

Communist

Volume 1
Number 4

\$1.00

Voice



Sept. 15, 1995

Anarchism and the marketplace

Today "everyone" is against the government, even many politicians directing the huge government apparatus. From the Speaker of the House to anarchist revolutionaries, government interference has been identified as the source of the miseries of today.

And indeed, isn't the world suffering from one war after another waged by chauvinist governments? Aren't there many tyrannies—to say nothing of Republican would-be guardians of American morality—that interfere mercilessly in the life of their subjects? Didn't the fake communist (actually state-capitalist) regimes have the state interfere with everything?

True, the right-wing ranters actually want to reinforce the repressive presence of the government under the cover of anti-government rhetoric. They only want to remove the social benefits that the masses have fought for in the past, and the restrictions on the marketplace. The anarchist revolutionary, on the other hand, really wants to eliminate the government. Anarchism identifies the people's subjugation to a ruling class with government action. It holds that the problem is that everyone can't simply do what they choose. If we just eliminate the government, life would be better, and people would be free.

Yet, a nagging question remains. Even if the government were eliminated, would oppression end? What about the power of the giant corporations? Some of them are as large and wealthy as many governments, and employ as many people. What about the power of the marketplace? Doesn't it ravage forests, pollute water, condemn tens and hundreds of millions of people to poverty and toil, as brutally as any government?

The run-of-the-mill capitalist politicians say that an economy run by the marketplace and a variety of corporations bring freedom. On the other hand, the reformists and anarchists, who think they are saying something radically different, would replace the giant corporations and profiteers by communal or other small-scale enterprises. They hope thus to eliminate authority and hierarchy, since each enterprise is small and may even be run as a collective. Then, they think, there would be no oppression and no ruling class and maybe no authority. Well, they may envisage weak federations of local councils, but for them to think about this too much is to

tread on the dread waters of politics.

But when production is carried out by independent enterprises, whether communally owned or run by profiteers, this is not the basis of freedom, but ultimately it is the basis of oppression. It means that the various enterprises and workers

Continued on page 2

**Communist Voice Organization
is founded!** — 5

**The World Bank and
imperialist domination** — 23

Detroit newspaper strike
Report from the picket lines! — 9
The left & the labor bureaucrats — 12



are connected, not by any conscious plan, but by the rule of market forces, by the result of thousands of transactions among the little groups. And market forces inevitably give rise to a division of rich and poor, to monopoly, and to the oppression of the poor by the rich.

So perhaps, however radical the anarchist ideology appears, it has something in common with the anti-government neo-conservative atmosphere of our time. However much it hopes to eliminate all coercion—government or corporate—its solutions are bound to the marketplace. It's no accident that one outright capitalist party, the Libertarian, is willing to flirt with anarchist phrases. It says it would remove all interference by the government in personal decisions, but it would subject the people even more to the marketplace than Newt Gingrich's "Contract on the Workers and Poor".

Anarchism fails because it can't see that the economic basis of the government remains under small-scale production including that run by communal groups. So its denunciation of the state ends up as wishful thinking, or even worse, finds a reflection in the anti-government posturing which the right-wing and the Libertarians use as a cover for supporting the marketplace. It fails because it sees the individual or the small group as self-sufficient, while in fact only the collective action of the working masses—the building of a proletarian party, the carrying out of revolutionary struggle, the collective running of the economy—can overcome exploitation and provide a true basis for the flourishing of individuality and creativity. It fails because its failure to understand the relation of freedom to mass activity mirrors the capitalist ideology of each person for their self.

Capitalist government is a monster, but it did not spring from the air. It expresses the interests of the ruling class. It is the division of society into hostile classes that results in oppression. This division into ruler and ruled, rich and poor, dominant nationality and oppressed nationality is based ultimately on an economic base. It is based on the fact that

the productive forces of society are not run by society as a whole, but are dominated by a ruling class.

The only way to overcome oppression is by eliminating the division of society into hostile classes. And this requires that the workers not recoil before, but take up the most powerful methods of political struggle in order to assault the domination of private ownership. They must rely on class organization and all-round mass struggle, political and economic and ideological. They must take over all production via revolution. At first, the new society requires a revolutionary government. Such a government will at long last be a tool of the majority of the people in their fight against exploitation by the few. It will help stamp out exploitation and bring the economy under the conscious control of all workers. But ultimately, as the economy is really run by all, everyone will be both a worker and an overseer of society's affairs, and so class division will come to an end. It is the end of class divisions that will bring the end of government and the whole political apparatus. Only in this way can there be a real and not illusory end of government and of politics.

This whole process is what is called communist revolution. It does not build up a regime such as that in China and Cuba today and the late Soviet Union and Yugoslavia yesterday. It is the tragedy of this century that some of the most profound revolutionary movements the world has ever seen—such as the Bolshevik revolution of 1917—were eventually undermined and collapsed. The best attempts to eliminate private ownership were subverted. Marxism-Leninism was abandoned, and state capitalist systems built up. The resulting regimes in those countries ended up representing the domination of a new capitalist elite. By way of contrast, true communist regimes are based on political and mass organizations and a state apparatus that rely on the initiative of the formerly downtrodden masses. Both the revolutions and the revisionist tragedies in these countries should be studied closely.

But what of anarchism? It has never led the liberation

How to get in touch with *Communist Voice*

Communist Voice is published by the Communist Voice Organization, a group of comrades spread over a few cities. It is dedicated to helping put Marxism-Leninism on a firm anti-revisionist basis, and thus paving the way for communism to take its place once again as the ideology of the militant proletariat in its struggle for a new world.

Editor: Joseph Green

\$1 for a single copy from a vendor
Subscription rates by first-class mail inside the U.S. are
\$3 per copy; \$18 for a six-issue sub
Discounts available for bulk orders.

You can get in touch with *Communist Voice* by writing to:
CV P.O. Box 13261, Harper Station, Detroit, MI 48213-0261.
Checks or money orders should be made payable to Tim Hall—Special Account. ☐

movement anywhere but to a dead end, and it always will.

Anarchism has had a disorganizing effect in the class struggle. It tends to see progress as everyone doing their own thing, rather than the mass rising up and consciously transforming the world. It tends to see organization and discipline and joint effort as a shackle on the individual, and it fails to see how they can be the agencies of liberation. The working people must join together to fight the bourgeoisie, and they must organize, organize, organize. A classless society will be impossible so long as the working people cannot run the economy in common. Anarchism's tendency to see all organization (especially political organization) as the enemy, as bad or worse than the vicious governmental authority of an exploitative ruling class, renders it useless as a theory of revolutionary liberation. But anarchism's hostility to party-

building and solid class organization is something we will deal with in another issue. For the time being, we focus on the issue of the difference between the anarchist and communist view of future society.

We begin in this issue a discussion of how neo-conservative influence is reflected in the left-wing. Today we study the misadventures of one group, the Revolutionary Socialist Study Group of Seattle, which broke up into two trends of thought: supporters of capitalist realism on one hand and anarchist dreamers on the other. We show how both sides of this split have abandoned communism: the "realistic" opponents of revolutionism, and the anarchist parody of revolutionism are both based on marketplace ideas.

— Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit □

In this issue

In this issue we are proud to announce the founding of the Communist Voice Organization, which will be henceforth be the publisher of *Communist Voice*. This is the fruit of discussions among comrades over several months. This issue contains an announcement about the CVO as well as the Constitution of the CVO and *Where We Stand*, its statement of principles.

The workers' struggle

Our coverage of the situation in the working class is highlighted this time by several articles and leaflets on the Detroit newspaper strike. The workers are facing a difficult situation,

but their spirited resistance has changed the atmosphere. It is the most lively struggle in Detroit for years, as the strikers work to overcome the police, the courts and the policy of their own trade union leaders, and it has national significance. Whatever the outcome, the workers have, for a time, gone beyond the passive resistance which is constantly recommended to them, and have demonstrated a fighting spirit. We report on the militancy that has been shown on the picket lines, and the resistance of the trade union bureaucrats. We also cover the reaction of the reformist left to this strike, and show how it has covered up the treachery of the trade union bureaucrats, while the anarchist-inclined Maoist International Movement (MIM) condemns the

Anarchism and the marketplace 1

The Communist Voice Organization is founded

Hail the founding of the CVO 5

Constitution of the CVO 5

Where we stand 6

The struggle of the working class

Detroit newspaper strikers take militant action 9

Report from the picket lines 9

Reformist left kneels before union bureaucrats

by Mark, CVO, Detroit 12

Detroit Workers' Voice on the newspaper strike 14

DWV vs. plans of postal management 16

On demo on 25th anniversary of Chicano moratorium . . 17

Los Angeles Workers' Voice on the demonstration 18

The affluent worker--bourgeoisified? Review of

Goldthorpe's 1969 book on British workers

by Pete Brown, CVO, Detroit 19

The IMF, the World Bank and U.S. imperialism:

an overview, by Gary, CVO, New Jersey 23

Ejido co-ops and capitalist development in

Mexican agriculture, by Mark, CVO, Detroit 26

What really happened in the last years of the MLP?

The controversy over anti-war work (introduction) 32

Polemic vs. dangerous trend which covers up for U.S.

imperialism, by Rene, Chicago, 7/18/91 33

From Anita, Chicago, 7/18/91 34

Some thoughts, by Colleen, Chicago, 10/20/91 35

Letter from George, SFBA, 11/13/91 35

A reply to criticisms of *Workers' Advocate*, part one:

On some questions raised about our agitation in the

anti-war movement, by Slim, Detroit, 11/21/91 37

Left-wing neo-conservatives, by J. Green, CVO, Detroit

Part one: The reflection of neo-conservatism in

socialist thinking 46

Part two: The mailed fist behind the anti-authoritarian

phrase 53

From Ben's vision of the future that's "like a war"

by Ben, RSSG, Seattle 60

strike itself.

Other coverage on workplace issues includes Pete's review of Goldthorpe's book of 1969 on whether the British workers are becoming bourgeoisified. This continues a series of articles on how the changes in the working class have affected its revolutionary potential.

And we reprint some leaflets. The *Detroit Workers' Voice* writes on the newspaper strike and on deteriorating workplace conditions at the post office. As well, we critically comment on the leaflet and report from the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* on the demonstration on the 25th anniversary of the Chicano Moratorium. This material points out both the increasing devastation of the working class areas in Los Angeles, and the serious problem of petty-bourgeois nationalism in the local movement.

The world situation

On a different front, we continue our coverage of the basic structure of present-day imperialism. An article from Gary continues our study of the IMF and World Bank, which began in the last issue with an article by Phil. It focuses on the pressure exerted by these agencies to keep the subordinate countries in line and bleed them economically.

We also continue our discussion of material related to the peasant uprising in Chiapas. The Zapatista program centers on strengthening agriculture co-ops, the peasant "ejido". Will this work? Can it save the Mexican peasant from ruin, as capitalist farming transforms the Mexican countryside? Mark studies the history of the ejido and shows what it has actually meant for the peasantry.

Neo-conservatism and the left

As well, we start a closer study of how marketplace ideology has affected left-wing thinking in the wake of the victory of the West in the Cold War. We carry parts one and two of "The reflection of neo-conservatism in socialist thinking". It shows how the present-day skepticism towards Marxist communism has not brought forth anything new, but just variants of marketplace ideology, which can also be seen in anarchist theorizing. Part two of the article goes on to analyze one attempt, by Ben of the "Revolutionary Socialist Study Group" of Seattle, to sketch out an anti-authoritarian paradise, and what it turns out to be.

In a way, Mark's article on the ejido is also relevant to our coverage of anarchism. Many anarchist and reformist trends tend to the "small is beautiful" philosophy and promote small-group enterprises as anti-hierarchical and the foundation of the society of the future. The ejido system consists of a multitude of such small-group enterprises, some of them collective enterprises. Yet far from being a reliable shield for the peasants, the ejidos have seen capitalist relations and class differentiation develop right in their midst.

The debate over anti-war work in the last years of the MLP

And finally, we also continue our coverage of the history of the Marxist-Leninist Party (MLP) and why it collapsed.

Both the CVO and the *Chicago Workers Voice* group spring from the "minority", a group of comrades from the MLP who wanted to continue communist work after it collapsed. An issue of concern has been why the MLP collapsed. The *CWV* group claim that its criticisms in 1991-92 of the agitation of the *Workers' Advocate* (central paper of the MLP) against the Persian Gulf war and of *WA* denunciations of the local bourgeoisie in dependent countries dealt with the problems leading to the MLP's collapse. But other comrades claim that *the Workers' Advocate* in fact maintained lively agitation for class struggle and socialism, and that the *CWV*'s criticism was fundamentally wrong and reflected the *CWV*'s own vacillations. These other comrades point to the development of liquidationist viewpoints in the MLP and hold that communism must be anti-revisionist if it is to be a live force in today's world. They point out that the *CWV* group has not seen the central importance of anti-revisionism, as shown for example in their attitude to Castroism and towards the Mexican journal *El Machete*.

We dealt extensively with the *CWV*'s disregard for anti-revisionism in our last issue. But we hadn't yet discussed the inner-party debate over the *Workers' Advocate* of 1991-92. To deal with this, we begin serializing a three-part article from comrade Slim — not previously readily available to the public — which replied to the Chicago comrades during the original debate. It provides a well-researched review of the agitation of the *Workers' Advocate* on the Persian Gulf war and sketches the theories that lay behind it. And we include statements from other comrades during the debate. □

Hail the founding of the Communist Voice Organization!

The liberation of the working class will be a collective effort of the workers themselves. And the re-establishment of a genuine communist trend in this country will require the collective work of those revolutionary activists who can see beyond the anti-communist theories influential on the left as well as the right in the wake of the defeat of the fake communist regimes in the Cold War. It will require the collective work of activists who can also see beyond the pat revisionist answers of Trotskyism, Stalinism, and academic Marxism. The structure and type of organization may vary, but communist activists must seek to unite together. Theoretical work as well as practical organizing requires joint efforts. The proletariat, and the activists who have taken up its cause as their own, cannot rely on the universities and magazines and think tanks funded by the bourgeoisie. They must coordinate their efforts, take revolutionary theory seriously, and sum up the experience of struggle, in order to revitalize the Marxist theory and have it once again guide the mass revolutionary struggle.

The first three issues of *Communist Voice* was published by the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group, with the support of comrades in other cities. In the first week of September, after detailed discussions, comrades in a few cities united into the Communist Voice Organization. The CVO, with the support of a number of sympathizers, will now publish the *Communist Voice*.

The CVO is a very small organization with a very simple structure adopted to its size and purpose. It is not organization for the sake of organization, but based on the needs and possibilities of the time. But its founding is a manifesto in practice against liquidationism and in favor of the building of revolutionary unity. It is a small step on the long road which will lead eventually to a revived communist trend re-establishing a genuine political party of the class-conscious proletariat. This is the only road that leads to the liberation of humanity from exploitation and oppression, for, as Lenin said,

“In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organization. Disunited by the rule of anarchic competition in the bourgeois world, ground down by forced labor for capital, constantly thrust back to the ‘lower depths’ of utter destitution, savagery and degeneration, the proletariat can become, and inevitably will become, an invincible force only when its ideological unification by the principles of Marxism is consolidated by the material unity of an organization which will weld millions of toilers into an army of the working class.” (*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, in the last paragraph of Section R)

Below we publish the constitution and statement of principles approved at the time of the founding of the CVO.

Constitution of the CVO

Preamble

The CVO is an organization dedicated to help establishing anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninism as a trend in the U.S. and the world. Only thus can Marxist communism once again take its role as the ideology of the struggle of the proletariat for an end to class oppression and for the ushering in of a classless society.

Now is a time of theoretical confusion, and the victory of the West in the Cold War has been accompanied by widescale doubts about whether there is an alternative to the marketplace, and widescale propaganda that it is socialism and Marxism that was responsible for the crimes of revisionist state capitalism and that collapsed. In such a period, the role of theoretical clarification is immensely important. But only a few individuals stand

for anti-revisionist Marxism in today’s period of doubt. The CVO is a union of precisely such individuals for the purpose of helping reestablish the theoretical basis of Marxist communism. Its members may engage in various political, agitational, and literary activities; these activities may provide a valuable link with the masses which, among other things, help inspire the theoretical work; and these activities may in turn be reported on in the publications of the CVO. But the work of the CVO centers on its theoretical task.

To this end, the CVO will publish the journal *Communist Voice*.

The CVO is a small grouping working in large part informally. It is a working group that will decide its general affairs periodically by majority vote, and concentrate on its theoretical and political work.

Rules

1. The CVO is a union of individual communists. The relationship of each individual is directly to the CVO. While local organizations may support the CVO, they are not intermediaries between the CVO and its members, nor are they formally bodies of the CVO.

2. The CVO will publish the journal *Communist Voice*. It will emphasize theoretical issues, but also carry other articles of interest to communist activists and class-conscious proletarians. Articles give the views of the writers, and unless otherwise indicated, do not necessarily reflect the view of the whole CVO. The editor or editorial board should seek to have the *CV* focus on matters of general concern to the CVO and to communism, but it should also ensure that the different opinions of CVO members find a place for expression. The journal will also welcome materials from non-members, including people who disagree with much of our stand, provided those articles are of serious value with respect to the issues of interest to the CVO. It is however not an open forum for all former members and supporters of the MLP or others not in the CVO, that is, it does not guarantee the publication of an article just because it comes from former MLP circles or any other non-CVO circles.

3. The CVO will elect each year the editor or editorial board for the *Communist Voice*. As well, each year the editor or editorial board will give a report on its activities and the situation of the *Communist Voice* and the CVO.

4. The CVO will elect each year a treasurer.

5. Members of the CVO must support the general stand of the CVO, pay dues, respect the CVO Constitution, and support the journal *Communist Voice*.

6. Decisions on new membership in the CVO after its initial formation, as well as expulsions, will be made by majority vote of the CVO itself. All general decisions of the CVO will be made by majority vote. It is expected that in any controversial decision, the members of the CVO will take the effort to look into the views of the various sides and not just ram through a decision by quick majority vote.

7. The voting in the CVO will be organized by the editor or editorial board of the *CV*.

8. The CVO will adopt a statement of purpose expressing its general stand. □

Where we stand (Statement of purpose of the CVO)

The comrades who are collaborating to produce *Communist Voice* are Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries. We stand for a working class alternative to capitalist society.

Capitalism thrives on exploitation and oppression

The present social order in the U.S. rests on the exploitation of tens of millions of workers. Year after year, the living standards of the workers and poor deteriorate. Meanwhile, this misery goes hand-in-hand with huge profits for the corporate giants, multi-million dollar bonuses for the CEOs, and the good life for the rich in general.

It is a social system that has created technological wonders and great productive powers. But in the hands of the capitalists, these great powers are turned against the workers. They mean speedup and layoffs. They mean swelling the army of unemployed workers and the huge "underclass" which lives on the edge of destitution. And while the need for social welfare grows, social programs are being cut to ribbons. This profit-driven system is the breeding ground for rampant racism, the hounding of immigrant workers and the oppression of women. Capitalist

greed constantly leaves environmental devastation in its wake.

The political system serves the needs of capitalist exploitation. American democracy means the class rule of the corporate giants. The president, the Cabinet and Congress are tied to the capitalists by a thousand threads, as are the Republican and Democratic parties. The legal system and the various police agencies keep the downtrodden from threatening the profits of the wealthy. The social ills bred by capitalism are "solved" by more police measures and a "boom" in jails. Capitalist democracy is democracy for the rich and repression for the poor.

Meanwhile, American capitalism is the world's imperialist superpower. It is the global cop and the largest international exploiter. It heads up a world order of oppression along with the other imperialist powers. It is a system where multi-national corporations exploit labor, plunder resources and exercise political influence around the globe. It is a system where the U.S. and other imperialists seek to impose their will around the world through economic pressure, international agencies, and war. Militarism, power politics, spheres of influence and the division between haves and have-nots are not an accident or a mere policy choice but are an inherent feature of capitalism in

its monopoly stage.

The workers and poor need a new social system

The workers and poor need a new society. They need a society that is free of the profit motive and therefore can use the great productive powers and technological marvels of today to benefit the masses. Such a new society can only be achieved through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by the class rule of the workers. The workers must stepwise learn how to run the new society, convert the economy to social ownership and abolish anarchy of production, end exploitation, and build up the common productive powers. The construction of such a socialist society creates the basis for eliminating the social ills born of capitalism and of class society in general. And it will create the conditions for passing over to a classless, communist society.

The new society is not some scheme dreamed up by utopian planners. The groundwork is being laid by modern capitalism itself. It has created productive powers that have the potential to eliminate want. Large-scale production has laid the basis for social ownership. It is the billions of exploited workers and poor peasants worldwide whose class interests make them the potential vehicle of revolutionary change.

We believe that the working class alternative is not just a future goal. Its achievement is the outgrowth of the development of the class struggle. The struggles of today not only are a necessity for survival, but provide the training ground for the greater battles of tomorrow. We support the day-to-day battles of the workers to defend themselves against the capitalist offensive of unemployment, wage and benefit-cutting, speed up, etc. We stand with the masses struggling against imperialism and the war machine, against racism, sexism and anti-gay bigotry.

We hold that for the workers and poor to achieve their immediate and long-term goals, they must be able to express their own class stand. They must get organized independently of the capitalist parties, the Republicans and Democrats. As well, they must fight such vehicles of capitalist influence as the trade union bureaucrats and the reformist misleaders in the anti-racist movement, the women's movement, etc. They must rely on mass action and class organization, not the establishment.

Without an anti-revisionist theory, there will be no communist movement

We think that the success of the working class struggle depends on it being guided by revolutionary theory. That theory is Marxism-Leninism. We do not think that theory provides some standard recipe for revolution. Rather it provides a basic framework and principles that must be applied to present conditions.

Many have falsely labeled themselves Marxist or Leninist. There are the "Leninists" who back repressive state-capitalist regimes such as the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of yesterday, or the China and Cuba of today. There are "Marxists" who are banking on the reformists or trade union bureaucrats to move the struggle forward, and "socialists" who preach about

the wonderful new societies that can allegedly come about without overturning the old oppressive social orders. Such "Marxists" have *revised* Marxism beyond recognition. We hold that Marxism-Leninism is nothing if not anti-revisionist. We aim to carry through the anti-revisionist critique of such theories and of the tyrannies that posed as "communist". We stand opposed to Soviet revisionism from Stalin to Gorbachev. We also stand opposed to Trotskyism, Chinese revisionism, Castroism, social-democracy and anarchism.

We believe that study of the entirety of the Soviet revolution and its subsequent decay is part of developing socialist theory. This must include examining the period under Lenin's leadership. We do not believe this means rejecting Leninism. We support the Leninist framework and draw a distinction between that framework and the evaluation of particular policies.

The revolutionary workers party

We believe that the class struggle requires a revolutionary party to guide and organize it. Such a party would be made up of the most class-conscious workers and other dedicated activists and be guided by Marxism-Leninism. As the class struggle develops, numerous other forms of organization will come into being and pass away. But unless there is a party representing the interests of the class as a whole, a party with the political clarity to influence the diverse struggles, the struggles cannot converge on a common path against the capitalist exploiters. A party of the most clear-sighted sections of the class is vital to guide the proletariat amidst the confusion spread by reformist and opportunist trends. A vanguard party is needed to both strengthen the present struggles and to develop within them the consciousness and organization that will prepare for the bigger battles of the future. The Communist Voice Organization is not a party, but hopes its work can make a contribution to the eventual rebuilding of a communist party worthy of the name.

For world proletarian solidarity

The struggle of the American working class is part of a global struggle of capital and labor, of exploiter and exploited. The American workers must stand with the workers and poor peasants around the world. This requires special attention to support for the creation and building of revolutionary class organizations of the proletariat all over the world. It also requires overcoming the national and ethnic divisions among workers. This is inseparable from the American workers opposing their "own" imperialist bourgeoisie, its oppression of toilers around the world, and its national rivalries with the competing bourgeoisies of other countries.

Our political roots

The founding members of the Communist Voice Organization are mainly former activists of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA, which produced *The Workers' Advocate* newspaper. The MLP dissolved at its 5th Congress in November 1993.

The MLP was a staunch defender of the workers' interests

and consistently fought to spread revolutionary class consciousness and defend the Marxist-Leninist theory. Under the pressure of over a decade of lull in the mass movements and of the neo-conservative ideological climate of the times, however, a section of the party gave up their previous belief in the need for building an anti-revisionist trend although another section held that the present times cried out for continued communist organization. Despair over revolutionary work also gradually took hold among a majority of the MLP's leaders who sought to eliminate the party's revolutionary stands and publications.

Thus the ideological unity of the party fragmented and the growing liquidationist mood was reflected in varying ways. The liquidators turned Lenin's views into cardboard caricatures and then dismissed them. Modern capitalism was prettified and imperialism reduced to incidental "flaws" rather than the world order of capitalism in its monopoly stage. In the difficult conditions and backwardness of the times, they no longer saw much point in imbuing the masses with revolutionary class consciousness and the perspective of socialism. Indeed, some eventually went so far as to put up for grabs even the basic Marxist theses that capitalism would give rise to socialism and that the work-

ing class was the vehicle of this revolutionary change. For some, the only thing that was realistic at present was "free market" development and petty-bourgeois dreams of ever-growing democracy which would supposedly take place under the rule of the capitalist and imperialist exploiters.

As the MLP dissolved, a section of former members and supporters fought to continue the discussion of the controversies that tore apart the MLP. These comrades came together as a grouping at and following the 5th Congress of the MLP, which dissolved the party. This grouping (the "minority") fought against the anti-Marxist liquidationist ("majority") views. But within this grouping itself, some shared the skepticism of the liquidators towards anti-revisionism and, as well, substituted anarchist anti-organizational phrasemongering for a serious critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the MLP. The "minority" grouping that had come up to carry on the debate on the controversial issues in the MLP proved incapable of declaring any common platform, and broke apart. The Communist Voice Organization is continuing, however, to uphold anti-revisionist Marxism, and to that end, we are publishing *Communist Voice*. □

In previous issues of *Communist Voice*:

Issue #1 (April 15, 56pp.):

Announcing a new theoretical journal, the *Communist Voice*
 Debate over current tasks of communist work
 What should we say to the masses about Cuba?
 On the workplace organizing of *Labor Notes* and on *Spark*
 Debate over the Mexican journal *El Machete* and Zapatista strategy

Issue #2 (June 1, 59pp.):

In support of the Papua New Guinea people's struggle against environmental ruin
 On the situation in the working class
 Workplace organizing and the "Solidarity Organizing Committee"
 Looking into the history of the Marxist-Leninist party
 Three key Zapatista declarations from Lacandona Jungle
 —Declaration of war, Jan. 1, 1994
 —For a national democratic convention and a transitional government, June 10, 1994
 —To form a movement for national liberation, January, 1995
 Critique of Zapatista views: on turning democratization into a panacea
 Marxism on proletarian and peasant demands

Issue #3 (August 1, 67pp.):

The International Monetary Fund and imperialist superprofits
 What have co-ops meant for the Mexican peasants?
 —The "ejido", yesterday and today, and the decline of the small peasant
 —Co-ops will not save the peasants from poverty
 On the repudiation of anti-revisionism by the Chicago Workers' Voice (reviewing issue #7 of the *CWV Theoretical Journal*)
 More on *El Machete* and the Mexican left
 On the need for a public stand against Castroism
 Towards unmasking Trotskyism
 —Barb replies to criticism of her article in *CWVTJ*, "Dealing with Trotsky: Idiocy or Treachery?"
 —A further critique of Barb's views, "For a serious struggle against Trotskyism"

Back issues are currently available at the same price as the current issue. See page 2 for how to order *CV*.

Detroit strikers take militant action

Below we report on the strike against the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*. Unwilling to accept management demands for job cuts, wage and health benefit slashing and job combination, the newspaper employees walked off the job on July 13. The workers have faced a powerful array of forces. The newspapers are part of the Gannett and Knight-Ridder media conglomerates with their multi-billion dollar resources. These media tycoons have hired a private goon squad and directly pay the local suburban police forces to attack strikers and insure that they do not shut down the production facilities running on scab labor. Some high-paid writers have deserted the strike. On September 13, a court issued an injunction to limit picketing at the gates of the production plant in Sterling Heights.

And the workers also must overcome trade union officials who have been trying to keep their struggle contained. Since the beginning of the strike, striking workers and their supporters have protested at businesses advertising in the papers, held pickets at newspaper facilities, and attended mass rallies. This has had some value. But as the scab production and distribution of the newspapers became better organized, the limits of such activity became more apparent. Militant workers began to demand stronger measures to impede production of the paper. Meanwhile, the local trade union leaders were making deals with the police to prevent strikers from blockading the production facilities.

On Saturday, September 2, the militant workers were able to break out of the restrictions their so-called "leaders" placed on them. In order to demonstrate their "militant" credentials, national AFL-CIO officials organized a large demonstration which marched to the production plant's gates. Though the 3,000 picketers outnumbered police by a ten to one margin, the union officials opposed militant defense of the picket lines. Instead, they wanted that, when police moved in to open up the gates for the scab trucks, a few designated people would peacefully kneel in front of the cops and be carted off. But these plans went by the wayside. It was clear that many workers were not going to stand idly by while the cops broke their picket lines. Faced with the size and spirit of the picket lines, the cops could only watch as the plant was shut down for the evening and following morning.

Once again, on Monday night, September 4, the workers stood up to the strikebreaking police. Although only 300 picketers were at the gates, they engaged in a fierce battle against 50 cops who tear-gassed them. The turn toward struggle frightened the union officials and the local media who spread mindless red-baiting against leftist activists advocating militancy. But a good section of the workers had taken the calls for militancy to heart. The strikers showed they could stand up in their own defense, despite the power of their companies and capitalist "law and order," despite the shackles placed on them by their own timid union leaders.

More recently, the capitulation of union officials to the court injunction has led to some setbacks. But no matter what the final outcome, the actions the strikers have thus far taken give heart to all workers yearning to fight back against the capitalist offensive.

The following report was prepared by supporters of *Communist Voice* who participated in the September 2 action. It has been updated with a description of the September 4 confrontation with the police, and other eyewitness reports on the September 9 mass picket and the next weekend's events.

Report from the picket lines

On Saturday, September 2, mass pickets kept the main production plant of the Detroit Newspaper Agency (DNA) shut tight for 18 hours. Management was unable to move any trucks out of their plant until Sunday morning, long after the usual delivery time. This temporary shutdown of the plant lifted the spirits of workers in the Detroit area and showed once again the power of mass struggle.

Events of September 2: mass picket shuts plant for 18 hours

On Saturday afternoon, about 1:30 p.m., management was able to get a few trucks out of their plant in Sterling Heights,

Michigan, a northern suburb of Detroit. But reinforcements for the picket line then began arriving, and by 2:00 P.M. the main gate was crowded with workers. The police force outside the gate then advised waiting trucks to drive away to avoid a confrontation. Apparently they hoped things would die down shortly. But the opposite happened. More and more workers began arriving at plant gates, and a large force was gathered at a local union hall to march down a main street to the plant.

Desperate to open the main gate, about 5:00 p.m. the police suddenly charged the pickets gathered there. The police were armed with helmets, batons, shields and pepper gas, while the workers had only their hands and picket signs. But the workers stood their ground and even pushed the cops back. Some of

them wisely used their picket-sign staves as weapons, jabbing the pigs in their ribs. This was something new to Sterling Heights police, who are used to kicking workers around. They rapidly retreated to a median across from the plant and called for reinforcements from nearby cities.

But in the meantime the march arrived with another 1,000-plus workers. This boosted the total number of picketers to around 3,000, with about 500 at each of two minor gates, a good 1,000 massed at the main gate, and hundreds more circulating in between. Now the two sides settled in for an all-night standoff. The police kept getting reinforcements, eventually from a score of nearby towns and cities, and also county sheriffs and state police. Inside the plant, management occasionally ordered their scab truck drivers to move around, making feinting movements in various directions. For their part, the picketers were more and more fired up. Seeing the massive police force preparing to charge didn't intimidate them; on the contrary, it made them angry to see "our tax dollars at work."

