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Successor to the
'Workers' Advocate'

The “four worlds” theory and the indigenous struggle

Staley struggle

How not to learn from a defeat

The right of self-determination

“Left communism” vs. Marxism

*Also — a bureaucratic “Labor Party” is born;
Thurow’s uneasy future of capitalism;
the 5th International in non-Trotskyist clothing;
and back and forth on Cuba*

An uneasy economist looks into the future

by Gary, New Jersey

A book review of Lester C. Thurow's *The Future of Capitalism*, 1996.

Lester Thurow is a leading ideologue of US imperialism. He is a former dean of MIT's Sloan School, an editor of both *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, an economist of world note, and general consultant to the US elite. His previous books include *Head to Head* and *The Zero-Sum Society*. His latest, *The Future of Capitalism*, attempts to modify some of his predictions, but mostly it presents the new world view he would like to put forward on behalf of US capital in the wake of some economic changes currently shaking the world. In short, it presents the views of a significant section of the US monopoly capitalist class about the current state of world imperialism — something we are trying to get a handle on ourselves. Sorting through the dozens of topics, any one of which could be dealt with separately, there is a wealth of data, summations of data and historical parallels of great interest.

Thurow presents 5 great, underlying forces which he says are determining the current events of the world today (all within the framework of global capitalism). Briefly, these are (in his

terminology):

1. The end of communism — both the Soviet empire and socialism as a movement in Western society (although he constantly refers to the “socialist trend” in Europe affecting bourgeois policy there — reflecting the propaganda of state-capitalist politics = socialist politics);

2. The era of man-made brainpower industries — the dominant companies are no longer based on natural resources but on technology, which means capital does not have to be centralized in a few locations to be viable, but can be scattered;

3. Demography — the world's population according to Thurow is too big (once again), but also it's moving between countries and continents more, and it's older;

4. A global economy — capital can chase cheap labor and technology faster and easier than ever before; and

5. It is a multipolar world with no dominant power. Half the book is spent explaining these “new” forces. The rest takes up their consequences.

Thurow's “discoveries” are trends that we are all aware of. His “end of communism” is the lull in the world socialist movement, in part tied to the collapse of the Soviet state-capitalist empire. Like all the capitalist apologists he is once again trying to bury Marx once and for all. The de-centralization of capital is occurring as a cycle in the constantly upgrading of technology

What is Communist Voice?

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

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

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Editor: Joseph Green

at the expense of the majority of the population; however it is still dominated by finance capital, and the process of monopoly continues to grow, but he doesn't discuss that. At every capitalist cycle, it produces an "excess" of population — this is an effect not a cause, and capitalist hacks have always raised this bogeyman since capitalism's inception. And yes, imperialism does create an ever integrated global economy, and today the imperialist powers are numerous, with the US not as dominant (relatively) as before. Thurow's earthshaking trends reflect some features of the current state of world imperialism, but his intent is not to elucidate but to present his program for saving capitalism (and the US monopoly capitalists in particular) by reforming certain peripheral features and smoothing its rough edges.

Of particular note in all this is a) his analysis of the state of the world's working class, and b) the coming economic cataclysm.

The state of the working class: Thurow presents some good statistics showing what everyone knows, that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. According to his stats, 1968 was a watershed year. That is when the rate of inequality in society started to rise rapidly, so that

"By the turn of the century the real wages for non-supervisory workers will be back to where they were at mid-century, fifty years earlier, despite the fact that the real per capita GDP more than doubled over the same period of time." (pg 6)

In the 1980's, in the US for example, all the gains in male earnings went to the top 20% of the workforce only, with 64% going to the top 1%. If you use incomes rather than earnings,

the top 1% get 90% of the total income gains. (pg 21) The real per capita GDP rose 36% from 1973 to 1995, but the real wages of the vast majority of the workforce fell 14%. (pg 2). Thurow calls this "surging inequality", and presents it as a necessary adjustment to these "new" forces shaping capitalism, and not the same old inherent contradiction of capitalism — the inevitable impoverishment of the working class. And since he doesn't have to worry about things like socialism (as he looks over his shoulder), he suggests we only tinker slightly with the system to ease the pain. He actually suggests advertising more to older people to create markets instead of to the young because that's where the money and numbers are! Thanks, Lester.

The other major phenomenon in the working class that Thurow presents is rising unemployment and a structural change in the composition of the working class. He shows that the real US unemployment rate is at least 14% (the official figures, 5.7% plus those unemployed but not counted, 4.6% plus involuntary part-timers, 3.4%). There are also another 4% who have dropped out of the official economy. This brings unemployment to 18%. In addition there is another 14% who are either in temporary jobs, or who work sporadically "on call", or self-employed independent contractors, many of whom have been forced out of their jobs in downsizing and are scrambling to make a living. This represents a third of the workforce either unemployed or living precariously in unstable and iffy work situations. European figures are far higher. Many countries are officially in double digit numbers, and the average official unemployment rate in Europe is double the US's. In Japan, unemployment approaches the EEC official numbers, as idle workers are kept on the payroll since their lifetime guarantee of employment has replaced a government social security system.

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The US is different than other OECD countries, according to Thurow —

“America is uniquely a first world economy with a third world economy inside of it. . . . American corporations operate with a skill structure very different from that found in Japan or the European continent. They essentially use more managers and professionals (11.5% of the workforce in the US versus 5.7% in West Germany) to deskill the production process. This allows US firms to employ fewer mid-skill workers and more unskilled workers than would be the case in either Germany or Japan. Americans ‘dumb down’ the production process. German firms operate with fewer managers and professionals by ‘skilling up’ the bottom of the workforce.” (pg 173)

The US, Japan and Germany all put pressure on lowering the average wages, but with different approaches — the US has a larger unskilled sector with slightly lower unemployment, while Germany has a larger skilled sector at higher wages but with higher unemployment. This represents a major shift in the US over twenty years: the job losses are coming from the mid-skill levels in the US. Thurow presents “factor price equalization” to explain why this is happening and why capital rates of return aren’t rising in proportion to falling wages, which has to do with a global market and free movement of labor and capital. In fact every scenario Thurow presents in the book about the future of capitalism includes falling wages and standards of living for workers in the industrialized countries. With cold economic equations, he shows how capitalism must go this way to be capitalism — something Marx showed last century.

The coming economic debacle: Thurow’s main analysis, and the key to his theories, is international trade and the US trade deficits. He sees this as the weakest card which will bring down the house, and result in major economic readjustments and global depression. He wants to see a concerted effort by US capital to reduce the deficit to ease the coming crisis.

His analysis is that huge trade deficits with Japan have financed the Pacific rim economic expansion, and that this situation is rapidly coming to an end. The Pacific rim runs large trade surpluses with Japan, which Japan covers with even larger trade surpluses with the US. The US has been able to carry this deficit by selling assets and borrowing. (Whether this is a conscious policy of finance capital or just coping with the situation after the fact is not clear.) The Japanese themselves have been doing a lot of this asset buying and lending, but they cannot keep this money-losing investment strategy going much longer. When they limit such investment, according to Thurow, the yen soars and the dollar plunges. Because of this shaky situation, the total net worth of Japanese property has dropped 36% in 5 years, and their stock market has gone from 39,000 in 1989 to 14,000 in 1992, a greater decline than the Stock Market Crash of 1929. And the depression has no end in sight in Japan — at some point, Thurow says, the US will lose its ability to finance its trade deficit. In the end, a lower standard of living will be necessary to finance the debt.

“The epicenter of the economic earthquake will be the US, but the shock waves will be strongest

on the Pacific Rim.” (pg 198)

The details of his scenario go like this: In Japan, export industries will shrink and throw millions out of work. A loss of the US-surplus-trade the rest of the world directly or indirectly enjoys will mean sales will fall all over the world. The US world trade deficit, and the concurrent world surplus with the US (which has generated \$1 trillion in debt) is the foundation of the house of cards. And when it collapses it will produce major retrenchment of the world economy. The US will have to generate surpluses to pay its trillion dollar debt — this means the rest of the world will lose its main market, and in an integrated world economy this means depression and stagnation. Thurow says this era of capitalism after World War II was operating with an economic locomotive to drive the world economy. The US has been that for 50 years, but it is no longer willing or able to do so. One reason he suggests is that the US doesn’t have the Cold War to force it to keep its half of the world as healthy as possible.

Finally, one interesting section of the book deals with the Mexican financial crisis of last year. It shows the domination of finance capital in the world of imperialism. Mexico’s economy by imperialist standards was relatively healthy: its international debts were not out of line according to Thurow, in fact they were lower than a lot of industrialized countries; its budget was even balanced. However the peso was overvalued (Thurow doesn’t say why, but the maneuverings of the Mexican bourgeoisie and their use of the state to maximize their plundering of the wealth would explain most of it.). This overvaluing caused its foreign exchange reserves to fall suddenly. A panic set in to get out of the peso and Mexican capital markets. The ultimate cause, according to Thurow, was in the US: because interest rates were so low here in 1992 and after, US finance capital put billions into Mexico to maximize their returns; when the overvaluing of the peso occurred, interest rates in the US were back up, so these same finance managers brought back billions, causing the foreign exchange crisis in Mexico and the subsequent panic. The IMF and the US government moved in to dictate Mexico’s economy and financial policies. They demanded fiscal austerity (on an already balanced budget), revenues from oil paid directly into New York Reserve banks, and 100% interest to consumer loans. The result, a further 33% decline in workers standards of living after a decade of rapidly falling standards, and a permanent recession with 40% loss of domestic sales and no growth seen on the horizon. (pgs 225-228) The bailout was for the finance capitalists in the US, with the Mexican people paying the bill for saving imperialist financial stability and the Mexican bourgeoisie maneuverings. These runs on currency and the consequences are not limited to IMF-dominated countries — a similar scenario happened in France in 1992.

Thurow sums up his book:

“The intrinsic problems of capitalism visible at its birth (instability, rising inequality, a lumpen proletariat) are still waiting to be solved . . .”

He presents this as a defender of the system seeking his own brand of reforms to insulate the system from these cataclysms which are coming. He leaves revolution as a solution out of the picture of course, but the book has merit in that he openly lays out some of the major contradictions in world imperialism. □

On Hyndman's book about Papua New Guinea — *Ancestral Rain Forests and the Mountain of Gold*

About the “fourth world” theory and the indigenous struggle

by Frank, Seattle

The following article is the third in a series on Papua New Guinea. The first was “In support of the Papua New Guinean people's struggles vs. environmental ruin”, and the second was “Imperialism and Papua New Guinea”. New Guinea is a large island in the Pacific Ocean, located just north of Australia. The western half is brutally occupied by Indonesia. Papua New Guinea, independent from Australia since Sept. 16, 1975, includes the eastern half of New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, the northern part of the Solomon Islands, including Bougainville, and many small offshore islands.

On Hyndman's ideological framework

The “four worlds” concept:

Marxism-Leninism and historical materialism:

Objective observation:

Sloughing over the question of imperialism

Ignoring the importance of democracy

Mystifying the Papua New Guinean state

An absurd theory regarding resource management

Distorting the Bougainville rebellion

Studying the Wopkaimin society with blinders on

A last comment on where Hyndman's reactionary
ideological stand leads

In 1994 the Australian academic David Hyndman wrote *Ancestral Rain Forests and the Mountain of Gold*. The “mountain of gold” is the site of the very large Ok Tedi multinational mining operation which has been discussed several times in the previous two articles of this series.¹ And the book is likely to be widely read because (if for no other reason) there's a broad interest among the workers, environmental activists and other progressive people in the issues it raises. These include defense of the environment from further ruin by the present world social system and supporting the struggles of indigenous peoples²

¹See *Communist Voice*, vol. 1, #2, June 1, 1995 and vol. 2, #2, March 15, 1996.

²Hyndman generally refers to the remnants of the pre-colonial or aboriginal peoples of the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, Oceania, parts of Asia, etc., as “Fourth World People” or “ancient nations”. In this article I usually refer to them as (continued...)

against the brutal capitalist destruction of what remains of their societies. But widely read or not, I think it's worthwhile to devote an article to criticizing Hyndman's book for two reasons in particular:

(1) Because there are probably no other books, recent or otherwise, which provide such a detailed study of the effects the opening of the Ok Tedi mine has had on the both the local population and the environment the book may become somewhat of a “Bible” on these and related issues. Moreover, since Hyndman is a scientist—an anthropologist of the “political ecologists” school no less—who has spent a number of years conducting field studies in Papua New Guinea (PNG) his views may be accepted by many as being especially authoritative. But I think this authoritativeness needs to be challenged for, as we shall see below, Hyndman repeatedly throws science overboard in order to bend reality to conform to preconceived ideas. Rather than being scientific he's thoroughly subjective. Such an approach can only lead those wishing to defend either the environment or the people of indigenous cultures along wrong paths.

(2) Hyndman's ideological framework—the source of these preconceptions—is essentially reactionary. He would have us withdraw from the stormy seas of class politics and hearken after the traditional societies of indigenous peoples. Unfortunately this framework is not his alone. In fact it's quite popular these days and forms the basis for many of the pacifying and opportunist political ideas which are undermining today's revolutionary movement. Moreover, the essentially reactionary nature of Hyndman's ideological stance may be missed by many for Hyndman writes in an anti-statist and “fourth world” language, a language which is commonly (and mistakenly) believed to be one of progress and even revolution—no questions asked. Furthermore, he often resorts to sneakish methods in order to defend and promote his essentially reactionary ideological framework.

That I'm criticizing *Ancestral Rain Forests and the Mountain of Gold* for these reasons does not mean that I think the book has no value. Far from it. For example, when I began this series I had not read Hyndman's study. But after having done so I find that it *confirms everything* I wrote earlier by providing many rich details regarding the Ok Tedi mining pollution

²(...continued)

“indigenous peoples” or as “peoples”. But in one sense my terminology is no better than Hyndman's. This is that any attempt to lump these peoples together tends to slough over the fact that their economic and political realities widely vary.

which I had previously been unaware of. (According to Hyndman's book, if I erred at all in my first article it was on the side of *understating* the extent of this pollution.) In my opinion the book has value as a source of information on other issues as well. These include details about the development of Ok Tedi mining consortium and its relationship with the PNG government, details on the struggles of the workers at the Ok Tedi mine, a study of what a particular traditional society near the mine was like in the 1960s and '70s and the effects the opening of the mine has had on this people (the object of his anthropological research), etc. But here (and especially in the latter) Hyndman's positive contributions begin to be seriously undermined by his attempts to fit factual information into his ideological framework. If something doesn't fit he either downplays it or just ignores it, even in cases where he himself has gone to some pains to uncover the facts. In other words he distorts the picture presented the reader. Finally, *Ancestral Rain Forests and the Mountain of Gold* takes up much more than the questions immediately surrounding "the Mountain". Hyndman also discusses the struggles of the Melanesians of West Papua against pollution by the (mainly) U.S. multinational corporation owned Freeport mine and their struggles against impoverishment and genocide by the racist, fascist and annexationist Indonesian government (a government supported by such "civilized" imperialists as those of the U.S. and Australia). He discusses the struggles of the Bougainvilleans against pollution and land expropriation by the Panguna mine, struggles which have fueled the Bougainville (North Solomons) secessionist movement. And he makes general comments on the struggles of indigenous peoples the world over. On a few of these issues he adds a new fact or two to those which are generally available from other sources. But he also omits many other important ones in order to fit everything into his ideological framework. If the reader is not aware of these he or she will be badly misled.

On Hyndman's ideological framework

The "four worlds" concept:

My purpose here is not to attack the phrase "fourth world". Nor do I advocate raking someone over the coals if they characterize today's indigenous peoples as comprising a "fourth world" (which Hyndman does over and over). Furthermore, I believe that progressive and objectively revolutionary things have been done by well-intentioned activists maintaining "fourth-worldist" ideas. For example, detailed and scientific (insofar as the issues they address) analyses of the impoverishment and ruin of indigenous peoples by expanding capitalism backed up by its political states are sometimes put forward at conferences of "fourth world" peoples, in "fourth world" publications, etc., by indigenous activists of this type. And these analyses often form the basis upon which many of the present mass struggles of indigenous peoples are being fought—

struggles which Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries unhesitatingly support. Nevertheless the "four worlds" concept is not based on a scientific appraisal of the world and is therefore not revolutionary. It points to the trees (rich and powerful "first world" countries, poor "third world" countries, "second world" countries which fit somewhere in the middle, and "fourth world nations" which are oppressed by the states of the first three "worlds") while ignoring the forest (the social system the states of the first three worlds represent). Furthermore, included in the forest it ignores is the fact that there's most often oppressed and oppressing social strata (and sometimes quite developed modern social classes, including the bourgeoisie and proletariat) within the indigenous "nations". These social forces may have common interests in fighting such things as crude genocide, but they also have fundamentally opposing interests which give rise to political contradictions on how to wage the fight on issues of common concern. Moreover, the fundamentally opposing interests give rise to opposing social movements and struggles within the society itself, some of which represent the interests of the oppressed majority and some of which represent the interests of the exploiting minority. These are the bases upon which the political contradictions over how to wage the fight on issues of common concern grow up. But the "four worlds" framework provides no real basis for siding with the oppressed against their "fourth world" oppressors. If one is trapped within it then logic says one has to support the most reactionary demands of exploiters (who quite justly—from this framework—demand support simply because they're "fourth world" people and therefore must be supported). These demands often go flatly against the interests of the majority of a particular indigenous people (their interest in protecting the environment for example) and against the interests of oppressed humanity everywhere. To do anything but support them means one has to go outside the "four worlds" framework. And for the struggles representing the interests of the masses of indigenous peoples to really advance (and alongside them, the support movement of working class and other oppressed people the world over) this concept must be gone outside of. More, this "popular" concept must be actively fought against for it's both based in and helps prop up the "acceptable" politics of today's world, politics dominated by capitalist-imperialism.

The "four worlds" concept has been around for a little more than 20 years. During this time—a time of decline, defeats, and disorganization in the mass movements of the oppressed, a time of ideological confusion, retreats and surrenders in the consciously revolutionary movement—it's been able to maintain a radical aura about it, almost religious in nature, which has generally gone unchallenged. But a review of its origins may further assist the reader in understanding that it's not such a radical or path-breaking concept after all.

The first thing which must be remembered about this concept is that it's to a certain extent an extension of the "three worlds" idea, and the Chinese revisionist "theory of three worlds" in particular. The "three worlds" idea was first popularized by the bourgeois political leaders of several newly independent Asian and African countries in the 1950s and '60s. Under it they attempted to build various alliances which would speculate on the struggles between the U.S.-led western imperialist bloc and the Soviet-led so-called "communist bloc"

to further the exploitative aims of their own domestic ruling classes. They presented themselves as a "third world" existing outside the latter two blocs. Later, in the early to mid-1970s, the revisionist "Communist" Party of China developed the "theory of three worlds" as the banner under which to attack Marxist-Leninist theory, disrupt the revolutionary movement from within, and justify forming an alliance with U.S. imperialism. This theory was based on different schema: the U.S. and U.S.S.R. comprised the "first world", the weaker imperialist powers of Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan, etc., comprised "the second world", while the other countries of Asia plus the countries of Africa, Latin America, Oceania, etc., generally comprised "the third world". And today, more than twenty years later, even the biggest imperialists and exploiters talk of "the first world", "the third world", the relationships between them, etc.

The latter should give us pause for thought, and perhaps ponder the political ramifications of the ideas which the "fourth world" concept to a certain extent extends. And from this angle a most obvious thing about the "three worlds" idea (including the Chinese revisionist "theory of three worlds") was that while purporting to give some kind of overview of world political and economic relationships it only dealt with relationships between countries. The worlds of labor and capital had been obliterated. The real worlds of class exploitation and oppression by capitalism—and resistance to these by the workers and other toilers—weren't part of the schematics. And regarding the Chinese "theory": the struggles of the proletariat and other oppressed classes and proletarian and people's revolutions weren't championed as being the path for progress—even in word, the monopoly-capitalist essence of "first world" domination was generally ignored, and capitalist exploitation and oppression in all countries which blew diplomatic kisses toward the Chinese government were covered up. One was just supposed to fall in line behind the pragmatic diplomatic maneuvering of the "third world" leaders Deng and Co. in China as they fought to increase the wealth and power of Chinese capitalism. In fact both the "three worlds" idea and the revisionist "Marxist-Leninist" "theory of three worlds" were expounded by the political representatives of growing (but weaker) national capitalist classes who were coming up in a world dominated by big capitalist-imperialist wolves (i.e., U.S. imperialism, the social-imperialists of the state-capitalist system in the former U.S.S.R., etc.) Their motive was to gain a bigger slice of the capitalist pie for their domestic capitalist classes and, if they had the strength, to become imperialists in their own right. So while they feared the class struggle of the workers and peasants at home they at the same time wanted to line them up behind them by speculating on their anti-imperialist sentiments. Hence they chastised the "first world", made demands on it, etc., but in such a way as to remove the class content of the struggle against imperialism and turn it simply into a national struggle. Further, they struggled to rig up various alliances among "third world" states (and between "the third world" and "the second world") to confront the "first world" (the superpowers). But these attempts rested on a shaky foundation. For example the economies and politicians of all these states were to greater or lesser degrees tied to, and in various ways, to greater or lesser degrees, etc., dominated by those of the rich and powerful

countries. Hence the "first world" always had a voice within the "third world" groupings—and this was usually a very big voice. Moreover, the Chinese revisionists, who represented a growing capitalism with great potential—and one which was seemingly least dominated by outsiders—reckoned that the "third world" couldn't gain the reforms of the imperialist order it wanted by taking on the rest of the capitalist world at once (including the state capitalists of the Eastern bloc). In fact it developed its whole "three worlds" theoretical schema as the basis for justifying alliances with "third world" tyrants and butchers, "civilized" imperialists of the "second world", etc., against the two superpowers of the time (the United States and the Soviet Union). Furthermore, this provided the theoretical justification for ultimately striking an alliance with U.S. imperialism (represented by the likes of Nixon and Kissinger while they still bombed Vietnam) against Soviet social-imperialism (deemed "the main danger").

This then was the historical background upon which the "four worlds" theories began to be spread in the mass movements of indigenous peoples in the 1970s. These theories were based on the truth that the struggles of the indigenous peoples were not only excluded from the "three worlds" schema but that "third world" states also oppressed the indigenous peoples. And naturally there were revolutionary activists among the indigenous peoples who had all along worked to show that this was connected to the fact that these states were the instruments of the capitalist system of production, etc. But the "four worlds" concept worked against them on several counts. Most fundamental of these was that it was a substitute schema which maintained the same old non-class approach to economics and politics. It obliterated the worlds of labor and capital in general as well as obliterating the worlds of oppressor and oppressed which most often existed within the indigenous cultures. In fact if one stayed with the schema there was no basis for opposing "fourth world" tyrants and exploiters (or would-be tyrants and exploiters) as long as they hurled some words against "the main enemy". Nevertheless, if the mass movements forced the issue that capitalism was somehow at root of the problems confronting the people (as they often did) then rather than proposing an alliance with all others exploited and oppressed by capital to overthrow it in a socialist revolution, "four worldsism" could only point toward somehow bringing back the old indigenous cultures. Having banished the forward-looking world of proletarian socialism it could only propose looking inward and backward. (This is not to say that *nothing* of value can be learned in such a search, only that the path for the liberation of the indigenous peoples can't be based on this.) Meanwhile the liberals of the imperialist world smiled on this orientation and gave it support.

So the "four worlds" concept corrected "three worldsism" in a certain way. But this correction did not represent a break with the essential ideological features of "three worldsism". Hence today it maintains certain ideological points of "three worlds" theory in a period marked by disillusionment with class struggle and revolution. Moreover, one of the factors fueling the popularity of the "four worlds" concept was that some of its main exponents began to preach in the mid-'70s that all the debates in the movement over "three worldsism", Marxism-Leninism vs. revisionism, Marxism-Leninism vs. bourgeois

liberalism, and so on, were over “other worlds” theories, “white man’s” theories, etc., and that they were therefore of no concern to “fourth world” people. (The author personally witnessed some of this preaching in the 1970s.) Such preaching didn’t really oppose the “theory of three worlds” (for example one could still hold this theory was correct in any “world” but the “fourth world”) and it was essentially a call for non-politicism and ideological retreat. Of course indigenous peoples continued to mount struggles throughout the world but, with ideological confusion giving way to wide-scale liquidationism and renegacy within the broader revolutionary movement, the indigenous activists and their supporters were left with a “four worlds” inheritance which tended to go unchallenged. Another factor fueling the popularity of the “four worlds” concept has been the support given it by various political opportunists, petty-bourgeois utopian sentimentalists, university-based bourgeois ideologues, etc., in the imperialist countries. It may in fact be much more popular in this milieu than among the masses of indigenous peoples.

This brings us back to Mr. David Hyndman, lecturer at the University of Queensland. To Hyndman “fourth world” is not a popular phrase (unscientific as it may be) he’s picked up as a convenient way of characterizing indigenous peoples. It’s a concept he fights very hard to defend in all its most negative aspects. We’ll return to this several times further along in this article.

Marxism-Leninism and historical materialism:

In writing of the Wopkaimin living around the Ok Tedi mine Hyndman says that their kinship mode of production “is not a stage of cultural or mode of production evolution”, it’s “non-capitalist rather than pre-capitalist”. Furthermore he says the Wopkaimin “are not potential capitalists waiting for their mode of production to evolve from ‘primitive communism’ to capitalism so they can have a ‘class struggle’”. Thus he reveals a sneering hatred of Marxism and of the very idea of class struggle. Moreover, he attacks the concept that modes of production (and hence the societies based on them) evolve. True, elsewhere he writes that “expansion of capitalism with colonialism and neocolonialism subordinates, utilizes, and in some cases replaces other modes of production” But how, for example, does this replacement take place? Is the previous mode of production transformed? If it’s transformed, then that implies that some evolutionary process must take place. But Hyndman is too wise for this. You won’t catch him breathing a word about transformations of societies in his book. This is because if he admitted that modes of production evolve, then the whole house of cards he so carefully constructs would come tumbling down. So instead he denies such evolution and thereby ends up in the camp of the most extreme philosophical reactionaries.

But if modes of production didn’t evolve, how is it to be explained that just a few thousand years ago neither the capitalist, nor the feudalist, nor the slave-based modes of production existed? How is it that the majority of humanity is no longer practicing kinship modes of production? Karl Marx discovered the key to answering these questions—historical materialism.

This was a integral and harmonious scientific theory which showed how, in consequence of the growth of productive forces, out of one system of social life another and higher system develops—how capitalism, for instance, grows out of feudalism. In his famous *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Frederick Engels elaborated on this as follows:

“According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production; by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other. The lower the development of labor and the more limited the amount of its products, and consequently, the more limited also the wealth of the society, the more the social order is found to be dominated by kinship groups. However, within this structure of society based on kinship groups the productivity of labor increasingly develops, and with it private property and exchange, differences of wealth, the possibility of using the labor power of others, and hence the basis of class antagonisms: new social elements, which in the course of generations strive to adapt the old social order to the new conditions, until at last their incompatibility brings about a complete upheaval. In the collision of the newly developed social classes, the old society founded on kinship groups is broken up. In its place appears a new society, with its control centered in the state, the subordinate units of which are no longer kinship associations, but local associations; a society in which the system of the family is completely dominated by the system of property, and in which there now freely develop those class antagonisms and class struggles that have hitherto formed the content of all *written* history.”³

Then according to the materialist conception of history, within the kinship mode of production such things as societal accumulation of productive experience and scientific knowledge led to new discoveries, inventions, etc., which resulted in the productivity of labor increasingly developing. The latter was the basis upon which classes and class antagonisms arose and these eventually destroyed the societies based on kinship groups. Thus we see that this conception involved both evolution and revolu-

³From the preface to the first edition of *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* in 1884.

tions. And it wasn't something which was won in a day. It was based on decades of study and investigation by Marx, Engels and others. Moreover, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (from which the above quotation was taken) was based on Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society*. The latter work was the product of 40 years work in which Morgan first studied the Iroquois and other Native American peoples, and later everything he could uncover regarding the remnants of primitive societies throughout the world. Engels held that "Morgan in his own way had discovered afresh in America the materialist conception of history discovered by Marx". In fact Morgan's discoveries had a comparative importance for anthropology as Darwin's theory had for biology—they revolutionized everything and are universally discussed in university anthropology departments even today, more than a hundred years later. Yet Hyndman rebels against historical materialism while pretending that Morgan never existed. He denies that modes of production evolve, sloughs over the fact that the kinship based societies he studies have already begun the division into classes, never deigns to consider where the capitalist mode of production came from, etc. He generally presents all societies as being static, without history, and grandly proclaims in his book: "Ethnicity over Class Formation: 'For Ne'er the Twain Shall Meet'". He thus throws out the past 150 years of development which gave anthropology a firm scientific foundation (at least in its main outlines) and returns to the old incomprehensible chaos which existed before. But he doesn't do this by openly confronting Morgan and Marx. Instead he just sneers at his own vulgar misrepresentation of their viewpoint (they would allegedly see the Wopkaimin as "potential capitalists waiting for their mode of production to evolve from 'primitive communism' to capitalism so they" could "have a 'class struggle'", etc.) So this man of "high science"—and he takes pains to establish that he's a political ecologist rather than just an ordinary anthropologist—stoops to some very low methods. Do I dare suggest that he chooses this path because he's incapable of making any scientific argumentation for his views?

Objective observation:

Hyndman criticizes J. Nash because, when writing about Bolivian tin miners, "she takes the position of a revolutionary advocate not objective observer". He doesn't say a word about the content of her book and apparently only drops her name to use as a convenient foil against which he can float another component of his ideological framework, the counterposition of revolutionary advocacy to objectivity. Of course Hyndman himself advocates ideas, this counterposition being one of them. And he obviously didn't arrive at this idea he advocates through observation of Papua New Guinean societies. No, it comes from a set of pre-existing ideas he filters his observations through, the ideological framework he uses to interpret information with, etc. These tell him that *he* can advocate (by taking the position of a counterrevolutionary advocate?) and remain an objective observer whereas a revolutionary cannot.

But this is a lot of rubbish based on an entirely false counterposition. Moreover, it's the directly linked with Hyndman's fight to deny historical materialism. And if one doesn't base themselves on this, then advocating revolution is indeed a

subjective absurdity. But to be a really revolutionary advocate (rather than a utopian sentimentalist, etc.) means that one must base themselves on objective truth and using materialist dialectics, divine the surest path toward the liberation of the oppressed. In fact one could say that the heart of Marxism-Leninism, as opposed to other political trends, is revolutionary advocacy based precisely on the results of "objective observation" of capitalist society, that is, the results of studying its economic laws and internal contradictions and how they're evolving, analyzing the logical resolution of these contradictions, studying the objective social movements, the class political tendencies and the power relations between them, etc. And a great deal of the activity of Marxist revolutionaries involves struggle to ensure there's no contradiction between "objective observation" (i.e., the product of scientific study and investigation) and what is politically advocated. (This includes theoretical work and the struggle against opportunism.)

Under the banner of "objective observation" Hyndman has banished all this from us. So where does that leave one? For one thing it leaves Hyndman bowing to the reactionary status quo. He observes the human and environmental devastation caused by the capitalist system of production but just accepts that capitalism must go on everywhere it presently exists. He observes today's states viciously oppressing indigenous peoples but just accepts that these states must continue to exist. For another thing it leaves Hyndman wandering in a "fourth world" wilderness painting most subjective pictures. But this is getting ahead of the game. I must now delve deeper into a series of issues raised by *Ancient Rain Forests and the Mountain of Gold*.

Sloughing over the question of imperialism

One of Hyndman's principal theses is that "Third World colonialism has replaced First World colonialism as the principal global force that tries to subjugate indigenous peoples and their ancient nations." And true enough, many of the states in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania brutally subjugate indigenous peoples and all too often practice genocide against them. But if one wants to write of "the principal global force" responsible for this subjugation, one should look to the world capitalist system of today. The states of the poorer and dependent countries are instruments of this system and often act as mere junior partners and chief enforcers and subjugators for the capitalists of the big imperialist states of the so-called "first world". For example, when the Papua New Guinean government sent troops to violently suppress the Bougainville Rebellion it was acting in its own political and economic interests (including getting the Panguna mine in operation again so that it could once again collect its share of the mining income). But it was also acting in the interest of the dominant mining shareholder, Australian-owned Conzinc Riotinto. And if one looks at the island of New Guinea as a whole it's very plain that the "principal global force" opening mines and gas and oil wells has its home bases in Australia, the United States,

Canada, Germany, etc. (imperialist countries all).

Independent states like that of Papua New Guinea are dominated by imperialism in complex ways (my last article began discussion of this). They act (and subjugate) in the interests of the domestic capitalist class and other exploiters, and also in the interests of the imperialist overlords. Hyndman's formulation sloughs this over. And he writes from an imperialist country (Australia) which is a big dominating force in PNG. His formulation in fact hides the oppressive and exploitative hand of the Australian and other imperialist ruling classes.

Let's now turn to one of Hyndman's observations and see if it misses anything.

He writes that "(the) island of New Guinea is dismembered between the Third World states of PNG and Indonesia" and no one could argue the island isn't divided between these two countries. But how did this division come about? To understand this one must review some of the history of colonial land-grabbing there. And if this is done, one will see that British, German, Japanese, Dutch, and Hyndman's own Australian imperialisms all made grabs for the island (or at least parts of it). Some imperialist powers replaced others as the imperialist balance of power in the world changed (often with the blessing of such international bodies as the League of Nations, the U.N., etc.) but all were only interested in strategic and economic advantages for themselves. (And in the latter regard, as early as the 1930s it was known that the western part of the island contained potentially very rich petroleum and mineral reserves). They weren't motivated by concerns about the indigenous peoples, and the hollowness of the "democratic principles" of the imperialists of Britain, Australia and the United States—as well as the hollowness of the Japanese ruling class's "Asian brotherhood" rhetoric—were exposed as they one after another refused to let the peoples of New Guinea make their own way in the world and decide their own destiny.

So this sordid history finally led to the island being divided between the Australian and Dutch colonialists in the post-World War II decades. But these were also decades in which the anti-colonial struggles were surging forward throughout Asia, Africa, Oceania, etc. Colonial powers which "dug in"—like France in Indochina and Algeria—were being defeated. In these conditions both the Australian and Dutch colonialists (under the prodding of other imperialist powers) instituted crash programs to groom independent governments which would let them maintain as many of their former colonialist prerogatives as would be possible. This would placate rising anti-colonial sentiments among the people at home and stave off the possibility of future anti-colonial rebellions on the island of New Guinea. (The latter seems to have been a more immediate prospect in the Dutch sector of the island than in the Australian.)

But the newly independent Indonesian bourgeoisie also had chauvinist designs on New Guinea. U.S. imperialism ultimately sided with the Indonesian ruling class against the Dutch ruling class, and in 1963-64 Indonesian forces violently suppressed the Melanesian independence movement and grabbed the Dutch colony on behalf of the Indonesian establishment. Since then they've launched fascist campaign after campaign to stamp out the Papuan freedom movement, killing tens of thousands of people. Nevertheless this movement continues, and I hope to discuss it more extensively in a future article.

