Forward

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Editors' Note

Forward solicits essays on politics, cultural critiques, book reviews, original poetry, short stories, expressions of opinion, and other articles of interest to the socialist movement. Manuscripts should be double-spaced, including footnotes of sources if needed, and submitted in duplicate. Feature-length essays generally should number no more than 25 pages. All manuscripts will be read. Unused manuscripts will be returned if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is included. Please submit material to *Forward*, P.O. Box 29293, Oakland, California 94604.

Forward

Contents

16 months. These two bitter, tough-fought strikes by workers of very different backgrounds are confronting many of the basic issues facing labor, and are among the most important labor struggles in years. One of these strikes, in Watsonville, California, is being conducted by 1,100 cannery workers, mainly Chicana and Mexicana women. The other, 1,500 miles away in Austin, Minnesota, is by the 800 meat packers of Local P-9 against the giant Hormel company. The strikes may very well foreshadow a new militancy in the working class and are providing vital lessons for the labor movement.

Leaders from both the Watsonville and Hormel struggles speak for themselves in the round-table discussions contained in this issue of *Forward*. Labor activists, socialists and all those concerned with working people should find many valuable insights in these two discussions.

This issue of *Forward* also contains an assessment of the left and the labor movement by an experienced trade unionist from New York City. Ed Ott, a former member of both the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Workers and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, offers perspectives on the tasks of activists in the trade unions today. We also have an interview with Roberto Flores, of the League of Revolutionary Struggle, on strategy and tactics for the labor movement and its relationship to the struggle for socialism.

Working people in the rural U.S. are having difficult times these days as well. Two farm activists from Minnesota — Mark Ritchie, a farm policy analyst for the state Agriculture Department, and Kevin Ristau, a field staff director for the League of Rural Voters — present their critique of current federal farm policy, a topic with which many progressives are not familiar. This article is also noteworthy for its effort to link the domestic farm crisis with U.S. foreign policy.

Our last major article is by Amiri Baraka on the personality and contributions of the jazz great Miles Davis. Davis has been a leading influence not only on musicians but artists in almost every field of creativity in the U.S.

This issue of *Forward* also has several book reviews,

Introduction

The labor movement in the U.S. is facing a critical period. That is something almost everyone — including most working people, trade union leaders, capitalists, business economists, the left and politicians — will agree upon. Trade unions are in their weakest state in 50 years. The number of workers in unions is down to approximately 17%, the lowest rate among industrialized nations. Employers are forcing workers to "give back" gains made over the last three decades. Union-busting is commonplace — from the federal government and the air traffic controllers (PATCO) to USX (US Steel) and the United Steelworkers union.

This situation has provoked widespread discussion about what working people should do. Many fundamental questions are being asked: What should organized labor do to revitalize itself? How can working people best defend themselves? How can employers' demands for concessions be fought?

These and other problems facing the labor movement are some of the questions addressed by articles in this issue of *Forward*.

Almost half of our issue is devoted to two extraordinary struggles which have taken place over the last


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Raza si

and poetry inspired by the Watsonville strikers. We welcome all comments.

In upcoming issues of *Forward*, we will be publishing essays on the Soviet Union, the experience of socialism in other countries, more on the working class and class structure of U.S. society, and further studies on the South and Southwest of the U.S., following up on William Gallegos' article on the significance of the "Sunbelt" in the U.S. today, which we carried in issue number five. We welcome contributions from our readers on these and other topics. We also encourage you to subscribe to *Forward* so you won't miss a single issue. Receive the next three issues by mail for only $12.00.

Anne Adams
Carl Davidson
Michael Lee

The workers of Watsonville and Hormel have already made history

The strikes by the workers of Watsonville Canning, in Watsonville, California, and Hormel, in Austin, Minnesota, have been among the most important in the labor movement in years. Both started out as responses to major "takeaways" demanded by the employers and have become outstanding examples of worker resistance, militancy and determination. They have also been models of labor solidarity, as they both have attracted widespread support from other workers, students, activists and others.

The following round-table discussions are the stories of the workers themselves. They discuss the effect the strikes have had on their lives and communities, the lessons they learned, their views toward their local and international unions, and some of their tactics. The interviews were both conducted in mid-October 1986 by supporters familiar to the strikers.

Each roundtable is fascinating reading in itself, but they are doubly interesting taken together. They describe many common experiences and conclusions about what they have learned about the labor movement, other people's struggles, and about their own strengths. The workers are among the most conscious and organized in

Hormel strikers show solidarity with Watsonville workers at International Women's Day program in Watsonville, California, March 1986.

the country today.

At the same time, the Watsonville and Hormel workers are from very different strata in the working class, different nationalities and social experiences. Their respective struggles also have their particularities. They have some interesting perspectives on organized labor, on their own identities and position in society, and their futures.

The workers in these two interviews speak with great eloquence. Whatever the eventual outcome of their strikes, the workers of Watsonville and Hormel have already made history.

— The Editors

Support for the Watsonville strikers should be sent to:

Local 912 Strikers' Committee
P.O. Box 1132
Castroville, California 95012

or

Teamsters Local 912
163 W. Lake Ave.
Watsonville, CA 95076

Support for the Hormel strikers should be sent to:

Austin United Support Group
P.O. Box 396
Austin, Minnesota 55912

Round-table discussion with the Watsonville workers

In summer 1985, Watsonville Canning Co. — the nation's largest frozen food processor — slashed the wages of its 1,100 workers, mostly Mexicana women, by up to 40%, demanded drastic reductions in health benefits and stopped deducting union dues from workers' paychecks. Richard Shaw Co., a competitor of Watsonville Canning, demanded similar cuts. On September 9, 1,750 workers were forced to strike.

The workers' union, Teamsters Local 912, was not prepared for the strike. One month into the strike, the workers themselves met, 500 strong, and elected a rank and file Strikers' Committee to handle the day-to-day conduct of the strike. Through the fall, they maintained picket lines on a daily basis, despite court injunctions so drastic that strikers living near the plants were arrested for standing on their front porches. The workers, few of whom had much in the way of savings when the strike began, had to feed their families and meet mounting legal expenses with $55-a-week strike benefits. But they received growing outside support, especially from the Chicano Movement.

In December, facing likely defeat in local union elections, the incumbent officers announced they were stepping down. The Strikers' Committee fielded a slate of candidates, which included Gloria Betancourt and Cha-

velo Moreno, and made a strong showing. Most offices were captured by another slate headed by Sergio Lopez, a business agent in the old administration. Lopez is the first Mexicano to hold the top office in this mainly Mexicano local.

In February 1986, after a heated debate, workers at Richard Shaw voted to accept a new contract cutting wages from $7.07 an hour to $5.85. The contract included a "me-too" clause which would renegotiate the wage package if Watsonville Canning settled for less or succeeded in breaking the union.

Despite some differences, the Strikers' Committee and the local union officials were able to work together on several projects, including a successful Women's Day program in March and a rally with Jesse Jackson in June, which brought 4,000 people to Watsonville. At the Teamsters International convention in May, Lopez and Chuck Mack of Teamsters Joint Council 7 succeeded in getting the International to mount an economic sanctions campaign against Watsonville Canning.

Summer 1986 saw a crucial test of the strikers' strength. Local 912 successfully petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to hold a certification vote on August 13 on Teamsters representation. Watsonville Canning owner Mort Console hired scabs on four-hour shifts to inflate the size of the "no-union" vote. But a major organizing effort by the Strikers' Committe brought a 90% turnout by the strikers, with some returning from as far as Texas and Mexico. Strikers were a clear majority of the 1,700 votes cast.

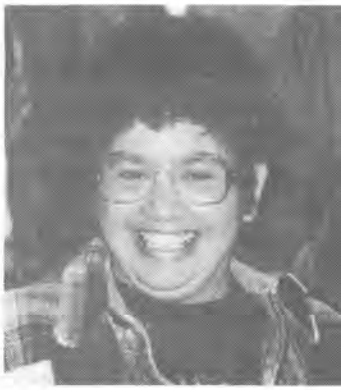
In September 1986, at the peak of the harvest season, Console closed the plant for 11 days amid talk of possible bankruptcy. A $930,000 personal loan from Wells Fargo Bank enabled him to resume production, but his debts are said to exceed $30 million. Wells Fargo, which extended Console an $18 million credit line five weeks before the strike began, now holds secured debts on all company equipment and assets, as well as personal property of the Console family. There is speculation that the bank may push for a buyout of the company by a growers' cooperative.

The strikers themselves are prepared for whatever may come. After over a year on strike, not one has broken ranks and returned to work.

The participants in the round-table discussion:

Gloria Betancourt: "I worked for 23 years for this company. I came to the United States in 1962. I was following my father, who had been here for 25 years. I settled in Watsonville. There are four children in my family, two girls and two boys. I've been fighting to maintain my family, to give them an education. It is more difficult for a single woman to maintain the family."

