

# ***Chicago Workers' Voice***

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### **\*Revolutionary Struggle in Mexico**

On the peasants struggle, by Sarah

Introduction to Analysis of Mexican struggle

*El Machete* editorial on political struggle in Mexico

### **\*The Labor Party = No Such Thing**

### **\* Rosa Luxemburg, Semi-Anarchism -- and Trotsky, Part IV**



**More on the Working  
Class: Hospital Workers**



# Editorial Guide to issue #11

by Jack Hill

Revolutionary politics in Mexico, political issues in the workers' movement in the U.S., and analysis of historical issues in the Communist movement continue to be the focus of the work of the *Chicago Workers' Voice*.

## **Mexico:**

Sarah comments on the views of Tom Barry and the "Food First" group regarding the crisis facing the small peasant farmers in Mexico. She points out the problems with the liberal proposals to solve the Mexican agricultural crisis and shows the need for revolutionary politics.

Anita Jones Sandoval discusses some of the current ideological issues under debate in the Mexican movement. Her comments should be helpful and of interest to activists in the U.S. concerned with the rapid developments in Mexico. She helps to set the context for the *El Machete* editorial which follows.

The editorial from *El Machete* gives the overall analysis of the issues in the political movement in Mexico from their perspective.

## **U.S. workers' movement:**

Most of the U.S. left is debating how to analyze and relate to the recently formed Labor Party. In Chicago

there have been at least three political meetings in September dealing with this issue from one or more points of view. I give my views, and we reprint a variety of other viewpoints so that the reader can get an idea of the range of opinions on this issue. Is there anything good about the Labor Party? Even if there isn't anything good about it, should we nevertheless work inside it to change it?

Along with the article by George of the Boston Communist Study Group on the history of hospital organizing in New York City and in South Carolina, we include a commentary by Jake. Do union organizing drives need to be allied with a section of the politicians to succeed? Is there any possibility of organizing which is not based on some alliance with a powerful political force or the bureaucracy of the established trade union?

## **Rosa Luxemburg:**

Barb finishes her series of articles analyzing and criticizing this important figure in Communist political history. Did Luxemburg move closer to Lenin's views in the last year of her life? If so, did she come all the way over to the Bolshevik analysis?

Barb also contributes a short review of a book on an important Bolshevik woman, **Larissa Reisner**. <

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# THE CONTINUING CRISIS IN MEXICO

by Sarah, *Chicago Workers' Voice*

The continuing crisis in the countryside of Mexico is a major cause of the Chiapas rebellion and the ongoing peasant struggles in Mexico. What are the features of this crisis and how is it shaping Mexican politics?

In the January 29, 1996 issue of CWVTJ (number 9, pp. 23-27), Jack Hill reported on the book *Zapata's Revenge* by Tom Barry. This book discusses many features of the crisis in the Mexican countryside.

## Bimodal structure of agriculture

Barry states that, especially after Lazaro Cardenas left office (he was the President of Mexico from 1934-1940), a bimodal or two-tiered structure developed in Mexican agriculture. Small farmers and ejiditarios farmed rainfed and less fertile lands where they mainly produced basic grains, especially corn and beans. What he calls "commercial agriculture" was developed by medium and large-scale privately owned farms and by some ejidos located in irrigated valleys in the Northwest.

The Cardenista land reforms demobilized the peasantry and substantially reduced the number of landless peasants, averting a peasant revolt. But the small and medium peasantry created by this land reform were also a source of cheap labor for large-scale commercial farming. Then in the 1940's the Green Revolution adopted by the Mexican government focused on assisting the large scale commercial sector. By concentrating resources on the large commercial farms, the Green Revolution accentuated this structure of Mexican agriculture.

While he discusses bimodal agriculture, Barry describes a trimodal class structure in the countryside.

"1) capitalist producers, 2) medium- and small-scale farmers who are surplus-producing but rely primarily on family labor, 3) infrasubsistence or subsistence farmers together with the landless, many of whom regularly work as *jornaleros* or wage farmworkers." (p.28)

He notes that because subsistence farmers don't need to rely totally on wage labor for their basic needs, they work for low wages on the commercial agricultural enterprises. This provides a source of cheap labor needed for the development of large-scale heavily capitalised agriculture in Mexico and for other industries. As well, the commercial grains that these farmers produce, because the small farmers have other income, are commonly sold for prices below what it actually costs to produce them.

This helps to provide cheap grain to the working class in the cities of Mexico, also helping to keep overall wages low.

This bimodal structure is one of the features on which industrialization and development of commercial agriculture in Mexico was built. It was essential for the development of Mexican industrialization in the last period.

He notes that various policies followed by the Mexican government have developed and strengthened this bimodal feature of Mexican agriculture. For instance, he discusses how the agricultural reforms under Echeverria strengthened this bimodal structure of agriculture. Some forces have talked of the reforms under Echeverria as developing a "modern subsistence sector." (See article by Food First, "Chiapas and the Crisis of Mexican Agriculture," by Roger Burbank and Peter Rosset, Institute for Food and Development Policy, Box 160, 265 S. 5th Street, Monroe, OR 97456)

This bimodal structure has meant rural poverty and displacement of peasantry from the land. And this has intensified with the changes brought about under neoliberal policies since 1982 and the policies that are part of NAFTA.

NAFTA means facilitating the opening of Mexican trade to cheap U.S. agricultural commodities. The opening to basic grains is especially important. Medium and small producers have relied on being able to sell corn in Mexico. This was part of the bimodal system. Now with cheap U.S. grains in the marketplace, especially in the cities, the small scale producers are increasingly being marginalized and driven out. U.S. agricultural exports to Mexico increased by 24% in 1993-94. Further, rural starvation is increasing as the small farmers can no longer compete to supply basic grains. Yet, without income from selling these basic grains and living in isolated areas, they are not able to buy the food they need.

## Secondary agricultural export market

The internationalization of the agricultural trade, besides the increase in export of basic grains to Mexico, has meant an increase in export of Mexican fruits and vegetables to the U.S.

Many of the big commercial farms produce for the export market, especially the U.S. Other large farms raise cattle, also targeting the U.S. market. To some extent,

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Mexican cattle are processed in the U.S. and then imported as processed or frozen meats for markets in the large cities of Mexico. Again the bimodal structure is seen, with many small and medium farms providing the calves (a risky part of the operation) to the large farms.

In the current economic climate profits in Mexican agriculture are maximized when production is geared towards making money for the big international corporations who dominate the scene. One area of high profits is producing exports for affluent foreign markets. Producing foodstuffs for low-wage domestic workers, however, is not highly profitable. The result is a very truncated type of economic development, typical of the distortions that imperialism inflicts on weaker or dependent countries.

A couple of factors are important. One is Mexico's international debt and the forced development of economic policies aimed at ensuring payment on this huge debt. Another is the policies of neo-liberalism and the ending of all or most protectionist controls. These policies mean more imports of cheap American grains into Mexico and more exports of highly labor-intensive fruit and vegetable crops.

The result of this new import/export exchange is that producers of grains in Mexico are driven out of business by cheaper American grains. Small farmers who sold corn on the domestic market and who relied on government guarantee of prices are the most affected. Since these are also the smaller farms, extreme poverty is created. So extreme, that starvation is increasing in remote areas where it is difficult and expensive to transport international grains.

Barry notes that the areas of Mexico where this system of agriculture is most advanced are those areas where rural poverty is the worst.

The above noted article by Burbach and Rosset noted the particularly severe effects of these overall economic policies in Chiapas. Chiapas contains about 3.8% of the land in Mexico and about the same percent of population. However, Chiapas is the largest coffee producer of Mexican states, the third largest in corn production, the fourth largest in cattle production and numbers among the three largest in tobacco, banana, soy and cacao production. This exists in a situation where 54% of the land is controlled outright by ejidos. However, 19% percent of the state's economically active population has no cash income and 39 percent earn less than the minimum wage. This shows the striking effects of the skewed nature of the Mexican economy.

### **Barry's proposals and their feasibility**

Barry thinks that there is no going back to earlier

revolutions. While the demands of the Zapatista revolution and the Plan of Ayala still resonate (the current struggles in Mexico have picked up many of the slogans and symbols of the earlier Zapatista revolt), the conditions today are different. The earlier Zapatista revolt and the Mexican revolution brought the PRI to power. Today, of course, it is the rule of the PRI which is under assault. Further, capitalism is much more highly developed today than it was at the time of the Mexican revolution. The proletariat is much larger and more developed. The possibilities of the proletariat putting forward its demands and influencing the course of the struggle are better. The possibilities for a united revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and peasantry aiming at seizing power are better.

Barry further states that: "Given the mobility of capital and the country's reliance on international financing, the options for pursuing nationalistic development strategies that shape production and consumption are limited." In particular, "there is no returning to a world where national economies could be managed in relative isolation from the rest of the world." He also says that he is not against highly capitalized and large scale farming in general. While I think all these points are controversial, in general I don't think a return to nationalistic politics which seek to protect and develop national capitalism are possible now.

Barry admits his proposals are largely within the neo-liberal framework and are meant to reform that framework. He is generally in favor of "alternative rural development" which he says "would require that the government focus its technical and financial support for agriculture by the peasantry and protections against the influx of cheap imported grains." He proposes that there should be methods of development which included a sector of labor intensive agriculture in the countryside. He talks of integrated agricultural plans so that the cities are not overwhelmed with peasantry driven out of the countryside and so that small and landless peasantry continue to be employed in the countryside.

Barry is sympathetic to the land demands of the Zapatistas. The Zapatista land demands include distribution of land of good quality to the peasantry, improvements in infrastructure - roads, irrigation systems, transportation, etc. - to those lands, support services to the peasantry and fair prices for their products. I am not suggesting that the Zapatista demands are linked to Barry's proposals. Barry has studied the situation in Mexico and the history of various movements extensively. He thinks that some of the Zapatista demands are consistent with what he suggests in the realm of integrated systems of large and small

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scale, capital intensive and labor intensive farming.

I want to make a few points about Barry's proposals and the implementation of such proposals within the context of the current capitalist system.

1. A highly integrated system of large and small scale, capital-intensive and labor-intensive agriculture geared to the needs of the masses is highly unlikely under capitalism. This is the fundamental flaw in Barry's and in similar proposals.

The very nature of capitalist competition and drive for profit that is inherent in capitalism would undercut any plan to not make maximum profit. There is far too much at stake for the big capitalists to tolerate the government regulations, price supports, and public assistance that would be given to poor farmers. Further, the kind of integrated plan Barry is talking about would undercut capitalist competition. And Barry is not proposing to get rid of the profit system or capitalist competition.

2. Reforms such as those proposed by Barry might mean a less skewed and less dependent capitalist development in Mexico. They might improve Mexico's position in relation to other capitalist powers. They could improve living conditions for some of the population. It might mean a less truncated and skewed internal market. And, in general, Barry holds this to be true about his solution.

(Barry and the writers from Food First represent different political trends. For instance, I think the writers from Food First are more in favor of breaking up the large scale highly capitalized farms. Barry's proposals are admittedly within the context of neo-liberalism while the writers from Food First are more directly against neo-liberalism. However, the writers for Food First have proposals for agriculture in Mexico which bear some similarity to Barry's. And the writers from Food First also think that their proposals would better the position of Mexican capitalism.)

Although the implementation of proposals along the lines that Barry suggests would not destroy capitalism, this does not mean that socialists should flat out oppose them. Of course, this does mean that we should not confuse proposals such as Barry's with socialism.

### Some thoughts on general land reform

1. What about proposals for a general land reform which greatly strengthens the ejido system in Mexico? Demands for this are very popular and the peasantry is going to war in some states in order to obtain it. The small and landless peasants in Mexico are in a very precarious position. Millions have flooded into the cities because there are no possibilities in the countryside. Starvation stares out at them every day. The poor peasants have no

choice but to fight. Otherwise, they will be wiped out in a very brutal fashion. Their fight must be supported by all revolutionaries.

I will note, however, that I think that no capitalist government is going to break up any significant portion of large-scale commercial farming and turn them over to the ejidos. A strengthening and improvement of the ejido system is possible. It was done under Echeverria.

Under capitalism and especially in the current context of global neo-liberalism, the implementation of such proposals will delay and shape the overall decline of the small peasantry and the increasing control of international finance capital and agribusiness over agriculture - if necessary, through a variety of forms. That is, such reforms probably make the decline of the small peasantry slower and less painful, but they do not stop it.

2. The overall bimodal or trimodal structure of agriculture will not change under capitalism except in situations where, similar to the U.S., the agricultural population is relatively small. That is, in the U.S. small farmers are not a ready supply of cheap labor for larger farms and nearby industry. Farmers small or medium may also work in industry or other occupations, especially in the winter-time. But to the extent that they are a supply of labor at all, it is hard to argue that they are cheap. Further, only on a very small scale do American small farmers work as employees of large farms or agribusiness.

In *Capital*, Karl Marx described what is now called bimodal structure of agriculture as a feature of capitalist development. Marx called it a common development as the growth of capitalism increasingly wipes out the small peasantry.

3. Some writers seem to think that the implementation of demands to greatly extend and strengthen the ejido system will halt the differentiation into classes in the countryside. For instance, the authors from Food First write disparagingly of the employment in the oil industry of indigenous peoples in Chiapas. Peasants who had accumulated some savings from working in the oil fields (primarily young men) returned home and invested in "Green Revolution" technologies. The authors conclude that this dramatically altered class and social relations in those villages. They seem to hope that such development of class differentiation can be slowed or even stopped.

I don't think this is true. Perhaps the struggle of the peasants may alter how this process takes place so that the effects are not so deleterious. For instance, within the Zapatista revolt, women have demanded participation in small enterprises and more rights. However, even in cases where there was much more radical land seizure and re-distribution to the small and medium peasantry

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(such as the Soviet and Chinese revolutions), it did not halt the differentiation into classes, into rich farmers and poor farmers, into capitalists and proletarians and semi-proletarians in the countryside.

### Socialism

My perspective is this, only socialism can save the Mexican peasantry. Socialism means that the working class and other laboring classes such as the small peasantry take over the means of production and run them in the interests of all the oppressed. Land will be seized as social property to be worked by an association of land workers. Ejidos will eventually be transformed into social property and not as individual communes which continue to compete with each other. Today socialism fights for improved working conditions and wages of the agricultural proletariat and it aims for, not the general destruction of large scale farming, but that the working class runs it in the interests of the oppressed.

The socialist proletariat fights to improve the conditions of the small peasantry. It supports and develops demands to do this now. It is not afraid if the peasantry breaks up large farms - as for instance happened in Soviet Russia to some extent. However, the proletariat realizes that this is a **problem**. When the proletariat and allied classes win power, they will adopt measures that develop the smoothest possible transition to socialism.

It seems to me that some of the thinking in socialist circles is that it is inevitable and preferable that the rural population be reduced dramatically, that the best and only possible development would be a situation similar to the U.S. where the rural population is very small. Only, of course, this would be under socialism and therefore much better. I don't think this is necessarily true or desirable. Many things have changed since the last revolutionary attempts to build socialism. For example, the current level of technology and new developments in manufacturing techniques and organization have brought capitalism from an era where gigantic factories ruled to an era where merely large factories rule. It is beyond the scope of this article, not to mention beyond my current knowledge, to discuss and debate the implications of current capitalist production methodology, but I do want to provoke some thought.

I believe that some advocates for socialism insist that bigger is automatically better. Moreover, there still exists among many leftists a prejudice of sorts against the peasantry.

This leads to thinking that perhaps the peasants as peasants don't fit into a plan for socialism and/or that the

countryside is too backward to organize and rebuild on a socialist basis. One might conclude that it would be easier or better or the only true Marxist-Leninist path to insist on moving a lot of the rural population to the cities where the peasants can become workers. Food production would be taken over by large scale farms run as state-owned enterprises or very large communes perhaps. Such plans would, of course, include the modernization of the countryside as Marxism does not allow for a socialism where the country is not developed along with the city.

But there is nothing in Marxism-Leninism that demands that peasants be driven into the cities in order to build a modern socialist economy. Capitalism demands this and the benefits to the capitalists are obvious. Equally obvious is the harm to society, especially to the farmers, that is caused by the typical capitalist development of agriculture: slums and shantytowns from overcrowding in the cities, workers' wages lowered by increased competition and desperation, food shortages and/or price hikes, starvation in the countryside.

Socialism is not possible if it is not superior to capitalism, and that includes being more efficient. Under capitalism, small scale non-modernized farming can not compete with large scale. It is being wiped out. Under socialism, large scale efficient and modern farming will predominate. However, it seems the current levels of technology and possibilities for integrated systems of production would favor the development of some small and some highly labor intensive farming. The integration of possible styles of production in the countryside would mean that large-scale highly "capitalized" farming and smaller scale farming would be a part of an integrated plan, along with the development of manufacturing and other industries in rural areas (where a labor supply already exists).

Thus, a socialist revolutionary movement and a socialist government would have to look for ways not to drive all the small peasants out of the countryside and into the cities. A socialist government works to eliminate the division between countryside and city. Such a government might very well locate a substantial amount of diversified industries away from the current large urban centers, not only providing employment to those who have been driven off the land, but a higher standard of living (higher wages) and an accelerated development of the rural economies.

### Linking the struggle of the proletariat with the struggle of the peasantry

Engels talks about linking the proletarian movement with the revolutionary movement of the small peasantry and that if this can be done, a socialist revolutionary  
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movement can succeed.

How to do this requires thought. Today, in Mexico the proletarian movement is small and the peasant movement, while active in various areas, is not mass either.

Should it be done by building up the proletarian movement in the cities and supporting unequivocally the peasant demands at present, even while realizing that many of those demands do not strike at the heart of capitalism? After all, the EZLN has raised demands that come out of the small peasantry and has won their support. The struggle launched on January 1, 1994 brought the demands of the peasantry onto the national political scene. And the struggles launched by the EZLN and others have opened political space for the proletariat and the left to have impact. It has helped to widen the impact of struggles such as the SUTAUR 100 strike. It has opened the situation where there is ferment and a general split to the left within the oppositional political movement. For instance, on May Day this year, the independent social organizations held a massive march of over 250,000. Various unions associated with the CTM broke ranks and marched in this action, although somewhat separately. The march was not dominated by the PRD.

At the same time the struggles of the SUTAUR workers, other struggles among the proletariat in the cities, the struggles in the neighborhoods and the growing shift of the oppositional movement to the left has given

more space for the peasant movement and organizations like the EZLN to operate.

Should alternative demands be proposed to the impoverished peasantry? Should a combination of the two be done? Marx and Engels, in their writings on socialism and the peasantry, make it clear that the proletariat can in no way guarantee to the small peasantry that their small holdings and their rural isolation can be maintained. Revolutionaries and socialists have to think seriously about this.

Socialism is not an extension of small peasant economy or the peasant commune. That idea that it is has more in common with anarchism than communism. Marx and Engels, however, wrote extensively on various types of measures which might be implemented in order to bring the peasantry to socialism without driving them out in the way that capitalism does. And the types of proposals they made are very forethinking in light of current knowledge and concern about protecting the environment and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. The answers require intimate and detailed knowledge of how the revolutionary movement in Mexico is developing. At present, no one has such answers. I suggest, however, that these issues be considered seriously, studied, investigated and resolved. The science of Marxism-Leninism is an essential tool for this essential task of the Mexican socialist revolution. ◇

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# An Introduction to the Ideological Struggle in Mexico

By Anita Jones de Sandoval

*Jones Sandoval is a member of the editorial board of CWV and a member of the Coordinadora Internacional en Apoyo al Pueblo de Mexico, an organization with ties to El Machete newspaper in Mexico. The views expressed in this article are those of the author only.*

This short article is to introduce the following article from *El Machete* newspaper entitled "Elements to Analyze the Political Movement", and to introduce a series of articles which will appear in future issues of *Chicago Workers' Voice* discussing trends and issues in the Mexican revolutionary movement. The framework for this discussion is the recognition that while the political and social crises in México demands much of the Mexican revolutionary movement, it also demands that the revolutionary movement in the United States develop both analysis and serious action in support of the movement in Mexico.

As has been the case since the EZLN uprising in January, 1994, events in Mexico are moving at such a rapid pace that conditions change before the ink is dry on any analysis of current political events.

A new guerrilla organization, the EPR (Ejercito Popular Revolucionario) has appeared. The Mexican government has moved large numbers of military forces into the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla and other areas. Peasant leaders and activists have been detained, and villages suspected of sympathy for the guerrillas are being harassed by the military.

An attempt at founding a united front of independent organizations (FAC-MLN) has held two conferences attended by delegates representing some 200 organizations. At the same time, the independent organizations are fighting against the low intensity war of political repression being waged against them.

As of this writing the dialogue between the EZLN and Mexican government is again broken. The government, which only a few weeks ago was casting the EZLN as the "good guerrillas", has now declared that the EZLN are "liars" and "in decay". Troops have been moved in tighter around EZLN positions.

The internal crises of the Mexican ruling class continues to deepen with ever more bizarre manifestations. Meanwhile, U.S. imperialism becomes more and more

nervous about events in its "back yard". The U.S. is openly supplying the Mexican government with helicopters and other military aid. U.S. intelligence agencies are sharing information with the Mexican government and the U.S. has offered to send military personnel as well.

These are the conditions in which revolutionaries in México are working. Understanding these conditions is part of any useful discussion of the ideological positions of the major trends in México. It should also be understood that speaking of ideological struggle is to speak not only of what the left commonly terms "the struggle between trends", although that is a vital part of the revolutionary process. Ideological struggle also means the struggle to rethink the application of theory, to break with old bad habits and find a way to move forward. Both kinds of ideological struggle are needed if a revolutionary leadership is to be built which the mass movement, with all its contradictory impulses, will accept. And, that is the only way that the spontaneous and the not-so-spontaneous and the organized mass struggles will come together and take the path of mass revolutionary struggle.

## ***El Machete: Elements to analyze the political movement***

The "Elements to Analyze the Political Movement" published by *El Machete* newspaper, is one of the first attempts since the Zapatista uprising in January 1994, by activist forces in the revolutionary movement in México, to publish an analysis of the social forces in Mexico, the current political-social situation and the trends in the political movement. Its aim is programmatic, offering points of analysis for discussion in order to achieve more coordination and more unity around a definition of the strategic and tactical tasks for the revolutionary forces in México at a national level.

*El Machete* identifies these tasks as the minimal conditions for the strengthening of the forces for liberation and for the fall of the current regime. It is worth mentioning that *El Machete* newspaper continues to play the important role of giving the independent social organizations and activists a voice for ideological discussion as well as for promotion of their struggles. The orientation of *El Machete* is towards applying ideology to the practical

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# EXTRA From *EL MACHETE*, ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS FOR THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

(From *Extra del El Machete*, included in the *El Machete* newspaper, Number 76, June 1996. Correspondence: Apartado Postal 14-339, Mexico 14 D.F., Mexico. E-Mail: cleta@mail.internet.com.mx Translation by the Coordinadora Internacional de Apoyo al Pueblo de Mexico, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., 120 Broadview Village #400, Chicago, IL 60153.)

The following is an attempt to summarize the current political economy in order to analyze our reality.

In our times, phrases such as “neoliberalism” or “civil society”, rather than clarify, cause confusion. They cause confusion because they hide the existence of the capitalist economy, the producer of hunger, and of its beneficiaries and promoters - real people of flesh and blood - criminals against humanity.

The collective of *El Machete* puts forward this document, a product of the thinking of various organizations, as a contribution towards the construction of the unity of progressive forces in Mexico.

1. Mexico's social formation is characterized by: capitalist development, integrated world wide in a manner subordinate to the predominance of international finance monopoly capitalism; the coexistence of diverse forms of production, subordinated to and including capitalist reproduction; the presence of a system of authoritarian pro-imperialist oligarchic domination with a growing use of Fascist forms of government, (presidential, centralist and repressive) under the doctrine of “national security” and with the war strategy of “low intensity warfare”. a state hegemony compromised by a political crises of credibility, legitimacy and composition of the governing group. The governing group looks to overcome this crises with a reform of the state within the party system, a reform of the rules of the electoral game and of electoral forms, in order to reestablish the passive consensus for its neoliberal project of structural change and the reproduction of capitalist dominion; ideological domination based on a modernization of bourgeois discourse into a discussion of neoliberal ideas, the doctrine of national security, economic security, competition, productivity, consumerism, individualism, patronage based social welfare-ism {asistencialismo focalizado}, and the criminalization of social conflicts which alters legality.

2. The fundamental classes in this social formation are:

— on one side, the bourgeoisie as the dominant class, with the hegemony of local finance capital and international

finance capital acting in Mexico, along with a broad base of medium and small capitalists linked to the commercial and service sectors; -- on the opposite side, the proletariat, the exploited and numerically dominant class, with diverse sectors depending on a rural or urban location and, principally, according to the different labor and valorization processes which coexist within capitalist production.

Together with these classes is the small, rural and urban petty bourgeoisie with its rich, medium and poor sectors, which being subordinated to capital through the market, transfer value to capital for its own reproduction, for which they are plundered by businesses, creditors, functionaries, landlords, bankers and industrialists. The majority of the petty bourgeoisie are poor peasants and salaried independent workers in the commercial and service sector. These workers offer their wage labor power for sale, either permanently or temporarily, or they try to occupy informal and precarious economic activities in an independent manner.

3. The current development of productive forces in Mexico is characterized by a high degree of centralization of capital and technology in the hands of the monopolist industrialists; in an intense reorganization of labor processes in order to modernize the form of exploitation of labor power into more flexible forms for the reproduction of capital, and by the persistence of broad productive sectors with low technology and productivity with a small investment of capital in new methods of production and with savage forms of exploitation which are lengthening the work day, and plundering workers' salaries and benefits. The low technology sector lives with constant instability regarding their operation and survival, given the low level of competitiveness of these businesses, their subordination and the logic of the market.

4. In the current stage of globalization, capitalism in Mexico has, for almost 15 years, been restructuring or changing its structure into a pattern of capital accumulation which is trying to convert itself into a secondary exporter. But, with the limits imposed by finance capital, it has advanced along the path of a strong predominance of financial speculation and parasitism of the neoliberal type, which impedes heavy, complete industrialization; focalizes technological modernization and increased productivity in the largest enterprises, although dynamizing manufacturing exports, principally those of the border areas sweatshops {maquilas} achieves larger amounts of

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*Extra, cont. from p. 9*

plus value; causes the growth of monopoly's dominance in the economy; opens the borders to more, freer foreign investment and to products from other countries, and reinforces authoritarianism in order to impose the legal changes and economic security for the Mexican and U.S. capitalists, who are partners in a block dominated by the United States.

