

# SOCIALIST VOICE

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## Harold Washington's Victory in Chicago

# Black Upsurge Meets Electoral Trap

Harold Washington's election as mayor of Chicago in April, following his upset Democratic Party primary victory in February, is being hailed by both black and white activists as a magnificent step forward in the struggle for progress in the United States. The black congressman's triumph in such a heavily segregated city did reflect a leap in black consciousness; at the same time it is significant testimony to the way that consciousness is being perverted and turned against the black masses.

The contradictory upsurge is occurring in the context of the simmering crisis of capitalism, which has had a profound impact on the way the bourgeoisie rules the country as a whole and specifically its second largest city. The collapse and fragmentation of the infamous Chicago political machine reflects not only schisms within the bourgeoisie but, alongside the black resurgence, an increasing polarization within the white working class.

Statistics measure part of the significance of the political shift. Black voting figures in Chicago as well as elsewhere have until recently been traditionally low and (as with Hispanic and working-class whites) decreasing. In the 1980 Reagan-Carter presidential election, with 950,000 Chicago blacks eligible to vote, only 400,000 were registered and only about 30 percent of these actually voted. However, two and a half years later, 77 percent of blacks as well as whites who were registered voted in the primary, and Washington got over 80 percent of the black vote. In the interim, black leaders and



Every time a few job openings are announced, thousands of Chicagoans turn up.

leftist politicians had succeeded in getting over 150,000 additional blacks to register. Since Washington won the superheated primary with a bare 36.7 percent of the vote while the rest was split between two white machine candidates, incumbent mayor Jane Byrne and Richard Daley, son of Chicago's long-time machine ruler, the black shift was decisive. Washington then got well over 90 percent in the

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## Karl Marx and the World Crisis

The specter of economic collapse is haunting the world. Bankers, bosses, politicians and economists talk about it but none of them know what to do. Karl Marx has now been dead for 100 years; yet his ideas, and in particular his analysis of the capitalist crisis, are alive, while those of our contemporary defenders of bourgeois rule have only a zombie-like existence.

For some bourgeois spokesmen, defending their ideology is primarily a matter of public relations and "confidence." Since the beginning of the new year, President Reagan has been happily proclaiming the coming end of the economic "recession." His professional huckster's optimism has been echoed by many others; right-wing economist Milton Friedman predicted that "1983 will be a year of rapid and vigorous economic growth" (*Newsweek*, February 7). Nevertheless, the flood of anxious reports on the state of the

world economy has not ceased. The news media are justifiably shaking over the danger to the major capitalist powers posed by threatening economic collapse in several large "Third World" countries; fears of a "debtors' cartel" surface

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# Warsaw Ghetto Fighters

This is the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising which began on April 19, 1943. The courageous Jewish fighters, armed with only Molotov cocktails and a puny assortment of guns, took on the armored might of Nazi legions and held on for months before being overwhelmed. The "anti-fascist" imperialist powers, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and, above all, the United States, did nothing. Now they do too much.

Today, hired word-merchants dust off the requisite phrases lauding the Warsaw Ghetto martyrs. And the world's statesmen mouth them. When those oppressed Jews fought tanks and artillery with their hands to stay alive and keep their families out of the ovens, they were a damned nuisance. Now they are damned by great praise.

Did you notice how many official Expressions of Sympathy the Palestinians in Lebanon received from the capitals of the world *after* they were crushed by the Israeli blitzkrieg? Take heart that we live in a world where even the mightiest of imperialists are still capable of shedding a tear for the unfortunate and the oppressed — so long as they are, safely, the victims and in no danger of becoming the victors.

Praise today from the Reagans and the Begins seeks to replace the real heroism of the ghetto masses with cardboard images carved out to suit contemporary national chauvinist (Zionist) needs. The true heroism of the stalwart Jewish fighters of Warsaw came not from the fact that Jews as a whole people were "chosen" or especially ennobled by their centuries of oppression. In the ghetto there were Jews who were capitalists and made their profits by trafficking with their Nazi overlords, just as their fellow capitalists from other occupied

sections of Europe did. The Jewish capitalists ran the ghetto council (Judenrat) which carried on administrative tasks for the Germans while ghetto dwellers were being shipped out to the camps. There were the Jewish police who guarded the ghetto for their Nazi masters. Not by accident many of these police were Revisionists, the Jewish fascist progenitors of the Begin crew of today. Jews like every other people are divided into classes, classes which in crisis behave very differently from each other. That is why the bourgeoisie collaborated and that is why it was the working class which fought. But given their particular oppression as Jews, these workers fought with particular strength.

It was the Jewish workers who formed out of their own ranks the Jewish Fighting Organization (JFO) which conducted the bitter, doomed war against the Nazis. It was house to house combat — and when the houses were burnt down and blasted apart, rubble to rubble combat. And when the few who remained alive were forced from the rubble, they continued the war from the sewers and newly dug tunnels until in July they were finally annihilated. With them perished the hopes of the last of the 70,000 Jews who had been penned up in the ghetto.

The JFO was overwhelmingly manned and led by workers, class-conscious and imbued with socialist ideals and principles. They fought fascism not on national grounds alone but out of the deep commitment to the struggle for a socialist world so long nurtured in the hearts of beleaguered Jewish workers in East Europe. These were the Jews who began their struggle by shooting Jewish capitalists and Jewish police as they sought to unify themselves in the combat against Nazism. These were the warriors who could have escaped through the sewers to the safety offered them by their allies in the underground Polish workers' movement. Instead, they chose to stay to fight and die with their families, their people and their class.

However, it would be a lie to leave it at that. Present in the leadership of the Jewish workers were other ideas in addition to socialist consciousness. And these ideas reflected, in part, the mixed consciousness of the Jewish masses. There were illusions in the Western imperialist Allies, in the Stalinist Soviet Union, in Zionism and other forms of Jewish nationalism. Each of these viewpoints provided a barrier in the struggle; they helped delay it, they helped give a false sense of the possibility of rescue until it was too late, and more.

The Polish and Jewish workers' movements had a rich history of political dialogue and polemic. They regarded political debate as a vital part of the class struggle. This was not lost in the ghetto even under the Nazi heel prior to the "final

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- No. 2: Capitalism in the Soviet Union (including a polemic against Ernest Mandel's workers' state theory).
- No. 3: The Class Nature of the Communist Parties.
- No. 4: The "Marxism" of the Petty Bourgeoisie — the Spartacist League and State Capitalism.
- No. 5: U.S. Labor and the Left; A Bukharinist Theory of State Capitalism.
- No. 6: The Labor Party in the United States; Is Nationalized Property Proletarian?
- No. 7: The Black Struggle: Which Road Today?
- No. 8: Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program — "Workers' Government" vs. Workers' State.
- No. 9: Marxism and the Draft; Afghanistan and Pseudo-Trotskyism.
- No. 10: Polish Workers Shake the World.
- No. 11: Iran — Revolution, War and Counterrevolution.
- No. 12: No Shortcuts to Stop Klan; For Socialist Revolution in El Salvador; Church and State vs. Polish Workers.
- No. 13: "Left" Betrays Salvador Revolution; Marxist Response to Reaganism; Poland: Solidarity Forever?
- No. 14: Anti-Reaganism vs. Anti-Capitalism; Spartacist Popular Frontism on El Salvador; Britain's Hot Summer.
- No. 15: Reagan's Russian Dilemma; Polish Workers Under Siege; Labor after Solidarity Day.
- No. 16: How Solidarity Was Defeated; Marxism vs. Reformism — A Test of Theory; Haitians Fight for Freedom
- No. 17: On the Road to Capitalist Crash; Peace Movement Sets Stage for War; Open Letter to ICC; Malvinas War.
- No. 18: LRP Convention Charts Course; Concessions Fightback; Trotskyism vs. Ultra-Leftism; Palestinians.

## SOCIALIST VOICE



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# International Correspondence

*Socialist Voice* is publishing the following three documents to keep our readers informed on issues being fought out between the League for the Revolutionary Party and the left Pabloite milieu internationally. (The Pabloites are those professed Trotskyists who regard the USSR and its imitators as workers' states, "degenerated" or "deformed." Pablo was the head of the Fourth International when he developed the theory in the late 1940's.) The questions under debate are crucial ones: the nature of the international vanguard party and its role during wars and revolutions. The documents are letters taking up central lessons of revolutionary history, in order to apply them to mass struggles today and to the even greater, more widespread struggles soon to come.

Trotsky and the Trotskyists of the past left us a valuable treasury of ideas and experiences culled from both victories and defeats of the working class. It is a tragedy that today these lessons are distorted almost totally by reformist and centrist epigones of Trotskyism. The first letter, to the Irish Workers Group (IWG), argues against the notion that Trotsky believed in a stage of class collaboration during a revolutionary upheaval. We apply what Trotsky learned from China to the struggle in Ireland today.

Likewise, the letter to the Austrian IKL (International Communist League) distinguishes Trotskyism from class collaboration in a war where the proletariat takes the side of an anti-imperialist force. (To clarify the quotations in the letter, we note that Trotsky was writing in 1939, at the moment when the USSR was allied with Hitler's Germany and faced attack from Britain and France.) We then draw conclusions for the civil war in El Salvador today.

The third document is excerpted from a letter to the Italian GOR (Revolutionary Workers Group for the rebirth of the Fourth International). In our last issue we reported that the 1982 LRP Convention had adopted a position dating the decisive collapse of the Fourth International under Pablo to its betrayal of the Bolivian revolution of 1952. As we wrote, "It was no longer a question of bad theoretical positions: the Bolivian section gave active support to the bourgeois nationalist government, a deadly enemy of the working class." The letter to the GOR amplifies the position outlined in our Convention report.

## Letter to the IWG

We are troubled by your article "Socialists and Revolutionary Nationalists" in *Class Struggle* No. 19, in regard both to your analysis of the Left Opposition's policy towards China and to your brief polemic against us on work in Ireland. It is bad enough for a far left group to have a position which invites class collaboration in the Irish struggle today – but to use Trotsky as a justification for it is too much.

First of all, you make several references to Trotsky's position on the relation between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the bourgeois Kuomintang (KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek in 1926-27. We cannot track down all your references, but we are certain that they do not represent Trotsky's worked-out position. The passages we have in mind are the following:

1) "Trotsky held that a united front with the whole KMT was the correct tactic up till Chiang's first coup in Canton on March 20th, 1926."

2) "It was in order to prepare for such an anti-imperialist united front ... that Trotsky fought ... for full independence

of the CCP from the KMT."

3) After the first coup, "Trotsky advocated a united front of Chinese Communists with the left KMT ..."

4) In the Northern Expedition, Trotsky called on the workers to "participate in the military struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek to prepare politically the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek" (emphasis added).

True, there are several quotations from Trotsky's writings in the 1926-27 period which back up the first three of these points (we still find nothing to justify the fourth, and would welcome a precise citation from you). But these are rendered obsolete by Trotsky's later conclusions. By 1928 he was writing that "the chief significance of the soviets was to be that of opposing the workers and peasants to the Kuomintang bourgeoisie and its left Kuomintang agency" ("Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution," in *Leon Trotsky on China*, page 321). This was hardly collaboration with the KMT. He goes on, "The slogan of soviets in China meant above all the break with the suicidal and infamous 'bloc of four classes' and the withdrawal of the Communist Party from the Kuomintang." And, as if answering the formalist objection that this meant nothing but leaving the KMT organizationally, he added, "The center of gravity consequently lay not in bare organizational forms, but in the class line."

The fact that the "center of gravity" was the class line precluded any notion of an anti-imperialist front with any and all sections of the KMT, i.e., a front between the classes. Passing military blocs during clashes with the imperialists, yes. Momentary fronts wherein the KMT could be exposed as pro-imperialist were also possible, in our opinion, but that would have been a far cry from an overall bloc across class lines and above all one you consider to be of strategic importance.

Incidentally in 1930 Trotsky once again denounced Stalin's previous collaboration with the "counterrevolutionary bandits of the left KMT" (page 453). And as for marching under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek in the Northern Expedition, he wrote in 1928:

"If at the beginning of the Northern Expedition we had begun to organize soviets in the 'liberated' districts (and the masses were instinctively aspiring for that with all their might and main) we would have secured the necessary basis and a revolutionary running start, we would have built our own army ..." and the CCP "would have been able ... to mature in these exceptional years and to assume power ... at least in a considerable part of China."

In sum, the entire thrust of your interpretation of the Trotskyist policy was specifically countered in Trotsky's writings from 1928 on.

The reason for Trotsky's change of position ought to be well known to Trotskyists; for example, it is outlined in the preface to the book *Leon Trotsky on China*. Namely, Trotsky originally held his theory of permanent revolution only for the special case of Tsarist Russia. It was the Chinese events that convinced him that it had universal applicability in the epoch of imperialism. In particular, in the mid-twenties he accepted the slogan of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" for China; that is why he entertained the notion of a KMT-CCP governmental bloc. But he quickly rejected that idea and established that the proletarian dictatorship was the only way out, just as it had been in Russia in 1917.

If you have any doubts about this, just look at his essay "China and the Russian Revolution" (pages 594-6) wherein he repeats his frequent analogy between the two. Once you recognize this, the idea that he would have proposed a strategic front between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in China during the revolutionary period makes as much sense as the idea of Trotsky proposing a similar front in Russia in 1917. In fact Trotsky in 1940 specifically took up the meaning of such a front — but under its true name, the popular front: "The policy of the 'People's Front' bore especially malignant fruit because it was applied in the epoch of the imperialist decay of the bourgeoisie. Stalin succeeded in conducting to the end, in the Chinese revolution, the policy which the Mensheviks tried to realize in the revolution of 1917. The same thing was repeated in Spain." (page 596)

There is no question that Trotsky's attitude toward collaboration with the KMT altered over time. At first he argued against the tailism of Stalin and Bukharin by pointing out that collaboration with the KMT required genuine in-

petty-bourgeois illusions about the united front with the bourgeoisie ..."

Can you seriously claim that implying that the KMT and the KMT left were "anti-imperialists" is not catering to "petty-bourgeois illusions about the united front with the bourgeoisie"? When you use the same term that the Stalinists have stolen as their own — and, moreover, when you use it in a way that represents at best an incomplete development of Trotskyism — you do a gross disservice to Trotskyism today. It is the equivalent of saying that Lenin supported the conception of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, as if the April Theses represented no change at all.

We believe this confusion on your part is evident in your discussions of united fronts in Ireland today and particularly in your polemic against us. When we commented on your work (*Socialist Voice* No. 14, page 6) we noted that you failed to insist on the necessity of independent proletarian organization and in practice denied this by subordinating the working class to the petty bourgeoisie. (Your distortion of



Left: Nationalist soldier searches leftist during Chinese 1927 revolution. Above: Shanghai workers massacred by Stalin-supported Chiang Kai-shek's "anti-imperialists."

dependence of the CCP. But later he made the question of working class independence absolutely primary, and collaboration is hardly mentioned at all, and then only as an abstract possibility. Collaboration with the KMT is only condemned. Instead Trotsky places at the forefront of his entire strategy for the rising revolutionary period the demand for soviets. Soviets are the highest form of united front and the form indicated for the time because they posed the class line as the "center of gravity" — as opposed to any front with the bourgeois KMT. The idea of a soviet front was counterposed to an "anti-imperialist front," therefore. (You implicitly recognize this by not claiming that the anti-imperialist front is the same as soviets.)

We also question your use of the terminology "anti-imperialist united front." Yes, the expression was adopted to represent a revolutionary tactic by the Second Comintern Congress. But it then became abused by the Stalinists — it was *their* policy of subordination to the bourgeoisie that became known as the anti-imperialist united front, and that is what Trotsky meant in every one of the times we can find where he uses the words "united front" to refer to a KMT-CCP bloc. For example: "The Bolshevik way ... consists of an unconditional political and organizational demarcation from the bourgeoisie, of a relentless exposure of the bourgeoisie from the very first steps of the revolution, of a destruction of all

Trotsky's record on China now appears to be closely related.) In particular, we criticized your use of the "anti-imperialist united front" slogan. Incredibly, in your polemic, which comes at the end of an article devoted to the "anti-imperialist united front," you do not take up this central point of our criticism at all!

You do take up two points against us: one, that we took out of context a quotation from a leaflet of yours, a quotation in which you call on the nationalist H-Block campaign to lead the workers in action; two, that our line would lead to a sectarian boycott of the campaign for the prisoners' rights and that we imply that "only 'military blocs' with nationalists are permissible."

The second point is a misreading on your part. The word "only" is yours, not ours. Our point was that proletarian independence is crucial in order to make temporary blocs with the nationalists; we gave military blocs as an example. The point is the same one that Trotsky was making concerning China, even in his earlier, pre-permanent revolution phase. Your missing this point only reaffirms our belief that the "anti-imperialist united front" slogan leads inevitably to the suppression of the importance of working class independence, no matter what your subjective intent when you introduce it.

As to the more critical first point, you argue that your demand that the petty-bourgeois nationalist leadership bring

out the workers in a general strike "is a tactic that threatens not to aid them to incorporate the workers but one which if taken up would have shattered the collaborationist alliance with the petty representatives of capital." Your call, you state, was addressed in fact not to the nationalist leaders but to the "thousands of mobilized workers who were 'incorporated' already by their illusions in a National Campaign which suppressed the call for workers' action."

Let us admit that your call was intended to be addressed to the workers and only in form to the petty-bourgeois leaders. It is true that for the leaders to call for a general strike would shatter their alliance with the bourgeois politicians and clergymen — obviously, therefore, they would not do it. But your call nevertheless tells the workers that the route to a general strike must lie through the nationalist leaders, neither through their own independent class organizations nor through the drive to build a revolutionary party. Some nationalist leaders, if forced, might lead such a strike in order to betray it. But the workers will wait a long day before these elements, not even reformist in character, initiate it.

Moreover, your call was not an "isolated" case that we "plucked" out of a totally different context; it occurs throughout your propaganda. Thus in your pamphlet on Political Status you credit yourselves with arguing "consistently for four years" in the relatives action committees and the H-Block campaign that "without the propaganda, agitation and intervention of the campaign being directed at involving anti-unionist workers for the goal of strike action" it will be unable to deal a blow against imperialism. Your

point is correct, of course: Marxists know that petty-bourgeois-led movements lack decisive social power. But the Marxist solution is to win the working class to lead these mass movements, whereas your solution appears to call on nationalist-led groups to lead the workers in struggle.

The passage we quoted in our article was only the most explicit statement of this point of view. You wrote that British imperialism could be defeated "if the National H-Block Armagh Campaign as a matter of urgency sets about the task of giving a clear and bold leadership to the struggle to bring out in action the overwhelming mass of Irish workers in support of Political Status."

The Chinese experience again illustrates the importance of the difference. Trotsky came to realize that the purpose of working-class independence was not primarily to link up with the petty-bourgeois or bourgeois organizations; no, given their independence, the workers could lead the petty-bourgeois masses and show them the necessity of getting rid of their nationalist leaderships. The same general lesson applies to the present-day Irish case. A general strike by the workers would give "clear and bold leadership" to the mass following of the Republican organizations — and the road to a proletarian solution would be cleared of an unnecessary obstacle.

Since you ascribe the LRP's differences with you to an ultra-left "misunderstanding of the general tactical method" of the anti-imperialist united front, we hope that a re-examination of Trotsky's work on this question will prove to you that our position is not ultra-left but precisely necessary for carrying out the class interests of the proletariat. ■

## Letter to the IKL

The letter from Wolfgang S. in the January *Permanente Revolution* criticized Trotsky's "imprecision and contradictions" on the question of the defense of the Soviet Union and implied that you share his criticism. The IKL's answer also referred to Trotsky's "problematic tendencies" concerning communist tactics in the imperialist countries allied to the USSR, tendencies which might "undermine the policy of revolutionary defeatism." Only one example is cited by either you or Comrade Wolfgang; this, I think, is a misquotation of Trotsky and represents a misunderstanding of his position.

