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AMERICAN LENINISM IN THE 1970s

RADICAL AMERICA

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Winter 1977-1978

SEXUAL POLITICS
& THE NEW RIGHT

REMEMBERING TET
WORKERS' COUNCILS



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Photo by Marc Ribaud

INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, when Radical America was begun, few of us anticipated our current political situation. We were then in the midst of a broad progressive upsurge, formed by the civil rights and anti-war movements, an expanding economy, and a decade of judicial liberalism. We were oriented primarily to the political struggles in the Third World, and to the fight against racism and imperialism at home. And we expected that the Left would continue to grow stronger year by year, just as it had been doing for the last decade or so.

The articles in this issue reflect a very different political situation. The orientation of socialists today is focussed primarily on working-class issues and the prospects for socialism in the advanced capitalist countries. And today it is the feminist movement, and not the civil rights or anti-imperialist movements, that is the strongest progressive force. One of the most important differences between our situation and that of ten years ago, however, is that today it is the Right and not the Left that is on the offensive.

As Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter show in *Sex, Family and the New Right*, the Right is attacking on a terrain that used to be our strength. The brunt of this Right-wing offensive is aimed at "quality of life" issues. Today, for example, it is the Right that is addressing issues of sexuality, the role of women and the family, the importance of community and opposition to bureaucratic government. Gordon and Hunter see in this Right-wing resurgence not only a backlash against the women's and gay liberation movements, but also a reassertion of patriarchal forms of family structure and male dominance. After analyzing the nature of the Right's offensive, Gordon and Hunter go on to examine why

the Left has been woefully inadequate in its response to the Right. They argue that the economism so prevalent in much of the Left today has undermined its ability to counter the Right-wing offensive. Finally, they stress the importance of two major contributions of the women's liberation movement — the recognition that "the personal is the political", and the development of political forms such as consciousness-raising groups and self-help projects that can put that recognition into practice.

We think there is an important connection between the weakening of the Left in the 1970's and the failure to address cultural or sexual issues in most political work. While the decline of the Left was the result of many pressures in the early 1970's, an important consequence of this decline has been the growing hegemony of a Leninist orthodoxy within that part of the Left oriented to working-class organizing, and a simultaneous proliferation of Leninist organizations, both local and national. As the mass movements of a decade ago retreated, the great pressure on the organized left has been to search among the different traditions of orthodoxy for the key to solving our current impasse. Traditional Marxism-Leninism, however, is generally silent on cultural and sexual issues; or worse, has lent support to conservative tendencies within the Left which would suppress feminism or cultural concerns in deference to an imaginary working class for whom such issues do not exist.

The growth of the Leninist Left in the 1970's is the subject of *American Leninism in the 1970s* by Jim O'Brien. The main purpose of this article is to present an outline history of the development of the major Leninist organizations in the 1970's, and an initial assessment of the successes and failures of these organizations. It develops for the first time an overall picture of the growth and

transformation of both the Marxist-Leninist organizations which emerged out of the New Left in the late 1960's, and those older Leninist organizations which were partially influenced by this radical upsurge. One important contribution of this article is to demystify the growth and proliferation of today's "Marxism-Leninism", to clarify the historical development and accomplishments of these organizations, and to assess their contributions to the growth of socialism not in the realm of doctrine, but in terms of their actual practice.

Here we would like to state some of our preliminary conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the Leninist Left. Many of the new organizations were formed as part of the turn toward the working class on the part of many New Leftists in the late 1960's. In fact, Radical America was founded to support this developing working-class orientation. We think that some of the trade union work undertaken by members of Leninist parties has been quite important, as Jim O'Brien points out and as Matt Rinaldi illustrated in his article on the Teamsters for a Democratic Union in *Radical America* vol. 11, no. 4 (July-August, 1977). Another strength of the Leninist Left has been their emphasis on the necessity of digging in for the long haul in socialist organizing, in contrast to the attitude prevalent during the late 1960's that political change could come relatively easily and quickly. While the Leninist Left by no means has a monopoly on "seriousness", their stress on long-term commitment has helped to place this issue at center stage for the Left as a whole.

In turning away from the politics of the New Left, however, the Leninist Left also seems to have rejected most of the cultural insights of the New Left, which had been so important. The cultural barrenness of the Leninist Left, and its general failure to integrate feminism, personal issues, or sexual matters into its theory

and practice, has made political activity or involvement unattractive and has repelled many people from becoming involved in socialism. Furthermore, this rejection of "cultural issues" by the Leninist Left has helped to make their politics a thin shadow of the socialist theory and practice that we need.

A particularly debilitating influence of the Leninist Left within our movement has been to make debate on revolutionary theory a scholastic and abstract exercise in the recitation of selected texts by Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, or Mao. One consequence of this has been to discourage creative thinking about what is unique or different in our current political situation, and to encourage the belief that the answers to our current impasse can be found in a proper reading and evaluation of writings which reflect vastly different historical situations. The deadening pressures of this orthodoxy not only support an idealist and ahistorical revolutionary theory, but also in practice lead to a lack of organizational democracy, as the ability to dominate study groups and political debate on socialist theory becomes a requirement for revolutionary leadership.

A closely related problem has been the evaluation of foreign revolutionary movements and Communist states by the Leninist Left. Emprisoned by their own categories, the Leninist organizations are fiercely divisive almost in direct proportion to their loyalty toward, or antagonism against, particular foreign regimes. The damage which the uncritical adherence of the traditional Communist Parties to the Soviet Union has created within the Left is well known; and the attempt to create an anti-revisionist center adhering to China's foreign and domestic policies has foundered pathetically in the sudden shifts in Chinese foreign policy during Mao's last years and as a result of the growing

conservatism in the year since his death. Some organizations following or influenced by the Trotskyist tradition, on the other hand, have sometimes criticized the socialist content of Third World liberation struggles in a simplistic manner. What each of these tendencies has in common is the attempt to force the problems raised by our present political impasse into a revolutionary model developed for another time and place, thereby increasing sectarianism and divisiveness in our movement.

Perhaps the biggest influence of the organized Leninist Left has been its insistence that the immediate task before us is to form a revolutionary party, and that the kind of revolutionary party we need is that created by Lenin in pre-revolutionary Russia. This fixation with the "Leninist" party is, of course, closely connected with an emphasis on orthodoxy, as each Leninist group attempts to achieve hegemony within the socialist Left, just as Lenin's party did in the course of the Russian Revolution. While there are different views among the Radical America editors about the ultimate usefulness of the Leninist vanguard party concept, it is clear to us that the particular party form chosen by Lenin was closely related to political conditions quite different from those facing us today. If organization is to mean anything more than a linking of socialists together for greater coordination and effectiveness, we must find a way for it to grow organically out of the struggles of mass movements. Finally, the Leninist emphasis on "building the party" has been responsible for a sorry record of destructive intervention by Leninist organizations into mass movements and non-party socialist organizations. Viewing the mass movement as valuable only if under "correct" leadership, the competition of Leninist organizations to provide this leadership has contributed to a factional and sectarian atmosphere which gives non-party left

organizations little breathing room.

One of the concerns of Radical America over the past decade has been to show the profoundly historical nature of the development of socialist thought, action, and organization, and of the vision of socialism itself. We have published many articles that have tried to show how working class people have created organizations and institutions as the need for them arose; and that these creations have not emerged out of a rigid mold, but rather out of the specific needs of the moment. Here we would like to emphasize that the history of revolutionary organization is broader than that claimed by the orthodox Leninists, and that many of the criticisms directed by us against the current state of the Leninist Left have arisen before in the history of the socialist movement. One important alternative to Leninism in the revolutionary period immediately following World War I was the council or soviet movement. This is the subject of Carl Bogg's essay, *Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control*.

Boggs analyzes three examples of "prefigurative communism" — the council or soviet movement in Russia at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution and for a few years thereafter; the federation of councils in Germany in 1918; and the factory council movement in Italy from 1918 to 1920. "Prefigurative communism" is the term Boggs uses to refer to those political traditions which attempt to embody, or "prefigure", within their own organizations some of the social relations which a victorious socialist revolution could bring. All of these movements fell apart or were crushed through a combination of internal disintegration and external repression. Boggs is careful to explain the particulars of each movement's historical situation, particulars which



affected both the precise nature of their politics and organization and their demise. We think that this article is important because it emphasizes the fact that Leninism is not the only revolutionary tradition; "prefigurative communism" is a very important alternative tradition. Though limited by many of the same constraints pressing on the Russian Bolsheviks, the council movement briefly demonstrated that there can be autonomous forms of struggle and working-class power that exist apart from a Revolutionary Party or State. These movements of "prefigurative communism", it is important to note, are not just archaeological relics from our revolutionary past. In the past ten years there has been a resurgence of interest

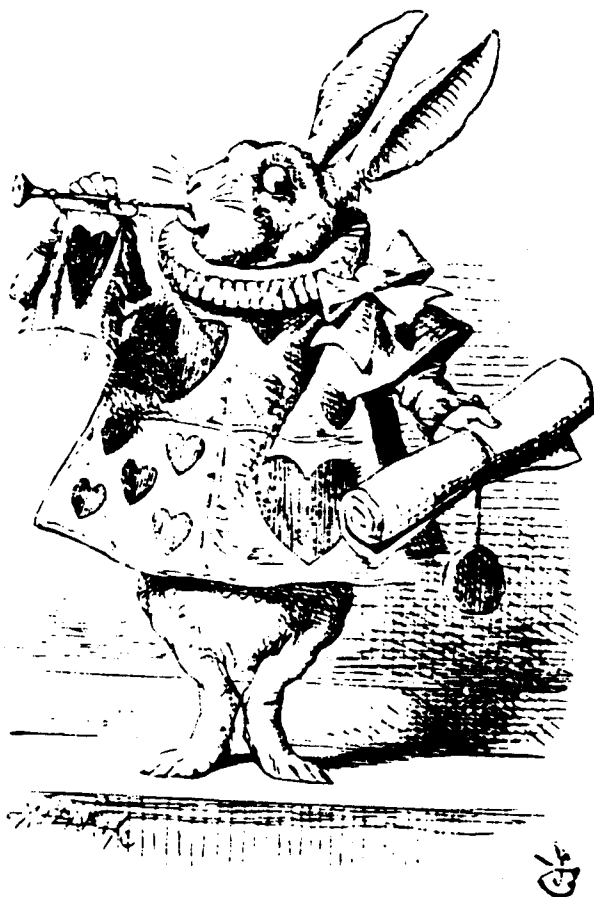
in the organizations and politics of these movements, inspired by events in France, Italy and Portugal. The jury is still out on the future of this revolutionary tradition.

The events of March 1977 in Bologna, Italy illustrate some of the tensions existing between different conceptions of revolutionary strategy. In her article on *The Unhappy Adventures of "Alice" in Blunderland*, Suzanne Cowan looks at the role played by a "free radio station" in the March student uprising in Bologna. Her article is also a reminder of the importance of revolutionary communications in a revolutionary situation, and calls to mind the central part played by *Radio Renascenza* and the newspaper *Repubblica* during the Portuguese "revolution" of 1974-1975. (See *Radical America* vol. 9, no. 6 (November-December 1975); and vol. 10, no. 2 (March-April 1976) for articles on the Portuguese situation.) Although *Radio Alice* was in some ways very vulnerable — its transmitter could be smashed and the station shut down quite easily — it demonstrates that there are many imaginative tactical and strategical possibilities for a revolutionary Left.

* * * * *

We are pleased to publish David Hunt's article, "Remembering the Tet Offensive," on the tenth anniversary of that momentous event. Hunt argues that the Tet Offensive was not only a major turning point in the Vietnamese war of liberation, but also a watershed for many in the anti-war movement who were pushed to the left by the vision of a victorious socialist revolution in Vietnam. Filled with detail, Hunt's article puts concrete meaning and understanding into the belief that the National Liberation Front employed a "social-

ist" military strategy that was far different from and superior to the capital-intensive strategy employed by the United States and the South Vietnamese forces. While the memory of Tet is in some ways cause for rejoicing, it is important to remember that Vietnam is still suffering, and will suffer for years to come, from the devastation wrought by the War. The promise of reparations to the Vietnamese from the U.S. government must be made good.





SEX, FAMILY & THE NEW RIGHT

Anti-feminism as a Political Force

Linda Gordon & Allen Hunter

Traditionally a man's role as head of the family takes him away from the hearthstone. A woman is like many stones: She is the hearthstone from which warmth and light are reflected throughout the home; she is the decorative, exotic stones hedging and protecting precious and beautiful growth; she is graceful as marble, preserving culture and tradition; and, she is as hard as granite with anything that threatens her home and children. She is soapstone and pumice, ever-cleansing and smoothing; She is a touchstone; a close comfort to her mate and little ones. And she sometimes feels like a well-worn cobblestone, over which have passed the tribulations of all she holds dear. Woman is at once like the sunny sand that warms, and like the heart and sinew of the sandbags that keep the home secure from intruding torrents in crisis. She can be ruby-lipped, onyx-eyed, pearl-skinned, and topaz-tressed. But always she shines like the symbol of her marriage, the perfect diamond that will reflect her growth from bride to grandmother.

Ron Wright, *A Man Looks at the Equal Rights Amendment*,
John Birch Society pamphlet.

A mere five years ago we probably would have dismissed such a statement as representing a defeated past, a man's fantasy projected onto a past that never really existed.* But this kind of anti-feminism is now propelling a strong and growing New Right. The New Right cultural politics of sex and family are not only a backlash against women's and gay liberation movements — seen in the opposition to

*Most of the ideas in this article should be regarded as hypotheses. Our views are not based on extensive research, but on reading the popular press, talking to other socialists concerned with these issues, and our own participation in various political projects. We hope that readers with concrete information about New Right groups, whether it supports or contradicts our argument, will send it to us; and that readers with different points of view will write letters for publication in *Radical America*. We want to acknowledge the substantial help given us by Frank Brodhead, Marla Erlien, Ann Withorn, and Sheli Wortis. Needless to say, they are not responsible for this final version, especially since we could not or would not accept some of their criticisms.

Facing page: "Get thee behind me (Mrs.) Satan! I'd rather travel the hardest path of matrimony than follow your footsteps!" A nineteenth-century defense of patriarchy by Thomas Nast.

abortion, affirmative action, and gay rights — but are also a reassertion of patriarchal forms of family structure and male dominance. Furthermore, this conservative cultural politics is a direct challenge to class conscious politics. The inadequate response by the Left is largely due to its prevalent economism and an insufficient appreciation of feminism. In Part I of this article we will look at the specific issues of the New Right, describe the ideological coherence of the separate campaigns and locate that coherence in the conservative response to broad social change. We will also hazard some guesses about the class and cultural basis of the reaction. In Part II we describe what a socialist program about sex and family issues could be.

THE NEW RIGHT: ITS ISSUES

Until recently it seemed that racism, especially anti-busing, was the heart of the conservative backlash. This fit with the central role of racism in the history of right-wing politics. The growth of anti-busing organizations in the last several years and the more recent reinvigoration of the Nazis and the KKK reinforced this view. Racism has not diminished as a political force, but has been joined — and the whole right-wing thereby strengthened — by a series of conservative campaigns defending the family, a restrictive and hypocritical sexual morality, and male dominance.

These campaigns, waged largely by single-issue organizations, identify their enemies most often as liberals, feminists and blacks. The "old Right" groups, such as the John Birch Society or the American Nazi Party, identified their enemy as communists, since theirs was a backlash against an earlier period of left political activity. Despite these differences however, many "old rightists" are leaders of new-right groups. The New Right, however, has attracted many thousands of new grass roots adherents and may develop a power and dynamism the old Right

lacked. Recently there has been an important shift from the periodic electoral manipulation of backlash sentiments to well-organized conservative mass movements with the national capability of mobilizing thousands. This large following will increase right-wing influence in both political parties and may help cement a rightward political realignment in national politics.(1)

One example of New Right power is the campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment. Anti-ERA organizing has been going on for several years in many states and has been able to prevent its passage. This constitutional amendment appears to most radicals a minimal and symbolic gesture. It offers little if won, but will represent a big defeat if lost. In a sense the opposition to ERA reflects conservative agreement that it would not make much economic difference. For example, the anti-ERA arguments are not usually about economic competition, but focus on silly comments about lack of privacy in toilets and a hypocritical abhorrence for drafting women. It is the feminist impulse behind ERA, not its specific content, that is most feared; it is less the equality than the independence of women that is opposed.

Like opposition to the ERA, opposition to abortion has been growing in the past few years, but its focus has recently shifted. Legally the strategy has been altered by the Supreme Court decision, and then by state administrative and legislative action, to the question of the use of public welfare and medical funds for abortion. Politically the anti-abortionists have increasingly revealed their deepest motives — fear of women's independence rather than concern for the unborn. Many anti-abortionists (and many pro-abortionists) have a genuine moral concern about abortion. But right-wing leaders have been able to manipulate these concerns into moral righteousness, and to join anti-feminist politics to racist, anti-working class, and especi-

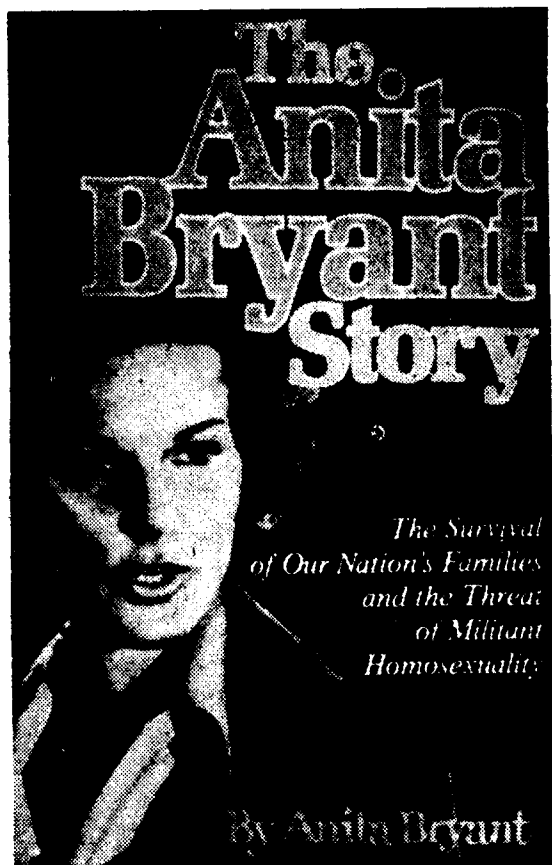
ally anti-welfare politics. As the feminist movement seeks to regain access to abortion for poor women and to prevent further defeats, abortion opponents will continue to push for further restrictions.

The anti-abortion campaign shares with the backlash against gay rights a hostility to freer sexual standards generally. The primary complaints of those who supported Anita Bryant at the polls are against "public displays" and the social influence of homosexuals. Resistance to gay rights is especially strong on questions of employment (notably in public schools and agencies) and access to housing. Private, unseen behavior does not seem to be as threatening. It is

the system of male-dominated heterosexuality that is at stake. Homophobia, like woman-hating, also rests on deep, often subconscious, often irrational feelings. Consider the fear so many have of young boys being sexually abused by older gay men, while in fact heterosexual child abuse is much more common; because men raping women is part of the system of male dominance it is less shocking than men assaulting men.

Opponents also see homosexuality as a total attack on the family, although in fact it is mostly an attack on the family as the only legitimate social unit. Coming out of the closet means ceasing to pretend to fit into the family system. The difference between a bachelor or a spinster and a homosexual is that the former is perceived as a deprived, lacking individual, a person missing something. The latter may be called a pervert, but she or he seems complete. Furthermore, what is different about homosexual relationships, even when they mimic marriage and the family, is that they are not based on the "special" qualities of a female member of the couple, qualities which are used to justify and perpetuate the exploitation of women. Homosexuals may and often do replicate conventional sexual divisions of labor, but they do not do so on the basis of alleged biological necessity. Thus the social and alterable quality of these divisions is evident.

The anti-bussing movement is nourished by some of the same fears for the loss of family. The loss of neighborhood schools is perceived as a threat to community, and therefore family stability by many people, particularly in cities where ethnically homogenous communities remain. The image of the neighborhood school may be a romanticized or even fake recollection; but fears for children's safety and objections to the inaccessibility of their schools and teachers reflect both family love and parental desire for control. The opponents of bussing are usually



quick to point out that school integration would likely produce an increase in inter-racial sex, and they are right. While they call upon images of black men raping white girls, the possibility of sex based in intimate and loving relations is equally frightening to them. And the fear of black power, "reverse discrimination," at the community level — associated with fear of crime, property devaluation, dirtiness and noisiness — reflects not only the direct economic crunch on white working-class people but also a less tangible sense of cultural disintegration.

A strong addition to this panoply of Right causes is the campaign against "reverse discrimination," or affirmative action. Affirmative action requirements and judicial decisions are victories won by the black and women's liberation movements. They have not, actually, altered employment or educational discrimination very much. But affirmative action has provided the basis for the organization and struggle of women and minority groups. The grievance mechanisms available under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Executive Order 11246 of 1968, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963, have been used more by working-class than by professional and managerial people (in contrast to a current Left view which holds that these are the tools of "bourgeois feminism"). The current focus in the affirmative action struggle is the case of Allan Bakke, who sued the University of California for admitting some minority students allegedly less qualified than he. His case was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in October 1977 and a decision is expected in the spring of 1978. A ruling for Bakke, by legitimizing the concept of reverse discrimination, could thereby also legitimize openly racist and anti-woman pronouncements and decisions, greatly strengthening the Right.

This is not an exhaustive list. Other issues may, in other parts of the country, already loom larger. Opposition to foreign undocumented

workers, to welfare, to the Panama Canal Treaty, to sex education and liberal textbooks, to the importation of foreign goods are examples. If the New Right develops into a strong reactionary movement it will, no doubt, incorporate anti-communism and jingoism. But we think the issues we have mentioned show that the New Right is picking up great strength from a defense of a threatened patriarcalism.

THE NEW RIGHT: DEFENSE OF PATRIARCHY

Abortion is only one of many issues. The whole picture includes drug abuse, alienation of youth, disrespect for authority, religious decline, decay of the family structure, destruction of traditional education, revolution on the campus, racial strife, undermining of law enforcement and the judicial system, increase in homosexuality and perversion, inflation, repudiation of our currency, registration and confiscation of firearms, no-win wars, destruction of national pride and prestige, deliberate loss of United States military superiority and economic strength, planned and fabricated shortages of fuel and food leading to rationing and increasing controls over the American people... to fight abortion without understanding and fighting the total conspiracy is to ensure certain and total defeat.

John L. Grady, M.D., Abortion Yes or No, American Public Opinion pamphlet (a John Birch Society publication)

One of the key sources of coherence in the New Right is, we think, a reactionary response to the continued dissolution of patriarchal forms. By patriarchy we do not simply mean male supremacy, and we dissociate ourselves from a prevalent feminist use of the term to describe a transhistorical system of male domination. We mean by patriarchy a specific organization of the family and society, in which heads of families controlled not only the reproductive labor, but also the production by all family members.

Patriarchy was a system that prevailed throughout the world in agrarian societies. As

commerce and handicraft production became increasingly important in Europe and the U.S., the patriarchal family remained the unit of production. It was only industrialism — specifically the removal of production from the home-workshop and the introduction of individual wage labor — that undercut patriarchy's economic basis. Without property or skills to pass on to sons, proletarianized fathers lost much of their power. At first the transformation of many working-class women into non-producing housewives increased their dependence on their husbands, but in the twentieth century widespread employment of women has given them more economic independence.

But industrial capitalism did not automatically or immediately make patriarchy obsolete. First, the effects of industry were experienced differently by different classes, religions, regional and ethnic groups. As we will argue in the next section, we think that the New Right represents particular social groups for whom patriarchy has remained viable into the present. Second, there was a great deal of resistance among working-class people to the individualizing tendency of capitalism, and even for women and children the patriarchal family in many circumstances represented a vital source of economic and emotional support, as well as a basis for anti-capitalist struggles — as in strikes, community boycotts and cultural rituals. Still, the main trend has been the weakening of family and community power and the increased autonomy of women, young people and single people. Today the political reassertion of the family is usually a reactionary, not a progressive, force.

Nevertheless, part of the feminist confusion about the term “patriarchy” stems from a failure to recognize that there have been losses as well as gains in its dissolution. Individual independence and the right to dissent have been gained at the cost of loneliness, rootlessness, and

disintegration of social order.(2) Many of the services that families provided — ranging from cooking to healing to entertainment — must now be purchased or paid for through taxes, and the services available are an inadequate approximation of more personally provided services. This means of providing services increases the isolation within and between families, thereby deepening the inability of families to produce what their members need. And the inadequacy of families to meet sharpening personal crises in turn provides the occasion for increased bureaucratic intervention and control.

But to meet these problems the Right proposes programs to preserve patriarchal forms. Their clinging to ineffective “solutions” (such as the prohibition on abortion, which can never stop abortion), and their support for repression of proponents of alternatives, comes from their misunderstanding of the source of these problems. True to their backlash orientation, the New Rightists blame Left political movements. While the Left could respond by claiming proudly to have furthered the decline of patriarchy, it is the process of capitalism itself which has been primarily responsible.

Here we want to call attention to eight major themes of the New Right's patriarchalism, all interrelated but analytically separable: anti-feminism, hostility to youth, anti-sexualism, homophobia, the defense of conventional family, an anti-civil libertarian bias, the work ethic, and religion.

Anti-feminism is in many ways the basis of the patriarchal defense. The “specialness” of women appears to be the foundation of the family, the sexual system, the system of work. Women's social uniqueness is produced by a family organization in which women provide motherly and wifely love and services. The abolition of the gender differences that recreate women's specialness threatens to deprive men and children of home-making, men of sexual



satisfaction upon demand, and everyone of stable living units. These services and stabilities are genuinely needed; they are not "false" needs imposed from above. The problem is that capitalist industrial society could not replace patriarchal stability. And now women's supposedly natural function — providing that stability — seems so tenuous that her specialness must be guarded by law, her access to the last male preserves (such as the army, sports) forbidden.

While there are many themes in the anti-abortion struggle, the fear of women's power seems the strongest. Power over reproduction has historically been defended by men because it is a source of class (property-holding) as well as sexual power. The spectre of women's rejection of motherhood has characterized anti-birth control propaganda for over a century, and population control fears cannot erase the more terrifying vision of facing a world without

womanly tenderness. It seems to us that the images of the aborted fetuses, the emphasis on the cruelty of abortion, reflects a fear for the withdrawal of motherly compassion. But while nurturance is a value to be cherished, for the Right is usually means self-sacrifice, as in the anti-abortionist's contention that women should put the life of the unborn child first. No political-economic explanation can alone explain the virulence of the anti-abortion movement; its passion shows that male dominance is also embedded in personality.

Male fear of loss of control over the family is also expressed through anti-youth biases of the New Right. Like the New Left, this movement represents generational struggle — but the parents' side. While the New Left was anti-authoritarian, the New Right stands for obedience. There are real grounds for concern about the passivity, pessimism and cynicism of many young people; many youthful responses to their problems are personally and socially disruptive; no one likes vandalism and car theft. But the Right has no positive program for youth, merely a lament for a lost past. Fathers who in fact are unable to pass on a culture to their children are blaming their impotence on liberal intellectuals, school teachers, etc.

Protests about loss of control over women and children are indistinguishably mixed in with hostility to sexual freedom. Anti-abortion spokespeople increasingly state explicitly their view that female chastity, not better contraception, is the solution to unwanted pregnancies. The anti-gay reaction is also a reaction against sex itself. The effeminate/exhibitionist style of *some* gay men that has come to be their *collective* image represents the desertion of the repressed, serious and under-emotional style that has been "masculine." Instead gays offer a style that is playful, pleasure-seeking, indeed gay, a style that is symbolically a rejection of the work ethic.

The work ethic is, of course, outmoded in the sense that sticking to its guidelines no longer particularly promotes economic success. But it protects many people from the recognition of their incapacity for pleasure. Thus anti-sexual feelings of the New Right also mask widespread sexual misery. The feminist movement has popularized the understanding that many — perhaps most — women do not experience orgasms. Less well understood is the fact that the sex clinics are as often faced with men who suffer sexual dysfunction and unhappiness. Nor is sexual “failure” limited to those who can afford therapy. One of the worst errors common among Leftists is the idea that busy, overworked and underpaid working-class people do not have time to “indulge” themselves in neuroses, or in longing to be rid of their neuroses. Sexual misery may be caused in part by class exploitation but it apparently affects all classes.

The sexual part of Right-wing repressiveness is largely hypocritical. Plenty of the anti-abortion, anti-gay men are anxious to lead active sexual lives, without much regard for the needs of their women. But we suspect that the longing for a stable family with clearly understood sex and generational roles represents in part a vision of a calm that will reduce sexual anxiety. The new assertions of female sexuality cannot fail to threaten conventional sources of masculine sexual confidence and the traditional family system is a familiar sexual turf. And the family system must be understood as including a continued double standard.

CLASS POLITICS AND THE NEW RIGHT

We have not rushed to offer a “class analysis” of the New Right because we think that Left analyses of phenomena like this have often been held back by hurrying towards reductionist, safely familiar, categorization. In fact the sex-and-family sources of much of the New

Right energy suggest that class groupings in the U.S. can be so divided and heterogeneous that other bonds — such as sexual, ethnic, and kinship ties — can provide the solidarity for collective political expression.

Nevertheless the New Right *is* part of class struggle. Even if the campaigns have amassed significant working-class support (and we are not sure that they have), they are dominated by leaders from the petite bourgeoisie, and politicians, churchmen, and some professionals.(3) A unity between class and male-supremacist politics is possible because it is often among the petite bourgeoisie that it has been possible for patriarchy to survive longest. Men who are self-employed, or whose work like that of politicians can at times be handed down to successors, retain the economic power of patriarchs long after factory workers’ sons rebel and/or become estranged from the family. Furthermore small businessmen, politicians, churchmen and the like more often integrate their wives into their careers, creating a functional basis for wifely subordination and an organic image of an integrated family. Political machines are often organized as small patriarchates, much like criminal machines. There are still some skilled craftsmen who, through exclusionary craft unions, can pass on vocations to their sons.

Anti-gay, anti-welfare, racist, and anti-youth feelings have been used to hark back to an older ideology, a distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. This division allows a subjective narrowing of the *working* class to exclude the unemployed, the under-employed, single mothers — the marginal in general. With this in view the New Right calls for the further victimization of these who are already the main victims of capitalist class relations, and tries to split the working class into antagonistic factions.

At the same time “white ethnics,” usually Catholics, have sometimes provided new consti-

tuencies for the Right campaigns. Cohesive ethnic communities and patriarchal forms have been mutually supportive, and both have been especially provoked by the violation of community autonomy through such interventions as busing. The Catholic Church has been important in several ways. It has provided a religious ideology that is anti-sexual and anti-feminist, as



well as a moralistic rhetoric for making political demands. The Church also reinforces authoritarian values. The wealth and national organization of the Church make it an effective political mobilizer. Fundamentalist Protestantism has also contributed many enthusiasts to the New Right campaigns. In general, church-based politics, at least among whites, reinforces cross-class alliances.

Conservative sections of the working class share some values with business and managerial

people that allow for cross-class political cohesiveness as well. These values are primarily individualism, the work ethic, and hostility toward liberal professionals, the bureaucratic state, and governmental intrusion into community and family life.

But despite its anti-big-government bias, there are ways in which the Right mobilization is useful for the capitalist class in the current recession. The pro-working-man sentimentality provides ideological cover for attacks on the working class. Two things seem to be happening. First, a squeeze on working-class living standards is being directed not primarily at the point of production, except among public employees, but at delivery of social services by the state. Second, with the decline of the black movement and increased conservative mobilization in some white "ethnic" communities, the decreased funds available are being redirected accordingly. There is a "fit" between anti-sexual, anti-woman, racist and work-ethic attitudes, and these attacks on social services.

The threatened collapse of the traditional Democratic coalition — labor, minorities, and liberal professionals — is one of the explanations for the "new populism" that is associated with the celebration of (white) middle America, and also for the criticisms by politicians of politicians for fostering the growth of the state. Thus Carter and other politicians will make use of the attacks on the big government to reduce social welfare but not to reduce the size of government itself. The capitalist state will be "retooled" and its class nature strengthened, and one of the legitimations for this will be the kind of anti-statism articulated by the Right.

At the simplest level the right-wing causes have the advantage of not making demands that will cost taxpayers money. In fact, they oppose many programs that cost money. They are against federal spending on abortion and busing, against federal enforcement of affirma-

tive action and occupational safety. They are against day care and adequate health care especially if paid for by public funds. Their opposition to governmental intervention and big-ness does not, however, extend to opposition to military spending, to nuclear power, or to further beefing up of domestic police forces.

ORGANIZATIONAL FORM OF THE NEW RIGHT

The organizational unity of the Right is growing along with its ideological coherence, and certain factors promoting that unity should be noticed.(4)

While we have focussed here on the sex-and-family issues which form the basis of many Right campaigns, we want to emphasize the great force of racism as a unifying belief. In addition the simple fact that the Right groups are virtually all white — and feel happy with that constituency — is also an organizational strength. Their racial homogeneity makes it easier to organize on a cross-class basis; the fear of reverse discrimination creates a unified sense of victimization among many white working-class Rightists which aligns them with capitalists and managers opposed to affirmative action for their own reasons.

Furthermore, the Right can use traditional community structures — such as ethnic neighborhoods, churches and church organizations, political party networks. Although socialists should surely look for progressive aspects of community networks, community organization today more readily lends itself to domination by petit-bourgeois leaders.

Related to the community strength of the Right is the important role of women in many campaigns. Women who espouse the most conservative views about woman's "place" are often the most active speakers, agitators, demonstrators. Women are active, of course,

because these campaigns represent a natural political extension of woman's work: family, children, church and morality. However, it is already noticeable that as some campaigns grow from local community resistance to city, let alone national forms (as in the anti-busing movement), men reassert control.(5)

Another important source of strength for the Right is its hierarchical form. That structure, while it may have alienated a few rebels, is initially comfortable for the majority because it replicates the dominant structure of the society.

At this time the single-issue approach of the New P'ght is also an organizational advantage. It allows lowest-common-denominator unity and seeks to create feelings of acceptance and solidarity. Even should the New Right coalesce into multi-issue organizations, larger than the far-right John Birch or Nazi models, its opportunism and rigid top-down form may immunize it against the sectarianism that fosters splits in the Left. Left sectarianism is partly the result of dogmatic thinking, but it is also partly the result of the socialist necessity to develop an analysis that encompasses an entire world and an entire revolutionary strategy. By contrast the Right gains adherents through manipulation of emotional and cultural symbols by a well-funded and corrupt leadership. On the other hand, we can expect divisions within the Right based on power struggles and on the conflicting needs of different interest groups. This will be especially common in electoral politics which invites competition for votes and for control of patronage. (A recent split in ROAR, an anti-busing organization in Boston, is an example of this.)

SOCIALISM AGAINST PATRIARCHY

Socialists of various tendencies, both reformist and revolutionary, have been burdened with a tradition of economism. By economism we mean encouraging working-class struggles for *more of*

the same, focusing on the redistribution of what is already delivered by the capitalist system without questioning *what* is produced nor *how* it is produced. (6) The economistic conception of socialism demands redivision of the pie and neglects the basic recipe. Socialists have too often neglected the social relations of production and they also have been resistant to radical perspectives on sex and family issues on the grounds they were not "basic." We are here concerned with the latter which we reject as a mechanistic two-stage model — first people struggle for higher wages and then they think about better sexual relationships — because it is so evidently not true.

Socialists have also neglected sex and family issues on the grounds that working class people *as a class* have conservative views on these issues. We do not accept this evaluation for two reasons. First, it is time socialists stopped imagining a working class composed of white patriarchs. Second, we see no reason why socialists should be more willing to compromise on, say, women's rights than on any number of other currently unpopular socialist principles. Finally, socialists have neglected sex and family issues because radical views on these subjects often came from the middle classes. But so did most socialist theory. The question is not whether or not there will be class alliances; the question is toward what end and with what outlook.

The issues currently being raised so successfully by the right justify as strong a socialist response as possible. We think socialists ought to develop programs and organizations that address the dissolution of patriarchy, and the left will also have to make sex, family and women's liberation among our primary issues.

It is not easy to be pro-sex in our culture. The prevailing cultural and commercial manipulation is saturated with sexuality to a degree that simultaneously tantalizes and repels. Not only

pornography, but also advertising, slick sex books, fashion, sado-masochistic rock — all these cash in on repressed sexuality. At times people try to hold on to a sense of morality and propriety by arguing that sex should be less important, by preferring to focus on work, friends, or "higher" endeavors. Some socialists and feminists, especially because of their anger about the sexual exploitation of women, adopt anti-sexual or anti-heterosexual attitudes. For many women all heterosexual relations are distorted by male dominance; the view that heterosexual relations are too trying, too full of inequality to be worth attempting, is surely a reasonable one for many women; some substitute homosexual relations, some masturbation, some celibacy. The last — celibacy — is a traditional response, for in the nineteenth century feminism was associated with prudery. As a personal choice the rejection of sexual activity may be appropriate for some, but as a political line it is a loser. Similarly, the substitution of masturbation for relationships seems unlikely to satisfy complex human sexual needs, mixed as they are with desires for love and intimacy.

It is important, if at times difficult, to project a view that endorses, even celebrates, the pleasures of sex; and emphasizes the affinity of sexual delight with free, mutual, sensitive and responsible relationships. The capacity for sexual pleasure and sexual relationships is a universal and creative human capacity. Furthermore, the instinct for sex is related to the capacity for play, in turn closely connected to the imagination of a good life which spurs people to struggle for socialism. Sexual restraint was and still is in some respects, necessary for survival. It is a part of the development of human self-control which maximizes the possibility of human freedom and creativity. But sexual prudery today is a tool of domination of men over women, of old over young, and of class



over class. In political practice these questions will be matters for judgment and it would be futile to search for clean and simple sexual morals. Such a search would lead to either moralistic repression or irresponsible individualism. But to deny the importance of the widespread search for sexual pleasure will only blind the Left to a tremendous amount of energy, anti-authoritarian sentiments, and capacity for greater honesty and cooperation already existing in society.

