

The Post-Soviet World Perspectives and Tasks of the Spartacist League/U.S.

Main Resolution from the Ninth National Conference of the SL/U.S.

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The Post-Soviet World

Perspectives and Tasks of the Spartacist League/U.S.

This special issue of English-language Spartacist is devoted to publishing the main resolution adopted by the Ninth National Conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. held this summer. The document was edited by a commission elected at the conference to incorporate points raised in the discussion and the amendments adopted by the delegates.

1. U.S. in the New World Disorder

Our ninth national conference takes place in the grim aftermath of capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe and the USSR. This world-historic defeat for the proletariat has led to heightened and rekindled interimperialist rivalry, nationalist bloodbaths, all-sided attacks on the working class, a resurgence of fascist political movements, anti-migrant frenzy, assaults on the rights of women and a sharp rise in reactionary obscurantism.

The ex-USSR has broken into its constituent parts, riven by nationalist conflicts that fed the drive toward capitalist restoration. The vast industrial plant of the former Soviet state is now in a fragmented shambles. Its multinational proletariat, while largely unbloodied, faces capitalist-induced hunger and joblessness, politically disarmed by decades of Stalinist repression and betrayal. The present Russian regime of Boris Yeltsin, balancing between imperialism and nationalist-corporatist elements of the former bureaucracy, is a patently weak and interim regime and, barring the intervention of the proletariat, the likely antechamber to a brutal dictatorship. Bloody internecine wars such as those now wracking ex-Yugoslavia threaten to spread beyond the southern reaches of the ex-USSR to areas such as the Ukraine.

The ignominious collapse of the bureaucracy in the USSR, where broad layers from the top down avidly embraced capitalist restoration and prostrated themselves before world imperialism, profoundly confirms the validity of Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism. We must hammer this point home in our polemics against our opponents. But we should also recall Trotsky's caveat regarding the negative confirmation of the Left Opposition's line on the aborted Chinese revolution of 1925-27: Out of defeats you recruit handfuls, out of victories millions.

Capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe and the former Soviet Union has ushered in a fundamentally new, turbulent and radically different period in world history. In important respects, such as the future course of developments in post-Soviet Russia and East Europe, there are

no close historical precedents to guide our analysis and political line. The West European bourgeoisies, no longer needing to buy the loyalty of the reformist-led workers movements against the "Communist" bloc as they did during the Cold War, are now seeking to dismantle the social-democratic "welfare state," thereby precipitating a sharply rising line of class struggle and many-sided political turbulence. The destruction of the Soviet Union has led to the increasing political hegemony and rivalry of the imperialist powers in the Third World—signaled by the devastation of Iraq in the Gulf War—since bourgeois-nationalist regimes and movements can no longer maneuver between Moscow and the West.

The imperialist bourgeoisie continues to trumpet the "death of communism," although its triumphalist mood of a few years ago has dissipated in the face of the new world disorder, from the widespread disillusionment over the social/economic disaster in reunified capitalist Germany, to the nationalist-communist slaughter in the Balkans and the humiliation of U.S. military forces at the hands of Somali clan warriors. In Europe, capitalist austerity measures have unleashed a torrent of struggle—in France the spectre of the 1968 upheaval haunts the government. In the U.S., imperialist celebration over vanquishing Iraq turned to panic and hysteria as Los Angeles erupted in a massive multiethnic outpouring against the racist acquittal of cops who had savagely beaten black motorist Rodney King. This upheaval spread up and down the West Coast, and across the country. And the bourgeoisies' dreams of a world safe

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EDITORIAL BOARD: Helene Brosius (editor), James Robertson and Emily Tanner (associate editors), William Cazenave, George Foster, Elizabeth Gordon, Len Meyers, Reuben Samuels, Joseph Seymour, David Strachan

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Susan Fuller

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Shauna Blythe

SPARTACIST PUBLISHING CO.
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for exploitation were jarred by the peasant uprising of downtrodden Mayan Indians in Mexico's Chiapas province.

Infected by bourgeois triumphalism and the collapse of the USSR, the common perception within the left has been profoundly altered. Stalinist parties around the world have loudly repudiated any pretensions to Leninism while presenting themselves as born-again social democrats. Popular consciousness in most countries (notable exceptions are South Africa and South Korea) accepts the view, propagated by the ruling classes and reformists, that the success of capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet sphere demonstrates the failure of Marxian socialism.

However, this attitude is bound to be *transitory* as the immediate impact of the collapse of Soviet power is superseded by new, major historical developments. The working class cannot consider as permanent and immutable a social system that subjects it to exploitation and degradation. As Engels pointed out, socialism arose as the theoretical expression of the struggle between labor and capital, although it *appeared* to be a self-contained intellectual construct:

"Modern socialism is, in its essence, the direct product of the recognition, on the one hand, of the class antagonisms existing in the society of today between proprietors and non-proprietors, between capitalists and wage-workers; on the other hand, of the anarchy existing in production. But, in its theoretical form, modern socialism originally appears ostensibly as a more logical extension of the principles laid down by the great French philosophers of the eighteenth century."

—*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880)

The '60s Radicalization and the Growth of the Spartacist Tendency

Our international organization has experienced and been shaped by two previous periods—the Vietnam War/détente era and Cold War II. Both these periods, although in very different ways, were dominated by the Russian question—the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the post-World War II emergence of deformed workers states both through the direct extension of Soviet military power (East Europe) and through indigenous social revolutions deformed from their inception (Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Cuba). The earlier of these two sub-periods in the Cold War had a more significant effect on the American section, which predated the formation of the West European and Australasian sections by roughly a decade.

The period beginning with the Cuban Revolution and the Algerian war of independence at the end of the 1950s and ending with the defeat of the Portuguese revolution in 1975 was characterized by the destabilization of the Western imperialist centers as a result of national liberation struggles and social revolutions in colonial and semicolonial countries (now conventionally called the "Third World"). The era was dominated by the Vietnam War, which generated increasing political turmoil in the United States—the mainstay of the world imperialist order. U.S. imperialism's efforts to utilize the conservative Kremlin oligarchy to restrain the apparently more militant Third World Stalinist and radical nationalist forces—and especially the humiliation of U.S. imperialism on the battlefield by the Vietnamese—led to the Washington-Moscow détente of the late 1960s-early 1970s.

In Latin Europe—the region of the imperialist world with the highest level of working-class consciousness and strug-



Suau/Time

Boris Yeltsin's October 1993 bloody coup against the Russian parliament ended the "democratic" phase of capitalist counterrevolution. Barring intervention of the proletariat, the working masses of the former USSR face massive unemployment, immiseration, fratricidal bloodshed and brutal bonapartist rule.

gle—this period culminated in a series of crises of bourgeois rule: the May-June 1968 events in France, Italy's "hot autumn" in 1969 and the Portuguese revolution of 1974-75. In France and Italy the reformist Communist parties played the central role in derailing the workers' struggles. In Portugal, the Socialist Party, as a cat's paw for the CIA, spearheaded counterrevolution by attacking the militant workers led by the CP.

In North America, West Europe and Japan, the Vietnam War era gave rise to a new generation of radical youth, designated the New Left, who impressionistically viewed the fundamental conflict in the world as one between the wealthy imperialist countries and the impoverished dark-skinned peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This outlook found its purest expression in Maoism, which became the dominant political current of youth radicalism in a number of major Western countries (the United States, West Germany, Italy).

Beginning in the late 1960s, a number of developments threw the New Left into increasing political disarray, especially in the United States, the only country where the Spartacist tendency existed at that time. The French May '68 events dramatically reaffirmed the revolutionary

potential of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries. Hounded and victimized by the FBI's COINTEL-PRO, the Black Panther Party underwent a violent split which destroyed what had been the hegemonic organization of black militancy in the U.S. And the rapidly developing alliance between Maoist China and U.S. imperialism exposed and discredited a regime which had been idealized by Western radical youth as the vanguard of world revolution.

As a result of the crisis of the New Left, the Spartacist League (SL/U.S.) quadrupled its membership between 1970 and 1973, recruiting, individually and in groups, activists from a wide spectrum of American radical tendencies. This quantum leap provided the resources (personnel, linguistic and financial) for the extension of our tendency to West Europe and Australasia. The initial indigenous cadre of these sections were largely won from our pseudo-Trotskyist opponents, which in their own ways were experiencing the crisis of New Left radicalism.

The withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam in early 1973 and the fall of Saigon to the Vietnamese Communists in 1975, while having a traumatic effect on the confidence of the U.S. ruling class, nonetheless quieted American society. The contemporaneous defeat of the Portuguese revolution, itself precipitated by the national liberation struggles in that country's African colonies, restabilized the restive southern tier of NATO Europe under the domination of a Washington-Bonn axis.

Cold War II and the Collapse of Stalinism

Shortly thereafter, U.S. imperialism went over to the offensive with Carter's "human rights" campaign aiming to subvert the East European Stalinist regimes (especially

Poland) amid generally worsening economic conditions throughout the Soviet bloc. The onset of Cold War II can be officially dated, so to speak, with the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in late 1979, an action taken by the Brezhnev regime in part as a response to the chill winds blowing from Washington. The following year saw the rise of Solidarność in Poland which, while initially drawing on legitimate workers' grievances against the Stalinist regime, developed into the first serious threat of internal counterrevolution in the post-1945 Soviet bloc. This event stands in marked contrast to the situation in Poland and Hungary in 1956-57 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 which in each case tended strongly toward political revolution against Stalinism and which resulted overall in a stalemated internal loosening of bureaucratic controls.

Under the renewed economic, military and political pressures of Western imperialism, the Soviet bureaucracy—now in its third generation—disintegrated during the regime of Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in 1985 under the slogans of perestroika (restructuring), glasnost (openness) and "new thinking" (conciliation in foreign policy). The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan on New Year's 1989 was quickly followed by the collapse of the East European Stalinist regimes, beginning with the formation of a Solidarność-led government in Poland. The fall of the Honecker regime in the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in late 1989 produced an impulse toward proletarian political revolution which, however, was soon overwhelmed by the powerful pressure of West German imperialism, leading to the capitalist reunification of Germany in mid-1990. Shortly afterward, Gorbachev pulled the plug on the Cuban economy by jacking up Russian oil prices to Cuba to world market levels. The Sandinistas, abandoned earlier by both



Der Spiegel

"Mile of death" north of Kuwait City. U.S. war machine rained terror on fleeing Iraqis for 18 hellish hours in February 1991. After the collapse of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, U.S. imperialist chief George Bush announced the "New World Order" and ordered devastation of Iraq.

Gorbachev and Castro, peacefully turned over power to the contras with the election of Chamorro. August 1991 saw the ascendancy of open counterrevolution in the Soviet Union as Boris Yeltsin—a former Gorbachev lieutenant—seized political power from the fractured and demoralized Kremlin oligarchy.

During Cold War II, all significant tendencies on the Western left supported the renewed imperialist offensive against the Soviet Union. Strong and at times dominant “Eurocommunist” currents emerged in the traditionally pro-Moscow Stalinist parties. All the pseudo-Trotskyist groups rallied to the “bourgeois-democratic,” imperialist-encouraged and nationalist-driven counterrevolution in East Europe and the USSR.

The international Spartacist tendency’s (iSt) Trotskyist defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state dramatically highlighted our programmatic uniqueness, allowing the SL/U.S. to attain a reputation as the left pole of the small U.S. left despite a decline of one-third in our membership. Our comrades were justifiably proud of defending the revolutionary program in the face of intense political hostility. Nonetheless, during Cold War II almost all sections were reduced to conditions of organizational stagnation and political isolation. The notable exception, of great importance, was our fusion—centrally on the Russian question—with the Recken group in Tokyo, which led to the founding of the Spartacist Group Japan, giving us both an outpost in the world’s second-largest capitalist economy and a bridgehead in the Far East. The 1988 fusion with Tribune Communiste in France (a group derived from a Pabloite current that had liquidated into the Stalinist Communist Party), quickly unraveled. The Tribco comrades, never fully won from Pabloism, had no stomach for our proposal to organize an international brigade to defend Afghanistan against the CIA-sponsored Islamic fundamentalists.

In 1989 our tendency, uniquely amongst the self-proclaimed Trotskyists, undertook a maximal and international mobilization to intervene in the incipient proletarian political revolution in the DDR. This mobilization not only served to qualitatively homogenize our cadre, but also severely tested our revolutionary will and capacity. The effectiveness of our intervention was at certain junctures weakened by disorientation and a paralysis of leadership. More fundamentally our intervention was conditioned by the weaknesses of our German section, both numerical and political, and ran headlong into the West German bourgeoisie’s massive counterrevolutionary onslaught.

While we failed to achieve any qualitative breakthrough, we did manage to quantitatively expand our German section. And on the basis of our struggle against capitalist counterrevolution in the DDR we were able to extend ourselves internationally; in Canada, where we fused with left oppositionists from the Mandelites and re-recruited an important comrade from the CP, in the formation of the Dublin Spartacist Youth Group, and also in Mexico and Poland, where we recruited comrades who had been in the orbit of the Morenoites. Our work in Germany also helped lay the basis for our extension to Moscow.

Washington’s Drive for International Hegemony

In a limited and deformed way, the effects of the victory of the permanent revolution in Russia in 1917 were

extended to some colonial and semicolonial countries after the Soviet Red Army’s defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. Soviet support and deterrence against imperialist attack enabled peasant-based insurrections in China, Vietnam and Cuba to shatter weak bourgeois orders in these countries, leading to the establishment of bureaucratically deformed workers states structurally similar to that of Stalinist Russia. Moscow’s backing also allowed certain bourgeois-nationalist regimes (e.g., Nasser’s Egypt, Indira Gandhi’s India, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq) to exercise a degree of political independence of the imperialist powers which they could not have attained on the basis of their own national economic resources. Consequently, the collapse of the Soviet Union has been followed by an imperialist drive to impose total political/military hegemony over the Third World.

Thus the struggles for national liberation and social progress in these regions are more directly linked to and dependent on class struggle in both the backward countries and imperialist centers. As comrade Max Schütz wrote in a recent document:

“The collapse of the Soviet Union will serve to render ever more stark the basic postulates of the permanent revolution: that genuine national independence is only possible under the leadership of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the extension of that dictatorship to the advanced capitalist, i.e., imperialist, countries.”

—“Baghdad, Bischofferode, Havana,”
22-23 September 1993

In the Persian Gulf War of early 1991 the Pentagon war machine—with Gorbachev’s endorsement—devastated Iraq, an erstwhile major Soviet client state in the Near East. Bush declared the U.S. blitzkrieg against Iraq was the beginning of a “New World Order,” while bourgeois journalists termed it “the first post-Cold War war.” U.S. air and missile strikes killed an estimated 150,000 Iraqis while American ground forces retook the oil sheikdom of Kuwait with scarcely any casualties on their own side.

Since the war, Washington has sought to topple Hussein and strangle Iraq by imposing one of the more effective economic embargoes in modern history, thereby reducing the most technologically sophisticated society in the Near East (save for Israel) to subsistence levels or worse. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children and old people have died of malnutrition and disease.

From Korea to Grenada, U.S. imperialism’s wars and military interventions were ideologically motivated in the name of defending the “free world” against Soviet Communism. Whereas Reagan justified the 1983 invasion and occupation of Grenada by the need to destroy a Soviet/Cuban base in the Caribbean, Bush/Clinton had to present the invasion and occupation of Somalia as a “humanitarian” mission to ensure the delivery of food to starving Africans. In the invasion of Panama, the U.S. expanded its repertoire of pretexts for “supersovereignty,” claiming its right to invade anywhere in pursuit of anyone in the “war on drugs.” Similarly, the U.S. starvation blockade of Haiti is enforced under the guise of a “democratic” mission. Yankee saber rattling about direct intervention in Haiti also poses a direct threat to the Cuban Revolution, against which the U.S. has imposed an embargo over the last 30 years.

The American populace reacted strongly against the Somalia adventure after the October 1993 battle in Mogadishu not only because of the dozen U.S. combat deaths



Teun Voeten/Impact Visuals

U.S. Coast Guard captures or returns Haitians who flee murderous junta terror as Clinton threatens military invasion in the name of "democracy."

and the capture of one helicopter pilot but also in response to the bloody atrocities committed against Somali civilians and the manifest hostility of the Somalis to the U.S. military presence. The U.S. ruling class has not as yet been able to gain popular acceptance that American soldiers should risk their lives for the sake of a "New World Order."

The continuing potency of the "Vietnam syndrome" was not only demonstrated over Somalia but also governed Washington's policies in the Gulf War and Balkan crisis. The decision not to occupy Iraq derived from the understanding that American casualties would have provoked serious opposition and unrest on the home front. This also figures in the Clinton administration's present reluctance to intervene on the ground in Bosnia.

As proletarian revolutionaries in the United States, it is our special duty to defend the right of self-determination for Puerto Rico, the principal remaining American colony, and to support struggles for its independence. At the time of the "non-binding" referendum on Puerto Rico's status in November 1993, with a heavy voter turnout, a narrow majority favored "commonwealth" over "statehood," while only 4 percent voted for "independence" (which was defined as neocolonial subjugation, with the continuing presence of U.S. bases). We are opposed to forcing the Puerto Rican people to accept any status against their will. In this particular situation we called "For the Right of Independence for Puerto Rico!" (WV No. 588, 19 November 1993), to emphasize that this is a *democratic* question. At the same time, we noted, "We advocate independence in order to strike a blow against U.S. imperialism, and because only

through breaking out of colonial subjugation will it be possible to move beyond the perennial question of Puerto Rico's 'status' to focus on the international *class* struggle."

The Puerto Rican question is complicated by the fact that, due to heavy emigration, in addition to the 3.5 million Puerto Ricans on the island, there are an additional 2.6 million Puerto Ricans living on the mainland, and a good deal of travel back and forth. This makes all the more clear that Puerto Rico's liberation can only result from the closest unity in struggle of the working class in the colony and the mainland. We seek to build an internationalist Trotskyist party in Puerto Rico as part of the International Communist League.

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in East Europe and the Soviet Union was the impetus for the "negotiated settlement" with the apartheid masters in South Africa. Four years after his release from prison, Nelson Mandela walked hand in hand to the new multiracial parliament with his former jailer, apartheid ruler F.W. De Klerk. In the "New World Order," the now-bourgeois ANC leadership fronts for racist capitalist rule. Unlike most of the ostensibly Trotskyist left, we refused to give the ANC-led nationalist popular front support of any kind in the recent "power sharing" elections. Instead we called for critical support to the small Workers List Party, recognizing that, in standing against the ANC, they were attempting to draw a crude proletarian class line.

South Africa is presently a powder keg, with both enormous opportunities and huge dangers for revolutionaries. The current situation is highly unstable and inflammable.

The black masses, who believe at long last they have elected a government reflecting their own interests and aspirations, find themselves in fundamental opposition to their own "liberation" leaders. Already the Mandela/De Klerk regime is confronting a wave of strikes by the powerful black union movement, who see the dawn of their own emancipation in the ANC's ascent to power and are not about to submerge their expectations and raw power to the profits of the Randlords.

A genuinely communist, Bolshevik workers party is urgently needed in South Africa today to champion the aspirations of all the oppressed, the blacks, coloured (mixed-race), Indians, joined by certain elements of the white populace, in a struggle to split the ANC/COSATU/SACP nationalist "popular front" along class lines and lead the fight for workers revolution. In the absence of a proletarian solution, a resurgence of ethnic conflagration threatens, exacerbated by the intervention of the apartheid army, in which whole regions are turned into bloody battlefields.

A motion of the International Executive Committee (IEC) from 28 June 1994 highlighted "the perspective for a racially integrated workers party drawn principally from class-conscious elements in the unions and based on the program of permanent revolution. This is concretized in our call for a Bolshevik workers party in South Africa. Such a party must necessarily seek to replace the ANC as the leadership of the national and social liberation of the oppressed non-white peoples." No "power sharing" with the Randlords—those who toil must rule!

The next period could well see the terminal crises of the Chinese and Cuban deformed workers states, as well as those of Vietnam and North Korea, albeit played out in very different ways. The Chinese Stalinists, with the support of Japanese and significant sections of American imperialism, are moving to attempt a cold restoration of capitalism from above.

The counterrevolutionary drive in China is intertwined with U.S.-Japanese rivalry. Recall that World War II in the Pacific was fought primarily for control of China; however, that prize was ripped out of the hands of American impe-

rialism by the 1949 Revolution. In the past few years, Japanese imperialism has stepped up its economic involvement in China at all levels, from trade to industrial investment. The Beijing Stalinists have taken a hard line against Washington's none-too-strong demands to tolerate "human rights" dissidents, knowing that Tokyo would easily and readily offset any American economic sanctions. As shown by the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the Chinese regime maintains a hard line: perestroika, but no glasnost.

Still smarting from its defeat at the hands of the Vietnamese, American imperialism has only recently taken steps to lift its economic blockade of the country. Above all, this reflects concern by the U.S. that Japanese and European capital are positioning themselves to grab the lion's share of Vietnam, which is following a modified Chinese path of restoring capitalist markets.

The U.S. is also strenuously pressuring the North Korean deformed workers state to open itself up for nuclear inspection, frantic at the idea that the North Koreans may have atomic weapons. This has taken the form of saber rattling, gunboat diplomacy and imperialist bullying. The imperialist puppet regime in South Korea continues to be torn by recurring and massive worker/student unrest.

U.S. imperialism is moving to destroy the Cuban deformed workers state, rendered extremely vulnerable without Soviet support, through economic warfare. The besieged Castro regime has responded by seeking greater integration into the world capitalist market (e.g., allowing Cuban citizens to hold dollars) while emphasizing the Latin American nationalist strain in its ideological posture. The Cuban Revolution cannot long survive in its Caribbean isolation. Already, the legalization of the holding of dollars drives a wedge between some whites who have access to hard currency and most blacks who have none. The fundamental defense of the Cuban Revolution lies outside the island, and underlines the urgent necessity for revolutionary struggle in Latin America, in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Opposition to the U.S. embargo of Cuba has become a popular cause on the American left and within the broader rad-lib milieu. With the destruction of the Soviet Union,

Salguero/NY Times



South African grocery workers strike Pick 'n Pay store chain in July 1994. "Power sharing" deal preserves neo-apartheid capitalism, pitting power of black proletariat against nationalist popular front with bourgeoisie.



Spartacist Japan photos

Protest against racist attacks on large Korean community in Japan (above). Spartacist Group Japan supporters protesting "Summit Meeting" of South Korean and Japanese leaders (below). Placard reads, "For the Revolutionary Reunification of Korea! For a Socialist Federation of Asia! Korean peninsula is a key battleground in intensified rivalry between U.S. and Japanese imperialism. SGJ uniquely fights to link struggle of oppressed Korean and other minorities to perspective of socialist revolution in Japan."



it is possible to defend the Castro government against Washington's predations (as was also the case in the early 1960s) from a liberal ideological standpoint, that is, against the Yankee colossus brutalizing a small Caribbean nation. Moreover there is a growing split in the American ruling class over the effectiveness of the embargo as some sections look toward economic subversion of Cuba through an invasion of the dollar. It is therefore necessary to emphasize in our opposition to the embargo that *our* main concern lies in defending Cuba's social revolution, not merely its national independence. It is important to link our opposition to the U.S. imperialist blockade to our historic position on the Russian question.

Interimperialist Rivalries Escalate

The destruction of the Soviet Union must inevitably lead to increasing conflicts between the major imperialist powers—the United States, Germany and Japan (with Russia waiting in the wings)—over the redivision of world markets and spheres of exploitation. Thus, the end of the Cold War has opened up a new era of capitalist trade wars. In the immediate aftermath of Yeltsin's seizure of power in Moscow in August 1991, we wrote:

"...without the Cold War justification for subordinating conflicts of interest of the rival capitalist powers to a common front—interimperialist economic rivalries are rapidly escalating. The first stage is the demise of the Cold War 'free trade' regime under GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) in favor of competing imperialist trade blocs: a German-led European Common Market, with East Europe as its hinterland; a Japanese-led 'East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere,' with Southeast Asia as its low-wage workshops; and a U.S.-run North American free trade area, with the rest of the hemisphere supplying raw materials and sweatshops."

