

Information, Education, Discussion

BULLETIN in Defense of Marxism

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Who We Are

The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published monthly by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. We have dedicated this journal to the process of clarifying the program and theory of revolutionary Marxism—of discussing its application to the class struggle both internationally and here in the United States. This vital task must be undertaken if we want to forge a political party in this country capable of bringing an end to the domination of the U.S. imperialist ruling class and of establishing a socialist society based on human need instead of private greed.

The F.I.T. was created in the winter of 1984 by members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party because we opposed abandoning the Trotskyist principles and methods on which the SWP was founded and built for more than half a century. Since our formation we have fought to win the party back to a revolutionary Marxist perspective and for our readmission to the SWP. In addition our members are active in the U.S. class struggle.

At the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International, the appeals of the F.I.T. and other expelled members were upheld, and the congress delegates demanded, by an overwhelming majority, that the SWP readmit those who had been purged. So far the SWP has refused to take any steps to comply with this decision.

"All members of the party must begin to *study*, completely dispassionately and with utmost honesty, first the essence of the differences and second the course of the dispute in the party. . . . It is necessary to *study* both the one and the other, unfailingly demanding the most exact, printed documents, open to verification by all sides. Whoever believes things simply on someone else's say-so is a hopeless idiot, to be dismissed with a wave of the hand."

—V.I. Lenin, "The Party Crisis," Jan. 19, 1921.

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APRIL 25 PROTEST PLANNED

by Stuart Brown

Plans are being set for a national mass demonstration in Washington, D.C., and possibly on the West Coast as well, this spring. The projected date is April 25, and the demands of the action, according to major trade-union and religious leaders who have initiated the proposal, will center around U.S. war policies in Central America and the government's complicity with apartheid in South Africa. An official call is expected to be out sometime in November.

The organization of a national coalition to build this march is a major development for the anti-intervention movement in the U.S. Ever since April 20, 1985, when coordinated national demonstrations took place in Washington, D.C., and other cities throughout the country, the movement has

been leaderless on a national level. Local activities have occurred, but they have been sporadic, smaller than they should have been, and not clearly focused politically. When Congress passed the contra-aid bill earlier this year, there was barely a murmur of vocal opposition, though public opinion polls continue to show the people of this country to be overwhelmingly opposed to any U.S. intervention in Central America. Now there is a chance to bring some real pressure on the government to bring an end to its reactionary intervention in Central America and South Africa.

The two issues projected for the April 25 protest have the greatest potential at present for mobilizing broad layers of public opposition. They are problems for which simple solutions can be projected, solutions which appeal to the basic humanity and common sentiments of millions: "U.S. Hands Off Central America!" "No Complicity with Apartheid!" "No Aid to the Contras in Nicaragua or Unita in Angola!" "Boycott South Africa, Not Nicaragua!"

Working people and activists all across the country must get behind local efforts to build April 25. It is an elementary responsibility to aid our sisters and brothers struggling for their basic right to self-determination in South Africa and Central America. The best way to do that is to keep the U.S. government from interfering in their struggles. ■

November 7, 1986

FALL ACTIONS

According to informal estimates we have received from local observers, it seems that around 25,000 people participated in local demonstrations against U.S. policy in Central America and other issues this fall. These included 10,000 in Los Angeles on November 1; 5,000 in New York, 4,000 in Washington, D.C., 2,000 each in Chicago and San Francisco, and 850 in Texas, all on October 25. Actions of 100 or more also took place in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Miami, and Seattle.

THE P-9 STRIKE, THE CLASS-STRUGGLE LEFT WING, AND THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

by Dave Riehle

I hope you received the package of material on the Hormel struggle all right. The UFCW just conducted a mail referendum vote on the contract they agreed to with the Hormel Co. for the Austin plant. They distributed 1800 ballots, which meant that virtually every scab in the plant got one. The contract was ratified by 1066 to 440. One poll watcher, a P-9 member, reported that over 900 of the "yes" votes came from inside the plant. Simple arithmetic shows 400 or so ballots were not returned, or possibly never received. This is clearly no ringing endorsement for the contract. The only information the voters had on the contract was an inadequate summary distributed by the UFCW, which, in addition to being only a summary, in many cases referred to the "implemented agreement" on many contract provisions. The "implemented agreement" was the one Hormel put into effect in January when they began hiring scabs, and no one has ever seen a summary of that, much less a complete copy. So the so-called "summary" made it impossible to have any kind of informed vote. In addition, the UFCW of course prevented the convening of any kind of free collective discussion on the contract, holding two meetings, one for the workers in the plant, and one for the former strikers.

UFCW Hypocrisy

More importantly, the contract provides no agreement whatsoever on the recall of any of the former strikers, and is a four-year agreement, while the other Hormel plant agreements which expire on September 1 of this year will now expire in three years. In other words, the UFCW utterly failed to make good on their stated reasons for intervening in the Austin situation—saving the jobs of the workers, and correcting the so-called "breaking the chain" by P-9—their false claim that the reason the Hormel agreements did not expire at the same time was because P-9 had broken the solidarity of the chain.

The first issue of the P-9 "Unionist" issued by the trustee in July, was headlined: "One Union, One Contract, One Voice." What they got was seven contracts, divided union meetings, and of course, no jobs.

The agreement also incorporates a two-tier wage system, which the UFCW officials had insisted was something they would never agree to.

This is the edited text of a letter written by Dave Riehle to an ex-member of the SWP.

Twin Cities Support Committee

In the Twin Cities P-9 Support Committee we now need to face the question of what to do next. We will continue meeting, and organizing what we can in defense of the Hormel workers and the North American Meatpackers Union.

However, the Support Committee here was able to organize a significant layer of indigenous trade unionists in defense of P-9, in the face of either outright resistance, or at least passivity on the part of the labor hierarchy. We even succeeded in bringing in an important number of local officials, and many others with real credentials in the local union movement. Some hundreds participated in our public activities—the rallies, food caravans, etc. Another smaller layer, but still significant, became active participants in the ongoing activities of the Support Committee. So an independent formation of trade unionists was created in the course of struggle, and the question now is what to do about that.

Experience has certainly demonstrated that there is a role for some sort of ad hoc, individually affiliated organization, that can act in a subordinate and supplementary way in cooperation with a striking union, as our experience in both the Hormel and Iowa Pork strikes shows. This work has won some measure of real legitimacy and respect within a fairly wide circle of the labor movement here. We think it would be wrong to simply demobilize and wait for the next crisis. What we want is to expand the horizons of what is legitimate activity and organization within the labor movement. Until quite recently we could have gotten nowhere with an unofficial body like the Support Committee. But we have been able to establish its legitimacy, and in the course of that begun to stretch the definition of what the labor movement is to include an organization not chartered by any august international body. This coincides with the inclinations of the average worker, and with the eroding moral and political authority of the union bureaucracy, no serious move whatever was launched to put us out of business.

Incipient Class Struggle Left Wing

The body of trade unionists organized by the Support Committee is what ought to be considered the nucleus of a class struggle left wing in the unions here. They coalesced around a real manifestation of the class struggle, one that required

them to differentiate themselves to some degree from the union bureaucracy, and even against it. While they have not really begun to grapple with the question of independent political action, that can only come as part of a process that can't be sucked out of anybody's thumb.

The SWP, which has talked in an abstract way in recent years about a "class struggle left wing," mainly as a rationalization for abstaining from active participation in the living labor movement, didn't know what to do when confronted here with the emergence of a real, even if embryonic, left wing. This is what P-9 and the unionists organized in the Support Committee represented.

Although *The Militant* presented a "gee whizz" enthusiasm for the developments—in Austin at least—they preferred to ignore what was going on in the Twin Cities. Even in relation to Austin, *The Militant* has never presented any analysis of what this was all about, or what ought to be done about it, except in the most superficial way. This was due in part to the SWP leadership's schematic conception of how the working class will radicalize, and how that will be reflected in the unions. In their view, change can only come through official channels, undoubtedly an unconscious reflection of how they want to run the SWP. Consequently, they overemphasize the *formal* side of this process, where the possibilities are extremely limited, to say the least, and tend to view any unofficial developments as merely substitutionist schemes by impatient ultraleftists. This stance has had to bend, in practice, to accommodate real life. You could hardly support P-9 at all without participating in some unauthorized activity. But apparently the instructions to their members were to confine themselves to the "legitimate" union movement. This meant essentially trying to make a motion on the floor of a union meeting to make a contribution to P-9.

Food Caravans

Real life followed other channels. The Twin Cities food caravans, which made such a large impact because they were *both* material aid and visible political support, could not be organized through official union channels, because the official union line was to make contributions in the conventional way—send a check to P-9 or, in many cases, to the UFCW regional office. We managed to sidestep this, and over the course of the strike organized four food caravans from the Twin Cities, totaling tens of thousands of dollars, all raised from local unions in violation of "policy." These caravans were organized with the highest profile possible, with news conferences, leaflets, car caravans, etc. As such they were, of course, fundamentally *political* actions, even though their immediate purpose was material aid. Even the most successful food caravan could only meet the needs of one thousand families for a day or two. Their impact was to *strengthen* the struggle, and solidify the determination of the strikers. Even when

the strike was officially sanctioned, and the bureaucrats felt compelled to make token financial contributions, they were well aware that the real line was that the strike was wrong, and should be gotten over with as soon as possible. Such a point of view, of course, certainly did not favor flashy, demonstrative deliveries of food. They preferred a quiet check in the mail that no one ever heard about. We succeeded in outmaneuvering them—possible because of the existence of the Support Committee, backed by a small coalition of very independent local unions.

We were so successful at this that our last caravan, on April 5, was the most successful of all, and this was *after* the strike had been repudiated by the UFCW and the receivership action was in motion.

SWP's Schematic Approach

The SWP's schematism prevented them from seeing this or participating. Where they had anything to say about it, they recommended that their local unions send their contributions in the form of a check in the mail to Austin, rather than to the food caravans, since they were administered by an unauthorized body, the Support Committee. For the first eight months or so of the existence of the Support Committee, they limited themselves to observing, and occasionally speaking, but never voting at the meetings of the committee. *The Militant's* coverage of the food caravans carefully left out any mention of the Support Committee, and especially of the fact that Jake Cooper, a fifty-year veteran of the SWP expelled in 1982, was the hero of the Austin workers for his role in organizing the food caravans, and embodied to them the heroic era of the labor movement. The *Unionist* referred to him as "P-9's patron saint."

This changed somewhat over time. The SWP began to participate in the Support Committee as voting members, but I think this reflected more the inclinations of the local people than any change of national policy. As far as official SWP history of the P-9 struggle is concerned, there was no Support Committee, and no food caravans. Fred Halstead's recent pamphlet is a good example.

Once the boycott was inaugurated in February, the SWP became more comfortable with the Support Committee, because it was now doing a "non-union" activity, one that fell within the charter of the "non-union" Support Committee.

Pessimism and Rationalizations

Underlying this mechanical approach to the unions is the deep pessimism that the SWP leaders feel about anything happening in the unions of any significance in the foreseeable future. This theme runs through all their theoretical attempts to grapple with what's happening in the unions, and, although not stated explicitly, why the SWP's ambitious plans to colonize the unions and begin to recruit significant numbers never materialized.

Their major rationalization postulates that nothing significant is going to happen until "the workers become politicized" i.e. develop class consciousness. This was all laid out at great length by Mac Warren in a report to the 1984 convention—possibly you were there. He said: "It is *only* as workers learn through experience that these solutions don't work [Jesse Jackson, etc.], that a politicization process can begin to develop, leading them to an understanding of independent working-class political action" (emphasis added). The key word is "only." The only attempt at all by *The Militant* to assess the meaning of the Hormel strike, in the May 9, 1986 issue, repeats this: "*Only when unions become fighting instruments can they effectively defend workers' interests. . . . Only when the labor movement is transformed in this way can it again become a social movement. . . . Only then can labor begin to speak out for the interests of working people*" (emphasis added).

This is non-dialectical thinking. "Only when" something happens can something else "begin." Reality doesn't simply proceed by serial development, but through interrelated and contradictory phenomena reacting on each other—uneven and combined development, in other words. Boiled down, this means the SWP has assigned itself the task of simply distributing a little socialist propaganda until the workers develop class consciousness. "Only then" can meaningful union struggles ensue.

This is clearly a formula for sectarian abstention. This was rather strictly adhered to in 1982, '83, '84. There are now some empirical adjustments being made. The SWP does now participate in the movement in defense of the Hormel workers—unlike their abstention in 1984 from the Iowa Pork strike in South St. Paul—but their effectiveness is vitiated by their underlying

false theoretical position. The SWP could have made a significantly larger impact if they had thrown themselves into the Support Committee at the beginning, the food drives, etc. But their support for P-9 was mostly literary—reports in *The Militant*.

Their main preoccupation has been visiting Austin, and seeking to bring their coworkers there. That is all well and good, but a revolutionary party should have a *policy*, not just a sentiment. But the leaders of the SWP do not understand the union movement, and they have no ideas on what can be done. As Warren said: "If they do go out on strike, the most important contribution we can make is not figuring out the best tactics for the strike, but participating in them and helping to mobilize solidarity with these battles, and tying them to the war that's unfolding in Central America and the Caribbean."

Obviously, unsolicited suggestions to strike leaders about how to conduct their struggle might very well be out of place, and not well received or understood. But can anyone really conceive of "participating in strikes and helping to mobilize solidarity" as separate from "figuring out the best tactics"—that is, explaining how they can be *won* in the here and now? In real life, if you *do* mobilize solidarity and participate in a strike effectively, you will become part of the discussion of how to win. Being an agnostic about "the best tactics" means abdicating any aspirations to being a vanguard, and basically seeing the party as a support group. Some political currents may have that view, but the SWP has certainly never expressed anything like that. The real content of this "theory" is that whatever happens can't be all that important, if you have no view to express on *how to win*. ■

NEW FROM THE F.I.T.

YEAR OF DECISION FOR U.S. LABOR The Hormel Strike and Beyond

by Dave Riehle and Frank Lovell

\$2.50

This reprint of articles from past issues of the *Bulletin IDOM* covers a momentous year in the development of the U.S. labor movement: the year of the strike by United Food and Commercial Workers local P-9 in Austin Minnesota against the giant meat-processing firm of Geo. A. Hormel Inc. It tells some of the story of that strike and draws its lessons, as well as presenting a class-struggle viewpoint on the broader issues facing working people in the U.S. fighting to defend their standard of living today.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF A REVOLUTIONARY ELECTORAL ALTERNATIVE

Socialist Action and Against the Current on the '86 Campaign

by Tom Barrett

In 1986 the problem was posed once again for those who consider themselves radicals and revolutionaries in the United States: how to relate to the electoral process. Readers of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* know that the Socialist Workers Party ran candidates on a working class program in many parts of the country, and that we called on our readers to work for and vote for these candidates. In addition, we ran a series of articles over the past few months discussing the error of orienting to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and to Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition.

Others who are part of the Fourth Internationalist movement in the United States also took a clear position against supporting capitalist politicians. The October 1986 issue of *Socialist Action*, in the "Socialist Action Forum" section, featured a discussion on the elections which included interviews with New York Rainbow Coalition representative Ed Ott; Burlington, Vermont, alderman Terry Bouricius (an associate of socialist mayor Bernie Sanders); three letters responding to SA's coverage of the West Coast conference on Socialism and Activism; and two articles presenting Socialist Action's views—one by Joe Ryan, the other by "the editor."

Against the Current, the magazine put out by the regrouped organization Solidarity, includes individuals who belong to Solidarity's "FI Caucus," on its editorial board. The September-October issue of *ATC* had a number of articles pointing out the need for independent working class politics and arguing against work within the Democratic party. One by Rich Finkel and Dianne Feeley—who was a victim of the 1983-84 purge in the SWP and is now a leader of the FI Caucus—points to the Bernie Sanders campaign for Governor of Vermont as one positive means of rejecting capitalist politics.

More Confusion than Usual

The question of electoral politics is always an important one, and this was especially true this year. At no time since 1972 have so many radicals fallen into the Democratic Party trap. Leaders of the Coalition for Peace, Jobs, and Justice, the organizers of the October 25 protests around the country, are openly calling for the election of a "peace majority" in congress. Radical activists, primarily members of the Democratic Socialists of America, made the difference in Mark Green's defeat of machine Democrat John Dyson in the New York senatorial primary.

