

Communist Voice

\$1.00

Volume 1
Number 5
Nov. 15, 1995

Successor to the
'Workers' Advocate'

Capitulation or struggle in the working class movement

In the Detroit newspaper strike, the Boeing strike, and other actions the workers are resisting the offensive against their wages and workplace rights. But a closer look at these struggles shows that a struggle of trends is also going on among the workers themselves.

A number of articles in this issue of *Communist Voice* deal with this struggle within the workers' movement. In Detroit, successful mass picketing at the production plants was stopped by the union leaders, who were afraid of the growing confrontation with the capitalists. We report in this issue not only on the general course of this strike, but on the different attitudes of the rank-and-file workers and their union leaders.

You would think that all left groups would unhesitatingly support the rank-and-file workers in this confrontation. But we also report on the widespread attitude of opportunist groups on the left that seek to find something good to say about the pro-capitalist labor leaders or who center their activities on trying to maneuver these leaders to do something useful. The cringing of some "socialist" and Trotskyist groups before the AFL-CIO leaders is astonishing. Rather than show the workers why these bureaucrats are betraying them, thus strengthening the workers' struggle, these groups can't imagine life without these bureaucrats.

So it is not enough to just want to strike back against the capitalists who are squeezing us. Today it is necessary for every worker and activist to ponder the different paths that are being set before us.

And indeed, today as the Democrats and Republicans debate how much to squeeze the masses, many workers fervently wish for an alternative. One issue that arises is, will there be a "labor party"? But the trade union leaders who have formed "Labor Party Advocates" want to cover up what has been going on in the workers' movement. "Labor Party Advocates" actually bases itself on the pro-establishment labor bureaucracy in the AFL-CIO. Such a "labor party" would be a dud. A real movement for change must fight for a renewal of the workers' movement, not base itself on being the political representatives of the highly-paid, capitulationist

AFL-CIO heads.

Yet some left groups find hope in the slight differences between this and that AFL-CIO hack. Some harbor expectations of a turn for the better now that Kirkland has now been replaced by SEIU's John Sweeney as AFL-CIO chief. We carry a report on how Sweeney has treated the demand for struggle in Los Angeles area local unions in his own SEIU. It shows that little can be expected from him.

But is everything therefore bleak?

No, not at all. The heavy sacrifices of striking rank-and-file workers, even in the present national atmosphere, show that the working class remains an oppositional force. When the picketing newspaper workers for a time defied the policies demanded by their "leaders" and actively blocked the scab trucks, it showed that the days will come when the workers rise up to transform their trade unions and to build

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their own political organization as well. The workers are bearing the brunt of the economic reorganization in this country while the capitalists get richer and richer, and there's worse to come. This is leading to deep skepticism about the system.

But if this skepticism is to lead to action, independent workers' organization must be built. Militant struggle and solid organization must be based on telling the truth about the class struggle and the capitalist system and the clash of trends in the workers' movement, and not on trying to attract people by finding a prominent labor bureaucrat or reformist politician to cozy up to.

The heart of truly independent politics is the building up of an anti-revisionist communist trend. Only the world view of communism can inspire activists to undertake a consistent struggle to mobilize the rank-and-file workers to build a new movement of struggle. Only anti-revisionist Marxism—which shows that the fallen "communist" regimes and present-day China and Cuba are not socialist but state-capitalist countries—can puncture the atmosphere that "socialist has failed". Only when the class-conscious communist activists join together, will there be a core that can reinforce and provide orientation for the carrying out of militant struggles and the formation of mass independent workers' organizations.

We don't know how long it will be before the workers' movement rebounds. No one can. We do see that the workers have not abandoned struggle, and will be forced by crusading capitalism into more battles in the future. We see that the old forms of the proletarian movement—such as the pro-capitalist unions which are bound by a stodgy, self-seeking, class-collaborationist leadership—are losing ground day by day. We see that the old forms of the radical left—the opportunist organizations that search for get-rich-quick schemes and infiltrating the labor bureaucracy, rather than organizing the rank-and-file for independent action—are just marking time. We are committed to helping inspire a communist resurgence in this country. We are convinced that only communism can provide the insightful criticism that is needed of the old, decaying forms, and the bold vision that is needed to renew the working class movement. To do this, Marxism-Leninism must also renew itself through an anti-revisionist criticism and summation of the theories and practices of the past. We call on all activists who want to help restore the proletariat to its place as the revolutionary harbinger of a new society to join with us in working to put communism on a firm anti-revisionist basis.

— 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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Harper Station
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Editor: Joseph Green

In this issue

Most of the articles in this issue touch in one way or another on our controversy with the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group. But this point of departure leads to wide-ranging discussion of many issues of contemporary politics.

For one thing, we return to the Mexican countryside and discuss whether land reform is socialist. The tremendous poverty of the peasants, as well as the peasant rebellion in Chiapas, add urgency to the question of the path forward in the countryside. The present system of agricultural co-ops in Mexico ("ejidos") owe their development on a massive scale to Lazaro Cardenas, reformist president of Mexico from 1934 to 1940. We show that an agrarian program that centers on more aid for the "ejidos" hasn't broke out of the framework of Cardenismo. A socialist agrarian program for Mexico, while supporting aid for the small peasants, should not pretend that they will be able to maintain their small plots indefinitely in the face of competition from large-scale agriculture. And rather than pretending that the extensive class differentiation in the Mexican countryside will go away, such a program should pay great attention to organizing the rural workers and semi-proletarians. Oleg and Julie from the *CWV* instead present land reform as not a bourgeois-democratic reform, but somewhat socialistic in itself.

We also carry material on the debate over what Marxism is today. We show that *CWV's* quest for Marxism without anti-revisionism (the fight against opportunist distortions of Marxism) has led them to hope that the Mexican left will unite behind a petty-bourgeois nationalist trend that supports Castroism as its model of socialism. We also discuss what in general united front tactics become when anti-revisionism is left out. We con-

trast *CWV's* idea of united front tactics to that of Lenin, as expressed in "*Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, and to that of the late Marxist-Leninist Party.

We carry material on the revolutionary stand on anti-war agitation and GI resistance during the Persian Gulf war. This is part of our series on the controversies in the final days of the Marxist-Leninist Party. The comrades who now form the *CWV* group were upset at *Workers' Advocate's* appeal to the soldiers caught up in the armed forces of imperialism, and at *WA* agitation among workers and activists in defense of the GI resistance. Comrade Rene (*CWV*) thundered that it violated anti-imperialist principles to take such a supportive attitude to the GI resistance, and to regard the oppressed youth that found themselves in the army as our class brothers and sisters. His standpoint was more that of petty-bourgeois nationalism than anti-imperialism. The *Workers' Advocate*, on the other hand, held that work to disintegrate the armed forces was an essential part of communist anti-war work. In our opinion, it was in fact proletarian anti-imperialism.

A large part of this issue is devoted to the struggle of trends in the working class movement, as reported in our front page article. We especially cover the critical situation facing the Detroit newspaper strikers. We also discuss political trends among the labor union bureaucracy. We deal with Labor Party Advocates, which wants to base a labor party on the union officialdom, and we carry a report on John Sweeney, new AFL-CIO head.

It is also our sad duty to pay final respects to Rich Lee, a long-time anti-revisionist communist activist who died recently from AIDS. □

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In memory of Rich Lee

(1947-1995)

On August 22 Richard Lee, a long-time communist activist who worked hard for many years to rebuild a genuine communist party free from revisionism, died from complications of AIDS. His work contributed to the founding and early life of the Marxist-Leninist Party, and near the end of his life, when the MLP was dissolving, he sought to uphold revolutionary theory by writing in support of the Leninist analysis of imperialism. He will be remembered fondly by all those who knew and worked with him.

Rich became politically active in the struggle against the U.S. war of aggression in Indochina, and he took an active part in the student movement in Buffalo, New York. He went to demonstrations, leafleted, denounced U.S. war crimes, and took part in Vietnam Veterans against the War. He rejected the values and culture of bourgeois life and looked for an alternative, looking at first to the youth culture and also taking a number of courses in what passed for Marxism among university professors at the time.

Through friends, Rich came in contact with anti-revisionists from the American Communist Workers Movement (Marxist-Leninist). At that time, comrades from the ACWM(ML) were active, among other things, in opposing the opportunist form of "Marxism" dominant in academic left circles. Rich Lee was intensely interested in this struggle, and it clarified for him the difference between the anti-revisionist Marxism of action and the cringing "Marxism" which was being promoted by various professors. He joined the Buffalo Student Movement (a student organization affiliated with the ACWM(ML)), opposed the drug culture and other diversions being foisted on the youth, and became a communist activist.

In April 1972, soon after he joined BSM, the police viciously attacked the opening of the William Z. Foster center in Buffalo, which was a communist bookstore set up by the ACWM(ML). Rich joined with other comrades who were present in staunchly resisting the reactionary police. This was part of the active and self-sacrificing struggle with which the ACWM(ML) won the right to distribute literature and carry on political agitation in many situations. He and others were arrested, but they continued their resistance in the courtroom, conducting a spirited political defense. With careful preparation as well as political defiance, they beat all but a few minor charges.

In 1975, Rich took part in the Committee to Oppose Racist and Fascist Attacks (CORFA), which organized an armed defense of the home of a local black couple against racists.

Rich was from a working class background, and he also agitated for communism in a factory in which he worked for some time.

Meanwhile, within a year or two of Rich's becoming a communist activist, the local organization in Buffalo went through a political crisis. This required more attention not just to mass activity, but to party-building—to learning how to organize the communist ranks. Most experienced comrades had left for other areas, and then the local secretary of the organization had resigned, and it would be awhile before a couple of other comrades would arrive from elsewhere. Moreover, this took

place during a period of confusion and disorientation in which the organization was re-examining its views on a variety of issues. Rich took up additional responsibilities, and contributed greatly to not just maintaining the local organization, but having it develop its work vigorously on a number of fronts. This process of party-building and learning new methods of organization required comrades to periodically notice their own mistakes as well as making suggestions concerning others' work. No one is born to this work—it has to be learned and relearned, especially as the situation changes and new tasks are placed before the communist organization and its activists. Rich took part in this process, and contributed greatly to the major growth at that time of the Buffalo branch of the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists (an organization formed when the ACWM(ML) merged with a few smaller groups). He also increasingly took on regional and national tasks for the COUSML.

In 1978, Rich transferred to the Chicago Branch of the COUSML (predecessor of the Marxist-Leninist Party). He played an important role there as well. And he was there when the Marxist-Leninist Party was founded on January 1, 1980.

In 1982, Rich began to go through a severe personal crisis, which would last a long time and which also had its political side. He resigned from the Marxist-Leninist Party and all associated organizations. But later he gradually resumed contact with the MLP as a sympathizer. He took part in a Marxist study group with the MLP, doing some of the research and analysis on the history of the women's movement in Russia that was published in part in the *Workers' Advocate Supplement* and then in book form in 1994 as "From Baba to Tovarishch/The Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet Women's Struggle for Liberation".

In the crisis that led up to the dissolution of the Marxist-Leninist Party, a number of comrades—demoralized by the long stagnation in the mass struggle—increasingly suggested that communist theory was obsolete. Rich opposed the denigration of Lenin's view of imperialism being put forward by Jim, a Central Committee member from Oakland. Rich started work on a reply to Jim's discussion document—which in essence doubted whether there was any political meaning left to the concept of imperialism—of October 1992. (Jim's document is also reproduced in the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Supplement* of Jan. 25, 1994, along with other documents relevant to this debate.) Rich's preliminary draft of January 1993 was circulated in the debate leading to the Fifth (last) Congress of the Marxist-Leninist Party. (Chicago e-mail #7, Nov. 17, 1993). Unfortunately, Rich was unable to complete his work on this question before his untimely death.

Rich Lee was one of the activists who were forged in the mass battles of the late 60s and early 70s. For him, communism was not just an intellectual pursuit, but a path of struggle for the interests of the working class. He bent all his efforts to the rebuilding of a genuinely communist, anti-revisionist party for a decade. Afterwards, he continued to sympathize with communist work and contribute as best he could. Without a multitude of more activists like Rich Lee, the proletariat will never win its liberation. □

The working class movement

This section of *Communist Voice* deals with the critical situation facing the Detroit newspaper strikers as their determined strike continues. As well, the article “‘Left’ daydreams about the labor bureaucrats” shows how certain opportunist organizations, despite their revolutionary and socialist phrases, are covering up for the treachery of the labor leaders towards the strikers.

But if the labor leaders aren't too militant in strikes, what about their role politically? Are they finally going to abandon their diehard support for the capitalist parties? We briefly discuss the issue of the labor party. Presently some of the trade union officialdom are backing Labor Party Advocates, which some people hope will provide a pro-worker alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. Pete Brown writes on what's wrong with Labor Party Advocates. And we carry a report on John Sweeney, newly-elected head of the AFL-CIO, which shows that there hasn't been much change in the AFL-CIO bigwigs.

Support the strike!

Newspaper workers fight on!

This article and the next are from *Detroit Workers' Voice* #7, September 21, put out by the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group. It also announced a *DWW* meeting on Oct. 8 in support of the newspaper strike.

The struggle of the newspaper workers presses on. In early September, rank-and-file workers showed what they can do when they dare to stand up to the billionaire newspaper giants. They showed the strength of thousands of workers united for a militant struggle by twice shutting down the Sterling Heights newspaper production plant. They showed how to defend their mass pickets against the strikebreaking police and company goons. The strikers showed what power they have when they go beyond the timid policy of the union officials. The workers are still facing a tough situation, though. Court injunctions to ban strong picket lines have been handed down and police attacks on striking workers mount. Union officials have begun to abandon mass picketing and continue collaborating with the police. The media of the rich tries to undercut support for the strike with hysteria about “violence” when the strikers defend themselves. But when the Detroit Newspaper Agency tries to destroy hundreds of workers' livelihoods, there's no talk about violence—it's just a business decision.

The newspaper strike is an important class battle. The newspaper bosses have the forces of capitalist “law and order” on their side. They have tons of money to spend on crushing the workers. On the other side are the strikers. Their struggle depends on building a powerful mass struggle and the solidarity they receive from their class brothers and sisters. **Now is the time for workers of all occupations to rally to the side of the striking newspaper employees!**

Workers show power of mass struggle

The events of the last couple of weeks have shown the power of mass struggle. On September 2, about 3,000 strikers and other workers shut the Sterling Heights plant down for the entire evening and most of the morning. This crippled distribution of the Sunday newspaper, a big profit-maker for the newspaper bosses. A key point in the struggle that day occurred about 5:00 p.m. when police suddenly made a charge against a couple of hundred picketers who were blockading the main gate of the plant. Rather than give way to the police as the union leadership had been advising, the workers held their ground. The police had riot gear, batons and pepper gas. But the workers fended them off and drove them back, using placard sticks to jab at the police. Two weeks earlier, police had brutally beaten several strikers. But when they got a taste of their own medicine they beat a hasty retreat from the picket line.

A few minutes after the initial confrontation on September 2, over 1,000 workers marched from a union hall up the street to the plant. More reinforcements arrived throughout the night. For their part the police bolstered their ranks with cops from twenty nearby towns as well as state police and Wayne County sheriffs. But with the strikers outnumbering the police by over 10 to 1, and with the strikers fired up, the police didn't dare mess with the picket line that night.

The strikers waged another important battle on the evening of September 4. Around 300 workers made a determined stand at the main gate of the Sterling Heights plant, holding off a 50-strong police contingent for several hours. Police tried to charge the line with batons and pepper gas. Strikers defended their line by swinging the picket sticks at the charging cops and pelting them with rocks and small pieces of metal. The police beat a

hasty retreat. Then tear gas was thrown at the strikers. But picketers continued to battle on. When the confrontation finally ended, over 20 picketers had been arrested and several cops injured.

The next big event in the strike struggle occurred on Saturday, September 9. By early evening, about 150 workers had gathered at the main gate. At this time, trade union officials helped police herd workers from the gate to allow scab trucks to enter the plant. But throughout the evening, more and more workers, primarily from local auto plants, began to arrive. By mid-evening, a couple of thousand workers bolstered the picket lines. Their general sentiment was "the scabs got in, but the paper won't get out!" A large section of workers came prepared for battle, with gas masks for tear gas and wooden poles for the police.

It became clear to the cops and the union leaders alike that nothing they did would stop the strikers and they watched as the strikers shut the plant down tight. Management was forced to use helicopters to get the Sunday edition out of the plant, a costly proposition that cut into their profit margins.

Going beyond the trade union officials

The struggle would have never taken a militant turn had not the rank-and-file gone beyond the policy of the trade union officials. Since the beginning of the strike, these bureaucrats have been trying to keep the struggle under wraps. True, after a month-and-a-half of token measures, the AFL-CIO decided to mobilize a large number of workers to attend plant actions on September 2 and 9. But even then, the bureaucrats opposed militant defense of plant gate picket lines. A couple of days earlier, union leaders made an agreement with the Sterling Heights police to help them clear the gates. Then, on September 2, they wanted a few designated people to kneel in front of the cops and be peacefully carted off, enabling the police to escort scabs in and out of the plant. Fortunately, the workers did not play along.

On September 13, when a judge's injunction limited picketing at the Sterling Heights plant, the union officials immediately began caving in. The mass mobilizations that had led to shutting down the Sterling Heights plant was abandoned the next weekend. This was despite the fact that the injunction still allowed unlimited picketing on the sidewalks near the plant. Thousands of workers, who had already shown themselves ready and able to shut down the plant, could have gathered near plant gates and

moved in to block them whenever they decided. But given this golden opportunity to defy the injunction, the union misleaders chose to bow to capitalist "law and order" rather than unleash the power of thousands of angry workers.

Workers need independent class organization

The lesson is clear. The more the workers can break out of the limits imposed on them by the union officials, the stronger their struggle will be. Even if occasionally the labor misleaders turn out the workers in large numbers, there is a question of how the workers are oriented. The official AFL-CIO policy is class collaborationist. It is based on the myth that the workers can both protect their livelihoods and make the profit-hungry corporations happy. It holds that a powerful workers' movement can be built without standing up to the capitalist courts, laws and police. It preaches that American democracy is designed for the working class as well as the rich, and if we're good boys and girls some Democratic Party politician, some government agency, some court or some police agency will be won over to our side. And the more this is preached, the more the workers get driven down.

The rank-and-file orientation should be one of class struggle. This orientation relies on developing militant mass action. It does not expect salvation from the capitalist labor boards, politicians or courts, but prepares the workers to battle them. On this basis, workers can begin to organize themselves for struggle independent of the bureaucrats.

Solidarity!

The struggle of the newspaper workers has gone through many twists and turns. Workers have shown what they can do when their fighting sentiments are unleashed. But just when the struggle was gaining momentum, the union bureaucrats began to dismantle it. Let's all get behind the rank-and-file! Whenever mass pickets are held, join them! The more workers on the picket lines, the harder it is for the police and the union officials to suppress militancy. When you see strikers, express support for their militant plant shut-downs. No matter what the outcome of the strike, workers everywhere owe the striking newspaper workers a debt of gratitude. They have given us a glimpse of the powerful blows workers can deliver to the capitalist slave-drivers when the rank-and-file begins to take matters into their own hands. □

No struggle = nothing NALC contract

From *Detroit Workers' Voice* #7, Sept. 21.

The brave struggle of the newspaper workers stands in stark contrast to the miserable no struggle policy of the postal union leaders. During a year of contract negotiations, three postal unions combined to organize one whole day of scattered

informational pickets in some cities (and nothing in Detroit). For postal union officials, there are only two options on the contract: beg management not to wreck our wages, benefits and working conditions too quickly, or, beg a rich bureaucrat in Washington to side with the workers against management. Both options suck. And the later option means workers don't even get

to vote on their contract.

The policy of no struggle has produced the nothing contract. Just look at the recent NALC [National Association of Letter Carriers] settlement. While the USPS [U.S. Postal Service] was swimming in \$1.5 billion in net income last year, letter carriers got a pathetic base wage increase of 0.6% per year for the four year contract. Two additional lump sum payments adds another \$300 per year on average, but these payments are not rolled in to base rates on which overtime, retirement funds, etc. are based. And COLA was eliminated for the first year of the contract.

Major issues are not even covered by contracts anymore, but are simply settled in back-room deals behind the workers' backs. The rotten 1992 labor- management agreement on DPS

mail, which raises workloads and allows unsafe conditions was done this way. Likewise raising workers' health insurance costs in the last contract. Now that DPS automation is being implemented, there should have been contract restrictions to help prevent the harmful affects of this system on letter carriers. But from the information released so far, it appears the whole issue has been postponed by the arbitrator.

While management keep sticking the knife in the workers, the NALC leadership keeps preaching that one day, labor-management cooperation will turn the bosses into worker-friendly lambs. But just because the union leaders do nothing does not mean the rank and file cannot organize itself to resist management attacks. □

The Detroit newspaper strike **Will rank-and-file militancy overcome** **labor bureaucrat obstacles?**

Since July 13, some 2,500 newspaper workers have been on strike against the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*, jointly managed by the Detroit Newspaper Agency (DNA). The speech below was delivered by a comrade of the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group at a *Detroit Workers' Voice* meeting on October 8. It summarizes some of the main developments in the strike struggle. (For further strike coverage, see *Communist Voice*, volume 1, number 4.)

In recent years the workers have been taking it on the chin from the capitalists. The restructuring of industry, mass unemployment, and the reactionary political climate created by the Republicans and the Democrats, replete with the slashing of social programs, has weighed heavily on the workers. It has led to declining living standards and presented many obstacles to workers fighting back. On top of this, the trade union officials have sought to placate the capitalist offensive, making concessions offerings to the Gods of Profit. But the capitalist appetite is never satisfied, and the union bureaucracy has shown itself incapable of mounting serious resistance to this assault on the working class. Just a couple of years ago, the strike movement hit rock bottom. The ebb of struggle almost made it seem like the capitalist lies—that the class struggle was a relic of only the early days of the industrial revolution, or maybe the 1930's—were coming true. But the pushing down of the workers did not mean class contradictions had ended, but that the workers' anger was forced below the surface.

This is why the fighting spirit demonstrated by the striking newspaper employees has been like a breath of fresh air. Despite the efforts to hold the struggle in check by the union officials, from time to time, the workers have shown the power

they have when they unite in mass struggle and refuse to be intimidated by the laws and police that serve the rich. The sight of thousands of workers shutting down the Sterling Heights plant, of hundreds of workers fiercely defending their picket lines against the batons and tear gas of the police shows that even in the present difficult conditions, workers can stand up, can confront the powers that be, can organize themselves for serious action against the exploiters. The newspaper workers struggle is but one skirmish. But if an effective struggle is possible even during this relative lull in the class struggle overall, this is evidence that the class struggle is not a relic of the past, but a necessity of today and the future. What *is* really a useless relic is class collaboration, the policy of the union officials. (And if class struggle is a necessity, it is a sign that the profit system of capitalism is backward and needs replacing.)

When the strike began, however, it was not at all clear that it would take on militant features. The leaders of the six trade unions representing the workers were offering to give up jobs and other concessions to the DNA as they had in the past. The head of the Mailer's Union recently admitted he offered almost \$11 million in concessions, and this is only one union! Such is the typical strategy of the union officials these days. Look for ways to satisfy management regardless of how it hurts the workers. Then tell the workers that this policy saves them from even worse concessions that management wanted. Tell them that if they sacrifice for the company today, they'll reap rewards from the higher profits of the future. In the past, the newspaper bosses were satisfied to go along with this anti-worker game. But the previous concessions did not lead to the workers recouping their losses in the future good times, but just the opposite. They whetted the appetites of the newspaper management for a

bigger assault on the workers livelihood as they sensed that now was the time to go in for the kill. Thus, management made no serious effort to negotiate, as even the National Labor Relations Board acknowledged. Essentially they forced a strike where they hoped to make the workers crawl back on outrageous terms or permanently replace them.

On July 13 the strike began. The workers showed a lot of spirit. They protested at businesses advertising in the papers, held pickets at newspaper facilities, and attended mass rallies. This had some value. But as the scab production and distribution of the newspapers became better organized, the limits of such activity became more apparent. Militant workers began to demand stronger measures to impede production of the paper. In particular, it was apparent that shutting down production at the main plants was the task at hand.

For the first month and a half of the strike, the leaders of the striking unions avoided those measures that could most effectively hurt production of the newspaper. Indeed they actively collaborated (and still do) with the police in Sterling Heights and Detroit to make sure the picket lines at the plants did not interfere with scabs coming in and out of the plant. Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO bosses as a whole offered some token support. This policy allowed the DNA to get their scab production off the ground.

A turning point

But a key turning point in the struggle came on September 2. The top AFL-CIO brass were in town for the downtown Labor Day march. This is always an event where the union leaders put on a show of being staunch defenders of the workers. And this time, the posturing was more than usual as the national AFL-CIO election campaigning was under way. AFL-CIO president Tom Donahue, the hand-picked successor to Lane Kirkland, faces the slate led by Sweeney of the SEIU (Service Employees International Union). To give you an idea of how little the opposition slate actually differs from the incumbents, the opposition previously had wanted Donahue to run against Kirkland. But in order to demonstrate their so-called "militant" credentials, the national and local AFL-CIO leaders representing both slates organized a large mass march to the Sterling Heights plant gates.

The union officials had no intention of using the thousands of mobilized workers to shut the plant down, however. They just wanted a symbolic protest where a few designated people would kneel at the plant gates and be peacefully carted away by the police. Union-trained marshals urged marchers to avoid confrontation all during the march from the union hall to the plant. But while the march headed toward the plant, something else was going on: a group of several hundred workers already at the plant gate refused to let police break their picketing in front of the main gate. They clashed with police and repelled them. This helped change the entire atmosphere. Now that these workers had demonstrated it was possible to repulse the police attacks, and with union officials having a hard time policing such a large crowd, the picketing took on a new character. The idea of not letting police break the plant gate picket lines spread widely. Huge crowds gathered at the gates to face down the police, the company's private security goons, and the scabs.

Although some 20 suburban police forces were on hand, the 3,000 strike supporters outnumbered them 10 to 1. Neither the cops nor the union officers dared mess with the fired up workers that night. The plant was shut down tight, delaying the distribution of the Sunday paper until late the next morning. The workers had shown their power. This was a real blow to the billionaire newspaper magnates who run the Detroit newspapers.

On September 4, despite the fact that the union leadership did not call for actions at the Sterling Heights plant, 300 workers showed up anyway. You have probably seen the newsreel footage by now of what happened. The workers were charged several times by the police who eventually tear-gassed them. But the workers fought back, fending off police with picket sticks, and hurling stones and pieces of metal. 20 brave picketers were injured in the battle but the police also suffered injuries. The police, who early in the strike beat up peaceful picketers, learned that they could no longer assault the workers without paying a price. Thus, even though the picketers could not shut down the plant for more than a few hours that evening, their action was very important to the overall struggle.

On Saturday, September 9, the unions again mobilized large numbers to turn out at the Sterling Heights plant. But again, union leadership tried to clamp down on militancy. However, several thousand workers showed up prepared for battle, with face masks for tear-gas protection and picket poles to fend off the police. Once again, the cops and the bureaucrats could only watch on as the plant was shut down again and the company had to resort to a costly helicopter airlift to get newspapers out of the plant.

Union leaders cower before court injunction

So now there were two main trends developing in the strike. There was a trend based on the militant initiative of the rank-and-file. And there the official trade union policy of trying to keep the struggle under wraps. This does not necessarily mean that the militant workers saw themselves as in opposition to the union leadership. But in practice, they were following a different policy.

Now the union leadership faced a dilemma. If they continued to bring large numbers of workers to the plants, they had to worry about the struggle going beyond them; and if they didn't, they had to explain why a clearly effective strategy was being abandoned. When, on Sept. 13, a Macomb County judge handed down an injunction banning picketing at the plant gates, they had their excuse for abandoning mass pickets at Sterling Heights. And it was abandoned with a vengeance. When 300 workers showed up at a meeting the following Saturday, expecting to be mobilized for picketing, the union representatives instructed workers not to picket, but to be "peaceful" and "conservative." Workers were instructed to slowly drive their cars around the plant to impede traffic. This failed to do anything but get some workers fat traffic tickets. And this policy has allowed production to go unimpeded at the Sterling Heights plant to this date.

There was a setback. And it was shameless treachery by the bureaucrats. The injunction, bad as it was, would still have allowed thousands of workers to assemble near the plant gates

so long as they weren't blocked. From there the workers could, at opportune times, move to blockade the gates as they had done before. There is no doubt thousands of workers (not only newspaper workers, but auto workers and workers and activists from other occupations) had demonstrated their willingness to do this the previous two weeks. But the union leadership squandered this golden opportunity, choosing to bow down to capitalist "law and order" rather than unleash thousands of workers against the newspaper tycoons.

From reading the left press, the union leaders are apparently offering the excuse that they would risk heavy fines and jail for union officials if they defied the court injunction. Naturally, we would oppose any such punishments on the unions. But the refusal of the union officials to defy the injunctions cannot be excused either. The workers have been willing to face arrests, fines, beatings, and financial hardship in order to push their struggle forward. But when the bureaucrats have to face similar hardships, they would rather sacrifice the struggle. And what good is saving the union from financial hardship if the union is not going to wage a determined struggle? Moreover, if the AFL-CIO really wanted to, they could tap the large amount of funds they squander on lobbying Democratic party politicians, paying themselves fat salaries, etc. or make a special funding request of the millions of union members to bolster the finances of local unions. In any case, not a single fine or day in jail for union leaders has yet taken place, yet the bureaucrats are on their knees already.

Workers fight on

Despite the undermining activities of the bureaucrats, the workers are fighting on. They have clashed with the Detroit police at the Jefferson Ave. plant. And several attempts have been made to confront scabs at the distribution centers, such as on Clayton in Detroit. The bureaucrats continue to do the dirty work of the police for them. For instance, at Clayton, recently a couple of hundred workers showed up to confront the scabs. But even when there was only a token police force on hand, the union officials attempted to discourage any militant action.

The latest development is the union leaderships are offering to come back to work if negotiations resume with the DNA. They are offering up a plateful of concessions to the DNA but want all strikers rehired and if there is an impasse in negotiations, they want binding arbitration. Thus, the union officials essentially want to return to the pre-strike situation. These maneuvers tend to undercut the workers momentum at a time when recent figures show the strike has significantly affected the DNA's production and income. But the DNA is thumbing their nose at the offer, claiming they will keep the 1,300 scabs on their payrolls, that only 500 of the 2,500 striking workers will get their jobs back after the strike, and that they will not accept binding arbitration.

Support rank-and-file militancy

In this situation, DWV calls on all workers and activists to help strengthen the strike. If you can, go to the pickets and help make them as militant as possible. Participate in the various other solidarity activities such as subscriptions, discouraging

sellers and distributors, advertisers, etc. Spread the truth about the struggle at your workplaces, in communities and in the schools. Feel free to make use of our leaflets and articles. If you need copies, let us know.

As you can see, the fate of the struggle will, to a large extent, be determined by whether or not the workers can break out of the limits imposed on them by the union leadership. To the extent the workers can organize themselves independently, they will maintain the ability to overcome the treachery of their so-called leaders.

How the opportunist left undermines independent class organization

The question of independent class organization is a pressing one for workers everywhere. Anyone interested in building a powerful workers movement should clarify to workers that they must not rely on the present class collaborationist trade union structure, but need to break out of the grip of the labor bureaucrats. There are no shortage of left wing groups around that talk about the mighty workers' movement they want to build. but the fashionable trend in the left is actually to channel the workers back into the arms of the bureaucrats. Let's look at some examples.

Perhaps the most naked example of this in the newspaper strike is the trotskyite SWP. In their publication, *The Militant*, they openly opposed the Sept. 4 action on the grounds that the trade union bureaucrats did not organize it. They considered this a "provocation." In other words, they were terrified of the independent action of the workers like the bureaucrats themselves are. Likewise, they do not have any criticism of the bureaucrats for undermining militancy and indeed paint them as great organizers. We have written on this in *Communist Voice* [volume 1, number 4, p. 12]. Since then, we have gotten further issues of their press. These issues were written after the union caved in to the court injunction calling off mass protests at the Sterling Heights plant. In the October 2 *Militant* they write, without any criticism: "200 people gathered at the DNA's north plant in Sterling Heights, where picket captains organized compliance with the injunction." So the not-so *Militant* echoes the capitulationist stand of the union officials.

And it is not only the trade union bureaucrats who are treated with kid gloves. The *Militant* portrays Detroit Mayor Archer as echoing the calls of the union leaders for negotiations. Presumably, this is supposed to show Archer is assisting the workers. Even though the *Militant* itself reports on the brutality of the Detroit police in attacking picketers, they manage to extricate the Mayor. But of course the mayor is a Democrat and everyone familiar with the union leadership knows they promote the Democrats as the salvation of the workers.