—"New World Order' Step Toward New World War," WV No. 534, 13 September 1991

A year later, New York investment banker and publicist Jeffrey Garten observed: "What we've seen in the last 18 months is the lowest level of international financial and economic cooperation possibly since the end of World War II" (*Wall Street Journal*, 17 September 1992).

Beginning in the late 1970s, American capital heavily shifted its manufacturing operations to low-wage countries in Latin America and the Far East and, partly as a consequence, greatly increased the rate of exploitation domestically. A few years later, Japan followed the same program although, unlike their American counterparts, Japanese workers have not experienced an absolute decline in living standards. Facing a stronger and more combative workers movement, the European bourgeoisies (excepting Thatcher's Britain) did not attempt to drive down labor costs in the 1980s for fear of igniting serious social and political unrest.

Consequently, the average level of wages and benefits in western Germany is presently 70 percent higher than in the U.S. and 40 percent higher than in Japan. Even labor costs in Italy are 20 percent greater than in the U.S. European industrialists have been pricing themselves out of international markets with the European Community's (EC) share of world manufacturing exports declining from 22 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 1992. The present internal program of European imperialism was summarized by Britain's Conservative chancellor of the exchequer Kenneth Clarke:

"Labor markets are the crux of Europe's economic woes—over-rigid, overregulated and over-priced. The first step

must be for European Community governments to look at the whole range of extra costs we force on business by excessive regulation.”

—*New York Times*, 9 August 1993

The recent establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) represents a significant escalation in global trade wars to the advantage of U.S. imperialism. As we noted in a joint statement (“Yankee Imperialism Gears Up for Global Trade War—Stop U.S. ‘Free Trade’ Rape of Mexico,” *WV* No. 530, 5 July 1991) issued by the SL/U.S., the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste of Canada, and the Grupo Espartaquista de México, NAFTA is a neocolonial regional economic bloc which not only gives American exporters privileged access to the Mexican market, but also provides an opportunity for U.S. multinationals to flood world markets with goods produced by low-wage workers in Mexico and other Latin American countries. The over 500,000 workers in the American-owned *maquiladora* (“free trade” zone) plants of northern Mexico are exploited at wage levels *below* that of Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea, major industrial neocolonies exploited by Japanese capital.

Despite increasing economic tensions, the major imperialist powers have to date maintained a diplomatic posture of collaboration in world politics (“multilateralism”). U.S. imperialism has sought the support of Germany and Japan, usually under the cover of the United Nations, in the military actions undertaken and projected in these first few years of the post-Cold War period.

Washington effectively maneuvered Bonn and Tokyo into not only endorsing but also financially contributing to the Gulf War in early 1991, although tight U.S. control of the Persian Gulf oil fields is clearly against the interests of German and Japanese imperialism. The U.S. refused to act unilaterally in the new Balkan wars when faced with conflicting policies advocated by Germany, France, Britain and also Yeltsin’s Russia.

In the absence of effective and coherent imperialist intervention, the wars precipitated by the breakup of Yugoslavia were initially decided by the regional balance of forces, which favored the drive for a Greater Serbia. Currently the imperialists, spearheaded by Germany, and in collusion with the newly fledged capitalist Russia, are trying to cobble together a Greater Croatia as a balance to Serbia. Largely to restore its image as the “cops of the world” given its earlier manifest impotence in the Balkans, the U.S. undertook a colonial-type occupation of Somalia under the imprimatur of a UN “peacekeeping” mission. At the same time, Germany and Japan have utilized the UN “peacekeeping” operations in Somalia and Cambodia respectively to circumvent postwar constitutional restrictions and deploy their military forces abroad.

The *divergence* between increasing economic tensions among the major imperialist powers and their “multilateralist” posture at the diplomatic level—a carryover of the Cold War alliance—cannot long continue. Currently the American bourgeoisie is disoriented by the end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War; *nobody* in Washington knows what they’re moving into. The U.S., very much locked into old habits, is looking for an enemy and most likely will settle on Japan, conveniently also a major economic rival, as the demon to replace the “red menace.” Meanwhile there are already signs of strain in the Balkans between the U.S. and Russia, which in its first venture outside the “near

abroad” is cultivating Serbia as a client state within the framework of the new imperialist partition of the Balkans.

Anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S., whipped up especially by the labor bureaucracy and liberal Democrats as well as right-wing populists, is on the rise. In turn, a poll taken last summer indicated that 65 percent of the Japanese public regarded their country’s relations with the U.S. as “unfriendly” because Americans were blaming Japan for their own economic failings. We should anticipate that the next period will see *open political conflict* between the United States, Germany and Japan, with their ruling classes seeking to mobilize popular support against the new main enemy.

That such interimperialist conflicts inevitably lead to war was demonstrated by the world conflagrations of 1914-18 and 1939-45. This time, however, the imperialist bourgeoisies are armed with nuclear weapons. And a nuclear war would *not* be, in Clausewitz’s famous dictum, a continuation of policy by other means. It would lead to the destruction of civilization if not of humanity itself. As we wrote five years ago:

“World imperialism has already brought human civilization to the brink of the abyss with two world wars. A rational human being would not consciously embark on a course leading to nuclear world war. But capitalism long ago created economic forces which strain against the boundaries of the nation-states in which they are fettered: world imperialism isn’t rational, and neither are the men who rule over us in its interest....

“The threat of nuclear war is real and immediate. We don’t have a lot of time left before an imperialist government (or one of its desperate and embattled junior partners) triggers a world cataclysm.”

—Introduction to “Documents on the
‘Proletarian Military Policy’,”
Prometheus Research Series No. 2
(February 1989)

2. American Society and Its Increasing Discontents

There now exists widespread recognition in the United States of fundamental economic and social decay. During the ’80s—dubbed “the greed decade” by liberal and populist journalists—60 percent of American families suffered a fall in income while that of the top one percent increased by close to 50 percent. It has become commonplace for older white workers and petty bourgeois to declare bitterly, “The American dream is dead.”

Mass homelessness, which first appeared in the ’80s, is now a chronic feature of the American landscape. Homelessness has become so ubiquitous that there are new categories—homeless families, homeless students and the working homeless. AIDS and tuberculosis are ravaging the heavily minority inner cities. Millions lack food, shelter and medical care. Millions more barely eke out an existence working at miserable non-union jobs that pay so little they are forced to work a second job, if they are lucky enough to find one. And further millions of unionized workers know they are just one or two paychecks from joining the homeless.

The real earnings of American workers peaked in 1973 and have since fallen by 20 percent, an intensification of the rate of exploitation unprecedented in the contemporary history of any bourgeois democracy. This was brought about

by three major mechanisms: a transfer of manufacturing operations to low-wage countries in Latin America and the Far East; an internal shift in industry from the unionized Northeast and Midwest to the "open shop" South and Southwest; and an anti-labor offensive which extracted major concessions ("giveback contracts") from the union bureaucracy as well as outright union-busting legitimized and encouraged by Reagan's smashing of the PATCO air traffic controllers in 1981.

In 1975, 58 percent of the U.S. industrial labor force was located in the Northeast and Midwest and 29 percent in the South (including Texas). A decade and a half later, the former region has been reduced to 43 percent and the latter increased to 37 percent. A major new industrial belt has been developed along I-85 running south from Washington, D.C. through the Carolinas. By 1990, the 1.1 million manufacturing production workers in North and South Carolina exceeded in numbers that of *every other state in the union except California*. Moreover, since then California's economy has been depressed while that of the Carolinas continues to expand. Over the last two years, the two states with the highest rate of capital formation (new plants) by far have been North Carolina and Texas.

The effect of this regional shift on labor can be gauged by comparing Ohio—a typical old Midwest industrial state turned into a "Rust Belt"—with North Carolina. Ohio's industrial workforce remains 40 percent unionized and the state's average hourly manufacturing wage is \$13.50. The corresponding figures for North Carolina are 4 percent and \$9.50. The South has become a major industrial region not only for American but also international capital. Foreign investors in Spartanburg County, South Carolina alone include Hoechst Celanese, BASF, Michelin, Hitachi and Adidas.

Demographic Shifts and Anti-Immigrant Racism

Accompanying these regional shifts in industry, American society has also undergone considerable demographic change over the last 30 years. Thus for the first time a majority of Americans now live in suburbs and smaller towns. In the period following WWII there was a massive migration of blacks out of the rural South and into urban centers. For example, Detroit went from a black populace of 16.4 percent in 1950 to 75.7 percent in 1990. This trend was accelerated by a corresponding "white flight" from the large cities to the suburbs.

The long-term decline in industry in the "Rust Belt" has resulted in a net outflow of population from those states into the South and West, now the fastest-growing sections of the U.S. The massive migration of blacks out of the South into the industrial cities has begun to flow the other way in response to the depression-like conditions in the Midwest (Chicago lost 70,000 steel workers during the Reagan years). For the first time since WWII, the majority of blacks now live in the South.

Following heavily Hispanic New Mexico, California, the most populous state, has the second-smallest percentage white population (57.3 percent in 1990) of any of the 48 continental states, while its black population stands at 7 percent. At the other end of the scale, sparsely populated, largely rural states such as the Dakotas, Idaho, Montana and the states of northern New England have black populations ranging from 0.6 percent to 0.3 percent. Nationwide

in 1960 only 0.9 percent of the populace was neither white nor black. By 1990 this figure had risen to 7.6 percent, a reflection of large-scale immigration from Latin America and Asia.

The bourgeoisie has worked to deflect workers' anger over their economic immiseration by whipping up chauvinist anti-immigrant sentiment. In California, where 22 percent of the population grows up speaking a language other than English, Republican governor Pete Wilson has called for denying welfare benefits to illegal immigrants and even taking citizenship away from their children who were born here. There is calculated hypocrisy in Wilson's demagoguery, since the big agribusiness corporations he serves require a steady stream of immigrant labor. At least as sinister are the Democrats, who call for sealing the Mexican border by massively deploying police and troops, and are actively attempting to rally mass opposition to immigration, leaning heavily on the chauvinist-protectionist AFL-CIO bureaucracy. Both parties are feeding the growing fascist fringe that more and more frequently targets immigrant and minority communities.

Asian Americans, the country's fastest-growing minority, are projected to reach 10 percent of California's population by the end of the decade. Other states with Asian populations over a quarter of a million include New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Texas and Hawaii. The ethnic breakdown of Asians in the U.S. has changed considerably in the last 30 years, with a substantial tapering off of Japanese immigration and a considerable increase in immigrants from Korea, Vietnam and the Indian subcontinent.

As a whole, Asian immigrants today are more urban and proportionately more petty-bourgeois and better educated than their forebears in earlier immigrations. But there is a substantial variation within the different national groups. The average family income of American-born Chinese, Japanese and Korean families is 40 percent higher than the average for American-born white families, while it is only 80, 70 and 60 percent of the white average for Filipinos, Indians and Vietnamese, respectively.

There are also important class divisions within the immigrant groups. While a third of all Asian Americans have at least a college diploma, a quarter of all families in New York's Chinatown live below the poverty level and immigrants from Southeast Asia account for 87 percent of all Asian Americans on welfare. Of the 63 percent of Chinese immigrants who are foreign-born, there is an almost even split between working-class and petty-bourgeois professionals. Thus one sees a large Asian sweatshop/janitorial population in West Coast cities juxtaposed to, for example, Monterey Park where two-thirds of the property owners are Chinese.

In the past, spokesmen for the Asian American community have echoed white racist politicians in denouncing "affirmative action" in education for blacks and Hispanics as "reverse discrimination." In the last presidential election, 70 percent of the Asian American vote went to Bush and Perot. Nonetheless, the rising anti-immigrant sentiment, combined with increased American hostility to Japan, has led to a heightened sense among Asians—both American-born and newcomers—that they could once again become the target of violent white racist nativism.

Comrades in California report markedly greater receptivity to leftist politics among Asian youth, especially young women, than in the past. Many Asian students, already



Ciro Cesar/La Opinión

Los Angeles, May 1994: rally demands "Stop Racist Attacks Against Immigrants!" The fight for full citizenship rights for foreign-born workers and against racist attacks is an important part of the internationalist revolutionary program, reflecting growing weight of Latin American and Asian workers in U.S.

caught in the divide between cultures as second or third generation youth, have become conscious of the divisions in this racist society and identify with the underdog, usually translated as a "people of color" consciousness. At a black studies class at the University of California at Berkeley, where we recently showed the Mumia Abu-Jamal video, the majority of the audience was Asian American. We have intersected some Asian students in the defense of sweatshop workers in San Francisco against Jessica McClintock; these youth have bought our paper but have otherwise remained fairly distant from our politics.

We have also run into an increased Asian presence in the lower layers of the working class. It is notable that SEIU 1877 "Justice for Janitors"—whose organizing vehicle, "Campaign for Justice," carries literature in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Tagalog—endorsed both our Denny's campaign and the labor/black mobilization to stop the Klan in Springfield.

Our exemplary activity in defense of immigrant rights, together with our demands for free supplementary classes for English as a second language, against budget cuts and for organizing the unorganized, should strike a chord with

radicalizing Asian students. We should also highlight our opposition to the protectionist poison of the labor bureaucracy and the Japan-bashing which has resulted from sharpening U.S. imperialist rivalry with Japan. Also important in this respect is the work of the Spartacist Group Japan in defense of the Korean minority there, our propaganda on the South Korean labor struggles and our defense of North Korea against imperialist attack.

On the basis of present demographic trends, Hispanics will become the largest ethnic minority in the U.S. in the second decade of the next century. Unlike the Asian American communities, Hispanics are predominantly working-class and plebeian in social composition. A larger proportion of Puerto Rican families live below the official government poverty level than black families. On the West Coast there is a growing Central American immigrant population, many of them left-wing political refugees. The Hispanic population is in all major respects—ethnically, socially and politically—more heterogeneous than the black racial caste.

The Cuban community is basically petty-bourgeois and strongly politically right-wing. Even among Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans there exist significant petty-bourgeois elements who identify with their white counterparts. The Roman Catholic church serves as an institutional and ideological link between the conservative Hispanic petty bourgeoisie and other ethnic Catholic groups (Irish, Italians, East Europeans) who are the main constituencies of white racist politicians in the big cities, such as Edward Vrdolyak in Chicago and Rudolph Giuliani in New York City.

The "intermediate" character of the Hispanic population is demonstrated by the key social indices of intermarriage and residential segregation. There are five and a half times as many Hispanic-white couples as black-white couples (22 out of 1,000 as against 4 out of 1,000). On residential patterns, a study of California in the mid-1980s concluded:

"...whereas primary and secondary immigrants settle in immigrant enclaves (barrios), subsequent generations are more likely to follow the traditional tenement trail: from ghettos and barrios to the suburbs.... Moreover, unlike the pattern for blacks, an influx of Latinos into an area does not appear to precipitate an outflow of Anglos."

—*Current and Future Effects of Mexican Immigration in California*, Kevin F. McCarthy and R. Burciaga Valdez (1986)

These social characteristics of the Hispanic population are paralleled by its political attitudes and behavior. A survey in California in the mid-1980s indicated that over 80 percent of blacks supported the Democratic Party compared to about 60 percent of Latinos and 40 percent of whites. Hispanics often constitute a swing vote in mayoral elections pitting black Democrats against white racist candidates. In Chicago in 1987, 55 percent of the Hispanic electorate voted for Harold Washington and close to 40 percent for Vrdolyak. This election also exhibited a marked ethnic division within the Hispanic populace: Puerto Ricans voted overwhelmingly for the black Democratic mayor while only a minority of Mexicans did so. In the recent New York City election, of Puerto Ricans who voted, 60 percent supported David Dinkins and nearly 40 percent supported Giuliani.

However, the past political behavior of the main body of the Hispanic population may not hold in the future. The recent massive immigration from rural Mexico, along with the proximity of their superexploited compatriots in the *maquiladoras* just across the border, has intensified the impact of the Hispanic population in the Southwest and

Southern California. Rising anti-immigrant racism combined with economic degradation could produce convulsive labor struggles (of which there are already clear signs in the Los Angeles area) leading to a sharp leftward radicalization. The Mexican-derived working class and plebeian masses are slated to play a far greater role—quantitatively and qualitatively—in the American socialist revolution than Marxists envisioned in the past.

This perspective is emphasized by the recent explosion of class struggle in Chiapas, which had substantial resonance on both sides of the border. We must seek to use *Espartaco*, the organ of our Mexican section, as a vehicle for intervention into the Latino component of the American working class. Recognizing that the limited Spanish capacity of the L.A. local is a significant weakness, we have given and must continue to give a high priority to the reinforcement of the small L.A. local with trips from the Bay Area and elsewhere and to actively seek political interchange with our comrades of the Grupo Espartaquista de México. Appropriate locals should consider setting some quotas during the upcoming sub drives.

Yuppie Racism in the White House

The 1990 economic downturn marked a sea change in the mood of American society. A survey by *Fortune* magazine found that 55 percent of the respondents agreed that “millionaires have gotten where they are by exploiting others.” Two years later, a poll showed that 80 percent of the American public believed that the government favored the rich and powerful compared to only 25 percent who held this view during the Eisenhower era of the 1950s. Yet this profound discontent and disillusionment with the present state of the American bourgeois order has not yet expressed itself in any political movement.

Our 1987 conference document, after commenting on the conjunctural difficulties of the Reagan presidency with the Iran/Contragate scandal, stated:

“What is *not* conjunctural is the tendency toward bourgeois reaction, which is rooted in the *objective contradictions* confronting American imperialism. Thus the downfall of Reagan does *not* mean the abandonment of what reformists and liberals term “Reaganism.”

—“Toward Revolutionary Conjuncture,” *SL/U.S. Internal Discussion Bulletin* No. 47 (June 1987)

Following Reagan came four more years of “Reaganism” with the Bush presidency, which triumphed in the 1988 elections mainly by engaging in a campaign of blatant racist demagoguery. Bush was narrowly defeated in the 1992 elections by the “New South” team of Clinton and Gore, who both courted the racist “Reagan Democrat” vote and profited from widespread disgruntlement with economic conditions.

The 1992 elections also featured the sinister candidacy of right-wing populist and would-be bonapartist Ross Perot. The maverick billionaire, who declared he was “buying the country back” for the American people, received almost 20 percent of the presidential vote in 1992, by far the best showing for a third party candidate since Theodore Roosevelt in 1912.

While in his campaign Clinton occasionally employed pseudo-populist rhetoric, for example by calling for a “national health care system” and denouncing “the absolute destruction of the middle class and an explosion in poverty,” he clearly *distanced himself from the labor movement*. The organizational decline of unions has reached a point where

support from the AFL-CIO bureaucracy is no longer a significant factor in bourgeois electoral politics at the presidential level.

While scrapping the last remnants of the old New Deal coalition, Clinton appealed with some success to women as a distinct constituency. The drive of the Republican right (Pat Buchanan/Pat Robertson) to completely outlaw abortion has given the Democrats a popular issue among women of all social and ethnic groups. More generally, Clinton has sought to appear sympathetic to the feminist attitudes current among professional and business women (exemplified by his wife Hillary) and also concerned with the problems of working women (e.g., day care, parental leave). 1992 marked the first election in U.S. history in which the woman question played a major role and the first election in three decades in which the concerns of blacks did *not* play a major role. All three bourgeois candidates turned their backs to the trade-union and black constituencies.

The present Clinton administration is a coalition between the right wing of the Democratic Party, whose main social base is the professional and administrative petty bourgeoisie (yuppiedom), and the Republican big bourgeoisie, which rejects and distrusts the pseudo-populist, rightist mobilizations of Buchanan, Robertson & Co. Such a “bipartisan” presidency is possible only in the absence of major labor and other social struggles. Faced with a big strike wave or mass, militant protests by the black and Hispanic communities, elements of the Democratic Party will return to a popular-frontist posture in order to contain the social unrest within the framework of bourgeois electoral politics.

There is a mood of frustration and cynicism about the Clinton regime. Thus while Clinton says he is for improving national health care, he also proclaims the necessity to drastically cut government spending—a measure obviously in direct contradiction to any possibility for improvement. In fact, Clinton’s proposals on health care (now stalled in Congress) are in essence a government handout to the big insurance companies, a brutal plan for “triage American style” that will put millions even more at the mercy of the capitalist medical system that wants to rationalize itself to maximize profits and minimize care.

Fueling anger and cynicism about the government was the bipartisan multibillion-dollar bailout of Sun Belt real estate speculators, the Savings and Loan scandal. Widespread looting of the government treasuries continues apace. For example, the state of New Jersey, big parts of which are toxic waste dumps due to unrestrained capitalist pillage, plans to spend \$3 billion to restore and maintain a long stretch of ocean beach along its north shore. This construction project, mainly a perk to a small group of wealthy property owners intent on keeping the Jersey shore as segregated as possible, will of course be undone by the next very large Atlantic storm. Meanwhile large parts of the urban and industrial infrastructure of New Jersey are literally crumbling. But just as with Reagan, under Clinton urban areas with their large labor and minority populations have to ride in the back of the bus, while the government pours billions of dollars, in this case...into the ocean.

The bourgeoisie has been playing this cruel game for the last 15 years, robbing the cities to give to the country clubs. California’s Proposition 13 was the first major offensive in the so-called “tax revolt,” a white middle-class backlash against government programs perceived as benefiting the urban poor. At the time, while recognizing the rightist and

racist nature of Prop 13, we advocated class-conscious workers abstain on the referendum because we don't advise the bourgeoisie how to finance the operations of its state. In 1992, in view of the complete devastation of inner-city schools deprived of funding—the concrete and direct effects of this measure—we recognized that we had made an error in failing to call for a “no” vote on Prop 13.

The bourgeoisie is aware of the deep disgruntlement and anger at the base of American society, and correspondingly has pursued both a reactionary ideological offensive and a drive to further strengthen the repressive apparatus of the state. The capitalist state's answer to the Los Angeles upheavals of 1992 was military occupation of the Los Angeles ghetto. And then they did the Waco massacre.

The Waco massacre was orchestrated by Clinton's top cop, Janet Reno. Federal police agencies massacred 86 people, including 24 children, for the crimes of exercising their Second Amendment right to bear arms and being members of an integrated religious commune alienated from mainstream American society. Reno's justification for incinerating the Branch Davidians was to save the Davidians' children from child abuse! In reality it was to exact revenge for the deaths of four federal agents killed in an abortive raid on the sect's compound outside Waco.

Just as the MOVE massacre was the bloody signature of the Reagan years, the massacre of the Branch Davidians was Clinton and Reno's declaration that their government would spill blood to keep the oppressed in line. We immediately fielded protests in several cities against this brutal massacre, and have attempted in our propaganda and activities to sear it into the minds of the working masses.

Bourgeois pundits, such as Charles Murray of the right-wing think tank, the American Enterprise Institute, propose to abolish welfare because it “encourages” illegitimacy. Last fall Murray published a particularly vicious exposition of his views in the *Wall Street Journal*. A measure of the

consensus between the Democrats and Republicans was Clinton's comment that Murray “did the country a great service.”

Clinton and Gore are taken to be representatives of the “New South” Democratic Party, but the “New South” is simply the urban areas of the “Old South”—all the places within five miles of an interstate highway. Indicative of the general cultural decline is the demise of classical radio stations. New York and San Francisco were the only major cities with two classical stations. Recently each city lost one station. Meanwhile there has been a burgeoning of country and western music stations in areas that are neither “country” nor “western.”

Hand in hand with the bourgeoisie's attacks on black rights comes a marked growth of Klan activity. Feeding off the economic misery generated by capitalism's deprivations, the fascists in many areas have formed the terrorist cutting edge of the religious right's campaign to shut down abortion clinics in this country. Lately the Klan has been very active in the Midwest, mobilizing hundreds and fielding simultaneous provocations in eight state capitals aimed at the Martin Luther King holiday.

The past two decades have also witnessed a qualitative strengthening of the repressive apparatus of the state. Police forces have been vastly expanded and paramilitarized; the U.S. now has the largest prison population, absolutely and per capita, in the world. Paralleling the explosive growth of the police has been the corresponding expansion of related elements of the “criminal justice system”—an enormous parasitic layer of judges, lawyers, clerks, prison guards, support workers, etc. that costs tens of billions of dollars to maintain.