Under neoliberal policy, the IMF, the World Bank and the North American Treasury intervene ever more in the design and the supervision of Mexico's political and economic projects.

For this reason, recent administrations have shown a special interest in guarantees to pay interest on the external and internal debts, the expropriation of funds designated for public services and social security, which have characterized the social intervention of the State since 1982, to the opening of the market in products and capital, under the dominion of Yankee imperialism.

This has required a complete reform of the State and its functions of regulation, property ownership and direct administration of state enterprises, with substantial modifications of the articles of the constitution which limit the free expression of capital such as:

- ownership of rural and urban lands
- strategic or profitable enterprises which were in the hands of the State
- free money exchange and speculative financial investment which inhibits the free flow of capital
- the elaboration of mega investment projects in large areas of land which were in the hands of the indigenous, peasant communities, or were zones of popular housing, or reserves of natural resources, {translator's note: "popular" is usually used to refer to something related to the masses of working people}. These projects set up tourist service areas for recreation and the commercialization of luxury articles for the wealthy population, such as in the areas of communications and information.

5. The networks of visible and hidden power in Mexico are disputing control of the State or struggling against its dominion through the hegemonic social forces of each of the fundamental classes, which offer leadership and unity to the members of the blocks oriented with explicit projects for the reproduction of capital or the transformation of society.

They are, of the dominant class, those which have formed the historic bourgeois block.

- the oligarchy of large businesses and landlords led by local finance capital.
- international finance and monopoly capital with

direct interests in Mexico, tightly linked to the economic block of North America.

— the hierarchy {cupolo} of the governing political group which includes the executive power, the leaders of the legislative houses and judicial power as well as the high level bureaucracies of the social organizations controlled by the State and PRI hierarchy.

— finally, the high command and the high officials of the armed forces of the State, the military machine formally led by the president, but with the capacity to serve as a guarantee for (or in emergency situations to lead) the dominant block.

These forces find expression through groups of economic, political and ideological oligarchic power, whose open expression are linked regionally to the history or influence of one of the principal fractions of the governing group: The group of "Guadalajara" with the politicians and businessmen linked to Echeverria and/or Lopez Portillo and its relationship with the narcotic cartel of the Pacific; the "Monterrey" group, linked to the Salinist group, to those businessmen who were enriched during his regime and with a probable association with the Gulf cartel and to the Puebla cartel, also called the "syndicate of governors" which is now headed by Bartlett and in which participate old politicians from the PRI party hierarchy and from the State corporate centers and from "Atacomulco", linked with Hank Gonzalez. The last two are related to diverse political chiefs, Government cadre, and businessmen, all fed by contracts and government preferences and also by the drug business. This above classification is uncertain and comes more from common sense and from the information leaks {filtraciones} which they let out about one or another faction in the moments in which their squabbles are larger. On thing for sure is that these groups exist independently of the name given to them and that they control networks of power which function as counterweights in the application of a common oligarchic project for the restructuring of capital under neoliberal forms and of the stabilization of the regimen with the application of the dirty war and a policy of co-optation towards parties and intellectuals.

Regarding the exploited classes, subordinated to bourgeois domination, their historic block is in a process of shaping itself {conformacion}, having gone through a long process to constitute itself as an oppositional, democratic and revolutionary social force. subject to the social transformation of Mexico by the organized sectors of the masses, independent of and against the State, the bourgeoisie and in particular, and in an immediate manner, in search of a rupture with the system of domination.

In this popular block participate:

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— groups of the social and political vanguard of the wage workers, the majority of the independent indigenous peoples' organizations, peasant organizations and popular urban organizations.

— supported by political class conscious organizations and democratic organizations (up until now dispersed and with a regional or sectoral presence) (among which are the majority of the base of the PRD (Partido Revolucionario Democrático) and PT (Partido del Trabajo), by non-governmental organizations, Christian base groups, women's groups and youth groups.

— its political, military and ideological vanguard is in formation with the current forces still dedicated to the preparation of its cadre, the coordination of its immediate actions and to the debate about the strategy and tactics to lead the revolutionary process. The EZLN, in particular, as a public political, military force, has attracted the sympathy of this block of popular forces in formation, due to its cause, its questioning of the regime and of the neoliberal policy which the regime manifests. Organizationally, this block is building side by side with the EZLN, with some differences, a broad front of opposition to the regime.

However, the social base of this block is made up of broad disorganized masses, who in the social realm maintain an attitude of discontent and passive, individual resistance. In the economic realm they struggle for survival but are disposed towards the call of the popular and political forces not to abandon their struggle for their basic demands. In the political realm they go from one side to another as the client base of the opposition parties in the elections which are of interest (the presidential and some municipal elections), but the majority follow a passive or abstentionist line, despite the fact that there are signs throughout the country of an incredulosity towards politics and towards the government's discourse. Nevertheless, in the violent struggle in these sectors, phenomena of both fear and terror coexist with an enthusiasm for revolt, explosiveness, and the desire to take justice into their own hands. This complex moral, psychological, and social condition of the political and social consciousness of the majority of the exploited, oppressed and discriminated against still lacks a national answer on the part of those forces that are organized and have a strategic sense of change. For this reason, in some regions, PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional), the political bosses (caciques) and various oligarchic or governmental groups, have used some of these characteristics (of the broad masses) in favor of interests which are against those of the people.

6. The tendencies toward the political coordination of the popular forces in the same strategic direction ad-

vances slowly, at the same time, the popular movement is confronting the war of low intensity - a dirty war, psychological and with the intention of co-optation and division by the State. Due to this, the popular movement has gone to resistance, after a brief period of upsurge, rebellion and continuous signs of struggle to build popular power and not just for the achievement of traditional demands. In order to resist the popular movement is dedicating forces to the building of mass political organizations which are solid and stable; fronts for coordination and intermediate forms, and forms of leadership with trained members and cadres to advance the political social struggle with a revolutionary vision.

7. At the present, the structural tendencies (trends/forms?) of the class struggle are manifested within a principal contradiction with a political character. **THE DESTINY OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL REGIME.**

This is about the struggle between the forces which are looking for a reform to strengthen the capitalist state in Mexico and its subordination by international finance capital and neoliberal authoritarian logic, against the forces which radically question this reform and are proposing the true democratic transformation of the regime.

8. Among the first forces diverse options are put forward, essentially committed to the reproduction of the bourgeois dominance, but some different schemes:

— the openly authoritarian position which considers it to be necessary to repress the attempts towards a democratic transition or a radical rupture of the regime, which they consider dangerous to the economic security of the neoliberal project for taking part in capitalist globalization and for the continuation of the present governing group. The margins of tolerance for alliances reach to sectors of the PAN, unconditional with this project and a superficial electoral reform that would then be the only path for social conflicts. This is the option which the traditional Priista grouping of governors has pushed, linked to the government's schemes for a hard line against the democratic organizations and strong economic and political corruption.

- the position which is working for the so called national political agreement, disposed to reform the electoral system and party system, sharing various pieces of government with them which will not alter the oligarchic dominion which is the center of State power. For example, the federalization and decentralization of the use of State resources, but without attacking the economic leadership of society following the efficiency and productivist logic proclaimed by the neoliberalism of the big creditors and their institutions (IMF and World Bank). The transformations of the regime would be gradual and effected through

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the electoral campaigns of 1997 and 2000. The possibility of an alternation of government with the PAN {and the PRI} is greater, they look for schemes of "cohabitation" and "concertation" which would not take away the privileges of the modern part of the current governing group. The repression would continue looking to legitimize itself as defensive acts of social concert/agreement and the war would continue its path of "low intensity" until the insurgents are subordinated to the political path. This is the option of the group allied within the Secretary of Government with the continuators of Salinism and the neoliberal technocrats. Their power covers/occults the economic and political interests of the group of Hank Gonzales and his external partners among which are distinct drug cartels.

— The proposal for a pacific and gradual transition fixing from 1997 as specific goal for the alternation of power, the transparency and equality of the parties and electoral process and the defense of a social policy which restores the role of the State as the redistributor of income for the working population via public services. In this option displaced sectors of the current group of government functionaries are participating (the majority of the Sam Angel group) and well known negotiating leaders which serve as a counterweight to the CTM, the CNC, (the so called "foristas unions") and others union organizations such as UNORCA. This group counts as well with sympathizers in the PRD and among the ex-panistas of the Democratic Forum. For them it is necessary that the dialogue with the EZLN shows results in the areas of the indigenous peoples, electoral democracy, the organs of justice, gradually healthier development with greater equilibrium in international competition. Nevertheless they are against the forms of social democracy, and the struggles for the national and social liberation of the country, despite the fact that some of them have declared themselves in open opposition to the first capitalist option.

Of all these options, big capital, local and international, prefers the first two, although they recognize that the options may require reforms to make the electoral processes "transparent" in order to avoid conflicts about voting (election results, defense of the vote).

For its part, the federal army is assured of achieving greater political intervention and control over the State organs of intelligence and security, independent of what factions of the dominant class which win the government in the next few years, for this they can count on the support (and pressure) of the bilateral agreements of the Yankee Pentagon.

9. On the side of the popular democratic, and revolutionary forces there are two principal proposals

regarding the destiny of the current regime and its policies: one for the pacific transition towards a political democratic system and one for a rupture with the regime in order to open a path for diverse options for the strengthening of mass participation.

— The first proposal represented by the PRD and a broad opposition coalition including the Cardenist line, the Camacho Solis line and some members of the San Angel group. Their tendency to maneuver within the center opposition (third path of the dominant class) in 1997 will have a popular impact if this sector is able to achieve concrete victories against the PRI, PAN and in particular against the neoliberal Salinismo and Zedilliosmo. Their economic proposal is defined by renegotiation with international capital to permit the defense of the medium and small enterprises, as well as a recuperation of the salaries and income for the peasants, no breaking of the NAFTA, nor cancellation of the debt, even less any delay in the modernization of enterprises or the increase in productivity negotiated in exchange for some benefits for the workers. Regarding peace and the dialogue, they insist on giving a role to the EZLN as a political, not belligerent force and will try to slow down the radical movements relating to any organization by accusing it of being a provocateur of violence.

— The option of a struggle for the rupture with and putting in crises the current regime calls for the definition of substantial changes in the relations of the people (or the civil society as the EZLN says) with the State, in order to find a situation which permits a new government which would call for the election of a constituent assembly to elaborate a new constitution.

However, here there also appear two positions: that which emphasizes the democratic transition, understood as a period during which, under new democratic conditions, the people would discuss what kind of government they want to give themselves, for this it is possible and convenient that a pacific political transition is accompanied by the presence of the EZLN as a guarantor of the process. that which supposes that this will not be possible without an advance in the preparation of a new revolution, with the coordinated use of all the forms of struggle which are decided upon by the people and which is called the construction of popular power.

Both proposals confront the weaknesses already noted of the scarcity of a coordinated force for action against the State and the lack of a clear political leadership direction recognized by the movement. This option {for a rupture} lives in the struggle against the dirty war and the instruments of the low intensity war, as well as in the ideological dispute with reformism and its proposal for

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alliances with sectors of the current regime.

Its main achievement is ideological, if it has very general agreements; it has questioned the project of the dominant block, in particular that of neoliberalism, the selling out of national sovereignty, and the lack of democracy, liberty and justice. In this way it has found national and international social and political sympathy and support.

10. Overcoming the lack of coordination of the popular and insurgent movements and defining a strategic and tactical project to confront the diverse options for the strengthening of capitalist power, are the minimal conditions for a motion towards the fall of the old regime and the strengthening of the forces which want national and social liberation for Mexico. ◇



*Part of a teachers' demonstration in early June in Mexico City. A militant teachers' organization rejected the pro-government teachers' union deal with the government. They carried on a sharp struggle, including fights with the police, for several weeks demanding a wage increase to make up some of the losses from the sharp inflation caused by the financial crisis of the last two years.*

tasks of building a revolutionary movement. It manifests many of the weaknesses as well as the strengths of that independent mass movement, but it has made solid progress in moving discussion forward, while remaining solidly linked to the day to day struggle.

This article makes three important contributions to the process: First, it pushes for a class analysis of México as a capitalist country and polemizes against two popular concepts: "neoliberalism" and "civil society" because they confuse and obscure class analysis.

Second, the article lays out the trends in the opposition movement (opposition to the PRI), differentiating sharply between the social democratic coalition, including sectors of the PRD and the forces seeking a rupture and deepening of the political crises of the regime. The article also characterizes two trends within the more radical trend. One is the trend most represented by the EZLN which seeks a new popular government achieved through an extension of democracy, although with the EZLN playing the role of armed back-up or guarantor. The other trend, of which *El Machete* is a part, is looking towards the preparation of a new revolution and the construction of popular power.

The third, important contribution to discussion made in the article, is the sober characterization of the mood of the masses and of the weaknesses of the radical movement. The article notes that the Mexican masses show contradictory impulses towards passive resistance, fearful inaction, and sudden explosive spontaneous action, while the organized movement has not been able to coordinate itself to respond to the masses at a national level nor to articulate a common strategy and tactics.

In the U.S., a trend among the few Marxist organizations or publications supporting the idea of socialist revolution, has been to offer general criticisms of the EZLN and other Mexican organizations, including the forces publishing *El Machete*. While many of these criticisms of the EZLN correctly identify the fact that it is a petty-bourgeois peasant force with vacillations between reformism and revolution, the criticisms tend to treat revolutionary theory as something academic and sterile. They miss the main point of the role of the EZLN and its trend, as well as that of other active left organizations. There are of course different trends in the movement. There is also a struggle for hegemony among those contending trends. Some of the organizations represent distinct class trends. At the same time, there is no strong proletariat trend, and no single trend has hegemony, or has won legitimacy as "the leader" of a revolutionary trend. Additionally, not all different organizations which exist represent different,

hostile trends.

For these reasons, the organizations and trends are interrelated and dependent on each other at the same time as there exists an ideological struggle. The EZLN and EPR as armed movements also depend politically on the mass organizations in México City such as SUTAU, MPI, Frente Popular Francisco Villa, etc. While at the same time those mass organizations are directly affected politically by the guerrilla organizations.

As for the EZLN, it would be wrong to overestimate its possibilities or role, but also wrong not to recognize that its struggle again raised the possibility of mass revolutionary struggle in the mass movement, which was suffering from stagnation in many ways. The importance of the EZLN stems partially from the important role of the peasant movement, in general, and the indigenous movement in particular in Mexico. It also stems from the character of the EZLN as both a mass peasant movement and an armed guerrilla movement. The EZLN's armed action and subsequent political explosion not only delivered a blow to the Mexican ruling class on behalf of the Indians and peasants, it also won an opening for the workers' movement and the radical mass movements. Furthermore, in many ways, it recaptured the humanity of revolution.....the masses, at a national level, responded to the EZLN as their own voice, reaffirming the fact that it is the masses who make revolution, and they make it in order to win a better world -- to win those 11 basic demands which the EZLN put forward in their first declaration.

This forced the left to confront its sectarianism, which had developed to the point that the major mass organizations in México City, for example, seldom spoke to each other, and seldom carried out united actions. The Zapatista uprising opened a political space for the political organizations, and it forced them to use it. This by no means forgives the EZLN its many weaknesses and its vacillations towards reformism; however, we can not afford, either, to treat it lightly. The issue is whether the peasant and indigenous movement can be won over to break completely with reformism, not just whether we can theoretically characterize that movement according to its class composition and inherent weaknesses.

These are the issues which the next article in the series will continue with a discussion of the ideological confrontation between the forces of reformism and revolution in the mass movement. ◊

# The Labor Party -- What is its Relationship to the Tasks of Building an Independent Movement of the Working Class?

by Jack Hill, *CWV*

As many readers of this journal already know, the U.S. now has an organization calling itself the Labor Party. It was founded under slogans such as, "The bosses have two parties, we need one of our own." Certainly we do need our own party and some people have high hopes that the Labor Party will fill this need. The numbers of people connected to this party sound impressive. The founding convention in Cleveland was attended by 1,367 delegates. The Labor Party has been endorsed by several international unions and many regional and local union bodies. These unions have a total membership of over one million workers. There are Labor Party chapters with varying degrees of activity in many of the major cities of the U.S.

This Labor Party, however, is not a working class party. Nor is it an instrument that the working class can use in its struggle against the capitalist class. We can start to get some understanding why this is so by looking at some of its important features.

Labor Party Advocates was formed in 1991, particularly through the efforts of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) and Tony Mazzocchi. Initially the idea of LPA was just to explore whether or not a Labor Party could be founded, which Mazzocchi and the other leaders of LPA took to mean whether enough support could be gathered from trade union leaders to make the Labor Party financially and politically viable in mainstream U.S. politics. For the first period of its existence, you could not even join LPA unless you represented a local union or higher body. Later you could join as long as you were in a union, even if you couldn't get your local to support LPA. More recently membership is open to anyone willing to pay the \$20 and agree to its very vague principles.

Since its beginning, certain left groups have taken it as their duty to build LPA's organization while trying to push its politics to the left. The groups that I know that pursued this policy are Trotskyist groups which have long held that the way to advance the class struggle is to form a Labor Party based on the trade unions. (Particularly, I am thinking of the "Organizer" group based in San Francisco, and the "Labor Militant" group.) People in these groups believe that it was pressure from the base that they organized in LPA which forced Mazzocchi and company to change the membership rules, broadening its base, and

to finally call the convention that founded the Labor Party.

During the early years of the LPA, it appeared to be more dedicated to postponing or preventing the formation of a Labor Party than to founding one. The reason I believe, can be found in LPA's relationship with the trade union bureaucracy. The mainstream of LPA has always treated the AFL-CIO leadership with kid gloves. In the view of the LPA leaders, the AFL-CIO was making a mistake in tying itself so closely to the Democratic Party. All they ever got in return for their mindless support of the Democrats was the D.P. joining with the Republicans to kill the AFL-CIO's main legislative proposals and adopt the Reaganite program. The LPA was more a potential weapon to threaten the Democrats than an organization trying to breaking the workers from the Democratic Party.

However, Clinton and the mainstream of the D.P. continued to stiff the trade union leadership. Pressure grew for Mazzocchi and company to carry through on their rhetoric against the Democrats. Among rank and file union members there is a slowly rising sentiment that we need to do something to hold back the anti-worker political and economic tide. This force and particularly the pressure from various high profile struggles such as the Staley workers and the Caterpillar workers are the reason the Sweeney leadership of the AFL-CIO has taken a more activist and "militant" public stance. I think this same force operates on Mazzocchi and company. Given the headlong rightward plunge of the Democratic Party, the LPA leaders probably felt they needed something a little stronger to threaten the Democrats. However, the LPA leadership doesn't want to be accused of actually hurting the Democrats. They organized the founding convention so close to the 1996 elections that a serious presidential campaign that might actually draw some votes from Clinton was obviously out of the question.

## Another Undemocratic Political Convention

The current character of the Labor Party can best be understood by looking at what happened at the convention and how it was controlled. The voting was controlled by the international unions which endorsed LPA; each international got 100 votes. Individual locals which endorsed LPA got at least three votes. Chapters got three votes for their first 50 members and one vote more for each

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additional 50. Individuals who were not elected as delegates from unions or a local chapter could attend as at-large delegates. Every 50 at-larger delegates got one vote.

Seating at the convention also followed this pattern. International union representatives were front and center, surrounded by local union reps. In the back of the hall were the chapter delegates and then the at-large delegates. The decisive votes were right in the front. Every vote came out the way the LPA leadership wanted it. Many who were at the convention noticed the political split between the more conservative front of the hall and the more radical back.

Big debates were held on two contentious issues, the language of the abortion rights clause and whether or not to run candidates under the Labor Party name. In both cases debate was forced by the dissension of one of the international unions.

The California Nurses Association forced the debate on abortion language. Abortion is not referred to by name in the program. One clause in the section on health care calls for, "Informed choice and unimpeded access to a full range of family planning and reproductive services for men and women." The representatives of the FLOC (Farmworkers labor organizing committee) said they would walk out if the word abortion was in the program. The CNA and many women's rights activists wanted a clear and unambiguous statement in defense of a woman's right to have an abortion. This was the longest debate, but the CNA position did not have the votes and the clause stayed the same.

In the months leading up to the convention the biggest debates inside many chapters were on whether or not the Labor Party should run candidates. The LPA leadership insisted that it would be fatal to the Labor Party to run candidates this year or any time in the foreseeable future, nationally or on a state or local level.

Adolf Reed justifies this stand in an article after the convention. "No one who argued for running candidates responded directly on the convention floor to the several, very practical opposing arguments. These were: 1) opting for an electoral strategy would by law cut off access to the trade-union treasury funds needed to finance the Party; 2) a number of key international unions and locals that have endorsed the Labor Party would withdraw their support if we were to enter electoral politics at this point; 3) other unions that would consider endorsing us wouldn't do so if we were to go the electoral route prematurely; 4) we don't have the strength to be successful electorally, and running losing campaigns only demoralizes our base and drains resources because political candidacies are an

ineffective vehicle for organizing; and 5) even if we were to win some offices, we aren't strong enough to keep officeholders in line, to keep them from — or help them avoid — rolling over corporate interests." (*The Progressive*, August 1996, p. 21)

Reed is an important figure in the Chicago LPA chapter, was on the program drafting committee, and is on the new national leadership body established after the convention. What he doesn't admit in this statement is that the Labor Party leadership does not want to do anything to hurt Clinton and the Democratic Party this year. Reed announced at a forum in Chicago in August that he has signed a fund raising appeal for a local "pro-labor" Democrat named Clem Balanoff. Other leaders of the Chicago chapter, sympathetic to the line of the Communist Party USA, stated before the convention that they considered it necessary to support Clinton as the lesser of two evils.

Many of the more leftist activists in LPA charge that there is an agreement, maybe formal, maybe just understood, that the LPA will not attack the Democrats or the labor union leadership and the AFL-CIO will not attack the Labor Party. Note that Sweeney, the head of the AFL-CIO, was in Cleveland during the LP convention. When asked for comment on the convention, he made a mild statement that now was not the time to form a labor party. I think the actions of the AFL-CIO leadership and the LP leadership show that such a deal does exist.

The ILWU (International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union) proposed that state and local chapters of the Labor Party should be allowed to run candidates in state and local elections as they saw fit. They forced a floor debate, but they lost the vote. (See p. 19 for Earl Silbar's note on the convention for his view of this fight.)

There is plenty of irony to add to the demagogery of the Labor Party slogan, "the bosses have two parties, we need one of our own." The bosses can run candidates but the workers can't?

Indeed the Buffalo chapter of the Labor Party was suspended for endorsing an autoworker union leader running as a Democrat. As Adolf Reed pointed out to the forum mentioned above in Chicago, all the members of the Buffalo chapter could have individually endorsed this man; they just couldn't use the Labor Party name. The LP leadership regretfully suspended their Buffalo chapter, not to punish LP members for working to elect Democrats (remember the D.P. is one of the bosses' parties), but as a stern warning to any of the more leftist chapters that they better not run candidates *against* the Democrats.

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## The LP stand on immigration

As another example of the politics of the Labor Party, I want to go into their stand on immigration. I have been involved in political work in defense of immigrants' rights for many years and feel I have some knowledge of the issues related to immigration. I also proposed a resolution on immigrants' rights to the local Chicago chapter of LPA which was not adopted. The Labor Party's stand on immigration is by no means the most objectionable feature of this organization but it is a good example of how their program caters to the politics of the Democratic Party and the mainstream labor bureaucrats.

Section 4 of the LP program is entitled, "End bigotry: An injury to one is an injury to all." Overall this section makes many good points against discrimination in all its forms. The section on immigrant rights, however, is inadequate. There are two pertinent statements in this section. "When immigrants are scapegoated and denied full labor rights and civil rights, we are all scapegoated and denied our rights. ... We support an immigration policy that does not discriminate on any basis; and a trade policy that supports international fair labor standards and works to alleviate the conditions that send people moving around the globe in search of opportunity." I believe that a correct stand on immigration is to oppose all restrictions on immigration and to demand full and equal rights for all immigrants. It is fatal to the working class cause to accept or allow any sort of discrimination among workers. I support the full implications of the popular slogans of the immigrants' rights demonstrations, "Full rights to all immigrants! The working class has no borders! No human being is illegal!"

The Labor Party's program does leave the door open for immigration restrictions. As long as there are such restrictions there are going to be immigrant workers in this country who are considered "illegal" and therefore workers with fewer or no rights. I also think that the immigration policies of the Democrats and the Republicans need to be explicitly denounced. Nowhere in the Labor Party program is the Democratic Party denounced by name, yet the Democrats' complicity with the Republican-sponsored crimes against immigrant workers is a major feature of the current political landscape.

I am also concerned that linking the issues of "free trade" and immigration could be harmful to international worker solidarity. A favorite tactic of the soldout bureaucrats who run our unions is to mobilize workers on a nationalist basis to "protect American jobs" against some foreign threat. Class collaboration can be slipped in easily

if workers are united as "Americans" against the Japanese or Mexicans or some other nationality. When the Labor Party program talks about imposing trade sanctions (giving high sounding moral reasons of course), I fear that it is just a short step away from joining in the anti-foreign campaigns of the chauvinist labor bureaucrats.

In sum, the Labor Party statements on immigration do not show any clear difference from the avowed program of the Democrats. Furthermore they fail to criticize the Democratic Party for its anti-immigrant stance.

### No criticism of the Democratic Party or of the Labor Bureaucracy for any damn thing

The two biggest obstacles to building a fighting workers' movement are the Democratic Party and the labor bureaucracy. These forces have smothered countless workers' struggles over the years. Those activists who have been working to build a militant workers' movement are well aware. However, instead of trying to help workers' break their ties to these enemies and traitors, the Labor Party develops these ties in a new form.

The Labor Party is not launching any actions which could hurt the Democratic Party's base among workers. It is not running candidates. It is not running any sharp campaign denouncing the Democrats as enemies of the working class. Its program does not even attempt to show what is wrong with the Democrats.

Now if the LP leadership had any intention of building a movement of working people organizing for their own class interests they would do at least some of these things.

I advocate building a fighting movement of working people, independent of the rich and their political parties and their opportunist trade union allies. To build such a movement we must carry out actions against the rich and actions against the Democratic Party. We need to expose the Democrats and the trade union bureaucrats.

