

Communist Voice

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Successor to the
'Workers' Advocate'

Who are the communists?

Last month the press was full of news about the Russian parliamentary election. The so-called communists led by Gennadi Zyuganov won a big victory, getting far more votes than any other party and winning a third of the seats. One magazine after another discussed: is this a communist resurgence in Russia, or do the communists just want to readjust the present reform program of Yeltsin? *Time* magazine ponders: "How dark a red is he?"

But the party that won the elections in Russia is not communist at all. Far from it. It is descended from the bureaucrats that ran the state-capitalist system in Russia for decades and presented it as "workers' rule". It used "Marxist" words to cover up its complete betrayal of anything Marx and Engels stood for. For decades true communism has only developed in a struggle against this party and its brothers around the world. This is the "anti-revisionist" struggle—the exposure of those who have betrayed the communist ideal in order to apologize for their new ruling class.

Who are the communists? To answer that, one cannot look at the "communist" party in Russia, or the ruling regime in Cuba or China, or other such revisionist parties. The communists are those who stand with the working class against both Western market capitalism and the state-capitalist regimes. It is not those who live the life of fat bureaucrats nor those who apologize for their crimes. It is those who stand with the working masses and who use Marxism as a tool against both the Western exploiters and the revisionist bureaucrats.

Our paper has nothing in it of use for the "communists" of the Russian parliament. It is instead written for the activists who want to see a mass communist trend reemerge among the activists. And we invite all activists who strive for liberation to write us with their views.

Who are the communists? They are found among the activists who stand with the mass movement. They are found among those activists who realize that the current disorganization of the left and of the proletariat is also an ideological crisis. They are activists who wish to purge Marxism-Leninism of the decades of Stalinist and Trotskyist distortions and use it to rebuild the proletarian movement.

We carry material on three of the major recent strikes—the Detroit newspaper strike (still continuing), the Boeing

aircraft strike and the France general strike. These strikes show that today, when the capitalists are crowing about their world triumph, things are getting worse for the masses. It also shows that the workers are not just facing their open exploiters—they are facing disorganization. They are not just facing the union-busting offensive of the capitalists, but their struggle is being held back by the pro-capitalist leaders of the trade unions. A revival of the workers' movement will require not only more struggle, but a new orientation for the proletarian movement.

In this issue, we also continue an ongoing debate with the anarchists over how to overcome an economic system based on the marketplace. The anarchists think that they are the most radical of all activists because they oppose all authority as another oppressor state. But they rely on each workplace group or collective or council owning its own means or production and owning what it produces. These groups exchange with each other, or barter with each other, or sometimes give some of their product away. The anarchists don't realize that the result is that their future society would be bound to

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marketplace forces. They don't realize that it is not the government, but the separate ownership of the means of production and the resulting constant exchange of commodities that have created the marketplace and capitalism itself. They don't realize that the bourgeois governments exist to reinforce an economic base of injustice, and it's not that injustice exists only because of government. They don't have the faintest idea that by focusing mainly on government, they are in line with the neo-conservative atmosphere of the times.

We also sum up the last two years of the work of the circles around the dissolution of the Marxist-Leninist Party: The Communist Voice Organization springs from activists in and around the MLP. When the MLP dissolved, the majority said that the situation was too bleak and there was no other choice. The last two years has proved that this wasn't true. It is precisely when there are few communists left, when the Marxist ideas are being assailed from every side, that it is most important for resolute activists to stand up for the truth. This will help create the grounds for the revival of the revolutionary movement in the future.

Indeed, the experience of the last two years reminds us of the struggle waged by Marx and Engels. In this issue, we mark the 100th anniversary last November of the death of Engels. Engels began his political activity in the heady days of ferment leading up to the European-wide revolutions of 1848 and 1849. But these revolutions collapsed, and the reactionaries triumphed, just as Western marketplace capitalism has triumphed today. Yet it is then that Marx and Engels, far from giving up the revolution, did most of their epoch-making work and laid the basis for new proletarian parties around the world.

Today many say communism is dead because the world is no longer what it was in the days of Marx and Engels and Lenin. But Marxism holds that the world is in constant change. It shows how even in the most stagnant political times, economic evolution is eating away at the prized stability of the exploiters and preparing the soil for new revolutionary movements. It has shown how the ownership of the means of production by private interests (whether individual or group interests) gives rise to class division and class oppression. And it has shown how to trace evolution of this private ownership as the world changes.

In times like now, when the very face of the world is being changed by economic and political developments, Marxism is the only reliable basis for reorganizing the proletarian movement. It provides the basis for fighting the triumphant neo-conservatism of our times.

But Marxism is not a completed theory. It is a framework that must be further built on by each new generation of activists. Today it is our task to carry Marxism further by completing the anti-revisionist critique—the exposure of the capitalist nature of the revisionist regimes such as Cuba and China today and Russia and Eastern Europe yesterday. Today it is our task to enrich Marxism by studying the new world developments, exposing the new forms of world imperialism, and judging where the new crises of world capitalism will break out. Today it is our task to keep Marxism alive among the masses even in a backward period of political life.

Who are the communists? It is those who take up these tasks. We call on all those who wish to lend a hand to join with us in the struggle for a new world.

— Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit □

What is 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.

Communist Voice continues the anti-revisionist cause to which the *Workers' Advocate* was dedicated. The *WA* was founded in 1969 with the aim of rebuilding a genuine communist party in this country. For a quarter of a century, the *WA* firmly opposed the pro-Soviet "Communist" Party and other opportunist organizations as revisionist travesties of Marxism and betrayers of the cause of the working class. It was always the paper of a communist organization, and from 1980 to 1993 was the national voice of **the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA**. From 1985 on, it also had a theoretical supplement. In November 1993, the Fifth Congress of the MLP dissolved the party and killed the *WA*. The Communist Voice Organization stems from those comrades who opposed the demoralization of the Fifth Congress majority and hold that only anti-revisionist communism can lead to the renewal of the working class movement. The *Communist Voice* continues, in a different form, with fewer resources, and with more focus on the theoretical task, the struggle of the *Workers' Advocate* to contribute to the organization of the revolutionary proletarian party.

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Editor: Joseph Green

Since the Marxist-Leninist Party dissolved:

Balance-sheet of two years of work

by Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit

Just over two years ago, in November 1993, the Marxist-Leninist Party dissolved. In the debate leading up to the dissolution of the Party, the majority of the Party leadership asserted that:

- a) the situation is too bleak, little if any communist work can continue, and that's why the party must dissolve;
- b) there really aren't any important ideological differences among the comrades;
- c) it's doubtful whether the working class will rise for socialism, and if it does, whether socialism can be built; and
- d) the MLP had restricted discussion among its members of the research being done and the ideas being discussed, probably as a result of being opposed to factionalism.

The Central Committee majority carried the party majority with it at the Fifth and last Congress of the party. It was a congress of the liquidation of communist work. But a minority

of the party opposed some or all of these assertions, and maintained their opposition despite a torrent of abuse from the liquidationist bigwigs. Instead of reexamining the debate on these points, it is now time to see what the experience of two years has shown.

What have the last two years shown?

a) Communist work can continue, and has continued. There have been 15 issues of two theoretical journals (all from the minority). A number of leaflets have been issued on topical events, mostly from the minority. The literary journal *Struggle* lives, and continues to make new friends.

b) The ideological differences have proved key. The "majority" was unable to publish any journal. Aside from the final leaflets announcing the dissolution of the party, there were only a couple of leaflets from one city by the "majority", while all the rest of the publishing work was done by the "minority".

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Meanwhile, the “minority” itself has divided. The debate over these ideological differences has proved one of the motivating factors of theoretical work.

c) Capitalism is failing to overcome its contradictions, which have deepened quite a bit in the last two years. The issue of private ownership of the means of production, which both bourgeois ideologists and some majority ideologists had thought was going away, is ravaging capitalist society with a vengeance. The working class remains disorganized, but the conditions that will force it to reorganize are intensifying.

d) As soon as the party structure dissolved, the circles of the majority discussed their views in secret, and sought to freeze out anyone who disagreed from discussion. It was precisely in the days of the Marxist-Leninist Party that discussion was spread among everyone, reports made available to all comrades interested, and the stage of work and the conclusions that seemed to be arising were discussed at general party congresses and conferences. As well, the rampant factionalism since the party dissolved did not foster a lively debate of idea against idea but was a factor dampening the debate: it helped reinforce the utter sectarianism by which the “majority” groups isolated their members from exposure to different ideas.

Different trends?

The last two years have shown that a variety of political trends were developing in the MLP. The MLP had been united by a zeal for communism, class struggle, and opposition to the revisionism. But in the last years of the party, that unity had broken down, and the party split apart and died. Since then, the trends have more and more gone their own way. Well, then, what trends are there?

The majority leaders were indignant, two years ago, that anyone described them as demoralized. Today it is impossible to reach any other conclusion when one examines what they have done for the last two years. The work of the MLP had reached a crisis. The majority leaders didn't want to change the MLP in response, but to liquidate it. Some of them promised that they would continue study groups or put out leaflets or publish a journal. But most of the “majority” study groups collapsed after a few months. And 1995 saw the end of the last pretensions of the “majority” to be a force of organized activists. The Revolutionary Study Group of Seattle—that had promised to do agitation and theoretical work so much deeper than that of the old *Workers' Advocate*—dissolved. The Boston Communist Study Group—the last remaining group of the majority—issued a statement saying that it wouldn't put out a journal after all and that it would just meet occasionally to discuss subjects of interest.

The “minority” was formed at the last Congress of the MLP, and it consisted of those comrades who wanted to continue the discussion of the ideological differences that had torn apart the MLP. For almost a year, this allowed them to collaborate on a journal, the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* (CWVTJ). But the “minority” was never able to declare a common platform. Eventually the ideological differences in the “minority” came to the fore, and it split into

several parts.

The *Chicago Workers' Voice* group just wants to float among various groups in the left. It has no set of principles, doesn't sum up what it is doing and where it is going, and is organizationally amorphous. It has abandoned the work to re-establish an anti-revisionist trend; waffles on the nature of the state-capitalist regime in Cuba; promotes a petty-bourgeois nationalist journal in Mexico, *El Machete*; and can't be bothered by the study of Marxism.

The *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* group agrees with the CWV on much of the orientation of practical work, but it is drifting away to the “left” of Marxism. It has no set of declared principles, but it is interested in a miscellaneous assortment of anarchist and odd journals such as the “International Communist Current” (ICC). The ICC denounces national liberation struggle, denounces unions (not for being led by reformist leaders, but for being unions), denounces the thought of united front work, and will only accept a political party that does not “organize” the working class.

The anti-revisionist cause

The largest part of the “minority”, including the comrades who carried on most of the polemical fight against the majority in 1994 in the CWVTJ, formed the Communist Voice Organization. It has adopted a set of principles; held common discussions of its work; carried out its general decisions by election; and it puts out the *Communist Voice* publication. The CVO carries on the anti-revisionist cause that the *Workers' Advocate* (the national paper of the MLP) fought for. In this period of ideological confusion in the left, the CVO seeks to help re-establish the theoretical basis of Marxist communism. Its members engage in various political, literary, agitational and other activities, but the focus of the CVO centers on its theoretical task.

Today we are starting the third year since the MLP dissolved. The ideological dissolution of the former MLP circles has gone pretty far, and there is little if any connection among them. Unity can only be based on a definite view of what is needed today to create a communist trend, not on groupings that have dissolved. The first two years since the party showed the importance of ideological clarification. Instead of the gradual decline of the last few years before the MLP dissolved, there has been some clarification of views, some enthusiasm, and some issues have been clarified. The work of the CVO faces not towards reconstituting the old, but building roots for anti-revisionist communism in the future.

There are many obstacles facing the CVO. There is no question that it is hard to carry on the necessary work with such small forces, scattered over a wide geographical area, and in such a stagnant political atmosphere as today. But the comrades of the CVO see this anti-revisionist work as an essential contribution to rebuilding the proletarian movement. Whether its contribution will be large or small, the CVO is determined to do what it can to make anti-revisionism a vigorous political trend once again. The end of the Marxist-Leninist Party was a tragedy, but the struggle continues. □

They're not sure about socialism or anything at all:

Boston group throws up its hands

A document from the Boston Communist Study Group was given to us a couple of months ago by a friend who had received it. It is reprinted elsewhere in this issue of the *CV*. (See page 7) The BCSG has reneged on its promise to put out a theoretical journal, and it wonders whether the marketplace is an eternal institution necessary for complex societies. It has given up on organized work—if it still exists, it is a coffee klatsch. Yet BCSG is the last remaining and most “left” of the groupings coming from the former MLP “majority”.

The BCSG comes from the former Boston Branch of the late Marxist-Leninist Party. The MLP—when it was a lively and active organization—stood for anti-revisionist communism and laughed at “marketplace socialism”. It stood up and defied all the conventional ideas about communism—whether from the universities or from the Stalinists or from the Trotskyists—in the name of the real communism of Marx and Lenin. It was an activist party, descended from the great wave of movement activists of the 1960s and 1970s. As the movement declined worldwide, and as the extent of proletarian disorganization became clear, the MLP went through an ideological crisis. Demoralization spread—and found concentrated expression in the Central Committee. A CC majority formed that wanted out of the revolutionary struggle and repudiated the former anti-revisionist stand of the MLP.

The Boston Branch was a firm supporter of the stand of the majority of the Central Committee. It promised to put out a theoretical journal after the party dissolved, and this was important in the CC majority holding around itself a number of comrades who were taken in by their theorizing but wanted to continue some work. Some of the “majority” leaders even claimed that such a journal would carry all the long and theoretical articles that comrades had dreamed off. They claimed that the party’s agitation and the publication of the journal *The Workers’ Advocate* was what prevented more theoretical work from being done. It just took too much time to do all this work, they said, and there were too many popular articles. So if the MLP publications were stopped and the agitation abandoned, they promised, we would enter the golden age of theory and profound thought. And not only that, some majority members said, but people could solve their personal problems, freed from the “dysfunctional workaholism” of being a communist activist.

Why didn’t they accomplish anything?

But what does the BCSG statement show?

The BCSG never put out a theoretical journal, and they admit that they never did much theoretical work. The only two articles they are still working on are rewrites or amplifications of work done before the party was dissolved.

But why haven’t they done anything? The statement gives every possible excuse.

At the time of the dissolution of the Party, the “majority” said that more theoretical work would be done if there wasn’t

the heavy load of agitational work. Now the BCSG says it can’t do the theoretical work because there isn’t the spur of the agitational work.

The BCSG statement says that they have no intention of becoming a “political trend” because the task is to sum up, re-examine the world, etc. But they also say they don’t have much enthusiasm to do the summing up and reexamination, because they don’t have the spur of being a political trend.

The BCSG says it can’t do theoretical work (which of course involves a lot of reading) because—its members are too interested in reading a lot. Make sense of that, those who can.

The BCSG said that all these ideological debates distracted comrades from a journal. Yet many of the best Marxist works have always been polemics, from Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy* to Engels *Anti-Dühring* and Lenin’s *State and Revolution*. And anyone who reads *Capital* knows how polemical it is. Indeed, the little work the BCSG did do is in large part concerned with this debate.

The BCSG says if they had really pushed to get organized and get theoretical work done, they might have developed the “required momentum” to get the work done. But, they say, they didn’t have the momentum for “pushing for it to get done”.

The BCSG’s excuses are all “chicken and egg” stories—we didn’t raise chickens because we had no eggs to hatch them, and we had no eggs because there were no chickens to lay them. Irrefutable logic!!!

It’s clear that the BCSG’s leaders never had any serious interest in putting out a theoretical journal. The BCSG did put out a couple of leaflets. But they obviously didn’t have their heart in that either, and they don’t bother even mentioning it. The statement complains about a lack of contact with the masses, but fails to mention what happened to their leaflets, and why they stopped putting them out.

Sectarianism

But the BCSG is sure of one thing. Only the work they do (or fail to do) is (or would be) any good. No other work from former MLP activists is even worth mentioning. The BCSG doesn’t even bother discussing what it likes or dislikes in the journals produced by other former MLP comrades. It doesn’t discuss the ideological controversies that brought out. In essence, it just tells everyone else to “go to hell”—in the words of one prominent member of the “majority”.

At the time of the last MLP congress, a few comrades said they would have supported other proposals for a journal, but they wanted to make sure that the Boston journal would come out. In their view, only one journal could be produced. But it turns out that if there was any proposal that was just a “spoiler”, it was the BCSG proposal.

The real reason

But enough of all the pretexts from the BCSG. Why really

has the BCSG stopped work? It's for the one reason the BCSG won't give. They don't believe in communism anymore, and that's why they don't have enthusiasm to put out a communist journal.

The BCSG statement doesn't directly express belief in almost anything. It lists one question after another. Is there even a working class or has it yet to gel? The BCSG doesn't know. Will there ever be socialism? The BCSG doesn't know. Is there any point in getting up in the morning? The BCSG is working on the question. But if they are going to get out of bed, they want guarantees as to where and when the working class will rise in revolution.

The turn to neo-conservatism

The BCSG doesn't say openly what they really think. They're a bit cagey on that. Mainly all they do is ask questions. This may reflect a lack of unity among themselves. But the questions one asks may well show the framework of one's thinking. Many of their questions doubt whether there is any possibility at all of overcoming the marketplace. Only two things seem real to them: a dynamic marketplace and a stagnating state capitalist bureaucracy. They don't see how a centralized planned economy can be compatible with mass initiative and local autonomy, and so they look to the marketplace. They themselves wring their hands, lamenting that their plan might "degenerate into simple 'market socialism' a la Gorbachev, Tito etc." Their world view has little to do with the real economic history of the times and is just a reflection of the current neo-conservative thinking, with a sprinkling of left rhetoric.

The BCSG isn't sure about socialism, but they are ultra-enthusiastic about the dynamics and revolutionization of the means of production by capitalism. They doesn't ask: is the capitalist marketplace leading to environmental catastrophe? Is capitalist dynamism inseparable from the tendency to impoverish the masses that has accelerated in the last few years in a real frenzy? What new catastrophes face the world? They barely mention a few problems in capitalism, while their picture of socialism is that the working class "bring(s) about a period of technical stagnation but in so doing lay(s) the basis" for a classless society. How inspiring.

In fact, the BCSG, the left-wing of the majority, has taken up one after another of the theories that were put forward by Fred (Seattle) and his group. These were the most right-wing members of the MLP—the ones who capitulated to neo-conservatism the earliest and who essentially dropped out of the MLP after the Fourth Congress (a year before the party dissolved) and stopped distributing the *Workers' Advocate*. After the MLP dissolved, Fred came out openly denying the existence of classes, promoting the new and improved imperialism, etc. The MLP lasted only so long as it opposed these theories. But when the majority needed a pretext to justify abandoning the party, they turned to Fred. The BCSG wrings its hands, while Fred is enthusiastic, but they both are dazzled by neo-conservatism and look towards some form of progress

other than class struggle for socialism.

It's complex, it's chaotic— it's fashionable!

But wait, there is something that makes the BCSG stop wringing their hands and that excites their genuine enthusiasm. The BCSG statement positively glows when it talks about "complexity" and "chaos" theory. This is what they see as having "potential for great impact". Reading between the lines, one can see the direction of their thought. Planned economy is too simplistic—the marketplace is supposedly suitable for complex situations. Talking about the different classes in society and class interests is too simplistic—there are so many complex factors about whether any class will "gel" (their term). Organizing a party is too "simplistic", while "interest groups" and "coalitions" are so much more complex.

It finally all comes down to their basic question:

"Is it possible that socialism and communism are impossible and that progressive social development will take place in some as yet unforeseen and probably less grand direction?"

Socialism and communism are old-hat for them, and there is a brave new complex world out there—it's just that the BCSG can't find it.

They aren't sure of what this new world looks like. They wring their hands that it may not be very grand (i.e. it's just the same old marketplace that the world has already seen, now romanticized in all its complexity and chaos.) They know only one thing. It was wrong of others back in the days of the party to accuse them of "heresies". Of course not—a heretic is someone who stands against the overall opinion of society. But they are orthodox followers of the neo-conservative mood of the times.

The leaders of the "majority" aren't simply revolutionaries who grew tired or have too many family responsibilities. Those who can no longer be activists could have continued to sympathize with Marxist work—any living Marxist party has not only its members, but a whole mass of sympathizers and people who are only in a position to contribute a little bit here or there. The leaders of the "majority" are, however, people who fight against anyone else who continues communist work. They also blame the masses for their own refusal to continue to agitate among them—as was shown by the few statements they put out after the MLP dissolved.

The BCSG's only work since the party dissolved has been to gradually develop theories to justify their abandonment of socialism. Well, actually, they don't develop new theories—they just take whatever is fashionable, from complexity theory to neo-conservative glorification of the marketplace. The BCSG is a "study" group which apologizes for not doing study, a "communist" group which doesn't believe in communism, and a "group" which has now announced that it has dissolved into passivity. □

The Boston study group reports on its activity

The following report of the Boston Communist Study Group, under the title *A report on the activity of the Boston Communist Study Group to former MLP activists and WA subscribers (7-17-95)*, was circulated to some people who had been around the Marxist-Leninist Party and kept secret from others. It expresses the mood that led to the dissolution of the MLP at its Fifth Congress in November 1993. Although it claims to speak for all former MLP activists, it ignores the fact that theoretical work has continued among a section of us, and various journals and leaflets are being published. This report was passed on by some comrades to *Communist Voice*. We have corrected some typos in the document below.

The Boston Communist Study Group is composed of former activists of the Marxist-Leninist Party in the Boston area. When the party disbanded in the fall of 1993, we came together with the hope of continuing some theoretical work on the issues facing socialist theory in the contemporary world. We had also hoped with the help of like-thinking comrades elsewhere, to publish a journal that could spread this discussion wider among those concerned with the future of communist activism.

Unfortunately we have not accomplished most of what we had hoped for. A small part of the theoretical investigation begun in the waning days of the MLP has continued here in Boston. The BCSG has settled into a stable theoretical political discussion group. But most of what was hoped for has not happened. The possibility of collaboration from others around the country did not materialize and we are unable to produce our hoped-for journal.

Why couldn't we realize our original ambitions?

As we see it there are two main reasons and a third factor that needs mentioning.

1. The exhaustion and burnout of MLP forces was even greater than we had anticipated. As well the transition to post-party life consumed far more time and emotional energy of people than we had anticipated. Not only was there the emotional let-down of the end of the party, but many of the people had worked for decades at an extremely intense level, some were full-time activists and thus there was a major transition, going back to school, getting jobs, and dealing with long-neglected family, personal or health problems. On the positive side, after decades of focused activism, the desire for people to read widely in politics, economics, science and arts was far greater than we had imagined. Thus whether in Boston or elsewhere, most of those who had thought they could take part in carrying forward some part of the theoretical work, could not muster the energy to do so or lost that energy part way through the work or could not maintain the focus on a narrow research topic.

2. We did not feel the pressure of a significant audience to push the work forward at a rapid pace. As is well-known, by the time of its dissolution the MLP had lost most of its ties with

the masses. The rest of the left was in shambles. Neither our small group nor any other group coming out of MLP commanded any national attention. While theoretical research is essential to making any contribution to a future movement, it does not exactly excite the kind of attention that presses you to work at a rapid pace. Moreover as we noted earlier the MLP was an activist party, its theoretical work was closely tied to activism of one form or another. When an activist party could no longer be maintained most comrades despite their theoretical interest were not prepared to reorient themselves as theoretical researchers.

Despite these difficulties it might have been possible to get more research done on a national level if we had paid more attention to organizing and pushing for it to get done. But to do so would have required momentum that exists when you are organizing yourself as a political trend. And we had and have no intention of doing so at this point. We have been more concerned with summing up, reexamining the world and our theory and [are] not ready to declare an active trend.

3. Beyond these issues a third factor needs mention. When the MLP died, it imploded into a factional war. A minority of the MLP blamed the majority for the dissolution, suggesting that their alleged ideological heresies were responsible for the demise of the MLP. The comrades in Boston were part of that majority as were others across the country who had hoped to work with us. Much of our energies in the crucial initial period following the dissolution of the party were taken up with this noisy debate and wild charges against us. The extent to which attention of former party activists was diverted into this debate meant that it detracted from energy that could have gone into our original plans. This is not the major factor, but it still must be considered as part of the explanation.

The Boston study group continues a stable existence, but not as a high-level research group, rather as a political, theoretical discussion group. We do not have the capacity to carry out deep research on the theoretical projects we had hoped to. And consequently we do not have the capacity to publish a journal. What theoretical investigation we do produce from time to time such as the accompanying articles¹ will be distributed by whatever means available, such as correspondence by mail and posted on the Internet.

The following are some of the issues we follow and discuss among ourselves and consider worthy of serious pursuit:

1. The objective factors surrounding the disintegration of the working class movement in the post-World War II era and

¹These two articles are not in this issue of *CV*. They are Joe's "Theories and evolution of the salaried middle strata—part 1", which we will comment on in a future issue of *CV*, and "Some features of health care workers as an organized part of the working class" by George. Both documents are based on previous work of the Boston Branch of the MLP.— *CV*.

the factors for its reemergence.

a. Factors within the working class itself, such as stratification, geographical dispersion, de-concentration from large factories, conversion from industrial to service, clerical, information economy, trajectory of living standards, impact of reforms and social safety net and their removal, the social contract and its changes, the impact of consumerization, racial and ethnic changes in the composition of the working class.

b. Changes around the working class such as the growth of the new middle strata and its influence.

c. The short-term and long-term effects of the much extended and much more intense globalization of the world economy.

d. Larger issues such as historical analysis of how classes gel, and give rise to political and economic movements. Under what conditions they do and what conditions they do not. (Geary's book on the European Labor Movement from 1848 to 1939, provides some interesting facts and ideas on this question.)

For some initial thoughts on these questions see the section "Concluding Thoughts" of the article on New Middle Strata.

2. Social movements in the last few decades in the advanced countries. What do they reflect in terms of classes, interest groups and coalitions of the above. What does the growth of the environmental movement mean, how significant will it be in the future, its class nature and potential. Why such fragmented identity politics in the last two decades? Class significance?

3. More on how race, class, and gender intertwine at the end of the twentieth century.

4. What does the communist experience of the 20th century show in larger terms?

What is the significance of the Bolshevik revolution, its revisionist degeneration and collapse? Is this simply a matter of Stalinist revisionists hardening some early errors and emergency measures into a repressive political system and a state capitalist economy under difficult conditions? Are there errors of Lenin's in the civil war and post-civil war period or views which may have applied in specific circumstances but which actually form the ideological basis of modern revisionism? Why was the resistance to revisionism so weak in the Soviet Union and around the world as compared say to the left trend vs. the opportunism of the Second International? Did the failure of Bolshevik revolution show that the world has not yet developed far enough for successful building of socialism? Is there something more fundamentally wrong with Lenin's views on the party, economy and state under socialism, under capitalism?

What does Bolshevik experience show about the difficulties of overcoming the market? Can the market be overcome without going through a

period of state monopoly stagnation? What does the early and later Bolshevik experience show about developing innovation and competition without the market? Capitalism provides a whip not only against the workers but it also whips the capitalists and forces them to constantly revolutionize the means of production. Is a general initiative of the masses enough to replace this whip? Bolshevik experience? Can a more loosely-planned economy with considerable autonomy of decision-making for economic units and decentralization of many aspects of decision-making be developed in the direction of overcoming the market, overcoming exchange of values, eliminating profit or group enrichment motives and developing flexible socialist economy? What kind of strength and organization and consciousness of the working people would be required for such an experiment not to degenerate into simple "market socialism" à la Gorbachev, Tito etc. or stagnate into state capitalist bureaucracy à la Stalin and company? Was Marx wildly optimistic on the question of overcoming the market? Or was it possible the role of the proletariat is to concentrate everything rigidly into the hands of the state, to level everything and bringing about a period of technical stagnation but in so doing laying the basis for a classless communist development to take off on this soil?

Is it possible that socialism and communism are impossible and that progressive social development will take place in some as yet unforeseen and probably less grand direction? [Emphasis added—CV.] These are some of the more particular and more global questions that we consider on the issue of communist experience but really have not got very far in investigating and giving intelligent answers.

5. We follow closely the current literature on the development of the economy and politics in the post-Cold War era. The instability of financial markets, the development and arming of Asia, the mobility of capital, migration of labor, the weakness of individual nation states in dealing with the financial markets. The growth of conservatism and nationalist and racist sentiments, the collapse of liberal, social democratic and left politics throughout the world and what these political changes reflect about classes, interest groups, political stability and future possibilities for revolutionary movements.

6. Finally we have done some reading and held a number of discussions on a subject that does not directly relate to politics but has potential for great impact. That is the emerging science and sometimes pseudo-science of complexity. There is a development across a number of physical and natural sciences of looking into the laws of development of adaptive, nonlinear dynamic systems and generalizing the similarities. There is much in this that seems to confirm and maybe enrich dialectics. Particularly interesting work has been done in the fields of

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Sucking up to the Sophists: Novack on the origins of materialism

by Pete Brown, CVO, Detroit

Review of *The Origins of Materialism: The evolution of a scientific view of the world*, by George Novack. Published by Pathfinder Press. First edition, 1965.

George Novack is a theoretician associated with the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party. I picked up this book at SWP's Pathfinder Bookstore in Detroit to provide some background for our local study of Marxist philosophy. I found the book interesting. It does a pretty good job of introducing the elements of a materialist world view and distinguishing that from an idealist world view. Novack stresses that materialism arose gradually. It didn't spring forth with a ready made solution to all theoretical problems. Materialist philosophy arose in conjunction with developments in society, technology and science. As progress continued in all these areas, materialist philosophy also made headway. But when the ancient (Greco-Roman) society went into decline, so did the materialist world view. Idealist philosophy, transmuted into the Christian religion, then came to dominate the Mediterranean world.

Novack's book covers the era from 600 B.C. to 200 A.D., from the time of Thales, the first philosopher, to the Latin satirist Lucian. A positive feature of the book is that it brings out that materialism first arose as a new, oppositional current of thought, swimming against the tide of magic and religion that held humanity in mental bondage. Novack explains how the new world view and the old had some apparent similarities, but in fact were quite different:

"Homer had attributed the origin of all things to the *god* Oceanus. Thales, the founder of materialism, taught that *water* is the origin of everything. There is something alike in these methods of explanation since both connect the beginning of things with this liquid. But there is a world of difference between the two.

"In his theory the philosopher dispensed with

any magical, mythical or allegorical agents. His primal substance is a visible part of the experienced world, a purely natural element. *Between the god Oceanus as the first parent, and water, the physical thing, as the basis of explanation, is the decisive shift from animism to materialism, from religion to philosophy.*

"This same contrast stands out in respect to the Babylonian and Egyptian legends of the origins of things. Thales agreed with these that everything was once water. But he maintained, in opposition to them, that the earth and everything else had been formed out of water by purely natural processes, similar to the silting up of deltas at the mouth of rivers." (pp. 86-87)

Novack surveys the Greek materialist thinkers — the first "substance" philosophers, the dialectician Heraclitus, and the atomists. Then he describes the counterattack of the idealist philosophers, culminating in the Athenian school — Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Novack does a good job of clarifying the two basic trends in philosophy, and gives quotes from ancient philosophers that show they, too, were conscious of this. This clarification helps in sorting through the bewildering variety of ancient philosophies.

Novack also ties philosophical developments to social and political history. This is fairly sketchy, and instead of settling all questions only whets the appetite for more information. But what information he gives seems accurate. For example, he clarifies the three major political parties in 5th-century B.C. Athens, and that Socrates and Plato were affiliated with the conservative party.

Novack brings in some material from disciplines outside philosophy to show the rise of a materialist world view among the Greeks. Especially interesting is a 20-page chapter devoted to medicine and history, with quotes from the Hippocratic writings and from Thucydides. This makes the issue of materialism vs. idealism much more concrete, since it shows the importance of scientific knowledge. When it comes to having a

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developmental biology, ecology, chemistry, bottom up artificial intelligence, cellular automata etc. At the same time there is as with any new field a great deal of faddishness, exaggerated claims, and not a little nonsense, especially as applied to social science. Nevertheless we feel that it will be important to get a handle on this development, that it will have considerable impact on the arguments of many political trends in the coming decades. Some recommended reading would be

Waldrop's *Complexity, the Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos*, Lewin's *Complexity, Life on the Edge of Chaos*, Cohen and Stewart's *The Collapse of Chaos*, Gellman's *The Quark and the Jaguar*. This letter gives a more mathematical approach to the question, but at the same time is an example of how the ideas of complexity can be turned into a formula for reforming and preserving capitalism. John Casti, also has a new book out, *Complexification*, which gives a deeper mathematical explanation of some of the concepts involved. He also gives some examples of the idealist application of catastrophe theory to social science. □

correct diagnosis of some deadly disease, and having it in time to effect a cure — this shows the importance of having a materialist analysis of anatomy, physiology, disease history, and so forth. And the same goes for pressing political issues. Thucydides wrote his history at a time of great crisis in Athenian politics, when its citizens were striving to understand the earth-shaking events going on around them. This compelled Thucydides to set aside myths and chauvinist “cheerleading”-type stories, and to try to clarify historical events in a realistic way.

