

Communist

Volume 3
Number 4
Oct. 25, 1997

\$1.00

Voice



Successor to the
Workers' Advocate

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CHINA: a congress of capitalists

Against dependency theory (II)

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What is Communist Voice?

Communist Voice is a theoretical journal which not only exposes the capitalist system, but deals with the tragedy that has befallen the revolutionary movement. It confronts the thorny questions and controversies facing progressive activists today, and holds that the crisis of the working class movement can only be overcome if Marxist theory again enlightens the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed. The liberating ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin have been twisted beyond recognition, not only by outright capitalist spokespeople, but also by the false "communist" régimes of China, Cuba and others today, and of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of yesterday. *Communist Voice* denounces these distortions (revisions) of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism — whether Stalinism or Trotskyism or reformism — and stands for placing revolutionary theory on a solid basis through the criticism of revisionism and by analyzing the new developments in the basic economic and political structure of the world today. Through this work, the *Communist Voice* seeks to pave the way for communism to once again become the red, fighting banner of the revolutionary working class movement. Only the influence of the real communist theory can help the goal of a classless, communist society again spread among the workers and oppressed here and around the globe. Only the spread of anti-revisionist Marxism can overcome the influence of liberal, reformist and petty-bourgeois nationalist trends and allow the struggle against capitalism to break out in full force.

The revolutionary parties and movements of the working class in the 19th and 20th centuries never achieved their full goals. The working masses fought monarchy, fascism, colonialism, and various capitalist classes, and also made their first attempts to establish a new social system — however these attempts never went beyond the first steps. This class struggle will be renewed in the 21st century, as the masses are faced with how to escape from the escalating misery brought by capitalist development around the world. To hasten the day

of the revival of the revolutionary movement, the *CV* opposes the neo-conservative and reformist ideologies that are dominant today. It holds that progressive work today requires more than opposing the ultra-conservatives and more than trying to reform the marketplace. It means helping reorganize the working class movement on a basis independent of the liberals and reformists as well as the conservatives. The *CV* sees its theoretical tasks as helping to clear the way for a future reorganization of the working class into, first and foremost, its own political party, as well as other organizations that truly uphold proletarian class interests.

Communist Voice thus continues the Marxist-Leninist and anti-revisionist cause to which its predecessor, the *Workers' Advocate*, was dedicated. For a quarter of a century, the *Workers' Advocate* was the paper of a series of activist organizations, the last one being the Marxist-Leninist Party. The demoralization of the revolutionary ranks included the dissolution of the MLP and, along with it, the *Workers' Advocate*. But the *Communist Voice* continues, in a different form, with fewer resources, and with more emphasis on theoretical work, the struggle of the *Workers' Advocate* to contribute to the development of a mass communist party.

The *Communist Voice* is published by the **Communist Voice Organization**, which links together members in a few cities. The CVO calls on all activists who want to fight capitalism in all its guises to join with us in opposing all the bankrupt theories and practices of the past — from Western-style capitalism to Stalinist state capitalism, from reformism to anarchism, from reliance on the pro-capitalist trade union bigwigs to "left" communist sectarianism toward "impure" struggles. It is time to lay the basis for the revolutionary communism of the future by revitalizing the communist theory and practice of today. Only when communism spreads among the millions and millions of oppressed can the struggle against capitalism again become a force that shakes the world!

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Discounts available for bulk orders.

CV
P.O. Box 13261
Harper Station
Detroit, MI 48213-0261

Vol. 3, No. 4
(Issue #15)
Oct. 25, 1997

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Communist Voice
ISSN 1096-3804
Editor: Joseph Green

Capitalist pollution in Southeast Asia

by Frank, Seattle

During the summer and early autumn of this year the skies of much of Southeast Asia were filled with a deadly build-up of air pollution. This was a repetition, on a larger and more severe scale, of a pollution problem which has been mounting in the region for a number of years and which is going to take much more to solve than the too little and too late cooperation of several ASEAN countries plus Australia to fight forest and peat fires which occurred in late September and October. According to the director-general of the World Wide Fund for Nature this year's episode was "not just an environmental disaster but a tremendous health problem being imposed on millions" (as indeed it was). But imposed by whom or what? We'll see below that it's obviously capitalist industrialization and development which are at root of the problem. We'll also see how, being the representatives of capitalism that they are, the governments in the region are either directly contributing to the problem or aiding and abetting it. Thus the question of industrializing and tilling the soil on the basis of a new social system is raised.

Briefly on the severity of the 1997 pollution and some of its effects—

Tens of millions of people in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand,

Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines were immediately and directly affected with people of the first two countries being hardest hit. In several of these countries the Pollutants Standards Index stood in the lower 100s for weeks on end and in the worst hit areas it rose from the 500s into the 800s. (In the Malaysian industrial city of Kuching it hit 839 in late September.) According to the wisdom of the medical and government establishments, even when this index reaches 100 outdoor workers with heart or respiratory problems should consult with doctors, use respirators, etc., and 500 is considered an emergency level. The immediate result of breathing such air for long periods of time was that several people died and many, many thousands were hospitalized (where there were hospitals, and where people could afford to go to one). Moreover, visibility sometimes fell to as low as a few yards; and there were deaths and injuries associated with this as small boats collided with ships. (It's also possible that the clogged air was a factor in both the crash of an airliner—which killed 234 people—and several ship collisions in the Strait of Malacca.) Airports, schools, and factories throughout the region were closed, opened, and closed again on a daily and sometimes hourly basis; towns with populations as large as 45,000 were evacuated.

Less discussed has been the fact that the affects of this year's pollution will be felt for many years to come. For example, the prolonged breathing of smog by millions of children is going to result in many cases of lung problems and

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earlier than normal deaths in the future. Besides this there are the issues of still more damage being done to the environment as a whole (including outside the most immediately affected area), more endangered species being driven to extinction resulting in the further narrowing of the earth's biodiversity, etc. And there is the issue of the burning of an estimated 2 million acres of rain forests (more of which below).

The immediate causes of the pollution . . . and the mystification and distortion of them—

Most briefly the 1997 disaster (as well as earlier episodes of smog build-up) was brought on by the fact that smoke from fires lit in Indonesia to clear land for capitalist plantations and government development projects blew to the north (and northeast and northwest). There the smoke clouds both trapped factory pollutants (and to some extent auto pollutants) underneath as well as mixing with them. Yet even though these causes can be understood by even a schoolchild doesn't mean that the representatives of capitalism didn't try to mystify and distort them. They did. And what these representatives (government officials, politicians, writers for the bourgeois press, etc.) said was very much biased by the national political interests of the capitalists they represented. A few examples:

(1) Indonesia

It used to be that the Indonesian government blamed "primitives" using slash and burn agricultural techniques for the smoke that blew northward. But this can no longer stand up. Everyone knows the forests are being burned to clear the way for giant pulp and paper and palm oil plantations. (World market prices for the latter have been rising a good deal in recent years). So this year the Indonesian government tried to blame the weather: "El Nino" had caused a drought which had prolonged the dry season which had caused fires to get out of control and so on. Thus the head of the National Disaster Coordinating Board pointed to "the freak weather phenomenon" and concluded "It's a natural disaster which no one could have prevented". Meanwhile other government officials (with straight faces) explained how the drought was causing spontaneous combustion.

Well, it's obvious that this nonsense could only travel so far and as the international protests increased the Indonesian government officials "took full responsibility" for what was occurring and made a few arrests of people lighting fires. Yet this "full responsibility" did not include arresting themselves either for abetting (i.e., not enforcing the paltry laws they had on the books) or for causing fires themselves (some of the worst fires were peat fires resulting from government development projects).

(2) Malaysia

Here there was plenty of talk about plantation-clearing in Indonesia being the cause of the haze and plenty of silence on the contributions of the Malaysian capitalist industries to it.

Besides this Malaysian capitalism has its own program of forest clearing and some of the fires causing the haze were in Malaysia. Moreover, since Malaysian capitalists are big investors in some of the forestry corporations burning land in Indonesia, this was another Malaysian contribution to the smog-pot.

(3) Thailand

The Thai establishment echoed its Malaysian class brothers. For example the *Bangkok Post* editorialized on September 26: "Good neighbors don't hurt others. Unless Indonesia stops the pollution, it cannot be considered a good neighbor." Quite apparently, the Thai capitalists whose industries were contributing to the pollution were considered good neighbors.

(4) The "civilized" and righteous industrialized countries (the imperialist countries)

Here perhaps the biggest tendency was to blame the pollution on the fact that these were "third world" countries—backward and "uncivilized"—which by definition just can't do anything right. Such realities as the fact that U.S. agribusiness pours thousands of tons of pesticides and pollutants into the soil and water each year, 70% of the emissions causing the green-house effect come from the industrialized countries, the U.S. nuclear monopolies and bomb-making factories continue to poison the earth with radioactive wastes (and to lie about it, fire and hound whistle-blowers at Hanford, Washington and elsewhere), etc., are conveniently forgotten about in this imperialist framework. Forgotten too is the fact that most of the poisonous pesticides used in the poor countries are manufactured by the civilized corporations of the rich countries. Forgotten too are the big Western investors reaping wealth from polluting operations in the poor countries, and the outright ownership of many of these operations by westerners.¹ Lastly, we mustn't forget the U.S. forest industry. It (along with its Canadian counterpart) is world famous for clear-cutting and all the destruction of habitat and biodiversity, the erosion and silting of streams, etc., which goes along with it. Only when it started to run out of old-growth forests to cut did it go over to tree farming (plantations) in any serious way. And then

¹Just take one notorious example of the latter which relates to Indonesia: the extremely rich Freeport gold and silver mine. This mine is located high in the mountains of West Papua, i.e., on the half of the island of New Guinea which the Indonesian fascists have annexed and now call "Irian Jaya Province", and is a tremendous polluter of everything downstream. But the Indonesian military has used the most beastly of means to crush movements to get the mine owners to clean up their act, compensate West Papuans whose way of life have been destroyed by pollution and displacement, etc. And the chief beneficiaries of these sordid acts have their headquarters where? At Freeport International in New Orleans, of course. They're civilized and sweet-smelling men, one and all!

it used, and still very much does use, *fire* to clear the old logging slash and "scrub" trees for these plantations (on both government and private lands), fire which has a certain propensity for getting out of control. And having denuded nearly all of the United States of its old-growth the corporations dominating this industry are now scouring the world for more trees to clear-cut and one of the places they've set up shop is the "third world".²

Too little and too late—

Environmentalists in Indonesia and elsewhere in the region have charged that the Indonesian government knew nine months beforehand that there would be a severe drought and that fires lit to burn forests and peat would therefore spread rapidly. The government knew there would be more smoke than usual. But it did nothing. The monsoon rains would eventually clear the air, just as they always did. This set the stage for the health and environmental disaster of late summer and autumn.

September came and the masses of the affected countries were protesting, there were some street demonstrations, and the international out-cry was mounting. Still, the protests and out-cry were at a relatively low level and might have been weathered. But capitalist profit-making throughout the region was being hurt as factories and airports closed, shipping was disrupted, tourists canceled their reservations, etc. This seems to be what was decisive this time in causing the governments of the region to pressure their Indonesian counterpart into doing

²The following might be instructive both in this regard and in regard to the imperialist press:

The Trillium Corporation (clear-cutters par excellence from Washington state) has won a contract to log nearly a million acres of old-growth forest in Tierra del Fuego. In the face of world-wide protests against destruction of the last remaining natural forest ecosystems (including protests in Chile and Argentina) the corporate chiefs promulgated a "shelterwood" forest management plan (a plantation plan) with a 90 percent cut over 15 years. But hey, this isn't going to be clear-cutting! And from the pen of one of the most liberal reporters of that most liberal and "environmentally conscious" newspapers (*The Seattle Times*) came page after page of adulation for Trillium and its corporate chairman. The devastation of the forests of the southern tip of South America was hailed as "do(ing) things right" via methods that "turn logging on its ear". (A few months later, that is in June, the other major capitalist newspaper in Seattle—which is also liberal and promotes itself as a friend of the environment—devoted two whole major articles to the really shocking news that two new holes in the ozone layer had developed over the northern hemisphere. In the ensuing months they haven't said another word on this issue. It seems that in the industrialized world, the world whose capitalists are most responsible for ozone depletion, filling the pages of the newspapers with dozen-page specials on baseball teams, the late Princess Diana, etc., is much more important than an issue like this.

something (in a brotherly and "good-neighborly" sort of way). There was also the issue that the Indonesian capitalists themselves have investments throughout the region and their profits were being reduced too. Yet even when the Indonesian and other governments acted it was very late and with half-measures. Troops were used to fight fires and air forces seeded clouds to cause rain, yet as late as Sept. 26 the Indonesian military dictatorship had not declared a general mobilization *even in the affected regions!* Meanwhile the fascist occupations of East Timor and West Papua continued, the militarist government sent police to break up a congress of the 250,000-member Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union and arrest leaders (Sept. 19), etc. No protests of these matters were made by the neighboring governments.

Obviously the Indonesian government didn't eventually act because it cared about the people suffering and beginning to die from pollution in the countries to the north. In fact it's virulently racist and practices genocide against Melanesians and (potentially) others. Nor does it care a whit about members of the Indonesian working class and peasantry no matter how "pure" their blood. It slaughtered nearly half a million of the latter during its United States supported rise to power in the mid-1960s. And its vision of the future includes that they be exploited in Nike, Reebok, and other sweatshops. But the governments of the countries to the north didn't act out of concern for the masses either. They too knew that there would be a big pollution problem this year, yet many of them had not even taken as simple of measures as to stockpile surgical masks. And it should be stressed that this is an extremely minimal measure for ordinary surgical masks are poor filters of smog particulates and need to be changed very often. All of the governments of the region are members of the same capitalist clubs (ASEAN, APEC, etc.) and have many inter-linked investments which they fight to protect besides fighting to protect the general capitalist order from being upset by democratic revolutions (against the Indonesian militarists for example) which have the potential of greatly upsetting that order, especially if they spread. And a communist movement rooted in the rapidly growing proletariat would spell the end of the capitalist order altogether.

Finally, someone might object that since Indonesia is such a giant compared to other countries in the region in terms of population, an experienced military, and so on, that these countries had no choice but to make weak protests, send a few thousand military men and civilians to fight fires, etc. But where then does that leave such imperialist giants as the United States? Well, not only did its government (through the CIA) play a big-role in bringing the Indonesian militarists to power over the dead bodies of hundreds of thousands but it's supported them ever since by selling them billions of dollars of sophisticated military hardware, "advising" them, etc. Sure, U.S. spokesmen publicly utter expressions of distaste for some of oppressive policies of the regime from time to time but no serious actions have ever been taken against it. Business goes on as usual with their good ally and they want more of it. Last year Clinton traveled to Jakarta for the annual APEC meeting and in effect kissed and hugged the Indonesian militarists while

they continued to stand on the throats of the peoples of West Papua and East Timor as well as the proletariat at home. This year there has been a lot of silence from Washington on the environmental crisis building in Southeast Asia and the contributions of the Indonesian regime to it. The U.S. capitalists too have economic interests they're protecting in the region and those interests don't dictate a serious fight against its polluters. In fact U.S.-owned (or partially owned) outfits themselves are big polluters there.

There must be another way—

One thing the civilized scribes of *The Seattle Times*, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and other U.S. papers haven't hesitated to do is to point out that the "third world" capitalists of Indonesia use fire to clear land for plantations because this is the "cheap" way of doing things. But doing things cheaply (cost-cutting) is just as much practiced by the U.S., Canadian, and other capitalists of the industrialized world as it is by "third world" capitalists. The issue that the bourgeois press doesn't want to address is that doing things this way (clearing forests with fire, dumping industrial wastes into rivers, releasing poisons into the atmosphere, etc.) is *forced* upon the capitalists by the laws of capitalist competition which are rooted in the fundamental laws of the capitalist system of production itself. Now it's obvious that the workers and other exploited and oppressed people of the world—those most severely poisoned and otherwise affected by pollution—have an immediate and vital interest in fighting to force the capitalists to spend money for cleaner or more environmentally friendly methods of production and communists support these struggles. They have been the decisive factor forcing the capitalists to clean up their act, at least a little, where they have actually done so. Yet today's capitalist system is such that even with the forcing of the capitalists of one industry or region of the world to take a few environmentally friendly measures the overall pollution and other environmental devastation continues to escalate. But there's more to socialism than forcing capitalists to adopt more costly methods of production. We want to end this system of production altogether and, in fact, since socialist production is not based on production for profit the present-day concepts of "cheap", "costly", etc., will eventually lose all meaning. The economic laws of today's capitalist world dictate that millions of Southeast Asians be unemployed while land is cleared with fire (cheaply) so capitalists can make bundles on the world commodities market. If in tomorrow's socialist world the

masses of people really decide to clear the forests for plantations (to some extent at least) to satisfy their wants there will obviously be hands available, as well as the technology, to allow it to be done in less polluting ways. Both already exist.

However, it seems very doubtful that a socialist society would decide to clear the remaining natural forest ecosystems of the world to make room for plantations at all. Such forests, what's left of them, are the lungs of the world, a source of clean water, a treasure trove for new scientific discovery, etc., as well as being a place where people can go just to enjoy themselves (at least potentially, under the capitalist system of production the masses of workers have little time to pursue life's pleasures). The capitalist class knows these things and is especially concerned with the questions of clean air and water. Thus governments and international institutions consisting of the representatives of various governments draw up management plans, adopt treaties, etc. But these plans are generally reactions to problems which have reached crisis proportions already. Moreover, because these governments are capitalist governments they, by their very nature, attempt to balance the interests of capitalist industries which make money destroying old-growth forests (for example) with capitalists who would financially benefit from their preservation. Hence the plans that are adopted, usually after years of wrangling, are very paltry—even *regarding the issues they address*. Moreover, although the capitalist class can reach certain agreements on certain issues the basic nature of the capitalist system of production ensures that the environment is going to be further wrecked somewhere else. Motivated by profit, and typified by dog-eat-dog competition and anarchy, this system of production cannot be planned overall and even those agreements which are made, plans which are laid, etc., are in constant danger of being broken down. But if the world's people are liberated from the shackles of capitalism through a socialist revolution they'll be free to think about and plan—effectively plan and plan on a world scale—society's productive activities on the basis of *their* wants and, ultimately, to carry out these plans on the basis of their consciousness. Naturally, all productive activity means interaction with nature but if the benefit of human society rather than the profit of individuals, corporations, sectors of the economy, etc., is its basis then it would seem incongruous that the environment be further wrecked through destroying more forests. More, it would seem that *restoring* the previously wrecked environment would be seen as an important subject for really mass human activity. □

CHINA: a congress of capitalists

by Pete Brown

The Communist Party of China held its 15th Congress in mid-September. This was a congress of capitalists. It was not a congress of communists, of working class revolutionaries striving to build a classless society. It was a congress of state-capitalist bureaucrats striving to find new sources of capital so they can better compete in world trade with other capitalist powers. The main decisions taken at this congress involved the rapid transition from state-capitalist forms of ownership to private-market forms, from a system of state ownership to a system of stock markets and shareholding of enterprises. Leaders of the CPC freely recognize that this will maintain the class divisions that already exist in China, and in fact that these class divisions will be intensified. It was a congress upholding and extending the sacred banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory, whose most famous slogan is "It is glorious to get rich!"

Clearly this was a congress that had nothing to do with Marxism. Yet, strange to say, the leaders of the CPC still insist that their revisions of Dengism are in fact updatings of Marxism. They call privatization of firms, the selling of stock, etc. the "socialization" of ownership — as if putting capital in charge of production is somehow equivalent to putting the working class in charge! This is total gobbledygook, and is recognized as such by most observers.¹

But the Western media follow a duplicitous line on China. When it comes to reporting something regarded as a success, e.g., the construction boom in Shanghai, they hail the wonders of capitalism and the wisdom of China's bourgeois leaders. But when it comes to reporting on the sweatshops, on convict and slave labor, on the suppression of dissent and the denial of basic democratic rights — suddenly then capitalism is forgotten about, and China's leaders are criticized for their "communist tyranny". And this confusion-mongering is propped up by various so-called Marxist groups who insist that China must be some kind of socialist country, despite all the evidence to the contrary. So in battling revisionism and trying to re-establish the theoretical foundations of Marxism, it is important to clarify the nature of the Chinese regime.

Large-scale privatization

The major result of the 15th Congress is the call for privatization of most state-owned firms, with the remainder being merged and downsized. Presently, there are about 300,000 state-owned economic enterprises in China; these employ over 100,000,000 workers, about 60% of the urban

working class.² Under the new plan, all but about 3,000 of these will be privatized. The ones remaining in state hands will be the major producers of basic industrial goods — steel, for example. These will be merged and formed into giant conglomerates along the lines of South Korean *chaebols* or Japanese *zaibatsu*.

While tens of thousands of small state-owned firms are being privatized, at the same time their credit from state banks will be curtailed. They will no longer have easy access to loans to buy equipment or raw materials, meet payrolls, etc. They will have to pay their own way, in the capitalist sense; and those that don't will close their doors, bankrupt.

Finding new sources of capital can take various forms. Many state-owned firms are being offered for sale to their own employees. The workers can purchase these firms through an employee-stock-ownership plan; in many cases, in fact, the workers are compelled to do so, on pain of losing their jobs.³ Shares of stock are also being offered for sale to capitalist investors from China, Hong Kong, and foreign countries. The newly private firms are also encouraged to seek loans from banks and investors based in other countries.

While the *chaebol* conglomerates will remain largely in state hands, they too will seek partial financing from other investors. They will issue shares of stock and look for loans from other sources besides China's state banks.

All in all, the economic policy agreed upon at the CPC's 15th Congress is similar to what's been going on in the U.S. the last couple of decades: privatizing and downsizing. The new private-capitalist forms will bring about a closer integration of the Chinese economy with world capitalist markets and make it easier for China to join the World Trade Organization (a prime goal of China's leaders). So in a sense, what's going on in China is just typical capitalist reindustrialization. What's different about it is, for one thing, the scale involved: tens of thousands of firms employing tens of millions of workers.

Secondly, what makes China different from, say, Russia or Poland is that the transition to private-market capitalism is taking place under the aegis, and with the continued political dominance, of the Communist Party. This has some so-called Marxists confused to the point where they insist on calling China a socialist country, when they might hesitate to say the same of Russia or Poland. But the difference between these countries is just a matter of degree, and of detail. Poland's "shock therapy" rush to privatization took place at first under the rule of Lech Walesa's Solidarity. But it was the capitalist-style policies of the "communist" party, in the 1980's, that opened the door to Solidarity in the first place. Furthermore,

¹See, for example, "To Deplore Capitalism Isn't Always to Fight It", article by Roger Cohen in the *New York Times* of Sept. 21, 1997.

²"China's Next Steps: The long march to capitalism", article in *The Economist* of Sept. 13-19, 1997.

³"Free-Market Plunge is Rattling China's Businesses", article by Seth Faison in the *New York Times* of Oct. 5, 1997.

after reorganizing themselves as the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the revamped "communists" came into power again for four years, 1993-97. And during their administration the SLD continued the same sort of market reforms that Solidarity did, continued to push ahead with privatization, and brought Poland into NATO. Recently the SLD lost its parliamentary majority (though its former leader is still president of Poland); but their leaders continue to swear allegiance, as a loyal opposition party, to the principles of free-market economy and NATO.⁴

Similarly with Russia: the revamped "communist" party there, under Zhuganov, does not have major policy differences with President Yeltsin, under whom privatization is taking place. And for that matter, having a "communist" party in control during the 1970's and 1980's did not mean that Russia was socialist then, either; but at that time the ruling party was still clinging to state-capitalist forms.

Continued one-party rule by the CPC does not make China a socialist country, even if this party calls itself "communist". All it means is that China's capitalist rulers are following the model of South Korea when it was dominated by one party, or of Taiwan or Singapore (or the Philippines under Marcos). These countries too followed the path of a market capitalist economy combined with a one-party dictatorship. (Another example is Mexico, where politics up until recently was dominated by one party, the PRI. And another example is Indonesia, where Suharto's party crushes the life out of any genuine opposition.) But there is nothing socialist about such a system. Singapore, like China, suppresses religious freedom; this makes it a dictatorship, but not a *working class* dictatorship, in which freedom of religion would be a basic principle (as well as freedom of atheism and the promotion of secular, scientific culture). Again like China, Singapore suppresses national minorities; this makes it a reactionary bourgeois-nationalist state, not any kind of proletarian state (in which internationalism would be a basic principle). And in all these countries workers' attempts to build independent class-struggle organization has been fiercely suppressed. The ruling parties in these countries sometimes call themselves "revolutionary," "socialist" or even "communist", but that doesn't make their regime any kind of workers' state.

Differing classes:

1. what privatization means to the workers

What will happen to Chinese workers in the newly privatized firms? First off, they are going to face an intense productivity drive. As President Jiang Zemin declares, they are going to need a "new level of discipline." The firms they work for must now perform at high levels of profitability, without support from state banks; and their products are expected to be of world-class quality in order to sell in competitive markets. While sweating to perform such quality work at close to the

world's lowest wages, many workers will also be expected to sacrifice their life's savings to recapitalize their employer. At the same time, it's expected that the government will demand new taxes to bail out the insolvent Chinese banking system (more on this below).

What sort of working conditions workers will face can be guessed at by looking at conditions in China's "special economic zones", where experiments in private-market capitalism have been tried out since the 1980's. There, a typical arrangement is for workers to live in dormitories right on the factory premises in conditions reminiscent of England's Industrial Revolution in the early 1800's.

All these delights — harsh exploitation, extremely low wages, no trade union representation, with all their "extra" money going back to their employers or the government — await the workers of privatized firms. But what about the workers whose firms declare bankruptcy — and there may be tens of millions of such workers? For them, there is nothing but poverty. China has no social safety net at all. In the past, in the state-capitalist system, workers received certain benefits such as health insurance, housing, and childcare. But these were organized and paid for by their employer, the individual enterprise they worked for. Outside of that there was no nationwide system of social security.

Well, at least workers usually had a social safety net they could rely on, because the state enterprises provided steady employment. But now it is expected that many thousands of these enterprises will close. As they do, they will take with them workers' pensions, health benefits, insurance plans, housing payments, and seniority. Now, President Jiang has talked about setting up a new nationwide social security system to replace the old enterprise-based system. But no doubt this will take some years to set in place; and in the meantime, many workers will no doubt be left out in the cold, as happened in Russia and Poland.

2. what privatization means to the bosses

For factory managers and Communist Party cadre, privatization will also bring an era of greater insecurity for some. But the more privileged sections will no doubt find their feet again, and in fact will use this situation to enrich themselves. This is, after all, the social base that is supporting President Jiang's privatization plan. For them privatization means transforming the enterprises they have been running into private firms that they can now have total control over. In practice many of the cadre have already jumped the gun and privatized firms themselves, with the nominal state property being transformed into their own private property. In new stock-ownership plans they are given the lion's share of the enterprises they head.

The more irresponsible, corrupt cadre simply sell off their enterprises, abscond with the company funds and leave their workers saddled with the firm's debts. A Western economist calls this "privatizing assets while socializing losses." The government estimates that some 12% of state assets have already been privatized in this way, and "that figure is probably

⁴"Polish Ex-Communists Vow Constructive Opposition", article by Marcin Grajewski for Reuters, and distributed via CNN News on the internet, Oct. 14, 1997.

far too low.”⁵ But even the more responsible cadre use this period to cut out a new life for themselves as Western-style entrepreneurs bent on exploiting their workers as much as possible.

Background: Deng Xiaoping Theory

China’s first major moves to privatization began in the late 1970’s, when Deng Xiaoping took over control of the government and launched the privatization of agriculture. Collective agriculture was abandoned, and China’s rural communes were broken up. Today the state retains formal ownership of land, but the land is leased to anyone with the wherewithal (i.e., capital) to farm it. Peasants are free to give up their traditional right to farm certain land if they want to (i.e., if they are broke and can no longer make a living at farming), while others are free to take over as much land as possible and use it in typically capitalist methods of farming — by hiring labor. The result has been a rapid and vast social differentiation in rural areas.

Previously, land reform had eliminated the old landlord class, and then collective agriculture was established nationwide in China by the mid-1950’s. This transformed the old countryside and brought major progress for the peasants. But as each collective was on its own, there was differentiation among them. It was not a system of “egalitarian communism”, as Western bourgeois commentators (who exaggerate everything) call it. There was differentiation among the collectives, as each of them sank or swam on their own.

But really massive differentiation and the driving of millions of poor peasants into the cities began with Deng’s reforms. Some peasants have gotten rich — and some of them rich not just by Chinese standards, but rich by American standards. This is the sort of result trumpeted in Western bourgeois reports. But at the same time it has meant the impoverishment of tens of millions of other peasants. Poor peasants with small amounts of land cannot compete against large farms on a capitalist grain market. The peasants just barely scrape by with subsistence farming, or (in many cases) they give up and go to the cities in search of work. In the decade from the mid-1980’s to the mid-90’s, approximately 100 million peasants came off the land and flooded China’s cities looking for employment. This is a vast, extremely rapid urbanization which dwarfs the urbanization that occurred, say, in the United States after World War II. In the last 20 years, agriculture’s share of the Chinese work force has fallen from over 70% to about 50%.⁶

But in principle there is nothing new about this phenomenon. It is the same kind of capitalist development that occurred in England, the U.S., Germany, etc. The bulk of the peasantry is transformed into a landless proletariat, a class of workers who must sell their labor in order to stay alive. For these

workers there is no social safety net to assist them. In many cases, in fact, in China today it is illegal for people to even move into a city, and they run the risk of arrest and deportation back to the rural area. Nonetheless they come flooding in, getting around official restrictions by bribes and by local capitalists’ demand for labor.

So the first result of Deng’s modernization plan was a massive differentiation among the peasantry. As private capitalism took off, some peasants got rich while many went broke. Then, to try and relieve pressure on the cities, in the 1980’s Deng launched his new idea: industrializing the countryside. Well-off peasants were encouraged to set up private manufacturing firms. This was trumpeted by the Chinese government as a brilliant revolutionary idea. But it is simply another traditional method of capitalist development. In fact, in England the beginnings of textile industry were in the rural areas. It was only when industry reached a certain size that it began taking hold in urban areas such as Manchester and Birmingham. The exploitation of rural landless workers by rural capitalists is supposed to be kinder and gentler than forcing proletarians to look for work in the cities, but in practice working conditions are generally worse, and the pay lower. The rich, “successful” peasants are quite happy to exploit their neighbors in ways that allow them to compete successfully against urban capitalists. There are reports of isolated villages, barely accessible by motorcar, in which a class of rural entrepreneurs drives around the village in German luxury cars, watches the latest TV shows on their satellite-dish TVs, and wears the latest Western fashions imported from Paris; and this wealth is generated by employing impoverished peasants in factories where the workers put in 14-hour shifts.⁷

Privatizing state industry — why now?