Today the Indonesian state indeed acts as colonial overlord of half the island of New Guinea. Yet what Hyndman's observation on the "dismemberment" of the island misses is the connection of imperialism to this both historically and at this hour. Many a "First World" capitalist (particularly U.S. capitalists) is raking in the loot under the umbrella of Indonesian colonialism. And led by the United States, the vast majority of capitalist powers support the occupation of West Papua by the Indonesian militarists. Thus while in the strictest sense of the term Indonesian colonialism has replaced Dutch colonialism in West Papua, it would be wrong to miss the connection the perfumed gentlemen heading up the American, German, Australian and other multinational corporations have to this colonialism. It would be wrong to miss the connections of this to the support which the United States and other imperialist powers have given the Indonesian fascists for decades.

Ignoring the importance of democracy

We've already seen that Hyndman decries the fact that the island of New Guinea has been "dismembered" between Indonesia and PNG. He treats the latter as being equally bad "Third World states" and thereby sloughs over that the Papua New Guinean state is relatively democratic whereas the Indonesian state is fascist and expansionist. True enough, as I discussed in my last article, the PNG ruling class has been increasingly adopting reactionary measures over the past decade and some of its leading figures openly express admiration for the Indonesian militarists' "civic action". Nevertheless, it makes a great deal of difference for the Papua New Guinean village people whether they're able to wage their struggles in the present conditions of relative freedom and legality or whether they have to wage them in conditions of illegality, government-organized assassinations, bombing and strafing of villages and regions, fascist resettlement schemes, etc., etc., as the villagers of West Papua must do. Yet in his treatment of "Third World" states Hyndman everywhere ignores the crucial issue of the fight for democratic rights within the respective countries, an issue of vital concern to the indigenous peoples' movements.

Now the latter fight raises a number of issues which Hyndman would rather not discuss (and which I'll return to below) because they violate his subjective "fourth-worldist" schema and introduce dreaded materialistic conceptions. For example, in Papua New Guinea there are many peoples still more or less practicing their traditional ways of life more or less based on kinship groups. For them to wage a more effective struggle for democratic rights requires that these "ancient nations" forge some kind of fighting political unity. And Hyndman's book begrudgingly admits that they've begun to do just that. Yet by doing this they've initiated a process—alliance, confederation, etc.—which points toward the founding of a new "nation" . . . from below, so to speak. (An evolution! . . . Oh horrors!) Furthermore, for the democratic struggle of this new evolving alliance to be even more effective, poses the issue of forging

political unity with the most consistently democratic *class* being dominated by the present state—the proletariat. (Worlds! Worlds! We must only think in terms of worlds!) Furthermore, within the traditional social formations a political struggle must be waged against the undemocratic social forces, their political representatives and ideas, etc., which most often exist. (But . . . but . . . this is just too much! Now I've heard everything! Now you want to attack Fourth World People!)

Mystifying the Papua New Guinean state

Hyndman writes as follows: “The island of New Guinea is dismembered between the Third World states of PNG and Indonesia. Economic development is used to invade Melanesian indigenous nations. What is called nation-building actually becomes state expansion by nation-destroying.” But this raises some interesting questions (all of which undermine his repeated attempts to erect an impermeable wall between traditional societies practicing pre-capitalist modes of production and capitalist society and its political institutions). First among these is that the PNG state is, after all, an instrument of class rule—the rule of *Melanesian* capitalists over the masses of Melanesian toilers. 99.9% of the government functionaries, civil servants, military personnel, police, etc., of this state are native Melanesians. They come from all regions of the country (although some regions are under-represented), from many of its ethnic groups, and just a couple of decades ago *all* these people were considered indigents by the Australian colonialists. Moreover, elections have been regularly held even though democracy is restricted in the ways typical of all bourgeois democracies (and restricted still more by the high rate of illiteracy). The Papua New Guinean state isn't an implant made on the island by colonialists from across the seas but instead has its origins in (and rests on the back of) a Melanesian nation—a new and weakly formed nation to be sure, but a nation nonetheless.

How then can Hyndman write of the Papua New Guinean state as being a colonial state which dismembers the island of New Guinea (along with Indonesia)?

Well, not *all* the people living on the territory dominated by this state are completely under its thumb. There are a good number of peoples practicing pre-capitalist modes of production in societies founded on kinship groups who live fairly free of its influence and domination. They often only really come into contact with it when multinational corporations, supported by the state, want to seize land in order to open a mine for example. Hence Hyndman says the PNG state practices internal colonialism toward these peoples. (I won't quibble over the words he chooses to describe what takes place.)

Of course there are certain other sides to this picture. For example these peoples often want, even *demand*, more connection with the state, i.e., they want government medical teams sent to their areas, etc. Hence they want an expansion of the state, but in directions which are beneficial to them. But this

again raises the question of what this state is, what its origins are, etc. According to Hyndman's book it's just there, another bad “third world” state which colonizes Melanesians side by side with the fascists of Indonesia. He won't confront the fact that this state represents the interests of certain particular social classes, or social strata, which have come into being (and continue to come into being) in an increasing number of the “ancient nations” residing in the territory of PNG. These classes (or strata) represent the new capitalist mode of production—which by its very nature is driven to accumulate, expand the market, etc.—and they generally want to build up the new Melanesian nation. Hence there really is nation-building occurring (it's not just a cynical slogan), there is state expansion, and there is “nation-destroying” (i.e., a breaking up of the societies founded on kinship groups). Part of the latter is due to economic evolutionary processes and part is the result of political actions. We should certainly oppose the coercive and swindling political actions of the PNG state to deprive the traditional societies of their means of livelihood (their land) and thereby begin the ultimate destruction of their cultures. But this does not mean we should make defense of these cultures an end in itself, or raise it above everything else.

As a matter of fact in Papua New Guinea the masses of new proletarians, semi-proletarians, small farmers producing for the market, ordinary commune members, unemployed people, etc. from the old societies which are being broken up have common interests in further breaking down the barriers which existed between the old social groups. For example, the new mines and plantations throw workers together from all over the country. To defend themselves from being forced into the most slave-like conditions they must organize resistance, strikes, unions, etc. But isolated local struggles can't go very far when the class you're confronting is organized nationally and internationally. Hence nation-wide organization and struggle is called for. More, there are issues like unemployment compensation, health care, education, worker-safety laws, environmental legislation, etc., etc., which, if they're going to be won, kept, or improved upon, demand that the workers begin to come out as an organized political force in their own right. Relatively small as it is, the Papua New Guinean working class has already embarked on this road. But to do this the workers have had to overcome the old suspicions and rivalries between the kinship-based societies they originated from. They've had to put class loyalties above clan loyalties when clan leaders or “big men” either became capitalists in their own right or sided with the capitalists. They've either had to learn to speak the lingua franca of the country or otherwise find ways to communicate with each other. In short, it's been in the workers' interests to overcome or rebel against many of the defining features of the old societies, to further break down the “ancient nations” in order to begin the process of forming themselves into a class—a class which will eventually be able to lead the struggles of the vast majority of the people for a better life.

None of the above means that the working class hasn't also had an interest in carrying forward and defending democratic, egalitarian, or other traditions from the old societies. The very opposite. Nor does it mean that the workers haven't also had an interest in assisting the traditional societies remaining on the land in their struggles against the state, against the multinational

corporations, etc. (These societies often even include workers' immediate family members.) Through swindling and violence, capitalism and the PNG state are breaking up these societies and leaving the people as paupers wandering the land. But even minimal acts on the part of the workers, like sending money home, pressuring the government to supply various social services in an area, etc., inevitably accelerate internal forces which work to break down the "ancient nation", degrade its "purity", etc., from within. This kind of "nation-destroying" is not something to be feared, much as many ivory tower professors in the imperialist world tell us we should fear it. It's preparing the social forces for a revolution to overthrow capitalism and all exploitation and oppression of humans by humans.

An absurd theory regarding resource management

One of the most key theses of Hyndman's entire book is contained in the following sentence: "Nations manage resources and states consume them." (By "nations" he really only means indigenous nations, nations practicing pre-capitalist/pre-feudal modes of production—even though he generally fudges the truth on the "purity" of these modes of production among indigenous peoples in today's world.) But this ludicrously false. Primitive nations can also fail to manage resources (and consume them on a grand scale), while states very much do manage them.

By quoting many, many other anthropologists throughout his book Hyndman gives the impression that he's a man well versed in the anthropological studies of the past several decades. Moreover, he's a "political ecologist", someone who's supposed to be especially interested in the relation of human societies to nature. It's therefore rather curious that he makes no mention of studies which have shown examples of indigenous peoples (and much "purer" ones than Hyndman is dealing with today) outright failing to manage resources. So let's take two well-known examples, the pre-colonial Easter Islanders and the "Cliff Dwellers" of the North American Southwest. In the first case it's generally thought the people deforested the island to such an extent that they no longer had wood with which they could construct outrigger canoes. Thus they could neither fish in their traditional ways nor escape the island over the seas from which they had arrived. Their old culture was devastated. (It is possible that a plant disease, rather than the people just cutting down all the trees, sped the denuding of the island. But what would that mean? Since the very concept resource management means conscious intervention in natural processes, it can only mean the Easter Islanders proved incapable of this. They undoubtedly hadn't acquired the necessary scientific knowledge. At any rate, this "nation" did not manage this resource successfully.) In the second case, by watering the fragile desert soil for many generations the people so leached it that they could no longer grow the crops they depended on. In this case the people could leave, but it was for unfriendly territory—the territory dominated by people they had originally built their culture in the cliffs to defend themselves from.

So we see that although these peoples may have managed resources (and it's generally believed that the Cliff Dwellers in particular were quite good at this), their management ultimately failed them. Of course one might object that these were exceptional situations. The society was either surrounded by vast oceans or human enemies, and it was ultimately the pressure of a population which had grown too large which radically changed the environment. And Hyndman gives this view in his book when he says that the "secret of success" of the Wopkaimin has been that they have a small population which can range over a large uncontested territory. They've been able to move their gardens when the soil became depleted, etc. But continued "success" (if it's real) means population growth. What (theoretically) will happen with this people when it can no longer move its gardens fast enough, when it over-forages the forests, etc., due to population growth? Will it on its own be able to advance its agricultural science fast enough to overcome the growing crisis, or will it move into the territories of other peoples and become involved in wars over dwindling resources?

Like everything else, Hyndman treats resource management ahistorically.

When the earth was generally peopled by primitive communist societies, the human population was much smaller than it is today. In those long-ago days it's not likely that people gave too much thought about managing resources. They just didn't have to. But at some point increasing population pressures on the land, climatic changes, etc., forced people to begin to use the scientific knowledge they'd acquired through their interaction with nature (i.e., through production) to begin to manage resources. And through such management they undoubtedly developed their scientific understanding of nature still further. But division of labor, class divisions, class antagonisms, and class domination and subordination were evolving concurrently with the development of production. More and more the question of resource management was becoming a question of management for whom and toward what end?

But states too have their history. They first came into being when the class contradictions within societies became irreconcilable. They were the instruments of the rule of one class over another—today the monopoly capitalist class and its allies (smaller capitalists, etc.) over the proletariat and other oppressed classes. Hence the decisive issue in their attitude toward the management of resources was what class dominated them.

Hyndman generally ignores the latter question. There are just states. They have neither a history nor a future. They're bad (especially "third world" states), they allegedly only consume resources but don't manage them, etc. Yet everyone knows that almost every state today *does* in some way manage natural resources. Oftentimes large government departments employing hundreds of thousands of scientists, technicians, and laborers are devoted to this, oftentimes the national army is assigned to work on management projects as one of its permanent duties, etc. Hyndman, like the majority of humanity, sees that this management is failing to stop a looming ecological catastrophe for all life on planet Earth but if one accepts the framework of ideas that he lays out, then one must join him in pining after the glorified resource management by ancient nations which he presents. Smashing up the present states and overthrowing the system of production upon which they rest,

organizing new states (transitory states which will eventually disappear with the eventual disappearance of classes) to accomplish this, socialist states which fight for the interests of the proletariat and other classes which are today oppressed—this perspective is banished when he sneers at Marxism, historical materialism, evolution, etc.

Further, Hyndman's framework would banish all political thought (besides yearning after an idealized primitive society). For example, modern science is based on the capitalist system of production, but also includes within it the scientific heritage of all previous systems of production, including production by societies founded on kinship groups. This science is distorted by money, by where governments and corporations pour funds for research as well as by the strivings of individual scientists for money and fame, etc. It's also distorted by racist, chauvinist and generally arrogant attitudes toward the scientific accomplishments of others (including indigenous peoples). These are often just ignored. *But nevertheless*, even this science is telling the world that something different has to be done regarding resource management, that the entire ecosystem must be taken into account when making management decisions, that biodiversity had better be maintained, etc. Furthermore, it not only knows the immediate causes of many of today's environmental crises but also knows what should be done to overcome them. (And this is the basis upon which many of the big political fights of the environmental movement are taking place.) Everyone knows what should be done but nothing is done! "Society", e.g., the dominant monopoly capitalist class, its governments, etc., is unwilling to pour funds and human resources into resource management which would benefit society as a whole, or into scientific research directed toward really resolving environmental crises. Resources are managed, but only for the aim of maintaining profits. (For example, the American timber industry began to manage forests, i.e., by setting up environmentally destructive monocrop tree farms, once it had devastated the naturally-occurring forests of the continent. Meanwhile the U.S. government manages millions acres of timberlands on the same basic model as a welfare handout to the timber capitalists.) Environmental problems are responded to, but only when there's a crisis of profits. (For example, the silting of streams caused by the timber capitalists methods of logging destroys the naturally occurring salmon runs and thereby hurts the profits of the fishing capitalists. The state responds by limiting what the logging companies can do and funds fish hatcheries—which distort the gene-pool of salmon in such a way as to further wipe out native stocks, etc.)

The basic issue is that the dominant capitalist system of production, which is fundamentally anarchic and driven to accumulate, driven to maximize profits, etc., can't and won't seriously manage resources in such a way as to benefit society as a whole. Generally speaking, if some concern (or even the capitalists of an entire country) really attempted to do this, it would lose in its competition for a share of the market because of higher costs and rapidly go bankrupt. Of course there are a few small "green" concerns able to carve out special niches in the market place. But these only serve consumers who are capable of paying the higher prices (and willing to do it). And with the rich growing richer and the poor growing poor even in rich countries like the United States and Germany—as a result

of the fundamental economic laws of capitalist production—these niches can only remain just that. Meanwhile the state, representing the interests of the capitalist class as a whole, only mildly slaps down environmental wreckers—incestuous members of its own exclusive club—and insists on some kind of management of resources when there's a crisis which is beginning to affect the class as a whole, or when a mass movement of the people forces it to do this.

And the above poses political tasks for the exploited and oppressed people of today. Developing the environmental movement is one. (Hyndman ignores it.) Developing the movement to overthrow capitalism and thereby be in a position *to use* the existing scientific knowledge to manage resources is another. (Hyndman is flatly against such "unobjective" advocacy.) Of course a socialist society would be able to deploy resources to scientific endeavors in a way quite unlike what is done today, and it would seem that today's stock of scientific knowledge would continue to increase. Moreover, in order to unify itself and lead the other oppressed classes in revolution and the building of a new society, the proletariat must wage a fierce struggle against racism, national chauvinism, imperialist arrogance toward indigenous cultures, etc. Hence the science of a socialist society wouldn't be distorted by—be held back by—these divisive ideologies the way it is today.

Distorting the Bougainville rebellion

When Hyndman deals with the class and political realities of Papua New Guinea, the "fourth worldist", anti-statist and anti-Marxist ideological framework he's erected continually comes crashing down. But that doesn't prevent him from rushing to its rescue in ways unbecoming someone who's supposedly objective. Let's see how this is so when he attempts to deal with the Bougainville rebellion.

First of all, Hyndman admits that the capitalist mode of production spread relatively widely on Bougainville after World War II—relatively more so than it did on "mainland" Papua New Guinea. (Hyndman's phrase was turned around, there was a meeting of class formation and ethnicity.) Cash-cropping became widespread, big-men manipulated and *transformed* (a word Hyndman won't use) the old marriage and inheritance system to serve exploitative capitalist aims, etc. He says that "*Bisnis* became entirely an impersonal economic exchange of commodities for cash" and that sexual relations between men and women were monetized as well. Then, when the Panguna mine was developed beginning in the late 1960s, businesses were organized to serve the construction workers and to get small contracts associated with the mining itself.

Now any ordinary soul would conclude from all this that capitalism was uprooting the traditional system of production on the island, transforming the age-old societies, etc. The extent of this transformation, the ways it was being accomplished, etc., might be subjects upon which there were differing opinions, yet the basic facts would seem undeniable. But Hyndman crudely

attempts to muddy the waters and thereby deny what he's just admitted in two ways:

(1) He points to the *kago* movement, a movement which arose against the spread of capitalism (and especially the most degrading and exploitative features of its "culture") as early as the 1950s. Yet the existence of such a movement would only seem to prove that the capitalist system was indeed spreading and shaking up the old societies. And it's certainly not surprising that the kinship-based societies practicing traditional economies would resist being turned into wage-slaves. The whole history of the development of world capitalism has from the beginning involved a violent uprooting of the masses of people practicing pre-capitalist modes of production from the land, the literal beating them into becoming wage laborers, etc. —and the masses of people on all continents have resisted this, sometimes for decades, and sometimes for centuries. That this is occurring now in one of the last bastions of pre-capitalist societies is only a continuation of what began elsewhere many centuries ago.

(2) He asserts that the Bougainvilleans (like the Wopkaimin people around the Ok Tedi mine) weren't "proletarianized". Instead they concentrated on setting up businesses. But how could there be businesses, cash-crop plantations, etc., without exploitative social relations and wage-labor (proletarianization)? Hyndman just leaps over this question. He refuses to confront the *process* occurring before his eyes—the development of a bourgeoisie and a proletariat on Bougainville (small as both may presently be). Moreover, while on the one hand he denies proletarianization on the other hand he comments on the fact that one of the protests on Bougainville was over the fact that jobs were going to "primitives" from the Highlands of PNG! Yet a demand for jobs is only another indicator that the division of the old societies (at least some of them) into the social classes typical of the capitalist system of production (bourgeoisie and proletariat) has already begun sometime earlier.

Hyndman tries to muddy the waters on this question because he wants to have an idealized movement of idealized indigenous nations confronting "Third World" states. (Remember that according to him nations are allegedly good because they manage resources whereas states are bad because they destroy resources, and so on.) Moreover, in trying to fit the Bougainville rebellion into this ideal he continues to flagrantly ignore a number of other embarrassing contradictions of his own making as well.

For example, he begins by pointing out that "nineteen distinct languages are spoken in the Panguna socio-ecological region" and discussing what the society most affected by the opening of the mine was like before the mine opened. (Much of this is quite interesting and seems objective.) He then goes on to discuss the movements which developed against the effects of spreading capitalism, against mining pollution, against exploitation of the people by the mine-owners, for compensation, etc., and comments on how these developed into an island-wide movement which eventually led to sabotage of the mine and armed struggle against the PNG government. He says that the "*Bougainvilleans were united as a people*" and that the "BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army—Fk) took control of every district in Bougainville, set up its headquarters at the Panguna mine site and established an interim government", and he

supports the BRA. Hence nineteen "fourth world nations" united to in fact erect a *state* on the island, weakly formed as it might be. (This state was not entirely new in that it relied a good deal on the old provincial administrative structures and personnel.) But Hyndman won't admit the existence of such a state because it won't fit into the subjective framework he's erected. So he quotes Nietschman as saying "it is a nation vs state" (Bougainville = nation, PNG = state—Fk) and adds "armed conflict over autonomous control of land and resources not an insurgency to overthrow the PNG National government".

But this movement for autonomy (or secession) has a history which is a little less pure and simple than this. At times it was dominated by political personalities who themselves were members of the PNG government (or even the Australian colonial administration). They used the threat of secession to barter for a bigger share of power and funds within the PNG framework for themselves, the provincial government, and fledgling Bougainville capitalism. Prior to Papua New Guinea's independence they had organized two referendums on Bougainvillean independence, and when these failed they generally favored staying in PNG. Meanwhile a more radical tendency led by former students at the Catholic seminary continued to hold up the banner of independence. They generally favored a political union with the newly-independent Solomons Islands but sought to achieve this by peaceful means. But in neither case was there any idea of having a nation without a state. (And it might be important to note here that historically Bougainville had had a disproportionate number of people in the military and police of the PNG state, a disproportionate number of people who became foremen and bosses in capitalist concerns, and members in the PNG cabinet from the very beginning. Moreover, it had built up a relatively powerful provincial government. The state "tradition" was perhaps the most powerful of any region in Papua New Guinea.) Furthermore, when the PNG state resorted to reactionary violence against this movement the people fought back. By all accounts the overwhelming majority now favored independence and they "voted" by giving support to the quickly-organized Bougainville Liberation Army. We've already discussed the fact that this army represented a new state in the making but now let's turn to the question of what class interests it was fighting for.

The Bougainville rebellion is most often characterized as being a rebellion of "native landowners" against the PNG government-supported infringements and pollution of the Panguna mine. But these landowners divide into two. On one hand there are the kinship-based societies striving to continue to survive on the basis of subsistence agriculture, hunting and gathering, etc. (Hyndman almost exclusively discusses these.) On the other hand there are capitalist landowners employing wage-labor on plantations. The expansion of mining and pollution has infringed on their cash-cropping activities and thrown them into conflict with the mineowners as well. (Hyndman barely mentions these gentlemen.) And in their public pronouncements the BLA leaders often emphasize their sympathy for these capitalists and others. They often tie freedom to the fact that the domestic business sector is oppressed by the PNG government. Moreover, some forces in the movement have stressed Christian appeals and others have worked to inflame feelings of ethnic superiority over Highlanders from the

main island. Thus the question of what political orientation should be followed in the movement, what demands should be pressed, etc., is posed. Hyndman “bravely” lauds the armed struggle but not so bravely runs away from the crucial questions of how to build this movement in such a way as to ensure that it will ultimately benefit the masses of people. What resources on Bougainville are going to be controlled, and by whom?

Studying the Wopkaimin society with blinders on

The Wopkaimin are a distinct people who have historically lived in the area which is now being occupied and polluted by the Ok Tedi mine. They’ve apparently always been a small people (less than a thousand in number) who historically lived by farming, fishing, hunting and gathering. Hyndman says taro farming was the mainstay of their food production and that the key to their success had been a small population ranging over a large area. This was a society founded on kinship groups and an example of a “great-man” society as contrasted to the “big-man” societies common in much of the rest of the Highlands (and the rest of Papua New Guinea). In other words class division and the subordination of women to the male sex had not gone as far as it had in those societies. (And here it might be noted that on some of the islands which are now part of PNG a kind of royal family system of exploitation of labor seems to have already come into being quite some time before the arrival of the colonialists from the West. Primitive communism was something of the distant past in these societies.)

Now Hyndman’s study of the Wopkaimin is in many regards detailed and fascinating. Yet in what one might think would be the most objective or scientific section of his entire book (i.e., the section which is based on his own field studies and observations) we find that he’s once again wildly subjective. He raises the slogan (as the title of a chapter) “Ethnicity over Class Formation: ‘For Ne’er the Twain Shall Meet’” yet his own study shows classes forming and reforming among the Wopkaimin. Furthermore, his ideological framework leads him to support a reactionary socio-political movement among the Wopkaimin even though the information he himself provides shows there is no justification for doing this. I’ll next take up these issues.

(1) Mining development went through three stages, each of which profoundly affected Wopkaimin society and *began* the process of its forming into modern social classes.

(a.) First was the period of the Kennecott prospecting base camp (1968-75). At its height this camp employed 45 Europeans and 500 Papua New Guineans (mostly from the Southern Highlands) who conducted a lot of test drilling. A few Wopkaimin men were also hired by Kennecott. This stage ended when the Samore government [of PNG] withdrew Kennecott’s prospecting authority after the company refused to budge in negotiations over how to divide mining profits with the PNG

government.

Hyndman says that, during this first stage, use of Western clothing, tobacco, steel axes and knives and Melanesian Pidgin English rapidly spread among the Wopkaimin. They were also struck by epidemics of fatal diseases (influenza and whooping cough) which were brought to the area from the outside and which may have killed as many as 10% of the people. Hyndman sums these years up by saying that by 1975 “Except for a few laborers at Tabubil, all the Wopkaimin were home practicing kinship relations of production in their ancestral rain forests”.

Now when he examines such things as the way the Wopkaimin produce and divide food, or the changes in their health during the period under consideration, or other questions, Hyndman is a meticulous and exciting researcher who seems to leave few stones unturned. But this summation, along with his general treatment of the first period, have some big boulders sitting right in the middle of them which he won’t go near. One example of this is that here, as well as in his treatment of a later period, he notes that “a few”—or “a handful”, etc.—Wopkaimin continued to be wage-workers. But he tends to just relegate them to town or to the mine and leave them there. How the fact that some members of the society now were wage-workers with money to spend affected the rest of the society is lightly dealt with. Yet this obviously had some profound affects. Moreover, just five years later the *entire society* abandoned its traditional way of life in order to move near the mine to get jobs (or set up small businesses). Another example is that he lightly dismisses the fact that the Wopkaimin now had steel axes and knives. But this could only increase the productivity of the labor of the society. And such increases in productivity of labor affect the relations between the people engaged in production, affect the relations of domination and subordination which exist, etc. Moreover, Hyndman discusses at some length how in Wopkaimin society the women were subordinated to men (a subject we’ll return to shortly). Yet he refuses to consider the effects the introduction of new tools would have on the division of labor, or on the stature of women, or on what was “tradition” in the “ancestral rain forest”. A third example is that Hyndman doesn’t touch the issue that the Wopkaimin could now much more easily communicate with the rest of the world, be influenced by its ideas, etc. But this was one of the factors which led to the Wopkaimin rapidly joining with the rest of the Ok Mountain peoples in earth-shaking socio-political movements during the next few years.

(b.) The second period was the early ‘80s. During this time the multinational Bechtel corporation built the infrastructure for the mine which the Broken Hill Proprietary-AMOCO-KE-PNG Government consortium opened in 1981-82. The Wopkaimin moved to roadside villages near the mine and for the first time overt nuclear families appeared as men and women took up residence together. (Previously men and women had lived in separate houses.) But while 60% of the men became wage workers (generally unskilled and often working 60 hours a week), the women no longer produced food as farmers because gardening had been abandoned. Hyndman writes that this “led to a reduction of women’s social status and a stronger identification and dependence of wives on husbands”. Moreover: “Wopkaimin men began economically manipulating the

marriage system as a form of *bisnis*.” “Marriage manipulation as a form of *bisnis* devalued women in the eyes of their men and themselves. . . . Adultery and prostitution became easier as women’s sexuality was alienated from themselves and controlled by men.” Meanwhile some Wopkaimin men also engaged in other trades besides the buying and selling of women and set up their businesses in the villages (a fact which Hyndman generally downplays).

Thus we see that in the early '80s the majority of Wopkaimin men were workers while a few had become small businessmen (or petty capitalists). Moreover, the oppressed women were either dependent on proletarian or petty capitalist husbands. Hence ethnicity and class formation had definitely “met”. But this period was relatively short-lived.

(c.) The third period is the later '80s and '90s. During this time mining construction ends and employment of Wopkaimin men in or around the mine plummets (from 60% in 1982 to 5% in 1987). The mass of Wopkaimin return to farming, fishing, hunting and gathering using the old division of labor (men clear the garden patches which the women then farm, men exclusively hunt, etc.) and dividing the social products in the traditional ways (men are allowed to eat both the farm produce and meat from hunting while the women are banned from eating this meat, etc.). Hyndman tries to give the impression that the Wopkaimin just went back to the hills as if nothing had happened in the previous years while repeatedly discussing evidence which flatly contradicts this.

The first point in this regard is that some men continued to be proletarians (5% or so) while others continued to be small businessmen (he gives no figure). Moreover, even though the mine fired people, the town (Tabubil) had grown to 10,000 and some people either got jobs or set up businesses there.

The second point is that the people fought for both jobs and business opportunities once the layoffs had begun. They only returned to their old way of life (at least most of them, and with some very important changes) when this failed.

The third point is that the Wopkaimin continued to participate in the cash economy. Not only were there a few men still working but the people also received a little compensation money. Hyndman comments on this as follows: “The masculine sphere of production was no longer based on wage earning, but rather on control over beer and compensation money.”

The fourth point is that rather than growing taro the society now grew sweet potatoes as the main crop. But sweet potatoes used up the soil faster and this, coupled with the mining pollution and the taking up of land by settlements, roads, etc., would inevitably mean the impoverishment of the people if they continued to have to exist exclusively in their old ways, using their old methods, etc.

The fifth point is that the consciousness of people had changed, an issue which I’ll touch on next.

In the 1980s the Wopkaimin workers had actively joined with other workers at the mine site in several protests, work stoppages and a strike. The issues ranged from discrimination, to safety, to wages and housing costs, and the strike (in 1988) was only suppressed after the government flew in the police and army. It seems fair to conclude from this that a section of Wopkaimin were gaining the rudiments of proletarian class

consciousness, were beginning to see their fates as being tied to those of the rest of the Papua New Guinean working class. Meanwhile Wopkaimin people participated in a series of protests and demonstrations (including road blockades which shut down the mine) which were organized in the area at large. A study of the demands raised at these actions seems to indicate that they reflected the aspirations of the two classes the Wopkaimin were dividing into, i.e., on the one hand there were demands for jobs while on the other hand there were demands for business contracts with the mine. Furthermore, as it became clear that only a few Wopkaimin were going to be given long-term employment, the demands for jobs receded while the demands for business spin-offs and business loans (including for businesses employing wage-labor) became more elaborate. (This seems to have continued in the '90s, a time in which Hyndman infers that the issue of modern classes forming among the Wopkaimin is dead and buried history.) The protests in the area pressed other demands than those mentioned so far as well. Most notable among these were demands for higher compensation payments and demands that the pollution be stopped. But in raising these demands the Wopkaimin found that they were marching shoulder to shoulder with people of other ethnic groups in the area, and with people from the provincial capital and the rest of the country. They were joining in one of the powerful political currents in the country.

So it seems to me that ethnicity and class formation (to again follow Hyndman’s formulation of the issue) did meet in Wopkaimin society in the '70s and '80s. That it didn’t go farther has little to do with any ethnic peculiarities of the Wopkaimin and everything to do with the way capitalism is expanding in Papua New Guinea (i.e., thousands of laborers are employed doing the preparatory work for opening a mine which will then employ only a few hundred workers.) Moreover, in general, capitalism is displacing people from the land in PNG much faster than it provides jobs. (My last article discussed some of the main ways this was being done.) In general, it’s creating a “surplus population” which can’t return to the land and live in the old ways for a number of reasons (both legal ones and because the land won’t provide enough bounty). Hence when big projects are started, people come from all over the country (and especially the Highlands) to compete with the people of the local area for jobs. Moreover, rather than train Papua New Guineans for skilled jobs, the multinational corporations favor bringing already-trained workers from Asia to fill these positions. In these conditions what was particular about the Wopkaimin was that there was land available for them to return to once the construction boom in the area was over. Thus the destruction of the Wopkaimin’s old mode of production was only partial and the division of the society into the modern social classes has only started.

(2) Among the Mountain Ok peoples (of which the Wopkaimin are just one) the exclusively male Afek cult ruled society. All men past a certain age were initiated into it, and according to the ancient beliefs male performance of rituals, maintenance of sacred relics and sacrifice of animals insured prosperity for all. Furthermore, the elaborate prohibitions of the cult specified how food was produced and consumed by gender. (Women

couldn't eat meat, for example, and this hurt their health.) In fact it was through the Afek cult that the division of labor was enforced and women subordinated. But this cult and its age-old customs had little to say on what to do in the rapidly changing world of the 1970s, a world where a money economy was developing on all sides, a world where prospectors scoured the mountains and set up towns, etc. And it was in these conditions that the *rebaibalist* (revivalist) movement exploded beginning in 1977.

This movement started among the northern Ok Tedi peoples (where Catholicism was weak and Baptist missionaries had been working for a couple decades). It began as a Christian religious hysteria (ecstatic seizures, prophecy, mass fainting, speaking in tongues, etc.) but soon developed into a social movement to radically overturn the old customs. (Hyndman characterizes it as a movement to "destroy the past".) It became a revolt against the Afek cult, and women were particularly zealous in the attack. Cult houses were burned to the ground and sacred relics were destroyed. Food prohibitions and male control of meat through the Afek cult complex were ended. Men's houses were abandoned in favor of nuclear families working, residing and consuming together. Hyndman says the gender roles were altered with women acquiring more equal status.

The Afek cult was thrown into complete crisis by these events as well as by the fact the peoples like the Wopkaimin had in the early '80s abandoned the old ways of living, taken construction jobs, etc. Nevertheless, within a few years it was able to launch a countermovement among the southern Ok Mountain peoples (where Catholicism was stronger). This was the "movement for cultural reanimation", or "reanimationist" movement, and according to Hyndman its aim was to "progress with the past" rather than to "destroy the past". It gained momentum with the rising unemployment of the mid-'80s. The Wopkaimin and others couldn't live on promises, and the Afek cult leaders began to actively organize people to move back to the old hamlets (called decentralization) and resume agriculture, fishing, and hunting and gathering in order to eat. Eventually most of the Wopkaimin did do this. It seems they had no other choice. But self-sufficiency didn't require that they also once again submit to the authority of the Afek cult, that women should accept second-class citizenship, etc. Nevertheless, the Afek cult did win out and those things have occurred (temporarily at least).

Hyndman supports the victory of the reanimationists (the Afek cult) over the *rebaibalists* without ever directly saying he favors one movement over the other. Instead he depends on long and elaborate opinions on how Afek traditions gave the Wopkaimin a sense of place or self-identity in a rapidly changing world in order to sway his readers. (Meanwhile he devotes very little space to explaining the attraction of *rebaibalism*.) Moreover, he implies that the reanimationist movement should be supported because it provides a basis (cultural identity through the Afek cult) for making demands on the mining consortium and government. But this leaves an important question unanswered. For example, *both* the reanimationists and the *rebaibalists* raised political demands for the establishment of a pan-*min* province in the region around the Ok Tedi mine (*min* is a suffix meaning people which is used throughout the area). In both cases the movement was aimed at

getting more control over the mining and better compensation. Hyndman explains in some detail how the reanimationists played on Afek cult traditions to develop a movement behind this demand but he is silent on how the *rebaibalists* were able to build their movement (and he stresses the two movements were mutually exclusive). Nevertheless some glue did hold the latter movement together, its members had a self-identity, some sense of place, some cultural awareness, etc., too. Hyndman is frightened by this glue, whatever it is, frightened by this new self-identity and sense of place and so on. It doesn't fit into his ideas of how the world must work. So instead he justifies mysticism, male cultism and subordination of women from his ivory tower, for the noblest of reasons of course!

I should add that another of the reasons Hyndman gives to sway us toward supporting the reanimated Afek tradition is that it re-established "patterns of hamlet sharing". The problem is that this sharing was directed by the male cult and worked to benefit men over women. According to the Afek ideology, "sharing" meant "we men share this meat and no woman shall have any". Thus the sharing wasn't among all the members of the hamlet at all. Some had sharing-rights which were consciously denied others. And this but sets the ideological stage for further restrictions upon who is allowed to share in society's wealth. For there to be a real communist sharing of the products of society's labor, such things as this "pattern of hamlet sharing" must actively be fought against.

