

# Communist Voice

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## Communism as a science

Over the years, communist activists have earned a reputation for militancy, for throwing themselves into the middle of the struggle. The communists are those who really fight for the interests of the masses, and don't just leave it to the courts, to the politicians, to letter-writing campaigns. Instead they call for struggle against capitalists, the racists, the militarists, etc.

But communism is more than just that. Militancy is only one part of a struggle. There is also the question of how the struggle is oriented.

Communism is based on a definite view on how society changes and how the workers will overthrow their oppression. It is not just based on striving for things that seem good, but is based on a scientific analysis of how society has developed.

It bases itself on the forces for changes — the proletariat (workers) and other toilers — that are engendered by the very forces of capitalism itself.

So it is not surprising that real communism is not just supporting the same things as the liberals and reformists, but more militantly. Of course, we are talking of real communists, anti-revisionist communists, not the apologists of the state-capitalist regimes or the revisionist parties that are more like reformists than the reformists themselves. But such real communism doesn't just criticize the liberals and reformists as wimpy, but is based on a different view of what is to be organized.

● The communists aren't simply those who are more militant in strikes than the present sold-out trade union bureaucracy. They have nothing to do with the policy of a multitude of reformist and Trotskyist groups who look to move the corrupt trade union apparatus of today a bit to the left or hope that the trade union bigshots will unite into a fighting "labor party". Instead real communism is based on developing independent organization among the workers to carry forward the struggle against exploitation, to serve as a pole of attraction within the trade unions, and to organize the unorganized.

● In this issue of *Communist Voice* we continue to deal with the attitude to revisionist regimes, such as Cuba, which claim to be socialist or communist. The communists aren't just more militant in the struggle against U.S.-led Western imperialism, although they resolutely oppose imperialist pressure on and intervention against other countries. But real communists don't defend the revisionist state capitalist regimes on the pretext that they have contradictions with U.S. imperialism, as many Trotskyists and reformists do. They call instead for the workers and activists of Cuba, China, North Korea etc. to organize against the revisionist ruling classes as well as against Western imperialism.

● In this issue of the *Communist Voice*, we continue to deal with issues concerning the struggle in Mexico. One of the big issues today is the uprising of the poor peasants in Chiapas, Mexico, a struggle led by the Zapatistas. And here too the distinction between communism and the fashionable views on the left today is striking.

(Cont. on page 2)

### What is anti-revisionist communism?

- Where is *CWV* going? — 19
- On dealing with other trends — 28
- On Cuban revisionism — 33
- El Machete & the Mexican left — 39

### Will agrarian co-ops ("ejidos") save the Mexican peasants? — 5

### The IMF and imperialist superprofits — 14

### For a serious unmasking of Trotskyism — 47



On one hand, communism shares with other trends in the left enthusiastic support for this peasant struggle, in which some of the most downtrodden indigenous peasants in Mexico have risen to their feet and demanded their rights.

But real communism doesn't simply champion the Zapatista program but more militantly than the liberal journals such as the *Nation*. The Zapatista program lays stress on the "ejido" or Mexican agricultural co-op, which it believes will pave the way for prosperity for all Mexican peasants. It is common in the liberal and reformist left to consider that the ejido and the co-op is vaguely socialistic. But communism shows that the ejido does not liberate the peasantry from the problems of small-scale agriculture, and is not socialistic, but simply a form of land reform. Land reform will help the indigenous peasants avoid being marginalized, but it is only part of the struggle that faces the workers and poor peasantry today.

Nor does real communism share the belief of the Zapatista leadership that democratization of the system in Mexico suffices to bring liberation to the Mexican toilers. Instead it holds that democratization must be utilized by the toilers to organize and bring the class struggle to the fore. Without independent action by the oppressed, the workers and poor peasants are unlikely to get any benefit from the changes that are pending in Mexico.

● There are those who call in every leaflet for the general strike or for millions to come into the streets, irrespective of the next step needed to spread the particular struggle. To give slogans at random is not militancy, but running away from the work to build up an independent trend today, no matter at what size. Real communism doesn't just sigh for the great days of the past or of the future—however prosaic the small numbers in struggle today may appear compared to dreaming about tens of millions of people in motion. Instead it shows activists what is the work today that will help clear the path for the revolutionary reorganization of

the working class to come and thus pave the way for the great days of the future.

Thus on one issue after another communism has a different orientation from reformism and liberalism.

The idea that communism is simply being more militant than the other left trends is based on the fact that, over the years, the communist activists gained the reputation of really standing for struggle, for being in the front lines against the strike-breakers, the reactionaries, the exploiters. But what does it mean to stand for struggle? And how does one judge what real militancy means? From the first, this couldn't be decided by seeing who made the most extreme promise or had the most blood-curdling rhetoric. On the contrary, it takes thought and analysis and orientation to see what is really sustained work for the revolutionary goal and what is just posturing.

Today, an atmosphere of disorientation hovers over the left. There are only a few activists that work along the Marxist communist path. Communism is widely identified as revisionism, and hence outmoded. *Communist Voice* is dedicated to rebuilding an anti-revisionist communist trend, and helping rally activists to a new struggle. But why, it may be asked, do *Communist Voice* and other anti-revisionist activists bother to swim against the tide?

It is because communism shows the path towards the future. It provides the class-conscious worker and militant activist with a picture of where the struggle is and where it should go. It is the only trend that can provide a revolutionary orientation suitable to the world of today, and make sense of the vast changes that are upon us. And it shows how, even in a time of disorganization such as the present, one can make one's voice felt in a way that will pave the way for real change in the future.

— Joseph Green, Detroit □

## How to get in touch with *Communist Voice*

*Communist Voice* is published by the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group with the support of comrades in other cities. We are all presently discussing the formation of a common organization to put out *Communist Voice*. CV will appear every month or month and a half.

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# In this issue

In this issue we continue our study of world imperialism. An article by Phil of Seattle begins a study of the International Monetary Fund and its relation to how world capitalism exploits the less developed countries. Despite the fact that only a handful of colonies remain, the capitalist world is not simply one of countries competing equally in the world market. The domination of the world by the most powerful countries still exists. But the form has changed. We are studying the features of present-day imperialism, the relations of coercion and submission that exist between the various type of countries, and the meaning of this for the proletarian struggle. Phil's article says that the IMF helps imperialism realize its superprofits, but the profits themselves are generated through the exploitation of cheap labor.

Many of the other articles in this issue are devoted to differences between communism and general, "commonsense", views that are prevalent among the liberals and the reformist left. For example, we report on our ongoing study of the "ejidos" (agricultural co-ops) in Mexico. We show that such co-ops are not socialist or semi-socialist, nor can they stop the growing differentiation among the Mexican peasants between rich and poor. This concerns the Zapatista program for the peasant revolt in Chiapas. We hold that enthusiastic support for the fighting peasants does not preclude, but requires, a realistic look at what they are demanding, what it will accomplish, and what their prospects are.

As well, much of this issue is devoted to our differences with the *Chicago Workers Voice* group. We were united until recently with the *CWV* group with what was informally called the "minority"—a grouping that emerged from the dissolution of the Marxist-Leninist Party in November 1993.

The Marxist-Leninist Party formed from activists involved in a wide range of different fronts of struggle, who went through

a long struggle to found a party. The Marxist-Leninist Party had been dedicated to building the trend of anti-revisionist communism, separate from and in struggle with the revisionist "communists" as well as the Western bourgeoisie. With the loss by the "majority" of their belief in revolution and Marxism, the Party dissolved. Those who wished to continue the debate against the demoralized ideas spreading in the MLP formed the "minority". But earlier this year, differences about the importance of anti-revisionism, and *CWV*'s intolerance of views different from their own, led to a split, and the "Communist Voice" was formed.

Recently the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #7 (May 25, 1995) appeared, the first regular issue of the *CWVTJ* since the split. It contains several articles relevant to our difference with them. Previously the bulk of writing for *CWVTJ* was from outside Chicago. This time the *CWV* wrote the main articles and set forward their views on a number of issues. We reprint one of the major articles from *CWVTJ* #7, Julie's article "*El Machete* and the Mexican left", and we comment on many others. Julie's article gives a good deal of information about the Mexican journal *El Machete* and its confused political stand, but she apologizes for it. Instead of helping the activists of *El Machete* come to clearer views, she speculates that *El Machete* might be able to unite the Mexican left. This shows that the *CWV* no longer thinks that anti-revisionism is that important for left-wing activity.

The *El Machete* controversy is also discussed by Jake, in his article in *CWVTJ* #7 entitled "Anatomy of a split—part one". We don't carry Jake's article (but we do carry the address for *CWVTJ* for those we wish to obtain *CWVTJ* #7). However we do carry Mark's article "How anti-revisionists evaluate other trends and how Jake does". Mark reviews the *El Machete*

## Communism as a science

by Joseph Green, Detroit ..... 1

## What have co-ops meant for the Mexican peasants?

Ejido co-ops will not save the peasants from poverty  
by Mark, Detroit ..... 5

In a village of the Mexican state of Michoacan:  
The ejido, yesterday and today  
by Pete Brown, Detroit ..... 7

The decline of condition of the small peasant continued:  
On Echeverria's ejido policy of the 70's  
by Pete Brown, Detroit ..... 9

Lenin on land reform (Correction to our last issue) .... 12

The last years of the MLP (Correction to last issue). ... 12

The International Monetary Fund and  
imperialist superprofits, by Phil, Seattle ..... 14

## What is anti-revisionist communism?

The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism  
by Joseph Green, Detroit ..... 19

How anti-revisionists evaluate other trends and  
how Jake (*CWV*) does, by Mark, Detroit ..... 28

For a public stand against Castroism  
by Joseph Green, Detroit ..... 33

*El Machete* and the Mexican Left  
by Julie, *Chicago Workers' Voice* ..... 39

How to get *CWVTJ* ..... 46

## For a serious unmasking of Trotskyism

Barb (*CWV*) replies to criticism of her article  
"Dealing with Trotsky: Idiocy or Treachery?" ..... 47

For a serious struggle against Trotskyism  
by Joseph Green, Detroit ..... 49

Reference notes to "Dealing with Trotsky" ..... 62

*Struggle*: a magazine of revolutionary literature ..... 67

controversy and shows how those who take anti-revisionist theory seriously have a different attitude from *CWV* towards work in the left.

We also carry Joseph Green's article "The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism" which is a general review of *CWVTJ* #7. It mentions the *El Machete* controversy; it raises some questions concerning recent political developments in Mexico; and it gives a general overview of where *CWV* is going. As well we carry two additional articles by Joseph that focus on individual aspects of *CWVTJ* #7. "What is anti-revisionism?/For a public stand against Castroism" shows that *CWV* is waffling on its view of Cuban revisionist society, that *CWV* apologizes for Castro having entered the Soviet bloc as supposedly a necessity of the anti-imperialist struggle. And the other article deals with Trotskyism.

Indeed, several articles in this issue concern Trotskyism. This is a vital issue for us as Trotskyism is one of the most influential of the present-day theories that go against Leninism. Trotskyism must be fought, but on what basis? The articles in this issue deal with whether we should analyze the theories of Trotskyism closely or mainly abuse Trotsky as *CWV*'s Barb did in her article on Trotsky in *CWVTJ* #7.

Barb's article "Dealing with Trotsky: Idiocy or Treachery?" covered many subjects, and it has attracted discussion and criticism in *Communist Voice* circles. We do not carry it here,

but we do print the reference notes to Barb's article, which *CWVTJ* didn't carry. Her article is criticized in the last section of Joseph's article "The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism", which was circulated on e-mail prior to publication. We include Barb's brief reply to Joseph's article. As well, we include "For a serious struggle against Trotskyism", which is a further analysis by Joseph of Barb's article in the light of her reply, and which opposes her views denigrating theory.

And finally, we also carry, as mentioned briefly above, articles showing the evolution of the Mexican ejidos. There are two reviews by Pete Brown of studies of the reality of ejido life, which may not be the romantic picture some would expect. One report, "In a village of the Mexican state of Michoacan: The ejido, yesterday and today" gives the general background to why ejidos arose in Mexico, and then deals with the experience of a particular ejido since its formation in the 20s. This ejido was formed as a result of peasant initiative and struggle, and thus is an example of the best that can be expected from the ejidos. And we carry a report that examines Mexican President Echeverria's face to the countryside of 1970-76, and is entitled "The decline of the condition of the small peasant continued: On Echeverria's ejido policy of the 70s". As well, Mark's article "Ejido co-ops will not save the peasants from poverty", gives an overview of what we are looking into on this subject. □



# What have ejido co-ops meant for the Mexican peasants?

What is the way out of poverty and ruin for the Mexican peasants? The following three articles discuss their experience with a Mexican form of agricultural co-op called the "ejido". The first article gives an overall of why this question is of importance for activists and of some of the issues about co-ops that the supporters of *Communist Voice* are looking into. The next two articles review books describing the past experience of the Mexican peasants with ejidos.

## Ejido co-ops will not save the peasants from poverty

by Mark, Detroit

The struggle of the peasants of Chiapas has raised a number of important questions about the Mexican revolution. One of these questions is what is the significance of the demand for aid to the ejidos. The traditional ejidos were a form of communal farm land belonging to the local village while the modern ejido land belongs to the Mexican state which allows peasants to farm it. As well, the present ejidos have many other ties to the Mexican state through government regulations, government credit agencies and other aid, planning bodies, official peasant organizations, etc.

The ejido co-ops are often held up as a panacea that will lead to the good life for the poor peasants. The peasantry may imagine that if only they get their own plot of land and some aid for their co-ops, they will have overcome exploitation or are establishing socialism. And any number of groups influenced by petty-bourgeois politics share this prejudice. For example, the Zapatista leaders paint visions of the wonderful life the peasants can have if only the ejido system is extended. Some reformist bourgeois trends in Mexico have promoted similar illusions as have any number of liberal social planners analyzing the problems of the Mexican peasantry. The *El Machete* group seems to equate the present ejidos with communism.<sup>1</sup>

But Marxism-Leninism, the ideology of the class conscious workers, has a different assessment. It recognizes that land

reform and co-ops have been of some help for the poor peasants and supports various demands of the peasant movement. In Mexico, it was a big step forward from the utter destitution the peasants suffered under the Diaz dictatorship that ruled from 1877-1910. But communist theory shows that the idea that land reform and co-ops can usher in an era of prosperity for the peasantry is a myth. Small peasant production gives rise to capitalism and leads to class differentiation among the peasantry. The competition of the marketplace will inevitably ruin large sections of the peasantry. Co-ops can mitigate this somewhat, but they cannot save vast sections of the peasantry from ruin. And communist theory holds that it is also a myth to think that any system of aid under capitalism will save the peasant farms en masse.

Some supporters of *Communist Voice* have begun to research the Mexican ejido system. This research to date lends support to the view that, despite the fact that an extensive ejido system has been in place in Mexico since the mid-1930's, the ravages of capitalism continue to take their toll on the peasantry. There are examples of the ejidos succeeding as commercial enterprises. But huge numbers of the peasants have continued to be ruined; they have left the land, become wage-workers, and swelled the slums of the cities. Whereas in 1921, nearly 70% of the Mexican population lived in the countryside, today, over 70% live in urban areas. Insofar as the ejido farmers do not produce at a mere subsistence level, they are subject to the laws of market competition and behave like a business. And as this takes place, the ejidos are unable to have harmonious communal relations. Some members of the ejido may do well, while others face ruin. Indeed, it is common for the ejidos to exploit wage-workers (landless peasants who work for others). In 1965, about 1/3 of all agricultural wage-earners worked on ejidos rather than private farms. This amounts to a ratio of about four ejido farmers to every wage worker on the ejido.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, despite the laws banning it, it is not unusual for impoverished ejido

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<sup>1</sup> *El Machete* of Dec. 16, 1994 states: "There are peasants that say they fight against communism but they practice it in their communities since they work the land in common, they defend the communal property relations against the privatizations, the Salinists, etc." The article also equates communism with the "ideals of Zapata," who stood for radical land reform measures in the Mexican revolution of the early part of this century, not the proletarian revolution or communism. (*El Machete* quote taken from Julie's article "El Machete and the Left", see p. 45, col. 2 of this issue of *Communist Voice*.)

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics derived from Steven E. Sanderson's *Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State*, p. 161.

farmers to rent their land to others, including the rich farmers. Ejido members may wind up employed as wage-laborers on the very land they have rented to the capitalist landowner.

Marxism does not merely expose the petty-bourgeois utopian dreams about small peasant farming or co-ops. It stands for certain demands for immediate relief from the crushing burdens on the poor farmers. But it does not fear the growing class differentiation that capitalism brings among the peasantry. Rather it considers this differentiation creates further grounds for the class struggle. Communism points out the class differences among the rural population, places special importance in the separate class organization of the rural proletariat and their particular class demands. It strives to win the poor peasants to the view that their salvation can only come through aligning themselves with the proletarian struggle.

For the proletariat to play a revolutionary role, it must orient the poor peasants against the capitalist system itself. But to carry this out in the present circumstances in Mexico, means first and foremost, that the revolutionary reorganization of the working class must be taken up. Not only must the stifling grip of the government's PRI unions on the workers' movement be broken, but a true class party of the workers must be re-established in struggle against the myriad of reformist and petty-bourgeois views that dominate the Mexican left today.

By developing their class organizations today, the working class helps prepare itself for the proletarian revolution of the future. Under socialism, the peasantry will be liberated from exploitation. The socialist revolution expropriates capitalist property and places the means of production in the hands of society as a whole. Thus, the poor peasant is no longer doomed to rely on their own paltry resources or the few crumbs of aid from the capitalist rulers for survival, but relies on the immense resources of the economy as a whole. The proletarian revolution does not forcibly expropriate the poor peasant farmer, but to succeed it must stepwise achieve the voluntary transition from small farm ownership through cooperative forms to large farms that are the property of all.

Mexican 20th century history provides a test case for the program of land reform and government-aided ejidos. The Mexican revolution of the early part of this century promised land to the peasants. But when the dust cleared, the poor peasants' demands were put on the back burner. Even the partial satisfaction of this demand required the peasants to continue to wage struggle after struggle against the rich landowners and the government. It is not until the 1930s, under the Lazaro Cardenas presidency, that the government carried out a significant program of land redistribution and formation of ejido co-ops. Although governments following Cardenas put more or less effort into developing the ejidos, they continued to be a prominent part of Mexican agriculture, co-existing with the rich private capitalist farms and the small private peasant holdings. Thus, especially since Lazaro Cardenas' time, there is much that can be learned about the operation of ejido co-ops in practice.

The following two book reviews by Pete Brown are part of an ongoing study to look more deeply into Mexican land reform and ejido development. The review of *Agrarian Revolt in a*

*Mexican Village* brings to light a particular peasant uprising and land seizure during the Mexican revolution of early this century. It shows the necessity of this fight and its importance in saving the poor peasants from destitution. The militant peasant action stands in contrast to the hesitancy of the first several post-revolutionary governments to do much about land redistribution. But the review also shows the limits of this peasant struggle. The Naranja ejido was able to maintain itself, achieve certain benefits for its members and was considered something of a success. However, the report details that success also meant that rather than communal harmony, there were growing class antagonisms. While some ejido members managed to get by, many others were buried by debt. The ejido accommodated only a fraction of the population of the local village. And the ejido exploited wage labor.

The review of *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Peasants in Mexico: A Case Study in Public Policy*, chronicles the Echeverria administration of the early 1970s. The review highlights what sort of treatment the co-op farmers get under a state-capitalist bureaucracy. The ejido farmers lacked the resources to successfully compete against the big capitalist farmers and needed aid. Echeverria, with rhetoric hearkening back to the days of Lazaro Cardenas, significantly increased funds for ejido development over several of his immediate predecessors. But the complete inadequacy of this aid lends credence to the idea that the amount of aid needed to insure the success of the ejidos is beyond what can be expected of any capitalist government. The review calls attention to the ways in which much of the aid that was allegedly going to uplift the poor peasants often wound up benefiting the rich farmers. It shows how the aid programs were rife with corruption. But can one really expect corruption to be eliminated in any society where wealth is concentrated in the hands of capitalist parasites?

Pete Brown's review also brings to light how Echeverria, like Cardenas before him, utilized official peasant organizations plus repression to curtail the development of a militant peasant movement. Indeed other sources note that while Echeverria never fulfilled his bombastic promises to pull the peasantry out of its misery, his regime bears responsibility for a notorious government massacre of peasants who tried to organize independently. And while many ejido farmers, unable to eat Echeverria's empty promises, deserted the land, Echeverria put a big effort into a crackdown on 125,000 ejido members who thought they could make a better go of it by illegally renting their land to others or abandoning their ejido land.<sup>3</sup>

The regimes that followed Echeverria, enchanted with the neo-conservative doctrines, have shown less interest in the ejidos. Still, there is now a period of 60 years to examine to see what ejido development means under capitalism. From the research so far done, it is a far cry from the idyllic picture painted by those imbued with petty-bourgeois illusions. The good life remains a dream for the small peasants, the plagues of capitalism continue to be the reality. □

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<sup>3</sup>*Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State*, p. 181.



# ***In a village of the Mexican state of Michoacan:* The ejido, yesterday and today**

**By Pete Brown, Detroit**

Below Pete Brown reviews Paul Friedrich's *Agrarian Revolt in a Mexican Village*, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. First printed 1970. Reprinted, with a new preface and supplementary bibliography, 1977.

Friedrich is an academic anthropologist. This book is a result of doctoral level research he carried out in Mexico in 1956. Friedrich was trained to do linguistic analysis, study of kinships, etc. — typical anthropology stuff. But he got interested in the more political issues of peasant uprisings. From a Marxist standpoint, his book is weak, because it tries at least in part to explain away political events by reference to kinship relations. But compared to a lot of anthropology texts, of course, it's very interesting and topical. Friedrich wrote up the results of his research in the 1960s, when the subject of peasant uprisings was becoming more and more popular.

Friedrich concentrates on one village, Naranja, in the state of Michoacan. The basic point is that, in the 1910s, the inhabitants of Naranja were in a bad way, very impoverished. But in the 1920s they carried through agrarian reform, overpowering the local hacienda owners, taking over the land and establishing an ejido (agricultural commune). This was an early example of the sort of land reform carried out in the 1930s across Mexico under the presidency of Lazaro Cardenas. But in Naranja this took place prior to it being sanctioned by the federal government. The government eventually came to acquiesce in the peasants' land seizure, but only after killing off their most militant leaders. Anyway, as a result of this reform the peasants of Naranja became a lot better off. The basic point seems to be that if local, indigenous people get together and fight hard, they can improve their lot in life.

The hero, or main character, is the peasant leader Primo Tapia. Friedrich gives an interesting history of Tapia's formation as a peasant political leader. He also gives an outline history of Mexico to show the background of agrarian revolt.

## **Expropriation of the indigenous peasantry**

The first push for modernization came under the presidency of Juarez, in the 1850s and 60s. Juarez promulgated a law calling for the breakup of Indian ejidos and privatizing the land, distributing it to individual farmers who could then "alienate" it (buy and sell). This was slowly implemented. By the 1880s some ejido land had been privatized, but much of it was still held communally though assigned to individual families. Pastures, wetlands, meadows, etc. were held and used communally. Of course, alongside the ejido land there also existed the haciendas, large-scale farms owned generally by people of pure

Spanish or mestizo ancestry.

A big push for modernization began in the 1880s under the presidency of Porfirio Diaz, which lasted until 1910. Diaz made scientific surveys of resources, invited in foreign investors, forcefully pushed "alienation" of land, and built infrastructure (roads and railways). Friedrich shows the local effects of all this in Naranja. And he gives statistics on the national results:

"The result of these measures was that, between 1883 and 1910, over 27% of the total area of the Republic was conveyed to private companies. Twelve states were left with no 'public lands' at all. By 1910, 14,000,000 Mexican peasants, many of them Indians, were trapped in a system of hired labor and peonage that often differed little from serfdom. By 1911, 95% of all rural families in all but five states were landless. The landless peasants had become a rural laboring class for some 20,000 landholders of mestizo and foreign extraction. Over 90% of Mexico's best land was effectively controlled by less than 5% of the population." (p. 3)

## **Growth of the revolution**

This was the background to the revolution of 1910-20. Opposition to Diaz grew up in the form of Liberal Clubs organized in many localities. These were based on demands for political freedoms — elections, free speech and press, etc. — as enunciated by liberals like Francisco Madero. But underneath these liberal demands were the economic demands for land (from the peasants), and for social security legislation and trade union reforms (from the workers).

Primo Tapia of Naranja was born in 1885. In 1907 he drifted north to the United States, where he stayed for 14 years. In Los Angeles, around 1910-11, he became a close adherent to the Flores Magon brothers. The Flores Magons were early organizers of the opposition to Porfirio Diaz. In Los Angeles they published a newspaper, *La Regeneracion*, and founded the Liberal Party. Their main ideological influence appears to have been Mikhail Bakunin:

"... By 1907, the reading of the Flores Magon circle featured Bakunin's *The Revolutionary Catechism* and *The Principles of Revolution*, Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread*, and *The Anarchist Philosophy*, and the writings of Spanish anarcho-syndicalists in newspapers, journals, and pamphlets. Another influential author was the Italian Malatesta who advocated that all radical groups — anarchist, communist, socialist, and agrarian — should unite in opposing capitalism and landlordism. Marx and

other Communist theorists were appreciated for their mordant criticism of capitalism, but partly rejected for their ideas on party organization and the state." (pp. 64-65)

In 1911 the Magonistas, with support from the IWW in southern California, organized an invasion of Baja California as part of the uprising against Diaz. Afterwards they were subjected to fierce repression from American authorities. Tapia drifted across the American West and Midwest as a laborer and IWW organizer. He worked in mines, on farms, and in factories. His IWW career came to a head at a sugar beet refinery in Nebraska, where he organized a union of 500 workers. He called a strike there in 1920, but the strike failed, and afterwards Tapia returned home to Naranja.

### The struggle for land

Friedrich then tells about how Tapia organized the peasants in his hometown to fight for the land. It's a complex story interwoven with regional and national politics. This was a time when the revolution had presumably triumphed, and a very liberal constitution had been established. Article 27 of the constitution called for restoring agricultural land to the masses. But liberal reforms had not actually been pushed through:

"... as late as 1923, fewer than 2,700 families still held more than one-half the national property, and a mere 114 owned one-quarter of the total; during that same year, Francisco Villa was assassinated by government agents ...." (p. 105)

National leaders all claimed to be revolutionary heroes, but they were mostly engaged in factional infighting. Local leaders such as Tapia had to wend their way through a maze of intrigue. Tapia organized a local revolt which broke the power of the haciendas and local reactionaries, but he still had to deal with the state and federal governments and their troops. At various times he was arrested and condemned to die, and finally in 1926 the president of Mexico had Tapia assassinated. But by that time his agrarian reform had been firmly established, and the peasants' ejido held onto the land.

### Conclusion

Friedrich has a little information about subsequent developments. During the 1930s the ejido land was repartitioned to bring in more families. This development broadened the

base of the ejido, bringing in more people. (Note: the original ejido of the 1920s didn't take in anywhere close to the total population of the village. And from the very beginning the ejido employed non-members as wage laborers.) Broadening the base made the ejido more popular, but it also weakened the old ejido leaders and produced factional splits among them, since some of them were adamantly opposed to repartition.

Friedrich describes the way the ejido was being run in the 1950s. Farmland for maize has been granted to individual families. Each family plants and tills its own plot. Harvesting, however, is done "by large brigades." Pasturing of animals is also done communally, on common land. The ejido government decides cases that come up of reallocating or expropriating land. (p. 133)

In the 1950s most members of the Naranja ejido were living well "by Mexican standards." They had plenty to eat and earned extra money through playing music in surrounding towns and selling some wares. But it also seems that their ejido plots were not succeeding as commercial farms. It appears the Indian peasants' general situation was about like it was in the 1880s prior to their expropriation by capitalist farmers. They had their land, had food, and had a fairly pleasant rural existence. But they were also stuck, economically and socially. A few of their children went to school in the cities, but very few.

The lesson Friedrich draws is that Primo Tapia's agrarian revolt (and we could generalize this to the Mexican Revolution) was a positive thing; through it the peasants regained their self-respect and escaped dire poverty. In the 1910s many Naranja residents had been reduced to semi-starvation, pulling up weeds to eat and selling themselves into peonage. Later, after the revolt, these same peasants and their descendants had a good basic diet and were able to sell a little surplus. Through struggle they were able to retard the destructive effects of capitalist agriculture.

But only retard. By the 1950s they were once again sliding backwards. Half the ejido members were in debt to local money-lenders, paying ruinous interest rates. Many had to sell their crop before harvesting it, in order to make ends meet. A growing population was increasing pressure for repartitioning the land, but farm plots were already small. Government investments in the area were directed at supporting new urban commercial developments. Poor peasants were being drawn into industrial and construction work in the cities, and there was declining interest in another round of agrarian reform. □



# The decline of the condition of the small peasant continued: On Echeverria's ejido policy of the 70's

by Pete Brown, Detroit

Below Pete Brown reviews *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Peasants in Mexico; A Case Study in Public Policy* by Merilee Serrill Grindle, University of California Press, 1977.

This book is a case study of Mexican bureaucracy, in particular the CONASUPO agency of the Mexican government. CONASUPO (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares) is the agency charged with maintaining agricultural price supports in order to provide a stable income for Mexican farmers. This agency has played an important role in the Mexican government's agricultural policy, and this role was greatly expanded during the Echeverria administration (President of Mexico in 1970-76). The author spent these years in Mexico talking to the administrators of CONASUPO and learning how they developed and implemented new policies.

Echeverria came to power at a time of growing discontent and agricultural stagnation. Under the previous administration, that of Diaz Ordaz, some rural rebellions had broken out, and student demonstrations took place in the cities. Diaz Ordaz responded with fierce repression. So PRI maintained its hegemony, but at the cost of widespread discontent with its methods.

In agriculture, the 1960s were a period of increasing misery for the mass of poor peasants and stagnation in production of Mexico's basic food crops. Since the mid-1930s PRI had maintained a policy of "aid to the ejidos," to try and convert the small-time peasants into a class of commercially successful small farmers. During the 1950s, in the immediate postwar boom, the government invested significant amounts of money in irrigation projects, roads, and other infrastructure in north-west Mexico (Sinaloa and Sonora) to create commercially successful ejidos. This was successful, to some extent; some ejidos (and also some large-scale private farms) became profitable exporters of fruits and vegetables to the U.S. (For more details on this, see the book by Manuel L. Carlos, *Politics and Development in Rural Mexico; A Study of Socio-Economic Modernization*, published by Praeger Press in 1974.)

But of course there were limitations to the success of this policy. The government didn't have enough money to build up infrastructure in all regions of Mexico. So while some peasants in the northwest prospered, those in other regions stagnated or even slid backward. And even in the newly opened up, irrigated areas, there was differentiation of the peasantry; some actually got rich, while others only went into debt trying to keep up.

In the 1960s the limitations of this policy became more and more apparent, especially since the government reduced its big investments in agricultural infrastructure. The gap between urban and rural incomes widened. Many peasants, discouraged, cut back on farming and spent more and more time hiring themselves out as laborers. Many left rural areas and poured into the

cities or went to the U.S. looking for work.

The wake-up call for PRI leaders came in the late 60s, when Mexico was forced for the first time to import corn and beans, the basic food staples for the Mexican population. PRI had encouraged agricultural exports as part of its plan for industrial development; the idea was to sell food products to the U.S., thereby gaining foreign exchange; and use this to purchase foreign-made industrial equipment. But while the sale of fruits and vegetables was making progress, the production of corn and beans for the Mexican populace was lagging. So now the foreign exchange earned through exports had to be spent importing corn from the U.S.

## CONASUPO studies the problem

As soon as Echeverria took office, CONASUPO launched a study program to try and discover the source of this problem and what could be done about it. In the first place, they found that the great majority of Mexico's corn was produced by small peasants and ejiditarios. They concluded from this that, in order to stimulate corn production, something had to be done to help the small peasants, especially those in ejidos.

But what? Previous administrations had tried distributing more land to ejidos. But by the late 60s, it was clear that land alone was insufficient. In fact the peasants themselves were taking land out of production, refusing to farm any more because it wasn't worth the effort. Instead of making the transition to commercial farmers, many ejiditarios were headed the other direction: there was actually an increase in subsistence farming in Mexico, as peasants refused to try and grow crops for sale, and instead planted just enough to feed their own families.

Clearly, agricultural productivity — the result of technical innovation — was one issue. The success of some ejidos in the 1950s showed that peasants readily embraced technical innovations when these were made available. But the government wasn't about to modernize every farm in the country. Peasants were expected to build up a surplus themselves, and use this surplus to modernize their own farms.

The trouble was, peasants were finding it impossible to build up any surplus. The reason? They were squeezed between rising prices for consumer items and industrial goods, on the one hand, and a stable price for agricultural goods. Government subsidies guaranteed the peasants a steady price for corn, but it was only holding steady, not rising; meanwhile the peasants had to pay constantly increasing prices for everything they purchased.

Secondly, the study discovered, the government policy of "aid to the ejidos" was in fact skewed to mean "aid the large-scale commercial farmers." For example, CONASUPO established a basic, minimum price for corn. But this was the price paid in Mexico City and other large markets. Commercially successful farmers were able to receive this price when they brought their crop to market in the city. But for the small-scale

peasants, bringing their crop to market itself involved prohibitive costs. They needed, first of all, silos to store their crop. Also processing equipment — for example shelling machines for their peanut crop. Gunny sacks to pack the crop for transport. Trucks to carry the crop to the city. Without this equipment the peasant was forced to buy, or rent, from agricultural suppliers who gouged him unmercifully. To avoid this expense and hassle many peasants simply sold their crop to middlemen; but then they received a price way below the price set by CONASUPO as the “basic, minimum” price.

CONASUPO concluded that the basic problem facing the small peasant was the economic relations in the countryside, the fact that the peasant was exploited by commercial interests and could never build up a surplus. As to what to do about it, CONASUPO proposed a wide-scale effort to circumvent these exploiting relations.

### CONASUPO's battle-cry:

**“Aid the ejidos (seriously, this time)!”**

CONASUPO proposed to replace the commercial relations in the countryside with government agencies that would provide the same goods and services to the peasants, only at stable low prices. To provide peasants with consumer items CONASUPO proposed the establishment of state stores in every village. These would carry the basic consumer items at stable, low, government-subsidized prices. Agricultural equipment centers would do the same thing, selling or renting gunny sacks, shelling machines, etc. New efforts would be made to subsidize the building and maintenance of silos. And an outreach program would be implemented, where government agents would go out to villages to purchase crops from small peasants, to ensure they got the government-subsidized price.

Echeverria endorsed this program and made it the centerpiece of his initiative on agriculture. The top bureaucrats at CONASUPO were fired up with this new program to *really* “aid the ejidos.” They talked Echeverria into devoting some new funds to the program. Under Echeverria about 5% of the national budget was shifted from industrial development to agriculture; this meant a jump of about 50% in spending on agriculture, compared to the previous administration. After completing their study in 1971 and getting new programs designed and launched in 1972, the bureaucrats at CONASUPO spent 1973-74 happily spending money implementing their new programs.

### **The results: some good, perhaps, but no revolution**

Grindle gives CONASUPO a grade of A for their study program, but says implementation was something else again. She describes the problems they encountered implementing new programs; some of these are unique to Mexico, while others are more general.

