

# REVOLUTION

SPRING 1988

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***Upholding Mao's Revolutionary Line:  
A Turning Point***

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*A Talk With Raymond Lotta*

***The United States and Mexico:  
Anatomy of Domination***  
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and the Emancipation of Women***

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GI Rebellion and Military  
Disintegration in Vietnam***  
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# **Commemorating a Major Struggle in the RCP, USA Upholding Mao's Revolutionary Line: A Turning Point**

*This winter marks a great anniversary in the history of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. It is ten years since the party's victorious struggle to uphold Mao's line and repudiate the revisionist coup-makers in China. It was a life-and-death struggle that saved and greatly strengthened the vanguard party for revolution in the U.S. It was the most important inner-party struggle to date in the RCP.*

*This article is reprinted from the Revolutionary Worker, No. 441 (1 February 1988).*

*In October 1976, a month after Mao's death, some top leaders in the Chinese Communist Party staged a coup,\* seizing control of the party and Chinese state, and went on to reverse the achievements and gains of the Chinese revolution and restore capitalism. This event was a tremendous setback for the proletariat internationally and represented one of the most crucial junctures in the history of the international communist movement. The struggle waged to understand, explain, and go forward in the aftermath of the events in China became a crucial turning point for this movement.*

*A year after the coup in China, in the winter of 1977-78, opportunists within the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA attempted to seize leadership of the party. Their ideological and political outlook was in unity with those who had seized power within the Chinese party. If they had won, these forces within the RCP, USA would have gutted the revolutionary essence of the party and succeeded in removing from the stage in this country the only organization capable of leading the proletariat in revolutionary struggle towards communism. This attempt to wreck the party was defeated and these counterrevolutionaries split*

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\* The coup was marked by the arrest of the "Gang of Four," Chiang Ching, Chang Chun-chiao, Wang Hung-wen, and Yao Wen-yuan, who had united closely with Mao in his struggle against the revisionists in China. On October 6, 1976 these four were seized and imprisoned and a campaign of slander was launched against them and the revolutionary line they upheld. In internationally publicized trials Chang Chun-chiao and Chiang Ching refused to renounce their revolutionary stand and opposition to the new Chinese rulers, while the other two did not hold firm in the face of attacks against them and ended up renouncing their previous stand.

from the party (quickly degenerating into insignificance). The great significance of the victory of the revolutionaries in the RCP is that in the line struggle — which was waged principally around cardinal questions related to carrying forward revolution in a socialist country — the RCP was able to lay the basis for crucial ideological, political, and organizational gains in the face of the setback in China. These key gains were expressed in the decisive theoretical contributions of the RCP's chairman, Bob Avakian.

### The Turning Point: What Was at Stake?

Mao Tsetung was the greatest revolutionary of our time. He stood with and led the Chinese masses in overthrowing reactionary rule and imperialist domination and in continuing the revolution as the masses themselves became the rulers of socialist China. The Chinese revolution had liberated one-quarter of humanity in a nation characterized by extreme poverty and backwardness that had been enforced for centuries by foreign domination and internal exploiters. Mao was guided by and continuously developed a vision of liberation which would accept nothing less than all-the-way revolution — shattering all exploitation and thoroughly rupturing with and transforming all existing relations and conditions — and for the whole world, not just for China.

This vision was expressed in the leadership given by Mao in the twists and turns of the Chinese revolution, which reached its greatest heights in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Initiated by Mao, the Cultural Revolution was a "revolution within a revolution," attacking the vexing problem: how to prevent revolution from being betrayed "from within," how to keep society moving in a revolutionary direction after the old, reactionary regime had been overthrown and the new, revolutionary regime had come to power.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was

... a mass revolutionary upheaval, initiated and inspired by... Mao Tsetung... against those in authority who sought to become the new party of order, restoring capitalism in the name of "socialism," using their revolutionary credentials as capital. The Cultural Revolution involved literally hundreds of millions of people in various forms and levels of political struggle and ideological debate over the direction of society and affairs of state, the problems of the world revolutionary struggle and the international communist movement. Barriers were broken down to areas formerly forbidden to the masses of people — science, philosophy, education, literature, and art. Putting self above the interests of the revolution, in China and the world,

was an outlook under attack and on the defensive and few were those who would openly utter such phrases as "my career." Through all of this, transformations were brought about in the major institutions in society and in the thinking of the masses of people, further revolutionizing them. (Bob Avakian, *For a Harvest of Dragons*, p. 111)

The Cultural Revolution burst forth in the 1960s, in the midst of a high tide of revolutionary struggle internationally. In this period there was an emergence of many new communist organizations and parties. Many of these based themselves on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and were in opposition to the revisionists of the CP in the Soviet Union.\*

The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA,† founded in 1975, was such an organization. It had its roots in the period of the '60s, and as Bob Avakian has stated,

it is no exaggeration to say that without the theory and line developed by Mao and the practice of the Chinese masses in carrying it out, especially through the Cultural Revolution, our party would not and could not have been founded when it was and on such a revolutionary basis. ("Second Party Congress Deepens Victory: Opening Remarks at Congress," *Revolution*, April/May 1978, p. 12)

One can understand why the coup in China, coming a month after Mao's death in 1976, was such a tremendous setback for the international struggle and the international communist movement. Not only had the inspiring and unprecedented advances achieved in the Chinese revolution been reversed, but China as the major base of ideological and material support for world revolution was gone.

This setback took on even greater significance when viewed in the context of the strategic developments in the world and the implications of this for revolutionary struggle worldwide. The RCP had analyzed that the basic underlying economic and political relations which had driven imperialism since the Second World War were becoming strained to the breaking point, and that the period ahead would increasingly be marked by major shocks and convulsions with things accelerating towards world war and un-

\* In the 1950s, leaders within the Soviet party had "revised" Marxist theory, using this as the theoretical basis to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union. Restoration of capitalism in a formerly socialist country was an unprecedented development in the history of the communist movement. This Soviet capitalist restoration, which sought to sweep along with it the entire world communist movement, was indeed an earthquake in that movement. Above all, it was Mao and the Chinese Communist Party who led the way in analyzing this development, standing firm against it, and leading the revolutionaries of the world forward in the face of it.

† The political and organizational center of the RCP at its founding in 1975 was the Revolutionary Union which was formed in 1968 in the San Francisco Bay Area and spread nationwide thereafter.

precedented opportunities for revolution worldwide, including within the U.S.

What was at stake was nothing less than this: would there be revolutionary parties which had prepared themselves and the revolutionary sections of the masses and would they be ready to seize these opportunities and turn them into major revolutionary advances for the proletariat on a world scale; or would revolutionaries compound the defeat in China and the setback it represented internationally by capitulating, going along with the line of the new Chinese rulers, or by becoming demoralized and just giving up on revolution, and in the process throw away the revolutionary possibilities in the period ahead?

### Rising to the Challenge

Even before the coup in China, the RCP had treated the death of Mao Tsetung as a great loss and in his memory had dedicated itself to living up to the lofty standards set by Mao and continuing forward, overcoming new obstacles and challenges, and advancing the struggle towards communism. In a speech given at a memorial meeting for Mao Tsetung in September 1976, before the coup, Bob Avakian struck a note of sober challenge and at the same time revolutionary optimism:

What is inevitable is that people will continue to fight back against their oppression and exploitation, that this system of capitalism is not here to stay, or eternal, that it only developed at a certain stage . . . and that the very development of capitalism . . . [has] drawn together as capitalism's gravedigger a mighty army from those who were scattered and separated . . .

So when they raise the question who will be Mao Tsetung's successors, the working class is ready with its answer: We will be Mao Tsetung's successors, in our millions and hundreds of millions, and we will continue the cause for which he fought and in which he led us and to which he devoted his entire life, until that great goal of eliminating exploitation and oppression and achieving communism has finally been achieved.

The coup in China brought to a head important differences in line and outlook which had been developing within the leadership of the RCP for some time. Forces who no longer upheld revolution, or upheld it only in name, had been factionalizing within the party, promoting their line and program. While never engaging in a frontal attack on the party's line, the influence of these members, some of whom were leaders in the party, had succeeded to an extent in imposing a conservative and a nonrevolutionary mark on the party's line and work among the masses. What characterized the line of these forces was their insistence on narrowing party work to day-to-day reform-type issues and

refusing to confront, or bring to the masses, the difficult questions and problems of how to carry forward revolutionary struggle in a country such as the U.S. They raised to a principle their refusal to educate and struggle with the proletariat around key international questions. Their world outlook had nothing in common with a genuine communist outlook that is characterized by its continuous struggle to understand the world in order to transform it, to end all exploitation and oppression. Their pragmatic worldview was defined by their rejection of revolutionary theory and in its place searching for easy formulas and short-term gains — gains defined by motivating people to act in their own narrow and selfish interests.

In the view of these revisionists in the party, their own outlook and narrow views were validated by the coup in China. After all, people with a reactionary, revisionist view like their own had come to power in China, and people with all those wild "idealist notions" about revolutionizing all of society, and the world, had been crushed! Their main approach to dealing with the questions surrounding the coup in China was to try and forestall any serious discussion on these events while organizing for their line outside of party channels.

For their part, the revolutionaries at the party center, led by Chairman Avakian, took a qualitatively different approach. This is explained by him in an interview a couple of years ago:

The restoration of capitalism in China, the seizure of power by the revisionists after Mao's death, was a tremendously discouraging thing for every revolutionary in the world. But what it did was force us to confront more deeply the problems and contradictions involved in carrying forward the revolution toward the goal of communism. That was a choice you had, either you would go more deeply into that and try to develop a more profound and all-around understanding of that and be able to go forward again on the basis of that, or else you would be defeated by it. ("Questions for These Times," *Revolution*, Winter-Spring, 1986, p. 58)

With this outlook the revolutionary center in the party issued a series of inner-party bulletins arming members with the seriousness and paramount importance of events in China and the line questions involved, and giving guidance to study around these questions.

After a period of study — and of intense struggle, involving increasing factionalism and violation of party principle by those who supported the revisionist coup in China — the question of what stand to take on the momentous events in China was battled out to a resolution at a meeting of the RCP's Central Committee ten years ago. At the Central Committee meeting Chairman Avakian submitted a paper which examined in-depth and all-sidedly the key line questions involved and the role of key figures in the Chinese Communist Party and put forward his analysis that the

wrong side had won in China and the reasons why this had happened.\*

The meeting itself was lengthy, exhaustive in its approach to struggling out the problems involved and arriving at a correct and all-sided understanding of the events in China. All members of the body were called on and encouraged to hold back nothing and say all they thought.

The struggle focused on Mao Tsetung and the Four and the capitalist roaders in power in China and the lines and programs they concentrated and gave leadership to. People had to draw on their understanding and view of revolution and a number of questions flowing from this to critically study and evaluate these crucial questions of line and program.

The meeting went through days of intensely sharp and wrenching struggle. At one point, when it became clear that their line was being defeated, the revisionists threatened to split the party. However, the revolutionaries on the Central Committee were not about to throw down their defense of Mao Tsetung's revolutionary line and their support for the role of the Four in order to preserve a party that would be rendered nonrevolutionary by such a compromise.

As revolutionary communists say, the vanguard is forged through struggle — and this struggle in the RCP was exactly that way. Rising to the challenge posed by revisionism required a leap in the ideological and political development of the party. During the period of study and struggle sharper clarity was achieved on the fundamental divergence between a revolutionary communist outlook and that of revisionism. Bob Avakian has explained this, in a concentrated and at the same time sweeping way, in the book *Bullets: From the Writings, Speeches, and Interviews of Bob Avakian*:

The goal of the revisionists is not to change the whole world, from bottom to top, but to rise to the top of the world as it is. Their aim is not to make the two radical ruptures† Marx and Engels spoke of in *The Communist Manifesto*... but to make some changes in form and appearance while leaving the essence unchanged. They want new faces, new forces in power — themselves — but no revolutionary overturning of all hitherto existing relations and conditions. They want a socialism, even a communism with no mass revolutionary upheaval, no overthrowing of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat, of the old by the new. In short, they want capitalism in the name of socialism and communism. (pp. 264-5)

\* Bob Avakian, "Revisionists Are Revisionists and Must Not Be Supported, Revolutionaries Are Revolutionaries and Must Be Supported," from *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1978).

† "Two radical ruptures" refers to Marx and Engels' statement that the communist revolution involves the radical rupture with all traditional property relations and all traditional ideas.

Rising to the challenge also required making a rupture with a view of revolution in which things go forward in a straight line and there are only advances and great gains, one after another, and never twists and turns or setbacks. A number of forces and groups internationally were so overcome by the tremendous defeat of the Chinese revolution that they were never able to overcome their demoralization and dropped away from the revolutionary struggle. They were unable to confront and deal with the fact that a socialist country like China, having gone through a protracted revolutionary struggle to seize power and having made unprecedented leaps in the revolutionizing of Chinese society after power had been seized, had been defeated and all of its achievements had been reversed.

In confronting this great setback it was necessary to deepen one's understanding of the revolutionary road, to base oneself on the difficult but liberating truth that

Things do not proceed in an unbroken straight line forward, but through spirals; they do not have a preordained course, but they do have identifiable fundamental contradictions and a motion that can be grasped, in all its complexity. Great leaps backward are possible... but great leaps forward are also possible... Thus, there are two possibilities, two futures that are posing themselves very directly and urgently before us and that are locked in acute conflict. (Bob Avakian, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, Ch. 8, p. 269)

In taking the stand that it did, the RCP had to go up against the tremendous credibility that the Communist Party of China held internationally. The Chinese revisionists who had taken over continued to uphold Mao in name and were trying to disguise themselves as the heirs to Mao. They were trying to cash in on the respect that Mao had from hundreds of millions of the oppressed throughout the world. The RCP was not a party in power in a socialist country, and it did not have other "credentials" that would impress those who view revolution as just another concern where what matters is how much "capital" one has accumulated — where the struggles and sacrifices of the oppressed are appropriated as such capital by opportunist leaders waving the banner of "revolution." So, in the view of such people, who was the RCP, USA to go up against the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, whoever they might be? On the basis of thinking like this, many groups unquestioningly went along with the new rulers in China. Other groups and parties, even large parties influenced greatly by Mao Tsetung, stood aside at the time and did not engage in the struggle, never taking a position on what had happened in China.

But the RCP argued that the size of a group or its influence at any given time had no bearing on its right and responsibility to take a clear-cut, principled stand on events in China. This had been a watershed event in the international communist movement, and as one of the RCP's internal bul-

letins guiding study on the question pointed out, "The struggle in China is a life-and-death question for the proletariat and has tremendous implications for the working class and its party in every country. *And the attitude and approach every party takes in understanding and evaluating the events in China will have much to do with determining whether or not that party remains a Marxist-Leninist party or degenerates into one kind of opportunism or another*" (emphasis added).

And this has been the case. No party or organization that has failed or refused to take a firm stand in opposition to the counterrevolutionary coup in China has been able to maintain its revolutionary bearings without wavering and without sooner or later going back on revolutionary principles and stands. Even where such groups have been involved in struggle against imperialism and reaction, they have not been able to carry this out consistently on the revolutionary road leading to socialism and the final victory of communism worldwide. Unless a revolutionary line wins out within such groups, they can only end up capitulating to imperialism and reaction, in one form or another.

### Ten Years Later

A very significant outcome of the struggle around the events in China was the struggle and rupturing with the outlook of viewing revolution from the point of view of "my country" outward. On one level it is clear that if the line of the new rulers in China had not been exposed by revolutionaries internationally and another, revolutionary communist, pole had not been planted and rallied around, it would be impossible for the world proletariat to make any real advances in this period in its struggle towards communism.

In the course of struggling over the socialist road and the problems that China faced as a backward country surrounded by imperialism, the RCP synthesized a deeper understanding that there are limitations as to how thoroughly the goals of communism could be achieved in one or a group of countries when much of the world was still dominated by imperialist economic and political relations. Crucial to radically rupturing with and transforming all relations and conditions is shattering the stranglehold of imperialist domination, slashing the thousands of threads of imperialism which bind the masses of people in the world in a matrix of exploitative and oppressive relations. Just as imperialism has integrated the whole world into one economic and political process, so the world revolution more than ever is an integrated process. Revolutionaries, while taking up the task of making revolution and building socialism in their own country, must proceed from the viewpoint of that whole world process in approaching and seeking to advance revolution.

In the period following the coup in China, the RCP joined with other parties and organizations who were continuing to uphold Mao Tsetung's revolutionary line in raising the banner of revolutionary communism and rallying forces

within the international communist movement around this banner. In this way a clear line of demarcation was drawn — between revolutionary communists and revisionists posing as "communists" — and on this basis new advances were made even in the face of the setbacks suffered with the revisionist coup in China. A very important achievement in this was the establishment of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), which represents a significant regrouping of revolutionary communist forces and is playing a crucial role in furthering the struggle to achieve a higher level of unity around key dividing-line questions within the international communist movement. On the basis of unity so far achieved by the RIM, as expressed in its *Declaration*, it is striving to support and influence revolutionary struggle throughout the world. In his book *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* Bob Avakian wrote that the formation of the RIM represents "... a real change in the equation of world relations — it represents a leap in the potential to confront and transform the world situation, including the possibility of actually preventing world war through revolution" (p. 10).

Through this process of deepening its grasp of proceeding first and above all from the point of view of the world arena and the overall interests of the world proletariat, the RCP, USA has deepened its understanding and enthusiastically taken on the responsibilities and implications of seizing state power and creating a revolutionary base area for world revolution in the U.S., one of the most powerful imperialist countries and one of the main bastions of oppression and exploitation in the world.

Positioning itself to really take on this responsibility has demanded that the party make important radical ruptures in its approach to revolution — in particular ruptures with economism, which reduces the class struggle to the economic arena and the day-to-day economic concerns of the workers and raises this above major political questions, including the most essential political question of all: the revolutionary struggle to seize power and transform all of society.

This economism has been deeply ingrained for many years in the international communist movement, especially in its approach to making revolution in imperialist countries. From the problem of how a revolutionary situation will develop in a country like the U.S. and one's view of the preparatory work leading up to that point; to what is the group in society that represents the most solid and reliable bedrock basis for revolution in such a country; to how the vanguard party must be organized and how it must play its leading role in relation to the revolutionary masses: In deepening and further developing a revolutionary line on these and other questions the party has had to break from years of tradition around some questions in the international communist movement.

As Bob Avakian has pointed out:

... it is ... a law of revolution, and especially of proletarian revolution, that in order for it to succeed in



any particular country, the struggle in that country and those leading it will have to depart from and even oppose certain particular conceptions or previous practices which have come to be invested with the stature of "established norms" in the revolutionary movement... because every revolution arises out of the concrete conditions (contradictions) in the country (and the world) at the time it is occurring, and every new revolution inevitably involves new questions, new contradictions to be resolved. (*Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, p. 312)

There has never been a revolution in an advanced imperialist country such as the U.S.\* While the general principles of Marxism developed up to this point through the experiences of the Russian and Chinese revolutions can and must be applied, there still remain many difficult contradictions and questions of revolutionary strategy in the political, military, and organizational spheres which must be solved not only in theory but in practice. The fact that the RCP took the correct stand at the decisive turning point brought about by the coup in China has opened the door to really confronting these problems of making revolution in a country like the U.S.

All of this is why we say that this party is different from any other party that exists or has existed in the U.S. There have been other revolutionary groups and parties in the U.S., and some have made very important contributions to the revolutionary struggle, but no other party in this country has been so firmly based on the principles of Marxism, as developed to their highest stage so far by Mao Tsetung, and no other party in this country has stood the test of upholding these principles, and deepening its ability to grasp and apply them, in the face of everything that has happened as a result of the counterrevolutionary coup in China and in the period since then. All of this underscores the significance of the two-line struggle in the RCP ten years ago and the reasons why that struggle is genuinely cause for commemoration and celebration. To put it simply: If that struggle had not been won, if the opposing line had triumphed in the RCP, this party would not exist today — or it would not exist as a revolutionary vanguard — and it would certainly not have made the advances it has, in theory and in practice as well, in coming to grips with what must be done to prepare for and carry out the struggle for the seizure of power in a country like the U.S. and to make the greatest possible contributions to the international communist movement.

Where are we ten years after?

The revolutionary banner of Mao Tsetung was picked up

\* Although Russia was an imperialist country in 1917, there are significant differences between its level of development and role in the world and that of the more highly integrated and developed imperialist world today and the U.S.'s major role within this system.

by many forces internationally, and in the face of the setback in China these forces have defended and struggled to further develop the science of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought as well as move towards a programmatic orientation of solving critical problems of proletarian revolution and on this basis further advancing that struggle. Clearly these achievements represent important gains in the face of the tremendous setback ten years ago. They are the basis of an international movement carrying forward the revolutionary struggle and strengthening its ability to confront the difficulties, and the opportunities, that are being ever more acutely posed by the developing world situation.

It is true that what characterizes the situation today is that the international communist movement is still lagging in its ability to respond to developments in the world and particularly to link up with revolutionary struggles wherever they may break out and bring its strength and influence to bear in a way which will have a decisive and strategic impact on the world. Yet in a more fundamental way what characterizes and influences events in the world today is the accelerating pace of events moving the world closer to the moment where all the contradictions holding the imperialist world together are stretched to the point of explosion, holding the danger of unprecedented destruction and the possibility of unprecedented revolutionary advances on a world scale, including the advance of the world revolutionary struggle that could prevent world war.

In this situation the possibility exists of making major qualitative leaps even beyond where things were at *before* the coup in China — to perhaps liberate even more of the world and the world's oppressed people.

The following two quotes from Bob Avakian both capture the tension between the difficulties and possibilities of this period and provide an orientation to confront them.

... the problem in this period is not that revolutionary possibilities may not arise but that they may not be seized — or may be thrown away. We must not be unprepared and must not leave the international proletariat unprepared for those great days in which decades are concentrated, and we must not repeat the historical error of sounding a retreat just when the opportunities no less than the difficulties are the greatest. (*For a Harvest of Dragons*, p. 153)

No one, that is no Marxist and least of all Mao Tsetung, ever told us that the struggle to achieve communism would be easy. But at the same time Mao Tsetung has told us — and taught us, in both word and deed — that nothing is hard in this world, *if we dare to scale the heights*. This is the strategic orientation we must stick to, basing ourselves on the understanding that Mao poetically and powerfully proclaimed, "Look you, the world is being turned upside down." ("Second Party Congress Deepens Victory," opening remarks at the Second Congress of the RCP, USA, *Revolution*, April/May, 1978, p. 12)

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# ***What's Behind Iran/Conragate?***

## ***A Talk With Raymond Lotta***

*The following interview was conducted in the early fall of 1987.*

*Raymond Lotta is a Marxist-Leninist political economist who writes on international relations, the current world economic crisis, and problems of the socialist transition period. His books include America in Decline: An Analysis of the Developments Toward War and Revolution, in the U.S. and World-wide, in the 1980s; The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist? The Question is Joined; and And Mao Makes Five. His articles have appeared in the Revolutionary Worker, Race and Class, and Research in Inequality and Social Conflict.*

**Question:** A little over a year ago, in the early fall of 1986, the Reagan administration really seemed almost invincible to many. Then in October 1986, when a Lebanese newspaper revealed that top Reagan aides had traveled to Iran to negotiate an arms deal, things began to suddenly unravel. And events since then have been unexpected and certainly interesting. I've got an overall question on what it all means, but the first question I want to ask is, why did this secret initiative by Reagan cause such a storm? Why did something that had been rumored and batted about months before, even by Jack Anderson in his columns, explode on the scene with such an impact? What led up to that? What were the factors that fueled the explosion?

Raymond Lotta: Well, it's true that this scandal seems to have come out of nowhere. There were some early warning signs of difficulties: the mid-term elections in the fall of 1986, when the Republicans lost control of the Senate, the Daniloff affair leading up to the Reykjavik Summit, and the Reykjavik Summit itself, all of which indicated that things were somewhat amiss, at least at some levels. But by and large Reagan seemed to be firmly in the saddle. And most important, there appeared to be a broad ruling-class consensus around the reactionary agenda that the ruling class has dubbed "resurgent America."

And then, like a lightning bolt, we have these embarrassing disclosures of the Iran dealings and the Contra connection, followed by a train of resignations and dismissals from the administration. Reagan is cut down from his mythic proportions. And this sends shock waves throughout the Western alliance.

The Tower Commission presented a certain assessment or analysis of what was going on. From their standpoint, or at least according to the official findings that were put forward, the issue was really a certain loss of control. A picture was painted of petty corruption, bureaucratic competition,

and rogue elephants. In the Commission's view, the problem was essentially one of management style. More specifically, it was suggested that Reagan was neither sufficiently involved in nor in control of policy decisions. This "loss of control" was compounded, according to the Commission, by some overzealous cowboys who got a bit too eager.

At the congressional hearings that took place in the spring and summer of 1987, we were basically treated to a cavalcade of revelations, titillations, sermons, and all kinds of deceptions. So the question is whether there is some rhyme or reason to all this, some logic underlying it.

To answer that, I think we have to understand Iran/Conragate as a very profound development, as a very, very important historical episode; and I think we also have to understand that the dust has by no means settled.

Objectively, Iran/Conragate resulted from two inter-related sets of contradictions. First, there are the strains and the difficulties, the high risks and the high stakes, associated with the repositioning for world war. The world economy and international political relations are very taut, very precarious. As Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, has emphasized, "we are already in a period now where . . . war could break out at any time and out of any particular so-called local conflict where the interests of the two sides, the two imperialist blocs, come directly and sharply into conflict."<sup>1</sup>

So the ruling class is trying to deal with some very sticky contradictions. But in trying to deal with those contradictions and in trying to take certain initiatives and angle for momentary advantage, the imperialists uncork new contradictions; they create new problems for themselves. The extensive use of covert actions is itself testimony to the delicate and tense situation that they face in the world.

The second, and very closely related, set of contradictions involves the debate and differences within the ruling class. These disagreements, I would think, revolve around two major types of questions. First, there are specific policy questions, such as Nicaragua and the Middle East. Second, there is debate and struggle around certain factors of institutional functioning. These are questions concerning the decisionmaking processes within the executive branch, interagency coordination and management, and the relation of covert actions to the gathering — through covert means — of intelligence. So I think Iran/Conragate involves two basic areas: policy disputes and some questions pertaining to institutional affairs.

But we should be very clear about what the scandal and the investigation represent. The revelations and the exposures, the hearings and the postmortems — these reflect neither the vitality of the system nor some bizarre tendency to self-flagellation that is somehow unique to the American body politic.

In fact, there are some very key questions that have not been fully thrashed out, and the hearings, the criminal investigations, and the shuffling of personnel within the administration are important arenas for resolving some of these problems. Certain sides have been taken, certain lines

***I think we have to understand Iran/Conragate as a very profound development, as a very, very important historical episode; and I think we also have to understand that the dust has by no means settled.***

have been drawn. At the same time, having pointed to the existence of such differences and the existence of particular problems, I think it's important to emphasize and to understand that these disagreements are not over the general program of resurgent America, a program that Reagan has presided over and come to symbolize, but are rather differences and disagreements over the methods for implementing it.

**Q: At the beginning of your response you touched on a few early signs, like the Reykjavik Summit and the Daniloff affair, that all was not well with the Reagan administration. But overall, what has been the scorecard, so to speak, of the Reagan team? How has it been implementing this program of resurgent America that you referred to?**

RL: I think it's undeniable that, from the standpoint of the interests of the ruling class, Reagan has accomplished some things. Notably, he's played an important role in restoring what is called American self-confidence and in helping to overcome this so-called Vietnam syndrome. The last seven years have seen the most massive military buildup in U.S. "peacetime" history. At certain points, the Reagan team was able to put the Soviet Union on the defensive. It carried out some low-risk, high-payoff actions in key regional theaters, for instance the invasion of Grenada. And the Reagan years have seen certain significant attempts to bolster the unity of will and unity of action of the Western alliance in relation to this general program of war preparation. Military spending in the NATO countries and Japan has increased. And, most recently and most dramatically, there has been unprecedented military cooperation outside of Europe — I'm speaking of the Persian Gulf maneuvers orchestrated by the U.S. and involving Western Europe and Japan. Still, the question of the unity of the alliance is a sticky one.

**Q: On the domestic front you can point to Reagan's short-term success in holding the economy together and his program of domestic repression.**

RL: The Reagan team was able to engineer a recovery of sorts from the 1980-81 recession, a perverse recovery, and was able to sustain some growth. But while one can point — from the standpoint of the ruling class — to those accomplishments, certain criticisms have been raised in certain quarters. For example, on international affairs criticisms have been raised by people like Brzezinski, even Kissinger, and other veterans of previous administrations. Some critical opinions have appeared in influential policy-oriented journals as well. Some of these criticisms seem to involve a view that the Reagan team's Middle Eastern policy is incoherent. There are also questions about the way in which the Star Wars program is being pursued: while there is agreement on the basic orientation of strengthening the first-strike nuclear capability of the U.S., some, like Brzezinski, feel that perhaps Reagan has put too many eggs in the basket of Star Wars and has elevated it into a grand strategy, when it can't become fully operational in the time frame and in the sense that is being suggested. (Some specialists in the field of Soviet military capabilities, like David Holloway, have even suggested that the Star Wars program may invite or accelerate more cost-effective Soviet moves to counter such a program, with perhaps more short- or medium-term operational benefits for the Soviets.\*)

There is some concern about the economy as well. The military buildup and the means to finance it have run up enormous costs and caused incredible distortions with destabilizing consequences.† And then of course there is the whole issue of the Third World debt crisis and how to manage it. This debt crisis is a time bomb ticking away. So perhaps there are ruling-class forces objecting to a certain "inattentiveness" on the part of the administration to those aspects of the overall program of strengthening the hand of the Western alliance for confrontation with the Soviet bloc.

**Q: But some of these problems are long-standing. Why should they come to a head when they did, in such a dramatic fashion, and over particular U.S. initiatives in Iran and Nicaragua?**

RL: I think this is the point. It's a very dicey situation that the imperialists face. Every move, every countermove, every regional initiative — all of these things can have very severe and serious consequences for them if they result in blunders, if they result in setbacks, if they result in short-term defeats. So for that reason, any of these moves is going to be subject to very intense scrutiny and evaluated in view of the general program of moving towards confrontation with the Soviet Union.

\*On Soviet necessities and capabilities with respect to Star Wars, see Raymond Lotta, "Star Wars and the Soviet Economy," *Revolutionary Worker* No. 393 (16 February 1987).

†This was before the stock market shock of October 19, 1987 — ed.

**Q: Maybe we should look at the question of the precipitating move, which was really the famous trip to Iran with the cake/Bible. If you think about it, there were two extremely high-level operatives in the administration going with a very elaborate, and uncharacteristic, personal message from Reagan to Khomeini. You would think that it was a major initiative.**

RL: At the outset, it's necessary to emphasize that while we have some sense of the issues in dispute, we can really only speculate about the positions that may have been taken and advanced and some of the differences over the specific aspects of these policies. But I do think we have something to go on. I agree with you completely that this Iran initiative was obviously a big thing. I mean it does say something about the functioning of the executive branch when you have Lt. Col. Oliver North and Robert McFarlane, the former National Security Adviser, on the scene in Iran.

So was there anything to this Iran initiative? I think there was a certain logic to it. And Reagan is not totally dissembling when he says that there were attempts and efforts made to seek out what are described as moderates. I think that the Iran initiative can be seen as working on three distinct but interrelated levels. One, the U.S. imperialists were probing and feeling about to increase their leverage in the Iranian government, increase their ability to foster divisions. In short, they wanted to use the sale and transfer of arms to put themselves in a stronger position — not just for the post-Khomeini period but even right now. I believe that the U.S. hoped to use these arms sales to strengthen its influence in Iran, without at the same time allowing these arms, at least the volume shipped, to lead to an Iranian victory or decisive advantage in the Iran-Iraq war. So I think that was one aspect of what they were trying to do.

It's pretty clear that, despite its rhetoric, the regime in Iran tilts towards the West and that the U.S., for a number of reasons, sees the necessity of working with and through this regime. But another question in terms of what might have been going on with the Iran initiative, and this is something that is not entirely clear and about which we can only

***It's a very dicey situation that the imperialists face. Every move, every countermove, every regional initiative — all of these things can have very severe and serious consequences for them if they result in blunders, if they result in setbacks, if they result in short-term defeats.***

speculate, is whether the U.S. may have been trying to force an even more favorable realignment within the regime. It's possible that the U.S. was trying to solidify a more pro-U.S. consensus within the regime. And this might have been linked to efforts to engineer some form of coup. The Palestinian scholar Edward Said has suggested this.<sup>2</sup> But if such moves were part of what was going on, and again we have no concrete evidence, they most likely would have involved forces centrally positioned in the regime, who knows, maybe even including Khomeini.

The third aspect of the Iran initiative did involve, it seems fairly clear, securing the release of some hostages. But I think this flowed mainly from the need to get some very high-level CIA operatives out of the hands of certain people in the Middle East, and perhaps secondarily it involved some questions of the "prestige" of U.S. imperialism as a world power — its ability to get its hostages freed.

**Q: In a certain sense Reagan himself laid out some of the crucial geostrategic interests the U.S. faces in bringing Iran back more firmly into its bloc. So why should there be such objection to this in the ruling class itself? It's obviously in their interests. And by sending Khomeini a personally inscribed Bible, Reagan himself pointed out the ideological convergence between the brutal fundamentalism of Khomeini and the brutal fundamentalism that Reagan has sponsored in this country. Just one other thing. McFarlane compared the Iran initiative to Kissinger's China opening. I don't think this is correct, but perhaps it reflects that they saw themselves as attempting a grand strategic stroke. So again, why should ruling-class forces object to that? Why was there such an uproar over this seemingly "well-meaning" initiative?**

**RL:** It seems there was general agreement within the administration and within the ruling class as a whole on the need to seek openings in Iran. But I think there were qualms over this particular initiative because (a) it potentially may have tipped the scales too much in favor of the Iranian government in the Iran-Iraq war and (b) some of the forces they were seeking out as allies, or identifying as potential allies, might not have been all that reliable.

Another area of concern, and this has come to light more recently, was that seeking this kind of opening in Iran — while it was intended to fortify the regional position of the West in the Middle East — may have had the more short-term effect of damaging the alliances with, and even undermining, some of the other regimes in the area, notably Saudi Arabia and Egypt. I believe there was concern that the continuation of the Gulf war together with this initiative might have created some tensions within and put some pressures on those governments.

And finally, there was some apprehension within the U.S. ruling class that the upshot of all this might have been to create new opportunities for the Soviets in the Persian

Gulf and the Middle East. (And in fact, these latter two concerns have actually surfaced more explicitly during the last two months and were important factors behind the U.S. decision to reflag Kuwaiti tankers.) So that was kind of how this thing was playing itself out. Again, we don't have exact confirmation of the lines of dispute on this, but I think that while there was agreement to seek out these openings, there was also concern over how all of this was being prosecuted and what its immediate fallout would be, especially for the "stability" of the region.

**Q: Certainly something that can be drawn from the experience of the demise of the Carter administration and now the problems encountered by the Reagan administration is the incredible importance of the Persian Gulf region to the strategic concerns of the U.S. imperialists, the serious difficulties the U.S. imperialists face in trying to hold all their disparate interests together there, and how cracks and fissures can rapidly open up for both inroads by their Soviet rivals and revolutionary initiatives as well.**

**But continuing in this area of policy disputes, from the content of the hearings it seems that there's some discord and wrangling going on in their ranks over Nicaragua as well. Are there disagreements over this? And what exactly are the terms of this?**

**RL:** I think the debate over Nicaragua is similar to what we discussed concerning Iran. Essentially, there's basic unity within the ruling class that the U.S. cannot tolerate another pro-Soviet regime in the Western hemisphere; it can't tolerate an expanding Soviet base of operations or sphere of influence in the Western hemisphere. And there's also unity that it's necessary to weaken and to destabilize the Sandinista regime.

All this, in the eyes of the ruling class, calls for a multipronged approach. It means ringing Nicaragua with military encampments, a major reason for the militarization of Honduras. It means putting economic and political pressure on the Sandinista regime, making it more difficult for the regime to sustain popular support. I think there's also unity within the ruling class in assessing the stakes of the situation. Again, it's very dicey: while such a regime cannot be tolerated, it's also the case that the U.S. can't afford to get bogged down in a prolonged military action in Nicaragua, and Central America in general, in the context of international contention with the Soviet Union. So I think those broad outlines and contours of policy define a certain consensus within the leading circles of the ruling class.

On the other hand, there does seem to be some dispute over how exactly to go at the Sandinista regime. And, while we can't say for sure that there are two clearly defined policy poles as to how to deal with the Nicaraguan government, there do seem to be two general approaches. First, there seems to be a view, which might be called the political transition model — one can take Mozambique as a possible

example — of applying economic, political, and military pressure as part of a long-term effort to force a more pro-Western tilt to a regime and to force the incorporation of pro-Western, anticommunist elements into that regime.

**Q:** But not necessarily to overthrow the regime itself?

RL: Not to directly overthrow it, but to create the conditions whereby further penetration becomes possible, leading either to a direct military takeover or to further internal disintegration and fragmentation of the pro-Soviet forces. So I think this is one view. And that view carries with it the recognition of the need for military pressure — which explains, in part, the on-again, off-again approach to the Contras. Even from this viewpoint, the U.S. cannot afford to disband a pro-American military force in the region. This “political transition” model has always figured as one possible avenue for dealing with the Sandinista regime. Aspects of this approach are embodied, at least in part, in the Arias peace plan.

The other approach — and I have to point out that these are not so completely unrelated or divorced from one another — sees the Contra operations as a direct prelude to, if not a pretext for, direct U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. In other words, the Contras are seen as a kind of advance contingent for the direct intrusion of U.S. military strength.

**Q:** And they're an element that can cause a provocation which could be the pretext for a U.S. invasion.

RL: Precisely. In other words, a retaliatory raid by the Nicaraguan government could be construed, as we've seen over the past few years, as an incursion into a neighboring country, and that, in turn, could become the stuff of an international incident — prompting a direct U.S. invasion.