The CPC’s 15th Congress sanctioned the further development of Deng Xiaoping Theory, extending it from the rural to urban areas, from agriculture to industry. But why now? The Chinese leaders know that this process involves enormous risks, as it may fragment their political system or may lead to revolts of workers. Despite the risks, however, they are bent on carrying through the program now. Why?

Economic necessity is pushing them. The financial structure of the Chinese economy is teetering. China’s large state banks, which account for 90% of banking assets, have become seriously overextended through the practice of granting easy loans to state-owned enterprises. In China’s state-capitalist system, each enterprise was supposed to be self-supporting and profitable on its own. But when state enterprises needed capital, loans from state banks were usually easily available even if the firms they lent to were not turning a profit. The result is that today “China’s banking system is insolvent; its bad debts exceed its

⁵“China’s Next Steps” in *The Economist* of Sept. 13-19, p. 24.

⁶“Weakness Seen in China’s Economic Boom”, article by Edward A. Gargan in the *New York Times* of Sept. 19, 1997.

⁷See pp. 110-113 of the book *China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power*, by Nicholas D. Kristoff and Sheryl Wudunn (Vintage Books, 1995).

capital."⁸

In some respects this crisis of capital is not peculiar to China; it faces all of the developing countries of East Asia. These countries have all seen rapid growth in recent years, and investment capital has been flowing in. But within the past year a capital shortage has manifested itself. The investment bubble has burst, and now Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia are canceling major projects such as dams and airports. They've also been forced to devalue their currencies.⁹ Chinese leaders were able to rein in inflation within the last couple years, but now they must generate some investment funds if they want their capitalist expansion to continue. This requires being very hard-nosed about financial accounting and granting loans to enterprises. From now on enterprises must prove they can make it in the capitalist world; if not, they will be forced into bankruptcy or merged into other, more successful firms (and downsized in the process).

Marxism: a clarion call to the oppressed

What is the response of the Chinese masses to the CPC's new policies? First of all, when it comes to concrete measures, the masses are not fooled and are not passive. Numerous reports of peasant uprisings have filtered out of China in the last few years. Poor peasants often petition the government for relief from oppressive and unfair taxes, for example; and when met with repression, the peasants sometimes respond with violent mass demonstrations. And now reports of workers' strikes and other forms of resistance are beginning to come through. For example, earlier this year thousands of workers in Nanchong, Sichuan province, paraded through the streets demanding back pay. Industrial disputes are spreading rapidly even by official reports.

So the laboring masses are pretty much aware of what is happening to them, on a spontaneous economic level, and who is to blame. But in fighting it they face severe repression from a government that makes it a habit to jail people for decades for merely speaking out about repression, for example, or merely suggesting the need for independent trade unions. And for more serious "crimes", such as actually organizing militant street demonstrations, the government doesn't shrink from executing people, as they did in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacres. The Chinese government executes more people than

all other countries combined, and although once in awhile some bureaucrat gets a harsh sentence for corruption, the vast majority of those executed are small fry who cannot afford the bribes necessary to get off.¹⁰

So on the one hand, the masses face severe repression. And on the other hand, much confusion is spread among the masses about communism and the role of the Communist Party. During the earlier part of this century the Chinese laboring masses carried out a gigantic revolution under the leadership of the CPC, and its prestige remains high among many working people for that reason. The fact that today the CPC has nothing to do with the ideals of communism, that today it is simply a party led by millionaire capitalist exploiters, is hard for some people to understand and accept, despite their everyday experience with this exploitation.

Some critics of the present-day Chinese regime harken back to the days of Mao. But Maoism doesn't provide an answer either. The Chinese economic and political system under Mao was first patterned after the Soviet revisionist model. In fact, Mao never had a clear analysis of what was wrong with Soviet state capitalism, so the Cultural Revolution didn't solve this problem and collapsed. Then, in the last few years of his life, Mao veered rightward again. There is much more in common between Deng's views and Mao's than the Maoists would like to admit.

Strengthening the Chinese masses' resistance to capitalist exploitation and raising it to a higher level requires basing that struggle squarely on Marxism, the theory of class struggle. This will require many difficult struggles on the part of worker activists to break from the CPC and its stooge organizations, to build independent revolutionary organizations, and to thoroughly repudiate revisionist ideologies such as Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory. This will bring new light to the masses' spontaneous struggles and gather their energy into a new revolutionary upsurge. This is what is necessary to sweep away the capitalists and revisionists and bring about a genuine system of socialism for the first time in China. □

⁸"China's Next Steps" in *The Economist* of Sept. 13-19, p. 26.

⁹"Rubin Says Asia Deficits May Spur a U.S. Backlash", article by David E. Sanger in the *New York Times* of Sept. 21, 1997.

¹⁰Of course most of those executed are being punished for ordinary social crimes. But political dissidents — especially those of a working class background — are also sometimes killed. And as reported by *ABC News* on Oct. 15, 1997, the government makes a big profit selling the organs of executed prisoners in an assembly-line procedure to ailing Western bourgeois. A kidney transplant, for example, costs \$46,000. So there are probably some fatcat bourgeois strolling around New York with the kidneys of Chinese activists keeping them alive. Is this the way a socialist government would operate?

As PRI totters: Mexico in transition

by Joseph Green

The political system in Mexico is changing. The July 6 elections were a bombshell. The PRI (Party of the Institutionalized Revolution), which with its predecessors has ruled Mexico since the Mexican revolution of 1910-20, was defeated.

This was a midterm election, in which the powerful office of the Mexican presidency was not at stake. But for the first time the mayor of Mexico City, far and away the largest and most influential city in Mexico and its capital, wasn't simply appointed, but elected, and the PRI lost. The new mayor is Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the most prominent member of the reformist PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution). The PRI also lost its majority in the lower house of the national legislature; it remains the largest party, with just short of a majority, but the opposition parties taken altogether have a majority, with the two main opposition parties being the reformist PRD and the right-wing PAN (National Action Movement). The senate, or upper house of the legislature, was not at stake in this election, and thus remains under PRI control. And PAN won the governorship of various key industrial states of Mexico.

The PRI had ruled Mexico as its private preserve for decades, talking in the name of the revolution but in fact ruling on behalf of a growing bourgeoisie. Until recently, it simply installed its candidates in office, and announced whatever election results it wished, no matter what the votes really were. Most of the unions, the official peasant organization, the official indigenous organizations, and a whole host of mass organizations were tied to PRI. A huge patronage machine extends across the length and breadth of Mexico, while the PRI has also made use of murderous repression against rebellious peasants and other activists.

But a crisis has been building up in Mexico. The growing impoverishment of the masses by capitalist development has led to constant demonstrations; there was the Zapatista rebellion and other peasant revolts; and there has been a mass ferment throughout Mexico.

The July 6 elections show that the PRI system of rule is breaking up. They also verify what the *Communist Voice* has pointed out previously: the PRI unfortunately isn't going to be overthrown in a social revolution, but in a liberalization of the bourgeois system. Mexico is in transition. But it is going from one form of bourgeois rule—the one-party PRI system—to another, and not to a revolutionary regime.

As this is a transition from one bourgeois regime to another, should it be of no interest to the masses? On the contrary. How the breakup of PRI's monopoly will take place is of importance, and will influence Mexican politics for a long time. Unless the masses fight for their own social demands, they will

be told to pull in their belts and satisfy themselves with a more democratically elected legislature. Unless the masses fight for their own rights, the huge bureaucratic machine built up by PRI will be in large part simply transferred to other bourgeois parties.

If we have opposed revolutionary play-acting about what the present transition in Mexico means, it is only to help the Mexican workers and peasants formulate better tactics in dealing with it. If we have pointed to the fact that bourgeois politics will dominate this transition, it is not to tell the workers to help the bourgeoisie, but to help them recognize the bourgeois interests that they must fight and to inspire them to upset the bourgeois appletart as far as possible. Unless the masses recognize the antagonism between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie, including the liberal bourgeoisie, they will be given little in the present Mexican crisis. But if they put forward their own demands, they may use the present transition to help organize an independent revolutionary movement. The bourgeoisie dreams of renovating capitalist Mexico so it can continue to exploit the masses forever, but the workers must use the political crisis to gain as much freedom as possible and to rebuild a revolutionary, socialist movement.

The PRI system isn't dead yet, but its breakup has begun

The news media in the U.S. trumpeted the July 6 elections as the end of the old PRI system of rule. This was a bit premature, to say the least. The July 6 elections left the PRI with a good deal of power, including the Presidency of Mexico, the Senate, and almost a majority in the lower house. They also left PRI in control of the army and with a gigantic administrative and police network in place. While President Zedillo of Mexico pointed to the relatively clean election in the capital, massive cheating and repression took place particularly in certain of the southern states of Mexico, where the PRI forcibly prevented PRD victories and kept up the military pressure on rebellious peasants.

The July 6 elections were not the end of PRI system, but only the beginning of the break-up of this system. How this will take place is still to be seen.

Will the PRI allow power to gradually slip from its hands? Zedillo, president of Mexico, presently is going along with the liberalization of Mexico and the ending of the guaranteed PRI hegemony. But there are deep divisions in the PRI, as the assassination of prominent PRI leaders has shown. (PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio was assassinated in March 1994. The Secretary General of PRI, Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, was assassinated in Sept. 1994 by Daniel Aguilar Trevino, who had been hired by a PRI deputy. Raul Salinas,

brother and right-hand man of the former Mexican president Carlos Salinas, was arrested in March 1995 for plotting the assassination of Ruiz Massieu, and the prosecutor accused Carlos Salinas himself of a cover up in the murders of both Colosio and Ruiz Massieu.)

Just recently PRI elected Mariano Palacios Alcocer as party president, who promptly declared that the PRI would have to get used to being an opposition party. This caused dissension as many PRI leaders are by no means reconciled to this prospect. Meanwhile PRI reformers were bitter about the fact that Zedillo simply imposed his choices, Palacios as PRI President and Socorro Diaz as PRI Secretary General, as in the old days.

Zedillo has offered cooperation to Cardenas, the new mayor of Mexico City. He has allowed him to appoint the police chief of Mexico City and to exercise a number of powers whose division between the President and the Mayor was constitutionally unclear. But Zedillo also created a political crisis through his unsuccessful parliamentary maneuvers to prevent the election of the PRD's Porfirio Munoz Ledo as president of the lower house. He still prefers to have army occupy Chiapas rather than have the government carry out the San Andres agreements negotiated with the Zapatistas. And the murder of opposition activists still occurs.

It is unlikely that the PRI will exit graciously from power; it's even possible that part of PRI will rebel. Most likely, if it does so, it will actually accelerate the breakup of the PRI regime, as the attempted coup of the hard-liners in 1991 against Gorbachev and Yeltsin accelerated the breakup of the Soviet Union. But in any case, there will be a period of struggle against PRI's repressive apparatus, and even bloody episodes are a possibility. The transition from PRI rule has only begun.

The legislative heroes will give little to the people

While huge fortunes are being made in Mexico and the bourgeoisie is modernizing, the workers and peasants have been left to pay the bills. While billions of pesos are given to the banks, the masses have seen their living standards drop in one crisis after another. Will the new legislature bring them any relief?

It's not likely. The main opposition parties are PAN and PRI. PAN is right-wing, and the PRD is a split from the PRI. The PRI had for many years stood for protectionist policies and for maintaining an "ejido" program in the countryside. As the PRI increasingly moved to free-market economic politics, shifted its agrarian policy concerning the ejidos, and abandoned various traditional policies, it was denounced by forces which, in effect, wanted to restore the old PRI policies. This was the origin of a split in PRI leading to the formation of the PRD. The reformist PRD basically accepts the general direction of the economic changes in PRI policy but wants them carried out in a slicker, more reformist manner; of course, it clothes this policy in ringing terms such as seeking a "new social pact", opposing neo-liberalism, renegotiating NAFTA, etc. Meanwhile PAN wants the shift to neo-liberalism accelerated; it cooperated closely with PRI on various of these changes; and

it is harsh against peasant rebels such as the Zapatistas. A legislature dominated by PRI, PAN and PRD is not likely to make any fundamental changes in economic policy, although there will be a lot more nationalist rhetoric and a lot more crocodile tears over the fate of the masses. The workers and peasants will only get those concessions which they are willing to rise up in struggle for.

The key question is thus whether the masses will rise in protest against the policies of the bourgeois parties—PRI and the main opposition parties, PRD and PAN—who are squabbling over who will preside over the new system coming into being in Mexico. Will the mass movement be submerged into the squabbles among the bourgeois parties, or will an independent movement develop? This requires not only demonstrations, but the development of independent political and economic organizations of all types to replace the current ones.

A struggle over independence or more refined co-optation

Although the PRI system is decaying, the end of the co-optation of mass organizations isn't automatic. The U.S. doesn't have a one-party system, yet the AFL-CIO unions are co-opted to bourgeois politics. If the unions and other organizations aren't simply to replace one form of bourgeois co-optation by another, there will have to be a real revolution at the base of these organizations.

For example, PRI-style unions left the bulk of workers defenseless and under domination of corrupt "charros" (labor bosses) as well as tyrannical employers. PRI's CTM (Mexican Confederation of Workers) and the broader but also PRI-dominated CT (Congress of Labor) have dominated Mexican unions. There have been a number of hard struggles against the PRI-dominated unions, and over the years some relatively small separate unions were formed, such as those in FAT, "the Authentic Labor Front". Now, with PRI breaking apart, the CTM stranglehold is breaking up and there is a new excitement among the workers. No doubt this will give rise to at least somewhat more economic struggle. But will this give rise to a truly independent union movement, as well as encouragement of working class political organization? Will many of the sold-out PRI union leaderships succeed in maintaining themselves with new rhetoric; will new pro-capitalist leaderships take control; or will a more fundamental change in the unions, and the workers movement as a whole, take place?

There are many influences on the unions. For example, for some time the class-collaborationist American unions have sought to influence the Mexican movement. The UE has been involved with FAT, and even the AFL-CIO has been involved with Mexican unions, posturing as supporting "independence", which it defines simply as the unions breaking with PRI. While American unions may have delivered some material and technical aid to workers facing the combined front of multinational firms and PRI's repressive labor law, they have also advocated class-collaborationist views. Among other things, they advocate either political neutrality or support for PRD.

The reformist PRD goes all out to woo the capitalists, but

it may be stepping up its attempts to win over workers and unions to its program. Earlier this year, on Feb. 22, it held a National Workers' Conference in Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, a suburb of Mexico City which has a PRD mayor. The meeting passed resolutions supporting various ongoing workers' and popular struggles and calling for PRD to take appropriate stands on them.

The PRI's CTM and CT have begun to splinter; a year or two ago, a number of its unions formed the basis of El Foro (the Forum of Unionism Before the Nation), and began a trajectory of leaving the CT. A National Workers Assembly was held August 22-23, including the El Foro unions, the unions of the more leftist May 1st Inter-Union Confederation, and other unions. Nine Forista unions, representing two million workers, refused to attend this meeting because they feared it would advocate the formation of a new union group. Nevertheless, the other Forista unions, the May 1st Inter-Union Confederation, and other unions attended and decided that a new labor grouping, the National Union of Workers, UNT, would be established later this year, on Nov. 28.

Thus unions are leaving the CT, and new union groups are being formed. Nine Forista unions are standing apart from other non-PRI unions, apparently with the view that they should take part solely in the economic struggle. Other Forista unions and the May 1st group of unions are going to form the National Union of Workers, which will represent perhaps a million workers. These unions, however, disagree among themselves over a number of issues, such as whether the new UNT should include only workers' unions or peasant groups and community activity groups. Among the complexities of the issue is that the broader plan would link the unions to the general ferment and political struggle in Mexico, but it would apparently do so in a way that would help wipe out even the idea that the working class needs its own organizations separate from those of "civil society", petty-bourgeoisie democracy, and the land-holding small peasantry. It may also still be an issue whether the proposed UNT will really separate completely, as the plan for it claims, from the CT and its "corporativist" agreements with the government, the PRI, and the capitalists, agreements which have shackled the workers hand and foot.

Thus the situation among the unions is changing rapidly, and this is a major event, but it is by no means sure what trends will dominate. There are still many unions under PRI domination. As well, the Forista unions, while leaving the CTM, have their old union leaderships. Moreover, the nine Forista unions which will stand outside the National Union of Workers are larger than the proposed UNT, whose nature is itself being debated. If the unions are to become truly independent (that is, independent of the bourgeoisie), they must not be satisfied simply with the breakup of PRI unionism, or else there will only be a transition from one form of bourgeois co-optation to another. Moreover, it is hardly conceivable that the militant workers will be able to achieve sufficient organization and unity of purpose to overthrow old entrenched leaderships and change ingrained organizational forms if there isn't also the development of socialist political organization among them.

Is it revolution?

There is a lot going on in Mexico, and this is especially so in relation to the continued low level of the mass movement in the US. But the elections also suggest that the imminent breakup of PRI's monopoly will not be part of a social revolution, but only a liberalization of the bourgeois system. Many left forces, however, were claiming that the breakup of PRI's monopoly could only take place in a revolution, which would almost be a socialist revolution, or at least the prelude to such a revolution. This sounded militant, but it meant closing one's eyes to the real situation of the mass movement. It meant prettifying the nature of the democratic movement of "civil society", and it meant ignoring the extent of the PRD's influence on militant activists. It meant ignoring the EZLN leadership's hopes in civil society. It meant forgetting about the present disorganization of the working class movement, the deep ideological and practical divisions in its attempts at political and economic struggle, the continued domination of the trade unions by bourgeois politics, etc.

It may sound very radical to paint every demonstration, every new development as the precursor of an immediate revolution, but it hides the tasks needed to develop a really revolutionary movement. It results in believing that the socialist forces will emerge spontaneously from the militant wing of the democratic movement; it results in hiding the separate class forces in the popular movement, and the need for the proletariat to distinguish among them.

On the other hand, a realistic assessment of the present transitional period would allow socialist activists to use the overall crisis and mass ferment to establish the foundations for a truly socialist party. The fact that the fall of the PRI is taking place in a liberalization underlines that one has to expect different class trends to exist in the democratization movement. Class-conscious workers, while pushing for the most complete smashup of PRI tyranny, should recognize that their interests go beyond those of "civil society" and the general democratic movement. Only such a stand could motivate the building of a socialist movement that is really independent of all factions of the bourgeoisie, the reformist PRD as well as PRI and PAN; and only such a stand could allow the proletariat to encourage the organization of the rural semiproletariat as well as supporting the general peasant movement. In articles such as "Two perspectives on Mexico: Taking democracy to the limit, or organizing a socialist movement",¹ I have outlined some general features of a communist program for a period of democratization.

Moreover, the flip side of the view that PRI rule could only break up in a revolution was that various groups think it is revolutionary to declare that democratization in Mexico is of no interest unless there's a revolution. This too isn't true. The working masses suffer immensely from the PRI stranglehold; the most thorough destruction of the instruments of PRI domination and co-optation is of great value for them. Any trend

¹ *Communist Voice*, vol. 3, #2, 8 May 1997.

that ignores the struggle for democratization would simply isolate itself from the correct militant instinct to fight PRI tyranny.

Some groups are committed to revolutionary phrasemongering. The Mexican Trotskyist paper *Militante* was ecstatic after the July 6 elections. The breakup of PRI means for it an automatic victory of the left and defeat of the bourgeoisie. It dismissed the right-wing PAN, declaring that PRD had won "in the most industrialized area of the country" (Mexico City), but ignoring that PAN governors had won in various industrial states. It declared for "a PRD government with a socialist program", thus dreaming that the reformist PRD would somehow become the vehicle for revolution.² The trotskyist Spartacist League in the U.S. polemicizes against illusions in the PRD, but also declares, in effect, against participation in the democratization movement, saying that this would be belief in a "two-stage revolution". It instead implies that there will be an imminent "workers' revolution".³ The *Chicago Workers' Voice* has polemicized that the socialist movement will arise in Mexico simply by taking the democratic movement "to its limits", and that the overthrow of PRI may well continue on to a socialist revolution. The July 6 elections threw this strategy into crisis; I discuss this in a separate article.

²Statement of July 9 from the editorial board of "Militante".

³"Mexico: For Workers Revolution! 'Left' builds illusions in bourgeois-nationalist PRD", *Workers' Vanguard*, August 8, 1997.

For revolutionary work in a period of democratization

The July 6 elections show that Mexico is now in transition, but it will take time before the PRI system is dismantled. One of the main questions will be whether the result is simply that PRD and PAN gain rights to administer the bourgeois system, or whether many of the restrictions on the masses are broken up. Will the workers develop political initiative and start to rebuild their class struggle, or will a new system of co-optation and stagnation replace the old PRI stranglehold?

In the 1930s in the Great Depression, the Mexican government was also in crisis. Lazaro Cardenas became president of Mexico in 1934. He brought some reforms of use to the masses, but he also built the foundations of the system of PRI co-optation and repression that hamstrung the workers and peasants for decades. Only now is this system tottering. Today his son, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, leads the reformist PRD. PAN and PRD would like to replace the outdated PRI system with a renovated system of bourgeoisie rule that would keep the masses in line. The task before revolutionary Mexican activists is instead to rebuild the class struggle in Mexico. This requires not only participating in the democratization movement, but also building up a socialist movement of the proletariat. To do so, there has to be a clear understanding of what the present transitional period is and what it is not. It is not pouring cold water on the struggle to show that it is a period of transition from one system of bourgeois rule to another; instead, it is a call for the class-conscious workers and activists to build up their independent class movement. □

The July 6 elections and the socialist movement in Mexico

by Joseph Green

Two different perspectives for building the socialist movement in Mexico have been debated by the *Communist Voice* and the *Chicago Workers' Voice*. The *CWV* holds that the socialist movement is simply the most militant wing of the democratic movement. The *CWV*'s Anita holds that the activists should push "the democratic demands to their revolutionary limits", and this will be "the process of gathering forces and building organization for a socialist revolution in Mexico". She pictures the overthrow of PRI's hegemony in revolutionary colors, and says that this revolution has a "dual nature" (both democratic and socialistic) that means that it may well go on from the overthrow of PRI hegemony to a socialist regime. I have held that such a strategy amounts to giving a socialist coloration to the replacement of PRI rule by a more democratic bourgeois regime. Whatever we might wish, what is imminent in Mexico today is not a social revolution, but a democratization of the bourgeois regime. The activists should push for the furthest democratization possible, but they must also build a distinct class movement for socialist revolution. If the activists simply form a left-wing of the struggle for democratization, they will end up subordinated to bourgeois politics.

What have the July 6 elections in Mexico shown about this controversy? How do the different perspectives for the mass struggle stand up to the situation where the bourgeois opposition parties are edging closer to power?

The significance of the July 6 elections can be clearly seen on the basis of the such articles in *Communist Voice* as "On proletarian tasks in the period of the tottering of the PRI regime" and "Two perspectives on Mexico: Taking democracy to the limit or organizing a socialist movement".¹ These articles are confirmed by the current development. They set forward the need to have a "communist program for the period of democratization", and stressed the different class forces in the democratization movement. They outlined some of the tasks which socialist activists should undertake but which are not simply democratic tasks carried out militantly.

On the other, the July 6 elections have thrown the strategy advocated by Anita into crisis. This confusion can be seen in her latest article in the *Chicago Workers' Voice*: "May 1st 1997 in Mexico City and the July 6th Elections". (See elsewhere in CV.) She seeks to inspire the reader by pointing to the many mass actions and exciting events in Mexico, but she has no idea of what the activists and masses should do to build a revolutionary movement. She avoids any direct assessment of the July 6 elections. But near the end of the article she tacitly

admits that something has changed, and that old strategies have been proved useless. She writes about this, coyly presenting her own strategy simply as that of "some organizations":

"If at one time 'independence' was defined by some organizations as being against the PRI and for mass organization, the breaking up of the PRI domination in the trade union movement and in the larger political/electoral arena, sharpens the question of what is the 'independent movement'? The question becomes how does an independent movement of the working class and of the poor working masses define itself? What are its immediate demands, and what is its long range vision?"

So, in her past strategy, the only dividing line of real interest in the political movement was whether one was for or against the PRI or for and against it in a militant way. This was the meaning of her view that the activists need only take the democratic struggles to their revolutionary limits. Be against the PRI, but be against it in a militant way, and this will build a socialist movement, an independent proletariat movement—that was Anita's strategy in a nutshell. But while militancy in the struggle is of great value to the toilers, a revolutionary strategy can't stop at this; the different classes in the democratization movement and their different aims can't be distinguished solely on the basis of militancy. Anita's statement that "independence" can no longer be defined in the old way is a tacit admission that this strategy didn't work. It failed the test of the July 6 elections; it doesn't provide a solid basis for a fight against PRD's reformism; it doesn't show how to deal with the present divisions in the union movement; and something new is needed.

Anita's strategy had sounded very revolutionary. It seemed more leftist to talk about an immediate social revolution than to emphasize, like the *Communist Voice*, the protracted nature of the work to rebuild a revolutionary movement. But no matter what we socialists would prefer, the objective conditions don't exist for an immediate social revolution in Mexico. So her strategy turned out to be revolutionary play-acting that simply put a socialist gloss on the existing movement. One has to maintain the excitement over the struggle that is the best part of her articles, but soberly analyze the different class forces in Mexico. Only then can one distinguish proletarian socialism from petty-bourgeois nationalism, reformism, and democratic panaceas and accomplish real steps towards the reorganization of the proletarian movement.

The old strategy

Anita's old strategy was laid out around the conceptions set

¹*Communist Voice*, vol. 2 #6 and vol. 3 #2.

forward by the petty bourgeois nationalist journal *El Machete*. Their "Elements of Analysis for the Current Political Situation" (June 1996) were reprinted in *Chicago Workers' Voice* #11 (Oct. 7, 1996) and accompanied by an article of praise by Anita. Her passage about defining independence that I have cited above crystallizes the essence of this strategy accurately and briefly.

But why does Anita say that one can no longer define "independence" by whether one is really against the PRI?

Anita and *El Machete* had hoped that all the groups that were outside PRI and PRI-affiliated organizations could unite. In the trade union movement, for example, she saw the need to fight against the corrupt trade union leaders (charros) in the PRI-dominated Confederation of Mexican Labor (CTM) and Congress of Labor (CT). But she regarded all non-PRI unions as "independent" and leftist. These unions were associated with different political trends and groupings, but Anita hoped that everyone could agree to join big umbrella coalitions fighting on the immediate demands.

But what happens when a number of unions leave CTM and CT, while still being under the leadership of the charros and while being stand-offish to the more leftist unions of the May First Inter-Union Confederation and towards the various activist coalitions on various issues? Are these charro-led unions now "independent" unions? And if so, what happened to the hope that everyone would unite in umbrella coalitions? In the past, one could explain various unions sabotaging the workers' struggles by their connection to PRI, or their reluctance to break with PRI, but now that they are outside PRI, some other explanation is needed for their inadequacies.

Or take the political movement. In the past, she thought that one could promote revolution while mostly avoiding a direct struggle against reformism and the PRD by stressing mainly the issue of promoting militancy; she hoped that this would suffice to split the PRD base from the PRD top leadership, and to solve any problem with reformism among other leftists. Perhaps it would implied that elections would never bring down PRI, and only a revolutionary struggle would suffice. And it could be imagined that the gradually increasing intensity of the anti-PRI struggle would tend in and of itself to center attention on the left wing of the democratization struggle. But what's to be done when Cardenas is mayor of Mexico City; and when PRI has lost its majority in the lower house of the federal congress to the electoral opposition? Won't it be necessary to take the PRD's influence more seriously? Is it still possible to define the "independent" movement in a way that includes most of the PRD's forces?

Actually, if by independence was meant class independence from the exploiters, it was always wrong to identify independence with all those who were outside PRI. The movement for democratization always had different class forces in it. The two main opposition parties, the right-wing PAN and the reformist PRD, are bourgeois parties, but have influence among the masses. The workers and peasants fighting PRI want not only their democratic rights, but also relief from the horrible cutbacks being forced on them. The radical peasants believe that democratization would mean extensive government aid and

would suffice to prevent their being forced off the land. The most class-conscious workers see the need for the overthrow of capitalism itself, but the workers and socialist activists are hamstrung by their political disorganization. There are many different aims and interests in the democratization movement, and different political trends. Lumping together the May 1st Union Confederation, the large coalitions, and the various activist organizations as "independent" without further distinction was always more wishful thinking than reality.

In this situation, the socialist-minded workers and activists need to build up their political organization in order to put a stamp on events. They must not only take part in the struggle to overthrow PRI and seek to have it go as far as possible, but also organize an independent proletarian trend. It will take time to build a truly Marxist and socialist party of the working class. Anita and the CWV had lost faith in the possibility of doing this, and *El Machete* never had such a faith. So they sought a faster way. Just unite everyone in the struggle for immediate demands. They hoped that the broad coalitions of community and activist groups would grow bigger and bigger and more and more militant, and at a certain point would constitute the revolutionary or socialist movement or a general left party. The problem, of course, was not the building of broad coalitions, but the exaggerated expectations in them, and the neglect of the real work needed to build a socialist movement. But Anita and *El Machete* ignored class issues to the point that *EM* lumps together most all of the forces outside the PRI (except PAN) as a "oppositional, democratic and revolutionary social force", from "groups of the social and political vanguard of the wage workers" to the majority of peasant organizations and community activists, and even including "the majority of the base of the PRD and PT, . . . non-governmental organizations, Christian base groups, women's groups and youth groups". Thus workers, peasants, petty-bourgeois radicals, liberal bourgeois groups, reformists, Christian do-gooders, etc. are all lumped together as a "popular block". The socialist movement was to spring from this popular block.

This hope is what has gone bankrupt with the July 6 elections. Anita's statement about the need to redefine independence is a hazy recognition of this.

The new strategy—just do the same as before

But if the old strategy is bankrupt, Anita has nothing new to replace it with. True, she seems somewhat worried about PRD influence, and hints that the new strategy would take more account of the danger of PRD influence. But she has no new ideas about how to do this.

So even while she hints about the need to step up the fight against PRD's reformism and perhaps to define "independence" as opposition to the PRD as well as the PRI, she can't discuss the problem openly because it would go against her idea of unity of the anti-PRI forces. She thinks it fights PRD influence to downplay the extent of the problem and to reduce it to the influence of the PRD top leadership. For example, Anita talked about the May 1st actions in Mexico City, a day on which PRI has no longer dared to hold its traditional union demonstration

since 1995, and she pointed out that "May 1st in Mexico has become the territory of the independents". She noted that this year a number of PRD bigshots such as Cardenas attended the independent May Day events, but "the PRD leaders did not speak at the rally". That seems promising, and she goes on to point out that, instead, FAC-MLN (Broad Front for the Creation of a National Liberation Movement), the union SUTAUTA 100, and other groups controlled the podium, with such speakers as Benito Miron. Unfortunately, she failed to note that some FAC-MLN activists were running as candidates on the PRD ticket, such as this same Benito Miron. Or again, she referred to the significance that the message of the armed and illegal peasant group EPR was read from the podium at the rally, but was silent about their cautious but apparently somewhat supportive attitude to the PRD.