Lydia Lerma: "I was born in San Antonio, Texas, and came to California 37 years ago because they said they paid better here. I have worked at Watsonville Canning for 25 years. Once I got the job at the cannery, I thought I would be there until I retired. I thought I was going to be able to work there until I reached 55 years of age and I would be able to get my pension. But it didn't turn out that way."



Cuca Lomeli: "I immigrated to the United States in 1970. I stayed here two years, went back to Mexico, and then I came back to the U.S. in 1980 and I began to work at the cannery. I continued to work until we went out on strike."

Chavelo Moreno: "I came for the first time from Mexico in 1958. I went back to Mexico and came back and settled in Watsonville in 1962. I worked for 22 years at Watsonville Canning until September of last year when we went out on strike."

Socorro Murillo: "I have been in the U.S. for nine years, eight of them at Watsonville Canning. I came from Mexico with the hope of giving a better future to my children. Until when we went out on strike, the wages were more or less good and I was able to maintain my family. But now that we have gone on strike it has become very hard. We cannot make ends meet now. I am fighting because of all of the years I have put into the plant, because of the bad treatment we received. Every day they would demand more work from us. They would push us to work harder. That is why I am fighting with such strength."

The interviewer is **Óscar Ríos**, strike supporter and longtime activist in the Chicano/Latino movement. The interview was conducted in Spanish and translated by *Forward*.

Watsonville roundtable

Óscar: What has made you fight so hard in the strike?

Chavelo: One of the things is the injustice being done by Mort Console against us. Because it is not just, what they do to us. After we saw them grow and prosper and they became rich, when they made their fortune they threw us out. And that is not just. We earned those wages and we deserve them. We cannot let them take them away from us because then we are going to suffer and our fellow workers here and in other cities will suffer as well as their children. And if we give in they will hurt all of us.

Lydia: If we don't continue to fight and if they don't pay us what we want, then other canneries will not continue to pay what the workers are getting right now. Rather they will pay what Watsonville pays. And if we accept the $5.05 Watsonville is offering, then all the canneries will want to pay the same. It doesn't matter that they have a contract. The contracts that they have right now are open contracts and can be changed if we accept the offer at Watsonville.

Socorro: I can see that it is our right to defend our jobs and the labor that we give to the rich. How is it possible that we can be sacrificing ourselves, while the rich get richer? That is why we are fighting.

Cuca: Anger has given me the strength to continue in the strike. The strike has shown us a lot of things. In the political area we have also developed a lot, because in this area the politicians had a lot to do with the issue. It has shown me how to defend my rights against the boss and to fight for what is just. That is why I keep on in the battle.

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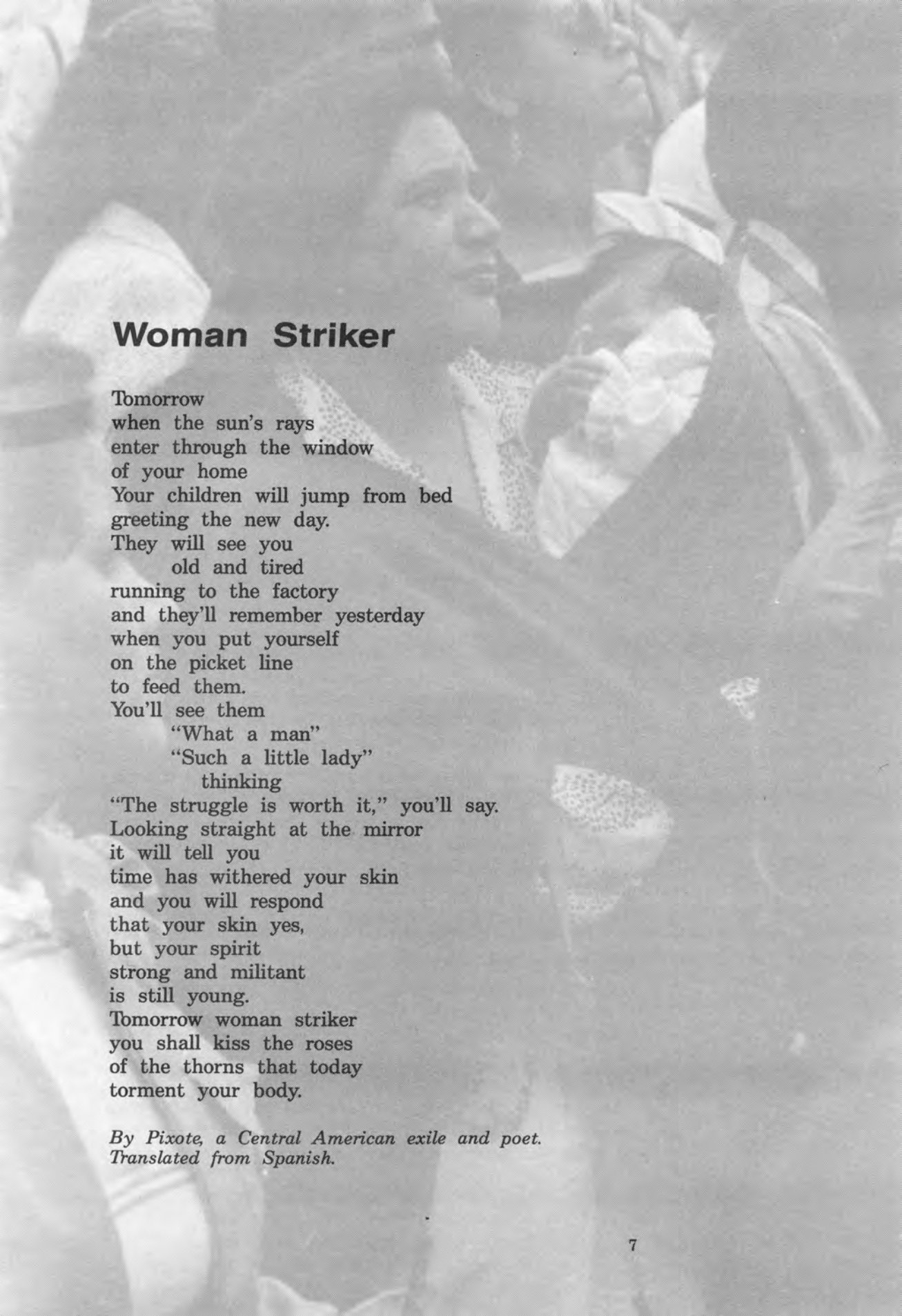


Woman Striker

Tomorrow
when the sun's rays
enter through the window
of your home
Your children will jump from bed
greeting the new day.
They will see you
old and tired
running to the factory
and they'll remember yesterday
when you put yourself
on the picket line
to feed them.
You'll see them
"What a man"
"Such a little lady"
thinking
"The struggle is worth it," you'll say.
Looking straight at the mirror
it will tell you
time has withered your skin
and you will respond
that your skin yes,
but your spirit
strong and militant
is still young.
Tomorrow woman striker
you shall kiss the roses
of the thorns that today
torment your body.

By Pixote, a Central American exile and poet.
Translated from Spanish.

Strikers' Committee leading march through Watsonville, November 1985.

Óscar: Could you explain what has been the impact of the strike on your fellow strikers? On your family and the town?

Gloria: It has had a hard impact because not having a wage has forced many people to leave their homes, to sell their properties and leave their friends, to try and find other jobs. They have been rejected by other companies because they have found out they are strikers. They have not had the right to receive benefits, nor unemployment nor government benefits, so it has been very hard in that sense. In terms of our families, I think that they will not be able to forget this year because they have been accustomed to have everything that were basic needs. And because of the strike they have seen the change. We cannot buy them clothes when they need it, nor books they need for certain classes. One of my daughters was taking classes in Salinas. She was taking classes in cosmetology. But she had to leave them because I could not give her the money to take the bus every day and other expenses.

Socorro: The strike has depressed us very much. It has left people on the streets, like myself. I have lost my home. Some days I live with one daughter, another week I live with another daughter. Things in Watsonville are not normal. Up to now over a hundred people have left Watsonville because of the strike. Many have moved to nearby areas so that they can return when it is appropriate. A few have gone back to Mexico. On the one side we have many difficulties, but on the other hand we have made many friends and we know many people are helping us. At the beginning we did not know very much about how to defend ourselves. And now we know more how to do that. Take myself, for example. I have been taken to court, but that kind of thing does not frighten me anymore. I feel that I have learned many things. We have learned how to speak and who to speak to.

Gloria: We have worked at that company as if we were one single family. We were all united. We all defended ourselves from the boss, from the supervisors, from everybody. So then they treated all of us in the same way and tried to run us out. But that's why we have remained united.