Others may be less radical or activist-minded and they might think in terms of electoral politics.

Regardless, the Labor Party is not up to the task, any task. It is not for building a fighting movement in the streets and on the picket lines; it is not even for a reformist campaign to elect workers to the local school board!

Many of the leaders of the Labor Party support Clinton's reelection, either openly as a reluctant choice of the lesser of two evils, or tacitly by joining with those who take the first position.

At the forum in Chicago, Adolf Reed predicted that the August meeting of the national leadership of the Labor Party would take up a national campaign for a Constitu-

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tional amendment guaranteeing everyone the right to a job at a living wage. It has now been announced that, indeed this is the first national campaign of the Labor Party. However, no concrete steps are being taken nationally or in Chicago for this campaign. Anyway, such an abstract, pie-in-the-sky type campaign would not do any concrete damage to the Democrats. Nor would it expose the labor bureaucrats who are stifling the workers' movement. Moreover, I don't expect these people to do much of anything in the name of the Labor Party till after the Nov. elections just to avoid even the appearance that they might be hurting Clinton.

**A minor obstacle now,  
potentially a bigger obstacle later**

In my view the Labor Party is worthless. It will not help workers build a mass movement or aid in organizing our class in any progressive way. It will not even run reform candidates against the D.P.

To a minor extent now, and maybe to a much larger extent in the future, the Labor Party blocks worker activists from making a real break with the politics of the Democratic Party and the labor bureaucracy.

The Democratic Party is abandoning the pro-labor, pro-minority rights, pro-women's rights political rhetoric which has been its mainstay since the days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (e.g. Clinton's signing of the Republican's welfare reform bill). The Labor Party is positioned to be a vehicle for the labor bureaucracy to push the "old" FDR-New Deal type politics which the "new" Democratic Party has thrown away. I don't see how it would be an advance to have workers looking to politicians for solutions to their problems under the same type rhetoric the Democrats have used for decades but now under the brand name "Labor Party." We need to develop a politics of mass struggle and of contempt for slick talking, hypocritical politicians.

There are those who say that we (the more radical left) should not give up on the Labor Party, that we should join it, stay in it and fight to change it. Certainly it is necessary to deal with the Labor Party as a political trend. We should try to clarify for activists who are in and around it, what the difference is between the Labor Party's platform, tactics and strategy and the platform, strategy and tactics needed to advance the working class struggle.

As far as working inside the Labor Party, I can imagine some useful fights that possibly could be waged inside the Labor Party. But such fights should not just be over when to run candidates, but over stands against the Democratic Party and the labor bureaucrats and stands in

support of workers' struggles. I don't see any chance that such fights would be won in the sense that the L.P. would be won over. The reason to fight inside would be to clarify politics for those involved. For example, I learned a little more about the left bureaucrats' stand on immigration by proposing a resolution on the issue.

I disagree with those who say we should strive to take over the leadership of this party, either locally in Chicago or nationally. This is an organization built by the bureaucrats for their purposes which I have tried to analyze above. No big waves of worker activists fresh out of militant mass struggles have joined this party. Unfortunately, the level of militant mass struggle among the working class is pretty low. Most of the people active in the Labor Party have been committed to the politics of conciliating the Democratic Party and the soldour labor bureaucracy for a considerable period of time.

I think it is a waste of time and energy to try to transform the Labor Party into a fighting organization dedicated to advancing the workers' struggle. The energies of worker activists would be better spent elsewhere.

To build an independent working class movement, the main task is not to force the bureaucrats to do it. Those of us who see what needs to be done need to organize ourselves to do it, independently of what the Labor Party does. At a minimum we need to be able to criticize and expose the labor bureaucrats for their sabotage of workers' struggles. We need to be able to denounce any and all slick talking politicians, especially the so-called "pro-labor" Democrats. The Labor Party is not going to do this; we can make sure everyone realizes this fact, but we shouldn't make it a main focus to force the Labor Party to do this. Nor can we hold ourselves back for taking up these tasks because the Labor Party is not willing to do them.

Some people will join the Labor Party. We should make sure they understand the character of this party. However, I don't see any reason to recruit workers or activists to join the Labor Party. Some people say we should recruit workers to join for the purpose of changing the character of the Labor Party. To me it makes more sense to mobilize workers to join an organization that is already committed to advancing the workers' movement. This brings up the point that a lot more work has to be done to build suitable organizations for workers who want to fight for their class. It is better to put our efforts in this direction than trying to take over the Labor Party. <

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Note:

A 30 minute video on the founding congress of the Labor Party was made by a group in Chicago which produces the TV cable public access show called "Labor Beat". Although the video is more optimistic about the Labor Party than one should be, I recommend viewing it as a way of understanding what went on at the convention. It

does cover the debate on whether the Labor Party should run candidates in elections.

Ordering info:

\$25 payable to "Committee for Labor Access"  
Labor Beat-- Dept. A  
37 S. Ashland  
Chicago, IL 60607

*For the sake of comparison, here is the resolution I submitted, in consultation with some other immigrants' rights activists, to the Chicago Chapter of the Labor Party on immigrants' rights. The astute reader should notice some differences from what was adopted.*

5. opposes all persecution of persons immigrating to the U.S. including at the borders, in communities and on the job.

6. opposes discrimination against people who don't speak English.

=====

### **Full Rights for All Immigrants! The Working Class Has No Borders!**

WHEREAS, The unity of workers of all races, nationalities, religions, sexual orientations is absolutely vital for the progress of our struggle.

WHEREAS, Immigrant workers are and have always been important members of the American working class.

WHEREAS, A major attack on this unity is currently underway in the form of anti-immigrant hysteria being whipped up by politicians and the mass media.

WHEREAS, Politicians from the Republican Party have been particularly virulent in spreading this poison. Furthermore, Democratic Party politicians are collaborating in this scapegoating campaign by their programs to close the border, raid workplaces and communities for so-called "illegals," and further restrict the rights of legal immigrants.

WHEREAS, The existence of a section of workers who are considered "illegal" and have no rights is harmful to all workers. This benefits only the company owners who mercilessly exploit them.

THEREFORE, Be it resolved that the Labor Party

1. calls for full rights for all immigrants.
2. opposes all scapegoating of immigrants.
3. opposes California Proposition 187 and all similar attempts on the national, state or local level to deny public services to immigrants.
4. opposes all attempts to restrict the public services to which documented or undocumented immigrants are entitled, including the current attempts by Congress and the President to deny public services to legal immigrants.

FURTHER, The Labor Party resolves, in solidarity with our immigrant brothers and sisters, to condemn any and all legislation or public policy that would limit the rights, freedom or well-being of immigrants and their children — regardless of their legal status. We further resolve to fight to secure the safety and well-being of immigrant peoples everywhere, on the legislative front, in the workplace and in our communities.

The Labor Party takes as its slogans:

**Full rights for all immigrants.**

**The working class has no borders.**

**No human being is illegal.**

*This is the email report that Earl Silbar, a Chicago activist, sent out upon returning from the Labor Party Convention.*

Date: Mon, 10 Jun 96 16:36:00 CDT

From: Earl Silbar

Subject: Labor Party convention from Earl

Hi! here're a few impressions and thoughts on the Labor Party convention in Cleveland (the short version): There'll be no action to upset the AFL and political business as usual- read on for more.

OCAW, UE & Co. had the votes (weighted)ca. 1,600:800 and the people - maybe 50-60% of the supposed 1,400 present.

They made a few concessions but got:

1. No LP elections or endorsements for (at least) the next 2 years.

2. A program that speaks to environmental, discrimination and women's issues without mentioning abortion (the longest debate at 2 hours) but which does endorse affirmative action. The program has no overview and

*continued next page*

calls for higher taxation of the rich without specifics; it avoids any mention of nationalizing zip.

3. A National Council with no elected members (except 1 vote to be split among 5 possible chapter reps). The only real power will reside with the endorsing internationals and groups they designate as "worker-friendly".

Besides abortion, the only major fight was about chapters ability to run candidates under LP program with only local resources. This only came about when an ILWU (Longshoremen) resolution was ruled down on the chair's questionable rule that a voice vote was against it. OCAW's Wages called an early lunch break to work out a deal. In the ILWU caucus, the 20 or so people there (without their Int'l Pres.-away at negotiations-) pressed the debate or threatened to walk out. This got approval to suspend the rules for an hour's debate.

Mazzocchi pointed out that the sponsoring unions had put up the money for the convention and "couldn't" back a group that endorsed candidates because it would eat up great resources just to comply with various laws. In passing, he indirectly acknowledged the falseness of his earlier statements that we legally couldn't run candidates at all.

Frank Rosen (?) of the UE spoke against, saying that we didn't have the experience and (he or some UE person) said that we couldn't act without or against the wishes of the Internationals. Nothing was really said on either side about the political deal between this group and the rest of the AFL, "We won't criticize you and you don't criticize us" (Don't ask; don't tell).

Carl Finnamore (ex-SA?) argued that workers' power comes from the streets (we endorsed a call for a national march on Detroit to support the strikers there), not elections.

I got to speak and agreed with Carl about our main power, asked the delegates who'd ever done electoral work to raise their hands (well over 1/2 did) and asked them not to deny us a weapon for fighting with. While this was very well received, we lost the vote and the wind went out of the sails of the chapter left.

Friday we adjourned early to march to City Hall to protest Cleveland Mayor White's plan to privatize public workers' jobs. Turns out he's black, workingclass and a (former?) union supporter, elected with big union support. While Wages and other union leaders denounced him, the lack of an alternative practically cried out. Many of us stayed in the street (with no cop intrusion, perhaps/certainly because they'd been working for a year without a contract?).

We were told that the mayor was in a nearby hotel, so

some of us began chanting to go there, about 10 minutes later, the main body began to desert the demo and headed there!

We went right into the lobby, where we filled it up, chanting "Union, We are...Union", "Labor Party", can't remember the others. We were angry, stirred up and very, very loud. No speeches, it would have been great with a bullhorn for 1 minute talks. Many women, some local firemen, also w/o a contract I think.

Just as we were ready to disperse, someone announced that White was seen running down a hallway. About 100 of us moved quickly, only to see security guards set up a line behind a door. Just as the crowd was about to turn back, someone I know well and his friend took the initiative to open the door and push past the guards. The crowd followed, but, alas, no mayor in sight.

The demo illustrated the militant character of many/most delegates and willingness of 100s to take action. Also the political bankruptcy of the leaderships' line. It certainly energized many of us and highlighted the unity intertwined with the real differences.

A note on process: the majority had an overwhelming vote advantage because sponsoring internationals got 100 votes in addition to the votes endorsing locals got based on membership. Most votes were voice, and the chair almost always ruled with the OCAW/UE majority bloc, even where questionable or pretty clearly against (several). Still, they did allow real debate, most likely because it cost them nothing except some impatience by their own people.

I think that many of "their" delegates understood their line (not too difficult- don't draw too sharp a line, don't step on the Internationals' political toes, ignore the AFL endorsement of Clinton (never even mentioned except by Jerry Brown on Sun. AM)

Militant and left chapter activists now have to search for reasons to put effort into the LP. If the Repub.s win Congress and the White House, the LP may become the preferred vehicle for union mobilizations on an implicit pro-Dem politics. If Clinton wins, it may become the vehicle for Union pressure tactics (on 'our friend')

There were some attempts to gather the opposition, mainly around Labor Militant as Solidarity leaders agreed with the central direction as the best possible given the circumstances. Perhaps 100-150 came to these groups. Names will be distributed and communication developed on assessments and where do 'we' go from here.

I think that this (temporary?) dead end/stall leaves a vacuum that class-conscious solidarity-political activists can fill if we organize ourselves. What do you think? <

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*Below is an angry reply to Earl's report by someone who supports the politics of the Labor Party.*

Date: Tue, 11 Jun 1996 07:56:18 -0700

From: "Andrew J. English"

Subject: Re: Labor Party convention from Earl Silbar(fwd)

I strongly disagree with Silbar's one-sided account of the convention. There were 9 international unions and over 300 labor bodies represented and 36 chapters. Except for the abortion debate (where a substantial number of the unions voted on both sides on a difficult issue, more on that below), and the electoral action debate (where the ILWU was the only significant union force on the side of running candidates right now) all of the union delegates were strongly united with a large portion of the chapter delegates in approving the main decisions of the convention. Many of the union delegates are also chapter leaders, but they chose to come as union delegates because they got more votes that way. There were also many socialists among the majority forces. What Irwin doesn't understand is that this is a LABOR party, not another tiny leftist third party. People representing thousands of union members have the right to more votes than people representing a 20 or 30 member chapter. It was obvious to everybody there that a few of the chapter delegations had been captured by ultraleft sectarians that were trying to obstruct the work of the convention by proposing endless silly amendments. If anything, the chairpersons should have clamped down on them sooner. The sectarians tried to get votes by demagogically pitting the chapters against the labor unions. On a per person basis they had at most a quarter of the 1300 people there. On a voting strength basis they were much weaker.

As a chapter delegate from Arizona, I had 3/5 of a vote. My friend, who was a Teamster delegate from Local 104, had 16 votes. To my mind that was entirely fair. I'm part of a 70 member chapter, he was representing 7000 workers.

On the electoral debate: the debate was not between running candidates and not running candidates. It was between building a mass LABOR party first, through publicizing our program and through actions in the streets so we can then run candidates in the near future that can win vs. running token propagandistic campaigns for the purpose of making certain leftists feel good. We don't want another pathetic losing third party, we want a winning First party. The convention voted to have the national council establish a committee to plan our electoral strategy and report to the next convention in two years.

10/7/96

*CWV Theoretical Journal*

We are building for the long haul. We need to get a lot bigger and get a lot more unions involved before we take the step of running campaigns. We represent one million workers, but there are 16 million in the organized labor movement.

On the abortion question. The vast majority of people on both sides were strongly in favor of the right to choose. Many women delegates spoke against the motion that wanted insert the word abortion into the text of the platform. The platform that was approved calls for "informed choice and unimpeded access to a full range of family planning and reproductive services for men and women". So under our platform abortion would be free! The only thing is that the platform does not mention the word. And that was done to preserve unity with the many working people have have religious objections. Including the mostly Mexican immigrant delegates from the Farm Labor Organizing Committee who would have walked if we called explicitly for abortion. This was compromise language that FLOC and feminists both worked out. It is in the section on health care. The section on opposing bigotry is strongly worded against discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, disability, national origin, immigrant status, national origin, creed, sexual orientation, or native language. It is for affirmative action. The constitution calls for a national council that is diverse and takes specific measures to ensure it. This is the most progressive set of documents to come out of a cross-section of the labor movement representing over one million workers.

If you aren't happy with the decisions, you'll have a chance to change them at the next convention, assuming you can find support for your ideas among some large body of workers. If all you can do is whine about how tiny groups weren't given more votes compared to huge organizations, then by all means go off and form your own tiny leftist organization. Then the rest of us can go own and do the historic work of building the Labor Party.

-Andy English

Labor Party of Arizona, convention delegate

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*The following short statements by NC of Los Angeles Workers' Voice show his approach to the Labor Party.*

May 17, 1996

From: NC, *Los Angeles Workers' Voice*

Dear friends,

The LPA "party" is a left-cover for the concessions

*continued next page*

loving AFL/CIO bureaucrats to hide behind . More workers now are fed up and sparks will fly over the next period. The hacks want to position themselves to be able to better head things off. To derail the workers actions and cool things out. This way show the bosses and the state they are more valuable to the system as a whole.

The AFL gets plenty of govt. funds now for "labor" projects, they will show they are worthy of more!!

Any of the LPA boosters here going to go into the track record of its leading lights a la Mazzochi, Wages and co.? How much ink have THEY added to concessions contracts over the last 20 years? Well, why deal with such materialist trifles! These left-hacks have told us all they will wage a fight! Cross their lackey hearts and hope the class struggle dies!

Why don't you expose how LPA unions and all the others are going all out for Clinton and the DP per usual. They even have a million or so in dues monies for "progressive" Republicans too! Looks like they are getting down right militant and serious! 40 million for the DP and gee maybe a couple hundred thou for the LPA!! Would any LPA honcho wage a campaign to stop this . Not on their wages system loving lives!

We need not belly crawl to concessions delivering nationalist and "foreigner" hating AFL, and LPA hacks and their party. Marxists should be active at the base inside the class—not the offices of the LPA-promoting the program of workers socialism and helping build up today's workers fightbacks against the bourgeois offensive. In the raised tempo of the class struggles , not bourgeois election circuses, will arise the mass forces to build a genuine workers party, not the sham labor fakers corral of the LPA which must be exposed by socialists.

FROM: NC

TO: Marxism list-e-mail, and others

DATE: 5/19/96 3:10 AM

Re: LABOR PARTY

Dear friends,

The organizational structures of the LPA Party are weighted so that votes of union officials "delegations" will count 20X or more than LPA chapter individuals or at large members.

This will insure that the AFL/CIO union apparatuses who bankroll this outfit will be able to keep control of things lock stock and barrel. At least this may insure their hegemony as long as the level of class struggle is low level and passive, situations the AFL and LPA with their panaceas in impotent boycotts and bourgeois election

mystifications want to maintain.

The AFL/CIO's Sweeney stated a few months back that he is constantly kept abreast of developments to build LPA and is satisfied. Now this coming from the chieftain of the labor-lieutenant force who has already given over to the Democrats near \$40 million this year so far. No wonder some forces are wondering whether this LPA party is not just another ploy to keep workers thinking they can trust the AF of Hell— and not organize their own battles against the capitalists and the state which is the real urgent task of this period of huge anti-workers offensive.

Beating back this offensive of capital needs the unity in mass actions by union and nonunion workers, employed and unemployed workers. Marxist workers and activists can play a key role in this too.

The LPA scheme seeks to hold the actual future mass motions back and help derail them.

The AFL/CIO bankrolls this operation and he/she that pays the pipers, calls the tune!

If you want to look at the road these tunes lead too, look at Caterpillar, Staley, Pittston, Hormel, Phelps Dodge, Patco, GM Van Nuys, Flint, etc. et al. This does not change when lifetime hack-Donkeys for the DP need to put on a "labor" party mask. ◇

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### An argument for fighting to take over the Labor Party.

*Note by Jack Hill: Below are comments that I believe are typical of those who argue for organizing to take over the Labor Party. They are in the form of replies by Mike Dean to statements against the Labor Party by Jim Miller. These comments were posted on the Marxism internet email list in June.*

MD: Earlier this week I had made some comments on the Labor Party. Mainly my argument was that the Party needed, and deserved, the support of all socialists. I still stand by that belief. However, many comments made by Jim Miller have convinced me that my stand has to be somewhat modified. Therefore, I would like to deal with a few comments of his that I feel are important.

JM: *I disagree with Mike that the new Labor Party is a "proletarian party." It is a maneuver carried out by a non-proletarian labor officialdom.*

MD: The term "proletarian party" is somewhat general.

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I had used the term without thinking of all it implied. The Labor Party is a party consisting of thousands of proletarians. It is controlled, however, by "non-proletarian officialdom". Though controlled by sellouts, there are thousands of workers willing to fight for a better world. If one claims that this party is not a threat to the existing order I urge them to take a look at the party's constitution. That document is the expression of thousands of workers. Obviously I believe much needs to be added to the document, but, nonetheless, I am surprised by the radicalism of the work. Sweeney fears the party, so he ignores it. Other "leaders" try to overhaul it. Actually, the formation of the party itself was an overhaul of an existing restlessness of the workers. The energy and conditions to create a labor party existed, that is how Tony Mazzocchi formed his pressure group. In an effort to thwart this potentially threatening movement the labor "leaders" would like to keep all the workers occupied in a non-threatening "Labor Party". It is simply my position that we "steal" this party from the bosses and hand it to the workers. If the power structure of the party flowed bottom up, then we would see the US's first true worker's party. If the labor officialdom are allowed to have their way we will see another waste of time. We can not sit on our hands and scream "I told you so!". We must fight to put the power of this party in the hands of the workers.

JM: *Also, to the extent that they function politically, they remain firmly attached to the capitalist system. None of them has a perspective that leads in the direction of breaking away from capitalist politics.*

MD: Exactly. That is why we, as socialists, must lead the fight for a real Labor Party. We must take this diversion and form a true Labor Party.

JM: *Mike says that, "it is not enough to know the problem, but you have to solve it." Unfortunately, Mike doesn't say what the problem is that has to be solved.*

MD: The problem is, and I feel Jim would agree, that what was formed in Cleveland was not a labor party. It was a shell of a labor party. Worse than that is was a shell used as a shield by the labor aristocracy. That is the problem. The solution is to put something in that shell. With a true workers party we will be able to turn that shell into a weapon.

JM: *The only time that a labor party can be successfully launched in the U.S. is when there is a rising*

*political movement that expresses the aspirations of working people engaged in struggle. This then would create the foundation for a genuine break with capitalist politics by a significant portion of the working class. Such a labor party will most likely rise from within the organized labor movement, but when it does, it will have to be propelled by the ranks of labor, not the pro-capitalist bureaucracy.*

MD: Point well taken. However, this statement is, in essence, saying to fellow workers "I would like to help you with your little project, but it's a waste of time." I argue that it is not a waste of time. Perhaps a true labor party cannot be formed at this moment (I would argue that we can now lay it's basis, if not form it). Nonetheless, we must not abandon our fellow workers in a period of struggle. Right now thousands of workers are trying to take control of a new labor party. If anyone here doubts this I urge them to attend a local meeting, it is there that you can see the frustration of the workers. Depending on our actions the workers will see one of two things. On the one hand they may see a group of people who critique, critique, critique. "Nothing", they will say, "is good enough for them (for socialists)." The workers will see a bunch of academics sitting on their hands while they (the workers) struggle with the mislead labor party. When it is all over, and the labor party had been a miscarriage (which it will be if we do not get involved), they will see a bunch of people saying this "I told you so." Regardless of your correct analysis of this labor party, they will only see pious socialists who never raised a finger. If, on the other hand, we get involved with this mess, the view will be much different. Socialists will be seen as the ones who were urging the party to strive towards a fighting program. Not only did the socialists have a correct analysis, they also got their hands dirty. "Perhaps there is something to that idea, socialism". The latter cannot happen unless we stand by the side of the working class.

JM: *What I hope will "go down the gutter" is Mike's illusion that this new party represents the working class.*

MD: As I hopefully made clear above, I do not believe that the LP represents the working class. It is a diversion. I think that mine and Jim's version of what the LP is are not so different. It is what I propose to DO that Jim and I disagree on. I propose that we take this shell and fill it. It may not represent the working class' best interests, but it IS the working class. Ours is the job to stand side by side

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with our comrades and push them in the correct direction.

As for what the leadership of the LP thinks of my views; the leadership can go to hell.

—Mike Dean

— from list marxism@lists.village.virginia.edu —

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### L.R.P. on the Labor Party, excerpts

*Below are some excerpts of the article which Walter Daum sent me by email giving the views of the League for the Revolutionary Party on the Labor Party. The LRP has been active in sending its activists to Labor Party meetings to denounce the LP leadership.*

Date: Wed, 12 Jun 96 21:09:46 EDT  
From: Walter Daum  
Subject: Re: labor party convention  
To: Jack Hill <mlbooks@mcs.com>

The New “Labor Party”:  
Democratic Party Advocates?

League for the Revolutionary Party  
June 4, 1996

There is an enormous need for an independent mass party of the working class in the United States today. Yet those who want to fight for a new, humane world cannot place their hopes in the Labor Party Advocates and the “labor party” it is founding in Cleveland in June. In the guise of supporting the cause of working people, LPA’s leaders are erecting an obstacle to the struggle of the exploited and oppressed against the horrors of capitalism.

...  
In the U.S., a mass party created by working-class organizations like the trade unions could be a step toward the necessary revolutionary party — if it grew out of the struggles of working people. But a pro-capitalist labor party created by the nationalist labor bureaucracy to defend the status quo is another matter. This kind of labor party, like those in Britain, Canada and Australia, would just safeguard the system of imperialism, racism, austerity and war. These examples illustrate the Leninist thesis that reformism is counterrevolutionary.

The “labor party” created by Labor Party Advocates will certainly not be a revolutionary party — no one claims it will. Nor is it a party born out of class struggle. It is not

even a bureaucratic labor party on the British model. It is a pseudo-party that refuses to declare electoral independence from the Democrats and will not stand in the way of its endorsers who openly back the most right-wing Democratic president since the 1920’s.

LPA’s leaders come from a dissatisfied wing of the union bureaucracy. We will shortly examine their stated aims and prove what we have said. But first some background on why these “labor party” advocates have taken this limited but unusual step.

...  
Mazzocchi’s original plan was to avoid electoral campaigns and any concrete program, in order to recruit 100,000 members (including 1000 union officers) and then hold a founding convention. The agenda was accelerated after the Democrats’ disastrous showing in 1994, which made the whole bureaucracy fear for its survival in the absence of any Congressional clout. It was decided then to hold a founding convention for a labor party in 1995.

But that would have left open the possibility of challenging Clinton and the Democrats in 1996. So the convention was postponed to June 1996 — conveniently too late to mount a campaign. Thus the LPA leaders are sticking to the non-confrontational course they outlined from the beginning. While falling far short of the 100,000 members projected, Mazzocchi has nevertheless found sufficient resonance within the labor bureaucracy to go forward. Five unions — OCAW, the electrical workers’ UE, the railroad workers’ BMW, the longshore workers’ ILWU and the government workers’ AFGE — are sponsoring the convention, with various regional bodies and locals.

Since Sweeney replaced the more hostile Kirkland, there has been more freedom to maneuver in bureaucratic circles. LPA would like a deal with Sweeney allowing the labor party to go ahead as long as it doesn’t interfere with the unions’ support to Clinton.

Indicative is the attitude of Sweeney’s old union. The SEIU in April elected a new president, Andrew Stern, and voted to send a delegation to LPA’s convention — but also promised an all-out drive to defeat “right-wing extremists” (i.e., Republicans) this fall. According to the CP’s People’s Daily World:

Stern called upon SEIU leaders to devote five working days to political action in 1996. “I’m going to be phone banking and walking precincts — and I want to see you there,” he said to cheers and cries of “I’ll be there!”

SEIU leaders might have spent five working days in January doing something to win the SEIU maintenance workers’ strike in New York rather than letting it go down

*continued next page*

the drain. Supporting Democrats rather than strikes is the spirit in which much of the new "labor party" will be operating this fall.