So it is not surprising that at the end of her article, when she lists "tasks for the revolutionary movement", these are exactly the same as what she has always said. They are mainly unity, unity, unity. She says:

"Unity is needed at various levels to remedy the fragmentation of the mass movement and in particular of the left wing of the movement and its mass struggles. There is a need for unity of action around the immediate demands and battles of the masses, and of the development of a united front of mass organizations and organizations and organizations fighting against oppression.

"There is also a need for unity of political organizations and revolutionary activists."

This is the same as her old strategy, when she held that any group which was outside PRI was part of the "independent" movement. Previously she wrote that "the independent mass movements of workers and urban poor remained active and strong in their local areas" and so she defined the task as simply to overcome their disunity. Now she says the problem is fragmentation, and the task is to overcome that fragmentation. The same old tune. Or rather, the same note played over and over again.

Unity is a grand thing of course. But how can the simple slogan "unity" answer the questions that even Anita admits are becoming pressing, such as who is in the "independent movement" that is to be united, and "what are its immediate demands, and what is its long range visions"? It doesn't matter. Anita just writes to unite on the immediate struggles, and forget about the vexing questions.

What about the influence of the reformist PRD, which Anita had seemed jittery over? Whatever remarks Anita makes about the PRD, she doesn't think the struggle against reformism is important enough to list as one of the tasks of the revolutionary movement. And overall, she is still downplaying ideological and class differences among the anti-PRI forces, and thus undermining any effective fight against reformism or against petty-bourgeois democratic illusions.

All she says is that "there must be more ideological, theoretical and political definition". She doesn't say what are the ideological, theoretical and political issues that need

discussion, nor what her answers would be. All she insists on is that this ideological work should not result in any divisions. This too is no advance over similar threadbare declarations she has made in the past.

She also says that "Out of this process, over time, a revolutionary party, the political organization of the toilers, can be formed which will be capable of developing a program and organizing for socialist revolution." So apparently any real work for socialism is put off until somehow this party appears. Otherwise she says nothing about what this party should do different from what is already being done. She says that "there are organizations which are working in this direction. Their work should be supported." This refers to *El Machete*, whose call for "Work to form the political organ of the toilers" she has vigorously endorsed. This call says nothing concrete about this political organization other than that it should not interfere with, or change, how activists or trade unions or other left-wing political organizations are presently organizing things. What use is a party if it doesn't change the way things are being presently organized? The whole point of organizing a party is to change a presently unsatisfactory situation. But not for *El Machete*, which apparently envisions a party as a large super-coalition of groups, each of which keeps its autonomy and none of which is bound to do anything.

Thus her strategy is simply build larger and larger coalitions, which is supposedly to remedy the fragmentation of the movement, which is the only problem she sees with it.

No assessment of the July 6 elections

This strategy of Anita's and *El Machete* led to passivity during the July 6 elections. This was a critical period for political work. The prospect of the PRI's political hegemony beginning to crack resulted in many activists from what Anita calls the independent or the left-wing organizations enthusiastically working with the PRD. So the elections provided a test of whether *El Machete* could, on the basis of its strategy, fight against the movement being subordinated to the PRD.

In fact, *El Machete* was unable to analyze the elections on the basis of its program. Its editorial statement on the elections in its issue of July 1 simply downplayed their significance. Its issue of July 9, after the elections, editorialized that Cardenas had the government, but not the power. The main difference with the PRD being put forward in these statements seems to be that *EM* didn't think the elections meant much.

In fact, the July 6 elections marked a change. Not a change to a supposedly true democracy where the people have their social demands satisfied, but a shift towards bourgeois-democracy as it is in the real world. The working class will never achieve liberation simply through democratic change, however rarefied—democracy only sets the stage for a further class struggle. But these elections marked the beginning of the political transition from PRI hegemony to a bourgeois democratic regime. Mind you, not necessarily a PRD regime. It might be a very conservative bourgeois-democratic regime, with the right-wing PAN exercising a lot of power and influence.

But *El Machete* didn't point to the overall change marked by the elections. It believed that it displayed independence from the PRD if it simply denigrated electoralism, while in fact this showed its inability to show the masses what the PRD and the bourgeoisie were aiming to do.

Even Anita couldn't maintain quite this same nonchalant view of the elections. In her article, in one place she enthuses over the great defeat PRI received in the election, and in another place goes so far as to say that the PRI "dominance" in the "larger political/electoral arena" has broken up. (In fact, it is the breakup of the PRI system has only begun.) But she is unable to give a class assessment of what the elections show about how this breakup is taking place. So to avoid having her enthusiasm for PRI's defeat seem reformist, she supplements her joy over the results with the implication that, nevertheless, when all was said and done, the elections were just the same as always, because they weren't "true" democracy. Nowhere does she point out that the elections show that the democratization is going to result in the transition from one bourgeois regime to another. Yet without that recognition of the nature of the present transitional period in Mexico, it is hard to understand the relation of class forces in the democratization movement, and the struggle to organize a specifically proletarian movement is hamstrung.

Difficulty in fighting the reformist PRD

This difficulty with assessing the elections is part of Anita's difficulty in dealing with the PRD. Instead of showing the activists that there are different class forces in the democratization movement, even in its militant wing, she holds that the issue is mainly who is more militant in the struggle against PRI. So with respect to the elections, the criticism of the PRD tended to get reduced to that it is an electoral party. Thus *El Machete* and Anita had to go overboard in denying the significance of the elections.

What Anita and *El Machete*'s seemed to be saying to the activists was, work with the PRD or don't work with the PRD, but also take part in the demonstrations and coalitions of activists. No doubt it is important not to restrict one's work to elections. But the difference between reformist and socialist work exists inside demonstrations and coalitions as well as in elections. There is reformist and PRD influence inside the activist coalitions as well as in electoral work.

Nor can PRD be fought simply by avoiding any agreements with it or joint actions. *El Machete* may have thought that only electoral work involved coalitions with PRD, while demonstrating and organizing transcend PRDism in practice. But this is childish. PRD-influenced groups are in demonstrations, unions, and other places. In the democratization movement, the different class forces will often come together in coalitions or alliances of sorts; PRD activists too have been murdered by PRI forces; some PRD-affiliated groups give calls that are quite similar to those of the rest of the left. It would seem that in elections too, there can be no absolute rule that "alliances" are always wrong. This is one of the reasons why *El Machete* and Anita are wrong to lay stress simply on whether activists took

part in the July 6 elections and not on the content of the electoral agitation. In the transition period, when electing an opposition candidate might help break up the old system, so long as there isn't any real alternative further to the left, activists will often be faced with the unpleasant question of whether to vote for some PRD candidates. It is necessary to be able to fight PRD's reformism, whatever the decision is. In either case, one should take the elections seriously, making use of election agitation to do such things as

- a) show that there are different class forces in the democratization movement (this can be done even if there is a sort of electoral alliance provided one is voting for the bourgeois liberal only for the sake of creating a better situation for the struggle against all bourgeois forces, including the bourgeois liberals);

- b) show the actual nature of the democratization going on in Mexico, thus encouraging the class-conscious workers and activists to organize a socialist movement as well as take part in democratization; and

- c) use one's agitation to show the need to organize in particular a socialist party, so that there will be an alternative to the left of the PRD, an alternative not just in elections but as far as the overall class struggle.

Although they did not directly endorse PRD candidates, *El Machete* and Anita failed to do these things, and failed to raise any criteria about what activists should do with respect to the elections. Instead *EM* and Anita, in essence, contrasted electoralism to work in the general movement coalitions. Nor is this surprising, given that Anita has actively polemicized against talking about the class nature of various forces as "sterile" and "academic", whereas the real issue was supposedly only to push all groups towards militancy. Such a strategy doesn't amount to an effective fight against PRD; it pushes activists who recognized the significance of the recent elections towards the PRD; and it also shows an immense ability to close one's eyes to PRD's concrete influence in the general left.

Anti-neoliberalism and Cardenismo

But one of the reasons that Anita and *El Machete* focus so much simply on militancy is because they have a hard time dealing with the immediate demands set forward by the PRD. The PRD talks about many of the same demands as the rest of the left, and this is especially true of various PRD-influenced activist groups. They call for the government to implement the San Andres accords with the Zapatistas; they support various struggles of the workers; they denounce neo-liberalism; they posture to this or that extent against NAFTA (by calling, say, for renegotiating it); etc.

To some extent, this reflects the nature of the democratization movement, in which a number of general democratic demands are supported by the liberals as well as the more radical workers and peasants. But it also reflects that not only does the PRD attribute all evil only to the conservative policy,

thus prettifying bourgeois policy in general, but much of the left is influenced by petty-bourgeois views that attribute all the problems of Mexico simply to neo-liberalism (i.e., the conservative bourgeois policy). There is still a good deal of support for old PRI policies in the left, which the PRI is thought to have bungled with its tyranny. Particularly the policies of the late Lazaro Cardenas (president of Mexico from 1934-1940) and Luis Echeverria (president of Mexico from 1970-1976) attracted support.

Even *El Machete* and Anita (and the *Chicago Workers' Voice* as a whole) have a hard time dealing with the old Cardenista politics. For example, take their agrarian program for Mexico. As I pointed out two years ago, referring to its general features,

"The presentation of government assistance to ejidos, the development of some communal forms, and better government planning as a sort of socialism that can save the peasantry is in line with the rhetoric of the late 30's in Mexico."²

The EZLN also shows the influence of old Cardenista ideas, and this is reflected in its tendency to reduce matters to a struggle against the recent neoliberal turn of PRI. The EZLN even tries to orient the world struggle mainly against neo-liberalism and, for example, has called for international conference against neo-liberalism. These have taken place, the 2nd such meeting haven taken place in Madrid in July-August of this year. This is in line with the fact that EZLN seeks alliances with "civil society" in Mexico and outside (as does *El Machete*), and civil society represents liberal bourgeois and petty-bourgeois non-partisan activism.

Anita sometimes seeks to slur over the difference between the struggle against neo-liberalism and the struggle against the foundations of capitalism. In her article, for example, she presents the EZLN as really upset with neoliberalism (as it indeed is), and then talks about "the basic neoliberal premises of capitalism". This can only confuse the issue that the EZLN and various coalitions against neo-liberalism are not challenging capitalism itself. Some leftists may regard socialism as the only answer to neo-liberalism, but should not obscure the fact that there is a large liberal and reformist opposition to neo-liberalism which is distinct from socialism.

Trade unions and the working class movement

Anita's strategy also has difficulty dealing with the trade union movement, as I briefly mentioned above. Anita complains about a grouping of nine Forista unions who left the PRI-dominated CTM but stand somewhat apart from the general opposition movement, the May 1st Inter-Union Confederation, and the other Forista unions. These nine unions have, for the time being, quite a few more members than the other non-PRI unions combined, and Anita is somewhat worried about their influence.

But how does she deal with it? She points to the significance of the unions marching in the non-PRI May 1 demonstrations, and lays stress on the maneuvering between the unions and other groups at these demonstration. While she says there are political differences between the May 1st Inter-Union Confederation and the nine stand-alone Forista unions, she says little about what they are. She does say, however, that one of the Forista leaders says that the Forista unions are only interested in the economic struggle, and nothing else.

But what about the relationship of the Forista leadership to the workers inside those unions? What type of union would these unions be, even if they joined with the May 1st Inter-Union Confederation, if the old leadership of "charros" remained? Does it suffice to leave the CTM for these charros to reform themselves? And what should the workers inside these unions do to really create class struggle trade unions?

Anita says nothing about these issues, and hasn't in all her articles on Mexico in the *Chicago Workers' Voice*. Nor does Anita look any too closely at the stand of the May 1st Inter-Union Confederation. It takes part in the general movement coalitions and demonstrations, and that's enough. The standpoint of *El Machete* and Anita is to join together various organizations, without affecting their internal policies. This is their idea of how to have unity, unity, unity, and this is even their plan for how to eventually build a "party".

This means simply accepting the trade unions as they are, and not seeking to mobilize a revolutionary trend at the base in the unions. Such a trend could rally workers to build real unions of class struggle. It is one thing for a new Marxist trend not yet to have many links with the workers at the factories. It is another if a trend claims to be Marxist and doesn't even care to raise the question of having these links, and instead relies on maneuvers among the trade union leaders.

The EZLN's strategy

It is useful to look further at the EZLN's stand. Anita and the *CWV* have praised the EZLN as being a step on the road towards socialist revolution, on the grounds that they are a very militant section of the movement. If socialism really does spring from taking democracy to the limit, then it isn't necessary to look too closely at the program of the EZLN, but only at the fact that it is fighting militantly for that program.

Indeed, it really is important that the peasants in Chiapas have surrendered to PRI's military pressure and have kept up their struggle. They are fighting to have the government live up to the San Andres agreements, and other peasants are fighting against their impoverishment as well. It is a correct class instinct that has led to mass sympathy with the militant peasant movement.

But the EZLN is not the vanguard of socialism nor of the struggle against "the premises of capitalism", and this refutes the strategy that the socialist movement would simply be the militant wing of the struggle for democratization. The EZLN leadership has made democratization into a panacea, and it has illusions in the liberal bourgeoisie. At one time, it banked on the victory of Cardenas in the national presidential elections of

²"The *CWV* renounces anti-revisionism", CV vol. 1, #3, p. 23, col. 2.

1994, and it called on everyone to build a national liberation movement, whose leader would be Cuauhtemoc Cardenas.

But it was disappointed with the results of their backing of Cardenas. So the EZLN leadership shifted to organizing "civil society" into a nonpartisan support group for the EZLN. The campaign to found this group climaxed this year with the founding congress of the Zapatista National Liberation Front in Mexico City on Sept. 13-16. Being somewhat upset with the PRD for keeping a certain distance from them, the EZLN leadership didn't directly back the PRD in the July 6 elections. As a protest against the military occupation of Zapatista territory, it boycotted the election (and EZLN activists burned down some polling stations) in Chiapas and some other southern states, but it actually no longer had a strategy for the rest of Mexico. It gave no view on whether to vote or not, or who to vote for, in the elections as a whole. Some Zapatista supporters called for boycotting the election in Mexico City, while many others voted for PRD. But the boycott did not indicate a major break with the PRD either. The EZLN's overall stand was that the opposition parties will carry out what they will on the electoral front, while the EZLN organizes some other path towards democratization. Indeed, according to an earlier report by Anita, reformists have dominated most of the campaign to found the Zapatista Front.

Anita's own strategy for Mexico doesn't go much beyond what is in the EZLN communique on the elections, so she endorses it as the stand of much of the left. She describes its "main content" as

"an explanation of the EZLN view of the need to build a 'non-party' or independent social movement. The communique states that the EZLN is 'not anti-party nor pro-party, not pro-elections nor anti-elections but is against the state party system, presidentialism [i.e. the authoritarian power wielded by the Mexican President—JG], and for democracy, liberty, justice, is leftist, inclusive and anti-neoliberal.' It gives the view that democracy does not mean broadening the elite nor replacing one elite with another but means turning politics upside down."

Anita, who claims to support building a toilers' party, supports this declaration that parties are irrelevant. This shows that her

idea of a party is something like a Zapatista Front but including the entire activist movement.

Moreover, it is notable that the EZLN presents the struggle in Mexico as simply one for democracy, but for a true, refined democracy, for a democracy that has been turned upside down: Anita, who claims to be for socialism, supports this. This shows that she is still following the view that the forces for socialism will come simply from organizing a militant movement for a higher and truer form of democracy. Indeed, Anita says enthusiastically that "It appears with this communique that the EZLN is looking past the elections and coinciding with the viewpoint of much of the independent mass organizations and the left in Mexico." She is, however, a bit worried that the EZLN leadership may not be sincere, and that the communique might be "another maneuver of the EZLN leadership between the reformist forces and the left". She is afraid that the EZLN will give another call for support to the PRD. But when the EZLN leadership mobilizes activists to center their activity on working side by side with the liberals in a broad coalition, Anita holds that this is the type of revolutionary work that she has been supporting in Mexico all along.

While Anita is worried about the EZLN's relation to the PRD, she doesn't connect this to the EZLN's program or to its class nature. It doesn't occur to her that a group whose furthest goal is eliminating neo-liberalism would have something in common with the reformist bourgeoisie. She thinks it is a question of whether the EZLN leadership is sincere in its declarations, but doesn't look at this from the class point of view: that the democratic petty-bourgeoisie inevitably vacillates in the struggle.

The electoral test

The July 6 elections weren't just a contest between politicians, but they also provided a test of revolutionary strategies. Anita's and *El Machete's* strategy that "taking the democratic demands to their revolutionary limits" would create a socialist movement and pave the way for socialist revolution has failed that test. It provided no analysis of the significance of the July 6 elections, gave no guidance as to what should be done during those elections, and no way to deal with influence of the reformist PRD on most of the Mexican left. □

May 1st 1997 in Mexico City and the July 6th elections

by Anita Jones de Sandoval
(*Chicago Workers' Voice*)

The following article and author's note, both reproduced in full with some typos corrected, originally appeared under the above title in *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #13, July 28, 1997. The article provides some interesting news about developments in Mexico, but fails to clearly assess the overall meaning of the July 6 national elections. It is critiqued in "The July 6 elections and the socialist movement in Mexico" on pages 15-20.

Author's note: Over the past three years there have been significant developments in the mass movement and political movements in Mexico; these developments are reflected in a concentrated way in the capital city. This article will discuss some of those developments, including the May Day events and the July 6th mayoral election and the challenges which these events present to the revolutionary movement. It is important to note that these recent events take place within a framework in Mexico of increasing militarization and repression. Information is based on discussion with activists from the organizations of CNOSI (Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Sociales Independientes) and observations made from discussion with CLETE and *El Machete*, and from various news sources including *La Jornada* newspaper and *Proceso* magazine from Mexico. Opinions are those of the author.

May Day 1997

Mexico City is an important center for [the] organized mass movement and its political organizations in the country. A city of some 28 million inhabitants, there are an average of 4 major protest marches a day, and innumerable smaller actions. Mass marches and delegations from other parts of the country (such as the recent massive presence of teachers from Oaxaca) arrive regularly to present demands, set up long term protest encampments in the governmental plaza or Zocalo (called plantones in Mexico) and to protest government actions and inactions. This year marked the third year in a row in which the ruling party (PRI) and its trade union center (CTM) did not sponsor a May 1st march in Mexico City. May 1st in Mexico City has become the territory of the independents . . . the independent social-political organizations, independent campesinos organizations from the southern and central regions of the country, the independent trade unions, and the left. Prior to 1995, each May 1st saw a gigantic official march with a rally in the Zocalo in front of the Government Palace, and an address by the President of Mexico from one of the balconies.

The independent organizations always organized their own march and usually found themselves in confrontations with the official march, sometimes violent confrontations, as police and PRI goons tried to stop the independent organizations from marching.

However, in 1995, the PRI and the ruling party trade union center, the CTM, showing the true depths of their internal crises and their fear of the radicalized mass movements, gave up May 1st in Mexico City. They now only organize cocktail parties and auditorium assemblies for a few invited workers and functionaries.

In 1995, the mass movement was in an upsurge, and as many as a million workers, campesinos, students, street vendors and others marched in Mexico City on May 1st. Last year and this year, the numbers were smaller, but still large — more than 250,000 and perhaps as many as 500,000. The independent march and rally are organized by the May 1st Inter-Union Coordinator which is a coalition of organizations. The march was led by a contingent of 3 thousand teachers from the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE), a center of the independent teachers movement. Another contingent of 2,500 teachers who had marched 580 km from the state of Oaxaca joined the march. Thousands of members of the SUTAU-RUTA 100 union and the MPI (Movimiento Proletario Independiente) and at least 10,000 members of the Francisco Villa Popular Front participated. There was also a contingent from the PRD including that party's leaders, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas and Manuel Lopez Obrador, although the PRD leaders did not speak at the rally. The main podium (some of the organizations had their own podiums), saw a range of speakers from the participating organizations, including Gabino Camacho (SUTAU-RUTA 100) and Benito Miron of the FAC-MLN. The speakers and the participating contingents raised a wide variety of demands: for the liberty of the political prisoners such as Eli Homero Aguilar of the Francisco Villa Front, for wage increases to keep up with the rising cost of living, for an end to the militarization and repression, for international working class solidarity and for socialism.

Of note is the fact that the EPR sent a message of solidarity to the march/rally and that message was read from the podium, despite the fact that the EPR is an illegal organization. Also of note is the fact that the EZLN did not send a message to the event, although the day before subcommandante Marcos did send, via the communication media, a letter to Fidel Velasquez, the leader of the CTM. This communique was an open letter commemorating May 1st and denouncing the CTM and the PRI for causing such extreme misery and degradation for the Mexican workers.

This year's May 1st also highlighted just how deep the political crises of the PRI is in the workers' movement and trade unions. Last year, the second year of no official May 1st

march, one of the largest trade unions affiliated with, but not actually a part of the CTM, the electrical workers union (SNTE) openly expressed dissension with the CTM and announced that it would march on May 1st. The CTM issued a statement asserting that none of its affiliates would be allowed to march. the SNTE marched anyway, although it left a gap between its contingent and the rest of the march. During the course of 1996 and early 1997 this split with the official union movement widened and a trade union grouping called El Foro (the Foristas) was formed by the SNTE and 8 other trade unions with some degree of past affiliation to or past alliance with the CTM, (the Telephone Workers Union, the Pilots' Union, the National University Workers' Union, the Social Security Employees' Union, and others). This grouping has significant political differences with the May 1st Inter-Union Coordinador based on the member unions' history of affiliation to the PRI, but as they have split from the PRI union front, they have sought some accommodation with the independent unions and social organizations. For May 1st of this year, the Forista unions reached an agreement with the May 1st Inter-Union Coordinadora and marched in force via a separate route to the Zocolo, where they had their own podium and speakers. From the podium the Foro leaders announced the formation of a new trade union center in Mexico in June of this year. Thus, concurrent with the death of the charro of all charros (corrupted trade union bosses), the president of the CTM, Fidel Velasquez, comes the death of the CTM as the dominant trade union center.

The formation of a new "non-PRI" trade union center presents a new challenge to the independent organizations and trade unions. The formation of the Forista trade union center shows the depth of the crises of the PRI. It is a positive development in that it further weakens the PRI and helps to further break the stranglehold of the CTM on most of the country's unions. Thus, it aids in clearing some of the obstacles for the development of a broader, more militant class struggle over the long run. However, politically the Forista trade union center is centrist at best. It remains to be seen how much of a break with the PRI, especially the "reform faction", has occurred. Furthermore, as stated by the leader of the Telephone Workers Union at the May Day rally, the Foro differs from the independent Inter-union Coordinator and other independent organizations because it is only interested in the trade union struggle, not in politics, not in party politics and not the mass movement per se. The independent union and social movement exerts influence and pressure on the Foro unions, but the Foro also exert a pressure on the left wing of the independent trade unions to move towards the center.

The July 6th elections

The July 6th mayoral elections in Mexico City have drawn international attention to the Federal District. The PRD's candidate, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, won the first ever such election held in that city, defeating the PRI and PAN candidates easily. Cardenas's win had been predicted, but the margin of victory was greater than expected by most. Cardenas won more

than 48% of the vote for mayor; the PAN candidate won 16%; the PRI candidate only 26%. In the elections for assembly (similar to city council), the PRI won approximately 45% of the votes, the PRI 24% and the PAN 19%. In both elections, another 5 parties shared the remaining votes. At the national level, less publicized elections for senators and deputies showed the PRI with 38% of the total votes, the PAN with about 27%, and the PRD with 26-28% of the total votes. (Elections results source: the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico via SPIN Internet). The PRI has tried to turn the defeat in Mexico City to its own advantage by claiming it as proof of the "new" Mexican system of true democracy. However, the "new system" managed to be just as corrupt and violent as ever before in the elections in the rest of Mexico. In Chiapas, voting installations were built by the military camps to allow the thousands of soldiers occupying the state to vote (while intimidating the communities). The indigenous communities in the southern states issued a "don't vote" call, and it was reported that Zapatistas burned down some of the new voting stations. It was also reported that in some other areas the local PRI groupings burned down voting stations to keep PRD supporters from voting. In the state of Tabasco the PRD force have accused the PRI of major fraud and massive mobilizations in protest of the elections have occurred during most of July.

Of particular interest is the communique issued by the EZLN (Marcos) just prior to the July 6 election. This communique as called a "Don't vote" communique by much of the media in Mexico; however, the communique does not call for people across Mexico to vote or not to vote. It does publish and support the decision of the indigenous communities across the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Hidalgo and parts of Guerrero to not vote. It also expresses considerable frustration with the PRD and other political parties for their pressure on the EZLN to "keep quiet", and their rejection of or ignoring of the demands of the indigenous communities. The main content of the communique is an explanation of the EZLN view of the need to build a "non-party" or independent social movement. The communique states that the EZLN is "not anti-party nor pro-party, not pro-elections nor anti-elections but is against the state party system, presidentialism, and for democracy, liberty, justice, is leftist, inclusive and anti-neoliberal". It gives the view that democracy does not mean broadening the elite nor replacing one elite with another but means turning politics upside down. It appears with this communique that the EZLN is looking past the elections and coinciding with the viewpoint of much of the independent mass organizations and the left in Mexico. What is not yet clear is whether this is another maneuver of the EZLN between the reformist forces and the left or if it represents some political development.

Now What?

These developments over the past three months are increasing the challenge facing the independent social and political organizations and the left organizations. If at one time 'independence' was defined by some organizations as being against the PRI and for mass organization, the breaking up of

the PRI dominance in the trade union movement and in the larger political/electoral arena sharpens the question of what is the "independent movement"? The question becomes how does an independent movement of the working class, and of the poor working masses define itself? What are its immediate demands, and what is its long range vision? The differences in the trends in the mass movement are continuing to sharpen, as are the contradictions within the PRI. For example, right before the elections, it was reported that some of the planteons in Mexico City set up by indigenous organizations from Chiapas posted banners called for "no vote" and were attacked by PRD groups. This process of differentiation and struggle is likely to continue even further after Cardenas takes office December 1, 1997 as the mayor of Mexico City.

What are the likely consequences of the election? Raised expectations on the part of the masses, including and especially on the part of the most activist section of the mass base of the PRD in Mexico City, and in other areas of the country where the PRD is more militant and active (Guerrero, Michoacan, and Chiapas). These expectations are not likely to be met even if Cardenas were to decide to take a more "left" stance of trying to fulfill some of the demands of the toilers. Mexico City is feeling the full brunt of Mexico's economic crises. The mayor's office has limited powers; it is not in charge of the police, for example. At the same time, the PRD program itself does not challenge the basic economic policy of Mexico—the EZLN criticizes it for only trying to dull the sharpest edges of neoliberalism. It certainly does not challenge the basic neoliberal premises of capitalism, much less call for anything more radical, or for socialism. Cardenas is looking towards the presidency of Mexico always . . . he will be under pressure from all sides. Given these pressures we can expect that the factionalization inside the PRD may also deepen.

Cardenas will be under attack from the right by the PAN, and the PRI. In some smaller towns in which the PRD has won elections, by the time they were inaugurated the offices, files,

equipment, money, etc., had all disappeared. Furthermore, the extremely violent repression against PRD activists has continued in many regions of the country. All of this will mean pressure on the masses, and especially on the organized independent organizations and left wing of the movement, to support Cardenas, or worse, to give up their actions, and demands.

However, it is also true that there will be increased pressure on the PRI—if raised expectations lead to a larger mass movement, increasing demands against the PRI government. Given these challenges, there is a greater urgency than ever that the revolutionary movement take seriously its tasks.

Tasks for the Revolutionary Movement

Unity is needed at various levels to remedy the fragmentation in the mass movement and in particular of the left wing of the movement and its mass struggles. There is a need for unity of action around the immediate demands and battles of the masses, and for the development of a united front of mass organizations and organizations fighting against oppression.

There is also a need for unity of political organizations and revolutionary activists. In order to build this kind of unity there must be more ideological, theoretical and political definition, and the revolutionary organizations must be able to show the maturity to undertake debate and struggle over these definitions without falling into sectarianism. There are organizations which are working in this direction. Their work should be supported. Out of this process, over time, a revolutionary party, the political organization of the toilers, can be formed which will be capable of developing a program and organizing for socialist revolution. Without this work, the working class and poor peasants and other working people in Mexico will not be able to break the chains of oppression and exploitation. □

Postmodernist philosophy is old subjectivist wine in new bottles

by Tim Hall

Postmodernism has produced diverse offshoots and projects. It poses as a radical challenge to the capitalist establishment, but in reality its philosophy undermines resistance to the ruling class. Its essence is a subjective idealism which attacks human reason itself and the materialist world view of science, reserving particular vehemence for Marxist revolutionary theory. Its logic prevents a coherent analysis of the natural world and especially of capitalist social reality and undermines revolutionary theoretical and political struggle against capitalism. Pomo claims to be a radical opponent of the "totalizing" critiques it sees embodied in rationalism and Marxism, but its own positions imply a complete ("total") destruction of all but the most fragmentary opposition of the oppressed class, the proletariat, to the capitalist exploiters. In the end, only "deconstructive" word-play is considered resistance.

- ♦ One strand of postmodernism claims that "nothing exists outside the text", that is, outside of language, narratives, writing.¹ Language and the relationships within it are first set up as the model for analysis of social life; then, with Derrida's writings in the mid-'60's, language becomes posited as the sole reality and "discourse" becomes the club with which to beat materialism and Marxism. Material reality is denied; all science is junked; analysis of capitalist oppression becomes impossible; there is no interest in the testing of scientific or political truth by the criterion of experiment and practice. If language alone can create "truth," then everybody, every local area, every ethnic group has its own "truth." This has enormously reactionary consequences, concealed behind a facade of concern for "the Other": for example, it leaves no basis for criticizing Hindu religious nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, Aryan Nation and Ku Klux Klan racism or even the "free market" rhetoric of the monopoly capitalists — everyone has their own "truth." (In fact, "everyone-their-own-truth" denies the real benefits of diversity, which consist in the challenge of differing views contesting which are true. Instead, postmodernism patronizingly pats "the Other" on the head as if to say, "Whatever you say, my child.")