My organization, the League for the Revolutionary Party of the U.S., regards the Soviet Union as capitalist and imperialist. The Stalinist counterrevolution culminated in the late 1930's by destroying the last vestiges of proletarian rule and the apparatus of the workers' state. Therefore we oppose the slogan "defense of the Soviet Union" in 1939 and afterwards.

Nevertheless, we believe that Trotsky's *method* in raising the defense of the Soviet Union, a country which he considered a workers' state, was entirely correct. The passage cited by Comrade Wolfgang, if it were accurate, would make Trotsky into a bourgeois defencist. On the contrary, his program was a consistently proletarian revolutionary one, which is why we consider ourselves Trotskyist despite our specific difference on the class nature of the USSR.

Comrade Wolfgang cites part of a passage from the journal *Der Einzige Weg* in 1939. The entire passage reads:

**"If France or England tomorrow were to invade Leningrad or Moscow, the French and English workers should take the most effective actions to impede the sending of soldiers and war material. If in contrast**

Hitler is obliged by the logic of the situation to send war material to Stalin, the German workers would have no right to engage in strikes or sabotage. I hope that nobody will propose any other solution."

An essentially similar passage can be found in Trotsky's book *In Defense of Marxism*, in the article "Again and Once More Again on the Nature of the USSR," page 30. The article is dated October 18, 1939, the same date given by *Der Einzige Weg* for the passage which it cites. This version reads:

**"If England and France tomorrow menace Leningrad or Moscow, the British and French workers should take the most decisive measures in order to hinder the sending of soldiers and military supplies. If Hitler finds himself constrained by the logic of the situation to send Stalin military supplies, the German workers, on the contrary, would have no reason for resorting in this concrete case to strikes or sabotage. Nobody, I hope, will propose any other solution."**

This is obviously the same passage as the one in *Der Einzige Weg*, allowing for reasonable differences in translation. But there are two important changes: *Der Einzige Weg* omits the phrase "in this concrete case," and it changes the phrase "the German workers . . . would have no reason" to "the German workers would have no right" (to engage in strikes or sabotage).

Trotsky's point was this: since the USSR at that time was allied with imperialist Germany against imperialist France and England, workers in England and France must make every effort to defend the Soviet Union and the class interests of all workers by hindering the French and English war machines. But the German workers would defend the Soviet Union by allowing the German government to send military aid to the USSR. That is, the German workers, unlike the French and English, would have no reason to disrupt war

supplies in this concrete case. Trotsky does not say that German workers who handle war supplies would have no right to strike over other reasons. If such workers had been striking, it would have been an act of international proletarian solidarity to allow war supplies to be shipped to Russia to aid the "workers' state" defending itself against imperialist attack. Of course, the workers would have to judge whether a specific act of solidarity with the Russian workers might weaken the specific struggle of the German workers. What to do in that case could only be decided by workers who keep the overall interests of the world proletariat in mind.

From this it is impossible to conclude that Trotsky had a tendency "to call for civil peace between bourgeoisie and proletariat in the imperialist countries allied with the Soviet Union," as Comrade Wolfgang asserts. And the question does not end here. Just as Trotsky favored the German workers allowing military shipments to the USSR, he also favored workers in Italy allowing the fascist regime (for its own reasons) to send arms to Algeria against French imperialism. During the Spanish civil war, he urged workers in France or the U.S. not to sabotage shipments going to the Republic against the fascists. In general, Trotsky advocated a working-class policy of military support to democratic struggles against imperialism and fascism.

But there is another side to the question which makes it of immediate practical importance. Military support to bourgeois-democratic (or Stalinist) forces who are leading a mass fight against oppression requires the firmest political hostility to their misleadership and an attitude of no confidence in their military policies as well. Thus Trotsky urged

## Letter to the GOR

In your theses, "The Fourth International Strangled (and its Stranglers)" (published in *Trotskyist Position*), you correctly observe: "The 'mistakes' of the International's leadership in 1950-51 were already the manifestation of the disbanding and yielding all along the line to reactionary and non-proletarian class forces." However, you do not explore the roots of this condition. As Lenin and Trotsky often pointed out, we must seek the roots of capitulation to petty-bourgeois views in their national contexts. In the epoch of imperialism, opportunist capitulations ultimately reflect capitulation to the national labor-aristocratic and petty-bourgeois layers in one's own country. Thus Trotsky demonstrated that the pro-Americanism of the German reformists (and centrists) under Nazism fundamentally reflected their acceptance of German petty-bourgeois nationalism; they wanted an Americanized Germany. Likewise, the U.S. Spartacists, for all their pro-Russianism, are fundamentally American chauvinists desiring a neo-Stalinized U.S.

According to your theses, the capitulation of the Fourth International to Stalinism meant the denial of this historic function of the revolutionary party in favor of an adaptation to Stalinism's alleged drive toward socialism. You go on to state that the Pabloites advocated "deep entryism into the Stalinist parties, not only where there were oppositional parties with regard to the bourgeois government, but above all ... in those countries in which the Stalinists were in power, as was the case for China and Yugoslavia."

No, comrades, the focal point for Stalinism was at home — in the countries of the various national sections, not China or Yugoslavia. The Pabloite position on China, Yugoslavia,

his supporters simply to avoid hindering arms shipments from the bourgeoisie to these forces, but certainly not to send any aid to the bourgeois democrats themselves. In particular, he opposed voting for war credits to the Spanish republicans and denounced those working-class parties that did so. Workers' aid, he pointed out, should be directed only to independent working-class organizations.

With this in mind, we note that *Permanente Revolution* carries a call for "Arms to El Salvador," to be sent to the bourgeois-democratic FMLN-FDR. This is not a Trotskyist policy but a POUmist one. Military defense of the popular frontist FMLN-FDR against the junta is correct, but it must be done without the slightest hint or confidence in these betrayers of the Salvadorean masses' struggle against imperialism. The petty-bourgeois nationalist FDR shamefully pleads for a negotiated settlement without militarily defeating the murderous army of the junta, and it promises to set up a government friendly to the U.S.; the FMLN refuses to arm the Salvadorean workers and relies instead on a guerrilla warfare strategy designed to prevent class differentiation and to keep the workers tied to the "progressive" bourgeoisie. (We have written at length on these points in a polemic against the Spartacist tendency in *Socialist Voice* No. 14.)

The capitulation of various pseudo-Trotskyist tendencies today has nothing whatever in common with Trotsky's resolute communist internationalism and revolutionary defeatism towards bourgeois forces everywhere. That is why we think it important to defend his record against careless accusations. Comrades, you would do well to examine your own "problematic tendencies" on this score. ■

Eastern Europe and the USSR reflected the way that the national sections saw the road to power, at home. They abandoned the independence of the vanguard party in favor of an adaptation to the petty bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisified layers at the top of the working class, at home.

It was no accident that the capitulation and collapse of the International occurred in a period of growing prosperity in the West and the expansion of aristocratic forces within the working class, as well as a huge growth of the middle-class layers between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. You conveniently ignore the fact that Pabloite deep entryism meant entering the Social Democratic parties in countries where they dominated the working class, as well as the Stalinist parties. In Britain the Pabloites demanded entry into the Labour Party. Their adaptation was nationalist and domestic at its roots; it was not simply an adaptation to Stalinism, even at home.

It is also important that the International became, not a centralized tendency reflecting a monolithic attitude toward Stalinism, but a bloc of national groups, each finding its own particular Stalinist or Social Democratic trend to adapt to, at home and abroad. That is why we have seen the ever-changing combinations of national sections inside and outside the United Secretariat. For example, the critical dispute in France between Lambert and Pablo was not over their differences on Russia but over which party to tail, the SFIO (and the Force Ouvriere) for Lambert, or the PCF (and the CGT) for Pablo. In the U.S., the greatest difficulty between Cannon and Pablo was that the American nationalist Cannon would not permit any foreigner to tell the SWP what to do on its home ground. Isn't that also the nature of the pact that keeps the SWP today in the same "international" with Mandel? Mandel has always cut off factions in the U.S. which sympathize with his politics

in order not to offend the SWP leadership. We could easily continue this recital to cover all the Pabloites, including the so-called "anti-Pabloites."

In our opinion, the method of all the Pabloites (and of the Shachtmanites) was the same: adaptation to national imperialism through the intermediary of the petty-bourgeois layers inside and outside the proletariat. Their differences were based in the different national roots and in the different layers within each national petty bourgeoisie, since the petty bourgeoisie is never unified in its outlook.

Stalinism, of course, was ultimately responsible for the degeneration of the Fourth International. It was the degeneration of the workers' state that poisoned the international working class. It was Stalin's Russian nationalism that provided the cover for the nationalism of the Comintern sections which then spread throughout the workers' movement. And it was the crushing of the workers' movement, largely through the agency of Stalinism, after World War II that permitted the international capitalist revival. The degeneration of the Fourth International derives from this material cause, which reinvigorated every petty-bourgeois nationalist strain and deepened the International's adaptation to them.

International: you object to what you call our "vulgar symmetry" in comparing the death of the Fourth International over Bolivia in 1952 to the death of the Third International over Germany in 1933. The only symmetry in our position is that both Internationals died as revolutionary organizations because neither demonstrated any critical response to the betrayal by their affiliated party. The rest of the "symmetry" is your creation. We do not say that Bolivia, objectively speaking, held the same position in the world as Germany between the wars. The German defeat signified an immediate, massive smothering of the world proletarian struggle as well as the political destruction of the International. The Bolivian betrayal was a conclusive political defeat for the International, and only in this sense was it also an important setback for the world proletariat.

Why was Bolivia crucial for the Fourth International? While the Third had been both a vanguard and a mass organization, the Fourth was largely restricted to a fragile vanguard. But in Bolivia the International played a significant role in an actual revolution. It had a strong working-class based section that influenced the key sectors of the proletariat. But it capitulated to nationalist petty-bourgeois coun-



*Two youths stoning Russian tanks during East Berlin workers' rebellion in 1953. If "Trotskyists" had been Trotskyists, a successful Bolivian workers' revolution in 1952 would have given communist lead to the growing wave of East European and "Third World" revolts.*

In your letter you state that both you and we consider the question of the USSR to be "the question of questions." This is true in the sense that the Russian question is the deepest one dividing us on the surface. But in a more underlying sense the Russian question is one facet of a multi-faceted question of world capitalism. . . . When we say that the Bolivian debacle was the conclusive denouement of the International's degeneration, we do not deny that it stemmed from the corrosion of Stalinism in the first place, nor do we underestimate the significance of Pabloism's views on Eastern Europe as indicators of the collapse to come. On the other hand, your one-sided explanation cannot account for Pabloism's capitulations to capitalism at home; whereas we can account for its capitulation to capitalism in general.

On the question of the Bolivian events and the Fourth

terrevolutionary forces and thereby paved the way for reaction. Unlike the International's previous capitulations to Stalinism, this was a test in practice — not, as before, predominantly through resolutions, theories and ideas. For materialists, Marxists, practice is the decisive proof.

As students of Trotsky, we deeply understand the need to defend workers' gains until every possibility is conclusively exhausted. That is why we date the restoration of capitalism in the USSR as late as 1939, much later than the centrist state capitalist and bureaucratic collectivist tendencies. That is why we believe that even under restored capitalism the Stalinists have not been able to eradicate all the gains of the Bolshevik revolution. Likewise we place the final end of the Fourth International as a revolutionary organization as late as possible — when it was absolutely clear by the test of practice

that the progressive proletarian character of the organization was extinguished.

Your acceptance of Stalinism as a form of workers' state has blinded you to the dreadful significance of the Bolivian betrayal. Imagine what a *real* workers' state could have accomplished. True, Bolivia was not Germany, but a successful revolution in 1952 — when the objective opportunity existed — could have been a major step toward reversing the history of working-class setbacks. Mass upheavals were soon to take place in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. A victorious workers' revolution could have posed the Fourth International as the realistic leadership so desperately (and conclusively) absent in all these revolts. A Bolivian workers' state, even though under attack by imperialism, would have been a brilliant beacon to the world proletariat, a smaller reflection of the Russian workers' state at the end of World War I. You, who see rotten workers' states in many countries, can no longer appreciate what a sensation a real one would have been, how differently it would have acted toward fellow revolutions, what a compelling image for the cynical and misled proletariat it would have presented. Thus your cynical analysis of the Stalinist states as proletarian has led you to devalue the potential of a genuine proletarian revolution.

Your letter goes on to say that the LRP ought to favor a Fifth International because the Fourth stood for the defense of the Soviet Union during the war. This suggestion reminds us of the attacks made against us by the ultra-left and the Shachtmanites for not giving up on the USSR in the 1920's, — because of its manifest degeneration and Stalin's record of betrayals. This is the method of idealists and moralists, not Trotskyists. It demeans you to use it.

We believe that the Fourth International's defense of the USSR during the war was a sign of degeneration but not a conclusive one. A party can have very wrong positions even on an imperialist war and still be revolutionary. Lenin, for example, supported Japan in the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, while Trotsky did not. The point at issue, parallel to the case of Russia in World War II, was whether Japan was marginally progressive or not. Because the war took place at the dawn of the imperialist epoch, a case could be made by revolutionaries for either supporting or not supporting Japan (there was no revolutionary case for supporting Russia), even though one side was dangerously wrong. Significantly, Lenin

## Warsaw Ghetto

*continued from page 2*

solution." Dozens of left political tendencies and publications flourished, and political life was intense — as questions of how to fight Nazism and how to win socialism were debated. Exchange, criticisms and polemics from abroad had always been encouraged as part of the vitality of a self-confident movement which, no matter its current state, acknowledged its internationalist heritage.

We too make no apologies for seeking to iron out in debate questions of principle, strategy and tactics based upon past gains and past experience. In fact we learned this, the Marxist form of politics, from precisely such progenitors as the ghetto fighters for socialism. We would do them less than honor if we were to join the ranks of hypocrites and bury their political and military accomplishments in false flattery.

In not giving political support to the dominant political leaderships which carried out the ghetto struggle we certainly do not wish to forget the small force present at the time to

changed his views on imperialism at the outbreak of the First World War. Since both Lenin and Trotsky opposed their own national imperialism, both reflected relatively healthy trends. By your reasoning, if we have to consider the Fourth International dead as soon as it supported an imperialist country in war (and a country whose imperialist character was not yet obvious), we would also have to consider the Leninist tendency to have been dead in 1905.

We also believe that Trotsky, had he lived, would have been convinced of the capitalist nature of the USSR by the test of the war. (His analysis of both the USSR and Stalinism had been developing and changing throughout the decade of the 1930's; there is no reason to believe that it became frozen in 1940.) Even though we place the date of the counterrevolution in 1939, we understand that the question was debatable by revolutionaries until the evidence of the war and the immediate post-war period made the world role of the USSR absolutely clear.

### Pabloites Abandon Fourth International

And as we state above, the corrosion of the International was even more evident for us in its mistakes over the national question in Europe than over the Russian question. But even these mistakes were not uncorrectable; a number of forces in the International did attempt to have them corrected — which did not happen over the later Bolivian "mistakes." Thus even the capitulations on the national question did not represent a total capitulation spelling the end of the organization as a revolutionary international.

We call now for the re-creation of the Fourth International because our fundamental position before the advanced workers is to fight for a return to the essence of revolutionary communism: Trotskyism. We seek to prove that the essence of Trotskyism can be retained only through our amendments. We stand for the Fourth in order to claim our right to Trotsky's banner and not yield it to his "orthodox" epigones. The Pabloites have done their best to drag the name of Trotskyism through the mud, but their weakness and inevitable divisions have prevented them from fully succeeding. Today the Pabloites, notably Mandel and the SWP, are willing to abandon their claims to the Fourth International as long as the price is right. At a time when they are preparing openly to surrender, it is essential for genuine Trotskyists to stand firm. ■

whom we do give our allegiance, the Trotskyists. We have at best incomplete knowledge of their work but we do know that they fought and died beside their working class brothers and sisters with honor. We like they give military support and fight alongside our class even when we cannot agree with its current political leadership.

It is not only in Poland that the new round of proletarian struggles are brewing. The whole world is on the eve. As our Trotskyist ancestors did in the Warsaw Ghetto we shall do now. The movement will have all its hesitations and mistakes which will cost it in blood, but Bolsheviks shall fight alongside their class, always trying to point the way, confident that the mass struggle itself will teach the class its path to a communist world. This time the struggle of the Warsaw Ghetto — writ large — will not be defeated. Our class can and does learn from its history.

**Remember the Warsaw Ghetto!**

**Forward to the Re-creation of the Fourth International!**



# Harold Washington's Victory in Chicago

*continued from page 1*

election against Republican Bernard Epton.

Washington referred to his primary campaign as a "crusade," and it certainly was much more than simply a winning electoral effort. The avalanche of blacks into the voting booths was touched off by Mayor Byrne. Blacks had backed Byrne when she split the once-monolithic machine in 1979. In office she stabbed them in the back: she ignored a popular black educator in favor of one of his subordinates as her candidate for the city's school superintendency; she replaced blacks with whites on the board of education and the Chicago Housing Authority board; her police chief was the notoriously racist Richard Brzeznek. All this led to a campaign to boycott last summer's ChicagoFest, part of Byrne's program to stimulate commercial activity; then to the successful voter registration drive; and finally the elections. While the spark that lit the fire was Byrne's conduct in office, the fuel came from far more profound causes reflecting the foundering of the U.S. social structure.

## Washington's Moderate Program

Washington himself jumped at the opportunity to underscore the significance of the massive black primary vote. It was, he said, blacks' "coming into political maturity":

"We were slow to move from the protest movement into politics. We were lulled to sleep thinking that passing a few laws was enough. But we've got to be involved in the mainstream political activity. That's what's happening here in Chicago. And that's the lesson that's going out across the country."

Here Washington seizes on the fact that the gains blacks made in the 1960's have been rapidly eroding (a fact, by the way, that liberals and reformists never warned of but was predicted repeatedly by Marxists); that is why he criticizes the ideas that protest or "passing a few laws" were enough. But no one should imagine that new and greater achievements are now possible. Actually Washington means the exact opposite.

Politicians like Washington believe that the Democratic Party is the place for compromise. "Maturity" in his book means surrendering adolescent fantasies, such as eliminating racism and winning full employment, education for all, etc. It means getting smart — that is, becoming cynical. It means accepting the fact that the earlier ambitions were unreal and unachievable in the real world.

One of Washington's aides said of the "crusade" that "It was like Harold was Martin Luther King all over again." But whatever his actual accomplishments, Martin Luther King had a dream; Harold Washington says wake up and look at the world around you — only small changes are possible.

According to representative Gus Savage, Washington's close friend, "White people may see him as some sort of Black Panther, but he's actually a moderate." He is indeed. Take his interview in the February *Chicago* magazine, when he was asked about Chicago's notorious "invisible government" — the business community, suburban executives." He answered, "I'm meeting with them daily, in singles, pairs and groups. And they find out I don't have horns. ... I wouldn't say the business community to a man is anti-black. They want the status quo and, to a certain extent, so do I. I'm not talking about changing the whole make-

up of the city of Chicago. ... I'm talking about trying to create a city in which business will be, shall we say, more relaxed about coming in. ..."

Obviously a candidate who loved the banks and big corporations of Chicago — where their conservatism has never been veiled, they have always sided with the machine and always supported the white status quo — would not have much appeal among black workers. Nevertheless, Washington knows how capitalism works. The city could not survive without credit from the big banks and the trust of the giant companies. An ardent pro-Washington reformist, David Moberg, writing in the Chicago-based social-democratic paper *In These Times*, quoted Washington as saying, "We have to conduct ourselves in such a way that in the process of winning we do not make it impossible to govern." Moberg points to the difficulty Washington would face as a result of "white flight or a capital strike against the city by banks and businesses."