A last comment on where Hyndman's reactionary ideological stand leads

We've seen that Hyndman thinks "revolutionary advocacy" is a terrible thing. Such advocacy supposedly can't be objective. This doesn't mean that our man of letters doesn't find ways to advocate ideas however. He just quotes others giving the views he wishes to advocate, biases his presentation of information in such a way that the reader can only come to conclusions he wishes them to come to, etc. He sneakishly advocates, advocates by implication, etc. And when all is said and done, the only thing Hyndman really advocates in his entire book (using the methods just discussed of course) is that his readers should support the struggles of indigenous peoples. He's hardly taking a new or courageous stand with this meek and indirect advocacy—and all he really advocates is that we tail after whatever may be happening at the moment—and it's a big step *backwards* when compared to the stand of those many advocates who not only starkly lay bare the oppression and genocide wrought on indigenous peoples but who also struggle to lay bare their capitalist roots and courageously ponder the implications of this. Moreover, it's a *conscious step backwards* for Hyndman is aware that these advocates exist. (And among them are the Marxists whom Hyndman so demagogically abuses.) Nevertheless Hyndman's advocacy is something, and no democratic-minded person—let alone revolutionary—could oppose it. The problem is that at every turn Hyndman's reactionary ideological

framework rises up against the kind of politics which are needed to really support the indigenous peoples' struggles. Let's review some ways this is so.

The first point is that Hyndman *generally* pretends that there's no issue of *what struggles?* to support among indigenous peoples. "Nations" are just supposed to be good because they manage resources and the like. So let's take some recent news from Alaska to illustrate where this leads in practice. Among Native Alaskans there's a large movement to defend the environment, including a movement to not allow an expansion of oil drilling in the Arctic. But in late 1995 three Native Alaska corporations (representing both Inuits and Indians) filed a law suit demanding that the Clinton administration open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. If this were done, they said, the Alaska Natives would benefit from oil royalties, etc. And they even claimed to have the support of most Native Alaskans. Meanwhile the Republican congress had been pushing for the same measure. So does Hyndman advocate we support this lawsuit? Or does he advocate support for the Gwich'in Athabaskans opposing it? What is the progressive stand? His whole general approach inevitably leads one to such impasses. They can be resolved by opportunistically "going with the flow", i.e., supporting whomever seems to have the majority at the moment (which often boils down to supporting those with the most money to pour into a propaganda machine), or they can be resolved on the basis of some other principles.

The second point is that in practice Hyndman advocates tailing after *reactionary* trends among traditional peoples. We've seen that in his book he supported the reanimationists and opposed the *rebaibalists* among the Wopkaimin. So in practice he did deal with the question of "what struggles?" but he did this surreptitiously. And the principles he used, when all is said and done, led him to support a return to the "traditional" oppression of women among the Wopkaimin even though the women (with the support of many men) were rebelling against it. This was justified on the grounds of achieving the "higher" objectives of "retain(ing) a sense of place and cultural identity", returning to a kinship mode of production which would "manage resources", etc. Freedom from oppression had to take a back seat to these things. Meanwhile he ignored that the *rebaibalist* movement also gave its members a sense of place, a cultural identity, etc. (although new and different ones), while also raising demands for a pan-*min* province which would attempt to manage resources.

The third point is Hyndman consciously sloughs over the question of growing class divisions within indigenous societies and even polemicizes against the very idea that this can occur. But such opposing movements as the pro- and anti-drilling political forces among Native Alaskans, for example, are most

fundamentally rooted in evolving social classes which stand opposed to each other. Thus Hyndman's framework works to undermine efforts by activists in the support movement to rally to the defense of the oppressed people in indigenous societies and oppose indigenous oppressors (who exploit the masses for "traditional" personal, family and clan gain—often within the framework of a co-operative or Native corporation—and ultimately for a *class* gain at the expense of society). Moreover, the exploiting social strata are those most want to sell out the fundamental interests of the masses, including protecting natural resources, in order to further enrich themselves. And activists in the Native American movement in the U.S., for example, have had a wealth of experience in dealing with this social stratum for many, many years. Hyndman's silence on this issue is really *more* than another big step backward. It's a conscious denial that there's even a question of opposing sell-outs in the indigenous peoples' movements. Yet how can one support a movement without opposing those who act to sell it out?

The fourth point is that Hyndman's attempts to prettify the traditional societies play into the hands of (and fuel) utopian and other negative currents in the support movement.

The world revolutionary movement is going through tough times marked by great ideological confusion and disorganization, and this includes the movement to support indigenous people's struggles. In these conditions many activists have become demoralized and given up their former attempts to deal with the world in a militantly scientific and materialist manner. Many have given up political activism altogether, while others indulge in utopian daydreams of humanity returning to an idealized primitive communism where the people live as one with nature, natural resources aren't plundered and destroyed, etc. And we could all allegedly return to this Eden if everyone would just grasp the wisdom of the indigenous peoples of today, learn from the shamans, generally adopt mysticism and their way of life. Furthermore, because of the weakness of the revolutionary movement, the dearth of militantly scientific analysis of the causes of environmental crises, racial oppression, continuing wars in much of the world, continuing genocide against indigenous peoples, etc., many young people who *are not* tired or demoralized, and who seek something better in the world than the bleak status quo, are drawn into this kind of utopianism as well. By casting aspersions on all states—which must include revolutionary socialist states (which can only be temporary states if they're truly socialist) welded together to fight for the interests of the masses of people (including their interests in protecting and nurturing the environment) after the present capitalist states have been smashed by revolutionary struggles—and by glorifying the indigenous cultures Hyndman fuels these diversionary politics. □

On the workers' movement

Lessons of the Staley struggle

by Jack Hill, *Chicago Workers' Voice*

The following article is from the "Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal" #10, May 31, 1996, and was accompanied by another article by Jack entitled "For your reference: History of the Staley struggle". We strongly disagree with the honeyed approach of this article, which in the guise of praising the workers ends up reconciling with the reformist union bureaucrats. Jack Hill's articles are criticized elsewhere in this issue of Communist Voice in the articles "How not to learn from the Staley struggle" and "A comment on the Staley lockout and proletarian reorganization: On Jack Hill's empty optimism regarding the accomplishments of the Staley struggle".

As one of the active members of the Chicago Staley Workers' Solidarity Committee, I would like to try to draw a few conclusions from this struggle. The Staley workers showed remarkable strength and heroism in the face of the powerful forces arrayed against them. I think they accomplished a lot in terms of building consciousness across the country of the possibility and necessity of workers resisting.

The Staley struggle was organized following the more militant and activist politics represented by Ray Rogers and Jerry Tucker. The struggle went farther than most of the trade union struggles that are under the thumb of the mainstream union bureaucrats. However, this struggle also shows that this politics has serious flaws. In my article on the history of the Staley struggle, I go more into some of the main ways this strategy and tactics developed at Staley.

Achievements

Many of the Staley workers hoped that their struggle would contribute to the revitalization of the "labor movement" in the U.S. They wanted to build a practice of workers supporting each others' struggles. They also wanted to encourage other workers to stand up to the employers' concessions demands. They were against the capitulationist attitude of the mainstream leadership of the AFL-CIO.

The Staley workers definitely shook up the labor movement. Despite being ignored and shunned by the "respectable" mainstream trade union leadership, they got the word out all across the country and even internationally. Gradually their pressure forced a few cracks in the boycott of their struggle by the bigshot hacks. Even Lane Kirkland was forced to make a token appearance in Decatur. Pressure from the Staley workers was certainly a part of the force which pushed Kirkland out and led

to the election of Sweeney as head of the AFL-CIO. Unfortunately, in spite of the hopes of some of the Staley workers, Sweeney was of no more use to the struggling workers than Kirkland had been.

To some extent the mainstream AFL-CIO hacks have been exposed as obstacles in our struggle. This certainly should be listed as an accomplishment of this struggle.

A big plus from this struggle is that the workers' movement has gained committed activists from the ranks of the Staley workers. Two and a half years of traveling the country organizing support for their struggle has converted a number of the rank and file workers into experienced and dedicated worker activists.

Why did they lose?

It was a big disappointment to all of us who had put so much time and energy into the Staley struggle when the majority of the workers decided to give up the struggle as lost. The question on everybody's mind has been — was some particular mistake made in strategy or tactics or was it just that the multinational corporation was too big and rich and strong?

Certainly weighing heavily against the chances of the Staley workers were the huge resources and strength of this monopoly capitalist corporation. Tate and Lyle has plants all over the world producing sugar and sweeteners from cane sugar, beet sugar, as well as corn. These monopolists were prepared to lose a lot of money on the Decatur plant to break the strength of the union and impose their terms on the workers. Particularly difficult for the workers was the ability of Tate and Lyle to get favorable coverage day after day in the mass media in the Decatur area. Then of course all the organs of government were at the disposal of Tate and Lyle. This went to the extent of Decatur city government forcing the workers to take down the picket shelters they had built. The hard-nosed response of Pepsi Co. to the yearlong campaign to force them to cut off Staley as a supplier also hurt the workers' morale.

Given the strength of the capitalist side no one can say for sure that even the strongest, best planned and militant strategy would have won. However, if the full potential strength of the unionized workers in Illinois and the nearby midwestern states could have been concentrated on Staley in Decatur, one would think that this should be enough to force Tate and Lyle to back down. One of the biggest reasons this never happened was the outright betrayal of the Staley workers by the international leadership of their union and by the leadership of the AFL-CIO. The Staley workers were shunned by the bureaucrats running the AFL-CIO. They were afraid of the independence and

militancy of the Staley workers. The biggest strength workers have is their numbers, but the AFL-CIO leadership was not willing to mobilize numbers for the Staley workers, and no other force has enough influence to organize truly huge numbers of workers.

The Staley local responded to the backstabbing from the official leadership of the AFL-CIO by avoiding getting into an open fight with them. The leadership of the local and particularly local president, Dave Watts, insisted on and fought for limiting tactics to what would not irrevocably alienate the bigshots of the "labor movement". Everybody knew that the Decatur Staley local was being stiffed by the hacks, but there was reluctance to get in a sharp and direct fight with them.

The Staley workers were very resourceful in their ability to maneuver around this hostility and back-stabbing by linking with many local unions and with all sorts of political activists. Several big rallies were held in Decatur with several thousand workers each time. The Staley worker activists also raised very substantial sums of money from individual locals, from all sorts of fund raisers, from the fund raisers of the Chicago SWSC [Staley Workers' Solidarity Committee] and other committees. This material and moral support enabled them to hang on for as long as they did. This mobilization, however, was only a fraction of the potential power of the workers' movement.

After the fight was lost, the last issue of the "War Zone Report" bitterly denounced the leadership of the UPIU and the AFL-CIO. I think that the bitterness of the Staley worker activists against these fatcat bureaucrats is quite just. I just think that they should not have held their tongues on this for so long. I also think that the struggle suffered because, at least partly to avoid alienating these bureaucrats, the Staley local leadership limited their tactics.

What could have been done differently?

First off it needs to be said straight up that different tactics would not automatically have had any better results as far as the Staley struggle is concerned. The basic limitations of the situation — the strength of Tate and Lyle and the relative weakness of the workers' movement can't be changed that easily. With the greatest tactics in the world, the Staley workers could very well have come out the same.

On the other hand, the Staley workers were not predetermined automatically to lose. It is also possible that the struggle could have got so hot that Tate and Lyle would have had to back down. Or the Staley workers might have still lost but in a way which would have helped made the issues even clearer to rank and file workers struggling to build their movement.

That said, there are two areas particularly that I would have liked to see different tactics by the Staley workers. One is on the need to develop the fight right at the plant gates, at the point of production. The other is on the need to make a clearer break with the soldout bureaucrats who are stifling the real workers' movement in this country.

I feel efforts should have been made to organize mass picketing at the plant gates to keep out the scabs and stop the movement of scab product. As long as production continued at the Decatur plant, Tate and Lyle had a big advantage over the

workers they had locked out. To effectively challenge this situation, a substantial number of Staley workers would have had to make up their minds that they didn't care what the legalities of the situation were, the scabs had to be stopped. Make no doubt about it, such tactics would bring the workers into confrontation with the police. The 760 Staley workers by themselves could not hope to really keep the plant shut down for long. But I believe that if the Staley workers had taken up such tactics, a substantial number of other workers could have been organized to participate along side them.

Some Staley workers did want to make some kind of a stand at the plant gates. Some activists estimated the maybe 100 or even more Staley workers would be willing to demonstrate at the plant gates and risk arrest. However, the leadership of the local, especially Dave Watts, didn't want to do this, and no one else in the local organized a sharp fight in favor of such tactics. Dave Watts still maintains that the bulk of the local membership was not willing to do this, that almost no one was ready to risk losing their rights to severance and pension benefits, and that the international would not have lifted a finger to help those who were arrested even in a peaceful act of civil disobedience. The end result was that few of the Staley workers were ready to step across the line of legality. Some members of the Chicago SWSC spent a lot of time in Decatur talking with Staley worker activists and this is also their assessment of the Staley workers' general state of mind.

However, I should point out that Staley workers were prominent among those on the front line confronting the police on June 25, 1994, alongside Cat workers and activists from Chicago and elsewhere. Especially in the period right after the police attack on the demonstration that day, the potential was there to mobilize large concentrations at the plant gates. Failure to grasp this chance was probably one of the big factors which started the Staley struggle down the road to defeat.

The strategy of corporate campaign is mixed up in the issue of whether and how to wage a fight at the plant gates. Ray Rogers pushed a line that workers don't need to strike or fight at the plant gates, that an energetic enough corporate campaign can force a company to give in. Maybe so, in some cases, but that certainly is not true in general and it definitely was not true for Staley. I think a more correct view is that corporate campaigns can be used as supplementary tactics in connection with mass struggle at the point of production. These campaigns can be a way of mobilizing supporters in other cities and applying additional pressure on the target corporation. They are practical ways that workers can get involved in supporting a struggle hundreds or thousands of miles away, besides just sending money and expressions of support.

The early campaigns that Ray Rogers organized against State Farm Insurance and Domino sugar never seemed to go anywhere. However, after Ray Rogers was out of the picture, the Staley workers did hit on a pretty good strategy of targeting beverage companies which purchased Staley product. Beer and soft drink companies are particularly concerned with their public images. They have huge advertizing budgets, and they fight hard for percentage points of market share. The victory in getting Miller to drop Staley gave the workers some hope and was a genuine blow to Staley's bottom line. Although Pepsi played hard ass, they may have been just at the point of crack-

ing. They were clearly worried about their public image after a year of attacks even by the relatively small resources the Staley supporters could mobilize. If the AFL-CIO had really applied serious resources to making Pepsi a shunned product in union households all across the U.S., Pepsi probably would have caved in.

My conclusions on the role of corporate campaigns in the Staley struggle are

1) The struggle suffered from the view that boycott campaigns were an effective substitute for struggle at the plant gates.

2) Nevertheless, mobilizing supporters to participate in the boycott campaigns, especially the Miller and Pepsi campaigns helped in building a concrete workers' solidarity movement.

3) For a boycott campaign to be effective, the target has to be very carefully picked both for vulnerability and for logical connection to the issue at hand. Furthermore, in this type of campaign the issue of tactics also comes up. It is not effective to just pass out flyers without combining this with mass demonstrations and other innovative tactics which can attract wider public attention. It should be noted that neither Dave Watts nor any other local Staley leaders ever objected to the mass demonstrations and civil disobedience type actions which the Chicago SWSC carried out in the Miller and Pepsi campaigns. The UPIU international leaders certainly did, but they had no jurisdiction over us.

Would the Staley struggle have suffered if the Staley local had openly denounced the state and national leadership of the AFL-CIO and the international leadership of their own union, the UPIU (United Paperworkers International Union), for undermining their struggle and turning a cold shoulder to them? Everybody close to the struggle knew this was happening. But the leaders of the Staley local didn't make a public issue of this. The hope was always there that with just the right combination of pressure the national AFL-CIO could be made to provide some serious resources to help the Staley workers.

Late in the struggle, Dan Lane was allowed to speak to the national AFL-CIO convention while on his hunger strike. This was after the delegation of Decatur rank and file had harassed the Bal Harbour winter AFL-CIO meeting and Sweeney was trying to win the President's post by appearing more struggle oriented than Donahue. Then, to get Dan to give up his hunger strike, Sweeney even personally promised him that the national AFL-CIO would provide about 40 organizers including 12 full time ones to push the Pepsi campaign. All along the carrot of the full resources of the national AFL-CIO always seemed to be hanging out there just out of reach. "Just behave yourselves and we'll give you all this stuff." This was the implied and sometimes stated message from the bureaucrats to the Staley workers. The threat was that if they didn't "behave" they could be drummed out of the official "labor movement" as splitters and maybe even suffer a concerted campaign against their struggle.

Although the Staley workers never got anything but pats on the back and pocket change from the state or national AFL-CIO, they did get quite a lot of donations from scattered union

locals around the country. If things had gotten really tense with the national AFL-CIO, one could easily expect that a lot of pressure would be applied to these locals to cut off Staley. The fact that there is no big independent movement which could replace such potential resources placed the Staley local in a bind.

However, the fate of the Staley workers confirms again that the official so-called "labor movement" led by the soldout bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO is a positive hindrance to the workers' struggle. We have to go about building a new fighting workers' movement in this country independent of all these traitors. We are not going to get anywhere trying to force these committed enemies of the workers' struggle to do right. We do need to wage the fight inside the existing structures of the "labor movement", but this present structure is totally unfit for serious struggle. The Staley workers' struggle has taught this lesson to some activists and workers. But I would have preferred clearer and earlier statements on what is wrong with the "official" leadership of the trade unions in this country. Especially I don't think it was a good idea to put on the speaking platform at rallies labor bigshots who weren't doing anything for the Staley workers.

Conclusions

The Staley struggle represents the best that the tactics of the more activist, liberal, or left wing sections of the trade union movement can achieve at this time. This one local of 760 members mobilized support all across the country, shook up the national leadership of the AFL-CIO, and gave an education in class struggle to countless workers. The problems with this strategy are that it avoids confronting continued production in the plant with scab labor and avoids directly exposing and confronting the AFL-CIO leadership and the international union leadership who are hamstringing the struggle. I think you have to do these things for the sake of the immediate struggle and for the sake of building a national workers' movement which can really start to change things in this country.

Honor the Sacrifices of the Staley Workers

The Staley workers willing went forth to very unequal battle against a monster corporation knowing that basically it was the 760 of them against all that money and power. They stuck it out for two and a half years through huge financial, emotional, and physical hardships. They did get substantial help from groups of activists in Chicago, St. Louis, Madison, and other places. Many hard lessons have been learned about the nature of the "labor movement" in this country. Ties have been formed among worker activists which can help build a real workers' movement. Without the determination of the Staley rank and file to stand up for themselves and try to build their fight broadly and as well as they knew how, none of this could have happened. These workers have paid a heavy price for their boldness; they deserve the utmost respect. □

A comment on the Staley lockout, and the struggle for proletarian reorganization:

On Jack Hill's empty optimism regarding the accomplishments of the Staley struggle

by Joseph Green, Detroit

This article also appeared on e-mail "to all" as Detroit #113, July 3, 1996.

Jack Hill (whose former pen name was Oleg) has written two articles summing up the Staley workers' strike/lockout in the Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal #10 of May 31 and has circulated them on e-mail.¹ They give some interesting information about the Staley struggle. But notable in these articles is the empty optimism about the supposed accomplishments of the Staley workers' struggle. He has to admit of course that this strike was lost. (When Staley locked out its workers, the struggle basically turned into a strike.) But was this loss a setback to the development of the strike movement? If we believe Jack, not at all. According to Jack:

* The struggle "definitely shook up the labor movement" (although it never even reached the point where its organizers would proudly proclaim it as a strike, and it was instead a show case for "corporate campaign" tactics).

* The struggle helped push "Kirkland out and led to the election of Sweeney as head of the AFL-CIO" (although Jack admits that this was of no use to the workers).

* The struggle "to some extent" exposed "the mainstream AFL-CIO hacks" as obstacles to the struggle (although Jack admits that one of the "serious flaws" in the strike was that it avoided "directly exposing and confronting the AFL-CIO leadership and the international union leadership").

* The struggle was particularly important in "convert(ing) a number of the rank and file workers into experienced and dedicated worker activists" (but Jack can't point to any new rank-and-file organization independent of the reformists, and he won't even discuss the views of these new worker activists).

* The struggle popularized mass tactics and "accomplished a lot in terms of building consciousness across the country of the possibility and necessity of workers resisting" (although Jack admits that one of the "serious flaws" in the struggle was that it "avoid(ed) confronting continued production in the plant").

* Jack presents the struggle as something essentially different from and superior to the other strikes that have occurred—for example, Jack is excited that the local union leadership welcomed the "communists and socialists" of the Chicago Staley Workers Solidarity Committee.

The workers need the truth

Jack thinks that all this praise of the struggle must be said, or else one is spitting at the heroism and sacrifices of the Staley workers. He thinks that, to honor their struggle, one must sugarcoat its outcome. I think the opposite—to honor the Staley workers and show true solidarity with them, one must look the truth in the face:

* The struggle, despite enthusiastic support from other workers, failed: the Staley workers voted out a reformist union local leader and voted in a capitulationist one, and then voted to return to work with a miserable contract, not much better than what they were offered at the start.

* The struggle did not shake up the labor movement, but followed the same pattern as other recent major strikes of staying within the narrow limits placed on them by the reformist trade union leaders and, for instance, not seeking to close down the struck plants.

* The local left in Chicago—in particular the Chicago Staley Workers Solidarity Committee—in the main followed a reformist policy and went along with the "serious flaws" in the struggle.

* The sabotage of the Staley struggle by the top AFL-CIO leaders was not exposed, as the local union leaders—while angry at the foot-dragging and pressure from the AFL-CIO—kept silent until after the struggle was lost.

The only way to respect the workers is to tell them the truth. This takes steadfastness and courage, and if the left is going to ask the workers to show staunch courage against the capitalists, it had better set an example by displaying some courage itself.

In the long run, it is invigorating—not demoralizing—to look the truth in the face. After all, if the Staley struggle had accomplished all the things that Jack thought it did, it's hard to understand why it failed. The hard facts must be brought out—only this will really help strike activists become "experienced and dedicated worker activists".

Jack however has a different view. He believes it demoralizes the workers to tell them the truth. If only Jack presents the present movement as going upward, ever upward (in the Chicago area, at least), then the workers presumably won't notice the steady decline of the movement, a decline which has not yet been stemmed.

Of course in some situations revolutionaries do have a more positive assessment of events than reformists. The revolutionary communists see the long-range pattern of development, and they judge the movement by different standards than the reformists. The reformists tend to be horrified whenever a struggle becomes sharp, whereas the revolutionaries laud the development of a sharp class struggle. However, it is not a stereotyped pattern good for all times and places that revolutionaries say

¹See elsewhere in this issue of *Communist Voice* for one of Jack Hill's articles, namely, "Lessons of the Staley struggle".

that the struggle has really accomplished a lot, while the reformists are full of gloom. In fact, in many situations the reformists and capitulationists gloss over the difficulties and present the situation as just fine, while it is the revolutionaries who warn of the depth of the crisis and of the need for new and decisive measures. The reformists for example are adjusting to the present neo-conservative atmosphere and presenting the present-day disorganization, meekness, and the lack of struggle as an advance over the past. This is a method they use to smother the struggle. Thus, in one strike after another, the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats try to smother militancy by assuring the workers that “corporate campaigns”, legal maneuvers, and begging hat in hand are all that is necessary. The reformist labor officials keep insisting that the strike is going ever so well, that the capitalists are losing so much money, or that the politicians are just about to interfere if only the workers vote for the right candidates, right up to the moment that the strike is lost. *Jack goes these reformist union officials one better, and insists—even after it has been lost—that the Staley struggle went ever so well.*

The truth is that the Staley struggle did not break out of the pattern of other recent strikes. There may be good reasons why the Staley workers were not in a position to do so. And the Staley workers are not to blame for the harsh situation confronting the workers’ movement today, but rather are victims of a situation which they fought to a certain extent and which is oppressing them and destroying their working and living conditions. It is not the mass of workers who are responsible for the capitulationist policy of the trade union bureaucrats. But the workers must be told the truth: the Staley struggle was waged on the old lines. As a result, despite the sound and fury, it precisely did not shake up the labor movement; it did not expose the policy of the AFL-CIO; and it did not encourage other workers to blockade struck factories. The biggest mass actions at Staley, including the demonstration of June 25, 1994 on the first anniversary of the lockout, did not blockade the struck factory, and the widely-circulated video of that demonstration promoted anything but blocking the factory. The problem was not, as Oleg has it, that there were some flaws in the struggle, but that the struggle was run from beginning to end along reformist lines, and the workers and the CSWSC [Chicago Staley Workers’ Solidarity Committee] never broke out of this pattern.

Jack Hill’s critique

Mind you, Jack has some differences from the local union leaders and even some of his friends in the CSWSC:

- * He recognizes that one of the key issues in the defeat of the strike was the failure to attempt to close down the plant (although he also thinks that the struggle might have been just on the verge of winning anyway).

- * He thinks the workers should try to devise better “corporate campaign” strategy than the union leaders and reformist activists—and he seems to believe all the union gossip about the great success of these tactics with “Pepsi”. Supposedly, if only the workers hadn’t settled, Pepsi was on the point of forcing Staley to agree to better terms.

- * He thinks that one can replace the “labor movement” by

a “workers’ movement” if only one breaks with “the AFL-CIO leadership and the international union leadership who are hamstringing the struggle”. Thus he looks towards various reformist union locals (which he refrains from characterizing as “reformist”) and other reformists as the base of a supposedly “independent” workers’ movement. He is excited by the action of certain union locals in providing material and moral aid for the Staley struggle and regards this as a sign of the development of an independent workers’ movement.

Jack’s critique is partly correct and partly reformist. It is correct that a key issue was to seek to close down the plant, and it is correct that the top union leaders played a disgusting role. But Jack also has trouble departing from the reformist AFL-CIO strategy for strikes. Thus Jack—having noted that “corporate campaigns” can be “supplementary tactics”—is far too enthusiastic about these campaigns and ends up promoting illusions about them. He is susceptible to the reformist rumors about how wonderful they are. Indeed, while he says that they cannot be an “effective” substitute for “struggle at the plant gates”, he also says that the “corporate campaign” would probably have brought Staley to its knees if only the “AFL-CIO had really applied serious resources” to it. He doesn’t notice that, if the “corporate campaign” itself would have sufficed, then this goes against his critique that such a campaign was no substitute for shutting down Staley.

Moreover, Jack’s idea of uniting everyone simply against the top union leaders is a reformist illusion. It ignores that the capitulationist trend doesn’t just consist of the top leaders in the AFL-CIO, but is a political and ideological trend comprising local leaders as well, even those who do wage some type of strike struggle, as the Staley local leaders did.

Indeed, Jack’s critique of the AFL-CIO top leaders hardly extends beyond the fact that they didn’t apply “serious resources” to the struggle and they sought to squash the struggle. He has a hard time dealing with the actual type of struggle that the AFL-CIO leadership wants to organize, and often pretends that differences among reformist union leaders on the details of their common strategy, and on their assessment of a particular struggle, are differences between the trend of capitulation and the independent trend of struggle. Thus Jack criticizes targeting the “corporate campaign” against State Farm Insurance and Domino sugar as bad tactics, and he attributes this to Ray Rogers and the “corporate campaign” strategy. But when he likes the “corporate campaign” he paints it as almost opposed to the AFL-CIO, for example, writing that it was “the Staley workers [who] did hit on a pretty good strategy of targeting beverage companies which purchased Staley’s product.”

If Jack’s main criticism of the AFL-CIO is that it didn’t donate resources to the Staley struggle, he praises extravagantly locals that did. As soon as a local union donates some money and endorses a struggle, Jack has a hard time seeing it as being part of a reformist trend.

Jack’s articles present the pattern that the difference between the good and bad trade union leaders is whether they give a struggle some material and moral support, or whether they boycott it. He doesn’t contrast reformism to the line of class struggle, but simply capitulation to struggle. The pattern is something like: the bad international leaders sellout the struggle,

while many good local leaders, the leftists, and the workers fight, although sometimes there are flaws in the way they fight. This pattern seems at first sight to fit the Staley struggle, since the top AFL-CIO leaders stabbed it in the back. Nevertheless, a look at other struggles, and a closer look at the Staley struggle, show that this viewpoint is mistaken.

For example, take the question of the “corporate campaign” that was used at Staley. It’s not that the top AFL-CIO leaders always sabotage “corporate campaigns” while the locals and the left carry them out. On the contrary, the AFL-CIO promotes “corporate campaigns”. It’s not that the AFL-CIO opposes all “in-plant resistance” and the good local leaders carry them out. On the contrary, the AFL-CIO, in seeking alternatives to strikes, has looked at “in-plant” tactics as well as “corporate campaigns”. It’s not that the AFL-CIO opposes “civil disobedience” actions, while only the “communists and socialists” of the CSWSC carry them out, but various officials from international unions or the AFL-CIO promote “civil disobedience” as an alternative to workers’ blockading plants. It’s not that the AFL-CIO wants to avoid strikes, while the local Staley leaders looked towards a strike, but the local leaders were agreed with the AFL-CIO in seeking alternatives to a strike. No doubt, the AFL-CIO is stodgy, and it’s not hard for activists to carry out “corporate campaigns” and “civil disobedience” with more flair and daring. But a strategy that doesn’t go beyond simply outdoing the AFL-CIO leadership at its own game is doomed to failure.

What has to be built up among the rank and file?

But let’s return to the issue of the mass struggle, which Jack wants. Now it is true that one of the key issues in the Staley lockout—as in the Detroit newspaper strike, and other recent strikes—is whether the workers seek to close down the struck or locked-out plant. But Jack never asks what type of organization and what type of trend would have to be built up among the workers to help them break out of the capitulationist tactics forced on them. It’s not enough to simply hope against hope that eventually someone will seek to shut down a struck plant. And it’s positively harmful to promote hopes that various union locals will somehow spontaneously become militant. One has to work to organize an oppositional trend that will serve as a core to mobilize the mass of workers to carry out mass tactics. This is what Jack stays away from doing.

Jack is a member of the *Chicago Workers’ Voice* group, which regards itself as communist. Does this mean that Jack is working to develop communist organization in the workers’ movement? Not at all. Jack doesn’t see any such role for the CWV group. Jack seems to regard it—as other members of the CWV also do—simply as a cheering squad for the mass struggle and for the general left. He only promotes that he participated in the Staley struggle as a member of the Chicago Staley Workers Solidarity Committee (CSWSC). His articles on the Staley struggle were in the *Chicago Workers’ Voice Theoretical Journal*, as I mentioned at the start of my comments. But even this journal itself only promotes Jack as a general activist of the struggle, and doesn’t promote the activity of the *Chicago Workers’ Voice* group. It seems that the CWV doesn’t seek to

develop an anti-revisionist communist trend in the movement, but insofar as the CWV connects with various movements, its members simply merge with different left groups.

And with respect to the CSWSC, Jack doesn’t say who was in it. He doesn’t say which left groups or trends were in it, and what they did. Were there reformist trends inside the CSWSC? Were there trends which basically supported the AFL-CIO strategy but simply wanted to carry it out in a militant way? Jack disagrees at one point with an assessment by some activists of the CSWSC, who, he seems to say, agreed with the views of the local union leadership against mass action at the plant gates, but Jack doesn’t discuss whether the stand of these CSWSC activists gave rise to any dissatisfaction within the CSWSC or was in fact the general stand of the CSWSC. Nevertheless, the CSWSC was, for him, the organization of the “socialists and communists” in the struggle.

Indeed, Jack doesn’t even discuss the agitation that the CSWSC and the CWV carried out during the Staley struggle, what it aimed at, and whether anyone listened to it. He is enthusiastic about “civil disobedience” actions in “corporate campaigns”, but he closes his eyes to an assessment of the agitation of the “communists and socialists”.

The CSWSC

But there’s a lot to consider about the role of the CSWSC. If one puts together bits and pieces from Jack’s own account, one finds out:

- * The CSWSC members most connected to the Staley workers, the ones who Jack says “spent a lot of time in Decatur talking with Staley worker activists”, seem to have agreed with the local union leaders in opposing mass action at the plant gates.

- * The CSWSC mainly carried out support work for the local union.

- * And the CSWSC was quite excited about the “corporate campaigns”.

Jack may be critical of the stand of some CSWSC members in opposing militancy, but he is generally enthusiastic about the work of the CSWSC and presents it in a wonderful light. He has no perspective of what activists should have done to change the CSWSC, or whether it is realistic to expect general coalitions of the left to revitalize the workers’ movement, etc. He just goes with the flow.

He is especially enthusiastic about the CSWSC’s “civil disobedience” inside the corporate campaigns. They may perhaps have been praiseworthy, but CD’s do not take the “corporate campaign” outside the reformist strategy. The CD’s may show that the CSWSC was more active than the union leaders in this struggle, but it doesn’t show that the CSWSC had a fundamentally different strategy than these leaders. Various reformist union leaders organize “civil disobedience” as their chosen form of mass action. In the Detroit newspaper strike, the union leaders have promoted CD’s as an alternative to militant mass action. At the height of the struggle, the workers took the occasion of a mass action organized at the plant gate by the union leaders—indeed, mainly by the international union leaders—to go beyond what the union leaders wanted and to actually block the distribution of the Sunday issue of the paper and bottle

it up inside the production plant. The plan of the international union at this action was to wage CD's. The union leaders have repeatedly put forward all sorts of civil disobedience actions and minor actions as the alternative to actually bottling up the newspapers at the production plant.

The reformist local leaders and the left

Thus it has a strange ring when Jack boasts about the good relations between the local union leaders and the left. Why shouldn't there have been good relations if the CSWSC was mainly subservient to the reformist trade union leaders? Should the goal of "communists and socialists" be to cement good ties with the reformists or should they seek to build up an independent workers' movement although that will mean struggle against reformism?

But Jack enthuses that "In contrast to some other struggles, such as some of the Cat locals, the Staley local never seemed to object to leftists distributing socialist or communist literature at their events or to socialists and communists participating in the support committees." But did these "socialists and communists" promote any work to develop an independent trend? Who were they (i.e., what trend were they, not what was everyone's name), and did they carry out consistent denunciation of the betrayal by the international leaders? Did they argue for a different policy than that of the local union leaders? Or did they mainly just back the reformist policy of the trade union leaders, and carry it out more actively and militantly?

Jack apparently promotes the good relations with the left as proof of

- * the supposedly special nature of the Staley local union leaders (despite their tactical errors); and

- * a sign that the local unions—if emancipated from the internationals—can form the base of the "workers movement" with which he hopes to replace the "labor movement".

In fact, the Staley union leaders don't appear that different from reformist activists elsewhere. In the Detroit newspaper strike too, the union leaders only denounced the "left" when it advocated a policy that the leaders weren't too fond of. If there was such excellent relations between the CSWSC and the union local in Staley, even though the union leaders harbored hopes in the AFL-CIO to the very end and insisted on a reformist strategy, it suggests that the CSWSC centered its attention on maintaining these relations to the exclusion of advocating an independent stand.