- ♦ A closely related variety of pomo subjectivism is the view most associated with Michael Foucault and ex-

pressed succinctly in his phrase "regimes of truth."² According to Foucault, truth is whatever the powerful say it is. (Yes, he actually argues this!) This concedes the concept of truth to the bourgeoisie and the rightists. If the bourgeoisie openly says that blacks are inferior, as they did in the days of Jim Crow and do today in such books as *The Bell Curve*, then Foucault's logic leaves no answer since it considers power to equal truth. The real scandal is that so many leftists have considered Foucault's view of knowledge progressive. The absurdity of Foucault's view is evaded by some who cite his claim that he regards power as not necessarily emanating from the state or the corporations but from what he calls "discursive formations," and that it can at times flow from below, be bottom-up power. However, these "formations" turn out on examination to be the various fields and professions of present-day society such as medicine, criminology, law, journalism, etc., whose specific customs are now suddenly "discovered" by Foucault. And in a capitalist society all these disciplines without exception are dominated by the bourgeoisie, so the determination of truth by such "formations" is, indeed, determination by those whom we ordinary, non-Foucauldian, mortals regard as the powerful. Furthermore, this issue has been so atrociously muddled by the postmodernist trend that one must also add the fundamental reminder that truth is a mental category which is so called because it more or less correctly reflects the actual nature of something existing objectively, materially, outside the mind of the observer. Hence, no amount of power can ever determine actual truth. When power strays from an accurate representation of objective reality, power lies, as it habitually does to protect the class interests of the rich. Foucault's abject surrender of the struggle for truth based on material reality follows from postmodernism's loss of interest in the existence of the material world and the proof of truth by means of evidence, logic and practical experience. In fact truth is on the side of the oppressed since actual capitalist development is moving toward a proletarian revolution and actual science constantly reveals truths which can be used, especially after such a revolution, to improve the conditions of the planet.

- ♦ Postmodernism generally views philosophical reason

¹Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1974, p. 158.

²Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, England, 1980, p. 133.

— which they think to discredit by calling it “instrumental” — as possessing a basically fascist character. Typified by the views of Jean-Francois Lyotard, this viewpoint is another surrender by postmodernism of a basic weapon of thought and action to the right. According to pomo, concepts themselves are oppressive (all except their own!). This makes a mockery of all thought. It also mocks any championing of diversity, for there can be no understanding of diversity without knowledge of the essential differences between diverse entities, that is, without forming concepts for each unit of diversity. Politically this means abandoning rather than encouraging a careful analysis of real differences between various social classes, national groups, types of regimes, etc.

- ◆ Postmodernism lumps together nearly all previous Western philosophical trends and attacks them as “metaphysical,” “rectilinear” and “logo-centric” (logic-centric) “modern” “products of the Enlightenment.” No distinction is made between the fundamentally opposed materialist and idealist views of reality or between mechanical and dialectical conceptions of motion. Marxist dialectics has long since demarcated itself from mechanical materialism, metaphysics and idealism of all types, but postmodernist philosophy ignores the rich history of struggle between these trends. In the name of a Nietzschean irrationality, any philosophical heritage for revolutionary thought is thrown out the window and replaced with a drunken speculation detached from history and material reality.
- ◆ Postmodernism justifies these positions by painting rationalism in general and Marxism in particular as “totalizing” philosophies, that is, as absolute, final systems suppressive of political or intellectual discovery and freedom. Postmodernism confuses the mobile, flexible dialectics of revolutionary Marxism with the static, mechanical views of the contemporary capitalist technology-freaks, the Stalinist revisers of Marxism and even the reactionary side of Hegel. Revolution is equated with oppression in language that echoes the Cold War anti-communist hysteria of the 1950's. Pomo's purpose in attacking “totalization” is not really to oppose universal viewpoints — for it itself is one — but to destroy the ability of the oppressed to reason, form concepts and grasp the internal laws of motion of nature and society.
- ◆ Postmodernism has a laundry list of related “sins” which it attacks in order to discredit

Marxism and rationalism. These include “reductionism” (in social theory, giving primacy to the role of the economic base in history, as in “we must be careful not to *reduce* the motive for the destruction of the rain forest to the economic laws of capitalism”), “essentialism” (choosing certain characteristics of a thing and leaving out others in order to characterize it in a concept, as in the concept “apple,” which leaves out “red,” “ripe,” “McIntosh,” etc.), the theory of the reflection of material reality in consciousness (which it misrepresents as being a theory of mirror-like, mechanically exact, “transparent” reflection), and the recognition of a coherent subject (such as the working class) which can act as an agent of revolutionary change.

- ◆ Despite its exaltation of language, postmodernist philosophy employs the most obscure, esoteric, inaccessible language which disarms both workers and intellectuals in the debate over revolutionary theory. Marxism itself is not always easy reading, but the difficult terms used by Marx, Engels and Lenin have precise, scientific meanings which cannot be replaced by a simpler terms, and these revolutionary Marxists supplemented their difficult analyses with vivid illustrations and evidence. Postmodernism neither meets these standards of evidence and illustration, nor is a truly new philosophy requiring a brand-new terminology. In fact, it is old subjectivist wine in new bottles.

These characteristics show the class nature of postmodernist philosophy. In pomo terms, postmodernist philosophy “functions” to “totally” “deconstruct” the ability of the working class to “constitute” itself as the “centered,” “self-conscious” “subject” — “agency” — of change, to prevent the proletariat from becoming class-conscious through the experience of struggle and the assimilation of Marxism, which alone will allow it to overthrow capitalism.. Lenin wrote that “without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”³ Without rationality and without the recognition of the material world independent of the human mind, not only Marxism goes out the window but all possibility of scientific and intellectual development and of democratic decisions is lost. This is a theory of mental slavery to the bourgeoisie.

In 1996 a serious debate over postmodernist theory broke out in academic circles. A physics professor, Alan Sokal, published a deliberately erroneous article cloaked in pomo gibberish in the postmodernist cultural journal *Social Text*, then revealed his hoax. The basic tenet of Sokal and his allies was to defend the scientific method of reasoning based on actual evidence gathered from the material world. *Social Text's*

³Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, New York, 1943, p. 28.

editors were so flattered by the pomo platitudes that they never checked any of the article's absurdities, then once the hoax was revealed they refused to consider its publication as revealing a grievously wrong orientation in their work. *Social Text's* behavior illustrated pomo's utter lack of interest in the material world.

The "totalization" charge is a red herring

Postmodernism has made a big hoopla over what it calls philosophical "totalization." While this vague charge may seem to be aimed at capitalist dictatorship in its fascist form, or Soviet state-capitalism, or even the repressive bourgeois democracy of the West, actually it is just a red herring thrown out by the postmodernist philosophers to attack materialist rationalism and especially Marxism. Following in that good old bipartisan tradition of bourgeois anti-communism, the pomos charge that Marxism and (here they add) all rationalism are "totalizing" outlooks which claim to give an exhausting, all-encompassing picture of reality right down to the last detail and to deduce a causal connection, or determinism, for every last molecule. Concrete difference, diversity, variation, polymorphy, accident, contingency are all alleged to be suppressed by big bad Marxism and rationalism. This is, of course, a distorted picture of Marxism, hence the charge is a red herring. And the red herring is meant to distract us from noticing the complete dismissal of rational thought by the pomos.

Reality, postmodernism holds, is too complex, too chaotic, too diverse, etc., to be described by a "total" theory or by any theory claiming any degree of universality at all. Causality and determination are rendered questionable or impossible by this complexity. And since reality is too complex to describe by theory, the pomos claim that to try to do so is to carry out a coercive act of domination by general concepts over the multifaceted, mobile details of life, a dictatorship of the universal over the particular. For example, conceiving a forest is called an act of conceptual (and anti-environmental!) violence against individual trees; conceiving "trees," in turn, would be conceptual violence against leaves; "leaves" would be violence against chlorophyll, etc. (And here the brave pomos ride to the rescue — of the poor trees against the forest, the leaves against the trees, chlorophyll) By extension of this logic, the claims of Marxism and rationalism are looked upon merely as Nietzschean "wills-to-power," as desires to oppress, not as theoretical efforts toward emancipation, capable of objective testing and proof. Revolutionary Marxism is not "totalist" in this oppressive sense fantasized by the postmodernists. But if any attempt at rational theory whatsoever is to be smeared as "totalist" (just two syllables away from the good old anti-communist shibboleth of "totalitarian"), then Marxism is resolutely totalist in its attempts to grasp the motion of the natural and social world in rational concepts.

Let us look at how some of the main representatives of postmodernist philosophy express their anti-Marxist and anti-rationalist positions under the banner of opposing "totalization." While these figures differ on secondary issues, they are united in their hostility to what they call "the great totalizing zero."

Jean-Francois Lyotard asserts that the universal holocausts the particular

According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, a theorist who participated in the anarchist wing of the 1968 French worker-student revolt, "the desire for truth", which is expressed in theoretical study and work, "feeds terrorism in everyone."⁴ Postmodernism here not only denies the work of theoretical cognition but picks up the Nietzschean weapon the bourgeoisie often uses against radicals: the accusation of a psychological desire to dominate. Lyotard explains his opposition to "totalization" as follows: "The notorious universality of knowledge, generally interpreted as an a priori condition of theoretical discourse in its communicability, is, understood in terms of drives (here is the psychological accusation again — T.H.), a mark of the destruction of personal identities."⁵ Lyotard considers that the use of concepts "implies the denial of disparities, of heterogeneities, of transits and stases of energy, it implies the denial of polymorphy."⁶

Lyotard realizes that the most powerful opponent of postmodernism's fragmentation of thinking is Marxism, so he goes after Marxism explicitly, writing "there is no exteriority (alternative — T.H.), no other of Kapital, which would be Nature, Socialism, Carnival, or what have you. . . ."⁷ That is, no alternative to capitalism can be conceived of by the mind or brought into existence by revolution. Any attempt to formulate a theory which would lead to such a revolution betrays, he alleges, a fascist totalitarian psychology which he calls a "furious concentrationary impulse."⁸ Even more explicitly attacking Marxist dialectics, Lyotard writes, "Every dialectical philosophy of the relations of knowledge and experience provides the subject-matter for a bureaucracy of the spirit, which presents itself as the organ, both visible and mysterious, in whose name the dialectic operates."⁹

The equation of Marxism with fascist dictatorship is an old charge leveled by both anarchism and the bourgeoisie; it can only be answered by stating that revolutionary Marxism holds that only a proletarian dictatorship *by* the working class *over* the rich can create real freedom *for* the oppressed, and that the Soviet-Chinese-E. European-Cuban regimes were/are not examples of worker-states at all but of state-capitalist bureaucracies representing not the workers but a new

⁴"Apathie dans la Theorie," in *Rudimens Païens*, Paris, 1977, p. 23, cited in Dews, Peter, *Logics of Disintegration*, London, 1987, p. 216.

⁵*Économie Libidinale*, Paris, 1974, p. 295, cited in Dews, p. 211.

⁶*Économie Libidinale*, p. 294, cited in Dews, p. 211.

⁷*Des Dispositifs Pulsionnels*, Paris, 1973, p. 18, cited in Dews, p. 137.

⁸*Économie Libidinale*, p. 94, cited in Dews, p. 137.

⁹*Désire à Partir de Marx et Freud*, Paris, 1973, p. 104, cited in Dews, p. 129.

bourgeoisie draping itself in red to fool the working class. This debate is not new, and the Marxist-Leninist trend now represented by *Communist Voice* has been making these points for nearly 30 years.

What seems new in the postmodernist attack is its broader philosophical character: it charges that the philosophical outlook not only of Marxism but of all rationalism (and this would, of course, include natural science) is totalitarian, oppressive of freedom, destructive of individuality and complexity. This is childish; it is obvious to all that no thought whatsoever is possible without the formation of concepts which indicate something in common, an identity, between two or more objects (as in: these two objects are *apples*, they are *green*). But this simple act of cognition is attacked as repressive; the existence of the least universal is said automatically to destroy its particulars. Thought itself is therefore seen as essentially fascist (such a position ends up — shamefully and ludicrously — implying that the fascists are the only thinkers!).

This is, furthermore, a non-dialectical, untrue view of the relationship between universal and particular. They are seen as opposites, but as mechanical, not dialectical, opposites, the one completely excluding and destroying the other: if you admit a universal "forest," say, then you are supposedly destroying the concept of trees. This is silly, of course, seen in this context, but silly becomes very political when you make the universal be "socialism" or "working class" and make the particular "James" or "Jacques" or "Francoise." Then the postmodernist feels quite comfortable in asserting that the universal will automatically destroy the particular. However, the truth of the relationship between any universal and its particular is not that they entirely exclude each other, but that while they are opposites they actually also interpenetrate each other. As in all true opposites, there is always a little of the particular in the universal and there is always a little of the universal in the particular. Without this interpenetration you would not dream of calling one the universal of the other. There is working class in Francoise; there is Francoise in working class. It is a *dialectical* relationship, not because somebody read Hegel or Marx, but because *life develops dialectically*, through the unity and struggle of opposites, and a dialectical theory of change most clearly depicts the motion of the natural and social world.

Lenin showed how dialectical relationships appear in the most basic concepts, even in the most simple connections: "To begin with what is the simplest, most ordinary, common, etc., with *any proposition*: the leaves of a tree are green; John is a man; Fido is a dog, etc. Here already we have *dialectics* (as Hegel's genius recognized): the **individual** is the *universal*. . . . Consequently, the opposites (the individual is opposed to the universal) are identical: the individual exists only in the connection that leads to the universal. The universal exists only in the individual and through the individual. Every individual is (in one way or another) a universal. Every universal is (a fragment, or an aspect, or the essence of) an individual. Every universal only approximately embraces all the individual objects. Every individual enters incompletely into the universal,

etc., etc."¹⁰ The point is (that horrid Lenin again): "Nature is *both concrete and abstract, both phenomenon and essence, both moment and relation.*"¹¹

Concepts themselves are universals in relation to their particulars, but in turn they are particulars to larger concepts. Here the pomos have entangled themselves in an impossible contradiction. Concepts are inherent in language itself. "Tree" is a concept, a generalization. If there had to be a separate word for every individual tree in the world, language would be impossible, it would be completely meaningless. Language is an endless series of generalizations from particulars. By pomo logic, pomos should not be able to talk. Mr. Pomo mentions the tree in his back yard, naming it "A." I have no idea what he is talking about because the trees I know of I have named "X," "Y," and "Z." How completely absurd! The pomos wish to have the benefits of advanced industrial society, computers and modems, while denying their most fundamental components. And once a pomo concedes my point on words being concepts, the whole "structure" of her/his theory "deconstructs." They deny concepts yet conduct philosophical controversies: how strange! Their anti-rational theory does not apply to themselves?!

In spite of postmodernism's incessant talk of "diversity" it is actually impossible to recognize diversity and analyze it without concepts. You cannot tell the difference between two things unless you "essentialize" them. To recognize (not to mention celebrate) the diversity between apples and oranges you must first see the essential differences between them. And here it is precisely Marxism's superior ability to conceptualize ("essentialize") social formations that allows for the most concrete analysis of the differences among them. For example, most postmodernists (and most leftists) consider the Soviet Union to have been a socialist state, principally because its means of production were state-owned. But seen through the lens of revolutionary, anti-revisionist Marxism, this is a very fashionable rigidity which echoes the views of the bourgeoisie. Marxism, properly understood, recognizes a fundamental difference (diversity) between state ownership when the state is an organ of the capitalist class (as it was in the Soviet Union where a new bourgeoisie and not the workers held sway, and certainly in the many cases of state-owned industry in obviously capitalist countries), and state ownership when the state is an organ of the working class (which the Soviet state ceased to be in the 1920's). Postmodernism's denial of concepts, in this case the *essential* concepts of capitalism and socialism (or a society in transition to socialism) which hinge on which class holds political power, leaves it a million miles from answering this all-important political question. It just can't deal with diversity — the differences between state-capitalism and socialism, between revisionism and genuine Marxism.

In fact, it is Lyotard's conception, common to postmodern-

¹⁰ Lenin, "On the Question of Dialectics," *Collected Works*, Moscow, 1972, V. 38, p. 361.

¹¹ "Conspectus of Hegel's *Science of Logic*," *Collected Works*, p. 208.

ism as a whole, of the relations between universal and particular that is mechanical and "totalizing," not that of Marxist dialectics. In Lyotard's view the universal is automatically suppressive of the particular, and since you cannot think or write at all without employing universal concepts, he and the postmodernist trend, by writing and thinking, are themselves, by their own view, real "totalizers." Marxist dialectics, in contrast, recognizes immense diversity and complexity in a flexible and turbulent relationship with universals and general concepts, themselves also in flux. It is the postmodernists, not the Marxists, who are the real totalizers; it is they, not us, who holocaust the particular.

Can Foucault "Cause" Us to Abandon Causality?

Let us now take another pomo majordomo, Michel Foucault. His general view of rationalism and Marxism is similar to Lyotard's. Famous for his phrase "regimes of truth" (*Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, England, 1980, p. 133), Foucault makes it clear that he is referring to what he believes is "the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal, and scientific discourse." (Ibid, p. 85) Foucault, too, makes the anti-rational charge on a general philosophical level and links it to an attack on Marxism, accusing both of "the inhibiting effect of global, totalitarian theories...." and referring to the "tyranny of global discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges of a theoretical avant-garde...." (Ibid pp. 80-81) This should make it clear that Foucault, as well, links his anti-rationalism to specific charges against Marxism. Once again we have the philosophical charge against Marxism and rationalism generally, with a special vehemence reserved for Marxism. Once again Marxism is identified with rationalism and an empty outcry against domination in general is linked with anti-rationalism.

Foucault's outbursts against the "coercion" of "scientific discourse" are just hypocritical bluster. So long as discourse is discourse it cannot by itself coerce any but the feeble-minded, but every discourse, even Foucault's, is an attempt to cause a mental and physical change. If reality is so complex as to disallow "totalizing" or even "generalizing" theories, one might ask Foucault and his followers: how could anyone know if a given "totalizing" theory, or "totalizing" theories in general, will lead toward a fascist dictatorship? Such determinism! Such causality! Actually, the postmodernists are only against generalizations and determinations when made by rationalists and Marxists; when made by postmodernists themselves they are just fine. Foucault is especially hypocritical in this respect. Explanation, he explains, is impossible. Causality and determination, he determines, must be abandoned altogether and be replaced with merely noting and describing "a polymorphous cluster of correlations."¹² But every correlation, at any level,

implies causation; the very concept of *relation* implies cause, as in "A and B are related — why? — because...." Foucault himself admits this, in his concept of "dependencies" (same source), with which he brings causes back in by the back door, but in such a fractured, splintered condition that they lose all causal power.

Surveying all this nonsense, a consistent postmodernist (of course, we are dealing with anti-rationalists here) would have to dismiss the master by saying: "Foucault's anti-causality theory cannot cause me to abandon causality." Hypocritical — and absurd! Some may say that Foucault does not deny causality, only refines it, and that his historical works are filled with causal assertions. This last point is true but this only reflects Foucault's confusion-mongering on the basic questions of philosophy. In his direct theorizing on causality, such as the quotation above, Foucault so bitterly attacks any straightforward causation and substitutes for it such an eclectic hash of variables that, for all practical purposes, causation is out of the picture. Foucault wants to have his causality when it suits him but get rid of the causality upheld by rationalism, science and especially the historical materialist theory of Marxism, which assigns to economic forces the fundamental causal role in social life. Foucault and the postmodernists want to engage in rational discourse about the impossibility of rational discourse; they want to keep *their* rational discourse and eliminate *mine*. They want to use their Packard-Bells on the Internet, that is, use products of high technology which have required countless conceptualizations of causation to produce, to prevent the working class from developing its revolutionary concepts, its revolutionary theory.

As soon as you employ language you employ concepts, you engage in the process of linking universals with particulars. Every single word is a universal at some level. This is why Derrida is the most consistent postmodernist: he attacks language itself with his concept (ha!) of *différance* (in Derrida's use the French word indicates incommunicability, not its ordinary meaning of simple "difference"). Reader, please return to and re-read the long Lenin quotation above, where Lenin shows the presence of universals in the simplest expressions. Having pointed that out, Lenin continues, showing how the use of concepts reflecting material reality leads inevitably to the conception of causation, results, determination, necessity. "Every individual is connected by thousands of transitions with other kinds of individuals (things, phenomena, processes), etc. Here already we have the elements, the germs, the concepts of necessity, of objective connection in nature, etc. Here already we have the contingent and the necessary, the phenomenon and the essence; for when we say: John is a man, Fido is a dog, this is a leaf of a tree, etc., we disregard a number of attributes as contingent; we separate the essence from the appearance and counter-poses the one to the other." ¹³

The point, for our present dispute with the postmodernists,

¹²"Politics and the Study of Discourse," *Ideology and Consciousness*, 3 (1978), pp. 7-26, cited in *The Politics of* (continued...)

¹²(...continued)
Truth, Barrett, Michele, Stanford, 1991, p. 130.

¹³Lenin, p. 361.

is that all use of language implies concepts, concepts imply universals, the recognition of universals implies connections and connections imply laws, causes, something determining something else. All anti-rational phrases to the contrary, there is no escaping this, even for such a luminary as Michael Foucault. The issue is not to eliminate concepts and reason, but to improve their accuracy, to correct them, to eliminate false concepts and to deepen the truth of the most accurate ones — via the scientific method. And since there is no escape from

rationality, you might as well renounce muddle-headed hypocrisy and turn to the highest development of reason, the Marxist dialectic, to guide your social practice if you are a worker or a progressive intellectual and want to revolutionize the world.

Postmodernism is a scandalously absurd attack on reason and Marxism. The emperor has no clothes. But many poor ex-radicals are too demoralized to see it. □

Carey's settlement trades small gains for maintaining part-timers' misery

UPS workers wage major contract battle

The following three articles are from *Detroit Workers' Voice* #16 (Aug. 30, 1997), published by the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group. This leaflet was distributed at the Labor Day march in Detroit and at local workplaces.

Teamsters at UPS waged an important contract battle in August by carrying out a 15-day strike. This was the first nationwide strike against UPS. The main issue involved was the company's increasing use of part-time workers. Since 1982, when the Teamster leadership agreed to a two-tier wage system with lower pay for part-time employees, UPS has hired many thousands of part-timers. Many jobs that could have gone to full-time employees have been made part-time jobs, with lower pay and reduced benefits. In many cases these "part-time" jobs are a complete fiction, as many of the "part-time" employees work 30, 40 and even more hours per week. So they work full-time but are paid as part-timers. And UPS has not increased the starting wage for the part-timers for 15 years. Another issue was the subcontracting UPS has been carrying out, further undermining the security of UPS jobs. As well, a major issue in the strike was the pension plan, which has been a union-supervised plan. The company demanded the right to take over the pension plan.

Job security is an issue that resonates with wide sections of the working class and made the UPS workers' strike very popular. Many sections of the working class have been decimated by corporate downsizing in recent years, and workers are increasingly angry about being pushed into part-time and temporary jobs with lower pay and benefits. And corporate-controlled pension plans are increasingly underfunded. Despite corporate promises, this threatens to leave the workers with little or nothing to retire on. These issues, and the fact that UPS monopolizes the package delivery system in the U.S., made this strike an important battle.

Given the way the Teamster leaders have undermined the Detroit newspapers strike, there was every reason to expect they would ruin this strike as well. Fortunately, however, UPS corporation was not well prepared for a strike, while the workers were enthusiastic for it. Well over 95% of the

workers, both full- and part-time, refused to go to work. They manned picket lines and gave scab management personnel a hard time when they tried to cross the lines. UPS airplane pilots and mechanics also supported the strike, honoring the picket lines; this helped shut down the system, making it virtually impossible for UPS to deliver packages.

UPS executives tried relying on company loyalty to save the day for them. They issued appeals to the workers, and tried to argue that their pension plan takeover would keep the pension funds inside the "UPS family." But workers weren't buying it. They've had plenty of experience with how UPS treats "family" — forcing workers to lift packages weighing 150 pounds, constantly speeding up the work while eliminating full-time jobs. So UPS then fell back into hoping for intervention by President Clinton. They wanted Clinton to declare a national emergency and order their employees back to work under the Taft-Hartley law. Clinton didn't rush to do this, though he did jawbone the Teamster leadership, lecturing them at one point that the company's latest offer seemed "reasonable" and "fair", in this way issuing a veiled threat of intervention if the Teamsters didn't hurry up and settle. Clinton also assigned his Labor Secretary to mediate, and she pushed through marathon negotiating sessions.

Meanwhile UPS was shut down, and they were losing more and more business to competitors every day. So in the end, UPS conceded more than they had originally offered. The company promised to convert 10,000 part-time jobs into full-time positions. And the part-time workers get pay increases of about \$4/hr. over the life of the contract. Full-time workers also get modest pay increases of about \$3/hr. under this contract. As well, the company gave up its attempt to take over the pension fund, and they promised to eliminate subcontracting.

Other provisions of the contract make it clear that this isn't really the great breakthrough claimed by the Teamster leadership. The new full-time positions opened up will be paid much less than the old full-time positions. So not only is the two-tier system maintained, but another tier of lesser-paid full-timers is added! And the starting pay increase for newly hired part-timers is a measly 50 cents an hour. Since there is a high turnover rate for part-timers, and the contract runs five years,

most of the part-timers will never get close to seeing that \$4/hr. raise. The union also agreed to changes in work rules to do away with "idle time"; some business commentators estimate that this speedup measure, by itself, will pay for the wage increases. The Carey leadership also caved in to company demands for a five-year contract as opposed to the previous three-year contract. Also, it appears that about 50 workers fired for strike-related activities do not get their jobs back under this settlement. So the Teamster leaders' claim of a great victory is actually quite hollow. The strike had the company on the ropes, but the Teamster bureaucrats let them off lightly.

Support the newspaper workers!

Courts and government agencies are tools of the rich

From *Detroit Workers' Voice* #16, Aug. 30:

The AFL-CIO union leaders said that the newspaper workers didn't have to stop production at the newspaper plants, but could rely on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and the courts to force the *Detroit News* and *Free Press* to come to an agreement. Strikers and supporters had blockaded the Sterling Heights newspaper plant in September 1995, but the union leaders called off these actions. The union leaders said that, instead, the workers should wait for the NLRB to act. Eventually, to help their case before the NLRB, these leaders told the strikers to make an unconditional offer to return to work. The picket signs were rewritten and the strike was rechristened a lockout. When an administrative law judge of the NLRB finally ruled in favor of the workers earlier this year, the union leaders said that now things would be fine and everyone would get their jobs back.

But what happened? On August 14, U.S. District Court Judge John Corbett O'Meara refused the NLRB request for an injunction against the company. He simply threw out the ruling of the NLRB's judge, and substituted his own prejudices about the strike.

Was this because O'Meara is a particularly bad judge appointed by Reagan or Bush? Actually, he is a Clinton appointee, and considered a "good pick" by the union's lawyers. (*Detroit Sunday Journal*, Aug. 24, p. 9) But the legal system is neither impartial, nor designed to help strikers. The courts and laws are a tool of the capitalists, and enforce capitalist law. The politicians, whether Democrat or Republican, appoint judges determined to uphold capitalist law and order. The courts and agencies are especially concerned to prevent mass action. But the AFL-CIO is telling the newspaper workers to wait patiently while each court ruling takes months and months to make, and is inevitably appealed.

Even if O'Meara had issued an injunction against the newspaper companies, it wouldn't have meant that the workers had won their struggle. More workers would have gotten their jobs

The major lesson of the strike is that it shows workers are getting restive, fed up with years of corporate downsizing and wage cuts while corporate profits and executives' salaries were soaring. It's about time things turned around. But nothing turns by itself; the corporations that have been driving workers into the ground are not about to offer us better pay and benefits, on their own. Struggle is needed. Let's get organized, and make the rich pay for a change! Let's build up our own trend of militant struggle independent of the weak-kneed union leadership. □

back, which would have been a very good thing. But the workers would still have lost all their demands, and the conditions and wages at the newspapers would continue to decay. Once the newspaper bosses knew that the union leaders wouldn't allow plant blockades and would rely on lawyers and courts, they had no reason to give anything to the workers.

The UPS capitalists settled because the strike had stopped their business. (In order to get a fast settlement, the Teamster officials agreed to a weak contract, with some concessions as well as some modest gains, but overall the contract was an improvement over what UPS had demanded.) When the leaders of the newspaper unions recoiled in horror from the attempt to shut down the newspaper plants, they sentenced the workers to a full-scale defeat. Mass action and shutting down the newspaper plants made the newspaper bosses take notice. The courts and police would have opposed this, and the unions would have had to be willing to defy them. Instead the union leaders decided to appeal to the good nature of the courts and government agencies. They kept people busy with corporate campaigns and secondary activities, while smothering any serious action against the newspaper bosses. This is the path that led to O'Meara's decision of August 14.

The newspaper workers and their supporters have held out heroically for over two years. On June 21, thousands came out once again to march against the newspaper bosses. On Labor Day, thousands will again come out to demonstrate their support for the newspaper workers and other workers' struggles. It's time to sum up what happened to this struggle. Let's not be satisfied with the sugary words of the union officials about fighting O'Meara's ruling—by appealing to yet another court, yet another government hearing. So long as the struggles are dominated by pro-capitalist and pro-court union leaders who smother mass action, there will be repeated defeats. It's up to the rank-and-file to prepare itself for militant action, and to build up its own organizations of struggle. No illusions in the AFL-CIO leaders, the courts and all the capitalist agencies! It's time to return to the class struggle. □

Workers and poor of all nationalities, unite against racism!

Conviction of racist killer cop overturned

From *Detroit Workers' Voice* #16, Aug. 30:

On July 31, Walter Budzyn, one of the two white Detroit cops who beat the black, unemployed steel worker Malice Green to death in 1992, was granted the right to a new trial by the Michigan State Supreme Court. At the same time the court upheld the conviction of co-murderer, Officer Larry Nevers.

The court's decision to grant Budzyn a new trial is an outrage. The court came up with some flimsy technicalities to support its claim that Budzyn did not get a fair trial. Bull!! It was Malice Green who never got ANY trial while it was Budzyn and Nevers who played judge, jury and executioner. They "tried" Green by smashing his skull with heavy metal flashlights. They murdered Green though he had committed no crime except to be suspected by the police thugs of having a "rock" of crack in his hand. For the Michigan Supreme Court to nevertheless grant Budzyn a new trial shows that no amount of evidence will prevent the capitalist courts from trying to find ways to protect the police thugs. Now Budzyn has been released from prison after serving a mere four years while awaiting a second trial.

The police, as servants of the rich, have never needed much of an excuse to carry out atrocities against the Afro-American and Latino masses. Despite all the hand-wringing by the ruling class authorities in the wake of the uprising following the videotaped beating of Rodney King, racist murders and beatings by the police continues. Just a couple of weeks ago, the savage beatings of Haitian immigrants Abner Louima and Patrick Antoine by New York City police made the national news. Louima, a security guard who used to like the police, was trying to break up a fight between two women outside Club Rendez-Vous when the police arrived and attacked him and, for

good measure, Antoine too, who just happened to be nearby. At the precinct station house, the police sadists beat Louima up again and plunged the wooden handle of a toilet plunger into his rectum and his mouth.