In fact Washington openly campaigned for a state income tax increase to bail Chicago out of its financial crisis. That is one reason why the little white primary support he got came mostly from the upper- and middle-class Lakefront districts. Washington had said aloud what Daley and Byrne wouldn't admit — that all three candidates stood for the financial program of the banks and the Republicans. If he could not get higher taxes from the state he urged that "we go on an austerity budget ...". Austerity for the workers is now very popular among capitalists, and Washington's little get-togethers had their effect. The president of the Greater State Street Council noted that Washington had "said many of the things the business community wanted to hear."

Harold Washington's dilemma is the same as that of any liberal or reformer who takes office at the head of a popular movement these days. And not just in the decaying cities of the U.S. For very similar reasons, the Nicaraguan Sandinistas try to keep capitalists in their government, plead their moderation internationally and work overtime to keep the



Organized Epton backers hurl racist epithets at Washington. Democratic Party "answer" to racism will only make it stronger.

masses in check and private property as inviolate as possible. Likewise Robert Mugabe seeks to placate the imperialist U.S., apartheid South Africa and white racist ex-ruler Ian Smith at the expense of the Zimbabwean people. Salvador Allende played the same game in Chile in the early 1970's, and lost.

The choice is clear. If capitalism is to be maintained, business must be allowed to squeeze out its profits and the

banks their interest. When times are tough it is the working people who must be squeezed. Fewer workers will have to do the work once done by more, and they will receive less pay. Social services needed by working people will have to be drastically cut. And capitalists invariably demand harsher terms from reformist politicians than from others: the risks are greater, and therefore the returns must be greater or the sources of investment will dry up and go elsewhere. For capitalists are frightened of mass movements, especially during crisis-ridden times. They fear that the reformers cannot control their base and that the populist rhetoric the politicians use to reassure the masses will instead inflame them. In some cases, the rulers suspect that the reformist leadership is lying and is really responsible for mass upheavals and threats to property.

The trick for the reformer is to placate both his popular base and the bourgeoisie. This is not always an easy task, but it has been done. When Andrew Young, Martin Luther King's former aide and Jimmy Carter's former U.N. ambassador, took the mayor's office in Atlanta the capitalists were not overly scared. There had been no real movement by blacks. But Young had employed a populist tone to keep his ties with black voters in the growing economic crisis. So far business has had no need to worry. The president of the Chamber of Commerce and a leading banker told the *New York Times* (March 20, 1983) that "His first year has been a good one. The business community has been pleasantly surprised. He has gotten things done that others couldn't."

That is exactly the point. The *Times* underlined just what Young has done for capitalism in Atlanta:

"For years City Hall had wanted to meet its financial problems with a sales tax increase. In 1979 voters rejected the tax by a 2-to-1 margin. In November, after some diligent campaigning by Mayor Young, a similar referendum for a 1 percentage point sales tax increase, to 5 percent, was passed by a margin of 53 percent to 47 percent, with support from poor blacks who would likely be hurt by the additional tax but voted for it anyway because Mr. Young asked them to. After a year, the tax increase is to be accompanied by a dollar-for-dollar decline in property taxes, a relief for corporations and homeowners."

Harold Washington's tax proposal in Chicago is similar to Young's in Atlanta, the one that "poor blacks who would likely be hurt" by it voted for because of Young, the one that provided "a relief for corporations." But the situation is not exactly the same: in Chicago there is an actual black movement that Washington rode to victory. As well, in Atlanta there is a history of collaboration to a degree unknown in Chicago. The ingrained racism of "the nation's most segregated city" and its bourgeoisie adds to the depth of the chasm between Washington and business. As in the nation as a whole, the bourgeoisie in Chicago is torn between a desire to deal with black leaders in order to keep social peace and the feeling that the system must turn to grinding workers harder — so much so that both leaders and led have to be subdued now.

But Washington has made the start he promised. His transition team includes senior executives of major Chicago banks. In addition, the absence of a black majority (present in several other big cities led by black mayors) acts as a further pressure on Washington to make peace with Chicago's "invisible government" at whatever cost. Still, to keep his mass base he will have to deliver a few sops. He would surely fire the already resigning Richard Brzezczek — but, as he already warns, there will be few other changes in the racist police

force. In general, the small gains that were possible in the 1960's are out of the question in the present state of capitalism. Washington's task, like Andrew Young's, like Coleman Young's in depression-ridden Detroit, will be to preside over austerity, not sops. And when you are dealing with a hungry *movement*, that's a real dilemma.

### Why Electoralism Today?

The Washington campaign reflects not only the bourgeoisie's need for reformers with popular support to keep the masses in place. It is primarily the product of a genuine, if limited, mass upsurge. But why has there been a response now? Over the years blacks have often been provoked and scorned by white politicians, brutalized by white police, without a mass electoral counterattack. Liberals and leftists have sallied forth time after time to register blacks *en masse* or to marshal their votes behind a "progressive" candidate — to little avail. The liberals and their leftist camp followers think they know why, beyond Byrne's provocations, the result was different in 1983: Ronald Reagan. There is truth in this but only half of the truth.

Reagan's across-the-board attack on poor and working people has certainly hurt blacks worst. Black unemployment is double that of whites, and it climbed by 25 percent in 1982. Black youth unemployment is at 49.5 percent compared to 21.6 percent for whites. And these official figures conceal millions more, as well as the alcoholism, drug addiction and suicide that accelerate as a result.

But blacks have hated Reaganism before this. What delights the liberals and leftists is that now the anti-Reagan sentiment has been congealed into a "solution": electoralism behind a progressive Democrat. There were hints of this turnabout in last November's New York elections, but no real movement yet. Previously all the evidence indicated that the growing contempt by white workers for the Democratic Party and liberalism was echoed among blacks as well. Despite the current liberal-left mythology, most blacks have been well aware that Reagan did not cause the economic crisis. He worsened it for workers and the oppressed, while the Democrats and liberals offered no alternative except further austerity.

In the 1960's when Martin Luther King's pacifist civil rights campaigns whetted the ghetto's appetite for a better life but failed to deliver, the masses erupted in riots and rebellions. These in fact produced most of the gains that King and the other leaders couldn't get. When the ruling class was prosperous and feared civil strife, it was willing to pay off within limits. Today the balance of forces has shifted. Prosperity is gone; the black masses are on the defense. Riots secure little, as Miami has proven more than once. Labor strikes — and blacks in the large cities of the North provide a large portion of the most powerfully situated layers of the working class — have been divided and corralled by the labor bureaucracy and so have led to little but retreats and concessions. Despite all the cynicism, the only alternative to an even worse future that appears to exist is the wretched Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party, in fact, contains a *negative* confirmation of the strength of the black working class. Since the 1960's a number of black leaders have become mayors, congressmen and other elected officials, mainly as Democrats. Propelled into office in the ebbing years of the once formidable mass black upsurge, they were wheeling and dealing and seemed to have carved out a few niches of power. They carried the authority of being recognized as brokers for the black masses by the white rulers. With the collapse of

radical black nationalism and the absence of militant labor struggles, the black Democrats appear to offer the only source of power against the Reagans, Byrnes and Brzezeks. Thus the blacks' turn to electoralism in large numbers is a defensive move by people who have given up their past hopes for a society of genuine racial equality, full employment and liberation.

The Democratic leaders did not create the new movement, but on the surface they seem to meet its limited expectations at least for the moment. The shift toward the Democrats and electoralism is only an initial reflection of the movement, not a long-term commitment. Despite the present mixed consciousness of the black masses, their needs and political experience will drive them away from this trap. The very strength that blacks have demonstrated acts to undermine the cynicism that limits their aspirations, ones that the Democrats cannot fulfill. Perhaps Jesse Jackson's comment was more apt than he realized when he said of the February primary, "What you saw was a political riot, disciplined rage." Demagogues like Jackson have worked to keep blacks tethered to (and their aspirations disciplined by) electoralism, so his choice of words was probably meant more as a threat to the white establishment than anything else. But the explosiveness could burst its

'liberal democrat,' we will alienate and isolate ourselves from the Black masses and inadvertently aid the forces of police brutality, corporate dominance and racism."

We will deal with the charge that not backing Washington aids the capitalists and racists shortly. As to isolation from the masses, contrary to Marable blacks are hardly wedded to electoralism — yet; all the electoral statistics prove that. They will be if the Marables and Harringtons have their way. Marable's particular sense of isolation stems from the fact that for years the masses ignored the idea of an independent black party. The programs advocated for such a party were for major reforms under capitalism — much the same as the programs of the black Democrats. Which is why people stuck with the Democrats: whatever elements of that program were felt not to be utopian under decaying capitalism were better fought for with a party that existed, had power and ties to the white rulers. A non-existent party couldn't compete on the same grounds. Black workers have learned to be suspicious of radical rhetoric aimed at narrowly limited ends.

Marable particularly believes that the decisive question is black unity:

"The success of Washington's campaign was from beginning to end a result of the forging of an in-

*Harold Washington raising funds in New York with labor sell-out Victor Gotbaum, Governor Cuomo and Mayor Koch. Koch's endorsement shows fraud of "anti-racist" Democratic Party campaign.*



electoral channels and undermine the power brokering business of the Jacksons and Washingtons.

### Washington's Popular Front

One leftist black spokesman who approves of Washington's form of "discipline" is Manning Marable, a vice-chairman of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Significantly, Marable has criticisms of Washington, whereas DSA itself makes none, at least in public. Marable is not one of the ordinary social-democratic leaders who has toiled in the Democratic Party vineyards for years, like his comrade DSA Chair Michael Harrington (still defending his support of Lyndon Johnson in 1964 — to keep American boys out of Vietnam, remember?); Marable long favored an independent black party and is only a recent convert to the Democrats. In justifying his new stance he wrote in the March 16 *Guardian*:

"If we decide to stay out of the reformist battle to mobilize Black voters, simply because Washington is a

dependent Black united front — ministers and Muslims, trade unionists and professionals, entrepreneurs and the unemployed."

The problem is that such coalitions are inevitably dominated by the entrepreneurs and professionals, as Washington's pro-business program demonstrates. True, Washington has also promised to improve public health in Chicago and revitalize black and Latino neighborhoods. But as Marable himself points out, "Any attempt to carry out any significant part of this program will generate the intense opposition of many white ethnics, the corporations and banks ...".

Marable is amalgamating two questions: the banks' and businesses' objections to real reforms, and working-class (both white and black) opposition to higher tax burdens. Washington has made little or no appeal to working-class interests, despite labor's backing for him after the primary (beforehand the local AFL-CIO had endorsed Byrne). If the

working people in Washington's "united front" start pressing for their programs, the coalition will break down very quickly. What will the black politicians and entrepreneurs do then, those who depend upon an orderly, stable government? Very little different from their white counterparts: Detroit's Coleman Young, formerly far to Washington's left, is now the model black strikebreaker and austerity liberal. Those who are channeling the black liberation struggle into dependence on middle-class and petty-bourgeois elements are the ones who "inadvertently aid the forces of police brutality, corporate dominance and racism." It is critical for working class people — blacks especially, given their far greater consciousness of the rottenness of capitalist society — to organize themselves independently of all capitalist interests and such electoral fronts.

Marable, an avowed Marxist, has some inkling of this, however corrupted he is by his fear of isolation from the class-collaborationist popular front he describes. When the corporations and police pull out all the stops to hamstring Washington's program (Marable suffers from the illusion that a capitalist politico like Washington would really carry his efforts that far) Marable notes: "The key here is for progressives to continue the mobilization of the working class, national minority and poor constituents, in the streets as well as beyond the next election."

But Washington's front, his "disciplining" of the masses' rage, is designed precisely to forestall mass action in the streets and in the factories. How many times have working-class militants been told — in Allende's Chile, Mitterrand's France, Coleman Young's Detroit, etc., etc. — "don't rock the boat; we'll wheel and deal in the corridors of power." Washington in power, like Mitterrand, will tragically hold the allegiance, at least for a time, of the masses who put him there (perhaps a long time, given the sharp racial nature of the elections) — and he will use it to carry out his austerity program while his base is momentarily tranquilized. That is the lesson that Marxists should be fighting to teach, no matter how unpopular it makes them for the moment. But there is more.

### The Chicago Machine

The real significance of Washington's coalition is shown by its relation to the traditional Chicago machine. Formed during the 1930's in order to head off the threat of mass

radical politics and unions, the machine rested chiefly on strong white working-class support. Like similar organizations elsewhere, it operated to break up class-wide solidarity by reinforcing the ethnic identities of the different segments of the class. The majority of workers within each group could get little from capitalism. But by identifying with the gains made by the upper layers of their group they could raise their hopes. Thus petty office seekers and petty shopkeepers (some not so petty) became influential, the more so if they could dispense favors. Ethnicity always tends to increase the influence of the petty bourgeoisie over the workers, since this element acts as power brokers between the ethnic group and the ruling class.

Each group vies with each other in showing loyalty to the machine, in order to win a piece of the pie. The machine's ethnic dynamic and its usefulness for the bourgeoisie was summed up by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now Democratic Senator from New York, and his academic buddy Nathan Glazer. In an article in *Commentary* magazine (October 1974) called "Why Ethnicity?", they noted that ethnic assertion was on the rise and that this was linked to the growth of the welfare state. In modern society it is not useful, they stated,

"... to assert claims on behalf of large but loosely aggregated groups such as 'workers,' 'peasants' ... . Claims of this order are too broad to elicit a very satisfactory response. ... As a matter of strategic efficacy, it becomes necessary to disaggregate, to assert claims for a group small enough to make significant concessions possible and, especially, small enough to produce some gain from the concessions made."

In plain English, Moynihan and Glazer advocated a strategy of abandoning working-class-wide demands which capitalism cannot meet in favor of smaller demands for a privileged few; later others can hope to imitate their success. "Disaggregation" is academic jargon used here to mean class division. The same concerns are voiced by the big bourgeoisie: thus the oft-quoted Wall Street executive Henry Kaufman, in an address to the Economic Club of Chicago two years ago, said that a "fundamental change has been taking place in our society over the past five decades;" the American majority now favors "democracy oriented to an unaffordable egalitarian sharing of production rather than equal opportunity" (*In These Times*, January 28, 1981).

Translated, this means that capitalism can't afford to have everyone live well. Instead of such "egalitarian democracy," Kaufman prefers "equal opportunity" — a few live well while most of us satisfy ourselves with the unfulfillable "opportunity" to do so.

The task of the urban machines was to arrange this "disaggregation" under the banner of "equal opportunity." Chicago's machine had an additional New Deal twist: it fattened itself off the federal deficit spending policies that allowed it to grease its operations and prevent rubbing components from overheating. Today, with reduced government revenues and giant deficits constantly in need of refinancing, the machine is wearing out. Chicago's heavy load of blue-collar job patronage and huge contracts for favored companies who hire the right workers is being undercut by the economy. The obvious point of friction is the ethnic and racial divisions. In the February primary, Byrne took the North Side ethnic wards, Daley the South Side and Washington the blacks.

For Chicago's machine has rested upon the black population as well. The blacks had their own machine, subordinated to the white, mostly Irish-led operation. The solidity of the blacks and the ability of black politicians to

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deliver a solid vote contributed to the strength of the white machine. Reciprocally, the white-run hierarchy enforced unity and loyalty on the blacks.

Parallel to the white, the Chicago black machine had ties to the tiny black bourgeoisie as well as with the old-line ministers and storekeepers. The original version under congressman William Dawson had a deservedly Uncle Tom image; Dawson even endeared himself to various Dixiecrats in Washington. But in return for subservience Dawson got his little *quid pro quo* in patronage and favors.

The black machine was weakened by the civil rights movement and the black power rebellions, when blacks found the strength to fight oppression and not just coexist with it, but it was not destroyed. But more recently it has begun to fracture, like its white counterpart. Especially since the black city population, unlike the white, has been growing: there are more needs and less cash for favors to be doled out. The depth of the economic depression facing blacks has raised the demand for machine aid tremendously.

### Middle-Class Revolt

In Chicago, the machine stymied the civil rights movement but could not itself meet the needs of the expanding black professional layer. The new elements want — like their white counterparts — “clean” government free of not only hustlers and unsavory types but also of inelegant politicians and storekeepers. Their education reflects modern bureaucratic and corporate needs. Their idealism stresses social welfare solutions for the masses’ needs, the bureaucratic version of the old machine favors and patronage. Their belief in their own altruism is unmarred by the fact that they desperately want professional positions in government commensurate with their status. And the machine has been unable to deliver.

The new professional middle-class elements provided the most solid core of Washington’s support in the primary. Obviously the majority of blacks who voted for Washington were workers, given the small number of even relatively affluent blacks. But as David Moberg pointed out in *In These Times* (March 2), “Especially strong support in the traditionally more independent and slightly better-off neighborhoods of the black south side also compensated for less impressive results in the typically machine-dominated poor wards of the black west side.” (Social-democrat Moberg tried later to downplay the implications of this with the contradictory claim that “Not surprisingly, Washington did best among low-income people.”) Nevertheless, as Washington’s status as a serious candidate grew he picked up more elements of the old black machine. He had always had the support of the few small “entrepreneurs” who welcomed his popularity and recognized his ability to handle the pork barrel. The “united front” had an old familiar flavor.

Harold Washington was an old machine product who, with his mentor, former congressman Ralph Metcalfe, had had to oppose machine mayor Daley after some particularly vile racist acts in the early 1970’s. But until then he had loyally served Daley in the Illinois legislature. Now he quite loyally reflects middle class ambitions and has promised to junk the patronage system. But he has also sent signals to both white and black machine leaders that he is still willing to deal: “In a sense, I am a product of the machine. I’ve dealt with it for years. It is proper in its place” (*Chicago Sun-Times*, February 23).

Immediately after his electoral triumph over Epton, Washington renewed his pledge to eliminate patronage (which the courts had just ordered ended anyway). But at the

same time he was careful to publicly embrace his machine enemies of just the day before, including ward boss Roman Pucinski, a leader of the Democratic rush to Epton after the primary. There will be no “business as usual,” Washington promised — but business there will be.

Middle-class “issue-oriented” reform movements have taken power from crumbling machines in many cities. Typically they find it necessary to build alliances with elements of the old machine in order to stabilize their rule. They make their own deals as well: instead of filling the government apparatus through appointments at every level from top to bottom in the old Daley manner, they appoint only the top layers, and that is enough to control the new bureaucracies. Their original verve for democratic “good government” disintegrates, to be replaced by their elitism which makes the reformers even less responsive to working-class pressures than the machine. The road from crusader to Koch has been traveled before.

Under the impact of the capitalist crisis the machine has come apart. As a Daley aide put it, “There’s a lot more fragmentation now. No one has the megabutton any more.” Even without Washington and the courts vowing to end patronage, bourgeois reality has already pulled the rug out from under it. The old forms of bourgeois rule are crumbling, but the new middle-class power brokers are seeking new forms to lock in the restless black workers.

While reform regimes, black and white, have won elsewhere, they have rarely done so riding a volatile mass movement as in Chicago. This gives the new administration a far more fragile character than normal. An embryonic “popular front” — to give it its real name — has arisen in black Chicago to play the role the machine can no longer perform: to detour the potentially radical mass movement and tie the revived socially conscious workers to decaying capitalism.