If a socialist politics of sex must be complex, a politics of the family must be even more so. We can be in principle unequivocally pro-sex because sex itself is a human activity that has its own worth and which can be separated from those oppressive power relations that invade it. We do not know whether the family can be separated from its oppressive aspects and remain a stable institution. The family is a remarkably universal social creation. It is so weaved into the systems of domination that it has been extremely difficult for socialists to distinguish its oppressive from its supportive

possibilities. We think that a socialist politics should clearly oppose the systematically oppressive relations that the family helps to maintain: age, male, and heterosexual domination. But we also think that socialists should support the search for the satisfactions that families can sometimes provide: emotional and sexual intimacy, child-rearing by caring people, cooperation and sharing. Some people are now searching for and finding these outside of families. Others are living in families in which they are struggling — often with good results — against inequality; many others have no choice but to remain in oppressive families. To denounce the family in our circumstances is at best an abstraction; at worst it may seem contemptuous. But without condemning many people's love and need for their families we can fight against the romantic, reactionary, reassertion of family as an ideal model of authority and community.

Women's liberation is a threat that must run through capitalist politics of sex and the family, but it also needs an independent focus. To view feminism as only a politics of sexual and family

change would be to vastly underestimate the breadth of the feminist critique. Commitment to women's liberation also requires changing conditions for women in economic and social structures beyond the family. Opposing discrimination against women in jobs and in the law is part of the struggle against women's oppression in the home and vice versa. The relationship between oppression in family and other institutions is a mutually determining dynamic.

NOTES TOWARD A SOCIALIST PROGRAM

1. Gay Rights

Politically it is important to recognize that the gay rights movement may still be on an upswing; gay liberation pressure has produced clear advances in recent years and Anita Bryant has stimulated a revival of gay liberation energy. A serious problem, however, particularly among male gays, is the increasing class divisions within the movement. (Male homosexuals, unlike women, include many men of quite privileged social position.) It is important for socialists enthusiastically to support campaigns to end legal, residential and job discrimination against homosexuals, for unbiased health and mental care, and for homosexuals' right as couples and as parents. By not addressing the needs of homosexuals, the Left has missed opportunities to help build socialist and class consciousness among working-class homosexuals.

The civil libertarian and simple-justice arguments for gay rights are not minor and should not be relinquished. But we are struck that much socialist support for homosexuals' freedom has been liberal — that is, it does not consider how open homosexuality can contribute to building a socialist movement for all. Homosexuals have been in the forefront of building alternative forms of living and non-

family support networks. Lesbians contribute, we think, a particularly strong challenge to male supremacy. As women who do not choose to live with men they are not, on the whole, as easily "managed." Working-class lesbians, at least those without options for upward mobility, may have less stake in getting male approval, and thus more easily assume leadership in workplace and community struggles. In most communities, the presence of women maintaining themselves without men is vital to the fight against male supremacy. Whether the women are gay or straight, they offer support and strong models to other women and place sexist men on the defensive. Strong, independent single women and their friendships, whether gay or straight, offer single women alternatives to compromising their own work and identity for men, and offer married women the strength to struggle to change their situations when that struggle requires taking risks. Lesbians have an objective, unchanging interest in the maintenance of supportive women's communities, and mixed communities that do not assume the heterosexual couple as the normal unit for social life. We all gain a more viable, militant community from the freedom of homosexuals.

2. Reproductive Self-Determination and Sexual Freedom

Today the abortion issue is the leading point of political contest in the areas of both women's liberation and sexual freedom. But the grounds of the struggle may shift very quickly so it is important to enunciate a full socialist program for reproductive self-determination even as we continue working actively for abortion rights. Historically, the separation of sex and reproduction has been a basic material condition for women's liberation and for sexual freedom.

Abortion, safe contraception and related medical care should be top-priority among the free social services socialists fight for. At the

same time, women's freedom to *have* children should be defended as vigorously; this means stringent guidelines to prevent coercive sterilization, abortion, or surrendering of children for adoption, as well as good day care, pediatric care, and welfare aid without which women are not free to choose.

Ultimately the best way of giving women control over their reproduction will be good sex education. A socialist sex-education program cannot be merely physiology; it must be a political women's liberation education as well as one based on pro-sex attitudes.

3. Violence Against Women

The implicit cultural licensing of violence against women helps maintain male supremacy. Revoking the license must be done by increasing women's power. While we need not applaud the sexual exhibitionism of clothing styles — largely dictated to women by sexist fashion and media industries — we must absolutely defend the right of freedom of dress, freedom of mobility, even freedom to be flirtatious and friendly without "deserving" violence. It is time to deny men the right to define the limits of women's good behavior. The ideology that men cannot control their sexual urges has been called upon to support male supremacy for centuries. The pathological sex murderers of recent years are in part products of the general insanity and violence of our culture, but in part too they are the demented extensions of "normal" male ideas that sexual domination is their right. The association of sex and violence is promoted by advertising, rock-music promotion, television, as well as "hard" smut.

4. Affirmative Action.

With the Bakke case pending in the Supreme Court, the left is in a position that is uniquely American: immediate political issues are dictated by the judicial system. But, like abortion,

we cannot ignore this. The defeat of affirmative action (even more than the possible defeat of the ERA) would be a severe setback. Though it is hard to know what to do right now except march, propagandize, and pressure particular institutions, the Left should maintain the view that the ERA, affirmative action, school desegregation and equal employment opportunities form important parts of any socialist program.

FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM

The importance of these issues, and the inadequacy of the Left's response, moves us to argue for the necessity of a feminist approach more strongly than ever. The inability of the non-feminist Left to incorporate the successes of the recent women's movement has produced a greater distance between socialist and feminist individuals and organizations than is healthy. A splintering of feminism itself into different political tendencies has of course promoted this separation. There was hope that the separation might be reduced by the development of an autonomous socialist-feminist tendency in the last five years, and in the long run it is the most promising development in the contemporary women's movement. But in the short run it has not been able to offer much general leadership, and within socialist feminism there have been setbacks. One was the reassertion of a crude Leninist, reductionist view of the "woman question" that was essentially anti-feminist, even though often coming from within socialist-feminist organizations. In reducing the question of sexism to a class question, and restricting the current program of women's liberation to one of "democratic rights," these Leninists tacitly accepted, at least in current organizing, the most conservative views of proper sexual and family behavior. At the same time many other socialist feminists, in their understandable concern to bring a class politics to their women's

liberation program, also avoided sex-and-family issues in favor of an emphasis on organizing women around labor-market and job grievances. This emphasis reflected an economistic tendency even among feminists, a tendency to neglect "quality" in favor of "quantity" issues. This mistaken emphasis sometimes leads to the undervaluing of two strengths of the women's liberation movement: the understanding that the "personal is political," and the development of organizational forms that prefigure socialist social relations. We would like briefly to reconsider these important feminist contributions, and to suggest that their value does not run counter to, and even supports, the building of a working-class socialist movement.

One meaning of the "personal is political" is that politics is not a "thing" external to people's own inner lives. Political relations invade, shape, and help constitute inner life. For instance, the relationship between a worker and a boss — "labor and capital" — is not just one of wages, hours, and working conditions, but is experienced through actual relationships between workers and their "superiors," relationships encapsulated in patterns of deference and domination, refracted through posture, tone of voice, dress, and influencing such "personal" qualities as self-image. Another meaning of the "personal is political" is that many personal problems have social, economic and political causes, and their solutions require social and political change. If this is a truism, the Left is not acting on it. Personal problems, if they continue to be perceived as private, will be obstacles to political participation. By contrast, personal problems subjected to a radical analysis can reveal the pervasive power relations in society, and can encourage people toward political strategies for change. The fact is that access to political concerns is usually initially through direct experience. For instance, it is maddening that affirmative action is felt as

more of a threat to many people than nuclear power plants. The reason, perhaps, is that affirmative action upsets traditional social relations and personal expectations, while nuclear power does not, at least not directly or immediately. Yet once people do connect deeply felt personal problems to larger political structures, they often go on to make political sense out of the whole society rather quickly. This is not merely hypothetical; many women in the last decade moved rapidly from complaints about sexual relationships to feminism to socialism.

This transition is of course not automatic. The transition is more likely to take place when personal experiences are collectively explored and politically experienced people participate in the process. Furthermore, saying that the "personal is political" does not deny individual's responsibility for their own lives. Not all personal problems necessitate political solutions, nor can all be solved politically. But virtually all aspects of personal life have social dimensions, just as all political power relations have personal dimensions.

Another major contribution of feminism is the development of forms of organization and thereby of community in which new kinds of social relations predominate. The collective investigation of personal oppressions can lead to a clearer understanding that the social distribution of power affects everyday life, and that the elimination of oppression necessitates new social relationships. Feminist groups, for example, have struggled to minimize internal inequalities and to create friendships and living communities in which all members felt valued and central. If feminist groups sometimes were idealist and attempted to create democracy simply by declaring it, that is no reason to undervalue the importance of struggle for democratic communities. In fact feminist groups have been able to create organizations that were far more democratic and participatory than

most of what the Left had previously done. There is, however, an inherent tension between the struggle for political power and the development of community solidarity; between the drive to organize more people and confront those with power, and paying attention to internal group dynamics. We are not suggesting that the struggle for power through outreach, organizing and confrontation should be sacrificed. But many on the Left are not attentive enough to how internal aspects of their own organizations tend to reproduce some of the very oppressive power relations, feelings of isolation and passivity that maintain capitalist domination.

The women's liberation movement has not been alone on the Left in attaching importance to the "personal is political" and to prefigurative forms of struggle. But these themes are central to feminism. They have been most clearly expressed in two organizational forms: consciousness raising and self-help groups.

In consciousness-raising groups, people share their personal experiences, often about things which they have been previously ashamed to discuss. In most homogenous groups, people have been able quickly to learn that even their worst shames and miseries were not so uncommon, were parts of social patterns, created by social relationships. There is a difference, however, between CR and support groups. Good CR groups should be supportive, through the enormously comforting gift of solidarity, but they should also challenge existing relations and defenses against change. The fact that many CR groups did create such challenges is illustrated by the fact that many dissolved after a year or two, despite deep personal commitments, because their members felt the need for larger and more action-directed political groups.

It is also important to note that CR groups were a particular form uniquely appropriate to women's liberation. "Men's liberation" groups have a greater tendency to become merely

supportive, to reinforce existing patterns, and at worst to provide cover for backlash grievances against women's anger. But we are not convinced that CR groups are useless for anyone except women. Like any political form, they are not magic; they require clear political goals, structure and leadership. But it seems to us that all political organizations ought to create some space, formal or informal, where people can talk politically about their personal lives.

Although "self-help" has come to refer mainly to gynecological clinics, in fact it denotes a more general organizational form in which people work collectively to help themselves deal with social problems. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the significance of these kinds of service projects is to contrast them with the more standard, welfare-state model of rendering services as commodities (paid for either directly or through taxes) delivered by bureaucrats or professionals. Recently, the women's movement itself has brought many social problems into the open: rape, incest, wife-beating, for examples. In response, institutions such as hospitals, police forces, judicial systems, mental health clinics and universities are intervening ever more extensively and deeply into family life. the well-known distaste with which most welfare recipients regard their social workers is an accurate indication of the attitudes that many service workers (including, unfortunately, many workers objectively in the working class) have been socialized into. But even well-meaning social workers often only deepen despair because of the inability of the institutions they work within to offer alternatives better than even the most oppressive families and neighborhoods.

A further complexity in developing a Left response to bureaucratic intervention is that we cannot simply denounce it. The feminists' power of disclosure, for example, went far beyond the capacity of the women's movement to deal with problems. A man's home is not his torture

chamber, after all. There is a great deal that therapy and counselling can do to help unhappy people. Even the capitalist state can sometimes protect people from worse, or more pressing, evils.

Self-help groups cannot replace the state, but they can offer radical alternatives for some. Through projects such as rape crisis centers, alcoholics groups, and shelters for abused wives, the victims of oppressive men and institutions are encouraged to change their lives with the air of other women, often previously victims.

The model of collective self-help, while not in itself a socialist strategy, strengthens the connec-

tion between personal and social change. In the best of cases, self-help groups combine consciousness-raising with material aid and an opening to a new community of people; thus providing not only the ideas but some of the conditions for adopting a less passive stance towards the world. The self-help model is a way of dealing with the fact that politics often becomes a part of one's life only when a political problem is directly experienced.

Of course there are wide variations in such projects, and the most famous of these — the gynecological clinics — are now frequently hierarchically run. Furthermore, self-help ideology



has sometimes promoted an unqualified anti-professionalism and disregard of helpful expertise. But the shunning of such work by socialists has also contributed to the low political level of many projects. Self-help groups are susceptible to all the political problems of service projects; attracting people with a client orientation towards the project, conflict of interest and energy between performing services and political outreach, bureaucratization forced by state licensing requirements, among others. But all political work has problems and we are not convinced that these are greater than the potential benefits.

It is also important to keep self-help projects and consciousness-raising groups in mind when evaluating the current state of the Left. While many sectors of the Left do not seem active now, such self-help groups are spreading among working-class women. Indeed, a good part of the most dynamic political activity in the working class today is among women who have been changed by feminism.

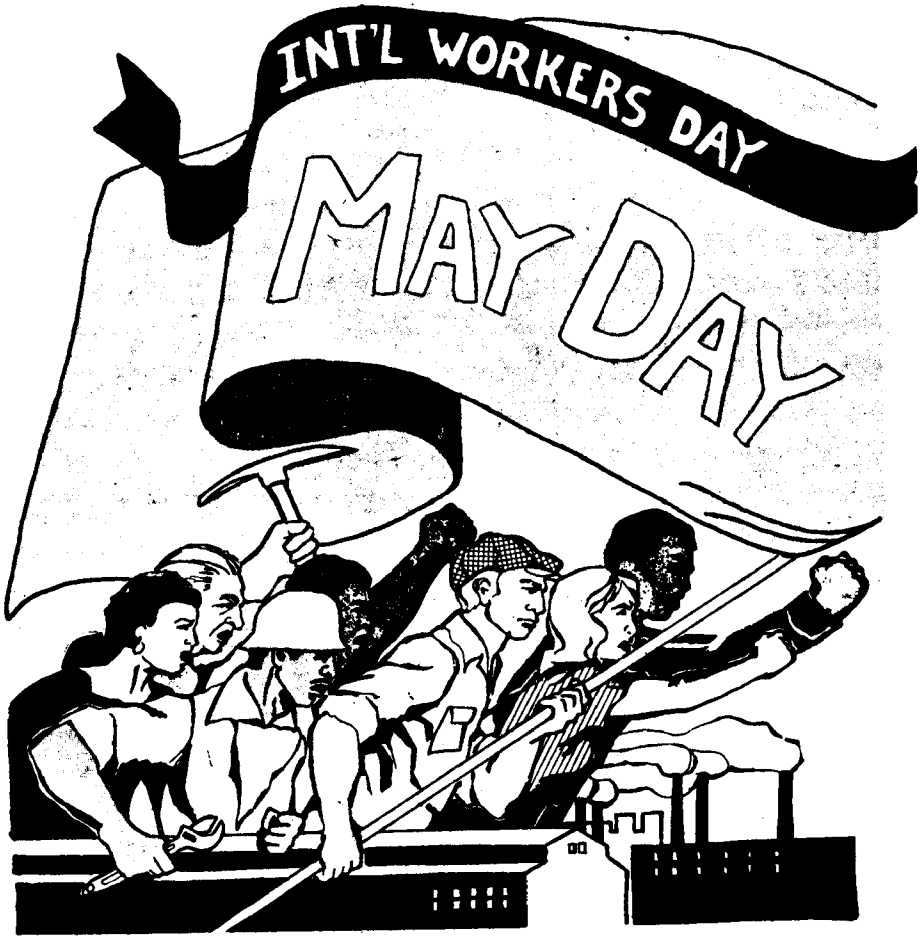
Still, it is important to remind ourselves again that many working-class women are in the Right, too. We are alarmed at the growth of the Right, and think it should be answered. But our primary reason for arguing that the Left should make sex-and-family, "personal," issues important in our work is not simply a desire to respond to the Right. On the contrary we have several more long-run and positive reasons for urging that course. We think that the development of a fuller socialist-feminist program on these issues would contribute greatly to a socialist program that would be attractive and realistic for our country. We think that many people, and perhaps especially working-class people, are troubled and looking for solutions to problems of personal tension, violence, and loneliness. We do not mean to suggest that this is a whole socialist program or even the basic part of one. But we think that family and

personal instability is a weak spot in capitalism, and that socialists can participate in and develop political responses attractive to much of the working class.

FOOTNOTES

1. Karl Mannheim made a distinction between traditional and conservative thought that we find useful for understanding the social bases of grass-roots support for conservative politics. See his essay "Conservative Thought" in *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 74-164, or from *Karl Mannheim* edited by Kurt Wolff (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 132-222.
2. We are not suggesting patriarchal societies were free of such problems. However stronger communities provided collective forms for restraining anti-social behavior and supporting its victims, while accepting the inevitability of such problems. By contrast capitalist society has raised the hope of abolishing such social misery at the same time as its destruction of community power makes it more difficult to control these forms of violence.
3. We do not mean to underemphasize the role of capitalists in the Right and in funding ultra-conservative politics. We have not discussed the capitalist funding, participation in, and even political leadership of Right politics because we want to emphasize the social dynamic of the Right as a movement.
4. For a good description of the New Right and some sense of its organizational ties see Andrew Kopkind, "America's New Right," *New Times*, September 30, 1977.
5. Kathleen McCourt, in *Working-Class Women and Grass-Roots Politics* (Indiana University Press, 1977), describes the conservative activity of white working-class women on Chicago's Southwest Side.
6. This is broader than the Leninist definition of economism because we connect the drive for working-class political power (emphasized by Lenin in his criticisms of economism) with transforming social relations.

LINDA GORDON and ALLEN HUNTER are both editors of Radical America.



***On to
May Day!***

AMERICAN LENINISM IN THE 1970s

Jim O'Brien

The course of American Leninism in recent years has been shaped by three main forces: the legacy of the Communist Party USA, the student revolt of the 1960s, and (more in practice than in ideology) the American working class. It is the last of these influences that is hardest to trace. The vocabulary of Leninism is full of phrases such as "the masses," "advanced forces," "vanguard," "united front," and other terms which often make it hard for the listener or reader to understand exactly what is going on. This article tries to sort out a mass of information on American Leninism in the 1970s and tell what is going on. Leninist groups are a large part of the present-day American left, and what they do is important.

The central core of Leninism is the disciplined political party, in which internal debate may be allowed but those members unite in carrying out the party's agreed-upon program. Such a party, it is asserted, can be the instrument by which the working class can destroy a capitalist state and assume direction of society for itself. Historically, according to all Leninist groups, this is what happened in Russia in 1917: the working class took power. Beyond that, there is intense debate among Leninist groups as to the course of events in the USSR and other countries that are presently run by Communist parties. But whatever their positions in these debates, all Leninist organizations share the same basic perspective for a socialist revolution in the U.S.: that it can, and in fact must, be carried out under the leadership of a Leninist party.

In the U.S., the biggest and most important Leninist group, from the time of its

founding in 1921, has been the Communist Party USA. The high point of its influence was in the 1930s, when its combined adult and youth membership reached a peak of 100,000 in 1938. But in good times and bad, the CP has been the one Leninist organization with the most members, the strongest working-class roots, and the widest influence. It is to the CP's history that rival Leninist organizations turn, time and again, to explain the leadership vacuum that they believe plagues the American working class.

The goal of all the CP's rivals is to build a party that will be larger and stronger than the CP and that will offer a clear left-wing alternative to the CP's strategic compromises and its fealty to the Soviet Union. Without this vision of a powerful left-Leninist party, none of the CP's rivals would hold together. Yet it is precisely this goal which is called severely into question by the experience of the 1970s. For all the valuable work their members have been able to do in concrete situations, none of the groups appears likely to supplant the CP with a mass-based party to its left. A history of Leninism in the 1970s has to take account both of the concrete work and of the party-building aspirations.

This article is not written from a Leninist point of view, but neither is it written with the purpose of joining in a wholly negative dismissal of "the sects." A sizeable number of the most serious, hardest-working, most self-critical, and most deeply radical people in the present-day left are members of Leninist organizations or would like to be. In particular, a very high proportion of those leftists doing political work in a working class context are Leninists. The article's non-Leninism is reflected, not so much in hostility to the groups or people it discusses, as in a different set of assumptions about the meaning of their

activity. I do not see the various parties and pre-party formations as entrants in a competition to see which one will emerge victorious and "lead" the American working class. Rather, I see them as groups of people who in various ways are trying to participate in, and influence, popular resistance to the workings of capitalist society. Leninist organizational forms may at times help or hinder them in this effort, but the forms themselves are hardly a timeless formula standing above history.

The article follows a basically chronological order. It first sketches the background of the Communist Party, next traces the emergence of the CP's left-Leninist rivals in the 1960s and early '70s, and then discusses their experience in working class activity in the early '70s. After tracing the groups' fortunes through the economic crisis of the mid-1970s, it tries to weigh the meaning of the historical record up to now. If the article seems at times to give too much space to the organizational history of various groups, that is because the publications of all the groups routinely ignore or distort the experiences of their rivals. In its sorting-out of the organizational chronologies, the article should provide a service even for many readers who disagree with its conclusions.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY

When the early stirrings of the 1960s student revolt first appeared, the CP was at the lowest point of its forty-year history. Just as the party had basked and flourished in the New Deal years, and in the wartime crusade against Nazism, so its fortunes suffered severely in the postwar shift to the right in American politics. The effects of this shift were of course savagely compounded by Cold War repression. By the end of the 1950s, after a bruising internal fight

over loyalty to the Soviet Union and the trap-
pings of Leninist orthodoxy, party membership
stood at one-tenth or less of its peak in the late
1930s.

It was not the CP's strategy that had changed
over the decades, but its ability to carry out its
strategy. In the late '30s CP members had held
leading positions in a number of new industrial
unions, and had led broad popular-front organ-
izations (the National Negro Congress, Ameri-
can Youth Congress, American Student Union,
International Workers Order, for example)
involving millions of people. Party members
saw these organizations as part of a strong
popular front against fascism and domestic
reaction, championing the interests of the vast
majority of the population. During the war
years, in which the CP opposed strikes and dis-
couraged anti-racism demonstrations in the
interests of national unity, its influence via the
unions and the popular-front organizations was
no less strong than in the '30s. But after the
war, as repression began, every organization in
which the Communists played a prominent role
was systematically isolated and in most cases
destroyed. The third-party presidential cam-
paign of former Vice-President Henry Wallace
in 1948, in which party members were the main
foot-soldiers, symbolized the difficulties in
trying to reconstitute a popular front that was
no longer popular.

In the aftermath of the Wallace campaign,
and of the prosecution of party leaders under
the anti-subversive Smith Act (whose use
against Trotskyists during the war had been
warmly applauded by the CP) the CP resolved
to dig more deeply underground. Several thou-
sand of its cadre went underground in the tradi-
tional sense, changing their identities and
homes for several years. The others went under-
ground in the sense of doing their main political

work in organizations which were not CP-
dominated and which either tried to exclude
communists or at least did not welcome them.
The party's 1954 program, for example, urged
"support for the anti-depression demands of
the A.F. of L. and C.I.O., for the farm de-
mands of the National Farmers Union, for the
democratic demands of the National Associa-
tion for the Advancement of Colored People,
for every proposal, every action, which can
help save our people from threatening eco-
nomic ruin, fascism, and war." Members were
encouraged to work within the Democratic
party where possible, as they had done during
the Roosevelt years.

The internal brawl which cost the CP a
majority of its remaining members in 1956-58
was over issues other than the central thrust of
party strategy. A large reform wing, most of
whose supporters dropped out during the fight,
tried to get the party to assert its independence
from the USSR in regard to issues like the
Hungarian uprising of 1956. There was no dis-
agreement over the proper course of political
activity for the CP, which was to work for an
"anti-monopoly people's coalition" — a
rechristening of the popular front. The CP's
draft political resolution in 1959 said "It is
essential to bring into existence an anti-
monopoly people's coalition uniting labor, the
Negro people, the small farmers, students,
professionals, small businessmen and other
democratic elements on a program of action for
economic welfare, democratic rights and
peace." As Gus Hall, elected party secretary in
1959 in a victory for the most orthodox faction
within the party, put it, "We want to partici-
pate in, organize and lead the broadest of
united front movements on every level — in a
thousand ways, in 10,000 places, on 100,000
issues if possible, with 180,000,000 people."

A GUIDE TO GROUPS

I. MAJOR PARTIES AND PRE-PARTY FORMATIONS

1. **Communist Party (CP)**: Founded in 1921 as a merger of two parties which had split away from the Socialist Party in 1919 in response to the formation of the Third International; since its founding, the largest Leninist organization in the U.S.; newspapers are the *Daily World* and the West Coast *People's World*.

2. **Socialist Workers Party (SWP)**: Founded in 1938 by members of a Trotskyist tendency whose founders were expelled from the CP in 1928; publishes a weekly newspaper, *The Militant*.

3. **International Socialists (IS)**: Founded as a national organization in 1969 as a merger of Independent Socialist Clubs, patterned after one started in Berkeley in 1964; ideologically a successor to the "Shachtmanites", who split away from the SWP in 1940 arguing that the Soviet Union was a new form of class society (bureaucratic collectivism) in which workers are exploited as much as under capitalism; publishes the weekly *Workers Power*.

4. **Workers World Party**: Founded in 1958 as a split-off from the SWP, based mainly in Buffalo, with an analysis much more friendly to the USSR and other Communist countries than other Trotskyists have; publishes the weekly *Workers World*.

5. **Progressive Labor Party (PL)**: Founded in 1961 as the Progressive Labor Movement, chiefly by members of a small left-opposition within the CP in New York State; became the Progressive Labor party in 1965; the leading Maoist group in the U.S. from 1961 until 1971 when it denounced Chinese leadership; publishes the weekly *Challenge/Desafio*.

6. **Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP)**: Formed as the Bay Area Revolutionary Union in 1967, becoming a national organization (the Revolutionary Union) in 1970-71 and forming the RCP in 1975; Maoist; publishes the monthly *Revolution*.

7. **Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)**, formerly the October League: Founded in 1972 as a merger of two

local Maoist groups, the October League (Los Angeles) and the Georgia Communist League (Atlanta), both founded in 1970-71; publishes the weekly *Call/Clarín*; became the CP(ML) in 1977.

8. **Communist Labor Party (CLP)**: Founded as a party in 1974, derived from the California Communist League which was founded in 1968 and became the Communist League in 1970; nominally Maoist at first, but swung rapidly in 1975 toward a basically pro-Soviet position, with the one consistency being allegiance to the Soviet Union during the Stalin period; publishes the weekly *People's Tribune*.

II. YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

1. **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)**: Founded in 1945 as the social-democratic Student League for Industrial Democracy; changed name to SDS in 1960 and became the main organizational vehicle for the New Left in the '60s; after splits in 1969 a much smaller organization keeping the name SDS was maintained under PL leadership until 1973-74.

2. **Young Socialist Alliance (YSA)**: Founded in 1960 as the youth group of the SWP.

3. **Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF)**: Founded in 1962 and affiliated with the Workers World Party, with the organizational lines between them not always being clear.

4. **Young Workers Liberation League (YWLL)**: Founded in 1970 as the *de facto* youth group of the CP.

5. **Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB)**: Founded as the Attica Brigade in 1973, with strong influence from the RU; changed name in 1974 and formally became the RCP's student group after the RCP was formed in the fall of 1975.

6. **Communist Youth Organization (CYO)**: Founded in 1975 as the youth group of the October League.

7. **Red Tide**: Founded in 1974 as the IS youth group.

Shrunken though it was, the CP was still the most important left organization in the U.S. at the time the student movement started, and it grew throughout the decade of the '60s. But the youth radicalization of the '60s did not come via the CP and it was not even significantly influenced by the CP. The party's only real youth group in the '60s, the W.E.B. DuBois clubs (founded in 1964) had only a small and transient presence on the campuses, and CP influence in other organizations was slight. There were several reasons for this lack of a CP presence. In the early '60s these included the residue of Cold War repression (Communist speakers would not have been allowed on most campuses, for example); students' own doses of anti-Communism; the ten-year generation gap that resulted from the CP's having attracted very few new members in the 1950s; and the CP's stilted propaganda. (As one college paper commented on a speech by a CP spokesman in 1960, "There is no doubt that many of the changes he predicts will come about — indeed, many of them are happening right now. But God, he was dull!")^{*} Direct CP influence was probably strongest in the mid-60s, as the student movement began to move to the left and as Cold War anti-communism began to be discredited. But as radicalization proceeded further still in the late '60s, the CP was left behind. It was too well-established to be transformed by students coming into it (as the Socialist Workers Party was). For newly radicalized youth who were coming to see themselves as revolutionaries, the Soviet Union was a woefully inadequate model of revolution, and the anti-monopoly coalition seemed irrelevant to revolution altogether.

THE REVIVAL OF LEFT-LENINISM IN THE 1960s

The Communist Party grew in the turmoil of

the 1960s but it was not transformed. The CP had too long a history, too many roots sunk in practical activity, too much caution bred of the repression it had undergone, to be fundamentally shaken up by the explosion of popular movements in the 1960s. In all important respects the CP is the same party today as it was in 1960, only larger. But there were thousands of participants in the 1960s movements, especially their student component, who came to embrace the basic tenets of Leninism without accepting the CP as the embodiment of the Leninist tradition. For them, the compromises and low-keyed political approach of the CP were not a necessary tactic for organizational survival, but were a systematic betrayal of revolutionary principles. The heady events of the '60s had given these people (along with tens of thousands of others who never accepted Leninism) a sense that revolutionary change was possible. The CP was seen as a wholly inadequate vehicle for working for anything other than marginal reforms in the system. These people swelled the ranks of the left-Leninist groupings that were already in existence, and they changed the basic composition of those groupings.* Radicalized young people also created wholly new left-Leninist organizations which took gradual shape in the 1970s. Except for the CP, all the present-day organizations which claim to be (or hope to become) the vanguard of the American working class are essentially products of the 1960s.

The best starting point for a look at left-Leninism in the '60s is with the experience of the older groups which were transformed by the

^{*} In using the term "left-Leninism" I am accepting the intention of all the CP's rivals to set up a party that is more revolutionary than the CP. Whether any particular group is *actually* "to the left" of the CP on this or that issue, or in general, is potentially a subject for endless discussion, but not by me.

influx of young members in the '60s. Of these the oldest and most important was the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP had originated as one of the small Trotskyist factions that were expelled from Communist parties around the world when Stalin cemented his control of the USSR and the Communist International in the late 1920s. Trotskyism held that the USSR had been a revolutionary socialist society in its early years, and was still a workers state, but that its revolutionary nature had been eroded by dictatorial rule and by an abandonment of world revolution in favor of "socialism in one country." The American SWP had reached a peak membership of about 3,000 at the end of World War II, having grown as a vigorous opponent of the labor unions' no-strike pledge (which the CP had just as avidly supported and helped to enforce) during the war. In the years of Cold War reaction the party lost about four-fifths of its members, including most of its trade union cadre, by attrition and splits. By the end of the '50s the SWP was chiefly a propaganda group which ran candidates for office.

From the late '50s on, with no durable roots in the working class, the SWP looked to student work as its primary source of recruitment. It worked assiduously to form a youth group which constituted itself as the Young Socialist Alliance in the spring of 1960, just as the first shoots of the 1960s student movement were beginning to appear. Its unambiguous orientation to the importance of campus work enabled it to ride the student movement to growth and influence over the course of the '60s. The anti-war movement which grew from 1965 on was most important in this connection. The SWP-YSA threw itself wholeheartedly into the movement from the start; its members became (and recruited) the foot-soldiers of single-issue end-the-war committees all across the country. In

time its ability to keep these committees active and to build demonstrations had made it the most influential single group in the coalitions that called the giant peace rallies of the late '60s and early '70s.

Chiefly on the strength of its anti-war work and its recruitment through the YSA, the SWP had a party membership of around 1,200 by 1973. By that time also, effective leadership in the party was very largely in the hands of younger cadre who had come in through the student movement and had little continuity with the party's working class roots of the 1930s and '40s. Older leaders such as the working-class veterans James P. Cannon and Farrel Dobbs were replaced by younger activists such as Jack Barnes, Peter Camejo, and Barry Shepard, all of whom had come through the YSA in the '60s. It was not a coup — the older leaders were the ones who had decided to turn toward the campus for recruits — but it did represent a decisive change in composition and in tone.

Although in a very different way from the SWP, the Workers World Party was also given a decisive stimulation for growth in the 1960s. Workers World originated as a minor split-off from the SWP in 1958, led mainly by veteran steelworkers in Buffalo with a few people in Youngstown and New York City. Its leader was (and still is) Sam Marcy. But its decisive growth came in the 1960s as the most angrily anti-imperialist wing of the youthful anti-war movement. Except for its newspaper, *Worker World*, the party existed mainly through its youth affiliate, Youth Against War and Fascism, which began in Buffalo and New York and which held the first Vietnam war demonstration in the U.S. in 1962. With the growth of the mass anti-war movement later in the decade, YAWF, expanding slowly to other eastern cities, kept at the movement's most

militant edge by carrying NLF flags and being the least ready to back off from confrontations with the police. YAWF was the one group besides the Weathermen to take part in the Chicago "Days of Rage" street marches in the fall of 1969. By the end of the '60s YAWF had perhaps a couple of hundred members and, because their memberships were largely overlapping, so did Workers World.

The Progressive Labor Party was at first a parallel development to Workers World, breaking away from the CP in the same way that Workers World split from the Socialist Workers Party. PL started as the Progressive Labor Movement in 1962, with a handful of New York State CP members expelled from the party for ultra-leftism (the main difference apparently was over their desire for a more open communist presence in working class activity) plus a smaller group of revolutionary students. Over the next three years PL maintained a flamboyantly open communist identification, recruiting from among the most radical, alienated, and militant members of a youth movement that was only slowly beginning to move to the left. Through its "illegal" trips to Cuba in 1963 and 1964 and the May 2nd Movement which it initiated as the first student group to proclaim resistance to the draft, PL built up a cadre large enough to take the step of forming the Progressive Labor *Party* in the spring of 1965. This cadre was overwhelmingly non-working class, and PL later said that of the 200 people present at the party's founding convention there was only one trade union club (consisting of five members) represented.

From the time of its proclamation of the party, PL made a turn toward base-building on campus and in the working class. It repudiated the culturally freewheeling tone of its early years, discouraging long hair and condemning drugs. In trade union work, the PL leadership

later recalled, during this period "most members were not known as PL'ers by their co-workers." In student work PL dissolved the May 2nd Movement and joined SDS in the winter of 1965-66, playing at first an inconspicuous role, then in 1967 putting forward the concept of a "worker-student alliance" and encouraging students to take summer jobs in blue-collar workplaces. Its own student cadres were prodded to take blue-collar jobs after leaving school.

Within SDS, despite the generally unobtrusive nature of PL's work at first, the party came under increasing attack from New Leftists. The attacks sprang in part from visceral worry about any disciplined cadre organization working within the unstructured milieu of SDS, and in part from PL's culturally retrograde opposition to the New Left's attempts to fuse youth culture (which PL considered a symptom of late-capitalist degeneracy) and radical politics. But PL grew apace as a function of SDS's growth. As the one Leninist group working within SDS it was in a position to say, in effect, "Here's how you can *really* change society" to students who were just being won to an amorphous radicalism. It had ready answers during a time when SDS national leaders were turning to one after another strategy in a series of efforts to comprehend the mushrooming student revolt and to decide where they should try to nudge it. PL's status as an opposition inside national SDS gave it far greater credibility than it would have had as the leadership of the organization. This was shown after SDS split apart in the summer of 1969 and PL inherited one of the remnants, the only one to keep the name SDS for long. PL's student program for the 1969-70 academic year, a year which turned out to be marked by the largest student protests in the country's history, was the building of a "campus worker-student

alliance.” It was a chimerical attempt to focus student militancy on campus-employee grievances rather than on issues like the war. In the tidal wave of campus militancy in 1969-70, PL’s strategy — imposed on its student cadre by the party leadership — amounted to a few specks of foam.

A final group with Old Left roots which emerged as part of the student movement was the International Socialists. Its heritage was in a “third camp” variant of Trotskyism which saw the USSR and other Communist countries as a new form of class society, no more progressive than the western capitalist countries and with their working classes being equally exploited. Formed as a national organization in 1969, the IS grew out of a network of local campus-based Independent Socialist clubs, of which the largest and most active was at Berkeley. The clubs’ major achievement had been to initiate Peace and Freedom parties in several states for the 1968 elections, with Eldridge Cleaver of the

Black Panther Party as the presidential candidate.

IS was not organized along democratic centralist lines, and was only ambiguously Leninist in its ideology at the time of its founding as a national group. With a much harsher evaluation of Communist-led nationalist movements than other Leninist groups, IS even tended to take a standoffish attitude toward the movement against the Vietnam war. Like its older and much stronger British counterpart (also called International Socialists), it made no claim at being a party and placed party-building in the distant future. When it dabbled briefly in SDS just before the 1969 split, it was as the most vigorous defender of a democratic and egalitarian vision of socialism.

