

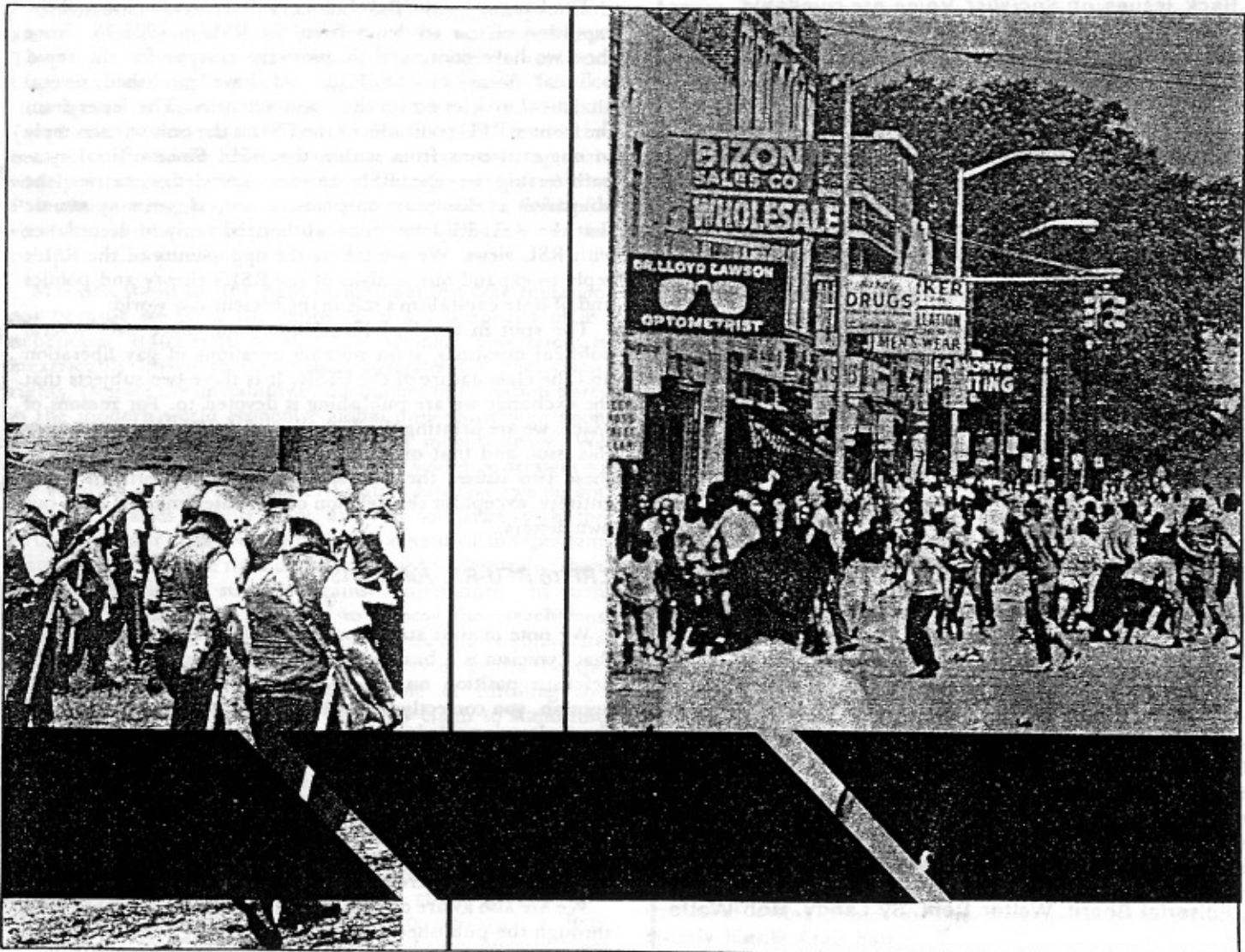
# SOCIALIST VOICE



Reconstruct  
the Fourth International

Magazine of the LEAGUE FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

## BEHIND THE BAKKE CASE



Is Nationalized Property Proletarian?  
Oil, Coal and the Energy Program  
The Labor Party in the U.S.

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# SOCIALIST VOICE

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## Exchange on State Capitalism

We are printing in two parts an exchange of correspondence between the League for the Revolutionary Party and the former Revolutionary Faction of the Red Flag Union (RFU-RF) together with our reply. The Red Flag Union was a gay liberation organization in California which split politically when it entered upon an investigation of Trotskyism. The majority of the group, the Bolshevik Tendency (RFU-BT), has since joined the Spartacist League (SL), while the small minority tendency, the Revolutionary Faction, announced its members' affiliation as sympathizers of the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL) in the October 15 issue of the RSL's newspaper, the *Torch*.

The League for the Revolutionary Party was born out of the expulsion of our tendency from the RSL in 1975-76. Since then we have continued to assess the reasons for the rapid political decay of the RSL and have published several analytical articles on its views and activities. The letter from the former RFU comrades in the RSL is the only written reply to our criticisms from within the RSL. Since official sympathizership in the RSL to our knowledge carries the obligation of discipline on political matters, we may assume that the RFU-RF letter is an authorized reply in accordance with RSL views. We are taking the opportunity of the RSL's reply to expand our analysis of the RSL's theory and politics and of state capitalism's role in the present-day world.

The split in the Red Flag Union took place over several political questions, most notably questions of gay liberation and the class nature of the USSR. It is these two subjects that the exchange we are publishing is devoted to. For reasons of space, we are printing the discussion of the Russian question in this issue and that of the gay question in our next issue. In these two issues, the correspondence will be printed in its entirety, except for the deletion of unrelated matters from our own letters.

*LRP to RFU-RF, July 29, 1977*

We note in your statement in *Red Flag* No. 2 that you see that cynicism is a basic factor in the Spartacist and RFU-BT defensist position on the so-called workers' states. In our opinion, you correctly link this view to their abandonment of the proletarian role in social revolutions and in the struggles of the oppressed. That you have seen through and rejected the RFU majority-SL line is a good omen, we feel. There is no question that these elements reflect the outlook of the aristocratic petty-bourgeois layers within the workers' movement who seek to cynically manipulate our movement in their own class interests.

We are also aware of your collaboration with the RSL, both through the published materials and through the grapevine. We cannot assess at this point the advisability of a tactical bloc against the SL with the RSL, but obviously a deeper relationship is implied by the open political agreements between your two groups. As you are undoubtedly aware, we regard the RSL as a politically rotten and cynical group which, if it is not yet as bad as the SL, is not due to a want of trying.

Cynicism in respect to the proletariat is not a feature of the Pabloites alone but almost totally pervades the whole "far left"

*continued on page 5*

# On Palestinian Self-Determination

Palestinian self-determination has proved to be the most intractable question in the Sadat-Begin pyrotechnics. Israeli, Egyptian and American diplomats utter pronouncements for "self-rule," Palestinian "rights" and a Palestinian "homeland" in their efforts to find a democratic-sounding phrase they can agree on to paper over their differences, delude the masses and preserve their bourgeois interests — at whatever cost to the hopes for liberation of the Palestinian workers and peasants. With the thirtieth anniversary of the first Arab-Israeli war approaching, the impossibility of a real solution under capitalism is being demonstrated once again.

Unfortunately the forces of the "left" have not provided answers consistent with the interests of the working classes. The petty-bourgeois nationalist Palestine Liberation Organization, still proclaiming its anti-imperialist intransigence, is now reported willing to accept a "mini-state" (read client state) on the West Bank. "Far left" tendencies both in the Middle East and elsewhere have come up with widely divergent and un-Leninist interpretations of the Palestinian struggle. It is necessary to resurrect the Bolshevik view of self-determination and outline its application to the complex situation in Palestine.

Marxists stand for the right of national self-determination not because we favor the existence of a multiplicity of independent states but because the socialist revolution is inextricably linked to the masses' struggles for democratic rights. Despite the unviability of the undeveloped nation-states in the modern world economy, global imperialist oppression stimulates mass aspirations for national independence. We communists would prefer it if the masses would go straight to the solution of federated workers' states; however, we do not lead the masses at this point and we solidarize with the struggles of our class even through the detour of independent states. We defend the right of the oppressed to determine their own course in the struggle against imperialism. In such struggles we maintain our duty to oppose the treacherous national bourgeois leaderships who will inevitably capitulate to imperialism. In the epoch of the decay of capitalism the national bourgeoisies are not capable of fulfilling the bourgeois-democratic demands that they claim to stand for, and even the weakest bourgeois state strives to create its own niche in the imperialist framework. It falls to Marxists to point to the socialist revolution as the only possible way to secure the democratic rights which the masses struggle to achieve.

Self-determination is not simply a right that is fought for under the rule of the bourgeoisie. When Marxists advocate national self-determination that is in effect part of the program of the workers' state that we are fighting for. It is sometimes argued (most notably by Rosa Luxemburg and her followers) that self-determination is impossible under capitalism and unnecessary under socialism; thus the socialist revolution should not place the demand of national self-determination on its banner. Aside from the fact that self-determination has been and can be achieved under capitalism only in part (restricted by the imperialists' hegemony over the entire world), what this argument overlooks is that the workers' state is not socialism but the transition to socialism. When the proletariat conquers power in an imperialist

nation (as with the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia) it will in general grant the right of self-determination to the nations formerly oppressed under imperialist rule in order to win the confidence and support of their people. Centuries of oppression and mistrust are not wiped out the day after a revolution. It is the period of fraternal relations between peoples under proletarian rule that makes possible the subsequent amalgamation of nations.

The right of self-determination is a key bourgeois-democratic demand incorporated into the arsenal of socialist weapons. Marxists, however, are not moralists or absolutists and no principle is inviolable. It sometimes happens that Marxists will recognize a nation's right to self-determination and will simultaneously urge that the right not be exercised (an example is the case of Quebec today); that is because the specific conditions may mean that the struggle of the proletariat of the oppressed nation is best served through the direct link within one country with the workers of the oppressor nation. In such cases, of course, Marxists will fight alongside the oppressed should they differ with us and choose to fight oppression through national independence.

It may also happen that a specific democratic struggle will come into conflict with the broader interests of the world proletariat as a whole — for example, when a war for national liberation becomes subordinated to a wider inter-imperialist conflict and is transformed into an objective support for imperialism. Such was the case with Serbia and Poland during World War I. In these instances communists do not defend even the right of self-determination should the wrong choice be made.

The case of Palestine is neither that of a classical national minority within an imperialist country nor that of a traditional colony ruled from abroad through a narrow layer of officials and settlers from the imperialist country. When the state of Israel was forged by the war of 1948, the Jewish residents of Palestine were a minority in the country. Through the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Arab Palestinian refugees and the automatic admission to citizenship of Jews from elsewhere (many of whom had been forced out of their own countries by oppression), the Jewish population is now a majority within an Israel that occupied the entire territory of Palestine as well as other areas in the 1967 war. Thus the Zionist dream of a Jewish state with a Jewish majority with privileged status in Palestine has been fulfilled (except for those who demand even further conquests of Arab land) at the cost of four wars, decades of guerrilla battles, and the constant tension of having created an armed camp in the midst of a bitterly hostile Arab East.

Zionism has depended upon the imperialist powers for its survival and its conquests both before and after the establishment of Israel. It has been the junior partner of the United States in the post-World War years (and of Britain before) in dividing and disciplining the peoples of the Arab East as a whole, not just the Palestinians. In addition, Israel is an imperialist country in its own right as is proved by its conquest and exploitation of the Sinai, the Golan Heights of Syria and the West Bank. The oppressed Jews have been transformed by

imperialism into an oppressor force, a subsidized Western imperialist enclave in the neo-colonial Arab world.

Because of this distinction the attitude of communists towards Israel and the Arab states is entirely different. Marxists support the struggle of the Arab states against imperialism, a struggle which has taken its most violent form in the Arab-Israeli wars. Under the leadership of the bourgeois Arab rulers the national democratic struggles against imperialism have been held back and betrayed. Even when these rulers are compelled by the pressure of the angry masses to confront imperialism with force they do so in such a way as to strike their own best deals with imperialism and hope to become sub-imperialist junior partners themselves. Their ambitions to rise out of neo-colonial status led Egypt and Jordan to take over Palestinian territory in the 1948 war and hold it until the Israeli conquest of 1967. The Jordanian Army butchered the Palestinian fighters in 1971, as did the Syrians in Lebanon in 1976; all the Arab regimes, no less than the Israeli, suppress the demonstrations and strikes of the workers. Nevertheless, when they are forced to turn their guns against the Israeli Army, the advance guard of imperialism in the Middle East, we stand with them — in order to demonstrate to the masses in the common struggle the need for revolutionary leadership and a socialist outcome.

On the question of Palestinian self-determination, the result of this analysis is that we stand for the right of Arab Palestine to self-determination and against the Israeli Jewish right to self-determination. This means the dismantling of the Zionist state of Israel.

We do not deny the existence of an Israeli Jewish nation; it exists, forged in the crucible of Nazism in Europe and incorporating the discrimination-ridden Oriental Jews through its colonial-settler state, Israel. Nor do we deny that there exists an Israeli Jewish right to self-determination. Bourgeois-democratic rights by their very nature apply to both oppressed and oppressors; these rights are inherently unequal since the cloak of formal equality conceals the reality of class differences. Revolutionaries champion bourgeois-democratic demands in order to transform them under a workers' state into proletarian democracy, within which class inequality will increasingly be eliminated.

For Marxists, however, the inherently unequal rights of the oppressors will always be subordinated if their exercise means the denial of the rights of the oppressed. In the case of self-determination, imperialist nations exercise their rights through might and by preventing oppressed nations from attaining their rights. The Israeli right to self-determination can only mean the denial of the Palestinian right to the same land, and therefore we do not defend that right.

(Although Israel is today a junior partner of Western imperialism, the Jews have been brutally thrown to the wolves before in history. It is conceivable that imperialism could write a new page in the Middle East and create a situation where the state of Israel is eliminated and Jews do in fact become an oppressed nation. It would then be necessary for Marxists to stand for their right to self-determination.)

Alternatives to Palestinian self-determination as outlined here are sometimes raised by those who fantasize that there exists a Leninist answer that does not deny Israeli self-determination. However, the alternative of a Palestine partitioned between Arabs and Jews (even a more equitable partition than the one the Zionists carved out in 1948) would be a denial of the national right of the Palestinian Arabs (the majority people in 1948 and the potential majority today if the refugees and exiles were allowed to return) to be free of imperialist encroachment. The alternative of a "bi-national state" or a "de-Zionized Israel" (without special legal privileges for the Jews) also denies the Palestinians' democratic right to determine the nature of their own country. No solution that excludes Palestinian self-determination can lead to the freeing of the Palestinian working classes.

Although we fight for the right to self-determination under capitalism, we believe that Palestinian self-determination is possible only through a victorious socialist revolution. It cannot succeed through collaboration with the bourgeois Arab regimes but only through the revolutionary extension of federated workers' states throughout the Middle East.

The Palestinian socialist revolution will be faced with important tactical decisions during and after the conquest of power. It may choose to offer compromises designed to split Jewish workers from their Zionist ruling class, including forms of autonomy and if necessary temporary privileges. These would not be rights but concessions offered to ease the course of the revolution by winning the allegiance of skilled workers and trained personnel. (The Bolsheviks hired former Czarist officials and military officers to work for the proletarian state.) There are of course pitfalls in such a policy but they have to be weighed against the possible advantages.

Aside from possible forms of autonomy and other compromises, an internationalist Palestinian workers' state will undoubtedly welcome the participation of Jewish workers who undertake to defend the workers' state. Such Jewish workers would constitute a minority and would enjoy all the rights of Arab workers in a proletarian Palestine and its soviet institutions. In all likelihood, given the specific circumstances of Palestinian history, the Zionist bourgeoisie would be denied access to democratic rights.

In contrast to some of the Palestinian nationalist organizations which have stated that only Jews who lived in Palestine prior to some date (like 1948) would be welcome to stay, a workers' state would use a class criterion rather than a meaningless date. The purpose of such a policy would be not to divide Arab workers from Jewish workers, as the cutoff date would do, but to split the Jewish population along class lines and win the loyalty of the Jewish workers to the workers' state if at all possible. If tragically the Jewish workers resist such a solution, the Palestinian revolution will take its course anyway.

A Leninist course in the Middle East can only be accomplished by the Arab proletariat in the leadership of the rest of the oppressed masses. This requires the reconstruction of the Fourth International and the building of sections in Palestine and throughout the Middle East. ■

# Is Nationalized Property Proletarian?

*continued from page 2*

here and abroad. In our documents written in the course of the abortive faction fight in the RSL prior to our expulsion, we analyzed this cynicism at some length. In the first issue of *Socialist Voice* we deepened our understanding of precisely this question.

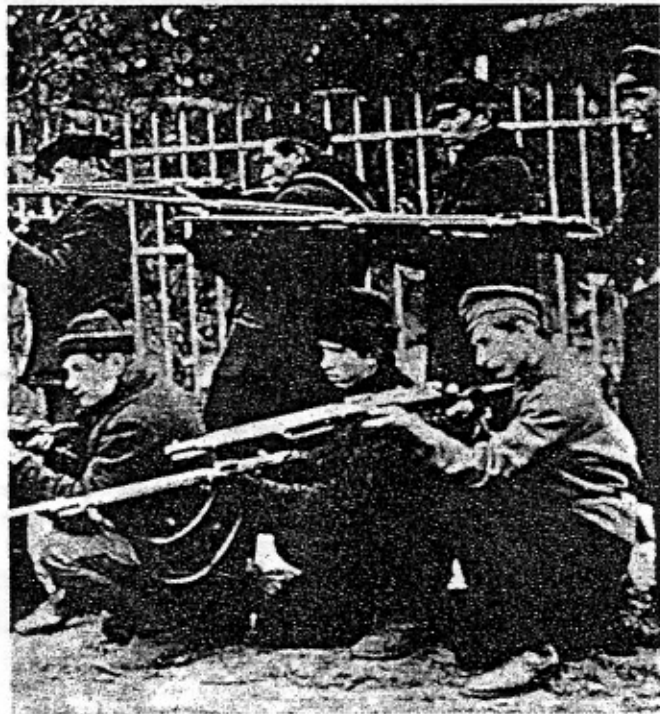
The cynicism which at present engulfs our movement is a result of the massive defeats inflicted upon the proletariat through the rise of the labor aristocracy due to imperialism (state monopoly capitalism). These include the betrayals of the First World War, the isolation of the Russian Revolution, the string of aborted revolutions which allowed for the emergence of fascism, the smashing of the workers' uprisings in the wake of the Second World War, etc. These defeats are the historical basis for the ability of the labor bureaucracy to maintain its sway over the American working class (together with their junior partners, the petty-bourgeois leaders of the movements of the oppressed). Identifying the mass of workers with the policies of the aristocratic bureaucracy is a source of cynicism among the petty-bourgeoisified mass of workers as well as a reinforcement of this ideology among the middle-class elements. Such cynicism pervades the RSL as well as the others.