A key element in Mazzocchi's non-aggression pact with the AFL-CIO leadership is LPA's refusal to run candidates. To the horror of the leftists hoping to push electoral activity at the founding convention, the convention call explicitly states LPA's established non-electoral position.

The Labor Party will initially be a non-electoral organization. The Labor Party will not be an alternative to COPE or AFL-CIO state or local bodies. These groups will carry on their activities, electoral and otherwise. The AFL-CIO will endorse and campaign for candidates in the 1996 election. Our efforts will in no way interfere.

Thus Mazzocchi and the LPA leadership indicate that the "labor party" will not act as an independent party or oppose the bureaucracy. In fact, the convention call doesn't mention the Democrats or Clinton. Meetings leading up to the convention have been remarkable for the absence of criticism of Sweeney and the Democratic Party.

In sum, LPA's labor party will reinforce the AFL-CIO's Democratic Party electoralism. It will ensure that radicalized workers who want to fight the capitalist attacks have no alternative. If LPA succeeds, it will 1) increase labor's clout with Democratic politicians by creating a vehicle for additional support or non-support; 2) lure back to the electoral fold workers who have refused in growing numbers to vote for their class enemies; and 3) build a barrier to a future, real, working-class break from the parties of capital. It adds up to "Democratic Party Advocates" in disguise.

In 1981, Lane Kirkland, urged to defend PATCO from Reagan's strikebreaking, said, "I have never got-

ten as much mail on an issue. . . . About 90% are pro-controllers and about 50% of those denounce me for not calling a general strike." He refused, and PATCO was smashed.

Later Kirkland was asked at a press conference if the workers were forever doomed to voting for the Democrats. He replied, "What do you propose? A general strike? Hello, Mr. Trotsky."

Well, that is the alternative: either reformism (Democrats, third parties, a bureaucratic labor party), or revolutionary communism based on mass class struggle. Revolutionary-minded workers have to fight today for the international proletarian party (Fourth International) that can become the leadership for tomorrow. Then a working-class upsurge will mean not just a few days of power in the streets but a genuine new world order — the old order upside-down — with the oppressed and exploited on top. ◇



*Demonstration in France in defence undocumented immigrants, August 21, 1996.*

# Rosa Luxemburg, Semi-Anarchism -- and Trotsky

## Part IV -- Conclusion

by Barb, CWV

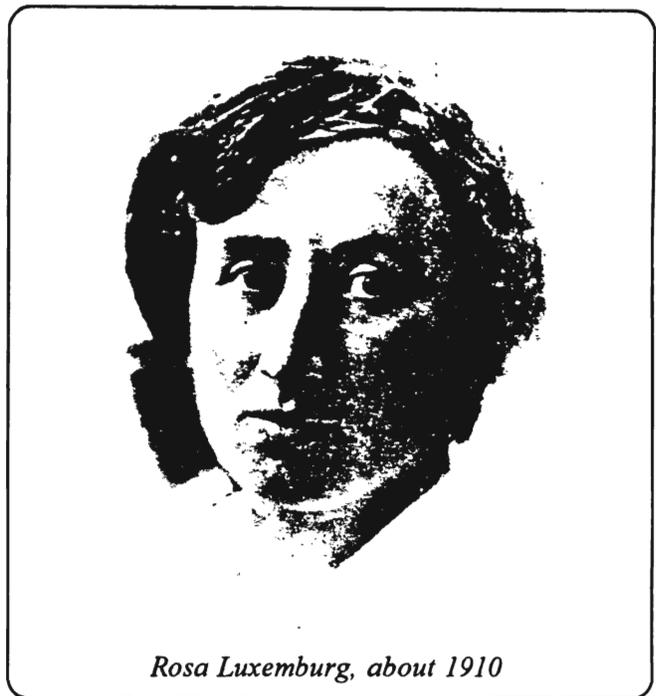
*“Order reigns in Berlin! You stupid lackeys! Your ‘order’ is built on sand. The revolution will raise itself again with clashes, and to your horror it will proclaim with the sound of trumpets: ‘I was, I am, I shall be’.”*

(1)

Lenin believed that Luxemburg had corrected most of her errors during the final period of her life. His belief was chiefly founded on the word of Clara Zetkin, Luxemburg’s comrade-in-arms and closest friend. Zetkin herself relied on testimony from Leo Jogiches, Luxemburg’s mentor, ex-mate and head of the Polish Communist Party who assumed KPD leadership after the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. After her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution, there was a silence from Luxemburg’s pen. Her final months were consumed by the German Revolution, so there are few theoretical documents available to confirm Lenin’s belief.

My contention is that although Luxemburg had “come around” somewhat, she held on to many of her “semi-anarchistic” views until her untimely end. But I also believe that, finally, Luxemburg must be evaluated in the context of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in which she rose to prominence. There is no disputing Lenin’s assertion that she was “head and shoulders” above all the other SPD leaders (2). Refuting the revisionism, opportunism and social chauvinism in the German Party impelled her greatness. But the legacy of the same party also contributed to her weaknesses.

Parts I, II and III have discussed Luxemburg’s “semi-anarchistic” weaknesses, many of which Lenin noted: her over-reliance on the spontaneity of the masses; her devaluation of the party’s organizational role; her overestimation of the mass strike; and her undialectical approach to the relationships between war and revolution, nationalism and internationalism, and imperialism and revolution. Most of these errors either had their roots in the ideological traditions of the SPD or were an ultra-radical reaction against them. Lenin had feared that Luxemburg and the Spartacists might be unable to completely break with Kautskyism and, as discussed in Part III, Luxemburg’s initial assessment of the Bolshevik Revolution had be-



Rosa Luxemburg, about 1910

trayed a striking similarity to Kautsky’s in her criticisms of the lack of “freedom” and “democracy,” the use of “terror,” and the general “dictatorial” stance of the Party.

### The State

#### Democracy

Reading Lenin and Luxemburg side by side, it has become clearer to me that Luxemburg’s “semi-anarchism” informed an un-Marxist concept of the proletarian state and the role it plays in the transition from capitalism through socialism to communism. Where Luxemburg rose above the other German leaders was in her unwavering belief in the immanence of the proletarian revolution, violent if it had to be, and in her faith in the dictatorship of the proletariat. But where she was weak was in the concept of what a state is and in the necessity of smashing of the bourgeois state apparatus. The smashing of the bourgeois state was so much the fundamental point in Marx’s theory of the state that Lenin devoted most of *The State and Revolution* to combatting distortions of this idea. On the one hand, the revisionists grasped onto Marx’s concept of the state “withering away” which led to such distortions as Kautsky’s theory of the “attrition”

of the bourgeois state, i.e., the gradual transformation of the bourgeois state into the proletarian state, to the absence of revolution. On the other hand, there was the classical anarchist doctrine of the immediate "abolition" of the state. Luxemburg seemed to waver between these two petty-bourgeois concepts.

What Luxemburg failed to grasp was that democracy is not a condition but, as Lenin explained, a form of the "state." For example, her criticisms of the lack of "democracy" under the Bolshevik regime, the limited franchise, her contention that the proletarian state should allow all people the "freedom to think differently," etc. brought her dangerously close to the anarchist ideal of the "free people's state." Lenin mentioned this as an early program demand and catchword among the German SDs in the 1870s when the party was under anarchist influence.

To quote Engels:

**The "people's state" has been thrown in our faces by the anarchists to the point of disgust....As the state is only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, to hold down one's adversaries by force, it is sheer nonsense to talk of a "free peoples' state"; so long as the proletariat still needs the state, it does not need it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist.... (CW, 1964, Vol. 25, "The State and Revolution," pp. 444-45).**

Lenin defined democracy as a form of the state machine which through coercion (for a state is an instrument of coercion) subordinates the minority to the majority:

**Democracy is *not* identical with the subordination of the minority to the majority. Democracy is a *state* which recognises the subordination of the minority to the majority, i.e., an organisation for the systematic use of *force* by one class against another, by one section of the population against another (p. 461)**

**The dictatorship of the proletariat...cannot result merely in an expansion of democracy...Democracy for the vast majority of the people, and suppression by force,**

**i.e., exclusion from democracy, of the exploiters and oppressors of the people -- this is the change democracy undergoes during the *transition* from capitalism to communism (p. 467).**

Under the bourgeois "democratic" state, despite its ideology, this ideal is perverted into its opposite, for a capitalist minority controls everything. Marx pointed out that all previous revolutions (which were bourgeois revolutions) perfected the state machine (i.e., extended democracy to a larger and larger segment of the "people"), whereas the proletarian revolution must smash this state. On the contrary, the destruction of the bourgeois machine is "the precondition for every real *people's* revolution" (p. 421).

As Lenin put it, the state is "at best...an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy" (p. 458). "The abolition of the state means also the abolition of democracy...the withering away of the state means the withering away of democracy" (p. 460):

Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists has been completely crushed, when the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes (i.e., when there is no distinction between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), only then 'the state...ceases to exist', and 'it becomes possible to speak of *freedom*'. Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realised, a democracy without any exceptions whatever. And only then will democracy begin to *wither away*... (p. 467).

Finally, "So long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state" (p. 473).

Luxemburg's concept of the proletarian state, then, was a mixture of the anarchist "non-state" and the bourgeois state. She seemed to demand a state that "coerced" very little, i.e., was hardly a state at all, and that almost immediately withered away. Like the anarchists, Luxemburg was often in too much of a hurry. Moreover, her demand that instead of coercing, the transitional state must "educate" by moral example also smacked of anarchist utopianism. On the other hand, she seemed unable to free herself from the model of the bourgeois state which must be forced to extend democracy to all people, or from its forms, i.e., the constituent assembly, or from its ideology, i.e., that the state is "above" classes instead of an instrument of class suppression. Luxemburg

retained some of what Lenin accused of Kautsky of -- "superstitious reverence for the [bourgeois] state" (p. 486).

Confused as these concepts were, what it comes down to is that Luxemburg did not assimilate -- or rejected -- Marx's concept of the proletarian state. Sometimes one feels that Luxemburg did not read her Marx and Engels very well. Or that she only concentrated on *Capital*, too purely on the economic side and not on the political side of Marx. It certainly seems that she did not absorb Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune as the form of the state (the non-state-to-be) "at last discovered" by the proletarian revolution (p. 437).

### Authority

Integral to Luxemburg's utopian concept of the state is the matter of authority. The anarchists' distrust and hatred of the state comes from their general "anti-authoritarianism." And there was more than a little "anti-authoritarianism" in Luxemburg. But "anti-authoritarianism" is not an innate quality: it comes from bad experience with authority. From her experience in the German Party, Luxemburg had good reason to distrust authority. In one sense it was a virtue for it gave her the audacity to expose and attack the revered pillars of the German Party. But in another sense, it hampered her theoretically because she refused to consider Marx and Engels as "authorities," certainly partly because the German "orthodox Marxists" had deceived and betrayed the proletariat on the basis of Marx's authority. This led her to regard Marxism too much as merely as a method of historical analysis -- dialectical materialism.. She sometimes threw out the baby with the bathwater. Luxemburg was determined to be her own "authority." She never could bring herself to acknowledge the authority of any of Lenin's arguments. And she interpreted the Bolshevik regime as the dictatorship of the Party, as the "authoritarianism" of an elite, which she regarded as a perversion of Marx's concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

To quote Engels again:

**Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other party by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means. And the victorious party must maintain its rule by means of**

**the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted more than a day if it had not used the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie? Cannot we, on the contrary, blame it for having made too little use of that authority? Therefore, one of two things: either the anti-authoritarians don't know what they are talking about, in which case they are creating nothing but confusion. Or they do know, and in that case they are betraying the cause of the proletariat. In either case they serve only reaction (pp. 442-43).**

Or as Engels elsewhere put it: the state is "bodies of armed men." In fact, Lenin constantly complained that the Soviet state was too lax, too soft -- a "jellyfish." After the Revolution, it had been quite lenient, allowing freedom of expression to other parties and granting the bourgeoisie every opportunity to cooperate. It was only after the opposition became outright counter-revolutionary, allying itself with the foreign imperialist invaders and disrupting the new economic relations, i.e., the food supply during the horrible famine, that the Bolshevik state really assumed the militant authoritarian character of Marx and Engels' conception.

Especially, Luxemburg did not seem to have a good grasp of the realities of the state immediately after the Proletarian Revolution, that is, in its very first stage of transition. Luxemburg thought "proletarian law" should be a completely different animal from "bourgeois law." She did not recognize that in the early stages of transition, there would be a complete mixture of everything that was bourgeois and proletarian, capitalist and socialist. As Lenin pointed out, under the proletarian democratic state, there can be no "equal rights." Even socialism

*does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality of 'bourgeois law', which continues to prevail as long as products are divided 'according to the amount of labour performed'" (p. 471). [Under socialism,] "'bourgeois law' is not abolished in its entirety, but only in part, only in proportion to the economic revolution so far attained, i.e., only in respect of the means of production (p. 472).*

Paradoxically,

Communism in its first phase retains 'the narrow horizon of *bourgeois law*'. Of course, bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of *consumer goods* inevitably presupposes the existence of the *bourgeois state*, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of *enforcing* the observance of the rules of law. It follows that under communism there remains for a time not only bourgeois law, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie! (p. 476).

### The Program of the KPD

So one must turn to Luxemburg's last two major writings to ascertain to what extent she had "come around." These are the documents "What Does the Spartacus League Want?" which contains the program for the German Communist Party (KPD), and "Our Program and the Political Situation," her speech at the Founding Congress (both December, 1918) (3). There is no evidence that Lenin read either document. What one finds in these documents is a mixture of straightforward Marxist principles and questionable, ambiguous formulations. No doubt, they were composed in a hurry and under stressful circumstances. However, they confirm my belief that Luxemburg had not entirely eradicated her "semi-anarchist" tendencies.

Luxemburg had wanted the name of the new party to be "socialist" not "communist" to avoid identification with the Bolshevik Party, but was voted down. However, in two areas, Luxemburg had definitely progressed toward Bolshevik concepts: the role of the soviets and the peasantry.

### The Soviets

In an important advance, Luxemburg had "come around" to recognizing the role of the soviets as the form of the new proletarian government. In "What Does the Spartacus League Want," she states its communist goals:

**The proletarian mass must therefore replace the inherited organs of bourgeois class rule -- the assemblies, parliaments and city councils -- with its own class organs -- with workers' and soldiers' councils [soviets] (p. 368)...Elimination of all parliaments and municipal councils, and takeover of their functions by workers' and soldiers' councils, and of the latter's committees and or-**



*Karl Liebknecht, probably just before 1914*

**gans (p. 373)... Replacement of all political organs and authorities of the former regime by delegates of the workers' and soldier's councils (p. 372).**

Although Luxemburg had hailed the arrival of the soviets and recognized their uniqueness in 1905, she had viewed them as the fighting instrument of the Revolution, as a new kind of trade union which would organize the masses in their mass strike actions, almost -- but not quite -- as a replacement for the Party. This is very much how Trotsky had viewed them before the Revolution. The soviets had confirmed her belief that the masses would spontaneously create their own revolutionary forms, but she had not seen them as the form that the proletarian government would take, nor as an arena where politics would have to be fought out. Almost to the end, she had believed that the democratic will of the people could be expressed best through the old bourgeois form of a Constituent Assembly.

However, after the German Revolution, the realities of the situation made it clear that it was only those elements opposed to socialism and working-class power, from the extreme Right to Kautsky's USPD, that were in favor of a national assembly. Thus, it clearly became an either/or situation: a parliament or the soviets. This was very similar to the situation in Russia when the Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly. This bore out Engels' prophecy that "Our only opponent on the day of the crisis and on the day afterwards will be the whole reaction grouped around the standard of pure democracy" (Frolich,

p. 266) (4).

In the last months of Luxemburg's life, soviets had sprung up spontaneously all over Germany, Austria and elsewhere. In Germany, they were almost totally under the control of the revisionist SPD and, in fact, the Ebert-Scheidemann government had arisen to power on their backs. However, almost immediately upon seizing power, this fake "socialist" government set out systematically to destroy the soviets (5). Thus, it obviously had become clear to Luxemburg that the control of the proletariat could only be assured through its own, new organs of government. The following statement brought her very much in line with Lenin's view:

**The National Assembly is an obsolete heirloom of bourgeois revolutions, a husk without content, a stage-prop from the period of petit-bourgeois illusions about a "united people", about the "freedom, equality, and brotherhood" of the bourgeois state. Whoever reaches for the idea of a National Assembly is consciously or unconsciously pushing the revolution back to the historical level of a bourgeois revolution; he is either a disguised agent of the bourgeoisie or an unconscious spokesman of the petit-bourgeoisie (Frolich, p. 267) (6).**

Still her conception of the soviets as presented in these documents is weak and vague. She does not really come to terms with the fact that if the soviets are to be the machinery of the socialist government, they must propel the true communists to power, be behind a socialist revolution. For example, her specific points are directed at "purging" the soviets of bourgeois influences, such as expulsion of officers from soldiers' councils, new elections, recall of representatives, etc. The phrase, "election of workers' councils...by the entire adult working population of both sexes" is vaguely stated. She omits or ignores the issue that the real problem has to be an ideological battle against revisionism in order to purge SPD influence in the soviets. Merely new elections would not do it.

### **The Peasantry**

Luxemburg had also "come around" to recognizing the class differentiation in the peasantry, instead of regarding them as one counter-revolutionary mass which would doom the Revolution. Again, the view of Trotsky before the Revolution. In its long decades as the world's leading proletarian party, the SPD had pretty much

ignored work in the countryside, nor had it offered a concrete analysis of the agrarian problem in Germany.

Luxemburg had raised her hands in horror at the Bolshevik agrarian program, which had sanctioned the seizing of the land by the peasants and its "equal" distribution by the peasants themselves. She had regarded this as a capitulation to capitalism and had not recognized the realities of the situation which gave the Bolsheviks no alternative at this time. Not only was it the peasant mandate, i.e., the mandate of the oppressed majority which Lenin insisted must be honored, but it was the only way to save the proletarian revolution (7). Luxemburg seemingly was more concerned that the revolution not be "deformed" than whether it succeeded or not!

In its "Immediate economic demands," the Spartacist program "corrects" the Bolshevik policy by advocating the immediate state seizure of land:

**3. Expropriation of the lands and fields of all large and medium agricultural enterprises; formation of socialist agricultural collectives under unified central direction in the entire nation. Small peasant holdings remain in the possession of their occupants until the latter's voluntary association with the socialist collectives ("What Does....", p. 374).**

Shortly after the German Revolution, Lenin had referred to an article written by her "opposing peasant Soviets, but...quite properly supporting Soviets of farm labourers and poor peasants" (*CW*, 1965, Vol. 28, "First Congress of Communist International," p. 473) (8). It seems she had come to acknowledge the crucial role of the poor peasants/farmers and rural-proletariat in assuring the success of the proletariat regime. She still speaks of the peasantry as a "threatening counter-revolutionary power," but now she advocates carrying the revolution into the countryside and mobilizing the landless proletariat and the poorer peasants against the richer peasants/farmers. But it is not really clear just what the function of the poor peasant soviets is to be, since the bourgeois land is going to be seized by the state.

And there are strange formulations. For example, she says, "It would be folly to realize socialism while leaving the agricultural system unchanged" ("Our Program," p. 404). Now this is probably a criticism of the SPD program which had ignored the farmers, but it is formulated as if it were a possibility to "realize socialism" only on the basis of industry. She also talks about eliminating the "opposition and the division between city and country...as soon as

we place ourselves upon the socialist standpoint" -- another vague formulation [my underline] (p. 404). Following the SPD tradition, the Spartacists had likewise failed to come to grips with the agrarian situation in Germany. Since Germany was a far more capitalist-developed country than Russia, its agrarian situation very likely assumed a different character, i.e., the "Junkers" -- large capitalist landlords rather than semi-feudal landlords, and small farmers rather than semi-feudal peasants, etc. But it almost seems as if Luxemburg's statements on the peasantry here are an after-thought, some of her language merely copied from the Bolshevik program. [It was precisely this section of her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution that had remained sketchy and unfinished.]

### The Party

Since these documents set forth the principles, aims and tactics of the first Communist Party of Germany, they reveal whether Luxemburg's concept of the Party had changed. Her previous concept had been very wishy-washy. She was so adamant that the Party not be "dictatorial" that, at times, the Party seemed to "tail" after the masses. In this document, the Party is:

**the socialist conscience of the Revolution...[It] is only the most conscious purposeful part of the proletariat, which points the entire broad mass of the working class toward its historical tasks at every step, which represents in each particular stage of the Revolution the ultimate socialist goal, and in all national questions the interests of the proletarian world revolution ("What Does....", pp. 375-76).**

The Party will totally sever itself from the revisionists groups; it will neither take part in the Scheidemann-Ebert government nor collaborate with Kautsky's centrist Independents (USPD). This is similar to Lenin's position that the Bolsheviks must refuse to take part in the Kerensky government, so that they could be free to pursue their own, revolutionary politics.

Yet, the old "tailist" qualities are still present. For example, she asserts: "The Spartacus League is not a party that wants to rise to power over the mass of workers or through them" (p. 375). Again, this is obviously a reaction against the Ebert-Scheidemann clique which exploited the workers' support and then betrayed them. But this formulation leaves Luxemburg hanging in the air. The Communist Party must rise to power and take over

power through the masses! Luxemburg states:

**The Spartacus League will never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany, never except by the proletariat's conscious affirmation of the views, aims, and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League...The victory of the Spartacus League comes not at the beginning, but at the end of the Revolution: it is identical with the victory of the great million-strong masses of the socialist proletariat (p. 376).**

One wonders how the "clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass" can be expressed except through a real fight in the soviets and elsewhere to gain ascendancy over the revisionists. And how can the proletariat become "socialist" otherwise? Or is there still, as Luxemburg previously had implied, a "great million-strong mass" out there that is naturally "socialist" or can come to socialism all on their own? In "The Russian Revolution" she had said: "not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority -- that is the way the road runs" (39). And in the Spartacus Program, she says the German communists will not take over until they have a clear majority behind them. But what are the "tactics" that will win a clear majority of the proletariat? Is it still through Luxemburg's old pet, the mass strike? Do the masses develop these tactics all by themselves?

One also wonders just what "end of the Revolution" can mean. Her vague formulations sometimes seem to reflect Kautsky's thesis that there must be a prolonged period of proletarian education and experience until the majority of the population supports revolution -- in other words, in the nebulous far future. But this was not Luxemburg's position for she most definitely believed that "socialism was the order of the day." Two things are lacking here: 1) a consciousness of the necessity for a fight against revisionism as a trend, and 2) a real Marxist concept of the proletarian party which aggressively takes power and authority in order to "smash" the bourgeois state.

Luxemburg stubbornly sticks to the same negative characterization of the authoritarian measures of the proletariat state as in her criticism of the Bolshevik Revolution. She betrays the same confusion as previously between "terror" and "revolutionary violence." She again asserts, "The proletarian revolution requires no

terror for its aims; it hates and despises killing. It does not need these weapons because it does not combat individuals but institutions" ("What Does....," p. 370). This was taken by her comrades to be a veiled criticism of the Bolshevik's use of force to suppress criminal activity among the *lumpen*. However, she also admits that "violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be confronted with the revolutionary violence of the proletariat" (p. 371). This is the same old faulty reasoning. First, because the bourgeois "institutions" had already been replaced by proletarian institutions -- the army, the police, the justice system, parliament, the government bureaucrats, etc. But second, because "institutions" are only a reality through the individuals who carry out their aims and the (sometimes very poor and unfortunate) lackeys they hire and bribe. Finally, even stripped of their "institutions," the bourgeoisie remain a class force, with superiority in education, resources, know-how, influence and ties to the world bourgeoisie.

The foundation for Luxemburg's view is well expressed in this passage from a late article against capital punishment:

**Revolutionary activity and profound humanitarianism -- they are the true breath of socialism. A world turned upside down. but each tear that flows, when it could have been spared, is an accusation, and he commits a crime who with brutal inadvertency crushes a poor earthworm (RLS, p. 399).**

This is absolutely silly bourgeois sentimentalism. How could a revolution be made and socialism created with such an attitude? But this is an example, admittedly extreme, of Luxemburg's moral approach -- so typical both of petty-bourgeois reformism and anarchism -- which underlay her outrage at many of the Bolshevik measures after the Revolution.

In the end, the Spartacus program still betrays much of the old Luxemburg. Her faith in the spontaneity and inherent socialism of the masses has not changed:

**The mass of the proletariat must do more than stake out clearly the aims and direction of the revolution. It must also personally, by its own activity, bring socialism step by step into life (SPW, "What Does....," p. 368).**

She talks about the proletariat learning "socialist civic virtues" as something that "can be won by the mass of workers only through their own activity, their own expe-

rience" (p. 369). Now, these are sentiments that are close to those which Lenin often expressed. That is, the workers will create socialism and learn socialist habit through their own efforts. However, she has just said that the Party "points the entire broad mass...toward its historical tasks...which represents...the ultimate socialist goal" and now she reverts to the old belief that the "mass...stake[s] out clearly the aims and direction of the revolution." Is the dog wagging the tail or the tail wagging the dog?

Lenin's position was that while the workers may be spontaneous "revolutionaries," even "socialists," they cannot come to socialist consciousness on their own. Why? Because scientific socialism -- the dialectical method of historical materialism, the study of political economy, the point of view of class analysis-- is just what the phrase says, a "science." Heretofore, only the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie intelligentsia have had access to "science." Therefore, at first they must bring "science" to the proletariat. At a later date, when the proletariat has been given access to "science," they will replace the bourgeois intelligentsia (9).