Liberals who 20 years ago looked to an “activist judiciary” to enforce civil rights for blacks are now confronted with the so-called “judicial counterrevolution.” The administrations of Reagan and Bush packed the judiciary at all

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levels with antediluvian reactionaries—"activists" in maintaining and strengthening the racist status quo. Thus the Supreme Court recently has explicitly upheld the death penalty, declaring that evidence that its application is racist is irrelevant. The court further maintained that evidence of innocence is irrelevant and should be no barrier to execution.

Under the aegis of the "war on drugs," actually a war on blacks and minorities, it is now routine to confiscate individuals' property before conviction for any crime, thereby denying those individuals the ability to obtain counsel. In order to "combat terrorism" old conspiracy and sedition laws are dusted off, or new ones cooked up, for carrying out witchhunts in a climate of anti-immigrant hysteria. The RICO laws are routinely used against striking unions and to criminalize dissent. The FBI is insisting on its right to snoop and trying to limit the technology of the U.S. telecommunications industry to ensure the feds can wiretap with no difficulty.

Spearheaded by the liberals, the bourgeoisie is making a big push for gun control, with the sinister BATF of Waco and Greensboro infamy as its enforcer. Gun control proposals before Congress threaten to criminalize millions of citizens. These laws would strip the populace of its weapons, while simultaneously the state qualitatively upgrades the armaments of its murderous police agencies. It is indicative of the abject reformism of the U.S. left that it meekly buys into and often cheers on the bourgeois campaign for gun control.

Thus we were alone on the U.S. left in denouncing the federal government's assault on the home of Idaho fascist Randy Weaver. On the basis of trumped-up firearms charges, Weaver was besieged by an army of FBI and BATF agents, who proceeded to murder his wife and son. As we pointed out, Randy Weaver and his family were given

"...a sample of the treatment meted out by the cops in the ghettos and barrios of every city in America. It is the working people, blacks and other minorities who are the main victims of 'gun control' laws and the trigger-happy badge-toting gunmen who enforce them."

—WV No. 579, 2 July 1993

The present constricted status of the Second Amendment to the Constitution reflects an important change in the rights of citizens relative to the government. As adopted in 1791, the Amendment was intended to create militias based on an armed people equipped with contemporary military, individually employed arms to fight against perceived enemies of the time: Indians, black slaves, French Canadians, the British and other foreign powers; and, for the Jeffersonians at least, defense against domestic tyranny. The "people" was, as an idealized norm, based on a freeholding small farmer class composed mainly of Protestant, British-derived white males. Today, constitutionally protected weapons would be comparable to those used currently by the American army infantry (full/semi-automatic rifles). The move to disarm the populace transforms everyone into second-class citizens. Everybody supposedly has equal rights, which are however there for the government to diminish. The issue of firearms has elements of contradiction. Lumpen youth are shooting thousands of people to death every year in violence largely fueled by the illegalized drug trade. If the bourgeoisie were really concerned about "violence," the logical step would be to decriminalize drugs, the illegal trade in which both requires and finances weaponry.

3. Revolutionary Integrationism: The Struggle for Black Equality

The videotaped beating of a black man, Rodney King, and the racist acquittal of his police tormentors, is brutal evidence and a glaring statement that systematic racial oppression is the norm some 30 years after the civil rights movement. Cop terror is increasingly the means by which the capitalist class resolves the contradiction between black people's achievement of formal legal equality and capitalism's need to forcibly segregate this race-color caste at the rock bottom of society. Previously discriminated against as a reserve army of labor (the last hired, first fired), ghettoized blacks have dropped perilously in status to a *surplus* population that the bourgeoisie has diminishing use for.

During the 1980s, the U.S. experienced the largest influx of immigration by far since the pre-World War I era, thereby radically altering the ethnic composition of the non-white population. With the black population remaining around 31 million, the number of Hispanics increased from 14.5 million in 1980 to 23 million and Asians from 3.5 to 8 million. The U.S. ruling class has predictably sought to play off the greatly enlarged Hispanic and Asian communities against the blacks and vice versa.

While the recent immigration of Hispanics and Asians has complicated American ethnic politics, it has *not* altered the strategic centrality of the black question to the American socialist revolution. On some issues, such as immigration control, white racist sentiment could converge with the attitude of the black community on a nativist basis. But American society will never polarize in general with whites and blacks on the one side and Hispanics on the other. The racial divide remains the fundamental barrier to political *class* consciousness in the American proletariat and the chief reason today why there is no mass workers party in this country. In an earlier period, from the 1880s to the 1920s, the labor movement was divided by the generalized hostilities of nativist Protestants against immigrant Catholic workers.

Every social index shows an *intensification* of racist segregation and immiseration. A black man living in New York's Harlem is less likely to reach the age of 65 than a resident of Bangladesh. Black men have three times greater chance of dying of AIDS and outnumber whites as murder victims by a factor of seven. More black Americans lack regular employment than at any time since the 1930s Depression: the National Urban League estimates that 20 percent of all black men and over 60 percent of black teenage males are unemployed (taking into account discouraged and involuntary part-time workers). The 1990 Census shows that black Americans' median *net worth* (the difference between household assets and liabilities) is *less than 10 percent* of that of all Americans (\$4,169 as compared to \$42,279). Constituting just 12 percent of the general population, blacks represent 48 percent of the prison population. One out of every five black men will spend part of his life behind bars. Incarceration is now American capitalism's irrational substitute for the welfare check—a vicious, fearful policy of social control of the black "underclass."

The Reagan/Bush years saw a hardening and widening of the internal boundaries of America's racial geography. According to the National School Boards Association,

two-thirds of all black children now attend segregated schools, defined as more than 50 percent nonwhite. The highest concentration of such segregated schools is to be found not in the South but in Illinois and New York.

The decay and deindustrialization of the Northeast and Midwest has been especially devastating for blacks, since unionized industrial workers (e.g., Detroit auto, Chicago steel) were central to the fragile economic base of the segregated black communities. Black youths whose fathers were steel workers are going to be lumpens, or work at minimum-wage jobs if they're "lucky." The budget cuts and crusade against "big government" of the Reagan/Bush years also hit blacks disproportionately hard, slashing jobs in public services, a major sector of black employment (e.g., hospitals, the post office, urban transit, state and city workers).

Commensurate with the loss of jobs, blacks are joining the armed forces in numbers disproportionate to their representation in the general population. Of enlisted men in the army, some 28 percent are black; for enlisted women the figure is 43 percent black. This represents a real Achilles' heel of U.S. imperialism. The U.S. government needs its black and Hispanic troops, as well as its white working-class soldiers. But black and Hispanic soldiers are less "gung ho" about pushing around the dark-skinned peoples of the world on behalf of a government that denies racial minorities equality, and black veterans have often been in the forefront of the mass struggles for freedom at home.

"War on Crime" = War on Black People

In addition to the growing chasm between black and white, there is now a huge disparity of wealth among blacks, reflecting the substantial growth of a black middle class. U.S. Census figures from 1967 to 1991 show that the proportion of black households earning \$50,000 or more a year rose from 5.2 to 12.1 percent (representing 1.3 million households) while the proportion earning over \$100,000 more than doubled. Still, of America's 1,000 largest corporations, only one has a black CEO, and the accoutrements of wealth do not enable middle-class blacks to fully integrate into American society, much less the rarified corporate sanctums. In *Rage of a Privileged Class* (1993), Ellis Close interviews a black senior vice president of a major insurance company who fears that the obstacles faced by his children are greater than the discrimination he faced even in the time of Jim Crow segregation:

"They have even worse problems because they've got MBAs from Harvard. They went to Princeton. They went to all these places and did all these things that you're supposed to do.... And things are supposed to happen."
"Instead of 'things' happening, instead of careers taking off, blacks are being stymied. They are not running into a glass ceiling, says Davis, but into one made of cement and steel. So many young people of his son's generation have about them an 'air of frustration' and are surrounded by a wall of gloom 'that's just as high now as it was thirty years ago'."

The precarious position of black students at integrated Northern universities was recently demonstrated in a chilling dragnet of black students enrolled at the state university in Oneonta, New York. University officials gave local police searching for a suspect the names, home and work addresses and phone numbers of every black male student on the campus. These youth were then seized at their homes and workplaces and subjected to terrifying and degrading police

questioning in front of their employers, coworkers, families and friends.

Major corporations began to open their doors to blacks only after the civil rights movement and riots of the 1960s and '70s tore this country apart. Fortune 500 companies hired directors of "minority affairs" and it was considered bad form not to hire and promote *some* blacks. Today those positions are being quietly eliminated.

The vocabulary of American politics today consists of generally recognized euphemisms for intensified racist oppression. "Getting tough on crime" and "the war on drugs" mean untrammelled police repression in the ghettos. "Welfare reform" means starving and freezing the black poor and letting more die through inadequate medical care. Bourgeois politicians and the media draw an equal sign between black males and criminals. Black women, who head the majority of black households, are told their impoverishment is a result of their slack morals. Arthur Jensen and E.O. Wilson and their "studies" of genetic inferiority are back in vogue, the "scientists" for a ruling class which proposes to combat the pathologies of the ghettos with boot camps, prisons, capital punishment, and with the promise to "end welfare as we know it."

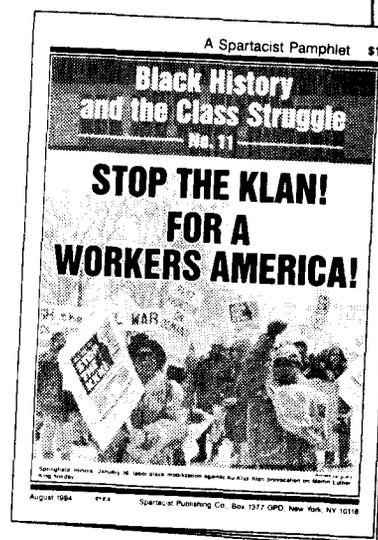
Race, not economic earnings, is still the factor that determines where black people can live, what clubs they can join, and whether they can make it home late at night from work without being harassed (or worse) by the police. The permanent vulnerability of the elevated status of even middle-class blacks reinforces the evidence that blacks in the U.S. are a *race-color caste*. The betrayal of black freedom signaled by the Compromise of 1877 stunts life even at the upper end of the economic spectrum. At the bottom end, the legacy of the slave system is genocide. "Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," adopted at our founding conference in 1966 and reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 (revised), was prescient in noting:

"For Negroes the fight for full employment at decent wages is not just the key to better housing, schools, etc., but a fundamental and necessary defense. If Black people are

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- Abolish the Racist Death Penalty! Mobilize to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!
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forced out of any economic role and become lumpenized as a group they will be in a position to be used as a scapegoat and could be totally wiped out during a future social crisis—just as the Jews in Germany were—without affecting the economy. The fight must be fought *now* to maintain Negroes as part of the working class.”

Clinton Pushes Blacks to the Back of the Bus

The so-called “New Deal” coalition of labor and minorities in the North, along with its traditional base in the white-supremacist South, enabled the Democratic Party to dominate American politics from the early 1930s through the mid-’60s. However, as we wrote in the 1992 ICL conference document:

“The mass struggles for black equality known as the civil rights movement—first in the South, then in the North—exploded the Democratic Party coalition.

“In the absence of a workers party and given the racist and conservative character of the labor bureaucracy, American electoral politics in the 1960s became centrally defined by the black question. Beginning with Nixon’s victory in 1968, the Republican Party gained ascendancy as the party of the white backlash.”

The continuing potency of racist demagoguery was demonstrated 20 years later when Republican candidate George Bush overcame an early lead by his Democratic rival, Michael Dukakis, by linking him with a black prisoner, Willie Horton, who while on furlough raped a white woman.

Our last conference document speculated that as a defensive reaction to Reaganism, blacks might more strongly embrace the Democratic Party. With Jesse Jackson as the shill for the Mondale ticket in ’84, thousands of new black voters registered Democrat and actively worked for that party’s ticket. In 1988 blacks comprised some 20 percent of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention, which was addressed by Jesse Jackson. This scene, viewed by millions on their television sets, was another factor that spurred racist white voters to abandon the Democrats.

Following the defeat in 1988, the right wing of the Democratic Party, organized around the Democratic Leadership Council in which Arkansas governor Bill Clinton was the principal figure, launched a concerted drive to *dissociate* the party from the black community and its causes to woo back the so-called “Reagan Democrats.” Clinton’s victory over Bush was preceded by his carefully orchestrated public humiliation of Jesse Jackson, which signaled to racist white voters that the old “New Deal” Democratic Party was dead. Clinton’s “new” Democratic Party would not be beholden to any “special interests” like blacks or labor or the urban poor. Blacks, for decades the most consistent voting base for the Democrats, stayed away from the polls in droves, but whites got the message and Clinton got the White House. Jackson—the country’s most prominent black spokesman for over a decade—was *persona non grata* during Clinton’s presidential campaign and has since been relegated to the back of the Democratic Party’s bus.

A parallel development has occurred at the level of urban politics. During the Reagan/Bush years, most major cities had black Democratic mayors, who oversaw the impoverishment and segregation of the ghetto masses while demagogically blaming it all on “Reaganomics.” However, since Clinton entered the White House, black Democratic mayors in the two largest U.S. cities—New York City and Los Angeles—have been replaced by right-wing white Republicans. In other cities around the country, black Democratic

Party mayors were made the targets of dirty FBI “sting” operations. The government’s humiliating videotaped entrapment and jailing of D.C. mayor Marion Barry symbolized the racist double standard and victimization of blacks who had seemingly “made it.”

Many black politicians now openly talk about forming an independent third party. At this point it’s little more than grumblings by the spurned sellouts who were previously valued pillars of this whole system of racist injustice. But the depth of alienation of blacks *at the base* of this society is so extreme that no matter how cynical the maneuvers of the politicians at the top, any move for a black “third party” could attract significant support and we should be alert to any motion on this front that presents openings for communist propaganda and intervention.

It’s also true that there is a place in a workers party for those radical or working-class elements who break from mainstream bourgeois politics. The highly unusual and very forward position taken by black Democrats in defense of our Springfield labor/black anti-Klan mobilization speaks to the willingness of this layer to make common cause with us at least on issues they know deeply stir their base. This development, and the resonance of our Springfield action in sections of the black proletariat that had never before been open to us (Chicago teachers, UAW) points to the opportunities we now have to win a layer of black workers to the perspective of forging an integrated revolutionary workers party in this country.

Black Separatism in the Service of Capitalist Exploitation

The undisguised hostility of the political establishment and the increasingly desperate conditions of black life have generated a renewed nationalist mood among black youth. Black separatist sentiment has always grown in this country in periods of political reaction and racist rollback. The current resurgence of separatism is fueled by profound despair and hopelessness. One can hear it in the nihilist, misogynist lyrics of rap music; in the self-degrading use of racist epithets among blacks; and on the popular black radio shows filled with conspiracy theories—how else to explain the disproportionate affliction and annihilation of black people from disease, dependencies, and poverty?

The dearth of domestic class and social struggle is the framework in which reactionary *idealism* and acquiescence to the racist status quo have taken hold, especially among black college students and middle-class blacks who are the main promoters of segregated “Afrocentric” schools and curricula to instill black self-esteem. The attenuation of class struggle has also shaped the most *right-wing* expression of black separatism since the days of Booker T. Washington.

This is not the left-wing nationalism of the Black Panthers of the 1960s, who defined themselves in opposition to the liberal-led civil rights movement (and the integrated leftist groups) and who identified with the colonial enemies and victims of U.S. imperialism. Muhammad Ali’s famous refusal to fight against the Vietnamese people is a faint memory in the ghettos where today’s “nationalist” hustlers organize boycotts and pogroms against Asian and Arab merchants. Unlike the Panthers, the cultural nationalists were *not* attacked by COINTELPRO. They are the direct antecedents of the present right-wing political hustlers in black politics.

Today's separatist mood is more accurately described as "Booker T. Washingtonism" than "nationalism"—right down to the pro-capitalist and fundamentally *anti-black* ethos. This "nationalism" is really about cultural national autonomy *within the confines of this racist capitalist state*, the American version of the Austro-Marxist program of national cultural autonomy. Nation of Islam leader Farrakhan's goals are symmetrical to those of the Klan, and like his forebears, Farrakhan has welcomed Klan leaders and even accepted financial contributions from them at his rallies. The Panthers, in contrast, looked to the lumpenized ghettos to ignite a revolutionary overthrow of the whole white power structure. The Nation of Islam shares Booker T. Washington's view that the races should be "as separate as the fingers," but has no qualms about working hand in glove with the white racist state.

Across the country, the Fruit of Islam are hiring themselves out as privatized security guards to police the housing projects in the inner cities. Just as the black Democratic Party mayors played a useful role in presiding over budget cuts and cop terror that would likely have spurred protests against white rulers, the Nation of Islam's rent-a-thugs enforce law and order in the slums that would likely explode if white cops intervened.

The historic base of the Nation of Islam is among lumpen youth and prison convicts, but today Farrakhan and his followers outdo the white racists in blaming blacks for their own oppression, railing against "black on black" crime and the "underclass" that "brings down the race." Farrakhan presently enjoys wide popularity among middle-class blacks and students at the most elite colleges. In capitalist America, black Harvard students ought to have every bit as much right as white Harvard students to become entrepreneurs, just as Dreyfus had the right to be an officer in the French army. Our perspective is for revolutionary integrationism into a socialist society through smashing the racist capitalist system. What Farrakhan appeals to is a desire by the black middle class to "uplift the race" by keeping the swelling black "underclass" *down*. With fewer opportunities for advancement than their parents faced in the decade or so of "affirmative action," many within this petty-bourgeois layer aspire to be the capitalist exploiters of "their" market.

The appeal of the separatists correlates to a pronounced feeling of *black isolation* in a virulently racist and outlandishly hypocritical white society. Thus when the U.S. Senate recently voted to condemn a grotesquely anti-Semitic speech by Farrakhan's henchman at a New Jersey college, many black students responded by questioning why the U.S. Senate has never condemned David Duke or Jesse Helms. The Nation of Islam was flooded with speaking invitations by black student groups eager to thumb their noses at their patrician college peers and the ruling class.

It's important to distinguish those nationalists who do share the anti-Semitism of a Leonard Jeffries or a Louis Farrakhan from blacks who defend these demagogues out of racial solidarity—*while forcefully combatting this growing "socialism of fools" poison*. Meanwhile, Zionists like the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) who fan the flames for race war against black people are also encouraging powerful reactionary forces which are not exactly "good for the Jews." America is a very backward, religious, Christian country. Who benefits from the seething ethnic tensions between blacks and Jews is the WASP ruling class and the growing ranks of Christian fundamentalist fascists, the

KKK and the Nazis, who would like to rid the country of both minorities.

As long as the racist capitalist system exists, some variant of black nationalism will exist and will have to be *politically defeated* by an integrated class-struggle vanguard in the fight for socialist revolution. In this regard one should recall that the Black Panther Party—which claimed to be the "Marxist-Leninist vanguard" of the black people acting in alliance with white and Hispanic revolutionaries—was destroyed by COINTELPRO state repression (and the Panthers' own internal contradictions conditioned by their lumpen-street culture). The Panthers were *not* politically defeated by a multiracial workers party.

In the 1978 preface to the revised *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 ("What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism"), we took exception to Richard Fraser's view that the black masses would instinctively support the program of revolutionary integrationism and therefore favor its advocates over all separatist tendencies: "An important weakness of the Fraser document, at variance with its main thrust, is treating blacks as an unconscious vanguard with a continuous political expression tending toward revolutionary integrationism."

Our opposition to multivanguardism, as stated in this same preface, may have relevance for the future as well as the past:

"The Spartacist League stands on the program and tactics of Lenin/Trotsky's Comintern. Basing itself on the experience of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks' struggle against the Jewish Bund and the Austro-Marxists, the Comintern counterposed to multivanguardism the *transitional organization*, a mass organization of a specially oppressed stratum (e.g., women, youth, national and racial minorities) expressing both its special needs and its relationship to the

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heart of American capitalism, our opponents opportunistically tail political trends in the black petty bourgeoisie. Currently they bow before black pseudo-nationalism. But they are equally capable of tailing liberal integrationist forces like the moribund Rainbow Coalition, if such organizations showed any life. Groups like the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) also posture as militant anti-fascist fighters; they currently stand as our competitors among youth determined to oppose the growth of the Ku Klux Klan and other fascist forces. We must continue to hammer away at the ISO and the RWL, exposing their fundamental reliance on the bourgeois state with their practice of leading students into the trap of police pens (or, as is often the case with the Cliffite ISO, away from the fascists altogether).

Notably, nearly a quarter of black workers are union members. Our programmatic call for the necessary unity of the struggle for black rights and workers' rights resonates far and wide in this strategic layer. Our Springfield, Illinois anti-Klan mobilization was taken up by black union members and union leaders as a fight for their interests, broadly defined. With the forces of the entire state of Illinois arrayed against us, we were unable to stop the KKK. But many of the unionists who participated in the demo acquired a consciousness of the social power of the integrated labor movement, and began to understand that it's necessary to wage a political fight against the labor lieutenants of capital in order to break the ties binding labor to the capitalist system.

Given the nadir of class struggle and erosion of black rights, an enormous leap in imagination and optimism is required for black youth to join an integrated socialist organization today. Yet we are recruiting black youth and even black workers, who draw revolutionary conclusions from the collision of their needs and aspirations with the bleak present and bleaker future offered by the capitalist class. It is going to take very big class battles to bring the major ethnic groups together in America. But the key cadre can and must be coalesced who will embody the conscious program of revolutionary integrationism in a party which is the Leninist tribune of the people.

4. The Working Class

The shift of manufacturing to Third World countries and the South formed the economic backdrop to an anti-labor offensive by unionized corporations, beginning in the late 1970s, reminiscent of the "American Plan" of the early 1920s when the membership of the AFL was cut in half. As in the '20s the careerist and legalistic labor bureaucracy proved organically incapable of defending the unions at any level. The clear lesson of this period is that no major strike can be won without defying the country's harsh anti-labor laws. Today's labor bureaucrats, the children of Taft-Hartley, know no other tactic than arbitration. (In fact, given the vast financial-legal resources of the corporations as well as the pro-business biases of government officialdom, this perspective is a sure loser.)

By the mid-1980s, leftist academic Mike Davis summed up the grim conditions facing organized labor:

"In industry after industry, the hard-won wage 'patterns' that guaranteed contractual uniformity and preserved effective solidarity between workers in different firms are being destroyed, their place taken by a savage new wage-cutting

competition. Within firms, multi-tier wage concessions, which allow employers to pay up to fifty percent less to new hires, are eroding inter-generational solidarity, ensuring, in the guise of protecting the privileges of seniority, that older workers are more vulnerable to replacement to exactly the extent that younger workers are made more exploitable. Meanwhile, on picket lines, workers in major industries who have chosen, or been forced, to resist the concessionary tide are confronted, for the first time since the 1930s, with scabs, billy clubs and the National Guard. Finally, beyond concessions lies the specter of rapidly approaching deunionization. In such traditionally organized industries as mining, trucking, construction, meatpacking, timber products and electrical manufacture, employers are increasingly seeking decertification of their local unions or are opening new non-union plants and subsidiaries."

—*Prisoners of the American Dream* (1986)

Over the past decade 1.6 million unionized industrial jobs have been eliminated by such methods with 80 percent of all workers in American manufacturing now having no union protection at all. The only major sector of organized labor holding its own in the Reagan/Bush years was the public employee unions, which retained close to 40 percent of their component of the workforce.

Over the past 15 years the number of manufacturing production workers declined from 14 to 11 percent of the labor force. This retrenchment combined with speedup (e.g., scrapping union work rules) has enabled American industrialists to achieve substantial increases in productivity. Output per hour in manufacturing increased by 40 percent between 1980 and 1992. Contrary to conventional impressions, productivity in all major industries is today higher in the U.S. than in western Germany, though still below that of Japan.

Increased productivity combined with the 20 percent cut in real wages has enabled American industrial capital to regain much of the international competitiveness lost in the 1960s-'70s. While West European industrialists saw their share of world export markets decline in the 1980s, U.S.-based manufacturers held their own at 17 percent despite (and partly because of) a smaller labor force. Fifteen percent of American factory workers now produce for export compared to 10 percent in the mid-1970s.