A balanced judgment of idealism?

Another notable feature of Novack’s book is his attempt to give a balanced judgment on the big guns of idealism — Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Novack is dissatisfied with what he considers a narrow, sectarian approach to these philosophers by some people who consider themselves Marxists. He mentions Bukharin’s book on historical materialism, and a book by B. Farrington on *Greek Science*, as guilty in this regard. He emphasizes that the idealist philosophers and their schools made significant contributions to science and culture, and they should not be classed as simply reactionaries or religious fanatics.

The trouble is, in trying to do justice to the idealists, Novack gets disoriented. For example, he emphasizes that there’s a lot of difference between a mystic or animist, a “primitive” religious person, and a sophisticated intellectual like Plato. Plato developed religious views into theology, which Novack considers a logically integrated system with theses, arguments, etc. rather than simply emotional or mystical guesses. Of course Novack considers theology only a pseudo-science. Nonetheless, he says, there’s a lot of difference between someone who argues rationally about religion, logically examining different points of view (as, he says, Socrates does in Plato’s *Dialogues*), and a simple-minded mystic or animist. Mystic irrationalism is missing from these great theoreticians, according to Novack.

But in fact mysticism is a recurrent theme in Plato’s *Dialogues*. It dominates “Symposium,” a discussion of Beauty. It comes up in “Republic,” where the philosopher-kings have a mystical vision of Goodness. It’s present in Socrates’ discussions of immortality, the soul, and God. Novack attributes the mysticism of the Platonic school to the neo-Platonists of a later, degenerate era, but in fact there’s a heavy strain of mysticism in Plato from the beginning. Plato is also an animist; even in his last dialogue, “Laws”, he insists that all motion in the universe is generated by souls.

It’s also misleading to characterize Socrates, the chief character in the *Dialogues*, as a neutral examiner of different doctrines. This is the persona adopted by this character in Plato’s writings, but clearly it’s just a big put-on. Socrates knows exactly where he wants every argument to go, in every dialogue; and he manipulates the so-called “scientific discussions” to go in that direction.

Is idealism logical?

In general, Novack overstates the logicity, or rationality, of the idealists. He warns us not to restrict rationality to people sympathetic with the lower classes. Perfectly reasonable people,

he says, can still be on opposite sides of the class struggle and develop logically coherent systems to justify their stand. This doesn’t mean they would agree. They will be on opposite sides, though each side has a logically coherent body of arguments backing it up. But in arguing this way in defense of the idealists, Novack credits them with being perfectly logical and coherent, even though of course he will say they expressed the ruling class line in their politics. This makes it sound like one’s general world view could be set apart in a logically tight compartment separate from one’s politics.

Marxism teaches that ideologies are a superstructural reflection of the economic base in society. Of course any thinker who limits himself to a narrow range of observations may produce a coherent body of ideas, giving a correct and materialist analysis, even though he also has some idealist prejudices in his views of other things. But when someone tries to generate a general ideology covering society, ethics, the human relation to nature, etc., such a general world view inevitably reflects the social base. This means, for ruling class ideologists, that it inevitably reflects an attempt to justify exploitation and the division into classes.

Novack covers this up. For him Plato is a perfectly logical metaphysician who was also a political conservative. His politics were backward, but he made “important contributions” to logic in developing his metaphysics. Novack obscures the fact that giving a conservative defense of ruling-class politics actually limits the extent of one’s rationality; and when one is trying to generate very broad, world-embracing justifications, these limitations inevitably generate contradictions, logical problems at the heart of one’s world-view.

Contradictions in Plato

Plato himself recognized these contradictions. For example, in his dialogue “Parmenides” the character Zeno generates a number of arguments against Plato’s metaphysics, among them the famous “third man” argument. These are killer arguments for the character Socrates in that dialogue. He admits he cannot answer them. Yet, bullheadedly, he insists on continuing to believe in his otherworldly realm of ideal Forms (Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Justice, etc.). And why? Because, Socrates says, he wants to. It makes him feel better to believe in this “higher world.” This is the mystic irrationalism that lies at the base of Socrates’ philosophy, which Novack considers a paragon of logic.

So Plato recognized the contradictions in his own metaphysics. Yet he persisted in believing and promoting it. This doesn’t seem like the actions of a perfectly “logical” truth-seeker. What it reveals, instead, is that Plato had deep ideological motives for hanging onto his metaphysics. These motives are obvious to a Marxist: Plato’s realm of Forms, relative to the material world, is an ideological reflection of the ruling class and its relation to the lower classes, those engaged in material production. Plato insisted on believing in the reality, eternity and legitimacy of such a realm, even if it involved him in logical absurdities.

In fact Plato’s writings abound in contradictions. Novack himself quotes Plato’s argument for immortality, that the soul is simple and cannot change. Far from being a “neutral

investigator,” the character Socrates insists on defining the soul as “simple” and “unchanging.” Novack praises Socrates for developing the science of definitions, but in fact there’s nothing scientific about this procedure — Socrates is simply bulling over objections to his views by defining terms the way he wants. When he wants immortality, the soul is “unchanging.” But of course he also wants to emphasize the importance of the soul, and attributes to it all the intellectual faculties — learning, thinking, making decisions, etc. And to emphasize that the soul “rules” the material body, he insists that the soul also animates the body, provides it with life. So when he wants to show that the soul is of universal importance and rulership, he stresses all the things it *does*. (But aren’t these *changes*?) But then when he wants to emphasize its eternity, he says it “never changes.” This doesn’t add up at all.

It only makes sense if we recall that the soul, like the Forms it contemplates, is another reflection of the ruling class. Plato wants to argue **both** that this class is of universal import, animating all other classes and giving them all proper guidance, **and** that this class is “simple” — i.e., small, select, an elite that is necessarily “unchanging” (no room for social mobility here). Again, it’s a contradiction in his metaphysics. And it’s not just a logical slip on Plato’s part, something he could cover over with another of his tricky definitions. It’s an inescapable feature of his metaphysics, because his metaphysics reflects his class outlook.

The same sort of contradiction extends to Plato’s theory of knowledge, which is a theory of the soul accessing the realm of Forms. In “Meno” Plato wants to emphasize the omnipresence of Forms, that they’re present as innate ideas in everyone’s mind. So he argues that even slaves have ready access to the world of Forms, can carry through mathematical reasoning, etc. But in “Republic”, when he wants to argue for rule by an intellectual elite, he conveniently forgets this argument; instead, his view is that some people are by nature suited for accessing Forms better than others. But didn’t Plato say the soul was simple? Then how could it be different in different individuals? Again, none of this adds up. What it shows is Plato trying to argue for both (a) the omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence of the ruling class — it must guide and direct everything; it must be the prime beneficiary of all material production, and to justify this must be considered the animator of all material motion; but also arguing for (b) the ruling class is totally divorced from material production, doesn’t soil its hands, is numerically very small, restricted to an elitist core, etc. This is a reflection and conservative justification of Athenian society, not an independent, logical development of theory.

Sucking up to the Sophists

A surprising feature of Novack’s book is his enthusiasm for the Sophists, who were itinerant paid philosophers in Socrates’ day. Sophists were hired by rising young politicians to teach them how to argue any side to any question. And they developed a world view that corresponded with this occupation. They taught that all truth is relative; that human interests override attempts at science; and that “might makes right” in politics. This was a cynical, manipulative philosophy. It roughly corresponded to the pragmatism of 20th-century American philosophers like William James and John Dewey.

But Novack only sees a positive side to this school. He says they were humanistic, man-oriented, and unbelievers in the old religion. They were not impressed by old traditions, rituals, and beliefs; and they helped undermine conservative values. This is what earned them the bitter enmity of Plato. Novack even guesses that some of them must have played progressive roles in Athenian politics.

Trying to orient the Sophists in their social and political milieu helps us understand their role and come to a balanced view of them. But I still think it’s stretching things for Novack to classify the Sophists as part of the materialist trend in philosophy, or to guess that they were politically progressive. It’s common for philosophical skeptics and relativists to take a conservative stand in politics, their argument being, “Since no one knows what’s right, one shouldn’t stand for anything or try to bring about anything new; just go with the status quo.” Some extreme relativists of recent times, such as William James, were quite backward politically; and James even promoted religion on a cynical pragmatic basis: “If it makes you feel better, go ahead and believe.”

Even if the Sophists were politically liberal pragmatists like John Dewey, that wouldn’t justify Novack’s gushing enthusiasm for them. Perhaps the key to this can be found in a footnote on p. 202, where he expresses enthusiasm for John Dewey’s “accent upon morality and social problems”, and describes Dewey’s philosophy simply as “the philosophical instrument of the Progressive movement in the United States.” For a Marxist, the fact that Dewey took an interest in social problems and played an active role in politics makes it important to clarify the difference between liberal pragmatist “humanism” and Marxism. But instead of trying to clarify this difference, Novack only expresses enthusiasm for Dewey’s stand and thus covers over the difference. This betrays a tendency to suck up to the liberal professorial stratum in U.S. society, a stratum that roughly corresponds to the Sophists of 5th-century B.C. Athens. □

The working class in struggle

Workers' strike wave in France jolts conservative government

by Mark, CVO, Detroit

The following article first appeared in *Detroit Workers' Voice* #8, Jan. 1, 1996.

At the end of November, French workers began a massive wave of strikes and protests in response to the austerity measures announced by the government. The conservative government, led by President Chirac and Prime Minister Juppe, is leading a major assault on the conditions of the 5.5 million government-sector workers and gutting social programs in general. The strikes and protests shut down transport, many public services and other enterprises, crippling the capitalist economy. This forced the government to retract several parts of their program. Workers still have a long road ahead in this battle, however. As of mid-December, it appears strikes and demonstrations are receding while the government has not renounced their overall austerity program. But the French workers have shown they are a force to be reckoned with.

The mass workers' strikes and other protests are an inspiring sight for workers everywhere. Only this past May, the arch-conservative Chirac, backed by an overwhelming rightist parliamentary majority, swept into power, replacing the more moderate capitalist government of the "socialist" Mitterrand. But in only a short time, a storm of protest has broken out against the new French rulers. French nuclear weapons tests in the South Pacific led to angry demonstrations. And now the austerity program has led to the biggest mass movement in France since the worker and student revolts which shook the French bourgeoisie in 1968. Of course, the neo-conservative assault on the workers and poor is not just a problem in France but has become all the rage of the capitalist rulers in the U.S. and much of the world. But by giving a glimpse of their potential might, the French workers show what latent power workers here and elsewhere possess.

The "Juppe plan"

The strike wave took off soon after the austerity program of Prime Minister Juppe began making its way through the parliament in mid-November. This program included major attacks on the retirement system for government employees, who make up nearly a quarter of the French labor force. It would raise the general retirement age for government workers by 5 years, and raise the length of service for full pension benefits from 37.5 to

40 years. As well, Juppe wants a wage freeze for government workers. And the government was planning major cutbacks in the state rail service as well as preparing to privatize the railway system and other state entities such as Air France, telecommunications, the electric utility, etc.

A key part of Juppe's plan was balancing the health care budget through such means as slashing medical care and raising the cost of insurance premiums. The social security system for all workers was also under siege. And a series of tax increases on the masses rounded out this plan. In short, the conservatives unleashed a broad assault that hit virtually all sections of the workers and poor.

In order to ram through these measures, Juppe has gotten the conservative majority in parliament to give him power to reorganize the health and pension system by decree, suspending parliamentary votes on these matters.

The workers respond

On November 24 the workers answered. Railway workers went on strike. That same day, a million workers joined in a one-day strike that brought public transport to a halt throughout France. Over the next couple of weeks, various other public sector workers joined the strike wave. Postal workers began shutting down nearly all the mail sorting centers. A large section of electrical utility workers walked out as well as telecommunications employees and hospital workers. Other transport workers joined in. In Bordeaux, where Juppe is also mayor, the city was brought to a halt by striking bus drivers, truckers and garbage collectors. Some private sector workers bolstered the strike movement. For example, truckers blocked highways and the dockworkers of Marseilles shut the port. Coal miners in the Lorraine region went on strike, waging pitched battles with police.

The strike wave was punctuated with a series of massive national demonstrations in Paris and other major cities. The "smallest" of these protests involved over 700,000 demonstrators nationwide and some may have been well over a million. Students played an active role in these demonstrations. In fact, on November 30, students organized their own demonstrations throughout the country demanding more funds for education and the hiring of more teachers and other school employees. The strikes and protests even inspired a demonstration by about 2,000 doctors against the health system cutbacks.

The strike waves and solidarity actions ground production to a crawl in a number of industries. A government institute

estimated the first 15 days of the strike may have caused as much as \$1.6 billion in lost production. The movement of people and goods was severely hampered. But despite the inconveniences the strike presented for the general population, even bourgeois pollsters reckoned that the strikers had the sympathies of 62% of the population.

Workers win some victories, but the big battles lie ahead

After about two weeks of trying to stonewall the strikers, Juppe was forced to strike a more conciliatory stance. In the first days of December, the education minister granted some of the student movement's demands. Then, on December 10, Juppe announced that he was retracting his plan to raise the requirements for public sector workers to receive pensions. As well, the plan to close down and privatize parts of the state railways was put on hold. This was a significant victory. Meanwhile, Juppe agreed to union leaders demands for a "summit meeting" on December 21 to discuss the austerity plan. The meeting took place but produced nothing but a few vague words about some possible token measures to relieve unemployment. But by agreeing to some concessions and talks, Juppe has been able, for now at least, to take the steam out of the strike movement, which by late December had been reduced to a few local areas. The government has also proposed a further series of "summits" with the hopes of using them to talk the workers' movement to death.

For the French workers and other oppressed to rid themselves of the bulk of the Juppe plan, new powerful waves of struggle will be necessary. Whether such actions break out soon or a lull sets in, workers are faced with the task of using the recent actions to break through the policy of the present trade union bureaucracies and develop their own fighting organizational forms. Although the big strike wave may give the appearance that the present French trade union leadership is just fine, a closer look shows that this is not the case.

One of the largest trade union federations is the CFDT. These union leaders have long been a base of support for the pro-austerity "Socialist" Party of Mitterrand. Mitterrand and company carried out their own austerity measures when they ruled and are excited about European unity plans which require budget-slashing. Thus, it was no surprise that CFDT leader Nicole Notat openly supported various features of the austerity plan, such as the health system reform. And the CFDT leadership worked to end the strike movement as soon as possible. The CFDT leaders' orientation was that holding talks with the government was the primary goal of the workers struggle, not winning any basic demands, and called for an end to strikes before the government had even granted any concessions.

The unions that called the bulk of strike and protest actions were the CGT and the FO. The CGT leadership is tied to the phony communists of the French Communist Party, long-time supporters of Soviet revisionism. They long ago gave up a revolutionary orientation against French capitalism and have for decades been subverting the radical motion of the workers. For many years they have also spread illusions in Mitterrand's "socialists" as the alleged alternative to the right-wing.

The CGT leaders talk about continuing strikes and actions

until the whole Juppe plan is discarded. They left the December 21 meeting with Juppe promising new worker mobilizations. However, little has come of these threats to date. But if the CGT leaders' are really in a position to quickly resume the mass strike wave, then it was treachery to wind down the struggle with the bulk of the austerity measures still poised to go forward. In fact, once the key sectors of the protest, like the striking railway workers are back on the job, it is not likely that they can simply be called back out at will. But whether or not the CGT was responsible for toning down the strike wave, then it certainly doesn't seem very concerned about the ramifications of the return to work of the key sectors of the strike wave.

For its part in this strike wave, the most visible public spokesman for the FO, Marc Blondel, is basically echoing the policy of the CGT. Traditionally, FO has been to the right of both the CGT and CFDT and more openly collaborationist in dealing with the employers. This is not surprising since it has its beginnings in a CIA-financed split from the CGT in the late 1940s. In recent years, some Trotskyites have moved into the FO officialdom, giving the FO hierarchy a somewhat more militant image than in the past.

The CFDT, CGT and FO are hardly forces that the workers can rely on to defend their interests. As long as such forces are dominant in the workers movement, the workers will face the danger of having their struggles subverted outright, or stopped half-way. If the workers struggles is to break out in full force, the constraints of the present union hierarchies must be overcome.

The "free market" cure

Behind the severe measures of Chirac and Juppe lies the crisis of French capitalism. Unemployment in France is heading toward 12%. Indeed, the unemployment rate in the European Union (EU) countries as a whole is around 11%. The growing poverty has increased the strains on the social welfare systems and contributed to budget deficits. Of course, if it was merely a matter of balancing budgets, the taxes on the wealthy elite could be raised. But the capitalist governments aren't interested in taxing the rich. The bourgeoisies in each European country claim the way out the crisis is to make Europe more competitive in the world market. Why if only the European capitalists conquer more of the market, then there will be jobs and happiness for the workers, they assert. Under the banner of competitiveness, there has been an assault on the social-welfare system that had temporarily provided a relatively high amount of security for sections of workers in Britain, Germany, France, Sweden, etc. So the first step of the plan that was to supposedly provide jobs and happiness for the workers, is not to provide jobs, but dismantle the safety net for the jobless. It's trick-down economics, European-style. The Juppe plan is simply a means of making the bourgeoisie wealthier by driving down the living standards of the masses.

Austerity measures against the masses are also part of the plans of the European Union's Maastricht treaty, an effort to further the integration of the capitalist economies of the EU to make them a more formidable force in capturing the world market. The roots of the French budget crisis are not to be found in Maastricht. With or without Maastricht, the French

bourgeoisie faced a severe economic crisis and would have felt compelled to bleed the masses to extricate itself from the crisis. But the plans for economic integration have played a role in bringing the recent budget crisis in France to a head. At present, for instance, the plans to abolish national currencies in favor of an all-EU "euro" currency have added another reason for the French rulers to lash out at the workers and poor. The plan for merging the present national currencies calls for maintaining stable exchange-rates between the participants. In order to achieve this stability, strict requirements have been imposed, including limits on public deficits and the ratio of government debt to total economic output. Many EU countries aren't yet close to reaching these requirements, France being the most significant. As the date for deciding who will qualify for entry into the new "euro" currency system approaches, the French government has another incentive to solve its budget woes by slashing its social welfare system.

The unified currency plan will not change the basic problems the masses already face from capitalism. Rather it will provide the capitalists with new mechanisms and excuses for continuing to shove austerity programs down the throats of the workers and poor. For example, in order for the single currency to be maintained, the budget requirements for a unified currency must be maintained. And even EU countries that do not initially qualify for joint currency will be financially penalized for exceeding budgetary restrictions. While the Maastricht plan is intended to reduce budget deficits on the backs of the masses, some plans being considered to enforce budgetary discipline will accelerate the budget crisis for countries that don't meet the EU budget criterion. For instance, according to *The Economist* of December 9, German Finance Minister Waigel is calling for penalties equal to 0.25% of a country's GDP for each percentage point their budget deficits exceed 3% of GDP. Had such penalties been applied in 1991, *The Economist* estimates they would have cost France a whopping 2.25% of its GDP. Even if the actual penalties are not quite as stiff, clearly they will only create further pressure

for cutting the social budget.

As the unified budget policies show, Maastricht's provisions move Europe in the direction of political union. How far this process will go, and how long unity would last, is far from certain, however. Nevertheless, if political union develops, it also provides further opportunities for European workers to unite across national lines for a fight against the onslaught of capital. This is important not only for the immediate fight. As the European bourgeoisie, united or otherwise, blows up whatever bit of security that had existed for the workers, it's more apparent that the capitalist system itself must go. If workers seize new opportunities to unite, they will be better situated for the future socialist revolution.

Workers around the world stand up to capitalist austerity

As capitalism approaches the 21st century, the results of its "free market" frenzy have further exposed its bankruptcy. But this common assault of capital is creating a common response. While France was shut down, a strike wave also swept Belgium. Major strikes recently broke out in Italy. Spanish workers took to the streets in militant protests against job losses earlier this year. Canadian workers in Ontario province recently held massive protests against axing social programs. These struggles not only show what workers can do when they rise up en masse. They also show the universal problem that workers in all these countries suffer from being dominated by class-collaborationist trade union leaderships and face the task of establishing independent class organization. U.S. workers should be inspired by these actions of our class brothers and sisters to build up the fight against our own employers and our own Juppe Plans, the Contract for America and Clinton's "Contract Lite." Likewise, for this struggle to advance, workers will have to overcome our domestic class traitors, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. □

Striking Boeing workers stand up to concessions

based on a report by Phil, CVO, Seattle

The Boeing machinists strike, which lasted 69 days, is over. The final offer was accepted by the IAM (International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers) membership by a vote of 87%. While the conclusion of this strike is not a complete victory for the demands of the strikers, they carried through the struggle with determination and courage, against the treachery of the union leadership and the pressure from the company. They won quite a bit more than they would have if they had accepted an earlier settlement, and they maintained their fighting spirit and unity to the end. The conclusion of this strike makes it possible to analyze the settlement terms and draw some conclusions about the state of the working class movement today and its strengths and weaknesses.

Boeing demands concessions

The machinists are the production-line workers at Boeing in the Seattle area and in some other locations around the country (Wichita and Portland are other important locations). They struck after their last contract expired on October 3, because the new contract offered to them contained a number of features designed to shift the costs of the medical insurance onto their backs by requiring a monthly payment for the standard Boeing Medical Plan, and also larger deductibles. As an alternative, they could join an optional managed-care medical plan, but even most of these plans had monthly fees associated with them. The new contract also continued many wage-cutting features in previous contracts such as an inadequate COLA formula and a two-tier wage scale. There were no wage increases until the third year of the contract, and the lump-sum payments were only 5% and 3% the first two years. The union leadership had also demanded some job-security improvements, but the company had not paid much attention to these demands. These features were supposed to control the increasing amount of work which Boeing was sending to subcontractors and overseas plants at lower wages. Earlier in the negotiations, the IAM had also demanded that the retired workers be transferred to the IAM's own retirement plan from the Boeing plan, but this demand had been dropped and Boeing had agreed to a small increase in the pension benefits. Another issue was gigantic stock option payments for the top five executives at Boeing which were triggered during the early days of the strike because Boeing's stock had reached new heights on the stock market. The size of these payments angered many workers in the face of the cuts they were being faced with in the new contract.

Boeing feels the heat

The strike came at a very good time because production on the new 777 jetliner was just beginning to ramp up, and the company had a large backlog of orders waiting to be filled. At

first, the company attempted to make do with supervisors and scabs to finish the planes that were near completion, but the amount of airplanes which could be finished in this way was not large. Then, a number of airline companies refused to accept delivery of airplanes completed with supervisory labor because they could not trust that the work was performed to the proper standards. The company suffered a further embarrassment when two supervisors attempted to transfer toxic wastes to another container at the Auburn, WA plant, and did not realize that the container being used to receive these wastes would react with them. The resulting release of toxic fumes sent one worker to the hospital and forced the evacuation of a large part of Auburn. Clearly, the company would rather risk people's health and safety rather than make a serious attempt to settle the strike.

However, after 45 days on strike, just before Thanksgiving, the company presented a new offer to the IAM workers which was not much of an improvement over the first offer. This second offer required no payments for any of the managed-care plans, lowered the monthly payments for the Boeing plan, and made some improvements in the job-security consultation language. Boeing also promised to make some advances in COLA payments and raise the retirement benefit by another small amount. The local union leadership recommended that this contract be accepted, but the workers defied them and voted by a 61% majority to remain on strike. The company and the union leaders had clearly miscalculated the degree of dissatisfaction among the workers.

Militant sentiment ran high during the strike, and several important mass actions were held outside the Everett plant, including one involving a motorcycle procession. Newly-elected AFL/CIO President John Sweeney and other national union leaders held a rally in Everett to proclaim a new spirit of resistance in the American worker. Many important union leaders began to make references to the example set by the Boeing Machinists in continuing to strike in spite of being denied Thanksgiving holiday pay and in the face of cold, rainy weather. IAM President George Kourpias came to Seattle to participate in the discussions personally with Boeing CEO Frank Schrontz. Clearly, the courage of the strikers was forcing even the sold-out labor hacks to pay lip service to the value of mass struggle.

Engineers and technicians show solidarity, face own contract

Meanwhile, the other major union at Boeing, the Seattle Professional Engineering Employees Association (SPEEA) was continuing to negotiate with the company on its own contract, which expired December 1. SPEEA is an open-shop union of engineers and technical workers which currently has a membership below 50% of its bargaining units. Their negotiations explored several alternatives to the medical-care package which Boeing had initially offered, because the company was

determined to reduce the costs of medical care it had to provide. SPEEA members refused to perform IAM work and held some actions in support of the IAM strikers. Many engineering and technical workers spoke of the common interests which the IAM workers were defending on the picket line, because they knew that the same benefits package was in store for them if the strike failed.

At the same time, there was a significant section of this strata that was hesitant to take strike action themselves. Ideas of solidarity have generally been weaker among these employees than the production-line workers. Nevertheless, three years ago these employees held their first strike ever, a one-day strike over COLA. So despite the "professional" outlook of many of the engineers and technical personnel, they can at certain times be drawn into struggle. The SPEEA union leaders, however, do not help the situation. For example, they confined themselves to token solidarity activities with the machinists rather than seriously trying to encourage active solidarity.

The strike brings some results

Finally, on December 12, after almost 70 days on strike, the company made another offer, which includes a three-year program of incentive payments to those who change to the managed-care plans, totaling \$1200 to those who change in the first year. The offer also includes lump-sum payments of 10% and 4.5% and a 30-month delay in the monthly payments for those who stay on the standard Boeing plan. However, this is now a four-year contract expiring in September, 1999. The longer contract provides the company with more stability, and if inflation begins to rise, the IAM workers will have to wait longer to negotiate a different deal. The new contract also includes more language on consultation about subcontracting and overseas production, which have caused some analysts to say that it sets a new example for methods of dealing with these questions. However, much of this contract language may become merely empty words if the past is any guide. This offer was accepted by a large majority of union members. One of them said to me, "Yeah, we'll take it. [IAM local president] Johnson recommended it, like he did the last one: come election time, he's outa there." This indicates the spirit of disgust which the union hacks have inspired in the rank-and-file; while they are now choosing to go back to work, it is on much better terms than they had in October.

The treachery of the union leaders is a constant backdrop to the courage of the strikers. The 10% first-year lump-sum payment is divided into two 5% parts; one is labeled a "strike settlement incentive" payment. Yet those IAM workers who crossed the picket lines during the strike (about 10% of the membership) will also be getting this money because, according to the union staff, "we have no way of enforcing that contract language." Clearly there is no thought of justice here, just an expedient way of drawing a "happy-face" in an attempt to assuage the bitterness which the strike brought about.

Yet the bitter feelings from the strike will not go away so easily, and the terms of the IAM settlement have raised hopes among SPEEA members of also getting a 5% lump-sum payment shortly. But the SPEEA negotiations drag on, and a real settlement is not yet in sight. Current indications are that there

will not be a new SPEEA contract until mid-January, and telephone "hotline" information indicates that the two sides are discussing "alternate compensation plans", which probably means stock options instead of lump-sum payments and compensatory time instead of paid overtime, and other items which seem attractive to some professional types. However, if these features were made a part of the standard contract, they would be viewed as betrayals by many SPEEA members who have been falling behind the rate of inflation due to the selective salary increase system, which favors brown-nosers and leaves many older workers with few raises.

Boeing and Caterpillar strikes: different outcomes, similar problems

It is instructive to compare the results of this strike with the recent announcement that after their four-year fight, the Caterpillar workers are going back to work without a contract and with huge concessions being imposed on them by the company. Although the results were different, in general terms it was similar to the Caterpillar strike. In both cases workers were very determined to resist company demands. But in both cases the struggle was hurt by the treachery of the trade union leaders. In the case of Caterpillar, however, the workers paid a much heavier price for the sins of their union leaders because the company took a much harder stance. For sure, Boeing went after and got some concessions, too, but it so happened Boeing itself was under extraordinary pressure to reach a settlement because its production was backlogged and corporate customers were ready to bolt due to delays and quality problems with scab production.

The strikes waged by Caterpillar workers could also have hit the company very hard. There was the strike of 1991-92, followed by a return to work with work slowdowns, and a new strike in 1994. But from the start the struggle was sabotaged by the UAW leaders. For example, UAW leaders colluded with the Cat bosses to allow the company to build up a big inventory before the strike of 1991-92 began. And when the company threatened to hire permanent replacement workers, the UAW officials ended the first strike. With the company playing hard ball and the union bureaucrats playing party-cake, the workers tried their best to dig in. But in the end the weak methods of struggle the union had confined the workers to failed miserably and the workers suffered a heavy defeat.

Vital role of a revolutionary party

During previous contract struggles, the Seattle Branch of the Marxist-Leninist Party was active while both IAM and SPEEA negotiations were going on. The MLP wrote many leaflets which were widely distributed to the workers. Most of the work was with IAM members, but when SPEEA engineering members rejected their contract six years ago, the MLP encouraged the rank-and-file protests which occurred in front of Boeing headquarters, demanding lump-sum payments, COLA, and general wage increases. This action had occurred after the IAM's last strike, which lasted for 48 days. In 1992, SPEEA members in both units rejected their contracts after their demands for a real COLA were ignored. Once again the MLP

provided encouragement and analysis supporting the justice of the workers' demands. For the first time in quite a while, negotiations at Boeing are going on without a Marxist-Leninist analysis available to the workers. While the strike shows that they will continue to struggle for their interests, the task of educating the workers to the injustices of the present system of wage slavery, raising their class consciousness and providing a long-range view to place the strike in a revolutionary context has not been taken up at this time. This has been a huge setback

for the struggle here in Seattle and the liquidators can take the credit for bringing this about. (1) □

(1) The "liquidators" were those leaders and members of the former MLP who gave up the fight for revolutionary working class politics. Other former MLP members and supporters founded this journal, *Communist Voice*, to carry on the MLP's revolutionary traditions.

Tough road ahead for striking Detroit newspaper workers

by Mark, CVO, Detroit

As winter sets in, the striking Detroit newspaper workers are facing a tough situation. Since the strike began in July, the newspaper employees have shown great determination not to cave in to the arrogant concessions demands of the newspaper capitalists. They continue to battle the corporate media giants who own the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press* with mass actions to disrupt newspapers distribution centers, with picketing businesses who advertise in the papers, and with organizing a boycott of the paper. As a result, the Detroit Newspaper Agency (DNA), which operates the two papers, has taken a significant financial hit.

But the treachery of the AFL-CIO leadership has taken its toll. The rank and file has been kept busy, but they have been channeled away from the thousands-strong plant blockade actions. These actions not only had the most potential for shutting down scab production. They proved to be the best vehicle in this strike for mobilizing active and militant support from other workers. By toning down the struggle, the labor bureaucrats have been playing into the hands of the Gannett and Knight-Ridder media chains that own the papers. These media corporations have made it clear they're not simply after the concessions the labor bureaucrats have given them in the previous contracts, but are out to smash the workers and go to a non-union scab workplace if need be. To this end they have committed their vast resources to prop up the scab operation for a long time, even if it means weathering some financial losses. The longer the scab production of newspapers continues, the more difficult it becomes for the workers to fight back and force management to retreat.

The union bureaucrats retreat

The strike movement had reached a crescendo in early September. Thousands of newspaper workers, joined by other workers and supporters faced down outnumbered police forces and shut down the main production plant on consecutive Saturday nights. This greatly disrupted the Sunday newspaper,

the big money-maker for the DNA. Although the union leaderships had mobilized many workers to come to these actions, their effectiveness was due to the rank-and-file disregarding the efforts of the union honchos to turn this massive gathering into an impotent symbolic protest where a few designated people would peacefully be carted away from the plant gates. Instead the workers, sensing their strength, massed at plant gates and turned back police attacks on their gate blockades.