So the *Militant* falls obediently in line. In the October 9 issue, the *Militant* uncritically promotes statements from a bureaucrat promoting offering huge concessions to the DNA before the strike.

Another trotskyite group, WWP, has been hyping what they call a "general strike" in support of the newspaper strike. Of course, a general shutdown of production in the region would be a mighty blow to the newspaper bosses. But in the hands of WWP, this call becomes a more sophisticated way of promoting

the bureaucrats. According to them, the general strike simply requires some maneuvering within the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. The WWP's plan is to politely ask the fine bureaucrats to have such a strike, and explain how the union by-laws allow for such a thing. But one question. If the AFL-CIO is not even willing to defy a weak injunction and shut down one plant, why will the pleas of WWP convince them to shut down production throughout the region? Isn't this just promoting bigger illusions in the bureaucrats. Meanwhile, while there is grand talk about a general strike, the WWP dodges the real immediate issue facing the workers. It avoids criticizing the stand against militant picketing by the union heads and promotes even the most corrupt bureaucrats, like AFL-CIO head Tom Donahue.

There are other left groups that have been criticizing the bureaucrats to some extent. But even here, the perspective that nothing can go forward without the present trade union hierarchy is maintained. For example, there is *The Spark* group. They might not like the stand of the union leaders, but they promote the idea that no matter how bad the policy, the present union structure is still basically the real fighting tool of the workers. Thus, even when criticizing the union leaders, the Spark manages to obscure the true nature of the trade union hierarchy. For instance, in the newspaper strike, they have only a few halting phrases against the labor misleaders, and act as if their stand is just an unfortunate mistake.

This flows from their view that the present unions are the real class organizations of the workers. This was recently explained to me by a *Spark* member. He conceded that the policy of the union leaders was bad, but since the unions historically developed out of the struggle of the workers, they're still workers' organizations. Thus, one should not be too critical of them lest they not support the workers' struggle. Indeed, he described how *Spark* tactics in a strike of several years ago were to avoid criticizing the bureaucrats despite the fact that the workers were angry at them.

Anti-revisionist communists, such as those who produce *Detroit Workers' Voice* and *Communist Voice*, stand against such views. Our orientation is toward the rank-and-file, not the bureaucrats. We believe that a powerful workers movement will arise only in struggle against the trade union bureaucrats. We strive to unleash the militant sentiments of the workers. And we believe the struggle is an opportunity to further the revolutionary education of the workers. For example, there is the question of workers becoming fully conscious of the significance of their own actions. In this strike, workers have sometimes broken with the official trade union policy. But there is the task of making them conscious of what this showed about the trade union hierarchy and what this implies about how to organize in the future. Or take the question of the police repression. Workers have fought the cops and roundly denounced them. Yet, on the picket lines, there are many questions about why the police behave as they do. Communist theory can clarify this. It can show how American democracy is really a class dictatorship of the rich which utilizes force against the working masses whenever they get too "uppity." Anti-revisionism helps workers sort out the trends in their movement and who their true friends and enemies are.

Presently, the anti-revisionist trend is but a tiny handful. But DWV and CVO see the building of such a trend as of vital importance to the workers present-day battles and to assist in moving the workers toward revolutionary conclusions. □

From the discussion after the speech and other additional points:

On the National Labor Relations Board ruling:

It was pointed out that the NLRB ruling is being appealed by the DNA. But if the NLRB stand that the DNA engaged in unfair labor practices holds, it means the newspaper companies are supposed to hire back striking workers after a settlement is reached and it allows strikers to more easily collect unemployment benefits. Union officials have claimed that this means "the federal government is on the workers' side." This is a joke. Even if the NLRB decision is not overturned on appeal, if the strike shows anything, it is that the government institutions (police, courts, laws, etc.) are weapons of the rich to help subdue the workers. Has the federal government lifted a finger to halt the brutal police assaults on strikers? No. Indeed, federal laws restrict labor actions against other media outlets owned by the Gannett and Knight-Ridder chains which own the Detroit papers. So while these resources from entire media conglomerates are used against the workers, the workers are only legally allowed to hit back at one part of the conglomerate. How pro-worker!

Strike news:

The weekend of October 8, hundreds of workers clashed with scabs and police at two suburban distribution centers. At present the main activities are no longer at the production plants but at some distribution facilities. Strikers are able to harass scabs and somewhat delay distribution, but the police have managed to keep the scab distribution centers operational.

More on the trade unions:

Of course the unions did develop out of the workers' struggle. But during the founding of the main industrial unions, for example, the issue wasn't simply that workers' struggle led to their creation, but what policy and structure they would assume. The present trade unions were long ago consolidated on a class collaborationist basis and against the radical trends. According to the explanation of the *Spark* representative, however, the present AFL-CIO unions are workers' organizations just like the present-day Russia is still a workers' state (!), however "deformed," because there was a workers' revolution in 1917. If the Russian system, even under Yeltsin, is supposed to be basically pro-worker, than this is further evidence of how *Spark's* use of the term "workers' organization" is to create illusions in the labor bureaucracy. □

“Left” daydreams about the labor bureaucrats

by Mark, CVO, Detroit

One of the hallmarks of opportunism in the U.S. left is promoting the trade union bureaucracy as the true defenders of the workers' interests. Some trends with this view go so far as to portray the present leaders of the AFL-CIO as great class heroes. Others have any number of criticisms of the way the present leaders behave, but hold that with some tinkering, the pro-capitalist union hierarchy will function as the genuine class organization of the workers. Both views glamorize the real situation with the present trade unions, however. Workers go into the unions because they want to defend their immediate interests against the onslaught of the employers. But the unions today are not under the control of the workers. They have long been under the thumb of a solidly-entrenched bureaucracy that defends capitalism and constantly undermines the workers' struggle. As well, the union officialdom has come to terms with the tons of regulations of the capitalist government to greatly restrict the workers' movement. Thus, the rank-and-file must be made clear that the workers' struggle is bound to encounter obstacles from the trade union leadership. Creating illusions in the present union administration means downplaying the need for workers to develop their own independent class policy and organization.

The Detroit newspaper workers' strike provides an example of how important an accurate appraisal of the trade union bureaucracy is. The strength of the strike has been the ability of the militant section of workers to periodically go beyond the timid policy of the union officials. And the struggle has been set back when the bureaucrats hold sway and the workers are held in check. In this situation, a number of trotskyite groups are channeling the militant workers back into the arms of the rotten bureaucrats.

Workers' World revolves around bureaucrats

The trotskyite Workers' World Party (WWP) is an example of a group that presents the most miserable bureaucrats in the most rosy light. For example, in the November 2 issue of their publication *Workers' World*, the lead article hails the newly-installed AFL-CIO top officials (Sweeney, Chavez-Thompson, and Trumka) under the headline "New union leaders say: Organize!". The article fails to mention how these worthies have only minor differences with the previous sellout regime of Lane Kirkland and have quite a track record undermining the building of a militant workers' movement. (See, for instance, the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* article exposing Sweeney on page 14.)

All through the newspaper strike, the pages of *Workers World* have been crediting the actions of the militant workers to the timid union officials. But in fact, the bureaucrats have abandoned the mass picketing at the production plants, collaborated with the strike-breaking police, and have tried to contain the militancy in the actions that remain. When the bureaucrats caved in to a court injunction and abandoned the most effective

mass picketing efforts, the WWP did not expose this treachery. Instead they pushed the idea that if workers merely followed union by-laws, they could push the bureaucrats to call a general strike. As it turns out, the WWP plan does not even really require the bureaucrats to call a general strike. According to *Workers World*, the workers would only hold a "referendum vote" that would "authorize a general strike in support of striking newspaper workers, *if and when such a tactic was deemed necessary*." (Nov. 2, 1995, p. 4, italics added). In other words, even if in union after union, the workers manage to push through the WWP demand, this demand does not obligate the bureaucrats to do anything! The WWP has inadvertently given a realistic appraisal of where their path of being entangled in trade union legalism leads.

In reality, for there to be some chance that the bureaucrats will respond to a call for a general strike, the ferment among the workers in the region will most likely have to be at a much higher level than it presently is. But hopes for spectacular actions in the future requires finding ways today to encourage workers to break with the policy of the bureaucracy, not presenting the AFL-CIO leadership as class heroes. This is what will help build the powerful movement of the future.

Meanwhile, the WWP recently discovered that the resumption of mass picketing at production plants was an issue after all. But once again, their worshipful attitude toward the bureaucrats undercuts the idea that the strike will be strengthened if workers take matters into their own hands. Indeed, even when the bureaucrats called mass picketing, the workers had to overcome the bureaucrats in order to convert them into effective actions.

Trotskyist League strike strategy

The Trotskyist League is an organization that has some just criticisms of the way the trade union leadership has been conducting the newspaper strike. They have emphasized relying on mass picketing as opposed to the legal maneuvers favored by the union heads, they point out the need to defy injunctions, that the bureaucrats rely on the bourgeois politicians, etc. Well and good. But they conclude that if only there is a little pressure on the bureaucrats, all will go well. In the name of putting pressure on the bureaucrats, TL pretends that the workers can rely on the union structures under the thumb of the bureaucrats. They never explain that the workers must prepare to carry out their struggle in defiance of the bureaucrats.

In a September 1 leaflet circulated at the strike, TL argues that "the key strategy question" for striking workers is attending union meetings to vote for good policies and leaders. But such activities will only be useful if a clear picture is presented of what to expect from the union officialdom. This, the TL leaflet fails to do. Instead they contend that these activities will enable the strikers to "correct their leaders." Fat chance!

TL never even raise the possibility that the bureaucrats won't go along with the workers' desires, much less what the workers should do in that eventuality. Instead they imply that

the bureaucrats will have no choice but to obey the will of the rank and file. However relying on the bureaucrats is foolhardy. For instance TL and others in the main strike solidarity coalition passed a resolution on September 14 stating “the striking unions are urged to request the metro Detroit AFL-CIO to ask its affiliates to conduct referendum votes to authorize the AFL-CIO to call a one-day work stoppage as a solidarity action. . .” Now it is two months later. Not only have the unions not carried out this request, they have retreated from the mobilizations they had previously been doing. All through the strike the bureaucrats have shown they would rather unite with the strikebreaking cops than the fighting sections of the rank and file. Typically, when the workers’ want to go beyond what the bureaucrats advocate, the workers’ proposals are rejected outright, or formally agreed to but then undermined in practice. All this is not surprising. The union hierarchy is designed to keep the workers in check, not reflect militant class sentiments. The militant workers should not be fed illusions about transforming the bureaucrats, but must organize themselves so they can carry out their own policy regardless of what the union big shots decide to do.

An October 18 leaflet provides another example of what TL means by “correcting” the bureaucrats. This leaflet is attributed only to some “union members” but was heavily promoted and influenced by TL and is endorsed in name by several TL members. The leaflet calls for good things like defying injunctions against mass picketing. But it emphasizes its calls are merely to “propose courses of action for the unions to consider” as it would be wrong to “tell the unions to defy the injunction.” By talking about the unions without distinguishing between the workers and the bureaucrats, TL confuses a militant stance toward the bureaucrats with bossing around the workers. Sure, no one should simply order the workers about, disregarding their sentiments. But the workers should certainly demand that their sentiments be followed by the bureaucrats whether the bureaucrats like it or not. TL banks everything on “correcting the leaders” and then acts as if treating the bureaucrats with great reverence will bring colossal pressure to bear on them!

As it turns out, *the TL leaflet never actually calls on the bureaucrats to defy the injunction*, but only offers it as one possible option. The other option the leaflet offers is not defying the injunction. Of course the leaflet pretends that the union leaders bowing down to court injunctions could be part of a really militant strategy. They hint that union hierarchy could give their blessings for militant activists to organize the mass pickets so “the unions could not be held responsible.” So at a time when the bureaucrats are cracking down on militant workers and red-baiting left-wing activists, the leaflet fantasizes about the bureaucrats handing over the struggle to them. TL has simply found a “militant” way to take the AFL-CIO bosses off the hook should they continue to cower before the courts. After two months of having their requests for militance turned down by the bureaucrats, TL doesn’t tell the workers that they cannot expect much from these worthies, but instead provides the

bureaucrats with an excuse for further inaction. They do not explain why the bureaucrats have been refusing to go along with a militant policy, but talk as if the bureaucrats will leap into action if only they are asked nicely. Meanwhile, their leaflet falls silent on the need for the workers to defy the bureaucrats.

TL trails behind the reformist bureaucrats

The illusions TL creates about the trade union bureaucracy are connected to their faith in a section of the AFL-CIO bureaucrats who sound more militant but want only a slightly-improved version of standard AFL-CIO policy. For example, TL thinks the New Directions Movement will be the vehicle for converting the UAW into a staunch defender of the workers. NDM in turn, has placed its faith in the new UAW president Stephen Yokich. Yokich has never had any more than small differences with the rotten UAW bureaucracy which sold the auto workers down the concessions river in the 1980’s. Nor has Yokich, a big name in Detroit area unionism, complained about the way the newspaper union leaders have tried to hold back the present strike struggle. Yet an NDM co-chairperson recently described Yokich as someone who “is sometimes surprisingly close to the kind of vision that New Directions brings to the union” and pledges NDM to “try as hard as possible to work together” with Yokich. (*The Ford Worker*, August 1995, p.3) TL itself may disagree with such praise for Yokich. But the trend that TL is banking to transform the UAW seems to think Yokich pretty much fulfills their vision for the union.

TL also is one of the trends pushing the Labor Party Advocates. Labor Party Advocates wants to create a labor party expressing the will of the union bureaucracy. The labor party would provide an alternative to the traditional union leader support for the Democrats. But, based on the bureaucrats, this party’s policies will be little more than that of the liberal-labor Democrats whom the bureaucrats have traditionally supported. That the TL is so anxious to build such a party once again shows that whatever criticisms they have of the union leaders, they nonetheless promote illusions in them.

WWP and TL: not so different after all

WWP praises the bureaucrats to the skies, while TL criticizes the bureaucrats and calls for a more militant policy. So, at first glance, they seem to be very different. However, they both share the opinion that the workers’ movement cannot go forward unless the union bureaucracy is leading it. And what is worse — pretending that the present union leaders are doing great things, or pretending that great things can come from the present bureaucracy? They are both worse. If the class struggle is to advance, the workers must build their movement and their true class organizations in defiance of the trade union bureaucracy. □

Longing for a labor party — Oleg on Labor Party Advocates

by Pete Brown, CVO, Detroit

Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal #8 carried an article by Oleg, "Proposals for a 'Labor Party' and the Staley workers' struggle." In this article Oleg offered his reservations about the plans by Labor Party Advocates to establish a labor party next June. Oleg's approach is to disagree with their plan but also to apologize for his differences. He would like to see something like their labor party established, but he can't bring himself to support a party that doesn't take a stand on a variety of issues Oleg himself is interested in — opposition to attacks on immigrants, for example.

In the midst of this article Oleg gives an update on the Staley workers' struggle. He notes that some of the worker-activists at Staley are angry at the union leadership in this country and are looking for new, working class political organization. And he notes that the Staley union local has formally endorsed LPA and recently hosted a conference on building the labor movement at which a number of LPA bigshots spoke.

The trouble is, the way these things are presented, they get mixed up. The local union president's fondness for LPA gets mixed up with the rank and file's anger at the union leadership. Instead of helping to focus workers' anger against the bureaucrats, Oleg's article may actually contribute to workers' confusion about LPA's aims.

The present situation is that workers have been left high and dry by the trade union and reformist leaders. Wages continue to go down; strikes are crippled by injunctions, police power and replacement workers; and there is no relief in sight from the politicians. Workers are in desperate need of reorganization. Now along comes LPA to tell workers they represent an alternative. But in fact LPA is based on the old trade union misleaders who have been helping stamp out militancy among the workers for years. And they insist that their labor party organization will be built around the trade union officialdom.

Oleg's report on the Staley struggle shows what happens when the bureaucrats are left in control of a struggle. The strike drags on, year after year. Production proceeds unhindered, and the capitalists are happily making profits. The workers' earlier militancy has been squelched. Once in a while the bureaucrats organize some mass event, but these are more and more taking on the nature of memorial meetings. The height of their militancy was reached more than a year ago, when they organized some "civil disobedience" at the plant gates. When the police responded with pepper gas, they quickly gave up even this tactic.

Oleg praises the Staley workers for self-sacrifice and maintaining the struggle for so long. Yes, the workers have performed heroically. But this just makes the union misleadership all the more culpable, for taking this heroism and squandering it in dead-end tactics. Oleg praises the union local for being democratic and allowing leftists to work with it, but the leftists are only mobilized into tame support work. The leftists them-

selves have not seriously challenged the tactics of the local union leaders, and this is why they are allowed to participate.

We see the threat of such a fate hanging over the Detroit newspaper strike. When workers began to develop militancy on the picket lines, then the bureaucrats organized some mass events to bolster their credibility and to rein in the workers. They planned some elaborate, showy "civil disobedience" demonstrations that would get them some publicity but also maintain their strict legalism. They could continue their jobs as scab-herders but also gain a reputation for activism. Unfortunately for them, this plan backfired. The rank and file, enthused by the mass outpouring, scrapped the "civil disobedience" and fought off police attacks on the picket line. This raised the issue to a district court, which issued an injunction against the picketers. At this point the bureaucrats gave up any pretense and simply caved in.

Today it looks like the newspaper strike will drag on for some time. The bureaucrats keep the workers busy with picketing advertisers, protesting outside newspaper executives' homes, etc. Local supporters and yes, even leftists, are allowed to participate. The workers are enthusiastic about doing what they can to advance the struggle. But the problem is, they're crippled by the bureaucrats' restrictions, and if these are not broken through, the strike is in trouble. Had the union followed a more militant policy, it wouldn't necessarily have been a short strike, but at least the struggle would not have suffered the setback it did. Today workers would be asking, "What's next?" instead of, "Can we hang on?"

Oleg raises that the Staley local allows leftists to participate, which is "quite different from a number of other struggles which are tightly controlled by conservative trade union hacks." But our experience with the newspaper strike indicates that the bureaucrats typically play both games at the same time. For those leftists who are happy to tamely support the bureaucrats and do as they're told, the bureaucrats are happy to mobilize them. This includes some LPA supporters.

But for those leftists who criticize this or that policy of the bureaucrats, such as the dead-end "civil disobedience" tactics, the bureaucrats carry out a vicious red-baiting campaign, denouncing the "outside agitators". This is despite the fact that most of these groups promote faith in the trade union bureaucracy overall and discourage actions taken without permission of the union leadership. Even tame LPA supporters sometimes get tarred with the anti-communist brush, because of the bureaucrats' insistence on keeping everything tightly controlled.

This shows what's wrong with the plan to build a labor party, a trade union caucus or reform movement, or any other similar organization basing it on the present trade union structure. For the newspaper strike the bureaucrats in the Detroit area organized support committees in local plants headed up by local union officials of UAW and other unions. On Labor Day weekend, for the bureaucrats' planned events, these committees turned out thousands of participants. But at the same time these committees were the vehicles for carrying out anti-communist

attacks. And once the injunctions came down, these committees shut off the mobilizations. Thus the workers' struggle was handicapped by the lack of their own independent organization.

Any plan for proletarian reorganization must develop an edge against the labor aristocracy and the trade union officialdom that sits on the working class. And LPA is not doing that. On the contrary; they promote it, and plan to build their party around it. This is what the labor party idea is all about. Oleg's

article tends to confuse this issue and promote that the basic problem with LPA is that their program isn't broad enough, that they don't have positions on foreign policy, racism, immigrants, etc. But arguing in this way is simply to avoid the major issue, to replace it with sectarian differences, and to apologize to LPA for not going along whole-hog with their scheme. It indicates that Oleg is actually quite interested in the labor party idea, but just can't bring himself yet to support it. □

On the new head of the AFL-CIO

John Sweeney's Unionism is Warmed-Over Kirkland Stew

by NC, *Los Angeles Workers' Voice*

The following article by NC originally appeared—under the Kirkland stew title—in the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*, #8 (October 8, 1995). NC's article provides a glimpse of the rotten policy followed by John Sweeney in his role as head of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Since it was written, John Sweeney has been elected AFL-CIO president. The SEIU has a better reputation than many unions, which is one of the reasons why some activists may hope that Sweeney will be a change from the former AFL-CIO leader Lane Kirkland. But a closer look at the SEIU shows that Sweeney has played the same role in the SEIU as Kirkland and other union bureaucrats play in their unions.

NC's article also deals with one of the more interesting aspects of the story of the SEIU in Los Angeles, the dissident activity at the base of the union. However, he doesn't look closely into the political complexion of these groups. NC repeatedly praises MFUD (Local 99 Members for Union Democracy), BAFU (Bus Drivers Association for Unity), and the Local 399 Multi-Racial Alliance. But he doesn't assess what their views are, what political trends are active in them, how they were built, as well as the temper of the masses and what they are willing to fight for. He simply identifies all militant workers with these groups. The *Los Angeles Workers' Voice*, along with the *Chicago Workers' Voice*, tends to think that all one has to know is that a leftist group is opposed to the worst, most sold-out reformists. They group together all the different forces that are so opposed, although they actually follow different ideas that an activist would have to assess in order to get a realistic picture of these forces, their prospects, and whether to try organizing something similar.

The *LAWV* may be reached at Box 57483, Los Angeles, CA 90057.

In late October, right before Halloween, the AFL/CIO bureaucracy will choose a new president. In this "democracy" the rank and file have no vote at all! Only high officials of member unions vote. The two official candidates are Thomas

Donahue, who was Lane Kirkland's official replacement choice, and John Sweeney, president of the SEIU (Service Employees International Union).

Both Donahue and Sweeney were loyal servants of the Kirkland dynasty for over 16 years. Their current differences are mainly over turf and the huge spoils of office. They both are concerned about the huge loss of dues-paying members mainly due to their own class collaborationist policies. They want to be a bit more aggressive about "organizing," not to defend workers' interests against capital but merely to get more dues moneys in their coffers. They also want to assure the capitalist bosses that their services of "business unionism" for the purpose of policing the workers in the interests of the ruling class and their state still can be relied on. The success of 20 years of capital's huge attacks on workers have exposed the utter bankruptcy of the pro-capitalist politics and tactics of the AFL/CIO.

Donahue is the closest thing to being a Kirkland clone. Sweeney, on the other hand, postures a bit for show about some new militancy and revitalizing the decaying labor federation. In Los Angeles, the *LA Workers' Voice* has carried out some research and talked with a few long-time members of SEIU Local 99, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) classified-employee union with 25,000 dues payers. These workers are the bus drivers, Teaching Assistants (TAs), cafeteria workers, janitors and clerical workers.

So let's see what Sweeney's track record here is like.

Local 99 had a somewhat militant beginning a few decades back, but today it is a thoroughly tamed instrument for the status quo. Its present misleadership is headed by Walter Backstrom. This Sweeney crony usually just signs off on whatever rotten contract he is handed by the LA School Board and the District Administration — very few or no questions asked! This has been especially true since 1981 when the Howard Friedman regime was installed with SEIU President Sweeney's blessing. Friedman and his gang were tyrants over the ranks. They vigorously stifled any rank-and-file initiatives. Friedman ruled by whim and caprice. The regime:

(1) Changed union by-laws unconstitutionally without a membership vote.

(2) Ruled no resolutions from the floor of membership

meetings could be passed.

(3) Held special closed union meetings for officials only.

(4) Rigged elections.

In 1983, after a rigged vote, Friedman and co. first physically threatened and then called the LA Police Department on rank and filers who had seized fraudulent ballots for evidence. The dissident rank and filers went to the PERB (Public Employee Relations Board) with the evidence. Friedman allied with the School District Administration to set up the whistle blowers and get them written up and fired.

Friedman and Co. were disgraced, and Sweeney replaced them with the Bill Price regime in 1984. Price continued in the Friedman/Sweeney tradition, and more rigged elections followed. In addition, Price forbade the members from any united mass meetings that would unite all the bargaining units in Local 99. This was a big fear of both the union officialdom and the District bosses who worked in cahoots to keep the membership weak and disunited.

As workers began to get upset and angry over rotten contracts and lack of democracy, Sweeney decided to remove Price in 1987 and take direct control, ruling from the SEIU International. By 1988, Local 99 was officially in "trusteeship" run directly by Sweeney. According to the Local 99 rank and file dissident "Local 99 Members for Union Democracy" (MFUD) group, Sweeney ran the union like it was his personal private property, like a feudal lord. In 1988-90, Sweeney groomed his local whiphand Walter Backstrom.

Typical of the Sweeney-Backstrom tactics was the scabbing that they ordered during the May, 1989 LA teachers' strike. When significant numbers of district school bus drivers honored the teacher picket lines and even joined in a few, Sweeney and Backstrom collaborated with the District Administration, headed by Superintendent Leonard Britton, and ordered the drivers to scab under threat of written disciplinary action and possible termination. These scab-herding actions are one more despicable example of the depths of Sweeney/Kirkland AFL/CIO pro-capitalist business unionism. This is the same Sweeney who today postures as some kind of "born-again" labor militant — at election time of course.

During the same period, local leaders headed by Backstrom continued the policy of forbidding any joint bargaining unit meeting where union dissidents and others could unite their forces to build a class struggle alternative. In addition, Sweeney as president slapped Local 99 with a \$180,000 "debt" owed to the International for alleged arrears in dues payments by Local 99. This gave Sweeney the excuse to maintain the trusteeship and run roughshod over Local 99 members.

The dissidents in the MFUD became more organized and began their own campaign against the corruption and bureaucratism of the Sweeney-Backstrom group. The MFUD were mainly Black, Latino and Asian bus driver members of Local 99. Sweeney-Backstrom again worked in cahoots with the administration bosses to get MFUD activists written up and fired. A handful of activists were, in fact, fired due to this collusion.

The case of Afro-American driver John Scates is typical. John was fired for organizing in MFUD during their campaign to stop the contracting out of bus driver jobs to unorganized private bus companies like Laidlaw, Mark IV, Cardinal, and

others. When District drivers organized for job actions, a number of militants were blacklisted, including John Scates, in a sweetheart deal between the School Board, the District bosses and the Sweeney-Backstrom leadership of Local 99.

In 1991, the MFUD tried to pull the drivers out of Local 99 and form a new independent union based on the rank and file.¹ Of course, the School Board and the Local 99 leaders worked in concert to pull out all the stops and prevent a new militant rebel union from emerging. In this, they had the help of the state PERB who are more concerned about maintaining relative class peace for the rulers and the corporations than they are about just demands for elementary workers' democracy and a bit of social justice for working people. The MFUD even got the required number of driver signatures required for a severance, but the case was unfairly quashed by the state bureaucrats in PERB.

By the end of 1991, MFUD had changed its name to Bus Drivers Association for Unity (BAFU) and continued the fight for a driver severance from Local 99. At around this same time, Sweeney undemocratically appointed Backstrom as the Secretary-Treasurer and leader of Local 99, along with this minions in other leadership posts.

1991-92 was the period of deep financial crisis in the LA schools and a social crisis in LA which would explode with the LA rebellion/riot of April 29-May 3, 1992. BAFU was also active with other workers and community groups in fighting for more funding for schools and building up a movement to make the rich pay for their capitalist crisis. These drivers and other activists organized a protest march and rally to take place at LA City Hall on Saturday, May 9, 1992.

Since the speakers would include Local 99 and UTLA teacher dissidents, as well as others, Sweeney and Backstrom waged a campaign of slander and calumny against the endorsers and organizers of this action. They suddenly and deliberately arranged their own separate rally at the School Board offices with the support of the LAUSD bosses, the Board, and the Democratic Party.

The activities of these forces may also shed light on the distinct possibility that they might well have worked in tandem through the Democratic (and Republican) Parties and the cops and national guard to eventually get their desired banning order against the BAFU-supported march and rally on the morning of May 9th. On this day, the LAPD and the national guard dispersed over 200 people who had come to march, as well as arresting over 25 who demanded their constitutional rights. A handful of activists were also dispersed at bayonet point from the City Hall rally site.

The 1991-94 Local 99 contracts, as well as those of teachers in UTLA, were a disaster. Over 200 janitors (and a few hun-

¹LA Workers' Voice conducted interviews with a handful of members and ex-members of Local MFUD and BAFU, and we also used copies of the leaflets of agitation and information that these two rank-and-file groups issued between 1989-1993 as back-up for this article. Copies of leaflets are available on request from LA Workers' Voice, Box 57483, Los Angeles, CA 90057.

dred others) were laid off — with a number ending up on General Relief doing almost the SAME jobs on workfare at school sites to get their measly \$212.00/mo. after their unemployment compensation run out! Local 99 members ended up with a 3% cut in 1991-92 and a further 6% cut in 1992-94. Even though 1994-95 contracts have restored most of the 1991 pay rate, Local 99 and other LAUSD workers have still lost close to 16% to inflation and increased costs of living in the last 4 years.

The one bright note of Local 99 during this period was the 1990 organizing drive which brought in 9,700 Teacher Assistants (TAs). This in spite of the fact that UTLA teachers' union hacks, now headed by Helen Bernstein, ordered teachers to cross striking TA picket lines and work — under penalty of district write-ups and termination hearings if they refused.

Bernstein used the bankrupt excuse that Local 99 (really Sweeney/Backstrom & Co.) had ordered 99 members to cross teacher picket lines in the May, 1989 strike! This is the real "solidarity" that the AFL/CIO and their hacks like Sweeney, Backstrom and Bernstein & Co. really represent. They are official scab herders always at the beck and call of the Democratic Party — and the capitalist status quo! With AFL/CIO class collaborationist treachery today facing only feeble resistance organized from the ranks, the bosses and their state can today lay in wait, hiding their "heavy artillery" and relying on the union apparatus to police the workers for them most of the time!

As concerns the TAs today, 95% of them have no health benefits, and those who get "lucky" and have more than 4 hours/day work and "qualify" are subject to 50% co-payments

of premiums!

Today, the repressive actions of Sweeney in SEIU Local 399 - Janitors and Nurses prove his years of treachery in Local 99 were no aberration! Sweeney is today maneuvering with Local 399 President Zellers to nullify a big upset election win by 21 members of the Local 399 "Multi-Racial Alliance," a union reform group tired of the bureaucratic, concessions-loving, racist and undemocratic regime of Zellers. Recently, Sweeney and Zellers were touting a new contract as a "great victory" for the thousands of #399 Justice for Janitors — the top pay janitors will get \$6.80/hr — IN FOUR YEARS!! They did not say that janitors with top pay now had to take a pay cut this year!

Sweeney and Zellers are resorting to every dirty trick in the book to prevent the 21 new rank and filers from having the right to change union policy. This in spite of the fact that the reform group won 21 of 25 officials' seats in the June 8th elections! Sweeney and Co. want to maintain the control of the union as a "business" for their ilk to collect dues and peddle the commodity labor power on the capitalist labor market like so much cattle. But now more workers are waking up and getting wise to the Judas nature of the likes of Sweeney, Backstrom, Zellers, and the AFL/CIO pro-capitalist unionism they represent!

Workers must find forms of organization and revolutionary politics and tactics that can move the class struggle to the force once again.

As concerns the union bureaucracy, it is still a formidable but decaying obstacle course that the next wave of mass workers' struggles will have to isolate, expose and sweep aside into the dust bin of history if the workers' anti-capitalist battles are to make big advances. □

Issues of the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* relevant to their differences with *Communist Voice*

Issue #8, Oct. 8, 1995 of the *CWVTJ* contains several articles commented on in this issue of the *Communist Voice*. Some of them—Oleg's "Does the *CWV* support Cardenismo?", NC's article on John Sweeney, and Tono Garcia's "In defense of Marxism"—are reprinted in this issue of *Communist Voice*. But *CWVTJ* also contains some other articles commented on here.

Issue #7, May 25, of the *CWVTJ* contains several articles relevant to their differences with us over what is anti-revisionist communism. Julie's article "*El Machete* and the Mexican left" was reprinted in *Communist Voice* #3, Aug. 1 (pp. 39-46), but *CWVTJ* #7 also contains some other articles that are commented on in *Communist Voice* #3, namely Jake's article "Anatomy of a split, Part I", Barb's "Dealing with Trotsky: Idiocy or Treachery?", and Oleg's "Crisis in Mexico".

Also, the special issue of the *CWVTJ* of March 7, 1995 contains 59 letters and articles on the differences between the *Chicago Workers' Voice* and other comrades, and on overall editorial summing up *CWV*'s view of the issue. However, the material is dated, given the further development of the debate—which can be followed in *Communist Voice*. Also, the "special issue" is slapped together in a way that makes it hard to follow, which its own 'Editorial Guide' points out. It also omits some relevant documents from the other side, even within the time range it claims to cover. All this is probably related to the irritation the *CWV* displays over having had to publish the material at all, with the 'Editorial Guide' calling the discussion "inopportune" and "force(d) on them". The *CWV* also announced that it only would circulate this issue to subscribers and those who write in for it..