Young working-class families have sought to offset the catastrophic fall in wages by means which by their very nature cannot be continually extended. In 1970, slightly more than 40 percent of married women between 20 and 35 held jobs outside the home. Two decades later nearly 70 percent of young couples have two incomes and are still not able to make ends meet. During the 1980s the volume of mortgage and consumer debt almost tripled, with the average American family now spending 18 percent of after-tax income on interest payments.

The union bureaucrats, especially in the auto industry, strong-armed the workforce to accept wage and benefit cuts in exchange for the promise of job security. But these concessions to the employers paved the way for mass layoffs and factory closings. The rate of exploitation has increased so that even unionized workers are barely getting by. A major issue in contract negotiations now is health benefits, the maintenance of which is vital for the survival of workers and their families, as no one but the rich can otherwise afford the "luxury" of capitalist medicine.

The most telling measure of the abject state of the labor movement is the qualitative decline in the number of strikes. During the last several years the number of strikes involving



Workers Vanguard

Since Reagan smashed PATCO in 1981, strikes have met increased scabberding and police attacks. Above, Teamsters in Southern California during April 1994 national strike protest cop attack on pickets. Militant class struggle must oust the reactionary AFL-CIO tops and forge a revolutionary workers party.

more than 1,000 workers has hovered at 35 per year, a postwar low. Many of the strikes that did occur in this period have been bitter defensive struggles in the face of aggressive management attempts at union busting. Beginning with PATCO and running through Morenci, Hormel, Greyhound, Continental and Eastern Airlines, the New York *Daily News* and *Pittsburgh Press*, Caterpillar, Ravenswood, Pittston Coal and Bessemer Steel, workers have had to contend with everything from contracts being torn up under the pretext of "bankruptcy," to massive scabberding, to assaults—some of them murderous—on the picket line by National Guardsmen, cops, professional strikebreakers and gun thugs. It is estimated that U.S. capitalists collectively pay on the order of \$1 billion a year in fees to management consultants for advice on how to break strikes and unionization drives. Mandatory and random drug testing is a major issue in the workplace and a key means by which employers weed out militants and cow the entire workforce.

AFL-CIO chief Lane Kirkland complains that management is waging "one-sided class war" against labor. Kirkland and the bureaucratic misleaders of the U.S. labor movement certainly have no intention of making the war two-sided. In fact it was the abject surrender of the labor tops in the key industrial unions of auto, steel, mining and transport during the 1970s, beginning with labor's agreement to wage guidelines during the Vietnam War, that prepared the ground for today's anti-labor offensive. Intent on obeying the letter of capitalist law, the labor tops have tried to avoid strikes and instead rely increasingly on impotent moral gestures—consumer boycotts, "corporate campaigns" and public relations blitzes. Now there are significant layers of the labor bureaucracy who have never engaged in a strike and have little or no idea of how to mobilize the union membership for anything but to lobby legislators.

The decline of the U.S. labor movement stands in sharp contrast to Canada. In the late '60s levels of unionization

in Canada and the U.S. were roughly equal. However, due to relatively few legal barriers to organizing, the percent of unionization in Canada has risen gradually to nearly 40 percent, while in the U.S. in the same period it has declined by more than half, to less than 12 percent of the working class. The workers are being ground down to the point of desperation, yet fear losing their jobs as major corporations continue to lay off thousands to increase profit. The average age of an assembly line worker in auto is now 47. For the capitalists it is a period of economic recovery, but not for the workers.

Along with its steep drop in membership the organized labor movement is undergoing other changes. The core of the bureaucracy that won its spurs in the anti-communist witchhunt of the '50s is passing from the scene, replaced by a younger generation whose experience in the labor movement is the experience of two decades of concessions and retreats. While in the more backward regions of the country anti-communism strongly persists, with the demise of the USSR it will likely become more difficult for the bureaucrats to play the "anti-red" card as effectively as in the past.

The influx of young radicals into the union movement in the 1970s led to a proliferation of oppositional caucuses whose characteristic strategy entailed taking the incumbent bureaucracy to court while supporting militant-talking out-bureaucrats exemplified by Ed Sadlowski in the Steelworkers and Arnold Miller in the UMW. Consequently, the immediate, hard questions posed for our union contacts in that period were opposition to the intervention of the capitalist state in the internal affairs of the union and insistence on class-struggle programmatic criteria for supporting, however critically, candidates for union office. With the signal exception of the Teamsters, the weight of such oppositional groups in the internal life of the unions and political consciousness of the ranks has diminished since the late

1970s. No incumbent AFL-CIO regime has faced a major challenge by a Sadlowski-type figure, supported by large numbers of leftist activists, in over a decade.

In the 1970s, the main body of Shachtmanites (the International Socialists and their subsequent split-offs) concentrated their forces in the Teamsters, a union whose leadership was long the target of a federal government vendetta and was portrayed in the bourgeois media as a gang of criminals. The Shachtmanite-organized Teamsters for a Democratic Union thus served as a key internal agent in the successful government campaign to take over the Teamsters, which culminated in 1991 with the Justice Department ensuring the election as union president of Ron Carey, who was supported by the TDU. Carey is now trying to close the crucial district offices of the Teamsters, the historic bases of the union's power.

Reformist operators continue to play an important role in various union oppositional groupings with, for example, the old Shachtmanites grouped around *Labor Notes* (who overlap heavily with *Solidarity*) brokering practically every out-bureaucrat in the AFL-CIO. Both the Communist Party (CPUSA), including its spin-offs, and the various social democrats still wield significant influence in a number of key unions. Additionally there are numerous erstwhile leftists who remained in the unions and have worked their way into the lower echelons of the bureaucracy. Together they now constitute a layer of politically slick operators who, during an upsurge of militant labor struggle, can serve as left advisers and lieutenants to the hidebound AFL-CIO officialdom, or even in some instances as an alternative to a badly discredited leadership. They constitute a serious obstacle to a class-struggle perspective for the labor movement, and cannot be dismissed or ignored.

At the local levels, where the full blast of the capitalists' anti-labor offensive is felt, there is evident sympathy for our class-struggle perspective. Hundreds of thousands of copies of our *WV* supplement, "Labor's Gotta Play Hardball to Win," have been distributed in labor struggles all across the country. Our propaganda aimed at labor tends to be well received, particularly in areas where unions are under the gun, such as the Deep South and Southern California. In these regions belonging to a union often cuts against the generally reactionary social and political climate. Comrades should nevertheless keep in mind that receptivity to episodic distributions of propaganda from the outside is not a guide to how the union leaders or members will respond to similar points raised inside the unions. In any case, distribution of propaganda from the outside is no substitute for a presence in the unions.

For a Union Organizing Drive in the South

The current organizational weakness of the union movement makes it difficult to predict the character, form and location of a major upsurge in labor struggle. The return of a Democrat to the White House after 12 years is generally seen as an easing of the harsh anti-labor climate of the Reagan/Bush era. While Clinton hardly has a reputation as a staunch "friend of labor," most unionized workers were inclined to regard him as at least a benign arbiter. This was evidenced in the American Airlines flight attendants walk-out in November, whose stated (and achieved) purpose was to pressure the White House into supporting federal government arbitration.

Earlier, a bitter split had arisen between the protectionist

AFL-CIO bureaucracy and the White House over NAFTA, which was rammed through Congress despite vociferous AFL-CIO opposition. Fearful of being left out in the cold, Kirkland from Bal Harbour talks of mending fences with Clinton, while at the base of the unions anti-NAFTA sentiment, which has a big chauvinist component, runs strong.

Whatever the illusions among unionized workers in the relative benevolence of the new Democratic administration, the continuing anti-labor offensive by the ruling class will necessarily provoke defensive struggles. In particular, we should anticipate major confrontations in the two sectors of the labor movement which managed to retain considerable strength through the Reagan/Bush years: the public employee unions and the airline unions.

Given the succession of defeated strikes from PATCO to Caterpillar, many workers, especially of the younger generation, do not view their union as a potential combat organization against the boss but at best as an agency to service their particular grievances. Consequently, we are now encountering young workers interested in broad political and social questions who are not involved or concerned with intra-union affairs. We are also encountering immigrant workers whose experience in the more class-conscious labor movements of their homelands makes them open to revolutionary politics. It is necessary to convince such workers, who may be sympathetic to a socialist perspective, that the union movement can and must be transformed into an instrument of militant struggle against the bourgeois order.

Such a transformation requires first and foremost a unionization drive even more sweeping and extensive than that of the 1930s. The labor movement cannot regain its strength in the manufacturing sector without the organization of the "open shop" South where conditions appear ripe for unionization. Many industrial operations in the South, including the numerous subsidiaries of European and Japanese multinationals, are highly profitable and could easily absorb a large increase in wages and benefits. We are not dealing here with the problems of organizing sweatshops. Significantly, a number of Southern-born black workers have returned to the South to gain employment after having been laid off from their unionized industrial jobs in the North. Such black workers could form the key cadre for an organizing campaign against their new bosses.

The unionization of the South cannot and will not have a narrowly economist character, nor will it likely emanate from the top echelons of the AFL-CIO. On the one side, the entire black community will tend to rally behind racially integrated workers fighting the local white power structure. On the other side, the Southern branch of the American ruling class will resort not only to the police, company goons and professional strikebreakers but, if hard pressed, also to the Klan and its ilk, while using racist demagoguery to turn backward white workers against the labor movement. In short, a union organizing drive in the South will become a major arena of political struggle between the oppressed black masses and the white ruling class.

In the mid-1960s, we raised a Freedom Labor Party as a transitional demand for the South. In this way, we called on civil rights militants to break from the Democratic Party and form a class-based party, one of whose central tasks would be promoting the unionization of the Southern workforce. Today, one can envision in the South the reverse dynamic. A unionization drive could generate an embryonic



Rally of over 2,500 steel workers, miners, paper, rubber and auto workers, 26 September 1993, honored two striking United Steelworkers murdered in cold blood by scab. Workers must fight to unionize the South!

workers party which would also become the political expression of the black community. "Organize the South" and the call for integrated labor action to defend black rights are key slogans for Southern work today.

A major unionization drive in the South would require parallel drives aimed at the large industrial belt concentrated on the Mexican-American border. Our 1987 conference document called attention to the fact that:

"The Mexican-U.S. border area, in particular, is increasingly an economic unit with 'twin plants' (*maquiladoras*) employing hundreds of thousands of workers producing for the U.S. market. In response to Japanese competition, Detroit bosses have moved whole sections of the auto industry below the border: at the same time as it closes 11 plants in the U.S., GM is opening 12 in Mexico. While the union bureaucrats—along with the Stalinists and social democrats—respond with flag-waving protectionist calls on Congress for import quotas, 'domestic content' laws and bans on 'runaway plants,' what's called for is common international labor struggle."

— "Toward Revolutionary Conjunction,"
SLJU.S. IDB No. 47 (June 1987)

In the subsequent six years, the economic weight of the *maquiladora* zone has greatly expanded and the exploitation of all of Mexico will be accelerated with the establishment of NAFTA. It is therefore important to work out concrete organizational forms and transitional demands for cross-border labor struggle.

5. Prospects and Problems in Youth Recruitment

In view of the official brutality of the Reagan years, the growing acceptance of overtly racist remarks and the shocking rise of racist violence on traditionally liberal campuses,

the youth upheaval against the whole system of injustice laid bare by the Rodney King case was especially significant for spanning the racial divide. As one young white looter shouted at TV cameras: "It's not black vs. white. It's rich vs. poor. And we're poor."

The situation is complex and contradictory. The overt racism which flourished in the Reagan years itself gave rise to the growth of anti-racist "politically correct" mushy liberalism on the campuses. And the multiracial class unity evidenced in the Los Angeles upheaval is contradicted by the appeal of the black nationalists. Still, as a generality, in post-Rodney King America students and young workers are plenty discontented and more open to left-radical politics.

This generation of youth has much to be discontented about. Until now, working people and immigrants of all ethnicities had seen their children achieve a standard of living higher than their own. No more. With the looting and decay of the country's basic industrial infrastructure, manufacturing openings have vanished and what new jobs are created in the service sector are typically low-wage, non-union and without health or other benefits. It is not uncommon for youth to work two or three of these "McJobs" simultaneously, simply to survive. In industry, youth are clobbered by a "two-tier" wage structure which pits those entering the job market against workers with more seniority, while intensifying the rate of exploitation among younger workers. The real hourly wage of high school graduates entering the job market is 25 percent less for men and 15 percent less for women than in the late '70s. The income of families with children headed by someone under the age of 30 is 35 percent below that of a generation ago.

The two-tier wage and generally horrendous conditions of employment (the hours worked in auto, for instance,

preclude workers from having much of a life apart from work) generate a widespread cynicism about unions among young workers. However there is a notable spark of pro-working-class and pro-union sentiment among high school and college students from immigrant backgrounds. Asian American college students launched a national campaign of protest in support of garment workers toiling in designer Jessica McClintock's sweatshops. In Los Angeles, contingents of Hispanic high school and college students have participated in marches and demonstrations in support of immigrant workers. It is possible that our road to these immigrant workers, many of whom bring more militant traditions of struggle with them to the United States, will come through contact and recruitment of their youth. The Spartacus Youth Clubs ought to win a hearing among this pro-working-class layer.

Deindustrialization and the "Dumbing" of America

A 1983 report on education ("A Nation at Risk") stated: "For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills [and economic attainment] of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents." The "dumbing" of America is directly related to its deindustrialization. The ruling class spends on educating those they exploit and oppress only what they can realize back in profit. Having taken the wrecking ball to the auto factories, gutted the steel mills and closed many of the mines, there are few jobs left for which to train the children of the working class and poor.

There is a particularly nasty race and class edge to the destruction of education. The growing "equality of ignorance" should also be noted, as schools in white middle-class suburbs are also turning out functionally illiterate graduates. As we wrote in "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been...PC? Racism and Witchhunts on Campus":

"The last half-serious effort to improve education in this country came after the Russians launched Sputnik in 1957, when a wave of government-sponsored hysteria produced a concerted effort to teach more math and science. But any commitment to educating the population went down with the decline of the American empire, particularly its losing dirty war against the Vietnamese workers and peasants."

—WV No. 533, 30 August 1991

The government's attacks on the public education system, the shrinking economy, and the absence of broad social struggle, have shaped a generation with no particular compulsion to learn because there is no evident social use for acquired knowledge. This poses real problems for an organization like ours whose revolutionary continuity is contingent on the assimilation of the lessons of the previous 150 years of the Marxist movement by a new generation of recruits. A 1989 memo adopted by the Political Bureau (PB) emphasized the need for a heavy investment in party resources to educate our new youth:

"What do our new young comrades moving into membership need? Not just a world view but a multiplicity of world views. If you are a black South African coal miner, if you are an urban Soviet dissident, if you are a sympathizer of the Tamil Tigers, you see things in a certain way. Our comrades must try to cause our newer members to appreciate these often contrasting world views and to *relate* them to the actual social and political historical development taking place in the world—which is far from always the same thing. In other words, our main thrust ought to be through appropriate and effective classes and patient individual con-

tacting by able cadres to assist in the development of a new layer of young Marxists."

—"Tender Loving Care!" 16 October 1989,
SL/U.S. IB No. 50 (June 1990)

Recent flare-ups of philistinism underscore the need for internal education of a broad nature, especially for our youth comrades. In the Bay Area, some youth recruits objected to a local forum on Springfield for its depth of discussion about Nathan Bedford Forrest and the origins of the Ku Klux Klan, evidently missing the relevance of the Civil War to present American society. In Atlanta, a comrade vituperatively attacked a party speaker for using basic Marxist terminology in a public talk. This incident was a tip-off that something had gone seriously wrong with the Atlanta OC.

The educational series to prepare the tendency for the projected debate with Ernest Mandel is the first nationally coordinated educational program in some years. There have been excellent local educational series, such as the Pacific Rim series on the West Coast, and each new publication by our party archive, the PRL, has been followed by educational series in all the branches. Regional educational series have been held almost every spring, but mainly for consolidating new recruits and contacts.

In addition to the importance of education as a feature of internal party life to train and assimilate youth cadres, the fight for the right to an education is a potentially explosive issue among working-class and minority youth, teachers and city workers. In the spring of 1991, students at the City University of New York (CUNY) protested steep tuition hikes and cutbacks in financial aid and educational services by shutting down the entire public university system. Militant protests and building occupations closed 12 campuses for three weeks. New York SYC members intervened around the clock in these protests, including doing their share of overnight duty in the occupied buildings.

Exorbitant tuition hikes at public universities and community colleges effectively constitute a deliberate purge of poor and minority youth from higher education, which is still widely perceived as the best escape hatch from a life of impoverishment. We should anticipate more outbreaks of struggle around this issue. At the high school level, the powerful, integrated teachers unions have, in fighting for their own interests, also led the fight against the destruction of public education. It's noteworthy that high school students, e.g., in Los Angeles, have actively supported teacher strikes.

Feminist Anti-Sex Crusade

Another kind of generational gap separating youthful contacts, *and even youth club members*, from our party concerns basic social values. Even radical youth coming of age today show the imprint of the Reagan years in their acceptance of state regulation of sexuality. On this score, the feminist Democratic White House is as meddlesome as the right-wing Republicans. Our party swims against the stream of this reactionary climate; for example, in defense of the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA).

Opposition to pornography and hysteria over child molestation marked the point of *convergence* between "politically correct" feminism and the Moral Majority right. The feminist movement which emerged as part of the student-youth radicalization of the late 1960s challenged conventional

sexual morality. Today, however, fanning hysteria over "date rape," feminism, which heavily influences the social mores of college youth, has become a major force for sexual repression and censorship carried out by the bourgeois state. The rightward lurch of the women's movement is symbolized in the shift from bra-burning to book-banning. Acceptance of this state-enforced puritanism is further reinforced for youth by the scourge of AIDS, which has turned sexual experimentation—which used to be a lot of what being a teenager was about—into a game of Russian roulette. Having seen little social struggle in their lifetimes, today's youth tend to look to "fight racism and sexism" by regulation of behavior through campus "speech codes" and even "politically correct" sexual conduct codes.

To understand the social factors that shape this right-wing impulse is not to condone it. Among members of the Berkeley youth who were recruited out of their opposition to the racist police and imperialist troops, there was alarming evidence of the influence of the feminist/bourgeois hysteria against "child abuse" and "date rape." The point was made that, however backhanded and couched in the vocabulary of the "victims," such arguments essentially support state intervention into, and criminalization of, consensual sexual relations. This discussion had a generally salutary effect on these new young members.

Regardless of one's personal preferences, as Marxists we fight for an expansion of human freedom in *all* spheres; as Leninists our struggle is fundamentally defined *against the bourgeois state*. As was stated in a discussion in the Berkeley/Oakland SYC on 4 January 1994, occasioned by some disagreements among the youth with "The 'Date Rape' Issue: Feminist Hysteria, Anti-Sex Witchhunt," in *Women and Revolution* No. 43:

"Questions of sexuality per se do not really fall within the realm of a revolutionary party.... The reason that we talk about questions of sexuality is that often these questions are politicized, usually not by us but by the bourgeoisie, by some element of society, that takes questions that are normally of a secondary interest and makes them political questions that we not only can comment on but in certain circumstances must comment on and must take a position on.... But the question of abortion rights is a very political

question where if we said that was beyond our realm we would be quite deficient as revolutionaries....

"So when we deal now with the question of child abuse, we are not dealing with some abstract question of the abuse of children but the politicization of that question and its use as an attack on childcare centers, which is where it started and what it was centered on.

"On the question of date rape, it is no longer a question of rape or dates or being raped by an acquaintance, but it has become a campaign where the relations between young men and women have been generalized to be seen as coercive and where it is being used to attack individual freedoms on campus. So these questions are no longer simple questions of rape by an acquaintance or child abuse; they have changed because they have become politicized."

There is an important and welcome backlash to the anti-porn, child abuse and "date rape" hysteria, in part pushed by a more rational section of the bourgeoisie, as evidenced by the tremendous publicity and clamor for Katie Roiphe's book attacking the feminists' crusade against sex (*The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus*). But also among our audience, and particularly outside the bean-sprout totalitarian city of Berkeley, we intersect youth who subscribe to our press and want to talk to us because they appreciate our unique, humanist and very forward stands on all social questions from the decriminalization of drugs, to the removal of the government from the bedrooms, to protesting the heinous murders of odd sects like MOVE or the Branch Davidians, to opposing gun control.

Marxists have always recognized that conventional sexual and social morality is tortuously deformed in all class societies and have never attempted to prescribe what is natural or unnatural, healthy or unhealthy. Isaac Deutscher said it well:

"We do not maintain that socialism is going to solve all predicaments of the human race. We are struggling in the first instance with the predicaments that are of man's making and that man can resolve. May I remind you that Trotsky, for instance, speaks of three basic tragedies—hunger, sex and death—besetting man. Hunger is the enemy that Marxism and the modern labour movement have taken on. In doing so they have naturally been inclined to ignore or belittle man's other predicaments. But is it not true that hunger or, more broadly, social inequality and oppression, have hugely complicated and intensified for innumerable human beings the torments of sex and death as well?... Yes, socialist man will still be pursued by sex and death; but we are convinced that he will be better equipped than we are to cope even with these."

—"On Socialist Man," *Marxism, Wars & Revolutions: Essays from Four Decades* (1984)

The Battle for Abortion Rights

In the absence of broad social struggle or a politically defined youth movement for us to intervene in, our youth recruitment will likely continue to be linear and of somewhat exceptional individuals. Across the country we have some very good youth contacts who are *not* joining us immediately because events do not compel them to do so. Patience and pedagogy are key. The attenuation of struggle and the displacement of the Russian question from *the* litmus test for revolutionists to a historic question also tends to blur the differences between us and our opponents. Apparently decent and young human material is being gathered by our opponents because the differences between our competing programs are remote and abstract until sharply counterposed in real struggle.

The Persian Gulf War and antiwar movement was the last period of rapid and significant youth radicalization in

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Workers Vanguard

Spartacist joined defense of abortion clinic against Operation Rescue bigots in California, July 1993. Question of women's rights is a polarizing social question from U.S. to Germany and Poland; defenders of abortion rights are in front line.

the United States. The war was a great accelerator of political consciousness and many essentially liberal, idealist and pacifist youth were open to a Marxist worldview as they fought to understand *and to change* society. Despite the excruciating limitations of our size and geographic extension, we were able to *polarize* antiwar protests and carry out effective opponents work as the protest movement clearly divided between a center, a left and a right. Our call to "Defeat U.S. imperialism, defend Iraq!" was sharply counterposed to the red, white and blue "peace" movement and the fake-leftists who advocated killing the Iraqis—slowly—with a blockade instead of bombs under the auspices of the United Nations instead of direct U.S. military attack.

For the first time in many years, there was a national movement in which to intervene and vie for our share of recruits. The last big wave of campus protests was "divestment" (the call for an international strike of capital against South Africa), in which we were mainly limited to propaganda and debate because we did not support what was essentially a utopian, pro-capitalist campaign for a "humanitarian" investment policy by U.S. imperialism. The radicalization and opportunity for recruitment opened by the Persian Gulf War was drastically cut short by U.S. imperialism's quick and devastating victory over Iraq. When the war ended, most of our brand-new youth recruits took one look around at the kind of hard-core organization they had leapt into...and leapt back out as quickly as they had signed up.

Still, a general awareness of the bloody terror inflicted by the U.S. government against the Iraqi people, and the yawning gap between the realities of American foreign and domestic policy and the government's democratic pretensions have created an opening for the left. There is no reason for today's radical-minded youth—whether white, black or Hispanic—to have either a spontaneous affinity for or hard antipathy toward any of the various groups

claiming the mantle of revolutionary socialism. Our opponents will likely grow in this period, particularly in places where we do not exist, but we should also grow.

To recruit newly radicalized youth, especially in active competition with our reformist and centrist opponents, is the central task facing our party in the U.S. today. It is not enough to counterpose our revolutionary program and tactics *abstractly* to those of our opponents. Youth recruitment requires that the clash of ideas and competition with our opponents be tested by active intervention in struggles when and where we can participate and through application of the united-front tactic.