So I think one can identify two different approaches. In some ways these are variations on the same themes; in other ways they carry with them different implications in terms of immediate military and logistical support for various Contra operations. Now it is possible — and this can only be offered up as creative guesswork — but it is possible that the Reagan team, operating according to this second model, had developed a plan for military action in the short run — military action up to and including a full-scale invasion of Nicaragua. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Miami Herald* carried stories — I believe in late July 1987 — which disclosed that the National Security Council and North had, under their direct control, a group of elite fighting forces, U.S. fighting forces, that were engaged in direct combat with the Sandinistas — in Nicaragua. So it's possible, it's very possible, that the Reagan team saw an invasion as being imminent.

**Q:** You're saying that the Reagan team may have been planning an imminent invasion?

*The scandal may have been deliberately provoked as a means of staying the Reagan team's hand in Nicaragua in order to prevent what was viewed in some circles as a precipitant of wider military action, and to derail a plan that was perhaps seen by some as having fiasco written all over it.*

RL: Right. They may have seen the viability and tenability of an invasion in the near term. I think this is something for us to seriously consider. It may also mean that the scandal, if you want to call it that, was deliberately provoked, so to speak, as a means of staying the Reagan team's hand in order to prevent what was viewed in some circles as a precipitant of wider military action and to derail a plan that was perhaps seen by some as having fiasco written all over it. This may have been a big part of the scandal.

**Q:** So you're arguing that the lines of demarcation were not support versus nonsupport for the Contras — in fact there seems to be some unity around not abandoning or disbanding that operation in any case. Instead, the debate appears to have been over a more dramatic near-term move versus a more protracted view of what was going to be necessary.

RL: Right, that's a reasonable description. I also think that were an invasion to take place, the optimistic projections of the planners saw it as being a lightning strike, as being in some respects a surgical operation that would result in the fairly short-term toppling of the Sandinistas. And I think that was something that was a matter of grave concern to others, who saw it more as a reckless gamble, as a gamble that would not only destabilize the surrounding governments and perhaps other regimes in Central America but one that might also have very negative results in terms of the U.S.'s positioning vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

**Q:** I think there's room for dispute as to whether the United States could accomplish a short-term, decisive victory over the Sandinistas.

RL: Right, that's exactly the point. In all likelihood, direct U.S. military action, were it to happen, would not be a Grenada-like affair; it would be a war and it would not be

something that could be fought in an enclave fashion, as was the case in the early stages of the Vietnam War. So it was a very, very risky proposition — or is a very, very risky proposition — and one that's cause for great consternation in the ruling class.

I think there's something else that's involved in the Nicaraguan issue, beyond the question of the military posture toward the regime. It has to do with the Reagan team's approach to Nicaragua and how this relates to the general situation in the Western hemisphere. There may have been high-level concern that the Reagan team was too wholly preoccupied with the question of Nicaragua, absorbed with it to the exclusion — obviously not to the absolute exclusion — but absorbed with it to an extent that may have lessened U.S. preparedness for dealing with other hemispheric issues. In particular, there seems to have been some concern that the Reagan team was not paying enough attention to the question of the potential for economic collapse or social upheaval in Mexico and to the larger implications of the debt crisis in Latin America as a whole.

On this matter of the preoccupation of the Reagan team with Nicaragua, there's the joke that goes around Washington that Reagan might not have known anything else, but he did know just about every member of the Contra fighting forces by name. And he had made those statements about how he would make the Sandinistas "cry uncle." Not that there's anything contrary to the interests of the ruling class in saying those things, but was there perhaps a too single-minded obsession with the Sandinistas?

**Q: Let me pose what I hope might be a provocative question. Really since 1979, but then developing and deepening it in the first few years of the '80s, the RCP has predicated its analysis on the understanding that the rivalry between the imperialist blocs headed by the U.S. and the Soviet Union is the principal contradiction or the overall determining factor, if you will, in the political affairs of the day. And yet, we see the Reagan administration come to the major crisis of its term in office over what seem to be contradictions in two Third World theaters. So how do you see the relationship between the U.S.-Soviet rivalry and this Iran/Contragate crisis? And a secondary element of the question is whether specific questions over U.S.-Soviet policy entered into the whole eruption of this affair as well?**

RL: There's been ample analysis produced by the RCP showing that at present the most vexing problem before the U.S. imperialist ruling class and the imperialist ruling classes of the world, and the most defining feature of the current situation, is the antagonisms between the two rival imperialist blocs. I think there's essential unity within the ruling class that this is a contradiction that can only be resolved through war against the other bloc, that such a war can and must be won, and that this is a question of sooner

rather than later. This is the objective contradiction that has to be resolved if either of the two imperialist blocs is to surmount the various problems and hurdles in the way of overcoming the many and the multidimensional crises that they face. And this assessment is a stark reminder of just how dangerous these times are.

But having said all that, it's very important to note that the Third World remains the site of tremendous upheaval, upsurge, and insurgency. The Third World is still very much the center for various struggles against oppression and exploitation. In Azania, South Korea, and Haiti mass struggles pummel reaction. In Peru the armed struggle led by a Maoist party continues to gain strength. And at the same time, the Third World is a focal point of contention between the two imperialist blocs, and their moves and counter-moves vis-à-vis one another there play a pivotal role in their positioning for a global military confrontation.

So this understanding and analysis of the centrality of the contradiction between the two imperialist blocs by no means suggests that the Third World has somehow dropped out of the equation or is only a matter of concern to the two imperialist blocs in relation to their strategic parrying and blocking in getting ready for showdown. The deepest needs of empire, of internationalized accumulation, critically involve control over the Third World.\*

I think the fact that so much of this controversy turned on the various initiatives pursued by the Reagan team toward Iran and Nicaragua, and the problems it faced in pursuing them, can't be divorced from the so-called Reagan Doctrine of rolling back Soviet influence in the Third World, of undertaking various levels of intervention, meddling, subversion, and sabotage in numerous Third World countries. All that tells us something about how these different contradictions are interlocked and interacting with one another.

I want to return to Bob Avakian's interview, "Questions for These Times," where he spoke directly to some of the ways that regional concerns, or contention over particular hotspots, intersect with the imperialists' larger global strategizing — particularly at a moment in history when, as we discussed earlier, any of these local conflicts could escalate into world war:

The point is, when I speak of a scenario where there's a move and then a countermove and then they're in each other's face, that serves to indicate that there isn't much room for maneuver on the part of the one side or the other. The rival blocs don't have much room to maneuver before they are directly up against each other. Now sometimes it's possible to be fooled by the appearance of things, ironically exactly because there is so little maneuvering room. What I mean by this is that because they don't have much maneuvering room sometimes they deliberately hold back from making

\*This is a point that is extensively addressed in *America in Decline*.

a particular move because if they do make that move it will start the process going which, with only one or two more steps, will lead directly to such a conflict.<sup>3</sup>

This speaks directly to the point I was making earlier about why some ruling-class forces may have been gravely concerned about a possible U.S. invasion of Nicaragua, and more generally about some of the concerns evidenced during the course of the Iran/Contra crisis.

When we step back and look at the Iran and Nicaragua situations and some of the criticisms that have been voiced about administration policies, I believe that a major question and probable cause of worry within the ruling class is how well the Reagan team has been juggling subregional interests in relation to regional interests (for instance, the relation between the Persian Gulf and the general situation in the Middle East, or the relation between managing things in Central America and hemispheric issues) and also how well they've been juggling regional interests in relation to global strategic interests. This is clearly an issue of concern, if not contention, within the ruling class.

There is the question of how the U.S. imperialists weigh the acceptable and necessary levels of military risk and military action in those particular regions and how that relates to generalized military conflict with the Soviet Union — that is, the relation between risks on a military level in any given area of the world and more generalized military conflict. Then there's the question of the relationship between the use of force and the use of diplomacy in particular regions, and how that too dovetails with larger global strategic concerns. And finally, there's a great deal of concern within the ruling class over the problem of preparing for multiple or simultaneous crises, including armed conflicts, in different regional theaters — and that too has military and political implications.

So these are some of the ways in which questions and issues pertaining to the handling of insurgencies in the Third World, unfriendly governments in the Third World, and rocky and turbulent situations in the Third World interact with the larger strategic matrix of factors that they face. The bottom line for the U.S. imperialists is this: how can they both hold their empire together and put themselves in the best position for an all-out confrontation with the Soviet Union. And handling that contradiction, juggling these regional and global factors, is a problem that bristles with the potential for debacles and for triggering that all-out confrontation with the Soviet Union.

**Q: Getting to the second part of the question, were there differences over the handling of U.S.-Soviet relations specifically? You mentioned the Daniloff affair and the Reykjavik Summit earlier as perhaps having fed into the eruption of this particular crisis.**

RL: As I indicated, U.S.-Soviet rivalry provides the

backdrop and the basis for understanding these other questions. But as to whether particular aspects of the U.S. posture toward the Soviet Union were really at the heart of Iran/Contra, this is very hard to determine. Yes, Reykjavik obviously sprung U.S.-Soviet relations onto the political landscape in a way that was not the case before and highlighted some problems in the way in which the Reagan team was handling U.S.-Soviet relations. But there is very little evidence to suggest that U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union was, or is, at the heart of the scandal and the debate that has taken place, although all the hubbub coming off of Reykjavik should tell us that it was certainly an element of the debate.

At this point, it seems as though the major differences within the ruling class focus on questions related to policies and activities in the Third World. Now, of course, this rather clearly involves U.S.-Soviet relations, since the clashing interests of these two imperialist powers get played out very sharply in the Third World.

But getting back to Reykjavik itself, there were probably two areas of concern with respect to how things were being handled by the Reagan team. First, it has been suggested that the administration was going over the heads of its NATO allies at this summit. It hadn't sufficiently consulted them. This caused a lot of confusion and resentment, especially since American nuclear weapons, and America's willingness to use them in defense of Western Europe, are in some ways the glue of the Western alliance. Second, the Reagan team was criticized from just about every quarter for its lack of preparation in going into the summit. Reagan's performance was a real embarrassment, and the Soviets scored some propaganda points.

As I mentioned, there is general unity within the ruling class about what time it is in the world, about what the needs and necessities are. I feel that what's principally facing the U.S. ruling class in terms of U.S.-Soviet relations is the question of how to deal with a changing, evolving situation in the Soviet Union and a somewhat more vigorous and aggressive international offensive on the part of the Soviet Union — politically, militarily, and economically.

**Q: And even ideologically.**

RL: And ideologically as well, right. The Soviet Union is showing the world a new sort of a profile — the *glasnost*. But this not just a clever public relations ploy. There are obviously some new realities that exist in the Soviet Union, and there is the question of how the U.S. should respond to those new realities. I'm talking about the fact that the leadership succession crisis seems to have been resolved in the Soviet Union, at least for the near term. There are also efforts underway to revitalize the Soviet economy and overcome certain aspects of crisis. This reorganization and restructuring is very much tied to efforts to further rationalize and integrate the Soviet-led COMECON economic alliance, in part on the basis of deeper linkages with the



world market. None of these measures can be dissociated from the Soviet Union's general need to increase its technological and economic capabilities in order to increase its military potential to carry through with its version of space offense and space defense.

So I think the question that the ruling class in this country is debating is how to probe and, at the same time, deal with the fact that the Soviets have clearly gained some initiative in international relations.

**Q: So in summation, it seems that things came to a head over regional contradictions that the United States was trying to deal with — specifically in Iran and Central America — and their relationship to the U.S.'s more overall interests. Earlier, you said that the crisis had been triggered by both policy differences and differences over institutional functioning. What are the institutional questions that are under dispute or up for resolution?**

RL: I think some of the central institutional issues involved in this debate and scandal turn on what is viewed by some analysts, people like Brzezinski and Kissinger, for instance, as excessive fragmentation and decentralization in the decision-making processes of the executive branch and some downgrading of the National Security Council or the National Security Advisor. Some in ruling circles apparently feel that the various policy strands — military and economic — have not been woven together as perhaps they should; and that, in turn, touches on the whole way in which various agencies are being coordinated and managed. So that, it seems, is one range of issues.

Another area of concern involves intelligence. There may be a criticism that the planning and evaluation of the risks inherent in various covert actions were inadequate. As I indicated earlier, I think that there was some concern that covert actions were being unduly combined with the gathering of intelligence by covert means. I also think there was — and is — some worry that intelligence has been unduly biased and tailored towards justifying certain policy initiatives rather than providing policy makers and policy executors with a full body of knowledge with which to act.

There may also be some sentiment that the Reagan team had cut itself off too much from what has been described as the "institutional memory" — that is, the expertise and the experts from different levels of government and from previous administrations. Another focus of concern is whether the policy makers and high-ranking officials, for instance people attached to the National Security Council, were tending too much to the details of certain policy initiatives — involving everything from bribery to gunrunning — and not enough to the more general contours of policy evaluation and formulation. Any administration, particularly at this juncture of history, must be able to act quickly on every level, especially the military level. But it must do so on the basis of the most informed judgement.

So those seem to me to be some of the institutional questions that were tied into this controversy.

**Q: Certainly a major motif, if not the major motif of the congressional hearings was exactly these institutional issues — they were phrasing it as checks and balances.**

RL: On the question of checks and balances, Bob Avakian put it very succinctly and very powerfully when he said that the so-called three branches of government — the executive, the legislative, and the judicial — are part of the same tree, and that tree is the system of global exploitation. That really cuts to the quick of the myth of checks and balances.

The conduct of these hearings should teach us much about this myth and its actual substance. First of all, these hearings had their crude, farcical quality. Representative Lee Hamilton, who played a very leading and instrumental role in convening and overseeing these hearings, bragged, or "proudly acknowledged" if you will, that in his capacity as a member of the congressional oversight committee dealing with covert actions he approved 90 percent of the requests for such actions coming from the executive branch. It's also interesting that the chief investigator on the Senate staff in these hearings was one Thomas Polgar, who happened to be the CIA station chief in Vietnam when Saigon fell. Another investigator attached to the Senate staff involved with these hearings was Joel Lisker, who worked with none other than Oliver North in 1985 in attempting to shuttle aid to the Contras.

**Q: So you're in good hands with all-state.**

RL: All this was no "travesty of justice," but rather a reflection of underlying realities. There are three basic points that should be made about these so-called checks and balances. First, there is a cohesiveness and a unity to institutionalized political power in general and to political power in this imperialist society in particular. We're dealing with a series of highly centralized hierarchies and bureaucracies. But the imperialist state apparatus is a structure of structures, a network of networks, that derives its internal unity from the production relations of society. It's very interesting that the imperialist affairs of state never ceased being carried out and attended to, even when they were under intense scrutiny during these hearings. In fact, the administration made a major, and provocative, military push in the Persian Gulf right in the midst of these hearings.

The second point is that the fulcrum of this political power is not Congress, nor some special, unique relationship between Congress and the executive branch. It is the executive branch which is the locus of the important and key decision making; this is the ruling team of the ruling class.

***Behind all the parliamentary pieties and the so-called constitutional constraints lies a vast and ugly network of organized violence.***

**Q: So the idea that the heart of the Iran/Contra affair was some sort of "secret junta" or "illegal government within the government," as some have put it, is wrong?**

RL: Well, this is a complicated issue. To begin with, the ruling class has always made use of shadowy, irregular, and seemingly parallel power networks to "get things done" under certain conditions. But there is a more specific history to the existence of so vast an apparatus of covert terror. And that has to do with the emergence of the United States as the top-dog imperialist after World War 2 and the fact that it would be "the policeman of the world." Dirty tricks, dirty operations, and dirty wars were, and remain, a basic method of safeguarding Pax Americana, especially in the Third World. And whether it's Iran in 1953 or Nicaragua in 1986, it's the CIA that has been at the core of these operations, with the National Security Council playing a pivotal initiating and "watchdog" role. And given today's volatile and dangerous world situation, hidden commitments, covert actions, and, yes, the principle of "plausible deniability" are that much more the order of the day...and have that much more potential to backfire.

But it is true that during the congressional hearings there was a lot of talk about people breaking the law and operations getting out of control. This became a big deal. So what was this really signifying? I think the Reagan team was really being criticized not for breaking the law but for breaking the rules. In other words, it was bypassing the established and agreed-upon procedures by which covert actions are reviewed and evaluated by congressional oversight committees. Now if these operations had actually succeeded, this wouldn't have been a big sin. But things were not going well in Nicaragua and were showing no sign of improving. Yet administration officials and operatives were pushing harder and harder, scheming, lying, diverting funds, and so on. No one in Congress was against covert actions — how many times were we reminded of that during the hearings? It was just that things were not going well, not subject to informed reevaluation, and in that sense getting out of hand. And then there were the "jolting revelations" about dealings with Iran. So these operations finally got reined in. In effect, major policy differences over Nicaragua and Iran were coming to a head and getting debated out over the question of covert operations and procedures.

And this brings us to the third point that has to be em-

phasized and that one could gain some insights into, or at least a glimpse of, through the course of these hearings. Behind all the parliamentary pieties and the so-called constitutional constraints lies a vast and ugly network of organized violence. Maybe we could visualize this as a kind of a carousel, like the one on *Let's Make a Deal*. We can see, on the one hand, the politicians holding forth, politely exchanging their views, holding press conferences, orating, issuing reports. We can see visits of foreign dignitaries and such statesmen being welcomed at the White House. And then this idyllic scene swivels around and what do we see, what is revealed? We see political operatives, arms merchants, secret armies, death squads, assassination teams, and logistical support systems under the direct guidance of the National Security Council and the CIA. We can look at Oliver North's so-called "Operation Democracy." Who was involved in Operation Democracy? There was the Vietnam connection: General John Singlaub, who was the on-site commander of Operation Phoenix, which was a program to exterminate anywhere from 20,000 to 60,000 NLF ("Vietcong") cadre during the war in Vietnam. We see anti-Castro Cubans, involved historically in various assassination attempts and sabotage. And we see operatives from the World Anti-Communist League, issuing forth from places like South Korea and Taiwan and staffed with many ex-Nazis.

**Q: I think one other thing that has to be added is the work the Christic Institute has done exposing the financial links of all this to the international drug trade, and the ways in which the CIA has overseen the divvying up of certain drug turf areas to finance different operations.**

RL: Maybe we can describe these as "off-shore" drug and arms enterprises under the coordination and guidance of the CIA.

But back for a minute to this notion of checks and balances: it is also used, obviously, to promote many an illusion and myth of democracy. During the hearings we heard endless rhetoric from the likes of North about "democracy" and "democratization" in Nicaragua — the hearings themselves became a pep rally for the Contras. But all this talk of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion — it really means nothing in the abstract, because these same people like North have absolutely no problems with the regimes in Chile, Paraguay, or Guatemala that rule through death squads and midnight knocks on the door; they have no problems with South Africa, one of the most draconic and repressive regimes in human history. In fact, administration officials had approved a plan in 1984 that would have had South Africa pay for the training and equipping of the Contras in Nicaragua. How fitting! North was up to his neck in the El Salvador operation during the years that death squads were killing 300 people a week! And the real question for them is not democracy. Or, more accurately, the objective content of

democracy, so far as the relations between the imperialist countries and the oppressed countries go, is this: are these countries within the U.S. geopolitical orbit, and are these countries open to U.S. foreign investment? *That's* the essence, the litmus test if you will, of the democracy that was being hailed at these hearings.

**Q:** Let's talk a little bit about the limits of permissible dissent that were etched out in the Irangate hearings. You kind of got hit by the fact that every committee member felt compelled to prove his anti-Sandinista bona fides at length and his patriotic bona fides overall.

**RL:** The congressional investigators were very deferential, bordering on the obsequious, in dealing with these witnesses. Those who have been involved in gunrunning and drug-smuggling, assassinations and bombings of villages and babies, were always, always praised for their dedication to their country — this was a running thread throughout the hearings. And the hearings themselves were absolutely obscene in the sense that there was never a single mention of the fact that since 1979, 200,000 people have died in Central America as a result of U.S.-sponsored hostilities and perhaps a million people have been uprooted from their homes. The drug connection, to which you referred, was hardly touched on.

Plans for martial law in the U.S., which we can talk about later, were never dug into; discussion about this was quashed as out of order. Joint U.S.-Israel covert actions were ruled out of order. Very importantly, never once did these hearings stray from the universe of discourse of how best to safeguard and extend U.S. international interests. The bottom line here was the reaffirmation of the global interests of U.S. imperialism.

**Q:** I know we'll get into the Ollie North phenomenon in a minute, but I do have to mention one thing here. There was a point in the hearings when North invoked his eleven-year-old daughter in some fashion, as if the defense of his eleven-year-old daughter and other eleven-year-old daughters like her is the rationale for all the dirty, foul deeds that he has been a part of — only a fraction of which were even indicated in the hearings. A lot of people were spontaneously very outraged by such hypocrisy from someone with the blood of so many children on his own hands. And it just seems to me that if what you really want — and what I think a lot of people really did want — is for the Ollie Norths of this world to stand in the docket accused by all the eleven-year-old children that they've slain, directed others to slay, and had a part in slaying — if that's what you want, then you're going have to have a different class holding state power to get it. That's not going to come when this class holds state power. It's similar to the Nixon thing; the crimes that

**Nixon was sent packing for never included the turning of Indochina into a butcher shop.**

This leads us to the promotion of North as a hero. The persona of Reagan has been very, very key to the whole resurgent America offensive. Yet today there's a joke going around among right-wingers in Washington and finding its way into the major newspapers that as far as the current Central America peace plan goes, "If Ronald Reagan were alive, it never would have happened." So you've got this kind of open mocking of Reagan now for some of the very things he was applauded for before. And yet at the same time, there was this rather stunning, and unexpected I think, mass promotion of Oliver North — at least the television networks moved very quickly in unison to make this man a major icon. What's going on with this?

**RL:** Well, it's certainly true that Reagan was knocked down a peg, or several pegs, one might say. But the knocking down of Reagan is linked to the kinds of questions of geopolitical positioning and specific policy initiatives that we've been talking about. He was not knocked down a peg or two — or several more as this situation continues to unfold and unravel — because America somehow no longer needs a program of reaction. On the contrary, I think there was a strong whiff, a strong scent, of fascism that came off of these hearings. This alarmed and outraged millions throughout this country who realized what was really being said, what all this implied about where this country is heading, and what that means in terms of people's futures and their lives.

If anything, these hearings signaled a continuing commitment to the reactionary and repressive domestic agenda that Reagan has been pushing through, which has been implemented at all levels of government, and which has a profound ideological kernel to it as well. I think that Ollie-mania was a critical feature of these hearings. I thought it was very telling that North was given a platform, in fact even goaded into offering his view of the world. And that was a view that America is under siege, that it is already at war, that a communist, anti-American contagion is spreading and must be stopped now, and it's only a matter of time before we'll be fighting in Arizona.

And there was an image projected about North that says something about how fascism is being packaged and marketed for America. This was an image of noble suffering; this was an image of a dedicated patriot, a true patriot, who'd been vilified for doing nothing more, for committing no other crime, than serving his country and serving his country with a great deal of passion. This was an image of someone who was facing down, staring down his tormentors, the congressional investigators — who, it should be pointed out, bent over backward to give him that platform to speak. This was a man who embodied and extolled the virtues of blind discipline and obedience. Oliver North was saying that if you love your family and you love your country, then anything is permissible — whether it's lying or

whether it's murder. And this does say something about one of the motifs of the fascist current in America today.

**Q: It's not only that anything is permissible, but that the lies, the murder, and the dealing in slime becomes noble, and anything short of that is contemptible, degrading, and weakening.**

RL: Exactly. And one of the most enduring and pernicious themes of America's national mythology is that whatever cruelty is perpetrated by America — that cruelty, that injustice, that heinous, heinous crime flows from the purest and most innocent of motives. This was, again, part of why North was brought forward in the way that he was and part of the reason that he was allowed to hold forth in the way that he did. The journalist Alexander Cockburn put it well; he described the North phenomenon as "fascism with a human face." And we also have to see that North was built up not only to regain some lost ground, because it is true that Reagan was cut down somewhat, at least from superhuman proportions, but to reignite the social base for reaction in this country and to demoralize and intimidate others. So I think that was an important element behind these hearings, although the principal aspect of what was going on at the hearings (and their longer-term effect) was more a matter of the debate within the ruling class.

**Q: Another good characterization of Ollie-mania that I heard from someone was, "They're saying North for President, but really it's North for Colonel." This was in reference to the Colonels all over the world that the U.S. has installed at various times to directly run the affairs of different states.**

RL: Yes. And very related and very apt are the revelations which have come out in the past year, thanks in large part to the efforts of people from the Christic Institute and others, linking Oliver North to plans for the imposition of martial law in the U.S. — martial law that was openly viewed as a way to repress domestic opposition to an invasion of Nicaragua. A very elaborate contingency plan has been worked up, and exercises have been carried out under the rubric of Rex 84 to test out certain aspects of that contingency plan, which involved everything from the suspension of the U.S. Constitution and the appointment of military commanders to run state and local governments, to rounding up and detaining dissidents and potential dissidents, including many, many immigrants. When this was raised by someone on the congressional panel as a rather shocking affair, that was ruled out of order by Senator Inouye, the panel co-chair.

**Q: Stepping back from all this, from everything we've summed up, it's been some months now since**

**this crisis erupted on the scene. It was, as you put it, a very profound historical moment, and we're still in it. Can we sum up what the results have been so far, and can we project anything about the future from this?**

RL: I think at this point what's clear is that the dust has not settled and that the outcome of these hearings was both inconclusive and contradictory. On the one hand, Reagan was punctured, though not totally disgraced and discredited in the way that Nixon was during the Watergate hearings. On the other hand, a certain picture emerges from these hearings of the Reagan team: they're basically a pack of fools and scoundrels — this is sort of your immediate take on it. So here, too, we see a contradictory outcome. We also see a massive shake-up in the administration, and the National Security Council has been reorganized. But for all those changes, the executive branch is weak and has been seriously weakened by these disclosures and what has gone on over the last year. What we find, then, is a somewhat crippled and increasingly symbolic presidency, which is not the fundamental situation U.S. imperialism wants and needs to be in in these times.

Another feature of the post-hearings situation is that there are still very serious disputes over the direction of policy in all the theaters and over all the issues that we discussed earlier in the interview, including Central America and the Middle East. There's still not only continuing debate over those questions, but there's bound to be debate over those questions taking the form of struggle over the succession — the presidential succession.

I think what this suggests is that things might very well flare up again and erupt perhaps even more dramatically and dangerously, for the ruling class, in the coming period. We might see a renewal of such open discord in conjunction with a major international crisis. So this is something that we have to watch very closely.

**Q: What about the overall character of these splits within the ruling class? How deep are they? And do definite factions now exist within the state apparatus?**

RL: I want to speak briefly to this question of the nature of splits within the ruling class and, in particular, how the differences are falling out in terms of factions within the ruling class now. To begin with, it's important to point out that all the principal fractions of finance capital are represented at the highest levels of government; none of them are frozen out as such. The national security and fiscal and monetary bureaucracies, for instance, are not monopolized by any one section of the ruling class; I mean they are not answering to one section of finance capital.

Now it's true that there may be shifts, sometimes very sharp shifts, in policy emphasis from one administration to another, and this is concretely embodied in personnel changes. But how are we to understand these splits and shifts? First, they have to do with the pressures and chang-

ing requirements of the objective situation — in the world economy, world politics, and the class struggle. It's not some sort of abstract power trip. And, second, high-level debate and struggle within the ruling class fundamentally turns on the strategic interests and needs of U.S. imperialism. It's not like some section of finance capital is just narrowly looking after its own investments. The role of the imperialist state is precisely to define, defend, and advance these larger interests. Now, of course, defining these strategic interests and their policy consequences is hardly a neat and clean, or cut and dried, process — these things do get fought out and can get very messy, even bloody. But what I'm trying to emphasize is that what defines state power is its *objective class foundation* and the common national interests of an imperialist bourgeoisie.

Getting back to this crisis, I want to stress again that we can't discern clear, fixed camps, pitting one set of forces against another. We can't say that there are two distinct and opposed factions; this is a shifting and fluid situation in which various spokesmen and representatives have their feet in different camps, which themselves are subject to rapid change. This also suggests that it would be wrong to see this as a conflict between Congress and the executive — that is not the nature of the drawing of lines, that is not how they are drawn. These differences and these factions cross party boundaries and they cross institutional boundaries.

**Q: And they get reflected and concentrated within the Reagan team itself.**

RL: Right, and that's the last point: these differences exist within the Reagan team itself; this has been evident both on the question of Nicaragua and on the question of Iran.

**Q: Part of the point here is that political analysis is not a question of searching for esoteric, hidden conspiracies; we have the telescope and the microscope of Marxism, which together can be used to penetrate the reality and get to the essence of what is going on.**

RL: And while, overall, we can't say for certain how deep these divisions are, we do know that they are not so deep that they have brought about a crisis that has basically stymied the functioning of this government, at least not to this point.

It also has to be stressed that as they move closer to direct and immediate confrontation with the Soviet Union, there's going to be a dialectic where closer unity is being demanded and forged while at the same time very sharp differences and disagreements erupt over particular aspects of what has to be done. And again, it's just part of the general situation of carrying the U.S. war juggernaut forward.

The conduct and the outcome of these hearings also emphasize that the U.S. imperialists are facing a minefield of contradictions. Wherever they turn in the world there are

***It's critical to recognize that the war juggernaut has not been derailed and that they are pressing full speed ahead with their war plans.***

booby traps in their path. But having seen all that and having grasped the difficulties they face, I think it's critical to recognize that the war juggernaut has not been derailed and that they are pressing full speed, full steam ahead.

The hearings and the way in which they were prosecuted, the raft and welter of problems and contradictions, and the real possibility that these things can lead to all kinds of difficulties, perhaps debacles, for them — all this gives renewed emphasis to and demonstrates the lucidity of Bob Avakian's observation that the driving compulsion to world war is not just a question of resolving the many strands of crisis and resolving this essential antagonism — the inter-imperialist contradiction — that is faced. The need to go to war is also linked to the need to hold the whole enterprise, the whole alliance, together in the face of these profound centrifugal forces that are unleashed exactly as they press ahead with their plans.

And I think this should be an object lesson for all of us. What these hearings basically did was, from the standpoint of the ruling class, reaffirm — not question, not call into doubt, and not at all upend — the basic and fundamental orientation.

**Q: Let's go back to the point you were making earlier on the weakened presidency. Lenin made the point that every minor crisis, meaning every crisis before an actual revolutionary one, contains rudiments of an all-out revolutionary one. Now, on one hand, one can imagine how such future splits, infighting, and fissures within the ruling class could create openings for revolutionary initiatives from below. In fact this current crisis did create openings for doing revolutionary work and exposure, did shock and stir millions politically, and helped pierce the suffocating atmosphere of resurgent America.**

**But on the other hand, one could also conceive of a situation in which a divided ruling class, faced with tremendous domestic opposition from below and serious, serious mishaps and accidents in its conduct of foreign affairs, was driven to war out of desperation. In other words, weakness can be as compelling a motive to move toward war, and it would be very, very unwise to assume that the weakening of Reagan somehow lessens the danger in the international situation.**

RL: Right. This is this point about the driving compulsion

to war involving the need to hold the whole alliance and enterprise together, and that just pushes them ever more resolutely forward along this path towards war. And this analysis should be contrasted with two other views. One, there is the view that somehow democracy has reasserted itself, that this system of checks and balances has shown its vitality in that Reagan will be monitored more closely, and people can now breathe a sigh of relief. What I'm saying can be contrasted with that erroneous notion of what's going on. And it should also be contrasted with a position, advanced by some on the left, that the substance and upshot of this crisis is that Reaganism is at an impasse, that Reaganism is paralyzed because what all this goes to show is that there are limits to the application of military force. According to this view, Reagan would want to solve everything through military means, through the buildup of conventional and nuclear weapons systems, through various attempts at low-intensity conflicts in various parts of the world — but this crisis shows that you cannot resolve contradictions that way. Nuclear war is obviously unthinkable, unwinnable, and untenable from the standpoint of the rival ruling classes — according to this viewpoint — and therefore what we see is the growing paralysis of a regime which could not pursue its logic, the logic of force and brutality, to the very end. And I think what the Iran/Contra crisis shows is quite the opposite.

**Q:** In other words the notion that the events of the last year have finally brought the U.S. imperialists to

their senses is a bit pollyannish, to say the least.

RL: Right. In sum, I think that these hearings and their ideological fallout have, as I said, reaffirmed the basic policy orientation; they are part of and must be situated within this larger, geopolitical global setting that we've been discussing. There is perhaps a final lesson for revolutionary and progressive-minded people, for those who yearn to see the Oliver Norths put in the docket, for those who are repulsed by the revelations of the crimes and atrocities committed in the name of democracy. All of what we have learned about how in fact the imperialists are preparing for their multiple contingencies and for their ultimate showdown with the Soviet bloc — all of this emphasizes even more that most essential Marxist-Leninist dictum that without state power, all is illusion. Without tearing down and shattering the whole edifice and network of imperialist political power, it will not be possible to solve any questions that are of concern to the broad masses of people, including the prevention of world war. □

#### Notes

1. "Questions for These Times: An Interview with Bob Avakian," *Revolution*, Winter/Spring 1986, Number 54, p. 4.
2. Edward Said, "Irangate: A Many-Sided Crisis," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Volume XVI, Number 4 (Summer 1987), pp. 27-49.
3. Avakian, op. cit., p. 4.

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# ***The United States and Mexico: Anatomy of Domination***

***by David Nova***

*An earlier draft of this article was originally prepared for and submitted to the "Breakdown the Border Conference" held in April 1987 in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua/El Paso, Texas. The author wishes to thank all those who read and commented on the earlier draft, contributing to this present article. In particular, the author wishes to acknowledge the suggestions and criticisms of Raymond Lotta, as well as permission from him to incorporate into this essay some key points from a speech delivered by Lotta at the "Breakdown the Border Conference."*

The U.S.-Mexican border is unique in the world. Here we find two vast and populous countries, one the world's most economically advanced and powerful and the other one of the poorest in the world, sharing a 2,000-mile border. It amounts to a monumental clash of universes. Yet as shockingly different as are the conditions of life on the two sides of the border, Mexico and the United States are bound to each other in profound ways. Historically, the development of each of these two countries has very much involved the other. Economically, the linkages are extensive: U.S. agriculture and industrial investments in Mexico are a major component of the U.S. overseas portfolio, American banks are the major foreign players in the recurring Mexican debt crises of the past decade, and the flow of legal and illegal labor from Mexico to the United States has not only assumed enormous dimensions but has also been of vital importance to the functioning of both economies. Geopolitically, developments in Mexico, along with Mexico's position vis-à-vis the rest of Central America, loom large in the strategic thinking of U.S. policy planners. And the stability of the border itself, the potential spillover of what happens on either side, is a source of concern and alarm in Mexico City and Washington.

The everyday reality of Mexico is an outrageous picture of oppression and misery. Some 60 percent of the population suffers from some degree of malnutrition, and some, particularly but not only in the countryside, are literally on the verge of starvation.<sup>1</sup> Due mainly to malnutrition, only one in five children born in the rural areas is of normal weight and height.<sup>2</sup> The minimum wage is currently about \$3 a day, and different estimates indicate that 48 to 60 percent of the employed population earn less than this miserable amount.<sup>3</sup> While official estimates of open unemployment continue to be ridiculously low — especially considering that the official trade union central, the Con-

greso de Trabajo, estimates that 10 percent of the working population lost their jobs in 1985 alone<sup>4</sup> — estimates of total unemployment and subemployment generally run at about 50 percent of the labor force.<sup>5</sup> As many as 26 million people lack even basic medical care.<sup>6</sup> This everyday pattern of misery is periodically punctuated by disasters fundamentally due to the distorted character of the economy, like the explosion of the PEMEX plant in San Juanico in 1984,<sup>7</sup> or natural disasters immensely aggravated and magnified by the structure of imperialist domination, like the 1985 earthquakes.<sup>8</sup>

Few will deny that there is great suffering in Mexico, and it is hard to overlook the close connections, ties, and linkages between the U.S. and Mexico. But what is the essential character of the relations between the United States and Mexico? Is it fundamentally a relationship between two political entities that control their own destinies? Is Mexico, despite whatever economic dependence, U.S. pressure, or interference that may exist, essentially a sovereign and independent nation? Or is it rather, despite its political independence, at bottom a semicolon, a state formally independent but in fact controlled politically as well as economically by imperialism? Is the U.S., consequently, not simply a meddling great power but an imperialist oppressor of the Mexican people and nation that dominates Mexican society economically, socially, and politically? And is the domination of the U.S. over Mexico at the root of the oppression of the Mexican people?

Various spokesmen for the U.S. government in their more cynical — and honest — declarations, do often include Mexico among their so-called "client" regimes and debate how best to utilize Mexico's dependence on the U.S. to advance U.S. policy aims. But they do fundamentally portray Mexico as independent from the United States, and this serves a very important political and ideological function: whatever may be amiss in Mexico, certainly the U.S. is not to blame. Although this often does not prevent them from taking credit for whatever, according to them, is going right in Mexico. Thus, for instance, we see the repeated spectacle of the Mexican regime being praised each time it follows U.S. "advice" and adopts yet another set of International Monetary Fund directives for the running of the Mexican economy. But when the application of such guidelines is followed by an even more profound and apparent crisis of the Mexican economy, this is of course due to Mexican mismanagement, a rather laughable charge when we consider that the U.S. government deficit for a *single year* is running at more than *double* the *total* accumulated Mexican foreign debt.