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

Land reform, socialism, and the Mexican countryside

The following three articles debate the Marxist agrarian program for the Mexican countryside. They center on whether land reform is socialist; whether recognizing the limitations of land reform means denying peasant demands for land; and whether an agrarian program must take account of the fact that land reform has not stopped the driving of the majority of the Mexican peasants off the land and the turning of a large number of the remaining ones into wage-workers and semi-proletarians. The *Chicago Workers' Voice* agrarian program centers on more financial aid to the agricultural co-ops (*ejidos*) as a solution to peasant poverty and as supposedly a quasi-socialist or somewhat socialist measure; in fact, their program is an idealized form of the program begun by the late Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico's president from 1934 - 1940 and founder of the present Mexican political system. We begin with Oleg's defense of the *CWV* program and then proceed to two replies.

Does the *CWV* support Cardenismo?

By Oleg, *Chicago Workers' Voice*

The following article is reprinted from the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*, #8, pp. 13-15. It is replied to in this issue of *Communist Voice* by Mark's "Peasant socialism or proletarian politics" and by Joseph Green's "The ghost of Lazaro Cardenas and the present crisis in Mexico".

Joseph Green accuses us (*CWV* as a whole and Julie and me, specifically) of supporting Cardenismo. Although in most cases I have not replied to Joseph's accusations, I think it might be worthwhile to do so in this case. A close look at Joseph's accusations against Julie and me will do two things. It will show the intellectual dishonesty of his criticisms and thus why it is not worth it to reply to all of his wild charges. Further I hope it will clarify a little bit more as to what the Cardenista program really is and is not.

Here are some quotes from Joseph (*Communist Voice* #3, p. 23):

Joseph: "The *CWV* continues to sugarcoat the politics of the EZLN. . . .

"But when Oleg talks about the EZLN program, whose agrarian demands, whose nationalism, and whose vision of national consensus are essentially an idealized version of the program of Lazaro Cardenas, he enthuses that 'the main slogans of the Zapatistas are for "Democracy, Liberty, and Justice." ' He doesn't refer to the connection of the EZLN's program to the program of Cardenas. Instead, he holds that the EZLN has a correct immediate program, whose only flaw is that it is 'only one step in the direction of complete emancipation of the oppressed in Mexico'— i.e. it is only the first step. So much for Oleg's view that the program of Lázaro Cárdenas is unworkable."

.....
"The *CWV* itself has trouble differentiating itself from the program of Lázaro Cárdenas.

"For example, Julie seems unaware that her own program for Mexican struggle, with her demands for state support for ejidos and for integrating ejidos into large-scale production, repeats basic features of the agrarian program of Lazaro Cardenas. . . .

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

"Of course, even under Cardenas, only a minority of peasants received land, and still less were in collective ejidos, and the amount of machinery and other aid to the ejidos was insufficient. But if that is the main difference with the program of Cardenas, then Julie is basically asking for the extension of that program. And isn't it promoting capitalist illusions, as Lenin and Engels and Marx thought it was, to hold that peasant agriculture can be transformed into large-scale production, with all the peasants reaping the benefit, prior to the achievement of socialism?"

How can one promote the radical carrying out of bourgeois democratic reform in the countryside, and yet specify that all the consequences of the development of capitalism such as class differentiation among the peasants be eliminated? Julie's 'socialist measures' in the countryside are the dreams of peasant democracy."

I think these quotes illustrate a general method of Joseph—

1. take some statement or phrase from his opponent
2. expand that statement way beyond the bounds of credulity to say it is equivalent to some other stand
3. prove that that other stand wrong.

I think any fair minded reader will find it an unjustifiable stretch for Joseph to argue that:

1. Oleg sees some merit in the Zapatista program of "Democracy, Liberty and Justice".
2. This program bears some resemblance to the rhetoric of Lázaro Cárdenas.
3. Therefore Oleg really does consider the Cardenista program to be workable even though he says otherwise.

In regard to number 1, I did say I thought that if the Zapatistas achieved their demands for democracy, liberty and justice, it would be a step forward for the Mexican working people. Then I went on to explain how I did not find this program sufficient. I think Joseph is twisting things when he says that "Oleg enthuses" for the EZLN program.

In any case I think the big leap of accusation by Joseph is in number 2. Joseph claims that the program of the EZLN's agrarian demands, nationalism, and vision of a national consensus "are essentially an idealized version of the program of Lázaro Cárdenas." These programmatic points are much too general to be made the specific property of Cárdenas. Furthermore, I have not seen any EZLN statements praising Lázaro Cárdenas or saying that their program is based on his. The EZLN does trace its program back to Emiliano Zapata as their name suggests. Cárdenas certainly paid verbal homage to Zapata as do nearly all modern Mexican politicians. Joseph needs to do a lot more serious research if he wants to prove that the EZLN is idealized Cardenismo. The research I have done on Cárdenas so far does not prove such a thing.

Joseph's conclusion is that I am really a reformist even though I say I am a revolutionary. I think the conclusion is that Joseph stretches and bends statements to "prove" that his opponents are no good.

Joseph resorts to similar gymnastics to "prove" that Julie's program for Mexican agriculture is that same as that of Cárdenas. Joseph starts with the fact that Julie calls for struggle to keep the peasantry from being devastated and driven off the land. He then claims that this is Cárdenas's program and therefore Julie must really be a Cardenista.

In fact it was not Cárdenas's program that the peasants struggle against the government. In fact he suppressed some peasant struggles. He did distribute a lot of land to peasants, but he gave a big impulse to the development of modern capitalist agriculture in Mexico. Cárdenas is by no means unique in implementing some concessions to the Mexican peasantry.

In this same issue #3 of the Detroit journal there are two book reports by Pete Brown, one concerning the development of a particular *ejido*, and the other on Echeverria's agricultural

program. Each of these cases show the Mexican government taking measures which temporarily and partially alleviated the plight of impoverished Mexican peasants. Pete's articles show that to get any measures from the Mexican government to do something for the peasants requires a class struggle.

I can't make out whether or not Joseph considers any general program of political and economic demands in relation to the struggle of the peasantry worthy of his support. For example, he says, "Yet the most radical democratic measures in the countryside, measures that eliminate the marginalization of the indigenous people, provide maximum state aid to the countryside, etc., would in the long run accelerate capitalist development among the peasantry even faster than now." (CV #3, p.25). Is he saying that in the countryside the struggle must be straightforward and only for socialism? Joseph should clarify.

For my part I do think it is necessary to support the struggle of the impoverished Mexican peasantry for such things as government financial assistance and protection from the big landowners. I don't think such a position makes one a Cardenista. I think it is possible to participate in and support struggles for such reforms without abandoning the struggle to organize for socialist revolution.

I am not carrying out agitation in the countryside of Mexico so I can't do much about trying to clarify to the Mexican peasants that there is no permanent cure for their problems outside of getting rid of capitalism. The former Marxist-Leninist Party and the *Chicago Workers' Voice* have tried with varying degrees of success to continue to develop agitation for socialism in connection to the living political issues we have been fighting on. We have tried to organize workers to participate with us in this fight. Yes I think that revolutionaries organizing among the Mexican peasants should organize peasants in the fight for socialist revolution while carrying out the immediate struggle against the peasants' escalating marginalization.

Joseph likes to chop words and stretch them beyond recognition when he is trying to demolish someone, but I don't think he would come up with any substantially different formulation if he had to state his views just in a straightforward positive manner.

Joseph will likely be hot to disprove everything I have said in this short piece, however, I would encourage Joseph to divert some of his energy into a serious study of a general political issue such as a real analysis and critique of Cardenismo. I'm not sure he can, but if he could it would be more a contribution to the proletariat than "proving" in 10, or maybe 50, pages that each and every person who writes in our journal is a worthless reformist scumbag. In fact, the more stones he throws and the wilder he gets, the less anyone cares what he says.

To repeat my main points:

1. Joseph is logically and factually wrong to equate Julie's position or my position to Cardenismo.
2. Joseph should clarify what his general stand is on the struggle in the countryside in Mexico.
3. Cardenismo is not just a generalized reformist political position but a definite political program which does have a big influence in Mexico today. See the attached article for some further research I have done on this topic. [Oleg's attached article is not reprinted here.—CV.]

□

“Chicago Workers’ Voice” continues to abandon anti-revisionism:

Peasant socialism or proletarian politics?

by Mark, CVO, Detroit

One of the central issues in Mexican politics is the question of what attitude to take to land reform in general and the history of ejido development, the specific form of Mexican land reform consisting of small farms on state-owned land, which received its main impetus under the regime of Lazaro Cardenas in the mid-1930’s. The *Chicago Workers’ Voice* has been conciliating radical petty-bourgeois nationalist trends in Mexico which promote illusions in the ejido system. The Zapatistas, for example, deserve credit for organizing the Chiapas uprising and articulating certain peasant demands. But their overall program seeks to reconcile all classes and political parties while their social program does not go beyond what is essentially an improved ejido program that they imagine will solve all the problems of the peasant masses. Meanwhile, the *El Machete* newspaper implies that ejido co-ops are something akin to communism. The *CWV*’s never-ending apologies for these trends is connected to their own difficulties in evaluating the significance of ejido land reform and dealing with the relationship of certain democratic demands to the class struggle.

In the *Chicago Workers’ Voice Theoretical Journal* #8 of October 8, 1995 Oleg defends the *CWV* approach. He says that Joseph, editor of *Communist Voice*, concocts “wild charges” when he notes that “the *CWV* has trouble differentiating itself from the program of Lazaro Cardenas” and “the *CWV* continues to sugarcoat the politics of the EZLN.”¹ But Oleg’s “defense” manages the amazing feat of avoiding any reply to the specific ways in which Joseph shows that the *CWV* and EZLN positions resemble those of Lazaro Cardenas. Instead Oleg tries to dismiss the whole issue as irrelevant in various ways. He complains that exposing Cardenas-like views among the radical left is a diversion from criticizing Cardenas himself. He holds that because the basic tenets of Cardenismo are found in many trends, they are no big deal when they appear among the Zapatistas. He dismisses the question of whether a trend shares many important tenets of Cardenas’ views on the grounds that on other matters there are differences. In short, Oleg will raise any sort of nonsense to avoid coming to grips with the actual stands being criticized by Joseph. So let’s proceed directly to the issues actually raised by Joseph.

Will better ejidos eliminate peasant pauperization?

According to *CWV* member Julie, ejidos with more government assistance can eliminate landlessness and pauperization among the peasantry. She argues that large-scale production under capitalism can be achieved without the ruination of the

¹*CWVTJ*#8, “Does the *CWV* support Cardenismo?”, p. 13, referring to *Communist Voice*, vol. 1, #3, p. 23.

mass of small peasant farmers. In Julie’s words, “assistance to the ejidos in such a way that the peasantry working there can make the transition to large-scale agriculture without being driven off the land” and “a planning of large-scale agriculture in such a way that the peasantry is not pauperized”²

is the solution to the peasants’ problems. This is in direct contradiction to world experience, an experience summed up in Marxist theory. Marxism teaches that small peasant production engenders capitalism. It holds that small farming leads to class differentiation. Communist theory shows how even if small farms pool their resources in co-ops of various types, this may bring important benefits for a time, but it won’t stop class differentiation and the eventual ruin of the mass of peasants. Large-scale production cannot exist without the mass destruction of the small farms, as the petty-producers lack the resources and advantages of the large producers and are therefore crushed in marketplace competition. Marxism teaches that to imagine that somehow, each small peasant producer can avail themselves of the resources necessary to guarantee their survival, is a utopian dream.

Such views of Marx, Engels and Lenin have been brilliantly confirmed in Mexico. The large-scale ejido program begun under L. Cardenas did improve the conditions of many peasants for a while, but within the ejidos, class differentiation developed over time, and a small class of exploiting peasants grew alongside of an army of landless and ruined peasants. I will not go into all the details here because this process has been extensively chronicled in several articles in *Communist Voice*,³ some of which Oleg read, but whose lessons he deeply buries. Oleg lectures about “serious research” he has done, allegedly unlike Joseph, such as reading a book by James Cockcroft on Mexico. But he fails to mention how Cockcroft chronicles such things as “a sixfold increase in *ejidos*’ hiring of wage labor (often other ejidatarios) in the 1960s,”⁴ a clear indication of the class divisions that grow up in the ejidos, or Cockcroft’s statistics on class structure in the countryside which (even if they may be somewhat overstated) show that despite the vast spread of ejidos, huge numbers of small peasant producers have been reduced to landlessness or hold their small plot as a mere supplement to their income as wage-laborers.

But the *CWV*’s Julie thinks the conversion to large-scale agriculture *can* coincide with the preservation of all the small

²*CWVTJ* #7, p.15, col. 3.

³See for example, “Ejido co-ops and capitalist development in Mexican agriculture,” *Communist Voice*, vol.1, #4, pp. 26-31. Also see the historical studies in *Communist Voice*, vol. 1 #3, pp. 5-11.

⁴*Mexico: Class formation, capital accumulation, and the state*, James D. Cockcroft, p.171.

peasant farms or co-ops, with vast masses of peasants not being driven off their land. Not only has this not happened in Mexico, it has not happened in any country where capitalist relations among the agricultural producers became dominant. Only the revolutionary overthrow of Mexican capitalism and the elimination of market relations under socialism can prevent the agony of the peasant masses.

So how does Oleg defend Julie against the evil Joseph? Does he attempt to prove that radical land reform measures can abolish pauperization among the peasantry? No. Does he challenge Joseph's views that Julie's statements mean

"promoting capitalist illusions, as Lenin and Engels and Marx thought it was, to hold that peasant agriculture can be transformed into large-scale production, with all the peasants reaping the benefits, prior to the achievement of socialism?"⁵

No. He says nothing about what the development of ejido co-ops lead to, even ejido co-ops with lots more aid. And from his standpoint, it's wise to avoid this matter. That's because the facts are that even when some ejido farmers get more aid, or when more money comes to them from other sources, it actually leads to further class division among the peasants. Even some analysts who are favorable to ejidos and supportive of Zapatista ideas admit this. For instance, a book published by the liberal Food First Institute notes that the increased use of fertilizers

"contributed to the gap that had begun to distinguish well-off from poor Zinacantecos [in Chiapas — ed.] during the development boom."⁶

Of course, one could construct a scenario where government aid will be distributed completely even-handedly, where this aid would be so immense it would insure the prosperity of every peasant farm, where all land and all other conditions would be equal, etc. Anything is possible in the imagination — but not under capitalism.

While falling silent about the actual content of the criticism of Julie's confusion of better ejidos with socialism, Oleg insists on criticizing Joseph's statement that

"the most radical democratic measures in the countryside, measures that eliminate the marginalization of the indigenous people, provide maximum state aid to the countryside, etc. would in the long run accelerate capitalist development among the peasantry even faster than now."⁷

According to Oleg, such views suggest opposition to having "any general program of political and economic demands in relation to the struggle of the peasantry,"⁸ except the direct fight for socialism. Oleg, on the other hand, says he is for immediate assistance to the peasants "without abandoning the

struggle to organize for socialist revolution."⁹ Well, we're all very cheered by Oleg's support for relief for the peasants plus socialism. The issue is why does Oleg think that clarifying that radical land reform accelerates capitalist development among the peasantry contradicts being for peasant demands?

Article after article in *Communist Voice* by Joseph and others supports measures for immediate relief for the peasants, supports the uprising for such things in Chiapas, etc.¹⁰ But evidently Oleg feels his opponents can't really be for the peasantry if they persist in noting how radical land reform accelerates capitalist relations. **Oleg feels uneasy about the notion of demands which accelerate capitalist development, wrongly assuming that since peasant demands are directed against a capitalist government and big landowners, they must necessarily have nothing to do with spreading capitalist relations themselves.** So if he is for more aid to the ejidos, he must deny that this will further develop capitalist relations among the peasantry. He must ignore what the results of 60 years of ejido development in Mexico prove. But, irrespective of one's intent, denying that radical land reform creates a broader field for the development of capitalist relations among the peasantry means ~~fretting~~ such reforms as somehow outside of capitalist relations, as perhaps something sort of socialist, just as L. Cardenas and all those in the Mexican left who want a variation of Cardenismo do. Such illusions are at the heart of peasant socialism, not Marxist socialism.

The importance of having a correct appraisal of the limits of land reform is not to discredit peasant land demands. It is necessary to establish a foundation for a communist program of economic and political demands for the peasantry. A Marxist approach supports radical measures in favor of the peasantry. But while supporting such bourgeois-democratic measures, communist theory calls attention to the fact that the creation of the best conditions for small peasant farming inevitably hastens capitalist relations among the peasantry. Communism supports the immediate needs of the peasants, but combats the peasant ideology.

Marxism-Leninism emphasizes that capitalist development is accompanied by great suffering, and helps ruin the mass of small agricultural producers. But this process also accelerates the class struggle in the town and countryside and swells the ranks of the proletariat and semi-proletariat, helping create the class forces necessary to overthrow capitalism. Marxism teaches that salvation lies in the class struggle and socialism, not the peasant plot. It emphasizes the class distinctions among the peasantry and the distinct class demands and organization of the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat. But for the downtrodden peasants to be guided along this path, the Mexican working class must reorganize itself, re-establishing its revolutionary party on the basis of anti-revisionist communism.

As for detailed demands for the immediate peasant movement, there are various just concerns that have been raised by the peasants: land, various forms of aid to small farmers, social

⁵ *Communist Voice*, vol.1, #3, p.24. col. 1.

⁶ *Basta: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas*, George A. Collier, p.102.

⁷ *Communist Voice* vol. 1, #3, p. 25, col. 1.

⁸ *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*, #8, "Does the CWV support Cardenismo?", p.14, col. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 2-3.

¹⁰ See for example page 2 of Joseph's article "Communism as a science" in *Communist Voice*, vol.1, #3.

programs, measures against terror and for expansion of democratic rights, etc., and other issues could be added to the list. The precise formulation of particular demands is not the question under dispute, however. Oleg's challenge was whether such a program of economic and political demands dealing with the peasants' concerns was possible while recognizing certain demands accelerated capitalist development. The answer is "yes." The above-mentioned orientation certainly provides a basis for a program of communist work among the peasantry. And far from opposing demands for relief for the peasantry, a communist orientation emphasizes how the EZLN ideas of class reconciliation undermine the fight for the immediate concerns of the peasant masses.

But in fact, it is the CWV that has been vacillating on such basic immediate demands as democratization. For example, when the EZLN raises the slogan of "democracy," Oleg supports it as part of a revolutionary program. At such times, Oleg ignores that the EZLN program creates the illusion that a democratic electoral process assures that the social demands of the poor are satisfied. But elsewhere CWV members talk about democratization as if it was merely a "bourgeois scheme," as something diverting the masses from their true interests. For various CWV members, democratic political reform must either be glamorized as what it is not, or simply dismissed.

Joseph, on the other hand, has supported the demand of democratization¹¹ despite recognizing that, under present conditions, a breakup of the PRI political domination will not lead to some parties of the masses coming to power, but an increase in the influence of the right-wing PAN and the bourgeois reformist PRD. Thus, he notes, the Zapatistas have calculated wrongly when they paint panaceas about democratic electoral reform as itself ushering in great gains for the masses. Joseph's sober evaluation of democratic political reforms holds that they can be utilized as a means to help organize the masses for the class struggle, but not be a substitute for it.

The EZLN and Cardenismo

The views of members of the CWV group on the peasant struggle and the tasks facing the Mexican revolution are connected to their efforts to glorify the petty-bourgeois stand of the EZLN leadership. Oleg correctly notes that a big problem in the Mexican left is support for "a return to the basic policies of Lazaro Cardenas or some improved variation of them."¹² But Oleg wants to pretend the EZLN is inoculated against this plague. What is remarkable is that while Oleg is quite sure EZLN and Cardenas have nothing important in common, when Joseph asserts that the EZLN's agrarian demands, nationalism, and vision of a national consensus are essentially an idealization of L. Cardenas' program, Oleg actually concedes that these points are common to both!¹³ For Oleg, however, merely

sharing an agrarian program, nationalism and a vision of national consensus doesn't mean EZLN's program is, to use his words, "some improved variation" of the Cardenas program.

Oleg tries to rescue EZLN politics by raising that "he has not seen any EZLN statements praising Lazaro Cardenas or saying that their program is based on his."¹⁴ Why the Zapatistas have to declare they support Lazaro Cardenas or his program to share basic features with it is beyond me. But in fact the Zapatistas anointed Cardenas' son, Cuauhtemoc, as leader of their "national liberation movement." And Cuauhtemoc's politics are based in the same tradition as his father. True the son has adapted somewhat to the fashionable neo-conservative PRI politics of today. But Oleg himself writes that the younger Cardenas "benefits enormously because his father has come to symbolize government support for the peasants and protection of workers' rights."¹⁵ If C. Cardenas' views are slightly to the right of his father, it merely shows how the EZLN will wheel and deal with most anyone. Indeed, EZLN attempts at national consensus even includes trying to woo the right-wing party, PAN, to help chart out a new Mexico at their Democratic National Convention.

Even if EZLN had never promoted C. Cardenas, it would not change the fact that basic features of their program are an idealized echo of Cardenas, the elder. No, the EZLN would not be in favor of the times L. Cardenas put down peasant uprisings. And they don't like the one-party stranglehold that the party L. Cardenas built has over the political system. But in his haste to prove what "wild charges" Joseph hurls, Oleg ignores the actual points on which Joseph criticizes the EZLN views as idealized versions of the Cardenas program. Joseph calls attention to how on the issues of **agrarian reform, nationalism, and national consensus**, the EZLN presents notions quite similar to L. Cardenas, but made to sound more glorious. This doesn't mean the Zapatistas agree with every move made by L. Cardenas, but that they take essential features of the Cardenas program and attempt to strip them of any unpleasant features that inevitably reveal themselves whenever the program is implemented.

Take the question of the ejidos. The EZLN program calls for any number of changes it would make in the present ejido system. They want more land, better land, more aid to ejido farmers, more emphasis on co-ops than individual plots, etc. Lazaro Cardenas did not just have rhetorical talk about doing this, he actually carried out a massive increase in land reform, government aid, and developed collective ejidos. So what the EZLN wants is essentially no more than a better version of this. The problem isn't that the EZLN calls for various improvements to help the poor peasants, but that they imagine it is possible to create a ejido program so good that the peasants' suffering will go away under capitalism.

L. Cardenas did not allow the peasant struggle to break out

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *CWVTJ* #7, "Crisis in Mexico," p. 8, col. 2.

¹³ *CWVTJ* #8, "Does the CWV support Cardenismo?", p. 14, col. 1, where Oleg's reply to the EZLN and Cardenas shar-
(continued...)

¹³ (...continued)

ing these views is that "These programmatic points are much too general to be made the specific property of Cardenas."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.15, col. 1.

in full force. At times he egged it on and even armed it against the most backward landowners, but he had no intention of letting it expropriate the bulk of the big farms. His repression of peasant uprisings was disgraceful, but can anyone expect a capitalist regime to stand by and let the poor peasants seize all the land they want? The EZLN can. In their "Revolutionary Agrarian Law" issued in December 1993, they talk about redistributing the land and resources of the big capitalist farms to the landless peasants and ejidos. But the expropriation of the rich farmers and agribusinesses is highly improbable without a powerful upsurge of the class struggle across Mexico. The EZLN, however, imagines that if only there is a more open political system, the need for the class struggle will be mitigated and the peasants' needs can be satisfied through accommodation with the capitalist rulers. Thus, they dream of an expropriation without fierce resistance by the bourgeoisie. Once again, we see an idealized notion of ejido land reform.

This brings us to the question of national consensus. Oleg quotes Cockcroft to the effect that L. Cardenas'

"populist and corporatist strategy. . . . was a broad appeal to almost all social classes and groups, particularly those with any kind of real or potential power, in order to bring them under state regulation."¹⁶

Now look at what the Zapatistas say. They write:

—their "revolution will not end in a new class, faction of a class or group in power but rather in a free and democratic 'space' of political struggle"¹⁷

—their ideal society will result from "resolution of the confrontation between various political proposals"¹⁸

—they "recognize the National Democratic Convention as the authentic representative of the interests of the Mexican people in its transition to democracy."¹⁹

As noted earlier, the Convention has been an attempt to unite all class forces, from the radical masses to the right-wing bourgeoisie as the architects of the new democratic system in Mexico. The EZLN echoes the all-class alliance of L. Cardenas, only fantasizing that this time the exploiters and exploited will create a paradise together.

As for the question of nationalism, both Lazaro Cardenas and the Zapatistas make extensive use of patriotic appeals which obscure the class contradictions in society. True, elevating national interests over class interests was not invented by L. Cardenas. But, largely based on his nationalization of U.S. oil

interests, pitching plans for strengthening the Mexican capitalists as a mighty blow to imperialism became a hallmark of government policy. For their part, the EZLN leaders paint every demand as part of the "patriotic" or "national liberation" struggle, ignoring that the class struggle against the Mexican bourgeoisie is on the agenda. The nationalism of the Cardenas regime was an important weapon in keeping the class struggle in check in Mexico just as the EZLN's nationalism blunts class consciousness today.

Ideological problems and EZLN's political impasse

Of course it's nothing new for CWV members to glorify EZLN's views. In May 1994, several CWV members were lauding the EZLN as making great advances in revolutionary theory.²⁰ In January 1995, Oleg wrote in praise of what he considered the clear-sighted policy of the Zapatistas to the PRD, the reformist party founded by C. Cardenas.²¹ Oh yes, Oleg, how clear-sighted to promote a reformist deceiver of the masses to lead the masses to victory! Now he raises a big stink that raising the similarities between the views of L. Cardenas and the Zapatistas is "an unjustifiable stretch." Whenever some clarity about the true political features of the EZLN comes to light, Oleg will be there to turn the lights off.

Oleg tries to dismiss the ideological problems of the Zapatistas as no big deal. If the EZLN fights the government, what else matters, he implies. And indeed, the Zapatista leaders have in the past pledged never to give up the mass struggle and armed actions. But glossing over the problems with the EZLN's theories only hurts the development of the revolutionary movement. The Zapatistas have been in a tough situation and are having great difficulties trying to figure out what to do. How the EZLN responds has a lot to do with their theories. In rough outline, they have gone through several policy zigzags. First, they talked about the Zapatista army storming into Mexico City, liberating the country along the way. Even at that point, the EZLN was banking on the bourgeois reformists, like the PRD, to come to power. But such a military campaign proved impossible and the government terror campaign soon threatened them in their strongholds in Chiapas. In this situation, the Zapatistas founded the "Convention" and talked about their hopes for peaceful change. They built up a lot of expectation in the 1994 national elections, hoping that the bourgeois reformist forces would make big advances and implement the EZLN demands. The elections did not go the way the EZLN hoped though, as the right-wing PAN gained strength, but not the reformist PRD. Upset at the election results, the Zapatistas then struck a more militant-looking stance. They declared that the "national libera-

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 16, col. 2, which cites Cockcroft, p. 130.

¹⁷*Voice of Fire: Communiques and Interviews from the Zapatista National Liberation Army*, edited by Ben Clarke and Clifton Ross, New Earth Publications, Berkeley, CA 1994, p. 117. This can also be found in *CV* vol. 1, #2, which reprints the three Zapatista "Declarations from the Lacandona Jungle", p. 29, col. 2.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, "Ski Masks and Other Masks", a communiqué by Subcomandante Marcos, p. 58.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 120, or *CV* vol. 1, #2, "Second Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle," p. 31, col. 1.

²⁰For more on this see *Communist Voice*, vol. 1, #2, "Denigrating anti-revisionism and glorifying Zapatista theories", pp. 36-37.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 37, col. 2, originally from Oleg's letter of January 4, 1995 (mistakenly dated by Oleg as 1994) circulated to former Marxist-Leninist Party circles known informally as the "minority."

tion struggle” was the order of the day, and called on the craven reformist C. Cardenas to lead it. The election fiasco had led to fiercer words from EZLN, but the underlying illusions in the bourgeois reformists and in transforming Mexico without a revolution remained.

Now it appears that the EZLN is considering the possibility of completely integrating its own organization into the present political system. It is reported that they have completed a referendum in Chiapas which asks:

“Should the EZLN unite with other forces and organizations and form a new political organization?” and “Should the EZLN be converted to a new political organization?” which should unite with “different democratizing forces . . . in a broad-based opposition front . . .”²²

Since the survey doesn’t ask if these new organizations should be oriented toward mass struggle, uprisings, land takeovers, or armed actions, this suggests the EZLN is talking about converting into a parliamentary opposition, or a civic organization that backs other electoral parties. That the EZLN considers just about every political formation except the PRI to be a democratizing force, gives one an idea of the rotten political character of the broad front they are considering. It is also reported that the majority of the referendum’s respondents voted in favor of these measures, and the EZLN claims it obeys the results of its surveys of mass opinion. Whether or not the Zapatistas become a respectable reformist opposition working within the system or not, this shows that Oleg is whistling in the dark when he downplays the importance of the Zapatistas’ view on national consensus.

Downplaying the struggle against opportunism

“I am not carrying out agitation in the countryside of Mexico so I can’t do much about trying to clarify to the Mexican peasants that there is no permanent cure for their problems outside of getting rid of capitalism,”

writes Oleg.²³ That’s interesting. The CWV group has for many years based much of its work among the Mexican immigrant community in Chicago. Everyone knows these immigrants have a keen interest in Mexican political affairs and that immigrants

come and go from Mexico all the time. If the issue is really that the CWV group isn’t based in the Mexican countryside and so can’t do much, why has CWV bothered agitating on Mexican affairs among the immigrants for all these years?

Of course it’s true that CWV members themselves write about some political issues in Mexico despite the “sin” of not living there. Apparently it’s only certain political-ideological issues that are not worth bothering with. Today, Oleg wants to avoid the unpleasanties of exposing the illusions of petty-bourgeois democracy among the peasants. Yesterday, he proclaimed

“I don’t feel like giving much advice to Mexican activists on the need for a Marxist-Leninist party in Mexico.”²⁴

And the day before yesterday, Oleg argued that criticizing the petty-bourgeois nationalism of *El Machete* means trying to prove that group “is shit.”²⁵ Oleg revives this last criticism in his *CWVTJ* #8 article, telling his readers that if Joseph dares to prove Oleg wrong with a written reply, Joseph is guilty of avoiding “a serious study of a general political issue,” he is against “real analysis”, and treats anyone who writes in *CWVTJ* as a “worthless scumbag.” In place of a serious fight against opportunism, Oleg offers his own moral purity. He, personally, is for a revolutionary stand, a communist party, etc. But when it comes to dealing with another trend that has some militant features, he casts aspersions on fighting on these issues.

Oleg wants support for the Mexican struggle. He wants solidarity between the workers in the U.S. and Mexico. And such solidarity is sorely needed. But for a proletarian revolutionary, this must include as a top priority, supporting the development of an anti-revisionist working class trend in that country. This requires a staunch fight against the fashionable views in the left, even among those forces that carry on a fight against the establishment. Oleg’s excuses to avoid fighting opportunism run contrary to true proletarian internationalism. And it is not merely the influence of communist views in the Mexican countryside that is at stake. The revolutionary education of the workers and activists in the U.S. who want to unite with the Mexican toilers requires a discussion of the stand of the various political trends and important issues in the Mexican movement. □

²²All quotes from the Zapatista referendum appear in *MIM Notes*, October, 1995, p.5. It also has referendum results taken from a mass organization called *Alianza Civica*.

²³*CWVTJ*, #8, p.14, col. 3.

²⁴*CWVTJ*, #7, p.11, col. 3.

²⁵Oleg’s letter of January 25, 1995, reprinted in the *CWVTJ* Special Issue, March 7, 1995, p.35.

The ghost of Lazaro Cardenas and the present crisis in Mexico

By Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit

A political and economic crisis is simmering in Mexico. The long rule of the governing party, the PRI, is being eroded, while the standard of living of the masses falls. As the system reaches a turning point, the proletariat does not have a party that truly represents its interests, and the working people are disorganized. There are many questions facing the radical left. What orientation is needed in the coming period? The Chiapas rebellion inspired millions of people around the world. But this peasant struggle can't proceed in the same way anymore. The EZLN faces the question of what path to choose, and its statements from the Lacandona Jungle reveal that the Zapatistas have been wandering in various directions.

Meanwhile Oleg's article on the peasant movement, "Does the *Chicago Workers' Voice* support Cardenismo?", appeared in the latest issue of the *CWV Theoretical Journal*. (And it's reprinted in this issue of *CV*.) Its basic thesis is that anyone who seriously questions the policies of the EZLN leadership, or the policies of petty-bourgeois nationalist groups in the Mexican radical left such as *El Machete*, or the glorification of these policies by the *CWV*, must therefore be opposed to the peasant movement. They must only support an immediate socialist revolution, says Oleg. He challenges me to respond to this point, saying "Is he saying that in the countryside the struggle must be straightforward and only for socialism? Joseph should clarify."