First of all, there's the political cycle in Mexico. A presidential term lasts six years, and the president cannot run again. And there are massive amounts of appointive positions in the

bureaucracy. So each new president has quite a bit of freedom to redesign government programs. Every new president wants to make a name for himself by launching new initiatives. His appointees come in, study the situation, and announce bold initiatives. But in the last couple years of his administration, things wind down. The bureaucrats are now maneuvering for jobs in the next administration. No one wants to rock the boat or possibly make a mistake, for fear they will be left out when the new president takes office.

This was much of the story with Echeverria's new “aid the ejidos” initiative. In the middle years of his administration some money was spent on new programs, some of which no doubt aided some peasants. Grindle mentions the purchase-outreach program as especially helpful. The fact that some peasants were able to sell their crop right there in their own locality, at the nationally set price, gave them some additional income. But in the last couple years of the Echeverria administration, things wound down. There were no new initiatives, even though CONASUPO leaders knew that implementation of their program was running into serious trouble in some areas.

For example, there was the problem of opposition from capitalist interests. Some of the young, firebrand bureaucrats in CONASUPO imagined that they would simply wipe out the peasants' exploiters with their new program of state stores. But the capitalists didn't take kindly to this, and a whole series of obstructions began to crop up. Local political leaders would not approve the construction of stores, or would demand a widespread system of payoffs to accompany them. (Grindle doesn't explicitly accuse anyone of corruption, but says government agencies “are perceived as” corrupt by the masses. It appears that PRI has a system of spreading around the benefits of any new program, to ensure everyone is kept happy. So the capitalists allow some new programs to be implemented, but at the cost of diluting their effectiveness. The extra expenses eventually drag down the program and prevent its aiding those who need it most.)

In many cases stores were built, but not where they were needed by the poor peasantry. CONASUPO would approve building a state store in a certain municipio (county). But the municipio *presidente* would insist that the store be built in his main city, rather than in a small village. That way his urban constituents would benefit. And the contracts for the store — construction, storage, transporting goods, etc. — could be given out to the *presidente*'s close friends and relatives. So they all benefited, while the peasants in the villages continued to be ripped off.

This was true to such an extent that many of the new stores were actually built in the large cities — Mexico City, Guadalajara, etc. CONASUPO budgeted the building of many new stores, and many of these were built; but not in locations where they benefited ejiditarios.

As a plan to circumvent and replace private commercial interests, then, the plan failed. CONASUPO bureaucrats were only equipped to take on small-scale ripoff artists in the villages; but these small-time entrepreneurs are tied in to capitalist interests in the cities, municipios, states, and regions; and all of these are directly tied in to PRI itself. At every political level



PRI is committed to keeping capitalists happy; and without directly confronting capitalist interests, not much success in aiding the poor peasants could be expected.

Aside from the private capitalists, CONASUPO itself is a state-capitalist agency. The bureaucrats who run its stores are graded on the basis of productivity and efficiency, and their future in the Mexican bureaucracy is a function of how well they manage. So there was considerable opposition to CONASUPO's new policies from within CONASUPO itself. Building a store in a large city is a bureaucrat's ticket to a successful career. Urban consumers are happy, private capitalist interests receive their share of the action, and it's easy to show a good return on the state's investment; construction and upkeep costs are relatively low, the store is constantly busy, and economies of scale can be realized. Building a store in a small village, on the other hand, involves sending planners and contractors out to the hinterlands. This involves a lot of extra expense and bother, without much return; the store serves a small number of people who don't have much disposable income. Nor do they have much political pull.

### **The bureaucrats' "peasant initiative"**

When the CONASUPO bureaucrats realized that some of their programs were stalling, they decided to create a new agency to stimulate acceptance of their programs. This was the "peasant initiative program." The idea of this was to reach out to the grassroots, to get peasants themselves involved. CONASUPO's programs of state stores, etc. were implemented in a top-down fashion. The idea of the "peasant initiative" was to go directly to peasants in ejidos and inform them of the new programs, and organize them to demand that these programs be brought to their village.

So in 1974 CONASUPO sent a number of "peasant organizers" out to the villages. Many of these (but not all) were young intellectuals fired up with the idea of aiding the poor peasantry. And they did a certain amount of work — calling meetings, informing peasants, getting them together to petition government agencies, taking them to the cities to directly make demands on the bureaucracy in face-to-face meetings, etc.

But again, as Grindle describes it, there were limitations to implementing this program. In the first place, from the beginning this was regarded as an experiment. It was only implemented in certain areas, and never received large-scale funding. And the main result of the program was to reveal the depth of the opposition, rather than to overcome it. The "peasant organizers" found that much of the opposition to

CONASUPO's new programs was centered in the peasant federation affiliated with PRI. Far from trying to defend peasants' interests, the federation leaders were precisely the local leaders tied in with capitalist interests, and they wanted nothing to do with attempts to supplant the capitalists. The "peasant organizers" also found themselves stonewalled by their own bureaucracy. Government agencies in the cities would receive their petitions, file them and forget them. The only way they could get something done was by direct appeal to some top bureaucrat, by way of personal connection; so a few peasants received some government largesse, but they remained politically powerless. Once the program wound down, and the personal connection was cut off, the peasants were left stranded.

CONASUPO also set strict limits on how far this "peasant organizing" could go. Organizers could gather petitions, write letters, etc.; but no demonstrations or public signs of dissent were allowed. As a result the young firebrands who were interested in actually helping the peasantry soon quit in disgust; and a year and a half after the program started, it was wrapped up.

### **Conclusion: a political show without much result**

Grindle doesn't provide statistics on the results of Echeverria's initiative, so I can't say what happened to the problem of importing corn and beans, or falling rural incomes, etc. The impression she gives is that some programs brought some benefit to some peasants, but these were strictly limited in their impact. She emphasizes that after six years the mass of peasants remained in the same position as before — on the bottom of the social structure.

Grindle describes the Mexican bureaucracy as a massive patronage system. When a new administration launches a new initiative, a certain amount of money is thrown around to deal with a problem. This is used to co-opt some dissenters. But the amount of money available is always limited, of course. Even though Echeverria increased the funding for agriculture, he couldn't afford to put a store in every village any more than previous administrations could afford to build roads, schools, health clinics, or silos in every village. Under these conditions the squeaky wheel gets the grease, especially if it's willing to pass the grease around. Noisy dissenters who cannot be co-opted are then dealt with by repression. So the PRI regime was able to get through the 1970s by making a show of sympathy for the problems of the poor peasantry, even if the actual results weren't very substantial. □

# Corrections to our last issue

Unfortunately, our last issue, *Communist Voice* #2 (June 1, 1995), seems to have found itself at war with its word processing program, and it lost several battles. Thus several entire passages were accidentally deleted from *CV* #2.

## Page 42:

### Lenin on land reform

On page 42, column 1, line 9, half of a passage in the extract from Lenin's "The Agrarian Program of the Liberals" (*Collected Works*, vol. 8, pp. 315-322, April 1905) is omitted at the garbled word "staéew". The passage concerned, with the omitted section in italics, is as follows:

The transfer of the land to the peasants would not at all do away with the predominance of the capitalist mode of production in Russia; it would, on the contrary, provide a broader base for its development; it would bring this development from the type approximating the Italian closer to the American. The property distinctions among the peasants, which are already tremendous, but relatively not very noticeable chiefly on account of the general oppression under the absolutist serf-owning system, would not in any way cease to exist. The expansion of the home market, the development of exchange and commodity production on a new scale, the rapid growth of industry and of cities—all these inevitable effects of a substantial improvement in the condition of the peasants would unavoidably increase property distinctions. The more illusions on that score are widespread among us, the more energetically must the Social-Democrats combat them, if they really want to represent the interests of the working-class movement as a whole, and not merely of one of its stages.

*Until there has been a complete socialist revolution, not even the most radical and most revolutionary measures for agrarian reform will eliminate the class of agricultural wage-workers. The dream of making all people petty-bourgeois is a reactionary platitude. For this reason we should start working now to develop the class-consciousness of the rural wage-workers and to rally them into an independent class organization....We must see to it that the rising tide of the proletarian movement creates a specifically proletarian mood and proletarian methods of struggle among the farm-hands and day-laborers. [p.319]*

*The petty-bourgeois stratum of the population, the peasantry in the strict and narrow sense of the word, cannot help being revolutionary at certain periods in history. Its present revolutionary attitude is an inevitable product of the conditions of the "old order", and we must vigorously support and develop it. But it will follow just as inevitably from the conditions of the new order, of the new, free, capitalist Russia, that part of the rural petty bourgeoisie will side with "order"; and the more land*

*the peasants take away from the landlords now, the sooner this will come about. In the countryside, too, only the rural proletariat can be a truly revolutionary class, a class that, under all circumstances, is revolutionary until the end. The conversion of the wretched, downtrodden muzhik into a free, energetic European farmer will be a tremendous democratic gain; but we socialists shall not forget for a moment that this gain will be of no real use to the cause of mankind's complete emancipation from all oppression unless and insofar as the farmer is confronted by a class-conscious, free, and organized rural proletariat."* [p. 320]

## Page 51:

### Last years of the MLP

An entire half page was left out of page 51. This deletion occurs in Joseph Green's article "*What really happened in the last years of the MLP?*" (On complacency (part two)). The problem occurs halfway into the passage under the subhead "The environment and socialism", where a number of odd-looking accented letters appear and in fact a good deal of text and two other subheads are left out. So please replace the entire passage under the subhead "The environment and socialism" on page 51 with the following:

### The environment and socialism

This pattern continued.

Comrade Steve from LA started a debate with Earth First!'s Don Smith over the population bomb, the environment, and socialism. (See the 20 Dec. 1992 issue of the *Supplement*.) Fred (Seattle) however opposed Peterson's talk about socialism as "barren rhetoric." (See the *Supplement* of 20 May 1993, p. 14, col. 2) This was the first time someone was condemned in the party press for advocating socialism.

Who rang the alarm? Did Rene jump in on Steve's side? Did the Chicago comrades, ever-vigilant about the smallest detail in the *Workers' Advocate*, rush into the fray?

No, it was left to me (in the *Supplement* of 1 July 1993) and Steve (in the *Supplement* of 10 August 1993) to deal with the issue.

### The reorganization of the Seattle branch

But Fred not only opposed Steve's talk of socialism, but directly flouted the resolution on the party crisis of the Fourth Congress. He spearheaded the reorganization of the Seattle Branch along liquidationist lines. He wrote about this in *Information Bulletin* #81 "On May Day issue and reorientation of the Study Group" (June 15, 1993)

Did Rene sound the alarm that something was rotten in this reorganization? Did the Chicago comrades take up the cudgels



on this issue?

No, it was left to me to oppose Fred's liquidationism in my article "On the proposal to reorganize the work in Seattle" in *IB* #82, August 10, 1993.

The Chicago comrades may have said this or that among themselves on this and other issues, such as that of socialism and the environment. But they stood aside. Neither Rene nor Oleg nor any other Chicago comrade stood up and pointed out to the party what was going on. They didn't keep up a struggle, pointing out each and every dangerous manifestation of liquidationism. They had toured the country to discuss their criticisms of the *Workers' Advocate*, and that was that. They were passive or sectarian on these other struggles against liquidationism.

And now Oleg even ignores the existence of these struggles. According to Oleg, I didn't speak until the party was dissolving.

### **Dave's criticism of Michael's report on the world situation**

Comrade Dave of New York wrote a letter critical of Michael's report "The State of Global Economic and Political Power in the Aftermath of the Cold War". Michael's report was prepared as preparatory material for the Fourth Congress and appeared in *IB* #70 (24 July 1992). Dave's criticism appeared in *Information Bulletin* #73 (15 Sept. 1992) under the title "On the 'Report on the status of global economic and political power' ". Many of its points are quite good, and stand up well with the passage of time.

Apparently, by the time of the 4th Congress in November, Dave had had second thoughts on his criticism. The same pattern appeared later. His article of Nov. 9, 1993 in the pre-

dissolution discussion (NY #1) rode off in a number of different directions simultaneously but it had many sparks of life. Still he supported the "majority", and even signed Michael's *Open Letter* denouncing the "minority".

I regretted at the time of the Fourth Congress that I hadn't had the time to write discussing and supporting some of Dave's views. The Chicago comrades hadn't written either.

[The article then continues as on page 51, with the subhead "The Fourth Congress".]

### **Page 51:**

Also omitted on page 51 was an explanatory footnote added by *CV* about the discussion at the Fourth Congress on the revision of the *General Rules* of the MLP. It noted that the *GR* wasn't just a document on organizational questions but included a statement of the party's basic ideological and political standpoint. The *GR*, as discussed and revised by the Second Congress of Nov. 1983, was almost a decade old by the Fourth Congress, and way out-of-date.

Also note that all the other footnotes to the article "On Complacency—part two", except for number 2, which gives a page reference to *CV* #1 and is marked as being by *CV*, are from the original version of the article circulated on March 2, 1995.

### **Page 14:**

On page 14, three lines from the bottom of the first column, the word "w222as" should be "was". □

# The International Monetary Fund and the realization of imperialist superprofits

by Phil, Seattle

The imperialist system has now existed for over a century, and has brought capitalism to every corner of the globe. As it has spread, imperialist capitalism has rapidly reduced earlier modes of production to mere vestigial forms, and established everywhere the forms of advanced commodity production. While none of the former leaders of the "majority" who liquidated the Marxist-Leninist Party would dispute the fact that capitalism has gained such preponderance, there would be wide disagreement as to the sort of strategy which must be adopted under such conditions. Many of them would no doubt maintain that it would be senseless to fight such a Juggernaut, and that its superiority over earlier modes of production can only mean that the workers have no other course but to throw themselves under its wheels and gaily provide it with fodder for further growth. Others would timidly suggest that maybe with a few "structural reforms" the worst brutalities of this beast might be eliminated, and insist that we could tame it and turn its awesome energy to provide great benefits, if only we gave up all our dreams of the chimera known as Revolutionary Marxism-Leninism.

Among the former "minority", too, there was no unity on the attitude to be adopted. The Chicago group seems to think that it is enough to despondently drift in the left, and snatch tempting ideological tidbits from this or that radical grouping. Whenever anyone mentions the task of organizing the theoretical work, a great scream of horror is heard in their ranks, and they pelt us with insults and accusations that Joseph wishes to once again be the boss of a mindless group of lockstep clones tilting at windmills with ancient lances. The comedy of this reaction can really be amusing if the results were not so unfortunate. So, I decided to attempt some serious theoretical investigations of the features of modern imperialist capitalism, rather than continue to be amused at this sort of helplessness.

This article is the first of a series of articles which will attempt to give a more thorough presentation of some of the institutions of the present-day international economic system. I have chosen to begin by describing the role of the International Monetary Fund and the history of recent attempts to stabilize the exchange relationships between countries of the world. This effort is an attempt at serious economics, a sort of "know your enemy", and in it I seek to work out the mechanism by which imperialist countries realize the superprofits which are produced in the less developed countries around the world. Of course, I am basing my work on Lenin's five-point definition of imperialism, i. e.,

- 1) Concentration of production and capital brings about monopolization,
- 2) Bank capital and industrial capital unite to form finance capital.
- 3) Capital is exported, as well as commodities,

4) International monopolist powers compete to share the world among themselves,

5) The complete territorial division of the world has been carried out, meaning that all redivisions must occur at the expense of one group of powers, in order to increase the share of the other group.

The essential impulse which motivates the factors in this definition is the production and realization of superprofits which are produced in the vast majority of less developed countries, but are appropriated by the small group of advanced industrial countries which are the headquarters of this system of international finance capital.

To begin with, I will examine the production of "superprofits" under the imperialist system. I will then describe the institutions which promote the realization of such profits. I must first describe what constitutes "superprofits", and how they arise during the process of production under imperialist conditions. To support this description, I will review the process of formation of the average rate of profit under domestic capitalist conditions.

The theory of the rate of profit is an important part of Marxist political economy. This theory rests on the conclusion that the product of a worker's labor is divided into two parts: one paid for by his wages, the other unpaid and appropriated by the capitalist as surplus value. The amount of a worker's wages is a measure of the amount of labor which is necessary for the continuance and reproduction of the worker as an employee of the capitalist. This amount is set by complex historical and social forces which establish the general proportion between paid and unpaid labor under definite conditions. In different societies, with different histories and different social conditions, the proportion between paid and unpaid labor may be very different, and in general there is a considerable political component to this proportion, arising from the level of culture of a people, their technical sophistication, willingness to engage in strikes and struggles for better working conditions, and so forth. Furthermore, since the different areas of the world have been subjected to capitalist development at different times and under different conditions, here democratic, there autocratic, there is a great deal of unevenness and inconsistency evident in the manner which this proportion is established. No general, simple law exists to fix this proportion; rather, it is subject to the special, individual processes worked out in each country or distinct area of the world.

Each different sphere of industry in society has a different technical composition of capital necessary for production in that sphere. Although the rate of surplus value, which describes the rate of exploitation, consists of the ratio of unpaid (surplus) value to paid value (variable capital), the capitalist, in figuring his rate of profit, looks at the whole of his capital invested in his operation, and thus calculates the rate of profit as the ratio of the surplus value produced to the entire capital invested (includ-

ing constant capital, or means of production). Thus, different spheres of industry which yield the same mass of surplus and the same rate of surplus value yield very different rates of profit. Competition between different spheres of industry brings about the formation of the average rate of profit, and capitalists conform to this average by calculating their selling-prices as equal to the cost-price of the commodities produced plus their profit, based on the average rate of profit described above. Thus, on this basis, prices deviate from values and the profits deviate from surplus values, although the total socially-produced profit is the same as the total socially-produced surplus in a society. The distribution of these profits is further modified by the amount necessary to expend for circulation of goods, means of exchange, government, and many other factors outside the scope of this discussion. Any profits formed under exceptional conditions, under conditions set by the existence of monopolies or government protection of certain conditions of production (preventing competition from bringing about the full effect of the process described above) will cause an industry to obtain a superprofit, which is a profit much higher than that which would be expected based on the total capital (constant + variable) invested in that industry.

Before the advent of the imperialist era, that is, before the last quarter of the 19th century, capitalism was well-developed only in Western Europe. But at that time, it was also developing with astonishing speed in the United States and Japan. In eastern Europe and Russia, it was also beginning to develop, but in the rest of the world, pre-capitalist conditions still existed, in the form of societies with a heavy component of peasant and subsistence agricultural economy. These areas of the world did not experience the full force of capitalist industrial development until the onset of the imperialist era and the domination of these areas of the world by the already well-developed industrial powers referred to above. This domination brought about capitalist development in a fundamentally different form than the previously developed industrial societies had experienced, under their own more autonomous development. Thus, the unevenness in social conditions and development which I mentioned above is most striking when the colonial world of Asia, Africa, and Latin America is contrasted to the metropolitan world of Europe, North America, and Japan.

In *Capital*, Vol. I, Ch. 22, Marx described some of the implications of national differences of wages. In general, these differences are the basis for what we today refer to as the standard of living and the cost of living. The standard of living is the amount of goods and services which people require as a fundamental condition for functioning in a society. This standard depends on geography, climate, population density, urbanization, development of means of transportation, and many other social and historical factors. The cost of living is the amount of labor which this standard costs to produce for the mass of the population. When capital from an advanced industrial country is invested in a less developed country, the standard of living in that country is significantly lower than the standard of living which may be common in the advanced country, and the cost of living may be equivalent to a much lower amount of labor in the advanced country (even though

this amount of labor yields an economically acceptable standard of living in the less developed country). This makes it possible for capital invested from a more developed society to yield much larger profits under conditions in a less developed society than would be possible domestically, even assuming that exchange takes place at the market value of the goods involved (which is not necessarily the case due to the effects of international competition and the formation of rates of profit under those conditions).

However, international trade has developed under conditions which make the realization of these profits extremely risky and subject to a number of significant obstacles. Up until World War I, trade was financed by the gold standard, which evaluated commodities, both domestically and internationally, on the basis of gold and gold-backed currencies. This maintained a rough economic equivalence between widely varying conditions in various countries; however, it also severely limited the amount of money necessary for expansion of various economies (because of the scarcity of gold and its function as a reserve asset for the banking system).

World War I brought about the suspension of gold convertibility as countries used credit to finance the expansion of weapons stocks and to pay for troops and the costs of the war. After the war, the major industrial powers attempted to resume gold convertibility, but found that industrial expansion had gone so far that this resumption could not take place. Demands for reparations from Germany caused massive inflation there, and the boycott of the USSR drove these two countries to trade with each other instead of with the rest of the world. Gold was still too scarce, and attempts to develop a standard based on the convertibility of key currencies to gold faltered. Furthermore, international credit institutions were not well enough developed to support trade, and trade wars brought about high tariffs and embargos as the various powers fought for the control of the markets which they desired to dominate. These frictions were the underlying cause of World War II., which again sent the industrial economies of the United States, Europe, the USSR, and Japan, on a mad spiral of competitive weapons production and military expenditures.

During World War II, the U. S. and Great Britain became convinced that better international credit institutions and an international monetary system based on credit were necessary to avoid a repeat of the conditions which had led to the trade conflicts of the inter-war period. While economic theory still held to the need for gold-backed currencies, the economization of the actual means of exchange was seen to be possible based on the extensive use of token currencies as means of everyday commerce. The first steps in this direction were taken at the Bretton Woods Conference in the summer of 1944.

### **Bretton Woods and its Institutions**

In July 1944 the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference met at Bretton Woods, N.H., to find a way to rebuild and stabilize a world economy that had been severely devastated by World War II. The conference brought about the founding of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the International



Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), also known as the World Bank.

The Bretton Woods Conference was arranged by the U. S. and British governments with the aim of laying a basis for international commercial relationships which was free from the chaos and protectionism of the pre-World War II era. The two dominant personalities behind the organization of the Conference were Harry Dexter White (1892-1948) of the United States, and John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) of Great Britain. The Conference laid plans for three post-war international economic institutions: the IMF, the World Bank, and the International Trade Organization (ITO). The founding of the ITO did not take place because of the failure of the Havana Conference in 1948, and as a result, several important trading countries signed the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), which was meant to be a temporary institution to fill in for the ITO.

The stated purposes of the IMF were to create international monetary cooperation, to stabilize currency exchange rates, and to assist member nations with temporary balance-of-payments difficulties. At its founding, the IMF had 35 members, and by 1993, this number had grown to 179 members. Most of the countries which had formerly been part of the Soviet bloc, including the Soviet Union, did not join until the early 1990s; and, of the Western nations, Switzerland has not participated (consistent with a tradition of non-involvement in international organizations).

To achieve its goals, the Bretton Woods Conference at its founding stated a number of conditions with which member nations were required to comply. Each nation agreed to establish a par value for its currency, that is, the value of a unit of its currency would be fixed in relation to the dollar or to gold. On its part, the US government agreed to redeem all gold held overseas at the rate of \$35 per ounce of gold. Domestic ownership of gold currency and bullion continued to be forbidden as they had been since 1933. These foundations were intended to prevent great fluctuations of national currencies in relation to each other. However, by the end of the 1960's, tensions had accumulated in the system which made it impossible to attain these objectives while keeping the original rules intact. Thus, in 1971, these foundations were abandoned when the United States removed the dollar from the gold standard. Most economists term this event the "downfall of the Bretton Woods System", even though the main institutions founded at Bretton Woods have grown in importance since that date. Since that time, many governments have allowed their currencies to "float" in value in relation to each other and in relation to the conditions of the world economy. These events also ended the legal restrictions on private ownership of gold currency and bullion by U. S. residents.

Member nations also agreed upon the principle of currency convertibility. Thus, if one nation owned the currency of another, it would be able to sell it back at par value. A third provision of the IMF charter was that member governments would contribute to the operating funds of the IMF according to the volume of their international trade, national income, and their international reserve holdings. Part of the contribution was

to be in gold, with the remainder in the nation's own currency. A nation may borrow funds against the gold portion of its contribution if it encounters financial difficulties due to an unfavorable balance-of-payments situation. "Balance of payments" refers to the amount of money that is paid out versus the amount that is taken in through international transactions such as trade and capital investments.

The IMF has adopted other devices to assist members in coping with balance-of-payments difficulties. The Standby Arrangements, adopted in 1954, enable nations to negotiate lines of credit in anticipation of current needs. The General Arrangements to Borrow, instituted in 1961, provide standby credit for emergencies. The Compensatory Financing of Export Fluctuations, introduced in 1963, enables developing countries to cope with sudden drops in export receipts without injuring the country's economy through currency exchange restrictions. However, the IMF has also followed a policy of requiring governments to adhere to certain conditions for receiving the loans they need to settle balance-of-payments problems. These requirements have become known as "conditionality agreements", and they have become increasingly burdensome for underdeveloped economies.

The above is intended as a summary description of the IMF. Two important topics will now be examined in detail:

- 1) The leadership and management of the IMF since its founding,
- 2) The policies of the IMF during the various periods in its history.

## Leadership and Management

According to the records of the Bretton Woods Conference, Lord Keynes of Great Britain and Harry White of the U.S. envisioned non-political, super-national institutions which would establish international order where chaos had reigned in the field of international trade and financial activity. Keynes died in 1946, and Harry White was hounded from government service as a purported Communist before his death in 1948. Their successors had no such idealistic view; instead, from the very first, they saw the IMF as a political mechanism to be arranged to serve the interests of the industrial powers, and those of the U. S. above all. The record of the first few years of the IMF clearly illustrates these facts.

The IMF was to be run by a managing director, 12 executive directors, and 12 alternate directors, which constitute the Executive Board. The U. S. insisted from the first that the directors be permanently salaried officers with their headquarters in Washington, D.C., whereas Lord Keynes had envisioned a part-time directorate which was also involved in the banking business in their home countries. He also had thought that the headquarters should be in New York, close to U. N. headquarters. Although the managing director has customarily been European, the executive directors were chosen according to the financial donations made to the IMF, which depended on factors which set the industrial powers far above the rest of the members, and the U. S. was far out in front of these. A practice of weighted voting was adopted, which gave the U. S. predominant

power in the deliberations of the Executive Board. Besides these directors, each member country has designated a Governor for the Fund to cast the votes allotted to it at annual meetings. Other decisions are made by the Executive Board meeting in executive session.

Over time, these arrangements have led to leadership by an elite. The major industrial powers, the U. S., Great Britain, Germany, Japan, and France, can each appoint a permanent director to a position on the Executive Board. Other countries must elect directors, either individually or as a bloc. Countries which have held individual director positions are the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Saudi Arabia (due to its importance as an oil-producing country). Presently, Russia and the People's Republic of China also hold individual directorships (Taiwan no longer belongs to the Fund). Most countries, however, must participate in the decision-making sessions of the Executive Board as part of a bloc, because their voting weights are so small that they must be combined with other countries' votes to yield enough for one Director. A Director's position is thus rotated among the members of a bloc. Over the course of the Fund's history, these arrangements have changed somewhat, so that in 1993, the Executive Board consisted of 24 members, including the five permanent members, the three directors elected individually and 16 elected by the bloc method. Each director also has an alternate; for the directors elected by a bloc, a different member country from that bloc holds the alternate director's position.

However, in practice, the major industrial powers have tended to operate outside the formal framework of the Fund by forming ad hoc groups for the purpose of presenting a common front in monetary matters. In the 1960s, the first of such groups was known as the Group of Ten, and it attempted to deal with the looming monetary crisis brought about by the closing of the gap between Europe and the US and the financing of the Vietnam War and Great Society programs by increasing the US domestic deficit. In the 1970s, the end of fixed currency parities and the gold standard caused the IMF to enlarge the Group of Ten to include some prominent developing countries, forming the Committee of Twenty. However, again the five major powers held private meetings as the Group of Five, and pressed the rest of the Committee to adopt a solution which they favored. This group was later expanded to form the Group of Seven (or G-7) whose meetings have continued to set the tone for world economic policies to the present day.

The economic theory which guides the Fund operates as follows: When a country is in a chronic deficit position in its balance of payments, it has a number of options available to it to correct this situation. These are:

- 1) It may take out a loan against some of its reserves, held by the IMF, and transfer these funds to the countries which it owes money to. These reserves may be borrowed from the Fund in the form of major convertible currencies or SDR's (Special Drawing Rights, the IMF's international reserve currency, created in 1968).

- 2) It may devalue its currency in relation to others, thereby making its own goods cheaper and more likely to be imported into other countries, and making the value of investments in its

securities worth less, while other countries' currencies and investments are worth more.

- 3) It may adopt a deflationary fiscal policy, driving up domestic interest rates and bringing about a decrease in government expenditures and shrinkage of the national debt. (These practices are known as structural adjustments.) These policies may also involve wage controls and other measures to make domestic labor cheaper. This makes foreign investors view it as a more attractive place to invest.

- 4) It may impose quotas on imports, tariffs on exports, and restrictions on money taken out of the country or exchanged for other currencies.

- 5) It may attempt to exchange foreign currencies which it holds for its own currency held by overseas countries, which lessens the debts it owes to foreigners.

Not all of these methods are available to every country in a negative balance-of-payments position, and some of them have unpleasant domestic consequences. In particular, the founding principles of the IMF, the IBRD, and GATT were all designed to discourage choices #2 and #4, but when the U. S. itself allowed the dollar to float in the early 1970's, the IMF Charter was revised to allow floating rates, and this practice has become quite common since then. Quotas, tariffs, and exchange controls are still viewed as practices which contradict free trade principles. These practices had been common in the inter-war period, and had led to severe trade wars which were seen as partly responsible for World War II.

Furthermore, since the industrial powers set the rules in the IMF, they are not likely to prescribe policies of severe structural adjustments for themselves to the same degree as they would attempt to impose them on countries with less voting power in the IMF. In recent years, the IMF has been more and more inclined to require structural adjustments in less developed countries as a condition of arranging financing for large balance of payments deficits. These agreements are also subject to a large amount of political influence; in other words, if a country is a close U.S. ally, it is more likely to get favorable treatment from the IMF for loans to cope with balance-of-payments difficulties than other countries which have more distant relations to U. S. strategic interests. In this respect, the loan recently arranged for Mexico was a prime example of the U. S. exerting its influence to assist a major trading partner.

### Historical Role of the IMF

When the Bretton Woods Conference was held, US officials expected the economies of the other major industrial countries to recover from the war fairly quickly, within five to seven years at the most, and placed provisions in the IMF charter which envisioned a return to normal trading arrangements and currency parities by 1952. The US also pushed Great Britain to restore full convertibility of the British pound in 1947, but this turned out to be a dangerous move which the British economy could not sustain. On the whole, the situation in Western Europe after the end of World War II was far more unstable and ruined than the US had envisioned, and as a result, the machinery of the IMF and the World Bank was largely bypassed, and

the European Recovery Program, or Marshall Plan, was set up to enable the economies of Western Europe to develop into viable trading partners more quickly through large direct loans and grants by the US. government. The "initial period" envisioned by the IMF charter to last until the European economies could restore fully convertible currencies in fact lasted until 1958, far beyond the 5-6 years originally envisioned. Up to the early 1950's, there was in fact a "dollar shortage", which made itself felt as a shortage of international means of payment (which was to be the US dollar). As the European economies recovered, the US began to run balance of payments deficits and a "dollar glut" developed. Foreign governments began to cash in their dollar reserves for gold more frequently, and the US had to change domestic gold reserve requirements to accommodate them.

Since the US dollar was the key currency of the international system (outside the Soviet Bloc), it could not be devalued without causing massive revaluations of other currencies. West Germany, however, was experiencing trade surpluses which would have called for an upward revaluation of the Deutschmark, but this was resisted for competitive reasons. The expenditures of the Vietnam War and the Great Society caused larger US deficits to develop, and foreign gold speculators began to bid up the price of gold on international markets. This led to a "two-tier" gold market in 1968, with governments buying and selling gold at \$35 an ounce on one tier and speculators bidding for gold at much higher prices on the second tier. The ultimate outcome of this period was the August 1971 decision by President Nixon to unilaterally terminate the \$35 exchange arrangement and devalue the US dollar.

During this entire period, the IMF had been in the background, as an echo of US policy. Gradual changes were made in an attempt to take the pressure off of the US dollar; in 1968, for instance, the IMF was given the ability to create Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) as an additional way of creating international reserves. Yet none of these measures could relieve the pressures which led to the August 1971 decisions. After these decisions, the IMF leadership, which was controlled by the central banks of the various nations of the world, appointed the Committee of 20 which attempted to work out new arrangements to resolve this crisis. But a solution did not occur before the 1973 Arab-Israeli War led the Arab countries to announce an oil boycott of the US and the Netherlands, due to their support of Israel. This boycott was followed by a large increase in oil prices by the OPEC countries, and the establishment of new par values of the major world's currencies became much

harder to achieve under these conditions. What finally came out of the deliberations of the Committee of 20 was an agreement that currency exchange rates should be allowed to float against each other. What this meant in practice was more frequent devaluations and revaluations due to the influence of speculators and changes in basic commodity prices as time went along. Further increases in oil prices occurred during the late 1970s to cause more uncertainty in world currency exchange rates.

Of course, the increases in the price of oil had profound effects on the world economy. The oil producing countries had no way of absorbing this sudden wealth, so they invested it in Western banks, which in turn loaned it to the economies of underdeveloped countries to enable them to cope with the effects of higher oil and import prices on their economies. Many raw material prices had in fact fallen during this period, so the ability of the developing economies to pay back these loans became more difficult to achieve. The IMF became more and more concerned with providing these developing countries with the means of coping with balance of payments problems. However, all this time, it was under the influence of the major industrial powers, especially the US, and its financial ability to handle these tasks was never adequate and always required coordination with major world financial institutions, thus adding to the indebtedness of such developing countries as Brazil and Mexico to the financial oligarchies of the US, Western Europe, and Japan.

These policies have placed the IMF and the other international institutions in a more prominent position, as efforts to manage the successive shocks and crises of the past several decades have grown. What is apparent from this history is that the capitalists have experienced a great deal of difficulty achieving the realization of the superprofits which they extract from the developing countries of the world. They have been forced to rely on credit pyramid of mammoth proportions, financed by the US dollar as its basic reserve currency. And this dollar, by and large, is in itself a credit currency which has no solid backing and depends on a lack of barriers in the world trading climate to achieve a circuit which prevents the whole house of cards from falling down. Commodity speculation and stock-market swindles add more stress to this situation, because at some point (yet unknown) these markets will become saturated and large profit-taking movements will cause a collapse to take place. In this context, the words of the roulette-wheel gamblers seem very appropriate: "Round and round she goes, and where she stops, nobody knows". □



# What is anti-revisionist communism?

The next four articles concern the differences between ourselves and the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group. These differences are on the fundamental question of what is communist work today. The following articles concentrate on issues raised in the latest *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*, issue #7, May 25. And the fourth article below, Julie's "*El Machete* and the Mexican Left", is one of the main articles from *CWVTJ* #7. Page references in other articles to Julie's article are to *CWVTJ* #7. But we have included a chart on page 39 that will allow the reader to find these references right here in *Communist Voice*: it shows which pages of Julie's article in *CWVTJ* #7 correspond to which pages here.

## The CWV renounces anti-revisionism

by Joseph Green, Detroit

The following article was circulated by e-mail on June 21 as Detroit article #85 to *Communist Voice* and *Chicago Worker's Voice* circles and some other circles springing from the late Marxist-Leninist Part.