The Mexican state and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the official party, do at times complain about economic dependence on the U.S. and U.S. interference. They are also fond of blasting their various domestic opponents as agents of imperialism, identifying the defense of the nation with the defense of the present government. But they too portray Mexico as independent. How could it be otherwise after the rule of some fifty-eight

years of a party — the PRI — that officially refers to its ideology as "revolutionary nationalism"? This pretense of independence is of great use to the regime: in a country where broad strata of the population have a deep and fully justified hatred of U.S. imperialism, the label of "agents of the U.S." must be reserved for the regime's opponents. There are other phenomena and appearances that can be taken — and have been by many — as indications of Mexico's independence. Such things as the existence of sizable concentrations of capital in the hands of the Mexican state and big Mexican capitalists, the rapid postwar industrialization in Mexico, the expansion of capitalist relations in agriculture, Mexico's formal political independence, and both apparent and real conflicts between the Mexican and U.S. governments have all been cited at some point as contradicting this or that notion of what is meant by imperialist domination. These notions are wrong and should be discarded. Despite differences in treating the question, the idea that the Mexican regime is in some important sense independent has broad influence. The purpose of this article is to examine the evolution of U.S.-Mexican relations, the mechanisms by which U.S. imperialism dominates Mexico, and the political and strategic implications of the current crisis gripping Mexico.

### **On Imperialism and the History of U.S. Domination over Mexico**

Mexico is not a sovereign, independent nation. It is an oppressed nation, a neocolony of U.S. imperialism. The reality of Mexican society is not due to Mexico being a certain number of years behind the "advanced countries" in its development, nor to Mexican "mismanagement and corruption," nor even to Mexican economic dependence on the U.S. conceived as an external phenomenon. Rather, it is a product of the thorough imperialist domination of Mexico, of Mexico's semicolonial status within the framework of the world imperialist economy. The different viewpoints on this fundamental issue do not stem so much from differences over the phenomena, the appearances of Mexican society, as they do from differences over how to comprehend the underlying forces that give rise to these appearances. They stem from differences over the nature of imperialism itself. It is therefore necessary to outline briefly what we mean by imperialism.

In speaking of imperialism, we do not mean simply the open aggression or particular policies practiced by the great powers that are often understood as imperialism in the popular mind. Nor do we understand imperialism as simply involving the external relations among distinct economies and nations. Rather, the developing countries are component parts of a unified world economy that derives its cohesion from the internationalization of capital. Raymond Lotta points out in *America in Decline*, "Under imperialism, accumulation proceeds decisively through *monopoly*,



specifically the dominance of international finance capital, which is the key activating and stimulating factor in the reproductive process. It proceeds on the basis of the *division of the world between oppressor and oppressed nations*. Colonial expansion and superprofits play a crucial role in the overall process of accumulation. And, in the imperialist era, accumulation proceeds through *rivalry* between different national capitals. If national capitals and formations are locked into a single international system, it is also the case that this system, though a coherent whole, is divided inescapably into national capitals and blocs of national capitals. These phenomena are not incidental but part of the form of existence of internationalized capitals."<sup>9</sup>

As noted, the division between oppressor and oppressed nations is one fundamental feature of imperialism. But what is the essential character of this division, what is the essence of the imperialists' domination of the colonial and neocolonial countries like Mexico in the continents of Latin America, Africa and Asia? It is not essentially just a matter of plunder, of the ripping off of natural resources or the theft of economic surplus. Though this obviously occurs, if this were all there were to imperialist domination imperialism would have long ago sucked these countries dry and reached the end of its possibilities for expansion. Nor is it just a matter of unequal trade, unequal market relations. Though such unequal relations are the norm rather than the exception, achieving higher prices for Third World exports and lower prices for imports of goods and technology from the imperialist countries would in no way abolish the profound penetration and domination of the oppressed nations by imperialist capital. Nor is imperialist domination essentially a matter of the enforced stagnation of the dependent economies. While in a broad and fundamental sense imperialist relations do certainly constitute a fetter on the development of the productive forces, this by no means precludes significant imperialist-sponsored transformation and industrial development of the semicolonial economies in many cases, Mexico itself being one notable example.<sup>10</sup>

Such views of imperialist domination are not only wrong — that is, they do not correspond to reality — they are also commonly linked to various schemes for reforming imperialism. It is not uncommon to hear the view that such plunder, unequal trade, and "stagnationist" policies are contrary to the interests of even at least an "enlightened" section of the imperialists themselves, and calls are made for less rapacious plunder, for a "new world economic order," or for policies purportedly designed to promote independent development in the developing countries. But such dreams of reforms, even if they could be implemented — and in many cases they cannot — would still in no way abolish the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations. The fact of the matter is that there exists a deeply rooted relation of dependency and subordination between the imperialist and the oppressed countries. This structural dependency flows from the very needs and requirements of the expansion of imperialist capital on a world scale.

At the core of the production relation between imperialism and the oppressed nations is the export of capital, whether in the form of direct investment, loans, or other forms. Some apologists for imperialism have sought to downplay the importance of the export of capital to the oppressed nations with the argument that the bulk of the capital in the advanced nations is reinvested in the advanced nations themselves. However, the essential issue is not the quantitative but rather the qualitative role of such investments. In the first place, the rate of profit on investments in the oppressed nations — having as its essential pedestal the superexploitation of the proletariat in these countries — is typically significantly higher than that on investments in the imperialist home countries. For instance, a U.S. congressional study of U.S. manufacturing companies with operations in Mexico and Brazil revealed an average rate of return on their foreign investments of 20 percent, while the overall rate of return on both foreign and domestic operations for these same manufacturing concerns was about 13 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Further, such investments are concentrated at the highest levels of the U.S. economy. In terms of direct investment, in 1979 seventy-one of the top 100 U.S. manufacturing firms had investments in Mexico.<sup>12</sup> In terms of loan capital, at the end of 1985 loans to Mexico by ten leading

***Mexico plays a particularly important role for imperialist capital, and its subordination and integration into the world imperialist economy is particularly highly developed.***

U.S. banks totaled between 21 and 39 percent of the total principal capital of these banks.<sup>13</sup> The high rates of return on investment in various forms in the oppressed countries, rooted in superexploitation, as well as other factors such as the cheap vital inputs into the reproductive process provided by these countries, play a decisive and essential role in stimulating the critical top layers of finance capital in the imperialist countries. This in turn stimulates the core sectors of the imperialist economies, keeping the mass of national capital functioning. Mexico plays a particularly important role for imperialist capital in this regard, and its subordination and integration into the world imperialist economy is particularly highly developed. This is illustrated by the fact that investment in Mexico accounts for about 10 percent of U.S. direct investment in the "developing world"<sup>14</sup> and that some \$100 billion Mexican foreign debt represents about 10 percent of the estimated \$1 trillion foreign debt of Third World countries.

Here it is necessary to step back so that we can better understand the historical foundations of the subjugation of Mexico. Almost everyone has heard of the centuries of Spanish colonialism in Mexico and the genocide perpetrated against the indigenous population, whose direct descendants continue as oppressed peoples within Mexico today. The achievement of Mexico's formal independence was followed by the Spanish invasion of Tampico in 1829, the French invasion of Veracruz in 1838, the U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845, the U.S. armed intervention from 1846 to 1848 in which the U.S. stole half of Mexico's territory, and the 1861 invasion by the French, British, and Spanish which led to French colonial rule in Mexico under Maximilian until 1867. But clearly since the last third of the nineteenth century the U.S. has been the key player in Mexico. This prominence is due to a combination of factors that include historical developments in both Mexico and the U.S. that facilitated relatively greater penetration by U.S. capital, Mexico's geographical proximity to the United States and, importantly, Mexico's major strategic importance in the rise and expansion of the U.S. empire. The historical roots of this have to be examined more closely.

After gaining independence, the United States underwent rapid economic development. One important reason for this was the fact that the United States was not fettered by a feudal land system. Another reason was the extensive commercial and financial linkages with Great Britain. But despite these advantages, rising industrial capital would face three major obstacles to expanding and integrating Eastern-based industry and Western-based agriculture: there was the slave system, which after having dramatically spurred on capitalist development in the United States eventually became a brake on it; there were the Indian tribes and nations which had been pushed together into the West; and there were the territories of the Mexican North. It is no exaggeration to say that the internal history of the United States is one vast process of territorial seizure and occupation.

Between 1848 and 1890 America was engaging Mexico in two ways. First, it was economically and politically integrating the territory it had stolen from Mexico's North into what would become the U.S. Southwest. This represented the victory of a more advanced economic system over another, and it was part of the process of the unification of the domestic market of the United States and the completion of the continental railway system. Second, U.S. capital would begin to systematically penetrate Mexico towards the end of the nineteenth century. By 1897 the United States had located about 30 percent of all its foreign direct and indirect investment in Mexico and was importing about 95 percent of its leaded minerals from Mexico.

The incorporation of Mexico's stolen territories and U.S. penetration into Mexico were products of the same expansionary drive of capital. In fact, the same capitalists were often involved. But the outcome was not at all the same. In the American Southwest the basis was being laid for full capitalist development, although this would always be inter-

woven with intense national oppression, a fact related to the region's relative backwardness. On the other hand, a semicolonial relationship was being imposed on Mexico. This involved powerful influence over the Mexican state; for instance, government subsidies and concessions were granted to American industrialists for the construction of railways. It also involved alliance with feudal landowning classes that were benefiting from the government's dispossession of Indian communities and peasant lands. By 1910 almost all the cultivable land in Mexico was concentrated in 840 giant haciendas, and about a quarter of this land was owned by foreigners. (William Randolph Hearst and Harrison Grey Otis owned over a billion acres of the best agricultural and grazing lands.)

During the Mexican Revolution and following, U.S. armed forces seized Veracruz in 1914, converged on Tampico together with British, German, and Spanish war vessels when it was threatened by Villa's forces in the same year, and launched a 12,000-strong "punitive expedition" under General Pershing against Villa in 1916. Following the victory of the counterrevolutionary war waged by the Mexican Constitutionalist forces against the peasant armies of Zapata and Villa, the U.S. gave timely military and political assistance to the postrevolutionary Mexican governments in their times of greatest difficulty.<sup>15</sup>

Imperialist penetration was neither uniformly stimulating capitalist development nor was it uniformly promoting unification of the Mexican national economy. True, railway construction revolutionized social relations. Wage laborers were needed to lay the track, and the railways stimulated some industrial development. But the creation of the rail lines also reinforced the extensive cultivation patterns of the already existing semifeudal mode of production by opening up new export markets to it. At the same time the rail network laid by U.S. companies consisted of north-south lines oriented to U.S. markets and ports. This did little to unify the national economy. But it did facilitate vast labor migrations: both internal, in response to what industrial development was stimulated, and northward, on account of the rail network's geographic and economic orientation towards the United States. Beginning in 1900, and especially after World War 1, Mexican immigrant labor would come to play a decisive role in the industrialization of California and the growth of agriculture in the Southwest.<sup>16</sup>

Any serious analysis of the relationship between the United States and Mexico must recognize the particularity of that relationship. As is true of other Third World countries, Mexico's subordination and dependent integration into the world economy result from the internationalization of capital and serve the expansion of imperialist capital. But what's different is that this unique geographic attachment of the world's most powerful country and a highly oppressed one has a much more direct impact on *internal* accumulation in the United States. This involves profound trade, investment, energy, agricultural, and labor market interconnections. Over half of the fresh fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States between December and March

come from Mexico; the *maquiladoras*\* are mainly supplied from U.S. plants and ship most of their output to U.S. plants; undocumented Mexicans account for about a quarter of the workforce in the high-tech Silicon Valley.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, one can venture to states adjoining Mexico City and find impoverished local economies that have reproduced four generations of labor power that migrate 2,000 miles northward to work in Texas agriculture, California manufacturing, or domestic employment. Mexico constitutes a special case of semicolonialism. And what also makes this relationship special is the geopolitical role that Mexico plays in U.S. domination of Latin America.

U.S. imperialism is clearly the greatest exploiter of the Mexican people. Mexico is fundamentally a nation oppressed by U.S. imperialism as a semicolony. But other powers that are no less imperialist than the United States also share in the feast: such imperialist nations as Switzerland, Sweden, Canada, Japan, West Germany, and the United Kingdom also have significant direct investment in Mexico,<sup>18</sup> and holdings of Mexico's foreign debt are even more broadly distributed. Indeed, under the umbrella of U.S. domination, all of the imperialist nations of the Western alliance share, directly or indirectly, in the exploitation of Mexico.†

### **Imperialist Control: Class Alliances and the Mexican State**

The decisive fact of economic life in Mexico is foreign domination in general and U.S. domination in particular. Some apologists for imperialism seek to downplay the neo-colonial character of the Mexican economy by observing that imperialist direct investment represents only a fraction of total capital formation in Mexico. But an analysis of the pattern of foreign direct investment is itself highly revealing. A U.S. congressional study revealed that in 1972, 32 percent of the 500 largest nonfinancial firms in Mexico were owned by foreign capital as were 33 percent of the top 100. Foreign ownership is even more concentrated in the key manufacturing sector: 50 percent of the top 300 manufacturing firms and fully 61 percent of the top 100 firms were foreign owned.<sup>20</sup> Foreign control is even more prominent in

\* *Maquiladoras* are factories in which low-wage, labor-intensive assembly work subcontracted by foreign (usually U.S.) companies is done.

† The role of the imperialist bloc headed by the Soviet Union is somewhat distinct. On a world scale the scope of the nascent Soviet empire continues to be sharply limited by the current structure of the world economy dominated by U.S. imperialism; in Mexico in particular U.S. control is especially tight and direct. In this context even Soviet-bloc economic penetration of Mexico — in such sectors as tractor production, glass, telecommunications, etc., under a continuing agreement signed in 1975<sup>19</sup> — has fundamentally political aims. Mainly barred from the Western imperialist feast in Mexico, the Soviets seek, through various means, a political foothold in the country.

the strategic capital goods sector: another account notes that in 1970 foreign capital received 70 percent of the income of this sector.<sup>21</sup> Foreign direct investment is, then, concentrated among the largest monopolistic firms and among the most strategic sectors of the national economy. But imperialist economic control is by no means limited to direct ownership.

What of the large firms of majority Mexican ownership, either in private hands or in the state *paraestatal* sector? Are these somehow independent of imperialist capital? By no means. Mixed ownership arrangements have often given imperialist capital a direct ownership role even in many of these firms. The significant expansion of the state sector over the past two decades was essentially financed through an immense influx of imperialist capital in the form of loan capital, with an external public debt growing from less than \$4 billion in 1970 to more than \$72 billion in 1983.<sup>22</sup> The dependence on foreign loan capital by large private Mexican enterprises also rose to some \$18 billion by 1983.<sup>23</sup> This immense expansion of foreign indebtedness and the associated debt crises has brought in its wake an even more particular and direct regulation of the Mexican economy as a whole by the imperialist countries over the past decade through the International Monetary Fund. Large Mexican-owned firms, both state and private, are also heavily dependent on the importation of capital goods and other key inputs from the imperialist countries, particularly the United States, and many nominally Mexican firms are tied by various licensing agreements to buy a production package of inputs from the foreign licensing corporation. Indeed, some 80 percent of the technology utilized by "Mexican" industry is of foreign origin — more than half from the U.S.<sup>24</sup> A statement by Business International Corporation, an imperialist consulting firm, if somewhat one-sided in downplaying other means of imperialist control, is revealing: "If licensed technology and management contracts can afford sufficient income and control without equity ownership, all the better in terms of economic nationalism."<sup>25</sup>

Both the *paraestatales* in the state sector and large private capital are bound by a thousand threads to imperialist finance capital. The big Mexican bourgeoisie in no sense represents an independent national bourgeoisie nor is it essentially representative or an expression of the Mexican national market. In fact, it constitutes a certain elite section of the Mexican bourgeoisie whose existence and development depends on a client relationship with foreign capital. Imperialist capital firmly controls, both directly and through associated subordinate bureaucrat-comprador capital, the dominant core and commanding heights of the Mexican economy and through this the economy as a whole.

Today structural dependency in Mexico is expressed through a three-way alliance between imperialist capital, state capital, and private comprador capital, which collaborate with and whose existence and development depend on foreign capital. Much research is being conducted and much more is required to get at the nature of this alliance.

The dominant sector of private Mexican capital is made up of several large national groups or conglomerates which include industrial, commercial, financial, real estate, and other activities and categories of firms linked by common ownership. These compradors tend to have access to foreign capital and technology, they often engage in joint ventures and provide multinational corporations with marketing connections and expertise, they are closely linked with the state financial sector, and they are also linked with export agriculture. The three largest Mexican banks have formal relationships with leading U.S., European, and Japanese banks.

It is appropriate to briefly consider here the Mexican state's role in the economy. The Mexican state has played a significant economic role historically, as in many other neocolonial countries, and this expanded significantly in the post-World War 2 period, particularly in the last decade up through the 1982 crisis. At the outset it can be observed that those sorry socialists that conceive the expansion of the state sector as politically progressive should ponder the fact that the state sector in Brazil experienced its most rapid recent expansion under the rule of the notoriously "progressive" military junta.<sup>26</sup>

In a broad sense the role of the Mexican state in the economic realm, like that of all states, is a matter of the defense and reproduction of the predominant relations of production, which can only mean, in the case of the contemporary Mexican state, the defense and reproduction of essentially colonial and highly exploitative relations. In a more particular sense, the state sector in Mexico has historically played an essential role in the development and provision of essential infrastructure and basic inputs at subsidized prices for imperialist and bureaucrat-comprador capital, such as the transportation system, electricity, and petroleum. In the postwar period the state also instituted a battery of protectionist trade measures, low tax rates, fiscal and foreign-exchange policies, and direct subsidies to promote import substitution-based industrialization as well as, more recently, a somewhat modified set of policies designed to promote production for export. All of this stimulated and in many cases directly subsidized imperialist capital operating in the country, as well as associated bureaucrat-comprador capital.<sup>27</sup>

The 1982 nationalization of the Mexican banks is often portrayed as a "progressive" or "nationalistic" measure. It was nothing of the kind. Rather, it sought to guarantee the sizable foreign debt of the ailing banking system as well as to help guarantee the ability of Mexico to pay its overall foreign debt through a tighter control of national financial resources and foreign exchange. Thus, such "Mexican nationalists" as the Bank of America lauded the nationalization, saying that "This is a positive step in that it puts the Mexican government clearly behind the banking system."<sup>28</sup>

The large bourgeoisie, its state and private comprador fractions, cannot dissociate itself from foreign capital. Foreign participation has always been regarded as a necessity to provide investment capital and modern technology in

agriculture and industry as well as modern organizational methods. This is no mere economic calculation. There is a political dimension as well. The simple fact is that the Mexican ruling class cannot stand by itself against the masses.

The state apparatus itself is penetrated by the agencies of U.S. imperialism. For instance, there was a close connection between the Ford Motor Company and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce at the time when negotiations over the creation of a Mexican auto industry were taking place. The interlocking directorates between private and government banks have long been an economic fact of life; by the 1970s officials of the Banco de Mexico were graduates of the same U.S. universities as the private bankers. Today U.S. imperialism has important ties to the Mexican military and maintains the largest CIA station in the hemisphere in Mexico.<sup>29</sup> It is also the only country outside the United States where the FBI officially continues to operate. When the marauding agents of U.S. imperialism encounter contradictions with Mexico's own security forces, the U.S. howls about "human rights abuses," as in the recent case of U.S. DEA agent Victor Cortés. Of course, if the oh-so-democratic

### ***The simple fact is that the Mexican ruling class cannot stand by itself against the masses.***

police forces in the U.S. had encountered a Mexican without identification in a car with false license plates, carrying semi-automatic weapons reserved for military use, and in the company of an accused drug trafficker, as was the case with Cortés, they probably would have just invited him to lunch.

If the postrevolutionary period in Mexico has not been marked by the more open U.S. military aggressions characteristic of many other countries in Latin America, this is by no means an expression of the independence of the Mexican regime but rather a demonstration of how faithfully and effectively it has served its U.S. masters.

The Mexican state, like states generally, is also an organ of the armed dictatorship of one class over another: specifically, an organ of armed dictatorship of the Mexican bureaucrat-comprador bourgeoisie and their U.S. imperialist masters over the broad masses of the Mexican people. To confirm this fact, one need only ask who it is that the Mexican repressive apparatus — both the official and the supposedly "privately" organized repressive apparatus — is used against, whether it be the hundreds of students massacred in Mexico City in 1968 and 1971; the continuous murders, "disappeared," and political prisoners in the countryside, only a small fraction of which were recently documented by Amnesty International;<sup>30</sup> or the broader pattern of "selective" assassinations, disappearances, torture,

and political prisoners in society as a whole.

Apologists often note that Mexico has, relative to its size, one of the smaller military establishments in Latin America. This is a product of the fact that, in contrast to various regional gendarmes for U.S. imperialism and regimes with sharp military contradictions with neighboring regimes, Mexico has played a mainly political and economic role for U.S. imperialism in Latin America. Consequently, the role of the Mexican armed forces has tended to be restricted to the repression of the Mexican people, although there has been more recent upgrading of the Mexican military, such as the 1982 purchase of supersonic F-5E combat aircraft, with an eye to the dangers of a spreading Central American conflict. Concerns over domestic stability, both today and in the wake of the 1968 political crisis, incipient guerrilla movements in the same period, dangers arising from the Central American conflict, and broader strategic considerations in light of international preparations for world war fueled an expansion of the regular Mexican armed forces from 71,000 in 1970 to 145,000 in 1982, while the military budget rose from \$166 million in 1966 to some \$1.3 billion in 1982.<sup>31</sup>

The Mexican military has important ties to the United States, with most of Mexico's military hardware either coming from the U.S. and other Western imperialist countries or produced in Mexico under contract from weapons producers in those countries. Some 1,200 Mexican military officers have been trained by the United States.<sup>32</sup> Mexico also receives about \$8 million in hidden U.S. military assistance, under the heading of combating narcotics traffic.<sup>33</sup>

The 1947 Rio Treaty and the Charter of the Organization of American States commit Mexico and the United States to "mutual defense" in the event of an attack on them or another Latin American signatory. Mexico is still a member of the InterAmerican Defense Council, created in 1942 to coordinate military policy in the Western hemisphere of the U.S. empire during the last world war, and the Mexican-U.S. joint defense commission, also created during World War 2, still exists as well.<sup>34</sup>

While there is fundamental unity between the Mexican bureaucrat-comprador ruling class and their imperialist masters, secondary contradictions do develop at times, and the Mexican state is utilized by the bureaucrat-comprador bourgeoisie as an instrument for bargaining with imperialism. But it must not be thought that all apparent conflicts between the Mexican and U.S. governments really reflect such contradictions. The broad and just hatred for U.S. imperialist domination in Mexico compels the Mexican government to repeat hollow, never-ending "nationalist" proclamations against the U.S. As past president Díaz Ordaz explained, such declarations are due "above all to reasons of internal consumption. The gringos accept our calling them sons of bitches. They don't like it, but it doesn't go beyond that."<sup>35</sup>

Further, apparent conflicts often involve conflicts among the imperialists themselves. Thus, for example, the recent controversy over the establishment of an IBM personal com-

puter subsidiary involved the opposition of *other* imperialist computer manufacturers already operating in Mexico who quite naturally opposed this potential increased competition for the domestic Mexican market. When IBM promised to export most of its production, the Mexican government decided this would be beneficial all the way around and ultimately approved the investment. Similarly, in the controversy over Mexico's recent entrance into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, many imperialist-controlled enterprises in Mexico that produce for the domestic market and benefit from high trade barriers lined up in opposition, while other foreign-dominated enterprises producing more for export supported the measure. Anyone who wants to portray such conflicts as being essentially between Mexican nationalists and U.S. imperialists would have to include a number of U.S. imperialist corporations among the "Mexican nationalists."

Nevertheless, secondary contradictions do exist. They stem in important measure from the fact that while the imperialists obey a more global logic, shifting their capital here and there in accord with a strategy of global empire, their Mexican compradors have a somewhat more restricted perspective and are particularly concerned to keep imperialist capital flowing into Mexico. Such were the roots of the conflicts over "Mexicanization" during the Echeverría administration. The government sought a more stable presence of imperialist capital through various forms of joint, sometimes majority Mexican, ownership. The imperialists did not like such restrictions on their ability to freely shift capital into and out of the country. That the intention of the Mexican government was not at all to limit foreign investment but rather to stabilize it and prevent disruptive shifts out of the economy is illustrated by the fact that foreign investment *doubled* during the Echeverría administration, while foreign debt more than quadrupled.<sup>36</sup>

The Mexican state has been an instrument for the penetration of imperialist capital, notably in the form of loan capital, and has sought to subsidize and guarantee the profitable accumulation of imperialist capital in Mexico as part of the expanded reproduction of the semicolonial economy as a whole. It has also historically served as an important avenue for the creation of new strata of the bureaucrat bourgeoisie through such avenues as government contracts and outright corruption, from Obregón's famous "bombshells of 50,000 pesos" to restrain the political ambitions of his generals and his own family's emergence as powerful capitalists up through the present day.<sup>37</sup> All of these factors, as well as the enlargement of the repressive apparatus and other measures oriented toward containing social unrest, account for the "bloated" character of the state relative to the economic base, which is one aspect of the distorted character of semicolonial development. The present Mexican state has not been, is not, and cannot be a force for independent national development. Rather, it is an essential part of the structure of imperialist domination and neocolonial development.

## Periodizing Mexican Economic Development

It is possible to identify four relatively distinct phases of Mexican economic development: an early raw materials-export economy, import-substitution industrialization, attempts at industrial export promotion, and the so-called petroleum boom. Imperialist penetration and transformation of the Mexican economy first becomes evident toward the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries with the rapid growth of foreign investment in mining, petroleum extraction, and agriculture, along with the associated necessary railroad infrastructure. This imperialist-sponsored and controlled capitalist development existed within a sea of semifeudal agriculture and represented but links in a process of internationalized accumulation: the raw materials extracted by the imperialist corporations were exported to the advanced countries, entering in various ways into the productive process there.

The superprofits garnered from such investment, as well as the cheapening of raw materials inputs, played a key and necessary role in the overall profitable reproduction of finance capital — predominantly British and North American — in the broader context of their global empires. But while such imperialist capital penetration did tend to spur capitalist development and the spread of market relations to a limited extent within Mexico, the economy did not and could not develop on an independent basis with an integrated national market and productive apparatus. The imperialist-controlled extraction of raw materials — and of surplus value, profits — was geared to or articulated with the needs of the imperialist economies. Imperialist control of the leading sectors of the economy was the basis upon which imperialist capital dominated the economy as a whole and upon which it interacted with and transformed other modes of production within Mexico. The momentum of economic development was predicated on the size and character of imperialist investments and the demand for Mexican raw materials in the imperialist countries. These characteristics — the disarticulated and distorted character of the economy, its fundamental dependence on infusions of imperialist capital, its subordinate integration into the world economy — were to be essential characteristics of subsequent Mexican economic development, just as they are characteristic of semicolonial development generally. This dependent raw materials export economy persisted in its broad outlines up until 1929. The Great Depression signaled the sharp emergence of barriers to continued capital accumulation in the structure of capital, both internationally and within Mexico itself, as a result of the development of the contradictions in the foregoing process of imperialist accumulation.

While some initial bases for the transformation of the structure of the Mexican economy were laid in the prewar period, notably in the expansion of the internal market and the state sector, the most fundamental changes came about through the redivision of the world effected through World War 2. Through the war, U.S. imperialism came out

decisively on top of a restructured world economy. U.S. capital began a renewed flood into Mexico. U.S. direct investment almost quadrupled between 1940 and 1967 and more than doubled again by 1976. Imperialist capital etched out new international circuits of capital manifested in Mexico as import-substitution industrialization: the stuff of which the so-called postwar "Mexican miracle" was made. Imperialist capital turned its attention from traditional raw materials-extraction sectors to manufacturing. In 1940 a mere 2.8 percent of U.S. direct investment in Mexico was in manufacturing; the portion rose to 66.3 percent by 1967 and 74.5 percent by 1976.<sup>38</sup>

Import-substitution industrialization is a process by which previously imported industrial manufactures begin to be produced domestically, generally beginning with consumer goods and advancing through intermediate and capital goods. At first glance it would appear to have the effect of reducing the level of imports. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only was the process dependent on massive infusions of imperialist capital in the form of direct investment, it was also predicated on huge imports of capital in the material form as capital goods and other inputs as well as technology from the imperialist countries, particularly the United States. Thus it only led to a shift in the structure of imports, with a decline in previously imported consumer goods that were now produced domestically and with notable increases in the importation of the intermediate and capital goods (and technology) required to produce these consumer goods. Even as some intermediate and capital goods begin to be produced domestically, this itself is contingent on rising imports of yet other producer goods and technology required to produce them. The result is a heightened dependence on industrial imports and technology from the imperialist countries, particularly the United States, which accounts for 62 percent of Mexico's imports.<sup>39</sup> Not only have imports increased rapidly, they have in fact increased more rapidly than exports, leading to a consistently negative balance of trade throughout the postwar period up to 1982.<sup>40</sup>

The earlier raw materials-export phase of Mexican development did not greatly stimulate an internal base of accumulation. During the postwar import-substitution phase, however, investment capital, producer goods, technology, and other inputs from the imperialist countries entered into a growing and increasingly complex Mexican industrial sector whose products are sold on the "captive" domestic Mexican market protected by high protectionist trade barriers for these domestic products. For those who are mesmerized by the prospects of Third World industrialization, it should be noted that the imperialists have industrialized Mexico, though on an imperialist basis.

This imperialist-sponsored industrialization has, of necessity, been highly unbalanced and disarticulated, even judged within the confines of the industrial sector itself. As noted, the whole process is fundamentally dependent on industrial inputs, technology, and capital export from the imperialist countries. Secondly, the previously imported

consumer goods that are now produced domestically involve mainly "luxury goods," relatively speaking, destined for the more affluent sections of Mexican society: roughly the top 20 percent of the population that received 58 percent of the national income in 1968.<sup>41</sup> Thus, much of the production effort is not augmenting the profitability of the national capital; that is, it is furthering neither the more efficient production of goods that enter into the costs of reproduction of the working class nor the more efficient production of the necessary raw materials and capital goods.

Thirdly, problems in maintaining the overall profitability of capital are exacerbated by the capital-intensive nature of the industrialization process, itself a product of the imperialist-sponsored character of industrialization. As the import-substitution process passed through relatively less capital-intensive consumer goods production, moving increasingly in the late '60s and during the '70s into intermediate and capital goods, this required both increasingly capital-intensive investment as well as larger, more expensive investments. This in turn required increasingly large infusions of imperialist capital to sustain the whole process. And due to the capital-intensive character of Mexican industrialization, which does not generate a high volume of new jobs, the economy needs to sustain high rates of growth — at least 7.5 percent a year — just to absorb new people entering into the work force.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, the chronic trade deficit — due to dependence on imported industrial inputs and compounded by foreign-exchange outflows due to technology payments, repatriated profits on foreign direct investment, and service payments on foreign loans — has generated consistent imbalances in the balance of payments. Such imbalances have essentially been compensated for — in better times — by the growing influx of foreign direct investment and loan capital. Ever-greater injections of imperialist capital are thus essential not only as the immediate stimulus for the industrialization process but also in order to maintain some equilibrium in the balance of payments. When, due to emerging barriers to accumulation both within Mexico and in the world economy as a whole, the level of injections of foreign capital does not grow rapidly enough to offset the progressive tendency toward the loss of foreign exchange for the reasons noted, then external financial balances become a concentration point and focal point of crisis, a crisis which tends to spread through the Mexican economy as a whole. This was the case in the initial 1970-71 difficulties, in the 1976 crisis, and again in 1982.

The period of relatively crisis-free import-substitution industrialization — ironically often referred to as "*desarrollo estabilizador*" or "stabilizing development" — draws to a close by 1968. A period of greater economic difficulties is accompanied by a political crisis with roots in the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. The development of the contradictions of import-substitution industrialization sketched here, along with a deepening agricultural crisis, interpenetrated with growing difficulties for imperialist capital on a world scale and led to a search for new development strategies.

During the 1968-76 period, one part of the significant expansion of the state sector seems to be geared toward unclogging some of the bottlenecks of imperialist-sponsored import-substitution industrialization. An attempt was also made to graft an export-oriented constellation of industrial activities on to the previous economic structure. This was in fact part and parcel of a developing imperialist strategy of "worldwide sourcing" in which the production of various parts, components, and other inputs was "subcontracted" out through a far-flung international network of suppliers. For instance, the 1982 Ford Escort, a U.S. car model, got its doorlift assemblies from Mexico, its rear brake assembly from Brazil, its shock absorber struts from Spain, the hub and bearing clutch from France, and other parts from five other countries.<sup>43</sup>

From an earlier overwhelming predominance of agricultural and raw materials exports, by 1974 industrial exports accounted for nearly 65 percent of total exports.<sup>44</sup> The new industrial production oriented toward the export market that developed alongside production for the domestic market was also dominated and fueled by imperialist capital. An early study revealed that 85 percent of the developing manufacturing exports were concentrated in the sectors of transportation equipment, electrical and nonelectrical machinery, and chemicals — all among the key industries of previous imperialist-dominated and controlled industrialization.<sup>45</sup> In addition to dependence on infusions of foreign capital, this export-oriented industrial production also relies heavily on imported inputs from the United States and other imperialist countries. The most extreme form of this is the *maquiladoras*, which have expanded at an explosive rate, with their aggregate value produced increasing nearly eight times from 1970 to 1981.<sup>46</sup> Parts are shipped by the U.S. parent company to their Mexican subsidiary — generally on the border but increasingly in the interior of Mexico as well — where they are assembled and then returned to the U.S. The *maquiladoras* use virtually no inputs from the Mexican economy except for the most essential one: cheap, superexploited Mexican labor.

Export-oriented manufacturing more generally is not only heavily dependent on growing imports of industrial inputs, it is even more immediately dependent on economic conditions in the imperialist countries and the overall profitability of the imperialist capital involved. In three of the four major exporting industries mentioned earlier, intra-company sales *within* the multinational corporation involved accounted for 80 percent of their exports; in the fourth, chemicals, the figure was about 60 percent. This multinational corporation-led export promotion in key industries is thus largely dependent on the willingness of the parent company to buy or allocate production from its Mexican subsidiary.<sup>47</sup> More generally, the export dependence on markets in the imperialist countries is illustrated by the fact that the U.S. alone buys over half of Mexico's exports.<sup>48</sup>

This 1968-76 bid to overcome the barriers to imperialist-sponsored industrialization led to new and higher barriers. The immense expansion of the state sector, due to attempts

to resolve economic difficulties as well as to significant increases in expenditure for the repressive apparatus and social services in an attempt to manage the political crisis, led to growing deficits financed through foreign loans. Service payments on these loans exacerbated balance of payments and other difficulties. Swelling imports for import-dependent industry, together with softening exports and stagnating foreign capital injections due to the world 1974-75 recession, combined and came to a head in the sharp Mexican balance-of-payments and economic crisis of 1976.

The program of petroleum-based growth embarked on in the 1976-82 period was financed through an immense expansion of foreign indebtedness and relied on massive imports of imperialist machinery, technology, and technical expertise. It was part of a broader phenomenon in which debt has been used as a chief means by which the imperialists have squeezed profits out of the semicolonial countries in a climate of narrowing investment possibilities and increasing long-term risks. It was also part of imperialist attempts to raise world oil production in the context of tight petroleum markets — the anarchic character of which underlay the recent collapse of the world petroleum market. Finally, the petroleum boom had a very important strategic determinant in the calculations of U.S. imperialism: that of developing relatively more secure oil reserves in the face of growing contention between the U.S.- and Soviet-led blocs. It is no accident that a major portion of Mexico's oil exports has gone to fill the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

That the petroleum boom was very much a question of *squeezing out profits*, as well as an indication of the perverse character of this boom, is shown by the fact that it rested upon increasingly intense superexploitation of large sectors of the proletariat in Mexico. While real (inflation-adjusted) incomes of some sectors of society did rise in this period, the average minimum wage measured in 1970 pesos fell from about 31 pesos a day in 1976 to about 25 in 1981.<sup>49</sup>

The particularly distorted character of the petroleum boom ultimately only exacerbated, added new elements to, and raised to a yet higher level the difficulties besetting accumulation in Mexico, in tandem with a deepening crisis of the world imperialist economy. This all came to a head in Mexico in the profound crisis of 1982.

The Third World debt crisis heralded by the Mexican 1982 near-default threatened — and continues to threaten today — the entire international financial system. But the imperialists have no fundamental solution to the problem. The short-term solution adopted in 1982 was essentially to bleed the Mexican people white. Foreign-capital flows into Mexico, particularly in the form of loan capital, basically dried up. Instead of foreign-capital injections powering development and covering chronic trade deficits and other shortfalls of foreign exchange, an unprecedented trade surplus was to cover mammoth service payments on the foreign debt. This could only be sustained for a period through the radical impoverishment of large sections of the Mexican people. Real earnings plunged by as much as 40

percent.<sup>50</sup>

The policies dictated by the imperialists through the International Monetary Fund in the wake of the 1982 crisis were inherently unsustainable. The outlines of a new outbreak of the balance-of-payments crisis in Mexico were already evident in 1985 before the collapse of the world oil market, which obviously exacerbated the situation enormously. There are renewed attempts today to effect a more pronounced shift toward an imperialist-sponsored export economy. And some profitable investment opportunities still exist, most notably in the still-expanding *maquiladora* sector of the economy. But the fact that the imperialists and their Mexican compradors could come up with nothing better in their 1986 debt negotiations than to "deal with" the problem of an unpayable debt by adding an additional \$12 billion to that debt illustrates that they are simply buying time.

We have summarized briefly the course of Mexican economic development. What this summary illustrates is that direct foreign ownership and control is but one important aspect of the imperialist domination of Mexico, which is most fundamentally rooted in a whole structure of Mexico's subordinate integration into the world imperialist economy. International capital has been the principal motor and shaper of the Mexican economy. It is not simply that imperialist capital is concentrated in the advanced, more dynamic sectors of Mexico's economy; these are the advanced, more dynamic sectors *because* of the predominance of imperialist capital. Imperialism has developed the Mexican economy, but on an imperialist basis that fundamentally responds to the requirements of the centers of accumulation located in the imperialist countries. In this context it is of secondary importance whether this or that firm is nominally owned by foreign nationals or by Mexicans, whether in a state or private form. The international circuits of capital are controlled by imperialist finance capital; their Mexican segments are also controlled by imperialist capital through myriad means and relations. The Mexican big bourgeoisie, that is, the bureaucrat-comprador bourgeoisie, and the Mexican state are but subordinate representatives, participants in, and defenders of this international process of imperialist accumulation.