In the midst of this confrontation a vigorous debate broke out among picketers massed at the main gate. The trade union leaders who organized the picket knew they could not simply open the lines to the police, the way they had been doing. (Only a couple of days earlier the union officials volunteered to clear the gates for the police so scabs could enter and leave the plant.) They made preparations for this evening to have "civil disobedience" actions — to have certain designated people lie down in the driveway. These individuals would then be arrested and carted away by the police. But, sensing their power, many workers began arguing against this. These workers wanted to go beyond mere symbolic protests that allowed their picket lines to be easily broken up. Slogans rang out: "No arrests!" "No scab paper tonight!" And serious discussion of leftist leaflets developed, going against the crude red-baiting promoted by the trade union bureaucrats.

Workers also kept up lively shouted challenges to the police outside and the scabs inside. Many humorous speculations on the scabs' parentage were shouted. A favorite slogan directed at the police was "Bought and paid for", referring to the fact that the Sterling Heights police force is now directly paid by the DNA. At a side gate, workers used tree trunks to bolster their blockade.

The militancy of the workers had its effect on the police. In a TV interview the Sterling Heights police chief admitted he would like to order an attack on the picket line, but with the large force of workers in their present mood, he was afraid his officers would suffer many casualties. So the standoff continued, and the trucks loaded with scab papers remained bottled up inside the plant. The mass picket continued for hours, with many workers staying out all night. Not until about 8:30 a.m. Sunday morning were the police able to force open the lines and get the trucks out, almost 12 hours behind schedule.

Lessons of the mass picket

The temporary success of the picket shows the power of mass struggle. With only a few workers there, it's fairly easy for the police to force a passageway for the trucks. But with

hundreds of workers there, geared up for struggle, the police are afraid to provoke them.

It isn't just a question of numbers. If hundreds of workers were content to stand around and watch while "civil disobedience" martyrs got dragged off to jail, then it would still be easy for the police to open the lines. This shows it's also a question of orientation, of what workers are prepared to do.

So the first lesson, the importance of mass struggle, points the way to a second lesson, the importance of organization. Workers on strike need solidarity, the support of their brothers and sisters at other plants. This support needs to be organized. And the orientation developed in this organization has to be one of militancy, of doing what is possible to keep struck plants shut tight.

This points the way to another important lesson: the need for independent rank-and-file organization. The workers cannot rely on the trade union bigwigs to organize the mass struggle. Even, as in this case, when the trade union leaders have called a strike and called a mass rally for it, they insist on keeping things as tame as possible. At a rally before the mass picket, numerous big-name union bureaucrats spoke. One after another they denounced corporate greed and declared that the actions of the DNA are "illegal." This sounds outraged and militant. But at the same time they were arguing for the workers themselves to stay within the bounds of legal reformism, to hope that their problems can be solved without standing up to the forces of capitalist "law-and-order" used by the newspaper bosses to destroy the workers' struggle. At most, the union officials would concede to cringing at the feet of the police with "civil disobedience." This attitude only undermines the struggle.

Without the activity of rank-and-file militants, the police would have busted the September 2 mass picket just as they have been busting picket lines at the Detroit Newspaper Agency plant every day. Of course the workers must be flexible in their tactics; they cannot always back down the police, especially when outnumbered. But it's a matter of outlook and orientation. Rank-and-file militants are oriented to finding ways to keep the plant shut tight, including ways that may require struggle and sacrifice; trade union bureaucrats are oriented to finding ways to keep things peaceful and legal, and promoting their establishment-track careers.

This brings up another important lesson of the mass picket: the importance of revolutionary theory. Individually, it's difficult for rank-and-file militants to stand up to the barrage of legalism and reformism promoted by the trade union bureaucrats, especially during a strike. But workers who are organized and grounded in Marxist theory are better able to maintain a clear perspective on things.

Confrontations such as this one raise questions in workers' minds. For example, many workers at the mass picket were questioning the role of the police. "I thought their job was to keep the peace." "I thought their job was to protect the people." "I thought they were the servants of the people, who pay their salaries." The whole question of the state, and its relation to the class divisions in society, was coming up for review in their minds.

Of course the trade union bureaucrats have their own

answers to these questions — that American democracy is designed for the working class as well as the rich, and if we're all good boys and girls the courts and police will eventually be won over to our side. We may have to wait two years to get a simple grievance settled, and we may have to wait a lifetime to get a favorable ruling about unfair labor practices, but don't worry — maybe your grandchildren will be able to collect some settlement money. This fairy tale sounds good to bureaucrats-in-training as they learn it in their university classrooms. But workers on the picket line, fighting for their livelihoods, need a theory that cuts through the legalist crap and gets to the heart of the matter. This theory is Marxism, the theory of class struggle.

The battles of September 4th and 9th

The strikers waged another militant battle on the evening of September 4. About 300 workers made a determined stand at the main gate, holding off a 50-strong police contingent for several hours. Police charged the line with batons and pepper gas. Strikers defended their line by swinging the wood from their picket signs at the charging cops and pelting them with rocks and small pieces of metal. The police beat a hasty retreat. Then tear gas was thrown at the strikers. But picketers continued to battle on. When the confrontation finally ended, over 20 picketers had been arrested and several cops injured. In the aftermath, trade union officials struck up their usual baloney about how militancy was really bad because some leftists called for it.

The next big event in the strike struggle occurred on Saturday, September 9. By early evening, about 150 workers had gathered at the main gate. At this time, trade union officials helped police herd workers away from the gate to allow scab trucks to enter the plant. But throughout the evening, more and more workers, primarily from local auto plants, began to arrive. By mid-evening, a couple of thousand workers bolstered the picket lines. Compared to the mass picket of a week before, there was much less ambiguity among the workers about what tactics to adopt. The general sentiment was "the scabs got in, but they paper won't get out!". A large number of workers had come prepared to shut the plant down. Many had face masks to deal with police tear gas attacks and wooden sticks to hold off police charges.

It was clear to the police and the trade union leaders alike that nothing they did was going to deter the strikers this evening. And so the police just looked on. Unable to disperse the picket lines, the newspaper management resorted to a new, desperate ploy. They had a couple of helicopters land at the plant to airlift the newspapers out! Workers ridiculed this, pointing out that airlifting papers would raise costs greatly and the companies would be taking a loss on the papers they got out. The next morning, the newspaper agency claimed to have gotten out about three-quarters of their Sunday distribution, but that's just their story. In the Detroit area, some newspapers did reach the streets, but they often arrived quite late, which hurts sales.

At the other printing facility in downtown Detroit, the workers faced a more difficult situation. Although there was a surplus of picketers at the Sterling Heights plant, and although

the union officials were in contact with officials at the Detroit plant, only about 150 workers were allocated to the Detroit facility. This was despite the possibility of newspaper production being shifted to the Detroit facilities.

Mounted Detroit police were successful in breaking the picket line there, arresting two strikers and escorting scabs in and out of the plant. According to workers there, the trade union bureaucrats were collaborating with the police. One worker cursed the bureaucrats for shamelessly telling the workers that "the police are our friends." The workers were disappointed, but their determination did not flag. Several left to confront scabs at a distribution center. When the private security force showed their face from inside the plant, a bottle and picket poles flew at them.

Union leaders bow to court injunction, workers still defiant

On September 13, Macomb County Circuit Judge Raymond Cashen issued an injunction limiting picketing at the Sterling Heights plant. He ruled that only 10 pickets would be permitted at the plant gates and they would have to clear out of the way of any traffic in or out of the plant. Violators would be held without bond, pending a court appearance. The ruling allowed unlimited picketing on sidewalks at the plant, however.

The injunction created new hardships for the struggle. But the mass pickets of the previous two weeks had shown the workers were ready and able to defy this injunction just as they had earlier defied police orders to disperse their gate blockades. Moreover, the injunction still allowed thousands of workers to gather near the gates where they would have been in a good position to seize the gates at any time. And the vastly outnumbered police had not been able to budge mass pickets in the past.

Despite the favorable conditions to defy the injunction, the union leaders shamefully bowed down to it. The mobilizing of thousands of workers to the Sterling Heights plant was abandoned for September 16. Dozens of union-organized marshals were stationed at the plant gates to prevent defiance of the injunction. Meanwhile, about 250 workers who had gathered at the union hall near the plant were discouraged from picketing at the plant gates. They were instructed by their "leaders" to be "peaceful" and "conservative". And in place of mass picketing, workers were told to drive around the plant in their cars as this might slow up traffic around the plant. This activity was hardly a substitute for mass picketing, was not even organized, and proved to be ineffectual. Moreover, while the union leadership has used the threat of police arrests to discourage mass picketing, workers who tried to carry out this car blockade were pulled over by the cops and given citations with heavy fines. Isolated drivers were, in fact, an easy target for the police compared to the mass pickets. Relatively small groups of workers eventually did try to stop scab trucks and busses at the plant gates. The police arrested nine strike supporters. But, undermined by their "leadership," these brave workers were unable to stop scab paper production.

That same evening, workers had a better go of it at the other

production facility. About 500 workers blocked plant entrances. Angry workers pelted company-hired goons with any object at hand. The newspaper management was forced once again to use helicopters to airlift production from a plant. However, as pickets dwindled in the early morning hours, police attacked, arresting several strikers and opening the gates for trucks.

Sunday, September 17 was an important time to have mass pickets at the downtown plant. The newspaper agency was supposed to resume separate weekly production of two separate papers (*Detroit Free Press and Detroit News*) instead of the

joint editions they have published since the strike began. But by mid-evening, no mass picketing was taking place at the plant.

So as we go to press, the struggle is at a new crossroads. The bureaucrats are starting to abandon any mass presence at the plants, lest the workers behave militantly. Smaller groups of workers are carrying on despite the bureaucrats. Whether the rank-and-file can overcome the treachery of their "leaders" and rebuild strong actions at the plants remains to be seen. □

Reformist left kneels before the trade union bureaucrats

by Mark, CVO, Detroit

The militancy demonstrated in the newspaper workers' strike is connected to the ability of the rank-and-file to go, on occasion, beyond the conciliatory policy of the trade union bureaucrats. Anyone interested in building a powerful workers movement should be enthusiastic about the efforts of militant workers to break out of the grip of the labor bureaucrats. But such is not the case among the reformist left. Let's look at some examples of their views on the newspaper strike.

The Militant vs. the militant rank-and-file

In its September 18 issue, *The Militant* newspaper fumes against the militant action of September 4 when 300 workers battled police. They denounce it as a "provocative action" because "union leaders announced from the platform [of the Labor Day parade in Detroit] that no action was planned for that night..." (p. 13) Oh horrors! The workers took matters into their own hands against the wishes of the bureaucrats! *The Militant* goes on to complain that actions such as these allow "the big business media" to "paint the show of labor strength over the Labor Day weekend with a violence brush." Evidently, not only must the workers not go beyond the policy of the trade union officials, they should not do anything that displeases the big business media!

Of course *The Militant* pretends that it is not against rank-and-file workers, it is only against another left-wing group, the Revolutionary Workers League. They complain that the RWL distributed a leaflet at the Labor Day parade calling for workers to "shut the plant down after the parade!" There are any number of just reasons to oppose RWL politics. But *The Militant's* criticism is nothing but shilling for the labor bureaucrats. They do not analyze what slogans can best help break the workers from the confines of the bureaucrats, but merely complain that an action was taken without approval from the timid trade union leaders. And they don't deal with the fact that the idea of shutting down the plant was not just on the minds of the RWL, but of hundreds of militant workers who came out to do just that

on September 4, and again of September 9. *The Militant's* opposition to RWL is simply echoing the red-baiting of the union hacks who use attacks on the left to discourage militancy.

While condemning the independent action of the rank-and-file, *The Militant* covers up for the bureaucrats. In their reporting on the strike struggle, they fail to note how the bureaucrats have worked to keep the struggle under wraps. They say nothing about how the bureaucrats argued against militancy on September 2, for example. Instead they uncritically quote a local Teamsters president taking credit for shutting the plant down when, in fact, it was opposition to the bureaucrats' policy that was the key to this victory. Indeed, only days before, the labor traitors were telling the police they would help them escort scabs in the plant. The way *The Militant* writes, one would imagine the union hacks were glorious class fighters. Their sole complaint about the bureaucrats is that a couple of them, along with Democratic Congressman John Conyers, used anti-scab sentiment to foment racist hysteria against immigrant workers from Mexico. But the fact that a few bureaucrats revealed the ugly chauvinism that pervades the AFL-CIO officialdom in general does not discourage *The Militant* from portraying these bureaucrats as heroes of the workers' struggle.

Workers' World cheers for the bureaucrats

The Workers' World Party (WWP) hails the actions of the workers on September 4 in its national newspaper's September 14 edition. But it falls silent about the union bureaucracy's efforts to stamp out militancy. They praise militancy but also the big-time bureaucrats like AFL-CIO president Tom Donahue and other reformist misleaders as if they were advocating a policy of class struggle.

Then in the *Workers' World* of September 21, they announce:

"Solidarity Saturday II [the mass picket of Sept. 9] showed that the AFL-CIO leadership would not be intimidated and was determined to carry this struggle forward." (p.5)

Right. A week later these same "brave" AFL-CIO used a court injunction limiting picketing at the Sterling Heights plant as an

excuse to call off mass picket lines there.

The same article claims the heroic union leaders were standing up against “violence-baiting and anti-union attacks by the big-business media.” In fact, the union leadership joined in the hysteria against violent picketers.

Thus the WWP appeals to the workers’ militant sentiments only to advise them to place their faith in the leadership of the very forces who are trying to contain their struggle.

After the union leaders caved in to a court injunction limiting picketing at the newspapers’ Sterling Heights plant, WWP leaders issued a flyer (reprinted in *Workers’ World*, Sept. 21, p.5) proclaiming how a coalition they were working in wants the AFL-CIO to call one-day “general strikes” on successive Saturdays. Of course any solidarity actions would be of use. But the leaflet omits any mention of the most pressing immediate issue in the strike, the need to defy the court injunction and maintain mass pickets to shut down plant production. Indeed, this leaflet was distributed at a meeting on September 16 where the bureaucrats discouraged workers from picketing at plant gates. Some militant workers in the meeting objected to the dismantling of the mass pickets. But not David Sole, whose articles on the strike appear in *Workers’ World*. Sole, president of a UAW union local, did not use his position to expose the rotten policy of his fellow union officials, but remained silent. The union bigshots were not defying the injunction, and so WWP did not press the issue. Once again, we see how a soft attitude toward the union bureaucracy undermines the workers’ struggle.

But what about the idea of the general strike itself? Sure, if by “general strike,” one simply means that a few unions will have a solidarity action on a Saturday or two, there’s a chance that might happen. But a general strike where production of goods and services is, in the main, shut down for a protracted period of time, is another matter. At a time when the AFL-CIO leaders have been working against shutting down production of even one newspaper plant, it is nonsense for WWP to pretend that, with a little prodding, the bureaucrats will shut down production in the whole region.

How *The Spark* leaves workers in the dark

This worshipful attitude toward the trade union leaders in the strike is shown by a number of other left organizations. *The Spark*, in its August 28-September 11 issue, avoids any criticism of the union sellouts. To look militant, *The Spark* talks about how neat it would be if the Labor Day parade could “take over downtown” for a day. It’s odd that this would be their focus as the main task facing the workers is whether picket lines can hinder production of the newspaper. But the underlying problem is that unless the workers develop independent action and organization, they will not be able to make *any* serious advances. And by hiding this from the workers, *The Spark* hinders them from carrying out militant picketing or any other actions.

In writing about the newspaper strike in a local Detroit leaflet, *The Spark* organization does utter a few halting criticisms of the union misleaders. But they treat these

criticisms as inexplicable flaws in an otherwise solid policy. For example, they call on workers to attend the strike actions and point out that the union officials “did not even spread the news about the demonstration widely.” However, *The Spark* then takes the bureaucrats off the hook, stating:

“Maybe they didn’t think people would come.

But whatever their reasons might have been, we all need to participate in this strike...”

Thus, even when criticizing the union leadership, *The Spark* manages to obscure the true nature of the trade union hierarchy.

Contrary to the way *The Spark* presents matters, the policy of the union bureaucrats is no mystery or accident. The AFL-CIO policy is based on class collaboration, on seeking out the alleged common interests between labor and capital. Naturally, such an overall policy means keeping the struggle of the workers from going “too far.” Just look at the history of this newspaper strike. From the beginning, the union leaders tried to placate management with concessions. And after the strike was on, they have tried to cool it out, and have even collaborated with the police against militant picketers. For the union leaders to be half-hearted about a demonstration is no accident, it is consistent with the policy they have been following.

Anarcho-Maoist group denounces strike

There is at least one “left” group that is outright opposing the newspaper strike. This is the Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist League which is under the leadership of the Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM). Their publication, *RAIL Notes*, of Fall, 1995 makes no bones about their anti-worker position.

“The Labor Aristocrat strikers are in a bloody alliance with the big corporate capitalists. The DNA employees want better benefits in exchange for their service, even those these benefits can only be proffered at the expense of the Third World proletariat.” (p.1)

It is a crime that the name of the downtrodden “third world proletariat” is used as an excuse to take the side of the first world bourgeoisie. And this is exactly what RAIL/MIM does. For them there is no difference between the workers and capitalists in the U.S. Why the greedy workers actually want jobs and decent wages! How dare they try to resist destitution! You won’t catch real third world workers doing that, they imply. Evidently RAIL/MIM considers it better for the third world toilers if the rich American capitalist can increase their profits by driving down workers here. And while claiming to represent the “third world” worker, RAIL is either ignorant of, or doesn’t care, that the striking workers include a number of black and Mexican national minority workers.

MIM says they support “the struggle of Third World workers for survival wages and working conditions.” So apparently their opposition to the strike demands is that they entail more than third world survival wages. By this logic, the proletariat in the U.S. should stand by and watch its wages fall to the level of the poorest workers in the world. Undoubtedly, the Detroit Newspaper Agency and the other capitalist employers in the

U.S. share such sentiments. They would love to drive workers in the U.S. down to third world levels, although they are usually wise enough not to admit it in public.

Of course, if the workers in the big imperialist powers are smashed, this will not help, but hurt the third world workers. It will certainly create downward pressure on wages and working conditions in the third world. Workers in this country should render all possible aid to their class brothers and sisters in other countries. But how letting themselves be crushed by the employers here will put them in a better position to render such aid, we will leave for RAIL/MIM to explain.

In order to discredit the idea of workers in the U.S. fighting for their livelihoods, RAIL presents the "brilliant" argument that the striking workers get some strike funds from the AFL-CIO, which has done bad things like opposing Japanese and Mexican farmworkers in California and black militants in Detroit. Yes, yes, there are thousands of crimes committed by the labor traitors. But RAIL/MIM sees no difference between the workers and the bureaucrats who betray their interests. If RAIL/MIM is so concerned about the bad bureaucrats, they would help the workers build independent class organizations, not condemn their struggle against the newspaper bosses. If they wanted to win the workers away from their chauvinist misleaders, they would be sympathetic to the fact that the newspaper workers are taking funds from the bureaucrats not to foster the plunder of the third world, but to keep themselves from starving so they can fight the wealthy corporations like Gannett and Knight-Ridder.

According to *RAIL Notes* however, taking strike funds from the AFL-CIO is the same as supporting the pro-imperialist AFL-CIO policy. By the same logic, shouldn't they condemn

welfare mothers for taking money from the U.S. government? After all, doesn't the U.S. government participate in plundering the third world on a grand scale. Shouldn't welfare mothers starve themselves and their children to prove their solidarity with third world workers?! And similarly, shouldn't our would-be revolutionary anti-imperialists also condemn government student loans and grants? Sure this will insure that the universities will be off limits to all but the rich. But the poor and minority students will be saved from soiling their hands with the blood of the third world masses. When all is said and done, the RAIL/MIM views dovetail with the right-wing offensive to drive down the workers and poor.

The RAIL publication tells us that MIM works "to build public opinion in favor of national liberation struggles, independent institutions of the oppressed and anti-imperialism and anti-militarism." It says it would support workers if they went on strike for these goals. This is just double talk. RAIL/MIM has written off the workers in the U.S. If it was at all serious about spreading anti-imperialist opinion among the workers, it would not denounce their battle for jobs and working conditions, but welcome their conflict with the employers as an opportunity to encourage workers to fight the capitalists on other fronts.

For all their revolutionary posturing, RAIL/MIM cannot see anything in the workers' struggle except the corrupt union officials. In this regard, they are the flip side of those reformists who pretend that nothing can go forward in the workers' movement without the trade union officials leading it. A truly revolutionary policy must clearly differentiate the stand of the labor traitors from the class interests of the mass of workers. Only such a policy can help push the class struggle forward. □

***Detroit Workers' Voice* on the newspaper strike**

The following articles are from issue #5 (Aug. 6) and issue #6 (Sept. 2) of *Detroit Workers' Voice*, produced by the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group. The latter leaflet was widely distributed at a march to the plant gates on September 2 as well as at the picket lines themselves. Both leaflets had an ad for *Communist Voice* on the reverse side, along with a shortened form of the article "The rebirth of communism" from *CV* #1. The Aug. 6 leaflet also had an article against the speed-up plans of postal management (see page 16).

Support striking newspaper workers!

From *Detroit Workers' Voice* #5, Aug. 6:

2,600 employees of the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* went on strike July 13. All workers should support them. Issues in the strike include job cuts, wages and health benefits. Most of the workers on strike work in distribution as warehouse employees, district managers, etc. The newspaper companies have been consolidating many distribution centers and already eliminated many jobs. This has helped them reach a position, this year, where they made \$46 million profit. Not satisfied,

however, they want immediate elimination of more jobs.

Other employees on strike are news and feature writers. The employers want to eliminate regular annual raises, and replace them with a system of "merit pay" (also known as "suck-up pay").

The workers on strike face a difficult struggle. *Detroit News* is owned by Gannett Inc., a major multi-billion-dollar media corporation. Gannett owns 93 newspapers including *USA Today*. Their deep pockets enable them to withstand a strike of some length. *Detroit Free Press* is owned by Knight-Ridder,

another multi-newspaper corporation. Both companies vow to “win control” of their operations — that is, to beat down the workers.

For their part, the workers have been active and energetic. They have maintained picket lines, and held one rally downtown attended by about 2,500 people. In the beginning, this was sufficient to disrupt newspaper production. And it convinced many advertisers to cut off their newspaper ads. But more recently the employers have had more success in getting papers produced and distributed. For this, the bosses can thank the police who protect the newspapers’ main production centers.

Though the union leaders have called a strike, it would be a mistake for the workers to rely on them to carry the struggle through. The union officials have been trying to placate man-

agement’s demands for job cuts, although it hasn’t been enough for the greedy owners. And they balk at developing a broader, more militant struggle. They do not emphasize the importance of powerful mass picket lines at the main newspaper production facilities. They’re opposed to picketing Gannett and Knight-Ridder operations in other cities. Teamster officials have only grudgingly even allowed any strike pay, and then only a paltry \$55 per week. Clearly, rank-and-file initiative is needed to strengthen the struggle.

Expressions of solidarity will help bolster the strikers. Cancel your newspaper subscription, visit picket lines, join the boycott of advertisers, etc. Support the newspaper workers in their struggle! □

Strengthen the strike against the newspaper companies!

From *Detroit Workers Voice* #6, Sept. 2.

After a month-and-a-half on strike, over 2,000 newspaper employees remain determined to stand up to the arrogant concessions demands of the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News* bosses. Newspaper management squeezed \$56 million in profits out of the employees last year, helping enrich the multi-billion dollar media giant Gannett, Inc. and the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain. But that only whetted the appetites of the newspaper capitalists for more profits. They demanded more job cuts, an arbitrary ‘merit pay’ system instead of regular raises for some employees and attacked health benefits. But the employees refused to have these demands for more concessions rammed down their throats and defiantly walked off the job.

The striking workers have shown their resolve by maintaining picket lines, holding rallies, demonstrating at businesses advertising in the papers and leafleting against newspaper sellers. Other workers and supporters of the strike have participated in these activities as well. The strike and related activities has caused difficulties for the newspaper bosses. At the same time, management is using all the forces at their disposal to destroy the strike. They have hired a scab work force and are able to still produce and distribute the paper. They have hired private goon squads to guard company property. And while poor-mouthing the striking employees, management has also paid the Sterling Heights police force some \$300,000 to violently attack picketers who try to prevent the scab papers from being trucked out of the plant. While the strike has hurt the newspaper owners to some degree, the strikers also face the question of how to turn up the heat on management and develop the militancy of their struggle.

Instead of seeking ways to build up more powerful mass struggle, however, the trade union leaders have been following a general policy of seeking to accommodate the newspaper capitalists and their police flunkies. True, the trade union bureaucrats called a strike. But both before and during the strike, they have been trying to placate management with their

own concessions package, although these concessions weren’t enough to satisfy the companies. The union leaders call for picketing, but then get upset at any signs of militancy. They condemn the violence of the Sterling Heights police one day. And the next day, they make a pact with these thugs to help the cops keep picketers from disrupting management’s production schedule. Even when the national AFL-CIO officials decide to bring several thousand workers to a solidarity rally at the plant gates, it is done when a deal has already been reached assuring management that this formidable force will not try to interfere with scab production.

To move the strike struggle forward, the rank-and-file will have to find ways to mobilize themselves independently of the trade union bureaucrats. They must fight for contract demands that protect their interests, not alternative concessions tailored to please the bloated newspaper moguls. The rank-and-file must strive to develop further militancy. While the trade union leaders try to find ways to make the pass pickets as ineffectual as possible, the rank-and-file must aim at organizing themselves for a more determined effort to confront scab production at the main facilities and distribution points. Boycotts and picketing advertisers have their place, but only have limited effect as the continuing scab production of the paper shows. Rank-and-file initiative is needed to strengthen the struggle.

Meanwhile, it is important to spread solidarity with the striking newspaper employees. Other workers and activists should bolster the picket lines, cancel their subscriptions to the scab papers and participate in other mass activities in support of the strike. Solidarity activists should be oriented toward helping build rank-and-file activity independent of the trade union misleaders. The newspaper capitalists are going all out to crush the workers. Should the workers and their supporters do anything else in return?

Down with concessions, scabs and the police!
Strengthen the strike with rank-and-file initiative!
Solidarity with the newspaper workers’ strike! □

Organize against postal management's DPS plans!

From *Detroit Workers' Voice* #5, Aug. 6.

The long-awaited Delivery Point Sequence (DPS) system is beginning to be implemented at some Detroit area stations. DPS mail will come to letter carrier's cases in walk sequence (supposedly, anyway) and carriers will not be allowed to case this mail. Management has sunk a couple of billion dollars into DPS automation and they hope to make up this amount and more by making the letter carriers suffer. Carriers will be required to juggle two bundles of mail in one hand (non-DPS mail plus DPS letters) ensuring more repetitive stress injuries and other difficulties delivering mail. DPS mail is supposed to be in address sequence, but the DPS automation missorts many letters, so the carrier may be on their route when they discover lots of mail that belongs elsewhere. Carriers will have to deal with understandably angry customers while the bureaucrats who are responsible for the mess will hide out in their air conditioned offices. After awhile, management will use the DPS system as an excuse to greatly lengthen the routes of letter carriers on the pretext that there is no need to spend much time preparing routes in the office. And as routes grow longer, more routes will be eliminated and more of our brothers and sisters will be shoved out of a job. All this might ruin many of our co-workers. But management doesn't care. For them, each block added to a route and each jobless worker means less wages and benefits to pay. It's only profits that really count at the "non-profit" post office.

Management's DPS committees are a fraud

These days, the problems facing letter carriers under the DPS system are so obvious, even our illustrious union leaders have started to complain a bit. But are they mobilizing the carriers to oppose management? No. They say the answer is joint labor-management DPS committees. They say this means the workers will be able to have "input" into management's plans. Big deal. This is like having the "input" of death-row prisoners in whether they would rather die by lethal injection or the electric chair. Letter carriers will be allowed to suggest how to carry out ruining their jobs — not whether they will be ruined. What an honor!

Where has such labor-management cooperation ever gotten us? Well, it got us the very same DPS plans which aimed at ruining the letter carriers. Most all the hardships DPS will bring carriers were agreed to by a sellout agreement between the USPS [the Postal Service] and NALC [letter carriers' union]

leaders in September 1992. Yet now we are told that the answer to this rotten labor-management cooperation is another labor-management committee. Remarkable! Letter carriers are also familiar with the farce of the powerless (for the workers) EI [Employee Involvement] joint committees. And isn't it really an insult to tell the workers that they can walk hand-in-hand to the promised land with management when this same management is trying to destroy our wages and benefits in the ongoing contract negotiations?

But despite all this, we are told that these DPS committees will really be different. But why? The committees give the workers no power, but rely on the good will of management once again. At best, we can expect a couple of cosmetic "improvements" while DPS ravages our conditions. Meanwhile management can use the DPS committees to pretend they have letter carrier approval for their plans to attack letter carriers.

We need our own plans, not "input"

But what is the alternative, various union officials cry? Do you want management to decide things without our "input"? This is a bogus argument. The real choice isn't between management's plans with "input" or without "input". The real choice is the workers having their own plans. Instead of labor-management cooperation, letter carriers need to get organized against management. We need to raise demands that will protect us whether management likes them or not. Rank-and-file letter carriers will have to rely on their own efforts, not those of the so-called leaders running the union. Individual resistance will undoubtedly take place. But worker-worker cooperation is the real alternative to labor-management cooperation. Now is the time to meet and discuss forms of struggle with your co-workers. There are many types of collective actions that can be carried out to resist management's plans. Circulate leaflets like this one among your co-workers at this and other stations. Circulate petitions with our demands. Postal workers have, in recent years, also carried out pickets and various types of job actions to fight management.

Let's not let management run rough-shod over us. Let's not place our hopes in the labor-management cooperation schemes of the union bureaucrats. Let's demand:

All DPS mail must be cased!

No to longer routes!

No unsafe work methods!

□

On the demonstration on the 25th anniversary of the Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles

The following report and leaflet are from the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* (LAWV) group. They deal with the slashing of social services in Los Angeles, and they give a glimpse of the serious situation facing the masses and of the trends in the protest movement.

But they also have some weaknesses. For example, the LAWV is justly upset at the petty-bourgeois nationalism it sees in the movement, and has repeatedly commented on it in reports they have circulated to other comrades. But its concern isn't reflected in its leaflets. Thus its leaflet below—although it calls for “uniting . . . across racial barriers”—doesn't deal directly with the nationalist agitation. And in his report, comrade NC (LAWV) optimistically suggests that a professor refuted petty-bourgeois nationalism by saying that there was a sold-out section among the Mexicans in 1848, when the US stripped Mexico by violence of what is now the American Southwest. But NC's report also shows that the nationalists too make a big deal of denouncing “vendidos” (sell-outs). NC simply tacks on to the professor's speech the idea that class interests should be referred to. But he fails to notice that his desire to bring out class issues is not simply an extension of the professor's speech. It is one thing to denounce the ruling classes for exploitation and another to lay stress on denouncing national sell-outs.

This is related to the LAWV's view of the tasks of communist activists today. In the polemic on this subject covered in earlier issues of *Communist Voice*, they sided with the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group, although they knew that *CWV* promotes the *El Machete* group and pooh-poohs its petty-bourgeois nationalism. The LAWV disagreed to some extent with *CWV*'s view of *El Machete* and nationalism, but didn't give these questions much importance.

Below is the report circulated on e-mail by NC of the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* to all interested comrades on Aug. 26, 1995:

About 2,000 protestors, mainly young Chicanos and Mexicanos but many mainly Latino workers too, marched three miles from Belvedere Park to Salazar Park to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Chicano Moratorium, and to protest huge budget cuts in health and recreation services in Los Angeles County — near \$560 million + 32 clinics and special health centers to close October 1, and also the big attacks on affirmative action and more Proposition 187-style attacks on immigrants looming. Well over 6,000 county employees may soon get the boot.