The battle for abortion rights continues to attract large numbers of young men and women. Most of the bourgeois feminist movement has done nothing to contest the particularly burdensome restrictions placed on *young* women seeking abortions. It is harder now for a young woman to terminate a pregnancy than it was 21 years ago when *Roe v. Wade* established the legal right to abortion. In more than half the fifty states, "squeal rules" are the law of the land and mandate that pregnant minors secure parental or judicial consent prior to getting a legal abortion. Since Bill and Hillary Clinton moved to the White House, bourgeois feminists have largely abandoned the fight in the streets to defend the clinics. There has been a certain shift to the left in this milieu as protesters, many of whom had illusions in the Democratic Party, are now up against the forces of a state administered by the Democrats.

While our own recent youth recruitment has notably improved our interventions in this struggle, it should be noted that we probably lost some opportunities previously because of an overly passive and propagandist (at best) or abstentionist (at worst) posture in some of the big battles for abortion rights. Critically assessing our intervention in Buffalo, New York as too little and too late, and sharply taking issue with the abstention of the Oakland local from a protest against Operation Rescue in Fremont on the

spurious grounds that it was "too dangerous," a comrade wrote:

"In the major demonstrations concerning women's rights, we have generally responded well, with banners and contingents when appropriate. Still, in thinking about the party's overall profile in terms of abortion clinic defense, I don't really feel we have done what we could. We were there at a number of clinic defense actions, although generally it was seen as a newspaper sale, and maybe a couple of signs....

"What is meant by clinic defense? The clinic directors and NOW, NARAL directors think it is 'providing escorts' in cooperation with the cops. Mass militant defense of clinics means polarization *against* the bourgeois feminists and their popular fronts....

"It seems obvious that one reason the RWL managed to recruit a layer of young activists out of the abortion clinic defense work is that we really were not very involved in it. And I would argue they recruited in good part because their slogans sounded like Spartacist slogans and appealed to radical youth: 'Build mass mobilizations to keep the clinics open! No reliance on the cops, courts, Democrats or Republicans!' 'Break with the Democrats, Build a Workers Party,' etc. Of course, they really were capitulating to NOW, et al., but that's the kind of contradiction we should be exposing. I mean, whose slogans are those anyway?"

—"Abstentionism or a Fighting Propaganda Group?" 7 April 1993, *SL/U.S. IB* No. 54 (April 1993)

Our youth work strongly tends to center on the campuses. Schools are not factories and there are no inherently "strategic" campuses. In youth work, gold is where you find it...and sometimes nuggets turn up in the most unpredictable places. Our geographic isolation severely limits our ability to win radicalized youth. For instance, subjectively revolutionary youth who look qualitatively no different from our own recruits sign up with outfits like the ISO in Austin or with the RWL in Detroit because we are not there to win them.

We extend ourselves across the country during the annual subscription drive and it is not unheard-of for subscribers introduced to us in this way to essentially recruit themselves to the SL or youth clubs by striking up a correspondence and eventually moving to a city where we exist. These are exceptionally motivated individuals and we can count the numbers who have done so in the last period on just one hand. Until human and financial resources permit us to support regional field organizers, it is important for locals to budget the time and money for trips to work over our subscribers in the regional hot spots, set up study circles where feasible, and generally attempt to transform our readership into active supporters and in so doing, qualitatively extend our political reach across the country. The efforts of the Los Angeles organizing committee to cohere a group of youth in the Southwest is a model for other locals to emulate in this work.

From abortion rights protests to anti-fascist mobilizations, there is evidence of a stirring among youth, a "molecular process" of some little radicalization bubbling to the top. Across the country we've run into clots of students who travel great distances to participate in political struggle. This is something that we haven't seen in this country for many years and it is an important development for the future of our party. As a leading comrade noted in a letter:

"We have run on since the early '70s essentially with the same stock of cadres. That's a long time. We need an infusion of large layers of able young people rapidly moving upward within our organization. This can only take place

in the context of a generalized radical turn in American political life *and* our effective participation in such developments. Otherwise we are a gone goose, and since we've already run on for 15 years, I think sooner, which is in fact later."

—attachment to minutes of Special Political Bureau meeting No. 6, 2 October 1989

6. Our Radical Competitors

Our 1987 conference document noted, "We are today widely acknowledged as the Trotskyists in the U.S...." The reformist Socialist Workers Party officially renounced Trotskyism in a 1983 speech by Jack Barnes. The welter of other smaller organizations nominally claiming to be Trotskyist—Socialist Action, the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, the Revolutionary Workers League, the Morenoites, the Freedom Socialist Party, etc.—distinguished themselves as champions of the forces of anti-Soviet counterrevolution abroad and concomitant pro-Democratic Party class collaborationism at home. Our organization stood out as the Trotskyists for our forthright Soviet defensism and opposition to the popular front.

Just how far to the right our opponents had moved was amply demonstrated during the Persian Gulf War. From overt *support* to the imperialist war effort against Iraq under the fig leaf of "United Nations" sanctions, to red, white and blue appeals to "Support Our Troops—Bring Them Home," the left's "antiwar" coalitions had only the thinnest veneer of "anti-imperialism." This "antiwar" movement essentially evaporated as soon as terror bombing of Iraq began, crumbling in the face of an initial, if shallow, wave of patriotism.

During the Gulf War, the centrist Revolutionary Workers League's call for "Victory to Iraq" provided a pole of attraction for youth repelled by the yellow-ribbon reformists. Together with its mobilizations in defense of abortion clinics against Operation Rescue fanatics, under the rubric of the National Women's Rights Organizing Coalition, the RWL recruited a layer of activist youth.

We were very slow off the mark in both these cases. During the war, we paid little attention to the RWL as is evident by the lack of any polemic against them in our press. Similarly, our attempts to intersect militant youth in the abortion clinic defense actions were initially quite minimal. Standing together in united actions is a crucial component of winning elements from opponent organizations. Instead we tended to falsely counterpose the idea that clinic defense was somehow contingent on mobilizing the power of organized labor. Given the current social backwardness and religious divisions in the working class, this is fatuous. Unlike the question of fighting the fascists, the defense of abortion clinics is something extrinsic to the felt needs of labor as an economic class.

In the aftermath of the war, following the split between the two former leading gurus of the RWL, we recouped with a quite effective polemic. A push was made to intelligently intersect their new young members particularly in their Midwest center and also on the West Coast. This paid off in the recruitment of three young members—their entire youth—in the Bay Area. Our more active orientation to clinic defense served to undercut the RWL/NWROC's



Workers Hammer



Holmes/Lansing State Journal

Spartacist League/Britain banner (left) at London anti-fascist demonstration, 16 October 1993: "Not wretched appeals to the capitalist state!" SL/B called for trade-union/minority mobilizations. In contrast, pseudo-left groups routinely lead anti-fascist protesters into police pens such as above right, in Michigan, April 1994, promoting deadly illusions in the "democratic" nature of the capitalist state.

appeals to youthful activism. Our labor/black mobilization against the Klan in Springfield is also a very effective tool in exposing the RWL's "anti-fascist" antics, which overwhelmingly consist of leading their supporters into police pens. While occasionally masquerading as "Trotskyists," the RWL is the epitome of the poly-sectoralist radical liberalism that infects much of the so-called left in this country.

Both the negative and the positive aspects of our work around the RWL should be instructive to our opponents work in this period. The fact that we are recognized as the genuine Trotskyists in this country does not automatically translate into regroupments or recruitment. On the contrary, this credential needs to be translated to a new generation particularly now that we don't have the Russian question as an automatic discriminator between us and our opponents.

ISO: Social Democrats on the Coattails of Clinton's Democrats

The International Socialist Organization, the most gleeful left cheerleaders for anti-Communist reaction, feel the wind in their sails and are heavily recruiting. Although this recruitment is generally occurring in places that we are not, it nonetheless speaks ill of our general intelligence about our opponents that we were pretty much caught by surprise at the numbers in attendance at the recent conference of the ISO on the East Coast.

It has been remarked that the ISO is coming to occupy the niche formerly held by the Democratic Socialists of America. While this seems to be broadly true, unlike the DSA and despite its general social-democratic politics, the ISO is capable of at least making ritual genuflections to the need for "revolution" and even claiming, if only occasionally and only on paper, the heritage of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. During the Gulf War, they also claimed in their press to be for "victory to Iraq"—a demand never raised in public for fear of offending the yellow-ribbon "antiwar" movement. But they could play it both ways.

In this regard, the youth the ISO are recruiting are quite heterogeneous—ranging from anti-communist social democrats to those who genuinely are looking for a revolutionary alternative. In addition to trips to those campuses where the ISO is recruiting to get a better sense of their operation and to sow the seeds of discontent among their newer members, we generally need better intelligence for effective polemics.

Despite being excluded from an ISO "public" meeting in Austin (as we are across the country) during our fall sub drive, the work of our sub-drive team was quite effective in exposing and embarrassing the Cliffites. It caused one member to quit; she is now a contact of ours in the Bay Area thanks to the follow-up work of the Chicago local. Another example of an effective intervention was that of our Japanese section who managed to drive leading British Cliffite Chris Harman to distraction by denouncing their position that the cops are part of the workers movement. That we had copies of their press as concrete proof of their despicable positions was crucial and something that should inform our opponents work generally.

Exposing the Cliffites' attitude toward the racist, capitalist cops is particularly effective given that internationally they try to trade on the "anti-fascist" work of the British Socialist Workers Party. The same posture is also often struck by the Labor Militant tendency. Although their forces are generally quite small in this country, and largely devoted to the most abysmal reformism, they can and do wield the work of Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) to their advantage. Over this issue, we should be able to quite effectively expose Labor Militant by pointing to their touching faith in the "anti-fascism" of the bourgeois rulers (codified in statements such as "the bourgeoisie will never again allow a petty bourgeois fascist upstart like Hitler or Mussolini to take power.")!

As part of their recruiting measures, our opponents cater to the current prejudices of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly "politically correct" feminism. In a recent interchange

with the ISO in San Francisco, we were reviled as advocates of "pedophilia" and "date rape." Such charges were taken to an apogee of hysterical libel in a leaflet issued by the all-purpose sectoralists of the Freedom Socialist Party in Vancouver. That our opposition to sexual and social morality being enforced by the capitalist state should provoke such a response from self-declared "Marxists" is a measure of how much they imbibe of the preachments of their "own" bourgeoisie. The perniciousness of this latter-day New Left sectoralism was grotesquely demonstrated by an RWL/NWROC campaign on Cal campus trying to whip up a feminist posse to hunt down a black man alleged to be a sexual "assailant" (the ultimate crime in racist America).

Pseudo-Trotskyists, Charlatans and Stalinist Remnants

The document of the second international conference of the ICL warned: "We must guard against complacency toward the various pretenders to Trotskyism. Despite decades of tailing whatever 'mass movement,' however reactionary, was popular at the moment, these political chameleons retain the capacity to put on a left face when convenient." This admonition was intended largely to call attention to Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat, in particular to a new centrist coalition calling itself the "International Trotskyist Opposition" (ITO).

The ability of the USec adherents in this country, who have long been of a reformist cast, to put on a leftist face is largely negligible. During the Persian Gulf War, Nat Weinstein's Socialist Action had hoped to recapture the "mass" popular-front role played by the SWP in the Vietnam antiwar movement. Despite Socialist Action's best social-patriotic efforts, that option was cut short by the war's quick end. In the aftermath, various clots of cadre and members split in pursuit of larger reformist pastures. The Fourth Internationalist Tendency simply opted to liquidate itself into Solidarity, a swamp of "radical" intellectuals and waterboys for the trade-union bureaucracy, headed by anti-communist leftovers from the defunct International Socialists.

Peter Sollenberger's Trotskyist League, a component of the centrist ITO, does have some potential capacity to

appear as a "left-wing" alternative. Sollenberger's entire political history has been one of erecting anti-Spartacist centrist "alternatives" to our organization. Recently, his new organization has accrued a small split from his former group, the RWL. Sollenberger's group is currently buried in the Solidarity swamp. While the "Trotskyist League" remains quite small and relatively inactive, we avoid monitoring what they are up to at our own peril.

Of a rather different nature, our most identifiable competitors in the sense of at least nominally parroting Trotskyist orthodoxy are David North's Workers League and the so-called Bolshevik Tendency. The spectacular demise of Gerry Healy's International Committee in 1985 widely exposed the base criminality of this organization. Yet David North rushed to claim the mantle of Healy's IC for himself. North continued Healy's slanderous "Security and the Fourth International" campaign of reviling the SWP as being run by FBI agents. After years of devoting the majority of their efforts to the imprisonment of a young SWP leader, Mark Curtis, in the aftermath of Yeltsin's 1991 counter-coup in the Soviet Union the Workers League began to pour content into their posture as the orthodox Trotskyists.

Today these renegades, who were among the most virulent anti-communists (and whose former international leadership, with which they claim continuity, committed crimes such as heralding the 1979 murder of 21 Iraqi CPers by Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime and collected cold hard cash for toadying to various despotic Near Eastern regimes), are palming themselves off as the organization which alone defended the gains of the October Revolution. Unlike our opponents who are recruiting youth, the Workers League is more a threat to our identity as *the* genuine Trotskyists. Their organization is largely a fake operation run by a handful of longtime cadre with few members. Nonetheless, they work the Ann Arbor campus where we have no presence. With their publication of material from the early Left Opposition, together with a very professional-looking newspaper professing Trotskyist orthodoxy, they could easily fool the unwary. To convince the uninitiated requires more than simply retailing a litany of Healy/North's crimes, which merely comes off as one left group saying nasty things about

Spartacist Pamphlet—Just Out!

Militant Labour's Touching Faith in the Capitalist State

This pamphlet counterposes the revolutionary politics of the International Communist League to the reformism of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) led by the Militant Labour organization in Britain.

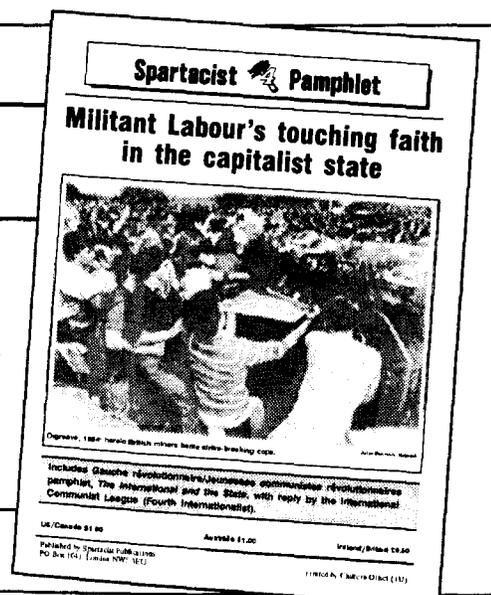
Includes the entire text of Gauche révolutionnaire/Jeunesses communistes révolutionnaires pamphlet, "The International and the State," with a reply by the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

Published in English and French

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another to no apparent purpose. Where and if appropriate, our propaganda must find a way of convincing people that these guys are a monumental fraud.

The "International Bolshevik Tendency" also has the capacity to sound very much like our organization. However, their current presence in North America is pretty much restricted to their annual journal, *1917*, which displays an increasingly rightist bent. Otherwise, particularly in the aftermath of a "split" headed by lumpen and "proletarian" thug elements, the BT is not much in evidence.

Of our opponents of a Stalinist or Stalinoid variety, Progressive Labor (PL) seems to show the most signs of life. In Los Angeles we have encountered some fairly raw, mainly Latino, youth attracted to PL's anti-racism and crude appeals for "communism." PL's youth have shown interest in the campaigns to save Mumia Abu-Jamal and defend Geronimo Pratt. Where we have intersected PL youth at anti-fascist mobilizations they have been susceptible to argument (far more so than the RWL) against relying on the state by protesting in police pens.

Otherwise, PL appears to have gone back to their "center-left coalition" reformism in the unions. Recently PL supporters did quite well in elections in a West Coast union, running a traditional-style campaign combining the most abject reformism with appeals for communism. They do get *Challenge* around in the industry and seem to be trying to build some kind of base among part-time workers, which we should pay attention to.

Of the remnants of the former Maoist organizations, the Revolutionary Communist Party (today the American fan club of Sendero Luminoso) still shows some capacity to pick up some anarchist youth here and there. Although these generally are not types we have much interest in, it should be noted that the RCP's grotesque anti-homosexual views cause them some acute embarrassment. After years of "study campaigns" (which studiously avoided Trotskyism) directed at trying to determine what went wrong in the Stalinist movement, the Marxist-Leninist Party—a small, eclectic group of former Hoxhaites—recently dissolved.

Gus Hall's Communist Party is a geriatric shell. Most of the CP's relatively "younger" elements, and the majority of its black cadre, split to the right in the early '90s, founding the Committees of Correspondence who are among the main movers for popular-frontism in the U.S. However, while we might say that "Stalinism is dead," the Stalinists of the CPUSA haven't breathed their last as was evidenced by the efforts of their trade unionists to spike labor support for our Springfield anti-Klan mobilization.

Apart from the CP, it is notable that we rarely encounter most of our other opponents in our interventions into labor struggles (with the sometime exception of the SWP). While groups like the ISO and Solidarity have some supporters within the unions, their efforts have largely been devoted to mobilizing the Justice Department to "clean out" the old-time labor bureaucrats. The RWL barely even makes a nod in the direction of the proletariat. Rather their posture is that of radical liberals with a micro-veneer of Trotskyism. Fundamentally, our opponents personify Lenin's observation that the source of all opportunism is an underestimation of the revolutionary capacity of the working class.

After more than a decade in which our intersection with our leftist competitors was minimal and overwhelmingly

hostile, our skills at effectively combating our opponents have become blunted. Ten years ago, a PB memo on work directed toward ostensibly revolutionary organizations (OROs), "Let's Stop Being Pests, For Surgical Precision in ORO Work," noted that the

"...depoliticized ORO activism of the past decade should not become the depoliticized ORO passivity of the future. The point is not to intervene 'once in a while' but to take advantage of openings when they exist...."

"The ORO press should be read and thought about. When we do intervene consideration must be given to tone. Sometimes pedagogy, sometimes a scathing attack, depending on our audience and the nature of the issue. Above all ORO work is *contacting work*."

—28 January 1984, *SL/U.S. IIDB* No. 43
(March 1984)

The SL/U.S. has tremendous capital, both organizationally and politically, which should enable us to rip our opponents to shreds, recruit and regroup. But that task requires necessary thought and intelligence from the locals, organizing committees and youth clubs, to inform our propaganda and interventions. As the "pest" memo concluded, "Forward to locals which wield a sharp knife, and only very occasionally a sledgehammer, against our fake-left opponents."

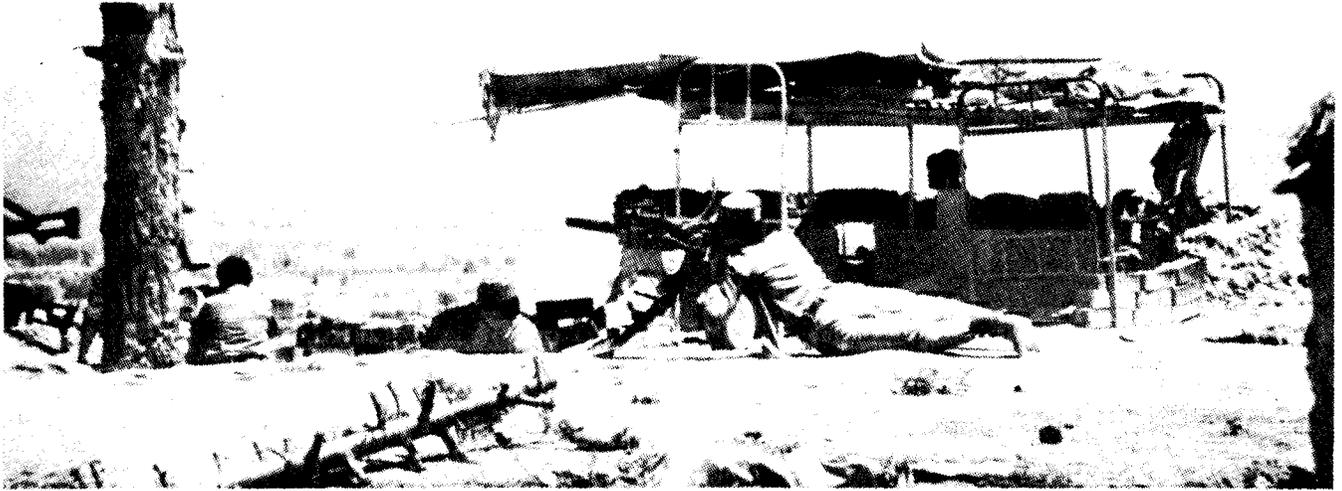
7. Cold War II in Hindsight—A Look Back at the SL/U.S. Since the Eighth National Conference

It's been seven years since the Spartacist League's last (eighth) national conference. More significant than the elapsed time is the fact that this ninth national conference takes place in a radically different political period and in a world redefined by Stalinism's ultimate betrayal, the undoing of the 1917 Russian workers revolution.

The Reagan years dragged on a lot longer than anyone anticipated. Instead of the shattering of a prolonged bad period indicated by the wishful title of our last conference document, "Toward Revolutionary Conjuncture," we got four years of CIA chief George Herbert Walker Bush (and former vice president Dan Quayle, whose career culminated in a crusade for "family values" against a *fictional* TV character who bore a child out of wedlock). It was a long, weird period and it took a toll on our party. In the last ten years we lost two of our three Midwest branches, and all our branches became smaller. These losses come not as the result of a sharp fight or split but through a slow, steady attrition of comrades whose political commitment gave out under the pressures and disappointments of a time when not much was moving our way politically, combined with the vicissitudes of life, mainly aging.

Programmatically this party kept on track through the Reagan years and seized what opportunities did present themselves for communist intervention. The party's capacity to internally correct political deviations and problems through exhaustive international discussion and fights is also clear. The extensive discussion and critical examination of our intervention into the DDR events stands out in this regard and politically prepared our tendency for the Soviet debacle. The French section—which certainly faced radically different domestic pressures—blew up at the top and this should be noted also for its impact on the SL/U.S. For

Karesimir, Afghanistan: Youth battalion guarded northern approach to Kabul, August 1989 (top photo). Land of contrasts: women veiled in head-to-toe chadors sit in the shadow of Soviet-made helicopter.



Afghanistan was a key battleground in Cold War II. Gorbachev's unilateral pullout in 1989 precipitated rapid disintegration of Soviet power and breakup of the USSR itself. Spartacist tendency actively campaigned for defense of Soviet-backed left nationalist Afghan government against CIA-organized Islamic mujahedin.

a long time, our tendency had three real party centers: New York, the Bay Area and Paris. Despite recent transfers to create an international center in London, we do not yet have any cohesive party collective outside the United States which could act as a counterbalance to the strong and often strange political pressures that bear down on us in this country.

It is sobering to note that the bourgeoisie in fact achieved three out of its four "core goals" outlined in our last conference document:

"The core goals of the Reagan presidency conform to a reactionary bourgeois *consensus*, the basic elements of which are: 1) overcoming at the level of popular attitudes the 'Vietnam syndrome,' i.e., disillusionment with the Cold War against the Soviet bloc and unwillingness to make sacrifices for the sake of anti-Communism; 2) increasing military and economic pressure on the Soviet Union, its allies and client states, specifically seeking to regain effective nuclear first-strike capacity; 3) decisively weakening the organized labor movement through a combination of giveback contracts, union-busting and the extension of non-union shops; and 4) reversing the limited and token gains of the civil rights movement, and cutting back and dismantling social programs beneficial especially to the black and Hispanic poor and the aged."

If previously the American population was unwilling to make sacrifices for the sake of anti-Communism, it is even less inclined to die for wars without any ideology. The absence of an external bogeyman to deflect domestic discontents is a problem presently for the capitalist ruling class.

Afghanistan: Campaign to Defend Jalalabad

Hindsight may be 20/20, but it is nonetheless useful to see how our last conference document stands the test of time so that we can try to avoid similar misestimations and



Workers Vanguard/Le Bolchévique photos

political impressionism now and in the future. Just as we underestimated the depth of the rightward shift in America, reflecting a very broad bourgeois consensus, we also underestimated the extent of Stalinism's retrograde influence on the Soviet peoples and its destruction of even residual consciousness of the program of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. But prior to Gorbachev's *glasnost*, no avowed Trotskyists could even probe the Soviet Union to get a measure of the mood of that society. We didn't foresee the spectacular unraveling of the USSR and East Europe in 1989-91, but we *did* recognize that the question of Afghanistan was central.