However, the entire Mexican economy is not evenly integrated into the core processes and channels of international capitalist production that work their way through the Mexican economy. There exists national capital and a national bourgeoisie. And while this strata has grown as a result of imperialist-led growth, it is also ultimately restricted by imperialist capital and generally is confined to either producing with more backward and labor-intensive techniques in the more marginal sectors of the economy or operating as a marginal producer in the more dynamic sectors. There exists a more "traditional" and largely impoverished section of the petty bourgeoisie associated with petty commodity production and exchange. And there persist partially transformed noncapitalist relations and forms of production. All of these phenomena are one measure of



the distorted and disarticulated character of imperialist-sponsored development. But they do not represent mere shards of an unrelated and "forgotten" economy. Such forms are in fact dominated and subsumed by — and, in the case of noncapitalist forms, forcibly articulated to — the international process of reproduction of imperialist capital.

### **Agriculture, Agrarian Relations, and Superexploitation**

Imperialism dominates, utilizes, and partially transforms precapitalist modes of production, and it siphons value through a complex network of linkages with the Mexican economy as a whole. Perhaps nowhere is all this more stark than in the case of Mexican agriculture, which played a key role in undergirding the entire process of postwar imperialist-sponsored development and whose crisis constitutes an essential barrier to renewed accumulation in Mexico. While the postrevolutionary agrarian reform, carried out particularly during the '30s, did provide part of the specific institutional context within which the postwar transformation of agriculture took place, the agrarian reform never completely abolished semifeudal relations in the countryside. The full implementation of the slogan "land to the tiller" was indeed never its intention. The imperialist-sponsored development of agriculture, interacting with the structure of agriculture inherited from the pre-World War 2 period, did lead both to important further partial transformations in semifeudal relations and the expansion of capitalist relations in the countryside. It also led to the even more highly disarticulated and polarized structure of Mexican agriculture that we find today.

An essential part of this agricultural development was the introduction of "green revolution" technology beginning with the formation of the Oficina de Estudios Especiales sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1943. This was accompanied by massive state investments in irrigation and other agricultural infrastructure and a flood of imperialist capital into a newly emerging food-processing industry and broader agro-industrial complex. After having been successfully tested and developed in Mexico, this "green revolution" strategy of imperialist-sponsored agricultural development was then spread, beginning in 1963, to other key dependent economies such as Iran, India, and some other Latin American countries.

What emerged in Mexico was a more advanced sector of agriculture including firms that, unlike the typical semifeudal *haciendas* of the Porfirian epoch at the turn of the century, are essentially capitalist in their internal relations. This modern capitalist agricultural sector is largely concentrated in the north and some more central regions, notably the Bajío.

This development of mainly larger-scale agriculture and cattle raising has been largely oriented toward the U.S. export market, the food processing and agro-industrial firms,

and the domestic luxury market — though some products like wheat have also entered in part into the consumption of some sections of the urban working class. Imperialist control of more developed agriculture has not mainly taken the form of direct land ownership, which is supposedly illegal under the 1917 Mexican Constitution, although Mexican frontmen or *prestanombres* — literally "name-lenders" — undoubtedly continue to play some role here. Rather, it involves, in part, the predominance of imperialist capital among food-processing and agro-industrial concerns. For example, today 97 percent of the market for evaporated and powdered milk is controlled by Nestle and Carnation; 60 percent of the market for balanced animal feed falls to Anderson Clayton, Purina, and International Multifoods; and foreign corporations control half of the production devoted to preparing, conserving, and packing fruits and vegetables and dominate the spheres of soft drink production, improved seeds, plaguicides, agricultural machinery, etc.<sup>51</sup>

This is but part of a broader structure of imperialist domination. As a recent study of Mexican agriculture indicates, "Agriculture has shown a new face in agroindustry, which has internationalized its production. . . . Such integration has spawned a whole new mode of industrial integration through production contracting, technological 'packaging' for whole industries, and nonequity forms of international control over agricultural production. It has also meant that the distinction between national and transnational agribusiness processors has begun to give way to the homogenization of production and technology. . . . Transnationals invest in all phases from farm to market. The locus of control is through contracts, technological 'packages,' and financial aid, not through equity ownership of the land."<sup>52</sup>

Imperialist-sponsored agricultural development was a key underpinning of Mexico's postwar industrialization. Agricultural exports covered almost 50 percent of necessary industrial imports by 1965.<sup>53</sup> From 1940 to 1960 agriculture grew rapidly and contributed in important measure to the overall growth of the economy.<sup>54</sup> But the transformation and development of more modern capitalist agriculture, as well as, in important part, the overall development of the economy, had as an essential foundation the intense oppression and exploitation of a partially transformed peasantry. Historically and throughout the Third World today, imperialism has the effect of both dissolving and reinforcing precapitalist relations, particularly in the countryside. And this has concrete expression in Mexico.

In a few areas, like one studied in northern Chiapas, the semifeudal oppression of the peasantry persists in a form almost unchanged since the days of the Porfiriato, right down to the landlord's "right of the first night" in which a newly married peasant woman has to go to bed first with the *patron*.<sup>55</sup> More generally, semifeudal relations and their reflections in the superstructure have been partially transformed, though not abolished. Such things as sharecropping, unpaid labor, usury, and even, in some areas, *peones*

*acasillados* — peasants that live and work on the landlord's land — are still broadly encountered, particularly in the south and parts of the center of the country.

The heart of persisting, partially transformed semifeudal relations is the enforced reproduction of an oppressed peasantry, and the land question remains at the heart of the oppression of this peasantry. Much of the best land is privately held and highly concentrated. Only 2 percent of all agricultural producers own 44 percent of the land, even according to grossly distorted official government statistics.<sup>56</sup> The reproduction of an oppressed peasantry no longer takes place mainly on the lands of private landlords; the state now plays the principal role through the *ejido* sector, state-controlled lands to which the peasants are given use rights but not ownership. *Ejido* and communal lands theoretically represented roughly half of agricultural land in 1970,<sup>57</sup> but the majority of the best *ejido* land is rented, under contract, or simply stolen by large agricultural interests.<sup>58</sup>

The peasant access to the land — largely, but not only marginal lands — that does exist is at the mercy of the state agrarian bureaucracy, the frequently corrupt *ejido* authorities, and private landowners with their own bands of armed gunmen. There is a huge mass of landless rural inhabitants: in 1970 the number of working people in the countryside

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without their own land — although many participate in family agricultural labor or in sharecropping — surpassed the number of peasants with a parcel by 400,000.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, the peasantry is surrounded by an oppressive web of private and state commercial intermediaries, restricted and frequently onerous credit, low state-regulated prices for basic crops, etc. At the local or regional level the network of domination by private landlords, the state bureaucracy, *ejido* and official peasant organization authorities, and commercial middlemen is woven together by *caciques* — perhaps loosely rendered as rural strongmen. The entire structure of oppression and exploitation is brutally enforced at the point of a gun, whether it be held by private *pistoleros*, the police, or the military, as such events as the May 1986 massacre of fifteen peasants by the police in two communities in Chiapas illustrate.

The oppressed character of the different strata of peasants, and of the wage laborers that are not entirely dif-

ferentiated from the peasantry, plays a pivotal role in the Mexican economy. Value is extracted by multiple means from peasant production and is ultimately siphoned off by the circuits of capital dominated by imperialist capital. In general, the peasant household faces not only the compulsion of market forces but also extra-economic pressures from above, principally state-connected. The peasantry produces relatively cheap food for the workers, helping to underwrite the structure of superexploitation of the proletariat as a whole. And the vast majority of the mainly migrant workers in such areas as construction supplement their earnings with their own or their family's peasant production, thus making it possible to pay such workers what are literally starvation wages. We will return to this question of superexploitation in a moment.

We have, then, the emergence, in the north and parts of the center, of a more advanced modern sector of agriculture that is essentially capitalist in its internal relations, producing largely for export, industry, and the domestic luxury market. On the other hand, particularly in the south and center, there persists a sea of oppressed peasants, suffering partially transformed forms of semifeudal oppression and supplying cheap basic foods, some export crops, and, most importantly, an extensive, superexploited migratory labor force. Peasant economy is forcibly articulated to and serves both more advanced agriculture and the economy more generally. This structure is highly disarticulated and distorted. It is an essential basis for the north/south polarization of the country. Advanced agriculture involves the often irrational use of the most advanced techniques while wooden plows and even digging sticks persist elsewhere. As far back as 1969 Mexico supplied the United States with 50 to 60 percent of its fresh winter vegetables, while over half the Mexican population could not afford even a minimal diet.<sup>60</sup> Recent press reports suggest that meat and cattle exports to the U.S. are rising while meat consumption even in the urban areas has dropped catastrophically. Meanwhile, Mexican government figures reveal that a third of the rural population *never* eat meat and 90 percent suffer from some caloric or protein deficiency.<sup>61</sup> Those who produce the food cannot eat.

Mexican agriculture began to enter into crisis in the mid-sixties. The mass of landless peasants almost doubled from 1950 to 1970.<sup>62</sup> Millions fled to the cities only to populate immense urban *cinturones de miseria*, or "belts of misery." By 1970 production of corn and beans, the basic crops associated with much of peasant production, had basically stagnated. The harvested area in corn fell 20 percent in a mere four years (1971-74), while beans fell 31 percent.<sup>63</sup> Once self-sufficient, Mexico began to import large quantities of basic grains. The peasantry had been sucked dry to underwrite the imperialist-sponsored development process. While cheap peasant production has served as a subsidy to capital by lowering the cost of the wage goods required by urban workers, this has given rise to the situation in which the extremely low incomes received by these peasant producers now jeopardize the very ability of the peasant house-

hold to reproduce itself. Crisis enveloped more advanced agriculture as well. Previous rates of growth as high as 8 percent had fallen toward zero in the first half of the '70s.<sup>64</sup> The stagnation of agricultural production, combined with the necessity to import food to feed a nation once self-sufficient in food, led to a net deficit in the agricultural balance of trade in 1974-75 and again for 1979-83, with the exception of 1982 when imports were severely restricted due to the balance-of-payments crisis.<sup>65</sup> Once a particularly dynamic aspect of postwar imperialist-sponsored development, the distorted and disarticulated structure of agriculture constitutes a major element of crisis in the Mexican economy.

Superexploitation — the paying of workers below the value of their labor power — is one of the most essential features, not only of agriculture, but of the economy as a whole. The superprofits garnered by imperialist capital rest on the pedestal of superexploitation. While there is a section of the proletariat that is better off, and while there exist significant differences and stratification within the Mexican working class, the proletariat as a whole is superexploited. Some idea of what we're talking about here is given by the

results of one study that showed that California farm-workers earn 7 times what agricultural workers in Mexico do, even after allowing for cost-of-living differences. In industry the spread is 11.5 times.<sup>66</sup> How is this possible? To begin with, living standards for many Mexican workers are driven down to an absolute physical minimum — but even this does not suffice. Contrary to chauvinist stereotypes of "lazy Mexicans," vast sections of the Mexican population can only eke out a precarious existence by combining income from many sources. It is not at all uncommon for workers to hold down more than one job and for all family members, including children, to be put to work in one form or another. Among those linked to the peasantry, wage income is combined with peasant agricultural or artisan production, which serves as an essential foundation for superexploitation of wage labor. In the cities, on the one hand living costs are driven down by such means as the self-construction of minimal housing, often "illegally" on invaded land without even the most basic services, giving rise to the immense shantytowns that ring Mexico's bloated cities. On the other hand wages received by various family

**TABLE**  
**RECENT ECONOMIC STATISTICS**  
(in billions of U.S. dollars)\*

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
1. Exports	9.3	16.1	19.9	21.1	22.2	24.2	21.9
2. Imports	12.1	18.9	24.0	14.4	7.7	11.3	13.5
3. Trade Balance (1-2)	-2.8	-2.8	-4.1	7.6	14.5	12.9	8.4
4. Current Account	-5.4	-8.2	-13.9	-5.7	5.2	4.2	.5
5. Capital Account	5.1	12.9	23.2	9.2	-7	-1.0	-1.8
6. Net Errors and Omissions	.6	-3.8	-8.6	-7.5	-2.5	-1.0	-1.4
7. Performance Balance (4+5+6)†	.3	1.0	.7	-4.0	2.0	2.2	-2.7
8. % Growth Real GDP	9.2	8.3	7.9	-.6	-5.3	3.5	2.7
9. Total External Debt		50.7	74.9	87.6	93.8	96.9	97.3
10. Total Service (Interest Plus Principal) on Line (9)		9.2	13.2	23.4	17.3	16.1	14.7
11. Monthly Minimum Wage (in 1982 Pesos)	12,777		11,413	10,920	7,860	7,759 (May)	

\*Except lines 8 and 11.

†Figures may not tally exactly due to rounding.

Sources

Lines 1-8: International Monetary Fund, *International Financial Statistics Yearbook 1985*; *International Financial Statistics*, November 1986 for 1984 & 1985 figures;

Lines 9 & 10: Banco de México, *Indicadores económicos*, and SHCP, *Data Book*, cited in *El Cotidiano*, July-August 1986, p. 8.

Line 11: figures from Banco de México and Comisión Nacional de Salarios Mínimos, cited in *Punto Crítico*, July 1984.

members are combined with income from various sources — a mass of petty commerce, household production, shoe shining, windshield washing, etc. — in the "informal" economy. So that while categorized as "underemployed," many of the Mexican proletarians and semiproletarians are in fact overworked, pooling multiple scant resources merely to stay alive.

The possibilities of maintaining and reproducing the superexploitation of the proletariat as a whole are determined by the essential role of the peasant and the urban "informal" economy. The progressive partial destruction and disintegration of peasant production has released an immense mass of surplus labor that has migrated to the cities but cannot be absorbed as workers by the capital-intensive imperialist-dominated industrialization process. This mass of surplus labor is a great weight dragging down the wages of the proletariat as a whole. Nor does it represent a reserve army of labor simply in the Mexican context — this reserve army, like other features of imperialist world economy, has become internationalized. In particular it has served as an immense labor pool for the domestic economy of U.S. imperialism. Millions migrate to work in the United States, and while they may earn better wages than in Mexico, they are still superexploited proletarians within the U.S. context, face the most outrageous oppression, and are hunted down like animals by the INS. The expanding U.S. domestic use of superexploited Mexican and other immigrant labor has been an essential part of the means used to manage the crisis in the U.S. economy.

Advanced agricultural techniques and millions on the edge of starvation; Coca-Cola signs in nearly every village and millions of so-called "illegal" immigrants to the U.S.; the largest city in the world populated in important part by people that lack even the most basic services; an immense, distorted petroleum industry and *tragafuegos* that blow flaming gasoline from their mouths at intersections for spare change; advanced industry and masses of peasants still suffering forms of semifeudal oppression; modern skyscrapers and children selling gum in the street: such is the picture of Mexico's uneven, distorted, and disarticulated imperialist-dominated development; such is the structure that control by imperialist capital has wrought.

## Crisis and Beyond

The depth of the problems facing the Mexican economy can be usefully gauged by examining the latest round of the debt crisis. The Mexican balance of payments underwent a startling inversion with the 1982 crisis. Throughout previous postwar Mexican experience, positive foreign-capital inflows on the capital account served to offset consistent trade and current-account deficits. Beginning with the 1982 crisis the influx of imperialist capital, as measured on the capital account, takes an even deeper plunge than that following the 1976 crisis. The capital account is actually

negative (net outflows) in 1983-85, largely due to the principal payments on the foreign debt exceeding capital inflows. Although service (interest plus principal) payments on the foreign debt decline somewhat due to the restructuring of the debt in the wake of the 1982 crisis and the easing of world interest rates, new loans contract sharply. The growing excess of debt-service payments over new loans is now covered by trade *surpluses*, something without precedent in the postwar Mexican economy.

Exports grow only moderately. The trade surplus is essentially the product of a profound contraction of imports, itself a consequence of the drastic austerity measures applied in the wake of the 1982 crisis. Continued payment of debt service was fundamentally predicated on this atypical trade surplus. The trade surplus itself was contingent not only on a profound contraction of import-dependent production but also on reductions in real wages evident in the figures given for real wages in this period. It is not an exaggeration to say that continued debt payments have been coined out of the blood and misery of the Mexican people.

Due to the inherent nature of the present structure of Mexico's economy, the anomalous large trade surpluses used to pay the debt service could not be sustained. The sharp restriction of imports and the drying up of foreign capital flows were accompanied by the abrupt contraction of the economy, with the real GDP plunging 5.3 percent in 1983. However, even the weak growth in 1984-85, encouraged by some loosening of the government austerity measures in 1984 (with real GDP growth rates still below the lowest figure following the 1976 crisis), inevitably led to a growth of imports for the import-dependent industrial sector in Mexico. Apart from a brief upswing in 1984, exports remained near their 1982 level. Newly rising imports eroded the trade surplus. This, together with continuing high debt-service payments and disappearing new foreign loan funds, resulted by 1985 in the worst overall performance balance of the balance of payments since the 1982 crisis (see Table).

The economy was thus on the verge of yet another balance-of-payments crisis *before* the collapse of the world oil market in the last weeks of 1985 and the beginning of 1986. This collapse obviously exacerbated the 1986 balance-of-payments crisis and accompanying sharp contraction of the economy. But the plunge in world oil prices was not, in itself, the only cause of the renewed balance-of-payments crisis. The squeezing of large debt payments out of the Mexican economy far in excess of diminishing inflows of foreign capital was *inherently unsustainable and would have led to a renewed open intensification of the crisis in any event*. The collapse of the world petroleum market, itself an expression of the essential anarchy and instability of the world imperialist economy, only accelerated and intensified the process.

The so-called "solution" to the Mexican debt crisis that emerged out of the 1986 negotiations was essentially to lend Mexico \$12 billion more to meet interest payments during 1987 and the first part of 1988, combined with *yet another* rescheduling of principal payments. The \$12 billion may or may not be sufficient to meet interest payments, achieve the

announced goal of 2 to 3 percent "growth" in GDP over 1987-88 (which, if achieved, would only return real GDP to its 1981 level), and stimulate limited expansion of export-oriented production. In any event, the same basic difficulties — if not worse — will confront the economy at the end of the "rescue package" in 1988. . . and the already unpayable foreign debt will be \$12 billion larger, with interest payments correspondingly greater.

As the conservative British publication *The Latin American Times* observed before the 1986 debt agreement: "Indeed, it is apparent that, as these rescheduling agreements become more and more complex, and increasingly nebulous, all that remains holding the banking system together is a fantastic network of tentative agreements, concerning which minimal publicity is nowadays given, in

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order to sustain precarious confidence as long as possible."<sup>67</sup> The 1986 rescue package has but added yet another unstable link to this "fantastic network."

The devaluation of the peso is an integral part of this "rescue package." The stated purpose is to both attract foreign capital (by lowering production costs) and to stimulate exports (the earnings from which are supposed to cover a substantial portion of Mexico's debt overhang). While the medium-term prospects are highly dubious, the immediate effects of devaluation combined with austerity are brutally in evidence: growing immiseration of the laboring population due to the declining purchasing power of wages, increases in the rates of infant mortality, spreading malnutrition in the context of the growing inability of Mexican agriculture to feed the population, and widespread social dislocation. The urban middle classes are under greater pressure than ever before in the postwar period.

The extraordinary buildup of debt throughout the Third World is a defining feature of the world economic crisis. And the magnitude and global dimensions of this debt are matters of intense concern for imperialism. But Mexico

(along with Brazil) is a special case. So much investment and loan capital has been sunk into Mexico and Brazil, and so important are they to the world economy, that a collapse of either one of them could trigger a major upheaval in the world economy.

U.S. imperialism has no substantive program for resolving the economic crisis of Mexico. The reasons for this have to do with the enormity of global economic crisis — which shows up in the slowdown in growth and investment, rising protectionist pressures, and grave financial difficulties — and the intensity of the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. What the U.S. is striving to do, therefore, is to tighten and deepen its domination of Mexico while playing for time on the economic front (this includes episodic austerity/bailout measures, especially aimed at the state sector, along with pressures to further open up the economy to foreign capital). U.S. imperialism is operating according to a strategic calculus: desperately trying to postpone the looming dangers of economic collapse and/or social explosion in Mexico — in the context of an approaching global showdown with the Soviet Union.

With this in mind, we can begin to get a better handle on the nature of the current conflicts within the Mexican ruling class and between the ruling classes of Mexico and the United States. The fundamental context for such infighting among reactionaries is the strategic context of preparations for world war with the Soviet bloc. In particular, the enormous damage to U.S. imperialism's world strategic position that would result from an international financial collapse due to the Third World debt crisis and even more so from the destabilization of the Mexican neocolonial regime, to say nothing of a revolutionary popular war — the specter of all this has made Mexico U.S. imperialism's announced second most important foreign policy concern after the Soviet Union. Any destabilization of Mexico, the soft underbelly of the U.S. imperialist motherland, would have incalculable ramifications within the U.S. itself, where the revolutionary potential of Mexican immigrants is already a major worry. This is the context in which U.S. economic moves, the militarization of the border, the persecution of immigrants, the "drug war," the encouragement of Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), etc., must all be placed.

Economic policy is the realm within which the fundamental unity of the U.S. imperialists and their Mexican compradors is most obvious. Mexico's government continues to dutifully follow the orders of the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund and to continue paying the foreign debt, no matter how many Mexicans may die of starvation in the process. In this regard, as in others, Mexico has played an important political role for U.S. imperialism in Latin America as a "model debtor" that continues to oppose even joint action by the Latin American governments on the debt question.

Policy differences between the current U.S. and Mexican administrations do exist on the war in Central America. The Mexican government — like many circles in the U.S. ruling class whose preferred policy is currently out of favor —

favors an attempted negotiated containment of the situation, while the current U.S. administration is pursuing a more openly aggressive course. But it must be stressed that Mexico's differences are essentially over how best to defend the U.S. empire in the region. As Mexican president Miguel de la Madrid expressed it during his last trip to Washington, "We believe that reason will finally have to impose itself; that the violence in Central America implies, as well, the risk of political agitation in the rest of Latin America and that relations between the United States and the Latin American countries could be injured. Mexico wants to avoid this because it is convinced that we should have a climate of harmony and cooperation on the continent. . . . [O]ur countries have differences over the means to achieve the ends, [but] the ends of having a peaceful Central American region, where violence is avoided, where we can promote economic and social development, are shared ends."<sup>68</sup> Leaving aside the "peaceful" rhetoric — which the U.S. imperialists are also fond of using to justify their most brutal military adventures — what self-respecting U.S. imperialist could really disagree with de la Madrid's fear — horrors! — that there be "political agitation" in Latin America, or that U.S.-Latin American relations be injured, or even with the proposal that the United States and Mexico "promote economic and social development" in Central America — imperialist-dominated development, to be sure. As de la Madrid says, essential ends are shared, disagreements involve the best means to the end.

As indicated earlier, the Mexican state is the essential instrument for the administration of the dependent role of Mexico in the process of global accumulation. At the same time, this state, principally through the PRI political apparatus and through its occasional anti-imperialist posturing, has helped to legitimize collaboration between imperialist capital and bureaucrat-comprador capital. Furthermore, the institutional integration of the labor unions and peasant associations into a highly centralized corporatist political structure has provided a certain degree of stability that has aided the expansion of capital. While continuing to rely primarily on the PRI to defend and maintain its domination of Mexico, U.S. imperialism has begun to give some encouragement to the PAN. The aim is to prepare an alternative bureaucrat-comprador party to replace the PRI in the event of the destabilization of the regime. There is no essential difference in the fundamentally pro-imperialist character of both parties, although the PRI is understandably upset about any encouragement given to the PAN. The PAN attended the 1984 Republican Convention, the PRI attended

the Democratic Convention. The PAN is painted favorably by much of the U.S. press and some congressional figures, while Reagan and top administration officials reassure the PRI government of their fundamental support. While the PAN may indeed receive U.S. funds as the PRI charges, the PRI government is to receive \$12 billion to temporarily soften the debt crisis and bolster its vulnerable neocolonial regime. It can be said of both parties, in Mario Benedetti's phrase: tell me what company you keep and I'll tell you *yanqui go home*. These maneuvers and stratagems are part of a more general political and ideological offensive, in which the two parties play somewhat distinct but complementary roles designed to tighten up U.S. domination of Mexico, both for fear of an explosion among the masses of Mexican people in the current crisis and to "batten down the

***Oppression has never ceased giving rise to resistance. But the situation today holds out unique historical possibility.***

hatches" in preparation for world war. And the corruption that goes with all this is just further evidence of how utterly antagonistic these parties are to the interests of the broad masses.

This essay has attempted to show that there is a concrete and interlinked history, structure, and logic of U.S. domination over Mexico. To put it differently, the anatomy of domination is at one and the same time the anatomy of oppression. And this oppression has never ceased giving rise to resistance. But the situation today holds out unique historical possibility. There is unsustainable debt throughout Latin America, conflict in Central America, the prospect of economic collapse and social upheaval in Mexico, and the specter of fierce clashes and major dislocations on the U.S.-Mexican border. At a time of great international tension, the United States faces its greatest regional crisis of the twentieth century. This situation presents enormous opportunities and challenges. Whether they are decisively seized upon and met has everything to do with whether the possibility of uprooting the structure of imperialist domination in Mexico becomes a reality. □

## Notes

1. *Uno Más Uno*, 21 May 1984; Gloria González Salazar, *Aspectos Recientes del Desarrollo Social de México* (Mexico City [hereafter "DF" for Distrito Federal]: UNAM, 1983), p. 260.
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# ***On the Question of Homosexuality and the Emancipation of Women***

*The following paper was written by a writing group under the leadership of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA and is being published to clarify and further develop the position of the Party as expressed in the Party Programme, as well as to raise the level of debate and struggle on this question. We feel the question of homosexuality is closely intertwined with the question of the oppression of women as reflected in its ideological underpinnings and that this is a question that needs to be more deeply understood and discussed. We are cognizant of the present political atmosphere and in trying to conduct such a debate have taken great care to make it quite clear that we, as representatives of the revolutionary proletariat, firmly oppose the pogromist and repressive atmosphere that is being whipped up against homosexuals including the use of the AIDS epidemic as a pretext to carry out various forms of repression. We fully intend to join with others in exposing and combating these attacks, even while continuing principled discussion and struggle over the important ideological questions raised here and their implications for the struggle for fundamental change, for the liberation of women, and for the elimination of all exploitation and oppression.*

## **Introduction**

Every revolution has its "love question." In the eyes of revolutionary communists this is a fine thing, representing as it does the breakdown of the old morals and the sanctity of the old society in this as in every arena of life. With this as an orientation and starting point, we must seek to deepen our analysis and understanding of developments and shifts in prevailing social morés with an eye to accelerating that breakdown and helping to usher in the new.

Profound changes are taking place in the position of women and the traditional family that have brought forward many new features in the class struggle. The breadth and extent of homosexuality is but one indication of these changes. As tremendously important as it is to grasp these

developments, it is no less important to understand that these changes are taking place under the still-dominant male-supremacist relations of society and that they bear the stamp of these dominant relations. And this is certainly true of homosexuality in today's society.

Homosexuality — in all its forms — is a prominent feature on the political stage today. And there is significant controversy surrounding our position on this question. Dealing with this issue correctly is bound up with deeply coming to grips with the oppression of women and with what will be required of the proletariat and its party in taking the road that will really uproot it. Especially given the urgency of the times and world developments, any revolutionary-minded person should be fired up to come to grips more deeply with how this oppression arose and what it will take to do away with it. As Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, put it in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*: "In many ways, and particularly for men, the woman question and whether you seek to completely abolish or to preserve the existing property and social relations and corresponding ideology that enslave women (or maybe 'just a little bit' of them) is a touchstone question *among the oppressed themselves*. It is a dividing line between 'wanting in' and really 'wanting out': between fighting to end all oppression and exploitation — and the very division of society into classes — and seeking in the final analysis to get your part in this" (pp. 140-41).

Impatience and desire to rupture with the old morals and traditions, including as they pertain to the family, is certainly not where we disagree with many feminists and lesbians! And, while making clear our basic disagreements with those who uphold homosexuality as a positive, or even radical, alternative to the dominant social relations, our party has struggled practically and politically to *not* make our line on this a dividing-line question in the struggle today. But we do feel that debate and deep, principled struggle over what it will take to end the oppression of women must be a component of the struggle today and that this must inform the question of what stand to take on homosexuality. This has to be our orientation if we want to win, and if we are to be guided by an outlook which seeks no halfway revolution but a complete transformation of the whole world and every social relation within it. It is in this spirit that we are issuing this paper, in the hope that it will stimulate further unity, discussion, and practical work.

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The *Programme* of the RCP, USA states:

As for homosexuality, this too, is perpetuated and fostered by the decay of capitalism, especially as it sinks into deeper crisis. This is particularly the case because of the distorted, oppressive man-woman relations capitalism promotes. Once the proletariat is in power, no one will be discriminated against in jobs, housing and the like merely on the basis of

being a homosexual. But at the same time education will be conducted throughout society on the ideology behind homosexuality and its material roots in exploiting society, and struggle will be waged to eliminate it and reform homosexuals. (Revolutionary Communist Party, p. 77)

The question of human sexuality today cannot be analyzed in a vacuum, or solely in individual terms, as if it somehow stood apart from or "above" the question of classes and class society. In order to understand the particular phenomenon of homosexuality, it must be recognized that *all* forms of human sexuality — including homosexuality — are manifestations of underlying social relations and products of social conditioning. Like all other social practices, they have a past historical development and a current material basis. And they at one and the same time concentrate some aspects of existing social relations and in turn affect these in one or another direction.

Approaching the question of homosexuality by attempting to evaluate it in an idealist way, by ripping it out of historical context and conditions of existing class society or by citing individual motivations to explain what is objectively a *social* phenomenon, can only lead to an incorrect analysis. The *Party Programme*, on the contrary, correctly identifies the decay of capitalism and the distorted, oppressive, woman-hating relations capitalism inherited, upholds, and thrives on as the material basis of homosexuality today.

In opposition to our approach, it is often raised that sexual attraction to persons of the same sex is just as "natural" as the attraction to the opposite sex, and further, that in particular individuals there is an "inherent" preference for homosexuality which is biological. In order to address this, certain fundamental points need to be

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established with regard to the relation between human sexuality in general and the development of human society.

Human biology and evolution must be taken into account in evaluating modern sexuality. But our biology and evolutionary development as a species actually provide proof time and time again that human social behaviors (certainly including all forms of sexual behavior) simply cannot be understood in a mechanical-reductionist fashion at the level of, for instance, genes and hormones.<sup>1</sup> Human social behaviors are rooted in the existing social conditions at any given time; they are shaped by these conditions in an ongoing way and react back upon them. What we need is a historical and materialist analysis of the origins and development of various human sexual practices, especially in relation to the development of class divisions and class struggle; at any given time any type of human sexuality can and should be analyzed and evaluated as a social practice and with reference to the existing social context and overall set of social relations. There is no such thing as "natural" or "inherent" outside of this context.

Thus, in regard to capitalist society today we should seek to understand more deeply how and to what extent a given form of human sexuality reflects (or even concentrates aspects of) the underlying social relations of this type of society and what, if any, its effect is in challenging or reinforcing these relations — again, from the standpoint of wanting to transform these relations as an integral part of finally eliminating class society and ending all oppressive social relations.

Our party has based itself on the understanding that women's biological role in reproduction was a significant factor influencing the first social division of labor (upon which class society eventually developed) and, furthermore, that biological reproduction continued to play a role in shaping the social division of labor between men and women in class society. Because of this, some feminists have accused us of saying that "biology is destiny."

First of all, we recognize that this question has sometimes been treated too mechanically and linearly by Marxists. But merely recognizing the historical reality — that from its origins our species had not one, or three, but two sexes; that each sex did have some biological particularities (primarily in relation to reproduction); and that these differences between the two sexes (as limited as they were) must have had some bearing on the tasks of our earliest ancestors — in no way constitutes a biodeterminist position. We are simply saying that, throughout our history and to this day, the fact that one sex has borne the young has had a significant impact on the social division of labor. Now, this

1. For further discussion of the social character of all complex human behaviors, in opposition to the reductionist biodeterminism of sociobiologists and their ilk, see Ardea Skybreak, *Of Primeval Steps and Future Leaps*, and Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin, *Not In Our Genes*.

is not to say that things had to happen that way, only that they did. Furthermore, we are not saying that biological differences in relation to reproduction need to have been, *in and of themselves*, a basis for the oppression of one sex by another or that in any future society such differences need even impinge to any significant extent on the social division of labor. But in the early days of humanity the differences between the sexes in reproductive roles *did* have implications for how they divided up their tasks, and this has had repercussions to this very day. It is really not very surprising that the means by which human beings reproduce themselves would have a tremendous impact on the organization of human society. Engels drew attention to this when he wrote:

According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a two-fold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other. (Engels, 1967, p. 5, our emphasis)

This *dialectical materialist* understanding is, in fact, quite an argument against biological determinism. Engels reveals in this passage the pivotal role that both production and reproduction of life play in shaping society. And he indicates here not only how these two things give rise to certain changing social structures but also the *interaction* between, on the one hand, the biological reproduction of the species and, on the other, the overall struggle for production. But this interaction, granted, should not be mechanically understood.

One of the unique things about human beings relative to other species is the unprecedented degree to which we interact with and transform the material world around us (and ourselves in the process), especially through the medium of ever-changing forms of social organization. Modern human sexuality reflects these complex and changing social interactions, which are not genetically determined nor in any other way primarily a manifestation of the biology of individuals. Human sexuality, up to today, obviously is not devoid of biological constraints: for instance it is still intimately connected with reproduction, and reproduction is still dependent on the female of the species bearing children. But sexual morality and sexual practices are social constructs, not mere manifestations of the underlying biology. While throughout history the only way human beings had of reproducing was through sexual relations between men and women — a fact which obviously had much

to do with why homosexuality has occupied at most a secondary role in society — this is not the entire framework within which human sexuality has developed.

Indeed, sexual customs not only reflect the role sex plays in bearing children but also typically mirror and affect the general property relations in a given society. Obviously, since our earliest origins it has been the case that any self-contained human grouping which did not broadly practice heterosexual sex would simply die out. Even in relatively recent history there is at least one example of a small, self-contained "society" doing just that: the strictly celibate Shakers, who vanished exactly because the lack of sexual relations between men and women precluded the production of any new generations. But beyond that, it must be understood that social rules and regulations governing sexuality have been an important means of ensuring the preservation and reproduction not only of people but of property relations and that this has been true ever since the advent of property-based social hierarchies. The combination of a basic biological constraint (the fact that heterosexual sex has been to date the only means through which to produce new generations) with the broad social constraints imposed by propertied classes seeking to preserve and reproduce property lineages and relations primarily through a patriarchal framework — this constitutes the material basis for the ongoing dominance of heterosexuality throughout history and in the world today.

In drawing out the dialectical relation between production and reproduction, Engels argued that the social division of labor along sexual lines was largely shaped by women's biological role in bearing and rearing children. Our ancestors were confronted with a means of reproduction which involved long periods of pregnancy for the women. Infants were highly dependent on the surrounding society for their basic material needs for extremely long periods of time — most likely including dependence for very prolonged periods of time on mothers' milk for basic nutrition. As Ardea Skybreak and others have argued, this kind of necessity may well have provided the initial impetus for our early ancestors to develop means of gathering and storing plant foods (with females quite likely playing a central role in the initiation and development of such activities); in time such activities would have been decisive in making possible the first accumulations of material surpluses, which would have freed society from the confines of literal hand-to-mouth existence. This would have made possible further development of the productive forces and explorations and transformations of the surrounding world by enabling people to further subdivide tasks among themselves, relying on accumulated stores of resources as a material "cushion" in undertaking risky ventures.

Given the somewhat different necessity and freedom encountered by the two sexes in relation to the children, it is not difficult to imagine how some of the earliest spontaneous divisions of labor would have fallen out at least in part along sexual lines. But what may at first have been no more than a slight difference in emphasis in the degree to which

each sex undertook different tasks has typically been superseded by an increasing compartmentalization and specialization of social functions that involved increased unevenness between men and women in the accumulation and control of material surpluses. This provided the material basis — as a direct consequence of this increased lopsidedness and "refining" of the division of labor — for the subjugation and oppression of women by men, along with other forms of social oppression that were emerging on the basis of unevenness in the accumulation of surplus and the transformation of social wealth into private property. We cannot say that this is the *only* way society could have gone beyond a literal hand-to-mouth existence, but the fact is that is the way things typically developed, and we are living the consequences of this history to this very day. The earliest divisions of labor along sexual lines would have, by definition, incorporated a certain unevenness between men and women which could have contained within it the seeds of incipient inequalities between them. *But it would have taken the emergence of strict and institutionalized class divisions based on a systematic process of uneven distribution and control of material resources for any social division of labor to become the basis for the full-scale and systematic oppression of women which has characterized all class society since then.*

This historical analysis is in sharp contrast to the position of some who have argued (often as part of an argument for lesbianism and against "the institution of compulsory heterosexuality") that the division of labor along sexual lines was the result of men simply wanting to live off women's labor. Not only does this unhinge the point from any materialist analysis of history and instead attribute everything to the personal motives of men, greed in the abstract, etc., but such a scenario was a literal impossibility in the earliest stages of history. Most importantly it should be recognized that antagonistic interests are not innate but themselves come into being on a material basis, i.e., in relation to objective conditions at a given time and without people being necessarily fully conscious of the basis or implications of the changes taking place in society. Certainly our early ancestors could not have known all the ramifications and implications of their first attempts to divide things up and parcel out tasks in certain ways. The history of antagonistic relations between men and women is no exception.

We would not argue (and this is not the point in the *Programme*) that homosexual behavior did not or could not exist prior to class society. But it is clear that societies that developed into class societies were overall characterized by a division of labor along sexual lines and the predominance of heterosexuality.