It's important, then, that all of those forces who continue to identify themselves as being in fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International, whatever differences we may have about what this means or how to apply it, have made a clear statement in favor of independent politics in 1986. Yet the *Socialist Action* forum and the article coauthored by Feeley in *ATC* both raise a troubling question: why didn't they express any endorsement for the election campaigns of the SWP?

Socialist Action Says Nothing

It is certainly "principled" to denounce the Democrats and all who support them, as *Socialist Action's* writers do, to quote Malcolm X and Eugene Debs, to explain how all of the gains made by labor, by Blacks, by women, were accomplished through direct action. All that is true. However, it is not enough for revolutionists to simply draw the class line in politics, though that is an essential first step. We must also explain our point of view in a way which presents a real alternative if that is at all possible. Doing this creates much better conditions for convincing others, and provides a means of translating the abstractions of independent working-class political action into a concrete reality. When socialists speak to the issue of elections, in other words, we must propose a reasonable course of action for working people.

Joe Ryan, in his article entitled, "Rainbow Coalition: False Hope for Social Struggles," says that what is needed is a labor party, which grows out of the labor movement and the struggles of the oppressed. He is certainly right. However, that labor party does not yet exist, and all that Marxists can do right now is *educate* on the need for such a party and *urge* that action be taken to bring it into existence. So this cannot be presented as a viable electoral strategy for 1986. We could not suggest that people vote for a labor party this year.

Socialist Action itself is attempting to provide a specific alternative with its campaign of Sylvia Weinstein for San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Modeling its effort on the kinds of campaigns the SWP has traditionally run, SA hopes to utilize an effective means of popularizing the ideas of socialism and winning new adherents to the revolutionary workers' movement, as well as contributing to the struggles for social change. But what about all of the other political races in

which Socialist Action is unable to field its own candidates?

The obvious solution would be for *SA* to state its endorsement of the SWP tickets in races around the country. Yet in its entire electoral supplement it remains completely silent, and says *not one word* about the SWP's campaigns.

Against the Current Goes Further

Against the Current also fails to mention the SWP campaigns explicitly. But the article by Finkel and Feeley contains a disparaging reference which, though far from an accurate characterization of the SWP's electoral activity, would seem to be intended to refer to that party: "At the other extreme, small-party groups have run sectarian campaigns. These usually made a principle of refusing to work with any other organizations on the left, while formulating a platform divorced from reality."

One can certainly understand revolutionists in the U.S. endorsing a campaign like that of Bernie Sanders as a good example of an alternative to bourgeois politics. A serious discussion within the left of the strengths and weaknesses of that campaign, its lessons and its limitations, would be very useful for all concerned.

But why should Finkel and Feeley feel it necessary to also counterpose the Sanders campaign to purely propagandistic electoral efforts like those of the SWP? Feeley herself ran for office a number of times on the SWP ticket and was a very effective campaigner. She ought to appreciate the value of even a purely educational campaign around a popularized Marxist program. Isn't there still a place for candidates who will bring a more complete revolutionary critique of bourgeois society into the electoral arena, even if this means that currently they have little hope of actually winning electoral office? Should working class fighters really only participate in the elections when they have a chance to win? What's wrong with a revolutionary party trying to explain its program to working people through the electoral arena so it can recruit to its ideas and its organization?

And once again, the problem is posed on a purely practical level: what should readers of *Against the Current* who are not in a position to vote for Bernie Sanders, but who may be able to cast a ballot for a candidate of the SWP, do when they go to the polls?

Alternatives

There are other courses of action which are theoretically possible—though neither *SA* nor *ATC* felt it was necessary to pursue them. Sometimes, for example, revolutionists use a tactic called "critical support" in the elections with regard to reformist working-class organizations such as the Communist Party or Social Democrats. Leon Trotsky suggested that the newly-formed Socialist Workers Party give critical support to the

Communist Party candidate for president in 1940, though the SWP did not agree.

We can't criticize *SA* or *ATC* for not giving critical support to the Stalinists or Social Democrats in the '86 election, however. That wasn't really a viable option. For one thing, both of those organizations generally supported the Democratic Party rather than running serious campaigns of their own. But there was still a genuine alternative to doing nothing. There *were* revolutionary socialists running for office in congressional districts and for statewide office in many areas of the country. These, of course, are the candidates of the Socialist Workers Party.

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism readers do not need to be reminded of the Socialist Workers Party's programmatic shortcomings. SWP candidates, however, do not address disputed questions of Marxist theory or party-building strategy in their election campaigns. Their platforms are clear statements of support to labor, to Blacks, to women, and to peoples throughout the world who are fighting to break free of imperialist domination. SWP candidates not only express support for strikes; they walk the picket lines with the strikers. They participate in demonstrations for an end to apartheid and for an end to U.S. war in Central America.

In contrast to socialist candidates whose platforms are nothing more than "campaign promises" about how wonderful socialism would be, SWP candidates' platforms are as much programs of action for right now as they are educational statements about the socialist future. The party leadership's wrong-headed policies have hampered the SWP's ability to run effective election campaigns. In particular, these campaigns lack the kind of real contact with working people and do not apply the transitional method in a way which would make them most effective. But this is no reason not to support SWP candidates enthusiastically. Even after the devastating consequences of the SWP leadership's turn away from revolutionary Marxism, the party's candidates still continue to defend a basically correct class-struggle platform. It has far better resources, both human and financial, for contesting the elections than do any of the expelled opposition tendencies.

If SWP candidates are saying basically what they should be saying, why shouldn't we support them? Wouldn't that have been the best way to educate radicalizing workers who might read *Socialist Action* or *Against the Current*? It is a serious dereliction that these publications didn't urge a vote for the SWP, especially when the party was able to get ballot status and media exposure in many areas, and put forward a fighting workers' alternative to the Democratic and Republican political machines.

Fight for a Common Party

There is another important reason for those who have been expelled from the SWP to support the

party's candidates: as a means of fighting for the reunification of the Fourth Internationalist movement in the United States. The division of U.S. supporters of the FI into four public organizations is a serious problem which must be remedied as soon as possible. Optimally, SWP campaigns should be a way for all FI supporters in the U.S. to work together in common class-struggle activity as a step towards unity.

The obstacle to this up to now has been the SWP leadership's refusal to allow expelled oppositionists so much as to enter party headquarters, let alone help with campaign activities. This, however, puts them in an awkward position: how can they explain to party members (especially to new members), or to our world movement, why the SWP refuses to allow Fourth Internationalists who genuinely support its campaigns to work for their success?

These actions are justified at the present time simply through lies—by falsely asserting that the expelled claim to be members of the SWP, by saying that we only support the campaign as a "maneuver" and are not serious about it, or by claiming that we would "disrupt" campaign activities. But the fact that the party leadership must tell these lies shows how weak its genuine politics are, and how little confidence it has in its ability to maintain control of the SWP based on an honest discussion and debate. Socialist Action and those in Solidarity who continue to identify with the Fourth International have given the SWP lead-

ership an easy way out of this problem—at least with regard to the election campaign—by failing to support the party's candidates. That takes away any need for the party leadership itself to explain its own actions.

In time either the SWP ranks will call their leadership to order for its dishonest and destructive policies or the healthy activists will continue their exodus from the SWP and the party will degenerate completely. The only legitimate basis for not endorsing the SWP candidates in the 1986 elections would have been if Socialist Action or those members of Solidarity who identify with the Fourth International have concluded that this process is already complete. But that would be a tragic mistake. We must continue to make a serious effort to reverse the process of political degeneration of the SWP and move forward to build a united, Fourth Internationalist U.S. revolutionary party.

Revolutionary Marxists in the U.S. should not pass up the opportunity provided by the Socialist Workers Party's election campaigns. We should do all we can to make them successful, to convince workers and activists to vote SWP, and use the SWP campaigns as a transitional step towards working-class political action—which is, in turn, a transitional step towards working-class political power. The SWP could and should do more with its election campaigns; but that is no reason for the expelled oppositionists to do less. ■

PERMANENT REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA

by Paul Le Blanc

Paul Le Blanc is an historian and activist in the Central American solidarity movement. His book is not only a scholarly and well argued defense of the applicability of revolutionary Marxism to events in the world today, but is also a full and inspiring account of the "mobilization of an entire people."

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— From the preface by George Breitman.

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Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua is available by mail for \$3.00 per copy or \$1.80 each for orders of three or more. Write to FIT, P.O. Box 1947, New York, NY 10009

INTRODUCTION TO THE BAITALSKY MEMOIRS

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

In early 1977, we received a copy of the samizdat memoirs of Mikhail Baitalsky, who, in the early 1920s in the Ukrainian Republic of the Soviet Union, had become a supporter of the Left Opposition. Baitalsky was arrested three times during the Stalin era and served two terms in the notorious Vorkuta forced labor camp. He was released from his second term in 1955 during the liberalization following Stalin's death. In 1958 he began writing about his experiences.

This project took him 12 years to complete and ended up in the form of nine "notebooks" totaling over 450 pages in length. He called them "Notebooks for the Grandchildren," and it is one of the most stunning documents to have emerged from the post-Stalin period.

Lifelong Revolutionary

Baitalsky was 13 years old in 1917 when the uprisings in Russia overthrew tsarist rule and the Bolshevik Party led the October revolution to establish the world's first workers' state. Although they were in some ways far from the center of events, in a Ukrainian village called Chernovo, in Odessa Province, he and his friends were nevertheless inspired by the liberating atmosphere of those times.

Starting with small self-organized study groups in the summer of 1917, he and the other village youngsters read, argued, and set out to learn as much as they could about it. By the early spring of 1920 they had run away from home and joined in launching the Young Communist League (Komsomol) in Ananiv, another village in the same province. They soon joined the Red Army to fight the counterrevolutionary forces who were sweeping like waves across Ukrainian territory.

In the early 1920s, Baitalsky and his friends, who all joined the Communist Party, became active in the movement against the "NEP-men" (named after the New Economic Policy, or "NEP"), who attempted to take advantage of the liberal economic policy on the part of the Soviet government at that time to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses of workers and peasants. They argued at meetings for Leon Trotsky's proposals for reform of the Communist Party as pre-

sented in a resolution called "The New Course" in 1923. After Lenin's death in 1924, they circulated Lenin's "Testament," which warned the party of the need to revitalize the Central Committee through an infusion of a large number of new workers, to strengthen the centralized economic planning commission, and to remove Stalin as General Secretary.

As a worker correspondent for the Komsomol newspaper in Odessa, *Molodaya Gvardiya*, Baitalsky continually received disturbing news of bureaucratic developments from numerous outlying regions. He and his friends observed, discussed, and became increasingly concerned as the 1920s wore on and the bureaucratization slowly began to strangle the revolutionary process. Despite the increasingly intimidating atmosphere, they continued—in their meetings and in their newspapers—to expose the growing instances of bureaucratic abuse and manipulation. As a result they were ostracized and ultimately arrested.

Persecution and Imprisonment

Baitalsky's first arrest was on May 5, 1929. He was offered the option of following the lead of two prominent Left Opposition supporters, Preobrazhensky and Smilga, who had publicly renounced their views. If he did so he would be freed. Otherwise he faced exile and imprisonment. After several days and sleepless nights he decided to capitulate for the sake of party unity and hope for the best. Baitalsky states of his decision: "It would have been better to have died."

Over the next six years, Baitalsky, who had developed into a talented journalist, worked for several newspapers, including the government newspaper *Izvestia* in Moscow. Throughout this period the attacks on the Opposition became ever more vicious. His childhood friends who had not capitulated were all imprisoned and exiled. The repression intensified after the assassination of Kirov in 1934, which provided an excuse for Stalin to launch another round of attacks on his opponents.

Baitalsky lost his job and was rejected by his wife, whom he had married during the early revolutionary period but who had become a staunch supporter of the official party line. He was finally arrested again on May 25, 1935, and spent the bulk of a six-year term (until May 1941) in the Vorkuta forced labor and death camps.

During this time he was able to collect information about many of the repressive events of

Marilyn Vogt-Downey is the translator of Baitalsky's memoirs. She has done extensive Russian translating for Pathfinder and Monad press, including Trotsky's Writings series and Samizdat, Voices of the Soviet Opposition.

the times, most notably the hunger strike led by Trotskyist prisoners in 1936-37—in which 300 to 400 participated for the right to be recognized as political prisoners—and the mass executions of these and hundreds of other political prisoners at the Brick Factory in March 1938. Baitalsky states that this latter event is the key to resurrecting genuine history from falsification about this period. The historic importance of who and what was executed there was a fundamental motive for this literary project.

After his release in 1941, Baitalsky was called up to serve in the Soviet army and was wounded fighting the German invaders. Several months after the war ended, he returned to civilian life, remarried, and had various jobs until his third arrest in April 1950. The first part of his second prison term he spent in a scientific institute in an area near Moscow, the same institute which Aleksander Solzhenitsyn wrote about in *The First Circle*. He was soon, however, moved to Vorkuta, where he remained for the rest of his sentence.

Other Literary Efforts

Baitalsky wrote not only his memoirs but a number of other items—poems, articles, and book-length works—most of which he signed with pseudonyms (Aronovich, I. Domalsky, Ilsky, D. Seter) so as to avoid another arrest. These writings discuss a variety of social problems, but a special concern of his was anti-Semitism in the USSR. As a Jewish youth he, like many others, had been drawn into the revolutionary movement at least in part because the revolution stood with them against the anti-Semitism both of the tsarist period and of the counterrevolutionary armies. But the rising bureaucracy brought back anti-Semitism to use it against the Left Opposition. Baitalsky has gone to great lengths to expose and provide a materialist analysis of this process—a precious rarity among modern Soviet writers.

One of his well-known works, "Commodity No. 1," written under the pseudonym A. Krasikov, deals with the government vodka monopoly in the USSR and the vast social deterioration caused by and reflected in the rising per capita vodka consumption. This deterioration, he explains, cannot be outweighed by the increased state revenues derived from vodka sales.

This and other writings of Baitalsky have circulated in the USSR in samizdat (a term which refers to "self-published" manuscripts circulated clandestinely). Some have also been published in Israel, where his daughter resides.

In May 1976 Baitalsky's apartment was searched by the state security police, the KGB, and much of his library was confiscated. Somehow his memoirs—to which he was in the process of adding a preface—were not among the materials confiscated. Baitalsky continued his literary efforts until he died in Moscow on August 18, 1978, at the age of 74.

The Importance of the Memoirs

This barebones review of Baitalsky's life cannot begin to convey what comes through in his memoirs. To begin to grasp their richness, one need only return to their title—"Notebooks for the Grandchildren"—and the question: Why did he write them?

Baitalsky had become a conscious participant in history through the Russian revolution. Of those early years, he says: "In my life, there were only about five years, and possibly fewer than that, when no one expected or demanded lies and hypocrisy from me." He and his circle of friends were changed people, and in turn they threw their lives into changing the world. "The main inspiring aspect of the Komsomol of that time . . . was a presentiment of something new, unforeseen significant accomplishments ahead for me, you, everyone. They will be very significant! And this will take place only thanks to my participation with the whole world of exploited and hungry. . . . With hopes fixed on the future, that feeling of personal participation in the world revolution, and a readiness to share full responsibility for it—and it was just about ready to occur—all this uplifted us and fortified us in all matters, even very ordinary ones" (Notebook 1).

He describes how the mass youth radicalization inspired new attitudes toward women and among women, changed human relations, brought rejection of the old ways, of hypocrisy and prejudice; a searching look at every aspect of one's life and self, from one's way of dressing to one's goals. Those in his milieu devoted themselves to seeking answers and following through on what they learned and were learning. The "boys and girls" who were Baitalsky's friends felt they were laying the basis for a new society in their Komsomol, their clubs, their factory jobs, their newspapers, and in everything they did.

They could not tolerate the return to corruption, greed, repression, and lies which is what they saw occurring around them as the bureaucracy grew and tightened its grip.