And Jack's hopes about the union locals show the limit of his "socialist and communist" stand. It extends no further than the action of various union locals today. When the Marxist-Leninist Party was alive, Jack took part in its work to develop a communist trend among the workers. Having given up on this attempt to organize a truly independent trend, he now puts his hopes on union locals in general, and on a general mixture of all the left in broad coalitions that are unable to stand against the dominant reformist ideas of the time.

Last year I pointed out that the *CWV* has replaced the idea of working to build up a revolutionary anti-revisionist trend with simply floating in the left. Jack Hill's articles on the Staley

lockout show this in full detail. Jack—having become demoralized with the idea of independent communist activity in the economic struggle or in the left movement in general—now closes his eyes to the trends. If he doesn't notice the different trends in the CSWSC—Trotskyists, reformists, etc.—then presumably the CSWSC can simply be regarded as the "left" and as "communists and socialists". If he doesn't characterize the stands of the union officials and refrains from telling the reader what groupings and trends they belong to, then presumably we can ignore this and just put our hopes in "locals" breaking away from the "internationals".

Indeed Jack's articles are notable for their lack of characterization of the political trends in the struggle. There are some good things and some bad things, some things he likes and some things he doesn't. But he doesn't present that political trends and political differences have much to do with it. He pictures the bad international leaders, the good workers, and the good left, and he describes the local union officials as sort of good but making some bad mistakes. His picture is basically: there are those for action and those against action. So, in essence, he calls for uniting everyone who is for action against the bad leaders of the international unions and the AFL-CIO. But this is an impotent call, which will never suffice to build an independent workers' movement, since the reformist leaders do, in general, carry out a certain sort of action.

Jack's refusal to deal with the issue of trends means that he doesn't tell the working class what is really going on in the union movement, nor does he tell it what the real situation in the left is. He simply crosses his fingers and hopes that there will be more militancy in the future.

The "labor movement" vs. the "workers' movement"

Jack of course regards himself as a real revolutionary. He would even do away with the "labor movement" of the present and replace it with the "working class movement". Is Jack really going to agitate among the workers "down with the labor movement"? Somehow, I doubt it. He has a bit too much good sense for this. But he makes much of the distinction between the "labor movement" and the "working class movement" is order to look real radical and so that the reader will overlook the fact that he doesn't put forward tasks needed to build up a revolutionary trend among the workers.

And what is this "labor movement" that Jack opposes. He says that "the official so-called 'labor movement' led by the soldout bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO is a positive hindrance". But Jack clearly doesn't believe that the local unions that gave material and moral support to the Staley workers were a hindrance, and he praises the actions of the local Staley union leaders as a major factor in uniting the workers for the struggle ahead. So for all his shouting about the "labor movement", he doesn't include the local unions and the local bureaucrats in this "labor movement". For him, this so-called "labor movement" is just another name for the top leaders of the international unions and the officers of the national AFL-CIO. Jack doesn't seem to have grasped that the reformist stand of the AFL-CIO isn't just a matter of a few bad apples at the top, but is reflected at all levels throughout the pro-capitalist unions.

So it turns out that Jack's articles not only describe some aspects of the Staley lockout, but they also reflect the reformist sickness afflicting most of the left today. They show his reluctance to look straight in the face of the present disorganization of the strike struggles and of the left activists. And it shows his replacement of the hard work of building a revolutionary communist trend with sighing after any bit of militancy that shows up here or there.

Today the working class struggle faces disorganization. There is an organizational and ideological crisis facing all organizations claiming to speak in the name of the proletariat, from trade unions to political groups. This has left the working class in a weak position with respect to the economic offensive of the bourgeoisie. In the U.S., fewer and fewer workers are in unions, and the unions are dominated by a pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy that strives to keep any struggle within bounds. Although the trade union leadership has sought to avoid struggle, the harsh concessions and cutbacks being forced on the workers have resulted in a number of struggles: at Caterpillar, at Staley, at the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*, at Boeing, etc. Many key strikes have been lost, and there are a certain common features that appear:

- * A labor union leadership seeking alternatives to strikes, and—during strikes—seeking to keep mass actions within narrow limits.

- * Some dissident lower-level labor union officials have opposed the most capitulationist policies of the higher officials, but have nevertheless refused to tell the workers the truth about the labor union bureaucracy and have themselves sought to keep the workers away from big mass confrontations.

- * The left-wing organizations have in the main created

illusions about what can be expected from the present labor unions and their officialdom.

These features can be seen in the Staley lockout, in which the workers held out courageously but lost. The strategy of the union officials—whether international or local—was to find an alternative to going on strike. Jack himself seems to have had some expectations about this strategy. While he says that there should have been mass actions at the plant designed to stop production, he also praises excessively every alternative to a strike that the union leaders tried. And he never even raises the issue of trying to organize an independent trend among the workers.

The only way forward is to strive to develop a new revolutionary trend among the working class. This requires a thorough and fearless critique of the dominant reformist ideas of the groups involved in struggle. But Jack would center such criticism simply on the idea that one should be involved in the struggle and be militant. Jack is so anxious to avoid criticism of any action that he ends up, half the time, apologizing for the reformists at the head of such actions. What is needed is to build up proletarian organization that has a truly independent stand, but Jack closes his eyes to this. He even ignores his own organization (the *Chicago Workers' Voice*) and instead hails as a new rebirth the solidarity actions of leaders of local unions and the most ordinary actions in the workers' movement (work-to-rules, "in-plant" actions, etc.). What is needed is telling the truth about the present stagnation in the movement, but Jack revels in the great accomplishments of the Staley lockout and the CSWSC. So Jack's articles on the Staley lockout amount to glorifying the present stagnation instead of rallying activists against it. □

How not to learn from the Staley struggle

by Mark, Detroit

The struggle of the Staley workers has been given a good deal of attention by left-wing activists. The struggle was marked by heroic sacrifices made by the Staley workers and was supported by other sections of workers and political activists. But the struggle was defeated and the workers forced to accept bitter concessions demanded by the greedy corporation. Jack Hill, of the *Chicago Workers' Voice (CWV)* group, was one of the solidarity activists who has written on what he considers to be the lessons of the strike. In the publication *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal #10* of May 31, 1996, Hill (who previously wrote under the name Oleg) provides a summation which is a great disservice to activists who really want to learn something from this bitter defeat.¹

Hiding the lessons of a setback

Hill doesn't want the workers to feel that their struggle was futile. That is understandable. Workers learn the lessons of the class struggle not only in victory but also through setbacks. But Hill treats the workers like children who cannot face the truth about their struggle. He thinks the only way to prevent the workers and activists from being demoralized over the defeat is to pretend that the struggle represented a major advance over the bankrupt policies of the AFL-CIO bureaucrats. Hill is wrong about this. Indeed, Hill himself frankly admits that policies of the union officials of the Staley local of the UPIU (Paperworkers) dominated the struggle. Does Hill contend that the local bureaucrats broke free from the bonds of the national bureaucrats? Even though he implies this, he himself admits "the leadership of the local and particularly local president, Dave Watts, insisted on and fought for limiting tactics to what would not irrevocably alienate the bigshots of the 'labor movement'."² But if the workers were kept under the thumb of the local union leaders and these local officials confined the struggle to tactics that would not antagonize the top AFL-CIO officials very much, then there was nothing that different about the Staley struggle from numerous other battles workers have waged against their employers in recent years. For Hill to dress this up as "independence and militancy" which "frightened" the AFL-CIO heads, as going "farther than most of the trade union struggles that are under the thumb of the mainstream union bureaucrats", is to hide these facts behind glorious, but empty, phrases.³

Rather, the failure of the Staley struggle to break free of the restrictive AFL-CIO framework was what undermined the

struggle. But Hill obscures this. Having admitted the local union leaders were reluctant to defy the national sellouts, he does not see this as discrediting the policy of the Staley local officials very much. Instead, Hill goes into raptures about one after another of the activities of the Staley local bureaucrats that were *within the limits tolerable to the top labor sellouts*. Thus, he writes approvingly of how well the UPIU local bureaucrats mobilized the workers, introduced democratic practices, educated the workers, favored "ingenious" methods of struggle and angered the top bureaucrats. And though the struggle was unable to break free of the basic AFL-CIO policy Hill proclaims the Staley conflict a model of class struggle that other workers should emulate. For Hill, since there was bickering between the local and national bureaucrats, that is cause enough to celebrate.

Hill holds that it was a mere "mistake" that the local UPIU leaders opposed the militant sentiments of the workers and pushed pacifist tactics. And such "mistakes" (which "only" killed the struggle!) don't prevent him from presenting the local misleaders in a good light. In fact, it is the very tactics of the UPIU local officials that Hill touts as the big triumphs of the Staley struggle. Hill is opposed to getting demoralized all right. He opposes getting demoralized about the stifling framework imposed on the workers by the AFL-CIO hierarchy!

Hill loves to talk about how he will stand for the class struggle until his dying day. But hiding the truth about the Staley struggle is betrayal of the workers. Instead of encouraging the workers to break free from the restraints of the union bureaucracy, he finds excuses and invents apologies for the local bureaucrats. Instead of emphasizing how a failure to go beyond the reformist local officials led to the strangling of the struggle, Hill feeds the workers fairy tales about how exceptionally militant their struggle was compared to other strike struggles.

Hill similarly avoids a serious analysis of the Staley solidarity group he belonged to, the Chicago Staley Workers' Solidarity Committee. When he refers to his solidarity group it is merely to show what good deeds they did. He crows about how the CSWSC allegedly was so defiant of the top national union misleaders while falling silent on the fact that the CSWSC was dominated by groups that placed their faith in the local union bureaucrats. Hill goes so far as to imply that all the groups in CSWSC are socialists and communists. Mr. Hill evidently thinks the various trotskyite, semi-trotskyite and revisionist views that dominated the CSWSC and led it to become cheerleaders for the Staley local bureaucrats, are compatible with a genuine communist stand!

Mr. Hill says the problem with strikes today is there is no big independent class movement to assist them. But where is this powerful class movement to arise from? No one can conjure up a general upsurge in the mass movement. But at whatever level the workers struggle exists, it is the task of revolutionary activists to provide a clear class outlook. Hill talks about the great class movement that will save the day, but shrinks from bringing the clarity to the workers necessary for such an

¹See Jack Hill's "Lessons of the Staley struggle" reprinted elsewhere in this issue of the *Communist Voice*.

²*Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal #10*, May 31, 1996, p.8.

³*Ibid.*, p.7.

independent movement. Nor does Hill ask what sort of trend must be established to provide a clear revolutionary outlook for the workers' movement. Hill does not want to face up to the task of building an anti-revisionist communist trend. Such a trend can only be built in the course of struggle against the phony "socialists" and "communists" that Hill has blended in with. But Hill recoils from this. The only trends he considers important to fight in the workers' movement is that of the worst sellout AFL-CIO bosses. The idea that the workers need a trend not only against the naked labor traitors but against the reformist opponents of the worst bureaucrats and the phony "socialist" and "communist" trends disappears from Hill's view.

Portraying the local bureaucrats as the alternative to the top sellouts

According to Jack Hill, the fact that the local bureaucrats have "flaws" like clamping down on militancy is no big deal. Hill will talk about the need to break with the trade union bureaucracy, but it is clear he is talking only about the national officers of the AFL-CIO and the top leaders of particular unions. In his article's "conclusions", for instance, he divides the forces involved in the U.S. trade union movement into merely two parts.⁴ On the one hand there is "the AFL-CIO leadership and the international union leadership who are hamstringing the struggle." And on the other hand "the tactics of the more activist, liberal, or left wing sections of the trade union movement." In the later category, Hill casually lumps together the local bureaucrats, workers who demanded more militant policies than the local bureaucrats, workers who were misled by the local bureaucrats, and all the left-wing forces in the trade union movement regardless of what policy they advocate, which includes the supposedly Marxist-Leninist *Chicago Workers' Voice* group represented by Hill. Hill promotes this whole trend as the force that "gave an education in class struggle to countless workers."

But what did the supposed "class struggle" education consist of? Hill says that the dominant trend in the Staley struggle "avoids confronting continued production in the plant with scab labor and avoids directly exposing and confronting the AFL-CIO leadership . . ." Who considers the "class struggle" as avoiding militant battles and avoiding confronting the top AFL-CIO hacks? Why it is none other than the local bureaucrats.

Hill wishes the local AFL-CIO leaders would not be so subservient to the authorities and the top union leaders and be more militant. But he rationalizes that this is the "best that the tactics" anyone in "the trade union movement can achieve at this time." Really? But if this is the best tactics that anyone can put forward at this time, then what grounds are there for criticizing the AFL-CIO policy at the national or local levels? If a more militant policy than the local bureaucrats advocate is really not something the trade union movement can achieve at this time, then Hill's own criticisms of the way the struggle was handled are just empty phrasemongering.

But in point of fact, more militant tactics than advocated by

the Staley local leadership are definitely "achievable" today. At a certain point in the ongoing Detroit newspaper strike, for instance, militant activists and workers shut down the plant and fought off the police sent to break the picket lines. This was done in defiance of the national and local union leaders who wanted the picket lines to adopt ineffectual civil disobedience tactics. In the Detroit newspaper strike, even some mild-mannered dissident union officials in the Unity-Victory Caucus have been campaigning for resuming mass picketing at the plant gates.⁵ True, like Watts and co., these dissidents are afraid to antagonize the mainstream bureaucrats. But these bureaucrats have gone farther than Dave Watts who opposed plant-gate actions according to Hill. This only further shows the absurdity of Hill's definition of what the most radical possible position is today. By defining the Staley tactics as the height of what's "achievable" today, Hill does not even rise to the level of some dissident union officials.

Of course Hill at times argues that the Staley workers were not willing to undertake such bold actions. But if that was the case, Hill should stop pretending that the Staley workers were pathbreakers. It is one thing to sympathize with the pressures the Staley workers were under. It is quite another to ignore that these pressures were not overcome. More importantly, even if the workers were hesitant to take up confrontational tactics, this in no way absolves the local bureaucrats. Really leading the workers would have at least involved trying to develop enthusiasm for militant tactics, a defiant attitude against anyone getting in the way of this, and a class outlook. But the so-called "class struggle" education of the Staley local officials opposed this.

Mr. Hill's idea of class education

Hill seems to feel that the type of education offered by the reformist union officialdom is a boon to the workers, however. In his article "History of the Staley Struggle" he uncritically writes: "The union local leadership decided to carry out a big campaign of education of the rank and file. Labor studies professionals, for example were brought in to educate not just the local leaders but all of the rank and file. A lot of attention was paid to trying to get nearly all the members involved."⁶

Educate them in what? Get them involved in what? Hill finds it convenient to not mention such little details. For Hill, it's better to keep things vague and just let the activists imagine this was some kind of wonderful effort. Perhaps it wouldn't look so glorious if the worker activists understood that the "labor studies professionals" are those who help train aspiring bureaucrats, advise them on legal matters, do research for them, etc. For instance, the UAW's national headquarters in Detroit, Solidarity House, is occupied by an small army of these types. They also inhabit the university labor relations departments. They may have some information that militant workers

⁵For more on the stand of the Unity-Victory Caucus, see the article "Tough road ahead for striking Detroit newspaper workers" in *Communist Voice*, vol.2, #1, pp.17-18.

⁶CWVTJ #10, p.11.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.10.

can make use of for their own ends. But their overall educational mission is to convince the workers to keep their struggle from becoming too confrontational, to promote faith in “the system” and to undercut the radicalization of the workers. In short, the education by the labor studies professionals are the illnesses which afflicted the Staley struggle. And note Hill’s emphasis on not only getting the bureaucrats involved, but also getting the rank-and-file enslaved to such a bankrupt education. If Hill is concerned about the state of the workers’ movement, he should be encouraging *contempt* for the stand of the labor professionals, not applaud their spreading influence.

Hill considers involving all the workers in such rot a sign of how democratic Dave Watts and co. are. Lovely, isn’t it? The Staley local bureaucrats, by Hill’s own account, *stifled* workers who wanted to be militant, *imposed* cooperation with the police *against the will of the workers*, and *opposed* any motion that would upset the top AFL-CIO brass. The local leaders were democratic — so long as the workers did not seriously oppose them!

Excuses, excuses and more excuses

Even when Hill is critical of some aspect of the local union bureaucrats, he finds ways to tone down the criticism with one apology after another. Should the Dave Watts leadership be criticized for opposing plant actions? Yes, says Hill — but hastens to cite the opinion of Watts and some solidarity activists who agree with him that the workers were unwilling to fight. Was it harmful for the UPIU local officers to not expose the top union officials? Why yes, says Hill — but don’t forget that attacking the top leaders might make them pressure some union locals from giving financial aid and there’s no independent movement to give aid. Incidentally, it’s noticeable that while Hill rightly considers the failure of the top lords of the AFL-CIO to provide much funding to be a reason to condemn them and be independent of them, he passes no similar judgment on local leaders who would end their financial aid to the Staley local under the pressure of the top bureaucrats. The Staley local officials and the allied local leaders are portrayed only as victims of the big ogres, as if their own efforts to restrict the workers had little to do with their own role in the union apparatus and their overall support for the general AFL-CIO outlook. As well, Hill doesn’t concern himself with what the relation between a truly independent class movement and the reformist local leaders would be. He mentions it should provide funds, but not that it should be hostile to the policy of the local reformist leaders and strive to break the workers from them.

Or take the decision of the “corporate campaign” organizers to avoid going on strike when the contract expired in 1992. Hill justifies this decision by saying “the workers were well aware that the company was preparing to replace them with scabs.”⁷ But scabs, or the threat of scabs, are something workers face whenever they go on strike. If it suffices to refer to scabs to avoid strikes, then strikes should just be junked in general. But, for the sake of argument, let’s assume that workers were not ready to go on strike. In that case, slow-downs might play some

role in helping prepare the workers for a militant strike battle. But the “corporate campaign” was organized as *a substitute for* militant strike action. Hill himself complains that the biggest error of the “corporate campaign” was failure to stop scab production, but also finds apologies for it, and even calls these tactics “ingenious.”

I don’t doubt that Staley workers found ingenious ways to slow down production although, contrary to the impression one would get from Hill’s articles, this is hardly some special path-breaking development at Staley but is a common form of worker resistance to speedup and overwork. But Hill is not merely complimenting workers for trying to fight back, nor is he merely promoting the idea that work slowdowns can play a useful role in some situations. He is hailing the fact that “the union organized what could be called a ‘strike within the plant’ (Tucker’s tactics).”⁸ In other words, Hill specifically hails the tactics of the reformist organizer, Jerry Tucker. But Tucker’s tactics are not OK just because they call for some action by the workers. Tucker’s tactics were based on calling some actions to avoid the type of struggle that Hill admits was needed. How “ingenious”!

Are “corporate campaigns” tolerable to the national AFL-CIO leadership?

One of the main ways that Hill dresses up the “corporate campaign” strategy is to portray it as something that goes beyond the stifling framework imposed on the workers by the AFL-CIO hierarchy. For Hill, the fact that “corporate campaigns” keep workers involved in various actions distinguishes them from mainstream AFL-CIO policy. This is not an accurate picture, however. Perhaps the “corporate campaign” organizers are more prone to call actions than the mainstream bureaucrats. But the methods employed by “corporate campaigns” are also employed in the struggles organized by the mainstream bureaucrats. Hill never talks about this. Indeed, if that were not the case, it’s hard to understand how Hill can, in places, acknowledge that the Staley struggle was both a “corporate campaign” and was kept within bounds acceptable to the top labor traitors. Hill argues that the militancy of the workers scared the AFL-CIO top traitors away from supporting the Staley workers. But the local leaders and their “corporate campaign” organizers were also scared of the militant workers. Hill even admits this, but confines his hostility to the big traitors while finding this only an inexplicable “mistake” of the local AFL-CIO officials.

But let’s proceed to direct evidence. In the current Detroit newspaper strike, it was not Watts, Rogers or Tucker that organized “corporate campaign” tactics, but the *mainstream local and national bureaucrats*. This began even under the leadership of Tom Donahue, long-time henchman of notorious sellout AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, and continued under the present “reform” national leadership of the treacherous John Sweeney. These tactics included numerous civil disobedience actions. Moreover, as Mr. Hill would put it, the more

⁷*Ibid.*, p.11.

⁸*Ibid.*

prominent union officials not only “educated” their fellow bureaucrats, but invited the rank-and-file workers and activists to training sessions to get similarly educated. Of course this education was in how to be passive on the picket line, how to prevent angry workers from “provoking” the police, etc.

Now if, as Hill contends, it is only a “mistake” when the “corporate campaign” organized by the Staley local officials discouraged workers from the plant gates altogether, consistency would demand that he consider the similar policy of the “corporate campaign” organized by the mainstream officials in Detroit to also be an mere oversight. After all, these mainstream officials have also kept the workers active, they’ve organized civil disobedience. They have merely overlooked the need to carry out militant mass picketing at the point of production, just like Dave Watts. Shouldn’t we write then about how far beyond the mainstream policy the mainstream bureaucrats have gone?! Shouldn’t we characterize their overall record as one of many accomplishments despite some “serious flaws.”? Mr. Hill would perhaps recoil from such statements about the top union officials. But this is where the logic of his analysis leads.

Hill makes mention of one action where the Staley solidarity activists’ civil disobedience at Chicago’s Navy Pier upset some big-wheels of the UPIU. This shows how pathetic the AFL-CIO bureaucrats can be in their fretting over being charged with illegal secondary boycotts. But in other circumstances, the mainstream bureaucrats may organize something quite similar. For instance, in late June, the heads of the unions in Atlanta, Georgia organized a demonstration of 150 that marched through the Knight-Ridder newspaper in Macon, Georgia.⁹ (Knight-Ridder owns the struck *Detroit Free Press*.) Some bureaucrats even got arrested. This doesn’t make the union bureaucrats great heroes. In fact, the union leaders in the Detroit strike usually use the excuse of avoiding legal charges for organizing secondary boycotts to avoid actions at other papers owned by the owners of the Detroit newspapers. But it shows that even with the somewhat more daring type of corporate boycott that Mr. Hill wants, the basic orientation of the mainstream bureaucrats can continue. And indeed in Detroit, like Decatur, the importance of mass plant picketing is still shunted aside by the dominant section of union officials.

While the civil disobedience action at Navy Pier demonstrates that those activists had more gumption than the union boss deadbeats, there are severe limits to the effectiveness of pacifist boycott actions and to boycotts in general. Nor do they indicate the Chicago solidarity committee was changing its overall support for “corporate campaign” tactics and the Staley local leadership. Mr. Hill, while elsewhere making a general statement on the limited effectiveness of boycotts, holds up the CSWSC civil disobedience boycott action as the way to have a really effective “corporate campaign” and just heaps unqualified praise on most everything his solidarity organization did.

Also, it should be noted that the mainstream bureaucrats have devoted significant union resources to boycotts against the Detroit newspapers, businesses which advertise in them and

businesses which sell the paper. They have attracted “wider public attention” for the struggle, which is the major criterion put forward by Mr. Hill to distinguish between good and bad boycott campaigns. Yet, this hardly violates their overall class collaborationist perspective. The overall plan remains to keep away from the plants and entice the newspaper capitalists to resume bargaining by offering a bunch of concessions. So the main elements of the “corporate campaign” are quite useful for the mainstream bureaucrats, too.

Nor are such tactics by the top bureaucrats a rare exception. The AFL-CIO early this year sent in one Eddie Burke to revive the “corporate campaign”-type tactics in the Detroit newspaper strike. Burke was a big organizer in the Pittstown miners strike of 1989, pushing passive civil disobedience as a substitute for the inspiring struggles the miners had historically waged such as the 1978 strike which involved such militant tactics as roving pickets shutting down one mine after another and armed confrontations with the company goons and police. Burke even tells workers to be prepared to “break any laws that are on the books” or don’t bother going on strike.¹⁰ Present national AFL-CIO officer Rich Trumka was head of the United Mine Workers then and collaborated with Burke’s tactics. In fact the new mainstream president of the AFL-CIO utilized civil disobedience tactics when the Service Employees International Union which he headed conducted their well-known Justice for Janitors campaign. So it’s just not true that, in general, “corporate campaign” tactics represent a split from the policies of the top AFL-CIO leaders. Thus, to make a big deal out of comparatively minor squabbles between various reformist union leaders over how to carry out “corporate campaigns” while ignoring the general agreement on them that exists in the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, means gutting the content from a serious fight against even the likes of the Sweeney regime.

Frowning on exposing opportunism

Jack Hill’s problem is that he no longer takes seriously that for the worker’ movement to advance there are political trends besides those of the worst bureaucrats that must be consistently fought. At most, Hill now confines himself to talking about a few “mistakes” or “flaws” that might appear in the views of the more radical-looking bureaucrats or other left-wing groups. In so doing, he ignores the connection between these errors and the overall ideological and political stand of the trends in question.¹¹ This has the effect of undercutting the very notion

¹⁰*Metro Times* (Detroit), July 3-9, 1996, p.16. Burke’s comments should not be interpreted as a call for militant action. Pacifist civil disobedience tactics may also involve breaking the law.

¹¹The *CWV* group as a whole downplays the fight against opportunism. An amazing example of this comes from the Anita’s page three article “News from Mexico” in *CWVTJ #10*. In a brief report on some activities of the Zapatistas, she casually mentions that the recently formed Zapatista Front for National Liberation, which is defined by the Zapatista leaders

(continued...)

⁹*Detroit Sunday Journal*, June 30, 1996, p.8.

of a political or ideological trend, creates the illusion that the overall outlook of these groups is pretty good, and downplays the need for building a truly revolutionary trend independent of the various opportunist trends in the left. Indeed, even if one is dealing with some revolutionary activists who are beginning to break from this or that opportunist trend, pretending that the problem with the old trend was just isolated errors retards their ability to split with the old framework.

Hill's approach is strikingly illustrated by his treatment of the forces that comprise the Chicago Staley Workers' Solidarity Committee. His idea of how to build a revolutionary trend is to avoid any sharp fights within those forces to the left of the top AFL-CIO leaders. Hill has been carrying on in this way for a few years now. But in the past he would at least occasionally refer to other groups as if they were a distinct trend, not the anti-revisionist communist trend that Hill claimed to uphold. Now this pretense has been dropped. Now Hill claims that everyone in the Staley solidarity movement who claims to be socialist or communist actually deserves to be so labeled. Thus, Hill has now openly renounced the fight against opportunism.

The *Chicago Workers' Voice* group, to which Hill belongs, has been telling anyone interested in the Staley struggle to get in touch with the CSWSC since at least 1993. But in nearly three years neither Hill nor the CWV group has provided any serious public analysis of this solidarity group or the trends that are in it. Six months after the whole struggle is over, Hill still has nothing serious to say about this group or Hill's work in it. This total lack of concern to publicly analyze what's going on within the solidarity movement is shameful for someone who purports to be a communist. It panders to the popular prejudice that the fight against opportunism is sectarianism.

In fact, Hill has time and again shown he is infected with this prejudice. For instance, Hill recently criticized the editor of the revolutionary literary journal *Struggle* because the editor uttered a few words of criticism of the petty-bourgeois nationalist politics of the Zapatista leadership in response to a contributor to that journal who had touched on the question of the Zapatistas in her writing. (The contributor, unlike Hill, was quite appreciative of the comments offered by the editor.) A journal encouraging the development of revolutionary literature was no place for giving an opinion about the Zapatistas, Hill wrongly argued. But of course Hill also expresses irritation at articles that I or other writers in the theoretical journal *Communist Voice* because they spend a lot of time analyzing the

¹¹(...continued)

as their main work in this period, has been turned over to the bourgeois reformist forces like the PRD. Anita's comment on this central undertaking of the Zapatistas is that "it is not clear at this time how successful this organizing is" because of this "one problem." If Anita "is not clear" how successful the Zapatista's new front is when it has been turned over to the likes of the PRD (the Mexican rough equivalent of the Democrats here), this is because nothing can make her criticize the Zapatista policy. To say there is only "one problem" with a front under the PRD's thumb is like a doctor saying there was only one problem with the last operation — the patient died!

positions of various trends/groups. Evidently a theoretical journal is no place for theoretical analysis, either. You won't catch Jack Hill explaining what trends exist and what role they played in the Staley solidarity movement in the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal*!

Hill essentially tells us that the Chicago solidarity group was good and leaves it at that. We learn they participated in actions, raised funds, brought Christmas gifts and did other nice things. Summing up their work, Hill speaks of how this group "played an important role in encouraging the Staley workers to hold on." But scattered information in Hill's report confirms that the Chicago solidarity group was mainly holding on to the coattails of the "corporate campaign" strategy of the local Staley bureaucrats, not helping the workers break free of their influence. Take for instance the video that Hill says was used by the Chicago and other solidarity activists "to mobilize support for the Staley workers throughout the rest of this struggle." This video shows the vicious police attack on the workers at the June 25, 1994 demonstration in Decatur. But instead of criticizing the shameful pacifist tactics foisted on the workers by the trade union bureaucrats and their friendly attitude toward the police, it promotes the bureaucrats who give their slant on the whole affair without being challenged by the video interviewers or by anyone else on the video.

I don't doubt that the Staley workers appreciated all acts of kindness and all expressions of solidarity. But as useful as such aid can be, there is also another act of solidarity that the workers needed. And this type of solidarity was far more important. That act of support was to be told the truth not only about the AFL-CIO top dregs, but about how the Staley local leaders were not leading the workers away from these dregs but herding them back into their clutches. The solidarity activists of most use to the workers are those with the consciousness and courage to fight the national AND local bureaucrats tooth and nail on the question of mass picketing and encourage the workers to form their own independent organizational forms to carry out militant actions in defiance of Sweeney and Dave Watts. This sort of aid is what is decisive if the workers are to make a real advance in their fight against the capitalist offensive. Without this, all the funds and gifts can only put off for a bit the terrible results of the bankrupt reformist strategy.

If the militant workers and activists want to have a force that can provide revolutionary guidance and organization for the workers struggle, they must not shrink from the struggle against opportunist ideas and trends but be enthusiastic partisans of the ideological struggle. This is how a real communist trend will be rebuilt, not by hugs and kisses to one and all no matter what their theory and practice. Jack Hill is no longer up to this most important type of solidarity. □

Empty “left” phrases about trade unions

Neil, of the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice (LAWV)* group has, in recent months, launched a critique of the stands of myself and others in the Communist Voice Organization (CVO) on the question of the trade unions. These views have reflected the growing influence on Neil of the anti-Marxist views of “left” communism, which among other things, opposes trade unions of any sort. However, at the time of my reply to Neil's attacks in the March 15, 1996 issue of *Communist Voice*, Neil was still trying to dodge the question of whether he supported the “left” communist theories on the trade unions. (He had already announced his support for such “left” communist positions as opposition to the revolutions this century which abolished the old colonial system and opposition to the right of oppressed nations to self-determination.) Now Neil boasts about the stand of the “lefts” against trade unions and has written a few more scattered remarks circulated on “e-mail” that reflect these views.

Neil's present enchantment with “left” communism removes him ever-farther from a revolutionary critique of the pro-capitalist AFL-CIO trade union bureaucracy which sits like a lead weight on the workers' movement today. Today he thinks cursing the form of trade unions is the answer. A few months ago Neil was touting the stand of some trotskyite or semi-trotskyite groups that have illusions in the present trade unions and are unable to take a consistent stand against the trade union bureaucrats. Indeed, Neil painted up in near-revolutionary colors the platforms of trade union reformers who merely opposed some of the worst sellout leaders — and still does. Unable to see how certain reformist and opportunist trends are soft on the union bureaucrats, Neil was lost as to how to differentiate himself from them. Neil's turn to “left” communism allowed him to run away from the problem, but not solve it. By taking up “left” curses against trade unions, Neil could look like a radical critic of the opportunists, without jettisoning his illusions in the opportunists as consistent opponents of the trade union bureaucrats. For Neil, the problem with the opportunist groups he had illusions in wasn't their soft stand on the bureaucrats, but that they weren't opposed to unions in general.

With this new semi-anarchist outlook, it was not surprising that Neil was obliged to launch all sorts of attacks on myself and others in the CVO. Articles by CVO members have aimed at helping the workers thoroughly break from the stranglehold of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy and encouraged their independent motion, organization and class consciousness. While Neil has had soft ears for the tunes of various reformists and trotskyists, we have taken pains to expose the bankruptcy of the opportunist left. Neil's new “left” phrases made him unable to appreciate the value of such work in building a revolutionary trend. So he mocked this work, and in so doing only confirmed his illusions in various opportunist groups. Why various left groups also are “telling the workers to be more militant” and “break with the

treacherous leaders” he cried.¹ And Neil, trusting lad that he is, accepted the opportunists at their word, failing to see that the groups he mentioned (ISO and the Spartacist League) were far from consistent opponents of the bureaucrats despite their phrasemongering against them. Of course, contrary to Neil's new wise friends, we attacked the AFL-CIO bureaucracy not because they established unions, but, among other things, because they set up unions that constantly hemmed in the workers' struggle.

Prior to my March article, when Neil was still dodging the question of whether he supported the “lefts” on the trade unions, he was unable to say anything coherent about what was new and better in his latest position. Hence, besides elevating the opportunists to ferocious warriors against the union bureaucrats, all he could do was tell lies. Mainly he just screamed that the AFL-CIO leadership does bad things and is not opposed to capitalism — and pretended this was not our own position. And he falsely alleged that I held that if only “some communist leaders” like myself were elected to union posts, that would be sufficient to fundamentally change the unions.

In my March article I concentrated on refuting Neil's lies and exposing his historic support for reformist and trotskyite trends who had a weak stand on the AFL-CIO officialdom. In this article I want to focus on a few of the more notable features of his new stand which show the influence of the semi-anarchist “left” communist trends.

Neil's semi-anarchist gurus

The “left” communist trends that Neil supports include the International Communist Current, which has a U.S. section, and the Communist Workers' Organization (CWO), based in Britain. These groups undercut a revolutionary critique of the present pro-capitalist unions by denouncing the whole notion of unions. They consider the immediate economic struggle of the workers as futile and efforts to organize it as contrary to revolutionary work. For that matter, the CWO group denounces all “movements” in general except for the proletarian insurrection. Neil also had been touting the stand of the Collective Action group in Baltimore, partisans of “council communism”. This outfit theorizes against the concept of a revolutionary political party, denounces as “conscious minorities” any groups which systematically try to organize the workers and develop their revolutionary consciousness, and opposes all “new ideologies or sweeping programs.” They also hurl phrases against trade unions in general. Whereas ICC and CWO mock the economic struggle, Collective Action gets so dizzy over wildcat strikes that they think they disprove the need for organization or a conscious leadership of the working class movement.² Now

¹E-mail message of February 1, 1996.

²See the “Introduction” to Collective Action's pamphlet *From the bottom up — three texts by Anton Pannekoek*, (continued...)

let's see how Neil has been infected by the semi-anarchist bug.