With bitterness we can note just how correct we were to say that it was "better to fight in Afghanistan than in the Ukraine."

In view of the recent blunting of our line in failing to call for a military bloc in defense of the Russian parliament against Yeltsin in October 1993, it is interesting how easily we understood what was objectively in the interests of the working class—when the Soviet workers state still existed—including the need for military blocs with politically distant forces. Thus in February 1989 when Gorbachev bowed to imperialism and withdrew Soviet forces from Afghanistan, we dispatched a reporter to this hot spot of the Cold War and the Partisan Defense Committee offered to organize an international brigade to fight alongside the forces of the left-nationalist Kabul government against Washington's *mujahedin* and in defense of the Soviet Union and Afghan women.

Although the Afghan government turned down the offer of a brigade, we were able to carry out a stunningly successful campaign of material aid for the victims of Jalalabad. To the horror of feminist Cold Warriorettes, we marched under a banner proclaiming, "No to the Veil! Defend Afghan Women! Support Jalalabad Victims of CIA Cutthroats!" in the midst of a huge abortion rights march in Washington in April 1989 and so launched the "Jalalabad Civilian Victims Aid Fund." This fund drive was a political campaign that reached deep into the pro-Soviet milieu around the world. In little more than two months we raised over \$40,000 for Jalalabad, mainly in small contributions from *thousands* of people.

The broad impact of this international class-struggle defense effort was a key impetus in the decision to change our name from the international Spartacist tendency to the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), reflecting our aim of winning some of the thousands of militants who *thought* they were communists to the authentic communism of Lenin and Trotsky. To be sure, those forces were mainly to be found outside America, nonetheless our campaign for Jalalabad here "in the belly of the beast" did much to maintain the political health of the SL/U.S.

The Strangulation of Sandinista Nicaragua

Closer to home, our call to "Defend, Complete, Extend the Nicaraguan Revolution!" and our active participation in work brigades and the "Nicabucks" campaign for material aid to assist in the defense of Sandinista Nicaragua against the U.S.-sponsored *contra* war dominated much of our work in the Reagan years, particularly on the campuses. Regarding Nicaragua, our 1987 conference document noted the "continuing strength of the 'Vietnam syndrome,'" and projected "significant American casualties" and a war on the "home front" in the event of a U.S. invasion. The document noted the Nicaraguans' "evident capacity and will to fight hard." But in February 1990 Violeta Chamorro won the presidential elections and the Sandinista *lider* Daniel Ortega handed over power to the *Doña Contra*, planting a kiss on her cheek.

The demise of Sandinista Nicaragua had a huge impact on the American left, which was mainly animated through the Reagan years in popular-frontist opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America. That movement, which at times mobilized tens of thousands of protesters, simply

folded up and died when the Sandinistas handed over power. Our prominent political opposition to the petty-bourgeois Sandinista government and repeated warnings that their "mixed economy" and "political pluralism" threatened the limited gains of the 1979 overthrow of Somoza uniquely enabled us to explain this gross betrayal of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants whose struggle had inspired revolutionary-minded youth around the world.

The Sandinistas were never forced to transcend or alter their own radical petty-bourgeois outlook and social appetites. Previous discussions in our tendency provided us with a firm theoretical understanding that for the perspective of permanent revolution to be realized in Nicaragua it was urgently necessary for the proletariat to be regrouped under a Trotskyist revolutionary vanguard in order to intervene in and take command of a struggle leading to socialist revolution.

The rollback of the incomplete Nicaraguan revolution did not occur by direct military overthrow of the Sandinista regime, but by "making the economy scream." Again, with benefit of hindsight, one sees in our analysis of Nicaragua evidence of a certain political impressionism which has been the subject of more recent internal debate over our analysis of the Iraq war as it unfolded and also how to weight our propaganda in this critical moment for defense of the Cuban Revolution. There has been a tendency to overdraw the military factor and anticipate a flood tide of anti-imperialist struggle while seriously downplaying the crucial and related factors of political consciousness and material economic reality.

The U.S. ruling class *also* is quite aware of the "Vietnam syndrome" and was able to roll back the partial Nicaraguan revolution without ever having to directly invade the country. Nicaragua was strangled and starved by the *capitalist market*, bled white by nine years of the *contra* war and economic blockade, and knifed and abandoned by *Stalinist nationalism* (which opposed any *direct* extension of the Cuban or Russian revolutions). The material conditions were made so unbearable for so long that even pro-Sandinista workers and peasants ended up voting for Chamorro because they thought it was the only way to end the *contra* war and enable them to feed their children again.

"Toward Revolutionary Conjuncture" also sneers at U.S. military and technical incompetence in the Near East and counterposes it to the successful Iraqi missile attack on the *Stark*. But it matters little how many U.S. missiles misfire when the U.S. has by vast orders of magnitude the overwhelming military arsenal and a ruling class rapacious enough to bomb anybody they choose off the face of the planet.

In *Lessons of October*, Trotsky points out that impressionism on military matters can be dangerous in fueling a rightist impulse and the belief that struggle is hopeless. He also warns against the idealist view that revolutionary fervor will make up for any military handicap and pointed out how quickly the German "ultralefts" flipped from one extreme to the other. Better to "face reality squarely." In "Germany, the Key to the International Situation" (November 1931) Trotsky wrote:

"Another important element in the strength of a party or a class is the idea which the party or the class has of the relationship of forces in the country. In every war the enemy strives to create an exaggerated idea of his strength. That

was one of the secrets of Napoleon's strategy. In lying, Hitler can in any case be no worse than Napoleon. But his boasting becomes a military factor only at the moment the Communists begin to believe him. More than anything else, a realistic inventory of forces is immediately necessary. What do the National Socialists have in the factories, on the railroads; in the army, how many organized and armed officers have they? A clear social analysis of the composition of both camps, a constant and vigilant calculation of forces—these are the unfailing sources of revolutionary optimism."

—*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*
(1971)

Social Tinder in Clinton's America

We erroneously thought that the "Contragate" scandal signaled the end of the Reagan years, but the sharp struggles anticipated in our last conference document had to wait until the Iraq war. The predominantly student-based struggle against the war was cut short by the quick U.S. victory, but soon afterward Los Angeles and other cities exploded in outrage at the acquittal of Rodney King's torturers. And as the yellow ribbons gave way to pink slips, the slogan "it's the economy, stupid" was the popular response of workers to the bourgeoisie's triumphalism and Bush was turned out of office just months after he vanquished Iraq and proclaimed a "New World Order" amid much gloating over the "death of communism."

Mostly what this new mood and these instances of struggle reveal is an enormous amount of amassed social tinder—not political consciousness. Like fireworks, they've lit the sky for a moment and then expired without leaving much of a trace. The fundamental factor conditioning American society is the fact that even the most hard-fought labor struggles of the past period have largely ended in losses, and while popular, most have tended to have only a regional, limited impact. Still, this is manifestly a potentially explosive period. It has been a challenge for our organization to shift gears from Cold War II and respond as a *fighting propaganda group* to new motion in a rather different society.

"Toward Revolutionary Conjuncture" provides a snapshot of a revolutionary organization stuck in a reactionary period and doing everything possible to break out of it. One of the more compelling and enduring political points

of the document, and which refutes its foolish title, is an excerpt of a speech to the New York local executive committee on the highly contradictory nature of American society and why, in the absence of broad social struggle, we should have a "*posture for a perspective*." Despite the huge changes in the world, this speech is as good a guideline as any for the present period and worth repeating:

"I've been screaming ever since the Yanks were jerked out of Saigon that this country is really unstable. But it is a very powerful, very stable country which is unstable. In any thirty-day period this country can be turned around.... "Furthermore, in this country where there is no perspective and no opportunity it is very uneven (I like that phrase better than 'pockets here and there'—that's a gold miner's idea), where particular conjunctures lead to the possibility of an organizational solution in favor of the party. I think we ought to scan for that."

—"The Politics of Cannibalism," *New York Spartacist League Internal Discussion Bulletin*
No. 1 (January 1987)

Turning the Party Outward

An early signpost of the struggle to turn the party outward in a new period was the fight over taking arrests at an abortion clinic defense action in New York City in June 1992. When, for the first time, New York's politically powerful Cardinal O'Connor took his flock to the streets to shut down an abortion clinic, we were there to stop him with a large, militant contingent in a hundreds-strong protest. Several comrades were arrested on minor misdemeanor charges. The blowback over these arrests by some comrades, combined with opposition to expanding the sub drive (upping the quota) and a steady Menshevik slide in the branch reflected in erosion of financial norms, indicated that for some the program had become an abstraction, not a weapon for communist intervention in the world. As a comrade stated in his report to the New York local meeting of 27 June 1992:

"In general when the masses participate in struggle against the rulers, we want to be a part of it. Not to be the only victims, but to participate alongside and where possible give leadership to those engaged in struggle. Otherwise, you should join the SLP or the DSA or the Socialist Workers Party.

"There are three ways you can wreck an organization that

Daniel Ortega, leader of petty-bourgeois nationalist Sandinista Liberation Front, ceded power to U.S. puppet Violeta Chamorro. The rollback of the incomplete Nicaraguan revolution was achieved through economic strangulation in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The defeat in Nicaragua underscores the importance of proletarian internationalist defense of Cuba against imperialism.



we ought to be able to avoid. Menshevism, expressed in a creeping erosion of Leninist norms, which is what I think we're dealing with here. The flip side of the coin is Stalinism, anti-democratic bureaucratism. And lastly, also connected with the whining about the arrests, De Leonism, where you retreat from a fighting perspective to abstract propagandism and each year you get older and more isolated from the class struggle."

—"Race, Class and Party in the U.S.,"
SL/U.S. IB No. 52 (July 1992)

In tribute to the old Wobbly leader, the "Vincent St. John memorial purge" was proposed to reassert our means and our aim as a class-struggle socialist organization. It was a very democratic "purge" in which comrades were offered the choice to fight for our program or leave. The malefactors were politically confronted and chose *not* to quit. The result was the salvaging of several comrades and a strengthening of our New York local, which must continually struggle against the deforming pressures of its existence as a support apparatus to the various central office departments.

Other manifestations of the same "office-bound" mentality and loss of political appetite flared up elsewhere.

The Black Question: Litmus Test for Revolutionaries

To fight for black rights has always been to "ask for trouble" in racist America. Notably, the black question was the screaming alarm signal that something had gone fundamentally wrong in the Spartacist League's Bay Area District and Atlanta Organizing Committee.

In March of 1993, the Oakland local executive committee adopted and implemented a policy of opposing a black student boycott against a Korean shopkeeper near the UC Berkeley campus who had maced a young black woman. Without any attempt at a firsthand investigation, these comrades falsely equated this entirely supportable anti-racist action with the economic boycotts of Asian storekeepers organized by black nationalist demagogues in New York City and Los Angeles. In addition to a display of sectarian posturing and office-bound leadership, the comrades responsible for this policy were adapting to the new Clintonite "liberalism," which condemns any black struggle for disturbing the country's "harmony." Earlier, the district adopted an overly cautious policy during the mass protests against the acquittal of Rodney King's torturers and unfortunately did not take part in the closing of the Bay Bridge, for instance, where an integrated crowd of hundreds of protesters took arrests.

An even worse example of this erosion of revolutionary consciousness was seen in Atlanta at the beginning of this year. On Martin Luther King's birthday, while we were organizing against the Klan in Springfield, Illinois, some 40 black youth demonstrating against the placement of a waste facility in the center of the black community in Birmingham, Alabama, were savagely beaten by white cops. The Atlanta branch informed the center only when a Southern-wide protest march was planned a month later, and then the branch leadership argued to stay away from the protest, because it was led by "nationalists."

These incidents are so alien to what is at the core of Spartacist politics, a fusion of the struggle for black liberation and socialist revolution, that the branches were deemed not viable as presently configured and a significant shakeup of the local leaderships was indicated. In both

cases, the false assumption that young blacks engaged in militant struggle are hardened nationalists led comrades to have nothing to do with them. This view, that black, Hispanic and even white liberal youth are impossibly distant from the communist outlook and program, is a reflection of a historical pessimism, a giving up on the role of our party as the subjective factor to *shape* history. Things are not always as they have been, nor will they always be as they now are.

The Fight Against Routinism

In February 1993, some elements of the International Secretariat (I.S.) and the Defense and Legal Fraction (DLF) launched an ill-advised and unnecessary international fund drive *without any substantive consultation* with the Political Bureau or national officers. This administrative campaign was aborted immediately by an emergency meeting of the Political Bureau which passed a motion noting the "appalling breakdown of Leninist functioning and communist collectivity" and added, "Now is the time to aggressively turn the party outward for recruitment and not tie up precious cadre resources with unnecessary and additional administrative tasks...."

A report to the Bay Area District on this fight in the party center analyzed the political roots of this breakdown and why comrades appeared oblivious to the opportunities of a new period.

"...we saw the collapse of Stalinism leading to the absorption of the DDR by German imperialism, which caused a wave of demoralization throughout our entire party internationally.... Later in August 1991 came the failed coup in the Soviet Union, that given the subsequent lack of resistance by the working class, led to the end of the USSR as a workers state.... These major changes in the world, then, coincided with a major shift in our central leadership configuration. And it was with this coincidence and during this interregnum that I think something started to slide politically in New York, both in the local and in the CO....

"An erosion has taken place somewhere there. I think there was a consonance developing between Menshevik organizational functioning and what I would call an inchoate centrist current that has begun to have little surges of consciousness. Someone on the round said that when you displace Leninist functioning, you will soon displace the Leninist program as well. I think that a layer of comrades in New York had begun to conclude that with the collapse of the DDR and the USSR it's all over and all they're doing is serving their time, hiding in a narrow, insulated world of routinism, vividly illustrating Jim's point, often made, that routinism is itself a form of demoralization. In their view we are all too old...let's not make waves; let's stay comfortable—and die.

"Screw that.... We are mankind's last hope, our party, our revolutionary program."

—"The Fight for Leninist Collectivity," *SL/U.S. IB* No. 53 (March 1993)

One thing we had better know: We are in a fundamentally new period. The "Russian question" as a useful litmus test to orient us in various political situations is no longer available. In the coming period only *practice* will demonstrate whether we or our opponents are revolutionary or left-centrist. We no longer live in a bipolar world. But this "new period" in its contours is very much like the one inhabited by our revolutionary forebears who struggled in a world fraught with opportunities and dangers—without the conquest of October 1917 to guide them. Our enormous advantage and debt to them is the heritage and experience of that Revolution.



Workers Vanguard

Labor/black mobilization built by Partisan Defense Committee and Spartacist confronts Klan rally in Springfield, Illinois, January 1994. Militant labor contingents, especially of the strategically placed black working class, can lead ghetto youth and anti-racist students to defeat fascist terrorism.

8. Lessons from the Springfield Labor/Black Mobilization

If we know the world to the extent we struggle with it, then the January 1994 Springfield labor/black mobilization against the Ku Klux Klan was a crash course in American social reality. The Springfield mobilization also provided an x-ray of the party; of its strengths and weaknesses.

The fascists have grown bolder and their supporters are coming out of the woodwork as participants and spectators in Klan and Nazi rallies all across the country. Their base is still primarily the rural backwaters of America, but the skinhead fascist youth movement extends the KKK's and Nazis' reach into the urban centers. In addition to the growing number of bona fide fascists who ride and rally in full regalia, the depth of support for the fascists among whites whose living standards have been drastically driven down can be measured in the electoral support for "mainstream" fascists like David "Klan in a suit" Duke. In November 1990 Duke won 44 percent of the vote for a U.S. Senate seat from Louisiana and swept the open primary prior to the election with 60 percent of the white vote.

In general, where the fascists have brazenly attempted to rally they have been outnumbered by large numbers of workers, youth and minorities. The outpouring of some 2,000 anti-fascists in Auburn, New York last September, which the PB misjudged and we did not have a presence at, is the pertinent example that there is widespread revulsion that runs far outside the framework of the organized strength of OROs or other groups and we should not underestimate the possibilities for a broad anti-fascist response. At the same time, the increasing collusion between the state and the fascists should be noted. The police now routinely pen anti-fascist protesters in cages, often shoulder to shoulder with fascist sympathizers. Here the spectacle of the frenetic RWL—chasing all over the map to "protest" the Klan in police pens—is a powerful negative example.

We must pick and choose our shots. The financial and cadre resources—and the critical trade-union connections and support—are scarce commodities that cannot be squandered and must be used intelligently. At the same time, we cannot afford an abstentionist "labor/black mobilization or nothing" attitude toward anti-fascist efforts initiated by others. Particularly given the trend toward protests in pens, our active participation is limited. But dispatching sales teams, where indicated and possible, is a means to propagandize and bridge the gap between the necessity for mass labor-centered anti-fascist mobilizations everywhere this scum appears, and our own very limited capacities to directly organize such mobilizations.

In general we have chosen to initiate labor-centered anti-fascist protests within striking distance of our existing branches and where the Klan's provocation intersects other issues or is so symbolic as to evoke a broader, visceral reaction from their intended victims. The 1982 Washington, D.C. demonstration took aim at the first Klan march in the nation's capital since their 40,000-strong 1925 march—a fact that was extremely evocative in this now majority-black city. In Philadelphia in 1988, the spectacle of a Klan rally at the Liberty Bell was widely viewed as grotesque. In Springfield, the KKK's provocation on Martin Luther King Day, the *only* national holiday commemorating a black American, was seen as a provocation against *all* black people and against the mass civil rights movement which smashed *de jure* Jim Crow.

Labor Movement Polarizes

The report by comrade Nelson to the Bay Area District Conference on the Springfield mobilization, printed in *Workers Vanguard* (No. 593, 4 February), stands as the political assessment of the significance and impact of this mobilization. It is also necessary to assess the internal strengths and weaknesses revealed through this mobilization and the external opportunities and problems we face as a result of this campaign.

The support for this mobilization in the union movement far exceeded any previous efforts we have undertaken. In an exemplary way, we were able to impart to a layer of unionists what a class-struggle defense of black rights means and a glimmer of wisdom that the union movement can and must engage in social and political struggle which requires a fight against the labor bureaucrats who choke the union movement on all fronts.

If Springfield gave one a taste of the potential we would have with just a little more weight in more unions, it also was a sharp lesson in the limitations of extension as "a mass party with no members." When the blowback came from the head of the state AFL-CIO and from the big fish in the small pond of downstate labor, we had no capacity inside the unions to counterpunch and salvage some active support for the mobilization. Only where we had a base were we able to organize union contingents.

While the AFL-CIO's "no marching" orders were met with derision and nobody pulled back their endorsement—*those orders were also largely obeyed*. This is the first time that labor officialdom has *explicitly* (in writing and in a televised press conference) mobilized *against* an anti-fascist initiative of ours. The opposition was a measure of how threatened the bureaucrats felt by the strong pull of this demonstration on their members and locals—it was too much for them to overlook or ignore—as *well as a measure of the direct pressure applied by the state*. We had better recognize however the implicit threat this represents to future mobilizations: we don't proceed in these ventures without a solid core of labor support. The Chicago local's regular strike support work and visits to the hard-fought battles in the "Illinois war zone" established credentials for us prior to the Springfield mobilization. In the aftermath of Springfield, maintaining contact with labor and black organizations in Chicago and downstate is vital to set the basis for common action in the future.

Sinister Police Provocations

Every anti-fascist initiative of ours has required energetic and intelligent legal defense against the state's machinations to destroy us. And the provocations against us in every mobilization have been very different, in points of origin and in content.

This time, the state and the Zionist Anti-Defamation League (which reached a new low in Springfield with "Project Lemonade," a "telethon" to raise money for themselves through pledges for every minute the fascists rallied) did not attempt to directly slander the Partisan Defense Committee (PDC) or SL as "violent." Instead, the Republican state administration quite openly, and particularly through the office of Secretary of State George Ryan, blocked with the KKK against anti-Klan protesters.

With our reputation for vigorous defense of our rights and public exposure of any move by the state to infringe on them, it's noteworthy that the government did not try to impose upon us the "protest" pens with metal detectors and police control of all ingress and egress that have become the "norm" of state control of anti-fascist protests elsewhere. Instead they attempted in more sinister ways to undermine us. Bands of cops strolled through our demonstration, bumping people, *trying in all ways to create a provocation*. While the fake-left pulled people out of our restricted rally site to the more desirable spot *we had ini-*

tially sought with direct line of sight of the fascists, we still regrouped the anti-fascist protesters at the end. The deal was clear: if our leadership moved with the crowd, against the terms of the rally permit, the cops would attack everyone. In a real way, the adventurists of the ISO and RWL were protected by us in Springfield.

The state's clear interest *from the start* was to create a leaderless and chaotic situation—a screaming pretext for a bloody police assault on anti-fascist protesters. Thus they dug in on the irrational demand (which they won in court challenges) to deny us a centrally located command post (speakers platform and sound system). As we stated in a press release, a rally without a centrally located speakers' platform is like a car without a steering wheel. Only the persistent efforts of our union marshals, the excellent sound system, and the constant dialogue of our demonstration leadership with the dispersed crowd enabled us to exert control and leadership over a very vulnerable situation.

The presence of agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) was ominous. The jurisdiction of this agency seems to be sufficiently broad and obscure that they increasingly serve as the all-purpose operatives for dirty tricks. Thus when the Feds wanted librarians to track what books foreign students check out of libraries, it was a BATF operation (foiled by librarians with respect for civil liberties). So was the heinous incineration of 86 Branch Davidians outside Waco, Texas. And it was a BATF agent who helped set up the Greensboro massacre. Their doubtless sinister intent to provoke something at our rally was evidenced by the discrepancy between their stated purpose and their performance: appearing on site ostensibly for a "bomb check," they conducted only a cursory search and ceased poking into things when our marshals watched their every move.

The Party in Light of Springfield

The substantial participation of comrades from all locals in the Springfield mobilization, including paying their own travel and expenses on top of their other party financial obligations, speaks volumes about the mettle of the membership of the Spartacist League/U.S.

It was also significant to see a layer of comrades, the so-called "missing generation" of youth in their mid- and late-twenties, pile in and apply the experience they had gained in the Philadelphia mobilization (through which many of them were recruited) to a new opportunity in Springfield. It indicated capacity among an albeit thin but critical layer of comrades which the absence of opportunity had largely hidden in a slow period. There is more than a trace of generational hubris that smacks of old age in assertions that certain "youth" who have been members for a decade or more are "too junior" to take responsibility for leading areas of party work. This layer must be given a shot at drafting articles, leaflets, running interventions, heading up regional work and organizing branches if we are to have a future.

The political weaknesses of the party center—in the shortage of personnel and in the absence of political consultation (weaknesses which unfortunately mutually reinforce each other)—were evident in the Springfield mobilization. There was a failure to consult, discuss and decide over first- and second-rate issues. Two of our most experienced leaders for these demonstrations were sent in rather

late in the game. No consultation ever took place on what to do about the Klan demos and counterprotests against them in other cities around the country on MLK day. In hindsight, we should have sent sales teams to cities like Austin (where we have an important subscription base) and Denver where there have been militant anti-fascist protests and a couple of others, resources permitting.

The *Workers Vanguard* editorial staff announced in advance that they could do very little to help with the heavy demands for propaganda necessitated by this mobilization and indeed they couldn't. Thus the main political organizer sent in to help lead the demonstration also ended up writing most of the press releases, mob notes, and *WV* coverage. We stripped the center to the point that it was no longer able to *centralize* the necessary discussion and consultation for the comrades on site in Chicago and Springfield running the mobilization. And for the field locals, the center simply ceased to exist for a period. This error should not be repeated. We must hold back or bring in to New York the forces we need to maintain a functional political headquarters during a mobilization like this.

Another political problem which has cropped up elsewhere (e.g., over the German elections which the Fourth Reich won) again reared its head in Springfield. In a *panic* at how defeat will be viewed by our audience, there is sometimes a foolish and dangerous tendency to put a gloss on the "bad news." Thus, on the eve of the demonstration when we lost the battle we had taken to Federal appeals court to stop the outrageous restrictions on our rally permit, a press release announcing that we were going ahead with our demonstration despite this *defeat* was "corrected" in New York to a schizophrenic triumphalist "we go forward" piece of nonsense.