Nationalist politics was still dominant here, though now it is dressed up again in a leftist guise/veneer of anti-Democratic Party and even a lot of anti-capitalist (gringo capitalism

anyway) rhetoric as well. There was a lot of speeches about opposing the vendidos—sellouts—and that “we are Chicano, Mexicano” and not “vendido—Hispanics” There was a nice history lesson by a college professor that actually exposed the problems of “Aztlán” nation-builders. The professor intimated that “When the Southwest was taken over by the US in 1848 and even before, we should remember that vendidos, (haciendados, etc) had already cut deals with the US army and politicians in Texas and the other areas to not resist and instead support the occupations”. I would add also their bourgeois and petty bourgeois and hacienda class interests! My point is that if this was so in 1848, imagine how much the upper class Latinos have been incorporated by the expansionist white capitalists into the overall system!

Other speakers effectively denounced the near reign of terror the cops maintain in some East LA barrio areas. An increasing number of young Chicanos/Latinos have indeed been gunned down under suspicious circumstances here over the last half year or so by the “law enforcers”, Los Angeles Police Department + LA sheriffs.

Yet others did denounce the plague of drug dealing, gangster turf battles and prostitution massively increasing in Latino impoverished areas. They decried the loss of decent jobs and the growth of sweated labor operations in garment, furniture, etc.! They attacked the capitalists for cutting the job training programs, attacking affirmative action and the also vastly trimming the summer jobs for youth programs on state and federal levels (20,000 summer jobs lost in the Contract on America)!

We got into a few brushes with some nationalist monitors who tried to stop our distributing, but I told them I teach in the area, I know some youth here and that our literature speaks to the key issues, the crying need for new militant organizations and massive fight-back actions. But after a half-hour I talked to three leaders of the Moratorium committee action, and they were persuaded to let us continue our distribution and discussions with the marchers, which we did for a few hours more.

We passed out about 800 Spanish agitation leaflets as well as about 500 in English. Also three *Struggle* magazines were given out to interested militants. All in all we felt it was a pretty good day.

We will send out snail mail copies of both leaflets soon!

The size of the action was kept lower by the fact of a \$30,000 police bond demand for a noontime march/rally. Instead the Marchers' Committee put up a lower bond and [was] told to march from Belvedere by 8:30-AM!!!! Bourgeois democracy!! □

On the 25th anniversary of the Chicano Moratorium **Let's stand up for mass struggle again!** **Educate, organize and fight back!**

Below is the leaflet of Aug. 17 issued by the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice*, Box 57483, Los Angeles, CA 90057.

1995 marks the 25th anniversary of the Chicano Moratorium. 25 years ago tens of thousands of determined protestors rallied to fight against the dirty U.S. imperialist war on the Vietnamese people as well as the stepped-up racist exploitation and oppression here at home. This event showed the power of the organizing of a popular mass movement which was able to win some gains.

Today the mass shootings and aerial bombardments of the Vietnamese people are over. But U.S. capitalism still robs and exploits the working people the world over. It has also stepped up its racist attacks and is scapegoating people of color. World capitalism is in a big crisis today. It must suck more and more profits from the workers and poor in order to compete with its rivals the world over. It needs badly to divide the working class majority. It wants to boost profits fast so it sweats the workers more. The corporations fire workers and speed up the rest. They use state influence to gut out the social services so the profitable ones like health will be "privatized" and the rich can make more money. They get their Democrats and Republicans to lower their taxes while swamping the working people with more expenses, higher tuitions and fees, etc.

Look at L.A. County today! 6,000 more workers will soon be booted into the streets. 67% of these workers are oppressed nationalities. 30 health clinics will close. The Democrats and Republicans say there is no money. But this is a transparent lie — yet another one backed up by the corporate-owned media.

The county Board of Supervisors just got done making \$382 million in interest payments to the rich bondholders — all tax free!! They have already said they will pay \$429 million next year as well. Instead of seeing our communities ravaged, thousands of workers fired, health and recreation services cut, we must build a movement and demand that no county social service workers be fired or services cutback or privatized. We must demand stiff tax hikes on the rich and the corporations plus **CUTTING OFF INTEREST PAYMENTS TO THE BANKERS**, and stopping the attacks on the workers!

On the job and in the colleges affirmative action is under assault. This attack is yet one more way to divide different groups of workers/students. The capitalist economy is also "downsizing" for certain skilled professions and the schools and college are geared to the capitalist job marketplace. That affirmative action in jobs and schooling is considered one of the main "expendables" by the rich and their political state proves the inherently racist nature of this whole system. Also the campaign against immigrants is closely tied to these scapegoating policies. By again uniting as working people and students across racial barriers and building a powerful mass movement of struggle against the rich ruling class and their political machine, we can force the capitalists' offensive back.

Fight for good jobs, education and housing for all!

Organize community meetings to plan how to fight back!

Stop cuts in health care and attacks on affirmative action! □

The affluent worker — bourgeoisified?

By Pete Brown, CVO, Detroit

Below Pete reviews *The affluent worker in the class structure*, by John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer, and Jennifer Platt. (Cambridge Studies in Sociology. Published by Cambridge University Press, 1969.) It is part of a series analyzing what the ongoing changes in the occupational structure of the workforce means for the class struggle.

This book is the result of research designed to test the *embourgeoisement* thesis. This is the theory that the working class is becoming bourgeoisified — not exactly a class of capitalists (nobody argues that), but middle-class and non-revolutionary. The political background to the study was the Labor Party's defeats at the polls in the 1950s. Labor won the 1945 election, and many people thought Britain was then set on a social-democratic path. But then Labor lost the next three elections in a row. The popular explanation was that with rising living standards in the 1950s, that the working class had been bourgeoisified and lost interest in Labor Party politics.

The *Introduction: the debate on the working class* is a review of recent literature on the subject of *embourgeoisement*. The authors discuss polls and other research by sociologists; they also discuss the ideas of semi-Marxists like Baran and Sweezy, who opposed *embourgeoisement* (hoping for a radical movement), and those like Marcuse who promoted it. (In *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse gave the pessimistic assessment that workers, influenced by mass media and the consumer culture, have come to accept the given reality as the *only* reality; thus a dialectical-critical outlook has died as the masses became "one-dimensional.")

Anticipating the book's contents, the authors give their own conclusions. Basically, they deny *embourgeoisement*. But they say there is a certain amount of "normative convergence" between manual workers with rising living standards and white-collar employees. This is interesting, as a more detailed analysis of what C. Wright Mills called the "equalization" of white- and blue-collar.

As their wages have risen, the authors say, manual workers have become more individualistic and more concerned with immediate family. At the same time, as lower strata of white-collar have gotten paid relatively less and their positions become less secure, they've become more collectivist in outlook and more interested in trade unions. So there's a certain convergence of values going on among blue- and white-collar.

At the same time, the authors insist, blue- and white-collar remain distinct social strata, with remaining distinct values and little or no social integration. White-collar still don't accept blue-collar as equals, blue-collar still regard white-collar with derision, and blue-collar still do not participate in white-collar clubs and organizations.

The book gives interesting material on the attitudes and conditions of life of various sections of society. The authors are unable, however, to deal effectively with the issue of the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat. This is because (a) they restrict their analysis to affluent workers, not taking in other strata; (b) they don't consider the contrast between ordinary workers and the labor aristocracy; (c) they don't even consider differences between the strata they have chosen for study, a difference between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers; (d) they contrast the blue-collar workers with white-collar, but don't define the latter group well — apparently it includes both career-oriented professionals and low-level clerks; (e) the political conclusions they try to draw out — that the workers are not bourgeoisified — doesn't mean much, since his criterion of "not bourgeoisified" amounts to support for the Labor Party, which is itself a bourgeois party; Goldthorpe himself eventually admits this, but never considers some more lively alternative politics.

Marxist theoreticians have long considered the bourgeoisification of certain sections of the working class. Marx and Engels witnessed the rise of a new, more prosperous section of the British working class in the 1860s and 70s, and connected this to stagnation in the British workers' movement. Lenin, in his work *Imperialism*, discussed the rise of a bribed section of the working class which acts as a drag on the lower sections. Lenin also discussed how the workers' movement must be built through a struggle against opportunism, a trend based in bourgeoisified strata. The question of these strata's influence is an important political question.

Goldthorpe tries to settle the question of workers' political orientation, but not by an analysis of trends, and of the social base for these trends. He assumes throughout that the natural political home for all workers is in the Labor Party, and that "building the workers' movement" is equivalent to strengthening the Labor Party. This outlook covers over differences between different strata and the need for revolutionary-minded workers to oppose the influence of bourgeoisified strata.

In *Chapter 2, the design of the research*, the authors describe more precisely what *embourgeoisement* advocates were saying: that manual workers in modern, relatively hi-tech plants (hi-tech for 1960), with stable employment and good wages, living in modern housing — that such workers had become middle-class in their outlook, values, and social behavior.

The authors maintain that this thesis was usually supported with results of rather superficial, sloppy opinion polls carried out on a national basis. To get a thorough check on the thesis, they argue for doing an in-depth study of a local population. In addition to opinion polls about values, they also want to investigate social relationships; and they want to investigate workplace relationships as well as relationships in the community. They argue this will give a more all-round picture

of the “new” working class.

The authors settled on a study of workers at three major industrial plants in the city of Luton, a suburban area near London. Here they found workers who came closest to the criteria set out for testing the *embourgeoisement* thesis. These criteria included: affluence (relatively high pay for manual workers); economic security (good prospects for continued employment); physical mobility (migration away from original neighborhood); consumption-mindedness; work in a plant with advanced technology, “progressive” employment policies and harmonious industrial relations; a home community that is new and “open”, mixing residents of different classes and strata and separated from old industrial regions.

The workers selected were from an auto assembly plant, a metals machining plant, and a chemical processing plant. They included assemblers, skilled craftsmen (tool and die), and process-control workers. The authors argue that these workers come closest to the ideal promoted by *embourgeoisement* advocates; and so if the thesis fails here, it’s generally false. As a comparison group, the authors compared these blue-collar groups to white-collar employees of the same enterprises (clerks, accountants, etc.).

Chapter 3: the world of work then proceeds to poke big holes in the *embourgeoisement* thesis. The authors point out that advocates of *embourgeoisement* usually focus on workers as **consumers**; since these modern workers have relatively high pay, it’s easy to argue that **therefore** they behave a lot like white-collar strata — with the same amount of money, they buy a lot of the same stuff. But, the authors say, if you look at on-the-job life, the experience of blue-collar strata is still a lot different than for white-collars. The most obvious fact about the manual workers is their low job satisfaction. Their jobs entail a lot of stress; they’re very monotonous but also very fast-paced and demanding. Their jobs are dirty, require physical exertion, and require mandatory overtime and shiftwork. In interviews workers continually express dislike of the job; the only reason they do it, they say, is for the money.

White-collars, by contrast, express job satisfaction. Their work is clean, involves no physical strain, has regular hours and no shiftwork.

This difference in work experience also shows up in different social relations and attitudes on the job. White-collars prefer a supervisor who takes an interest in their work; but manual workers prefer a foreman who keeps out of the way. White-collar workers are universally interested in promotions, in advancing their careers; blue-collars have little or no interest in promotions (which, as the authors point out, is realistic; they really don’t have much chance for occupational mobility). White-collars take an interest in company-sponsored clubs and cultural organizations; blue-collars show no interest. White-collars frequently socialize with workplace acquaintances, but blue-collars don’t look at the workplace as a place where positive social relationships can be developed. The blue-collars’ basic approach to the workplace is “instrumentalist”: they see it as a place to earn a living and nothing else.

Advocates of *embourgeoisement* thought that higher-paid

workers would develop more positive attitudes towards their employers and places of employment; they would join company glee clubs and become integrated into the pro-company middle-class outlook. But the authors here show this is not happening. Yes, these modern industrial workers are more highly paid than before; but they have gained higher pay precisely by sacrificing comfort, social relations, a chance for higher education and mobile careers — in other words, by rejecting many values that middle-class strata hold dear. And there is no likelihood of this changing in the future: the authors argue, for example, that automation doesn’t necessarily make work easier, less taxing, less inclined to require overtime and shiftwork, etc.

The authors conclude (p. 83): “... the thesis of working-class *embourgeoisement* can have little relevance to present-day British society” — at least to the world of work. To the extent that manual and white-collar employees’ experiences approach one another, they assert that the movement is all the other way — of white-collars being proletarianized: “As a result of . . . rationalizing tendencies, a stratum of white-collar workers has now obviously emerged whose members are dissociated from decision-making or control functions, perform entirely routine and generally unrewarding tasks, and have little more opportunity for career mobility than their blue-collar counterparts.”

Chapter 4, the pattern of sociability considers workers in their community setting. Here the *embourgeoisement* advocates have a stronger case, because modern manual workers’ pay is often equal to or higher than that of white-collars’. Hence they can afford to live in housing as new and nice as that of white-collars and afford some of the other amenities — cars, home appliances, etc. — that white-collars have. The authors concede that, on standard of living, these “affluent workers” do not differ from some middle-class strata. But they still insist there is a large gap in **lifestyle** — how they spend their spare time, and with whom they spend it.

The authors then show how affluent manual workers’ lifestyle differs from that of middle-class strata. But along the way they also show how their lifestyle differs from **traditional** working-class lifestyles. In the traditional working class neighborhood, there were thousands of workers living crowded together. This mass created powerful normative controls. Workers’ kin (extended family) typically lived close by and constituted a worker’s closest friends.

Having moved out of the old neighborhood, the affluent workers have lost that working-class community. Their neighbors now are often white collars, even professionals such as teachers and engineers.

In the traditional working-class community, husbands typically had a circle of friends independent of their wives. Men had as friends workmates and other men they met in the community (in bars and sporting clubs). Their wives’ friends were restricted to kin and neighbors.

Among traditional working class families, entertaining at home was infrequent and was restricted to close relatives and a very few particular friends.

Now for the affluent workers, the authors found that kin still

constitute the bulk of their friends, *even though* the workers are now living some distance apart from them. They write, telephone, and travel distances to visit relatives rather than make close friends out of work associates or community contacts. This is true much more so than with white-collars, who tend to associate more with people from work or with people they have met as general cultural contacts (in clubs, for example). Thus the authors maintain that working-class norms of the “old neighborhood” are carried over into the modern workers’ lives, even though they no longer live in a working-class community.

The authors note that a major reason for this is the nature of their work lives. With mandatory overtime and shiftwork, manual workers simply do not have the opportunities to socialize that white-collars do. The result is that their lives become “privatized” — concentrated on their immediate, conjugal family. Separated from the “old neighborhood”, they lose a sense of community, of strong working-class neighborhoods surrounded by kin; they emphasize the material well-being, cohesiveness and autonomy of their own immediate family as opposed to wider kinship or community; their marriages are more egalitarian, with men doing more of traditional “women’s work” in the home and more overlapping of friendships between husbands and wives.

The emphasis on home and family makes affluent workers more like white-collars, especially the lower strata. But when choosing friends the manual workers stick to old ties, while white-collars tend to choose on more of a cultural basis. So there’s some normative convergence, again, but it’s not universal. Furthermore, the authors give data to show there is little or no social convergence, no inter-sociability between white- and blue-collars. For their part, career-oriented white-collars have no interest in socializing with manual workers. But blue-collars, too, have no interest in socializing with white-collars, precisely because manual workers are *not* career-oriented and do not feel comfortable with “snobs.” Many writers have interpreted the workers’ striving for material improvements as proof of their new career-oriented *embourgeoisement*, but this study argues that the two are separate phenomena. Careerism dominates the middle classes but is rare among the (manual) working class, even the affluent.

Chapter 5: Aspirations and social perspectives. Advocates of *embourgeoisement* argued that affluent workers had become status-conscious; that they purchased cars and other consumer durables as part of the middle-class race to “keep up with the Joneses.” The authors here argue against that notion. But here again they concede that there’s a difference between modern affluent workers and traditional workers. To make the affluent workers’ ideas and aspirations more precise, they give a thumbnail sketch of traditional working class and middle-class ideologies:

Traditional working-class perspective (p. 118)

(i) Society is dichotomous, divided between “us” and “them.” “They” hold power and authority over “us.” This division is virtually unbridgeable; you’re born on one side and remain there.

(ii) Wants and expectations are fixed. Concerned with maintaining, not with advancing consumption or cultural experience.

(iii) Concerned with the present, not with planning ahead. Fatalistic.

(iv) Collective action is the only way to accomplish things. Mutual aid and group solidarity valued. Occupational advance and conspicuous consumption discouraged. Desire for children to get steady jobs, *not* to leave home in a geographical or social sense.

Middle-class perspective (p. 120)

(i) Society is hierarchical but fairly open; individuals can and should try to move up.

(ii) Wants and expectations are capable of continuous enlargement. Careers will progress, incomes rise.

(iii) Concerned with planning ahead, on deferring gratification for the sake of career or business.

(iv) Prime value on individual achievement, the prime indicator of moral worth. Achievement carries over from one generation to the next; children expected to carry achievement forward.

The affluent workers studied here have a perspective sort of in-between these two. They feel that they can advance their levels of consumption, and they have taken steps to do that. They moved away from the old neighborhood to get higher paying jobs. In so doing they rejected fatalism and sacrificed for the future.

But have they then embraced middle-class values whole-hog? No. They still do not believe in promotions, careerism, middle-class individual achievement. They don’t believe they, individually, can do much to improve their economic situation — primarily they see this dependent on “the economy.” Despite the sacrifices they have made, workers and their families do not plan career (and family) moves the way middle-class employees do. One aspect of this: blue-collars have more children than white-collars, who restrict family size so that each child can attain maximum status.

One interesting point of convergence: affluent manual workers have just as high aspirations for their children’s education and future jobs as do white-collars. They want their kids to go to college and get professional-level jobs. Even so, the authors point out, there are differences: the blue-collars want their kids to have intrinsically interesting jobs rather than boring, unrewarding tasks, while the white-collars are more interested in having their kids attain higher status. The manual workers prefer engineering or similar professions in which, they feel, people still “do something”; white-collars are more interested in administrative and managerial jobs for their kids. And they differ in career planning and preparation for their children: the blue-collars really don’t understand what is needed to excel in college, and the authors show that they are bound to suffer a much higher rate of disappointment than the white-collars.

The authors found that affluent workers' general ideology doesn't fit into either a "power" (dichotomous, crude Marxist) model or a "prestige" (middle-class, Weberian) model. The main thing defining classes, according to these workers, is *money*. They discount lifestyle, education, and occupational status, which white-collars regard as defining characteristics. The affluent workers regard people with the same level and kind of income as being in the same class; thus they themselves regard manual workers and white-collars as part of one large "middle class", which they equate with the term "working class". They accept the class structure as generally permanent and just, hence are not "class conscious" in a Marxist sense. But since they don't recognize individual mobility on a ladder of prestige, neither are they "status conscious" in a Weberian sense.

Chapter 6: Conclusion. The authors sum up that affluent manual workers are still fairly distinctively working-class. They say that "middle-class social norms are not widely followed nor middle-class lifestyles consciously emulated; and assimilation into middle-class society is neither in process nor, in the main, a desired objective." (p. 157) Thus they conclude that the *embourgeoisement* thesis is wrong, even though they have noted changes in affluent workers from traditional workers. They maintain, "a break with working-class traditionalism need not take the form of a shift in the direction of middle-classness . . ." (p. 159)

This leads them to further reflections on social history. They say that refuting *embourgeoisement* "lead[s] us also to regard with some skepticism the broad evolutionary perspectives on Western industrialism in which . . . the emergence of a middle-class society is seen as a central process, resulting more or less automatically from continuing economic growth. In particular, we must be skeptical of the reliance that is placed on rising affluence, advances in technical organization of industry and changing patterns of urban residence as forces likely in themselves to bring about a radical restructuring of the stratification hierarchy. . . . A factory worker can double his living standards and still remain a man who sells his labor to an employer . . .; he can work at a control panel rather than on an assembly line without changing his subordinate position in the organization of production; he can live in his own house in a 'middle-class' estate or suburb and still remain little involved in white-collar social worlds." (p. 162)

They then give some last-minute qualifiers to their refutation of *embourgeoisement*. They note that economic development is not *negligible* in its effects; the working class does change, as they have noted in their discussion of normative convergence. And they allow that basic changes in class structure *may* occur in the future. But their research indicates that this would not happen spontaneously, from economic evolution. Rather it would require "fairly radical institutional alterations" which would "require purposive action of a political character." (p. 163) Here they get back to their discussion of politics and perspectives for the Labor Party.

Basically, the politics they come up with is "push the Labor Party to the left" (or, to be more precise, "*hope* — without

reason — that Labor Party leaders will move to the left"). They see their refutation of *embourgeoisement* as also a refutation of liberalism (reliance on capitalist economic growth to evolve into a more egalitarian society.) But they also aren't interested in "revolutionism", for which they don't see any movement among the working class. They spend some pages criticizing the views of Serge Mallet, who thought that workers in modern, automated plants would be *more* revolutionary than others; they don't find any evidence of that. Apparently Mallet promoted a kind of dogmatist approach, theorizing that modern industrial workers are just automatically revolutionary and pro-socialist due to their position in society. In picking on Mallet the authors have chosen an easy target for their attack on "revolutionism." In opinion polls they don't find that affluent workers are for revolution, en masse; hence Mallet was wrong that these workers are automatically pro-socialist; hence (they conclude) any advocacy of revolution must be wrong.

Rejecting both bourgeois liberalism and "revolutionism," the authors end up with a call for structural reform. Their electoral analysis of affluent workers indicates that these workers remain loyal to the Labor Party. And the authors encourage Labor Party leaders to do something to maintain workers' loyalty. They say Labor must develop a plan for radical restructuring and push this through Parliament. They conclude on a pessimistic note, however, remarking that Harold Wilson's administration of the late 60s is implementing conservative policies, moving quickly in the wrong direction, and thus squandering its remaining working-class loyalty. They predict Britain may very well end up sunk in social stagnation under long-term conservative policies from both parties (Conservative and Labor). This was accurate, as a prediction of what was happening to Britain's two major parties. But it was also very narrow, restricting political possibilities to a choice between these parties. They never considered the possibility of a political movement of the workers themselves.

Like C. Wright Mills¹, the authors of this study express the point of view of left-leaning but frustrated intellectuals. Their research seems accurate to me and contains a number of insights into changes in the working class. But when it comes to political implications, they remain stuck in the liberal-labor framework. Their judgment on "revolutionism" is restricted to the empirical test of whether there is, right now, a mass revolutionary movement among the workers. People with an activist orientation have to look beyond that, however, and consider what is *possible* and *necessary*, not just what *there is* at the moment. Can we live with social stagnation under long-term conservative policies from both parties? If not, then we need to build our plans for "radical restructuring" around something besides vain hopes in the liberal-labor politicians; we need a movement of the workers themselves. □

¹See "The growth of the middle classes, and the prospects for socialist consciousness/Pete Brown reviews C. Wright Mill's *White Collar*" in *Communist Voice* #2, June 1, 1995, pp. 15-21.

The IMF, the World Bank and U.S. imperialism: an overview

by Gary, CVO, New Jersey

The following article by Gary is part of a series which explores what world imperialism looks like after the demise of the old colonial empires, what world institutions that have been formed, the changes brought about in the class structure of the developing countries by the explosive growth of capitalism on a world scale, and how this affects the struggles of the exploited and the prospects for revolution. Earlier articles included Frank's first article on APEC (in *CV* #2), which is the organization of Pacific Rim countries, and Phil's article on the role of the International Monetary Fund (in *CV* #3).

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have become key tools in the international system of finance capital led by US imperialism. The functions of the two bodies have become almost identical in their programs and goals. Originally founded in 1944 to oversee the rebuilding after the war, and to solve the problems of international trade and its financing, both have evolved into instruments of imperialist plunder and domination. Far from the ebbing of the imperialist system as the present-day liquidationists tell us, today we are witnessing a refined, more brutal, more dominating system of imperialism, with the IMF and the World Bank as leading imperialist bodies. Under the guise of "development" and alleviation of poverty, world imperialism through these bodies have done the opposite, while drawing the weaker states of the world more tightly into the imperialist system. Since the imperialist crisis in the 70's, the imperialist powers led by US imperialism have stepped up their domination of the world economy, drawing in the weaker states ever tighter into their web with dire consequences for the working class and other peoples of those countries. The IMF and World Bank are certainly not the only mechanism of this plunder, nor even the main avenue of plunder, but they serve as a clear example of the escalating parasitism of imperialism and even the monopolization of capital circulation itself.

The Fund and the Bank were set up to help replace the old system of colonialism after World War II. The US demanded that the world open itself to US penetration of goods and capital, and they were in a commanding position as the other imperialist powers lay nearly in ruins. Only the US had the reserves of capital and manufacturing capacity to reconstruct the capitalist world. Great Britain at first objected to abandoning colonialism (in the preliminary 1941 meetings) but eventually acquiesced. Europe (including Great Britain) was given the leading position of the Fund, while the US took the World Bank presidency. (Every World Bank president has come from a leading US financial group bank, except for McNamara — the architect of the Vietnam war) Of course both bodies marched to the US tune. The initial task was to help European capitalism revive, to fund infrastructure projects, but the US used its own Marshall

Plan instead and bypassed much of the Fund and the Bank. This was because the Marshall Plan had built in advantages to US capital to the detriment of European capital, and in the beginning the Fund was the stronger body and too much European presence on the Fund would entangle US plans. (For example, the Marshall Plan forced Sweden to open its borders to a flood of US cars, thus effectively retarding Swedish auto manufacturing. Dozens of similar perks to US capital dominate the Marshall Plan.)

For twenty years the Fund and the Bank drifted along as bodies used more to grease the penetration of US and sometimes European corporations into Asia, Africa and Latin America than as a vehicle for the export of capital. They operated as a guarantor to private investment. When US imperialism went into crisis in the late 60s, eventually leading to going off the gold standard and other adjustments, some emerging capitalist interests in the less developed parts of the world (led by the oil cartel countries) had room to push their advantage. For the first time since the war, and even this century, the monopolization of the world's raw materials by imperialism, and its unbridled ability to penetrate and dominate small countries was threatened — not ended, but threatened. In the wake of the political and economic crisis that ensued, the leading imperialist bodies began to reformulate their world strategy and plot revenge. The US monopoly capitalists were split on how to proceed: one faction, centered around the Trilateralist Commission and the Rockefeller group, wanted to strengthen state capitalist programs, open up trade by allowing for the emergence of small capitalist nation states protecting a certain amount of domestic capitalism (an approach still favored by Japan today). The majority of the US imperialists however began to implement Reaganism before Reagan. In 1976, Robert McNamara, the president of the World Bank, began to talk about increasing the loans to the underdeveloped world by demanding "structural adjustments" to those economies. By 1979 that policy was implemented with a vengeance, and world imperialism had a vehicle for tightening the screws on the world's people and drawing blood from stones. The World Bank and the IMF became the sub-structure for the export of capital, the enforcers of debt servicing, and the arbiters of which and how countries got international loans.

These SAL's (Structural Adjustment Loans) unabashedly laid out in black and white the imperialist plan. Requirements for the loans were presented with no negotiations. We'll look at these requirements in a minute, but first its important to note that the World Bank and IMF had become the point men on capital export and debt servicing for the world. When countries had to make payments on debt, the Bank and the Fund had priority — their loans were paid first. And if a country received a loan from them, than other private capital would follow — direct, physical capital as well as portfolio loans; if no loans from them were approved, then world capital tended to dry up

for that country. The Bank and the Fund hold a substantial part of the world debt to the imperialist powers. (The World Bank alone holds \$182 billion — the largest single creditor) They have become the chief financial tool of imperialist domination. The capital for the loans comes from selling bonds on the world (primarily the US) financial markets. These bonds have the highest world ratings, and coupon clippers look to these bonds to fill their portfolios.

So when the World Bank and its sister the IMF lay down criteria for obtaining capital loans, the local capitalist rulers obey. These local, national capitalists are becoming fat off these loans, so why wouldn't they? In fact there has been a new trend emerging showing more of the new elite in the underdeveloped world with ties to the World Bank. The Bank has served for two decades as the brain drain on many countries. The best and brightest are offered careers at the Bank, and then down the road emerge as national leaders, with cabinets of World Bank functionaries. Their own local capitalist interests are given the largest crumbs off the table. So getting the world to obey the new requirements for SAL's was not difficult, and the logic of the plan is self-perpetuating — the more SAL's you get, the more are needed. The debt crisis of 1982 (precipitated by three years of unusually high interest rates on this debt, coinciding with the onslaught of this new loan policy) insured that the World Bank would have its way. Unable to obtain any further financing of any kind without Bank approval, the debtor country capitalists surrendered to it. Led by Mexico, 12 of the top 15 debtor countries submitted to SAL requirements within three years.

Requirements:

- ◆ downsizing of government social spending, drastic cuts in health, education expenditures
- ◆ privatizing government owned corporations
- ◆ raw materials export promoted to earn foreign exchange, while trade barriers and quotas are eliminated to increase imports, protectionist measures are eliminated
- ◆ elimination of subsidies for agriculture
- ◆ restrictive monetary policies and high interest rates to curb inflation, including devaluing local currency to reduce export good prices
- ◆ “demand management”, which is lowering wages to control inflation
- ◆ create incentives to attract foreign capital while reducing regulation of private sector.

The Bank adjusts each country's requirements depending on which parts are more pertinent. But all SAL's include currency devaluation, trade liberalization, lower social spending, higher interest rates and lower wages. All designed to ensure the country's debt is serviced, by increasing that debt and strangling the economy and workers. One result has been environmental devastation as people are forced to sell off their natural land's assets to pay the interest payments, reduction of basic health and education, and increases in unemployment and poverty. Without these SAL's the capitalist economies in these countries would still produce poverty and exploitation of land and labor and general misery — with them, the level of oppression is magnified, streamlined, and structured to serve imperialist interests to

a greater extent over local capitalist interests.

An example of the SALs in action can be seen in Zimbabwe. Between 1980 and 1987 it received loans from the World Bank of \$646 million, but was not subjected to “structural adjustment” because it was not in arrears in servicing its debt. Despite drought and South African sponsored violence, it was more successful than its neighbors who were under the SAL yoke, growing 2 to 3 times faster than the average rate in Africa. With an efficient system of labor exploitation, it had become self sufficient in food, established a manufacturing base and was exporting wine to Europe. It spent heavily in health and education, had trade controls to help domestic industry as well as subsidies. In short, everything opposite to the SAL program. In 1987 it applied for a loan from the World Bank to promote its manufacturing exports, and the loan was refused because the Bank knew the monies would promote a local manufacturing base. The Zimbabwe elite found loan capital drying up. By 1990, a SAL was in place administered by a new finance minister with World Bank ties whose daughter married the Bank representative. Since then there has been currency devaluation, end to price controls, elimination of minimum wage, cuts and fees in health and education. The result: the health and education system, once the pride of the area, is in shambles, serious food shortages instead of self sufficiency and a growing external debt. These events might have occurred eventually without SAL interference, but the World Bank enforced their monopoly severely to force the Zimbabwe elite into the imperialist web ever tighter, and under its terms.

To get an idea of the magnitude of the plunder guided by the IMF and the World Bank (and remember, for every loan made by them, an equivalent in private capital export occurs — so while the Fund and the Bank don't hold the majority of the debt, they take the lead in the plunder), between 1982 and 1990 a net transfer of \$418 billion in debt service from developing countries to imperialist countries took place. Total inflow of capital was \$927 billion in the period, while debt servicing ALONE in the other direction was \$1345 billion! And this does not include other outflows like royalties, dividends, repatriated profits, etc. This amounts to \$6.5 billion PER MONTH transferred to the barons of finance capital from the underdeveloped countries (\$12.5 billion per month if you include principal). And this hasn't reduced the debt — these debtor countries are 61% more in debt in 1990 than they were when the debt crisis hit in 1982. (Statistics in this paragraph taken from S. George's *Debt Boom-erang*, 1992) The effect on the debtor countries has been staggering, setting most of these countries (except for their elites) back to near-colonial conditions. 30 of the 47 Sub-Saharan African countries are being subjected to these SALs — expenditures on health fell 50% during the 80s, 25% for education, and these numbers are typical for SAL countries around the world. The SAL programs have created economic and social devastation wherever they are implemented. Since the implementation of SAL programs, the number of people living in absolute poverty has doubled (to 1.2 billion), over half the Sub-Saharan children are starving or malnourished, 1.6 billion are without potable water, over 2 billion are un- or underemployed, and infant mortality rates have doubled. Even in countries

where there is a certain amount of manufacturing and domestic markets like Mexico, the effects have been devastating — since the SAL program restructured Mexico's debt in 1983, real wages have fallen 75%, so that a family of four on minimum wage (60% of the workforce is on minimum wages) can only buy 25% of its basic needs. (From D. Budhoo's article in *50 years is Enough*, 1994) The workers' share of national wealth fell from 49 % to 29% between 1981 and 1990. Living standards in Latin America as a whole have fallen back to where they were 30 years ago (J. Gershman in same). So while a crisis in imperialism and debt servicing would have produced some sort of devastating effects on the people of those countries whatever happened (short of revolution), the systematic, conscious plan of the World Bank and its imperialist masters have used the crisis to tighten the screws to heighten the domination of the imperialist powers, to strangle any emerging domestic capitalism where they could.