In addition to the revival of various earlier forms of left-Leninism in the 1960s, the student movement also produced its own home-grown Leninism, which has come to be embodied chiefly in the Revolutionary Communist Party



International Socialists Convention, 1977. Workers' Power.

and the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) but which has many other manifestations as well. New Left Leninism arose within and around SDS in the late '60s, with a number of propelling causes (besides the natural appeal of Leninism to a radicalized intelligentsia, whose role in bringing revolutionary ideas to the working class it accentuates.) There was the presence of PL, which influenced even its opponents and provided a constant goad because of its persistence and discipline. The prestige among anti-imperialist students of the Vietnamese, Cuban, and (especially before the 1972 Nixon visit) Chinese Communists also was important. So was the example of the Black Panther Party, whose violent rhetoric commanded attention and whose vicious repression by the state had the effect of silencing doubt about its claims to be the leading force for revolution in the U.S. Finally, there was the frustration of the New Left leadership within SDS of being atop a vast organization which, because of its extreme de facto decentralization, they could not actually control.

New Left Leninism appeared in SDS in the spring of 1969 chiefly as rhetoric. In the superheated atmosphere of that spring there was a frantic scrambling around (in the Columbia University Library and elsewhere) for classical texts that would enable New Leftists to tackle PL on its own grounds. If PL quoted Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, its enemies in SDS would quote them, too, but with different fragments supporting different conclusions for present-day strategy. Very quickly Leninism became a "given" in the debates within national SDS; even the Weatherman faction, for all of its frenzied voluntarism and its dismissal of the traditional working class, made sure to make a claim on the Leninist heritage. But the Weathermen (who became the Weather Underground in early 1970) made no attempt to form

a Leninist party. Nor, for several years, did any of the other groupings in SDS who had adopted Leninist rhetoric during the internal debates. The Black Panther Party, whose representative at the 1969 SDS convention had urged students to "pick up the telephone and call Chairman Mao Tse-Tung" if they doubted that the Panthers were the vanguard organization in the U.S., was accorded the deference which its leaders' martyrdom had seemingly earned it. Only in late 1970 (when they bungled the planning of a large national conference they had called for Washington D.C.) and early 1971 (when the Panthers were split into bitterly quarreling groups led by Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver) did the Panthers' prestige ebb. Thereafter the road was left clear for groups emerging from the white New Left to begin making their own claims to form Leninist vanguard organizations.

THE RECEDING OF THE MASS MOVEMENT

The nationwide student strike against the Cambodia invasion in May 1970, in which hundreds of campuses were closed down either by students or by fearful administrators, marked the climax of the student movement. Over the next two and a half years students continued to make up the largest single group in the large anti-war demonstrations, but the campuses themselves were increasingly quiet. Although there were protests at more schools than in the late '60s, they were smaller and they represented chiefly the delayed ripple-effects of the student movement on such schools as regional state colleges and church colleges. In the spring of 1972 there were widespread student protests at the Nixon administration's stepped up bombing of North Vietnam and mining of Haiphong Harbor, but they were on nowhere near the scale of the Cambodia

reaction two years earlier. After the 1971-72 school year there was a pronounced decline in student politics across the board, and there was no mistaking that the student movement of the 1960s was over.

For years there had been discussion within the student left about what people should do after they left school, and how political activity could be carried on in a non-college environment. This question became all the more crucial after 1970 as more and more veterans of the student movement were out of college and as campuses became less and less of an obvious political arena.

In addition to the student movement's decline, there was another circumstance that affected the political choices of those who wanted to remain active. That was the appearance of working class militancy in 1969-70, on a larger scale than in a long time. More workers went on strike in 1970 than in any year since 1952, with the highlights being a long GE strike stretching over the winter of 1969-70, a Post Office wildcat broken only after U.S. troops sorted the mail in New York, Teamster wildcats forcing renegotiation of the master freight agreement, and a two-month strike against General Motors in the fall of '70. This was coupled with a mild recession in 1970 that made it look as though a long era of relatively prosperity might be coming to a close. Within the student left there had always been an instinctive (however unsystematic) siding with workers against management; for example, at the 1968 SDS convention when a reporter showed up from a Detroit newspaper that was on strike the entire convention was almost instantly on its feet shouting "out! out!" That was at a convention where a resolution that effectively wrote off the traditional working class almost got a majority of votes. Thus when strikes and the economic downturn in 1970 made the work-

ing class more "visible" to student radicals outside it, it was natural that a growing number of activists would try to put their work in the context of class struggle.

Beyond that, there was the question of organizational forms. There were three reasons why Leninism emerged as the main type of organization chosen by those veterans of the student movement who wanted to engage in working class activism. First, Leninism was by far the best-known ideology that stressed the importance of workers and the working class. Leninist revolutions, even the Chinese revolution which was based on peasants in a country with only a tiny working class, had always been carried on in the name of the proletariat. The vocabulary of Leninism still offered a ready framework in which working class activity could be viewed. Second, the existence of more than a dozen countries governed by Leninist parties offered a prospect of apparent success that was lacking in alternative socialist visions. Third, this was a period of declining political motion; the initiative in such a period always lies with those who call for tighter forms of organization in which individuals are bound by group discipline and pressure to maintain an intense pace of work.

In the gradual turn toward Leninism and toward working class involvement, the Communist Party was in some ways in an enviable position. It had not committed itself wholeheartedly to the student movement in the way that other groups had, and it had used the 1960s to strengthen ties within the unions and within nonwhite (mainly black) communities. Its primarily campus-centered W.E.B. DuBois Clubs had been totally overshadowed by SDS in the late '60s, but the CP's youth work had been strong enough that in February 1970 it was able to form the Young Workers Liberation League with a racially mixed and mainly non-student

composition. Of the 400 registered for the YWLL's founding convention over half were blue-collar workers, over 40 percent were non-white, and only about a quarter were college or high school students.⁵ The CP also called (though not under its own name) a Rank and File labor conference in Chicago in June 1970 that drew 875 union members, over a third of them black.⁶ Trade Unionists for Action and Democracy (TUAD), the organization which came out of the Chicago conference, has never become more than an organizational shell, but the conference itself showed the extent to which the CP had preserved its base within the unions.

Just as the CP had changed very little in the midst of the social turmoil of the 1960s, it changed very little in the early '70s. To a limited extent, it felt more able to conduct political activity in its own name — the Angela Davis case, which dragged on from the magnetic CP member's arrest in October 1970 to her acquittal in June 1972, was an enormous help in that regard — but for the most part CP members' day to day work was carried on quietly in the multitude of scattered organizations that were considered as parts of the anti-monopoly coalition.

The Socialist Workers Party, which had thrived in the largely campus-based anti-war movement, carried its same program into the early '70s. It continued to furnish the organizational backbone of such mass demonstrations as those in Washington and San Francisco in April 1971 (the largest since November 1969) and it tried hard to step into the organizational vacuum left by the splintering of SDS in mid-1969 by building YSA chapters on more campuses. It tried to carry its formula of precisely-focused mass demonstrations into the area of women's liberation with the formation of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition in 1971, although WONAAC was

never able to build demonstrations larger than about three thousand people. By 1973 the anti-war movement had collapsed with the signing of the Vietnam peace treaty, WONAAC had collapsed with the 1973 Supreme Court decision overturning state abortion laws, and YSA's main campus focus was to sell newspapers and run candidates in student government elections. But the SWP had continued to replenish its cadre via its recruitment through YSA and the coalition groups it controlled in the early '70s. By 1973, the SWP had 1,200 members; and over half of the people who attended its national convention were under 25 years old.⁷ Its polished weekly paper *The Militant* had an average paid circulation of 31,000, up from 17,000 in 1970. It was able to support a large paid staff (a minority at the 1973 convention tried to get the paid staff limited to 10 percent of the membership but failed)⁸ and was in a position to take an active role when new struggles would emerge in the future.

The SWP had no policy of workplace concentration, but its members for the most part went into white collar jobs (as high school or elementary teachers, journalists, social service workers, technicians, computer programmers, library workers, etc.) at the semi-professional upper reaches of the working class. Ironically, the Progressive Labor Party (which had put forward the strongest emphasis on industrial workers within the student movement) shifted at the start of the '70s away from putting its ex-student members into blue-collar workplaces, letting them drift instead into the professions and into the same sort of white collar jobs that SWP members generally entered. In both cases, the political activity that party members would engage in would mainly be away from the members' own workplaces. But the similarity ended there. PL's program was to build "*Challenge collectives*" through which party members and

supporters would sell PL's monthly paper at factory gates and other working class locations. There was a certain logic in pushing *Challenge*, whose photographs, frenetically down-to-earth language, and Workers-Will-Get-Revenge headlines made it seem like a left-wing *National Enquirer*. Sales went up to a peak of 90,000 in mid-1970.* PL's demonstrations, too, had in 1970-71 an unabashed revolutionism that made them ideal expressions of anger for the people (many of them working class) who took part. Whatever the ostensible purpose of the demonstration, it was sure to have an impassioned incoherence, with all kinds of issues brought in and with PL's "Fight for Socialism" party flags flying proudly.

Up until 1971, whatever the vagaries of its strategy for the U.S., PL had kept its role as the main pro-China group in the American left. But in 1971 PL followed the logic of its intensified anti-revisionism and charged that China was headed down the same "capitalist road" that the USSR had earlier followed. Since 1971 PL has had no socialist homeland (not even a "degenerated" or "deformed" workers state as Trotskyists do). Even though PL had long been under attack from other American leftists claiming loyalty to Maoism, its voluntary abandonment of its links with China meant that the field would be opened for a bewildering variety of new groups hoping to occupy PL's former position as the leading Maoist group.

At the same time PL's ex-student members were pulling out of blue-collar workplaces, a

* *Challenge*, August 1970. I should add that former PL members I have talked with feel that the strenuous sales campaigns, rather than the paper's actual appeal to workers, accounted for the high circulation figures. They feel that the workers they sold *Challenge* to would have bought any paper that seemed to be generally "on their side" — out of solidarity rather than out of interest in the paper.

large proportion of the members of the International Socialists were going in. IS's ideology had always stressed the direct control of production by workers, and it moved to act on that belief soon after the founding of IS as a national organization in 1969. It moved its national headquarters from Berkeley to Detroit in 1970, renamed its paper *Workers Power*, and decided that IS as a group would pressure individual members to "industrialize." Members sought jobs in basic industries — chiefly in auto, trucking (and other jobs covered by the Teamsters Union) and telephones — and with a particular emphasis on industrial cities in the Midwest. Its campus-centered chapters were seen chiefly as sources of recruitment, with the potential for feeding members into the areas where IS hoped to concentrate. IS's goal was to transform an almost entirely campus-derived organization into an instrument of working class power, and the first step was for the members to become workers themselves.

The Workers World Party underwent a much slower change in the early '70s, though its emphasis did gradually shift. Most of its work was still through YAWF and was still focused on the war, combined with work around the defense of imprisoned black militants such as the Black Panthers in New York and New Haven. It remained a small (though remarkably active for its size) East Coast cadre organization, composed mainly of whites from non-working class backgrounds. In 1971-72 it turned toward a more working class emphasis, setting up local groups under the name Center for United Labor Action as vehicles for doing some work around issues such as unemployment, the Nixon administration's wage freeze, and welfare. Its members were encouraged to get blue collar jobs ("If you are sure in your own mind that the future belongs to the working people," Workers World founder Sam

Marcy told members, “even the crummiest plant is easier to take”), and get involved in union work. But in most areas there was no policy of workplace concentration; the group hoped for more working class (especially non-white) recruitment, but the focus of its work was outside the workplace and on the streets.

* * * * *

The most striking development in American Leninism in the early '70s was not the fate of the CP or its already-existing rivals, but the rise of what became known to its partisans as the “new communist movement.” This was a home-grown Leninism that sprang from the ruins of the white New Left and from the left edges of nationalist movements among nonwhite minorities in the U.S. Never well-defined, its negative points of reference were set forth by Irwin Silber of *The Guardian* newspaper in 1972. Silber reported that “a sizeable cadre of radical activists” had “learned from its encounters with anarchism, adventurism, Trotskyism and revisionism” and was trying to develop coherent political principles and organizational forms.⁹

The Guardian itself is a weekly which started as a voice of the CP-influenced “progressive” survivors of the late 1940s and '50s. It grew as a publicizer of anti-war activities and was heavily influenced by the New Left in the late '60s. Now in the early '70s, after a split in its staff, it became a rallying point for the new Leninism. The paper's chief contribution was in its wholly favorable coverage of China and its retailing for U.S. leftists of the Chinese government's view of world affairs. Mao Tse-tung and the Cultural Revolution had been warmly viewed in the New Left in the late '60s, but in the early '70s a disillusionment had begun to set in, provoked by China's reception of President

Nixon and its support for the governments of Pakistan and Ceylon against insurrections. China seemed to most leftists to be operating more as a traditional Great Power and less as a beacon of revolution. *The Guardian's* intervention — it had by far the highest circulation of any independent left publication in the U.S. — was instrumental in helping to carve out a Maoist milieu within the American left. In this milieu a variety of parties and pre-party groups could find nourishment.

China was attractive to these people less for the details of its political and economic life than for the hope it offered for revolution in the U.S. In the Chinese government's world view, the Soviet Union had been a socialist country for decades, and then after Stalin's death in 1953 had veered toward capitalism and imperialism. No American Maoist group has been able to defend this historical position intelligibly, but for all of them it provided the assurance that they — rather than the much larger CP — were in the mainstream of twentieth century Communism. The task of Leninists in the U.S., in this view, was to recapture the revolutionary boldness that international Communism and even the American CP had shown in the era of Stalin. There was an assurance of historical continuity and (in China) a present-day example of a revolution that had not taken the wrong road. For those looking for an alternative to “anarchism, adventurism, Trotskyism and revisionism” it seemed ideal. It provided an ideological umbrella that, whatever its subsequent leaks, enabled at least three organizations to get started and attract several hundred members each in the early '70s.

The chief student-derived Maoist organizations in the early '70s were the Revolutionary Union and the October League. The RU originated as a study circle of ex-student community and workplace organizers in 1968 and emerged

publicly as the Bay Area Revolutionary Union in the spring of 1969 (in time to play a prominent role in the fight against Progressive Labor at the SDS convention that year). Publishing a series of documents called the Red Papers, BARU members made contact with others around the country attracted to its seriousness, its perspective of doing working class organizing, and its program of laying the groundwork for an eventual Leninist party while building a “united front” against American imperialism. (Formally there was little difference between the united front and the CP’s anti-monopoly coalition, since BARU equated imperialism with monopoly capitalism. But there was a vast difference in the tone, since BARU came out of the New Left; in practical terms the “forces” that BARU was talking about uniting were much smaller than the well-established reform movements the CP hoped to influence.)

Groups of ex-students in other cities started to form local collectives and BARU became a national organization, the Revolutionary Union, in late 1970. (By early 1973 it had organized groups in fifteen different areas, and by late 1974 it was in about twenty-five.) Throughout the group’s early life there was a running tension between militant anti-imperialism and often low-keyed workplace organizing. The tension came to a head in mid-1972 when a large part of the Bay Area RU group, led by Bruce Franklin, broke away to form Venceremos, a short-lived organization that espoused urban guerilla warfare. For the RU majority, whose most influential leader was Bob Avakian, the most urgent task was to build a working class base through the efforts of RU members who took blue-collar jobs.

The second major organizational pole of attraction for ex-student leftists wanting to proletarianize themselves in the early 1970s was

the October League, formed in May 1972 as a merger of the Los Angeles October League and the Atlanta-based Georgia Communist League. Both of the component groups were derived from remnants of the “Revolutionary Youth Movement II” faction that existed briefly in SDS (with a more traditionally Leninist version of the Weatherman’s anti-imperialism) at the time of the 1969 split. The key figures were Mike Klonsky of the Los Angeles group, a former SDS national secretary, and Lyn Wells of Atlanta, a former leader of the Southern Student Organizing Committee and a RYM-II candidate for national office (along with Bob Avakian of BARU) at the ’69 SDS convention. Aside from veterans of the white New Left, the Atlanta group also had several young blacks who had been part of the civil rights movement. Both the Los Angeles and Atlanta groups had been formed in 1970 with a perspective of taking blue-collar jobs and developing a working class base. Before their 1972 merger and for about a half-year afterwards they put their main emphasis on trying to recruit workers into study groups on the basis of putting forward communist ideas. As the OL’s founding Statement of Unity put it, the group stressed “broad propaganda directed primarily at the advanced workers.”*

Aside from the RU and the OL (which was attracting attention nationally and laying the basis for the adhesion of ex-student collectives in several other cities), there were a wide variety of other Maoist groups emerging in the early 1970’s, some strictly local and others with claims to a national scope. The most important

* This reference, along with others in a similar vein, was excised a year later when the OL reprinted its founding document — with no indication that the document had been altered to reflect a change in line. Of all the American Leninist groups the OL, now the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), has probably been the least scrupulous in its regard for historical accuracy.

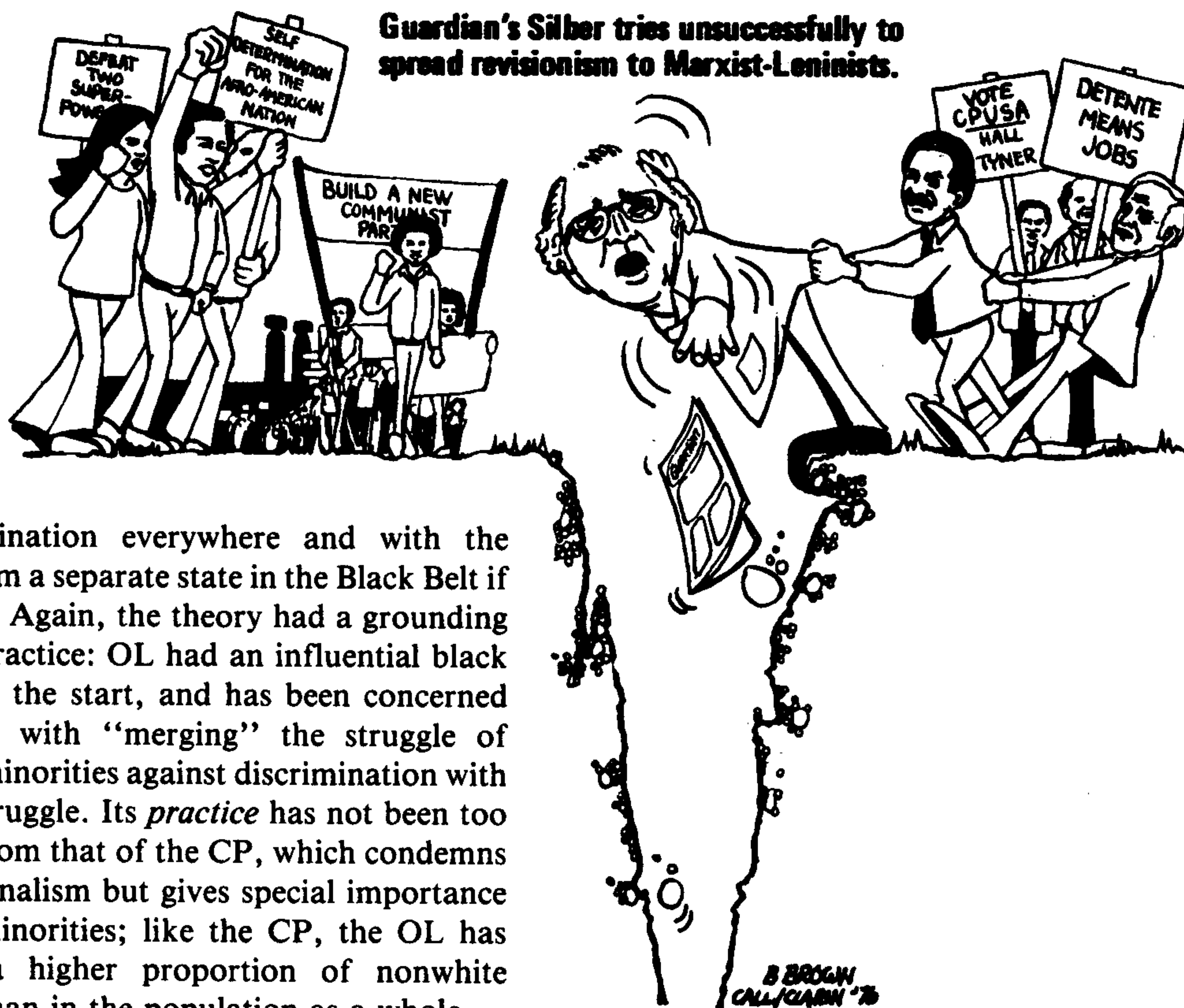
Build the New Party To Lead the Masses!

were (a) the Communist League, which merits special discussion; (b) a collection of tiny groups linked with the main Canadian Maoist organization (the Communist Party of Canada M-L), notable chiefly for their doctrinaire purism and subsequently joined together in late 1973 as the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist Leninists; (c) the Black Workers Congress, founded in 1971 by the non-factory leadership within the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit and moving toward Maoism after its formation; (d) the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, an offshoot of the former Young Lords Organization and active chiefly in New York; and (e) some shifting Chinese-American formations, with I Wor Koen as the most significant. In addition there were local collectives, some of which were in the process of affiliating with nationally organized groups. On the fringes, important because of their local roots but not really Maoist in their orientation, were a number of groups such as the Sojourner Truth Organization in Chicago (another offshoot of the RYM-II grouping in SDS), Modern Times in Cleveland, Workers Unity in St. Louis, and a dozen or so others. (These latter groups held a conference in Cincinnati in the fall of 1972 which drew about 200 people. They were bound loosely by an extra-unionist outlook on workplace organizing, a sharp emphasis on racism as a divisive force in the working class,

and a de-emphasis on party-building as an immediate priority; they never came together as a national formation, however.)

The only group that could be ranked along with RU and the October League in importance was the Communist League. Derived from a largely black and Puerto Rican group of orthodox Stalinists who were expelled from the Communist Party in the late 1950s, CL had started as the California Communist League with about a dozen members in 1968. It attracted a few New Left survivors after the SDS split and became the Communist League; its most important step was when a large number of the factory participants in the old League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit joined in the early '70s. CL had the heaviest working class composition of any Maoist group in this period, but its leaders argued that no practical activity was possible until a party was formed.

American Communist groups in the years after 1919 would undoubtedly have proliferated and split endlessly if the Communist International had not stepped in and forced the creation of a unified party in 1921. In the 1970s, however, the Chinese leadership showed no interest in playing a comparable role in regard to the array of Maoist organizations in the U.S. and other advanced capitalist countries. The major attempt at bringing unity to the party-building process was made by *The Guardian*, which sponsored a series of forums



self-determination everywhere and with the right to form a separate state in the Black Belt if they chose. Again, the theory had a grounding in actual practice: OL had an influential black cadre from the start, and has been concerned throughout with “merging” the struggle of nonwhite minorities against discrimination with the class struggle. Its *practice* has not been too different from that of the CP, which condemns black nationalism but gives special importance to racial minorities; like the CP, the OL has attracted a higher proportion of nonwhite members than in the population as a whole.

While there was wide variance among the emerging Maoist groups on the “national question,” there was much greater unity on the sexual issues that had been raised within the student movement at the end of the '60s. All the major Maoist groups excluded homosexuals from membership, opposed feminism as bourgeois or petit-bourgeois ideology, and barred women's caucuses from forming within their organizations. Within this general framework there were differences, with the RU standing out for its opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment and for its open sneering at homosexuality, but the broad outlines were the same. In general they followed the example of the CP

(earlier copied by the Progressive Labor Party) and rejected the alternative taken by the Trotskyist and neo-Trotskyist groups. The SWP, Workers World and IS all welcomed homosexuals, though the SWP had barred them prior to the emergence of gay liberation as an issue in the late '60s, and tried to accommodate feminist ideology to Leninism rather than rejecting it outright.

The adoption of conservative sexual politics by the new Leninist groups made sense. First of all, there was precedent. The Stalin era in the USSR, which to these groups represented the building of socialism, had been marked by the

restoration of Czarist policies on homosexuality, abortion, divorce, and similar topics which the Bolsheviks had at first swept away after 1917. Present-day China has also been quite puritanical in its official views of sex, and it was natural that the new American groups would take up the example of China as well as Stalin's USSR. Second, the task that the new Leninists were setting for themselves — the creation of a new vanguard party in a period of declining political motion — was one that called for an extraordinary effort of will and a bending of every effort toward political ends. Puritanism represented a natural corollary. It was not sexual abstinence that was called for, but the channeling of sexual energy into stable male-female relationships that would provide the fewest distractions possible (for the individual and for the group) and would leave the maximum amount of time for political work. Third, student-derived groups like the RU and OL were going into the American working class as uninvited guests, as politicians seeking to win a following rather than as working class people acting directly out of rage against society. As such they felt a need to define as narrowly as possible the range of issues on which they would present controversial ideas. It is this latter trait which, in general, makes political parties (not just Leninist ones) very slow to pioneer new ideas in the sphere of social relations; the tendency is always to take the approach that "We're just like you except that we believe X instead of Y on this particular issue."

The Maoist groups' hard-line position cannot be fully understood, however, without taking into account the political rivalry that they were inevitably engaged in with the women's movement. Maoism and feminism were the main claimants to the political heritage of the New Left in the altered climate of the early

'70s. Maoism laid claim to the New Left's strong identification with Third World nationalist revolution, of which the foremost example was China. Feminism, although it arose in the late '60s largely as a reaction to blatant sexism within the New Left, still owed a great deal to the New Left's vision of individuals having power over their own lives. Feminism (in all its variants) and Maoism confronted each other as warring cousins, and the Maoist groups were much less able to take feminist insights in their stride than were the older groups like the Socialist Workers Party. In the struggle of the new Maoist groups for a "critical mass" of members to launch Leninist parties, the autonomous women's movement was the main organized source of resistance to recruitment among veterans of the New Left.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: THE EARLY SEVENTIES

As most of the left-Leninist groups saw it, their central task in the early 1970s was to develop a presence in the American working class. The CP already had such a presence (however covert the party often had to be) but the other groups did not. Before looking at their efforts, it may be well first to look at the situation of the CP, which served in some important ways as the negative example that the left-Leninist groups hoped to avoid. The CP's two major problems, as admitted by party leaders themselves, were its lack of a strong rank-and-file presence and its limited ability to mobilize even its own members for coordinated efforts.

The CP's strong suit in its working class activity was the influence its members had won over a period of decades among a wide layer of mainly lower-level trade union officials. When

it initiated the Rank and File Conference in June 1970 it was able to secure a large number of endorsements, even from national officers of some unions. At the same time, the party had much greater frustration when it came to developing strength at the base. While party leaders talked of the need to form rank-and-file caucuses in unions (with Trade Unionists for Action and Democracy as a kind of coordinating center) very few caucuses were actually formed. Here a major problem was CP members' reluctance to distance themselves from union officials whose policies they could generally support. CP members had much more to offer these officials in the role of energetic activists who could provide legwork in union affairs than they could offer as leaders of independent caucuses. There was a trade-off between the dangers of cooptation on the one hand and isolation on the other.

A second aspect of the CP's work that the rival Leninist groups hoped to avoid was the party's tendency toward centrifugal motion, with members going off almost on their own. The 1969 CP convention, for example, had taken as its main theme the policy of "industrial concentration," with basic industry in the Midwest as the main focus. But two years later the party was still bogged down in discussions about how best to implement the policy.¹¹ In general the CP tended to recruit somewhat stabler, better-rooted people than the left-Leninist groups, and that made it all the harder for the party itself to decide its members' priorities for their own lives. By the same token, the CP's recruitment of new members from community organizations was often a two-way street. One party leader complained that "some of our comrades consider themselves as mass workers first and Communists second. They in fact become representatives of the mass movements in the

Communist party, not class conscious Communists in the mass movement."¹¹ The classic instance of the party's *de facto* decentralization was the 1972 presidential election, in which CP leader (and candidate) Gus Hall charged angrily that not all the members of the party's own central committee had voted for him.¹²

Needless to say, trade unionists in or close to the CP looked askance at young people from left-Leninist groups coming into the workplaces. The CP regards them as "basically the 'Left' flank of monopoly attack on honest trade unionism," while the director of Trade Unionists for Action and Democracy has called them "conscious, organized disrupters, as often as not, in the pay of the FBI, the CIA or the local red squad of the local police department."¹³ The underlying issue, aside from organizational chauvinism, is that the CP has regarded itself as the best judge of how far the unions (and workers) can be nudged to the left in a particular situation; the left-Leninist groups are seen as naive at best and as jeopardizing the possibilities of whatever gains can realistically be made by the unions in their struggles with management.

Actually, the work of the CP's rival organizations in the early '70s showed that it was possible for ex-student leftists to play an influential role, within certain definite limits. In individual workplaces, the role tended to depend on the individuals involved; that is, members of the Leninist groups would function well or badly depending on the same qualities that produce natural leaders in factories regardless of their organizational memberships. In strike-support work or other labor-solidarity actions, on the other hand, the size and energy of the organization in a particular city would be an important factor. In only one case during this period — the RU's work in organizing support committees for the Farah garment strike, which

dragged on from May 1972 to early 1974 — was any group able to make an impact as a nationally coordinated organization.

All of the groups eschewed from the start, or soon abandoned, the approach of trying to recruit working class people directly into the organization by propagandizing. PL tried that, especially in 1970-1971 with its *Challenge*-selling campaigns and all-out denunciations of trade-union leaders, but began turning away from that emphasis after about a year when it appeared to be isolating present members faster than it recruited new ones. The October League, although its style was very different from PL's, had a comparable approach at first, trying to recruit "advanced workers" into study groups in the shops where its ex-student members worked. And a few people were recruited in that way, but OL's main period of growth came after it decided in late 1972 to put much more stress on involvement in trade unions and in concrete workplace issues.

The turning point for OL came with a wave of black-led wildcat strikes, chiefly over racial discrimination, in Atlanta in the summer of 1972. After workers had wildcatted successfully against two major employers in the city, black OL members working at the Mead Packaging Corp. took the initiative in setting up a rank-and-file group which issued demands and then called a walkout to back them up. The wildcat lasted for seven weeks, with most of the black workers (two-thirds of the workforce) staying out. There was widespread support in the black community, mobilized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Sherman Miller of OL, chairman of the strike committee, won an overwhelming vote of confidence in the face of red-baiting by the *Atlanta Constitution*. On the other hand, most of the white workers stayed at work and the strikers won only limited gains. The Mead

strike gave OL a confidence that its members *could* take leadership in workplace struggles rather than staying isolated, but also a feeling that these struggles would have to go through unions if they were to be effective.

After OL's turn in late 1972, none of the groups had an approach that relied mainly on ideological appeals. Instead, they sought to involve themselves in trade-union and shop-floor politics (through union caucuses, strike support, union organizing drives, and sometimes direct action on workplace grievances). The idea was that by helping to provide leadership around day-to-day issues, members of the Leninist groups would both help to win immediate demands in a way that would increase working class solidarity, and at the same time create an opening in which they could broach wide political issues.

The main proponent of working in trade-union caucuses was IS. Its orientation was toward oppositional caucuses organized nationally within unions. It was not then strong enough in any industry to start such a caucus, but its members became involved where they could, notably the United National Caucus in auto, Teamsters United Rank and File, and the United Action Caucus of the teachers union. Of these, the United National Caucus was the one that offered IS the most room to work. (Teamsters United Rank and File was a fragile coalition of dissident bureaucrats whose warring ambitions tore the group apart within a year of its founding in 1971; the teachers caucus was too large for IS to have much impact.) The UNC had originated among skilled trades workers in the late '60s and had attracted a few long-standing UAW oppositionists but had no concerted participation by an organized left group until IS arrived to provide a lot of its legwork. As a national opposition inside the UAW, which despite the presense of shifting

cliques among its leadership is subject to the same one-party rule that Walter Reuther forged in the 1940s, the UNC was utterly insignificant. But it did maintain itself as a potential rival leadership, with a basic loyalty to the union as an institution. For IS the caucus provided a legitimacy in its union work that it could never have won so quickly by itself. The trade-off was that when IS members acted in the caucus's name they had to soft-pedal their own politics in behalf of a lowest common denominator acceptable to the caucus's best-known leaders.

The October League's experience with caucuses (which earned it a steady barrage of criticism from the RU for "right opportunism") was similar to IS's. Participation in caucuses led by other people could help give OL members legitimacy but could also hinder their freedom of action. The most-discussed example was the Brotherhood Caucus which OL worked in and helped to build at the Fremont, Calif., General Motors plant in 1973. The caucus swelled to 2,000 members by the time of the local elections which put the caucus's leader into the shop presidency. Once in office, he soon distanced himself from his left supporters, and in time OL was denouncing him vigorously. This sort of problem was especially likely to arise with black candidates for union office; given historic discrimination against black workers in the plants and the less-than-proportional representation in the union leadership, it was sometimes easy for black candidates to win office with black and white radicals doing much of the legwork. But the same pressures toward organizational conservatism that exist for white union officers exist for nonwhites as well, and the historical transformation of yesterday's militant into today's bureaucrat is just as easy. The CP puts major emphasis on the election of nonwhites to union office as a good thing in itself, but for groups

like the OL with shallower roots and necessarily a more rank-and-file orientation the problem is acute. A group like the OL has nothing to offer a union leader once he or she is in office.

A comparable problem could arise in union organizing drives, which OL and RU members were often involved in. Here the dilemma was the classic one of whether to subordinate everything else to the need to get a majority of workers to vote for a union. OL's newspaper *The Call* said at one point that radicals should use the organizing struggle. "when workers are most open to political ideas, to bring political issues directly into the labor movement."¹⁴ But the pressures in the other direction are enormous; even aside from the anti-communism of the unions, there is always the fear of identifying the organizing committee with the views



OL speaker calls for a new communist party. *The Call*, May, 1977

featuring representatives of different groups in the spring of 1973 in New York. They all drew respectable crowds, with the forum "What Road to Building a New Communist Party?" drawing over a thousand people to hear speakers from RU, October League, Black Workers Congress, and *The Guardian* itself. It was in this period that Irwin Silber could write that "Today, Marxist-Leninist forces in the U.S. are moving inexorably towards the creation of a new communist party."¹⁰

But unity in the new Maoist left was tantalizingly brief. The Communist League stayed aloof from the *Guardian*-sponsored discussions and by the time of the last two forums in the summer of 1973 the RU and October League were trading barbs (with the RU accused of sectarianism and OL of opportunism). By the end of 1973 the Communist League was moving on its own to form a party, the RU and OL were at each other's throats, and RU members had been ousted from the lower-level jobs several of them had held on *The Guardian*. The RU was the largest Maoist group, with perhaps 600-800 members, but it appeared that it would be the beneficiary of neither a united front from above (through alliances with the other major groups) nor a united front from below (by recruiting their members). In the spring of 1974 the process of disintegration went further when RU lost the alliance it *had* been able to build with the Black Workers Congress and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organizaton and also lost most of its few black members in a dispute over the "national question." At that time, with its isolation the most pronounced, RU announced that the time had come to "unite all who can be united" to form a new party, and intensified its polemics.

Differences on substantive issues were partly a cause and partly an effect of the tendency toward organizational proliferation. Of these

differences, the most significant was over the "national question" as applied to American blacks. All of the groups paid at least lip service to the 1928 Comintern resolution asserting that blacks in the southern Black Belt constituted a nation with the right to self-determination. But in seeking to apply this analysis the new Maoist groups diverged wildly.

The disputes, despite the bizarre trappings that they sometimes took, were not ideological hairsplitting but represented sincere efforts to see how a unified movement might somehow be built out of the racially separate revolutionary movements of the late 1960s. The most startling application of the Comintern theory was that of the Communist League, whose leader Nelson Peery formulated the notion that there was still a Negro Nation in the old Black Belt South, despite the huge out-migration of blacks since the 1920s; all the residents of that area, including its white majority, were designated as "Negroes." This was a convoluted attempt to give an ideological underpinning to CL's thoroughly integrationist attitude toward its own projected party and the path it saw toward working class unity. The Revolutionary Union, for its part, floated the theory that blacks were still a nation but a "nation of a new type," overwhelmingly proletarian in make-up. For RU this theory (which was finally dropped in favor of agnosticism after never-ending internal debates) served chiefly as a theoretical counterpart to its practical opposition to special demands on behalf of blacks or other nonwhite groups; RU's perspective has been similar to that of the CP's unite-and-fight practice from the 1930s, minus the progressive content that the CP's line had in a time of rampant and unsubtle Jim Crowism. Finally the October League had a confusing view that blacks were still a nation in the Black Belt South and a national minority elsewhere, with the right of

of its left-wing members and making the union drive easier to red-bait. There was no real resolution to this dilemma. The worst situation of all, especially as sectarianism grew among the Maoist groups, was for more than one group to be in the same non-union shop; one electronics shop near Boston, for example, is now considered unorganizable because too many different groups have members working there.

Whatever else they did, all the groups put a major stress on trying to stimulate labor solidarity, most commonly through strike support. This was most central to RU's work. RU members in about twenty cities started local workers' monthly newspapers (with names like "The Worker," "People's Voice," "Northwest Worker," etc.) for the purpose of carrying local labor news as well as doing low-keyed propaganda work. Distributed at workplaces all over the metropolitan area, the paper would try to convey a sense of class-wide solidarity. When strikes took place, RU branches would publicize them through the paper and, if they had the opportunity, would try to get workers from other workplaces to join the picket lines in solidarity. During the Farah strike of 1972-74 RU, building on the fact that it had cadre in El Paso close to the strike, built support committees which pressured clothing stores not to carry Farah products. In general, the strike support work of RU and other groups had the strength of being able to show strikers that they had allies. It also had a weakness in that the allies who could most easily be mustered were student and ex-student radicals. The main exception was in the case of ethnically based strikes like those of the Farah workers and the United Farmworkers (whose boycott nearly all the left groups took part in, especially during 1973-74); groups in the large Chicano communities in the West would often take an active part in support work for those strikes,

comparable to the role Atlanta blacks had played in offering a base of support for the Mead strike. In those cases, though, the message was as likely to be ethnic solidarity as it was working-class solidarity. Still, for all its limitations, strike support work probably represented the left groups' most tangible accomplishment in the early 1970s.