Óscar: When you ask other strikers why they have stayed out, what do they tell you?

Gloria: That they would prefer to die of hunger than to go back to that *desgraciado*, because of everything that we have suffered this year. Each one of us can tell you all the things that we have suffered this year, and we feel more and more anger. The strikers have not lost their enthusiasm. Their enthusiasm is rejuvenated every day. And it is because they have faith. They see that the strike representatives have not abandoned them; they have been very steady throughout the whole year. We have not given them any reason to doubt us, and seeing that, they feel strong. Every time we call on them for something, they feel very solid.

Strikers jeering police at a solidarity rally on October 6, 1985.

Cuca: Another thing that's very important is that the

people are very enthusiastic because their strike representatives, the strike leaders, have not defrauded them. We have all worked together and they say, 'Why should I go back to work when before we were like one family working in peace?' People feel anger at all the time that they have worked. Now they are trying to destroy us. Why should we let them do that?! We're going to hit them hard and in any way that we can.

Óscar: Of all the experiences and lessons you have learned, what is the most important?

Cuca: The most important experience is in learning how to speak in front of different types of people. During these 13 months I have also noticed that most of them are women. Many of them are single mothers, and they have had to make do with the $55 strike benefits that they make.

Knitting on the picket line.

Lydia: I think that I have learned how to make better use of the money that I have. Before we used to make a good wage, and it didn't matter that much how much the product cost. Now I have learned how to save and buy foods that don't cost that much. I don't go out to spend money in restaurants and things like that. I have learned how to help other people as well. Now my husband works, and I know that other people besides the strikers need help.

Gloria: I have learned about brotherhood and sisterhood. We all look at each other as brothers and sisters in struggle. We have tried to help one another. We have struggled together. And the strike has united us.

Chavelo: One thing that I have liked is that I have been able to get to know many people in different places, in different struggles that ultimately are all related in one way or another. For example, the students and different workers' struggles. Students fight for their education. There is discrimination against minorities in the schools. There's cutbacks of scholarships and funds. If the poor people don't have help from the government they won't be able to get an education. I have learned how students

Police guarding one of the struck plants. Police have made over 700 arrests of strikers and supporters since the strike began. Many were beaten.

fight, and I have compared our struggle with theirs, and they are similar. Another thing that I have seen is that we are 1,000 strikers. Most of us are married with children, two or three or more children. So when we take our children to the struggle, they know what's happening. I like for them to participate and to see what is happening in the struggle so that when they grow up, there won't be just a thousand people by our side. They will be many thousands of more people who will be supporting us. Through the years I think that will lead to a tremendous force that will not be easily squashed.

Óscar: *Do you think the political climate in Watsonville has changed?*

Lydia: I think that it has. I think the City Council has been very much against the strikers since we went out. People like Console and others, when they go to the City Council, right away they get help. But when the strikers go to ask for help, they never give it to us. They always find us guilty. They send the police on us, and they blame the strikers even if it is not

true. Before we had more faith in them. But now because of this I don't have as much faith as before. I used to believe in the police before, but now when all this has happened, I don't anymore. It has all been lost because of what has happened with the strike.

Chavelo: What I have seen is the same as Lydia. Since the strike began, the police and the City Council have been on the side of the boss and not on the side of the worker. More recently, after almost a year on strike, they have somewhat taken the side of the workers, even if it has been only verbally. They say that they want to help us, but that's because we have pressured them. We have been there constantly and pressured them to do something. But of their own free will, they never did that before. What they are doing is now they are looking at the elections that are coming up. They know they depend on us as to whether they will return to power. But something else we have learned is that we have the right to vote, and not only ourselves, but our families. Our children and our friends should register to vote. And we have to look at who we are voting for, which people will represent us. Before the strike

I did not used to look at politicians in that way. I used to think that they were all doing a good job.

Cuca: Reagan's support for business can be seen in the strike. I imagined to myself that because Mort Console has so much political support that he would run for governor. He has a lot of political influence. He did what he wanted to with the strikers. He must have planned the strike at least four years ago. Among ourselves, among the working class, it is being shown that another one of the injustices here in the U.S. is that Chicanos and Latinos have always been discriminated against. And the same is happening here with the City Council and the politicians. They don't support us. Perhaps if we organized ourselves well and if we tried to unite more, perhaps up ahead we can change the future in Watsonville.

One of the injustices in the U.S. is that Chicanos and Latinos have always been discriminated against. And the same is happening here.

Gloria: In these upcoming elections we have to unite and vote to give Latinos more representation, because all the people that form the executive board are whites, the City Council members. The times we have gone there, it has been very noticeable that they see us with great indifference. They don't care about Raza workers. That is why we want to unite to try to get more representation and more Latino representation.

Óscar: What would you consider to be a settlement with Console that would save the union and get all the workers back to work? What would be the bottom line for a settlement the strikers would accept?

Chavelo: I think that the strikers who are out right now would accept a contract similar to what is being paid in other canneries, with benefits, with rights to vacation, pension, seniority rights. I think that that would be a good victory, because if we can't get a contract, we would be a thousand workers without jobs, and that would be a bad thing for ourselves, for the city and for all the community. It would affect us all the way around.

Lydia: I agree with what Chavelo is saying. I think the cannery should think about this and give us what workers are being paid in other canneries. In this way the cannery owner would also get the help of the strikers,

those who know how to do the work. His cannery would be able to move forward and not go broke. What's happening right now is he doesn't have the workers that know how to do the work and he is losing out.

Óscar: How do you see the fact that Mort Console is at the point of going bankrupt?

Gloria: We are not going to change our minds. And we will not accept a bad contract. I wish that they would offer us a good contract, but that is like a dream. So we are going to stay this way, doing what we're doing.

Sergio Lopez, new secretary treasurer of Teamsters Local 912, the first Mexicano to head the local.

Óscar: Some of you are original members of the Strikers' Committee. Since the beginning of the strike, many things have happened. What changes have there been in the work you are doing with the union?

Gloria: At the beginning it was more difficult to work with the union. There was a change of union representatives several months into the strike, but before then we didn't really have any representation in the union. The 'man' passed his time drinking at the bar. And that is why we didn't have faith in the union. That is why we criticized the union leaders so much at the beginning. We couldn't work with them. But in the process of the strike, we on the Strikers' Committee learned that we were representing our *compañeros* on strike, and that because of them we had to unite with the union and try to work with them so that there would be better representation. It has been a triumph for us, because in spite of this year we still have the trust of our *compañeros*. The union has become stronger because of us. Because we supported them, they can see the confidence that people are developing in them, little by little. When I say stronger, I mean that we were able to get the International to be interested in the strike and at the same time to recognize the value of our officials. Can you add anything to that, Chavelo?

Chavelo: The way I see the participation of the union representatives with the workers is that we think it

is a necessity to unite in order to be stronger, and they saw that without us they would also be nothing. So looking at both sides, ourselves and themselves, we have united and I think that we have had success because we have been able to move forward.

Lydia: I also think that we should have the union give us support, because whenever the owners wanted, they would be able to kick us out, but with the union they can't do that that easily.

Óscar: What did you do to make your situation change?

Chavelo: It took a lot of work right from the beginning. We showed that without the workers, the union officials are nothing. We showed that through the work we did and in the programs we organized. I think that's the only way. I think working with the union has helped the strike. There has been communication. That is one of the most important things, the communication between the workers and the officials. When there is communication, we let them know what the people need or how the membership is looking at things, and then when they see this, they have to work along those lines, because the people are the union. We are the union.

Workers and officials from other Teamsters locals have come out to support the strike.

Gloria: I think we would have lost the strike if we had not worked with the union, because there were too many enemies against the strikers. There were groups who were trying to advise the strikers to go into work without a union. They would have been able to get away with it if we had not opposed it and united to advise the strikers otherwise, if we had not told them that it is better to have bad representation than no union representation. That's why we have lasted this 13 months of the strike.

Óscar: What kind of outside support have you gotten during the strike?

Cuca: We have met a lot of people — community groups, Chicano groups, which have given us a lot of support,

The Watsonville strike attracted widespread support from Chicano students.

food, publicity. And they have learned from us that they also have to fight for their rights. For example, students. If they want to get ahead in this country they have to go to school, and right now a lot of benefits are being cut from the schools. In this country students have fought a long time, and they are learning from us, the workers, that now they too have to support us and to unite. We have to unite in this country in order to defeat the capitalists. We have also gotten political support like from Jesse Jackson.

