add up to a personal and political condemnation, which are as erroneous as they are malevolent.

In some instances Volkogonov's vicious remarks are nakedly expressed: "Apart from his wife, Trotsky had no close friends. Instead, he had what Stalin would later call 'staff.' This was not the same as domestic staff, but rather a silent, terrified socialist staff who, for the privilege of the slave, for the possibility of being somewhat higher than ordinary mortals, were willing to carry out the leader's every wish. Trotsky was one of those



who laid the foundations of this numerous and essential attribute of the bureaucratic Moloch” (p. 172). Typically, there is no evidence offered for these accusations; no source is cited. The paragraph stands as a terrible slander. Members of Trotsky’s staff were devoted Bolsheviks, and for that reason Stalin made certain that they were jailed, exiled, driven to suicide, or shot outright. Such was the “privilege” they earned.

Sometimes Volkogonov is just sloppy with his sources. Describing a factional dispute and split in the Socialist Workers Party in 1939–1940, Volkogonov refers to “Trotsky’s old personal friends Shachtman and Burnham.” Deutscher had written that Trotsky felt personally close to Shachtman, so Volkogonov takes Burnham, Shachtman’s factional partner, and adds him to the list of personal friends. Never mind that Trotsky referred to Burnham as “a strutting pedant” and an “intellectual snob.” Never mind that Jean van Heijenoort, in his memoir, points out that Deutscher’s assertion of a friendship between Trotsky and Shachtman was erroneous. Volkogonov ignores the most authoritative sources, and therefore he does not merely repeat an error, he compounds it. Another small mistake, perhaps, but it does not inspire confidence in Volkogonov’s ability to sort through documentary evidence.

On other occasions Volkogonov’s methods are more than sloppy; they serve a political purpose as well. Naturally enough, the biography includes an account of Trotsky’s initial meetings with prominent figures in the pre-World War I socialist movement, like Karl Kautsky and Vladimir Lenin. In his description of Trotsky’s meeting with Kautsky, Volkogonov quotes the appropriate passage from Trotsky’s autobiography and then adds: “Trotsky was nonetheless impressed by the sheer scale of Kautsky’s thinking, and when the meeting was over Trotsky felt that everyone there was a head shorter than [Kautsky]” (p. 48). But nowhere does Trotsky say these words, or anything like them. Trotsky’s autobiography, *My Life*, contains no reference to how he felt, despite Volkogonov’s assertions. Nowhere else in Trotsky’s writings on Kautsky does he give additional information about this meeting. Volkogonov cites no book, article, or document for his statement. Perhaps he is speculating, knowing that Russian Marxists held Kautsky in high esteem prior to World War I, but if so, and this is the most charitable interpretation, Volkogonov presents his speculations as fact. Of course, a biographer is free to speculate, and often must do so, but reasoned conjecture should be presented as such, as opinion, not as truth.

The less charitable explanation is the more likely one. The reader will learn later that Volkogonov is bluntly partisan, favoring Kautsky and endorsing his polemic against Lenin, Trotsky, and the Russian Revolution. Kautsky condemned the Bolsheviks for ignoring parliamentary democracy, for resort-

ing to violent revolution and relying on terror to maintain that revolution. Volkogonov frankly supports such criticism: “Rejection of the parliamentary principle, in a country where the first shoots of democracy had barely appeared, would in due course damage the very idea of socialism itself” (p. 67). And, “it has become clear that what happened in 1917 was the most tragic mistake. Before waiting for the aims of the February revolution to be accomplished, the Bolsheviks proclaimed the transition to the socialist phase. In these circumstances it seemed that the revolution could go further only by bringing forward the dictatorship of the proletariat in ugly and terrible forms” (pp. 79–80). Further, he adds, “it has become increasingly clear that one of the greatest delusions of the twentieth century was the notion that it is possible to improve people’s lives by bloody revolution. Among the biggest fanatics were the makers of the Russian revolution...” (p. 234). Perhaps it is enough to realize that Volkogonov entitled one of his chapters “The Madness of Revolution.”

When one rereads Volkogonov’s account of Trotsky’s meeting with his future antagonist, Kautsky, it becomes clear that the words of praise which are put in Trotsky’s mouth actually reflect Volkogonov’s opinion, not Trotsky’s. In a similar vein, Volkogonov gives detailed accounts and specific descriptions of meetings, conversations, etc., for which there is no textual or documentary evidence. Apparently, Volkogonov gives free rein to his imaginative powers. Given the author’s propensity to create, nothing in this book should be regarded as reliable unless there is solid corroboration.