It's surprising to me that Oleg—a comrade with years of experience—still doesn't realize that the serious differences in the radical left require open discussion if the left is reemerge as a major force. He thinks that these differences can be explained simply as the refusal of some wild-eyed people to support the immediate struggle in defense of the conditions of the masses. Very well, let's answer his question.

What I agree with Oleg on

✓ I and Oleg and just about the whole radical left—with the possible exception of the Maoist Internationalist Movement (MIM)—agree in supporting the strikes and militant actions of the workers against their exploiters, in Mexico as in the U.S.¹

✓ I and Oleg and just about the whole radical left agree in supporting the Chiapas rebellion and other peasant actions against the desperate conditions they face. In fact, the *Communist Voice* has carried far more material than has the *Chicago*

¹MIM would probably support strikes in Mexico or other third world strikes, but opposes the Detroit newspaper strike. This is discussed in Mark's article "Reformist left kneels before the trade union bureaucrats" in the last issue of *Communist Voice* (CV #4, pp. 13-14).

Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal on the Chiapas rebellion—from the full text of the three major statements of the EZLN from the Lacandona Jungle (see *CV* #2) to articles beginning an analysis of the Mexican countryside.

✓ I and Oleg and many activists would welcome a mass communist party of the proletariat, having allies in the countryside as well a mass basis in the urban proletariat, if that would come into existence. And we would want to see that party leading the mass struggles.

✓ And of course, I and Oleg and just about the whole radical left agree in saying that our ultimate goal is socialism.

Where we differ

But it's not enough to agree on these generalities. How can the left and the working masses rebuild their struggles? It's not enough to say that one supports struggles against the impoverishment of the peasants and workers. Everyone knows that the struggle in Mexico (as in the U.S.) faces many obstacles, and the activists are divided into many groupings, with different views, that have a hard time cooperating. It's not enough to say "long live Chiapas", and it can give rise to discouragement if activists don't realize why the struggle in Chiapas and other mass outbreaks don't grow and merge as one might have expected from the rhetoric of *CWV*. And overall, the struggle of the toilers in Mexico may not be as low as it currently is in the United States, but it isn't particularly high, especially given the big crises ravaging Mexico. So activists need to know what hinders the struggle, and what will help build a new struggle. Should we just blame the setbacks in the movement on bad conditions and wait for better times, or are there also obsolete views and practices in the radical left itself that must be fought against and discarded?

On these particular issues, Oleg and I have many disagreements, some of which are as follows:

✘ We disagree on whether land reform can succeed in overcoming the limitations of small-scale peasant agriculture under capitalism—on whether it can guarantee that the poor peasants can prosper on their small plots, and on whether it can provide these peasants with the advantages of large-scale agriculture.

✘ Because I recognize the limitations of land reform, I claim that the program in the countryside can't be restricted to land reform but has to emphasize recognizing the class differentiation among the peasantry, organizing the rural proletariat, encouraging the poor peasants to break with the idea of a national consensus, etc. Oleg on the contrary centers his agrarian program on demanding "government financial assistance

and protection from the big landowners”.²

✱ I hold that the reorganization of the proletariat is key to advancing the mass struggles, providing support for the peasantry, intervening in the process of democratization in Mexico, etc. Oleg has said that he won't deal with the issue of the proletarian party in Mexico because he is discouraged with his experience in party-building in the U.S.³

✱ I hold that there has to be criticism of many ideas fashionable in the radical left—including petty-bourgeois nationalism and peasant socialism—while Oleg thinks that criticism should be reserved for the bourgeoisie and bourgeois reformism.

✱ I hold that Marxism must be anti-revisionist if it is to be revolutionary. Oleg and the *CWV* waffle on the nature of Castro's state capitalism in Cuba. Moreover, *CWV* promotes the petty-bourgeois nationalist journal *El Machete* as promising center for organizing the whole Mexican radical left into some sort of quasi-Marxist “national political movement”, even though it admits that *El Machete* is not anti-revisionist.

✱ I think that communism is just an empty phrase unless it includes anti-revisionism and emphasis on the reorganization of the proletariat. Oleg gets excited by the outward symbols of communism, like the militant-looking masthead of *El Machete*, and doesn't pay much attention to the theoretical content of Marxism.

✱ And Oleg's complacent attitude to theory is reflected in our differences over the situation in the Mexican countryside. I think that Marxist analysis of land reform, democratization, and the mass struggle is essential, while Oleg doesn't look deeply into Marxism. He won't discuss Marx and Lenin's views on land reform or peasant ownership, but pretends his differences are solely with me. In his recent article, his central argument is that I am very bad because I say that even “the most radical democratic measures in the countryside . . . would in the long run accelerate capitalist development among the peasantry”. But he ignores the similar views of Marx and Engels and Lenin, views which are outlined in the *CV* article “Marxism on peasant and proletarian demands”. For example, it is Lenin who said

“The transfer of the land to the peasants would not at all do away with the predominance of the capitalist mode of production in Russia; it would, on the contrary, provide a broader base for its development...” (*CV*#2, p. 41, col. 2)

Cardenismo

Overall, Oleg shies away from the fight for Marxism and instead wants to go with the flow in the radical left. He only wants criticism of the open reformists, such as the PRD in Mexico, and not criticism of the radical left.

²This is Oleg's description of the demands that he accuses me of not supporting in his article “Does the *CWV* support Cardenismo?” It occurs right after his challenge to me to say if I support anything but immediate revolution in the countryside.

³“Crisis in Mexico,” *CWVTJ* #7, p. 11, col. 3.

True, Oleg does seem to think that there are some problems on the radical left. For example, he has mentioned the influence of the late Lazaro Cardenas, president of Mexico from 1934 to 1940, who laid the foundations for the present system of government, which is now rather shaky. He writes that

“From the PRD out to many sections of the Mexican left, one finds a theme that Mexico should return to the basic policies of Lazaro Cardenas or some improved variation of them, and this would make things a whole lot better. Cardenas senior is praised for nationalizing the oil industry, for carrying out land reform, for protecting the Mexican workers, for social measures generally in protection of the poor and for protecting Mexico against the rapaciousness of U.S. imperialism. If the Mexican government would just take up these policies again, the argument goes, things would be better for the Mexican masses.” (*CWVTJ* #7, p. 8, col. 2-3)

But two things stand out.

● In his writings, he hasn't described any current force in the radical left that is influenced by the policies of Cardenas.

● And he has a hard time differentiating his program from that of Cardenas other than by saying that the masses need to force the government to enact such measures, rather than expecting the government to do it by itself.

EZLN

First of all, which groups on the Mexican left are influenced by Cardenismo? Oleg says remarkably little. He thinks that perhaps the Mexican Communist Party might have gone this way in the 30s. But as for now, he refers mainly to the PRD (Mexican Revolutionary Democratic Party), which originated as a split from the ruling PRI with Cuauhtemoc Cardenas (the son of Lazaro) as its most dramatic figure.

But what about the influence of Cardenismo in the radical left? Oleg suggests, in effect, that any groups that are fighting the government are immune. If this were so, then Cardenismo wouldn't be much of a problem in the left.

But doesn't the EZLN's agrarian program, vision of national consensus, and nationalism have much in common with the ideology of Lazaro Cardenas? Isn't the importance of Cardenismo precisely that it has influence among activists who are fighting and sacrificing for the toilers?

Oleg says no, because Cardenismo is supposedly only a matter of people praising Lazaro as an individual. And after all, he says, the name of the EZLN refers back to Zapata and not Lazaro Cardenas. So Oleg says complacently:

“. . . I have not seen any EZLN statement praising Lazaro Cardenas or saying that their program is based on his. The EZLN does trace its program back to Emiliano Zapata as their name suggests.”

An article by Mark in this issue of *Communist Voice* discusses the influence of Cardenismo on the EZLN program. Here let's just point out that even by Oleg's narrow criterion, Cardenismo might well be a problem for the EZLN leadership. In its third statement from the Lacandona Jungle, the EZLN

leadership asked for the organization of a National Liberation Movement, and said it should be led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, Lazaro's son. Cuauhtemoc Cardenas was the founder of the PRD, a party which Oleg recognizes as having "a theme that Mexico should return to the basic policies of Lazaro Cardenas or some improved variation of them".

And there's more. The EZLN leadership pays close attention to Mexican history, as is apparent from their statements from the Lacandona Jungle. So surely it is not just a coincidence that they are calling for the formation of a movement with the same name and similar aims as one associated with Lazaro Cardenas in the 1960s. This movement is described by James Cockcroft, in the book on Mexico cited by Oleg, as follows:

"... pockets of peasant militants throughout the nation, who since the late 1920s have been known as *agraristas*, have repeatedly rallied to national movements drawing together progressive elements from diverse social classes. In the early 1960s, many *agraristas* joined a nationwide but short-lived Movement for National Liberation (MLN). The MLN represented a vigorous attempt to unite Marxists, disenchanted intellectuals and artists, workers, peasants, and prominent *politicos* like ex-President Lazaro Cardenas into a broad-based movement for revitalization of the Mexican Revolution. It fell apart when Cardenas grew disenchanted with the pro-Fidel Castro leanings of younger militants and the state escalated its dual policy of repression and cooperation." (Cockcroft, *Mexico, Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State*, pp. 202-3)

So the 1960s saw a National Liberation Movement with Lazaro Cardenas, and today EZLN wants one led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. Yet Oleg says, in effect, "Cardenismo? Where? Where?"

Moreover, the CWV is now fervently backing some of the elements who would have been expected to join such a National Liberation Movement, such as *El Machete*. Indeed Julie of CWV admits that *El Machete* thinks

"that the EZLN might be correct in proposing Cuauhtemoc Cardenas for the leader of a Movement of National Liberation."⁴

El Machete would of course be in the wing of the National Liberation Movement that favors Castroism. But by the 1990s Castroism has become just another state-capitalist ideology.

Yet Oleg thinks that I am simply inventing problems that don't exist.

Oleg's view of Cardenismo

Oleg not only refrains from saying who is influenced by Cardenismo, but he has a hard time differentiating his program from Cardenismo. It's not that Oleg is a Cardenista. No, he is part of the radical left. The tragedy of the matter, and the

⁴Julie, "El Machete and the Mexican Left", *CWVTJ* #7, p. 18, col. 2 — also reprinted in *CV* #3, p.43, col. 1.

reason Cardenismo is so important, is that it is a problem for many activists who sincerely and genuinely want to support the struggle of the Mexican masses.

Well, how does Oleg try to deal with Cardenismo?

His original criticism in *CWVTJ* #7 was that the Cardenista program isn't practical anymore. Earlier in this article, we quoted Oleg listing a series of Cardenista measures, from nationalizing the oil industry to land reform. In *CWVTJ* #7 he discussed nationalization of the oil and some other measures in a rambling way and was unable to decide whether they were helpful to the Mexican masses. But, he said, the Cardenista program had been "romanticized" and, if tried today, "wouldn't work anyway".⁵

His second attempt at distinguishing himself from the Cardenista program was in *CWVTJ* #8. He now has three basic points:

(a) He says that various of its measures were good, but that you shouldn't rely on politicians like Cardenas to enact them. Instead you must force the politicians to enact them. He writes of articles in *CV* examining Cardenista-style land reform that:

"Each of these cases show the Mexican government taking measures which temporarily and partially alleviated the plight of impoverished Mexican peasants . . . Pete's articles show that to get any measures from the Mexican government to do something for the peasants requires a class struggle."⁶

So here the distinction with Cardenismo is how to ensure it will be carried out.

And indeed, Julie of the CWV has called for "a vigorous working class struggle linked up with the poor peasant revolt" to obtain such measures as

"a planning of large-scale agriculture in such a way that the peasantry is not pauperized, assistance to what is left of the cooperative forms of agriculture . . . and assistance to the ejidos in such a way that the peasantry working there can make the transition to large-scale agriculture without being driven off the land."⁷

These measures are a somewhat idealized description of the Cardenista agrarian program, which also sought to develop ejidos in a way that integrated them into large-scale agriculture, which organized some collective ejidos, and which sought to keep many peasants on the land. Julie, however, says we have to obtain these measures by struggle, as Oleg recommends.

(b) Oleg points out that Cardenas on occasion attacked the mass organizations of the oppressed, "controlled and contained" the powerful struggles of the workers and peasants", etc.⁸ Here once again Oleg doesn't deal with the content of the Cardenista

⁵"Crisis in Mexico," *CWVTJ* #7, p. 8, col. 3.

⁶"Does the CWV support Cardenismo?", *CWVTJ* #8, p. 14, col. 2.

⁷*CWVTJ* #7, p. 15, col. 3, or *CV* #3, p. 40, col. 2.

⁸Oleg, "Lazaro Cardenas, What does he really stand for?", *CWVTJ* #8, p. 18, col. 2.

social measures.

Oleg's main theoretical point—on the impulse to capitalist development

Oleg's main attempt to criticize the measures in Lazaro's agrarian program is when he says that it "gave a big impulse to the development of modern capitalist agriculture."⁹

This is the key theoretical point in Oleg's article. It is CWV's idea of how to distinguish what's wrong with the Cardenista program from what we should demand. We should oppose reforms that give an impulse to capitalist agriculture, and support reforms that are a step towards socialism. (What Julie calls "a series of democratic and socialist measures".¹⁰) Oleg would be careful to say that these measures are not the full liberation of the working class and peasantry, nor can they provide a permanent solution. But he seems to think these measures are not an impulse to capitalism, but a step in the other direction.

This provides a criterion that, at first sight, may seem more-or-less reasonable and clear. It undoubtedly accords with the way of thinking of a number of activists who haven't quite explicitly formulated it, but sort of lean in this direction. It seems to be comprehensive: it upholds the ultimate goal of socialism as well as supporting reforms in that direction. It has only one problem: it goes against the facts of economic life.

All land reform—in so far as it actually gives land and resources to the peasants—gives an impulse to capitalist development. This is because it establishes a system of small peasant ownership. (This is either individual ownership or a system where the countryside is divided into many independent co-ops.) Small-scale peasant agriculture gives rise to class differentiation and capitalist relations. As Lenin said,

"...small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale."¹¹

There is no way around this.

Land reform has been an important part of some bourgeois-democratic revolutions. A revolutionary land reform can dispossess a reactionary landlord class. It can lead to fundamental changes in the politics and economics of a country. But these changes don't create a quasi-socialism, but spur on capitalism.

True, if land reform takes place in the middle of a socialist revolution and is a prelude to agriculture being part of large-scale production run by the working class, then capitalist relations might not develop very much. That's because the original land reform will be immediately followed up by further steps towards the full socialization of production in the countryside. But the land reform we are talking about in Mexico today will not take place in the midst of a socialist revolution, but at most in the midst of a democratization of the capitalist political system.

⁹CWVTJ #7, p. 14, col. 2.

¹⁰CWVTJ #7, p. 15, col. 3.

¹¹"Left-Wing" Communism, *An Infantile Disorder*, 2nd paragraph of chapter 2.

Does it give rise to capitalism only because it's a limited reform?

But Oleg implies in his article that Lazaro's land reform gave an impetus to capitalist agriculture only because of its limitations. Cardenas may have trod on the toes of a number of big landlords, but he left a system of large, private farms in place. He didn't fight the state, but helped build it up. He spurred on peasant organization, but only within the bounds of the overall national consensus that he wanted to build. And so on. It seems reasonable to Oleg, and probably to a lot of activists, to suppose that if only Cardenas had swept aside all the large landholdings, if only he had unleashed the full force of the peasant movement, it wouldn't have led to capitalism.

The Chinese example

But not all plausible ideas are true. Common sense has to be tested and readjusted according to experience and theoretical analysis. And it turns out that this plausible idea—that only half-hearted land reforms give rise to capitalist relations—is false. It goes against the history of revolutionary movements.

Take the land reform carried out by the Maoists in the Chinese revolution. This was just about the most radical land reform conceivable. It swept aside all the large landlords. It embraced all the poor peasants. It was based on not just fighting, but overthrowing and eliminating the old Kuomintang state and its entire apparatus in the countryside. It did all the things Oleg demands of a land reform. Moreover, after several years, the land reform was followed by the setting up of various sorts of communes. The reform swept aside the old Chinese countryside, changed the class relations, and definitely improved the condition of the peasants.

The revolutionary sweep of the Chinese land reform made it appear socialist. Nevertheless, it turned out that, over a period of time, it too gave an impetus to capitalist development. Today class differentiation is obvious in the Chinese countryside. There is a growing gap between rich and poor. Large numbers of peasants are flocking to the cities. Some say 100 million Chinese peasants have already crowded into the coastal cities, and that within five years there may be 200 million people former peasants in marginal occupations in the cities—floating from job to job.¹²

The Chinese revolution had dispossessed the old exploiters in the countryside. But it had not been able to integrate the countryside into large-scale production run by the workers as a whole. The countryside ended up divided into independent units—although they were collective or communal units—whose prosperity and whose technical improvements depended on their own fortunes. The peasants' life improved greatly over the past,

¹²Bruce Nelan, *Time* magazine, Nov. 6, 1995, "Risky Change in a Dynasty/Amid profound economic dislocation, Deng fades away, and his heir apparent faces a power struggle", p. 46. However this rather superficial article overlooks the class differentiation in the countryside, which is noted by more serious reportage, and ascribes the whole flow of peasants simply to the lure of the good life in the cities.

but capitalist relations eventually found their way back with a vengeance.

Indeed, some of the apparently particular features of Mexican agriculture can be seen in China. Take the following problem: After the Cardenas land reform, agricultural production first went up in a balanced fashion, but then there was a turnaround. While the production of certain export crops and cash crops continued to expand, Mexico now has a growing problem with its staple foods. As one professor describes it:

“By the early 1960s Mexico was exporting basic grains (including wheat) as well as ‘luxury’ crops (such as avocados and tomatoes). To the degree there was a ‘Mexican miracle,’ some analysts have said, it may have taken place in the agricultural sector. Within ten years this situation suffered a drastic reversal. By 1975 Mexico was importing 10 per cent of the grain it consumed; by 1979 it was importing 36 percent of its grains, and in 1983 it imported roughly half the grain it needed.”¹³

China shows the same general pattern. At first, China too developed its basic food crops as well as industrial and other crops. I recall one year in which the Maoist government boasted that the northern regions of China had now become self-sufficient in rice and no longer had to import it from the southern regions. But then there was a turn around with respect to the staple foods. Land is being used to produce the more valuable crops, or is being taken out of agricultural production altogether. It’s more profitable to build a factory or a city on the land than to keep on producing rice. Chinese grain production is no longer keeping pace with population; and China is losing its self-sufficiency in rice. And yet the demand for grain is rising faster than population as more meat is eaten and more livestock has to be fed.¹⁴ Some economists think that China may become the world’s largest rice importer early in the next century—with drastic effects on the world market. This mirrors the way Mexico shifted over to commercial crops, while having to massively import corn and other staple goods.

Perhaps someone will say that all these things happened in China because China didn’t follow the socialist road. Precisely. Land reform by itself—no matter how radical—is not a socialist step, nor a quasi-socialist step. Only if the overall economy is transformed to socialism, can the countryside avoid the spread

¹³“Mexico since 1946: Dynamics of an authoritarian regime” by Peter H. Smith, which is chapter six of the composite work “Mexico since Independence”, edited by Leslie Bethell. See p. 328.

¹⁴China’s lost of farm land and stagnating production of grain is referred to in Joseph Kahn’s article “Feeding the masses/China’s Industrial Surge Squeezes Grain Farms, Spurs Needs for Imports/A Meat Diet Increases Usage Just as Land is Being Lost to Surging Development/Collectives Make a Comeback” in the March 10 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, and in Patrick E. Tyler’s article “Jijaying Journal/On the farms, China sows trouble” in the April 10 issue of the *New York Times* (p. A4).

of capitalist relations. A revolutionary land reform, if it is part of an attack on private property in general, can help provide the room for the working class to transform the economy. But by itself, even such a land reform has not gone beyond capitalist relations. In China, the revolution developed into revisionist state-capitalism, not socialism. Thus all the capitalist implications of land reform sooner or later began to manifest themselves. The Chinese countryside could not provide a socialist bastion against the market reforms—in which the revisionist “Communist” Party turned towards a free-market economy and against the communes—because the countryside was not socialist, and these reforms unleashed forces that were already building up among the peasantry.

Is land reform therefore a useless bourgeois scheme?

Oleg doesn’t want to look this reality in the face. Neither does Julie. She assumes that if one only adopted better policies, one could avoid class differentiation in the countryside. She thinks you can merge “socialist measures” into a land reform program under capitalism—and Oleg presumably believes that this will be, not full and permanent socialism to be sure, but a partial and temporary step towards socialism.

All this amounts to closing one’s eyes to reality. It hinders activists from adopting revolutionary policies for dealing with the actual class differentiation that is going on—such as organizing the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat, supporting the class struggle in the countryside, etc.

But Oleg implies that if land reform and other measures will ultimately give an impetus to capitalism, then they’re useless. He quotes me saying that “the most radical democratic measures in the countryside, measures that eliminate the marginalization of the indigenous people, provide maximum state aid to the countryside, etc.” would give an impetus to capitalist development. He then indignantly implies that this means I oppose radical democratic measures. He says “Joseph should clarify”.¹⁵ But what Oleg’s demand shows, is that Oleg does not understand the economic nature of radical democratic measures.

* Consider the national liberation movements around the world. Haven’t these struggles been vital for overthrowing brutal colonial oppression and allowing whole peoples to begin to rise their heads? Yet who can deny that these movements have dramatically accelerated capitalist development in the newly independent countries? Africa for example has seen as astonishingly rapid development of capitalist economic relations, and it has borne the brunt of all the evils and disasters of capitalism.

National independence, even if it is achieved by a revolution, gives an impetus to capitalism. This is inevitable unless there is a socialist revolution. And recognition of the bourgeois economic nature of national liberation is important for the proletariat. If the independence struggle was regarded as vaguely socialist—or socialist if it is carried out in a revolutionary

¹⁵CWVTJ #8, p. 14, col. 2.

way—then the proletariat might simply merge into the radical wing of the general all-class liberation movement. But when the bourgeois-democratic nature of the struggle is understood, it encourages the proletariat—however small or inexperienced—to develop its independent organization even as it takes part in the independence movement.

* Consider the abolition of slavery in the United States. This was an absolutely necessary struggle, which only reactionaries would deny. Yet the Civil War unleashed an astonishingly rapid development of capitalist industry throughout the U.S. True, the development of capitalist relations among the freed slaves themselves was held back by the semi-slave conditions they faced: ~~the~~ discrimination, racist terror, and the sharecropping system. But this simply verifies my point. Had a radical democratic program been carried out in the south, had the anti-slavery struggle been followed by full democracy for the freed slaves, there can be little doubt that the result would not only have been greatly improved conditions for the black people, but it would have led to much faster development of class differentiation among them. And the result would have been highly favorable for the unity of black and other workers in the struggle against capitalism.

Democratic reforms open the way for a wider and faster economic development. And, until the socialist revolution, such economic development can only be capitalist development.

* I have given two examples of profound democratic reforms—national liberation struggles and the abolition of slavery. Not all democratic reforms are like that. We constantly hear agitation for minor reforms—such as an improvement of this or that social program for the peasants. Lenin dealt with this question in the struggle against the mistakes of petty-bourgeois populism, or Narodism (to use the Russian word). At one point revolutionary, the Narodniks evolved to the advocacy of a series of small reforms to aid peasant agriculture, more credit, more government aid, etc. The Marxists showed how these reforms would mainly benefit the stronger peasants and were not of a socialist character, but of a bourgeois character. With respect to these reforms, Lenin said:

“The fact that one cannot content oneself with the ‘petty efforts’ of bourgeois progress by no means signifies absolute rejection of partial reforms. Marxists by no means deny that these measures are of some (albeit miserable) benefit, they can result in some (albeit miserable) improvement in the working people’s conditions; they speed up the extinction of particularly backward forms of capital, usury, bondage, etc., they speed up their transformation into the more modern and humane forms of European capitalism. That is why Marxists, if they were asked whether such measures should be adopted, would, of course, answer: they should—but would thereupon explain their attitude in general to the capitalist system that is improved by these measures, would motivate their agreement by their desire to speed up the development of this

system, and, consequently its downfall.”¹⁶

The various measures of government aid to the peasants and better planning of the ejidos which are demanded by *CWV* seem in large part to consist of such petty reforms. So are the setting up of small workshops in the countryside and other direct aid programs carried out by some non-governmental organizations, church groups, etc. The *CWV* glorifies its own program by implying that, if it were carried out on a large-enough scale, it would bring prosperity. This doesn’t make their program more revolutionary, but actually retards clarity on the class relations that are developing in the countryside and that will be accelerated by such reforms. We ourselves don’t reject minor reforms in the countryside (referring of course to those reforms that actually do provide some benefit and that don’t simply drive the poor peasants and rural laborers yet deeper into the PRI system of bureaucratic tutelage), but we hold that it is vital to present a true picture of what the peasants are going to face. At the moment, the results of petty reforms are being swamped, in their overall effect on the peasantry, by the major changes taking place in Mexico’s capitalism. Clarity about this will encourage the development of the large class movements necessary to make a significant effect on the Mexican countryside.

That is why we put emphasis on the tasks of class organization facing Mexico, and especially on the reorganization of the proletariat. Only this will allow the workers to put their stamp on Mexico, affect the pending democratization, change the living conditions of the masses, and prepare for the overthrow of capitalism itself. But the overall tasks of class organization and class struggle are obscured when it is implied that one can tinker with land reform and other social programs and find the perfect form that would allow—prior to socialist revolution—economic development without capitalist development.

Lenin on the proletarian struggle and capitalism

Now let’s turn to a particularly striking passage where Lenin discussed the relationship of proletarian struggle to capitalist development. With respect to the anti-colonial policy of the proletariat, he wrote to Maxim Gorky on January 3, 1911 as follows:

“It would be quixotism and whining if Social-Democrats were to tell the workers that there could be salvation somewhere apart from the development of capitalism, not through the development of capitalism. But we do not say this. We say: capital devours you, will devour the Persians, will devour everyone and go on devouring until you overthrow it. That is the truth. And we do not forget to add: except

¹⁶ *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, “The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of It in Mr. Struve’s Book (The Reflection of Marxism in Bourgeois Literature)”, Ch. 1, p. 370.

through the growth of capitalism there is no guarantee of victory over it.

"Marxists do not defend a single reactionary measure, such as banning trusts, restricting trade, etc. But to each his own. Let Khomyakov and Co. build railways across Persia, let them send Lyakhovs [blood-stained military officers], but the job of the Marxists is to expose them to the workers. If it devours, say the Marxists, if it strangles, fight back.

"Resistance to colonial policy and international plunder by means of organizing the proletariat, by means of defending freedom for the proletarian struggle, does not retard the development of capitalism but accelerates it, forcing it to resort to more civilized, technically higher methods of capitalism. There is capitalism and capitalism. There is Black-Hundred-Octoberist [reactionary, lynch-mob, monarchist—JG.] capitalism and Narodnik ('realistic, democratic', full of 'activity') capitalism. The more we expose capitalism before the workers for its 'greed and cruelty', the more difficult is it for capitalism of the first order to persist, the more surely is it bound to pass into capitalism of the second order.

.....
". . . The Russian revolution [the bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1905] and the revolutions in Asia = the struggle for ousting Octobrist capitalism and replacing it by democratic capitalism. And democratic capitalism = the last of its kind. It has no next stage to go on to. The next stage is its death."¹⁷

I have cited these words of Lenin because they appeared in the first issue of the *CWVTJ* (see my article "On the debate over imperialism"). Apparently Oleg and the *CWV* didn't think too deeply about what's appeared in their own *CWVTJ*. It sufficed that an article criticized people they wanted criticized—they didn't look too closely into what was in this criticism. In this case, they overlooked the question of whether the spread of capitalism is giving rise to the economic and political basis—the development of the proletariat and of its class struggle—that will overthrow capitalism.

Perhaps someone will say: if capitalism can only be overthrown through its own growth, then we should get MBA's (degrees in business administration), invest in corporations, plan struggles according to how they affect the stock market, etc. But Lenin clarifies that we leave such things for the bourgeoisie. The only way the communist activist contributes to capitalist growth is through organizing the proletariat for struggle, exposing each and every crime of capitalism, developing the class struggle, and in general preparing for the overthrow of capitalism.

The fact that radical reforms actually accelerate capitalism

¹⁷ *Collected Works*, Vol. 34, pp. 438-9.

in the long run, does not mean one should support the capitalists, but it points the way to developing the class organization needed to fight the capitalists. For example, it's not land reform in itself that will undermine capitalism; so the communist agrarian program must have more than that. This is why Lenin, referring to a radical land reform, said:

"The conversion of the wretched, downtrodden muzhik [Russian peasant] into a free, energetic European farmer will be a tremendous democratic gain; but we socialists shall not forget for a moment that this gain will be of no real use to the cause of mankind's complete emancipation from all oppression unless and insofar as the farmer is confronted by a class-conscious, free, and organized rural proletariat."¹⁸

The spread of class differentiation in Chiapas

But let us return to Chiapas. Careful observers have noted the class differentiation among the peasantry here. For example, the reformist Institute for Food and Development Policy published the book "BASTA! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas" by George Collier and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello. They studied the conditions in several villages of indigenous peasants in the area.¹⁹ They report how when the peasants got jobs during the local oil and hydroelectric boom, the result was that peasant agriculture was irreversibly changed and the peasant population began to split into rich and poor.

Concerning what happened in one village after the construction boom ended, the authors write:

"Many Zinacantecos did indeed return to farming, but did not give up off-farm vocations. . . .

"Zinacantecos began to transform their farming by using fertilizer and herbicides to intensify their cultivation in the highlands. By using fertilizers, they could farm plots year after year without fallowing. . . . The herbicides substantially reduced the work of weeding the milpa [corn field], reducing or eliminating the need to hire workers to help, and freeing up family labor to do things in the off-farm economy.

"These changes contributed to the gap that had begun to distinguish well-off from poor Zinacantecos during the development boom. Those who had established themselves as independent

¹⁸ "The agrarian program of the liberals", *Collected Works*, vol. 8, pp. 320.

¹⁹ By the way, the term "indigenous peasants" is used in this article to refer to the peasants from Mayan and other Indian backgrounds. The indigenous peasants suffer discrimination and worse oppression than the other peasants, and their plight in Chiapas was truly shocking. The indigenous peasants—and their struggle against marginalization—were at the heart of the Chiapas rebellion.

contractors, truckers, or successful wholesale-retail market vendors had money in their pockets from such off-farm work to pay for the chemical inputs being used in farming. Often they farmed at the expense of poor Zinacantecos who didn't have financial resources to pay for fertilizer and weed sprays, even if they held land to farm. Many poorer Zinacantecos began to rent their *ejido* plots to their wealthier neighbors who could afford the chemical inputs." (pp. 101-3)

Zinacantecos actually were in a better position than many other peasants, due to off-farm work being still somewhat available to them when the energy boom died down. In another village, peasants simply found themselves in a desperate condition because the agricultural situation had changed and there wasn't much field work left. This was partially because the landowners

"had reallocated their production during the energy-led boom. Much of the land once rented to peasants—in effect for sharecropping—had been converted to grasslands for cattle." (p. 104)

But it was also because it was much harder to hire themselves out to "milpa-farming peasants like the Zinacantecos, for whom Chamulas had also labored"; it seems that the Zinacantecos needed far few hired hands now that they were using chemical fertilizers and herbicides.

This change in the countryside came about because the peasants had money to spend on their fields. It seems to me that the only thing that could hold back the resultant split between rich and poor was if the villages of the entire area were so poor that no one had the money to buy fertilizers and herbicides or otherwise improve their agricultural technique. Anything that provided the peasants with a bit of money—from outside employment to financial aid—would probably have the same result. Unless Oleg's remedy of "government financial assistance" to the peasants or Julie's "democratic and socialist measures" were so hedged with rules and regulations that the peasants had little initiative—in short, unless Julie and Oleg's program imitated and outdid the PRI bureaucracy that grew up on the basis of the reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas—it too would probably have the same result fairly quickly. It was solely the mass misery and utter marginalization of the indigenous peasants that slowed down this process in large parts of Chiapas.