### The Racist Campaign

The steamroller that put Washington in as the Democratic candidate picked up speed as the main issue became race. Democratic Party chairman Ed Vrdolyak, a Byrne backer, told precinct workers: “It’s a racial thing. Don’t kid yourself. I’m calling on you to save your city, save your precinct and keep your friends in office.” After Washington’s primary victory, Byrne endorsed him but then stabbed him in the back with a brief try at a write-in campaign of her own, obviously largely motivated by the race of the victor. And the Republican candidate, given an unexpected lease on life because of the color of his skin, raised the blatant campaign slogan “Epton, Before It’s Too Late.” The Police Department served as the center for virulent race-baiting of Washington. Democratic wardheelers went over to Epton by the bucketload and drummed up fear of a black menace among their constituents. During the electoral campaign these elements organized several viciously racist incidents. There were, however, no mass race riots like those that confronted M.L. King years ago.

The isolation of the blacks reinforced the tendency to stick together and gave Washington considerable support out of solidarity of the oppressed. For blacks are more than just another “community” of ethnics. Vital to the economy, they nevertheless have always been a pariah caste viciously discriminated against and held at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder by strong racial barriers. There have always been lower wage scales and higher unemployment for black workers amounting to significant super-exploitation. (The small but politically important black upper strata have never been able to avoid identification with the black masses nor to

escape the barrier of prejudice; they too earn less than their white counterparts and have far greater difficulty obtaining suitable employment.) The division of whites into strongly encapsulated ethnic groups allowed imperialism to nurse an aristocracy of labor into existence as a barrier to class consciousness. However, whites as a whole, including all the white ethnic groups, were allowed to join in the aristocratic ethos — because they could feel themselves rewarded as long as black labor remained qualitatively more victimized.

The attempt to rebuild white solidarity linking the ethnic subdivisions in Chicago after the Byrne-Daley fiasco can only be carried out by wielding the black "threat" as the binding force. If the impact of the crisis has hit blacks harder, white workers (especially in the industrial Midwest) are also seeing their world fall apart. Economic distress has combined with other social factors to undermine all aspects of their existence, including "their" machine.

Ethnicity was always reinforced by living in common neighborhoods; in Chicago the ethnic communities lasted longer than elsewhere, with less of a post-war white move to the suburbs. They rely on traditional moral and religious standards and strong family ties. But the Catholic church, the ethnic social cement, has been evolving. As well, there are new migrations that replace old; youth gain wider horizons and rebel; old cultural and family ties break down. The crisis sped up all these conditions, as unemployment shook up the family structure even forcing workers to move in search of jobs, vital city services collapsed and crime became rampant. With the growing black urban population desperately expanding its ghettos, many of the problems white people face could be conveniently blamed on blacks and channeled into racism.

Moreover, the machine's grip on its mass is weakening, given the social breakdowns and the politicians' inability to act as go-betweens with government for dwindling services. On top of this, Washington personifies a real threat: if more blacks and social reformers get city jobs, then there is far less for the machine's remnants. Under these conditions, if the Byrne-Daley split were to continue with an even deeper struggle among the white ethnic groups, then all would be lost for the machine. It had no other card to play but racism.

There has always been racism in Chicago politics, at least partly in consequence of the machine's interest in maintaining segregation. However, racism was only one impulse among many in the white working class; it was deliberately whipped up when necessary. Thus it is no accident that the racism expressed by white workers during the campaign still carried a significant troubled undertone: people told reporters they were voting white even though they knew something was wrong about that. The attempt by the media and the national Democrats to present the machine politicians as merely responding to irrational mass racism was a direct inversion of the truth.

### The Pro-Democrat Strategy

Only through the binding forces of racism could the Chicago machine hold itself together. But it is not just the machine: maintaining the Democratic Party in any form requires it. The Democratic Party is the chosen vehicle for the task of absorbing class consciousness, chewing it up and destroying it. Machine structure or no, it wields racism to this purpose: witness the slimy mayor Edward Koch of New York, who relies more on high-level public relations than precinct work for his racial slurs.

The only difference between Chicago and the rest of the nation is that here the necessary weapon was used more openly and threatened to get out of control. That is why multitudes of national Democrats who had backed others in the primary

rushed to Chicago to force white precinct leaders, aldermen and even congressmen into line behind the candidate. Presidential hopefuls, Southern politicians and even Koch stuck in their contributions. The Kennedy family used its business connections to strangle Byrne's write-in campaign. Why? Because a Washington defeat could have provoked a black voter withdrawal from the Democrats nationally; at minimum it would have produced a black presidential candidate in the Democratic primaries in 1984. It might also have set white racist forces in motion in the Democratic Party across the nation. And that would have meant the end of the Democrats' power, based as it is on burying political polarization by compromising and avoiding "delicate" questions.

The Democratic Party is an assemblage of various groups — ethnic, sectoral and social. The famed New Deal "coalition" was put together very much like the Chicago machine; the same sectors were represented. But the Democrats barely survived the Depression, when workers rose to the heights of industrial unionism and economic class consciousness but stopped short of independent class political action. World War II and the post-war prosperity kept the Party going. Now the return of the crisis has undermined its already fading "coalition" as well as the surviving machines. Under such circumstances blacks are inevitably singled out to be the fall guys, the group officially designated to get nothing. But they form one of the largest groups; their withdrawal would end the Democrats' "natural" political majority. It could also lead to the collapse of electoralism as a diversion for the masses, at least the black masses — and thereby to social explosions. Hence the concern of Mondale, Kennedy et al. Their future was at stake.

The Democrats term their molecularization of class politics "coalitionism" — the knitting together of discrete interest groups and ethnic groups with separate consciousnesses. Coalitions arrived at through deals among the leader-brokers are fragile at times of social movement. Each of the allied sectors is bisected by class lines when there is a mass following. The petty-bourgeois class outlook of the leadership is fundamentally at variance with that of the mass base, even if there are points of agreement. When the practical struggle breaks out into open *movements*, the difference between the brokers and the broke is revealed.

### Liberals Betray Alliance

In Chicago there were two coalitions that held. One was between the black middle strata and their white counterparts on the Lakefront. The second was the alliance of the black masses behind the black middle class. But even the first of these working coalitions was weak: only 39 percent of the liberals, according to polls, were on Washington's side in the blatantly racist election campaign — a testimony to the puerile nature of liberalism and the fragility of an alliance built on the good will of the affluent. With the machine crumbling, many liberals turned to it, swallowing their previous contempt; the rich have a great stake in stability and therefore in keeping business, the banks and the politicians reasonably happy.

Harold Washington's "new Democratic coalition" with the liberals is aimed also at winning sections of the white working class, over time. And the way to try to do this is through its present leaders, like Pucinski. The trade union leaders, for what they are worth in terms of a base that will follow them, are mostly already collaborating. For the AFL-CIO bureaucracy nationally is now an important voice within the Democratic Party, charged with responsibility for heading

off any resistance on the industrial front. It has been successful so far, through its electoralism and coalitionist strategy with liberal interest groups (see our "Labor after Solidarity Day" in *Socialist Voice* No. 15). Registration has recently been rising nationally among the poorly paid and the jobless, white and black. Some of this is due to incessant AFL-CIO propaganda; all of it is due to the bureaucrats' success in blocking off more volatile forms of struggle.

To gain white support and achieve social peace now that it is in office, the black middle-class leadership is offering to preserve white neighborhoods. Al Raby, Washington's campaign manager, said, "We're very interested in community stability" (*In These Times*, March 30). This means not only physical preservation but ethnic stability as well. It means preventing "white flight" to the suburbs, which would ensure capital and job losses. It therefore means collusion with the white liberals who don't have a mass base and with the machine bosses who do, as part of a national alliance among power brokers.

### Washington's "Stabilization"

But like all capitalist pacts in this society of each against all, this one is doomed to fail. For stability cannot be restored. The masses, white as well as black, sense this and are justly frightened. The attempt to promote an inter-racial compromise based on the status quo is epitomized by the black middle class's totally giving up on the forced busing program for school integration that it had championed in the past (with less enthusiasm from working-class blacks whose children were on the front lines of battle). The ethnic sense of community is dissipating, pulverized under the hammer blows of the crisis. Blacks must seek new housing. All need scarce jobs. The interracialist solution is possible only through a class struggle against capitalism, not through compromise within it.

Stabilizing the white neighborhoods along their present lines is a strategy bound up with "struggle" through electoralism and the revival of the Democratic Party. Action to defend people's interests, when not confined to voting, becomes at best lobbying, rent strikes, pressure tactics and petitions — anything but the industrial action that brings to bear the power of the working class.

Neighborhoods (hardly "communities") do not have the inherent organization that factories and industries do for workers. Neighborhood consciousness stresses a multiplicity of enemies: not only muggers and addicts, but landlords, merchants, ethnic intermarriage, the kids hanging out, the blacks moving in, the next precinct getting some favor from city hall, the next district getting a favor from Washington, the next state with lower business taxes, etc. As usual, the pulverization of working-class consciousness must single out the blacks as victims — the easiest group to scapegoat and unite the rest against. This is the *real* program of those who advocate "progress" through the Democratic Party.

### The Working-Class Alternative

In contrast to neighborhood organization, struggle centered on the industrial front teaches in short order who the real enemy is: the capitalists and their political and ideological agents. The potential for united, national and even international struggle lies in the fact that the primary relationship workers share in society is to the means of production.

That is why revolutionaries counterpose industrial action to "community" struggles as a central strategy. Of course, these days local strikes led by defeatist union bureaucrats frequently lead to losses. The real potential in strike action is to open up a

fight for a general strike which can unite workers of all stripes against the oppressive system. A general strike inevitably poses the question of who shall rule in society, the bosses with their crisis-ridden capitalism or the workers with their capacity to control, centralize and revitalize industry. In the whirlpool of powerful strike action, workers will learn their strength as a class rather than their disunity as competitors and passive voters. This is the milieu for the revolutionary party to develop in as a real alternative.

In contrast, "community stability" and electoralist discipline over the masses have the potential for disaster. The reformists, liberals and middle-class "socialists" who advocate returning to the status quo of yesteryear feed the fires of class division. When they claim the banner of the left and of anti-racism, they leave only one radical alternative to white workers who are facing what looks like a free fall into disaster: a racist and, in the future, fascist course. Harold Washington's program of higher taxes and austerity, a replay of what drove Jimmy Carter out of office, won't fool black or white workers for very long.

The liberal middle class on the Lakefront can afford to be more "tolerant" (to use Moberg's expression, which he means as a compliment) because their competition with blacks is not as intense. Their moralistic sneering at white workers, their desire to "educate" them that racism is nasty, overlooks one fact that workers understand far better than they: under this system competition for jobs is real and it will indeed be a question of white versus black as long as capitalism remains. It is no surprise that workers have often followed the petty-bourgeois machine leaders rather than the intelligentsia: in this perverted society the former understand reality better. "We want ours" is an accurate response in the land of "opportunity."

The revival of social movement among blacks in Chicago is a very positive sign. The present uneasy coalition at the top between the black and white liberals and shifting sections of the machine will be only a temporary brake upon mass consciousness if the movement takes off. In the 1930's there was a genuine, mass class-wide industrial movement. Then the Democratic Party was only the means for distributing sops to the masses, not the weapon for winning them. If the movement accelerates today, the system will be under pressure to dole out more than its leaders wish, although its resources are more limited than even in the 1930's. The capacity of the embryonic movement to achieve partial aims and then, its appetite whetted, much larger goals, is aided by its leadership's fragility — but its greatest barrier is the racist division of the class inherent in the Democratic Party set-up.

The black working class is strategic to the economy of both Chicago and the nation. It has the opportunity, when its proletarian consciousness and leadership develops, to lead the entire working class by providing a concrete alternative in action. Militant strikes undertaken despite the AFL-CIO bureaucracy in the early 1970's showed that white workers even in the South would follow the lead of blacks in struggle for their mutual benefit. Revolutionary propaganda for general strike action among black workers is crucial in Chicago and the nation today.

Whatever happens, the "stability" fought for by the coalition leaders of today will fail. If ethnic solidarity and therefore racist solidarity wins out among whites, reaction is inevitable. The political polarization among white workers in Chicago is real; at the moment its direction is bad, but it can be reversed. The black masses, whose motion is the most significant fact, will undoubtedly break with their present leadership. This does not mean that they will cease to un-

derstand the need for racial solidarity as a defense against attack; it means that they will understand that unity can only be achieved without the misleadership of strata too attached to the system. But as the "left," black and white, maintains its present reformism, the pressure on black workers will be towards a narrow ethnic type of self-identification at the expense of class consciousness. Their modest hopes dashed

once again, they will be forced to turn to the dead-end of separatism and nationalism as an answer to the dead-ends of integrationism and electoralism. The tragedy will be that the bankruptcy of liberalism and reformism will leave the masses nothing but reactionary alternatives if the revolutionary, proletarian pathway has not been laid.

April 25, 1983

# What's Left? Not "Democratic Socialism"

The following leaflet was distributed by the LRP at the Socialist Scholars Conference in New York on April 1 and 2. The conference, subtitled "What's Left?" (a deliberate double entendre), was held in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Karl Marx's death and was sponsored by members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other reformists friendly to it. About 1500 people attended the affair, mostly former student New Leftists now turned professors, overwhelmingly white and affluent. It was old home week, and anybody who came would have felt right at home — except Marxists.

The conference's keynote session was addressed by a lady parliamentarian from Italy and a gentleman parliamentarian from France. She, a social pacifist, had the decency to admit that Marx had been no pacifist. He, on the other hand, had no decency whatever — he simply approved government cutbacks in public services and favored America's nuclear build-up in Europe. At this there were a few hisses from the audience. He passionately defended his democratic right to speak, which had never been contested in the first place. Lots of applause. DSA chair Michael Harrington chided his French comrade-in-arms for going too far. DSA's leaders believe, as the leaflet demonstrates, that the U.S. should have enough arms for "sane" defense but feel that U.S. capitalism not only could but very definitely should be much nicer than it is at the moment.

We have never had much good to say about the politics of the old new leftists, who were at once contemptuous of and patronizing toward the workers. But at least these people in the 1960's *hated* the miserable and monstrous capitalist system from the very core of their being. Now the "socialist scholars" are well-scrubbed and self-satisfied. When at the end of the conference they sang the revolutionary anthem, "The Internationale," it was good to see that a number of today's young radicals thought as we did that such hypocrisy was a fitting end to an obscene rite for a great revolutionary warrior, Karl Marx.

"Democratic socialism" is becoming very trendy on the left. Large scale conferences such as this one are testimony to its growing popularity. Unfortunately there is nothing new or hopeful about "democratic socialism" except its name. Sadly enough for those who hope otherwise, reformism by any other name proves to be the same graveyard for human aspirations that it always has been.

As practiced by the official sponsors of this conference — and even more by its centerpiece organization, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) — "democratic socialism" is attracting two different types of people. One source of recruits, small but important as a barometer, is youth new to politics and struggles who hope that the DSA and its satellite groups can offer something more than the wretched

liberals do, while retaining the latter's "relevance" and "practicality." After all, look at the failures of past "far out" ideas.

Indeed, the majority of new adherents to "democratic socialism" comes from the middle class and student movements of the visionary old "new left." These people spent a number of years trying to galvanize "revolution," at least in rhetoric and litany; failing in that, they have now become very, very "practical" — and very, very cynical.

Some still feel that they are revolutionaries underneath. Others want to lay the ghost to rest. So it is no accident that many of them claim the mantle of Karl Marx and even set up conferences to weigh Marx's pluses and minuses, while basking in the attractiveness of ideas which have motivated generations of fighters. But no academic garb can hide the fact that Marx despised the "democratic socialists" of his day. Proudly proclaiming himself a communist, he believed that these elements represented no progressive stage toward socialism but rather its mortal enemy. Instead of academic "exchanges of ideas," Marx characteristically-used bitter polemic. For him, the fate of humanity was at stake, and those who wanted to blur the class struggle were opponents of human liberty and not friends. For the greatest of revolutionaries, the working class could only triumph by irreconcilable warfare against capitalism, not by reforming it.

Those who yesterday accepted Marx (and Lenin, and others) as catechism rebel against their own misunderstanding: in their free discourse of today, they junk not only their dogmas but the very principles that were central to his outlook.

## DSA "Rationalizes" Capitalism

For the DSA, socialism is a long-term goal, often referred to as an ideal which may or may not ever be realized in practice. Its practical program is democratic control of capitalism. This has nothing to do with Marx or Marxism, even in part. National Chairman Michael Harrington poses this capitalism as an alternative to the old liberalism of the New Deal. According to Harrington, old liberalism "no longer responds to structural problems rooted in the economy, dominated by a corporate power aided and abetted by the government."

Harrington argues that the problem with New Deal liberalism is that, while the government manipulates fiscal and monetary levers, the corporations decide on investment, technology and pricing policies. His program for "democratic control" essentially calls for extending the liberal program of the New Deal further, mobilizing the corporations within a master plan laid out by the government. This is a program to revitalize liberalism, moving further to the left but maintaining the capitalist framework.

Harrington remarks about the New Deal that "the



millionaires thought Roosevelt was a communist — when instead he was saving capitalism." So today it is the DSA, certainly no bunch of communists, who are putting forward their "new liberalism," their program to save capitalism: to make the system invest and plan more efficiently and in a way which will lessen social tensions between workers and capitalists. This is a program not aimed at arousing masses of workers and oppressed groups to action. Rather it takes such explosions as inevitable and seeks to channel them "constructively." Instead of identifying itself with the real interests of the masses that Marx sought to illuminate, the DSA views itself as in alliance or coalition with these masses. The "democratic socialists" reflect the class outlook of the intelligentsia and see the world as social engineers, managers,

murderous anti-Palestinian policy — even if it occasionally balks at Begin's "excesses." Look at the Costa Rican "comrades" who enlist under the U.S. banner to help smash the remaining vestiges of revolution in Nicaragua. Look at the "socialists" who lead France and who have led Britain and Germany: they offer austerity and unemployment at home and "moderate" cold war abroad. A fine lot.

But doesn't "democratic socialism" object to many of those policies and politicians? Doesn't it side with the "left" of these parties? Yes. However, the "left" of these parties inevitably capitulates to and covers for the right. No accident that Michael Foot, who today leads the British Labour Party in its war against its own left wing, was the Tony Benn of yesteryear. Today DSA, not being near or even faintly near



*Ex-President Carter meeting with members of Nicaraguan junta in 1979. Sandinistas are sympathizers of the reformist Second [yellow] International which also contains parties supporting imperialist aggression against Nicaragua.*

planners, technocrats and well-meaning bureaucrats. Inevitably they seek solutions above the class struggle between workers and capitalists and trace capitalism's problems to bad management and bad policies.

For the DSA, the current economic crisis is a result of corporate greed and mismanagement, not a product of the fundamental drives and workings of the system as it was for Marx. Socialism is not seen as the act of the class struggle of the workers but as some higher ideal which will come about because it is more sane and rational. Reformism, opposed to revolution, believes that socialism can evolve out of capitalism and win by demonstrating its superiority.

One might ask, however, when has reformism ever led to a socialist state or society even though "socialists" have been in power in a number of countries for years? The reality is that reformism comes to power in order to put a damper on the class struggle, to convince workers that their needs can be met by the capitalist state and thus it helps hold back revolutionary change which alone can bring about socialism. One need only look at the counter-revolutionary role of the German Social Democracy, which murdered scores of revolutionary workers including Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919, or the role of the socialists in the Popular Fronts of the 1930's which helped pave the way for the victory of fascism in Spain and World War II.

Or look at its adherents today. Look at the Israeli Labor Party, member of the Second International, which has always defended the colonial-settler Zionist state and its inevitably

power, allows itself the luxury of leftish criticisms of its comrades — but ever so faint ones.

DSA's "practicality" leads it to make only the most mild criticisms of Israel. If another country did what Israel does, not simply in Sabra and Shatila but every day on the West Bank, DSA would howl. Why doesn't it howl over Israel? The reason is obvious: the practicality of its ties here to "left" Zionists, union bureaucrats, and liberal politicians. It is perfectly legitimate to ask if DSA were in South Africa, what would be its "practical" compromises there?