Issue number seven of the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* has appeared, dated May 25. This is its first issue since the collapse of the "minority" grouping, of which the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group was a part. Up to now, comrades from Detroit and elsewhere provided most of the writing for the *CWVTJ*, but this time the *CWV* had to write the bulk of the material themselves. This is a change from the past, and the result is that the *CWV* expressed its views on a number of subjects. This gives a good deal of interest to *CWVTJ* #7, even though the articles are inaccurate concerning both facts and the views of those not in *CWV*. For those who are interested in the controversies that blew up the so-called "minority", *CWVTJ* #7 will repay close attention.

This article will just outline some of the subjects I think are important. I hope to go into one or more of these subjects later in more detail.

### Section 1: CWV's liquidationist program

The main significance of *CWVTJ* #7 is that it outlines a liquidationist platform. It's not that *CWV* declares directly that "we denounce anti-revisionism" or "we denounce the idea of a communist party". They are willing to make statements to prove their hearts are pure. But in the content of their views on the tasks of the movement today, in their theorizing about the revolution, and in their action, they have discarded these cardinal points of the communist program. They have instead

rallied around the following three points:

#### The CWV abandons anti-revisionism

- The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism as any sort of meaningful concept.

For decades the names of Marxism and communism have been prostituted by the revisionists and turned into an apology for the state-capitalist regimes in Russia, China, Cuba, etc. Marxism has been stripped of its revolutionary features, and revisionist parties have urged class collaboration in the Western bloc and support for the ruling bourgeoisie of the former Eastern bloc. This is why revolutionary activists have struggled for decades to tear the mask off the revisionist parody of Marxism. In our days, Marxism and communism can only develop as an anti-revisionist theory that contrasts its views and practices with those of the revisionists. The only real communism is that which fights irreconcilably against revisionist regimes and opportunist parties.

But the *CWV* no longer sees anti-revisionism as the major issue for communist activists. For example, *CWV* embraces the journal *El Machete* as a possible rallying point for uniting all left-wing Mexican activists. Yet *CWV* admits that, in Jake's words, *El Machete* "is not an anti-revisionist organization nor does it think it should be one." (p. 37, col. 1, *CWVTJ* #7 — all subsequent page references are also to *CWVTJ* #7 unless otherwise noted).

In general, in Julie's and Jake's and Oleg's discussion in *CWVTJ* #7 of the tasks of the movement in Mexico, anti-revisionism vanishes. Moreover, Julie of the *CWV* falls back into the old game of apologizing for the crimes of the revisionist regimes. She justifies Castro's entry into the Soviet revisionist bloc, saying that "Cuba really had no choice—since it seemed that U.S.-Soviet rivalry gave the opening to remain independent of the U.S. for a period." (p. 21, col. 1) And in the program she sets forward concerning Cuba, she leaves out the struggle against Castroism.

## The CWV abandons party-building

● The *CWV* has thrown aside the program of rebuilding a proletarian party.

Yet the proletariat has been paralyzed in the face of the world capitalist offensive because of its disorganization. The working class has risen time and again in the twentieth century, trying to build socialism, fighting against fascism, taking part in the anti-colonial struggle, etc. But today it is faced with a situation where just about all its traditional organizations are either in decay or dominated by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois political trends. In this situation, proletarian reorganization must be a central point of the revolutionary program.

But the *CWV* has grown skeptical and dubious of communist party organization. Oleg expressed this mood vividly in his article in *CWVTJ* #7 on Mexico and the Mexican left. He said he is “leaving out of this discussion the whole question of the need for a revolutionary working class Communist Party in Mexico... We have just had so much trouble organizing such a party in the U.S. that I don’t feel like giving much advice to Mexican activists on this question.” (p. 11, col. 3, *CWVTJ* #7) And similarly Julie, in discussing the needs of the class struggle in Mexico, leaves out discussion of the steps needed to build a revolutionary party. The *CWV* sings the praises of the EZLN, dreams of broad fronts embracing all the different trends of the “radical left”, and speculates on a general revolt, but doesn’t talk about how the proletariat will build a party.

The *CWV* was shocked by the dissolution of the party they used to belong to, namely, the Marxist-Leninist Party. This was one of the reasons leading them to anarchistic theories denigrating organization in general. But these theories simply express a mood, and have nothing to do with a materialist examination of the experience of the 20th century. This experience shows that proletarian parties were essential to allow the proletariat to play a powerful role. It shows that when these parties decayed, so did the proletarian struggle. And it shows that when the activists of the MLP were united in party organization, they accomplished a good deal and were a force to be reckoned with, while the actions of scattered activists often leave little trace.

The difficulties facing the building of communist parties shows the need for the anti-revisionist struggle. But the *CWV* instead draws anti-party conclusions. This is not logical. If the failure of the attempt to build the MLP should silence our talk about parties, then what about the failures of the trade union movement? It is in disarray in the U.S., and it is led by diehard pro-capitalist bureaucrats. Should this lead us to abandoning the trade union struggle, or to refrain from discussing the situation of Mexican unions? And what about the experience of the “radical left” in the U.S.? Isn’t it fragmented, dominated by opportunist and reformist theories, and still unable to separate decisively from the trade union bureaucrats and the left-wing of the Democratic Party? Should one abandon left-wing activity and refrain from talking about activism and radicalism because of the small, demoralized, and fragmented state of the American left and the prolonged lull in the mass movements?

## The CWV descends to personal vilification

● The *CWV* has also descended to personal vilification when dealing with political differences.

It has been common in this century for the reformists to throw mud at the communist revolutionaries. They say the communists are “true believers”; bosses of the proletariat, and not activists; pawns of some privileged bigshots; splitters and sectarians; not normal, but driven by some psychological disorder—what hasn’t the bourgeoisie and the reformists echoed in chorus? The reformists want to scare the workers away from examining the political basis of the struggle between the revolutionary and reformist trends.

The *CWV* has joined in this type of chorus. The political grouping they used to belong to, the “minority”, split up because of political and ideological differences. But when they discuss this split, the *CWV* doesn’t focus on the different views of the tasks facing us. Instead they shout about how evil one individual, Joseph Green, is. They make personal attacks or absurdly wild political charges. According to Jake, it’s all a matter of “Joseph and his supporters”; Joseph wants to be a boss; he’s sectarian; he’s privileged; or he sacrificed too much; he’s an ignoramus who just happened to guess correctly *El Machete*’s positions; he thinks only his articles are anti-revisionist work; he has disdain for the mass movement and the activists; etc.

*CWV* never stops to wonder why not just me, but so many long-time activists with minds of their own are upset with them. Indeed, the majority of the former “minority” oppose such stands of the *CWV* as their support for the journal *El Machete* and their complacent attitude towards theory. But the *CWV* rarely even takes notice of what is written by those who disagree with them. And when they do take notice of them, they throw mud at them too, and not just at me.

It’s notable that the “minority” itself—while it existed—had to fight against a campaign of vilification. The MLP dissolved when the majority of the CC and of the party abandoned their former revolutionary beliefs. The “majority” however refused to discuss their views openly. They demanded that there should be no discussion of the issues for two years, and they sought to isolate those who raised questions by calling them “subjective”. They even circulated an *Open Letter* warning the world not to listen to the “minority”. This campaign started originally with attacks on Mark and then concentrated on vilifying me. For example, Ben in Seattle wrote “an appeal to comrades of the xmlp trend” which ended with the demand that “Joseph should be told to go to hell”. This was printed without comment in *CWVTJ* #2 (p. 29).

Today the *CWV* has taken up the methods used previously by the “majority” to oppose the continuation of anti-revisionist work. Back in March 1994 the *CWV* proclaimed, replying to the Boston Communist Study Group in *CWVTJ* #2, that “We welcome an open debate while others mock and grimace”. Today it is Jake and Julie and Oleg who are mocking and grimacing; who wrote in the Editorial Guide to the *CWVTJ* Special Issue of March 7 that the debate has been forced on them; who tried to silence the questions about *El Machete* for six months; etc.

## Section 2: Issues of contemporary politics

The *CWV*'s views on the tasks of the movement today are expressed in *CWVTJ* #7 through opinions on a variety of subjects. There are a number of points of particular interest.

### ***CWV* embraces *El Machete* harder than ever**

◆ The *CWV* maintains, in *CWVTJ* #7, a diehard defense of the Mexican journal *El Machete*.

Julie, in her article "El Machete and the Mexican left", provides a good deal of material which shows that the worries comrades outside Chicago had about *El Machete* are fully justified. Yet she not only defends *El Machete* but holds that it might be the center for organizing the Mexican "radical left" as a "national political force". She's not sure, saying that "it would be difficult from here to judge the possibility of this tactic" (p. 19, col. 1). But she is intrigued at the thought of *El Machete* uniting the "radical left" or "the more independent and radical left", or a series of organizations, "many if not most...are mainly based in the peasantry" and some of which "make up the far left wing of the PRD". (On page 19, col. 1-2 she gives all of these different descriptions of the groups she thinks *El Machete* might fuse together into a coherent national trend.)

This shows that *CWV*'s endorsement of *El Machete* wasn't just a matter of circulating a magazine to provide some information, as they pretended when this endorsement was questioned. Instead their support of *El Machete* says a good deal about their idea of how one should work in the left today, and what one should aim at.

Why then does *CWV* insist that Oleg's original endorsement of *El Machete* was not quite right? It's because, in Julie's view, Oleg's advertisement for *El Machete* might have given the "impression" that *El Machete* was "Marxist-Leninist". (pp. 21-22) But Julie merely thinks that *El Machete* might play the key role in the Mexican radical left. And to do that, she doesn't think Marxism-Leninism or anti-revisionism is important. This is correcting Oleg's original endorsement by making it worse.

What type of organization could, in Julie's view, provide a rallying point for the left? What type of journal would, in *CWV*'s view, be useful to the Mexican radical left and help move it forward? Well, let's look at how *CWV* describes *El Machete*.

Even Julie admits that *El Machete* "doesn't make a clear distinction between socialism and radical peasant democracy" (p. 21, col. 3) and that they have "a very weak idea of what socialism is" (p. 21, col. 2). Also, she says "*El Machete* does not speak heavily of the working class movement" (p. 20, col. 2). She also thinks that one of their main ideas for how to revitalize the left is simply "expanding the EZLN struggle" over all of Mexico. (p. 19, col. 2)

But Julie doesn't find these "weaknesses" that significant. She doesn't see that activists need clarity on these questions if a powerful revolutionary trend is going to develop. She doesn't

seek to inspire activists with the need to struggle for scientific and revolutionary views. Instead she tries to smooth over one of *El Machete*'s mistaken standpoints after another. She even contradicts herself in her zeal to apologize for *El Machete*. For example, she presents *El Machete* as fighting militantly for a split with the reformist party led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, even though she admits that "they also give analysis why the EZLN proposal for a National Liberation Movement with Cardenas as the head might be correct." (p. 18, p. col. 2)

Meanwhile Jake admits *El Machete* is not anti-revisionist. Nevertheless, he suggests that *El Machete* might be Marxist-Leninist, but just not a "pure" or "perfect" Marxist-Leninist group. He writes that the controversy over *El Machete* is over how to deal with organizations that "are not pure (i.e. are not Marxist-Leninist or, at least, are not perfect Marxist-Leninists)" p. 36, col. 2)

So an organization can be Marxist-Leninist without being anti-revisionist, according to Jake. And according to Jake and Julie, an organization might be able to rally the Mexican left into a truly independent force without being clear on what socialism and radical democracy are, while trailing after the EZLN, while apparently not having much connection to the working class movement, while not opposing revisionism, etc.

### **The *CWV* and Castroism**

◆ *CWVTJ*#7 writes off the struggle against Castroism and Cuban revisionism.

In its last leaflet with an article on Cuba (Sept. 20, 1993), the *CWV* had somewhat glorified the Castro regime as waging an anti-imperialist struggle, waffled on the nature of the Cuban regime, and failed to give any call to struggle against Castroism. The *CWV*'s article and my comment on it, "Should we build an anti-revisionist trend among the masses", are contained in *Communist Voice* #1, April 15, 1995. *CWVTJ* #7—which seeks to refute CV #1—nevertheless continues this waffling on Cuba and this indifference to the struggle against Castroism.

Jake doesn't even think whether an organization supports Cuban revisionism is important. He counterposes an organization's attitude to revisionist regimes to its domestic stand or even "how we view world politics and who we were cheering for internationally (workers or nationalist regimes)" (p. 37, col. 2) It seems to me that whether one cheers on Castroism is a major issue in how one "views world politics" and who one is "cheering for internationally".

Julie, by way of contrast, says that one's attitude to Cuban revisionism is related to one's stand on domestic issues. She writes that, in the U.S., "those forces which are the most forceful in promoting Cuban 'socialism' are also frequently the most forceful in working to maintain the political movement under the domination of the left-wing of the Democratic Party, the trade union bureaucracy and other such forces." (p. 21, col. 2) She goes on to say that *El Machete* "not being clear" about the nature of Cuba "tends to stand" against *El Machete*'s stand on domestic politics in Mexico.

But it turns out that Julie herself defends alignment with Soviet revisionism as a necessity of the anti-imperialist struggle.



She says Cuba “really had no choice” and that becoming a part of the Soviet bloc “gave the opening to remain independent of the U.S. for a period”. (p. 21, col. 1)

This stand of Julie’s is a betrayal of anti-revisionism and of anti-imperialism. It shows that Julie herself is waffling on the nature of Castroism. She objects to promoting Castroism as socialist, but she instead promotes it as waging an anti-imperialist struggle. She defends its revisionism as supposedly a necessary and worthy struggle to be independent of the U.S. This doesn’t just mean apologizing for Castroism, but tearing the heart out of the criticism of Soviet revisionism. Moreover, Julie’s apology for Castro not only negates anti-revisionism, but even opposition to both superpowers. In her view, supporting one superpower against the other was anti-imperialism, at least when it is done by Castro. Remaking Cuba in the image of one superpower is defended by her as a fight against the other superpower.

So it turns out that Julie’s difference with *El Machete* is that the Cuban regime should be defended as anti-imperialist rather than socialist. She says that “Cuba should be defended against the maneuvers of U.S. imperialism”. But she doesn’t distinguish between what it means to defend the Cuban toilers and what it means to defend the “Cuban regime”. She doesn’t call for the Cuban toilers not only to be hostile to U.S. imperialism, but also to organize in their own defense against the Cuban regime and Castro’s party. Nor does she call for a struggle against the Castroist ideology. This is a betrayal of the class interests of the Cuban workers, and it means capitulating to revisionist ideology. It is not a mere oversight, because Julie is replying to the sharp criticisms made of *CWV* on this issue.

Thus Julie’s stand is similar to that of the *CWV* article on Cuba criticized in CV #1. Like that article, she often identifies the actions of the Castro government with those of the Cuban people. She even describes the action of the Castro government in joining the Soviet bloc as simply the choice of “Cuba”.

### **CWV on the struggle against opportunism**

◆ The *CWV* regards the struggle against opportunism as being “hostile” to activists.

As their articles on the Mexican left show, the *CWV* doesn’t see the need to fight to build up an anti-revisionist trend. They want to drift among the major radical trends that exist. If the left in general was anti-revisionist, then the *CWV* would be militantly anti-revisionist. But if the left has abandoned anti-revisionism, then this “weakness” has to be excused. If *CWV* is interested in trends that are “unclear” about socialism, then petty-bourgeois democracy too has to be excused. To actually fight to build up the anti-revisionist Marxist trend and in this way fundamentally change the situation in the left, is denounced by them as a bad attitude to activists. They confuse the fact that the various political trends are in hostile conflict with each other, with one’s attitude to the activists in these trends.

In fact, the only comradely attitude to activists in the mass struggle is to discuss open and honestly with them their views and orientation. It is no service to them to applaud when they are taking a dead-end road that leads them to disaster. It is no

service to them to shrink from the struggle of political trends because it is only this struggle that can sort out what is right and wrong about the different ideas in the left. Jake and Julie imply that it is sectarian to discuss the struggle of political trends. On the contrary, it shows contempt for the activists not to tell them the truth. To know the truth and to keep silent or say it only in a whisper, is not just cowardice and capitulation; it may also mean that one wants to exploit these other activists. *CWV* wants to promote itself on the back of *El Machete*, just as *El Machete* seems to want to build itself on the back of EZLN, and this is exploitative rather than being revolutionary solidarity.

I have repeatedly said that the criticism of opportunism and revisionism should be done out of a sense of responsibility to other activists and proletarians. Take the attitude to *El Machete*. Julie wrote me that “My bet is that they come out of student and art circle anarcho-Marxist trends. It is a rather lively paper....But their clue as to how to advance is rather limited.” (Letter of Jan. 21, 1995, omitted by *CWV* from the *CWVTJ* Special Issue of March 7 that supposedly carried all the relevant correspondence between Nov. 25 and Feb. 26.) I replied to her: “...your description intrigued me. I hope they really do turn out to be a group that is alive, because the world needs a multitude of groups that are alive—in Mexico, in the U.S., all over the globe. And I think how to deal with such groups is important. When a group of rebellious youth come up and boldly put forward their views in a no-holds-barred fashion, our task toward them is, in an equally lively, bold, and no-holds-barred fashion, to tell these comrades the truth. We’d better have zeal, because they probably are aware that if they accept our views, they are going to be in the fight of their lives against most other trends. If they don’t want to hear our views, then they are not ready yet, and we should simply keep note of who they are and how they evolve and of what theoretical issues their evolution places upon ourselves. If they do listen, then we have a dialogue. But I don’t think the announcement on *El Machete* in *CWVTJ* #5 was in this spirit.” (letter of Jan. 23, see *CWVTJ* Special Issue of March 7, p. 33)

What did Oleg conclude from this passage? In his letter of reply, he wrote to me that to that I was trying to prove that *El Machete* “is shit”. (Letter of Jan. 25, see *CWVTJ* Special Issue, p. 35, paragraph 5) I wrote back immediately to Oleg: “In your letter I learn that I want to prove that *El Machete* is shit. Would you kindly tell me where and when I have tried to do so? Is that what the discussion by me and others of the EZLN, the Mexican left, the Mexican crisis, and the tasks of proletarian reorganization has been regarded as?” (Letter of Jan. 26, *CWVTJ* Special Issue, p. 37) Oleg never replied.

This exchange shows *CWV* denouncing the struggle against opportunism as trying to prove that other activists “are shit”. This is what Jake is referring to when he says in *CWVTJ* #7 that “One issue in particular, how Marxist-Leninists should deal with left organizations that are not ‘pure’ (i.e. are not Marxist-Leninist or, at least, are not perfect Marxist-Leninists) is a central theme in our internal controversy” (p. 36, col. 2) Jake no longer sees a struggle of trends among the radical left. There are just the pure and the impure, the perfect

and the imperfect. And to point out the imperfections of the impure is, in Jake's view, to be impermissibly "hostile".

### **CWV and organization**

◆ The *CWV* continues down the road of developing anti-organizational theories.

For example, Jake manages the amazing feat of discussing "the anatomy of a split" without describing what it is that split. He just talks of "our forces", and casts doubt on a "national organization".

Moreover, the *CWV* discusses in *CWVTJ* #7 the revolutionary movement in Mexico and the demands it should give and the prospect of socialist revolution including the "peasant revolution". But it does so without considering the issue of building up a proletariat party.

Meanwhile Barb thinks it refutes Trotskyism to point out that there is such a multitude of warring Trotskyist groups. She writes that "That fact in itself suggests something is vitally wrong." But this is of course the same charge made by reformists against Marxist and communist groups in general. If Barb would point out the particular features of Trotskyism that foster unprincipled splits and conflicts—and such features exist—she would have a point. But to simply mock at the number of groups suggests that Barb and the *CWV* have grown tired of the struggle of trends altogether. They no longer have any confidence that a party can ever emerge from this chaos. They instead are thinking of a loose unity of trends and groupings with radically different ideas. And so they think it may be possible that *El Machete* can become an organ for the radical left in general, bypassing the struggle of trends.

Thus the *CWV* doesn't put forward actively changing the situation in the left by building an anti-revisionist trend. They don't see how this helps lay the basis for the development of a revolutionary communist party in the future. And they don't talk about such a party. Instead they gravitate towards an above-it-all stand, denounce the struggle for principle as sectarianism, and dream about broad alliances. Disillusioned for now in the idea of a party, the *CWV* prefer to just float in the left in general, glamorize the fashionable politics of the more radical section, and avoid getting too closely tied to any one organization.

### **CWV on the EZLN**

◆ The *CWV* continues to sugarcoat the politics of the EZLN.

For example, Oleg will criticize unnamed leftists, but not EZLN and *El Machete*, for romanticizing the views of Lazaro Cardenas. He writes that "From the PRD out to many sections of the Mexican left, one finds a theme that Mexico should return to the basic policies of Lazaro Cardenas [president of the Mexico from 1934-40—J.G.] or some improved variation of them, and this would make things a whole lot better....I think this view is wrong..." (p. 8) He holds that this program "wouldn't work anyway".

But when Oleg talks about the EZLN program, whose agrarian demands, whose nationalism, and whose vision of national consensus are essentially an idealized version of the

program of Lazaro Cardenas, he enthuses that "the main slogans of the Zapatistas are for 'Democracy, Liberty, and Justice.' " He doesn't refer to the connection of the EZLN's program to the program of Cardenas. Instead, he holds that the EZLN has a correct immediate program, whose only flaw is that it is "only one step in the direction of complete emancipation of the oppressed in Mexico"—i.e. it is only the first step. So much for Oleg's view that the program of Lazaro Cardenas is unworkable.

Or consider Julie's comparison of the EZLN to the FMLN. (p. 16, col. 2) To begin with, this is a somewhat odd comparison. The FMLN was, at its height, a nation-wide revolutionary force that sought to overthrow the old system and bring about some type of revolutionary change. The EZLN leads a local peasant revolt that looks to the forces of "civil society" to bring democratization to Mexico. Well, the oddity of this comparison aside, Julie writes that the EZLN has probably not, in some sense, "broken out of the mold of the FMLN revolt". (p. 16)

But she then goes on to try to present the EZLN as having overcome the problems of the FMLN. She claims that the EZLN "do not seem to have tailored their demands and program to the interests of the bourgeoisie (as the FMLN did in its later years)". Yet, in the very same sentence, she admits that the EZLN "seem to have a definite reliance on the very real splits in the bourgeois parties". So she can't see how the EZLN program, that downplays social demands and class issues, has anything to do with their program of achieving democratization in Mexico through alliances with bourgeois forces.

### **CWV and the program of Lazaro Cardenas**

◆ The *CWV* itself has trouble differentiating itself from the program of Lazaro Cardenas.

For example, Julie seems unaware that her own program for Mexican struggle, with her demands for state support for ejidos and for integrating ejidos into large-scale production, repeats basic features of the agrarian program of Lazaro Cardenas. (p. 15, col. 3) Julie calls for the workers and poor peasants to fight "for a series of democratic and socialist measures..." Her key agrarian measures are "a planning of large-scale agriculture in such a way that the peasantry is not pauperized" and "assistance to the ejidos in such a way that the peasantry working there can make the transition to large-scale agriculture without being driven off the land".

The presentation of government assistance to ejidos, the development of some communal forms, and better government planning as a sort of socialism that can save the peasantry is in line with the rhetoric of the late 30's in Mexico. And under Lazaro Cardenas, there was the most massive distribution of land to the peasants in Mexican history. A large number of peasants and even some agricultural laborers were organized into "ejidos" where they had their own land. Moreover, the Cardenas government made some attempts at building collective ejidos that preserved large-scale production. The most famous example was the organization of ejidos among the agricultural

laborers of the Laguna cotton fields. Major funds from the Mexican federal budget went to the countryside.

Of course, even under Cardenas, only a minority of peasants received land, and still less were in collective ejidos, and the amount of machinery and other aid to the ejidos was insufficient. But if that is the main difference with the program of Cardenas, then Julie is basically asking for the extension of that program. And isn't it promoting capitalist illusions, as Lenin and Engels and Marx thought it was, to hold that peasant agriculture can be transformed into large-scale production, with all the peasants reaping the benefit, prior to the achievement of socialism? How can one promote the radical carrying out of bourgeois democratic reform in the countryside, and yet specify that all the consequences of the development of capitalism—such as class differentiation among the peasants—be eliminated? Julie's "socialist measures" in the countryside are the dreams of peasant democracy.

### CWV and the democratization of Mexico

◆ The *CWV* has trouble dealing with the prospect of democratization in Mexico.

Julie regards it as a bourgeois scheme, and notes that *El Machete* is "skeptical" of it. (P. 16, col. 2) She fails to notice that democratization is also the program of the EZLN. And when *El Machete* says that current demands should be centered simply on the elimination of the one-party state, it too is taking democratization as its immediate program.

The long and short of it is that the *CWV* has a hard time distinguishing between a communist and a petty-bourgeois democratic approach to democratization. Thus the best *CWV* can do, when they are criticizing the PRD or other bourgeois parties, is to denounce democratization as a scheme. But when they see it in the program of the EZLN and *El Machete*, they are silent.

The communist approach would, among other things, point out the class alignments that one can expect. It would debunk the euphoria about democratization and the petty-bourgeois democratic illusions in it. And oddly enough, this isn't done by simply opposing "bourgeois schemes". *El Machete* and the EZLN oppose bourgeois schemes of democratization from the point of view of a better and purer democratization. But this petty-bourgeois democratic viewpoint actually intensifies the euphoria over democratization.

Instead the communist approach calls for utilizing the struggle for democratic rights to help organize the class struggle. It would not paint the present situation in Mexico in glowing revolutionary colors, as Julie and Oleg and the *CWV* do, or pretend that adverse election results are simply the result of fraud, as the EZLN does, but soberly prepare the workers and activists to deal with the growing influence of PAN and the conservative bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> It would not simply dream of the

great revolutionary upsurges and revolts, but prepare the workers for a long period of struggle to develop independent organization. It would not pretend that the consequences of capitalist development in agriculture can be avoided by democratization and better planning. And it would show that organization independent of PRI, which looks like such a big step today, is only the first step on the road to building up their revolutionary organization.

### CWV and the growth of capitalism in Mexico

◆ The *CWV* has difficulty seeing that the problems of Mexico are, in part, the result of economic growth under capitalism. Mexico is actually one of the countries of the "third world" which had massive growth. This did not bring prosperity to the masses, and it even intensified class contrasts in Mexico. But this doesn't mean the growth was a fraud, but it shows that capitalism gives rise to the intensification of class antagonisms.

Oleg however seems to regard Mexico's emergence as an industrial country as a myth, a mere appearance, a part of "Salinas' strategy to make things look good in Mexico" (p. 5, col. 2). He says that "Salinas was able to make things look so good that last year Mexico was admitted to the club of industrialized nations." (p. 5, col. 1-2). Julie, by way of contrast, says that "Over the past 40-50 years there have been dramatic changes in the Mexican economy. Mexico has a fairly modern and extensive industry." (p. 15, col. 1) And she says, correctly, that the development of the last 40-50 years is connected to the pressure for democratization.

But this growth is also related to the major social problems in Mexico. It isn't just the restriction of growth by foreign imperialism, but capitalist growth itself, that plagues the Mexican toilers. Yet Oleg presents Mexico's recent economic crisis as connected mainly to surface phenomena. He lays great stress on the particular features of today's stock market, on the growing importance of mutual funds, and on the rapid monetary shifts in world investment today. These things have a good deal to do with the particular features of how the recent Mexican crisis developed. But they are surface phenomena. They should

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

fixing elections for decades. Nevertheless, the elections do show certain things. For example, PRI stole the 1988 presidential elections from Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. But the 1994 national elections were a different story: Cardenas, and the reformist PRD which he had founded, didn't do very well. On the other hand, PAN and the conservatives have done quite well in recent elections. The EZLN's Third Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle in Jan. 1995 discussed the 1994 elections. (See the full text of the declaration in *Communist Voice* #2, June 1, 1995, pp. 32-34. ) It saw only fraud in the election results, and it refused to ponder the trends revealed by the elections. There undoubtedly was fraud in the elections, but the EZLN leadership was closing its eyes to the evolution of bourgeois politics revealed by the elections.—Note added to the *CV* edition of "The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism".

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<sup>1</sup>Massive and systematic fraud has been a regular feature of elections conducted by the ruling party, PRI, which has been  
(continued...)



not be ignored, but their operation should be explained on the basis of more fundamental features of the situation. But Oleg doesn't focus on the structural problems and local class relations in the Mexican economy.

Thus Oleg's analysis has a certain similarity to that in the magazine *Mexico Business/The Magazine of Business in Mexico*, which promotes Mexico to the American bourgeoisie. The April 1995 issue has an article "The Hazards of Hot Money". In this article, Joshua Chaffin writes that "As analysts and government officials perform a post-mortem on Mexico's economic collapse, they blame an economy heavily reliant on short-term portfolio investment—stocks, bonds and the like—versus longer-term direct investment in plants and equipment. Says James Nash, chief Latin American economist at Nomura Securities in New York: 'That was the kiss of death.'"

Since the author focuses on "hot money", he suggests that better regulation of the stock market can cool the money off. The article contrasts the regulations in different Latin American countries. It suggests tinkering with them. And this is a logical deduction from the type analysis given by Oleg, which turns out to paraphrase bourgeois analysis in left-wing terms.

Julie, unlike Oleg, does talk directly of the quite real transformation of Mexico. But she is vague on connecting this to the social problems of Mexico. So for example, when discussing the present ruining of the peasants, she ends up discussing it in a spirit similar to Oleg's. She doesn't directly speak to the overall reason for the driving of the peasants off the land, and ends up simply laying stress on its relation to NAFTA and American agribusiness. She assumes that "democratic and socialist" measures such as better planning would stop this process. Yet the most radical democratic measures in the countryside, measures that eliminate the marginalization of the indigenous people, provide maximum state aid to the countryside, etc., would in the long run accelerate capitalist development among the peasantry even faster than now.

### Section 3: CWW's lollipop politics

While renouncing anti-revisionism and party-building in practice, the *CWW* nevertheless will every now and then say that it supports these things. It has a stock of red, revolutionary phrases for use at the proper ceremonial times. The *CWW* hands out phrases like doctors hand out lollipops to lull children into passivity. The phrases are sweet and taste good, but they have little to do with the actual politics of the *CWW*.

Take Oleg and Julie's attitude to the program of Lazaro Cardenas. We have seen that they have trouble differentiating themselves from it. Julie's "democratic and socialist measures" for the countryside have much in common with the program of Lazaro Cardenas, and Oleg praises this program, when it is taken up by the EZLN, as the struggle for liberty and justice. But don't worry. The "editorial guide" to *CWVTJ* hands out a big red lollipop and tells us that "a return to the program of Lazaro Cardenas is not a valid solution to the Mexican crisis."

And Oleg assures us that the program of Lazaro Cardenas is "unworkable".

Or take Oleg's attitude to need for proletarian reorganization. Oleg says that he is not going to talk about the need for a party. And indeed *CWVTJ* ignores the question of the party in its entire discussion of the left. But don't worry. Right in the middle of the passage from Oleg we quoted above that says he isn't going to deal with the party, he writes: "I would like to point out that such a revolutionary party is necessary for the revolution in Mexico." He hands the reader a big, red, proprietary lollipop.

And consider the issue of anti-revisionism. Jake doesn't think the fact that *El Machete* is not anti-revisionist is that significant. And he also tries to explain away their support for Cuban revisionism. But nevertheless, he writes at the end of his article in *CWVTJ* #7 that "Anti-revisionism means very definitely that we must settle accounts with Soviet revisionism, Trotskyism, Maoism, Castroism, social-democracy, anarchism, etc., even through the path to do so is sometimes not very clear." (p. 40, col. 3) He is willing to add any "ism" to this list that you please. He will give you as many lollipops as you like, but not a real anti-revisionist meal.

Lollipops don't provide the protein and vitamins and other nourishment needed to build a strong body. Oleg and Jake and Julie's lollipop politics sounds nice and militant and aims to satisfy all the militants. But it is incapable of building a strong communist movement. It is simply a modern form of the politics Lenin described as characteristic of the collapse of the social-democratic parties in the face of the outbreak of World War I:

"...On the one hand, the most 'Left' and arch-revolutionary resolutions, and on the other, the most shameless forgetfulness or renunciation of these resolutions—this is one of the most striking manifestations of the International's collapse..." ("The Collapse of the Second International", *Collected Works*, vol. 22, p. 209)

In the case of the *CWW*, the most militant declarations in favor of some subject are often made precisely for the purpose of excusing the failure to deal with that subject at all. Thus Oleg declares that he thinks a party is necessary to explain away that he is not going to deal with the party at all. And Jake implies that he will fight every ism under the sun precisely because he is really fighting those who take anti-revisionism seriously.

And consider Julie's comments on *El Machete*. She describes one "weaknesses" after another of *El Machete*, but only to suggest that *El Machete* may unite the left anyway. It reminds one of Lenin's talk of "the old error, that of the Second International, which diplomatically veiled opportunism and the gap between word and deed." ("On the struggle against social-chauvinism," *Collected Works*, vol. 22, p. 203)

### Lollipop politics and research

Parents worry that if their children consume too many lollipops too close to dinner, they will ruin their appetite and not eat what they need to get proper nourishment. Whether this is true for children, it certainly seems true for *CWW*. They like

their lollipop politics so much and find it so filling that they don't see the need for painstaking research and deep thought that goes beyond the fashionable thinking of the day.

Take the issue of Mexican politics. The *CWV* has been campaigning on Mexico for years. Last year they held a May Day which centered on the Chiapas revolt, and back then they were already promoting *El Machete*. But they didn't see the need to do research on these subjects until controversy began in the "minority" over their endorsement of *El Machete*.

The *CWV* has shown impatience with what Jake's calls my "point-by-point refutations of Ben and others". (CV #1, p. 48, col. 2) The *CWV*'s method is simpler. Again and again in *CWV* #7 one sees a description of this or that person as a good guy or a bad guy replaces the consideration of the political and theoretical issues involved. Instead of such descriptions being a conclusion based on careful analysis, such descriptions become the content of their analysis. The problem here isn't that their articles are too hot and spicy—in fact, lollipop politics tends to be bland—but that they think cooking consists of just throwing on the condiments.

Thus the other side of lollipop politics is personal vilification. And this vilification, combined with little to say on the issues, is shown in *CWV* #7.

- We have seen that their attitude to the breakup of the minority is to find someone to vilify, mainly me but also Mark, and recently Gary.

- Or take the program of Lazaro Cardenas, which they themselves point out is an important issue in Mexico. Oleg analyzes the program of Lazaro Cardenas as follows: "As far as I understand it, Lazaro Cardenas saved capitalism in Mexico much the same way Roosevelt did in the U.S. in the same time period. His policies were, by no means, for the workers and peasants. He mixed demagogic public relations steps and some reforms which appeared to be for the workers and peasants, with repression and attacks against workers and peasant organizations." (p. 8, col. 3)

The problem is that Oleg doesn't tell us what Cardenas actually did. We only learn the conclusion, that it was bad. As a result, the conclusion is abstract and vague and hard to apply to anything else. As a result, the *CWV* can describe some of the same basic policies as demagogic and not really for the workers and peasants when carried out by Cardenas, and as voicing "the demands of the indigenous people and the poor peasants in Chiapas and all across Mexico" (p. 11, col. 1) when demanded by the EZLN.

*Communist Voice* uses a different method. When it analyzes an issue such as the ejido system and the demands for its improvement, it doesn't simply ask whether the good guys or the bad guys are asking for it. It analyzes the nature of this demand. CV #2 started a study of the nature of cooperatives and communes in agriculture, and of the Marxist stand towards them. The fact that such ejidos figure prominently in the program of Lazaro Cardenas is an important fact, but it is not sufficient in itself to define one's attitude to the EZLN demands. For example, the minimum wage was raised under Cardenas. Does this mean that the demand to raise the minimum wage should be dropped?