But when a judge issued an injunction banning blocking plant entrances, the union officials caved in and actively discouraged plant protests. They offered to accept many concessions and go back to work if only the company would negotiate with them. But the DNA refused and stepped up its efforts to crush the workers by using the RICO anti-racketeering statutes to bring a lawsuit for "extortion" against the unions. Attempts to disrupt some distribution centers have continued, but even here the bureaucrats work to contain worker militancy. Sometimes businesses advertising in the scab press are picketed. And there was a mass picket at the downtown offices of the papers in late November. But none of these things has come close to replacing the mass plant blockades. Meanwhile, a huge amount of union funds and union members have been devoted to putting out a weekly paper called the *Detroit Sunday Journal*. This paper contains little information about the strike and is mainly run-of-the-mill news coverage. The fact that the paper is put out by strikers makes it popular with strike supporters who have been boycotting the scab papers. But it's not going to hurt the DNA much and is being used by the AFL-CIO leadership to divert attention from the resumption of efforts to shut down production.

Unity-Victory Caucus

The decision to abandon mass plant actions has upset a section of the workers and even a few dissident union bureaucrats have come out for resuming mass picketing. These dissident union officials have formed the Unity-Victory Caucus. During the strike, various forces have leveled just criticism of the bureaucrats' opposition to plant gate blockades and the

bureaucrats have gone into a frenzy against their critics. The union bosses have resorted to mindless red-baiting and cooperated with the police against militant workers and activists. So taking up powerful mass actions has always required a fight against the labor bureaucracy. But the UVC leaders ask for mass plant actions without mentioning why they have been blocked or the pressure put on those favoring plant pickets. Instead, they emphasize how united everyone is on other strike activities as if the union leadership's stand on the plant blockades is a minor matter, not a key part of a treacherous policy. Thus, UVC's mass appeals bend over backwards to present the main bureaucrats in a good light. Indeed it took them four months to voice any public disagreement with what the top officials are doing and, according to a UVC supporter, even this limited opposition was an agonizing decision for them. Perpetuating illusions in the sellout leaders works against building mass actions independent of them. And it has not prevented the top bureaucrats from going into a frenzy against the UVC. The main union officials tell workers to stay away from UVC-organized picketing and use scare tactics about "violence" on the picket lines.

With the hostile atmosphere created by the top union leaders, the UVC has found it difficult to draw large numbers of workers to their production plant pickets. A November 11 rally got over 100 people out to picket, and a week later the total was only about half that. The amount of striking workers drawn to these protests, however, is considerably less than these numbers indicate since a large portion of the pickets are strike solidarity activists. The rank-and-file strikers who turn out at the UVC pickets, expressed great disgust with the cowardly policy of the main union officials. For example, at the November 18 event, one striker related how she would have never believed her union leaders could betray the rank and file, but she really has had her eyes opened. Overall, however, the the main bureaucrats continue to dissipate the momentum built by the bold rank-and-file actions of September.

Will the bureaucrats call a general strike?

While the dominant union leaders are killing the momentum previously established by the rank and file, the UVC leaders apparently feel that these labor traitors can be coaxed into calling a general strike. Various opportunist left-wing groups in the main strike solidarity coalition have been the driving force behind this scheme. The idea is that if only enough workers vote in their local unions in favor of a general strike, then the

Metro Detroit AFL-CIO leaders will organize it. Actually, even if workers pass resolutions in their local unions, these resolutions do not require the bureaucrats to do anything. They leave it up to these worthies if and when a general strike should be called.

A general strike is a powerful class weapon. And it is precisely for this reason that it is hard to imagine that, in the present circumstances, the AFL-CIO hierarchy will feel compelled to call such an action. The leading AFL-CIO bureaucrats cannot even bring themselves to shut down production at one newspaper plant, much less the entire region. And the workers are not yet near a level of struggle and organization where they can independently carry out such great actions or stand much chance of forcing the bureaucrats to organize them. The strike solidarity coalition called on the bureaucrats to organize a general strike three and a half months ago. In November, resolutions in favor of having the bureaucrats call a referendum of all local unions to authorize (but not require) the top officers to call a general strike were passed in meetings of two of the six striking unions and three UAW locals. The bureaucrats have responded by retreating further from struggle and creating hysteria against even the mild UVC opposition. But the UVC and the bulk of the opportunist left persist in insisting that, with a little push, the general strike is just around the corner. This reflects the illusions in the union hierarchy common to both the UVC group of union officials and the opportunist left. Indeed, among the biggest "left" supporters of the general strike scheme is the Workers World Party which consistently paints the worst labor traitors as great heroes.

The road ahead

Rather than wishful thinking about the AFL-CIO doing wonderful things, the workers must be told the truth about the tasks at hand. The strike has already proved that the mass militant actions of the workers can deliver powerful blows to the greedy corporations. It has also shown the bankruptcy of relying on the AFL-CIO hierarchy. The fighting workers must be encouraged to build up independent forms of organization and rally their coworkers. This is the only path that can allow the workers to advance despite the treachery of the bureaucrats. This is what will provide the best chance of a decent strike settlement for the workers. And this is the sort of preparation necessary for workers everywhere to carry out the great clashes of the future. □

Marxism vs. Anarchism

Ideology of the 5th Estate: **Bakuninism — backward politics under the guise of no politics**

by Pete Brown, CVO, Detroit

The Detroit anarchist newspaper *Fifth Estate* (FE) encouraged us in CVO to look at the writings of Mikhail Bakunin, with the thought that as soon as we did, we would immediately drop Marxism and adopt anarchism. So I recently did some reading of Bakunin, especially his book, *Statism and Anarchy*.¹ But reading it doesn't make me want to rush into adopting anarchism.

Germanophobia and Anti-Semitism

First of all, let me just note the major stumbling block to reading Bakunin: his ultra-nationalist and racist phrases. Bakunin purports to be an internationalist, but on every political question he gives a nationalist twist to it. His basic orientation is: Germans are bad, Slavs are good. And he throws in "the Yids" (Jews) with the Germans as even worse than bad. Marx, as a German Jew, is of course the worst of the worst. At his worst, Bakunin actually gives this kind of argument against Marx: Marx is sly and sneaky and domineering because he's a German Jew. This kind of thing makes you wonder why anyone would recommend reading Bakunin.

Bakunin's book purports to be an explanation of the two-line struggle in the International Working Men's Association (IWA) between "statism" and "anarchy." These are Bakunin's terms for Marxism and those who support political activity of the working class, on the one hand, and his own anti-political followers. Yet most of Bakunin's book does not concern itself

¹Bakunin's book *Statism and Anarchy* was written in the summer of 1873. Its subtitle is "The Struggle of the Two Parties in the International Working Men's Association." In this book Bakunin attempted to explain to his Russian followers what happened in the International, and to give them guidance for developing the revolutionary movement in Russia. It was published in Switzerland in late 1873 and then smuggled into Russia.

The edition I read was translated and edited by Marshall S. Shatz, professor of history at University of Massachusetts, Boston. It's one of a series — Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought — published by Cambridge University Press. It was printed in 1990.

with Marx, or the IWA, at all. Instead it is sort of a diplomatic history, or survey of European governments, in the 19th century. As you read it, you're led to ask, what has this to do with the IWA and Marx?

Eventually this becomes clear. The key feature in Bakunin's diplomatic history is the rise to prominence of Germany. Germany began the 19th century weak and divided into numerous small states. But eventually it gained unity under Prussian leadership. This was finally completed in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. And this unity was not achieved in a progressive or revolutionary way. It was achieved by way of Prussian militarism and Bismarckian diplomacy. So Bakunin sees this as a thoroughly reactionary movement. And this was a "pro-state" movement, a movement toward the creation and consolidation of a modern nation state.

Bakunin's method then is to paint Marxism with the brush of Prussian/Bismarckian "statism." He tries to equate support for workers' participation in politics with support for the reactionary bourgeois state. A lot of his arguments just boil down to nationalist prejudice bordering on racism. His other method is to obscure the actual role of the Marxists in the history of Germany, by giving a one-sided version of that history. Bakunin gives some facts about German history while covering over others. For example, he creates the impression that Marx was some kind of Prussian chauvinist; but if that's the case, why had the Prussian government stripped Marx of his citizenship? Apparently Bismarck and the Prussian monarch had less faith in Marx's support for Prussian "statism" than Bakunin did.

Should workers participate in politics?

The basic issue in the fight between Marxism and Bakuninism in the IWA was the question of workers' participation in politics. The modern editor of Bakunin's book sums up the issue thusly in his introduction:

"To the Marxists, the proletariat's participation in the political life of its respective nations seemed an effective way of pursuing the class struggle and ultimately achieving the supremacy of the proletariat and the elimination of the state. To the anarchists, however, any participation in 'bourgeois politics' was inherently corrupting. One could fight the enemy or one could join the enemy, but one could not do both. To expect to

use political methods to abolish political domination was a dangerous delusion.²

The editor here gives a sympathetic interpretation of Bakunin's position, much more straightforwardly than Bakunin himself does. For a sharper characterization of Bakunin's position, we turn to Marx. The following quotes are from a report Marx wrote for the IWA. First of all, the report notes what are the actual conditions under which the anarchists' dogma comes true:

"... the old clichés regarding 'abstention from politics' . . . can become a reality only under the most absolute despotism, with the workers abstaining from any meddling in politics, much like the prisoner abstaining from a walk in the sun."³

This is the reality of workers' abstaining from politics: that the prisoners are not even allowed to dream of liberation. Marx correctly ridiculed such an absurd dogma. But Marx also saw the undermining role played by Bakuninism inside the workers' movement:

"Anarchy, then, is the great war-horse of their master Bakunin, who has taken nothing from the socialist systems except a set of slogans. All socialists see anarchy as the following programme: once the aim of the proletarian movement, i.e., abolition of classes, is attained, the power of the State, which serves to keep the great majority of producers in bondage to a very small exploiter minority, disappears, and the functions of government become simple administrative functions. The Alliance [Bakunin's organization] draws an entirely different picture. It proclaims anarchy in proletarian ranks as the most infallible means of breaking the powerful concentration of social and political forces in the hands of the exploiters. Under this pretext, it asks the International, at a time when the old world is seeking a way of crushing it, to replace its organization with anarchy. The international police want nothing better"⁴

Based on their experience with Bakunin, the leaders of the IWA could see the reality behind Bakunin's preaching of "abstention from politics." Bakunin pretended to be all for "fighting the enemy" rather than "joining him", but to fight the enemy workers need organization in the first place. And Bakunin in practice was undermining and disorganizing the IWA, the foremost class organization of its time.

Was Marx a timid bourgeois parliamentarian?

²From Shatz's "Introduction" to *Statism and Anarchy*, p. xxx.

³See the report, "Fictitious Splits in the International", in *The General Council of the First International: Minutes*, published by Progress Publishers, Moscow. This quote is from p. 406.

⁴From the report, "Fictitious Splits" cited above, p. 407.

Now let's review a couple of the historical arguments advanced by Bakunin against Marxism. In one section of his book Bakunin gives a history of the 1848 revolution in Germany. This was a democratic revolution against monarchy, feudalism, and the fragmentation of Germany. Bakunin concentrates on the Frankfurt parliament, an all-German assembly that came up during the revolution but declined to take any revolutionary measures against the reactionaries, and as a result eventually succumbed. During the revolution's high tide, the ruling princes of the different German states were powerless to prevent the Frankfurt parliament from being elected and meeting. But they bided their time and eventually made a comeback because the parliament never consolidated republicanism in Germany, never actually overthrew the monarchs and never dispersed their armed forces.

In criticizing the errors of the Frankfurt parliament, Bakunin gives the view that the parliament failed because it did not take advantage of the revolutionary situation to press home the attack. In this respect Bakunin's recital of the parliament's errors is similar to Marx's analysis. (For Marx's analysis, as written up by Engels, see *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany*.⁵) Both criticize the parliament for not taking revolutionary steps. But note: Marx's analysis was not produced 25 years after the fact, as Bakunin's was. The book by Engels was written in 1851-52, and it was based on journalistic articles Marx wrote during the course of events themselves.

We give one example from the book by Engels, to show the revolutionary orientation of him and Marx: in his article "The Frankfurt National Assembly" Engels asserts that the parliament should have

"above all . . . secured to itself an organized and armed force in the country sufficient to put down any opposition on the part of the governments."

A similar point is made by Bakunin in his criticism of the Frankfurt parliament:

"they neglected the sole means of opposing the reactionary forces of the state — organizing the revolutionary force of the people."⁶

So Bakunin's assessment of the parliament's errors, given a quarter-century later, is quite similar to the assessment Marx gave at the time of the revolution. But in his book Bakunin actually obscures the position of Marx and Engels. He doesn't actually say that Marx supported the liberals in parliament — that would be too gross a lie. But he throws out numerous slanderous remarks to the effect that Marx is a "statist" like "all Germans" and "intellectuals" (especially Jewish ones). Then in

⁵This book is a collection of articles originally written as a series on the German revolution for the *New York Daily Tribune*. In writing this series Engels utilized his files of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, the paper edited by Marx during the revolutionary period. He also consulted with Marx, and in fact the articles were printed under Marx's byline. The collection I consulted was published by Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1977.

⁶Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 156.

his concrete discussion of 1848 he doesn't mention, he simply leaves out of discussion, what Marx did. Bakunin does mention that there were a few sincere revolutionaries in Germany, but he neglects mentioning Marx and Engels among them. This is a glaring omission in a book devoted to attacking Marx. Bakunin adopts a revolutionary stance similar to Marx's, and then tries to use this to attack Marx — pretty bad, Mikhail!

As a final note on this, I should clarify that the positions of Marx and Bakunin on 1848 were not at all similar in many respects. For one thing, Bakunin's explanation of the parliament's failures is given a racial or nationalist slant by saying the Frankfurt parliamentarians exemplified the German spirit of "statism" and obedience to authority. For another thing, Bakunin and Marx had different tendencies with regard to German unification. Marx saw unification as a historically necessary and progressive step. Bakunin generally opposed German unity, and in fact his own practice in 1848 was aimed at rallying the Slavic nationalities against Germany. Bakunin paints all "German unifiers" with the same brush — they're all reactionary "statists". But with German national unity on the historical agenda, the question was *in what way* this unity would be achieved — in a revolutionary way, as Marx advocated, or in a slow, painful, and Prussian-monarchical way, as eventually took place.

Was Marx a Lassallean?

The other major historical argument Bakunin brings against Marx is to tie him to Lassalle, a major working class leader of the 1850s and 60s. But here again Bakunin's argumentation is sneaky, at best. His main point on this is that Lassalle always claimed to be a disciple of Marx. OK; but does that make Marx a disciple of Lassalle's errors?

Bakunin himself admits that Marx "turned on" Lassalle and denounced him. Yes, the fact is, Marx did criticize Lassalle, precisely for his "statism" (Lassalle's tendency toward reformism and collaboration with the Prussian state, as well as his general line on socialism, which was a call for state aid to workers' co-operatives). The fact that Bakunin knows of Marx's critique of Lassalle makes it evident he must also have known the content of this criticism. Yet he studiously avoids giving that content. He only says that Marx was "jealous" of Lassalle.

So here again Bakunin pursues a rotten method of argumentation. He deliberately obscures the content of Marx's critique of Lassalle, even though he must have known what it was. It was well known that Lassalle was erring more and more in a "statist" direction. Lassalle was something of a political adventurer, and held secret negotiations with Bismarck in which he offered support to some of Bismarck's expansionist schemes in return for Bismarck throwing a bone or two to the working class. But it was also pretty widely known that Marx criticized this behavior of Lassalle's.⁷

⁷For Marx's assessment of Lassalle and an explanation of how his assessment of Lassalle changed over time, see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 1846-

What Marx did give Lassalle some credit for is that he did go out and build a working class political party in Germany. In fact, Marx is the one who gave Lassalle the idea of building an independent movement right among the workers, not the bourgeois liberals with whom Lassalle had previously associated. If Bakunin is going to blame Marx for Lassalle's mistakes, why doesn't he give Marx credit for Lassalle's positive achievements? But Bakunin's not interested in clarifying things, but simply in throwing mud at Marxism.

A variant of peasant revolutionism

Anyway, this is the main content of Bakunin's book: attacking Marx by distorting German history and combining that with nationalist and racist remarks. Now, the conclusion to Bakunin's book ("Appendix A") gives his own direct advice to young, revolutionary-minded people in Russia: what they should do to overthrow the tsarist autocracy, how the movement should be organized, etc. Here Bakunin appears as the practical organizer, trying to develop an alternative to Marxism. So what kind of revolution does Bakunin foresee for Russia?

Bakunin says there are three main features to the Russian people's "ideal," an ideal that is to be realized by the revolution:

"Its first and principal feature is their [the Russian people's] universal conviction that the land, all the land, belongs to the people, who have watered it with their sweat and fertilized it with the labor of their own hands. Its second major feature is the belief that the right to use the land belongs not to the individual but to the whole commune, to the *mir*, which temporarily distributes it to individuals. The third feature, equal in importance to the preceding two, is the quasi-absolute autonomy and self-government of the commune, and hence its categorical hostility to the state."⁸

Thus, Bakunin's idea of the revolution is a variant of peasant revolutionism. And his outlook doesn't go beyond that. Overthrowing the tsar isn't just a stage of the revolution for Bakunin; in his conception overthrowing the tsar and seizing the land is the summation of the social revolution. The overthrow of the tsarist state will free the peasant commune from its oppressive features and allow it to revert back to being a true collective, as in the good old days (before the "Germanic state" of the tsar was imposed on the good-hearted Slavic peasants). At that point all oppression and exploitation will be at an end. The peasant communes will establish some sort of relations among themselves — Bakunin isn't too clear about this, but insists they will be "federative" and "bottoms up." He also

⁷(...continued)

1895, with explanatory notes, translated by Dona Torr and published by International Publishers, New York, 1942. See Marx's letter to Kugelmann of February 23, 1865, on p. 193; and Marx's letter to Schweitzer of October 13, 1868, on p. 250.

⁸*Statism and Anarchy*, pp. 205-6.

mentions possibly establishing ties between peasant communes and urban industrial workers, but this is barely mentioned; the main emphasis is on a peasant uprising as the key to solving all problems.

From this scenario we can see that Bakunin has not thought too deeply about the economic basis of socialist society. Bakunin tosses out the thought that the communes might have some relations, and he mentions the existence of merchants also. Presumably these self-contained communes will want to trade with one another. So there you would have the basis of commodity production, again; separate enterprises producing goods and then trading with one another. This is the basis for capitalist development. In fact, this would be quite a progressive thing; a capitalist Russia could develop much more rapidly than a tsarist, semi-feudal Russia. But Bakunin creates the impression that you just throw off the tsar, and BANG! — all social issues are resolved, and you're in communism.

With the development of capitalism would come class divisions, regardless of what Bakunin says. Merchants would collaborate with the more successful peasants, and the latter would concentrate their power inside the communes. At the same time the merchants would be setting up some kind of force to regulate and guarantee trade. They might not call it a state, at first — they might call it the “organization of patriotic revolutionaries for pan-Slavic fraternization” — but it would be a state, nonetheless. It would suppress bandits, regulate trade and commerce, and eventually, if threatened by revolts of poor peasants, it would (try to) suppress them also. There you'd have the further development of the class struggle in a post-revolutionary society.

Bakunin doesn't even consider this. In his view all you need is revolutionary zeal to overthrow the tsar, and after that, by overthrowing the government, you've *ipso facto* done away with all oppression of any kind.

Bakunin expressed the small peasants' frustrated economic aspirations and their hatred for the autocracy. But his hardening these ideas into anarchist dogmas shows the limitations of small-peasant ideology. There's no consideration here of how to develop a modern industrial society. There's not even a recognition of commodity economy and what that implies. Instead there's just a conservative yearning for the mythical good old days before those modern newfangled inventions like governments, parliaments, etc. came into vogue.

In his general ideology Bakunin took the peasants' angry cry, “Smash the tsarist government”, and converted that into the dogmatic call: “Smash all government, and this will solve all problems; and in the meantime boycott all politics.” But the latter call turns into something reactionary, as it urges the working people to abstain from looking for a way out of their oppression.

Even though Bakunin called himself an historical materialist, he never recognized the economic basis of the state, that it's a product of class antagonisms. He didn't recognize that to do away with the state you have to do away with classes, and to do this you have to do away with the capitalist economy rooted in commodity production. His simple-minded approach — just “attack the state” and all will be well — sounds ultra-militant, but in fact is a conservative approach that would leave the revolution stuck at the level of a peasant uprising (if it got that

far).

Note that Bakunin's orientation toward the peasantry as the most revolutionary class is not restricted to Russia. For Western Europe as well Bakunin looks to what he calls “more traditional” sections of the working people — workers just coming off the land in Italy and Spain, as opposed to the established urban industrial workers of Germany and England. The latter he charges with being bourgeoisified, with being “taken in” by capitalist society. The “more traditional” working people he says are more likely to revolt because they still have the communal agricultural spirit and are not yet degraded by capitalism. And in the West, as well as in Russia, Bakunin's idea of socialism was of local communes tied somehow into federative relationships; he always opposed the idea of nationally-organized socialist societies, even in countries with well developed large-scale industry.

A theory of duplicity

Now we have a general idea of Bakunin's theory of social revolution. It remains to examine his theory of revolutionary organization. This is something that anarchists, following Bakunin himself, always make much of in accusations against Marxists that they are “authoritarian”, “centralist”, etc. According to them the anarchists are all for the masses, while the Marxists are “dictators.” But what is the truth of these accusations?

In Bakunin's own day, assessing his organizational ideas was a very complex affair that required much work on the part of Marx, Engels and the entire General Council of the IWA.⁹ To give a quick summary: Bakunin came into the IWA calling for extreme centralization, demanding that everyone obey all the directives of the General Council. At this time Bakunin expected to be co-opted into the IWA leadership, and expected that his followers would be able to muster a majority in the IWA's central bodies. But things didn't work out that way; the General Council was reluctant to turn the IWA over to Bakunin. So Bakunin then had groups under his leadership affiliate as local bodies, and paid lip service to the IWA's general leadership. But in practice Bakunin maintained his own organization, and the IWA locals under his control prohibited political activity by workers in their areas. This went against general policy of the IWA, so the General Council issued some criticism of these locals. At this point then Bakunin turned into a fierce advocate of “federalism.” “local independence,” etc.

So advocating “local control” and “autonomy” is by no means a Bakunist principle, as anarchists and sympathetic

⁹See *The General Council of the First International: Minutes* published by Progress Publishers, Moscow. See especially the volume on 1871-72, with the article “Fictitious Splits in the International”, a report by the General Council to its branches on the Bakunists' undermining activities in the IWA; also the article “The General Council to all the members of the IWA”, a report on the Bakunists' factional activity. The latter report served as the basis on which Bakunin was expelled from the IWA.

commentators like Shatz try to argue.¹⁰ Shatz has been taken in by Bakunin's later advocacy of federalism and his numerous calls for "bottoms-up" organization. But in practice Bakunin pursued a line of advocating whatever organizational form he thought would most quickly gain him ascendancy. Centralism was fine when he thought he could dominate the center; but if not, then he advocated local autonomy (while still practicing centralism for his own secret faction inside the IWA).

So in practice Bakunin evolved what could best be described as a "duplicitous" theory of organization. In public forums Bakunin was the fierce ultra-democrat preaching "bottoms up" and "against dictatorship." But among friends and supporters Bakunin preached centralism and "total dedication" to his own organization. In his theoretical writings this culminated in Bakunin's advocacy of two kinds of politics, one for the masses and one for the revolutionary elite. For the workers, they were to be satisfied with calls to "abstain from politics"; in other words, they were to remain disorganized and confused. But for the elite — well, they would take care of the masses, behind the scenes.

The secret elite

Bakunin's theory of the elite comes out in his letter to Sergei Nechaev dated June 2, 1870.¹¹ Now, in 1870 Sergei Nechaev was Bakunin's closest friend and collaborator. Nechaev presented himself to Bakunin in Switzerland as a Russian émigré who had direct ties to the revolutionary youth and intelligentsia in Russia. Bakunin was excited about being in direct touch with the rising generation of radicals in his home country, and through Nechaev hoped to influence the building of revolutionary organization in Russia.

So in this letter Bakunin expresses his views, to a close collaborator, on how they should proceed to build such organization. And here Bakunin says:

"We are the most pronounced enemies of every sort of *official power* — even if it is an ultra-revolutionary power. We are the enemies of any sort of publicly declared dictatorship, we are social revolutionary anarchists. But, you will ask, if we are anarchists, by what right do we want to influence the people, and what methods will we use? Denouncing all power, with what sort of power, or rather by what sort of force, shall we direct a people's revolution? *By a force that is invisible, that no one admits and that is not imposed on anyone, by the collective dictator-*

¹⁰On p. xxxi of Shatz's "Introduction" he says, "To the anarchists, the International must serve as a direct model for the new society, a microcosm of the free future order. Therefore they envisioned it as a true federation, with local sections enjoying the greatest possible degree of autonomy."

¹¹This is contained in the volume *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* edited and introduced by Arthur Lehning. Translations by Steven Cox and Olive Stevens. Published by Jonathan Cape, London, 1973.

ship of our organization which will be all the greater the more it remains unseen and undeclared, the more it is deprived of all official rights and significance."¹²

Bakunin goes on to describe the post-revolutionary situation:

"Imagine yourself in the midst of a triumphant, spontaneous revolution in Russia. The state and with it all forms of social and political organization have been demolished. . . .

"But imagine that in the middle of this universal anarchy there were a secret organization, dispersing its members in small groups throughout the empire, but nevertheless firmly united and inspired with a single idea These small groups, unknown to anyone as such, would have no officially declared power. But . . . these groups would finally have the strength of that close solidarity which binds isolated groups in one organic whole These groups would not seek anything for themselves, . . . and they would be in a position to direct popular movements This is what I call *the collective dictatorship* of a secret organization."¹³

Now of course Bakunin argues that this organization would not violate the freedom of the people, would be closely linked to them, and would express their aspirations. That all sounds good, except — how can an organization be closely linked to the masses when the masses don't even know of its existence? Bakunin's remarks here have the impression of sounding concerned for the masses, but they are not the remarks of someone concerned with building up the consciousness of the masses. On the contrary, they express the same old ruling-class distinction between the elite and the masses. Bakunin's conception is that the intellectual elite, the revolutionaries, should secretly manipulate the masses; there is no conception of the masses learning to liberate themselves.

It's quite revealing to see such passages from an anarchist, because we know from experience that the anarchists are the fiercest enemies, supposedly, of "hierarchy", "parties", "authoritarianism" and all the rest. But here they are, advocating the worst kind of authoritarianism — a secret dictatorship!

Two kinds of secrecy

Now someone might ask, "But wasn't it necessary for revolutionaries under tsarism to maintain secrecy?" Yes, of course it was necessary to maintain security from the tsar's police. But that's not the same thing as maintaining secrecy from the masses. Marxists have always recognized the need for varying amounts of organizational secrecy, depending on the political circumstances of the country. But even under the worst oppression, Marxists advocate that a party representing the masses be known to the masses. And they search for ways to

¹²Lehning, pp. 191-92. Italics are in the original.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 192-93.

integrate party life with the life of the masses, so that the working people can develop political awareness in their everyday life. What this passage clarifies is that Bakunin isn't worried about keeping the organization secret from the police, because he's talking about a situation after the revolution, when the state has already been smashed — there are no more police! And yet even then, he insists, the elite revolutionaries must keep their organization completely underground, unknown to the masses they are leading.

The same conception appears in Bakunin's letter to Albert Richard¹⁴, only there the stress is on building such an organization today, before the revolution; and there he's addressing the situation in France instead of Russia. But in both cases Bakunin stresses the need to keep such an organization secret.

A non-class conception of the state

These letters of Bakunin's also bring out his non-class conception of the state. Bakunin insists that the revolutionary elite should be people who are dedicated, sincere, not vain, not power-hungry or venal, etc. Thus his dictators are to be people who are pure, not in it just for the money or to make a name for themselves. The trouble is, Bakunin thinks that's all there is to the state — fat cat politicians trying to make a name for themselves. He ignores the basic fact about the state, that it's a class dictatorship. It never occurs to him that the bourgeoisie might have self-sacrificing, sincere state administrators. He thinks that if he somehow eliminates corruption (by revolutionary will), he will have eliminated the state.

Similarly, Bakunin thinks that what makes an organization a state is that it is official — that is, it's open and declared, it has laws publicly known. As opposed to that he proposes rulership by a closed, secret organization. Now, it's OK to criticize public parliamentary debate for its hypocrisy. But Bakunin's way off the rails here. He's actually arguing that secret, unknown rulership is better for the masses than open, declared rulership. This is completely off the bat. It shows that Bakunin should have condemned himself, first of all, when he issued his denunciations of "would-be dictators."

Bakuninism and *Fifth Estate*

So why did *Fifth Estate* recommend Bakunin to us? What is there about *Fifth Estate* that is Bakunist? Well, generally, like other anarchists, the writers for *Fifth Estate* are anti-state and anti-politics. For example, they're opposed to running in elections. In the latest issue of their newspaper¹⁵, for example, in their letters column, they debate some other anarchists who advocate running for office.

But *FE* does support political activism around issues they're interested in. For example, protests against the war in Vietnam

(in a retrospective article); GI mutinies; blocking road construction in Britain; picketing the Indonesian embassy in Moscow as a protest against the occupation of East Timor; protests in Moscow against the war in Chechnya. And in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, *FE* simply endorses the list of activities promoted by left-liberal groups active in Mumia's defense: write the governor, etc. So *FE* is not universally opposed to any political activity.

But what really distinguishes *FE* is their eco-anarchism, their consistent denunciation of modern technology. All political issues are looked at through this lens. For example, in the letters column of their latest issue, they discuss an article that appeared in their Winter 1995 issue, "A Treatise on Electronic Anarchy and the Net" by Sunfrog. The gist of this article, apparently, was to denounce e-mail and the Internet. (*FE* also prints e-mail addresses of various organizations, though, so they're not completely consistent on this.) Now it's reasonable to point out that the Internet, like other utilities and forms of communication, remains enmeshed in the capitalist-imperialist system, that capitalists are designing it for their own profit-making and political purposes, and they don't intend for it to get out of their control. At the same time, it's unreasonable to suggest boycotting this modern means of communication. The telephone system is also enmeshed in capitalism and dominated by telecommunications monopolies, but I doubt if Sunfrog boycotts telephones.

The glories of pounding rocks

Other examples of their anti-techno bias abound. A Summer 1994 article by T. Fulano, "Insurgent Mexico", opposed the Zapatistas demanding TV sets, washing machines, stoves, etc. as "consumerism." In reply, a resident of Mexico wrote to them saying:

"T. Fulano, I assume you have gotten rid of your own stove and refrigerator and you don't wash your clothes in a washing machine if you are going to say that an indigenous woman should not have a machine that could save hours of drudgery. I don't imagine you've ever spent several hours a day scrubbing clothes on a rock by a river. Not just one day, but every day for the rest of your life. Not just your own clothes, but clothes for an entire family. Not just clothes that smell a little funky under the armpits, but clothes soiled with dirt from the fields. . . ."¹⁶

T. Fulano responded by saying:

". . . As a matter of fact, I have washed my clothes by hand, with water drawn from a village well. In Portugal, where I lived for a time in a small village, I didn't reap the rich experience of local women, who did it as a group activity one day every week or so. But I know what hard work washing is, and I rather think there is

¹⁴Bakunin's letter to Albert Richard is dated April 1, 1870. It begins on p. 178 of the Lehning volume.

¹⁵*Fifth Estate*, Summer 1995, Vol. 30 #1 (346). See p. 29 for the debate on running in elections. *FE* can be reached at 4632 Second Ave., Detroit MI 48201; phone (313) 831-6800.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 30, col. 4.

something to be said for it.”¹⁷

So Fulano glorifies the “rich experience” of pounding clothes on rocks and living without running water. It never occurs to Fulano that the Portuguese women who make washing a group activity are doing their best to get over a bad situation, and no doubt they, like the women of southern Mexico, are thirsting for a way out. Incidentally, Fulano’s response later confesses, “. . . my life in Detroit is decidedly different than it was in the village. I use a washing machine, a car, and many other industrial processes and machines.”¹⁸

Another example: in what looks like their editorial page, “Tales from the planet”, the producers of *FE* criticize anarcho-syndicalism. They criticize it, not — as Marxists would do — for being anarchist (and hence promoting a losing strategy for the workers’ movement), but for promoting industrialism and workers’ control. There they say, “. . . the [anarcho-syndicalist] perspective rarely challenges the fundamental precepts of industrialism and would wind up with a similar mechanical world only [only!] administered more fairly. Also, as the modern world cranks along, much of what would be controlled by workers councils (actually more to do as the work day is completed) has become increasingly absurd.”¹⁹ As example, they point to some consumer items they consider silly; they question what do you do with fellow workers involved with producing such items. Anyway, the point is, their criticism of anarcho-syndicalism is another example of their anti-technology orientation. (As an aside, I must admit this is a novel argument against socialism, that it would just be too much to do! The anarchists don’t want to participate in running society because — they’re tired!)