#### "Practicality" Leads to Racism

Let us look at another issue in the U.S. and see how "democratic socialist" practicality leads to betrayal of democratic values.

If anything motivated the new left as of yore it was antagonism toward racism and national chauvinism. Now look. At its October 16-17 meeting, the National Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) passed a resolution in favor of protectionist legislation, the "Fair Practices in Automotive Product Act" (HR 1533). This bill, which recently passed the House of Representatives, would require foreign companies selling automobiles in the U.S. to manufacture them with mostly American parts and labor. Despite claims of some of the bill's defenders, it will inevitably add to the growing anti-Japanese racism and chauvinism and will neither preserve nor create jobs for United States workers.

DSA's support for protectionism is no accident. DSA politics, in the name of avoiding "far out" solutions, tolerates

only those positions which accept the continuation of capitalism "for now." Inevitably those who support such "sensible, practical" politics find themselves supporting the only politics that are practical and necessary for the decadent capitalist system: division of the working class through racism, nationalism and imperialism. DSAers who oppose protectionism are in an ambiguous position.

DSA's official support for the so-called domestic content bill is a perfect illustration of Eugene Debs saying that it is better to ask for what you want and *not* get it than to ask for what you *don't* want and *get* it. Protectionism in the auto industry would mean unemployment among workers in Mexico employed by U.S. auto firms in an already tottering economy. The threat would be great for Japanese workers as well, given the weight of the American market. Does anyone doubt that rival capitalist powers would not respond with tariff walls of their own, that the trade wars of the thirties would not recur? Wouldn't chauvinism escalate, as it did in the past, into feeding the fascist movements? Because of the built-in racism of U.S. society, such campaigns inevitably ignite racial oppression to divide the working class here at home.

Moreover, protectionism is class-divisive and racist *immediately*. Two sections of the working class suffer directly when imports are cut off: those in export industries faced with overseas counteraction, and poor workers — many black and Hispanic — who can't afford higher-priced domestic goods. "Domestic content" represents the point of view of sections of the better-off white male workers. By championing the viewpoint of this labor aristocracy, the DSA's "minimum program" acceptable under capitalism adopts elements of capitalism's "maximum program": racism and imperialist chauvinism, leading to fascism and world war.

"Domestic content" is part of a general campaign led by the AFL-CIO bureaucracy which has pushed for increased protectionism for steel, textiles, clothing, and many other industries besides auto. Such measures in the U.S. and Europe have exacerbated the collapse of the ex-colonial world, unable to sell its products and forced into staggering indebtedness. At home protectionism has deepened industrial backwardness without saving jobs. Inevitably it has been accompanied by attempts to whip up a furor against immigrant workers.

### Protectionism Supports Imperialism

The DSA leadership naturally denies that it supports racism and chauvinism. Michael Harrington, in a *New York Times* op-ed article of Dec. 2, admits that the domestic content bill could "lend itself to racist, even chauvinist interpretation. ..." Happily, though, "the United Automobile Workers union, chief advocate of the bill, has been quite forthright in fighting this reactionary interpretation of it." Harrington is lying. Everything about the UAW's "Buy American," "Park your foreign car in Tokyo" campaign leads straight to racism. In the windows of Solidarity House, UAW headquarters, are cartoons with caricatured Japanese faces reminiscent of the World War II era when the U.S. government put over a hundred thousand Japanese-Americans into concentration camps. Even UAW staff member Dan Luria, who defends domestic content, is a little more honest than Harrington. He writes, "Not everything about the way the UAW is pursuing the local content issue is equally laudable. There should probably be less tolerance for jingoist ideology" (*Labor Notes*, June 24).

The protectionism campaign being waged by the AFL-CIO bureaucrats is tied to their general support for U.S. imperialism. Their co-sponsorship with the CIA of the American Institute for Free Labor Development which aids reactionary

Latin American regimes in repressing leftist-led unions is only one example. And DSA likewise supports U.S. imperialism both through its links to the bureaucrats and in its own right. In 1980, the DSA's predecessor organization, DSOC, carried signs in peace demonstrations saying, "Russia Go Home: U.S. Stay Home" — as if there were no U.S. troops in the Philippines, South Korea, Greece, Japan, Germany, etc.

The same "practical" method of tailing the more backward U.S. workers and union bureaucrats leads even to capitulation to the U.S.'s much weaker imperialist rival, the USSR. During the Polish workers' uprising of 1980-1981, the DSA counselled moderation and pacifism to the Polish workers. Revolution, said the DSA, would only cause the Russians to invade. The Polish working class followed similar advice from native Polish capitulators like Walesa and Kuron. The result as we know was that Solidarity ceded the momentum to the Polish Stalinist puppet government. The Stalinists planned and implemented martial law at their leisure, thus saving the statified capitalist regime from workers' revolution for the time being.

### A "Sane" Imperialist Defense?

Unlike the more openly reactionary labor bureaucrats, DSA claims to be opposed to imperialism. It protests U.S. intervention in El Salvador and writes favorably about the Nicaraguan revolution and the Sandinistas. It is part of the Second International which, since 1976 when Willy Brandt became its president, has shifted to a third world orientation and has established contacts with liberation fronts such as the FSLN in Nicaragua, Robert Mugabe's Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe, SWAPO in Namibia and the African National Congress in South Africa.

For the DSA, war and imperialism represent bad policies, not necessary drives of a reactionary capitalist system. Thus while it participates and takes leadership in the anti-war movement, DSA, being "practical," is also for defense. For example, Bogdan Denitch, a DSA National Executive Committee member, argues for a defense system based on a non-imperialist foreign policy. In an article, "Defending Sane Defense," (*Democratic Left*, December 1981) Denitch writes:

*"Socialists, therefore, must keep emphasizing that no sane defense policy can exist without a democratic foreign policy. A nonimperialist U.S. that could ally itself with democratic struggles for self-determination and popular rule would need a different defense policy."*

What kind of creature is a non-imperialist U.S.? Denitch says nothing about socialist revolution, so presumably he believes the capitalist beast can be tamed into a vegetarian pussycat. Being "practical," Denitch discusses two types of defense policy — "one for a U.S. that would follow a democratic foreign policy and one for the here and now." For the "here and now" Denitch and Harrington want a "lean defense system" through cutbacks and arms reductions that meets the national security needs of the present non-democratic and imperialist foreign policy.

Under the guise of "practicality," Denitch proposes a utopian alternative, a democratic foreign policy under capitalism, that only serves to cover for his real program which is designed to give the U.S. a more efficient, "reasonable" and less costly military machine. It is one thing to acknowledge a reality which pacifists ignore: American capitalism will never disarm. It is another thing to *support* that reality if done "reasonably."

The purpose of the U.S. military buildup is war and aggression aimed in particular against the proletariat and

oppressed masses throughout the world — not “defense,” “sane” or otherwise. U.S. capitalism cannot cease to be imperialist. Even when the U.S. pretends to ally itself with national liberation struggles, it is only to prevent them from going in an anti-capitalist, revolutionary direction.

Jimmy Carter’s human rights campaign, his Zimbabwe strategy and his approach to Nicaragua were imperialist policies with “democratic” coverings. DSAers generally spoke favorably of Carter’s policies in these areas because they were similar to their own strategy. The DSA argues that it is in the interest of the U.S. to promote reforms to prevent revolution or Stalinism. The reality is that societies like Nicaragua and Zimbabwe cannot provide real, lasting changes. Mugabe or the Sandinistas, once in power, turn around and attack the workers and peasants who made the revolution, smashing strikes and land seizures.

“Democratic” foreign policy strategies of the capitalists are even more sinister and dangerous because they cover the imperialist aims both here and abroad. It is no accident that all major wars in this century came under liberal Democratic administrations and all were fought for in the name of democracy and freedom.

It is also no accident, as any serious observer must recognize, that under Democrats as well as Republicans “human rights” was never a step toward a crusading democratic foreign policy, but camouflage for the U.S. and its exploitative pawns and allies.

U.S. capitalism, given the world economic crisis, cannot any longer afford the luxury of buying off masses in the neo-colonial countries. Even the few superficially “democratic” pawn governments the U.S. props up are becoming more nakedly brutal. During the past prosperity bubble, a U.S. “democratic foreign policy” could never even come close to existing. To tout this possibility now is practical only in the sense that there are many people who do want to believe it.

### Revolution vs. Reform

Telling the truth as we see it to our fellow workers is the fundamental Leninist principle we follow. Workers can accept or reject our organization based upon its actual politics and not as a result of “practical” deals with the power brokers. The reformist ideologues of the DSA respond that we are doomed to be small as a result. For the moment that is undoubtedly true. The vast majority of workers reject what revolutionaries have to say. However the crisis of capitalism is deepening every day. Inevitably the workers will erupt, not because of us but because they will have to. Today in our press, in our industrial work and by all means possible we fight to show fellow workers what program and what leadership they will need when they rebel.

We know that a frightened and demoralized working class (which thinks of itself as impotent as a result of decades of leadership by a craven bureaucracy which divided every struggle the ranks forced) will not accept our program now. We know that workers, correctly contemptuous of the Democratic Party, might very well be sold a bill of goods by the DSA and its “progressive” friends and try discredited liberalism again. But we also know, as Marxists, that the underlying rot of capitalism is so profound that the “practical” programs of these people are utopian. No, the real test between reformist and revolutionary politics (and the organizational methods which reflect them) will not be detoured for long by the moderation of the moment.

The real battle of the future, however, will be between socialist revolution and fascist “national socialism”. The crime

is that, in the name of socialism, DSA now educates for liberal solutions which cannot work and will only “prove” to the masses that the really radical and dynamic way out of capitalist misery is through fascism. The protectionist seeds fertilized by the DSA today will provide grist for that mill tomorrow.

Workers around the world did rebel at the end of the 1960’s and the beginning of the 1970’s. In the U.S. there were ghetto upheavals and innumerable wildcat strikes in the factories. France saw a massive general strike, and upsurges occurred in Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland, China, the Caribbean and Latin America. Everywhere a new generation of workers disgusted with the old reformist and Stalinist parties was searching for an alternative. Significant numbers of advanced workers and militant students checked out the “far left” — the Maoists, the pseudo-Trotskyists and the lot — and found that underneath the revolutionary rhetoric the politics were basically the same. When the massive round of social explosions cleared away as the workers movement found no alternative and receded, the forces which the centrist left (revolutionary in words, reformist in practice) had gained also dissipated. The “far left” since then has moved even more to the right. Traditional reformism has for the moment regained its hold. But now the crisis is far deeper.

### Marxism Means Revolution

The League for the Revolutionary Party is opposed to both the open reformism of the DSA and the radical-sounding versions of the centrists. Revolutionists are no friends of U.S. or Russian — or Japanese, or Israeli — imperialism, nor of politics that capitulate to any of them. But revolutionists are not sectarians. We will join together in action with workers and others of all political beliefs over issues we agree on: U.S. Out of Central America, Israel Out of Lebanon, Victory to the Polish Workers. In the course of such demonstrations, strikes and campaigns we will demonstrate over time that only the revolutionary program can win serious gains and keep them. That means general strikes against the capitalist attacks on the working class, creation of a workers’ state through revolution, nationalization of industry under workers’ control, central economic planning. To win people to this program it is necessary to build an organization that persistently explains why such politics and no other can succeed: a Leninist revolutionary party.

For us, Karl Marx’s ideas can only live in an atmosphere of serious debate and above all serious practical struggles against the ruling class and its system. Marxism needs not only a real centenary but real and continuous exploration. The past victories of reformism and Stalinism after World War II and the consequent defeats of the working class have left the workers’ movement in a state of near political sterility. Now as the proletariat responds to the crisis of capitalism it must be rearmed, and the need is desperate. Reified Marxism chanted out of little red books or given biblical authority is a blind alley. But abandonment of its essence, its devotion to the class struggle and revolution, is just as much a travesty. The coming resurgence of Marxism will be a product of serious revolutionaries who reject the “old crap” of reforming the system and dedicate themselves to its overthrow. That is the only practical task in this barbarous world that capitalism, kept alive far too long, has produced.

In our opinion Marxism has suffered failures but has not failed. And indeed we recognize that reformism has indeed triumphed and proven very practical. But look at the world around us and see the splendors of its success! ■

# World Crisis

*continued from page 1*

simultaneously in several journals. One of the most optimistic bourgeois organs, *Business Week* magazine, illustrated its "Recovery at Last" article with a graph titled "The modest world recovery ... will bolster world trade ... but will not restore jobs" (February 14). A month later (March 21) it added that capital spending in 1983 will fall by 8.8 percent — hardly a portent of a serious recovery.

A significant sidelight on the bourgeoisie's controversy has been focused on the economic condition of the West's chief rival, the USSR. On Christmas day, a CIA report was released crediting the Soviet Union with a comfortable 4.8 percent growth rate for the past three decades. Congressman Henry Reuss, chairman of the Joint Economic Committee that commissioned the report, stressed the liberals' conclusions: "This important study helps put into perspective for Americans the fact that the USSR, far from being on the verge of collapse, has experienced major growth." Reuss was clearly disputing Reagan's frequent assertions that the USSR, because of its lack of "free enterprise," was economically doomed. A CIA official, releasing a follow-up study, underlined the point: "In fact, we do not consider an economic 'collapse' ... even a remote possibility" (*New York Times*, January 9).

Why this sudden concern for Russia's economic well-being? Reagan bases his hopes for economic recovery on his strategy of reviving the Cold War and restoring America's world economic dominance. As well, he justifies his enormous military build-up by arguing that forcing the USSR to match the U.S. will break its weakening economy. The CIA report, in stressing Russia's purported strength, seeks to alter not Reagan's military strategy itself but its excessive proportions. It reflects the growing sentiment within the U.S. bourgeoisie that Reagan's arms spending will be ineffective and too costly — trying to smash Russia might bring down the faltering U.S. as well.

All the bourgeois spokesmen, whether pessimists or optimists, agree on one thing: with the correct domestic and international policies, the Western and Eastern bloc economies will be able to emerge from the present crisis without undergoing a new great depression on the order of the 1930's. But working-class people must be immediately suspicious of such rosy claims. The crisis has brought depression conditions, not just a mere downturn, to whole regions of the U.S., Canada and Europe — not even to speak of the poor countries. Even though Reagan has found a few positive statistics to crow over lately, the fact remains that massive unemployment, prohibitive consumer interest rates and deteriorating public services are still with us and are showing no signs of improvement.

Moreover, very few people believe in the economic wisdom of any of the official or unofficial ideologists of capitalism any more. Bourgeois economists have been at a total loss to account for the prolonged stagnation of the 1970's — the slow growth rates, declining productivity of industry, unexpectedly accompanied by rampant inflation — that followed the prosperity of the post-World War II boom. Symmetrically, the Stalinist ideological boosters of Soviet "socialism" have been unable to explain the staid economies' long-term decline in growth rates since World War II that have led to frequent working-class uprisings. The recent CIA reports had to acknowledge this decline while seeking to bury its significance. The decline was reconfirmed by Soviet figures in early 1983.

Both industrial output and national income grew by less than 3 percent in 1982, the smallest increases since the world war and well under the targets of Moscow's central planners — who are supposed to be able to control the USSR's economy without being buffeted about by the economic storms that plague Western capitalism.

With open variants of bourgeois ideology floundering, it is no accident that pseudo-Marxist theories are becoming popular again. As world capitalism careens toward collapse, obviously tinkering with the external manifestations of its crisis will not suffice. With the class struggle threatening to heat up, a theory that can influence masses becomes necessary. As in the past, the system will attempt to save itself by resting on the appeal of pseudo-Marxist ideology and pseudo-Marxist political forces to masses of workers. Thus the seemingly arcane task of disassociating authentic revolutionary Marxism from its corruptions is critical.

Germany, Britain, France, Scandinavia, Spain — virtually every European country has witnessed a reform "socialist" government in recent years. Every variety of welfarism and statification is supported by both reformist and Stalinist "Marxists." In the USSR, where "socialism" rules officially, many Stalinist theoreticians in the post-war period have tried to employ the laws of capitalist development discovered by Marx in order to manage their society. The Soviet planners overlook what Marx knew, that these laws lead inexorably to capitalism's crises and decay. The same oversight is made by the advocates of "alternative economic strategies" in Western Europe, leftists wishing to bring "Marxist" theory to the aid of their national capitalism. In sharp contrast to Marx, they all stand for the reform of capitalism, not its overthrow.

The only analysis that can come to grips with the world crisis is Marxism. An honest use of Marx's work would bring out the depressions, fascism and world war that we are facing; reformism cannot deal with it. Western and Eastern social patriots alike have a vested interest in denying any inevitable revolutionary showdown in theory and in fact. They also share a common interest in treating East and West as separate, distinct systems in order to suppress their increasingly visible similarities and their symbiotic roles in the preservation of world capitalism at the expense of the working classes.

## Marxist Theory of Crises

The classical epoch of industrial capitalism ended with the First World War, but this is still the period cited by all defenders of capitalism when they refer to the regenerative powers of the "business cycle" and the periodic crises that engender it. We have to review the classical cycle in order to see how the development of capitalism has compelled it to change.

For Marx, capitalist crises are crises of "overproduction": too many commodities are produced than can be profitably sold, and too much capital has been invested in industry, in the attempt to claim a share of the available profits. This comes about because capitalism, on both the domestic and international scale, is a system of separate and independent ownerships. In prosperous times every capitalist invests as much as he can and steps up production; in particular, the periodic booms stimulate the production of "fixed capital," the buildings and machinery which are not used up in one cycle of production and therefore do not have to be immediately replaced. When times are good, all resources are strained to bring new fixed capital into production; but once this capital starts producing, a flood of commodities is brought onto the market, and the crisis ensues. Unemployment, which falls during the boom, rises again; the high

rate of profit that stimulated the boom declines, first when the low level of unemployment strengthens the bargaining power of workers, and further when the crisis forces production to slacken off.

The crisis eventually takes its toll: masses of workers are thrown out of their jobs, as a result wages are forced back down toward subsistence or below, and the weakest, smallest and least modern plants go under. But the effects of the slump enable profitability to revive: labor can be hired at low wages, factories, equipment and materials can be bought by the surviving capitalists at bargain prices. So the slump is followed by a new recovery period and in turn by a new boom.

Typically, in the course of the boom period, the competition among capitalists stimulates new productive techniques that advance the level of productivity. The temporary shortage of labor during the boom, owing to the low level of unemployment, is the key factor in convincing capitalists to find ways of increasing their use of machinery ("dead labor") in proportion to living labor. Thus the boom period of the cycle carries out what Marx called the "concentration" of capital: its expansion and technological advance — just as the slump period already described tends to carry out the "centralization" of capital, its unification into fewer hands through takeovers and mergers.

"Overproduction" as the analysis of crises is frequently transformed by reformist theorists into "underconsumption," the idea that the mass of workers are paid too little to buy back what they produce. This leads to the program of persuading wise managers and concerned capitalists to advance their own self-interest by paying the workers more; the workers will then be able to consume and purchase more, and thereby crises will be forestalled or dampened.

There are insoluble problems with such a theory. First of all, as Marx pointed out, crises arise in the wake of cyclically high wages for labor, not low. As well, much of what is produced and overproduced under capitalism is means of production, not simply commodities meant for working-class consumption: even the best-paid workers do not buy manufacturing equipment. Thirdly, the masses' underconsumption — in the sense of their inability to afford the full range of commodities needed for a comfortable standard of living — is a constant of life under capitalism through both boom and bust. If underconsumption were the cause of crises, then crisis would not be cyclical but permanent.