The book *Basta!* goes on to describe how these developments in the countryside wash away community spirit or the remnants of communalism (actually, apparently it was something of a patriarchal form of community spirit) among the peasants. They write that the evolution of the countryside

"also undermined the social organization of many peasant hamlets by removing a certain safety net of mutual dependence that kept young and poor people who needed food bound to their older and wealthier neighbors who, when weeding and cultivating had been done by hand, needed people to help them. . . the poor found themselves utterly marginalized; their labor in the fields was no longer required and they lacked any way of earning the money necessary to buy food." (p. 109)

I won't go into the rest of their description of what happened to the Zinacantecos, as interesting and relevant as it is. But Collier and Quaratiello, who are no Marxists and don't claim to be, inadvertently describe the Chiapas countryside developing according to the picture drawn by Marx and Lenin. For example, they point to the internal political divisions in the villages that result from the growing gap between rich and poor. And they show capitalism developing in the countryside not just from rich ranchers and landlords, but also from within the peasantry as well. As they point out at one point, talking of the "colonists" (the peasants who come to Chiapas to find a bit of land to farm),

"When one considers that wealthier colonists attained economies of scale from collective herding and commercial marketing, the distinction between them and private ranchers began to blur." (p. 45)

Their book really deserves an article in itself, but I will restrict myself to one more statement from the book, this time from the introduction:

"Journalists tended to paint an image of the poor, honest peasants on one side and the greedy ranchers and corrupt politicians on the others.

"This idealization of the peasants is inaccurate, however, because some of the inequalities in the countryside are the result of stratification within peasant communities, not merely the result of injustices heaped upon them from outside. Understanding indigenous politics in this way necessarily complicates the sympathies one might hold toward peasants, but I view this as salutary. I think we misrepresent peasants if we allow ourselves to view them in simplistic terms—as either the passive victims of the state or as 'noble savages' who can reinvigorate modern society with egalitarian and collective values. By acknowledging tensions and differences in peasant communities, we face up to both the virtue and the vice inherent in peasants' exercise of power over one another, and we integrate individual agency into our understanding of peasant communities. We also arrive at an appreciation of why not all peasant and indigenous groups welcomed the Zapatistas." (p. 9)

The struggle of the indigenous women against patriarchy

And finally, let me add one more touch to the picture of Chiapas. One of the inspiring things among the Chiapas rebellion is the role of women. EZLN accounts of the countryside bring out the patriarchal oppression which bound women down in the indigenous villages, so that the women suffered even worse than the men. One EZLN activist described the situation of women as follows:

"Many women got up at two or three in the morning to cook and by dawn they left with the man, who rode a horse while the women ran behind, carrying a child.

"When they arrived at work they shared the

chores equally with the man, whether it was cutting coffee or working the cornfield. When they got back home once again they did other work, preparing food."²⁰

But women took an active part in the rebellion, and the EZLN consulted with women to develop a list of their demands as part of the overall EZLN demands. While the EZLN may perhaps be waffling on abortion rights, in general the active role of women in the insurgency is changing their status in the countryside.

So it's interesting to see what the indigenous women and EZLN women activists are demanding. Some of the demands on the government are perhaps what one would expect: education, child care centers, health clinics with gynecological services, food for children, etc. And they demand from their own communities and the EZLN: participation in decisions, freedom from abuse, free choice of a marriage partner, etc.²¹

But along with these demands, there are a number of demands for small enterprises. Matilde Perez and Laura Castellanos put it as follows:

"They also sought to create and establish small businesses with technical assistance such as farms for raising chickens, rabbits, pigs and sheep. Prime materials and machinery for the installation of bakeries and craft workshops were requested as was transportation and access to the market for the fair sale of their products."²²

The same thing appears in the list of demands that the EZLN put forward in a communiqué on March 1, 1994. Point 29 dealt with the demands of indigenous women and included, among other demands:

"f) That we get livestock projects of chickens, rabbits, lambs, pigs, etc., . . .

"g) We also ask for bakery projects with ovens and supplies.

"h) We want to build artisan workshops with machinery and raw materials.

"I) For our craftwork, we seek markets where we can obtain fair prices."²³

As far as I can see, the indigenous women are not simply demanding assistance in raising livestock for their own food, but in raising livestock as a business, as the artisan workshops and craftwork will also be. The women don't just look back to the remnants of the old communal past, but are anxious to be wage-workers, or artisans, or have some source of outside income. Thus Collier and Quaratiello, for their part, refer to the

²⁰*Voice of Fire, Communiqués and Interviews from the Zapatista National Liberation Army*, edited by Ben Clarke and Clifton Ross, 91.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 85, 93.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 93.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 85.

"the Zapatista women who want the chance to become truck drivers"²⁴ (which, by the way, may mean driving a truck for wages but may perhaps also refer to buying a truck and setting up a small trucking business, which is one of the ways some small peasants in Chiapas become small entrepreneurs). The women are integrating themselves into the money economy. And while individual artisans are not capitalists, the inevitable result of a mass of small businesses is that some grow large and others fail.

Here again we see that the mass impulse forward in Chiapas is leading to a further growth of capitalist relations. The women aren't misguided in seeing a source of income as necessary in modern-day life; they are seeking to have an equal voice in modern-day life. But what economic effect will this have? It would be putting on blinders to pretend that their small enterprises will not help create a more capitalist countryside. It would however be reactionary sentimentalism to oppose their movement and thus favor the old patriarchalism with its double and triple exploitation of women. The communist stand is to vigorously support the women's struggle while taking full account of the inevitable class differentiation. This requires calling for class organization and class consciousness among the women in the countryside as well as the men; and this is what the EZLN program lacks.

The ghost of Lázaro Cárdenas

If you look at the demands set forward by Oleg and Julie of the CWV for the Mexican countryside, they leave aside the question of the class differences among the peasantry. Julie calls for "democratic and social measures" that seem to be aimed at preventing this class differentiation, which however is already a fact. Oleg seems to think that land reform and government assistance to the peasantry only gives an "impulse" to capitalist relations if these measures aren't radical enough. It is this search for perfect measures, that will allegedly avoid the bourgeois-democratic nature of agrarian reform, that make it hard for the CWV to distinguish itself from the general framework of a glorified and purified Cardenista agrarian program.

Marxism has a totally different approach. It bases itself on a realistic picture of what is happening in the countryside. It doesn't recoil before or gloss over the growing class differentiation in the countryside, but firmly takes its stand on the side of the proletariat and semi-proletariat. A major pillar of its agrarian program is spreading the clearest consciousness among the masses of what is happening to them, of how the gap between rich and poor is growing in the villages, and of the relationship of the poor peasants to the overall working class, as part of developing the class struggle. To do this, the revolutionary activist must also criticize the ghosts of the past that still dwell in the radical left, and build up an independent trend of anti-revisionist communism. □

²⁴*BASTA!*, p. 90.

Marxism and anti-revisionism

What is Marxism today? The main groups in the American left today—despite the radical and communist phrases of some of them—are not actually Marxist. For example, they present as socialist or sort-of-socialist some of the state-capitalist regimes which falsely call themselves communist, such as China or Cuba. And they talk of class struggle, but act as a tail to class-collaborationist labor bureaucrats or reformist politicians.

The *Chicago Workers' Voice* group has given up on building an independent anti-revisionist communist trend. It instead hopes that, whatever the failings of the opportunist trends individually, in a broad coalition they will stand together for militant class struggle against the capitalists. It thinks that, to be independent of the politics of the reformist or petty-bourgeois nationalist or Trotskyist or other opportunist trends, it suffices for CWV to close its eyes to them and instead characterize coalitions of these trends as simply "organizations of activists".

Below we carry three articles relevant to where CWV's abandonment of anti-revisionism has led them. One of them deals with CWV's endorsement of the Mexican journal *El Machete*. The second one is Tono Garcia's article from *El Machete* that CWV suggests shows the Marxist character of *El Machete*. And the third one discusses how CWV's view of united front tactics differs from the Leninist view.

'El Machete' continues its campaign for Castroism CWV looks for Marxism without anti-revisionism

by Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit

The *Chicago Workers Voice Theoretical Journal* #8 reprints an article from the Mexican journal *El Machete* entitled "In Defense of Marxism". For almost a year now the CWV group has alternately promoted *El Machete* as Marxist and denied that they thought it was Marxist. Their recent issue should settle most doubts on this score as they suggest that *El Machete* is defending Marxism in a "lively debate over how to move forward".

But what is the Marxism of *El Machete*? Even *CWVTJ* admits that *El Machete* isn't anti-revisionist. *El Machete* never talks about the difference between revolutionary Marxism and the nauseating platitudes from the state-capitalist regimes which called themselves communist. But the CWV group has grown tired of trying to build up an independent communist trend and is willing to settle for anything that sounds Marxist. Let's see what they have come up with in *El Machete*.

Campaigning for Castroism

El Machete has been campaigning for some time that it is wrong to simply condemn the U.S. imperialist blockade against Cuba, but Cuba must be supported as the socialist inspiration for the people's movements. We have reported on this previously. Continuing in this vein, the May 1 issue of *El Machete* carried a big article entitled "Cuba lives, long live Cuba!" Most of it is devoted to promoting "the five basic principles of the

Communist Party of Cuba". So *El Machete* is defending the very pattern of organization of Cuban society, in which a party falsely calls itself "communist" in order to justify suppressing all independent motion of the working people.

The article, signed by Ricardo Loewe, is specially highlighted by *El Machete*. Indeed, it constitutes a third of the text of their special four-page supplement, *El Machete Internacional*, which contains materials designed for especially wide circulation.

El Machete points out that "signed articles are the responsibility of their authors". But Loewe's article is given special emphasis, and there are no articles with opposing views on Cuba in any issue of *El Machete* that we have seen.

In any case, the July 7 issue of *El Machete Internacional* contains another article, this time unsigned, entitled "Long live socialist Cuba!" It too defends the supposed "absolute loyalty" of the revisionist party in Cuba to "the interests of the working class and the rest of the laboring people" and to "Marxism-Leninism". So *El Machete* identifies Castroism with Marxism-Leninism.

Unable to deal with democratization

The CWV is discreetly silent about these Castroist articles in *El Machete*, but it makes a big fuss over Tono Garcia's article in the July issue entitled "In defense of Marxism". It says this article is part of an important debate "within those forces which collaborate to produce *El Machete*" and that it "is important and

of interest to those in the United States who share the goals and concerns of the revolutionary movement in Mexico.”¹ However the *CWV* doesn't say what it thinks the issues are, or what it thinks about these issues, but just translates Tono Garcia's article. We include *CWV*'s translation below.

Now, it's not possible from this one article, which is quite general, to grasp the particular position of Tono Garcia. Who Tono Garcia is, and what he is trying to accomplish, is by no means clear. But what we are concerned with here is not Tono Garcia as an individual, but the range of ideas that appears in *El Machete*. This article by no means puts forward a Marxist position. It shows the fuzzy idea of Marxism that prevails in *El Machete*. Those who wish to help the activists that surround *El Machete* should not simply applaud such articles, like *CWV* does, but show what Marxism really is.

This particular article is mainly a polemic against “some intellectuals, members of the Revolutionary Democratic Party [PRD]” on the question of the democratization of Mexico, but it expresses no opinion about the PRD as a whole. The PRD originated in a split from the ruling PRI party; it is a bourgeois reformist party and is associated with Cuauhtemoc Cardenas.

Tono Garcia denounces unnamed PRD intellectuals, saying they respect the Mexican constitution and the law, or that they don't talk about “corporativism”. However, his main complaint is that they talk about the democratization of Mexico.

He points out, correctly, that democratization won't bring socialism or undermine capitalist exploitation. But he doesn't say what the significance of democratization is for the working masses. He does not show what the workers should do to utilize democratization to widen and broaden the class struggle, which is a key part of the Marxist stand on democratization. Nor does he describe the stand of different classes towards democratization, instead only denouncing corrupt intellectuals. He simply denounces bourgeois democracy as a useless scheme of self-seeking careerists. However, he apparently distinguishes between democratization and eliminating the PRI's traditional “corporativist” method of dominating political life and mass organizations, which he regards as important. Unfortunately, it is not clear how these two things can be separated from each other.

The ruling party in Mexico, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), set up a system in which it dominated the government for decades, decided what numbers to announce as the alleged result of elections, controlled the mass organizations (through “corporativism”), and even murdered activists when things got hot. It combined co-optation with repression and clamped down on all independent political action in the country. This system is now tottering. The workers and peasants are going to take an intense interest in this, and it is important to define what independent proletariat action in this situation would be.

Instead Tono Garcia spends a lot of time denouncing the intellectuals for talking about “the struggle ‘against the party of the state’ and for the “alternation of power’”. He says that this “clearly reveal(s) that their only objective is to get themselves

into government and nothing else.” He then shows how in France and Italy and most of Latin America there is bourgeois democracy and different parties alternate in power, but there is still corruption. But if these examples sufficed to show that democratization is of no interest to the workers, then they would also prove that eliminating corporativism is of no interest either. After all, the very same countries have also dispensed with Mexican-style “corporativism”, and they are still corrupt, and capitalist exploitation is deepening in these countries. The point is not simply that various PRD politicians are simply careerists seeking the spoils of office, which is undoubtedly true. Nor can the only point of interest be that bourgeois-democracy is still the rule of the bourgeoisie. The Marxist stand must also ask, what are the best conditions for the class struggle, and what does democratization have to do with these conditions.

What is being debated?

What is fascinating—and perhaps is the debate which the *CWV* is talking about—is that the EZLN makes a big deal of this very same struggle “against the party of the state”, and so has *El Machete* in the past. The *CWV*'s Julie herself cites *El Machete* saying that

“The objective in the present period of the class struggle is to put in crisis and to achieve the rupture of the popular forces with the form of government of the system of the party is the state.”²

And yet here is Tono Garcia denouncing this formulation as a “fashionable” phrase of careerist intellectuals.

This appears to be two different positions. Actually, both positions are apparently united by their inability to comprehend what democratization means for the masses.

Supporting revisionist tyranny?

This confusion over democratization might be related to *El Machete*'s failure to fight revisionism. Garcia himself denounces the former “Soviet state capitalism and its European satellites”, which is more than you usually find in *El Machete*. He doesn't mention Cuba in his article, and as we have seen *El Machete* itself actively campaigns in favor of Cuba revisionism.

What does this have to do with democratization? Well, Cuba, like Mexico, has the system of “the party of the state”. Like how the PRI ruled for decades, the Castroists deny genuine elections. At present, Cuba has elections in which political debates are banned, and the candidates are only allowed to post a sheet of paper with their biography. And the Castroists think that their state-capitalist “communist” party is the only one that should be allowed. Unlike a genuine communist party, which seeks to be the only party the proletariat needs by organizing the proletariat, leading it in struggle, and thus convincing it of the

²See Julie's article “*El Machete* and the Mexican Left” from *CWVTJ* #7, which is also reprinted in its entirety in *Communist Voice* #3. The particular quote from *El Machete* can be found in *CWVTJ* #7, p. 17, col. 1 or *CV* #3, p. 41, col. 2.

¹*CWVTJ* #8, p. 19, col. 1-2.

communist stand, the Cuban party imposes itself upon the people through bureaucratic tyranny, just as the PRI has done for decades. But *El Machete* lauds the basic principles of the Castroist party, so perhaps it has been influenced by the Castroist method of rule.

On human, social and ecological rights

In any case Garcia not only has a hard time seeing any significance to democratization other than the aspirations of corrupt intellectuals, but he has a hard time characterizing the line of the American imperialism and the Church. He denounces general phrases about the people's rights as a foreign plot. For example, he makes a big point about an article in which

"The Iberoamericana University, an institution financed by groups like the CIA and [the Jesuits]" described its work as, in part, "to promote those vigilantes of **human, social and ecological rights...**" (emphasis as in the original).

Can he really be so sectarian as to denounce struggle for human, social and ecological rights as a CIA plot?

Well, some revisionists do. Just last month the Chinese officials visiting New York for the 50th anniversary of the UN also denounced the Western bourgeoisie for talking about human rights. The Castroists too aren't fond of talk about "human rights", although they have made a deal with the Pope to allow the Catholic Church to deal with these issues in Cuba. If it is fashionable for the Western bourgeoisie to drape its oppression of the workers in the mantle of democracy, it is also fashionable for the revisionist bourgeoisie to drape its oppression of the workers in the mantle of a "Marxist" criticism of the class nature of bourgeois democracy. A Marxist stand is radically different from that of either the Western bourgeoisie or the revisionists. It shows the reality of exploitation behind the "democratic" mask of the Western bourgeoisie, but it does so in a way that encourages the mass struggle of the proletariat and toilers for their democratic, social and ecological rights.

Where's the beef?

The rest of Tono Garcia's article is devoted to general Marxist phrases and calls for activists to "retake Marxist scientific analysis". Perhaps he has other articles or writings in which he expresses his views more clearly, and it may be *El Machete's* fault that these more detailed articles don't appear. In any case, it is typical of *El Machete's* articles on theoretical points to talk in such generalities, and this can hardly help activists take up a Marxist stand. A debate about how to move forward that is restricted to opposing platitudes can only turn off serious thought.

As far as Garcia's article, it advises activists to "break with the pure unionism and practical corporativism of some organizations". But he doesn't elaborate what this means.

He says activists should "develop political-revolutionary work for education and consciousness-raising among the masses." This too is not elaborated any further.

He says it is necessary to deal with the "reality of the division and **struggle of classes**", but doesn't give any example.

He does however call for "developing the independent organization of the Mexican people", clarifying in another paragraph that it is "necessary to **understand** practically that 'the people' are 91 million Mexicans . . ." 91 million seems to be a figure for the entire population of Mexico — workers, peasants, middle classes, and bourgeoisie combined. Is it all to be merged into a single "independent organization"? So much for the "division and struggle of classes". Such an appeal does however fit in with the petty-bourgeois nationalism found elsewhere in *El Machete*.

The voice of the radical left?

The *CWV* itself doesn't say why it likes Garcia's polemic against democratization. It doesn't analyze the theoretical issues involved. It just says we should be impressed by the name of the article and by how much support *El Machete* has. It insists that *El Machete* has become "the voice of some of the most important independent mass organizations, some of which are grouped in the national coordinator of independent social organizations, CNOSI." It then gives the names of some of the members of CNOSI, without directly claiming they have any connection to *El Machete*.

El Machete itself simply claims to be a "workers' and peasants' journal, written by and for toilers". Thus the *CWV's* claims seem rather inflated. As well, *El Machete's* self-description presumably means either that it is simply a journal, with no activist organization standing behind it, or it believes in conspiratorial organization whose existence is kept hidden from the masses. Or then again, it may mean that the *El Machete* organization is unable to, or uninterested in, working out a platform. If so, this would be reminiscent of the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group itself, which has no platform expressing its views and purposes and is rather indefinite as an organization.

But *CWV's* claims about *El Machete* shows what is on their mind. They don't see the point of supporting the struggle to establish an anti-revisionist trend in Mexico. Instead they will overlook *El Machete's* faults if it sounds radical and a lot of activists support it. They don't see that to help our sister and brother activists, to really be on their side, one has to have the backbone to say some unpopular things about the fashionable errors of the radical left—even if all of CNOSI supported those errors.

The debate in practice

Thus it doesn't bother the *CWV* that *El Machete* has a weak idea of socialism and Marxism. According to an earlier article by *CWV's* Julie, *El Machete* sees socialism as a sort of "radical democracy"³; it "doesn't make a clear distinction between socialism and radical peasant democracy"⁴; it is "hesitant" to criticize "EZLN's conciliation to the PRD" and thinks it may be correct to have Cuauhtemoc Cardenas the head of the

³"El Machete and the Mexican Left", *CWVTJ* #7, p. 20, col. 3 or *CV* #3, p. 45, col. 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, *CWVTJ* #7, p. 21, col. 3, or *CV* #3, p. 46, col. 1.

National Liberation Movement, even though these plans of the EZLN mean “banking on sections of the bourgeoisie”⁵; it “does not talk a lot about the working class movement”⁶; considers Castroism “to be one the road to socialism”⁷; etc. Julie admits that many of these questions are key issues for the orientation of the Mexican movement, and *El Machete* is weak on them.

Aren't these the real views that *El Machete* is putting forward as Marxism? What is important is not whether someone repeats “long live Marxism” a few times. The revisionist traitors to Marxism could and did do this all the time. What is important is the content of one's views. Besides the views listed above, Julie also pointed out that “there are some indications . . . that they equate communism with communal forms which

⁵*Ibid.*, *CWVTJ* #7, p. 17, col. 3 to p.18, col. 2, or *CV* #3, p. 42, col. 2 to p. 43, col. 1.

⁶*Ibid.*, *CWVTJ* #7, p. 20, col. 2, or *CV* #3, p. 44, col. 2.

⁷*Ibid.*, *CWVTJ* #7, p. 21, col. 2, or *CV* #3, p. 45, col. 2.

exist among the peasantry in Mexico.”⁸ And in the same issue of *El Machete* that has Tono Garcia's article there are more indications that it sees communalism as close to communism.⁹ Meanwhile *El Machete Internacional* continues to promote that the Southwest is “occupied Mexico”.¹⁰

But, Julie and *CWV* shrug, so what?. The *CWV* sees *El Machete* as the Marxist voice pointing the way forward in Mexico anyway. This shows what Marxism without anti-revisionism is in today's world. It is a doctrine which doesn't have a clear idea of anything including socialism. It is a doctrine which is afraid to contradict the fashionable, anti-Marxist ideas in the radical left, afraid to look at what's really happening in the Mexican countryside, and afraid to look at what's really happened to the revisionist regimes. □

⁸*Ibid.*, *CWVTJ* #7, p. 21, col. 3, or *CV* #3, p. 46, col. 1.

⁹*El Machete*, July 19, “Socialism or neo-liberalism”, p. 4, col. 4.

¹⁰*El Machete Internacional*, July 7, p.4, col. 3.

El Machete on Marxism

The following article is from *El Machete*, Number 63, July 19, 1995, as translated in the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #8. Notes by the *CWVTJ* translator appear in [square brackets], while all parenthetical remarks, including question marks in parentheses (???), are by Tono Garcia. Emphasis is as in the original. PRD is the abbreviation of the Revolutionary Democratic Party associated with Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. This article is reviewed in “*CWV* looks for Marxism without anti-revisionism” starting on page 33.

In Defense of Marxism by Tono Garcia

It's impressive to read or hear the opinions of some intellectuals, members of the Revolutionary Democratic Party, who, leaving aside any serious analysis of reality, embrace (without thinking?) the confusing verbiage which the dominant class uses to try to keep itself in power.

With the clear intention of not being marginalized from public budget (scholarships; subsidies; appointment and salaries, such as advisors, project directors, commentators, etc.), they try to hide the facts that might show the workers and the people the situation in which we are living.

They say that what is missing in Mexico is democracy, but they are talking about the same bourgeois “democracy” installed by dominant capitalism to fool the people, to make them believe that they themselves elect their rulers—getting rid of some, putting in others, but without substantially modifying anything which goes against their [capitalist] interests.

On the contrary, and just like the well-paid opposition parties, they [the PRD intellectuals] agree fully with **respecting**

the constitution and the law, which guarantees submission to the state and the exploitation of all the producers to the benefit of big capital; which maintains the parasitic bureaucracy that lives by appropriating the public resources and, guarantees the domination of the transnationals.

They are especially careful not to say a single word about corporativism, which is the vertebral column of the bureaucratic State, and which guarantees the control and crushing of the workers, peasants, shopkeepers and all the people through semifascist organizations and confederations. This includes the thousands of small and medium businesses which are controlled by the officialist leaders of their organizations.

It seems that they [the PRD intellectuals] are betting that one day these mafioso-like leaders will come into contradiction with the government so that the “opposition” can then receive them with open arms as it has done with all the scum that has left the PRI [the ruling party].

The “ideologs” of the petty bourgeoisie limit themselves to talking of “democracy” in the abstract without clarifying whom it would benefit. The same thing appears when “critics” of the system win “friendship” with the government bureaucrats and end up converted into the best tricksters [for the government] of the people, when they are not just simply salaried spies.

Other terms which have become fashionable are the struggle “against the party of the state” and for the “alternation of power” which clearly reveal that their only objective is to get themselves into government and nothing else.

But we can see past these empty phrases: in France, the self-named socialist party kept Francois Mitterand in the presidency of the country for fourteen years, without affecting, in the least, the profits of capital and while participating in the inter-

ventionist wars just like any other imperialist country. In Spain, Felipe Gonzalez plays the same role. Eight years of the government of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (?) ended just as corruptly as whatever other government, never ceasing to be capitalist.

The Italian government is one of the governments in power which has the most alternation of power. It has had false socialist and communists, social-democrats, Christian democrats, fascists, "leftist" and "rightists"; all have passed through power. And it continues to be one of the most corrupt governments.

In Latin America, since the fall of Soviet state capitalism and its European satellites made the "communist threat" (?) and the open dictatorships disappear, the North Americans have been converted into the most feverish defenders of "democracy" and the alternation of power, in order to favor the bureaucracies which are most docile in turning over to them the resources of the Latin American countries.

Suddenly, "public opinion" pollsters, human rights commissions, "civic alliances", "defenders of the vote", and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have appeared like mushrooms all over the place. They are almost always promoted by adventurers who lend themselves to the most unimaginable games of the espionage and interventionist agencies.

The Iberoamericana University, an institution financed by groups like the CIA and the Company of Jesus (the Jesuits), summed up its strategy for work in Mexico in the June 16th issue of the newspaper *El Financiero*,

"To promote in the fields of ideology and culture, the agents for activities for the citizen consciousness and social responsibility"; in the social field, **the articulators of the necessities and demands of the collective and organized attention**, such as the **creators of public policies (???)**". In the political field, "to promote those vigilantes of **human, social and ecological rights**, as well as the use of three key words to mark its action: **consensus, dialog, ethics.**"

Retake Marxist Scientific Analysis

As we can see, this elegant language (common in the press

of the "left" and which has infected more than a few companions and organizations) has a well-defined origin.

This phraseology is very careful to elude any concept related to the **reality** of the division and **struggle of classes**, the internationalization of capitalist exploitive relations (which they call, for example, globalization"), about the necessity of **eliminating** the backwards and dependent capitalism to which we belong and its greedy and corrupt bureaucracy. The exponents [of this phraseology] are more worried about finding jobs and personal positions than in developing the independent organization of the Mexican people.

To fight these positions and to break their influence in the mass movement is the responsibility of all those who say they are revolutionaries.

A principal task of all those who understand the need for a Proletarian Party is to replant the intense and serious study of Marxism and the national and international reality of capitalism and its world imperialist system, pushing forward propaganda and organization in the working class and all the proletariat.

But, it is necessary to **break** theoretically and practically with all those petty-bourgeois ideological positions, confusion, and pretensions; calling these things by their names and explaining to the population what is really going on!

It is necessary to break with the pure unionism and practical corporativism of some organizations and to develop political-revolutionary work for education and consciousness-raising among the masses.

It is necessary to **understand** practically that "the people" are 91 million Mexicans and not only those small groups who are already organized and which traditionally mobilize. And, above all, in this epoch, it is necessary to shake up the imagination, to get out of [doing] the wasteful mobilizations of always, and to prepare other actions which win the **sympathy** and the growing participation of the unorganized masses. This will only be possible to the extent that the political organizations identify the general interests of the distinct sectors [of the population] and to raise regional or national programs which break with "sectorism" [narrowness] and immediate petitionism [petitioning for immediate demands only]. □

What's left of united front tactics when you take out anti-revisionism?

by Joseph Green, CVO, Detroit

The *Chicago Workers' Voice* group has given up on building an independent anti-revisionist trend. Instead it hopes that various "broadly based" coalitions of different left trends—comprising as much of the radical left as possible—can take over the role that they once thought the communist trend should play. In the most recent *CWV Theoretical Journal*, Julie and Oleg both describe their search for broad organizations which will follow a consistent policy of class struggle. Both lament that they can't find these organizations for the particular front of work they are involved with.

Julie describes the work of a clinic defense organization in Chicago, the Emergency Defense Clinic Coalition. She doesn't see why ECDC didn't overcome the limitations she sees in its work. But it didn't, and she says its "life as an organization has ended". So she describes the perspective she would like to see in the struggle, and laments that "Unfortunately there are no organizations on the horizon with such a perspective."¹ She has no suggestion of what to do in this situation.

Similarly, Oleg ends up describing all the things he thinks a political organization of workers needs. This is basically everything except socialist consciousness. He laments that "Neither Jesse Jackson nor Labor Party Advocates are going to form the kind of labor party that is really needed to advance the working class struggle in the U.S."² He too has no suggestion about what to do.

Thus the *CWV* group expects that coalitions of groups with vastly different agendas—whether in the struggle for women's rights or in the labor movement—can be stable, and take up all the militant tasks of the anti-revisionist communist trend except maybe work for socialism. In the old days, *CWV* thought a proletarian party was needed to orient the mass movement towards consistent class struggle and to inspire the coalitions and broad organizations that come and go in the mass movement. Now that the party they worked in, the Marxist-Leninist Party (MLP), is dead, they are disillusioned with party-building. They no longer seek to transform the radical left by establishing an independent proletarian trend, and they look instead to general coalitions of the left to fill the gap. For the time being, they see no coalitions that will accomplish what they want in the U.S. But their abandonment of the anti-revisionist perspective leaves them without any analysis about why this situation exists, and what activists should do about it. The only perspective left to them is to search around for some other broad coalition in the left and, if it can be found, close their eyes to its defects and hope it will overcome the present problems of the left. This is basically what the *CWV* is doing

with its support for the petty-bourgeois nationalist journal *El Machete* in Mexico.

United front tactics without the independent proletarian trend

The *CWV* sometimes defends their search for the perfect coalition as united front tactics. But it has little to do with Marxist united front tactics. Let's take a look at Lenin's book "*Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, which is generally acknowledged to contain many of the basic ideas of united front tactics, although it doesn't use the term "united front". What did Lenin see as the point of these tactics, and how did he evaluate the general left coalitions?

The first thing that strikes the eye is that Lenin's book is about how to build up and strengthen the Bolshevik trend (the anti-revisionist communist trend of his day). The book centers on how to build up the communist party. Of course, Lenin didn't think that a party could be created just because it seemed like a good idea—for example, the extent of centralism and discipline and the correctness of its theory could not be determined simply by passing a resolution. He showed how the party developed in the course of the class struggles. But the book centered on how the party was to be built.

Lenin describes how the party, the proletarian vanguard, builds up its links with the masses. He says that propaganda and agitation are not enough, but the masses need "their own political experience".³ And he describes what are the conditions that facilitate the masses seeing the bankruptcy of other trends and coming over to communism.

Thus the united front tactics that he describes revolve around building up the anti-revisionist communist trend. It is thus natural that the *CWV*, which views united front tactics as a replacement for the difficult, painstaking but revolutionary work of building up a new trend, would differ tremendously from Lenin on united front tactics. As we shall see, these differences are particularly sharp on such questions as:

What can be expected of broad coalitions in the radical left;

What the radical left consists of;

Does there have to be an open fight between communism and other left trends;

And what does it mean to win over the masses.

Are the coalitions of different trends stable?

Julie's article summing up the history of Chicago's Emergency Clinic Defense Organization (ECDC) sets forth her orientation towards coalitions comprised of a multitude of competing left trends, as ECDC was one such coalition. Julie saw

¹*CWV* #8, p. 4, col. 1; p. 12, col. 1.

²*CWV* #8, p. 52, col. 1.

³"*Left-Wing" Communism*, ch. X, p. 97, Chinese pamphlet edition.

ECDC as the organization which could have formed a stable alternative with an all-round political agenda opposed to the reformist organizations. But she thinks that “while it was objectively an alternative to NOW and NARAL, it was not conscious of the need to develop an all-round alternative to the bourgeois feminism of these organizations.”⁴ So it sort of was and was not an alternative. Julie leaves it at this and slurs over the issue of why the political trends in ECDC, many of which regarded themselves as “revolutionary” or “socialist” or “communist”, weren’t conscious of the need to oppose the establishment-oriented standpoint of NOW, and whether it is reasonable to suppose that activists could become conscious of this without breaking with a number of these trends. So the impression is that Julie thinks that what are needed are coalitions similar to ECDC but conscious of what Julie thinks their role could be.⁵

Lenin’s perspective towards these coalitions was different. He pointed to the existence of various opportunist and revisionist trends in the radical left, and called these trends “petty-bourgeois democrats”. He wrote that their nature was vacillation, not consistent class struggle. He said:

“The petty-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviks) inevitably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the Soviet system, between reformism and revolutionism, between love-for-the-workers and fear of the proletarian dictatorship, etc. The proper tactics for the Communists must be to *utilize* these vacillations, not to ignore them; and utilizing them calls for concessions to those elements which are turning towards the proletariat—whenever and to the extent that they turn towards the proletariat—in addition to fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie. The result of the application of correct tactics is that Menshevism has disintegrated, and is disintegrating more and more in our country, that the stubbornly opportunist leaders are being isolated, and that the best of the workers and the best elements among the petty-bourgeois democrats are being brought into our camps. This is a long process, . . .”⁶

Lenin thus regarded vacillation as an inevitable basic feature

⁴CWVTJ #8, p. 9, col. 1.