Theorizing against the fight for wages and working conditions

The AFL-CIO trade union bureaucracy is a big obstacle for the workers' movement today. Not only are the union bureaucrats interested in preserving the capitalist system, they also try to keep the struggle for wages and working conditions from becoming too militant and thus undercut the workers' ability to maintain or improve their conditions under capitalism. Neil doesn't see how various reformist and opportunist trends fail to offer the workers a revolutionary alternative to the path of the bureaucrats but actually create illusions in the present unions. So he distinguishes himself by shouting "left" phrases that indict the unions for fighting over the question of the wages and benefits. For instance, Neil attacks the unions for "peddling the commodity labor power"³ or trying to "get a few percent more of the value that the workers themselves produced and delivered".⁴ Neil boasts that these are "some of the new ideas we are developing. As any honest worker and militant Marxist can see, none of this has very much to do with cozying up to the trots or any other revisionist or reformist groupings."

But what does it mean to distinguish yourself by denouncing a fight over the value of labor power? According to Marx, it is capitalism that turns the worker, or more precisely, the workers' labor-power, into a commodity. And, in order to survive under capitalism, the worker has no choice but to "peddle" this commodity to the owners of the factories, plants, etc. Not only that. If the worker wants to prevent the capitalist from driving down their wages, she or he must fight over the value of their commodity, fight over the price of their labor-power, fight to "get a few more percent of the value that the workers themselves produced". So Neil's phrases only distinguish him by standing opposed to the fight for the workers' daily needs.

Go to the Staley workers, Neil, or the Detroit newspaper strikers, or the janitors who participated in unionization campaigns in Los Angeles. Tell them about your new discovery. And don't use the terminology of economic theory, but tell them what that theory means in common language. Tell them how awful it is to fight for higher wages and better working conditions. Meanwhile, don't be surprised if upon your informing the workers that the union bureaucracy is defending their present-day interests, the workers don't see the point of splitting with the labor traitors you have thus prettified. A Marxist points out how the AFL-CIO officialdom not only supports capitalism, but undercuts the daily economic struggle. Marxism considers the economic struggle one front of the class struggle. Neil gives theories that denounce the economic struggle in the name of fighting AFL-CIO bosses and the capitalist system.

²(...continued)

February, 1996.

³E-mail message of March 29, 1996 entitled "Unions — for or against capitalism".

⁴E-mail message of December 5, 1995.

Are unions pointless in the present era?

The semi-anarchist phrases against the economic struggle are closely connected to the "left" communist position on the trade unions. Groups like the ICC hold that trade unions used to be able to win gains for the workers but that is no longer possible and hence, this form of organization is pointless. Neil tries to avoid saying categorically that the trade union form is worthless, and does his best to dance around the position of his mentors. But the main direction of his arguments is against unions as a form of organization. His theorizing on the economic struggle would logically lead to conclusions against unions of any sort, not just the present type of unions. He argues that "the key thing is that most all unions today, are defenders of the wages system and are based on peddling the commodity labor power."⁵ But even workers that oppose capitalism and the wages system must still fight today over the price of their labor power. Taken literally, Neil's formulation means that there might be some kind of OK unions — provided they don't engage in the economic struggle!

What sort of organization would Neil propose that is based on fighting for the daily interests of the workers against the employers? In general theory, Neil thinks it is sufficient to talk about "political and industrial organizations based on a program of class struggle and decisively hostile to the interests of capital." Of course all class organizations should direct the workers to fighting against the capitalists. But this formulation is insufficient. It does not answer the question of what are the particular characteristics of different class organizations.

For instance, a communist party is a different type of organization than a trade union, though both can play a role in developing the class struggle. A party organization should include only workers and other activists who are not only interested in the struggle over working conditions, but also are dedicated to the goal of achieving the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system and working toward a communist society. Trade unions are necessarily broader organizations. They include not only the most class conscious workers but also workers who presently merely want to defend their livelihoods. Thus they include non-communist workers, workers who have illusions in capitalism or the bourgeois political parties, i.e., workers whose participation in, and consciousness of the class struggle, is more limited. The task of the class conscious activist is not to deny the need for organizations of the broader mass of workers, such as the union form of organization, but to strive for the maximum influence among the workers in the trade unions. The aim of this work is not to tell workers they have no need to fight over daily matters, but to build the strongest possible fight by developing an independent stand from the labor traitors, from the bourgeois parties, etc. This work also means showing the workers the limits of their present fight and that their liberation can only come through destroying capitalism.

Neil prefers to leave all these questions in a haze. This not only allows him to dodge the question of the usefulness of trade unions per se (while his mentors categorically despise them). It also allows Neil to keep kidding himself that the forms of mass

⁵"Unions—for or against capitalism", March 29.

organizations he calls for or likes are inherently more radical than a trade union organization. Thus he undercuts real revolutionary work in two ways:

1) he ignores that the broad nature of the unions, its bringing together of workers whose class consciousness is just beginning, is to the advantage of the revolutionary cause; and

2) he downplays the role of the organization of class conscious workers in developing the fighting capacity and revolutionary consciousness of those in the mass organizations.

Should we care if the capitalists smash the trade unions?

Another feature of Neil's absurdly "left" critique of the trade unions is that he denies, or doesn't care about, the capitalist efforts to weaken or eliminate the present trade unions. One of the features of the present capitalist offensive is to replace unionized workers with non-union workers, smash unions in various workplaces, pass more and more laws to restrict the activity of unions, etc. This does not mean that the days of union-management collaboration are gone, or that the bourgeoisie has now decided to simply sweep away all the unions. It does not mean that in the face of this assault, the present trade union bureaucracy is becoming militant class fighters. Actually, they generally cave in to this assault. But only the blind and the semi-anarchist "left" communists can deny that more and more employers consider even the present meek unions to be an obstacle to more profits. Only they can not see that the old liberal-labor politics, bankrupt as it was, gave greater leeway to the unions, and has been replaced by neo-conservatism as the main trend among both big bourgeois parties. They can't grasp that just because the AFL-CIO leadership doesn't offer serious resistance to an attack doesn't mean there wasn't an attack. Nor can they understand that the fact that the AFL-CIO leadership defends the capitalist system does not mean that their vision of capitalism is necessarily liked by important sections of the bourgeoisie.

But when reality conflicts with Neil's semi-anarchist formulae, out goes reality. He writes: "many of the smaller capitalist firms still bitch about unionization" but "most U.S. bosses, especially in bigger shops/factories/offices . . . see the unions like a good protection racket."⁶

It's indisputable that the AFL-CIO bosses are opposed to a resolute struggle against the capitalists and often try to placate them with concessions. But the point is, in struggle after struggle, the capitalists are no longer satisfied with the old situation, but want even more. Hence, they not only cooperate with the trade unions, but are shoving them hard and even destroying them when this is practical. Neil claims that the big capitalists aren't the ones interested in fighting the unions, only some small entrepreneurs. Can he be serious? What are firms like Staley (Tate & Lyle), Caterpillar, Bridgestone, and the Gannett and Knight-Ridder newspapers, Neil, "mom-and-pop" operations? Why are the multinationals running around the country and the world to find non-union labor? Neil and his "lefts"

evidently feels all such efforts are a hoax that is secretly strengthening the unions! And if most of the employers are so anxious to have unions, why is it that so few have them? Can't they find their number in the phone book?

Neil has the answer. He alleges that it is only the ignorance of most employers that keeps them from bringing in unions. Why the small firms oppose unions only because "their chiefs and grandmothers still belong to the John Birch Society type groups too!"⁷ So that's it, Neil? The employers are just idiots who don't know anything about making profits? Perhaps the reader now thinks I have gone too far in attacking Neil. Surely, he couldn't deny that keeping unions out is a way for employers to insure higher profits. Au contraire! He argues that today's reformist unions are really just disguised "company unions" (i.e., no unions, just fake union organizations set up directly by the employer). He states: "How much different would having an OPEN company union be for the workers." And then he cites statistics which he presumably thinks prove that workers without unions are doing just as well or even better than those without unions. Neil argues: "in 1994, U.S. union workers pay dropped 3.0% while those left at the bosses' mercy with no workplace organization got smacked with a LOWER 2.7% cut in one year, worst since the early 30's!" So according to Neil, if workers only had company unions and were at the bosses' mercy, they would be better off! The only problem is that Neil's statistics only prove that he is twice as ignorant as the foolhardy employers he mocks. Even if it's true that in one year the non-union worker lost a tiny bit less percentage-wise than the union worker, the union worker is most likely still to have better wages and benefits. If I make \$12/hour and my non-union counterpart makes \$9/hour, I don't think I'd trade places just because I had my wages reduced 3% to \$11.64. And I don't think any employer would be so stupid as to not to notice the difference, too.

For Neil to scoff at the capitalist assault on unions only plays into the hands of the employers. The anti-union offensive aims at driving down the rank-and-file workers, both unionized and non-unionized. (It's well known that employers in heavily-unionized areas grant somewhat better conditions to their non-union workforce as a way to avoid unionization, even the weak AFL-CIO type.) Thus, it is an issue for the workers, not just the fat cat bureaucrats. That is why one does not have to be a supporter of the trade union bureaucrats to oppose this offensive. Indeed, opposing the anti-union offensive requires the workers to go beyond the pitiful resistance offered by the union officials. But Neil, drunk with his new semi-anarchist phrases, swaggers by the concerned workers and says "who cares."

Neil's new theories belittle the fight against the labor traitors

Naturally, if the economic struggle is hopeless, and unions as such are suspect, then there really isn't much point to attacking the labor traitors for sabotaging the present-day struggles. Neil does not like the AFL-CIO leadership. But his new,

⁶"Unions — for or against capitalism", March 29.

⁷*Ibid.*, for all quotes in this paragraph.

allegedly superior new outlook leads him to belittle the importance of the workers breaking free from the grip of the AFL-CIO leadership and developing their own militant class organization and struggle. He writes to me: "On the unions, you think the workers merely getting angrier and shit-canning their judas leaders will gain great victories or at least hold the line against the vicious attack of capital and its political state machinery (these things would be progress, but cannot today insure victory in a major strike, lockout, etc.)."⁸ And as an alternative, he proposes telling the workers that the unions are bad for trying to fight for higher wages and that they aren't against the capitalist system. What a muddle! He admits it will be "progress" to develop independence from the bureaucrats. But, he says, really this "progress" will lead only to defeat for it cannot possibly achieve any victories!

It is not the economic struggle that is pointless, only Neil's theorizing on it. In fact, a militant struggle will tend to retard the capitalists' efforts to worsen the condition of the workers. Depending on the relative strength of the two sides clashing, workers may make some gains, may hold the line, or may merely beat back some of the worst attacks. But in any case, if the workers don't fight, their plight will be even worse. Meanwhile, how well the workers are organized is one of the key determinants of how successful their struggle is. Every time Neil mocks the stand of consistent encouragement for the workers "shit-canning their judas leaders", he weakens their chances of winning.

Neil's theorizing is not only nonsense, but impossible for himself to uphold. Los Angeles Workers' Voice leaflets written this year call on the masses to fight on issues like opposing cutbacks in public education and social programs and tells the masses they "can't rely on the union officialdom".⁹ Applying the same standards Neil applies to his opponents, shouldn't Neil also be denounced for calling on the masses to "shit-can" the bureaucrats and leading them in a futile effort to win great victories? Typically, in this leaflet, Neil doesn't even mention the unions are defenders of the capitalist system, much less make this the main appeal, though allegedly his opponents are the ones who avoid this and thereby demonstrate their bankruptcy.

Is it permissible to run in union elections?

As mentioned in the introduction of this article, Neil has contended that I hold that if only some communists like myself get trade union posts, then the unions will be fundamentally transformed. Back in March I called this charge a lie and I continue to challenge Neil to produce any evidence of this. But the main issue raised by this charge is not Neil's ability to lie, but whether it is permissible for communists to run for offices in the AFL-CIO unions. I maintain that the main task of communist work in the trade unions these days is to build direct ties between the workers in the unions and the party of class-

⁸E-mail message of December 5, 1995.

⁹LAWV's leaflet "Make the rich pay! Defend public education!," Feb. 3, 1996.

conscious workers (or, where no such party exists, groups oriented towards re-establishing such a party). However, I also think that it would be a mistake for revolutionary-minded workers to not participate in the present AFL-CIO unions despite their domination by a reactionary trade union bureaucracy. Such participation can be a supplement to the main task. Running in union elections, under certain conditions, is one of the ways of participating in the present trade unions so as to further spread the views of the communists among the workers.

Simply gaining some trade union posts by no means transforms the union bureaucracy into the fighting machine of the workers, however. Indeed, even when mild reformers win some union posts, the mainstream bureaucrats often try to crush them. Therefore, the goal of a revolutionary in a trade union election is not to get a cushy post and reconcile with the bureaucrats, but to use that post to rally the rank and file against the bureaucrats. The revolutionaries must make clear to the workers the limits of what can be accomplished through the repressive union apparatus and emphasize that they can rely only on the development of their own independent class organization. As for the revolutionary unions of the future, they can only come into being when the mass struggle of the workers is so powerful that it entirely shatters the union bureaucracy, not only replacing its leaders, but does away with its overall policy, apparatus, rules, methods of organizing, enslaving ties to the establishment, etc. Whether this will require forming completely new unions, or the workers will be able to radically transform the present unions will be determined by the course of the class struggle.

Since March, Neil has continued to try to dodge the issue of whether revolutionaries can make use of trade union elections. He has implied that there's something wrong with it, and his ideological gurus despise the idea. But Neil will only say things like "those that settle into getting elected on a 'push the leaders to the left' plank are really wasting the workers time and efforts."¹⁰ Yes, Neil, we ourselves oppose the idea that winning a few posts will convert the union leaders to militant leftists. But what about running in the elections so as to oppose all illusions in the trade union bureaucracy? That is what I am talking about. So far Neil only shouts abuse while running away from a straightforward reply.

"Left" communism and support for reformism

Neil has had exaggerated hopes in any number of groups that basically have a reformist approach to the AFL-CIO union bureaucracy. He will get upset if a left-wing group openly hails the union bureaucrats. But he is liable to become disoriented when confronted by a group that curses some bureaucrats or fights against them in a very limited way. He talks about such groups as if they were revolutionary or near-revolutionary when they actually have not broken free from a reformist approach to the pro-capitalist trade unions. Neil continues to have difficulty differentiating his views from the views of reformist-dominated mass organizations or from the certain groups of the trotskyite-

¹⁰E-mail message of March 30, 1996 entitled "Unions/SEIU".

Cliffite milieu.

For example, even after his conversion to the semi-anarchism of the “left” communists, Neil hypes the reformist MFUD/BAFU groups in the Los Angeles area Service Employees International Union. Last year he called them a “class struggle alternative” and a “militant rebel union” and he was still touting BAFU in late March, 1996.¹¹ But the only evidence Neil can produce to back up his claims shows that these groups merely oppose some particularly bad union leaders, not the union bureaucracy as such, and call for “better benefits” as well as some reforms which would make the union a bit more democratic. Neil now strongly hints that it violates proletarian principles for a communist to run for trade union office, but to this day has nothing but praise for the *reformist* platform that these groups used to run in the union elections. We can also cite Neil’s stand on the *Chicago Workers’ Voice* group whose mushy stand on the reformist trade union trends and the opportunist left we chronicle elsewhere in this issue. Neil has been a close ally of the *CWV* group and remains silent on their efforts to reconcile with opportunism in the workers’ movement.

¹¹See Neil’s article in *Communist Voice*, vol.1, #5, Nov. 15, 1996, pp.14-16, and the March 30 e-mail message “Unions/SEIU”.

Why then has he become enchanted with the “left” phrasemongers who mock the idea of trade unions, or even reject the fight for immediate economic demands as futile. Does Neil oppose all struggles for partial demands? Well, in theory he has been advising activists to follow semi-anarchists like the ICC and the CWO who consider all struggles for reforms impossible since the 20th century began. But in practice, Neil doesn’t necessarily reject all partial struggles. In 1995 Neil was still arguing that there was a point to struggles that aimed at certain reforms. A couple of months ago, he was still carrying agitation in favor of a fight on certain immediate issues like the budget cutbacks in Los Angeles.

But though Neil’s instincts have kept him around the mass movements, he has not been able to figure out what separates a Marxist stand in these movements from the stands of the more militant-looking reformist and left-wing trends. “Left” communism or council communism (*Collective Action*) provides Neil a way out — a set of empty anarchist phrases to look more revolutionary than thou, while not actually being able to distinguish between a revolutionary course for the class struggle and the more militant wing of reformism. In particular, phrases against parties, trade unions, and the leadership of struggles by class conscious groups are appealing to Neil as they offer a simple, if mindless, “answer” to what is wrong with the left and the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracy. □

Union bureaucrats establish “Labor Party”

by Pete Brown, Detroit

In early June the founding convention of the new “Labor Party” was held in Cleveland. This is a party founded of, by and for a section of upper-level trade union bureaucrats, together with an assortment of social-democratic-minded allies of theirs. It is *not* a mass workers’ party or an avowedly revolutionary or socialist party. This party’s founders were happy for many years functioning as the “labor” tail of the Democratic Party, but with the latter’s drift to the right, giving up any pretensions to traditional Rooseveltian liberal-labor politics, they felt the need to try and revive such politics.

Reaction from the left

It’s interesting to see the reaction to this event from various leftist groups, as it provides a sort of mirror in which one can view the various trends. Let’s look at a few of these.

First of all, under the heading “most enthused” we should include *People’s Tribune*, newspaper of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. Now, in the old days LRNA called itself the Communist Labor Party, but in the conditions of the 90s it revamped its image, threw communism out the window and emerged as generalized, mild-mannered “revolutionaries.” Their special advocacy group is the poor, people on welfare, etc., and they often have informative articles about the struggles of these strata. But their political orientation has gone completely awry. LRNA doesn’t even pretend to have any doubts or criticisms of the new party. They enthusiastically proclaim, on their front page, “Labor Party to fight for employed and unemployed.” They’re excited that the Labor Party decided to allow the National Welfare Rights Union and the National Union of the Homeless to affiliate to the party. And granted, that is quite a concession from union bureaucrats, to even admit that poor and homeless people exist. But what evidence do they have that the Labor Party “will fight for” the unemployed?

In their centerfold spread on the party’s founding convention, LRNA waxes enthusiastic about the great numbers of people there — 1,367 delegates “representing more than one million people” according to LRNA. But this is the typical trade-union bureaucrat style of counting. The president of a trade union with a hundred thousand members will say he “represents 100,000 people”, neglecting to mention if those 100,000 people expressly sent him on this mission, or if he even informed them about it.

LRNA’s article contains some information about the Labor Party’s 19-page program. They say it calls for a constitutional right to a job (at \$10 an hour); supports affirmative action and immigrant rights; denounces racist church burnings and police brutality; and calls for a guaranteed annual income. All good things, of course; but one wonders if LRNA isn’t just selecting out the most popular items from this 19-page program. (I hope to examine this program in a future article: since the Labor Party Advocates refused to allow any discussion of program before the party’s founding, and never publicized any drafts of

the program, I haven’t yet had an opportunity to peruse it.)

This is LRNA’s method in dealing with the founding convention — to just slough over differences and act as if everyone’s enthused and everyone’s equal. Workers on strike, people on welfare, etc. are thrown into the same boat as top labor bureaucrats like Tony Mazzocchi and social-democratic political figures like Jim Hightower and Ralph Nader. And of course all these figures are going to go all out for the homeless, the unemployed, those on welfare and those suffering under racial and ethnic discrimination. Is this for real? LRNA thinks so, or at least wants to hope so.

Socialist Action: diehard defenders of the bureaucrats

Also under the heading “very enthused”, but with some possible reservations, we could list *Socialist Action*, a mild-mannered Trotskyist newspaper (and organization). Now, the founding of the Labor Party is actually precisely what *SA* has been advocating for years. In their basic policy statement, given on page 2 of their newspaper, they say, “We advocate a labor party based on the unions.” No doubt many *SA* supporters were also active in Labor Party Advocates, and they’re pretty excited about the party’s founding. So the front page of their June 1996 newspaper proclaims, in large red headlines, “The Need for a Labor Party with a Winning Union Strategy.”

This issue of their paper appeared shortly before the party’s founding, and *after* an LPA conference in Northern California. *SA* was looking forward to the founding convention, but got a scare at the California conference when former California governor Jerry Brown showed up as the featured speaker. They recognize that a Labor Party might function as simply a stalking horse for bourgeois politicians, to draw workers back into the fold of mainstream bourgeois politics. In an interesting sidebar, “A page from labor history”, they note that rotten AFL bureaucrats in the late 1930s set up a political grouping, “Labor’s Non-Partisan League”, for just such a purpose. And they say a debate broke out at the California LPA conference over the question of basing the Labor Party on the trade unions, or “for a party that would submerge unions in a combination of groups like the Greens and other middle-class political formations — as well as demagogic political representatives of the bosses.” By “demagogues” *SA* means people like Jesse Jackson and Jerry Brown.

So here’s the basic dynamic of the Labor Party, according to *SA*: whether it should be “based on the trade unions” or whether the unions should be “submerged”. On this question, let no one doubt, *SA* is all for having a Labor Party “based on the unions.” In advocating this they wax enthusiastic over “Brother Mazzocchi”, the trade union official who has been pushing strongly for this position in the Labor Party.

SA pretends that this is a major question of principle, like a question of class orientation. Presumably the Greens and the “demagogues” represent other class forces, while trade union leaders represent the working class. But why? Because they are

officials of trade unions, elected by workers? But isn't the mass base of the Democratic Party — the vast majority of those who register and vote Democratic — also workers? So by the same logic does this make Bill Clinton a representative of the working class?

The question is, how can *SA* justify their advocating “a labor party based on the unions” as the way forward for the working class, when they know that “based on the unions” means “dominated by the trade union officialdom”, the same officialdom that has a stranglehold on the working class movement today? To *SA*'s credit, they have some recognition of this little problem. For example, in a separate article they note how bureaucrats of railway unions overturned a membership vote and helped impose a backward contract settlement on rail workers. And in an article on the Detroit newspaper strike they express strong doubts about whether John Sweeney is up to organizing a winning strategy. They even have their doubts about Mazzocchi, noting that he conciliates those labor bureaucrats who are still staunchly pro-Democratic Party, and urge him to take a more “independent” stand.

But these are only doubts “among brothers.” Basically, *SA* is all in agreement with Mazzocchi. And this means giving a dead-end orientation to the workers. The working class stands in need of reorganization today, to establish itself as a class force independent of the bourgeoisie. But this can't be conceived of as consolidating a social-democratic political vehicle for the labor bureaucrats. Nor can it be limited to organizations “based on” the present trade unions, who represent a fairly small percentage of the working class. And even for those workers presently in trade unions — although they already have some rudimentary class organization, the stifling bureaucracy sitting on top of this organization means that these workers, too, will have to go through a period of reorganization before they can establish their independence from bourgeois politics.

Spark wants a no-vote

Another Trotskyite paper publicizing the Labor Party's founding is *The Spark*. *Spark* isn't as enthused about it as *SA*, but they're generally supportive of the project. The main point in their article is to criticize the founding convention's decision to *not* run candidates in the 1996 elections. The convention leaders argued that it served no purpose to run candidates who could not possibly win. *Spark* criticizes this, arguing that even if you don't win, you can at least publicize your politics and help to wean workers away from the established parties. At least, *Spark* says, the founding convention could have urged a no-vote tactic against the established parties.

Like *SA*, *Spark* is suspicious of the Labor Party leaders' tendency to conciliate the Democrats and their trade union supporters. They suspect that the bureaucrats might not be putting all their cards on the table, since they've refused so far to launch any campaign against Clinton and the Democrats. Not only did the Labor Party refuse to run candidates, they also refused to issue a stinging denunciation of the Democrats, or to urge workers to boycott supporting the Democrats.

These groups are right to be suspicious of the bureaucrats. They should be even more suspicious. The fact that they aren't shows the depth of old-style leftist politics, which these groups

have not been able to shake free of. They talk and talk about “build the working class movement”, but they don't want to analyze what's actually going on in the working class movement and what it will take to revive it. They think the established trade union officials will do the work for them — will ride in on a white horse, declare the “Labor Party”, and this will do the trick of organizing the working class independent of the capitalists. But after decades of domination of liberal-labor politics promoted on a daily basis by the union officialdom, the workers will have to go through a period of profound political shakeup in order to establish their independence. This will have to include a serious critique of the opportunists in the labor camp and also revisionist forces among the leftists themselves.

Bulletin gets the goods on how the bureaucrats organize

Finally, we come to the *Bulletin* Trots (Workers League), who are highly critical of the new Labor Party project. They promise a series of articles on the new party in their newspaper, *The International Workers Bulletin*. In the first of these, in their July 1, 1996 issue, they concentrate on the way the founding convention itself was organized. This was in typical bureaucrat fashion: top-down, without democratic discussion, and with leftist politics suppressed. First off, they make the point that rank-and-file members of some participating unions didn't even know about the convention:

“Far from mobilizing the ranks of the labor movement for the building of a Labor Party, the Cleveland convention was organized behind the backs of the workers. Most of the unions which participated did not even inform their own members that the convention was taking place. The UMWA, for instance, has never reported the effort to establish the Labor Party in its magazine, *UMW Journal*. It endorsed the Labor Party only on the eve of the convention, sent only a handful of delegates, and yet cast 100 votes and secured a position for Trumka's nominee on the Labor Party's National Council.” (UMWA is the mine workers union; Trumka is the president of the union, also the new national secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO.)

There are two points here: first, that the founding of the Labor Party does not represent the victory of any mass upsurge among the workers themselves. The workers aren't even informed. Secondly, that the union bureaucrats guarantee a dominating position for themselves, even though they don't really “represent” the members of their unions.

Bulletin goes on to describe how the convention was rigged: “All distribution of political material was prohibited, except that provided by Labor Party Advocates.” So any leftists who showed up with hopes of generating broader discussion were quashed.

Now, how about the way the Labor Party leaders produced a program? “At dozens of meetings and conferences sponsored by Labor Party Advocates over the past five years, Mazzocchi and his supporters insisted that it was premature and even undemocratic to seek any discussion on program before estab-

lishing the Labor Party. The party's program would have to be decided democratically at the founding convention, they claimed. But when delegates arrived in Cleveland, they found a program, constitution and plan of action had already been worked out in advance by the leaders of the sponsoring unions” Very cute, the way the bureaucrats operate, isn't it?

But wait. Couldn't participants in the convention offer alternative resolutions? *Bulletin* says no: “The Labor Party's resolutions committee, hand-picked by Mazzocchi, blocked consideration of any proposal not favored by the top union bureaucrats. The delegates were not informed of resolutions submitted by chapters or affiliated locals unless they were approved by the resolutions committee. No resolution not approved by this committee could be considered except by the vote of two-thirds of the delegates.” Consider all the energy and intelligence required by the bureaucrats to get all this planned out. Amazing, isn't it? Just think if they used this much planning to try and organize the unorganized, or push for higher wages, or — but no, forget it, they're not about to do any of *those* things.

But even this procedure leaves a bit of an out, you say; couldn't someone who was real well organized, and real determined, publicize his own alternative resolution and try to get the two-thirds vote to have it placed before the convention? Well, now let's consider the voting procedure:

“ . . . Of the nearly 3,000 delegate votes cast, a clear majority, about 1,600, were in the hands of the nine endorsing national unions

“Another 908 votes were cast by local unions and nonendorsing national unions, giving full-time union officials nearly 90 percent of the total votes. Only 152 votes were cast by local chapters of Labor Party Advocates.

“The endorsing unions received 100 votes each, with additional votes for each of their own locals which affiliated to the Labor Party. . . . the result was a huge bloc vote cast at the direction of a handful of top officials. Fourteen hundred people attended the convention, but four of them . . . cast a total of 1,075 votes between them.

“By contrast, the 120 individuals who attended the convention as at-large delegates were allowed to cast two votes altogether.”

Bulletin further makes the point that “this procedure was not voted on by the delegates or submitted for their consideration before the convention opened. It was simply announced as a fait accompli, as part of the convention rules.”

One can't help wonder about the enthusiasts from *Socialist Action*. Aren't they embarrassed by this? Have they no shame?

Bulletin goes on to describe how the organizational structure of the Labor Party was set up in the same way, with Mazzocchi and his bureaucrat friends guaranteed longstanding domination

of the party. As a sidelight, they also point out that Jerry Brown appeared at the convention and “got the most enthusiastic response of any speaker”; which goes to show that *Socialist Action* was wrong in thinking that there was some kind of principled contradiction at work between the “unionists” like Mazzocchi and the “pro-demagogue” elements. Mazzocchi got his party based directly on the unions, just as he wanted; but he also opened the convention up to the demagogues, who preach the kind of politics Mazzocchi wants to impose on the workers.

Thus, *Bulletin* gives a sharp critique of the Labor Party's founding convention. The question this raises, though, is: Why is *Bulletin* so critical of a “labor party based on the unions”? Isn't this just what *Bulletin* itself advocated for many years? Back in the 1980's *Bulletin* supporters were known as the foremost “knights of the labor party.” On any question, they would say the solution is to build a labor party. Then it would be pointed out to them that this means putting working class politics into the hands of the labor bureaucrats. And for this they had no answer (which doesn't mean, as those familiar with them know, that they fell silent).

This culminated, at the time of the Persian Gulf war, in *Bulletin*'s infamous demand that “the unions must vote” on the question of war. Every other leftist or progressive group was opposed to war and raising slogans like “no blood for oil.” But *Bulletin* stood out for not taking a position on this important political issue; instead they called for the unions to vote on the question. But who did they think was going to organize such a vote? — Precisely the same stratum of labor bureaucrats who organized the voting at the Labor Party's founding convention.

Perhaps *Bulletin* has changed. They say: “The Cleveland convention demonstrated, as the Workers League and the Socialist Equality Party have warned for several years, that it is impossible to build a political alternative for the working class based on the AFL-CIO.” So perhaps, since the Gulf war, *Bulletin* has become more critical of the labor bureaucrats. But then, in the past as well *Bulletin* was quite critical of the bureaucrats, at times. The *Bulletin* “method” was to combine naive faith in the bureaucrats (calls for a labor party, etc.) with hysterical denunciations of the bureaucrats when the latter did not live up to their naive expectations.

Perhaps, to some extent, this is just a sectarian difference. In the last few years *Bulletin* has organized its own electoral vehicle, the Socialist Equality Party. There may be some common points between this organization and the Labor Party — for example, the Socialist Equality Party also calls for a minimum wage of \$10 an hour — and *Bulletin* is no doubt anxious to differentiate its formation from that of the union officials. In any case, so far they have made a contribution in showing how the bureaucrats organized their convention, and this now throws the ball back into the court of LRNA, SA, and other “labor party” supporters like *Spark*: Can they really stomach such an organization? □

More debate on Marxism and the right of nations to self-determination

The March 15th issue (vol. 2, #2) of *Communist Voice* covered an ongoing debate on the right of nations to self-determination and its relation to Marxism. This particular debate is mainly with the “left communists”, who claim to be Marxists while denying that just about any Marxist principle applies to the 20th century.

The fact is that, right from the start, Marxism defended the right to self-determination, and showed how this was necessary in order to cement the internationalist unity of the workers of the world. Proletarian unity has to be based on the

voluntary amalgamation of the workers of all countries, and it cannot be based on the oppression of nationalities. On the contrary, real unity develops in struggle against all oppression, including the national oppression carried out by empires and imperialists of all stripes, including the revisionist regimes. In opposing the right to self-determination, the “left communists” end up championing in theory what Stalinist revisionism did in practice.

In this issue of *Communist Voice* we continue our coverage of this debate. □

“Left” communist from Britain denounces the right of nations to self-determination

From: “J.S. Daborn”

Date: March 22, 1996

RE: Marxism and the right to self-determination

This e-mail letter from Jock Daborn of the British “Communist Workers’ Organization” was a reply to Joseph Green’s article, “Marxism and the right to self-determination”, which was the lead article in Communist Voice, vol. 2, #2. Green’s article defended the right to self-determination and denounced the “socialist”-colonialists who hold that Marx and Lenin’s support for the right to self-determination is outdated, and who regret their past support for anti-colonial struggles. It used the example of Bosnia and the Balkans, and pointed out how the denial of the right to self-determination greatly aggravated national antagonisms and helped create the present bloody tragedy. It also showed how revisionism in general and Stalinism in particular opposed the right to self-determination in practice. JSD in reply not only denied the right of self-determination in general, but proclaimed that his trend had never even supported an anti-colonial struggle in the 20th century. Following his article, there is a reply by Mark.

A Hasty Response from an Internationalist

We have not intervened directly in this debate before because it seemed to us that NC [Neil of the *Los Angeles Workers’ Voice* group] was actually answering clearly and increasingly coherently to the ramblings of Joseph Green.¹

¹14 pages of excerpts from the exchange between NC and Joseph Green can be found in *Communist Voice*, vol. 2, #2, (continued...)

However in this latest atrocity story which contains more sophistry than the average output of a Jesuitical College he continually refers to the “communist Left” usually tarring them with the brush of anyone else he wants to drag into the debate. It is quite obvious that a renegade Maoist cannot know much about the communist left. This reply also demonstrates he does not know much about Marxism.

When he says “most activists eagerly supported national lib movements” he means those who supported ideologies which represented the left wing of capitalism. The internationalist communist left which was the first and most consistent opponent of the decline of the Comintern towards Stalinism and social democracy in the 1920s (and ever since) has never supported national struggles in this century. We have also never stated that Marx and Lenin’s views were simply outdated because for both of them the view of the national question was HISTORICALLY CONDITIONED. Lenin’s *Imperialism* demonstrated that capitalism had moved into a new epoch (which Lenin did not live to see the full implications of). This epoch (of the parasitism and decay of capitalism, the era of imperialism) changed the tactical and strategic demands of the proletarian revolution. It was no longer enough to recognise that certain national struggles could actually lead to the expansion of capitalism — no such struggles existed. Every struggle now became part of global imperialist competition for control of the planet. There is no such thing as an independent national struggle in this epoch. Every national bourgeoisie is the tool of its imperialist backer and no struggle can ‘succeed’ without such backing. The whole history of the last 90 years shows this. This means that the proletarian position on the national question has got to

¹(...continued)
March 15, 1996.—CV

become a CLASS ISSUE and not a NATIONAL ISSUE. It is why the bourgeoisie have (on the ideological level) always used the national question against the unity of the working class and its struggle in this century. JG by refusing to recognise that nations are divided into classes does not even begin from the ABC of Marxism on this one. Instead he throws in another red herring. Anyone not arguing with him on the national question is arguing that there is only a 'straight struggle direct to classless society'. We wish we could! No, there are enough problems on the road to the establishment of socialism which we have to deal. But today the first of these are all the left capitalists who refuse to recognise the nature of capitalism today. Basically we are on a 'narrow path' as Lenin stated in *What is to be Done?* and on both sides we are surrounded by the swamp of bourgeois ideology which includes nationalism and support for the national struggle and occasionally monsters arise from the marsh in the shape of JG to try to drag the working class off its on class terrain.