A fair-minded reader might object to what appears to be nitpicking in the preceding examples. After all, no one expects that a biography of approximately five hundred pages will be free of error, and Trotsky himself, the partisan author of *The History of the Russian Revolution*, would have been the first to point out that objectivity in the writing of history is a fiction. But Trotsky also, to refer again to the *History*, warns against “treacherous impartiality.” With these words he could have been anticipating the present account of his life, though the impartiality which Volkogonov claims for his work is only a thin veil for a highly subjective assault on Trotsky, the Russian Revolution, and Marxism.

One might add: a subjective and deeply ignorant attack on Marxism as well. Volkogonov does not understand socialism, permanent revolution, the Left Opposition, Stalinism, or the Fourth International. In short, Volkogonov does not at all understand Trotsky. Worse still, he believes this ignorance makes him qualified to produce a biography.

To discuss all of these programmatic topics properly and with sufficient detail to reveal the extent of Volkogonov’s errors, it would be necessary to write an *Anti-Volkogonov*. For that task, one would need the patience of an angel.

Instead, a single example may suffice. Here is how the concept of permanent revolution is explained:

one of its most important features [is] the stress on the totality of the revolutionary process, in time, scale, aims and means. This totality, however, ignored the objective conditions: whether the shift was necessary, whether the masses were ready for more activity and so on. At its basis was the idea of revolution as the highest good. It represented the primacy of the subjective over the objective, revolution for the sake of revolution. Mankind, the individual, the nation and the masses remained somewhere on the sidelines, or were at best a means for achieving this total revolution. [p. 198]

In case the reference to the subjective was at all unclear, Volkogonov becomes more explicit: “Everything connected with the theory of permanent revolution reveals Trotsky not only as a theorist but above all as a personality... he never ceased to advocate revolution” (p. 201). Trotsky’s analysis and elaboration of permanent revolution — an essential and enduring contribution to twentieth century Marxism — is reduced to some personal quirk. This is the sort of explanation that accounts for nothing.

Every significant idea of Marxism is treated with a similar degree of superficiality and incomprehension. Volkogonov’s understanding of political theory never goes any deeper than what he reveals in his exposition of permanent revolution. From him there is nothing to learn.

The reader could turn to almost any page in this biography and encounter one or more examples of the numerous problems only briefly cited here. Open the book at random, and one may come upon something like the following: “the cult of Lenin... may well have had its origins in Trotsky’s own writings” (p. 433) — an absurd claim. Volkogonov’s work is so riddled with error, large and small, as to render his biography worthless. It is one thing for a biographer to oppose Marxism, in part or in sum, or to oppose revolution. A reader could still benefit from that writer’s research. A serious and honest critic deserves serious study. But Volkogonov is not that critic, nor is he a trustworthy scholar.

In a famous essay Francis Bacon commented, “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested...” And some half-baked books are best thrown away, untasted. Twenty years ago, George Breitman wrote a review for *Intercontinental Press* entitled, “Two Worthless Books About Trotsky.” Volkogonov, despite the unique access he enjoyed to Soviet files, has merely added another volume to that unfortunate list of worthless books.

Meanwhile, the English translation and publication of Pierre Broué’s biography of Trotsky, whenever it is done, promises to be a book worth waiting for, one to chew and digest. □



# How Other Reviewers Responded to Volkogonov's *Trotsky*

by Joe Auciello

Reading the reviews of Dmitri Volkogonov's *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary* is a dismal, startling, and eye-opening experience. The biography is so demonstrably incompetent, so unrelievedly derivative and shoddy, that one would expect it to be savaged in the press or ignored — killed by silence. On the contrary, the book has been welcomed. Reviewers have showered praise on the author and his biography in proportion to their condemnation of the subject of the biography, Trotsky himself. Once this fact is understood, all the pieces fall into place. Every commodity, after all, contains a use-value.

The most notable exception is the earliest review, published by Daniel Singer in *The Nation* of March 25. Given the articles that were to follow, Singer's analysis can almost be described as "honorable." He dismissed Volkogonov's work in no uncertain terms, "The new book reads like a crib by not the brightest of pupils," and he refers to the biography's "lack of depth" and "simplistic discussion." Most importantly, he points out: "The main drawback of the book...is the absence of any social background." As for the secrets uncovered from the Soviet archives: "What is important is not new and what is new is relatively unimportant." He concludes, rightly, that Volkogonov is "a pedestrian scribbler...a converted Stalinist hack." Unfortunately, Singer's critique had little or no influence on the other reviewers.