In the last few years the New York police force has been extensively praised by Democratic and Republican politicians for allegedly fighting crime. Yet during this time it has carried out a reign of terror against Haitians, Afro-Americans, Latinos, Asians and others. Ordinary people are attacked by the police on the most minor pretext, and sometimes just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Moreover, the number of people who die while in police custody has been going up.

Nor are such atrocities restricted to New York and Detroit. Police abuse of ordinary people, and especially minorities, occurs around the country, often under the pretext of the so-called "war on drugs". For example, recently Marine snipers mobilized into stopping drugs from entering the Texas border gunned down a 15-year old Mexican-American youth who had merely been grazing goats near his farm.

The workers and poor have never been able to rely on the capitalist courts for justice. Here in Detroit, were it not for the mass protests following Malice Green's murder, the authorities would have swept the issue under the rug as usual. Now that the situation has cooled down, the courts have seen an opportunity to reverse even the small bit of justice that Budzyn's conviction represented. The fight against racist police depends on building up a militant struggle of the oppressed. If there is to be justice, there must be a mass struggle. The movement against racism should be aimed against the capitalist ruling class, for they are the ones who benefit from racism and protect their police thugs who uphold the oppressive status-quo. □

How the Chicago Workers' Voice group deals with the WPAEN:

The working class movement minus anti-revisionism

by Mark, Detroit

Recently the *Chicago Workers' Voice* (CWV) group has been promoting a new coalition called the Working Peoples' Action and Education Network (WPAEN). According to the CWV's Jack Hill, this organization includes left-wing activists of various types (including some CWV members) who are uniting to build a militant workers' trend which stands up to the trade union bureaucrats.

The CWV's claims to be Marxist-Leninist, but their approach to WPAEN has little in common with genuine communist tactics. Real communist work in broader organizations of diverse trends aims at moving the fighting masses closer to the communist trend. But the allegedly Marxist-Leninist CWV takes quite a different stand toward this type of united front work. They hope that this or that militant (or militant-looking) left grouping will serve as a substitute for the Marxist-Leninist trend. Thus they have given up working to build up anti-revisionist communism, preferring to disparage the building of such a trend.

Comrades of the CVO have been pointing out the CWV's abandonment of the task of building up an anti-revisionist trend for a couple of years now. Perhaps some will say that such accusations are unfair since the CWV still proclaims itself Marxist-Leninist (although it hasn't described its basis of unity beyond this simple assertion). But recently, evidence supporting our accusation comes from a source that can hardly be thought of as prejudiced against the CWV — a member of the CWV. In a recent article in the *CWV Theoretical Journal* #13, CWV member Jake accuses Jack Hill of not having "realistic expectations" about the WPAEN which Jake considers to be dominated by "left social-democratic" and "centrist" politics and activists who "have been around for a long time and have held these same views all the while."¹ Jake feels compelled to explain to Jack Hill that the "WPAEN is not revolutionary" and that "I can't see this class struggle developing without revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary organization to lead it." As we shall see, Jake's overall reply to Hill has several problems. And Jake gives no evidence that he sees Hill's wrong views on the WPAEN as but one symptom of a disease that has consumed Hill and the CWV overall. But this does not change the fact that even Jake is forced to publicly acknowledge Hill's illusions in the WPAEN and link this to Hill's forgetting the

role for Marxist revolutionary organization.

Jack Hill vs. anti-revisionist organization

Jack Hill used to work for the building of anti-revisionist communism, having labored for the better part of two decades in the now-defunct Marxist-Leninist Party and its predecessor organizations. But with the collapse of the MLP, Hill and other CWV members soured on building such a trend. Hill now makes no bones about this in statements like "I no longer believe that any one group has a monopoly on the one and only true path to revolution."² Of course, no group is infallible and all-knowing. But here Jack is clearly dismissing his previous belief that a distinct anti-revisionist trend was what presented the clearest revolutionary path. Why, that sort of thinking is just sectarianism according to Jack. Having dismissed any distinct role for anti-revisionist communism, Jack and his mates in CWV are looking for some other left trend to unite with which will can allegedly serve as the consistent revolutionary trend.

For Jack, the search to liquidate anti-revisionism in favor of broad left unity has focused on certain trends working in the strike solidarity movement. Jack thus states in his only article to date on the WPAEN that "Personally I am more interested in building unity on the basis of opposing the labor bureaucrats and the politicians who posture as friends of labor, the minorities and the poor, than I am in building unity on the basis of a general call for socialism at this time." True, Hill is apparently only giving his reasoning behind his opinion on whether the WPAEN itself should now officially declare itself a socialist organization or not. But this does not change the basic problem with Hill's reasoning, namely, that it is no more than a declaration that, *in general*, there's no point to building genuine socialist (i.e., anti-revisionist) organization at present.

It's striking that in an article where Hill opines about the wisdom of declaring WPAEN socialist or not, he never says anything about what are the tasks of a communist organization in relation to the WPAEN and confines himself to fashionable statements promoting broad left unity as opposed to a distinct communist trend. From the limited presentation of the stand of various trends in the WPAEN presented by the CWV, I have no doubt that it would be a farce for it to represent itself as socialist. (Nevertheless, WPAEN documents attempt to do so

¹Jake's comment is reprinted on page 36 of this issue of *Communist Voice*.

²*Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #12, 2/26/97, p.26.

and wind up giving a reformist picture of socialism for their efforts.) For instance, some members are hesitant to even talk about "capitalism" in public. But this does not excuse Mr. Hill who can't bring his allegedly "Marxist-Leninist" self to at least point out that the building of the anti-revisionist trend is a pressing task without which the workers' struggle will be left with no trend that can provide consistent revolutionary guidance. As regards WPAEN, he fails to recognize that while there is no way the organization as presently constituted will become truly socialist, that if a Marxist-Leninist determines to work in such a group, s/he must not abandon the work to promote Marxist views among its activists.

At this point it is worth briefly returning to Jake's stand on the relation between Marxist-Leninist organization and the WPAEN. As mentioned above, Jake correctly senses that Hill tends toward abandonment of an independent Marxist trend in favor of broader left unity. But Jake himself equivocates on what role the WPAEN will play. One minute Jake says "I don't expect much from this formation" but the next that WPAEN may evolve in the direction of revolutionary consciousness. As well, in his own way Jake also mixes up the role of specifically communist organization and the broader coalitions that come up in the mass movements these days. One of his arguments for his admitted lack of enthusiasm for the WPAEN is that he does not expect that it will adopt a program of something like Marxist socialism. He calls the WPAEN "the best of the militant trade unionists" but only to emphasize that the WPAEN is not socialist and not yet even for the class struggle. But whether or not there is some point in communists organizing in the WPAEN cannot rest on whether or not the organization as such declares for socialism. By this criterion Marxists should simply avoid all the broader forms that come up in the mass movements in this period as they are bound to have goals less than the complete communist program.

It seems that Jake too ignores that the value of Marxist-Leninist work in broader organizations is not primarily whether the group itself proclaims itself "communist" but whether the influence of the communist trend is strengthened among the mass of uncorrupted activists in the broader group. If it is important to work among the WPAEN members, that work would not necessarily be demanding that WPAEN adopt a socialist banner, but advocating policies that strengthen the practical struggle, carrying out political agitation for revolutionary views, and opposing left-social-democratic illusions in the trade union bureaucrats.

How Jack Hill avoids a serious analysis of WPAEN

The CWV's belittling of building a distinct anti-revisionist trend goes hand-in-hand with their giving a glorified assessment of whatever left groups that they are hobnobbing with at the moment. When the CWV group decides to promote this or that group, getting an accurate picture from them of the political complexion of the group is like pulling teeth. Jack Hill (who used to write under the name Oleg) is a master at this.

Let's take Mr. Hill's general presentation of the WPAEN.

Overall he bills it as "a coalition of militant activists . . . building a unified movement of the working class, independent of the trade union hacks and politicians." But as we read on in Hill's *CWV* #12 article "Introducing the Working Peoples' Action and Education Network", we soon learn that "not everybody in the organization would formulate its goals the same way", i.e., there is disagreement over whether to consciously build a trend independent of the AFL-CIO bureaucrats. We further find out that "some members have soft spots in their hearts for one or another bureaucrat."

Hill contends that the WPAEN takes a better stand than the last workers' solidarity coalition movement he promoted, the Chicago Staley Workers' Solidarity Committee (CSWSC), because the "majority on the committee was always opposed to taking a sharp stand against local or national trade union leadership . . . in the Staley committee we were unable to go very far in criticizing the mistakes or reluctance to move the struggle forward on the part of the leadership of the Staley local." But if we look at the WPAEN leaflet on the newspaper strike in Detroit, we can find some criticism of the local newspaper unions and the national AFL-CIO leadership. However, the leaflet itself betrays unrealistic expectations about the local AFL-CIO union leaderships in general. For one thing, the leaflet talks about the "good local leaderships" in some recent strikes although in the major strikes of recent times the local leaderships have not broken with the top AFL-CIO leadership. As regards the Detroit newspaper strike, the WPAEN mentions that a group called Unity-Victory Caucus came out in favor of mass tactics in opposition to the main AFL-CIO leaders but then backed down from a fight with the labor bureaucrats over these issues. This is true, but the WPAEN (and the *CWV* leaflet on the subject) fail to note that this half-hearted stand was the stand taken by the "best" of the local union leaderships who in fact dominated the policy of the Unity-Victory Caucus. Thus, they fail to connect the weaknesses of the Unity-Victory Caucus to the dissident local bureaucrats.

While the WPAEN might have more criticism of the labor bureaucrats than the CSWSC, it still vacillates on the question of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, spreading hopes that the local dissident bureaucrats will play a good role and are really separate from the national AFL-CIO apparatus. If Hill failed to notice WPAEN'S vacillation, it is because last year Hill himself was promoting that the new fighting workers' movement would include the dissident local bureaucrats, such as the Staley local leadership and those locals that gave some material support to the Staley local (without taking up any independent policy from the national labor traitors). And while a year after the Staley struggle got smashed, Hill talks about how superior the WPAEN is to the Chicago Staley solidarity committee, last year he was touting this Staley solidarity committee as accomplishing wonderful things in alliance with the local bureaucrats.

Why does the WPAEN ignore the role of the most militant activists?

It's also notable that while Jack Hill promotes that the

particular merit of the WPAEN is that it wants to unite everybody that really wants to stand up to the labor bureaucracy, the WPAEN analysis of the Detroit newspaper strike omits any mention of those activists who actually did that in the Detroit strike. For instance, though we disagree with the overall political stand of the Revolutionary Workers' League (RWL), in this case they generally defied the labor traitors and actively organized for militant actions to shut down production. Though its practical work was much more limited, Detroit members of our Communist Voice Organization carried out a consistent agitation in a similar vein. The really militant trend in the Detroit strike played a key role in the powerful mass blockades of the newspaper production facilities in September 1995, going face-to-face against the AFL-CIO bureaucrats to organize workers to defy the bureaucrats passive civil disobedience tactics which would have let the police peacefully cart off workers and open the way for scabs. The small trend that really fought the labor traitors didn't have the influence necessary to sustain the militant tactics, in large part due to the repression and maneuvers of the AFL-CIO bosses. But it continued to urge the workers to defy the bureaucrats. Thus, while Hill talks about how much he wants a broad unity of all those who take a militant stand in the practical struggles, the WPAEN and the CWV betray a sectarian streak toward certain groups who do this.

Abandoning the fight against opportunism

Jack Hill's inability to give a serious analysis of the trends in the mass movement is also reflected in the lack of political analysis of the left-wing trends in WPAEN. About all we learn on the issue is that "some of us come from trends which consider themselves Marxist, there are other activists who have not identified themselves with any ideological trends . . ." Jack Hill just ignores the fact that the majority of trends that consider themselves Marxist today are actually social-democratic, Soviet/Chinese revisionist, Trotskyist, and other opportunist trends. These trends are not really Marxist. In fact, for Marxist influence to spread among the workers, a consistent struggle must be waged against their political and ideological views. Last year, Hill implied that all the groups in the Chicago Staley solidarity committee were socialists and communists, despite the fact that he now admits that the committee couldn't even raise a peep against the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. In fact, there were a variety of revisionist, Trotskyite and semi-Trotskyite groups participating in this committee. This year Jack tries to sound more modest, saying only that there are those who consider themselves Marxist in the WPAEN. But he continues to sweep the issue under the rug.

Mr. Hill can repeat ad nauseam that he's for the practical struggle, but to ignore the fight against opportunist "Marxism" means jeopardizing the present class battles. Hill raises that "a major point of practical unity for those of us who have gone on to form WPAEN is that we agree on the need to take a public stand against trade union leaders who are undermining particular struggles . . ." Yet we have seen that while in their Detroit newspaper strike leaflet they had many just criticisms

of the labor traitors, in fact the WPAEN has a hard time taking a consistent stand against the labor bureaucrats. This is typical among the opportunist left. Many a group will have curses for the bureaucrats, only to create illusions in this or that dissident bureaucrat or to pretend that with a little rank-and-file pressure, the unions will become a militant fighting machine. Is it really the case that the fashionable opportunist stands of the left have nothing to do with the WPAEN's vacillations on the labor bureaucracy?

Let's look at another example of the need to fight opportunism. Hill mentions that "In fact WPAEN is still straddling two positions — is it a socialist organization at least broadly dedicated to the Marxist principles of socialist revolution or is it a broader organization of all who want to advance the practical immediate [struggle? — Mk.] of the working class?" Evidently some in WPAEN consider it to be socialist and others like Hill think it should only be concerned with the practical movement.

Hill doesn't face the fact that the WPAEN has resolved this by a very unprincipled compromise. The programmatic documents of the WPAEN talk about the need for "working class power" or "working people's political power" but give it a reformist content. There is no hint that for the workers to really take power they will have to wage a revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism. So presumably this "political power" is achievable under the present class rule of the bourgeoisie. As well, the WPAEN documents portray the program of this "political rule" as simply a number of reforms which are similar to those of the dissident bureaucrat-controlled Labor Party. But some reforms, however just, will not end the rule of capital. To talk this way is essentially to reduce socialism to the demands of the reformist Labor Party.

Presumably, it is a section of the self-styled "Marxists" in the WPAEN that have insisted that the organization appear socialist. They have gotten their wish, not by actually winning over the organization to this position, but by bartering away a real Marxist presentation of the question of political power. The end result does not serve the development of a socialist trend, but retards a clear understanding of the difference between reforms under capitalism and a revolutionary rule of the workers, the expropriation of the capitalists, the establishment of social control over production, etc. The WPAEN talks about the need for a workers' political party and there is indeed a need for this. But is it going to be a political party that paints up the WPAEN list of reforms in socialist colors? The workers need no such favors.

Instead of the fight against opportunism, Hill plays up how the "Marxists" in the WPAEN are all allegedly agreed on the Marxist principle of socialism. But among those considering themselves Marxists, there exist a large gulf about what is and isn't socialism. Opportunists parading as Marxists promote the Soviet Union under Stalin or even Gorbachev and Yeltsin as socialist or some kind of workers' state. Likewise for China and especially these days, Castro's Cuba. Anti-revisionist communism considers these societies as state-capitalist societies ruled by a bureaucratic bourgeois elite that evolved more and more toward market capitalist forms. Hill declines to comment

on this matter as if it was not any real dividing line between genuine Marxism and its opportunist counterfeit. This is not surprising considering that Hill's *CWV* has given up an anti-revisionist critique of Cuba and instead paints it up as some kind of revolutionary state. Hill thus contributes to the confusion on the nature of socialism that is so prevalent among activists today.

The program of the WPAEN and working-class unity

Jack Hill states that the forces that formed the WPAEN spent months working out statements of their program and strategy and tactics. What they arrived at is mainly a list of reforms that evidently all in the group agree on. Many of the demands are fine. However they don't exactly distinguish the WPAEN from many other left groups. Indeed, they are basically within the confines of liberal-labor politics, resembling, for instance, those put forward by the Labor Party run by the dissident labor bureaucrats. Hill simply praises the program while the WPAEN proclaims that this program is the key to overcome the sad situation of "small groups of isolated workers" and achieve working class unity and a powerful struggle.

But while the reforms advocated by the WPAEN will no doubt be to the liking of many workers, it does not follow from this that the workers will similarly be united on how to achieve these demands. That requires workers reaching some understanding of who their friends and enemies are and by what methods they must fight. For example, within the WPAEN there is not yet real unity on what attitude to take toward the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. Among the masses as a whole, there are powerful illusions in the labor bureaucrats, other reformist forces and even the bourgeois politicians. True, one can find some criticism of these forces in the WPAEN program, but there's no particular emphasis on what sort of trend to build. As for the labor bureaucracy, the most we find in the two programmatic WPAEN documents provided by the *CWV* is one phrase in one of the documents that "the leaders of most unions . . . talk the talk but they don't walk the walk" when it comes to fighting the corporate class.

Nor can a massive class upsurge be conjured up by simply putting forward some just demands. Rather one must pay attention to where the masses are beginning to struggle and encourage this motion. One must carefully evaluate the conditions under which the masses are fighting so as to have a sober appraisal of how the struggle is likely to unfold. Tactics which are based on such a concrete examination of the conditions of the struggle will help move the present skirmishes forward. But these days, when the mass motion is still in relative ebb, imagining that just the right call or maneuver will bring giant forces into the streets can lead to activists becoming disillusioned. Moreover, when the level of struggle is down, attempting to find a quick path to rallying huge numbers often pressures activists to tone down their views so as to curry favor with the reformist organizations with larger followings, be they a section of the trade union bureaucrats, the NAACP, NOW,

etc. Daydreaming about the big mass movement being around every bend can also divert one from the slow, painful, but necessary work to develop a really revolutionary trend. For example, Jack Hill has been shouting over and over that the workers' movement needs to be big and powerful as if he's discovered a new world. But revolutionary work is not proclaiming how wonderful it will be when everyone rises up, but developing a trend that can provide consistent clarity and organization when the huge movements break out, something Hill is no longer interested in.

Hill mentions that the first campaign the WPAEN engaged in was on the issue of welfare cuts. But the WPAEN flyer on this has nothing to indicate what sort of trend it thinks has to be built. It does not even raise the question of the role of the liberal Democrats who continue to pose as friends of the poor and even have their minor quarrels with Clinton's cuts.

The more the WPAEN becomes involved in struggles, the more the questions of what path of struggle to follow will come to the fore. Therefore it would be an illusion to think that unity of the activists within the WPAEN or among the masses as a whole can come about without a resolute struggle between trends. This again raises the importance of building a specific anti-revisionist communist trend and fighting to unite the workers behind its views on the particular fronts of struggle. The clarity provided by a trend of the most class conscious workers (though that trend will be relatively small) is vital to establish a pole around which the awakening militancy among the broader sections of the masses can coalesce. This will be the key thing to developing the fighting unity of the workers regardless of the fate of a particular loose coalition such as the WPAEN.

Some other issues of the WPAEN program

As mentioned, the WPAEN program includes many supportable, if not at all uncommon, reforms. But it's worth touching on a couple of problems with their demands. For instance, there is the question of GATT and NAFTA. These "free trade" measures are aimed at fostering the exploitation of the masses at home and abroad. However, it is capitalism itself that is crushing the masses and it's an illusion to think that the particular form of trade relations is the main thing responsible for the suffering of the workers and poor today. Hence, it's important to not only oppose free trade but expose that a more protectionist policy also is a weapon of capital against the workers. The WPAEN denounces GATT and NAFTA, and indeed it is good to expose the bourgeois propaganda about the alleged wonders that "free trade" capitalism will bring about. But for a group that prides itself on opposing the trade union bureaucracy, it's notable that there is no mention of the labor bureaucrats' "alternative" of protectionism and "buy American" campaigns. When there is a debate over free trade and protectionism going on, and one only condemns "free trade", this is, consciously or not, a concession to the chauvinism and class-collaborationist nonsense promoted by the AFL-CIO bosses.

It's also striking that the WPAEN program only demands a

tiny reduction in the defense budget. It calls for trimming a mere \$25 billion, and this is to come only from foreign aid to oppressive regimes. This is similar to the chauvinist approach of the Labor Party which calls for some defense cut but for maintaining a strong military machine.

The sad result of giving up anti-revisionism

Jack Hill fails to give a clear picture of what to expect from the WPAEN. He and the CWV have singled out this particular coalition as the one to rally behind if you want to build the powerful workers movement. Time and again Hill emphasizes how sharp a stand the WPAEN activists have against the trade union bureaucrats. At one point he goes so far as to announce that "we have united on a basis of the necessity to oppose and expose those who sabotage and undermine the working class struggle" which, if really true, would mean that the WPAEN was not only taking a consistent stand against the AFL-CIO leadership, but was exposing the bankrupt ideas of the opportunist left as well.

But as we have seen, these claims are greatly exaggerated. The WPAEN is willing to say some things against the union bureaucrats, which might put this group somewhat to the left of

the previous workers' support coalition touted by the CWV, the Chicago Staley Workers' Solidarity Committee. But there are many left groups that have harsh words for the AFL-CIO leadership but are still unable to maintain a consistent stand on the matter. This is what Jack Hill seems to have forgotten. True, he concedes that some in the WPAEN may have a soft spot for this or that bureaucrat. But he fails to draw attention to the vacillations that have already clearly manifested themselves in the positions of the WPAEN as an organization.

All this is old hat for the CWV. A couple of years ago, some of its members were promoting that any group that was militantly fighting were the real anti-revisionist communists in practice. Then the CWV decided that a petty-bourgeois nationalist group in Mexico that puts out the paper *El Machete* was really the center of rebuilding the proletarian party in that country. Last year, Jack Hill was promoting that the workers' movement would be revived through solidarity groups that trailed behind the meek dissident bureaucrats.

Having relieved themselves of the task of building a specific anti-revisionist communist trend, they have been chasing after all sorts of trends in the hopes that it will somehow provide the class leadership that only anti-revisionism can provide. □

A comment by Jake, *Chicago Workers' Voice*

This critique by Jake of Jack Hill's views on the Working People's Action and Education Network (WPAEN) appeared originally in *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #13, July 28, 1997. Both Jack and Jake's views are criticized in the article "The working class movement without anti-revisionism" starting on page 32.

Dear Jack,

I don't share your enthusiasm for WPAEN. Though I wish them the best of luck and great success in fighting the bourgeoisie, I don't expect much from this formation. From what I have seen so far, they are very similar to other left social-democratic coalitions (or "centrist" organizations) that have come and gone in Chicago through the last 15 years.

I say this not to condemn WPAEN but for the sake of revolutionary science and realistic expectations. In the present political climate WPAEN may look very progressive and very oppositional compared to other existing activist organizations, and they are. But there are some forces within WPAEN that still hold illusions in some segments or elements of the labor

bureaucracy. Perhaps such illusions will be shed if mass motion develops and WPAEN stays close to it. I hope so. But many of the activists in WPAEN have been around for a long time and have held these same views all the while.

While I don't fault them for trying, I do feel that their politics are similar to the best of the militant trade unionists that we [have] seen in this period. The problem is that in order to advance, our class must go beyond trade union militancy to class struggle. I can't see this class struggle developing without revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary organization to lead it.

Perhaps WPAEN will grow and evolve in that direction. Certainly, Marxist Leninist activists that participate in it should work for revolutionary class consciousness and socialism. However considering that WPAEN is not revolutionary, does not clearly see the class basis for the labor bureaucrats treachery and the limitations of trade union militancy (pretty hard to do that without Marxism) and can not agree to advocate socialism, I remain skeptical.

—Best Regards, Jake, CWV □

Introducing the Working Peoples' Action and Education Network

By Jack Hill

(*Chicago Workers' Voice* group)

The following article and italicized introductory note are reprinted in full from the latest issue of the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* (issue #13, July 28, 1997). We have added our own footnotes. This article is criticized in "How the CWV group deals with the WPAEN: The working class movement without anti-revisionism" starting on page 32.

*The following article introduces the Working Peoples' Action and Education Network. Chicago Workers' Voice does not endorse this organization although two of its supporters participate in it. The views in this article represent those of the author.*¹

The Working Peoples' Action and Education Network is a new organization formed by some of the activists who had been involved in the Staley solidarity work in the Chicago area and by other activists in working class struggles, mainly in the Midwest. Our goal, in general terms, is to develop an organization to help push forward the various practical fights of the working class. We want an organization which is not restricted by what is acceptable to the labor bureaucrats or other political forces that usually limit the working class struggle. We want an organization which can unite with activists and militants who came up in particular struggles. My conception of the organization has always been of a coalition of militant activists which could do some useful work in building a unified movement of the working class, independent of the trade union hacks and politicians. Since WPAEN is a loose organization with people of varying views, not everybody in the organization would formulate its goals the same way.

A difficult situation faces political activists who want to be active in the political, economic and social struggles of the working class in this country, but who recognize the need to

oppose and struggle against the strangulation of these struggles by the labor bureaucrats and the posturing "left wing" of the Democratic Party. The coalitions which are built to participate in particular struggles invariably refuse to deal with such issues. In recent years workers have lost a number of important fights such as the Staley struggle, the Detroit newspaper workers, the Firestone workers and Caterpillar. In the Staley and the Detroit struggles coalitions of activists were built to support these struggles. Activists outside of the Firestone workers and Caterpillar workers also participated in supporting those struggles. All of these struggles were hamstrung by the labor aristocracy. In all of them the workers directly involved and the activists who supported these workers could not bring themselves to directly confront and oppose this sabotage. In many cases they tried to work around the obstacles, but they were not willing to get into direct and open conflict with the sold out trade union officials. WPAEN is one attempt to build an organization willing to do this.

A lot of the impetus for this organization came out of our experience in the Chicago Staley Workers' Solidarity Committee. We liked the way the committee was able to bring together activists from a variety of political backgrounds into very sustained and useful practical work in support of that struggle. We didn't like the fact that the majority on the committee was always opposed to taking a sharp stand against local or national trade union leadership when these leaders did things which harmed the struggle. In particular in the Staley committee we were unable to go very far in criticizing the mistakes or reluctance to move the struggle forward on the part of the leadership of the Staley local. The Staley committee considered itself *de facto* in opposition to the national leadership of the UPIU which was trying to strangle the Staley struggle behind the scenes. But even there the Staley committee did not want to attack publicly the UPIU leadership until the Staley workers themselves did it which, unfortunately, was after the struggle had been smashed. (Issue no. 10 of the *CWVTJ* has two articles on the Staley struggle for those who want more information.)²

A large section of the political and trade union activists in this country take it as a given that you cannot, under almost any circumstances, directly oppose the official leadership of local or national trade union bodies. They are willing sometimes to work around these leaders and take up different policies and tactics. They are willing to discuss among other activists the

¹The CWV claims here that it doesn't endorse the WPAEN (despite the promotion of it in Jack Hill's article). Yet, a CWV leaflet distributed at the June 21 Detroit newspaper workers' solidarity march says "Members of the CWV also participate in a new organization in the Midwest, the Working Peoples' Action and Education Network. This organization brings together activists from a variety of viewpoints who want to build the working class movement. We encourage like-minded activists to contact us to find common ways to build a real workers' movement." An odd way to *not* endorse an organization!

²One of these articles by Jack Hill, "Lessons of the Staley struggle", was reprinted in full in *Communist Voice* vol. 2, #4, August 1, 1996, along with two commentaries "On Jack Hill's empty optimism regarding the accomplishments of the Staley struggle" and "How not to learn from the Staley struggle".

shortcomings or worse of these leaders. But they are not willing to come right out and wage an open political battle with these leaders, even when these leaders are undermining particular struggles. These activists believe, as far as I can make out, that you are weakening the union if you directly attack its official leaders, or, at least, they seem to think that rank and file workers may think you are attacking the union itself if you attack the leaders.

Further experience leading up to forming this organization came through a caucus that a number of us participated in during the months before the Labor Party founding convention in June of 1996. This caucus waged a fight inside the Chicago chapter of LPA [Labor Party Advocates—CV] for a more militant program for the Labor party and for the Labor Party to run candidates in the upcoming elections against the Democratic party. (I thought it was useful to oppose the right-wing social-democrats who control the Labor Party, although I am not enthusiastic about running candidates in elections. See my article on the Labor Party in issue no. 11 of the *CWVTJ*.) We consistently lost these battles in Chicago and nationally. After the Labor Party convention some of the activists in this caucus still wanted to make the major focus of their work the fight inside the Labor Party. Others of us felt that, while it might not be wrong to wage some fight inside the Labor Party, we really needed to build an organization independent of the Labor Party as well as independent of the Democratic Party and the trade union leadership, if we wanted to contribute to building a serious working class movement in this country. So the two groups from this caucus went their separate ways.

Thus a major point of practical unity for those of us who have gone on to form WPAEN is that we agree on the need to take a public stand against trade union leaders who are undermining particular struggles or otherwise hurting the working class movement. We consider it important to oppose the influence of the Democratic Party over the working class. The politicians who try to pose as friends of the workers and the poor and oppressed must be opposed and exposed. We want to build an independent and militant working class movement. The Labor Party is not doing this.

We who wanted a new organization contacted other activists who had similar views and started to meet in the fall of 1996. We spent months working on general statements of political and economic program and of tactics and strategy. This process did enable us to get to know each others' political viewpoints better. The compromise documents have many good points. (See pp. 32-34 for two of these documents.)³ They take a strong stand against all the types of discrimination and division which plague the working class in this country. They call for mass struggle to achieve such partial goals as jobs for all with a living wage, public housing, universal, free health care, and equal rights for immigrants. They say, "Make the Rich Pay!"

³The page numbers referred to here and elsewhere in this article are those of the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #13, July 28, 1997. Some of this material is, however, reprinted on pages 39-41 of this issue of CV.

And they point out how the taxes on the rich have been steadily going down. The program does not call for socialist revolution, nor does it explicitly call for socialism. I don't myself consider such calls necessary for the type of organization WPAEN is trying to be. In my opinion the organization will become better known by the practical struggles it takes up and how it intervenes in them, than by its theoretical stand on paper. If WPAEN can help to build independence from and opposition to the trade union bureaucracy and the posturing Democratic Party politicians in building the practical movement of the working class, it will serve an important role.

The activists who participate in WPAEN come from a variety of backgrounds. Some of us come from various trends which consider themselves Marxist, there are other activists who have not identified themselves with any ideological trends, there are activists who got their political experience in the Staley struggle, and we are now getting some new people interested in the struggle against welfare "reform".