## On Barb's article on Trotskyism

- This method of superficial analysis leads to bad results in *CWV*'s articles on Trotskyism. It's not that Trotsky shouldn't be criticized. On the contrary, it will be impossible to build up an anti-revisionist trend without waging a firm and protracted struggle against Trotskyism. I have tried to contribute to this, and I wrote most of the particular MLP articles against Trotskyism which Julie lists and suggests comrades should read. (p. 44) I also think that the *CWV* has a point when they describe Trotskyism and Stalinism as basically twins. But their method of vilification results in a mistaken and faulty analysis. I find it hard to believe that it would convince any somewhat knowledgeable Trotskyist, who could point out a dozen factual errors without even trying. And it degrades the repudiation of Trotskyism into showing that this individual is an egomaniac and was stigmatized by his experiences as the son of a kulak, which even if true would be of merely personal significance.

The *CWV* doesn't take theoretical work that seriously. It's not that they don't do any work at all. But they think that the essential issues are oh so easy. I think this attitude holds Barb back from realizing the serious work that is needed on the issues she raises. Her article is long on sheer assertion and short on careful study.

First, let's look at a few examples of the vilification which run all through Barb's article.

- Barb titles her article *DEALING WITH TROTSKY: Idiocy or Treachery?* And Barb seriously ponders the issue: "idiocy or treachery? It's a close call. Stalin, of course, opted for 'treachery',...Lenin seemed to prefer 'idiocy',...I, myself, lean toward the 'idiocy' label." (p. 44, col. 3)

But this detracts from dealing with Trotskyism as a political trend. Barb tries to justify her approach by a phrase from Lenin. But Lenin repeatedly gives a political analysis of Trotsky's varying stands, rather than focusing on whether Trotsky was an idiot or a traitor. It's not Lenin, but the *CWV* who runs away from the fact of the struggle of trends. If only the world were free of idiots and traitors, then the left could unite simply and easily—that's the implication that comes from the article's approach.

- Barb tells us that "During his Party career, Trotsky actually had a very small following..." (p. 44, col. 2) Trotsky's support went up or down at different times. But Trotsky was in fact a major leader in the Bolshevik Party after he joined in 1917.

- Barb tells us that Trotsky "operated in a world of romantic, idealistic self-delusion, spawned from an incredible ego..." (p. 45, col. 1) Since we forgive Jake for this, is it fair to hold Trotsky to a higher standard? (As Jake would say: just kidding.)

- Barb says that Trotsky "never confronted the fact that he was not really willing to work to build socialism." (p. 45, col. 1) This is repeated in one form or another throughout the article. So the bitter disputes in the Soviet Union over the nature of the system and what is proper policy are turned into the simpler matter of that no one should stand aside from socialism. Why, every activist knows that.

■ Barb tells us that “Actually, both Trotsky and Stalin, in their different ways, believed that real socialism in the Soviet Union was impossible — and dare I say, undesirable?” (p. 51, col. 2, underlining as in the original) Well, that makes the refutation of Trotskyism and Stalinism pretty easy. It’s that both trends thought socialism undesirable, while any self-respecting activist knows that socialism is a good thing. But wouldn’t it be the case that some Stalinists actually thought they were defending states that were really socialist? And that some Trotskyists actually thought that they knew how to put the revisionist countries back on the path to socialism?

■ This simplified method of dealing with Trotsky reaches the point that Barb refutes the term “degenerated workers’ state” by—polemicizing against the term “workers’ state”. I found that astonishing. And I found equally astonishing how casually she took the point. But, if she is right, she has revolutionized socialist theory. In that case, *CWV* has found the real root of the common error of the Second and Third Internationals—the idea of the “workers’ state”. But here is Barb’s reasoning: “what kind of scientific, economic, let alone Marxist, term is ‘workers’ state?’ Doesn’t ‘worker’ really mean ‘proletariat?’ If so, why didn’t Trotsky use that term.” (p. 51, col. 2)

However, while Barb is upset at the term “workers’ state”, she supports the term “workers’ and peasants’ state”. She doesn’t ask, why not a “proletarian and peasants’ state”. I don’t know why the addition of the word “peasants” makes the word “workers” any better. Nor do I have the faintest idea why, if, as Barb believes, the terms worker and proletariat are identical, that it would make a difference which one is used.

In any case, Barb answers the question of how to characterize the Soviet state simply by quoting Lenin. I think that one has to give more of an analysis than this. There is the question of what communist theory says the state should be during the transition to socialism. And there is the question of analyzing the actual experience of the Soviet Union, and seeing how far it realized this theory, and what happened when things started to go bad. There is also the question of evaluating Lenin’s views. These issues can’t be answered by simply citing a few dozen words from Lenin. That’s a caricature of the Leninist approach.

However, it is important to see Lenin’s views on the subject. That’s one part of serious work. And it is notable that Barb gets Lenin’s views wrong. She doesn’t go seriously into Lenin’s theory on the state and on the transition to communism. She just says:

**“When Lenin said, ‘It is not quite a workers’ state. That is where Comrade Trotsky makes one of his main mistakes...ours is not actually a workers’ state but a workers’**

**and peasants’ state,’ he added, ‘and a lot depends on that.’ This is an understatement because everything depended on that.”** (p. 53, col. 2, underlining added by Barb to Lenin’s quotation)

Barb continues by raising that one subject after another depended on this formulation. These subjects concern the stand towards the peasantry.

Well, Barb is quoting from Lenin’s article *The trade unions, the present situation and Trotsky’s mistakes*, Dec. 30, 1920, (*Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 24). And Barb makes “everything” depend on the “workers’ and peasants’ state”. It is sort of odd that Barb picks a work on the trade unions in order to illustrate controversies on the peasantry. Barb uses Lenin’s words to deal with a series of issues that have nothing to do with that particular article of Lenin’s. But very well. Let’s look more deeply at the passage Barb brings out. The very next article in Lenin’s *Collected Works* is *The Party Crisis*, and it discusses this passage over again. Lenin says:

**“While dealing with the December 30 discussion, I must correct another mistake of mine. I said: ‘Ours is not actually a workers’ state but a workers’ and peasants’ state. Comrade Bukharin immediately exclaimed: ‘What kind of a state?’ In reply I referred him to the Eighth Congress of Soviets, which had just closed. I went back to the report of that discussion and found that I was wrong and Comrade Bukharin was right. What I should have said is: ‘A workers’ state is an abstraction. What we actually have is a workers’ state with this peculiarity, firstly, that it is not the working class but the peasant population that predominates in the country, and, secondly, that it is a workers’ state with bureaucratic distortions.’ Anyone who read the whole of my speech will see that this correction makes no difference to my reasoning or conclusions.”** (*Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 48.)

So Barb is wrong about Lenin’s views on the term “workers’ state”. The *CWV* approach risks discrediting the struggle against Trotskyism.

Nor should one take *CWV*’s bitter personal attacks on Trotsky as a sign of *CWV*’s vigor in dealing with the political trend of Trotskyism. On the contrary, it coexists with *CWV*’s flabby attitude towards the present political trend of Trotskyism. For example, in *Communist Voice* #1 we pointed to Oleg’s interest in the Trotskyist group Spark. As well, the *CWV* makes a point of bringing seven publications from other countries to the attention of activists, and distributing them through “Marxist-Leninist Books and Periodicals”. Two of these seven are trotskyist papers: the *Workers’ Voice* from New Zealand and *Che Fare* from Italy. (*CWVTJ* #7, page 3) □

# How anti-revisionists evaluate other trends and how Jake does

by Mark, Detroit

The *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* (#7, May 25, 1995) carries an article from Jake of the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group entitled "Anatomy of a Split, Part I." The article gives Jake's account of the split between the *CWV* and the supporters of this journal, *Communist Voice*, forces that had been in an informal "minority" grouping that formed in the wake of the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist Party in November 1993. There are two main features of Jake's article that I would like to draw attention to.

First, there is an abandonment of an anti-revisionist approach to other left-wing trends as demonstrated in his treatment of the controversy over the *CWV* group's endorsement of the *El Machete* group in Mexico.

Secondly, Jake completely distorts the developments leading to the split in order to cover the *CWV*'s rejection of unity on the basis of an anti-revisionist platform. While he is consumed with whether or not the *CWV* group would control the "minority's" journal, Jake fails to attach much significance to the fact that the "minority" was unable to reach agreement as to its orientation, what principles it would be based on and what tasks it faced. He hides that a section of *CWV* openly rejected anti-revisionism and the *CWV* was raising one objection after another to a proposal for an anti-revisionist organization even before the debate on *El Machete*. Jake hides the *CWV* group's bitter opposition to bringing the controversy over *El Machete* into the pages of the *CWVTJ* though this journal was supposed to be a voice for all opinions within the "minority," not just Chicago's.

Instead Jake fumes that a "drastically different" organizational proposal from the one they discussed in November 1994 was suddenly foisted upon the unsuspecting *CWV* group. Jake finds the proposal drastically different even though there were no basic changes in the political platform, the basic organizational structure, or the powers of the editorial board of the organization's journal from the November proposal. The one difference, and the one thing Jake seems to care about, was instead of the *CWV* group automatically being considered the editorial voice of the journal, the organization would decide who would serve on the editorial board. In other words, there would be elections to the editorial board. Clearly this was too bitter a pill for Jake to swallow as he could not countenance an organization unless the *CWV* ran its journal by divine right. Jake charges his new-found nemesis, Joseph, with issuing some ultimatums to do some unexplained something or other. But it was the *CWV*'s Julie who issued the ultimatum that only if every *CWV* member was on the editorial board of a "minority" journal could she support such an organization.

All Jake can see in the split is someone else possibly taking posts that his group occupied. Jake can't understand that if the "minority" was unable to agree to any common orientation, if

the *CWVTJ* wasn't going to function as the voice for the whole "minority" but only for the *CWV* group, then a split was an accomplished fact and that all that remained was the recognition of it. Unable or unwilling to understand any of this, Jake can think of nothing better to do than to slander those who want their own voice as undemocratic and devious plotters.

I plan to write more on Jake's fanciful distortions of history later on. But in the first installment of my reply to Jake I would like to return to the issues Jake poses on what approach to take toward other left-wing trends.

## Who judged *El Machete* prematurely?

Jake argues that the *CWV* group based its analysis of *El Machete* on thorough research while Joseph just arbitrarily dismissed *EM* without the slightest knowledge of their stand. The way Jake writes, many readers would get the impression that Joseph is so arbitrary that when Joseph correctly stated that *EM* supports Cuban revisionism and is not proletarian internationalist, he did so "before he knew that *EM* had carried an article favorable to Cuba, before he knew *EM* had published a nationalist article by an MLN supporter."<sup>1</sup> This is utterly absurd as *EM*'s stand on Cuba and their support for nationalism were known throughout the entire "minority" by late December, members of the *CWV* group talked about this themselves, and the quote from Joseph used by Jake is from March 2.

But perhaps Jake's point is that while Joseph knew something about *EM*'s stand by March 2, Joseph's letter of December 14 gave a blanket condemnation of *EM* based on pure guess work. This is also a lie. Joseph's letter of December 14 does not call *EM* "a trend hostile to ours" or anything like it.<sup>2</sup> Instead it criticizes the *CWV*'s decision to carry an endorsement for *EM* based on the shallow reasoning given for supporting *EM* in the December 1 endorsement itself. For example, Joseph questions how the ad could talk of the "left-wing revolutionary perspective" of *EM* when instead of analysis of its political stands, "the article speaks about its graphic on the masthead, and that it publishes important news about Mexico such as statements from the EZLN." Indeed the *CWV* endorsement of *EM* rested on such statements as: "You can get an idea of the paper's stand from its masthead" because "the masthead has a hammer and sickle inside a star on one side and a clenched fist on the other." Perhaps Jake considers such statements evidence of the thorough study allegedly carried out by the *CWV* before endorsing *EM*! And what is most revealing is that Jake equates hostility toward a trend with merely calling for a serious examination of the trend. So much for the critical Marxist examination of other

<sup>1</sup>*CWVTJ* #7, p.37, col.1.

<sup>2</sup>*CWVTJ Special Issue*, March 7, 1995, pp. 3-6.



trends demanded by anti-revisionism. Jake's approach boils down to this: if a trend looks kind of militant, let's promote them regardless of what their politics may turn out to be.

Indeed while the *CWV* group took a decision to distribute the *EM* newspaper several months before they published an endorsement of it in the *CWVTJ*, the first substantial analysis of *EM* offered by the *CWV* appears six months after their public endorsement in *CWVTJ* #5. For months following their endorsement, the *CWV* group answered repeated requests from the Detroit group for information on *EM* with no more than a few scattered snippets and claimed they could not even translate articles from *EM*, which published only in Spanish.

In fact, it was Julie of the *CWV* who first brought to Joseph's attention the haste with which their endorsement was carried out. In her November 25 letter to Joseph,<sup>3</sup> she complained that Rene was pushing for an ad for *EM* even though "we had never discussed an ad for *El Machete*" and even though half the *CWV* group (including Jake) had not gotten to read *EM*. Of the three people who reportedly had read something, Julie remarked Rene had "lost all faith in anything in the American movement, and has generally lost all faith in trying to pursue building something that is anti-revisionist...", and he and Anita were on the verge of withdrawing from *CWV*. So only one person who had not openly abandoned an anti-revisionist perspective had read any amount of *EM* literature at the time of the endorsement. This was Oleg, and his ad clearly demonstrates a lack of analysis.

So it turns out that when the *EM* ad was carried, very little analysis had been done by the *CWV* on *EM*, no collective discussion of the whole *CWV* group on the ad had taken place, the driving force pushing for the ad was a liquidator even by *CWV* accounts and Oleg's ad reflects a lack of serious consideration of *EM*. But Jake insists that it was Joseph that judged *EM* prematurely! No Jake, Joseph's letter of December 14 (as well as his December 21 letter that was reprinted in *CWVTJ* #7) does not prematurely judge *EM* but discuss what issues should be considered so as to avoid a premature announcement.<sup>4</sup> Joseph shows that a real anti-revisionist analysis cannot rest on superficial things like what a group's masthead looks like, or that it reports news about the Zapatistas.

Of course Jake is still trying to deny that the December 1 announcement was really an endorsement. But what else could one conclude when the announcement calls *EM* the most left-wing revolutionary trend the *CWV* knows of in Mexico, touts its use of the hammer and sickle identified with communism without any questioning of whether they really uphold communist principles, takes at face value that *EM* politics actually coincide with slogans they issue like "Workers of all countries, unite!," etc.<sup>5</sup> Jake might want to argue about intentions, but how can

one argue that the *CWV* didn't really want to prettify the stand of *EM* when Julie and Jake do precisely that in their articles six months later in *CWVTJ* #7?

### What is the "social practice" and "class base" of *El Machete*?

According to Jake, you can't judge *EM* solely on its political and ideological views, but must judge their "social practice" and "class base." I will assume here that since Jake wants to contrast politics to social practice, he is defining social practice as the type of activities a group engages in independent of the views they put forward in that activity. For example, do they organize strikes, armed guerrilla groups, mass organizations, etc.? And I will assume that by "class base" he does not mean what class views are manifested in the politics of an organization but is referring to such questions as what is the members' past or present position in society, or among what sections of the population do they organize. These are interesting questions. Since Jake has raised this as the only way to really judge *EM* let's see what he has to say about these matters. Nothing. And Julie? Some months back she said she had a hunch they were "anarcho-Marxist" students while in her present article she goes no further than to tell us they are a "group or collective" connected to the mass movement.<sup>6</sup>

I don't fault the *CWV* for not having much information on these matters as it may be hard to come by. But it is typical of Jake's hypocrisy that he has one standard of analysis for himself and another for his opponents. When *CWV* praised *EM* as a revolutionary force back in December, the *CWV* could only guess they were students and that's about it. Six months later, the *CWV* hasn't revealed much more. All that's really known by *CWV* is what political and ideological stands *EM* takes in their newspaper. This is what the *CWV* group has had to base themselves on in endorsing *EM* in the past. And the present *CWV* prettification of *EM* is also based on how they evaluate its political-ideological stand.

### Is Jake a loyal follower of MLP methods?

In his article, Jake tells of a phone conversation in which, he falsely implies, I endorsed *CWV*'s handling of the *EM* controversy. An interesting feature of this phone conversation omitted by Jake was his insistence that the Marxist-Leninist Party's stand toward other left groups was somewhat sectarian and that Chicago's policy was an improvement. Evidently, Jake has changed his mind because he castigates Joseph for not being a loyal follower of MLP methods. Jake may choose to deny what

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<sup>3</sup>*CWVTJ Special Issue*, March 7, 1995, p.1.

<sup>4</sup>The Dec. 21 letter can also be found in *Communist Voice* #1 under the title "Against endorsing *El Machete*, and some views on Zapatista strategy".

<sup>5</sup>For the full ad, see *CWVTJ* #5, December 1, 1994, p.46 or (continued...)

<sup>5</sup>(...continued)

see *Communist Voice* #1, April 15, 1995, p. 18 where it is reprinted in its entirety.

<sup>6</sup>Julie's speculation that *El Machete* comes out of "student and art circle anarcho-Marxist trends" is from her letter of Jan. 21, 1995 to Joseph Green. Her article's one sentence on who is the *El Machete* group can be found on *CWVTJ* #7, p. 14, col. 2.

he said on the phone, but there's no denying that what he writes in *CWVTJ* #7 shows that his "improvements" on MLP policy are in opposition to the anti-revisionist approach taken by the MLP.

Jake tries to justify Chicago's support for *EM* by saying the MLP supported groups that were "soft on Cuba". But if we take Jake's own example of the relations between the MLP and the Marxist-Leninist Party of Nicaragua (MLPN), it shows the opposite of what Jake says. The MLP did have fraternal relations with the MLPN. But, according to Jake, when there was an indication they might have some "softness" on Cuba, the MLP wanted to get to the bottom of whether the MLPN really was favorable to Cuban revisionism. Jake says the answer was no, the MLPN really wasn't taking this stand.<sup>7</sup>

Now let's look at the stand of *EM*. They clearly support Cuba as "on the road towards socialism" according to Julie's article in *CWVTJ* #7. Thus, they are not just indicating some "softness" on Cuban revisionism, but glorifying it. In fact, their stand would fit in quite nicely with Castro's lies that Cuba is still trying to build socialism. So for Jake, fraternal relations with a group that really didn't support Cuban revisionism is no different than supporting a group that is enthralled with the Cuban path to socialism.

To escape from this little problem, Jake has to lie about what his cohort Julie has admitted. He claims "it's not exactly clear what they think of Cuba." Of course, if Jake doesn't trust Julie's

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<sup>7</sup> Actually, Jake's description of how relations were between the MLP, USA and the MLP of Nicaragua misrepresents the situation. The period when the question of whether the MLP was exhibiting some "softness on Cuba" arose, was also a period in which the MLP saw a series of serious problems develop in the MLPN's stand and when relations with the MLPN became very strained. "Softness on Cuba" coincided with promoting Vietnamese revisionism and a pro-Soviet revisionist leader in Brazil, and with decay in the MLPN's stand on the struggle inside Nicaragua. Jake lectures others about looking at a group's overall stand, but, as usual, ignores his own advice.

More, the MLP did not just ask the MLPN if they really liked Castroism or were just kidding, but *publicly criticized* the fact that while some MLPN members would heap scorn on Castro in private discussions, they began to issue friendly reports about Cuban revisionist society in their press. (See, for example, *The Workers' Advocate Supplement* of September 20, 1990. "New tasks confront Nicaraguan Marxist-Leninists — part two," pp. 34-38.) True, the MLP did not break off relations with the MLPN the moment some bad views appeared. This is not because the MLPN's political problems weren't important, but because it could not be immediately known whether these views would overwhelm their revolutionary proletarian stand. In contrast, the *CWV* group has been attracted to *El Machete* at a time when *EM* was immersed in petty-bourgeois democratic politics. But whether one accepts my review of relations between the MLP, USA and the MLP of Nicaragua or Jake's more harmonious description, they both show the stand on Cuban revisionism was a vital factor in determining what sort of relations existed between the MLP and other organizations.

opinion, maybe he would consider Oleg's statement that "another bad article is their statement on Cuba where they call for solidarity with Cuba not just on a humanitarian basis but on the basis of support for socialism."<sup>8</sup> Maybe *CWV* supporter NC of the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* can open Jake's eyes with his evaluation that *EM* carries "a ton of state capitalist, reformist, and nationalist baggage of the old revisionist movement and I do not see them seriously trying to solve any of the contradictions that doomed that movement." (NC's e-mail message of Jan. 14, 1995)<sup>9</sup> If it's not clear to Jake whether *EM* glorifies Cuban revisionism, it's because Jake refuses to see what's right in front of him.

Jake has another excuse for apologizing for *EM*'s stand on Cuban revisionism. He says Joseph doesn't look into what *El Machete*'s views on Cuba mean "in the context of Mexico." Presumably the point is so obvious, that Jake doesn't even have to bother telling us why supporting Cuba is more palatable "in the context of Mexico." But "in the context of Mexico" a clear stand against Cuban revisionism is essential precisely because Cuba is widely thought of as socialist and Castroite theories have had a good deal of influence there as in Latin America as a whole. Moreover, in Mexico, it is not just radicals who support Cuba, but even the government has traditionally had good diplomatic relations with Castro. Hence, it is *less likely* that "in the context of Mexico" support for Cuba can be taken as a sign of a revolutionary stand than in a country like the U.S.

Undoubtedly, there *are* sincere revolutionary-minded people who are confused about Cuba. But Jake's attitude is an example of how the *CWV*'s floating in the left is in conflict with an anti-revisionist approach. Those who want to just drift among the left-wing groups downplay the need to take a conscious stand against opportunist trends like Cuban revisionism. From this point of view, the more common the illusions in Cuba, the less you should call attention to the issue. Anti-revisionist communists don't believe they do the radical masses any favors by shuffling the differences between trends under the rug. They hold that the more common a weakness in the movement, the more important it is to discuss it. They strive to bring clarity on such issues as Cuban revisionism to the masses as a way to strengthen the fighting capacity of the movement.

### Does the general political stand of *EM* merit support?

As we shall now show, there are other important differences between the MLPN when it was supported by the MLP and the present-day *El Machete*. Jake says that support for *EM* can't just rest on its stand on Cuba, but must take into account their stand on the class struggle in Mexico. Very well. Unfortunately, Jake again fails to tell us what he thinks the stand of *EM* is, but he does refer us to Julie's article for more information on this. Julie's article contains abundant information that proves that

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<sup>8</sup> *CWVTJ Special Issue*, March 7, 1995, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> See NC's note to Joseph Green, Oleg, and Julie, *CWVTJ Special Issue*, March 7, 1995, p. 25.

*EM*, despite a few quibbles, is quite enchanted with the political viewpoint of the EZLN, a group that has carried out militant actions but is immersed in petty-bourgeois nationalist and reformist politics, and that *EM* supports radical democracy as socialism. (Julie's conclusions completely contradict her analysis, however.) Meantime, Jake has to twist and turn to try and distance *EM* from the nationalist drivel carried in its pages as if *EM* uncritically carrying articles with naked nationalist rot from others is better than writing them themselves. Jake also probably thinks *EM*'s support for what *EM* calls their "brother paper" in the U.S., *People's Tribune*, also doesn't bear on whether they are a hostile trend. Why just because they promote groups in the U.S. that promote nationalism, or in the case of *People's Tribune* even support bourgeois politicians like former Chicago mayor, Harold Washington, doesn't make Jake love *EM* any less.

But now let's return to the MLPN. What excited the MLP about the MLPN was not that it used the word "revolution" or because its publications had nice mastheads, but that in its actual politics and social practice it stood up as a revolutionary working class alternative to the petty-bourgeois Sandinistas. The MLP was excited about the proletarian critique of Sandinismo by the MLPN, the fact that it organized independently of and *in opposition to* the FSLN, that it organized the workers as an independent class force, even forming their own workers' militias during the anti-Somoza revolution. Is there a difference between fawning on and promoting petty-bourgeois politics like *EM* does or fighting them as the MLPN did? Jake apparently doesn't think so.

Of course if the MLP had adopted the methods of Jake, the MLP would have become Sandinista groupies just like nearly all the opportunist left in the U.S. If Jake can characterize *EM* as "advocat(ing) revolution and actively fighting the bourgeoisie" when all the information shows it follows petty-bourgeois democracy, then certainly the petty-bourgeois Sandinistas, who actually carried out a revolution, deserve the same credit. Of course, this would just obliterate the distinction between proletarian and petty-bourgeois politics and between the MLPN and the Sandinistas. It would have meant covering over the Sandinistas policy of placating the bourgeoisie at the expense of the workers and poor peasants. This is how Jake would have "improved" upon the policy of the MLP.

### **Is anti-revisionism practiced by particular groups?**

In his article, Jake declares that the *CWV* group's notion of anti-revisionism means "fighting for real Marxism-Leninism" is "more of a process, more of an outlook and a method than a special group of people emerging from a specific organization." This is really profound! Theory undergoes a process of development, but presumably specific groups of people or organizations don't! Yes, Marxism-Leninism undergoes a process of development, it is a framework that must take into account ever-changing conditions. But that doesn't mean there is not a definite Marxist-Leninist framework. Similarly, there are definite

Marxist-Leninist groups despite the fact that they all undergo a process of change. But to say Marxism is more a process than an organization is an absurd counterposition because the process of developing Marxism-Leninism is carried out by actual humans organized into actual specific political groups. By contrasting Marxism to specific organizations which practice it, Jake casts doubt on whether organizations should lay claim to being Marxist-Leninist or anti-revisionist.

To highlight the falsity of Jake's proposition, let's test it in practice. Was the MLP an anti-revisionist organization or not? By Jake's reasoning this is at most a minor matter because anti-revisionism is "more of a process" than an organization. What about the former "minority" grouping which was "a special group of people emerging from a specific organization"? Might Jake specifically be describing them? Should they have declared themselves an anti-revisionist organization? Jake evidently doesn't think it was very important.

In fact, there was a debate in the "minority" over whether to declare ourselves an anti-revisionist force. The forces that went on to form the *Communist Voice* trend thought it was important while the *CWV* group had a different attitude. In the November 1994 meeting of the "minority," some *CWV* people thought it would make us "like Catholics" and "the Pope"<sup>10</sup> because according to them, any group with a certain degree of militancy in the mass movement could be thought of as anti-revisionist. Now Jake basically argues that who is and who isn't anti-revisionist is not so important. At the November "minority" meeting, the Detroit group's Joseph challenged the idea that there was something amiss in the "minority" declaring itself a distinct anti-revisionist trend opposed to other trends in the opportunist left. Joseph asked who else in the U.S. was taking up anti-revisionism and stated that if there were other organizations who were, we should unite with them. No one in the *CWV* group has been able to answer that challenge. Jake's prattle about Marxism as a process not an organization just obscures this reality and fudges over the distinction between anti-revisionist groups and other organizations.

### **What anti-revisionism is**

Jake writes: "To date, Joseph and our Detroit comrades haven't furnished a view of what they think anti-revisionism is." Now this is truly amazing. A sentence earlier, Jake says, referring to Detroit and Chicago, "we have different assessments of what it means to be anti-revisionist and what is necessary to carry forward anti-revisionism." Well, for someone who allegedly doesn't have a clue as to where Detroit stands, Jake seems to know exactly how Chicago differs! Jake's claim not to know anything about Detroit's views, however much it contradicts his other statement, does however provide Jake with

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<sup>10</sup>See the rough notes on the minority meeting of Nov. 94 prepared by Joseph Green and circulated last November to the entire minority for corrections, and Pete's "Additions to Joseph's minutes on Chicago meeting of November 5-6", circulated to the entire minority in January.

a convenient excuse for saying absolutely nothing about Detroit's views in his subsection on the differences entitled *anti-revisionism*.

But if Jake hasn't got an idea of where his opponents stand, it is only because he hasn't been paying attention. Members of the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group and others waged a lengthy battle against the liquidationist "majority," a battle to defend anti-revisionist positions on imperialism, the fight against opportunism, the party, the role of the working class, what theory is and its importance, and any number of other theoretical issues and issues of present-day politics. Or maybe Jake has not noticed that his opponents views on anti-revisionism are stated in direct form in such *Communist Voice* articles as "The rebirth of communism" (v.1,#1) or argued on various specific issues, for instance, *CWV*'s failure to uphold an anti-revisionist perspective on Cuba ("On the *CWV* agitation on Cuba: Should we build an anti-revisionist trend among the masses.") in the same issue. Meanwhile the June 1, 1995 issue of *CV* stresses the difference between anti-revisionist politics and that of the Zapatistas among other things.

Besides this, the debate over *EM* has sharply raised a

number of particular features of an anti-revisionist stand. Anti-revisionism means clearly differentiating trends, not excusing away harmful political views as *CWV* does with *EM*. It means seeing the importance of the ideas guiding a group and how these ideas greatly affect its actions and what role it plays rather than pretending that *EM*'s views don't disqualify it from leading a revolutionary fight against the Mexican bourgeoisie. Anti-revisionism holds that only Marxism-Leninism can provide a clear revolutionary path and emphasizes the need for proletarian reorganization in Mexico. The *CWV*'s Julie, on the other hand, thinks that no matter how wrong-headed the views of *EM*, it could function as the rallying center for the rebirth of the revolutionary working class movement in Mexico. Anti-revisionists are enthusiastic about declaring and building up their own trend, while Jake muses about whether that's so important since Marxism is a "process" and others in *CWV* mock the need for building an anti-revisionist trend by imagining that the tasks of anti-revisionism will be taken up by some other trend. The difference between the *CWV* and Detroit is not whether one uses the word "anti-revisionist, but whether one upholds it in practice. □



# What is anti-revisionism?

## For a public stand against Castroism

by Joseph Green, Detroit

In his article, the "Anatomy of a Split, Part One", Jake raises the question of what is anti-revisionism (*Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #7, p. 40). He claims that the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group hasn't abandoned anti-revisionism, it just has a different definition than the *Communist Voice* group does. And he doesn't know what the *CV* definition of anti-revisionism is.

Well, it seems to me, that any real concept of anti-revisionism involves not only research, but the following three aspects as well:

- 1) recognition of the oppressive nature of the state capitalist regimes which hide under the banner of their perversions of "communism" and "Marxism";

- 2) agitation among the masses against revisionism and the revisionist regimes; and

- 3) recognition of the importance of opposing revisionism if the left is to be reorganized on a revolutionary and truly communist basis.

Where does Jake and the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group stand on these issues? Let's take the example of their stand on Cuban revisionism. Cuba is a political issue of importance today. Castro's government is one of the remaining state capitalist regimes, and moreover it is the one with the greatest influence and support among activists in the U.S. and Latin America. It is a question of fundamental importance—is the Castro regime socialist or progressive, or does the Cuban proletariat have to oppose both U.S. imperialism and the new Castroist bourgeoisie?

Cuba provides a test of anti-revisionist views. After all, what type of "anti-revisionism" would it be that only condemned regimes that have already fallen, but was silent about the oppressive nature of the most influential existing revisionist regime?

The last major article on Cuba from the *CWV* grouping brushed aside the issue of opposing Castroism and promoted various stands of the Cuban government. I commented on this *CWV* leaflet in my article "On the *CWV* agitation on Cuba: Should we build an anti-revisionist trend among the masses?"<sup>1</sup> That was back in mid-April. *CWVTJ* appeared in late May and replies to the views *Communist Voice* set forward over a month before. So this time, we can add to *CWV*'s earlier writings what Jake and Julie say about Cuba in *CWVTJ* #7. And we will see that, on the three points of anti-revisionism I mentioned earlier,

- 1) the *CWV* vacillates on the nature of the Cuban regime—while saying it isn't their model of socialism or that it isn't Marxist-Leninist, they promote various of its stands as

anti-imperialist;

- 2) the *CWV* discussion of Cuba stresses only defense of Cuba against U.S. imperialist pressure, but doesn't call for the Cuban proletariat to struggle against Castroism and doesn't lay stress on dealing with the confusion of many activists over Cuban revisionism; and

- 3) the *CWV* doesn't regard a fight against revisionism as important for creating a truly communist trend in the left.

Let's look at these issues one by one.

### I. The nature of Cuban society

Julie gives the most developed response on what *CWV* thinks of Cuban society. She writes:

"I think Cuba should be defended against the maneuvers of U.S. imperialism. But I think it is far from the road of socialism. In an earlier period Cuba linked its economy closely with that of the Soviet Union. Cuba really had no choice—since it seemed that the U.S.-Soviet rivalry gave the opening to remain independent of the U.S. for a period. The Cuban regime carried out a series of reforms vs. the Batista regime. And because of this it has a lot of popular support. But this is a state capitalist economy. Today, the dollar has been legalized. Western investment is there. Furthermore, a look at their foreign policy over the years revealed that they did not stand with the most radical section of the left but with the reformists."<sup>2</sup>

Here we see that Julie, while criticizing Cuban foreign policy and its market reforms of the last few years, still regards it as anti-imperialist. Its joining the Soviet revisionist bloc is regarded as what a popular government had to do to defend its reforms from U.S. imperialism. Castro is thus presented as embracing revisionism not because of the class nature of his regime, but because he "really had no choice". This means, presumably, that this is the policy *CWV* itself would had Cuba adopt, because there was no other choice. It means that *CWV* isn't just defending the right to self-determination of Cuba and not just condemning the brutal American interference in Cuba, but is supporting the maneuvers of the Castro regime and of the former Soviet bloc.

Does this mean that Julie is supporting a non-revolutionary regime of exploiters, because it has differences with the U.S. government or because she likes some of its policies? And if so, which other bourgeois third world regimes should be supported? What are the criteria we should use? Julie can't quite get herself to say that *CWV* supports such and such an exploiting regime.

<sup>1</sup>Both the *CWV* article on Cuba and my comments on it can be found in the first issue of *Communist Voice*, April 15, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>*CWVTJ* #7, p. 21, col. 1-2.

So instead, when talking about the nature of the Cuban regime, Julie is vague. She never speaks directly to this, but disapproves of some of its policies. It doesn't have the most radical foreign policy, she says, but it's a part of the left, albeit the reformist left. And it should be defended. But is it a capitalist country, with its own bourgeois ruling class? Julie doesn't say. She does not speak of the class contradictions in Cuba.

True, she says that Cuba now has "a state capitalist economy" and is "far from the road of socialism". Many people, if they would write such things, would mean that Cuba is a capitalist country. But if one examines closely how *CWV* writes, one sees that they are leaving a loophole here. "Far from the road of socialism" could simply mean *CWV* doesn't like their current economic policies—which in fact are leading from state capitalism to a more market-oriented system.

But wait, the reader may say, Julie says Cuba has "a state capitalist economy". Is anything left vague here? Isn't this the way many people would write to say that the Cuban regime is a state capitalist regime of exploiters? But actually, Julie carefully doesn't quite say this. One has to recall that Lenin referred to certain features of a transitional economy as state capitalism under proletarian rule. And *CWV* itself describes economies in transition to socialism as a form of state capitalism. In their book published last year, *From Baba to Tovarishch/The Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet Women's Struggle for Liberation*, they wrote that

"Lenin and the early Bolsheviks had envisioned arriving at socialism through a form of state capitalism under the hegemony, however, of the proletariat, and guided by a Marxist-socialist policy which represented the interests of the proletariat and the other working masses." (p. xix)

And *CWV*'s Barb reiterated this in her article on Trotskyism in *CWVTJ* #7. She distinguishes between, on one hand, state capitalism "under the leadership of a proletarian government" and, on the other hand, state capitalism "under the control of a new class of (petty-)bourgeoisie" which is "*de facto* a capitalist nation—albeit with state welfare features and socialist rhetoric".