A further statement even more clearly betrays Luxemburg's old belief in the ability of the masses to arrive at a socialist consciousness totally by their own efforts:

**More and more, the government is losing the support of the masses of soldiers, for the soldiers have entered upon the path of criticism and self-examination. True, this process may be slow at first, but it will lead irresistibly to their acquiring a complete socialist consciousness [my underline], (p. 394).**

Again, one must ask: What is the Party? and Where is it? It still disappears and reappears almost like a phantasm. Or is it really the case, as Luxemburg's biographer Nettl accused, (as for Trotsky) "every man his own Party?" (p. 802)

### **Minimum/Maximum Program**

But where I feel Luxemburg really betrays elements of anarchist utopianism is in the very nature of the Party Program. It is clearly a program for socialism, i.e., a "maximum" program. It rejects the idea of a two-stage, minimum/maximum program which was the nature of the Bolshevik program: the minimum program of 1903 which set forth demands under the conditions of struggling for a

bourgeois democratic republic, and the revised program of 1919 which added measures for the achievement of socialism. Lenin endorsed the definition of a good program as set forth by the pre-revisionist Kautsky of 1896:

**Our practical demand should be conformed, not with their being achievable under the given alignment of forces, but with their compatibility with the existing social system, and with the consideration whether they can facilitate and further the proletariat's class struggle, and pave for it the way to the political rule of the proletariat...The Social-Democratic programme is not written for the given moment -- as far as possible, it should serve not only for practical action, but for propaganda as well; in the form of concrete demand, it should indicate, more vividly than abstract arguments can do, the direction in which we intend to advance. The more distant practical aims we can set ourselves without straying into Utopian speculations, the better; the direction in which we are advancing will be all the clearer to the masses.... The programme should show what we demand of existing society or of the existing state, and not what we expect of it (CW, 1961, Vol. 6, "Agrarian Programme of Russian Social Democracy," p. 121).**

Now admittedly this is a very delicate balance, but it is just this carefully considered quality which is not apparent in the Spartacus program. Luxemburg states that it is a return to the program of the Communist Manifesto, which proclaimed that the "immediate task was the introduction of socialism" ("Our Program," p. 377). It is a deliberate counter-force to everything the old German SDs stood for; it is an attempt to unify theory and practice. The old party had professed socialism in theory, but in practice had carried out nothing but bourgeois reforms through parliament and tried to protect the workers' economic existence through the trade unions (10).

Luxemburg states:

**Our program is deliberately opposed to the standpoint of the Erfurt Program; it is deliberately opposed to the separation of the immediate, so-called minimal demands formulated for the political and economic struggle from the socialist goal regarded as a maximal program. In this deliberate oppo-**

**sition [to the Erfurt Program] we liquidate the results of seventy years' evolution and above all, the immediate results of the World War, in that we say: For us there is no minimal and no maximal program; socialism is one and the same thing; this is the minimum we have to realize today ("Our Program," p. 387).**

This program calls for measures to take place after the socialist revolution, after the proletariat has established power: the immediate takeover by the soviets; confiscation of all dynastic wealth and income for the collectivity; expropriation of the lands and fields of all large and medium agricultural enterprises; formation of socialist agricultural collectives; workers' councils to take over the control and direction of enterprises, and so forth. And yet one also finds such measures as the establishment of a strike commission which "will furnish the strike movement now beginning throughout the nation with a unified leadership" ("What Does....," pp. 374-75). This sounds like a "minimum demand," i.e., before the Revolution, under the conditions of capitalist domination. Yet she titles one section of the program "immediate measures to protect the Revolution."

This is confusing until one realizes that Luxemburg really had a wrong conception of the revolutionary process. She calls the November Revolution "Stage One of the Socialist Revolution," and now "Stage Two" is on the order of the day. What she means is that the political part of the revolution had been achieved and now the economic part of the revolution is on the agenda. Now this simply does not tally with situation which actually prevailed in Germany. Although the Revolution had been carried out by the proletariat, the government in no sense whatsoever was a proletariat government. The SPD government was social-democratic in name only; it was a purely bourgeois government, and not a liberal one at that. It was systematically destroying the soviets and jailing and murdering the communists and left-wing activists. It was becoming more reactionary by the day. The junkers and the industrialists were still all powerful and the government was cooperating with them, actually restoring their control. The capitalist foundations of German society had certainly remained untouched. It was but a stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, which had gotten rid of the last remnants of feudalism and the monarchy, and had established a unified bourgeois republic.

The SPD government may be considered as parallel to the Russian Provisional Government, except that it was even more reactionary. Yet Luxemburg talks as if there

had been a political victory of the proletariat. Just because Liebknecht proclaimed the "socialist republic" certainly did not make it such. How could the "political" stage of the proletarian revolution be achieved by a reactionary, bourgeois, fake SD leadership? Luxemburg had forgotten an important fact which Lenin always emphasized: only the proletariat can carry out the bourgeois revolution.

Now according to Luxemburg, the "2nd Stage," the economic stage, will be achieved through the mass strike which is

**the central feature and the decisive factor of the revolution, thrusting purely political questions into the background ("Our Program," 397)...It then becomes an economic revolution and therewith a socialist revolution (pp. 396-397).**

It seems that Luxemburg oddly separates the revolution into its "proletarian" part and its "socialist" part. And this harks back to her old article on the "Mass Strike" where she insisted that political mass strikes preceded economic mass strikes. Not only that, but the way it is stated sounds like the workers in this "2nd Stage" take over the capitalist enterprises and run them, which is close to an anarchist concept. Whereas Lenin's idea was that socialism is only gradually achieved through the progressive substitution of new economic relationships for the old bourgeois relationships, and that this is coordinated through the Party and State organs. What it all boils down to is that her program still betrays an anarchistic skipping over stages, the stage of the bourgeois democratic republic.

Yet on the other hand, other statements admit that "political" power has not yet been seized by the proletariat (or does she mean it was seized and then lost?):

**The conquest of power will not be effected with one blow. It will be a progression; we shall progressively occupy all the positions of the capitalist state and defend them tooth and nail...in order to take and transfer all the powers of the state bit by bit from the bourgeoisie to the workers' and soldiers' councils ("Our Program," pp. 405-406).**

This does not sound like an insurrection which defeats and smashes the bourgeois state. This sounds like a gradual and peaceful transference of power to the proletariat, almost a Kautskyite position. But she ends on a worse note:

**But before these steps can be taken, the members of our own Party and the proletarians in general must be educated...To educate the proletarian masses socialistically meant to deliver lectures to them, to circulate leaflets and pamphlets among them. No the school of the socialist proletariat doesn't need all this. The workers will learn in the school of action (p. 406).**

This is a very strong restatement of Luxemburg's reliance on the spontaneity of the masses to make the socialist revolution. But how will the masses progressively occupy the key positions of the state -- under capitalism -- without any sort of minimum program to guide them? In the end, this is a very confused "guide" to the revolution.

As a comparison, it is interesting to see what Lenin said about the Bolshevik minimum and maximum programs. And this was immediately prior to the October Revolution when the victory of the Bolsheviks was pretty much assured. The "very radical," "left" communists, e.g., Bukharin, wanted to discard the minimum program *in toto*. Lenin opposed this idea:

**It is ridiculous to discard the minimum programme, which is indispensable while we still live within the framework of bourgeois society, while we have not yet destroyed that framework, not yet realised the basic prerequisite for a transition to socialism, not yet smashed the enemy (the bourgeoisie), and even if we have smashed them we have not yet annihilated them...in the political sphere...the minimum programme should under no circumstances be discarded for, first of all, there is as yet no Soviet Republic; secondly, 'attempts at restoration' are not out of the question...; thirdly, during the transition from the old to the new there may be temporary 'combined types'...for instance, a Soviet republic together with a Constituent Assembly'...as long as there are odds and ends of bourgeois relations, why abandon the minimum programme..By abandoning it we should prove that we have lost our heads before we have won. And we must not lose our heads either before our victory, at the time of victory, or after it; for if we lose our heads, we lose everything (CW, 1972, Vol. 26,**

“Revision of the Party Programme,” pp. 171-73).

In a sense, Germany had just completed its “February Revolution.” Any further gains by the proletariat had immediately been crushed. There loomed ahead a long period of reaction, and an almost “starting over” by the true communist forces. So, under these circumstances, it seems very utopian of Luxemburg to discard the concept of a minimum program. One can still detect echoes of the old ultra-left slogan of Parvis, Luxemburg and Trotsky: “No czar, but a workers’ government.”

## The German Revolution

For those who are not familiar with the German Revolution, a brief summary may be in order. It is also useful to look at Luxemburg’s role in the “Spartacus Uprising” in order to measure her practice against her theory.

At the beginning of 1918, mass strikes spontaneously sprang up all over Germany in opposition to the war and the increasing famine. The government responded with brutal reaction. In August, a large naval anti-war action took place which reassured Lenin that the Revolution was actually beginning. The German front collapsed in September, and the government began to sue for peace. In October, revolutionary ferment set in among all sections of the masses to depose the monarchy and its government and establish a united republic. Soviets were set up all over Germany, some spontaneously by the workers and soldiers, some by the *Spartakusbund*, some by the USPD, and still others by the SPD. In early November, full-scale rebellion broke out when the sailors joined forces with the workers and launched a general strike. Liebknecht, who had been in prison for his anti-war agitation, was released, and with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards formed the nucleus of revolutionary agitation. On November 9, a nationwide mass strike deposed the government, which handed over the office of Chancellor to the SPD chief, Friedrich Ebert, who has gone down in infamy for his exclamation, “I hate revolution like mortal sin!” It has been pretty much verified that the plan of the German bourgeoisie was to put the brakes on any further “Bolshevization” of the workers by so doing. The democratic republic was proclaimed. Liebknecht proclaimed the “socialist republic.”

The Soviets then mushroomed and claimed power throughout the Reich, although it is agreed that most were mere window-dressing, appendages of the SPD government. Luxemburg, who had been in prison for almost three years, also for anti-war agitation, was then released.

The new leadership of Ebert and Scheidemann immediately began suppressing every further demand of the workers and, in fact, made deals with the Prussian military to suppress the workers with arms and disarm the workers. It began training special counter-revolutionary thug forces to do so. It also called for a National Assembly. As Frolich put it, “The power center of the counter-revolution was within its [the workers’] own ranks” (p. 263).

The *Spartakusbund* was determined to push the Revolution further along a true proletarian, socialist path. It was at this point that Luxemburg wrote its socialist program. Then began the campaign of vilification against the KPD and particularly against Luxemburg and Liebknecht. This came from all quarters, from the White Russian emigres in Germany to the SPD government itself. On December 6, the counter-revolutionary government arrested the Executive Committee of the Soviets and occupied the Spartacists’ *Rote Fahne*. A Spartacus legal demonstration was “set-up” by the authorities and fired upon. *Spartakusbund* then organized a huge protest demonstration. The result was that a price was put on the heads of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. In constant danger, Luxemburg continued to write and speak to the workers, urging them on to a more leftward stand. Big strike movements once more surged, but the government began crushing them with military force. As noted before, Luxemburg had interpreted the strike movement as the “beginnings of the general contest between capital and labour...the start of the violent class struggle, the outcome of which can be nothing less than the...introduction of a socialist economy” [my underline] (Frolich, p. 275).

The government was pressuring the soviets to abandon their powers and to rebuild the old state apparatus of imperial Germany. The Spartacists were urging the soviets to remove the government, disarm the counter-revolutionary forces, create a Red Guard and reject the National Assembly. The Spartacists organized a huge demonstration to greet the first Soviet Congress. The government quickly passed measures to neutralize the soviets, and the soviets “committed political suicide and surrendered the keys to power” (Frolich, p. 277). Luxemburg later regretted both the timing and the radical formulation of these demands, for they had brought about the demise of the soviets. They had also probably signed her death warrant.

The *Spartakusbund* had come into being as an anti-war fraction within the SPD at the start of the war. In 1918, it was still only a loose federation of local groups, similar to the old anarchist “circles” and numbering only a few thousand. Most of its members were young and

ultra-radical. When Kautsky and Bernsteins' USPD had split from the SDP in 1917, the Spartacists retained affiliation with the USPD because of its mass base and because it hoped to influence its left-wing. They had, however, retained full autonomy over their own program. Because the USPD right wing had totally fallen back in with the SPD, the Spartacists severed their ties and formed the Communist Party of Germany (*Spartakusbund*) (KPD) in late December. Realizing that the soviets were dying, Luxemburg wanted the KPD to utilize the elections to the upcoming National Assembly as a socialist propaganda platform. She was voted down by the Spartacist majority who saw an "October victory" immediately ahead. Lenin later agreed that her position had been correct.

What followed in January is known as the "Spartacus Uprising," but it is somewhat questionable whether it actually was an uprising. To this day, accounts and assessments are not settled, but it is clear that it was Liebknecht and not Luxemburg who organized a conscious "putsch." All of her writings of this period confirm that she was preparing for a long struggle to educate and reorganize the workers through the election platform to the National Assembly. What seems to be the case is that the "uprising" was provoked by the SPD leaders of the counter-revolution to once and for all get rid of this leftist threat to their regime. The tactic was a governmental slander campaign against the Police president of Berlin, Eichhorn, a USPD member. When he was dismissed, a large demonstration was organized by the left USPD, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the KPD. Representatives of these groups then formed a Revolutionary Council which determined to overthrow the Ebert-Scheidemann government and seize power. Liebknecht was the most radical of the leaders, and acted without consulting the KPD. Evidently, Luxemburg quarrelled violently with Liebknecht over this, but masses of workers had already taken up the cry.

Yet Luxemburg's own stand (and the official stand of the KPD) was ambiguous and in a sense untenable. She regarded the situation as still not ripe enough for the KPD to seize political power, as it had not had time to gain the backing of the masses. She was not against the armed struggle, and anyway there was nothing she could do about it because it was already taking place. However, she regarded the struggle as having a "defensive character." Her aims, as expressed in *Rote Fahne*, were to: disarm the counter-revolution, arm the proletariat, unify all troops loyal to the revolution, and demand new elections to the soviets. The idea was to defeat the Ebert-Scheidemann clique in the key structures of the revolution

and make the soviets into real centers of action. However, according to Zetkin, her demands, which in an oblique way called for the overthrow of the government, were "only a propaganda, catch-all slogan to rally the revolutionary proletariat, rather than a tangible object of revolutionary fighting" (Frolich, pp. 290-91). Luxemburg evidently believed that while these left forces could not really take over the government, still the proletariat would make large advances in consciousness through their struggle and that class positions would be further clarified.

It was a dilemma. As Zetkin stated:

**[The KPD] could not accept the aim of the mass action -- the overthrow of the government -- as its own; it had to reject it. But at the same time it could not let itself be separated from the masses who had taken up the struggle (p. 291).**

The Revolutionary Council disagreed among themselves as to aims and tactics. Except for Liebknecht, the fighting was almost leaderless. Therefore, the approach lacked offensive thrust, and the masses were very confused. Although Luxemburg felt it her duty to encourage the masses and tirelessly urged the workers on through speeches, leaflets and articles in *Rote Fahne*, the terrible strain on her was noticed by all. She could see failure lying ahead, and felt responsible for sending hundreds to their death. Frolich asks did she

**lack that crowning touch of the party leader who can make realistically sound judgments at critical moments irrespective of his mood and who knows how to see to it that his decisions are carried out -- that crowning touch which became Lenin's second nature? (p. 293)**

For Luxemburg, the majority ruled, but she did not have the pugnaciousness, the confidence, or the skill to change the minds of the majority as Lenin did. And another question remains: should the KPD have organized a retreat of their forces when the inevitable end was in sight?

Due to the conflict between the KPD's position vs. the Revolutionary Council's position, she could do nothing but helplessly watch the ensuing slaughter, for which she must have felt somewhat responsible. Luxemburg was trapped in her own theory: her commitment to the hegemony of the masses at all costs. Her associates

agreed that she became very depressed and seemingly careless about her own safety. The leaders of the revolutionary forces, one by one, were captured or killed by the government, and Liebknecht and Luxemburg were brutally murdered on January 15, 1918. Later, evidence was uncovered which revealed that the SPD government had actively worked behind the scenes and through infiltrators to encourage the revolt in order to crush the leftist forces.

### Appraisals of Luxemburg

The fate of Rosa Luxemburg was to become all things to all people. The ambiguities and contradictions in her theories obviously made this possible. Upon her death, she was both praised and vilified by those calling themselves Marxists -- from a true Marxist genius to a "syphilis bacillus" (11). Since then, she has been assessed as an orthodox Marxist, a Marxist-humanist, a Leninist-with-errors, a Menshevik, a semi-Menshevik, a semi-Anarchist, both a left-wing and a right-wing deviant. Stalin concocted something called "Luxemburgism" which he equated with "Trotskyism." In recent times, she has been taken up by the anti-Stalinists, the Trotskyites, the anti-Leninists, the anarchists, the humanists who want a kinder, gentler Marx and/or Lenin, and by those who are simply disillusioned with everyone else. She became one of the heroes of the New Left and of the Polish Solidarity Movement. The Women's Movement tried to claim her, but even the "socialist wing" found her too heavy duty. The right-wing anti-communists and the Stalinists equally despise her, but those who consider themselves in the Marxist-Leninist trend mostly ignore her because they don't know what to do with her.

### Luxemburg's Contemporaries

To Luxemburg's revolutionary contemporaries, she was a heroic martyr. After the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, mass memorials were held all over Europe and the Soviet Union. Trotsky gave an extravagant eulogy which probably expressed the general opinion of the Bolsheviks at the time:

**She had such perfect command of the Marxist method that it almost seemed a physical part of her. One could truly say that Marxism had entered into her very blood...Rosa Luxemburg was head and shoulders above not only her enemies, but also her comrades. She was a genius...She was a warrior**

**of the world proletariat...[Luxemburg and Liebknecht] were magnificent figures which tower over the whole of humanity....they belonged not to a nation, but to the International! (Portraits, pp. 18-25).**

In the words of one who knew her best, Clara Zetkin:

**In Rosa Luxemburg the socialist idea was a dominating and powerful passion of both heart and brain, a truly creative passion which burned ceaselessly. The great task and the overpowering ambition of this astonishing woman was to prepare the way for social revolution, to clear the path of history for Socialism. To experience the revolution, to fight its battles -- that was the highest happiness for her. With a will, determination, selflessness and devotion for which words are too weak, she consecrated her whole life and her whole being to Socialism. She gave herself completely to the cause of Socialism, not only in her tragic death, but throughout her whole life, daily and hourly, through the struggles of many years....She was the sharp sword, the living flame of revolution (Cliff, p. 96).(12)**

Not to be outdone, another KPD comrade, Franz Mehring, the biographer of Marx, called her "the best brain after Marx" (Cliff, p. 91).

### Lenin

To Lenin, Luxemburg was "our Rosa" or even "Our magnificent Rosa." After her death, he described her as an "outstanding representative of the revolutionary proletariat and of unfalsified Marxism" (*CW*, 1966, Vol. 31, "Contribution to History of Dictatorship Question," p. 342). He was furious at Paul Levy (head of the KPD after the murder of Jogiches), whom he regarded as an agent of Kautsky's "Two-and-a-Half International," for publishing her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution -- "precisely those writings of Rosa Luxemburg in which she was wrong" (*CW*, 1966, Vol. 33, "Notes of Publicist," p. 210) (13). He urged the publication of her biography and her complete works to correct this picture. He felt these would "serve as useful manuals for training many generations of Communists all over the world" (p. 210).

Lenin never downplayed what he considered her "semi-anarchistic" mistakes, but he did not consider them

important enough to constitute a revision of Marx. He considered them errors of judgment due to the particularities of her circumstances -- her isolation and her associates. While Lenin had equated many of her "mistakes" chiefly with her inability to completely break with the Kautskyite trend, her exposure of German opportunism was her great contribution:

**"Since August 4, 1914, German Social-Democracy has been a stinking corpse" -- this statement will make Rosa Luxemburg's name famous in the history of the international working-class movement ( p. 210).**

Supporters of Luxemburg continually point out that she had attacked Kautsky's revisionism four years before Lenin fully realized where Kautsky had been heading. Lenin generously admitted this in 1914:

**I hate and despise Kautsky now more than all the rest, the filthy, vile and self-satisfied brood of hypocrisy....R. Luxemburg was right, she long ago understood that Kautsky had the highly developed "servility of a theoretician" -- to put it more plainly, he was ever a flunkey, a flunkey to the majority of the party, a flunkey to opportunism (Letter to Schliapnikov, *RLS*, pp. 443-44).**

However, Lenin did criticize the Spartacists for not breaking from Kautsky's centrist USPD earlier, and felt this was one reason why the uprising did not succeed. Loyal as she was to the idea that she must be with the masses, Luxemburg perhaps had overvalued ties to the USPD's mass base.

Lenin stated:

**When the crisis broke out, however, the German workers lacked a genuine revolutionary party owing to the fact that the split was brought about too late, and owing to the burden of the accursed tradition of "unity" with capital's corrupt (the Scheidemanns, Legiens, Davids and Co.) and spineless (the Kautskys, Hildferdings and Co.) gang of lackeys (*CW*, 1973, Vol. 32, "A Letter to the German Communists," p. 513.).**

In the same vein, Luxemburg had only come to support the necessity for a 3rd International long after the debacle of the 2nd International. She had held on to the

vain hope that the old organization could resume a correct path, if the old leaders would be deposed by the masses. In the last months of her life, while she gave lip-service to the new International, when it came time for a vote, she instructed the German delegates to vote against it. She feared that the Bolsheviks would dominate the organization and impose their version of the revolution on other parties.

Luxemburg had been inconsistent, she had gotten blind-sided on certain issues, she was even stubbornly wrong-headed, and her dialectical method was not perfect. But her revolutionary spirit, sincerity and bravery were never in question. Lenin remained loyal to Luxemburg. In the last year of his life, his famous final tribute:

**"Eagles may at times fly lower than hens, but hens can never rise to the height of eagles"...In spite of her mistakes she was - - and remains for us -- an eagle ("Notes of a Publicist," p. 210).**

### Georg Lukacs

The first extensive analysis of Luxemburg was undertaken by another contemporary, Georg Lukacs, the Hungarian communist. Lukacs was credited (or blamed!) for first systematizing Luxemburg's views into a "theory of spontaneity." Unfortunately, this later aided Stalin to concoct his theory of "Luxemburgism" which he used as an adjunct to "Trotskyism" in order to crush his opponents. At this time, Lukacs was a staunch Bolshevik supporter (14). His quite solid and provocative analysis formed the basis for many subsequent studies.

Lukacs wrote two articles. In the first, he ranged Luxemburg against the bourgeois current of revisionist Marxism and credited her with reviving "orthodox" Marxism. In the second, he ranged Luxemburg against Lenin and the Bolsheviks and found her wanting.

In "The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg" (1921), Lukacs credits Luxemburg with rescuing the dialectical method from the leaders of the 2nd International, from those like Kautsky who had built a reputation on his "orthodoxy." Lukacs insists that the dialectical approach "implies a return to the pristine and unsullied traditions of Marxism: to Marx's own method" (p. 33). "Orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*. It is the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth" (p. 1). This, by the way, was also Luxemburg's view and has been the view of many of her supporters who all too often throw out

the content, principles and conclusions of Marx, Engels and Lenin!

Lukacs states that the difference between Marxist and bourgeois thought is precisely the point of view of totality, i.e., dialectically looking at the world as a whole and not on the basis of isolated phenomena. He finds Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital* (despite her wrong conclusions!) and Lenin's *State and Revolution* "the two fundamental studies which inaugurate the theoretical rebirth of Marxism" (pp. 34-35):

**They provide...a literary-historical account of their [the problems under consideration] genesis...They analyze the changes and reversals in the views leading up to the problem...They focus upon every stage of intellectual clarification or confusion and place it in the historical context....This enables them to evoke with unparalleled vividness the historical process of which their own approach and their own solutions are the culmination (p. 35).**

This understanding of totality led naturally into an understanding of the dialectical unity of revolutionary theory and practice. Lukacs finds this to be one of Luxemburg's key contributions. It formed the basis of her attack on the German revisionists, Bernstein and Kautsky, who professed revolutionary theory but who practiced bourgeois politics.

Lukacs also finds this totality or wholeness to be the basis of Luxemburg's attempts to deal with the role of the party in the revolution, specifically the relationship between the masses and the party. Again, this concern arose in opposition to the revisionists: "For the mechanical vulgarizers the party was merely a form or organization - and the mass movement, the revolution, was likewise no more than a problem of organisation" (p. 42). The German party, which had gone through many decades of a non-revolutionary situation, had tremendous organizational techniques; it was so huge and efficient that it had almost created a "state within a state." It was used to dictating to the masses at every turn. It had become a lifeless structure, totally unable to deal with a revolutionary situation, as demonstrated by its immediate capitulation to the bourgeoisie at the start of the war. So there is some validity in Lukacs' statement that "Luxemburg had grasped the spontaneous nature of revolutionary mass actions earlier and more clearly than many others" (p. 41). The SPD had depressed the will and initiative of the masses, and so Luxemburg is credited with trying to

rebalance the equation. And certainly, sections of the proletariat were far ahead of the SPD in revolutionary consciousness.

However, Luxemburg took this too far, making an unwarranted generalization, leaping to the conclusion that the masses are always the bearers of revolutionary, even socialist, consciousness, always ahead of the leaders. She all but threw out organization entirely, and with it any "dictatorial" role of the party. She also presented a false either/or situation, i.e., her statement that "organization is much more likely to be the effect than the cause of the revolutionary process, just as the proletariat can constitute itself as a class only in and through revolution" (p. 41). This led Luxemburg into her infamous "revolution as process" theory.

Lukacs concludes by praising Luxemburg's commitment to the masses: "She was the great spiritual leader of the proletariat...she remained consistently on the side of the masses and shared their fate" (44). In my opinion, this was a tragic consequence of her false either/or dichotomy, i.e., the masses or the leaders. One wishes she had done what Lenin had done during the July Days -- which posed a somewhat similar situation: a premature uprising and subsequent murderous reaction -- that is, gotten out of town and lived to fight another day! This might have represented a more realistic and Marxist concept of loyalty to the masses and to the revolution, for Marx and especially Engels often talked about the duty of the revolutionaries to know when to effect an organized retreat.

In "Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg's 'Critique of the Russian Revolution'," Lukacs believes he has found the theoretical basis for Luxemburg's errors. He feels her criticism of the Bolshevik Revolution came from a

**false view of the character of the proletarian revolution...the overestimation of its purely proletarian character, and therefore the overestimation both of the external power and of the inner clarity and maturity that the proletarian class can possess and in fact did possess in the first phase of the revolution (p. 273).**

In other words, the "No tsar but a workers' government" stance.

This accounts for her utopian view of the agrarian problem. She thought the proletariat had far more control than they actually had. Whereas the Bolsheviks only had only two choices: "either to mobilize the liberated energies

of the elemental peasant movement in the service of the proletarian revolution; or, by pitting itself against the peasants, to isolate the proletariat hopelessly and thus to help the counter-revolution to victory" (p. 274). The other side of this is an underestimation of the non-proletarian elements in the revolution, both without and within the proletariat. This led to other errors, such as underplaying of the role of the party; not recognizing the role that organization plays against revisionism; overreliance on the innate "socialist" consciousness of the proletariat to correct the errors of the leaders; refusing to acknowledge the necessity of the dictatorship; and failure to see the role of the soviets in enforcing the dictatorship.