From the time human society became divided into classes and the patriarchal family emerged as a basic unit of production and of reproduction of property relations, heterosexual relations have in fact been male supremacist relations and have been permeated through and through with the corresponding male supremacist ideology necessary to maintain the subordination of women which is essential to the functioning of such a system. Heterosexuali-

ty has never again been free of that stamp of oppression. Given this, some would argue that any alternate form of sexuality, any departure from this oppressive predominant form, should be deemed inherently "progressive" by virtue of its "opposition" to or rejection of the oppressive form that is heterosexuality. But what is the character of this "departure" in the context of the existing patriarchal, class-divided society? Does it in fact even constitute a real break with the traditional male-female relations embodied in heterosexuality, or would it be more correct to view homosexuality as an extension, and in some of its aspects even a concentration, of some of these very same relations? To answer these questions we need to explore more deeply two interrelated developments: the material basis in history for the establishment of the social dominance of heterosexuality and the particularity of the social role or function of that objectively secondary form of sexuality which is homosexuality.

As we said earlier, the historical material basis for the clear-cut dominance of the heterosexual form of sexuality in human society (at least, as far as is known since the advent of property-based social hierarchies) encompasses two closely intertwined aspects: an initial biological constraint (heterosexual sex having throughout human history been the only means through which new generations could be produced) and, with the emergence of private property, the creation of the patriarchal family as a basic vehicle for the structuring, development, and reproduction of property relations. In fact, if it weren't for this latter development, heterosexuality might not have become the socially dominant (i.e., most prevalent) form of sexuality, even if it remained necessary for the production of children. The biological connection would have ensured that heterosexuality would flourish, so to speak, but this alone would not have ensured that it would become the most prevalent, socially dominant form of sexuality in human beings.

For instance, in the absence of the development of property relations, an exploitative division of labor, and a patriarchal framework through which these relations are realized and reproduced, it is possible to imagine a society in which heterosexual matings have been institutionalized (perhaps even highly ritualized) for the purposes of producing children, but where men and women engage to an equal or even greater degree in various alternate forms of sexuality, for recreation or whatever other purposes. Who can say for sure what the sexual practices of our earliest ancestors were? Obviously heterosexual sex must have been pretty popular or they would have died out, and this form of sexuality would have had a disproportionate impact on society because only this form could have added new members to the group, but who's to say that other forms of sexual experimentation were not just as common, devoid of social stigma, and so forth. The point of this kind of speculation is not to argue that this was necessarily the case but to highlight the fact that the development of private property and of the forms of social organization created to structure and perpetuate the new relations of property in class-divided socie-

ty would have dramatically altered the character, prevalence, and overall social significance of any form of sexuality, hetero-, homo-, bisexuality, whatever.

When the basis for material accumulation emerged in human society (taking a dramatic leap with the first attempts at cultivation and/or domestication of animals), some people no doubt found that they were able to accumulate more than others and that this gave them a disproportionate influence over others in society. A more clearly defined and institutionalized division of labor in society would have made possible even greater accumulation. The most "successful" individuals and groupings would have been those who found the way of expanding their productive base by coercing the labor of others to their advantage, thereby accumulating even greater wealth and a disproportionate voice in the affairs and regulation of society. Completely new social structures had to be developed to regulate the new division of labor, quell any resistance by those who suddenly found themselves at a distinct disadvantage, and provide channels through which to continually expand accumulation and regulate its distribution, including from one generation to another. As class divisions emerged, people created chieftains, councils, priests, armed bodies, and assorted other institutions for the enforcement and perpetuation of the newly exploitative division of labor. Fundamental to this process, and perhaps its very earliest expression, was the creation of the patriarchal family which institutionalized the subjugation of women, children, and in many instances slaves. For thousands of years the patriarchal family has remained a basic form through which human beings have reproduced not only themselves but their property relations as well. And this form has managed to survive, with only slight alterations, throughout all the different types of class societies in pastoral, agricultural, and industrial contexts; it remains to this day a crucial anchor of imperialist relations of exploitation and oppression throughout the world.

While this is not the place to attempt an in-depth analysis of the origins and development of the patriarchal family, it is important to understand its role in putting the stamp of the institutionalized oppression of women on all forms of human sexuality. From that point on, and this is the crux of the relevance of the patriarchal family to this discussion, women occupied a special and oppressed position within the process of accumulation: the need for the preservation of the newly emerging forms of private property, typically dominated by men (an outcome of the prior division of labor), necessitated the guarantee of male lineage and brought about restrictions on female sexuality. Women became domestic slaves — the actual meaning of the word "family" (from the Latin *famulus*) being the "the house of slaves." Not only did the fruits of women's labor become alienable property whose disposition was controlled by others and which served to bolster the power and authority of their oppressors, but their most essential role became institutionalized as that of breeders, their relative value mainly defined by their ability or lack of ability to produce new

members of the family unit.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately the question arose of the need of male heads of families to supervise and control this breeding. It wouldn't do for the cohesion and stability of the patriarchal family to be undermined by such things as custody disputes over children of uncertain lineage! For one thing, children themselves had become property and, furthermore, lineage had to be clearly established to ensure that accumulation could proceed to expand and build on itself along orderly transmission lines. For the first time in history it really mattered socially who a woman's child's father was, especially in the case of a male child. But the certainty of lineage and

2. Since this time, it is probably the case that male homosexuality has always accompanied marriage and the family, much as has prostitution. For example, in ancient Greece the class relations dictated that male homosexuality was acceptable, the prevailing attitude being that real and complete love could not be fulfilled with such lowly creatures as women. Taboos against lesbianism were a part of the constraints — on up to and including mutilation — used against female sexuality and sensuality, so important in keeping household slaves "faithful." The following remarks from Andrea Dworkin provide some important insights in this regard:

It must also be noted that glorious ancient Greece, so often cited as the ideal male homosexual society, that is, a society in which sex among men and boys was entirely acceptable, operated in accordance with these same principles: male sexual aggression against boys and among men was highly regulated by custom and in practice; sexual relations between men and boys expressed a rigid hierarchy of male power; the youth used was feminized vis-à-vis older men; sex was not consensual, that is, among peers (in fact, on Crete and in other parts of Greece, boys were kidnapped into sexual apprenticeship); the boy became the man, changed status, his reward at the end of an apprenticeship; populations of women and slaves, neither of which had any rights of citizenship, absorbed the brunt of male sexual aggression. Male homosexuality in male-supremacist societies has always been contained and controlled by men as a class, though the strategies of containment have differed, to protect men from rape by other men, to order male sexuality so that it is, with reference to males, predictable and safe. Females and devalued males who participate in the low status of women are logically the preferred victims, since male sexuality as it exists in male-supremacist contexts requires victims, not fully present equals, in order to realize itself. The devalued males can often change status, escape; women and girls cannot. And the devalued male who cannot change his devalued status can always find solace in his own rights of tyranny and privilege, however circumscribed, over women and girls in his own family, class, race, or group.

... Those gay men of our own time who offer ancient Greece as a utopian model are only confirming that, for them, the continued scapegoating of women and the sexual exploitation of less powerful males would be an insignificant price to pay for a comfortable solution to their own social and sexual dilemma. As adult men, they would have freedom as they understand it, the freedom of the sexual predator; women, girls, and devalued males would continue to be the prey. This moral bankruptcy is not in any sense unique to homosexual men; rather, it is part of what they have in common with all men. (Dworkin, 1981, pp. 61-62)

overall submission of women was obtained at a great cost to women, including through coercion and distortion of their sexuality in the form of enforced monogamy, institutionalized rape, mutilation of sexual organs, outcast status and/or draconian punishments for sexual activity outside the family, etc. In short, *this* is the origin and material basis for the continued social dominance of heterosexuality throughout the world — living testimony to millennia of oppressive relations between men and women, all geared to the reproduction of property relations.<sup>3</sup>

The point of all this is that with the emergence of private property and the creation of the patriarchal family, heterosexuality would necessarily have assumed a disproportionate social significance relative to any other forms of sexuality. From that point on, women's sexuality would have been strictly regulated and restricted to the greatest extent possible to heterosexual relations, and monogamous ones at that. This would minimize the number of "illegitimate" children, "uncompensated" elopements of marriageable daughters, and any sexual activity, be it with other women or with men outside the family, which would represent a defiance of the rules of submission and subordination. All because such activities could now undermine the orderly process of accumulation and transmission of property.

For men the same restrictions never really applied. For one thing, the practice by men of "supplemental" forms of sexuality (homosexuality, the use of prostitutes, etc.) did not have the same material consequences or hold the same potential for disruption of the accumulation process as the extrafamilial activities of women. The patriarchal context did not require of them the same proof of submission, and these activities either would not result in children or would result in children whose paternity could easily be denied if

3. The social dominance of heterosexuality is likely to be with us for quite some time, given the interplay of tradition and the level of development of the productive forces on a world scale. Abstractly it might be tempting to argue that heterosexual relations are so imbued with male right that such a form would have to be discarded altogether and as soon as possible as part of eliminating the roots and buttresses of the oppression of women, but its long-standing worldwide significance in the reproduction of people and production relations, coupled with the millennia of stubborn tradition accompanying this, make it unlikely that heterosexuality will become historically obsolete any time soon. What is realistic, however, is that the fight against male supremacy must and will be a crucial part of the struggle against the existing social order, and that, with the overthrow of this order through proletarian revolution, it will be possible through tremendous and ongoing struggle to transform social relations and increasingly restrict male right in the context of the family and society generally, thereby undercutting the ability of heterosexual relations per se to embody and perpetuate the oppression of women. And this very same struggle to continually restrict male right will no doubt have a great effect on all secondary or supplemental forms of sexuality as well, most likely undercutting even more rapidly the material and ideological basis for their particular role in class-divided society.

incorporating them into the family context were to threaten property lines in any way. Thus, "supplemental" forms of sexuality have traditionally been engaged in by men to a much greater degree than by women.<sup>4</sup> Male homosexuality, for instance, has often been practiced by primarily heterosexual men who simultaneously maintained traditional families (wives and children), the existence of exclusively homosexual "communities" on a large scale being a relatively modern development.<sup>5</sup> A similar arrangement for women (husband and lesbian lover on the side) has traditionally been much less socially acceptable and prevalent, to say the least! But even for men, the development of a means to reproduce the relations of property through a patriarchal family and the need to preserve and protect this patriarchal form has ensured that heterosexuality would predominate and be given "favored status" over other forms of sexuality.

Thus, homosexuality has of necessity been marginalized by the emergence and centrality of the patriarchal family, and while it has perhaps always "accompanied" hetero-

4. It is true that, to various degrees in various cultures, there have been taboos against certain forms of supplemental sexual activity by men, and even severe punishments proscribed for violations in relation to the monogamous family. In the main, though, these prohibitions have been the strongest (and most enforced) when these violations interfere with the property rights of other men of a higher class position. For example, having an affair (and getting caught) with the wife of another man, and especially of a higher and more powerful class position, could result in execution in some societies. But these types of proscriptions serve the very same property relations that in the main have demanded overall sexual submission and regulation on the part of women and at the same time have perpetuated male right and relatively greater male license in the sphere of sexuality. They go hand in hand with such other civilized practices as rape along with pillage as a tribute in war, the rights allowed slavemasters and feudal lords over the women and young girls of their estates, etc.

5. As a side point: While it is true that the erosion of the traditional family in some parts of the world opens the door to a flourishing of marginalized forms of sexuality, this doesn't mean that the expression of these forms itself contributes to the breakdown of the patriarchal family to any significant degree (Falwell, et al., notwithstanding). In societies with a high degree of development of the productive forces and parasitism relative to the rest of the world (e.g., the U.S.) it is possible for "exclusively" homosexual communities to develop on a fairly large scale. The wealth and parasitism of these societies make it possible for significant numbers of individuals to step aside from the process of accumulating and reproducing social wealth in the context of a family as a productive unit and to function more as individuals. For a majority of the people in the world this is not really an option: a feudal or bourgeois family unit of some sort remains crucial to "get by," let alone "prosper," and individuals who by design, accident, or coercion are unable to avail themselves of this familial context typically face great practical hardships. While the increasing parasitism of bourgeois society itself begins to gnaw at traditional patriarchal family relations, it remains true, as we have indicated, that the expression of secondary forms of sexuality which traditionally "accompany" heterosexuality in class society (e.g., homosexuality) does not per se significantly undermine, and in some ways bolsters, the existence of the family.

***Homosexuality exercises its principal influence on the relations of society in the ideological sphere, as a concentrated "statement" on the relations between men and women. But the question is, what is the content of that ideological "statement"?***

sexuality to one degree or another, its character as a social relation has ever since then been defined relative to the dominant heterosexual form and has played out its social role on a stage set by those dominant relations. By virtue of its marginalization (having much less direct bearing on the reproduction of people and property relations than heterosexuality) homosexuality exercises its principal influence on the relations of society in the ideological sphere, as a concentrated "statement" on the relations between men and women. Given the overwhelming dominance of heterosexuality, the practice of homosexuality requires a conscious decision to differ from the prevailing norm. It is primarily a means of expressing and concentrating an ideological outlook and worldview. But the question is, what is the content of that ideological "statement"? What outlook and worldview does it put forward? What features of human sexual relations does homosexuality typify, highlight, and concentrate? To what extent does it genuinely challenge or undermine male right: the economic, political, and ideological domination of women by men which is at the heart of prevailing relations between men and women generally, including in the sexual sphere? To what extent does it do just the opposite — serving as yet one more ideological buttress for the social reinforcement and perpetuation of these oppressive relations? These are the questions we should seek to answer in examining more closely the content of that ideological "statement" which homosexuality puts forward in today's world.

We would argue that the content of the "statement" or ideological position expressed through homosexuality at best represents no deep or thoroughgoing rupture on the question of the oppression of women and at worst contributes to it. We recognize that some radical elements, especially among lesbians, remove themselves politically from certain trends within the homosexual lifestyle which are obviously not progressive. But anyone attempting to seriously analyze this social phenomenon — pro or con — must be able ultimately to encompass and analyze it in its entirety. The bottom line is that homosexuality does not escape, nor reverse, the dominant, exploitative relations of society. In fact, as we will show, homosexuality serves as

both a reflection and a concentration of some of the worst features of the exploitative relations between men and women. But at the same time there are some significant differences between male and female homosexuality, or at least some aspects of the latter.

### Male Homosexuality

While male homosexuality is manifested within all class and racial groupings, it is particularly prevalent, and certainly very openly manifested, among the more privileged middle strata. This has been evident in the U.S. over the last couple of decades, with the flourishing of gay men's communities which have been overwhelmingly white in composition and which have occupied a relatively privileged position in society. Homosexuality became a much more prevalent social phenomenon in the U.S. during and especially after World War 2, the high point for U.S. imperialism. But it has especially skyrocketed in the last ten to fifteen years. In the city of San Francisco it is estimated that one of every seven men is gay. San Francisco is both the gay capital and the most gentrified city in the U.S. Gay men occupy a large percentage of middle management and high-tech positions on Wall Street West and its attendant support structures. They play a prominent role in San Francisco politics, and the highest voter turnout in the city is from the Castro (a major gay district). Going into the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, the *New York Times Magazine* ran an article on the city which included a description of the important role of gay men in the financial structure of the city and highlighted their politically stabilizing role (through their contribution to gentrification).

In fact, throughout the late '70s and early '80s the degree to which political manifestations of male homosexuals reflected a pointed degree of American patriotism and conservatism has been striking. Cases in point include the crowds that turned out in San Francisco's Castro district to stage a hero's welcome to the two gay hostages from the airline hijacked in Lebanon (complete with the gay men's choir singing "God Bless America," etc.) and the predominant idealization of and identification with Americana from the heyday of U.S. imperialism that characterized the gay pride parades of this same period.

The gay men's communities have typically been characterized by the promotion of a very narcissistic and self-indulgent lifestyle, including a high degree of preoccupation with sex. Beyond that there are also some extreme expressions of woman-hating and decadence. The S&M and leather scenes are not insignificant and are rife with distinct Nazi overtones. Transvestism and displays of stereotypical "effeminate" behavior are essentially caricatures of some of the worst aspects of what being a woman in this society can be. Ads featuring critical body dimensions and preferences are a constant feature of even the "progressive" gay papers. The number of sexual liaisons engaged in by many gay men can be staggering and is an acknowledged feature of the gay

men's scene, at least before the AIDS crisis.

But the time when the bourgeoisie was content to tolerate and even encourage anything that fostered the "me decade" and the climate of self-indulgence and narcissism, especially if it was wrapped in red, white, and blue, has drawn to a close with a slam. The last five years have witnessed the AIDS epidemic, which has had devastating effects on the homosexual community, causing tremendous grief and suffering and now discrimination and the specter of persecution. This is increasingly turning many bitterly against a system and institutions that have done little to stop or alleviate the disease and which now use it as a pretext to fuel an atmosphere of pogroms and increasing repression. While many homosexuals still aspire to be included in the American mainstream and still are trying hard to establish themselves there, they are increasingly on the outs, and this is causing more than a few to take stock of what time it is and develop a broader social consciousness. The fact that the severe attacks they face emanate from the highest levels of government is giving rise to increasing challenge and opposition to the program for Resurgent America.

The more middle-of-the-road homosexual men reject the more backward aspects of the gay lifestyle. However, there are some underlying points of unity. One way of posing this point is to ask what it means, in a society in which male supremacy and misogyny (woman-hating) are such integral elements of its whole operation, for a section of this society to regard a relationship with a woman as repellent or, at the very least, unfulfilling. To say the least, this is a culturally loaded phenomenon, and by no means simply an issue of "individual choice."

The proliferation of male homosexuality in the USA and other imperialist countries is in large part a response to the increasing parasitism of imperialism and the decline and decay of the family within that. With the climbing rate of divorce in the urban centers — where the average marriage lasts about five years — there is now, for men of the privileged strata, the option of living life unencumbered by dependent wife and kids (40 percent of men increase their incomes after a divorce, while 75 percent of women plummet downward). A *New York Times Magazine* feature captured this reality in an article depicting the successful lifestyle of the single male yuppie, capable of designing his own apartment, being a gourmet cook, etc., and having no great need to share his life with a woman. While the traditional financial and other obligations pertaining to the nuclear family have been breaking down, the prevailing ideology of male right and superiority certainly have not, and they are contributing factors to the increase in male homosexuality and its more misogynous features in the '80s. In many ways the flourishing of the gay scene is like a logical extension of the "wife joke" mentality.

There exists a minority of men within the gay scene who do reject much of the decadence and seek to disassociate themselves from it. And part of their "becoming gay" had a lot to do with not wanting to be a part of the sick relations between men and women that are characteristic of this



society. Such gay men often form good friendships with women and are no more overtly chauvinistic than their heterosexual counterparts. In fact, they can appear to be less chauvinistic than most heterosexual men because they "don't treat women as sex objects," etc. Nevertheless, their stance as homosexual men is rooted at a deeper level in the same male supremacy. It is not enough to merely hate the existing relations between men and women and to say that "it's all fucked," and equally so for everyone. The leap must be made to understand that it is something which needs to be and can be actively combated now. In other words, a thorough rupture with misogyny and the ideology of male domination is required, and it needs to be recognized that male homosexuality does not begin to make that rupture — in fact, as a broader social phenomenon, it contributes to bolstering the oppressive relations between men and women, whether that is any given individual's intent or not. Certainly more struggle is called for on this question.

One thing that can help to sharpen things up is to reflect on the possible causes for the tremendous expansion of the "gay scene" in the U.S. in the 1970s. In many ways the decadence, demoralization, individualism, pleasure-seeking, and self-indulgence of the gay men's scene is a concentration of much of what has afflicted the petty bourgeoisie since the "me-decade" of the 1970s in particular.

In the course of the broad social upheavals of the '60s, beginning attempts were made to forge a much-needed "new morality," including in relation to sexuality and relations between men and women more generally. But the social character of the movements and individuals engaging in these attempts (still primarily petty-bourgeois in outlook) was such that they could only go so far and were not able to make a really deep and thoroughgoing rupture with the deeply ingrained outlook of the bourgeoisie in this as in other areas. Thus, while things had been "opened up" in a good way, when the more hopeful and inspiring period of general social upheaval ebbed in the '70s many found themselves politically and ideologically disoriented and became increasingly cynical and self-indulging. And as such they became easy pawns for the bourgeoisie's attempts to reverse much of what had been accomplished during the '60s in the ideological sphere. The bourgeoisie also wanted to bring in a new spirit, a new morality (actually a very old one), which involved a resurrection of gross patriotism, national chauvinism, and war fever — "my country right or wrong," etc. But after the '60s this was no easy task. First it would be necessary to undertake some destruction of the spirit of the '60s. As a transitional means they therefore actively promoted the self-indulgent narcissism of what came to be known as the "me decade." They did this in clear opposition to the healthier spirit of collective alienation and aspirations for social change which had become so widespread in the "us vs. them" decade of the '60s. And the male homosexual community readily lent itself to this "me decade" phenomenon that flowered in this period.

A bitter irony, and one which should cause some reflec-

tion, is that all this promotion and encouragement of narcissistic self-indulgence (including the male homosexual lifestyle) was only to serve as a stepping stone, to "clear the way," so to speak, for the newly brutal, regimented toe-the-line repressive climate of today — and the male homosexual community is running smack up against it, from the official sanctioning of Falwell, et al. and vicious attempts to resurrect and strengthen the traditional Family with a capital F, to the pogromist atmosphere being whipped up using AIDS as a major pretext and focus, to the upholding by the highest court of laws that criminalize "sodomy," etc.

The bourgeoisie both promotes homosexuality and its values in various ways and practices it broadly. But they also have more overriding political needs on this issue, particularly today in relation to war preparations. The bourgeoisie certainly has no problem with the misogyny and male privilege underlying male homosexuality. But their program for preparing especially middle America for World War 3 has the promotion of the nuclear family as an essential component. The pogromist atmosphere being whipped up, especially around AIDS, will only become more virulent and must be exposed and opposed as part of the overall preparations for the revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist system and its repressive state.

Not a day goes by that a representative of the government or the press doesn't seize on the pretext of the AIDS epidemic to publicly float the idea of increased mandatory testing of various sections of the population, the possible need for permanent forms of identification of carriers (yes, even tattoos!), the passing of laws to make the transmission of the disease a crime, the possible need for some form of quarantine in internment camps, or similar repressive measures — all this in the name of protecting the health of the nation, even though numerous medical experts from the U.S. and other countries have stressed repeatedly that such measures would not be effective in bringing the epidemic under control and would in fact contribute to its spread as potential carriers avoided detection or treatment for fear of the consequences. It is even argued that AIDS is "God's revenge against homosexuals" and that all the hysteria is perfectly understandable given the great threat posed by the disease. In the context of the ongoing promotion of fundamentalism, this is the perfect atmosphere for the fostering and unleashing of further blatant reaction with official sanction. Proposition 64 (which called for quarantine measures against AIDS victims) was voted down by a 72 to 28 percent margin in the California elections, only to be resurrected by Jessie Helms on a national scale and in the rapid implementation of the Reagan administration policies on AIDS — from mandatory testing of prisoners, federal employees, and immigrants to once again clearing the way for quarantining through recent precedents and court decisions.

Gay-bashing (the beating of gay men), including to the point of death, is undergoing a sharp upswing in metropolitan areas like San Francisco, as well as elsewhere. And, of course, in 1986 the Supreme Court, in the landmark case of *Bowers v. Harwick*, upheld the right of the police to enter

into someone's bedroom and arrest them for engaging in homosexual sex in states that have laws that criminalize "sodomy" on the books. A big point in all this is obviously the promotion of the nuclear family, that well-tested institution for the suppression of women (and children as well). And it serves the purpose of unleashing a pogromist mob mentality, seeking to rid the nation of all that is considered "deviant" and undermining the national will and strength. Such morality campaigns are presently a major element of the grotesque crusade to "restore pride" in the nation and to rally people to the reactionary necessities at hand for U.S. imperialism — namely interimperialist world war. Homosexuals are being offered up as fresh meat towards that end. From now on the state openly reserves the right to determine what is and what isn't acceptable morality, even in the personal sphere, and, moreover, to enforce this through direct and vicious repression. As Jerry Falwell put it in applauding the *Bowers v. Harwick* decision: "The highest court has recognized the right of a state to determine its own moral guidelines, and it has issued a clear statement that perverted moral behavior is not accepted practice in this country."

The implications of all this were made very clear in an article on the *Bowers v. Harwick* ruling in *RW* No. 366 where the analogy is drawn to Nazi Germany's dealings with homosexuals just before World War 2:

In Germany too an extreme (and murderous) offensive against homosexuality was intimately linked to the enforcing of sex roles and the traditional family. The Nazis demanded that women return to "Kinder, Kirche, Küche" ("Children, Church, Kitchen"), and the forcible suppression of "deviant" forms of sexuality was directly related to that enshrining of the reactionary patriarchal family. It is no accident that when Heinrich Himmler (head of the Gestapo and SS) established his sex-police in 1936, it was entitled the "Central Agency for the Struggle Against Homosexuality and Abortion" and that when the death penalty was enacted in 1943 for "extreme cases," the law was called "Protection of Marriage, Family and Motherhood. . . ."

However, what is most important about the history of Nazism's assault on homosexuality is that it makes clear the linkage between "pro-family" bourgeois moralism and the preparations for war:

It is no accident that the key charge against Hirschfeld's research [on the sociology of homosexuality] (and against homosexuals themselves) was that this was all "un-German" — "deviation" from traditional sexuality was made an antipatriotic crime. The suppression of homosexuals was not only inseparable from the enforcement of the traditional family — both of these impulses were directly connected to the necessity of German imperialism to steel itself for the extreme crises of world war. (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 366, p. 13)

All this underlines the importance of opposing pogromist attacks on homosexuals and exposing in an all-around way the reactionary political underpinnings of these attacks.

On the question of how we ourselves should view homosexuality — as a concentrated expression of a certain ideology and worldview pertaining to male-female relations in society — we would say that if indeed it is true, as we have argued, that there is an underlying male supremacy and misogyny to male homosexuality, then it serves as an objective ideological obstacle to the full social emancipation of women. The underlying male supremacy should therefore be brought out, discussed, and struggled against, as one would do in relation to any other form of backwardness on the question of the oppression/liberation of women. We should argue that any individual's "right" to be homosexual cannot be absolutized and divorced from the broader social context, and that strategically, and certainly from the standpoint of the achievement of a communist society free of all exploitation and oppression, this question is superseded by the need to break the chains of the oppression of women. It is from this perspective that we do and will struggle against the male supremacy and misogyny that underlies male homosexuality and seek to ideologically remold homosexuals as our *Programme* states. The transformation of personal/sexual relations can only come about as part of embarking on the road towards ridding the world of exploitative relations. But again it must be clearly stated that such a goal can never be realized by taking part in or tailing reactionary attacks or by forcibly seeking to punish homosexuals or abolish their lifestyle. And after the seizure of power the party will deal with this question overwhelmingly by relying on the conscious activism of the masses — seeking to win people to transform the world and usher in wholly new social relations in this as in every sphere.<sup>6</sup>

6. When we state (e.g., in our *Programme*) that once the proletariat is in power struggle will be waged to "eliminate" homosexuality, we are very clear about what is to be eliminated: the ideology underlying homosexuality and its material roots in exploiting society, i.e., the material conditions which give rise to it. We are not talking roundups and forcible coercion! In fact, our position on how to deal with homosexuality is very similar to our policy on how to deal with religion. As atheists we will also struggle for the "elimination" of religion. In opposition to Marxism, the ideology behind all the various religions fosters belief in, and reliance on, a wide array of nonexistent supernatural forces and promotes a false, unscientific understanding of the origins and development of things in nature and society and of the masses' own ability to transform things on the basis of this correct understanding. Thus, religion ultimately instills in the masses a sense of powerlessness before the forces of nature and society. Our *Programme* puts forward that, while guaranteeing the masses' right to practice religion provided it is not used as a counterrevolutionary staging area, the party will also assert its own independent role to broadly analyze and criticize the Bible, Talmud, Koran, and so forth. We recognize that for people to recognize their views are incorrect and to unburden themselves of their religious beliefs, a process of protracted ideological struggle will be required in the context of, and in combination with, the overall and ongoing struggle for the revolutionary transformation

## Lesbianism

Lesbianism is a very different social phenomenon than male homosexuality. This is because the dominant relations in society in fact do involve the oppression of women by men, and lesbianism is an attempt to reject or avoid this oppression, at least in the personal sphere. In contrast to male homosexuals, the lesbian "community" is relegated more to the fringes of society than to its mainstream (though there are exceptions). The large numbers of women alienated from the family unit and living outside of it is testimony both to the breakdown of the family and to the oppression of women. Historically, lesbian relations and circles have encouraged and provided some support for women to exist and function outside of the traditional roles. Of course, lesbianism also exists among women of the proletariat and is often directly linked, as it frequently is for women of other strata, to an attempt to get out from under abusive situations, i.e., being brutalized by father, husband, son, or whoever.

Given the prevalence and routine character of physical and emotional abuse of women by men, and the pervasive misogynous atmosphere of the whole of society, it is certainly not difficult to understand why some women would have reacted by turning away from men and seeking solace in the companionship and intimacy of other women. This road was explored in particular in the period coming off the '60s when a thirst for "alternatives" was in the wind. And as the women's movement of that era ran up against some of its own limitations and the worldwide ebb in the revolutionary high tide of the '60s and early '70s, the social revolution so many had thirsted for appeared more distant; lesbianism could serve as a sort of refuge and position of retrenchment, a vehicle for adjusting the scale of one's dreams and expectations and returning, if not to "the fold," at least to a more narrow, more inward-looking, and even more "familial" scene.

In any case, while many lesbians would not claim to offer a worked-out theory on the source of women's oppression and the road to a future society, there is today a section of more radical lesbians who are an important force on the political landscape. For example, they have been an integral part of the most radical sections of the movement against imperialist war. The party and the revolutionary proletariat have and will continue to learn from some of the insights that radical feminists (including radical lesbians) have contributed to the understanding of the nature, depth, and forms of patriarchal relations in society.

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of the world and all social relations. A similar process will apply in the struggle against the ideology and material roots of homosexuality as it has taken form in class society, focusing on such things as the misogyny, defeatism, and, at best, reformism underlying homosexuality which are objective hindrances to the proletariat's struggle to make a thoroughgoing radical rupture with the past and completely refashion all social relations on a new basis, free of the stamp of the old oppression and exploitation.

Even though it is generally alienated from the mainstream of society, a large part of the lesbian community (as somewhat distinct from its most radical sections) is nevertheless plagued with all the ills of the rest of society — including such things as alcohol and drug abuse, violent abuse of mates, and attempts to raise children in monogamous relationships that are not, in the last analysis, all that different from the traditional male-dominated nuclear family. This does not somehow more characterize homosexuals than heterosexuals. But these aspects do bring out the fact that there is no overcoming the dominant social relations short of working for and finally achieving their overthrow. It is a very dangerous illusion to think there can be fundamental or meaningful change in this system short of revolution, including in this arena.

The imperialists have always carried out, and will continue and intensify, many attacks on lesbian women for daring to live outside the male-headed household — including ripping off their kids, subjecting them to the infamous "deprogramming" techniques, etc. The very same social system which generates, and ultimately condones, the most mind-boggling brutality and degradation of women on a daily basis accuses lesbians of being perverted and a social blight, and it routinely unleashes its legal, medical, and psychiatric professions against them. This is all part of butressing the ideological and political arguments for the nuclear family, which has the oppression of women as its mainstay, and of reactionary calls to house and home and women in their place. In fact, they also use the pretext of homosexuality directly to agitate for the nuclear family with man and god at the head of the household. The proletariat and its party will continue to oppose and expose all this (as well as the philistine view of the nuclear family as the immutable and natural order of things for human beings, which serves to perpetuate the oppression of women).

Of course, oppression gives rise to many different forms of resistance. But not all forms of resistance necessarily reflect a correct understanding of the source of that oppression or of the means to ultimately get rid of it. And there will always be spontaneous forms of resistance to oppression which present reformist alternatives, alternatives that end up leading away from the real source of and solution to that oppression. Thus, in evaluating the question of lesbianism we need to approach it on the basis of the principal and broad interests of humanity, as concentrated in the outlook of the revolutionary proletariat. While finding the programmatic ways to unite and work together with others, including lesbians opposing the oppression of women and other crimes of this system, we must also continue to wage ongoing struggle over the key question of just what exactly is the source of women's oppression and what is therefore required to liberate women.

In brief, the heart of our disagreement with lesbianism is that in the final analysis lesbianism, and even radical lesbianism, represents and promotes a dead-end "alternative" to the dominant oppressive relations and an incorrect understanding of the source of women's oppression. It is in

essence a defeatist view of how to deal with this oppression, and it promotes reformism and a narrow conception of a future society and the struggle to achieve it. Ultimately it fails to make a thorough rupture with the dead hand of the past.

It should be stressed here that there is often an important difference between subjective desire and actual analysis and therefore program. Certainly there are many radical lesbians who genuinely aspire to a radical turning "right-side-up" of the present world and all or many of its social relations. But desire alone is not sufficient, and revolutionary transformations cannot take place through practice based on an incorrect assessment of the underlying causes of oppression.<sup>7</sup>

Without being firmly rooted in a materialist analysis of the source of the oppression of women, we are bound to miss the road which can lead to the complete liberation of women and humanity as a whole. And we should strive not to limit our sights: we should strive for nothing less than "the abolition of class distinctions generally . . . the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest . . . the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, the revolutionising of all the ideas

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7. And here mention should also be made of the misandry (man-hating) which is prevalent among some lesbians, who sometimes go so far as to reject any type of associations with men or even with women who relate to men. Frankly, it is not difficult to understand how some women would come to bitterly "hate all men" given the relentless brutalization and degradation suffered by women at the hands of men. Not surprisingly, it is the people who are the most complacent and accepting of this state of affairs — of the brutally male supremacist character of the prevailing social system and of many of their own daily actions — who are the most apt to go berserk and spew venom at the mere mention of the fact that some women actually "hate men"! But while a certain satisfaction can be had at the thought of provoking such backward types into a frenzy, misandry nevertheless represents a wrong outlook and is an obstacle to the struggle against the oppression of women and all oppressive relations. We should, of course, draw a sharp distinction between oppressor and oppressed on this question: misandry cannot be put on a par with misogyny any more than the outlook of a Black person who comes to "hate all whites" as a result of national oppression can be put on a par with outlook of a Bernhard Goetz or with institutionalized racism and national oppression. It should, however, be recognized that misandry reflects a very narrow outlook on the question of the causes of the oppression of women and what must be done to end it. By targeting the sum of individual men as the enemy and source of this oppression (as opposed to the social system which gives rise to, promotes, and institutionalizes this oppression), not only are potential allies locked out, but the real enemy is let off the hook. This outlook seeks merely revenge and individualistic satisfaction. Ultimately it reveals itself to be reformist and utopian because it fails to understand how the oppression of women runs much deeper than the backward thoughts and practices of men, how it is literally built into the current social system and is integral to its functioning. It is necessary to grasp that the causes of the oppression of women reside not in men as such, but in a whole system of historically evolved social relations. Thus, what is required is to plunge beneath the surface phenomena to cut out the root through thorough social revolution.

that result from these social relations" (Marx, 1977, p. 282).

By contrast, a number of theories have emerged in reaction to the oppression of women which profess the existence of some sort of inherent, absolutized, and ultimately bio-determined "nature" of men and "nature" of women divorced from the social context (take for example Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, which was hailed at the time and is still seen as a "classic" by many). Regardless of whether the fictionalized "inherent nature" of women is deemed to be "better" or "worse" than that of men, these arguments are not grounded in material reality (they certainly have no valid scientific basis) and such theories are detrimental to the struggle against the oppression of women. This is true not just because they are groundless and tend to concentrate a defeatist outlook but also because they feed right into the imperialists' current promotion of obscurantism and assorted theories assuring us of the immutability of the present social relations. This at a time when the objective need and emerging possibilities for thoroughgoing revolutionary transformations on a world scale are getting increasingly sharp. Falling back into arguing for some mythical "distinct nature" of women as well as men at a time like this constitutes a retreat from the challenges confronting us and can only end up being an accessory to the bourgeoisie's current offensive against women.

Many radical feminists (and radical lesbians, whose politics are an extension of the politics of radical feminism) reject such theories and seek the causes of women's oppression (and the basis for its elimination) in the sphere of social relations past and present. Yet they maintain important theoretical and ideological differences with revolutionary Marxism.

Feminism, as an ideology and social program, is clearly favored in one form or another by many who genuinely hate the existing social order, or at least the conditions women are subjected to within that order. Some (though not all) feminists recognize the need for a fundamental and thoroughgoing change in the social order as a whole. But even at its most radical, feminism is in fact much too narrow and restrictive a social vision to fully unleash the potential of women for revolutionary change. Feminist objectives vary greatly, but the struggles waged with that ideology to combat the oppression of women in existing society (be they openly reformist or of a more "radical bent") are all severely hampered and restricted by the common theoretical assessment that the oppression of women is THE principal underpinning and linchpin of the existing social order. The implication of this assessment is, of course, that this question should therefore be treated as the most essential, focal question in the struggle for fundamental social change. In particular, many radical feminists argue (incorrectly) that institutionalized patriarchy and the systematic oppression of women existed prior to the development of classes and therefore deny that the abolition of classes is today the key to women's liberation. This analysis — that patriarchy, divorced from the emergence of classes, is the source of

women's oppression — is often put forward as "the theory behind the practice" of radical lesbianism.

By contrast we have argued that while the initial division of labor along sexual lines would have quite likely reflected a certain unevenness between men and women and possibly contained the seeds of incipient inequalities, it would have taken the emergence of institutionalized class divisions to turn the division of labor into a basis for the systematic oppression of one sex by another.