PL and RU were the two groups most oriented toward direct action over workplace grievances, although all the groups were ready to take part if something arose. PL was the most explicit in championing the tactic. As *Challenge* said in 1972, "When the best interests of the workers conflict with the bosses' laws, 'ground rules,' contracts or 'legal procedures' already laid down, a fight must be made to *break these rules*.'" For about a year after it formed the Workers Action Movement in 1972, PL/WAM put its main emphasis on petitions for 30 hours work for 40 hours pay, but in the summer of 1973 it turned to direct action as its main thrust.

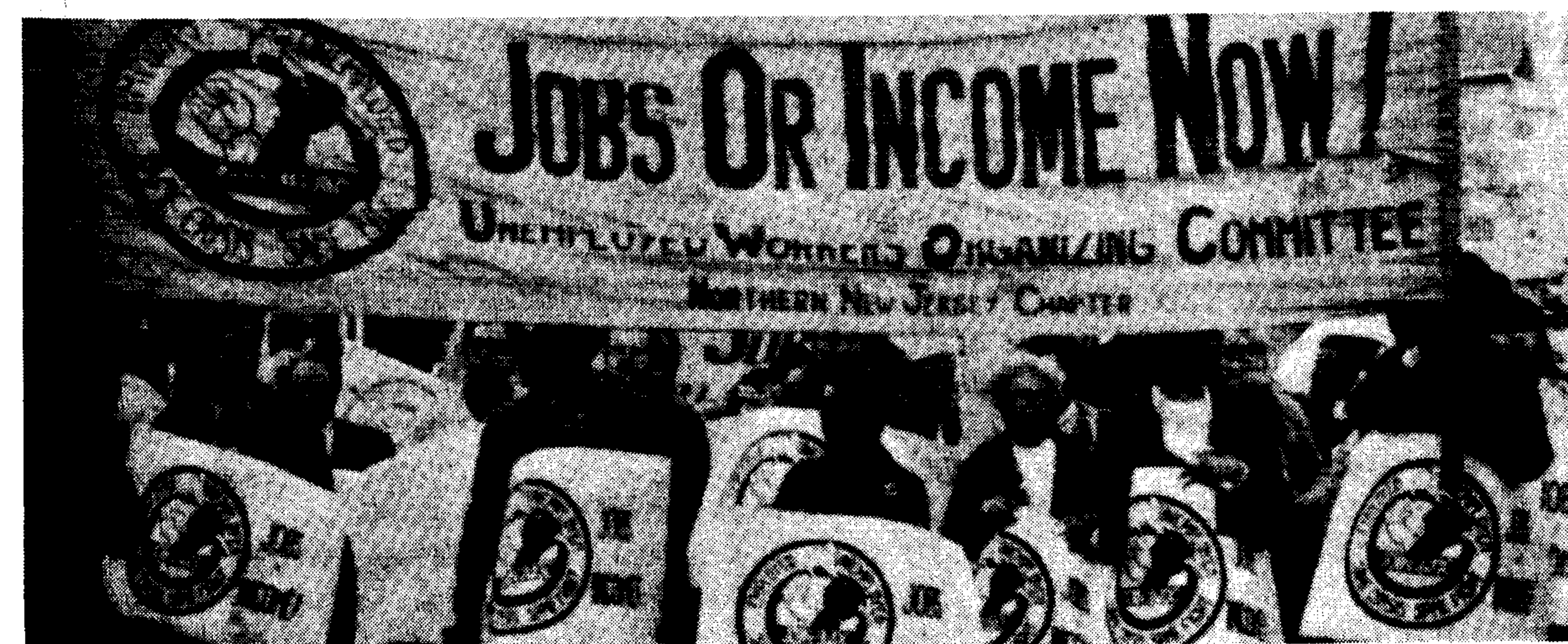
In the auto industry in particular, PL put forward a strategy of walkouts over health and safety hazards on the job. Besides being a way to deal with the hazards (which were rife, especially since the companies were working the lines overtime), such walkouts were seen as a way of preventing the companies from building up a stockpile in anticipation of the UAW contract expirations in the fall. In fact, PL members did play a role in several short walkouts over excessive heat in the Mahway, New Jersey Ford plant, and touched off a sit-in and strike at the Mack Avenue Chrysler plant in Detroit in August. The Mack strike, coming on the heels of two unrelated but successful shutdowns of other Chrysler plants in Detroit, evoked the full power of the UAW, which mobilized a thousand union officers and staff people to disperse the picket line and steer workers into the plant. Ignoring the fact that

the Mack strike had grown out of a particular context, PL took it as a vindication of its ability to lead workers in struggle and drew the lesson of "Greater Boldness" from the episode. A full-page *Challenge* headline in January '74, still reflecting this orientation, called on workers to **"Be Bold: Storm the Union Halls; Be Bold: Block the Plant Gates; Be Bold: Sit In; Be Bold: Besiege the Bosses; Be Bold: Wildcat."**¹⁶

Abstract directives could, of course, get no response, but even when members of a Leninist group tried to plan a walkout nobody was able to calculate when there would be a response and when there would not. In June 1974, for example, the firing of an RU member who was a chief steward at the Dodge truck plant instantly sparked a three-day wildcat that involved the energies and initiative of a great number of workers in the plant. Yet later in the summer radicals in the plant tried several times to lead walkouts over excessive heat, without getting any response.

In all the areas of their work, the ex-student Leninist groups were trying to recruit working class people as a major step toward trans-

forming the organizations themselves. It was slow going, though there were some gains. The chief barrier to recruitment seemed to be the intense demands that membership in the groups made on a person's time. It was not uncommon for members to spend nearly all their waking hours, whether on the job or in conversation or at meetings, doing something related to the work of the organization. Even though all the groups tended to have lower expectations of worker-recruits than of the ex-student core members, the time demands were still fierce for any member. Not many indigenous workers were found who were willing to make that kind of commitment, especially those with families. It was a special problem when a married person would join but not the spouse; any time taken for the organization would have to be fought for within the family. During the period the October League probably had the highest proportion of working class recruits — mainly black and latin — though exact figures are impossible to come by. The Revolutionary Union attracted a fair number of working class people into its "intermediate organizations" (strike support and other ad hoc committees,



Unemployed demonstration in Washington, D.C., April, 1977. From Revolution, organ of the RCP.

Unemployed Worker Organizing Committees, and newspaper staffs) but people tended to come in for a while and then drift away, with not many of them ending up as members of R.U.

Even aside from the question of time, there were other barriers to working class recruitment. In a great many instances the workers who were most radical, most ready to fight back against management, were basically rebels — not at all interested in harnessing their anger to a disciplined organization. They might readily take part in demonstrations, work with party people on specific projects, but feel no desire to submerge their own individuality in the party. For many of them, especially those put off by reliance on quotations from classic Marxist-Leninist texts, the party would simply present them with a new kind of authority not wholly different from the kind they resisted in the rest of their lives. The “petit bourgeois individualism” which many Leninists condemned was by no means a unique trait of the “petit bourgeoisie.”

HARD TIMES, 1975-77

It is sometimes said that lack of interest among working class people in left politics is due to the ability of the capitalist system to “deliver the goods,” and that in conditions of economic crisis the organized left has the potential for accelerated growth. Whatever the general validity of this notion, it has not been true in the mid-1970s. The onset of a near-depression in the U.S. at the end of 1974, reaching the highest unemployment level (9.2% officially) since the 1930s in May 1975, had no catalyzing effect on the organized left. Among the left-Leninist groups, with the exception of successful work in some areas, the general trend was toward a slowed rate of growth, greater sectarianism, and a variety of adaptations that

made the goal of a mass revolutionary Leninist party seem much more distant.

The frustration has been greatest in the Maoist milieu that grew up in the early '70s. Continued organizational rivalries and conflicting responses to events in China and to Chinese views of the international situation made the term “new communist movement” a virtual anachronism. But all the left-Leninist groups have had the dilemma that, while they can often do good work on some issues, they have been able neither to play a major role in working-class resistance to the economic crisis nor to gain hegemony on the left over their rivals. All of them keep going today chiefly on the raw energy of their ex-student cadre.

The one group which has probably been affected least by the economic turndown has been the Workers World Party. Its forte has been pulling together united-front actions around issues of imperialism and racism in alliance with whatever other groups it can work with in a particular city. Workers World, in fact, has been by far the most successful group on the left in building united-front coalitions in which even different Leninist organizations can coexist, however uneasily. That is true because it has been the most patient about its own organizational growth, and the least concerned with distinguishing itself from its rivals. Its major accomplishment in recent years was the initiation of an anti-racism march in Boston in December 1974, which drew well over 10,000 people and overshadowed the much smaller crowds which anti-busing forces had been able to bring out for demonstrations during the early months of school desegregation in Boston. Except for the CP, which stayed aloof (the head of the Young Workers Liberation League dismissed the march as “a routine exercise in left sectarianism”¹⁷) all the other

major national and local left organizations joined in building it. Workers World's own growth has been modest. It has groups in about fifteen cities in the East, Midwest and South, and — this is a guess — about three or four hundred members. It has functioned chiefly as a cadre of demonstration-builders, and its presence is felt much more on the left than its size would suggest.

At the other extreme, the Progressive Labor Party has been affected the most by the economic crunch. Over the course of 1975 and '76 PL moved steadily toward the belief that its work, however militant, had been reformist rather than revolutionary. As the party's national committee said in the fall of 1976, "in a period when the ruling class is unable to make concessions and attacks workers harder on all fronts, the situation cries out for revolution."¹⁸ It began to project joining PL as the only immediate step that workers could take to resist the effects of the crisis. *Challenge*, reporting on a struggle over the firing of a welfare worker in Detroit, said, "One worker asked whether we were using Lou Etta's case as a 'publicity stunt' to build the Party. The answer is basically yes."¹⁹ PL's problems in trying to recruit directly on the basis of "Reform No, Revolution Yes" were compounded by the fact that *Challenge*, though now a weekly instead of a monthly, was far less appealing, graphically and stylistically, than in the early '70s. Much of it was directed at party members themselves and not even nominally at the outside world. As of mid-1977 PL was present in about as many cities as it had been earlier in the decade, but only in New York was it of any appreciable size. (The second and third largest chapters, in Boston and the Bay Area, had left more or less en masse in the spring of 1974 and the spring of '76 respectively.) Individually, members of the party could involve themselves in militant

workplace activity — as when several PL'ers in a Chicago AFSCME local helped lead a several-week wildcat strike in the summer of 1976 — but it had nothing to do with their being members of a Leninist party.

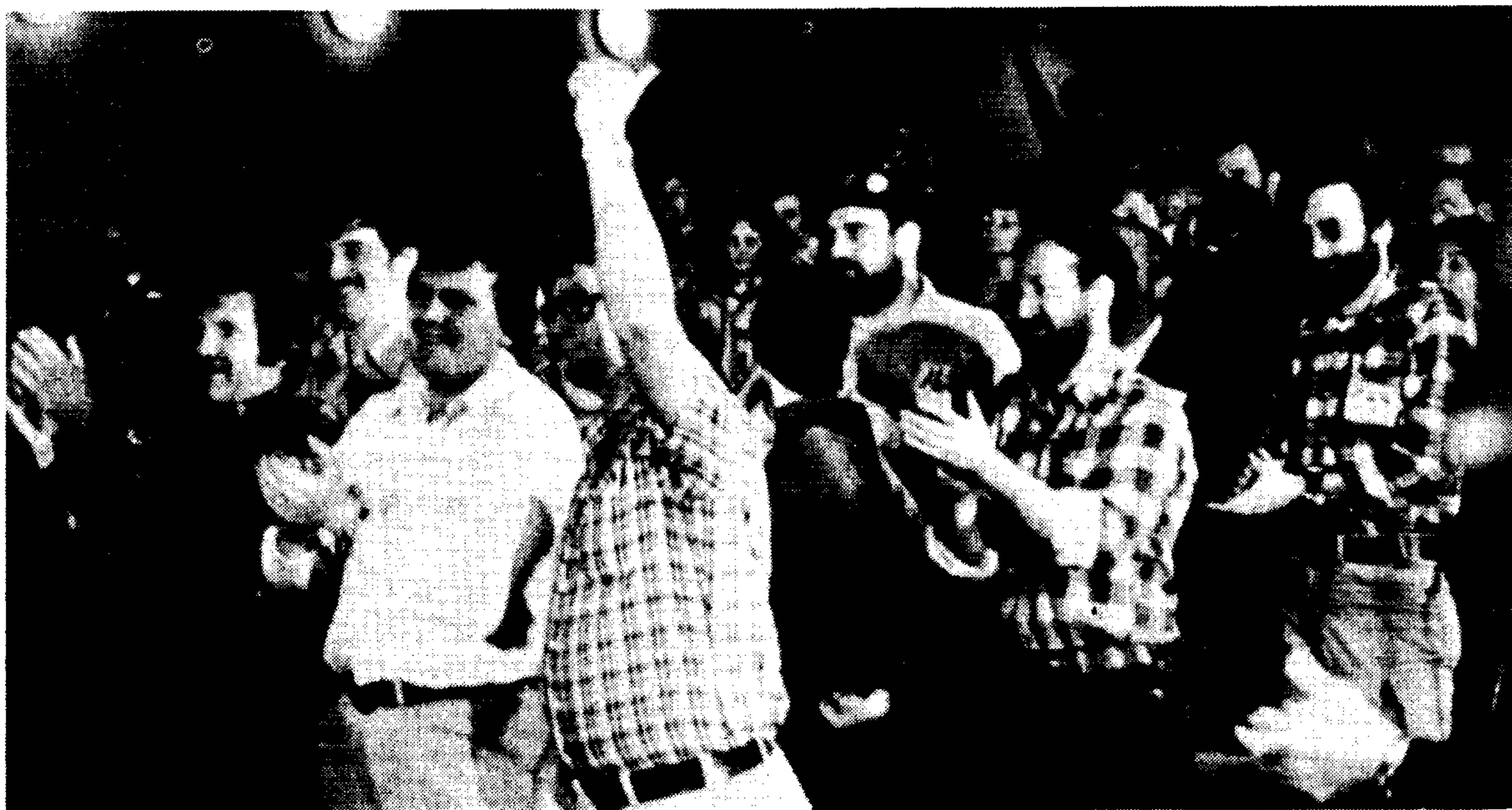
The Socialist Workers Party's perspective remained one of "adjusting ourselves to the demands and direction of the mass movement in order to help lead that movement forward,"²⁰ and on the whole this strategy has nudged it somewhat to the right as the turbulence of the '60s has receded further into the past. Within the Coalition of Labor Union Women, formed in 1974, the SWP along with the CP opposed the efforts of groups like IS and the October League to attack the top-down structure of CLUW and lessen its reliance on high-level women trade union officials. The party's 1976 presidential campaign, although in its details it was as full of transitional demands (ones which cannot be granted within the structure of capitalism) as ever, had an overall tone of much greater moderation. When he first scanned the SWP platform, the staff director of the Democratic Party's 1976 platform committee said "It all looks perfectly reasonable. You may have saved me ten months of work."²¹ During the turmoil in Portugal in the summer of 1975 the SWP, in contrast to all the major European Trotskyist groups, vehemently attacked the Portuguese CP and far-left groupings for failing to respect parliamentary forms.

The SWP's major practical successes in recent years have been in exposing federal violations of civil liberties and in organizing around the defense of busing. Its suit against government surveillance, filed in 1973 and still in the courts, has released thousands of pages of evidence of the government's "Cointelpro" harassment of left and liberal activists. The SWP's suit has thus been to the benefit of the entire U.S. left. The SWP also initiated the

National Student Coalition Against Racism which helped to build the December 1974 anti-racism march and a follow-up in May 1975 called by the Boston NAACP. Its work around busing, which brought a substantial number of blacks into the YSA and SWP, also served as a bridge into working class recruitment. The party enunciated a turn toward the working class at its 1975 convention, and began to break up its city-wide branches into separate locals with some being in working class areas. An increasing trickle of new recruits began coming into the party directly rather than through the YSA, and the change has been most pronounced among blacks. The proportion of blacks is not quite as high as in the population as a whole, but it is growing. The party claims to have 59 percent more members than it did two years ago, which probably means that it has somewhere around 1,800 now. At the same

time, sales of *The Militant* are only about two-thirds of their peak in 1973.

The work of the International Socialists in the mid-70s has been marked by one major success — its work in the Teamsters union — and a general frustration. IS's almost exclusive workplace orientation has been a source of weakness in a period of high unemployment. Not only is it harder for IS members to get or keep the kind of industrial jobs that the organization stresses, but the level of fighting that can be carried on in those jobs is lessened. High unemployment puts the management in a stronger position, with workers tending to be more worried about losing their jobs. Layoffs also reduce the proportion of young, nonwhite, and female workers in a shop — people who are often most sympathetic to some of the aims of left groups and most estranged from the union leaderships. IS's main adaptation to this cir-



Second Convention of Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

cumstance has been to attempt worker recruitment on the basis of trying to win whatever small victories can be won in the economic pinch. Union contract negotiations have been the main focus.

IS's biggest impact was in the Teamsters Union, where IS members stimulated the creation of two nationwide networks: Teamsters for a Decent Contract, organized around the master freight agreement, and an organization named UPSurge among United Parcel Service workers. Both groups, arising in an oppositional vacuum in the gangster- and Republican-ridden Teamsters Union, attracted a lot of indigenous rank and file leaders and a lot of attention within the union. TDC in particular, which drew hundreds of Teamsters to some of its local rallies, can probably be credited with pressuring the union leadership to win a marginally better contract than it would otherwise have gotten. And some Teamsters came into IS as a result of their contact with it. At the same time, TDC was organized around the narrowest of issues — not taking a stand, for example, on the Teamsters' scabbing on the United Farm Workers in California agriculture. The TDC national steering committee passed a motion to go on record as opposing "political change by any means other than lawful, constitutional procedures."²² Still, for a few dozen IS members to catalyze *any* sort of national opposition within the Teamsters was a noteworthy feat. A successor-organization to TDC, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, has established itself in the past year as a persistent thorn in the side of the union.

IS in recent years has been acutely conscious of its nearly all-white origins and has tried intensively to recruit blacks. The first major attempt was a fiasco. In the fall of 1974 the black Socialist Collective in Los Angeles "merged" with IS and its leader was made a

national officer, but he and most of his followers were back out again after a few months of trying to resist assimilation into the much larger IS. More recently, however, IS has attracted a youth affiliate, the Red Tide, which is mainly black, and some blacks have also been recruited in industrial work; the organization may be about 10 to 15 per cent black today.

At the same time, IS's industrial focus has helped to make it one of the most heavily male organizations on the left, despite the fact that it is receptive to many insights of the women's movement. More than any other Leninist groups, it has stayed away from community issues such as housing and welfare, and health care, in which working class women customarily play leading roles. Last spring, when IS expelled an opposition caucus (about one-fourth of the membership) that had grown up in opposition to the industrial-concentration policy, it lost a disproportionate number of its women members. It is probably at least two-thirds male today.

It is in the Maoist camp that high hopes of a few years ago have been most severely dashed. Organizations have survived, but the momentum that was apparent around 1972-73 has long since disappeared, along with all prospects for unification. One by one the major Maoist organizations have founded parties, more or less on their own. The Communist League formed the Communist Labor Party in September 1974, the RU formed the Revolutionary Communist Party in October 1975, and the October League formed the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) in June 1977. This summer *The Guardian* announced the start of its own effort to coalesce a party separate from all the others.

The inspiration furnished by China has, for most people and groups in the Maoist milieu, been badly dimmed. The two main turning



EXPRESSING SOLIDARITY, Chairman Hua and Chairman Klonsky exchange toasts.

points were the civil war in Angola in late 1975, in which China denounced the efforts of the Soviet- and Cuban-backed MPLA to solidify control, and the apparent rightward turn in Chinese domestic policy after the death of Mao Tse-tung in the fall of 1976. Even before the Angolan civil war, the Communist Labor Party swung erratically away from its pro-China identification and essentially embraced the Soviet Union's foreign policy while continuing to call its government "revisionist." The *Guardian*, whose support for Third World national liberation movements was older and deeper than its Maoism, broke with China in late 1975 over its Angolan policy, which seemed to put China on the side of South Africa and the U.S. against what the *Guardian* felt were the legitimate forces of national liberation in Angola. For its part, the Revolutionary Communist Party, while defending Chinese foreign policy down the line, was benumbed by the campaign against the radical "Gang of Four" following Chairman Mao's death; the RCP has withheld all comment on China's course in domestic affairs since a general affirmation in October 1976 that it knew the Chinese proletariat would carry the revolution forward.* Some smaller Maoist groups, such as the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists, announced that China was now on the capitalist road and declared that Albania was now the center of world revolution.

* In a refreshing lapse into humor, Clark Kissinger of the RCP (a one-time national secretary of Students for a Democratic Society) said in reply to an October League spokesman's insistence that he say where the RCP stood on the "Gang of Four," that "no matter what would have happened, if a chimpanzee had been elected Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, he would have gotten a telegram of congratulations from Michael Klonsky." (*Revolution*, Jan. 1977) OL, in a later polemic against the RCP, summarized this comment by accusing its rival of "heaping abuse on Stalin, Mao-Tse-tung and the present Chinese leadership (whom they referred to as 'chimpanzees.')" (*The Call*, April, 1977)

The October League was the principal group which declared itself ready to follow China wherever it led. OL has called for striking the "main blow" against the USSR in world affairs, and OL's chairman has spoken of opposing those forces in the U.S. which favor "appeasement." OL's newspaper gave instantaneous support to the Chinese leadership's campaign against the "Gang of Four" and has kept after the luckless "Gang" members ever since. In August 1977, after OL had formed the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), Chinese CP chairman Hua Kao-Feng singled out the new party's leaders for an elaborate banquet in Peking. The tone of the speeches seemed to indicate that the CP(ML) will be the closest thing to an "official" pro-China party in the U.S. With Mao Tse-tung dead, however, the prestige-value of this recognition is worth far less in the American left than it would have been a few years earlier.

Of the larger Maoist or once-Maoist groups, it is the Communist Labor Party that has suffered the most in the past several years in the sphere of organization-building. The CLP floundered ideologically after its founding congress in 1974, and now exists in the general orbit of Communist Party politics, a polite but unwanted left-opposition to the CP. The CLP's main newspaper, the *People's Tribune*, is like the Progressive Labor Party's current *Challenge* in being a propaganda organ that is much too dull for its intended purpose. Clearly at this point, CLP members who are doing effective political work in their workplaces and communities are doing so as individuals or small groups rather than as members of a national organization. A recent article in the *People's Tribune*, complaining that sales had dropped badly, said, "We must ask our comrades and our readers, if you do not use the national press to organize and lead the prole-

tariat in its activities, what *do* you use?"²³ At a guess, the party's membership may be about half of the five hundred people who attended its founding congress. The group's one successful activity is its book-publishing operation, which reprints and distributes old Stalinist classics under the imprints Proletarian Publishers and Vanguard Press.

The Revolutionary Communist Party, formerly the Revolutionary Union, started as the largest nationally organized Maoist group and it probably is still the largest today. But its momentum is questionable. Since the spring of 1974, when the RU announced its intention to "unite all who can be united" and found a new party, it has had slow going both in the ex-student Maoist milieu and among the working class people it has sought to draw in. Its attempt to wade into the Boston school crisis in the fall of 1974, with a strong stand against busing, had no impact on the course of the Boston desegregation fight but made RU a pariah on the left. Relations with the *Guardian* reached the point where RU members in New York held an angry demonstration at the newspaper's office protesting its treatment of RU activities. The RCP when it formed a year later was basically the RU plus a local group in Honolulu and scattered clusters of people that RU had already been working with in other cities. Since the party's founding its slow growth has been a disappointment to those who thought that having a party would make a major difference in the organization's work.

Although the RU/RCP has always stressed economic issues more insistently than any other Maoist group, the economic crisis of the mid-70s has led to only limited gains. RCP-initiated Unemployed Worker Organizing Committees have worked strenuously to mobilize the unemployed (under the old SDS slogan "Jobs or Income Now") and to

publicize cutbacks on unemployment relief, but there has been no massive response. It is sobering (and not merely for RCP members) that there have been no local demonstrations of the unemployed in any way comparable to the huge rallies of March 1930 which amounted to hundreds of thousands of people across the country. The RCP has also continued its labor-solidarity work with the initiation of city-wide or regional workers organizations in places such as the Bay Area, New York-New Jersey, and Milwaukee where it is strong enough. As of September 1977 there is also a National United Workers Organization with RCP members as its sinew. Much of the RCP's recruitment, however, seems to be through its student group the Revolutionary Student Brigade, which is the main nationally organized rival to the SWP's Young Socialist Alliance in the shrunken arena of left wing campus politics. More of the RCP's members than previously are working class in origin, but it is still a basically ex-student organization whose working class recruitment has never entered a period of self-sustaining growth. Its membership is probably around 600 nationally, and the largest demonstration it has led in recent years was its July 4, 1976 march in Philadelphia which drew around 3,000.

During 1974, while the RU antagonized more and more people in the Maoist milieu, the main beneficiary was the October League, which basked in its relative nonsectarianism. OL partisans held several *Guardian* staff positions, and OL members in Boston were able to pull together a "Fred Hampton Contingent" for the December 1974 anti-racism march with participation from a variety of independent (largely nonwhite) groups. But in short order OL moved toward a more sectarian stance. It split partially with the *Guardian* in the spring of 1975 over its insistence on "No United Action with Revisionists" in trying to lead Inter-

national Women's Day marches with programs aimed at excluding the Communist Party. In the summer it announced plans to build a new party as soon as possible and in the fall it took sole control of the Southern Conference Educational Fund, a once-broad coalition of southern radicals and reformers. As it followed the intensification of Chinese anti-Soviet rhetoric in 1975 it progressively lost support in the ex-New Left milieu it had formerly thrived in.

During its protracted party-forming process, the OL's mass work took on an increasingly propagandistic and sectarian flavor. In the spring of 1975 its members formed local Fight Back committees to carry out resistance to attacks on working class living and working conditions. And a National Fight Back Organization was formed at a Chicago conference in December '75 with well over a thousand participants. But OL (now the Communist Party M-L) appears to have used the Fight Back groups for short-term recruitment, pushing its politics much harder than the RU does in its comparable organizations. Fight Back participants who cannot be recruited into OL appeared to drift away without being replaced by new people. At this point Fight Back demonstrations tend to be only a little larger than the CP(ML)'s own membership in the particular city where they take place. In 1976 OL criticized its previous trade union work for "rightist deviation" and denounced Ed Sadlowski's campaign for the United Steelworkers presidency as a trick by the bourgeoisie to "channel the revolutionary aspirations and strivings of the masses into reformism."²⁴ Its current trade-union slogans such as "Boycott the [union] elections! Drive out the bureaucrats! Build class struggle unions!" have no basis in logic and none in practice except as part of a fishing expedition for scattered workers who might be

potential recruits. Now that the party has been formed, the line will almost certainly change in the direction of less rhetorical militancy.



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Kids raise money for new Party!

Dear Call—

On Friday, me, my sister and our friends had a ice tea sale. We made lots and lots of ice tea. We sold most of the ice tea. Lots and lots of people got some ice tea.

After the sale was over, we made lots and lots of money. We made \$3.55. We are going to put all the money into the new Communist Party.

All of us are very happy. The price of the ice tea was a dime.

By Elizabeth, Catherine, Genevieve and Janine from Denver



From The Call, August, 1977.

The CP(ML) at this point is probably still somewhat smaller than the RCP, though it appears to have a larger working class (and especially nonwhite) composition. By being less hostile than the RCP to women's issues it has also built a membership that is much less male dominated. Over 60 per cent of the delegates to OL's 1975 congress, in fact, were women. The proportion of nonwhites in the organization may be as high as one-quarter or one-third, much higher than in the RCP.

For the organized left in general, the most discouraging aspect of its work in recent years has been its inability to touch off significant resistance to any of the major attacks that the economic crisis has brought onto working class people: unemployment, speed-up, cutbacks in social services, and the deportation of "illegal aliens." The theories of leadership of the Leninist groups have not been a significant aid in stimulating such resistance. The most significant work has probably been that of CP members, scattered throughout hundreds of unions and community organizations around the country, doing whatever seems possible in a given situation. The RCP's work around unemployment has been energetic and valuable, but, in relation to the size of the problem, hardly significant. The SWP has at times tried to apply its mass-demonstrations approach to the problem of social service cutbacks, but has had little success; for example, a New York demonstration called at the height of that city's fiscal crisis in 1975 drew only 300 people. All the groups have taken part in, or helped to organize, small local protests against the round-up of "illegal aliens," but the protests have been small and have chiefly a slight deterrent value in making the deportations fit less smoothly into the bureaucratic routine of local Immigration officials.

Where left groups have been able to make their presence felt nationally, it has mainly been around issues that are peripheral to the current economic crisis. Members of the RCP are said to have played a role in helping to spread the 1975 and 1977 wildcat strikes of coal miners; but the coal industry has been exceptional in experiencing boom times throughout the '70s. And another wildcat in 1976, with no sign of organized-left involvement, was as big as the other two. The work of IS members in the Teamsters union was also in the context of a

well-organized industry in which workers had a degree of economic security as a basis for demanding greater concessions in the contract. Similarly, the Sadlowski campaign in the steel union, into which a number of left groups put a fair amount of energy, was conducted chiefly around issues of union democracy rather than being directly tied to the economic crisis. Sadlowski's 44 per cent showing, while significant in view of the red-baiting he encountered, was about the same as the percentage won by previous candidates who had lacked an organized network of supporters.

PROSPECTS

A balance sheet on the efforts of American Leninist groups in the 1970s has to take account of both their practical work and the persistent hope that *the* vanguard of the working class will emerge through the strivings of the various Leninist parties and pre-party formations. It is hard to separate these two areas, since they are firmly linked together in the ideology of the Leninist groups themselves; in strategic discussions virtually every description of concrete work is seen as being related to the need for a vanguard party. But for our purposes it is necessary to separate the concrete work from the party-building aspirations.

In their concrete work, the Leninist groups have often come out looking quite well. In particular, the "colonization" of ex-students in blue-collar jobs has been anything but a fiasco. Like CP militants in previous decades, these people have generally been able to develop roots in their new surroundings and have been able to take an active role in workplace and union politics. Growing numbers of ex-student leftists (party members as well as independents) are being elected to lower-level trade unions offices, especially as shop stewards, after a few years on the job. Whatever the dilemmas they

will encounter once in office, their election is a sign that they are accepted as workers and not as exotic intruders in the workplace. To be sure, it is by focusing on immediate issues that they are generally entrusted with formal or informal leadership; the one Leninist group which maintains the purest and most uncompromising stance in its trade-union work, the Spartacist League, has achieved near-total isolation for the union caucuses it has established. When groups like the October League and Progressive Labor periodically take on aggressive all-or-nothing postures in their leaflets and demands, the same isolation awaits those of their members who faithfully carry out the organizational line. But the general picture remains a positive one: a high proportion of the members of the left-Leninist groups are in working class jobs and are able to participate, often influentially, in the life and struggles of their workplaces.

Leninist organization has affected the concrete work of individual members in different, sometimes contradictory ways. It seems clear that the democratic-centralist structure, with constant criticism and self-criticism, draws from many individual members a far greater commitment of time and energy than they would otherwise make to their political work. At the same time, membership in a group (especially the smaller and more impatient left-Leninist groups) can diminish the chance of friendships with other workers. The party member has little free time and has to justify virtually any socializing to himself or herself in terms of the political uses that may come of it. Where the other worker happens to be a member of a different Leninist organization, the problem is compounded. This worker, rather than being a potential recruit, is an *obstacle* to recruitment. Depending on the flexibility of the individuals involved, squabbling between rival vanguards can often cause wonderment and



contempt toward the left in general among the uninvolved people who witness it. It can also severely hamper the concrete work that the members of any one group want to do. Even at best, a tremendous amount of time, for members of nearly all the Leninist groups, is spent in activities whose chief purpose is to build the organization itself rather than to spur working class activity more directly.

As for the "science of Marxism-Leninism" that some groups claim to be bringing to the class struggle, it is clear that the science is very often a matter of guesswork. The best discussions I have seen in a recent Leninist publication of this topic were in the RCP's *Revolution* in 1976, in a series of discussions of the "mass line." The articles were good in that they recognized the immense problems that face a would-be vanguard group in trying to gauge the mood of a group of workers and decide how to try to intervene in a fluid situation. As one of the articles said, in a convoluted analysis of one particular action, "While, on the one hand, communists couldn't have led the masses unless they *were* sticking close by them and coming from *within* their ranks, on the other hand,

once communists and advanced forces were within the ranks of the broad masses of workers and, to whatever extent they were within, there still remained the question of what they were going to *do*.””” The Communist Party has long accorded its members a very broad leeway in how they will act in concrete circumstances, having learned from experience the difficulties in setting national policies and programs that are too specific. Even the Socialist Workers Party, which in the '60s and '70s has concentrated its members' energies on campaigns set by the national SWP leadership, has generally stayed away from prescribing what its members should do in workplace settings or in unions. Newer and smaller groups like Progressive Labor, IS, and the Maoist groups, on the other hand, have tried to establish an organizational presence in the working class by committing as much energy as possible to specific, carefully chosen programs. But there is no “science” that guides them in these programs. A real science would enable a group to predict the results of its intervention in a particular field of activity, and all of these groups have been markedly unable to make predictions of that sort.

When we move on to the question of party-building, and the goal of creating a hegemonic party to the left of the CP, the prospects of the left-Leninist groups seem much more cloudy than in the realm of concrete activity. This is seen most obviously in the matter of size. The CP is by far the largest Leninist organization, and it also appears to be taking on new members faster than any other group. The left-Leninist groups, unlike the CP, are heirs of the student movement of the 1960s. But none of them was able to recruit enough survivors of that movement to create a critical mass of members for the forging of a strong party. And none of them has achieved a self-sustaining recruitment of working class members in recent

years. The Socialist Workers Party, much the largest of the groups other than the CP, had ideal conditions in the sectoral movements of the late '60s and early '70s to draw even with the CP, but it failed to do it.

Aggravating the problem of size is the problem of organizational proliferation. If everyone who wanted a Leninist party to the left of the CP were to unite, they might have a large one, but that is not within the realm of possibility. The growth of competing organizations is not simply the result of certain people being obsessively sectarian. Even where two groups might be fairly close politically, there is a built-in logic in the Leninist form of centralized organization that leads to the formation of new groups by those who cannot win the old groups to their positions. The fact that the CP has enjoyed a relatively large membership without any recent splits is due to the fact that the CP is a special case. First, it attained its position on the left during the Stalin era, when the Soviet Union's position as the single pole of attraction for Communists abroad offered a “franchise” to one Leninist group in every other country. Second, as we have seen, the CP does not operate as a Leninist cadre organization in nearly so disciplined a fashion as its smaller rivals; within the CP there is room for a far greater variety of viewpoints and activities than in the smaller groups.

Even if we leave aside the question of numbers, the experience of recent years casts doubt on the left-Leninist vision of a vanguard party to the left of the CP. For its rivals, the CP is a hopelessly compromised reformist organization, part of the problem and not a solution. The left-Leninist groups, especially the newer ones forged in the 1970s, have tasted neither the carrot of mass influence nor the stick of repression that are part of the CP's heritage. But even in the '70s the experience of these

Anita Bryant is
no more of an
angel....



...than the homosexuals she attacks.
They are both signs that this
society is falling apart.

groups offers signs that the necessities of organizational survival bring with them a certain cautionary influence. The Socialist Workers Party, for example, has seemed to deepen its commitment to parliamentary forms in the '70s, taking on some of the aspects of a social democratic party despite its Leninist forms of internal organization. The Revolutionary Communist Party's consistent stand against busing is hard to understand as anything other than an attempt to ease the party's acceptance in white working class areas. The Communist Party (M-L), formerly the October League, has followed its pro-China views to the point of taking what can only be called right-wing positions on issues of American foreign policy and military spending. All of the groups, to the extent that they have been able to take part in coalitions involving any significant number of workers, have had to play down many aspects of their politics; the International Socialists' work in the Teamsters Union is a good example of this.

From "Anita and the Drag Queens," article in the
July 1977 issue of the New York-New Jersey
Worker, affiliated with the Revolutionary Commun-
ist Party

It would be a grave mistake to view the frustrations of left-Leninism in the '70s as simply the product of "bad decisions" made by the leaders and members of the particular groups that have entered the field. The experience in the U.S. is basically the same as in other advanced capitalist countries, only on a smaller scale since our left is much less significant than elsewhere. Nowhere has a left-Leninist party, whether Trotskyist or Maoist or neither, threatened seriously to displace a Communist party or even to gather most of the left-Leninist forces in the country under its wing. What is in question is not the continued survival of most of the left-Leninist organizations in the U.S., nor their ability to make contributions to a working class resistance to capitalism. But when it comes to the specific organizational goals of these groups, the building of a large party that will eclipse the Communist Party from the left and become a revolutionary vanguard for the entire American working class, it is a different story. The experience of recent years suggests that the goal is a will-of-the-wisp.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Political Affairs*, 33 (April 1954), pp. 13-14.
2. *Ibid.*, 38 (September 1959), p. 34.
3. *The Worker*, Jan. 3, 1960.
4. *Reed College Quest*, Feb. 15, 1960.
5. *Daily World*, Feb. 10, 1970.
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9. *The Guardian*, June 21, 1972.
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11. Jose Stevens, "Party Work in Harlem," *Political Affairs*, 50 (Sept. 1971), p. 41.
12. Gus Hall, "The 1972 Elections: A Turning Point," *ibid.*, 52 (Jan. 1973), p. 18.
13. *Daily World*, April 29, 1975; *Labor Today*, Jan. 1976.
14. *The Call*, October 1974.
15. *Challenge*, Jan. 20, 1972.
16. *Ibid.*, Jan. 24, 1974.