In a reactionary magazine like *The American Spectator* the ideological agenda was most blatant. They gleefully ran a 3-page review recounting the Volkogonov version of Trotsky's life — and death. "The details of the murder are grisly, though on balance it is difficult to feel sorry for Trotsky: he got no worse than he gave...he had presided over some of the most barbarous treatment ever meted out to political enemies, or even to those who were insufficiently suffused with his own ideological ideals." *The American Spectator* is most pleased with the biography for its potential to undermine "the enduring fascination for Trotsky on the part of Western leftists," for the belief "that had [Trotsky] won the struggle for power after Lenin's death in the early twenties, Russia would have evolved into some form of social democracy," a pernicious thought, thereby "absolving the Bolshevik revolution of responsibility for its consequences." Never mind that for *The American Spectator* the peak of radicalism extends no higher than social democracy. The main thing is to render Trotsky's ideas as "nonsense." Published in the March issue, the review is entitled, "Eternally Revolting."

The professional or trade publications like *Booklist*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *Library Journal*, which help to determine which books are purchased for local public libraries, appear to be impressed by the sheer volume of Volkogonov's work, as if size were an indication of literary worth. These reviewers find that the new book "frequently overshadows" and serves as a "counterpoint" to Isaac Deutscher's "hagiographic" trilogy in this "milestone portrait" that solves a problem previously unrecognized: "the paucity of reliable works on the enigmatic Trotsky."

Theodore Draper wrote the best of the bad reviews, a typical *New York Review of Books* piece, overly long and politely tendentious. He achieves a kind of spurious balance, criticizing minor weaknesses while approving major ones. In his article, Draper generally accepts Volkogonov's account of Trotsky's life and of the Russian Revolution. Typically, Draper asserts that Trotsky's loss of political power to Stalin was the result of the "Leninism which first served [Trotsky's] ambitions and then betrayed him." Volkogonov locates the source of the Trotsky-Stalin conflict primarily in personalities. Draper rightly dismisses this theory as superficial, but, as indicated by the preceding quotation, he rejects one error only to espouse another.

Draper is not really roused to indict Leninism, though. He would much prefer to see the whole topic just go away. Before beginning his essay proper, he twice tells readers that Trotsky has long ceased to be relevant: "To most people, Trotsky has become an increasingly dim memory, and his prophecies, whatever they were, belong to a distant age..." and "those who are under the age of fifty have had little occasion for thinking about him." That, of course, depends on the nature of one's thoughts. Those who try to prepare for revolution in America — as fantastical as that idea may seem to some today — cannot dispense so easily with Trotsky and his political legacy.

Volkogonov's loudest cheerleaders and Trotsky's most resolute opponents take the form of a troika of Harvard professors: Marshall Goldman, Adam Ulam, and Richard Pipes, who have published reviews in the *Boston Globe*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times Book Review*, respectively. It's as if they are in a weird contest to determine who can praise the book most extravagantly. Goldman call Volkogonov's work, "bold and daring...brilliant...it provides an essential understanding of the origins of the Soviet dictatorship...a classic volume...adds enormously to what we thought we knew." Not to

be outdone, Ulam claims, "*Trotsky* is a most perceptive study...Volkogonov has performed a great service...[he] deserves a place of honor in the ranks of Russian historians." Pipes compares Volkogonov favorably to Deutscher and finds that the "indispensable" new biography, in part "both original and fascinating," provides "a far more realistic portrait" of Trotsky.

The cause of these lavish and undue compliments is not difficult to fathom. This chorus of academicians is delighted to find in Volkogonov an endorsement of cold-war demonology of Bolshevism, the central thesis of their life's work. The idea, by now numbingly familiar, is concisely stated one more time by Adam Ulam, "Though not endowed with Stalin's sadism, Trotsky was equally authoritarian in his thinking and ruthless toward the enemies of communism. He cannot be absolved of responsibility for setting Russia on a course that led to Stalinism — any more than Lenin can." Hence the appeal of Volkogonov to Western academia and bourgeois culture in general. That such a noxious work as Volkogonov's is so well received says more about ideology than biography. Reading their comments is a little easier if one recalls Trotsky's observation in a letter to Wendelin Thomas in 1937, "The revolutionists are always the most slandered."

The most startling example of slander — a unique instance — appears in the article by Richard Pipes published in the *New York Times Book Review*. According to Pipes:

Trotsky and Lev Sedov...frequently said and wrote that Stalin's regime had to be overthrown and Stalin himself assassinated. These were absurdly irresponsible claims...And yet it turns out from the documents cited by Volkogonov that these empty threats, quickly communicated to the Kremlin, struck terror into the heart of the paranoid tyrant. Stalin became consumed by the idea of getting rid of his rival: his orders to "liquidate" Trotsky...were not, as previously believed, primarily motivated by a yearning for revenge, but rather by the desire to save himself and his regime. The obsessive charges of "Trotskyism" levied against the defendants in the show trials of 1936-1938 and the bloodbath of 1937, it now emerges, were inspired by an irrational yet genuine fear of internal subversion. To have demonstrated this is a major contribution of Volkogonov.