The debt crisis of 1982 was used as a lever to bring recalcitrant countries completely under the thumb of world finance capital led by the US. Finance capitalists shifted the burden of the crisis not only onto the backs of the debtor countries' workers, but also onto the workers in the metropolitan countries (between \$44 and \$50 billion in tax relief have been paid to imperialist banks over the crisis). The risk of the debt has been shifted to public institutions like the World Bank and its satellite organizations and away from commercial banks. In 1985, commercial banks held 49% of the debt from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and official agencies 36%; in 1993 that changed to 35% and 45% respectively. This left commercial banks free to engage in the speculations, takeovers and swindles at home in the 80s. New tradable bonds were issued to replace

the old debt and fresh loans were offered by the World Bank. Public institutions like the World Bank accounted for 57% of the 89-93 debt increases, even though commercial bank debt to poor countries grew. So while debt has increased dramatically, the crisis is over for the finance capitalists, as the crisis worsens for the people of the poor countries.

Add to all of this the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. They have entered the web of the World Bank's SALs in a major way. All the "shock therapy" of Jeffrey Sacks (the Harvard economist who has advised these countries to sell off government enterprises, cut social spending, etc.) could have been written by World Bank officials, and indeed the similarities between the two are overwhelming. Each year the percentage of SALs to this area has grown, and the structural adjustments are already created massive suffering for the people there.

The present state of imperialism cannot be understood without attention to the role of the World Bank and the IMF and their satellite organizations. They have been integrated into the top policy bodies of world imperialism, and US imperialism in particular. The parasitic nature of this system grows year by year as the US turns more to coupon clipping and less to manufacturing. It is what Lenin describes as the decay of countries richest in capital. However it also reveals the contradictions inherent in this system. The debt crisis of 1982 is supposedly over according to finance capital representatives, not because the debt has lessened (it has risen dramatically), but because the mechanism for payment has been secured. But doesn't this lead to a bigger crisis in the near future as the ability to pay shrinks every year? □

Ejido co-ops and capitalist development in Mexican agriculture

by Mark, CVO, Detroit

The issue of Mexican agricultural co-ops, called *ejidos*, first came up in *Communist Voice* in relation to the uprising of the peasants of Chiapas and the views of the Zapatistas. The centerpiece of the Zapatista agrarian program is the promotion of a revamped ejido system as the path to prosperity for the peasantry as a whole. Earlier articles in *Communist Voice* analyzed the overall Zapatista economic and political strategy, and included the Zapatistas' own words in their three key declarations from the Lacandona Jungle. The following article by Mark studies how ejidos have actually developed in Mexico.

The poor peasant farmers of Mexico are suffering extreme poverty and many stand constantly on the brink of ruin. Several million peasants are presently landless, scouring the countryside and cities or migrating to the U.S. for any available wage work, mainly in jobs paying sub-poverty line wages, or living on the margins of the economy. On top of this, the indigenous peasants suffer special discrimination. Such conditions lay behind the uprising in Chiapas. If the poor peasants are not to be ground down, they must fight for their immediate needs. And this struggle should be vigorously supported by workers and progressive activists everywhere.

The neo-conservative policies of recent Mexican presidents Salinas de Gortari and Zedillo have been a slap in the face of the workers and poor farmers. As regards the peasantry in particular, these representatives of the Mexican capitalists declared an end to further land redistribution and cut important aid programs. And when the downtrodden peasants dared to rise up and demand land, aid and political rights, the government has replied with brutal repression.

The ruin of the Mexican peasantry is not simply, or mainly, due to the recent shift by the ruling PRI to the callous policies of neo-conservative economics, however. Rather, the neo-conservative policies are accelerating a process that has long been going on. They are expediting the destruction of small peasant agriculture by the development of capitalism in Mexico. Even the development of an extensive "ejido" system of agricultural co-ops in Mexico beginning with the reformist presidency of Lazaro Cardenas in the mid-1930's, while providing some welcome relief for land-starved peasants, could not stop the general tendency of capitalism to ruin small peasant farming. Indeed, the small peasant production carried out through the *ejidos* eventually led to the development of capitalist relations and the growth of class polarization among the peasantry.

The demands of the poor peasants for relief, whether they are in the ejidos or not, are necessary to fight for. But portraying the ejidos as the way to achieve general prosperity for the peasantry means creating a harmful illusion. Ultimately, it means

prettifying the capitalist relations that have developed within the ejidos. Nevertheless, it is quite fashionable in the left to promote panaceas about agricultural co-ops. The Zapatista leaders, organizers of the heroic revolt in Chiapas, consider the further development of the ejidos as the main social measure necessary to provide the good life to the peasantry. The liberal and reformist left often portrays the ejidos as some sort of semi-socialist cocoon shielding the peasants from capitalism. Indeed, even reformist representatives of the Mexican capitalist class, like presidents Lazaro Cardenas in the 1930s or Echeverria in the 1970's, were not above portraying the government-aided ejido system as a blow to the capitalism and imperialism.

But studying what happened to the peasantry during the last 60 years of extensive ejido development in Mexico reveals quite another picture. Rather than an idyllic harmonious life within the ejidos, we see that even with the improvements they brought to the landless peasants, in the end there remained widespread inability to eke out a living on the tiny ejido plots. We see that after a time, the better off ejido farmers becoming exploiters of their fellow ejido members and other landless impoverished peasants. Though until recently it was illegal to sell ejido land (as it was state land given over for use by the peasant farmers), economic conditions forced many ejido members to legally or illegally rent out their land to others on the ejido or to rich private interests. The last six decades show that even in co-ops the small farmer cannot, with rare exception, compete in the market place against the resources of the big capitalist farms be they Mexican or foreign-owned. This development of capitalist relations in agriculture has revamped the class structure of Mexico, driving millions of peasants off the land and converting them into wage-slaves in industry and driving them to the slums of the cities. As well, a sizable army of rural proletarians (wage-workers) has been created along with an enormous group of semi-proletarians who earn much of their income from wage-work while retaining their small subsistence plots. Capitalism has ravaged the Mexican peasantry, despite *and through* the ejido co-ops. But to the extent it has proletarianized the peasantry, Mexican capitalism has created further conditions for the potential development of the class struggle that will eventually bury it.

The extent of ejido co-op development

The Mexican revolutionary period beginning in the second decade of this century destroyed the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. Diaz accelerated the dispossession of the communal farm lands of the Indians and granted large parts of the country's land to big Mexican landowners and U.S. and other foreign capitalist interests. This resulted in swelling the ranks of the landless peasantry and fueled the demand for land reform that was one of the main battle cries of the revolution. The aftermath of the revolution, however, ushered in governments more

interested in placating the rich elite than in satisfying the demands of the masses. While official land reform crawled along, the peasants waged fierce struggles against the big landowners throughout the 1920s and early 30s.

The coming to power of the reformist bourgeois government of Lazaro Cardenas in 1934 marks the start of a much larger-scale agrarian reform. Cardenas distributed over 20 million hectares (about 50 million acres) to the poor peasants and vastly expanded the ejido system along with a system of state credits and other sorts of aid. Under Cardenas, ejido land with irrigation increased four times, encompassing half the allotments.¹ While the situation of the peasants improved somewhat, large sections of the peasantry were unaffected, and aid was inadequate and weighted toward those ejidos that were commercial successes. Ejido farmers were pressured to develop their farms according to the plans of the government bureaucracy, and government laws and official peasant organizations were established to keep the struggle of the peasants from impinging too far on the interests of the wealthy capitalist farms. In short, Mexican land reform was carried out in a halting, bureaucratic way, not in a revolutionary way most advantageous to the poor peasants.

This basic program was continued by all subsequent Mexican presidents with more or less zeal, at least until the last couple of years. A second big wave of land redistribution took place between 1956 and 1976 although the land was of poorer quality. By 1990 some 3.5 million people held rights to ejidal land. If one includes the families of those working such land, the ejido population had clearly become a big part of the entire rural population of 23 million. For example, in the state of Oaxaca, individuals with ejidal rights recently comprised about 44% of the economically active population of the state.² Nationally, the ejidos comprise nearly 50% of all grazing, agricultural and forest land in the country. This breaks down into 75% of all land used in agriculture, 62% of forest land and 43% of livestock-grazing land.³

These statistics shows that despite the miserably slow, painful and incomplete way it was carried out, an extensive ejido system eventually came to be established in capitalist Mexico. Of course, it also must be kept in mind that however impressive the amount of land that came under control of the ejidos, over 87% of ejido farmers do not even farm collectively, but on individual small plots with meager resources while the big capitalist farms have the prime land and vast resources.

¹Cockcroft, James D., *Mexico: Class formation, capital accumulation and the state*, p.132, Monthly Review Press, 1990 edition.

²Lynn Stephen, *Viva Zapata!: Generation, gender, and historical consciousness in the reception of ejido reform in Oaxaca*, p.10, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1994.

³ Statistics derived from *The End of Agrarian Reform in Mexico: Past lessons, future prospects*, Billie R. DeWalt and Martha W. Rees, p.5.

The development of class differentiation in the ejidos

Despite its limitations, ejido agrarian reform brought major changes. As compared to the utter destitution of the Diaz dictatorship, the overall conditions of the peasants improved and the number of small peasant farms dramatically increased. However, as communist theory shows, market competition between small producers leads to growing class differentiation and conflict. The ejidal co-op system has, even with certain government restrictions, created a broader base for the development of capitalist relations in the countryside. On the one side, a relative handful of ejido farms have become successful commercial enterprises. On the other side, vast numbers of ejido members, unable to survive solely on their farming incomes, must work periodically or full-time as wage-workers for the wealthy ejido farmers or on private capitalist farms or in non-farm occupations.

One sign of the plight of the poor ejido farmers is the massive amount of land that has been rented, sold or abandoned. In 1992, the Mexican government decided to allow ejido farmers to become owners of their individual plots with the right to sell them if they wish. Before that, however, ejido land was owned by the state, which gave the ejido members the right to use the land. It was illegal to sell land and there were restrictions on renting the land, too. But when poverty-stricken farmers could no longer survive through farming, they commonly rented out or even sold their lands anyway. A review of studies on ejidos published in 1994 states: *What is striking in the literature on individual ejidos is how, in spite of regulations and laws to prohibit it, a very active land market has flourished. This land market began soon after the land was redistributed and has increased in activity, especially in the last two decades. Sharecropping, land rental, and even land sales are all quite common in most ejidos in every section of the country.*⁴ Some studies claim that even on the minority of ejidos that are considered collective farms, ejido members abandon their land as frequently as on individual ejidos or sell their ejido rights to other ejido members. Land has historically not only been rented to others in the ejidos but to private capitalists.

While most ejidal land rented out is by impoverished ejido members, not all ejido members who rent land do so because of poverty. Well-off ejidal members are able to gain control of the land of their impoverished neighbors and then have poorer ejido farmers sharecrop on it. Wealthy ejido members also hire wage-laborers to work their farms or land rented to them by their poorer cohorts, or assist the better off peasant in working these plots. Thus, they become exploiters. And in some cases the well-off peasants branch out into other business enterprises which become their primary concern while the hired help maintains the farm. A number of studies over the past 20 years indicate "in all ejidos in which careful studies of land distribution have

⁴*Ibid.*, pp.35-36.

been made, there is substantial inequality in landholdings.”⁵

The accumulation of wealth by one ejido member at the expense of another often finds its fullest expression among ejidal officials. They use their official powers, and their position as intermediaries between the ejido and government officials and credit agencies to increase their land holdings and line their pockets. The conversion of ejidal officials into corrupt power brokers is a common fact of life on ejidos. A study in the mid-70s reports there are even “[peso — ed.] millionaire ejidatarios”.⁶ A 1988 study reports how one of these “millionaires” uses Mayan and refugee Guatemalan labor to maintain his farm operations.⁷

Another index of the miserable lot facing the mass of ejidal farmers is the extent to which they need to seek other avenues of income to survive. In the 1950s it was estimated that 85% of ejido farmers earned over half their income from farming. By the early 80s, only about 40% of them did so. Mostly the outside income came from working as seasonal wage-laborers; for a large section of ejido members farming became merely a supplement to wage-labor.⁸ While the ejido farmers who exploit others are generally small-time operators compared to the big, private capitalist farms and domestic and foreign agribusinesses, the contradiction between the ejido elite and the wage-workers can become quite sharp. Both the capitalists and the exploiting ejidatarios have a common interest in keeping wages low and worker productivity high. One writer on the subject cites the contradictions between ejido sugar-cane growers and the day workers hired by them, stating “most day workers in the fields referred to the ejidatario ‘bosses’ as *patron*.”⁹ A similar hostile relationship existed in ejido tobacco and henequen growing.

The destruction of the poor ejido farmer is also demonstrated by the plight of those who still try to earn most of their income through their little farms. The poor peasants often fall into debt to the government’s Banco Rural and private creditors, which gives these lenders great leverage in how the farm is run. Historically, Banco Rural has virtually run some entire ejidos. In such cases, the poor “independent” farmer becomes much like an employee in their relation to the credit institutions. In a 1981 conversation with ejido farmers in northern Michoacan (in central Mexico), a researcher reported that the ejido members complained that “*Banco Rural is our patron. We’re the workers and we don’t even get a wage or have a labor union Our earnings from farming are far less than what we’d get if we were bank employees.*”¹⁰ Interestingly, the ejido in question was actually one of the better-off farms, utilizing fertilizers and tractors. Of course, acquiring such farm “inputs” necessary to compete against rich farmers, is one of the main sources of

indebtedness.

Ejidos and big capitalist agriculture

As the example of indebtedness to the banks shows, ejidos don’t exist as islands of communal bliss but have been integrated into the capitalist system as a whole. Another feature of this integration has been the ties between ejidos and big commercial farms and imperialist transnational agribusiness. Ejido farms, with government help, have been used by capitalist farmers and transnational corporations as junior partners in exploiting cheap peasant labor. In some cases, the government food agency, CONASUPO, has acted as a middle man, buying the production of ejidos and small private farms at bargain prices, and then selling them to the imperialist agribusinesses or to Mexico’s state-private joint venture, Albamex. International agribusiness also has worked out arrangements with the Mexican exploiters who advance credit to ejidos on the conditions that they grow what the agribusinesses want grown and sell the crop to them. An example of this is the U.S.-dominated strawberry growing in the Zamora region of Michoacan.¹¹ Here the transnationals use Mexican agents to procure rented land from the ejidos. In this area, 80% of the ejidal land was rented at one time.

The power of the big capitalists in relation to the ejido is clearly shown by their domination of commercial agricultural production. The big capitalists and agribusinesses account for a relative handful of farms. Yet, according to one estimate, in 1960, 2% of farms accounted for 70.1% of all sales.¹² Their scale of production, extensive mechanization, superior irrigation, access to credit, etc., along with hefty chunks of government agricultural aid slanted toward the large growers over the small, means the small ejido and private farmer cannot compete. In the early 80’s, a mere 3.5% of farms absorbed almost ¾ of modern farming “inputs” including irrigation and capital investments.¹³ There are rare instances where an ejido has achieved the size to compete against the rich private farms. But such “success” means these ejidos have led the way in ejido exploitation of wage-labor. They have become successful capitalist exploiters in their own right.

Chiapas: development expands class differentiation among the peasantry

Chiapas, the location of the Zapatista-led peasant uprising, is one of the most economically backward regions of Mexico. Traditionally, it also lagged well behind most every other Mexican state in terms of government development aid and social programs. Nevertheless, significant ejido land redistribution took place in the Central Highlands region of the state beginning under L. Cardenas in the 1930s and, over the last two decades, extensive peasant farming colonies have spread to the eastern section, in and around the Lacandona jungle, the

⁵*Ibid.*, p.17.

⁶*Ibid.*, p.18.

⁷*Ibid.*, p.51.

⁸Cockcroft, p.191.

⁹*Ibid.*, p.204.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p.193.

¹¹DeWalt and Rees, p.49.

¹²Cockcroft, p.153.

¹³*Ibid.*, p.166.

Zapatista base area. While Chiapas remains one of the poorest states, there was a large influx of development money into the state starting in the 1970s connected to oil development and hydroelectric projects. Employment of the local population in various development projects was a big factor in accelerating the growth of market relations among the peasantry. Meanwhile, in the western part of the state, large commercial agriculture has long existed, employing a sizable rural proletariat. Thus, even in backward Chiapas, capitalist relations have become dominant.

A book by the U.S.-based liberal Institute for Food and Development Policy (Food First) called *Basta: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* chronicles the class polarization that has taken place among the ejido and small private farmers in Chiapas during the last 30 years. Food First Executive Director Peter Rosset declares in an introduction to the book that the Zapatistas are “showing all of us a path forward” and the authors are similarly enamored with certain Zapatista views. Among other things, the authors share with the Zapatistas the general notion that peasant co-ops under capitalism will be the salvation of the peasantry. Thus, the authors tout a restructured version of the ejidos, small non-farm business co-ops, and even a devaluation of the peso (!) to help the co-ops export crops, as the answer to the poor peasants’ problems. They don’t seem to mind that their own book shows that such “solutions” have not saved the peasants and that the creation of peasant entrepreneurs is an example of the splitting of the peasantry into rich and poor that they elsewhere decry. Despite these and other problems, the book does contain a good deal of useful information.

The book points out that “while *ejido* land itself has not yet become a commodity to be bought and sold, the use of land, to a great extent, had — even before the ‘reform’ of Article 27 of the Constitution and the Agrarian Code [allowing sale of ejido land — ed.] liberalized the tenure and use of *ejido*. Firewood once free for women to gather anywhere in the *ejido* or communal lands is treated today as a private good to be bought and sold. Now that highland farming requires capital expenditures, poor families without assets more readily rent land to wealthier neighbors.”¹⁴ As the poor sunk further down, a few peasants made a killing. *Basta* writes about how the poor are exploited by wealthier peasants, “many of whom derived substantial income from skilled wage work and commerce and who thus could afford fertilizer, weed sprays, and even the cost of farm laborers.”¹⁵ Some peasants became rich enough to form their own businesses while having impoverished peasants work their land-holdings. The book notes a case where one rich peasant employed 25 field hands during 1987, employing them on land rented from destitute peasants.

In some instances, the most vicious forms of exploitation have developed within the peasantry. For example, peasant farmers who accumulated wealth and established small busi-

nesses took advantage of those desperate for cash by “prepaying workers at a discount to contract for their future labor.”¹⁶ Under this practice, extra-low wages were paid to the poor peasant months in advance of the actual use of their labor. Wages thus become so low that it becomes as economical to employ hired labor as have family members work the farm! Even when there is no work for such pre-paid labor on their employers’ farm they can only work for others at the discretion of their boss and can be “lent” to other employers in a modern version of debt servitude. As well, poor indigenous peasants now have “their own” indigenous usurers who “are living in substantial measure from the surplus product of others’ work.” (*Ibid.*, p.118)¹⁷ One such money-lender has given up running his small trucking business on weekends because of the interest he earns on the equivalent of \$18,000 in loans, an enormous sum in the context of rural Chiapas. So much for Food First’s dreams about the wonder-working powers of small peasant business!

The above examples involve peasants in the Central Highlands where agrarian reform has been in existence for quite some time. But the same process is at work in the relatively newer ejido settlements in eastern Chiapas. In this regard the book mentions the *Nuevo Huistan* ejido populated by Indians from another part of Chiapas. It points out that by 1983, 7% of its income was from cash crops and livestock. In terms of land area devoted to subsistence farming in the surrounding area in 1990, it was only 30%. The effects of this development? “It is important to note that the settlement’s increasingly commercial orientation separated settlers (who for the most part had begun production on roughly equal allotments of land) into two groups, one of poorer settlers who relied on subsistence farming and wage work for other compatriots, and a wealthier group involved in marketing cash crops and cattle.”¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, underdevelopment has long been a problem in Chiapas. But in the conditions of generalized lack of resources and oppression, the class antagonisms among the peasantry were considerably less developed. The old social structure, while hardly an ideal, retained a certain sense of community that served as an ad hoc social safety net. But with development came a shattering of this system. Oil development and other projects opened up jobs for the poor peasants where they could earn a lot more than on their little plots. With the funds from these jobs, some peasant farmers could apply more modern techniques to their farming and become viable commercial farmers. Or they could invest their funds in small businesses. This created a serious division between rich and poor, exploiter and exploited. And with this, the old safety net was undermined — everyone was on their own to sink or swim in the competitive market. The two painful choices offered the peasants in Mexican society were backwardness with some social harmony, or development and class polarization.

The book *Basta* also calls attention to some other noteworthy

¹⁴*Basta: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.118.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.45.

features of social structure among the peasants. It relates how in the Central Highlands, the PRI long ago set up a stratum of indigenous officials who have discretion to dispense money for projects. This has been another source of class stratification. This contrasts with eastern Chiapas where the local government is in the hands of non-indigenous rich ranchers and farmers despite the fact that the surrounding population is largely Indian. Also, eastern Chiapas has been the site of explosive growth of small farming settlements over the last 20 years, attracting landless peasants from throughout Chiapas and other states. Many were still fighting for government recognition of land claims when the 1992 laws announcing an end to redistribution of land hit. Such conditions partially explain why the Zapatista revolt is thought to have garnered its most active support from eastern Chiapas.

Effects on class structure

As we have seen, ejido development did not stop capitalism from wrecking havoc among the small peasant producers. Capitalism's continuing tendency to ruin small peasant agriculture has played a major role in a dramatic shift in the class structure of Mexico. The development of mechanized capitalist farming, and the inability of the poor peasant to compete with the capitalist farms, has continually swelled the ranks of peasants who can no longer make a go of it in farming. These poor peasants have left the countryside by the millions and swelled the ranks of the working class and the unemployed scrounging for an existence in the urban slums. Just how little ejido development has arrested this process is shown by the following fact. In the post-Lazaro Cardenas period of ejidal development the economically active population involved in agriculture declined from 65% in 1940 to 29% in 1979 while in the same period industrial occupations grew from 15% to 27.6% and the service sector employment grew from 19% to 43%.¹⁹ These figures do not show how many of the people employed in each sector were working class, intermediate classes or bourgeoisie. But they undoubtedly reflect a major decline in the overall importance of small farming and the creation of a big industrial and service working class.

Although only about 29% of the Mexican population is now considered rural, even here wage-work is extremely widespread. Using figures from about 1980, it appears that a full-time rural proletariat comprises about 12% of the rural workforce. Examples of such workers (largely women) includes those in the food processing operations of Kellogg's, General Foods, Coca-Cola, etc. or the German-owned coffee plantations of Chiapas which employed about 25,000 indigenous workers. But many rural proletarians are employed by small farms, too. In 1980, some figures indicate about another 26% of the rural workforce engages in part-time field hand work.²⁰ This statistic on part-time field hands does not explain how much of these part-time

workers' incomes comes from wages as compared to farming and other sources. But many studies indicate a *majority* of ejido and other small farmers earn most of their income outside of their own plots which merely supplement their wage work. As well, class stratification has grown since 1980. Therefore, it is most likely that the semi-proletariat is much bigger than the 26% figure on occasional field hands suggests and, along with the proletariat, is probably the majority of the rural workforce. This report will not attempt to give a final estimate of the exact size of the entire semi-proletariat or proletariat in the countryside nor the large section of peasants engaged primarily in farming. But there has been another pole in the class differentiation among the peasantry. This is the fast growing section of rural exploiters who, despite their rapid growth, remain a tiny part of the peasantry as a whole.

Clearly, ejidos have not prevented capitalism from ruining the small peasant producer nor the triumph of large-scale capitalist agriculture. They have not prevented the dramatic proletarianization of the peasantry. At the same time, large sections of the rural population still have some interest in small farming, although the main trend is that the small plot plays a lesser role in their lives. Despite the decreased importance of farming in the peasantry's income, there remains a tendency to hold on to the small plot as a backup means of economic security in a country with over 40% un- and under-employment.

These trends highlight the importance for any revolutionary working class trend in Mexico to approach the peasantry not by glamorizing demands for "land" or "ejidos," but by emphasizing the distinct class demands of the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat. It shows the need for class organization that fights for both the immediate interests and the long-term goal of the proletariat to overthrow capitalism and place the means of production in the hands of society as a whole.

"Article 27" changes: further privatizing ejido property

Viewed in the historical context of 60 years of ejido development, the changes made by the neo-conservative PRI government in 1992 to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 do not mark the beginning of "privatization" of the ejido, but facilitate a process that has long been underway. Article 27 provided the legal basis for land reform in Mexico. The 1992 revisions include a declaration that the government will end further redistribution of land to poor peasants and will allow (but not require) ejido land to be sold, rented, sharecropped, mortgaged, or participate in joint ventures with private entrepreneurs and foreign investors. A majority of the ejido must vote to join a process where each plot must be formally mapped out (demarcation of plots is a common source of conflict among ejido members) and then the owners of each plot receive a deed to their parcel. Thus, the law legalizes practices that are already widespread.

This does not mean the changes to Article 27 are not important, however. Declaring an end to further land redistribution will especially hurt those peasants who are still clamoring for land and making land claims. The new laws will make it

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p.183.

²⁰Figures for semi-proletarians derived from Cockcroft, p.191.

easier to alienate land and intensify class differences. Of particular immediate interest to the Mexican government, it will mean it can more easily cut back on its financial obligations to the ejidos. At the same time, it is likely that there will be a mixed reaction by the peasantry to these measures. Some will be very upset. There will be well-founded trepidation among many peasants about the measures as they contemplate losing the little security that a small plot may bring. This is especially so since these measures come at a time when the government had already been cutting back ejido subsidies, price supports and protective tariffs. There is resentment that big capitalists will benefit from these changes at the expense of the small farmer. But since ejido development is already largely *de facto* privatized and since the traditional peasant dreams of owning their own little plot are far from dead, the new changes may have some appeal. Moreover, there is no love loss for the PRI bureaucracy which has delivered on few of its promises to the ejidos and created a repressive political atmosphere. In fact, the right to alienate land may be seen as a boon to some poor peasants who were forced to rent their plots at cut-rate prices partially because, as an illegal transaction, the buyers had extraordinary leverage over rental prices.

As of 1994, the process of giving deeds to ejido members was still under way. This report cannot give a figure for how many ejidos have or will enter the privatization process. Some ejidos had entered this process and a detailed research report on the matter characterizes the process as not moving quickly but

“plodding through.”²¹ This same report predicts that while small ejido plots will not quickly be sold en masse, gradually over the next two decades many holdings will be sold. In this regard, the report observes that “*even without the certification program, the ejido would be unlikely to continue as it has since the 1920s and 1930s.*”²²

Forward through the class struggle!

The misery of the poor peasants in Mexico is not just a result of the cruel PRI policies of recent years. Its roots are in capitalist development itself. For revolutionary Marxist-Leninists, this means that disgust with neo-conservative policy should not be channeled into daydreaming about uplifting all the peasants under capitalism through ejidos, even under the most radical ejido program. It means placing emphasis on the development of class consciousness among the peasantry, pushing forward the class struggle and explaining to the millions of destitute peasants that there will be no long-term or thorough relief for them until they join forces with the urban working class in rising up in a revolution that ends Mexican capitalism. □

²¹Stephen, p.35.

²²*Ibid.*, p.34.

What really happened in the last years of the MLP: The controversy over anti-war work

Previous issues of the *Communist Voice* have gone into the differences between it and the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group. Both the comrades now in the Communist Voice Organization and those in the *CWW* group spring from the Marxist-Leninist Party, and we both opposed the MLP majority that dissolved the party at its Fifth Congress in November 1993. Together with some other comrades, we formed the so-called "minority" that continued communist activism.

But the *CWW* became increasingly intolerant of others, which helped lead to the fragmenting of the "minority". They cited, among other things, the history of the collapse of the MLP as justification for their suspicions of others. In response, the *Communist Voice* has carried material on what really happened in the last years of the MLP. It traced the clashes during the last years of the MLP between those who increasingly denigrated Marxism, anti-revisionism, and activism and those who held that communism remained the only path for the liberation of the working class. (See *On Complacency—Part Two, CV #2*, June 1) It showed that the Chicago comrades stood aloof from all of these struggles except their own polemic against the *Workers' Advocate*, the central newspaper of the MLP.

But the *CWW* claims that their objections to the *Workers' Advocate* were the only real struggle for communism in the twilight of the MLP; comrade Rene of the *CWW* claimed that the *WA* was covering up for U.S. imperialism. So to help fill in the picture of the last years of the MLP, this polemic has to be examined.

The polemic covered a wide range of issues, many of which are listed in *On Complacency—Part Two*. But it will be useful to examine them in detail. Fortunately, for the part of the debate that concerned agitation against the Persian Gulf War, there is a series of three thoughtful and detailed articles from 1991-92 by comrade Slim. He sought to look carefully into all the issues and concerns raised by the Chicago comrades. His articles are also exceptional for their detailed review of the actual materials that appeared in the *Workers' Advocate*. They not only provide an excellent starting point for judging the Chicago polemic, but have other value as well:

- ◆ They provide a review of the extent of MLP agitational work and the theories behind it. MLP work in the mass movements went basically along the line outlined in the *Documents of the Second Congress* of the MLP of 1984, and Slim provides some additional elaboration.

- ◆ They show that the *Workers' Advocate* not only maintained agitation on topic events, but appealed for the building of communist organization. The liquidationist currents in the MLP never succeeded in taking over the *Workers' Advocate*; instead the main ones aimed at undermining and

eliminating the *WA* and the *WA Supplement*.

- ◆ Finally, the history of the *Workers' Advocate* that they illustrate bears on any consideration of what we need today. Despite its continued lively agitation and communist appeals, the *Workers' Advocate* did not stem the decline of the MLP. The *WA* lacked something. For example, it failed, as did the Fourth Congress of the MLP, to bring to the surface the doubts and controversies that were increasingly on the minds of comrades. Certain issues were debated in the *WA Supplement*, but the debate didn't go nearly far enough. The *WA* failed to press hard enough on these issues so that all shades of thought would have felt compelled to express themselves in its pages, and thus give comrades a picture of the differing trends of thought developing throughout the MLP. And the *WA*, while appealing for continued work, failed to see what major changes would be necessary to maintain this work in the future. Such gaps sidelined the *WA* with respect to the issues simmering in the MLP, and also meant it couldn't deal vigorously with similar ideological issues among the activists in general. This should show us that any attempt to continue work today, while avoiding a discussion of major differences on orientation and strategy, is doomed to failure.

As to the views set forward by the Chicago comrades, I believe the record will show that they were deeply flawed. Their accommodation to the petty-bourgeois nationalism of the third world, as seen in their support today of the Mexican journal *El Machete*, was already manifest. It showed in their protest when the Peruvian bourgeoisie was charged with bearing responsibility along with imperialism for the cholera epidemic; in their suspicions at the sharp criticism of the Mexican bourgeoisie in the *Workers' Advocate*; in their unease about *WA* agitation against Saddam Hussein; in their doubts about making *WA* appeals to the oppressed cannon fodder in the American armed forces; etc.