So in assuming that the proletariat have innate, or have already acquired, socialist consciousness, "She constantly opposes to the exigencies of the moment the principles of future stages of the revolution" (277). This is the key to all ultra-left, ultra-radical, "semi-anarchistic" positions. One thinks, for example, of the revolution-defensive stance of Luxemburg, Bukharin (and Trotsky in essence) around Brest-Litovsk. And of many other of her mistaken stands: that there are no more national wars, that self-determination of nations is no longer relevant, that the oppression of women and minorities do not need to be addressed, that full democracy and freedom can be granted to all the people, etc.

But beneath this, Lukacs finds the point from which these beliefs follow to be an "overestimation of the *organic character* of the course of history" (p. 277), specifically, "*the ideological organic growth into socialism*" (p. 178). He finds this also to be a legacy of the German party. This does not mean that Luxemburg did not believe in the necessity of a political revolution, but rather that after the political revolution, socialism in the economic sense would take care of itself due to the creative efforts of the masses. She believed that "the Revolution was needed only to remove the 'political' obstacles from the path of economic developments" (277). This is a part of her "overestimation of the spontaneous, elemental forces of the Revolution." And this is also the anarchistic separation of politics from economics. This accounts for her failure to see that the soviets were not only the political administration of the society, but also the means to transform bourgeois into proletarian economic relations. She failed to see the soviets as an "organizing form," as "the chief weapon in the period of transition, as the weapon by which to fight for and gain by force the presuppositions of socialism" (p. 280). As Lenin pointed out, the soviets must bring about entirely new economic relations.

Her mechanical counterpoising of "positive" vio-

lence to "negative" violence -- of "tearing down" to "building up" -- also stems from this, i.e., the "political" revolution had done the "tearing down," and now there must be "building up." And this determined her attitude toward the Constituent Assembly as well. So, paradoxically, while she makes leaps into the future, at the same time, she is tied to the past. Lukacs' conclusion: "She imagines the proletarian revolution as having the structural forms of bourgeois revolutions" (p. 284).

This "organic growth" view also has bearing on her method of fighting revisionism. Lukacs, as did Lenin, criticized Luxemburg for not recognizing revisionism as a tendency. Lukacs states that while both Luxemburg and Lenin agreed politically and theoretically about combating opportunism, their conflict was "whether or not the campaign against opportunists should be conducted as an *intellectual struggle within* the revolutionary party of the proletariat or whether it should be resolved on the level of *organisation*" (p. 284). Lukacs states that the Bolsheviks regarded "organization as the guarantees of the spirit of revolution in the workers' movement," whereas Luxemburg maintained the opposite: "that real revolutionary spirit is to be sought and found exclusively in the elemental spontaneity of the masses" (p. 284).

Moreover, she also viewed the party organization as growing "organically," that is, "The party becomes the organisational focus of the all the strata whom the processes of history have brought into action against the bourgeoisie" (p. 285). The centralized organ only "is at most a coercive instrument enforcing the will of the proletarian majority in the party" (p. 285).

Lukacs maintains that "Rosa Luxemburg starts from the premise that the working class will enter the revolution as a unified revolutionary body which has been neither contaminated nor led astray by the democratic illusions of bourgeois society" (p. 285). Therefore, since combatting opportunism lay within the party as an intellectual battle, there were too many individual battles against "opportunists" and neglect of seeing opportunism as a "tendency." To the end, she failed to see the role played by the Mensheviks as representatives of a different class, as petty-bourgeois democrats, although she was all too aware that the SPD opportunists represented the bourgeoisie. But she never saw the Mensheviks as similar "enemies of the revolution" only as one current of the revolution, with different opinions on tactics and organization (p. 290).

Lukacs points out a final irony in Luxemburg. Even though she professed that it would be the spontaneous masses who would correct revisionism and put the revolution on the true path, yet she spent her lifetime combat-

ting opportunism! -- a contradiction between her theory and her own practice!

## **“Luxemburgism” as a Petty-Bourgeois Weapon Against the Revolution**

### **Stalin**

The impetus for Stalin's passage on Luxemburg was an article which implied that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had been soft on German centrism and had not waged a thoroughgoing struggle against opportunism. Stalin interpreted this as a Trotskyite accusation that Lenin was not yet a “real Bolshevik” before World War I, a sly insinuation of Trotsky's contention that Lenin “came around” to his theory of “permanent revolution.” To capitalize upon Luxemburg's early history was, of course, valuable to Stalin's purposes. He totally discarded her later evolution. In “Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism,” he states:

**[Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg] invented a utopian and semi-Menshevik scheme of permanent revolution (a distorted representation of the Marxist scheme of revolution), which was permeated through and through with the Menshevik repudiation of the policy of alliance between the working class and peasantry, and they counterpoised this scheme to the Bolshevik scheme of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. Subsequently, this semi-Menshevik scheme of permanent revolution was seized upon by Trotsky (in part by Martov) and turned into a weapon of struggle against Leninism (Vol. 13, 1931, p. 93).**

Thus, the very early Luxemburg was held accountable for the Trotsky of Stalin's period to suit his purposes. In addition, they were linked together as examples of individualism and renegades to the “true” Marxist Party - Luxemburg to Lenin's party and Trotsky to Stalin's party. But of course, Stalin maintained that his party was Lenin's party, so there you have it. In trying to assume the mantle of Lenin at all times, Stalin had to continually violate and misinterpret Lenin to justify his own twists and turns. Similarly, Stalin not only violated Luxemburg, but outright lied, maintaining that she did not attack Kautsky until urged to do so by Lenin! In a curious fashion, the fate of Luxemburg at his hands went through constant re-

evaluation as Stalin's own policies changed, until this final assessment, after which she was excised from the history books and became a non-person (see Note 11).

### **Trotsky**

So Trotsky took it upon himself to “rescue” Luxemburg from Stalin's abuse. But it actually was more self-serving than gallant. In “Hands Off Rosa Luxemburg” (1933) and “Luxemburg and the 4th International” (1935), he uses Luxemburg to support his theory of “permanent revolution” as against Stalin's “socialism in one country”, and equates this concept with Lenin's views. Another chief argument is that Luxemburg's counterpoising of the “spontaneity of mass actions to the ‘victory-crowned’ conservative policy of the German social democracy...had a thoroughly revolutionary and progressive character,” for the German Revolution of 1918 was carried out by the masses, not the SD leadership (“4th International”, p. 168). Obviously, Trotsky is implying a parallel between the German revisionists and the Stalin clique and trying to martial forces to depose the Stalin leadership.

Trotsky then goes on to step two. There was, however, a subsequent “crisis in leadership”, where Luxemburg fell short in matters of organization and a “sharp program.” Trotsky calls her manuscript on the Russian Revolution “weak” but insists that “day by day, she was moving closer to Lenin's theoretically clearly delineated conception concerning conscious leadership and spontaneity” (p. 169). He praises Luxemburg for grasping “the retarding character of the ossified party and trade union apparatus and begin[ning] a struggle against it, earlier than Lenin” (p. 168).

Trotsky never at any time offered any real analysis of Luxemburg's non-Leninist or non-Marxist tendencies and, in fact, depreciated them. There was a reason for this. Trotsky did not want a resurgence of the socialist revolution in the Soviet Union, but only to depose the leadership. In the works cited, the implication is that the correct combination of Luxemburg's “spontaneous masses” and his “leadership” would equal “Leninism” and thus oust the Stalin clique. Thus, Trotsky equates himself and Luxemburg with the “true” Marxist/Leninist Party -- and regards Stalin as the renegade. In the end, he co-opts Luxemburg as a spiritual ancestor of his 4th International.

Admittedly allied with some of Trotsky's stands in her early career, Luxemburg always disavowed connection with his theory of “permanent revolution” and, moreover, insisted that she didn't even understand it. She personally despised his arrogance. She then equated Trotsky and

Lenin together in her polemics against the "dictatorial" tactics of the Bolshevik Revolution. Now finally she has been co-opted by Trotsky as his comrade, his ally against Stalin, standing behind him -- "the shade of Rosa Luxemburg...irreconcilably inimical to him" ("Hands Off," p. 449). What would Luxemburg have thought about that?

### The Trotskyites: Tony Cliff

The first extended "Trotskyite" appraisal was given by Tony Cliff. In his study, *Rosa Luxemburg* (1959), Cliff picks up on several of Trotsky's claims, but uses Luxemburg much more blatantly as an anti-Marxist/Leninist weapon. Ostensibly posing "Luxemburgism" as "true Marxism" as against Stalinism, he mechanically traces the roots of Stalinism back to Lenin. He also poses "Luxemburgism" as an alternative model for the Western Revolution, as opposed to Lenin's Eastern "Asiatic" Revolution, a stance which the New Left picked up.

What Cliff admires most about Luxemburg is her "doubtall" quality:

**A passion for truth made Rosa Luxemburg recoil from any dogmatic thought. In a period when Stalinism has largely turned Marxism into a dogma, spreading desolation in the field of ideas, Rosa Luxemburg's writings are invigorating and life-giving. Nothing was more intolerable to her than bowing down to 'infallible authorities.' As a real disciple of Marx she was able to think and act independently of her master. Though grasping the spirit of his teaching, she did not lose her critical faculties in a simple repetition of his words, whether these fitted the changed situation or not, whether they were right or wrong. Rosa Luxemburg's independence of thought is the great inspiration to Socialists everywhere and always....No one can do more to release us from the chains of life-less mechanistic materialism than Rosa Luxemburg (pp. 94- 95).**

Here also, we find the first characterization of Luxemburg as a "Marxist-Humanist:"

**For Marx Communism (or socialism) was "real humanism," "society in which the full and free development of every individual is the ruling principle" (*Capital*, Vol. I, p. 649). Rosa Luxemburg was the embodiment of**

**these humanistic passions (p. 95).**

Again, this is obviously meant as a blow to Stalin's brand of "Marxism," but it is really using Luxemburg as a weapon against Marx himself, for the implication is that this brief excerpted statement is the real Marx, discarding the militant warrior Marx of the Communist Manifesto, the 1848 Revolution, and the Paris Commune. Throughout this book, Cliff treats Marx as a fuzzy "democratic" as against Lenin, the "Jacobin."

Cliff also uses Luxemburg as a weapon against Lenin. The above statement implies that Lenin deviated from Marx's "humanism." In fact, Cliff's book is based on just this kind of sly insinuation. Cliff equates Luxemburg and Lenin as equals, and assesses the "historical limitations" of each. In doing so, he really falsifies and slanders Lenin. As examples: Luxemburg pointed out the problems of imperialism vs. the non-capitalist countries. Lenin did not; implication, his analysis *Imperialism...* is lacking. Her treatise on economics proved Mehring's contention that she was "the best brain since Marx"; implication, Lenin was maybe the "second-best brain!" This totally ignores Lenin's copious economic analyses of the agrarian situation in Russia. Luxemburg knew how to deal with bourgeois reformism better than Lenin (or Trotsky) because there was no huge SD party gone bad in Russia. Her arguments were "superior" -- "Her scalpel is a much more useful weapon than Lenin's sledgehammer" (p. 92); implication, the methods of Leninism were crude, only suited to backward countries, not to the West. This is a really ludicrous statement considering Lenin's volumes of painstakingly analysis of the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, Cadets, etc. Luxemburg was adamantly against "sectarianism;" implication, the Bolsheviks were sectarians, which led to the Stalinists' sectarianism. Luxemburg had a more realistic view of the world. She did not consider the victory of socialism to be inevitable and echoed Engels' prediction of "socialism or barbarism." Lenin was confident of a world revolution which would lead to socialism. He was mistaken; implication, Luxemburg is a better Marxist than Lenin.

Cliff asserts that it is Luxemburg, not Lenin, who best serves as an ideological and tactical guide for the revolutions in capitalist-developed countries:

**Rosa Luxemburg's conception of the structure of the revolutionary organisations -- that they should be built from below up, on a consistently democratic basis -- fills the needs of the workers' movement in the advanced countries much more closely than**

**Lenin's conception of 1902-4 which was copied and given an added bureaucratic twist by the Stalinists the world over (p. 93).**

One of the reasons she is a more suitable guide is because "Rosa Luxemburg had a much earlier and clearer view of the role of the Labour bureaucracy than Lenin or Trotsky," since in Russia the trade union movement was weak (p. 92); implication, if they could have, the Bolsheviks would have conducted the revolution through the trade unions, rather than through the soviets; further implication, the revolutions in the west can be conducted through the trade unions -- if the bad bureaucrats are replaced.

In short, although Cliff does not really bring Trotsky into this study, he obviously is using Luxemburg to support Trotsky's brand of social-democratic reformism dressed in revolutionary rhetoric.

### **The Anarchists: Raya Dunayevskaya**

In *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1981), Dunayevskaya, Trotsky's former secretary and founder of *News and Letters*, picks up where Cliff left off, which only demonstrates the same petty-bourgeois origins of reformism and anarchism. Dunayevskaya sees Luxemburg as the only revolutionary leader who reflected Marx's "humanism," on the basis of excerpts from his very early and very late obscure writings, which throws out almost 50 years of Marx. Like Cliff, Dunayevskaya also poses Luxemburg as the guide for the western revolutions. Her "organization as process," through the spontaneity of the masses, is the key to organizing the proletariat -- or rather, the proletariat organizing itself. Dunayevskaya thus takes Cliff's passage on the Luxemburg type of party to its logical conclusions -- the anarchists' non-party.

Dunayevskaya views Lenin's "tragedy" as lying in the fact that he never revised his 1902-03 concept of the party, i.e., the vanguard ("authoritarian," "elitist") party concept (pp. 63, 172). She sees Lenin as leading to Stalin through the concept of the vanguard party. She maintains that she rejected Trotsky because he supported Stalin's regime as a "workers' state," but she also criticizes him for coming to accept Lenin's definition of the party. In the end, she lumps Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin altogether as "authoritarians." She sees Luxemburg's greatest weakness to lie in the fact that she never quite discarded the concept of vanguard party, although she considerably weakened it in what Dunayevskaya considers the right

direction -- toward the spontaneity of the masses.

Still Dunayevskaya criticizes Luxemburg for her "near tone-deafness on philosophy" (p. 155). What she means by "philosophy" is: "...the projection of Marx's Humanism. That is to say, philosophy of revolution rather than the vanguardist party" (p. xxxi).

On what grounds does Dunayevskaya call Marx a "humanist?" What does she conceive his "philosophy of revolution" to be? What it amounts to is that Dunayevskaya culls every scrap she can from Marx, usually out of context, which she can reinterpret as advocating petty-bourgeois, democratic-anarchist, non-class-based ideas: as suggesting that other groups, rather than the proletariat, can lead the revolution -- women, peasants, colonized peoples, etc.; as suggesting that Marx had foreseen looser organizational forms -- "Marx at no time made a fetish of organization" (p. 155); as suggesting that Marx saw the beginnings of oppression not to lie with class division but with male-female division, and so forth.

Therefore, Dunayevskaya considers Luxemburg (while not perfect!) as the revolutionary figure closest to her own interpretation of Marx -- as reflecting the "true Marx."

**Conclusion: "The Revolution is splendid, everything else is rubbish" (15).**

Far from worshipping everything Lenin thought and wrote, I feel that he overestimated Luxemburg's "change" in the same way and for the same reasons as he overestimated the chances of success of the European revolutions. She and Liebknecht were Germany's best hope.

What others have praised as her strong points -- her critical nature, her theoretical ability, her passion to unite theory and practice in order to find the correct revolutionary path to socialism in the west -- in my opinion, all have their downside as well.

Luxemburg's quality of never accepting anything without questioning it was both a virtue and a defect. There is something very appealing about this young woman who single-handedly took on the revered fathers of German Social Democracy, Bernstein, Bebel, Kautsky, not to mention the giants of scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, and the leader of the first socialist revolution, Lenin! However, I also think she had an overdose of egoism which prevented her from utilizing the knowledge of others. She really did regard her theoretical writings as an advance on Marx, and she never regarded Lenin as anything more than her equal.

Moreover, I feel that others have overestimated her as a theoretical thinker, as a *dialectician* (16). I think she often overgeneralized, and thus made anarchistic "leaps"

in reasoning. She simply did not possess Marx or Engels or Lenin's ability to keep abreast of the constantly shifting balance of social forces, the continuous regrouping of revolutionary energies. But that she did try to "rescue" the dialectical method is perfectly true. That she did try to ally theory and practice is also perfectly true. And while some of her analyses led to faulty conclusions, they all show flashes of brilliance -- her "eagle" quality.

I also think she was trapped in certain traditions of the German Party, which made it difficult for her to deal effectively with trends of revisionism. She always occupied the position of an opposition within a larger party; the Spartacists were not a real party until the very end. How much actual experience as a leader of a communist party would have developed her shaky views on the nature and organization of the party and on the means to fight revisionism will forever remain a provocative question.

Luxemburg did raise questions that are relevant today: What forms should the revolutions in the west take? Where do the forces of revolution lie? What should be the nature of the proletarian party? But I feel she gave no real answers.

Finally, I think it is a mistake to measure Luxemburg against Lenin, and certainly against Marx, although she herself was responsible for this. Measure Luxemburg against everyone in the German Party: no contest. Moreover, measure Luxemburg against the other leading Bolsheviks: Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Radek, Kollontai. Were her inconsistencies, her contradictions, her errors any more serious than those of the above? And to imagine her ever caving in to Stalin, as her comrade-survivor, Clara Zetkin did, is indeed ludicrous.

There was an integrity to Rosa Luxemburg that was a rare quality. She fulfilled her only personal goal which was, in her words, "to live a life worth living." Perhaps she had too much of the sentimental bourgeois concept of the martyr in her; she felt it was the revolutionary's duty to suffer and die with the masses. But one cannot question her goal to unite revolutionary theory and practice, nor her burning desire to create socialism to alleviate the sufferings of the masses, nor her personal courage. She put her money where her mouth was. She truly was the "flame of the revolution."

#### Notes:

(1) "Order Reigns in Berlin," *SPW*, p. 415. This was the last article she wrote before her death.

(2) Luxemburg once tongue-in-cheek referred to herself and Clara Zetkin as "two of the last men in the party." This is not to diminish the stature of Karl Liebknecht. In

fact, Lenin pinned his hopes of a successful proletarian uprising in Germany on the leadership of Liebknecht and regarded him as the head of the KPD when, in fact, it was Luxemburg who wrote the program for the Party, was its theoretician and propagandist. Liebknecht was more a man of action. Beginning as an SPD parliamentary delegate, he became the chief organizer and agitator of the *Spartakusbund* and KPD.

(3) The only other source of Luxemburg's final ideas is *Die Rote Fahne* (Red Flag), a newspaper started by her and Liebknecht after the German Revolution, November 18, 1918.

(4) Letter to Bebel, December 11, 1884.

(5) When the first national Congress of Soviets met in December, 1918, it had a composition of 489 SD delegates, 80 USPD and only 10 Spartacus followers.

(6) Her biographer and KPD comrade Nettel was dubious about her "change". He said that the only factual error to which she ever admitted was her support for a Constituent Assembly in Russia at the end of her life (p. 718).

(7) An article on the evolution of the Bolshevik agrarian program is planned for the next issue.

(8) Luxemburg's article "The Beginning" in *Die Rote Fahne*, November, 1918.

(9) For example, "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness" (*CW*, 1972, Vol. 10, "Reorganization of the Party," p. 32).

(10) Luxemburg blamed Engels for the "parliamentarism-only tactic" of the German SDs, i.e., his Preface to Marx's *Class Struggles in France*, where he had stated that the era of barricade fighting was over. Later, evidence turned up which proved that the leaders of the Party had revised and distorted Engel's Preface against his protests (see Frolich, pp. 380-384).

(11) Attributed to Ruth Fischer who, with Maslow, took over leadership of the KPD during Stalin's ascendancy. She used Stalin's propaganda to show that "Luxemburgism" was the German version of "Trotskyism" and to Stalinize the KPD. Trotsky and Luxemburg were mainly aligned on the grounds similar origin and intent, the

result being “anti-party.” Luxemburg’s “theory of spontaneity” was the basis of her “anti-party” deviation. When the Stalinist parties swung to the “right” in 1925, Fischer was expelled as “ultra-left,” and Luxemburg was briefly rehabilitated, then paired with Fischer as “ultra-left!” When Stalin swung to the “left” in 1928, he lumped both Trotsky and Luxemburg together again as “Mensheviks.” For the complex specifics of all this, see Nettl, Vol. II, “Luxemburgism -- Weapon and Myth,” pp. 787-827.

(12) From Clara Zetkin, *Rosa Luxemburg and the Russian Revolution*, not available in English translation. Zetkin did criticize Luxemburg’s former errors, but she stuck to her story. In a letter to another comrade, the Pole “Warski,” Luxemburg stated: “I shared all your reservations and doubts, but have dropped them in the most important questions.” However, she qualified this by saying that she still regarded the Bolshevik’s “terror” and their agrarian program as wrong but necessitated by circumstances that would be mitigated by the European revolution (Nettl, pp. 716-17).

(13) See Lenin’s letter to Zinoviev, July, 1921, *CW*, 1970, Vol. 45, p. 23, and his assessment of Levi, *CW*, 1966, Vol. 33, “Notes of a Publicist,” pp. 207-11.

(14) Georg Lukacs was a Hungarian philosopher and literary critic who constructed a Marxist aesthetic. He was Commissar of Culture and Education under Bela Kuhn regime. When it was overturned in 1919, he went into exile in Austria and Germany. He then spent several years in the Soviet Union, where he was identified as a Stalin supporter. After the war, he returned to Hungary and became a member of parliament. However, he played a major role in the Hungarian uprising in 1956, after which he was again deported but allowed to return. He devoted the remainder of his life to literature. Lukacs stated that he repudiated some of the ideas in his book, *History and Class Consciousness*, but he was never specific about the Luxemburg articles.

(15) Ettinger, p. 136.

(16) As a typical example of the ‘best brain after Marx’ school of thought, Nettl maintains that she was capable of thinking in an extended scientific manner” like Marx (i.e., her *Accumulation of Capital*), whereas Lenin was not (p. 841). [Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capital* is not thinking in an extended scientific manner?] He also credits her with first identifying theoretical concepts such as “social patriotism” (p. 853).

10/7/96

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Rosa Luxemburg's corpse, March 1919. Probably an official photograph

# A Revolutionary Portrait: *Larissa Reisner*

by Barb, Chicago

Review of: Porter, Cathy. *Larissa Reisner*. Virago Press, 1988.

*I can ride, shoot, reconnoitre, write, send correspondence from the front, and if necessary die...*

The name "Larissa" resonated throughout the Civil War years in Russia and Europe. Poet, journalist, war correspondent, front-line fighter, spy and diplomat, she also bore the distinction of being chosen the first Bolshevik woman political commissar. The "Revolutionary Pallas" -- liberated, independent, fearless, and by all accounts strikingly beautiful and elegant as well -- Larissa Reisner came to symbolize the "New Soviet Woman." Dying tragically at the age of 30 in 1926, her short dramatic life was much commemorated in poetry and romanticized by legend at the time. Later, a victim of Stalin's rewriting of history, she dropped out of public consciousness until after his death when some interest in her revived. The first biography in English, by Cathy Porter who also stimulated interest in Alexandra Kollontai, appeared in 1988.

Larissa Reisner is unusual because she was a second-generation revolutionary. She was born in 1895 into a family of the socialist intelligentsia. Her mother was a Russian raised in the German section of Poland; her father was a Baltic German. The Reisners considered themselves Marxists and lived the typical cosmopolitan life of revolutionaries at the time, residing in Germany and France before settling in St. Petersburg. Her father, a lawyer, joined the Bolsheviks in 1905 and was a close associate of Karl Liebknecht in Germany. After the repression came down, her father abandoned his links with the Bolsheviks and went off into the mystical, symbolist, psycho-sexual currents of "creative Marxism" prevalent at the time. He held a professorial position at the University of St. Petersburg, but remained a maverick and was constantly under police surveillance for teaching socialist ideas at the university, for aiding strikers and helping political exiles, and for teaching his version of Marxism at workers' clubs. Later he was chosen to draft the first Bolshevik Constitution.

So Larissa Reisner was raised in a mixture of revolutionary ideals, Marxist doctrine, and all the fashionable literary and psychological theories then circulating. Chief among influences was the example of her mother, who had "liberated" herself from the restrictive life of middle-

class women of the time, and who encouraged her daughter's independent thinking.

One of the few women students accepted into St. Petersburg University, Reisner chose a curriculum of law, science and literature. However, her true passion was poetry. With the First World War and the rising revolutionary current, she soon became disgusted with the reactionary aestheticism which prevailed, and turned to the Futurist group, whose leader Mayakovsky braved public scorn for his anti-war poetry and was a Bolshevik supporter. With her parents' backing, she also started her own literary journal, whose satirical and scornful attacks on the autocracy, the church and the bureaucracy pushed the limits of censorship.

From the February Revolution to the October Revolution, Reisner became increasingly politicized and active. She taught literacy classes at the soldiers and sailors clubs and became involved with the Bolsheviks in the St. Petersburg soviet. She was much impressed by the Bolshevik women speakers, such as Kollontai. She also became associated with the Menshevik-Internationalist paper edited by Gorky, *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life), for which she wrote articles criticizing the Provisional Government, and especially Kerensky. This, not surprisingly, proved to be an uneasy alliance as her increasingly Bolshevik views constantly came into conflict with the editorial board.

The chief political influence on Reisner was the man she later married, Raskolnikov (F.F. Ilin). Born into a poor family and a radical practically from birth, he joined the Bolsheviks after 1905. Originally a writer who had contributed articles to Bolshevik publications, Raskolnikov became an organizer and spent several spells in prison and in exile for his activities. He had been conscripted into the navy and by this time had risen to become vice-chair of the Kronstadt Soviet, editor of the local Bolshevik newspaper, and Bolshevik leader of the entire Kronstadt garrison. Raskolnikov was highly trusted by Lenin as a military commander, and eventually received two Orders of the Red Banner for his service.

Different accounts, probably romanticized, put Reisner on the front lines of the October Revolution. One version had her among those who stormed the Peter and Paul Fortress; another placed her on the Battleship *Aurora*, in fact, giving the orders to shoot at the Winter Palace! At



any rate she was one of the first to enter the Winter Palace after its capture. Her colorful account, which included a scathing denunciation of Kerensky's political and moral corruption, proved too much for *Novaya Zhizn* and severed her relationship with the publication.