Baitalsky recanted after his first arrest because he reasoned the situation could not continue to deteriorate and, in the meantime, he would bide his time and allow the majority approach to be tested in real life. However, he did not change his own views and maintained the standards formed in the early postrevolutionary years. And it is with his revolutionary vision that he looks at and describes the changing circumstances around him as the 1920s drew to a close. He follows events through the 1930s, including the forced collectivization of the Soviet peasantry, the famine in Ukraine, and what these events meant in the streets and train stations of Moscow; how they contributed to the expansion of the network of closed cafeterias and stores for the privileged strata of the bureaucracy; how they led to the reinstatement of the passport system—a hated institution of the tsarist period, the abolition of which was one of the revolution's achievements.

We watch, through Baitalsky's eyes, the official deification of Stalin on all levels of propaganda and literature, the construction in progress from the garish subway stations to the heralded mines, roads, and railroads built with prison labor. Throughout the accounts, he includes the interplay and conflict that arose between "party loyalists" and "the opposition." (This was amply played out in his own early marriage.) Even his accounts of camp life are extraordinary, presented through the prism of the revolution's original values revealing the most extreme expression of its degeneration.

Baitalsky does not simply describe. He analyzes cause and effect—especially the cause and effect of the rewriting or destruction of history which has contributed to the barrenness and sterility of modern Soviet society. Baitalsky wants to set the record straight by telling what really happened. That's why he wrote his memoirs—so all the grandchildren could begin not only to know the truth, but to know that a truth exists at all.

Distinctive Aspects of the Work

Baitalsky's political outlook—his defense of the October revolution and of the Left Opposition's views—are enough to make him distinctive. But two other qualities make this work of his special as well. First is his style. At times he can wander in time and space in a maddening way, appearing to depart widely from his main topic. But in the end the reader sees that he has woven a purposeful and brilliant juxtaposition, unifying opposites to show their dialectical relationship. It can be of awesome power and effectiveness.

Secondly, Baitalsky never removes people from the historical process. He manages to contrast

official propaganda or individuals embodying it to reality—official descriptions of infallibility and soaring proletarian success are held up against the pathetic methods and personalities implementing the repression, creating inequality, or violating elementary human decency. He contrasts the vile slanders by the bureaucracy against the victims of repression to the blameless actions, simple virtues, or uncompromising devotion to the revolution which are the real "crimes" involved.

Baitalsky's skillful use of ideas and language makes his indictments all the more powerful. He wrote the memoirs for the next generation, and he wanted them to understand. But at the same time, he never knew if anyone at all, anywhere, would ever have the opportunity to read what he had written. While he maintained his loyalty to Trotskyism as he had known it, he had no idea what Trotskyism really meant to the world today.

Baitalsky's one good friend from whom, he says, he never hid his support for the Left Opposition, suggested to him that his memoirs were doubly seditious for the fact that they interjected Trotskyism. Baitalsky responded:

"And what do you, or I, or any of the judges know about the views of contemporary Trotskyism, if it even exists somewhere abroad as a political current? Where does it exist? Do you know? What views does it profess? Are they known to you? And in general, can you consider that you know the views of a person if you read only summaries of them? Summaries that are, moreover, presented by that person's opponent, who—as has been established—cannot be trusted?"

Baitalsky wrote for the new generation, but also for the sake of all his friends in the Left Opposition who had given their lives to defend the revolution against its gravediggers. ■

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NOTEBOOKS FOR THE GRANDCHILDREN

Notebook 1

by Mikhail Baitalsky

We need FULL AND TRUTHFUL information. And truth should not depend on who it has to serve (Lenin, "Letter to Varga," September 1, 1921).

Nothing can make us forget (A. Blok).

For thirty years now the memory of the Vorkuta executions has been like an open wound inside me. The sentence, handed down by a local "troika" of the NKVD,¹ was established in Moscow according to a list. How many there were on the list of victims even now remains a secret, buried in the archives. It was approximately 900—maybe more.

A list with the names of 190 of these comrades has subsequently been constructed from memory. I was acquainted with many of them at Archangel transfer prison and at the Vorkuta camp barracks, where we lived together in the winter of 1936-37, a year before they were shot. Three of the executed—Maksimov, Krainy, and Lipenzon—were my friends in the Odessa Komsomol. And another—Grigory Baglyuk—was my close, my beloved friend all throughout the last thirteen years of his life, which altogether only lasted thirty-three years.

Not only were lists of people sentenced, but the executions themselves were carried out in groups, numbering 50 persons each.

The innocence of the executed was established two decades later. It was acknowledged before the whole world by the fact that the state itself, in whose name the death sentences were passed down, has posthumously rehabilitated them. And the indictment against them has been turned against the society in which such a mass, medieval crime proved to be possible. Therefore, having established their civic honor posthumously, society hastened to forget them; since it was not pleasant to remember the names in which it bears a severe and eternal disgrace to itself.

The only honest answer to this tacit reproach is to reveal what has been hidden, to publicize all the activities of these secret courts. To cover this up means to shield the inquisitors. None of the subsequent generations can wash the blood of the executed from its hands until it undertakes to investigate the cases of the inquisition that handed down mass sentences.

This is the first installment in the memoirs of former Ukrainian Left Opposition supporter Mikhail Baitalsky. The second installment will appear in our next issue.

At the beginning of our humane century, a whole country, and with it the best people of all Europe for several years in succession, was disturbed and seething because of the unjust verdict handed down against only one person—Dreyfus.² But in our socialist country, almost in the middle of this highly humane century, verdicts were handed down on a similar and no less false accusation. But the sentences were far more cruel, all the way to the death penalty. And such sentences numbered not just one, and not one hundred, and not one thousand, but hundreds and hundreds of thousands. However, no one was disturbed.

No one! Everything was done with the society totally silent, although every arrest was known of by neighbors, co-workers, or simple acquaintances, so that the number of those who knew was many times greater than the number of those arrested, and the number arrested numbered in the millions. The only thing that worried those who knew was anxiety about themselves: Won't they come tonight for me also? And of course everyone who awaited arrest knew full well his or her own innocence; and, moreover, acknowledged the innocence of others who had been arrested earlier. But even to themselves they were afraid to say this, fearing arrest.

But no one dared to take up the case of the arrested as Zola took up Dreyfus's case or even at a meeting to ask those who shouted "crucify him": Shouldn't we at least have a bit of an investigation as to why this person is being crucified? Instead, they crucified and presented the nails in silence.

Only the wives and mothers brought parcels to those who awaited crucifixion. The wives and mothers turned out to be the best part of the society of the silent.

In those years, people were moved by fear, the most elementary of feelings. It reduced millions of people to spiritual ruin and internal destitution.

Decades have now passed. Now, it is no longer fear that moves the people as in 1937, in its bare-reflex form. The time of reason has come and it turned out that Terror-37 has isotopes. The isotope of Terror-37 affects other aspects of the human organism. Although the subconscious defense reaction of the organism is unchanged—keeping oneself aloof, covering one's eyes, rolling oneself up into a ball—the conscious reaction is different. The new isotope produces it. The gen-

eration which never experienced Terror-37 no longer justifies itself by one's weakness before the terrible machine of the state nor by resigning itself to historical necessity, but by the very latest, enlightened, scientific sober good sense: Hush! Be quiet! Because it is uncultured to make noise. Why be interested in the camps for labor reeducation? The tourist camp is more interesting; we won't interfere in other people's affairs. Anyway, nothing will be changed. Let's concern ourselves with sports, art, and science. One must not be narrow; common sense above all else. Therefore, let's forget about it.

And so it is: The same events compel some to turn to their memory and compel others to deny themselves the benefit of precisely this memory. Well, what of it; it was not without reason that a great Russian poet said:

Those born in the deaf years
Do not remember the way. . . .

For a short period of time it seemed that people aroused themselves. They listened eagerly to the secret Central Committee letter, which has since disappeared completely, with Khrushchev's

speech to the Twentieth Party Congress.³ Now anyone who wants can declare that there never was such a letter and there never was a 1937. And of us who lived through the 1930s, few remain. Eye-witness testimony is our main cause—we simply do not have the right to carry away into non-existence that which we know to be true. But we are not only witnesses but participants in the events, and we stand before the court of our grandchildren just like Stalin with his accomplices and successors. The neo-Stalinists continue to justify Stalin and to silence us, the witnesses against him. But can we tell only about the mechanism of illegality and terror without exposing the secrets of the synchronized mechanisms of lies and historical falsification that are connected with it? This is why I cannot limit myself to only recording what I lived through, saw and heard; but I am compelled to record some of the things I have thought so much about—colliding with all the falsifications that Stalinism is so skilled at, ready as it is to falsify in any area, from history to economics, justice, and the biological sciences.

I am obligated to write and preserve these notebooks for the grandchildren.

1. Komsomol Christening

In February 1920 the Odessa Young Communist League (Komsomol) emerged from the underground fight against Denikin.⁴ And in March an envoy from the provincial committee of the Komsomol came to remote Ananiv, the chief town of the district. He was of small stature, dark-haired, and lively. His name was Kolya Chudnovsky. In the assembly hall of the girls' school, there was a meeting of worker and student youth of the city. The Ananiv organization of the Komsomol was born. There weren't many young workers in it—in Ananiv, an out-of-the-way and god-forsaken little town, all industry consisted of a half-dozen mills and butter churns. The nearest railroad was about nine miles away. All around, in the forests and villages, in all the corners and on all the roads, the civil war was still going on.

The young organization soon received a baptism in fire. An uprising broke out near the city. There were a few wealthy villages scattered between Ananiv and Balta. The center of the uprising turned out to be the village of Pasitsel. There, it was said, a detachment of White officers were holed up. Some big shot kulak [rich peasant] had brought in his own cavalry detachment from the Balta forests. The rebels even found a three-inch cannon.

The party and Komsomol organizations of the city were moved into a barracks-like place. We were issued weapons. Taking a rifle in my hands, I discovered that I was still too small to take aim.

The city's garrison consisted of a platoon of the Red Army. A small detachment was formed of communists and Komsomol members. It was designated a combined communist company. We moved out against Pasitsel.

In the morning, lying in the lines of the freshly plowed field, I saw the commander, a tall young lad wearing a sabre and carrying a Nagant revolver. He walked rapidly, not ducking the bullets and repeated:

"Comrades! Don't waste your cartridges!"

When he came closer, I recognized Vanya Nedoluzhenko. We had been students together before the revolution in the rural, two-class school in my native small town of Chernovo. He was three or four years older than I was and had already managed to spend time on the German front. There he became a Bolshevik.

I did not ask him where his school friends were, the kulak sons of the Sorochags and the Sheptyuks—with Petlyura⁵ or in the White Army. The boys grew up, they played together in the school yard; but when they became adults, it was as if some sort of sharp sabre divided them. . . . I heard the swish of a sabre in the air and I ran after Vanya Nedoluzhenko shouting "hurrah" toward the rebelling village. And we took the first huts and flew into the wide street. The peasant women hid in the cellars, the men found shelter in the attics with rifles; and we flew forward, forward. . . .

We attacked. Right next to me, on one side, was a Red Army soldier I didn't know who was overgrown with black whiskers; and on the other side a high school boy like me. We raw troops were not all placed side by side but were mixed in with veterans so that they taught us as we went along.

Not far from me, Sema Kogan was wounded. Sema was my friend in the secondary school, a quiet, very quiet boy in metal-rimmed eyeglasses with thick lenses, the best student in our class. What was he, half blind, doing in the battle line? But could he have allowed himself not to join in the battle for a trifling reason like glasses? He wasn't able to hit a target—but he could become one in place of another comrade. Sema honorably fulfilled his duty.

Meanwhile, some Green detachment joined those in rebellion, becoming part of the cavalry. Various insurgents at this time called themselves "Greens," emphasizing that they were neither Red nor White. And we were only a handful and we did not even have a machine gun. The next day there was more fighting. Less than half of our detachment survived it. I did not see my good comrade Mishka Patlis after the battle. And he was not found among the dead. What incredible vitality was needed in order to crawl stubbornly—with your head almost cut in half, bleeding profusely, losing consciousness and again regaining it—and reach your own forces! Mishka came crawling up the next morning. Our nurses, Komsomol members, as young as we were, bandaged Mishka and cried and cried.

When I see a woman crying, I lose control of myself. Only once was I indifferent to a woman's tears. It was over only two sparing tears of my mother's. Throughout all those days, she did not know where I was. Of course, I did not condescend to write letters to my parents. But when a rumor of a great battle near Balta reached my little town, Mama understood where she had to look for her missing son.

It was early spring, the time of bad roads. There could be no thought of traveling over the sloppy country roads by cart. Mama got a horse from some people she knew. Father could not restrain her. In the little village of Chernovo, certainly no one had ever seen a Jewish woman riding horseback, or in Ananev either, for that matter. All splattered with mud, Mama rode, made inquiries, and reached the forest where her boy, her stupid, muddleheaded son, should have been lying. Of course, he was no longer there. And of course, it never occurred to him that his mama was beside herself with grief. Her strange, abnormal son!

Maybe we were in fact deaf and dumb, if we were ashamed of filial feelings, thinking that they harmed our struggle for the cause of the proletariat of the world—especially when Mama was non-proletarian.

Arriving at the medical station in Odessa after the uprising was crushed, I met Mama. She did not throw her arms around me and did not cover

me with tears. She just fixed her beautiful eyes on me for a long time. I could not bear it and out of confusion uttered some stupidity or other.

And then, those two tiny tears rolled down Mama's cheeks.

I returned to Ananev full of, as we said then, Komsomol fervor. As the instructor of the district committee, I rode and walked from village to village—more often walked than rode. They sent us out in pairs. In torn overshoes—which we usually ended up taking off to make walking easier—with our rifles on our shoulders, we went from one village to another. In our pockets were the mandates of the district committee.

In the southern part of the district, closer to Odessa, as far back as the time of Catherine the Great, a number of German colonies had been established. Their appearance was sharply distinct from the neighboring villages. The streets were not buried in mud, but paved with cobblestones. The large houses were topped with red-tiled roofs. In every yard, under sheds, there was machinery: mowers, seed drills, winnowing machines.

We took the risk of setting out for the German colonies. In the yard of the village Soviet the president, having read our mandates, convoked the meeting. Only the young men gathered. The parents would not let the young women out. Alongside the sons, there were several sullen fathers. So as to be better understood, I mixed in with my Russian some broken phrases in a half-Yiddish, half-German self-constructed dialect. (We had been taught German in school.) Nobody signed up to join the Komsomol.

As we left the village we heard gunshots behind us.

* * *

I remember how we buried comrades killed by bandits in the Savran forest. The survivors of the Green forces hid in the Savran and neighboring small rural districts close to Balta after the uprising had been put down. To requisition farm produce in the Savran district at one time meant to go to an almost certain death. But there was never a time when the young Komsomol members would refuse. When I read "Elegy on Opanas" by Eduard Bagritsky,⁶ I always imagine food commissar Kogan, the best student in our class. It doesn't matter that Bagritsky's character is called Joseph and not Semen. There were many such Kogans:

Kogan, smiling
Adjusts his spectacles:
Opanas, do your pure toil,
Never blinking from your target.
It is awkward for a communist
to run like a borzoi.

. . . The bodies of our comrades who had perished in the Savran forest lay covered to their shoulders with old tarpaulins. Their faces were blue, bloated. Before they were killed, their stomachs were cut open and filled with grain.

Slowly, slowly, we walked to the sound of the funeral march. Crowds of city people accompanied the coffins with us. These strange women, crying over the bodies of unknown boys and girls, only at that moment apparently understood much, these women, artisans' wives, milkmaids, truck farmers, and sunflower-seed vendors. They did not understand the class nature of the Komsomol, of course. What could they know about the class struggle? But the moral and spiritual superiority of these boys and girls, who had given their young lives—this they understood.

Few yet then knew about the Komsomol, especially in the country and small towns. And indeed, that is where the majority of the people lived. But the people saw what kind of person the Komsomol member was.

The Balta district didn't finally rid itself of the gangs of bandits hiding in the forests until the end of 1921. For a time we retained the habit of carrying our rifles. Later we switched to revolvers, and then we even left the revolvers behind. But the gunpowder with which we were charged—that remained.

Reading the first part of my notes, a young friend of mine said: "Old men glorify their youth. But don't you think that an appropriate epigraph would be a short dialog from the Robert Penn Warren novel, *All the King's Men*?"