17. *The Militant*, Dec. 27, 1974.
18. *Challenge*, Oct. 14, 1976.
19. *Ibid.*, Oct. 7, 1976.
20. *The Militant*, Nov. 7, 1975.
21. *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1975.
22. *Workers Vanguard*, April 2, 1976.
23. *People's Tribune*, March 15, 1977.
24. *The Guardian*, Jan. 19, 1977.
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A Survey of Movements and Ideas

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INDUSTRIAL PARK POEMS

FREE ENTERPRISE

Handbills stuck on every car
tomorrow will be litter
and our cars, like statements
done in duplicate.
Disheartening
to walk out in the parking lot,
see the advertising trained on us.
Even though the Mall is down the road
these guys come right up to the door:
Housewares. By the truckload.
From the factory.

It makes me think of Grandpa
selling watermelon, doing business
off the tailgate. The truck he rode
on Flatbush Ave, pushing rotten melons off,
is like the truck that comes tomorrow
selling us pots and pans.

At lunch we stroll to look them over.
Our income is steady and our houses fill,
while men who hustle cheap goods,
like my husband's father, work to keep moving.
They only wait to close a sale,
nailing down our immobility, sewing up,
a dollar at a time, their dream:
to grow executive sons on housewives' money.

Miriam Goodman

SHARING AN OFFICE

The typewriter motor whirring,
the juice can, its pop top
pulled off like a zipper,
hurtling into the wastebasket:
a service of weekday noises.
The technical writer's typewriter
gathers itself towards speech,
then lapses into silence
barely breathing.

As elders spell the congregation
in the verses of a psalm,
we type at one another.
I, worried about his depression,
let fly a volley of noise.
Under the barrage, he vanishes.
I do my job as if I were a carpenter
nailing up the framing for a house
while someone in the river
shouted "Help!"

CAFETERIA

Clock up on the wall
eggs us on. We sprawl

around the tables, available
as decks of cards. Electric

waxer runs here twice
a day, on schedule

bumping the machines.
In goes a quarter,

good as a base hit.
Out comes juice in cans

or milk in stiff containers.
Salt and sugar: free,

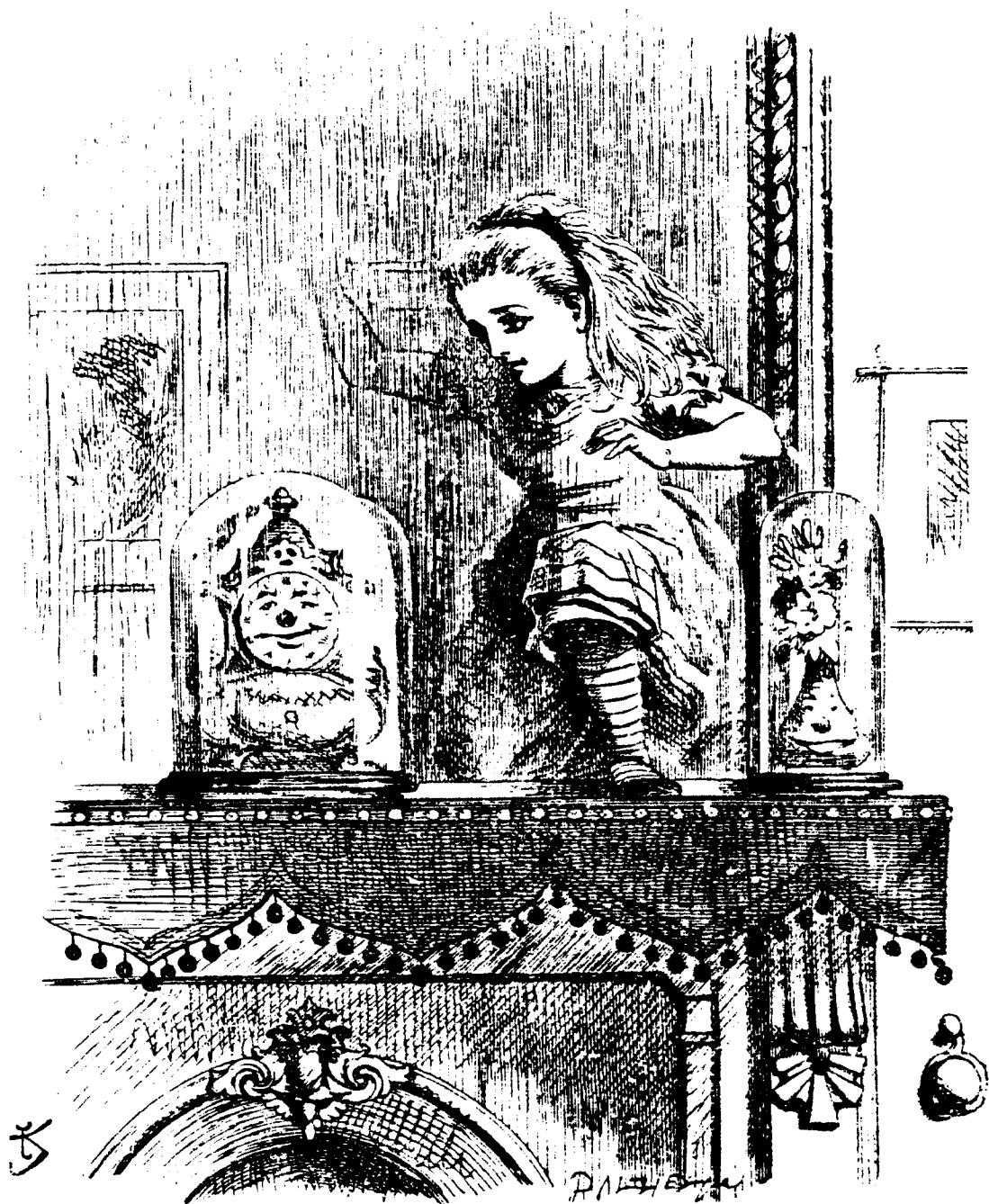
done up in packets; bundled
like grains, we strain at limits.

The man who comes down
finds me writing, asks

if I am making a report
on people who buy coffee

in the middle of the afternoon.

*MIRIAM GOODMAN teaches poetry writing and works in an electronics plant.
Her book, Permanent Wave, was published by Alice James Books, Inc. in spring, 1977.*



THE UNHAPPY ADVENTURES OF "ALICE" IN BLUNDERLAND

Counter-culture, Revolt and Repression in the Heart of Italy's "Red Belt"

Suzanne Cowan

The "free radio" station *Alice* broadcasts intermittently most days of the week, at a frequency of 100.6 megahertz on the FM band in Bologna, principal city of the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy. The programs are not at all what one would expect to hear in a country which has been dominated for over thirty years by the reactionary, corrupt and Vatican-affiliated Christian Democratic Party. Nor, for that matter, do they reflect the standards of public communication espoused by the Communist Party (PCI), whose administration of Bologna and the other territories comprising Italy's so-called "red belt" dates from the end of the Second World War. *Radio Alice*'s broadcasts are an amalgam of music (rock, jazz, some classics, many folk and political protest songs), news (reports on left-wing and working-class struggles in Italy and abroad, reports on the local student movement, readings from newspapers published by groups of the "extra-parliamentary" left, up-to-the-minute accounts of activities organized by feminists, homosexuals, and radical civil-rights activists), and comments on a wide variety of topics by anyone who cares to telephone or drop in to the station's headquarters. These consist of two dilapidated rooms located on the top floor of an apartment building in a rather run-down residential section of Bologna.

On the afternoon I was there, a young Calabrian worker — one of the thousands of southerners who flock to northern Italy each year in search of jobs and improved living conditions — was explaining to the radio audience how he and many other people are forced to live in garages or sleep in friends' kitchen in order to avoid paying the 100,000 lire

(about \$120) per room gouged out of them each month by landlords and real-estate speculators in this city, which the local administration has long vaunted as a showcase of progress and democracy. The anger of these young people, and of thousands of others who listened to *Radio Alice*, is turned against all the major political, social and cultural institutions of the country; but most particularly against the PCI, which they believe has assumed the guise of an adjunct, rather than a force of opposition, to these institutions in recent years.

The station initiated its broadcasts on Feb. 9, 1976. Its name, *Alice*, was taken from Lewis Carroll's classic *Through the Looking-Glass*. When Alice steps through the mirror, she ceases to be part of the habitual, "common-sense" order of things and enters an "alternative" reality where all of one's inherited attitudes and patterns of behavior are called into question. Just as the "truth" of this land of marvels cannot be tested by any previously existing standards of evaluation, the "facts" broadcast over the airwaves at 100.6 mh are not presented as acritical, passive reflections of reality; one must actually pass through the mirror — violently, if necessary — to experience another way of existing, which radically contradicts and challenges the former. The language of *Alice's* broadcasts exemplified this concern: there is a liberal peppering of "profanity" and of the sort of expletives which only a few years ago were taboo, not only on the air-waves, but among educated members of society in general. In addition, there is considerable use of *sinistrese*, the untranslatable common jargon or slang of young Italian radicals: part irony and part abstraction. *Radio Alice's* language abounds in the kind of semi-extemporaneous, telegraphic-poetic-imaginative discourse associated with many avant-garde movements of the past: Italian and Russian Futurism (Malakovsky is one of *Alice's* model heroes), Dada, Surrealism,

the language of American "hipsters" of the 1950s. However, the radio collective does not pursue an unconventional mode of linguistic expression merely for its own sake. Its members emphasize the importance of turning the flat, static, ostensible neutral language of the mass media and adopting a form of discourse based instead on free exercise of the imagination and immediate communication of feeling.

When *Alice* began broadcasting in February 1976, it was the first "alternative" radio station with a political line clearly to the left of the PCI's to begin operating in Bologna. Several of the people who formed the nucleus of the *Radio Alice* collective had come out of *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), a militant left-wing organization which had played an important role during the convulsive period of 1968-1969 and had subsequently disbanded, partly as a result of a violent campaign of government repression and harassment.¹ The collective had begun by publishing an intermittent newsletter, *A/Traverso*, which combined radical politics with reflections on the potentially revolutionary use of language. Using a transmitter left over from old military equipment, which they had purchased for about \$300, and a record player bought on the installment plan from a local cut-rate hi-fi equipment store, they started to broadcast.

At a very early stage of its work, the collective declared itself politically "autonomous," unaffiliated with any particular group or party of the left, but organized to serve the entire movement — which, as it pointed out, did not appear to find its expression in any specific sector of the movement. In adopting this

1. The most important organization to emerge out of the internal split in *Potere Operaio* was *Lotta Continua* (Struggle Continues), one of the more militant of the far-left groups in Italy. *Lotta Continua* has now been disbanded as a national organization except as a newspaper.

position, the radio collective was merely putting into practice a tendency which had been growing within the Italian radical left at least since 1974; that is, the rejection of organizational models and tactics espoused not only by the "reformist" parties, but also by the smaller formations of the non-Communist left. Although the collective maintained relationships of mutual support and alliance with some of these groups on an *ad hoc* basis, they refused to become sectarian, and also rejected most traditional patterns of internal organization: elected offices, "democratic centralism," delegated responsibilities, formulations of strategy, position papers, committees, conferences. Such mechanisms, they maintained, inevitably resolved themselves in hierarchy and authoritarianism, sapping the combative energy of the movement. They tended to create rigidly defined structures which soon became closed-off, impervious to the most dynamic, rebellious and creative forces for social change. These forces include young workers, women, students, prisoners, the unemployed, and all those people — now numbering in the millions — who are effectively *emarginati*, "marginalized," with no realistic prospect of ever being integrated into the existing system as fully productive human beings.

From its inception, then, *Radio Alice* acted according to the principle that transforming the means of communication, an imperative necessity for the left-wing movement, was a task which had to be undertaken primarily by the autonomous activists. Any instrument of "counter-information," agitation and political struggle that identified itself with a fixed organizational entity would end up working for its survival and perpetuation, rather than for the mass movement as a whole. They felt that it was vital to keep "free radio" open and available to all forces of the movement. "Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred free radios broadcast" is one slogan frequently used by the *Radio Alice*

collective, and it might as easily spring from the numerous other "autonomous" groups which devote their energies and technical skills to strengthening the movement through the air-waves.



Refusing to delegate tasks or form fixed committees, the collective developed, more or less spontaneously, an open pattern for the organization of its daily broadcasts. A number of independent but mutually allied work-teams emerged: a student collective, several feminist groups, a workers' staff responsible for regular programming about local and national labor struggles, informal groups of young workers who could speak, at nearly any time during the day or evening, about their organizational problems; and finally a staff which started out as a radio collective and then evolved into a self-managed "young proletarian center." Listeners phoned the station incessantly, and were given the chance to discuss their personal or collective problems on the air. People read poetry, played musical instruments, delivered harangues. Sexual matters were discussed, openly and matter-of-factly, using the frank

terminology of young working-class people. Members of the collective occasionally engaged in scandalous tomfoolery: one of them telephoned the Italian Prime Minister pretending to be Giovanni Agnelli, wealthy and influential head of FIAT, exclaiming that the workers were tearing things apart and that something had to be done about it at once. On Feb. 25, an open "jam session" which had been called by *Alice* attracted an estimated 2000 young people, armed with tambourines, guitars, flutes, saxophones, kites, and banners. They gathered in a central square and then flowed in a joyous and unauthorized procession through the streets of the city.



THE MARCH UPRISING IN BOLOGNA

Communist Party officials at first regarded all of this with nervous, if tolerant, indifference. However, serious troubles for *Radio Alice* began in March 1977, as a result of an outbreak of tension and violence which for several days turned Bologna into a theatre of war.

The events began on the morning of Friday, March 11, with a relatively minor incident. A meeting was being held in a large lecture-hall of one of the university buildings, under the auspices of *Comunione e Liberazione* (CL), a Christian Democratic-affiliated youth organization which, despite its militant-sounding rhetoric and professions of ecumenicism, plays

an extremely reactionary role among young people and university students. Five or six left-wing activists attempted to enter the auditorium. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that they intended to disrupt the meeting. In any case, they were given no opportunity to do so, because they were recognized at once and literally kicked down the stairs by CL's security guard. The news quickly spread throughout the university, and a group of militant students gathered in front of the building and began chanting slogans. Up to this point no physical violence had occurred, apart from the rough expulsion of the five students. Nevertheless, the university rector called in the police, who began indiscriminately clubbing students and then, as they attempted to flee, throwing tear gas canisters. A line of police vans blocked off one of the streets; several officers started shooting at a group of oncoming students, who responded with paving stones and molotov cocktails. A police jeep was hit by a firebomb. One officer, wearing his uniform but driving an unmarked car, took aim and fired directly at a group of young people who were trying to escape from the tear gas. The bullets struck Francesco Lorusso, a 24-year-old medical student and militant of *Lotta Continua*, who only moments earlier had come out of the apartment building where he had been studying. Lorusso died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

This occurrence touched off nearly three full days of unbridled mayhem. On Friday evening, several hundred people sacked an elegant restaurant which had the misfortune to be located in the heart of the university district, just opposite from the student dining hall. Police began to arrest people *en masse*, rounding up anyone and everyone who happened to be near the scene. Heavy charges were brought against them on the grounds that they were carrying objects they had allegedly looted from the restaurant (one of the arrestees, a 65-year-old

retired woman, was indicted along with all the others because an officer claimed to have discovered a stolen cloth napkin in her purse). Mass protest demonstrations, clashes between police and youths, breaking of shop windows, and large-scale arrests went on throughout the following two days. On Saturday afternoon, following a particularly heavy barrage of tear gas canisters, a crowd of people took refuge inside the central railway station, which was surrounded by police. Barricades were erected across several main streets of the university section, piles of furniture and debris were set on fire, and pavements were torn to bits. In the evening, some individuals broke into and looted a local armory (the militant organizations unanimously and emphatically denied responsibility for this action), and subsequent police attacks were met with gunfire. At dawn on Sunday morning, March 13, the entire university area was surrounded by armored cars and occupied by the police. Throughout the rest of the day, however, they continued making random arrests and throwing tear gas bombs at groups of six or more people seen standing about or walking down the streets in the center of town.

From the very beginning of the events, *Radio Alice* broadcast up-to-the-minute news and eyewitness reports. In keeping with its policy of encouraging the protagonists of struggles and conflicts to speak for themselves, the collective invited people to telephone or come to the station and share their first-hand accounts with the listening audience. Not only those who remained outside the immediate zone of combat, but also those who were participating in the street actions, followed these accounts on their home radios and transistors.(2)

They provided detailed information on both the movements on the young people and the maneuvers and tactics of the police, making no effort to minimize the violence which was used on each side. To the acritical listener, it might

have even seemed that they fomented it. In fact, some persons who called or came to the station did more than simply report on what was taking place. They were not "neutral observers," but outraged protestors, and they sometimes launched appeals to their comrades to show up at a particular place armed with sticks, iron bars, molotov cocktails, or anything else that could be used against the police. In retrospect, it is obvious that such announcements were both naive and ill-advised. But at that point the city was in the throes of what amounted to civil war, and the *Radio Alice* collective, committed to the principle of allowing anyone to speak openly, had no intention of censoring them. It was for this reason that the station was immediately branded as an accessory to crimes of violence, accused of directing the street-fighting, and attacked and shut down by police.

Actually, there were two separate attacks. The first came on the evening of March 12, when officers wearing full riot gear and armed with machine-guns occupied the area where *Alice* was located, closed all the cafes and taverns, and exploded tear gas canisters at both ends of the street. They then broke into the studio. After smashing and confiscating the equipment on charges of inciting to violence and *associazione a delinquere*: "associating for the purpose of planning a criminal act." (This crime, as well as a multitude of others, is part of the national criminal code first drawn up under the Fascist government and still in force today.) On the following morning, other members of the radio group gathered some used equipment and began transmitting again—this time under the name of

2. Many of the reports were recorded on tape and later published; reading through them, one can get a clear idea of the content, style and language of the broadcasts. Transcriptions of the tape-recordings are contained in a volume prepared and edited collectively by a group of people who were witnesses to and participants in the action last March: *Autori molti compagni, Bologna marzo 1977: fatti nostri* (Verona, Bertani, 1977).

"The March 12 Collective," since *Radio Alice* had been declared an illegal association. A few hours later the authorities cut off electrical power in the entire neighborhood, and the collective switched over to battery-charged transmission on a different frequency. When police again showed up and began breaking down the door, the people in the studio escaped over the adjoining rooftops to avoid arrest. They were not acting out of romantic bravado: it was clear that, if caught, they would be heavily charged, and in Italy it is common practice for people under indictment to be kept in jail for months, even years, before being brought to trial. Often, in fact, they are held for long periods of time and then released without any formal charges being levelled against them at all.

THE RESPONSE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

For anyone even superficially acquainted with the PCI's role as leader of the major social and political struggles carried out in Italy over the past thirty years, it is difficult to examine its reaction to the events of March, 1977 without a feeling of perplexity and profound dismay. For, apart from conventional declarations of sorrow over Lorusso's death and verbal slaps in the wrist to the police for having "overreacted" during the tumult, the Party's criticism was directed almost exclusively against the protestors, whom it described as "thugs," "fomentors of violence," "provocateurs," "dupes," "adventurists," "enemies of peace and democratic order." (3) Unable to deal with the breadth and complexity of the "movement," the PCI could find no better explanation for its individual manifestations than to attribute them to the work of armed provocateurs; or, what is worse, to the shady operation of a vast international conspiracy. The April 20 issue of the PCI illustrated weekly *Giorni — Vie Nuove* carried a demented article, reminiscent of the worst



reactionary, paranoid cold-war journalism, which asserted (among other things) that the CIA had decided to prepare a "coup" in Bologna, recruiting for this purpose a number of American students whom they sent to Italy to establish terrorist organizations, with the active collaboration of drifters, drug addicts, would-be

3. Nearly all the articles relating to the disorders and their aftermath which appeared in *L'Unita* between March and June, have been collected and printed in a 36-page "special issue" of the newspaper. With the exception of one introductory essay, the articles from *L'Unita* are printed exactly as they appeared in the original editions, with no accompanying commentary. The materials were assembled and printed as a collective effort by a large number of people, and proceeds from the sale of the publication were used to raise funds for the militant daily *Lotta Continua*.

urban guerrillas, and a host of nazi-maoist fringe groups. This argument was picked up and carried by a number of local Party newsletters and journals. Although the "conspiracy theory" was quickly shown to be a patent fabrication and denied by official PCI spokespeople, significant numbers of the Party faithful, including many lower-level functionaries, continue to propound it even now. Moreover, while admitting that the student protest phenomenon has deeper and more tangled roots than mere infiltration by a bunch of neo-fascist bullies, the Communist press still continues to play heavily on the role of violent and rabid fanatics who are allegedly taking control of the movement and using it to lead an attack against democratic institutions.

Behind the "uprising" which took place in Bologna from March 11-13, there were not a few "dens" of criminals and provocateurs, but a series of underlying problems which began long before March, continue unabated at the present time, and have grave implications for the entire political future of Italy.

Nor were the events of Bologna in any way an isolated phenomenon. Similar incidents had taken place in numerous cities before then, and an analogous explosion occurred simultaneously in Rome. Furthermore, these incidents touched off a wave of repression, harassment, and violence against the radical left throughout the country. Hundreds of militants were arrested; bookstores and "free radio" stations were destroyed and closed down; police confiscated newspapers, posters, leaflets, and other printed materials by the thousands; left-wing publishers were rounded up and thrown in jail. In Bologna alone, a steady stream of arrests and police actions has continued from March through July. The PCI's claim that these measures are primarily the work of the national government, just because the Italian police is under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, is a

grave distortion of the fact. While not immediately responsible for the repression, the Party has played a clear and direct role in perpetuating it. Beginning with the day after Lorusso's death, when local officials refused to allow his brother to speak at a mass demonstration called jointly by the PCI and the trade unions council, the Party has carried out an ongoing campaign of denunciation and invective against the militant youth movement, thereby implicitly condoning its suppression.(4)

Despite this campaign, however, it would be incorrect to represent the PCI's position as one of single-minded intolerance and vindictiveness toward left-wing criticism. There is much disagreement among Party leaders on this point; along with the vituperations, both *L'Unita* and the PCI weekly *Rinascita* have acknowledged the existence of a deep and widespread *malaise* among young people, and devoted thoughtful, serious discussion to its underlying causes. It is

4. Supporters of the PCI policy observe that, given the climate of anger and potential violence which permeates the student left today, it is absolutely necessary to exercise very tight control over all public demonstrations called by the mass left-wing parties and labor unions. They point to recent examples of harassment or outright physical threat against exponents of these organizations, such as last February's assembly at the University of Rome, where Luciano Lama, head of the major Italian labor confederation, was hissed, insulted, and finally forced to make a hasty retreat from the campus. For such reasons, the PCI claims it has no alternative but to exclude the radical elements from its assemblies, and justifies having ordered its security guard to physically block their entry into the main square during the protest rally against the shooting of Francesco Lorusso. There is no doubt that the far left, including students, has become increasingly disruptive and violent in recent months, and has treated "reformist" speakers with a discourtesy bordering on mob prejudice. Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that the Communist Party and its allied organizations have been systematically unwilling or unable to deal in a serious manner with the underlying causes of this attitude. Thus, for all its grave appeals for "dialogue" and "contact," the PCI has in effect contributed greatly to widening the gap which already exists between students and the organized working class.

undeniable that, throughout the past 30 years, the PCI has retained a measure of openness, flexibility, and tolerance of dissent unknown to any other Communist party. Moreover, even though the upper echelons continue to formulate general strategy without any real involvement of the mass base, at the lower levels of the Party organization there continues to be a striking degree of genuinely popular participation and open debate. Once again, the city of Bologna provides an outstanding example. Within forty-eight hours after the outbreak of the student revolt last March, party section meetings and assemblies were held throughout the city, with an estimated participation of 24,000 members.⁽⁵⁾ Mayor Renato Zangheri and members of his staff met with a group of "representatives" — albeit a limited and carefully chosen one — of the protestors, and made space available in the City Hall for a meeting to raise money for the defense of jailed militants. Reporters from a number of non-Communist left-wing newspapers were among the participants in an open interview with the mayor, an interview which ran far beyond its scheduled time. Moreover, on July 15, *Radio Citta*, a Bolognese "free radio" station run by the Communist Party, broadcast a lengthy "open forum" in which citizens were invited to telephone and air their views about the matter of political repression in the city.

Such phenomena hardly constitute an image of "monolithic communism," and one feels confounded at the apparent anomaly of a Party which both justifies and abhors repression; which condones the arrest and jailing of dissidents and yet gives them a place to speak; which fulminates against "mob violence" and at the same time acknowledges its serious social and political causes. The Communist Party seems profoundly ambivalent, helpless and confused before a reality that is only apparently new: the emergence of a movement composed of

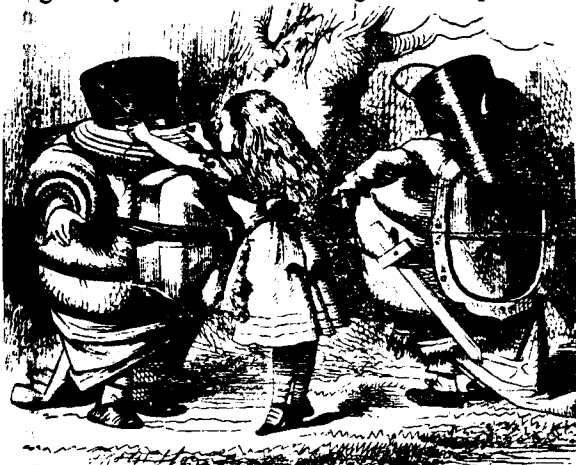
hundreds of thousands of young people who frustratingly refuse to "play by the rules," to exercise patience, to act reasonably, to let themselves be integrated — to go away. Its discomfort is understandable. It is confronted by a huge, ragtag, inchoate movement which represents only the most clamorous and visible aspect of an even more widespread phenomenon: a large-scale opposition to the Party's long-range program, its major objectives, its entire model or mode of "doing politics."

Out of the wave of working-class and student struggle which took place in the late 1960's, there arose a number of political organizations strongly critical of the PCI's strategy for peaceful transition to socialism. They attacked the notion that the existing system could be reformed from within, leaving its relationships of production and capitalist patterns of development basically unchanged. Besides exerting considerable influence on intellectuals and students, these formations placed salutary pressure on both the labor unions and Communist Party itself. However, they were too divided, too numerically and strategically weak, to gain the alliance of large sectors of the proletariat. Despite a steadily decreasing number of working-class members,⁽⁶⁾ and a leadership composed almost exclusively of middle- and upper-middle-class politicians, the PCI remained the party of the great mass of Italian working people. It also played a generally positive role in the broad grass-roots movement for radical reform in the areas of civil rights and public institutions which developed from roughly 1974 through 1976. The divorce referendum, women's liberation struggle, abortion

5. Statistics cited in the Italian weekly *L'Espresso*, 23, No. 12 (March 27, 1977), p. 8.

6. In 1946-1947 industrial and agricultural laborers constituted nearly 80 percent of the Party's membership, whereas today they represent just under 50 percent.

campaign, organized efforts to transform the educational and health systems, formation of radical groupings within the Armed Forces and police: all of these so-called "emerging movements" represented a tremendously important, dynamic force which originated and developed outside the political framework of the mass-based "reformist" parties. For a time, the PCI was able to mediate successfully between the "emerging movements" and established political institutions. There were several triumphs: the divorce referendum passed; the PCI virtually swept the 1975 regional elections; the Christian Democrats were in crisis, and their political hegemony seemed on the verge of collapse.



Just within the last year, however, there has been a singular reversal. The profound economic crisis in which the country now finds itself has forced the PCI into a position of utter helplessness: unable to alter the situation to any significant extent simply by "reforming" the most blatantly corrupt, mismanaged and wasteful of its public and private enterprises (even assuming that such reforms are possible within the current system, which is doubtful), it has no choice but to crouch in the shadow of the ruling party, neither opposing nor supporting its policies. Which is to say, in effect, doing nothing

at all. In its position as a sort of "silent partner" to the Christian Democrats, maddeningly marking time as the crisis of unemployment and inflation continues to grow, the PCI has also been forced to legitimize the existing power-structure; and this in turn has involved accepting a new onslaught of repressive measures by the courts and police.(7) At the same time, by the logic of its own strategy, the Party now finds itself obliged to abdicate even the role it played only a few years ago, as mediator between the forces pressing for social change and the political establishment "on top." In the past several years, its tendency has been to control and limit class conflict by treating it as a phenomenon which can be dealt with solely through representation of the working class within existing political institutions. This has had the effect of weakening the *entire* working class, and ironically, has also weakened the PCI's own ability to act as a real force of opposition to the Christian Democratic regime.

The strategy which the PCI has followed up to now, of working within the established institutions in order to assume gradual political leadership of the country, may, in a certain sense, prove successful, because it stands a strong chance of entering the government within the next few years. To accomplish this, however,

7. On July 5, leaders of the six major Italian political parties, including the PC and Christian Democrats, ratified a series of "agreements" dealing with tax reform, political decentralization, long-range economic planning, and public safety. The agreement, which was reached after months of intense wrangling, was heralded as a triumph by the PCI. Most of the points finally agreed upon were so vague and general as to be meaningless; others might eventually lead to serious political and economic reform, but since the day they were passed the Christian Democrats have fought tooth and nail to prevent their being put into effect. The only substantial point accepted by all sides was that regarding public order, which effectively increases the powers of the police and sanctions the use of violence against nearly anyone suspected of criminal behavior.

it will be necessary to weaken as much as possible all those forces which cannot be absorbed and contained by its "top-down" mediation; which oppose the ongoing process of authoritarian consolidation of power and bureaucratization. Within this framework, it is the extreme left, rather than capitalism, which becomes the enemy. Its militants represent a threat to the PCI's concept of democracy, because they have no place in it and because they reject the innate exploitation and inequality which make the very idea of that democracy a sham. Thus, they are lumped together with Fascists and "thugs." "Communism" becomes synonymous with (bourgeois) democracy; "terrorism" with all forms of radical opposition. And this opposition includes not only students, the young, the unemployed, "new leftists," and so on; but also vast sectors of the working class itself, which do not find their political expression in the mass parties and whose most profound needs cannot be met simply by gaining "representation" within existing political structures.

The notable success of the Italian Communist Party over the past decade, and even before then, has sprung largely from its ability to maintain open and organic contact between two kinds of struggles: the one moving forward within the party and labor organizations, and the one occurring outside of these formations, at the grass-roots level of society. This unitary movement, combining the forces of what might be called — to use a rather simplistic shorthand — the "insiders" and the "outsiders," has not been grievously ruptured. The fault for this split lies as much with the militant "autonomous" groups — which naively and irrationally tend to brand *all* forms of power, all organized movements, as *intrinsically* corrupt and authoritarian — as with the reformist parties, which can find no way of integrating them into their strategy for change within the given framework of the

capitalist state. The "outsiders," those who neither can nor will be assimilated, have absolutely no way of utilizing their enormous resources of energy, creativity, intelligence, anger. . . and love. For, old-fashioned as it may sound, they love their country very deeply, and want to see it transformed: a process which can only come about through struggle. When this love and anger is rendered politically useless, irrelevant, it manifests itself in the form of violence. This is the real significance, the real "tragedy," so to speak, of last March's revolt in Bologna. Its damage was not limited to the breaking of shop-windows, arrest of a few dozen protestors, or dismantling of a "free radio" station. It opened up a profound chasm between the honest and dedicated Communist Party cadres and the radical leftists; between the old comrades — many of whom fought heroically against fascism and German occupation during the resistance — and the "emarginated" youths who want to renew that Resistance, carrying it forward against the enemies of today. Between the two groups there has ceased to be any meaningful communication. In the words of one journalist, "From opposite shores, the two cities are doing all in their power to understand each other less and less." (8)

CONCLUSION

About a month after it was closed down by police, *Radio Alice* began broadcasting again. Its equipment seems held together with string and masking tape; the transmitter sits on a table too wobbly to hold anything else, and the staff members are visibly frazzled. Their numbers have been drastically reduced, because eight of them are in jail and many of the others are devoting nearly all their time and energy to getting them out. The broadcast schedule is completely erratic; on some days there are no

8. Domenico del Prete, in *Il manifesto* (Wednesday, July 20, 1977), p. 3.

programs at all. Still, the station is allowed to operate. Charges brought against it as an illegal or subversive organization could not hold up in court, and the ban against it was lifted. Members of the collective continue to meet, plan strategy, and broadcast what they wish. Mayor Zangheri repeatedly refers to this as an example of the open-mindedness and tolerance of his city. In a very substantial sense, of course, he is right. In France (not to mention West Germany!), it is probable that initiatives like *Radio Alice* would be firmly and definitively nipped in the bud. Whether its continued operation stands as self-sufficient proof of democracy, however, is another question. Or rather, it is a question of how one defines democracy. *Radio Alice* now functions, albeit haphazardly and under considerable strain, because the prevailing authorities (law courts, local political administration, etc.) permit it to do so. When it attempts to play a direct and active role in a struggle to transform society as a whole, the limits of democracy become immediately visible. It then steps out of the area of "free speech" and enters a certain realm of concrete political practice, a realm which by now both the PCI and the Christian Democrats concur in defining as dangerous and destructive. Here, too, paradoxical though it may seem, they are correct: *Radio Alice* was meant to be a "subversive" organization — not according to the legal definition, perhaps, but in the deepest literal meaning of the term. It was initially formed, not merely to report on and "reflect" existing reality, but to help change it. To break through the mirror. Its organizers are now prevented from moving in this direction — by the reformist left, political divisiveness and immaturity of their own movement, and limits to "democracy" set by the established authorities. This is why, despite the creative non-conformity of their language and life-style, the comrades of *Radio Alice* seem so tense, so frustrated, so absurdly and pathetically unfree.

POSTSCRIPT

Over the weekend of September 23-25, a national conference was held in Bologna to discuss the question of political repression, the role of the "reformist" left-wing organizations, and the possibility for restoring some strategic guidelines and unity to the sharply divided non-Communist left in Italy. The conference, which attracted thousands of young people from all over the country, as well as a number of foreign observers, took place with relative order and tranquillity. The outburst of violence which had been darkly predicted by the conservative press failed to occur, partly due to the responsibility, seriousness and self-discipline of the participants themselves, and partly owing to the truly democratic, open-minded spirit of the citizens of Bologna. The municipal council, working in collaboration with a number of local organizations and co-operative agencies, provided meeting places, temporary accommodations, and low-cost meals to the visitors, most of whom made no secret of their hostility to the PCI and local administration. If the meeting could be considered a "public relations" success for Bologna's administration, which was able to avoid potential disaster and give a considerable lift to its somewhat sagging national image, it had a much less positive outcome for the participants. Most agreed that the discussions and confrontations had been stimulating, but failed to provide either new perspectives or large-scale initiatives capable of welding together the disparate fragments of the Italian "new left."

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Photo by Marc Ribaud

REMEMBERING THE TET OFFENSIVE

David Hunt

Ten years ago this month, the NLF, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, launched its Tet Offensive. The Offensive was a momentous event in modern history, comparable in importance to the storming of the Bastille at the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, or to the Long March which saved the Chinese Communist Party in 1935 and set it on the road to eventual victory fourteen years later. Tet was decisive within Vietnam, where it marked the turning point in the struggle which had been inaugurated when the Vietnamese declared their independence from France in 1945 and which ended with the liberation of Saigon in April 1975. It also inspired the left in many countries, including the United States, and constituted a major step forward for socialism the world over.

BACKGROUND TO THE OFFENSIVE

To recapture the full impact of the Tet Offensive, we need to think back to the 1965-1967 period when U.S. forces and Vietnamese guerrillas exchanged blow for blow and the outcome of the war seemed very much in doubt. On the one side, from its formation in 1960, the NLF had flourished in the countryside of Vietnam. The Front had promised to overthrow the landlords and to make the peasant majority "masters of the countryside."⁽¹⁾ Its policies of educational and medical reform, village democracy and economic equality by way of land reform, as well as its insistence on national independence, had won strong backing from the rural population. Over the years, the

Front had organized a formidable military presence which had successfully contended with the U.S.-supported "Government of Vietnam" (GVN) and its puppet "Army of the Republic of Vietnam" (ARVN). By 1965, the NLF had liberated almost the entire countryside by expelling GVN authority from most villages and was on the verge of toppling the U.S. allies altogether. In desperation, President Johnson escalated the war, pouring in ground forces (535,000 by early 1968) and drastically increasing expenditures for equipment and technical assistance to be used against the insurgents.

Grasping the central reality of the war, which was that the NLF had sunk its roots deep into the rural social structure, and hoping to isolate and thus cripple the guerrillas, Pentagon strategists set out in 1965 to tear this society apart. U.S. and ARVN troops engaged in daily "search and destroy" missions, rounding up "suspects," burning villages and driving people into concentration camps called "strategic hamlets." Areas governed by the Front were declared "free fire zones," artillery shells rained down day and night, B-52's bombed densely populated villages, and helicopter gunships strafed "suspicious" individuals unlucky enough to be caught out in the open. U.S. planes blanketed crops with poison sprays while bulldozers tore up paddies, orchards and homes. Aiming to provide heavy rainfall and destructive flooding, U.S. scientists seeded the clouds; to strip the guerrillas of ground cover, they endeavored to set fire to the forests of the Highlands; they experimented with ever more fiendish varieties of napalm and anti-personnel bombs. In an effort to escape from this refined and murderous assault, many peasants spent days on end huddled in bunkers. Others moved out of the center of their villages into makeshift huts constructed to seek shelter under the walls of the nearest GVN military post, in a district or province capital city, or in Saigon. By sustaining

this policy of "generating refugees," which its apologists glorified as the U.S.-sponsored "forced-draft urbanization and modernization of Vietnam," the Pentagon hoped to "drain the sea," leaving the "fish" — the guerilla activists — with no "water," that is no rural society, in which to live.(2)

The NLF response to this aggression was total warfare, requiring the participation of the whole society. Picture a densely populated, flat terrain, generally devoid of ground cover (Vietnam's population and NLF strength was concentrated in the level, open areas of the Mekong Delta and the Central Lowlands, rather than in the "jungle" of the Highlands which was often stressed in U.S. media coverage of the war). In this confined space, the two sides jockeyed for position, striving to find and wipe out each other's military forces and to acquire tax payments and recruits from the local population. Here, the NLF organized its regular or "main force" units of full-time, highly-trained and heavily-armed soldiers. Staying together at battalion strength (500 or more troops), these units bivouaked in prepared camps located in different villages, whose residents provided food, shelter, intelligence concerning the other side, and moral support. Main force battalions never lingered long in one place. Trying to survive in

I would like to thank the following friends who helped me to put the Tet Offensive in historical perspective, and who happily reminisced with me about an important event in all of our lives: Feroz Ahmad, Margery Davies, Ann Froines, Milt Kotelchuck, Jack Spence, and Peter Weiler.