Besides this, the Chicago comrades also insisted that the *Workers' Advocate* was making a serious mistake of principle by seeking to agitate in the spirit of various Marxist-Leninist principles rather than simply repeating some classic formulations of these principles word-for-word. This demand is not only mistaken, but it does not indicate any real adherence to Marxism. For example, the Chicago comrades are firm defenders of the Mexican journal *El Machete*, even though it neither repeats communist principles word-for-word nor agitates in their spirit; they admit it has a petty-bourgeois democratic idea of what socialism is, takes Cuba as a country on the road to socialism, etc. It's instructive to compare their different standards for *Workers' Advocate* and *El Machete*.

Communist Voice will carry material that will let comrades

judge for themselves the polemic.

The original controversy was mainly carried in the pages of the *Information Bulletin* (IB) of the MLP, which was an internal publication circulated among members and sympathizers of the Party. There is far too much material to simply print all of it. Instead we will organize this material into sections dealing with particular topics, and print them one by one. We will not only carry Slim's articles but the relevant materials from the Chicago comrades and other comrades.

◆ In this issue, we start with the issue of the Persian Gulf war. We print the original charges that the *Workers' Advocate* was covering up for imperialism, and Part One of Slim's reply. Slim's review of the *WA* shows conclusively that the *WA*, far from covering for imperialism, was agitating in a most vigorous fashion. This is not to say that the *WA* made no mistakes or had no weaknesses or couldn't be improved, but to judge realistically its strengths and weaknesses.

◆ In the next issue, we will concentrate further on the issue of agitation directed to the common soldiers in the American imperialist armed forces. This will center on Part Two of Slim's reply, and relevant material by others on the issue of work with the military.

◆ Afterwards, we will print Part Three of Slim's reply, which deals in more detail with whether the important thing is to follow the spirit of the Marxist principles, or to repeat certain formulations word-for-word. It will deal with the explicit call for revolution, the "defeat" slogan, the question of left-social-democracy, and the issue of building an independent movement.

◆ We intend to cover other subjects later, such as the issue of the stand towards the Latin American bourgeoisie, and perhaps how the inner-party discussion developed, which is explained well in a chronology from Slim.

—Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit □

Polemic against the dangerous trend which attempts to cover the deeds and nature of today's U.S. imperialism

from comrade Rene, Chicago

Below are excerpts from the article, dated July 18, 1991, which appeared as titled above in *Information Bulletin* #62, Sept. 20, 1990. A few grammatical corrections have been made. The article starts with a "note" by Rene.

Note:

For some time now myself and other comrades in my cell have been discussing what I see as a danger for the Party expressed right in the pages of the *Workers' Advocate*. . . . I came to the conclusion that those views were not mistakes, oversights or misinterpretations but a consolidated trend of ideas that seek to cover for US imperialism, its deeds and nature today. As a result of what I consider lack of a real interest to properly discuss and correct at once this errors or otherwise prove that what I raise is not the truth and that there is nothing wrong with the *WA*, I started this polemic.

We face a real tough situation in our work in the US today, we must move promptly to read and analyze the line in the *WA* constantly, and respond immediately to the most minimal discussion, to pretend that everything is OK would be a grave mistake. This is why I encourage everyone who has seen this polemic to make sure that it gets circulated at once inside the entire party and made public as soon as the majority in the party has had a chance to read it. . . .

This polemic is dedicated both to those who wrote or support

the content of the articles on Free Trade [on NAFTA], and to those who in spite of admitting to seeing some smoke, refuse to take a stand against it and to call for measures to eradicate the smoldering fire at once, like true Marxist-Leninist, before it bursts into flames that will no doubt consume them, thus "passively" being in agreement.

.....
The author of this polemic sees in these particular articles a blatant attempt to COVER UP FOR U.S. IMPERIALISM, to MAKE A DISTORTED ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS IN THE USA AND IN ITS COLONIES.

.....
Tracing back reading *WA* one finds:

- 1) a series of articles during the war against Iraq:
 - a) trying to deny that today's imperialist armed forces in the U. S. are voluntary.
 - b) calling these soldiers: "Sons and daughters of the working class", followed by "Brothers and sisters" and finally "Comrades"!
- I'm opposed to putting the party of the working class on its knees just to promote some degree of opposition to the Gulf war from within the army. One thing is to report on the events and another to exaggerate this opposition specially when no mention is given to some of the reasons for some of the soldiers to refuse to go.
- c) The description and/or analysis of the resistance within

Iraq to Saddam Hussein is short and sometimes incorrect. Take the example of the role of the CIA and US in general.

2)In the same papers one finds not:

- a) Warnings to the American workers not to fall into chauvinism.
- b) Calls to defeat US imperialism (our "own").
- c) Analysis as to the significance of the US victory in the Middle East and how it puts it into a much better position than its competing 'blocks'.

d) Any mention that the US is still a superpower. And a very dangerous one — ask Iraq.

The end of the war against Iraq and what followed inside the U.S. (a big parade of chauvinism both disguised as good deeds to rid the world of a mad man, and naked imperialist feast) proved that the American working class had taken a big step backwards and is very much numb specially since the war started. Therefore it is now, by will or by mistake, well into the imperialists' trap. . . □

From comrade Anita, Chicago, July 18, 1991

Excerpted from the article which appeared in *Information Bulletin* #62, Sept. 20, 1991.

There has been considerable discussion in Unit A of a number of *WA* articles and analysis of U.S. Imperialism's status in the world today, the Persian Gulf War etc. There is concern in the Unit about some points made or not made in the *WA*. although there are varying views on specific points. I want to raise some points on the *WA*. articles on the Gulf War and the Free Trade Agreement here. Some of the issues on the Gulf War were discussed in the MWRS [Mid-West Regional Secretariat] last February. I'm reiterating them again because I don't know how much they were discussed beyond that and because I have given further thought to them since the MWRS.

GULF WAR: I have read and re-read the *WA*. articles on the Gulf War from September to the present many times. Locally, we studied some articles from Lenin on war and socialism etc. during the war and we spent some time trying to sort out some of the difficult questions that the war and the anti-war movement placed before us. I also, more recently, re-read our polemic on the Malvinas War and the RCPB [Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (ML)] with the idea of thinking more about these questions and about the *WA*. articles. All of leads me to continue to be concerned about the early agitation on the war and about some points in more recent articles as well. While the *WA*. certainly did not imitate the RCPB and blunder into every possible opportunist position available, I don't think that the articles from September to February completely lived up to the standards that we ourselves set. U.S. Imperialism is denounced but there is no absolutely clear cut stand that our chief enemy is at home, nor that we stand for the defeat of U.S. Imperialism, and there is not any agitation for socialism or Marxism-Leninism in relation to reactionary wars.

In the polemic against the Sparts' support for Saddam Hussein, the *WA*. explains how supporting Saddam Hussein is not for the defeat of U.S. Imperialism but never actually states unequivocally that we are for the defeat of U.S. Imperialism nor

explains what the tasks are for its defeat. Several articles raise that the issue is for the Arab and Iraqi toilers to "settle accounts with their own oppressors" while the U.S. workers are told to "protest U.S. war moves and war drive" (September, October *WA*.). There is also an article in September on the reactionary regimes of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia which states that the Arab masses need the politics of working class liberation. Indeed these are key questions for the Arab workers, and they are questions about which there is a lot of confusion. But don't we need those politics also, don't we need to settle accounts with our own oppressors also? And, of course, the U.S. is also an oppressor of the Arab and Iraqi people. In the January *WA*. an article mentions that Saddam Hussein deserves to be overthrown but it's not the U.S. who should do it. This is true enough, but there is not any mention that the U.S. imperialists also deserve to be overthrown. It is not until the February issue that there is an article about the U.S. being the number one aggressor in the world — listing the crimes of U.S. Imperialism. And it is not until the March issue that there is an article mentioning overthrowing imperialism (lead article) or an article on Marxism-Leninism, socialism and war (article on "why war after war"). I think these are serious shortcomings in the *WA*. 's agitation on the war that should be discussed.

In the recent *WAS*, in the letter from Austin, the author of the letter states agreement with the stand of the Party that the war was an inter-imperialist war. I was surprised to see that the editor in commenting on the letter did not clarify this. It is/was my impression that our stand was that it was a reactionary war but I'd find it hard to support any claim that Iraq was/is an imperialist country. Did I miss something or did the *WAS*?

.....
Although there have been times when I thought our press was too "picky" about formulations and phrases I find it worrisome that there is so much "looseness" in the press now. I also am concerned that comrades don't seem to be reading the *WA*. seriously and thinking about the content of the articles. We need a lively atmosphere of discussion and thinking to sort out the questions that have to be sorted out. □

Some thoughts on the discussion of the WA, in regard to the line on U.S. imperialism

from comrade Colleen, Chicago

The following extract is taken from Colleen's article of Oct. 20, 1991 in *Information Bulletin* #63, Nov. 10, 1991

I also have concerns regarding the agitation during the Gulf war; Anita has voiced a lot of these concerns. Something that worries me a lot is a common defense of the WA articles is that it served the movement; it took up the crucial issues at a crucial

time. To me that is not enough. Was it a Marxist-Leninist beacon, against imperialist war and imperialism and for socialism, did it call for defeating our own imperialism? It did call for Arab and Iraqi toilers to settle accounts with their own oppressors, while U.S. workers are left to 'protest U.S. war moves and war drive.' In general the stand towards the U.S. seems to be somewhat weak, in comparison to the stand towards Hussein. There is more to be said, but no time now. □

Letter from comrade George, Nov. 13, 1991

The following article from George, San Francisco Bay Area, appeared in *Information Bulletin* #64, Dec. 15, 1991.

.....
... I would like to speak to some of the issues relating to "The Workers Advocate" agitation on the Persian Gulf War brought up by the comrades from Chicago.

It seems to me that they have criticisms on a number of common points but reach differing conclusions. Rene sees a cover-up for US imperialism. Oleg sees a softening of the criticism of US imperialism. While Anita sees serious shortcomings, and a looseness in our writing. And on the anti-war agitation she concludes the *WA* didn't live up to its own standards set in its polemic with RCPB on the Malvinas war.

I have carefully reread most of our writings on the war. I can't agree with the conclusions of these comrades. My rereading reconfirmed my earlier impression. Our agitation was particularly powerful in making a broad anti-imperialist anti-war appeal. The *WA* writers obviously worked hard to deal with a whole series of questions that were thrown up by the nature of the war, the bourgeois war propaganda, the rapidly growing but politically undeveloped mass opposition, etc.. They dealt with the key questions coming up in the movement such as "support our troops", the role of the UN, the Democratic Party, the media even the phony anti-imperialism of "Defend Iraq" trots. All in a very concrete and popular way that drew the activists toward a revolutionary anti-imperialist position.

Does this mean that the articles are perfect, that they can't be improved. Of course not. There are points which the comrades raise that would strengthen the agitation. I want to address this later.

But a cover up or a softening of criticism of US imperialism absolutely not. Not living up to the standards we set and serious shortcomings? I disagree. As for looseness this is a more subtle

issue which I would also like to address later.

Let me explain in more detail why I disagree with the Chicago comrades views. One of the central points the comrades raise is the absence of the slogan or call for the "Defeat of US imperialism".

Should we have raised the slogan "Defeat US Imperialism"?

The first thing that needs to be pointed out is that all the way through our agitation, from our first articles in September on, the stand of building opposition to US imperialism is everywhere. The *WA* articles bring out the imperialist nature of the war moves and then the war. This is brought out explicitly in headlines as well as in the text. It is brought out concretely and in detail. It is brought out in dealing with the pro war arguments of the bourgeois (e.g. "Bush's arguments for war: The lies of an imperialist hypocrite" Sept. *WA*). It is brought out in background explanation ("What are Kuwait and Saudi Arabia" sub head — 'A system of imperialist client states' Sept. *WA*) It is brought out in our calls (e.g. "No blood for imperialism!" Jan *WA*). It is brought out in our photos (see front page *WA* Oct., Dec., Jan, Feb.). It is brought out in our advice to the activists of what direction the movement needs to be built (against the imperialists, sheiks and generals; independent of the capitalist parties; relying on mass action etc.) and it is brought out over and over again in a comprehensible popular mass agitational way.

Another feature of our agitation was that it dealt with the immediate issues that faced the activists and the movement (to reach out to the masses and how to agitate to do this, illusions in congress and the UN, the movement splitting by the liberals, the phony anti-imperialism of the Trots etc.)

Would raising the slogan "Defeat US imperialism" have

made our anti-imperialist stand any clearer or stronger? I don't see how. What would we be saying with it that we weren't already saying — beyond the particular phrase itself?

Would it have made our anti-imperialism more comprehensible. I think quite the opposite. As a main slogan or immediate call it made no sense. It seems to me it would have been an abstract speculative slogan. The possibility of US being defeated in this war only occurred in our day dreams — if only Hussein would suddenly change his stripes and wage people's war, if only the Arab masses could break free of their bourgeois, if only the only the movement in this country was at a higher level. Then sure some form of the "Defeat. . ." slogan might take on importance for guiding the movement in a revolutionary direction. But not in the situation we were in.

I think for us to have used it as a main slogan or call would have created the impression that either we were out of touch with reality or raising our slogans solely for their shock/anger expressive value. Further, since this wasn't a war in which we were rooting for the other side it would have been confusing standing on its own.

Did we live up to our standards?

Anita argues that

"I don't think that the articles from September to February completely lived up to the standards that we ourselves set. (in the RCPB polemic on Malvinas War — ed.) U.S. Imperialism is denounced but there is no absolutely clear cut stand that our chief enemy is at home, nor that we stand for the defeat of U.S. Imperialism, and there is not any agitation for socialism or Marxism-Leninism in relation to reactionary wars."

It seems to me that our agitation manifests beyond any reasonable doubt that our stand was the chief enemy is at home, although we didn't say those specific words. Likewise our work did just about everything concretely possible to further the long term goal of defeating US imperialism, although we did not use that precise slogan because it wasn't useful.

Agitation for socialism and Marxism-Leninism in relation to reactionary wars should be treated as a separate issue. I agree these have to be an essential part of our agitation. They are not only important because they give overall direction to the advanced activists and class conscious workers but also for our own ranks. This kind of agitation helps us maintain our revolutionary orientation in the thick of the struggle. It imparts the overall perspective to help us continue our work in the face of temporary setbacks. I think the article "Why one war after

another" (Mar. *WA*) was excellent in this regard.

Why not one or two of these articles earlier on? For me I am amazed at the amount and quality of the work that the *WA* staff does in normal times. During the War the work they accomplished was astounding. The issue came up the end of August and it was over in a few months and we had our national conference in the middle. In the context of our limitations if the point is to underscore the value and importance of this type of agitation I agree and think it is a good point to raise.

What should our attitude be toward the soldiers?

I just want to touch on this issue because it raises an interesting point tangentially. Rene and Oleg voice opposition to the *WA* addressing GI's in comradely tones. I think the facts are unmistakable that the bulk of the US military are the sons and daughters of the working class, and disproportionately from the most oppressed section because of the economic draft. This is one of the great weakness of the US military. A weakness we all would have seen if the war had been a prolonged one.

But the "war"/massacre was very short so the *WA*'s farsighted appeal and encouragement of GI resistance didn't bear fruit. And this is the tangential point I want to raise. The movement burst on the scene and disappeared in the space of a few months. The *WA*'s carefully crafted popular revolutionary agitation and the large amount of work in the local areas wasn't for naught but it wasn't given a chance to show its full power and correctness either. Different areas got a glimpse of it. LA [Los Angeles] for example had a situation where demonstrations were held weekly at one site. They were able to distribute *WA* reprints to a good number of activists over and over again. It wasn't long before a section of the activists were avidly seeking out the literature and agreeing with our stands. If we discount the brevity of the motion, when evaluating our work, we risk being unduly harsh because our tangible results were minimal.

I had originally intended to speak to other points in the Chicago comrades letters. But I have run out of time. There is one last point I promised to address above, that is Anita's criticism that the *WA*'s writing appeared to be getting a little too loose. I like your point about needing a lively discussion of our work. It will help us in this difficult period. I think that that kind of discussion can best be encouraged if we try to stick to elaborating the issues of why we think some thing is incorrect, rather than trying too quickly to characterize it and give it a name. For instance the issue of looseness does not require just an assessment of whether an idea is a little bit off the mark. It also requires an assessment the amount of work we can expect from our comrades who are already doing perhaps more then they should. □

A reply to criticisms of Workers' Advocate — Part One

On some of the questions raised about our agitation in the anti-war movement,

from comrade Slim, Detroit

The following article first appeared in the Dec. 15, 1991 issue of the *Information Bulletin* (No. 64), which was an internal discussion bulletin of the late Marxist-Leninist Party. It was part of a vigorous discussion, in which any comrade who so wished could contribute an article, and it would be circulated to everyone in the party in the very next issue of the *IB*. This article was dated Nov. 21, 1991.

Comrades from Chicago have put together a number of different criticisms of articles in the *Workers' Advocate* [the central newspaper of the MLP — *CV*]. It appears to me that some of the issues raised are merely differences over wording. Others are differences over how we should agitate — where the emphasis should be, what the slogans should be, etc. Still others are differences of analysis — different assessments of certain phenomena in the present objective situation and in the mass movements, and the significance of them for building a revolutionary movement.

Unfortunately — although there are different kinds of criticism, and on a series of different articles and different subjects — they have been thrown together under certain general headings: “a consolidated trend of ideas that seek to cover for US imperialism” (Sept. 20th *IB*, Rene, page 23) or “a softening of our criticism of U.S. imperialism” (Sept. 20th *IB*, Oleg, page 29) or “In general the stand towards the U.S. seems to be somewhat weak, in comparison to the stand towards Hussein” (Nov. 10th *IB*, Colleen, page 3) or that “I don’t think the articles from September to February completely lived up to the standards that we ourselves set.” (Sept. 20th *IB*, Anita, page 27)

To be able to get a handle on the criticisms, I think it is necessary to separate them out, to look at various of the separate charges one-by-one, and then, only after this, to come to a conclusion on the significance of the criticisms over-all.

As there is a wide range to the criticisms and issues involved, this cannot be done in one reply, but will take several. To begin the process, I will deal with some of the questions raised about the *Workers' Advocate* agitation on the Persian Gulf war.

Did WA list the crimes of U.S. imperialism?

Comrade Anita raises,

“It is not until the February issue that there is an article about the U.S. being the number one aggressor in the world listing the crimes of U.S. imperialism.” (Sept. 20th *IB*, page 27)

If the issue here is not over whether there was “one article”

but over whether we carried out a good deal of agitation against the U.S. being the number one aggressor and whether we repeatedly listed the crimes of U.S. imperialism, then I believe comrade Anita is mistaken.

Let’s look at the issue of listing the crimes of U.S. imperialism first. The fact is that it was not just in February, but from the very first articles on the Persian Gulf crisis in September, that the *WA* listed a series of past aggressions of U.S. imperialism.

Look, for example, at this statement in the Sept. *WA*: “Didn’t Bush himself just invade Panama last December, violating international ‘law and order.’ Didn’t Bush, as vice-president, help organize the invasion of Grenada, the mining of ports in Nicaragua, and a dirty war in Nicaragua? Even the World Court ruled against the U.S. on the mining of Nicaraguan ports, but the U.S. blithely ignored that . . . And what about Israel, to whom Bush sends \$3 billion a year in aid? As vice-president, Bush supported Israel’s brutal invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which included the bombing of Beirut and the massacre of thousands of Arabs . . . It is a war to ensure imperialist domination in a strategic region. The workers have no interests in this kind of war!”¹

Or look, for example, at this statement in the Oct. *WA*:

“Iraq invaded Iran in 1980. The Reagan-Bush government backed Saddam Hussein in that effort. Israel invaded its neighbors in 1967 and carried out a brutal blitzkrieg in Lebanon in 1981. Again Reagan and Bush supported Israel . . . White racist South Africa invaded its black African neighbors many times, but Washington did not go into a war frenzy. The cozy support for apartheid South Africa remained undisturbed . . . it’s the worst hypocrisy for the U.S. to talk about standing up against ‘naked aggression’. What did Bush do in Panama last Christmas, where more than 5,000 Panamanians were slaughtered and most buried in hidden mass graves? What did Reagan and Bush do in Grenada or Nicaragua?”²

These types of statements can be found sprinkled about the literature throughout the Gulf conflict. In fact, this was a basic theme of our agitation — exposing the hypocrisy of our “own” government’s claims that it was “opposing aggression,” pointing out that the U.S. is notorious for naked aggression in the past, and emphasizing that in the Persian Gulf war the U.S. was

¹“Bush’s arguments for war: The lies of an imperialist hypocrite”, *WA*, Sept. 1, 1990. [p.7, col. 1]

²“Bush’s dilemma: How to sell his oil war,” *WA*, Dec. 1, 1990. [p.4, col. 1]

carrying out imperialist aggression.

Did *WA* denounce the U.S. as the number one aggressor?

But then what about the second question over whether the *WA* failed to target U.S. imperialism as the number one aggressor in the world. Comrade Rene makes more or less the same criticism as comrade Anita when he says,

"2) In the same papers [on the war against Iraq] one does not find: . . . d) Any mention that the U.S. is still a superpower. And a very dangerous one — ask Iraq." (Sept. 20 *IB*, Rene, page 24)

On this, too, I believe comrades are mistaken. The *WA* repeatedly pointed out that U.S. imperialism is the dominant power in the Middle East, the number one military power in the world, the remaining superpower, and so forth.

Look, for example, at these statements from the Sept. *WA*:

"U.S. imperialism has been the single biggest power in this area for decades. U.S. oil monopolies have long dominated the profit making from the Gulf's oil. Washington is using this latest crisis to restore unrivaled U.S. hegemony in this area."³

And

"Beginning in the 1930's American oil companies had muscled into the area and eventually the U.S. became the dominant economic and military power."⁴

Or look at this statement in the Oct. *WA*:

"The truth is, it all boils down to naked big-power imperialism . . . this is a war to determine that U.S. imperialism is the world's top cop, the superpower which can maraud anywhere in the world it likes."⁵

Or take this example from the Dec. *WA*:

"Clearly the world balance of powers is shifting. Soviet imperialism has collapsed as a world superpower. Germany and Japan have begun to do better than the U.S. economically. Smaller powers in various regions of the world may begin to exert themselves for greater local strength — for example, as Iraq has attempted. In this situation, the U.S. ruling class wants to make a renewed bid for maintaining world supremacy.

"While U.S. economic strength has declined, it remains the world's most powerful military power — with not only the biggest armed forces

in the world but also the largest arms industry. In Bush's concept of the 'new world order,' he wants to use Washington's role as No. 1 world policeman to win new economic and political advantages for the U.S. ruling class."⁶

Or for a more thorough discussion of what the Persian Gulf war meant for the U.S. role in the Middle East and the world balance of powers, take a look at the article "What sort of 'new order' in the Persian Gulf?" which was dropped from the February *WA* for lack of space and carried instead in the Feb. 20 issue of the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*.

Now one may disagree with the *WA* assessment of the shifting world balance of powers and, in particular, with the argument that U.S. economic strength is declining relative to certain other imperialists. This is an important question of analysis in its own right, a question bearing on how we expect the world situation to develop and whether the prospects are for a long period of capitalist stability or for instability and revolutionary outbreaks. That question will have to be taken up in another reply.

But, for the time being, I believe the statements quoted above indicate that the *WA* continued to target U.S. imperialism as the number one military power, the number one aggressor in the world. The *WA* assessment of the world balance of powers did not blunt its fire against U.S. imperialism. And I think care should be taken not to let a disagreement over the assessment of the world balance of powers to blind one to the *WA*'s repeated assessment that the U.S. is trying to use its super-power position to strengthen U.S. imperialism all down the line.

Did *WA* direct its fire at "our chief enemy at home"?

Along with the above criticisms, comrade Anita also raises that in the articles from September to February,

"there is no absolutely clear cut stand that our chief enemy is at home . . ." (Sept. 20th *IB*, Anita, page 27)

Again, it must be seen that the *WA* repeatedly pointed out that the main enemy is at home. This was not simply a matter of a few words, as with the Trotskyites who make bows to some revolutionary phrases and then go on with their normal reformism. It was a basic underlying principle in all of our agitation and in all of our work. That is the fundamental question that should be looked at when assessing our agitation on the war. But for the moment, let's look at just the words expressed in the *WA*.

For example, look at these statements from the December *WA*:

"We strongly believe that the Marxist-Leninist stand on the Persian Gulf war is that this is an unjust, reactionary war on both sides. It is a robber's war. The duty of the working class in

³"Bush's arguments for war: The lies of an imperialist hypocrite," *WA*, Sept. 1, 1990. [p. 11, col. 1]

⁴"No to a war to save the oil kingdoms! What are Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?", *WA*, Sept. 1, 1990. [p. 6, col. 2]

⁵"No to an oil war in the Persian Gulf!," *WA*, Oct. 1, 1990. [p. 11, col. 1, col. 2]

⁶"Bush's dilemma: How to sell his oil war," *WA*, Dec. 1, 1990. [p. 4, col. 2-3]

the U.S. in such a war is to fight 'the main enemy at home' — 'our' capitalist ruling class. Meanwhile, to the working people of Iraq and the Middle East, we say they are right to oppose the U.S. imperialist build-up but they should not throw their support to the Saddam Hussein regime. To break the cycle of militarism, tyranny and capitalist exploitation, they need to build movements of the toilers against imperialism and all the local exploiters — whether they be Baathist militarists or medieval-style kings, sultans and sheikhs."

Or in the same article,

"We instead call on activists to help build a movement that will fight the bourgeoisie and imperialism. We put forward slogans against illusions in the UN and Congress and thus fight the harmful influence of the liberal bourgeoisie in the anti-war movement. We say, organize against the imperialist bourgeoisie in the U.S., and support the Middle Eastern toilers against their own exploiters and oppressive regimes. Don't defend the Iraqi regime — defend the Iraqi toilers."⁷

This seems to me to be a clear cut stand. And the same view is expressed, although more briefly and in slightly different words, in the 4th National Conference resolution which was carried in the Dec. 1 *WA*.

"Workers, youth, and all progressive people should join together to denounce and oppose this present aggression and threatened war. And we should direct the struggle first and foremost at our own bourgeoisie, and its imperialist system which stands behind the war drive We should indeed demand that the imperialists get out of the Middle East, and that the people of the region should be allowed to deal with their own problems."⁸

As well, the same stand is expressed in different ways through a myriad of other articles going back to September.

For example, in our promotion of the statement at the joint rally of anti-war protesters and strikers from Greyhound and the *New York Daily News*:

"A big cheer went up when a speaker from an anti-war coalition declared, 'After nine long months on strike, there's no doubt there's war. But the war is here! Against the greedy corporations, not against other workers in the Middle East!'"⁹

⁷"Should the anti-war movement 'defend Iraq'?", *WA*, Dec. 1 1990. [p. 6, col. 1 and p. 11, col. 4]

⁸"U.S. imperialism, get out of the Persian Gulf!", *WA*, Dec. 1, 1990. [p. 8, col. 2 and col. 4]

⁹"Strikers and anti-war protesters unite," *WA*, Dec. 1, 1990. (continued...)

Or in the national leaflet which came out in mid-January, right after the U.S. started bombing Iraq:

"Our beef is not with the Iraqi workers and youth (in or out of uniform). Our beef is with those who oppress us here at home. Our beef is with a system that brings us unemployment, homelessness, racism, bigotry and war."¹⁰

Or in our promotion in the October *WA* of the slogan from the Chicano moratorium:

"The slogan of the day [1970] was 'Down with imperialism!' and 'Our war is here!' That spirit was present in this year's march . . ."¹¹

Or in the lead article in the Sept. *WA*:

"Protest U.S. war moves! Let the Arab people settle accounts with their own oppressors! U.S. troops get out of the Middle East!"¹²

Or in the lead article from Oct. *WA*:

"The workers of the world have no interest in this war, not in either side. We here in the U.S. must oppose the U.S. war drive. The Arab people should settle accounts with their own oppressors . . . We must support the workers of the Middle East by standing up against U.S. intervention . . ."¹³

Now comrade Anita criticizes the wording in the last two articles listed above. She is unhappy with what she sees as a weakness in the revolutionary agitation in the *WA*. And she complains that these formulations call for the Arab people to make revolution, but not so for U.S. workers.

I will go into the question of the *WA*'s appeals for building up the revolutionary movement in the U.S. in a moment. But for now, it should be recognized that no matter what you think of the particular wording, the statements quoted above are expressions of the point of view that workers in the U.S. should be fighting the U.S. government, not Iraq; that our support should be not for the U.S. war on Iraq, but for the Iraqi toilers; that, in short, our chief enemy is at home.

Did *WA* call for revolution in the U.S.?

Now let us turn to the question of whether there was a weakness in the revolutionary agitation from the *WA*. In my view, all the agitation in the *WA* was directed towards building

⁹(...continued)
[p.2, col. 3]

¹⁰"No more blood for imperialism," national leaflet, mid-Jan., 1991.

¹¹"Chicano Moratorium anniversary protests U.S. war in Gulf," *WA*, Oct. 1, 1990. [p.7, col. 1]

¹²"No war for the oil companies! U.S. troops out of the Persian Gulf!", *WA*, Sept. 1, 1990. [p. 7, col.4, the boldfaced slogans at the end of the article.]

¹³"No to an oil war in the Persian Gulf!," *WA*, Oct. 1, 1990. [p. 11, col. 4]

the revolutionary movement in this country. And in fact the main themes and central issues on which we fought in the anti-war movement were the key questions without which there can really be no talk of revolution or socialism. But before going into this question from all its sides, let us first deal with some of the specific criticisms from Chicago.

Comrade Anita says that in the articles from September to February

“there is not any agitation for socialism or Marxism-Leninism in relation to reactionary wars.”

And later she says,

“it is not until the March issue that there is an article mentioning overthrowing imperialism (lead article).” (Sept. 20th *IB*, page 27)

I believe, if you are speaking of the articles which are *solely* on the war itself, then it is true there are not statements *explicitly* calling for the overthrow of the U.S. government or for socialism in the September through January (not February or March) *WAs*. But it is wrong to say there is not agitation for revolution and socialism “in relation” to the reactionary Persian Gulf war.

Here I am not talking about the articles criticizing revisionist state capitalism and calling for workers socialism — which can be found in the Oct., Dec., Jan. and Feb. issues of the *WA*. Nor am I talking about articles on other mass fronts of struggle which indicate a revolutionary direction, or articles that deal with the building of the revolutionary socialist party, and so forth — which can be found in the *WA* from Sept. through Feb.

But, instead, I want to look at only the articles that raise the question of the war, link it to other issues, and argue for revolution and socialism. I apologize for the rather lengthy quotes below. But I feel the need to make clear not only the words but, also, the flavor of the *WA* declarations.

To begin, I should note that I believe comrade Anita got her dates wrong. Actually in articles solely on the war, there were explicit calls for building the revolutionary movement as soon as the U.S. began bombing Iraq in mid-January. For example in the national leaflet (see footnote 10) and in the February lead article which was somewhat based on that leaflet. It says, for example,

“The present war is based on the class divisions in this country. The establishment is backing the war It is for ‘imperialism, right or wrong.’ . . . But the working people in this country share a common interest with workers all around the world. We all suffer from exploitation, and we all suffer from the growth of militarism and exploitation. Let us link up the anti-war movement with the radical aspirations of the common people, not the equivocations of a few hesitant ruling class figures To build an effective anti-war movement, we must target the imperialist system We must see that this was not an accident, but a result of all these institutions being tools of the imperialist ruling

class. Not the UN, not the Democrats, but the struggle against imperialism must be our banner The fight against this war is ultimately a struggle over what kind of society we want to live in. We need a new society that can uproot militarism altogether. Let’s build up a revolutionary opposition to the imperialist system, so that each generation does not have to keep waging an anti-war struggle, so that we can do away with imperialist war altogether.”¹⁴

Now let me pass on to some other articles that are not solely on the war.