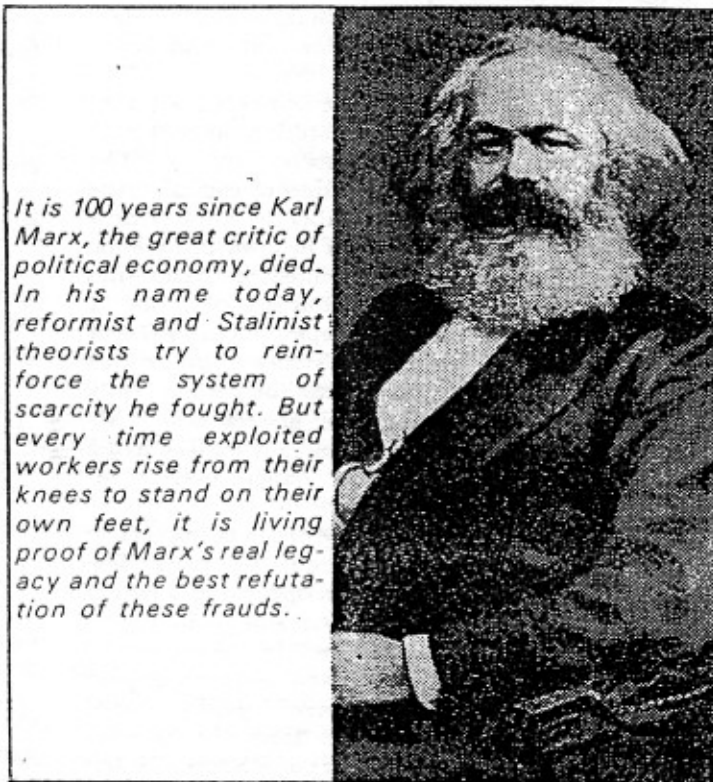
Overproduction demonstrates the necessary contradictions of a system that has the potential to produce real abundance, yet under which that very potential causes a breakdown every time it builds up. In the classical epoch of industrial capitalism the cycle reflected the system's initially progressive role. The class struggle compelled the capitalists to advance productivity, accumulate more and more means of production and therefore to produce useful commodities more cheaply. For the first time in history, scarcity — with all its endemic misery, starvation, wars and pestilence — was no longer an inescapable part of human life.

### The Epoch of Capitalist Decay

The history of the capitalist cycles changed around the turn of the century. It was Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Russian Bolshevik party, who observed during the First World War that the imperialist policies being carried out by all the major capitalist countries were signs of a new stage of capitalism: its epoch of decay. For Lenin, the modern capitalist epoch is one of reaction, counterrevolution and world wars. At the same time it also makes possible the proletarian revolution and the transition to socialism. The

contradictions of capitalism have matured to their fullest.

The imperialist stage, the new epoch, is chiefly characterized by the straitjacketing of free competition by monopoly: that is, by the domination of most spheres of industry by a few giant companies powerful enough to keep out all smaller, weaker competitors. It is the qualitative extension of the tendencies of concentration and centralization.



*It is 100 years since Karl Marx, the great critic of political economy, died. In his name today, reformist and Stalinist theorists try to reinforce the system of scarcity he fought. But every time exploited workers rise from their knees to stand on their own feet, it is living proof of Marx's real legacy and the best refutation of these frauds.*

The hegemonic power of giant capitalists within each country is mirrored by the international hegemony of a handful of states. The result, both domestically and internationally, is that the surplus-value produced by workers everywhere is siphoned away from the weaker capitalists and disproportionately into the pockets of the dominant big capitalists in the imperialist countries. The result is that further economic growth in the non-monopoly industries and in the non-imperialist countries is severely hampered — as we can see in the present day, when none of the ex-colonial countries has been able to rise to the level of the economically advanced, despite the long boom of the post-World War II years. Brazil and Mexico, touted by many bourgeois ideologists as the beacons of capitalist progress in the "Third World," now have proved to be the leading victims of a calamitous policy of debt expansion that is slashing the living standards of millions of workers and peasants in countries facing drastic austerity programs.

Lenin actually expected that the uneven growth characteristic of the epoch of capitalist decay would work out differently: he predicted expansion in the backward countries through the export of capital and, concomitantly, industrial decay in the imperialist countries. While both of these trends have occurred, the predominant tendency has been the opposite: "the rich got richer and the poor got poorer." Growth is still concentrated in the advanced economies. Lenin's erroneous prediction is to be found in his popularly written pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and he does not make clear what the theoretical basis for it was. Nevertheless, his insight into the phenomena of monopoly and

imperialism as signposts of capitalism's epoch of decay was profound. In this, he was following the logic of Marx himself, who foresaw the decay and breakdown of capitalism decades before it came about. For example:

"As soon as (capital) begins to sense itself and become conscious of itself as a barrier to development, it seeks refuge in forms which, by restricting free competition, seem to make the rule of capital more perfect, but are the same time the heralds of its dissolution and of the dissolution of the mode of production resting on it."  
(*Grundrisse*, page 651)

The Marx-Lenin understanding of the new epoch was that capitalism was beginning to transform itself into its opposite; it was laying the basis for the "invading socialist society." The deepening concentration and centralization of capital made the system appear stronger. But in actuality the displacement of individual, competitive entrepreneurs in favor of national and international blocks of capital pointed to capitalism's doom. Society-wide economic organization is a condition of socialism and working-class rule; by keeping industry out of the hands of the proletariat capitalism sought to prolong its own existence and use the new forms against the workers. On a world scale, the internationalization of economic life threatened capitalism's national bases. And imperialism had a similar response: rule by the dominant nations over an international economy.

The Marxist-Leninist assessment of the epoch of imperialist decay was confirmed by World War I and its aftermath. The war's immense slaughter and destruction opened up a period of social revolutions beginning in Russia and spreading to central Europe. The system defended itself by relying on the Social Democracy, the reformist parties who held their grip on sectors of the working class by means of benefits paid for out of the superprofits imperialism extracted from the colonial countries. Reformism rested on key layers of workers who felt that they had an interest in defending capitalism. It was not long, however, before the world capitalist economy collapsed in the Great Depression of the 1930's.

In line with the new epoch, the Depression, among other things, totally altered the behavior of the business cycle. At its depths in the early 1930's, U.S. unemployment reached 25 percent, and the average rate of profit in industry dipped below zero. There were ups and downs within the overall depression of the decade, but the normal processes of capitalist recovery never took hold: too little surplus-value was available for new investment. Not even the government "pump priming" of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal cured the crisis.

### The Falling Rate of Profit

The chronic disease that produced such severe symptoms as world war and the Great Depression had already been analyzed by Marx. He called it the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Bourgeois economists had previously observed this law, but Marx discovered the reasons for it. Its underlying cause is the growing concentration of capital, the need to step up productivity, that compels capital to produce with an increasing preponderance of "dead labor" (machinery, buildings, raw material) over living labor. Since surplus-value is extracted only out of the labor of current workers, (machinery in production only transfers to new commodities value that has been previously produced), the rate of profit as a proportion of capital invested necessarily declines.

Recent bourgeois economists as well as many professed Marxists have disputed this law of Marx's. History, on the other hand, has verified it. Significant evidence is provided by

statistics on capital accumulation: since new investment must come out of profits, a tendency for the profit rate to fall will naturally bring about a falling rate of growth. And while exact, reliable information on capitalist profits is impossible to find (the capitalists conceal it from the workers, from the government tax agents and from each other through innumerable maneuvers, "legal" and illegal), scholars have been able to come up with aggregate figures on accumulation for given countries. Consider the figures in the table taken from the book *Capital in the American Economy*, by Simon Kuznets, pages 64-65. He observes that the percentage rate of growth in capital stock for the U.S., per decade, was 60.8 in the 1869-89 period, 59.4 in 1889-1909, 43.3 in 1909-29, and 29.6 in 1929-55.

### Cyclical Crises Linked to Profit Fall

The long-term decline in growth rates is striking, especially considering that the figures for the two most recent of Kuznets' periods include the years of build-up to world wars. When Kuznets in separate calculations excludes military industries, the decline is even sharper.

The long-term fall in the rate of profit arising from the concentration of capital is not the same thing as the short-term profit fluctuations dependent on the business cycle: the latter reflect month-to-month shifts in working-class strength, largely according to the level of unemployment. But the cyclical crises and the law of the falling rate of profit are closely linked. The long-term fall is carried out, ratchet-like, by the periodic crises: overproduction forces more backward capitalists to devalue their commodities as new, cheaper production techniques are introduced. At the same time, the value of obsolescent invested capital is also forced down. At the depths of the crisis, surviving capitalists can buy up cheap equipment from those who go under, and thus the rate of profit on new investment turns up again. But the strongest capitalists, because of their near-monopoly power and their influence over the state, manage to survive even when their productivity is backward. Their overvaluation of obsolescent capital amounts to "fictitious capitalization," a phenomenon also investigated by Marx; the build-up of fictitious capital perpetuates the falling rate of profit tendency.

The falling rate of profit tendency lies behind capitalism's epoch of decay: it necessitates the disproportionate appropriation of surplus-value by the dominant capitalists. It made monopoly at home and imperialism abroad inexorable. The decline in profitability also prolonged and deepened the cyclical slumps, thus creating the Great Depression as a characteristic "downturn" of the epoch of decay. This interrelation of several strands of Marx's theory of the development of capitalism is what makes possible a comprehensive explanation of modern-day crises.

### Post-World War II Boom

Only when the U.S. entered the Second World War did its economy get back on its feet after the Great Depression. The government's astronomical war budget, financed through debt, restored employment and profits. The American victory in the war made good the U.S. debt, but other capitalist powers, even those on the winning side, were crushed economically by the war.

The post-war boom began in the U.S. and spread to the other imperialist countries. As we explained in *Socialist Voice* No. 17 ("On the Road to Capitalist Crash"), this unprecedentedly long depression-free period was a unique occurrence. It resulted from the cataclysmic world-wide defeat

suffered by the working class as a result of fascism, war and the crushing of the post-war revolutionary upheavals through the agency of Stalinist Russia (whose workers' state had been destroyed on the eve of the war) and the Stalinized Communist Parties, with the aid of the reformists. As well, the hegemonic economic and military power of the U.S. ruling class made possible a greater concentration of resources than ever before; control over surplus-value was centralized on an international scale. Together these factors brought together sufficient amounts of surplus-value extracted from workers to re-establish the profitability of capitalist economy.

Governmental intervention policies from the 1930's continued after the war with the effect of dampening the business cycle. There were subsidies to industry through the arms budget and other state spending and policies like unemployment insurance to prevent working class incomes from sinking as low as before the war. But all that these Keynesian measures accomplished was to sustain the prosperity bubble once it got started; they could not create it. Only the capitalist victory in the class struggle over the workers, together with the restructuring of capital through the war, managed to do that.

The boom built up a massive balloon of fictitious capital, the various capitalist claims to a share in surplus value based on waste production, overvaluation and speculation rather than productive investment. In the classical business cycles, such balloons were periodically burst by cyclical crises; in contrast, the post-war balloon has been continually inflated. The danger of a cataclysmic collapse should a severe crisis occur only encourages capitalist governments to try desperately to keep postponing the crisis — and thereby making its consequences even greater.

### Ideology of the Boom

The post-war boom produced a powerful impression among people. In the imperialist countries it appeared that capitalism had solved its economic problems once and for all; so the bourgeoisie argued through its news media, schools, churches and every ideological pulpit. Professional economists were in the vanguard of the campaign to thrust memories of the 1930's depression into the past. Indeed, the depression did seem to have been forgotten. Even today, when the slide into the next great depression is already underway, the ideologists insist that proper governmental policies will reverse it. But today the prescriptions are far from unanimous. Keynesianism is discredited, having produced in the 1970's not stability but "stagflation." The trickle-down conceptions of Ronald Reagan and Milton Friedman proved themselves worthless in a much shorter time. At present, no successful capitalist solutions are available, but all the pro-capitalist theorists guarantee that they exist.

The situation is little better among professed Marxists. During the 1950's and 1960's, many abandoned Marxism because its assertion of inevitable capitalist crises seemed unreal. Indeed, such a period of uninterrupted prosperity during the epoch of capitalist decay had never been foreseen by either Marx or Lenin. Prophetically enough, Trotsky in the 1920's had referred to such a possibility:

**"If we grant—and let us grant it for the moment — that the working class fails to rise in revolutionary struggle, but allows the bourgeoisie the opportunity to rule the world's destiny for a long number of years, say, two or three decades, then assuredly some sort of new equilibrium will be established. Europe will be thrown violently into reverse gear. Millions of European workers will die from unemployment and malnutrition. The United States will be compelled to**

**reorient itself on the world market, reconvert its industry, and suffer curtailment for a considerable period. Afterwards, after a new world division of labor is thus established in agony for 15 or 20 or 25 years, a new epoch of capitalist upswing might perhaps ensue."** ("Report on the World Economic Crisis" at the Third World Congress of the Communist International, June 1921).

But even Trotsky, noting that a prolonged boom could result from a major proletarian defeat, did not elaborate upon this conception. The post-war prosperity, unforeseen and seemingly permanent, provided the excuse as well as the material incentives for the deserters of Marxism. After all, the failure of Marx and the Marxists to understand the potential of capitalism was an error of no small significance, they claimed.

No doubt Marxists have made errors. But it is always necessary and productive to examine why they were made. Was something indeed wrong with the fundamental theory?

To our mind, no. The heart of Marxism is its partisan allegiance to the proletarian class struggle. With all the great Marxists this has been coupled to a revolutionary optimism, a profound belief in the capacity of the working class to change the world. Marxism is science with a purpose. As a theory of action, it cannot rest upon objectivist indifference or cynicism, which in the last analysis becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus Marxist predictions, while they may have an alternative character ("socialism or barbarism"), tend to be based on the presumption of proletarian struggle and victory rather than their opposite. Thus Marx made his ringing proclamation of the death knell of capitalism, knowing full well that this depended not only on economic laws but above all on the proletariat's political deeds.

Lenin's erroneous predictions during World War I on the future of imperialism were due in all likelihood to his revolutionary optimism. Unwilling to accept as final the degree to which the Western proletariat could be bought off by their rulers and the reformists, he imagined that capitalism would prefer to turn its new investments toward the colonies where a massive and dangerous proletariat had not yet been created. Likewise Trotsky on the eve of World War II couldn't calculate the consequences of the Stalinist counterrevolution in the USSR that meant the restoration of capitalism; he had to operate on the assumption that the workers' revolution would intervene.

But when the workers have suffered historic defeats, the Marxist method can still be applied. Marxists can explain both the era of prosperity and its impermanence, unlike the deserters from (and the fraudulent defenders of) Marxism who interpreted the post-war boom as denying the epoch of capitalist decay. The latter assessed capitalism as if it were again ascendant; as if there were progressive as well as reactionary wings of capital, capitalists who could be aligned with in order to further radical struggles. No wonder reformist and nationalist ideologies flourished. In "the real world," capitalism seemed to have eradicated its "final" crisis and tempered its periodic ones.

With "official" Stalinist and reformist theories this was explicit. In the advanced countries the continued existence of capitalism was the first postulate of every political program. The popular front and the "mixed economy" were accepted as obviously beneficial, with socialism relegated to the bye and bye. Likewise, in the rebelling "Third World" a whole stage of progressive capitalism and multi-class fronts was posed before the socialist revolution could be deemed timely.

Other professed Marxists went along with the political

conclusions of this "progressive capitalism" approach. But not being committed to parties which had to maintain a working-class facade, they could be even more openly cynical and could question the proletarian basis of Marxism itself. Whether it was said openly or not, these people believed that capitalism had become so progressive fundamentally that its basic material problems had been solved — leaving only its cultural immiseration to be dealt with.

For example, at the height of the boom the predominant theory masquerading as up-to-date Marxism was presented in the book *Monopoly Capital* by Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy. They argued that in the (supposedly non-competitive) monopoly stage of capitalism, the problem was no longer insufficient profits but "the tendency of surplus to rise;" hence economic crises are replaced by long-term stagnation, on the one hand, and social crises ("emptiness, degradation, ... moral bankruptcy") on the other. For this reason among others, "the answer of traditional Marxian orthodoxy — that the industrial proletariat must eventually rise in revolution against its capitalist oppressors — no longer carries conviction." Baran and Sweezy denied that capitalism generated crises so profound that capital could resolve them only through unrelenting attacks on the working class and thereby abandoned all hope of proletarian revolution.

Even today when the crisis is upon us, the memory of the post-war boom remains powerful. Radical theorists, like the open defenders of capitalism, still think of the world in terms of 19th-century cycles. Take for example the recent book *What's Wrong with the U.S. Economy?*, written by radical economists associated with the left-talking wing of the trade union bureaucracy. The authors lay the blame for the crisis of the 1970's on a corporate power grab:

"1) Corporations developed and abused *too much supervisory control in production*. 2) Corporations erected and nearly strangled us with a *top-heavy corporate bureaucracy*. 3) Less and less subject to market or popular discipline, corporations generated *spreading waste of resources and products*. 4) Underneath all these problems, problems emerged as more and more people found it necessary to rebel against *corporate domination in the domestic and world economy*."

The suggestion is that the capitalists took advantage of the prosperous conditions of the post-war boom in order to assert their power — and thereby brought the boom to an end. It follows that if corporate power could be imposed so quickly it can just as easily be reversed, through a political struggle for "workplace democracy," "community enterprises," "democratic planning" and "democratic capital controls." These "principles for pulling ourselves out of the economic crisis" are based on the assumption that devastating crises are still reversible even under capitalism. Socialism would be better able to avoid "these recurring headaches," but serious problems can be escaped more easily simply by democratizing capitalism.

The idea that the working class is to play not a revolutionary role but one of goosing the capitalists into running a better, more democratic society is an old one. It was originated by Eduard Bernstein, the pre-World War I Social Democrat whose "revisionist Marxism" reasoned that capitalist development was making the system evolve in a socialist direction. Workers' cooperatives and the like were useful to keep things democratic in the meantime. Bernsteinian revisionism was based on an accommodation to the superficial material realities of the day; the catastrophes of the interwar period proved it disastrously wrong. Today such theories must

also rely on a blindness of historical hindsight.

Such reformists squirm in various ways to find new schemes for restoring the old prosperity. In France, Francois Mitterrand's popular front regime started off two years ago with a "bold" policy of nationalizations aimed at bolstering French capitalism during the world recession. But this program and its few sops to the workers bogged down and have now been replaced with an austerity policy (as we foresaw from the start: see *Socialist Voice* No. 14, page 15). Mitterrand's nationalization policies are typical of today's reformism, and its failure was inevitable. So is the "socialist" austerity policy: it too will be vastly insufficient to overcome the crisis conditions.

For the world crisis that emerged in the early 1970's and is now intensifying is not simply another cyclical downturn. It represents the re-emergence of the conditions of epochal decay that were suppressed by the post-World War II boom; it foreshadows the onset of a new Great Depression. In this deepest crisis since the 1930's, the major capitalist states are trying their best to prevent big firms from going under: government bail-outs, insurance schemes, guarantees of unrecoverable bank loans and nationalization are techniques that have been used. But these only inflate the crisis balloon more. In a world as unstable as this one — with imperialist rivalries, nationalist uprisings and powerful working classes increasingly frustrated at living under crisis conditions — the balloon cannot float much longer.

### The Crisis of Stalinism

It is not only the West that is on the brink. The collapse of Poland's economy, both before and after the flourishing of the Solidarity movement, should have signalled even the most abject apologists for Soviet-style "socialism" that the Stalinist countries were not immune from the world crisis. Other Stalinist states have had crises and years of negative growth before, but not like Poland's. A leading Polish economist wrote in a Warsaw newspaper recently that "this is one of the biggest catastrophes in world economic history" (cited in the *New York Times*, March 24, 1983).