The first campaign we decided to take up was on this issue. The attack was serious, it affected large numbers of people, it raised important political issues of uniting the various sections of the working class, and there seems to be some level of mass motion against the welfare cuts. Some of us went to public hearings in February and March on the proposed new rules for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the new program replacing AFDC and other welfare programs) for Illinois to learn and to see what people were saying. We organized a public meeting in April to discuss how to build the fight. Out of the public meeting we had enough people interested to organize a demonstration against the welfare cuts which we held at the State of Illinois building in May. The flyer for this demonstration is reprinted here on pp. 30-31.

A number of WPAEN members went to Detroit for the AFL-CIO sponsored march in support of the newspaper workers. WPAEN put out a flyer attacking the sabotage of that struggle by the trade union leadership. The final version of the flyer is pretty strong and specific about what was done and not done by the trade union leadership. This flyer is also reprinted here (pp.35-36)

The *Chicago Workers' Voice* put out its own flyer for this action (see pp. 37-38). We weren't sure how the final version of the WPAEN flyer would turn out but regardless of what WPAEN did, we had some particular points we wanted to raise. For example, we are uncomfortable simply asserting that the strike could have been won. Generally we prefer to say that the tactics of the trade union leadership were wrong and stifled the struggle. We would have preferred different tactics, however, it's hard to guarantee that workers will win even if they give it the best fight possible. Our enemy is very strong, and our movement is not nearly as strong as it needs to be. There are strong objective reasons why workers' struggles generally are not able to break through the stifling misleadership of the trade union bureaucracy.

The WPAEN is still in formation. I think it is a hopeful attempt to develop some practical intervention in working class struggles. Many of the activists in WPAEN are experienced, dedicated and not defenders of any section of the trade union

bureaucracy. We have united on a basis of the necessity to oppose and expose those who sabotage and undermine the working class struggle.

At the same time I can not say for sure how this organization will shake out. Not all the membership is equally firm in opposing the labor bureaucrats and the posturing politicians. Some members have soft sport in their hearts for one or another bureaucrat. Some members don't want to use terms such as "capitalist" in our public propaganda. Others in WPAEN are not interested in pushing for the use of such terms even though they use such terms themselves. In fact WPAEN is still straddling two positions — is it a socialist organization at least broadly dedicated to the Marxist principles of socialist

revolution or is it a broader organization of all who want to fight to advance the practical immediate of the working class? Personally I am more interested in building unity on the basis of opposing the labor bureaucrats and the politicians who posture as friends of labor, the minorities and the poor, than I am in building unity on the basis of a general call for socialism at this time.

Another problem we are still working out is how to work with other organization which are taking up the same fights as we are. One small organization based mainly in one city is not going to be able to change the whole course of the working class movement in the U.S. However, at this point I think it is worth the effort to build it. □

From a WPAEN leaflet

Below are excerpts of a leaflet distributed by the WPAEN at the June 21, 1997 march and rally supporting the newspaper workers in Detroit. In the first quote, the WPAEN mistakenly gives the impression that the Unity-Victory Caucus represents a trend unconnected with the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, whereas it was actually dominated by some dissident local bureaucrats. The second quote is an example of their illusions in the stand of the local AFL-CIO bureaucrats in various recent strike struggles. — Mark

Within a month of the injunction and the union leaders' backing down both strike activist groups (the AFL-sponsored Labor/Community/Religious Coalition and the strikers' Unity-Victory Caucus called for:

1. Mass picketing to win the strike
2. A general strike in Detroit
3. A National Labor Solidarity March

"A mass meeting of strikers from all unions, called by the

Council, voted for mass picketing and defying the judge.

How did the union presidents respond? They rejected the Coalitions "recommendation", baited the Unity-Victory Caucus as a "splinter group", and said that the strikers' meeting, which they'd called, had no authority over them as local union presidents. Either the strikers would take and expand the fight or the "Lords of Labor" would choke the fight to death.

Our greatest weakness? No leaders came forward to implement the strikers' vote. . . .

They turn victory into defeat. Why? Was this a fluke? Or is this behavior typical of our union leadership? And if it is, what accounts for it? And what can we do to turn this around? Well, take a look at PATCO, P-9 Hormel, the rail workers, Staley, Caterpillar and Bridgestone-Firestone. Did our Internationals mobilize our power and fight? Even with good local leadership in some cases, the internationals caved in or sabotaged these fights. . . . □

Program of the Working People's Action and Education Network

Reprinted from the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* #13, July 28, 1997.

We propose this Program to bring together different parts of the working class under the same roof — to join our separate fights into one.

Layoffs. Welfare cuts. Poverty wages. Police brutality. Union-busting. Immigrant-bashing. Poor schools. 12-hr. days. Unsafe workplaces. Inadequate childcare. Declining healthcare. Discrimination. Pollution. Privatizing public services.

The corporate class is attacking the working class while making record profits. Democrats and Republicans only differ over how to help corporate greed. The leaders of most unions, civil rights groups and community organizations talk the talk but they don't walk the walk. The corporate class won't give us anything for free. Working class people have to fight to provide for our needs and get a better life for our kids. Small groups of isolated workers can't do this alone against such powerful enemies. We have to join forces in our fight for justice — with a good program and strategy and tactics to win.

A common program can be a basis for working-class unity — on the job and in our communities — to win what we all need. Without a common program to unify us, we'll remain isolated, against the united power of the corporate enemy. With such a common program, we'll begin to build the solidarity that can turn our potential into real power.

Program - what we fight for now

1. EVERYONE OUT OF POVERTY!

JOBS WITH A LIVING WAGE FOR ALL WHO CAN WORK!

A DECENT INCOME FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T!

***SHORTER WORK DAY WITH NO LOSS IN PAY.**

Make the bosses pay. In the '30s, working people in the U.S. won the shorter work day with no loss in pay. This made the bosses hire more workers to get the same work done. In the '80s, workers in Germany won the 35 hour week with the same results. It has been done, and we can do it.

***FOR A LIVABLE MINIMUM WAGE AND A GUARANTEED ANNUAL INCOME.** Clinton and the Republicans agreed to a \$5.25 minimum wage. Bid deal. Who can live on \$200 a week? Wouldn't all young people and adults living on less than \$10 an hour support the fight for a decent minimum wage? Shouldn't people raising their kids at home, the disabled and retired have a livable income?

***PUBLIC WORKS FOR HUMAN NEEDS, NOT CORPORATE WELFARE.** The government subsidizes big business every day while they cut programs for us. Don't millions of us need services like day care centers, health clinics and women's shelters? Quality, affordable housing and mass transit? Couldn't we organize a fight for public works with union wages and apprenticeships?

***BUILD SOLIDARITY! FIGHT DISCRIMINATION! AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!** Jobs and services are cut by greedy corporations and politicians, not people fighting discrimination. Who should we blame for our problems? Accepting discrimination divides and weakens our fight for a better life. We need solidarity and affirmative action to win **JOBS FOR ALL AT A LIVING WAGE!**

A DECENT LIFE FOR ALL!

2. QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION! Working class and poor children deserve an education equal to the best, including vocational schools and college. The minimum starting point is equal funding for all schools.

3. UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE. Pre-school age children need high-quality attention to grow into their full potential. Working people must have high-quality, corporate-funded workplace daycare and government-subsidized neighborhood childcare centers.

4. GUARANTEED HEALTH CARE. Take all profits out of health care. Our health must not be a hostage to their money-making. Ending for-profit health insurance alone will pay for 30 million working people now without coverage. Quality health care for all. Government-funded. Run for our well-being by patients, health care workers and professionals, our unions and community groups.

5. DEFEND OUR SAFETY — AT WORK AND WHERE WE LIVE! Corporate profits go up when they spend less on workers' safety and health protections. Corporate criminals injure and kill us on the job. They poison our air, water and environment. To help them, their politicians cut health and safety standards and enforcement budgets for government agencies like the EPA and OSHA. Corporate criminals get a slap on the wrist while workers suffer and pay the real price. Couldn't we organize to enforce safety standards based on our health needs?

6. DEFEND OUR JOBS, WAGES AND CONDITIONS. JOB SECURITY AGAINST LAYOFFS. Employers are

always looking for ways to use new technology. They up their profits and wipe out our jobs. They replace us with machines and leave most of us with less-skilled, lower-paying jobs. Let's make the employers pay. **We need job retraining with full wages for laid-off workers.** When the bosses don't pay up, we say: Stop the closings! Occupy the workplace! Fight for laws that guarantee wages, benefits and training!

7. REPEAL ALL ANTI-WORKER LAWS. End restrictions on our right to organize strong, democratic unions like the Taft-Hartley Act. Repeal laws that benefit the multinational corporations at the expense of working people in all countries, like NAFTA and GATT. End criminalization of immigrants; equal wages, benefits and civil rights for all immigrants. Fight racist treatment by cops, courts and laws. Oppose slave-labor prison industries.

CAN WE AFFORD THESE THINGS? ABSOLUTELY! HOW? MAKE THE RICH PAY!

8. RETURN CORPORATE AND PERSONAL TAXES TO 1950 LEVELS. This will bring in an extra \$250 Billion a year from the top 500 corporations and the richest 5%. That's about

\$700 Million a day! In 1950, they paid 2/3 and we paid 1/3 of the taxes with far fewer unemployed! Now they pay 1/3 and we pay 2/3! We can turn this around. How? Massive workers' struggles won these gains in the 1930s and 40s. And that's what it'll take today.

9. CUT CORPORATE WELFARE HERE AND AROUND THE WORLD!

* **In the U.S.,** the government spends \$50 Billion in corporate giveaways and special breaks to the rich

* **Outside the U.S.,** the government spends another \$25 Billion to support oppressive governments to keep workers' labor cheap. This includes countries like Mexico, Guatemala, South Korea and the Philippines with U.S. military bases, training, loans, aid and CIA drug-running and subversion. Cut all U.S. aid to corporate runaway shops.

10. WORKING CLASS POWER. The corporate class has been able to take away so much because they control the economy and the government too. All major parties put corporate greed first. We need our own organizations to fight for working peoples' needs and political power. If we don't, the rich will only use the government to keep attacking us. With political power, we can keep our gains and build for our future. □

Dependency theory and the fight against imperialism (part 2)

by Joseph Green

Part one:

This article concentrates on the theories of Samir Amin and Andre Gunder Frank, and part one appeared in the last issue of CV, vol. 3, #3, Aug. 1, 1997:

Introduction

—Some features of contemporary world imperialism—

The nature of capitalist development

—Denying the existence of development—

—Industrialization of the Third World—

The concept of capitalism

Dependency theory on its knees before the local bourgeoisie

Denial of the Marxist theory of revolution

—Land reform—

—Delinking—

Part two:

A sketch of part one 42

Failure to recognize state-capitalism in the

revisionist countries 43

—Replacing class analysis— 44

The point of view of a state official 45

—Repealing the law of value— 46

—The polycentric world— 47

The proletariat and socialism 48

The right to self-determination 49

—Amin's nostalgia for empires— 50

—Negating national freedoms— 51

The environmental issue 52

A Sketch of Part One

Dependency theory recognizes that the imperialist system continues to exist after the liberation of most all the colonies, but it gives a wrong picture of what the imperialist system looks like. Dependency theorists believe that they have the most radical critique of world imperialism because they deny that the subordinate countries are undergoing "real" economic develop-

ment or that there is a national bourgeoisie in the under-developed countries. The more radical one was, the more firmly one was supposed to deny that there could be "development" in the dependent world. However, the dramatic changes in the Third World economies since World War II refute this point of view. Forced to admit that the economies weren't standing still in the Third World, dependency theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank and Amin talk of "growth without development".

Far from being a radical break with capitalist theorizing, this denial of the existing development is based on a glorified vision of capitalism, as something which brings prosperity, equality, and social peace. The imperialist world view holds that development and growth would solve all Third World problems; the dependency theorists seem to agree that development, at least, would indeed solve Third World ills. They believe that they can disprove the existence of development by pointing out that the gap between the rich and poor countries was not being overcome. They denounce all who talk about the actual development as reformists or imperialist apologists. They fail to understand the Marxist view that development can go hand in hand with growing inequality and devastation. They are upset by East Asian industrialization and try to prove that it is exceptional, rather than welcoming it as adding to the potential world strength of the proletariat, because they fear that Asian development disproves their dogmas of "growth without development".

The theories of Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin use Marxist phrases, but they deny the revolutionary role of the proletariat, envision the socialist revolution in a petty-bourgeois nationalist fashion, and otherwise negate basic Marxist-Leninist views concerning the building of a revolutionary movement. In particular, they oppose the Marxist views concerning the distinction between democratic and socialist revolutions, and the bourgeois-democratic nature of land reform and national liberation. Their view is that such theories are old-hat and reformist because to recognize the bourgeois-democratic nature of any struggle would, according to them, mean that the struggle should be led by the bourgeoisie and that social demands should be watered down or abandoned so as not to antagonize the bourgeoisie. They tend to divide Third World movements simply into progressive and reactionary, instead of seeing the different class tendencies in the progressive movement. As a result, they can't formulate the strategy needed to build an independent working class movement in the Third World countries.

Indeed, as a result of abandoning the Marxist theory of revolution, the dependency theorists have a good deal of trouble maintaining an independent stand from bourgeois nationalist movements. Instead of being able to penetrate to the reality behind the populist and leftist-sounding rhetoric of such movements, they deny that the national bourgeoisie exists in most

Third World countries. Moreover, the dependency theorists tendency to regard "real" development in the Third World as inevitably somewhat socialistic gave rise to their tendency to become advisors to the supposedly non-existence national bourgeoisie of various countries where it is in power. Amin for example spent much of his career as an advisor to various African regimes. Moreover, just about all dependency theorists regarded the state-capitalist bourgeoisie of the revisionist (fake communist) countries as socialist. At the very least, they regard them as standing outside of world capitalism.

Their theories about revolution had wide influence, but they have been proved wrong by world development. Dependency theory has utterly failed as a guide for revolutionary struggle against imperialism; its revolutionary pretensions of the 60s and 70s have collapsed. It can't help the proletariat understand the nature of revisionist state-capitalism because it regarded it as socialism. It can't help the proletariat deal with the new issues raised by Third World development because it is still stuck in the thought that this is "growth without development".

The struggle against imperialism needs a theoretical base that takes full account of the new features of present-day imperialism. While the world is very different from what it was 100 years ago, its new features can only be understood in light of the Marxist theories of capitalism and class struggle. While the proletarian movement around the world is disorganized today, nevertheless the objective conditions are maturing for it to arise again.

Failure to recognize state-capitalism in the revisionist countries

One of the key questions of the 20th century revolutionary movement is the attitude to the revisionist countries (such as the late Soviet Union and the old regimes in Eastern Europe and the present regimes in China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea). These regimes fly the banner of Marxism and communism, but are in fact state-capitalist regimes that are no more Marxist-Leninist than the Pope. In many of these countries, important revolutions had taken place at one time; but the revolutionary ferment subsided, and the governments degenerated into the rule of new bureaucratic bourgeoisies. The working class of these countries no longer stands up as a revolutionary force, but is generally deprived of the most basic democratic rights.

Dependency theory prides itself on its analysis of capitalism as a world system. But without understanding the nature of the former Soviet Union, which was a superpower presiding over its own world bloc, there could be no accurate picture of world capitalism in much of the latter 20th century, where its main forces were split into two world blocs. Not all Third World countries were in the Western bloc; a number joined the Eastern, revisionist bloc, or imitated to this or that extent the political and economic forms of this bloc. By holding that the revisionist bloc was outside the capitalist system, dependency theory showed a complete misunderstanding of the world

system of capitalism.

Moreover, the state-capitalist countries have always exercised much influence on the world working class movement and oriented it towards reformism and other mistaken paths. To support the revisionist countries as outside the capitalist orbit, means to abandon the struggle against the revisionist theories which have eaten the heart out of the revolutionary movement. It also means to abandon support to the millions of proletarians and peasants who were discontented in the state-capitalist countries themselves, or even to regard them all as reactionaries. The future of Marxism in China, for example, depends on the workers seeing that there is nothing in common between true communism and the present "Communist" Party, which rules by tyranny and whose capitalist nature is hardly a secret to anyone these days. But the dependency theorists regard the state-capitalist regimes and their ruling classes as part of the "forces of socialism". They regard the problems with these regimes not as due to their state-capitalist nature, but as defects of socialism.

Amin in particular has engaged in a furious polemic against the view that the revisionist regimes are state-capitalist. In one book after another, he has set out one peculiar theory after another to prove that these regimes are not capitalist. He has claimed that they are a "non-capitalist" economic system even if not a socialist one. He has predicted that these countries would resist "recompradorization" even as they knocked on the doors of Western financial institutions and begged to be let in, and as some of them squeezed the local population to pay off their loans.¹ He is particularly enamored of Chinese revisionism. In 1985 Amin argued in his book *La deconnexion* that the Chinese state, as compared to the Soviet state, had *not* "turned into a despotic machine virtually impervious to popular pressure"; by 1990, when the book was published in English as *Delinking*, the Chinese army had already carried out the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989 as part of suppressing demonstrations throughout the capital city of Beijing.²

¹According to the way Amin talks about other countries, the heavy indebtedness to the West of many of the revisionist regimes should prove that they have undergone a "recompradorization" by which their truly "national" character had been obliterated. Of course, Marxism does not have such a glorified view of the virtues of the "national bourgeoisie" as Amin does. From the Marxist standpoint, whether there is a national bourgeoisie in a country, or whether it has a "national bourgeois state", is not determined by whether the local bourgeoisie takes foreign loans or tries to stay apart from the world market.

²Amin argued that although the Chinese state "was doubtless bureaucratic and undemocratic", nevertheless the forces of "statism" (state-ism) were weaker in China than Russia "because nothing has been done here comparable with Stalinist collectivization and industrialization" (*Delinking*, p. 23) Amin's view of the Chinese state reminds one of the reformist opinion that the

(continued...)

Amin argues that the revisionist countries are not capitalist because their economic forms are somewhat different from those in Western capitalism. He says that they lack the competition of different capitals, the

"parcelling out of ownership of capital, bringing with it 'competition', in turn the foundation of economic alienation that is essential to the working of capitalism. Furthermore, the market (or pseudo-market) form that the competition of capitals demands, has not (not yet?) spread to a single one of these social formations."³

In fact, however, a careful study of the Soviet economy shows that the competition of different enterprises and ministries existed in the Soviet Union. This competition between the small-group or sectoral interests of the Soviet elite was not just a secondary or minor feature of Soviet practice but was central to the way in which the Soviet economy worked. This is discussed in detail in my article "The anarchy of production beneath the veneer of Soviet revisionist planning" in an earlier issue of *Communist Voice*, so nothing additional will be said here.⁴

—Replacing class analysis—

In his various theses on revisionist society, Amin is careful to avoid a clear statement about whether there is a ruling class and who it is, and what the nature of the state is. If the working class and peasantry don't rule in these countries, then who does? Is the country ruled by a new bourgeoisie that exploits the workers and peasants? Amin twists and turns on this question. If he said it was ruled by a new bourgeoisie, he would probably have to say that these were capitalist countries. So he can't say that. He says that the ruling politicians and the managers of enterprises aren't the popular masses, but he doesn't say anything definite about what they are actually are. Instead of giving a clear answer to the class makeup of revisionist society, he talks of three different "tendencies" prevalent in these countries. These are:

"— a socialist tendency, expression of the popular content of the social forces organized in the struggle against capitalism, whose reality and persistence cannot be denied by the mere denunciation of the hollow character of the 'socialist rhetoric' of power (though this should be done);

"— a statist tendency corresponding to the constitution of new social forces, dominant or

aspiring to dominate, to which one will return:

"— a capitalist tendency, expression of the objective forces associated with the development of the forces of production."⁵

This is Amin's fundamental analysis of revisionism, and he often repeats his talk of "the tripartite socialism-capitalism-statism conflict".⁶ But in his writing, the precise nature of this conflict remains shrouded in mystery. These three tendencies are sometimes presented as different classes or strata of people, and sometimes as different ideological tendencies. Indeed, sometimes he divides one tendency, such as the statist one, itself into these same three parts, which shows how confusing and frivolous his approach is! Thus, with respect to China, he says that there are "internal struggles in the dominant statism".⁷ These internal struggles are between the "tendency for progress in the popular and democratic political and ideological life" and "the option for a realignment around the statist technocracy-national capitalism couplet." So let's see. There are three tendencies: "a still live socialist tendency, a national capitalist tendency and a statist tendency". But within the statist tendency, there is a fight between all three tendencies, between the socialist tendency and a combination of statism and national capitalism.

So underneath all this gobbledygook about different tendencies, Amin is really focused on the internal struggles in the bureaucratic ruling class (the "statists"). When he analyzes the revisionist countries, he can't see further than the different currents of opinion among the revisionist leaders.

This is verified by the fact that he never has any discussion of what is really happening to the "peasant and worker peasant base". Of course, it would be laughable to say that this base had an independent voice in the policy of the revisionist governments. The only way the workers could build a movement in their own interests in these countries would be by organizing against the ruling regimes. Amin does not even consider such a step.

So what Amin really regards as the "socialist tendency" in the state-capitalist countries is one after another of the various reforms proposed by the revisionist ruling parties. He himself prefers a form of market socialism or "mixed" economy, with

⁵*Delinking*, p. 22.

⁶For example, *Maldevelopment*, p. 184 and many other places. It is also notable that Amin's view of the three tendencies in the revisionist countries bears more than a passing resemblance to Cockcroft's view in *Dependence and Underdevelopment* that the Mexican revolution was still continuing through the decades of PRI rule (a view he later abandoned). To phrase Cockcroft's analysis in Amin's terms, presumably the politicians in the PRI comprise the statist tendency, the workers and peasants are the revolutionary and socialist tendency, and the private bourgeoisie (seen erroneously as completely distinct from the PRI bureaucrats) is the capitalist tendency.

⁷*Delinking*, p. 23.

²(...continued)

Chilean army was free of the putschist traditions of the military elsewhere in Latin America and would thus never overthrow a democratically-elected government like that of Allende.

³*Delinking*, p. 22, the two parenthetical remarks are Amin's.

⁴See *Communist Voice*, vol. 3, #1, March 1, 1997.

the market sector subject to state regulation and "delinked" from world market prices; and he thinks that this would be an antidote to "statism".⁸

This is seen in his fondness for the Hungarian and Yugoslav paths, which he recommends repeatedly and stresses as the best way forward for China. These countries dived deeply into "market socialism". Amin writes, after praising China over the Soviet Union, that

"This kind of combination occurs again, but more amenable to a potentially favourable evolution, in Yugoslavia or in Hungary, at a higher level of development (as the phase of extensive accumulation is already past), but operating under more severe external constraints (small country, Western infiltration into Yugoslavia, Soviet presence in Hungary). *An evolution that, in China, followed on this basis* and permitted the continuing strong development of the forces of production, would, in our view, offer *the best long-term hope for the forces of socialism.*" (emphasis added)⁹

So it's not surprising that Amin placed a good deal of hopes in Gorbachev's "perestroika", which sought to remedy the ills of state-capitalist "statism" by speeding up the evolution towards Western market capitalist methods. Indeed, this became *a world plan* for Amin. He wrote that

"... consciousness of the crisis . . . is much more acute in the South than in the West and the East. To some extent, however, perestroika is required everywhere. To refuse it, through the prevailing discourse of neo-liberalism, is to make certain a response by the peoples in the form of the despair of racisms, primitive nationalisms and religious or other fundamentalisms."¹⁰ He enthused about Gorbachev's reforms that "Their political, democratic and popular aspect gives new heart to the socialist forces in the society. By restoring greater balance between the three components of the post-capitalist society (socialist, capitalist and statist components)—and putting an end to the hegemony of the statist trends—the reform may unblock the situation and open new ground for the dialectic of social

progress."¹¹

This fits in with his view that commodity relations (production for profit) can be socialist, and not just capitalist. He writes that

"Too often, commodity relations have been treated as the same as capitalist commodity relations, and likewise socialism and the abolition of commodity relations."¹²

Amin's view is that proper state regulation can change the whole logic of commodity relations, if one "delinks" from the world market.

The point of view of a state official

Basically, Amin holds firmly to the idea that state regulation and state intervention can change the nature of capitalism. Despite the occasional phrase about social conflict, he does not call for the class struggle. For example, when he deals with economic crises, he doesn't point out that they require the working class to organize in response. Instead his view is that a proper government plan can solve the crisis. He has the view of a liberal and enlightened government bureaucrat, who sympathizes with the working masses, but who thinks that the government could smooth out all social problems if only its hands weren't tied by conservative stupidity.

Thus Amin polemicizes against "neo-liberalism" and the unrestricted rule of the free market in favor of regulated market relations. He believes that this can overcome capitalist crisis, and that this state intervention must be done by each country on its own, by "delinking" from the overall world system. He explains world capitalist crisis by the lack of an enlightened world agency that would smooth out all the crises of capitalism; presumably only the impossibility of having properly enlightened world mechanisms today result in his emphasis on "delinking". He says:

"Any crisis is a shining example of capitalism's inherent tendency to overproduction. It can be overcome only if at the scale of the system where it is operating there are social and political mechanisms forcing appropriate redistribution against the spontaneous tendency of capital. These regulatory mechanisms imply state intervention. That is why it takes so long to overcome structural crises, since there is no international regulatory system. The crisis is overcome only at the end of prolonged exploratory structural adjustment. The outcome depends on the resolution of local and international social and political conflicts."¹³

Capitalism's inherent tendency to disproportions of all types, to unbalanced development and crises, will exist as long

⁸He held that the three conflicting tendencies in the revisionist countries "should have been managed through political democracy and a mixed economy". (*Maldevelopment*, p. 5). He thus associates eliminating the political tyranny with increasing the trend towards marketplace methods. He also believes in maintaining all three tendencies, the statist and capitalist as well as the socialist tendency. His idea is that there must be a proper balance between them.

⁹*Delinking*, p. 23.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. xii.

¹¹*Maldevelopment*, p. 218.

¹²*Delinking*, p. 134.

¹³*Rereading*, p. 96.

as capitalism does. If it is blocked in one way, it will sooner or later manifest itself in another. For Amin, however, it can be overcome by some world regulatory agencies. All one needs to do is assure the proper balance between statist intervention, market forces, and popular pressure, maintaining commodity production but under a regulatory leash, and crises can be overcome. It is only the lack of an enlightened world policy that results in "local and international social and political conflicts".

But perhaps all Amin is trying to do is to show that anarchic capitalist production must be replaced by planned production, which he is describing in popular language as production according to "an international regulatory system"? Is he just arguing for socialism, although without using that word? But Amin clearly says that the world regulatory "mechanisms" are to counterbalance "the spontaneous tendency of capitalism", which will continue to exist. Amin's regulatory agency is not a replacement for capitalist production, but exists alongside the capitalists. It is indeed a typical regulatory agency, dozens of which exist in any developed capitalist economy. Amin to the contrary, no such agency can bring harmony to capitalism, even if they followed the policies he recommends.

Amin believes that such enlightened intervention is possible on the national level. If such state mechanisms can maintain the proper balance between statist intervention, market forces, and popular pressure, he would regard the result as "socialism".

Now no doubt, state intervention such as minimum wage laws, public education, national health plans, and so forth are quite important for the working masses. But these can only be obtained by class struggle, and not by dreams of a broad class consensus between proletariat and capitalists (which Amin claims exists in the imperialist centers). Moreover, these measures cannot prevent capitalist crisis nor do they constitute socialism.

—Repealing the law of value—

Yet again and again, Amin writes that the disproportions, exploitation, and the crises of capitalism would go away if only the government planned correctly. He presents laws of capitalist development almost as if they were legislative laws, that could be repealed by passing a different law—if only there were a "polycentric" world in which all countries were "delinked". All it requires is that each national government take political action to legislate what level of poverty, what level of contrast between rich and poor, what type of economy it wants, and these things could be achieved, no matter what the laws of commodity production are. According to Amin, the tendency of capitalist production to devastate subsistence farming, to create a marginalized sector of unemployed people, to have the rich grow richer at the expense of the poor, are only a consequence of an unregulated law of value. He thinks that worldwide capitalist market ("the worldwide law of value") is an obstacle because it imposes itself on the individual governments against their will, as if local capitalism doesn't impose itself on the individual governments in the same way.

Thus Amin writes:

"This book [*Delinking*] is a plea for recon-

struction of the world on the basis of polycentrism. My thesis is certainly founded on the refusal to accept that the worldwide law of value provides the exclusive criterion of 'rationality'. This law is, on the contrary, to blame for 'currently existing capitalism': a world typified necessarily by the increasing polarization of wealth and power, and therefore unacceptable."¹⁴

The increasing contrast of rich and poor is not a tendency of "worldwide" capitalism as opposed to national capitalism, but it is an inherent tendency of all capitalist production. Yet for Amin, national government regulations providing another standard of rationality from that of worldwide capitalism could prevent it, even though capital still exists. If only countries were "delinked" from the worldwide law of value, they could make political decisions that would twist capitalism to their will. Backing up this idea, he contrasts politics to economics, writing:

"... the option for delinking must be discussed in political terms. This proposition derives from a reading according to which economic constraints are absolute only for those who accept the commodity alienation intrinsic to capitalism, and turn it into an ahistorical system of eternal validity. Keeping the debate on a political plane implies in turn a concrete tactical analysis articulated with a strategy that is itself evolving."¹⁵

Aren't these the words of the liberal bureaucrat who has no idea that the state power itself is subject to the "economic constraints" of the existing economic system?

Instead of analyzing how the capitalist system actually works, Amin dreams of a perfect system of "rationality". Inequalities are supposed to arise because of a bad choice between differing concepts of rationality, rather than springing from capitalism itself and being limited by the class struggle between the two contending forces in capitalist society. He writes:

"... the world capitalist system as a whole—centres and peripheries included—was governed by the same law of value that we categorize as 'world capitalist'. . . . We have argued that adoption of these criteria of economic rationality led by force of circumstance to reproduction of inequalities (here centre/periphery) in development. . . . We have therefore proposed that one . . . should define the criteria of economic rationality on the basis of constraints and social relations internal to the nation. We believe moreover that this proposal is in no sense utopian, and could not be since it rationalizes the effective practice

¹⁴"Preface to the English edition", *Delinking*, p. vii.

¹⁵"Foreword", *Delinking*, p. xiv.

of socialist societies (or supposedly such) which have effectively 'delinked' and are, to say the least, parties to a plan for a new, 'socialist', society, integrating the mass of the people, even if they are diverted from it in their actual evolution."¹⁶

Why, this is marvelous reasoning! Amin's says his plan for a new rationality isn't utopian because it is already being used by the revisionist societies (the ones he calls "socialist" or "supposedly such"), but then has to admit that these societies increasingly diverge from his expectations "in their actual evolution". The delinking doesn't have the effects he wants it to. So delinking is not utopian only in the following sense—it's possible but it's not much of a change after all. Doesn't this suggest that, when all is said and done, it's not so easy to defeat the laws of capitalism by mere political tinkering?