Chavelo: What I can say is that when people see our strike, they know that we have maintained our unity. A thousand people went out and it is a thousand people that are now out 13 months later. We have not crossed the picket line. And they can learn that as long as you are united there is a chance to win. I think that is the best message. We have also met students, like through MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán — *ed.*), groups like Raza Sí, or political organizations like MAPA (Mexican American Political Association — *ed.*) and LULAC (League of

United Latin American Citizens — *ed.*). They too have come to our programs. They have seen that our struggle is similar to theirs and that there is a relationship, because we are Chicanos and Raza and we are fighting not only for wages but also for justice.

Lydia: When we had been out on strike six months, the people began to get demoralized because they thought we didn't have support. But then they saw that support, people bringing food and money and especially during November, during Thanksgiving, when people gave so much support and all the people were able to get a turkey. We did not expect this kind of support. We thought we would be very much alone on the picket line, but we learned that that was not so. Everyone around us was seeing what was happening and came to support us, from San Francisco, San Jose, Salinas, Hollister, Santa Cruz and many other areas. So people's spirits began to pick up and their determination became stronger. We saw that we had to be even more united because people wanted to go back to work or go to other places to work. But when they saw the support, they saw that they could not leave the area and that they had to continue the struggle. I think we have gotten so much support because the strikers have been so united, and I think that the people want us to win this strike because they know that a lot depends on what happens at this strike.

The United Farm Workers have been strongly supportive of the strikers.

Chavelo: A lot of support has come from the San Francisco Bay Area, but also from other areas like San Jose and Sacramento. I am part of the Treasury Committee of the Strike Committee and I know that we have received donations in checks, small amounts, like $5.00, $10.00, from Los Angeles, Texas, New York, New Jersey and different areas. I can see that our strike is being heard throughout the country. One thing is that the local support has been somewhat confused because the press locally has always favored the company. So local people weren't sure whether to come with us or not. But also, in the City Council, some members

have supported us and that is something that we keep track of. We know who is with us, but the majority of the City Council has not supported us.

Óscar: How have you been able to deal with the scabs?

Cuca: We are fighting for our rights and our jobs. We have kept fighting because we feel so much anger towards the scabs who cross the picket lines. Do you think that people like Gloria, who has worked for 23 years, don't feel anger, don't feel like wanting to tell the scabs off? They don't care right now because they are working and making money. Perhaps one day they will understand, though it might be too late. When you tell them that it's the future of the children that's at stake, that the only legacy that we will leave the children is the benefits and to win a good salary, the scabs don't understand that.

Gloria: Every time we go to the picket line it's very hard for us because we see those people going in, people of our own Raza who are taking our jobs away. And they don't act like they feel shame. On the con-

Scab truck leaving Watsonville Canning.

trary, they act like they don't understand what they're doing, or like what they are doing is something right, which it's not. They are betraying their own Raza, and they are also hurting themselves.

Óscar: What did you do when you went to Salinas to deal with the scabs?

Gloria: First we talked to them about the strike. Then we intimidated them. We would shout at them. We got to the point of having tough encounters with them. But they kept on coming from different parts. We divided ourselves in groups. Some of us went to one town, others to other areas. We all did the same thing. The arrests began. But the people did not get intimidated. Because we don't have money and we don't have lawyers to defend us, we understood that that was not the best tactic, because if we all got arrested we wouldn't be able to continue with the strike.

The women have fought the hardest, the ones who have suffered the most. . . . Without the women, we would have lost the strike already.

Cuca: Groups of strikers have gone to different cities to talk to the people who were coming to work. We tried to speak with them. There were confrontations, and there were actions by the police and the scabs, attacks by them. We continued to try to talk with them. At the shopping centers where they would go to get picked up, as soon as they saw all the strikers appear, they would say, 'Let's get out of here, we cannot go to work.' Days went by when nobody would come to the areas to get picked up.

I don't know what happened with the problem in Gilroy, where they got 18 strikers and they put them in jail. Because we didn't have lawyers, we didn't continue with that strategy, because we didn't have the means to get our people out. The union didn't help us in that. We had to look to ourselves, or wait to see what decisions the judges made. So generally these were the pressure tactics that we used. Other tactics that are more militant we have not used. We have tried to talk with them, trying to reason with them, but they haven't responded. We have tried talking and pressure, but they haven't changed.

Gloria: One of the tactics is being militant on the picket line. We have scared the scabs, we have chased them off. So they have to keep renewing the scabs.

We have not given the scabs the chance to acquire the experience that we already have. That is one of the reasons that the company will not be able to get off the ground in this way. Because we are not going to give them the chance.

At the beginning, we tried to talk to them to reason with them. But we saw that they didn't care. The only thing they wanted was to work and to make money. Our strike didn't mean anything to them. All of these people come from Mexico and they know about strikes. They know that a strike is sacred and has to be respected.

Óscar: The majority of the strikers and many of the leaders are women. What has been done to guarantee that women are able to play a leadership role?

Chavelo: I have seen women there playing a very important role since the beginning of the strike. They are the ones who have fought the hardest, the ones who have suffered the most. They see the scabs crossing the lines, even though they see that our women are there on the picket line. The women have stayed there very determined. They have not become discouraged. Nobody has asked or told the women that they have to fight. They have chosen and decided by themselves that they want to struggle and are struggling. Without the women in this struggle, I think we would have lost the strike already.

Lydia: I work in the Food Committee, and I have put a lot of effort in it not only for myself but for the other strikers. Sometimes I feel like I want to leave the committee because there is too much work. But then I think about it again and I just can't do it, because it is not just myself, but there's thousands of people who are depending on the food that is picked up and distributed every two weeks. It is true that many women have had to fight with their husbands to be able to go out on the picket line, but for my part I have not had fights with my husband. He has supported me because he wants me to continue until the strike ends. He has helped me very much. Without his support I don't think that I would have been able to continue forward.

Gloria: Not all the men are understanding. For another thing the majority don't come from big cities. They come from small towns and they have other ideas. For them, the woman belongs in the home. They don't see women being involved in politics or criticizing scabs or anything like that. But I think the struggle belongs to everyone, men and women, because there are more women than men in the company, so women have to have more participation.

Cuca: I think the women have learned to develop themselves politically. Right now there are no women representatives in the union. Perhaps in the future there will be. In the recent union elections, the Strikers' Committee had a woman leader on the slate for union office for the first time in the history of Watsonville. My hope is that in the future there will be a woman as a union official representing us.

Hormel striker joins Watsonville workers and supporters in 50-mile solidarity march from San Jose to Watsonville in May 1986.

Óscar: What is happening with the strike right now? Are there negotiations?

Socorro: Right now what is happening is that every day there are fewer scabs, and the scabs change from day to day. They are rarely the same ones who come in, day in and day out. We hear that the company is going broke and they don't want to negotiate right now. We have to continue fighting. There is nothing else we can do.

Lydia: For right now there are no negotiations. They say that the cannery is going broke, that they owe a lot of money. Right now they say that the growers don't want to take any produce to that cannery because it owes them money. They are making it right now with not too many scabs. The way I see it, Watsonville Canning wants to show us, the strikers, that they are still winning. And they are still working the plant in order to get us to go work at another place and forget the strike.

Cuca: I think that right now the unemployment agencies are sending people to work at other canneries. So

I imagine that the boss has contacted other companies to tell them to hire the strikers to see if they will abandon the picket line. But I don't think that has happened. With this news in the press, and what we have seen has happened with the company closing one or two weeks, we realized the company is going broke. But they don't want to accept it. And that's why I think it's happening that other companies are hiring the strikers. But I think the Watsonville owner was disappointed because when he reopened the plant, the picket line still had people. I imagine he also doesn't want to accept that reality. But it is true that they are going broke.

At a rally on June 29, 1986, Jesse Jackson told 4,000 supporters and strikers that Watsonville was the Selma of the 1980s.

Chavelo: What I see is the company continues to be very stubborn. They continue to say that they do not want to negotiate with the union because they are doing all right, but we who worked there for so many years know that's a lie. Every day the number of workers is less. With those who are working there now, the scabs, the production is less. The number of trucks that come out of there with production is minimal. The owner had to close down because he owes too much to the growers, which means that he has not been getting enough money to pay for what he has been buying. And it is being seen more and more that he needs us — people with experience like ourselves who have been there for years and learned so much. Our ability is indispensible for him to progress. Without us the company is not going to move forward.

Óscar: *You have come in contact with a number of left groups during the strike. After this much time on strike, what do you think of socialist ideas?*

Chavelo: The support that we have gotten, whether it has come from the left or the right, we have welcomed it. We have accepted it because we have needed it. But we have come to realize that the majority of supporters also have socialist ideas. I have noticed that socialist ideas are those that benefit more the working class, the working people and not the rich, like for example

the Reagan administration. I am grateful for the support we have received and I hope that the support will continue coming.