How does he do this? First he turns a bourgeois offensive on the working class into something which is the fault of the working class! The situation in ex-Yugoslavia is his chosen example. Here the state capitalist Tito regime was disintegrating under the accumulation crisis of capital. In response to unemployment and draconian inflation the working class began to fight on its own terrain against the bourgeoisie. There were literally millions of strike days lost at the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s (see *Internationalist Communist Review*, *Workers Voice* and *Revolutionary Perspectives*, organs of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party, on this). The response of the Yugoslav bourgeoisie — nationalism. Disintegration of Yugoslavia into its constituent nationalities. Nationalities which had to be virtually re-invented overnight. We know now that the Croatian bourgeoisie could not even find one policeman to carry out its first attacks on Serbs but government ministers themselves launched the first rocket attacks. When leftists call on us to support the Bosnians (because they are less exclusive), which Bosnia do we support? They don't say but the only one is that of Izetbegovic and the Bosnian ruling class. We could go on but the important point [is] the national issue isn't some neutral ground over which the workers can manoeuvre against the bourgeoisie — it is the bourgeoisie's chosen ideological weapon against the working class in this epoch. When JG talks about analysing "the new conditions of world imperialism", that is precisely what he should do instead of rehashing the tired old "anti-revisionist" nonsense from his past.

In fact when he calls for the building of mass movements, trades unions and the like, JG is living in the last century. Then it was the illusion of all socialists that capitalism would happily allow us to build up mass organs under its sway without attempting to recuperate them for capital. In 1914 we got our answer when these mass organs went over to mobilising the masses for imperialist war. Our organisational imperatives have to be different. Our target has to be to destroy the capitalist state internationally before we can proceed to building socialism. Our priority is the building of the one organisation which is the essence of the anti-capitalist programme of the proletariat and that is the international party. Whilst the mass assault of the future working class will destroy capital it cannot

do this without the leadership of that party but that mass assault will not come from mass organs of long duration (such as unions) since these will constantly become part of the capitalist framework). It is odd that JG should argue that the internationalist communist left deny the need for the party but then that is part of his generally slanderous method of throwing out any argument in any direction. Nowhere is this more obvious than in his penultimate paragraph where he gives us a series of fables. He tells us "some say" and "some say" and again "some say" but who are these people. To be specific would however render JG's arguments susceptible to analysis and one thing a dying ideology cannot tolerate is such criticism. Criticism is something JG ought to be frightened of given the paucity of his knowledge of Marxism. His account of the decolonization issue after WW2 [World War Two] is so wrong that we cannot leave it aside. He states that left communists say that the national struggle was a waste of time because it did not lead to socialism in Africa. Does he read anything? Lenin argued in *Imperialism* that decolonization would lead not to socialism in Africa but to a crisis in the metropolitan countries and thus to a proletarian revolution there. What however happened was that imperialism itself was happy enough to decolonize once it realised that it was cheaper and more efficient to get the African bourgeoisie to police local exploitation. Obviously (and we had better say this before JG gets another red herring) the imperialists did not think of this overnight but actually were prompted by national struggles in places like Algeria etc. But why were these struggles so difficult to suppress? We suggest you need look no further than the aid the USSR and USA furthered to them in order to advance their own interests.

Let's just finish off by disposing of some more of JG's detritus. He accuses us internationalists of being indifferent to national oppression. This is untrue. What we have to recognise is the fact that national oppression can only be solved by the proletariat. The bourgeoisie certainly have no interest in alleviating it. What we have to point out that every case of national oppression is actually against the proletariat. Take the example JG so kindly furnishes us with — the Palestinians. Which Palestinians are oppressed? The millionaire backers and leaders of the PLO with their mansions in New York, Beirut and Paris or the proletariat who live in the West Bank and Gaza? Which Palestinians have paid the heaviest for the policies of the PLO? The proletarians who worked in Kuwait before the Gulf War or the high command in Tunisia? Until JG recognizes that all oppression is only aimed at the proletarian section of any nationality he will never be in any position to recognize that our "ideology is proletarian internationalism". Instead he will be mouthing slogans which only give sustenance to the national bourgeoisie in each imperialist conflict and help keep workers apart. If communists don't take up the class interests of the workers then they will be taken up by the reactionary ideologies of the likes of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

JG is right in one thing. There are no short cuts to socialism. However to get onto the high road of proletarian revolution we must first turn around and escape from the cul-de-sac of the past. How bankrupt JG is can be seen that he confuses his own reactionary formulae for those of Marx and Lenin. When he states that the founders of scientific socialism stood for the right to self-determination even under socialism we have arrived at

the full realisation of his illiteracy. The *Communist Manifesto* states that national frontiers will be abolished (not reinforced with new ones!) and Marx stated elsewhere that “the proletariat are the negation of all nationality”. He might be thinking of Lenin in 1917 accepting national self-determination in Finland etc. but then in 1917-8 Russia was not socialist and in any case there was little that could be done there in the face of German imperialism. None of this is sufficient evidence for JG’s amendment to the communist programme. And this is really the nub of the issue. The defeat of the Russian Revolution, the rise of Stalinism and then Maoism which did not even arise from a proletarian revolution have been identified as communism by the bourgeoisie for so long that many cannot sort out that which is proletarian from that which is not. All this baggage has to be rejected. There is a tendency which has stood out against the

counter-revolution, drawing the revolutionary lessons from the defeat of the Russian Revolution. That is the internationalist communist left, mainly based on those comrades who founded the Communist Party of Italy in 1921 and then fought against the degeneration of the Comintern, against Stalinism and Trotskyism. Up to now it has been swimming against the current but the collapse of Stalinism has opened up a new interest in its ideas. If the present generation of revolutionaries can bury the past it will be the basis of the future world party of the proletariat. Needless to say, the JG’s of this world have no place in it.

Jock,
Communist Workers Organisation
British affiliate of the IBRP

□

Rely to J.S. Daborn on the right of nations to self-determination

To: All
From: Mark, Communist Voice Organization
Date: 3-29-96
Detroit #111

On March 22, J.S. Daborn responded via the Internet to an article by Joseph Green that appeared in *Communist Voice*, vol.2, no.2. The article by Green, entitled “Marxism and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination” exposed the “left” communist views that deny that the right to self-determination of nations and the national liberation struggle have any worthwhile role to play in the epoch of imperialism.

J.S. Daborn’s response is a perfect example of how the anti-Marxist trend of “left” communism winds up in a “socialist-colonialist” policy. It confirms precisely the point raised by Joseph Green’s article. JSD boasts that his “left” communist political trend was “the most consistent opponent” of “activists [who] eagerly supported national liberation movements.” Daborn, the so-called “internationalist,” not only takes a stand against all the revolutionary-democratic and anti-colonial struggles of the last hundred years or so. Daborn denounces the very idea of building a mass movement or having any mass organizations whatsoever (that is, unless they are so unstable that they quickly collapse!). For instance, JSD writes that “the building of mass movements, trade unions and the like . . . is living in the last century” and the idea of “mass organs of long duration (such as unions)” is based on “the illusion of all socialists [sometime in the past — Mark] that capitalism would happily allow us to build up mass organs under its sway without attempting to recuperate them for capital.” And while denying the mass movements, Daborn swears that Green errs when he describes Daborn-type views as rejecting every struggle but the direct struggle for socialism!

JSD wants revolution all right. So long as it can take place

in a never, never world where mass organizations are automatically immune from bourgeois influence, where the task of organizing the class struggle can take place without any possible setbacks, negative influences or “attempts to recuperate them for capital.” JSD wants organization, provided it can take place in the pristine circumstances of his imagination, not in the real world. And since the world has not yet provided the oppressed with any examples of such idyllic conditions, JSD is upset over the very existence of mass movements, at least if they have any degree of organization to them. For Daborn, one day the ultimate movement will arise and all the capitalists will be swept away the world over. Until then, JSD holds that organizing the masses is simply playing the enemy’s game.

JSD is free to stand for running away from all the problems that any attempt to organize the workers entails (and not just the workers, but other oppressed masses including the vast poor peasantry that still exists in the world). But its really funny when JSD labels those criticizing such views as religious zealots. After all, it’s JSD who pontificates against “movements” and “organizations” of the oppressed in the name of the Great Judgment Day when, suddenly, out of the blue, with no previous experience in battle, with no stable organizations, the proletariat will appear in pure form from the heavens, slay the beast of capital the world over and go instantly to classless society. Let’s just hope the bourgeoisie offers no resistance, that no problems occur along the way and that classless and stateless society is achieved the day after the world uprising lest the twists and turns of struggle lead, as JSD swears they must, to corruption and defeat.

Daborn’s ostrich-like view of imperialism

JSD’s general cursing of movements applies first and foremost to the movements against national oppression. JSD begins

his discourse on the subject by lecturing about how we all must take into account the features of capitalism in its imperialist stage. But it's JSD who's playing the ostrich here. JSD is so far removed from an examination of the actual situation under imperialism that he advances the proposition that "no such struggle existed" in the imperialist epoch which "lead to the expansion of capital." JSD, who is so concerned with the actual conditions in the historical era of imperialism, cannot even acknowledge the huge and ongoing growth of capitalism that has taken place all over the world in the last century.

And here's some other little details the significance of which JSD does not comprehend. Imperialism did not merely spread capitalist relations and exploitation. It also imposed direct political rule in the colonies, carried out extreme racist policies, deprived the native population of all rights, practiced semi-slave exploitation (presumably, JSD wouldn't countenance trade unions even in the colonies!), plundered the natural resources and the economy at will, etc. Such oppression has been in addition to the "normal" economic exploitation of the workers and makes this exploitation more severe. JSD considers the anti-colonial fight against this sort of imperialist oppression some kind of detour from the real interests of the proletariat, however. He claims that the fight against national oppression is merely a game for the bourgeoisie, something the workers dare not soil their hands with. True, JSD later seems to contradict himself, stating that only the proletariat can fight national oppression. The resolution of this seeming contradiction for the "left" communists like JSD, is that his version of the proletarian struggle against national oppression is confined to the world socialist insurrection of the future while various struggles against oppression today they consider to be playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie.

What the stand of the PLO shows

JSD raises the example of the "millionaire backers and leaders of the PLO". But why is this supposed to discredit the idea of a Palestinian fight against national oppression or the idea of the right of nations to self-determination? JSD is only slapping himself in the face with this example. The PLO has *sold out* the Palestinian struggle for democratic rights. This is why the Israeli rulers and Clinton pat Arafat on the head. The PLO, the main political representative of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, has betrayed the masses on the question of national oppression. For JSD, however, since the PLO leaders live high on the hog, the Palestinian struggle against national oppression itself is discredited. Never mind that the *masses* rose up against the Israeli occupation *despite* the PLO leadership. For JSD, the uprising of the masses and the PLO capitulation are one and the same thing, the despised national liberation struggle. And by equating the fight against national oppression with the rich PLO leaders, JSD actually prettifies them.

Is there such a thing as national oppression?

JSD is also wrong when he asserts that "all oppression is only aimed at the proletarian section of any nationality." Indeed it obliterates the very concept of national oppression. If all oppression is directed only against a certain class, then what

basis is there for talk of oppression on the basis of nationality, even for the proletarian section? Can one imagine a society where bigotry against workers of a certain race or nationality was widespread, but cases of racism against shopkeepers or students or professionals of that race or nationality were unknown? It's absurd. If a black worker is denied a job because the employer is a racist, does this mean the worker was mistreated because he was a worker?!

Certainly the toilers pay the heaviest price for racism and national oppression. But, in the first place the toilers include not only the proletariat. National oppression hits the peasant masses very hard too, not just the proletariat. And in the second place, while the exploitative interests of the bourgeois sections of an oppressed nationality push it toward reconciliation with the dominant bourgeoisie, it's absurd to deny that the bourgeois sections can't be denied their democratic rights. The black bourgeoisie of South Africa, for example, was denied political rights until recently. Nelson Mandela, whose ANC engineered a reformist solution to apartheid, spent several decades in the white racist jails. And Mandela is certainly the foremost political representative of the black bourgeoisie in South Africa. Or take the Palestinian bourgeoisie in the occupied territories. Even though the PLO leaders have grown fat and become the whiphand of the Israeli rulers, it is undeniable that Israeli oppression has imposed all sorts of restrictions on Palestinian businesses, stolen the water resources of Palestinian farmers, etc. The PLO deal with the Israelis did not even get many of the rights needed by significant sections of Palestinian business.

Meanwhile, Jim Crow segregation in the U.S. deprived blacks of all classes of their rights and most certainly was an impediment to the class interests of both the black proletariat and the black bourgeoisie. The overcoming of this American version of apartheid hardly marked the end of racism in the U.S. nor could it prevent capitalism from keeping large sections of the black population on the verge of ruin. But the elimination of some of the most degrading forms of racism was an important advance. The extension of democratic rights opened up certain job opportunities for the black workers, opened up some organizing opportunities, broke down many walls between black and white workers, and it led to a clearer class differentiation among blacks as the bourgeois section of the black community became more developed, reflected in such things as the rise of black mayors in major cities. This is an example of how overcoming racism against black people in general helped provide the conditions for a sharper class struggle.

Did imperialism equalize the conditions in all countries?

A serious examination of the actual conditions under imperialism in this century would also recognize that the advent of imperialism did not mean that all countries were at the same level of development, nor that the class relations were in all places similar. Consequently, the course of struggle that arose in response to the conditions in each country would also vary. In the historical stage called imperialism, there have not only been highly-developed capitalist-imperialist powers. There have been countries where modern class differentiation was little developed, countries where capitalist relations were ensnared in

semi-feudal forms, whole nations enslaved by colonialism, etc. And whether JSD likes it or not, this meant that the revolutionary movements in the 20th century would not all have socialism as their direct goal, but would go through a variety of stages before the struggle for socialism would come to the fore. For instance, the fact that hundreds of millions of peasants still lived under semi-feudal conditions this century, meant that the issue of an agrarian revolution that gave land to the peasants still represented progress in much of the world. JSD's "examination" of the world consists of chanting that imperialism has spread its influence around the world while ignoring the actual results of this process on the social systems in various countries at any given time during this century.

Daborn's socialism, colonial-style

Of course, when the workers actually come to power, JSD is not about to grant national rights, either. To justify this, JSD tries to make Marx and Lenin in JSD's own image. Why they did not recognize a "right to self-determination" under socialism JSD contends. And the *Communist Manifesto* talks about national frontiers being abolished. But neither Marx, nor Engels, nor Lenin, thought that the victorious proletariat could immediately abolish different nationalities and all national borders, or that nations enslaved by the former big power rulers should be denied the right to decide if they wish to be independent or not. See, for instance, Engels' stand that the British workers should allow the British colony of India its freedom, should they come to power. By denying the right to self-determination of nations under socialism, JSD legitimizes the national oppression carried out by the former rulers.

JSD, while portraying Lenin as an enemy of the right of nations to self-determination under socialism, admits that Lenin recognized the independence of Finland. But that doesn't count, protests JSD, because Lenin was allegedly really just handing over Finland to Germany! Not only is this a lie, but it's striking that while JSD thinks Lenin's policy on the national question was simply one of cynical maneuvering, he nonetheless voices no objection. For JSD, the fate of whole nations (proletariat included) can just be decided by whatever is convenient for the "Marxists" in the dominant country. JSD also argues against the right to self-determination of nations under socialism on the grounds that Russian revolution was never socialist. For JSD, when the proletarian revolution comes to power, it means the immediate end of separate nations. And since Lenin did not immediately decree the end of the separate nations that had been annexed by the Czarist empire, JSD considers this a sign that the principles of a socialist society were not present. Here JSD betrays his confusion of the Czarist method of unity of nations with Marxist methods. JSD is denouncing Lenin's policy of *voluntary* unity, unity based on the recognition of the right to self-determination, with bludgeoning the oppressed nations into submission.

Is the liberation struggle an imperialist plot?

JSD grudgingly concedes that the crumbling of the old colonial system was "prompted by national struggles". But that doesn't meet with JSD's approval. JSD can only see the efforts

of the U.S. and Soviet imperialists to interfere in the liberation struggles. What's noteworthy is *why* JSD complains about imperialist meddling. JSD does not attack the imperialists for denying the right to self-determination, nor show how imperialist intrigues in the revolutionary struggles undermine and subvert the liberation movements, but to complain that imperialist "aid" is "why these struggles [were] so difficult to suppress"! In JSD's view, the national liberation movements are just creatures of this or that imperialist. And thus JSD considers it an "internationalist" duty to *fret over the difficulties of suppressing the liberation struggle*. Just as JSD in general rails against mass movements and organizations of the oppressed in this century, on the grounds that the capitalists will try to subvert them, so now the efforts of imperialism to subvert the liberation movement becomes an excuse to "repress" the liberation struggle. I suppose JSD would not hail the imperialist powers for crushing the liberation struggles. But JSD hold that it is the job of the proletariat to rail against the liberation movements.

Kneeling before almighty imperialism

But one question, JSD. Will not the bourgeoisie try to subvert the proletarian uprising and the organizations that try to bring it about? Why if organization and movements for more humble goals are futile because the bourgeoisie will fight against it, then the fury of the bourgeoisie against organizing for the proletarian insurrection will be a million times greater. Shouldn't the direct struggle for socialism be surrendered with even more determination than less ambitious struggle? Or take the various spontaneous outbursts that come up? Since they come up under capitalism, they can't possibly be immune from bad influences either. So why shouldn't unorganized struggles be cast aside with organized ones?

JSD's problem is that he passes from recognition of the power of imperialism to considering all struggle against it (save the socialist uprising) to be futility. JSD looks at the betrayal of the workers by the anti-Marxist social-democratic trade union leaders during World War I. And what does he conclude? Not that the workers need genuine class organizations (including trade unions), but that the workers should give up organizing mass movements and trade unions. And why should they give them up? Because imperialism will not allow mass movements, not allow real workers organizations. JSD has found the perfect way to avoid the difficulties and possible setbacks of struggle — abstain from the mass struggle.

Should we fight for the best conditions for the class struggle?

JSD's trump card is that every struggle that does not achieve socialism leaves some sort of system of exploitation in place. True. But to reduce the Marxism's stand on the class struggle to that is to distort it beyond recognition. Marxism calls attention to the fact that no democratic demand can overcome class exploitation. But Marxism also shows how the democratic demands clear the path for struggle against economic exploitation. No Marxist would deny that only socialism can end exploitation. But Marxism certainly does care about the particular conditions under which the struggle takes place. The

proletariat cares about whether it has more or less political freedom, whether it is exploited in “normal” fashion or in chains, or in concentration camps under a police state. The proletariat cares whether capitalist relations are tangled up with semi-feudal relations or accompanied by virulent racist and nationalist oppression, the torture of immigrants, etc. If the workers fail to fight these outrages they allow the bourgeoisie to impede the class struggle. If the proletariat does not fight such oppression today, they will be driven into the ground, unfit to wage the great class battles of the future. And when JSD pontificates against mass movements and stable organization, he is not saving the workers for the “pure” struggle, not saving Marxism from the swamp of opportunism. He is assisting the bourgeois onslaught against the masses.

Turning *What Is To Be Done* upside-down

In passing, it’s funny that JSD tries to back up his position with reference to Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done*. For the very “swamp” that Lenin cautioned against falling into is the swamp inhabited by JSD. In this work, Lenin was arguing against those Russian “Marxists” who failed to see that the proletariat would commit a grave blunder by thinking that it could stand aside from the struggles against oppression other than the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist. Lenin here argues against the narrow view of the proletarian struggle by the “economists” that negates the need for the workers to *lead the struggle against all oppression*, and in the particular conditions of Russia at the time, the *democratic* struggle against the autocracy. Lenin called on the Russian workers of the time to oppose every abuse of the autocracy against the peasantry, the students and liberal intelligentsia, etc. Lenin talked about *the workers being the vanguard of the democratic revolution*. He states: “The point we were discussing was the possible and necessary participation of various social strata in the overthrow of the autocracy; and not only are we *able*, but it is our bounden duty, to guide *these* ‘activities of the various opposition strata’ if we desire to be the ‘vanguard.’ (Chapter III, Section E.: “The working class as vanguard fighter for democracy”.) And when years later, Lenin criticized Luxemburg, Pannekoek, and other “lefts” of

his day for opposing the right of nations to self-determination, he rightly labeled their views “imperialist economism”. In this way, Lenin linked the views of the “lefts” who negated the right to political independence in the era of imperialism to the “economists” of old who shunted the need for the worker class to be the foremost champions of democracy.

Ideological support for genocide

In closing, a note of the situation in the former Yugoslavia. JSD has figured out that the bourgeoisies in the various republics used nationalism to divide the workers. But what’s amazing is that JSD thinks this is an argument against recognizing the right to self-determination of nations. Thus, when Joseph Green says recognition of this right is not the cause of the problems in the former Yugoslavia, JSD attacks Green for supporting the crimes of the bourgeoisie and blaming the workers for these crimes.

JSD refuses to recognize that the denial by the Serb bourgeoisie of the right to self-determination is also bourgeois nationalism. And the Croatian bourgeoisie is not guilty of recognizing the right of self-determination of nations, but of only recognizing this right for itself, not Bosnia. Denial of the right of self-determination of nations is the bourgeois nationalism of a stronger bourgeoisie that wants unity in the form of a crushing and lording over the other nations. And it is this particular form of bourgeois nationalism that has escalated national antagonisms to the point of genocidal war. The bourgeoisie of the nations which separated off use bourgeois nationalism to line up the masses behind their class aims. But denying the right to self-determination is hardly building unity of the workers. It means providing an ideological excuse for the Serbian and Croatian dismemberment of Bosnia. It is the imperialist realism of carving up Bosnia among the stronger bourgeoisies.

If the separation of the republics hurt class unity, unity through military occupation and mass slaughter have turned class unity to rubble. And if anyone thinks that class unity will be restored without the recognition of national rights, including the rights of nations to self-determination, they are living in a dream world. □

“Left communist” appeals to Nigel Harris for help vs. Marxism Marxism upholds the right of nations to self-determination as a principle, not a cynical maneuver

by Joseph Green, Detroit

The following article deals with one of the ways Neil of the “Los Angeles Workers’ Voice” and a number of other “left communists” explain away Marx and Lenin’s support for the right of self-determination. Neil in particular appealed to how Nigel Harris presents the Marxist views on the right to self-determination in his book “National Liberation”. According to Harris, Marx and Engels cynically appealed to national freedom when it was useful for some other immediate political purpose, and opposed it when it wasn’t. Harris makes a show of scholarship, but the article—using the example of Ireland—shows how Harris resorts to the most blatant misrepresentation of the writings of Engels. This article was originally circulated via e-mail as Detroit #107 on Feb. 22, 1996. It was part of a series of articles on how Neil and the “LAWV” had repudiated Marxism in everything but name, and some other parts of this series appeared in “Communist Voice”, vol. 2, #2.

The Los Angeles Workers’ Voice versus Marxism Part 6: Neil’s replacement of theory by “the ends justifies the means”

Neil’s attempt to prove that his denial of the right to self-determination is Marxism is a ludicrous spectacle. He tears phrases out of context and invents stands of Marx and Lenin. He cites Marxists refuting opportunism as proof that Marxism denounces the right of self-determination as opportunism—but what it really shows is that Marxists, who uphold the right to self-determination, are the ones who fight opportunism.

But what else could a socialist-colonialist like Neil do? Since Marx and Lenin upheld the right to self-determination, it is inevitable that any attempt to make them into opponents of that right was bound to lead to charlatanism and fraud. True, Neil could instead admit that he thinks Marxism is wrong. But being straightforward about his politics isn’t Neil’s strong suit.

“Instrumentalism” versus Marxism

Neil’s main point is that Marx or Engels supposedly only supported the right to self-determination movement as a tool for some other purpose. He claims there are no general principles, and no particular advantages that national freedom holds for a people. It is simply a question of manipulation. If it is thought that such freedom would serve some geopolitical goal, then it should be advocated. But if it would help one’s opponents’ goals, then it shouldn’t be advocated. The implication is all the

talk about the right to self-determination is just cynical demagoguery to hide one’s manipulation of the masses, who are pawns in a game of global power politics. The implication is that it is simply a question of “the ends justifies the means”, and one could just as well crush national freedom as support it.

Nowhere can Neil find Marx putting this forward. Neil sent around a brief chapter from Nigel Harris’s book *National Liberation*, which is supposed to contain all one needs to know about Marxism’s view of the national question. It turns out that Neil has simply copied some of Harris’s conclusions, conclusions that don’t even follow from the few fragments of Marx and Engels’s writing that Harris quotes. He hasn’t even bothered to tell us what political trend Harris represents (Harris is some sort of leftist), or to present us with Harris’s footnotes saying where he got his brief extracts from the writings of Marx and Engels. Moreover, it is Harris, not Marx, who writes that “The attitude to national liberation, however, remained entirely instrumental.” (*National Liberation*, p. 46) By “instrumental”, Harris means that Marx and Engels just used it as a means to some end, as an “instrument” and tool with no value in itself. Thus he writes that “In 1848, Engels had viewed Europe as a general, deploying as his armies subject peoples to lock up the gendarme of Europe, Tsarist Russia.” (p. 47) Harris goes further, and mixes together the right to self-determination and nationalism, which are not the same things. Recognition of the right to self-determination helps cement the internationalist unity of the world proletariat; “nationalism” is never the ideology of the proletariat. Harris plays with the term “nationalism” because it allows him to mix together national liberation and imperialism; the revolt against nation oppression and the oppression itself; etc.

Of course, in one sense of the word, almost everything is “instrumental”—class struggle, revolution, the political party, etc.—as none of these things will exist in the communist classless society and all are essential in the struggle to reach that society. But there are definite principles involved in class struggle, revolution and party-building, and only a cynical manipulator, not a Marxist, says that anything goes so long as it can somehow be connected to a good motive.

In fact, Harris’s own extracts from the Marxist writings, no matter how few, lead in a different direction. Harris cites statements by Marx about Germany and Britain with respect to the right to self-determination and the principle that “A nation cannot be free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations”, and then points out that “Once admitted, however, the principle could then also be applied to the Magyar treatment of the Croats, the Polish of Ruthenians, etc. The door was opened to a much more generalized right of national self-determination.” (p. 44)

Precisely. A general principle is at work. Marx and the Marxists and the most class conscious members of the working

class did extend this principle. But Harris, having seen the general principle, then retreats from it and returns to trying to prove that Marx and Engels really saw the issue as only an “instrumental” one. Neil then repeats, without adding any thought of his own, a number of examples from Harris.

Before going on to Neil’s examples, it should be noted that of course the views of Marx and Engels evolved. Marx and Engels were remarkable for the consistency of their materialist standpoint. But they developed this framework throughout their lives in dealing with a myriad of different problems of revolutionary work and in dealing with situations that themselves evolved over the decades. Moreover, they sometimes erred in their assessments of individual situations, such as the proximity of revolution—they themselves remarked on this. So studying their work and Marxism-Leninism in general isn’t simply a matter of learning by heart some simple-minded recipes (“ignore all national questions”; “squash all separatists”; “abolish money on the first day of the revolution”; “all wars in the 20th century were imperialist” etc.). It is necessary for those who study Marxism to do some hard thinking on their own and to study the Marxist theory in an intelligent way. But Harris simply jumps from subject to subject, trying to convince people that there are no principles involved, just the utilization of any means to an end. And Neil does even less, simply taking some gossip here and some gossip there.

Now let’s look at how Neil studies Marxism.

Ireland

Neil assures us that Marx and Engels didn’t hold to the right to self-determination because “They sometimes supported independence and then sometimes federal union of Ireland with Britain.” (Neil, Feb. 13, Part one of his reply to Detroit #105)

But actually, Marx and Engels supported federation between Ireland and Britain on the basis of the free choice of the Irish people. They advocated that first Ireland should be independent (that is, the forced union of England and Ireland should be repealed), and then, if both countries agreed, a federation should be established on a voluntary basis between Ireland and Britain. Neil doesn’t seem to understand the difference between the voluntary union of peoples on the basis of national freedom, and the forcible union under colonialism. It is this blindness that allows him to become a “socialist” apologist for colonialism. He doesn’t seem to understand that national freedom is, for the proletariat, a step towards the unity of the proletarians of all lands, not a step away from it. And national freedom requires, under certain conditions, independence.

Harris however tries to prove that “Marx and Engels were initially unsympathetic towards the cause of Irish freedom.” (Harris, p. 43) His proof? He says that Marx and Engels thought “The Chartists would liberate the Irish as a byproduct of their struggle for power in Britain.” (*Ibid.*) But here Harris contradicts himself. Marx and Engels supported the Chartist demand, contained in one of their giant petitions, for the freedom of Ireland. But Harris says that this means that Marx and Engels opposed Irish freedom.

Marx and Engels did change their minds as to how Irish freedom would be obtained. First they thought it would come through a joint struggle of the Irish and British workers. Later they thought that Irish freedom (the abolition of the forced union

with England followed by either complete separation from England or, preferably, a free federation or confederation with England) would come before the British proletariat won victory. Dealing as they did with the Irish question over a period of many decades, their views on the prospects for Ireland changed, as did the actual situation in the world, such as the situation of both the Irish movement and the English proletarian movement. In the article “About the Irish Question” in 1882 Engels thought that the immediate prospects for Irish freedom weren’t very good—short of England being threatened with or involved in a war with a major power. And indeed, Ireland remained oppressed throughout the nineteenth century. But Marx and Engels were never indifferent to the oppression of the Irish.

But Harris has another argument to prove that Marx and Engels were contemptuous of Irish freedom. He quotes from one of Engels’s earliest works, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, written in 1844-5, that “Irish distress cannot be removed by any Act of Repeal.” (“Repeal” refers to repealing the British law that removed all self-government for Ireland and established the union of Ireland and Britain.) However, it is one thing to believe that national freedom alone won’t bring prosperity; it is another to believe that freedom is a bad thing. This statement doesn’t necessarily show that Engels opposed “Repeal”. The rest of the passage seems to show that Engels is in favor of “Repeal”, but is debunking the illusions of petty-bourgeois nationalism. A later article by Engels in January 1848—that I will quote in a few moments—repeats this same position about “Repeal” not being useful in itself, and this time there can’t be the slightest doubt that Engels is ardently supporting “Repeal”. Engels’s idea in 1848 is that it is not sufficient that Ireland has rights, if the workers and peasants have no rights in Ireland. He holds that the workers and peasants should contest the rule of the Irish exploiters and, as a start to this, should ensure that they obtained democratic rights in Ireland. It shows that, Neil to the contrary, Marxist support for a national movement never meant becoming loyal supporters of the regimes of the local bourgeoisie.

But back to the statement from Engels in 1844-45 that Harris quotes. It continues as follows:

“Such an Act [Repeal] would, however, at once lay bare the fact that the cause of Irish misery, which now seems to come from abroad, is really to be found at home.”

This sentence suggests that Engels is supporting “Repeal”, and precisely because it would have brought nearer the agrarian revolution and the class struggle in Ireland. Engels’ statement of 1844-45, which Harris takes as opposition to “Repeal”, is similar to statements that Marx and Engels would later repeatedly make as one of their explanations of the need for bourgeois-democratic revolution—it won’t emancipate the proletariat from wage-slavery, but it will lay bare that emancipation requires the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In any case, it’s clear that Engels was already in 1844-45 establishing a theoretical framework that would later allow him to champion “Repeal”. Engels’ statement doesn’t show that he was against Irish freedom, but that his solidarity goes wholeheartedly to the oppressed toilers of Ireland.

Now let’s proceed to the promised article of January 1848 from Engels. This was written at the time when Marx and Engels’ thought that the growth of the Chartist movement into

a joint movement of the British and Irish workers, and its victory, would liberate Ireland. Harris assures us that Marx and Engels were opposed to Irish freedom at this time, but what does the article show? In it, Engels not only ardently backed Irish freedom, but criticized the bourgeois Irish politicians for not being serious enough about "Repeal" but only playing with the word "Repeal". It also contains the point that "Repeal" won't be useful unless the demands of the "People's Charter" are implemented in Ireland.

Engels writes:

"The first issue of *The Northern Star* for 1848 contains an address to the Irish people by *Feargus O'Connor*, the well-known leader of the English Chartists and their representative in Parliament. This address deserves to be read from beginning to end and carefully considered by every democrat . . .

". . . The consequences of this forceful appeal to the Irish people will very soon be strongly felt and seen. Feargus O'Connor, himself of Irish descent, a Protestant and for over ten years a leader and main pillar of the great labor movement in England, must henceforth be regarded as the virtual chief of the Irish Repealers and advocates of reform. His speeches in the House of Commons against the recently published disgraceful Irish Coercion Bill, have given him the first claim to this status, and the subsequently continued agitation for the Irish cause shows that Feargus O'Connor is just the man Ireland needs.

"*O'Connor* is indeed seriously concerned about the well-being of the millions in Ireland. Repeal—the abolition of the Union, that is, the achievement of an independent Irish Parliament—is not an empty word, not a pretext for obtaining posts for himself and his friends and for making profitable private business transactions.

"In his address he shows the Irish people that Daniel O'Connell, that political juggler, led them by the nose and deceived them for thirteen years by means of the word 'Repeal' . . .

.....
"With a lucidity which cannot escape even the most obtuse mind, O'Connor shows that the Irish people must fight with all their might and in close association with the English working classes and the Chartists in order to win the six points of the People's Charter—annual parliaments, universal suffrage, vote by ballot, abolition of the property qualification for members of Parliament, payment of M.P.s and the establishment of equal electoral districts. Only after these six points are won will the achievement of Repeal have any advantages for Ireland.

"Furthermore, O'Connor points out that justice for Ireland has already been demanded earlier by the English workers in a petition which received 3 ½ million signatures, and that now the English Chartists have again protested against the Irish Coercion Bill in numerous petitions and that

the oppressed classes in England and Ireland must at least fight together and conquer together or continue to languish under the same oppression and live in the same misery and dependence on the privileged and ruling capitalist class." (*Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 6, pp. 448-9, all emphasis in this or other quotations in Detroit #107 are as in the original)

If this isn't clear enough, here is an extract from an earlier article of January 4, 1848 by Engels. It points out that Feargus O'Connor

"put himself at the head of the Irish party in a single bound. It was he who proposed the outright rejection of the Coercion Bill; it was he who succeeded in rallying all the opposition behind him; it was he who opposed each clause, who held up the voting whenever possible; it was he who in his speeches summed up all the arguments of the opposition against the Bill; and finally it was he who for the first time since 1835 reintroduced the motion for *Repeal of the Union*, a motion which none of the Irish members would have put forward."

Now let me refer to extracts from two letters from Marx which deal with the relationship of federation to independence. This comes from the time when Marx changed his mind about how Ireland would gain national freedom and felt that it would come from the initiative of the Irish movement, and not as a result of joint proletarian victory in England and Ireland. However, Harris to the contrary, the support of "Repeal" remains the same—it's only the method for achieving it that has changed. A letter to Engels of 30 November 1867 states:

"The next question is, what shall we advise the *English* workers? In my opinion they must make the *repeal of the Union* . . . into an article of their *pronunziamento*. This is the only *legal* and therefore only possible form of Irish emancipation which can be admitted in the programme of an *English* party. Experience must show later whether a purely personal union can continue to subsist between the two countries. I half think it can if it takes place in time.

"What the Irish need is:

"(1) Self-government and independence from England.

"(2) An agrarian revolution. With the best will in the world the English cannot accomplish this for them, but they can give them the legal means of accomplishing it for themselves.

"(3) *Protective tariffs against England*. . . ."