After the October Revolution, Reisner first worked with Lunacharsky to preserve the art treasures of the old regime. As the Civil War began, Reisner, along with thousands of other women, set off to give their lives for the new regime. And there are doubtless thousands of other untold stories of unknown heroic women who fought in men's regiments or special Communist women's detachments on the front lines, or who nursed the wounded and dug fortifications on the battlefields, or who served as propagandists, spies and agitators. At age 22 Reisner joined the Party and for the next five years worked and fought alongside her husband to save the new republic.

She began by working at the Naval Commissariat in Moscow, where Raskolnikov by this time was deputy commissar for Naval Affairs and a member of the Revolutionary War Council of the Eastern Front. Then, Reisner and her husband were sent off to fight the Czechs in Kazan (later Gorky) along the Volga River. For the next two years, she fought on many fronts as a soldier and scout for the Fifth Army and Volga flotilla. At the First-All-Russian Women's Congress, Reisner was rewarded for her service by being appointed the Red Army's first woman political commissar and dispatched to Moscow's Naval General Staff where she was in charge of the political education not only of the ordinary sailors but of

the former czarist naval commanders. This was really an extraordinary assignment for such a young woman, but these were the years when many were called upon to perform extraordinary feats.

There are rich anecdotes of her struggles to overcome the sailors' distrust of her cultured background, their downright hostility to her sex, and all the old patriarchal attitudes of these rough men, but by all accounts she quickly gained not only their respect and admiration for her bravery, but inspired awe and almost worship. "Our love," they called her. She manned the guns in the thick of fierce battles, organized and led dangerous reconnaissance missions, and educated the sailors in the new culture. She lectured them on revolutionary literature, organized them into drama and journalism clubs, and not the least, changed their attitudes toward women. She was portrayed by one naval commander as suddenly appearing on deck in the midst of chaos and panic during an air bombardment, looking like an apparition all dressed in white, her calm, low voice keeping order and inspiring confidence, in effect, saving the day.

At the same time, she sent back regular first-hand accounts of the battles and their aftermaths - "Letters from the Front" -- which were published widely. Her style was perhaps overly florid and metaphorical, but her writings definitely conveyed a sense of eye-witness immediacy and poignant human interest, and they were highly popular with the public.

Two incidents of this period are particularly striking. One, when Raskolnikov was captured by the Whites, she donned the trappings of a bourgeois lady and, in great peril to her safety, amidst wholesale slaughter of Bolsheviks and their sympathizers, went behind enemy lines to look for him. She was captured herself and underwent brutal interrogation and even torture before she escaped. The other, which is very amusing, recounts how despite stubborn resistance, she taught the sailors how to ride horses so that they could double as scouts and infantry on land. At their head, dressed as a man and nursing a crippled foot, Reisner fearlessly led this new naval "cavalry" which never ceased complaining. Thus, in a sense, she created the first, albeit reluctant, "marines."

As the war wound down, Reisner returned to civilian life and journalism, roaming the cities and countryside to record the devastating chaos of the war's aftermath. It also appears that she helped negotiate the liberation of Russian prisoners in Latvia. She returned to her previous literary circles, but spent her efforts in trying to "reeducate" many of the literary figures who had either supported the Whites or had remained aloof.

In 1921 Raskolnikov and Reisner were dispatched to

Afghanistan which was struggling to declare its independence from Britain, while the Soviets were trying to establish their influence there. Raskolnikov was appointed Ambassador and Reisner received a diplomatic post, her job being to work with the mother of the Emir and the women of his harem. She continued to send back lush, exotic sketches of daily life, but also hard-hitting portrayals of the oppressive status of the women. She maintained regular contact with Kollontai and Zhenotdel's educational program for women of the Middle East. She also became an "informant" for the Comintern.

Upon returning to Moscow after two years, Reisner attempted to rejoin the literary scene but found the new, younger school of "proletarian" writers critical of her writing, which they considered too artificial and "elitist." She concurred with this assessment, and from then on worked to simplify and "proletarianize" her style. She found the atmosphere of NEP uncomfortable and, like an old war-horse, longed for revolution, so she gained permission from the Comintern to cover the impending German uprising. Because of her knowledge of German, she was appointed to serve as a clandestine liaison between the German and Russian proletariat. After the failed uprising, Reisner continued to live illegally in Berlin residing with various workers' families while she served as a "scout" for Comintern members living there underground. Her book *Hamburg at the Barricades* is an account of the uprising, together with portraits of its leaders and sketches of the everyday life of the workers. The book was immensely popular and considered dangerous enough to be burned by the German *Reichstribunal*.

By 1924, Reisner had broken with Raskolnikov and had formed a relationship with Karl Radek, who was expelled from the Comintern's EC for his part in the failed German revolution. At this time her Civil War "Letters" were published in book form as *The Front*, which has often been compared to John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World* in its intensity and immediacy. Then she travelled to the mining areas of the northern Ural Mountains to report on the life of the people under the birth of Bolshevik industrialization. She began work on a trilogy of the workers' lives under serfdom, czarism, and socialist construction, which was never completed, although out of this experience, her articles were collected under the title *Coal, Iron and Living People*. Again, she lived with the workers, and also adopted an orphaned boy whom she took back to Moscow.

Weakened with malaria, Reisner continued this intense schedule until the end of her life. She returned to Germany to report on the budding fascist movement and to take the Krupp empire to task, and then to Byelorussia

to defend an army correspondent who had exposed criminal infiltration into the Party, sending back articles for *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. Her last mission was to work with Radek, now temporarily rehabilitated as Provost of the new Sun Yat Sen University in Moscow, to train future Chinese communist cadres. She was appointed to lecture on Russian literature. She had plans to go to Tehran on a special flying expedition. Her last days were spent working on books about the Decembrist movement and the precursors to socialism.

Larissa Reisner died from typhus three months before her thirty-first birthday in 1926.

Porter's biography is a valuable contribution which attempts to separate the real woman from the romantic legends surrounding her. Its weakness is that, being written from a feminist point of view, it lacks analysis of Reisner's political views. However, some sense of her political stands can be gleaned from books on Raskolnikov and Radek. Her husband being a former Kronstadt commander, the couple at least sympathized with the rebellious sailors. And there is no question that Reisner was an admirer of Trotsky, with whom she had worked closely during the War years. Evidently, during the party debate on the role of the unions, both she and her husband supported Trotsky's position, the implication being, however, out of personal loyalty rather than sound conviction. She had also briefly held a position in one of Trotsky's commissions. Karl Radek was an extravagant Trotsky supporter. He was eventually convicted of "trotskyism" and disappeared into Siberian exile. It is documented that Stalin killed Reisner's reputation, in effect made her a "non-person", because of these associations. Yet one must remember that she died in 1926, before positions were clearly sorted out. And there are many testimonies to her unquestioning loyalty to the Bolshevik Party, and to her propagation of Lenin's writings.

Essentially, one concludes that Larissa Reisner was not really an astute political person. But there is no question that she was a sincere revolutionary activist. And she made valuable contributions which, like those of so many other revolutionary women, have been largely ignored. While not directly involved in the women's movement, she was an extraordinary role model. Rejecting her privileged upbringing, living, working, fighting, and sacrificing among the masses, she epitomized the "New Woman" born of October, in Kollontai's words, "proud and conscious of her rights -- a citizen of Russia."

#### Bibliography

Only a couple of Larissa Reisner's many works have

been translated into English:

"Heroic Sailors of the Russian Revolution" (trans. A. Rothstein), *Communist Review*, No. 1, May 1920.  
*Hamburg At the Barricades, and Other Writings on Weimar Germany* (trans. and ed. R. Chappel), Pluto, London, 1977.

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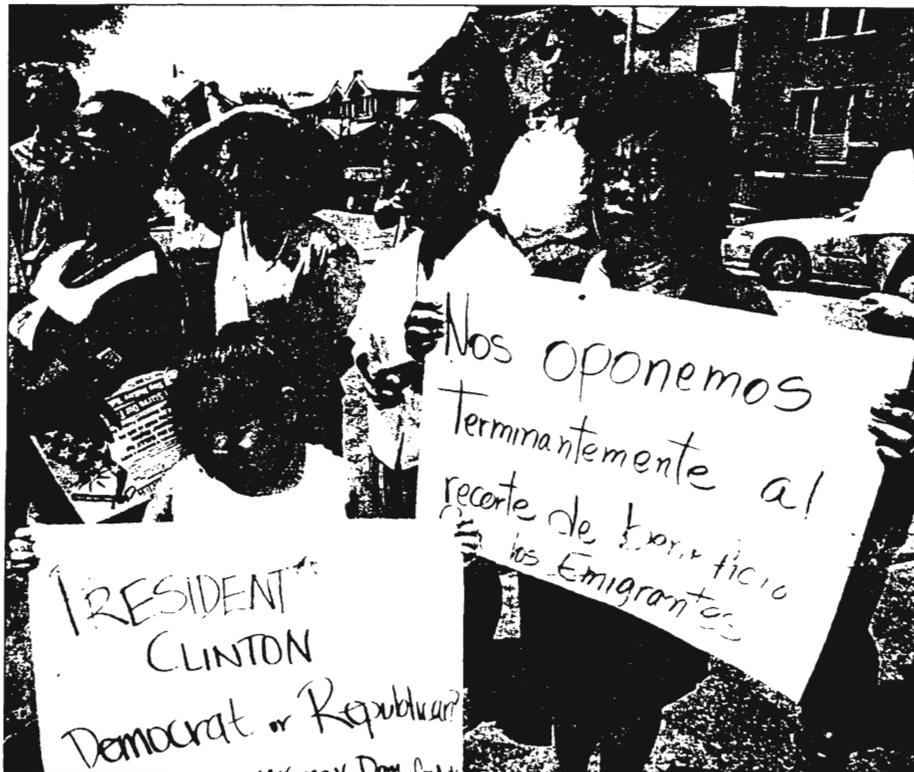
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## The working class: It's role and composition

### From Boston: George on Health Care workers

A few comments on George's article on hospital workers by Jake, *Chicago Workers' Voice*

Continuing our coverage on the composition of the working class, we present an article by George of the Boston Communist Study Group, "Some features of health care workers as an organized part of the working class."

CWVTJ is not necessarily in agreement with the outlook or conclusions in this article. However there are several reasons for printing it, not the least of which is that it represents the conclusion of work started under the MLP (and the aims of this journal include publishing the MLP's theoretical work and material from ex-MLP activists). Another reason is the information that it provides with strike statistics and the brief, interesting account of Local 1199's organizing drives in New York and Charleston, South Carolina. Finally, we are interested in debating this question and that means printing views of the participants, whether we disagree with them or not.

The changes in the class composition of society, especially in the structure of the working class, such as the shift to a "service economy," the decline of trade unions, the large "middle strata" and the growth of the technical/professional strata, must be understood and accounted for in our revolutionary theory. However these changes pose a dilemma to some Marxists who find in the present economic and class structure a refutation of Marx and a balance of forces weighted against socialism and revolution.

The question "what's happening to the working class" was one of the rocks that the late Marxist-Leninist Party crashed into. Disagreements over what these changes are and what they mean, particularly in regard to the role of the proletariat in shaping events, was part of the crisis that proved fatal to the MLP. (See the Dec. 13, 1993 Statement of the Chicago Branch of the MLP, available on the web, <http://www.mcs.com/~mlbooks>.)

After the MLP dissolved in November 1993, the Chicago Branch continued its work and started publishing this journal. In our view the changes in the working class were not a refutation of Marxism and our comrades in Boston had gotten it wrong.

Meanwhile, a few members of the MLP's Boston branch continued to work on theoretical projects they had started under the MLP, that is, investigating the changes in the working class and studying one particular category in the service sector, hospital workers. The reader should note that the Boston Branch of the MLP had carried out revolutionary work among hospital workers, from hourly service employees to nurses, and with some success.

The Boston Communist Study Group produced two documents which summarize their work. (These may be the only documents that the group produces as it appears to be inactive. However, the authors can be contacted through the email address provided below.)

Both of these documents are published in CWVTJ. Peter Tabolt's article, along with my criticism of it, appeared in issues #9 and #10 of CWVTJ.

The line given by the Boston Branch on the working class was wrong. Focusing on the relative decrease in manufacturing employment, Peter Tabolt fudged his statistics to create the impression that the working class is being replaced by a huge "middle strata." Further, the "professional/managerial strata" was supposed to be growing the fastest. The huge size of this middle strata and its stronger position in society, Tabolt maintains, leads to dulling the class consciousness of the workers. Boston is very pessimistic about the prospects of future struggle and seems to see the present-day political trends as very long term.

Supporting Boston's argument is the fact that the industrial proletariat in the advanced countries is shrinking in proportion to the rest of the workforce. Further, the level of struggle by working people is extremely low and there is no trend in sight to reverse this. The service sectors have indeed become larger and in any future round of class struggle, the service workers will likely be much more important than before.

Yet reality contradicts much more of Boston's argument than it supports. For example, the professional/managerial strata is not growing. The trend is more professionals but fewer managers. Added together, the combined strata has been fairly constant for decades. The proletariat overall is not shrinking even though manufacturing employment is declining, because service jobs are growing rapidly.

*Continued on page 61, See Comments*

# Some Features of Health Care Workers as an Organized Part of the Working Class

by George, Boston Communist Study Group  
10-10-95

**Note:**

The following is an investigative report produced by a member of the Boston Communist Study Group. This study group was formed after the dissolution of the Marxist Leninist Party by former members and supporters of that organization in the Boston area to continue the investigation and discussion changes in the world economy and political systems and class structures that have given rise to the crisis of revolutionary theory. The present work is part of a continuation of a study of changes in the class structure in the US that was originally published in the Workers Advocate Supplement of March 20, 1993. At this time we are also posting a paper beginning a review of the historical theoretical literature on white collar specifically managerial/professional strata. [See CWVTJ #9 and #10 -- ed.]

We hope that this material is of some help to those trying to figure out the changes in the world and their implications for revolutionary theory. We would appreciate any comments by those examining the same issues. Please write us at: pt1947@llbean.ultranet.com

Sincerely, Peter Tabolt, 10-10-95.

This article is a sketch of one segment of the working class, health care service workers, through some statistics and some descriptions of their trade union organization.

This study did not begin as a well defined project and is still in a stage of figuring out exactly what questions to ask to understand the direction of development of the class. One thing is clear: the section of the working class

that is employed in large manufacturing operations is declining and has been for some time. As well, the numbers of workers employed in all manufacturing operations is also declining relative to the class as a whole.

The following table comparing numbers of manufacturing workers with numbers of non-farm workers and numbers of private non-farm workers gives some idea of the relative decline.

(figures are from Handbook of Labor Statistics, Table 153 and Employment, hours and Earnings, U.S. 1909-90 volume 1.)

(numbers are in thousands)

YEAR	MNFACT	%		%	
		M/NF	NN-FRM	M/PNF	PTNN-FRM
1920	8652	32	27340	35	24737
1925	8061	28	28766	31	25966
1930	7464	25	29409	28	26261
1935	7374	27	27039	31	23558
1940	8940	28	32361	32	28159
1945	13009	32	40374	38	34431
1950	12523	28	45197	32	39170
1955	13288	26	50641	30	43727
1960	12586	23	54189	27	45836
1965	13434	22	60765	27	50689
1970	14044	20	70880	24	58325
1975	13043	17	76945	21	62259
1980	14214	16	90406	19	74166
1985	13092	13	97519	16	81125
1989	13257	12	108413	15	90644

With the industrial army shrinking, questions of how the working class organizes political movements to deal with its oppression and exploitation by the capitalist class have different answers than they did when we were organizing in appliance plants and auto plants of tens of thousands of workers on the assembly lines. Granted, all the workers were not on identical jobs on one assembly line. There were assemblers, machine operators, repairman, etc., but their common relationship to the small percent of the population that owned and controlled General Electric, Chrysler, Phillip Morris, seen through layers of foreman and managers was fairly easily perceived by everyone that punched a time clock. What should be done about that relationship was a subject of fairly common speculation, analysis, and debate and was tested in economic and political struggles.

The industrial trade union campaigns of the 1930s showed some of the power of the industrial workers united to struggle over the right to have their organization at the workplace, their wages, and conditions of labor. The San Francisco General Strike and the Sit-down Strikes in Auto are a couple of well known examples of the working class in industrial areas uniting in collective struggle against the representatives of the capitalist class.

It is also well known that the trade union organizations that drew in the workers and led them against the capitalists were led by people who were generally united around the politics of shaking up American capitalism in order to save it.

Those leaders, by and large, accepted a temporary alliance with the communists and the trade unions the communists had organized in order to use their energy, their organization, and their prestige in the class in the fights taking place with the capitalists. Those leaders also understood that they would have to block off the revolutionary currents in the movement.

In the 40s and 50s through Taft-Hartley restrictions on trade unions, expulsion of "red" unions from the CIO, McCarthy hearings to publicly denounce communists, the pro-capitalist trade unionists united with the capitalists to win the fight over whether or not the workers should have the option to take a revolutionary direction. The workers lost.

The workers who had fought pitched battles to build their organization in the 30s and 40s were roped off on the side lines during the political battles of the 60s and 70s. There were workers involved in the anti-racist struggles and in the opposition to the war in Vietnam but more by way of exception, contrasted to the bulk of the working class.

One can speculate as to the effect if the workers had

been called out, as they were in the 2 labor day demonstrations in Washington D.C. in the 1980s, or if there had existed a revolutionary opposition in the working class strong enough to call the industrial workers into action over the heads of the official leaders and the working class had joined or supported en mass the 1968 Chicago and Washington demonstrations or the anti-racist strikes of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement in 1969 and 70. But the speculation would only be nostalgic day dreaming for not only have those movements past but so has the large organization of industrial workers with such a large weight in the class overall.

There are millions of workers in the U.S. who will one day again organize against the capitalists. It is important to look at the new make-up of the working class and how different sections come into struggle to have some idea how the political fight with capital might develop.

The section of the working class in the broad category of service workers (which, in some tables, may cover anyone from a bank loan officer to a sweeper, from a technician to a bookkeeper) is more diverse than the section of the class in the category of manufacturing workers. One of the questions to be asked is: What is the revolutionary potential of this growing section of the class.

This article is a collection of various statistics, anecdotes of economic conditions, descriptions of strikes, which has the thread of describing various aspects of service workers. The article looks mainly at the economic side of things because there are a lot more statistics and descriptions of union elections, strikes, hourly wages than there are of political marches, rallies, leaflets distributed, etc. The article does examine sections of workers in motion, organized in the name of defending and advancing their interests.

This material looks at workers employed in hospitals in the health care industry. Sources will be noted in abbreviated fashion as they are used and listed as references at the end of the article.

The following material is included:

- I. Some statistics on health care workers
- II. Organizing in the NYC area
- III. Organizing in the Southeast
- IV. Some factors in organizing
- V. Some features of nurses organizing

## I. SOME STATISTICS

STRIKES: HEALTHCARE RANKS FOURTH IN STRIKE COUNT  
(from *Modern Healthcare*, 12/3/90)

<u>Industry</u>	<u>Number of work stoppages</u>	<u>Percent of total work stoppages</u>
Manufacturing	405	59
Retail	102	15
Construction	56	8
Healthcare	42	6
State/local gvrnmt.	34	5
Transportation	12	2
Food	11	2
Utilities	6	<1
Communications	5	<1
Maritime	5	<1
Mining	3	<1
Petroleum chemical	2	<1
Other	2	<1

HEALTHCARE STRIKES FISCAL 1985 THROUGH FISCAL 1990  
(*Modern Healthcare* 12/3/90) \*(added to original)

<u>State</u>	<u>Number of strikes</u>	<u>(Area)*</u>
California	35	(WstCst)
New York	34	(NrhEst)
Pennsylvania	29	(NrhEst)
Ohio	15	(MidWst)
Michigan	12	(MidWst)
Connecticut	11	(NwEngd)
Massachusetts	10	(NwEngd)
Minnesota	10	(NrhCtrl)
Rhode Island	8	(NwEngd)
Oregon	7	(WstCst)
West Virginia	5	(UprSth)
Illinois	4	(Centrl)
Indiana	4	(MidWst)
New Jersey	4	(NrhEst)
Iowa	3	(Centrl)
Kentucky	3	(UprSth)
Alabama	2	(SthEst)
District of Columbia	2	(Ct1ECst)
Hawaii	2	(Hawaii)
Missouri	2	(Centrl)
Washington	2	(WstCst)
Maryland	1	(Ct1ECst)
New Mexico	1	(SthWst)
Texas	1	(SthCtl)

(table from the xerox on labor movement. table 4.3: unionization in hospitals in Selected US Cities, September 1978)

PERCENT OF WORKERS IN HOSPITALS WITH MAJORITY COVERED BY CONTRACTS  
 professional nonprofessional  
 & technical

Area	Private	State/Local	Private	State/Local
<b>Northeast</b>				
Boston	5-9	80-84	-	95+
New York	5-9	95+	40-44	70-74
<b>South</b>				
Atlanta	-	-	10-14	-
Dallas/ Ft. Worth	-	-	-	-
Miami	-	95+	-	90-94
<b>North Central</b>				
Chicago	0-4	95+	35-39	95+
Minneapolis	90-94	50-54	80-84	60-64
St. Louis	0-4	85-89	0-4	85-89
<b>West</b>				
Denver	-	-	-	-
San Francisco	55-59	70-74	80-84	70-79
Seattle	65-69	95+	15-19	95+

SOME UNIONS RANKED BY AVERAGE LENGTH OF REPORTED WORK STOPPAGE  
 (Modern Healthcare 12/1/89)

Union	Average length of strike (days)	Average days worked w/o contract	Average # in struck brgn unit	number of strikes
Untd Food and Cmmrcl Workers Union	85.2	27.0	59	6
Intl Brotherhood of Teamsters	81.0	52.7	126	5
Untd Steelworkers of America	46.2	6.8	366	6
United Auto Workers	39.8	97.0	69	6
Ntnl Union Hsptl & Hlthcr Emplys	39.4	21.0	196	38

Srvs Employees				
Intl union	28.8	47.1	468	35
Nurses unions	25.9	36.9	317	38

PERCENT OF HOSPITALS WITH ONE OR MORE UNION CONTRACT  
 "Unionism in Hospitals, 1961-76"  
 (taken from xerox LABOUR MOVEMENT)

year	Total	Federal	State/Local	Nonprofit	Profit
1961	3.0	.0	1.0	4.3	4.3
1967	7.7	22.6	5.3	8.2	4.9
1970	14.7	52.0	14.1	12.4	8.0
1973	16.8	63.2	16.6	13.9	8.0
1976	23.1	80.7	22.4	19.7	10.8

Hospital service workers' organizations are concentrated in the northeast, midwest, and west coast areas where there is a relatively high level of AFL-CIO organization. This concentration exists partly because some hospital organizing took place in the 1930's upsurge, SEIU in the San Francisco Bay area, for example. And partly it reflects the fact that connections to the section left activists that was a remnant of the 30's upsurge was a major force in getting the hospital organizing drives going and hence the movement emerged where the left and left traditions were strongest.

In part, hospital organization is concentrated in "old, established union areas" because great amounts of material and political support from outside the particular workplace is usually needed. According to accounts in the NEW NIGHTINGALES (see sources) of SEIU organizing, the union relies heavily on the workers friends or family having experience in trade unions.

## II. ORGANIZING IN THE NYC AREA

The organizing of the hospital workers in the NYC area, and later in the Philadelphia area, in the campaigns of 1199 (National Union of Hospital and Health Care Workers) as described in the book: UPHEAVAL IN THE QUIET ZONE, brings to mind the labor organizing of the 1930's. Beginning in the late 1950s, 1199 organized large numbers of hospital workers in low strata, low paying jobs in large public rowdy campaigns.

In 1959, 3,500 workers from seven hospitals in New York City staged a 46 day strike involving the lower mass of workers. The kitchen and laundry staffs "became bulwarks of 1199's organizing drive" (Upheaval, p 33).

These were the workers making \$32 for a 44 hour, six day week (72 cents an hour). Some worked eleven hour split shifts covering 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM. In the 1959 strike 600 workers applied for public assistance, and once on the rolls they had more income than they had while working.

The strike involved a coalition of workers organized by departments. "...union was weak in white collar and pink collar while...overwhelming support in housekeeping, food service, traffic and safety...the large emergency division tended to split along racial and occupational lines...the engineering (maintenance) department was pro union." (upheaval p. 34)

At Beth David hospital there were about 100 black and 100 hispanic strikers with some white service workers out also. They had daily picket duty - walk two hours, rest two hours. 90% of the non-professional staff walked out. Over the city, technicians generally ignored appeals to join the strike. The 20 Mt. Sinai social workers who walked out were a rare exception among white collar workers.

From hospital to hospital, dietary, laundry, housekeeping were solidly behind the strike. The nursing auxiliary staff, despite some racial division, was also generally strong. The engineering (maintenance) workers were less predictable. Mt. Sinai unlicensed engineers gave support to the strike while the Beth Israel engineering department negotiated a separate contract.

The strike ended in a standoff. On the main strike issue - official recognition of the union - hospital management won; there was no official recognition. On the issue of various grievances and grievance procedure, the union won an opening. There was some sort of complaint procedure set up which had, at some level of the process,

appeal to a board outside the hospital. This enabled the union to insert itself, in departments where 1199 had developed some strength, into the complaint process as a de facto representative of the workers.

Following the strike the union mounted a strong campaign, adding 10 organizers to the staff assembled during the strike. They maintained the local strike offices that were in existence and set up new branch offices throughout the city staffed by union organizers. There was a continuous flow of union newspapers and leaflets linking workplace issues to civil rights movement issues, etc. Arbitration awards from the grievance process were played up so that everyone would hear about the "union victory". Lower level managers (foreman, etc.) in the stronger union departments had to recognize the unions influence, if they wanted the department to get work done, regardless of "official status". This campaign continued for months so that by the end of a year 1199 could ask for and get changes in the grievance process in the unions favor.

Outside the workplace 1199 maintained a widespread net of services. They handled housing, credit, legal, and welfare problems. 1199 sponsored dances, lectures, and theatrical performances. They organized the workers into political demonstrations, in the 1960's staging sympathy demonstrations with sit-ins in the south. The union paid considerable attention to New York City and New York State politics including striking in 1962 to force governor Rockefeller to support labor law revision in New York. 1199 agreed to end the strike in return for a pledge to introduce and push for legislation granting hospital workers collective bargaining rights. The legislation was enacted a year later, restricted to workers in the NYC area.