Cuca: I did have some socialist notions because of going to school in Mexico. After going out on strike, I came to realize that there is a need to get along with people with socialist ideas or other ideals. I also am grateful for the support that we have gotten. It doesn't matter where the support comes from. In the future we have to continue fighting in order to make a better life for our children.

Lydia: I think that right now it doesn't matter who supports us, whether they are rich or poor, as long as they continue to support us. We have to continue being united.

Cuca: We have received a lot of help, but in this strike there have been a lot of opportunists, opportunist parties, those that are just going around looking for strikes, to take advantage of us. You come to see so many things, how politics works.

Chavelo: One of the things that I have seen in the large city newspapers is that they don't write about the struggles about socialism, the struggles about equality. We have to look for these things in newspapers that are put out by the membership themselves and papers that tell the truth, such as we have read in *Unity* newspaper, which writes about what is actually happening in the struggle that we are in. There are things that we have never seen in local newspapers, but *Unity* has written about them, so we can see the differences that exist.

Gloria: The idea that I had of all these left groups was what I had read in the papers. Lately I have gotten to know more about these things because we have gotten to know people from different parties. I like socialism. It has ideals that are real. I think I understand them more now than I did before the strike. □

I like socialism. It has ideals that are real. I think I understand them more now than I did before the strike.

Observations on Watsonville

Did you notice that, María?
This Watsonville is not
the same as yesterday,
the sun that shines on us
is sad and somber . . .
Did you notice that, María?
Neither are we
the same people.
Decent workers
with families to keep
seen now as dastardly criminals . . .
Did you see that, María?
that the judges and the police
didn't remain neutral . . .

Did you notice that, María?
that we should allow ourselves
to die of hunger
so we can be considered
fine examples of citizens
Did you notice that, María? Did you?

By Payín, a Salvadoran refugee poet, inspired by the Watsonville strikers. His poems are translated from Spanish.

A day with my Boss

(on the picket line)

Good morning Boss
How are you?
a bastard as always . . .
They told me
that last night you couldn't sleep
because you were thinking
of the thrashing the previous day.
I am here
poor but content . . .
carrying my little sign.
I tell you, your pigs
arrested Carlitos yesterday.
Good afternoon Boss
don't be such a bastard
don't be such a crook
pay me what I deserve
don't be so grotesque.
Have a good evening Boss
go to bed
and don't forget that tomorrow
a new thrashing awaits you.
Yesss, María will be here
cursing your mother and even
your aunt
Bye, bye Boss
you bastard
you crook

— Payín

Round-table discussion with the Hormel workers

In August 1985, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local P-9 walked out on strike at Hormel's flagship plant in Austin, Minnesota. Seven years earlier, Hormel, the most profitable company in the meat-packing business, used the threat of a plant shutdown to force huge concessions from Local P-9 — a tactic used ruthlessly by employers throughout the packing-house industry in recent years. The money paid for the construction of a new state-of-the-art plant in Austin, which turned out more meat with fewer workers than any other plant in the industry.

In 1984 Hormel cut wages in the Austin plant from $10.69 to $8.25 an hour. The UFCW International, believing it impossible to win gains from packing-house employers at this time, advised P-9 members to go along. Instead, P-9 members elected new local leadership committed to fighting concessions and hired labor consultant Ray Rogers of Corporate Campaign, Inc., to help them.

P-9's strike was marked by a high level of rank and file participation and aggressive appeals for outside support. But the International felt P-9's struggle was undermining its own efforts to check the downward spiral of wages and "restore stability" in the meat-packing industry.

In January 1986, Hormel hired permanent replacements for the strikers and reopened the plant. Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich called out the National Guard to occupy Austin and break up the picket lines. With the AFL-CIO's backing, the UFCW publicly denounced the strike as a "suicide mission."

P-9 responded with a nationwide boycott of Hormel products and roving pickets to other plants in the Hormel chain. At Ottumwa, Iowa, and Fremont, Nebraska, over 500 workers were fired for honoring P-9 picket lines. There was an outpouring of sympathy for P-9 from every part of the country, and several support rallies drew thousands of people to Austin.

In March the UFCW withdrew strike sanctions and cut off strike benefits to P-9. Two months later it put the local in trusteeship, seized its bank accounts and its offices in the Austin Labor Temple, and declared the strike over. In September it negotiated a new contract bringing wages in the Hormel chain back up to $10.69 an hour after three to four years. The contract contains no guarantee that the 800 strikers will get their jobs back.

The strikers plan to continue the boycott until all are rehired. Many are working to form a new union, the North American Meat Packers Union (NAMPU), and have petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for an election to replace the UFCW as bargaining agent for workers in the Austin plant. They expect other packing-house workers to rally to NAMPU as well.

The continuing conflict between the P-9 strikers and the UFCW International has touched off a heated debate in the labor movement. P-9's critics accuse it of "going it alone," of trying to get a better wage than other packing-house workers and breaking solidarity with other UFCW locals. Supporters say the International's attempt to "stabilize" wages by allowing wage cuts at the higher paying plants has failed. Echoing P-9 President Jim Guyette ("If concessions are going to stop, they'll have to stop with the most profitable plant of the most profitable company"), they argue that P-9 was in fact holding the line for all packing-house workers. In any event, they say nothing can justify the strike-breaking acts of the International.

When this interview took place, the UFCW had just

Kathy Buck.

Merrill Evans.

Jim Guyette.

Rod Hinker.

sandblasted a mural which strikers had left on the walls of the Austin Labor Temple. The mural expressed the theme of international labor solidarity and was dedicated to Nelson Mandela.

The participants in the round-table discussion:

Kathy Buck: 38, married, with seven children, former financial secretary of Local P-9. "I was approaching my two-year anniversary with the plant when we went out on strike. I'm also an injured worker, so I haven't even worked most of those two years."

Merrill Evans: "I'm 39 years old. I've worked here 17 1/2 years at the time we went out on strike. My wife Carol was employed there. She worked there approximately three years before we went out on strike. Between the two of us we have seven kids. Three of them live at home. I'm the first generation Hormel worker and the last."

Larry Gullickson: "I'm 42 years old. I'm married; I've got three daughters. I was about four months shy of 19 years in the plant when we went out on strike."

Jim Guyette: "I was the president of the local and the last elected president of the local. I'm 37 years old; I have three kids. I am married. I had 17 years in the plant when the strike started. I am a third generation Hormel person. And I think that the Guyette reign of generations in the plant will end with three."

Rod Hinker: "I'm 40 years old and I've been with the Hormel company for 18 years. Single parent with four children. I'm a third generation Hormel worker."

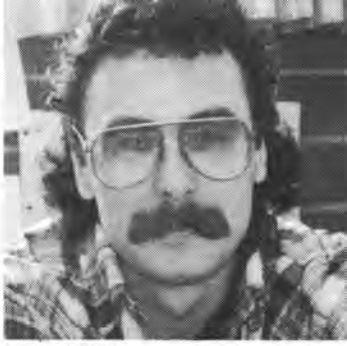
Lynn Huston: 34, married, with one son. Vice president of Local P-9. "I'm a third generation Hormel worker. At the time we went out on strike, I was about four days short of having three years in at the plant."

Ray Rogers: 42, single. Director of Corporate Campaign, Inc., retained by P-9 to help organize the struggle against Hormel.

Steve Wattenmaker: "I work with Corporate Campaign, with Ray."

Pete Winkels: Business agent for Local P-9. "I started work at Hormel in 1967. My dad started working for the company in 1922 and had continuous seniority from 1930. So like a lot of other families around here, his brothers worked there, his sisters, sisters-in-law. I think we totaled it up one time and between him and his brothers and their children, my cousins, we had close to 350 years with Hormel. Everybody on our side of the family has stayed out. I've got three kids."

The interviewer is **Mark Prudowsky**, chairman of the Chicago Area Labor Support Committee (CALSC). CALSC has done support work for the P-9 strikers.


Lynn Huston.


Ray Rogers.


Pete Winkels.

Not pictured here are Larry Gullickson and Steve Wattenmaker.

Hormel roundtable

Impact of the strike on Austin

Mark: What impact has the strike had on Austin, on the strikers, on the families, on the town, on your kids?

Larry: I don't think there's any doubt, when it comes to the social life of this town, that it's been split. You've got your scabs in the plant — you've got your people outside the plant. They don't mix. They simply won't. You're simply not going to have people that won't live up to their word mixing with people that do.

Jim: And then you look at the families. Families have been broken up. People have gotten divorced. I can relay an incident where a person died who was a union man. Some guy showed up at the funeral and because he scabbed in the plant, they ran him out of the funeral. People said, 'This guy didn't agree with what you did, and even though he's dead the rest of us are living. You're not welcome here.' And that division has gone on in families, and it's caused a tremendous amount of trauma that families have had to cope with.