Take for example the article in the Feb. *WA* on Bush’s State of the Union address:

“Meanwhile, the masses are being hit with a double-whammy. While our sons and daughters are being sent off to die in the Middle East for the greater glory of the oil empire, at home we are supposed to suffer so that the capitalists can remain filthy rich. Such is capitalism at its finest It’s time for the working class to launch its own war — not a foreign war, but a class war. The conditions for the working class will sink further and further unless we unite together for the interests of the working majority. Down with the exploiters and their sick system! Unity of all the exploited and oppressed!”¹⁵

Or look at article next to the front page lead on the war in the Jan. 1st *WA*. The New Year’s editorial links together the issue of the foreign war with the domestic issues of the capitalist economic crisis, the racist system, and attacks on women’s rights to point to the need for socialist revolution.

Under the subhead “Imperialism means war” it emphasizes,

“Imperialism hasn’t changed. It is a two headed monster devouring the sweat and blood of workers at home and ravaging the toilers abroad. It is a system of plunder and war. We must fight it every step of the way. Let us open the new year with the shout — No to an imperialist war for oil!” [p. 1, col. 2]

It then goes on to attack the capitalist system and the racist system in the U.S. And then it calls for the building of a revolutionary party of the working class.

“We must pull together our collective anger, our skills, our knowledge into organizations of every type And, if we are to rise in action for our general class interests, if we are to fight not only this or that outrage but the whole system of outrage, we must also build up our own party, a revolutionary party of the working class.” [p. 9, col. 4]

¹⁴“Spread the word, No blood for oil and empire!”, *WA*, Feb. 1, 1991. [p.11, col. 3-4]

¹⁵“Bush covers up the disastrous ‘State of the Union’,” *WA*, Feb. 1, 1991. [p. 2, col. 1 and col. 4]

And then the article goes into the question of socialist revolution:

“Still there are those who grumble ‘don’t work with the communists because even if the workers eventually overthrow the capitalists it is inevitable that new bosses will take over’ The communists don’t fight to trade one repressive government for another, but for working class rule. The communists don’t fight to replace old exploiters with some phony ‘socialist’ exploiters, but to eliminate all exploiters and build workers’ socialism We are working to learn from experience and develop the revolutionary theory that can guide the movement and arm it against betrayals and setbacks the communists are still small and the workers’ movement is still crippled. But the growing crisis is blowing away old illusions and opening new possibilities for organization. On this new year, let us join hands to plant the seeds of resistance. Workers and militant activists, join with the MLP to get organized and build up a revolutionary party of the working class.”¹⁶ [p. 10, col. 3-4]

Or for another example, look back to the Dec. *WA*. “. . . the Republicans and Democrats have really nothing to offer the working people but war, racism, anti-woman bigotry, S&L rip-offs, and unemployment. The signs of disillusionment with the capitalist politicians are seen everywhere Marxist-Leninist Party (MLP) is working to turn the mass discontent to militant action and the building up of an independent working class movement. Important in this is inspiring the masses with an alternative to this capitalist hell — workers’ socialism, which shows that there can be a future without exploitation and without capitalist bureaucrats and politicians riding on their backs.”¹⁷

Or look to the article in the Oct. *WA* on the recession. Among other things it denounces the Democrats,

“Oh they won’t cut the military budget, no the Democrats are saluting the U.S. war for oil in the Middle East.”

And it goes on to deal with the capitalist system:

“Capitalism . . . is a system built on the exploitation of the working majority by the rich parasites. As long as the system lasts, there will be periodic economic crises and a constant push against the working masses. We must get organized to resist the layoffs and homelessness and

cutbacks. We must get organized to stand as a class against the system of exploitation. The workers must get organized to build a new system, a system run by the workers in common for the benefit of all. A system without a class of leeches living off our sweat and toil. A system where production is for us to use, and so increasing production is not the cause of layoffs and recession but to increase the welfare of all.”¹⁸

The statements quoted above are some examples of the appeals for revolution and for socialism that we were making to the masses and to the anti-war activists during the Gulf crisis. In linking the issue of the war to domestic issues, these articles are useful for developing the mass questioning of the entire system and building the hatred of the masses for it. They are not merely throwing around the words revolution and socialism but developing a particularly strong appeal to the masses and to the activists for building up a revolutionary movement and a revolutionary party. When we are looking at our agitation during the Gulf war crisis, these and other articles should not be forgotten.

The main direction of our agitation on the war

Still, in the articles in the Sept.-Jan. issues of the *WA* that were *solely* on the war, there were not explicit calls for the “overthrow of U.S. imperialism,” for the “defeat of our own government,” for “socialist revolution.” And it appears that Anita and other comrades in Chicago are critical of that.

But for that criticism to be just, for it to be correct, I think the comrades have to prove that the articles that were solely on the war were *not* themselves agitation in the direction of building up the revolutionary movement; were *not* themselves agitation on the crucial issues which were essential to point the movement in a revolutionary direction; were *not* themselves the key questions for breaking the activists from illusions in the liberals and reformists and leading them into the revolutionary stream.

The comrades’ criticism does not do this. For example, Comrade Colleen argues,

“. . . a common defense of the *WA* articles is that it served the movement; it took up the crucial issues at a crucial time. To me that is not enough. Was it a Marxist-Leninist beacon, against imperialist war and imperialism and for socialism, did it call for defeating our own imperialism?” (Nov. 10 *IB*, Colleen, page 3)

But what does being a Marxist-Leninist beacon mean if it does not mean that our theoretical basis, or Marxist-Leninist principles, assist us to analyze and fight on the crucial issues at the crucial times that build up the movement and push it in a revolutionary direction; that in fact help the activists break from the reformists and opportunists and move toward a revolution-

¹⁶“New Year’s editorial: Sow seeds of resistance in a year of crisis,” *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991.

¹⁷Editorial on the 4th National Conference of the MLP, USA, Fall 1990, *WA*, Dec. 1, 1990. [p. 7, col. 1]

¹⁸“Face the recession with struggle,” *WA*, Oct. 1, 1990. [Starts on front page, cited passages are on p. 11, col. 3-4]

ary perspective?

It is essential, in this regards, to remember Lenin's criticism of the opportunists and reformists. He pointed out repeatedly that the issue was not who made calls for revolution and socialism. He emphasized that Kautsky, Trotsky, and other reformists of the Second International were indeed past-masters of such appeals. The crucial question was over revolutionary methods of struggle; over whether one actually worked in a way that pushed in the direction of revolution.

For example, in his famous *Socialism and War* Lenin put the question this way:

"Kautsky . . . Plekhanov . . . they recognized everything in Marxism except revolutionary methods of struggle, the preaching of and preparation for such methods, and the training of the masses precisely in this direction."

Or as he put it a few pages earlier,

"Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the same ideological-political content: collaboration of classes instead of class struggle, renunciation of revolutionary methods of struggle, helping one's 'own' government in its embarrassed situation instead of taking advantage of these embarrassments for revolution."¹⁹

It seems to me that this is the issue that has to be asked. There is no question that the *WA* agitated directly that socialist revolution is needed, I have shown that above. But did the *WA* also push in the direct of class struggle? Did it use the war-time issues to built hatred for our 'own' government and work to direct that hatred into a revolutionary stream? Did it, in short, follow revolutionary methods of struggle?

I think with any fair appraisal of our agitation you would have to answer yes. But let us look at our agitation a little more deeply and see what we find.

Revolutionary agitation illustrated — the "defeat" slogan

Let us take the example of the concrete application of the Leninist principle of standing for the "defeat" of our "own" government in the reactionary Persian Gulf war.

When we study Lenin's articles it is important not to just read and repeat the slogans from his time but to understand the key content that is being explained. Slogans always vary from time to time and from situation to situation. But the underlying principles, the real issues that are the basis for the slogans, that is what has to be gotten a hold of.

In World War I the direct social-chauvinists took the line of "defense of the fatherland" — support for the "victory" of their own government in the inter-imperialist bloodletting. The

¹⁹*Socialism and War*, V.I. Lenin, in the section "Kautskyism," pages 19-21, the Chinese pamphlet *Lenin on war and peace*. [Pamphlet of July-Aug. 1915, *Collected Works*, vol. 21, p. 311-2, and then p. 310 in the section "Social-chauvinism is the acme of opportunism".]

centrists, the social-pacifists, like Trotsky, under a mountain of empty phrases about "revolutionary struggle against war," put forward the slogan of "neither victory nor defeat." Against both of these slogans, Lenin counterposed the slogan of converting the imperialist war into civil war, and he pointed out that necessarily meant "defeatism," desiring and actually working to facilitate the defeat of your own government in the war.

Let us look at one of Lenin's explanations in the article, *The defeat of one's own government in the imperialist war*.

"What is the substitute proposed for the defeat 'slogan'? It is that of 'neither victory nor defeat' . . . This, however, is nothing but a paraphrase of the 'defense of the fatherland' slogan. It means shifting the issue to the level of a war between governments (who, according to the content of this slogan, are to *keep* to their old stand, 'retain their positions'), and not to the level of the *struggle* of the oppressed classes against their governments!" (emphasis as in original)²⁰

Here is one of the key issues that the party fought on through out the Persian Gulf war. We repeatedly and consistently gave a class analysis of the war and fought to break the masses and the anti-war activists out of the framework of a war between governments and to shift the focus to another side, to the struggle of the oppressed against the governments.

This was unquestionably a difficult struggle. It was not simply a fight against the direct chauvinists — including the majority of the Democrats, of the union bureaucrats and of the black misleaders — who stood for the victory of U.S. imperialism in a "quick war" for "vital national interests" and the "American way of life."

More importantly, it was a fight against the main social-democratic and reformist leaders of the anti-war movement who followed after the liberal bourgeois pacifists. A section of the Democrats, a section of union bureaucrats, and a section of black misleaders argued for a negotiated or diplomatic settlement on the basis of U.S. intervening with troops, sanctions against and the embargo of Iraq, and setting up U.S. military bases in the Persian Gulf. This they called "peace." But it was based on protecting "vital national interests" of U.S. imperialism, because they feared a shooting war would draw the U.S. into a "quagmire" and bring a military or political fiasco. Of course, when the shooting war actually broke out, most of this opposition collapsed — either voting support for the war or abstaining in the name of "supporting our troops." The main leaders of the anti-war movement either followed the liberal stand fully (as with the "Campaign") or trailed the liberals by raising slogans like "let Congress decide!" (as with the "Coalition"). In either case, their stand actually amounted to protecting our government from the "defeat" of suffering any political or military embarrassments and diverting the anti-war movement from targeting all the imperialist politicians and the imperialist system.

²⁰"The defeat of one's own government in the imperialist war", *Collected Works* of V.I. Lenin, Vol. 21, page 278-9.

(In passing, it should be mentioned that we also had to fight a section of Trotskyites who, from the other side, tried to keep the issue at the level of a war between governments by calling for “victory for Iraq” or “defend Iraq.”)

We exposed each of these sections. We denounced their concrete slogans and counterposed to them the call for driving U.S. imperialism out of the Middle East, for targeting imperialism, and for building the independent movement of the working masses. And we strove — through a myriad of different agitation on the war, on domestic issues, and so forth — to break the imperialist framework and orient the movement to the class struggle. These were some of the crucial issues for actually working in a revolutionary direction and concretely carrying out the “defeat” slogan.

But let us continue with Lenin. After the above description he went on to say,

“Those who accept the ‘neither victory-nor-defeat’ slogans can only by hypocritically in favor of the class struggle, of ‘disrupting the class truce’; *in practice*, such people are renouncing an independent proletarian policy because they subordinate the proletariat of all belligerent countries to the *absolutely bourgeois* task of safeguarding the imperialist governments against defeat. The only policy of actual, not verbal disruption of the ‘class truce’, of acceptance of the class struggle, is for the proletariat *to take advantage of the difficulties to overthrow them*. This, however, cannot be achieved or *striven for*, without desiring the defeat of one’s own government and without contributing to that defeat.” (see footnote 20, emphasis as in original)

Now we fought the social-democrats and imperialists who, in practice, were subordinating the anti-war movement to the liberal bourgeois pacifists, to trying to save our government from a potential fiasco in a shooting war. And we, in practice, were “striving for” revolution, working “in the direction of” revolution, by building up the mass movement on the basis of the class struggle, on the basis of breaking it from the liberal bourgeois line, on the basis of opposing the “class truce” — which went so far in the U.S. that union leaders were calling off mass protests and strikes and denouncing the militancy of the anti-war movement, for the sake of “supporting our troops.”

Of course, it must be admitted that U.S. imperialism had few difficulties in this war that we could use. It used its overwhelming military might to crush Iraq quickly; and the character of Hussein regime prevented it from waging much of a fight, much less turning to a people’s war as was waged in Vietnam. At the same time, there were no raging mass movements nor a vigorous revolutionary movement in the U.S. before the war that could be built upon quickly. Nevertheless, the mass movement did emerge, grew rapidly, and turned towards militancy in at least a number of cities. And our agitation used every difficulty the imperialists ran into, every exposure of its reactionary character and aims, to build up that movement and orient it towards a revolutionary perspective. We supported, encouraged, and in some cases directly led the militancy coming

up against the reformists subservience to respectability and legality. And we worked to build up opposition to the war within the military itself.

We did not say the words “we stand for the defeat of our own government” in this war. But we followed the only slogans that could mean concretely the “defeat” of our government in the war, because these were the only things that had the potential to build up a mass struggle that actually had the possibility to put spokes in the wheels of the U.S. war machine, and which could direct the movement in such a way that it helped to build up an independent class movement and turn it in a revolutionary direction.

That is to say, in practice we followed the only correct course to undermine our government’s military and push in the direction of socialist revolution. And this is the whole point, the whole meaning, of the “defeat” slogan discussed by Lenin.

The Malvinas war revisited

In criticizing the *WA* articles, comrade Anita raised the question of our polemic with the RCPB [Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (M-L)] on the Malvinas war. This is, indeed, an important reference point. And we should look at it more closely to see how our agitation measured up.

The first thing that needs to be remembered is that in this polemic we never charged the RCPB with failing to raise some particular set of slogans. This was not our criticism. And we made this clear in a number of places in the article.

For example, with regard to the “defeat” slogan we say,

“It is therefore incomprehensible why the leadership of the RCPB(ML) would not take this ABC of Leninist tactics as the *underlying idea behind its agitation* on the Falklands war.”²¹

The criticism was not that they failed to utter the “defeat” slogan but, rather, that they failed to make it the basis for their agitation.

Or take another example. Speaking more generally we point out,

“Of course, this thesis [of Lenin] does not mean that in every demonstration and in every popular appeal against imperialist war the revolutionaries should give civil war and socialist insurrection as the action slogans or the assessment of the present stage of the struggle. No, that would be a mockery of Lenin’s profound idea. Rather it means that the revolutionaries must strive in the direction of linking the popular movement against imperialist war to the class struggle . . .”²²

And later we point out,

“The parties must do everything possible to encourage and develop this powerful mass fer-

²¹“Why does the RCP of Britain (ML) Reject the Slogan ‘The Main Enemy Is at Home’?,” *WA*, September 5, 1982, page 13.

²²*Ibid.*, page 14.

ment. In advancing their slogans and tactical appeals, they must carefully study the actual level of consciousness among the masses so as to penetrate and influence this movement. But all of these slogans and mass tactics must have but one objective — to step by step raise the consciousness of the movement towards socialist consciousness and to bring the movement step by step closer to the revolutionary socialist movement.”²³

The criticism was not that the RCPB failed to have the words socialist revolution in all their articles. Rather we charged them with failing to agitate for a class viewpoint, failing to strive in the direction of class struggle, failing to work in a way to link up the anti-war agitation with socialist agitation and push in the direction of revolution.

What did this criticism RCPB mean in concrete terms? And how did it measure up to our own work in the Persian Gulf war?

We denounced the RCPB for adapting to the national-liberal-labor policy, the imperialist pacifism, of the social-democrats led by Tony Benn. Benn criticized the war, but in order to save Britain from possible military and political fiascoes that might arise from the war. The RCPB tailed after this policy, preaching opposition to the war to preserve the “national interests” of Britain. They actually laced their agitation with calls for “true patriotism” and for such things as pulling out the troops for fear that “British,” not Argentine, lives would be lost.

In the Persian Gulf conflict we, on the other hand, fought with every thing we had against our “own” imperialist pacifists. We exposed their defense of the “national” interests. We denounced the imperialist logic that was concerned only for the lives of our “own” and not the Iraqi troops. We worked for an internationalist spirit among the working masses and activists.

We also denounced the RCPB for things like preaching subservience to legality and bending before the threat of repression by the British government — which they did to, among other things, remain united with the “respectable” anti-war misleaders. In the Persian Gulf conflict we, on the other hand, fought the “respectable” misleaders tooth and nail, fostered militancy in the movement, supported the GI resisters (who were the first to be called “traitors” and faced some of the harshest repression), and encouraged the movement to go beyond the confines of the respectable-type protests.

When you look at our criticism of the RCPB over-all, then it is clear they went against Leninism all up and down the line of their practice, and then went so far as to denounce Leninist principles themselves. We, on the other hand, followed Leninism all up and down the line of our agitation and actual work. We did not denounce Leninist principles but, rather, applied them concretely. And then we also went on to explain some, but not all, of those principles in our press.

Comrade Anita says that,

“While the W.A. certainly did not imitate the RCPB and blunder into every possible oppor-

tunist position available, I don’t think the articles from September to February completely lived up to the standards we ourselves set.”

I don’t think this is the point. It is not that we did not imitate every blunder of the RCPB. The point is that we followed a line in direct and complete opposition to the line they followed. It seems that if we look carefully at the polemic with the RCPB, and at our own practice in the Persian Gulf conflict, then you would have to conclude that we did live up to the standards that we ourselves set.

The issue of theoretical articles

I do not mean to say here that all of our agitation was perfect; that there were not minor flaws or that we did not have to correct and improve upon our agitation all through the Persian Gulf crisis. Many of the particular criticisms made by comrades in Chicago, as well as by other comrades, and the local agitation and reports they produced, assisted to constantly improve our work. But considering the shortness of the war and the wide-ranging character of our agitation, it seems to me the work was correct along its main lines.

The only weakness that I can see is that we did not have more theoretical articles fully explaining the Marxist-Leninist basis for the tactics we were pursuing.

I believe this is the point that comrade Anita is making when she says,

“In the polemic against the Sparts’ support for Saddam Hussein, the W.A. explains how supporting Saddam Hussein is not for the defeat of U.S. imperialism but never actually states unequivocally that we are for the defeat of U.S. imperialism nor explains what the tasks are for its defeat.” (Sept. 20 *IB*, Anita, page 27)

If by this comrade Anita means that it would have been important to give a theoretical elaboration of how our tactics were based on the “defeat” slogan and other Marxist-Leninist principles on war, then I agree. Although I believe the article “Should the anti-war movement ‘defend Iraq?’” did a good job of explaining some of the Marxist-Leninist principles and how they should be applied in the Persian Gulf conflict; and it hit on one of the major ways the “defeat” slogan was being distorted by the Trotskyites at the time; and it touched on the question of the liberals, and the Trotskyists tailing the liberals, at the beginning and end of the article; it could have been more all-sided and useful for the revolutionary-minded activists with a section explaining the application of the “defeat” slogan in the U.S. I believe I expressed this view when comrades in Chicago first criticized the article back in January. And it remains my view today.

I do not believe this weakness represented a major weakness in our all around work. It could have been. It had the potential to become a problem. But only if the entire party had not been thoroughly schooled, over many many years, in both the theory of Leninism and its application to the anti-war struggle in the U.S. But the Party has been so schooled and did not show any major vacillation in its central or local organs. And this was

²³*Ibid.*, page 15.

true even though the line on the war was more complex and controversial than I originally thought, at least if we look at the vacillations of the OCPO [of Portugal, who publish *Politica Operaria*] and the CPI [Communist Party of Iran].

Nevertheless, it is legitimate to ask why not more theoretical articles? Why not guard against a potential problem for the Party? Why not more theoretical explanation of what we were doing in the movement to help the activists coming up? But I don't think the answer to these questions can be found in some ideological weakness. I think such an ideological weakness would have shown up in our practice, and it did not.

Instead, I think you have to look for the answer in the shortness of the war (which meant we never got to some things, and weren't able to improve on every aspect of our writing) and, more importantly, to the over-extension that we face.

For some time we have been working at the very edge of our collective ability. Our forces have been gradually dwindling, not only in the local areas, but also in the *WA* group. At the same time, there are major changes rapidly developing in the world; changes that raise new questions or old questions in a different way; changes that require of us more theoretical work, a deeper analysis on a whole range of questions.

Because of the enormous amount of additional work required when the anti-war movement took off, this problem was pushed to what I believe was a crisis point during the Gulf conflict. We simply could not get to all that we wanted to do and, in particular, we were not able to quickly produce the theoretical articles we wanted to produce on the anti-war movement or the sharper, more powerful positive agitation for socialism that we need.

As well, the Gulf crisis and its aftermath helped to raise more clearly a whole range of theoretical work we need to do. Not only comrades in Chicago but, also, comrades from a number of areas have raised the need for deeper analysis on a series of issues like: the world balance of powers; the economic crisis (not just this particular recession, but also the deeper crises that capitalism appears to be facing in this period); the health care crisis and the socialist perspective for health care; the crisis in education and the socialist perspective for education; the question of what's happening to the working class;

how to view the question of bribery within the working class; and so forth.

During the war itself this crisis was felt, but you can not say we were very conscious of it. As soon as the war was over and things began to settle down, however, we began to see and discuss the problems. Comrades have been informed, for example, of the CC [Central Committee] decisions in April to make various organizational adjustments, including cutting back on the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, in order to make room to, on the one hand, better concentrate work on the issues around the study of Soviet history and building socialism and to, on the other hand, develop work for deeper, analytical articles in the *WA*.

Experience has shown that the changes decided on in April were not sufficient. We managed to squeeze out a few more serious articles on socialism (the ones on communism and the budget crisis and communism and unemployment) and, for example, the articles on the Free Trade Agreement. But given the many demands on us at this time, these beginning attempts at a new series of articles were accomplished principally by comrades simply working harder. We have not really been able to sustain continuing work for a series of more analytical articles nor were we able to really speed up the work on Soviet history. The CC is now looking at the question of taking more radical measures to allow us to put more emphasis on this side of work.

In my view this is the question — which has to do with the character of the *WA*, where it should put its emphasis in the next period — that the party has to address.

This completes part one of my reply on issues raised by comrades in Chicago. I hope to soon be able to go into some further issues related to the war: on the question of GI resistance, on the "support our troops" slogan, and on the assessment of the working class in the anti-war movement. And then to move on to a number of other issues that comrades in Chicago have raised. □

Left-wing neo-conservatives: The reflection of neo-conservatism in socialist thinking -- part one

The following article is condensed from the article by the same name that was circulated on e-mail as Detroit #74 (Jan. 28) and that appeared in issue #6 of *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* (Feb. 10).

Ben, of the Revolutionary Socialist Study Group (RSSG) of Seattle, has trumpeted his views that the future society will be a "cooperative anarchy". He writes that it will be

"nothing but the most marvelously efficient cooperative anarchy in which the actions of many independent, conflicting and parallel processes will somehow be coordinated to create fantastic amounts of amterial and social wealth without the necessity for any clumsy, burdensome and inefficient bureaucracy".¹

These articles from Ben show his view of eternal capitalism. Oh

¹See "Ask Comrade Science" (Seattle #68, December 11, 1994).

Mark replied, challenging Ben to release his articles on the subject and adding that

"...Let's see, a society of independent producers who, despite conflicting with one another, 'somehow' produce a heaven on earth. Ben's 'cooperative anarchy' is just another way of describing capitalism, another way of praising the 'invisible hand' which unites the independent, conflicting entities. Socialism must overcome anarchy of production, it must overcome independent processes that are somehow coordinated. Ben is right to be upset about the bureaucracy that developed in the former Soviet Union. But opposing bureaucracy without opposing anarchy of production is fitting for the Chamber of Commerce, not a socialist. And no matter what Ben imagines, his anarchy will, like in all other capitalist societies, give rise to a repressive bureaucracy—no matter how many computers exist in that society!" (Detroit #69, "Ben loses his nerve", Detroit 17, 1994.)

Ben replied in Seattle #72 ("How Mark Uses Stalin's Theory ...") with page after page of abuse against Mark. He also went into pages of praise of "cooperative anarchy" which, however, neglected to mention one little thing—how cooperation and efficiency emerges from the anarchy of independent production units. Either there's a planned economy, or there isn't. But Ben wants it both ways. It's anarchy, but it's cooperative.

yes, he talks about communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat and a future classless society, but he pictures the future as having such features of capitalism as separate enterprises in anarchic competition with one another.

Fred (RSSG) has a similar picture, but he no longer calls it communism. As well, he praises today's imperialism as having overcome the reactionary features of the past and become an era of "unprecedented economic growth and political and cultural transformation of regions" which has "transcended the old social contradictions and struggles of the past."² And we shall see that Fred's "socialist" theorizing amounts to projecting various features of today's capitalism into the future.

From an eternal anarchy of production to imperialism transcending the class struggles of capitalism: the RSSG has been trapped by the neo-conservative mood of our time. The RSSG pride themselves on the "realism" with which they fight revolutionary illusions. But the increasing poverty and misery, the growing environmental dangers, and the never-ending national conflict present a somber picture of what the rule of the capitalist marketplace means for the majority of the people of this planet.

No, it's not reality that gives plausibility to the pictures of Ben and Fred and Jason. It is simply the pressure of triumphant neo-conservatism, which is imposing its views as the new "common sense" of our period.

For quite some time, the mainstream ideology of the American bourgeoisie was liberalism. Whatever the bourgeoisie did, no matter how many Vietnamese it napalmed, no matter how many black activists were murdered, no matter how many strikes were smashed, the main bourgeois ideologues trumpeted their liberalism. Today liberalism is the "L" word; even the liberals are rushing to embrace conservative themes; and the magic of the marketplace is the alpha and omega of bourgeois

²Fred's view of the dynamic new imperialism can be found in his article "What can be learned from the bloodbath regarding approaches to investigation" (Seattle #41). I commented on this in my article "Censorship, imperialism and revisionism" (Detroit #28). Both articles are in the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #2, March 30, 1994.

Fred returned to the subject in part 3 of his "bloodbath" article. In the first endnote he eulogizes imperialism, denies that it is still in the "basic capitalist framework", and says it has transcended the old social contradictions. See the *CWV Theoretical Journal* #4, Sept. 1, 1994. I commented on his denial of class struggle and revolution in "Plebeian class consciousness and socialist revolution" (Detroit #31) in the same issue of the *CWVTJ*.

wisdom.

It's not just Newt Gingrich who expresses this conservatism, but liberals. It is not just liberals, but would-be radicals who can see no further than the tip of their noses. On the left, reformism has always capitulated to dominant bourgeois ideology. So it's not surprising that today it reflects neo-conservative thinking.

The abandonment of communism

The spread of neo-conservatism has gone so far that communism and socialism are suspect in the eyes of many or most members of the RSSG. Although Ben is a RSSG member, he himself refers to this. He writes that

"Neither Fred nor Jason seems to consider himself a communist at this point. This is fine with me. I don't consider them communists either."³

Referring to other members of the RSSG, Ben says that they "consider talk of going beyond capitalism to be 'fantastic' ('fantastic' not in the positive sense but in the sense of being outside the realm of matters which are possible to intelligently discuss)." (*Ibid.*, the parenthetical remark is Ben's)

And Ben points out that "from now until the end of time 'MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO 'ROUND' " seems pretty reasonable to many RSSG members."⁴

A funny "revolutionary socialist study group", the RSSG is. In it we find "revolutionary socialists" who regard any talk of going beyond capitalism as stupid, idle chatter. They polemicize against class organizing.⁵ And they think money makes the world go round, now and forever. Maybe the RSSG should be called the neo-conservative coffee klatsch.

The magic of the marketplace

When did such ideas first get expressed?

As the MLP carried out a program to study Soviet history and see how and why the proletarian revolution got diverted into revisionist state capitalism, the concept of socialism was restudied.

Given the overall atmosphere of the times, it is perhaps not surprising that some comrades ended up accepting marketplace ideas as the only alternative to revisionist state capitalism. Fred ended up laying stress not on the class and ownership relationships in a society, but on its efficiency and "rationality". He alleged that the Soviet Union had abandoned Marxism for revisionism, but that it had implemented the Marxist views on eliminating capitalist ownership—and look at the mess that resulted.

³"How Mark Uses Stalin's Theory...", Seattle #72, paragraph 24.

⁴Seattle #72, paragraph 96, Ben's capitalization.

⁵See the debate on Palestine carried in the *CWV Theoretical Journal* #3, June 1, 1994 and #5, Dec. 1, 1994. Jason and Mark's latest replies are in *CWVTJ* issue #6, Feb. 10.

This led him to scorn workplace leaflets because the task was to put forward a more efficient way to restructure industry. He began to sneer at phrases denouncing profiteering. Instead he wanted plans for making industries could be more competitive in the world market and for making value calculations (the setting of prices) more rational.⁶

Fred held that a better society would be run on the basis of a more accurate calculation of the value of the things it produced—value being the number of labor-hours that went into the production of them. It was wrong calculations that led to inefficiency and economic crisis. And, he hypothesized, inadequate communications technology might be the key to the existence of class division.⁷

How times change. At one time Fred wrote that "value itself must be abolished", but now he believes that proper value calculations are the key to the future.⁸ Yet the labor theory of value isn't a theory of the most efficient way to produce goods, but an explanation of how capitalism works, and how exploitation takes place. The prices of most (not all) commodities oscillate around their value, and Marxism analyzed what that

⁶See Frank's article "For Proletarian Socialist Revolution" in the *CWV Theoretical Journal* #3, June 1, 1994. This fine article criticizes Fred's replacement of class struggle and revolutionary agitation with a program of structural reform. It dwells at some length on the preparation of a leaflet on the Northwest timber industry, thus dealing with environmental issues. Fred had edited Frank's mini-pamphlet on timber in order to produce the RSSG's only leaflet. It turned out that Fred was upset about Frank's denunciation of profiteering. He wrote a letter to Frank in which he stated that

"One could assume that the alternative to profits and competition is losses and monopoly, and there is a strong logic in the experience of state capitalism to back this up."

Frank soon left the RSSG for political reasons. The former MLP circles in Seattle split into two groups.

⁷In a letter to me of April 25, 1993, Fred hypothesized that the lack of good communications technology caused the development of Soviet bureaucracy. He summed up that:

"It may be the case that a socialist economy is simply impossible without a digital infrastructure."

I replied later that year to Fred. I hope to publish the complete text of this exchange later in this series.

⁸Fred's formulation appears in his article "Rough thoughts on Pete's notes on the speech, 'The Technical and cultural basis for workers' socialism in the modern world'" (the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, Feb. 20, 1992, vol. 8, #2). I criticized it in "Some notes on theory" (*Supplement*, May 20, 1992, Vol. 8, #5). I said that value isn't abolished, but "whether it is a real and meaningful concept depends on whether the system is still capitalist, or has communist ownership by society as a whole." Value can neither be abolished by government decree, nor resuscitated by 100,000 economists laboring "to assign a numerical rating to every useful article in sight."

value was under capitalism. Value explains how the marketplace operates under capitalism, not the way to build a new society.

I will go into more detail on this in later in this series. For now, it suffices to note that Fred's theory that value rules the world—and that value will do so even more strictly in a future society—means that, in essence, the economy would continue to be run by money and the marketplace.

The marketplace and the environment

As Fred developed his theories, he was led back repeatedly to capitalist solutions. He wrote that

“One thing that strikes me is the fact that the Western model has many features which seek economic rationality and therefore continue to advance society . . . This rationality is sought indirectly as a by-product of sectional profitability, . . .”¹⁰

Of course, Marxism has always analyzed the dynamism of capitalism compared to past exploiting systems. It has pointed to the rapidity and global scale with which capitalism develops—and the rapidity and global scale with which it commits crimes and rapes the toilers and the environment. But the way Fred saw it, he had discovered a new world—the “rationality tendencies” in capitalism.

What are these “rationality tendencies”?

Fred held that

“credit and speculation seeks planning of future changes in economic activity, such as research or pollution control. Exchange value calculation [setting prices—JG] seeks to balance the relative benefits of expanding allocation to this or that product.”