Their lead articles in the summer ‘95 issue are retrospectives on the Vietnam war. Here they denounce U.S. imperialism for its crimes against the people of Southeast Asia. But instead of clarifying the economic basis of imperialism they give the impression that imperialism is rooted in an *idea*, that of Westward expansion, of subduing the Natives, and of bringing Nature under the control of science and technology:

“This was only the latest unfolding in that westward movement, the empire’s relentless drive to destroy and subdue Wilderness, the ‘savages’ who inhabited it, and all of nature.”²⁰

And further on:

“This quintessentially technobureaucratic campaign against Vietnam flowed from the same hatred and poverty of spirit that fueled the wars against the indigenous peoples of this continent. It was a deep-seated hatred, founded upon guilt and a sense of separation, so it had to be manifested in a war against the earth itself.”²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31, col. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, col. 2.

¹⁹ *FE*, Summer ‘95, p. 2, col. 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14, col. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, col. 3.

Here they reach the point of saying that the actual cause, or motive, of the war was ecological destruction in itself; it was a war of “technology” against “the earth.”

What follows from such an absurd analysis? Should the workers all run away from their jobs, avoid industry, join rural communes and pound clothes on rocks? If such phrases are taken as serious analysis, these are the sorts of “solutions” that would follow. And in fact these are the sorts of solutions offered by *FE*.

Two faces of technology

Is there a connection between this type of view and that of Bakunin? Bakunin was certainly no environmentalist. But there is a common thread in that Bakunin was also opposed to modernism and didn’t care for the industrial proletariat.

Bakunin also glorified the more backward workers, those “more traditional” in his words, those coming fresh off the land. He had a class bias toward the more backward peasantry and against the industrial proletariat. So there’s a conservative streak in Bakuninism, and this is reflected in *FE*’s opposition to technology. There’s also the same confused, small-producer type of opposition to capitalism.

Capitalism has created an enormous engine of technology. This has various effects — some positive, some negative. In this situation the anarchists throw up their hands and say “it all sucks.” And that includes the workers involved in capitalist production. We’re all tainted by having something to do with this technology.

But Marxism takes a more rational approach of sorting out the good from the bad. The modern engine of technology has enormous potential for expanding the control of human beings over their lives, hence for bringing about a truly humanistic society (and a humanized earth). What’s blocking the realization of this potential is not workers’ “guilt”, but workers’ enslavement to capital. Until the workers take control of society — and with it, of technology — capitalist production will continue to generate racism, pollution and war just as regularly as it produces trains, planes and automobiles. But for the workers to take control, they must be organized — and not just in small groups and communes, as Bakunin and *FE* advocate — but in national- (and international)-level bodies; and in the first place in political organizations.

The two faces of technology are rooted in the twofold division of society into exploiters and exploited. This is the basic, underlying problem that *FE* never clarifies. In this respect they follow Bakunin, who never grasped the economic basis of politics. But ranting against “the state” or “technology” in general does not help resolve this basic problem. On the contrary — it undermines the workers’ attempts to build revolutionary class organization. And this is what’s needed, today, to advance on the road toward communist society. □

The debate on anarchism continues

The *Fifth Estate* versus communism

Fifth Estate
4632 Second Ave.
Detroit, MI 48201

26 October 1995

Dear Joseph Green:

Your article about anarchism in the latest *Communist Voice* is so uninformed, it is barely worthy of a reply. You really know nothing about anarchist theory or practice, probably having only read the ravings of one of the mass murderers your grouplet worshipped for so many years.

If you would stop reading Stalin or Mao for a while and look at the classics of anarchism such as Bakunin or Berkman (the latter's *What is Anarchist Communism?* is a good starting point for beginners), you would see that little of what you wrote corresponds to the heroic history of the combative class struggle carried out by generations of workers to bring about anarchism. However, the process might prove too difficult for you to deal with since to affirm the revolutionary role of anarchists throughout the world would also mean a realization of the counter-revolutionary and murderous role played by the Bolsheviks and Stalinists from Ukraine to Spain.

Your desires to resuscitate the failed theory and practice of Marx, and particularly Lenin, is a dismal recapitulation of what ended so disastrously in state capitalist police regimes (ones you apologized for as Holy Writ). Lenin once described social democrats as "useful idiots." That's what his epigones have become in this era. So keep on supporting strikes and other reform struggles, but leave in the garbage that which has so richly earned its place on the scrapheap of history.

For anarchy,
E. B. Maple ☐

CV replies: huffing and puffing won't eliminate the capitalist marketplace

Jan. 15, 1996

Dear *Fifth Estate*,

Your letter huffs and puffs, but it never answers the issue raised in my article "Anarchism and the marketplace" in *CV* #4. I raised that anarchism was unable to eliminate the basis of oppression because it doesn't know how to get beyond the

marketplace. You don't even try to answer this. That's because you have no answer.

Anarchism raises government as the root of oppression, thus identifying one of the results of class division and class oppression with the cause of class oppression. Anarchism goes further and is skeptical of organization in general, thus recoiling from planned production by society as a whole, which is the only way to replace private ownership and the rule by the marketplace. Libertarian-style anarchism actually praises the marketplace, while left-wing anarchism hates the corporations. Yet left-wing anarchism still looks to small-scale production and autonomous units, even if they are communal units or, in the case of anarcho-syndicalism, industrial councils. The autonomy of each unit from society as a whole actually enslaves each unit to the rule of the marketplace.

Your answer? None. You only curse the communists. You curse all the more because you have no alternative to the marketplace. Very well, let's look into your curses of Marxism and communism.

True, there is no communist country at this time, only a few oppressive state-capitalist regimes. Capitalism exists everywhere. But if this disproves Marxism, then it disproves left-wing anarchism too, or any theory that looks beyond capitalism. I note, for all your bluster about the great anarchist history, you do not cite a single example of anarchism having transcended capitalism anywhere. Possibly that's because you yourself don't believe in the claims of other anarchists to have temporarily done so.

The fact is that the proletarian movement is disorganized today. We anti-revisionist Marxists look that fact in the face, and strive to help reorganize the class struggle. We do this by repudiating the revisionist ideology of state-capitalism that falsely passes as "Marxism". We also do it by studying the changes in the present-day economy, the increasing contradictions of capitalism, and the technological and organizational changes that cry out for revolutionary change in society. And we do it by keeping contact with the proletarian struggle even now, when the mass struggle is at low ebb.

Your letter however does not even note the fact of disorganization. In your reply to us, you do not say what you are doing today and you do not assess how to move forward. You simply dream of the heroes of the past, while for today the *Fifth Estate* indulges in sentimental hand-wringing about the evils of technology and worrying that peasant women in Chiapas want washing-machines. (Not all anarchists do that, but that's your wing of anarchism.) In fact, you live on moralism, not on a careful examination of the economic and political realities of today.

As for Marxism-Leninism, the socialist movement which you curse has helped organize the proletariat and develop its class struggle on many fronts. On the issue of strikes, which you raise in your letter, it was Marxism which first showed the role of the workers' economic struggle: do you recall from the history of the First International that a whole wing of anarch-

ism, that which followed Proudhon, opposed the strike struggle of the workers? With respect to political struggle, Marxism has helped the workers overthrow dictatorships, take part in national liberation struggles, and separate their interests from those of the liberal bourgeoisie. But anarchism finds political struggle suspect in itself. And with respect to overcoming capitalism, Marxism has inspired the largest and strongest workers' movements that aimed at liberation, has shown how to integrate economic and political struggle into the revolutionary struggle, and has led to the most important attempts at socialist revolution.

True, so far all attempts to build socialism have failed. They were either crushed or state-capitalist regimes were built. You would discredit Marxism-Leninism because the state-capitalist regimes had a "Marxist" or "socialist" label. You might as well also discredit "democracy", "class struggle", and "revolution" because these regimes also prostituted these terms. It is in fact Marxism which has inspired the most trenchant criticism of these regimes and which has shown that these regimes were "revisionists" not "communists". We in *Communist Voice* are dedicated to continuing this criticism. Whenever you decide to stop huffing and puffing and to do some real work instead, you're welcome to join us. But I'm not holding my breath waiting.

By the way, Pete of the CVO took your advice and read the anarchist theoretician Bakunin. His review of Bakunin's theories will be contained in *Communist Voice*, vol. 2, #1. [See pp. 19-25 in this issue of *CV*.] From it we can see that Bakunin too did not know how to go beyond capitalism, and moreover that his way of eliminating "authority" was to advocate the building of a secret leading group to direct the actions of the masses. Moreover, according to Bakunin, public organization is degrading and authoritarian, but secret manipulation behind the backs of the activists was just fine and dandy. Sorry, I'll think I'll stick with Marxism and its devotion of all its efforts to the conscious organization of the mass movement.

For the overthrow of capitalism,
Joseph Green, editor, *CV* ☐

The Insurgency Culture Collective discusses the future society

Liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice;
Socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality.
—Michael Bakunin

11-29-95

Salud Joe,

I read your article on Anarchism in the Sep. 15, 95 *Communist Voice* and need to correct you when you compare anarchists with libertarians. Libertarians are laissez-faire capitalists. They are classical liberals like the Japanese Liberal Democrats. They advocate minimizing government. Anarchists

advocate mutualism, collectivism, communism, or syndicalism which are all similar. Syndicalism is an economic organization where workers organize by industry to manage their own production and by community to manage the distribution of the products they produce. By use of the "stay-in general strike" the workers occupy the means of production and boycott the capitalists and military and police, so they have no resources to fight a protracted counterrevolutionary war. The industrial unions like the CNT in the Spanish Civil War form militias to fight the fascists and capitalists and to maintain public safety. Crimes are dealt with by arbitration by revolutionary tribunals of persons chosen from the community at random. This system functioned in Catalonia. During the system Spanish farms practiced anarchist communism like the free communes of the Ukraine during the Russian Revolution which were under the protection of Makhnovist partisans who destroyed Ukrainian nationalist (white) counterrevolutionary armies and fought Trotsky's army to a standstill when he tried to force them to submit to Red Army authoritarianism. (They were ultimately overwhelmed because they eventually ran out of fighters even after killing 9 Red Army soldiers to every one they lost.) Anarchists want no authority: no government, no capitalists, no church or religion, no ruling class, and no political parties. We believe in the organization of society by free association based on voluntary cooperation and mutual aid. Any government will automatically become the new ruling class. If it is a one party state it will replace capitalist plutocracy with a party ruling class and party authoritarianism. What difference is there between a so-called dictatorship of the proletariat and a military dictatorship or a fascist one? There is no difference except in the terminology.

No anarchist would advocate a free market like you described. Anarcho-communists believe in collective ownership and distribution according to everybody's needs. Anarcho-syndicalists form confederations and have representatives of all workgroups meet to convey the products and needs of each group so they can plan the distribution of the products of their labor based on need. Money is typically abolished in favor of a system based on barter or hours of labor as a basis of exchange. This is very different from capitalism where wealth is [accumulated] by extracting surplus value from people's labor and paying capitalists to sit by idly while everyone else does the work. In order to help those collectives who have less resources those with more resources set up funds or pools of resources to help those with less improve their situation. One factor which leads greatly to preventing against the creation of a new ruling class is the destruction of authority and all institutions of authority like the church. Under Bolshevism the state owns everything — not the workers. Under anarchism, the workers own and operate the means of production in small workgroups that voluntarily cooperate. Anarchists believe strongly in organization. We only oppose authority. There is a big difference. Voluntary organization based on cooperation does not need authority to control it or lead it because they take responsibility for themselves. Any political party will become a new ruling class. Any party organization will become dominated by a minority who will use their position to consolidate power. Any parliamentary structure will disenfranchise the workers they claim to represent. Anarchists don't want to lead a

liberation movement. They want to be the liberation movement.

Long live anarchism/Viva la Anarquía

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**Reply: Does barter eliminate money,
does small-group ownership eliminate the
capitalist marketplace?**

Jan. 15, 1996

Dear Scott,

Thank you for your attention to my article *Anarchism and the marketplace*. In replying to my article, you sketch out briefly the type of society that you and other anarchists are working for. In fact, you do not describe societies that have existed (no anarchist experiment of any size has ever eliminated money or done without various institutions of authority), but as you would like them to be. But the main issue is—does the plan which you advocate actually succeed in overcoming the marketplace?

In examining this, it is important to note that I did not claim that all anarchists praise the corporations and are Libertarians. I explicitly and repeatedly noted that there are different types of anarchists. Some anarchists do praise the marketplace—because there is no “authority” telling anyone what to buy or what to sell. So what if the iron whip of hunger and necessity enslaves even more certainly than a government decree? Certain anarchists (such as anarcho-individualists for whom the freedom of contract between individuals is the highest freedom) ignored this just as do the classical liberals you refer to in your letter. It is a fact that some anarchists are attracted to today’s Libertarian Party, and that the Libertarian Party itself flirts with anarchist-style phrases, presenting government as the source of all evils. But I also stressed that there are other anarchists “who think they are saying something radically different. [and who] would replace the giant corporations and profiteers by communal or other small-scale enterprises” or who “envisage weak federations of local councils”.

Do these plans by the anti-capitalist anarchists actually succeed in overcoming the marketplace? That is the fundamental question. It’s not a question of whether radical anarchists like yourself want to go beyond capitalism—I’m sure you do. It’s a question of whether the plan you outline really does go beyond capitalism. You think so, and say that “Money is typically abolished in favor of a system based on barter or hours of labor as a basis of exchange.” But let’s look a bit closer at this.

You suggest that exchange will continue in anarchist society, through barter and through exchanging things of equal value, measured by the hours of labor needed to produced them. But exchange implies that separate individuals or enterprises

(whether communal enterprises or even industrial federations) are doing the exchanging. Each of these individuals or enterprises has the right to consume or dispose of its own goods—i.e. it owns the goods. You yourself point out that the workers “own” the means of production in “small workgroups”—i.e. each small productive unit owns its own factory or work bench or the land it grows crops on, etc. And this ownership of the means of production by the small unit translates into its ownership of the things it produces. These units do not produce according to a common plan, but according to what they can expect to exchange. This is in fact a picture of a rudimentary form of the marketplace. This is what gives rise to money and, eventually, to full-blown capitalism.

You think you have gone beyond capitalism by eliminating money in favor of barter. But it is precisely the repetition of thousands and thousands of barter deals that gives rise to money. In the Spanish experience you mention, one sympathetic (although not anarchist) commentator has noted that a number of anarchists became quite attracted to the idea of a single national currency. (David Miller, *Anarchism*, 1984, p. 163)

And indeed, you suggest that exchange might take place on the basis of the number of hours needed to produce something. But that is a rough description of how exchange takes place when it is done with money. At one time, serious capitalist economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo pointed out that prices tended to oscillate around the number of hours needed to produce something (assuming work of average intensity and efficiency). Marx analyzed this more precisely. This is the famous “labor theory of value”, and it is a description of how capitalism works, not of a communist society. So it turns out that, by exchanging according to the number of hours, the anarchist society would simply be trying to duplicate what a capitalist society achieves on the basis of money.

You say that the “Anarcho-syndicalists form confederations and have representatives of all workgroups meet to convey the products and needs of each group so they can plan the distribution of the products of their labor based on need.” If they directed production according to one overall confederation, of which the other confederations were local bodies, then this might not be too far from the Marxist description of classless society, the communist goal. However, in practice the anarcho-syndicalists also have a multitude of these confederations and workgroups each of which can dispose of its own goods; you yourself talk of “confederations” in the plural. This is what I referred to in my article as “weak federations of local councils”. And as you point out in your next sentence, what you hope will be distribution according to need involves exchange or barter. You also referred to the practice of the CNT in the Spanish Civil War. When it organized production in Barcelona, it made use of a patchwork system including a Central Labor Bank, credit, cash purchases, requisitioning etc. One of its commissions referred to the difficulties that came up between various small workgroups that regarded themselves as owning their own means of production, saying that “By regarding each collective as private property, and not merely as its usufruct, the interests of the rest of the collective have been disregarded.” (Miller, p. 165. who in turn footnotes the quotation to Broué and Témime. *Revolution and Civil War*, p. 163)

Thus, in the society you picture, the ownership of the means

of production is fragmented among individual workgroups. There is still exchange and barter. Although you don't realize it, this society would still be subordinate to marketplace forces. The reason you can't get beyond the marketplace is that you fear that any overall coordination by society as a whole must be a state. In reality, the bourgeois state is not just any authority, but an authority by which one class reinforces its oppression of another and does so by developing a bureaucracy that stands above society. You cannot conceive in theory of society directing its affairs in common without an oppressive state developing. Nor can you conceive of the working class temporarily making use of a revolutionary state to suppress the former exploiters and pave the way for a classless (and stateless) society. You are sure that the dictatorship of the proletariat—a working class rule which transforms the very economic basis of society—is the same as fascist dictatorship.

You assert that "Under Bolshevism the state owns everything — not the workers." Actually, the communist idea is to eliminate the concept of ownership of the means of production (not personal items) by any group or apparatus other than society as a whole. You don't really believe this is possible, and can only see this as a fascist dictatorship. And so, you retreat to the idea of maintaining ownership by individual workgroups, but you don't realize that this means maintaining the rule of the marketplace. You see capitalism only in its highly developed forms, like GE and ITT, but not in the soil of exchange that gives rise to these corporate giants. This is why you protest my article pointing out that anarchism doesn't get beyond the marketplace, although you yourself use the concepts of ownership and exchange in your reply. That is why anarchism looks to ownership of the means of production by individuals or communes or small workgroups or confederations (depending on the particular anarchist).

You have been kind enough to send Tim Hall, editor of *Struggle* magazine, a number of anarchist writings (including some by Bakunin), which he has shown me. These writings help show what you are thinking about, and I found them interesting and appreciated that you sent them. One of them was a catalog of the Insurgency Culture Collective which describes briefly the views of your collective. It lists three examples of "successful anarchist societies", including the one organized by Zapata (the Morelos Commune). Actually, Zapata was hardly an anarchist, although various anarchists sympathized with him, and I rather doubt that you would agree with his political and organizational methods, but that's not the main point. The issue is your collective regards this as one of its model societies. Well, let's see. Zapata led a mass peasant struggle for radical land reform, distribution of land to the tillers, rights for the local villages, etc. If this had been carried out throughout Mexico, rather than the Morelos Commune being crushed, this would have been of tremendous importance and would have done much to improve the lives of the peasants. But it didn't go beyond the marketplace. It would have freed the peasants from the old plantation owners, but it would have dramatically accelerated the development of class divisions among the peasants themselves. Far from overthrowing capitalism, the Zapatista land reform would

have accelerated the development of a capitalist Mexico. You confuse revolutionary-democratic reform with the abolition of capitalism because the anarchist framework doesn't grasp what capitalist relations really are. Instead it is necessary to study how the economy actually develops, and not just reason from the point of view of general principles about avoiding authority. For example, we have carried a number of articles showing what the evolution of Mexican agricultural collectives has given rise to. These articles were based on factual studies of Mexico. They have concerned the hamstrung "ejido" collectives, but the same economic trends would have made themselves felt in the Morelos Commune, if it hadn't been crushed.

You also raise the issue of organization, and say that anarchists aren't opposed to organization, just authority. But this is just playing with words. Just as anarchism doesn't see the marketplace in barter and the exchange of products between small workgroups, it doesn't see authority in the type of organization it advocates. In fact, authority existed during the land reform under Zapata, and it existed in the anarchist agricultural collectives in Spain. Meanwhile anarchism's deep opposition to solid proletarian organization can be seen in your opposition to any political party, as well as in your skepticism that the workers as a whole can ever run the economy, rather than having the ownership of the means of production divided up among a multitude of workgroups.

It's true that today, in the midst of proletarian disorganization, the parties we see around the world are pretty disgusting. But this will only be changed when the proletariat finds its voice in the new world situation and revolutionary proletarian parties are built up once again. The situation won't be changed by trying to avoid all "authority". Indeed, the anarchist leader Bakunin advocated that a secret leading group, unknown to the masses whose activity it directed, was acceptable, because it was not a public "authority". That was his idea of organization without authority. Bakunin claimed that secret manipulation was "not imposed on anyone" precisely because it was secret. In this case, anarchist opposition to all authority led to the use of a particularly repulsive form of authority.

The distrust of organization leads anarchists to advocate that ruling classes and class oppression spring from political parties and states, rather than seeing that the economic soil of exchange and private ownership creates the class divisions that underlie oppression. You think that by regarding the state as the source of oppression, you have emancipated yourself from belief in the state. But you thereby make the state and political authority into the most powerful and independent forces in human history, when actually the state was created by and in turn reinforces definite class and economic forces. As a result of your analysis, you end up in the position I pointed out in my article in *CV* #4, that identifies oppression and "the people's subjugation to a ruling class" primarily with the government.

I look forward to hearing from you again, and hearing more about your views about the problem of the marketplace.

For uprooting the capitalist marketplace,
Joseph Green, editor, *CV* □

Marxism & the proletarian party

In memory of Engels: 1820-1895

by Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit

Last November was the centenary of Engels' death. Side by side with Marx, he worked his whole life to bring about a new social system, a system without exploitation, the classless society of communism. But the way Marx and Engels envisioned this society, the way they saw this society coming about, and the materialist basis they gave to the theoretical side of the movement, all stood against the accepted wisdom of the left-wing forces of their day. At every step, they were faced with struggle against petty-bourgeois moralism, fashionable leftism, anarchism, and other dead-ends.

Engels became an activist in the exciting years leading up to the all-European revolutionary wave of 1848 against the monarchies. He and Marx threw themselves into the workers' movement as well as into the general revolutionary movement. But when the revolutionary wave receded, and the old forces were still at the helm of Europe, they were not discouraged by the failure of the movement. Yet the revolutionary decline was long and deep. The French workers were to languish under the restored empire of Louis Bonaparte until 1871. The German toilers would languish under the Hohenzollern dynasty until the end of World War in 1918. The old revolutionary organizations of 1848-49 were dispersed or dissolved. It was a smash-up of progressive hopes and aspirations on a European-wide scale. But Marx and Engels neither abandoned activity, nor pretended that the revolutionary wave was continuing, nor reconciled to growing capitalism. Instead they summed up the lessons of the defeat of the movement. They also carried out a protracted study of the economic changes that were driving history forward even as the reactionaries rejoiced in their triumph. And they encouraged each new effort of the proletariat to get organized, no matter how different these efforts were from the old forms of the movement in which Marx and Engels had first worked. They contributed to reorganizing the proletariat on a new basis, inspiring the formation of the First International, and in the case of Engels, contributing to the Second International as well.

Marx and Engels worked for many years, but they never lived to see any major attempt at building socialism. In 1871, the French working class formed the famous Paris Commune, which Engels upheld as the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹ But

it lasted only 70 days before it was crushed by military force, and a ring of bayonets isolated it in Paris for all that time. The first major attempt to build socialism was the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, over twenty years after the death of Engels and almost a third of a century after the death of Marx. Yet Marx and Engels never abandoned the struggle for the working class to transform the world, never set it aside as the folly of youth, never became wise old men who knew better than to believe that there could be a new world free of the capitalist marketplace.

Today there are those who want results immediately. If the world revolutionary wave of the 1960-70's is but a memory, if the attempts to form revolutionary parties of the proletariat have collapsed, if the old trade unions are in decay, they think it is time to throw in the towel. They only want to build whatever is achievable now. Some blame their inactivity on the masses, while others still leaflet and pontificate a bit, but are more concerned with being in line with leftist fashion than in striving to build up a new proletarian revolutionary party. Some want guarantees that the proletariat is still a revolutionary force. They all cannot see beyond the restricted horizons of today. Their eyes are closed to the value of upholding communist principle in times of stagnant politics like now, and they have no feel for how such work would fit in to the broad sweep of the historical advance of the working class. How they are shamed by the memory of Marx and Engels who worked over decades to build up proletarian organization, develop mass revolutionary parties, and reorganize the proletariat for a socialist attempt that would not be made until long after their deaths! Marx and Engels realized that so long as property ruled human society, so long as private interests "owned" the productive forces of humanity, just so long would the proletarian struggle continue and just so long would building the revolutionary movement be on the agenda. Marx and Engels realized that capitalism and its crimes were themselves the guarantee that the movement would rebound.

Those who have surrendered to the demoralization spread by the current neo-conservative ideological atmosphere say that the proletariat is not what it once was, the nature of the capitalist corporations is changing, imperialism doesn't look like what it used to be, etc. But Marxism has always been the socialist

¹Engels wrote: "Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the

¹(...continued)

Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat". (See his introduction of March 18, 1891 to the third German edition of Marx's book about the Commune, *The Civil War in France*.)

theory most adapted to a world in constant change. From the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 to their later writings, Marx and Engels based themselves not on the economic and political conditions of 1848 remaining static until the new society was established, but on the constant revolutionization of the workplace, of the classes in society, of whole politics. Marx and Engels not only traced the evolution of pre-capitalist systems to capitalism, but they paid vigilant attention to each change in capitalism. For example, the third volume of *Capital*, written by Marx and completed by Engels, traced the continuing evolution of capitalism, the development of the monopolies of their day, the resultant changes in class relations, etc. In their work, they also traced the evolution of the working class itself. They hailed the advent of the proletariat working in large factories in England, but at the start of their lives most workers were in small workplaces. Eventually the big factory proletariat spread widely, replacing the situation originally facing Marx and Engels. And then, in the days when the Third International was communist and not corrupted by Stalinism (Soviet revisionism), this proletariat formed the strongest base of the revolutionary communist parties. Today the world economy continues to change; monopoly is taking on new forms; the size and organization of factories are changing yet again—but these changes are not the death of Marxism-Leninism, but the driving forces that will lead to yet another attempt at revolution. The basic class contradictions between worker and exploiter are still here and are becoming sharper, and this is another sign of continuing value of the Marxist theory.

Nowadays, much of what Engels said is taken as a platitude, and then discarded. When Engels said that the proletariat was not just a suffering class, but a class destined to overthrow the old society, this was something new. Previously the factory proletariat was regarded as a repulsive degeneration of modern society, something whose suffering should motivate humanitarians to tinker with society or to hold on to patriarchal and other pre-capitalist forms. But Marx and Engels held that not noble-minded individuals, not isolated utopian experiments, but the class struggle led by these proletarians will liberate society. Today this is taken as old-hat, and yet it is not followed. Many swear by the proletariat, and yet hope against hope that the small peasant plot will bring prosperity to the countryside; or think that the proletariat can only follow the present-day reformist trade unions; or can't see further than squabbling little groups "joined" together in an amorphous jumble. And there are those leftists who are afraid of the advance of technology, and of the growing contradictions it gives rise to, and hope to go back to small collectives or to old technology or even to patriarchalism (which is somehow to be purged of male supremacy).

Engels pointed to private property and the anarchy of production as foundations of capitalism that must be eliminated if the class division of society is to be ended. Some people claim today that the experience of the revisionist countries disproves this. They claim that private property isn't so important, because the state-capitalist regimes supposedly eliminated private interests and anarchic production and yet were still oppressive. Some claim that this shows that market economies are the best that humanity can achieve, while most Trotskyists argue that the state-capitalist regimes were basically socialist

and only needed a "political revolution" at top to convert them into the future society. Both are blind to the real economic history of the last century. The splitting up of revisionist economies into competing cliques and groupings, noted by all serious studies, showed that the fake "communist" regimes hadn't eliminated private interests and ownership, but maintained them, although in a somewhat different form than in the Western market economies. The gross irrationalities in the revisionist countries show that there was the clash of competing interests. The Marxist view of capitalism has again been confirmed by the state capitalist experience.

Today, we are living in a time in which the old revolutionary organizations and previous proletarian organizations are dead or in decay, and most of what's left is likely to disintegrate even more before there is a revival. But the victory songs of the capitalists are fading away as stagnation and reaction grip the capitalist world. The faster the capitalist economies develop, the more cutbacks there are and the more contradictions break out. Sooner or later revolutionary proletarian organization will start to develop in new ways, and the class struggle will arise again on the basis of the world reorganization of the economy. Activists are faced with a choice: contributing to a reorganization of the revolutionary proletariat, or trying to save a few scraps of the old movement. They are faced with either taking up revolutionary science and seeking to rebuild the movement on a firmer base than in the past, as Marx and Engels did after the collapse of the revolutions of 1848-49, or lapsing into sentimental dreams of the past punctuated by intermittent short-lived hopes that the bankrupt forces will do something. There will be no progress until a scientific attitude pervades the movement and attention is devoted to reorganizing the proletariat. Marxism-Leninism is the only theory that can provide a basis for this, but it must be a Marxism purged of the revisionist corruption and enriched with a study of the latest world developments. It is anti-revisionist communism that will provide the basis for the realization of the cause which Marx and Engels stood for.

Below we print Lenin's article on the occasion of Engels' death. It was written during the heyday of the Second (social-democratic) International, which was originally one of the great attempts at organizing the proletariat for a conscious attempt at revolution. The First International had electrified the militant proletariat and was a major step in proletarian organization, but much of its membership consisted of trade unions enrolled en masse, sometimes without even consulting the members. Parties of the Second International were supposed to be based on workers enrolling individually, and the members were supposed to have a certain minimum of activity and a certain amount of ideological unity. The Second International changed forever the conception of a mass political party. The Second International would eventually collapse as a revolutionary organization, but not before giving birth to a left-wing which would give rise to the Communist International, the next great attempt at proletarian organization. Today we are faced with helping lay the foundations for the next wave of proletarian organization. In this task, the example of the life of Marx and Engels and the guidance of the communist theory whose foundations they laid, will be a valuable heritage for activists around the world. □

Frederick Engels by V.I. Lenin

Lenin wrote this in August 1895, and it appeared in *The Worker (Rabotnik)* #1-2 sometime in 1896. (*Collected Works*, vol. 2, pp. 15-27.) The two footnotes below are Lenin's.

What a torch of reason ceased to burn,
What a heart has ceased to beat!
[—N.A. Nekrasov]

On August 5 (new style), 1895, Frederick Engels died in London. After his friend Karl Marx (who died in 1883), Engels was the finest scholar and teacher of the modern proletariat in the whole civilized world. From the time that fate brought Karl Marx and Frederick Engels together, the two friends devoted their life's work to a common cause. And so to understand what Frederick Engels has done for the proletariat, one must have a clear idea of the significance of Marx's teaching and work for the development of the contemporary working-class movement. Marx and Engels were the first to show that the working class and its demands are a necessary outcome of the present economic system, which together with the bourgeoisie inevitably creates and organizes the proletariat. They showed that it is not the well-meaning efforts of noble-minded individuals, but the class struggle of the organized proletariat that will deliver humanity from the evils which now oppress it. In their scientific works, Marx and Engels were the first to explain that socialism is not the invention of dreamers, but the final aim and necessary result of the development of the productive forces in modern society. All recorded history hitherto has been a history of class struggle, of the succession of the rule and victory of certain social classes over others. And this will continue until the foundations of class struggle and of class domination—private property and anarchic social production—disappear. The interests of the proletariat demand the destruction of these foundations, and therefore the conscious class struggle of the organized workers must be directed against them. And every class struggle is a political struggle.