The second, a letter to Kugelmann of Nov. 29, 1869, states that

"I have become more and more convinced—and the only question is to bring this conviction home to the English working class—that it can never do anything decisive here in England until it separates its policy with regard to Ireland in the most definite way from the policy of the ruling classes, until it not only makes common cause with the Irish, but actually takes the initiative in

dissolving the Union established in 1801 and replacing it by a free federal relationship.”

Harris—who Neil studied on this issue—also quotes parts of these two letters. One might perhaps be able to see, even from what Harris cited, that Marx’s view was to repeal the union and then try to establish a federal relationship. But Neil doesn’t have any conception of the relationship between “independence” and a free “federal relationship”. So he jumped to the conclusion that Marx changed back and forth from one position to another, rather than seeing that Marx had a consistent position in support of Irish freedom.

Two types of unity

This shows that Neil’s socialist-colonialist standpoint does not grasp the difference between voluntary unity and colonial suppression. From Marx’s point of view, the difference is decisive. The “unity” of colonial suppression disunited the British and Irish workers; independence would start to reunite the British and Irish workers, and it would also perhaps allow the establishment of a free federal relationship between the countries of England and Ireland.

The working class needs to unite into a world movement, and stands for the merger of the different nationalities. Communism stands for immediately organizing the workers of all nationalities into common trade unions and the same revolutionary party and other common organizations inside a single country. It also stands for the closest unity of the proletariat across national borders. And it looks towards the merger of countries. But this merger can only come about on the basis of freedom. Any imperialist hack or colonialist apologist or annexationist butcher supports the unity of the graveyard, with the slaves “united” with their overlords. The proletariat supports the unity that arises in a common struggle for freedom from exploitation and oppression. Lasting unity of the workers of all lands can only be achieved in a dialectical, not a mechanical standpoint: it requires struggle for freedom of the oppressed.

So much for now. We will continue next time on Neil’s distortions of Marxism.

Appendix:

Harris’s lies about Marxism

Neil doesn’t study Marxism but instead claims that Nigel Harris gave “an authoritative and most unbiased description” of the views of Marx and Engels on the national question. We have already seen how Harris distorts the views of Marx and Engels on Ireland. But let’s dwell on this a bit longer to see just how dishonest and ignorant the supposed “unbiased” Harris is.

As I pointed out above, Harris implies that Marx and Engels opposed “Repeal” while they worked with the Chartists. He gives the quote from *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* which I have cited above, but for some reason says that it expressed Engels’ views of 1848 (although it was written in 1844-45). Let’s return to this quote. It ends with Engels saying that “Repeal” would “lay bare the fact that the cause of Irish misery, which now seems to come from abroad, is really to be found at home.” Harris says this means Engels is opposed

to “Repeal”, but Engels actually goes on to discuss the question of whether “Repeal” is essential for allowing the Irish to recognize the cause of their problems. Thus Engels writes that “Meanwhile, it is an open question whether the accomplishment of repeal will be necessary to make this clear to the Irish.” He then gives reasons for suggesting that “Repeal” will in fact be necessary, namely, that “Hitherto, neither Chartism nor Socialism has had marked success in Ireland.” This suggests that Engels is saying that “Repeal” may well be necessary if Chartism or socialism is to make progress in Ireland.

But Harris doesn’t quote these sentences. He doesn’t try to understand Engels’ method of reasoning and how it differs radically from commonplace bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism. Instead he hopes the reader will be satisfied with the view: either national freedom liberates the masses from poverty, or it is useless; either petty-bourgeois nationalism, or negation of the national question. He doesn’t point out that Marx and Engels believed that bourgeois-democratic freedoms in general (and not just “Repeal”) don’t liberate the masses from exploitation, but provide a broader platform for the development of the class struggle.

To back up his disregard for what Engels is saying, Harris goes on to hint that Marx and Engels are racists (something Neil is not above doing either). Believe it or not, Harris actually says that Engels believed that “the poverty was due to the temperament of the people.” To make this seem plausible, Harris points out that Engels felt that continuous oppression had made the Irish into “a completely wretched nation”.

It is of course true that Engels denounced oppression for the wretched conditions of the Irish toilers, and repeatedly denounces British crimes as well as the local social conditions. However, as to poverty itself, what Engels actually said was that “The cause of this poverty lies in the existing social conditions, especially in competition here found in the form of the subdivision of the soil.”

There is no way that anyone who seriously read the passage from Engels that Harris is quoting could have missed this. In fact, Engels lays stress on the social conditions, and goes on to ridicule other explanations of poverty. Engels lists a lot of these explanations, and after debunking them, reiterates that the social conditions are the real cause of poverty. He says:

“ . . . in the same way a hundred other causes of this poverty are brought forward, all proving as little as these. This poverty is the result of our social conditions; apart from these, causes may be found for the manner in which it manifests itself, but not for the fact of its existence. That poverty manifests itself in Ireland thus and not otherwise, is owing to the character of the people, and to their historical development.”

Engels does say too much about the character of various peoples, which I think reflects that this is a very early work of Engels, before the full materialist theory was worked out. But he vehemently denies that this is the cause of poverty.

So much for Harris’s “unbiased” scholarship. So much for Neil’s view that one can find in Harris’s work all that one needs to know about Marxism on the national question. □

“Left” communists banish Marxism to the nineteenth century

by Mark, Detroit

In the article below Mark examines the typical statement of principles of a “left communist” group, the ICC. The ICC throws away basic Marxist principles concerning the economic struggle, the political struggle, the political party, the national liberation movement and so forth as supposedly rendered obsolete by 20th century capitalism. According to the “left communists”, such principles only apply to rising capitalism but not decadent capitalism. Mark’s article was originally circulated “to all” on e-mail on January 31, 1996 as Detroit #101.

After much prodding, NC of the *Los Angeles Workers’ Voice* group has announced the other allegedly Marxist currents he is excited about. One of these groups is the International Communist Current. Recently I received some literature from this group. Below I’m reproducing the “Basic Positions of the ICC” as given in their publication “International Review” #83. As the reader will note, this is not a group with basically sound positions that just has some admiration for the “left” communists of Lenin’s time (Luxemburg, Pannekoek/Gorter, Bordiga, Pankhurst, etc.) who fought the social-traitors and stood for the proletarian revolution. Rather, their basic positions are a litany of every theoretical error made by the “lefts”. In fact, by combining together the worst features of each “left” communist of the past and taking them to the extreme, they wind up with an overall theory that would probably make some of the “lefts” of the past cringe. Their theorizing leads to some amazing analysis of contemporary politics, such as that the employer offensive against the unions is a myth and that in the Detroit newspaper strike, the unions egged on the strikers to be militant (!!!) as part of a plot to isolate the strikers. But rather than go through their erroneous views on this or that event, let’s get right to their underlying principles. To do this, I reproduce below their own document outlining their basic views which appeared on the back cover of their *International Review* #83.

Basic positions of the ICC

The *International Communist Current* defends the following political positions:

* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the

conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

* The stratified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc. and were called ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’ were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

* All the nationalist ideologies — ‘national independence’, ‘the right of nations to self-determination’ etc. — whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. ‘Democracy’, a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called ‘workers’, ‘Socialist’ and ‘Communist’ parties (now ex-‘Communists’), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism’s political apparatus. All the tactics of ‘popular fronts’, ‘anti-fascist fronts’ and ‘united fronts’, which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.

* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union organization, whether ‘official’ or ‘rank and file’, serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it’s not

the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class toward a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither 'to organize the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

Our Activity

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

Our Origins

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1889-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the *German, Dutch and Italian Lefts*.

Well, there it is. I should note a couple of things to further clarify their positions given above.

Their first paragraph talks about post-World War I capitalism

being decadent, etc. The problem is the conclusion they draw from this which is not explicitly made here. Their conclusion is that in its decadent phase, reforms of any lasting nature are impossible and thus demands short of revolution are themselves signs of opportunism. For example, when they not only attack the trade union bureaucracy, but the notion of rank-and-file organization, they do so because of their general view that in this period, trade union forms of organization have no role to play (except to enslave the workers). They grant that in early capitalism, trade unions were OK because then reforms were possible, but now unions are little more than a capitalist plot. Thus they write:

"A hundred years ago, during the ascendant period of capitalist development, trade unions were tools the working class could use to defend its interests against the bosses. Unions were never revolutionary organizations, that called into question capitalist rule. But they could be used to win wage increases and improve working conditions. However when capitalism reached the limits of historic development, when it became a fetter on the further development of the productive forces in the beginning of this century, the situation changed. When capitalism ceased to be historically progressive, durable reforms and improvements under capitalism were no longer possible. Whatever workers won was illusory, only to evaporate and prove meaningless very quickly. With reforms and improvements no longer possible, the nature of the trade unions were transformed." (*Internationalism*, #92, Fall 1995, p.3)

Elsewhere they explicitly denounce trade unions, and, for good measure, national liberation struggles, as one might expect from the above-mentioned stand versus "self-determination." They write, referring to a group who split from them, but whom they agree with on various things:

"Programatically, they even adhere to certain proletarian positions. They are against trade unions and support for 'national liberation' struggles." (*International Review* #83, p.24) (Evidently this is why NC has taken to putting national liberation in quotes, too.)

As for the rest, there's a good dose of semi-anarchism. Rejection of utilizing elections under any circumstances, rejection of any sort of united fronts, every section of the bourgeoisie (in which they place in an indistinguishable lump presumably everyone from David Duke to the radical left), is equally reactionary.

Of note also is their downplaying of the role of the party. The party shouldn't "organize the working class" or "take power", because they imagine that would be substituting itself for the workers or the workers councils.

I hope these brief comments will provide a hint of how the ICC diverges from Marxism-Leninism and provide some insight into the sort of pseudo-Marxist theory that NC considers such a happy discovery. □

Correspondence

1) Cuba

2) 5th International

An exchange of views on Cuba — revolutionary society or revisionist regime?

Cuba today — state capitalist or revolutionary?

To: Jos. Green
From: MD
March 19, 1996
Re: How does Castro support state capitalism?

Joseph,

In a message you sent to the Marxism list you included a list of subjects that the new issue of *Communist Voice* [Vol. 2, #2, March 15, 1996] deals with. One of these was an article titled “Castro’s state capitalism is no answer for workers.”

I assume that you share this view. I am curious as to how you justify this assumption. Second, what should Castro, or the people of Cuba do? Do they have a choice, or do they have to resort to state capitalism—as Lenin said he had to before his death. Do you think Castro wants state capitalism?

These are all serious questions. Take your time to answer them. I appreciate any response you may have.

Thank you,
MD

□

Reply: Is revisionist society socialist, or oppressive?

March 20, 1996
Dear MD,

Thank you for your message. I think the issue involved is whether revisionist society is socialism, or a sort-of-socialism, or a pre-socialism that deserves to be supported by progressive people, or is another oppressor of the working class. With respect to Cuba, I find it odd when the question is raised of what alternative choice does the working class have—in a way that implies that they have decided the current policies—when the fact is that the working class doesn’t have any choice in Cuba. For example, in the last elections, candidates for office posted sheets with their biographies for people to consider, but weren’t

allowed to discuss the issues, to say nothing of campaign on the issues. It was a charade—the closest you can get to non-election elections. Cuba is not the worst nonrepresentative state in the world, but its basic direction is determined by the ruling class and government, and not by the toilers. The Cuban revolution was a major liberating step in its time, but the days of the revolution have long been over, and a revisionist society has been consolidated. The workers are faced with organizing against both U.S. imperialism dictate and the Castroist government, party, and ruling class. Until they take that step, they won’t really exist as a force with a choice.

You mentioned the issue of state capitalism. I am going to try to write on this matter for a upcoming issue of *Communist Voice*. [See “State capitalism, Leninism, and the transition to socialism”, part one of which appears in this issue of *Communist Voice*.] It deserves a good deal of attention. Lenin talked of “state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat”—something which manifestly does not characterize Cuba, since the Cuban government rests on the passivity of the workers, not on their revolutionary consciousness. It is not that state capitalism is a progressive society, but that a country in transition to socialism has, at one point, an economy which resembles state capitalism in some of its basic economic features (for example, a state ownership of the economy rather than simply societal ownership, money and a large section of the economy run by financial accounting, pay differentials, etc.). This resemblance is important to recognize because, for one thing, it explains why a revolution can degenerate relatively “peacefully” into a revisionist rule. But the recognition of certain common features with state capitalism should spur the revolutionary workers to fight to prevent such a degeneration, and help them recognize hostile class regimes when they arise, not be an apology for any despotism that arises. State capitalism in itself (whether Western state capitalism or revisionist state capitalism) is not a step towards socialism, although it may show that economically the conditions are ripening for socialism.

What are your views on Cuba and the other revisionist state-capitalist societies, like China? Or the late Soviet Union? Would you raise the same issue, about the supposed lack of any alternative, about China and the late Soviet Union as you would about Cuba? What do you think the Cuban workers should do? Or the Chinese workers? And if activists and workers never

build their independent revolutionary movement, but always pursue what Marx ridiculed as “real politics” (“realistic” politics)—the giving up of major interests in order to trail this or that section of the powers-that-be—won’t they be political zeroes, satisfied with the illusion of having an influence but in fact simply floating on the tides of history?

Hoping to hear more from you (but I might not be able to get your reply or respond to it until early April, because I will be away from e-mail for almost all of the rest of March),

—Joseph Green □

Not as a socialist revolution, but as an anti-imperialist one

DATE: March 21, 1996
Re: Reply on Cuba

Joseph,

Hi. I have not had a chance to read your paper very thoroughly yet. I will soon do so. I am very interested to hear what you have to say.

I usually support the SWP and am somewhat involved with their party. The only major issue that I question or theirs is their stance on Cuba. As you may know, they are VERY pro-Cuba. I find myself leaning towards supporting Cuba, not as a socialist revolution, but as an anti-imperialist one.

It will be interesting to see what view I should hold after reading and thinking about what you have to say. I’ll write back to you soon. Hopefully I will catch you before you leave e-mail land. Thanks for taking the time to respond to my initial letter,
—MD □

Reply: On Castro’s “anti-imperialism”

March 21, 1996
Dear MD,

Thanks for your last reply. Unfortunately, I am in the midst of preparing to leave, and won’t be back until April 2. But I look forward to more discussion then.

Let me just make some quick, very hurried remarks.

I agree that mass movements don’t divide into socialist and reactionary. But I think it is a mistake to support the Cuban regime as anti-imperialist, although not socialist. The Cuban revolution is over, and the regime is not now based on the revolutionary action of the masses. This is why there are the non-election elections.

It is a correct sentiment that leads activists to want to see a force opposed to U.S. imperialism. And besides, whatever the Cuban regime is, the U.S. aggression against Cuba is brutal, unjust and imperialistic, and should be opposed. But we have to distinguish between what we would like to see and what exists. And the Cuban regime does not now have a progressive anti-imperialist policy, nor is it now leading a progressive trans-

formation of Cuba, but is presently another force sitting on the back of the Cuban masses. We have to look at what it is now; it’s not right to identify it with what happened decades ago. If that were correct, then a similar stand would have to be taken to Russia, China, Mexico, etc.

The key thing that we have to support is building up the initiative and organization of the masses around the world, with particular attention to the reorganization of the proletariat. This requires looking at what are the class alignments and struggles inside various countries, including Cuba. Are the present policies of the Cuban government and ruling class, and the policies it has undertaken for a number of years, building up the mass initiative, and the independent organization, and consciousness, of the toilers, or are they instead concerned to preserve the rule of a new revisionist bourgeoisie?

Moreover, if one supports the Cuban regime as anti-imperialist, then it would lead one to think favorably of the type world alliances the Cuban government has been building. This includes its ties with the PRI regime in Mexico, which Cuba also has tried to build bridges with. Is the PRI too to be supported because the Mexican revolution was indeed of tremendous significance? And Castro’s regime also backed the last-minute struggle of Cedras’s reactionary thugs in Haiti, who posed as anti-U.S. fighters while really being tyrannical rulers who reigned by systematic terror and murder.

I realize this is sketchy, but we can explore things more later. Talk to you later,

—Joseph □

Cuba—worthy of socialist support?

April 7, 1996
Re: Cuba

Joseph,

Sorry for the delay of this letter. I wrote you (not so) long ago regarding the validity of Cuba. You claim that Cuba is not worthy of socialist support, I claim it is. I believe this assumption to be correct.

I had written a somewhat lengthy letter to you explaining why I support the revolution. Unfortunately that letter was doomed to perish. I accidentally deleted it. Since then I forgot, or have been too lazy, to re-write you. Perhaps it is good that the original letter was deleted. I feel that I had really written an unnecessary amount. This letter will be a little bit shorter. So, I will raise a few points, and perhaps you can reply and critique them.

So . . . this is why I support Cuba’s socialist revolution.

As you know, Cuba has traditionally been the unofficial property of the US ever since the Spanish-American war. Right up until the time that Batista came to power Cuba was a source of wealth to the United States. There has been a tradition of revolt in Cuba. Jose Marti was the most prominent revolutionary. None had succeeded. Cuba, until 1959, had been an imperialized nation.

So Cuba revolted. Castro never claimed it to be a socialist

revolution. He only labeled it so after the USSR came into the picture. After the collapse of the USSR Cuba began to recover from the Stalinist tendencies that had been a result of dependence on the Soviet Union. Today Cuba is a nation struggling to remain independent and to cure the past social ills.

I call the Cuban revolution socialist because it fits the socialist tradition. Socialism is not a category. It is an interpretation of events. The Cuban revolution is a step towards communism, as opposed to a step towards capitalism. Thus it fits the socialist interpretation of a progressive revolution. The July movement expropriated the foreign capitalists and nationalized the economy. This is only a small step towards socialism, but a step none the less. The workers in Cuba had a say in what the government did for the first time in history. Although their say may be insignificant, they now have the means to speak. In the US the workers must both expropriate the capitalist class AND take state power. In Cuba all the workers have to do is take state power. And I also feel that Castro's sincere interests are on behalf of the workers. This does not justify Castro's authority, however. I just want to point out that at least Cuba has a leader that is for the people, though perhaps not by the people. Whereas most nations the leader is not for the people nor by the people. I refer to the saying "for the people by the people." This is one reason why I support Cuba—what they have now is better than what they would have if everyone denied them support. At least the Cuban people can build on what they have today.

Next, I kind of said this earlier, Cuba is fighting imperialism.

Next, I led onto this a little bit ago, the ills of Cuba are the result of Stalinist influence. However, now that Cuba has had to do without USSR support, it is changing. An example of this can be seen in the Cuban culture. Films that would not have been able to be shown twenty years ago are now being played. *Strawberries and Chocolate* is an example of a progressive Cuban film. It depicts the Youth League as being misled. In the film a homosexual man who questions the status quo changes the dogmatic attitude of a member of the Youth League. Throughout this entire film there is a theme that Cuba must struggle for independence but also fight for domestic change at the same time. Second, homosexuality is becoming more and more accepted. Once gays were sent to "re-education" camps or labor camps. Now Castro has openly proclaimed that homosexuality is not something to be looked down upon. A few years back there was a huge parade of gay rights supporters celebrating their new achievement. This would have never happened when the USSR was dictating [to] Cuba. So, Cuba is changing for the better. However it now faces its hardest task. It must struggle more than ever to survive through an embargo with no outside help. While Cuba gets healthier culturally, it gets sicker financially. Thus, it is important that we fight the embargo against Cuba so that the people can be provided the means to survive and prosper.

Last, the issue of Cuba is not black and white. The people of Cuba are as diverse in their attitudes, feelings, and livelihood as the people of any other nation. I do not want to give the impression that the people of Cuba feel this way or that. All people like us can do is fight to give the Cuban people the means to make up their own mind, to fight for self-determin-

ation. All our "discussion" can never shape or mold the people into what we think they should be. For us to deny the Cuban people because their revolution does not fit our taste is a crime. For us to stand by and watch an entire people suffer because we do not like Castro is not fair. We must support Cuba.

In solidarity,

—MD □

Reply: We must support proletarian reorganization, and look frankly at what revisionism really is

April 11, 1996

Dear MD,

Thank you for your letter of April 7, in which you sent forward your view that the Cuban revolution is continuing, carrying out an anti-imperialist policy, and a step towards socialism. I understand the sentiment that make activists want to see some spot in the world where socialism is making progress and the imperialists are being defied. This is undoubtedly a progressive sentiment.

But if we want to make a difference, we must examine the world as it is, not as we would wish it to be. We must not close our eyes to the fiasco of revisionism and reformism, and to the present disorganization in the proletarian and revolutionary movements around the world, but must center our efforts on overcoming the evils that have undermined the movement in the past. We must examine the situation in the world today, where the proletariat everywhere has to reorganize. There are no regimes that support the proletariat, and reformism and revisionism have disorganized the parties and organizations that claim to speak in the name of the proletariat. It doesn't help to sugarcoat this reality. Progress requires the independent action of the masses, and we must devote ourselves to helping the proletariat and the progressive masses organize themselves for a new assault on world capitalism and imperialism. This requires looking frankly and honestly into the historical situation, into the class situation existing in each country, and into revolutionary theory.

And what happens if we look at Cuba and Castroism in this light?

You say in your letter that "their [the workers'] say may be insignificant" in Cuba. But the consciousness and organization of the masses must be our prime concern. As Marx said, the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves. Or to put it another way, revolution is the act of the masses. The Cuban revolution was not the personal act of Castro, but the result of the sacrifice and struggle of the Cuban masses. If the workers' say is now insignificant, then this means that the Cuban revolution is over, long over, and the days that Castro was a revolutionary are long over. It means that some other class, besides the workers or peasants, is the ruling class in Cuba. It means that we have to analyze the new bourgeois society that presently exists in Cuba, and not be satisfied with talking about the undoubted importance of the revolutionary overthrow of the late U.S.-backed, Cuban dictator

Batista. This is not a question of whether Castro really believes in what he is doing—it is a question of analyzing present-day Cuban realities.

To me many of the arguments given in your letter sound like special pleading. Do you really believe that steps to socialism can be made, not by the masses, but by Castro's personal will, and that the question is Castro's personal sincerity? It seems to me that, if this is where the views of the SWP leads, it pretty much speaks for itself. One of the verses of the famous song the International spoke to such a conception:

“we want no condescending saviors,
to rule us from their judgment hall,
we workers ask not for their favors,
let us consult for all”.

Wouldn't these words turn to ash in our mouths if we were to sing it while advocating that socialism is coming to Cuba via a benevolent despotism? Or should socialists hide the fact that the Cuban masses simply have to go along with whatever the Castroist elite thinks is best for them, and only admit this in private discussions among the activists? After all, if leaflets and speeches were as candid as your letter to me, and said that the working people had only insignificant input in Cuban politics, this would hardly be taken by most workers, or by Castro and most of his supporters, as support for his regime.

From the point of view of socialism, and from the point of view of a materialistic assessment of politics, we must ask, not about the personal sincerity of Castro, but about the class structure in Cuba. And in fact, Cuba is a class-divided society. You argue that the Cuban revolution expropriated the bourgeoisie. But Cuba has its own domestic class divisions. It isn't sufficient to say that Castro rules personally. There is a ruling elite, which Castro heads. There is a class division in Cuba, and Castro represents the elite which heads this ruling class. Cuba being in the Soviet bloc helped foster the development of the new ruling class, which in turn supported the Soviet bloc and Stalinism because this was in its class interest. They still have the same organizational forms — the more relaxed attitude towards homosexuality which you refer to doesn't affect the basic class division in Cuba or the methods of rule of the Cuban “Communist” (read: revisionist) Party. And presently Castro and this ruling class are also bringing back foreign capital. But more on that in a moment.

You argue that Cuba is taking steps toward socialism because it has “expropriated capital”. This refers to Cuba taking up the bureaucratic state-capitalist form used in the late Soviet Union, in China, North Korea, and Vietnam today, etc. Most of the arguments you use to defend Castro's regime could be used to defend the revisionist regimes in general. An important question is whether these regimes too deserve the support of socialists. If you think so, you are consistent in also advocating that Castro's regime deserves such support. But then our difference isn't simply over Cuba, but over the assessment of state-capitalism, Stalinism, and revisionism in general. And in that case, we should examine the general history of revisionist state-capitalist rule, whether it was a new oppressor of the working class or a step towards socialism, and why these regimes either collapsed outright or turned towards market reforms (e.g., China, Vietnam, Cuba). If not, if you think only Cuba deserved support, you have to look seriously at the fact

that the basic economic and political structure of Cuba was and is—as far as essentials—similar to that of other revisionist countries. If you could clarify your view of this, it would make it easier to see what the points at stake in our discussion are.

You do seem to hold that Cuba has been better than these other regimes, at least since it has had to do without the support of the late USSR, as it has allegedly been overthrowing Stalinist influences. You say they have been moving towards acceptance of homosexuality. But let's look more closely at what's been happening to Cuba recently. The Cuban regime has been moving to market-style reforms. It has been courting foreign capital in a big way—such as in oil exploration and development, hotels, and tourism. It has legalized local small-scale enterprise, and it had already tolerated some small enterprise for a long time—for example, in prostitution (for the tourist trade) and in other ways of hustling to get dollars—because it finds these activities a useful source of foreign exchange. Meanwhile, it also tightened political controls. Such market-reforms combined with political despotism can hardly be called a departure from revisionism; indeed other states which you presumably regard as Stalinist are also carrying them out. China for example has also maintained a rule of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie over the masses, while moving towards market reforms.

Now it is true that one can't expect any revolution, no matter how it is carried out, to establish socialism all at once. But when the workers' only have an insignificant say and are a subject class; when the revolution is over; when private capital is assuming more and more importance in the Cuban economy; and when a ruling state-capitalist bourgeoisie is trying to hold on to power, what grounds are there for speaking of steps towards socialism?

You speak of the anti-imperialism of the Castro regime. Here too it is a question that activists yearn to see an anti-imperialist policy, but one has to close one eyes to the present-day stands of Castroism to identify them with anti-imperialism. You spoke of the influence of the late Soviet Union on Cuba (although you haven't said whether you think the Soviet Union was socialist or state-capitalist and whether you regard the things you regret about its influence as simply imperfections in its own revolution). In fact, this refers to the fact that Cuba was in the Soviet bloc, thus supporting one major world imperialist bloc against the other, U.S.-led bloc. Castro supported one crime of Soviet social-imperialism after another. Whether it was the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the bloody Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty, or the late pro-Soviet Dergue in Ethiopia waging barbaric wars to suppress the right to self-determination of the Eritreans and other subject nationalities, Castro never stood up and said “no!” I don't think that this can be regarded as an anti-imperialist policy.

Moreover, the Castro government also turned to a reformist policy towards U.S. imperialism and the pro-Western bourgeoisie, and has long supported reconciliation with the regimes of the Latin American bourgeoisie. Its “anti-imperialism” in Latin America turned into just supporting the bourgeois nationalism of the ruling regimes. One example of current interest is its long-standing support for the PRI regime in Mexico. Is this an anti-imperialist policy? And if so, does it mean that we have to support the PRI too as “anti-imperialist”,

and that failure to do so would be trying to “shape or mold the (Mexican) people into what we think they should be”? Most activists supported the revolt of the Chiapas peasants (and the reformist press even romanticized the EZLN leadership), and we have carried a good deal of material about this in the *Communist Voice*. We have discussed the positive and negative features of the EZLN, carried their first three key statements from the Lacandon Jungle so it could be seen what the EZLN was saying in their own words, had a critical discussion of the program of the EZLN with special attention to its agrarian program, analyzed the nature of the strategy of “democratization”, etc. But it is inconsistent to support the revolt in Chiapas, and yet hold that supporting PRI is a progressive policy. Or is support for the PRI a progressive policy in Cuba but a reactionary policy in the U.S.?

The Castro government has not recoiled from support for even exceptionally oppressive governments. For example, it supported the last-ditch struggle of Cedras’s blood-stained thugs in Haiti, and the Cedras government was one of the worst death-squad governments in this hemisphere: it was “Duvalierism without Duvalier”. The excuse for Cuban support was that contradictions had developed between Cedras and U.S. imperialism, and so defending his bloody rule was supposedly an anti-imperialist struggle against U.S. intervention. But such a pretext for supporting Cedras was absurd. Unlike Castro, our support went to the struggle for freedom and against exploitation of the Haitian people, and we sought to encourage as far as possible the development of an independent class movement of the Haitian toilers. When two key enemies of Haitian freedom—the Cedras regime and U.S. imperialism—came into contradiction despite the best efforts of both of them, it was not an anti-imperialist policy to back Cedras, as Castro did. The contradiction between U.S. imperialism and the Haitian reaction which it fostered provided a crack in which the mass struggle developed to a certain extent. One had to help the Haitian masses develop their struggle against Duvalierist tyranny and savage economic oppression from U.S. and world capital, and help them break out of the limits that Aristide sought to put on the struggle. It is absurd to instead support this or that death-squad leader when U.S. imperialism says to such a trained dog, you have bit a few too many people.

Let’s get back to the issue of the Cuban revolution. You say that “The workers in Cuba had a say in what the government did for the first time in history. Although their say may be insignificant, they now have the means to speak.” The overthrow of Batista was of great importance, and deserved the utmost support. But I think your statement confuses the revolution against Batista (and the mass initiative that was released by it) with the passive situation among the Cuban masses that now exists. What is so glorious about the present “insignificant say”? It is not enough to contrast the present regime to Batista’s dictatorship. Even the U.S. government allows an “insignificant say” to the proletariat, but socialist analysis proves that, despite the formal political freedoms in the U.S., it is still a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. As to the Cuban workers having the “means to speak”, what are you referring to concretely? They are gagged during elections. They have not succeeded in developing their own party, and if they

did, it would come into contradiction with Castro’s system of rule. They do not have an independent press. They have a right to applaud, but not a right to express their own views, and they now respond to the regime with cynicism and passivity and indifference.

You say that Castro is changing his policy on homosexuality, and you lay a good deal of stress on this. Having demonstrated in this country for gay rights, I can only hope that the relaxation of the past Cuban policy on homosexuality will be thorough and permanent. (I do wonder whether our exchanging remarks on this question amounts to trying “shape or mold the (Cuban) people”, which you suggest is something that we should avoid, because apparently only Castro has that right.) But that doesn’t even distinguish Castro’s Cuba from various Western capitalist regimes.

You suggest that “For us to stand by and watch an entire people suffer because we do not like Castro is not fair.” Precisely so. I have not done so, nor has the *Communist Voice*. We have spoke clearly and decisively—and the same in public as in private—about the brutality of U.S. imperialism, the state-capitalist nature of Castro’s regime, and the need to encourage the development of an independent proletarian movement in Cuba. We have done this in our theoretical journal, and we have done this in leaflets for distribution among the masses. We do not abandon the Cuban people just because Castro’s regime doesn’t deserve support, but encourage struggle against both U.S. imperialism and Castroism. We think that it is our duty to support the fraternal Cuban working people even if our stand is unpopular among most American reformist and Trotskyist organizations.

You conclude from the need not to watch an entire people suffer that “We must support Cuba.” But there is a distinction between supporting the Cuban regime and the Cuban masses. Cuban society is divided into classes. If you and I are not to stand aside as an entire people suffers, we have to stand by the toilers of Cuba, the suffering majority. Their struggle comes up against both imperialism and the local Castroist elite. I think it is just as much abandoning the Cuban working people to refrain from struggle against Castroism as it would be to refrain from opposing U.S. imperialism. If free-market ideology and Western capitalism is not to be taken as the alternative to revisionism, the Cuban workers must be clear on what Castroism is. Without such clarity, the working people may end up passive and numbers of toilers may be mobilized behind the plans of the Western bourgeoisie. Without such clarity, the Cuban toilers will end up sacrificing for Western capitalism one way or another—whether by U.S. dictate or through the deals carried out by the Castroist bourgeoisie. So I think that our stand against Castroism is crucial for encouraging the independent motion of the Cuban masses. And it is also important for seeking to rouse the American proletariat to struggle against American and world capitalism and imperialism, because Castroism, as one part of revisionism, has had a bad effect on the ideology of the revolutionary movement here as well as in Latin America.

So I agree that we must stand by the Cuban people. But I think this is only possible if our struggle is based on the truth. We must look hard truths in the face. This is the only way to support the revival of a truly socialist movement, whether in the

U.S., in Cuba, in Latin America, or around the world. □

Communism and “Communism”

April 14, 1996

To: Jos. Green

In your last letter you bring up many good points on Castroism and you point out that I should clarify my views. I will start with the latter.

COMMUNISM AND “COMMUNISM”:

I feel that the USSR, China, N. Korea, are mockeries of socialism. They do, however, lay certain groundwork for socialism. With the rise of these “communist” states came a nationalized economy, an expropriation of the capitalists, and a Soviet-style government, meaning a democracy controlled by worker’s councils instead of parliamentarianism. Unfortunately, all these accomplishments fell into the wrong hands quite suddenly. The nationalized economy was now run for the benefit of the privileged bureaucracy, the capitalists have been replaced by Stalinists, and the Soviets were no longer meaningful. The position I take on China, and the one I would take if the USSR were still in power, would be an overthrow of the government by the working class. I have said before that the groundwork for a working class system exists in these nations, but they are in the wrong hands. Is Cuba any different from these Stalinist states?

This is short and incomplete. But I just wanted to respond to your request for more clarity on my beliefs. I will have to do some serious thinking about Cuba, and I would like to continue this conversation after doing so.

Talk to you later,

—MD □

Reply: What is the nature of the nationalized economy?

April 23, 1996

Dear MD,

Thanks for your reply of April 14. I appreciate your answering my query concerning your views of the revisionist regimes, and your serious attitude in wanting to think various things through before replying further. I think we might perhaps have something additional to talk about concerning the nature of the “nationalized economy” in the USSR, China etc. Is the problem in these countries simply the political leadership of the nationalized economy, or is the economic system itself still capitalist, although not the same variant of capitalism that existed prior to the revolution? Was the question of overcoming the capitalist class already solved in those countries, or is there a new capitalist class in those countries. But I will wait with respect to this and other questions until you finish pondering matters and are ready to resume the discussion. There is no reason to hurry.

As a sidepoint, while you are considering matters you might

be interested in looking over a few articles in the March/April issue of *Foreign Affairs*. This is very much a journal of the “establishment”, with articles by diplomats, very respectable professors, etc. In the recent issue, the article “Cuba’s Long Reform” by Wayne S. Smith describes some of the market reforms in Cuba in recent years and gives a liberal imperialist view on how Castroism will evolve and about what type of relations the American bourgeoisie should have with Castro. The article “Eyes on Cuba” by Pamela S. Falk talks about the pressure from the American business community—as it watches the capitalists of other countries invest heavily in Cuba—that the U.S. also should do business with Castro’s regime. These articles assess Cuba from the standpoint of the American bourgeoisie, and have interest from the point of view of describing that bourgeois attitude as well as confirming some things about foreign investment in Cuba.

—Joseph

P.S. I wasn’t quite sure if I got a slightly mangled version of your note of April 14. . . . □

Communism is not black or white, revisionism is/is not socialist

April 25, 1996

Re: Cuba, Cuba, Cuba...