As Trotsky remarked in a not too dissimilar context, "You have to overcome a feeling of disgust even to refute such falsifications." Pipes's argument against Trotsky, which resurrects the main charges of the Moscow Trials, is an outrageous accusation. It is especially significant that Pipes, an outstanding figure in the academic world, the author of encyclopedic



volumes on the Russian Revolution, published his comments in the *New York Times*, the “paper of record” in the United States.

For a “scholar” such as Pipes to make such statements — to claim that Trotsky and his son called for Stalin’s assassination and provoked “genuine fear of internal subversion” — indicates sloppy, unprofessional work, at best. First, the argument itself is untrue, as was shown decades ago in the Dewey Commission hearings, published in 1938 in the book *Not Guilty*. (Trotsky’s testimony was also made available as *The Case of Leon Trotsky*.) Second, and most important, far from being his “major contribution,” Volkogonov does not make or defend this accusation in the biography. In fact, Volkogonov explicitly refutes the very point that Pipes has him asserting.

Volkogonov does cite a memorandum by the NKVD informer, Mark Zborowski, which claims that Lev Sedov said, “Stalin has to be killed.” Volkogonov considers several possible explanations for this report, suggesting even that the entire document may be a fabrication, and concludes: “Whatever the explanation, there is not a single shred of evidence that the Trotskyists carried out or prepared for any high-profile act of terrorism (emphasis added).” In other words, Volkogonov demonstrates precisely the opposite of what Pipes claims he is proving.

Furthermore, according to Volkogonov, “the order to annihilate [Trotsky] physically had been given long before” the Moscow trials. Nothing in Volkogonov’s biography justifies the charge that Stalin held a “genuine fear of internal subversion.” The depth of this slander can be gauged by the fact that no Communist Party in the world today would make, or repeat, this accusation which was taken as gospel by Communists, and many others, in the 1930s.

How, then, can Pipes’s statement be accounted for? One possibility is that he did not read, or did not read carefully, what Volkogonov wrote in this biography and instead relied on what Volkogonov apparently published eight years ago. Walter Laquer, in *Stalin: The Glasnost Revelations*, writes, “According to the new mythology that made its appearance under glasnost, much of the blame for the terror, the show trials, and the purges has to go to Trotsky because he called for the physical elimination of Stalin.” Laquer cites as a source for this mythology an article by Volkogonov in the Soviet literary magazine *Oktiabr*, No. 12, December 1988.

Laquer, no friend of Trotsky or Marxism, clearly refutes this assertion. *The Revolution Betrayed*, he writes, “could not possibly have driven Stalin to his ‘desperate decision’... Trotsky never called for Stalin’s physical elimination, nor did he engage in any activities to this end.” Is Pipes unfamiliar with Laquer’s work? If Pipes did rely on Volkogonov’s older, discredited, statements, could he not himself have analyzed their authenticity, as Laquer did, instead of repeating them thoughtlessly? If Pipes is not capable of such analysis, couldn’t he at least have noticed what Volkogonov actually wrote in his biography?

Pipes has also failed to take notice of Trotsky’s writings. Laquer’s exoneration of Trotsky would be obvious to anyone familiar with Trotsky’s work. The great Russian revolutionary criticized individual terrorism again and again, in article after article, year after year. We will cite only a few of many examples. In 1934 Trotsky wrote:

But if Marxists categorically condemned individual terrorism... even when the shots were directed against the agents of the czarist government and of capitalist exploitation, they will even more relentlessly condemn and reject the criminal adventurism of terrorist acts directed against the bureaucratic representatives of the first workers’ state in history... *Individual terrorism is in its very essence bureaucratism turned inside out...* Communist terrorists, as an ideological grouping, are of the same flesh and blood as the Stalinist bureaucracy.<sup>1</sup>

Returning to this idea again in 1936, Trotsky explained:

The Soviet bureaucracy, which could also be called the Soviet aristocracy, has certainly become the greatest social danger to the country’s development. But it can only be replaced by the conscious vanguard of the working class in a mass political struggle in the country... The press in Moscow speaks in every case of the alleged preparation of an attempt against Stalin... In reality Stalin is only the representative of the ruling caste... The elimination of Stalin would not change much. Molotov, or someone else, would fulfill the same function with just about the same success if the masses remained passive and dispersed.<sup>2</sup>

In 1937 Trotsky directly addressed the nature of his personal relation to and feelings about Stalin: “My standpoint does not allow me to identify the real stature of the man with the giant shadow it casts on the screen of the bureaucracy. I believe I am right in saying I have never hated Stalin so highly as to be able to hate him.”<sup>3</sup>

Writing a little more than a year later, knowing that Stalin had arranged the murder of his son, Trotsky speaks more angrily, but never departs from the foundation of Marxist principle.