⁵In this regard, Julie’s paints ECDC in remarkable colors. The formation of ECDC, as other clinic defense organizations across the country, was a significant development. Julie however goes further and implies ECDC was somewhat better than clinic defense organizations elsewhere. Yet the actual account she gives shows that ECDC was pretty similar to the others, wouldn’t openly criticize NOW, was standoffish to militants elsewhere, etc. Some activists in ECDC were receptive to MLP’s (including Julie’s) agitation on various issues, but no more so than was the case with clinic defense organizations elsewhere.

⁶LWC, Ch. VIII, p. 73.

of the petty-bourgeois democrats, right up until the disintegration of their trends. He said one shouldn’t ignore these vacillations. This means that communists should support the impulse to engage in clinic defense shown by the formation of the clinic defense organizations, no matter how weak this impulse was. But it also means one shouldn’t expect that these coalitions will become a stable and “all-round alternative to the bourgeois feminism” of the establishment-led organizations like NOW and NARAL. And indeed, Julie’s description of ECDC shows its constant vacillation: its failure to openly oppose NOW, its on-again-off-again attitude to militancy, its reluctance to deal with other militant clinic defense groups, its inability to see the political basis of the pro-choice movement, etc. This organization, influenced and led by a dozen or more groups that prided themselves on their radicalism, could nevertheless never get itself to issue a statement openly differing with NOW. And then, at the Mother’s Day clinic defense of May 12, 1990, NOW called the police on ECDC activists, and asked the cops to stop the militants from confronting the anti-abortion clinic blockaders. Even then, ECDC wouldn’t openly criticize NOW. All it did was decide to write a private letter to NOW. (Julie isn’t even sure whether the letter was ever sent, which shows how little significance this letter had.)⁷

Julie describes some of these vacillations in her article and in her chronology of ECDC. But she doesn’t see these vacillations as an inevitable feature of the political trends that formed ECDC. She sees this vacillation as simply an unfortunate fact, and she hopes that a better coalition of such groups could avoid it. She doesn’t notice that these vacillations show the need to build up communist trend in opposition to petty-bourgeois democracy. She apparently hopes instead hopes that petty-bourgeois democratic trends will all adopt communist, class struggle policies.

Lenin however identified the movement taking up a correct and stable orientation with the disintegration of the petty-bourgeois democratic trends and the isolation of those leaders who clung to these trends. And this provides a more realistic picture of the situation with ECDC. The various petty-bourgeois trends were not going to accept all-round consistently militant policies, an open struggle against NOW, a focus on work among working women and men, etc. If many activists had been won over to these militant policies (which would have been a very good thing), and if they had succeeded in taking over the direction of ECDC, then ECDC would have ceased to be the broadly-based representative of the radical left that Julie describes. It would have become quite a different type of organization than the old ECDC, and it would have had to face direct conflict with most of the left trends that formerly belonged to it. Thus, the old ECDC would have come to an end.

What are the trends in the movement?

So Julie’s analysis of trends differs profoundly from Lenin’s. Lenin talks of a bourgeois trend, the revolutionary proletarian trend, and the petty-bourgeois democrats of various

⁷Julie’s ECDC Chronology, which she will send on request to those who want it.

types in the middle. He describes united front tactics as one way the communist trend helps the masses see, through their own experience in struggle, the bankruptcy of the petty-bourgeois trends.

Julie's perspective however is that there is a reformist or bourgeois trend, and a general radical left that is opposed to it. She in essence takes the radical left as a whole, rather than basing her analysis on the radical left is divided between the class struggle trend and the petty-bourgeois democrats. She recognizes that various organizations might have this or that particular weakness or mistaken policy, but she slurs over why this is so. She describes coalitions of different radical left trends as simply "organizations of activists". Such a description is true enough, but way too general. It ignores a political characterization of the particular coalition, and of the goals and agendas of the different trends in it. To simply leave it at that ECDC and other coalitions are "organizations of activists" implies that we can get beyond the clash of trends if only we all agree to unite on the basis that we are activists. Similarly, she hopes that *El Machete* in Mexico will become the voice for "the radical left in general" in Mexico, and with thus mold them into a "national political movement . . . that is against the PRI, and against the PRD as well and which supports the development of the peasant struggle and is for building up the working class struggle . . ." At the same time, she says this radical left includes the "far left wing" of the reformist PRD.⁸ She recognizes that *El Machete* and various groups have this or that weakness, even a lot of weaknesses, but she slurs over what this means about the political trend of these groups and about their overall role with respect to organizing the working class; and by doing so, she departs from the standpoint of communism.

MLP on the trends in the movement

The CWV has claimed at times that its view of united front work is that of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA. It is interesting therefore to compare Julie's view of the trends in the pro-choice movement with those of the MLP. The pro-choice movement and the struggle for women's rights was one of the subjects dealt with in detail by the Fourth National Conference of the MLP in Fall 1990. The analysis put forward by this conference can be found in three interesting speeches in the *Workers' Advocate Supplement* for December 15, 1990 (Vol. 6, #10). These speeches distinguish between the bourgeois trend which included such organizations as NOW and NARAL; the left-reformists who formed a centrist trend in the pro-choice movement; and the independent trend. Thus the MLP agreed with Lenin's analysis of the radical left, and did not feel that the whole radical left stood for class struggle. What Lenin described as petty-bourgeois democrats, this conference called left-reformists or centrists.

For example, the conference pointed out that

"In the cities where the demand for clinic defense was strong and NOW refused to organize it, or heavy-handedly tried to clamp down on

militancy, activists looked to someone else to organize the clinic defenses. In those areas separate clinic defense organizations emerged.

"But in general, these clinic defense organizations were initiated and dominated by left-reformists, including Trotskyists, revisionists and even straight-out Democrats. They tried to paper over or bridge the rift between NOW and the pro-choice activists, rather than developing a mass trend consciously opposed to the liberal bourgeois trend. In practice, these opportunist forces played a centrist role between the bourgeois trend of NOW, NARAL, etc. and the building of an independent trend."⁹

Julie however directs attention away from the contradictions within the radical left that are highlighted by the MLP analysis. She accepts many criticisms by the MLP of the policies by which the clinic defense organizations were led. But she doesn't connect the mistaken policies of various organizations to an overall view of where these organizations fit in the struggle of trends in the left.

The struggle against opportunism

As a result of CWV's tendency to group the radical left—anti-revisionists, revisionists, Trotskyists, petty-bourgeois nationalists, etc.—all together as simply activists fighting the bourgeoisie, CWV downplays the need to oppose opportunist ideas and practices in the radical left. It thinks that criticism should be directed at the open reformists, but drags its feet on criticism of the radical left. It is upset at our criticism of *El Machete*; it prefers to glorify the EZLN rather than realistically discuss its program; and it has a tendency to suggest that ECDC was better than other clinic defense organizations. (footnote on sectarianism)

Lenin on the contrary described criticism and exposure among the masses of the opportunist trends as an inseparable part of united front tactics. As we have seen, he described the disintegration of the petty-bourgeois democratic trends as the aim of these tactics. And he also gave as one of the preconditions for revolution that

"all the vacillating, wavering, unstable, intermediate elements—the petty bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois democrats as distinct from the bourgeoisie—have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people, have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy;..."¹⁰

Lenin didn't view this disgrace of the opportunist trends as simply the automatic result of joint action. No, he also gave many examples of the direct fight against opportunism that had to be part of united front tactics. He wrote that the old *Iskra* editorial board temporarily had

"a formal political alliance with Struve, the

⁸CWVTJ#7, p. 19, col. 1-2, or CV #3, p. 43 col. 2 - p. 44, col. 1.

⁹*Workers' Advocate Supplement*, 15 Dec. '90, p. 10, col. 2.

¹⁰LWC, Ch. X, p. 99.

political leader of bourgeois liberalism” but that “at the same time it was able to wage an unremitting and most merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestation of its influence in the working class movement.”¹¹

He pointed out that during World War I

“we concluded certain compromises with the ‘Kautskyites’, with the Left Mensheviks (Martov), and with a section of the ‘Socialist-Revolutionaries’ (Chernov and Natanson); we were together with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal and issued joint manifestoes; but we never ceased and never relaxed our ideological and political struggle against the ‘Kautskyites,’ Martov and Chernov (Natanson died in 1919 a ‘Revolutionary Communist’ Narodnik, he was very close to and almost in agreement with us).”¹²

Lenin’s book repeats this idea in a number of different ways. For example, in a famous section of his book “*Left-Wing Communism*” Lenin pointed out that not all compromises are treachery. But he simultaneously stressed the need to criticize those compromises which are rotten. He wrote that revolutionaries must

“single out from the practical questions of the politics of each separate or specific historical moment those which reveal the principal types of impermissible, treacherous compromises, compromises embodying the opportunism that is fatal to the revolutionary class, and to exert all efforts to explain them and combat them.”¹³

Winning the masses

The *CWV*’s view of trends also leads to a different idea of what it means to win over the masses. The *CWV* emphasizes turning the coalitions of varying trends into a stable force for consistent struggle. This is an unrealistic assessment of what can be accomplished in these coalitions. Yet Julie hopes for an ECDC without any of its drawbacks, and centers her account on what ECDC accepted or rejected. Marxist united front tactics, on the other hand, emphasize the consciousness of the masses and bringing them into the class struggle as the central issue, and these tactics don’t identify the coalitions with the mass organizations with revolutionary orientation. Instead they measure work in the coalitions by how it affects the mass activity. So Marxist tactics do not focus on the formal decisions of such coalitions. If the MLP had waited for ECDC and other coalitions to, say, agree to criticize NOW, then the criticism of NOW would rarely, if ever, have taken place. The MLP acted independently to carry out this and other militant policies, and the MLP—very partially and momentarily, but

repeatedly—succeeded in winning masses of activists for certain militant policies.

Around the time of the Third Congress of the Communist International, Lenin described the issue of winning the masses as follows:

“To win over the majority of the proletariat to our side—such is the ‘principal task’[at this point in CI development—JG]...

“Of course, we do not give the winning of the majority a formal interpretation, as do the knights of philistine ‘democracy’ of the Two-and-a-Half International. 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. But it was winning over the majority, and that is possible even if, formally, the majority of the proletariat follow bourgeois leaders, or leaders who pursue a bourgeois policy (as do all the leaders of the Second and the Two-and-a-Half Internationals), or if the majority of the proletariat are wavering. . . . let us not allow a single serious opportunity to slip by when the bourgeoisie compels the proletariat to undertake a struggle; let us learn to correctly determine the moment when the *masses* of the proletariat *cannot but* rise together with us.”¹⁴

Following this line, the MLP took part in clinic defenses and pro-choice demonstrations across the country. It put out its own independent literature, including denunciation of the orientation of NOW and NARAL, and refused to restrict its leaflets to what the left-reformist coalitions thought was acceptable. It brought picket signs with basic slogans to distribute at clinic defenses; it encouraged the shouting of militant slogans; it used slogans and songs to get the political message out; it encouraged workers to come to clinic defenses and it distributed pro-choice literature in working class neighborhoods; etc. It advocated militant tactics right on the clinic defense lines. It put forward proposals in coalition planning meetings which were sometimes accepted. But the MLP continued its basic work with the mass movement no matter what the coalitions accepted in their planning meetings. Why could the MLP get away with this? It was mainly due to the fact that the MLP carefully considered what was immediately needed to advance the struggle, how to present this in a way comprehensible to the mass of activists, and what the mood of the activists was, and consequently a number of MLP policies were taken up or sympathized with by other activists while in the midst of the struggle. For example, various restrictions on the struggle mandated beforehand by various reformist or left-reformist leaders were often defied by

¹¹*Ibid.*, Ch. Ch. VII, pp. 68-69.

¹²*LWC*, Ch. VIII, p. 69.

¹³*LWC*, Ch. VIII, p. 65.

¹⁴A letter to German Communists, August 14, 1921, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 522.

the mass of activists while in front of the clinics when they could see that it was necessary to take action if the anti-abortion fanatics were to be blocked. In that sense the MLP won over the mass of activists, momentarily and only on certain issues, but repeatedly. So MLP literature and actions were accepted as a reasonable part of the movement by the mass of activists despite the views of the left-reformist leaders.

More on how MLP acted towards the coalitions

Thus the MLP, while regarding the formation of the clinic defense organizations as significant, did not center its work on the coalitions. As it was described at the MLP's Fourth National Conference,

"Outside Boston and Buffalo, our branches have generally been in areas where there is a clinic defense organization or coalition separate from NOW or the other bourgeois-led women's groups, and these organizations have been dominated by groups following a centrist or left-reformist policy. While our direct party work in the movement, at actions, and among the working masses remains primary, branches have supplemented this with work with these organizations. As we said before, although they are dominated by opportunist groups and sometimes only a handful of unaffiliated people attend their organizational meetings, they have the following of clinic defense activists. These clinic defense organizations are generally loose, so that anyone pro-choice is free to attend, and our comrades have been able to attend many meetings and raise our views and proposals without tying our hands as to what the centrist leaders will agree with and without getting bogged down in coalition politics."¹⁵

Thus the MLP, while carrying out direct work with the activists, utilized the slightest vacillation of the left-reformists towards struggle. When clinic defense organizations were formed, even though they didn't directly denounce NOW, the MLP paid attention to the activists at them. At the same time, the MLP placed its emphasis on winning over the activists towards struggle, and never identified the movement with the centrist-led organizations.

What if the trend doesn't exist

The CWV justifies its tactics by the view that party-building failed. The MLP dissolved, and the CWV thinks this justifies their profound skepticism towards any attempt to build up an independent anti-revisionist trend today. As Oleg puts it, "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

¹⁵ *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, Dec. 15, 1990 (Vol. 6, #10), p. 14, col. 2.

activists on this question."¹⁶ And similarly, the CWV doesn't feel like encouraging the workers and activists here either to build such an anti-revisionist trend.

But how does Lenin approach this? Are the principles he sets forward only applicable when there is already a mass communist party?

On the contrary, Lenin's advice is directed to showing how the communist activists gradually build up the revolutionary proletarian trend around them. If the party isn't yet in existence, he calls for even more attention to building it. Consider his description of the stages in the development of communist work. He says

"the first historical task" is "winning over the class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat to Soviet power and the dictatorship of the working class" and that it "could not be accomplished without a complete ideological and political victory over opportunism and social-chauvinism". When this is accomplished, "the second task...consists in being able to lead the masses to the new position that can ensure the victory of the vanguard in the revolution."¹⁷ (*Ibid.*)

It isn't that united front tactics should be postponed until the entire vanguard is won over. But it is clear that a communist party, at the center of the revolutionary proletarian trend, is needed if communist tactics are going to influence large masses. And if that party and trend don't exist, then every effort must be centered on creating it, even though this takes an entire period. And it is notable that Lenin doesn't sneer at small groups which set out to establish this trend, but endorses their work as an inevitable and necessary stage of the movement. He states that so long as the first historical task of creating the independent communist trend is yet to be accomplished,

"so long, and to that extent, propaganda was in the forefront; even propaganda circles, with all the defects of the circle spirit, are useful under these conditions and produce fruitful results."¹⁸

Ignoring the building of an independent anti-revisionist trend leads to passivity

So we end up back where we started—that CWV has torn the heart out of united front tactics when they separate it from the work to build an independent anti-revisionist trend. This results in Julie and Oleg having no advice to give to the activists about what to do when the coalitions of different trends don't carry out struggle or dissolve and die. The CWV ends up in a passive position of floating around the radical left, rather than trying to transform it.

The CWV even rewrites the history of the movement to delete the independent role of the anti-revisionist trend. This can be seen in Julie's account of the ECDC. Julie worked for years in the clinic defense movement in Chicago as an MLP

¹⁶ *CWVTJ* #7, p. 11, col. 3.

¹⁷ *LWC*, Ch. X, p. 98.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

activist. During the years when ECDC was most active, she was a representative of the MLP. Yet she barely mentions the MLP. She occasionally mentions in passing that it advocated some stand. But she doesn't describe the views and tactics of the MLP towards the ECDC and the clinic defense movement. She doesn't describe how the MLP analyzed the ECDC (as another of the "centrist" clinic defense organizations dominated by "left-reformism"). Nor does she assess MLP tactics towards such organizations—what was it trying to accomplish in its work with such organizations, how did it carry out such work, what did it think would happen to such organizations, and what in her opinion resulted from these tactics. Nor does she describe the MLP's work to build its own direct links with the activists and the masses, and the subordinate role it gave to work with the clinic defense organizations. To some extent, this lack may reflect the fact that the Chicago Branch of the MLP (from which the CWV group springs) may have been developing its own orientation towards the movement, different from that of other MLP branches. In the last years of the MLP, its political unity fractured and different areas gradually went their own ways. The revolutionary declarations in MLP statements less and less reflected the actual stands of the various units and branches of the MLP. But mainly, Julie's lack of discussion of the MLP's role reflects Julie's new ideas about united front work.

Indeed, if Julie rarely mentions the MLP, she doesn't mention at all the role of the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group, the organization she remained in after the MLP dissolved. What is the CWV's overall attitude towards the clinic defense organization, and did it have much work on women's rights besides supporting ECDC, helping write ECDC leaflets, etc.? Her neglect of the CWV role partially reflects that CWV group is not a very well-defined organization. Mainly, different comrades simply do their own individual work. But it also reflects that CWV doesn't see itself as building an independent trend. Its difference with *Communist Voice* is not simply over what the anti-revisionist trend should look like, but over whether there is any importance to trying to build up such a distinct political trend.

CWV's approach leads to political passivity when things go wrong and complacency when there is a bit of excitement. Julie in her article on ECDC and Oleg in his article on the labor party end up simply lamenting that the organizations they would like to join don't exist. And when the CWV finds something it likes, like EZLN or *El Machete* or some trade union group that is involved in a struggle, it tends to fall back into cheerleading.

And indeed, without the independent communist trend, activists are left in a difficult position in dealing with the different political trends in the radical left. Julie for example gives a good deal of analysis in her history of ECDC. But how

does an activist, when faced with a coalition, get an extensive analysis of the history of the movement and of the policies needed to create an all-round political alternative to reformism? Well, in Julie's case, it's noticeable her article summarized a good deal of MLP analysis concerning NOW, the assessment of mass actions in different parts of the country, various of the slogans, etc. (removing the parts about developing an independent proletarian trend). She refrains from saying where this analysis comes from, or how she knows such detail about the actions that took place around the country. But where this analysis comes from is important from this angle: how is an individual activist, confronted with left-reformist coalitions, going to develop orientations, slogans, etc.?

In fact, the slogans and tactics and orientation for united front work are not simply obvious. MLP slogans and tactics on the pro-choice movement were developed through consultations throughout the party and its sympathizers, by summing up experience in different parts of the country, and by looking into the history of the women's movement. Without organization, each communist or small group is on their own. They will undoubtedly come up with a number of good ideas, but their work will be hamstrung by hit-or-miss methods and by the one-sidedness that is an inevitable feature of individual or small-group work. It takes organization to unite the activists and to provide a way of collectively judging the state of the movement and of circulating new ideas and experiences from other areas.

And moreover, building such organization requires conscious effort. If all the effort goes into coalition work, and little into either direct contact with the masses or repeated efforts to build up independent communist organization, then such organization will never be built. It takes time to learn how to work together, and yet this is essential for any serious revolutionary trend. Or does anyone think it will be easy for the working class to learn how to run socialist society if it hasn't first been able to build up political and other mass organizations in the revolutionary struggle?

Today the proletarian movement and the left is disorganized. It's not sufficient to simply sigh after the coalitions or actions of yesterday. It's necessary to put communism on a firm anti-revisionist basis, and thus create the basis for reviving communism as the revolutionary mass trend of the proletariat. The CWV thinks that this can be replaced by united front tactics. But an examination of Lenin's ideas about united front work shows that rousing the masses in consistent struggle is connected to strengthening the ties of revolutionary communism with all sections of the workers and activists. And an examination of CWV's practice shows that united front work without anti-revisionism leads to passivity and complacency in the face of today's crisis of the radical left. □

On GI resistance & anti-war work during the Persian Gulf war

The main article in this section, by Slim, provides an analysis of GI resistance, the volunteer army, the attitude of the working class towards the war, and the “support our troops” slogan. It is of interest in and of itself, but it also serves here as part of our coverage of “what really happened during the last years of the Marxist-Leninist Party”. It was part of the debate over the *Workers' Advocate*, the national paper of the MLP. The *Chicago Workers' Voice* group claims that they alone fought to uphold communism in the last years of the MLP and no one had listened to them. The truth is quite the opposite. The *CWV* group took a sectarian attitude towards the struggle of other comrades against liquidationist theories, and instead centered their attention on finding fault with the spirited agitation that was maintained in the *Workers' Advocate*. It was of course their right to criticize the *Workers' Advocate*, but it is also necessary to assess the content of that criticism.

The articles below deal with the criticism of the support for GI resistance that was put forward by Rene (formerly of the *CWV* group). This was part of Rene's growing skepticism about work among the American proletariat (aside from Latino proletarians), which however he presented as staunch anti-imperialism. Other *CWV* members may have thought his views were a bit extreme, but they held that he was on to something. They held that the *Worker's Advocate* article denouncing the “support our troops” slogan was fatally flawed, was too friendly to the soldiers, etc., and they made this issue into one of their main indictments against the *Workers' Advocate*. Rene's views on GI resistance are quoted at the beginning of Slim's article. His entire criticism of *WA's* anti-war agitation was contained in the last issue of *Communist Voice* (it is part of his “Polemic against the dangerous trend which attempts to cover the deeds and nature of today's U.S. imperialism”).

Besides Slim's article, we carry the two articles denouncing the “Support our troops” slogan that are referred to in this debate, one from *Workers' Advocate* and the later one from the *Chicago Workers' Voice*. Despite their repeated verbal criticism of the *WA* article, the *CWV* comrades barely mentioned it in their written statements, and we reproduce those brief remarks. We omit several moving accounts from comrades outside Chicago, who wrote opposing Rene's views from the standpoint of their own personal experience in the armed forces.

A reply to criticisms of WA — Part 2:

More on questions raised about the *Workers' Advocate* agitation in the anti-war movement

by Slim, Detroit

The following article first appeared in the Jan. 20, 1992 issue of the *Information Bulletin* (No. 65), which was the internal discussion sheet of the late Marxist-Leninist Party. Part one of Slim's article, which first appeared in *IB* #64, can be found in our last issue, #4, Sept. 15, 1995. Slim's articles were part of a vigorous discussion, in which any comrade who so wished could contribute an article, and it would be circulated to everyone in the party in the very next issue of the *IB*. This article was dated Jan. 10, 1992.

In part one of my reply to criticisms on the agitation of the *Workers' Advocate* on the anti-war movement, I discussed a number of the questions related to the general orientation and

tactics of the Party. In part two, I will discuss three particular issues raised in the criticisms, namely on the GI resistance; on the “support our troops” slogan; and on the assessment of the working class in the anti-war movement.

What is the question on GI resistance?

One of the important fronts of our agitation against the Persian Gulf war was for the GI resistance. From the time of Bush's decision to send troops, there was a remarkably quick response not only in the rise of the anti-war movement generally but, also, in opposition coming up from within the military itself. From our experience in the Vietnam war, and from our Marxist-Leninist principles, we recognized that this was an important phenomena and quickly began to agitate in favor of it. From the October issue of *WA* on we encouraged the anti-

war movement to support the GI resistance, and we encouraged the GIs to begin to stand against the war and to target imperialism.

The stand of GIs coming out openly against the war, of those organizing dissent in the ranks of the soldiers and sailors, and of those refusing orders to the Persian Gulf was particularly heroic. These were the first activists to be called “traitors,” to face harsh harassment, to be sent to the brig, and to face heavy charges. The ruling class attitude towards them was made clear in the Marine Corp’s declaration against Jeff Paterson who they called a threat to “the effectiveness, morale, discipline, and readiness of the command and national security of the United States.”¹

The *WA* cheered Paterson and his fellow resisters for striking such worry into the imperialist war machine. The *WA* emphasized that Paterson and Larson had

“realized that the role of the U.S. military abroad has been to back up imperialist exploitation of foreign peoples. They want no such dishonor.”

The *WA* also pointed to the discontent coming up more broadly within the armed forces — even in the Gulf itself. And we declared,

“The Pentagon hopes that U.S. soldiers are unthinking automatons who can simply be whipped into line, with discipline and propaganda, to toe the ruling class line in favor of imperialist war. But they forget that the soldiers are thinking people, who come from the ranks of the working and poor people.”²

This is how the *WA* began the agitation in support of GI resistance.

However, not everyone in the Party thought the agitation was appropriate. In his letter criticizing the *WA*, comrade Rene complains that there are a series of articles during the war against Iraq which were:

“a) trying to deny that today’s imperialist armed forces in the US are voluntary.

“b) call these soldiers: ‘Sons and daughters of the working class’, followed by ‘Brothers and sisters’ and finally ‘Comrades’!

“I’m opposed to putting the party of the working class on its knees just to promote some degree of opposition to the Gulf war from within the army. One thing is to report on events and another is to exaggerate this opposition specially when no mention is given to some of the reasons for some of the soldiers who refuse to go.” (Rene, Sept. 20 *IB*, page 24 [See CV #4, p. 33, col. 2])

Comrade Rene does not elaborate his views. And, although I have had some discussion with him since he wrote his letter, I am still not completely clear on his thinking. But it appears that he is concerned that: there is some major difference

¹“Defend Jeff Paterson! Marines refuse to serve in Persian Gulf”, *WA*, October 1, 1990. [p. 5]

²*Ibid.* [p. 5, col. 3; p. 11, col. 3]

between the drafted army of the past and the volunteer military of today; that he is skeptical about *WA*’s agitation on how young working people are pressured into the military — sometimes called the “economic draft”; and that he is skeptical about how widespread and significant the GI resistance was or is worried that it was not always motivated by the noblest aims.

It is these issues that I will speak to in the hopes that I may begin to clarify why I think the *WA* agitation was correct and important.

Drafted or volunteer, it is still a mass army

On one crucial point there is really no difference between the drafted army of the Vietnam war and the “all-volunteer” army of today. The U.S. imperialist war machine, in either case, is a mass military — a military composed in its vast majority of youth from the ranks of the working people.

It is not an elite army today any more than it was during the Vietnam war. To be sure there are elite units of the military and there are elite classes in the military, then as now. The *WA* made sure to denounce the “imperialist army” itself in a number of articles and to target the officers and “lifers” — the professional soldier core that is maintained to hold the imperialist army together. For example, in one article summing up the experience of the Vietnam war the *WA* emphasized

“the anti-war movement directed its fire against the White House, against the Pentagon, and against the officers who were directing the aggression.”³

And the *WA* also carried specific articles against General Powell⁴ and General Schwarzkopf.⁵ In short, the *WA* recognized a class analysis of the military, and sought to target the ruling class and its officers for the crimes of the imperialist army.

At the same time, the *WA* recognized that the mass base of the military was drawn from the ranks of the working people. To have such a huge military machine, the U.S. imperialists have had to draw the masses into it. This means that the overwhelming majority of the GIs — the grunts, the cannonfodder — come from the ranks of the working class, the poor, and also from the lower petty bourgeoisie.

It is this composition, this mass basis of the imperialist armed forces, that creates the possibility for our agitation to find a responsive ear right inside the military itself. And it seems to me that it is important that we use that ear, that we appeal to that mass base, that we try to organize the workers in uniform.

Anyone serious about organizing revolution has to find ways to work in the military because winning over a section of the

³“Who really spat on the Viet Nam GIs?”, *WA*, Feb. 1, 1991. [p. 9, col. 1]

⁴“Warmonger Colin Powell to lead M.L. King parade,” *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 8]

⁵“Like father, like son,” *WA*, Feb. 1, 1991. [p. 5, on General Schwarzkopf]

soldiers, or at least neutralizing much of the military forces, is one of the important questions for whether the revolution will succeed or fail. Anyone serious about actually standing for the defeat of our own imperialists in a reactionary war has to not only hope for setbacks for the imperialists, and not only build up the anti-war movement in general, but also look for ways to encourage dissent inside the military itself. The mass, working class basis of the imperialist armed forces gives us the possibility to do this work. And to the extent possible, given our limited forces and resources, the Party has to use such openings as the emergence of GI resistance during the Gulf war to get its agitation into the ranks of the GIs and help them resist and join up with the fight against imperialism.

Imperialist recruitment — even in the drafted army

Comrade Rene once asked me where the analysis of an “economic draft” comes from? Well, at least for our Party, it comes in part from the analysis going back to the Vietnam war.

During that war people were dragged into the military not only by the draft, but also by recruiting. Remember that the name of the GI newspaper FTA not only meant “fuck the army” but also was ridiculing the army’s recruiting slogan of the day “fun, travel, and adventure.”

In fact, the GIs in the Navy, Marines, and Air Force were not drafted during the Vietnam war but, rather, recruited. Of course, many joined to avoid being drafted into the army. But there were, also, many recruits to the army itself. There were, for example, youth facing jail who were given the ugly choice of either joining the army or serving time. There were economic pressures on workers and poor people who felt they had no place else to go when they dropped out of high school or graduated. There were people who hoped service in the military would allow them to get job training or a college education. And there were some who, feeling pressured in these and other ways, also joined the military thinking it was their patriotic duty. The “volunteers” to the drafted army during the Vietnam war came in no small numbers.

This fact has been one of the reasons that our party has always opposed the pacifist nonsense that simply ending the draft, or simply arguing that people should not join the military, could stop war. Under the capitalist system, the ruling class has a million and one ways to pressure, trick, and ensnare people into the imperialist war machine. That situation won’t fundamentally change until the capitalist system is done away with.

Recognizing this fact, our Party never restricted itself to only agitating against the draft. We always emphasized the necessity to reach into the military itself with our agitation, to help those ensnared in military service to resist, to fight back, to join the anti-imperialist struggle.

Further, the Vietnam war showed us that it was not just those who were drafted but, also, the working people who were ensnared by other means — including many that joined for patriotic or anti-communist reasons — who learned from the experience in the imperialist military machine itself to hate the war machine, to hate imperialism, and to look for an alternative. Indeed, we have a number of party members who came to revolutionary conclusions, and eventually joined the Party,

out of just such experience.

We have concluded from this that a moralistic attitude towards the GIs, whether drafted or volunteer, is wrong. Many revolutionaries during the Vietnam war had to fight against a moralistic attitude in the movement that condemned the ordinary GIs for the war and wanted to spit on them. With the rise of the GI movement, by around 1970, the mainstream of the movement came to accept the view of supporting GI resistance. Our party summed up this experience and always emphasized work to build up the GI resistance among the draftees and volunteers who were “ensnared” in the military — including in our agitation against the attempt to re-institute the draft at the beginning of the 1980s.

In short, the heart of our assessment of an “economic draft” is not new but, rather, goes back to the time when the army was still a drafted army.

The shift in recruiting with the “all-volunteer army”

But we have also followed what has been going on with the military in recent years.

Faced with enormous mass opposition, the government ended the draft after the Vietnam war was over. And given the anti-militarist sentiment of the time and the general situation, the Pentagon had difficulty both in meeting its quotas for new recruits in general and, in particular, getting recruits with enough education to deal with the higher tech capabilities of the modern military. This was one of the major reasons that there was a push to re-institute the draft at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980’s.

However, there was a change that took place in the U.S. that made it possible for the Pentagon to enlist enough recruits to get by, at least if there were no major wars going on. That change came with the economic crises and the capitalist offensive to drive down the standard of living of the masses. The standard of living began dropping in the mid-1970s. By the 1980s, the economic pressure had narrowed the possibilities for minority youth and young people from the working class generally. The hopes for a job, or for job training, or for necessary education were dimmed. That, coupled with the fact that there was no major war for a whole period of time, meant the military looked like a possible way out for many youth.

Of course, the Pentagon played this to the hilt, promising high-tech job training, college education, and so forth. Under the prevailing economic conditions, the Pentagon was able to meet its quota for recruits in general. And it was able to raise the level of recruits, getting more high school graduates to fill their high-tech needs.

But just barely. The Pentagon has always been right on the edge of recruiting enough personnel, and it became very dependent on the reserves for plans for a major war. As soon as there was a mass call up for the Persian Gulf war, even before the shooting war began, they started running into trouble. As the *WA* pointed out, the army recruiters began to fall short of their enlistment goals by an average of 30% from August,

1990.⁶ Afraid they might run short of cannonfodder, the Pentagon froze soldiers in their jobs and temporarily held them past their enlistment terms.⁷ And there were renewed calls for the draft.⁸

The *WA*, analyzing these developments, pointed out “For years, the military has been recruiting young men and women with promises of jobs, career training, and adventure. But now with a war imminent in the Persian Gulf, the truth has come out about what it means to sign up with the imperialist army. It means going to war for the interests of the rich men who rule the USA — for such dishonorable causes as safeguarding oil profits and shoring up undemocratic kingdoms like Saudi Arabia.”⁹

In other words, the economic draft — which had seemed such a boon to shore up military enlistments — was turning into a weakness for the military once there was a threat of a major war breaking out.