1. David Hunt, "Villagers at War: The National Liberation Front in My Tho Province, 1965-1967," *Radical America* (Vol. 8, #1-2, January-April 1974), 124. This essay spells out in more detail my sense of NLF politics and U.S. escalation in the 1965-67 period.
2. See the celebrated defense of U.S. police by Samuel Huntington, "The Bases of Accommodation," *Foreign Affairs* (July 1968). Noam Chomsky's devastating critique of these apologetics is still to the point. See his *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York, 1969).



Photo by Marc Ribaud

In the midst of a pre-industrial, subsistence economy where many villages had trouble simply supplying food for their own inhabitants, they could not overstrain the limited resources of the different communities. In any case, too long a stay might attract the attention of GVN observers who — in physical terms — were never so far away. Moving at night to avoid detection, the troops would head for the next village where an equally well-prepared camp had been arranged to shelter them for another brief period. Wherever they went, NLF main force units acted in liaison with local paramilitary guerrillas who guarded their campsites and helped them pass across particularly dangerous terrain, a well-traveled highway, for example. Even more fundamentally, in every village, the battalions relied on an intricate and sophisticated "civilian" support network which provided the vast

logistical base they needed to keep on fighting. Villagers all across the countryside stockpiled food and maintained fortified camp sites, trenches and underground shelters, along with medical stations, arsenals and storage areas for heavy equipment. And finally village cadres recruited volunteers into the local and regular forces and collected the taxes which financed this whole military effort.

Picking their spots with care, main force units only occasionally launched an operation. Attacks were organized in minute detail, with soldiers rehearsing their tactics in life-size models of the target area, built according to specifications supplied by undercover agents working within the GVN camp. Retreat routes, with fortified positions, food, ammunition and medical services, were set up so that NLF troops would not be caught off guard when the enemy rushed in reinforcements. Teams of villagers stood by to carry away captured equipment as well as the wounded and the dead. After the battle, units took refuge in a safe area, replaced their losses and critically reviewed every detail of the action.

To gauge the success of such tactics, the observer had to recognize that guerrilla war unfolds *over time*, and that morale and political strength, rather than territory occupied, are the keys to victory. In the wake of one of these local NLF attacks, GVN and U.S. units were rocked back on their heels and retreated behind the walls of their outposts, so that low-level harassment from local paramilitary guerrilla forces usually sufficed to keep them on the defensive. The terrain was thus left free for NLF political work to go on unhindered (even in the best of times, no GVN political cadres traveled without military escort), and for regular forces to catch their breath and heal their wounds. But as time passed and these main force units remained out of sight, the Americans and their allies took heart. Sorties began again, troops regained some

of their former fighting spirit, search and destroy missions ranged more widely. Under such conditions, the GVN was somewhat freer to contend with the NLF in the countryside, extorting taxes (and rents) from the peasants and kidnapping conscripts for the ARVN. Growing more confident with each passing day, U.S. generals and advisers in the region would begin to hope that the insurgents' main force units had disintegrated (we must remember that throughout this time planes and artillery were hammering at areas in which NLF battalions were circulating). But then, just when the end seemed to be in sight, long-hidden regular units struck again, hurling their adversaries back into outposts and cities and freeing the countryside once more from GVN interference.(3)

Lacking adequate sources of information, and misled by politicians and the media, the American people could see in the fighting little beyond a welter of small battles in provinces with strange names scattered all over the country. The overall trend of events was lost amidst the numerous unsynchronized local and regional struggles, each with its own particular timetable of lulls and sudden attacks. In the absence of any compelling opposition analysis of events, the official explanation of the situation gained a certain credence. According to this view, the U.S. military was in a strong position. To be sure, casualties were high, and the expense of the war was staggering (upward of \$30 billion in 1967). But vast firepower and over a million troops (counting ARVN soldiers and South Korean mercenaries) were clearly doing a great deal of damage to the other side. In November 1967, U.S. officials affirmed that 67% of the countryside was "secure" or "relatively secure"(4) (at the end of the dry season, many NLF regular units had been inactive for several weeks or even months), while in cities like Saigon, according to *New York Times* military correspondent Hanson Baldwin (in an article

published January 19, 1967), the once formidable NLF underground network had supposedly been badly crippled. The domestic strains of a long inconclusive war were there for all to see, but surely, U.S. authorities argued, the end had to be hurting even more.

Few Americans disagreed with this assessment. Critics of government policy based their position on moral grounds, decrying the destruction being inflicted on the defenseless Vietnamese, or arguing that, since no fundamental strategic interests were at stake in Vietnam, the war was not worth the effort and cost necessary for victory. But, with a few exceptions, even the most militant anti-war activists continued to assume that the Pentagon could win the war if it chose to keep up its military pressure on the enemy. By and large, for the anti-war movement, the people of Vietnam were victims, and the proper position for our government was "get out," leaving the Vietnamese to their own quarrels, which ultimately had little bearing on our lives. Among opponents of government policy, there was little understanding of NLF sources of strength and a minimal identification with its vision of the future.

Straining to respond to U.S. escalation, the NLF was indeed shaken to its foundations. Casualties were high and morale among village fighters faltered as they doggedly persisted with an endless round of tasks: maintaining underground tunnel systems, carrying ammunition, tending the wounded, cultivating their crops, paying taxes and contributing food to the troops — while bombs and shells rained down and enemy patrols periodically swept through. But Front organizations withstood this shock, cadres

3. Wilfred Burchett's accounts of NLF military and political organization are basic. See *Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerilla War* (New York, 1968) and *Vietnam Will Win!* (New York, 1970). The latter volume, for example, has a wonderful description of an NLF unit "rehearsing" a battle plan (pages 35 ff.)

4. *Le Monde*, February 1, 1968.

with "high morale and an everlasting endurance of hardship" refused to grow discouraged,(5) and enough villagers clung to their homes and to their roles within the resistance to keep the whole operation intact. The essential political strength of the guerrilla movement carried it through. Even in its brightest moments, the GVN had no real ties to the rural population (its landlord supporters had long ago fled to the cities) and survived only on the basis of U.S. money and military support. By contrast, even in the most trying times, the NLF was sustained by the reality, evident to most, that it alone had a program which made sense to the Vietnamese people.

On the other side, the morale of U.S.-GVN forces was deteriorating in a much more telling fashion. As the war dragged on, the resilience of the insurgents, who again and again demonstrated "the recuperative powers of the phoenix," demoralized soldiers who had no compelling reason of their own to keep on fighting.(6)

Even the leaders of the counter-insurgency effort began to falter, and their confident assertions in the quiet periods between battles took on an increasingly hollow ring. The NLF could sense this gradual loss of will. American troops had boldly sought out NLF regular forces in the winter-spring campaign of 1965-1966, and during the next year as well, although less aggressive, they had still been able to launch powerful thrusts into guerrilla base areas like "War Zone C," northwest of Saigon.(7) With the coming of a new dry season in late 1967, as the NLF in many regions lay low, the old optimistic note was again sounded by U.S. generals and politicians, though now colored by an unmistakable uneasiness. And indeed, another turn-about on the battle field was in the offing. But this reversal was to differ from its predecessors, in that it was not to be confined to this local battlefield or that one. Instead, from one end of

the country to the other, *all* of the NLF main force units *simultaneously* swung into action to build up momentum for the mighty blow which was to be the Tet Offensive.

STORY OF THE OFFENSIVE

The Tet Offensive was a remarkable achievement, involving the simultaneous, coordinated activity of a great many small units spread over the whole terrain of South Vietnam and often in the middle of areas ostensibly controlled by the other side. In the course of a generation of fighting, there had been many military campaigns launched by the revolutionary movement, but none, not even the legendary siege of Dien-bienphu, had been conceived on such a grand scale, and none had drawn so generously on the heroism and ingenuity of the Vietnamese people. Having set the stage, we should now turn to the Offensive itself.

Right from the beginning of the dry season campaign of 1967-1968, the NLF seized the initiative. Its forces struck hard at U.S.-GVN positions in the northern provinces close to the DMZ and in the Central Highlands and Lowlands, they shelled installations within twenty miles of Saigon and assumed an increasingly menacing posture in the Mekong Delta. By mid-January, the French newspaper *Le Monde* was speaking of a "sustained and general offensive" which had the Americans pinned back in defensive positions. There was no longer any question of mounting punitive

5. The phrase comes from a peasant of My Tho, quoted in Hunt, "Villagers at War," 106.
6. "Not only do the Viet Cong units have the recuperative powers of the phoenix, but they have an amazing ability to maintain morale," notes U.S. General Maxwell Taylor, in November 1964; quoted in *Pentagon Papers* (Boston, 1971), III, 668.
7. See the historical overview in Nguyen Khac Vien, *Histoire du Vietnam* (Paris, 1974), 246 ff. On the "pacification" of War Zone C, see the classic account of Jonathan Schell, *The Village of Ben Suc* (New York, 1967).

operations similar to those undertaken by U.S. forces during the previous two years. Nervous, yet reluctant to abandon their optimistic reading of the situation, U.S. leaders asserted that the attacks were a "desperation tactic," a final death throes before guerrilla resistance collapsed once and for all.(8)

These engagements, ominous as they were, did not significantly depart from the previously established character of the fighting. The real surprise was yet to come, for the NLF — and here lies the drama and originality of the Tet Offensive — was planning to bring the war into the cities. Surrounded by barren terrain and with rings of military bases nearby, the urban centers of GVN power had enjoyed a privileged, peaceful status throughout the war and seemed impregnable to direct assault. The unexpected way NLF strategists resolved this problem required a vast deployment of all the resources at its command. To bring about the needed mobilization, the Front instituted universal conscription in the areas it governed (astonishingly, from an American, not to speak of a GVN, point of view, the guerrilla forces relied entirely on volunteers during the harrowing 1966-1967 period).(9) In the weeks before the attack, the NLF secretly prepared forward positions in the suburbs, while main force troops disbursed, dressed in civilian clothes and set out in ones and twos to enter the cities. U.S. strategy, which had dislodged hundreds of thousands of peasants and sent them on the roads, facilitated this infiltration, while the travels habitually associated with the Tet holidays, a time for visiting and reunions, further covered NLF preparations. Once in the cities, as an American journalist noted, "the Viet Cong were absorbed into the population by the urban underground like out of town relatives attending a family reunion." Meanwhile, weapons were coming in too, hidden in peddlers' carts, amidst vegetables bound for market, in people's luggage. In turn,

"the underground had. . . stockpiled arms, explosives and munitions, in dozens of innocent-looking places throughout the city," in private homes, in flower pots, even in coffins ceremoniously buried in cemeteries.(10)

On January 20, liberation forces surrounded the U.S. Marine base at Khe Sanh high up in the mountainous jungle terrain close to the Laotian border in northwest South Vietnam. General Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, immediately assumed that the other side planned a re-run of their famous Dienbienphu campaign of fourteen years earlier. The guerrillas, he reasoned, were pouring all their resources into an effort to take the fortress, in the hope that this feat would demoralize the administration and lead to a negotiated settlement, just as the fall of Dienbienphu in 1954 had broken the resolve of the French and opened the way to the signing of the Geneva Accords. Forty-thousand troops were readied to come to the aid of the garrison, and an uneasy President Johnson forced a number of his top generals to endorse a statement, "signed in blood," as he put it, that they could hold Khe Sanh no matter what.

But of course the liberation forces were not planning to attack Khe Sanh, and their feint was brilliantly designed to take advantage of the incapacities of the U.S. high command. Thinking defensively and anxious above all to avoid a humiliating setback, the Pentagon strategists were bound to reflect first on ways of avoiding the kind of defeat suffered by their French predecessors. At the same time, a conventional "seige," with clear battle lines and objectives, and without the exasperating "political" distractions which resulted when fighting took place amidst densely populated villages, was

8. *Le Monde*, January 11, 1968; *New York Times*, January 21, 1968.

9. Hunt, "Villagers at War," 98-99.

10. *New York Times*, February 4, 1977.

bound to appeal to men who had never been able to pry the guerrillas loose from their base among the people. Unfortunately for the American public, the U.S. media fell into the same trap, and misleadingly emphasized the siege of Khe Sanh throughout the Offensive. In any case, Westmoreland stubbornly kept his attention focused on the fortress in subsequent weeks and refused to believe that the decisive battles might be going on elsewhere. Finally, when the damage had been done, the Vietnamese lifted their siege in early April, and in turn the Marines evacuated the base, which had no real strategic value, on June 28.(11)

The major part of the Offensive began on the night of January 29-30 in the Central Highlands and Lowlands, the next night in Saigon, Hue and the Mekong Delta. Guerrilla forces assembled, at times wearing insignias on their shirts to facilitate mutual recognition. In certain cities, they broke into laundries and stole ARVN uniforms which were worn during the attack, thus throwing even greater confusion into enemy ranks. Guns were removed from their hiding

places and test-fired amidst the convenient explosion of holiday fireworks.(12) And then the NLF struck, hitting 34 of 44 province capitals, 64 district capitals, and numerous military installations, all in all over one hundred major targets from one end of the country to the other. The Front broke into prisons and freed thousands of political prisoners, it occupied or burned down many GVN province headquarters and other government buildings, it overran bases, capturing or destroying millions of dollars worth of equipment, it inflicted telling losses on disoriented, often panic stricken U.S.-GVN forces hastily mobilized to repel the assault. The Americans had grown accustomed to an enemy which generally made it a principle to avoid frontal engagements. Now with shocking power, assaults by large bodies of regular forces came crushing into the middle of areas once judged absolutely "secure."

11. On the siege of Khe Sanh, see *New York Times*, January 26, 1968; Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York, 1973), 543; Dan Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (New York, 1971), 189, 203; *Le Monde*, June 28, 1968.

12. *New York Times*, February 4, 7, 1968.



Photo by Marc Ribaud

Let's review some of the particulars of the Offensive. In Hue on January 30, as the university was closing for the holidays, one of the teachers commented enigmatically to his class: "Soon you will witness the return of the conquerors of Dienbienphu." Later he was seen working with the NLF. Sure enough, as one resident remembered it, on January 31, at 3:00 in the morning... the Viet Cong came shouting into the city. They crossed the bridge on the run. They passed under my window running and yelling all the time. There were hundreds of them. I saw some young women who ran with them.

NLF occupation of Hue was swift and peaceful. GVN authorities put up no significant resistance, and in fact a number of local officials immediately switched sides and began working with the liberation forces. The Prison was opened and two to three thousand prisoners went free. In a dispatch dated February 2, Agence-France-Presse correspondent Francois Mazure noted:

At dawn, the new masters of the city went through the streets in groups of ten. In each group, there was a leader who spoke to the people through a bullhorn... The other members of the team... knocked on doors and passed out pamphlets and leaflets. Joking and laughing, the soldiers walk in the streets and guardens without showing any fear... They give an impression of discipline and good training... Numerous civilians brought them great quantities of food. It didn't seem that these residents were being coerced in any way.

A few days later, the Saigon government expelled Mazure from South Vietnam for spreading pro-communist propaganda.(13) For almost a month, the NLF flag flew over the city which many Vietnamese regarded as the traditional, authentic capital of their country.

First attempts by U.S. Marines and ARVN forces to retake Hue were unsuccessful. As one U.S. official stated:

By resisting, the North Vietnamese force us to destroy Hue in order to retake the city. They know that they cannot hold in indefinitely. But they dig in, retreating only one step at a time, putting up the

most stubborn resistance I have ever seen. (14)

On February 14, the U.S. high command decided to use air power against the defenders, and by February 24, when liberation troops finally slipped away, Hue, historic capital of Vietnam and site of many old and distinguished monuments, had been almost completely levelled. For many a Vietnam veteran, memories of the battle in Hue are among the bitterest of the whole war. U.S. marines fought for days on end with no relief, largely because General Westmoreland was anxious to retake the city as soon as possible so that his troops would be ready for what he thought would be the real showdown — at Khe Sanh.(15) NLF guerrilla units surrounded Hue so that the Americans, who were attempting to encircle the enemy in the center of the city, were themselves being encircled and had to rely on air transport for food and supplies. The usual unfriendly relations between U.S. and ARVN troops deteriorated still further as the ARVN soldiers hung back from fighting and attempted to steal supplies which were being air-dropped to the marines. Seeing their neighborhoods destroyed and antagonized by incidents of looting and brutality on the part of U.S. troops, Hue residents viewed the Americans with undisguised hatred. "If looks could kill, very few marines would still be alive," remarked one young American officer.(16)

Although less prolonged, the battles in other provincial centers followed essentially these same lines. In one locale after another, NLF forces peacefully assumed control, then were driven out by U.S. bombing and shelling, with the occupation lasting anywhere from 24 hours

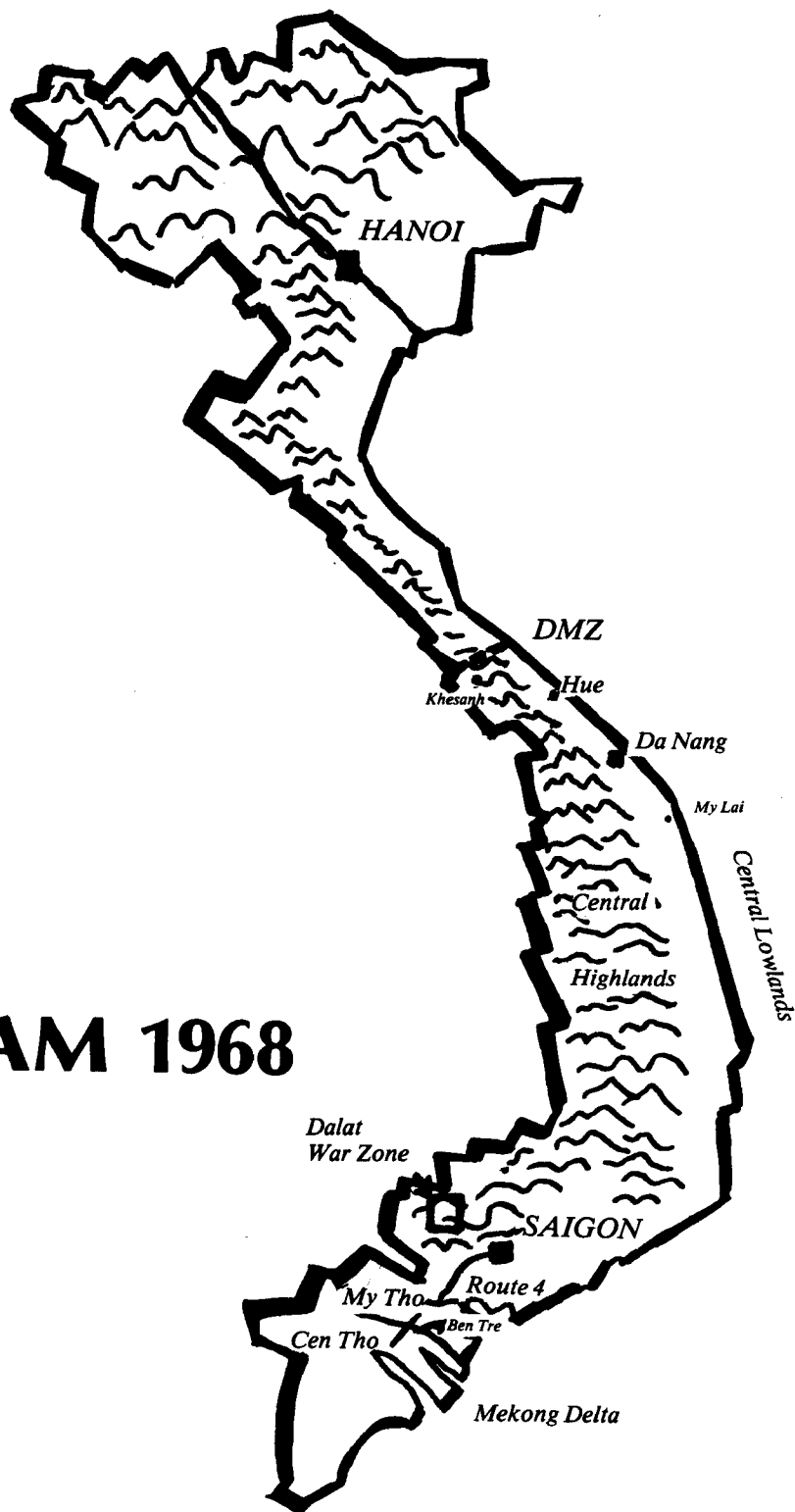
13. The quotes in the paragraph and other information on events in Hue are found in *Le Monde*, February 6, 10, 17, 1968.

14. Quoted in *Le Monde*, February 9, 1968.

15. *Le Monde*, February 25, 1968.

16. Quoted in *Le Monde*, February 21, 1968.

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to more than a week (Dalat, for example, was held for eight days.(17)) "The Viet Cong had the Government by the throat in those provincial towns," explained one U.S. military adviser. "Ordinary methods would never have got them out, and the Government did not have enough troops to do the job, so firepower was substituted."(18) In My Tho, bombing and shelling reduced ½ of the city to rubble, according to the *New York Times*, or completely destroyed the city, if we are to accept the *Le Monde* account of February 6. "The looks the people of My Tho gave the Americans today appeared to be angry," the *Times* correspondent noted. But the most famous case of this strategy in action was Ben Tre in Kien Hoa Province. Here is an excerpt from the February 8 *New York Times*:

"The Viet Cong had people all over this town," said Maj. Philip Canella... "Christ, they were everywhere... They had apparently infiltrated into most of the town; they were probably living with the people. It was Tet and there were plenty of strangers in town."

Ben Tre was pulverized by U.S. firepower. "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it," an unidentified U.S. Major explained, thus coining one of the most notorious phrases of the war and a fitting motto for the U.S. counter-attack against the Tet Offensive.(19)

Saigon itself was occupied by the revolutionaries. Packed with 4,000,000 people (more than 20% of the entire South Vietnamese population), many of whom were refugees from the countryside, the capital city witnessed two kinds of attack.(20) First, and most spectacular, were the assaults on highly visible targets right in the middle of town: the U.S. Embassy, the Presidential Palace, the Government radio station. Two employees in the Embassy helped an NLF attack team break in and hold the building for several hours.(21) All of these places were retaken within twenty-four hours, but as a *Le Monde* correspondent pointed out, the point of



17. *Le Monde*, February 10, 1968.

18. Quoted in *New York Times*, February 11, 1968.

19. These citations and other information on U.S. bombing and shelling are found in *New York Times*, February 6, 1968. According to the *Times*, there were at least 750 civilian casualties in My Tho, 350 in Can Tho, 2,500 in Ben Tre.

20. My account of events in Saigon is based on Jean-Claude Pomonti, "Les Saigonnais dans le guerre," *Le Monde*, February 7, 1968.

21. *New York Times*, February 5, 1968.



the actions in the heart of the most prosperous residential area of Saigon was not to seize and hold terrain, nor to liquidate political enemies, but rather to "shake up the bourgeoisie." (22) In pursuit of this aim, liberation troops moved freely, often making a point of knocking on doors with small requests — for example, a drink of water — content to make their presence known among the local notables who provided the main social base for the GVN regime.

Meanwhile, in many of Saigon's poorer

neighborhoods, overflowing with refugees, the NLF took a different approach. Here, the troops working in close coordination with the local underground, settled down to stay in the midst of the population, which had fed and housed them in the days before the attack and hidden their weapons. In effect, these quarters had become liberated territories. "I have always thought of this whole area as a Vietcong combat hamlet," said one military policeman of Cholon, one such Saigon neighborhood. (23) These occupations were still in force several weeks later when a French correspondent noted that in Cholon the visitor:

knows immediately that he is in a zone controlled by the NLF. The signs of this are scarcely perceptible. The expressions on the people's faces are closed, hostility is evident, manifested by the whole community: mocking dignity of the children, pretended indifference of the adults — that is of the women, since men are rare and are never less than fifty years old. One also notices the absence of urban misery and of begging. And especially conspicuous — the decisive proof of NLF control — is the total absence of the governmental army. The ARVN troops are content to block the streets leading into the neighborhood. The visitor quickly understands that he is not welcome, and the children, faithful guards, make him understand this very clearly as he leaves with some stones which whistle past his ears. (24)

Here too the Americans were reduced to bombing and shelling, and by February 6 the *New York Times* stated that "in some places in the city and suburbs the destruction is almost total."

22. *Le Monde*, February 7, 1968.

23. Quoted in *New York Times*, February 11, 1968.

24. *Le Monde*, May 4; see also *New York Times*, February 8, 1968.

THE MEANING OF THE OFFENSIVE

By permanently modifying the political and military balance of forces in South Vietnam, the Tet Offensive constituted a decisive moment in the history of the war. American politicians and journalists were quick to voice the opinion that the NLF had "lost militarily," because it had been forced to evacuate the cities, but somehow, as if by accident, had won a "psychological" victory during Tet. But from the NLF point of view, military methods were always conceived as a means of affecting the political — or "psychological" — situation. All tactical operations, even one as ambitious as the Tet Offensive, were designed not to seize and control some piece of territory, but to bring pressure to bear on enemy forces and to undermine their resolve to continue the war. Approached from this perspective, the Offensive amounted to a crushing defeat for the United States.

Even if we are content to view events from a narrowly military perspective, the Pentagon had little grounds for satisfaction. During the fighting, ARVN forces were "cut to pieces" with some of the elite units "disintegrated to the highest degree." U.S. casualties were also substantial: 3895 dead between January 30 and March 31.(25) In their routine planning for the war, American strategists took for granted outlays for equipment which would seem staggering for any other nation, but even so the material losses suffered during the Tet Offensive gave pause. For example, the NLF claimed to have wrecked 1,800 aircraft during the fighting. Replacing the planes, trucks, radar and communications equipment, guns and ammunition lost during the Offensive was possible, of course, but such expenditures also increased the burden of the war on the already over-extended American economy. These losses also had repercussions on the battlefield where, as an NLF spokesperson explained,

The result in lowered U.S. military efficiency was immediately noticeable... in lack of coordination between American and Saigon forces; lack of coordination between their own ground units and between ground units and air support; and frequently a total absence of support for platoon and company-sized units caught in our ambushes. (26)

In February, the American situation was desperate, not only in Vietnam, but on a global scale as well. The military had no idea what to expect next. Another attack on Hue? Saigon? Khe Sanh? As *New York Times* pundit James Reston put it, Washington was "trying to anticipate the oriental mind, and... having a very hard time indeed." (27) U.S. Strategic reserves were exhausted, and the Pentagon realized that, in the event of a crisis elsewhere in the world (the Middle East, for example), its options would be limited. The Pueblo incident of January 23, 1968 (when the North Koreans captured a U.S. ship which had violated their territorial waters) had already made clear a vulnerability which Tet had succeeded in dangerously aggravating. (28)

For three years, U.S. forces had been endeavoring to push back the insurgents who in 1965 controlled almost the entire countryside and had the cities virtually surrounded. By 1968, and at a huge cost, some progress had been made in gaining a bit of breathing room. But in the course of the Offensive, the guerrillas once more tightened their lines around the urban areas, establishing a stranglehold on towns they had decided to evacuate to escape U.S. bombing and shelling. A State Department working

25. *New York Times*, February 2, 1968; Oberdorfer, *Tet*, "dedication."

26. See the analysis offered by an NLF spokesperson in Burchett, *Vietnam Will Win!*, 193 ff. According to this commentator, 200,000 Saigon troops, 1/3 of the entire ARVN force, deserted in the first week of the Offensive.

27. *New York Times*, February 4, 1968.

28. Burchett, *Vietnam Will Win!* 187 ff.

paper dated March 3 analyzed the situation in these terms:

We know that despite a massive influx of 500,000 U.S. troops, 1.2 million tons of bombs a year, 400,000 attack sorties per year, 200,000 enemy KIA in three years, 20,000 US KIA, etc., our control of the countryside and the defense of the urban levels is now essentially at pre-August 1965 levels. We have achieved stalemate at a high commitment. (29)

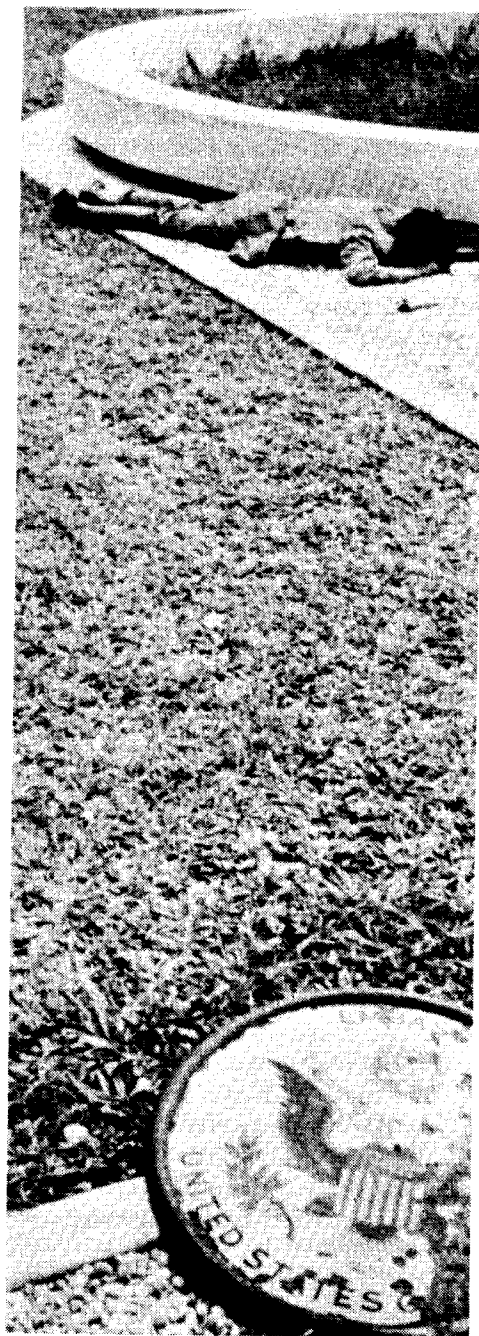
Of course the NLF had suffered losses of its own in reestablishing this commanding position. The Americans claimed that enemy casualties had been prohibitive, as many as 60,000 dead — which would have amounted to virtually the entire strike force employed in the Offensive. A *Le Monde* estimate suggested that all but 10-15% of these dead were residents of cities and towns who had been killed largely as a result of U.S. bombing and shelling, (30) but we can be sure that losses in NLF military units were substantial. At the same time, they had not fundamentally diminished the capabilities of the insurgents. From their advanced positions, they launched major attacks on February 18-19, March 4-5 and May 5, not on the scale of the original assaults, but still punishing. And of course shelling and harassment actions were constant throughout this period. In May, U.S. ground forces lost 2,215 dead (500 a week), compared to 2,043 in February at the apparent height of the offensive. (31)

The political ramifications of the Offensive were profound. As the attacks unfolded, GVN pacification cadres fled from the rural areas, and its troops were either shifted into the beleaguered cities or walled up in strongholds close to district and province capitals. By early March, the pacification program in the Mekong Delta had been "entirely destroyed," and even

29. *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 558. This U.S. view corresponds closely to the NLF analysis quoted in Burchett, *Vietnam Will Win!*, 193.

30. *Le Monde*, February 22, 1968.

31. *Le Monde*, June 7, 1968.



on the most important highway, route 4, the NLF was collecting tolls and blocking enemy transport. The situation between Saigon and Danang was hardly better. In Thua Thien Province, while the battle in Hue got most of the attention within the U.S., guerrilla units were taking control of the rural terrain. In the other northern provinces, the Marines gave up pacification efforts and drew back into their bases.⁽³²⁾ Citing a report prepared in late February by General Wheeler, the authors of the Pentagon Papers noted that "the most important VC goal in the winter-spring offensive was the takeover of the countryside." According to Wheeler, this goal had been largely achieved. The "main event" thus is still to come, not in a one-night offensive but in a week-by-week expulsion of GVN presence and influence from the rural areas, showing up on the pacification maps as a "red tide" flowing up to the edges of the province and district towns, and over some of them.

Once again "controlling" the countryside (to use the Pentagon's term), the NLF was free to carry on its political work, recruiting, collecting taxes, strengthening the logistical base for further military activities. As Wheeler put it, "the enemy is operating with relative freedom in the countryside. . . . His recovery [from the losses of the Tet Offensive] is likely to be rapid."

In a more general sense, as always, the way the two sides fought conveyed a sense of who they were and what they stood for, and these lessons emerged all the more clearly because of the scope and drama of the Tet Offensive. NLF strategy involved a marked degree of decentralization and local initiative. Many main force troops had been given civilian clothes, spending money and identification papers, and then had been dispersed one by one or in small groups with orders to reassemble at a later date in the cities of South Vietnam. The readiness to give such orders (such a plan would have been inconceivable for ARVN or U.S. commanders) and the fact that the soldiers successfully regrouped

at their assigned times and places spoke volumes about the state of mind of the guerrillas. Even the seemingly petty details which emerged from newspaper accounts of the fighting were full of import. Reflect, for example, on the fact that some cities, the NLF attackers disguised themselves as ARVN forces, a ploy which sowed much confusion among Saigon and American personnel, but seemingly did not disrupt coordination among the guerrillas. Only troops who had been minutely prepared and who completely trusted each other and their leadership would have dared to employ such a device.

Every aspect of the campaign also clearly depended on civilian cooperation. Tens of thousands of people must have directly aided the revolutionary forces, helping them to smuggle their weapons into cities, providing food and shelter once they had arrived, enabling them to blend into the urban neighborhoods from which they later launched their attacks. As in other aspects of guerrilla warfare, the fighting itself required civilian logistical support: maintenance of bunkers and other defensive positions, assistance in dealing with killed and wounded, transport and storage of supplies, information on the activity of enemy units. The failure of U.S. intelligence to anticipate the attack was also politically significant. Many Vietnamese had known what was coming, yet had failed to betray the secrecy of NLF preparations. As a *Le Monde* correspondent affirmed, the way the Offensive unfolded "implied the participation and the complicity of a significant part of the population."⁽³⁴⁾

32. *Le Monde*, February 23, March 9, 13, 26, 1968; *Economist*, March 9, 1968; Burchett, *Vietnam: The War*, 198.

33. These two citations are from *Pentagon Papers*, IV, 547.

34. *Le Monde*, February 9, 1968.

U.S. response to the Tet Offensive was also characteristic. After the NLF had for the most part peacefully occupied the cities, U.S.-GVN authorities were reduced to demolishing areas they stood no chance of regaining by other means. Their victory communiques could not hide, in the words of *Le Monde*, "the horrible massacre of a population, often complicit, but unarmed." By February 22, the French newspaper stated, literally "hundreds" of communities had suffered a substantial number of civilian casualties. The massive firepower which had been wrecking the liberated areas of the countryside for two years and driving refugees into the cities was now turned against these same cities, forcing the guerillas and the inhabitants, many of them already uprooted, to flee. Not all the massacres resulted from the bombardment of heavily populated urban areas. In the countryside, U.S. troops were slaughtering villagers who seemed to side with the NLF, as in My Lai on March 16. On the ropes, without any political toe-hold, the Pentagon was compelled to drop all pretense and to commit its forces to the outright extermination of the rural population. Army morale, which had never been high, began to give way as this ruthless strategy emerged more clearly. The fact that word of the My Lai massacre was leaked by U.S. army personnel was a sign of what later was to grow into a substantial anti-war resistance among the GI's.(35)

The situation in the cities was more complex than in the countryside, but there too the Tet Offensive modified the balance of forces, shaking loose many students, Buddhists, and moderate politicians — the individuals and groups who later would constitute the "Third Force" — from their allegiance to the GVN. By showing their presence in the heart of cities many had believed to be entirely "secure," the insurgents had indeed "shaken up" the urban bourgeoisie. "The Front let them off this time,"

Le Monde explained, "did not ask them too choose. Too skillful, the NLF leaves them some time to reflect."(36) As a *New York Times* correspondent observed on February 4,

The complacent and prosperous dwellers in the big cities had, over several years of peace and a semblance of security, come to think of the Vietcong as a specter that haunted the fields and hamlets in the dark of night. Now, for the first time, they found the VC in the streets, shouting their slogans and fighting with nerve-shattering fury against the hastily gathered American and Vietnamese units sent to oppose them. It is unlikely that the well-to-do will ever feel quite the same confidence in the central Government.

In the following months, this erosion in Government support continued as various moderates came to realize that the NLF was there to stay and that the Americans would stop at nothing, not even the destruction of Vietnam, in order to "save" it from communism.(37) In April 1969, this political shift served as the basis for creation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), a broad coalition which included the NLF and which from then on, in opposition to the claims of GVN authorities, asserted its right to speak for the Vietnamese people in Vietnam and in the world as well.