Hello,

Sorry I have taken so long to respond. I have been really busy and have not had much time for e-mail. I guess that my main stance is that communism is not black and white. It is not possible to label a nation communist or not communist. Many nations have socialist characteristics, i.e. China, the old USSR, Cuba, etc. all have more socialist characteristics than any other states in the world. Of course they lack in the power structure category (regarding the influence, or lack of, the Soviets). It is also important to respect the fact that capitalism in Cuba, China etc. would not be like capitalism in the U.S. Cuba & co. would be the fuel source, not the beneficiary, of capitalism. Basically, the Cuban people have it better off under Castro than Clinton. Obviously this is not to say that the Cubans should not fight for more say in their lives, nor quit the fight for socialism. I believe that it would be best to work with what remains of a socialist economy and build off that, by revolutionary force if necessary. So, my position is basically that we should support Castro over Clinton, and the Cubans over Castro. I do think, however, that Castro is in many ways a good leader and I would (maybe) urge the Cubans to elect him as their leader (if meaningful elections were to be held). But, the fact that there are no real Soviets that decide their leadership deters my respect for Castro. His is not justified, it is not founded on the support of the masses.

I stress the fact that we must not do as the group ISO (?) did when they split from the SWP during World War II. The ISO decided that the state capitalism of the USSR was no closer to socialism than US-style capitalism. They then decided that it was not worth their efforts to protest against privatization in the USSR, they felt it would make no difference. To them the

USSR no longer had any, not any, socialist characteristics. I believe that what should have been done was that the Russian people should have overthrown their leaders and from that point reinstate what had been lost of their socialist revolution and continue down the path to socialism. (This is all very easy for me to say from behind a computer!)

Now to directly respond to some of your comments;

“Is the problem in these countries simply the political leadership of the nationalized economy, or is the economic system itself still capitalist, although not the same variant of capitalism that existed prior to the revolution?”

You say “still” capitalist. I do believe that the revolutions of China, Russia, and Cuba did expropriate the bourgeoisie. Unfortunately a Stalinist-like bureaucracy originating in the remnants of petty-bourgeois culture overtook the revolution and created a stale bureaucracy that’s [whose] sole aim was to preserve the power structure and all the privileges given to the Stalinist class. This is not capitalism, though. Capitalism is an imperialist system. The Soviet Union was mainly defensive. They came up with the idea of “peaceful coexistence” and “socialism in one country.” As for their areas of influence; they were mainly creating a buffer zone, this was not imperialist. The USSR also did not suffer the same contradictions of capitalism thanks to their planned economy, though Stalinism does have it’s own inner contradictions.

It does seem that once these Stalinist nations begin to gain a dominant position in the world they begin to adopt more and more capitalist tendencies. I suspect this is because capitalism is an imperialist system and therefore provides more wealth for the dominant class than does the defensive Stalinist system. It seems that Stalinism only uses the guise of communism in order to gain support from the people then, once well established, discards this disguise.

Also, no Stalinist system would transform into a capitalist system until it elevates itself from the third world category. By using the guise of communism these nations can convince people to sacrifice everything for the revolution only to later turn around and turn them openly into proletariat workers. This is happening in China and, although I believe there is still hope, Cuba. So, perhaps the problem is not in the leadership. Nor are these systems capitalist from the start. The problem may lay in the Stalinist system itself. Perhaps the natural progression of Stalinism is to elevate the nation from the third world status into the role of a superpower, then turn capitalist. No individual leadership would knowingly make this switch, it is just the natural progression of the system. Capitalism is more profitable than Stalinism once you overcome the third world hole that you started out from. This all makes sense when you consider that Stalinism is a petty bourgeois system. The USSR, China, and unfortunately Cuba are the result of the petty bourgeois gaining control of the revolution. How can we prevent this?

It would be important to look at the transition from Lenin to Stalin and how Stalin could have been prevented from gaining power on behalf of the petty bourgeoisie.

“Was the question of overcoming the capitalist class already solved in those countries, or is there a new capitalist class in those countries.”

As I said, there is a Stalinist bureaucracy in those countries that are in the period of transition to a Capitalist system. As for Cuba, that nation has obviously not achieved the status of a superpower. I do not think that capitalism will take control in that country as a result of the progression of Stalinism as much as out of sheer necessity for economic benefit of the people. Socialism is running out of fuel in Cuba. Hopefully there will be some events in Latin America and Mexico that will change this. If these events do take place then we will see where Castro’s interests really do lie. Is he interested in capitalism out of necessity, or out of selfish gain for a privileged bureaucracy, as Stalin was? Until Castro has the chance to prove himself I do not think we can automatically label him as Stalinist. Though he is overly authoritarian.

“...Cuba in recent years and gives a liberal imperialist view on how Castroism will evolve and about what type of relations the American bourgeoisie should have with Castro. The article ‘Eyes on Cuba’ by Pamela S. Falk talks about the pressure from the American business community—as it watches the capitalists of other countries invest heavily in Cuba—that the U.S. also should do business with Castro’s regime. These articles assess Cuba from the standpoint of the American bourgeoisie, and have interest from the point of view of describing that bourgeois attitude as well as confirming some things about foreign investment in Cuba.”

I think that both socialists and capitalists are interested in finding out what is really going on in Cuba. Though each would like the opposite outcome of the other, each has separate intentions.

“P.S. I wasn’t quite sure if I got a slightly mangled version of your note of April 14. . . .

It seems like the first few lines were missing. But they contained nothing of importance.

It was good to get some of these things out of my head. This letter is basically my thinking out loud, I have not really thought in depth or revised any of these thoughts. So if there are any major errors I am sure that we will soon discover them.

Talk to you later,

—MD

PS. Have you heard of Labor Militant? This organization, and your letters, have changed my mind of Cuba. I did consider it socialist, but now I see my errors. □

[Aside from a brief note from J. Green saying that it would be awhile before he could write back, the next letter was:]

July 23, 1996

Dear MD,

It’s been several months since your last message, and I’m just now getting around to replying. I hope you’re still interested. My tardiness isn’t because the subject of Cuba isn’t of interest, but a lot of other things intervened. In fact, we are intending to prepare more materials on Cuban revisionism and publish them in later issues of *Communist Voice*. Indeed,

perhaps some of the things that have stopped me from replying to you are relevant to our discussion. Among them has been the preparation of an article on Leninism, state capitalism, and the transition to socialism, part one of which appeared in *Communist Voice* vol. 2,#3, June 1 of this year. It contrasts Lenin's views on the transition to socialism with those of other trends, including Stalinist views. Lenin dealt with a number of issues that have come up in our correspondence concerning how to assess what Castro's regime and the other revisionist regimes (China, North Korea, etc.) represent.

* With respect to Cuba and other revisionist countries, you have held that the replacement of the old capitalist class shows a certain progress towards socialism. Undoubtedly a socialist revolution will replace the former capitalists, but Lenin didn't think it sufficed to overthrow the old ruling class and expropriate the previous capitalists. He believed a new bourgeoisie could arise and replace the old. This is one of the central parts of the Marxist theory of revolution, and one of the reasons he placed so much stress on the need for organization under socialism. He even went so far as to say that "Confiscation alone leads nowhere, as it does not contain the element of organization, of accounting for proper distribution." (You can find the references to this quote and other views of Lenin in the article in *CV*.) Socialism has to mean that the working class does away with the need for any exploiting class, whether the previous one or a new one.

* In discussing what the various revisionist regimes are (China, the former USSR, Cuba, etc.) you have suggested that "It is not possible to label a nation communist or not communist" and instead they have a number of communist characteristics but not others. But I think there is a dividing line. It's not a matter that one can simply ask whether a country has so many characteristics (expropriated some of the old bourgeoisie? a good educational system? a public health care system? etc.) and judge that it is sort of part socialist and part not. But one has to study the society's underlying characteristics, and discover whether the society is a class society and which is the ruling class. A bourgeois country might have more or less social welfare measures, or might even dispossess some bourgeois in favor of others (certainly the small bourgeois are constantly being dispossessed by the larger ones). But which class rules and what overall characterizes the society? Lenin, following Marx, held that socialism is a matter of proletarian class rule. It's not a matter that some countries are a bit socialist but with a bad ruling class.

* Lenin held that the working class must not be passive, but must defend itself even against its own state power, a state power that is moving towards socialism. The workers, while building up and defending their own state apparatus and their own party, must oppose the mistakes of their own creations. And, for example, Lenin discussed the implications of this principle for the trade unions, and he polemicized strongly against Trotsky for his policy of "bureaucratic harassment of the trade unions". This too bears on Cuba, where Castroism has not organized the working class as an active class, but holds the workers passive while reinforcing a revisionist apparatus to run Cuba.

* You have contrasted our view that "Castro's state cap-

italism is no answer for workers" to whether a revolutionary regime has "to resort to state capitalism—as Lenin said he had to before his death." The article in *CV* discusses extensively Lenin's views on state capitalism, and on different types of state capitalism. It discusses in what sense Lenin talked about state capitalism and the use of state capitalist methods during the transition period, and the limits he placed on it. Lenin held to the end of his life that a bourgeois economy is incompatible with a proletarian state, and that a proletarian state may only use such methods within definite limits. Lenin's views go against the view that bureaucratic state capitalism is socialism or a transition to socialism or a replacement for mass consciousness and initiative.

These and other views of Lenin bear strongly, I believe, on the discussion with respect to Cuba. One has to assess what happened to the Cuban revolution, which once aroused the enthusiasm of the working people and represented their will, but which today no longer exists. Since the workers only have an "insignificant say" in today's Cuba, as you yourself point out, there is no longer a revolution and there is not a proletarian class rule. The working class is passive with respect to the Castroist party and the economic and state bureaucrats. This is not a transition to socialism—not as Marxism-Leninism conceives it. Socialism can't come from a benevolent despotism, but only from the development of the consciousness and organization of the proletariat, rallying the other toilers around themselves. You place a good deal of emphasis on whether Castro, as an individual, is sincere, and worry about this. (You ask me, "Do you think Castro wants state capitalism?") But socialism cannot be built on the good will of an individual, but requires the conscious advance of the socialist mass. Nor can speculation about the good will of an individual replace assessing the class realities of Cuba. The issue isn't whether Castro is sincere, but to analyze the class structure and class realities in Cuba.

It seems to me that instead of trying to assess the Castroist regime according to the basic Marxist views on socialism, you are influenced by the special pleading which the SWP and a number of other groups engage in with respect to Castroism. You would much like to see some socialist countries, so you don't look too closely at the way these groups twist theory to justify the present sad reality. But recognizing the situation is a revolutionary step. It is the first step to changing it. Those political forces that identify themselves with the revisionist regimes think that they are engaging in the real politics of the day, and don't suspect that by holding on to the coattails of these revisionist forces they have become dead in spirit and as moribund as revisionism itself.

In looking over your letters to me, I see a series of changing and even contradictory theses that seem to me to evade dealing with the realities of revisionism and Castroism. You started with saying that the Cuban regime was not socialist, but was anti-imperialist. Later you suggest that the Cuban regime is sort of socialist. You also say you are for Castro over Cuba, and the Cuban people over Castro—but at the same time you would recommend that the workers vote for Castro, if the regime ever really allowed elections. All in all, you keep coming back to making it all depend on the personal sincerity of Castro, and you wonder how to test this.

You hold that one shouldn't repeat what you call the error of those who split decades ago from the old Trotskyist mainstream, of denouncing the Soviet Union as state-capitalist. But the error of the various trends which are descended from the various splits by Tony Cliff and Schactman and others didn't lie in pointing out the state-capitalist nature of the Soviet Union. Their error was in trying to resuscitate the Trotskyist theory, purging it only of the claim that the revisionist regimes were economically socialist. On one hand, some almost became Cold Warriors themselves for awhile, and on the other, they ended up supporting, in this or that way, various other notorious regimes, such as that of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War.

I don't think it makes sense to replace a serious examination of the reality about Cuban society with rather quirky and unrealistic theories such as that Cuba and other revisionist countries can't really become capitalist until they become super-powers. You back this up by a comparison of whether the Soviet Union was more or less aggressive than Western imperialism. You argue that the Soviet Union was only creating a "buffer zone", so its empire-building wasn't really imperialist. The same arguments used to be used to prove that the British/American/French Allies were really on the side of the angels in World War I, because Germany was more aggressive; or that Germany was really on the side of the angels, because the Allies had more colonies and were fighting to keep them. Meanwhile the need for "buffer zones" or defensible borders has always been one of the chief arguments of militarists. To take a recent example, the Israeli militarists claim that they have only been building "buffer zones" in Lebanon, the Golan Heights, etc.

Instead we should seriously look into the facts about what Cuban society is today, and consider what it takes to organize the proletariat to rise up in its own interest. First and foremost, Cuba is a class society, and the working class isn't on top. The workers only have an "insignificant say". You dismiss the significance of this. But when a militant Cuban workers'

movement develops, you can be sure that it won't miss the significance of this, nor will it satisfy itself with the consolation that "we had even less say under Batista".

For one thing, Cuba state-capitalism is rapidly developing connections with Western capitalism, from providing prostitutes for the tourist trade like in the bad old days of Batista to searching for as much foreign capital as possible. It's not true that the workers are free from the rule of capital. These days, the development of capitalism in Cuba is becoming more and more blatant. Besides the domestic state capitalism, there is a development of small Cuban private enterprise and a mass influx of big foreign capital.

You say that you would like to see the workers in the revisionist countries overthrow their leaders (except Castro) and continue further down the path to socialism (as you see the present regimes as sort of socialist, even if a parody of socialism). Do you think that agitation that tells the workers to stake everything on the personal sincerity of Castro can achieve this aim? Do you think that a strategy such as "For Castro, against Clinton; for the workers, against Castro; but for Castro too, should he decide to run for office" can inspire a class movement to overthrow the bureaucrats? It seems to me that either one must seriously look to encouraging a communist workers' movement in Cuba and elsewhere, or else all that is left is simply sugarcoating the state-capitalism that is really going on there.

Based on the view that we should examine the class realities in Cuba, the *Communist Voice* will present more of the facts about the current developments in Cuba in future issues. It's useful, in examining these facts, to keep in mind what the various general ideas about Cuba are. I think that the views you have put forward are useful in summing up a certain widespread attitude towards Castro. And I would be pleased to hear from you again.

In struggle against capitalism,
Joseph Green

□

Has the proposed 5th international really transcended Trotskyism?

A few groups are thinking of building a 5th International. The following letters with the Socialist Future group in Britain deal with this plan. This 5th International will not call itself Trotskyist and will denounce "Trotskyist dogma" in name, while maintaining the basic Trotskyist standpoint and dogmas and acknowledging its continuity with Trotskyism.

From: Paul Feldman,
April 15, 1996
RE: Self-determination of nations

Dear Joseph Green,

I read your article on self-determination with interest].¹ Substantially, I agree with what you say. I edit a Marxist magazine called *Socialist Future* (which is the journal of the Socialist Future Group) and we are producing a pamphlet on self-determination.

Our origins are in the Trotskyist movement, and I would agree with you about the uselessness of the Trotsky dogma. We ourselves have concluded that it is time historically to transcend

¹This refers to "Marxism and the right of nations to self-determination", the lead article in the March 15, 1996 issue of *Communist Voice—CV*.

the Fourth International.² We are working with some Russian communists on the project of a new revolutionary international. An essential part of the agreement is a declaration on self-determination. At present we are campaigning around the Chechnya question here in London.

Could you tell us something about the politics of Communist Voice. Perhaps we have more in common than separates us! Who knows!

With best wishes,
Paul Feldman

□

* * * * *

April 28, 1996
Dear Paul,

Thank you for your note of April 25 with its kind words on my article on the right to self-determination. I would be pleased to find out more about the Socialist Future Group, and to exchange views with you. Probably the easiest and fastest way for us to find out something about each other's views would be to start by exchanging some past issues of our publications. . . . This should give us some idea of each other's standpoint.

I was interested in your statement about the uselessness of Trotskyite dogma. Most likely, things will get really interesting when we discuss our critiques of Trotskyism and our views of what Marxism-Leninism is in the present period. A number of articles of interest with regard to various Trotskyist formulas were printed in the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, a publication of the late Marxist-Leninist Party, which dissolved in 1993. The Communist Voice Organization originates from the "minority" that opposed the demoralization of the MLP majority that led to the MLP's demise. The old MLP opposed or polemicized against various Trotskyist organizations concerning the right to self-determination with respect to Afghanistan, anti-war agitation in the Persian Gulf war, such stock formulas as "military but not political support" for various countries or "political but not social revolution" in the revisionist countries, revolutionary strategy, united front tactics, etc. If discussion continues into such points after we get an initial idea of each other's positions, some of this earlier material may also be relevant.

Looking forward to learning more about the SFG,
Joseph Green

□

* * * * *

[There are some short letters to arrange the exchange of literature, and then the following letters:]

June 14, 1996
Dear Joseph Green,

We are going to Russia next week to advance an agreement we made in 1994 to work for a Fifth International of

Communists. Here is the document we signed with the Russian Party of Communists. Any comments would be appreciated. We leave on June 19.

IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL OF COMMUNISTS

I

THE NATURE OF OUR EPOCH AND THE NECESSITY FOR THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL

The Great October socialist revolution in 1917 ushered in a new historical epoch of the transition from capitalism to socialism. Objectively this epoch continues in spite of the fact, that today the economies, and therefore the working masses of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China and Vietnam are being forcibly incorporated into the world economy, forming a new whole.

The crisis of imperialism is world-wide. It is a whole with an independent existence which penetrates every part, every country, including those which are not part of capitalism. The agreements made during the GATT talks cannot be implemented without provoking the undefeated masses into struggle in every country. The working class in France, Belgium, Spain and Mexico has already shown its resistance to the unemployment and poverty arising from the free movement of capital. A new level of internationalisation of imperialist dominance has emerged in the systematic attempts of the leaders of the main bourgeois states to co-ordinate their efforts within the G7, the "Ten", the European Union. It is also revealed in the formation of international alliances of liberal and conservative parties.

Following the demise of the USSR, world imperialism set out to impose a so-called New World Order based on economic, political and social dominance by the leading industrial states. Imperialism is setting out to establish neo-colonial exploitation of the majority of humanity. The communist movement has, however, experienced a process of break-up and national separation. But in the epoch of imperialism, of world economy and world politics under the domination of finance capital, no workers' party can establish its programme by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of developments in its own country. Such a programme must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of the world economy, and of the world political system taken as a whole, in its connections and contradictions.

Life in the 21st Century can be guaranteed only through the victory of the working class in the revolutionary struggle for social ownership and control of the means of production. All the conditions are present for a giant leap forward for humanity. It is only the liberation of the means of production through socialist revolution that offers a way forward.

The pressure for capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China and Vietnam is an undisguised attempt to wrest the gains of October, above all the nationalised property relations, from the world's working class. The reciprocal action of opposites — the working class in struggle

²I.e., the Trotskyist International—CV.

for socialism against the capitalist restorationists — is the source of the political revolution, which acquires the features of a social revolution as the capitalist restoration makes more progress. The reintroduction of capitalism would require super-exploitation of the working class, fascism, war and consequent global catastrophe

II

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

Parties, organisations, groups and movements willing to take part in the creation of the new International of Communists, share the following principles of the theory of Marxism:

1. The working class is the only consistently revolutionary class in society, capable of leading other strata of working people, which may and must become its allies.

However, the working class cannot fulfil its historic revolutionary mission solely by its own efforts. Communists are responsible for constantly developing Marxist theory and for the introduction of socialist consciousness into the workers' movement.

2. All the material conditions exist for socialist revolution in capitalist countries and for halting the restoration of capitalism in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China and Vietnam.

The industrial capitalist countries, under the dominance of the private ownership, cannot:

- * avert global environmental catastrophe;
- * improve the living standards for the masses;
- * provide economic stability;
- * secure the development of science and culture;
- * attract the political support of the population and resist the growing pressure of neo-fascist and authoritarian forces.

Developing countries are forced into neo-colonial dependency by international capitalism. This process is reinforced by the international division of labour. The gap between the rich and the poor in the world is increasing, endangering the stability of the whole world capitalist system.

3. Unlike the parties of the reformist Second International, we understand the socialist revolution not as a quantitative collection of the elements of democracy and socialism, but as a qualitative leap to the conquest of power by working people.

Such a transition may occur in both a peaceful and non-peaceful way. There is no doubt, however, that working people will not be able to take power by purely parliamentary methods. Seeking a peaceful outcome of the socialist revolution, the parties of the Fifth International rule out any sole right of the bourgeoisie to defend its class interests by military means. Communists must be ready to overcome any resistance to the class will of the proletariat to enforce the will of working people.

4. The new International is guided by the scientific theory of materialist dialectics, the theory of knowledge of Marxism. This method rejects formulas, quotations, empty abstractions and impressions. It is a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, from living perception to abstract thought and thence to practice. As Lenin insisted, without revolutionary theory there can

be no revolutionary party. Materialist dialectics is the essence of Marxism and not an aspect (Lenin). It is tested through recruitment, training and party building. Revolutionary consciousness can only develop in conflict with trade union and other forms of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology. Only a party led in this way can be ready for the abrupt turns that characterise our epoch. It is not possible to lead the working class in successful revolutionary struggle without this approach. In fact, such struggles will inevitably end in defeat.

III

LESSONS OF HISTORY

The new International is based on the revolutionary legacy of the Ist, the IInd, the IIIrd and the IVth Internationals, having decisively rejected bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology as well as the dogma of Stalinist and Trotskyist varieties.

The most important revolutionary achievements of the IIIrd Communist International are the following:

- * a decisive break with reformist conceptions of socialism;
- * an ideological and organisational split between reformists and revolutionaries on an international scale;
- * through the example of the Russian Revolution it proved that power can only be conquered through revolutionary means.

At the same time the IIIrd Communist International became the hostage of the bureaucratic transformation of the Russian/All-Union Communist Party. As a result it turned into the instrument of the theory of socialism in a single country. Democratic centralism was substituted by bureaucratic centralism, and the solidarity and support of Bolshevik Russia by an apology for the reactionary features of Stalinism.

It is this transformation that led the Comintern to the brink of dissolution in the late 1930s. However, long after its formal dissolution in 1943, the structures and traditions of the Comintern had a contradictory role as the instrument of Stalinism in other countries and in the world communist movement.

The International must incorporate the achievements of the Fourth International over its half century of existence. These are:

- * the foundation of the theory of bureaucratic transformation of Soviet Russia and its development;
- * ideologically and in practice fighting against liquidation of parties into reformism and a variety of protest movements as well as Stalinist or Trotskyist dogma;
- * defending Marxism as a theory of knowledge against all forms of revisionism and bourgeois ideology;
- * inseparable from this, the defeat of state penetration by forces of imperialism and Stalinism

IV

PROGRAMME, STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The parties of the International share the view of the Bolsheviks that while socialist revolution has to begin and develop on a national basis, it is founded on the perspective of world revolution, which implies the priority of ideological, political

and other support of the revolutionary movement throughout the world. The new International resolutely rejects any export of revolution by military means to countries where there is no immediate revolutionary situation.

The parties of the new International will actively engage in workers' and democratic movements, as well as in trade unions and protest movements. They may join political blocks and coalitions with other parties and movements to defend democratic freedoms and the various interests of the masses as part of a struggle for power by the working class.

The new International, however, will implacably oppose at all times any attempt by member parties to liquidate into centrist, dogmatic, extremist and nationalist organisations, protest movements or any other non-revolutionary groupings.

Parties of the International will lead an ideological struggle against centrism, reformism, nationalism, chauvinism and revisionism to show workers how these forces tie the proletariat to bureaucracy and to capitalism. Proletarian internationalism and communist solidarity are key principles of the new International. Members of the new International assume the following international duties:

- * to actively fight any persecution of member parties;
- * to organise political acts of solidarity with any party in a critical stage of class struggle;
- * to help and strengthen by every means necessary members of the new International.

The International gives its unconditional support to all national movements in struggle against imperialist domination. The break-up of Stalinism, together with the world slump, has created new conditions for the struggle in the former colonial countries. These changes have created a sharp leadership crisis within those movements which have achieved national independence as well as those still fighting to attain it. In some countries, the crisis of national bourgeois leadership is leading to a break-up of states into ethnic and religious entities. Only leadership based on socialist internationalism can maintain and develop the integrity of these states and thwart the intrigues of imperialism and pseudo-socialist demagogues.

The inability of national bourgeois regimes to provide answers to the basic problems of life in such countries, together with the absence of socialist leadership, has led to a growing influence of reactionary, religious ideas amongst the masses. There is no solution to the problems facing the masses along this path. We stand by the propositions of Lenin elaborated in the first congresses of the Communist International that the democratic tasks of former subject nations can only be guaranteed by the socialist revolution.

We support the right of nations to self-determination against imperialism and reaction. At the same time, the Fifth International will oppose bourgeois nationalism, artificial divisions among the popular masses provoked by bourgeois and reactionary nationalists, and is for the transformation of the national liberation struggle into one for socialist revolution. Within this right to self-determination are contained the rights of national minorities and peoples to their language, culture and religion and not to suffer discrimination in civic and economic rights. The parties of the International oppose the manipulation of legitimate national aspirations by reactionary regimes and strug-

gle for their overthrow. Only workers' governments can transcend nationalism with socialist internationalism.

In Russia and the other republics of the former USSR as well as in East European countries, capitalist restoration plans must be halted. Instead, the International struggles for workers' management and control. Bourgeois political regimes must be replaced by socialist workers' governments based on a new political system of Soviet-type power by the working class. This must be accomplished as a part of the political revolution through the development of communist leadership.

In Britain, the United States, Germany, Japan, France, Italy and all the capitalist nations, the task of revolutionary parties is the smashing of the state and seizure of power by the working class. Parties in each country will draw up Transitional Demands appropriate for national conditions. These will advance the consciousness of workers and show concretely the socialist solution to their problems.

V

ORGANISATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The International affirms that none of these principles or task can be realised outside of the building of Leninist parties.

History has shown that it is impossible for the working masses to defeat the imperialists without a special organisation — a democratic centralist party. Democratic centralism is both an ideological and organisational principle, based on the dialectical materialist outlook and method: Open discussion internally, total unity in practice, the authority of leadership.

Membership of the Fifth International entails training by members of each section, through international and national schools, in the theory and practice of materialist dialectics. This training must be based on the understanding that the working class is kept oppressed predominantly by ideological means.

Marxism must be constantly developed by the leaders of the new International in struggle against bourgeois ideology in the building of the Fifth International of Communists.

14th December 1994

The Russian Party of Communists
The Socialist Future Group of Britain
(Since signed by the Communist Party of Mauritius and the Workers Organisation, Perm) □

On the Trotskyist ideological basis of the proposed 5th International —it means running backward as hard and fast as one can

June 17, 1996

RE: Statement of ideological principles for the Fifth International

Dear Paul,

Thank you for sending the copy of the 1994 joint statement of Socialist Future with the Russian Party of Communists

calling for a Fifth International (“Ideological principles for the Fifth International of Communists”). It gave a concise presentation of the views of the Socialist Future group, and clarified a number of points about the views of the SF group which I have had as I and other comrades have started to read the literature you sent. It is quite helpful in this regard.

However, I disagree with the main drift of the statement.

While the SF group talks about the uselessness of Trotskyist dogma, it seemed to me that the statement still was basically along the lines of the main Trotskyist views concerning nationalized property relations as sufficient to show that a country has broken out of capitalism, denigration of the need to assess the local conditions, stereotyped views about the relationship of imperialism to the less developed countries, stereotyped views about tactics (the “transitional” program), no consideration whatsoever of the need to deal with the anti-revisionist struggle, and failure to see the need to build up a truly independent, anti-revisionist Marxism. The polemics which we have waged in the past against Trotskyism dealt with major issues, not minor points. On these major points, I fail to see where the SF group has abandoned Trotskyism. As a matter of fact, if I were asked, I could not point to a single view in the joint statement that is different from Trotskyism, other than its assurances that these recycled Trotskyist standpoints are supposedly something different from classical Trotskyist dogma.

The failure of this statement to overcome Trotskyism has serious consequences. One of the key points of that statement is the assertion that capitalism hasn’t yet been restored in the former Soviet Union and other revisionist countries, and it calls for a struggle against the reintroduction of capitalism. What is required, however, is the very opposite—exposing that the former Soviet Union had been capitalist for decades and that bureaucratic state capitalism has nothing to do with socialism. Instead, the conception in the statement would reduce the struggle against Stalinism to simply a squabble over who leads the “nationalized property relations” of state capitalism. It is a point on which Stalinism and mainstream Trotskyism are agreed, and on which both are wrong. If Marxist-Leninist communism is again to rise up as a banner of struggle for a new revolutionary movement of the proletariat, the anti-revisionist Marxists have to expose what the nature of revisionist state capitalism is. It is absolutely essential if the proletariat is to recover its revolutionary confidence after the fiasco of revisionism; and it is absolutely essential if the proletariat is to organize separately from the revisionist bureaucrats.

A program that slurs over the nature of revisionist state capitalism—and moreover lauds it, under the term “nationalized property relations”, as one of the legacies of the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917—is equivalent to running backward as hard and fast as one can. To be a communist, it is not sufficient to be opposed to the neo-conservative wave of the moment. Some trends support liberal capitalism, and parade this support as a fight against neo-conservatism. The joint statement supports bureaucratic state capitalism as fundamentally different from neo-conservative capitalism. But the revolutionary proletariat must stand against all exploitative relations, conservative, liberal, or revisionist. It won’t shed tears and become nostalgic either over the old liberalism, or the old revisionist regimes, but will fight neo-conservatism from the standpoint of the future,

the standpoint of Marxist communism.

Let the Gennadi Zyuganov’s shed tears over the fall of the old revisionist system.³ Let the dead in spirit bend their heads respectfully before the dead body of the old revisionist system. Anti-revisionist communists must stand against Yeltsin and the various enthusiasts of Western capitalism, and also against the tired old shadow of the revisionist system which is all that Zyuganov represents. The truth is, that if one promotes nationalized property relations as, in themselves, being outside of capitalism, or as sort of socialism, one is essentially a left-cover for the Zyuganovs in Russia and the social-democrats in the West, no matter how sharply one criticizes various individuals from these groups or various subordinate points of their program.

So I think that the joint statement places the Socialist Future group and the “Fifth International” into the left-wing of Zyuganovism, a sort of revolutionary-sounding tail of the trend he represents.

This comes up even in particular political issues. Although our exchange of views began with your kinds words about my article “Marxism and the right of nations to self-determination”, it seems to me—from some of the literature that you have sent—that we disagree strongly on some of these issues. With respect to the former Yugoslavia, it seems to me that the Socialist Future group—despite words criticizing all sides—tends to be somewhat supportive of Serbian state-capitalism today, undoubtedly because of the nationalized property relations. Moreover, the attitude of the Socialist Future group to the right to self-determination is murky at best. (It’s notable that the November 1995 Congress document of the SF group, “Perspectives for 1996”—discussing the situation in Yugoslavia, no less—goes to the extent of tacitly denying that Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, etc. have become independent, saying that only Eritrea has become independent during this decade.) The literature denigrates the revulsion over the brutalities of Serbian revisionism, even though this revisionism is presently into a chauvinistic frenzy, seeing in this revulsion only people falling for Western propaganda. The new Serbian bourgeoisie are not the only bourgeoisie nor the only chauvinists in the former Yugoslavia; they are not the only ones denying the right to self-determination or persecuting minorities; but it is closing one’s eyes to reality to ignore what they have done. It means becoming an apologist for revisionism, for Stalinism, for anything at all, so long as the old bureaucratic state capitalism is still, to some extent, maintained.

This attitude towards Serbian revisionism is the same apology for revisionism as what the mainstream of Trotskyism got itself into with respect to the bloody Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and other revisionist crimes. To overcome the dogmas of Trotskyism it is not sufficient to say that one is against “Trotskyist dogmas”, it is necessary to show in practice that you can wade out of the quagmire engulfing Trotskyism. Instead, the proposed statement truly does continue the legacy

³Gennadi Zyuganov was the supposed “communist” who opposed Yeltsin in the recent Russian presidential elections, and represents the old revisionist and Stalinist forces who shamelessly presented bureaucratic state capitalism as “communism”.

of the Trotskyist Fourth International, as it says it does, but this is a legacy of betrayal, of inability to raise about the revisionist standpoint despite all its shouting about bureaucratic leaders. It seems to me that the joint statement for 5th International does not show any overcoming of Trotskyism, but is a statement to unite one or several streams of Trotskyism with various fragments from the disintegrating revisionist movements. It maintains the main Trotskyist formulations, but assures people that they can subscribe to them without being Trotskyist. At the same time, it also shows that the Trotskyist framework is on its knees before revisionist state capitalism and is incapable of embracing the major changes in the world situation occurring today.

The revolutionary communism of the future will not be developed by sewing together bits and pieces of the discredited Trotskyist, revisionist and reformist groupings of the past. It can only come into being by looking frankly at the errors of the past anti-Marxist theories that masqueraded before the proletariat as socialist and communist, and by painstaking applying the Marxist theory to current world developments. A single real advance in showing how the class struggle develops today is more important than any number of diplomatic deals to try to unite the left on revolutionary phrases. We must revolutionize the theory guiding the revolutionary activists, not drug them

with sentimental left phrases.

Those are the thoughts that came to mind when I saw the statement that the Socialist Future group is seeking to organize an international trend around. There is more to talk about. There is the theoretical explanation of the error of taking revisionist state ownership as a departure from capitalism rather than as state capitalism—above I have referred basically to the practical consequences of this error. There is the astonishing interpretation of anti-imperialism in the joint statement. But this will serve as the start.

Despite my blunt words, I do appreciate the fact that you have sent us your literature and the statement calling for the Fifth International. It is useful for both of us to see the different trends that are trying to deal with the present ideological crisis of the left. If you wish, after you return from your trip to Russia, to pursue the theoretical and practical issues further, I will try to explain our viewpoints on these issues to you further. I would also be interested in knowing who the “Russian Party of Communists”, the “Communist Party of Mauritius” and the “Workers Organization, Perm” are, and seeing any representative literature they may have in English.

Comradely greetings,
Joseph Green

□

Correction:

The last issue of *Communist Voice*, vol. 2, #3, June 1, 1996 contained a rough translation of the 4th EZLN declaration from the Lacandon Jungle, and a commentary on it. In such places as the paragraph of the translation that states that “Three new initiatives were launched by the Zapatistas as a response to the

success of the Consultation for Peace and Democracy”, the initiative for the international sphere was described as a call for “an intercontinental counter-offensive against neo-liberalism” when it should have been described as a call for an intercontinental *conference* against neo-liberalism. □

In previous issues of *Communist Voice*:

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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, and Mark's reply
Review of Kim Moody's views on the working class
Oleg & Pete Brown on *Spark's* workplace organizing
Debate over *El Machete* and Zapatista strategy
El Machete and "occupied Mexico"

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DWV: Fight the contract on the workers and the poor
Workplace organizing & 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 mov't for nat'l liberation, Jan. 1995
Critique of Zapatista view of democratization as panacea
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Marxism on proletarian and peasant demands

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—The decline of the small peasant continued during Echeverria's ejido policy of the '70s
—Co-ops will not save the peasants from poverty
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On the need for a public stand against Castroism
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—A further critique of Barb's views, "For a serious struggle against Trotskyism"

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—Reformist left kneels before union bureaucrats
—*Detroit Workers' Voice* on newspaper strike
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