These views of Marx and Engels have now been adopted by all proletarians who are fighting for their emancipation. But when in the forties the two friends took part in the socialist literature and the social movements of their time, they were absolutely novel. There were many people, talented and without talent, honest and dishonest, who, absorbed in the struggle for political freedom, in the struggle against the despotism of kings, police and priests, failed to observe the antagonism between the interests of the bourgeoisie and those of the proletariat. These people would not entertain the idea of the workers acting as an independent social force. On the other hand, there were many dreamers, some of them geniuses, who thought that it was only necessary to convince the rulers and the governing classes of the injustice of the contemporary social order, and it would then be easy to establish peace and general well-being on earth. They dreamt of a socialism without struggle. Lastly, nearly all of the socialists of that time and friends of the working class generally regarded the proletariat only as an *ulcer*, and observed with horror how it grew with the growth of industry. They all, therefore, sought for a means to stop the development of industry and of the proletariat, to stop the "wheel of history." Marx and

Engels did not share the general fear of the development of the proletariat; on the contrary, they placed all their hopes on its continued growth. The more proletarians there are, the greater is their strength as a revolutionary class, and the nearer and more possible does socialism become. The services rendered by Marx and Engels to the working class may be expressed in a few words thus: they taught the working class to know itself and be conscious of itself, and they substituted science for dreams.

That is why the name and life of Engels should be known to every worker. That is why in this collection of articles, the aim of which, as of all our publications, is to awaken class-consciousness in the Russian workers, we must give a sketch of the life and work of Frederick Engels, one of the two great teachers of the modern proletariat.

Engels was born in 1820 in Barmen, in the Rhine Province, of the kingdom of Prussia. His father was a manufacturer. In 1838 Engels, without having completed his high-school studies, was forced by family circumstances to enter a commercial house in Bremen as a clerk. Commercial affairs did not prevent Engels from pursuing his scientific and political education. He had come to hate autocracy and the tyranny of bureaucrats while still at high school. The study of philosophy led him further. At the time Hegel's teaching dominated German philosophy, and Engels became his follower. Although Hegel himself was an admirer of the autocratic Prussian state, in whose service he was as a professor at Berlin University, Hegel's *teachings* were revolutionary. Hegel's faith in human reason and its rights, and the fundamental thesis of Hegelian philosophy that the universe is undergoing a constant process of change and development, led some of the disciples of the Berlin philosophy—those who refused to accept the existing situation—to the idea that the struggle against this situation, the struggle against existing wrong and prevalent evil, is also rooted in the universal law of eternal development. If all things develop, if institutions of one kind give place to others, why should the autocracy of the Prussian king or of the Russian tsar, the enrichment of an insignificant minority at the expense of the vast majority, or the domination of the bourgeoisie over the people, continue forever? Hegel's philosophy spoke of the development of nature, of man, and of human, social relations. While retaining Hegel's idea of the eternal process of development,¹ Marx and Engels rejected the preconceived idealist view; turning to life, they saw that it is not the development of mind that explains the development of nature but that, on the contrary, the explanation of mind must be derived from nature, from matter . . . Unlike Hegel and the other Hegelians, Marx and Engels were materialists. Regarding the world and humanity materialistically, they perceived that just as material causes underlie all natural phenomena, so the development of human society is conditioned by the

¹Marx and Engels frequently pointed out that in their intellectual development they were much indebted to the great German philosophers, particularly to Hegel. "Without German philosophy," Engels says, "scientific socialism would never have come into being."

development of material forces, the productive forces. On the development of the productive forces depend the relations into which men enter with one another in the production of the things required for the satisfaction of human needs. And in these relations lie the explanation of all the phenomena of social life, human aspirations, ideas and laws. The development of the productive forces creates social relations based upon private property, but now we see that this same development of the productive forces deprives the majority of their property and concentrates it in the hands of an insignificant minority. It abolishes property, the basis of the modern social order, it itself strives towards the very aim which the socialists have set themselves. All the socialists have to do is to realize which social force, owing to its position in modern society, is interested in bringing socialism about, and to impart to this force the consciousness of its interests and of its historical task. This force is the proletariat. Engels got to know the proletariat in England, in the center of English industry, Manchester, where he settled in 1842, entering the service of a commercial firm of which his father was a shareholder. Here Engels not only sat in the factory office but wandered about the slums in which the workers were cooped up, and saw their poverty and misery with his own eyes. But he did not confine himself to personal observations. He read all that had been revealed before him about the condition of the British working class and carefully studied all the official documents he could lay his hands on. The fruit of these studies and observations was the book which appeared in 1845: *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. We have already mentioned what was the chief service rendered by Engels in writing *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Even before Engels, many people had described the sufferings of the proletariat and had pointed to the necessity of helping it. Engels was the *first* to say that the proletariat is *not only* a suffering class; that it is, in fact, the disgraceful economic condition of the proletariat that drives it irresistibly forward and compels it to fight for its ultimate emancipation. And the fighting proletariat *will help itself*. The political movement of the working class will inevitably lead the workers to realize that their only salvation lies in socialism. On the other hand, socialism will become a force only when it becomes the aim of the *political* struggle of the working class. Such are the main ideas of Engels' book on the condition of the working class in England, ideas which have now been adopted by all thinking and fighting proletarians, but which at that time were entirely new. These ideas were set out in a book written in absorbing style and filled with most authentic and shocking pictures of the misery of the English proletariat. The book was a terrible indictment of capitalism and the bourgeoisie and created a profound impression. Engels' book began to be quoted everywhere as presenting the best picture of the condition of the modern proletariat. And, in fact, neither before 1845 nor after has there appeared so striking and truthful a picture of the misery of the working class.

It was not until he came to England that Engels became a socialist. In Manchester he established contacts with people active in the English labor movement at the time and began to write for English socialist publications. In 1844, while on his way back to Germany, he became acquainted in Paris with Marx, with whom he had already started to correspond. In

Paris, under the influence of the French socialists and French life, Marx had also become a socialist. Here the friends jointly wrote a book entitled *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*. This book, which appeared a year before *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and the greater part of which was written by Marx, contained the foundations of revolutionary materialist socialism, the main ideas of which we have expounded above. The holy family is a facetious nickname for the Bauer brothers, the philosophers, and their followers. These gentlemen preached a criticism which stood above all reality, above parties and politics, which rejected all practical activity, and which only "critically" contemplated the surrounding world and the events going on within it. These gentlemen, the Bauers, looked down on the proletariat as an uncritical mass. Marx and Engels vigorously opposed this absurd and harmful tendency. In the name of a real, human person—the worker, trampled down by the ruling classes and the state—they demanded, not contemplation, but a struggle for a better order of society. They, of course, regarded the proletariat as the force that is capable of waging this struggle and that is interested in it. Even before the appearance of *The Holy Family*, Engels had published in Marx's and Ruge's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* his "Critical Essays on Political Economy," in which he examined the principal phenomena of the contemporary economic order from a socialist standpoint, regarding them as necessary consequences of the rule of private property. Contact with Engels was undoubtedly a factor in Marx's decision to study political economy, the science in which his works have produced a veritable revolution.

From 1845 to 1847 Engels lived in Brussels and Paris, combining scientific work with practical activities among the German workers in Brussels and Paris. Here Marx and Engels established contact with the secret German Communist League, which commissioned them to expound the main principles of the socialism they had worked out. Thus arose the famous *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of Marx and Engels, published in 1848. This little booklet is worth whole volumes: to this day its spirit inspires and guides the entire organized and fighting proletariat of the civilized world.

The revolution of 1848, which broke out first in France and then spread to other West-European countries, brought Marx and Engels back to their native country. Here, in Rhenish Prussia, they took charge of the democratic *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* published in Cologne. The two friends were the heart and soul of all revolutionary-democratic aspirations in Rhenish Prussia. They fought to the last ditch in defense of freedom and of the interests of the people against the forces of reaction. The latter, as we know, gained the upper hand. The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was suppressed. Marx, who during his exile had lost his Prussian citizenship, was deported; Engels took part in the armed popular uprising, fought for liberty in three battles, and after the defeat of the rebels fled, via Switzerland, to London.

Marx also settled in London. Engels soon became a clerk again, and then a shareholder, in the Manchester commercial firm in which he had worked in the forties. Until 1870 he lived in Manchester, while Marx lived in London, but this did not prevent their maintaining a most lively interchange of ideas: they corresponded almost daily. In this correspondence the two friends exchanged views and discoveries and continued to

collaborate in working out scientific socialism. In 1870 Engels moved to London, and their joint intellectual life, of the most strenuous nature, continued until 1883, when Marx died. Its fruit was, on Marx's side, *Capital*, the greatest work on political economy of our age, and on Engels' side, a number of works both large and small. Marx worked on the analysis of the complex phenomena of capitalist economy. Engels, in simply written works, often of a polemical character, dealt with more general scientific problems and with diverse phenomena of the past and present in the spirit of the materialist conception of history and Marx's economy theory. Of Engels' works we shall mention: the polemical work against Dühring (analyzing highly important problems in the domain of philosophy, natural science and the social sciences).² *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (translated into Russian, published in St. Petersburg, 3rd ed., 1895), *Ludwig Feuerbach* (Russian translation and notes by G. Plekhanov, Geneva, 1892), an article on the foreign policy of the Russian Government (translated into Russian in the *Geneva Sotsial-Demokrat*, Nos. 1 and 2), splendid articles on the housing question, and finally, two small but very valuable articles on Russia's economic development (*Frederick Engels on Russia*, translated into Russian by Zasulich, Geneva, 1894). Marx died before he could put the final touches to his vast work on capital. The draft, however, was already finished, and after the death of his friend, Engels undertook the onerous task of preparing and publishing the second and third volumes of *Capital*. He published Volume II in 1885 and Volume III in 1894 (his death prevented the preparation of Volume IV). These two volumes entailed a vast amount of labor. Adler, the Austrian Social-Democrat, has rightly remarked that by publishing volumes II and III of *Capital* Engels erected a majestic monument to the genius who had been his friend, a monument on which, without intending it, he indelibly carved his own name. Indeed these two volumes of *Capital* are the work of two men: Marx and Engels. Old legends contain various moving instances of friendship. The European proletariat may say that its science was created by two scholars and fighters, whose relationship to each other surpasses the most moving stories of the ancients about human friendship. Engels always—and, on the whole, quite justly—placed himself after Marx. "In Marx's lifetime," he wrote to an old friend, "I played second fiddle." His love for the living Marx, and his reverence for the memory of the dead Marx were boundless. This stern fighter and austere thinker possessed a deeply loving soul.

After the movement of 1848-49, Marx and Engels in exile did not confine themselves to scientific research. In 1864 Marx founded the International Working Men's Association, and led this society for a whole decade. Engels also took an active part in its affairs. The work of the International Association, which, in accordance with Marx's idea, united proletarians of all

²This is a wonderfully rich and instructive book. Unfortunately, only a small portion of it, containing a historical outline of the development of socialism, has been translated into Russian (*The Development of Scientific Socialism*, 2nd ed., Geneva, 1892).

countries, was of tremendous significance in the development of the working-class movement. But even with the closing down of the International Association in the seventies, the unifying role of Marx and Engels did not cease. On the contrary, it may be said that their importance as the spiritual leaders of the working-class movement grew continuously, because the movement itself grew uninterruptedly. After the death of Marx, Engels continued alone as the counselor and leader of the European socialists. His advice and directions were sought for equally by the German socialists, whose strength, despite government persecution, grew rapidly and steadily, and by representatives of backward countries, such as the Spaniards, Rumanians and Russians, who were obliged to ponder and weigh their first steps. They all drew on the rich store of knowledge and experience of Engels in his old age.

Marx and Engels, who both knew Russian and read Russian books, took a lively interest in the country, followed the Russian revolutionary movement with sympathy and maintained contact with Russian revolutionaries. They both became socialists after being *democrats*, and the democratic feeling of *hatred* for political despotism was exceedingly strong in them. This direct political feeling, combined with a profound theoretical understanding of the connection between political despotism and economic oppression, and also their rich experience of life, made Marx and Engels uncommonly responsive *politically*. That is why the heroic struggle of the handful of Russian revolutionaries against the mighty tsarist government evoked a most sympathetic echo in the hearts of these tried revolutionaries. On the other hand, the tendency, for the sake of illusory economic advantages, to turn away from the most immediate and important task of the Russian socialists, namely, the winning of political freedom, naturally appeared suspicious to them and was even regarded by them as a direct betrayal of the great cause of the social revolution. "The emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself"—Marx and Engels constantly taught. But in order to fight for its economic emancipation, the proletariat must win itself certain *political* rights. Moreover, Marx and Engels clearly saw that a political revolution in Russia would be of tremendous significance to the West-European working-class movement as well. Autocratic Russia had always been a bulwark of European reaction in general. The extraordinarily favorable international position enjoyed by Russia as a result of the war of 1870 [the Franco-Prussian war], which for a long time sowed discord between Germany and France, of course only enhanced the importance of autocratic Russia as a reactionary force. Only a free Russia, a Russia that had no need either to oppress the Poles, Finns, Germans, Armenians or any other small nations, or constantly to set France and Germany at loggerheads, would enable modern Europe, rid of the burden of war, to breathe freely, would weaken all the reactionary elements in Europe and strengthen the European working class. That was why Engels ardently desired the establishment of political freedom in Russia for the sake of the progress of the working-class movement in the West as well. In him the Russian revolutionaries have lost their best friend.

Let us always honor the memory of Frederick Engels, a great fighter and teacher of the proletariat! □

The concept of the party—in the days of Lenin and Luxemburg and today

by Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit

In the last issue of the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* (#8, Oct. 1995), Barb continues her series of articles on Trotskyism. She has two articles, "The Trotsky School of Confusionization" and "Luxemburg, 'Semi-anarchism'—and Trotsky".¹ The second of these two articles concentrates on the question of the proletarian party. The best parts of the article are where she tries to describe Luxemburg's tendency to denigrate the importance of the conscious building of party organization. Hopefully, some of the quotations from Luxemburg are accurate, but most of the rest of Barb's article is political fiction. She gets many basic facts wrong and didn't bother doing a serious study of the subjects she deals with. She also goes overboard in identifying Luxemburg with Trotsky. All this is a shame, since otherwise one could learn a good deal from pondering what is right and what wrong with Luxemburg's views.

As far as her own view towards the party, Barb presents herself as an ardent party loyalist. Yet her view of the communist party is repulsive:

- she opposes Luxemburg for talking of the "independent action" of the masses;
- she opposes Luxemburg saying that a proletarian revolution "must have the support of the majority of the workers";
- she chides Luxemburg for talking of the masses inventing methods of struggle, and believes that talk of the masses making the revolution contradicts the role of the party;
- she repeatedly chides Luxemburg for being upset at the dictatorial rule of the top leaders, barely mentioning that there is something wrong with Luxemburg's description of this as the party method;
- she cites general statements about "action" as being somehow contradictory to organizing a party.

So Barb ends up painting the picture of a bureaucratic party, where initiative comes only from the top, and which imposes itself and its revolution upon the proletariat. Who would want to support such a party? Wouldn't it make more sense to oppose such a party? Indeed, perhaps Barb's abhorrent picture of party life explains why, although she condemns Rosa Luxemburg for not seeing the organizing role of the party, Barb herself is not too keen on building communist organization today. She, and the political trend she adheres to today, that of the *Chicago Workers' Voice*, have been disillusioned about parties—or any organization beyond that of the local circle—ever since the

¹I will abbreviate these two articles as TSC and LSA. Note that the endnotes in LSA are misnumbered. The reference numbers in the text start with 9 instead of 1, so for example number 29 actually refers to the endnote 21 at the back of the article. I will refer to such notes with a double number, such as 29/21.

collapse of the Marxist-Leninist Party in 1993. Barb has one standard for Rosa Luxemburg and another standard for activist work today.

◆ Barb repeatedly chides Luxemburg for not seeing the importance of the party, but the *CWV* no longer sees work towards the reconstruction of an anti-revisionist party as an issue in the left today. It omits reference to the party in its picture of the revolution. For example, as the *CWV*'s Oleg put it in an article on Mexico, he is "leaving out of this discussion the whole question of the need for a revolutionary working class Communist Party in Mexico. . . . We have just had so much trouble organizing such a party in the U.S. that I don't feel like giving much advice to Mexican activists on this question."²

◆ Barb chides Luxemburg for not seeing the point of the "statutes of the constitution which set the standards for admission to the party".³ And true enough, a party should have a definite set of principles it stands for and which all members support. But the *CWV* has no statement of what it is and what it stands for. And in the split between the *CWV* and the comrades who now form the Communist Voice Organization, who had previously been united in a grouping informally called the "minority", the *CWV* denied the need for the "minority" to have a statement saying what it is, or even for it to have a name.

◆ She chides Luxemburg on the need for definite organizational clarity about who is in or out of the party. But what about the *CWV*? She is supposedly an editor of *CWVTJ*; at the same time, she refuses responsibility for any position of the *CWV*, saying that she has no particular association with it.⁴

◆ She says that "Luxemburg simply could not resolve the dilemma between the Party as 'dictatorial' or the Party as 'tailist'".⁵ But the only way *CWV* gets out of this dilemma is by leaving aside the party altogether.

Rosa Luxemburg, despite her mistakes concerning the role of the party, joined the revolutionary proletarian parties of her day and eventually helped organize the German Communist

²"Crisis in Mexico," *CWVTJ* #7, p. 11, col. 3.

³LSA, p. 34, col. 2.

⁴Barb has worked with the *CWV* group for a number of years. Julie (*CWV*) wrote on Feb. 10, 1995, claiming that Barb helped edit the *CWVTJ*, and opposing having elections for the editorial board on the grounds that Barb and some other comrades probably wouldn't be elected. (See the *CWVTJ* Special Issue of March 7, 1995.) Barb, on the other hand, claims she has no particular relationship to the *CWV* group, is just as close politically to me and other comrades as to them, and has merely written some material that has been published by them. (See "Barb replies on 'Dealing with Trotsky'" in *Communist Voice* #3, Aug. 1, 1995.)

⁵LSA, p. 38, col. 2.

Party. Barb's *CWV*, however, is running away from independent communist organization as fast as possible, and sees its role as simply floating among various left organizations. Barb may support the communist parties of the past, when they were large and had some supposedly infallible leaders (as Barb presents Lenin). But for today, when the proletariat is disorganized and when only ordinary activists stand for building an anti-revisionist communist trend, Barb abandons all the principles that she holds up to Rosa Luxemburg. For Barb, every issue of revolutionary work was cut-and-dried in the past, but none of them apply to the present.

And yet, if there is no work today to lay the foundations for a party, then the reemergence of a proletarian party will be set back indefinitely. It doesn't just spring up by itself in an upsurge without preliminary work. As Lenin pointed out:

“. . . In the spring of 1905 our Party was a league of underground circles; in the autumn it became the party of the *millions* of the proletariat. Did this happen 'all at once', gentlemen, or did it take ten years of slow, steady, unobtrusive and quiet work to *prepare* and ensure such a result?"⁶

The Leninist party

I think that Barb's own ambivalence about the party today is one reason she has a hard time dealing with what's wrong with Luxemburg's views. Again and again she can only deal with Luxemburg by ignoring Luxemburg's concrete views and simply insisting that Luxemburg should have said that the party organizes everything. For example, she writes that Luxemburg's idea is that the party

"assumes different functions at different points in the historically necessitated revolutionary process — at times, educator, propagandist, technical advisor, tactician, guide, cheerleader. But one thing the revolutionary party is not for Luxemburg is the organizer of the class struggle, an essential defining characteristic which is not dependent on specific points in the revolutionary process."⁷

So here Barb draws a line between a party being the guide, tactician, educator, and agitator (cheerleader) of the class struggle, and it being the organizer of the class struggle. But what is this difference?

In fact, Luxemburg did have a passive view of the role of the party, but it cannot be explained as the difference between being a guide, tactician, educator etc. and being an organizer. Barb's method of "refuting" Luxemburg shows at least as much confusion about the party as Luxemburg has. In fact, it is in some respects the same confusion, for Luxemburg's denigration of solid party organization stemmed in part from fear that a party would have the bureaucratic standpoint that Barb depicts as proper party life.

⁶"Some Features of the Present Collapse," *Collected Works*, vol. 15, p. 154.

⁷LSA, p. 38, col. 2, underlining as in the original.

So to deal with Luxemburg's stand or Barb's articles, it is necessary to discuss what the relation of a communist party should really be to the masses. It is a gross error to counterpose the organizing role of the party to the creative role of the masses, whether in the name of the masses as Luxemburg does or in the name of the party as Barb does.

In his book *'Left-Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin lays stress on how the Bolshevik party was built up. Yet this is also the book in which he talks at length about united front tactics (although without using the term "united front").⁸ It's not an accident that this book is important for describing both party-building and mass tactics. In Lenin's view, they were closely related. The democratic centralism and discipline of the party cannot be built up as things in themselves, but only in the course of the proletarian struggle.

Thus in Ch. II of *'Left-Wing Communism* Lenin talks about the need for discipline and centralism. But, Lenin asks, how can such a disciplined party be built? Can it simply be declared or brought into existence at will? No. Lenin stressed that, among the conditions needed to bring it about, was the party's ability "to link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses of the toilers—primarily with the proletariat, *but also with the non-proletarian toiling masses.*" (Emphasis as in the original)

Naturally, this means to merge with them in their class struggle. Moreover, Lenin points out, another prerequisite for the strengthening of the party is

"the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided that the broadest masses have been convinced *by their own experience* that they are correct."

How far from Lenin's view of the party is Barb's critique of Luxemburg! Barb points accusingly at any reference by Luxemburg to mass initiative, while Lenin is convinced that the ability of the party to link itself with this mass initiative is a condition for its centralism, its discipline, its strength.

Luxemburg made serious mistakes concerning the role of the party, but these mistakes have to be characterized more carefully than Barb does. However Barb's picture of the party does reflect the practice of some parties. The Bolshevik party in the Soviet Union eventually degenerated into a revisionist ruling party of a state-capitalist country. To understand either Luxemburg's errors or the travesty that the Soviet revisionists made of the party, it helps to consider what the communist party should actually be. The next sections of this article will look one by one at some of the basic features of a Leninist party which Barb negates.

The independent action of the masses

Barb finds the roots of Rosa Luxemburg's errors in that she stood for the independent action of the masses. After showing

⁸I discussed this in my article "What's left of united front tactics when you take out anti-revisionism" in the last issue of *CV*, vol. 1 #5, Nov. 15, 1995.

that Luxemburg denounced Lenin's conception of the party in 1903-4, Barb tries to explain what Luxemburg's alternate view was. Barb writes

"So what then were Luxemburg's views of the nature of the Social Democratic Party? She conceived of SD as the first political movement in history to reckon on the 'organization and independent action of the masses' . . ." ⁹

So Barb holds there is a contradiction between the party's organizing role and the independent movement of the masses. When Barb says that the Party organizes the class struggle, she conceives of this as apart from the proletariat's independent action. And by so doing, Barb abandons the Marxist conception. She shows that she is fully enmeshed in the present anti-party atmosphere, which thinks that "independent action" of the proletariat is action independent of political organization, not action independent of the bourgeoisie.

Marxism holds that to overthrow capitalism requires the initiative and mass action of the working class. The working class only becomes a militant class, rather than just a suffering class, when it begins to take action independent of the exploiters. And when the workers rise in class struggle, this inevitably becomes a political struggle.

But this building of an independent proletarian movement is not just a question of one worker grumbling to another over the dinner table. It is a matter of common action against the exploiters. The workers only have their numbers and their class consciousness and their sense of organization to counterpose to the money, the thugs (in and out of uniform), the corporate power, and the state machine of the bourgeoisie. Organization is not a replacement for independent action, but a requirement of it. And as any truly class-wide struggle tends to become a political struggle, so too the workers must develop independent *political* organization. They must build a party—but not a party like those of the bourgeoisie, but a party based on the mass action of the oppressed.

This is how, for example, the late Marxist-Leninist Party regarded the issue of "independence". At its Second Congress in 1984, it opposed the fashionable anti-party theories of the day, while calling for the building of "the independent political movement of the working class". It pointed out that

"In order for the working class to effectively fight for its own class interests, the workers cannot restrict themselves to the economic struggle alone. They must above all build up their own independent political movement, a movement which is independent of and opposed to the politics of the capitalist class." ¹⁰

It went on to explain that this is "a crucial step on the road towards the socialist revolution", that "special importance" should be paid to mass action, and that "the mobilization of the workers into the work of building their own class party is of

decisive importance".

This of course is not how the concept of an "independent movement" of the masses is understood by reformists, anarchists, and anti-party ranters. Just because the word is so evocative and powerful, there has been a struggle over what "independent" means. It is often said that "independence" is first and foremost independence of any party or organization, or even of any ideology or general view of the world. If a few workers get together and strike for higher wages, this is regarded as independent activity. If all the advanced workers of a country get together and build a party for the sake of preparing for a socialist revolution that will dispense with the guardianship of the bourgeoisie—this is regarded as a violation of independence. This difference of opinion has been around for a long time. Back in 1905 Lenin pointed out that

". . . The slogan 'workers' independent activity' is again being misused by people who worship the lower forms of activity and ignore the higher forms of really Social-Democratic independent activity, the really revolutionary initiative of the proletariat itself." ¹¹

Lenin stressed that the workers become truly independent of the old society when they build up their own revolutionary party based on communism. He wrote that:

". . . When this fusion [of 'socialism with the working-class movement'] takes place the class struggle of the workers becomes *the conscious struggle of the proletariat* to emancipate itself from exploitation by the propertied classes, it is evolved into a higher form of the socialist workers' movement—the *independent working-class Social-Democratic party*. By directing socialism towards a fusion with the working-class movement, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels did their greatest service: they created a revolutionary theory that explained the necessity for this fusion and gave socialists the task of organizing the class struggle of the proletariat." ¹²

The creative initiative of the masses

Barb also chides Luxemburg for referring to the masses developing new forms of struggle. She scolds Luxemburg because she

"insisted that 'every new form of struggle had not been 'invented' by leaders, but had arisen from the creative initiative of the masses'—'in the beginning was "the act"'" ¹³

But it is not just Luxemburg, but Marxism that recognizes the creative role of the masses. That is why Lenin, discussing not just the general strike but various forms of guerrilla

⁹LSA, p. 33, col. 3, with Barb adding the emphasis to the word "independent".

¹⁰*Documents of the Second Congress of the MLP, USA*, published as the Jan. 1, 1984 issue of the *Workers' Advocate*, pp. 23-4.

¹¹"New Tasks and New Forces", March 8, 1905, *Collected Works*, vol. 8, p. 212.

¹²"A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, vol. 4, p. 257, 1899, emph. as in the original.

¹³LSA, p. 34, col. 2.

struggle, wrote in September 1906 that:

“ . . . Marxism differs from all primitive forms of socialism by not binding the movement to any one particular form of struggle. It recognizes the most varied forms of struggle; and it does not ‘concoct’ them, but only generalizes, organizes, gives conscious expression to those forms of struggle of the revolutionary classes which arise of themselves in the course of the movement. Absolutely hostile to all abstract formulas and to all doctrinaire recipes, Marxism demands an attentive attitude to the *mass* struggle in progress, which, as the movement develops, as the class-consciousness of the masses grows, as economic and political crises become acute, continually gives rise to new and more varied methods of defense and attack. . . . Under no circumstances does Marxism confine itself to the forms of struggle possible and in existence at the given moment only, recognizing as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to the participants of the given period, *inevitably* arise as the given social situation changes. In this respect Marxism *learns*, if we may so express it, from mass practice, and makes no claim whatever to *teach* the masses forms of struggle invented by ‘systematizers’ in the seclusion of their studies. We know . . . that the coming crisis will bring us new forms of struggle that we are now unable to foresee.”¹⁴

If Luxemburg had said this, how Barb would have raged against anarchism! Yet this is a more careful and longer expression of an idea expressed by Plekhanov and probably others, to the effect that revolutionary communism “is nothing but a conscious expression of an unconscious trend inherent in the development of society today.”¹⁵

And Lenin never abandoned this standpoint. 14 years later, in 1920, he stated that:

“History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many-sided, more lively and ‘subtle’ than even the best parties and the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes imagine. This is understandable, because even the best vanguards express the class consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of thousands; whereas revolutions are made, at moments of particular upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, by the class consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes. From this follows two very important practical conclusions: first, that in

order to fulfill its task the revolutionary class must master *all* forms of social activity without any exception . . . ; second, that the revolutionary class must be ready to pass from one form to another in the quickest and most unexpected manner.”¹⁶

Thus Luxemburg’s mistake was not that she recognized the revolutionary innovations of the masses. Such recognition is essential for a revolutionary communist. But this doesn’t mean that the party simply rubberstamps whatever takes place among the militants. Nor, as Lenin points out elsewhere, can the recognition of the most varied forms of struggle replace the need, at any particular time, for the party to appeal for certain definite forms of struggle. The communist activists always have to judge what new developments deserve to be promoted, and which ones are dead-end. And so the new developments in the mass struggle increase the importance of the party’s role, of its analysis of the situation, of its guidance of the struggle. In her theorizing, Luxemburg didn’t seem to realize that, if the party is the conscious expression of an unconscious process, this doesn’t mean that the party simply promotes whatever is going on. Far from the spontaneous movement settling the differences between different trends seeking influence among the militants, it raises these differences more sharply.

Thus Lenin, in pointing to how revolutions are made by the masses, doesn’t draw the conclusion that there is no role for a party. For example, does the revolutionary proletariat to pass back and forth rapidly—and in unexpected circumstances—between different forms of struggle? Clearly this requires that this class have its own revolutionary leadership, which assesses the role of the new forms of struggle that arise, issues timely slogans, and takes decisive action.

Indeed, Lenin stressed, in such works as his famous book *What Is To Be Done*, the need to fight against the path of spontaneous development of the movement. He pointed out that, for example,

“A fierce struggle against spontaneity was necessary, and only after such a struggle, extending over many years, was it possible, for instance, to convert the working population of Berlin from a bulwark of the Progressive Party [bourgeois liberals—JG] into one of the finest strongholds of Social-Democracy. This fight is by no means finished even now . . .”¹⁷

And he points out:

“ . . . the crux of the question is, how is one to understand the statement that the mass working-class movement will ‘determine the tasks’? It may be interpreted in one of two ways. *Either* it means bowing to the spontaneity of the movement, i.e., reducing the role of Social-Democracy to mere subservience to the working-class movement as such. . . . ; *or* it means that the mass movement puts before us *new* theoretical,

¹⁴“Guerrilla warfare”, Sept. 30, 1906, *Collected Works*, pp. 213-14.

¹⁵“A Critique of Our Critics” (Article Three, Section VIII), *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 590.

¹⁶*Left-Wing’ Communism*, Ch. X, pp. 100-101, Ch. X, Chinese pamphlet ed.

¹⁷*What Is To Be Done?*, Ch. II, Sec. B, March 1902.

political and organizational tasks, far more complicated than those that might have satisfied us in the period before the rise of the mass movement.”¹⁸

This is a question on which Rosa Luxemburg was not clear. In her polemic against Lenin’s book *One step forward, two steps back*, she opposed the view that there must be a merger of communism (called social-democracy in the early years of the century) with the working class movement, saying instead that “the social-democracy is not *joined* to the organization of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat.”¹⁹

If this were so, it would imply that communism basically just follows whatever the militant section of the proletariat has to say.

Some people can’t reconcile Lenin’s views about, on the one hand, the masses developing new forms of struggle, and on the other hand about the need for the party to be able to stand against spontaneity. They present these two points as contradictory. Along with Barb, they apparently think that Lenin means replacing the mass initiative, and not that communist activists, in supporting the mass struggle, have to be able to fight for its revolutionary orientation. Thus there is no lack of writers who suggest that Lenin changed his mind from one year to the next. But any serious study of the development of revolutionary movements will show both that the masses rise in new forms of militant struggle, and that for these new forms of struggle to be spread widely, for a revolutionary orientation to be maintained over time, in some cases for the struggle to embrace the whole militant proletariat, and in other cases for the proletarian tactics to change to take account of the sudden twists and turns in the situation, the proletariat must also develop its own leadership. The work of the proletariat to develop its own activists and activist circles, to train them in a revolutionary outlook, to have them learn how to work together and to stay linked to the masses, is just as much a part of the proletarian struggle as a strike. These activists provide coordination, consistency, and orientation to the struggle, so that the struggle just doesn’t flow here and there. And the development of this proletarian vanguard, if successful, leads in fact to the development of the class communist party, or if this party already exists, to linking it with the new mass initiatives.