⁹Indeed, as capitalism develops, prices oscillate not around the labor-value of a commodity, but around a related but different measure. A certain correction is made to the labor-value — although this correction averages to zero when taken over the whole economy. This is explained in Volume III of Marx's *Capital*. This confirms that value is not the “rational” measure of a product, but the description of a social relationship that exists only at a certain point in human history.

¹⁰This is again from Fred's letter of April 25, 1993 to me, as are the next few quotes from Fred.

Fred also said that the Western model “has contradictory tendencies too” and not just rationality tendencies. But he saw these backward tendencies mainly as resistance to proper calculations. He wrote

“somehow there appear to be delays in adjustment to rational policies, resistance to adjustment, and adjustment through crisis which interrupts economic development.”

He overlooks that capitalist growth and capitalist crisis are two sides of the same process of capitalist rationality. No, the bad things just “somehow” appear.

So here we have it. Financial speculation supposedly spurs on pollution control. The correct setting of prices (calculation of exchange value), backed by the wisdom of the credit markets, will protect the environment. This is chapter and verse from the late Warren Brookes' neo-conservative columns in the *Detroit News*. Not that Fred read these columns of course—but his new standpoint led him to the same idea.

And what a concept! What careful observation of reality! In a world where the marketplace, with its scale of operations multiplied manifold by credit and speculation, is stripping Brazil, East Asia, New Zealand, etc. of their forests! In a world where more and more untested chemicals are put into production each year! But don't worry. Just calculate the price for timber correctly, and the environment will be protected.

This was no passing fancy for Fred. He returned several times to this theme.

For example, consider his criticism of Frank's mini-pamphlet on Pacific Northwest timber that appeared in the last *Workers' Advocate Supplement*. Frank wrote that a socialist society would seek to protect the environment and that “Such decisions are not based on what yields the highest rate of profit, . . .”¹¹ But Fred protested that all decisions had to be based on the highest rate of return, properly and rationally calculated. He wrote that

“It is not accurate to counterpoise social and cultural demands of the people to overall economic efficiency, . . . A socialist society would want to utilize all its labor resources, . . . to produce the maximum amount of social wealth. Conservation would not contradict this, since in the long run conservation would yield more useful wealth for humans than exhausting resources.”¹²

Such reasoning reminds one of the usual neo-conservative argu-

¹¹*Workers' Advocate Supplement*, Aug. 10, 1993, p. 31, col. 2. See the lead article “Capitalist profiteering and capitalist competition are at the root of layoffs in the Northwest timber industry: Save all the old-growth! Make the government and industry fairly compensate unemployed timber workers!”

¹²See the discussion of this in the section “Fred on political economy” in my article “Some miscellaneous points”, *Detroit* #14, Nov. 18, 1993.

Note that Fred himself admitted that

“We might not be able to measure this wealth [environmental values—Jph.] in the same terms as the immediate use of resources, but that is another issue.” (Seattle #20, point c)

He thus admits that there are two separate measures. If he took this seriously, he would see that Frank was right to say that the protection of the environment could not be based on preserving the highest rate of return. But having admitted that environmental values can't really be measured by their labor-value, he nevertheless insists that it should be anyway. This is an example of how neo-conservatism is not based on reality, but is imposed against reality.

ments that corporations, if properly led and free from do-gooder interference, will protect natural resources because it is more profitable to do so.

Ben and the marketplace

Ben however claims to be a Marxist and that his future society will transcend money and the marketplace. He claims to be above Fred and Jason and their followers.

But his differences with Fred and Jason are mainly cosmetic. When you look at the content of Ben's views, they are close to Fred's. In fact, he gives the same example of the marketplace and the environment. Unlike Fred, he doesn't talk about value. No, he talks about the competition of the independent production units. But does this mean he has departed from the marketplace ideology? Not at all! Both competition and exchange value are different features of the same marketplace. Ben simply praises the market mechanism directly (without "formally" calling it the market mechanism).

He writes:

"Consider an example. Two similar products are available. One tends to use resources that **endanger an ecosystem** and the other **requires more labor**. Or, similarly, the production of one or the other may indirectly affect the **living conditions of people in Bangladesh** The decisions of the masses, as consumers (as individuals or via organizations that choose products), as workers (as individuals or via organizations similar to unions) and as shapers of public opinion (again, as individuals or via participation in economic, political or cultural organizations) would determine the proportion of the two competing productions which accumulate to the public wealth."¹³

So let's see. One product poisons Bangladesh but can be produced easily, and the other is safe, but uses up more "public wealth". Should the Bangladeshis be poisoned? Let the consumers decide! If 50% of the consumers are concerned about safety, then the Bangladeshis will only get 50% of the poison; if only 10% care, then 90% of the poison will do its ugly work.

Ben has put the marketplace in charge of poisoning. Note that he isn't talking of the people voting to decide whether to clean up their environment. For him, that would be bureaucratic super-centralism and Stalinist tyranny. No, he is talking of the "proportion" of two products being decided by, for example, the choices of consumers as they ask for one or the other product. The marketplace will decide.

So Ben's example is based on neo-conservative marketplace ideas. Neo-conservatism blames all the ills of capitalism on "big government". They say the collapse of "communism" (referring to the state capitalist regimes) proves that the unrestricted market must reign supreme. Environmental bans are among their targets.

¹³Seattle #72, paragraph 102, Ben's emphasis.

And Ben ends up with a similar solution. He is at pains to find a way to protect the environment without administrative action of any sort. And he looks back to the marketplace.¹⁴

Even under capitalism, they don't always do things this way, although the neo-conservatives would like to. Various poisons are straight-out banned for domestic use. (But American corporations may still manufacture them in Bangladesh as an exercise in the chauvinism of money-making—"we only care about the health of our own nationality"—and an exercise in imperialist bullying of poor countries.)

Take the poisoning of inner-city children by the lead in house paints. Even in the U.S., whether to use lead-based or lead-free paint isn't left up to the consumer or to the factory producing paint. Lead-based house paint is simply banned. (Oh, what horrible "Stalinist super-centralism", and right in the U.S.! Or, as the conservatives used to say when I was young, "creeping socialism".) Of course, the capitalists dragged their feet for decades on this issue, but eventually they banned such paint.

But in Ben's utopia, there would be a certain proportion of houses still getting fresh coats of lead-based paint unless absolutely everyone said "no".

Anarchy of production

In general, Ben envisages communist economy as consisting of independent economic units which are in competition with each other. He has no understanding of how a planned economy can be anything but "Stalinist super-centralism". He can see central planning agencies only as busybody tyrants, directing absolutely everything, smashing local initiative, and preventing the trying out of different approaches or the discussion of differing ideas. He is afraid of any formal authority in a socialist country, or even of the administrative apparatus that remains in a communist country.

But how then for society to run production as a whole? And without that, there is no socialism.

Well, there is no way.

Ben himself calls his system of independent competing "production units" as "cooperative anarchy". But he goes bonkers denying that this is the same thing as the anarchy of production. No, he says, he envisions anarchy, but it is "cooperative anarchy". He thinks you have changed something when you have renamed it.

When Ben first made this claim, Mark in reply pointed out that Ben was idealizing capitalism. Adam Smith claimed that the clash of private interests gives rise to public good through the "invisible hand" of market forces. Ben says that the anarchy of competing production units gives rise to "fantastic amounts of material and social wealth" by being "somehow . . .

¹⁴Another capitalist solution is to put a dollar figure on the environment or on human life, and then decide what is most profitable. Some U.S. regulatory agencies have an official value for a human life. This is essentially Fred's solution of readjusting value calculations.

coordinated". But coordination that just "somehow" happens is nothing but another name for Adam Smith's "invisible hand".

But Ben swears that all his "cooperative anarchy" has in common with the anarchy of production is the word "anarchy".¹⁵ What about the concept of anarchy, Ben? Doesn't the word refer to a concept?

Ben's "cooperative anarchy" refers to the relation between "production units" (factories, enterprises, etc.). What else is anarchy among production units than the anarchy of production? Isn't a red sweater the same as a sweater that is red?

What replaces the invisible hand?

Yet Ben shouts that the brains of his critics are addled by Stalinism. Trumpets blare; and he explodes into verbal fireworks denouncing the me and Mark as enemies of freedom.

But wait a minute. If Ben claims his "cooperative anarchy" isn't the anarchy of production, then how does he see this anarchy giving rise to cooperation? He has ruled out planning. But he also claims that he is not relying on the unplanned result of competing forces, Adam Smith's "invisible hand". Very well, what takes the place of the "invisible hand" of the marketplace?

In Seattle #68, where Ben put forward "cooperative anarchy", he only told us that cooperation takes place "somehow". That's not much to go on in building socialist society. Until he explains it a bit better, he is dancing to the tune of his own mindlessness.

Well, Ben returns to defend his "cooperative anarchy" in Seattle #72, in which he numbers each section. But it takes Ben until paragraph 98 before he feels safe to get around to this key point. He finally asks the 64-million-dollar question:

"What might assist production units in a communist economy to coordinate their activity into a harmonious whole?"

Finally, the key question. Does Ben's "cooperative anarchy" (his idea of "communist economy") rely on Adam Smith's "invisible hand", or not?

So what's the answer?

Ben has no answer.

In paragraph 98, Ben raises the question only to evade it. Instead of answering the question, he gives a one-sided description of capitalist crisis. Well, Ben, we're waiting.

In paragraph 99 Ben gives his view of how revisionist economy works. He carefully avoids any mention of the class domination and ownership by a privileged elite in that society and attributes the problems of state capitalism solely to bad planning.¹⁶ So what's his alternative to revisionist tyranny? He

simply contrasts the bad revisionist economy to "free-market capitalism" and "marketplace mechanisms".

That's clear, isn't it? The one clear, concrete answer Ben can give is the marketplace. But as to anything else, we're still waiting.

In paragraph 100 he tells us the masses will decide. But he doesn't tell us how they will decide and implement their decisions.

No, wait, he does have one suggestion! In some particular industries at some particular times, there will be "central planning bodies".

Thus his only concrete example in this paragraph is "central planning bodies", which he otherwise regards as Stalinist super-centralism, repressive, incompatible with mass initiative, typified by the miserable Soviet bureaucratic tyranny, and worthy only of "religious sectarians"—his name for Mark and me. He was supposed to be describing how "cooperative anarchy" is superior to central planning, and so far its only method to achieve cooperation is—central planning, but not for the whole economy.

Let's look at this further. Either these central planning bodies are compatible with mass initiative and promote it (and even require mass initiative as the precondition for their successful work), or they aren't. If this type of central planning is compatible with and promotes mass initiative, then why not have it for the economy as a whole? But if these central planning bodies are enemies of mass initiative, why have any of them? Where does Ben think he will find, from among the liberated, free worker-intellectuals of the future, those who will consent to slave away in the repressive, Stalinist industries run by bureaucratic central planning agencies, while watching all the other worker-intellectuals living a free and happy life in the section of the economy under "cooperative anarchy"?

So we're still waiting for Ben to describe any method of coordination other than either Adam Smith's "invisible hand" or some form of planning.

In paragraph 101 Ben tells us "There are other ways of involving the masses in the economic life of society."

Well, finally! Let's look at them. Ben lists several ways to involve the masses:

- a) as consumers;
- b) as producers;
- c) as shapers of public opinion;
- d) in mass organizations which wield "no formal authority whatsoever". (Ben's emphasis)

But suppose all these different ways of making economic decisions clash. For example, suppose public opinion wants a factory to be run one way, but the workers at that factory insist on another way? What happens? Ben is silent.

Suppose workers at two different factories disagree. Who decides then? Ben is silent.

And isn't saying that the "consumers" decide another way of referring to market forces? Remember Ben's example of how

¹⁵Seattle #72, paragraph 86.

¹⁶In my article "Some notes on theory (2)" in the *Workers' Advocate Supplement* of July 25, 1992, I put forward a more realistic picture of the Soviet state capitalist economy. Ben gets his idea of Soviet economy from the "common sense" of the West—i.e. from the stuff of hack anti-communist editorials. Thus he ignores the role of the class interests and competing

(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)
individual interests of the bureaucratic ruling class.

to decide whether Bangladeshis are to be poisoned by a bad product?

Or again, if there is no body with formal authority, exactly how does public opinion manifest itself? It isn't sufficient for a lot of people to simply think the same thought in unison. But Ben is silent here too.

So here too Ben has evaded the question.

Paragraph 102 simply elaborates paragraph 101, this time with examples. This verifies what we have said about Ben's views. This is where Ben gives the example we discussed above that the marketplace will decide how to deal with a product whose production poisons Bangladesh. How many Bangladeshis die will depend on how many consumers buy the poisonous product. Heaven forbid that a communist society might actually ban a product that poisons Bangladeshis, or that the Bangladeshis might ban it themselves. This would be taking away the freedom of consumers to have their pound of Bangladeshi flesh. It would be super-centralism, bureaucracy, and every other violation of the anarchist-technocratic utopia. What's a few hundred thousand poisoned Bangladeshis in exchange for the freedom of the marketplace?

But onwards.

Paragraph 103 says that "there might be different and opposing" economic planning bodies. You see, Ben isn't opposed to central planning, so long as there are a multitude of conflicting plans in operation at the same time.

But who decides when the "different and opposing" planning bodies disagree? Ben is silent.

Or then again, Ben says, there might only be a single agency, but it would be in a constant state of civil war between "opposing or competing political, economic or cultural philosophies". He says that "competing material interests" might operate in the agency, even in the early stages of a communist society. Well, once again, how do decisions get taken? Which side predominates at any time?¹⁷

And why does a repressive, Stalinist agency, as Ben envisions planning agencies, become efficient and socialist just because it has internal conflict?

In paragraph 104 Ben tries another approach—a big dose of charlatanism. He goes in for a lot of big fancy phrases, hoping people will think "he must be profound, because we can't understand any of this." Actually he is whistling in the dark.

For example, he assures one and all that his idea of coordination makes "the action of the marketplace under capitalism" look "**infinitely crude**", and Ben puts "infinitely crude" in BOLDFACE. Wouldn't it be better if he simply told us how this coordination was to be achieved and let us judge for ourselves how infinitely wonderful it is?

But no. That's not Ben's way. Instead he makes grand pronouncements. Why, he says, "economic, political and cultural

struggles would be utterly and completely merged and indistinguishable from one another." Or at least, Ben's ideas about them would be utterly and completely merged and indistinguishable from utter nonsense.

And finally, in paragraph 105, Ben comes up with yet another answer. This is his last, his final answer. Coordination will be accomplished through "consciousness". It seems that you don't need institutions to express this consciousness. You're not allowed to ask how the consciousness expresses itself. Just trust in "consciousness". Apparently this is a spiritual touch—the great universal consciousness will come down and reveal itself through its prophet Ben. And just as believers think the Church is higher and purer than the world of mere material concerns, so Ben assures us that "consciousness would also be the primary, the highest and the **ultimate form of wealth**." (Ben's emphasis)

Moving on, there is paragraph 106. (Sorry, Ben never has a final answer. The fast talk just goes on and on.) This time he tells us that it is all in his article "On the Transition to a Communist Economy". However, he won't show us this article. He has kept it under wraps. We can imagine why.

Ben pictures capitalist society

Insofar as Ben's picture of "cooperative anarchy" describes anything, it is a glorified picture of today's capitalist society.

Ben describes "central planning agencies" that only plan particular industries, while the overall economy remains unplanned. That's just modern monopoly capitalism, where the giant multinational corporations plan vast empires, but the overall result is determined by the marketplace.

Ben also says that consumers, employees, public opinion, and mass organizations have some input on economic decisions, but don't have "formal authority". That's an idealization of what happens in any developed capitalist country. There are a lot of organizations and sectors with some input, "formal authority" for most is restricted, and the dollar rules. Of course, under capitalism, sometimes mass organizations do have a bit of formal authority—for example, unions can negotiate binding contracts. But there can be no binding labor rules of any type under "cooperative anarchy", because there can be no binding rules of any type.

Or take Ben's idea that some central planning agencies will be internally divided by competing interests. Here Ben has inadvertently described the state planning boards of revisionist countries. Far from the revisionist countries running their economy as one smoothly running machine, as Fred and Ben imagine, instead the revisionist economies were split into rival interests. This internal rivalry in the revisionist countries didn't give rise to dynamism and progress but to the various absurdities and stagnation of revisionist economy. We mentioned this briefly above.

So Ben just can't get beyond capitalist ideas. The more he tries to elaborate his views concretely, the more we come back to modern capitalism. He believes that cooperation will arise through the conflict of independent producers. In this, he is simply paraphrasing Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. When

¹⁷Note that Ben assumes that politics will exist forever. He doesn't have a hint of what Engels meant when he pointed out that economic decisions, in a classless society, would lose their political character and become the mere administration of things, not people.

Ben wrote that Marx isn't dead, he apparently meant to say that Adam Smith isn't dead. Didn't Marx think highly of the classical authors of bourgeois political economy including Adam Smith? Now there's a part of Marxism that even neo-conservatives can identify with.

A crippling framework

We will return to these questions later on in this series. This will take us into the study of some Marxist economics including such questions as the meaning of value, and the relations of large-scale production to freedom, and of diversity to planning.

For now, however, let's look at how neo-conservatism enters the RSSG. Fred and Ben and the RSSG are not capitalists or even accountants. Fred and Jason, who praise imperialism, are not executives or stockholders but part of the working intelligentsia. Ben, who tends more to a Jeffersonian-democratic view of small-scale independent ("parallel") enterprises competing with each other, is not a small businessperson. But the collapse of revisionist state capitalism and the growth of the world economy means, in their eyes, that there is no alternative to the basic mechanisms of capitalism and bourgeois democracy.

Marx pointed out the activists of the petty-bourgeois democratic trend in mid-19th century France were also not simply motivated by self-interest. He pointed out that their demands against the ruling monarchists, no matter in what revolutionary phrases they were formulated, were for "a transformation within the bounds of the petty bourgeoisie." But why could they see no further than a purified marketplace of small proprietors, which they hoped to rid of class struggle, rather than take the stand of organizing the class struggle? Marx explained, presumably talking about the best of these representatives of the petty-bourgeois, that: "...one must not form the narrow-minded notion that the petty bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the special conditions of its emancipation are the general conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. *Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shop-*

keepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically." (Italics added)¹⁸ (21)

Our "socialist" neo-conservative thinkers do not wish to serve the capitalists, and some of them pay lip-service to the class struggle (although Fred has gone way beyond that and Jason polemicizes against the call for revolutionary class organizing). But they have lost faith in any alternative to the marketplace and bourgeois politics. In their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the corporations and bourgeois democracy have in practice. Their viewpoint is that of the reformist petty-bourgeoisie, dazzled by capitalist growth but complaining of the crises and struggles that "somehow" just keep erupting. And so whether they are being "realistic" in drawing up plans for the development of Palestine (Jason)¹⁹, or letting their fancy soar in dreams of the future information era (Ben), they simply embellish the current neo-conservative "common sense" of capitalism. □

¹⁸See Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, midway through section 3.

¹⁹Jason enthused over the PLO-Israeli mini-state deal and opposed "certain long-held assumptions about international aid, as well as the role of Zionism" and also the "role of imperialism". He debunked the tasks of revolutionary class organizing. Instead he looked to the improvement of people's lives and a vigorous economic development of the mini-state through Palestinian cooperation with Israeli capital and IMF money. See the debate on Palestine carried in the *CWV Theoretical Journal* #3 (June 1, 1994), #5 (Dec. 1, 1994) and #6 (Feb. 10, 1995).

Left-wing neo-conservatives (part two): The mailed fist behind the anti-authoritarian phrase

In part one of this article we saw that Ben's vision of "cooperative anarchy" based on independent and competing production units is an abandonment of communism in favor of neo-conservative marketplace ideas. And we pointed out that Ben was at a loss to describe how these independent and competing units ever cooperate with each other.

In reply to this article, Ben wrote "Why is Joseph afraid of consciousness" (Seattle #76). One has to wade through most of this article until one gets to the key part, in which he tries once again to answer the question of how his "cooperative anarchy" ever manages to cooperate on anything. And there he gives out a few pearls on what his ideal anti-authoritarian society of the future looks like.

1. The mailed fist: Kind of like a war

And it's a nightmare, where the normal methods of dealing with differences are the "reeducation" of "recalcitrants", the denial of needed goods to people to coerce them to give up their views, and the censoring of the mass media.¹ So long as it's all done informally by vigilantes, and not by a government, Ben praises it as a manifestation of "raising the public consciousness". So long as it is done by "bottom-up methods" and not "top-down methods", it's not just acceptable, but even laudable.

This shows the mailed fist behind Ben's anti-authoritarian phrases. He promises freedom from coercion if only we eliminate all formal authority. But I had asked Ben how his "cooperative anarchy" decided what to do when there were disagreements. To have a vote would be to establish an authority binding on all, and Ben is against people being bound by anything. So how are differences settled? It turns out that when Ben tries to picture how differences are settled, he ends up with a dog-eat-dog system of might makes right.

Ben describes how disagreements are settled as follows:

"the answer is kind of simple: the various sides
fight it out. This would kind of be like a war..."
(paragraph 113, Ben's emphasis)²

In fact, it will be kind of like thousands upon thousands of wars—one for each decision, big or little, in which there is not unanimity. Only in Ben's anarchist imagination, these "wars" supposedly cause "little real destruction". We are just supposed to take his word for this.³

¹See the appendix for details on Ben's vision.

²Unless otherwise noted, paragraph references are always to Seattle #76, and the emphasis is always Ben's.

³Ben claims that there is no damage because "the main
(continued...)"

2. The anti-authoritarian phrase

In his earlier work on "cooperative anarchy", Ben sought to present himself as a supporter of diversity and complexity. He stepped up his rhetoric in Seattle #76. He claims that, since I disagree with his anarchism, I am doubting the ability of the masses to decide activities "as simple as **eating a meal or going to the bathroom.**" (paragraph 172) Ben insists he is waging the good fight against those who want to "tell people what to think" (Subhead between paragraphs 129 and 131). And on and on and on.

But it turns out that Ben is only opposed to *the government* telling people what to think. He goes into loving detail on the correct way to apply coercion against people who disagree—he has obviously given it a lot of thought. Ben abuses the "recalcitrants" and "iconoclasts" of a future society with that same zeal with which he abuses me.

3. The marketplace and the environment

Ben's anti-authoritarian phrases turn into their opposite because his ideal society is based on the marketplace.

In Seattle #72, Ben said that the alternative to central planning was the competition and struggle between a multitude of independent "production units". But how would any coordination take place in this sea of anarchy? Under the subhead "Communist Competition", Ben gave his answer. He wanted to show the "other ways of involving the masses in the economic life of society" instead of having some type of planned economy. (Seattle #72, Paragraph 101)

The example he gave was how would society decide between two different products. One was good environmentally, but "requires more labor" to produce. The other harms the environment of the people of Bangladesh.

Ben proposed that how much of each product would be produced would be decided by "the decisions of the masses, as consumers. . . , as workers . . . and as shapers of public opinion." This would "determine the proportion of the two competing products which accumulate to the consumers." Ben emphasized how important this method was to deal with the decisions in "an economy vastly more complex and sophisticated than the one-dimensional cartoon picture Mark has drawn up..." (Seattle #72, paragraph 102)

weapons in this war are public support and the support, consciousness and **passion** of workers and consumers..." But as we shall see, Ben describes a war of boycotts and strikes and infiltration, aiming to harass and shut down one's opponent.

This of course would be recognized instantly by any intelligent neo-conservative as a marketplace solution. It means if 55% of the people choose the better product, 45% of the poison would ravage Bangladesh. Even if 95% of the people choose the better product, 5% of the poison would ravage Bangladesh. Even 99% of the people choosing the better product would leave hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis to suffer the effects of poisoning.

I pointed out that even in the U.S. things aren't always done that way. For example, lead-based house paints were eventually banned.

How does Ben respond?⁴

IV. Ben's war on "recalcitrants" and "iconoclasts"

To begin with, this partisan of diversity and "independent, conflicting and parallel processes" suddenly discovers that

⁴Ben is embarrassed by his own example of marketplace environmentalism. He originally raised it to show the superiority of his "cooperative anarchism". But after I pointed out that his example showed that "cooperative anarchism" couldn't protect the environment, he wanted to shuffle the issue under the rug. He whined that it is a bad example, saying "**One of the ways that charlatans and demagogues operate is in how they pick examples. The key method here is to pack an example which is not representative of the phenomena that it is supposedly being chosen to represent.**" (paragraph 176)

So, somewhat desperate, Ben hints that environmental bans are horrible tyranny. Shades of Newt Gingrich and the Republican Congress! He asks, didn't Joseph worry about what happens if only 10% of the people boycott a bad product? Does this mean, Ben slyly implies, that Joseph wants "a military or police force" to enforce the product ban against the will of 90% of the people!!!! (Paragraphs 139, 142)

But I never suggested banning a product against the will of the people. It only takes a little thought to realize that even if relatively few people boycott a particular product, it is still possible that a majority might support a ban on that same product. Consider lead-based paint. If it was on the market, lead-based paint would still be used. But I don't see mass demonstrations in favor of lifting the ban. For that matter, a boycott of a harmful chemical is sometimes totally impossible until the manufacturers are compelled to disclose what's in their products. But under the rules of "cooperative anarchism", they can't be compelled to disclose this if they don't want to.

Ben goes on to imply that Engels was against environmental bans. You see, in Ben's view, such bans always require a repressive apparatus to enforce, and he quotes Engels saying that future society won't have "a special repressive force". But in the same quote Engels says that the government will be replaced by "the administration of things and the direction of the process of production". Wouldn't that include removing harmful products from production? And why would the banning of lead-based paints require a repressive apparatus in a society which was not based on making profits?

everyone, unanimously, would choose the better product. Why, it's a no-brainer in his view, since who would want someone to be poisoned? Only a few "recalcitrants".

Now Ben himself picked out this example to show how to handle decisions on complex matters. But it turns out that, for the society of "cooperative anarchism" to safeguard the environment, there must be unanimity.

Naturally, therefore, Ben starts worrying about the problem of those who disagree with the proper decision. He calls them "recalcitrants" (they're generally called "dissidents", Ben). And he even speculates about how "dysfunctional" they are. Why, the task is to "**expedite the disintegration and dispersal of the recalcitrant dysfunction**". (paragraph 151, Ben's emphasis)

This method of treating recalcitrants and iconoclasts as dysfunctional people was, in fact, one of the worst abuses of Soviet revisionism and Stalinism. Since Soviet society had supposedly entered the golden age, dissidents were considered mentally unbalanced and were subject to being locked up as nut cases. Ben—the arch-crusader against Stalinism—preserves this Stalinist crime for his future society. So long as it isn't done by a general authority, it's OK. It's just the people of the future displaying their high-minded desire to ensure the happiness and mental well-being of their neighbors.

Moreover, Ben's preoccupation with stamping out recalcitrants and iconoclasts follows logically from his negation of any authority. A general authority, elected by all, could ban a product without having to tamper with the brains of dissidents. So long as the product wasn't produced, such a society could even welcome "iconoclasts" for raising questions and keeping everybody on their toes. But with Ben's marketplace solution, there must be complete unanimity or else some of the dangerous product will be produced. So there cannot be toleration of dissidents. Pressure must be put upon them. Ben, who promised that people will be allowed to make marketplace decisions as "consumers", has a Catch 22: if you make the wrong decision, you are a "dysfunctional" individual and a target of the new society.

How production units cooperate

So much for the diversity Ben promised consumers. Now let's look at what happens at the workplace. Suppose the workers at two factories disagree about something. In that case, Ben would have them wage strikes and workplace actions against each other. They would try to prevent each other from getting necessary raw materials for their production. And they would recruit sections of each other's workforce to slowdown production from the inside. (Seattle #76, paragraphs 118-125) If you succeed in shutting down the other factory, you've won, says Ben.

Note that Ben describes this and other coercive measures as the *general method of resolving differences*. He is *not* describing the period of revolutionary action against the old regime. He is *not* describing conflict in the transition period to a classless society. He is *not* describing a fight against racism or other vicious oppression. He is *not* describing what workers might do in a future society when for some reason other channels are

closed. He is describing the routine and ordinary method by which workers will resolve any differences in the happy future of “cooperative anarchy”.

How do people in the good society, people who are highly educated, people who are consciously working for the good of all, people who are free from the harsh economic pressures of today, work together? How do they resolve differences? According to Ben, it’s pressure tactics first and last.

In Ben’s view, for the workers to abide by a vote would be tyranny. But for workers to coerce each other is the anarchist heaven. Each production unit for itself and let the “recalcitrants” take the hindmost.

So the difference between capitalism and “cooperative anarchy” is this: under capitalism, workers wage workplace actions against their exploiters; under “cooperative anarchy”, they wage workplace actions against each other. Under capitalism, they wage war against oppression. Under “cooperative anarchy”, they wage war against “recalcitrants” and “iconoclasts”.

Strikes and boycotts

Well, what do strikes and boycotts look like in a society which supposedly has no money? And note that Ben isn’t interested in mere informational strikes to notify the public—he wants real strikes with teeth that force one’s opponents to their knees.

But how do you do stop “production units” in their track in a society without money? Ben’s solution: you deny needed materials.

However, in a society where everyone is highly educated and the division of labor is fading and there is material abundance, the shifting of production from one factory to another would often be quite easy. No problem. Ben takes care to inform us that in this society “restrictions on the use of information might be negotiated among production units” (paragraph 133).

So there will be trade secrets. And they won’t be regulated by society as a whole. After all, that would require some rules binding on all and hence it would be tyranny in Ben’s eyes. Under feudalism, each little duchy and kingdom had its own tariffs and systems of weights and measures. Under “cooperative anarchy”, each production unit will guard its own technical knowledge.

What will be the result? If a group of people wants to be free from pressure, they will build duplicate factories and production units, so that they can’t be blackmailed into submission. They will engage in a lot of duplicate research. This puts a whole new light on Ben’s interest in “parallel processes”. Every discovery will have to be repeated ten times—because no one will be able to rely on anyone else.

Censoring the press and cleaning up soap operas, the anti-authoritarian way

But at least the society of “cooperative anarchy” will guarantee that everyone will be able to express their ideas publicly, right?

Wrong! There is nothing binding in this society, not even the rule that others have the right to speak. Ben, in Seattle #76, describes how pressure will be used to censor the mass media and even to keep certain actors/actresses off the air. Part of the war of worker against worker will be the struggle to dominate the mass media.

And Ben is not talking about some exceptional measures. He is not describing, say, the struggle against racist agitation or incitement to genocide. No. He is talking about “truly complex questions—like how to raise the general level of culture”. (Paragraph 181) And in this same paragraph, the answer he gives is censoring the media, right down to “altering the ending of a soap opera”. Ben envisages a busybody censorship that pokes its nose into the most minor matters!

And, says Ben, just imagine the “debate” among the masses over sorting out what to censor! He rubs his hands with glee. Why, this debate “might not infrequently play as large or larger a role in **raising the public consciousness** as the outcome of a particular struggle itself.” Debating what soap opera to ban might be even more important than whether the soap opera is banned, says Ben. But any real-life worker might well tell Ben and his guardians of soap opera morality: “get a life!”

Coercion

Now we can see the full hypocrisy of Ben’s claim that he opposes

“the need for coercion of any sort, the need for a special body with powers above that of ordinary individuals, a special body that makes rules, law and regulations that others must obey, **even when they disagree...**” (paragraph 148)

Social relations in Ben’s ideal future society are deeply and totally oppressive. This “cooperative anarchy” is full of ways to make you obey, “even when you disagree”.

In fact, there are no guarantees for popular rights unless there are rules of behavior which must be obeyed by all. Ben to the contrary, these rules do not require a special coercive apparatus, unless the society as a whole is based on suppressing part of the population. Without these rules, might makes right—you only have the rights you can defend in a conflict that, Ben admits, resembles war. That’s why Marxism lays stress on analyzing and fighting the economic and social relations that cause oppression, not on dreaming of the abolition of all authority.