By the end of the decade 1199 had quadrupled its membership, including a number of new members who were professional and technical workers (lab techs, social workers, therapists, clerical workers) 1199 had organized in a separate sub-section (guild) of the union. Ratified by the membership in 1964 as part of a new union constitution, the Guild of Professional, Technical, Office, and Clerical Hospital Employees would, like the drug and hospital divisions, keep its own records, collect its own dues, and create its own delegate assembly (Upheaval p. 117). This was aimed at curing "...the union's failure to engage professional hospital workers (which) had been one of its 'biggest weaknesses' in the 1959 strike..."(Upheaval p. 116)

Special literature was produced for guild organizing campaigns. Issues included "...fair job classification system based upon educational experience, salaries in line

with responsibilities, educational opportunities for advancement made available through tuition-aid programs financed by the hospitals, and licensing legislation." (Upheaval p. 117) Guild organizing proceeded slowly and mostly at institutions where 1199 already represented the service and maintenance workers. By the end of the 1960's the union had a strong presence in the New York area, organizing druggists, hospital service workers, and professional and technical workers.

### Community support

Organizing this large number of hospital workers into a union required not only great effort and sacrifice on the part of the workers, but also a large amount of support for the strike from outside their organization.

The strikes of 1199, in one statement of a civil rights spokesman, had the advantage of: "a strong community movement among Negro and Puerto Rican leaders. This is the first time they have worked as closely together... The fight of the hospital workers is symbolic of all the problems of the minority groups in the city and has become the focal point around which they are rallying." (Upheaval p. 113) 1199 organizing in NYC was a combination of (1) concentrating on hospitals where there was an active core of workers, (2) having support of AFL-CIO unions, and (3) making the strike a big public issue - an issue of social and economic rights of the predominately black and hispanic hospital workers.

In some ways the 1199 organizing of the 1960's resembles the organizing of the unskilled factory workers in the mid 1930's in that these workers are a section that can economically be easily replaced and seem to require social and political support to get organized and need political/social movements to continue to grow. Many of the service workers in this section of the class have "the most to gain" from improving their wages and working conditions and "the most to lose" because of immigrant status or racial or sex discrimination which meant the job they are risking is one of the few open to them.

Some of the political support came from bourgeois circles "...the moral sympathies and sense of fair play of those who helped shape public opinion." (Upheaval p. 37) They enlisted the support of columnist James Wechsler of the New York Post and editors of the New York Times, the New York Amsterdam News, and El Diario for a campaign that was conducted "like a crusade ... good versus evil." (Upheaval p. 38)

Prominent public figures like Eleanor Roosevelt spoke out. In her syndicated column "My Day" Mrs. Roosevelt commented on the severe hardship faced by hospital

workers, and wrote to hospital administrators asking for some accommodation with the workers.

New York's organized labor also responded to 1199's call for help. In particular, Harry Van Arsdale, Jr., president of New York's Central Labor Council, offered "a most welcome cloak of respectability" for the hospital strikers. (Upheaval, p. 73) Overriding the reluctance of some trade unionists to accept the legitimacy of unionism in the non-profit health sector, and "setting aside 1199's maverick past", Van Arsdale publicly placed the Council's seal of approval on the (1957) Montefiore campaign. Faced with growing criticism by civil rights groups as to the racist policies of many AFL-CIO affiliates, Van Arsdale "seized on the hospital drive as a dramatic test of organized labor's good intentions with regard to the city's rapidly expanding nonwhite working population." (Upheaval p. 73) That is, as a chance to improve the craft unions rotten and deserved racist reputation in the face of an anti-racist upsurge.

In the 1959 strike the AFL-CIO unions were mobilized to give considerable support. 1199 had active support of the NYC AFL-CIO Central Labor Council, ILGWU, Jewelry Workers Union, District 65 Wholesale and Warehouse Workers Union, and IBEW. Local 3 IBEW gave \$28,000 in contribution and \$50,000 in loan. Construction unions walked off site at three affected hospitals. IBEW members were assessed \$1/week for the strikers. (Upheaval p.74)

For the trade union leaders who thought J. Edgar Hoover (FBI) was the AFL-CIO Sergeant-At-Arms, 1199 was given an official "Seal of Approval". Early in the strike Van Arsdale, at an emergency meeting of CLC representatives on the steps of city hall, told associates he had received private disavowal of communist ties by Leon Davis (of 1199) and announced "the issue is now closed". At a May 21 meeting of 300 CLC delegates Davis said, "the union is not communist controlled, and I, personally, am not an issue in this strike." (Upheaval, p. 76)

Even George (never-walked-a-picket-line) Meany, AFL-CIO president, gave national endorsement of the hospital strike. Shortly after Meany's statement, Victor Riesel, an anti-communist labor columnist, called the 1199 office to ask: "what have you got against me? How come you give everybody material but me? I'd like to help." (Upheaval, p.77)

Mike Quill of the Transit Workers Union gave endorsement of the strike and attacked the hospital trustees as being worse than Governor Faubus (Arkansas governor opposing school integration in Little Rock) in their treatment of blacks. The statements of Van Arsdale, Meany, Quill were making it clear to even the dullest trade

union hack that this was a time to forget "better dead than red", put racism in the closet, and come out and sing **SOLIDARITY FOREVER**. A total of 175 union locals officially voted aid to hospital workers. About \$110,000 of the \$123,000 (in 1959 dollars) received by 1199 came from unions and union members.

The examples of support listed above are in no way intended to give an impression that somehow the strike was "bought and paid for" by the AFL-CIO. What was extraordinary was that the AFL-CIO did not strangle it because the leaders weren't politically conservative, did not pick it apart as individual unions fought for jurisdiction, but instead gave the strike considerable unified support and thus allowed the tremendous energy and sacrifice of the workers to carry on a strong battle and emerge with their organization intact to carry on the struggle.

It is more than likely that the political trends coming up around the emerging anti-racist movement had a lot to do with the strength of the strike and its extraordinary support. From the side of negative pressure the anti-racist movement must have had a lot to do with the AFL-CIO (minding its working class manners) supporting a strike of lower strata, unskilled, many black, many Spanish speaking workers.

From the side of positive pressure, the anti-racist movement no doubt added depth to the issues of respect and dignity that are already present as workers organize. As noted earlier there was an organized political movement in the communities the workers lived in, whose leaders wished to support or could not afford to ignore the hospital workers struggle. Representative Adam Clayton Powell led 200 church members to walk picket lines at Mt. Sinai. Delegations from NAACP, Federation of Hispanic American Societies, and Urban League marched together at Bronx and Brooklyn Jewish Hospitals. Bayard Rustin, "key lieutenant to both A. Phillip Randolph and Martin Luther King, Jr., worked tirelessly to coordinate community support for the strikers." (Upheaval, p. 79)

The organizing- strike movement carried on for a decade in New York City tapped a deep current in the working class. They were able to carry on in the face of state-employer opposition and attacks common to most workers' strikes. As well, they faced opposition particular to workers in a public service. "1199 walked a fine political line on (the issue of halting production)..., insisting that the strike made quality patient care intolerable while at the same time taking pains not to hurt anyone." (Upheaval, p. 71) Some Beth Israel strikers set up a telephone hotline to render assistance in case of emergency. Each hospital counted on this issue of patient welfare to pull overtime effort from nursing and adminis-

trative staff and call on a unique "reserve army of labor" in the form of spouses of house staff, relatives of patients, and volunteers from girl scouts and public schools.

### III. ORGANIZING IN THE SOUTHEAST (SOUTH CAROLINA)

The experience of the hospital workers in NYC was not that of workers in some other parts of the country. In South Carolina, ten years after the 1959 strike in New York, there was a strike at two hospitals in Charleston. The commitment and determination of the workers was no doubt equal in both areas. Almost everything else about the two struggles was different.

The strike lasted from March 20 to June 27, 1969. Two hospitals were struck by hundreds of licensed practical nurses and nonprofessional hospital workers. The registered nurse, all white, opposed the strike in the main. The strikers all were black and nearly all were women. The workers had sought 1199 protection for a strike in Charleston (with its anti-union reputation — South Carolina had the lowest rate of unionization for manufacturing workers in the US.)

Led by Ralph Abernathy, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) joined with 1199 in the three month strike. SCLC was working to build a base in an area where it had serious competition - "a black elite" of ministers, contractors, realtors, and funeral home directors which had accommodated itself to the situation in Charleston and viewed SCLC marches as an intrusion. (Upheaval, p. 134)

In 1963, Charleston did have lunch-counter sit-ins, mass demonstrations, and night rallies which resulted in a non-discriminatory agreement with the city's main stores. In 1964, the NAACP won a suit for (slow) school integration. So it can't be said that Charleston was totally isolated from the political currents moving in the rest of the country, but it was an area where more open reactionary politics were the norm.

The strikers had two demands: (1) rehire 12 fired workers and (2) recognize the union. It was battle from the outset - a temporary injunction was issued banning all picketing. This was amended; picketing was allowed but the number of pickets was limited to ten and they had to be spaced TWENTY YARDS APART! (Upheaval, p. 137) While in 1959 in NYC, the local labor council had felt pressure to show some labor solidarity, in Charleston they did not. The white dominated South Carolina AFL-CIO effectively turned its back on the strike.

Throughout the strike the union was unable to, received no support in local political circles as it had in New

York. The governor took a hard line stand saying that no agency of the state could be involved with a union. To oppose the strikers there was a deployment of city police, added to by agents from the State Law Enforcement Division, and finally, the national guard. During the strike there were over 1,000 arrests.

In some ways the strike was an SCLC experiment. "The Charleston strike, coming a year after King's assassination during the Memphis sanitation workers strike, offered the SCLC the chance to renew its purpose and strength." (Upheaval, p. 139) As the SCLC had no base in Charleston, the strike did not have the unified support seen in the example of the 1959 NYC strike. Instead, SCLC faced resistance from ministers, businessmen, and other black leaders who were trying to find their own resolution to the strike.

Toward the end of April, 1199 and SCLC began a campaign of mass marches. After 10 marches in 6 days the Governor declared martial law. On May 10, Ralph Abernathy, Coretta Scott King, and Walter Reuther (UAW) led a Mothers Day march of 10,000. Along with the national attention there was federal intervention which brought an end to the strike. There was agreement to rehire the 12 fired workers, set up some sort of grievance procedure, and a possibility of dues checkoff through the credit union. This agreement looks similar to that of the 1959 "truce" in which the union didn't win, but wasn't crushed either, staying "on its feet" to fight another day. However, the two situations were much more different than alike. The organizing campaign that was carried on in NYC was not carried on in Charleston. The workers' organization withered under persistent attack. In an officer's report to an 1199 convention (upheaval, p. 151) this process is described in terms of a local in Toumey, S.C. which won an NLRB election in 1980, and negotiated a contract in 1981. When that contract expired, management proposed to remove both the arbitration-of-grievances clause and the dues checkoff. They also subcontracted out the housekeeping department, where the union had over 95% membership, and threatened to do the same with the dietary department.

Before the next contract expired in June, 1984 the hospital laid off 16 nurses aides, 14 of them black union members, and replaced them with white LPNs who had been told not to join "the Black Union". Other black union members were replaced with part-time white workers. A one year contract was signed in September, 1984 that called for a meager 2% raise for most workers. On October 5 the hospital laid off 53 nurses aides, most of whom were union members.

In four years the size of the bargaining unit had

dropped from 26 workers to 300 workers and union membership was down to less than 70 voluntary dues payers. In January, 1985 the hospital filed a decertification petition and by March the last 30 duespayers voted unanimously to officially disavow their representation by the union. In April, 1985 the hospital hired back many of the aides it had previously laid off - with a \$2.00 per hour wage cut leaving them earning \$3.35 per hour.

In Charleston, SC the strategy of organizing a base of minority workers and building a campaign around that core (which 1199 characterized as "union power - soul power") slammed square into the political structure in South Carolina - much the same as the AFSCME campaign organizing sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee a year earlier.

In NYC and the northeast after the 1930's there was a certain incorporation of the "respectable" labor movement into local bourgeois politics (generally in the Democrat party) and a certain allowance of workers political (mainly voting) rights. This did not extend to areas of the country such as the Dixiecrat South. The labor upsurge of the 1930s might just as well have happened on the moon as far as Charleston and Memphis were concerned.

The "marriage" of 1199 and SCLC faced a choice: they had won a foothold in the hospitals in Charleston, much as 1199 had won a foothold in NYC in 1959. With that opening they could mount a campaign, with workers in the area taking notice of the organizing, and draw in those anxious to fight. But to do that, in the face of the reaction encountered in Charleston (as in the Memphis campaign in which Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated), would require building, unleashing a revolutionary movement that would join the anti-racist/anti-Jim Crow movement with an economic movement of workers in the south.

The motion in Charleston is an indication that the workers may well have been ready. From the reaction of the bourgeoisie it is clear they would stop at nothing to suppress such a movement. Neither SCLC nor 1199 was ready to take such a path, the 60's had not produced a revolutionary trend and organization ready to organize for such a struggle either. As a result the movement quickly subsided.

#### IV. SOME FAVORABLE/UNFAVORABLE FACTORS IN ORGANIZING

With the rapid growth of the health service industry in the 1960's there was a surge in organizing hospital service workers. There was, in some areas, some amount of latitude in contract negotiation (after the union's existence

was accepted) in that hospital management could draw on government programs to pay for wage increases. In the 1970's, with the spread of "cost containment" hospitals were more restricted in their ability to pass along the costs of contract settlements. As well the general political and social movements of the 60's waned and with them the conducive atmosphere and support for hospital workers economic struggles.

Also in the 1970s, the Taft Hartley Act was amended to include large numbers of hospital workers (being able to use the NLRB). But it was amended in such a way as to actually impose more restrictions on the workers. The hospitals were able to use the regulations to delay elections and union recognition for years (usually killing the organizing drive). One of the things in management's favor was the NLRB ruling on what constituted a bargaining unit. The ruling, at that time, set up three employee groups for union representation: all professional employees, all non-professional employees, security guards. In the late 1980's the NLRB proposed changing their ruling to set up eight categories: all registered nurses, all physicians, all professionals except for registered nurses and physicians, all technical employees, all skilled maintenance employees, all business office clerical employees, all security guards, all other non-professional employees. (Modern Healthcare, Sept. 30, 1988). After being proposed there was a tug-of-war over the proposed changes that went on for years.

As much as I can tell, the issue of size of the bargaining unit is important because unions generally go into hospitals when called by workers already organizing and the "hotspots" are usually in certain small areas. The longer the time between a struggle coming into the open and a formal contest (election or strike) the more pressure the management can put on the workers to suppress those initially in motion and discourage others from joining with them.

Another obstacle that came up with the amended Taft-Hartley was the competition among various unions fighting over the same hospital workers, providing management with more excuses for delays and transforming pro-union majorities into 2 or 3 pluralities. (Upheaval, p. 172)

During 1199's early years of organizing hospital workers, union leaders had frequently looked to government and found an ally of sorts. They viewed revision of New York State's labor law, in 1963, as a positive turning point. They were not as fortunate with the changes in federal labor law in 1974. Similarly, whereas in 1968 in New York, the union had benefited from intervention by city and state officials, during the 1970's public officials at

both the federal and state levels began to respond to the "skyrocketing costs of health care." Government attempts to control price increases in the health care industry frequently began with efforts to curtail wage increases. The union found itself operating in a more competitive and combative environment. As a result, 1199's progress slowed considerably in the late 1970's. While between 1968 and 1974 union membership increased by 128%, by 1980 there was a gain of only 25%. (Upheaval, p. 167) Competition with other unions for members, which had been of little significance in 1199's early years (after some agreements dividing public and non-profit hospitals), became a second factor complicating the union's ability to organize in the late 70's.

The financial restraints imposed on hospitals by government guidelines created an incentive for the hospitals to cut back on staff. Whereas in NYC in 1975 there were 112 community hospitals with 141,277 full-time workers, by 1980 the number of hospitals declined to 82 and those employed to 134,172.

According to a nationwide hospital wage survey conducted by Vanderbilt University personnel department, real wages reached a peak in 1972-73 but generally declined over the entire period from 1970-77 (Hospital Labor Market Analysis quoted in Upheaval, pl. 177)

## V. SOME ISSUES FACING NURSES

Hospital nurses have been organized into professional organizations for a longer time than unskilled workers in hospitals have been organized into unions. With the union upsurge beginning in the 60s, and cost containment in the 70s, there was growing pressure for nurses to go past the bounds of professional status and to organize as a union with strikes and etc. just as other hospital workers had done in the 60's. In 1968, the American Nurses Association rescinded its no strike policy. In 1970 the convention recommended support of other health care organizations. In 1977, 1199 added a League of Registered Nurses division to its existing hospital workers divisions.

Professional nurses, according to one hospital personnel expert (Hospital Management) had become the primary target of union organizing in the health care industry by 1980. (The climate being too restrictive for the unskilled and semiskilled to get very far in organizing.) A nationwide shortage of RNs and changes in the hospital workplace put increased job pressure on nurses and made them more receptive to unions. While the "high tech" medicine of the 1970's was making college educated skilled nurses more valuable, the combination of increases in work load resulting from cost containment drives and

labor shortages made nurses more interested in "labor" organization.

During the last 30 years there has been changes in how RNs were utilized. In the 1960s, RNs were often either a type of foreman or leadhand on their floor and LPNs and aides were employed to tend to the patients. By the late 1970's and early 80's, it was becoming the fashion to cutdown or eliminate the number of LPNs and aides and to increasingly use the RNs directly in patient care. In the 90s it may be shifting again.

The following material is taken from articles in Modern Healthcare gives some idea of the situation facing nurses currently.

"Most hospitals are playing around with their mix of professional and non-professional staff...Are some pushing the use of unlicensed assistant personnel to the maximum? No question." (6/21/93, p. 28)

"Perhaps a situation closer to what the ANA fears is occurring at the University of Illinois Hospital and clinics in Chicago. The hospital intends to eliminate 148 registered nurse FTEs (full time employees) and replace them with about the same number of LPNs, medical assistants, and nurse/operating room technicians." (6/21/93, p. 28)

"As nursing staffs have become more expensive...hospitals have been hiring additional technicians and assistants to perform non-nursing functions, ensuring that they're paying nurses strictly for nursing care. But the net effect on FTEs and labor costs is virtually nil, because what's saved by limiting nursing staffs is spent on adding technicians and assistants.." (6/21/93)

"You're seeing a lot of attrition involving nurses because of the shift from inpatient to outpatient services...outpatient care doesn't require the same intensity of care." (12/20-23/93)

(Describing the plans of one hospital) "During the course of the 18 month project, the hospital will cut its 1,500 member workforce by a net of 115 jobs, or nearly 8%. The project will eliminate 250 old jobs but will create 135 new ones as the hospital develops new patient care models. As part of the process, the hospital will scale back its 300 nursing positions by about 100 jobs. So far, 56 nurse positions have been eliminated as part of the 90 lost this year to attrition. Ultimately replacing the 100 nurses will be 135 new 'caregiver' positions. The jobs will have three titles: patient-care technicians, patient service associates and administrative associate. The new workers will perform many of the non-medical patient care tasks formerly assigned to nurses."(12/20-27/93)

This pressure on nurses may well result, as outlined above, in the splitting up of the work load into "strictly

nursing care”, professional positions having some supervisory role and “caregiver positions” subdividing the work into jobs requiring less formal education and paying lower wages. However, if the result is the hospital paying out the same amount as they limit nursing staff and add technical staff they may go back to the late 70’s trend of using nurses as all around skilled worker/ patient care giver. If the trend of division of labor continues the RN’s will tend to revert to their pre -60’s conservative professional/ semi managerial role, while the nursing assistants will add to the lower ranks of hospital workers. If the trend of using RN’s for all around patient care reasserts itself nurses will become more proletarian and more interested in organizing.

The following is a partial list of sources:

UPHEAVAL IN THE QUIET ZONE, Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1989

(also quoted in the above)

Frank A. Sloan and Bruce Steinwald, HOSPITAL LABOR MARKETS ANALYSIS OF WAGES AND WORK-FORCE COMPOSITION (Lexington, Mass:

D.C. Heath and Co. 1980)

OFFICERS REPORT TO THE SEVENTH CONVENTION OF NATIONAL UNION OF HOSPITAL AND HEALTH CARE EMPLOYEES (AFL-CIO) December 9-12, 1987.

WORKING LIVES, THE SOUTHERN EXPOSURE HISTORY OF LABOR IN THE SOUTH, edited by Marc S. Miller, Pantheon Books, 1980.

(several articles) by David Burda in MODERN HEALTHCARE (9/30/88,12/1/89,12/3/90, 6/21/93, 12/20-23/93, 12/20-27/93).

Sexton, Patricia Cayo, THE NEW NIGHTINGALES, New York Enquiry press, 1982.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND HEALTH SERVICES, edited by Amarjit Singh Sethi and Stuart J. Dimmock, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1982 (including) THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN HEALTH CARE: USA, C. Schoen

(also including) LEGISLATION GOVERNING HEALTH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS: USA T.C. Mckinney and M. Levine. ◇

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*Comments*, continued from page 50

Then there is the matter of the daily news. This year the economic statistics show that the rich are getting richer and everyone else is losing ground. If you pick up a newspaper these days, its hard to miss that real wages are declining and that white-collar jobs are also being eliminated. Regardless of what the capitalist fantasy is, proportionally more people are wage laborers and fewer are independent professional, entrepreneurs or owners.

Since Marxists have traditionally held that the industrial workers would lead the working class and Marxist-Leninists concentrated their organizing in factories, several questions naturally arise.

One question is whether service workers will replace manufacturing workers in importance. Regardless of which sector is decisive, the size of the service sectors makes organizing them imperative.

The Boston Branch of the MLP and the BCSG looked into the history of union organizing among hospital workers. It is summarized in George’s article below.

However, we could not publish this article without pointing out some of the problems in it and some of our disagreements with it:

First, the statistics presented by George need to be updated. The latest strike figures are from 1990.

Second, George poses: “...the questions of how the working class organizes political movements ... have different answers than they did when we were organizing in appliance plants and auto plants....” Here he is referring to the MLP’s workplace organizing and he is stating that the working class should organize differently. Unfortunately, he never gets back to explain what those answers are. It may be that the answers are implied in the two Boston articles (George’s and Peter Tabolt’s) -- and I do infer some conclusions (mostly wrong) from these articles -- but such important conclusions really have to be explained in detail and stated explicitly.

Third, there is the question of outside support for hospital workers’ struggles. While not explicitly saying so, and with or without the intention of the author, the article will likely give the reader the impression that 199’s union organizing was successful in New York but a failure in Charleston, South Carolina because in the North, they received support from local politicians and the labor bureaucracy. The danger in this is that if activists believe

that they cannot win without support from the established powers of the state and the trade union apparatus, they are likely to compromise their struggle in order to gain such support. The Staley struggle is a case in point (see CWVTJ #10 for Jack Hill's summation of the Staley fight). Today the trade union hacks and the Democrats don't support militancy, they oppose it. Staley and other locals not only faced the power of the capitalists, they had to contend with the union bureaucracy's attempt to strangle them. In the present situation, workers are usually faced with the ironic question of how to neutralize this opposition more than how to get support from the AFL-CIO. In any case, what the hacks will likely demand is that you don't hurt the capitalists. Workers that listen to them almost inevitably lose.

Several times George notes that hospital workers need outside support to win their fights. He compares their situation (correctly I believe) to that of the unskilled workers in the 1930's, workers easily replaced on the job.

Clearly with hospital workers, and perhaps with all workers today, winning a strike requires more than just the support of the workforce. This does not mean that struggles will live and die on the basis of support from establishment circles. There is the matter of the workers spreading their struggle and linking up with other people fighting oppression. For example, George shows that 1199's strength in the '60's was their all-sided organizing:

"Following the strike [where 1199 failed to get recognition but did get a foothold] the union mounted a strong campaign, adding 10 organizers to the staff assembled during the strike. They maintained the local strike offices.... There was a continuous flow of union newspapers and leaflets linking workplace issues to civil rights movement issues, etc. Arbitration awards from the grievance process were played up so that everyone would hear about the 'union victory'.

"Outside the workplace 1199 maintained a widespread net of services. They handled housing, credit, legal, and welfare problems. 1199 sponsored dances, lectures, and theatrical performances. They organized the workers into political demonstrations, in the 1960's staging sympathy demonstrations with sit-ins in the south. The union paid considerable attention to New York City and New York State politics including striking in 1962 to force governor Rockefeller to support labor law revision in New York..."

When 1199 lost, they didn't give up or rest on their partial victory, they accelerated their organizing and, very importantly, connected to the biggest mass movement of

the time, the civil rights movement, and organized workers to participate in that movement (though unfortunately not with revolutionary working class politics).

In South Carolina, however, the situation was very different. Compared to New York, both labor and the civil rights movement were weak. In New York, the union bureaucrats and some of the politicians could not afford the political price of withholding support to a strike of minority hospital workers. But in South Carolina, the higher price was levied on supporting black workers. Objectively, the situation was much more difficult for black workers in Charleston than in New York. Furthermore, the organizing drive in South Carolina was not as good as the one in New York, as George pointed out:

"The 'marriage' of 1199 and SCLC faced a choice: they had won a foothold in the hospitals in Charleston, much as 1199 had won a foothold in NYC in 1959. With that opening they could mount a campaign, with workers in the area taking notice of the organizing, and draw in those anxious to fight. But to do that, in the face of the reaction encountered in Charleston..., would require building, unleashing a revolutionary movement that would join the anti-racist/anti-Jim Crow movement with an economic movement of workers in the South.

"The motion in Charleston is an indication that the workers may well have been ready. From the reaction of the bourgeoisie it is clear they would stop at nothing to suppress such a movement. Neither SCLC nor 1199 was ready to take such a path, the 60's had not produced a revolutionary trend and organization ready to organize for such a struggle either. As a result the movement quickly subsided."

I agree with this statement and in particular I believe that the lack of revolutionary organization and consciousness was a fatal weakness in the Charleston struggle.

What's decisive for our class is not the capitalist union hacks or politicians but the organization and determination of our class. As Karl Marx said, the emancipation of the working class is an act of the working class itself. ◊