### State Capitalism No New System

The SL and RFU-BT polemics on Shachtmanism contain weight not from any contribution of theirs but insofar as they echo Trotsky's point in relation to the state capitalists and bureaucratic collectivists of his day. He pointed out that giving up on the gains made by the proletariat in the October Revolution would lead to a surrender on defense of bureaucratized workers' institutions in the West as well, and would in general promote a cynical assessment of the capabilities of the proletariat.

We have attempted to show in *Socialist Voice* and *Socialist Action* that nothing so well characterizes the IS-USA, IS-Great Britain (now SWP-GB) tendency — and the RSL which has a leftist version of the same politics — as Trotsky's prediction. Therefore we would point out that adopting a state capitalist position does not by itself answer the basic questions facing revolutionaries. Precisely what sort of state capitalist view becomes decisively important. How does the IS view, which the RSL tends to accept, that the USSR became the second most powerful nation in the world under the rule of an anti-proletarian force jibe with the maintenance of the theory of permanent revolution which rules out such a possibility in the absence of proletarian revolution? To believe that the bourgeois Stalinists were responsible for the development is to junk the Leninist theory of the epoch as well as Trotsky's strategy for it. Without the strategic theory except in name, politics becomes reduced to maneuverism and the proletariat becomes an object for revolutionaries to manipulate rather than their actual class, which they are part of and lead.

We understand state capitalism to be one aspect of state monopoly capitalism and a prop for its maintenance on an



*The armed workers of Russia seized power in 1917. The Bolshevik Revolution shook the world, and its thunderous impact is still felt today.*

international level. It develops in the "absence" of the proletariat (a formulation common to the RFU majority in *Red Flag No. 2*, the Cliffites and the Spartacists) which is "absent" solely because it has been temporarily defeated by the selfsame Stalinists. It represents the attempt of backward (more precisely semi-backward) nations to catch up with the advanced. Its ability to do so in the USSR was due to the successful proletarian revolution which nationalized and centralized property, established a monopoly over foreign trade, centrally controlled credit and banking, etc., in a way that the bourgeoisie could never have accomplished. These gains were not erased by the Stalinist counterrevolution but seized, utilized and turned against the proletariat. This included the very consciousness of the working class and its identification with the defense of the beleaguered proletarian outpost. This Marxist consciousness rendered into its opposite, bourgeois ideology, was not the least gain of the international working class as a result of October which was used by the counterrevolution against the proletariat.

Only the working class was capable of creating the institutions and momentum which permitted the existence and development of state capitalism when the proletariat had been defeated by counterrevolution. Even in negation, the proletariat is the only truly creative class in this epoch. The proof is indicated by the fact that the "deformed workers'

states" have had a greater drive toward development than the pluralist bourgeois economies as a result of their heritage in the negated Russian Revolution. As a result of the defeat of the workers by the Stalinists, the Chinese, et al, had a model as well as concrete aid for a time after joining in the elimination of the working class as a revolutionary factor. Nevertheless, because these nations did not stem from a genuine workers' revolution at the outset and were at a different point in history, they have not been able to transcend the limits imposed by imperialism. For all of their efforts, they have fallen into massive debt and reinforced their ties to the strong, though weakening, West.

Unable to catch up and create an independent national position for themselves within the capitalist world market, these nations devolve back into the orbit of state monopoly capitalism and move in the direction of its systemic forms (although a political revolution is necessary for full devolution).

Our state capitalist (perhaps more accurately described as "state monopoly capitalist") analysis rejects the idea that state capitalism is a new or higher last stage of capitalism, either on a world wide or a more limited basis. This analysis, in contrast to past state capitalist theories including the RSL's, does not see this society as an end product of capitalist development in the advanced countries, even though we are fully aware of the tendencies inherent in capitalism which lead in that direction. In the face of a strong proletariat (not smashed) in a modern state, we agree with Trotsky that the chances for state capitalism are minimal since the target of a nationalized productive system is far too tempting. Russia, as a result of its own build-up, has moved into the position wherein it can no longer maintain a viable state capitalism, and it totters on the brink of crisis while attempting to introduce a variety of pluralist and open market forms. For all its development, Russia is profoundly weak and dependent upon state monopoly imperialism. It aggrandizes itself within the compass of maintaining the fabric of Western-dominated imperialism.

From this position we are certainly no defensists. But we do have the closest political affinity to Trotsky's position that Russia had become a chief agency for counterrevolutionary support to Western imperialism in the world. In fact we hold to this position far more closely than any kind of Pabloite who fetishizes Trotsky's views, since they now have to discover a "revolutionary" aspect to a Stalinism capable of creating "deformed workers' states." As well, our position, in stressing the economic weakness and political incapacities of Russia, does not mechanically equate Russian and Western imperialism and in no sense can be described as "Third Camp."

For example, it is our understanding that Russia's role in Africa is not equatable with that of the U.S. The essential role of Russia is to gain some political and diplomatic support in its rivalry with the U.S. in order to protect its own national interests. It is compelled to do so in such a way as to prop up the position of Western imperialism by hamstringing the social movements and fettering them to versions of the same old neo-colonialisms (Angola is only one example). This understanding has meant that we hold sharply different positions on Africa from the RSL, which has not been able to explain why it doesn't emphasize the threat of Russian imperialism in southern Africa. The RSL position also resulted in an absurd third camp line on Zaire, where the Russian danger and the American domination were equated. It also means that the RSL, like the IS, can never deal with the SLers who demand to know where the economic proofs of Russian imperialism are in

Africa. (They are there in the limited economic sense, but to a tiny degree compared with the West).

Our views have appeared in far greater depth in our magazine, including our understanding of the difference between our analysis and that of the RSL. This was important for us to work out, since we believe that in one way or another the "Russian Question" is central for any serious political tendency or dispute. We were forced to dig quite deeply in order to explain the enormous cynicism of the RSL revealed so blatantly during our expulsion.

*Former RFU-RF to LRP, November 11, 1977*

We apologize for the delay in our response to your letters of July 29 and August 19. The initial problem involved a post office foul-up in which some of our mail was returned rather than delivered. We hope you have safely received those of our documents you ordered. Since August we have been extremely busy in our political work, but have carefully studied your letters, as well as the publication *Socialist Voice* and some issues of *Socialist Action*.

As you are aware, we have recently affiliated with the R.S.L., as sympathizers, and are therefore in disagreement with your analysis of that organization and believe you have misrepresented its views on a number of points. While there was much in your letters that we do agree with, and while we have found your publications helpful in clarifying certain political points in the course of our study, nevertheless differences remain. We believe the R.S.L. is the only existing organization with a theory and practice capable of building a revolutionary party in this country and internationally. You believe it is "politically rotten and cynical," moving to the right. The course of the class struggle will, of course, settle the question. We are confident that our decision to join that struggle on the side of the working class and its best organization — the R.S.L. — will be proven correct.

On Russia: We believe that your state capitalist analysis, while excellent in many respects, borders dangerously on the Pabloite view of nationalized property as inherently progressive. "Only the working class was capable of creating the institutions and momentum which permitted the existence and development of state capitalism when the proletariat had been defeated by counterrevolution", your letter says. And in *Socialist Voice* No. 2, "Nationalization of the means of production could be carried out by the proletarian revolution alone, and Russian state capitalism despite the subsequent defeat of the proletariat stands as a conquest of the workers."

We agree that in Russia nationalized property and the rest of the economic base upon which state capitalism was built arose from conscious proletarian activity in a workers' state. (We would not, however, call state capitalism itself a "conquest of the workers," which implies that workers will, or should, choose to fight for the victory of the capitalist class.)

But how explain the economic transformations in the other Stalinist states? Were the means of production in China nationalized by a proletarian revolution? Your analysis seems to lead to that conclusion, since, you have said, only the workers can carry out that task. If the Chinese regime has a "heritage in the negated Russian Revolution," what specifically is this, and through what agency does it operate? Material aid and the ideological model of state capitalist Russia are cited in your letter. Is it these which give it what you call "a greater drive toward development than the pluralist bourgeois economies" or is it the nationalized economic base, adopted from victorious state capitalism in Russia, and set up

without any significant conscious proletarian activity whatever? According to you, the proletariat in negation is still capable of creating the institutions and momentum to develop an economy in a way the bourgeoisie could never do. What is this but the old claim that property *forms*, regardless of class relations, may assume a proletarian character and surpass capitalism?

You do not see state capitalism as an end product of capitalist development in the advanced countries, and neither do we. Your misstatement of the R.S.L. position on this point does not help your credibility. Similarly, on Africa, if the R.S.L. doesn't *emphasize* the threat of Russian imperialism, this is precisely because it is not as imminent a threat as U.S. imperialism to the people of that area. This does not mean the danger of Russian imperialism is nil, only secondary. Nor were these two forces equated in Zaire, as you wrongly charge.

"While revolutionaries should warn of the dangerous games of the Russian imperialists, their main task must be to expose the fact that the Western imperialists are using the invasion (of Zaire) to beef up their puppet regime and military presence in central Africa." (*Torch*, p. 13, May 15-June 14, 1977)

If this is an "absurd third camp line," we would be interested to hear of your own. Do you defend the Katangan mercenaries?

## Reply

The RSL comrades' criticism that our analysis "borders dangerously on the Pabloite view of nationalized property as inherently progressive" is a charge put forward without serious proof, based on quotations taken out of context. Any fair reading of our material would show that we have little agreement with the Pabloite view of nationalized property. However, and this is what the comrades find troublesome, we reject the traditional Shachtmanite view of state property as well. The "bordering" they really react to is the closeness of our understanding to the fundamental outlook of Trotsky, despite our obvious disagreements with Trotsky on the question at hand. The errors of Pabloism and those of the bureaucratic collectivists (some now dyed "state capitalists") stem from similar causes, and their similarities are by no means accidental.

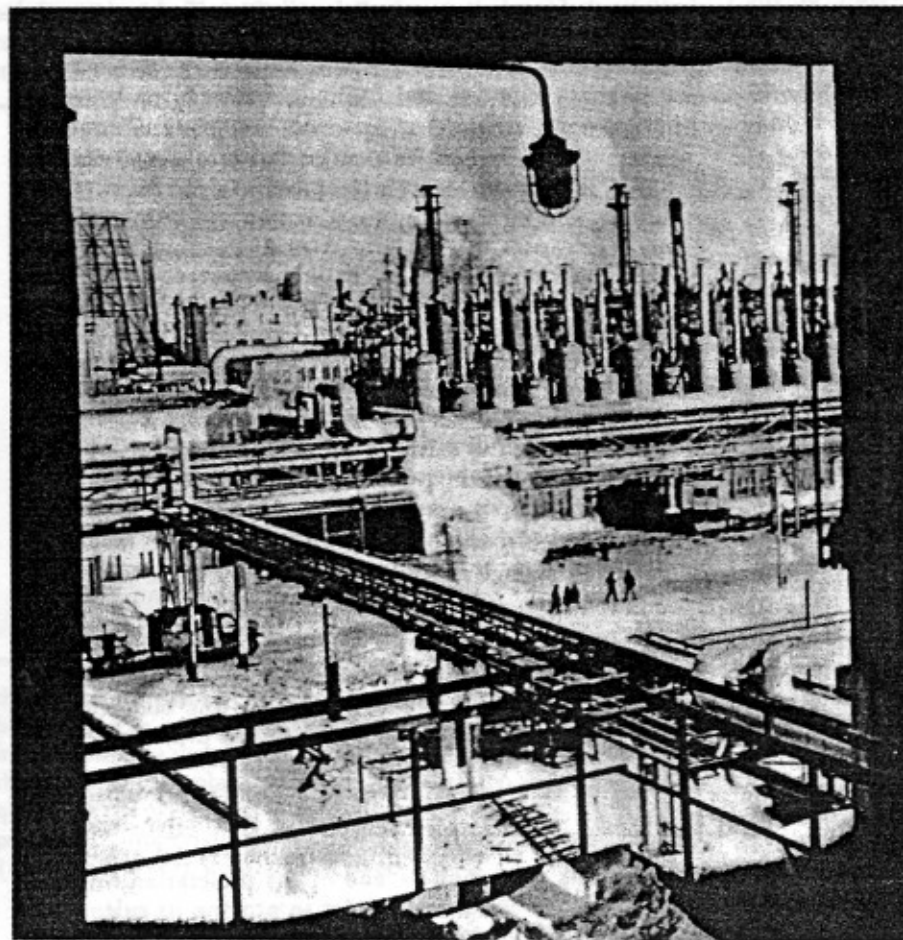
Our articles have always stressed that nationalized property is progressive only as a tool and a facet of the workers' state which permits the working class to centralize control of the economy and establish conscious planning to an increasing degree. But statified property is not statified in the abstract; in bourgeois hands it is bourgeois state property, property utilized by the executive arm of the capitalist ruling class. In the Western economies the nationalized industries serve to shore up the national economy as a whole and its monopoly profit-making sectors in particular; they are still subject to the

limitations and blind economic laws of capitalism, and they are frequently allowed to deteriorate under government control.

In the Stalinist state capitalist countries the laws and limitations still manifest themselves but in altered form. The great advance of the productive forces in the USSR took place in the 1930's when the Soviet Union was still a workers' state. Its enormous industrial growth stood in sharp contrast to the bourgeois economies. Since the time when the Soviet workers' state was overthrown in the great purges of the late thirties, no country has been able to expand its productive forces at a rate more rapid than that of the traditional capitalist countries for any appreciable length of time. None of the post-World War II Stalinist states succeeded in building an economic structure capable of sustaining an independent national economy despite herculean attempts.

This can be understood through the perspective of the theory of permanent revolution. In this epoch of capitalism's decay, the bourgeoisie is a historically reactionary class incapable of completing even bourgeois revolutions. Bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist forces, whether right or left, in the semi-colonial countries have failed to carry out decisive breaks with imperialism. Only an international federation of workers' states could achieve the economic abundance upon which sustained independence from imperialism could be based.

Where the fraying fabric of world imperialism is weakest radical alterations have



*Soviet chemical plant. The faltering state capitalist class still rests upon the massive development of the productive forces which it inherited from the decapitated proletarian dictatorship.*

been required to maintain the overall stability of the system. After the Second World War capitalism foundered on the brink of revolution in Italy, France, Eastern Europe and throughout the colonial world. And here Stalinism played its part — neither as a proletarian force nor as a higher form of capitalism, but as the one force within the international state monopoly capitalist system that could defeat the insurgent masses and give world capitalism a new lease on life.

Contrary to Trotsky's prediction that Russian Stalinism could not survive the war, its rule persisted. Russia emerged from the war a recognized world power, far removed from the weak and transitory degenerated workers' state that Trotsky had described before the war. It was transformed into a more stable bourgeois class society through the triumph of the bloody counterrevolution, an overwhelming but nonetheless temporary defeat of the proletariat.

Russian capitalism was not restored upon the basis of the earlier, primitive bourgeois forces of Czarist times. Nor was it the imposition of a more-or-less direct Western domination, which Trotsky had imagined would be the likely alternative to the revival of proletarian power. It was a capitalist regime based upon the nationalized and centralized industry, state banking and state-controlled foreign trade which had been created by the Soviet workers' state, as well as upon the industrial growth of the thirties without which Russia could not have survived the war or expanded its power. And last but not least, the Stalinists inherited a dominating position within the powerful international working classes as a result of the USSR's heritage in the October revolution, since the masses of the world still looked to it for leadership.

In the wake of the war Russian power expanded into Eastern Europe, crushing the workers' uprisings and dual power institutions in the revolutionary conditions brought about by the Nazi defeat. In the West it was the power of the Communist Parties within the proletariat which broke the back of the revolutions. In Vietnam, North Africa and other colonial areas again it was Stalinism which paved the way for the re-establishment of Western, chiefly American, imperialism. All these proletarian defeats were made possible by the Stalinists' power stolen from the working class and rooted in the objective and subjective achievements of the October revolution. That is the irony of history, the fact that history proceeds through negation and contradiction. Despite the defeats, the result of World War II was no new or higher epoch of capitalism. Stalinism's success only prolonged the epoch of imperialism (state monopoly capitalism, in Lenin's view) and shifted the class struggle and the operation of the laws of capitalism to a new plane.

Thus the Stalinists moved to full nationalization in Eastern Europe only in 1947-48, after the last efforts at independent proletarian revolutionary activity had been crushed in both East and West. The Stalinists' historical relation to the working class and the dangerous property forms bequeathed them by that class earned them the fear and enmity of the West. American hostility was increased by the apparent power of the Soviet Union, reflecting its industrial growth in the 1930's. As soon as Stalinism demonstrated its capacity for imperialist expansion, the United States began to challenge its former ally in the "war to preserve democracy." Russia tightened her grip upon the satellite countries, eliminating rival forces and integrating their economies into her own.

Similarly the Chinese Stalinists could not move in the direction of full-scale nationalization until 1953, after the mass potential of the revolutionary period had died. Full-scale

nationalization is a danger to the state capitalist regimes if the proletariat is prepared to challenge for power. Trotsky had pointed out that a fully state capitalist economy was quite possible in theory but was, for one thing, too tempting an object for the proletariat to seize to ever come into existence. Trotsky's world view was based upon the fact that the proletariat had not been defeated on a world scale and was an immediate contender for power. Only the post-war working class defeats enabled state capitalism to expand; the subsequent revival of working class struggle in the deepening world economic crisis is the key to state capitalism's accelerating weakness today.