This weakness appeared not only in lower enlistments, but also in resistance emerging within the military machine itself. I will deal with that phenomena below.

Reasons for GI resistance

Comrade Rene complains that in the *WA* there is “no mention given to some of the reasons for some of the soldiers who refuse to go.” (Rene, Sept. 20 *IB*, page 24 [See *CV* #4, p. 33, col. 2])

This seems to imply that there were bad motives behind some of the GI resistance that the *WA* was fostering. But, unfortunately, comrade Rene does not spell out what the bad motives were or how he thinks the *WA* should have dealt with them. I cannot really speak to his complaint, since I know so little about it. But I can point out reasons for resistance which were given in the *WA* in a series of cases.

For example, the *WA* points out that Marine Corporals Paterson and Larson

“were radicalized by taking part in activities against U.S. intervention in Central America. Through these actions, and through their personal studies and investigations, they realized that the role of the U.S. military abroad has been to back up imperialist exploitation of foreign peoples. They want no such dishonor.”¹⁰

It notes that Air Force medic Derrick Jones “had been stationed in Texas during the Panama invasion and the accounts he had heard of U.S. aggression had turned him against the

war.”¹¹

It quotes army mechanic Lance Walters denouncing the racism in the military and the racism of the war and saying,

“I really believed all that hype about America being the beacon of freedom and justice. I’ve become a lot more aware since then.”¹²

It mentions that

“Oscar said he joined the National Guard in 1989, following the island’s devastation by Hurricane Hugo, ‘motivated by the possibility of helping the Puerto Rican community in case of disaster and necessity.’ But he decided against military service during basic training ‘when I realized that I was being prepared to be a killing machine.’”¹³

The *WA* also reports on 68 soldiers protesting the bad treatment they faced in basic training and mentions

“Some of the soldiers also protested against the war. One said he had no intention of fighting to get Iraq out of Kuwait.”¹⁴

And it points to a series of cases of protests against the “economic draft.” For example, two black women

“spoke out at a December 13 press conference that they had enlisted to learn job skills and earn money for college, not go to war. They said they had been fooled by the Army’s advertising which sells military service as a scholarship program.”¹⁵

And

“Tahan Jones, a black 21-year-old Marine reservist, spoke out against the war and said he believed black youth are funneled into the military because of poverty, racism and oppression.”¹⁶

And Lance Walters, who I already mentioned above, said

“he went into the army to get vocational training and to change direction from what looked to him like a dead-end future.”¹⁷

Here are a whole series of examples from the *WA* of reasons given by people for joining the GI resistance. There are some

¹¹“U.S. soldiers in Germany oppose the war,” *WA*, Feb. 1, 1991. [p. 9, col. 3]

¹²“Black GIs decry racism in the military,” *WA*, March 1, 1991. [p. 6, col. 4]

¹³“Puerto Rican soldiers resist,” *WA*, March 1, 1991. [p. 6, col. 3-4]

¹⁴“AWOL protest at Fort Hood, Texas,” *WA*, March 1, 1991. [p. 7, col. 2]

¹⁵“Black women soldiers seek CO status,” *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 7, col. 3]

¹⁶“Marines court-martialing GI resisters,” *WA*, Feb. 1, 1991. [p. 9, col. 4]

¹⁷“Black GIs decry racism in the military,” *WA*, March 1, 1991. [p. 6, col. 4]

⁶“Recruiting gets harder,” *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 7, col. 4]

⁷“A volunteer army?” *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 7, col. 4]

⁸“Liberals prepare country for a draft,” *WA*, Dec. 1, 1990. [p. 5, col. 1-2]

⁹“Recruiting gets harder,” *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 7, col. 4]

¹⁰“Defend Jeff Paterson! Marines refuse to serve in Persian Gulf,” *WA*, October 1, 1990. [p. 5, col. 2-3]

more or less directly anti-imperialist reasons. There are anti-racist reasons. There are reasons of anger against the bad treatment or over being tricked to join the military. And they all point to the fact that experience in the imperialist armed forces push many working people, even those who joined with a certain patriotic feeling, towards opposition to the military and to war.

There were, of course, other reasons as well. I have heard of some more or less religious pacifist reasons for resistance. But it is hard to know how extensive this was since one of the few legal ways of getting out of the war is to apply for conscientious objector status (CO) which requires people to give essentially religious pacifist justifications for their anti-war stance. As well, I am sure, many refused simply because they didn't want to be killed in such a war. And there may have been quite backward reasons by some GIs. When masses of very ordinary people start to get drawn into motion, there are often quite backward reasons given for it by the people involved. But whatever the reasons given at the time, the motion shows that ordinary working people are starting to stand up against the war, often in the face of heavy repression. Our job is not to stand by the side making moralistic complaints about their reasons. Rather, we have to find ways to link up with them and to bring class consciousness into the movement, to orient it towards anti-imperialist and revolutionary reasons.

As I mentioned above, one of the major reasons for GI resistance to the Gulf war was bitterness over the "economic draft." I don't believe the *WA* exaggerated that phenomenon. Besides the examples above, we had other reports that anger against being tricked by the Pentagon was quite a mass phenomenon. One marine we have contact with joined shortly before the Gulf crisis broke out, and was in basic training when Bush announced the mobilization of troops to the Middle East. He reported to us that over half of the people he went to basic training with dropped out after Bush's announcement (using various pretexts to get medical discharges, disciplinary discharges, and so forth). I have heard that this kind of thing also took place at other bases and in all of the armed services. It appears that the anger at being tricked into the military to be used for Bush's war was quite widespread. The *WA* attempted to fuel that anger and to push it in an anti-imperialist direction.

The *WA* worked to foster the GI resistance

To build the movement meant not only supporting resistance when people gave anti-imperialist reasons for it, but also supporting mass dissent even when it came up over smaller issues like the bad treatment GIs face in basic training.

The military tries to turn the youth into automatons through harsh discipline and propaganda. Every act that breaks through that discipline to some degree and allows the soldiers to think for themselves is important. It can be the first step towards taking a stand against reactionary war and the imperialist system that fosters it. And it helps to create an atmosphere in which the young soldiers can more readily break through the regimentation to link up with the anti-imperialist movement. The *WA* supported the mass actions and the individual resistance (where that indicated a mass current), and worked to connect that to our anti-imperialist agitation.

Of course at this time, the Party has no units working in the military or concentrating at military bases. Our main touch with GIs was through our friends, contacts, and supporters from the working class and from Party members who had relatives in the military. Thus our agitation for GI resistance aimed at orienting the mass movement to support the GI resisters and to get our working class contacts to agitate among their relatives in the military.

In this we had some small success. For example, some reports and one article on resistance in the Marines came from the son of a Party member.¹⁸ We sent him literature which he used to carefully, secretly agitate among his fellow marines. Despite his care, he was disciplined for his anti-war stance by being given the especially dirty jobs on disciplinary details. And he was threatened with worse treatment. Nevertheless, he continued to give us reports of what was going on and to describe the resistance he was involved in or had heard about. This is the one example where *WA* directly got reports. But there is no question that, through party members and contacts, we were able to get our agitation spread more widely in the military, at least to some extent. And undoubtedly that side of the work would have grown had the war lasted longer and the mass movement grown stronger.

What can be said, I think, was that the work to support the GI resistance was important. Although the brevity of the war kept this work from bearing much fruit, it did show the potential for the development of mass GI resistance in a major imperialist war (and even when before it the mass movements had been quite weak). And it showed the potential for the Party's work (even though we are still small and have no direct work on military bases). I believe the *WA* acted correctly in this — not exaggerating but, rather, encouraging an important part of the movement that emerged against the Gulf war.

***WA* against the "support our troops" slogan**

Another issue that needs further discussion is about the article "On the slogan 'Support our troops'" carried in the February 1 issue of the *WA*.

This article has come under particularly sharp criticism by comrades from Chicago. But, unfortunately, none of them have written out their views on it. Comrades Rene and Oleg mention unhappiness with *WA* using the word "comrades" to refer to ordinary soldiers. (Sept. 20 *IB*, pages 24 and 30) But that is all that is said.

Since there is no written criticism, I am forced to deal with their views by comparing the *WA* to the leaflet put out by the Chicago Branch against the "support our troops" slogan¹⁹ and by referring to my notes on discussions with them. I must apologize beforehand if I misformulate their criticisms, but this is the best I can do from my old notes.

¹⁸"Marines refuse to attend pro-war rally in Tennessee," *WA*, March 1, 1991. [p. 6, col. 3-4]

¹⁹"More on the slogan 'Support our troops'", *WAS*, Feb. 20, 1991, page 5.

Are ordinary soldiers our “comrades”?

Before going on to more substantial criticisms, it is necessary to speak to the criticism of the use of the word “comrades.”

In the second paragraph of the February article you find the sentence, “The only way to help our comrades caught up in the army is to support the GI resistance.” Here “comrades” clearly refers to the ordinary soldiers since it talks about those “caught up in the army” — not the generals or the graduates from the Air Force Academy. As well, the sentence preceding it, after denouncing the unjust war, specifically says “it does not help the *ordinary soldier* to get a patriotic send-off. . .” (emphasis added) And, also, it raises the word “comrade” directly in conjunction with a call to “support the GI resistance.”

In principle I see nothing wrong with using the term “comrade” in this way. It is no different than when we put out leaflets calling on “comrade workers” to strike, even though those workers do not yet all support striking. It is no different than when Lenin called out to “Brother, soldiers” in his famous “Appeal to the soldiers of all the belligerent countries” in April, 1917, even though Russian and German soldiers were then still slaughtering each other on the battle field.²⁰

The ordinary soldiers come from the ranks of the working class and oppressed. They are our brothers and sisters, they are our comrades, even if they do not yet know it and have not yet taken their stand on the barricades fighting against the imperialist war. (In saying this, I must also emphasize that it in no way implies that we cannot also denounce an ordinary soldier when he or she commits atrocities, or consciously takes the side of the imperialists against the working class, any more than the appeal to “comrade workers” means that we cannot denounce a worker who crosses a picket line for being a scab.)

Just to check I looked up the word “comrade” in my old Webster’s dictionary. Its first definition for comrade is “an intimate friend or associate.” I also looked up the word “brother.” After the first definition on having common parents, it lists “2. kinsmen; 3. a fellow member. . . ; 4. one related to another by common ties or interests . . .” If we are speaking of a *class* “association” and common *class* “interests,” which we certainly are, then there is really no difference in the terms and they are both applicable.

Nevertheless, it was pointed out to me that the term “comrade” would not be understood in this way in the movement. Rather, it would tend to mean a fellow activist in the movement, a person who has already joined up with the demonstrations and other protests. Although I think this may indicate something about the weakness in class consciousness among some movement activists, it is also true that the term “comrade” frequently has a communist connotation (the second definition in Webster’s). Thus confusion might be caused. I said back in February that rather than cause confusion we would try not to use the term “comrade” again in this way. And the *WA* editorial group agreed with that restriction. This, as far as I know, is where the matter still stands.

What were the main criticisms?

If that were the only issue that concerned comrades in Chicago, then there would be little reason for this whole discussion. But they also had more substantial criticisms of the February article.

My notes from the February 16-17 Midwest Regional Secretariat meeting indicate the following main criticisms of the February *WA* article:

1) In general, the *WA* article needs to denounce not only the “support our troops” slogan but, also, needs a sharper criticism of the reformists and their slogan “support our troops, bring them home”.

2) In particular, the article should oppose the argument blaming the movement for the deaths, injuries, psychological problems, etc. of the soldiers. (Of course the *WA* article slapped at this argument in its reference to the issue with Vietnam veterans. But it did not deal with the issue directly and pointedly with regards to the Gulf war itself.)

3) It should specifically state that the anti-war movement is not interested in raising the morale of the troops, because we oppose the war.

4) It should elaborate more on how the youth are being tricked into joining the military.

5) It should draw out the fact that this is an imperialist army and that we oppose it. (Of course the *WA* suggested the imperialist character of the army in its discussion of the Vietnam war, in its denunciation of the unjust character of the Persian Gulf war, and in its opposition to the Pentagon and the ruling class using the ordinary soldiers as simple cannon fodder. But, it did not directly draw out that this is an imperialist army, as had been done in other articles.)

These are my notes on the main criticisms. And I think they are fairly accurate since the leaflet put out by the Chicago Branch shortly after this discussion does in fact rewrite and add paragraphs to the original *WA* article at least dealing with points two through five above.

I thought back at that time in February, and I still do, that these criticisms were useful for developing our agitation. A major fight had just broken out in a number of groups and mass meetings of the movement in Chicago against the reformists slogan “support our troops, bring them home.” And the Chicago Branch was striving to develop very pointed agitation to hit at the reformists. The *WA* editorial group had not yet gotten a report on this fight, and it could not, of course, be faulted for having missed some of the particular arguments that would be important for that debate. Nevertheless, these criticisms pointed towards developing sharper agitation, and that was helpful.

At the same time, I do not see any of the criticisms as being questions of principle. Nor do I feel that the Chicago Branch leaflet marked some major advance over the *WA* article.

For example, their leaflet itself also does not directly deal with the reformists slogan “support our troops, bring them home” — which was the comrades first, general criticism of the *WA* article. Of course, the “bring them home” side of the slogan is difficult, if not impossible, to argue against directly. And I see no fault in the leaflet not dealing with it — since much of the main substance of the issue is dealt with in what

²⁰ *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, page 186.

they do say. But, in light of their own leaflet, I believe comrades in Chicago should take care to rethink their original upset with the *WA* article.

Beyond this the Chicago Branch leaflet leaves out a number of the useful arguments that were in the original *WA* article, including:

- 1) The exposure of the Pentagon's mistreatment of the GIs, how they are used as cannonfodder and then thrown away;
- 2) The particular argument against the imperialists' claim that since GIs enlisted it is, therefore, "democratic" to order them to be killing machines;
- 3) The direct argument against the liberals' demand that the anti-war movement be patriotic;
- 4) The drawing out of the class basis for the anti-war movement;
- 5) And the arguments for internationalism.

The omission of the latter two points is particularly troublesome. I believe the arguments for internationalism are especially important in opposing the "support our troops" slogan (I will go into this more below). And the arguments on the class basis of the movement were important for the particular anti-war circles that comrades were working among in Chicago. These circles tended to have a somewhat anti-imperialist perspective but were especially weak in grasping the need to build the movement among the working people.

Nevertheless, this was only one leaflet and an accompaniment to the *WA*. On the whole the leaflet is quite good. But it is hard for me to see that it is a particular advance on, or in principle different from, the *WA* article — which was itself, of course, only one article that was accompanied by many others.

Did *WA* pander to backward sentiments among the masses?

More recently an additional criticism has come up. Comrades charge that the *WA* article tended to pander to backward concerns among the masses — that is, their concern for their sons and daughters, relatives and friends who were caught up in the military.

Now it should be noted that the Chicago Branch leaflet itself mentions that the "support our troops slogan" is used to appeal to these mass concerns. But at least some of the comrades seem to think that the *WA* article put too much emphasis on this question to the point that it is pandering.

This is one criticism that I simply cannot agree with.

I do not believe that the concern of the working masses for their relatives and friends in the military is inherently a backward view. Indeed, this concern can be one of the powerful motivating sentiments that leads to opposition to a particular war and, as well, to revolutionary sentiments. That was certainly the case during the Vietnam war as more and more youth were brought home in body bags. And I believe it was the case in Russia during World War I, when soldiers cried out that the Tsar was killing them, down with the Tsar.

In and of itself, this concern is neither backwards nor progressive. Whether it becomes backwards or progressive really depends on what it is coupled with and what conclusions are drawn from it. For example, the sentiment can be used to create a backward mood among the masses when it is coupled with the

call for a "quick war" with few U.S. casualties and when it is combined with a chauvinist disdain for the working people (including the soldiers) on the other side in the war.

This is, of course, what the bourgeoisie was trying to do in the Gulf war, and the reformists were helping them. What this means for the Party — which is trying to develop this mass concern in a revolutionary direction — is that we have to pay particular attention to hitting the imperialist arguments and fight that the masses' concern be turned towards an internationalist, working class perspective.

And this is exactly what the *WA* was trying to do. For example, accompanying the article "On the 'support our troops' slogan", the *WA* carried another article entitled, "On the talk of a 'quick war' — a scenario for mass murder." That article pointed out, among other things,

"The strategy of a 'quick war' is based on the age-old imperialist and racist idea that American lives are more important than 'enemy' (in this case, Arab) lives. And not a soul among the politicians or journalists sees anything wrong with this view!"

And internationalism was one of the major themes of the article "On the 'support our troops' slogan" itself. For example it denounced the chauvinism with regard to the Vietnam war dead.

"[The Viet Nam memorial] lists the names of American soldiers who died in action against the Vietnamese. It does not, however, list the names of those who died protesting the war, such as at Kent State. Nor does it list the names of Vietnamese soldiers who died in the war, or of Vietnamese civilians killed by B-52s."

And it goes on to emphasize,

"The anti-war movement must base itself on the other America, and it must unite with the workers and downtrodden of all lands. Not patriotic unity with the flag-wavers, but internationalist unity with our class sisters and brothers around the world. That should be the slogan of the anti-war struggle."

To sum up, I do not think the *WA* article against the "support our troops" slogan was the best article ever written. I think the criticisms originally raised by comrades in Chicago were useful for developing this side of our agitation. But I also think that, while criticizing the *WA*, those comrades should take care not to lose sight of the valuable arguments that were made in the *WA* article or forget about how the Party's agitation is developed in close collaboration between the local areas and the central organs.

The working class and the anti-war movement

There is one final criticism from Chicago on *WA*'s agitation on the war that I believe needs some discussion. That has to do with the assessment of how U.S. workers viewed the war and what the Party did to mobilize them into the anti-imperialist struggle.

Comrade Rene apparently thinks that the *WA* gave an overly optimistic appraisal of the workers' stand towards the war and

that the WA was negligent, at least in certain regards, in its work to mobilize the workers.

In a particularly striking passage comrade Rene gives his own assessment:

“The end of the war against Iraq and what followed inside the US (a big parade of chauvinism both disguised as good deeds to rid the world of a mad man, and a naked imperialist feast) proved that *the American working class had taken a big step backwards* and is very much *numb specially since the war started*. Therefore it is now, by will or by mistake, well into the imperialists’ trap.” (Rene, Sept. 20, page 24, emphasis added by Slim)

I believe that this summation is overly pessimistic and misses the signs of progress that took place with the workers during the anti-war movement. At the same time, I believe the assessments presented in the WA were pretty close to the mark. Let me go through a few different aspects of the question to explain my view.

Did the working class become numb especially since the war started?

Although it is an unfortunate situation, I agree that the word “numb” is an apt description of the mood of working class over-all at this time. But I don’t think you could say that this is the case especially since the war started or that the workers’ movement took a big step backwards with the war.

Sadly it is the case that the working class has been numb for a number of years. The Party has been discussing this fact at conferences and congresses for nearly a decade. And we discussed it again at the 4th National Conference held last fall, shortly after the Gulf crisis had broken out.

The resolution entitled “The present recession and the prospects for mass struggle” (in the December WA) pointed out a number of factors involved in the numbing of the workers. Among other things, it mentioned the use of certain special social programs to undermine militancy, the layoffs, the driving of workers into unorganized shops, the sellout of the union officials and other reformist misleaders, and so forth. Perhaps one may disagree with the analysis of these factors or think others should be added or emphasized. But it is indisputable that the Party has analyzed the deadened situation among the workers and the WA has promoted that assessment.

Of course the Party did not stop at simply analyzing the numbness. It also pointed out that,

“Nevertheless the elements for a new upsurge of struggle have accumulated in the course of the 1980s.”

The resolution noted a number of signs of discontent among the masses and factors that might provide an opening for struggle in the period ahead. It gave a sober estimation that the turn to class struggle “does not happen easily.” And it explained,

“The Marxist-Leninist Party must continue to encourage the path of mass action and militant organization. The seeming omnipotence of the bourgeoisie is dispelled through actual experience. The Party’s job is to find ways to draw the

working class, youth, and all oppressed people into such struggle, utilizing whatever openings, large or small, that present themselves.”²¹

These latter points from the resolution are particularly important for assessing the results of the war and the anti-war movement. Did further elements for a new upsurge of struggle accumulate? Did the anti-war movement give further indications of mass content? Did workers begin to be drawn into the struggle? Yes they did, on all counts. It seems to me that the anti-war movement bore out the analysis that was made at the 4th National Conference.

How should we view the wave of chauvinism at the beginning of the war?

But perhaps comrade Rene is thinking about the wave of chauvinism that swept through the country, especially with the start of the shooting war, when he says the working class had taken a big step backwards.

There is, of course, no denying that we were confronted with an enormous wave of chauvinism, even among the workers (and I don’t believe that the WA denied it). But the question is, how do you analyze that chauvinism and what you do about it?

The first thing that has to be realized is that you have to expect the working class to be infected by the wave of chauvinism that accompanies the beginning of any major war. In the history of the world working class movement it is really the exception when the workers were immune to the bourgeoisie’s chauvinist crusade at the beginning of a major war.

One of the few exceptions was the working class of Russia at the onset of World War One. And it is useful to look at how Lenin explains this.

Lenin first describes the general situation in Russia:

“In one respect, the Russian government has not lagged behind its European confreres; like them, it has succeeded in deceiving ‘its’ people on a grand scale. A huge, monstrous machine of falsehood and cunning was set going in Russia too for the purpose of infecting the masses with chauvinism, of creating the impression that the tsarist government is waging a ‘just’ war, that it is disinterestedly defending its ‘brother Slavs,’ etc.”

He points out all the classes were infected with the chauvinism, including the peasantry:

“Among the peasantry, the ruling clique, with the aid of the bourgeois press, the clergy, etc. also succeeded in rousing chauvinist sentiments.”

But he expects the peasants to shake off the chauvinism and to eventually join the struggle.

“But, as the soldiers return from the field of slaughter, sentiment in the rural districts will undoubtedly turn against the tsarist monarchy.”

²¹All above quotes [in the last two paragraphs] from “The present recession and the prospects for mass struggle”, WA, December 1, 1990. [p.8]

And then he discusses the working class.

"The only class in Russia that they did not succeed in infecting with chauvinism is the proletariat. Only the most ignorant strata of the workers were involved in the few excesses that occurred at the beginning of the war . . . In general, and on the whole, the working class of Russia proved to be immune to chauvinism."

"This is to be explained by the revolutionary situation in the country and by the general conditions of life of the Russian proletariat. We again witnessed a great strike movement such as the world has not known . . . On the eve of the war, in St. Petersburg, things had already developed to the first barricade battles."

He also points to the fact that the Bolshevik party had broken with the opportunists before the war. And he notes that opportunism and reformism

"constitutes an insignificant minority among the politically active strata of the workers."²²

This is how Lenin explains the exceptional stand of the Russian workers. This did not mean that there were huge anti-war demonstrations at the beginning. No, in fact, the workers movement suffered an initial setback from heavy repression and the prevailing chauvinist mood in the country. In arguing that the working class was not infected by the chauvinism Lenin points not to big protests but, rather, to the fact that the vast masses of workers did not take part in the anti-German pogroms and the pro-war agitation. And, with the revolutionary fervor that already existed, the workers were able to fairly quickly overcome the setback and launch renewed revolutionary struggle.

Of course, this was not the situation in the U.S. with the start of the Gulf war. With the workers already numb before the war, and with the working class movement already crippled and dominated by the opportunists and reformists, one could not expect the working class to rapidly rally against the war. On the contrary, one had to expect that the bourgeoisie's enormous machine of lies and deceit would infect wide sections of the workers with chauvinism, at least initially.

But one should not conclude from that initial wave of chauvinism that the working class is hopeless, that it will not break out of the imperialist trap. If we look at the historic experience of the world working class movement it can be seen, generally speaking, that as a major war develops, as the truth more and more comes out about the war, as the working masses face increased suffering and their youth come home in body bags, then gradually the masses shake off the chauvinism and more and more come out to fight against the imperialists.

Lenin remarks on this phenomena saying,

". . . even though 'at the beginning of a war', and especially in a country that expects a speedy

victory, the government *seems* all-powerful, nobody in the world has ever linked expectations of a revolutionary situation exclusively with the 'beginning' of a war, and still less has anybody ever identified the 'seeming' with the *actual*."²³

This is how we too had to judge the beginning of the Gulf war. Based on our knowledge of the history of the international working class movement, and on our own direct experience with the Vietnam war, we knew that the development of the war itself and our revolutionary work would help workers to shake off the chauvinism fostered by the bourgeoisie and increasingly come into the struggle. Although the government seemed all powerful, and it seemed that wide sections of the workers were dragged into the chauvinist wave, we had to be able to see through the surface phenomena to find the new sprouts of resistance that were coming up, to encourage them, and build upon them to rouse the working masses.

How WA assessed the development of the anti-war movement

How then did the WA assess the developments with the Gulf war? There is a striking passage in the February issue of the WA, after the U.S. had begun bombing Iraq, that is useful to recall.

It says,

"But among the common people, something new is happening. It is no big deal that you can find some super-patriots, eager to support a war that is supposedly already won. There have always been ruling class bullies in this country, ready to shout 'America, love it or leave it' or to lynch minorities and dissenters. But it is a big deal that right at the start of such a war you can find mass sentiment against the war, and the mass desire to act. . . . Let us not forget that the movement against the war in Viet Nam did not break out at the very beginning of the war, nor did the movement prevent the war from escalation to a high level. Yet everyone admits that it played a tremendous role in undermining this aggression, upheld the honor of the common people of this country, and encouraged progressive struggles on all fronts."²⁴

This is the way the WA looked at the situation. It recognized the wave of chauvinism in the country and denounced it. But its emphasis was on what was new and developing, on what had potential for drawing the working masses into struggle against imperialism.

Or look at another statement, in March, after Bush declared victory in the bloody massacre.

"But what we saw during the Persian Gulf war is

²² *Socialism and War*, Chapter II, "Classes and parties in Russia," V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, pages 317-320, or see *Lenin on War and Peace*, published by the People's Republic of China, pages 28-31.

²³ "The Collapse of the Second International," section II, V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, page 215.

²⁴ "Spread the word, No blood for oil and empire!" Feb. 1, 1991. [p. 11, col. 2, 3]

something far different. Not just a replay of the Viet Nam-era movement, but the birth of the movement of the 90s. A new movement to combat a new world order. . . . In fact, the movement accomplished much. Its vast extent in such a short period is a sign that America is not just a land of flag-wavers and willing killing machines, but a land of rebellious activists and people searching for change. It has embraced rebellious GIs, and students just beginning to think about the world, and circles of workers discussing world events. It shows that there is a potential for organizing against imperialism."²⁵

Here again the *WA* does not simply look at the surface phenomena, but points to the significance of the new, emerging movement. Here we see the assessment from the 4th National Conference being colorfully drawn out with the flesh and blood of the experience a section of the masses had gained in the anti-war movement. The bourgeois press not only promoted chauvinism, but tried to make any one with anti-war sentiment feel isolated and alone. The workers' press had to emphasize the resistance, no matter how small, that was breaking out to let the activists know that they were not alone; to encourage them to continue to fight and build up the movement; to help the movement itself break down the wall of chauvinism and smash through the pro-war atmosphere that had been created in the country.

The attitude towards the working class in particular

But what about the question of the working class in particular?

Comrade Rene points to

"one article in the *Supplement* from Seattle talking about official optimism which hints at some questions from the writer of the article. . . ." (Rene, Sept. 20 *IB*, page 26)

Presumably comrade Rene is speaking of the final paragraph of that article which says,

"Official optimistic declarations that workers oppose the war solve nothing, and such statements contradict our advocacy that the movement reach out and win over the working class."²⁶

I actually don't know if this statement was a criticism of the *WA*. Perhaps it was criticizing "official optimism" from some other quarters. I don't know. But for the sake of argument, let us assume that it was a criticism of the *WA* and proceed to discuss it from that angle.

If that is the case, then it is unfortunate that neither comrade Rene nor the article from Seattle point out specific examples of "official optimistic declarations" that they are unhappy about. Perhaps it is the statement in December that

"George Bush is having trouble selling his

²⁵"Spread the word, No blood for oil and empire!" Feb. 1, 1991. [p. 11, col. 2, 3]]

²⁶"Aerospace workers and the war," *WAS*, February 20, 1991, page 15.

war plans to the American people."²⁷

Or perhaps the statement in January that "this is a war the working people and youth of America do not want."²⁸

I cannot be sure.

But if the complaint is against such statements as these, it is hard for me to see the problem. Before the bombing started, even the bourgeoisie admitted that it was having trouble selling the war to the working masses. And the report from Seattle on work among aerospace workers itself states that,

"Before the bombing started, the vast majority vacillated on whether they favored a war. A minority said give sanctions a chance. Some would say 'we should kick ass,' etc., but not as a consistent view — they also tended to voice opposition to the war, such as 'we're not being told the real reasons for it.' In some areas, supervisors attempted to distribute ribbons, etc. before the war started, but found no interest in this."²⁹

Is this not an expression of Bush's difficulty selling the war? Is it not an expression that at that time there was no general support for the war among the workers?

But let us look further at what *WA* said when it elaborated on the question a bit more. In January, after the big December anti-war demonstrations, the *WA* wrote

"In the factories and work places, there is much interest in the movement. But they do not yet send large numbers to the demonstrations. Patient work has to take place to overcome the non-politicism fostered on the working class, and the chauvinist politics laid down by the trade union bureaucrats. This is not only a question of linking the anti-war movement with workers' demands, important as supporting various workers' struggles is — one slogan or demand will not magically change the situation. It is a matter of building up an independent working class movement, of encouraging the class consciousness and defiant spirit of the working masses, of building up independent organization and defiance of the union hacks and respectable community leaders."³⁰

Here the *WA* points out that while there was interest in the movement, large numbers of workers were not yet participating. And it attributes this to the non-politicism and the chauvinism that was being fostered. Was this assessment cor-

²⁷"Bush's dilemma: How to sell his oil war," *WA*, Dec. 1, 1990. [p. 4, col. 1]

²⁸"No more blood for imperialism, Take to the streets against Bush's war," *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 1, col. 1]

²⁹"Aerospace workers and the war," *WAS*, February 20, 1991, page 14.

³⁰"Anti-war movement grows," *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 6, col. 4]

rect? It was, at least as far as I can tell from a number of work places with which I have somewhat more detailed knowledge.

For example, Boeing in Seattle. In the report reprinted in the *WAS* we are told,

“a couple of more leftist-thinking workers have been asking our comrades about when there are demonstrations they can go to. One went to her first demonstration and was a vocal participant in the Marxist-Leninist Party contingent. She loved it. There are many black workers, mainly those in the mid-30s or older, who are unequivocally against the war. And there remains the minority that is anti-militarist among the workforce.”

Here you have a minority that is against the war, with a few seeking to join the demonstrations. As for the majority who are reported to have been in support of the war, we are told

“it seems to me that support for the war is very weak.”

The report goes on to specifically point out,

“The popularity of the ‘support the troops’ line is interesting. One use of it is to avoid politics.”³¹

Is this not part of the non-politicism the *WA* was pointing to. The report also indicates the problems with chauvinism in the plants, and notes some of the weaknesses those arguments have among the workers. In short, I would say the assessment even at Boeing, a military industry where skilled workers predominate, more or less verifies what was said in *WA*.

Yet a few other quick examples.

GLS [Great Lakes Steel] in Detroit was similar to Boeing. It is also a shop where the skilled workers predominate. And there was also a huge pro-war atmosphere created in the plant. Despite the repressive situation, a small section of workers joined with us to carry out an in-plant sticker campaign against the war and remained deeply interested in the anti-war movement throughout.

At Beaumont, a suburban hospital outside of Detroit, the situation was much more varied. In one department where we work among the lab technicians, there was overwhelming opposition to the war. A number of the techs took our leaflets to distribute at campuses where they go to school and some joined us in the anti-war protests. At the same time, there were other departments where there was quite vocal support for the war. But even in those a few workers stood with us to oppose the chauvinism and repeatedly asked about demonstrations. And, similar to what was mentioned in the report on Boeing, the support for the war began to wane as soon as news on U.S. war atrocities started to come out.

In the postal facilities in Detroit, we found wide-spread opposition to the war. This probably reflects the large black composition of the work force. At least the mood was similar to that found in the city in general. However, even here the sentiments varied widely from station to station and department to department. In some, like the bulk mail facility, there was vocal support for the war, especially from among white

workers. On the other hand, at some stations it was the anti-war workers who were most vocal and set the mood. As well, there were many examples of people, though initially against the war, getting swept into the Democrats liberal “support our troops” charade once the war broke out. But this pro-war stand was fairly weak. Many of them shifted back against the war once U.S. atrocities hit the news. As well, some who were sucked into sending cookies and such to “support the troops” actually remained vocally opposed to the war itself. And there were wide sections who opposed the war throughout. Even at that, only a few were drawn into the demonstrations. The opposition had not reached the point where wide sections of the workers were able to overcome the stand of the black bourgeoisie, the liberal Democrats, the union officials, and so forth. Nevertheless, our agitation was finding more and more receptive ears. This was seen, among other things, in the virtually unanimous opposition to the war in Injured and Handicapped Postal Workers United when we organized a discussion against the imperialist bloodletting at one of the IHPWU meetings.