It is imperative for the clarity of our own comrades and those hundreds of others we take responsibility for at our mass actions, that we tell the blunt truth. Pollyannish "spins" provide not solace but the invitation to chaos.

9. Party Perspectives and Problems

Geographic Extension

The heavy participation of comrades from all locals of the SL/U.S. in the Springfield labor/black mobilization served to directly impart a keen appreciation of the new opportunities for us as well as of our role as a fighting propaganda group: to intervene in society in order to change it. Most locals made modest but real breakthroughs in student and labor contacts in their areas through the course of the Springfield mobilization and the more junior comrades in each local surged forward during this campaign, to the benefit of our local work.

As already noted, our geographic isolation hurts. With the loss of Detroit and Cleveland we are stretched impossibly thin in the Midwest. Comrades from Manhattan are now the closest link to the miners, who may be but a shadow of their former selves in terms of numbers but who have had militant strikes in the last year. Centers of episodic radical student activism or labor militancy, like Austin or the Pacific Northwest, are mainly beyond our reach except during the annual subscription drive. Our knowledge of the

South would be vastly extended even through the presence of a small organizing committee in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill triangle.

Essentially our presence in the United States is limited to the Northeast Corridor, Chicago, and the Bay Area, with a toehold in Los Angeles and a toenail-hold in Atlanta. Just as the Bolsheviks extended across the great expanse of Russia by consolidating circles of *Iskra* supporters, we should have a perspective of consolidating circles of *Workers Vanguard* readers across the country. Even several small organizing committees would qualitatively extend our knowledge and capacity to intervene in America. Areas we particularly seek an extension or addition to are: the Pacific Northwest, the South, Austin and the Midwest. Hawaii and Puerto Rico present different ethnic compositions and political and social questions—a presence in either of those islands would significantly broaden our existence.

In addition to breaking out of our geographic isolation we must have a perspective of getting back into industry. It's also worth noting that these problems are linked. We lost our Detroit branch when the plants closed down in that city. Deindustrialization of the party has largely been an objective problem with the closure of factories, layoffs, and shift of manufacturing outside the urban centers to predominantly rural areas where we do not have a presence.

Presently there is a contradiction between the local concentrations of our forces and where we anticipate strike action and political struggle. The map of the class struggle has shifted. If 20 years ago the Midwest and particularly black Detroit and the UAW looked like the focus of labor militancy, today the hot spots of labor and political struggle are Los Angeles and the South, where there is also a powerful objective intersection of the fight against racial discrimination and the fight to unionize industry. Our weakest branches are in these two regions.

In recognition of the shift in manufacturing and the rise in labor militancy in Southern California, the Bay Area leadership discussed and decided to send more cadre resources to Los Angeles beginning in 1992. This has paid off in the stabilization of the OC, which doubled in size between 1992-1993 through recruitment and in-transfers, but is still underled and woefully undersized for the opportunities that present themselves. Historically Los Angeles has been a recruiting ground for our tendency and we should look to reinforce this OC as candidates and opportunities arise.

The Atlanta branch distinguished itself by "missing" the Springfield mobilization in terms of integrating the importance of it in any way into their local work in this majority-black Southern city dominated by the King Center and where the PDC-initiated 1989 labor/black mobilization against the KKK took place. Perhaps imperceptibly to themselves, the branch leadership simply gave up on political life, which requires a constant struggle to maintain the party's edge. A sharp fight over their slippery slide, occasioned by the Birmingham events, pulled the OC out of its downward plummet.

Our Chicago local now covers everything west of Jersey City to the Rockies and south of Toronto to the Rio Grande. As evidenced through the extreme pressure cooker of the Springfield mobilization, the Chicago branch runs pretty well and has proven capacity to recruit and integrate new youth members. With its experienced leadership team, this

branch could triple in size without experiencing growing pains. Instead, Chicago has modestly but steadily recruited and shipped out good comrades to serve in more needy U.S. branches and sections of the ICL.

In view of the Springfield mobilization's big appeal on the Champaign-Urbana campus, Chicago immediately extended itself to central Illinois, where we are struggling to recruit a youth OC. The comrades have only recently set up shop and have not yet found individuals whose interest in the Springfield mobilization can be shaped into an understanding of the need for and will to fight for a new society. There are some good contacts who will likely take some time to recruit. The alacrity with which the local undertook this extension speaks to the political health and capacity of the branch.

The Springfield mobilization also widely extended the Chicago local's contact with the key activists in the black political milieu in the city (and in Springfield) and greatly extended our trade-union contacts in industries where we have no presence throughout the region. Maintaining occasional contact with these rather politically distant friends is important. In the industry where we do have a presence, circulation of the party press, including subscriptions, shot way up after Springfield. Some recruitment to the LBL and the party seems indicated from this.

The Boston branch quietly doubled in size and is once again primarily a youth branch with a small party OC acting as its collective party rep. This recruitment did not come as a result of intervention in a storm of activity, but through patient contacting of young people who subscribed to our press and wanted to talk to us. This kind of recruitment in a period of relatively low activism on the campuses speaks to the continuing importance of Boston as a major arena for youth work and where we could grow exponentially among students if something breaks. An imminent shift in organizers to a more junior party cadre indicates the need for the center to assist Boston more through visits and especially educational and forums in the next period.

The small Washington, D.C. OC is very integrated into the party's work. Comrades from the OC regularly and usefully intervene in political discussions in other branches, in the center and regularly contribute to *WV*. The branch has not recently recruited and is too exclusively focused in its public work on the elite black Howard University campus. Participating in the march against cop brutality in Birmingham, Alabama was a breakthrough for our D.C. branch and the knowledge they gained of where students organized for this in the D.C. area should inform their local tasks and perspectives.

Our two party centers, New York and the Bay Area, have been the main battlegrounds for the struggle to turn the party outward to face new opportunities in a different period. The Bay Area District also fought its way through an interregnum in leadership as the old team was broken up for necessary transfers and a new leadership collective took time to forge. That battle is not over and there is still a disturbing tendency for very senior comrades serving on the local executive committees to expect the most senior comrades to do their thinking for them (and then ignore their advice anyway). But this district has demonstrably pulled itself out of its steep slide of '92-'93 through good, sharp fights that strengthened the party. Recently in-transferred cadre have been more integrated into the district

leadership, to the benefit of the youth work in particular. Youth recruitment and training in the Bay Area is now enabling us to seed other locals with effective young cadre.

The New York local functions and has even modestly recruited. Historically, the pressures of servicing the center eat up New York organizers and their locals. But as the fights in the party center against the "time servers" and an "office-bound" mentality make clear, we need a local rooted in social reality in the center. The trend of the NY local to chronically fall far short of the sales quota, and to qualitatively underestimate political opportunities and send inadequate forces at the last minute, is a worrisome note that should be addressed. In general, the problems of the local are due to and cannot be fully dissociated from the problems of the party center.

The majority of comrades in the New York branch work in central office departments, all of which are very strapped. The routine nature of much of this departmental work can be politically narrowing. Hopefully with recruitment some rotation of comrades who have been at the same jobs for a long time can be accomplished. The central office, circ and maintenance carry very large responsibilities essential to the operation of the party. There has been notable improvement in the functioning of the circulation department. Maintenance, which is quite overstretched, faces increased tasks.

Another matter of concern in the center is that three of the most knowledgeable members of the party medical commission are no longer resident in New York. With the decline in American health care services, the aging of our membership and the growing dependence of other sections on the medical commission, the center is increasingly strapped in this regard as well.

The Political Bureau

The problems of transition to the post-Cold War era have been compounded by major shifts in daily party administration. Over a period of years and in a relatively quiet political period, the number of formal Political Bureau meetings diminished and the same central cadre who had worked together for a long time functioned as a collective mainly on an informal basis. It worked pretty well then, but with the shifts and increased political turmoil, the organic collectivity collapsed and the center was tending to dissolve into its component parts.

The political chairman of our Chicago branch noted:

"...from the standpoint of communication from the local to NY an awareness that one was no longer communicating with a center but with a number of bureaus. As a result, it became clear in the Chicago local that several bases had to be touched, dependent on the 'specialties' involved—i.e., at least, on the level of information, the center was not centralizing."

—“From a Distance,” 10 February 1993,
SLJ.U.S. IB No. 53 (March 1993)

The function of the central office had eroded from the administration of a communications and command center to the staffing of a 24-hour copy shop. In February 1993 more frequent, regular PB meetings were instituted as a mechanism to help a new and less experienced team in central party administration pull together a center that would hopefully function as more than the sum of its component parts. But good will and the maintenance of centralist norms of organizational functioning are not in themselves

sufficient to renew a leadership collective, although they are necessary conditions for it. A collective leadership can be reformed only in the course of working out a political line, strategic perspectives and tactical orientations to move the party forward in the present period. We should *not shy away from fights* out of a misplaced spirit of "old guardism" or from fear of factionalism and splits.

At the same time, there is a broad terrain between unanimity on political line, including the underlying methodology and empirical assessment, and dead-end factionalism. And it is precisely on that terrain that a revolutionary party usually operates in most historic circumstances. As a Central Committee comrade recently observed:

"Every one of the sections of the ICL certainly has problems, often different among themselves, in the practice of democratic centralism. Within the ICL, on issues which come up in dispute, we are in constant struggle to avoid two extremes: one is to vilify those who you are arguing against; the other is to avoid issues that ought to be in dispute. What we ought to try to do is the maximum of co-opting comrades to a common collective, not by disappearing issues but rather in thrashing them out. This is a precarious and ultimately necessary source of splits and fusions. Bureaucracy is one way of flinching from this."

—"Notes Occasioned by the CIOC Split from the RWL," 27 January 1994

Shying away from a fight last summer led to the most serious breakdown in the center. Criticism by a comrade on the *WV* editorial board of the front-page article in *WV* No. 579 (2 July 1993) on the U.S. cruise missile attack on the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, and of the management of the paper, was met with a furiously defensive, turf-conscious, hypersensitive, arrogant, cliquist, anti-Leninist response by the self-conscious and self-described "*WV* collective." While the comrade was on assignment outside the center, a significant exchange of letters was circulated among some editorial board members and kept from other Central Committee members.

Failure to communicate, especially where there are tensions and differences, is highly corrosive. The situation festered, with the editorial board adopting a defensive posture vis-à-vis the rest of the party leadership. This fight was resolved only with the assistance of intervention from leading comrades outside the center, including a senior member of the editorial board who had pointed to the core of the problem in a document written months earlier ("On the *WV* Ed Board and the Center," 16 February 1993 [in *Internal Bulletin* No. 53, March 1994]). A two-day PB meeting on 2-3 September endorsed that document and passed the following motion:

"The main problem in the center in the past period has been the absence of cohesive, effective Political Bureau and I.S. bodies to lead the work in the SL/U.S. and internationally. One result of this has been a deflection of political decision-making to the *WV* editorial board on line questions, resulting in an editorial board that was beginning to act in a self-conscious and independent fashion. The recent dispute over *WV* No. 579, and especially the cliquist circulation and suppression of documents about this dispute, revealed a vacuum of effective party leadership. We must forge a collective leadership in the U.S. Political Bureau."

—*SL/U.S. IB* No. 55 (October 1993)

The political issues in this particular dispute were resolved and the fight served to reveal the underlying problem: the scarcity of cadre resources exacerbates the erosion of Leninist collectivity and generates defensiveness which

is an obstacle to resolving differences. But this very over-extension in the center underscores the need for an effective Political Bureau.

The International Secretariat

The breakdown of leadership in the SL/U.S. center was paralleled in the International Secretariat. These developments reached their climax in the period leading up to the international conference, long overdue, which found the I.S. caught politically flat-footed by the challenge of a left-wing split from the U.Sec represented by the French Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires (JCR). The international conference decided to qualitatively strengthen the I.S. with an infusion of cadre. This considerably augmented the political depth and breadth of the I.S., although it by no means solved the problems.

The situation improved, but only quantitatively. The German work, which had previously been left largely to one comrade, was brought under the control of the I.S. and fights were pursued about the disorientation among Moscow comrades toward the decayed Stalinist milieu in the ex-USSR. Fundamentally, however, the I.S. along with the SL/U.S. PB tended to be relatively passive bodies. Now, with a new division of labor and the full-time commitment of one comrade to the quadrilingual *Spartacist*, the intent is to regularize production of our international theoretical organ, our journal of record, on a more frequent basis, reasserting its central role in our tendency and providing the sections with a weapon to carry out political battle against our opponents in the international arena.

An abiding weakness of the I.S. has been its tendency to be administrative and routinist, as well as rather chaotic, in its approach to problems. The sheer volume of necessary administrative work—for example, the burdens of conducting a voluminous written discussion on the ex-Soviet Union and Permanent Revolution via fax/E-mail and photocopy—contributes to an administrative approach. The substantial input of leading cadre into this work has perhaps gone some way toward addressing the situation. The I.S. must become more hard-minded toward the real and multifarious difficulties of the sections by learning to distinguish better between problems that are susceptible to improvement via intervention from a distance and those which are not, and to recognize the severe inherent limitations on our ability to contribute usefully to the work and debates from afar.

The I.S. in many instances can have only a very partial grasp of the problems and pressures working upon the various sections. The danger of "office leadership" is even more pronounced for the I.S. than for the center dealing with problems in the American branches, inasmuch as—despite real regional variations within this country (Berkeley "beansprout totalitarianism" vs. a hard city like New York, North vs. South, etc.)—the United States is one society and has been since the Civil War. Hence comrades in the center are subjected to and presumably aware of many of the same pressures as affect comrades in the U.S. branches. In international work, therefore, the danger is very real of becoming remote from the reality on the ground without hands-on experience through travel, which however is usually expensive.

A case in point is the Italian section. Despite considerable correspondence and phone calls, and prior consultation over the political questions to raise at the section's 1993

conference, it was only after a comrade visited Italy that she realized in the course of internal discussions there that a large fight had to be waged over the woman question. One of the reasons we have struggled to concentrate leading cadre in a major European center is precisely to make it possible to frequently directly intervene into and assist the other European sections.

There is a vicious circle quality in the tendency of the I.S. to seek to substitute itself for the sectional leaderships to push the work forward. The organizations outside the U.S. are far weaker in resources and experience than the SL/U.S., and their leaderships tend to be politically insecure even when they are not beset by an absence of an established division of labor and a painful lack of leadership collectivity. Small and overstretched, without much in the way of links to the working class, the sections have something of the quality of "Potemkin villages" which often have been unable to grapple politically with what is going on in their own countries. This situation is most acute for the European comrades whose countries are being shaken by youth ferment and social struggles of various kinds (Italy, France, Germany), for whom the disproportion between their resources and their tasks is even more excruciating than it is for us here. In this situation, the sections necessarily turn to the I.S. for help not only with questions of line and propaganda, but also with problems with tactics, opponents, contacts, internal functioning and regime. But unfortunately, it's a lot easier to destroy at a distance than to create, and the I.S. gets swamped in the process of trying to assist these sections and substitute for their weaknesses.

At present the I.S. lacks a sufficiently wide international representation in the center, which can only be partially alleviated by travel in both directions, finances permitting. The I.S. is also short in linguistic capacity. In particular, we lack a senior native Spanish-speaking cadre. And our

relative incapacity in Russian renders work on Russian publications with Moscow expensive, time-consuming and generally difficult. Our resident capacity in Japanese and Chinese remains nil.

There is still insufficient political consultation on international line questions between the I.S. and WV, and we should be especially conscious of this given the political wobbles of the last period. We need to pay particular attention to our line concerning the ex-USSR. No article bearing on this question should be "routine" or viewed as simply a WV article, as shown by the problems with the article on Bosnia in WV No. 595. Russia is no longer a workers state, but a capitalist state with considerable military forces at its disposal and aspirations to play a role as an imperialist power. Questions involving the ex-USSR inevitably will raise new problems, and we should strive to anticipate this and also make better use of our outpost in Moscow, which provides us with invaluable eyes and ears into a new and very fluid situation.

Historically the I.S. has paid insufficient attention to finances and the need to make hard financial choices. Recently a large outlay of funds was made by throwing too much money (in a panicky and guilty fashion) and too little thought at an objectively almost no-win problem.

Finances

The party continues to experience difficulties in our capacity to meet our financial needs; we have an aging membership suffering a decline in its disposable income, and at the same time we face increased and immediate opportunities in the U.S. and internationally. Generally, our necessary expenses continue to outstrip our basic income. We have an enormous untapped pool of places in the world where we are not but where we want to be. We have needs far beyond our present commitments, which poses an acute

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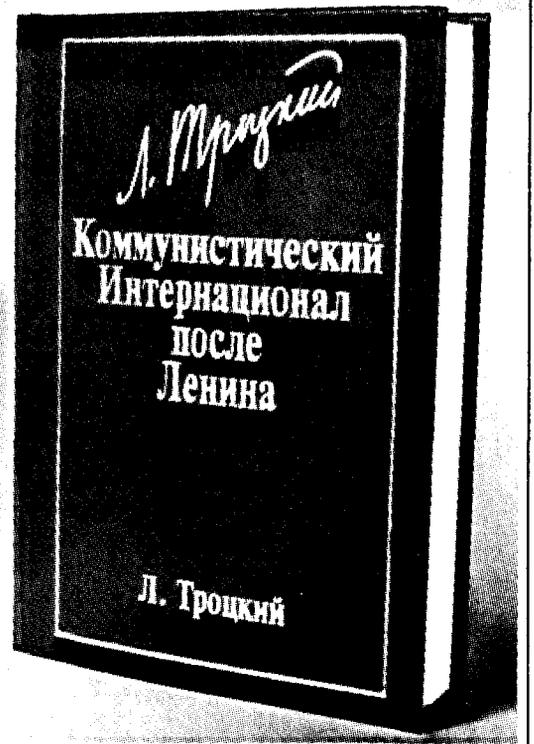
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contradiction that we have to address as best we can.

Most dramatically, since the German events in late 1989, the focus of the ICL has shifted to outside the SL/U.S. to a greater extent than in the past, while the SL/U.S. is presented with real opportunities for growth. This is a further contradiction which requires careful balancing of priorities and resources and makes a report on SL/U.S. finances necessarily in part a report on international finances.

The recent fights over the loss of communist collectivity in the center stressed the need for discussion, collectivity and centralism to put an end to wasted work and wasted money, noting that there is a financial cost to just about everything we do. We have begun what must be an ongoing conscious effort to limit expenditures wisely while still being able to turn our work outward and exploit our opportunities.

Internal fund drives are measures that we are loath to undertake. We reject the conception of the SWP and other ostensible leftist organizations who resort to pure voluntarism, setting nominal regular pledge payments and launching a fund drive around every particular activity they undertake. That is a profoundly social-democratic conception that holds the party hostage to wealthier members and periphery who vote with their wallets for those party activities they want to finance.

In the past seven years, we have been forced on four different occasions to turn to fund drives aimed largely or solely at our membership (including internationally) to raise money for particular needs. The latest fund drives highlight the ill-conceived nature of the DLF/I.S. fund drive which was launched in January 1993 without proper consultation—but quashed after full leadership discussion—just three months prior to another, necessary fund drive.

We did two external international fund drives: the 3-L's in late 1989-90 to fund our work in Germany and the Lenin-Trotsky Fund Drive beginning in October 1991 to fund our intervention in the now former Soviet Union. For each of our major anti-fascist mobilizations, most recently for Springfield in conjunction with the PDC, we have done external fundraising to help defray the enormous costs entailed. Fundraising for an action is by its nature very time-limited and intensive—once the action is over the impetus to contribute drops off sharply and quickly. The huge success of each of these fundraising efforts speaks volumes about the financial consciousness and commitment of our members and supporters and the continued attractiveness of a communist program among a layer of the left despite the myth of the “death of communism.”

This high consciousness has not come without ongoing attention and fights. Over the last few years there have been several fights over attempts to evade financial norms, reflecting an erosion of comrades' consciousness and commitment to the party and its program. In each case these fights were a warning sign or part of more general political problems.

Like most departments in the center, the treasury is very stretched. The responsible comrades must work long hours paying meticulous attention to details. Additionally, they are often compelled to deny what may seem like small requests for funding this or that project costing only a few hundred dollars. However, as has been noted, a dozen projects, all eminently reasonable, can entail several thousand dollars in unforeseen expenses and play havoc with our

cash flow, preventing us from taking on urgent activity when it is warranted.

Along with an expansion of our work—and spending—with the collapse of Stalinism came an expansion of the party into the technological advances of the “computer age.” During this period our publishing has also expanded significantly.

In the next period we need to do more regional travel to pursue recruitment possibilities and OROs and more travel to the locals from the center. The latter has been consistently curtailed by financial constraints since before the last conference and the lack of cross-fertilization and hands-on site visits has been felt negatively and repeatedly by the party. We must continue national, I.S. and local political prioritizing and budgeting to spend our excruciatingly limited time, personnel and money resources where they will do the most good. Looking a bit further into the future, the anticipated refounding of a youth organization will have financial consequences, no doubt requiring assistance from the party.

The Trade Union Commission

The sharp decline in the organized labor movement over the last period has set the context in which the TUC has operated. The wage structure in the United States has come to resemble an hourglass—a number of high-wage skilled jobs, more very low-wage unskilled jobs, and hardly anything in the middle. Our comrades are older, more skilled, and more highly paid, placing us at some distance from the more volatile and younger sections of the working class. This is a very real potentially conservatizing influence on our cadre. In general, the temporary and tenuous access to the American labor movement noted in the 1987 conference document remains fundamentally unchanged. Our depletion in numbers, aging and an ongoing drop in manufacturing jobs have accentuated the party's concentration in light and semi-service industry and government employment.

Both earlier and ongoing efforts to get our small pool of younger comrades industrial skills have paid off in terms of mobility and employability. Significant future youth recruitment will require the TUC and local party leaderships to devote more attention to this work. Related to this, we have to continue to look for local opportunities for industrial concentration.

The TUC has been instrumental in mobilizing party teams with trade-union experience to intervene with our literature in various strike situations. Given the small number of strikes over the last period, we have been able to field teams with appropriate propaganda for almost all significant strike actions. This, along with our PDC and labor black league activity, including but not limited to our united-front efforts for mass labor/black mobilizations against fascist provocations, has enabled us to extend our readership and deepen our ties with both local union leaders and members.

In certain key sectors of the workforce, remote from our locals, we have built up small but regular readerships. These have to be regularly serviced by the center and regional branches. Correspondence, regular visits and continuity of personnel in maintaining contacts is essential, for these are vital cores of the proletariat.

As was noted in the 1987 conference document, our comrades in light and semi-service industries can do valuable exemplary work, in strike situations and also engaging in

Workers Vanguard

New York City transit worker James Frazier, victim of police shooting, addresses defense rally at Transit Authority headquarters, 7 March 1994. Labor-centered fight to defend Frazier shows way to mobilize against racist bosses and police frame-ups.



activities involving labor black leagues and the Partisan Defense Committee. In general this has been done. At the same time the organization of comrades concentrated in particular industries into fractions that meet on some regular basis has too often not happened or been allowed to disintegrate under the pressure of carrying out other areas of party work. Consequently, important opportunities have been overlooked, and in other instances efforts to mobilize have been marked by disorganization, ignorance of the political terrain in the union, political disorientation, and amateurish confrontations with the bureaucracy and management that place the comrades at risk. In many cases old norms of communist work in the labor movement have to be relearned. In this regard, efforts to expand the *WV* readership among industrial workers require careful planning. All this means a significant allocation of time and cadre, but it will pay off in a much more effective party organization.

The TUC in particular, but also the DLF, need to pay closer attention to the issue of class-war prisoners. Too often, the legal victimization of strikers is covered up by both the union bureaucrats and the bosses' press. And too often, the union tops abandon strike militants, bowing before bourgeois legality and public opinion, and threats of RICO suits against the union by the boss. Meanwhile, among the membership and at the local level there are strong feelings of solidarity. The case of Bob Buck is very important to the labor movement, and our defense of him is both noted and appreciated by unionists and especially strikers everywhere. We should more diligently seek opportunities to come to the defense of other class-war prisoners.