Whereas Russia's power was founded upon the material basis bequeathed by the shattered workers' state, the post-war state capitalist regimes, despite their initial spurts of growth, have not been able to overcome their backwardness. They escaped only temporarily from the clutches of Western imperialism, and are now dependent upon the Western powers for trade, capital and modern technology without which no industrial state can accumulate or even maintain itself. The very newest state capitalist regimes (unified Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) cannot organize their economies at the level that their forbears achieved and are compelled to forego industrialization drives in the interest of bare survival. Cuba has been compelled to abandon any industrial perspective and to try for little beyond an agricultural role in the world market. Thus the new state capitalist regimes resemble the bulk of traditional ex-colonial countries, and there is a growing similarity in form between the "pluralist" statified regimes and the overt Stalinist ones. (Can any "deformed workers' state" theorist cite *fundamental* differences between the economies of Cambodia and, say, Mozambique, Somalia or Burma — differences that would make the supposed Cambodian "workers' state" progressive even in Pabloite terms? Can any Pabloite distinguish between the incentives offered for Western investment by "proletarian" Vietnam and by other former colonial countries in Asia and Africa?)

The traditional signs of capitalist anarchy — unemployment, inflation, declining economic growth, vast state debts — have begun to reappear as decisive factors in the state capitalist countries. Reforms in Eastern Europe have reintroduced open internal competition, and the state monopoly of foreign trade has been set aside in several countries. The erosion of nationalized forms stems from the same capitalist crisis that produced the proletarian resurgence starting in the late sixties. The upsurges in France and Italy were matched in Poland, Czechoslovakia, China and other Stalinist states. It is no accident that the Western powers are eager to shore up (and exploit) the state capitalist regimes with loans, nor that the state capitalists look carefully at the greater flexibility of Western economic methods. Statification, however much it appeals to the nationalist ambitions of national bourgeoisies, is too rigid and dangerous a weapon for the bourgeoisie to attempt to wield in the face of a propertyless proletariat on the move.

It was in this context that we wrote that Russian state capitalism "stands as a conquest of the workers." Nationalization and full centralization of capital are tools of the Bolshevik revolution — and of the proletarian future — that the bourgeoisie stole in order to prolong its rule. In the hands of the bourgeoisie these dangerous tools, designed to free the productive forces from their capitalist fetters, fail of their purpose and tempt an aroused proletariat. Then the state bourgeoisie must try to jettison them. (We have previously expressed these ideas in Socialist Voice No. 1, pages



26-27; No. 2, pages 26-27; No. 4, pages 21-22; and No. 5, pages 28-29.)

Yet the RSL comrades go on to characterize our view as one "which implies that workers will, or should, choose to fight for the victory of the capitalist class." This is simply an impermissible distortion which cannot be derived from a serious reading of any of our substantive articles and letters. Many paragraphs could be cited but one which appears two paragraphs after the cited lines will do (see *Socialist Voice* No. 1, page 27):

"The basis of Russian state capitalism is the use of the workers' gains, the expanded and nationalized means of production in particular, against the working class. Vulgar pragmatists cannot grasp what is commonplace under capitalism: capital itself is dead labor created by the proletariat but turned to the suppression and domination of living labor. Nationalization, centralization and concentration are vitally important forms propelled into existence by the workers' struggle. As capital, both form and content are utilized by the bourgeoisie against the workers. Labor's creation alienated from the workers under capitalism will be recaptured by the workers' revolution."

The proletarian content underlying the forms of nationalization and centralization was not an invention of ours. Marx, Engels and Lenin had the idea before us. It is part of what Engels called "the invading socialist society" within capitalism. For Lenin in particular, the monopolizing and statifying tendencies immanent in the decaying capitalism of

Lenin, like Engels, used the term "socialization" within a capitalist context to mean that production becomes social while appropriation remains private; the benefits still accrue to the bourgeoisie but the whole process is becoming public. The means of production are now ready made for the proletariat to seize and harness. The property forms move inexorably toward a new class relationship. This is the revolt of the productive forces against the relations of production. It only remains for the proletariat to make the decisive move, the revolutionary overthrow of the private appropriators of the "socialized" means of production.

Lenin was not discussing the near-totally statified economies of today's state capitalism but the socializing tendencies under the capitalism of his time which pointed in that direction. Even so he considers the tendency as a transition toward socialism which the bourgeoisie is being dragged into; the bourgeoisie will use the tendency against the proletariat but it is caught up in a dangerous undertow that it is far from comfortable with. This makes our point all the stronger, for what is true of the state monopoly capitalist "socialization" that Lenin witnessed is no less true of post-war state capitalism.

Lenin considered the entire epoch of imperialist decay as transitional, a transition that the bourgeoisie opposes but cannot control. In the same sense, state capitalism of the Russian variety is even more socialized and therefore more dangerous for the bourgeoisie. It is made safe for the bourgeoisie only to the extent that the working class has been set back from its revolutionary challenge. Historically, the existence of the



*Russian industrial scene. State capitalism is dependent upon monopoly capitalism. A decisive proportion of its technology must come from Western imperialist countries.*

this epoch were not neutral forms, adoptable equally well by bourgeoisie or proletariat. The tendencies are anti-capitalist in the sense that they reflect the future proletarian society even though they take place while the bourgeoisie still rules. We quote perhaps his most concise formulation, from the pamphlet "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism" (*Collected Works*, Volume 22, page 205):

"Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads directly to the most comprehensive socialization of production; it, so to speak, drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order, a transitional one from complete free competition to complete socialization."

transitional epoch has been prolonged beyond what Lenin foresaw because of the Stalinists' triumph over the working class, a triumph resting upon the gains of October turned against their creators. It is in this sense that state capitalism outside of the USSR as well is based upon institutions created by the workers; Russia's power used to smash the international proletarian revolutions permitted the existence and the short-lived economic gains of the other state capitalist nations. Even in negation the power of the working class is the only creative force in this epoch.

The RSL point of view on these questions is notably different and far more generous to the state bourgeoisies. The letter to us refers to China's "nationalized economic base,

adopted from victorious state capitalism in Russia," as if the Soviet property nationalizations had taken place after the state capitalist counterrevolutions, not before. A more explicit statement occurs in the RSL's pamphlet, *The Rise of State Capitalism*, by Ron Taber (p. 19):

"The second reason behind the state-capitalists' ability to mislead the masses is the economic achievements of state capitalism. State capitalism in Russia (and to a lesser extent in China, Cuba, North Korea and elsewhere) has been capable of making significant strides toward industrialization. Russia was only the fifth most developed country in the world in 1914; today it is second, and is a full-scale industrialized country."

Only a modicum of pragmatism is required to credit the state capitalists with the industrialization of China, such as it is. But it takes a conscious theory to believe that Russia's rise to the world's second industrial power is an "achievement of state capitalism." The RSL on paper holds to the view that the Stalinist counterrevolution was not completed until the late 1930's, but Taber's assertion that Russia's industrialization took place under state capitalism suggests that the state capitalists seized power well before that. (The same internal contradiction is to be found in the theory of the former Revolutionary Marxist Committee, as we demonstrated in an article in *Socialist Voice* No. 5.)

Thus the RSL avoids the dilemma of recognizing the proletarian heritage in state capitalism by crediting state capitalism itself with significant advances. If state capitalism was able to transform Russia not just from the fifth industrial power but from a vast, underdeveloped semi-imperialized domain to the second strongest nation on earth, that is a fantastic achievement — one that Lenin and Trotsky thought impossible for any bourgeoisie in this epoch. If the radical petty-bourgeoisie can develop the nation state in this manner (and it was not just in Russia but in China and elsewhere, according to Taber, that a similar qualitative transformation took place if only "to a lesser extent") then capitalism is still capable of sustained revolutionary accomplishments. With this the epoch of bourgeois decay and counterrevolution is tossed out the window, along with the theory of permanent revolution and other quaint ideas.

The RSL's outlook on state capitalism is not original with this organization. It derives from the political tradition of Shachtmanism, a tendency that the RSL broke away from at its origin in an incomplete fashion. (See our analysis in the article "The Struggle for the Revolutionary Party" in *Socialist Voice* No. 1.) Shachtman, a pioneer of the theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" as a description of the USSR and its imitators, argued that nationalized property is not necessarily proletarian: in the past, the state form of property had been adopted by Asiatic Despotism (in Marx's sense), church-ruled states and a myriad of other societies, while in the present, state property could be employed by both the bourgeoisie and the "bureaucratic collectivists" against the proletariat. That is, Shachtman regarded nationalized property as neutral with respect to class. It was a form with no specific social content that could be a legitimate feature of three different social orders in the modern epoch: capitalism, Stalinism and socialism.

Leaving aside the earlier historical epochs which have nothing to do with the present case, it is clear from Lenin's analysis of the imperialist epoch that the socialized form of

property is an inevitable outgrowth of the laws of development of capitalism, laws generated by the class struggle that themselves turn the progressive aspects of capitalism in its revolutionary epoch into their opposite. Thus the socialization of property is not neutral but is in fact symptomatic of capitalist decay and the transition to socialism.

To summarize the matter briefly, the Pabloite view (that China, Eastern Europe, etc. became "deformed workers' states" after World War II) stems from the mechanistic belief that the proletarian form of nationalized property necessarily determines a proletarian content. Shachtman's alternative was to deny that proletarian content existed in the nationalized form. In contrast to both, Marxists must recognize that form reflects content. It can neither determine content nor remain independent of it except for an inherently unstable period in which the contradiction must be resolved. The tendency towards socialization under state monopoly capitalism is an invasion by the socialist future which the bourgeoisie cannot resist. It cannot control the degeneration of its own forms and institutions, and its original weapons for waging the class struggle have become too weak. In the case of Russian-style state capitalism, the socialized forms are remnants of the once-proletarian past, now decaying in the hands of those who stole them from the workers.

Taber's pamphlet (page 4) presents the RSL's view on the question:

"Thus, the collective forms of monopoly represent an encroachment of forms proper to socialism into the capitalist economy. But these forms are not an attack on capitalism; they come into being in order to shore it up.

"We discussed at the outset the fact that every social system, in its epoch of decay, acts to offset the threat of its overthrow by a new and more progressive social system. The collective forms represented by monopolization are an important aspect of this tendency. In this case, decaying capitalism borrows from the future society in order to shore itself up in the face of the revolutionary threat of the working class. Put differently, capitalism, as it decays, tries to dress itself up in proletarian forms as a means of protecting itself from the working class."

At first sight Taber's case seems different from Shachtman's in that he refers to the collectivized forms of property as "forms proper to socialism" and "proletarian forms" (wording which might surprise the former RFU minority comrades since it "borders dangerously on the Pabloite view of nationalized property"). But he also tells us that "these forms are not an attack on capitalism; they come into being in order to shore it up."

The RSL view is clearly opposed to the Leninist analysis of the epoch of capitalist decay even though the verbiage is retained. For the RSL, to be sure, the collectivized forms of property indicate that capitalism is in decay and are dangerous to the capitalists. What the RSL does not see is that these forms reflect the content of the socializing drives of the system itself turning capitalism into its opposite. They are not a disguise borrowed from the socialist future as if the bourgeoisie was limited only by its own cleverness in selecting what clothes to wear on the morning of a new epoch. The socialized forms are inevitable symptoms of the system's own death agony and at the same time the birth pangs of communism. The voluntarism in the RSL's approach credits the bourgeoisie with the ability to make choices and carry out



*Russian workers and soldiers demonstrate in 1917 with red flags unfurled. Revolution soon led to nationalized industry, central state banking and credit, and foreign trade monopoly held by the fledgling proletarian regime.*

tasks Marxists have always thought impossible in its epoch of decay.

The RSL's logic leads it into a different interpretation of state capitalism's historical role from our own. There are essentially two possible theories of state capitalism. The first holds that it is a new and higher form of capitalism which can maintain exploitative capital accumulation beyond the point where traditional capitalism fails; in fact, that it represents a new stage of development, that is, a new epoch beyond that of imperialism and state monopoly capitalism. The second sees that state capitalism made its temporary advances as the result of conjunctural defeats of the working class but that its stepped-up accumulation can only lead to intensified crises; this theory postulates that while sizeable changes have taken place since the time of Lenin and Trotsky the epoch is still that of imperialist decay and the transition to socialism.

The first theory suggests that state capitalism is still capable of playing an independent role in world politics; the second, that it is fundamentally cast as a prop for the dominant state monopoly capitalists. The first theory is a variant of bureaucratic collectivism, posing a whole new era in which the historical alternatives for our times are of a tri-cornered or "third camp" character (capitalism, socialism, or Stalinism). The fact that it calls the new society state capitalist rather than bureaucratic collectivist merely proves the old adage about the aroma of roses. These are not just theoretical positions; they are linked with a whole approach to mass struggles. That the RSL is coming to accept the first theory is indicated not just by a few unfortunate quotations but also by its analysis of state capitalism's independence and strength in world events, notably in Africa.

In their letter, the RSL comrades cite a *Torch* article on Zaire in order to maintain that Western imperialism is the main danger in Africa and that Russian imperialism is a lesser danger. This is a correct but misleading point, since the Russians are described as the lesser danger because of their comparative weakness and not because of their role as a prop for imperialism as a whole. Russia's struggles with the United States are real but occur within a context wherein the USSR must seek to shore up the stability of the world system under American dominance. Without the Pax Americana the entire imperial fabric would be ripped apart.

Thus the *Torch*, in a more thorough elaboration of its view, wrote (April 15, 1977) that "the Russians hope that out of the

confusion they can take over some big pieces of Africa that used to 'belong' to the U.S." In this situation,

"The way forward for the working masses of southern Africa is to take advantage of the conflict between the imperialists to press their struggle forward. This means accepting arms and material support from the Russians to use against the U.S. and its allies. While the Russians at this moment represent a *potential* menace to the revolutionary movement, it is the United States which still has its foot squarely on southern Africa's neck.

"Only a working class leadership can keep the mass movement independent from Russian control while accepting Russian support. The middle-class nationalists who are currently at the head of the guerrilla movements in southern Africa will not and cannot do this. They are willing to sell themselves lock, stock and barrel to the highest bidder. Today, it is the Russians. The Russian imperialists offer the nationalists the means of getting power without developing the full revolutionary energies of the masses."

But the Russian danger, even the potential Russian danger, is not that Russian imperialist control will be substituted for Western domination. Take the case of Angola, where Russian and Cuban military support was massive. The MPLA's victory in the national liberation struggle eased the West's stranglehold on the country but did not wipe out Western imperialism's interests. Western capitalists retain many profit-producing properties, and the Cuban troops can be trusted to discourage Angolan workers from seizing them. What enables the Russians and their friends to bolster imperialist control is the natural affinity between a state capitalist power and the petty-bourgeois nationalists. The Russian role is to strengthen the left nationalists when the right wing is collapsing, to provide a model not just of state property but of defeating the working class — and it does this today, not just in the potential future. The RSL's view that "the troops and aid supplied to the MPLA by Cuba and Russia — whatever Russia's eventual imperialist ambitions — are today aiding the fight to throw off the imperialist yoke" is a dangerous illusion (*Torch*, January 15, 1976).

The RSL also exaggerated the independence and potential power of state capitalism in Ethiopia, where it argued that



*Ogaden guerrillas brandish Russian-made weapons originally sent to Somali regime. Russia's intervention in Africa aims to advance its own influence but maintains basic U.S. dominance.*

"the Dergue is a classic example of a state-capitalist ruling class" (*Torch*, September 15, 1977). This conception overlooks the extreme backwardness of Ethiopia, which makes an advancing or even economically integrated stratified capitalism a highly unlikely possibility (much less an accomplished fact). As well, the intensification of the capitalist crisis and the revival of proletarian struggles throughout the world mean that state capitalist solutions are a dangerous game for bourgeois forces of whatever persuasion anywhere: large-scale nationalization of the means of production would once again present too tempting a target. It is no wonder that societies recently set up in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam remain decentralized even though nationalizations have taken place and are too weak to attempt rapid industrialization. Ethiopia, Angola and Somalia have economies differing from the overtly Stalinized ex-colonial nations, but they converge. They are anything but "classic" state capitalism, which was a phenomenon of the period of relative prosperity and working class setbacks after World War II.

Once more the RSL overestimates the power of Russian state capitalism by implying that it can step into the Americans' shoes. Even if Russian aid to the Dergue should enable the Ethiopian forces to defeat the national liberation struggles in both Eritrea and the Ogaden (which is not assured), this will only set Ethiopia up for revived domination by the West, mainly the United States — not by the USSR. The most the Russians can hope for is a diplomatic and military dalliance with marginal economic ties.

The same analysis holds in Zaire. There, the RSL equated not the danger of Russian and U.S. imperialism (as we wrongly formulated it in our letter) but the *role* of Russia and the West. Thus the *Torch* wrote on May 15, 1977:

**"The FNLC is not a genuine national liberation movement. It is nothing more than a band of mercenaries who are long time enemies of the people of Zaire. The fact that they are now in the**

service of Russia, the weaker imperialist power in Africa, does not alter their thoroughly reactionary character. The workers and peasants must have no illusions in this outfit.

"Russian imperialism probably either supported or ordered the invasion of Shaba. Sensing the weakness of Mobutu's position in Zaire, the Russians hoped that an invasion would lead to a crisis in Zaire. Either there would be a revolt in Zaire's officer corps that could end in a coup against Mobutu, or there would be some other split in Mobutu's regime. Either way, the Russians figured, the fall of Mobutu would open up the area to Russian influence."

First, let us point out that the Russians' strength in the semi-colonial countries lies with their political ability to line up on the side of mass anti-imperialist struggles. Once they succeed in helping to stabilize a struggle and contain the proletariat, the Russians undermine their own potential even then. But their strength is not their ability to be the "highest bidder," as the *Torch* in the same article claims they were, for the Katangan mercenaries. This unproved charge is probably false, since the West can easily outbid the Russians at purely mercenary games.

This brings us to the central point, that the Russians are a full-fledged imperial rival here to the U.S. capable of not only supporting but of "ordering" invasions. The Russians are seen as the up-and-coming imperialist menace even though they are weaker at the moment. This analysis is similar to the Maoists', who conclude that Russia as the weaker but rising superpower has to be fought even at the cost of backing U.S. imperialism (for example, NATO) and that national liberation struggles aided by Russia cannot be supported (as in Angola). The RSL does not draw such conclusions but also sees Russia as a rising and independent imperialist capable of aiding "classic state capitalist" regimes to power — just as a classic "third camp" analysis would have it. We stand by our comment that the RSL position was an "absurd third camp

line." Compare our own view of the Katangan events (*Socialist Action*, June 1977):

"The insurgent force of Katangan troops is led by 'left-wing' petty-bourgeois nationalists who once collaborated in the suppression of Lumumba. At this point, when there is no evidence that the rebels represent a genuine national liberation struggle, there is no reason for the working class to support them. Support for the imperialist puppet Mobutu, however, such as that provided in the guise of opposition to Russian imperialism by such Maoist groups as the October League, is out of the question for revolutionaries."