The Tet Offensive was the critical battle of the Vietnam war, an assertion we can make even

35. On My Lai, see Seymour Hersh, *Cover-Up* (New York, 1973). When this story began to emerge in the autumn of 1969, U.S. authorities responded with counter-charges according to which the other side had also conducted massacres during the Tet Offensive, especially at Hue. The allegations were later exposed as fabrications by Gareth Porter, in "The 1968 'Hue Massacre,'" *Indochina Chronicle* (#33, June 24, 1974).

36. *Le Monde*, February 7, 1968.

37. This process was carefully documented in a series of *Le Monde* dispatches; see, for example, the analysis in the May 4, 1968, edition. *Le Monde's* coverage of the Tet Offensive was consistently excellent, and even today, ten years later, its dispatches are substantial, useful contemporary history. By contrast, the U.S. coverage makes painful reading today, reminding us of how inadequately the American people were served by papers like the *New York Times*, throughout the war.

while recognizing that there have been many "turning points" in the Vietnamese struggle for national liberation: the Declaration of Independence from the French in 1945; Dienbienphu and the Geneva Accords in 1954; the founding of the NLF in 1960; the 1964 General Offensive which prompted U.S. escalation in the following year; the 1972 Spring Offensive and the Paris Peace Agreements of January 1973; the definitive liberation of the whole country in April 1975. Tet 1968 was only one phase in this sequence; in the words of North Vietnamese officials, it was not "final victory, the seizure of central power." But nonetheless, even then (in March 1968), they recognized it as "a decisive step in an unfolding process."⁽³⁸⁾ The revolutionary leaders had always been confident, and, on the other hand, they knew the suffering and destruction of the war were far from over. But after the spring of 1968 they were certain of final victory.

In the first place, the Offensive transformed the situation within South Vietnam. After 1968, there remained Catholics, political moderates, sectors of the bourgeoisie, not to speak of a hard core of drug dealers, profiteers and traitors, who continued to hold the Front at arms length and who lent a measure of support, however grudging it was in certain cases, to the Saigon regime. And so long as this regime remained in place, the U.S. would have a base for continuing the fighting. Still, a threshold had been crossed, and the insurgency was now broad enough to present itself to the country and to the world as a *government*, sure of its ultimate right to speak for the nation. In short, formation of the PRG was one of the enduring legacies of Tet.

The Offensive also permanently tipped the international balance of forces in favor of the Vietnamese and against their imperialist enemies. From the point of view of the Pentagon, the fight against the NLF was much more than a "police action," which could be carried off with

limited means. On the contrary, it was a major war. Realizing that some measure of active participation of the "home front" would be necessary to offset the total effort which the guerrillas were able to command from their own mass base, they hoped to pit the American people against Vietnam's revolutionary movement. But this commitment was never forthcoming, and the attempts to make a political case for the war failed badly ("roughly half those interviewed by the Gallup poll in June 1967 said they had no clear idea of what the war was all about"⁽³⁹⁾). As a result, the government had to fall back on what was by definition an inadequate position: that the war could somehow be fought and won without seriously impinging on the lives of the American people, that we were capable of producing both "guns and butter." Finally, as the fighting persisted and losses mounted, U.S. leaders were left only with the cynical assertion that, right or wrong, escalation was winning and that, however people might feel about the conflict, it would soon be over with the Pentagon on top.

The Tet Offensive completely exploded the illusion and left Washington without any way persuasively inviting mass participation in the war effort, and as a consequence without a prospect of winning the war. Indeed, Nixon and Kissinger were required to withdraw U.S. forces and bring down military spending on Indochina in other words, to present Vietnam as a project which would cost the American people almost nothing. At the time, anti-war activists according to the Nixon strategy of "Vietnamization," as the technological destruction of the countryside more military significance than it in fact deserved. Massive technological means of destruction had been employed with great ruthlessness from 1965 on. There was no doubt that

38. Quoted in the dispatch filed by Jacques Decornoy in *Monde*, March 1, 1968.

39. Oberdorfer, *Tet!*, 100.

such tactics caused great suffering across the countryside, but such means alone, even with refinements like computerized B-52 runs controlled from Thailand and "people sniffers" scattered along the Ho Chi Minh trail, could hardly accomplish what had not been achieved in conjunction with half a million troops. Human factors were what counted — on *both* sides. By undermining the morale of the U.S. expeditionary force and driving it out of the war, and by destroying public confidence in the war effort within the U.S., the Tet Offensive buried once and for all any realistic Pentagon hope for military victory.

Within the United States, changes wrought by the Tet Offensive, though not "decisive" in the sense just discussed, were nonetheless profound. President Johnson had crushed Barry Goldwater and the Republicans in 1964, winning one of the most one-sided elections in American history. But the NLF brought him down, enmeshing him in a tissue of lies and boastful predictions, then sending his whole administration foundering with their Offensive. This demonstration of the vulnerability of U.S. leadership was not lost on many sectors of the ruling class (Clark Clifford, the *New York Times*, etc.) who now began to argue openly that the government had made a mistake and that policy in Vietnam and elsewhere had to be rebuilt around a recognition of the limitations of U.S. power. Never again would any administration be able to unite the entire ruling class behind a strategy of U.S. aggressive military victory in Vietnam. More broadly, the realization that U.S. troops could not be committed to Third World battlefields without grave risk substantially reined in a foreign policy which for a generation had been both highly aggressive and firmly supported by the entire ruling class.

The NLF also singularly changed the relationship between the government and the American people. Tet made "the light at the end of the

tunnel" into a widely recognized, derisive one-liner. Even today, it is not entirely clear how much administration propaganda grew out of an attempt to deliberately falsify what was happening in Vietnam and how much needs to be explained in terms of the ideological shortsightedness of U.S. leaders. Symbol at the same time of duplicity and contemptible self-deception, President Johnson was both the perpetrator and the victim of the war. But however we wish to read his motives, the Tet Offensive highlighted the gigantic incompetence and bad faith of U.S. leadership, and cruelly brought into the open the futility of the sacrifices which they had imposed on the American (and the Vietnamese) people. Perhaps more than any batch of Watergate tapes, it undermined the trust which many had once readily accorded national leaders.

Finally, Tet left its mark on the U.S. left. Over the years, we had argued against the Harvard-trained experts, with their seemingly scientific analysis of "modernization," "wars of national liberation," "counter insurgency." But even as we grew to despise the Bundy's, the Rostow's, and the others who defended the war, we were not sure we had the means or the knowledge to articulate a distinctive counter-explanation of events. The Tet Offensive indicated that they had been wrong and we had been right, more right even than we had dared to imagine. It showed that there was a reality which corresponded to the critical bent we were struggling to develop and encouraged us to probe more deeply into the intricacies of a world which U.S. power and its apologists previously seemed to own.

The demystifying character of the Tet Offensive was evident in countless incidents, large and small. Let us take as an example, one among the many which might serve our purposes, President Johnson's press conference of February 2. According to the *New York Times'* account, Johnson

acknowledged that the Vietcong's simultaneous attacks on cities throughout South Vietnam had disrupted life in many communities and inflicted casualties on civilians. But "a few bandits can do that in any city," he remarked, pointing to the disruptions caused by riots in Detroit and other American communities.

The president himself thus confirmed something we were already beginning to suspect: that there were many similarities between Blacks in U.S. cities and Vietnamese peasants, and we could not help reflecting on his characterization of both of these groups as "bandits." We were then also discovering that police violence was largely responsible for the deaths and destruction when people "rioted" in Detroit and Newark, just as U.S. bombs and shells caused most of the damage in Vietnamese cities "attacked" by the NLF. In both cases, revolt was greeted with a savagery designed to "save" a terrain U.S. leaders were unable to control by conventional means. The Tet Offensive was full of such moments of insight, when seemingly scattered events all over the world began to fit into an overall pattern of struggle between U.S. imperialism and its enemies.

More generally, the Tet Offensive made a powerful contribution to the rebuilding of some sort of socialist presence in the United States. For a whole generation of young people, socialism seemed to be the preserve of an isolated, defeated handful. The Cubans had given new life to socialist ideas, and the Cultural Revolution was beginning to bring the Chinese more into focus. Some of us, through family or friends, had been in touch with a more vital and persuasive vision of socialism all along, while others discovered this route in the civil rights movement or other struggles. But by and large leftist politics in 1968 were still moralistic, isolated from working people.

The Vietnamese helped to change all of that, and never more tellingly than with the Tet Offensive. As the insurgents burst into view,

"shouting their slogans and fighting with nerve-shattering fury," we realized that they were not just noble victims, but that they were going to win the war. Trying to make sense of the details of the Offensive, we were bowled over by the sheer ingenuity of it, the thrilling spectacle of people performing miraculous feats. Tet was brought into focus with blinding clarity just how much human beings are capable of accomplishing. Carried along by the momentum of their endeavor, we wanted to be associated with the Vietnamese revolutionaries (Tet made the NLF flag an emblem) and to figure out how our newly discovered vision of "power to the people" might be realized here in the United States. There was more than a little naivete in these sentiments, but a process had been set in motion, or, where already in motion, greatly speeded along. The Offensive demonstrated that socialism was not just a moral stance or an academic persuasion, but a real possibility embodied in the collective action of real people. On the other side, the capitalist-imperialist power of the United States was not as impressive as it had seemed, there was hope that we too might discover how to exploit its contradictions and check its aggressions. In a context where it was almost impossible to feel confident about being a revolutionary, the Vietnamese endowed socialism with an aura of heroism and glory. The Tet Offensive made us proud to be socialists, for many, it enabled us truly to be socialists for the first time.

DAVID HUNT wrote the book-length study "Villagers at War: The National Liberation Front in My Tho Province, 1965-1967," which appeared in *Radical America* (Vol. 8, Nos. 1-4, January-April 1974). He teaches history at the University of Massachusetts in Boston.

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MARXISM, PREFIGURATIVE COMMUNISM, AND THE PROBLEM OF WORKERS' CONTROL

Carl Boggs

A conspicuous deficiency of the Marxist tradition has been the failure to produce a theory of the state and political action that could furnish the basis of a democratic and non-authoritarian revolutionary process. The two most widely-tested strategies for advancing revolutionary goals — Leninism and structural reformism — provide no real alternative to the bureaucratic hierarchy, the power of the centralized state, and the social division of labor characteristic of bourgeois society. While Leninism did furnish a mechanism for overturning traditional structures, it has reproduced within the party-state a bureaucratic centralism that retards progress toward socialism. And structural reformism, as expressed in traditional Social Democracy and the Communist parties of the advanced capitalist societies, has led to the institutionalization of working-class politics, into bourgeois electoral, judicial and administrative structures. Both strategies have actually reinforced the growth of modern bureaucratic capitalism through their obsession with state authority, “efficiency” and discipline.

Because these models lack a conception of the particular socialist forms that would replace the established models of domination, and since both mirror and even extend some of the most repressive features of the bureaucratic state, they are never really able to escape the confines of bourgeois politics. Thus “Marxism-Leninism” and Social Democracy, which in the U.S. have been the main strategic responses to the disintegration of the new left, are actually two sides of the same coin. Despite their ideological contrasts, they rest upon many of the same theoretical (and even programmatic) assumptions.

It would be easy to attribute this phenomenon to the temporary aberrations of "Stalinism" and "revisionism", but the problem has deeper roots. It stems from the failure of Marxism to spellout the process of transition. Note that Marx thought communism on a world scale would appear organically and quite rapidly. One finds in Marx scarcely a hint of what forms, methods, and types of leadership would give shape to the unfolding socialist order; whatever strategic directions can be unravelled from his work are ambiguous and often inconsistent.(1) At times he seemed to indicate that socialist transformation would resemble the passage from feudalism to capitalism, to the extent that changes in civil society would necessarily precede, and anticipate, the actual transfer of political power — but he did not set out to conceptualize this process or take up the problem of strategy.

The crude determinism that overtook European Marxism in the period between Marx's death and World War I did little to clarify this task. The presumed mechanics of capitalist development undercut the need for a conscious scheme of transition; "crisis", collapse, breakdown—these fatalistic notions propelled Marxism toward the most naive faith in progress. Since that capitalism was expected to disappear through its own contradictions (the falling rate of profit, crises of over-production, concentration of wealth, immiserization of the proletariat), the transformative process was never viewed as problematic. The ends and methods of socialist revolution were assumed to be determined by the logic of capitalism itself, as automatic mechanisms that side-stepped the issue of political strategy and subjective intervention. Obstacles that stood in the way of this historical advance toward socialism — bureaucratic domination, the social division of labor, lack of mass socialist consciousness — were viewed as merely reflections of an outmoded

production system. Attempts to confront such obstacles directly, or to specify the actual character of the transition, were dismissed as exercises in utopian speculation.

Leninism overcame this strategic paralysis, but its "solution" was an authoritarian and power oriented model that only further repressed the democratic and self-emancipatory side of Marxism. In the past century, the most direct attack on statist Marxism has come from what might be called the prefigurative tradition, which begins with the nineteenth century anarchists and includes the syndicalists, council communists, and the New Left. By "prefigurative", I mean the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal. Developing mainly *outside* Marxism, it produced a critique of bureaucratic domination and a vision of revolutionary democracy that Marxism generally lacked. Yet, wherever it was not destroyed by the bourgeois state or by organized Marxist parties, it fell prey to its own spontaneism, or wound up absorbed into established trade union, party and state institutions. These historical limitations, along with a powerful critique of Leninism and Social Democracy, are the legacy of prefigurative radicalism that commands renewed attention today.

1. SOCIALISM OR STATISM? THE PROBLEM DEFINED

The eclipse of traditional Social Democracy was hastened by the Russian Revolution and the endurance of the Bolshevik state. Leninism always stressed the danger of "spontaneity" and the need for a centralized and disciplined organization to correct the immobilism of the "open" parties of the Second International. The Bolshevik party was constructed less for underground combat (a theme that is often over-exaggerated) than for carrying out a "minority

revolution". Two conditions shaped this strategy: a small proletariat co-existing with a large peasantry in a pre-industrial society, and a weak state subject to extreme crises of legitimacy. For Lenin, everything hinged on the *immediacy* of the struggle for power. As Lukacs noted, Lenin's major accomplishment was to defy the "laws" of capitalist development and to inject political will into Marxism: the strategy was one of *Realpolitik*. (2) The party-state is more central to Leninism than the vaguely anarchistic vision of mass participation that Lenin sketched in *State and Revolution*. Since the Bolsheviks conquered power at a moment of grave crisis, and without a sustained build-up of popular support beyond the cities, their schema did not call for a transformation of civil society preceding the transfer of power. They achieved immediate power objectives, but the isolation and opposition they faced made their *socialist* goals unrealizable. To preserve a revolutionary regime under such conditions meant solidifying the party-state; beyond that, the project of *transforming* such a society would call for massive use of control, manipulation, and coercion.

The Leninist monopoly of power in Russia had two main consequences: it transformed the masses "represented" by the party into manipulated objects, and it generated a preoccupation with bureaucratic methods and techniques. Lenin's whole approach was that of the technician who stresses the organizational means of political struggle while downplaying the ends themselves. (3) This suppression of values permits the utilization of capitalist methods to advance "socialist construction": hierarchical structures, Taylorism, the authoritarian-submissive personality, alienated labor. All stirrings from below were thus dismissed as "utopian", "ultra-leftist", or "anarchistic". The very means which Bolsheviks used to lay the economic-technical basis for the transition to communism,

inevitably subverted those ends and encouraged the growth of bureaucratic centralism.

Lenin equated workers' power with the fact of Bolshevik rule, mocking the "petty bourgeois illusions" of leftists who clamored for democratic participation. By 1921, the regime had already destroyed or converted into "transmission belts" those popular and autonomous institutions — the Soviets, trade unions, factory committees — that played a vital role in the revolution. Before his death, Lenin recoiled from the bureaucratic tide, but the Bolshevik tradition offered no alternative strategy. The only conception of transition in Lenin was the one followed in *practice* — an adaptive, flexible tactics that, when combined with the primacy of the party, favored centralism.

Beyond references to the "dictatorship" of the proletariat", the Bolsheviks scarcely raised the question of structures. Aside from futile internal protests from the left communists, there was no analysis of what political forms and authority relations were comparable with the Marxian vision of a classless and stateless society. For Lenin, the nature of the transitional period always remained unspecified; the demand "all power to the Soviets" was essentially a slogan, and in any case had no impact on post-revolutionary development. The Soviets were viewed as stepping stones to the conquest of power rather than as the nucleus of a new socialist state. The party always took precedence over the Soviets and strove to limit their autonomy; true to Lenin's administrative emphasis, his vision of revolution was anchored in large-scale organization. (4) Having "smashed" the authoritarian state, the Bolsheviks soon recreated it.

Though Marxism was originally an anti-statist theory, Soviet development since Lenin has produced what the Yugoslav Stojanovic calls the "statist myth of Socialism." (5) Revolutionary goals became inseparable from

state initiative in the realm of control, ownership, planning, capital accumulation, employment of the workforce. The transition to socialism assumed a mystical quality: the consciousness, social relations, and political habits necessary to build a socialist order would seem to spring from nowhere, with no lengthy and organic process of transformation within civil society to nurture them.

Whereas Leninism has functioned best in pre-industrial countries with weak institutions of authority, the strategy of structural reforms has taken hold in advance capitalist societies where bourgeois traditions are more firmly implanted. Even where "Leninist" movements have survived in the industrialized countries, they have either abandoned their vanguard status or drifted toward isolationism.

The theory of structural reforms is often understood as a reversion from Leninism to traditional Social Democracy, but the model introduced by the Italian Communist Party after World War II contained a more positive conception of the transition. It seeks to by-pass the extremes of vanguardism and spontaneism by participating *within* and *extending* the forms of bourgeois democracy (elections, parliament, local governments, trade unions). Its premise was that Marxist governments could not gain hegemony until the political balance of forces strongly favored them; increased working-class strength would gradually modify structures, breaking down the power of the monopolies and the central bureaucracy while injecting new life into mass politics. In contrast to Leninism, it envisaged a gradual, peaceful democratization of the state; against the "ultra left", it offered a "tangible" strategy that looked to intermediate objectives within the prevailing culture and traditions rather than to struggles of total confrontation.

The evolution of Communist parties in the developed societies reflects the contradictions of

structural reformism: electoral-parliamentary struggles have led to *strategic* (not just tactical) involvement in bourgeois structures and to institutionalization within the system. This process has unfolded at three levels: (1.) like Leninism the strategy itself discourages prefigurative forms that would permit the masses to define the revolutionary process; (2.) parliamentarism undercuts any commitment to grassroot struggle, workers' control, and cultural transformation and detaches the party from everyday life; (3.) years of electoral campaigns geared to winning votes and building power coalitions favored the rise of interest-group politics based on appeal to economism, populism, and patronage.

Structural reformism thus perpetuates the division between politics and economics. On the one hand, the party mobilizes votes, creates alliances, and expands its local administrative and parliamentary representation; on the other, the trade unions attempt to advance the material demands of labor through contractual bargaining. This separation fragments the working-class movement and makes it difficult to link immediate struggles with broad socialist objectives. Electoralism minimizes popular mobilization and encourages a partial, alienated, institutional approach to politics,⁽⁷⁾ whereas trade unionism reproduces the hierarchy, discipline, and corporativism of the capitalist factory.

There is another problem — one stemming from the concept of a "neutral" state that views the bourgeois power apparatus as standing "above" the class struggle, as a technical instrument that can be restructured and wielded for revolutionary purposes. The conservatism of structural reformist parties reveals that the state is inseparable from civil society, a product of capitalist development. The institutions that grew out of the bourgeois revolution are too deeply embedded in that tradition to be somehow miraculously lifted out of it and forged

into mechanisms of socialist transformation. What Gramsci and Luxemburg noted in an earlier period still applies: liberal democratic structures function above all to *legitimate* bourgeois society. The excessive reliance on the state here differs from that of Leninism, but it too fails to situate the revolutionary process in the general society and in the unfolding of new political forms.

Despite a commitment to pluralism, structural *reformism* merely embellishes the statist myth of socialism in a different guise — the central state itself becomes the prime mover, the source of all initiative and legitimation, the main arena of participation. In the end, structural reformism and Leninism appear as two diametrically opposed strategies that lead to twin versions of state bureaucratic capitalism. Whereas Leninism reproduced the essentials of capitalism, including hierarchy, commodity production, and alienated labor, in a new and more total form, structural reformism promises to extend, refine, and “rationalize” existing bourgeois institutions.

2 A PREFIGURATIVE COMMUNISM?

Within Marxism, the problem of bureaucratic domination and hierarchy is usually understood as a manifestation of the class structure — a conceptual weakness that helps to explain the absence of a strategy grounded in new forms of authority. Prefigurative strategy, on the other hand, views statism and authoritarianism as special obstacles to be overturned; its goal is to replace the bureaucratic state with distinctly popular institutions. Ideally, this tradition expresses three basic concerns: (1.) fear of reproducing hierarchical authority relations under a new ideological rationale; (2.) criticism of political parties and trade unions because their centralized forms reproduce the old power relations in a way that undermines revolutionary

struggles; and (3.) commitment to democratization through local, collective structures that anticipate the future liberated society. The prefigurative model — at least in some of its more recent expressions — stressed the overturning of *all* modes of domination, not only the expropriation of private ownership. Statist attempts to introduce nationalization, central planning, and new social priorities may achieve a transfer of legal ownership but they may also leave the social division of labor and bureaucracy intact.(8)

The idea of “collective ownership” remains a myth so long as the old forms of institutional control are not destroyed; the supersession of private management by state or “public” management poses only a superficial, abstract solution to the contradictions of capitalism. As Gorz puts it: “There is no such thing as communism without a communist life-style or ‘culture’; but a communist life-style cannot be based upon the technology, institutions, and division of labor which derive from capitalism.”(9) Only when the workers themselves establish new participatory forms can alienated labor and subordination be eliminated. This transformation includes but runs much deeper than the problem of formal ownership — it penetrates to the level of factory hierarchy and authoritarianism, fragmentation of job skills, commodity production, and separation of mental and physical functions that grow out of the capitalist division of labor. These features, which are often thought to be necessary for greater efficiency and productivity, can better be understood as a means of ensuring control of labor.(10) The drive toward specialization and hierarchy comes not primarily from capital accumulation and technological development in the narrow sense, but from the need to create a bureaucratically organized and disciplined workforce.

Bureaucratization creates obstacles to revolutionary change that were only dimly foreseen by

classical Marxism. The expansion of the public sphere and the convergence of state and corporate sectors has meant more centralized and total networks of power and, correspondingly, the erosion of popular democratic initiative. Bureaucratic logic, which enters every area of public existence, helps to enforce bourgeois ideological hegemony insofar as it diffuses a culture of organizational adaptation, submission, pragmatism, routine; it depoliticizes potential opposition by narrowing the range of political discourse, by institutionalizing alienation, and posing only "technical" solutions to problems. Once entrenched, bureaucracy tends to produce a rigidity that resists fundamental change. Marxist movements themselves have been repeatedly victimized by their own internal bureaucratization.

Yet this dynamic, even as it permeates new spheres of life, opens up breaches in the capitalist power structure; new points of vulnerability and new centers of resistance begin to appear. Not only production, but every aspect of social existence is brought into the class struggle. While prefigurative movements first appeared during the early stages of industrialization and bureaucratization, the explosion of popular insurgency in the 1960s — the revolutionary left in Western Europe, Japan and elsewhere, the new left, rank-and-file working class struggles, oppositional movements in Eastern Europe — demonstrated that they are still very much alive.

The institutional focus of prefigurative communism is small, local, collective organs of popular control — factory councils, soviets, neighborhood assemblies, revolutionary action committees, affinity groups — that seek to democratize and reinvigorate revolutionary politics. Generally an outgrowth of traditional structures that express some vague commitment to direct democracy — for example, the peasant collectives in Russia, China, and Spain, the

shop-stewards organization in Britain, the trade union grievance committees in Italy and France — they often become radicalized at times of crisis and produce broader revolutionary forms. The Paris Commune, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, the Hungarian Revolutions of 1919 and 1956, the Spanish upheaval of 1936-39, the Vietnamese Revolution, and the 1968 Revolt in France were all catalyzed by extensive networks of "dual power."

Such groups, generally called councils, can generate a leadership organically rooted in the local workplaces and communities that is directly accountable to the population. They possess other advantages: for example, by collectivizing work and "management" functions, councils can more effectively combat the social division of labor; by emphasizing the transformation of social relations over instrumental power objectives, they can incorporate a wider range of issues, demands, and needs into popular struggles; by posing the question of ideological hegemony, they can furnish the context in which the masses would develop their intellectual and political potential — where a sense of confidence, spirit, and creativity would begin to replace the fatalism, passivity, and submissiveness instilled by bourgeois authority;(11) and, finally, by encouraging political involvement that is centered outside the dominant structures, the capacity to resist deradicalization can be greatly strengthened.

In the broadest sense, prefigurative structures can be viewed as a new source of political legitimacy, as a nucleus of a future socialist state. They would create an entirely new kind of politics, breaking down the division of labor between everyday life and political activity. As Cornelius Castoriadis suggests, "What is involved here is the de-professionalization of politics — i.e., the abolition of politics as a special and separate sphere of activity — and, conversely, the universal politicization of society,

which means just that: the business of society becomes, quite literally, everybody's business."(12)

The early prefigurative tradition, of course, rarely achieved this level of politicization. There is a striking contrast between the old European anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements and the postwar council insurgencies in Russia, Italy, Germany and elsewhere. The earlier variants scorned politics and celebrated spontaneity to such an extent that they could never transcend their own social immediacy or work out an effective strategy. They represented a flight from larger societal issues that often inspired contempt for "theory" and "organization" in any form (a style that was repeated in the early new left). Initially a response to organized Marxism, their fate was one of two extremes: either flailing away helplessly from the outside or assimilation into Marxism itself. The difficulty of extending local centers of revolutionary democracy within a repressive order only intensifies this problem.

Anarchism and syndicalism have responded to this problem by insisting that a lengthy period of ideological-cultural transformation could gradually erode the moral foundations of bureaucratic state power. But all such prefigurative movements were in fact destroyed because their hostility to coordination and leadership enabled the ruling forces to monopolize the political terrain. Moreover, to the extent that they arose out of a peasant or petty bourgeois world-view, they were basically romantic and utopian, longing for a past uncorrupted by industrialization and urbanization.

From the Marx-Bakunin debates of the late 1860s until World War I, the relationship between Marxism and anarchism was one of polarized conflict: organization vs. spontaneity, leadership vs. self-activity, centralism vs. localism, etc. In some ways this polarization was intensified by the Bolshevik Revolution, when

the success of Leninism forced anarchists into retreat. At the same time, with the postwar crisis of European capitalism, prefigurative movements began to look to new models — the soviets in Russia, the factory-council struggles in Italy, Council Communism in Germany and Holland. While still suspicious of all "political" activity, the council tendency did attempt to integrate the best elements of both traditions. Council theorists such as Pannekoek and Goerter, for example, moved beyond a strict commitment to spontaneous and local movements; they sought, at least in theory, to incorporate the needs for structure, leadership, and coordination into a democratic and prefigurative revolutionary process.

Councilism marked a distinct advance beyond the earlier approaches on three levels. First, despite a general differentiation between party and council communism, the general direction was toward fusing popular organs of self-management with larger systems of coordination and planning — called in German a *Raetesystem*, or federated network of councils. Local assemblies were understood as part of a broad *political* strategy. Second, while contestation for state power was never defined as the overriding goal, nor viewed in vanguardist or electoral terms, neither was it contemptuously dismissed. The process would be different: established structures would have to be undermined from below and replaced by collective popular structures. Third, councilism did not look to an idyllic past rooted in a primitive collectivism but to a Marxian vision of the future — to the unfolding potential of the working class, and to economic-technological development as the basis of human liberation.

But even councilism failed to produce a mature revolutionary strategy that could be translated into a sustained movement. Born out of crisis, the councils rapidly disappeared once stability returned; explosive advances were

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crushed and neutralized. In Russia, they were destroyed by the Leninist party-state, in Italy by an isolation bred of localism and factory centeredness, and in Germany by a narrow interest-group politics that was the expression of a rising stratum of highly skilled, professionalized workers in crafts occupations. These failures, in one form or another, have been repeated elsewhere many times since the original postwar council upsurge. The prefigurative dimension of revolutionary politics has repeatedly clashed with the instrumentalism of bureaucratic power struggles.

3. RUSSIA: THE TRIUMPH OF JACOBINISM

The Russian working-class movement, though small and lacking in political maturity by general European standards, first emerged as a radical force at the turn of the century. Politicized by the repressive apparatus of the authoritarian Tsarist state, it naturally sought autonomous forms of proletarian organization. Such forms initially appeared on a large scale during the 1905 Revolution, when factory committees and local soviets (councils rooted in the factories and/or communities) organized strikes and mass demonstrations; but they quickly subsided after the insurgency was bloodily repulsed by Nicholas II, and they did not reappear until 1917. In 1905 they were limited to a few urban areas, and while some grew to enormous size (the Moscow soviet recruited more than 80,000 workers) they were generally short-lived. In the months immediately preceding and following the October Revolution, however, they were able to establish a powerful geographical and institutional presence as organs of "dual power."

By March of 1917, more than 140 soviets were thriving in Russia and the Ukraine; only a few months later the number mushroomed to about 200, many of them in the countryside. Factory committees also appeared by the hundreds, in the industrial center of Petrograd and elsewhere.

More closely tied to the daily lives of workers and peasants than was the feeble Provisional Government, the soviets and factory committees became the legitimate decision-making bodies in many important communities and factories. Radicalized by the wartime disintegration of economic and political life, they developed into vital agencies of revolutionary mobilization and potential centers of collective political power. They were the primary catalysts of the October Revolution.

The soviets were defined as primarily *political* assemblies. Even in areas where they became the ideological battleground for the three main leftist parties — the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and Social Revolutionaries — they nonetheless reflected a broad social base, with delegates elected from virtually all popular strata. The number of delegates varies greatly — from less than 100 in some village and town councils to 3000 in the Petrograd Soviet. Meetings were held regularly, sometimes daily, and debate over local issues was usually open and heated. In the larger assemblies, of course, the executive committee assumed free rein over everyday matters and sometimes developed centralist tendencies, but the rapid turnover of delegates together with the quick pace of events imposed limits on bureaucratization. More than anything else, the soviets helped to legitimate the left by virtue of their stable grassroots presence in the midst of crisis; they must have been indirectly responsible for recruiting hundreds of thousands into the leftist movements — a task that the parties themselves could probably not have achieved.

As the crisis of 1917 brought Russia closer toward revolution, councilism ran into three serious problems. The first involved a split between the soviets and factory committees, between politics and economics. For the most part, soviets assumed decision-making powers over the general affairs of the *community*, while

the committees were more directly concerned with workplace issues at the *point of production*. Although both lacked ideological homogeneity and strategic direction, the factory committees were consistently to the left of the soviets. The factory organs were more militant — and pushed for workers' control and mass action — strikes, demonstrations, occupations. The soviets, on the other hand, exercised a moderating force; they generally pressed for legal tactics, partly owing to their more diverse social composition and partly because of their commitment to institutional politics. The Petrograd soviet, for example, was slow to take up the popular struggles that built toward the October Revolution.(13) At the same time, the committees were inhibited by a narrow emphasis on daily economic demands that tended to exclude political objectives. Acting through the committees, workers physically ousted the management of many factories and established their own system of control, but "politics" was left to the soviets and the council movement remained fragmented.(14)

The second problem was closely related to the first: how to build geographical and political coordination. Without political unity, prefigurative politics was bound to disintegrate on its own or succumb to the logic of Jacobinism. In fact, the events of 1917 moved so rapidly that there was little chance for such a dispersed and ideologically-diffuse mass movement to construct nationwide structures of popular self-management. The idea of a Central Soviet was entertained, and several regional meetings produced debates around the proposals for federative coordinating bodies, but no consensus emerged. Strategic paralysis was thus hardly avoidable, given the power of regionalism, the cultural gulf between cities and countryside, and the rivalry between soviets and factory committees.

This brings us to the third problem — the

conflict between prefigurative structures and leftist parties (notably the Bolsheviks), which ultimately led to the demise of the popular assemblies after the revolution. What was involved here was the capacity of the Bolsheviks to establish their political hegemony within the soviets and committees and then transform these organs into instruments of its own consolidation of state power. The general pattern was for the Bolsheviks to build a majority base of support, form a revolutionary committee that would be subjected to party discipline, and then utilize the local organs as a legitimizing cover for establishing party domination.⁽¹⁵⁾ These tactics worked admirably, given the tightly-knit, disciplined character of the party and the open, ill-defined nature of the

soviets and factory councils. By the time of the Revolution, the bolsheviks controlled about half of all soviets and most of the large urban ones, including the crucial Petrograd soviet that played a major role in catapulting the party to power. And they were from the outside the most influential force in the factory committees.

The revolutionary conquest of power was actually taken in the name of the soviets; the party was envisaged as the global "expression" of local structures, as only one of the mechanisms through which the revolutionary process would occur. In reality, however, the Bolsheviks were always suspicious of the soviets — especially those which retained autonomy vis-a-vis the party — and began to wage an all-out assault on them in early 1918. Independent local organ-



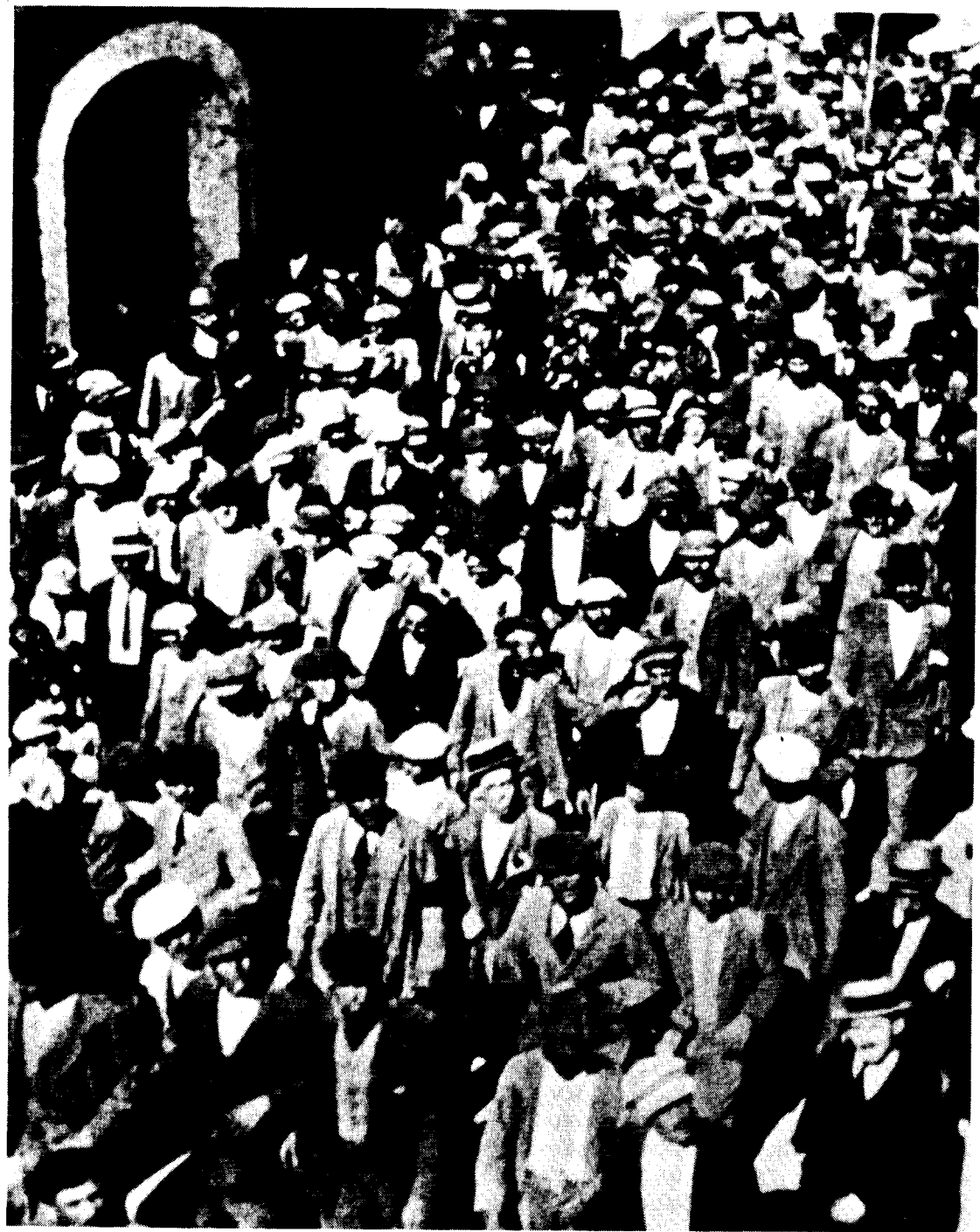
In September, 1917, weapons were distributed to the Petrograd workers to defend the capital against General Kornilov's attempted coup.

izations of all sorts were denounced as havens of "parochialism" and "anarchism" (not to mention Menshevism), and workers' control was dismissed as a "leftist illusion". The Bolsheviks were now in a position to subordinate the remaining soviets, even where they lacked a clear majority, though not without stiff resistance. These councils, along with others that had come under Bolshevik hegemony in the pre-revolutionary period, were gradually emptied of collective-democratic content and transformed into "transmission belts" for implementing decisions made by the party leadership. The factory committees were dismantled by the trade union apparatus, which had already become an adjunct of the party. By mid-1918 the "leftists" of the Supreme Economic Council had been purges, opening the way to decrees which terminated workers' control in certain key industrial sectors.(16)

This was perfectly consistent with general Bolshevik strategy. The rise of bureaucratic centralism and the suppression of prefigurative structures was accelerated by the civil war and the post-revolutionary crisis, but the dynamic had been set in motion much earlier, before the seizure of power. Lenin saw workers' control as a tactical objective to be exploited before the party took over state power — as a means of limiting capitalist hegemony in the factories, of spurring insurrection, and, ultimately, as a step toward nationalization and a top-down state-planned economy. Popular self-management, whether through the soviets, factory committees, or some other form, was never viewed by the Bolsheviks as a principle of socialist state authority. Already in early 1918, Lenin argued that the survival of the Bolshevik government — not to mention the development of a productive economy — depended upon central planning and coordination, a rationalized administration, "one-man management", labor discipline, and strict controls over local organizations.(17)

The bureaucratic centralism implicit in this strategy could only lead to what leftist critics of the regime were already calling "state capitalism". Many felt that bureaucracy itself was a crucial enemy of socialism and insisted that the revolutionary goals of the Bolsheviks had already been forgotten. They stressed workers' control, local autonomy, and open debate within the party. In response, the Bolsheviks dismissed these critiques as "utopian" and "syndicalist"; they looked upon the soviets, factory committees, and even trade unions as disruptive impediments to the main task of consolidating the party-state in the face of grave political threats. In the period 1918-1920, the regime moved to eliminate left opposition with the party (culminating in the ban on factions at the 10th party congress in March 1921) and subordinated the hundreds of mass organizations that were the backbone of revolutionary struggle. The soviets became structures of government power; the factory committees either disappeared or lost their management functions; the trade unions became auxiliaries of the party and the workers' opposition was defeated by 1921; and the left Communists were finally driven from the party or crushed by force (as at Kronstadt).(18)

In the battle between Leninist and prefigurative forces in Russia, the former rapidly gained the upper hand. The party was unified and disciplined while the popular organs were terribly fragmented. Moreover, a central premise of the prefigurative movement — that revolutionary initiative should be taken away from the party and "returned to the class" — was unrealistic given the small and isolated proletariat in Russia and the historical pressures that favored centralism. Conflict and crisis strengthened the Jacobin tendency toward restoration of order, and the compelling demand for "unity" could only reinforce the vanguardist and statist strategy that Lenin had outlined as early as 1902.