What political or moral satisfaction for the proletariat [could] be given by the murder of Cain-Dzhughashvili [Stalin], who can be replaced with ease by the next bureaucratic “genius” in turn? To the extent that the personal fate of Stalin interests us at all, we can only wish that he will live to see the destruction of his system.<sup>4</sup>

Similar ideas are to be found in *The Revolution Betrayed*, the work which supposedly gave Stalin his “genuine fear of internal subversion” and terror. If Stalin had actually read *The Revolution Betrayed*, he would have found no justification for terror or assassination; rather, he would have read a denunciation of such methods. “In themselves, terrorist acts are least of all capable of overthrowing a Bonapartist oligarchy... Individual terror is a weapon of despairing or impatient individuals, belonging most frequently to the younger generation of the bureaucracy itself.”

Of course, Trotsky was no pacifist. As a Marxist he would never raise nonviolence to the level of a political principle. But neither did he advocate bloody retribution against the Stalinists. Trotsky, instead, as is well known, argued for a political revolution: “the bureaucracy can be removed only by revolutionary force. And, as always, there will be fewer victims the more bold and decisive is the attack.” Even a brief reading of Trotsky’s writings shows that there is no evidence for the claim that his works provoked Stalin to purge and murder members of the Communist Party and stage the Moscow Trials.

The most effective antidote to the nonsense and distortion written about Trotsky is to read Trotsky himself. Most of those who hold this magazine in their hands are familiar with Trotsky’s works. For those who are not, now that anthologies are out of print, a good place to begin is the autobiography, *My Life*, and then perhaps the Pathfinder edition of *The History of the Russian Revolution*. Daniel Singer, who in *The Nation* wrote the one major review critical of Volkogonov, suggests, “If you want to learn something about Trotsky the revolutionary, first in sympathy then in conflict with his times, you must turn to Deutscher” — referring to the biographical trilogy *Prophet Armed*, *Prophet Unarmed*, *Prophet Outcast*. From these works the real significance and stature of Trotsky will emerge cleanly and clearly. □

May 1, 1996

1. “The Stalinist Bureaucracy and the Kirov Assassination” (December 28, 1934), in *Writings of Leon Trotsky [1934–35]*, New York: Pathfinder Press.

2. “Individual Terror and Mass Terror” (August 20, 1936), in *Writings... [1935–36]*.

3. “Hatred of Stalin” (January 4, 1937), in *Writings... [1936–37]*.

4. “Cain-Dzhughashvili Goes the Whole Way” (March 17, 1938), in *Writings... [1937–38]*.



# Capitalist Politics as Pulp Fiction

*Primary Colors, a Novel of Politics* by "Anonymous." Copyright 1996 by Machiavelliana. 366 pages, published by Random House, New York, \$24.00.

Reviewed by Tom Barrett

The author's note which precedes the text of *Primary Colors* reads: "Several well-known people — journalists mostly — make cameo appearances in these pages, but this is a work of fiction and the usual rules apply. None of the other characters are real. None of these events ever happened." The reason this book has caused a stir, especially inside the Capital Beltway, is that the author and publisher have done all they can to convince the book-buying public that the fiction is thinly disguised fact and that *all* the characters are real. Cynical political horse-trading and casual bed-hopping are considered to be sure-fire formulas for best-selling books and top-rated television, and this book has plenty of both. And it has sold well.

The plot centers around the governor of a "small southern state" who is seeking the Democratic presidential nomination. His name is Jack Stanton (get it?). He has little ambition of his own to be president — rather, that ambition belongs to his wife Susan, who says of him: "Jack Stanton could also be a great man...if he weren't such a faithless, thoughtless, disorganized, undisciplined shit." It is she who makes the campaign decisions — she determines the schedule, the staff, the agenda, all of the nuts-and-bolts organizational details which in reality have as much to do with who wins elections as issues and personality. In fact, part of the value of *Primary Colors* is its demonstration that the real issues which affect our lives are in fact of secondary importance in capitalist electoral politics.

The story's first-person narrator is a young activist named Henry Burton, the son of a white mother and African American father. His preacher grandfather had been the most prominent leader of the civil rights movement and had been assassinated (not exactly Martin Luther King, Jr., whose children are today in their thirties, but close enough). In spite of the reverence with which people speak of his grandfather, Henry realizes that he had been no saint and that his activism had been a contributing factor in his family's dysfunctionality.