But, furthermore, we would take issue with the view that if institutionalized women's oppression (or even any earlier budding inequalities stemming from the division of labor) existed before the development of social classes, it necessarily follows that the struggle for the abolition of classes cannot be the principal means through which to seek the abolition of the oppression of women in modern times. Such a struggle is seen by many feminists as, at best, a parallel process, rather than as the key to a future in which all oppression among human beings has been eliminated and thoroughly uprooted, including between men and women. In fact, even if we were to accept the (incorrect) analysis that the *systematic* oppression of women by men historically predated, or somehow developed "independently" of, the emergence of class divisions and class exploitation in society, it would *still* remain the case that the abolition of all class distinctions (and all their underlying bases in the social conditions of production) is inseparable from, and at the heart of, abolishing *all* oppressive human social relations, including the oppression of women. Thus even at its most radical, feminism (and by extension lesbianism) as an ideology and social program ultimately condemns women to rattling but not shattering their chains and to limiting their sights to seeking some greater control over their own individual destinies — rather than taking responsibility, together with revolutionary men, for the future of the world and humanity as a whole.

While we cannot here go into a more thorough contrast between feminism and our own overall social vision (and again it should be said that "feminism" is a term which encompasses quite varied perspectives), we would focus on the essential point: that feminism, in the final analysis, does not point the way to thoroughly uproot all exploitation and oppression nor even to break the chains of oppression of women and that it ends up restricting the role of women in politics, even in a sense working against the view that the revolutionary movement *as a whole* must take up the woman question in all aspects of the class struggle. It is this difference in outlook which we think is at the root of some of the criticisms of our Party's *Programme* on women, "missing" its emphasis throughout the entire section on transforming society. The key question is what role to play in transforming society as a whole, including in relation to the oppression of women. Thus our Party's slogan: "Break the chains! Unleash the fury of women as a mighty force for revolution!"

To focus in on sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual, as the key link in the liberation of women —

for example making it a defining issue of one's life and identity — relates to the oft-repeated statement that "the personal is political." This slogan was developed — often explicitly in opposition to politically active men with backward views on the woman question — to address the often real denial of there being any political questions involved in the character of personal relations between men and women. Certainly this contained (and contains) some very real truths, and rebellion against such denials was (and is) certainly justified. And there is no question that women's sexuality has been suppressed and distorted in both gross and subtle ways in the service of patriarchy. This should be understood and combated. But making the question of sexuality and personal relations a major *focus* of the overall struggle is narrowing, reformist, and ultimately defeatist.<sup>8</sup>

The stance that the "personal is political" is often the outlook behind the petty politics and concerns that often come to characterize attempts to build "alternative relations" as the end or central goal — whether in the form of an alternative women's community or in the case of individual relationships. Even the more radical expression of lesbianism, which presents itself as a programmatic way to abolish the nuclear family and the oppression of women, amounts to a very individualistic and futile attempt to transform sexual relations under capitalism and therefore ends up very conservative and restrictive.

Some revolutionary-minded lesbians have argued that issues in the personal sphere, including questions of sexual preference or identity, should indeed not be a major focus of the overall revolutionary movement and that there should therefore be no need for the party to evaluate lesbianism one way or another, as their personal morality is "entirely subordinate to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle." And in general some people have raised that they don't see how homosexuality poses a problem because it supposedly "in no way hinders the class struggle." But most homosexuals (male and female) do make the question of their sexuality, and sexuality in general, the essential and defining question of their life and identity and the focal point of their political and ideological perspective. This, and the misogyny of the ideology underlying male homosexuality, certainly does hinder the class struggle and specifically the struggle to combat the oppression of women. Beyond this, even for radical lesbians with a broader, more revolutionary perspective, the practice of lesbianism is an expression of an ideological position, an ideological "statement" concerning the oppression of women, and promotes an "alternative" to existing social relations between men and

8. A particularly backward example of where this can lead is the way some feminists justify the use of pornography on the grounds that since women's sexuality has been suppressed, women should not be denied this viable form of sexual expansion and expression, and that, instead, feminists should provide more. This is *crass* reformism and is often combined with the stunning demand for increased "worker control" of the sex industry!

women. What we have argued here is that the content of that "statement" is a logical extension and concentration of the ideology which informs radical feminism, with all the narrowing and reformist limitations that implies. And the practice of lesbianism therefore serves as an obstacle to individual proponents of lesbianism making a full, truly radical rupture with the whole of bourgeois ideology, especially as pertains to women.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the practice of lesbianism does not take place in a vacuum but in a social context: it is therefore not just a matter of "personal" concern but has a broader social impact, serving to actively promote an "alternative" outlook which, again, is narrow and reformist and ultimately turns people away from tackling straight up and in a revolutionary political way the question of the oppressive relations between men and women which are the norm in today's society. All this is how homosexuality "gets in the way," as seen from a revolutionary perspective.

Certainly an argument could be made — and has been — that lesbianism can in fact be empowering for women. There are a range of reasons put forward, such as: "[W]e are taught to hate ourselves because we are women and . . . we can love ourselves instead." "Being outside the dominant culture can give lesbians a certain freedom in shaping the kinds of relationships we want." "In many communities, a lot of the activist work that is being done to free all women from oppression is being done by lesbians. Not having this big emotional or economic dependence on men makes us able to do that. If you're not trying to get so much from men, you can often be more objective, assertive and powerful. That's the freedom we have to shape the world" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1984, pp. 157, 146, 141).

It can frankly be stated that the overwhelming majority of women in bourgeois society who are involved in relationships with men are significantly hampered in their ability to contribute to social life generally and to revolutionary change in particular by those very relationships. This is a problem our party confronts every day in the course of revolutionary practice and is an issue which has been sharply addressed by Bob Avakian (see, for example, the interview "Questions for These Times," *Revolution*, No. 54, Winter/Spring 1986, pp. 50-51). It is a problem which has to be broken through as never before. But lesbianism hasn't succeeded in doing that and does not represent a means for doing so. Becoming a lesbian in these times, especially in

9. While, as has been pointed out, heterosexuality as a social phenomenon cannot be evaluated solely in terms of ideological content because of its ongoing connections to production and reproduction in today's world, the practice of heterosexuality nevertheless also has an important ideological component, which is more often than not permeated with the male supremacy and misogyny typical of the prevailing social relations in class-divided society. But the point here is that the content of the ideological "statement" being made through the practice of homosexuality — even in the case of radical lesbianism — in no way makes a thorough rupture with the prevailing ideology and social relations.

the case of more conscious and revolutionary-minded individuals, may, to a certain extent, "free up" some women and allow them a bit more room to be independent, assertive, creative, etc., since it sometimes enables them to avoid the typically suffocating aspects of male-female relations, at least in the personal sphere. But this is only to a certain point, and always from a very individualized standpoint. Issues of the individual rights and rebellions (including the stance of upholding as an absolute the right to be homosexual or lesbian) do not reflect the broadest social vision or the most emancipating world outlook, including in relation to the question of how to abolish the oppression of women. No matter how radical it may be or appear to be at any given time, it stems from and reflects no more than the outlook of the radicalized petty-bourgeois democrat — it does not point to the real material basis and historical processes which underlie the oppression of women, as well as class exploitation and social antagonism generally, and it does not therefore grasp the basis for overturning all this and for completely revolutionizing human social relations, and with them morals, values, and ideas.

Thus our critique of lesbianism in modern society is certainly not that it wreaks havoc with mainstream social relations between men and women, or that it endangers that institution of female servitude known as The Family. Quite the contrary! Our critique of lesbianism focuses on the narrowness, defeatism, and ultimately bourgeois-democratic reformism embodied in the lesbian outlook, even at its most radical. In a word, it is still much too conservative.

## Sexuality and Communism

It is often raised, with regard to the future of sexual relations, especially under socialist society — why is it that the Party "rules out" the progressiveness of lesbianism (or male homosexuality)? In other words, aren't we, in fact, making heterosexuality an absolute by criticizing the position that lesbianism should be upheld as a possible "relation of the future"?

First of all, this is hardly the central question around which life or the future revolves (or even the liberation of women at this point). (The fact that an inordinate preoccupation with sexuality is a feature of homosexuality generally — even if this is generally far more so among male homosexuals and often far more grotesque in its expression among a significant section of them — should once again be a tip-off as to the basic problems with the outlook concentrated in homosexuality.) Who knows what form or forms (if any) human sexuality will take in the future? Heterosexuality itself may be a mere option among many, or sexuality in general may even disappear in a society where the biology of individuals becomes even more fully irrelevant to the character of social relations and social organization. But this is a ways down the road. It is a fact, however, that the reality of society has raised the possibility of the development of sexuality increasingly free from the constraints of reproduc-

tion and exploitative relations, and people should speculate and dream about what might be possible.

Sexuality and marriage, especially in the imperialist citadels, have become less and less tied to the purpose of reproduction. And this is overall a very good thing and bound to become even more the case the more humanity advances. But, especially if viewing the revolutionary struggle as an international process, there is no question that heterosexuality and the family will be with us for quite a while and remain the dominant form of reproduction. For example, on a world scale the more feudal and land-based social relations of the family will — and do — exert a very strong pull.<sup>10</sup> In the imperiums and colonies people will overwhelmingly continue to engage in heterosexual relations — and in some recognizable form, the family — not only because of the tremendous habit and social custom ingrained into society for quite some time now, but because this still, by and large, conforms to the underlying economic base of society.

This will pose some difficulties and complications for the struggle to achieve communism, especially given what has become institutionalized heterosexuality (especially in the form of the traditional family) in the emergence of class society and the relations of oppression. Socialist society (or societies) will be unable to immediately rip up the ground from which all this springs. As long as this is the case, homosexuality and lesbianism will also continue as a concentrated ideological expression of the relations between men and women in the context of society overall. And just as in the case of heterosexuality, homosexuality too must be subjected to analysis and struggle on its objective role at any given point as part of sorting out and charting the path forward.

Given all this, the question of the unfettering of women to take part in the revolutionary transformation of every sphere of society and the smashing of all material and ideological fetters that stand in the way of women playing this kind of revolutionary role, including the exploitative relations between men and women, is of cardinal importance. It is out of this, in the tremendous mix of international and historical factors, that the future will be wrought in regard to the character of the future relations between men and women.

What Engels had to say on this is quite enlightening:

What we can now conjecture about the way in

10. Somewhat from the opposite angle, while the imperialist citadels are in an advanced stage of decay in regard to the traditional heterosexual family, they are also in the lead of the many misogynous decadent forms this is taking — porn, rape, battery, etc. This is important to point out because it is not the case that the Third World is somehow "holding back" or "lagging behind" the imperialist countries. The system of imperialism and its social relations as a whole are a fetter on the world — with enforced backwardness and heightened parasitism being complementary expressions of the need to uproot it the world over.

which sexual relations will be ordered after the impending overthrow of capitalist production is mainly of a negative character, limited for the most part to what will disappear. But what will there be new? That will be answered when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will maintain their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual — and that will be the end of it. (Engels, 1967, p. 73)

There is much in Engels's spirit and method to learn from. There is an emphasis on breaking the fetters to genuine love between men and women. But there is also the understanding that society's perceptions of what is possible and desirable at this point is bound to be limited by what we want to abolish. Of course, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't conjecture and imagine what revolutionary changes are possible with regard to the question of sexuality. But while this may sound like something of a paradox, conjecture is all we can do at this point and it will be up to future generations to resolve these questions in practice. Especially once humanity attains communism, things are bound to be so different that we really have nothing but speculation and somewhat trippy imagination to go on (and there's certainly nothing wrong with that).

While we are certainly not willing to say that heterosexuality is a permanent category etched for all time in stone, who's to say exactly what this ultimately will mean? Who's to say that homosexuality or bisexuality will become dominant? Or for that matter, who's to say sex and love will play a role in society even recognizable by today's standards? Human beings may very well bring something entirely new into being. But even though it is an open question what sexual relations will be like under communism, it is clear that there will be no reaching that future point with the ideology that today produces homosexuality, or argues for it. □

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# ***When John Wayne Went Out of Focus: GI Rebellion and Military Disintegration in Vietnam***

***by Nick Jackson***

For Americans who did not come of age in the early sixties, it may be hard to grasp what those years were like — the pride and overpowering self-assurance that prevailed . . . [A]nd we believed we were ordained to play cop to the Communists' robber and spread our own political faith around the world . . . So when we marched into the rice paddies on that damp March afternoon, we carried, along with our packs and rifles, the implicit convictions that the Viet Cong would be quickly beaten and that we were doing something altogether noble and good. We kept the packs and rifles; the convictions, we lost. (Caputo, 1977, pp. xiii-xiv)

Over the past few years a rash of commemorations have been held and memorials dedicated to honor Vietnam veterans. Overwhelmingly they have been less remembrances of historical reality than exercises in selective amnesia and official burials of the truth. The war in Vietnam may not always be explicitly upheld as a noble cause, but that is clearly the message. And in any event, Vietnam veterans are being honored for answering the call of duty and serving well.

Yet even the stated purpose of these commemorations — to heal the wounds and trauma of war and bring Vietnam-era vets back into the American fold — hints at the truth that they are designed to obliterate: the U.S. was not engaged in an honorable cause in Vietnam but a heinous war of aggression. And the troops did not all behave as loyal mercenaries for imperialism; many GIs hated or were tormented by their role as butchers for the U.S., and thousands actively revolted against the war. Overall the U.S. military faced the most severe internal crisis in its history — a disintegration of morale and fighting ability that impacted not only upon the U.S. performance in Vietnam but its global standing as well.

This is the truth that can't be buried; these are the

veterans that the proletariat will always cherish. "I think that the [veterans] who deserve to be honored and are honored by the revolutionary proletariat and the oppressed people of the world," Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, has stated, "are those who recognized what they were being forced to do, who stared straight in the face of what they were doing, recognizing it for what it was . . . and found it totally repulsive; particularly those who rebelled against it and joined in the struggle against those atrocities and against U.S. imperialism and some of whom actually became revolutionaries" (1986, p. 36).

Going into the Vietnam War it was taken for granted that America's obedient youth, the "flower of the nation," would eagerly answer the call to war, just as their fathers had in World War 2. But startling developments took place among these youth during the war, and rather quickly the U.S. military machine found itself severely hobbled from within: mutinies broke out in jungle gorges and on board the U.S.'s fighting fortresses; officers were killed by their own troops; hundreds of thousands of soldiers deserted the ranks before their tours were up; antiwar protests, organizations, and newspapers tormented the brass on every major U.S. military installation in the world.

When the first U.S. ground troops were sent into battle in March 1965, with the massive firepower and support capacity of the U.S. behind them, they were told that they were in Vietnam to crush a force which was politically isolated among the local populace and which militarily would prove to be easy pickings for the U.S. soldiers. But instead of this scenario unfolding, from the first the U.S. troops found themselves pitted against a determined, if outgunned, armed revolution which enjoyed massive popular support. Eight years, some \$120 billion and 3,000,000 troops later, the country which sent these soldiers to war had lost the war.

By the late 1960s the disintegration\* of the U.S. military became so severe that the U.S. imperialists were forced to regard the very reliability of their troops as a major factor in the war's overall prosecution. This crisis, which peaked between 1969 and 1973, played havoc with more than a few commanders' assignments at the time, such as when soldiers refused to go out on patrols or when considerable resources had to be rechanneled to deal with skyrocketing desertion rates and discipline problems. A small and increasingly influential number of soldiers were refusing

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\*By "disintegration" is meant the internal decay and crisis of a military, whether in single units, whole armies, or somewhere in between. Disintegration does not necessarily mean the collapse of an army, nor is it automatically irreversible. During the Vietnam War it meant that disruptions and dislocations within the U.S. armed forces were severe and widespread enough that they became important elements in the formulation of military policy and strategy, while at the same time they never became so thorough that the U.S. was unable to field an army.

## ***The U.S. military faced the most severe internal crisis in its history — a disintegration of morale and fighting ability that impacted not only upon the U.S. performance in Vietnam, but its global standing as well.***

orders in one way or another, while the majority of the troops were obeying orders often only with great reluctance or in name only. The minority of GIs who were still gung-ho were usually looked upon by the others as at best suicidal and at worst "traitors" within the enlisted ranks. And a significant section of the Armed Forces was consciously and often actively antiwar and linked — spiritually if not always organizationally — with the Black liberation and antiwar movements in the U.S.

The disintegration crippled the U.S. war effort in Vietnam and threatened to get much worse if something wasn't done about it. The potential for this crisis in the military to spread and deepen, coupled with the fact that in Vietnam U.S. imperialism was not in a do-or-die situation, ultimately helped force the mightiest armed force on earth to cut its losses and run in ignominious defeat.

The indispensable underlying cause of the disintegration of the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam was the persistent battering they were receiving at the hands of the Vietnamese liberation forces — the result of a people's war. The U.S. military was continually frustrated in its efforts to "pacify" and control South Vietnam and wipe out the Vietnamese liberation forces. If anything, the liberation forces grew in size and strength and were able to inflict heavy losses on the U.S. forces. This kind of battering created a profound crisis in the U.S. military, a crisis of widespread demoralization, with troops questioning and rebelling against everything from barracks discipline to what they were doing in Vietnam to what kind of a society had sent them to fight and die in Vietnam.

But this military battering was not the sole cause of the disintegration of the U.S. forces in Vietnam; it was also shaped by global political developments, most particularly the social and political upheaval that shook U.S. society in the 1960s and early 1970s. That is, on the basis of military factors, other related, political factors also contributed to this disintegration.

The disintegration of the troops in Vietnam came at a time of thunderous national liberation movements and revolutionary upheaval throughout the world. These developments, spurred in part by the heroic liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people, greatly weakened and exposed U.S. imperialism and helped spark unprecedented

social upheaval in the belly of the beast itself. This turmoil, most notably the Black liberation struggle, the antiwar movement, and the youth rebellion, along with divisions within the U.S. ruling class, had a tremendous impact upon the troops. The military situation in Vietnam, coupled with the political situation around the world and in the U.S., served to sharpen all the class and national contradictions that permeate the U.S. services; the realization spread among many GIs that they were not fighting a just war to "help the Vietnamese people help themselves" but a reactionary war to enslave them, and this pushed forward the growth of an antiwar movement among the troops.

This essay is not intended as a political or military history of the Vietnam War, but rather an examination of one feature of that war. The first section will survey the manifestations and scope of the disintegration. Those following will analyze the major factors behind the troops' revolt — from the military pounding the U.S. took in Vietnam to the social upheaval in the U.S. and the world during the '60s.

### The Magnitude of the Contagion

In 1971 the *Armed Forces Journal* published a shocking (and now famous) article on "The Collapse of the Armed Forces." In a note accompanying the piece the *Journal's* editors noted that they had some reservations about running it, but they said these were minor when compared to the importance of solving what had become a dire problem for the Army. The opening lines of this article penned by Col. Robert D. Heinl capture some of the crisis atmosphere in the upper reaches of U.S. war planners at the time:

The morale, discipline and battleworthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States. By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near-mutinous. Elsewhere than Vietnam, the situation is nearly as serious. (1971, p. 30)

In 1967 the U.S. was still speaking in confident tones about the fighting capacity of their troops. Four years later the situation had changed so drastically that official military journals felt compelled to publish such summations.

It would certainly be a mistake to call the disintegration of the U.S. armed forces in the Vietnam War anywhere near to complete, that is, a full collapse. But it would be a greater mistake not to grasp how very serious it was, in both scope and impact, and how severely it hamstrung the U.S.'s

military operations.

By 1969 a majority of the U.S. troops had turned against the war for many different reasons; the demoralization and questioning among the troops was profound. While the GIs and sailors who took part in any act of open protest (or blatant insubordination based on antiwar feelings) during the war remained a minority, this more conscious section had by this point gained the initiative among the rank-and-file and (together with the liberation and antiwar movements raging in the U.S.) set the tone of the political atmosphere in large sections of the U.S. military. And because this took place, even if it is true that many of the soldiers never went beyond thinking "this is the wrong war at the wrong time," these same soldiers took part in, or at least went along with, a lot of activity inspired by the advanced minority.\*

Not only did most of the ground troops in Vietnam hold at least grudging respect for the enemy, being especially awed by its staying power and popular support, but by 1970 soldiers could easily be found who openly sympathized with the Vietnamese liberation struggle — that is, with "the enemy" — especially among Black and other oppressed nationality soldiers. And by then in many units the most backward sections among the troops, upon whom the military has always tried to base the life and spirit of its armed forces, often found themselves politically isolated and/or neutralized on the question of the war and many other social issues, from the American flag to racism.†

The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Internal Security, in its "Investigation of Attempts to Subvert the United States Armed Forces," revealed some of the magnitude of the problems in the military as the bourgeoisie then saw it: "Drug abuse, the desertion rate, reports of so-called fraying of officers and accounts of virtual mutiny in the ranks of some units reflect adversely upon the reputation and dependability of American fighting forces" (1972, pp. 6381-82). A 1971 *New York Times* article declared, "The bitter Vietnam experience has left the United States Army with a crisis in morale and discipline as serious as any its oldest and toughest soldiers can remember . . . [T]he men

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\*In other situations, when the authorities and the backward have the initiative, such intermediate-type thinking is more likely to find expression in a silent lack of enthusiasm while going along with the program. One much-quoted study following World War 2 found that "out of an average one hundred men along the line of fire during the period of an encounter, only fifteen men on average would take any part with the weapons. This was true whether the action was spread over a day, or two days or three. . . . In the most aggressive infantry companies, under the most intense local pressure, the figure rarely rose above 25% of total strength from the opening to the close of an action" (Dyer, 1985, p. 118).

†Another illustration of how at odds with the norm the political atmosphere in the military had become is provided by the fact that for several years in the early 1970s it was the radicals who dominated the political stage among Vietnam veterans and not the soldier-of-fortune freaks who lead the parades today.

themselves are fed up with the war and the draft, questioning orders, deserting, subverting, smoking marijuana, shooting heroin, stealing from their buddies, hurling racial epithets and rocks at their brothers" (Ayres, 1971, p. 1). When the most powerful state in the world calls into question the reputation and dependability of its armed apparatus, a serious situation is at hand. We will review in some detail many of the expressions of disintegration during its high tide, keeping in mind that these were the results of the disintegration and not its causes, a subject we will address in the second section of this essay.

**Desertions and AWOLs.** In 1971, seven of every 100 soldiers in the U.S. Army deserted, while another seventeen of every 100 went AWOL.\* In real numbers this translated into 98,059 deserters in the Army in 1971, most of whom (around 67 percent) came from the lowest ranks, E-1s and E-2s. Further, most desertions and AWOLs took place not in Vietnam (an estimated 3 percent) but stateside (around 88 percent), for the simple reason that there were very few places for GIs to hide in Vietnam (see Bell and Bell, 1977, 435; Gabriel and Savage, 1978, p. 181, Table 1).

GIs in the Vietnam War deserted for very different reasons. For some it was a political stand against the war and the U.S., and these soldiers deserted to take part in the antiwar movement in the U.S. and Europe. For others it was simply a desire not to get killed in Vietnam; this was an especially prevalent sentiment after major troop reductions began in 1970. Probably the bulk of the deserters could at least agree on an FTA/FTW orientation — Fuck the Army/ Fuck the War. The military eventually had to establish no less than nine "personnel control facilities" on bases from New Jersey to California solely to house deserters and AWOLs.

But to understand the full import of this phenomenon, other figures must be added. In 1944, during World War 2, the U.S. Army's desertion rate was nearly as high as in 1971: 6.3 percent. (Further, the highest desertion rate to date in the Marine Corps occurred in 1975 — 10.5 percent, and that in the Navy in 1976 — 2.4 percent, both after U.S. forces were out of Vietnam.) While the real figures in Vietnam would undoubtedly have been higher if the army had not instituted the practice of charging many deserters with only being AWOL, it is very misleading to look only at figures from various wars and times when analyzing a military's morale and support for a war. More important is to examine the *quality* of the desertions by asking the question: what would it have taken to get the soldiers "back into the fold." In World War 2 the desertion rate mainly reflected war weariness in general, while in Vietnam it reflected much more profound opposition to the war itself, and not simply soldiers looking to save their own hides. This is revealed in the fact that desertion was often the strategy of choice among the most politically advanced GIs and sailors and in

the fact that many of the troops deserted *after* returning from Vietnam, not before going there.

**Combat Refusals.** According to one writer, "The latter stages of the Vietnam War produced no fewer than ten major incidents of mutiny" (Cortright, 1975, p. 35). According to another writer, "By 1975 there were 35 separate combat refusals in the Air Cavalry Division alone" (Rinaldi, 1974, p. 29). And for each of these major refusals, there were dozens of minor ones or situations in which combat orders were effectively thwarted.

Especially after 1969, when the ground fighting began to be cut away and the futility of the war stood out in starker relief, soldiers who remained in the field became more and more disinclined to accept combat assignments, especially ones they regarded as needless and recklessly hazardous. The watchword among the troops became "We will not be the last ones to die in this war." One military scholar lamented, "Once America began to pull its troops out of Vietnam, the average soldier simply wanted to get home alive and cared little for the ultimate fate of his formation or the accomplishment of the country's mission" (Stanton, 1985, p. 294).

In many infantry units by 1970 officers were often forced to "talk it out" or "work it out" with hesitant soldiers, rather than using the military standard operating procedure of harsh punishment for such recalcitrant troops. Simply refusing to fight became the main way the troops in Vietnam opposed the war.

Obviously combat refusals are not unknown in the annals of military history. Whole areas of military science are devoted to the question "What does it take to get a soldier to fight and perform in battle?", resulting in various proposals concerning buddy systems, unit cohesion, the role of junior officers, etc. To some extent the bourgeoisie expects combat refusals among large numbers of its troops. Among the ground troops in Vietnam, combat refusal generally took the form of "advancing only so far" rather than refusing to advance at all or refusing to "engage" the enemy ("search-and-destroy" missions were dubbed "search-and-avoid"). These combat refusals — both major and more limited — not only physically hindered the war (by 1971 the U.S. was forced to rely more and more on the air war, in part because of such refusals) but also manifested the larger disintegration and potential for collapse. This in turn relates to what is called "preservation levels" — the level of casualties after which a given army can expect a marked reduction in the willingness of its soldiers to operate aggressively, not just to shoot but to pursue an enemy. In Vietnam the preservation level of the U.S. military got extremely low, even by bourgeois standards. And more significant to the Pentagon than the combat refusals in infantry units which did take place was the *threat* of far more widespread mutiny if the war continued as it had been. Thus these refusals certainly influenced the imperialists' decision to cut back the war on the ground.

The motivations for these refusals varied. If the accounts

\*Desertion is defined as being AWOL for thirty days or more.

of several of these combat refusals in infantry units are accurate, the combat refusals were often touched off by what the men saw as crazy operations and were not intended as political actions against the war (though, again, one could only relatively wall off one from the other, for they took place against the backdrop of widespread anger and disgust with the war). The same cannot be said of several mutinies which took place in the Navy.

When the U.S. cut back its troop strength and ground activity in Vietnam, it stepped up its bombing of North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. But the military's internal problems also shifted to those services most immediately connected with the bombing, especially the Navy. In San Diego, in the spring of 1971, sailors aboard the aircraft carrier *Constellation*, in conjunction with antiwar activists, initiated a series of protests against the ship sailing to Vietnam. In the fall the attack carrier *Coral Sea* was docked in California preparing for a tour off the Vietnam coast. A dozen sailors met, drew up, and began circulating a petition which read in part:

We the people must guide the government and not allow the government to guide us! The *Coral Sea* is scheduled for Vietnam in November. This does not have to be a fact. The ship can be prevented from taking an active part in the conflict if we the majority voice our opinion that we do not believe in the Vietnam war. If you feel that the *Coral Sea* should not go to Vietnam, voice your opinion by signing this petition. (Cited in Rinaldi, 1974, p. 44)

Within a few weeks 1,200 of 4,500 sailors on the *Coral Sea* signed the petition. The action quickly drew support from the antiwar movement and revolutionary groups, including the Revolutionary Union (predecessor of the RCP, USA):

The huge civilian peace rally in San Francisco on November 6 was used as a forum to focus attention on the struggle aboard the *Coral Sea*. At 5 A.M. on November 9, as the crew returned from pre-embarkation leave, over one thousand anti-war civilians gathered at the main gate of Alameda Naval Station to distribute anti-war literature and talk with the men about opposing the ship's mission. The following day, three junior officers publicly tendered their resignations and strongly condemned the war effort. On the morning of the *Coral Sea's* departure, November 12, fifteen hundred civilians again demonstrated before dawn at Alameda to support the dissenting sailors. When the ship sailed that day, thirty-five sailors stayed behind. (Cortright, 1975, p. 112)

A year later Black sailors revolted on the carrier *Kitty Hawk* demanding an end to racism on the ship and a withdrawal of the carrier from the war. A month later 150 Black, Chicano, and some white sailors seized control of

various parts of the carrier *Constellation* for twenty-four hours, fighting Marine MPs and gangs of backward whites, and eventually forcing the ship to return to its home port of San Diego.

**Fraggings.** Col. Heintz wrote in his *Armed Forces Journal* article:

Word of the deaths of officers will bring cheers at troop movies or in bivouacs of certain units. . . . Shortly after the costly assault on Hamburger Hill in mid-1969, the GI underground newspaper [of the somewhat elite 101st Airborne] in Vietnam, "G.I. Says," publicly offered a \$10,000 bounty on LCol Weldon Honeycutt, the officer who ordered (and led) the attack. (p. 31)

Officially there were 239 fragging attempts in 1969, 386 in 1970, 333 in 1971, and 58 in 1972 (see Gabriel and Savage, 1978, p. 183, table 3). According to one reporter who investigated this question in 1971, only 10 percent of actual fragging attempts even made it to court, and therefore to the official statisticians, making the total number of fraggings astoundingly high (Linden, 1972, p. 12). Attempts to kill using rifles, automatics, claymore mines, "misdirection of hostile ambush" (i.e., shooting your officer in the back while in combat), and so on, did not count as fragging. Only killing by hand grenades counted. Approximately 80 percent of the official fragging attempts were against officers. Many more officers received "friendly warnings" like a grenade pin on their bunks. By the end of the war the situation had gotten so bad that many combat units had to turn in their weapons at the end of each day; but the officers were still not entirely safe. As one veteran recalled: "Nobody fucked with nobody in the field. An officer knows if he messed with you in the field, in a fire fight you could shoot him in the head. This was standard procedure in any infantry unit [by the end of the war]. Anybody tells you differently, he's shitting you" (Baker, 1981, p. 190).

The situation was unprecedented. (One writer noted that "the practice of 'fragging' . . . was statistically not a factor until the Vietnam War" [Veninga and Wilmer, 1985, p. 64]). While fraggings may not have been an everyday event in any combat unit, they did become an everyday topic of discussion in most of these units by 1970, which itself says a lot about the morale of the troops. And each instance of fragging had a "multiplier" effect; one Army judge warned that "once an officer is intimidated by even the threat of fragging he is useless to the military because he can no longer carry out orders" (Linden, 1972, p. 12).

Fragging was not necessarily carried out by, or at all limited to, the most politically radical elements among the troops; many of the more intermediate soldiers who were fed up with the war took it up spontaneously. Most were probably part of the broad grouping in the enlisted ranks called the UUUUs: "The unwilling, led by the unqualified, doing the unnecessary, for the ungrateful." This by no

means lessens its importance.

**Dope.** Of the approximately 1,000,000 GIs discharged from the army in 1971, the Veteran's Administration estimated there were between 50,000 and 100,000 drug addicts (see Hauser, 1973, p. 126). In 1970, 11,000 soldiers were charged with using hard drugs, and it was assumed that four of five GI addicts went undetected.

Widespread use of reefer reflected in part the cultural rebellion among youth both in and out of the service. But reefer and especially hard drug use also became a symptom of the all-around demoralization and collapse of the fighting will of GIs in Vietnam, as well as the depth and intensity of the ideological contradictions ripping many apart. Some tried to escape from the war in Vietnam through any means possible. Some of the complex reasons for starting on heroin were revealed by one GI junkie: "I really got along well with a girl there. . . . She was VC,\* she told me; she made booby traps and laid them at night — and I'd be out there stepping clear of them — but she and I were in love. That's when I started on junk" (Helmer, 1974, p. 157).

An in-depth analysis of drug use in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War is beyond the scope of this article. If it may have had an aspect of alienation and even identifying with the cultural youth rebellion, it is also doubtless true that at least in part the brass consciously tolerated or even directly promoted this rampant drug use as a means of containing the rage of GIs in Vietnam, in much the same way that the bourgeoisie pumped drugs into Black ghettos during the same period to dissipate urban rebellions. Drugs may have helped some GIs carry on with their missions while floating above the ideological contradictions tearing at them. And the hand of various U.S. agencies in the drug trade in Southeast Asia has been widely exposed. (See for instance, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, by Alfred W. McCoy. McCoy notes that "Previously nonexistent in South Vietnam, suddenly no. 4 heroin was everywhere" in the late 1960s [1972, p. 181]. For this he blames the profiteering of various South Vietnamese generals and government officials.)

**Fraternization and Joining the Enemy.** There is little hard documentation by either the U.S. or Vietnam as to U.S. soldiers deserting, making contact with the enemy, and then turning around and fighting with the liberation forces

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\*VC was U.S. slang for the Vietnamese Communists (Viet Cong), or Charlie for short. Or as one Black vet later remembered: "'Sir Charlie,' that was what we called him. We respected Charlie" (Goff and Sanders, 1982, p. 130). But that was not what the GIs were supposed to say, nor what they were supposed to feel. Strictly speaking, "VC" applied only to the South Vietnamese freedom fighters, the National Liberation Front (NLF), also called the People's Liberation Armed Forces. Those from the North were members of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), "the regulars." In practice, VC was used by most GIs for all forces fighting against them.

against the U.S. and the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). The reticence on the part of the U.S. to reveal information about this subject is certainly understandable. Nevertheless, such things did take place, even if on a small and scattered scale.

The most celebrated example was the case of Robert Garwood, a Marine Corps private who defected to the NLF in 1965, actively collaborated with the liberation forces throughout the war, and was court-martialed for aiding the enemy upon his return to the U.S.\* Numerous GIs during the war reported sighting a "salt-and-pepper" combo, a white and a Black GI who seemed to be fighting the U.S. troops all over South Vietnam. A GI underground newspaper reprinted the following order from the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam to the NLF fighters in the field:

NLF forces are . . . to welcome and give good treatment to those U.S. servicemen who cross over to the South Vietnamese people and the People's Liberation Armed Forces; to stand ready to help them go home or seek asylum in another country if requested by them. (Reproduced in Committee on Internal Security, 1972, p. 6806)

And Jack Anderson reported in his column in 1980:

According to military sources . . . as many as 500 American GIs actively assisted the enemy in Vietnam. About 30 prisoners of war went over to the enemy and played active anti-American roles in the POW camps. And as many as six Americans are believed to have taken up arms against U.S. troops in Vietnam. At least two of these — both Marine privates — are known to have joined in combat with the Viet Cong against American forces. (p. C-7)

Besides directly joining the "enemy" there were other much more widespread, though less extreme, forms of fraternization between U.S. GIs and the Vietnamese liberation forces. One important form was local "truces" between GIs and the local NLF or NVA fighters. While many such examples are more legendary than official, since such topics are largely banned from official discussions, examples drawn from the personal experience of Vietnam vets abound. For instance, in 1971 NVA and NLF troops received orders not to fire at troops wearing symbols of a rifle turned upside down or carrying their rifles in the down position on patrol. GIs tell of one American division which captured an NVA captain and told him they wanted to declare a truce in their area of operations. When the body count dropped to zilch, the unit was investigated.

The Vietnamese revolutionary forces placed a special

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\*That Garwood has since come "home" and repudiated his actions in Vietnam in no way changes their significance at the time.

## GI's !

What has Johnson said to you ? and what have happened (taken place) before your eyes in Vietnam ?  
It is massacre no spare old folks children and pregnant women.

It is flattening villages, consuming tens of thousands of houses, digging out graves and destroying crops, pagodas and churches.

Is it the " help " to the Vietnamese against communists and preserving " the Free world " ?

No ! It is action of aggression, of barbarity, of immorality. It is action of a cornered wild beast flinging himself about frantically.

It is action contrasting with the will and traditions of civilization, freedom and Democracy of the United States. .  
For your individual interests, conscience and honor of the Americans, you should :

- Oppose to orders of mopping - up operations, reinforcement !
- Don't commit crimes against the Vietnamese people !
- Press for your repatriation ! Don't get killed for the cannon - dealers !
- Cross over to the side of the NFL, you will receive humanitarian treatment and help to go home !

The National Front for Liberation.

emphasis on agitation among the troops in a righteous calculated attempt to sharpen certain political conflicts already present within the imperialist armed forces and thereby help foster their disintegration (see accompanying box). Such agitation often targeted Black soldiers. One Black vet later recalled his experiences in Nam:

The Vietnamese constantly appealed to blacks to get out of the war. They would leave leaflets laying all over the jungle. In perfectly good English, the leaflet would say, "Blacks get out, it's not your fight," or, "They call us gooks here and they call you niggers over there. You're the same as us. Get out, it's not your fight." In some ways those leaflets affected morale. It would make us wonder why we were there. Most of the people were like me; they were naive. We didn't know what the hell was really going on.

A favorite saying among Black troops in Vietnam became "No VC ever called me nigger." This vet continued:

Ho Chi Minh made a point that stuck in many of our minds. He said, "It's a civil war. The war is between the Vietnamese, between the North and the South." . . . Old Ho Chi made sense to most of us. This kinda idea especially made sense to me, because we had too many Americans dying. And it was obvious that we were the aggressors because we were fourteen thousand miles from home rather than vice versa. We were fighting Charlie in his own backyard. We

didn't really feel that we were fighting for our country; half the brothers felt it wasn't even our war and were sympathetic with Ho Chi Minh. (Goff and Sanders, 1982, pp. 131-33)\*

GIs also report many individual ways in which they or their compatriots acted to obstruct the U.S. war effort and/or to show solidarity with the Vietnamese.† And in the context of Vietnam, even living among the Vietnamese (i.e., having an apartment off-base) was in a certain sense a form of fraternization or at least a phenomenon that helped break down part of the wall of chauvinism that the U.S. counted on to separate the troops from the Vietnamese. This was most prevalent among Black GIs, and it was often an expression of hatred for life on the base and sympathy with the Vietnamese.