He leafed through the book and pointed out several lines:

"Yes, you tell me that we had such a remarkable and beautiful past, but I say to you: if we had such a remarkable, beautiful past, then where, in the devil's name, did this quite unremarkable and unbeautiful present come from? Where, if the not remarkable and not beautiful were not in our past also? Explain this to me."

"Not necessary," she said. "It's not necessary, Jack."

I agreed that Jack's question did not come into my young friend's head for nothing. However, I tried to convince him that I am not idealizing my past. "It really was like that," I said. "The first period of the revolution brought out the best qualities in everyone. In another time, those qualities might have died away. Defending a just cause, i.e., not oneself but one's brothers and

sisters, people grow taller. This is primarily because a readiness for self-sacrifice becomes an indispensable element of the society's psychology. Indeed, without such readiness, neither the revolution nor the Second World War would have been possible.

"Every historical period, I agree, carries within itself the embryo of its successor, but this does not necessarily mean that the successor will be its copy. This would be an oversimplified view. I understand the dialectic of development to be that the new arises out of the old and the newer still, born from what was new before, is a continuation of what came before and at the same time in many ways its opposite. Could you really say, for example, that the cruelty of Stalinism was only a continuation . . . ?"

"And why couldn't you say that?" interjected my friend. "Don't you know that Gorky was constantly petitioning to Lenin for one or another arrested intellectual? And have you never heard of the hostages? Or of the letters of Korolenko to Lunacharsky?"

"I know and have heard. I will not answer that you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs. Possessiveness and cruelty are very much connected. And defending one's privileges is close to defending one's property, but a long way from defending the oppressed and persecuted. The result of the activity of Stalinism was the destruction of innocent people who had been deliberately depicted as guilty. Didn't the revolution in its first days release its opponents on their word of honor? Only later did it have to shoot them. . . ."

"But weren't there some sorts of genes—genes of injustice? Were there or weren't there?"

"The genes you speak of are the absence of an open airing of views and the uniting of various functions of justice into a single apparatus. But this is explained (and possibly justified) by extraordinary circumstances, by the exceptional strains of the time, by mortal danger. And, of course, such a morally difficult, double-edged state of affairs could be entrusted only to people with very special qualities, the type I described just now, and then only for a short time. But the perpetuation of the extraordinary engenders new, unforeseen dangers. . . ."

[Next month: "Our St. Jacques Monastery."]

NOTES

1. NKVD is the Commissariat of Internal Affairs, including the political police.

2. Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935) was a Jewish officer in the French Army convicted of treason for espionage during an anti-Semitic campaign in 1894. His conviction was overturned after a long campaign in his defense by Emile Zola and others.

3. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev gave a secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU revealing some of the "excesses" of the Stalin period.

4. Anton Deniken (1872-1934) was a leader of the counter-revolution in Southern Russia during the civil war.

5. Simon Petlyura (1877-1926) was another leader of the counterrevolution in the Ukraine.

6. "Elegy on Opanas" (1926) is one of the best-known poems of Ukrainian poet Eduard Bagritsky (1895-1934). It is about the civil war in the Ukraine and the fate of a peasant who betrayed the cause of the revolution.

7. Maxim Gorky and Vladimir Korolenko frequently appealed to the Bolsheviks to release hostages the Bolsheviks had taken from among the wealthy and privileged classes during the civil war as a guarantee against atrocities by the counterrevolutionary armies.

LENINISM AND REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

A Response to Tim Wohlforth

by Paul Le Blanc

One of the tragedies of the revolutionary movement is the "burn out" and demoralization of talented leaders who, in the face of immense pressures and disappointed hopes, forget what they once knew. What is particularly tragic is the disorientation this generates among many revolutionary-minded activists. Over the past several years, a significant number of figures who once identified themselves as spokespeople for the Leninist-Trotskyist tradition have undergone a crisis which has resulted in the open abandonment of their previously held convictions. Among the best-known of these in the United States have been Jack Barnes of the Socialist Workers Party, and former SWPer Peter Camejo of the North Star Network. Though of somewhat less consequence, their ranks have now been joined by Tim Wohlforth.

Wohlforth was a founder and leader of the Young Socialist Alliance in the early 1960s, as well as a prominent member of the SWP. After an international current led by Britain's Gerry Healy split away from the Fourth International to form its own, sectarian, "Fourth International," Wohlforth became a leader of the Healyite group in the U.S. called the Workers League. He developed a reputation—as leaders in such small groups often do—of being the most uncompromising Leninist "hard," capable of being brutal toward any challenge to his authority. In his role as an educator in the "Leninist-Trotskyist" tradition (as interpreted by Healy) he gave considerable stress to "Lenin's great struggle for Marxist *method* and *theory* which made possible the creation of a party capable of overthrowing capitalism." Counterposing this to the alleged "revisionism" of the SWP, he confidently predicted that the future belonged to the Workers League: "We have now entered into the period of the 1970s—the period of Lenin and

Trotsky."¹ Instead, it was a period in which Wohlforth, finding himself at cross purposes with Healy's increasingly irrational politics, was accused by Healy of being a police agent and expelled from his own organization. For a short period he rejoined the SWP, taking a special interest in educational work, but then grew restive in the increasingly uncongenial atmosphere and drifted away.

Leninism Rejected

Wohlforth has now offered a fundamental re-evaluation of Leninism in the September-October 1986 issue of *Against the Current*. In this article, entitled, "The Two Souls of Leninism," we are told that Leninism "contained an elitist element which pre-figured future totalitarianism," that "Leninism created the conditions for the triumph of Stalinism," and that "Leninism is not valid as a democratic, revolutionary, working class heritage" (p. 42).

Before critically examining the manner in which Wohlforth comes to this conclusion, certain points should be clearly grasped. Despite the seeming implications of the article's title, Wohlforth's aim is not to counterpose positive aspects of Leninism to its negative side. The purpose of the article is *not* to offer an objective, critical assessment that can help make Leninism a more effective tool in the struggle for socialist democracy, but instead to reject Leninism altogether. Much of the information he presents is accurate, but he also leaves out important facts and offers a questionable interpretation—similar to that promulgated by long-time opponents of Leninism—which has become increasingly fashionable over the past few years among activists or former activists who were burned by stilted, undemocratic, mechanistic pseudo-Leninism. (Such pseudo-Leninism, one might add, was practiced both by and upon Wohlforth in earlier years.) The controversy over this interpretation is *not* simply an historical or academic quibble. It has immediate practical implications for the relevance of revolutionary socialism, as opposed to "left"—and not-so-left—reformism or arm-chair Marxism.

What Is Leninism?

Wohlforth writes that "the tendency toward elitism in Leninism was at best embryonic and contrary evidence of its open, mass, democratic character was far more abundant" in the years

Against the Current (in which the article that Paul Le Blanc is discussing in this article appeared) is the magazine of *Solidarity*, a left-socialist group recently formed through a merger of *International Socialists*, *Workers Power*, and *Socialist Unity*. Some of its members identify with the *Fourth International*, others reject Leninist and Trotskyist perspectives. Wohlforth's article was published complete with sympathetic illustrations, and with no indication that there are sharp disagreements within *Solidarity* or on the editorial board of the magazine concerning the perspectives he offers. Alan Wald, the magazine's cultural editor, is preparing a critique for publication in a forthcoming issue.

leading up to the 1917 revolution. This is an important admission, often denied by anti-Leninists, but Wohlforth is correct to note that the democratic character of Lenin's organization and orientation have been well documented.² He goes on to assert, however, that "the real test of Leninism came after it came to power in 1917" (p. 38). The bulk of his article examines repressive measures of the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs), and anarchists, and he concludes that

the single party state was the conscious construction of Lenin and Trotsky. . . . It was justified theoretically by the leading proponents of Leninism at the time. I do not see how the practice of Leninism in power can be separated out from Leninism as a general theory and practice. Any legitimate interpretation of Leninism must include the assertion that party leaders should do what Lenin and Trotsky did given similar circumstances (p. 42).

This is quite a leap, involving reasoning whose strands must be untangled and seriously evaluated.

The Leninism of Lenin existed for about 20 or 30 years (from 1893, or at least 1903, to 1923). Wohlforth deals only with the last six years. The *real* test of Leninism, he says, is not the fact that it contributed decisively to the world's first socialist revolution. No, the *real* test is confined to the crisis—generated by civil war, foreign interventions and blockade, and economic collapse—which overwhelmed that revolution, particularly in the period spanning 1918 to 1921. This stacks the deck. It also makes it impossible to understand the reality of Leninism conveyed in the expansive and subtle description of the Italian revolutionary Marxist Antonio Gramsci:

Did the Bolshevik Party become the leading party of the Russian nation by chance? The selection process lasted thirty years; it was extremely arduous; it often assumed what appeared to be the strangest and most absurd forms. It took place, in the international field, in contact with the most advanced capitalist civilizations of central and western Europe in the struggle of the parties and factions which made up the Second International before the [First World] War. It continued within the minority of international socialism which remained at least partially immune from the social-patriotic contagion. It was renewed in Russia in the struggle to win the majority of the proletariat; in the struggle to understand and interpret the needs of a numberless peasant class, scattered over an immense territory. . . . This selection process was a struggle of factions and small groups; it was also an individual struggle; it meant splits and fusions, arrest, exile, prison, assassination attempts; it meant preserving the spirit of a simple worker on the throne of the Tsars; it meant not despairing even when all seemed lost, but starting again, patiently and tenaciously.³

This suggests, surely, that there is something of value in the tradition which Wohlforth would have us shrug off. What's more, Wohlforth's misdirected focus on the "bad years" of Leninism in power, at the expense of all that went before,

pulls our attention away from an important question. The Bolshevik movement led by Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 was, by his own admission, a force for revolutionary socialism which had an "open, mass, democratic character." This is clearly something that we socialists of the United States would like to build here, one would think. But how was such a positive thing turned into its opposite? Wohlforth seems too concerned with rejecting Leninism to even ask this question. He slides over it by means of a distortion which we will examine shortly.

In fact, while *Leninism* is unambiguously rejected by Wohlforth, he never even bothers to define what he means by this term. Entire volumes could be (and have been) written on this question, but at the risk of seeming to oversimplify we would suggest that the following five points summarize the essential characteristics of Leninism:

- Leninism involves a commitment to bringing together the workers' movement and the struggle for socialism.

- Leninism involves a commitment to integrating practical reform struggles into a revolutionary strategy.

- Leninism involves an uncompromising retrieval of a critical-minded *revolutionary* Marxism as a guide to action.

- Leninism involves an uncompromising working-class internationalism and anti-imperialism.

- Leninism involves a commitment to building a cohesive activist organization (democratically centralized) based on a political program infused by the previously-listed characteristics.

Inherent in all of this are certain assumptions: that socialism is desirable and possible, even if the majority of people are not yet convinced of this; that the working class is capable of liberating itself and all of humanity; that this won't happen spontaneously and automatically but only through enormous effort; that not everyone is always prepared to become involved in that effort (but *sometimes* many are); that the working class majority doesn't think with one mind but with many minds, which respond to objective realities and sometimes to programs for changing reality if those programs seem to make sense; that it is possible and necessary for a revolutionary socialist minority to become transformed into a revolutionary socialist majority. These "vanguardist" assumptions are often denigrated as being elitist, but without them the revolutionary socialist orientation lapses—in the real world—into incoherence.

Leninism is the most coherent expression of this revolutionary socialist orientation, the most consistent articulation of revolutionary Marxism

in our time. it is too valuable to toss aside. There are no better alternatives.

Lenin, Trotsky, and Soviet Democracy

Wohlforth seems to be saying that the Bolshevik revolution degenerated because of certain bad ideas of Lenin and Trotsky. As he puts it, "The single party state was the conscious construction of Lenin and Trotsky." This distorts the reality beyond recognition. To begin with, the clear intention of Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolshevik party as a whole was to establish a working-class democracy based on the soviets (democratic councils). Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 were *not* anticipating a single-party state, but a multi-party democracy—today we might say a working-class "political pluralism"—within the soviets.

As early as September 1917, before the Bolshevik revolution but after the Bolsheviks had won control of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky—as the Soviet's new president—said to his Menshevik, SR, and anarchist opponents:

We are all party people, and we shall have to cross swords more than once. But we shall guide the work of the Petersburg Soviet in a spirit of justice and complete independence for all fractions; the hand of the praesidium will never oppress the minority."

In the same month, Lenin was describing what soviet democracy should look like, with special reference to freedom of the press:

State power in the shape of the Soviets takes all the printing presses and all the newsprint and distributes them equitably: the state should come first—in the interests of the majority of the people, the majority of the poor, particularly the majority of the peasants, who for centuries have been tormented, crushed and stultified by the landowners and capitalists.

His next point makes it clear that, as even the anti-Leninist historian Bertram D. Wolfe noted, "Lenin had no idea of outlawing all other parties and creating a one-party system." For he argued:

The big parties should come second—say, those that have polled one or two hundred thousand votes in both capitals [i.e., Petrograd and Moscow]. The smaller parties should come third, and then any group of citizens which has a certain number of members or has collected a certain number of signatures."⁴

Four weeks after the Bolshevik insurrection Lenin demonstrated his continued commitment to soviet democracy in drafting for the Council of People's Commissars a resolution which stated that

no elective institution or representative assembly can be regarded as being truly democratic and really representative of the people's will unless the electors' right to recall those elected is accepted and exercised. This fundamental principle of true democracy applies to all representative assemblies without exception.

Explaining this in the All-Russian Central Committee of Soviets, he provided a significant line of reasoning:

Various parties have played a dominant role among us. The last time, the passage of influence from one party to another was accompanied by an overturn, whereas a simple vote would have sufficed had we the right to recall. . . . The right of recall must be granted the Soviets, which are the most perfect carrier of the state idea, of coercion. Then the passage of power from one party to another will proceed without bloodshed, by means of simple new elections.

Early in the following year he was still emphasizing the role of political pluralism in soviet democracy:

If the working people are dissatisfied with their party they can elect other delegates, hand power to another party and change the government without any revolution at all.⁵

Wohlforth makes much of Lenin's and Trotsky's opposition to the proposal to establish a coalition government with the Mensheviks and SRs in the wake of the Bolshevik insurrection. He argues that this would have been a healthy "temporary measure to assure a real transition of power to the Soviet structure" (p. 38). The implementation of this proposal would have meant dividing up posts in the Council of People's Commissars, the leading executive body set up by the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Lenin and Trotsky were convinced, however, that a coalition with moderate socialists who had demonstrated their hostility to the Bolshevik revolution (and who, in fact, *opposed* a real transition of power to the soviets, preferring the bourgeois-parliamentary Constituent Assembly) would not be viable. Surely the two revolutionaries had a point! Nor does their position constitute favoring a single-party dictatorship in the sense that this term is commonly understood. It is the norm, for example, for the Conservative Party and the Labor Party in Britain, or the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S., not to share cabinet posts and executive authority with their opponents after an election. No one seriously refers to this as a single-party dictatorship. There was, at this time, no proposal by Lenin or any other Bolshevik leader to ban left-wing opposition parties or to throw them out of the Soviets.

In January 1918 the All-Russian Congress of Soviets adopted an initial constitution for the new Soviet Republic and elected a new All-Russian Central Executive Committee, the legislative body operating between congresses, with 306 members: 160 Bolsheviks, 125 Left SRs, 2 Menshevik-Internationalists; 3 Anarcho-Communists, 7 SR-Maximalists, 7 Right SRs, and 2 Menshevik-Defensists. As Roy Medvedev has commented, "The Bolsheviks obviously recognized the rights of many political minorities at that time and proceeded on a pluralist basis in the representative Soviet bodies."⁶

In the spring of 1918, observed Victor Serge, the All-Russian Soviet Congress reflected

a whole system of inner democracy. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not the dictatorship of a party, or of a Central Committee, or of certain individuals. . . . Lenin himself is obliged to follow strict rules. He has to convince a majority of the Central Committee of his party, then discuss with the Communist fraction in the Vee-Tsik [the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the Soviets] and then, in the Vee-Tsik itself, brave the fire of the Left SRs, anarchists, and International Social-Democrats, all doubtful allies, and of the Right SRs and Mensheviks, irreducible enemies. All the decrees are debated during sessions which are often of tremendous interest. Here the enemies of the regime enjoy free speech with a more than parliamentary latitude.⁷

The Crisis of Bolshevism

In his article Wohlforth ignores this earliest phase of Leninism in power and concentrates on the period in which soviet democracy disintegrated under the impact of the civil war and economic collapse which began in mid-1918. Much of what he documents—regarding the suppression of opposition parties, the substitution of Bolshevik authority for working-class democracy, the workings of the Cheka, and the theoretical justifications for these policies advanced by leading Bolsheviks (including Lenin and Trotsky)—is accurate. It would be wrong however, to think that he has unearthed anything new. As early as 1920, for instance, the radical philosopher Bertrand Russell offered an eye-witness account, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, which simply and lucidly made many of the same points. Yet Russell's severe critique showed a greater sense of perspective than Wohlforth is inclined to employ.