4. ITALY: THE LIMITS OF SPONTANEISM

The Italian council movement sprang up out of the *Biennio Rosso* (the "Red Two Years") that swept the northern part of the country during 1918-1920, ending with the collapse of the factory occupations in Turin. The crisis of the bourgeois order had actually begun in the prewar years, when the ideological consensus that Premier Giovanni Giolitti manipulated (through the political art called *trasformismo* — the molding of broad elite alliances which served to absorb leftist opposition) started to crumble. Rapid economic growth after 1900, with the development of the "industrial triangle" of Milan, Turin, and Genoa, established the basis for a highly class-conscious and militant proletariat.

Industrial workers joined the Socialist Party (PSI) and the trade unions in large numbers, though many were attracted to syndicalism and some even looked to anarchism. Like other parties of the Second International, the PSI proclaimed a revolutionary strategy that masked a reformist practice; it struggled for liberal reforms in the political sphere and social welfare measures in the economic sphere — an approach that produced large membership and electoral gains that by 1919 gave the party 156 seats (roughly one-third) in the Chamber of Deputies. The PSI's trade union partner, the General Confederation of Labor, (CGL) functioned mainly as a bargaining instrument with capitalist management; it sought to strengthen working-class economic power with the idea of precipitating a general crisis that would hasten the "natural death" of capitalism.

Such a reformist scenario might have advanced the fortunes of the PSI had it not been for the outbreak of the war and the Russian Revolution. The military defeat left Italy in a state of paralysis. Defeat led to social disruption and severe economic decline, characterized by food shortages, unemployment, inflation, and a

sharply falling *lira*. Popular militancy spread rapidly; by 1917-1918 a wave of strikes, street demonstrations, and land occupations began to erode the PSI-CGL reformist domination and inspired an outpouring of syndicalism. (Working-class struggles confined to the point of production). Proletarian rebellion was centered in Piedmont, notably Turin, where the rise of a skilled, concentrated, and relatively homogeneous proletarian culture prompted comparisons with Petrograd on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution. News of the October upheaval fueled these struggles, which reached a peak that would irreversibly transfigure the old political terrain.

What evolved was a movement directed as much against the established Marxist organizations as against the capitalist order, and basing itself on a total, uncompromising break with all bourgeois institutions. It inspired three major tendencies — Leninist vanguardism, syndicalism, and, above all, a council communism born out of the Turin working-class movement. By mid-1919 tens of thousands of workers were recruited into the *consigli di fabbrica*, or factory councils, that grew out of the trade union grievance committees at Fiat and other enterprises once proletarian demands could no longer be absorbed within the union framework. These council-based struggles inspired new modes of class warfare and ultimately pressed for a revolutionary strategy that challenged the PSI-CGL reformist model.

Though distinct from syndicalism, the council movement assimilated much that was positive in the syndicalist critique of hierarchical and vanguardist Marxism and emphasized many of the same goals: direct democracy at the point of production, working-class solidarity, and collective self-management of factories. In May 1919 Turinese council revolutionaries founded the journal *L'Ordine Nuovo*, which through the efforts of Antonio Gramsci and others sought to



Antonio Gramsci in 1920.

establish a new theoretical grounding for what was an explosive but still amorphous popular insurgency. The journal set out to analyze and facilitate the conditions making possible the transition to socialism; the factory councils were seen as the first step toward more comprehensive forms of socialist democracy, as the "embryo" of a new proletarian state. In the period 1918 to 1920 Gramsci outlined an organic or "molecular" conception of revolutionary process distinct from both the Social Democratic and Leninist model.

One reason the factory councils became a vital force in postwar Italy, aside from their very

dramatic expansion in the Piedmont region, was the sense of impending upheaval that overtook the left. Gramsci especially sensed this, at times adopting an almost religious optimism toward the new opportunities created by the political chaos. The council movement based its hopes on a simplistic crisis theory: bourgeois society was crumbling everywhere, capitalism had lost the initiative, and out of the catastrophe would come the seeds of a revolutionary order implanted in the councils and other popular assemblies.

Class strife in Italy exploded into the open in early 1920. The increased scope and militancy of the council movement set the stage for a powerful counter-offensive by industrialists in Piedmont and Liguria, which involved massive lockouts and troop occupations of many factories. What followed was a general strike in Piedmont, "defensive" in its origins, that mobilized more than 500,000 workers for the entire month of April. Strikes spread throughout Northern Italy, but went no farther. The appeal for an Italian general strike went unheeded. The hostility of the PSI and CGL leaderships was too much for this localist movement to overcome, and defeat was unavoidable. Isolated geographically and politically, exhausted, and with depleted financial resources, the workers returned to the factories.

The collapse of the Piedmont general strike, however, was followed five months later by a series of factory occupations that seemed to push Italy to the edge of revolution. An upsurge again engulfed most of Northern Italy: the occupation of more than 200 factories by 600,000 workers revitalized the sagging council movement. As in April, the upheavals began mostly as a defensive move to preempt a lockout by industrialists over a bargaining stalemate. But the struggles that grew out of attempts to take over and manage the factories, under



Some of the Italian "Red Guards" who occupied the factories in 1920.

chaotic and burdensome conditions, quickly politicized the workers and broadened the agitation beyond its earlier limits. From Milan, Genoa, and Turin the occupations spread to other areas. While the council structures as such did not spread beyond their Piedmont origins, the occupations everywhere were infused with a sense of proletarian solidarity and a drive toward workers' control. The occupations proceeded in an orderly and peaceful fashion, and a

revolutionary euphoria was in the air. The industrialists too thought revolution was imminent; Giovanni Agnelli, convinced that capitalism was too badly maimed to resurrect itself, was on the verge of surrendering Fiat-Centro to the occupying workers, asking, "How can you build anything with the help of 25,000 enemies?"(19)

The failure of the occupations resulted, not so much from their abandonment by the PSI hier-

archy, and even less from actual or threatened state repression, but mainly from skillful cooperation carried out through collaboration between government, progressive industrialists, and trade unions. Historian Paolo Spriano called it "Giolitti's Masterpiece" — a final, gallant effort to save Italian capitalism through an elite-engineered "reformist solution". Out of the *Biennio Rosso* came the vague formula of "union control", which on paper meant equal trade union participation in enterprise management and state economic planning, but which in reality meant little since the fascist avalanche would soon make a mockery of such agreements.

The factory council movement won great victories in Turin, but lacked the strategic thrust and resources to sustain them. The organs of workers' control that galvanized the entire Piedmont proletariat one moment vanished the next. The masses that had so resolutely detached themselves from bourgeois institutions were just as completely reintegrated into them, and the initiative soon passed back into the hands of the bourgeoisie. This sequence of events seemed inevitable, owing to the ideological and political weaknesses of the factory councils themselves.

The weaknesses were many, the most fatal being a geographical isolation rooted in Piedmont (and even Turin) "exceptionalism." During this period the region was the base of Italian industrialism, typified by a system of factory production and an urban working class culture duplicated nowhere else on the peninsula. Predictably, the council movement produced by these conditions was itself unique; it nourished a regionalism and a certain arrogant provincialism that negated attempts to expand beyond its Piedmont origins. Within Turin itself, a phenomenon known as "factory egoism" appeared, thus destroying the possibility of unified organization even among the Turinese Workers. As Gwyn Williams has pointed out, "Every factory looked to its own defenses, like a militia.

There was no coordination." (20) Cut off from the rest of Italy and politically alienated from the PSI and CGL, the council movement was ultimately confined by its own narrowness much as by the force and cunning of the bourgeoisie.

In the end, the failure of the Italian council communists to build a mature revolutionary movement was largely an *internal* one. The proletariat, though militant, could not transcend its own divisive parochialism; in the absence of any coordinating centers, without any real lines of communication, the insurgency would be immobilized by its spontaneism. The fragmentation of social forces from factory to factory, city to city, and region to region arrested the movement short of the political-institutional sphere. In contrast with Russia, where local movements were rapidly subordinated to the vanguard party, in Italy they withered away in the absence of integrated leadership and strategic direction — the same dilemma seen from a different side.

The Italian case thus dramatically reveals the limitations of a narrowly prefigurative strategy. Gramsci himself soon realized that the factory councils alone were not enough; after the defeat of the *Biennio Rosso*, he paid more and more attention to the role of the party, seeing it as a counter to the spontaneism of the councils. Yet Leninism was clearly no solution to the failures of 1918-1920. To whatever extent the crisis might have permitted a seizure of central state power, in retrospect it is clear that there was no cohesive *popular* force to carry out the process of general socialist transformation. The very amorphousness and localism of even the most advanced Piedmont struggles was itself a sign that ideological preparation among the masses was lacking — or had only just begun — suggesting that a vanguardist seizure of power would probably have reproduced the old divisions and resulted in the same kind of centralized power that occurred in Russia.

5. GERMANY: THE CORPORATIVIST IMPASSE

The German factory councils, or *Arbeiter-räte*, also had their origins in the postwar crisis and played a vital role in the strike wave that swept the country in 1917-19. Hundreds of councils appeared in the most important industrial centers (for example, in Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, and the Ruhr area) during this period, and many subsequently spread into the small towns and countryside in regions such as Saxony and Thuringa. The movement for popular self-management, which grew out of years of proletarian struggles at the point of production, also mobilized large sectors of the military and the peasantry. As in Italy, the councils were the radicalized expression of more traditional structures: shop committees, cooperatives, neighborhood associations, and strike committees. They were associated with the left wing of the German Communist Party (KPD)

and with the independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) and the "ultra-leftism" of Ernest Dauemig. The powerful Social Democrats, on the other hand, dismissed workers' control as "council anarchy" and attempted to neutralize and assimilate it through the strength of its party and trade union organizations.

In theory, the main political tendency of German councillism differed little from its Russian and Italian counterparts; the strategy was essentially prefigurative. The councils championed "proletarian autonomy" and "industrial democracy" as the basis of revolutionary transformation, which naturally placed them in an adversary position vis-a-vis the state, the parties, and the unions. Some theorists envisaged workers' councils as the first step toward a future socialist state; others saw them as limited to managerial functions within particular enterprises; but most viewed them as agencies of democratic counter-power in a



Demonstration in front of the House of Representatives in Berlin. The sign reads: "All Power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils."

rigidly authoritarian society, as the dialectic between class consciousness and proletarian institutions that would directly confront capitalist domination in Germany.

This last point brings us to the key assumption of the German movement. By establishing themselves as a strong counter-force to bourgeois hierarchy in the factory and by undermining the collaborative role of the unions — that is, by subverting the ideological legitimacy and narrowing the economic options of a fragile capitalist system — it was assumed that the councils could push the society toward fatal crisis. To the extent that the proletariat was able to overcome a traditional submissiveness to authority through the democratizing impact of the councils, it would prepare to take control of the economy and establish its own hegemony once the crisis destroyed the capacity of the bourgeoisie to rule.(21) This schema held sway until 1923, when it became evident (even to the “ultra left”) that European capitalism had recovered from its postwar breakdown.

The political scenario constructed by the German revolutionary left was never a serious historical possibility, even with the crisis; the prefigurative dimension was feeble from the outset. There were in fact *two* types of factory councils in Germany already in 1917-18: one that stressed the expansion of direct proletarian democracy and a commitment to mass insurrection (in the tradition of Luxemburg), another that held out the possibility of advancing workers’ interest (and even “workers’ control”) within the existing managerial structure. It was this latter — the interest-group or corporatist approach — rather than the autonomous model that increasingly prevailed after 1919.

As Sergio Bologna has shown, the largest and most significant elements of the Germany council movement were composed of highly-specialized machine workers who were concen-



Rosa Luxemburg

trated in medium-sized enterprises (e.g., chemicals and tool-making) that had not yet experienced high levels of rationalization. These were not the assembly-line workers of mass production but the skilled craftworkers who had been since the turn of the century a predominant force in German industry. As a skilled and professional stratum, they took on the narrow, self-interested outlook of a privileged “aristocracy of labor” and tended to set themselves apart from the unskilled “mass” workers of the large factories.(22)

In those regions and enterprises where technicians, engineers, and machine-workers became a leading force in the factory councils, the movement rapidly assumed a “managerial” character; the goal of workers’ control, which

emphasized job freedom and creativity, was closely associated with the struggle to attain or retain professional status. These workers understood their councils to represent the specific interests and aims of one sector of the proletariat against the whole. (In contrast, the Russians and Italian councils — despite strategic problems stemming from localism and spontaneism — viewed workers' control as a process of socialist transformation that would unite the struggles of *all* workers.) Many German councils were shaped by a provincialism that looked to proletarian control over single factories; others wanted to convert the trade unions into structures that could take over factory production.

This was the essence of corporativism. It left intact the social division of labor within the factory, even intensifying it by broadening and institutionalizing the separation between mental and physical labor, "experts" and mass workers. In replacing the old managerial structure with a new one based upon expertise and job "autonomy" — that is, by implementing a system of co-management — these councils merely reconstituted hierarchy. Moreover, the corporatist model accepted the basic capitalist practice of contractual bargaining; as long as the wage contracts existed, "workers' control" actually reinforced managerial exploitation and commodity production in the total economy.(23) It is hardly surprising that the leading sectors of the German workers-councils movement, lacking a general class perspective, could never generate broad struggles directed against capitalist domination in either specific industrial enterprises or in German society as a whole. The failure to raise proletarian struggles to the political sphere was merely one aspect of this problem.(24)

Corporativism, even had it led to the overthrow of the propertied class within individual factories, would not have mobilized the German proletariat toward socialist goals; and even had



A machine gun post in Munich, 1919.

the skilled technicians been able to achieve some "autonomy", they would not have achieved structural leverage over the entire economy. Indeed, Gorz has argued that this limited defense of technical and professional interests — however cloaked in the rationale of proletarian self-management — necessarily inhibits politicization of the skilled stratum itself. Instead of socializing or collectivizing technical expertise, the corporatist tendency reifies bourgeois divisions. In Gorz's words: "The capitalist division of labor, with its separation of manual and intellectual work, of execution and decision, of production and management, is a technique of domination as much as technique of production."

The postwar development of the German *Raete* bore little resemblance to the council theory developed by Daumig, Pannekoek and Gorter in the 1920s. Their theoretical approach, which transcended the factory-centered ideology of syndicalism, moved toward an organic merger of politics and economics; the councils would

Arbeiter!

Der Kampf gegen die Bourgeoisie und die Verräter des Proletariats ist in vollem Gange entbrannt. Wichtige Positionen habt Ihr im ersten Ansturm erobert.

Der ganze Sieg kann nur errungen und befestigt werden, wenn der bewaffnete Kampf mit aller Energie geführt wird.

Arbeiter treten sofort in den

Generalstreik!

Nähmt die Arbeit nicht früher auf, als bis der volle Sieg gesichert ist!

Es geht ums Ganze!

Es geht um Eure Zukunft!

Es geht um den Sieg der proletarischen Weltrevolution!

Ausgeschlossen vom Streik

ist das Eisenbahn-, Post-, Telegraphen- und Telefonpersonal, ferner die Arbeiter und Angestellten notwendiger Lebensmittelfabriken, die Gasanstalt, der Wasser- und Elektrizitätswerke, das Personal für Bereitung und Abzug von Abfällen und der sozialen Fürsorgeeinrichtungen.

Gesamtwirtschaften sind ebenfalls vorläufig vom Streik ausgeschlossen.

München, den 16. April 1919.

**Vollzugsrat der Betriebs-
und Soldatenräte Münchens.**

A poster from Munich, April 1919: "Workers: The fight against the bourgeoisie and the traitors of the proletariat has blazed into full action. With your first assault you have conquered important positions. Complete victory can only be achieved and consolidated if the armed struggle is continued without let-up. Workers, join the General Strike! Your future is at stake! The victory of the proletarian world revolution is at stake!"

perform both economic and political functions, they would ideally represent the movement of the entire working class, and they would be integrated into regional and nationwide federative networks of assemblies that would supply the necessary element of strategic planning and coordination.(26) By 1921, however, this theory had become detached from the actual politics of the working-class movement, and the gap

between the vision of council communism and the corporativist degeneration of the real living councils widened irretrievably.

According to Bologna's analysis, the growing rationalization of German industry after the postwar crisis undercut the prospects of council communism from the beginning; the skilled technicians, bent on preserving their creativity against encroaching bureaucratization, constituted a phenomenon of the early stages of capitalist development. From the viewpoint of prefigurative revolution, this is true enough. Yet the German councils, far from disappearing, in reality adapted smoothly to the capitalist schemes of rationalization, proliferated as they became absorbed into the reformist Social Democrat apparatus, and eventually would up as a (corporativist) model for the future. Where the *Raete* survived, they lost all independence and increasingly assumed narrow, economic functions.

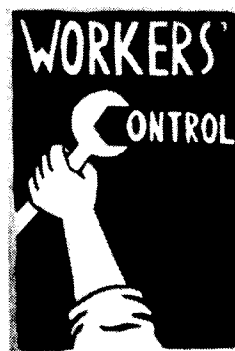
Recent attempts to institutionalize "workers' participation" in West Germany, Scandinavia, and Czechoslovakia all bear the mark of the original council experiments in Germany. These modern versions of corporativism all have in common a managerial concept of workers' control. It entails an input into enterprise decision-making by the most skilled and "responsible" employees according to the principle of comanagement; worker involvement is limited to the enterprise itself and does not extend to the overall shaping of public policy. The councils assist in management, but they are in no sense autonomous organs, having become fully absorbed into the party-union-state directorate.(27) Such reforms have historically functioned to integrate workers into a more streamlined and "democratized" capitalist production apparatus — a fate that the early Russian and Italian council movements, whatever their strategic weaknesses, resisted until they were either destroyed from above or disappeared.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Though the council movements were crushed, died out, or were absorbed into capitalist structures in Russia, Italy and Germany after World War I, their tradition lived on, to reappear in new contexts: in Spain during the Civil War; in Italy again during the Resistance; in Hungary in 1956; and in many advanced capitalist societies during the 1960's. These more recent versions of prefigurative politics encountered the same obstacles and dilemmas and experienced similar patterns of decline: Jacobinism, spontaneism, and corporativism.

The Spanish and Hungarian councils, like the Russian, fell victim to bureaucratic centralism. In Spain during the Civil War, the rapid expansion of syndicalist and anarchist collectives — inspired by a long prefigurative tradition in the countryside — helped to define the strongest left-wing insurgency in Europe between the wars. But the drive toward popular control was cut short by political forces (including the Communist Party) within the Popular Front coalition that sought to establish bureaucratic control over the movement in order to mobilize the masses against fascism. The military crisis spurred the development of bureaucratic management, leading to a dismantling of local democratic structures even in the liberated areas.(28) In Hungary before the Soviet intervention, hundreds of factory committees appeared in the few months preceding the October upheaval. It has been suggested that this was the first *total* revolution against bureaucratic capitalism in any country.(29) But the councils never became institutionalized; they lasted no longer than it took the Soviet occupation authorities (with the assistance of Hungarian party leaders) to destroy them.

The French upheaval of May 1968 gave birth to an unprecedented number and variety of local groups — action committees, factory councils, student communes, neighborhood groups —



Britain, 1969.

most of which collapsed from their own spontaneism. In Italy the revolt was not so spectacular, but the forms that grew out of it, such as the *comitati di base*, survived longer. This new period of popular insurgency helped to rejuvenate a European left that had long been suffocated by the Soviet model; it kept alive the prefigurative ideal and illuminated the bankruptcy of the established Marxist parties.

Most significantly, the radicalism of the sixties brought a new political content to the prefigurative tradition. It affirmed the importance of generalizing the struggles for self-management *beyond* the point of production, to include all spheres of social life and all structures of domination. It sought to integrate personal and "lifestyle" issues into politics — especially in the area of feminism — more extensively and more immediately than was true of past movements. (Since very few women participated in previous movements — the work force and therefore the various proletarian organizations being overwhelmingly male — the issue of patriarchy was scarcely raised.) And it focused on a wider range of issues that confronted the social system as a whole: health care, culture, ecology, etc.

At the same time, the new left was close to traditional anarchism in its glorification of spontaneity and subjectivity, in its celebration of everyday life, and in its hostility to "politics"

and all forms of organization. It brought out the limitations of spontaneism in even more exaggerated form. The French May provides a good example: mobilized by the millions, students and workers were unable to translate their uprising into a force possessing leadership, structure, and direction, and popular energy dissipated quickly. The French Communist Party played an important role, but the new left nonetheless had its own logic. this was the fate of the new left everywhere: in its fear of centralism, in its retreat into extreme subjectivism, and in its uncompromising abstentionism, it gave little strategic expression to its vision of liberation. It effectively attacked the ideological underpinnings of bourgeois society, but the means it employed — mass direct action politics on the one hand, small isolated groups on the other — were politically primitive.(30)

The corporatist development of modern



France, 1968: "Support the occupied factories for a People's Victory."

councillism has followed three distinct paths. In certain Western European societies — West Germany and Sweden, for example — workers have been integrated into bourgeois managerial structures through elaborate schemes of co-participation that leave intact the features of capitalism as a whole. In other countries, such as Italy and France, workers' councils that emerged as autonomous centers of struggle in the late 1960's and early 1970's underwent bureaucratization and were absorbed by trade union and administrative structures. Finally, in Communist systems such as Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, where proletarian self-management is an accepted objective and where councils have become institutionalized fixtures, the party-state has curtailed the autonomy of popular institutions, limiting them to narrow "co-management" functions within a broad economic plan imposed from above. The separation between economics and politics is established in each case: the corporatist councils have restricted decision-making authority within specific enterprises but have little or no impact on societal-wide public policy.

The dilemmas of modern prefigurative movements came from the legacy of the entire prefigurative tradition, which in contrast to Leninism and structural reformism sought to affirm the actuality of revolutionary goals. In rejecting a vanguardism, they often ignored the state and the problem of power; in stressing the prefigurative side, they downplayed the task of organization. And like the organized Marxist movements, they ultimately failed to articulate a democratic socialist theory of transition. The instability and vulnerability of dual power necessitates rapid movement toward a broad system of nationwide revolutionary authority; without this, as history shows, local structures are unable to translate popular energies into a sustained movement that is both prefigurative and politically effective. What is required, and

what the entire prefigurative strategy lacks, is a merging of spontaneism and the "external element", economics and politics, local democratic and state power struggles. But the recent experiences of radical movements in capitalist countries reflect a continued polarization between prefigurative and statist strategies that is harmful to such a possibility.

There have been attempts — for example, in the Chinese Revolution — to democratize Leninist vanguard strategy by combining the centralizing features of the revolutionary party with the localist elements of the prefigurative approach. Mao stressed the "national-popular" character of the party and the role of ideological struggle to counter-balance the primacy of the party-state. He envisaged a process rooted in grassroots structures of authority (e.g., revolutionary committees, communes) as well as the party itself. But the Maoist alternative really constitutes a modification of classical Leninism rather than a new synthesis. Insofar as a fusion between Jacobin and prefigurative elements exists, the Jacobin side is clearly hegemonic, with the party-state directing the process of revolutionary transformation from above.

An alternative schema would reverse this relationship by asserting the prefigurative over the Jacobin. For the party is essentially an *instrumental* agency preoccupied with concrete political tasks rather than the cultural objectives of changing everyday life and abolishing the capitalist division of labor; it tends naturally to be an agency of domination rather than of prefiguration. Since emancipatory goals can be fully carried out only through local structures, it is these organs — rather than the party-state — that must shape the revolutionary process. Centralized structures would not be superimposed upon mass struggles, but would emerge out of these struggles as coordinating mechanisms. Only popular institutions in every sphere of daily existence, where democratic

impulses can be most completely realized, can fight off the repressive incursions of bureaucratic centralism and activate collective involvement that is the life-force of revolutionary practice.

FOOTNOTES

1. Stanley Moore, *Three Tactics: The Background in Marx* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963).
2. George Lukacs, *Lenin* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), *Passim*.
3. Francois George, "Forgetting Lenin", *Telos* #18 (Winter, 1973-74). See also Frederic and Lon Jean Fleron, "Administrative Theory as Repressive Political Theory: The Communist Experience", *Telos*, #12 (Summer, 1972), pp. 89-94.
4. See the Flerons, *op. cit.*, and Ulysses Santa-Maria and Alain Manville, "Lenin and the Problems of Transition", *Telos*, #27 (Spring, 1976), pp. 89-94.
5. Svetozar Stojanovic, *Between Ideals and Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), ch. 3.
6. The Italian Communist Party, for example, advocates a two-pronged strategy of political "democratization" and economic "modernization". The first objective involves revitalizing parliament and local administration vis-a-vis central executive power; eliminating patronage, corruption, waste, and nepotism in government while building a more competent professional civil service; making public agencies more open and accessible; and developing a system of national "democratic planning". The second includes rationalizing production by eliminating the vestiges of backwardness and parasitism in Italian capitalism; undermining monopoly power and imposing limits on "distorted privileges"; encouraging productive efficiency through governmental development of scientific and technical programs; modernization of agricultural production; and development of a broad welfare system.
7. As Maria A. Macciocchi writes of her own experience as a PCI candidate for parliament, electoral campaigns tended to degenerate into spectacles and oratorical contests filled with shallow platitudes. She found it extremely difficult to raise substantive issues, for the PCI was too frightened of alienating potential new recruits from its electoral constituency. See M.A. Macciocchi, *Letters from Inside the Communist Party to Louis Althusser* (London: New Left Books, 1973), *Passim*.
8. See C. George Benello, "Anarchism and Marxism", *Our Generation* (vol. 10, no. 1, fall, 1974), pp. 55-56.

9. Andre Gorz, ed., *The Division of Labor* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: The Humanities Press, 1976), p. xi.
10. See S.A. Marglin, "What do Bosses do?", in Gorz, *op. cit.* In modern societies, this bureaucratic domination increasingly permeates most spheres of everyday life to the extent that it becomes part of the psychology of the masses. See Henry Jacoby, *The Bureaucratization of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 189.
11. The role of local councils in stimulating the development of proletarian subjectivity — and helping to overcome political fatalism — needs to be stressed. It was central to Gramsci's vision of the councils during the *Ordine Nuovo* period, when he saw one of their major contributions as instilling a "psychology of the producers" in the workers. It was also a common theme in Pannekoek and the German council movement, which Aronowitz sees as a drive to undermine the authoritarian personality that is created through the factory bureaucracy, and the family. See Stanley Aronowitz, "Left-Wing Communism: The Reply to Lenin", in Dick Howard and Karl Klare, eds., *The Unknown Dimension* (New York: Basic Books, 1972). See also Daniel Kramer, *Participatory Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Shenkman, 1972), ch. 7.
12. Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Hungarian Source", *Telos* No. 30 (Winter 1976-77), p. 15.
13. On the moderate character of the Petrograd soviet, see Oskar Anweiler, "The Political Ideology of the Leaders of the Petrograd Soviet in the Spring of 1917", in Richard Pipes, ed., *Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 148.
14. On the distinction between Soviets and factory committees, see Peter Rachleff, "Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution", *Radical America* vol. 8, no. 6, Nov.-Dec., 1974, especially p. 94, 103.
15. See Dietrich Geyer, "The Bolshevik Insurrection in Petrograd", and John Keep, "October in the Provinces", in Pipes, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-46.
16. See Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 84. Daniels sees this process as a crucial turning point in the evolution toward bureaucratic centralism.
17. The economic strategy of this period was in fact a subordinate part of the general militancy strategy designed to maximize Bolshevik control. See Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-25 and Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* (London: Solidarity, 1970), p. 46.
18. For a detailed account of this development, see Brinton, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-47.
19. Quoted in Paolo Spriano, *The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), p. 123.
20. Gwyn Williams, *Proletarian Order* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), p. 253.
21. On the relationship between the German council movement and the theory of the crisis, see Sergio Bologna, "Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Council Movement", *Telos* No. 13 (Fall, 1972), p. 26.
22. Bologna, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
23. Guido De Masi and Giacomo Marramao, "Councils and State in Weimar Germany", *Telos* No. 28 (Summer, 1976), p. 27.
24. See Brian Peterson, "Workers Councils in Germany, 1918-1919", *New German Critique* No. 4 (Winter, 1975), pp. 122-23.
25. Gorz, "Technology, Technicians, and the Class Struggle", in *The Division of Labor*, p. 174.
26. On the theories of Pannekoek, see Richard Gombin, *The Origins of Modern Leftism* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 88-97, and Aronowitz, *op. cit.*
27. For an analysis of factory councils in the advanced industrial societies, see Adolf Sturmthal, *Workers' Councils* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), chs. 4-6.
28. These developments are examined by Murray Bookshin, "Reflections on Spanish Anarchism", *Our Generation* vol. 10, no. 1, Fall, 1975, pp. 24-35, and Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism* (New York: Monthly Review Press), pp. 139-143.
29. Castoriadis, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-14. He argues: "Thus, like the few weeks of the Paris Commune, for us the Hungarian events are more important than three thousand years of Egyptian history because they constituted a radical break with the inherited philosophies of politics and work, while prefiguring a new society." *Ibid.*, p. 14.
30. This tendency was more pronounced in the U.S. than in Europe, where the strong presence of Marxism tempered the extremes of new left spontaneism. For example, commitment to the goals of workers' control and self-management — more or less taken for granted by the European extraparlimentary movements — received little attention in the U.S. See James Weinstein, *The Ambiguous Legacy* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), ch. 7.

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LETTERS

Dear *Radical America*:

I was rather disturbed by the distorted footnote reference to PROD in Mathew Rinaldi's recent article on Teamster reform activity.

However one may choose to characterize its organizational form or policies in the past, PROD is certainly today a genuine national rank-and-file Teamster reform group — the largest in the field by far — with 5,000 real live dues-paying members.

It doesn't merely "claim" these members; it actually has them, as the accompanying fiscal year '77 financial statement shows.

No one denies that PROD began only as an organization of Teamster road drivers which concentrated on lobbying and litigation related to their health and safety problems.

Today, however, PROD has members who are Teamster city drivers, dock workers and warehousemen, construction and factory workers, and office clericals. It has nearly 20 local chapters, a rank-and-file leadership body elected in a referendum vote open to the entire membership, and it is organizing Teamsters around a variety of issues involving contract demands, union democracy, pension fund corruption, and working conditions.

Nationally, PROD is currently conducting a campaign to collect thousands of signatures on petitions in support of internal union charges filed by three PROD members against IBT President Frank Fitzsimmons. The charges and the petitions seek Fitzsimmons' removal from office and ouster from the union.

PROD is also continuing the investigative and research work on the Teamsters union and the trucking industry which resulted in publication of its widely acclaimed 1976 book, *Teamster Democracy and Financial Responsibility* (which even Brother Rinaldi refers his readers to in another footnote to his article).

I personally have been involved with reform movements in both the United Mine Workers and Steelworkers in the past. To a far greater degree than either the Miners for Democracy or Sadlowski's Steelworkers Fight Back, PROD has developed a strong base of financial support among the Teamster rank-and-file — to the point where its five-person full-time staff is financed entirely out of membership dues. This, to me, is one true test of its rank-and-file character and following.

In the future, hopefully, there will be greater unity and cooperation between the two national rank-and-file reform groups — PROD and TDU — now active within the IBT. But any history which relegates PROD and its thousands of members to a single, inaccurate footnote does a disservice to the reform movement as a whole.

Fraternally,
Steve Early
PROD Staff Attorney

Dear *Radical America*,

I wish to praise the Ehrenreich's articles on the PMC for raising issues we need to discuss, and to criticize their approach to several of these issues.

Their model of class and class consciousness is a crude Marxist one. They pay lip service to E.P. Thompson's view that class, class culture, and the experience of class are *not* determined solely by work, and that private life is central to one's consciousness of class. But they ignore these cautions, using instead a notion of class which reduces material conditions to work, and work to *the* determination of class position. The Ehrenreichs do state clearly that the PMC includes a wide range of people whose status, experience, and income are diverse, yet when they generalize, they ignore this diversity, even undercutting their own arguments in their example of the nurse. The consciousness of the people they lump into the PMC is based on far more than 'objective' work position, as is everyone's consciousness. But when the Ehrenreichs discuss the role of the PMC in advanced capitalism, consciousness itself drops out of their

formulations. Moreover, they make almost no allowance for the fact that many in the PMC are women, a fact which might have forced them to address the issue of the relationship of work, family and class for women workers, or wives of professional-managerial workers.

These problems are most apparent in the Ehrenreich's account of the new left. Because of what they identify as the PMC's 'objective' class position, they can only describe left-wing politics among students as elitist; in this they follow a long line of Marxist commentators on the new left. Among other examples, they single out the Port Huron Statement as documentation of anti-working class views. First, they take quotations out of context and interpret as anti-working class a desire by the Statement's authors for the universities to reflect the ideals of intellectual life (honesty, self-examination, autonomy). This desire for a university free from the state was a central demand of the new left, but it cannot be simply interpreted as anti-working class.

Second, what does it mean for a student movement (or women's or gay movement) to be anti-working class? The Ehrenreich's state that the student movement's opposition to bureaucracy, hierarchy and profit, its desire for meaning in its life, are fulfilling its 'objective' class functions — elitist and anti-working class. There is no recognition that students organizing around 'participatory democracy' in various settings (universities, neighborhoods, etc.) was an attempt to organize not for their own privilege, but because along with most other people in this society, they experienced themselves as powerless.

I object strongly to the blanket statement that the 'professional managerial class' exists by virtue of its "expropriation of the skills and culture of the working class," as well as to ascribing anti-working class radicalism to the new left with its "recurring vision of technocratic socialism." If there was anything the new left was not, it is technocratic! The point is that the model that the Ehrenreich's use in analyzing class prevents them from recognizing that consciousness can be achieved in many ways, and that the socialist, anti-authoritarian, anti-technological politics that many new leftists embraced was not by virtue of expropriating the skills and culture of the working class, nor to maintain their class position, i.e., new left

politics were not unidimensionally determined by the class position of new leftists. It was not simply the black movement in 1968 which forced members of the 'professional managerial class' to give up their class privilege and join the 'other side.' From the early 1960's onward, a new left politics was developing that was not a simple reflection of class position.

To reject the politics of the new left because it represents a "moralistic contempt for the working class," is to misrepresent the new left and to ignore the fact that a moral anti-capitalism is part of a socialist consciousness, and not simply confined to 'privileged' sectors. Belittling the new left in this way ignores the possibilities for the development of socialist consciousness among all sectors of the population.

The teachers, social workers, city planners and organizers of the 1960's and 1970's are not simply warring "invaders" in the communities of blacks and the working class; it slights the ambiguities of the roles people in these positions *may* play — not simply one of social control and expropriation of skills and culture. This view does not give credit to white new leftists who believed in community control from early on, who believed in power for powerless groups, who developed, along with others, notions of community unions and advocacy. In other words, it does not acknowledge the power of a socialist and leftist consciousness in spite of one's 'objective' class position; nor does it deal with how it may be possible for people to develop an anti-capitalist and anti-sexist and anti-racist consciousness even though it is *not* a reflection of their class position. As E.P. Thomson says,

Reductionism is a lapse in historical logic by which political or cultural events are "explained" in terms of the class affiliations of the actors. When a connection, or causal relationship, has been established between these events (in the "super-structure") and a certain configuration of class interests (in the "base"), then it is thought that the demands of historical explanation — still worse, of evaluation — have been met by characterizing these ideas or events as bourgeois, petit-bourgeois, proletarian, etc. The error of reductionism consists not in establishing these connections but in the suggestion that the ideas or events are, in essence,

the same things as the causative context — that ideas, religious beliefs, or works of art, may be reduced... to the "real" class interests which they express. (p. 352, "The Peculiarities of the English" in the Socialist Register, 1975)

In view of the wide range of people the Ehrenreichs include in the PMC, we need to be more specific about whom we are talking in each instance. I am not sure it is accurate to accuse the PMC as a class of creating "class-conscious anti-communism." In any case, it would be essential to clarify how this comes about and why the 'working class' in this country is so available for such an ideology.

Wini Bienes

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