The majority of the proletariat

Barb however, in “refuting” Rosa Luxemburg, adopts the bureaucratic idea of the party that scared Luxemburg. She goes so far as deny the connection between the party and the will of the proletariat. In a passage entitled “The Revolutionary Party”, Barb denounces the following view of Luxemburg:

“Luxemburg’s position was that the revolutionary party must be a mass-based party, and must have the support of the majority of the workers before a proletarian revolution can take

place. The party must express the will of the masses.”²⁰

This is what Barb considers as wrong. Barb then goes on to point out how, from these views, Luxemburg assessed the Bolsheviks. Her next words are

“Speaking from her [Luxemburg’s] experience in the huge and long-established German Social Democratic Party, she viewed the Bolsheviks, and continued to view them, as ultra-radical (Jacobean), ultra-centralist and dictatorial. Her criticisms of Lenin and the Bolsheviks were precisely the same as Trotsky’s—before he joined the Party. But neither’s views on the nature of the party changed.”

So, in Barb’s opinion, you cannot defend the Bolsheviks from these hysterical criticisms of Luxemburg and Trotsky without repudiating the idea that the party should be connected to the masses. And note that Barb is not just trying to say that a party might be small until it finally wins over the mass of the proletariat. She is not talking about, for example, the situation that faces us today in which the proletariat is almost completely disorganized. Instead Barb takes care to specifically repudiate the idea that the party needs the majority of the proletariat *at the time of the socialist revolution itself*. But what type of revolution would it then be, if it weren’t backed by the proletarian majority? How can such a revolution reconciled with Marx’s view that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the workers themselves?

Lenin had a different view of communist revolution. He stressed the necessity for the communist parties to win “the majority of the proletariat to our side”.²¹ Lenin also pointed out that

“Of course, we do not give the winning of the majority a formal interpretation. . . . When in Rome, in July 1921, the entire proletariat—the reformist proletariat of the trade unions and the Centrists of Serrati’s party—followed the Communists against the fascists, that was *winning over the majority* of the working class to our side.

“This was far, very far, from winning them decisively; it was doing so only partially, only momentarily, only locally.”²²

In my article on united front tactics in the last CV, I discussed how this applies to united front tactics today. I will not repeat this here, but go into the question of the revolution, which Barb raises. Lenin stresses the need for the revolution to have the support, not just of the majority of the proletariat, but of the majority of the working people. He writes:

“The proletariat wages its class struggle and does not wait for elections [referring here not to

²⁰LSA, p. 32, col. 1.

²¹“A letter to the German communists”, Aug. 14, 1921, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p.522. This was also put forward at the 3rd Congress of the Communist International.

²²*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Ch. II. Sec. C.

¹⁹“Organizational Questions of the Russian Social-Democracy”, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, p. 119.

a vote among the prospective strikers but a vote among the general population—JG.] to begin a strike, although for the complete success of a strike it is necessary to have the sympathy of the majority of the working people (and, it follows, of the majority of the population); the proletariat wages its class struggle and overthrows the bourgeoisie without waiting for any preliminary elections (supervised by the bourgeoisie and carried out under its yoke); and the proletariat is perfectly well aware that for the success of its revolution, for the successful overthrow of the bourgeoisie, it is *absolutely necessary* to have the sympathy of the majority of the working people (and, it follows, of the majority of the population).²³

Barb however doggedly defends the view that it is a Luxemburg-ist deviation to think that the party needs the support of the majority of the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie. In her article on the timing of the Bolshevik insurrection, she insists

“It was also essential to Lenin that the Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, call the insurrection and that the matter not be left up to the Soviets. [Barb’s underlining—JG] Lenin’s reasoning was that to put emphasis on the Congress of Soviets (and the Constituent Assembly) misled the masses into putting faith in parliamentary methods. One could not ‘appoint’ a revolution; it spawned ‘constitutional illusions’; it was essentially a Menshevik idea. Many of the Bolsheviks had become sidetracked by the Democratic Conference and the Pre-Parliament which Lenin wanted to boycott.”²⁴

Out of this confused passage, which mixes together the Soviets and the Pre-Parliament, the only clear concept is that the party acts by itself, and that the Soviets are mere parliamentary playthings. She claims that this is what Lenin said in his “Theses for a Report” in October 1917.²⁵

But actually in these theses Lenin supports the slogan of “All power to the Soviets” and explains what is needed to make it a reality. He stresses that the Soviets must be “an organ of insurrection”. His warning about parliamentary illusions is not that the Soviets shouldn’t take power, but that one shouldn’t rely on paper resolutions but “the problem of the seizure of power by the Soviets is that of a successful uprising.” And he thinks it is time to seize power because, among other things, the revolution would be supported by a majority of the population. He writes about the situation

²³“Greetings to Italian, French, and German Communists”, *Collected Works*, vol. 30, p. 60, Oct. 10, 1919.

²⁴TSC, p. 22, col. 2-3.

²⁵See the “Theses for a Report at the October 8 Conference of the Petrograd Organization, also for a Resolution and Instruction to Those Elected to the Party Congress”, *Collected Works*, vol. 26, pp. 142-44.

“... when the Moscow elections have given the Bolsheviks 49.5 per cent of the votes and when the Bolsheviks, with the support of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, that has long existed in reality, have an undoubted majority in the country.” (p. 144)

And he describes that a revolution is already developing among the masses, talks of “a peasant uprising . . . sweeping the country” (p. 143) and says that

“... a revolution against Kerensky’s Bonapartist government is undoubtedly fomenting in the country (peasant uprising, increasing dissatisfaction and conflicts with the government in the army and among non-Russian groups, conflict with the railway and postal employees, the resounding defeat of the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary conciliators at the elections, etc.)” (p. 142)

Barb confuses the question of the timing of the insurrection and whether to wait for the opening of the Second Congress of Soviets with whether the insurrection is supported by the population. She insists that Lenin thought it would spread parliamentary illusions among the masses for them to see the revolution being called by the Soviets, when Lenin’s proclamation “To the citizens of Russia!” was written in the name of the Revolutionary Military Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.²⁶

The structure of the party and the role of the Central Committee

Barb also deals with the question of the organizational structure of the party. She cites a number of passages where Luxemburg and Trotsky denounce the Leninist party as being the dictatorship of the Central Committee or even the rule of “a single ‘dictator’” over the rest of the party. But in refutation, Barb simply lauds “centralism”, without doing much to oppose Luxemburg’s picture of the Leninist party. She simply says that Luxemburg “highly exaggerates” the centralism, and her one concrete illustration of this is that Luxemburg had “completely overlooked the important role of the Party Congresses”, which are another central institution, but that’s it.²⁷ Otherwise, she has little to say about the other party bodies and the other circles around the party, and all of it negative: she calls the “party circles” which existed prior to the organization of a solid party “anarchistic”; and in footnote 28/20 she quotes Lenin giving an overview of the different circles around the Party, but here Lenin is denouncing the Menshevik view of the party.

This creates quite a distorted picture of what a communist party is and of what centralism is. In a truly communist party, the united and self-sacrificing action of the whole party requires not only strong central institutions, but strong, conscious and active local bodies. The organizational principle is not just any type of centralism, but democratic centralism. And, as we have seen, Lenin doesn’t believe that this centralism can be created

²⁶*Collected Works*, vol. 264, p. 236.

²⁷LSA, p. 34, col. 3.

simply by a decree, but it develops through the party's role in the class struggle and through, in a certain sense, merging with the masses.

Barb also seems to accept Luxemburg's view that the famous fight at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party—the fight which gave rise to the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks—was over whether to have a highly centralized party. This isn't Lenin's opinion of what the fight was about. He wrote an article "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back/Reply by N. Lenin to Rosa Luxemburg" which answers the articles Rosa Luxemburg wrote in the German journal *Die Neue Zeit* in reply to Lenin's more well-known book with a similar title *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)*. He points out that:

" . . . I must point out that Rosa Luxemburg's *Neue Zeit* article does not acquaint the reader with my book, but with something else. . . Comrade Luxemburg says, for example, that my book is a clear and detailed expression of the point of view of 'intransigent centralism'. Comrade Luxemburg thus supposes that I defend one system of organization against another. But actually that is not so. From the first to the last page of my book, I defend elementary principles of any conceivable system of party organization. My book is not concerned with the difference between one system of organization and another, but with how any system is to be maintained, criticized, and rectified in a manner consistent with the party idea."²⁸

For example, he points out that he defended such ideas as "that Rules adopted by a Party congress must be adhered to until amended by a subsequent congress. This thesis . . . I did indeed defend in my book quite 'intransigently'."

But Luxemburg says the fight was over the powers of the Central Committee. For example, she claims that

"according to his conception, the Central Committee has the right to organize all the local Party committees."

Lenin points out that this is not true. His draft of the Rules did not contain any such provision. On the contrary, a commission elected by the Party congress added this provision to this rule, and this commission was dominated by Lenin's opponents.²⁹ What was the real fight over the Central Committee? Lenin states that

" . . . If Comrade Luxemburg had taken the trouble to acquaint herself with the resolutions of the many local Party committees that constitute the majority [what was later on called the "Bolsheviks"], she would readily have seen (which incidentally is also clear from my book) that our controversy has principally been over whether the Central Committee and Central Organ should represent the trend of the majority

of the Party Congress, or whether they should not. About this . . . demand the worthy comrade says not a word, she prefers to declaim against mechanical subordination of the part to the whole, against slavish submission, blind obedience, and other such bogeys. I am very grateful to Comrade Luxemburg for explaining the profound idea that slavish submission is very harmful to the Party, but I should like to know: does the comrade consider it normal for supposed party central institutions to be dominated by the minority of the Party Congress?—can she imagine such a thing?—has she ever seen it in any party?"

Far from viewing the party as simply an appendage of the Central Committee or other central institutions, Lenin advocated a party with vigorous local committees that were linked to a variety of organizations around the party. A single passage from Lenin describing his view is far richer in organizational ideas than all Barb's curses against anarchism. For example, in the original book *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (not the article in reply to Luxemburg), he sketches the following picture:

" . . . Depending on degree of organization in general and of secrecy of organization in particular, roughly the following categories may be distinguished: 1) organizations of revolutionaries; 2) organizations of workers, as broad and as varied as possible (I confine myself to the working class, taking it as self-evident that, under certain conditions, certain elements of other classes will also be included here.) These two categories constitute the Party. Further, 3) workers' organizations associated with the Party, 4) workers' organizations not associated with the Party but actually under its control and direction; 5) unorganized elements of the working class, who in part also come under the direction of the Social-Democratic Party, at any rate during big manifestations of the class struggle. That, approximately, is how the matter presents itself to me. As Comrade Martov sees it, on the contrary, the border-line of the Party remains absolutely vague, for 'every striker' can proclaim himself a Party member. What benefit is there in this looseness? A widespread 'title'. Its harm is that it introduces a *disorganizing* idea, the confusing of class and party."³⁰

Here we see Lenin standing for a definite idea of the party—which is composed only of the first two categories of organizations. At the same time, we also see the idea from Lenin that was explained years later in "*Left-Wing Communism* as the party merging, so to speak, with the masses. The last three categories aren't in the party but are one way the party links itself with the masses.

Lenin stood for every organization (not just the center) being

²⁸ *Collected Works*, vol. 7, p. 474, September 1904.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 474-5.

³⁰ Section I. *Collected Works*, vol. 7, p. 266.

active and having a conscious attitude to the stands of party leaders. Consider one example of his views, taken from the period of ideological confusion and depression in 1908 after the revolutionary wave from 1905 had collapsed. In reply to the sneers of the Social-Revolutionary Party at the mistakes of communist members of the Russian Duma (talk-shop Parliament), Lenin stated:

“. . . A workers' party understands that in a period of political lull and collapse the latter must inevitably show itself in the Duma group too. . . . Therefore the workers' party criticizes and corrects the mistakes of its deputies. Every organization, by discussing each speech and arriving at the conclusion that such-and-such a statement or speech was a mistake, provides material for political action by the masses. Don't worry, gentlemen of the S.R. Party: at the moment when the political crisis becomes acute, our group—and in any case members of our Duma group—will know how to do their duty. And our criticism of their mistakes is done publicly, and openly, before the masses. Our deputies learn from this criticism, the classes learn, the Party learns—the Party which has seen hard times, and knows that it is not by ranting but only by the stubborn and steadfast work of *all* organizations is it possible to emerge with honor from a difficult situation. . . .

“The S.R.s don't understand the importance of open socialist speeches which are frankly criticized and corrected in the Party press. The S.R.s prefer to hush up the mistakes of *their* representatives.”³¹

Indeed, Lenin points out that the criticism of leaders, and the evaluation of a political trend by the masses as a whole, are encouraged by a party organized in the true communist fashion. He points out that the communists engage in this, and the S.R.s don't,

“because you [the S.R.s] do not have a *party*, you attach no value to educating the masses by open criticism of persons, statements, tendencies and shades of opinion.”³²

Is this the picture one gets from Barb's article? Not at all. The entire picture is concentrated on the top. But from the point of view of communism, without a revolutionary and conscious base of the party, and without connections between that base and the masses, the top of the party is hanging in empty air.

The struggle against opportunism

In order to create such a Marxist party and to keep it revolutionary, there must be a fight against opportunist theories and trends. Barb doesn't deal directly with Luxemburg's views on this question. Instead Barb creates the impression that

³¹“Some Features of the Present Collapse”, July 2, 1908, *Collected Works*, vol. 15, pp. 155-6, emph. as in original.

³²*Ibid.*, 157, emph. as in original.

Luxemburg was a consistent fighter against opportunism, but was just confused about organizational issues of party life. But this isn't quite right. Luxemburg was a member of the left-wing of the German Social-Democratic Party and had a number of accomplishments in the fight against the right-wing, but her mistaken perspective about opportunism was one of the major causes of her errors about party organization.

Barb however writes:

“. . . on what grounds did Lenin highly value Luxemburg, . . .? He admired her trenchant and highly courageous exposure of the revisionism and outright reactionary social-chauvinism of the pillars of the German SD Party. As a new and very young member of the SDs, she fearlessly attacked Bernstein, even Bebel, and formed an early and essentially correct assessment of Karl Kautsky. Lenin delighted in quoting her assessment of German Social Democracy as a 'stinking corpse.'”³³

This mixes fact and omission into a glorified picture that presents Luxemburg as fighting opportunism, alongside Lenin, continuously and consistently from the very early days to the end.

But consider for example the struggle at the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party in 1903 and the resulting split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.³⁴ In this split, Luxemburg backed the opportunist Mensheviks. Moreover, she seems to have stood side-by-side with Kautsky on this question. Kautsky published Luxemburg's articles against Lenin's book *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* in the central organ of the German Social-Democrats, *Die Neue Zeit*. But he refused to publish Lenin's reply (from which I have taken an excerpt above), although Lenin pleaded with him and offered to shorten his reply to any length that Kautsky specified.³⁵ In 1905 Kautsky himself wrote in *Die Neue Zeit*, repeating the same type of attack on the Bolsheviks as Luxemburg, claiming that

“He [Lenin] stands for strict centralism and dictatorial rights for the Central Committee, while Axelrod and his friends want to give more leeway for the activity of the local committees.”³⁶

So the reality is a bit more complex than a consistent fight by Luxemburg, backed by Lenin, against Kautsky. There was the issue of what to fight Kautsky on and on what issues was Kautsky still presenting the line of revolutionary Marxism. (And

³³LSA, p. 30, col. 1.

³⁴Barb discusses this controversy, of course, but she doesn't connect it to her assessment of Luxemburg's stand towards revisionism in the international social-democracy of her time.

³⁵See Lenin's letters to Kautsky of Oct. 10 and 26, 1904, *Collected Works*, vol. 43, pp. 127, 130. A footnote to Lenin's reply to Luxemburg, by the editors in the *Collected Works*, claims that Lenin's article never appeared in *Die Neue Zeit*.

³⁶Cited by the editors in Lenin's *Collected Works*, vol. 43, footnote 95, to Lenin's letter to Leitesen of April 19, 1905.

there was the issue of on what questions Luxemburg's critique was correct and on which questions she herself departed from revolutionary Marxism.) But moreover, Luxemburg, although she increasingly disagreed with the main leaders of the German Social-Democratic Party and fought them on various issues, did not believe that the party could be freed from the grip of opportunism through this struggle. Instead, Luxemburg held that "The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role."³⁷ This suggests that, while she criticized various party leaders, she regarded it as normal for opportunism to be entrenched at the top of the party. Her perspective was not that the party could purge itself of this conservatism but that when the revolutionary wave came, and the masses rose up, they would carry the party as a whole with them. So, from this point of view, she could not see the point of the Bolsheviks fighting the Mensheviks, nor would she and other German lefts be prepared for having to build an alternative organization when, at the time of the revolutionary wave, the German Social-Democratic Party was hamstrung by its right-wing. This was one of the key issues in which Luxemburg's mistakes about spontaneity led her astray. Luxemburg's view of opportunism was not separate from her theory of the party, but one of the main pillars of her passive attitude to the role of the party.

Action and the party

Barb starts and finishes her article on Luxemburg with the question of "action". She cites Luxemburg saying "In the beginning was 'the act'" (or "deed", as it is sometimes translated). And she refers to Trotsky saying "Give me a formula for action!". She returns to this theme repeatedly. She is upset with Luxemburg's talk about the "independent action" of the masses. By the end of her article, she is equating talk about action to "mindless action for action's sake, the old 'revolution by the deed.'" And she jumbles together a wide variety of groups who were all noted for their "action".

Yet in her first article on Trotsky, in *CWVTJ* #7, Barb took the opposite standpoint. She started by quoting Lenin saying "No theory is half so important as practice". She presents Lenin as holding that if something doesn't work, just adjust the plan. Improvise. She says that this is what it means to be "an intensely practical and pragmatic person", as she "believe(s) all scientific socialists are".³⁸ But what a difference a few months makes, and now talk of action is suspect.

No doubt mindless activity is a problem. The denigration of theory should be opposed. But Barb herself puts a wall between

³⁷"Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy", *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, p. 121. Barb also refers to this statement, saying that "Luxemburg basically believed that all organization leadership inevitably tended to be conservative. . . ." (LSA, p. 34, col. 2). But she doesn't see that this has any connection to Luxemburg's perspective about the fight against opportunism.

³⁸*CWVTJ* #7, p. 51, col. 1. I discussed her misuse of Lenin's statement in *CV* #3, "Theory isn't half so important", pp. 52-53.

theory and practice. She keeps setting practice versus theory, first taking one side then the other. This is profoundly mistaken. As for the Leninist communist party, it was known for being a party of action. It is precisely due to its active role in the world, that theory was so important for communism.

And why make such a big deal out of the phrase "In the beginning was the deed"? Actually, not just Luxemburg, but many people quoted this catchy saying, which comes originally from Goethe's play *Faust* (Part I, Scene III). If this phrase alone is proof of semi-anarchism, as Barb suggests, then we may perhaps discover a previously unsuspected source of anarchism in Engels, since he used this saying too—as an illustration of an aspect of materialism. In discussing agnosticism's skepticism about the physical reality of the objects we think we see or touch or taste or hear, Engels says:

". . . But before there was argumentation there was action. *In Anfang war die Tat*. [In the beginning was the deed.] And human action had solved the difficulty long before human ingenuity invented it. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. From the moment we turn to our own use these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-perceptions."³⁹

Barb's political fiction

The main political issue raised in Barb's article on Luxemburg's semi-anarchism is the question of the party. But there is also the question of historical accuracy. A writer has the obligation to know something about what she or he is writing about, and to get the facts right, to say nothing of having pondered the issues at stake. But Barb doesn't take the time or effort to get even the most elementary facts right. It's a pity, because she raises issues which would otherwise be of major importance. But her works are political fiction.

For example, Barb presents herself as the most loyal follower of Lenin. Yet Barb puts forward a series of theories about revolution that have little to do with those of Lenin. She is, of course, entitled to advocate any position she chooses, whether or not it is the same as Lenin's. But it is a farce when her main evidence for her theories, diametrically opposed to Lenin's, is a word or phrase of Lenin's torn out of context.

* Barb criticizes Luxemburg for aiming for socialism in pre-World War I Germany, because Barb thinks there must be a bourgeois-democratic revolution against the monarchy first.⁴⁰ She criticizes Liebknecht similarly.⁴¹ Barb is of course free to advocate this. But Lenin believed that Germany could make progress "only in the direction of the *socialist revolution*" and criticized Luxemburg for not being completely consistent on

³⁹See Engels "Special introduction to the English edition of 1892" of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 3, p. 101.

⁴⁰LSA, p. 37, col. 2.

⁴¹LSA, p. 35, col. 3.

this.⁴²

✱ Barb has a truly distinctive theory on the mass political strike, which would revolutionize socialist theory. She holds that it can only be characteristic of a bourgeois revolution rather than a proletarian revolution. She criticizes Luxemburg for not realizing this.⁴³ Barb is of course free to try to persuade people of this view. But Lenin, referring to the role of the mass political strike in the revolution of 1905, claimed that

“... The peculiarity of the Russian revolution is that it was a *bourgeois-democratic* revolution in its social content, but a *proletarian revolution* in its method of struggle.”⁴⁴

✱ Barb maintained in *CWVTJ #7* that Lenin’s view was that a socialist regime in Russia would be a “workers’ and peasants state”, rather than a “workers’ state”. She maintains her opposition to the concept of a “workers’ state” in *CWVTJ #8*, and she still claims that this is Lenin’s view. This time it’s not clear what she is advocating. For example, she first says that the Soviet Union in 1920-21 was a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and then later says it wasn’t yet one. She also says it was a “capitalist country” or “basically a capitalist country” and not a “workers’ state”.⁴⁵

Moreover, Barb seems to read Lenin just to extract the harsh words he uses—she doesn’t seem to bother to read enough to see what he is saying or even whose position he is condemning.

✱ Barb denounces the revolutionary Auguste Blanqui by citing Lenin’s article about a totally different person, the reformist Louis Blanc.⁴⁶ Barb is aware that Lenin is talking about “Blancism” not “Blanquism”, but it doesn’t seem to make any difference to her.

✱ Barb assures us that Lenin regarded “the right wing of the Bolshevik party”, along with Kautskyism, as one of the “present-day representations of ‘Blanquism’.”⁴⁷ She proves this by referring to a passage where Lenin denounces Menshevism (“Right-wing ‘Social-Democracy’”) as Blancism or reformism.

⁴²See Lenin’s article “The Junius Pamphlet”, *Collected Works*, vol. 22, pp. 316-317.

⁴³LSA, p. 37, col. 1.

⁴⁴“Lecture on the 1905 revolution”, *Collected Works*, vol. 23, pp. 238.

⁴⁵LSA, p. 40, col. 1 and col. 3 and p. 41. For a discussion of Barb’s statements about the “workers’ state” in *CWVTJ #7*, see *Communist Voice #3*, “The CWV Renounces Anti-Revisionism”, p. 27 and “For a Serious Struggle Against Trotskyism”, pp. 50-51, 53-4.

⁴⁶LSA, p. 43, col. 3, footnote 28/21.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

Wrong party (Mensheviks not Bolsheviks), wrong person (Louis Blanc not Auguste Blanqui), wrong trend (reformism, not old-style revolutionism), but it doesn’t matter to Barb. Hey, Lenin was denouncing something or someone, wasn’t he?

✱ Barb tells us that Lenin, in one of his articles refuting Trotsky’s views on the trade unions, identified Trotsky as having the same views as the Workers’ Opposition. The passage she cites in Lenin’s article is actually talking about certain views of Bukharin, who, Lenin says, has on this issue gone far beyond Trotsky.⁴⁸

✱ Barb claims that

“Within the Social Democratic (communist) movement, especially around 1902-03, anarchistic tendencies emerged as ‘left-wing’ communism.”

Barb refers to Lenin’s book *‘Left-Wing’ Communism, An Infantile Disorder* to make this point. But as far as 1902-03 goes, Lenin says the exact opposite in that book. A couple of pages into Ch. IV, he identifies 1900-1903 as a period where “the tradition of ruthless struggle against petty-bourgeois, semianarchist (or dilettante-anarchist) revolutionism” was “particularly strong” in “revolutionary Social-Democracy”.

Barb makes a big show of scholarship. She has a lot of footnotes and a long list of books she has supposedly used as references, including the whole *Collected Works* of Lenin, large numbers of works by Trotsky, the writings of Rosa Luxemburg, etc. But what happens when you check the references she gives or the facts she cites? It turns out that, more often than not, the references are wrong or misrepresented. I have shown how Barb treats the works of Lenin. I could have cited additional examples from her references to the works of Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky.

Barb hasn’t studied the subject, but just made a pretense. She lists all the *Collected Works* of Lenin as her reference. But there is no sign that she has read more than a phrase here or there from any of them. And mainly she uses a few excerpts from the works of Luxemburg and Trotsky made by other authors, rather than reading the original works herself.

Barb’s articles raise many issues, such as semi-anarchism, the theory of spontaneity, the role of the party, the assessment of Rosa Luxemburg, the repudiation of Trotskyism, that are of serious interest. It’s a pity that she approached these subjects in such a superficial manner. This cannot provide any guidance to revolutionary work. All it can do is discredit the absolutely necessary study of theory and repudiation of opportunism. □

⁴⁸LSA, p. 40, col. 2, referring to *Collected Works*, vol. 32, pp. 49-50. This is part of Barb’s dogged attempt to prove that Luxemburg and Trotsky really hold the same position on the party.

What does it mean to follow Leninist principles?

More on the debate over anti-war agitation during the Persian Gulf war

The main article in this section, by Slim, deals with the question of what it means to follow the Leninist principles of anti-war work. In the last years of the Marxist-Leninist Party, a debate arose over how the party's newspaper, the *Workers' Advocate*, had agitated during the Persian Gulf war of early 1991. The *Chicago Workers' Voice* group claims that their criticism of the *WA* back then was part of a struggle against the increasing abandonment of communism in the MLP. In fact, the comrades who would form the *CWV* directed the bulk of their criticism at those comrades who were most active in continuing the struggle for communism and who had been very active in the anti-war struggle.

To give the reader an idea of the issues in this debate, we have been reprinting material from the MLP's *Information Bulletin*, where the debate raged. We are centering our attention on a four-part series on anti-war agitation by Slim, as it gives the best overall description of the debate and also describes the anti-war movement, the GI resistance, and various Marxist principles.

Part one of Slim's article appeared in the Sept. 95 issue of *CV*, along with related material from other comrades. It had an extensive review of the material in the *Workers' Advocate* showing that it had vigorously aim its fire at U.S. imperialism during the war; that it had contained material on building the revolutionary movement; that it agitated for socialism; etc.

Part II, which appeared in the Nov. 95 issue of *CV*, defended the policy of support for the GI resistance, which the *CWV* group was skeptical about.

Part III in this issue, and the more extensive Part IV (to be printed in a future issue), deal with the issue of what does it mean to follow Leninist principles? Does it mean to repeat certain principles word-for-word, or to be guided by them?

The *Chicago Workers' Voice* claimed that certain words and phrases had to be repeated. For example, they held that the meaning of directing one's agitation against one's own government is to use the exact phrase of working "for the defeat of one's own government". As well, they claimed that the phrase "imperialist army" always had to be used. Moreover, in justify ignoring the agitation that the *WA* had in fact done for socialism and revolution during the Persian Gulf war, the *CWV* said that this agitation had to be in articles solely on the war.

Some of the *CWV* claims can be found in Julie's letter from *Information Bulletin* #65. Slim is replying to this letter in Part III of his reply to criticism of the *WA*. We reproduce this letter in which Julie reviews a number of lead articles in the *WA*. She says that they accomplished a great deal, and disagrees with the more extreme assertions by other *CWV* comrades, but she nevertheless agrees with the main drift of their criticism.

To help illustrate the point at stake between the *CWV* and the *WA*, we are also reproducing an anti-war appeal written by Lenin in 1917 during World War I. It has a number of features which the *CWV* criticized the *WA* for. It refers to "brother soldiers", while the *CWV* was upset at the *WA* referring to workers and youth trapped in the army as "comrades". It doesn't use the phrase "imperialist army", but instead shows concretely the crimes of the army. It doesn't use the phrase "defeat our own government". And although it appeals for revolution, it doesn't talk of overthrowing imperialism. Overall, by *CWV* standards, Lenin's leaflet was quite defective.

Lenin's leaflet does directly associate revolution with World War I, while the *WA* did not suggest that revolution would take place in the U.S. during the Persian Gulf war. But then again, Lenin was writing about World War I, a war which was giving rise to revolutionary situations and actual revolutions. But it would have been unrealistic to expect a revolutionary situation in the U.S. during the Gulf war.

Time has proven that the *CWV*'s insistence on having certain set formulas in every lead appeal didn't indicate a firm attachment to Leninism. Today the same *CWV* has abandoned one after another of the standards it put forward for judging the *WA*. It doesn't judge other groups by these standards today. Take the issue of socialism for example. It disregarded *WA* agitation for socialism on the grounds that they didn't appear in what *CWV* regarded as the proper place in the *WA*. But the *CWV* today supports the Mexican petty-bourgeois nationalist journal *El Machete*, although it admits that *EM* tends to see socialism as "radical peasant democracy". As well, a good part of *EM*'s main agitation for "socialism" consists of presenting the state-capitalist regime in Cuba as "socialist". But it doesn't matter any more for the *CWV* group. □

Some questions for comrades in Chicago about our agitation on the anti-war movement

by Slim, Detroit

The followed article, dated Feb. 19, 1992, first appeared in the *Information Bulletin* (No. 66, Feb. 20, 1992), which was the internal discussion sheet of the late Marxist-Leninist Party. Part one and two of Slim's article (from *IBs* # 64 and 65) can be found in *CV* #4 (Sept. 15, 1995) and *CV* #5 (Nov. 15, 1995). In this debate, whenever a comrade submitted an article, it was circulated to everyone in the MLP in the next issue of the *IB*.

Note that Julie's letter, referred to below, is reprinted on pages 51-54 of this issue of the *CV*.

I had hoped to go onto other issues this month. However, I could not pass up commenting on the letter from comrade Julie. I believe she has put her finger on an important question for judging our anti-war agitation.

"I have concerns that the weaknesses in *WA* [*Workers' Advocate*] agitation," Comrade Julie says, "were possibly connected to *not paying sufficient attention to the phenomena of left social-democracy*." (Julie, Jan. 20 *IB*, pages 4 and 5, emphasis added) Whether you agree that there were weaknesses or not, comrade Julie has here suggested that one way we should judge our agitation is on the basis of how it served to develop our work in the left social-democratic trend, and by extension, to the struggle between all the main political trends in the movement. I think this is an important consideration.

How are we to sum up our work? How are we to assess what we did right and what we did wrong? We can argue over personal opinions, over what I prefer and what you prefer. We can have a debate over words, over adjectives, over questions like what is the best curses to throw at Bush and Hussein. Or we can look for some objective criterion by which to judge our work.

One such criterion has to do with the theoretical questions — was our agitation based on Marxism-Leninism, did we use Marxism-Leninism as the guide for our work?

Comrade Julie has raised an additional criterion. With her comment on left social-democracy, she has essentially suggested that we should judge our agitation on the basis of how it served the struggle between trends. We should analyze the practical struggle, what were the main political trends in it, in what forms and under what slogans did the struggle between the trends unfold, and how did our work serve to develop the revolutionary trend, the trend for Marxism-Leninism and the party.

I think this is the right approach. If the debate is actually going to arrive at an objective appraisal of our work, if it is to serve to strengthen the Party and not just bog us down in a squabble over words, then we must center the discussion on at least these two essential issues — the theoretical questions and the assessment of the struggle between trends.

Unfortunately, having opened the door and taken a peek inside, comrade Julie quickly retreated. Instead of using her own criterion to judge our work she slipped back into arguments over generalized feelings.

But once the door has been opened, we cannot let it be closed so easily. Let us ask comrade Julie, and other comrades in Chicago, a number of questions to see if we can establish an objective basis for the summation of our agitation.

The question of an explicit revolutionary call

In her detailed survey of the *WAs*, comrade Julie asserts that there were several glaring weaknesses.

One of the main ones she points to is in the lead articles of the September through January issues of the *WA*. Comrade Julie says they have a glaring weakness because they contain

"no explicit revolutionary call, no call to settle accounts with our own oppressors." (Julie, Jan. 20 *IB*, page 3)

This is not a criticism of failing to explain our theory and tactics to activists. Comrade Julie also makes that point, but it is a separate criticism which we will have to look at later. Here, the issue is apparently one of simply adding a few words or a sentence to the lead articles saying that

"we too have to settle accounts with our oppressors and that opposing the war drive is part of that." (Julie, Jan. 20 *IB*, page 3)

The question here is why? Why, from the first threats of war, from August on before the war actually broke out, did the *WA* lead articles require an explicit revolutionary call? What is the Marxist-Leninist principle involved? Or what is the analysis of the struggle between trends that demands such a call?