"It is, of course, evident that in these measures the Bolsheviks have been compelled to travel a long way from the ideals which originally inspired the revolution," the philosopher observed. He added:

I recognize to the full the reasons for the bad state of affairs, in the past history of Russia and the recent policy of the Entente [the war-time coalition of Britain, France and the United States which was economically blockading and militarily intervening to overturn the revolutionary regime]. But I have thought it better to record impressions frankly, trusting the reader to remember that the Bolsheviks have only a limited share of responsibility for the evils from which Russia is suffering.

Russell was of the opinion that the Bolshevik regime "represents what is most efficient in Russia, and does more to prevent chaos than any possible alternative government would do." He noted that Maxim Gorky (at the time one of the sharpest left-wing critics of the Bolsheviks) "supports the Government—as I should do, if I were a Russian—not because he thinks it fault

less, but because the possible alternatives are worse."⁸

Nor can we afford to join Wohlforth in forgetting an essential fact the Bolsheviks made the revolution confident that World War I would generate a revolutionary upsurge throughout Europe (which happened) and that Russia would soon be joined by other, more industrially-advanced, countries in the socialist transition (which didn't happen). They had no intention of building socialism in an isolated, backward, bleeding country; they were engaged in a desperate holding operation until the victory of other socialist revolutions could come to their assistance. The failure of workers' struggles to overturn capitalism elsewhere resulted, as Isaac Deutscher has put it, in

the great tragedy of the isolation of the Russian Revolution; of its succumbing to incredible, unimaginable destruction, poverty, hunger and disease as a result of intervention, civil wars, and of course the long exhausting world war which was not of Bolshevik making. As a result of all this, terror was let loose in Russia. Men lost their balance. They lost, even the leaders, the clarity of their thinking and of their minds. They acted under overwhelming and inhuman pressures.⁹

One could go through Wohlforth's account of this heroic, tragic, devastating period and argue over one or another incident or interpretation. But the fact remains, when all is said and done, that by 1921 there had occurred an authoritarian, elitist, substitutionist, and brutalized distortion of what had originally been a profoundly democratic and humane movement. Rather than quibbling over details, one might do better to strive for deeper understanding by trying to comprehend this period in all of its contradictions and complexity, and for this the testimony of Victor Serge in his novel *Conquered City* or of Isaac Babel in his many poignant stories may be more useful. Pointing to the conditions that led to the degeneration of Bolshevism does not necessarily justify the degeneration but is certainly necessary if we hope to understand it. To say that this period provides "the real test of Leninism," revealing some unique and ugly essence of its "soul," is indefensible.

It's worth repeating Wohlforth's assertion: "I do not see how the practice of Leninism in power can be separated out from Leninism as a general theory and practice. Any legitimate interpretation of Leninism must include the assertion that party leaders should do what Lenin and Trotsky did *given similar circumstances*." Does accepting Leninism mean accepting *everything* that Lenin and Trotsky ever said and did, including faulty policies and statements (which were not in harmony with their previous thought and practice and valued traditions) during the agony of civil war and economic collapse? In saying "yes," Wohlforth demonstrates a mechanistic approach to reality

which could ultimately be employed to justify a rejection of Marxism and socialism.

Living Marxism

If Leninism is the most consistent articulation of revolutionary Marxism in our time, this means that it is not a finished and rigid or self-enclosed doctrine, not a dogma, but is a continuously evolving, critical, and self-critical body of theory and practice. Leninists learn from their own experience (including mistakes) and from the experience of previous Leninists. This may be in contradiction to the "Leninism" which Wohlforth himself once embraced and now rejects, but it is consistent with the method of Lenin and Trotsky.

Utilizing this method, we are compelled to reject Wohlforth's contention that a single-party dictatorship is essential to Leninism. Consider the manner in which Trotsky dealt with the question:

As far as the prohibition of other Soviet parties is concerned, it did not flow from any 'theory' of Bolshevism but was a measure of defense of the [proletarian] dictatorship in a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies. For the Bolsheviks it was clear from the beginning that this measure, later completed by the prohibition of factions inside the governing party itself, signaled a tremendous danger. However, the root of the danger lay not in the doctrine or in the tactics but in the internal and international situation. If the revolution had triumphed, even if only in Germany, the need to prohibit the other Soviet parties would immediately have fallen away. It is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the juridical point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian system. But the reason for this development lies neither in Bolshevism nor in the prohibition of other parties as a temporary war measure, but in the number of defeats of the proletariat in Europe and Asia.¹⁰

Here and elsewhere we can see Trotsky moving substantially beyond the ad-hoc theoretical justification for the single-party system which he and other Bolsheviks had articulated in 1919 and afterward. From within a Leninist framework one can agree or disagree with his assessment of "the need to prohibit the other Soviet parties" as an emergency measure. But one must recognize that his

call for a political revolution in Stalinist Russia was consistent with the original Bolshevik-Leninist aspirations:

the establishment of the widest Soviet Democracy and the legalization of the struggle of parties, the liquidation of the never-changing bureaucratic caste by electing all functionaries; the mapping out of all economic plans with the direct participation of the population itself and in its interests; the elimination of the crying and insulting gaps of inequality; the liquidation of ranks, orders, and all other distinctions of the new Soviet nobility; a radical change of the external politics with the spirit of principled internationalism.

In fact his belief in the necessity of a multi-party system was written into the program and founding document of the Fourth International:

Democratization of the soviets is impossible without legalization of soviet parties. The workers and peasants themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognize as soviet parties.¹¹

This perspective has been recently reconfirmed and further developed in an important document, "Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," which was adopted at the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International.¹² For those who continue to struggle for socialism in the spirit of Lenin and Trotsky, revolutionary Marxism continues to develop. For these and others, today and tomorrow, Leninism remains a living, vital force for human liberation.

Dogmatists and sectarians may wish to deny that the heroic Bolsheviks made any mistakes. Those who are disheartened may be inclined to point to those mistakes in order to justify a withdrawal from revolutionary socialist politics. But we must seek to learn from such mistakes in order to make Leninism more adequate as a revolutionary approach to the problems and struggles of our time. The rejection of Leninism implies a retreat from the commitment to revolutionary socialism as a *practical* proposition.

The meaning of Leninism boils down to this: building a cohesive activist organization around a revolutionary Marxist program. This is something which must be embraced by those who are animated by the ideals and values of the socialist vision. ■

NOTES

1. Tim Wohlforth, The Struggle for Marxism in the United States (New York: Labor Publications, 1971), pp. 28, i.
2. The nature of the Bolshevik movement is indicated in John Reed, Ten Days that Shook the World (New York: International Publishers, 1926) and in much of the scholarship surveyed in Ronald Grigor Suny, "Toward a Social History of the October Revolution," American Historical Review, February 1983.
3. Antonio Gramsci, Selected Political Writings, 1921-26 (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 210.
4. Tony Cliff, Lenin, vol. 3 (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 162; Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-70), p. 378; Bertram D. Wolfe, Lenin and the Twentieth Century (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1984), p. 179.

5. Max Shachtman, "Revolution and Counter-revolution in Russia," New Internationalist, January 1938, p. 10; Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 26, p. 498; Tony Cliff, Lenin, Vol. 3, p. 10.
6. Roy Medvedev, The October Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 115.
7. Victor Serge, Year One of the Russian Revolution (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 243.
8. Bertrand Russell, The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949), pp. 54, 60-61, 21, 38.
9. Isaac Deutscher, Marxism in Our Time, (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1971), pp. 83-84.
10. The Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936-37 (New York: (Notes Continued on page 34))

THE LIBERATING INFLUENCE OF THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM (Part 3)

by George Breitman

I have traced the course of this thing, perhaps in too much detail, because I think a study of mistakes of this kind, frankly recognized and correctly analyzed, can be at least as useful educationally as a study of correct policies or actions. Everybody makes mistakes, even geniuses like Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. The Russian Revolution of 1917 would have been impossible if the Bolsheviks had not learned many valuable lessons from the defeat of 1905. In politics mistakes are unavoidable, said Trotsky; what is reprehensible is clinging to mistakes and refusing to correct them. This of course does not apply to the Ludlow dispute. But the Ludlow thing was important methodologically, as Trotsky said in his letter to Cannon. So it deserves further comment.

Reading Trotsky's approach to the Ludlow question now, I am struck by how much more rounded and all-sided it was than the one we had at the time. This enabled him more effectively to select out the major elements of the problem—for example, he began with a concrete class analysis, taking off from the fact that the ruling class was opposed to the Ludlow amendment, while that fact was subordinated in our analysis, which tended to center on a secondary factor, the illusions which the Ludlow forces fostered. Of course, what the ruling class wants in a particular case need not always be conclusive (sometimes they make mistakes too), and sometimes it is not even clear what the ruling class wants (that certainly was the case with the impeachment problem last year). But what the ruling class wanted on the Ludlow amendment was both relevant and clear, and it fructified Trotsky's thinking. While for us the position of the ruling class was something of an embarrassment which we didn't care to dwell on and didn't altogether explain, even poorly, concentrating instead on the question of illusions.

Illusions and the necessity to combat them were a prominent feature not only of the Ludlow discussion but of other questions facing the SWP at that time. This stems from the abiding obligation we have to help the masses overcome bourgeois ideology in all its forms and variants, including illusions about the nature of bourgeois democracy. Recently for example, our propaganda and action

around Watergate had to take into account, and to include material to counteract, the illusions widely generated about Congress, the courts, and the Constitution.

But here, as with everything else in politics, a sense of proportion is needed and I am afraid it was sometimes lacking. Sometimes, like today's TV housewife who is driven frantic by the absence of sparkle on a drinking glass or the presence of a ring around her husband's collar, we were a little obsessed by the illusion factor. Perhaps "obsessed" is too strong, perhaps a better word is "overpreoccupied."

But the struggle against illusions is not an end in itself. It is only a means toward an end, and not the central means. Its weight varies from one situation to another, sometimes considerably. And the way in which we struggle against illusions is not uniform and unvarying in all situations; in one case it is best done head-on, in another a more indirect approach proves more effective. And since effectiveness is or should be a paramount factor, a distinction has to be made between merely making the record against illusions, no matter how loudly and vehemently, and setting into motion forces that actually help people to raise their political consciousness.

We tended to throw all illusions into one bag marked "Dangerous, Expose At All Costs." Trotsky was more selective, more discriminating. In a different context, in a 1930 pamphlet that will be in English later this year, he had occasion to refer to the consciousness, mood and expectations of the revolutionary workers in Russia at the time of the October Revolution, and there he discussed what he called their "creative illusion" in "overestimating hopes for a rapid change in their fate." It was an underestimation of the effort, suffering, and sacrifice they would be required to make before they would attain the kind of just, humane, socialist society they were fighting for. It was an illusion in the sense that between that generation and that kind of society lay civil war, imperialist intervention, famine and cannibalism, the rise of a privileged bureaucracy, totalitarian regimentation and terror, decimation in the second World War, and much more that they did not see; it was an illusion based on an underestimation of the difficulties that would face them after the workers took power in backward Russia, which would have been infinitely smaller if the revolution had succeeded in spreading to the rest of Europe.

And it was creative because the workers' expectations enabled them to deal the first powerful blow against the world capitalist system and open up the era of proletarian revolutions and colonial uprisings. The record shows that the Bolsheviks did not spend much time or energy combating such illusions; they were too busy trying to

This concludes the talk on the Ludlow amendment, one of three talks Breitman gave at an SWP educational conference in August 1974. His second talk, on the labor party question, will appear in our next issue, No. 37. (This series began in the October issue of the Bulletin IDOM.)

imbue the masses with the determination to make the revolution.

In any case, Trotsky was able to differentiate among illusions if he could designate some as creative. Even more important, he was able to distinguish different sides or aspects of an illusion, as in the Ludlow discussion. Instead of a single label on the illusion or illusions connected with the Ludlow amendment, he called attention to the fact that certain aspects were progressive at the same time that others were not.

The idea that war can be abolished or prevented without ending the capitalist system that spawns war does not have much to recommend it from a Marxist standpoint. But if the spread of that idea leads masses of people into action to try to prevent the government from going to war, or to set limits on its power to declare war, isn't that a good thing from the standpoint of Marxists? Even if the idea that sets them into motion against the capitalist government is not scientific, and is therefore wrong and illusory, isn't it good, that is, progressive for them to conduct such a struggle? Isn't that precisely the way that they can learn what is wrong and illusory about their ideas on how to end war?

When I read you the second position adopted by the Political Committee on the Ludlow amendment, in February 1938, after Trotsky's letter was read, you may recall that in one place Goldman's motion said "the working class learns through experience." This was a commonplace in our movement; everyone subscribed to it. But the difference was that Trotsky held that the workers' experience with a struggle for something like the Ludlow amendment was exactly the thing that could help them to learn about and go beyond their illusion. While the Political Committee, even as it was saying "the working class learns through experience," took the view that we should try to discourage the workers from having such an experience with the amendment and that we should dissociate ourselves from the experience if they went ahead with it anyway.

The PC view was that this is an illusion, therefore we can only expose and denounce it. Trotsky's view was that this is an illusion, but it has a progressive potential. Therefore, without assuming any responsibility for the illusion, and without hiding our belief that it is an illusion—but without making our belief that it is an illusion the major feature of our approach to it—therefore, because it has a progressive potential let us encourage and help the workers to fight against the government on the war question. Let us join this movement and become its best builders, because this is the most effective way of helping them to overcome some of their illusions about war and democratic capitalism.

It seems to be the difference between the approach of narrow propagandism and the approach of revolutionary activism. In the first case you write an article explaining "the Marxian principles on war" and hand it out to those who are interested in such matters; you won't affect many people that way, but you have done your duty and presumably can sleep well. In the second case you intervene in the class struggle, helping to set masses into motion against the ruling class or to provide bridges for those in motion from the elementary, one-sided, and

illusory conceptions they start out with toward better, more realistic and more revolutionary concepts about capitalism and war and how to fight them.

I do think that the source of our error was in great part the remnants of the narrow propagandism that prevailed in the first years of the Left Opposition in this country, when we were restricted almost entirely to trying to reach the ranks of the Communist party with our written and spoken ideas. Subsequently we consciously set out to transcend this phase, with increasing success. But occasionally, especially when new problems were posed, we had a tendency to slip back. The transitional method that Trotsky recommended to us was precisely the thing we needed to enable us to say goodbye forever to such lapses.

If it was not an error of propagandism then it is hard to explain the thing Shachtman said in Mexico that I have already cited: "There is great danger that in jumping into a so-called mass movement against war—pacifist in nature—the revolutionary education of the vanguard will be neglected."

At first sight this seems like a non-sequitur. Why should jumping into a mass movement, or only entering one with more dignity than jumping provides, present a danger, a great danger, that the revolutionary education of the vanguard will be neglected? How does it follow? What is the possible connection? It doesn't make sense unless the reasoning is being done from the standpoint of propagandism, where you feel that the most urgent task you have is to present your entire program without ambiguity or possibility of misrepresentation on all occasions—a necessity that occurs to you because you lack confidence about the revolutionary education, the ideological solidity of the vanguard, that is, of yourselves.

In such a case, if you are not sure of it, the main thing becomes the strengthening of the revolutionary education or ideological condition of the vanguard group, and doing something about that seems more important, much more important, than taking advantage of an opportunity to intervene in the class struggle.