The RSL used the Katangans' earlier alliance with Western imperialism as well as their alleged clientship to the USSR as reasons for denying them military support. For us, however, the central factor is the masses and their struggle. We align with the anti-imperialist struggle even under bourgeois leadership against a more immediate danger, giving into no illusions that the nation-state is sustainable or desirable. We openly seek to break the power of the nationalist leaderships who cannot set the masses on an internationalist course, whether or not they play with the Russians.

The upshot of the RSL's misconception of the Russian role in Africa is that, despite the *Torch's* occasional usage of stock Marxist criticisms of nationalism, the nationalist leaderships are let off the hook. The betrayal by the petty-bourgeois nationalists lies not in their predilection for servitude to the Russians as the RSL contends but in the class position in capitalist society and the consequent nationalist ideology which envisions a state capitalist future for the "socialist" ambitions. It is this that determines their preference for guerrilla strategies over mass struggles of the working class, for suppression of the most militant demands and struggles of workers and for aid from the state capitalist countries which share their goals. Time and again nationalist leaderships in Africa and throughout the world have sold the masses down the river because no national solution is possible in this epoch. Yesterday's leftist nationalists are today's practical men of power. Revolutionaries have no alternative but to combat the nationalist ideas which have mass influence among the proletariat in order to eliminate the nationalists' hegemony in the anti-imperialist struggle.

Such a resolute attack is consistently avoided by the RSL. Through its front group, the Solidarity Committee Against Apartheid, the RSL raises the slogan of "Black Workers' Revolution" in South Africa, making no attempt distinguish their goal from the bourgeois revolution of the left nationalists. After criticisms on this score by the LRP, the RSL now adds from time to time the word "socialist" (which many left nationalists of course accept on their own terms) but still does not counterpose itself to the left-wing nationalists.

This opportunism was compounded by the RSL Central Committee's strategy for the South African revolution, published in the July 15 *Torch*. Here it was announced that "the guerrilla struggle is a precondition for the workers' seizure of power," a capitulation to the petty-bourgeois strategy despite warnings that the guerrilla struggle must be subordinate to the struggle of the urban workers and under the guidance of the revolutionary workers party. It is a poor substitute to provide such warnings in an article devoted to elaborating the "crucial" strategy of guerrilla warfare. Revolutionaries do not oppose guerrilla tactics when they play a subordinate role to a mass workers' struggle, but we do

combat the petty-bourgeois notion that the guerrilla struggle is primary. It cannot become the centerpiece of our strategy. In no sense is guerrilla warfare a "precondition" for the only real solution, proletarian struggle.

With this in mind the RSL's charge that *our* analysis skirts on the edge of Pabloism becomes a bad joke. The Pabloites of the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" have been notorious for their devotion to guerrilla movements. For them, the logic of their reasoning was quite consistent: if petty-bourgeois nationalists could make the socialist revolution in Cuba, like the petty-bourgeois Stalinists in China and elsewhere, why couldn't it be done by whatever left-nationalist guerrilla movements spring up? The RSL does not share these illusions in the nature of the socialist revolution, but it does share illusions with the Pabloites on the capacity of state capitalism to make progressive advances in the present-day world. If state capitalism — "classic" state capitalism — is once again capable of building independent nation-states, then the radical state capitalist nationalists have a positive role to play even if they don't go far enough and their totalitarianism in power is objectionable.

The Pabloites have already given up the conviction that workers' consciousness in the Marxist sense is really necessary for the socialist revolution. Any force which can nationalize the economy is good enough for those to whom nationalized property is the equivalent of a ("deformed") workers' state. Classic Shachtmanism despite its conflict with Pabloism was not so different. Shachtman did not accept the material basis within capitalism for the socialist revolution, the objective tendencies towards socialism inherent in capitalism. Thus the basis for revolution became a purely subjective consciousness, the workers' arbitrary moral choice of socialism over decaying capitalism and its Stalinist rival. "Consciousness" no longer meant understanding by the workers of an objective drive inherent in capitalism but a choice the workers might make if they were convinced or fooled. The question of who comes to power, socialists or state capitalists, was reduced to who can galvanize or manipulate the masses with greater dexterity. The RSL has not yet stooped as low as the classic Shachtmanites but it has set up a similar logic for itself. This is the source of the hyper-leftist covering for bourgeois-democratic programs which characterizes the work of the RSL today. It is the theoretical basis for various manipulative strategies to use the workers as a battering ram rather than a conscious Marxist vanguard, the classical guerrillaist outlook counterposed to Marxism.

In the 1930's Trotsky pointed out that a critical distinction between revolutionaries and reformists was the question of the defense of the USSR as a workers' state. That is no longer the case, and not solely because the Soviet Union is no longer a workers' state. Revolutionaries of course cannot accept a theory that calls for the "defense" of the counterrevolutionary and imperialist USSR, but it is not sufficient to recognize Russia as capitalist. As the USSR plays an increasing role in propping up imperialism, defense of the USSR becomes more and more a defense of world, and therefore predominantly American-regulated, imperialism. However, the RSL's notion that Russian imperialism is the weaker, latent but rising alternative camp has led to an overestimation of the progressive potential in state capitalism and left bourgeois nationalism. The line between revolutionaries and reformists is now most sharply drawn between proletarian internationalism and bourgeois nationalism in all its forms, including Stalinism and the varieties of centrism. The RSL is digging itself into a position on the nationalist side of the line. ■

# Behind the Bakke Case

The "reverse discrimination" case of Allan Bakke versus the special minority admissions program of the University of California at Davis Medical School was heard before the United States Supreme Court last fall. Whatever its outcome, the case is an important reflection of the current political climate for blacks and for all the exploited and oppressed. The conflict surrounding the case indicates that the struggle of the masses is for the moment at a low point and defensive in character. How did it come to this?

The great social struggles such as those waged by the blacks and anti-war forces which swept the nation in the last decade have ebbed. The masses sought real equality, real participation in lasting prosperity and an end to reactionary wars.

Real gains were won as the result of long struggles combined with ghetto uprisings which threatened to rip apart the fabric of American capitalism. But the movements which developed in the midst of the post-World War II prosperity bubble were restricted by their middle class leaderships and had to settle for limited gains and reforms instead of fundamental solutions. With the end of the post-war boom these progressive reforms of the sixties have given way to the grim realities of bourgeois society in the seventies.

The Bakke case occurs at a time when the black masses are rapidly becoming aware of the depth of the capitalist crisis. Martin Luther King Jr.'s great "dream" of what life could be like for blacks in the American capitalist future has proven to

be more of a blinding illusion than an illuminating prediction. Sadly but aptly, a 1977 Christmas season headline in the *New York Times* ran, "Black America's Holiday Mood: Gloom, Suspicion and Pessimism." Indeed, mounting evidence indicates the correctness of this commentary.

The statistics are all too familiar and all too clear. The October 1977 figures issued by the government show that black unemployment had risen to fifteen percent, well over double the rate for whites. Joblessness for young blacks was at the rate of forty percent. More realistic estimates which include those who have given up looking for work in despair place the figure at over sixty percent. That is, nearly two-thirds of all black youth are jobless. As well, inflation eats away at the wages of those who do have jobs. The decay of the cities is very much the destruction of the sprawling ghettos into which the black population has been forced. The erosion of even the minimal social services the city governments provide has had a ruinous impact upon the black working class inhabitants of America's major cities. Whole geographical areas have been forsaken and reduced to rubble.

The growing "gloom, suspicion, and pessimism" of the middle 1970's stands in sharp contrast to the heady struggles, fighting demands and majestic upsurges of the 1960's and to the unrestrained expectations which burgeoned in their wake. Indeed the system seemed to be working, although yielding reforms in limited doses. As a result many black working class families began to believe that with work, education, dedication, luck and ambition they and their children could "make it." Social mobility into the middle classes or at least steady, good-paying working class jobs seemed possible. While this was always a mirage for the multitude, enough visible concrete gains were achieved so that the illusion was not made of air alone but did reflect a small if



*Multitudes of blacks marched on Washington in the 1960's. Now the misleaders fly to the conference tables to haggle over the remaining gains won in the past.*

distant reality. Once there were movements; now there are only organizations. Once there were heroic actions; now there is statesmanship. Overly moderate demands have given way to shamefaced concessions, and adventurism has been transformed into petty bureaucratism, petty patronage and penny-ante social work. Mass movements have given way to courtroom contention.

The moderate middle-class leadership of black groups such as the NAACP originally concentrated upon these courtroom and lobbying strategies. It was the eruptions of the black masses that actually achieved what gains were made. Concessions apparently won through legal briefs and legislation reflected far more the threat of mass uprisings. Under the demands and hammer blows of the masses, new leadership with more militant "black power" perspectives came to the fore. But they too in the absence of revolutionary leadership accepted the limitations of the system consistent with their petty-bourgeois aspirations.

The limited economic and democratic goals achieved reflected the interests of the upper strata of the black middle classes. The recent NAACP support for the oil monopolies on the grounds that satisfied capitalists will create more jobs is the grossest example. As the situation deteriorates, the black masses will see less to support in the moderate bourgeois-democratic outlook of these elements. The fact that this outlook does not reflect their class interests becomes more apparent, but there seems to be no realistic alternative.

### **Bakke and the Reaction**

Seeing the ebbing of the militancy of the blacks and the left in general the reactionaries are gaining confidence and picking up momentum. Only a program and a leadership which fights for a society of plenty with real economic and political equality can meet the needs of the black masses. Unfortunately, just at the point where the limits of capitalism and bourgeois democracy are being so graphically revealed, those who pass as the "Marxists" are putting forward militant versions of the same failed program. In the current situation this will spell not simply dashed hopes but will lead to even greater disasters. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the issues surrounding the Bakke case.

Mass actions and movements are not yet central in the present conjuncture. During the past decade of radicalization it required hundreds of militant demonstrations attended by hundreds of thousands of angry blacks, women, workers and anti-war advocates to secure the temporary gains that were won. Today as we have indicated the moves are made by the few rather than by the masses. Reactionaries seeking to whip up mass struggles are accelerating their activities but with as yet only sporadic successes. However, the masses' desperation will grow, and if it is not countered by revolutionaries the system will pit the victims against each other; this is the fuel for the future reaction. Consciously and unconsciously this is the system's last line of defense.

Reaction in its embryo is now associated with individuals such as Anita Bryant, Phyllis Schlafly and Allan Bakke who today have taken the offensive and are in the process of acting as the "vanguard." In 1973 Allan Bakke, a thirty-three-year-old white NASA engineer, was rejected for admission to the University of California Medical School at Davis. Even though he was rejected by thirteen other medical schools, he wrote to the admissions office at Davis and threatened a suit against the

special admissions program there. A U.C. admissions official suggested that he re-apply and then consider court action should he be rejected a second time.

Bakke was rejected again in 1974. After submitting a complaint of racial discrimination to the U.S. Health, Education and Welfare Department, Bakke filed suit against the regents of the University of California. The regents then filed a counter-suit to insure that the constitutionality of the special admissions program would also be determined by the court in addition to the question of whether or not to admit Bakke. Judge F. Leslie Manker decided without a trial that Davis had discriminated against Bakke, and that the special admissions program was invalid. However, he did not order that Bakke should be admitted to Davis. In September 1976, the California Supreme Court, on appeal from both Bakke and the Board of Regents, found the special admissions program at Davis unconstitutional and ordered that Bakke be admitted to Davis. The case has now been appealed before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Bakke's lawyer explained that his client's concrete grievance is that at the time he was rejected by Davis, sixteen out of a hundred openings had been specifically reserved for minority applicants. "Allan Bakke's position is that he has a right ... not to be discriminated against by reason of his race."

The reactionary, anti-black implications of the Bakke suit are demonstrated by these specifics. Bakke and his lawyers claim that his grades and test scores were higher than those of some of the sixteen minority students admitted. They do not point out that other white students who were admitted also had lower scores, nor that medical and other professional schools have traditionally favored the admission of those whose parents or relatives are well-connected alumni and financial contributors. Moreover, the path to medical school is normally strewn with money, educational advantages and the kinds of knowledge available to the better-off layers of society. Medical school admissions are overwhelmingly class-biased in favor of the rich. Bakke's claim that they are biased in favor of the oppressed is a vicious distortion of reality.

An index of the alarm aroused by this case is the fact that 146 different groups have filed fifty-eight friend of the court briefs, the highest number in Supreme Court history. Most of the briefs are hostile to Bakke, but this should not be taken as a true measure of the class forces at work behind this case. For what is in fact behind the Bakke case is a great unravelling of the social fabric of American liberalism, its utter inability to solve the profound capitalist crisis. And as surely as this is taking place, a new "radical" alternative is developing, a new banner of conservative reaction is being woven with the loose threads. The American Nazis at an anti-Bakke demonstration in Oakland displayed placards proclaiming "Bakke Equals White Power"; the Nazis know that a victory for Bakke will be another defeat for black Americans, other minorities and ultimately the working class itself. Far more immediately than the Nazis who wait in the wings, Allan Bakke has become a symbol of the reaction, aiming to roll back every gain made during the past decade.

### **The Limitations of Affirmative Action**

The black masses fought for equal rights, jobs, education and a decent income because they have been forced into the bottom rungs of the bourgeois economy and denied even the right of free labor under capitalism to compete equally for jobs and wages on the labor market. A capitalism no longer

capable of providing full employment or unlimited economic expansion dooms blacks to be outcast. Guaranteed full employment and guaranteed free education open to all are the only solution through which the black masses will win jobs and education. Indeed, the masses will learn in practice that these solutions can only be won through socialism.

Instead the middle class leadership of the black movement settled for a miserable quota system like that at Davis medical school which admit only a tiny number of blacks. Given the huge need for more doctors in the United States (especially in the ghettos) and throughout the world, the quota based upon limited admissions represented only the most token concession to the needs of the black people.

The limitations and the real dangers of the "affirmative action" or preferential hiring strategy are shown by the results in the field of medical school admissions related to the Bakke case. In 1967 and 1968, only 800 out of 33,000 medical students were black. As the early civil rights movement evolved into the black liberation struggle of the later 1960's aimed directly against society's political and economic system, minority admissions and employment rose with the struggle. When workers at San Francisco County Hospital struck in 1966, for example, one of their first demands was increased minority enrollment at the University of California Medical School, and as a result minority admissions rose dramatically.

In 1970, in response to militant demands for more minority doctors, the Association of American Medical Colleges recommended a minority admissions quota of 12 percent by 1975, theoretically to match the black percentage of the population. Substantial growth in medical school enrollment during the period 1970-75 should have made this target easy to achieve; total first-year enrollment in medical schools rose by 47 percent from 1969 to 1975. Yet only 8 percent of medical admissions were minority students and minority admissions peaked in 1974 at only 10 percent. The figure has declined steadily since then, falling to 9.1 percent in 1975 and 8.9 percent in 1976. The trend even before Bakke is clear.

Of the 40 schools that once had aggressive recruitment and admissions policies for minority students, twenty-five have completely abandoned these programs. Tuition costs go up while loan and scholarship funds decrease, making it harder if not impossible for sons and daughters of working people to attend medical school. Minorities are particularly hard hit since 85 percent are dependent on financial aid to pay tuition and expenses. The admission of a larger handful is only the tiniest step towards allowing all those who wish to become doctors to do so. In addition to the financial barrier, the limited number of medical school openings stymies the ambitions of many capable people (of whom even an Allan Bakke may perhaps be one).

Most importantly, the quota system does absolutely nothing for the upgrading of medical care for the great majority of people. For medical school admissions, like all educational programs, is a class question. Working people have the right both to advance their own standard of living through education and to benefit from the increased social services that modern society is capable of providing. But in recent years with the end of the post-war capitalist boom, education and all public services have been drastically cut back. The cut-backs that black and Latin people have been among the first to suffer are the sharpest edge of the attack on the working class. Opening medical schools to only the most socially mobile blacks is the barest recompense, for the slightly higher number

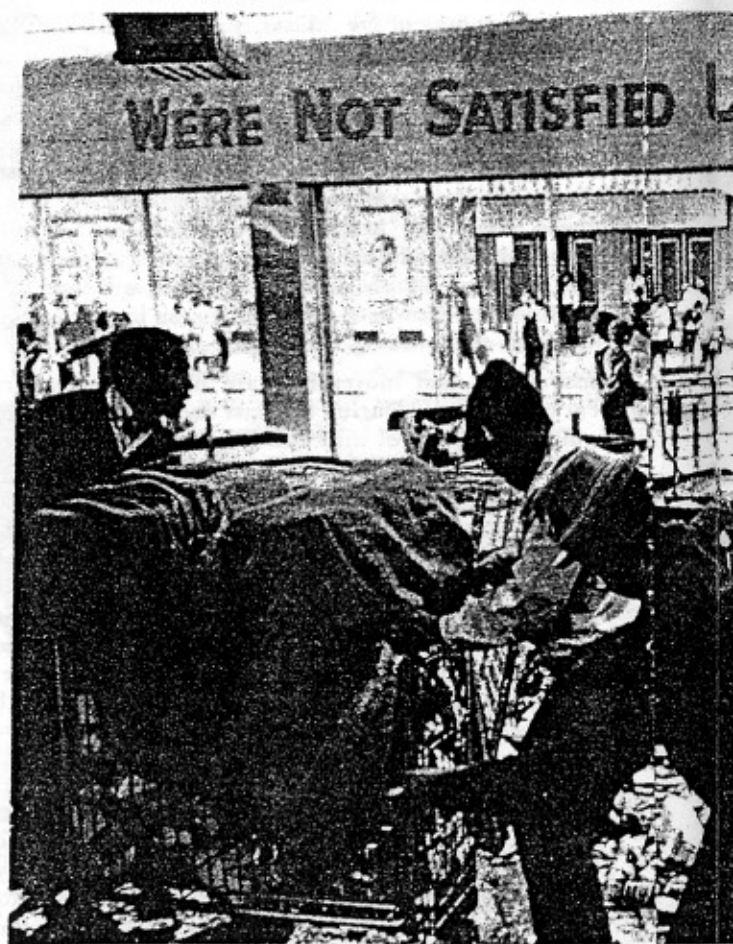
of black doctors today has not changed the ratio between doctors and masses in the ghettos.