5. The anti-authoritarian phrase and history

For Ben however his future world of multiple wars is the realm of freedom and consciousness. He has a simple equation: oppression=state machine=formal authority.

For Ben, all general authority is the same. The authority of a tyranny; the authority of a restricted bourgeois democracy with slavery and no vote for women and the poor; a broad bourgeois democracy with class oppression but where everyone has the vote; the revolutionary authority of a transitional state, which is breaking up the old oppressive social relations and paving the

way for new ones; and the non-governmental authority of a classless society are all fundamentally the same in Ben's eyes. They're all authority. And this "authority" is the root of all evil. So he advocates a society without authority.

Ben insists that there must be "no formal authority, no binding laws, no regulations that could not be disregarded by anyone who felt it was better and 'made more sense' to disagree with such regulations." (Paragraph 68).

Primitive communalism and the tribal ideal⁵

To make this conception seem reasonable, Ben implies that this is what existed under primitive communal, or tribal society. He says that his "cooperative anarchy" would work "by relying on conscious social planning, consensus, persuasion and the kind of respect attained by a tribal elder in primitive communal society. By relying on the individual and group decisions of the masses who...would figure out 'the right thing to do' without need for a special class of administrators." (paragraph 74, emph. in the original)

Moreover, Ben says he has the same conception as Engels and moreover is waging "an epic struggle of Marxism against revisionism". (Paragraphs 1,2, 67,74) To prove it, he vaguely recalls that Engels said something somewhere about tribal society. (Paragraph 67) He writes that

"There are a number of theoretical issues that might be related to this [how to reach consensus] but the one that most strikes me involves a passage from Engels (probably in Origin of the Family) relating how the most lowly cop, in a modern society, possessed more **formal authority** than the respected elder in the primitive communal society—while at the same time the wise elder in such a primitive society might command far more **real respect** than the most fearsome dictator in a modern society."⁶

⁵For the sake of simplicity, I am using the term "tribal society" for what Engels calls "gentile organization". Engels refers to the tribe, the gentes, the phratry and other institutions of ancient society. None of these institutions, other than the tribe, are well-known nowadays, and a term like "gentile society" might have an unintended religious ring (as the word "gens" or "gentes" means nothing to most people). Of course, the term "tribal society" isn't too good either, since who knows what idea this conjures up for most people and especially because different tribes and indigenous peoples were in vastly different stages of development. A careful reading of *The origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* would give one a more concrete idea of gentile or tribal society.

⁶The actual passage from Engels goes as follows:

"Having public power and the right to levy taxes, the officials now stand, as organs of society, *above* society. The free, voluntary respect that was accorded to the organs of the gentile (clan)

(continued...)

But the first thing that strikes the eye is that Engels' description of primitive communal society is nothing like Ben's "cooperative anarchy". The tribal society—at its best—really did reach consensus. Its members did not follow Ben's advice for how to settle differences and certainly did not wage struggles to starve each other out, to prevent each other from speaking at councils, etc. (Unlike Ben's idea of settling differences by something that resembled wars, tribal society reserved war for relations between tribes.) The consensus in the tribe was based precisely on it not having competing production units, but a common economic life.

Also, Ben to the contrary, the various tribal societies did not allow everyone to do whatever they pleased. They had their councils, chiefs, elected positions, and traditions for deciding the affairs of the tribe. They had binding rules for the conduct of tribal affairs, for relations between the sexes, for the production and distribution of food, etc. and their tribal decisions and tribal public opinion could not lightly be flouted.

So it is one thing to note that tribal society was united by respect, not by state coercion; it is another to present it as lacking authority and institutions. The tribe didn't lack authority; it had authority on a totally different basis than that of a class-divided society. Meanwhile, on the other hand, Ben's "cooperative anarchy" doesn't seem to be united by respect. He describes a war of one against all. Such a means of settling

⁶(...continued)

constitution does not satisfy them, even if they could gain it; being the vehicles of a power that is becoming alien to society, respect for them must be enforced by means of exceptional laws by virtue of which they enjoy special sanctity and inviolability. The shabbiest police servant in the civilized state has more 'authority' than all the organs of gentile society put together; but the most powerful prince and the greatest statesman, or general, or civilization may well envy the humblest gentile chief for the unstrained and undisputed respect that is paid to him. The one stands in the mist of society, the other is forced to attempt to represent something outside and above it." (**The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**, Sect. IX. This passage is also quoted by Lenin in **The State and Revolution**, Ch. 1, Sec. 3)

Ben cites this to say that the old tribal (gentile) society has no "formal authority". But the actual issue is that the authority of tribal society grew up out of and was backed by tribal opinion and based on it, while the authority of capitalist society stands outside and above the masses. Engels doesn't use the term "formal authority", but he describes the councils, chiefs, traditions, etc. of tribal society, which he calls the "gentile constitution". Engels shows that the way people administer their common affairs varies tremendously in different societies, that it varies qualitatively, while Ben repeatedly makes the absurd claim that there is no authority without the state.

issues—if applied within the tribe—would have horrified the tribe. And Ben’s competing and independent production units would have appeared monstrous to primitive communal society.

Engels points out that the division into classes—although brought about by economic progress—has nevertheless brought a host of disasters to humanity. He contrasts present-day “civilized” society to what the old tribal society was at its best. He described the dignity of the men and women under the old system, the strength of character of the people, bravery, etc. It seems to me that this is the dignity of people who never feared starvation so long as their society itself didn’t starve.

But he also pointed out that the denizens of this society had no sense of themselves aside from the tribe. They of course had personal inclinations, but they lacked the modern sense of individuality.⁷ And the deep-felt tribal concern for others doesn’t extend beyond the tribe; these tribes could wage wars of extreme cruelty against outsiders. The lack of existence of special repressive forces, such as armies and police departments, in tribal societies shouldn’t be misunderstood. Separate armies didn’t exist, but the tribe as a whole was the army.

The future classless society will have something in common with this tribal society. Its members too will never fear starving or going without the necessities of life so long as the society as a whole is not starving. Its members too will have a dignity and self-respect that few harried and overworked common people have nowadays. But its members will have a diversity and sense of individuality and a wide knowledge different from the old tribal society. And the basis for this will be the very thing that many people fear will enslave humanity—the existence of large-scale production and modern technique.

The origin of oppression

But for now let’s return to the issue of special concern to Ben, that of authority.

Ben, implying that Engels agrees with him, holds that oppression is based on the existence of the state and formal authority. Abolish the state and the special repressive force, and oppression will vanish. And the way to abolish “formal authority” is, after a revolution, to have independent “production units” which are in competition with each other and which clash in little mini-wars. Ben says that such an economic system will be possible—and it will be “cooperative” and not fall apart—because everyone but a few “recalcitrants” and “iconoclasts” will be very wise, the highest form of wealth. And this means that they will unanimously decide on the best thing to do.

⁷See *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Ch. III “The Iroquois Gens” for moving passages on both the personal character of humanity “before class divisions arose” and on the limitations of their individuality, their “almost complete domination...by external nature”, and that “the tribe, the gens and their institutions were sacred and inviolable, a superior power, instituted by nature [in their view], to which the individual remained absolutely subject in feeling, thought and deed.”

In fact, contrary to Ben, Engels says that oppression arose prior to the state due to the replacement of common production by the division of labor.

The breaking up of the old communal economy (this breakup itself based on economic evolution under the old tribal system—such as the increase in productive technique and in population density) led to class division, oppression, subjugation of women, etc. All this arose *before the state existed*, although its intensification led eventually to the development of the state. Abolish—by social revolution—the fragmentation of the economy into separate interests; bring into being social relations in which the economy is run by all and for all; and the state will fall. And the ability to do this rests on modern economic development, first and foremost the development of large-scale production.

Engels takes pains to show that the state is not an eternal institution, but one that arose at a certain point and will be abolished—but he never suggests that all authority will be abolished. Rather, authority will be transformed into a mere administration of things and of production and lose its political content.

So here we have two quite distinct frameworks.

◆ Ben puts emphasis on the state and authority as the source of oppression. Engels puts emphasis on the economic basis of oppression. He traces the origin of oppression to social relations, and shows how these exploitative social relations give rise to the state.

◆ Ben puts forward independent and competing production units as the guarantee of freedom. Engels sees them as the basis of oppressive capitalist relations, the basis of the capitalist state. Engels holds that overcoming a society based on competing interests and separate classes will be the cause for the future fall of the state.

◆ Ben sees the main role of the state, and its monstrous oppression of the people, in its administrative role. Engels sees the state as the tool which has cemented the domination of one class over another. Hence when the state falls, Engels sees administration remaining, albeit an administration of things, not a political administration of people. As he says:

“The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is *replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production.*” (*Anti-Dühring*, Part III. Socialism. Part II. Theoretical. International Publishers edition, *emph. added*, p. 307)

◆ Ben puts emphasis on phrasemongering about consciousness. Engels shows how economic evolution provides the foundation upon which human consciousness develops.

In brief, Ben has the anarchist interpretation of society, Engels the materialist view.

The struggle of Marxism versus anarchism was debated long ago. But it is coming up once again. Ben’s anarchist view fits in with the neo-conservative idea that “big government” is the only oppression. Let something be done privately for the profit of some production unit, the neo-conservatives say, and it will be

done better.

Naturally, the Republican neo-conservative only sees social measures as “big government”, not big jails and big armies. (The Libertarian neo-conservative might take matters a few steps farther, and sometimes envision private armies). Ben would abolish the whole government, but he would duplicate its repressive functions through vigilante action and the war of one against all. Every freedom which Ben seems to grant as he

denounces government interference, he takes back as he describes how his social system works. Eliminate formal authority, says Ben, and everything—censorship, reeducation, suppressing iconoclasts, the war of one production unit against another—will be a manifestation of mass activity and mass consciousness. In this, Ben shows the influence of the neo-conservative ideology. □

Appendix to part 2: A guide to Ben's society

Some readers may have trouble believing that Ben really could be enamored with such a repressive society as “cooperative anarchy”. So below are some more details from Ben's description in Seattle #76 of how his ideal society deals with differences.

As far as reeducating dissidents:

In paragraph 149, Ben takes up my question of how would his “cooperative anarchy” deal with differences. But he rephrases it as follows: “Joseph raises the question of what is to be done with **recalcitrant individuals**.” (Ben's emphasis). Actually I never used any such term as “recalcitrants”, nor did I suggest that disagreements would be confined to a few individuals, or that disagreements would only come up in a transition period in which the society was being set up. I envisage diversity and disagreement as a component part of communist society, and I asked Ben how he would deal with it. Ben, confronted with the possibility of differences, says it's just a few sick individuals, and their existence is just a carry-over of the old society.

Ben describes these dissidents very disrespectfully. He calls them “recalcitrant poisoners and abusers” for simply disagreeing with Ben on which product to choose from the shelves of a store or distribution center. (Paragraph 150). But on Ben's own supposition two different products were being offered for their use. The consumers, by their decision on which product to buy, were supposed to decide how much of each product to produce. But if they make the wrong decision, Ben calls them sick abusers.

Indeed, in paragraph 154 he talks of the “**severely polluted...mental-emotional environment**” of the dissidents. Ben not only abuses me for disagreeing with him, he abuses the people of the future for daring to disagree with him.

In paragraph 156 he talks of “help(ing) people ‘clean up’ their consciousness”. That's nothing like telling people what to think, which he is so worried that I might do. Not at all. Perish the thought.

In paragraph 159 he says that

“Ultimately it becomes vastly ‘cheaper’ to re-educate the recalcitrants than to fight them and suppress them constantly.”

Ben insists that no one in his society will ever be forced to “obey, even when they disagree”. Oh no, they will simply be

“suppressed” when they do what they want to do. Or they will be re-educated. Whatever is cheaper.

In paragraph 160, talking about the recalcitrants, Ben says that

“the tendency would be for the toxic residue to tend toward zero—and the need for coercion would tend toward zero with it.”

This clarifies again that the recalcitrants would be subject to “coercion”—until that wonderful moment when everyone is unanimous about everything.

In paragraph 161, Ben says that

“The ‘recalcitrants’ are in principle **no different than the rest of us**. They are only a little **further along the bell-shaped curve of social dysfunction** than everyone else”.

So no one is too far away from being called dysfunctional, if they disagree with Ben.

Censoring the mass media:

Ben claims that

“Joseph's logic would have us set up a ‘**Ministry of Culture**’ which would decide which items of culture were **wholesome enough** for mass consumption. Joseph's Ministry of Culture would doubtlessly coordinate its activities with the ‘Ministry of Truth’ which would ensure that no one could be deceived about politics or history.” (Paragraph 180)

What an active imagination Ben has! Only it turns out that it's Ben who wants to censor the mass media to ensure that the masses aren't exposed to “social dysfunction” or “toxic residue” (his terms for differing ideas or for dissidents). In the very next paragraph, after raising the specter of the Ministry of Truth, Ben tells us that censorship is just wonderful when done by “**the active participation of the masses themselves**”. There would be

“boycotts or labor actions against units that manufacture toxic culture”.

True, Ben boasts that

“**the media will not be controlled by anyone**. . . . Media workers . . . will write what they want, Similarly consumers of media will read,

listen to and participate in whatever they want.”
(Paragraph 133)

But almost fifty paragraphs later one learns that people will also censor what they want, harass actors/actresses as they wish, etc. The mailed fist keeps peeping out from behind the anti-authoritarian phrase.

In fact, Ben is really fascinated by the details of censorship. Why, he tells us, perhaps the masses wouldn't simply stamp out the offending production unit but instead “might even organize to make a particular cultural product better via aspects of it”. And Ben tells us that the censorship might reach as far as “even something as minor as altering the ending of a soap opera or intervening to affect the selection of an actor or actress if for some reason they believe that important...” (paragraph 181)

On denying needed goods to people:

Ben describes the methods by which one “production unit” might wage war against another in order to change their opinion. In paragraph 118 he speculates on how to bring an “iconoclast factory” to its knees (Ben regards “iconoclasts” are something bad, a “toxic residue” from the past). He talks of trying to persuade a section of the workers in the “iconoclast factory” to

“stage a **labor action** (possibly similar to a strike or a slowdown or at the least a dampening of enthusiasm) in order to **put pressure on the rest of the workers** to rethink their positions.”

So Ben's “cooperative anarchy” tries to incite discontent and sabotage production at “iconoclast” factories. If the factory persists in iconoclasm, it faces yet harsher measures. Ben specifies that the pressure on such factories includes persuading “other workers, not in the factory, to refrain from supporting the iconoclast factory.”

Now, just what does it mean to “refrain from supporting” the iconoclasts? In paragraph 120 Ben writes that

“the factory's suppliers could **refuse to supply** the factory with the goods it needs to produce Hence the renegade factory would have to find other production units that would freely supply it with what it needs. If it can't—the renegade factory loses the struggle. Game over. It

is shut down.”

But what if the “iconoclasts” find other suppliers? Then the “labor action” spreads to the suppliers through “strikes, slowdowns, boycotts”. As Ben says, “And on and on it goes.” The war would spread far beyond the original disputants, with each side “targeting or aiding their **allies and enemies.**” (Paragraph 125)

So production at an “iconoclast” factory will be sabotaged. The dissenting workers will be denied food to eat or raw materials for their factory. And eventually, they will lose the struggle, “game over”, and be shut down. But, in Ben's view, that has nothing in common with forcing them to “obey, even when they disagree”.

Naturally, the result would be that each faction in the “cooperative anarchy” would have to be economically independent of others. “Production units” would have to form into giant networks, monopolies and alliances. The production unit with the most friends and allies (either voluntary allies or people who are simply scared of losing their suppliers) would be the most powerful. New workers would be carefully screened, to make sure that competing alliances weren't sending in organizers whose aim is to shut one's factory down. And if you want to be influential in this society, you should choose your profession to produce some vital product that others really need.

Private ownership

Ben's description shows that each “production unit” actually owns (or can dispose of, it amounts to the same thing) the goods it produces. Despite Ben's assurance that there are “**no commodities nor money to buy them with**”, in fact each individual or production unit retains control over the goods it possesses and the machinery and other means of production that it uses. That's why it is capable of denying these goods to other factories. But this means that each “production unit” actually owns both its own tools and factories, and the goods it produces.

And so the “production unit” ends up trading with other production units to get what it needs. Thus, Ben to the contrary, the factories are actually producing commodities, something to trade with other factories and suppliers. There is a marketplace. And on this basis, the “cooperative anarchy” will soon give rise to money and then to credit, finance, speculation, “futures markets”, etc. □

From Ben's vision of future society that's "like a war"

Below are some brief excerpts from Seattle #76, Ben's article of Feb. 3, 1995. They are some of the passages referred to in the article *Left-Wing Neo-Conservatives*, part 2. Excerpts from Ben's Seattle #72, relevant to part 1, can be found in the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*, #6, pp. 39-44.

The Confabulator Has No Clothes:

WHY IS JOSEPH AFRAID OF CONSCIOUSNESS ?

How Joseph Revises Marxism to Equate the Consciousness and Initiative of the Masses with the Action of the Capitalist Marketplace and thus Attempts to Bar the Door Forward to the Theoretical Development of Communism for the Sake of the Organizational Stability of the Detroit-Chicago Sectarian Grouping

Joseph's Questions:

-53- However one thing that stands out in considering Joseph's questions is that they really are **most excellent** questions. It is only Joseph's demagogical and opportunist methods of presenting them for sectarian purposes that is a problem. This shows that Joseph actually has theoretical abilities that **could** serve the proletariat should we help him to wake up and take a stand against his own internal corruption and decay.

5) *What happens when different ways of making economic decisions clash ?*

a) *What if public opinion wants a factory run one way but the workers at the factory insist on another way ?*

b) *Suppose workers at two different factories disagree.*

Who decides what happens ?

c) *Who decides when planning bodies disagree ?*

d) *If a planning body is divided or in a state of civil war, which side wins ?*

Ben's Answers (preface):

-55- Because Joseph's questions may provoke some interest in the subject, I will touch on some of them. It would, of course, be foolish for me to attempt to answer everything in detail. Rather, I will simply try to sketch out some ideas. I have opted for speed rather than thoroughness because by striking while Joseph is still in the midst of his neo-conservative series, there is a **better chance** that some of this may actually be read. Should any readers be curious about my opinions or would like me to sketch out my ideas in more detail, they should **write to me and I will try to respond**. In this regard I should note, however, that my time is not "mine" to waste. **I am quite busy and want to make my time, which belongs to the peoples of the world, productive.**

-56- What this means in practice as far as my answering letters is that EVERYONE gets priority over Joseph and Mark, who, until they publicly renounce their **ugly and corrupt practices**, are convicted charlatans and spam slingers in my book.

They have **zero interest** in sorting out any of these questions and look at every exchange in terms of shoring up their sectarian grouping and their wallowing in the mud of denial.

-57- Furthermore, I reserve the right to only reply to letters that are serious and show respect for the scientific process. This more or less excludes LA [*Los Angeles Workers Voice*], since the comrades there are confused on the distinction between political discussion and mutual masturbation. Finally, I would hope that anyone who writes might show at least a tinge of firmness against spam slinging, which undermines the unity of our "information community" and **degrades the quality of the scientific process** by which we sort out questions that are of **vital interest** to the proletariat. It is hoped that comrades who consider themselves communists might show a flicker of recognition of the necessity to fight the corruption that is **eating at the soul** of the Detroit-Chicago sectarian axis.

-58- And finally, I will note that I deal with a number of these questions in somewhat greater depth in both TCE and DIPR and comrades who would genuinely like to see these documents distributed are most welcome to assist me in getting a campaign underway to get at least two comrades from each city to send in a reply to a poll. . . .

[Ben has repeatedly boasted about his articles TCE and DIPR, but has prudently kept them secret.—J. Green]

Ben's Answers (content):

-59- I should start by pointing out that several of Joseph's questions are based on mistaken **assumptions**. Maybe I can clear some of these up.

-60- Joseph assumes that **social planning** requires a **centralized and formal** administrative apparatus. Let's explore some of the differences. These definitions are approximate but comrades can probably get a sense of the basic ideas here.

-61- **Central planning**, involves decisions being made by a small group of people who act, in a formal sense, as **representatives of the masses**. Hence on complex questions, under Joseph's world-view, there is **little need for the masses to actually have their pretty little heads bothered with knowing too much of the details of the complex issues involved**. There is **little actual need** for the information that is involved in sorting out the issues to travel into the masses' consciousness.

-62- **Formal planning** involves a group which makes a set of rules that are binding on all. There is inherently little room for deviation, much less defiance, of these rules by groups or parties which may believe they may **know better**.

-63- **Social Planning** involves methods by which the masses affect and control the overall direction and thrust of economic development. This may include approximate (sometimes fuzzy) agreements negotiated by various involved parties or groups. Such groups may be acting out of their differing (and sometimes distorted) conceptions of the **general interest**.

-64- Only to Joseph and those with similar prejudices does social planning require central or formal planning. Let's

consider a hypothetical situation:

The Real Respect Accorded a Tribal Elder

-67- There are a number of theoretical issues that might be related to this but the one that most strikes me involves a passage from Engels (probably in *Origin of the Family*) relating how the most lowly cop, in a modern society, possessed more **formal authority** than the respected elder in the primitive communal society — while at the same time the wise elder in such a primitive society might command far more **real respect** than the most fearsome dictator in a modern society. I only remember this quote approximately but I have always found it very thought-provoking.

-68- The issue, as I see it, as we consider, theorize and speculate about forms and relations of production in a communist society, is to grasp that there would be **no formal authority**, no binding laws, no regulations that could not be disregarded by anyone who felt it was better and “made more sense” to disagree with such regulations.

-69- Such **formal authority** corresponds, more or less, with what I described in Seattle # 69 as “**top down**” **organizational methods**. I said that while top-down methods are sometimes necessary, that we should consider ways of accomplishing as much as possible without resort to top-down methods. Where possible, we should place greater reliance, I said, on “**bottom-up**” **methods**. Bottom-up methods are inherently more democratic and **involve the masses to a greater degree** than top-down methods in a wide variety of situations. Bottom-up methods are inherently “**more parallel**”. By this I mean that **greater brainpower** is applied to a problem, **more knowledge and experience are gained**, etc.

-71- Communist society will be based on **bottom-up methods**. Hence how bottom-up methods come into the world and function must be taken seriously.

.....
1) How can society ever hope to run production as a whole without any **formal authority** or **central administrative apparatus** ?
.....

-74- By relying on conscious social planning, consensus, persuasion and the kind of respect attained by a tribal elder in primitive communal society. By relying on the individual and group decisions of the masses who would be highly educated and informed and would figure out “the right thing to do” without need for a **special class** of administrators.

2) *If central planning bodies are compatible with mass initiative and to some extent promote it, then why not use them to run the economy as a whole ?*

-76- Actually centralized planning bodies may play a useful role. How much they are used might depend on their track record and competence. There is no reason to rule out the possibility that a central planning body might **emerge** to play a powerful and useful role in the direction of the overall economy. In fact there are reasons to expect this. But even then, its authority would not need to be **formal**. . . .

[Of course, Ben defined “central planning” as formal and oppressive in paragraph 61 above.—J. Green]

-112- And this brings us to Joseph’s fifth question: What happens when there is a **clash** ?

-113- Actually the answer is kind of simple: the various sides **fight it out**. This would kind of be like a war except that, generally speaking, there is little real destruction, no real causalities and, in the long run, **everybody wins**. Everybody wins because all sides are fighting for the general interest, not their own **private interests**. Everybody wins because the **main weapons** in this war are public support and the support, consciousness and **passion** of workers and consumers — and this creates an environment and a dynamic where the side which has positions most closely corresponding to the general interest has the **ultimate advantage**.

Let’s see if we can get a clearer picture:

a) *What if **public opinion** wants a factory run one way but the **workers** at the factory insist on another way?*

There are many possibilities, many scenarios. Let’s consider:

-117- **Another factory could be set up** to do things the way that the majority public opinion wants. If there is enough support it might not be difficult to set up a competing factory that **better serves** the public interest. In a communist economy a factory would **NOT** be set up on the basis of capital from the **capital markets** which would then be used to **purchase** means of production. Rather, the means of production would simply be supplied from **production units sympathetic to the cause**. Similarly a **labor force** might simply **volunteer to help out**. Maybe the workers would work a little less at their other job (or jobs) in order to have the time to support the new factory.

-118- Another possibility is that long-term work could be done to **win over the workers** at the iconoclast factory. Or — to persuade some portion of the workers to stage a **labor action** (possibly similar to a strike or a slowdown or at the least a dampening of enthusiasm) in order to **put pressure on the rest of the workers** to rethink their positions. Naturally this might involve mobilizing other workers, not in the factory, to refrain from supporting the iconoclast factory.

-119- Now suppose the iconoclast factory were producing in a way that was **harmful** to the public ? Suppose, for example, the factory was a polluter, either polluting the natural environment with **chemical poisons** or the social-mental environment with **bad culture** ? Then **stronger action** could be taken. A **boycott** of the factory’s products could be organized. This would certainly tend to demoralize the factory’s workers and make them think twice about their position. After all, **they are only working there in the first place because they get satisfaction from serving the general interest**.

-120- Or, more **severely**, the factory’s suppliers could refuse to supply the factory with the goods it needs to produce. It should be kept in mind that in a communist economy there are **no commodities nor money to buy them with**. Hence the renegade factory would have to find other production units that would freely supply it with what it needs. If it can’t — the renegade factory loses the struggle. Game over. It is shut down. But what if the renegade factory does find a supplier ? Then the factory’s opponents could initiate action against the factory ally that is supplying it with goods — attempt to target it via the organization of producer or consumer actions (strikes,

slowdowns, boycotts). And on and on it goes. Most struggles might be minor and end in simple compromise. More important issues would tend to escalate and on occasion the most important issues might quickly **convulse the whole of society**.

-121- It can be seen that all these action are **highly dependent on the consciousness of the public** — who are all producers and consumers and who all will interact with the struggle based on the strength of their **consciousness, convictions and passion** about the rightness of the cause and their confidence in the various combatants.

b) *Suppose workers at two different factories disagree. Who decides what happens ?*

c) *Who decides when planning bodies disagree ?*

d) *If a planning body is divided or in a state of civil war, which side wins ?*

-123- Similar to the case of the renegade factory, the answer, most esteemed Joseph, is that the various sides may **fight it out**. Or they may negotiate a **compromise**. Or, as in other kinds of war, they may do a little of both, engaging in **skirmishes** of various kinds in order to **gauge** their own **strength** and support and the strength and support of their adversaries. The outcome would depend on the strength of the convictions of the combatants, the correlation of forces and their **ability to mobilize “troops”** (ie: producers, consumers and the mass consciousness) for their **“war”**.

-125- So what do we have ? Producers and consumers organizing **work actions and boycotts**, for and against various types of production and consumption units, targeting or aiding their **allies and enemies**. Meanwhile all sides endeavoring to **raise the public consciousness** as part of an effort to **mobilize larger and larger numbers of people** into the support of their cause. And all of this taking place in a world without money, without wages, without capital and without a market. Yes this can be confusing.

-133- Actually, however, **the media will not be controlled by anyone**. Whatever cyberspace equivalent of newspapers, magazines or BBS's will evolve — these outlets will be production units. Media workers (writers, movie makers, programmers) will write what they want, make films about what they think is important, and report on public opinion as they see fit. Similarly consumers of media will read, listen to and participate in whatever they want. There will be no “intellectual property” in information protected by law but restrictions on the use of information might be negotiated among production units and there will be protection of personal privacy.

-148- I will argue that the need for coercion of any sort, the need for a special body with powers above that of ordinary individuals, a special body that makes rules, laws and regulations that others must obey, **even when they disagree**, will eventually become **superfluous** in one sphere after another.

-149- Joseph raises the question of what is to be done with **recalcitrant individuals**. Here, for purposes of discussion, I use the term “recalcitrant” to indicate those people who can not be persuaded not to take actions that would result in the **poisoning of others**. Hence we are talking about those who may have various problems in their thinking and who as a result are selfish, self-centered, ignorant and don't give a shit about

others. Such people are typically suckers for every trend that holds society back and their actions will need to be **fought constantly**.

-160- I believe the tendency would be for the toxic residue to tend toward zero — and the need for coercion would tend toward zero with it.

-161- Another point must be made here also. The “recalcitrants” are in principle **no different than the rest of us**. They are only a little **further along the bell-shaped curve** of social dysfunction than everyone else. When we examine, understand and treat their dysfunction so that they gain something **beautiful** in their consciousness for each thing **ugly** that they give up — we also advance the solutions to the dysfunctions that trouble us all and we work to, so to speak, raise the **mass consciousness**.

The Mother of the Mother of All Poisons

-179- So let's talk of more typical kinds of poison. Let's talk about a kind of poison that does far more damage than chemical poisons or narcotics. Let's talk about **poison in our culture**. The pollution of the the mental-emotional environment — the **poisoning** of the mass consciousness via **toxic culture and ideology** — is an **immense assault on the interests of the masses**. The amount of damage done is difficult to calculate. Many people are left ignorant of their most basic nature or the nature of those that they love. The most crippling and debilitating anti-people ideas and concepts are promoted on a mass basis and with **ferocious intensity**. But at the same time the nature of the problem is **intractably complex**. Should “Married with Children” be banned ? There are certainly lots of anti-people outlooks promoted on that show. Then again some might say it was satire. Or should “The Simpsons” be banned? You know that it teaches children to be disrespectful of their parents?

-180- Joseph's logic would have us set up a **“Ministry of Culture”** which would decide which items of culture were **wholesome enough** for mass consumption. Joseph's Ministry of Culture would doubtlessly coordinate its activities with the **“Ministry of Truth”** which would insure that no one could be **deceived about politics or history**. . . .

-181- When we deal with truly complex questions — like how to raise the general level of culture — we can see that there is **no substitute for the active participation of the masses themselves**. They can organize boycotts or labor actions against units that manufacture toxic culture. Whether the boycott or labor action would be successful is in **direct proportion** to the actual offensiveness and harmfulness of the cultural product. The masses might even organize to make a particular cultural product better via altering aspects of it, even something as minor as altering the ending of a soap opera or intervening to affect the selection of an actor or actress if for some reason they believe that important (although I **refuse** to speculate on whether soap operas will still exist under communism). What stands out — is that the **involvement of the masses** in these kinds of questions, **the debate that ensues** in the process of sorting matters out — might not infrequently play as large or larger a role in **raising the public consciousness** as the outcome of a particular struggle itself. □

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.

Some of the contents of the Summer-Fall 1995 double issue, Vol. 11, No. 2:

Editorial: "Our Literature and Our Politics"

Fiction: "You Deserve a Break Today"
"Talk about Extinction or: The Stereotype (A Monologue)"
From "Moon in the Seventh House"

Poetry:

"Only Chiapas?"	"The Invisible Hands of the Marketplace"
"What's Obscene"	
"Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, April 20, 1914"	"Tie a Yellow Ribbon"
	"Fat Generals We Have"
"The Cry of a Proletarian"	"For Whom the Bell Is Curved"
"Disgruntled"	"Info Insects"
"First Amendment Rag"	"Hearing the Echo"
"Awry Orwell"	"Financing Needles in the First World"
"Lessons of a Worker's Son"	
"Cannon Fodder"	"Baton Rouge during the Gulf War"

Announcement: "Communist Voice Organization formed"

Struggle's editor is Tim Hall, an activist and Marxist-Leninist since the 1960's. *Struggle* is a non-profit magazine, produced and distributed by the voluntary labor of a very few people. *Struggle* welcomes poems, songs, short stories, short plays, and line drawings. Manuscripts will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. It pays its contributors in copies.

Subscription rates are \$2 per issue (\$2.50 by mail), \$10 for a subscription of four, \$12 for four for institutions, \$15 for four overseas, free to prisoners. Bulk discounts and back issues (on anti-racism, against the Persian Gulf War, depicting the postal workers' struggle) are available.

The summer-fall 1995 double issue is twice the usual size and costs \$4 (\$5 by mail).

Checks or money orders must be made payable to Tim Hall—Special Account.

Struggle can be reached at P.O. Box 13261, Detroit, MI 48213-0261.