One has to understand the Austin situation to understand the Hormel situation. This is not a diversified

industrial base or economic base. It is a one-horse town situation. Hormel is paying the fiddler and paying the audience to listen to the fiddler, and what P-9 has done represents a real departure from that. One has to understand that the issues were very moral and very real issues because you don't go out on the kind of situation that we went out on unless those things are justified.

Merrill: Of the 800 people that are not going back to work, I would think that 500-600 of those families are going to have to move out of town to find a job because there is no place to get a job around here unless you work for Hormel. The guy who lives across the street from me went back to work. His brother didn't. The one that's out says he'll never talk to him as long as he lives. It's not something that you're going to forget. I don't think this community will ever recover from what the Hormel company has done to us.

P-9 survived 50 some years without a strike — the first 30 years was built on getting along with the company based on strength, and the last 20 years was based on giving up what they had negotiated the first 30 years. Now after 20 years of giving up, the union has said, we can't give up any more and decided to fight. And the Hormel company has figured on crushing us, and they don't care what tactics they use. The tactics that they have employed are criminal.

Kathy: I think, too, if you drive down Main Street or go out to the mall, you see all the businesses closed, it shows the impact that the strike has had. Yet the merchants still fail to recognize that it was the workers of P-9 that kept the businesses afloat in this town.

Lynn: The scabs haven't bought anything in town and probably won't for years and years to come. They come here from up to 70 miles away. They go to work and they go home. They don't even want to be seen in this town, to be associated with this company.

Mark: So not a lot have moved in?

Merrill: No. None of them have moved in. It's interesting. All you have to do is go out there and sit by the back gate of the Hormel company when they come out. Out of five cars, four of them get right on the freeway and leave. One comes into town, the other

four get on the freeway and go. They don't even stop.

Lynn: The other thing that being a scab has done to these people is just totally destroyed their self-respect. You wouldn't believe — you should walk around with me through the town. You can tell anybody that's a scab regardless of how they're dressed or what they're driving, because anybody that's a scab won't look at us. They'll turn the other way — they'll walk the other way. Or if they walk by, they'll look down at the ground. You can always tell a P-9 member because they always keep their head up and they'll look you right in the eye. But a scab never will. You can pick them out.

Strength of the strikers

Jim: I think it's unfortunate what the company has done to the town, because we are the town. We never wanted to destroy our town, we never wanted to engage in the fight in the first place. But I think the fact that the company carried this to us, that the families were a key part of the decision-making process, and that there were classes for younger people and movies about other struggles and what this struggle was all about — that has helped people cope.

Despair and the realization that you don't have the ability to dream anymore are things that destroy moral character quicker than anything. What Lynn is bringing up is that people haven't had their character destroyed because they've done something they believe in. The most dangerous kind of people are those who believe in what they're doing. And we believe in what we're doing. We're not dangerous people, but people who believe in fairness and justice. But to those who perpetuate white-collar and other heinous crimes on the public, we are dangerous people, because all we've ever asked for is the right thing. We didn't want people to get hurt. We wanted a safe place to work. We wanted a fair contract. We didn't want a Philadelphia lawyer to tell us what was in the contract. We wanted to have the contract and understand it ourselves. And that's not being unreasonable.

Ray: I think that one of the biggest things that happened here is that every striker and their family members had a very positive and constructive way by which they

We believe in what we're doing. We're not dangerous people, but people who believe in fairness and justice.

could participate in resolving a very serious problem, realizing that it wasn't going to be resolved overnight.

Even now, here you are at a time when you look at the company, the bank, the National Guard, the courts, local law enforcement, the UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers) and the AFL-CIO, etc., everything they have done to destroy these people. Why is there still a movement here? Why are you here and many other people coming out? Because there is still a powerful movement here. Why? Because the people have been so educated and so well trained and so involved that they don't have to have some labor leader out of Washington come in and tell them whether the struggle is on or off. They'll decide when this thing is over. And they know right now that they still have a very powerful operation.

The National Guard protecting scabs at Hormel.

One of the important things we brought into this fight for a local was number one, the concept — which the national labor leadership hates — empower the rank and file and empower the local leadership. We brought tools to help the workers do that. One of the things was, we were able to reach out to 50,000 union leaders in every state in this country with a mailing list that we had spent many years building up. And we've been to many other groups as well. We're able to generate financial support — from unions and other groups from every state in this country, as well as countries outside. We went from a mailing list to taking workers and sending them out on these caravans where they broke down the barriers at other plants and with other workers, both in the meat-packing industry and outside. And they went beyond that. They got into the conventions and the National Organization for Women. Whether it was labor unions or other groups, they went and they appealed to them. But it was the rank and file; they were empowered.

Whereas the union leadership in this country, the way they've always worked things is that they've tried to basically tell the rank and file worker, 'Look, you're really not smart enough to do anything for yourself. You got to look for direction from us. And we have

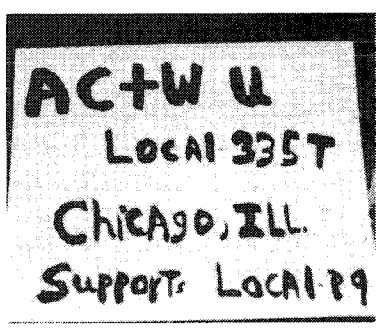
our attorneys, we reach out to our legislators and we'll fight your fight, O.K.?' The fact of the matter is the fight is never fought. But now you've got a situation that is so unruly for the corporate leadership as well as the labor leadership to deal with, because you now have workers that have been empowered.

Support for the Hormel workers

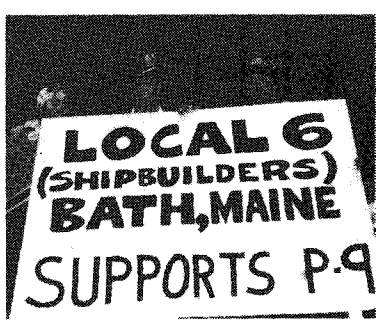
Mark: Did the amount and breadth of support surprise people, or was it expected? How do people look at that?

Jim: We got help where we least expected it. And where we expected to get help, we got nothing. That's directed at the International because they've tried to undermine the whole struggle and the support apparatus to the point of literally taking food out of people's mouths.

Quite frankly, the support has been gratifying, and it's been overwhelming because there's a sense of fairness among the American trade union movement. But among the American trade union bureaucracy there are too many people who are dictated by politics instead of morality. There's too many of those people who are simply perpetuating their own comfortable position. The worst crime that has happened in the trade union movement is you get some people with some principle to them, you elect them to office, put a coat and tie on them, give them a desk and a secretary, and they forgot where they come from.



Pete: Let me tell you a little story about the support. Just Saturday night at that dance they had, I was standing out in the hall, and at one end of the hall I'm talking with Bobbie Polzine, who was a founder of Groundswell in the farm movement. And I mentioned to her, 'Look, here I am talking to you from the farm organization in the middle of all these unemployed strikers, and over on the other end is Dr. Fred Dube from the African National Congress. If you said two years ago that this would have ever happened in Austin, you'd have been crazier than hell.'



Jim: We've received support from all around the country. In addition, there are people doing support work in Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Guam, New Zealand, Canada, Great Britain, South Africa, Europe, Scan-

dinavia — 19 different countries. Truth's a funny thing. It's slower, but it's more powerful. The lies are quicker and more deceptive. But when we've had the chance to tell the truth, and that's all anybody ever told that went out on the road, it's garnered the kind of support that this struggle has had, which I think is unprecedented in the labor movement in the last 30 years. This started out to be a very simple labor dispute over some very real issues, and it's turned into a mass movement of the American labor movement who are frustrated, who are deliberately not given the tools to win struggles with, and who see this as a model by which to pattern their fight-back campaigns against corporate injustices.

Kathy: Presently, there's 42 support groups in major cities across the country. Well, these shouldn't have been limited to just major cities. We should have been able to set them up in the smallest cities as well and even down to the local communities. P-9 is based on the grassroots and we can't forget that.

The Hormel strike won nationwide attention. Here workers from around the country rallied in support on April 22, 1986.

Ray: Backing up what Kathy said, when the strike started we immediately sent out hundreds of strikers. We had the whole of Minnesota mapped out. We went door to door to well over half a million homes with our campaign literature. On this literature there'd be a form people could send in, or a little fund-raising envelope. We did get quite a number of contributions — a dollar from a homeless man in Minneapolis, and $15-20 from individuals. Then we found that by getting out at the plant gates, a lot of individuals donated. One of the most powerful things that's happened in the campaign is this whole concept of the support group. Not a support group in name only, but a support group that becomes a very aggressive fighting force like the rank and file members themselves — to set up support groups all around the country that can really feed into a campaign like this, that can help to get the truth out. They can really counteract the things that the UFCW and the Lane Kirklands put out.