### Divide and Conquer

A prominent feature of the Bakke case has been its divisive effect on the long-term "liberal-labor alliance" for reforms. Under the careful guidance of the labor bureaucracy and the allied middle class leaders of the reform organizations, a disaster for the working class is being prepared. If their policies go unchallenged, they will both contribute to a mass reactionary movement and leave the proletariat unprepared for it.

The labor movement is divided over the Bakke case. Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) leads the pro-Bakke forces. Shanker argues that special admissions or hiring programs for oppressed minorities and women threaten the interest of white and male workers and constitute "reverse discrimination." Against strong opposition in the union's ranks, Shanker and the AFT leadership have filed a friend of the court brief on the side of Bakke.

Among those unions against Bakke are the United Automobile Workers, the United Farm Workers, the United Mine Workers and AFSCME, all of which have filed briefs against Bakke. Joseph Rauh, a veteran civil rights lawyer and also the political wire-puller for many left labor bureaucrats, stated, "I'm for whatever has to be done to give preference to *qualified* blacks — many white people will suffer, and I don't think anyone is not compassionate toward Mr. Bakke. But the



Washington D.C., 1968



problem is comparing his right against those who have been so long discriminated against. Who has the higher right?"

The old-line craft unions and the more conservative forces in the leadership of the industrial unions support Bakke along with Shanker. Thus the AFL-CIO is so hopelessly split over the Bakke case that it hasn't filed a brief at all. During the Vietnam war Meany was able to hold most of his forces together in support of the imperialists, but with the loss of one-time allies and dissension in the ranks, the Bakke case has proved too disruptive even for Meany. When questioned on the case he replied with frustration, "I have no position."

The developing conflict over Bakke within the unions reflects the embryonic political schism developing within the bureaucracy on a host of issues (see the article "U.S. Labor and the Left" in *Socialist Voice* No. 5). This split also catalyzes the deepening division in the petty bourgeois-led liberal and ethnic organizations which cluster around the labor bureaucracy, and whose officials frequently lead interchangeable careers with the labor leaders.

America has been typified by an ethnic consciousness which has tended to divide the working class and promote struggles within the class over the "pie" in bad times. This ethnicity has been revived, financed, publicized, reorganized and developed with great energy in the last few years. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a leading exponent of stoking the coals of the ethnic revival, has openly asserted that ethnic consciousness is a counterweight to offset the potential development of class consciousness and solidarity among

workers. Senator Moynihan is tied not only to the ethnicity "movement" but to the big Jewish middle-class groups in particular and to the Meany-Shanker wing of the labor bureaucracy. The politics of ethnicity have begun to produce their ugly reactionary consequences over the Bakke case.

Thus the Jews as a group have gone through a sizeable rise in class status but their newly-won gains are precarious in the worsening crisis. Middle-class liberal Jewish groups which in the past were allies of the civil rights organizations are now aligned with such conservative forces as Young Americans for Freedom. Their argument is that blacks and other racial minorities don't have "higher rights" and that it is unfair to discriminate against one group in order to help another. Dr. Kenneth Clark, the well-known black leader, plaintively stated, "It's as if some of our old friends completely wiped out their knowledge of everything they knew and fought against — up through the 60's. They seem to want to believe that there is no racism in America any more and they have to know better."

Hyman Bookbinder, a Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee and an old-time labor faker was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying, "I've lost friends over this issue and I've lost my temper many times." He called quotas a "repulsive, obnoxious concept" to the Jewish community because they were used so often to discriminate against Jews. Bookbinder argues, "Jews are disproportionately represented in higher education and if they have earned that right they should be there. But if you take the quota idea to an extreme, someday someone could say, OK, we're only letting 3 percent Jews in."

Bookbinder and others are searching for a justification of their anti-quota position based upon the assumption that the present gains of the Jews are otherwise safe. But it is not the black struggle that endangers these gains; it is the decay of modern capitalism. Leaders who insist on defending the relative privileges of certain strata of Jews by holding back the aspirations of oppressed sections of the population will have followed Moynihan's prescription, contributed to the division of the working class — and thereby helped set the Jews and blacks up for a new generation of pogromists.

### The Marxist Strategy

The affirmative action strategy has not only undermined the possibility of solid and lasting gains for blacks, but it has prepared as well the potential for struggle among the exploited rather than against the exploiters. Affirmative action and preferential hiring are part of a political program espoused by sections of the middle class who seek to defend their narrow toehold on jobs and services while accepting the limits of capitalism. It is not accidental that in pitting workers against each other affirmative action enables the state to undermine the unions in the name of racial fairness.

There is no question that black people deserve recompense for hundreds of years of slavery and discrimination. It is therefore tragic that the strategies chosen set blacks up not for recompense but for disaster — and the loss of the gains that have been made.

"Socialist" and New Left defenders of affirmative action have in some instances justified this strategy to the point of defending firings of white workers and government regulation of the trade unions. Their defense is built upon the notion that white workers need to surrender "ill-gotten" gains achieved through membership in the aristocracy of labor. The Leninist



view is that indeed a section of the American working class, overwhelmingly white, does constitute a labor aristocracy standing in a privileged position relative not only to super-exploited black workers but to workers of oppressed countries throughout the world. In order to head off the mass movement of workers in the metropolitan countries, the imperialist bourgeoisie conceded limited gains to a small layer of workers.

But it has never been any part of the Marxist or Leninist program to demand that relatively privileged workers give up their gains to the less privileged. Despite their imperialist derivation, these gains are the distorted winnings of the class struggle. Leninists have fought for equalizing working class standards *upward* so that all workers win the "privileges" of the better-off layers. The struggle is to be waged against the capitalists' appropriation of surplus-value. Rather than fight to redivide the pittance given to the workers let us hold on to these gains and spread them to all.

The logic of the privilege-surrender argument implicit in affirmative action is that the only way blacks can attain jobs or schooling is at the expense of whites. But the idea that capitalism will long permit black workers to hold jobs gained from whites is a delusion. The present period supplies ample proof of the Marxist contention that the benefits won by workers under capitalism, even privileged workers, are always under threat of erosion. In the United States, where the divisions within the working class have always worked against the blacks, as the crisis deepens it is not only illusory but dangerous to imagine that black workers will be the beneficiaries of white losses.

The Marxist attitude towards affirmative action programs bears certain analogies to our attitude towards the labor aristocracy. In the latter case we totally oppose the strategy which led to the creation of a privileged layer, but we do support the struggles which forced the imperialists to dole out even limited benefits and we oppose any reactionary attempt to remove them. The struggles and gains of the workers must be distinguished from the treacherous policies of the misleaders which distorted them.

Likewise with affirmative action and other quota arrangements directed against the interests of the working class as a whole. These programs reflect in a distorted way the achievements of the struggle of the sixties and earlier decades. It is precisely the task of communists to disentangle the material gains and aspirations of the masses from the

bourgeois politics that claim to represent them but strangle them instead. We give no support to the strategies and programs that divert the movement but only to the gains embedded within them.

The reactionary attacks against the programs, however, seek not only to reverse the gains but to destroy the masses' power that won them in the first place. We therefore fight alongside those who support the politics of affirmative action. In such a bloc we openly criticize these treacherous programs and middle-class leaderships which have helped set the black masses up for reaction. Such is the Bolshevik policy of the united front.

It is the elementary task of communists to point out that even such small gains as the few jobs and educational openings blacks have obtained will not last under capitalism. If the gains of the moment are all there is, there will never be a "second" socialist stage in the struggle nor even the retention of past gains for the layer of workers who achieved them.

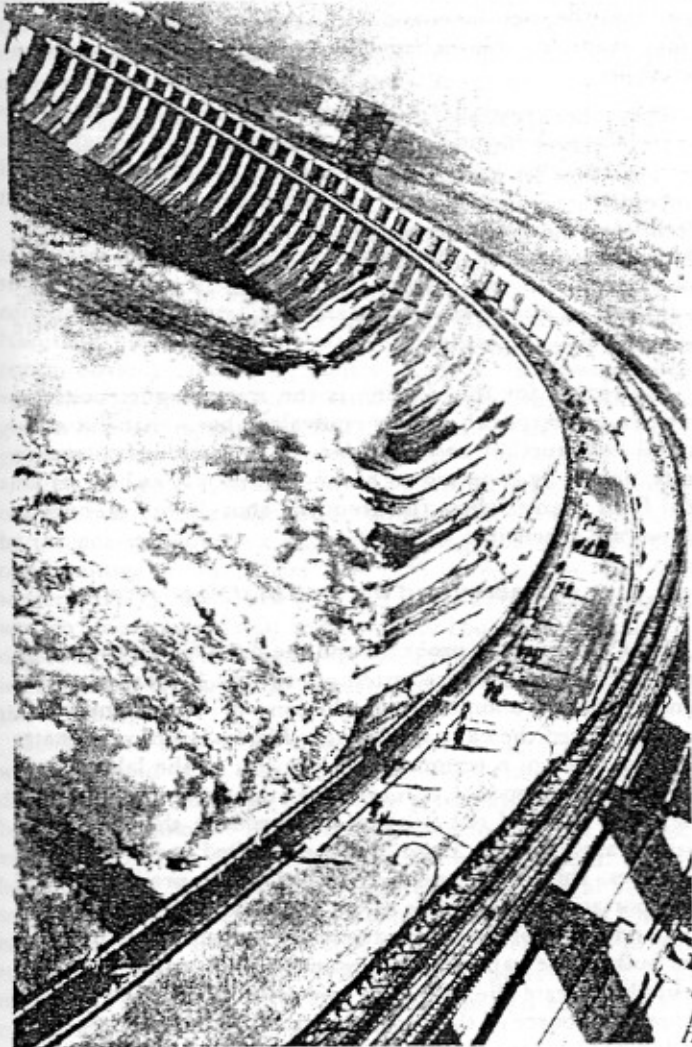
The doctrine of division is doubly pernicious in that it seeks to entrap a section of the black workers into acceptance of capitalism while the mass of less well-off workers and unemployed is set adrift. The black working class is critical in the United States. There will be no revolution without it nor even a real revolutionary party leadership. Black workers, by virtue of the lessons learned from the mass struggles of the past against oppression and their strategic position within the working class and industry, will be in the vanguard of the proletariat far out of proportion to their numbers.

The strategy of solidarity as opposed to the doomed petty-bourgeois strategy of internal fights for pieces of a diminishing pie is one that the black working class will find is in its own best interests. It is the only way to secure jobs and democracy. Given the racial history of the United States, if this is necessary for all workers it is doubly necessary for the black proletariat. The masses of white workers facing the crisis can also be won to such a program. As we have pointed out repeatedly in this magazine, the present conjuncture in which mass struggles have been temporarily impeded has accelerated the capitulation of the left. A new period of mass struggles, however, will attract far greater and less cynical forces to the banner of Marxism and will also reorient some of the ranks of the present "far left." The black masses have come too far not to wage a further struggle that will open up new vistas for the working class as a whole. ■

# Oil, Coal and the Energy Program

Jimmy Carter proclaimed his energy program to be "the moral equivalent of war" when it was introduced in Congress last spring. Indeed, nuclear hard-liner James Schlesinger of Defense Department fame was placed in command to add to the sense of crisis. Meanwhile, class war has been raging in the Eastern coal mining regions. But Congress has refused to accept Carter's urgent call to arms. The energy bill was passed early by the House of Representatives and later by the Senate in much-altered form, but it has since languished in a conference committee while the various factions of the bourgeoisie squabble over its provisions.

The left press has in general condemned the energy bill as a war on the standard of living of the working class and an attempt to bolster American imperialism. It is all that, but as such it would not be new or even controversial within the bourgeoisie. Making the working class pay for the capitalist economic crisis has been the continuing policy of every administration since the end of the post-war boom, and "energy independence" has been proclaimed as a goal ever since the Arab oil embargo of 1973-74.



*There is no shortage of energy resources. The problem is capitalism, which short circuits productive forces.*

What is new in Carter's program is the recognition that the eleventh hour is at hand, that the energy crisis requires active government intervention to discipline an important section of the bourgeoisie in order to rescue American (and therefore world) capitalism. For despite Nixon's Project Independence, the U.S. has *increased* its percentage of imported oil from 14 percent in 1973-74 to 38 percent in 1976 and over 40 percent in 1977. Numerous plans for shale oil and liquified fuel development have been shelved. In addition, the cold spell last winter found the bourgeoisie as woefully unprepared as in 1973 to allocate fuel on an emergency basis. What went wrong on both counts was that the oil and gas corporations, operating under the voluntary incentives for investment designed by previous administrations, were incapable of putting the bourgeoisie's long-term interests ahead of the profit-making possibilities inherent in the rapid fuel price rises.

That is why Carter calls his program the equivalent of war. He is ineptly trying to create a national sense of emergency as well as a patriotic mood of sacrifice. As in wartime, the leadership of the bourgeois class will be trying to appeal to higher "social" (meaning capitalist) interests to enforce the centralization of economic power that the bourgeoisie needs for its own survival. It will mean a stepped-up encroachment on the workers' living standards (which have already suffered from attacks such as skyrocketing gasoline and heating costs since 1973), but Carter nevertheless has hoped to win mass support for his program because it does have the appearance of attacking the oil capitalists. The danger posed against the working class will be all the greater if it does not recognize that its interests are served by no part of the Carter program.

To understand the Carter program, it must be recognized that there was no actual shortage of natural gas last winter, nor was there any immediate shortage of oil in 1973-74. But there was and is a shortage of capital, the capital the oil industry needs to guarantee continued production of oil and gas and the development of new sources of fuel that will maintain the profitability of their existing capital investment. Present supplies will eventually run out (even if not as soon as the ten years that some industry spokesmen claim) so new sources and synthetics have to be developed. It was estimated in 1974 that the oil industry needed \$500 billion in capital investment over fifteen years to explore for new sources of oil, build synthetic oil and coal gasification and liquefaction plants and expand existing pipeline and refining capacity. Since the energy industry at that time generated only \$16 billion per year for investment, the gap would have to be made up from other sources of profits. (By comparison, capital investment for all industries and services except oil is about \$42 billion per year in the U.S.)

The multi-fold oil price increases which accompanied the Arab oil embargo four years ago have not solved the problem. Although oil company revenues increased as a result (chiefly because of their profits on domestic oil, where the companies do not have to pay royalties), much of the additional money collected by the oil industry has to be shared with the governments and capitalists of other oil-producing countries. Such funds are not available for the rational, centralized investment in new technology by the United States that Carter and Schlesinger believe to be necessary.

It is no wonder that Carter built his energy program around the desperate need to raise new capital for investment. The

centerpiece of his program is the increased tax on oil at the wellhead, which is now expected to take in \$12 billion per year. This sum was at first promised to be returned to consumers in the form of income tax rebates, but energy czar Schlesinger later suggested that the rebates might be very limited. (It is hard to believe that Carter's consumerist promise was anything but sugar-coating.) These billions will constitute a pool of surplus-value centralized in U.S. government hands, and Carter's apparent intention is to use this money to promote and direct capital investment by the energy industry.

In fact, the Senate version of the energy bill includes a provision for an "energy development fund" and an additional fund "to encourage efficient development," according to the *New York Times* of November 1, 1977. The *Times* report continued, "The concept ... is similar to an energy corporation suggested several years ago by Nelson A. Rockefeller. The fund is expected to make loans and direct grants to develop new technologies. The fund was added with the understanding that it would serve as the repository for revenues from the President's proposed tax on domestic oil, which was adopted by the House."

The wellhead tax is not the only source of new capital planned in Carter's bill. Raising the price of oil, coal and natural gas will make the development of *new* sources of fuel profitable. This is what Carter had in mind when he said in his energy message to Congress: "One of the principles of our energy policy is that the price of energy should reflect its true replacement cost, as a means of bringing supply and demand into balance over the long run. Now realistic pricing is especially important for our scarcest fuels, oil and natural gas."

The "true replacement cost" is the production cost of oil and gas from new sources. Under Carter's proposed taxes, industry will not have to fear competition from cheaper existing sources of fuel when it develops offshore oil or synthetic fuel at high cost and high prices. A *Fortune* magazine editorial (May 1977) put it this way:

**"A great deal of the investment in new forms and sources of energy will have to come from the U.S. government. With capital requirements so huge and payoffs so remote and so uncertain, the job cannot be left up to the free market. For one thing, it will be necessary to build some plants that are not now economically feasible, meaning that the product will cost more to produce than it can be sold for. Clearly, private business cannot afford to put up such plants on a significant scale. But the nation can."**

The bourgeois government will attempt to discipline the oil capitalists less by cracking the whip than by making it more profitable for them to operate along the desired lines.

### The Shift to Coal

Also critical to the Carter energy program is the increased usage of coal. Carter's plans would increase the share of coal in energy usage in the U.S. from the current 18 percent to 29 percent, up to a projected 1.1 billion tons of coal in 1985. This increase is designed to cut the U.S.'s dependence on foreign oil. There is actually little evidence that such a projection can be fulfilled, or even that the oil companies, which now control 20 percent of the coal mined and eight of the sixteen largest coal companies, would welcome such a shift to coal. Never-

theless Carter's proposal confirms our present analysis of the energy crisis.

During the 1973-74 oil crisis, the price of coal rose rapidly to reach a par with oil on a cost-per-energy-provided basis. That is, the value of coal rose to equal the cost of reproduction (replacement cost) of the use-value of the commodity, just as the vast increase in the oil price brought it to the level needed to make the production of new, less efficient sources of oil profitable. The role of the oil companies as coal owners undoubtedly facilitated this rise, which happened even though there is no immediate capital shortage in the production of coal.

Coal company profits are directed not so much at the opening of new mines as they are at developing new ways to substitute coal for oil and petrochemical feedstocks, projects which do require new quantities of capital for both research and operation. For example, a switch from oil to coal by utilities and manufacturing companies, as called for by the Carter program, will require investment in pollution-controlling stack scrubbers. As *Business Week* (November 28, 1977) complained, "Most companies, hard-pressed for capital, would rather put the sizeable investment for a scrubber into manufacturing facilities instead." An alternative to scrubbers is the development of high-energy low-sulfur liquid fuel from coal. Such research is apparently being worked on, primarily by the oil-owned coal companies who are looking for ways to maintain the usefulness and profitability of their oil facilities (for example, petrochemical production in petroleum refineries).