Henry has little enthusiasm for Stanton or his campaign, but he is virtually drafted onto the staff by Stanton himself, whose personal magnetism is for all intents and purposes irresistible. Henry's first encounter with Stanton is in Harlem, where Stanton is campaigning at an adult literacy center. His great talent is what Democrat and Republican staffers call "retail politics" — one-on-one with the

voters, shaking hands, listening (or pretending to listen) to constituents, and "pushing the right buttons" — saying those words which persuade people that the candidate is genuinely concerned about them and will make a sincere attempt to improve their lives. It is this type of political campaigning that Jack Stanton does better than anyone else, not only in the campaign in progress, but in recent memory.

Part of the fun of *Primary Colors* is guessing who the characters are in real life. For example, Stanton's early undeclared opponent — who drops out before he even enters — is Orlando Ozio, the governor of New York, whose chief political adviser is his son Jimmy. A no-brainer: Mario Cuomo was governor of New York until his defeat in the 1994 election, and during the last decade or so of his political career his chief political adviser was his son Andrew. Luther Charles, an opportunistic African American leader, once associated with Henry's grandfather, is clearly Jesse Jackson. Lawrence Harris, Stanton's declared opponent, is a Massachusetts senator, who suffers from heart disease — he succumbs to it shortly after winning the New Hampshire primary, unlike his real-life model Paul Tsongas, who is still living.

## The "Character" Issue

Jack Stanton has voracious — though not terribly particular — appetites. He eats anything that doesn't eat him first, and if any campaign staffer leaves a scrap of food on a plate, Stanton will finish it off, just like a big friendly dog. He — or rather, his wife — is constantly battling his weight.

The [Governor's] Mansion was smelling of popcorn that night when I arrived for the meeting. I went to the kitchen, where Susan and young Jackie [the Stantons' son] were emptying one bag and sticking another in the microwave. ... "No more doughnuts," she said, carrying a bowl of bleached white popcorn over to the counter. "This is now the official snack food of this campaign. Henry, you eat this stuff — you lose weight. It has negative calories." She put her hand on my forearm, kissed my cheek. "Have a taste."

It smelled like popcorn but tasted like chewed-over paper. "You think he'll go for this?" I asked.

"He'll go for anything," she said, "if you provide it in sufficient quantity."

Stanton's sexual appetites match his culinary appetites. He hits on practically every woman he meets. Not all consent, and he is no rapist, but the threat of an exploding scandal is never far away. Olivia "Libby" Holden, a loud, overbearing — and probably completely fictional — woman, joins the campaign to track down and defuse potential sexual land mines left behind by Stanton's conquests.

"Our Jackie has done some pretty stupid things in his life. He's poked his pecker in some sorry trash bins. We gotta stop *them* before they stop us. We gotta CRUSH 'EM, then sweep 'em up. From now on, you can call me — THE DUSTBUSTER!" She smiled, wickedly, crazily, then leaned over and took my chin in her hands and stared me very close in the face. "You know, honey-chile, I'm stronger than dirt."

Holden uses hardball methods to silence a Gennifer Flowers-type character named Cashmere McLeod. When Stanton's campaign is seriously threatened by a popular opponent, she digs up sufficient dirt on him that he must abandon his campaign. Holden has a history of mental illness, and ultimately she succumbs to it, as did the Clintons' close friend and associate Vincent Foster.

The campaign staffpeople in *Primary Colors* routinely engage in casual liaisons. Even Susan Stanton comes to Henry Burton's bedroom — she is no more worthy of canonization than her husband. It is not Jack Stanton's affairs but his lack of discretion that gets him into trouble.

In reality, the reporters — who are called "scorps" (short for "scorpions") by the campaign staffpeople in *Primary Colors* — are far more interested in sexual scandal than are the American people, both in the book and in the real world. As the infidelities of past presidents, including Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson, have come to light there has been remarkably little excitement about them, and even less reassessment of those capitalist leaders' place in history. Very possibly Gary Hart could have survived the Donna Rice scandal in 1984 if he had worked around it in the way that the Clintons worked around Gennifer Flowers's allegations. (In *Primary Colors*, Cashmere McLeod's accusations are actually false.)

It was during the height of the Victorian era that the most sensational sex scandal in American politics took place. It involved the 1834 Democratic candidate for president, Grover Cleveland, who was the father of an illegitimate daughter. (He financially supported the child to adulthood.) Supporters of Republican candidate James G. Blaine chanted, "Ma, Ma, where's my pa? Gone to the White House, ha ha ha!" Democrats responded with, "Blaine, Blaine, James G. Blaine — continental liar from the state of Maine!" Clearly, American politics has changed little over the decades.