Therefore, according to the terminology used by the *CWV*, it doesn't say whether a country has departed from capitalism, or is overall a state capitalist country, to simply say that it has a "state capitalist economy". It still leaves the issue open. One would have to characterize the government and whether there is a new bourgeois ruling class. Perhaps Julie will eventually do so. But since leaving the MLP, the *CWV* hasn't yet. And Julie doesn't do it in *CWVTJ* #7. She simply notes some Cuban policies she disagrees with, but doesn't give any class basis to them.

In fact, for some time *CWV* has played a peekaboo policy on this issue. And in the meantime neither Julie or the *CWV* call on the Cuban proletariat to organize independently of the regime. Moreover, they write in a way that often mixes together the Cuban toilers and activists and the Cuban regime, falling back on talking about "Cuba" in general.

Thus Julie's condemnation of some Cuban policies doesn't yet answer the question of what she thinks of Cuban society. It

replaces characterizing the class realities in Cuba with judging how *CWV* feels about various Castro policies, some it likes and some it dislikes.

This ambiguity explains how Julie can apparently denounce Cuba, but then defend the Castro regime's linkup with Soviet revisionism as a legitimate and necessary anti-imperialist step. She likes some Castro policies and dislikes others, and is willing to forgive some of those she dislikes as necessary to maintain the policies she like. She says that "Cuba" had no choice but to go revisionist—lumping together the Castro's government with the Cuban toilers in the single term "Cuba". Julie defends Cuba's entering one imperialist bloc (the Soviet revisionist bloc) as anti-imperialism, because it means independence from the other bloc. This raises the question of her attitude to revisionism in general. Why should only Cuba—and not various other revisionist countries—be regarded as not the "most radical" part of the left, but anti-imperialist all the same?

So for Julie, Castro's regime is not socialist, but it is anti-imperialist. She doesn't talk of the two-fold task of the Cuban workers—against U.S. imperialist brutality and the new revisionist Cuban bourgeoisie—but only of defending "Cuba" in general against imperialism. In my opinion, this not only abandons a communist standpoint on Cuba, but adopts a "three worldist" form of "anti-imperialism" that is more suitable for the practical politics of the ruling classes than for the revolutionary interests of the toilers.

## Cuban reforms

Julie also appears to argue that there are concrete reasons not to label Cuba as a country with a new bourgeois ruling class. She points to the reforms brought by the Cuban revolution, and to the regime maintaining some popular support.

I have already dealt with such arguments in my article "On *CWV* agitation on Cuba" in *Communist Voice* #1. See in particular the section "Is the Castro regime special?" starting on page 31, col. 2. I pointed out, for example, that the undoubted importance of the Cuban revolution should not lead one to forget that the Cuban revolution has been over for a long time, and that Cuban society is no longer a revolutionary one. But rather than repeating these earlier arguments, this time let's take a different approach, and note that Julie's arguments in favor of the special position of Castroism could just as well be made about the diehard capitalist PRI regime in Mexico.

The PRI regime in Mexico springs from a revolution just as Castro's regime does. The Mexican revolution was a massive upsurge with ramifications all over Latin America. It was surely as important in its time as the Cuban revolution in its time.

Moreover the Mexican revolution too, just as the Cuban one, brought a series of reforms and lifted the workers and peasants from the utter humiliation of the years of the previous dictatorship (the Diaz dictatorship). And, as a result, the PRI regime still has mass support, so that Julie herself talks about the importance of agitating against PRI.

And the Mexican government is surely more independent from foreign domination than the Diaz dictatorship. It has

maintained various policies that go against those of Washington, such as its moderate attitude toward and diplomatic relations with the Castro government.

Of course, there are also differences between Mexico and Cuba. In Cuba the new bourgeoisie displaced the old one and a fairly complete state capitalist system was set up, while in Mexico the state capitalist bureaucracy grew up in large part from within the old bourgeoisie and it works with the private bourgeoisie. The Cuban government still has influence in radical circles, while the Mexican government is not seen as revolutionary. And the Mexican government didn't wander far from the U.S. bloc, while the Castro government entered the rival social-imperialist bloc.

But the basic feature Cuba and Mexico have in common is that they are class-divided societies which live by exploiting the workers and peasants. They are not revolutionary societies, and the Cuban workers will only become a political force when they organize independently of Castro and Castroism, just as the Mexican workers will only be a force when they organize independently of PRI and the other capitalist parties.

## II. The CWV group doesn't agitate against Cuban revisionism

Today widespread discussion about anti-revisionism is essential. The crisis of the left and the widespread despondency about socialism are related to the collapse of revisionism. If a vigorous communist trend is to develop, it must clarify the nature of the revisionist regimes and distinguish itself from revisionist policy. Anti-revisionism isn't something to be restricted to whispers among a few, but must be brought forward in discussion among the masses.

True, due to small forces, the extent of CWV's or our agitation is limited. But the point is that, in the work that is done, when relevant subjects arise, the issue of anti-revisionism should be brought forward. Agitation on Cuba for example raises the question of the nature of Castroism.

But the CWV thinks that the main thing to do among the masses on this issue is to defend "Cuba" from the U.S. imperialist blockade. It doesn't see the point to discussing what is revolution and what is revisionism in Cuba. It may criticize Castro's policies a bit, but it keeps the criticism toned down so as not to disturb activists with other views. Instead of making a point of dealing with the activists' views of Cuba and campaigning against the widespread opportunist views about the socialist or anti-imperialist nature of Castroism, it tries to ruffle as few feathers as possible. Of course, since the CWV defends Cuba's membership in the former Soviet bloc, it would be hard for it to campaign about Cuban revisionism among other activists. But one gets the impression that part of the CWV's vacillation on Cuba is precisely that it is trimming its views to what is fashionable.

This attitude is manifested in how CWV views the Mexican journal *El Machete*. When the CWV informed the activists about *El Machete*'s stands in CWV #5 and #6, it didn't see fit to point out that *El Machete* backed Cuba as socialist or that *El Machete* didn't seem to oppose revisionism, and it didn't give an

assessment of this. It didn't think that this was significant to talk about to the activists. Only after six months of intense debate in the "minority" grouping to which the CWV belonged, and after the "minority" fragmented into the CWV grouping and the *Communist Voice* grouping, did CWVTJ get around to discussing it. And then Jake and Julie can, in CWVTJ #7, call this a "weakness" of *El Machete*. But of course, any organization has weaknesses, and *El Machete*'s weaknesses don't disturb CWV much. They simply shrug and say, no group's "perfect".

### An insignificant weakness?

Jake in his article goes on to ridicule concern with a group's stand on Castroism and Cuban revisionism. Instead of supporting discussion of these issues, he suggests it is sectarianism and there are so many more important issues. He writes indignantly that this is as if one were to judge the late Marxist-Leninist Party

"without looking at what we [the MLP] were advocating in the class struggle in our own country and what role we played in it, without considering how we view world politics and who we were cheering for internationally (workers or nationalist regimes), without reading what our conception of socialism and communism is..."<sup>3</sup>

Thus Jake implies that I judged *El Machete*'s politics solely by their stand on Cuban revisionism. Actually, if you examine the first letters I wrote to CWV and to the "minority" about *El Machete*, I didn't deal with the issue of Cuba at all. I dealt with the issue of the class struggle in Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

For example, my letter of Dec. 21 stated, referring to the endorsement of *El Machete* in CWVTJ #5, that

"It seems to me that this manner of endorsing *El Machete* goes against having articles with analysis on Mexico, the Zapatistas, and the issues in the Mexican movement." And it goes on to say that "the attitude to and analysis of the Zapatistas seems to me to be central to the endorsement [by the CWV] of *El Machete*. *El Machete* is endorsed as sort of a revolutionary left wing of the Zapatistas. It works in the national convention they called for, but opposes in some way the reformist PRD of Cardenas. So I will start by looking at the EZLN (Zapatistas)...I hope I at least point to some sore points and inspire others to further analysis of what's going on in Mexico and what is the path for the Mexican proletariat."

And then the letter goes into the issue of Zapatista strategy.

So it's just another one of Jake's lies that I (or others) didn't look at the stand of *El Machete* in the Mexican struggle. Here,

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<sup>3</sup>CWVTJ #7, p. 37, col. 2.

<sup>4</sup>See my letters of Dec. 14, 16, and 21, 1994, which are in the CWVTJ Special Issue of March 7, 1995, and the letter of Dec. 21 is also in *Communist Voice* #1 and in CWVTJ #7.

as has become all too common, he has a convenient memory that remembers what didn't happen and doesn't remember what did happen. He doesn't even bother to check references, such as my letter of December 21, that are reprinted in his own journal, the *CWVTJ*. Facts, smacts. Jake doesn't care. But for those who do, the fact was that it was precisely their stand on the Zapatista struggle that was the first issue raised about *El Machete*.

But Jake's lie is for the sake of ridiculing concern with the issue of Cuban revisionism. He goes to the extreme of *contrasting* *El Machete's* stand that Cuba is socialist with their conception of socialism. For Jake, whether one consider the revisionist regimes as socialist has nothing to do with one's concept of socialism. These two things are allegedly entirely different! Even Julie admits that "...the fact that *El Machete* considers this regime to be on the road to socialism, to me, manifests a very weak idea of what socialism is..."<sup>5</sup> But for Jake, hailing Cuba isn't even relevant to seeing who *El Machete* was "cheering for internationally (workers or nationalist regimes)."

Jake develops the same point by claiming that the late Marxist-Leninist Party itself didn't worry so much over the issue of Cuba. As Jake puts it, "some of the revolutionary organizations that the MLP [the late Marxist-Leninist Party] was very close to also had a softness for Cuba."<sup>6</sup> And Jake gives the example of MAP(ML), later known as the Marxist-Leninist Party of Nicaragua (MLPN).

But here too, Jake has a convenient memory. He is simply rewriting history as he goes along. In fact, the MLP was quite concerned with the stand towards Cuba and publicly criticized the stands of MAP(ML) and of the Communist Party of Colombia (ML) on these subjects. The MLP judged highly the self-sacrificing struggle waged by these parties in difficult conditions, and their close links to the workers and activists, but it also studied closely the orientation followed by these parties in the struggle and their attitude to revisionism. Indeed, it pointed to the relationship between a party's orientation in the class struggle and its view of revisionism.

### Cuba and the Nicaraguan Marxist-Leninists

Jake tells us that the MLP, USA and MAP(ML) of Nicaragua simply settled the issue of Cuban revisionism through private discussion among themselves. They may have been weak on Cuba, but basically they were OK. As Jake put it, "We asked them what they really thought. They did not consider Cuba a socialist state nor did they follow Castro."<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the *Workers' Advocate*, national paper of the MLP, publicly discussed the issue of the MAP's stand toward Cuba. The article "New tasks confront Nicaraguan Marxist-Leninists" discussed the difficulties facing MAP with the defeat of the Sandinistas in national elections and the advent of the Chamorro government. And it analyzed weaknesses in the policies of MAP

in the local struggle. Part two of this article appeared in the Sept. 20, 1990 issue of the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*. The section of the article entitled "The collapse of revisionism" was critical of the fact that MAP had been silent in its new journal *El Pueblo* on the issues raised by the collapse of revisionism. And the article went on to state:

"Among the issues raised by the crisis of revisionism is what is the alternative. Cuba, Vietnam, etc. have been posing as the real communists and the alternative to Gorbachovism. With his squabble with the Sandinistas, Castro has been hiding the fact that he fervently agrees with the Sandinista conciliation with the bourgeoisie and imperialism.

"The MLPN hasn't dealt with this in their press. Various MLPN comrades may privately pour scorn on the Cuban revisionists, but in the past the MLPN rarely wrote about them. Now, when it is just as important as ever to denounce Castroist revisionism, there have even been a number of basically friendly reports about Cuba in *El Pueblo*. There was a bit of criticism, but no real attempt to deal with Cuban revisionism. And, as we have remarked before, there was the reprinting of Ho Chi Minh's testament. This could only create further confusion about the crisis of revisionism."<sup>8</sup>

As we see, the *WAS* wasn't satisfied that individual comrades of the MLPN privately denounced Cuban revisionism. It was concerned with the public stand of the MLPN. And the *WAS* wasn't impressed with a bit of criticism, but held that there must be some emphasis on the subject of Cuban revisionism.

The *WAS* was sensitive to the mood of activists with respect to Cuban revisionism, but felt that the issue of Cuban revisionism had to be raised anyway. It stated that:

"There are certain questions about Cuba that have to be handled carefully. The Cuban medical personnel, teachers, etc. were highly valued by the poverty-stricken masses in Nicaragua, and so there was outrage over the Chamorro government-Sandinista agreement to remove them. And, in general, U.S.-Soviet collaboration against Cuba is really filthy and worth denouncing. But the MLPN comrades, while sensitive on such points, are oblivious to the need to conduct a systematic exposure of Cuban revisionism before the masses."

Jake makes a big deal that certain petty-bourgeois nationalist articles in the journal *El Machete* were written by outsiders. (See *CWVTJ* #7, p. 37, col. 2 where Jake explains away an article by saying that "the article was from MLN, not EM.") But the *WAS* wasn't satisfied with that type of explanation. Only if a journal campaigned vigorously for its views, could other

<sup>5</sup>*CWVTJ* #7, p. 21, col. 2.

<sup>6</sup>*CWVTJ* #7, p. 37, col. 1.

<sup>7</sup>*CWVTJ* #7, p. 37, col. 2.

<sup>8</sup>*Workers' Advocate Supplement*, Sept. 20, 1990, vol. 6, #8, p. 37, col. 2.



articles be explained simply as the views of others. Thus *WAS* wrote that

"It would be one thing if MLPN vigorously put forward views against revisionism in *El Pueblo*, while also opening its pages as a forum to activists with other views. That would perhaps be one way of airing the issue, and of establishing *El Pueblo* as the place where activists go to debate the most crucial issues of the day. But instead *El Pueblo* is basically silent, and the MLPN is silent on the burning issue of the political collapse of revisionism."<sup>9</sup>

Thus *WAS* discussed these issues openly. It tried to provide some help to the Nicaraguan activists in dealing with the problems before them by discussing the sore points of the struggle in Nicaragua. This doesn't mean that the *WAS* thought that it had all the answers, but it believed that a thoughtful discussion among fraternal comrades would encourage deeper consideration of the issue.

By way of contrast, the *CWV* downplayed the sore points in *El Machete's* stands. Even now, the articles by Jake and Julie apologize for and gloss over the effects of *El Machete's* "weaknesses". And Jake and Julie are angry at myself and others who "forced this discussion in the heated manner it was done", as the Editorial Guide to the Special Issue of *CWVTJ* of March 7 puts it.

### Cuba and the CP of Colombia (ML)

The MLP's concern with MAP's stand on Cuba was not an aberration. The MLP also was worried about the stand on other parties and groups on this issue. Thus the lead article of the June 20, 1989 issue of the *Workers' Advocate Supplement* was entitled "On recent stands of the CP of Colombia (ML)/Marxism-Leninism cannot be reconciled with Castroism." This lengthy article went into the issue of Castroism, and it criticized the abrupt change in the CPC(ML)'s stand towards Cuba. For example, *Revolucion*, the paper of the CPC(ML), had denounced the July 1985 Havana conference on the foreign debt in an article with a title characterizing this conference as "In support of imperialism and the bourgeoisie", and it said that Castro and the other revisionists were playing "an increasingly more active role as firefighters of the revolution." But in Jan. 1989 *Revolucion* hailed Cuban revisionism as socialism and Marxism-Leninism.<sup>10</sup>

Jake holds that the stand on Cuban revisionism and on the class struggle are quite separate. But the *WAS* article showed in detail that CP of Columbia (ML)'s support for Cuban revisionism was linked to their retreating from previous revolutionary stands in the class struggle. And the article pointed out that

"The attitude towards Cuba has direct, practical repercussions on the left-wing movement in

Colombia. Politically Cuba is not a distant or isolated island. It is a player in Colombian politics, with long-standing connections to the pro-Soviet revisionist, Castroist, and social-democratic forces there."<sup>11</sup>

### The decline of anti-revisionism

So when the MLP still believed in anti-revisionism, it did not brush aside the issue of Castroism. It campaigned vigorously on its views, and it championed forms of collaboration between activists that included discussion of the sore points.

Of course, the belief of the majority of the Central Committee and of the membership in anti-revisionism began to fade. This was one of the key features of the crisis of the MLP. True, the MLP couldn't simply have continued as in the past even if its entire membership had maintained their communist beliefs. The difficult conditions of the 90s mandated dramatic changes in the organization and activity of the MLP, and a re-examination of weaknesses in the past. But in one form or another anti-revisionist work would have continued. However, given the lack of belief in anti-revisionism, the majority didn't want to make this effort; they mocked the "workaholic" of those who wished to continue anti-revisionist work in the midst of a backward period; and the MLP dissolved.

The *CWV* came out of the dissolution of the MLP with a desire to maintain some activity in the left. But it also was losing its belief in anti-revisionism. Its stand on Cuban revisionism is a clear sign of this.

### III. Anti-revisionism and the left

This leads us to *CWV's* view of the significance of anti-revisionism for rebuilding a communist left. Here too we see the *CWV's* loss of any belief in the central significance of anti-revisionism.

Julie discusses *El Machete* in her article "*El Machete* and the peasant left". She catalogues one weakness after another in *El Machete's* stands, although she tries to explain them away. They don't quite know what socialism is; they don't seem to have much to do with the working class movement; they think Castroism is on the road to socialism; etc. But she still thinks that it is conceivable that they might become the center for reorganizing the Mexican "radical left".<sup>12</sup>

This raises the question. In this time of theoretical confusion and practical vacillation and organizational fragmentation, how can a strong communist trend be built on the basis of such theoretical confusion as is manifested by *El Machete*? And what type of work should be done among left activists?

But the *CWV* doesn't see anti-revisionism as important for the left. Jake admits that *El Machete* isn't anti-revisionist, and

<sup>9</sup>*Workers' Advocate Supplement*, Sept. 20, 1990, vol. 6, #8, p. 38, col. 1.

<sup>10</sup>*WAS*, June 20, 1989, vol. 5, #6, p. 43, col. 1-2.

<sup>11</sup>*WAS*, June 20, 1989, vol. 5, #6, p. 44, col. 2.

<sup>12</sup>See the section of Julie's article entitled "The Campaign of the PRD Against the Radical Left and *El Machete's* Campaign to Unite the Radical Left".

Julie admits everything under the sun. Yet they think it might still unite the left into a powerful national united force in the class struggle.

Indeed, Julie seems to think that such a left would be sufficient to guide a socialist revolution of the Mexican proletariat. Julie says that

“...Even some limited breaking of the PRI stranglehold over the government and the official mass organizations may provide some opening to the working class struggle. But, it seems the current political crisis [in Mexico] may provide an opening for a much more mass struggle to break out. It may provide an opening for the working class and poor peasantry to build up their strength and *launch a general revolt against capitalist rule in Mexico.*”<sup>13</sup>

If a socialist revolution is imminent in Mexico, what type of organization of the “radical left” could provide some leadership? Apparently, even something grouped around *El Machete*.

Julie and the *CWV* are inspired by the hopes of big upsurges, and don’t see the role of theoretical controversies and anti-revisionism compared to such big events and general revolts. Lenin held another view of the matter. He wrote that:

“Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This thought cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity.”<sup>14</sup>

Is it conceivable at a time of theoretical disarray that the “radical left” will unify if various groups can simply publish articles in a journal with unclear ideas itself? Apparently the *CWV* thinks so, and it doesn’t bother to examine the experience of similar plans in the past. And it seems to see a Mexican communist movement coming from the simple coordination of the “radical left” rather than building up a new, anti-revisionist trend. It is rather unlikely that the left can be unified in this way, or that a future communist movement will be based on simply unifying the groups of the radical left of today.

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<sup>13</sup> *CWVTJ* #7, pp. 15-16, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> *What Is To Be Done*, Ch. I, Section D. “Engels on the Importance of the Theoretical Struggle” in *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 369.

But even if such a national force could be built out of the left in this way, what plans and strategy would it have in the face of the numerous problems of guiding the revolution? What type of “socialism” could it build?

In fact, one of the most practical things that can be done today, is to help provide some theoretical clarity. It will require hard work, but any success on this front will be of immense help to the revolutionary movement of the future. And it makes a mockery of theory to say one is dealing with it while denigrating the issue of revisionism. As the article *New Tasks Confront Nicaraguan Marxist-Leninist, part two*, pointed out:

“The crisis of world revisionism is one of the historic events of our day. It affects the ideological climate surrounding the working masses and all activists. The view of the ongoing collapse of most revisionist regimes, why it has taken place and what it proves, profoundly affects one’s idea of what should be done. The evolution of world revisionism also directly affects the tactics and views of the revisionist and reformist parties around the world. In Nicaragua, this collapse has had direct effects.

“But MLPN has been silent on this. They don’t discuss this type of issue in *El Pueblo*.”<sup>15</sup>

Nor, apparently, does *El Machete* discuss it. Nor does the *CWV* think that this lack is important. They are not inspired by the idea of proletarian reorganization, in Mexico and the U.S., a reorganization which will require a good deal of protracted work and a good deal of theoretical effort. It will take much struggle and there will be many zigzags before a renewed, anti-revisionist mass communist trend is born. But the *CWV* wants big results now. Maybe *El Machete* will unite the “radical left”, they speculate. Maybe “democratization” in Mexico won’t just provide an opening for struggle, but for an immediate socialist revolution. How can they be bothered with such, in their mind, minor issues as the stand toward Cuban revisionism, the picture of socialism, the separation of communism from petty-bourgeois radicalism, etc.? They have not the slightest hint that their abandonment of anti-revisionism and their search for immediate results from merging with the “radical left” doesn’t make them more relevant to the class struggle, but takes them away from the revolutionary work that has to be done. □

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<sup>15</sup> *WAS*, Sept. 20, 1990, vol. 6, #8, p. 37, col.2.

# El Machete and the Mexican Left

by Julie, *Chicago Workers' Voice*

On *El Machete*

This article is reprinted from *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #7, May 25. The three preceding articles in *Communist Voice* criticize a number of views from this and other articles in *CWVTJ* #7. In doing so, they sometimes refer back to quotes from this article of Julie's, but they give references to the page numbers in *CWVTJ* #7. To help readers find these references in the following pages, the chart below compares the page numbers in *CWVTJ* and here. The numbers x/y indicate page x and column y, so 14/1 is page 14, column 1.

<i>CWVTJ</i>	<i>CV</i>	<i>CWVTJ</i>	<i>CV</i>
14/1	39/1	18/2	43/1
14/2	39/2	18/3	43/1 to 43/2
14/3	39/2	19/1	43/2
15/1	39/2 to 40/1	19/2	43/2 to 44/1
15/2	40/1	19/3	44/1
15/3	40/1 to 40/2	20/1	44/2
16/1	40/2 to 41/1	20/2	44/2 to 45/1
16/2	41/1	20/3	45/1
16/3	41/1 to 41/2	21/1	45/1 to 45/2
17/1	41/2	21/2	45/2
17/2	42/1	21/3	46/1
17/3	42/1 to 42/2	22/1	46/2
18/1	42/2		

The editorial guide for *CWVTJ* (*Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*) no. 6 noted that the "next issue of *CWVTJ* will continue our coverage of Mexico including some topics of controversy within the ranks of our own supporters." In *CWVTJ* #5 we carried an announcement that *El Machete*, a left-wing Mexican newspaper, was available through CWV. This ad was not meant as an endorsement of *El Machete* as a Marxist-Leninist organization."

"We note that several supporters of the *CWVTJ* strongly oppose any endorsement of *El Machete* and disagree with Oleg's announcement in the last issue. Joseph Green has written his concerns on this and Oleg has replied." Joseph has written that he was shocked by the article (ad) for *El Machete* and that this was wrong. In a number of letters he stated that he considers *El Machete* to represent a "hostile" trend. If one reads his December 21 letter to *CWVTJ* and the other materials printed in *Communist Voice* vol. 1, no. 1, it seems that he has done all this while only taking a cursory look at this paper.

I will attempt to give my views on it. And, unlike Joseph, my views are based on actually having read *El Machete* and some study of the Mexican political situation.

*El Machete* is an interesting paper. It gives some idea of what is going on in the Mexican left, what it is concerned about, what the controversies are. The group or collective which puts it out has definite connections to the mass movement and ideas on how to move it forward. Their views and actions put them in the more radical wing of the Mexican political scene. They campaign against the PRI and the PRI government. This is of obvious importance, as the PRI is the ruling party of the capitalist government in Mexico. As well, the PRI came to power as a result of the Mexican revolution. It has used populist and nationalist appeals to justify its policies. It dominates the official trade unions, peasant and student organizations.

*El Machete* also campaigns against the PRD which is of vital significance in building a revolutionary movement in Mexico. It is a bourgeois party. But, after all, it is led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the son of Lazaro. And the name Lazaro Cardenas is closely connected with a series of measures such as land reform and nationalization of oil that were done after the Mexican revolution. Cuauhtemoc Cardenas has talked about going back to the original aims of the PRI. Further, this party is closely connected with some big left political parties. The PSUM (which came in part from the Mexican CP) became a part of this party as did a section of the major Trotskyist party, the PRT. Furthermore, at the base of the party are militant peasants and workers. So while this party is a bourgeois party it has a lot of left credentials. Thus, exposing the bourgeois nature of the PRD is an important part of building up any revolutionary movement.

## The crisis in Mexico deepens

The political crisis in Mexico is deepening. Who would have believed a few months ago that the brother of the ex-president would be arrested for plotting the assassination of another top PRI official. And then to top it off, the brother of the assassinated official was arrested for covering it up and having huge amounts of money in American and Swiss bank accounts. There was an article in the *NYT* which quoted Carlos Fuentes. Fuentes said he talked to Gabriel Garcia Marquez and that Marquez told him that they should throw all their books into the sea as real life has surpassed them.

It's possible that the 65 year rule of the PRI will break up. The big bourgeoisie openly talks about the possibility that this break-up will descend into "anarchy." They hope that the break-up will be contained and that the PRI will reform itself into a more ordinary style bourgeois party and regime.

The political crisis of the PRI coincides with a major economic crisis. There is an article on this elsewhere in this issue. This crisis is affecting almost everyone except the super-rich, but especially the workers, peasants and the poor. It is itself provoking a major political crisis. The bourgeoisie also openly worries that the austerity measures undertaken by the

government will provoke "unrest."

What is the back-drop of this crisis? Over the past 40-50 years there have been dramatic changes in the Mexican economy. Mexico has a fairly modern and extensive industry. While the working class played an important role in the 1910 revolution, it is much more developed today. Large numbers of workers are employed in the maquiladora industries, the oil industry, auto, food processing and others.

The small peasantry is being driven off the land in large numbers. Mexico City is now the largest city in the world in population. Its population swells every day as more pauperized peasants move in. This process has been going on for a while, probably to be intensified by the changes codified in NAFTA. For instance, in preparation for NAFTA, the Mexican Congress changed the Constitution to allow for sale of ejido land. (See accompanying article for some info on the growing integration of American agri-business with Mexican agriculture.<sup>1</sup> While the article doesn't draw this direct conclusion, the changes are sure to mean even more peasantry being driven off their land.)

The changes also mean the growth of an urban middle class and the growth of the Mexican big bourgeoisie.

In my opinion these economic changes provide the backdrop for various factors in current Mexican politics.

The growth of the Mexican bourgeoisie as a larger, more diversified class and the growth of the middle class, I think, form the basis for the calls from these sectors for "democratization" — that is, what the bourgeoisie considers to be "democratization" — the privatization of state owned enterprises, the separation of the PRI party from the state, the breaking of the PRI from the official mass organizations, the establishment of a real multi-party system, etc. Such a more formally "democratic" system would be more suitable for the bourgeoisie at this stage of development.

Zedillo himself has embarked on a few truncated reforms of this sort. For example, the PAN has been allowed more of a role in the government. Jose Francisco Ruiz-Massieu (who was assassinated) was an advocate of this type of "reform" and advocated distancing the PRI from the state structure. Both Zedillo and Salinas de Gortari before him were educated in the U.S. at Ivy League colleges. Both advocated a more streamlined, technically advanced, and privatized industry. But these reforms are not enough to satisfy the diverse forces in the Mexican bourgeoisie.

And then there are the desires of the Mexican masses. The increasing pauperization of the peasantry along with the discrimination and repression against the indigenous communities led to a peasant revolt in Chiapas which gets wide sympathy from the population. This revolt could not help but get sympathy from the peasantry in other regions and the large sections of urban poor, who are frequently newly dispossessed peasantry. It could not help but get the support of the working class, which is getting poorer, and the indigenous communities.

The working class has been under the reins of the PRI union

federation, the CTM, since the 30's. Over the last 10-15 years the working class in Mexico has suffered from the same type of rationalization we have seen elsewhere. This means factories closing, layoffs, etc. Since the debt crisis of 1982, the Mexican workers have suffered big losses in real wages as well as high levels of unemployment. However, along with this the working class movement has been at a low level. Yet, as indicated by the struggle of the Ruta 100 workers, there are increasing signs that the proletariat is restive.

The current economic crisis is intensifying all this. The situation would seem to call for a vigorous working class struggle linked up with the poor peasant revolt, for a series of democratic and socialist measures such as a general rise in wages, including agricultural wages, a planning of large-scale agriculture in such a way that the peasantry is not pauperized, assistance to what is left of the cooperative forms of agriculture such as some of the communal forms in the indigenous areas and assistance to the ejidos in such a way that the peasantry working there can make the transition to large-scale agriculture without being driven off the land, abrogation of the foreign debt — as well as a whole series of other issues such as restricting the influence of the Church, women's rights, rights to the indigenous cultures and languages, improved education and health care, and protection of the environment.

The current political crisis may provide an opening for such a struggle to break out. Even some limited breaking of the PRI stranglehold over the government and the official mass organizations may provide some opening to the working class struggle. But, it seems the current political crisis may provide an opening for a much more mass struggle to break out. It may provide an opening for the working class and poor peasantry to build up their strength and launch a general revolt against capitalist rule in Mexico.

The bourgeoisie, especially those sections connected to the PRD, want to use the peasant revolt as one of its rams to get concessions for itself. And they want to do this without provoking a working class and peasant movement whose demands would shake up the capitalist system. The National Commission for Democracy in Mexico (which is a U.S. organization) is currently holding a series of political meetings in the U.S. I think the aim of these meetings is to organize the U.S. political movement behind the schemes of the PRD sections of the Mexican bourgeoisie.

### Some comments on the EZLN

So how do various forces play out in this?

The EZLN led the peasant revolt in Chiapas. This revolt shook up Mexican politics. It deepened the crisis within the Mexican bourgeoisie and inspired other sections of the masses into action. This revolt radically changed the political atmosphere in Mexico. For instance, in the current economic crisis, the PRI is not presenting its immediate austerity measures as a "social contract" as it has done previously. (However, Zedillo is still trying to get a long term "social pact" negotiated with the Mexican capitalists and the CTM.)

The peasantry in Chiapas would certainly like to get some

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<sup>1</sup>This article is not included in this issue of *Communist Voice*.

of their demands satisfied. Also the Zapatistas have entered into the more general stage of Mexican politics. Last spring they called for the organization of the CND which included most of the Mexican left from the more radical to the PRD, PT, etc. The Zapatistas seem both to bank on the discontent within the Mexican bourgeoisie and its desires for a more standard bourgeois democratic political system and to bank on the radical left. The Zapatistas also seem quite adept at various political tactics, seeming to fairly artfully maneuver between threats of another revolt, negotiations, refusing various negotiated solutions and using the electoral arena.

They also seem to give some sympathy and assistance to the formation of other peasant organizations, etc. But in no way have they committed themselves to society splitting up into two hostile camps — the proletariat and poor peasantry on one side and the bourgeoisie and its various hangers-on on the other. This seems to come partly from their class basis — the EZLN is clearly based in the poor peasantry — and the general situation in which there hasn't been much working class movement.

In that sense, the Zapatistas probably have not broken out of the mold of the FMLN revolt. While they do not seem to have tailored their demands and program to the interests of the bourgeoisie (as the FMLN did in its later years), they seem to have a definite reliance on the very real splits in the bourgeois parties. Thus also the call for a transitional government to be led by Cardenas. And, it seems that in the current campaign of the PRD against the radical left, they may be standing at the side of the PRD.

### ***El Machete* is skeptical of the democratization schemes of the bourgeoisie**

How does *El Machete* stand up in this?

They are skeptical of the democratization schemes of the bourgeoisie. In an article entitled, "Our America" Nov. 1994, they discuss some of the electoral schemes:

"In the midst of these circumstances described above, 1994 saw the promotion of different proposed schemes for an alternative society and also of sharp attacks by neoliberalism, which presents itself as the antithesis of a socialist society, arguing its validity in light of the fall of the east.

"In most cases, hopes are summed up in the immediate possibilities of electoral triumphs in Mexico with the PRD; Brazil with the PT; Venezuela with the Radical Cause; Colombia with the M-19; El Salvador with the FMLN. These were the proposals which were heard being proposed with a loud voice in the Latin American meetings.

"The speeches of the presidential candidates were vacillating. On the one hand they tried to gather popular and democratic demands, and equally they tried to guarantee conditions to Capital. The acceptability to the entrepreneurs and economic sectors, which would be adverse to

any kind of democratization proposal, was a central preoccupation which expressed the vacillations of the proposals to such a point that measures of the monetary fund cut were not seriously controlled.

"The alternative electoral politics perceived democracy in the same sense in which the oligarchies advertised it." (No. 4, Nov. 20, 1994)

I see it as very important that *El Machete* is skeptical of the democratization schemes of the bourgeoisie, even the most radical of them. For example, they raise that they are skeptical of the electoral ambitions of the FMLN. This is at a time when many in the left see electoral victories for the FMLN to be a big victory for the popular movement.

What significance does the participation of the FMLN in the elections actually have?

In El Salvador both the oligarchy and the popular organizations were exhausted by the war. And the FMLN had for some time tailored its demands to the interests of the bourgeoisie. In this situation the agreement to allow the FMLN leaders to participate in the elections meant not so much giving an opening to the interests of the workers and peasants. It has not meant much in the way of the workers and peasants being able to use the electoral arena as a means to present their demands and a way to help them get organized.

### ***El Machete* against the PRI**

*El Machete* has also indicated that:

"The objective in the present period of the class struggle is to put in crisis and to achieve the rupture of the popular forces with the form of governing of the system of the party is the state (PRI). Its action is equal to all the neoliberal governments which make us suffer: delivery to the empire of our natural resources and our sovereignty; insufficiency of housing, land, health, work, food and education as well as the restriction of the right to information, cultural development, justice, liberty, democracy etc. To fight for the demands (contained in the Zapatistas declaration of the Lacandona Forest presented the 1st of January)<sup>2</sup> would generalize the popular struggle in each of its forms."