Our analysis that the Stalinist states are stultified capitalist economies has been presented in detail before (see *Socialist Voice* No. 2). At first we could only point out that the crisis of Stalinism was inevitable; now the facts to prove it are overwhelming. The apologists who believed that crises were impossible in the "post-capitalist" societies have been proved wrong.

But that does not prevent them from insisting that Stalinism's crisis has nothing to do with capitalism. Thus the pseudo-Trotskyist Ernest Mandel insists that Poland "in any case has been hit by a crisis of underproduction and not overproduction" (*Intercontinental Press*, June 28, 1982). Aside from the fact that for Marxists underproduction crises are characteristic of pre-capitalist, pre-industrial societies (and that "post-capitalist" economies, where "labor power is no longer a commodity," should not be hit by production crises at all), such a statement is based on a contradictory, superficial assessment.

Mandel makes similar yet even more absurd arguments in a new article on "China: the Economic Crisis" (in the 1982 *Socialist Register*); the title itself is a refutation of Mandel's decades-long world view. While he claims that China is progressive because of the fact "that labor power is no longer a commodity, that there is no longer a labor market in China, that workers have job security and a guaranteed minimum wage," Mandel also speaks of "the enormous extent of rural unemployment and urban unemployment" and "the rise of



youth unemployment" (apparently he means job security for employed workers only), the ten percent of Chinese peasants "who do not eat enough to still their hunger," and inflation rates of 15 to 20 percent (so much for guaranteed minimum wages). Then in a postscript he adds, "As a result of retrenchment, thousands of factories have been idled or shut down" so that urban unemployment doubled from early 1980 to late 1981; what's more, "the threat of dismissal now hangs over the heads of 100 million wage-earners in China." But of course this has nothing in common with capitalism and its over-

derlying cause of overproduction crises is the same in the Stalinist form of statified capitalism. But Stalinism has sacrificed some of capitalism's economic flexibility, notably the ability to close down unprofitable operations at will. It thereby delays the onset of crises and so makes them all the more devastating when they ultimately occur.

In the West, the crisis of overproduction makes itself visible as an excess of commodities (both for consumers and for industry) which fail to be sold. In the East there is hardly an excess of consumer goods; that is because Stalinist priorities



Left: Richard Moe, head of a U.S. auto parts company, says "Export the Recession" and "Buy American." The UAW's reformist leadership agrees.

Right: Japanese workers, already economically hit, at a demonstration. Capitalism in crisis heads toward trade war and a future world war. The only answer is Marx's: "Workers of the world, unite!"

production crises!

Under Stalinism, the capitalist tendency toward periodic overproduction exists but takes on a somewhat different form. The "centrally planned" economies still represent separate capitals — both within each country, and especially across national borders. For example, each small Eastern European country demands its own steelworks. In the 1970's Poland built the huge Huta Katowice complex, designed to produce more steel than Poland could possibly export or use itself — at a time when there was already tremendous idle capacity in the steel industry of its hoped-for markets, the United States and Western Europe.

In traditional capitalism, market forces — either through falling sales or advance surveys — would pressure against such construction during slumps. But with Stalinism the construction continues, following the directives (hardly scientific plans) of the central administration. No ministry or section of the bureaucracy will cancel its plans alone for fear of getting behind in the competitive race. Under these conditions, the crisis finally occurs when a shortage of materials or capital for construction compels whole projects to be shut down or left partially completed and therefore largely useless. The un-

inevitably downgrade consumer production, carrying out the Marxist law of the subordination of consumer goods to production goods in capitalism to its limit. But this represents no "crisis" of underproduction: under Stalinism, consumer goods are *permanently* underproduced. On the other hand, in the Stalinist crisis industrial inventories increase much faster than usable output; and the abandoned and partially completed projects that dot the landscape — despite decades of bureaucratic recriminations and exhortations to plan better — are testimony to the law of overproduction.

The Marxist falling rate of profit tendency also has its effect under Stalinist capitalism, although since this system has existed only for just over four decades the century-long growth figures that we have for the United States are not available. We cited Russia's economic decline six years ago (*Socialist Voice* No. 4, page 22). Now the CIA report on the Soviet economy provides new evidence. For example, its measurement of annual rates of growth in the gross national product (GNP), calculated for each five-year-plan period, show a decline from 5.5 percent in 1951-55 and 5.9 percent in 1956-60, to 5.0 percent in 1961-65, 5.2 percent in 1966-70, 3.7 percent in 1971-75 and 2.7 percent in 1976-80. Likewise, the

CIA's calculation of Soviet industrial production shows a decline from an annual growth rate of 9.4 percent in the 1951-59 period to 6.3 percent in 1960-75 and 3.4 percent in 1975-80. (The USSR's official rates for the same periods are larger but declining in parallel: 12.0 percent, 8.2 percent and 4.4 percent.)

As we argued for the U.S., declining growth rates reflect declining profit rates, since accumulation is based on investment of profits. For the USSR this connection is even more striking, since the CIA also indicates that investment rates in the USSR have sharply increased: from 14 percent of GNP in 1950 to 33 percent of GNP in 1980. That is, increasing investment produces decreasing growth, a sure sign that the rate of return on investment — the rate of profit — has been falling over the 30-year period.

The falling rate of profit tendency has helped bring the Stalinist economies from their peaks at the hour of their triumphant counterrevolutions over the proletariat in the 1930's and 1940's, down to the morass of capitalist decay. As with traditional capitalism, this tendency exacerbates the conditions that generate crises.

A number of leftist commentators have applauded the CIA report for demonstrating the "progressiveness" of Soviet "socialism" despite its obvious difficulties. There is considerable irony in this. Remember the old days during the boom when the Stalinists crowed about how the Russian and satellite economies were growing at a fantastic pace, how soon they would outdistance the U.S., Japan and West Europe, how hours of work were to be qualitatively reduced? Now the sycophants have to search feverishly for something positive to say. Thus the *Guardian* newspaper (March 23) wrote, "Clearly, the Soviet Union has major problems. It also has major economic strengths, including natural resources that are the envy of the U.S." — as if mineral wealth is a socialist accomplishment. The *Guardian* also criticized the CIA for pointing to declining Soviet growth "without mentioning that even in slowing down during the 1970's it had kept pace with the U.S." Keeping pace with an economy undergoing depression conditions is no great achievement either. And it is a far cry from the claims of outstripping the reactionary West that used to constitute the *Guardian's* "proof" that Russia was socialist.

In a similar vein, the pseudo-Trotskyist *Militant* (April 1) used the CIA report to proclaim that "The Soviet workers state is a dynamic and progressive society." Likewise *Frontline*, a new Stalinist paper descended from the *Guardian*, concluded that "The fact of the matter is that the Soviet Union today is an economic powerhouse." That's what all the bourgeois ideologists say about the U.S. economy when they pray for profits to recover. But workers and socialists who think for themselves know better — and ought to in the case of the USSR as well.

*Frontline*, in defending Russia's economic performance, is forced into the argument that "The decline in the rate of GNP is certainly troubling, although a certain leveling off from the spectacular gains of the earlier period was only to be expected." Of course, *Frontline's* progenitors in the 1950's neither expected nor predicted anything of the kind. In fact, the Stalinists had to say the exact opposite in order to maintain some semblance of a Marxist justification for calling Russia socialist. For beneath all the Stalinists' concern over the USSR's growth rates lies the class question: if Russia is a workers' state (and certainly if it is already socialist!), it must be developing towards a communist society of abundance. Such a transitional state would have to show *accelerating* rates of productivity, unhampered by the social relations (class

barriers) of capitalism. Publishing today in the aftermath of the cynical corrosion of Marxist hopes, *Frontline* blithely demonstrates that Russia is no kind of transitional state at all without realizing that this is what it is saying.

As we have shown, the virtue of the crisis for a capitalist economy is that it revives profitability and enables expansion to resume. But this requires raising unemployment levels and wiping out weaker enterprises. (No wonder Stalinist planners openly wish they could fire masses of workers!) Stalinism has been deprived of these economic weapons in exchange for central administration. This trade-off enables backward countries to build up their economies slightly, starting from a point where so much basic industrial construction is needed that overproduction is not an immediate problem and huge growth rates can be recorded for a few years. But the trade-off presents a major obstacle to reaching modern levels of productivity for an industrial country operating under the economic laws of capitalism. That is why Stalinism is facing the crisis in its present form: it has been delayed for years, but is seemingly permanent once it occurs. That is, unless the Stalinists could smash the workers again, reduce their standard of living drastically and eliminate all the gains of the Bolshevik revolution which they haven't yet been strong enough to destroy.

### Crisis of Reformism

We have seen that traditional Western capitalism also has crises in a form different from the classical business cycle. It too has become hidebound, weighed down by giant firms whose collapse would be catastrophic for even the strongest countries. The rulers of both East and West are faced with an overwhelming dilemma: their economies need to undergo a full-scale crisis to wipe out capital and smash the working classes, but the size of the collapse required and of the industries affected is so great that this "cure" cannot be risked. Its effects are unpredictable, for one thing, and a revolutionary response by masses of workers is feared. Hence both Eastern and Western rulers are attempting to run business as usual, and the forces building up for a future collapse remain.

For several decades the Stalinist system and its ideology of nationalization as a solution to economic problems served capitalism well. It was a bulwark against revolution in Europe; it channeled the mass upheaval in China into a nationalist dead end; it persuaded the workers and peasants during innumerable colonial revolutions that their interests were the same as the national bourgeoisie's; it acted as a reformist prop of imperialism in the advanced countries. But that has changed. Its economy no longer works as a model, even when seen through the rosier glasses. The USSR can no longer bolster the collapsing satellite economies. It can no longer offer to prop up a tiny Nicaragua in its nationalist rebellion against U.S. domination the way it once took Cuba in tow.

Moreover, the original strength of the Stalinists — like the Social Democrats before them — came from the mass proletarian *movements* whose leadership they usurped. This too has changed. Neither brand of reformism now commands the enthusiasm of masses once the workers go into motion. But this does not mean that their futile reformist programs are harmless. In the twenties and thirties millions of people in desperate economic conditions, finding no way out on the left, turned to fascism and its proclamation of "national socialism." The same can happen again — all the more so since the "solution" capitalism requires for another upswing is a bout of violent defeats for the working class.

Reformist stultification on a "democratic" basis is useless for

capital, as Mitterrand's effort has shown. But if capitalism is to revive it needs further centralization, something now only possible through outright repression of the masses. "Liberalizing" Stalinism no longer provides the cadre to accomplish this for the sake of a promised communist future, and "democratic" reformism needs prosperity to operate. Only a new fascist movement — based on distorted hopes for a radical alternative but channeled through a program of racist and anti-communist violence. — can carry out capitalism's economic program. The reformists and Stalinists who offer the masses no *revolutionary* solution to the capitalist crisis will share the responsibility if fascist radicalism wins out.

Marx was often mocked both during his own lifetime and after for predicting the collapse of capitalism. Yet his

description of the system that advances only through economic crisis has proved remarkably accurate, and his prediction of the epoch of capitalist decay was more than confirmed by the thirty years of unprecedented horrors from World War I to World War II. Those who regard the fundamentals of Marxism as disproven are basing their hopes for capitalism's future on the ephemeral post-World War II boom — that is, on the unprecedented defeat of the working class that made it possible (as well as on the labor-aristocratic and middle-class perspective of the most insulated imperialist countries). Capitalism in the 1930's already proved what brutalities it is capable of in times of desperation. One hundred years after Marx's death, it remains true that the horrors of capitalism's decay can be prevented only by its overthrow. ■

## Socialism in One Hospital?

During the past year a left-sounding organization, the Bolshevik League (BL), has begun doing political work in the hospital workers' union, District 1199. In *Socialist Voice* No. 17 we analyzed the disastrous way in which the Stalinist politics advocated by the BL have propped up capitalism and betrayed the working-class movement historically. Since workers who support the League for the Revolutionary Party have been active in 1199 since 1976, a comparison of our Trotskyist strategy with the BL's Stalinism is in order here as well. The BL's Stalinism is distinguished by a certain leftish facade — but when the facade is stripped away, little remains besides the old reformist outlook, the old adaptation to the labor bureaucracy and an even more fundamentally reactionary world view. Nowhere is this more apparent than in 1199.

The issues under debate in 1199 are crucial ones, for the health care crisis is dire and threatens to become far worse. In New York City alone, over a dozen hospitals have been closed, at the same time that unemployment, inflation and cutbacks are worsening health conditions for the working class. The capitalist crisis has also undermined 1199 hospital workers' resistance to the bosses' attacks on their living standards; not since the 1976 strike has there been a militant union-wide response.

The LRP has always fought, in the unions and out, to convince working people that the only solution to the capitalist crisis we face is the socialist revolution made by the working class. Until a proletarian revolutionary party is built, the masses of workers will see no alternative to the reformist trade union bureaucracy which accepts and defends the capitalist system — including the right of the bourgeoisie to exploit workers. But to convince even revolutionary-minded workers to dedicate themselves to socialism, it is necessary to demonstrate in practice that workers' victories are possible, that the sell-out bureaucrats can be overcome — once the workers recognize their power as a united class.

For this reason the LRP has consistently argued for a general strike by all workers fighting back against cutbacks and union concessions. Such an action would show the workers the strength of their class and advance their political consciousness to where they could see the necessity and possibility of a revolutionary solution; it would also bring the capitalist system to the point of defeat. We learned this strategy from Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The misnamed Bolshevik League has nothing in common with it.

One of the Bolsheviks' great conflicts was with the "economists," the particular tendency of reformists who wished to keep the workers' struggles within trade union

bounds. This policy, Lenin argued, in effect left the decisive political questions in the manipulative hands of the bourgeois liberal politicians and their pseudo-left camp followers. To see how the Bolshevik League fits into this pattern today, let us start with its leaflet concerning last summer's contract negotiations, "Build a Rank and File Movement of Hospital and Health Care Workers" (reprinted in the July-August 1982 *Workers Tribune*). It begins by criticizing the proposals put forward by the 1199 negotiating committee:

"There is no demand for an improvement in the quality of health care for the working class as a whole. Hospital workers must begin to take the lead in fighting for quality and free medical care for the working class. Without this last demand, hospital workers are cutting themselves off from their true base of support. They are also tacitly going along with the cutbacks which have so affected the quality of health care."

Obviously, the BL is not a typical trade union reformist or centrist group that simply wants to fight more militantly for slightly better wages and conditions — or these days, to give up a little less than the bureaucrats are willing to. The BL sees larger medical care issues for all workers as real issues for hospital workers to fight for, and it sees that the bureaucrats have kept the workers divided, preventing united struggles.

But how is "quality and free medical care for the working class" to be won? Through a contract struggle by one sector of the working class, as the BL advocates? *Free medical care for all* achieved by one union's contract? That's a joke! But this absurdity shares with the labor reformist strategy the idea of sticking to union-bound activity rather than political action. The difference is that the ordinary "economist" labor reformists are rotten but not absurd. It is perfectly possible to win slight modifications in wages and job conditions through union contracts, as they believe. The union bureaucrats have always done this, always ignoring the wider class consequences. The BL recognizes the workers' weakness, but the question is what they attribute it to and what they propose to do about it. Here is what they claim:

"...the unions say that when they go on strike, they do so to get improvement of the services offered to the population. However, for the past few years, their strikes have hit the working class harder than the bourgeoisie, because they have not been directed in the sense of creating an alliance with the working class, but uniquely in the sense of obtaining better working conditions and salaries to the detriment of the working class."

It is not, as the BL says, the workers' desire for "obtaining

better working conditions and salaries" that is "to the detriment of the working class." This is a typical, reactionary bourgeois complaint. Obviously, "better working conditions and salaries" for one section of the working class is painful to the capitalists whose profits are slightly reduced as a consequence — but it in no way hurts other workers. These days, contract struggles that win real gains would be a great inspiration to other workers!

The BL argues that public workers' strikes "hit the working class harder than the bourgeoisie" because they have shut down subways and buses that workers use and cut off hospitals and other vital services. Any class-conscious worker, however, knows first of all that these services have been left to decay by their bourgeois managers dedicated to profits rather than service; and secondly that the blame for a strike falls not on the workers, who are always reluctant to give up their livelihoods as well as the services they perform. The fault is the bosses' looking to squeeze out the last drop of profits. When a "communist" organization tells you that the workers are to blame for the hardships of a strike, something treacherous is going on.

But remember, the BL is not a typical union-oriented reformist group caught with its reactionary pants down. Nor is the BL rushing out to shake hands with the National Association of Manufacturers, as did its predecessor, the Communist Party of yore — at least not yet. No, it wants to come to radical-sounding conclusions. When it tries to build pink castles on reactionary hot air, then the BL rises to its fantasies of the absurd. As an alternative to strikes it proposes keeping the hospitals and other services open to the public for free:

"Instead of striking, workers could open up clinics for free, refuse to process Medicaid bills to keep the hospital from receiving reimbursements, etc. These actions would gain more sympathy from the working class and probably guarantee the resolution of contract disagreements in a manner more favorable to the workers."

Zounds! Sounds really great! But where are the doctors coming from? Just how are the worker-run hospitals supposed to pay for their supplies during such a "militant alternative to the traditional strike"? What does the BL think the police are going to do when workers seize hospitals and transit workers open up the subways for free? The capitalists aren't going to abandon their private property rights even for a moment, not even in one hospital!

The real point is not that free medical care and public services aren't possible. In fact, workers have used such imaginative and militant tactics successfully in the past — but in the course of general strikes of at least a city-wide scope, not in isolated institutions. The most recent example was in Gdansk, Poland during August 1980: the regional Inter-Factory Strike Committee determined which industries should shut down and which services should continue to operate for the public, based on the widest interests of the working class as a whole. Working people are capable of such efforts — but trying to duplicate the conditions of a general strike within a few isolated hospitals will get nowhere. It takes a centralized workers' institution like the Inter-Factory Strike Committee (an echo of the revolutionary Russian soviets — workers councils — of 1917) to confront and provide an alternative to the power of the bosses' state.

To win such gains, at minimum a social movement is required that electrifies and mobilizes masses of people in a political upheaval. When the BL claims that the same can be done through a contract struggle, it finds itself in the position

of trying to bottle an earthquake. Or more mundanely, trying to contain political struggles in economist forms.

The Bolshevik League prefers to resort to economist tactics rather than argue for the necessity of a general strike when it talks about the need for working-class unity. This position is ironically analogous to its Stalinist conception of national liberation struggles around the world: keep each revolution nationally isolated by rejecting any call for international proletarian unity as "Trotskyite"; above all, make sure that each struggle stays on acceptably capitalist grounds by denying that revolutions in "Third World" countries today can be carried out on a socialist program. The BL deserves credit for discovering how to apply the Stalinist doctrine of "socialism in one country" to the New York City hospitals. It works here just as brilliantly as it does on the world scale, where every self-styled "socialist" leadership has fallen back into the clutches of the imperialist world market.

The Bolshevik League hopes to achieve its "socialism in one hospital" through the device of rank and filism. Thus the anti-strike leaflet concludes with the call:

"The workers of 1199 themselves must begin to organize independently of the bureaucrats. Only by creating a strong, independent democratic rank and file organization can the workers begin to redirect the union to serve their interests and the interests of the working class as a whole....The rank and file must develop its own press to expose the maneuvers and power plays of the bureaucrats and to open up democratic debate among the workers themselves."

Who could oppose the idea that the rank and file — that is, the membership as a whole — should control their union? The problem is that rank and file workers have many different points of view as to what their union should do. Union democracy is a fine thing, but by itself it doesn't solve the problems workers face. As soon as somebody, some leader, presents a particular course of action or just a single proposal, some rank and filers approve and others disapprove. What then is the "rank and file" solution? Which rank and filers should replace the present bureaucrats? When an outfit like the BL raises rank and file control as the ultimate solution for union salvation, watch your wallet!