By contrast, let us consider how we would pose the same problem today, after having absorbed the meaning of the transitional method. We would say, "Here is a mass movement that we can enter, where we can win over people to our revolutionary positions and help raise the consciousness of many more. It is a pacifist movement, which means that in order to work effectively there our own members must be well educated about the nature of pacifism, what's wrong with it, and how to counter its influence. Which means, therefore, that before we enter and after we enter we must make sure our members are immunized politically against pacifism, if that is not already the case. That is, instead of neglecting, we must increase the revolutionary education of the vanguard on this point." Shachtman counterposed mass work and revolutionary education of the vanguard. We on the other hand combine them, because not only the masses learn that way, but we, the vanguard, do too.

Methodologically we also seemed to be suffering from a confusion about the relation between principles and tactics.

Principles are propositions embodying fundamental conclusions derived from theory and historical experience to govern and guide our struggle for socialism. Relating broadly to our goals, they set a framework within which we operate. Although they are not eternal, they have a long-range character and are not easily or often changed. In fact, we have essentially the same principles today that we had in 1938. The dictatorship of the proletariat, or the struggle for a workers state, as the form of state transitional between capitalism and socialism—that is a principle with us. Insistence on class struggle methods against class collaborationist methods—that is another. Unremitting opposition to pacifism in all its guises, because pacifism is an obstacle to revolutionary struggle—that is a third.

Tactics, on the other hand, are only means to an end. "Only" in this context is not meant to disparage them; without the appropriate tactics, principles cannot be brought to life, so there is clearly an interdependence between principles and tactics. But tactics are subordinate in the same way that means are subordinate to an end. They are good if they enhance and promote the principle, not good if they don't. In addition, tactics are flexible, adjustable, variable. They depend (or their applicability depends) on concrete circumstances. To advance a particular principle, tactic "A" may be best today; but it may have to be replaced by tactic "B" tomorrow morning, or tactic "C" tomorrow night. Meanwhile the principle remains unchanged.

Principle tells us to oppose pacifism, but it does not tell us whether or not to participate in a certain mass movement, it only tells us that under all circumstances, whether participating or not, we should so function as to counterpose revolutionary ideas and influence to those of the pacifists. There is not a single tactic that follows from any principle; after understanding and grasping the principle, we still have to consider tactics; and tactics, while they are subordinate to principles, have laws, logic and a domain of their own. Tactics must not, cannot, be in violation of principle (no tactical considerations could ever get us to say that we think war can be abolished through a referendum vote), but tactics are not limited to formal reaffirmations of our principles—they are not worth much if that is all they are.

What was the nature of the Ludlow amendment problem? Was it for us a matter of principle or a matter of tactics? If the SWP in 1938 had had any doubts about pacifism, any ambiguity about it, then the matter of principle would properly have been foremost. But if ever there was any party whose members had been trained, indoctrinated, drilled and virtually bred on a hostility to pacifism, surely it was the SWP. I can testify to that personally; long before I knew some of the most elementary ideas of Marxism, I had been taught about the dangers of pacifism.

Let me try to suggest an analogy: Comrade Smith takes the floor to propose that the branch should participate in a local election campaign by running our own candidates, and explains not only the benefits that would accrue to us from such a campaign but also the facts demonstrating that we have the forces and the resources to run such a

campaign effectively, etc. But I take the floor to oppose Comrade Smith's proposal on the grounds that the workers have electoral illusions and that these illusions can only be reinforced and perpetuated if we, the revolutionary opponents of bourgeois electoralism, take part in these fraudulent elections. No, I say, our revolutionary principles forbid our participation in bourgeois elections and require that we must call on the workers to boycott the elections; any other course would be in violation of our principled opposition to bourgeois parliamentarism.

Such a scene has never occurred at any SWP branch meeting, although it could occur and probably does in some of the Maoist and other sectarian groups in this country. Something not too different occurred in the Fourth International as recently as five years ago, when the French Communist League ran a presidential campaign dominated by the theme that its main task was to combat the electoralist illusions of the French workers.

Such a scene has not occurred at any SWP meetings, but if it did occur there would not be any lack of comrades, new as well as old, who would point out that Comrade Smith had raised a tactical question and that instead of answering him on the level of tactics I had switched the discussion to the level of principles, leaving aside the question of whether the principles I had invoked were at all relevant to the point at issue.

Nobody in the SWP has ever done this—mix up principles and tactics—in relation to elections and our participation in them. But isn't that precisely what happened in connection with the Ludlow amendment?

From the very beginning of the discussion in January, when Burnham proposed support for the amendment, all that was needed was an answer on the level of tactics, assuming that there were no differences on the level of principle. But Shachtman, instead of giving a tactical answer, replied with a motion to criticize the amendment "from a principled revolutionary standpoint." And even at the end of the discussion, at the plenum in April, Cannon's initial motion, later withdrawn, wanted to affirm that the Political Committee had taken "a correct principled position" on the amendment "but made a tactical error" by not giving the movement critical support.

But it was even worse than that, methodologically, in my opinion. When we are confronted with the need for a tactical decision, to be offered instead "a correct principled position" is to be offered at best an irrelevancy, and at worst an evasion, but in all cases not what the situation calls for politically. Pointing in such circumstances to the correctness of the principled position may provide us a measure of psychological consolation—"see, we were only 50 percent wrong"—but how much correctness can a principled position provide in real life if it is given as a substitute for a tactical position?

I think I have been justified in devoting so much time to the Ludlow dispute for at least three reasons. First, I think the details were needed because without them you would have only some generalizations and would lack the data through which to judge my conclusions.

Second is that the problems posed in that dispute related

rather closely to other questions of importance. For example, there was the slogan of the workers and farmers government in the Transitional Program (which more recently we have shortened to the slogan of the workers government in this country). The stenograms show that the SWPers kept putting questions about this to Trotsky—did he mean by the workers and farmers government the same thing that we meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat?—lurking behind which was the implied question: if the workers and farmers government means something different than dictatorship of the proletariat, don't we have the obligation to state this very forcibly, to emphasize it, in order to counteract the illusion that the workers may have in anything less than the dictatorship of the proletariat?

In tomorrow's talk I shall show additional evidence of the prominence in the thinking of the SWP leadership of the illusion factor as well as more about the confusion over tactics and principles. But my point is that clarification of the issues involved in the Ludlow dispute helped the SWP to better understand the Transitional Program and its method as a whole. And without that clarification, if we had continued to cling to the SWP's first and second positions on the Ludlow amendment, what do you think would have happened decades later when a mass movement against the Vietnam War began to develop in this country? One thing you can be sure of is that we could never have played the role we did in that movement if we had not previously learned the lessons of the Ludlow question through the Transitional Program discussion. In that case the SWP would be considerably different from what it is today, and I don't mean better.

The other reason I feel justified in giving so much time to the Ludlow dispute is because it helps us to view our party, its cadres, its program, and its method the same way we try to view everything else—historically. Sometimes there is a tendency to think they suddenly developed out of nowhere, fully formed and finished, with results and acquisitions that can be taken for granted. But it wasn't like that at all. We got where we are ideologically, politically, and organizationally as the result of a good deal of sweat, heart's blood, sleepless nights, trial and error—and struggle.

And that's how it will be as we continue to develop further. We have the advantage over our predecessors of not having to plow up the same ideological and methodological ground that they covered. If we really absorb the lessons they learned and the methods they pioneered, then we should be able to go beyond them and plow up new ground. And we certainly can do that better, the more realistically we understand how they did their work.

Two comrades whose opinions I respect made some suggestions after seeing the first draft of the notes for this talk a couple weeks ago. I didn't succeed in incorporating most of their suggestions into the talk, mainly because it got so long without them, but I would like to take them up now.

One comrade thought that the emphasis of my talk might be misleading, especially for those who were not familiar with the early years of our movement. After all, he pointed out, we were not on the whole sectarians or

abstentionists before 1938; even with our small forces and limited resources, we did some very good work when the opportunity came along. Furthermore, he added, although we didn't have the words "transitional method" or "transitional demands" in our vocabulary then, we did frequently and even effectively use that method and raise such demands in our work, especially after the big turn in 1933. Otherwise, he said, some of our most important work of that period—such as the Minneapolis experience—is inexplicable.

I must say that I agree with his concern, and if I did, or to the extent that I did, derogate or seem to derogate the party or its leadership in the pre-Transitional Program period of our existence, I certainly want to correct that now. There isn't any trace of muckraking or debunking in my motives in giving these talks. I don't know anyone who has a higher regard than I have for the pre-1938 party and its leadership. I said that it was a remarkable organization and the more I think about the conditions of that period, the more strongly I hold this opinion. From my own extensive activity in the three years before 1938, I know that the party was not sectarian or abstentionist or dogmatic or doctrinaire, on the whole by at least 95 percent.

If it had been, it could never have accepted the Transitional Program, it could never have absorbed the transitional method so fast. Certainly no other organization in this country ever understood them at all.

So please understand what I have been speaking about in that context. We were not abstentionists, but sometimes we made abstentionist errors, and the transitional method helped us to overcome them once we understood it and incorporated it into our arsenal. Does telling this story discredit the comrades of that time? Not at all. On the contrary, it seems to me greatly to their credit that they were able to correct their errors and lift the whole movement onto higher ground.

The other comrade's criticism was that in my discussion of principles and tactics, I entirely omitted the question of strategy, which he feels is the area where the Transitional Program makes its central contribution. I think he is completely correct on this latter point: the Transitional Program did provide us with a coherent and viable strategy or set of strategic concepts, perhaps for the first time in this country, and certainly on a scale we had never known before.

(Strategy, I should say parenthetically, was explained by Trotsky as follows in 1928: "Prior to the war [World War I] we spoke only of the tactics of the proletarian party; this conception conformed adequately enough to the then prevailing trade union, parliamentary methods which did not transcend the limits of the day-to-day demands and tasks. By the conception of tactics is understood the system of measures that serves a single current task or a single branch of the class struggle. Revolutionary strategy on the contrary embraces a combined system of actions which by their association, consistency, and growth must lead the proletariat to the conquest of power." Tactics are subordinate to strategy, and strategy serves a mediating role between principle and tactics.)

But I did not go into the question of strategy in my talk deliberately: because it was virtually omitted from the 1938

discussion in the SWP; the focus was almost entirely on the principle-tactic relationship. The stimulus given to strategical thinking instead also marked an important step forward, thanks again to the Transitional Program. My not going into that aspect was not intended to deny that or minimize it. Anyhow, I hope that the comrade who made this criticism will, as I suggested, some day himself speak about the danger of what he calls "tactical thinking that is not rooted in strategical thinking," and how the Transitional Program relates to this.

Tomorrow I shall resume the narrative, concluding my account of the chaotic plenum of the National Committee held in April 1938 after the return of the SWP delegation from Mexico, with major attention on the dispute over the labor party question. The following day, I shall make some comparisons between the SWP of then and the SWP of today, based upon a recent reading for the first time of the 1938 minutes of the Political Committee.

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A STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION OF MALCOLM X'S BLACK NATIONALISM

by Paul Lee

This effort is dedicated, with respect and affection, to the memory and living legacy of George Breitman, whose pioneering, conscientious work on Malcolm X's evolving independent thought laid the foundation and set the standard for nearly all later studies. His humanity, honesty, intelligence, industry and dedication to the struggle for human liberation, his faith in people, is exemplary and inspirational. George, you are missed.

Introduction

It is an accepted contention today that Malcolm X was "the most potent single contributor" to the popularization of black nationalist ideas in recent times.¹ This is attested to explicitly and implicitly in the constitutions, manifestos, and annual memorials of various local, regional, and national organizations proclaiming black nationalism as their guiding ideology and Malcolm X as its contemporary ideological progenitor. It is in these movements that the political progeny of Malcolm X labors to manifest the ideals and the tenets of black nationalism towards the amelioration and elevation of the conditions of the masses of Afro-Americans.

However, this process has been and continues to be hampered by a lack of clarity and general consensus on just what ideology Malcolm X had evolved and developed at the end of his life. This problem has persisted for two main reasons: first, Malcolm X's political ideas were in constant transition throughout his last two years (which are those most frequently looked at by activists and scholars); and, second, this process has been inadequately researched and presented, making analysis both difficult and faulty in the light of new information. The third major impediment to an analysis of Malcolm's political development is the fact that only a handful of Malcolm's closest associates have written about or allowed themselves to be interviewed on this crucial period, thereby necessitating and highlighting the speculative method used in most analyses.

To an extent, this paper overcomes some of these constraints. First, it is based on my own

independent research. Second, it importantly benefits from interviews with several of Malcolm's closest associates. Although for the most part they will not be quoted explicitly, their firsthand insights are an important part of this thesis. It is important to stress, however, that until more comprehensive research is undertaken and completed, involving interviews with more of Malcolm's co-workers, our assessments must be considered tentative or exploratory. This paper is my personal attempt in that direction.

Malcolm X's last two years can be said to have "revolved" around Africa. His politics at one time or another aimed at emigrating to, asking support from, urging support for, and always identification with Africa. And although at times this had religious overtones, Malcolm's concerns were always very clearly political. These changes represent a progressive growth and evolution in Malcolm's political ideas. The aim of this paper is to identify these changes and highlight some of the dominant themes in Malcolm's political thought, and also to raise pertinent questions for further research.

Three Periods

The evolution of Malcolm's black nationalism can be divided into three basic categories and periods: 1) the religio-nationalist period, spanning his years as a follower of Elijah Muhammad in the Nation of Islam (hereinafter NOI); 2) the emigrationist-separationist period of his first month as president of the Muslim Mosque, Incorporated, or MMI; and 3) the internationalist-pan-Africanist period, consolidated in the formation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (hereafter OAAU), of which he was the chairman, encompassing the final months of his life.

Malcolm X was a follower of Elijah Muhammad in the Nation of Islam for 16 years (1948-64). This period is punctuated by steady growth, gain, and high visibility for Mr. Muhammad, Malcolm, and the NOI. But it is not distinguished as a period of independent thought and action by Malcolm, nor could it have been. An often overlooked reality is the fact that Malcolm was a *spokesman* for the philosophy and theology of Mr. Muhammad and not an independent theoretician. In Mr. Muhammad's view, the NOI was not a "black nationalist" or political organization or movement. It was a religious body, a "nation," more akin in structure and outlook to the hierarchy of a church than to the democratic

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Black Nationalism

or collectivist nature of a political club. Mr. Muhammad claimed *divine* guidance as Allah's Last Messenger and Malcolm, at first, accepted this. Later, of course, he repudiated this belief, but it must be stressed that in his role as NOI minister, Malcolm accepted and preached a theology which he certainly built upon and modified, but he did so upon a foundation he did not lay and could not clearly contradict.

The NOI was founded in Detroit in 1930 by Fard Muhammad, considered God in Person by the faithful. After Fard's disappearance in 1934, Elijah Muhammad assumed leadership of the movement until his death in 1975. A major tenet of the movement was separation to "a land of our own," either in America or "elsewhere." This had long been an ideal of black nationalists, but with three exceptions. First, the territory desired was never specified, nor was any program ever initiated to transport the NOI anywhere. Second, the NOI said that the U.S. government should finance this exodus as partial reparation for 300 years of slavery, but that they also knew in advance the government would not do so. Third, Mr. Muhammad taught that "divine intervention" would provide the NOI with the land.

After accepting Mr. Muhammad's teachings, Malcolm quickly rose within the NOI and in 1954 he became the minister of Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 7 in Harlem. Harlem, in the 1950s, was rising anew as "little Africa" to black and African nationalists of all stripes and also to foreign dignitaries. (Malcolm's first meeting with Ghana's first African premier, *Osagyefo*—"Redeemer"—Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, was on a platform in Harlem.) It was the Harlem of the nationalist street-corner speakers and propagandists, such as the Unmatchable Carlos Cooks of the African Nationalist Pioneer Movement, who perhaps more than any Harlem personality since Marcus Garvey rallied the call for "African Redemption" and was a forerunner of the famous BUY BLACK campaigns.

The United Nations further quickened the new interest in Africa by showcasing to the world the leaders and delegations of newly-emerging African nations. Malcolm was an alert and interested observer—Mr. Muhammad's teachings prevented much direct involvement with political organizations or movements—but these trends and movements had a formative effect upon his thinking. In 1958, for example, Malcolm organized the first NOI Afro-Asian Bazaar. Beginning in 1957, Malcolm regularly spoke at rallies commemorating Marcus Garvey Day and African Freedom Day (which we now know as African Liberation Day).