In Mexico the PRI is closely entwined with the official trade unions, peasant organizations, student organizations. Certainly a key question facing the Mexican political movement is to break the working class and peasantry from the political domination of the PRI and to build an independent political movement. *El Machete* seems to recognize the importance of this question. To my mind, building an independent political movement requires the break of the working class and peasantry

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<sup>2</sup>The three Zapatista declarations from the Lacandona Jungle can be found in their entirety in our last issue, *Communist Voice* #2.



from the political domination of the PRI and also from the PRD which has arisen in recent years.

It is clear that *El Machete* does consistently campaign against the PRD and seem to desire a poor peasant and workers' movement not hooked up with the PRD. There are numerous articles in their press which reflect this.

### Critique of the EZLN relationship to the PRD

As well, they are somewhat critical of the Zapatistas for their relations with the PRD. In an editorial entitled "Define and Retrench ourselves" (No. 54, Nov. 23, 1994), they write concerning the imminent repression of the movement by the government and warn about the possibility that the EZLN will follow reformism.

"Up to the end of 1993 the organizations of the independent left were implementing tactics of resistance. Starting from the Zapatista uprising we understood that we had to take up the offensive and now we believe that we have to retrench ourselves.

"In the coming days important events will happen which it will be necessary to analyze in order to have correct tactics.

"The rich and their government will exaggerate and after the first days of December they are going to have to make clear where they are going to travel to give continuity to their neo-liberal politics. Anything could happen, up to sensationalist actions like those which Salinas made when he took power, but now it is not exactly against La Quina (leader of the oil workers union who was arrested when Salinas took power, *CWWTJ* ed. note).

"Faced with imminent repression all of us are going to have to put forward our stands and define ourselves.

"The people of the political parties will have to decide: will they continue playing at bourgeois legality being a chorus of the oppressors or will they define a really independent position. As well, the Zapatistas will have to define if they will continue giving play to reformism or to really value the independent positions (from which they have distanced themselves). Because it is not possible to follow shouting 'Long Live the EZLN' and taking land and carrying out actions of civil insurgency, with the risk that at any moment Zapatismo will disqualify (disavow?) those who have already shown their heads." (No. 54, Nov. 23, 1994)

In another article discussing problems with the CND, *El Machete* states:

"In light of the failure of the CND, the EZLN has called for the formation of a Broad Opposition Front and recently for the National Liberation Movement. In order for these initiatives to bear

fruit it is necessary to analyze the errors committed in the CND or otherwise it will stumble on the same rocks.

"We think that the two fundamental limitations which didn't allow the CND to develop were the sole and exclusive leadership role taken by the reformists and the lack of unity among the independent forces." (Jan. 18, 1995)

In reading their literature it is clear to me that *El Machete* is critical of the EZLN's conciliation to the PRD. And that to me is good. Nevertheless, in many cases I think that they are too hesitant to sum this up and to adequately outline the potential consequences of this policy.

For example, *El Machete* quotes somewhat admiringly that Marcos said the EZLN is not an arm of the PRD. The article then goes on to discuss a series of dirty tricks of the PRD in the CND. Then it goes on to say in a section entitled "Why don't the ultras respond to these maneuvers":

"The revolutionary has the same ethics which the Zapatistas showed with respect to some measures with which they have differences. The Zapatistas cannot respond to the maneuvers with dirty tricks. Simply they wait the precise moment in order to give their political positions." (Oct. 23, 1994)

In another article they also give analysis why the EZLN proposal for a National Liberation Movement with Cardenas as the head might be correct.

"There is much discussion about why the EZLN insists on proposing Cuauhtemoc Cardenas to head the diverse initiatives for forming fronts which would bind together the struggles of the worker, peasant and popular sectors at the national level.

"There are various interpretations with respect to this. Some assert that the Zapatistas are responding to the plans of the reformists; others (say) that there is poor information and as a result of their isolation they have let themselves take as 'advisors' those who deceive them into believing that Cuauhtemoc represents the force of the 6 million who voted for him."

"Nevertheless it is possible to have other explanations. It is sufficient to analyze the political action of the Zapatistas in order to confirm that they are applying their political method, where far from disqualifying a force, they use it in order to make it commit itself and to define itself in its actions."

"Independent of the differences which we have with Cuauhtemocism, it is true that it represents an important force at the current moment. Because of this, the Zapatistas are forcing it to define itself."

"This is not to say that the Zapatistas are anxiously waiting for Cuauhtemoc as an individual to support them, they are simply taking steps

so that in case this support is given, an alliance would be established, and, in case of the opposite, they could invite the Cardenista base to act in spite of the influence of the caudillo.”

The same article then goes on to say,

“Nevertheless it appears to us that the Zapatistas have not been clear with respect to the role which the social independent organizations and in general the left movement which is not in the reformist trenches should play. Instead of making clear pronouncements about the role it believes these forces are obliged to play, it has played the politics of the riddle, where one day they encourage the participation of these forces and the next they restrain them. This is creating a lot of confusion which needs to be clarified before it is too late, as is well known by the companeros of the EZLN who work in the military terrain, **order and counterorder** (with neither explanation nor self-criticism) is equal to disorder.” (Jan. 18, 1995, “Cardenas and the EZLN”)

This article I think is an example of *El Machete*’s hesitancy. It first says that the EZLN might be correct in proposing Cuauhtemoc Cardenas for the leader of a Movement of National Liberation. They raise that this might be a means of winning over the base of the PRD. I see no evidence that this is behind the EZLN’s proposal. The article goes on to criticize the EZLN for its lack of “clear pronouncements” regarding the left. This is a valid criticism — but taken with the endorsement of the EZLN policy re: Cardenas seems to be hesitant and halfway. It seems to me that the EZLN calls for Cardenas to be the head and fails to make clear pronouncements about the left because it is indeed banking on sections of the bourgeoisie to achieve some of its aims.

### **The campaign of the PRD against the radical left and *El Machete*’s campaign to unite the radical left**

In a series of articles *El Machete* refers to a number of actions of the PRD against themselves and other of the radical left in Mexico.

Their tactic towards this seems to have undergone some transition as the situation develops. Late last year they were talking about rescuing the CND. “It was not easy but the serious organizations continued to mobilize themselves, to organize and to defend the CND although they did it as outsiders, waiting the moment to rescue it.”

“In this action many independent organizations will participate of which they are in the COCIP, UR, CNOSI, many (organizations) which did not participate in any coalition and, for a long time, the organizations which were demarcated from the parties such as the UCOPI of Guanajuato and many others who will rebel against the political party leaderships who have

made agreements.” (Oct. 23, 1994)

Coinciding with what seems to be the consolidation of the hold of the PRD over the CND, *El Machete* now calls for a united front of the radical left. For instance in an article entitled “National Front of the masses” (Jan. 18, 1995) they say:

“Various independent social organizations have agreed on the urgent necessity of building a National Front of the masses pushing forward the political movement of the independent organizations in the short run along the crucial axes of struggle against neoliberalism, against the repression and imperialism. For the strengthening of the class organizations, for a new revolution and for the building and defense of popular power.”

They also seem to also think that *El Machete* can become an organ for the radical left in general. *El Machete* now prints statements and letters from a variety of radical left organizations in Mexico. I presume that this is part of their idea to become an organ for the radical left.

Obviously it would be difficult from here to judge the possibilities of this tactic. It does seem that there is an increasing split between the radical and independent left in Mexico and the PRD. For example, there were two demonstrations against the PRI held in Mexico City on April 10, 1995, the anniversary of Zapata’s death. The PRD held a demonstration of 2-3,000. Another demonstration called by various radical left and independent trade union organizations was of about 50,000. This demonstration supported the Zapatista revolt, denounced the suppression of the government of the Ruta 100 workers and opposed the current austerity measures. There have also been other demonstrations, some strike votes and other actions in the past year that reflect this split. Considering this development, the present economic and political crisis, and the situation in which the government is cracking down on the radical left and the PRD is campaigning against the “ultras,” it is possible that the more independent and radical left may desire to become more united and consolidated.

Nevertheless, there are certainly a lot of inherent difficulties in building an independent political movement out of the more independent and radical left in Mexico. Many of these organizations have thousands of worker and peasant members — so that would seem to be in favor of the possibility of building a mass based independent movement. But these organizations themselves have a series of divergent views. There seem to be inherent difficulties in developing revolutionary bearings while carrying out this tactic. As well, few of these organizations have entered onto the field of national politics. Many represent the poor in a particular city or colonia, the peasants in a definite state, or the workers in a particular factory or industry. So there are difficulties in uniting this as a national political force. As well, many if not most of these organizations are mainly based in the peasantry. So there are inherent difficulties in developing a revolutionary working class perspective. And some of the radical left make up the far left wing of the PRD. Thus, there is the danger of independent organizations eventually falling back into the PRD.

Thus, I can not judge if this tactic will work or how well it will work. But if a national political movement can be built up that is against the PRI, and against the PRD as well and which supports the development of the poor peasant struggle and is for building up the working class struggle, then this would be an advance for the Mexican revolutionary movement.

### Limitations in *El Machete's* perspective

I think *El Machete's* critique of the PRD is limited — mainly over the electoral politics and its lack of calling the masses out to defend the EZLN against repression.

As well, when it comes to building an independent political movement they seem to see the main path as splitting with the PRD and expanding the EZLN struggle.

When *El Machete* talks of expanding the EZLN struggle it seems they may have three ideas in mind. They may think that the EZLN struggle itself can be spread all over Mexico, thus sparking a general revolutionary struggle. However, I doubt that this is their view. Secondly, they certainly would like to see the spirit of class struggle manifested in the Chiapas revolt to spread all over the country. And thirdly, they may think that defense of the Chiapas movement against the attacks of the government will spark a general revolt.

I think the editorial in the issue of Oct. 23, 1994, manifests all three ideas:

"In Chiapas the formation of the Provisional Government has already been initiated. Thousands of indigenous people have formed autonomous and independent zones, with their own forms of organization and government. They no longer pay taxes to the Priista government nor permit the entrance of its functionaries. There the popular will is respected and the leaders have to do what the people mandate or they are removed."

"This is what should be done it all the country, in the indigenous communities, in the unions, in the towns. In all places we have to replace the charro unionism with independent unionism, spurious leaders with leaders of the people."

"It is very important that we, the organizations which are farthest from the fraud of the 'bourgeois legality', should work arduously in order to regain the National Democratic Convention and to demand its banner from those who have only usurped it in order to demobilize. For this it is necessary to regain the State Conventions, participating actively in the discussion, arousing the consciousness of, and organization of the people."

"Because it is not just a matter of trying to change the leadership of the convention. It doesn't accomplish anything to throw out the reformists and put in the radicals, if they haven't done work at the base which makes possible the

real participation of the people. For this it is necessary to have the struggle within the Convention, but above all else it is necessary to do the work among the people in order that they understand, support and defend this Provisional Government. If not, all will fall at the first blows of the state."

There are limitations to this perspective. I would hope that the spirit of class struggle of the Chiapas revolt would spread. And it seems to have indeed changed the political atmosphere and encouraged the class struggle to break out. Yet, I don't think the Chiapas revolt can just be spread. For one, in Chiapas the poor peasantry that is being wiped out also suffers extreme discrimination and oppression as indigenous communities. Thus, the revolt there has particular features. As well, a peasant revolt alone can not break capitalist rule in Mexico. After all, Mexico is now a mainly urban country.

As well, the issue of supporting the Chiapas revolt against the repression of the government is of great importance. There have already been a series of demonstrations in Mexico City and other places. I understand that there have also been efforts to get supplies into the Lacandona forest and to block the government troops. This is an important fight that a movement must take up if it is to be revolutionary. And the stand towards this teaches many valuable lessons as to where various classes and parties stand. I don't think a general revolutionary movement will break out or be built around the issue of supporting the Chiapas revolt.

Yet I think this fight has to be seen as an important issue but also as one of a number of issues that must be taken up in order to build a revolutionary movement in Mexico. I don't think that this issue alone will spark a general revolutionary movement.

### *El Machete* and the working class movement

*El Machete* does not speak heavily of the working class movement. There has not been a vigorous working class movement for several years in Mexico. (The Ruta 100 struggle may reflect that this situation is changing.) However, such a movement is obviously important. Mexico is no longer a majority peasant country. Furthermore, as evidenced by the peasant revolts 1910-1921, the peasantry can not expect the bourgeoisie to fulfill its demands. There needs to be a working class revolt and a close unity of the working class and poor peasantry. One of the severe weaknesses of the present movement is that the working class is not active.

There may be more than one reason why *El Machete* does not talk a lot about the working class movement. It may be in part because they are focused heavily on the current movement and how to develop it. And at present the working class movement is at a low level. As well, they may have some perspective that a poor peasant revolt under revolutionary leadership could alone defeat the rule of capital in Mexico.

When it does talk about the working class struggle, it talks about the needed split with the PRD and the need for independent worker's organizations and unions.

For instance this is how they discuss two demonstrations in Mexico City, "In the Federal District(Mexico City) two important marches were held in October: on October 2 in remembrance of the events of '68, and a popular and worker demonstration on October 14, convened by the Coordination Nacional de Organizaciones Sociales Independientes (CNOSI)." ... "The demonstration of Oct. 2 was convened by the CEU and the presidency of the CND. The second by the CNPI, UCEZ, MPI, FPFV, CLETA, and CONATIMSS.

"In the first the central point was the defense of the vote and the support of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas; in the second the demands were those most heartfelt to the workers (against the pact and the salary cap. For the taking of land and against the latifundistas) and support to the EZLN." (Oct. 23, 1994, "Two Different Marches")

### Radical democracy and socialism

Furthermore, I see a series of weaknesses in their descriptions of what they are fighting for. They do sometimes talk about establishing socialism and defeating capital. But where I have seen it described it seems to be radical democracy. In the article "Our America" they describe somewhat what they are fighting for.

"The electoral political alternatives perceive democracy in the same sense as that published by the oligarchies. The impulse for direct and daily democracy expresses itself in a new form of governing in the spaces of the social organizations, the territorial confines and in stimulating the participation of the population in the affairs which concern them is missing. This permits us to assert that the alternatives not only need to be proposed, they must be built in a permanent manner."

"In this sense one thing is the democracy of the leading elite and another very different of the social bases, which nearly doesn't participate in definitions." (November 20, 1994, "Our America")

There is also a signed article by Enrique Gonzalez Ruiz (he writes frequently with signed articles and I do not know whether he is directly part of *El Machete*). After denouncing the 1917 Constitution he says:

"For this, it is necessary to rescue the idea of popular sovereignty, which includes representation but doesn't exhaust itself in that. The vote is not a blank check which the person voted for fills in however he feels like, but a mandate subject to the precise conditions and above all, revocable.

"1. The popular action in order to denounce whatever corrupt official.

"This implies to take the monopoly of penal action from the Public Ministry, which entrusts

to the government's hands the prosecution of crimes and ends frequently in complicity and raptures."

The article then goes on to discuss a series of other democratic measures of this sort. (Jan. 18, 1995, "About the New Constitution)

The discussion of what I consider to be radical democratic measures in their press, to me coincides with their weak conception of what socialism and communism is.

For instance, they carry an ad in the Nov. 20, 1994 issue that the defense of Cuba should be linked to the defense of socialism. "It doesn't serve anything to have generic solidarity which only deflects attention from the main task of the workers: **destroy capitalism and construct a society without classes.**" They seem to hold that Cuba is not socialist but is standing on the road towards socialism.

I think Cuba should be defended against the maneuvers of U.S. imperialism. But I think it is far from the road of socialism. In an earlier period Cuba linked its economy closely with that of the Soviet Union. Cuba really had no choice — since it seemed that the U.S.-Soviet rivalry gave the opening to remain independent of the U.S. for a period. The Cuban regime carried out a series of reforms vs. the Batista regime. And because of this it has a lot of popular support. But this is a state capitalist economy. Today, the dollar has been legalized. Western investment is there. Furthermore, a look at their foreign policy over the years revealed that they did not stand with the most radical section of the left but with the reformists.

We have a lot of experience with this in the U.S. Those forces which are the most forceful in promoting Cuban "socialism" are also frequently the most forceful in working to maintain the political movement under the domination of the left-wing of the Democratic Party, the trade union bureaucracy and other such forces. I think that not being clear about Cuban "socialist" politics tends to stand against *El Machete's* desires to build an independent revolutionary movement.

And the fact that *El Machete* considers this regime to be on the road to socialism to me manifests a very weak idea of what socialism is.

There are further issues with their conceptions of socialism and communism.

The Dec. 16, 1994, issue starts reprinting the *Communist Manifesto*. But in their explanation of why they are printing the *Communist Manifesto* they say:

"It is said that we live in a democratic country, nevertheless for many communities of the country it is enough for someone to accuse you of being Zapatista or communist in order to justify repression.

"What is it to be Zapatista? Why does Salinas call it Zapatista? Is it bad to follow the ideals of Zapata? To be communist signifies following the ideas of communism. There are peasants that say they fight against communism but they practice it in their communities since they work the land in common, they defend the communal property against the privatizations, the Salinists, etc."

There are some indications here that they equate communism with communal forms which exist among the peasantry in Mexico. I think there is discussion among them that part of socialism may be built out of the peasant "non-capitalist" communal forms and/or some of the historical indigenous forms. While Marx himself did talk of socialism utilizing some of this type of form, I think that this doesn't apply today. Or, if it does, it would be on a very small scale. The indigenous communal forms probably only still exist in some parts of central and Southern Mexico. Straight up large-scale capitalist agriculture is throwing the peasantry off the land. The ejidos (which are often farmed as individual plots) and communal forms are very marginal compared to large scale agriculture.

So, while it seems to me that *El Machete* talks about socialism, it doesn't make a clear distinction between socialism and radical peasant democracy. It seems to me that this is a key weakness that they have.

Obviously one key question facing the Mexican left is to oppose the suppression of the radical left and to oppose that the left become a part of the "democratization" schemes of the bourgeoisie. On this questions, *El Machete* has some consciousness. I also think that another key question facing the Mexican revolutionary movement is the development of the working class struggle and the grasping the distinction between radical peasant politics and socialism. On this *El Machete* doesn't seem to be so conscious.

I think Oleg's article in *CWVTJ* No. 5 was more glowing than was warranted. The Editorial Guide of *CWVTJ* No. 6 stated

"This ad was not meant as an endorsement of *El Machete* as a Marxist-Leninist organization." If the original ad gave that impression, that was wrong. I don't think that *El Machete* should be promoted as more than what it is. However, in the American left one usually only hears of the PRD dominated left in Mexico, and occasionally about trotskyist schemes. The political aims promoted are usually some form of going back to previous policies of the PRI — possibly with the addition of more rights for the indigenous. I think the left needs to know that this is not the only politics in Mexico. Thus it should know that *El Machete* exists and what it represents. As part of supporting the struggle in Mexico, I think it is important to grasp the strengths and weaknesses of this trend.

I find it encouraging that the class struggle in Mexico is developing. I find it encouraging that there seems to be a split developing in the political movement both against the PRI domination of the official mass organizations and also against the politics of the PRD.

I hope that *El Machete's* close involvement in the mass movement along with their opposition to the PRD, their critique of EZLN, their awareness of having to come to terms with the legacy of previous movements, etc., will lead them to a deeper analysis of how to move forward in the current political situation in Mexico.

I hope that this article will assist us to better understand issues that are facing the development of a revolutionary movement in Mexico. □

### Issues of the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* on their differences with *Communist Voice*

Issue #7, May 25, of the *CWVTJ* contains several articles relevant to their differences with us over what is anti-revisionist communism. Julie's article "*El Machete* and the Mexican left" is reprinted in its entirety in this issue of *Communist Voice* (pp. 39-46), but *CWVTJ* also contains some other articles that are commented on in this issue of *Communist Voice*, namely Jake's article "Anatomy of a split, Part I", Barb's "Dealing with Trotsky: Idiocy or Treachery?", and Oleg's "Crisis in Mexico".

Also, the special issue of the *CWVTJ* of March 7, 1995 contains 59 letters and articles on the differences between the *Chicago Workers' Voice* and other comrades, and on overall editorial summing up *CWV's* view of the issue. Unfortunately, it is slapped together in a way that makes it hard to follow, which its own 'Editorial Guide' apologetically admits. It also leaves out some relevant documents from the other side, even within the time range it claims to cover. All this is probably related to the irritation the *CWV* displays over having to publish the material at all, with the 'Editorial Guide' calling the discussion "inopportune" and "force(d) on them". The *CWV* also announced elsewhere that it would refrain from circulating its own special issue except to subscribers and those who write in for it.

For those interested in either of these issues of *CWVTJ*, they are available for \$3.00 each by mail. Write to *Chicago Workers' Voice*, P.O. Box 11542, Chicago 60611. In general, mail subs are \$20 for six issues or \$3 per issue. E-mail address: [mlbooks@Mcs.com](mailto:mlbooks@Mcs.com). □



# For a serious unmasking of Trotskyism

The following three articles concern the fight against Trotskyism and are all related to Barb's article in the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #7 "Dealing with Trotsky: Idiocy or Treachery?" This article is criticized in the final section of Joseph Green's article "The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism" (see pp. 26-27 of this issue of *Communist Voice*). The first article below is Barb's reply to this criticism (Joseph's article was circulated before publication in *CV*). The next article is Joseph's further elaboration of the need to take theory seriously. And finally, we include the reference notes to Barb's article "Dealing with Trotsky".

## Barb replies on "Dealing with Trotsky"

Joseph:

Well, you can see by the length of these notes why I decided to omit them. Because I had erased my original drafts, I occasionally had to resort to a different text, with a different translation, to reconstruct the notes — but the essence is the same.

I have carefully considered your criticisms of the Trotsky article and, I agree, there are some overly flamboyant characterizations in it.

But I think you may have misinterpreted my motives in writing it. It was intended as, and stated to be, an overview and it was meant to provoke. I really don't think you can at this point conclude that I have given up "anti-revisionism" because I did not analyze any "trends" or deal with any other matter which was not my stated purpose! Actually, the real point is that ALL Trotskyite groups are "revisionist," because Trotsky was "revisionist!". An article on Luxemburg and Trotsky is in the works, in which I do plan to discuss *News and Letters* and probably a couple of the T. groups. However, I do not feel that this is my "role" in the struggle. I was never a member of the M-L Party and did not spend years in close association with these groups. I don't know them intimately as you and others do. And frankly, I think it doesn't hurt occasionally to cut through all that and get back to the roots of things. The struggle against Trotskyism has of late stagnated and I thought it needed a kick in the pants.

I have received several "shaken-up" responses to the article. Readers have said such things as "I never thought of things like that before," etc., etc., so I feel I have accomplished my purpose. So instead of a "lollipop"—maybe more of a "bitter pill"?

I deliberately meant to attack Trotsky on a personal level, as well as on a theoretical level. I meant absolutely to "degrade his reputation." The essence of petty-bourgeois groups is the infallible, charismatic leader who operates by personality as well as fancy-sounding "revolutionary" slogans. This is true whether you are talking about Mao, Che, Gonzalo of Shining Path or even Jesse Jackson. There are a lot of idealistic young people out

there who are attracted to Trotsky's glamorous image and his revolutionary-sounding rhetoric. And I am really more concerned about these folks than I am with encrusted party members or ideologues of any stripe.

I guess I don't understand your qualification on my quote of Lenin's regarding the peasantry. The point being that Trotsky's refusal to really deal with the peasantry was crucial to his inability to deal with the actual building of socialism. I believe the peasantry was the key factor in trying to build socialism in the USSR, and I believe Lenin thought so also. I do not take the point casually at all. So I will stand by what I said (I may not have said it very well!) And after half a lifetime of reading and thinking and analyzing, I have as yet found no reason not to stand with Lenin.

Joseph, you and I do not know each other at all. I believe I am just as dedicated to socialism and just as serious as you are in getting at the truth of things. I am not influenced by Jake, Julie, Oleg, or Rene any more than I am influenced by you, Mark, Pete, or Tim. I will continue to do my thing in my own "style" and let the chips fall where they may. I will never get into any name-calling or petty bickering with people I feel are sincerely progressive. I simply do not care about it. So you may very well say that I am "vilifying" and taking things "casually", that I am "upset", "seriously pondering," making unfounded assumptions, have not studied my material, do not realize that serious work needs to be done, and am not interested in theory or whatever, but those are really assumptions on your part. In my view, I am seriously (and NEVER casually!) expressing my conclusions — "truth-as-I-see-it." That's all. And I would give you the same respect to your views.

And you are very very mistaken. I am passionately interested in the theory of revolution and socialism. I don't even mind being "wrong" on some details (although I really don't think I am so wrong!) if I can contribute even one tiny insight that will lead in the right direction for the future.

I have been associated with the M-L Party since 1978 (COUSML days). I believed you were the only group composed of mature, sincere communists, dedicated to finding the revolu-

tionary path to socialism. I was impressed with the sound analytical ability of many comrades, and the *WA [Workers' Advocate]* constantly clarified important matters for me. I supported the Party in every way I could. Paradoxically, I could not apply to join the Party because I was not convinced that many of your stands were correct! I could not in clear conscience tell the world that Mao, Stalin, Hoxha, or Baines had the key to socialism, or that the regimes they (or the Party) represented as such were socialist — especially being based in Madison, where, while the “Marxist” intellectuals were not serious socialists, they were not stupid either and had read their history. (In particular, I underwent much public derision for promoting Albania — which I tried to do for a time, against my better judgment!) Nor would it have been comfortable to belong to a group where I could not know the top people involved in making these theoretical decisions or know how they arrived at them — the last embarrassment being someone’s conception of “weak socialism” as the “scientific” way to classify the Soviet Union in its earlier days — which, by the way, was immediately picked up [and] ridiculed by the Spartacists. Let’s be honest. I think those wrong views did more to hold back the struggle than my small article on Trotsky will — which at least expresses MY views and not someone’s else’s.

A few of the details:

I used Lenin’s trade union articles because this is where he dealt with Trotsky’s wrong conception of the Soviet state, and it is where Trotsky’s wrong conception sent him off on a seriously incorrect and harmful path.

Trotsky really did not have enough strength inside the Party to muster forces for his positions and certainly not to fight against the triumvirate after Lenin’s death. What supporters he had from time to time were quite wavering and undependable.

Lenin’s characterization of the state was based on a concrete

analysis of its economic and social forces at the time. Trotsky’s characterization was not. I thought that was an important point!

What does “communist theory” say about how the state should be in the transition from capitalism to socialism? Marx and Engels didn’t say much. Lenin was desperately trying to find a way to get there.

My article was intended to be about Trotsky’s empty, vague revolutionary-sounding rhetoric, and how it disguised and confused the reality that he was not a materialist or a scientific socialist. This is why I was so hard on his terminology. I agree that it doesn’t make a great deal of difference whether one says “proletariat or worker” but it does make a great deal of difference whether one includes the peasantry in the equation.

I was not talking about Trotskyists or Stalinists and what they may or may not have thought, but about Trotsky and Stalin who misled an awful lot of people who may well have been very sincere in their desire for socialism. That is really the tragedy of it, isn’t it?

I think I did a little more than quote a few dozen words from Lenin. The discussion of “On-Cooperation” set forth his views quite thoroughly on what needed to be done with the peasantry to progress toward socialism. On the other hand, Lenin said more in a few words than most others do in a lifetime.

And no, I didn’t “seriously ponder” the issue whether Trotsky was an idiot or a traitor. It was a catchy title. You read far too much into it! My point was not that getting rid of idiots or traitors would unite the left simply and easily, but that getting rid of Trotsky might free up a lot of people who could be very useful for the struggle!

And finally, you kept attributing my personal views to *CWV*’s views on Trotsky. I am not speaking for the journal; I am publishing in the journal. Don’t blame the *CWV* “group” for what you feel are my errors! □

*The movement needs revolutionary theory, not "bitter pills"*

# For a serious struggle against Trotskyism

by Joseph Green, Detroit

At the end of my article "The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism" (see elsewhere in this issue of *Communist Voice*) I commented on Barb's article "DEALING WITH TROTSKY/Idiocy or Treachery?". In reply to a brief note I wrote Barb asking for the reference notes which were omitted from her article, she sent a reply defending her article, as well as graciously preparing and sending me the notes as well. I wish to publicly thank her for that, and I think the additional materials she sent will be useful to those who wish to think over her article and my criticism. (The notes appear elsewhere in this issue of *Communist Voice*.)

Her letter however convinces me that it will be of use to further elaborate on why I found her article superficial, and why I think that her method of vilification threatens to discredit the criticism of Trotskyism.

In criticizing her article, I by no means wish to defend Trotskyism. Trotskyism is now very influential among the remaining activists who profess communism. And yet it is a revisionist theory that leads them astray. The Trotskyist trends are generally afraid to stand by themselves and build an independent communist trend, and they generally seek to attach themselves to some larger, opportunist force. Most of these groups defend, as essentially socialist on the economic level, the very state capitalism and Stalinism they denounce, and they generally render "military support" to them. Most of them keep calling for the notoriously pro-capitalist American labor bureaucrats to lead working class struggle. Just about all of them keep finding one reason or another to defend this or that reactionary regime in the third world, such as "military" defense of Saddam Hussein during the Persian Gulf war, which was actually a reactionary war on both sides. And all of these groups adhere to Trotskyist formulas that replace serious analysis of revolutionary issues with phrasemongering. Repudiation of Trotskyism is essential if there is going to be a serious anti-revisionist, Leninist trend and a meaningful anti-revisionist theory.

But this repudiation has to analyze the Trotskyist theories and practices. I don't think Barb's article did this. I think Barb ignored the best and most careful work against Trotskyism done in the past, and substituted a lot of name-calling. I hope criticizing this erroneous approach will encourage a deeper and better critique of Trotskyism and a better understanding of Leninism, building on the best work in the past and taking it further.

## Anti-revisionism

First, as Barb misrepresents it, let's clarify why I criticized her article previously.

Barb, in her reply, says that "I really don't think you can at

this point conclude that I have given up 'anti-revisionism' because I did not analyze any 'trends' or deal with any other matter which was not my stated purpose."

Actually, in my article "The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism", I didn't cite Barb's article as evidence of abandoning anti-revisionism. Instead I pointed to *CWV*'s endorsement of the journal *El Machete*, their views on how the Mexican left might be united, their views on Castro's Cuba, their denunciation of the struggle against opportunism as trying to prove that activists are "shit", their abandonment of the program or rebuilding a proletarian party, etc.

I did however cite Barb's article to show that the *CWV*'s method of evading issues through vilification campaigns led to superficial analysis and was a caricature of Lenin's approach. And I claimed that this holds them back from seeing the need for "painstaking research and deep thought that goes beyond the fashionable thinking of the day." Let's see if this is so.

## On a personal level

Barb admits in her reply that she "*deliberately meant to attack Trotsky on a personal level*, as well as on a theoretical level." (emph. added) She vividly describes this as something in the nature of a "bitter pill". This is a good description of one aspect of her method, although I am inspired to strengthen her image and refer to "poison pills".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, she gives a theoretical justification for the use of bitter pills. She says that the problem of wrong, petty-bourgeois views in the left springs from the existence of

"the infallible, charismatic leader who operates by personality as well as fancy-sounding 'revolutionary' slogans. This is true whether you are talking about Mao, Che, Gonzalo of Shining Path or even Jesse Jackson."

So Barb thinks she has found the common essence of a wide variety of groups—from the Communist Party of China to the left-wing of the Democratic Party. It's all a matter of "petty-bourgeois groups" with their gurus.

And Barb holds that vilification of the charismatic leader is the way to deal with the politics of these groups. It is way to shake up "a lot of idealistic young people out there who are attracted to Trotsky's glamorous image and his revolutionary-sounding rhetoric." And presumably it is the way to deal with Mao, Jesse Jackson, etc.

Barb points out that she has

"received several 'shaken-up' responses to the article. Readers have said such things as 'I never thought of things like that before,' etc., etc., so I feel I have accomplished my purpose."

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<sup>1</sup>By the way, a number of Trotsky's works make clear that he too is fond of bitter pills.

No doubt vilification can work for a time. Certainly American politicians make wide use of bitter pills. Nowadays millions of dollars may be spent on "negative campaigning" on TV in a single hotly-contested Senate race. It must work some of the time, because the politicians keep on shelling out more and more money for these ads. But at the same time, everyone has contempt for this style of campaigning, and no one regards these poisonous ads as theoretical work.

So Barb's article may well sway some individuals, as she says it has. But what will they have learned about politics? Let's see.

### A bottle of bitter pills

In her article, Barb informs us, among other things, that

- \* Trotsky had "almost a hatred" for the peasantry (*CWVTJ* #7, p. 53, col. 2);

- \* Trotsky was "not really willing to work to build socialism" (p. 45, col. 1);

- \* Trotsky thought that real socialism in the Soviet Union was "dare I say it, undesirable" (p. 51, col. 2);

- \* Trotsky was either an idiot or a traitor;

- \* Trotsky was a follower of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (p. 48, col. 3 and p. 52, col. 3);

- \* Trotsky used "romantic terms" like "worldwide", "final or total or complete victories" of this or that, and "workers' state" (p. 46, col. 2, p. 51, col. 2-3);  
etc.

What does the reader learn from these things? Nothing. This type of personal attack weakens the desire to study theory. There's nothing much to study if the only lesson is to love the peasantry, to love socialism, and not to be a traitor.

Moreover, this method of personal abuse isolates the view of Trotskyism from any assessment of Trotskyism as a trend, and as we have seen, Barb insists that it wasn't her intention to "analyze any 'trends' ".<sup>2</sup> Thus the *CWVTJ* can carry Barb's personal abuse of Trotsky while Oleg of the *CWV* is fascinated by the organizing work of the Trotskyist group *Spark* (see *Communist Voice* #1) and while the *CWV* helps distribute Trotskyist papers from Italy and New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

And it's not that everything Barb says is wrong. She often abuses Trotsky on issues where he is really wrong, and where his theories have created a lot of confusion. But she treats these points with the same bitter pills as elsewhere in the article, and

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<sup>2</sup>In fact, Barb's article gives views on the evolution of Trotsky's followers, as well as on the relations of Trotskyism to other political trends. Consistency is not the strong point of Barb's remarks, nor is consistency necessary when the object is vilification. But Barb's insistence that she is not concerned with "trends" says something about how she views the left.

<sup>3</sup>Similarly, Julie justifies the *CWV*'s endorsement of *El Machete* as showing activists that there is something in the Mexican left besides the left-wing of PRD or Trotskyist groups (*CWVTJ* #7, p. 22, col. 1), but at the same time the *CWV* promotes Trotskyist papers from Italy and New Zealand.

as a result, the reader doesn't learn much. Barb tells us that Trotsky is not materialist, not Marxist, bossy, romantic, arrogant, etc. etc. etc., but she doesn't show how the Trotskyist positions at stake are in fact not materialist, etc. She phrasemongers against Trotskyist phrasemongering, and that just isn't good enough.

### Barb's defense

The method of personal attack covers over a lack of serious work on the subject. Thus Barb's article has a series of blunders about factual matters. To my surprise, in her reply to me, Barb defends a number of them:

- I had pointed out that it was absurd for Barb to say, as she did on p. 44, col. 2, that "During his Party career, Trotsky actually had a very small following..." His support went up and down, but eventually he was one of the major Bolshevik leaders.

In reply, Barb says that Trotsky "did not have enough strength inside the Party to muster support for his positions and certainly not to fight against the triumvirate after Lenin's death. What supporters he had from time to time were quite wavering and undependable."

How easily Barb's vilification of Trotsky turns into apology for Trotsky! (Poor boy, if he didn't fight, it was supposedly because he didn't have enough support for it.) And it confuses the fact that Trotsky lost the fight with Stalin with whether Trotsky was an influential leader. By Barb's method of reasoning, one would conclude that no one but Lenin and Stalin had any significant following.