\*Because we will be using several quotations from the oral history of Stanley Goff and Robert Sanders, it is important to note that they both represent political views that were more in the mainstream of GIs than its radical advanced minority (and they were both highly decorated while in Vietnam). This itself says a lot about the seriousness of the disintegration, if views such as those above belonged to the intermediate soldiers.

†In 1969 the Navy and Marine Corps reported 365 acts of "wrongful destruction" (sabotage, arson, etc.) of military property; the figure jumped to 488 in the first six months of 1971 (Cortright, 1975, p. 123).

***One General wrote, "Should senior commanders not be able to reverse the trend toward indiscipline, this country will, not long from now, lose its status as the world's first power and stand almost helpless against those who would humble it or destroy it."***

**Regulations and Discipline.** The all-around breakdown of traditional military discipline was one of the most prominent signs of the crisis gripping the U.S. military. One author wrote that, by 1971, of 100 troops there were seven desertions, seventeen AWOLs, two discipline charges, twelve complaints to Congress, eighteen nonjuridical punishments, twenty pot smokers, and ten users of narcotics (Baskir and Straus, 1978, p. 110). In the same year the *New York Times* reported that "Court martial convictions for insubordination, mutiny and refusals to obey orders climbed from 230 in 1968 to 294 in 1969 to 331 last year. This year, convictions may exceed 450. These figures represent only the extreme cases. No statistics are kept on the less serious incidents, which occur almost daily in many units" (Ayres, 1971, p. 1).

Beginning in 1971, more in an attempt to cut losses and regroup with the future in mind than to salvage the splintered state of its armed forces in Vietnam, the military began brandishing new carrots and sticks. In December 1971 various unprecedented "reforms" were instituted, especially in the Army and Navy, in an attempt to do away with certain petty aggravations for the troops: hair regulations were loosened, a five-day work week was instituted in some places outside Vietnam, civilians were hired in some places to do KP, beer machines were allowed in the barracks and sleeping quarters on ships, and on-post and on-board ship coffeehouses were established (we shall see where they got that idea from). The coffeehouse at Ft. Carson in Colorado, known as the pacesetter in these "reforms," was called Inscap. In addition, a Defense Race Relations Institute was founded to train 1,400 military instructors annually. Needless to say, the soldiers and sailors were still expected to kill and die for the U.S. empire.

Far more important and indicative was the fact that 11 percent of the Marine Corps was unceremoniously booted in 1971 with "unsuitability discharges" for misconduct, unfitness, etc. The Army in December 1971 made the decision to discharge thousands of low-ranking GIs early for similar reasons. In December 1972, 3,000 sailors were given "administrative discharges," with an additional 3,000 given the same in the months following. Those targeted in the Navy were said to be "agitators and other malcontents," a

large percentage of whom were Black (Cortright, 1975, pp. 18, 91, 126).\*

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A prominent military scholar wrote around this time: "In the United States, the military establishment, and especially its ground forces, are experiencing a profound crisis in legitimacy" (Janowitz, 1972, p. 428). This crisis, he wrote, was centered in the U.S. infantry — in what had been a war geared to victory on the ground — and was twofold. First, the legitimate authority of the bourgeois state was challenged by the troops, and therefore the reliability of the armed forces was in question. Second, and related, because of the U.S. losses and the disintegration, the legitimacy of the U.S. military capability around the world was being called into question.

What concerned Janowitz and others familiar with the military's dilemma was that while the U.S. could, if it had to, face defeat in Vietnam, as great a loss as this would be it could not compare to the collapse of the U.S. armed forces. One general spelled out these concerns:

The military forces of the United States face a disciplinary situation which, if not already critical, is at least one of rapidly growing proportions. Should senior commanders not be able to reverse the trend toward indiscipline, this country will, not long from now, lose its status as the world's first power and stand almost helpless against those who would humble it or destroy it. (Quoted in Ayres, 1971, p. 1)

With the growing challenge to the U.S. in this period

\*The wasting war inside the U.S. officer corps was another indicator of the crud creeping within the military during Vietnam. Narrow careerism within bourgeois officer corps is, of course, a standard phenomenon. While there were important instances of middle-ranking officers protesting the war, what stood out in Vietnam was the extent to which this careerism spread and came to be accepted, providing another sign of the magnitude of the disintegration within the U.S. military.

For officers planning a career in the armed forces a Vietnam service ribbon was *de rigueur* for further advancement, and they tried to make sure their personnel folders were "punched" as having served in Vietnam in some capacity, any capacity. Attempting to apply Napoleon's ditty that "a bolt of ribbon wins many battles," the officers also handed out medals ("gongs") to themselves and the soldiers by the truckload. "Statistics revealed that 1,273,987 awards for bravery . . . had been given by the Army in Vietnam . . . [T]his compared with 1,766,546 such medals in all of World War II and only 50,258 in Korea" (Hauser 1973, p. 175). In fact, more gongs were shoveled out as the war on the ground waned: the Pentagon apparently hoped that medals could at least partially and temporarily buoy the sagging morale of the troops and junior officers. But in many ways it had the opposite effect — underlining for the troops the hypocrisy and careerism of the U.S. officer corps, as well as the hollowness of the war effort overall.



from the imperialist Soviet Union, some hard-nosed decisions had to be made. Bob Avakian, in "The '60s-'70s Shift," said of the defeat of the U.S. imperialists in the Vietnam War:

Vietnam became the tail of the tiger that they couldn't let go of. And in the long run, it contributed to greatly weakening U.S. imperialism. . . . [But while the U.S. tried to win,] when it became clear that wasn't really possible without throwing everything in and literally risking everything, the U.S. imperialists tried to extricate themselves, pull back, maneuver and regroup on a world scale as best they could. . . . to prepare for meeting the rising challenge that was coming from the Soviet Union. (pp. 11, 14, 16)

The decision to pull out of Vietnam was made in part to rescue the military from its seriously fractured state before things got qualitatively worse and to reconstitute it in preparation for the much more "life-threatening" clash even then beginning to loom on the horizon: that is to say, war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. This was the concern behind a blunt statement made by McGeorge Bundy, National Security Advisor to Kennedy and Johnson, when he spoke to the Council on Foreign Relations in 1971: "Extrication from Vietnam is now the necessary precondition of the renewal of the U.S. Army as an institution" (cited in Loory 1973, p. 385).

### People's War Batters the U.S. Military

In early 1961, shortly after taking office, John F. Kennedy told a reporter: "Now we have a problem in trying to make our power credible, and Vietnam looks like the place" (quoted in Halberstam 1972, p. 76). Vietnam was, of course, the place for the U.S. to draw the line against national liberation movements around the world.

This was a time when every schoolchild was, and could be, taught that the U.S. had never lost a war (Korea was either avoided or declared a stalemate — in any case, it wasn't portrayed as a defeat). This was said to prove the righteousness of the U.S., its place in the world — and its duty to play an "activist" role internationally. The proposition that in terms of sustaining heavy casualties it might plausibly be said that the U.S. had never really fought a major war in the twentieth century — this was not mentioned. Many of the soldiers sent to Vietnam also initially had an overweening confidence in the invincibility of the U.S. military around the world—a consummate faith in the potency of American firepower, which was the most important thing for the U.S. officer corps. After all, if moral righteousness and an unbeatable military machine weren't responsible for the U.S. never having lost a war, what was? The GIs were taught that the Vietnamese would be quick to capitulate

when pitted against American troops, and most of them believed it.

Former prisoner of war (POW) George Smith later described the political rationale fed to the elite Green Berets early on:

The Communists were coming down from China to overthrow the legitimate government of South Vietnam, which had the support of the people but was helpless to defend itself — that's what they told us. It was even on the patch we had for Vietnam service — a picture of the Great Wall of China with a break in it and red streaming down: the Red Hordes of China streaming down into South Vietnam. (1971, p. 36)

As Smith indicated, the earliest troops were told they were there to stop an invasion from the north originating in China. Later, and for most of the war, the troops were told they were there to stop an invasion simply from North Vietnam, preserve the legitimate government of South Vietnam, and protect vital U.S. interests. It was anything but an indigenous revolutionary situation and a war of national liberation, they were told, and this view is still the dominant view pushed by the bourgeoisie in the U.S. (see, for instance, Summers, 1982 and Palmer, 1984).

Of course, there was more to the ideological and political glue holding together the U.S. military than puffed-up confidence in its might coupled with noble-sounding missions. Recruits "were dragged into uniform, shaved bald, and put through the systematic process of degradation, humiliation, and indoctrination known as 'basic training.' Drill sergeants worked 24 hours a day to stomp out any flicker of rebelliousness, to instill fear of and unquestioning obedience to military authority. 'I want to be an airborne ranger/I want to live a life of danger/I want to go to Vietnam/I want to kill the Vietcong' — this is what the recruits had to chant day in and day out, at 5:00 a.m. runs and forced marches; and anyone who didn't 'eat this shit up' was a 'maggot,' a 'pussy,' a 'dud'" (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 364, p. 13).

All-American chauvinism and racism were drilled into the troops from the first day of boot camp. One vet recalled: "When you go into basic training, you are taught that the Vietnamese are not people. You are taught that they are gooks and all you hear is 'gook, gook, gook, gook'" (VVAW, 1972, p. 44). The backward GIs wallowed in this like pigs in shit throughout the war; and many other soldiers were often influenced by and practiced the same USA/Number-One mentality.

But this mentality was grounded in large measure on the empire that the U.S. carved out for itself following World War 2, an empire that was not going uncontested. Struggles raged in the oppressed nations in the world against imperialism. Popular wars, as often as not aimed at U.S. imperialism, flourished on every continent, and it was within this global conflict between imperialism and the oppressed nations that the liberation struggle in Vietnam took place.

Indeed the Vietnam War became the nodal point of the overall principal contradiction in the world at that time (which was between imperialism and the oppressed nations) and itself did much to fan the flames of liberation struggles worldwide. The U.S. troops were thus thrust onto the front lines of the most significant armed struggle of the day between revolution and counterrevolution — on the reactionary side.

But few of the lurking factors which brought these U.S. soldiers into the vortex of world events were clear to the troops in 1965 when the first Marines landed in Danang, South Vietnam. For significant numbers of them to even begin to get at the true nature of the war and their role in it would require a clash of swords with the Vietnamese revolution.

*The victorious armed struggle of the Vietnamese people was an indispensable precondition and the principal agent for the disintegration of the U.S. troops in Vietnam.* Words alone, or even words primarily, do not lead to the disintegration of armies. Simply put, bourgeois armies will not listen to words, unless and until they face a forceful armed struggle against them.

When the first Marines landed on China Beach, Danang, South Vietnam on March 8, 1965, images straight out of Hollywood D-Day movies danced in the heads of these happy warriors. Instead of machine-gun nests greeting the Marine Expeditionary Forces, however, there were Vietnamese girls to welcome them as "liberators" and give them garlands of flowers. The whole spectacle was staged by none other than the U.S. Navy.

Once the Marines landed they were assigned to guard Saigon and coastal cities in the South in an "enclave strategy." The puppet South Vietnamese Army was to carry the war into the countryside to exterminate the liberation forces. It is doubtful the U.S. ever intended to maintain this arrangement for long, as two reasons for sending U.S. troops to Vietnam in 1965 were that ARVN was in an advanced

state of disintegration itself and that the NLF controlled probably a third of the South and had a large influence in another third. The defensive role for the Marines (and several Army units which joined them in the summer of 1965) was canned within a year. In its place came a strategy of attrition and a succession of plans for securing territory in South Vietnam (the notorious "Strategic Hamlet" and other "pacification" programs), cutting the liberation forces off from their bases of support within South Vietnam and supplies and troops from the north, and most importantly wiping out the NLF and the NVA. Troop levels jumped from 23,300 in January of 1965 to 385,300 two years later, to a peak of 542,000 in January 1969. Real war began, and John Wayne went out of focus.

Search-and-destroy missions were the cutting edge of U.S. military strategy and activity until the ground troops were withdrawn. Simply put, their aim was to find the enemy, engage the enemy, and then kill the enemy. Official tactical procedures stated that as often as possible the killing should be accomplished not by the troops on the ground but rather by strafing and bombing runs from helicopters and jets standing ready once the enemy was sighted. At least that was the ideal model for search-and-destroy and the main method used to produce corpses for the daily body count, which was the prime quantitative gauge used by the U.S. in the war.

These were some of the modern methods of warfare on the ground. Beyond these, with undying faith in their technological wizardry, the military commanders taught the troops to ultimately rely on superior weapons to defeat the enemy. That's the way imperialists try to fight. Not only was the success of search-and-destroy missions contingent on the troops' ability to call in firepower from the air, but the war from the air in its own right was of enormous importance in the U.S. effort generally.\*

But the U.S.'s high-tech search-and-destroy strategy ran up against the reality of people's war, which deprived U.S. forces of the ability to fight "their way," as Bob Avakian put it, "to overwhelm and pound the enemy with superior technology and force" (1984, p. 76). As one critic of U.S. military tactics pointed out,

In actual practice there were probably as many divergences from this pattern as there were maneuver battalions and battalion commanders. Much depended on the enemy. The most difficult problem — and one that the army never resolved — was find-

#### U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL IN SOUTH VIETNAM 1961-1972

January 1961	900
January 1963	11,300
January 1965	23,300
January 1966	184,300
January 1967	385,300
January 1968	498,600
January 1969	542,000
January 1970	473,000
January 1971	336,000
January 1972	133,200

Sources: Adapted from Cincinnatus, 1980, p. 217, Appendix E and Lewy, 1978, p. 147, Table 4-1.

\*Vietnam was eventually a country with 21 million bomb craters and tens of millions of acres of land infected by toxic chemicals like Agent Orange, Agent Blue, and Agent White. 7,600,000 tons of bombs were dropped on North Vietnam alone in the war — three times the amount of all bombs dropped by all countries in World War 2. Three airports in South Vietnam in 1968, for example, recorded more takeoffs and landings than Chicago's O'Hare ("the world's busiest airport"), and this didn't even include helicopter traffic.

ing him. For the most part, search-and-destroy missions were fruitless. Plans would be laid for days and weeks. Penetration would be made. An FSB [fire-support base] would be established. Assault companies would comb the terrain and come back emptyhanded. The enemy had disappeared. Or, having found nothing, an American unit would suddenly be ambushed in an area that it had already searched and found to be clear of enemy troops. Hit when they least expected a fire fight, American soldiers could only huddle down into some semblance of a defensive formation and return fire while they called in Cobra [helicopter] gunships or protective artillery fires. Too frequently those fires had to be called down upon their own positions in order to make the enemy break contact. Then came the dust-off [medical] choppers to evacuate American wounded, and after that, if possible, the rest of the strike force would be airlifted out. Another search-and-destroy mission was over. (Cincinnati, 1980, pp. 77-78)

This brief sketch of a search-and-destroy operation capitalized many of the main features of the war on the ground in Vietnam. First, "the most difficult problem" was finding the enemy: not only did U.S. government statistics show that in 1967-68, for example, less than 1 percent of the approximately 2,000,000 small-unit operations saw contact with the enemy, but it was repeatedly noted by the military command in Saigon that in the majority of cases where contact was made it came on the initiative of the liberation fighters themselves, not the "good soldiering" of the U.S. and puppet troops (see Lewy, 1978, p. 83). U.S. ground troops were actually "used as scapegoats to find out where they were. That was all we were — bait. They couldn't find Charlie any other way. . . . Actually, they'd love for us to run into a regiment which would just wipe us out. Then they could plaster the regiment and they'd have a big body count" (Goff and Sanders, 1982, pp. 32-33). To the extent it was possible to record, U.S. figures for the war show that most of the enemy killed in action were not killed by the soldiers' standard issue M-16 rifles, M-60 machine guns, or M-79 grenade launchers, but rather by U.S. helicopter gunships, bombs, and artillery.

And while U.S. troops had great difficulty in locating the liberation forces, the latter often knew precisely where the GIs were, thanks to both an intimate knowledge of Vietnam's terrain and the eyes and ears of a supportive population.

GIs learned about the extent of popular support for the NLF in sometimes dramatic ways. One vet described the following scene on the morning after an attack by the NLF on an Army base camp:

They left about 400 people on the barbed wire that night. When we pulled the bodies out, there was three people that worked in the kitchen in battalion

headquarters. They served food to the officers. One of the cooks from our mess hall was there. Some of the people that owned the little shops that was just outside the base. Some of the boom-dee-boom clubs. Some of the owners of the boom-dee-boom clubs. Some of the guys that you see in the clubs that just seem to come in and just be sitting there. And the people that worked in the barbershop. Two of them. And the girls who polished our shoes and washed our clothes. (Terry, 1984, p. 128)

Further, while NLF and NVA troops could go where they wished in the South to a large extent, it was made painfully clear to the GIs that they could not. In particular the GIs met with mines, booby traps, and snipers wherever they went in the Vietnamese countryside. In 1970 Pentagon statistics were leaked which showed that *over half of U.S. casualties up to that point in the war came from mines and booby traps* laid by full-time guerrillas and part-time liberation fighters. Mines and booby traps did not kill nearly as many people as were killed by the U.S. in B-52 raids, for instance, but they killed thousands, and the thousands they killed were U.S. combatants, not civilians. Since the Vietnamese peasants always seemed to know where these devices had been laid and always seemed to avoid them, they also impressed upon the U.S. troops that their enemy was very popular indeed. By the end, the main aspect of technical superiority that bolstered the fighting spirit of the U.S. soldiers was the knowledge that if wounded they could generally count on speedy medical evacuation. The U.S. armed forces in Vietnam had a better medivac record than any other army in history. They needed it.

Another difficulty the U.S. faced was that Vietnam was a "circular" war. Battle lines are never straight or perfect in war, but in Vietnam there were *no* front lines in a strategic sense other than the borders of South Vietnam (and that was no absolute either). There were areas where fighting took place and areas where no fighting took place — at any particular moment. U.S. military doctrine and practice were ill-prepared for any but linear formations and assaults. So ground troops found themselves taking and retaking the same piece of ground, without gaining any advantage, which frustrated them no end.

The battle for Hamburger Hill came to symbolize American frustration with the "circular" war in Vietnam and its inability to win. In May of 1969 U.S. forces assaulted a suspected NLF base camp on Ap Bin Mountain about one mile from the border with Laos. After nine assaults over six days of heavy fighting, in which U.S. and ARVN forces took heavy losses, the hill was taken — "only to abandon the virtually worthless objective several days later" (Bonds, 1979, p. 178).

Administrative and organizational problems — which were rooted in the political character of the U.S. military — exacerbated U.S. difficulties. One was the ratio established at the beginning of combat to noncombat assignments (the "tooth-to-tail" ratio). Around 14 percent of the troops in

Vietnam at any one time were in combat situations, while fully 86 percent took up support duties in the major base areas. This tail-heavy arrangement drained resources overall, and again indicates how necessary massive, and rather constant, supply and support were to the imperialist combat troops. The U.S. dependence on a complex, tail-heavy organization also meant that any one snafu (by a resupply helicopter, a shoddy jet mechanic, a doped-up radio operator, etc.) could screw up the entire works for thousands of other soldiers.

The Tet Offensive in 1968 was the real turning point in the war and the disintegration of the U.S. armed forces. Whatever the shortcomings of this offensive by the liberation forces from a political and strategic standpoint, nothing showed the weaknesses of the U.S. position and the strength of the revolutionary armed forces more than Tet. Because of its pivotal role in the disintegration, it is worth describing briefly here.

In the early hours of January 31, 1968, tens of thousands of liberation fighters launched simultaneous and coordinated attacks on 100 cities and towns in the South, including Saigon and 39 of 44 provincial capitals. Specific targets hit included the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, the Presidential Palace and Joint General Staff headquarters in Saigon, and the U.S./ARVN headquarters of all four military regions in the rest of the South. The cities and towns in the South were the only locations the U.S. had previously been able to credibly advertise as 100 percent secure. But this bodacious Tet Offensive said more about the true situation in the South than a thousand military status briefings ever could. While the Offensive as envisioned by its North Vietnamese planners was marked by serious problems, it did demonstrate the courage and initiative of the guerrilla fighters in the South and the tremendous mass base on which they could rely, both to secrete them into the cities before Tet and to provide them refuge when the attacks were rebuffed and often even crushed.\* And it also blew a gaping hole in U.S. propaganda about having "secured" wide areas of the countryside and seeing a "light at the end of the tunnel."

Tet may have been a physical ("military" in the narrowest sense) victory for the U.S., but the ultimate outcome was a severe political defeat. The focus of the U.S. troops was *not* generally on the NVA weaknesses but on the fact that "the U.S. nearly got its ass kicked." And Walter Cronkite showed how wide the rifts within the U.S.

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\*As planned, the Tet Offensive reflected strong revisionist currents in the North Vietnamese leadership which favored immediate regular warfare and urban insurrection ahead of their time, partly, it appears, as pressure in negotiating tactics. (For more on the lines and policies involved, see "Vietnam: Miscarriage of the Revolution," *Revolution*, July-August 1979.) All in all the errors made by the liberation forces were not directly relevant to the U.S. troop disintegration, except insofar as they hurt the Vietnamese revolution itself and thus perhaps slowed the disintegration.

bourgeoisie were off the Tet setbacks when he dramatically announced on CBS News February 27, 1968 that the best possible outcome in Vietnam would now be a stalemate. (On Tet, see Oberdorfer, 1971.)

Today there is a campaign afoot to cover up and reverse the reality of the U.S. defeat with an American version of the stab-in-the-back mythology: the U.S. wasn't "militarily" defeated in Vietnam, the war was "lost by the politicians" due to political considerations or merely a lack of "will." For example, General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam 1964-68, said in 1980: "militarily we were successful. . . we didn't lose a single battle above company level" (quoted in Currey, 1984, p. 284). Col. Harry Summers in April 1975 bragged to a North Vietnamese colonel: "You know you never defeated us on the battlefield." According to Summers, the Vietnamese officer replied, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant" (1982, p. 1). And on a more popular level, there are movies like *Rambo*.

These rewrites of the history of the Vietnam War are bogus from a number of different angles. They ignore the U.S.'s inability to crush the Vietnamese liberation forces or secure South Vietnam and most importantly the pounding taken by the U.S. forces in Vietnam. One Vietnam vet told this author of hearing of numerous "battles in which whole units were wiped out, or of battles like Ia Drang Valley in 1967, where dead American soldiers were carted out by the truckload. These were small and middle-sized battles — how many of these does it take?"

One recent semi-official history, *The Rise and Fall of an American Army, U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973*, is apparently somewhat more realistic on this question at least. A reviewer notes:

As for always winning on the battlefield, anyone who actually believes that stuff will profit from a careful reading of this book. On page 169 can be found an account of how a company of the 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne), was virtually annihilated in a battle with a North Vietnamese army battalion; on page 175 one can read about the destruction of an entire battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade; on page 186 one can find an account of a communist ambush that cost a Marine company 273 killed or wounded out of 300 engaged. There are plenty of other examples in this vein. (Spector, 1985)

The reactionary lament that the politicians lost the Vietnam War also conveniently ignores the fact that had the U.S. chosen to fight on in Vietnam, or go all out for "total victory," it would have courted the risk of greatly compounding its defeats: deeper crisis and division at home, the erosion of its global position (particularly in the face of the rising challenge from the Soviet Union), the possibility of more extensive defeats on the battlefield, and the further disintegration of its military forces. Extricating itself from

Vietnam didn't reflect a "lack of will" on the part of the U.S. bourgeoisie; rather it was crucial if the empire was to be preserved.

### Shattered Illusions

Who were the troops sent to Vietnam? Where were the young men found who answered orders to wage a war that killed four million Vietnamese, and countless Cambodians and Laotians, in the U.S. holocaust (casualty figure from Karnow, 1983, p. 11)? How did these soldiers at the beginning approach the war that later so many of them would refuse to fight in one way or another?

The ground troops in Vietnam were mainly working class youth; a majority of them were white, but a high percentage were from the oppressed nationalities. As noted, numerous propaganda pieces appearing in the press in the mid-1960s tried to whip up patriotism among all these youth and explain why they owed it to "their country" to carry out its dictates. For those who balked at the idea, there was the draft.\* The average age of the U.S. soldiers in Vietnam was between 19 and 20; in World War 2 it was 26.

The section of working class youth sent to Vietnam in 1965 and later was part of the generation that grew up in the 1950s and '60s, when a fairly broad section of workers in the U.S. began to experience fairly steady employment and relatively high (and rising) wages. These privileges represented the fruits of the U.S. victory in World War 2 and the U.S. bourgeoisie's resulting increased ability to bribe some sections of the masses within its national borders. The U.S. military was able to make good use of the illusions nurtured by the relative prosperity in the U.S. in the 1960s, not only among those youth who had enjoyed some of the spoils of World War 2 but even among some of the most oppressed youth who believed their turn was coming soon.

The early and earnest illusions of the soldiers sent to fight in Vietnam, both those that were based on the notion that the troops were in Vietnam to "help the people help themselves" and those that saw the enemy forces as easy pickings for the U.S. military machine, were vital in bolstering the fighting spirit of the armed forces at first.

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\*Two points are noteworthy here about the draft. One, thirty-two of the thirty-five years during which the U.S. has had a draft since 1776 were from 1940 to 1973 (no draft being held for a year between 1947-48), the period in which the U.S. first won and then ruled over the largest empire in the history of the world. Two, in order to pacify the middle class and because of U.S. imperialism's need for a larger trained body of professionals at home, many middle class youth were given deferments during Vietnam, and therefore the percentage of working class youth drafted into the Army was higher than in World War 2, for instance. This fact may have led to an even greater exacerbation of the Achilles' heel problem for the bourgeoisie in Vietnam, but the problem still remains latent in all drafts of youth for imperialism's wars.

They were also integrally involved in the later disintegration of the U.S. military. As the war dragged on with the U.S. increasingly on the losing end, its power was shown to be limited and its military methods bankrupt; and as the conflict became more and more a source of massive political protest and questioning in the U.S. and around the world, these illusions were ever more undermined and tended to boomerang back on the ruling class that had sent these troops to war.

The illusions among GIs that they would be regarded as saviors and heroes among the Vietnamese people were dashed in every rice paddy, village, and jungle trail. As one vet summed up:

Vietnam taught you to be a liar. To be a thief. To be dishonest. To go against everything you ever learned. It taught you everything you did not need to know, because you were livin' a lie. And the lie was you ain't have no business bein' there in the first place. You wasn't here for democracy. You wasn't protecting your homeland. And that was what wear you down. (Terry, 1984, p. 133)

At first some troops pointed to "the other war" — the massive "pacification" drives in the South such as Census Grievance and the Strategic Hamlet and Phoenix programs — as showing the good intentions of the U.S. in Vietnam, specifically its interest in a "political solution." But when experience showed that these programs meant the most ruthless assassination of tens of thousands of suspected liberation fighters, or the forcible imprisonment of the Vietnamese masses in strategic hamlets, the venal hypocrisy of U.S. claims to be acting on behalf of the Vietnamese masses stood out in even sharper relief.

The reality that the U.S. was trying to crush a popular liberation movement, not to assist it, became clear to some GIs by the very methods used by the U.S. to attain victory. As Carl Dix testified at the Mass Proletarian War Crimes Tribunals of U.S. Imperialism in New York City in 1981 about GIs in Vietnam:

You kill children, you kill women, you kill old people. They drop bombs and try to get the whole village. Because all the people over there are the enemy. It's not like, here's an army and there's an army and the Vietnamese people are in the middle. It's the people that's the enemy. And if you're gonna go over there, that's what you got to get ready to get down on and deal with. (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 136, p. 12)

The troops were told by the brass that regardless of what area or unit they were assigned to in Vietnam, their primary military objective was the same: to produce a high body count. The body count for most of the war was, as mentioned, regarded by the brass as the most important indicator of the overall progress in the war. Contests were

held among the U.S. troops, with prizes like two-day passes, based on enemy Killed in Action (KIA) vs. U.S. KIA. Fistfights and worse broke out repeatedly over who would claim an arm or a leg after a firefight. Morbidity knowing no bounds among U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, graves were sometimes dug up to boost a unit's body count, while the officers intoned: "A dead Vietnamese is a dead VC."

Committing atrocities against the enemy is a component part of all wars waged by imperialism, official policy and standard operating procedure. Pillage, rape, plunder, and massacres — the "spoils of war" — are historically one way that imperialism boosts the morale of its troops. In Vietnam this practice ended up turning in large part into its opposite — undermining the troops' belief in the righteousness of the U.S. cause, turning many against the war, and tearing many so deeply with guilt that they couldn't function (some of whom later committed suicide). (In Vietnam these atrocities also became, especially as U.S. hopes for winning on the battlefield began to evaporate, a symptom of the decay and frustration rampant in the ranks of the U.S. military.)

The bourgeois-democratic illusions were so powerful initially among many of the GIs that especially when GIs began to see that *they* were considered the enemy by most Vietnamese many were forced to do some radical rethinking about the war as a whole; and the contradiction between illusions and reality provided added fuel for the disintegration of the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam. Many statements by Vietnam vets speak graphically to this point:

When I came to Vietnam, I thought we were helping another country to develop a nation. About three or four months later I found out that wasn't the case. (Terry, 1984, p. 22)

I was a prisoner of so many of the myths and misconceptions of an environment in which communism was the dirtiest word in the dictionary and in which democracy was a word to which one should kneel in divine supplication. . . . I fervently believed in America's role in the world as the policeman of democracy and the defender of freedom. I approached the shores of Vietnam confident that I was a member of the rescuing cavalry arriving at the nick of time to save the besieged wagon train of Vietnamese democracy from the hordes of communist savages. . . . When I witnessed "democracy" being applied to Vietnam through indiscriminate killing of peasants and napalming of villages; when I saw the ARVN defenders of Vietnamese democracy flee in terror at a single sniper's bullet and desert in droves at the first opportunity, and then faced the incredibly courageous opposition of men of the same nationality supposedly fighting for an alien and wicked cause, totally outclassed in numbers, firepower, logistics. . . everything but in raw courage and determination; when I saw how pitifully little the Vietnamese people benefited from

its Western style "democratic" government, I began to wonder about the validity and righteousness of our Vietnam crusade. (Clodfelter, 1976, pp. 9-10)

[ARVN] used to pick up and run. They would always shy away from fighting at night. They wouldn't even fight for their own country; we didn't see any reason why we should. . . . But I have to say one thing. Charlie himself — the North Vietnamese soldier — was tough, man. I mean, they really got down to it. What frightened me most of all was that it was a political war. Charlie had a philosophy; they'd say that we were aggressors, that we shouldn't have been there interfering in their affairs. To me, it seemed like it was between North and South Vietnam. It was sort of like a revolution they were fighting. A lot of Vietnamese didn't want us there. They didn't need anyone interfering. They believed that to the bone, that one grain of rice was worth one drop of blood. And many times, when you would kill an enemy, you could see they were little kids out there fighting you. Or women. Actually see them laying there dead. I would wonder what provoked a woman or a little kid to get out there and fight like this unless they honest to God felt that their beliefs were right. It was scary to me, waking me up, making me ask what I was doing there. I mean, what WERE we doing there? We weren't supposed to know anything or say anything — just keep taking orders and moving along. But still I had my own mind. I still had to think for myself about what I was fighting for. (Goff and Sanders, 1982, pp. 133-34)

It was there, on the blue-black floors of the jungle that I learned to root for the Vietcong. (Hamill, 1975, p. 18)

The disintegration of the troops was evident on many different levels, as morale was ripped apart from a hundred different directions. As the war dragged on and it became evident that the U.S. couldn't win, the bankruptcy of the U.S.'s military strategy became ever more apparent. And with Nixon's declaration that the U.S. was seeking "Peace with Honor," the whole U.S. rationale for being in Vietnam — defeating the Vietnamese communists — was undermined. The troops more and more felt they were shedding their blood for nothing, and that their missions were meaningless.

According to one vet, there was a "total lack of respect for most officers." This lack of respect reflected not only the failure of the war effort but the class contradictions within the military as well. GIs were outraged at the petty harassment and seemingly senseless rules and regulations (while buddies were being killed, officers harassed soldiers about the length of their hair); the military's gross incompetence (vets report numerous instances in which

U.S. forces bombed or shelled their own); the rampant corruption (selling U.S. equipment — including arms — on the black market was widespread, and it was universal knowledge that such transactions often ended up supplying the "enemy"); as well as the total hypocrisy of all the brass's statements about body counts, lights-at-the-end-of-the-tunnels, and the many other examples of "doublespeak" that became so infamous during the war. Many asked themselves why they should be enthusiastic about fighting for Vietnamese freedom when ARVN troops obviously weren't, or even what this freedom was supposed to mean, when the U.S. was turning Saigon into a giant whorehouse and supporting a thoroughly corrupt and brutal dictatorship. It was an experience straight out of the novel *Catch-22*.

For many vets, their experience in Vietnam triggered an avalanche of questioning not confined to what the war was all about, but to the whole gamut of "cherished beliefs" of what U.S. society was all about. The moral collapse and disillusionment among Vietnam vets went extremely deep. Even today, over a dozen years after the war's end, the so-called "healing" process has not smoothed over all the wounds: many vets still talk of the deep anger they feel over being used in a war they didn't understand; and for others — numbering literally in the thousands — their solution to the contradictions raging within them has been to take their own lives. If any Rambos today want to free U.S. GIs from prison confines, they might try here at home. The prisons here are full of them.

In his book *Giant Steps*, the basketball player Kareem Abdul-Jabbar describes the experience of one of his friends in Vietnam:

My man Munti, who had lived in my building, went to Vietnam all gung-ho. He was a point man on patrol in the jungle and loving it. Then one day his squad walked right into a horseshoe, a classic Viet Cong ambush where they let you move forward until you're almost encircled and then open fire from 270 degrees. Most of the guys in his unit were hit, and Munti got a flesh wound, some shrapnel in the mouth. They were pinned down, some guys dying, when the VC stopped shooting and yelled to them, in English, "Why are you fighting us, soul brothers?" As quickly as the ambush had begun, it dispersed.

Munti went wild after that. His political awareness had been magnified a thousand times; his life had been spared. From then on Munti decided he just wasn't going to fight anymore. He kept his rifle with him at all times, but said he just wasn't doing any more combat duty. He had only six weeks left on his active tour, so they said he had "combat hysteria" and sent him home. Munti came back and lived in New York for seven or eight years. Then one day he checked into a hotel, left a letter, and blew his brains out. (Abdul-Jabbar, 1985, pp. 238-39)

In Vietnam, of course, not all GIs reacted to the reality of the situation by coming to oppose the war. Some who were deeply stung by the humiliation of it all became even more vicious hitmen for U.S. imperialism, and even if these most backward soldiers often found themselves politically more isolated in many units towards the end of the war, they still objectively (and some consciously) helped to limit the scope of the disintegration:

It gave you a feeling of superiority. You walking through the village and you got your great big old flak jacket on. You got your helmet and bandoliers all over you. You got your rifle. You tower over most of these people. It got to the point where you just didn't trust none of them. You don't sweet-talk them, because they ain't going to be sweet-talking you — unless when you come back through here, there's going to be a booby trap to blow your fucking ass away. So we'd just try to scare the shit out of them. (Baker, 1981, p. 195)

Some people are just plain made to wave the stars and stripes.

The objective interests of proletarian youth inside an imperialist army are always opposed to those of their rulers. But it is not often that they can see this. In Vietnam conditions were such that large numbers of soldiers were able to grasp in a beginning way, especially through the agency of the Vietnamese people, that they were pawns in a barbaric crusade. When they did, things began to unravel, and this is a fact of no small significance.

### **The Impact of the Black Liberation Movement**

The political mood and activity of the masses (as well as the ruling class) at home and throughout the world plays a key role in determining the will to fight of all armies. In imperialist wars that achieve a greater measure of support from the home population, such as World War 2 for the U.S., the morale of the troops is seldom a significant problem. (Such support, of course, is usually based on a prospect of victory.) This was not the case with the Vietnam War, in which millions of people in the U.S. (and around the world) actively opposed the U.S. genocide in Indochina. The disintegration of the troops wasn't simply a result of the defeat suffered by the U.S. in Vietnam; it was also linked to overall developments in U.S. society — themselves closely related to the Vietnam war. The shock waves of the war reverberated throughout the U.S. and rebounded back into Vietnam by way of many troops who had been influenced by the Black liberation struggle and the U.S. antiwar movement. The existence of conscious poles of opposition to the war and organized efforts to spread the "Movement" to the GIs had a tremendous impact on the political terrain within the military; it did much to transform the basic

hatred felt by many GIs for their predicament into more conscious opposition to the war.\*

Among the important developments within the U.S. troops during the Vietnam War was the fact that the oppressed nationalities were mounting the political stage in revolutionary ways. As the civil rights movement among Black people gave way to urban uprisings, and as revolutionary sentiments developed among the basic Black masses, the bourgeoisie developed a systematic policy to get Black youth off the streets and into khaki.† Tens of thousands of these youth were press-ganged into the Army and Marine Corps, which also helped to alleviate the military's severe manpower shortage at the beginning of major troop commitments to Vietnam. As in other wars in U.S. history, ruling class ideologues were trotted out to promise Black people pots of gold at the war's successful conclusion. In July 1966 the *New York Times Magazine* ran an article titled "The Army and the Negro" to explain what a good thing the Army could be for Blacks. The closing line of the article was a quote from a Black sergeant: "We've got to start someplace to be part of America, and maybe the Army is the best place. The Army gave the Negro, at least, the chance to stand side by side and compete" (Grove, 1966, p. 52). Daniel P. Moynihan wrote in the *New Republic* later that year: "Acquiring a reputation for military valor is one of the oldest known routes to social equality" (Moynihan, 1966, p. 22). They were hackneyed lines, but no better could be offered.‡

The massive recruitment drive among Black and other oppressed nationality youth quickly came back to haunt the

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\*This is illustrated by comparing the U.S. experience in Vietnam with that of other imperialist armies which suffered even more extreme military defeats. For instance, on July 1, 1916, in the Battle of the Somme in World War 1, the British Army sustained 60,000 casualties, 20,000 of them killed, without any serious cohesion problems. An assault launched in mid-April 1917 by French General Nivelle against the Germans left over 100,000 French troops dead. Following this slaughter, mutinies took place in 54 of 116 divisions of the French Army. Yet three months after this enormous rupture in the cohesion of the French forces 99 percent of these same soldiers were back in the war. It is true that France and Britain were on the winning side of World War 1, but that wasn't totally determined in 1917. The fact that the disintegration of the U.S. forces in Vietnam was much more severe, both qualitatively and quantitatively, than either the British or French armies during World War 1 speaks to the depth of the crisis gripping U.S. society in the '60s, as well as the power of people's war in disintegrating reactionary armies (see Pedroncini, 1967).