Is the view that the Party's main appeals on all questions must contain an explicit call for revolution and therefore we also needed such a call when war was threatened in the Gulf? If that's the view, then why is the complaint made on the Gulf agitation and not on our appeal for Solidarity Day¹, or for the big pro-choice march on Washington², or for some other question? If this is the view, then it would seem to be a question of general principle, and comrades should say so straight-forwardly and explain what principle of Marxism-Leninism requires this.

Or is the view that the Party's main appeals on every threat of reactionary war must contain an explicit call for revolution? If that's the view, then why was the complaint made on the Gulf agitation but nothing was said about the agitation on the U.S.

¹See *WA* of August 1 and October 1, 1991.

²See *WA* November 1 and December 1, 1991.

imperialist troop movements to Lebanon in 1987³, for example, or on the invasion of Grenada in 1983⁴? If this is the view, then again it would appear to be a question of principle, and comrades should say what principle of Marxism-Leninism requires a few words or a sentence giving an explicit revolutionary call in most lead articles when reactionary war is threatened.

Or is the view that this particular war or this particular anti-war movement required an explicit appeal for revolution right from August, when the first threats of war began and even before an anti-war movement broke out? If this is the view, what is the principle of Marxism-Leninism or what is the particular analysis of this threat of war or of this particular anti-war movement that required it?

Comrades who believe that it was a weakness not to have an explicit revolutionary call in our lead articles from August to mid-January should answer these questions. They should give us an objective criterion to judge whether this was a weakness or not.

We are not talking here about revolutionary agitation in general. To be sure any revolutionary party must agitate for building up a revolutionary movement if it is serious about what it's doing.

But, in the first place, I showed in Part I of my reply that the Party was carrying out revolutionary agitation in general.⁵ Comrade Julie does not mention the examples of revolutionary agitation that I noted apparently because they are not "solely" on the threats for a war against Iraq. Fine. But that means we are not discussing revolutionary agitation in general, but specifically the lead articles when war was first threatened in the Gulf.

In the second place, it must be stressed that, although we must always be carrying out agitation for building up a revolutionary movement, when and how that agitation is done is based on an assessment of the particular situation, on the moods among the masses, on the particular questions that are being thrown up by the class struggle.

To be sure comrades have different preferences on when and how to develop revolutionary agitation. I might prefer a revolutionary appeal in one particular article. Some one else might think it is more logical to have a revolutionary call in another article. These kinds of disagreements come up all the time in the *WA* group, and among CC [Central Committee] members, and with the local organizations. But as long as they are just a matter of personal preference we make little of them. Local branches rewrite *WA* articles all the time and, sometimes, those rewrites include putting in an explicit revolutionary call or taking out a revolutionary call. As long as those changes are just a matter of personal preference or have to do with some particular local situation, and as long as they don't create some danger, we do not make any issue of them. And we would be wrong to do so.

³See *WA*, February 1, 1987.

⁴See *WA*, December 15, 1983.

⁵Slim, Dec. 15 *IB*, section entitled "Did *WA* call for revolution in the U.S.?", pages 8-10.

But if we are trying to make a general summation of the struggle our Party waged against U.S. aggression in the Gulf, if we are trying to assess what were the strengths and weaknesses in the *WA* agitation on that war, then we cannot debate my preference or your preference. We have to have objective criteria. We have to say what is the issue of principle involved and what is the particular analysis of the situation that demands that we agitate in one way or another.

The question of the "defeat" slogan

Comrade Julie also declares that she agrees with comrade Rene that

"there were weaknesses in 'calls to defeat U.S. imperialism'." (Julie, Jan. 20 *IB*, page 5)

Then, again, the question is why do you think so?

In Part I of my reply, I argued on the question of principle. Is it a principle of Marxism-Leninism that we make the defeat of our own government in a reactionary war one of the essential bases *underlying* our agitation and work? Or does Marxism-Leninism require that we actually make the words "defeat our own government" the slogan of our agitation?⁶ Comrade Julie does not directly address this question. But it is the first one that must be answered.

If the answer is the latter, then we must actually use the words "defeat our own government" as our slogan and the only question that remains is when and how we should use them.

If the answer is the former, then the question becomes: what is the particular analysis of the situation that requires us to give calls using the words that we must stand for the "defeat" of our own government in this reactionary war?

Is there vacillation in the ranks of the Party that means we have to explain the "defeat" slogan and how it applies in our tactics in this war? If so, then it is not a question of putting that slogan at the top of our leaflets but, rather, of writing theoretical articles that review our Marxist-Leninist principles and how we are applying them in this situation.

Or, is there a fight with other trends in the movement that requires it? If so, then it is not a question that logically the "defeat" slogan should appear in some particular article or another. Rather, comrades should explain what is that fight, what are the particular questions being raised, how are they being raised, and how should we answer them?

For example, comrade Julie goes into why it was "correct and important" for the *WA* to explain one side of the "defeat" slogan in the article "Should the anti-war movement 'defend Iraq'?" She says that pointing out the "defense of Iraq Saddam Hussein has nothing to do with fighting imperialism and that desiring defeat for U.S. imperialism does not mean desiring victory for Iraq" was important. Why? Precisely because that "view was being pushed to militant activists by the Sparts, RWL and others." (Julie, Jan. 20 *IB*, page 3) But what in the fight with opportunist trends required that we explain the "defeat" slogan from the other side? Comrade Julie does not analyze this, nor do other comrades.

Or, is there a question of explaining this particular principle

⁶Slim, Dec. 15 *IB*, pages 11-12.

of Marxism-Leninism to activists, as comrade Julie seems to assert? If you think so, then why this question as opposed to others? We have only limited resources. We cannot do everything. Was this one of the main questions that we needed to do ideological work on among the best activists coming up in the movement? If so, why and how should we have done it?

Left social-democracy and explaining revolution to the activists

This question of explaining revolution to the activists leads us to the particular question of left social-democracy. Comrade Julie touches on the phenomena of left social-democracy in Chicago, but she fails to actually test the weaknesses she sees in the *WA* in relation to that phenomena. Let us go into the phenomena of left social-democracy a little more and then ask the questions that need to be answered if we are to arrive at an objective appraisal of our agitation.

During the Gulf war there were a number of groups that postured to the left of the main reformist coalitions, including some Trotskyists, anarchists and others. But I don't believe this is what comrade Julie is referring to. When she speaks of left social-democracy she seems to be talking about a leftward trend among the masses — a section of activists that are gravitating away from the liberal Democrats, and the reformists tied to them, and are starting to seek out their own independent direction but, as of yet, have still not broken with the liberal Democrats or their reformists hangers-on. For the purposes of this discussion, I will use the term left social-democracy only in this meaning.

Was there such a left social-democratic trend in the movement against the Gulf war? What did it consist of?

In a number of cities, like Detroit and Buffalo, you really cannot speak of left social-democracy. The movement did not go far enough for trends to begin to differentiate and the activists remained under the domination of the "Campaign" and the "Coalition" throughout.

In a number of other cities, like the Bay Area and Seattle, the movement went farther and developed more intense mass actions that went beyond the confines desired by the reformist coalitions. However, as far as I know, that left-ward motion did not begin until around the time Bush started bombing Iraq and it never reached the point where it began to take an organized form. Unless I am mistaken, and comrades in the various cities should correct me if I'm wrong, it is really hard to speak of left social-democracy in those cities except in the sense of a vague, spontaneous mood, and not in the sense of a definite political trend.

The only organized forms of what might be called left social-democracy, that I am aware of, were the Students Against War in New York City and the Pledge of Resistance in Chicago. And these two were themselves quite different animals.

The Students Against War (SAW) was an organization of high school students. It was a short-lived group —lasting from some time in November, I believe, to the end of March (although tiny meetings that did nothing continued longer). At its height it consisted of about 100 members, with some 35 or so attending any given meeting. It was most known for calling

the January 14 school walkouts and militant street actions which swelled to 2,000 people because of Bush's ultimatum to start the bombing the next day. Although the group was always a separate student group, it started out in the reformist milieu influenced more-or-less by the "Coalition" and the "Campaign." It moved to the left and the chief influence became anarchism and radical environmentalism. As well, some of its chief activists were also interested in the RCP [the Maoist "Revolutionary Communist Party"] and the MLP [Marxist-Leninist Party]. According to one of its main militants, of the 100 members probably all considered themselves to be anti-imperialists, about 95 thought of themselves as revolutionaries, and many thought of themselves as Marxist-Leninists or were open to Marxism-Leninism. (But, of course, what anti-imperialism and revolution and Marxism-Leninism meant to them varied a great deal.) I believe you could say SAW represented a left social-democratic trend.

The Pledge of Resistance in Chicago could also be called left social-democracy, but it was a good deal different from SAW. Comrades in Chicago would have to give a complete assessment, but I believe it could be described more-or-less as follows.

The Pledge existed long before the Gulf war. It represented a left wing of the CISPES-type solidarity movement, and was dominated by primeval three worldists (JBAK, Prairie Fire, etc.) and religious circles that were something akin to liberation theology. It was not uncommon for it to use anti-imperialist rhetoric. And while it supported the FMLN [of El Salvador] and the Sandinistas, numbers of the activists hoped for revolutions in Central America and some had begun to hesitantly question some of the tactics of the FMLN and Sandinista leaders.

When the threat of war in the Gulf broke out, it appears that activists seeking a more militant stand than the reformist coalition (called "Emergency Coalition" in Chicago) flowed into the Pledge. At its height it held meetings of usually 80 to 200 people. Besides the original political trends dominating Pledge, a number of additional groups became active in it including, at least: ACT-UP, anarchists, the RCP and Stop the U.S. War Machine Student Network (which RCP dominated). The Pledge was without question the center for the more militant actions — blockading buildings, taking the streets, and so forth. And while it sent representatives to the Emergency Coalition meetings, the Pledge became, essentially, an alternative coalition to the main city-wide reformist coalition.

Such is a brief review of left social-democracy in the movement against the Gulf war. It should be clear that it was not a nation-wide phenomena and that nationally the party could not have, and should not have, centered its attention on it.

Even if we want to talk about the more vague left-ward motion that took place among the masses in a number of cities, with the possible exception of Chicago that did not begin until about the time the bombing started. The phenomena simply did not exist before this and could not be addressed in the September through January issues of the *WA*.

Where left social-democracy did arise it was of great importance. But it should also be clear that it was a very particular animal in each case. This required special attention from the local organizations, but it varied in each city. In New York,

comrades paid attention to making contact with SAW, to trying to march with it in the protests, to attending its meetings, and to carrying out verbal agitation on the special issues that arose among its activists. In Chicago, comrades had to give the Pledge a good deal more attention, including putting out leaflets especially designed to deal with the debates that arose in these circles.

Now, let us take a look to see if in the two cases where left social-democracy did exist as a definite trend whether we find the glaring weaknesses that comrade Julie sees.

Build the independent movement

It appears clear to me that both with respect to SAW and to the Pledge of Resistance the key issue remained the work to drive a wedge between them and the reformist coalitions tailing the liberal Democrats and to orient them in an independent direction.

In SAW this came up in two ways.

In the first place, the hostility of SAW activists towards the "Campaign" and the "Coalition" only went so far and centered chiefly on the reformists' opposition to militancy and their bureaucracy. SAW activists got a quick education in the movement, but they never became very clear that the politics of the reformist coalitions centered on tailing after the liberal Democrats. And until they got clear on that politics they could not actually break from the reformists or take their own independent stand.

In the second place, SAW activists needed clarity on agitating against the liberal Democrats, and so forth, to understand how to approach the masses and draw them into more militant struggle. Although SAW activists were chiefly from private schools and the more elite public schools, they were always concerned about reaching among the youth from the working class and oppressed nationalities. They were concerned, and made attempts, but they had a great deal of difficulty figuring out how to do that.

For example, in the unified city-wide coalition formed to hold a march on February 21, SAW activists fought against the ban on civil disobedience actions and fought against the bureaucratic decision to have about 38 speakers. When it came to its own group meeting, it debated what should be done. Some proposed that they join the anarchists for a split-off march. Others argued that such split-offs simply took the radicals away from the masses and they should find ways to develop the politics and militancy of the masses in the main march. The latter view won the argument. But they really did not know what to do. And so, when the march took place, they ended up following the anarchists in a split-off action. SAW was caught between trailing after the reformists if they wanted to stay among the masses or separating themselves from the masses in insignificant split-off actions if they wanted to be radical. Only more experience and more education in the Party's tactics could have helped them out of this dilemma. As for Pledge, the issue apparently also centered on encouraging them to make a conscious break with the reformist politics of tailing the liberal Democrats and adopting an independent, anti-imperialist orientation. Although comrade Julie seems to imply that this was not that important in these circles (Julie, Jan. 20 *IB*, page

4), it appears to me it was. I say this because I can think of no other reason that the Chicago branch put out two special leaflets for the Pledge circles — one against the "support our troops" slogan adopted by the reformist coalition and one on the question of militancy when the reformist coalition attempted to suppress a march — aimed at encouraging a conscious break with the reformist politics.

The Chicago branch did *not* put out a special leaflet explaining the need for revolution — a leaflet centered on giving a theoretical elaboration of the Party's tactics for building up the independent movement as the only way to contribute towards developing a movement to overthrow our own imperialists (although they did add a phrase or sentence to some of their leaflets giving an explicit revolutionary call). And they did *not* put out a special leaflet giving a theoretical explanation of the "defeat" principle and how that principle should be applied in the Gulf war (although they did have a leaflet designed for an ISO-dominated student conference that put the "defeat" slogan in the headline and added a sentence that the "defeat" slogan means work for a revolution in this country).⁷ On the other hand, they did put out two leaflets devoted entirely to dealing with special issues that had come up in the Pledge circles and aimed at encouraging them to break with the reformist politics of tailing the liberal Democrats and to take up independent, anti-imperialist politics.

Perhaps I am mistaken, but this would seem to indicate that this was the key question, or at least one of the key questions, in dealing with left social-democracy in Chicago.

Left social-democracy and an explicit revolutionary call

But then what about the question of having a few words or a sentence giving an explicit revolutionary call in our lead articles to orient the activists in the left social-democratic trend?

This did not really appear to be an issue with SAW activists. Most of them already believed there needs to be a revolution. And they were harangued about this by a series of "left" groups like the RCP, the Sparts, and the anarchists. To add a brief explicit revolutionary call to our lead articles or to leaflets would not have helped orient them in the slightest or helped them to differentiate the MLP from other left groups.

In fact, the question with them was quite different. Their circles were plagued with a certain cynicism about the possibility of revolution and confusion about what type of revolution to work for — and both of these issues were tied to the debacle of revisionism in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China. To deal with their actual concerns required at least agitation denouncing the phony socialism of the revisionists, critiquing what went wrong in those revolutions, and providing positive ideas about the workers' socialism that we are working for. These are the kinds of issues we were trying to address in *WA* articles on the collapse of revisionism, the New Year's editorial, and

⁷"The Anti-War Movement & the Struggle to Defeat US Imperialism", *Chicago Workers' Voice*, January 26, 1991.

others. Now I know comrades in Chicago don't want to talk about other articles, those not "solely" on the Gulf war. But in this case you must consider them, because the concerns of these activists go beyond the confines of the anti-war movement and center on the question of revisionist socialism vs. workers' socialism.

Of course there are weaknesses in our agitation on this front. We have not finished our critique of the Soviet revolution and cannot really provide a succinct and popular exposition of this question. At the same time, we continue to have trouble developing our positive agitation for socialism. If we want to focus attention on correcting weaknesses in our agitation, then I believe this is one place it should be focused. But those weaknesses will not be solved by simply adding a few words about revolution or a sentence about socialism to our leaflets. It requires deepening our theoretical work and making room for journalistic work on this front.

Well then, what about the Pledge? I cannot say for sure. Comrades in Chicago will have to answer this question. But it's hard to see how adding a few words with an explicit call for revolution would differentiate us from the RCP or Prairie Fire or the anarchists. And with all their "revolutionary" shouting in Pledge, it is hard for me to see that our adding a sentence explicitly calling for revolution to our lead articles would really do much to orient the activists. Perhaps there was a question of tone — with all the "leftist" shouting perhaps we could not get activists to listen to what we had to say on breaking with the reformists and adopting an independent path unless we too shouted about revolution. I can't ever remember us winning the competition when it came down to who postured the most for revolution. But perhaps the situation was different in Chicago. I do not know.

Comrades in Chicago should think about it and explain to the rest of us how the question of revolution came up in those circles and what that meant for our agitation.

Left social democracy and the defeat slogan

The same question must be asked about the "defeat" slogan. How did this issue come up in the left social-democratic trend?

I never heard of the issue even being raised in SAW. Of course, the SAW activists hated the Sparts (who were one of the few groups raising at least one side of this question), because the Sparts tried to take them over in one of SAW's earliest meetings. After that, SAW activists would not listen to a word

from the Sparts. As far as I know, the "defeat" slogan simply did not come up as an issue.

As far as Pledge goes, I am unaware of any debate on the subject. But I do not know all that went on in those circles. Comrades in Chicago should tell us if the issue came up and how it came up.

If the question did come up, it is hard for me to imagine that it could be dealt with by simply putting a sentence or two in our leaflets saying we stand for the defeat of our own bourgeoisie and that means building a revolutionary movement. I believe that in any event we would have to explain what the "defeat" slogan actually meant in this war, what the party's tactics were and how they were based on the "defeat" slogan. In the situation we faced with the Gulf war, the "defeat" principle could only mean taking the anti-war movement in an independent direction, severing it from illusions in the liberal Democrats and Congress and the United Nations, so that, in the long run, it could contribute to building up a movement for the revolutionary overthrow of our own government. Any thing short of a full explanation of our tactics in relation to the "defeat" principle had the danger of exaggerating the possibilities of this movement and, when it failed to go far, helping to create demoralization among the very activists we wanted to bring to our side.

Perhaps this is the kind of explanation of our tactics that comrade Julie wants when she complains that our articles that were directed at activists — like "What Path for the Anti-War struggle" and "Should the anti-war movement 'defend Iraq'?" and "Defy the liberals, don't split the movement" — lacked an explanation of "the need for revolutionary movement and the connection between that aim and various political questions and tactics in the movement." (Julie, Jan. 20 *IB*, page 3)

But if this was so important for dealing with the left social-democracy, why didn't the Chicago branch itself write such an article? Is it possible it was not such a crucial issue after all? Is it possible that the Chicago branch, like the *WA* group, was too busy writing other leaflets on other more crucial issues? Is it possible that when we sum up our work we have to judge it based on some objective criteria, including not only the theoretical questions and the struggle between trends but, also, on the limits that the Party's size and strength puts on our work?

These are the questions I have for the comrades in Chicago. □

Criticism of WA agitation on the war

by comrade Julie, Chicago

The following letter from Julie, dated Dec. 1991, appeared in the MLP's *Information Bulletin* #65, Jan. 20, 1992.

I would like to raise some issues about the controversies regarding the agitation on the Gulf War.

I think we have to look at our tactics and agitation from the overall point of view of whether these tactics and agitation help us towards developing a revolutionary movement.

We have had many discussions in the past and much experience concerning what are communist tactics in an imperialist war. The heart of these tactics are well explained by Lenin in his description of the Basle Manifesto:

"in the event of war breaking out, Socialists must take advantage of the 'economic and political crisis' it will cause, to 'hasten the downfall of capitalism' i.e. to take advantage of the governments' embarrassments and the anger of the masses, caused by the war, for the socialist revolution." (From *Socialism and War*, p. 15, Foreign Language Press Peking)

What are some of the characteristics of what must be done in order to take advantage of the crises provoked by war — limited though they may be — in order to advance the cause of socialist revolution? It means such things as exposing the imperialist war as well as imperialist peace — in this case exposing what was behind the war, the oil interests, etc.; exposing that the war was based in the imperialist system; and also exposing the imperialist peace. This means exposing such plans as peace through U.N. sanctions, exposing the bourgeois parties, exposing that the Democratic Party would not bring peace, etc. Revolutionary tactics also mean standing for militancy in the movement, opposing the opportunist control of the movement and standing for building an independent movement, among others.

Unlike the RCP for instance we do not call for revolution while in practice cozying up with the bourgeois liberals. Nor like the Sparts do we put our hopes in the military victory of Saddam Hussein's regime.

In the overall I think these were the tactics the Party followed. But I think that this should not blind us to the fact that in our agitation on the war there were a series of weaknesses which weakened these tactics.

August — I should note an addition to the chronology written by Comrade Slim.¹ Comrades from Chicago criticized

¹Slim wrote a "Chronology of the process of discussion between some comrades in Chicago and the higher bodies of the Party." It is part of his article "A note on the process of discussion" which appeared in *Information Bulletin* #62, Sept. 20,

that there should have been a national WA leaflet after U.S. troops sent to the Persian Gulf in August. This was discussed at the September regional secretariat meeting.

September — lead article entitled "U.S. troops out of the Persian Gulf." This article answers the question "What are these war moves all about? What are the U.S. troops being sent to defend? Whose interests will be protected . . ."

Answer: "The fight that has broken out in the Persian Gulf is a fight among robbers and tyrants. It is a fight among the rich over control of oil, over division of the loot, over power and domination." The various interests are explained, those of the U.S., Iraq, the monarchies. Various of the U.S. interests are described — protect U.S. corporate slice of oil wealth; Pentagon wanting to build instruments of mass slaughter; end of talk about peace dividends; keep the Pentagon's world military empire in place; military foothold in Saudi Arabia.

This article says our interests are not with our own government. Sympathize with working and exploited people in Kuwait and Iraq but not with monarchies or the U.S. war.

All of these questions needed to be explained and are on the mark in regards to explaining the economic interests behind this war and developing the hatred of the masses for the bourgeoisie.

Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that there are weaknesses. Though the term imperialism is used twice in the article and various interests of the U.S. are described, nowhere is it explained that this war is coming out of a whole system, that such wars are inevitable. The answer given to our interests are not with U.S. war moves, the monarchies or our own government is ". . . since when do the interests of the wealthy capitalists become the same as the workers?" and "Our interests lie with the Arab workers and poor in their struggle against all their oppressors."

However, the article does not explain that we have to get rid of our own oppressors. In fact, the end of article calls on the activists to "protest U.S. war moves" and to "let the Arab people settle accounts with their own oppressors." Not explained that we too have to settle accounts with our own oppressors. This article also describes Saddam as a fascist and a tyrant but Bush only as Bush, which I think is a definite mistake. These two mistakes would not bother me so much if they had only appeared in one article. But both these mistakes turn up in other articles over the next few months.

This issue of the paper also has articles "What are Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?" "This article goes into some history of why the development of the oil kingdoms and some of the shakeups this system has had since the 1970's."

This article raises some interesting speculation on the possible results of the conflict in the Middle East.

¹(...continued)
1991, pp. 18-22. It shows the active internal life of the MLP. It has not been reprinted in *CV*.—*CV*.

“In the long run, however, through various torturous twists and turns, the breakup of the present order will allow the workers of the region to see through the politics of the different factions of capitalist exploiters and develop their own class politics of working class liberation.”

This statement may be too hopeful and not strong enough on the twists and turns the workers movement will have to go through. In the immediate aftermath the U.S. emerged as a military top dog. The U.S. victory provided one of the basis for the present “peace” conference in which Palestinian struggle is being subsumed. While in the long run I think this means a certain exposure of the anti-imperialism of the type of Saddam and the problems with PLO politics, the path of development of the politics of working class liberation remains extremely difficult.

The September issues also has an article “The lies of an imperialist hypocrite” which goes after Bush’s lies in justifying war.

October lead article — “No to an oil war in the Persian Gulf” correctly exposes the imperialists’ aims behind the war being prepared by the U.S. in oil, desire for bases, shoring up the regimes of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, in wanting to be world’s top cop, etc. This article also points out no justice on Iraq’s side either.

But this article also contains such formulations as this:

“And the working people worldwide are now supposed to side with one or another of these oppressive tyrants? Hell no! 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, including the Saudi and other monarchs, as well as the generals and other despots. We must support the workers of the Middle East by standing up against U.S. intervention, as well as staying clear of falling for the sweet talk of a tyrant like Saddam.”

Now it could be argued that we couldn’t hope for much more than a movement against U.S. intervention whereas the war might very well and did provoke a movement to settle accounts with oppressors at least in Iraq. But it is not expressed here that we too have to settle accounts with our oppressors and that opposing the war drive is part of that. Furthermore, we again have the problem of Hussein being referred to as a tyrant and a fascist with no such absolute and evil terms being used for Bush.

It might not be so bad that this article does not express the connection between building an anti-war movement and settling accounts with our oppressors if the more general article in the same issue “What path for the anti-war struggle” did. But this article does not dot the I’s on this connection either.

This article does point out that the war is a product of imperialism. Points out that we have to expose the basis of the war in the imperialist system. Points out that the movement has to embrace mass struggle. Points out that we can’t put faith in Congress because Congress fully behind war drive. Points out that movement must pillory both parties, points out the fallacies

of relying on U.N. All these things quite correct. But the article nowhere explicitly points out the need for revolutionary movement in U.S. and the connection of anti-war struggle to that nor the significance of taking these stands for building a revolutionary movement. This is even though it is an article which seems to be directed at giving some advice to the activists. It would seem very important that if we are trying to speak to the left-wing activists coming up that here we would explain the need for revolutionary movement and the connection between that aim and various political questions and tactics in the movement.

December issue — Main article “Bush rushes towards war” points out that the war being prepared is “between two capitalist robbers, the giant U.S. imperialism and the smaller Iraqi capitalists, over how the oil loot in the Persian Gulf is to be divided.” The article exposes why the U.N. supports Bush’s war. This was important to expose as the U.N. is not some abstract body for peace but in fact represents the world balance of powers and its actual role was to cover for U.S. imperialist war. The article also gives a call to spread anti-war protests, spread truth about the war, and to go to even wider sections of the people. This is all quite important. But again no explicit revolutionary call, no call to settle accounts with our own oppressors.

Same issue of paper also has articles “Bush’s dilemma: How to sell his oil war” and “Making the Gulf safe for medieval-style tyranny” which give some further exposure U.S. aims in the war.

This issue also contains the article “Should the anti-war movement ‘defend Iraq?’” Article points out that defense of Iraq Saddam Hussein has nothing to do with fighting imperialism and that desiring defeat for U.S. imperialism does not mean desiring victory for Iraq. This is correct and important as this view was being pushed to militant activists by the Sparts, RWL and others.

But this article seems to be directed to activists and to be taking up the question of what orientation the movement should have. It would seem that at least here we should spell out that we are for the defeat of our own bourgeoisie and what this actually means — that it means building up a revolutionary movement. And what kinds of tactics are necessary. But again this is not done.

Also the resolution from the 4th National Conference does not do this either. This resolution does point out that we can not look to Congress, for a movement against imperialist war, nor the United Nations nor an “Arab solution.” States we have to look to the masses. But it does not specifically state have to build a revolutionary movement and get rid of imperialist system and what the connection of this is to our tactics, although it does call for directing the movement first and foremost against our own bourgeoisie and its imperialist system.²

²Actually the resolutions of the Fourth National Conference discussed in detail the struggle to organize a revolutionary movement of the proletariat for socialism in the U.S. (See the (continued...))

January issue — lead article “Take to the streets against Bush’s war”. This article again clearly states that “this is a war to safeguard the profits of the oil monopolies. It is a war to shore up the right of U.S. imperialism to be No. 1 power broker in the Persian Gulf. It is a war to prop up the tyrannies of filthy-rich oil kings and sheiks of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.” The article does take up exposing the imperialist interests behind the war. But this article continues with certain problems seen earlier. Saddam Hussein is denounced with epithets such as fascist and tyrant while Bush is an imperialist. I think among the masses to be called an imperialist is not taken to be as bad as being called a fascist. The article again makes the point that “Saddam deserves to be overthrown but it’s not up to Washington to deal with him — that’s a task before the Iraqi and other oppressed peoples of that region.” The article does specifically make the point that “We don’t want to take part in America’s imperialism, but fight against it. Our beef is not with the Iraqi workers and youth but with those who oppress us here.” But again it has no specifically revolutionary call and does not draw the conclusion that if we want to get rid of such wars we have to get rid of imperialism. Its call is to “join the protests against Bush’s war.”

The January issue also contains an article on the movement “Defy the liberals, don’t split the movement” which deals with the split between the two major liberal coalitions around the marches in Washington. The article does repudiate the path of relying on Congress and the U.N.; discusses the question of approach to Iraq; exposes the harmful role of the liberals in the movement. The article also calls for mobilizing the masses.

“Instead of begging Congress to act, the anti-war movement should denounce Congress and both imperialist parties in a clear voice. The issue facing the movement is to oppose the warmongers, not to wait upon them to see reason. Instead of looking for enlightenment in this or that segment of the establishment, the movement should strive to draw in the workers and ordinary people.”

But again the article does not specifically draw out that we need to get rid of imperialism, that we need a revolutionary movement, and the connection of this aim to our tactics. Again this is an article in which I would have expected this to be dealt with.

February issue — lead article “Spread the word — No

²(...continued)

WA of Dec. 1, 1990.) In her letter Julie doesn’t directly express any opinion on the views given there about the current situation and the tasks of communist work among the masses and among activists. She refuses to take note of any resolution but the one on the Persian Gulf. She then says there is nothing in this one resolution on building a revolutionary movement because it only talks about the anti-war movement. She ignores completely the analysis at the Fourth National Conference about the relationship of the various movements.—CV.

Blood for oil and empire.” This article does go into the fact that this was a war for oil, empire and the new world order. In the section “What next” this article does raise [the need] for the activists specifically targeting imperialism as a system. Calls for a new society although doesn’t say that this is socialism. In general I thought this article did well at addressing issues facing the activists in organizing a militant revolutionary movement.

The February issue also contains the article “Will Congress challenge the war drive.” It exposes what Congress is up to and states correctly that to fight against the war drive we have to fight the war makers.

This issue also contains an article “On the slogan ‘Support our troops’.” Comrades here were happy when we saw the title of article because we were involved in a number of debates on this issue but disappointed with the article itself. In particular article did not dot the I’s that this is an imperialist army and we don’t support it. We do support GI resistance. The article contains a number of good points such as that the “support our troops” campaign was linked to efforts to reconcile supporters and opponents of Vietnam war and this one too. That it is a slogan to support the war. Also that this campaign linked to efforts to suppress the anti-war movement. But its main thrust seems to be how badly soldiers treated by the military. This is of course important to deal with. And we have to link this to the aims of the military and the system of imperialism. But, in tone, since it is not said strongly that this is an imperialist army and we don’t support it, I thought the article could almost be taken to be “we are the real ones who support the troops.”

I should point out that comrades in Chicago wrote another article on this issue for *CWV* because felt *WA* article not sufficient.³

March issue — lead article “Might doesn’t make right — U.S. out of the Persian Gulf”. Among other things this article does correctly explain that the U.S. victory is a disaster for the American workers. Also has among others “why one war after another” — article which explains in some detail why imperialism breeds wars and have to get rid of system of imperialism.

Comment: Our agitation dealt with the various prescriptions proposed by the liberal misleaders of the movement such as reliance on U.N. sanctions, reliance on Congress. It dealt with the Trotskyist faith in the abilities of Saddam Hussein. But until January leaflet and February *WA* agitation did not specifically deal with building a revolutionary movement and the connection of various tactics to that.

Also, in our discussion of tactics we did not specifically deal with left social democracy. In the anti-draft and anti-nuclear movement of the early 80’s (grant you this movement did last longer) we discussed and dealt with this quite a bit. Yet this is a definite issue. In Chicago for instance there is a fairly large left social-democratic milieu, which in general also opposed U.N. sanctions, scoffed at Congressional resolutions, opposed

³The *Workers’ Advocate* and *CWV* articles opposing the “support our troops” slogan are reprinted next to each other in *CV* vol.1 #5 (Nov. 15, 95). —CV.

the slogan "Support our troops", had some contradiction with the liberals over militancy in the movement. These forces certainly not as clear or forceful as the MLP about taking a stand on these issues. Also prevalence of hostility to the working class in this milieu. Also very hesitant to have any split with the liberals, although we did have right and left social democracy loosely grouped in two different coalitions and various left social democratic forces unable to stomach it when the Feb. 25th March was called off and marched anyway. (See *WA* article). I have concerns that the weaknesses in *WA* agitation possibly connected to not paying sufficient attention to the phenomena of left social-democracy.