- I pointed out that Barb cited Lenin's article "The trade unions, the present situation and Trotsky's mistakes" (Dec. 30, 1920) on the issue of different views on the peasantry, when the article had nothing to do with this subject. Barb is unrepentant. She says that she "used Lenin's trade union articles because this is where he dealt with Trotsky's wrong conception of the Soviet state,..." But she was talking about a wrong conception of the relationship of the state to the peasantry, and Lenin's article was on the relations of the state with the trade unions, and Lenin was criticizing a pamphlet by Trotsky on the trade unions.<sup>4</sup>

- Barb claimed that Lenin held that under socialism there was a "workers' and peasants' state", and she said that talk of a "workers' state" was the key issue proving Trotsky's negation of the peasantry. I pointed out that it was the general view of Lenin and the Bolsheviks that socialism had a "workers' state". Barb was mistaken about Lenin's views. She had pulled a phrase about the "workers' and peasants' state" out of one of Lenin's articles, where in the heat of argument he misspoke on an issue tangential to his main point. Lenin had immediately repudiated his error in his next article.

What's Barb's response? She deals with this several times in her brief letter.

She begins by saying that "I guess I don't understand your

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<sup>4</sup>Moreover, in the second paragraph of the article, Lenin says "My principal material is Comrade Trotsky's pamphlet, *The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions*."

qualification on my quote of Lenin's regarding the peasantry. The point being that Trotsky's refusal to really deal with the peasantry was crucial to his inability to deal with the actual building of socialism." So she doesn't care that Lenin retracted his statement on the "workers' and peasants' state". All that's important is that he said something against Trotsky. Here one can see how the method of bitter pills threatens to discredit the criticism of Trotsky, who really did have wrong views on the peasant movement, but they weren't based on holding that socialism had a proletarian state.

Somewhat later in her reply to me, Barb returned to this issue of the "workers' and peasants' state". This time she said: "Lenin's characterization of the state was based on a concrete analysis of its economic and social forces at the time. Trotsky's was not. I think that was an important point!"

So Barb gives Lenin a lollipop—his analysis was very good. And she gives Trotsky a bitter pill—his analysis was not. The lollipops and the bitter pills are the important points for Barb, not the content of Lenin's analysis. Lenin did not think it was a "workers' and peasants' state". He thought socialism had a workers' state, and that the Soviet Union at that moment had a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions in a country where the peasantry predominates.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Barb goes on to defend her repudiation of the "workers' state" by arguing that communist theory isn't really clear about what the state should be in the transition to socialism. She says "Marx and Engels didn't say much. Lenin was desperately trying to find a way to get there." Nevertheless, Marx and Engels thought it was a workers' state (does anyone remember "the dictatorship of the proletariat"? ) and so did Lenin.

### On vague, revolutionary-sounding rhetoric

● I had also questioned Barb's thesis about how different it is to say "workers' state" than "proletarian state".<sup>6</sup> And I pointed out that if this difference really was important, then why does Barb herself talk of a "workers' and peasants' state" rather than a "proletarian and peasants' state".

Barb replied that she agreed there wasn't much difference between the terms "worker" and "proletariat". Yet she still defends making this distinction as a way of showing that Trotsky's rhetoric is empty. She writes:

"My article was intended to be about Trotsky's empty, vague revolutionary-sounding rhetoric, and how it disguised and confused the reality that he was not a materialist or a scientific socialist. This is why I was so hard on his terminology. I agree that it doesn't make a great deal of difference whether one says 'proletariat or worker' but it does make a great deal of difference whether one includes the peasantry in the

equation."

Let's see. In order to show that Trotsky's rhetoric is empty, Barb denounces him for a terminological difference—between worker and proletarian—that she admits isn't very important. Recall that she had vehemently stated in her article: "what kind of scientific, economic, let alone Marxist, term is 'workers' state'? Doesn't 'worker' really mean 'proletariat'?" (p. 51, col. 2) Boy, that will really show the reader how to avoid empty rhetoric!

Barb defends this terminological nonsense by saying that the issue of the peasantry is important. But whether one says "workers' state" or "proletarian state" doesn't affect the question of the peasantry.

And the more serious an issue the peasantry is, the less excusable are such terminological quibbles. The more serious it is, the more the issue of the peasantry itself should have been discussed. But Barb said little about Trotsky's views about communist work among the peasantry after the October Revolution. She refers vaguely to controversies from before the October Revolution. She refers vaguely to arguments about the overall fate of the revolution. She mixes together statements from various periods. And she ends up having trouble seeing anything wrong with much of Trotsky's views, saying: "In later years, in defending himself against accusations that he did not deal with the peasantry, Trotsky merely co-opted Lenin's analysis of the peasantry and of co-operatives as having been his own. But he did not hold these views at the time." (p. 53, col. 2)

Actually, Barb doesn't say much about Trotsky's views of communist work among the peasantry in the period from the October Revolution and through the 20s. Her most detailed passage concerns the NEP period (p. 48, col. 2). Here she uses a lot of fancy phrases like "super-industrialization", "total industrial planning", "total collectivization", but she doesn't give the reader any description of what she is talking about. And her reference for this is a few pages from E. H. Carr's *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923* (Vol. 2, pp. 379-383). These pages are not a detailed study of Trotsky's views, but a brief sketch of controversy among the Bolsheviks on NEP, concentrating on the issue of planning, and have little on the peasantry or about the terms Barb uses.

● Barb does agree that she had "some overly flamboyant characterizations" in her article, although she gives no examples of them. In fact, she defends her title, "Idiocy or treachery". She says: "...no, I didn't 'seriously ponder' the issue whether Trotsky was an idiot or a traitor. It was a catchy title. You read far too much into it!"

Actually, it wasn't just a title—it was one of the article's themes. A passage on page 47-48 weighs the issue, comparing Barb's view with that of Lenin's and Stalin's. And she returns to this point at least two more times in the article. On p. 46-47 she raises it with respect to the question of the timing of the October revolution. And then, with respect to the issue of Brest-Litovsk, she writes: "Again, a close call between 'idiocy and treachery.'" (p. 47, col. 3). Moreover, the same idea is repeated in other ways throughout the article, when she says over and over that the issue is that Trotsky didn't find socialism desirably, was bossy, Platonist, etc. The overall view is that it

<sup>5</sup>"The Party Crisis", *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup>Strictly speaking, in her article and her reply to me, Barb uses "proletariat" rather than "proletarian".



isn't worth while dealing with the theoretical issues seriously, because Trotsky as a person is so bad.

### Theory isn't half so important

So I don't think it's an accident that Barb opens her article with a quote from Lenin, "no theory is half so important as practice". ("The Trade Unions, The Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 30) Here again, as with her bitter pills, Barb orients the reader away from theory. And it shows that the *CWV*, despite the presence of lengthy polemics in *CWV* #7, still doesn't see the point of the theoretical work, and it begrudges spending much effort on it.

And yet, shouldn't the repudiation of Trotskyism be based on clarifying theoretical issues? It seems that Barb quotes Lenin the way Marx was once quoted during an earlier period of theoretical confusion. Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done* that:

"...Quite a number of people with very little, and even a total lack of theoretical training joined the movement because of its practical significance and its practical successes. We can judge from that how tactless the *Rabocheye Dyelo* [*Workers' Cause*] is when, with an air of triumph, it quotes Marx's statement: 'Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs.' To repeat these words in a period of theoretical chaos is like wishing mourners at a funeral 'many happy returns of the day'." <sup>7</sup>

Of course, today the practical movement is stagnant, rather than attracting people by its successes. But it is a period where the movement is in theoretical crisis, and where the level of theoretical discussion is generally rather low. Hasn't Barb too wished the mourners "many happy returns of the day"?

But Lenin also went on to show that Marx's thought had been distorted, saying:

"Moreover, these words of Marx are taken from his letter on the Gotha Program, in which he *sharply condemns* eclecticism in the formulation of principles. If you must unite, Marx wrote to the party leaders, then enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but do not allow any bargaining over principles, do not make theoretical 'concessions'. This was Marx's idea, and yet there are people among us who seek—in his name—to belittle the significance of theory!" <sup>8</sup> (*Ibid.*, emph. as in the original)

So it turned out that Marx's idea had been turned on its head.

And what about Lenin's idea? Here the situation is more complex. Lenin's quote about "no theory is half so important as practice" is taken from an article in which he assumes that the squabbling party leaders are united on the basic party program

of action. In particular, he is discussing the issue of the "coalescence" of the trade unions and the state apparatus. Since everyone is basically agreed, he says, further progress will come from studying our experience, not exaggerating minor differences.

Now, are we really in a period where all the militant activists agree on the basic program and strategy? And can the practical experience of the moment—valuable for keeping in touch with the masses—replace the need for theoretical work to deal with the present ideological confusion about socialism and socialist revolution? Can we replace our discussion of socialist revolution and the "workers' and peasants' state" and the summation of past revolutions by carrying out a proletarian revolution just now? Obviously not. Or are we to assume that summing up the work of, say, occasional small-scale leafleting will, by itself, solve these issues for us? Only those with what Lenin calls "an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity" could believe that. <sup>9</sup>

Thus Barb has taken Lenin's statement out of context. His words could justly be cited in a situation where a revolutionary party or trend has agreed on a new plan of work, and it needs to gain some experience in it—rather than simply multiply minor differences in the abstract—in order to gain deeper insight, as well as to move the work forward. But it is turning Lenin on his head to cite these words in the midst of a present-day polemic against Trotskyism. It means that Barb, for all the length of her article and its show of scholarship, thinks that the main theoretical issues have already been settled in the movement. What remains would be simply to "degrade his [Trotsky's] reputation" through personal abuse in order to "free up a lot of people who could be very useful for the struggle."

So Lenin's statement about theory and practice is in fact a concrete assessment of a particular party crisis at a particular moment, and not a general statement that theory should be put aside. Thus Barb is misusing it. Nevertheless, I'll take the occasion to point out that I'm not sure that Lenin's assessment of the party situation of the time was quite right. It may have been one-sided. Lenin caught quite well the tendency of Trotsky and certain other party leaders to drown serious politics in squabbles, and also the tendency to believe that a bright new formulation could replace the need for real work. Research done by the late Marxist-Leninist Party suggests that, years later, this would be a major aspect of the way Stalin and Trotsky debated the "socialism in one country" issue. But two other things can also be noted:

1) Lenin's article is important theoretically, which suggests that the party controversy he was dealing with, even if it started as a squabble, couldn't be resolved without theoretical discussion.

2) In the light of hindsight, the relationship of the trade unions to the state faced theoretical problems beyond what the Bolsheviks had already discussed. The socialist revolution faced even more zigzags: it was continuing during a period of the ebb of independent worker initiative; there was the question of how

<sup>7</sup>"What Is To Be Done?", Ch. I, Sec. D. *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 369.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, emph. as in the original.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

much popular support socialism had in the countryside; there was the question of how political trends in Russia were evolving. What to do in this situation, even the possibility of the loss of state power, had to be confronted, and couldn't just be set aside as capitulationism. Continued failure to look at this issue didn't mean that the proletariat would always remain in power, but contributed to the proletariat losing power by way of the revisionist degeneration of the party and state and trade unions. Already in January 1921 this probably required a good deal of thought. And the overall situation facing the revolution and the state would definitely affect how one discussed the "coalescence" of the trade unions and the state.

If so, Lenin would still have been right to oppose squabbling and phrasemongering, but there was also theoretical and political issues underlying the unease inside the party. It was a mistake to sum matters up as simply squabbling. Both in theory and with regard to the practical situation facing the party, the situation was more complex than this.

Barbara might now start pondering whether I am an "idiot or a traitor". After all, I am questioning an assessment of Lenin's. Her article sometimes gives the impression that to question any view of Lenin's is, in itself, arrogance and treachery. This, in my opinion, is an undialectical, mechanical, and anti-Leninist picture of Leninism. The Leninism which provides an essential theoretical basis for our anti-revisionist task is not simply every opinion and action of Lenin's. It is the basic Marxist framework which he followed, and which he struggled to implement and develop in the course of carrying out the revolution, and on the basis of which his own actions and views can be evaluated or criticized. It is our task today to develop an anti-revisionist communism, and this requires dealing with a number of questions which cannot be answered by simply citing this or that opinion from the past. And it requires examining the policies of early Soviet history, including when Lenin was alive, from an independent and critical standpoint, albeit one based on Marxism-Leninism. Only this approach will allow Marxism to survive.

So this brings us to the question of Barb's version of Leninism.

### Barb's version of Leninism

Barb presents her views as the resolute upholding of Lenin. She writes that: "...after half a lifetime of reading and thinking and analyzing, I have as yet found no reason not to stand with Lenin." And she regards it as a conclusive argument on a point to simply cite a few words of Lenin—often fragments of sentences pasted together with ellipses (...s).

But what are some of the basic views which she ascribes to Leninism? It turns out that she holds that Leninism means

- that there is a "workers' and peasants' state" under socialism;
- the peasantry as a whole is mainly socialist;
- that there is at most a brief interlude between democratic and socialist revolution;
- that all the "materialist" analysis needed to embark on a socialist revolution is "let's give it our best shot"; and

- that the brief sketch "On Cooperation" sums up the basic analysis of the peasantry and answers the main questions about what should have been done in the Soviet Union.

This is not Leninism, but a variety of other views under the signboard of Leninism. It doesn't focus one's attention on the key issues needed to be studied, and inspire further study of both theory and concrete conditions, as real Leninism does, but blandly assures one that everything has been settled.

Let's look at these points one by one.

### The workers' and peasants' state

Barb returns over and over in her article to the question of the "workers' state" and the "workers' and peasants' state". She writes that "everything depended on that" referring to the supposed mistake of talking about a "workers' state". (p. 53, col. 2)<sup>10</sup>

Barb presents her views as those of Lenin. We have pointed out above her misuse of a passage where Lenin misspoke. But what basically were Lenin's views?

He held that socialism had, until the state withered away, a workers' state. When he identified the Soviet Union as a

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<sup>10</sup> She takes this to absurd levels. For example, Trotsky made the fundamental mistake of identifying the Soviet Union—in the years when it was once again a capitalist country, albeit a revisionist, state-capitalist one—as a "degenerated workers' state". Barb says that what's wrong with this is—the term "workers' state". She writes "Trotsky's awkward defense of the Soviet Union really rests on his major utopian error of conceiving the state as having been at one time a 'workers' state'." And she adds, in the next paragraph, "So, Trotsky's air-headed formula goes something like this: something [the workers' state] that NEVER WAS has degenerated, so the proletariat must rise and restore it to what it NEVER WAS." (p. 52, col. 3 to p. 53, col. 1, capitalization as in the original) But for that matter, it wouldn't make any difference to the essence of Trotsky's error if he had called the Soviet Union a "degenerated workers' and peasants' state". The issue is that it was then a capitalist state.

Nor is it just idle speculation that the Trotskyite theses could be preserved while using terms like "workers' and peasants' state." The Marxist-Leninist League of Sweden (MLLS) adopted the standpoint of the Trotskyism of the IS-Tony Cliff trend. And in its theses on imperialism, the MLLS says that the revolution in every country, independent of its social conditions, should give rise to a victory "of a socialist character". Yet the MLLS characterizes the resulting "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the oppressed countries as a "workers' and peasant state". (See the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, Feb. 15, 1995, vol. 6, #2. The statement of the MLLS on "the workers' and peasant state" is on p. 11, col. 1. MLLS's views are challenged in the article "A comment on the Swedish comrades' resolution on imperialism and the oppressed countries" in the same issue of the *WAS*. See in particular page 17, the subsection "What is a socialist revolution?")

workers' state, or a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions in a country with peasant majority, he was claiming that the Soviet Union was in transition to socialism.

On this issue, I think Barb might take to heart her own characterization of Trotsky and Stalin, that

"...they both distorted, misquoted and downright falsified the words of Lenin to conform to their own theories and actions and, on the other hand, claimed Lenin's ideas and analyses for their own, when at the time they had actually held contrary views..." (p. 46, col. 1)

### The peasantry is basically socialist

The term "workers' and peasants' state" might be used in different ways by different people. In Barb's case, she apparently puts such stress on the "workers' and peasants' state" as part of tendency to present the peasantry as a whole as basically socialist. As is typical in *CIWWTJ* articles, she is somewhat contradictory on this—that is, she hands out one or two lollipops assuring everyone that she only supports the small peasantry—but the general drift of her article is in a different direction.

To begin with, she repeatedly criticizes Trotsky for holding that the peasantry is not pro-socialist. She doesn't look into the detailed views of Trotsky concerning work with the peasantry, but instead defends the peasantry against criticism of its class stand. For example, she is indignant that it could be suggested that the peasantry might "turn its back" on the socialist revolution. (p. 47, col. 2) She refutes this by saying that it means that "as soon as the peasants received their land, they would turn against the Bolsheviks and support the counter-revolution."

But there is a difference between whether the peasantry might turn against the revolution and whether they will do so immediately after receiving land.

Barb however won't hear of any class tendencies the peasantry might have against the socialist plans of the proletariat. She ridicules the view that small-peasant proprietorship does not dispose one to either socialism or internationalism. She says that "note that he attributed the hostility of the peasantry to two factors: their petty-bourgeois character which would resist any attempts at collectivization and their 'primitiveness' or lack of 'internationalism,' defined as 'their limited rural outlook and isolation from world-political ties and allegiances.' Once again, Trotsky was wrong; this didn't happen."<sup>11</sup> (p. 47, col. 2) But whatever Trotsky's formulations,

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<sup>11</sup>On p. 47, col. 2 she quotes Trotsky, at the end of Ch. 9 in his book *Results and Prospects* (1906), saying that "...the working class of Russia will inevitably be crushed by the counter-revolution the moment the peasantry turns its back on it. It will have no alternative but to link the fate of its political rule and, hence, the fate of the whole Russian revolution with the fate of the socialist revolution in Europe." This expresses (continued...)

it is true that the peasantry, taken as a whole, does not gravitate to socialism and even the old communal traditions tend to break down. The socialist proletariat has to work to win over as much of the peasantry as possible, allying with the rural proletariat and poor peasantry, and providing material benefits of various sorts to the peasantry. And there is a reason why communists talk of "proletarian internationalism" and not just internationalism in general. I would also note that Marx as well as others referred to rural backwardness.

Barb claims that the Soviet experience refutes all these characterizations of the peasantry's stand (p. 47, col. 2), but I don't know how she reaches this conclusion. She seems to idealize peasant conditions, and writes indignantly that Trotsky "felt that total collectivization of the peasantry was the only real solution, i.e., turning them into a proletarian labor force." (p. 48, col. 2) She does not give a reference to Trotsky's statements on this. In and of itself, I don't know why total collectivization

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#### <sup>11</sup>(...continued)

Trotsky's view that there was no possibility for the Soviet Union to build socialism based on its internal resources. But it doesn't predict an immediate overthrow of the socialist revolution.

Furthermore, in the above passage Trotsky is writing over a decade prior to the October revolution. He is writing during the period when the Russia still faced a bourgeois-democratic revolution (which, however, does not mean its motive force was the bourgeoisie). Note in the following passage from the same book that he says that the peasantry as a whole, fresh and confident from its revolutionary upsurge against the landlords in the democratic struggle, will supposedly subordinate its own class nature and support the proletarian dictatorship, out of sheer gratitude for having received the land. This is part of Trotsky's argument against a democratic stage of revolution. It is deeply mistaken, but it says the opposite of what Barb claims.

Trotsky says, near the beginning of Ch. V of this book, that "*The proletariat in power will stand before the peasants as the class which has emancipated it. The domination of the proletariat will mean not only democratic equality, free self-government.... [etc.. etc.], but also recognition of all revolutionary changes (expropriations) in land relationships carried out by the peasants. The proletariat will make these changes the starting-point for further state measures in agriculture.*"

"Under such conditions the Russian peasantry in the first and most difficult period of the revolution will be interested in the maintenance of a proletariat regime (workers' democracy) at all events not less than was the French peasantry in the maintenance of the military regime of Napoleon Bonaparte, which guaranteed to the new property-owners, by the force of its bayonets, the inviolability of their holdings. And this means that the representative body of the nation...will be nothing else than a democratic dress for the rule of the proletariat." (emph. as in the original)

It also has some other Trotsky oddities—comparing the situation during a revolution to that during the oppressive rule of Bonaparte, but I'll leave that aside for now.

is so horrible (it's not the same as forcible collectivization). Nor do I know why it, by itself, would turn the peasantry into a proletarian labor force, since collectivization is only one step on the road of creating a fully working class countryside. But Barb seems to be horrified at the thought of peasants being converted to workers.

But under communism, there will no longer be class division, and peasants will simply be agricultural workers. They will have the exactly the same relation to the soil as workers to their factories, and will not have exclusive ownership of the land. Actually, the connection of the countryside and the city will be far closer than today, so that people will move back and forth between the two easily, and mix agricultural and industrial and intellectual occupations. So a specifically "peasant" population will no longer exist. Along the way towards this, peasants will become simply rural workers.

Under capitalism, turning all peasants into workers means stripping them of the land. It is a painful process for most peasants. But under socialism, there is no longer exploitation of the working class. Converting the countryside to rural workers should be a boon to the countryside.

Along these lines, Lenin held that

"...A society in which the class distinction between workers and peasants still exists is neither a communist society nor a socialist society. True, if the word socialism is interpreted in a certain sense, it might be called a socialist society, but that would be mere sophistry, an argument about words....One thing is clear, and that is, that as long as the class distinction between the workers and peasants exists, it is no use talking about equality, unless we want to bring grist to the mill of the bourgeoisie..."<sup>12</sup>

"Their conditions, production, living and economic conditions make the peasant half worker and half huckster.

"This is a fact. And you cannot get away from this fact until you have abolished money, until you have abolished exchange. And for this years and years of the stable rule by the proletariat is needed; for only the proletariat is capable of vanguishing the bourgeoisie."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>From Lenin's speech of May 19, 1919 at the First All-Russian Congress of Adult Education, "Deception of the People with Slogans of Freedom and Equality," Section IV (*Collected Works*, vol. 29, pp. 358-9). Lenin's statement was cited in the *Workers' Advocate Supplement* of Jan. 15, 1989, Vol. 5, #1. It occurred in the speech to the Third Congress of the Marxist-Leninist Party, entitled "On the party-wide study of the Marxist-Leninist concept of socialism". This was the speech that set forward the idea that "perhaps the term 'weak socialism' is helpful" in distinguishing between Marxist socialism and the transition towards socialism that began right after the October Revolution. Barb says she found the concept of "weak socialism" (continued...)

But let's return from the classless society of the future—although it was nice to dwell there for awhile to remind ourselves that the present system of exploitation is not eternal—to something closer: attempts at transition between capitalism and socialism. Barb, as we have seen, ridicules the strawman that the peasantry, as soon as it receives land, will rise up against the socialist revolution. But she leaves aside the issue that the peasantry's attitude to revolution does change depending on whether it is democratic or socialist revolution. And this is one of the key issues facing the proletariat.

Instead, Barb cites Lenin's views about alliance with the peasantry without going into his analysis of the overall nature of the peasantry and of its different sections. But Lenin pointed out that the peasant movement, so long as the peasantry acts as a whole, is a bourgeois-democratic movement, not a socialist movement. It is the rural laborers and the agricultural semi-proletariat (poor peasantry) who are part of the base for socialist revolution, whereas the peasantry as a whole is unstable.

For example, here is Lenin describing, in 1905, the social forces of the revolution:

*"The proletariat must carry the democratic revolution to completion, allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush the autocracy's resistance by force and paralyze the bourgeoisie's instability. The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, allying to itself the mass of the semiproletarian elements of the population, so as to crush the bourgeoisie's resistance by force and paralyze the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. Such are the tasks of the proletariat..."*<sup>13</sup>

Lenin held that the "the revolutionary democratic-dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" represented the decisive victory of the democratic revolution, as opposed to "the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat", which represented a "full socialist revolution".<sup>14</sup>

And he pointed out:

"...The success of the peasant insurrection, the victory of the democratic revolution will merely clear the way for a genuine and decisive struggle for socialism, on the basis of a democratic republic. In this struggle the peasantry, as a land-owning class, will play the same treacherous, unstable part as is now being played by the bour-

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<sup>12</sup>(...continued)

ism" embarrassing, although she doesn't say why. Yet the content of the idea of "weak socialism" was the above view of Lenin on the relation of workers and peasants, and other views of Marx and Lenin on the transition to socialism, and its cutting point was to show that collectivization and state industry under a popular government was not yet Marxist socialism.

<sup>13</sup>*Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, Sec. 12, pp. 109-110, Chinese ed. or *Collected Works*, vol. 9, p. 100, emphasis as in the original.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, Postscript. Section II.

geoisie in the struggle for democracy. *To forget this is to forget socialism, to deceive oneself and others, regarding the real interests and tasks of the proletariat.*<sup>15</sup>

In 1918, after the revolutions of 1917, Lenin reiterated the same thought. He wrote that:

"...The Bolsheviks formulated the alignment of class forces in the bourgeois revolution as follows: the proletariat, winning over the peasants, will neutralize the liberal bourgeoisie and utterly destroy the monarchy, medievalism and the landlord system.

"It is the alliance between the proletariat and the peasants in general that reveals the bourgeois character of the revolution, for the peasants in general are small producers who exist on the basis of commodity production. Further, the Bolsheviks then added, the proletariat will win over the entire semi-proletariat (all the working and exploited people), will neutralize the middle peasants and overthrow the bourgeoisie; this will be a socialist revolution, as distinct from a bourgeois-democratic revolution."<sup>16</sup>

Thus the peasantry was, along with the proletariat, the main social basis for a popular democratic revolution in Russia. But Lenin held that it is "to forget socialism" to believe that the peasantry as a whole would be such a force for socialism. It would be, in fact, a sort of populist "socialism", which sees all the toilers as united, and doesn't see the different class interests between the workers and the small proprietors.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, Postscript. Section III, p. 153 or *Collected Works*, vol. 9, p. 136, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup>"The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky," Ch. "Subserviency to the Bourgeoisie in the Guise of 'Economic Analysis'", *Collected Works*, vol. 28, pp. 294-95

<sup>17</sup>Barb refers in a few places to the proletariat working only with sections of the peasantry, adding the word "small" or "certain sections of" in square brackets (p. 53, col. 2 and col. 3). But in most places, she speaks of the peasantry in general. And, as we have seen, she gets indignant at quotations where the peasantry in general is characterized as having a petty-bourgeois stand. She slides back and forth between talking of the peasantry as a whole as the basis for socialism—and in a couple of places shrugging and qualifying the term "peasantry". This amounts, in theory, to sliding back and forth between the standpoint of the democratic and the socialist revolution. In practice, it amounts to trying to cover over a serious political issue by handing the reader a nice phrase, a lollipop. It is precisely such vagueness that often characterizes populist socialism, which takes up one nice-sounding slogan after another, and never pursues any idea to its conclusion. By way of contrast, Leninism puts into the forefront the petty-bourgeois nature of the peasantry as a whole, and the distinction between the various sections of the peasantry.

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Let me give an example of how nonchalantly Barb deals with the issue of differences among ~~of~~ the peasantry. In this case, Barb alters a quotation from Lenin by adding the word "small" in square brackets without realizing that it doesn't belong there. She quotes Lenin talking about a "special form of class alliance between the proletariat...and the [small] peasantry." (p. 53, col. 3) I couldn't find this quotation in the source she gives. But there is the more famous quotation that goes:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat is a specific form of class alliance between the proletariat, the vanguard of the working people, and the numerous non-proletarian strata of the working people (petty bourgeoisie, small proprietors, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, etc.), or the majority of these strata, ..." (The word "specific" appears as "special" in some other translations. And the parenthetical list of the different strata is Lenin's and not an addition to the quote.)

Lenin's idea is that the vanguard of the working people, the proletariat, rallies around itself, or makes agreements with, the mass of the working people. It makes no sense to "correct" this quotation to say that the vanguard rallies around itself only the small peasants, rather than the majority of the peasantry. The rural proletariat and semi-proletariat (small peasantry) are closely linked to the urban proletariat, and they seek to unite around them various small proprietors such as the middle peasantry.

This is made clearer if one sees how Lenin continues the quotation. He talks of this special type of alliance as referring even to neutralizing various sections of the working people. And he stresses the difference between the proletariat and the non-proletarian working people as an all-round class difference affecting their views ~~peasantry~~ as classes. Thus, a few sentences after the part we have quoted above, Lenin elaborates further:

"...It is a specific kind of alliance which takes shape in a specific situation, namely, fierce civil war; it is an alliance between firm supporters of socialism and its vacillating allies, sometimes 'neutrals' (in which case instead of an agreement on struggle the alliance becomes an agreement on neutrality); an alliance between economically, politically, socially, and spiritually different classes." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 29, "Foreword to the published speech, 'Deception of the people with slogans of freedom and equality', p. 381.)

But Barb corrected Lenin's idea because all she got out of this quotation is praise for the peasantry. She didn't see the distinction Lenin's makes between who is the basic force for socialism and the other working people. This moves her, on this issue, towards populist socialism, which overlooks such things.

Yet Barb, who ignores these issues, postures that "Trotsky took no notice of the class divisions within the peasantry." (p.

(continued...)



Does this mean that the socialist revolution oppresses or hates the mass of peasantry? Not at all. This would be the way populist socialism denounces Marxism—recognition of the class struggle in the countryside or of the vacillations of the petty-bourgeoisie is regarded as sheer hatred of humanity.

### A brief bourgeois-democratic interlude

Perhaps related to her view of the peasantry, Barb holds that the democratic revolution is at most a brief interlude before the socialist revolution. She never discusses its particular class character and its relation to the peasantry.

Let's see how she puts it. She writes that: "...the Bolsheviks were a proletarian party and regarded the bourgeois revolution as a brief preliminary stage to the socialist revolution." (p. 46, col. 3) As we shall see in a moment, the Bolsheviks never promised that the interlude between the democratic and socialist revolutions would have any particular length, brief or otherwise.

But first more on Barb's view. Her assertion that the interlude is brief appears to be connected to a tendency to collapse the two stages of revolution together. In the section of her article discussing Trotsky's theory of "permanent" revolution, she gives a quote from Trotsky that says, in part, "the complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is conceivable only in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. leaning on (or basing itself on—CIWVTJ) the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat...would inevitably place on the order of the day not only democratic but socialistic tasks as well..." (Barb's underlining.)<sup>18</sup>

Barb's comment is that "This doesn't sound too bad..." (Barb's underlining). She doesn't seem to see much wrong with holding that the democratic revolution establishes the dictator-

ship of the proletariat.<sup>19</sup>

This is particularly striking as Trotsky is polemicizing against Lenin's well-known view that the most radical conclusion of the democratic revolution was a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers' and peasants". Barb criticizes this or that from Trotsky's statement, without ever mentioning the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship. Apparently the problem she has is that the dictatorship of the workers' and peasants, which Lenin regarded as a description of democratic revolution, is pretty much how she pictures socialism.

Barb does mention the issue of "skipping stages" and explain it as follows: she refers to Trotsky's "pre-Revolutionary slogan 'No tsar, but a workers' government'" and says it "left out the peasantry entirely". So she does repeat the Bolshevik view that Trotsky's version of "permanent revolution" skips over the peasantry, skips stages, etc. But she doesn't seem to know what this criticism of Trotsky actually refers to. She makes it sound as if this meant that Trotsky didn't think the peasantry would play any role in the revolutionary assault on the old order.<sup>20</sup>

But that wasn't the issue. Trotsky described the peasantry as one of the forces involved in the battle. What he "skipped over" was the specific character of the petty-bourgeois politics the peasantry in general gives to the movement. Trotsky pointed to the fact the politics of the petty-bourgeoisie is unstable and vacillating, and that the petty-bourgeoisie can't create a new society separate from that of capitalism (the society where the bourgeoisie rules) or socialism (the society that the proletariat wants to build). But he stretched this analysis to an absurdity, turning it into its opposite. In his view, the peasantry had to simply follow behind the program of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, because it couldn't have an "independent" stand.

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<sup>17</sup>(...continued...)

53, col. 3) Well, Trotsky said many wrong things about the peasantry, but he did recognize divisions among it. The question is, when will Barb make the divisions among the peasantry central to her discussion of democratic and socialist revolution?

<sup>18</sup>See her article, p. 49, col. 2-3. The full quote as cited in Barb's article is

"The perspective of permanent revolution may be summarized in the following way: the complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is conceivable only in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. leaning on (or basing itself on—CIWVTJ) the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which would inevitably place on the order of the day not only democratic but socialistic tasks as well, would at the same time give a powerful impetus to the international socialist revolution. Only the victory of the proletariat in the West could protect Russia from bourgeois restoration and assure it the possibility of rounding out the establishment of socialism."

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<sup>19</sup>Barb's criticism (p. 49, col. 3) goes in full:

"This doesn't sound too bad, except for the part about 'leaning' on the peasants. 'Rounding out' socialism is conveniently vague. What this means in essence, however, is that it is impossible to build socialism in one country. Most important, it omits a concept of 'stages' (the 'uninterruptedness' aspect). Trotsky has been accused of skipping the stage of the democratic revolution, e.g., his pre-Revolutionary slogan 'No tsar, but a workers' government,' which left out the peasantry entirely, but I think it is equally accurate to say that he skipped the stage of the transition from the socialist political revolution to the economic creation of socialism, because he thought it couldn't be done. Trotsky's concept of the 'transition' period went more like this: the transition from the Revolution in Russia to revolutions in other countries."

She then moves on to an additional passage from Trotsky and her comments.

<sup>20</sup>Recall that she holds that to say there's a "workers' state" under socialism also negates the peasantry. Hence for her to say that something "skips" the peasantry doesn't mean that she thinks it is "skipping" the democratic revolution.

Really? When the peasantry burns down the landlord's estates and seizes the land, it is not "independent" of capitalism, and it is in fact giving an tremendous impetus to capitalist development. Yet in most cases in the 20th century, this would horrify the local bourgeoisie. And if the peasantry is rising in revolt against autocracy and landlordism under the leadership of the proletariat, it will still fight for its own view of how the land and other matters should be settled, and it will still continue the vacillations characteristic of its class position.

But in Trotsky's caricature, the peasantry was directly taking up the stand of either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Since the liberal bourgeoisie was not revolutionary, it followed that the revolutionary peasants would support a proletarian government. So the "complete victory" of the democratic revolution would, in Trotsky's view, install a workers' government, of essentially socialist character.

And how does Barb present this issue?

She raises, a few pages later, that the proletariat and the peasantry are in alliance in the democratic revolution and in the socialist revolution. She thus skips over the issue of the specific class nature of the peasantry, and simply says that the proletariat and peasantry are always in alliance. In this paragraph she raises that "Trotsky...[set] up a strawman argument in order to defend the idea that the peasantry was 'utterly incapable of an independent political role'." (p. 53, col. 3, emph. as in orig.) As we have seen, this is part of Trotsky's argument skipping over the democratic revolution and the democratic nature of a movement of the peasantry in general. But Barb answers it by saying that "Lenin, of course, never talked about the independent role of the peasantry, but rather of a 'special form of class alliance between the proletariat...and the [small] peasantry....'" (emph. as in the original)

Let's see. Barb says that Trotsky denied the "independent" role of the peasantry. But perhaps she meant to say that the whole issue of "independence" is a strawman, as she opposes it by saying that Lenin *never* talked of the "independent" role of peasantry. But any case, Barb answers an argument about whether there is a democratic stage of revolution by giving Lenin's description of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the "special form of class alliance" of socialism.. She thus skips over the heart of the issue, the nature of peasant politics and the issue of the democratic revolution.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast, Lenin didn't evade this but drew a sharp picture of the features of the different stages of revolution.