†One such effort called "Project 100,000" eventually brought in not 100,000 but nearly 250,000 youth, 40 percent of whom were Black, who were technically ineligible for military service because of low scores on so-called "intelligence" tests. This program was also called "New Standards Men" (See Binkin and Eitelberg, 1982, p. 34).

‡And such lines are being repeated today: a 1986 *New York Times* series on the military featured an article titled "Blacks and Women Find Roads for Advancement Through Life in Military" (Halloran, 1986, p. B24).

U.S. rulers. The national oppression rampant in the U.S. military, coupled with and heightened by all the contradictions set loose by the losing effort in Vietnam, intersected with the Black upsurge in the U.S. in the late 1960s to unleash a storm of Black protest within the U.S. military — not limited to Vietnam. This was a central force in the disintegration of the U.S. military and the creation of anti-war and radical movements among GIs. It was a powerful example of the kind of strategic role the Black masses can play in revolution in the U.S.

Since the war began, Black soldiers (along with soldiers of other oppressed nationalities) had been routinely given the most dangerous combat assignments, the harshest punishments, and had been subject to constant racist abuse by officers, NCOs, and backward whites in the enlisted ranks. (Before 1966 Blacks accounted for over 20 percent of U.S. combat casualties in Vietnam. Officially the figure dropped to between 11 and 13 percent after this.) One Air Force report conceded:

Unequal treatment is manifested in unequal punishment, offensive and inflammatory language, prejudice in assignments of details, lack of products for blacks at the PX, harassment by security police under orders to break up five or more blacks in a group and double standards in enforcement of regulation. (*Congressional Quarterly*, 1976, p. 37)

Before the late 1960s, however, this hadn't given rise to open protest, and many Black soldiers still entertained the notion that if they only went off to fight for the U.S. things would look much better when (and if) they returned. But even early on when going along with the program was still the dominant current among them and radical stirrings and impulses had not yet taken root broadly, there was a section of Black troops who identified with Malcolm X, both his support for the Vietnamese revolution and his exposure of the hypocrisy from Washington that Blacks should "get violent" in places like Korea but stay nonviolent in the South of the U.S. These sentiments would have a powerful impact on other Black GIs and, through them, on the entire military as well.

The rebellions lighting the city skies across the U.S. in the spring of 1968 were a spark for even the intermediate among the oppressed nationalities to join in open rebellion against the military. A freelance reporter at the besieged Marine post at Khesanh near the DMZ (the border between North and South Vietnam) wrote later: "The death of Martin Luther King intruded on the war in a way that no other outside event had ever done. . . . [W]e stood around the radio and listened to the sound of automatic-weapons fire being broadcast from a number of American cities" (Herr, 1978, p. 158). There were protests, revolts, and/or racial fighting on every U.S. base in Asia following King's assassination.

By this time most of the Black troops "felt that the American Dream didn't really serve us. What we experi-



enced was the American Nightmare. . . . We felt that they put us on the front lines abroad and in the back lines at home" (Goff and Sanders, 1982, p. 133). For many, the experience of being slammed against the wall by U.S. soldiers — while home on leave from Vietnam — broke the camel's back. Another Black vet recounted a discussion in Vietnam off the urban uprisings:

Captain one time asked Davis what kind of car he gonna have when he get back in the States. Davis told him, "I'm not gonna get a car, sir. I'm gonna get me a Exxon station and give gas away to the brothers. Let them finish burnin' down what they leave." It wasn't funny if he said it in the stateside. But all of 'em bust out laughing. (Terry, 1984, p. 41)

The Black Panther Party issued calls to Black GIs to "Either quit the Army, now, or start destroying it from the inside" (*The Black Panther*, 1970, p. 4). And many oppressed nationality GIs thought the time was right for violent revolution [one poll found that 76 percent of Black soldiers supported Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver and were seriously dealing with the question of the armed overthrow of the U.S. state [Terry, 1973, p. 214]]. While their convictions never led to an overall battle plan, that didn't mean that more than a few weren't making some concrete preparations. A Black Marine told a reporter that he knew guys from Detroit who were taking mortars back, breaking them down so that each one could get a piece into his duffel and then reassembling them when they got together back on the block. "You see that four-oh-deuce?" he asked. "Now that'll take out a police station for you" (Herr, 1978, p. 118).

Throughout Vietnam and the U.S. military, Black GIs launched protests against national oppression and were in the forefront of combat refusals (against being used as "cannonfodder" in "suicide missions"), antiwar protests, and other rebellions within the ranks.

The stockades in Vietnam and the U.S. became special centers of struggle among the Black troops (who made up 53 percent of the population in Air Force prisons and 30 percent in Army stockades in the early 1970s, while comprising only 12.1 percent of all enlisted personnel in the U.S. military and 11.7 percent of total Air Force strength [Cortright, 1975, pp. 203, 208]). On August 16, 1968 there was a major rebellion at the Marine brig at Danang. Two weeks later 250 GIs rose up at the Longbinh Jail near Saigon (a.k.a. LBJ), destroying buildings, battling guards, and holding the prison for almost a month. In the U.S., in 1969 alone, the stockades went up at Ft. Dix, Ft. Jackson, Ft. Riley (three times), and Camp Pendleton, among other places, with Black soldiers playing a central role in each uprising (Cortright, 1975, pp. 40-41, pp. 70-73). At Dix one of the prisoners' demands was: "Free Huey P. Newton, the New York Panther 21, the Presidio 27, and all political prisoners!"

In August 1968 one of the most significant mutinies of the Vietnam War took place at Ft. Hood, Texas. On August

23, 100 Black soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division met to discuss racism and the use of troops against civilians — forty-three GIs then publicly announced that if called they would refuse to go to Chicago for riot duty during the Democratic Party National Convention. Over half of the Ft. Hood 43 were Vietnam combat veterans. Technically guilty of mutiny, which is a capital offense in the U.S. military, the 43 were arrested. But given the political atmosphere in the military and U.S. society generally at that time, the brass decided to hush up the mutiny as much as possible and to give out light sentences and transfers to the 43.

Meanwhile in West Germany, where many commentators say "racial tensions" were the sharpest inside the military at that time, important developments also occurred. On July 4, 1970, for example, almost 1,000 GIs of all nationalities met at Heidelberg University for a conference called by Black GIs to discuss U.S. military and economic activities in Vietnam and around the globe as well as racism in the military. A little over two months later, at the U.S. Nelligen base in West Germany, following months of rising tensions,

black and white GIs threatened to blow up the entire base. Their warnings were not idle threats, for two fire bombs had already gone off in the early morning at an MP station near the base gate. Frightened commanders responded by mobilizing truckloads of MPs and imposing a 6:30 p.m. curfew. At about 9 p.m. that evening, however, approximately one hundred GIs deliberately broke the curfew and marched through the base shouting "Revolution" and "Join Us" to fellow GIs. (Cortright, 1975, p. 97)

A number of Black political organizations were formed in the military, including in Vietnam, Europe, and the U.S. One, called the "Black Liberation Front of the Armed Forces," staged the demonstration at Longbinh Jail in 1971 in support of the demand to free the Black political prisoners in the U.S. And there are reports of clandestine chapters of the Black Panther Party being formed in Vietnam.

There were also significant stirrings of protest and rebellion among other oppressed nationalities in the U.S. military. One particularly significant example of civilian protest that reflected this was the 1971 L.A. Chicano Moratorium. It demanded an end to the war and denounced the proportionally higher casualty rates suffered by troops of Mexican descent. When police attacked it, the Moratorium became a major rebellion.

Vietnam was the second war in U.S. history in which there were integrated companies, platoons, and squads (the first being Korea). While hundreds of thousands of Blacks enlisted in World War 2, with the exception of a few isolated formations, Blacks not only served in segregated units but they were used exclusively in support capacities. (In 1940, before the U.S. entered the war, there were only 5,000 Black soldiers and a total of five Black officers, three of whom

were chaplains, in the entire U.S. Army.) By 1968, 12.6 percent of the Army enlisted ranks and 11.5 percent of the Marine Corps enlisted ranks was Black. (Only 5 percent of EMs in the Navy was Black at that time.) The impact of the bourgeois integration of the U.S. military following World War 2, as stunted and oppressive as it proved, became a major factor in its later undoing, as many proletarian youth for the first time in their lives were thrown together with youth of other nationalities.

By the time Marines at Khesanh stood around a radio listening to broadcasts of uprisings in the ghettos "back in the world," there was no mistaking the fact that the Black upsurge had become a primary ingredient in the military disintegration. Especially in areas of Vietnam away from the heaviest fighting (where conditions more necessitated "sticking together" among the grunts, regardless of political views), the U.S. armed forces took on more and more the appearance of "two armies": one, the military proper; the other, Black GIs, other soldiers from the oppressed nationalities, and the "grays" (white guys sympathetic to the national struggles and general revolt back home) who identified more with the social upheaval in the U.S. than with the dominant order. The emergence of "two armies" partially reflected the split overall in the U.S. working class between genuine proletarians and the better-off section, and it often led to fights within units, especially in the rear areas. (The *New York Times* reported that "Racial tensions have so polarized whites and blacks in many units that fights break out periodically in bunk areas and latrines... between September, 1970, and August, 1971, the Army recorded eighteen racial incidents — gang fights, protests, riots — that required 'significant' police action" [Ayres, 1971, p. 1]).

For the bourgeoisie, the post-World War 2 integration of the military came to pose a certain catch-22 conundrum. Remarkd one Vietnam veteran who joined the Black Panther Party after leaving the service:

I had a white guy in the team. He was a Klan member. He was from Arkansas. Ark-in-saw in the mountains. And never seen a black man before in his entire life. He never knew why he hated black people. I was the first black man he had really ever sat down and had a decent conversation with... Arkansas and me wind up being best friends. (Terry, 1984, pp. 246-47)

***One poll found that 76 percent of Black soldiers supported Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver and were seriously dealing with the question of the armed overthrow of the U.S. state.***

With Black troops during the war consistently playing an initiating political and organizational role in the disintegration of the troops of all nationalities, integration obviously posed its problems for the brass. At the same time, the following is also true (and illustrative of the mood among Black troops in the years after the Tet Offensive and rebellions in 1968):

It was indeed fortunate that the desegregation of the military service occurred before either the civil-rights movement of the late 1950's or the black-power movement of the 1960's. The very thought of a segregated army during those years is frightening. Outright organized mutiny or revolution might well have occurred had not the Army already been desegregated. (Walton, 1973, p. 64)

Thus, while the bourgeois spokesmen before the Vietnam War were pitching a call to proletarian youth who'd been "kept out of the mainstream of U.S. society" to join in the war effort and gain "social equality," the postmortems offered a different line. Commenting on military deserters, but clearly meaning to apply his conclusions more broadly, one military sociologist said that these troops suffered from a chronic "defective assimilation of such symbols of the national society and culture as are afforded by American high schools" (Shils, 1977, p. 430).

But this is all wrong. The assimilation and integration of these youth into bourgeois society, while certainly uneven among the troops entering the services, was not inconsiderable, including among the most oppressed youth (who at least early in the war often bought the line that military service might be a way to "get out of the ghetto," etc.). At least until 1968 the U.S. was able to count on a fairly patriotic and obedient pool of youth. What was at play after this point was not the continued inability to "fit in" but rather the *dissimilation* and *deintegration* of a large proportion of the previously loyal troops, deserters and others, from the "national society and culture." And this resulted in part from the experience in the war and in part from the related social turmoil in the U.S.\*

\*The composition of its military is a big problem for the bourgeoisie, and the brass had a decidedly terrified response to the Black and other proletarian youth they commanded. Remarkd one general about the "pride of the nation": "My analysis is that they came to us. They came out of the bowels of the big cities, and they lived by fist and knives and bludgeons, and they're trying to conduct their business here pretty much the same way" (cited in Hauser, 1973, p. 96). And summing up recent lessons from Vietnam about these youth of all nationalities, a professor of military history at West Point warned of intrinsic problems in wars fought by the U.S. without all-out mobilization (which would presumably bring in more nonproletarian youth): "the brunt of the battle to defend the American society and way of life may be borne, until the average citizen gets into the fight, by those who have benefited least from that society and way of life" (Wesbrook, 1980,

## Student Protest and the GI Movement

One after another in the spate of Vietnam vet reminiscences in recent years has talked of the contempt that GIs in Vietnam supposedly felt for the "longhaired antiwar protesters." Such sentiments were real enough among many, to be sure, although mainly early in the war. Of far greater importance in the long run was that the "fuck-you-you're-baby-killers" stand of radical students and others helped to shake and wake up many GIs to their reactionary role in the war. The fact that youth back in the U.S. (and, again, around the world) were not only rebelling against the war but the whole bourgeois status quo also certainly hit home to many of the troops, who found themselves in a highly authoritarian and repressive situation. In fact, the antiwar movement along with the Black liberation movement were crucial in the development of "a phenomenon never before experienced in the armed forces in the U.S.: an organized and sustained movement of political opposition and resistance to the war, with a strong anti-imperialist character" (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 364, p. 13).

There was some lag time between developments in the civilian antiwar movement and the GI antiwar movement. This isn't surprising given the tightly controlled isolation of and threat of reprisal against antiwar GIs by the brass, and more importantly the fact that the Black liberation movement and the student and youth movement played a vanguard role in regard to developments in the U.S., bringing consciousness "from without" to the GI struggle. While the civilian antiwar movement in the U.S. and worldwide began to get going with the deployment of the first ground troops to Vietnam in 1965 (on April 17, 1965 over 20,000 students marched against the war in front of the White House) and the surge in young men getting drafted (reaching a peak of 382,010 in 1966), antiwar actions inside the military at this time were very small and isolated, often taking the form of individual protests. But they were only the first tremors of a growing revolt.

In November 1965 Lt. Henry Howe participated in a civilian peace march in El Paso carrying a sign denouncing "Johnson's fascist war." For this Howe was given two years

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p. 275). The good professor is right to worry about the proletarian youth in his army, but we would like to point out that plenty of radical Vietnam veterans started out as "average citizens." Many youth from rural backgrounds, for example, were radicalized while in Vietnam and in the service. It might even be said that the U.S. military provided a kind of radical "road to the rural youth," as shown by the fact that in some Midwestern farm towns a majority of these former troops joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) when they returned.

In several respects this problem is greater today than it was then. This may be demonstrated in many ways, including quantitatively. In 1970, 13.5 percent of EMs in the Army were Black, while 11 percent in all services was Black. By 1981 the figures were 33.2 percent and 22.1 percent respectively (Binkin and Eitelberg, 1982, p. 42, table 3-1).

at hard labor at Ft. Leavenworth, the military penitentiary. In the summer of 1966 three soldiers at Ft. Hood in Texas refused to ship out to Vietnam. In October the same year Dr. Howard Levy refused to train Green Berets at Ft. Bragg in North Carolina, for which he eventually served twenty-six months at Leavenworth. In July 1967, in the middle of the Detroit rebellions, two Black Marines stationed at Camp Pendleton in California requested a "captain's mast" (a meeting between officers and enlisted personnel, normally a disciplinary hearing) to question why "Black men should fight a white man's war" in Vietnam. They were later convicted of making "disloyal statements" and "advising, urging, and attempting to cause insubordination, disloyalty, and refusal of duty." One was sentenced to ten years, the other to six (Cortright, 1975, p. 52). The brass came down very hard on such early protests to frighten others away from similar actions. Later treatment of GIs accused of much more serious "disloyalty" and "refusal of duty" (even by the time of the Ft. Hood 43 in the summer of 1968) was far lighter in comparison. By then the military was no longer dealing with relatively small, scattered actions but with widespread insubordination throughout the services and cracking down hard, the brass realized, would only deepen the rebellion.

The civilian antiwar and Black and other oppressed nationality movements, as well as the youth rebellion sweeping society, influenced and spurred a burgeoning antiwar movement among GIs. Early signs of these links included the widespread practice by GIs in Vietnam of drawing peace signs and Black Power fists on their helmets, of constantly flaunting hair regulations, and of dapping among the Black soldiers. By 1969 many soldiers newly arriving in Vietnam had not only been influenced by the social turmoil in the U.S., but some of them had been active in protest marches, urban uprisings, and even revolutionary organizations.

Despite repression, isolation, and the conditions of war, even in Vietnam soldiers found ways to act in solidarity with antiwar actions back in the U.S. On November 15, 1969, for instance, many soldiers on patrol wore black armbands in unity with a massive march that day in Washington D.C. A few weeks later fifty soldiers, many of them in uniform — which automatically made the action illegal — gathered in JFK Square in Saigon on Christmas Eve and distributed leaflets urging their fellow GIs to declare a cease-fire for the Tet holiday on February 6, 1970. There were many other forms of protest by Vietnam GIs, including combat refusals (the main form opposition took), petitions, letters to Congress (soldier complaints to Congress totalled 250,000 a year by 1971 [Cortright, 1975, p. 23]), and newspaper ads calling for an end to the war, including one placed in the *New York Times* November 9, 1969, signed by 1,366 active-duty servicemen, 189 of them in Vietnam (Cortright, 1975, p. 62).

At the same time, a large-scale, open, and organized GI antiwar movement took root and flourished in the U.S., largely due to the presence and support of the civilian anti-

war movement. The movement was centered around GI coffeehouses, which began springing up in early 1968 and eventually located near most major Army bases, the two key Marine Corps camps, and some Navy and Air Force installations. Civilians usually initiated these centers, generally as part of a conscious effort by radicals to spread the antiwar (and in some cases revolutionary) movement to the GIs — to “fight for the troops,” as it were — with many vets later joining. These coffeehouses provided an atmosphere where rebellious GIs could “breathe,” forums for political discussion, and a means of distributing protest literature. “The majority of guys who came to these storefronts were attracted by their anti-brass atmosphere, stuck around to rap with some people and perhaps read an anti-war paper, and generally got exposed to left-wing politics” (Rinaldi, 1974, p. 35). The House Committee on Internal Security heard testimony about one such coffeehouse in Seaside, California:

It displayed a red flag and banners on the front of it, and the walls were lined with various “movement” group posters, including the Black Panther Party posters and so forth. They had a large literature rack there with various underground newspapers; the sayings of Chairman Mao and other pamphlets from the Peking press were available free to GIs. They did the work on the galley sheets for several underground newspapers there and distributed these newspapers to the military, and they held programs for the viewing of films and had guest speakers there for the GIs on weekends. (Committee on Internal Security, 1972, p. 6487)

Numerous attempts were made by both military and municipal authorities to shut these centers down. When revoking business licenses didn't work, groups like the KKK were unleashed to firebomb the coffeehouses.

Out of these storefronts GI, civilian, and veteran activists published as many as 300 GI newspapers. They included *FTA* at Ft. Knox, *Attitude Check* at Camp Pendleton, *All Hands Abandon Ship* at the Newport Naval Station, and *Left Face* at Ft. McClellan. These newspapers came to be the most important organizing tool of the GI movement. “While the number of GIs who created these papers might total in the hundreds, the number who helped distribute them numbered in the thousands and the number who read them and related to them numbered in the tens of thousands” (Rinaldi, 1974, p. 36). *Bragg Briefs* in North Carolina, for instance, regularly had a run of over 7,000 copies. The contents of the papers varied considerably, from open support for the Vietnamese revolution to complaints about food rations. Some were put out for longer stretches by civilian and GI radicals, while others were printed for only an issue or two by GIs who just wanted to stir up some trouble any way they could.

Throughout the war the brass made strenuous efforts to politically quarantine the rank-and-file soldiers and isolate

### *Out of these storefronts GI, civilian, and veteran activists published as many as 300 GI newspapers.*

“troublemakers.” GI antiwar and radical activists were routinely given “punitive reassignment” (sometimes literally to Alaska), dope was planted on them, and some were even forcibly shipped to Vietnam in the middle of the night. Previously open bases were often closed to all but military personnel, and the military made major efforts to stem the tide of antiwar literature flowing to the soldiers: “In March 1971 the Army headquarters in Vietnam sent a message to all commanders telling them to confiscate antiwar mail addressed to soldiers, even first-class items for individual addressees.” This action was justified legally on the grounds that this literature constituted a “clear danger to the loyalty, discipline, or morale of the troops” (Hauser, 1973, pp. 83-84).

Dozens of antiwar GI groups in the U.S. developed, one such group formed in Europe, and one national organization arose among junior officers (the Concerned Officers Movement). In the main these organizations were neither very cohesive nor stable, and they were generally not linked together except through the informal antiwar movement networks that developed spontaneously.

On April 15, 1967 a handful of Vietnam veterans marched in an antiwar protest in New York City carrying a banner which read “Vietnam Veterans Against the War.” An organization which would play an important role in the antiwar movement was born. The first antiwar march led by a contingent of active-duty GIs took place in San Francisco on April 27, 1968. Six months later, on October 12, 200 active duty GIs and 100 reservists marched at the head of a massive antiwar demonstration in San Francisco despite strenuous efforts by the brass to prevent any troops from taking part. Two days later, partly inspired by this show of antiwar strength, twenty-seven prisoners at the Presidio army stockade staged a sit-down strike to protest the shooting death of a fellow prisoner, intolerable prison conditions, and the war. They were later charged and court-martialed for mutiny. In November a contingent of over 200 active-duty GIs headed an antiwar demonstration of a quarter million in Washington, D.C. (Cortright, 1975, pp. 57, 62).

In 1970, on Armed Forces Day, thousands of GIs rallied against the war. Local rallies drew 100 soldiers from Ft. Benning, Georgia, 750 from Fort Bragg, 700 from Fort Hood, Texas, 400 from Fort Riley in Kansas, 200 Marines from Camp Pendleton near San Diego, and 100 soldiers from Fort Ord in California as well as thousands of others at various locations across the country (Cortright, 1975, p. 67). A year later the GI movement was strong enough to declare its own Armed Forces Day, which resulted in the cancelling of most

of the official military celebrations. And as the GI movement mushroomed, the bonds between antiwar soldiers and civilians became even more problematical for the U.S. rulers; in one instance the DMZ coffeehouse in Washington, D.C. was able to find out which soldiers were being assigned riot duty for upcoming demonstrations on May Day 1971. Leaflets were then distributed to every affected base calling on the soldiers to join the demonstration instead.

Major political/legal cases involving GIs, such as the Ft. Hood 43, the Presidio 27, and the case of six GIs at Ft. Lewis in Washington state who refused orders to go to Vietnam became *causes célèbres* quite broadly. A sanctuary movement similar to that for Central Americans today also developed to help GI deserters.

Coinciding with the widespread support for antiwar GIs in the civilian U.S., an unprecedented shift in public opinion regarding the military in general took place. Military journals still talk about the hostility many in uniform faced, especially from the youth in this country. For the first time in the U.S.'s history, not only could a man in uniform not walk into the bar and get offered the customary free drinks, he might just get hooted out. Only the VFW types, it often seemed, were still willing to give a soldier a pat on the back. On some college campuses being seen in a ROTC uniform was flirting with a rumble. Between 1969 and 1972, thirty-eight ROTC units were forcibly closed down and overall enrollment nationally dropped from 128,000 to 72,500.

Due to both the duration of the war and the antiwar movement, many youth who left Vietnam with only nagging questions about the war later became staunch and vocal opponents. Thousands of these youth joined VVAW after leaving the services, and this group had an impact as no other could on those still in the military, as well as more broadly in society. The actions of VVAW members varied greatly, from petitioning Congress to inciting the troops to turn their guns around, but its activities in April 1971 helped ensure that its overall radical imprint on those times would not soon be forgotten. In Operation Dewey Canyon III, "a limited incursion into the country of Congress," VVAW and over 2,000 veterans carried out an envelopment of the nation's capitol. Fifty vets tried to get themselves arrested as war criminals, but no one would oblige them. The police and city council tried to run the vets out of town, but the vets wouldn't oblige them. The high point of the actions came on Friday morning, April 23. Wrote one reporter:

about 800 men walked up to a wire fence erected the day before to keep the April 24 anti-war march off the steps [of the Capitol Building]. There they threw their medals towards the statue of the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, John Marshall. It took two hours for all the men to throw down the Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts and campaign ribbons they had been awarded in Vietnam. (Goldberg, 1971, p. 13)

It was a provocative and electrifying day, the significance of which was captured in the following short conversation during these goings-on. Said an elderly woman to a veteran handing out leaflets: "Son, I don't think what you're doing is good for the troops." Said the vet in response: "Lady, we are the troops" (cited in Emerson, 1976, p. 331).\*

### Divisions Within the Ruling Class

In early August 1964 the U.S. manufactured a confrontation with the North Vietnamese Navy in the Gulf of Tonkin, following which the U.S. Senate (88 to 2) and the House (unanimously) approved the famous resolution which thereafter provided the legal sanction for the Vietnam War. At this point in the game the U.S. bourgeoisie was firmly united behind an escalation of the military conflict in Vietnam. The only real issues being debated were how much and how long it would take to crush the Vietnamese revolution. There was religious harmony over the goal. Early on the troops went into battle, told that "the nation is behind you 100 percent" — meaning the ruling class was all for the war.

But at a later point significant splits did occur within the

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\*Almost every political tendency in the antiwar movement found a voice among GIs during the Vietnam War. The sharpest question facing the revolutionary and assorted left forces was whether the military should be reformed or whether the spontaneous radical activity of the GIs should be diverted toward revolution. The Communist Party, Socialist Workers Party, and Worker's World Party — who all made attempts to work among the troops — lined up behind the former program. Their activity was characterized by attempts to "democratize" the military through reforming the military system of justice, ending harassment of soldiers by officers, ending racism in the military, and so on. They pitched their calls for action at the mainstream of the GI movement, while they turned off the most politically advanced soldiers and sailors. With regard to the war they emphasized not exposure of U.S. imperialism's aggression and support for the liberation struggle but rather legalisms. Anything more would be "too alienating" for the "average GI."

Now it was certainly true that a lot of GIs spontaneously took up calls for "democracy," "freedom" from the most oppressive rules and regs, "the right to speak," and so on, as they were just coming into political life and they were grabbing at whatever ideas were most accessible. But it is one thing when such ideas are spontaneously born or even for revolutionaries to relate to such actions, and it is quite another thing for "socialists" and "communists" to promote such things as the road forward for the troops opposed to the Vietnam War, racism, and the like.

This was the case with the key point in the program of the American Servicemen's Union (an organization led by the WWP which received wide publicity in the bourgeois press at the time): GIs should not have to fight an "illegal" war in Vietnam (see Stapp, 1970, p. 90). This only fed illusions among broad sections of the troops that a formal declaration of war by the U.S. would somehow change the nature (or course) of the war. Such illusions should have

U.S. ruling class over the war, first over whether the war could be won quickly, and at what political and financial cost, and later, to a growing degree, over the best way to extricate the U.S. from a losing enterprise. These splits had a direct and marked impact on the political terrain in the U.S., and on the troops and their disintegration in particular, providing important openings for mass initiative from below.

When, following Tet, the then longest-reigning Secretary of Defense in the history of the U.S., Robert McNamara, resigned, when the commander of U.S. troops in Vietnam, Gen. William Westmoreland, was denied a request for over 200,000 additional soldiers, and when Lyndon Johnson himself was compelled to agree not to run for another presidential term, then clearly there were severe problems afoot within the U.S. ruling circles. Later developments — including the My Lai massacre exposure, the Pentagon Papers, etc. — were also significant. These conflicts contributed powerfully to the political freedom of the GI antiwar movement and to an awareness among GIs that major and influential sections of the bourgeoisie itself were becoming most pessimistic about the chances for victory in Vietnam, further spurring on the disintegration of the U.S. troops.

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been addressed, of course, and their origins understood, but not in this way.

When the CP was not calling for U.S. troops to be pulled out of Vietnam and sent instead to Selma to enforce integration there — as if the problem was where the troops were stationed, and as if the military has ever protected the interests of Black people — it was sidling up to those they declared the "anti-monopolist" sections of the ruling class. This was their answer to the pressing question of the day within society as a whole, as well as among GIs: Is the Vietnam War a policy mistake or is it rooted in the system of imperialism?

The SWP especially preached patriotic loyalty to the Constitution. One SWP GI was quoted favorably in the group's semi-official history of the war:

I appeal for support from all Americans who agree that GIs are citizens who are entitled to the right of free speech guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Although I have never disobeyed an order, and have fulfilled all my duties as a soldier, my constitutional rights are now being threatened. (Halstead, 1978, p. 301)

Qualitatively different was the line and program put forward among the troops by radical Vietnam veterans, former members of Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Panther Party, and newly formed Marxist-Leninist organizations like the Revolutionary Union. Assailed by the likes of the CP for being "ultra-left," the distinguishing feature of the most advanced work with the troops was its revolutionary spirit which united the troops around anti-imperialism and open support for the NLF victory over the U.S. Although no general, systematic program emerged among these forces on the role of GIs in the revolutionary process, through the efforts of these radicals, masses of GIs gained their first understanding of imperialism and determined to join in its destruction.

## Other Factors

A word here about some organizational questions that various bourgeois analysts have cited as having played a key role in the disintegration of the troops in Vietnam. Seeming strengths quickly turned into their opposites. Take, for example, the question of "unit cohesion." Lack of unit cohesion in Vietnam is blamed by some on the individual rotation system, in which Army enlisted personnel had a one-year tour of duty in Vietnam, Marines had a tour of thirteen months, and officers routinely had six months in the field and six months behind a desk. This rotation system, which thus saw units constantly having their members coming and going, reflected the early notion that Vietnam would be a cakewalk for the U.S. (and that therefore the troops needn't be kept in Vietnam "til victory"). It also allowed the military to send its officer corps in particular through the sacred initiation ritual of getting "blooded," without sending millions of troops to Vietnam at any one time. But after the war the argument was made that

the performance of the American Army during the Vietnamese War indicates a military system which failed to maintain unit cohesion under conditions of combat stress. . . at virtually all levels of command and staff, but principally at the crucial squad, platoon, and company levels. The disintegration of unit cohesion had proceeded to such an extent that by 1972 accommodation with the North Vietnamese was the only realistic alternative to risking an eventual military debacle in the field. (Gabriel and Savage, 1978, pp. 8-9)

While there is much truth to the disintegration of unit cohesion in Vietnam, such an argument is oversimplistic and faulty. Another writer noted that: "It is an irony of sorts that the primary-group processes which appeared to sustain combat soldiers in World War 2 are close cousins to the social processes which underlay the vast bulk of the fraggings in Vietnam"\* (Moskos, 1975, p. 35). Said another scholar sympathetic to the disintegration: "where primary-group solidarity existed, more often than not it served to foster and reinforce *dissent* from the goals of the military organization and to organize *refusal* to perform according to institutional norms" (Helmer, 1974, p. 47). It might even be said that, as the war went on, the *lack* of unit cohesion in Vietnam was an advantage to the U.S. The chaotic personnel turnover in combat units, among other things, meant that soldiers who had already been in Nam six or eight

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\*The "primary-group theory" in bourgeois military analysis was launched by a paper in 1948 stating that the German army did not collapse in World War 2 ("as it should have") due to exceptional unit cohesion and a superior officer corps (see Shils and Janowitz, 1948).

months and were turned against the war knew they would soon be leaving. Those just arriving usually had to learn the "lessons of Vietnam" all over again themselves.†

In the wake of the proving ground of Vietnam another administrative quandary discussed today is the loss of "gladitorial ethics" in the U.S. officer corps in Vietnam (Duty, Honor, Country, etc.), and their replacement with "careerist, managerial, me-first" ethics. (While the "big transformation" purported here is exaggerated, still it reflects something.) Ticket punching, massive medal-awarding to officers, and a lower ratio of officers to soldiers killed in Vietnam compared to World War 2 are pointed to as evidence of this trend. Some claim that the phenomenon of enlisted personnel questioning and challenging military orders in the war resulted from an officer corps too weak to impose itself and rendered the U.S. armed forces unable to carry through with the war. This in turn eroded the reputation of the military and military life. An imperialist army cannot operate properly when the grunts forget what World War 1 General Pershing (recently commemorated with a missile) taught: "All a soldier needs to know is how to shoot and salute." (One of the bitter complaints by the Navy after the *Kitty Hawk* mutiny in 1972 concerned the "general abandonment" of the phrase "Aye, aye, sir.")

Three points may be made in response to these arguments about the decay of the U.S. officer corps: First, it remained generally quite loyal to the war to the end. One reason almost all POWs stayed patriotic during their entire incarceration was that they were mainly elite Navy and Air Force pilots who'd been shot down. Second, there was certainly an element of the imperialists' ideological chickens (like me-firstism) coming home to their bourgeois roost in conditions of no marked progress in the war. Third, once again these analyses mix cause and effect. The disintegration of the U.S. armed forces began from the bottom up and not because of an officer corps too lenient to keep the troops in line.

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The Vietnam War became such a quagmire for the U.S. imperialists that during that time one of the most popular songs about the war in the U.S. ridiculed "being the first one on your block to have your boy come home in a box." Just as indicative of this quagmire was that among their troops in Vietnam: "The most popular broadcast on the transistors was that of Hanoi Hanna and her gleeful

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†Based on concern over unit cohesion and the Vietnam experience there are now experiments in the U.S. military (such as the Cohort system) where recruits stay together from basic training on. Of special interest is the call by some to form companies and maybe even brigades by nationality and/or region in order to maintain "cultural and racial homogeneity" (see, for example, Wesbrook, 1980, p. 275).

predictions of American annihilation" (Clodfelter, 1976, p. 106). If politically united behind a war throughout its course, armies can sustain very heavy casualties and sacrifice. The Vietnamese revolution showed this. But in Vietnam not only did the good bulk of U.S. troops come to oppose the war, many came to oppose the very society that had sent them, and some even welcomed the forecasts on Radio Hanoi of their own defeat.

In part because the U.S. did not have it all on the line in Vietnam and was able to retreat and regroup, the disintegration never led to a full collapse of this central pillar of bourgeois rule. Nor did the masses of troops adopt a revolutionary defeatist position (although a small but significant minority who embraced the SDS spirit of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is gonna win!" did). But the disintegration certainly played a serious role in the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam, both by forcing itself into the calculations of the bourgeoisie in planning the war and, most significantly, by posing a threat of "eventual military debacle in the field" if it were not brought under control by the pull-out of troops from Vietnam.

Many of the alienated troops wanted the U.S. to lose the war, if only in the sense of getting the hell out of Vietnam, and the outlook that eventually came to predominate was a sort of limited defeatism: the Vietnam War was seen as the wrong war, at the wrong time, in the wrong place. As for "other times," the sentiments of the soldiers differed markedly and changed continuously in the course of the disintegration; this question indeed became a focal point of discussion and debate among the troops.

Beyond the objective limits of the crisis gripping U.S. imperialism in the 1960s, the disintegration did not go even further than it did politically and organizationally because there was no leadership able to divert the spontaneous shift in the loyalties of many soldiers in more thoroughgoing revolutionary directions. But how far it did go! And this without large-scale devastating military routs (though the bottom line was defeat by a protracted people's war), without the emergence of a real revolutionary situation, and without a vanguard leadership, all at a time in which the bourgeoisie was making demands for "ultimate sacrifice" on the part of these youth.

The depths of their Vietnam defeat certainly hasn't been lost on the bourgeoisie, which has over the past decade been restlessly casting about for the reasons for the debacle and relentlessly trying to bury and reverse the political damage it did. In particular much ink has been spent trying to assess the reasons for the U.S.'s military defeat and the demoralization of the troops, even attempting to draw lessons from the writings of the early nineteenth-century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, including his emphasis on the "moral factors" in warfare.

One of Clausewitz's principal dictums, however, was that war is a continuation of politics by violent means. Wars waged by imperialism will thus inevitably be stamped with reactionary politics. The bourgeoisie can never really change the fundamental character of its armed forces or the

weapons-oriented basis of its war machine. On the other hand, the Vietnamese were able to win, and to batter the U.S. military, principally owing to the fact they could fight a just, people's war. In fact, the conclusions most bourgeois analysts have reached as to why the U.S. lost have rather exclusively centered on the physical strategy and tactics used in the war, the internal administrative problems in the military, and the conflicts with other bourgeois institutions like the press.

Vietnam showed that under proper conditions — most importantly the military blows of an opponent, especially a revolutionary opponent — a strong bourgeois army can experience a tremendous shift to disloyalty by its troops.

Lenin once recounted a discussion he'd had with some Russian soldiers back from fighting the Germans in World War 1:

I shall never forget the question one of them asked me after a meeting. "Why do you speak against the

capitalists all the time?" he said. "I'm not a capitalist, am I? We're workers, we're defending our freedom." You're wrong, you are fighting because you are obeying your capitalist government; it's the governments, not the peoples, who are carrying on this war. . . . [Such a soldier] doesn't understand the connection between the war and the government, he doesn't understand that the war is being waged by the government, and that he is just a tool in the hands of that government. (Lenin, 1974, pp. 407-8)

Soldiers in imperialist armies have seldom in large numbers come to understand their role as tools of their bourgeois governments. When a significant proportion of U.S. soldiers in the Vietnam War came to see themselves as dupes, pawns, suckers, and tools, a most dangerous thing occurred: The Enemy was no longer the U.S. government's enemy, but the U.S. government itself. □

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