The effort to build transitional organizations (labor black leagues) also intersects the work of our fractions, and can powerfully enhance their influence and authority. This has been evidenced in both our Denny's and Springfield mobilizations, as well as in our efforts in defense of New York transit worker James Frazier.

This requires close coordination between the TUC, the party center and the locals. To that end we would do well to try to implement steps that Cannon and Dunne recommended to the Workers Party Political Committee in

1925. They are still applicable today:

"1. The Trade Union Department shall meet regularly and formulate recommendations on all important questions of policy for the Political Committee.

"2. All material on current trade union problems (or copies of same) shall be supplied to the Trade Union Department.

"3. All comrades in charge of party trade union work in the field shall be again instructed to report regularly to the secretary of the Trade Union Department, and to send him copies of all reports on their work which are sent direct to the CEC.

"4. The Political Committee should have the recommendations of the Trade Union Department on all trade union questions before taking final action on them, except in cases of emergency where immediate political decisions are necessary."

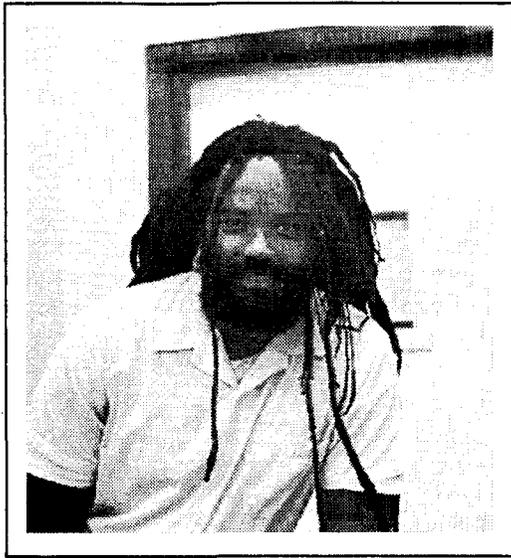
—James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism (1992)

Labor Black Leagues

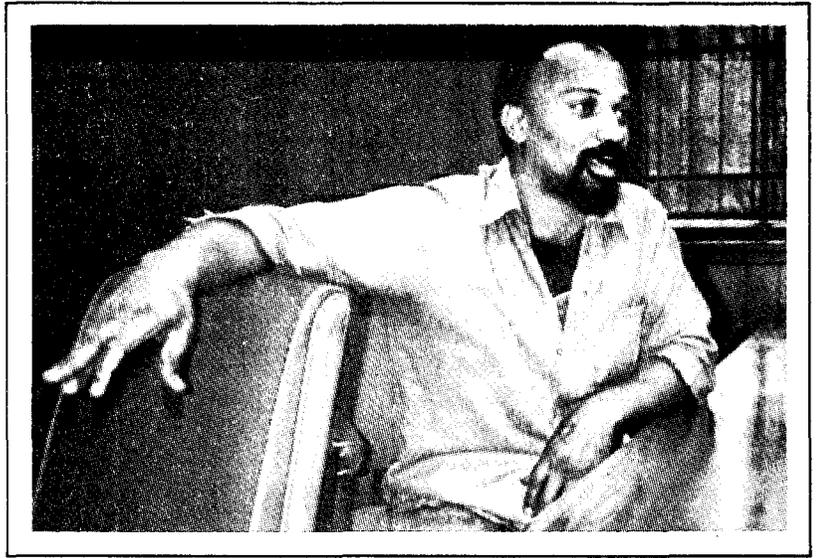
The labor black leagues arose out of particular local struggles or anti-fascist mobilizations and were founded in anticipation of attracting workers who wanted to participate in struggles with the party but could not meet the requirements of party membership. In the absence of class struggle these organizations cannot thrive, and while we have maintained them, their existence in between opportunities for intervention and campaigns has largely been as more or less moribund circles of ex-members or loosely affiliated circles of coworkers who like to socialize with comrades and assist in particular campaigns. As a rule, the LBLs have not won members who personify the consciousness and commitment to a program that can build a transitional organization. Comrades should be wary of capitulating to the past composition of the LBLs. It's a new period with some opportunities for revitalizing these organizations. The Bay Area stands out as the one local that has consistently assigned party cadre to lead LBL work, and so it exists.

Through the Denny's campaign, protests against anti-immigrant racism, the Springfield mobilization and demonstrations against racist cop terror, the LBLs have had plenty of activity in the past year. The vicious attacks by the ruling class and its police against the black population

Death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal at Pennsylvania's Huntingdon prison, 1993 (left). Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt) at San Quentin prison, 1985.



Jennifer Beach



Workers Vanguard

PDC urgent campaigns to save the life of Jamal and to free Geronimo are key in the fight for black liberation which is inseparable from the struggle for proletarian socialist revolution in racist America.

provide no shortage of outrages to get out in the street and protest. But the fundamental problem with cases of racist murder by the police is that there is nothing short of socialist revolution to offer as the answer to systematic police brutality. Typically the demands for "justice" for victims run straight into the reformist trap of civilian review boards to oversee capitalism's beasts run amok.

Once in a rare while we get an opportunity to launch a labor-centered fight for a victimized *living* union brother or sister, and it is out of those struggles that we can impart the lessons of labor/black defense to coworkers and build the LBLs. The Cassandra Seay case in Chicago and the James Grimes case in New York were examples of this in the past. The fledgling New York LBL, founded through the James Grimes defense case, ran headlong into the hardening racial polarization in New York City in the late '80s with the Bensonhurst and Howard Beach lynch mob murders. The union-based defense of James Frazier offers a real possibility today to coalesce a core of supporters who reject the *race war* being fanned by the nationalists and the Zionists and seek to fight for a *class-struggle* solution to the crisis in New York City.

Capitulation to the "episodic" nature of this work necessarily blurs what transitional organizations are—an acceptance that either the workers we meet will immediately join the party or drift away. But we have a lot they can do—in particular the work on behalf of class-war prisoners Mumia Abu-Jamal and Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt). We continue to win wider openings to black youth and workers as a result of this work. The LBLs need to take up the defense work of the PDC on a consistent basis.

This will also add a necessary labor component to this work and will only expand the openings presented to us. *The* issue that our nationalist opponents have been trying to organize around has been the fight for political prisoners. At any one of these events an integrated group of

trade unionists of the labor black league standing on the defense work of the SL and PDC would be a substantial pole of attraction and help cut through a lot of nationalist demagoguery.

The necessary connection between the party and a transitional organization is confirmed in the negative in our attempt to build an LBL in an area where we do not have a local committee. This attempt, which originated with a group of workers who mobilized with us against the KKK in Philadelphia in 1988, has proven to be a failure. Our friends adapted to craft unionism and abstained from issues centering on the race question at the work site and in the region. Their frustrations with the AFL-CIO officialdom led them to organize a breakaway union in which there was no participation by the membership. The breakaway operation ran counter to forging united working-class struggle, relied on the bourgeois courts, and was counter to the concept of industrial unionism and the principles of the LBL. The lesson here is that without cadre on the spot to intervene and guide the political work, standard trade-union consciousness—or worse—is the most that can be expected.

Problems with individual LBL members engaged in activities inimical to our program crept up in several instances in the Bay Area. Though the LBL is a relatively loose organization in programmatic solidarity with the party, it nonetheless needs a simple mechanism of negative discipline. Recently the Bay Area LBL passed a two-part motion establishing membership standards (acceptance of the statement of purpose and program) and a provision to drop from membership those whose actions contradict its purpose.

Defense and Legal Fraction

During the early years of the Reagan era, the SL had to vigorously defend the workers party's right to organize. Through a series of successful lawsuits, most notably against the FBI's Domestic Security/Terrorism Guidelines,

we won a modicum of protection for the organization. The pursuit of our own democratic rights was also implicitly and in fact a defense of other opponents of the government, because our legal victories cut at the heart of the government's efforts to equate "terrorism" with leftist political opposition. We emerged from the Reagan/Bush years without the type of repression envisioned by the right-wing ideologists who sought a return to their halcyon days of the McCarthy era.

We've gained a reputation for tenaciously defending our legality and rights. The importance of our legal victories manifests itself in nearly every campaign we undertake—from our defense of death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal to the recent labor/black mobilization against the KKK in Springfield. These lawsuit victories have been crucial in obtaining endorsements for our anti-fascist mobilizations from individuals and organizations with whom we have had no prior relationship. They have stayed, to some degree, the various police agencies, government offices and their mouthpieces in the press who remain at the ready to bandy about "violence" smears to sabotage our activities.

It is important to note, however, that not one of those legal victories went to trial, but rather were out-of-court settlements, in which we were able to reach a point of compromise we could live with. When we filed suit to protect our permit rights in Springfield, such point of compromise could not be reached. We were forced to litigate in the bourgeois courts which marched in lock step with Illinois state authorities relegating the anti-Klan mobilization to a second-class permit, in contrast to the first-class treatment given the KKK terrorists. For comrades who'd grown accustomed to our victories, this underscored the limitations of the party's ability to defend itself and others in the capitalist courts. We may again be forced to defend our right to organize, particularly as we are very much in the face of the Democratic Party, and more exposed, while the bulk of the left to one degree or another supported Clinton.

The PDC was the initiator of the November 1988 anti-Klan mobilization, and all our anti-fascist mobilizations since. The PDC was also the vehicle for the fundraising campaign for the besieged people of Jalalabad. While we made clear the PDC's relationship to the SL, having the PDC as the initiator of these campaigns has enabled others, particularly trade-union officials and members of other organizations (who would feel constrained from endorsing and building an action called by the communist SL), to join in these united-front actions.

These campaigns transcended the prior self-imposed constraints under which PDC work for the first 14 years of its existence was primarily legal-defense work in the American juridical and penal process. In recognition of this fact, in 1989 the PDC expanded its definition to a "legal and social defense organization." At the outset of the Jalalabad campaign six other sections of the iSt formed their own fraternal defense organizations.

The Defense and Legal Fraction of the party has as its central responsibility PDC work. The expansion of this work has been a considerable source of tension within the party as the party's defense and legal fractions compete for the same scarce resources of party personnel. The PDC is not a membership organization and constant campaign footing cannot be maintained or imposed on the SL/U.S. or

ICL sections, a fact the DLF and the Bay Area party fraction have needed to be reminded of from time to time. The breakdown of Leninist collectivity indicated by the attempted launching of an international fund drive for small and not very costly PDC anti-fascist actions in Vancouver and Berlin spurred the Political Bureau to pass a motion at its emergency meeting on 4 February 1993 drawing to the attention especially of the DLF, and also the I.S., that international circulars mobilizing tendency resources fall within the purview of the I.S. and not the DLF.

While most of the more than 100 class-war prisoners supported by the ILD were workers framed and railroaded in the course of labor battles, the PDC has supported a total of seven labor prisoners, only two of them in the U.S. The PDC's defense of Ravenswood striker Robert Buck was important in giving a labor axis to our work.

In 1987, after extensive discussion in the Political Bureau, the SL for the first time undertook a commitment to a death penalty defense case—a huge and irreversible undertaking to fight to save the life of former Black Panther and MOVE supporter Mumia Abu-Jamal. We did not make this decision lightly. We recognized at the time that it was crucial to get other, larger and more established organizations (such as the CP's defense arm) to take up Jamal's defense. This life-or-death case is an enormous responsibility.

The PDC has made Jamal's case an international cause, enabled him to become a published journalist once again, and has been successful beyond the normal reach of our modest means in getting the word out and making Jamal a recognized symbol of the fight against the racist death penalty. However, our efforts to be the catalyst for others to take up his case in a sustained and responsible way have not succeeded. While many have done work in support of Jamal, not one organization with the needed resources and dedication has come forward.

Our other high-profile defense case is that of former

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Black Panther Party leader Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt), whom we consider America's foremost class-war prisoner. The PDC has initiated united-front protests in support of Pratt, actively publicized his case, and at Geronimo's request initiated legal actions challenging his mistreatment by prison officials. These suits and attendant publicity presently require an increased outlay of party resources and personnel.

Our work on behalf of the class-war prisoners, particularly Jamal and Geronimo, has won recognition and more or less grudging respect for the PDC and the SL. We have established relations of varying degrees with reputable militants in the labor and black movements and with certain radical/liberal intellectuals. Critical to our decision to go forward with the Springfield mobilization was the active involvement of a core group of Chicago trade-union officials with whom we've established relations over the years, beginning with the campaign to stop the frame-up of transit worker Cassandra Seay and cemented by the campaigns for Jamal and the other prisoners. Union officials in the central Illinois "war zone" who endorsed the mobilization were impressed by our prominent defense of Ravenswood striker Bob Buck.

This work has given the party a hearing in wider circles not normally open to us, including among nationalist-dominated black student groups on college campuses. This work has also opened doors in the radical and black press, particularly local black radio stations. Our success has also generated blowback from hostile political competitors, most notoriously expressed by the violent physical assault on two PDC representatives at the Tribunal for Political Prisoners in 1989. Freedom Now! and the Tribunal for Political Prisoners were examples of the burst of prisoners' rights groups in the late '80s. These two have since imploded as a result of sectarian squabbling.

In an insult to Cannon's ILD, the Workers League launched the sham "International Labor Defense Committee." The party and the PDC were slow to react to the danger posed by the sinister Northites undertaking defense work. We allowed their essentially fraudulent defense com-

mittee to gain some reality and credibility. Ever vigilant for an opportunity to knife the SL, the Northites polemicized in their press against us over the case of victimized Greyhound striker Roger Cawthra. The *non-sectarian* traditions of Cannon's ILD must inform and imbue the PDC's defense work; it is the best offense against our opponents and the best defense of the class-war prisoners.

Class-Struggle Defense Notes (CSDN), now on a reduced publication schedule in keeping with other priorities, is in its eighth year of production and has a substantial subscription base. The PDC has cohered a modest core of financial sustainers whose contributions support the day-to-day operation of the PDC. The annual Holiday Appeals sustain the stipend program. However the PDC's financial statements, showing a significant debt to the party, indicate the real basis of its existence.

Among those who have been sustaining contributors are ex-members who have maintained a relationship with the party through the PDC work, some of them drawing closer, graduating to contributing directly to the SL and some going on to rejoin. We have also recruited to the party a few people first encountered during our defense activities.

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in English as *The Third International After Lenin*), containing Leon Trotsky's critique of the program adopted by the Communist International in 1928, as well as other key documents by Trotsky. The publication of *The Communist International After Lenin* was a joint project involving the PRL, including especially the Western Station, the I.S. and Moscow Station. This volume makes these works available to a Russian-speaking audience and is being circulated in the former Soviet Union for the first time. This gives the PRL substantial credibility with archival sources in the former Soviet Union, which Moscow Station should continue to cultivate.

The editorial preparation of *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* took more than a year of concerted full-time mobilization of PRL resources: its production took six months of work by the WV comp crew and the library staff. This investment of resources paid off in a handsome and comprehensive volume which has won our tendency significant international capital as the modern-day heirs of Cannon. It is indicative that many of the favorable reviews published in the press of our opponents do not deign to mention the PRL and Spartacist tendency as the book's publishers—a backhanded acknowledgement that this fact is politically embarrassing for them. The book has also been favorably reviewed in a few academic journals concerned with communist history, winning us some recognition in these circles.

Given the out-transfer of two comrades, we note that the

PRL's capacity for new production such as the Cannon book is right now nonexistent. However, it is important to keep the library functioning as a, for now, relatively passive repository, albeit one capable of acquisition and also the capacity to *retrieve* materials as they are needed. We note with satisfaction the establishment of the Western Station, which gives us valuable extension into rich archival sources and also circles of Marxist intellectuals on the West Coast.

The PRL operates in a very different manner from other party bodies and fractions, affording us the opportunity to intersect a very different layer of individuals and institutions from those the party encounters in the normal course of its work. It permits us to interact on our own terms with Marxist intellectuals, which also feeds back into other party work. Thus PRL contact with a professor at Champaign was useful later in pursuing our Springfield campaign at Champaign-Urbana. This should be contrasted to our experience with the *British Revolutionary History*, where the course of the key players compelled us to withdraw to protect our political independence from a clot moving headlong to the right in the face of the drive for capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR.

Our fund drive to secure the PRL substantially passed its goal, indicating the value comrades and supporters place on this unique repository of Marxist history. It must be noted, however, that our success, while of long-term benefit to the party, has the immediate consequence of tying up key cadre with onerous administrative duties not directly

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involving the work of the library *per se*. One of the tasks of the party administration is to find the personnel and struggle for a situation which will alleviate some of these pressures.

Publications

Workers Vanguard is our central party organ and, as the newspaper of the largest section of the ICL, inevitably plays a flagship role in our tendency internationally. The comrades who write and produce *Workers Vanguard* are subjected to an especially pounding schedule and there is a manifest need for new and younger writers to be brought in. This is our most *urgent* personnel crisis in the party. The protracted and mainly quiescent political decade-plus of the Reagan years slowed recruitment to a trickle and we have only a thin layer of comrades ranging in age from their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. However it is from this layer that we must try to rejuvenate the party, especially our newspaper which is the expression of *what we are*.

The coverage in *Workers Vanguard* leading up to the outbreak of the Iraq war did not foresee the swift and one-sided U.S. victory and predicted heavy American losses. A subjective desire to see U.S. imperialism defeated and humiliated here colored an objective assessment of the likely outcome of the war. There was an underestimation of the effect of the withdrawal of Soviet military advisers on Iraq's war-fighting capacity (especially its air defenses) and an overestimation of Saddam Hussein's willingness to risk his army to secure the annexation of Kuwait.

The question of which audience *WV* should be addressing partly underlay the fight over the article "U.S. Sneak Attack on Baghdad" in *WV* No. 579 (2 July 1993). In its satiric tone and assumption of a comprehensive knowledge of U.S. military actions over the past 15 years, this article was clearly directed at the radical cognoscenti. In a fax to *WV* (28 June 1993), a member of the *WV* editorial board heavily involved in youth work criticized the draft article:

"...I think the article on the bombing of Iraq is too cute by half. I would start it on a more serious note: 'On x day 23 U.S. Tomahawk missiles were sent streaking off in the dead of night toward the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. Smashing into the downtown area, they killed eight civilians including a baby. Why?'"

—*SL/U.S. IB* No. 55 (October 1993)

To this criticism, another member responded (29 June 1993):

"We think it would be wrong to change the tone of the article from scathing to earnest, as you propose. I think your approach would tend to equate the invasion of Somalia or Grenada or the bombing of Libya, i.e., classic Reagan-style imperialist bullying, with the present action which is a display of impotence (and a gift to Saddam Hussein)."

—*Ibid.*

It was necessary to state clearly and strongly that this bombing of the capital of a semicolonial country was an imperialist crime. Far from being an expression of the weakness of U.S. imperialism, it was an arrogant expression of its military prowess, gunboat diplomacy in the age of the cruise missile. An analytical comparison of this particular action by Clinton with certain military actions undertaken by the Reagan administration a decade ago was a secondary or tertiary point. Our articles must center on the key *political questions* to be *intelligible* both to workers and our younger readers.

Workers Vanguard is presently written too much for the

party by its skilled editorial board. It is necessary for not only the voice of newly radicalized youth but also the voices of older party members to come through its pages to a far greater extent than is currently the case. And the current situation is *not* the one-sided responsibility of the *WV* editorial board and central party leadership. There has developed in the *SL/U.S.* and *internationally* an unfortunate tendency to view the *WV* staff as a literary service organization capable of instantaneously producing copy tailored to their specifications. Comrades in the field need to get back in the habit of issuing timely leaflets relating to their activities.

It is necessary to broaden party input into the press *from bottom to top*. *WV* should *reprint* more locally generated material—leaflets; copy from labor black league newsletters; letters to local rad-lib, black and campus newspapers; reports of events; verbal presentations at rallies, etc. It is also necessary for leading comrades in the center with demonstrated literary capacity, who are not on the *WV* editorial board, to do more writing, rewriting and editing for this party organ than at present.

The institution of regular Political Bureau and I.S. meetings which regularly take up press questions has helped redress political imbalance between the editorial board and these bodies. Valuable correctives on our coverage of Haiti, on our analyses of Cuba, China and Vietnam, and our attitude on Yeltsin's coup against the Russian parliament were the direct result. When questions arose over a *WV* article on the recent Puerto Rican independence "referendum," we convened a PB consultation during paper production and thrashed out our line.

It should be noted that we have the demonstrated capacity to issue special *WV* supplements when required over the last period. Supplements were issued when Los Angeles exploded in outrage over the brutal cop beating of Rodney King, and also in response to the New York *Daily News* drivers strike.

Part of our problem will be resolved when we acquire a functioning national youth grouping with its own newspaper, editor and writers. Over the past period *WV* has found itself filling three slots: the central party organ, theoretical journal and youth paper. More frequent publication of *Spartacist* will also relieve the pressure *WV* has shouldered as an international line journal for the tendency.

The journal *Women and Revolution* has a truly international character, enhanced over the last period by our sections running articles on women's liberation and the woman question in their own presses under a *Women and Revolution* masthead, reflecting the increased importance of the woman question in almost every country in which we work. *W&R* plays a unique and important role permitting the party to comment extensively on a broad range of questions from anthropology to "date rape" to permanent revolution.

In addition to the production of the more or less regularly scheduled journals we have a heavy schedule of other materials: an annual black history pamphlet, various other pamphlets, and our Russian-language bulletins. Increasingly, there is the need to reprint important documents such as the *Marxist Bulletin* series.

As an experiment we have printed a pamphlet and the latest issue of *W&R* with heavier cover stock in order to open commercial channels of distribution, which promise to get these publications into scores of bookstores nationwide not otherwise accessible to us.

Also as an experiment we have uploaded selected articles from each issue of *WV* for electronic circulation on the Internet. Both this measure and the previous one must be carefully monitored to determine that the distributions are implemented, and produce tangible benefits.

In order to safeguard *Spartacist* for future generations of Marxists, it is our intent to issue bound volumes printed on higher-grade paper than the current newsprint, which has a very limited shelf life. Likewise, if we go over to typesetting and printing the *Marxist Bulletin* series, we want to use paper of a quality commensurate with these documents' archival status.

This substantial publishing activity is very directly connected to the computerization of our comp department. Productivity and flexibility have been substantially enhanced by the new technology, but so also has the volume of work. And comp itself is also overstretched. In addition we will have to budget substantial additional expenditures for equipment and software to upgrade our capabilities and protect the department from becoming technologically obsolete in a very rapidly moving field.

Spartacus Youth Clubs

Our national youth organization was dissolved in 1986 because it had ceased to have any reality as an independent organization and was therefore mainly an organizational and administrative encumbrance. Local Spartacus Youth Clubs were initiated and the *Young Spartacus* masthead was maintained for the publication of youth copy in *Workers Vanguard*.

The local youth clubs have served their purpose in apprenticing subjectively revolutionary youth to the party and serving as a transmission belt to the party of young cadre. Youth recruitment qualitatively picked up about a year ago and the perspective for refounding a national youth organization is real—one the party aspires to and works toward. We do not yet have the numbers sufficient to forge

a viable organizationally independent youth organization, but with doubling or trebling of the youth clubs' membership it would be appropriate to immediately constitute the Spartacus Youth Clubs as a national organization.

In addition to the numbers of youth picked up recently, the calibre of the recruits should also be noted. We are winning the kind of youth that have the appetite to build a youth organization. In fact, they have been key to rebuilding our party organization in this period. The Bay Area youth recruits were instrumental in the fights against the party exec's terribly wrong line on the black student boycott in Berkeley. A subsequent fight over slogans for an immigration demo had the youth leading the charge against the party exec's right-wing bulge toward the Democratic Party and resulted in a new exec including these new comrades.

While the campuses have been relatively quiet in the past year, our recruitment has been modest, but steady. Pending a broader radicalization that would enable our youth work to really take off, there are intermediary measures that the youth clubs can take to cobble together a more cohesive nationwide presence. A real youth as youth editor is an indicated first step and the cadre exists in the center to take on this assignment. A federated youth national committee pending the formation of a national organization is another possibility. If we had the cadre in the center, a national youth clubs coordinator and representative to the PB would also be an option worth considering. These measures and other aspects of the work and functioning of the Spartacus Youth Clubs will be taken up at their first national gathering in conjunction with the Ninth National Conference of the SL/U.S.

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