

Introduction

On July 7, 1990, a conference on "Socialist Upheaval and the U.S. Left" brought together some 800 people from the San Francisco Bay Area and from nearly all its left formations. Five guest speakers presented comments in the plenary sessions. In the morning, Linda Burnham (of *CrossRoads* magazine) and Leon Wofsy (University of California faculty) addressed the causes and consequences of the current upheaval. Manning Marable (author and professor), Barbara Ehrenreich (co-chair of Democratic Socialists of America), and Kendra Alexander (Northern California chair of the Communist Party) spoke in the evening on implications of the today's upheaval for the U.S. left. Their comments comprise this booklet.

The conference was the product of a left regroupment process that has been proceeding in the Bay Area and elsewhere for more than a year now. Under the impact of the crisis of socialism and the failure of the U.S. left to gain significant political initiative, several of the larger socialist formations and numerous independent leftists have been engaged in various, distinct processes of self-criticism and rethinking. Out of these processes emerged discussion groups including people from formerly opposed organizations as well as independents; forums and seminars marked by positive interaction; bilateral meetings between organizations; and even political "mixers" of a social nature.

The July 7, 1990 conference in Berkeley was the first attempt by advocates of such rethinking and regroupment to carry out a major, joint project. The conference organizing committee included people from the Communist Party of Northern California, Crossroads, Democratic Socialists of America, Frontline Political Organization, Global Exchange, Global Options, radio station KPFA, the National Committee for Independent Political Action (NCIPA), the National Guardian, North Star, the Women's Building, Berkeley Citizen Action, and the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. The organizing committee did not constitute a coalition, however, and its members functioned as individuals. Dozens of additional organizations co-sponsored the conference.

At the conference itself, people came from the above groups and several Trotskyist and other formations; there were also activists from trade unions, solidarity organizations, women's projects, the gay and lesbian movement,

and environmentalist groups. In sheer numbers, the gathering was a huge success. The 800 people who came were double the number expected; we underestimated how many had been waiting for a chance to analyze glasnost, perestroika, and related developments collectively and what they mean for our own struggles in the U.S.

Raising and collectivizing the level of discussion was the first goal of the conference. The second was to encourage the growth of unity on the left. The morning program took on general themes of today's upheaval – what's actually happening, what are its effects on the rest of the world, and what are the roots of the crisis as well as its theoretical implications? Linda Burnham and Leon Wofsy spoke; conference participants then went into small groups to discuss these general themes.

The afternoon workshops tackled specific areas or topics, such as Eastern Europe, Cuba, China, ethnic and national conflicts under socialism; liberation struggles in Asia, Southern Africa, Central America and the Middle East; domestic issues such as the labor and anti-racist movements in the light of socialist upheaval; and global issues such as Rethinking Marxism, the environment, women's oppression, and the dynamics of the post Cold War world. The evening included cultural relief, thanks to Barbara Dane, Wazir Peacock, and the San Francisco Mime Troop, and three speakers – Manning Marable, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Kendra Alexander – on the impact of the socialist crisis upon the struggle for peace and justice and the left in the U.S.

Throughout the day people from almost every kind of left political perspective put forth their ideas in a remarkably unsectarian atmosphere. Differences became intense at times and views ranged from the assertion that socialism hadn't failed because it had never really existed, to perceiving developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as disastrous; from saying perestroika would hurt Third World peoples, to seeing it as exclusively positive. The prevailing perspective seemed to be recognition of the need for new thinking, for fearless reconsideration of former assumptions. In the final plenary session people voted unanimously to have the conference organizing committee plan future gatherings for ongoing debate.

The July 7th Committee is now an ongoing group. Our first project is to make available this pamphlet, as well as a videotape of the evening plenary. In addition, we are planning a set of discussions in November based on "The Playground of U.S. Capitalism? The Political Economy of the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s," by Dick Walker and the Bay Area Study Group, soon to be published in *Fire in the Hearth: Volume 4 of The Year Left* by Verso. For 1991, a number of us have initiated a conference of leftists of color to be held in the Bay Area in the Spring.

For more information, or for additional copies of this pamphlet or of the videotape (\$15 each), please contact the July 7th Organizing Committee, P.O. Box 2809, Oakland, CA 94609.

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