Yet Amin goes to the point of denouncing economics. One chapter of his book *Delinking* ends with a section entitled: "Conclusion: political economy or historical materialism?" He writes that:

"'Economics' is a false science, not because its propositions are 'false' but in the sense that it presents the reflection of social contradictions as forces external to the society (the 'economic laws'), analogous to the forces of nature. Marx makes a fundamental critique of this in *Capital*, that is he shows precisely this."¹⁷

Marx showed that the economic laws studied by the political economists of his day were not eternal laws, but laws of capitalism. But from this it follows that they can only be eliminated by the social revolution that eliminates the capitalist mode of production. Amin, however, says they can be eliminated by government regulation under capitalism; this is reformism, not Marxism.

—The polycentric world—

Amin's tendency to view the world like a government official does is also seen in his plan for a polycentric world, or a kinder and gentler imperialism in which the rich aid the poor and the powerful countries allow the poor ones to do what they please. His book *Delinking* was a plea for such a world, with "one planet, several systems". But to whom? Phil (of the Communist Voice Organization) had pointed out in his article on Amin that he "makes it very clear that his audience is not the working class, either in the periphery or in the center, but 'decision makers'; that is, bureaucrats in the governments of the less-developed countries and in the UN infrastructure."¹⁸ And that is so. The polycentric plan is not put forward as the

goal for a revived working class movement, but is aimed at the present movers and shakers of the world. It is designed to be something they might really accept.

Amin wants to influence these other state officials and powerful people right away. Writing in 1989, he refers to theories which he believes to have been totally forgotten, and he stresses that "In ten years time neo-liberalism will have met the same fate."¹⁹ His plan is for a readjustment of North-South relations, which in the North would be implemented by large reformist parties. He thinks that, as neo-liberalism dies off, the reformists will come back to power and could initiate "alternative development" in the North.

Amin doesn't talk about the class struggle in the North nor even pretend that the reformist parties will unleash the class struggle, but bases his plan on the idea of austerity for the working class. He emphasizes that

"Alternative relations with the South, less unequal and exploitative, entail a degree of austerity in the North and not the myth of the resumption of indefinite growth. This austerity could be turned into a positive force, if it was not understood like the austerity policies of the right (making the workers pay to retrieve the same development), but as the precondition for the beginning of an 'alternative' local and world development."²⁰

Amin's says Northern austerity could be sweetened by the promise of "alternative development". But all he has to offer with respect to Northern social policy is some recycled social-democratic and reformist chimeras, such as

"the programme of Swedish social-democracy for transferring ownership of capital, which could provide the basis for an alternative industrial policy, detached from financial profitability; the programme of the PDUP in Italy, which puts the accent on 'alternative development' and broadening of non-commodity opportunities; some ingredients of the programme of the Greens in Northern Europe envisaging the decentralization of economic and social activities;..."²¹

This is not an alternative policy, but the ordinary bourgeois policy of saying that the masses should tighten their belts in gratitude for "employee ownership" or a few democratic reforms.

This entire plea for polycentrism is an appeal to "progressive governments" in the North (which unfortunately he doesn't list explicitly) and major ruling class parties to give up neo-liberalism. Amin writes that

¹⁶*Delinking*, p. 19.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁸"On Samir Amin's utopia about the bourgeois development of the third world", *Communist Voice*, vol. 3, #1, p. 39, col. 1.

¹⁹"Preface to the English edition (1989)", *Delinking*, p. vii.

²⁰*Delinking*, p. 72.

²¹*Delinking*, p. 73. Note that Amin emphasizes not the ecological proposals of the Green, but their dreams about decentralization.

"The progressive governments of the North cannot ignore the South and line up with the strategies of the complex linking the United States, the World Bank, the IMF and the consortium of banks representing financial capital on a world scale."

Of course he also appeals to "the popular governments of the South", also unnamed but presumably including those in whose national and international planning bodies he has labored for so long.²²

The proletariat and socialism

Marxism regards the proletariat as the central force of the socialist revolutionary movement. Marx held that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves, and that by liberating themselves they would also liberate all of humanity. But dependency theory downplays the special role of the working class, which becomes simply part of the oppressed masses, the "popular and national alliance" in Amin's words.

Indeed, Amin has gone quite far in writing off the special role of the working class; he even theorizes against socialism being working class rule. He says that

"the national and popular society is not a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (which is at best a tiny minority). It is an alliance of classes with partially convergent, and partially divergent, interests (there is, for example, a divergence of real short- and medium-term interests between peasants and the urban population). *The state is the sole means of mediating these relations.* Finally, because the relation between *the intelligentsia (the avant garde 'Party')* and the popular classes is not one-dimensional (the avant garde 'represents' the people) but complex and riddled with alliances and conflicts." (Emphasis added)²³

Thus Amin, once again looking at things through the eyes of a state official, holds that it is the state that is the key factor. While Marxist theory holds that the socialist state has to be built up as a proletarian state (until the classless society in which the state dissolves away), Amin holds that the state can stand disinterestedly above the interests of all classes and mediate between them. Just as he thinks that state regulation can change the nature of capitalism and eliminate all its disharmonies, so here he holds that state regulation can harmonize the discordant classes. In his conception, it is wise state regulation, not building a new society that eliminates commodity production, that will bring social harmony.

This being his conception, it is not too surprising that Amin

makes the peripheral intelligentsia (i.e., the intelligentsia in the "peripheral" countries) into the leading class force of the historic social transformations to come. In one passage, he not only says that the working class of the "centers" accepts the present capitalist rule and thus is "not, under the present state of things, able to produce their own socialist 'organic intellectual'", but he goes on to say that the workers—or even all the popular classes who form the broad national and popular alliance—are incapable of doing this in the peripheral countries as well:

"The situation at the periphery is quite different: the popular classes have nothing to gain from the capitalist development as it appears to them. They are therefore potentially anti-capitalist. But their situation is not the same as that of the proletariat in the classical Marxist conception. It is that of a motley collection of victims of capitalism affected in highly diverse ways. On their own these classes are not in a position to draw up a plan for a classless society. They have constantly shown themselves capable of 'rejection' and even revolt, and more generally of active and passive resistance. In these circumstances there is historical scope for the constitution of a social force capable of fulfilling this objectively necessary and possible role: of catalyst to formulate an alternative social plan to capitalism, to organize the popular classes and lead their action against capitalism. This force is the intelligentsia."²⁴

He goes on to praise the intelligentsia as follows:

"The intelligentsia . . . is defined by: (i) its anti-capitalism; (ii) its openness to the universal dimension of the culture of our age, and thereby to locate itself in this world, to analyse its contradictions, understand its weakest links; and (iii) its ability to remain in lively and close contact with the popular classes, to share their history and cultural expression.

"It remains to add the conditions conducive to the crystallization of such an intelligentsia, and the obstacles thereto. In my view, this question, to which too little thought has been given, is fundamental to the progressive movement of our day, the real question that history has placed on the agenda historically. I shall not attempt a hasty answer."²⁵

So, first he assures us that the intelligentsia is the revolutionary class, and then he tells us that the problem is to create an intelligentsia that really is as revolutionary as he would like it to be. He defines the intelligentsia as having all the features of a revolutionary party, and then admits that this

²² *Maldevelopment*, p. 229.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 192-3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

intelligentsia is a figment of his imagination. No doubt the intelligentsia has given rise in the past to a number of revolutionary activists, and it will do so in the future, but it is not the class base of socialist revolution. The intelligentsia is a section of the petty-bourgeoisie, with all its faults and vacillations, and for intellectuals to become consistent fighters for socialism, they must consciously devote themselves to the interests of another class, the proletariat.

Thus Amin has it backwards when he insists that the key task on which activists should focus is rallying behind the intelligentsia, which the workers should simply follow behind. It is the revolutionary intellectuals which should recognize the role of the proletarian class struggle; and it is the revolutionary proletarian party which will have the three features which Amin attributes to the intelligentsia. What is really necessary for activists today is to pay attention to reorganizing the proletarian movement, and to developing parties, trade unions and other working class organizations that express its independent interests.

Amin as always is not oriented to the class struggle, but to state regulation. So he dreams of a state officialdom, an intelligentsia, that is wise enough and linked closely enough to the masses to guide the state in harmonizing all the classes.

The right to self-determination

One of the striking features of recent years has been the vast increase in the number of countries. Many old countries have split; many new countries have been born; old national antagonisms have flared, and new persecutions of minorities have taken place. The Palestinian struggle continues; Ireland is still in the news; Bosnia became famous around the world; the people of East Timor still face Indonesian savagery; the old Soviet Union has broken up into a number of countries; etc.

Because the major colonial empires had already dissolved decades earlier, the present events often appear from a distance to be simply a tendency to fragmentation. Although some may present this as imperialist manipulation of the Third World, the same process can be seen in Europe and other relatively more developed countries as well. Czechoslovakia split into two, although this occurred peacefully as the Czechs respected Slovakia's right to self-determination. In Canada, the provincial government of Quebec is presently ruled by separatists, although the majority of Quebecers still want to stay in Canada. In Great Britain, "devolution" has reached the stage where Scotland now has a local parliament and Wales has a (rather powerless) local assembly. The Basque separatists in Spain are again in the news. And so on.

Although dependency theory deals with former colonies that fought their own liberation struggles and the dependency theorists call for a "national" as well as class-liberationist movement (Frank) or for "national and popular" policies (Amin), the dependency theorists haven't had much interest in the connection of the right to self-determination to the current national issues. They mainly use the term "national" to defend either

Third World regimes or a petty-bourgeois nationalist orientation for the mass struggle. Amin preaches that real national issues can't arise in the Third World, and is skeptical of the Marxist view linking national movements with the spread of capitalism. His attitude to national issues inside the Third World is basically annoyance.

To avoid misunderstanding, it should be noted that the Marxist principle of the right of nations to self-determination does not necessarily mean encouraging any particular secession movement. Every national movement has to be examined individually. But Marxist analysis shows the importance of national freedom; it holds that the issue of unity or secession should be decided according to the desires of the population; and it strikes hard at the oppression of national minorities and at forcible retention of oppressed nations inside oppressor countries. Marxism stresses building the unity of the proletariat across national lines, but it shows that this can only be accomplished by the proletariat of dominant nations defending the freedom of oppressed nations.

Amin however doesn't talk about the application of such principles to the Third World. Instead he says that the national issue basically doesn't exist in the periphery and is a creation of imperialism:

"On the national question in the modern period, I noted that central capitalism was an integrating force but peripheral capitalism disintegrated society and made national consciousness virtually impossible. I considered the issue of 'ethnicity' in Africa on this basis. . . .

"I suggested that local and regional disputes in Africa were a reflection of the USSR's and local ruling classes' conflict with imperialism and the strategies of imperialism."²⁶

Amin reduces the national issues in the Third World to imperialist plots not as the conclusion of a deep study of the national issues in various countries but because he wants, at all costs, large states in order that a country be big enough to carry out his strategy of "delinking". No doubt the major conflicts in Africa have many causes. Only some of them are either national issues (or imperialist plots for that matter), but there are a variety of economic, social and political conflicts, with many religious and ethnic garbs. But among them are national struggles; the long, bloody war of the late Ethiopian state-capitalist regime against Eritrea was a straightforward issue of national oppression.

True, when other conditions are equal, large states can be advantageous for economic development and for uniting workers of different nationalities. But other conditions are not always equal. For one thing, Marx and Engels pointed out repeatedly that no nation can be free if it oppresses another nation. Thus large states based on national oppression may seriously harm working class unity; however, if the workers of the oppressor nationality oppose national oppression, working class unity may be cemented despite bourgeois national

²⁶*Rereading*, p. 164.

bigotries. For this and other reasons, sometimes the division of a large state is necessary to create conditions for the future reuniting of the populations involved, this time on the basis of national freedom. Even when the working class movement thinks that secession is inadvisable, it must separate itself from the policy of forced unity via the bayonet, and thus must champion the right of self-determination for oppressed nations.

But Amin looks at things from the standpoint of the state official. From his point of view, how annoying that the various ethnic and regional groups of the local population, when rising to new economic and political life after winning independence from the European colonizers, might actually go through a process of cohering into nations. The important thing for the official is to have a powerful state or a large empire.

—Amin's nostalgia for empires—

Indeed, surprising as it may seem for a supposedly anti-imperialist writer, Amin longs for the empires of the past. For example, Amin may be one of the few "socialists" left who still carries a torch for the now-forgotten Austro-Hungarian empire. It flew apart into separate nations after its defeat in World War I, dissolving into Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, etc. According to Amin, however, there really weren't any national feelings among the people in the Austro-Hungarian empire, but the empire dissolved only due to "the myth of the linguistically unified nation-state".

Amin may be describing the moon, but he certainly isn't describing Austro-Hungary. Hungary had waged a war for independence in 1849; the Ruthenians had been torn apart from the other Ukrainians who lived outside the Austro-Hungarian empire; the Polish Austro-Hungarians were torn apart from the other Poles; the Slovenians gravitated towards unity with other South Slavs; the Austrians gravitated towards unity with Germany instead of the Hapsburg empire; some Slavic languages in Austro-Hungary, which had seemed on the verge of extinction, had been making a comeback; etc. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian "dual monarchy" was a motley patchwork of different arrangements for different areas rather than either a federation or a unified system. If the proletariat could have put its stamp on the dissolution of the Austro-Hungary empire, perhaps some of nationalities would have united in a socialist federation. But given the defeat of the local socialist revolutionary movement in World War I, the division of Austro-Hungary was inevitable.

Yet Amin describes the dissolution of the empire as if it had nothing to do with economic and political trends and instead a benevolent state planner, under the influence of some fashionable books, had woke up one day and said "maybe it would be a good idea to redraw the map of central Europe". This goes along with his view that intellectuals are the driving force of contemporary history, but it has little to do with the real history of Austro-Hungary.

Amin's concern is that the resulting states wouldn't have had the clout that the Austro-Hungarian empire supposedly did. He always seems to imagine himself as an advisor to the throne, and he apparently sees the size and glory of the empire

as the main thing. So he sighs that

"the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire" resulted in "putting the small inheritor states at risk of being peripheralized, until their later incorporation in the Soviet empire."

Were there any objective reasons why the Austro-Hungarian empire broke up? Amin claims that

". . . it cannot be said that each of the bourgeoisies, if they still exist—Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, Slovene, Croat, German—needs 'its' state and 'its' market. It cannot be said that they would have been unable to constitute segments of a single bourgeoisie on the basis of a single integrated market. It cannot be said that the mass of the peasant population would prefer to be exploited by its own 'national' bourgeoisie. The polarization of the conflict around language is typical—and due in great part, according to us, to the projection of the ideology attached to the new role of language in the developed European West.

". . . if one can imagine the unrealized potentialities, the maintenance and renewal of the ancient empire—and nowadays a kind of Hungary-Yugoslavia (which are not doing so badly in the present-day world) at the scale of the entire region—would perhaps have allowed more room for manoeuvre for the plans for independence and democracy."²⁷

This passage is fully in line with the mentality of the imperial official. Amin "cannot be said" to have much concern for how the bourgeoisie and capitalism actually developed in Austro-Hungary. He waves it all aside as unnecessary. Why, if only the planners had known his theories about "delinking" rather than being under the influence of the "myths" of their days, such as the existence of national movements in Europe! Why then, no doubt decades of sad history could have been avoided. He replaces a study of what actually happened in Europe with a dream of a utopian form of capitalist development. It is just the whining of a frustrated government official: why didn't the bourgeoisie listen to me?

Amin sees salvation, unfortunately temporary, in the later building of "the Soviet empire" or "Russian empire". He thus endorses Russian domination and bullying of the Eastern European revisionist regimes. Amin postures as against the "statist tendency" in the Soviet Union and other revisionist countries. But here we see Amin supporting one of the most chauvinist features of this "statist tendency", its expansionism. This shows that one should take seriously that Amin isn't for fighting the "statist tendency" but simply for ensuring the proper "balance" between the "statist tendency" and the other tendencies in revisionist countries; he really needs the "statist tendency" for

²⁷*Delinking*, p. 45. Amin mourns the passing of the Austro-Hungarian empire not just there, but also in *Maldevelopment*, pp. 80-81.

his plans.

Indeed, now that the Soviet Union has disintegrated, Amin mourns the insufficient *chauvinism* in the Soviet Union. He regarded the *big power nationalism* of the "statist tendency" as a positive thing. Thus Amin's preaches against the nationalism of small countries in favor of the nationalism of empire. He writes:

"... The ruling class was fragmented into conservatives, Gorbachev supporters, right-wing populists, and so on, and the top-down reform became impossible. I thought the big power nationalism of this class [that sent Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan—Jph.] would be a safeguard. . . . I also overestimated the Soviet patriotism of the popular classes, which could not have cared less for the satisfactions a country with the rank of theirs could command. The rejection of patriotism may be healthy in some respects, as in the long term it permits the social project to be brought to the foreground. It is also exceedingly dangerous in the short term, as external adversaries will not fail to exploit it in order to peripheralize Russia and the other nations of the former Soviet Union and turn them into Europe's—especially Germany's—own 'Latin America.'"²⁸

Amin doesn't give a thought to whether there was national oppression in the Soviet Union, or why the nations would be so eager to leave the Soviet union. He is entirely divorced from the real situation in the Soviet Union. His eyes are fixed only on the economic and political power commanded by an empire, the bigger the better. And if it takes great power chauvinism and militarism to ensure that empire, so much the better. Amin was actually banking on this chauvinism, nationalism and militarism; and he was disappointed when he proved too weak.

In the Arab world and in Africa, Amin would also like to see giant states. This desire may be understandable, but he doesn't understand what possible obstacle could stand in the way of building such states. The idea of a United Arab Republic embracing the Arab world appealed to many activists; the UAR united Egypt and Syria from 1958-61, and in 1963 there was an agreement—never implemented—to unite Syria, Iraq and Egypt. But even today, Amin can see no reason why the UAR collapsed other than "anti-democratic methods" by the Nasser regime in Egypt. Similarly, he longs after Pan-Africanism, and doesn't understand why this too couldn't become a reality. Even now, and despite his boasts about having seen through Nasserism long ago, he still holds that "Kwame Nkrumah and Gamal Abdel Nasser will remain prophets of our age" for trying to form larger states.²⁹

²⁸ *Rereading*, p. 185.

²⁹ *Maldevelopment*, p. 207.

—Negating national freedom—

In order to maintain these views, Amin replaces a study of the economic and political factors dividing the Arab and African worlds with various abstract theories. We have already mentioned his view that national formations can't develop in the peripheral countries.

Another is that the state is what is primary: it is not that a nation-state reflects the existence of a nation, but that the state itself creates the nation. In Amin's view, it is the state that is the "historical subject".³⁰ This fits in well with his viewpoint of a state official.

And finally, Amin asks "How many of the Third World states of today bear even a vague resemblance to nation-states?"³¹ It doesn't strike him that this might *increase* the importance of the national question. When Europe came out of feudalism, many of its boundaries had little to do with the economic and national realities. This spurred on its national wars. If the boundaries had already corresponded to social realities, little of this would have happened.

In fact, Amin has no real assessment of why the creation of additional countries is taking place. He has no plan how to deal with the nationality issue other than that national freedom must be "tempered" by the needs of empire-building, and he implies that the demand for national freedom is a tool of imperialism. Thus he writes that:

"... The objective need to provide the Third World with great economic, political and military scope, as the sole means of intervening effectively in the contemporary world and winning respect as a genuine partner, entails the renunciation of the narrow ideology of nation as it has been inherited from 19th century Europe. . . . The rights of peoples and nations to self-determination, including their right to secession, must be *tempered* by outlooks sympathetic to the constitution in appropriate forms of great 'multi-national' states, democratic and mindful of differences. This is the only way to checkmate the imperialist plans that always aim to divide."
(emphasis added)³²

Who is being advised to "temper" their recognition of the right to self-determination? Apparently Amin is still advising the governments and bourgeoisies of the new African and Arab states. To tell them to temper their recognition of democratic rights, and to provide them with the excuse that the oppressed minorities and nationalities are tools of imperialism, makes a mockery of Amin's few words of opposition to "the idea of unification by force".³³

Amin sees only the size of countries, and whether they will

³⁰ *Delinking*, p. 44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

³³ *Ibid.*

have more seats in world conferences. It never strikes him whether the present formation of multitudes of countries might be a historical phase, which will later be followed by irresistible demands for amalgamation. And if this is so, it is reasonable to ask, what will help future amalgamation of the working class of all nations and countries most: upholding the right to self-determination today, or worrying excessively about the danger of mini-states? Won't the peoples themselves eventually judge the benefits of mini-states versus large states, or is that something which can only be left to government officials and planners?

Today's national and ethnic issues are complex. But, unlike Amin's imperial nostalgia, Marxism gives a framework that helps deal with them. It shows that the formation of nations is not an accident, and it appreciates the liberating quality which a number of national struggles have had. At the same time, it lays stress on the character of the proletariat as a world class, and it sees socialism as tied to proletarian internationalism and as ultimately bringing a united world without national borders. But it does not interpret this as meaning that the working class should be indifferent to national questions. On the contrary, it holds that if the socialist movement is to be able to unite workers of all nationalities in common organizations, if there is also to be unity across national borders, it must fight all forms of national oppression. This includes upholding the right to self-determination for oppressed nations—that is, the right for the population of the territory concerned to decide whether they wish to stay in the country or secede and form a separate country. This doesn't just mean supporting progressive national liberation struggles, but that the socialist movement must zealously support the right of the population concerned to decide the issue of secession, even if the socialists feel secession is a mistake and are agitating against it.

These principles are often vulgarized and regarded as obsolete today. For example, it is held that the bloody national massacres and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Croatia shows that the right to self-determination is suspect. But why did Yugoslavia explode into national slaughter, while Czechoslovakia didn't?

The Czechoslovakians accepted the right to self-determination when the Slovaks wanted to leave, and calmly and peacefully formed two separate countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Isn't such just a peaceful resolution of the question far more favorable to eventual Czech and Slovak unity than forcible retention of Slovakia, even if the secessionists prove to have been wrong about the benefit of an independent Slovakian state?

In Yugoslavia, many national bourgeoisies, with the Serbian nationalists being the most extreme but not the only ones, opposed national rights for other peoples. This inflamed national passions and created a fertile ground for massacres and for hatreds. Slovenia, which managed to leave Yugoslavia with relatively little difficulty, is calm. Croatia and Bosnia, where Serbia fought harder against the right to self-determination, are bloody. Had an independent proletarian force existed in Yugoslavia, it would have found the Marxist principle of the right to self-determination of immense value in its agitation and

practical work. It would uphold not just the right for various nations to leave Yugoslavia, but the necessity for all states, the secessionist ones as well as Serbia, to uphold the rights of national minorities. Only by upholding such principles, could the conditions be created for the closest relations in the future among the workers of all nationalities, and only thus could one fight the chauvinism of the local bourgeoisies.

No doubt, large states can have many advantages. They can unite the masses and create the conditions for faster economic and political development. But it depends on the conditions in the particular large state, and division is often a necessary step on the way to reestablishing a better and more durable unity. For Marxist workers, it is not state boundaries but the interests of uniting the workers that is primary. And supporting the national rights of other workers, even if this leads to new national boundaries for the time being, is often the best way—indeed the only way—that the workers of a dominant nationality can establish relations of trust with workers of a nationality that has long felt the bitter sting of national oppression.

The Environmental Issue

In the 21st century, issues concerning water, forests, biodiversity, global warming, pollution, the development of new diseases, etc. will loom more and more important. More and more economic activity will center on these issues; some areas of the world will be threatened by catastrophe; and this will have major affect on national economies. The major imperialist powers and their world agencies will dominate the steps taken (or not taken) on these issues. One of the concrete ways in which imperialism expresses itself will be its domination of world action on the environment. But dependency theory has had relatively little to say about these issues.

Amin for example devotes a chapter of his book *Delinking* to an analysis of the Green movements.³⁴ He discusses the general philosophical views of the Greens concerning Europeanism, individualism, Marxism, etc. But he says nothing about the environmental issues themselves.

This was understandable during the origins of dependency theory. Theorists such as Frank expected imminent revolutions in Latin America and perhaps elsewhere in the 60s and 70s. Thus it was perhaps natural that environmental devastation would appear as just one of many crimes of capitalism, and the solution for Frank and others for all these crimes was immediate socialist revolution. Then again, perhaps the dependency theorists were also influenced by the lack of concern for the environment on the part of the regimes which the dependency theorists regard as outside the capitalist system.

But this is only part of the story. As the hopes of some dependency theorists in immediate revolution (Frank) or in the

³⁴Chapter 5, "On the Green Movements".

development of "delinked" regimes (Amin) have been frustrated, the dependency theorists did not develop a longer range view on environmental issues. Nor have they focused on the long-range needs of proletarian reorganization; but have become disoriented (as shown in the 1982 joint work, *Dynamics of Global Crisis*, of Amin, Frank, Arrighi and Wallerstein) or looked towards supposedly practical schemes of co-operation with the existing bourgeois forces (Amin). Nor do they seem to devote any special attention to the broader environmental issues. Perhaps this is partially because the environmental issue would focus attention on the need for the world economy to be controlled globally, while Amin believes that a capitalist utopia can be achieved locally if only countries "delink" from the world economy. The need for a conscious global control of economic life in order to protect the environment is one of the strong arguments for socialism, and it hits against Amin's idea of mixed economy, where some state intervention merely holds back the worst excesses of the spontaneous tendencies of capitalism. World capitalist agencies can introduce a certain planning, but it will always be partial, tardy, and directed in the interests of the most powerful countries and monopolies. The need for global control argues strongly in favor of a socialist revolution that replaces production for profit and commodity production with a system of conscious planning.

There are of course a number of pitfalls to be avoided in dealing with environmental issues. One can't simply extrapolate shortages or problems; many mistaken predictions of raw material shortages have come about in this way. Throughout the course of world industrialization, replacements and substitutes

have continually been found for materials that become rare or expensive. The use of whale oil for lighting and other purposes resulted in a devastation of whale populations by the mid-19th century and disaster might have soon followed, but a substitute industry developed around petroleum and its byproducts. Of course, this helped set the stage for a more profound 20th century problem with fossil fuels; but such is the way capitalism deals with such problems, ameliorating one environmental problem only to lay the basis for yet another.

The rapid increase in technological and scientific knowledge will continue to be important for solving environmental problems brought into being by the capitalist use of technology. There is no going back. The environment can't be saved by jettisoning technology, but the market-economy of capitalism has to be overcome so that technical and scientific knowledge can be used to protect rather than ravage the economy. The devastation of the environment is one of the examples of how the private ownership of the means of production is coming into contradiction with the vast productive forces of large-scale production. Marxism holds that such contradictions can only be overcome by a period of social revolution. Fully conscious and effective planning in the interests of the entire population requires that the entire society own the means of production, and that the working class, not a "statist" class of bureaucrats, is in actual control of the economy.

Escalating environmental problems are one of the features of contemporary world imperialism. On this issue, as on so many others, dependency theory falls short. □

CUBA: socialist or state-capitalist?

Continued from page 60

progress of his Cuban "socialism."

Proyekt, who lectures against "textbook definitions", simply accepts Castro's word that he's defending socialism and ignores the concrete examination of how the Cuban economy actually works that I begin to present in my articles. For instance, he concedes that the "market socialist" ideas of the Soviet economist Liberman influenced the Cuban economic policy. But rather than talk about what the implications of market mechanisms dominating the Cuban economy means, he argues that whether or not the economy operated according to market principles in the state sector is of no consequence. He argues it would only be of consequence if there was a capitalist class in Cuba, but instead he implies that there is merely "bureaucratic privilege" for an elite.

So the state sector operates on capitalist lines to the benefit of the privileged managers and party bureaucrats. But that can't be capitalism according to Proyekt, because there's not private owners. Instead of seeing that state owned enterprises can be run along capitalist lines without private owners, Proyekt advances that amazing thesis that "state capitalism" cannot possibly exist. His proof? The U.S. imperialist bourgeoisie says

Cuba is socialist! "They are much shrewder than people like Joseph Green. They have no use for categories such as 'state capitalism' since they recognize that unless there is a Cuban bourgeoisie, there is no capitalism to speak of." So it turns out that for confirmation of whether Castro has been leading Cuba on the socialist path we should reject the "textbook" definition of Karl Marx and replace it with the "shrewder" criterion provided by the CIA and the State Department.

But while in the 1970s the privileged bureaucrats were not the legal owners of their enterprises, in fact, they operated very much like private owners. Cuban managers (and the state bureaucrats tied to them) wheeled and dealt in anarchic fashion, undermining the formal central plans. Enterprises lived or died on their own resources and treated their assets as private property through both legal and illegal means. Things got so bad that by the mid-80s Castro himself was hypocritically claiming that the whole economic path adopted in the 70s was a big mistake. And not only was the state sector rife with capitalist practices, but there were powerful free market forces operating throughout the economy, both through the black market and official policy opening up more avenues for private entrepreneurs.

—Mark □

On some recent Internet debates:

CUBA: socialist or state-capitalist?

Recently some articles from *Communist Voice* that show how the state-capitalist system developed in Cuba played a role in a debate in some left-wing Internet forums about Castroism. The first CV article was introduced onto the "LeninList" on September 2 by Jacques Beaudoin of the Canadian Maoist group Action Socialiste.¹ Louis Proyect, a university professor who is an ardent Castroist, had gloated that there was "an absence of any supporting data, either historical or economic" to the claim that Cuba was state-capitalist. But as more CV articles were posted into these forms, Proyect admitted that the historical and economic data in these articles was "indeed factual" and "testimony to the decline of the Cuban revolution." However, to him and the other defenders of Castroism in the debate, this didn't make any difference.

Proyect and other Castroists hold that the Cuban regime was socialist so long as the economic system differed in any way from the market capitalism of the U.S. They refuse to recognize that capitalism can arise within the state-sector itself and that such a thing as an overall state-capitalist system can exist. Thus it isn't important for them whether the workers run things in Cuba; it is quite conceivable to Proyect that socialism could be run by a Bonapartist tyrant (his own example) who would serve the workers interest while dictating over them. So long as the methods of exploitation were a bit different from Western capitalism, Proyect and others won't recognize that a state bourgeoisie exists in Cuba.

U.S. hostility to Cuba is supposed to be absolute proof of the socialist nature of Cuba, while the growing links of Castroism with West European capital is not supposed to prove Cuba's capitalist nature, but simply Castro's ability to maneuver cleverly

Thus the debate centered on such issues as whether there is such a thing as a state-capitalist system. Mark and Joseph, on behalf of the *Communist Voice*, repeatedly emphasized the need to study the actual evolution of Cuban economic and society, while Proyect and others claimed that these facts were irrelevant as there was no such thing as state-capitalism.