The other possible alternative to increased coal use is nuclear power for generating electricity. The 63 nuclear reactors now in use provided 11 percent of the electricity currently generated in the U.S. But there has been a great decline in the construction of reactors: in 1976 there were three new orders; in 1977 there were four, of which only two were definite — compared to an average of 30 reactors per year in the earlier 1970's. As well, numerous plants which were on order were cancelled.

The reason for this decline is the much higher costs for nuclear power on an energy-equivalent basis than for coal. Initial construction costs are far higher, and maintenance costs, originally expected to be lower, are just as high as for coal-fired plants when the frequent shut-downs of nuclear plants are taken into account.

### Energy and the Law of Value

The Carter energy program and the drive for higher energy prices are the capitalists' attempts to find a solution to the fundamental economic contradictions of capitalism which have produced the capital shortage. Marx's law of value states that the value of a commodity is the cost of the labor power necessary to reproduce its use-value; this value includes both the living labor of the workers who produce the commodity directly as well as the "dead labor" embodied in the machines, pipelines, ships, etc. which are used in its production and transportation. In the case of oil and natural gas (even more so than in most of modern industry), the dead labor comprises the bulk of the capitalists' investment since very few workers actually operate the refineries and wells. And since surplus-value (the source of the profits accruing to the bourgeoisie) is added only by the living labor involved in production, the large amount of surplus-value produced by the vast work force

of modern industry is still small in comparison to the total amount of capital invested.

This relatively low amount of surplus-value is perceived by the capitalists as low rate of profit on their invested capital; it is an expression of the major Marxist law of capitalism underlying the crisis of the epoch of capitalist decay, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. It is this tendency which the energy capitalists confront as a shortage of the capital necessary to preserve and increase their investments, for that is the essential function of capitalist profits. And thus the falling tendency of the rate of profit brings about the periodic crises of capitalism.

In order to overcome the crisis and the relative capital shortage, capitalists have historically been forced to concentrate and centralize — the oil industry is an outstanding example. But even these tendencies run up against the overall insufficiency of surplus-value. Thus in the epoch of decay production is able to expand only in those sectors of capitalism which are able to appropriate surplus-value disproportionately, at the expense of other sectors. This is the meaning of the epoch of imperialism and monopoly. The mechanisms for doing this have become familiar: monopoly pricing and the manipulations surrounding the oil embargo and the natural gas crisis. The dislocations that these crises broadcast throughout the world economy reflect the Marxist proposition that capitalism in this epoch has become a fetter on the development of the forces of production. One sector can grow only at the expense of others; in the case of the energy crises, this meant capital in auto, steel and food production, as well as the standard of living of the masses. The chief victims have been the workers and peasants of the industrially backward, non-oil producing countries.

Carter's program, therefore, can be regarded as an attempt to enforce the law of value against the working class and sections of the bourgeoisie, in what the Administration considers to be the best interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole. Naturally, not all of the bourgeoisie is happy with this attempt, obviously including some oil industry spokesmen who would rather have direct control of surplus-value with less government intervention. But it remains the case that government domination is necessary, not only because of the amount of capital required, as the *Fortune* editorial pointed out, but also because the dislocations in the economy caused by the energy industry's taking advantage of unpredictable opportunities to raise prices (the 1973 oil embargo, the cold winter of 1977) have to be avoided in the future. Schlesinger went so far as to warn that another crisis could bring about "a degree of political and social unrest of the kind we did not see in the 1930's" (*New York Times*, October 6, 1977; syntax in the original).

Schlesinger is worried that any further undercutting of wages without the trade unions having been previously defeated could result in a working class explosion. The oil bourgeoisie cannot be allowed to look out for its own interests at the possible cost of the survival of the entire system. So the bourgeois state must intervene and play the central role in solving the crisis of capitalism by concentrating capital for the energy sector — this major role is itself a reflection of the tendency towards statification of economic power which is as much an expression of the law of value in this epoch as the crisis itself.

The success of Carter's plan, should it be accepted by Congress, depends on whether the working class is willing to accept the additional sacrifices called for. The AFL-CIO

officialdom has raised reservations about the program's threat to workers' living standards and has criticized the energy conservation measures that Carter proposed (limited and feeble as these are), arguing that they would increase unemployment in auto and related industries. But the bureaucracy accepts the energy program as a whole. Every wing of the labor bureaucracy is so tied to the restrictions that modern capitalism places on the productive potential of society that putting forward a socialist vision and program is simply unheard of.

## The Coal Strike

The class struggle has come to the surface in the energy field despite the wishes of the trade union leaders. The coal strike by the United Mine Workers this winter has tremendous implications for Carter's entire energy program. The projected expansion of coal production means that the bourgeoisie requires orderly labor relations in the coal fields. It cannot afford to become dependent on coal and have to deal with a workforce whose several hundred thousand members account for a quarter of all industrial disputes in the U.S. and tie up wide sections of the economy in doing so.

According to Carter's program, the mining workforce of 200,000 today will grow to a possible high of 485,000. Right now, 40 percent of the miners are less than 30 years old and many are veterans of Vietnam. Their militancy, coupled with the traditional labor solidarity in the mines, is a challenge to the bourgeoisie's dream of labor peace. Thus the mine owners' goal is to weaken the union as a whole and prevent the rank and file militancy from affecting industrial stability by shackling the miners with a no-strike contract, stopping them from spreading their grievances into strikes that frequently shut down large sections of Appalachian coal mining.

The UMW has been weakened already (it now produces only 50 percent of American coal, compared to 75 percent in 1967) through two factors: the growth of high-productivity and high-wage strip mining, especially in Western states, and a notorious weakness in organizing non-union mines, both strip and underground. Unionization and its benefits have a great effect on company profits. Because of both wildcat strikes and union-enforced safety rules (which require numerous extra personnel to oversee, frequently slow down production and can even stop production when violations occur), the labor productivity of unionized mines can be less than one quarter of non-union underground mines and as little as one-fifteenth of non-union Western strip mines. It is clear why the mine owners would like either to crush the union as a fighting force or else further strengthen the bureaucracy's efforts to discipline the militant rank and filers.

Balancing the forces that weaken the union are two other factors: one, the solidarity among miners, which frequently means that non-union mines in union territory will either not even attempt to operate during a strike or will be effectively shut down by union pickets and other activities if they do; two, the economic difficulties of shipping coal from Montana and Wyoming to the industrial East and Midwest. Railroad cars and trackage are insufficient for the task of supplying the eastern half of the country with Western coal. In addition, Western coal is unsuitable for burning by urban utilities because of its sulfur content and is unusable for steel-making.

These factors, added to the duration of the strike, which has begun to overcome the large stockpiles held by the utility companies and other coal users, have strengthened the strikers' bargaining position. Bourgeois spokesmen, once supremely confident of the outcome of the strike, are now expressing their concern about its detrimental effect on the profitability of other sectors of the economy. As of this writing, some utility company officers have asked Carter to intervene in coal negotiations.

### A Socialist Program

The miners' militancy has already succeeded in overcoming an intended sell-out by the Arnold Miller leadership of the right to strike demand (one of the two major issues in the current strike, along with the restoration of health benefits cut during a previous strike). But militancy is not enough. The mineworkers need to have a political solution of their own (more precisely, for the working class as a whole) to counter the Carter Administration's attempt to organize the capitalist class's response to the energy crisis. More than other sections of the American working class, the miners have recognized the political nature of their struggle against the coal bosses. In recent years they have marched on Washington with their demands, sat in at the West Virginia state capitol and won significant health and safety gains. Nevertheless, more is required and even these gains will be swept away in the coming whirlwind unless they are rooted in firmer soil.

The end of the post-war capitalist boom, the threat of a new depression, and the potential impact of the energy shortages all mean that the bourgeois attack on the miners and other workers directly in the path of the energy crisis will escalate. The attack is political, international in scope, and cannot be met at the level of collective bargaining (much less in single industries). It is crucial that the trade-union militancy of the coal miners find its expression in the political arena. An appeal to the bourgeois Democratic and Republican parties is out of the question because of their intrinsic dependence on the capitalist class. Nor is a labor party based upon the present-day labor leadership worthwhile, despite the enthusiasm of some sections of the left for just such an alternative. As proven by the craven record of every layer of the trade union bureaucracy today, such a party would position itself within the narrow reformist bounds that capitalism in crisis can afford to permit. It takes a revolutionary working class party to fight for a socialist state and a program that is not dependent on concentrating more surplus-value in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Such a program would include the nationalization of the mines and all energy operations under the workers' control and union safety committees to ensure safe production (and with the right to shut down unsafe operations). In another direction, it would insist on the channeling of investment and research into reusable and safer forms of energy such as nuclear fusion and solar energy, independent of whether the existing energy facilities would be rendered obsolete. This problem, it is worth noting, is a specifically capitalist one. A socialist society would be able to develop clean sources of en-

ergy without bringing about economic chaos. If fusion became technologically feasible, the oil industry could either be shut down or kept alive in part in order to produce those petroleum products which would still be necessary, such as certain chemicals, medicines and drugs. The socialist criterion would be usefulness, not profitability.

Therefore nationalization of the coal and energy industries is only a beginning, for it is the overall allocation of capital resources among different industries that has to be centralized. State control of banking and credit is essential, and this could only operate through centralized economic planning. Furthermore, workers' control is insufficient if it means simply local control by the workers of their own workplaces. Serious safety codes, for example, are ultimately dependent not upon local conditions but upon the allocation of resources nationally and internationally. This working class control must fundamentally be centralized as well; it means political control over state power. That is, control must be held by the workers' state, the dictatorship of our class, the proletariat.

This is not an abstract question. Serious spokesmen for the bourgeoisie (Henry Ford, Robert Roosa) have called for serious planning by the bourgeois state. In addition, such "radical" labor statesmen as George Meany have called for nationalization of oil. On the other hand, demands from leftists and liberals that oil monopolies be broken up are utopian fantasies; the bourgeois spokesmen are correct when they point out that only "the nation" can amass the capital necessary for investment in energy. For them of course "the nation" means the bourgeois government acting in the broad interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole.

Even though the bourgeoisie and its minions in the labor bureaucracy are forced by the crisis to play with the notions of nationalization and government allocations of surplus-value, these are supremely dangerous steps to take in the face of an undefeated working class. Therefore in the present situation Carter has preferred a plan which attempts to centralize capital more through the carrot than the stick. When the bourgeoisie is forced to accept such steps toward nationalization as "workers participation" schemes and even "workers control" of particular industries, it does so under the pressure of the workers and the threat of collapse — and usually under the facade of a "socialist" or reformist labor government.

Such measures by the bourgeoisie, however similar they may be to the actions characteristic of a proletarian state, are not in themselves instruments of the working class so long as the bourgeoisie controls state power. They reflect the socializing tendencies inherent in capitalist decay. The capitalist class will nationalize industry only for its own purposes: not just to centralize capital and preserve obsolete investments, but also to protect its own power to control production against an aroused militant work force — as in the mines. Only under the rule of the working class will nationalization of industry fulfill the aspirations that the working class places in this demand (which has been a tradition in the United Mine Workers, for example, for half a century). It is the socialist program, linked to the militant struggle exemplified by the UMW miners, that will provide the real solution to the energy crisis. ■



# The Labor Party in the United States

The following article is excerpted from the document "The League in Crisis: Behind the Labor Party Slogan" by Sy Landy and Walter Dahl. This document was issued in November 1975 during a faction fight inside the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), in response to the majority's point of view as expressed by Jack Gregory in "The Marxist Approach to the Labor Party and the General Strike." "League" in the article refers to the RSL. The faction fight resulted in the expulsion of the Revolutionary Party Tendency which then became the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP); for a full discussion of the dispute, see *Socialist Voice* No. 1.

The RSL leadership's response to this document was to forbid its circulation among the membership, ban any further documents from the minority tendency and then ban the minority itself. The RSL has publicly denied the existence of this document and of course has never replied to it. The document was issued in a limited mimeographed edition at the inception of the LRP. We are giving it a broader circulation now because of the significance of the ideas it presents. In this issue we are publishing (in edited form) the sections of the document on the question of a labor party in the United States; other sections dealing with the importance of the general strike slogan (which we have written about elsewhere) are omitted here.

What passes for Trotskyism today is in a sorry state. It is typified by a fetishistic preservation of Trotsky's words combined with a studious rejection of their revolutionary content. Nowhere is this more true than with the labor party question. The slogan once used by Trotsky in a revolutionary fashion is today used openly to promote reformist politics. The RSL was not alone in this — virtually the entire pseudo-Trotskyist milieu has essential agreement. After the historic struggles of Bolshevism against Menshevism it is hard to believe that a reformist party would be considered a necessary and desirable stepping-stone to socialism by self-professed Bolsheviks, but that is indeed the case today.

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The advocacy of a labor party has become a hallmark of American "Trotskyism" since the Socialist Workers Party adopted the slogan at Trotsky's urging in 1938. Yet the slogan and its continuing applicability have been subject to little reexamination. Since 1938, through the Second World War, the post-war strike wave, the post-war boom, and now the onset of a new depression — that is, through vastly changing circumstances — there has been only a sporadic discussion among those who claim adherence to Trotskyism. The discussion has been sparse not only among the false claimants to the mantle of the Fourth International but among the genuine revolutionists as well.

The League, from its inception until just yesterday, never subjected the labor party slogan to serious examination. We

accepted it as we accepted other concepts because they were part of the heritage of Trotskyism as we understood it. Until well after our last convention, all members of the Political Committee as well as some other leaders of the organization expressed reservations about the slogan. The resolution of views on the subject is very recent, and now the question has become polarized.

The question is critical for the League. The Central Committee resolution of October states that "a continued emphasis on the Labor Party slogan is central." A Detroit auto bulletin calls it the trade unions' "foremost political task now." *The Torch*, the industrial bulletins and verbal presentations now far more than in the past make a big push for the labor party. In a Detroit Postal Action Bulletin (November 1975) the two demands on the union officials are: 1) Full employment at living wages — JOBS FOR ALL! and 2) Build a political party representing the needs and interests of the working class — FOR A LABOR PARTY!

The Revolutionary Party Caucus holds that the labor party slogan has been used in a mistaken fashion from the League's beginning. It is an even more dangerous mistake to use it now as the hub of our work. The slogan for the revolutionary party has to be central and foremost. This question is critical for the League and the maintenance of its revolutionary politics.

The labor party position in the past was used in a frequently changing manner and never as centrally as now. As we cast off other vestiges of Shachtmanism-Pabloism we could have coped with this one. Now, however, the new-found urgency to beat the drums for the labor party slogan occurs as part of a general right turn (under cover of the necessary deepening of our practical work). It comes as part of a theoretical capitulation to defeatism and fatalism.

The labor party slogan — the labor party struggle — is under other circumstances and in other times necessary and correct. At this point it means not the advance of the struggle for the revolutionary party but its sidetracking, its postponement to a dimly seen future day. The labor party position and the right turn represent an acceptance of and adaptation to the present level of consciousness of the class, and acceptance of its frustration, its fears, its cynical rejection of "far out" alternatives. Acceptance of "what is" instead of fighting it will over time make us part of the problem and not part of the solution. That is the danger.

The Central Committee Resolution adopted by the League in opposition to the Landy amendments introduces a strong element of fatalism and defeatism into League politics:

*"There will be a rise in the class struggle, greatest in the countries most affected by the crisis. At the same time, the struggles will not be united. Although the struggle in the semi- and underdeveloped countries will be 'joined' by workers in the more healthy, advanced countries, this will not be impressed on the consciousness of the overwhelming majority of the workers. The struggle will retain its fragmented unconscious level."* (emphasis added).

The Resolution further insists that "The class struggle will increase, although mostly on a trade union and democratic basis; the lull will come to an end but not yet break into a 1933-1934-type mass upsurge." Another example: "Thus, while we do not expect a massive outbreak of the class struggle in the U. S. or on a world scale, we do not expect the relative peace of the past period to continue to the same degree. Rather we see a rising curve of struggle largely limited to trade union and democratic struggles."

There is an underlying consistency between the view that the next interval of struggle will be on a democratic and trade union basis and the advocacy of a labor party. The Central Committee Resolution accurately reflects this link when it states: "...our call for a labor party is based on a general assessment that at least at this point the road leading the working class to a revolutionary party will go through if not an actual labor party then at least a mass movement fighting for such a party within the labor movement."

It further states that "We would struggle jointly with non-revolutionary workers, even with left-wing bureaucrats, to actually try to build a movement to have the labor movement form an independent political party." Naturally the masses will have to go through the stage of a struggle for a labor party, a party of the trade unions, since this too reflects the projected "fact" that their struggles will attain no more than a democratic and trade unionist content. We can, of course, try to put our content into the struggle, but we have to accept the framework of the labor party since the content the masses will put in will be reformist — democratic and unionist. So goes the logic of the argument.

The labor party slogan is featured in the Resolution and has become increasingly central in our work. The acceptance of the labor party instead of the revolutionary party as the major party slogan reflects the acceptance of the limits to the struggle indicated by the Resolution in general. Let us examine this fatalistic limitation more closely.

The Resolution attributes the restriction of the future struggle to democratic and trade unionist demands to the general economic situation alone. The critical factor, however, is the power of the union bureaucracy and the relationship of forces within the proletariat. The leadership question is not only the chronic and central question of the epoch but it is acutely important in this conjuncture. The Landy amendments rejected *in toto* by the current majority stood on this alternative understanding of reality. The democratic and unionist outlook of the masses stems fundamentally from its cynical acceptance of the reformist leadership.

Tailing the consciousness of the masses means in reality tailing the consciousness and actions of the bureaucracy. The "realistic" statement of "what is going to be" and the adaptation of our struggle to that "reality" (actually the limits foisted upon the class by our enemies), instead of posing the question of how we *overcome* that "reality," is a continuation of the objectivism and outsiders' view which marred our past politics.

From the very origins of the League we stated our understanding that "critical support" was a version of the united front tactic. We understood that it meant entering into a relationship with a movement we marched with while counterposing to its program and seeking to expose its leadership. We, as opposed to the Spartacists, had no sectarian aversion to wielding the weapon of critical support for Arnold Miller and the Miners For Democracy; we gave no carte blanche to the left bureaucracy. We outlined the shape

of the Miller-Rauh leftist current as we saw its development. We thought it was very possible, given the cynical attachment of the working class to the bureaucrats or aspiring bureaucrats as the "realistic" alternatives that the left bureaucrats would dominate the future upsurge. We thought it quite probable that we would have very small influence as compared to them. We would fight to change this probable development through critical support, among other tactics. However, we would give no blanket critical support; we made it clear that we would not accept their supremacy without a fight. We would not conform to any stage, period, or conjuncture of left bureaucratic hegemony in advance. We stood for the revolutionary alternative. We would not tail. In words now sneered at in the RSL, we "planted the pole," we "unfurled the banner."