In this context, Malcolm's analyses and presentations began to assume a more political character. His incisive critiques and organizational abilities won him the respect, although sometimes grudging, of many of Harlem's nationalists, and Temple No. 7 became a significant *potential* political force.

Mr. Muhammad did not refer to himself, the NOI, or its philosophy as black nationalist. But all three reflected and projected characteristics of black nationalism which E.U. Essien-Udom has defined broadly as

the belief of a group that it possesses, or ought to possess, a country; that it shares, or ought to share, a common heritage of language, culture, and religion; and that its heritage, way of life, and ethnic identity are distinct from those of other groups. Nationalists believe that they ought to rule themselves and shape their own destinies, and that they should therefore be in control of their social, economic, and political institutions.²

This is and has long been the basic philosophical framework through which most black nationalists have conceived of themselves and their relationship to others. But because of the political connotation of the term it was not deemed acceptable to the NOI.

In 1960, Malcolm, then rising in the nation's consciousness as Mr. Muhammad's national spokesman, asserted during a radio debate that

what the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is teaching is not what we have been accused of—nationalism. . . . The difference between being a Muslim and a nationalist, nationalism is the political approach or a political solution to the problems that confront the so-called Negroes in America. . . . The aim of the black nationalist is the same as the aim of the Muslim. The Muslim and the black nationalist have no differences—in objective. We're pointing toward the same goal.

He explained that "the difference is in method":

The black nationalist, wherein he relies on a political solution to the problems that confront the so-called Negro, we, as Muslims, believe that the only solution to our problem is a religious approach, and this is why we stress the importance of a moral reformation. As a rule, the black nationalist will not talk to you about God or any religion or any kind of . . . uplifting of the moral values, whereas the Muslim, he stresses first to raise the moral standard of the so-called Negro. . . . So I would like to stress that Mister Muhammad is not a politician, he doesn't believe that politics is the solution to the so-called Negro's problem. He says that the primary ingredient involved in our solution—it will take God³

Mr. Muhammad may have agreed in general terms that "the aim of the black nationalist is the same as the aim of the Muslim"—for example, in terms of the Muslims' demand for complete freedom, justice, and equality—but beyond such common sentiments, in broad terms, they parted in the area of programming. For example, a major plank of the NOI was separation. Item number four of "The Muslim Program," under the section titled "What the Muslims Want," stated that the NOI wanted "our people in America . . . to be allowed to establish a separate state or territory of their own—either on this continent or elsewhere." This territory

was to be provided by "our former slave masters"—the U.S. government—and they were to supply and maintain the needs of this black nation for 20 to 25 years—"until we are able to produce and supply our own needs."⁴

The NOI preached that the end of the white man's divinely-allotted rule was soon at hand, and even if white people assented to the demand for separation, this would only temporarily forestall their eventual destruction. Nevertheless, Malcolm and the other NOI ministers continued to publicly and privately present, argue, and debate the idea of separation, probably because of the psychological and emotional benefits which this approach seemed to yield.

Break with NOI

In 1963, Malcolm's faith in Elijah Muhammad began to crack and erode as a result of what he perceived as moral contradictions in Mr. Muhammad's character. Moreover, Malcolm was already in a power conflict with enemies in the NOI's hierarchy, and he believed that they were eventually able to alienate Mr. Muhammad from him and, with this added weight, prevail over him in the struggle. The result was that he was unable to function within the NOI; indeed, the character of rumors and information he received suggested that his enemies within the movement planned for his silence to be permanent.

On March 12, 1964, Malcolm X announced his forced departure from the Nation of Islam and the formation of a new organization, the Muslim Mosque, Incorporated. In his press statement, Malcolm played down any personal differences with Elijah Muhammad and said:

I still believe that Mister Muhammad's analysis of the problem is the most realistic, and that his solution is the best one. This means that I too believe the best solution is complete separation, with our people going back home—that is, to our African homeland.⁵

However, an examination of this statement reveals two important differences between Mr. Muhammad's analysis and Malcolm's presentation of that analysis. First, Mr. Muhammad always emphasized that his solution was the *only* solution, not just the best one. Second, as has been noted, Mr. Muhammad apparently never specified where complete separation was to be effected. A careful reading of Mr. Muhammad's lectures, writings, and interviews reveals references to separation "back to our own" or "to the East," which are suggestive of Africa or possibly Mecca. Apparently no comparable allusions to a territory within this continent were ever clearly made. The idea of five states in the south, and a so-called back-to-Africa program, were largely the result of speculation by the press.

Thus Malcolm's formulation of Mr. Muhammad's program contains both a qualification of its certitude and a specification of its objective. More-

over, Malcolm's pre-ouster public statements undoubtedly contributed to the speculations and assumptions of the press. For example, in a press conference in San Francisco in October 1963, Malcolm reaffirmed Mr. Muhammad's belief that separation was the only answer to the race problem, but reportedly "claimed that the *ideal* situation would be for all [of the so-called Negroes] to return to Africa." The following day, in a lecture at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, Malcolm reportedly said that the sought-after black nation "is to be *preferably* in Africa"⁶ (my emphasis in both—P.L.).

Whether or not seeming modifications of this sort contributed to the tensions which finally resulted in Malcolm's expulsion from the Nation is not germane to this study. It is considered here only as another indication of Malcolm's increasing African orientation, and is perhaps also indicative of Malcolm's private doubts, as well as his private hopes.

Malcolm's interpretation of Mr. Muhammad's separatism as the "best" rather than the "only" solution also reveals his personal uncertainty about emigration. The NOI idea of territorial separation somewhere in this hemisphere was apparently broached only once by Malcolm after the break,⁷ and then perhaps out of habit. He further qualified the idea of emigration to Africa by terming it "a long-range program."⁸

A third important departure was Malcolm's advocacy of black nationalism. Malcolm had moved both himself and the Nation closer to political and cultural black nationalism, as distinguished from the Nation's implicit religious and economic black nationalism. In fact, his introduction of new ideas and activities later prompted two of his former assistants to blame him for bringing black nationalism—in this case, political and cultural nationalism—into the Nation.⁹ Malcolm had begun to relate the movement's aspirations and objectives to African and other colored independence movements and encouraged an examination of these models as closely analogous to the Afro-American struggle.

So, at the time of the break, Malcolm explicitly embraced all these aspects of black nationalism. Although his program at this time, and even later, was not clear, his concepts certainly were. For example:

The political philosophy of black nationalism means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community. . . .

The economic philosophy of black nationalism . . . only means that we should control the economy of our community. . . .

The social philosophy of black nationalism only means that we have to get together and remove the evils, the vices, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other evils that are destroying the moral fiber of our community. We ourselves have to make our own society beautiful so that we will be satisfied in our own social circles. . . .¹⁰

He saw black nationalism as a philosophy best suited to meet the immediate needs of Afro-Americans, while at the same time "point[ing] us back homeward."¹¹

This did not solve the problem of emigration, however, and in early April 1964 he made a fact-finding tour abroad. Shortly before his departure, Malcolm replied to a reporter's question about his thoughts on "Americanism": "A cat can have kittens in an oven but that doesn't make them biscuits. I was born in Omaha; that doesn't make me an American. Africa is home."¹²

Malcolm in Africa

Malcolm left for home on April 13, 1964 and did not return until May 21. During the first part of his five and a half week tour, he went to Saudi Arabia and made a religious pilgrimage to Mecca, the Holy City of Islam. In Mecca, Malcolm redefined his concept and interpretation of Islam, which later underwent further modification in Africa. But in Nigeria and particularly Ghana, several new political elements were introduced into his thinking, displacing some old preconceptions and re-enforcing others.

In a letter from Accra, Ghana, dated May 11, 1964, a much abbreviated version of which appears in the collection *Malcolm X Speaks*,¹³ Malcolm related three new insights. First, he discovered that

The true picture of our plight in America has been skillfully distorted here purposely to minimize the concern and reaction of the Africans.

Second he noted that:

Studying the situation in these areas very closely, one can easily detect a well-designed plan, or gigantic conspiracy, to keep the Africans in Africa from ever getting together with the Africans abroad. As one highly placed African official told me . . . , "When one realizes the number of people of African descent in South and Central America, and includes them with those of North America, the total number of Africans in the Americas (Afro-Americans) could easily number well over 80 million, and once this is realized, one can more easily understand the frantic necessity of keeping the Africans from ever uniting, or developing bonds of common interest, with their 80 million Afro-American brothers."

Unity between the Africans of the west and the Africans in our swiftly emerging African fatherland could well change the present course of history.

This last point was, in fact, the impetus for the formation of Malcolm's second organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, whose aim was well suggested by the place of its birth: Ghana.

His final insight, predicated upon the above two, both settled the question of emigration for him and complemented his original black nationalist initiatives. It was his opinion that:

We can learn much from the strategy used by the American Jews. They have never migrated physically to Israel, yet their cultural, philosophical, and psychological ties (migration) to Israel has enhanced their political and economic and social position right there in America.

Pan Africanism will do for the people of African descent all over the world, the same that Zionism has done for Jews all over the world. If we too return to Africa (not physically) but philosophically, culturally, and psychologically, it will benefit us right there in America, politically, economically and socially. Just as Jews all over the world help Israel and Israel in turn helps Jews all over the world, people of African descent all over this earth must help Africa to become free and strong, and Africa in turn must obligate itself to help people of African descent all over this earth.¹⁴

Malcolm later replaced the Zionist analogy with a Chinese analogy—perhaps because he deepened his understanding of Zionism by visiting Palestinian refugee sites in the Gaza strip on a later tour—but the content of his concept of pan-Africanism remained constant.

Organizationally, Malcolm's pan-Africanism was expressed in the formation of chapters of the OAAU in several parts of the African continent, as well as in Europe. In Ghana, an information bureau was set up, giving practical support to his ideas. Writer Maya Angelou, who was a member of that bureau, in introducing the organization publicly, said: "We feel it is important that Africans in Africa should be in constant possession of the facts of the lives of Africans in the New World and vice versa." She said since liberation is a double-edged sword, "we plan to keep our people at home abreast of the developments in Africa."¹⁶

This view of liberation as a two-edged sword¹⁷ was also a component of Malcolm's domestic black nationalist initiatives. As he pointed out to a Nigerian writer, "there are 20 million blacks in the United States and this is Africa's greatest weapon in America."¹⁸

Although this Pan-Africanism, implicitly and explicitly, became a dominant theme in Malcolm's public statements and work, he did not see it as an immediate remedy to the problems of Afro-Americans. Writer Peter Bailey, one of Malcolm's associates, tells us that "When he spoke on a public level to the people he had to make this sound almost like it was nearer to completion than it really was, but when he talked to a small group of us . . . then he of course recognized that these were long range plans."¹⁹

So Malcolm's pan-Africanism should be seen, like his earlier emigrationism, as a long-range but more certain complement to his black nationalism. This dichotomy between long- and short-range philosophies perhaps contributed to Malcolm's uncertainty as to just what to call himself after his visit to Africa. Nevertheless, the substance of his domestic thought maintained its nationalistic character, and had the added advantage of being less doctrinaire and thereby avoiding some

of the traditional traps that American black nationalists have fallen into.

These concepts and activities, however, lacked the dynamic center of a well-structured ideology. In fact, many of the newer elements of his thought seem not to have been grasped by most of his followers and co-workers, and remain today imbedded in news reports, tapes, and memories of

people who met him along his travels, awaiting the attention of researchers.

Malcolm, in essence, was a propagator of ideas, not an ideologist, as Dr. Maulana Karenga has noted.²⁰ But because his mind was open, his travels broad, and his character single-minded and sincere, his life still bears further study. ■

NOTES

1. Milton D. Morris, The Politics of Black America, (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) p. 96.
2. Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; paperback edition January New York: Dell, 1964) p. 20.
3. Malcolm X in discussion "A Choice of Two Roads," with Bayard Rustin, (New York: WBAI-FM, Nov. 7, 1960). Available on tape (Los Angeles: Pacifica Tape Library, BB 3014).
4. "The Muslim Program," as published regularly on the back of NOI's paper, Muhammad Speaks beginning in early 1963.
5. Quoted from a press statement as read (and slightly revised) by Malcolm X at his news conference at the Park Sheraton Hotel, New York. Recording of this excerpted on Chris Koch's documentary on Malcolm X, (New York: WBAI-FM, 1965) released as A Retrospective (Los Angeles: Pacifica Tape Library BB 3084). Compare with the version "A Declaration of Independence," from Malcolm X Speaks, George Breitman editor, (New York, Merit, 1965, p. 20).
6. FBI Summary report in microfilm Malcolm X: Surveillance File/17 Feb. 1953 to 1964, (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources Inc.)
7. In an interview with an unnamed national staff member of U.S. News and World Report (March 30, 1964, p. 39), Malcolm again advanced his modification of the NOI's ostensible objective ("The only real answer is for our people to go back to Africa"), and also referred to its standard, nebulous alternative: "If the Government does not let us go back to Africa, then we should have a black nation here." Typically, he avoided giving any specificity to the latter, but he did express the hope that it could be in Florida or California. "I like it where the weather is warm," he advised.
8. In a press statement, March 12, 1964, Malcolm X Speaks, p. 20.
9. The former assistants were Henry X and Joseph X, respectively the then assistant minister and "appointed administrator for the New York Area" of Muhammad's Mosque of Islam No. 7, Harlem. The Nov. 8, 1964, New York Times reported: "They said it was Malcolm who injected the political concept of 'black nationalism' into the Black Muslim movement, which they said was essentially religious in nature when Malcolm became a member."
10. "The Ballot or the Bullet," talk given in Cleveland, Ohio, April 3, 1964, Malcolm X Speaks, pp. 38-39.
11. Press Statement, March 12, 1964, Malcolm X Speaks, p. 20. Here again Malcolm was referring to his interpretation of "Mr. Muhammad's program," with its purported emphasis on Africa. That this was, in fact, his interpretation was made explicit three days later in remarks at a school boycott support rally at the Milbank Center in Harlem on March 15, 1964. He asserted there: "I'm a believer . . . and follower of the honorable Elijah Muhammad. . . . I ran into some obstacles in the Nation of Islam, and I feel that I can best serve the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's purpose and program and carry into existence why I feel, I understand concerning his objectives better on the outside than I can on the inside." (newsfilm soundtrack of this rally included in the motion picture Malcolm X, 1972, Warner Bros., emphasis in original).
12. Quoted by Marc Crawford in Life, March 20, 1964, p. 40A.
13. Pages 62-63.
14. El Hajj Malik El Shabazz/Malcolm X to reporter-columnist James Booker, May 11, 1964, from New York Amsterdam News, March 27, 1965, p. 11. (The editorial introduction mis-dated this letter as May 10, 1964.)
15. See, for example, the talk at OAAU "homecoming rally," New York, Nov. 29, 1964 in By Any Means Necessary, George Breitman ed., (New York, Pathfinder, 1970) pp. 136-37; and extract from question period of talk at HARYOU-ACT forum for peace corps, Harlem, Dec. 12, 1964 in Malcolm X Speaks, pp. 210-212.
16. Quoting remarks made at the Press Club, Accra, Aug. 28, 1964, in Daily Graphic (Accra), Aug. 29, 1964, pp. 8-9.
17. Malcolm X used the analogy himself in an interview with writer-photographer Gordon Parks on Feb. 19, 1965, two days before he was assassinated. Commenting on his travels abroad—which comprised just over half of his final independent year—Malcolm said, according to Parks, "Everybody's wondering why I've been going back and forth to Africa. Well, first I went to Mecca to get closer to the orthodox religion of Islam. I wanted first-hand views of the African leaders—their problems are inseparable from ours. The chords of bigotry and prejudice here can be cut with the same blade. We have to keep that blade sharp and share it with one another" Life, March 5, 1965, p. 29; reprinted in John Henry Clarke, ed. Malcolm X: The Man and His Times, (New York: Macmillan, 1969) pp. 121-22.
18. Interview by "Sad Sam" Amuka, Spear (Lagos), Jan. 1965, p. 15.
19. Peter Bailey, Robert Martin interview, Civil Rights Documentation Project, New York, Sept. 4, 1968 (Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C., p. 49).
20. "The Socio-Political Philosophy of Malcolm X," The Western Journal of Black Studies, Number 3, Winter 1979, p. 253.