Three basic trends took part in this debate. There was an ardent pro-Castroist trend. This trend also holds that China and other state-capitalist countries are socialist, although not as good as Cuba. It includes those who have a soft spot in their hearts for Soviet revisionism, especially Stalin but also the remnants of the old Soviet bureaucracy. During the course of the debate it was also seen that supposed critics of Stalinism such as Proyect nevertheless defended the Stalinist system.²

¹This was Mark's article, "The imperialist Helms-Burton law and the myth of Cuban socialism" (*Communist Voice*, vol. 2, #5, Oct. 1, 1996).

²Of course, many Trotskyists are also fans of the Castro (continued...)

There were also a number of Maoists, who argued that Cuba was capitalist or even fascist. The main Maoist participants highly promoted Stalin and did not recognize the similarity between the Stalinist system and that in Cuba. They had only a bit of economic analysis of Cuba and focused on various of Castro's reactionary stands in world politics.

The third trend was that of *Communist Voice*, which put forward a consistent anti-revisionist analysis of Cuba, focusing on its economic and social structure. This analysis is opposed to that of either Maoism or any shade of Trotskyism.

We reproduce below some excerpts from the debate, dealing only with the exchange between Proyect and the *Communist Voice*. Even with respect to this exchange, we only reprint a representative sample. Nevertheless, one can see many of the key themes in this debate.

In accordance with Internet form, the participants indicate that they are quoting an opponent by putting a "greater than" sign (>) in the left-hand margin.

Joseph Green, LL09080,2,3, Sept. 6: Cuban Economics in the 1980's

[Joseph Green posted Mark's article "Did Castro steer Cuba towards socialism in the late 1980s" (*Communist Voice*, vol. 2, #6, Dec. 15, 1996). This article discussed in detail the growing transition from state-capitalism to private capitalism in Cuba. It dealt in particular with the question of whether the Cuban "rectification" of 1986 was a move towards socialism.—CV]

Lou Proyect, LL09076, Sept. 6: Theory of the Cuban Revolution

[This was a long article by Proyect which, however, ignored the evolution of Cuban economics and concentrated on glorifying the early history of the regime. It didn't discuss any serious defects in the regime and presented Cuban socialism as continuing onward and upward according to the principles of Che Guevara.—CV]

This article grew out of a debate with supporters of Tony Cliff's "state capitalist" theory. . . . I noticed an eagerness to

²(...continued)
regime. Such Trotskyists hail Cuban state-capitalism as some kind of workers' state, while cursing Stalin. This is in line with their general hypocrisy of condemning Stalinism while promoting various "Stalinist" regimes (the former Soviet Union, China, N. Korea, etc.) as "workers' states". On this matter, Proyect's theorizing is close to that of his former group, the Trotskyist SWP, but he no longer belongs to any organization.

apply this category to Cuba by his supporters on the Internet in the absence of any supporting data, either historical or economic. I rose to the challenge and presented the case that Cuba was socialist, not capitalist. . . >

Louis Project

Lou Project. LL09087, Sept. 6: "Marxism" and Marxism

> But Cuban "communism" is not following some
> fundamentally different path than the collapsed Soviet
> Union or the Chinese revisionist rulers. In fact, what
> attitude to take toward the Cuban regime has long
> been a dividing line between communism and its
> opportunist counterfeit. A slew of reformist,
> petty-bourgeois nationalist and phony "Marxist"
> trends are promoting Cuban state-capitalism and its
> revisionist rulers. Some, like the Socialist Workers Party
> (SWP), fawn over the rhetoric of the Cuban elite
> as the pinnacle of communist wisdom today.

One of the most pressing tasks of the late 20th century is to reconstruct a revolutionary movement. In the course of this struggle, there will be intense if not bitter polemics *among* Marxists.

This was also the case in the late 19th century in Russia. The emerging Russian Social Democracy had intense and bitter polemics over such questions as the role of the peasantry in the coming revolution, the attitude to take toward the bourgeois parties, etc. But these polemics were conducted among people who regarded themselves as Marxists and not "Marxists."

The problem with small, self-declared vanguards like Joseph Green's *Communist Voice* is that they view their own particular organization as Marxist and everybody else as "Marxist." . . . I saw the Maoist movement, which used to have tens of thousands of adherents in the United States, divide like amoebas in the 1970s over who was the authentic expression of Mao . . .

Louis Project

Joseph Green, LL09106, Sept. 8: RE: "Marxism" and Marxism

Louis Project is upset with me. In LL09087 he cites a statement from the CVO article by Mark that I posted the day before yesterday, "Did Castro steer Cuba towards socialism in the late 1980s". The excerpt he takes starts with the assertion that ". . . Cuban 'communism' is not following some fundamentally different path than the collapsed Soviet Union or the Chinese revisionist rulers." But, strange to say, LP has nothing to say about whether the CVO article has actually proved this to be true or not. He doesn't deal with whether the facts in the CVO article undermine his attempt to present Cuban revisionism as having some unique system, quite different from that which existed in the Soviet Union. Instead he goes off into a tirade against me and the CVO. . . .

So LP, instead of looking into the economic facts described in the CVO articles, raises that he is upset that the CVO article

talks about "a dividing line between communism and its opportunist counterfeit". He doesn't think that it requires examining the facts about Castroism or other views to see whether there is such a dividing line. Instead Project believes that he can defend Castroism by citing general principles to show that there is no such thing as an opportunist counterfeit of communism. He writes that the Russian Marxists never had such an attitude as to believe that there were dividing lines and opportunist counterfeits. He writes, referring to "the late 19th century in Russia", that:

> The emerging Russian Social Democracy had intense
> and bitter polemics over such questions as the role
> of the peasantry in the coming revolution, the attitude
> to take toward the bourgeois parties, etc. But these
> polemics were conducted among people who
> regarded themselves as Marxists and not "Marxists."

In the late 19th century, emerging Russian Marxism debated such questions with the Narodniks, anarchists, liberal bourgeoisie etc. Can we regard the Narodniks as Marxists? the anarchists as Marxists? the liberal bourgeoisie as Marxists? Can any serious historian so regard them?

But perhaps Project is really referring to the internal debates in Russian Social Democracy at the beginning of the 20th century? But in those debates the revolutionary Marxists drew exactly those dividing lines that so upset Project. Recall Lenin's book "What Is To Be Done?" And years later, Lenin was still writing on the same theme. Here's a typical statement by Lenin:

*"The dialectics of history were such that the theoretical victory of Marxism compelled its enemies to *disguise* *themselves* as Marxists. Liberalism, rotten within, tried to revive itself in the form of socialist *opportunism* . . . They cravenly preached 'social peace' (i.e., peace with the slave-owners), renunciation of the class struggle, etc. They had very many adherents among socialist members of parliament, various officials of the working class-movement, and the 'sympathizing' intelligentsia." (The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx, March 1, 1913, Collected Works, vol. 18, p. 584, emphasis as in the original)*

In other articles, Lenin described the view that all the trends were really united on the basic and most important things as "official optimism", and he showed how it helped corrupt the Second International, which had once been revolutionary.

..So LP's description of Russian Marxist history is just wrong. And he does no better when he jumps from Russian history to contemporary history and says the reason for the small size of the movement today is too many debates. This is an absurd idealist position which ignores the major crisis facing the world left today and the relation of this crisis to objective conditions. But it is also hypocritical when it comes from someone like LP whose own disparaging method of polemic is well-known to anyone who has followed the debate on, say, the Marxism-International list.

But back to Cuba. Perhaps LP would like to judge Castro and the Cuban regime by the same standard that he claims to uphold against Castro's critics? Would he care to explain how Castro would treat a Cuban worker who thought that Cuba was state-capitalist, or is he going to deny the widescale malaise among Cuban workers today? The Cuban regime represses independent opinion, while all I do is insist that revisionism is not Marxism. Yet Proyect is upset about how harmful my activities are, while silent about how Castroism tramples on the political freedoms of the working class. . . .

--Joseph Green

**Joseph Green, LL09118-20, Sept. 12:
Castro embraces revisionist economics**

[Joseph Green posted Mark's article "Cuba's economic system of the 1970s and early 80s: Cuban 'socialism' adopts the Soviet state-capitalist model" (Communist Voice, vol. 3, #1, March 1, 1997). It was proceeded with an introduction refuting the theory of Tony Cliff. —CV]

—Joseph Green

**Louis Proyect, LL09113, Sept. 12:
Reply to Joe Green**

- > *and I are to bring them up. Since these facts*
- > *undermine quite a few of the assertions that LP makes*
- > *in his treatise on the Cuban theory of revolution, he*
- > *prefers to simply disparage the CVO article rather than*
- > *deal with its content.*

These facts are indeed factual. They are testimony to the decline of the Cuban revolution. I have posted much more powerful information to the Spoons list myself, including material from radical journalist Mark Cooper written in Harpers Magazine 2 years ago. Cooper describes in chilling detail the consumption habits of plant managers and their attitudes toward "their" employees.

I also wrote about the transformation of Cuban class relations in the early 1960s. These are facts also. These facts are of little interest to you because you see Castro as a continuation of Batista. That is why the USA risked nuclear war in 1963? To get rid of the new Batista? . . .

- > *Indeed, it is notable that LP's treatise on Cuba ignores*
- > *the issue of whether a new ruling class or the Cuban*
- > *working class makes the decisions in Cuba; he*
- > *concentrates on technocratic issues in planning*
- > *not on whether the working class is carrying out*
- > *and enforcing the planning; and he ignores the Castroist fear*
- > *of an open expression of working class opinion in Cuba. LP*
- > *is worried about the dangers of too much debate among*
- > *the left. The Cuban regime shows one way to prevent such*
- > *excessive debate from taking place among the left:*
- > *repression.*

Whether a new ruling class or the Cuban working class

makes the decisions? Comrades, this is a classic formal logic expression. A can not be A and not A at the same time. Perhaps we should send Joseph Green over to the marxism-introduction mailing-list where he can get a refresher course on dialectical materialism. It would be useful to review the 18th Brumaire where Marx describes how Louis Bonaparte repressed the bourgeoisie in order to guarantee its continuing hegemony.

-Louis Proyect

**Joseph Green, LL09144, Sept. 15:
Proyect's About-Face on the Facts About Cuba**

It wasn't much more than a week ago that Proyect was assuring one and all that there wasn't any serious analysis or facts behind the claim that Cuba was state-capitalist. Read his "Theory of the Cuban Revolution" which appeared on September 6, 1997 on the Lenin List. In 13 pages of sycophantic praise for Castroism, there is not a word about the decline of the revolution. In the second paragraph Proyect talks of "an absence of any supporting data, either historical or economic" to show the degeneration of Cuba into a state-capitalist order.

But now Proyect admits that not only are the Communist Voice articles "factual", but that there is even more "chilling" evidence about the anti-working class attitude of Cuban managers. The CV articles present a good deal of material about the economic structure of Cuba, how it has evolved over the decades, and the capitalist features of the Cuban state sector. They are both historical and economic. If Proyect really cared about these facts, one would imagine that he would withdraw his "Theory of the Cuban revolution" and start examining the implications of these facts.

But that's not Proyect's way. Proyect cares nothing for the facts, and he simply waves them aside. In essence, his reply is "facts, smacts, been there, done that". Let's see how Proyect manages this:

First, Proyect writes about what Communist Voice has written about Cuba:

- > *These facts are indeed factual.*

Thus he admits that our articles, which discuss structure of the economy, the capitalist relations among the state enterprises, and the passivity and exploitation of the working class, are based on hard reality.

- > *They are testimony to the decline of the Cuban*
- > *revolution. I have posted much more powerful information*
- > *to the Spoons list myself, including material from radical*
- > *journalist Mark Cooper written in Harpers Magazine*
- > *2 years ago. Cooper describes in chilling detail*
- > *the consumption habits of plant managers and their*
- > *attitudes towards 'their' employees.*

So Proyect not only admits that our facts correct, but that they show what has happened to the Cuban revolution. Such

praise from a bitter opponent is rare indeed.

But, Proyect says, Harpers Magazine has even more information about Cuba. It's not too likely that Harpers has a Marxist analysis of Cuba, but if it has reliable material that shows the anti-working class nature of Cuban managers, this would reinforce the analysis that Cuba is state-capitalist. Yet oddly enough, for Proyect, the fact that abundant evidence exists of Cuba's state-capitalist nature is somehow an argument that all the facts should be ignored. The more facts that prove the existence of exploitation in Cuba, the more Proyect thinks they should be ignored. "Been there, done that", yawns Proyect.

In the same vein, Proyect crows that he himself has supposedly posted a lot of material that discredits the Cuban regime, and implies that he has talked about the "decline of the revolution" in Cuba. It's a pity that he didn't remember all this a week ago when he posted his "Theory of the Cuban revolution". There's not a word about "the decline of the revolution" in that article; not a word about the contempt of Cuban executives for the Cuban working class. Quite the opposite. Instead Proyect creates an impression of the continual "deepening" of the revolution! . . .

> *I also wrote about the transformation of Cuban class relations in the early 1960s. These are facts also. These facts are of little interest to you because you see Castro as a continuation of Batista.*

Proyect claims to have proven that there were social changes in Cuba after the overthrow of Batista. That's knocking at an open door. All our articles say things like the following, from the first paragraph of Mark's article "Cuban 'socialism' adopts the Soviet state-capitalist model":

"The revolution of 1959 brought much progressive change to Cuba. A major land reform was carried out and the conditions of the poor were improved through extensive social reform. Within a few years after toppling the tyrannical, U.S.-backed Batista regime, the Castro government nationalized the U.S. and other foreign capitalist holdings as well as the large businesses and farms of the Cuban bourgeoisie."

.....

The point being disputed isn't whether there was a revolution in Cuba, but whether the revolution died, and the regime consolidated into a state-capitalist order. The world isn't static. It is 1997. The Cuban regime has gone through several decades of change since the early 1960s. In particular, it was in the 1970s that the Cuban regime, frustrated at the failure of its previous economic plans, resolutely turned to the Soviet state-capitalist model. Our articles examine the Cuban economy in its motion and development over the decades, and showed the tragedy of petty-bourgeois radicalism and its degeneration into an oppressive, state-capitalist order. This history is of importance for anyone who takes seriously the study of revolutionary experience, and for anyone who wants to see why it doesn't work to replace Marxism by petty-bourgeois democracy.

Proyect implies that we have betrayed the Cuban revolution because we have made this study. The truth is the opposite. It is Proyect and the apologists of Castroism who have betrayed the Cuban proletariat by pretending that the revolution of 1959 is still alive. Proyect is interested in supporting a force in Cuba that is powerful and influential, not a force that is currently downtrodden and oppressed. He turns his back on the workers and sucks up to the new Cuban bourgeoisie.

.....

But the real significance of Proyect's "Reply to Joe Green" is that he explicitly admits that we have set forward a serious body of facts about Cuba, and he tacitly admits that he can't deal with these facts, and that he doesn't want to anyway.

--Joseph Green, Sept. 14, 1997

Joseph Green, LL09150-2, Sept. 16: Che vs. Anti-revisionism

[Joseph Green posted Mark's article "Che, the armed struggle, and revolutionary politics" (*Communist Voice*, vol. 3, #3, Aug. 10, 1997). This article showed that "for all Che's personal fortitude and activity in the revolutionary movement, his views do not offer us a guide to achieving the elimination of capitalist-imperialist oppression".]

Louis Proyect, LL09173, Sept. 17: RE: "Che vs. Anti-revisionism—part 2 of 2"

. . . The importance of the Cuban revolution is that it showed that the only way to successfully stand up to imperialism in the final analysis was to liquidate the capitalist class and arm the people. The social transformation of Cuba in the early 1960s was exactly the kind that took place in Russia in 1917. The state nationalized basic industry and private agriculture, instituted a planned economy and created a monopoly on foreign trade.

The US ruling class correctly identified the character of events in Cuba in the early 1960s. That is why there was a nuclear confrontation. It did not want an extension of the Soviet economic system in the Western Hemisphere. These facts are understood by everybody in the Marxist movement and, on the other side of the barricade, the CIA and the State Department. Adolpho, Tony Cliff and Joseph Green agree with each other that the class nature of the Cuban state is no different than the Dominican Republic or Haiti. This is utter nonsense.

. . . The reason that they can believe this sort of nonsense is that their definition of capitalism differs radically from most Marxists. While we can agree with these comrades that the United States or Peru is a capitalist country, we see Cuba differently.

Until Cuban state industry is privatized, until you can buy shares in these industries, until investment decisions are made privately on the basis of profit rather than social need, until inheritance is permitted, until multinational corporations can buy and exploit Cuban land and resources, until—in other

words—there are capitalist property relations, it makes no sense to speak of Cuba as "capitalist."

Cuba today resembles the USSR under the NEP. In the blizzard of words coming from Joseph Green, I can not remember whether or not he characterized the Soviet Union under NEP as socialist or not. It hardly matters, to tell you the truth. I know that Adolpho regarded the NEP as a time in which socialism existed. The problem with Adolpho is that he places entirely too much emphasis on non-economic criteria. A visit of the Pope to Cuba is not proof of capitalism. The Soviet Union concluded a peace treaty with Hitler in 1939 and there were far more villainous characters that the USSR put the red carpet down for in this period. The key to defining Cuba is property ownership and for the most part, none of it is privately owned.

Louis Project

Joseph Green, LL09198, Sept. 17: Project's own criteria show Cuba is state-capitalist

[The LeninList moderators did not allow this message to appear until Sept. 21.—CV]

Project claims to be replying to the articles I have posted on the Lenin List, but he hasn't bother to examine the economic history of Cuba which is set forward there. If he had, he couldn't write the following in his latest reply to me (LL09173 Lou Project re LL09151 Joseph Green "Che vs. anti-revisionism—part two of two"):

- > *Until Cuban state industry is privatized,*
- > *until you can buy shares in these industries,*
- > *until investment decisions are made privately*
- > *on the basis of profit rather than social need,*
- > *until inheritance is permitted,*
- > *until multinational corporations can buy and*
- > *exploit Cuban land and resources,*
- > *until—in other words—there are capitalist property relations,*
- > *it makes no sense to speak of Cuba as 'capitalist'.*

Why are these the criteria for judging whether Cuba is state-capitalist? Project starts out with the preconceived idea that state-capitalism must resemble Western market capitalism right down to the stock market. It is interesting, however, that Mark's articles show that most of Project's conditions are already satisfied. Cuba already has already gone pretty far in the transformation from state capitalism towards private capitalism.

* Privatization is proceeding in the state industry. Mark's articles showed that the state enterprises in Cuba have been given so much autonomy that they compete with each other more and more like private firms. At the same time, state firms are being offered both to foreign capitalists and to groups of the Cuban elite who are allowed to turn these enterprises into so-called "sociedades anonimas" or corporations.

* More and more investment decisions are made on the basis of profit. Not only is there a growing private sector in

Cuba, but the state sector increasingly decides on the basis of profit. How else do the state enterprises make their decisions when granted autonomy? And on what basis does Project think that the privatized companies, the "sociedades anonimas," make their decisions?

* The bureaucrats and professional/technical types are able to provide educational opportunities and other advantages for their children so that they can keep their parent's privileged status.

* Multinational corporations can buy Cuban companies and exploit Cuban land and resources. The Cuban government is even giving special incentives to foreign firms to do so.

So most of Project's conditions are already met. Project insists that stock must be sold, however. Cuba must exactly resemble the West in every last detail, right down to a thriving local stock market, before Project will admit that there is any form of capitalism in Cuba. Why? Capitalism comes in various forms. For example, modern joint-stock companies hardly existed in Western capitalism until the latter 19th century, and were a major change from earlier capitalism. Even today, rich peasant farming in a capitalist countryside is not based on selling stock. . . .

Take Project's statement:

- > *Adolfo, Tony Cliff and Joseph Green agree with each other*
- > *that the class nature of the Cuban state is no different*
- > *than the Dominican Republic or Haiti. This is utter*
- > *nonsense.*

When you read something like this, you know that Project hasn't bothered to examine the views of any of his opponents, but simply equates them all. And, indeed, such an approach by Project to a serious issue is utter nonsense.

Project says that I equate Cuba with the Dominican Republic or Haiti. When have I ever said that these countries have exactly the same class relations in them? Never. But for Project, he doesn't have to examine my arguments. He just has a knee-jerk reaction, with which he replies to all critics.

In my view, Cuba has a different form of capitalism than that which exists in the Dominican Republic or Haiti. This is also clear in Mark's articles which specifically refer to the distinctions between state capitalism and private capitalism and study the process of transition between them. You can't study the process of transition between two things unless you think that they are different, now can you, Mr. Project? They are both capitalism, but they are different forms of capitalism.

—Joseph Green

Louis Project, Marxism-Int'l, September 26: Re: Castro embraces the state-capitalist model (part one of 3)

- >
- > *Let's review what socialism is, so as to judge whether the*
- > *policies of the 70s were bringing it closer. Socialism entails*

- > the abolition of the private ownership of all the means of
- > production and the direction of the economic system as a
- > whole by the working masses. Such control over the
- > economy goes beyond each group of workers running their
- > own particular factories, or peasants their individual or
- > collective farms. It means that each factory and farm is
- > subject to the direction of the working masses as a whole.

This is formal logic incarnate. A textbook definition of "socialism" is established that allows for no contradiction. "Capitalism" appears in many forms, from the radical democracy of the early months of the French Revolution to the extreme reactionary rule of big business under fascism. What unites all of these differing regimes is the basic mode of production, which is private ownership of the means of production for profit.

"Socialism" represents, by the same token, abolition of private ownership and the introduction of planning for the benefit of society as a whole. Under socialism, there can be bureaucratic privilege and poor planning, but it is socialism nonetheless. The use of the term "state capitalism" is simply an unscientific way to stigmatize regimes that do not live up to Joseph Green's textbook definition.

- > Building socialism requires working toward the elimination
- > of a separate management stratum. Society can only advance
- > toward socialism if the motivations necessary for disciplined
- > production can move beyond relying on direct financial
- > reward for oneself or one's workplace. Only in this way can
- > the new society work toward eliminating all class
- > distinctions and inequalities.

"Building socialism" is deeply problematic in single countries. Marx and Engels anticipated that socialist revolutions would sweep the industrialized nations of Europe in the late 1800s and become as dominant in the 20th century as capitalism was in the 19th. Instead, socialism arrived in underdeveloped, primarily agricultural countries. The intense pressure from imperialism, expressed through war and economic blockade, has created all sorts of distortions, from the deepest manifestations in the USSR during the 1930s to the slightest as on the small island of Cuba today. All this is elementary to real Marxists. But "anti-revisionists" like Joseph Green of Communist Void operate on the basis of the anti-Marxist notion of "socialism in one country." Lenin said that unless there were revolutions in Europe in the 1920s, the USSR was "doomed." The notion that Cuba, devoid of a skilled work-force, heavy industry, advanced telecommunications, large-scale automation, etc., could live up to the expectations of Joseph Green's tiny peripheral sect is highly unlikely. What is also unlikely is the possibility that Green could ever break through and win the following of the American working class, as the Cuban CP did. What would be more interesting is a critique of the last 25 years of his current, the Communist Void.

- > A more detailed look at the measures that encompassed the
- > economy in the 70s reveals they encompassed many of the

- > well-known features of capitalism. These market reforms
- > were based on the plans formulated by the Soviet revisionist
- > economist E.G.Liberman, which had influence in the Soviet
- > Union in the early 60s.

Ah, yes, Libermanism. Cuba experimented with Libermanism as a way to overcome inefficiencies. But Libermanism does not equal capitalism. I know that this is very difficult for someone as dogmatic as Green to figure out, but market mechanisms don't mean that much as long as there is no capitalist class.

What is interesting is that the imperialist bourgeoisie has no use for the term "state capitalism". You can pore through the pages of tomes by Henry Kissinger, Dean Rusk, Richard Helms et al, and you will never hear a single reference to "state capitalism." The bourgeoisie regards Cuba as socialist, just as it regarded the former USSR—with all of its Libermanism—as socialist. They are much shrewder than people like Joseph Green. They have no use for categories such as "state capitalism" since they recognize that unless there is a Cuban bourgeoisie, there is no capitalism to speak of.

They hated states like the former Soviet Union for the same reason that the Wall St. Journal hates the American trade unions, no matter how self-serving the bureaucracy that runs them and no matter how little democracy there is in them. The hatred is a class hatred. Unions, in their imperfect manner—to put it mildly—, defend the interests of working people. It is better to have democratic unions, like the 1938 Teamster Local in Minneapolis, than it is to have bureaucratic and corrupt unions, like the Detroit Teamsters local of Jimmy Hoffa in 1948. The more democratic a union there is and the less privileges the officials enjoy, the more motivation workers have to defend their unions. But they are organizations of the working class nonetheless.

Cuba, under the best of circumstances, could never have built "socialism" in the true Marxian sense. Socialism is a world-wide system. The fate of Cuba was intimately tied up with the fate of socialism world-wide. A profound revolutionary upsurge that took place after WWII receded in the 1970s and the net result has been the collapse of the USSR and the pending privatization of Chinese state industry. Despite the retreat, the Cuban government has fought like a tiger to preserve socialized property relations. That is why the imperialists are using biological warfare, setting off bombs in restaurants and blocking shipments of medicines that could save the life of sick children. . . .

-Louis Project

• **Louis Project, Marxism-Int'l, Sept. 26:
The Heritage Foundation on Cuban
"free market" experiments**

{This posting by Project consisted entirely of passages from the statement "Why the Cuban trade embargo should be maintained", taken from the Heritage Foundation web page. It claimed that Cuba wasn't serious about free-market reforms like China. Project added no comment to it at all.]

**Joseph Green, Marxism-Int'l, Sept. 27:
RE: The Heritage Foundation and Cuba**

It's not often that one sees "Marxists" who regard the right-wing Heritage Foundation as the fount of wisdom, but Louis Proyect is one of them. He refuses to study the actual class structure in Cuba and instead has posted the analysis of the Heritage Foundation that Cuba is socialist. I wouldn't be surprised if there are similar analyses from the John Birch Society or the Michigan Militia.

The Heritage Foundation is in a debate among the bourgeoisie over how to handle Cuba. Even the establishment journal "Foreign Affairs" carries some articles advocating that the U.S. bourgeoisie have relations with Castro and taking Cuban market reforms very seriously indeed. In Canada and Western Europe, the bourgeoisie does work with Castro, as Proyect himself has pointed out in a previous post. Indeed, Proyect says that Castro's policy is seeking "alliances" with these bourgeoisies. But in the U.S. the right-wing has dominated bourgeois policy on Cuba. U.S. policy towards Cuba has been savage and bloodthirsty, and naturally all progressive people are disgusted by it. But, when opposing U.S. aggression against Cuba, it is not necessary to agree with the Heritage Foundation's economic analysis, nor to line up behind the policy of the Canadian and West European bourgeoisie. On the contrary, if we want to support the Cuban workers, we must oppose both the right-wing and the liberal bourgeoisie. Proyect has lost that spirit of class struggle. He is correct that the economic analysis of "state capitalism" in the CV is fundamentally different from that given by both wings of the bourgeoisie, but this is the virtue not the sin of CV. I take Proyect's statement as being, unwittingly, high praise for Communist Voice from a bitter opponent. . . .

The Heritage Foundation is from that wing of the bourgeoisie that tends to view public schools, the income tax, and affirmative action as "socialist". It also regards socialism as tyranny and repressive government. Yet Proyect takes his analysis of socialism from the Heritage Foundation, right down to denigrating the issue of whether the working class rules in Cuba. Proyect takes a large state sector and a planning apparatus as the sign of socialism. He says nothing about whether the working class controls the planning. Proyect's view of socialism is benevolent despotism; he stakes everything on Castro-worship.

Actually, though, so long as the bureaucracy rules over the working class, the economy can not actually be run through social planning for the benefit of all. This can be seen in any serious economic study of the experience of the Cuban economy, and even in the statements of the Cuban regime itself. Planning continually breaks down and dissolves into anarchy. This is described in the articles in Communist Voice. To understand this, one has to ponder the structure of the Cuban economy; examine its private sector; examine its state sector; examine its agriculture; etc. This takes time—and our articles run into quite a few pages. But anyone who invests the effort into looking at this material and examining the evolution of Cuban economy may find that they are well rewarded by a deeper grasp of what state-capitalism is and of why bureaucratic planning is not socialism.

Contrary to what Proyect says or implies, we do not think that socialism arises all at once, pure and immaculate. On the contrary, we have been making an extensive study of the transition period to socialism and of Marx and Lenin's views on it. But the key point in the transition period is that the role of the working class in controlling the economy increases. This is not what is happening in Cuba. In Cuba, it is the technocrats and bureaucrats who rule, and the workers aren't even allowed to debate the main issues. As a result, planning in Cuba cannot overcome capitalist anarchy.

Proyect also tells us that he doesn't believe that socialism can succeed except when it embraces the whole world. If, for the sake of argument, we accept this view, then Cuba certainly isn't socialist. Proyect should then describe what type of social system he thinks can survive in a country while it is waiting for the whole world to go socialist. But Proyect wants it both ways: it isn't socialist until the whole world is socialist, but it is socialist right now because the Heritage Foundation says so.

In fact, Cuba is neither socialist, nor in the process of moving towards socialism. It is not ruled by the working class, but by a new bourgeois class. Socialism, or the transition towards socialism, is not a benevolent despotism. It is the independent act of the working class itself. You won't find that view in the Heritage Foundation, but that's the view that inspires the proletariat whenever it rises up in struggle. In the words of a song never sung in the Heritage Foundation:

"We want no condescending saviors,
To rule us from their judgement hall.
We workers ask not for their favours,
Let us consult for all!"

—Joseph Green

**Mark, Marxism-Int'l, Sept. 27:
Reply to L. Proyect's Posting of Sept. 26**

Louis Proyect has admitted that he cannot refute the facts that have been presented in my articles on Cuba which demonstrate the growth of the state-capitalist system there. So now he argues that the Marxist theory of socialism is irrelevant in deciding if Cuba is socialist. Marxism for Proyect is not the underlying principles contained in the works and actions of Marx and Engels, but whatever policy Castro happens to follow.

Thus Proyect is upset that in my article "Castro embraces the state-capitalist model", I raised that one should judge whether Cuba was moving toward socialism in the 1970s by whether or not it was moving toward social control of the means of production. I pointed out that "such control over the economy goes beyond each group of workers running their own particular factories, or peasants their individual or collective farms. It means that each factory and farm is subject to the direction of the working masses as a whole." This is part of the description of socialism by Marx and Engels. But Proyect dismisses it as mere "formal logic incarnate" and a "textbook definition of 'socialism'." Obviously Proyect considers it ridiculous to use Marxist goals to measure the

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