The current majority leadership of the RSL accepts the politics of the left bureaucrats — democratic and trade unionist demands — as hegemonic for the next stage. If this course is kept to it can lead only to capitulation. The form of such a capitulation is not yet determined. It might lead to paving the way for the accession to power of the left bureaucrats. Our work, propaganda and agitation could help pave a boulevard to power for them should the masses begin to push underneath them. However, there is no guarantee in this epoch that reformists feel free enough to carry out their own program or part of it. The alternative course to capitulation is for the RSL to pave a road for itself as a substitute for the reformists.

The central duty of revolutionists at the moment is to fight both variants of capitulation in the League. A key struggle in this regard is the fight against the omnipresent labor party slogan.

## Consciousness and Reality

When the comrades who authored the Resolution discuss the conjuncture they cite objective conditions. However it is the subjective consciousness of the workers, the stated "democratic and trade union" consciousness, which typifies a limited and discrete stage that cannot be bypassed or above all fused with the stage afterward. According to the Resolution, objective conditions set the stage for the subjective consciousness that the League must relate to in order to end being "outsiders" from the labor movement. The acceptance of a discrete democratic and trade unionist stage is fatalist and defeatist. It posits a reformist stage, if we are to call things by their right name. Trotsky made the necessary point about Stalin's version of stagism:

"...Comrade Stalin advanced his theory of stages that cannot be skipped over. By the word 'stage' in this case, must not be understood the political level of the masses which varies with different strata, but of the conservative leaders who reflect the pressure of the bourgeoisie on the proletariat and conduct an irreconcilable struggle against the advanced sections of the proletariat." (*Leon Trotsky on Britain*, p. 267)

Trotsky points out that the level of political consciousness is not the factor which marks off stages of development. Levels of consciousness ("democratic and trade-unionist" for one) vary between layers of the class. To accept the level of consciousness of the relatively backward as the level of the stage is to tail the misleaderships who reflect bourgeois understanding. To accept this understanding of the conjuncture is to misunderstand the conjuncture. The backward do not



understand the objective conditions or tasks because the bureaucracy "understands" neither the objective conditions nor the tasks imposed on the proletariat. It is not simply a misunderstanding but a bourgeois, albeit reformist, understanding.

When the comrades accept the limits of consciousness as being democratic and trade unionist for the entire conjuncture, they accept a limit to the possible tasks and results of the stage as well. Thus we have seen the fatalist statements already cited: "we see a rising curve of struggle largely limited to trade union and democratic struggles"; "the struggle will retain its fragmented unconscious level."



1959 Labour Party poster showing reformist leaders whose party helped preserve their "betters." Pseudo-revolutionaries call for similar labor party in the U.S.

Comrades claim that this cynicism is a scientific assessment of "reality." But this is not reality. It is simply the way that the bureaucracy of the labor movement conducts the struggle. It is designed to foster this level of consciousness and impose it upon the class. It is not "reality" but what the Marxists have in the past labelled as "realpolitik."

Why is it necessary to accept that the conjuncture will not end in a reversal of this defeatism? The defeat which propelled the present pro-bourgeois forces into leadership occurred long ago. As a result of this, the backward consciousness which comrades tail predominates at the moment and is used to block all potentially revolutionary upsets of the current balance of forces. But the working class, *this* working class, has not suffered massive defeats; to be precise, it has had some defeats but it is not defeated. If the working class had been

smashed and its institutions crushed, then it would be both possible and necessary to say: from the vantage point of the revolutionary proletariat so much is possible and little more. But even then the tasks of revolutionaries would be to overcome the consequences of defeat, not just to accept them as limits to work within for the immediate stage.

The backward workers see themselves as powerless and disunited. They are frightened of worse conditions to come. They feel themselves to be prisoners of forces beyond their control. They are cynical and see no alternatives to the present class leadership which looks like another uncontrollable "reality." They are also cynical about the state, the electoral system, the President and the Congress. They see enemies on all sides, foreigners, blacks, other ethnic groups. Little better is possible, they feel.

This outlook also permeates the more advanced layers, the ones who do have more belief in the possibility of social change through struggle. The more advanced layers are subjected to their own forms of cynicism in addition to those directly percolating up from the more backward workers. First, they are cynical about the capabilities of the mass of workers — whether they can go beyond democratic and trade union demands or fight for even these. Second, they are aware of the defeats the working class has suffered internationally — Chile, Bolivia, etc. Through this stratum the backward attitudes which in the last analysis are transmitted into the proletariat via the bureaucrats and their allies are being infused into the League.

The mass of the working class believes itself to be weak and powerless. This is precisely backward consciousness, untrue and at variance with the objective conditions and the objectively necessary tasks of the proletariat. The gap between objective reality and subjective illusions is enormous. The trade union movement in the United States is more strongly organized and more powerful than any other in the world. The American working class is highly organized by a highly organized economy and integrated production methods. The historic volatility and combativity of the working class in the United States is still a cultural factor of no small proportion. The strategic concentration and lessons learned by a potent black proletariat are a vital asset. Even the familiarity with weaponry is far advanced as compared to many other national proletariats.

In this specific conjuncture the economy is in serious trouble, an aspect of the chronic crisis besetting capitalism at this time and in this epoch. Cities and banks perch at the edge of default. The bourgeoisie is also going through its own serious crisis of leadership. The bourgeoisie itself is beginning to deepen its internal polarizations. The Presidency is still enormously weak; Congress has not gained authority; the "system" is still viewed cynically. The new mercenary army is untested, racially torn, suffering from disciplinary problems. The American bourgeoisie is not in imminent danger of falling apart. But its problems are severe and the lines of tension and division are apparent. The crises of Vietnam and Watergate still haunt the ruling class.

The fundamental material basis for reformism and for disunity in the working class is eroding as American capitalism moves to strip away the gains of the working class. The miseries imposed by the bourgeoisie are precisely what advanced consciousness would not accept and would fight. Yet the backward consciousness lingers on in the class even though its material base, sown in the past, erodes.

Advanced workers are "advanced" in the Marxist sense to

the degree that they understand the objective conditions, the needs and the consequent tasks of the proletariat. Marxism both stems from the objective conditions and at the same time reflects them; it is conscious of them and reacts upon them. Marxism represents the most advanced consciousness of the proletariat. Backward consciousness is consciousness which reflects a pro-bourgeois understanding of objective conditions and tasks.

The backward workers are caught in the contradiction between their consciousness and their material condition as workers. They are caught between the subjective illusion of weakness and the objective reality of strength. Consequently the masses in struggle, and especially the oppressed sectors of the working class, may have one conception of the world (it is frequently torn with contradictions) but in practice find themselves doing something else. They find themselves acting in a more profoundly radical way. This is because of the impact of the real material interest of workers which can only be learned in struggle, in practice.

Take the example of the ghetto riots of the 1960's. At the same time that they were rising up in city after city, blacks also registered in record numbers in the Democratic Party. Burning cities and rebelling is not yet communist consciousness, but it is a dynamic step beyond the consciousness indicated by the black workers in the polling booths. The depth of the hostility demonstrated in practice reflected the dawning recognition that the material interests of the oppressed workers lie in the rejection, the destruction of capitalism — not in its democratic reform.

The rioting black workers were demanding an alternative to the failures of the civil rights leadership, the black power and nationalist leadership, the trade union and liberal Democratic leaderships. It was at varying levels of consciousness — but the mass struggle was demanding a new leadership and program and at the same time trying to force one into existence.

In France in 1968, the most massive general strike on record took place, during a conjuncture which seemed relatively slow-moving. The balance of forces was not favorable; the CP and SP led the working class and pursued a collaborationist strategy; revolution and even mass action appeared to be unlikely events. Nevertheless, the unprepared (and therefore seriously hampered) general strike rocked France and its solidly entrenched Gaullist regime and army. A month before, the French workers would have thought the prediction of a general strike to be wild. But in practice the workers built a truly massive attack on the seemingly stable regime.

The failure of the CP and SP to lead — indeed, their role as betrayers was proven. The centrist "Trotskyist" groups failed to provide an alternative strategy. Not one of the three major "Trotskyist" groups fought for a real political alternative to the Fifth Republic. They allowed the strike to remain substantially economic and defensive rather than seeking to press it in the necessary political and revolutionary direction. None of them opposed such a direction in the future — but they did not see it feasible at that stage. Basically their argument was not different from Gregory's: "The workers' consciousness is over-all too retarded. The correct revolutionary leadership and understanding of conditions does not exist."

Material causes, the fundamental objective questions, are what compel the workers to move. The gap between the objective reality and consciousness is now enormous. The fundamental reality is not expressed by backward consciousness or democratic and trade unionist consciousness, but is expressed by the program of the Fourth International. Revolutionaries must demonstrate that the masses are capable

of transcending their own consciousness of the moment. The power of the working class in the ghetto riots and especially the massive French events is proof of the need for our program. Revolutionaries use democratic and unionist demands, openly stating that they are subordinated to the revolutionary program. We emphasize that such demands cannot deal with the objective situation. The leaderships that foist such a limited program on the masses must be fought.

Revolutionaries base themselves on the material conditions, including the objective power of the working class. They ceaselessly fight and expose the misleaderships whose role it is to blind the class from awareness of its historic tasks. The RSL in contrast now accepts the predominant belief among the advanced workers today that the class as a whole is weak. As we have stated, the backward workers' belief that the working class is powerless has percolated into the advanced layer, and through this layer into the League. But the backward workers' belief is only a reflection of the bureaucracy's pro-bourgeois line — in a dialectical sense. The reformist bureaucrats, left and right, do not believe that the working class is weak. In a conservative and immediate sense the labor lieutenants of capital are actually afraid the workers might break out and smash everything in their path. A victory of the ranks would mean shunting the bureaucrats aside, in their view, in favor of chaos or the reds. It would mean, at the least, disruption of the system they urgently support.

Therefore this bureaucracy has carefully avoided giving the ranks opportunities to break out. They know how deep the anger and frustration run. They recognize the power of the class. In the spring, Woodcock, the IUD and Gotbaum were flexing a few muscles; there were rallies of modest size in Washington and New York. This kind of rally has been dropped; the breakout by the ranks at the April 26 Washington rally was the signpost. Woodcock called off his projected little demonstration in Lansing soon after. The New York situation and similar situations elsewhere force some still-limited and sporadic actions on the bureaucrats, but as soon as possible they back away rapidly. Even though the leaders were forced to make general strike threats in the New York, Gotbaum and others clearly recall the bridge tenders' strike in 1970. They saw in embryo what a general strike could do and therefore now acted as conservatively as the situation allowed them to.

The constant craven submissions that occur daily prove the bureaucracy's fear of the ranks. Although the ranks are by no means consciously revolutionary, their actions would be incredibly powerful and radical — and the leadership knows it. The ranks in turn judge the actions of the leaders, and this proves to them that the leaders are bad. But the ranks are rendered cynical and therefore accept the leadership; it exists, it is real, and there is no credible alternative. They believe the class is weak because the bureaucracy has, so far, prevented any display of strength. Thus the backward workers have drawn the conclusion that no display of strength is possible because there is no strength. The bureaucracy knows better. The workers will know better.

### The Labor Party Today

The bureaucracy, even in its brief flirtation with rallies before it burned its fingers, was careful to emphasize electoral action and not industrial or mass action. The elections and the Democratic Party are a safety valve for the anger and frustration building up in wide sections of the class. The

bureaucracy points to a Democratic victory as the answer. But they work up little enthusiasm from any significant layer of the class. The workers are cynical about more than the Democrats; their cynicism extends to the state, the President, Congress, etc. The war, the economy and Watergate have taken their toll in terms of the legitimacy of the institutions of society. The workers at the moment expect little from any politicians or from the "system."

The bureaucracy has been attempting not only to prop up the Democrats (and in some cases the Republicans) but to "restore faith in the democratic process," ... faith in the electoral and bourgeois-democratic system. To not understand this is to understand nothing. That is the meaning of the bureaucracy's political moves. They seek to prevent mass industrial action, to prop up the "democratic" state and to prop up the Democratic Party. Thus they try to prevent a workers' victory over the system the bureaucracy is wedded to.

of an independent party of the working class based upon the trade unions, a militant force created by the mass workers' movement.

In Trotsky's hands the weapon was designed to emphasize the revolutionary content and the revolutionary party. The workers, even though the strike tactic was losing its influence because of recent defeats (Little Steel, etc.), well knew the power of their own actions which had built the CIO. When the labor party was posed, it meant the same militant CIO translated onto the political scene. The workers of the late 1930's would not understand surface electoralism to be the method of a struggle indicated by the labor party slogan. It meant the joining of a militant political weapon to a militant economic understanding.

It was necessary, however, to combat the remaining beliefs that pro-bourgeois electoralism *plus* militant action had won the workers their gains (the belief in Roosevelt *and* the CIO



Leonard Woodcock, former UAW boss, with President Carter, Detroit Mayor Young and auto industry bosses. You can't tell labor reformists from capitalists without a program.

The task of revolutionaries is to lead the working class to challenge state power. We must fight any attempt to rebuild support for the state. We must demonstrate the power of the workers' alternative and combat the workers' cynicism and self-cynicism.

To this end, the labor party slogan was a central slogan in 1938 and is incorrect at this juncture. In 1938 the working class was the class that had created the CIO. It had engaged in giant battles on the industrial front against the bourgeoisie. The Lewis bureaucracy of the CIO had been pushed by the class into active economic combat. The reformist leadership betrayed the class, but it also in part reflected the militancy of the class and its struggle. It had to, in order to retain leadership.

The militant economic strike was a familiar weapon to the workers. However, the class was tied politically to Roosevelt and the Democrats through the union bureaucracy. Labor party sentiment existed, and there was some hostility to Roosevelt. But the decisive elements of the bureaucracy and the class were still attached to the New Dealers.

The working class became increasingly aware of the limitations of the strike weapon because of the historic impasse of the CIO restrained to the economic sphere. The central question was that the class move politically to challenge the state and break with all bourgeois forces. The labor party tactic was crucial: it put pressure on the bureaucracy (which enjoyed respect in the ranks) to break from Roosevelt and the Democrats (who also enjoyed respect). It posed the question

struggles). That is one reason why Trotsky insisted on the revolutionary content in the slogan. He insisted, for example, on associating the workers' militia slogan with the labor party slogan directly.

"The crisis, the sharpening of class relations, the creation of a workers' party, a labor party, signifies immediately, immediately, a terrible sharpening of forces. The reaction will be immediately a fascist movement. That is why we must now connect the idea of the labor party with the consequences — otherwise we will appear only as pacifists with democratic illusions."

(Trotsky on the Labor Party, p. 10)

Today the situation is quite different. In the conjuncture the unions have not exhausted the strike weapon; it hasn't been used. The workers are not educated by their life experience and struggle to know their own mass power through participating in their own economic actions. In contrast to the militants of the thirties, they see themselves as weak and impotent. On the other hand, they have far less confidence in the electoral system, the state and the Democrats. For them, the labor party slogan would not connote placing their militant fighting trade unions into politics — because the unions are not militant and fighting. This is why the labor party slogan can have only an electoralist content today. That is why training workers eyes on the electoral system does what the bureaucracy wants to do, avoid a head-on confrontation.

Throughout Lenin's attack in "Left-Wing" Communism — An Infantile Disorder on the sectarians who reject using

parliament and elections, he makes an additional point. The campaigns for and about parliament must emphasize the anti-parliamentary and anti-electoral politics leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In his critical support of the British Labour Party, Lenin stressed revolution, soviets and the proletarian dictatorship. He urged that these ideas be posed continually and in a popular manner.

Comrade Gregory's document and the Resolution give no such content to the labor party slogan. Where is the notion that the labor party cannot carry out our program, the program formally attached to the call for the party, by electoral means? Not only does the slogan conform to the bureaucracy's electoralist path, the League also does not use the slogan in such a way as to guard against the danger. We give no warnings. Our literature never counters electoral illusions which must accompany the term "labor party." And that is because the majority is presenting the labor party slogan not in the algebraic way that can be used to communicate in practice the need for the revolutionary party, but as part of a discrete stage: a reformist stage for this conjuncture because the challenge to state power is not possible at present. When algebra becomes arithmetic, this is the only result.

Gregory took Landy to task for posing revolution in his "General Strike for a Workers' Government" slogan. For Gregory, that meant revolution now, an impossibility in this conjuncture. (We have already proved that the slogan contains no call for insurrection now even though we insist that it does pose the connection between the strike and the need to take power.) To the political general strike, Gregory counterposes the labor party. For Trotsky, the call for a labor party was associated with a congress of labor to launch it and a workers' government as its goal. This set of slogans poses algebraically the soviets, the revolutionary party, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Revolutionary Marxists must fight for this meaning. If Comrade Gregory were to do that, he would be issuing a call for confrontation which, like the political general strike, would mean disaster for the class — in his opinion.

Gregory does not fight for the revolutionary meaning of his labor party slogan. He is consistent; his methods of reducing algebraic demands to minimal demands means that he divorces revolutionary implications from them. His labor party slogan is not used as a way of proving in struggle the need for a revolutionary party. Instead, his slogan addresses the advanced workers who want a revolutionary party and tells them to accept the consciousness of militants who feel that the stage is set only for a party with reformist content. "Revolutionary program" becomes a cover for a reformist call. The next stage will be the revolutionary stage, the socialist stage. We have heard that one before.

For us the revolutionary party must be the central slogan. This slogan always is central on the strategic level. Now it is central on both the strategic and the immediate tactical level. We are a propaganda organization which uses every opportunity to agitate in order to propagandize more effectively. Action and active intervention are necessary for the correct use of propaganda and agitation. The labor party is an agitational slogan. A group may also systematically discuss in its propaganda how, when, and where to raise the labor party agationally.

This is not the question before the League. The RSL at the moment is using the slogan directly, and generally not in the form of systematic discussions of the method of using it. The labor party has become a minimal demand separated by a

stage from the revolutionary party.