Mark: Can you talk about the experiences of talking to other people in the labor movement?

Merrill: When we first went out to speak it seemed like what everybody wanted to know was, 'You're the president?' or 'You're the business agent?' or 'You're a member of the executive board?' — and they'd go, 'You mean you're just a rank and filer?' 'Yeah, yeah — I'm not a member of the executive board or anything.' That seemed to be the thing that floored most people, that here's a rank and file guy standing up in front of a hundred people telling them what's going on and they're going, 'This ain't the way it's usually done.'

Lynn: Then when you explain that there's 100 other people just like you, rank and filers all over the country in other spots telling the same story, that's what really amazes you. The other thing that we'd always get is, for the longest time we would get letters addressed to Merrill Evans, business agent, Merrill Evans, president, Local 9, etc. People thought that if anyone could come and tell the story like these people told them, they were obviously the head of that local union. And it didn't seem right that a rank and filer could talk on all of the issues and cover everything like our people

Here's a rank and file guy standing up in front of a hundred people telling them what's going on — this ain't the way it's usually done.

did all over the country.

Jim: One of the best quotes I heard was from our vice president, and that's, 'We're not a rank and file with leaders, we're a rank and file of leaders.' Each and every person has a job and has tremendous talents to be used, and each person's job was just as important as the next person's job. We didn't have a caste system. We didn't have a system by which one or two were out trying to seek all the glory. We had a situation where we built a team and a team that works together, a team that is very effective and a team that Ray talks about, that corporate America cannot deal with. That was the concept that we tried to build within P-9 and also to build outside of P-9. I think those are the very concepts that Eugene Debs and John L. Lewis, some of the other legitimate labor leaders in history, have tried to promote and perfect within the labor movement. But right now, you don't have legitimate trade union leaders, you've got trade union politicians.

Attitude of the UFCW

Merrill: We never asked UFCW President Bill Wynn for anything. All we wanted to do was be left alone. He wouldn't even do that. He came down squarely on the side of the Hormel company.

Bill Wynn, UFCW's president.

Jim: The International union has not helped or supported anybody in a struggle, that I know of, in the meat-packing industry. They've got Hormel out now, they've got FDL, which is a Hormel subsidiary, out now, and they're not helping them — no direction, no support, no nothing. They've got strikes going on in Canada. They're telling the Canadian workers that we're going to be boycotting Swift products — nobody knows about the boycott here in the U.S. They got an organizing drive in ConAgra. They can't win an organizing drive in ConAgra or in Dole foods, they couldn't win one in Iowa Beef. They can't win any organizing, because people are smart enough to know they aren't gonna pay some clown union dues in order to negotiate away their wages, benefits and jobs.

Lynn: The Austin Clown Club has more respect than the International union in our town. And I think in

most towns you'll find that to be true. There's a reason why people are picketing UFCW headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. There's a reason why 40,000 people in California have signed a petition asking that Bill Wynn be removed from office. There's a reason why those petitions are moving across the country. If Bill Wynn put his job to a vote, I think Marmaduke would outpoll Bill Wynn for the presidency of the International union, because Marmaduke will not bite the hand that feeds him, but Bill Wynn does. Marmaduke's the big Great Dane in the cartoon strips.

"Go-it-alone" strategy

Mark: One of the main charges leveled against P-9 by the International has been this charge that P-9 chose to "go it alone." The most sophisticated version of that, that I've seen, has been United Electrical Workers' lobbyist Lance Compa's. How do people look at that whole debate?

Jim: What flies in the face of Lance Compa's argument is the fact that unionism is declining in America. And the reason it's declining is because 'for the good of the whole' they are purging the very fighters in the union movement. What he tries to do is borrow from the old CIO philosophy, but what he's missing is the very essence of the CIO philosophy, which was that an injury to one is an injury to all. What they're really saying is that for the good of the whole, we'll forget 1,400 people that work at Hormel because we've got all these other workers that'll keep shoring up and paying our dues. However, in reality they're defeating themselves and destroying the labor movement with that kind of ideology — it's an ideology that the rank and file people in this country are not buying.

Pete: When I first read Compa's piece, I ended up taking a shower because I was so steamed up. But what struck me when he mentioned enterprise unions is that's exactly what the UFCW has done. We were told time and again when we asked UFCW Packinghouse Division head Lewie Anderson, 'What's the strategy of the union?' — their line was, 'We're going to get

the best deal we can come up with.' That's exactly what they've done throughout the industry. The old United Packinghouse Workers and the Amalgamated always went after the strongest companies and used them to set the standard for the rest. (The United Packinghouse Workers and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters represented workers in the meat-packing industry until 1977, when they were absorbed into the UFCW — *ed.*) What the UFCW has done is turn that around and gone after the weaker companies and made them an example to bring down the stronger companies. Look at what they've done: there are different labor rates all across the board. With the Oscar Mayer chain, everybody's got a different expiration date. Before, everybody had a common expiration date. Now nobody does. That's 'enterprising' for the company and for the union because their dues come in and it keeps them greasy. So they're the ones who benefit from it, certainly not the workers.

On this 'go-it-alone' strategy — it's true. We went it alone. It's only because we had no other choice.

Kathy: I think the best argument for P-9 is our activities during the strike. One of our first major activities was to take a caravan of over 300 people and go around to each Hormel plant and communicate what our struggle was about, why it was important for us, why it was important for them. And as we branched out, all across the country, it isn't just P-9. These things aren't happening just to P-9, these things are happening to all meat packers, to all industries really. It isn't even limited to just meat packers. These things are happening in every industry. And if people don't stand up and start fighting to support each other in the struggles, it only adds further to the decline of the work force and unionization of America.

Rod: Some other issues I think are important here. Seniority shouldn't even be a negotiable item. To have the International give that away weakens unions. Along with this are past practices. These are bold, union-busting tactics. When we had problems in the old plant, we'd shut the line off and that problem would be taken care of that day. I mean, we had the power to be able to do that, and now we have no power whatsoever.

Lynn: On this 'go-it-alone' strategy — it's true. We went it alone. It's only because we had no other choice. We had meeting after meeting to try and get some support

from the UFCW. They would give us none. They wouldn't give us sanction to even raise funds to help our members. We had no choice but to go it alone. I guess people were amazed that we were able to do the things that we did all by ourselves without the help of the UFCW, and, in fact, they did everything they could to try to stop us and work against us.

Hormel is the most profitable company in the industry. They have a higher dollar-return-per-asset value than any other company, not only in meat packing, but the entire food processing industry. This is a company that can afford to pay decent wages and benefits. We're not going against a company that was going belly up or was broke or was filing Chapter 11 bankruptcy. We were going against a company that was making lots of money and could more than afford to take care of its workers.

Ray: It wasn't that we were going to 'go it alone' — we were going to go without the International. Because the International wouldn't help us, we went out and built support. First we broke down all the communication barriers between our Austin plant and Ottumwa and Fremont. After the Hormel chain we went into the FDL operation; then we're gonna go beyond that. The whole basis of the campaign was building this very broad coalition of support. What in fact this campaign has done is it has built the greatest coalition of support for a labor cause that the history of this country has ever seen — certainly in my lifetime.

Jim: 'Enterprise unionism *vs.* industrial unionism' is a catchy phrase that a labor bureaucrat has thrown together, and I don't think that that best characterizes this struggle. What this struggle represents is *corporate unionism* vs. *real unionism based on solidarity.* It's been a 'go-it-alone' strategy, but it's been based upon the fact that this International union was not helping nor supporting. It was based on the premise that we wanted something better. We did not want to continue to compromise on people like we'd been forced to do. We were not going to do that any longer, whether they be people injured or whether they be people we're going to axe for the 'good of the whole movement,' or purge 'x' amount of people out of the union movement. We were

not willing to do that because we feel that an injury to one is an injury to all, and the unity that comes from trade unionists banding together is something that the corporations cannot deal with.

Steve: What the UFCW has done in this town by putting P-9 in trusteeship has not been to set up a benevolent dictatorship to settle a small dispute and turn the union back over to the membership. They wanted a scorch. They never wanted P-9 and the rank and file to rise again. You can see that, among other things, in the court papers. They're doing depositions now. Part of putting a local in trusteeship is to file suit against it. The UFCW has filed suit against Local 9. Their intention is vengeance against P-9.

Boycott Hormel products!

It isn't what they say it is publicly. They are behind the scenes using the courts, using the trusteeship to make sure that there could have never been another day to fight. That's the actual fact of what this trusteeship has been. One other fact on the trusteeship is that it is illegal in this country to put a local into trusteeship for the purpose of ending a strike. They admit that's why they did it, and the only reason they've gone this far is they got a crooked judge. So that's another factor that has to be considered — this thing of if you surrender your rights, if you have a right and you surrender it, then it's very hard to ever get it back again. People made a decision that they were in the right and they were gonna fight on it.