Lenin pointed out that the proletariat will strive to develop the democratic revolution into a socialist revolution. But he by no means promised that the bourgeois-democratic regime would

be a brief one, as Barb does. This depends entirely on the conditions in the country and on how the revolution unfolds. Only if one regarded the peasantry as inherently socialist could one guarantee that the revolution would immediately go to socialism.

This century has seen many petty-bourgeois nationalist and revolutionary trends. It makes a hash of politics to simply reduce them to either proletarian or big bourgeois trends, as Trotsky does. The important and insightful analysis of the vacillating role of the petty-bourgeois is turned on its head, when it ends up denying that petty-bourgeois politics can and does put its stamp on certain movements. Here, as elsewhere, Barb, who correctly says that Trotsky is mechanical, undialectical etc., can't recognize the actual mechanical and undialectical features in his theory of "permanent revolution".

Lenin said in 1905 that

"...from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organized proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop halfway. If we do not now and immediately promise all sorts of 'socialization', that is because we know the actual conditions for that task to be accomplished, and we do not gloss over the new class struggle burgeoning within the peasantry, but reveal that struggle."<sup>22</sup>

He held that

"The struggle against the autocracy is a temporary and transient task for socialists, but to ignore or neglect this task in any way amounts to betrayal of socialism and service to reaction."<sup>23</sup>

But he didn't promise that the period between the two revolutions would be brief. On the contrary, he stated:

"One circumstance, however, must not be forgotten, although it is frequently lost sight of in discussions about the 'sweep' of the revolution. It must not be forgotten that the point at issue is not the difficulties this problem presents, but the road along which we must seek and attain its solution...It is precisely on the fundamental nature of our activity...that our views differ. We emphasize this because careless and unscrupulous people too frequently confuse two different questions, namely, the question of the direction in which the road leads, i.e., the selection of one of two different roads, and the question of how easily the goal can be reached, or of how near the goal is on the given road."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Note that Barb didn't intend to describe the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants, or else she wouldn't have added the word "small" to Lenin's quotation. She is adding small because she is thinking of socialism (and doesn't realize that even in the case of socialism, the word "small" doesn't belong here, since Lenin isn't describing the motive force of the socialist revolution but the broader net of class alliances created by proletariat and semi-proletariat).

<sup>22</sup>"Social-Democracy's Attitude Towards the Peasant Movement", *Collected Works*, vol. 9, p. 237

<sup>23</sup>"Two tactics of social-democracy in the democratic revolution", near the end of Ch. 10, *Col. Works*, vol. 9, p. 86.

<sup>24</sup>"Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic (continued...)

The interval between the democratic and socialist revolution depends on a number of factors, such as whether the democratic revolution is brought to its most radical conclusion, and the organization and consciousness of the proletariat and semi-proletariat, etc. Trotsky merged the two revolutions, based on the view that the revolutionary peasantry could do nothing but follow the proletariat, and asserted that the democratic revolution culminates in a "workers' government". Barb insists that the period between the democratic and socialist revolutions is brief, apparently based on the view that the revolutionary peasant is inherently socialist. For her, it's just a matter of "carry(ing) through the democratic revolution in such a way that it grows over into a socialist revolution" (p. 50, col. 2) rather than their being particular concrete conditions besides the policy of the revolutionary party. Both her and Trotsky's views orient one against looking at the actual factors facing the revolution. And they perhaps have more in common concerning the peasantry than Barb realizes.

### Just give it our best shot

Barb goes to the extent of describing Leninism as just carrying out a socialist revolution without particular analysis of the immediate conditions. She writes: "Lenin's totally materialist view was roughly: Let's give it our best shot. As he put it, 'It would be a criminal betrayal of our socialist (communist) goal not to (take power).'" (p. 50, col. 3)

Materialism means examining the actual conditions facing one in the world, rather than just acting on the basis of one's desires. Yet Barb reduces Leninism to carrying out a revolution just on general, universal principles. And it just isn't so.

Barb says her quote about taking power comes from the beginning of "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power".<sup>25</sup> I have not yet found the exact words she cites, but there is a spirited statement that "...a political party...would have no right to exist, would be unworthy of the name of party, would be a nonentity in any sense, if it refused to take power when opportunity offers."

But Lenin then goes on, in this almost 50 page article, to analyze all the arguments against the Bolsheviks taking power. And he sketches a number of the economic and political measures that the proletarian government will take, and why they can succeed.

Another particularly interesting article in this regard, written a few weeks earlier, is "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It".<sup>26</sup> Here he places the emphasis on outlining the economic measures needed to avoid economic catastrophe in Russia, showing that avoiding the catastrophe requires steps towards socialism, and that it also requires the proletariat and poor peasantry to come to power.

<sup>24</sup> (...continued)

Revolution", June-July 1905, p. 110, near the end of Ch. 12. emphasis added, Chinese ed.

<sup>25</sup> *Collected Works*, vol. 26, Oct. 1, 1917.

<sup>26</sup> *Collected Works*, vol. 25, Sept. 10-14, 1917.

Moreover, to set the original course to the October revolution, Lenin wrote his famous "April theses". He didn't just state "let's do it", but gave reasons as to what the next step should be.

It's a parody to reduce Leninism to simply seizing state power and improvising as one goes.

Yet Barb makes this parody into one of the key points of her article on Trotskyism. She says that the essence of Trotskyism is phrases "which in reality translate: 'it can't be done.'" (p. 45, col. 1) But Lenin, she says, was the "intensely practical and pragmatic person" who just "adjusted the plan" but keep right on going. (p. 51, col. 1) His slogan was, in Barb's words, "give it our best shot". And, as we might recall, she quotes him to the effect that "No theory is half so important as practice".

As far as the analysis of the stage of revolution, I think Barb's presentation of "just do it" has more to do with how Trotskyism approaches the issue than Leninism. The various trends of Trotskyism take the essence of the theory of "permanent revolution" to be that the character of revolution in each country is set by the overall world conditions. Then they assert that, in the era of imperialism, all revolutions should be proletarian ones, of essentially socialist character. This is independent of the conditions prevailing locally in each country. It means that one's theory becomes more and more irrelevant to one's practice.<sup>27</sup>

### On Cooperation

Barb's attitude to theory and the theoretical analysis of practical conditions may be related to her practice of usually quoting only a few words from Lenin's articles. But there is one exception. She cites long passages from "On Cooperation", and spends an entire page on it.

Barb thinks that this article summed up the basic lessons of Leninism on the peasantry, and that it also provides answers to what should have been done in the Soviet Union. In her reply to me, Barb says:

"I think I did a little more than quote a few dozen words from Lenin. The discussion of 'On Co-

<sup>27</sup> Trotskyism doesn't exactly close its eyes to local difficulties altogether. But it has a stereotyped response: it asserts that no country can establish socialism by itself. Aid from more advanced countries, or from the whole world going socialist, will overcome the local obstacles. So they end up with a socialist revolution that establishes the dictatorship of the proletariat, but which does not have the internal possibilities to progress beyond a certain point towards socialism. In a way, this theory takes account of the fact that revolution faces local conditions. But it does so in a stereotyped way: socialist revolution everywhere, but no one can establish socialism until everyone does. Such answers put a damper on examining the concrete conditions facing the particular country, or study of the past revolutionary experience, because no matter what measures are implemented, victory or defeat depends in the main on whether there is world revolution

Cooperation' set forth his views quite thoroughly on what needed to be done with the peasantry to progress towards socialism. On the other hand, Lenin said more in a few words than most others do in a lifetime."

Indeed, Barb dramatizes the issue in her article and presents Stalin and the Soviet leadership seeking to suppress this article. She writes:

"There was a nasty rumor at the time that a fantastic scheme was concocted to publish only one (fake) copy of *Pravda* featuring the essay to show to Lenin, but that the conspirators were dissuaded by the watchdog vigilance of Krupskaya!" (p. 53, col. 3)

If only they had followed this article! If only Stalin and Trotsky hadn't "believed that real socialism in the Soviet Union was impossible—and dare I say, undesirable" (p. 51, col. 2), and instead just carried out the plan outlined in "On Cooperation". Then all the subsequent disasters would have been averted! In these "few words" (eight pages), Lenin solved the riddle that communist activists have pondering for decades since.

Now, this article of Lenin's is interesting, but it is only a sketch. It set forward that collectivizing the peasantry was the key issue, and talked about creating all "that is necessary to build a complete socialist society". It said that this "is still not the building of socialist society, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for it."<sup>28</sup> And it puts forward that it will, "at best", take "one or two decades" to accomplish this preliminary work to the building of socialism.<sup>29</sup>

But, as one might expect of a brief sketch, it didn't take up various issues.

Consider this. The article stated that with the co-operative societies: "...we have now found that degree of private interest, of private commercial interest, with state supervision and control of this interest, that degree of its subordination to the common interests which was formerly the stumbling-block for very many socialists." (p. 468) Wouldn't this have to be tested out in the course of the decades needed to put this plan into operation? At a time when there were very few agricultural production co-ops, this degree of subordination had still to be tested. And even more so, since it can be noted that the term "co-operatives" covers a wide range of different type of economic organization. Which types would be attractive to the peasantry, and what effect would they have on the overall economy? Moreover, even full collectivization and state-controlled industry, though under a working class government, are still not socialism, so what are the economic laws that govern such an economy?<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Collected Works*, vol. 33, p. 468.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

<sup>30</sup> Barb talks about adjusting plans until she reaches the article "On Co-operation". Earlier she states that "The real point is that, as a Marxist, Lenin was an intensely practical and pragmatic person, as I believe all scientific socialists are. If  
(continued...)

Or again, Lenin emphasized that the co-operatives must "not only generally and always enjoy certain privileges, but that these privileges should be of a purely material nature (a favorable bank-rate, etc.) The co-operatives must be granted state loans..."<sup>31</sup>

Doesn't this indicate that the peasantry as a whole won't simply collectivize out of socialist sentiment, but that it needs material incentives to do so? And if so, how large did these incentives have to be? Did the Soviet Union have sufficient resources to provide them? Could the economy grow fast enough to provide them while agriculture was still mainly in the hands of the small-peasant economy?

Lenin's sketch raised various issues, but it was not the plan for how to overcome them.

Moreover, I think there were also some issues that this sketch didn't raise. In particular, what were the political alignments among the peasantry and the population as a whole likely to be in the 20 years or so while collectivization was taking place?

Lenin pointed out in 1918, that the October socialist revolution of 1917 was, at first, a bourgeois-democratic revolution in the countryside. He wrote:

"The victorious Bolshevik revolution...meant the complete destruction of the monarchy and landlordism (which had *not* been destroyed before the October Revolution). We carried the *bourgeois* revolution to its conclusion. The peasantry supported us *as a whole*. Its antagonism to the socialist proletariat could not reveal itself all at once. The Soviets united the peasantry *in general*. The class divisions among the peasantry had not yet matured, had not yet come into the open."<sup>32</sup>

Lenin then goes on to discuss how the class differentiation proceeded in the countryside. One and a half pages later he stated:

"All who are familiar with the situation and have been in the rural districts, declare that it is only now, in the summer and autumn of 1918, that the rural districts themselves are passing through the 'October' (i.e., proletarian) revolution. A turn is coming. The wave of kulak revolts is giving way to a rise of the poor, to the growth

<sup>30</sup> (...continued)

something didn't work, if the social conditions changed, if the balance of world forces changed, he analyzed the situation and adjusted the plan. but he always kept his eye on the goal..." (p. 51, col. 1-2). Did this need to constantly adjust and — I would add, study experience and theorize about it — end with the article "On Co-operation"?

<sup>31</sup> *Collected Works*, vol. 33, p. 469.

<sup>32</sup> "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky" (October-November, 1918), Ch. "Subserviency to the Bourgeoisie in the Guise of 'Economic Analysis'", Chinese ed., p.99-100

of the 'Committees of Poor Peasants.' "<sup>33</sup>  
And a page later he sums up:

"A year after the proletarian revolution in the capitals, and under its influence and with its assistance, the proletarian revolution began in the remote rural districts, ....

"Having completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution in conjunction with the peasantry as a whole, the Russian proletariat passed on definitely to the socialist revolution when it succeeded in splitting the rural population, in winning over the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians, and in uniting them against the kulaks and the bourgeoisie, including the peasant bourgeoisie."<sup>34</sup>

Very well. But what happened subsequently? The class struggle in the countryside died down, and the Committees of Poor Peasants could not be maintained. The low level of collectivization in the countryside (prior to the first five-year plan) is presumably related, in part, to this. But this means that the countryside took steps back towards a bourgeois-democratic peasantry.

Well, what political trends are likely to exist among the

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<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 102-3.

peasantry during the couple of decades that might be needed for slow collectivization? And what political trends would exist in the city, allowing the proletarian city to sacrifice substantially to ensure aid to the peasant countryside? Could the Bolsheviks maintain a popular regime with mass support under these conditions?

These are all questions facing the communists at the time, whether they dealt with them explicitly or not. They are questions that Lenin's writings themselves bring to mind—precisely because Lenin is one of the most profound writers ever on social revolution. Some of these questions are brought to mind when reading "On Co-operation", but they aren't answered. When Barb presents this article as answers, rather than as pointing to questions, she is converting Leninism into an empty icon. When Barb presents "On Co-operation" as a replacement for just about everything Lenin wrote on the peasantry, she is pushing aside some of the most profound theoretical legacy the proletariat has. It is a farce and a parody to set up "On Co-operation" against the rest of Lenin's work.

We don't need bitter pills and lollipops, and we don't need icons. We need revolutionary theory. The repudiation of Trotskyism is essential for this, as the dry, stereotyped dogmas of Trotskyism are not only wrong, but they paralyze further thought on the key issues. But it must be based on clarifying theoretical issues, not on preparing poison pills.

(to be continued)

□



# Notes to Barb's article

## "Dealing with Trotsky: Idiocy or Treachery"

Barb's article on Trotsky is one of the those which I have discussed in my comments on *CWVTJ* #7 ("The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism"). But Barb left out the references from her article, writing: "To save space, I have omitted citations. If anyone wants sources, of quotes or other information, I'll be glad to furnish them." (*CWVTJ* #7, p. 54, col. 3) In order to help any reader who wants to look further in the issues, I am providing the notes below. I wrote to Barb, who kindly provided them. However, she had lost her manuscript and original references for her article. She wrote that "Because I had erased my original drafts, I occasionally had to resort to a different text, with a different translation, to reconstruct the notes — but the essence is the same."

Below are the references and some additional comments (and one correction to the article) supplied by Barb. I have made without comment a couple of minor corrections in the page numbers supplied by Barb for references to Lenin's *Collected Works*, when the correction was obvious. I have also added a few comments of my own, in italics in [square brackets]. I have not commented on minor changes in wording as occur in different translations.

Unfortunately, I found Barb's hard notes to use, even though I had Lenin's *Collected Works* and many of Trotsky's key works at my disposal. I think that notes should be designed, as far as possible, so that the reader can look more deeply into the material and spend time thinking about it, rather than searching endlessly just to find the reference. But while some of the references were clear, I spent hours just trying to find other references. I also thought more attention should be paid to getting the idea right than seems to be shown in some of the notes.

— Joseph Green

### Source Abbreviations:

DA — Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the 4th International. NY: Labor Publications, 1972

DEF — In Defense of Marxism: Against the Petty-bourgeois Opposition. Pathfinder Press, 1973.

LO — The Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1928-29. NY: Pathfinder, 1980.

PR — Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects. NY: Pathfinder, 1969.

RB — The Revolution Betrayed. NY: Pioneer Pubs., 1957.

TA — The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology. NY: Dell, 1964.

WHAT — What is the Permanent Revolution: Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution. Spartacist Pamphlet, 1970. (Pages are not numbered, so I have numbered them)

CW — Lenin, *Collected Works*. Moscow, Progress Pubs., 1964, 1965, 1966, 1972, 1973.

SW — Lenin, *Selected Works*. Moscow, Progress Pubs., 1964.

p. 44, col. 1

Lenin: "No theory...practice"

Lenin, CW (1973), Vol. 32, "Trade Unions, the Present Situation, and Trotsky's Mistakes," p. 30. He continues: "Let's analyze what we have done."

*[Actually there are intervening words: "That is why when I hear: 'Let's discuss 'coalescence', I say:...' The words Barb cites occurs in the midst of a long passage discussing the particular issue of the "coalescence" of the state and the trade unions, in which Lenin argues at one point (p. 29) that "Then there is the question of 'coalescing'. The best thing to do about 'coalescing' right now is to keep quiet. Speech is silver, but silence is golden. Why so? It is because we have got down to coalescing in practice; there is not a single large gubernia economic council, no major department of the Supreme Economic Council, the People's Commissariat for Communications, etc., where something is not being coalesced in practice. But are the results all they should be? Ay, there's the rub...But we have yet to make a business-like study of our own practical experience;..."]*

Lenin: "Abandon...future"

CW (1965), Vol. 27, "Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)," p. 109.

p. 46, col. 1

Lenin's "testament"

E.g., Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge* (NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989), p. 80.

*[It's also in Lenin's *Collected Works*. Lenin's letter to the 13th Congress, or the "testament", is in Vol. 36, pp. 593-611. The particular quote Barb uses is on p. 595.]*

p. 46, col. 2

Trotsky: "hero of this biography"

WHAT, p. 10.

Lenin: On Romantic Revolutionism

CW (1966), Vol. 33, "The Importance of Gold....," pp. 110-111. Here Lenin gives a characterization of the Romantic Revolutionary which fits Trotsky to a "T":

"The greatest, perhaps the only danger to the genuine revolutionary is that of exaggerated revolutionism, ignoring the limits and conditions in which revolutionary methods are

appropriate and can be successfully employed. True revolutionaries have mostly come a cropper when they began to write 'revolution' with a capital R, to elevate 'revolution' to something almost divine, to lose their heads, to lose the ability to reflect, weigh and ascertain in the coolest and most dispassionate manner at what moment, under what circumstances and in which sphere of action you must act in a revolutionary manner, and at what moment, under what circumstances and in which sphere you must turn to reformist action. True revolutionaries will perish (not that they will be defeated from outside, but that their work will suffer internal collapse) only if they abandon their sober outlook and take it into their heads that the 'great, victorious, world' revolution can and must solve all problems in a revolutionary manner under all circumstances and in all spheres of action. If they do this, their doom is certain."

Lenin's definition of "internationalism":

CW (1964), Vol. 24, "Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution," p. 75.

**p. 46, col. 3**

Trotsky: "United States of the World"

TA, "War, the International," p. 74.

"...the Revolution joined Trotsky"

*Left in Form, Right in Essence*, ed. Carl Davidson. (Guardian Pamphlet, 1973), p. 29 quotes Michael Miller's pamphlet, *From Trotskyism to Social Imperialism* as using the phrase. Miller makes an interesting point: "From Trotsky's point of view, a miracle happened at this propitious moment in history...40,000 Bolshevik workers joined Trotsky since he had foreseen everything!...The problem with Trotsky's theory is that it requires no party at all....The Bolsheviks, having finally come around to the 'correct idea', were able to lead the revolution despite having had an incorrect line for 14 years prior to the event!"

Trotsky: The Bolsheviks adopted all his theories

E.g., WHAT, pp. 12-13; PR, pp. 166-67; see also, 1922 Preface to 1905, "Our Differences," and many, many other sources; in other words, a constant refrain.

**p. 47, col. 1**

pp. 46-47, Lenin: "idiocy or treachery"

CW (1972), Vol. 26, "The Crisis Has Matured," p. 82.

Trotsky: "But should Europe...back"

PR, "Preface, Results and Prospects," p. 31; see also, TA, "The Congress of the Soviet Dictatorship," p. 107 and "Progress of the Proletarian Revolution," p. 130.

Lenin: "Without a revolution in Germany...perish"

CW (1965), Vol. 27, "7th Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)," p. 98.

Lenin: "It has turned out...delayed."

*Left in form*, p.7; see also, CW (1966), Vol. 33, "7th Congress," p. 98 and CW (1966), Vol. 33, "9th All-Russia Congress of Soviets," p. 145.

[Neither of the CW citations seem to have the particular quotation, and the first one is presumably to the 7th Moscow Gubernia Conf. of the RCP, not the Seventh Congress.]

Lenin: "Is the existence...It is a fact."

CW (1966), Vol. 33, "9th All-Russia Congress of Soviets," p. 151

Lenin on prospects of world revolution.

As early as Brest-Litovsk, Lenin warned against counting on the German revolution (CW, 1965), Vol. 27, "7th Congress", adding, "Yes, we shall see the world revolution, but for the time being it is...a very beautiful fairy-tale," p. 102. (Note: In writings of this period, "world revolution," "European revolution" and "revolution in the advanced capitalist countries" are often used interchangeably.)

**p. 47, col. 2**

Trotsky: "The working class...in Europe"

PR, "Results and Prospects," p. 115.

Trotsky: "their limited rural outlook...allegiances"

PR, "Results and Prospects," p. 77

**p. 47, col. 3**

Trotsky's role in Brest-Litovsk:

E.g., Edw. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol. 3 (NY: Norton, 1980), pp. 20-42. For Lenin's criticism of Trotsky's position, see CW (1965), Vol. 27, documents of the "7th Congress," especially pp. 113-5; and "Peace or War," pp. 40-41: "I said that the policy of refusing the proposed peace 'would, perhaps, answer the needs of someone who is striving for an eloquent, spectacular, brilliant effect, but would completely fail to reckon with the objective relationships of class forces and material factors...' "

Lenin: "There is no doubt...happen."

CW (1972), Vol. 26, "Thesis on the Question of a Separate Peace," pp. 443-44.

**p. 48, col. 1**

Lenin: "Trotsky's thesis...trade unions."

CW (1973), Vol. 32, "The Trade Unions, the Present Situation," pp. 37, 42.

**p. 48, col. 2**

*Correction*: end of Paragraph 1, "socialist accumulation" should read "primitive socialist accumulation", Carr, Vol. II, p. 382.

Trotsky's views on NEP:  
E.g., Carr, Vol. II, pp. 379-383.

"Trotsky on German Revolution:  
"weakness..leadership"

TA, "War and the International," p.77. He proposes a "world communist party" with "sections," TA, "Criticism of Socialism in One Country," pp. 146-47. The 4th International was to be such a body. He maintains that a major cause of the failure of the 3rd International was because it was composed of national parties, in addition to being dominated by Soviet interests. It is difficult to see how that would have been avoided if the national "parties" had been national "sections." See also, LO (1923-25), "The Defense of the German Revolution", pp. 163-174.

col. 2/3, Trotsky on internal defeat of the Soviet Union: "The main cause...labor"

LO, "What is the 'Smychka'?", pp. 352-53.

**p. 48, col. 3**

Trotsky: "if we...world"  
*Pravda*, Aug. 5, 1924.

Trotsky on uneven and combined development of capitalism

TA, "The Law of Uneven and Combined Development". He applies this theory to explain the Russian Revolution, but is unable to extend a coherent analysis to the rest of the world.

Trotsky on defeat of Soviet Union in World War II: "only a short...countries", and "If it is not...October Revolution."

R. Palme Dutt, *The Internationale* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964), pp. 248, 247.

**p. 49, col. 1**

Cannon's characterization of SWP:  
*Left in Form*, p. 20.

**p. 49, col. 2**

Trotsky: "The initiator...prerequisites."  
WHAT, p. 10.

Trotsky on Permanent Revolution

1st formulation, 1905-6: TA, "The Theory of the Permanent Revolution," pp. 62-65, and PR, pp. 130-35; later formulation: PR, "What is the Permanent Revolution? Basic Postulates." pp. 276-281; see also WHAT, p. 12.

Trotsky on Socialism in One Country

TA, "The USSR and the Problems of the Transitional Epoch" and "Criticism of the Theory of 'Socialism in One Country'," pp. 145-150.

Trotsky: "main...Bolshevism"

Trotsky, *The New Lines* (pamphlet, 1923/24)

col. 2/3, Trotsky: "The perspective...socialism"  
WHAT, p. 12  
p. 49, col. 3, Trotsky: "No tsar...government"  
PR, pp. 221-23

**p. 49, col. 3**

Trotsky: "The organic...epoch"

TA, "Crit. of Soc. in One Country," p. 148

**p. 50, col. 1**

Marx's definition of permanent revolution: "While... 'permanent revolution'"

"Address to the Communist League"

[*Selected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 179, 185, the underlining was added by Barb]

**p. 50, col. 3**

Lenin: "It would...not to [take power]"

See CW (1972), Vol. 26, "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power," p. 90 and "The Crisis has Matured." p. 84.

[Neither reference has the exact quotation used by Barb, but the first one for example says that "...a political party..would have no right to exist,...would be a nonentity in any sense, if it refused to take power when opportunity offered."]

Lenin: "The uneven...separately"

CW (1964), Vol. 21, "Slogan for a United States of Europe," p. 342

Lenin: "Whole historical...features"

CW (1965), Vol. 30, "Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", p. 107

Lenin: "first steps of communism"

CW (1965), Vol. 30, "Economics and Politics...", p. 109

pp. 50 -51, Lenin: "Nay...radically"

CW (1965), Vol. 30, "Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", pp. 110,112-113

**p. 51, col. 1**

"The CP...roots"

CW (1966), Vol. 33, "The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy," pp. 184, 186

Lenin: "The proletariat...socialism"

CW (1966), Vol. 33, "The Role and Functions...", p. 189

**p. 51, col. 2**

Trotsky: "not a shred...it"

*Left in Form*, p. 8

Trotsky: "That is...diagnosis"

TA, "The USSR and the Problems of the Transitional Epoch," pp. 279-280; see also, DA, pp. 43-48

**p. 51, col. 3**

Trotsky on "national socialism"

PR, Introduction, p. 133; see also, DA, pp. 43-48

Trotsky on fascism

See Trotsky's pamphlet, *Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It* (Pathfinder, 1973) in which he gives a curiously non-economic analysis of fascism, blaming its rise on the CI, the perfidy of the German SD leaders, and the "complete incapacity of the [working class] to take into its own hands the fate of society," p. 28. Fascism is characterized as "counter-revolutionary despair," p. 10.

Trotsky on "degenerated workers' state"

"The Soviet Union is a contradictory society, halfway between capitalism and socialism," but, "To define the Soviet regime as transitional, or intermediate, means to abandon such finished social categories, as *capitalism* (and therewith "state capitalism") and also *socialism*," TA, "The Soviet Thermidor," p. 161; see also, DA, pp. 43-48; and DEF, "Again and Once More Again on the Nature of the USSR." Trotsky's refutation of state capitalism in the Soviet Union is found in RB, "On State Capitalism," pp. 245ff. This will be the subject of a forthcoming article.

"But Trotsky felt that this whatever it was..."

Or in his own words, "The gangsters of the state have transformed the workers' state into 'devil-know-what-it-is'." He employs the less than helpful analogy of a broken-down auto in which "the motor of the economy is damaged, but which still continues to run and which can be completely reconditioned with the replacement of some parts," DEF, "Again and Once More Again," p. 25

**p. 52, col. 1**

Trotsky: "Socialism...calculation"

*Left in Form*, p. 8

Trotsky: "In the last analysis...power"

DEF, "Again and Once More Again," p. 25

Trotsky on political revolution and "caste" v. "class"

TA, "USSR and the Problems of the Transitional Epoch" and "Whither the Soviet Union?" and "Whither the Soviet Union?" see also DA, pp. 43-48; and DEF, "The USSR in War." His position is that if one considers the state bureaucracy a "class," then the revolution has been defeated and capitalism has been restored, RB, "Additional Notes," xiv.

Trotsky on "bureaucratic collectivism"

DEF, "Again and Once More Again," p. 30, and "The USSR in War," pp. 5-11; see also, LO, "Philosophical Tendencies of

Bureaucratism".

**p. 52, col. 2**

Trotsky on counter-revolution, Thermidor, Bonapartism

TA, "The Soviet Thermidor" (form RB) and "Thesis on Revolution and Counter-Revolution"; see also, LO, "The Dangers of Bonapartism," "Analogies with Thermidor," and "Declaration to the 6th CI Congress," p. 139; and DEF, "Again and Once More Again".

Marx on Louis Bonaparte

"The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"

**p. 52, col. 3**

Lenin, Marx, Engels: "The most concentrated...economics"

CW (1973), Vol. 32, "The Trade Unions, the Present Situation," p. 32.

Lenin: "Comrade Trotsky...distortions"

CW (1973), Vol. 32, "The Trade Unions, the Present Situation," p. 24.

**p. 53, col. 1**

Trotsky: "...in consonance...Russia"

WHAT, p. 7

p. 53, col. 1, Trotsky: "On the occasions...proletariat."

WHAT, p. 7

col. 1/2, Trotsky: "No one...restoration

WHAT, p. 8

**p. 53, col. 2**

Lenin: "absurdly left"

[Barb listed the quote but gave no reference]

**p. 53, col. 3**

Trotsky: "I accused Lenin...peasantry"

PR, p. 201; Lenin: "From the Bolsheviks, Trotsky's original theory has borrowed their call for a decisive proletarian revolutionary struggle and for the conquest of political power by the proletariat, while from the Mensheviks it has borrowed 'repudiation' of the peasantry's role," CW (1964), Vol. 21, p. 419. [Barb's underlining]

Trotsky: "utterly incapable...role"

PR, "Results and Prospects," pp. 72-74

Trotsky: On "independent political role of the peasantry" and peasant party

PR, pp. 72-75, 128

Lenin: "special form...peasantry"

E.g., CW (1972), Vol. 26 "3rd All-Russia Congress of Soviets," p. 456

*[This quote doesn't seem to come from this article. However one can find elsewhere such statements as "The dictatorship of the proletariat is a specific form of class alliance between the proletariat, the vanguard of the working people, and the numerous non-proletarian strata of the working people (petty bourgeoisie, small proprietors, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, etc.), or the majority of these strata, ..." CW, vol. 29, "Foreword to the published speech, 'Deception of the people with slogans of freedom and equality', p. 381. And the world "specific" appears as "special" in other translations of this passage.]*

On rumor regarding Lenin's "On Co-operatives"

Medvedev mentions this situation in *On Stalin and Stalinism* (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 26027, in reference to efforts to suppress Lenin's last writings on revising the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection)

pp. 53-4, Lenin: "...since..automatically"

SW, Vol. 3, "On Co-operation," p. 698 (CW (1966), Vol. 33, pp. 467-472.

*[The particular quote comes from CW, p. 467. It is not quoted quite right in Barb's article. She has that "...socialism... will achieve its aim automatically." What Lenin said is that "...the socialism which in the past was legitimately treated with ridicule, scorn and contempt by those who were rightly convinced that it was necessary to wage the class struggle, the struggle for political power, etc., will achieve its aim automatically." Apparently in this passage the "socialism" being referred to is co-operative work, and those who treated it with ridicule etc. were the communists. Other passages in "On Co-operation" can be cited by those who wish to argue one way or the other about how far such co-operative work is equated with socialism in this article.]*

**p. 54, col. 1**

Lenin: "Indeed...peasant"

"On Co-operation". p. 699 [SW]

*[CW, vol. 33, p. 468. Barb's has "...all that is necessary to build a complete socialist society out of co-operatives alone?" when it is "...out of co-operatives alone, which we formerly ridiculed as huckstering and which from a certain aspect we*

*have the right to treat as such now, under NEP?" She also merges two paragraphs with "... " and adds underlining.]*

Lenin: "Given...socialism"

"On Co-operation," p. 701 SW [or p. 471, vol. 33, CW]

Lenin: "It will take...decades"

"On Co-operation," p. 700 SW [or p. 470, vol. 33, CW]

Lenin: "Nevertheless...object"

"On Co-operation," p. 700 SW [or p. 470, vol. 33, CW]

col. 1/2, Lenin: "Co-operation...socialism"

"On Co-operation," p. 702 SW [or p. 473, vol. 33, CW]

**p. 54, col. 2**

Lenin: "By reorganizing...revolution"

"On Co-operation," p. 703 SW

*[Or p. 474, vol. 33, CW—the extract in Barb's article is apparently a summary of a passage here.]*

Lenin: "Our opponents...base"

"On Co-operation," pp. 703-4 [SW]

*[CW, vol. 33, pp. 474-5. Barb says, in an insert to the extract from Lenin, that by "Our opponents" Lenin means, among others, Trotsky. But "our opponents" refers to the opponents of the Bolsheviks, not to the internal controversies within the party.]*

**p. 54, col. 3**

On percentage of peasant cooperatives

Medvedev, LHJ, p. 221.

"A study...written"

CW (1973), Vol. 32, "The Trade Unions, the Present Situation," p. 40. The ellipsis reads "and Bukharin".

*[If the reference Barb gives to p. 40 is correct, then Barb's passage is apparently adopted from the passage in CW in which Lenin, referring to Rudzutak's theses "The tasks of the trade unions in production", says: "There you have a platform, and it is very much better than the one Comrade Trotsky wrote after a great deal of thinking, and the one Comrade Bukharin wrote ...without any thinking at all. All of us...would profit from Comrade Rudzutak's experience, and this also goes for Comrade Trotsky and Comrade Bukharin."]* □

# Struggle

## A magazine of proletarian revolutionary literature

*Struggle* is an anti-establishment, revolutionary literary journal oriented to the working-class struggle. We seek to reach “disgruntled” workers, dissatisfied youth and all the oppressed and abused and inspire them to fight the rich capitalist rulers of the U.S. and the planet.

*Struggle* is open to a variety of artistic and literary forms and anti-establishment political and cultural views. We look for works with artistic power which rebel against some element of the capitalist power structure or against the system itself.

*Struggle* believes in the initiative of the oppressed themselves and opposes the bureaucratism that turned the Soviet workers’ government away from the socialist path in the early 1920’s. Until November 1993, *Struggle* was published by the Detroit Branch of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA, and the party gave great creative, political and material support to the magazine. But at the party’s Fifth Congress in November, a majority, discouraged by the lull in the mass movements, voted to disband the party without proposing any worked-out revolutionary alternative. The Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group and groups in other cities produce the *Communist Voice* theoretical journal, continuing in the spirit of the MLP. *Struggle* is associated with this trend. We will continue, but we need greater readers’ input, donations, subscriptions and help in distribution.

(Excerpted from the Editorial Policy)

*In the Spring 1995 issue, Vol. 11, No. 1:*

*Editorial:* “What is Revolutionary Literature?”

*Fiction:* “Expelled”  
“Voices”  
“The Skin off My Knuckle”

*Poetry:*  
“Time and a Half”  
“La Chota”  
“The Problem with Meditation”  
“Follow Orders”  
“Dog Spawn Rising (Election Day Gothic 1994)”  
“A New Christian Ethic”  
“You Said IQ? How Much Need You?”  
“A Miscarriage of Justice”  
“Son of a Birch”  
“Prospect Point”  
“Shopping Trip #35 at the Mall”

“Some Things Change the Rest of Your Life”  
“What Do You Do?”  
“An Indignant Tomorrow”  
“Los Angeles Is Always Burning”  
“Anthem”  
“Pledge of My Allegiance”  
“Red Tide”  
“Siren-Barred Bote”  
“Oh, Freedom”  
“G.O.P.”  
“DEM.”

[authors’ names omitted]

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