These are the work places that I know more details about. But I think the situation was similar in other cities. I know, for example, that comrades in San Francisco, Seattle, and New York report that numbers of young workers — mainly from low-paying service jobs — and minorities came in to the anti-war protests, especially when the struggle became particularly intense as the bombing started.

Drawing this all together, it seems to me that various features of the situation can be summed up. There was a wave of chauvinism with the beginning of the war. But as I have said, that was to be expected. Looking at that situation more closely, it appears that the pro-war attitudes found among workers were fairly weak, and began to be shaken when news of U.S. atrocities started coming out. Certainly, our agitation was able to penetrate more and more deeply as the war developed. Of course, since the war was quick, and U.S. imperialism won such an easy victory, we were able to go only a limited distance towards destroying the pro-war atmosphere that had been created among workers. Nevertheless, there was a substantial section of the workers — especially among the young and minorities — who opposed the war all along. And some of those joined the demonstrations and worked with us to build opposition to the war in the work places.

Taken as a whole, then, I think the *WA* assessments were fairly accurate. What the war experience shows is that beneath the surface appearance of an all-powerful U.S. government and widespread chauvinism, skepticism and discontent is growing among the workers. Even as Bush launched his orgy of victory parades, the elements were continuing to build for a new upsurge.

To be sure we continue to face an arduous struggle against the non-politicism that has been fostered for decades among the workers. And we must wage a sharp struggle against the chauvinist crusade that, in other forms, is still being pushed by the union hacks, black misleaders, and other reformists. But when you see sections of workers standing against the war, even in the face of the entire establishment pro-war hoopla; when you see workers starting to join the anti-war protests; when you see workers starting to work with us against the war in the plants and other workplaces; then that is an indication of sentiment

³¹ “Aerospace workers and the war,” *WAS*, February 20, 1991, pages 14-15.

that is building up deeper among the broad masses that will, sooner or later, turn towards militant struggle.

I believe that the *WA* was correct to emphasize that sentiment, to encourage it, and to work to build upon it.

What's the issue?

So what did comrade Rene and the aerospace reporter from Seattle want the *WA* to do?

Comrade Rene does not elaborate his views. The only particular advice on this question that I found in his letter was the complaint that

“one does not find: a) Warnings to the American workers not to fall into chauvinism.” (Rene, Sept. 20 *IB*, page 24)

But this complaint is hard for me to understand. In paper after paper, and article after article, the *WA* sharply denounced the disgusting chauvinism of Bush and the Democrats and the union misleaders and the black bourgeoisie. In relation to the working class directly, you find statements like the one mentioned above calling for

“Patient work . . . to overcome . . . the chauvinist politics laid down by the trade union bureaucrats.”³²

To be sure we don't blame the working masses for the chauvinism. We put the blame on the reactionary bourgeoisie, on the liberals, and on the reformist misleaders where it belongs. And we call on the working masses to break with them and build up an independent working class movement. This is not only done in general appeals, but also in very concrete ways. In a number of articles we expose the union leaders for their calling off of strikes and economic protests on “patriotic” grounds. We support the linking up of the anti-war movement with a number of strikes. We draw out links between the fight against the war and other popular struggles like the movement against racism and the pro-choice movement. And in these and other ways, we work to build up the hatred of the masses not only for the ruling class but, also, for the chauvinist misleaders so that they may more quickly and completely break with them to build their own class movement.

In all of this, I do not believe that moralistic outrage against the chauvinism that did infect whole sections of workers is much help. But in light of what the *WA* actually did, it is hard for me to understand the complaint that there is an absence in

³²“Anti-war movement grows,” *WA*, Jan. 1, 1991. [p. 6, col. 4]

any other way of warnings to the workers not to fall into chauvinism.

Meanwhile, the aerospace report from Seattle says, “I think we need a spirit of outrage at U.S. crimes . . . and an analytical approach to the workers' class interest, i.e. a deeper exposure of the oil and empire question.”³³

Certainly the *WA* did sharply denounce the U.S. crimes. And it also did deepen, among other things, our analysis of the workings of U.S. imperialist domination of the world oil industry. But then, from what is said here, I'm not even clear that this was a criticism of the *WA* or, rather, simply an encouragement that we continue to develop these particular aspects along with other features of the agitation.

It may be that the complaint against “official optimistic declarations,” from Comrade Rene and the from the aerospace report, is an expression of a desire that the *WA* carry more material describing the fight the Party was waging in a number of work places. I know that various comrades and contacts of the Party were waging very sharp battles against the pro-war atmosphere on the job and, at times, felt quite isolated. Perhaps more articles, like the one on aerospace workers, would have been helpful.

To be sure, we did not carry a great deal on the workplace struggles until February and, for lack of space, much of that had to be put into the February 20 issue of the Supplement. But waiting to that date for articles was not simply a question of the *WA*. The coverage on particular work places, on our agitation in working class communities, and so forth is very much dependent on getting reports, leaflets and articles from the local areas. And we really did not start receiving much of these until the end of January and into February. The articles in the Feb. 20 *Supplement* on New York postal workers, Boston railroad workers, Seattle aerospace workers, and Detroit steel workers gave an indication of the fight the Party was waging in the work places and the different, concrete angles of our agitation. It also gives an indication that the Party's agitation is not simply a matter of a handful of editors off by themselves cooking up good ideas. The party's agitation is above all a collaboration of the comrades in the local areas with the central organs to constantly develop and strengthen our theory, our tactics, and our revolutionary style. Hopefully this discussion of various criticisms will strengthen that collaboration and help build up our press. □

³³“Aerospace workers and the war,” *WAS*, February 20, 1991, page 15.

WA vs. the slogan 'Support our troops'

The following article appeared in the February 1, 1991 issue of the *Workers' Advocate* (page 8).

Congress and newspapers, war-lover and liberal critic, tell us that we must all unite to "support our troops." They appeal to ordinary working people worried about the fate of their co-workers or children or friends who have been sent off to fight in the Gulf.

But this appeal is false and hypocritical. It presents the idea that there can be unity between the Pentagon and anti-war activists, between supporters and opponents of the war, to "support our troops". When a war is unjust, when it is mass murder of the people of another land, then it does not help the ordinary soldier to get a patriotic send-off or to hear news censored so that it seems all is well. The only way to help our comrades caught up in the army is to support the GI resistance. We must find ways and means of getting the truth into the armed forces, and we must link up with the soldiers who are organizing against the war or refusing to take part in.

Bush and the Pentagon care nothing about the ordinary troops

The newspapers tell us that the Viet Nam veterans suffered depression and problems because they didn't have red-white-and-blue parades when they got home. What rot!

The GIs suffered because they had been used to kill and murder an innocent people. It was to their honor that they could not coldbloodedly massacre innocent people and smile it away.

The GIs suffered because the Pentagon and the ruling class simply used them up and threw them away. The establishment doesn't give a damn what happened to GIs in the hellholes called veterans hospitals. And they fought for two decades to deny medical benefits to soldiers suffering from exposure to the army's weapon of chemical warfare "Agent Orange", and this fight is still continuing.

The GIs suffered because they faced racism and harsh oppression in the army, and when they got back home.

The anti-war movement linked up with the GIs

It was the anti-war movement that linked up with the concerns of working people in uniform. In another article we review the experience of Viet Nam.¹ Here we note that once again it is the anti-war movement that is providing aid and comfort to GIs who don't want to be mindless killing machines.

After all, when you see patriotic, flag-waving demonstrations shouting "support our troops", will it be those people who display sympathy for GIs who don't fight? Hell no. They'll call them traitors. And the same newspapers who tell us that we must all "support our troops" editorialize against the soldiers

¹This refers to the article "Who really spat on Viet Nam GIs?", which is not reprinted here.

who object to aggressive war. You enlisted, the papers sneer, and weren't drafted, so it's all so democratic to order you to be killing machines.

So why should those really care about the common people in the army take up the same slogan?

Can there be national reconciliation around supporting the troops?

The present campaign to "support our troops" culminates years of effort by the bourgeoisie to promote a "national reconciliation" between supporters and opponents of the war in Viet Nam. The Viet Nam memorial is a perfect example of this "healing of wounds". It lists the names of American soldiers who died in action against the Vietnamese. It does not, however, list the names of those who died protesting the war, such as at Kent State. Nor does it list the names of Vietnamese soldiers who died in the war, or of Vietnamese civilians killed by B-52s.

It seems that the point of "support our troops" is to support the war that is being waged by the government. This slogan is not a new one. And that is what it has always meant in the past.

The other America

Among the liberal forces who say that the anti-war movement should give the slogan "support our troops", there are those who say that the anti-war movement should compete with the government over who is more patriotic.

But there are two Americas. There is not just the America of Bush and the Pentagon and the Wall Street bankers. There is the America of poverty and backbreaking work. There is the America of the downtrodden and the oppressed. And these two Americas, the America of the rich and the America of the poor, are at war.

The anti-war movement must base itself on the other America, and it must unite with the workers and downtrodden of all lands. Not patriotic unity with the flag-wavers, but internationalist unity with our class sisters and brothers around the world. That should be the slogan of the anti-war struggle.

What the liberals are doing

The patriotic forces promote that we can unite everyone by demonstrating our reasonableness and patriotism and common concerns. By saying "support our troops" there will be a friendly discussion of those concerned with the welfare of our youth.

But look what's going on right in front of everyone's eyes. The patriotic newspapers and militarist forces are not preparing for discussion. Instead, war in the Gulf means repression at home. They are carrying out a multi-pronged offensive against the rights of the people.

1) They are seeking to cover up the protests, and marginalize them.

- 2) They are working to build up a flag-waving "America, love it or leave it" movement.
- 3) They are attacking Arabs in the U.S.
- 4) They are laying the groundwork for police repression through anti-terrorist hysteria. And the government and capitalists are seeking to build networks to look for "suspicious" people in factories, post offices, etc.

5) They are presenting dissent as treason by saying that it will result in the death of troops.

They are having a hard time accomplishing this. And it is the growth of the anti-war movement that is hurting their plans. But there can be no illusions. The war in the Gulf means flag-waving repression at home. □

CWV vs. the 'support our troops' slogan

After seeing the *Workers' Advocate* article denouncing the "support our troops" slogan, the Chicago comrades wrote their own version in the Feb. 15, 1991 issue of *Chicago Workers' Voice*. It owes much to the *WA* article, including whole passages. It also appeared in the February 20, 1991 issue of the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, which said that it "expands on some of the points" in the *WA* article "and adds some additional points." But the *CWV* insisted their article is fundamentally different than the *WA* article. Comrade Slim has a different assessment in the second part of his reply to criticisms of *Workers' Advocate*, which appears elsewhere in this issue of *CV*. Judge for yourself.

Congress and newspapers, war-lover and supposed critic of the war alike, tell us that we must all unite to "support our troops". This is an appeal of the bourgeoisie and the rabid flag-wavers. But it is also meant to draw in working people worried about the fate of their co-workers or children or friends who have been sent off to fight in the Gulf. "Maybe you think the war is wrong," they say. "But now that it's started, you must support our troops."

What hypocrites. They want us to just forget what this war is all about with mindless yellow ribbon campaigns. Why, you can even put signs that say "world peace" with your yellow ribbons. But this "world peace" is the "peace" of the "new world order". In Bush's double-speak, war is "peace". It is the "peace" of the slaughter of the Iraqi people. It is the "peace" of the lives of young men and women sent to die for the greater profits of the oil billionaires and so that rich U.S. capitalists can dominate the Middle East.

The "Support the Troops" campaign is also meant to throw blame on anti-war activists for deaths, injuries, psychological trouble, etc. of the troops for not "supporting the troops". But who sent the troops there in the first place and what for? This is an unjust war. It does not help the ordinary soldier to get a patriotic sendoff or to hear news censored so that it seems that all is well.

"Be All You Can Be, Join the Army" the recruiting ads say. The military is presented in an oh, so innocent light as a way to get an education, a way to get a job. It is presented as the alternative to two of the other big choices the bourgeoisie has for working class and minority youth, the streets or prison. Again what hypocrites. The rich capitalists close down factories. The educational system is left to rot while big handouts are given to the rich and the military machine is built. Then the military is presented as the alternative to the very situation the

bourgeoisie has created.

"Be what we want," they say. "Be a part of the military machine of U.S. imperialism." After all, what is the purpose of the U.S. military? The military invaded Panama, Grenada, Lebanon and many other countries for the profits and empires of the rich. U.S. troops were sent to put down struggles of the black people in the 60's. U.S. troops have been sued to break strikes. All the recruiting ads cover over the truth. That the rich capitalists want an army of cannon fodder to keep other countries in line, to put down dissent and strikes at home, to defend their rule and profits.

* * * * *

Unfortunately, in the anti-war movement there are those who say that the movement should give the slogan "Support Our Troops". Here in Chicago the movement has been flooded with buttons that say so. Some peace groups even put yellow ribbons on their literature tables. This is a big mistake.

There can be no unity between the Pentagon and anti-war activists, between supporters and opponents of the war. Furthermore, the only way to help those caught up in the army is to support GI resistance. We do not support this war. We are not looking for ways to raise the morale of the troops so that they can better fight, kill and die for U.S. imperialism. No! We are working to build an anti-war movement to end this war. We work to find ways and means of getting the truth into the armed forces, and we link up with the soldiers who are organizing against the war or refusing to take part in it.

There are those in the anti-war movement who promote that we can unite everyone by demonstrating our reasonableness and patriotism and common concerns. But again this just covers over what is actually going on against the anti-war supports. The "Support Our Troops" campaign is not preparing for discussions. It is part of the ideological preparation for repression at home. The rich and their government, the flag-waving press and the militarists are carrying out a multi-pronged offensive against the rights of the people.

- 1) They are seeking to cover up the protests, and marginalize them.
- 2) They are working to build up a flag-waving "America, love it or leave it" movement.
- 3) They are attacking Arabs in the U.S.
- 4) They are laying the groundwork for police repression through anti-terrorist hysteria. And the government and capitalists are seeking to build networks to look for "suspicious" people in factories, post offices, etc.
- 5) They are presenting dissent as treason by saying that it

will result in the death of troops.

They are having a hard time accomplishing this. And it is the growth of the anti-war movement that is hurting their plans. But there can be no illusions. The war in the Gulf means flag-waving repression at home.

The anti-war movement should not get caught up in any of

this flag-waving. Build the anti-war movement. Expose the aims of this war. Organize groups and committees against the war in factories, workplaces and schools. Unite with those GIs who want to find a way to oppose the war and encourage other GIs to resist. This is our task. □

CWV on the articles denouncing the “support our troops” slogan

In his article, Slim points out that the *WA* article denouncing the “Support our troops” slogan

“has come under particularly sharp criticism by comrades from Chicago. But, unfortunately, none of them have written out their views on it. Comrades Rene and Oleg mention unhappiness with *WA* using the word ‘comrades’ to refer to ordinary soldiers. . . . But that is all that is said.”

Slim’s observation is accurate. Rene’s written statement is quoted at the beginning of Slim’s article. Here are other remarks from the *CWV* comrades :

Excerpt from Oleg’s letter of July 12, 1992 in *IB* #62, Sept. 20, 1992:

“These objections [about how to characterize U.S. imperialism’s overall role in world imperialism] . . . rekindle worries that I had about some of the articles in *WA* about the Persian Gulf War. For example, the February issue, page 8, the article on ‘Support our troops’ refers to U.S. soldiers as ‘comrades.’”

Excerpt from Julie’s letter in *IB* #65, Jan. 20, 1992, “Criticism of *WA* agitation on the war” (this appeared in the same *IB* as Slim’s article):

“This issue [of the *Workers’ Advocate*] also contains an article ‘On the slogan “Support our troops”.’ Comrades here were happy when we saw the title of the article because we were involved in a number of debates on this issue but disappointed with the article itself. In particular the 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 the Vietnam war and this one too. That it is a slogan to support to war. Also that this campaign [is] linked [to] efforts to suppress the anti-war movement. But its main thrust seems to be how badly soldiers [are] 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 [we] felt *WA* article not sufficient.”

“But to me there were some glaring weaknesses in some of our agitation (on the Persian Gulf war) especially coming from our Party which has a fairly rich history in movements to oppose imperialist war, including . . . the weakness in regard to our agitation against ‘Support our Troops.’”

The following remarks occur after Slim’s article, which appeared in *IB* #65, Jan. 20, 1992. There wasn’t any reply to the points he raised with respect to *WA*’s article on the “Support our troops” slogan, just a declaration that the *CWV* comrades still held to their criticism.

Excerpt from Julie’s letter May 12, 1992 in the *IB* #68, June 7, 1992:

“I state in my previous letter that ‘there were some glaring weaknesses in some of our agitation (on the Persian Gulf war) especially coming from our Party which has a fairly rich history in movements to oppose imperialist war, including . . . the weakness in regard to our agitation against ‘Support our Troops.’”

Excerpt from Anita’s letter of mid-May 1992 in *IB* #68, June 7, 1992:

“Criticism of the anti-war agitation centers mainly on what was not said (the exception being the controversy over the articles against ‘support our troops’).”

Excerpt from Oleg’s letter of July 12, 1992 in *IB* #70, July 24, 1992:

“The views that Rene puts forward in his letter on the U.S. military and how we should analyze it and agitate among the soldiers are not mine. However, I do agree with the criticisms made by Comrades Anita and Julie of the Feb. 1991 *WA* article on the support our troops slogan. I should also like to point out that Rene does not say anywhere in his letter that it is wrong to organize inside the military.” □

Correspondence

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Dear Tim,

Thank you for your note and issues 1 and 2 of the *CV*, sent on 07/10/95, which I got on 07/14/95. I am sorry for not writing sooner, but until just recently I had to do both jobs (clerk and janitor) at work. This took a great deal of energy out of me and I did not feel like writing anyone. However, a new janitor was hired and I am back to my normal routine as a clerk in the Hemodialysis Unit in the Medical Division of this facility.

I would like to share some observations with you about the *DMLSG/ CV*, *CWV* and *LAWV*, as an outsider looking in on a family feud. It seems to me the real issue to grasp by the horns and wrestle with is Authoritarianism, and the relationship of this problem to the nature and role of a Vanguard Party in building and directing a Progressive Mass Movement. In the various talks about "Anti-Revisionism" all parties to this debate seem to dance around this issue. One of the best books I have read on this topic is *A Look at Leninism* by Ron Taber. This short book should be required reading for all current and future cadre. While I do not agree with the proposed solutions of Ron Taber, he does describe the basic problems with the traditional Leninist view of Marxist development.

I suspect the *CWV* (and to a lesser extent the *LAWV*) are reacting against past memories of excessive Authoritarianism in the former MLP, USA. However, what they fail to grasp (which the *DMLSG* does to their everlasting credit!) is thought is usually established before and serves as the foundation of action. This is a basic concept in Philosophy. Therefore, political theory usually has a higher priority than political action. A reading of Lenin and Mao provides the necessary Chapter and Verse from Marxist Scriptures to support this position. However, this does not mean there is no political activity, because theory should usually be verified and modified by practice! But until the theoretical problems have been identified and solved, the practice should be selective and kept at a minimum. The history of Marxist development in Russia, China and Viet Nam has proved this to be correct.

Next, any analysis of Anti-Revisionism/Anti-Authoritarianism should be expanded to include issues of age and sexuality. These problems are the flip side of the same coin as are problems of economics, politics, race and gender.

The article by the *DMLSG* in *CV* #1, *Where We Stand*, was a very positive contribution, but should be reduced to a six-to-eight point set of brief, basic concepts. As a former professional (yuppie!) working in Silicon Valley I enjoyed reading the various articles by Pete Brown. As the nature of the working class changes, more theoretical work is required in this area. The various *Letters* (03/16/95, and 03/25/95) by Frank were on-point! I support the establishment of a national organization

based around the *DMLSG* and the *DWV* and *CV* as the official organs of this trend. Local Collectives do not have the strength to endure and grow under Current Objective Conditions. The various fingers of the left hand should be united in a fist to weather the storm. Too bad the *LAWV* in their reply of 03/19/95, did not agree with this proposal. I noticed in a flier from Neil Church (*LAWV*) of 08/17/95, [it] listed the *CWV*, but not the *DWV* and/or the *CV* at the bottom of the page. How does the Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg and Alexandra Kollontai differ (if this is truly the case!) from Lenin and Mao on this issue! Neil Church (*LAWV*) in his *Letter* of 03/20/95, did not propose a new organizational model of a Vanguard Party, just a lukewarm statement there were unanswered problems with the former MLP, USA. In my opinion, this is not a positive contribution to this debate.

Mark's article in *CV* #2, were positive, but I am not sure how "Anti-revisionists point out how trotskyism is the political twin of Stalinism and Soviet revisionism as a whole"!!? I intend to write to Jake/Julie at the *CWV/TJ*, and request any material they have on the Trotskyists (the Sparts in particular!) and Anarchism. I would benefit from any publications you could send me (or point me to) on these issues. The three essential conditions (page 42, ¶5) should be memorized by all current and future cadre:

1. A clear idea of the ultimate aim.
2. A correct understanding of the path leading to that aim.
3. An accurate conception of the true state of affairs at the given moment, or of the immediate tasks of that moment.

I hope the last few months of debate among the minority members of the former MLP, USA has resolved many of the issues between the various factions. At least the various trends should agree to disagree! I also hope future issues of the *CV*, move away from a "He said, she said, no I did not, yes you did. . ." dysfunctional, soap opera, exclusive, inner-family dialogue, to a more inclusive, positive, national organ of Left/Progressive struggle!!! (That last sentence was a real mouthful!) The *CV* should consider expanding a subscription base beyond former friends and members of the MLP, USA. An edited copy of this letter will be sent to Neil Church (*LAWV*), who has been very supportive of me while I am in prison.

As of this date (09/11/95) I have not seen additional issues (#3+) of the *CV*. If they are available, please send me copies ASAP. I continue to be the target of counter-insurgency operations, with Search and Destroy missions directed against my mail being the most common form of State Terror, Lodging a complaint with prison administration, and/or filing a Writ in Calif. State Court is a waste of time, since I do not expect to get justice from either area. I parole to the SF Bay Area on 05/96, and can carry this burden until then. However, please send me a brief postcard upon receipt of this letter to acknowledge you got it. Also, you may publish this letter (in whole or in part) in future issues of the *CV* if you include my full name and address.

I trust all is well with you and yours. I greatly appreciate your continual support and hope to hear from you soon. Keep

up the good work and stay out of trouble. Think kindly of me.

I send you my greetings,
Chris ☐

The following two letters from and to Chris crossed each other in the mail:

10/16/95

Dear Tim,

This is just a brief thank you note to Joseph Green and you for sending me CV, numbers three and four on 10/02/95, which I received on 10/06/95. I rejoice in the establishment of the CVO. Since I first contacted the MLP, USA and you during Summer, 1995 I have followed the various twists and turns of this group. Now I finally think the clear-thinking element of the minority faction is on the right path with the CVO. I hope this small seed grows into a large and strong tree.

In the future I shall direct all CVO related letters to Joseph. Please inform him I am working on yet another long letter based on CV numbers three and four. Plus, I will send any DMLSG/DWV and/or *Struggle* related letters to you. I know Joseph and you are very busy, so I want to follow the new division of labor and not become a burden. . .

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 ☐

October 20, 1995

Dear Chris,

Thanks for your thoughtful letter of Sept. 11. It is clear that you have studied issues 1 and 2 of *Communist Voice* and pondered various articles and the issues of revolutionary life. This is encouraging to us. And I apologize for not getting back to you sooner.

As to the differences between the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group and ourselves, I think they center on anti-revisionism, as you will see when you get issue #3 of CV. For example, CWV waffles on its attitude to Castroism, while the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* group excuses this by saying that there isn't a thorough enough analysis of revisionist economy. The CWV has basically lost the spirit of trying to build up an independent anti-revisionist trend, different from what now predominates in the left. They don't see the point of clarifying the nature of Castroism, but prefer to merge into the left on this issue. Similarly, CWV sees the popularity of petty-bourgeois nationalism in the left at this time and adjusts to it, while the LAWV group adjusts to CWV's attitude on this issue. In issue number 3 we outlined a series of differences on basic issues of revolutionary tactics with the CWV, and these will probably be further discussed in

issue number 5, and I look forward to your comments on them.

We understand your frustration at the back and forth charges, but I think such "squabbles" are typical of times of theoretical confusion. Political and theoretical differences have never been clarified without a bit of this give and take—look at Marx's writings against the Bauer brothers, Bakunin, Proudhon, etc.! But we are trying to follow Marx's example and supply a deep content to the controversy. We agree wholeheartedly with you that mere recriminations are useless. We think that the controversy will be useless if it is just different people coming out with positions that lack deep thought and careful investigation. Instead, controversies should inspire one to further investigation of the real world, and to careful theoretical thought. Take for example the issue of how to support the heroic struggle of the Chiapas peasants. As we differ with CWV on the evaluation of the Zapatista program, we have carried out study of the actual conditions of the Mexican countryside, as well as of the Leninist views on land reform. We have studied the experience of the "ejido" (co-op), which figures so deeply in the EZLN program, and we have reprinted the major declarations of the EZLN from the Lacandona jungle so that our readers could see them for themselves.

Similarly, when it comes to controversies about the history of the late Marxist-Leninist Party, we are publishing actual studies and documentary material of what went on. In issue #2, one of the articles traced the ideological differences in the party. And starting in issue #4, we began carrying comrade Slim's articles on the controversy over the line of the *Workers' Advocate* (central journal of the MLP). Some of this material is of interest in its own right, as an exposition of part of Marxist tactics. Issue #5 will carry particularly interesting material on the attitude toward the cannon fodder in the military.

You referred us to Ron Taber's book *A Look at Leninism*. So far, I have unfortunately not been able to find it. But in any case I think that the issues of what is democratic centralism and what is proper inner-party life are quite important. We hope to have in future issues some discussion about the nature of party life, how parties have evolved since the time of Marx, etc. And part of this is indeed the question of inner-party democracy. Many problems that have arisen in activist groups on this. In fact, we think this is one [of] the questions on which Stalinism and Trotskyism are twins, because in the name of factionalism the Trotskyist groups have often reproduced the same oppressive atmosphere as Stalinism groups have produced in the name of a united party. If one looks not at the grand labels they deck themselves out in, but in the actual ways they build their parties, the Stalinists and Trotskyists have surprising similarity on political as well as organizational issues. For example, just as Stalinism promoted the revisionist regimes as socialist, confusing socialism with mere state ownership of key industries, Trotskyism too has a good deal of trouble distinguishing state ownership from socialism. Partially as a result of this, most Trotskyist groups ended up giving "military support" to the various crimes of the Soviet Union under revisionist rule, such as its bloody intervention in Afghanistan.

But back to the CWV group. I don't think that authoritarianism is what bothered CWV about the old party, but rather they are upset because their views were rejected by almost everyone else in the MLP. I and others spent a good deal of time trying

to understand the *CWV*'s organizational views, and I have been quite disillusioned on this by what they have done since the party dissolved. For example, while the party existed, Jake of *CWV* complained incessantly about the elections to the Central Committee—which were carried out by secret ballot after nomination and discussion at party congresses. But he never could explain precisely what it was he wanted changed, nor did he ever put forward alternative nominations. After the party dissolved, when it came time for *CWV* to show how to properly carry out elections, Jake and the *CWV* rejected the whole idea of elections. In their view, the *CWV Theoretical Journal*, at that time an organ of the whole “minority”, should not be bound to the democratic will of the whole “minority” either as far as its general policies, nor should the “minority” have anything to say about the composition of the editorial board of the *CWVTJ*. Jake joked that all this would have constituted the “MLP Part Deux”. Instead, the *CWV* thought that everyone should simply accept whatever the *CWV* group did. After that, I found it hard to see that the *CWV* is much concerned about authoritarianism.

Let me point out that the MLP carried out congresses and national conferences regularly, holding 9 in its 14 year life. Being a small party, these national meetings involved everyone. And with the exception of the last congress, the material at these meetings was extensively prepared and dealt with the issues facing the party—these meetings were all major events in the life of the MLP. On top of that, the MLP was based on local branches having their own internal life; the branches were supposed to be, and were, self-moving. While the general line of the party was decided by the party as a whole, the local branches and basic units had wide authority to publish what they wished (within the limits of the general views of the party) and to decide their local matters.

I'm not saying that the system was perfection—nothing is perfect in human affairs. On organizational issues, as well as theoretical ones, the MLP naturally had to keep progressing, so

long as it was still alive. I had proposals for changes in the party structure, and many other comrades had their concerns. But overall, the MLP did pretty well along the lines of democratic centralism; and the system looks really good by comparison with what exists among most of the circles that were all that was left after the party dissolved. And I think the virtues of the MLP organizational structure came from its adherence to a Leninist view of revolutionary work and organization.

So what really motivates *CWV*'s upset with us is not memories of MLP authoritarianism, but their recoiling from anti-revisionism. This is what lies behind their organizational grievances, and their recoiling from the idea of a party. (They think a proletarian party may have been good in the past, but they won't take up any tasks for preparing for a new one today. In the recent *CWVTJ* #8 which just arrived here, Barb denounces Rosa Luxemburg at length for having a wrong idea of the role of a party in the past, but Sarah and Oleg—in their articles dealing with the present-day movement—can see nothing but broad coalitions of varying left trends as the only organization for today. Sarah and Oleg won't even discuss any particular role for *CWV* itself in the mass struggles, nor does Sarah mention the past role of MLP in the pro-choice struggle.)

We on the other hand hope to reach out in the *Communist Voice* and rally all those who see the need for anti-revisionism. This we believe is the only way to build a true communist trend that can deal with the demands of the times, the changes in the composition of the working class, the changes in world imperialism, etc. I look forward to your comments on our future attempts in this direction!

With my regards,

Joseph Green
Editor, *CV* □

In previous issues of *Communist Voice*:

Issue #1, April 15, 1995 (56 pp.):

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*
Debate over the Mexican journal *El Machete* and Zapatista strategy
El Machete and "occupied Mexico"

Issue #2, June 1, 1995 (59 pp.)

In support of the Papua New Guinea people's struggle against environmental ruin
Detroit Workers' Voice: Fight the contract on the workers and the poor
Workplace organizing and the "Solidarity Organizing Committee"
The growth of the middle classes, and prospects for socialist consciousness: review of C. Wright Mills' *White Collar*
Ongoing controversy on our tasks
Looking into the history of the Marxist-Leninist Party
Three key Zapatista declarations from Lacandona Jungle
—Declaration of war, Jan. 1, 1994
—For a national democratic convention and a transitional government, June 10, 1994
—To form a movement for national liberation, January, 1995
Critique of Zapatista views: on turning democratization into a panacea
On the stand of *Chicago Workers' Voice*: denigrating anti-revisionism and glorifying Zapatista theories
Marxism on proletarian and peasant demands

Issue #3, August 1, 1995 (67 pp.)

The International Monetary Fund and imperialist super-profits
What have co-ops meant for the Mexican peasants?
—The "ejido", yesterday and today: in a village of the Mexican state of Michoacan
— The decline of the small peasant continued during Echeverria's ejido policy of the '70s
—Co-ops will not save the peasants from poverty
On the repudiation of anti-revisionism by the *Chicago Workers' Voice* (reviewing the CWV *Theoretical Journal* #7)
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"

Issue #4, Sept. 15, 1995 (63 pp.):

The Communist Voice Organization is founded
Detroit newspaper strike:
—Report from the picket lines
—Reformist left kneels before union bureaucrats
—*Detroit Workers' Voice* on newspaper strike
DWV vs. plans of postal management
On demonstration on 25th anniversary of Chicago moratorium
The affluent worker—bourgeoisified? Review of Goldthorpe's 1969 book on British workers
The IMF, the World Bank and U.S. imperialism: an overview
Ejido co-ops and capitalist development in Mexican agriculture
What really happened in the last years of the MLP: part one of the controversy over anti-war work
Left-wing neo-conservatives:
—(1) the reflection of neo-conservatism in socialist thinking
—(2) the mailed fist behind the anti-authoritarian phrase
—From Ben's vision of the future that's "like a war"

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“Talk about Extinction or: The Stereotype (A Monologue)”
From “Moon in the Seventh House”

Poetry:

“Only Chiapas?”
“What’s Obscene”
“Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, April 20, 1914”
“The Cry of a Proletarian”
“Disgruntled”
“First Amendment Rag”
“Awry Orwell”
“Lessons of a Worker’s Son”
“Cannon Fodder”

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“Baton Rouge during the Gulf War”

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