In summation I would not agree with the conclusions of Comrade Rene that the *WA* articles on the war do not include "warnings to the American workers not to fall into chauvinism"; "any mention that the U.S. is still a superpower. And a very dangerous one"; "analysis as to the significance of the U.S. victory in the Middle East and how it puts it into a much better position than its competing 'blocs.'" These issues I think the agitation does contain. Although I think there are differences "as to the significance of the U.S. victory" I do think there were weaknesses in "calls to defeat U.S. imperialism." I also think that there was a qualitative difference between the agitation of the MLP on this war and that of the RCPB on the Malvinas war. I think other of Comrade Anita's statements are wrong such as that "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."

But to me there were some glaring weaknesses in some of our agitation especially coming from our Party which has a fairly rich history in movements to oppose imperialist war, including the lack of a revolutionary call in a series of articles up until January leaflet, the lack of a clear stand that we do stand for the defeat of U.S. imperialism in the article on "Should the anti-war movement defend Iraq", and in general lack of call to overthrow imperialism until the war broke out in mid-January, and the weaknesses in regard to our agitation against "Support the Troops."

Comrade Slim in his letter of 11-21 states that

"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'." (*IB* #64, Dec. 15, 1991, p. 10)⁴

He further goes on to say "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". This I do not agree with.

The agitation in the *WA* did take up number of important questions in the direction of building a revolutionary movement. I think that explaining directly the need for a revolutionary movement and socialism and the connection of various political and tactical questions to that is itself one of the "key questions for breaking the activists from illusions in the liberals and reformists and leading them into the revolutionary stream." And to me it is a definite weakness that this wasn't done from August-January. □

⁴Slim later vehemently protested the way Julie quoted his views here. (See the footnote 1 to Part IV of his reply to criticisms of the *WA*, which will be printed in a future issue of *CV*.) Julie left out his emphatic assertion that ". . . it is wrong to say there is not agitation for revolution and socialism 'in relation' to the reactionary Persian Gulf war." He had given two pages of examples of such agitation. From Sept.-Jan. they weren't in articles solely on the war, but they were in articles which dealt with other issues as well as the war. And in Feb. and March they were in articles that were solely on the war. He refers to the passage "Did *WA* call for revolution in the U.S.?" in Party I of his reply. This passage can be found in *CV* vol. 1 #4, pp. 39-41.—*CV*.

Appeal to the soldiers of all the belligerent countries

The following leaflet by Lenin was written during World War I, following the February revolution that overthrew the tsar in 1917 but prior to the October Bolshevik revolution. It is reprinted from Lenin's *Collected Works*, vol. 24, pp. 186-8, May 4 (April 21), 1917.

Lenin wrote this leaflet in accordance with his general principles of working for the defeat of one's own government, fighting imperialism, etc. But Lenin did not include his various theoretical formulations of anti-war struggle that the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group insists must be put in every leaflet and every front page article during a war. He appealed to the "brother soldiers" in the reactionary armies, while the *CWV* found it suspect when the *Workers' Advocate* did something similar. He didn't use the term "imperialist armies" but instead concretely showed the reactionary aims of the armies, something else which the *CWV* felt violated principle. And he didn't give long lists of the past crimes of capitalism but concentrated on the immediate holocaust facing the workers, peasants and soldiers. In short, he violated all the *CWV* rules. *CWV* rules had little to do with Leninism or with figuring out how to encourage the GI resistance or the anti-war sentiment among the workers, but a good deal to do with trying to outshout certain "left"-phrasemongering circles in Chicago.

Brothers, soldiers!

We are all worn out by this frightful war, which has cost millions of lives, crippled millions of people and caused untold misery, ruin, and starvation.

And more and more people are beginning to ask themselves: What started this war, what is it being waged for?

Every day it is becoming clearer to us, the workers and peasants, who bear the brunt of the war, that it was started and is being waged by the capitalists of all countries for the sake of the capitalists' interests, for the sake of world supremacy, for the sake of markets for the manufacturers, factory owners and bankers, for the sake of plundering the weak nationalities. They are carving up colonies and seizing territories in the Balkans and in Turkey—and for this the European peoples must be ruined, for this we must die, for this we must witness the ruin, starvation and death of our families.

The capitalist class in all countries is deriving colossal, staggering, scandalously high profits from contracts and war supplies, from concessions in annexed countries, and from the rising price of goods. The capitalist class has imposed contribution on all the nations for decades ahead in the shape of high interest on the billions lent in war loans. And we, the workers and peasants, must die, suffer ruin, and starve, must patiently bear all this and strengthen our oppressors, the capitalists, by having the workers of different countries exterminate each other and feel hatred for each other.

Are we going to continue submissively to bear our yoke, to put up with the war between the capitalist classes? Are we going

to let this war drag on by taking the side of our own national governments, our own national bourgeoisies, our own national capitalists, and thereby destroying the international unity of the workers of all countries, of the whole world?

No, brother soldiers, it is time we opened our eyes, it is time we took our fate into our own hands. In all countries popular wrath against the capitalist class, which has drawn the people into the war, is growing, spreading, and gaining strength. Not only in Germany, but even in Britain, which before the war had the reputation of being one of the freest countries, hundreds and hundreds of true friends and representatives of the working class are languishing in prison for having spoken the honest truth against the war and against the capitalists. The revolution in Russia is only the first step of the first revolution; it should be followed and will be followed by others.

The new government in Russia—which has overthrown Nicholas II, who was as bad a crowned brigand as Wilhelm II—is a government of the capitalists. It is waging just as predatory and imperialist a war as the capitalists of Germany, Britain, and other countries. It has endorsed the predatory secret treaties concluded by Nicholas II with the capitalists of Britain, France, and other countries; it is not publishing these treaties for the world to know, just as the German Government is not publishing its secret and equally predatory treaties with Austria, Bulgaria, and so on.

On April 20 the Russian Provisional Government published a Note re-endorsing the old predatory treaties concluded by the tsar and declaring its readiness to fight the war to a victorious finish, thereby arousing the indignation even of those who have hitherto trusted and supported it.

But, in addition to the capitalist government, the Russian revolution has given rise to spontaneous revolutionary organizations representing the vast majority of the workers and peasants, namely, the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in Petrograd and in the majority of Russia's cities. Most of the soldiers and some of the workers in Russia—like very many workers and soldiers in Germany—still preserve an unreasoning trust in the government of the capitalists and in their empty and lying talk of a peace without annexations, a war of defense, and so on.

But, unlike the capitalists, the workers and poor peasants have no interest in annexations or in protecting the profits of the capitalists. And, therefore, every day, every step taken by the capitalist government, both in Russia and in Germany, will expose the deceit of the capitalists, will expose the fact that as long as capitalist rule lasts there can be no really democratic, non-coercive peace based on a real renunciation of all annexations, i.e., on the liberation of all colonies without exception, of all oppressed, forcibly annexed or underprivileged nationalities without exception, and the war will in all likelihood become still more acute and protracted.

Only if state power in both the, at present, hostile countries,

for example, in both Russia and Germany, passes wholly and exclusively into the hands of the revolutionary Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which are really capable of rending the whole mesh of capitalist relations and interests, will the workers of both the belligerent countries acquire the confidence in each other and be able to put a speedy end to the war on the basis of a really democratic peace that will really liberate *all* the nations and nationalities of the world.

Brothers, soldiers!

Let us do everything we can to hasten this, to achieve this aim. Let us not fear sacrifices—any sacrifice for the workers'

revolution will be less painful than the sacrifices of war. Every victorious step of the revolution will save hundreds of thousands and millions of people from death, ruin, and starvation.

Peace to the hovels, war on the palaces! Peace to the workers of all countries! Long live the fraternal unity of the revolutionary workers of all countries! Long live socialism!

Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. [Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party]

Petrograd Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.

Editorial Board of *Pravda*

□

Correspondence

Correspondence with the *Fifth Estate* and the Insurgency Culture Collective on the issue of anarchism versus Marxism can be found on pp. 26-29.

Alferitz on *Communist Voice* #3 and #4

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Joseph Green, Editor *CV*
11/13/95

Dear Joseph,

First, let me express my joy upon hearing of the establishment of the CVO [Communist Voice Organization]! This is a positive step, and I hope a strong tree shall grow from such a small seed. One of the most important tasks of the CVO is to expand the subscription base of the *CV*. In order for this to happen, the *CV* should consider decreasing the amount of space devoted to dialogue with the *CWVTJ* [*Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*]. There is a difference between squabbles based on theoretical confusion, and personality conflicts. Often, it is difficult to distinguish between these elements. One possible solution to avoid this toxic mixture is to simply shift the tone and style of the dialogue. As a step in this direction, the articles could be edited in such a way to appeal to a new and wider audience.

This could be part of a wider process of the CVO/*CV* developing beyond the Minority faction of the former MLP, USA [Marxist-Leninist Party] and seeking to unite with other radical-left individuals and/or groups. In particular, I am thinking of senior high school, college students, young working adults, gays, women and people of color. If this does not happen, then I fear CVO will be limited in their positive impact.

The articles *Communism as a Science*, and the *IMF and Imperialist Superprofits* from *CV* #3 were right-on! However, I thought the article *For a Serious Struggle Against Trotskyism* was not very clear. I also felt the same way about Barb's article on Trotskyism in *CWVTJ* [#7]. I think what is needed is an article (or even a series of articles) on basic Trotsky/Trotskyism. This should include a brief biography of Trotsky, a summary of his role during the October Revolution and Civil War, negative and positive (if any!) contributions to the development of M-L ideology, and how the main Trotskyite trends in this country further develop this ideology. Upon this foundation further articles on Trotsky could be written.

This is an important task because the Sparts (SL/FI) and Socialist Action (SA) are now major players in radical-left circles. I have a soft place in my heart for the Sparts because of their position on human sexuality, but it appears they have

serious ideological problems in other areas. The RCP/USA is another neo-Stalinist group which should be reviewed in the *CV*. If it is not possible for the *CV* to accomplish these tasks at this time, is there another source you can point me to on these topics.

CV #4 was a feast for hungry eyes! The article *Anarchism and the Marketplace*, the series of articles in *The CVO is Founded*, and *The Struggle of the Working Class* were positive contributions to a new (and improved!) M-L ideology. The collection of articles in *What Really Happened in the Last Years of the MLP, USA* were a positive contribution on how NOT to run a radical-left party. But, once again the *CV* is preaching to empty Choir Stalls in a ruined Church! Perhaps future articles of this type should be published as a *Supplement* to the *CV* and available upon request.

The article *Anarchism and the Marketplace* in *CV* #4 was mirrored by Barb's article *Luxemburg, Semi-Anarchism and Trotsky* in *CWVTJ* #8. Her article was a positive contribution to the dialogue on these topics, and highlighted some important issues. If Dialectical Materialism is to remain the main tool of M-L analysis, then this should be based on an accurate view of Physics. Traditional Newtonian Physics saw the universe as being fixed, rigid and operating according to absolute laws of Formal Logic. Lenin based his theory of knowledge on this foundation, and saw the primary role of the Vanguard Party as the sole Guardian of Absolute Truth before, during, and after the revolution.

However, recent developments in Quantum Mechanics point to the universe as being more flexible, fluid and operating according to the relative and contingent laws of Modal Logic. In this scheme the Party is simply one agent and voice among many in a United Front struggle. If the Party is the sole source of all wisdom, knowledge and truth, then it can (has and will) use any and all means to secure and maintain this leading role. These two models of Truth and the Party reveal the basic difference between *DWV/CVO* and *CWVTJ/LAWV*.

I do not think a large portion of the population (by their own ability and under their own power) will rise-up in revolution and overthrow the existing economic and political order. This is due to the depth of social control by the various agents (Family, Church, School, etc.) of the Ruling Class. Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm remain key figures in this analysis, and should be required reading for all current and future Party Cadre. Therefore, the Vanguard Party is necessary as a major (but perhaps not sole?!) vehicle of Truth before the revolution. Perhaps the most serious problems with the nature and role of the Vanguard Party are during and after the revolution.

Another major question to be answered in the *CV* is the role of Religion before, during, and after the revolution. Religion is a strong tool of social control used by the Ruling Class. However, there is an element in human nature which requires some type of spiritual expression. Any analysis of Physics, Logic, and the Vanguard Party (among other factors!) should also add spirituality to the formula.

Well, I have added more than enough fuel to the fire, so I shall take my leave. I trust all is well with you and yours. I greatly appreciate your continued support and hope to hear from you soon. Think kindly of me and keep up the good work.

I send you my greetings,
Chris Alferitz ☐

Reply: On the concept of the Leninist party

December 16, 1995

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your letter of Nov. 13, which was very encouraging. Please forgive the tardiness of my replies. By this time, however, you must have seen the Summer/Fall issue of *Struggle* and also issue #5 of *Communist Voice*. I hope that the work of the Communist Voice Organization will meet your expectations. Our main goal is to help re-establish an anti-revisionist communist trend. We have received a number of enthusiastic responses to our declarations about the rebirth of communism. But to turn this enthusiasm into a force for the building of a durable trend, there has to be a theoretical struggle to show what Marxism is and what it isn't. Some issues that we have discussed have sparked fairly wide interest, such as the articles on anarchism that you liked. Some anarchist circles have written back to us denouncing our Marxist standpoint, and we intend to continue this discussion, because it deals with an issue of wide interest in youth and activist circles today. Some other issues we are raising appear obscure to most people, I am sure. But it is necessary for us to deal with them.

In this respect, I remember the experience of the *Workers' Advocate*, which I and other comrades worked on for many years. This paper had much greater resources than *Communist Voice* now has. For its entire life of almost 25 years, it was the voice of a national communist organization—and from 1980 to its death in 1993 it was the national voice of the Marxist-Leninist Party. By resources, I mean first and foremost comrades who wrote for it and worked with it, and that it represented a party whose organizing was reflected in its articles. It could cover a much wider range of issues than we can today. It had many articles that were easy for people to read; its coverage of current events gave one a feel for the different struggles of importance around the country; and we did indeed have a readership at the workplaces and in the movements which we were organizing in.

Nevertheless, the *Workers' Advocate* collapsed. It dealt with many things but, in its last years, it didn't deal clearly with the actual debate on the minds of the various activists of the MLP. It didn't suppress this debate: the MLP actually expanded its internal discussion sheet, the *Information Bulletin*, in the last years. Moreover, some of this debate spilled over into the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, which was a theoretical supplement the *WA* had for almost a decade. A good deal of discussion was carried out, but far more was needed—it had to be brought out that Marxism and anti-revisionism and party-building were really being questioned right in the party ranks (just as we can't ignore that the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group is questioning

these things today). What was needed was to press the debate, and not allow various ideas to fester without examination. This would have meant a lot of fights that may at first have looked like squabbles: (“You are denouncing Leninism”; “No, I'm not, I'm merely saying it's not consistent”; “What good is a theory that is not consistent? That's just a way of denying it altogether”; “How dare you question my views, that's uncomradely, I've had so many years of revolutionary experience!!!”) Meanwhile the *Workers' Advocate* kept producing some fine agitation—not just on various struggles but for socialism itself. But because the MLP didn't dirty its hands sufficiently with “squabbles”, comrades stopped paying attention to its work. And then the Fifth Congress of the MLP not only dissolved the party but took special pains to kill the *WA*.

The *Communist Voice* is determined not to make the mistake of the *Workers' Advocate*. We have to continue that discussion of ideas which the party didn't push sufficiently. The *CWV* group doesn't want this discussion, and so they make it as hard as possible for us to discuss different conceptions of communist work. But if we aren't going to die as did the MLP, we have to focus on the actual ideas about organizing, about Marxism, about the orientation for communist work. It may take a while for the point at stake to emerge from charge and counter-charge, but sooner or later, this will happen. And we are trying to hasten this time by looking into the theoretical issues at stake. When we differed with *CWV* romanticization of the Zapatistas, for example, we didn't just argue over phrases. Instead we turned to a close study of the rebellion in Chiapas. We support the militant peasants, but we also examined the program the EZLN was following—which *CWV* refuses to do. We printed the major statements of the Zapatistas; we studied their strategy; we pointed to the class basis of their banking on a section of the Mexican bourgeoisie; etc. We also studied the agricultural co-ops (“ejidos”) which are the key to the EZLN agrarian program, and we dealt with how to separate the revolutionary program from the reformist one of Lazaro Cardenas, who was Mexico's president from 1934-40 (Mexico's FDR so to speak) and who dramatically extended the “ejido” program. All this was connected to a study of class relations in the Mexican countryside, which *CWV* also vehemently refuses to do. This work turned out to have a value in itself, and to be relevant to problems elsewhere in the world. But we couldn't have developed this theoretical work, unless we made clear that the *CWV*-type approach was mistaken.

Turning to another subject, I was interested in your views on Barb's articles in *CWVTJ* #8. I found your views very comprehensible, as I thought myself that those articles had the form of a careful study of at least Luxemburg's position. She cites many books, and has many footnotes, and talks about many things. But I think that you may not be aware of some features of Barb's articles. For one thing, her facts are wrong on just about everything. She confuses people, political trends, everything. I found that again and again, when I checked the quotations Barb gave or the references she used or the “facts” she used, she was wrong. (For example, she puts everyone, from guerrilla groups in South and Central America to the student uprising of 1968 in France to terrorist groups in one pot, describing them all as Trotskyist and anarchist. After all, they all engage in “action”, and she says that “One can trace this strain all the way back to

Trotsky's position at the 1903 Congress where . . . he called for 'action!'" Or take another example of her lack of historical interest: she describes the political revolutionary par excellence, Auguste Blanqui, as an anarchist, which means as a person who abstains from political action. Blanqui was highly respected by Marx and Engels, despite their disagreements with him, and by the Parisian proletariat, but Barb says that he was regarded as a handmaiden of the bourgeoisie and "proves" it by referring to Lenin's opinion of—Louis Blanc of all people—a totally different fellow who was a reformist. Blanc, Blanqui, what's the difference? To see the full joke in this, bear in mind that Louis Blanc was notable for his opposition to the celebrated Paris Commune of 1871 while Blanqui was the favorite political figure of the Communards.) Her articles aren't research but historical fiction. Indeed I found that she didn't use many of the resources she listed—and she showed less respect for her subject than good fiction writers, who often are at pains to research the historical backgrounds of their novels. I hope to write on this, so I won't go into the details here. But I believe that the reader has the right to demand that the writer get the basic facts right.

Politically, I also disagree with what she wrote. The theme of her article on Luxemburg was the party—and if she had written carefully on this, I would agree with you that it would be a contribution. But she botched the job by presenting a caricature of a pro-party position. From Barb's point of view, to talk about the masses making a revolution is to deny the role of the party in the revolution. She thinks that to talk about the independent role of the masses is also to deny the role of a party. She doesn't have a clue of the connection that a real communist party should have to the independent role of the masses. Instead her view is that the party replaces everything, when it is led by an infallible leader as is her conception of Lenin. And of course, there are no infallible leaders today. So it ends up that her extreme pro-partyism for the time of Luxemburg is paralleled by her extreme anti-organizational stands of today.

I believe that her article makes Leninism and party concept seem repulsive. I think that few activists who ponder her conception would want to have much to do with a party or a doctrine that is as she presents it. I know I wouldn't. And I don't think her conception has much to do with Lenin's view of a party. In *"Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin talks of the need for the party—if it is to build itself up, if it is develop its discipline, its centralism, etc.—

"to link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses of the toilers—primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian toiling masses." (Ch. II, he puts emphasis on the words "but also with the non-proletarian", but for the point I want to make, I would like to put the emphasis on the words "to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses".)

He talks of a revolutionary theory that

"assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement."

Barb on the other hand discusses every issue, down to the

timing of the day of the insurrection, in a cut-and-dried fashion as if it is all obvious, and only anarchists and Trotskyists could have any trouble finding the correct position. She presents this as upholding Leninism, but in fact she is upholding anything but Leninism.

You mention in your article the issue of whether the universe is

"fixed, rigid and operating according to absolute laws of Formal Logic. Lenin based his theory of knowledge on this foundation, and saw the primary role of the Vanguard Party as the sole Guardian of Absolute Truth before, during, and after the revolution."

This, I think, is precisely the view of Leninism that one would get from Barb's articles. But in fact, it has nothing to do with Lenin's conception of how a party develops through a merger with the masses; how theory takes final shape through connection with a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement; of how it is necessary to

"investigate, study, seek, divine, grasp that which is peculiarly national, specifically national in the *concrete manner* in which each country approaches the fulfillment of the *single international task*." (Ch. X)

Yes, investigate, study, divine—divine means "to perceive by intuition or insight; conjecture". Lenin was pointing out the need for a party to literally throw itself into figuring out how to inspire the independent action of the masses. You can't order the masses to carry out the single, communist, world task—nor can you simply order the class-conscious vanguard, the party, to do this. You must seek the actual laws of revolution, the actual concrete ways in which the masses take up action—and unless you can do this, you can't develop a centralized party of revolutionary activists and you can't develop a truly dialectical and materialist theory.

But for Barb, it's easier. It's just that Lenin said this, and so and so disagreed. That proves—in her view—that so-and-so is anti-Leninist, anarchist, etc. That's the content of her article on Trotsky in *CWVTJ #8*. And it's funnier still because she makes everything depend on the exact day of the October revolution, and it didn't take place exactly as Lenin thought. I can't describe to you the feeling Barb's approach gives me. And if you have seen other people and other trends put this forward as supposedly Leninism, then I don't blame you for thinking that something is terribly wrong and requires correction. The content of Barb's ultra-Leninism is simply searching for a superman rather than learning from Leninist theory and developing our own independent activity. And her ultra-Leninism doesn't even reflect respect for Lenin's views—she gets Lenin's views just as garbled and wrong as she gets all historical facts.

However, I think your letter hit the nail on the head when it connected pessimism about the party with pessimism about whether the masses will ever arise for revolutionary goals. Today is a time of maximum disorganization and theoretical confusion. Pessimism runs wild. When there is an attempt to adjust revolutionary theory and adapt it to the present conditions, the result is to try to substitute something for the party. If the masses won't make revolution on a conscious basis, so the

idea goes, perhaps somehow all the different pressure groups will more or less get together anyway. But there is no way to get around the fact that the present period is a difficult one. We can either face that fact, and thus contribute to overcoming this period of disorganization, or we can close our eyes and try to invent a method of historical change that doesn't require the conscious participation of the majority of the exploited. Ultimately, those are the two alternatives.

I think that the party is much more than simply another force among many in the united front. The proletariat must be able to unite as a political force if it is going to do away with capitalism. The mass of workers must show initiative and consciousness. The party is needed not because the masses won't rise, but because the masses will rise. There must be work to build the party even when the class-conscious vanguard is very small. But if the conception is that the masses won't ever arise, then the whole idea of the Marxist party falls to the ground. And if we felt that the masses will never rise in struggle for socialism, we would fold up the CVO, as the majority of the MLP folded up the MLP itself and the *Workers' Advocate*.

You also asked our opinion on a number of different trends. It would be hard to go into all of them. The *Workers' Advocate* wrote on a number of these trends, but these writings are sometimes from years ago. While the *WA* often characterized the basic features of these trends well, it would not be using the examples or issues of today, but those that were current at the time the articles were written. On the other hand, since these articles often deal with fundamental themes, perhaps they may retain a good deal of value over the years. For example, Trotskyism has a number of basic dogmas which it holds over the years. Are you interested in articles criticizing the Trotskyist promotion of revisionist regimes as deformed workers' states, their support of the crimes of revisionist regimes and even of the Saddam Hussein regime on the grounds that they are giving "military, but not political support", their misadventures in the Gulf War, etc.? I could xerox some of these and send them to you if you are interested.

Of course, I agree with your view that the Sparts have deep ideological problems. But which of their stands on human sexuality impressed you? It's been a long time since I looked at Spart views on this question, but I thought I remembered that the Sparts had some repulsive positions on this, such as denying the problem of adult sexual abuse of children.

I look forward to hearing more of your views about *CV* and other political issues. And may the new year be a good one for you.

Communist greetings,

Joseph Green, Editor, *Communist Voice* □

Alferitz on CV #5, land reform, and the party

[The letter below crossed in the mail the above reply to Alferitz of 12/16/95. We also omit some technical issues on mailing in the letter below.—CV.]

12/12/95

Dear Joseph,

Thank you for sending me *CV* Vol. 1 No. 5 of 11/15/95, which I received on 11/21/95. . . . Also, thank you for publishing my letters on pages 59-60 of your journal. I hope they were positive contributions to the debate, and raised badly needed questions. I want to briefly comment on a few articles in *CV* #5.

The article *In Memory of Rich Lee, 1947-1995*, was a positive step in the right direction. However, this essay reads almost exactly like the article published in *CWVTJ* #8. The same comments I made to them, I shall also make to you. Sexual liberation (Wilhelm Reich, Eric Fromm, etc.) is the flip side of the same coin as economic/political revolution. However, your obituary left unanswered an important question. Since Rich Lee died of AIDS, how did his sexuality influence his politics (and vice versa). You had a chance to make a positive statement on this issue, and (like the *CWVTJ*) did not take advantage of the opportunity. I hope this is corrected in future issues of both journals.

The continued series of articles on Mexico (in particular *Peasant Socialism or Proletarian Politics?* by Mark, and *The Ghost of Lázaro Cárdenas and the Present Crisis of Mexico*, by you) were a good education on which elements of land reform to implement (and avoid) in the Third World. However, land reform was a major problem in the former Soviet countries. These societies were simply unable to properly feed their populations. The vast majority of food for human consumption (including items imported from the West) came from small, "private" plots of land. Any debate on land reform should take these hard lessons of the past into account. Perhaps it might be necessary to allow "private" plots, and/or co-op collectives to exist (like the NEP under Lenin) just to feed the population. While this policy has well-known dangers, it is a greater evil to allow people to starve just for the sake of ideological purity. I see "private" plots, and/or co-op collectives only under a transitional stage of socialism on the road to a better society. A revolution is not worth the price paid in suffering if it cannot properly feed the population.

The single most important article in this entire issue was *What's Left of United Front Tactics When You Take Out Anti-Revisionism*, by you. This essay hit the nail on the head in terms of the root cause of the present crisis in the progressive/radical left. A vanguard party is THE most vital element to safely navigate through the various twists and turns of ever-changing objective conditions. I have kept an open mind while reading the *CWVTJ* (and *LAWV*). However, if what you say is true (and sadly I think you are correct), then these two organizations have departed from the orthodox (and true!) path of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Perhaps in time and under the pressures of negative objective conditions, these two factions will change their positions.

As usual, you may print (in whole, or in part) this letter in future issues of your zine. Did you get my last letter on *CV* Nos. 3 and 4? [It is printed above, along with a reply.—CV] Send a brief note, and let me know the status of this item. I trust all is well with you and yours. I greatly appreciate your continued support and hope to hear from you soon. Think kindly of me, and keep up the good work. Happy Holidays! I send you my greeting.

Reply: State capitalism and land reform

Jan. 15, 1996

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your kind comments on *Communist Voice* #5.

I was happy to see your interest in the articles on land reform. We have tried to show the bourgeois-democratic nature of land reform and the class differentiation that follows from it. With respect to land reform in the revisionist countries, what happened is more complex than what is put forward in the Western press. I think in dealing with this, several issues have to be noted that are generally confused in the bourgeois press. One day hopefully we will deal with this further in the *CV*. For now let me note some of these points. They will be rough points, because I don't have the opportunity at the moment to research them carefully and to recheck ideas that sprang from previous study of the Soviet economy.

For one thing, I think the class nature of the system established has to be kept in mind. The original land reform in the Bolshevik revolution as well as in a number of countries was a bourgeois-democratic reform. Although these reforms were highly progressive and necessary, they did not establish socialist forms of agriculture, but bourgeois-democratic ones. Moreover, in the 30's Russia was a state-capitalist and revisionist country, not a revolutionary socialist one. The collective farms established at this time in revisionist Russia were not part of a socialist system, as was shown in detail by the study carried out in the late Marxist-Leninist Party. The basic history of agricultural collectives and communes in revisionist countries is a study not of socialist or communist agriculture, but of state-capitalist agriculture.

It would be wrong however to present that these collectives were simply an agricultural failure. True, the contrast between the collective and the individual private plot is not between socialism and capitalism, but between state-capitalist and individual small peasant agriculture. So noting the actual history of the collectives isn't a matter of discussing socialism. But in fact the collective farms did grow a lot of certain foods, while leaving the private plots for other foods. For example, in Russia, the grain was grown by the collectives, and various vegetables in the small plot. For quite awhile, grain production went up dramatically after World War II in Russia, up until the great economic stagnation leading to its collapse hit the Soviet Union, but grain needs also zoomed because, for example, the consumption of meat went up. Meanwhile China achieved self-sufficiency in various grains—and it is the market reforms that are destroying that self-sufficiency. I stress again that I am not raising this as defense of socialist agriculture, since the Chinese system prior to the market reforms was not socialist.

Some of the reasons for Russian troubles with food production are interesting. One reason is the relative lack of investment in the countryside by the revisionist government. There were neither sufficient resources allocated to the farms themselves, nor were sufficient resources devoted to the infra-

structure needed to get food from the fields to the cities, or to store food (for example, refrigeration). One can imagine the effect on the people's consciousness of a situation where there is constant concern over the size of the harvest combined with notable waste of what is grown. This irrationality—one of many in the revisionist system—was not just an accident, but a sign of the tremendous class conflicts that grew up in the revisionist countries.

And then there is the final irony. It turns out that revisionist state-capitalism, condemned by the Western bourgeoisie for decades for its hostility to the small plot, actually is what preserved individual agriculture in many countries. In Poland, before "Solidarity" overthrew the revisionist system, the small farmers were constantly irritated by the restrictions by the government and the various irrationalities of the system. But after "Solidarity" took over, some sources say a joke spread in the countryside: "the communists (unfortunately, the government was not recognized as revisionist) destroyed the large farms; Solidarity destroyed the small ones". This refers to the fact that the free-market reforms, brought by Solidarity and looked forward to by the small farmers as salvation, ruined them in large numbers. The inevitable result of the free sway of the market is separation into rich and poor, and large numbers of small farmers found themselves the losers. Some Polish farmers have prospered and their farms will grow larger, while larger numbers will be driven off the land. I recently saw a report about Siberian farming that, if accurate, indicates that the same process is going on in Russia. Undoubtedly some farmers there will prosper, but the majority are facing an increasingly bleak situation, or will simply flee the countryside.

With respect to a socialist revolution, the form of organization in the countryside depends on both the attitude of the agrarian population (the degree of class differentiation, the class consciousness of the agricultural proletariat, etc.) and the resources available for the countryside. It is definitely the case that the farming in the countryside will go through transitional forms on the way to socialist farming. This is not a matter of some sad necessity brought about by the alleged superiority of capitalism in the countryside, but because it is how the class struggle works. Long before the twentieth-century experience with collective farms and communes, Engels already discussed the necessity for transitional forms of agriculture in his article of 1894 *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*. (He also pointed out that co-operative farms aren't in themselves socialist, and he discusses different types of co-operatives. There are some excerpts from Engels' article in "Marxism on peasant and proletarian demands" in *CV* #2.) Socialism isn't simply a set system imposed on the population, but grows out of the class struggle and class relations.

I look forward to hearing from you again on this and other questions. We look forward to your comments on the various issues of *CV*. And I hope that the new year has started well for you.

Revolutionary regards,
Joseph Green, editor, *CV* □

In previous issues of *Communist Voice*:

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Announcing a new theoretical journal, the *Communist Voice*
Debate over current tasks of communist work
—Frank on *El Machete*, organization, the movement of the 70's and theory
—More by CV, NC, and Frank
—On complacency, part four
What should we say to the masses about Cuba?
—CWV on Cuba and the blockade
—*El Machete*: Long live Cuba but. . . socialist
—Should we build an anti-revisionist trend among the masses?
On changes in the working class
Oleg on the *Labor Notes* conference
Mark replies to Oleg on the *Labor Notes* conference
Review of Kim Moody's views on the working class
Oleg on *Spark*
Pete Brown on *Spark*'s workplace organizing
On the workplace organizing of *Labor Notes* and on *Spark*
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El Machete and "occupied Mexico"

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Looking into the history of the Marxist-Leninist Party
Three key Zapatista declarations from Lacandona Jungle
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—To form a movement for national liberation, January, 1995
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—Co-ops will not save the peasants from poverty
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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"

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What really happened in the last years of the MLP: part one of the controversy over anti-war work
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—Peasant socialism or proletarian politics?
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