The voters were much more concerned with Blaine's dirty dealings with the railroad robber barons than with Cleveland's bedroom indiscretions, and Cleveland became the first Democrat elected to the presidency since before the Civil War. Women, of course, did not have the right to vote in 1884, but,



considering the significant preference of women voters for Clinton in 1992, it is questionable whether that might have made a difference in the Cleveland-Blaine contest.

### The Issue of Leadership

In the last analysis, after all the junk food is consumed, after all the clandestine lovers have exchanged parting kisses, after all the votes have been counted, *Primary Colors* presents Jack Stanton as a favorable character, as a genuine leader. He is well informed on the issues and, as mentioned previously, he is a master of "retail politics." With capable staff members, including his wife, to handle public relations/advertising, fund-raising, scheduling, and press work, he is a formidable candidate, a genuine contender for the presidency.

But the whole thing is backwards. It's about manipulating public debate in the interests of promoting one man's career, rather than an individual taking political action in the interests of the people as a whole (let alone the working people as a class). As the American people demonstrated when they elected Clinton in 1992, when they are concerned with whether they will have jobs or not, when they worry whether they can provide for their families even if they do have jobs, they have little interest in whether or not a candidate inhaled marijuana smoke or if he had an extramarital fling. A politician's personal life has absolutely zero effect on a working person's standard of living — on jobs, wages, health insurance, housing, environmental pollution, unsafe working condi-

tions, public education, or anything else which affects our children or ourselves.

What Bill Clinton did in 1992 — and what he appears to be doing again in 1996 — is to set the agenda for the election. He defined the issues and controlled the debate, as the fictional Jack Stanton does in *Primary Colors*. This is the key to political leadership, and unfortunately, it is the political representatives of the bourgeoisie who are today defining the terms of political discourse in nearly every industrialized country (and most underdeveloped ones as well).

The anonymous author of *Primary Colors* cannot imagine politics any other way. But we can. Even the capitalist constitution cannot exclude workers' political representatives from injecting our political agenda into the process. By exercising leadership and practicing "retail politics" — going to the working people where they are, talking and listening to them one by one, labor politicians

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## Building the Labor Party: "This Is the Time — And We're Going to Do It!"

### Continued from page 45 Talk to Our Neighbors, Our Relatives, Men, Women...

But I want you to know it's very, very important that we not just come to a meeting or say I'll be there. We've got to talk to our neighbors, we've got to talk to our relatives, we've got to talk to the guys in the shop, and we've got to talk to the women, and tell the women: "You've played a role before in history, and you can do it again."

I understand your meeting last night — about Karen Silkwood and what she attempted to do in this union — was a very, very beautiful and dramatic meeting. And the women can play a very important role. And we've got to have more men coming with their wives, with their relatives, with their sisters, with their daughters. And we're going to make it.

And now, I would like to just say a couple of words to some people that I haven't had the chance to work with in most of my experience. I would like to say: *Bienvenidos a*

*nuestros hermanos i hermanas hispanicos/as. Es muy importante para nosotros trabajar [together -conjunto, para] construir nuestro propio partido politico. [Applause.]*

And together we're going to make this country into the kind of country that we've always wanted and worked for. And it is not only for us alone. It is for our children, for our future, and for the very future of humanity — when you stop to think about what's happening in the world today.

And we can do it.

And not only that, but you're going to find that when we get to working together, we're going to be sisters and brothers like we were when we went out to face the cops and face the corporation's agents, who had guns and rifles and fire bombs, tear gas, all of these things — we felt like we were sisters and brothers when we got out there on those lines.

And again we're going to do it. We're going to feel very close to each other. And it's one of the greatest experiences you can have. From what I have had out of life I remember

can redefine the terms of politics in this country. That process has already begun. □

April 21, 1996

most the rich memories these people gave me. People who had no idea that they were going to come out and build a union, but were they proud of their activity!

And it was my pleasure to have worked with them. And it will be our pleasure together to again get that kind of solidarity.

And then the words of the traditional union song, Solidarity — those words are going to come back to us:

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold,  
Greater than the might of armies magnified a thousandfold,  
And we can bring forth a new world from the ashes of the old.  
For the union makes us strong.

And that's how our days are going to be, working together. And we're going to work hard. And we're going to make it. And Tony Mazzocchi is going to be one of the honored people in our movement. And we're going to prove that he has been right. And that each and every one of you has been right. □

1. Welcome to our Hispanic brothers and sisters. It's very important for us to work together, to build our own political party.



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### Who We Are

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published by an independent collective of U.S. socialists who are in fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International, a worldwide organization of revolutionary socialists.