Indeed, rank and filism as the familiar policy of reformist and centrist organizations working in the trade unions has been a convenient way of keeping under wraps the socialist *political solutions* the organizations supposedly stand for. In the case of the Bolshevik League it fits in perfectly with the BL's economist union strategy. We summed up the chief problem with rank and filism in an article in the December 1982 issue of the *Socialist Voice Hospital Workers' Bulletin*:

"Rank and filism is a particular political philosophy which says that unions can be reformed into organizations capable of solving workers' problems. Rank and filists say that workers should concentrate their activities within the narrow framework of one particular union. But workers' fundamental plight doesn't originate in the individual workplace or union; the capitalist crisis is national and international in scope. Therefore a rank and file or individual union solution to our problems is impossible."

By confining their efforts to the union framework, rank and filists prevent themselves from fundamentally confronting the politics of the union bureaucracy, since those politics are based on defending the capitalist system as a whole. Many rank and file groups around the country are inspired by one "socialist" organization or another, but this hasn't prevented them from supporting the left (and not-so-left) union

bureaucrats whose politics and actions are indistinguishable from the bureaucratic mainstream.

When ordinary reformist and centrist economists hide their politics behind "rank and file" verbiage, it works — because they don't have all that much that's radical to say that's different from the bureaucrats. When the BL proposes "socialism" in one or a dozen hospitals and tells us that this is the "rank and file" answer, the contradiction between maintaining the facade of radicalism and the reality of tailing union bureaucrats becomes manifest.

There are in 1199 at least two existing "rank and file" groups ("Nobody here but us chickens"). One is a creature of the old Leon Davis-Jesse Olson wing of the bureaucracy, "1199ers for SUD's (Strength, Unity and Democracy)." The other is the "Rank and File Action Committee" based on a small group of delegates (stewards) who supported Doris Turner in her successful bid for the New York local presidency last year. The Action Committee is uncritical of Turner, despite her regular and predictable sellouts (see, for example, our article on the 1982 contract in *Socialist Voice* No. 17).

The rank and file BL hasn't yet commented on these two groups to let us know if it differs with them. The BL does make some criticisms of Turner, but it also purveys the illusion that because she is black and from the more oppressed sector of the hospital union, she therefore is not just another bureaucrat. In its contract supplement to *Workers Tribune*, after listing a few of the divisive acts that union officials had carried out to betray the hospital workers' strike in 1976 and the PATCO walkout in 1981, the BL observed: "Doris Turner of 1199 ran as an alternative to this style of union leadership."

But Doris Turner did nothing of the sort. She has participated in all the Davis leadership's recent efforts to give back workers' hard-won gains without a fight. Aside from some recent bureaucratic merger maneuvers, her only distinguishing characteristic is that she demagogically points to her color and sex as proof that she represents her union's base. And the Bolshevik League does its bit to peddle this piece of demagoguery:

"Leon Davis had originally handpicked Doris Turner to replace him as President of 1199 in New York. However, Turner (a Black woman) is not so compliant as Nicholas. ...The Davis group of bureaucrats are themselves for the most part from the same petty bourgeois background as the guild members. They have received many privileges due to their position as part of the labor aristocracy. ...Turner's group, on the other hand, does tend to originate from the rank and file. They have received privileges from their position in the bureaucracy but have more support from the proletarian membership of the union." (*Workers Tribune*, March-April 1982).

No, the old leaders got their privileges not from their distant background as drug store pharmacists during the Depression but later, from their decades of serving in the union bureaucracy — like Turner, who was Leon Davis' right-hand woman for 26 years. Turner's bureaucratic privileges are far greater than those of the average working-class lab technician or secretary in the relatively better-off 1199 guild division (50 percent of whom are black and Hispanic), whom the BL so categorically labels "petty bourgeois." Yes, she "originated from the rank and file" — every traitor was once an innocent child, for that matter. And that's what the "rank and file" comes down to: it is a sociological cover for tailing left bureaucrats.

The BL was forced to admit, after having supported Turner, that she accepted appointment to the governor's council on hospitals, a management office. The BL's leaflet ruefully commented, "At a time when health services are being drastically reduced we find Doris Turner working along with the state and hospital management." Surprise!

But there is more. Lenin made the point that the "economists," by trying to limit workers' actions to their workplaces, were leaving politics in the hands of the bourgeois liberals and thereby implicitly supporting the latter. For politics is where the real decision-making power is, today especially when so many services and nominally "private" operations are funded by one level of government or other. Economist "rank and filism" means tacit support for the bureaucrat-backed bourgeois Democrats. Many of today's "left-wing" reformists are openly supporting Democratic politicians. The BL is less forthright; but its bureaucratic "alternative," Doris Turner, is as much a Democrat as any. For example, in the recent New York State governor's race, her ambivalence was not over the Democratic Party but over which candidate to support, the liberal Cuomo or the racist Koch. Wavering over the likes of Koch is hardly fighting for black rights!

That the BL's vaunted rank and filism turns out to be a facade for backhanded support to a favored union bureaucrat goes a long way toward explaining the BL's anti-working class politics of trying to persuade workers that striking for better wages and conditions only hurts other workers. The problem is that the struggle for greater gains is not *extended* to workers as a whole — and the blame for this lies with the bureaucrats, not with the workers who really need higher wages. The bureaucrats work overtime to avoid a class-wide challenge to capitalism and therefore refuse to engage in class-wide actions. The BL's anti-strike propaganda fits in perfectly. Its "revolution in one hospital" is only a left cover.

Stalinism like other forms of reformism is based upon contempt for the working class and its struggles. It always attributes the narrow character of the struggle it proposes to the alleged inability of the workers to see further than their own stomachs. In 1199 as in the world at large, Stalinism's radical pretensions turn out to be more of the same old garbage that all pro-bourgeois bureaucrats and rulers attempt to sell the working class. ■

## CAPITALISM IN THE SOVIET UNION

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### *The Rise and Decay of Stalinism*

# Central America

*continued from page 32*

Somocista mercenaries operating from Honduras to oust the Sandinistas allow only one long-range option for the U.S.: sending in American troops. This is undoubtedly the logic of Reagan's policy, even if he seeks to avoid it. The rebels are winning in El Salvador, and no amount of military supplies can give the 9-to-5, Monday-through-Friday officers and above all the conscript peasant soldiers the will to die for the oligarchs. In Nicaragua, U.S. support for the hated Somocistas and their "liberal" allies around ex-Sandinista Eden Pastora has cemented the restive masses behind the Sandinistas, at least for now.

Reagan too knows that the mercenaries could not overthrow the Sandinistas. What he and the CIA want is to provoke a Nicaraguan attack on Honduras and thereby a border war. By turning the present civil wars into international conflicts, they hope to use the Honduran air force and other Latin American pawns to crush not only the guerrillas but the masses as well. But Honduras is not strong enough for the task. There is no subimperialist Israel or South Africa in this region; Argentina, the closest candidate, can no longer play the role of junior partner after the events of last year's Malvinas war. So Reagan's real hope is that the U.S. might be able to step in as "peacemaker" and determine the outcome, as in the Middle East. But in the absence of a Central American Israel, the masses will not have been crushed prior to such negotiations. That is what sets up the logic for the use of U.S. troops.

The liberal attempt to halt the mass upheavals leads in the same direction by a different road. Dodd could talk only abstractly about economic aid to offset "the factors which breed revolution." Years ago the liberals used to talk about massive aid programs like John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress. But now they limit themselves to what the *New York Times* calls matching "affordable means to defensible ends." The crisis-ridden world economy permits no greater effort. Banks offering loans now invariably demand harsh austerity programs to accompany them, and these just provoke renewed mass rebellion. What used to be part of the solution is now more of the problem. With no hope for middle-class "democracy" and no source of aid without austerity strings attached, the liberals too will have no choice but to send in the marines.

The "great debate" between Reaganites and liberals now taking place in Congress, therefore, is not between one side defending the forces of reaction and the other side opposing them. Both want to prop up the pro-imperialist gangsters; nobody has called for cutting off *all* aid to the "criminals" and torturers. The debate is over how much to give, not whether or to whom. The liberals, however, are "concerned" — they want to sell the repressive system to the masses of both Central America and the U.S. under the facade of "peace," "democracy" and "human rights."

## Radicals Aid Liberalism

In this they have eager allies in Central America and elsewhere. Both the Carter and Reagan administrations have justified their intervention on the official grounds that the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and the Salvadorean FMLN are forces engineered by Havana and Moscow to spread "Communist" domination. In reality, aid to the leftists from Russia and Cuba is minimal; the weaker Russian imperialists are conceding domination of Latin America to the U.S. The Russians cannot afford to keep even the small but debt-ridden economy of Cuba viable. So Fidel Castro has vainly sought an economic

bail-out from the West; while both he and the Russians give the Salvadorean rebels the same treacherous advice they gave Allende in Chile ten years ago: don't do anything too radical, don't give the U.S. any pretext to intervene.

The ideas of compromise are not simply imported from abroad. The Sandinistas are still hoping against hope to maintain a "mixed" (i.e., capitalist) economy to gain imperialism's good graces: 70 percent of the Nicaraguan economy is still in private hands, despite the capitalists' sabotage and hoarding of funds. A symbolic offer was reported in the December 8, 1982 *New York Times* by reporter Raymond Bonner:

"In an effort to improve Nicaragua's business image, Joaquin Cuadra, Nicaragua's Minister of Finance, outlined new foreign investment rules yesterday. He described them as more favorable to foreign companies than the investment policies of the regime of Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle. ... Mr. Cuadra said that foreign investors would be allowed to own 100 percent of any operations they established in the country — in contrast to Mr. Somoza's policy of taking a 50 percent share — and would be permitted to repatriate profits."

This is hardly the policy of "communists" hell-bent on overturning free enterprise! In El Salvador likewise, the FDR-FMLN leaders have always committed themselves to preserving capitalism, postponing socialism to the remote



*In Managua, Nicaragua, the Pope thundered 'Silence!' to the aroused masses. Soon they will silence him.*

future. They have promised, of course, that capitalism preserved would be "democratic" and dedicated to the masses' interests — a fraudulent idea if there ever was one. In practice, even when the guerrilla armies have been winning, rebel spokesmen (both liberal diplomats and "communist" guerrillas) have constantly pleaded for a negotiated settlement with the U.S., promising to leave the government's gangster army undefeated. But the imperialists have, understandably, refused to believe that the workers and peasants on the guerrillas' side would tolerate such deals for long; otherwise peace would have been declared long ago.

History has proved, in Chile and time and time again, that imperialism will not and cannot be appeased by anything less than the smashing of the mass struggles that threaten its rule. Inventing the threat of Russia and Cuba and their mostly mythical military aid is Reagan's way of hiding imperialism's

real task, that of crushing the masses to end their unrest. The liberals' attempts to propitiate the masses with sops (in today's economy, virtually worthless ones like El Salvador's empty land reform) has the same goal. The real role of the masses' condescending saviours, the left bourgeois nationalist leaders, is to disarm the masses politically and militarily.

It is not that the guerrilla leaders or the Sandinista authorities are insincere; that is irrelevant. Because they accept capitalism (and with it, imperialism) as the parameter of the possible, they carry out the only alternative available. As the *New York Times* interview with Nicaragua's Minister of Finance went on to point out,

"Most of the Sandinista leaders are Marxists. Their decision to give foreign investors so much leeway, despite their views, came in recognition, Mr. Cuadra said, that foreign investment was necessary to help the country's international payments account, bring in technology and jobs."

Some "Marxists"! They hope to build a nationalist economy as opposed to one dominated by imperialism — with the help of imperialism! And so they stifle all attempts by the workers and peasants to end capitalist exploitation.

The rebel leaders' practice proves them to be anything but communists. They have left the urban masses without guns in El Salvador, even when they themselves recognized that defense of the workers' general strikes in 1980 was necessary. When this history of treachery led to demoralizing defeats, the leftists abandoned the working class in favor of rural guerrilla warfare, making passive observers of the workers and peasants. The guerrillas' strategy of sabotaging water works, power lines and industry has nothing in common with the proletarian task of seizing the factories and farms and holding them hostage from their capitalist owners. The highly hyped guerrilla claim that the masses have democratic power in the liberated areas turns out in practice to mean limited control over limited choices; the real power over important political questions resides with the middle-class guerrilla officials. All this is consistent not with a working-class revolution but only with the liberal program of a benevolent national capitalism exploiting the workers in friendly coexistence with a newly "peaceful" U.S. imperialism (or with the French, Spanish, or German varieties).

### Has the Pope Sold Out?

The Catholic Pope's recent tour of Central America highlighted the anti-proletarian character of the nationalist misleaders. While the Pope greeted psychopathic killers Roberto d'Aubuisson in El Salvador and General Rios Montt in Guatemala, he refused to utter a syllable of support for the Nicaraguan people's revolutionary triumph over the bestial Somoza. Yet the Sandinista leaders welcomed him to Managua and brought a quarter of the country's population to see him, insisting that there is "no contradiction" between Christianity and the revolution — until the Pope's arrogant behavior infuriated the masses against him. Likewise the

Salvadorean guerrillas called a cease-fire to honor his visit.

The old Catholic church, openly tied to reaction, can no longer hypnotize the masses. New Protestant fundamentalist sects speaking in radical right-wing tones are advancing as the established church crumbles. Even this very conservative Pope had to make his little visit to the grave of murdered liberal Archbishop Romero in San Salvador; open reactionary clericalism doesn't work. Now the middle-class leftists hope to use the "People's Church" to tie the masses to bourgeois nationalism. But just as all nationalism ultimately rests on the dominant imperialism, left Catholicism cannot break from Papal reaction. In Nicaragua the "liberation theology" wing of the Sandinistas has significant governmental power, which it uses to continue Somoza's policy of banning abortion and birth control (see the first-hand reports in the March 1983 *Democratic Left* published by the pro-Sandinista DSA).

The Sandinistas had been trying for years to win over the whole church in Nicaragua and gain the Pope's blessing. Now they complain that "the Pope has sold out to imperialism and to Reagan" (*New York Times*, March 6). In fact no sale was necessary. The Church has sided with capitalist "stability" for centuries, and this Pope is no different. The "leftists" who kneel to kiss his ring are only reinforcing the historic stranglehold which superstition has held over the masses.

The masses will never win as long as they rely on the good graces of their liberal bourgeois "friends." The only strategy for working-class defense against oppression is to recognize the inevitability of confrontation with capitalist power. This means no trust in the petty-bourgeois nationalists now leading the struggle, or in their "Communist" or Eurosocialist allies. It means building an internationalist proletarian party which will arm the masses with both guns and an authentic communist program. Under the present military circumstances, it also requires military support of the FMLN fighters against the Salvadorean regime. However, it is crucial that the workers be organized and armed independently, not only to defend themselves against the junta today but the inevitable treachery by their "friends" tomorrow.

A program of proletarian socialist revolution in country after country is the only real alternative to imperialist domination. National economies, especially ones bled for centuries, can no longer survive in an increasingly interdependent world. Bourgeois nationalist "solutions" have repeatedly failed. Asian, African and Latin American peoples have repeatedly risen to fight imperialism. Yet under nationalist misleaderships, each of the "new nations" has been brought back into the deadly embrace of the world market, imperialism and (neo-)colonialism. Once again the masses face wrecked economies, starvation and even bloodier wars.

The hope for the exploited masses lies in the possibility of their seeing through the petty-bourgeois nationalism they now accept and developing a genuine proletarian socialist consciousness. The material facts of the struggle are on their side: it is hard for anyone to pretend that the Central American struggles are national rather than international, although the Sandinistas and the FMLN do their utmost. The struggles are also becoming more proletarian: it is not just a world market that loots the value produced by individual peasants, but capitalist production relations that exploit the new masses of urban and rural workers alike. A century ago Karl Marx observed that capitalism produces its own gravediggers, the proletariat. In the epoch of imperialist decay the gravediggers are produced in every corner of the world and in increasingly concentrated numbers. Reactionaries and liberal imperialists may debate how best to hold on, but the days of all of them are numbered. ■

## ***El Salvador: Revolution or Betrayal?***

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## Central America: Capping a Volcano

Rebellion in Central America is not new. But never before has it been so widespread internationally, and never before has it had such a proletarian content — as urban and industrial workers in country after country join their peasant and rural comrades in the fight for liberation. For centuries the working people of the region have suffered greatly at the hands of their exploiters. Now they have the strength to overcome their powerful foes. But to do so they will have to defeat legions of false friends.

First the Conquistadors came to rob, murder and rape — and stayed to enslave. They brought with them the pious churchmen whose task it was to preserve the pre-capitalist systems of exploitation by consoling the masses with ideas of heaven to make them toil gladly on earth. Then came the capitalist oligarchs and their senior partners, the imperialists, to exploit wage slaves and small peasants. They too brought with them the "friends of the people," the same old churchmen in modern dress and the secular liberals — all of whom preach "peace" and "restraint" to the masses. The foes and "friends" may squabble with each other, but all seek to preserve the capitalist system of imperialism and the misery that inevitably accompanies it. For exploitation cannot survive through repression alone: the gentle face of imperialism is as necessary as its grimmer visage.

Listening to Ronald Reagan speaking to the U.S. Congress on April 27, there was no doubt that he stood for the naked fist of imperial repression. He demanded hundreds of millions more for his killer friends in the blood-soaked government of El Salvador as well as the other corrupt, murderous but pro-American regimes in the area. His theme was simply to continue and expand the policy that has already sent U.S. military advisors to El Salvador, CIA mercenaries to invade Nicaragua, plus millions of dollars in supplies to aid regimes that butcher tens of thousands of civilians per year. It is a desperate effort to prop up the grisliest forces of imperial decay against popular rebellions.

Speaking on the other side was Senator Christopher Dodd, young, Democratic and liberal. He truthfully described conditions in Central America that he had witnessed:

"Most of the people there are appallingly poor. They can't afford to feed their families when they're hungry. They can't find a doctor for them when they're sick. They live in rural shacks with dirt floors or city slums without plumbing or clean water. The majority can't read or write; and many of them can't even count.

"It takes all five Spanish-speaking countries of Central America more than a year to provide what this nation does, or produce what this nation does, in less than three days. Virtually none of even that meager amount ever reaches the bulk of the people. In short, a very few live in isolated splendor while the very many suffer in shantytown squalor. In country after country, dictatorship or military dominance has stifled



*Salvadorean guerrilla struggle, misled though it is, reflects a far greater eruption now building up in Central America.*

democracy and destroyed human rights."

And his solution? To "make violent revolution preventable by making peaceful revolution possible." He did not say why violent revolution was so uncalled-for when "dictatorship or military dominance" had "stifled democracy and destroyed human rights" for the bulk of the people suffering in "shantytown squalor," nor why violence would be unfitting treatment for the Salvadorean security forces whom he called, accurately, "criminals." That is because he is not primarily concerned with justice for the people but with stability for the interests of imperialism. He just didn't think Reagan's militaristic methods would work. "This is a formula for failure ... a proven prescription for picking a loser."

### The Liberal Alternative

The liberals' hoped-for pacification in El Salvador would occur through negotiations between the rebel FDR-FMLN leaders and the right-wing regime representing the oligarchy. Likewise, he wants negotiations over Nicaragua among the U.S., Latin states friendly to it and the left-wing Sandinista government. Here he favors aiding the "groups inside Nicaragua which believe in a free and democratic society" — namely non-Somocista capitalists who are already allying themselves with the bloodthirsty National Guardsmen of the Somoza regime that the masses overthrew in 1979.

Dodd and the other liberal capitalist politicians point out that Reagan's losing war in El Salvador and the inability of the

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