MALCOLM X AT THE NEW YORK CITY OPERA

X (The Life and Times of Malcolm X), Music by Anthony Davis, Libretto by Thulani Davis, Story by Christopher Davis.

Grand opera, to be successful, has to work on a number of levels, both musical and theatrical. The new work, *X (The Life and Times of Malcolm X)*, which had its world premier on September 28 at the New York City Opera, gives itself still a third set of problems—how to deal artistically with an individual who is a recent, and controversial, politico-historical figure. On almost all counts, however, the work was successful in its debut series of four performances.

Most striking, at least for me, was the pain taken by the three members of the Davis family who collaborated on the work to accurately present the facts of Malcolm X's life and his political evolution: from street hustler, to prisoner, to leader of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, through his break with that organization and his conversion to traditional Islam, ending with the final months in which he began to express a more coherent revolutionary vision. In general, cultural works about historical or political figures have some leeway in fictionalizing their protagonists, and the Davises could have been excused if they had chosen to exaggerate one or another aspect of Malcolm X's life for dramatic effect. Instead they adhered closely to Malcolm's own account of that life as presented in his autobiography. Many of the words which come from Malcolm's lips during the course of the opera will be recognized by those who are familiar with his speeches.

Art and History

Artistic works must stand on their own merits, and can't be judged fundamentally on the basis of how they present history or politics. Nevertheless, I think the decision to stick close to the historical truth served the artistic effort well in this case. After all, the life and times of Malcolm X were dramatic enough, and need little in the way of embellishment. That factual story, told plainly and simply by this opera, is the most important single element in its dramatic impact.

Opera or drama based on controversial political subjects is nothing new, of course. And it must be acknowledged that the standards by which such works are judged inevitably change as the contemporaneity of their subject matter recedes. Today, several hundred years after their premiers, we don't care much about Shakespeare's historical accuracy in portraying the characters of various English monarchs. (The fact is that his approach was tainted considerably by the stake of the Eliz-

abethan court in the interpretation of recent history.) Nor, for example, does Mozart's softening of the anti-aristocratic theme of the play on which he based the *Marriage of Figaro*, in order to have the work approved for performance in Vienna, have much impact on our enjoyment of it.

Two or three hundred years from now audiences will relate quite differently to *X (The Life and Times of Malcolm X)* if it should succeed in establishing itself as part of the standard operatic repertory. But for the present, when many of us who were in the audience to experience the opera can remember seeing and listening to the man himself before his assassination in 1965, or are otherwise acquainted with the facts of his life, an accurate historical portrayal was certainly a plus. Anything which strayed too far would probably have been a severe distraction.

An Effective Work

Musically, *X* follows in the tradition of most contemporary operatic works. It is written in a dissonant style, and depends not primarily on its melodic content but on the interplay of voice, driving rhythms, and a mood-setting orchestration for its emotional impact. Its atonality does combine with other idioms. The second scene of Act 1, in particular, where Malcolm is seduced by the street life of the Roxbury ghetto in Boston in the 1940s, shows that Anthony Davis is quite capable of writing in a more easily accessible jazzy style. Also integrated into the musical score is chant reminiscent of African cultural traditions. On its own terms the music is successful, combining these different styles effectively and meshing well with the power and drama of the story.

The libretto, by Anthony Davis's second cousin, the poet Thulani Davis (the story was by his younger brother, Christopher), has been criticized by some as being overly akin to "agit-prop" theater—where the political message, not the artistic impact, is the overriding consideration. But I don't agree. The text does quote Malcolm's words, which were political words. But how could an opera do anything less when trying to present his life, which was a political life even at the time when his primary motivations were religious? And on several occasions the lyrics transcend their political message to hit with a powerful emotional force, such as when Malcolm is being interrogated in prison and sings:

I would not tell you what I know. You would not hear my truth. You want the story but you don't want to know. . . . As long as I've been living you've had your foot on me, always pressing.

My truth is white men killed my old man, drove my mother mad. My truth is rough, my truth could kill, my truth is fury. . . .

My truth is a hammer coming from the back. It will beat you down when you least expect.

And then he repeats,

I would not tell you what I know. You want the truth; you want the truth; but you don't want to know.

Later, toward the end of Malcolm's life, during the black urban revolts of the mid-1960s, he is asked by reporters to comment on what is taking place but turns the question around, posing the same refusal of the whites to understand what is happening to Blacks:

What do you want to know that you've not been told? We have explained ourselves so many times.

You always ask what you already know. You wonder why there is revolt—a violent land breeds violent men. The slaver breeds a rebel not a slave. Can't you see at all? Do your eyes tell you lies?

It has begun and I am no more its cause than any one here. I do not stand alone against your foolish blows. . . .

Men of 50 nations lead their people on. We throw off the tyranny of states, the slaver's greedy hand. A tide rises at your back and sweeps you in its path. Can you see at all? Do your eyes tell you lies?

Yet the reporters are totally oblivious to Malcolm's message, and the scene ends with them simply repeating their own preconceptions to themselves:

Is he not the one? Is he not the one who sent the youth into our streets? Is he not the one? Is he not the one who called us devils, who preached black hate? Mr. X, Mr. X.

This feeling the opera gives for the reality of the Black experience comes through in other ways as well. The white police are on stage throughout the opera, and from the very first scene—where they inform the Little family that "a man was on the tracks, a streetcar ran him down" (referring to Malcolm's father) without mentioning that he was pushed or thrown there by racists—they are accurately portrayed as an alien, occupying force. By the time of the "riot" scene, the sympathies of the audience are certainly with the Blacks who are finally fighting back and getting some measure of revenge against the cops.

The staging of this production was also effectively done, with few props and a bare stage—a suitcase, a step ladder, some Muslim prayer rugs, a wooden table and straight-backed wooden chairs (which served double-duty as prison bars during the second act), and a backdrop of stark panels reminiscent of a bombed-out ghetto neighborhood. The spartan set evoked the poverty and difficulty of life in the Black community. The inner turmoil of this existence was also implied by the constant motion of characters on and off

the stage, even those who had no lines and no direct part in the action taking place.

One did sense that sections of the score could have been shortened. It suffered from excessive repetition, which is no doubt included for dramatic impact and works on occasion. But it was overdone and sometimes caused the pace of the opera to drag. This was particularly true since most of the action consists simply of people talking to one another.

The singers were generally good or better, with Thomas Young especially effective in the dual role of Street, the ghetto hustler-king, and Elijah Muhammad. The unfortunate exception to this was Ben Holt, who played Malcolm. He was cast in the part because he looks very much like Malcolm X, but his voice could not project back to the second ring where I was sitting, and he played the part far too passively. There was little of the fire and dynamism of Malcolm X about him. In his scenes with other major characters—his brother Reginald, sung by Mark S. Doss, for example, or Elijah Muhammad—he was simply dominated by them.

Operatic and Political Controversy

Those attending *X* on the evening of October 14, when I saw the final performance, were not a typical New York City opera-going crowd. A large proportion, perhaps even a majority, were Black, and they responded enthusiastically. The composition of the audience reflected the controversy surrounding the decision of Beverly Sills, general director of the City Opera, to include the work as part of the company's 1986 season. Many of the usual sponsors of the City Opera refused to put up money toward the costs of the production, and Sills had to make a special appeal to New York's Black elite.

It is, of course, a significant comment on our times that an opera like this should come to be performed by such a prestigious company. Sills herself motivated the production solely on the basis of the artistic merits of *X*. But it was political considerations which persuaded the usual City Opera sponsors to back off and the more privileged elements in the Black community to step forward.

Yet a contradiction remains even for those who ended up contributing financially to the production. It seems obvious that the more than two decades since Malcolm's death have made the subject of his life a bit safer for those layers of the Black community who would no doubt have had nothing to do with him had he remained alive and continued to evolve in a revolutionary direction. The process of iconization which happens to many dead fighters for social change—their cooptation by the establishment in an effort to render them harmless—has certainly been a factor here. By supporting the production of *X*, this layer of the Black community is attempting to strengthen its claim to Malcolm's legacy, and to the right to

interpret the meaning of his life and his words in a way which will strengthen their own position in society, not threaten it.

This process of accepting Malcolm in death is much easier for the Black establishment than for the white. Still, a similar process taking place in society at large played no small role in the ability of Sills to put the opera on at all. It's doubtful, had *X (The Life and Times of Malcolm X)* been proposed for production in 1966 instead of 1986, that she would have been quite so inclined to recognize its "artistic merits" or that the class in this society which has the ability to put *real* pressure on would have given her the leeway which she did in fact have.

All of this said, however, the ultimate fact remains. No matter what efforts are undertaken to

render Malcolm X "safe" for those who have found a comfortable niche in the U.S. capitalist system, his words still speak on their own terms to the Black masses, as well as to oppressed and down-trodden people everywhere. The Davises cannot be accused of being part of any attempt to coopt or soften Malcolm's message. They have told an essential historical and artistic truth.

The opera *X*, precisely because of its historical accuracy and its faithful recreation of Malcolm's own words and ideas, will not contribute much to the establishment's effort to render harmless this great fighter against social injustice, for human freedom and dignity. ■

Reviewed by Steve Bloom

THE BLACK STRUGGLE AND CLASS POLITICS

Black American Politics from the Washington Marches to Jesse Jackson, by Manning Marable, Verso Press, 1985, London, 366 pages, \$8.95 in paperback.

Manning Marable is perhaps the best known Black socialist in the United States today. A newspaper columnist, his feature, "Along the Color Line," appears regularly in newspapers across the country. He is the author of several books, including *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, published in 1983, and numerous articles in such publications as *In These Times*, *New Left Review*, and *The North Star*.

Since this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of significant Popular Front movements in several countries—such as Spain and France—it is well to remember that despite the dashed hopes and outright betrayals that such movements have delivered to the working class, the idea of the Popular Front is very much alive. In the United States, one of the most effective and sophisticated spokespersons for this concept in contemporary left politics is Manning Marable. His most recent book, *Black American Politics from the Washington Marches to Jesse Jackson* is a relatively detailed and forceful statement in favor of the Popular Front.

The book is composed of a lengthy historical prologue—which is its most useful portion—and loosely connected essays on the role of Blacks in capitalist politics, the Washington marches of 1941, 1963, and 1983, the victory of Harold Washington in the Chicago mayoral election, and the

presidential campaign of Jesse Jackson. In his concluding comments on the role of Black politicians, Marable remarks that the most likely successful strategy for Black workers and the poor would be the emergence of an "anti-corporate trend or coherent bloc" within the Democratic Party. The author hopes that at some future time this bloc would be able to split the party. But what would these "anti-corporate" forces do after such a split? Marable doesn't analyze this.

He sees the Rainbow Coalition and the upsurge of Black voter participation in Democratic primaries as the first step in the development of this bloc within the Democratic Party. There is a striking similarity between Marable's perspective and that of traditional populism, with its strategy of "people's movements" and its program aimed against "big business." In fact, it's the old concept of the "People's Front" dressed up in new rhetoric.

A Popular Front movement is precisely one which is composed, like Marable's "anti-corporate trend," of center-left bourgeois and working-class political formations, where the fight for the needs of the working-class component is subordinated to maintaining the alliance with the bourgeois elements. Marable fails to address how, in the context of the multi-class "anti-corporate bloc" which he envisions, the specific interests of Black workers in particular, or workers in general, can be adequately defended. If political formations are essentially the organized reflection of class interests, then whose class interests are going to be served in this multi-class popular front coalition when the needs of its various components conflict? The answer to that question is obvious, as has been revealed in life many times in the last decades.

Formed within the context of a bourgeois political party, the Democratic Party, and funded

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by the liberal or even "radical" segment of the bourgeoisie, such vague anti-corporate blocs as Marable envisions have two principal functions: 1) They preserve as much as possible the vital class interests and power of the bourgeoisie while permitting a modest amount of radical reform. 2) They provide a "responsible" alternative (for the working class as a whole) to the revolutionary socialist left. The Popular Front movements feature left reform programs together with anti-business phraseology. They top this off with heady appeals to such glittering generalities as "freedom," "democracy," or "the people." But the subordination of the working class component of the Popular Front guarantees that the bourgeois elements will be able to put their own content into these vague generalities.

Attack on American Trotskyism

An important part of the Popular Front strategy is an attack by its proponents on any genuine revolutionary socialist alternative that may exist. Such a working-class current must be derided as "rigid," or "sectarian," or whatever criticism serves at the moment. True to form, Marable's book

makes an effort to discredit revolutionary Marxism in the United States. With little or no criticism directed toward the opportunism and reformism of either the Communist Party or the Socialist Party and their attitude toward the Black struggle, Marable focuses most of his criticism on the U.S. Trotskyist movement.

To begin with, he accuses Leon Trotsky and his U.S. comrades of "grossly underestimating" the importance of the Black bourgeoisie. But in making such a criticism, Marable ignores completely the motivation of George Breitman and other members of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party in establishing relations with Black militants like Malcolm X. U.S. Trotskyists didn't underestimate the importance of the Black bourgeoisie. Rather, they sought to work with another kind of Black leadership, one that was going in a revolutionary direction and which was independent both of capitalist political formations and of white control in general.

Self-Determination

Marable scores Trotsky and his U.S. comrades for their "dogmatic" adherence to self-determination and Black nationalism. But his attack ignores the real distinctions between this perspective and the approach to the Black struggle put forward by the CP and others—that the Black movement is purely and simply a part of the larger class struggle within capitalist society and as such can be totally subsumed within it. Such a sterile conception does not accord much dimension or identity to the Black experience.

U.S. Trotskyists correctly realized that an important part of the revolutionary struggle of Black people must be the establishment of a political organization which is independent of capitalist parties and of white direction. They understood that an important part of support by revolutionary socialists for the independent Black movement is advocacy of the *right* to self-determination, though not necessarily the specific *demand* for self-determination *per se*. That is a question for the Black masses themselves to decide.

This position represents the beginning of a consistent revolutionary attitude toward the Black liberation struggle. Marable's distaste for a genuine revolutionary perspective flows directly from his advocacy of a Popular Front political strategy with its inherent class collaboration. *Black American Politics from the Washington Marches to Jesse Jackson* does not present a different road to socialism, merely a reformist alternative to it. ■

Reviewed by Mark Weber

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Striking Contrast

What a striking contrast. First I read the September-October issue of *Against the Current* which contained an article called "The Two Souls of Leninism," by Tim Wohlforth. (It might better have been called "The Demoralized Soul of Tim Wohlforth.") Wohlforth joins the long list of those who have "discovered" that Leninism is inherently totalitarian and, like most of those who have gone before him, makes the assertion that his retreat is actually "going beyond Leninism," that he is presenting something "new," etc., etc.

Then I got my November issue of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*. I know that Steve Bloom couldn't have had Wohlforth's article in mind when he gave his talk on the Leninist party in the United States, since he did that in July. But I found that the approach he took was an effective sort of response to Wohlforth's repetition of often-refuted slanders against Lenin and the Bolshevik party.

A Supporter
New York

NOTE: For another response to Wohlforth's article see "Leninism and Revolutionary Socialism," by Paul Le Blanc on page 15 of this issue.

U.S. Immigration Policy

On Thursday, September 25, 1986, the *Miami Herald* reported that four people from a disabled Iberia Airlines DC-10 were asking for political asylum in the U.S.A. One couple is from Cuba, the other is Nicaraguan. The Nicaraguan male is the son of a top Sandinista—political secretary for the FSLN in San Marcos, Nicaragua. Whatever the reasons for their asking for asylum, it is certain that these people will not have the problems gaining a place in this country as thousands from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and other points south of the U.S./Mexican border have.

All others than those from Nicaragua and Cuba are called "illegal aliens." From Nicaragua and Cuba they are "political refugees."

Indeed! They may be granted the status of "defector" like any tennis player, ballet dancer, or circus performer from a Warsaw-pact country or Soviet citizen when they choose to enhance their careers by coming to the U.S.A.

A Comrade,
Miami, Florida

(Continued from page 19)

Pathfinder Press, 1978), pp. 426-427.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 413; Leon Trotsky et. al., The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), p. 105.

12. This and other critical-minded applications of Leninism to today's realities can be found in Resolutions of the Twelfth World Congress of the Fourth International, a special issue of *International Viewpoint*, published in 1985 (published at 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France).

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