Supporters of this magazine may be involved in different socialist groups and/or in a broad range of working class struggles and protest movements in the U.S. These include unions and other labor organizations, women's rights groups, antiracist organizations, coalitions opposed to U.S. military intervention, gay and lesbian rights campaigns, civil liberties and human rights efforts. We support similar activities in all countries and participate in the global struggle of working people and their allies. Many of our activities are advanced through collaboration with other supporters of the Fourth International in countries around the world.

What we have in common is our commitment to the Fourth International's critical-minded and revolutionary Marxism, which in the twentieth century is represented by such figures as V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leon Trotsky. We also identify with the tradition of American Trotskyism represented by James P. Cannon and others. We favor the creation of a revolutionary working-class party, which can only emerge through the conscious efforts of many who are involved in the struggles of working people and the oppressed and who are dedicated to revolutionary socialist perspectives.

Through this magazine we seek to clarify the history, theory and program of the Fourth

International and the American Trotskyist tradition, discussing their application to the class struggle internationally and here in the United States. This vital task must be undertaken if we want to forge a political party in this country capable of bringing an end to the domination of the U.S. imperialist ruling class, establishing a working people's democracy and socialist society based on human need instead of private greed, in which the free development of each person becomes possible.

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is independent of any political organization. Not all U.S. revolutionaries who identify with the Fourth International are in a common organization. Not all of them participate in the publication of this journal. Supporters of this magazine are committed to comradely discussion and debate as well as practical political cooperation which can facilitate eventual organizational unity of all Fourth Internationalists in the United States. At the same time, we want to help promote a broad recomposition of a class-conscious working class movement and, within this, a revolutionary socialist regroupment, in which perspectives of revolutionary Marxism, the Fourth International, and American Trotskyism will play a vital role.

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* will publish materials generally consistent with these perspectives, although it will seek to offer *discussion articles* providing different points of view within the revolutionary socialist spectrum. Signed articles do not necessarily express the views of anyone other than the author.



# Why We Need a Worker-Based Political Party in the United States

Reprinted from a Labor Party Advocates flyer

**1. Taxation policies benefit the wealthy and corporations.** For more than 30 years, members of Congress and presidents — Democrats and Republicans alike — have enacted one law after another to create two tax systems: one for the rich and powerful and another one for the rest of us. For example, in 1953 millionaires paid 49% of their income in taxes (combined federal income tax and social security); in 1991, they paid 27%. In 1953, middle income families paid taxes at a rate of 11%; in 1991 they paid 18%. In addition, in the 1950s the corporate share of total U.S. taxes collected averaged 39%, while individuals contributed 61% of the total. By the 1980s, the corporate share had fallen to 17%, while individuals' share had risen to 83%.

**2. Corporate profits are booming and we're out of work!** With profits at an all-time high, AT&T laid off 40,000 workers in January of 1996. On the heels of record first quarter '95 profits, Mobil laid off 4,700 people. Wall Street rewards companies for cutting jobs.

**3. Real wages are falling.** In 1973, production and non-supervisory workers (that's 80% of all workers) averaged

\$10.81 an hour. By 1993, the average fell to \$9 an hour. That's a 17% drop in earnings!

**4. We're working longer hours to make ends meet.** The U.S. business strategy is to use contingent workers or overtime to avoid the cost of hiring and training new workers. At a time when nearly 9 million people can't find jobs, other Americans are putting in the most overtime since the government started keeping records.

**5. The corporate elite profit at our expense.** In 1980 the average CEO pay was 41 times the average worker's wages. By 1993, CEOs paid themselves 149 times the average worker.

**6. Jobs for middle-income Americans have been destroyed.** The economy produced about 7 million new jobs since 1988 — but almost all of these new jobs are either at the very top of the income scale or at the very bottom.

**7. Manpower is now the country's largest employer.** Temporary jobs expanded by 211% between 1970 and 1990, compared with 54% for all employment.

**8. The rich are really rich.** In 1989, the richest 10% of families held 80% of all nonresidential real estate; 91% of all business assets; 85% of all stocks; and 94% of all bonds.

**9. Money talks in electoral politics.** Many different individuals, companies, and PACs gave money to congressional campaigns in 1991-92, but business outspent other groups by a wide margin, investing more than \$295 million in its favorite candidates.

**10. Health insurance, a pension — what's that?** More and more workers are saying goodbye to benefits as employers eliminate health and retirement benefits. Two-thirds of the private sector workforce (over 60 million people) have no private pension plan. Half of all Americans have no retirement plan. More than half of the 40 million uninsured Americans are employed.

**11. On NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], Clinton bought the votes to cost us 300,000 jobs.** Before the peso crisis in 1993-94, we suffered a net loss of 10,000 jobs. After the peso devaluation, it is conservatively estimated that 300,000 U.S. jobs have been lost as of 1995. □

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