The Revolutionary Party Caucus calls for the foremost slogans to be "Build the Revolutionary Party" and "Reconstruct the Fourth International." We must continue our policy of giving critical support inside the unions when left bureaucratic currents actually wage struggles under the pressure of the ranks in motion. Since such elements have been noted for their acquiescence rather than struggle, the League has not been able to use this tactic frequently. The Revolutionary Party Caucus favors the use of the labor party slogan in similar fashion. When a segment of the bureaucracy or incipient bureaucracy moves to the left under pressure of the ranks, we can challenge them on the basis of the labor party as follows: "You claim to be for certain political demands necessary for the workers. You will never get them from the Democratic Party. You are betraying the interests of the ranks. We do not believe these demands can be really won and solidified without a further program, a revolutionary party, and a revolution. You don't accept that. Then at least form your own party, a labor party, and fight for the demands; etc. You will not do so, you have no intention of really conducting this fight."

Thus the labor party slogan is not central in this conjuncture, but it can be used occasionally as a united front tactic, as part of an effort to win the ranks from the vacillating leaders whom the masses are pressing forward. When in fact the leaders are not vacillating but are firmly betraying, the central labor party slogan is a disaster. And that is the League's present course.

### Trotsky on the Labor Party

Trotsky's discussions on the labor party have been subject to much abuse in the League, so they have to be carefully re-examined. The initial discussion was based on an interview with the *New York Times* in 1932, in which Trotsky was quoted as saying that "the emergence of a labor party is inevitable" in the U.S. As he explained in the letter from Prinkipo of May 19, 1932, the term "labor party" had been ill-chosen; he had meant an independent party of the working class, an algebraic formulation which was perfectly open-ended, that could take on either a revolutionary or a reformist content as the struggle developed. He stated:

"The question was not of a labor party in the specific British sense of the word but in the general European sense, without designating what form such a party would take or what phases it would go through." (*Leon Trotsky on the Labor Party*, p. 6)

Trotsky added that although a labor party of the British trade union type was possible, "that eventuality, which appears to me to be very problematical, does not constitute an aim for which the Communists must strive and on which one must concentrate the attention of the proletarian vanguard." He explained the reason:

"A long period of confusion in the Comintern led many people to forget a very simple but absolutely irrevocable principle: that a Marxist, a proletarian revolutionist, cannot present himself before the working class with two banners. He cannot say at a workers' meeting: 'I have a ticket for a first-class party and another, cheaper ticket for the backward workers.' If I am a Communist, I must fight for the Communist Party."

Although the situation changed by the time of the next

discussion in 1938 the method for analyzing the question did not, and Trotsky did not retract his statement of principles, nor his methodology, nor indicate he had been wrong retrospectively in 1932. The class struggle itself, the creation of the CIO in the 1930's determined that the form the "independent party of the working class" would have to take in the latter part of the decade. The mass struggles of the workers, reflected in a bureaucracy which to a degree led militant actions, determined that the algebra could no longer be "independent party of the working class." Given the struggle of the unions, the party would have to be based upon them.

The rise of the CIO was a result of an enormous mass working class movement. It was clear to Marxists that the movement must transcend itself and head towards politics. The transmutation of the CIO into politics had to be posed as a struggle for a CIO-initiated party, a trade union party. However, the labor party in this epoch has always been a party through which the labor bureaucracy maintained its ties to capitalism, attempting to maintain control over the workers by reflecting in part their need for an independent class party. The revolutionary party is the only party that truly represents the proletariat; we have no second banner.

In 1938, if the pressure for an independent party of the class could be maximized, the bureaucracy might be forced to go along. (It might not: the reformists often do not carry out their own program out of fear of the masses' actions.) The masses and the reformist leadership might fight for the same slogan but the meaning would be different to each. The program and ideological nature of the party which the Trotskyists called on the masses to struggle for was left open deliberately — not because they wanted a party whose program was neither bourgeois nor Marxist, but because the openness corresponded to the actual struggle.

This was done in order to pose the Marxist solution as part of the CIO movement and not in counterposition to it. The labor party slogan, however, could not be perfectly algebraic (open-ended) in the way that "independent party of the working class" could. In answer to a question by Cannon about whether the labor party is a revolutionary party, Trotsky replied:

"I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible. At every meeting I will say: I am a representative of the SWP. I consider it the only revolutionary party. But I am not a sectarian. You are trying now to create a big workers' party. I will help you but I propose that you consider a program for this party. I make such and such propositions. I begin with this. Under these conditions it would be a big step forward. Why not say openly what is? Without any camouflage, without any diplomacy." (p. 20)

For Trotsky, the question was always one of siding with the labor party struggle in order to raise the revolutionary party. As Trotsky stated in 1932:

"That the labor party can become an arena of successful struggle for us and that the labor party, created as a barrier to Communism, can under certain circumstances strengthen the Communist Party, is true, but only under the condition that we consider the labor party not as 'our' party but as an arena in which we are acting as an absolutely independent Communist Party." (pp. 8-9)

Trotsky did not claim nor could he claim that the labor party was a revolutionary party or even that it was perfectly open to that possibility. In stating that his party is the revolutionary party (then the SWP), he demonstrated that he still adhered to the 1932 position: there cannot be two banners for a revolutionary. In fact, he says explicitly that his 1932 position and outlook were essentially right:

"When for the first time the League considered this question, some seven or eight years ago — whether we should favor a labor party or not, whether we should develop initiative on this score — then the prevailing sentiment was not to do it, and that was absolutely correct." (p. 14)

Thus the labor party remains a reformist party. In the course of struggle its content as a slogan becomes *more* open-ended. By participating in the struggle (even entering the labor party if necessary) the revolutionaries can raise the question of the revolutionary party in more concrete terms than otherwise. To raise the question of a "revolutionary labor party" sows illusions that the end result of the movement for an independent working class party should be an enormously expanded SWP (of 1938) under no matter what name. If the revolutionaries won hegemony in such a movement, then in a living way the labor party as such would cease to exist. The struggle would be openly and explicitly transformed into the creation of the revolutionary party.

What made the conditions of 1938 different from 1932? Trotsky took great pains to show the SWP leaders in the discussions that it was not the subjective mood of the workers or the bureaucrats that was decisive: rather it was the objective situation. By the objective situation he meant more than the mere fact that the CIO had been organized. The CIO struggle had reached an impasse and had to change its direction:

"The problem is not the mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not by psychology. The same is absolutely correct for this specific question on the labor party. If the class struggle is not to be crushed, replaced by demoralization, then the movement must find a new channel and this channel is political. That is the fundamental argument in favor of this slogan." (p. 24)

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Trotsky considered the labor party an objective necessity at the time not solely because the CIO unions had come into existence, but more precisely because their struggle, hitherto taking the form of economic strikes, had reached the limits imposed by the renewal of the Great Depression.

"Now we have a movement of tremendous importance — the CIO; some 3,000,000 or more are organized in a new, more militant organization. This organization which began with strikes, big strikes, and also involved the AFL partially in these strikes for a raise in wages, this organization at the first step of its activity runs into the biggest crisis in the U.S. *The perspective for economic strikes is, for the next period, excluded*, given the situation of the growing unemployed ranks, etc. We can look for the possibility that it will put all its weight in the political balance. (p. 14, emphasis added.)

The comrades of the majority read these passages to mean that the objective necessity was determined once and for all time by the rise of the CIO in the 1930's. The specific impasse that the workers faced at the time of the 1938 discussions is not seen as specific. Thus Comrade Gregory wrote in his document, "From this point on, there could be no turning back. There would not be another movement to create industrial unions. Economic crisis would require political struggle, and in the absence of a mass revolutionary party this required demanding that the trade unions create the working class party to solve the immediate problems ..."

But the unions have "turned back" in one sense, a vital and important sense. The militant strikes characteristic of the early CIO are not characteristic today, and have not been dominant for nearly three decades. The CIO as a *movement* does not exist. For us to say now that "the perspective for economic strikes is, for the next period, excluded" would be unjustified: the unions, under the dead hand of this

bureaucracy, have not even begun to fight. What we can say is that serious economic fights will pose the *necessity* for political mass action even more sharply. The unions' failure to fight has not enabled them to avoid defeats; on the contrary, the union-busting campaign in New York and other cities is proceeding rapidly over the limp bodies of the bureaucrats. The series of defeats could be reversed if the unions take a firm stand. In no central way has the U.S. working class suffered a smashing defeat. As we have already argued, a general strike would be far from a disaster for the unions, but an indication that they are no longer willing to take the bourgeoisie's attacks lying down. The question of leadership, the existing balance of forces is the decisive political question in our epoch reflecting (and altering) the objective scene.

Cde. Gregory tries to cement his argument with another passage from Trotsky's discussions:

"Of course the question of the labor party cannot be considered independent from the general development of the next period. If a new prosperity comes for some time and postpones the question of a labor party, then the question will for some time become more or less academic, but we will continue to prepare the party in order not to lose time when the question again becomes acute..." (*Leon Trotsky on the Labor Party*, p. 30)

Thus for Trotsky, the labor party slogan does not remain a constant from 1938 through a period of prosperity. The objective conditions that Trotsky is considering are obviously not limited to the existence of the CIO, but include the economic questions, tempo and direction of material drives, etc. To say that the slogan becomes "academic" is to say that it is not being used; it is returned to the shelf for use at the appropriate time. Of course, the party will educate the workers (including its own members) on the method and timing of the labor party slogan even when the slogan is not in

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use, but this is something quite different from continuous agitation around the labor party slogan. Nevertheless, Cde. Gregory insists that a new prosperity (Trotsky's hypothesis) would change nothing — precisely the contrary of what Trotsky wrote.

To drive this point home, it need only be recalled that the League has always understood that Trotsky never expected a twenty-year resurrection of capitalism after the Second World War. When he hypothesized a prosperity he had only a short interval in mind. Yet even with this understanding Trotsky wrote that the labor party slogan would under certain circumstances be withdrawn. It follows from the logic of the position stated here that the slogan was central in the late 1930's until the war, during the middle 1940's (the post-



Trotsky maintained that Marxists could not have "two banners." We "must fight for the Communist Party."

World War II upsurge of the labor movement), and at no other time.

This is also a question of the dynamics of the union bureaucracy. Trotsky used the labor party slogan to challenge the reformist bureaucracy and the workers who followed them. His working assumption was that these leaders were leading the workers in struggle. As he once wrote about the reformist bureaucrats (the context being the Anglo-Russian Committee and the British general strike of 1926):

"The possibility of betrayal is always contained in reformism. But this does not mean that reformism and betrayal are one and the same thing at every moment. Not quite. Temporary agreements may be made with the reformists whenever they take a step forward. But to maintain a block with them when, frightened by the development of a movement, they commit treason, is equivalent to criminal toleration of traitors and a veiling of betrayal." (*The Third International after Lenin*, p. 129)

"The tactic of the united front still retains all its power as the most important method in the struggle for the masses. A basic principle of this tactic is: 'With the masses — always; with the vacillating leaders — sometimes, but only so long as they stand at the head of the masses.' It is necessary to make use of vacillating leaders while the masses are pushing them ahead, without for a moment abandoning criticism of these leaders. And it is necessary to break with them at the right time when they turn from vacillation to hostile action and betrayal. It is necessary to use the

occasion of the break to expose the traitorous leaders and to contrast their position to that of the masses. It is precisely in this that the revolutionary essence of the united front policy consists." (*Leon Trotsky on Britain*, p. 255)

The union bureaucracy today is not committing the same degree of treason as its British counterparts who destroyed the 1926 general strike. Yet it is betraying daily, and in no sense is it taking forward steps in the interests of the workers. The labor party is the demand of reformism, even though the reformists do not generally build a party independent of the bourgeoisie if they can help it. The call for a labor party is therefore either a proposed united front with the bureaucracy, a demand that Meany et al form a labor party (and thus its meaning as a rotten bloc used at the wrong time is clear); or else it is a united front proposal to the United National Caucus in the UAW and other opposition types who may even now stand for the labor party or will in the future. Arnold Miller toyed with the issue; other bureaucrats have done so and will continue to do so. As a result of pressure from the workers, even sections of the current bureaucracy will turn towards a labor party strategy. By agitating in such a direction at this point when the Millers are not leading the ranks in struggle, the League is laying the groundwork for these reformists and making the workers' minds fertile for their victory instead of the revolutionaries'.

Some of the majority leaders, Cde. Taber in particular, like to think that the labor party slogan is not a call for a united front with a section of the bureaucracy. We want a united front with the militant workers, says Taber; it is not their leaders who are responsible for their mistaken reformist ideas but the bourgeois ideology induced from society as a whole.

This in reality is only another way to deny the centrality of the leadership question. The working class accepts its leadership and the reformist program not simply because of the leadership itself but precisely because bourgeois material incentives, values and ideas are "in the air." The backward workers to whom Taber adapts do not believe they are following the bureaucracy, so Taber adopts this illusion too in the Resolution and other unguarded moments. For a revolutionist to be in a united front with militant workers means to be in a united front with some leadership (as well as the ranks) even if it lacks a name. A leadership moving with the workers can be pressured to fight for its party, goal, or program (even if it does not yet have it) — or stand exposed. In 1938, the bureaucracy didn't have the labor party program, yet the stand by the Trotskyists was correct. Today the same stance leads us to substitute for the reformists who don't raise even their own programs or their party, the labor party.

Substituting for pro-bourgeois forces who don't carry out their own demands out of fear is a time-honored form of capitulation, (e.g. the SWP's substitution for the liberals in the anti-war movement based upon and confined to the bourgeois democratic demands which the bourgeois democrats could not fight for). The revolutionary who substitutes for the reformist becomes more and more reformist in practice. Trotsky said:

"The policy of the *united front* has not only its great advantages but its limits and its dangers as well. The united front, even in the form of temporary blocs, often impels one to opportunist deviations which are frequently fatal, as, for example, with Brandler in 1923. That danger becomes absolutely predominant in a situation in

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which the so-called Communist Party becomes a part of a labor party created by the grace of the propaganda and action of the Communist Party itself." (*Leon Trotsky on the Labor Party*, p. 8)

Gregory sees nothing wrong with long-term united fronts. He writes:

"Try to apply this argument to the trade unions. What are the trade unions? As we all know, the current trade unions involve a long-term united front with the bureaucrats. Should we abandon them? Should we break the united front? Of course not, and it's not really necessary to go into the absolute necessity of working in the trade unions, the defensive necessity of the trade unions, etc. They are objectively necessary.

"But the labor party is also an objective necessity. Political struggle by the trade unions is necessary for defensive purposes. Therefore we make the united front appeal."

At this point we will allow Trotsky to answer Gregory.

"To defend the maintenance of the Anglo-Russian Committee with the argument that we cannot leap over the organizations of the proletariat that are 'historically given' is to engage in crude sophistry, which will invariably lead to opportunist conclusions. We cannot leap over the trade unions, since they are 'historically given' organizations of the proletariat. But the Anglo-Russian Committee is a temporary formation, brought into existence by a temporary situation."

(*Leon Trotsky on Britain*, p. 254)

We have already cited Trotsky on the episodic, non-long-term nature of political united fronts with opposition leaderships, and the dangers that flow from the contrary policy. Lenin could be cited at length as well. Cde. Gregory can only argue that the labor party is nothing like the Anglo-Russian Committee; it isn't temporary but on the contrary is the political equivalent of the economic trade unions. This attitude towards the Labour Party is shared by a multitude of politically dead "revolutionary" organizations in Britain who have chosen to enter and stay within the Labour Party as they do with unions. Gregory has established a basis for a similar policy when a labor party develops in the United States. The logic points to more than a united front: deep entry becomes the only conclusion.

Gregory's idea of the acceptability of the long term united front of the labor party was answered by Trotsky directly. In the course of discussing whether or not to raise the united front call for a labor party in 1932:

"To consider a labor party as an integrated series of united fronts signifies a misunderstanding of the notions both of the united front and of the party. The united front is determined by concrete circumstances, for concrete aims. The party is permanent. In a united front we leave our hands free to break with our temporary allies. In a

common party with these allies we are bound by discipline and even by the fact of the party itself. The experience of the Kuomintang and of the Anglo-Russian Committee must be well understood. The strategic line dictated by the lack of a spirit of independence of the Communist Party and by the desire to enter into the 'big' party (Kuomintang, Labour Party) produced inevitably all the consequences of the opportunistic adaptation to the will of the allies and, through them, to that of the enemy. We must educate our cadres to believe in the invincibility of the Communist idea and in the future of the Communist Party. The parallel struggle for another party inevitably produces in their minds a duality and turns them onto the road of opportunism." (*Leon Trotsky on the Labor Party* p. 8)

The danger of capitulation in the labor party slogan is indicated by the way the RSL has raised the slogan in recent months. It is not used to bring forward the revolutionary party, as Trotsky advocated. In the *October Postal Action* (New York), the "propaganda article" called for the labor party because "today there is no mass revolutionary party, and it won't be formed overnight." This amounts to separating the "today" labor party from the future "won't be formed overnight" mass revolutionary party. Instead of using the labor party struggle as a way to build the revolutionary party, the two are divided. A labor party for now, a revolutionary party for the next stage. A reformist (or perhaps a "neither bourgeois nor proletarian") party for now, a revolutionary party when it is possible. Not just a struggle for a labor party now instead of a struggle for the postponed revolutionary party, but the need now is for the actual labor party!

The revolutionary party is used as a cover for the labor party designed to attract advanced workers and trap their practice at the level of the less advanced. A bridge can be traveled in two ways. This is the wrong direction. The algebra is broken down into minimal and maximal. Labor party for today, revolutionary party for tomorrow; reform "democratic and trade union" struggle stage today; revolutionary stage tomorrow.

The basis for this is to be found in the stagist position of the Resolution, and it is explicit in Gregory.

"Do we say that there is nothing that can be done until a mass revolutionary party is built? Or do we raise the immediate need for the trade unions to struggle in the political arena, demanding the construction of a labor party to fight for the workers' needs? The answer is obvious."

The majority's position can have no other meaning than the fight for a reformist interlude party. There is no party that is neither Marxist nor bourgeois, and Cde. Gregory's labor party is specifically for the stage "until a mass revolutionary party is built"; that is, it is not a revolutionary party. Trotsky, answering Shachtman who couldn't see what he was saying either, said: "It would be absurd to say that we advocate a reformist party." But for Gregory, "the answer is obvious." On the theoretical level, the League majority has laid the basis for a reformist stage and reformist parties. The danger of degeneration into outright centrism is the "obvious" course.