"No retreat, no surrender"

Lynn: There's been a lot of talk about the view of 'no retreat, no surrender,' the all-or-nothing strategy. Talk about this has been off course. When we say 'no retreat, no surrender,' what we wanted to happen here is — we wanted to have a good place to work. We wanted good benefits, we wanted good wages and, above all else, we wanted to be able to work at a place where you weren't going to continually get injured.

My father, I guess, is a good example. He's worked 38 years. He's had two carpal tunnel operations on his

hands. He probably doesn't have 15% of the strength in his hands that he should have. The injury rates in our plant were tremendous. The year before we went out, the total injury rate was 202%. If you work in our plant one year, statistics tell you that you're going to be injured twice in the first year that you work there.

Now we were working at a place where we knew that your health was going to deteriorate. Something that money could not buy. Along with that, they were taking away the money and the benefits. Our people's feeling is, and it still is, if this is not going to be a good place to work, or even a fair place to work where you're going to be able to walk out of here with two arms and two legs when you retire, then we don't want to work there.

Mark: ***That's a good point, because I'm not sure to what extent people understand that. One of the things that the company and the International tried to do is to portray this as a difference between $10 vs. $10.69, and the injury thing never got talked about.***

Jim: We aren't playing Russian roulette here — we're people, and we're people who make our living with our hands and with our bodies. This plant has robots, but robots are sticking people into machines instead of meat. Now there's something wrong. It's the newest, most modern plant in the industry, and it's a company that's leading the industry, as far as compromising on people's health. We weren't about to do that.

Lynn: When you go to work in that plant you're giving them your body because you know it isn't all gonna be there by the time you come to retirement.

Merrill: Our parent union tried to play that down. What kind of a union is willing to play, like Jim said, Russian roulette with people's health and lives? And they were, because they tried to play that down and pass it off like it didn't amount to anything. Also, they trustee'd the leadership — they went and signed a contract in September 1986 that does absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing to address that injury rate problem. I heard that the hospital is treating more Hormel workers now than they ever did. So, it's not been addressed. The

scabs inside the plant, we know some of them that have lost their arms.

Trusteeship of P-9

Mark: How did you all react to the local being put into trusteeship?

Pete: When that came up, we had a meeting with the rank and file, explained everything to them, what could happen. I said what do you want to do? Do you guys want to throw it in or do you want to keep going? I think there was about six people that said — six people out of about 550, 600 people at the meeting — that said that they should throw it in. No, they felt that they had gone too far for too long.

Mark: What about the argument that says when you're in a war, there's times when you're going to beat a retreat to fight another battle? You're going to recoup your forces?

Jim: You don't win wars by moving backwards though, I'll tell you that. Tactical retreat based upon sacrificing injured people, tactical retreat based upon sacrificing 1,400 people — I mean, I don't believe in that sort of strategy, and I don't think you win any wars when you eliminate all your soldiers.

Merrill: There were clauses in the contract that they would not talk about, that literally gave them free rein to fire anybody for saying anything about the Hormel company. So there was no 'live to fight another day.' If we would have accepted that contract, Local 9 would have ceased to exist. The company could have effectively eliminated the union.

Kathy: O.K., I want to tell you a story. At the beginning of the year we had a meeting with the governor of Minnesota, Rudy Perpich, and he thought we should retreat tactically and live to fight another day. He used himself as an example. He said that he ran for office, was elected, subsequently defeated, ran again and got re-elected. We could do the same thing.

I asked him what would happen if, during that time that he was out of office, they had enacted a law that said once you'd been defeated for the governorship you can't run again. And this is what we were faced with.

Everybody that was active in the strike — the contract gave us no provisions of safety for the problems that we were addressing and fighting, let alone job security. So who's going to live to fight another day? And I think this is where we were at, why we could not make a tactical retreat as some people say. There was no job security there for anybody that had spoken out against the company and no recourse to resolve any discharges that would result from that.

Ray: Sometimes when you say, 'Look it, we cannot move forward, therefore we have to make some kind of a decision to fight another day,' the fact of the matter is that these people are still moving forward. They do have an ongoing struggle. It is something that's building a lot of support. I find it very hard to believe that you could turn this off and then turn it back on, the way that the International has dealt with this situation. They have made it impossible for these people to say basically, all of a sudden, 'stop,' and then fight another day. They're into this sort of thing. It's been a situation where if these people don't keep fighting, they don't have a chance to do anything, and they probably never will.

We could have won the battle hundreds of times over. Only one factor prevented it from the beginning — the International.

Pete: Not only that, we've already gone through eight years of waiting to fight another day and retreating with that new plant. I remember the big talk was in '70, 'Don't worry, as soon as we get that new plant built, then we'll have them and we can take them down anytime we want,' on and on.

Ray: This 'no surrender, no retreat' thing, this battle would have been over; we could have won the thing hundreds of times over. Only one factor that prevented it from the beginning — the International union. The company would have liked to, at some point, come to some kind of a compromise. I'm not sure that they were in a situation that they could.

Mark: **Let me see if I can try to sum up the sentiment. What's being said basically is — given the seriousness of the conditions inside the plant, given the 202% injury rate — that at every step, there were democractic votes taken, that people felt that rather than go back to work and compromise on any of**

these safety issues in particular, that people would lose their jobs and not work at that plant and work elsewhere or find another situation. Is that fair or is that inaccurate?

Jim: No, that's not accurate. This is our job, this is our community and, as Lynn put it, our bodies go into the plant. We're asking for a safe place to work. We aren't saying that we'd rather have another job. This is our job; this is the reason why we're still fighting. This is our town. It's our livelihoods that's at stake.

Police have made hundreds of arrests during the strike. At this demonstration in April 1986, police used tear gas and arrested 17.

Eventually this company will have to do the right thing, because, as Ray put it, it's a question of self-preservation. We're out fighting for what we think is right and we're motivated by real concerns. This company is motivated by money only. Now to me, economically, this company would be money ahead by having a safe place to work, because it would reduce their outlay for injuries at the work place. Yet what this company's strategy is, is to use the unemployment, the high unemployment, use the Ronald Reagan political scene in America to injure people and put their mismanagement onto the American public to assume the support of these injured people.

P-9 decision-making

Lynn: You know, the other thing that is said is that, 'Well, the executive board should not have kept everybody out. Guyette shouldn't have had everybody out. He should have sent everybody back into the plant.' We brought this question before the rank and file — it was about a six-hour discussion on it. Both sides of the issue were heard by everyone. Everyone that wanted to speak had the chance to speak, and they did. It was a long meeting. There was a lot of discussion, a lot of it heated. The rank and file decided that they wanted to stay out. We felt that because that decision affected each and every individual member out there, they were the people that should make that decision, not nine people on the executive board.

Mark: ***I think that's probably the main thing***

that I've appreciated about this strike. No one could ever come away from Austin believing that people were being misled or were being kept quiet.

Larry: If you'll read the publications, though, of everything that the UFCW put out, that's what they were trying to imply. And it wasn't that way. It's never been that way.

Kathy: The executive board made the recommendation to go back in the plant that night (in January 1986, after the National Guard arrived in Austin — *ed.*).

Merrill: Yeah, then it was turned down.

Mark: You all were talking about going back in using an in-plant strategy?

Merrill: Yep. And the rank and file turned it down. The executive board recommended that we go back to work. It was split in the rank and file and the executive board. It was not a unanimous vote, but they recommended that we go back to work and the rank and file turned it down 80%, something like that.

Future plans

Mark: What is the struggle for P-9 at this time, where is it right now? What is the main goal people are after right now?

Jim: Hormel is laying people off in the corporate office, in other plants in Ottumwa and in Atlanta. They're talking about layoffs in Houston, in Dallas. There's no question the company's hurting. The united support group has called for a nationwide boycott of Hormel products and an international boycott of Hormel products until everyone gets their jobs back. The labor movement has to understand that when people buy a can of Spam, they aren't just buying something to feed their family, but they are endorsing the labor policies of this company, and those labor policies affect everyone else in the meat-packing industry. What affects the meat-packing industry affects everyone in America, whether white collar or blue collar, because of the rippling effect that this creates economically.

But people are continuing the struggle because we

want our jobs back and because it's simply more than a mere jobs issue. The strategy is to continue the strategy as set down by Corporate Campaign. It's a winning strategy, and North American Meat Packers Union is something that I think most people are going to vote for because it's a legitimate, bona fide organization, motivated by integrity and representing people fairly, instead of what we've come up against at this point. That's the strategy as far as we're concerned.

Merrill: Had the UFCW, after they put us in trusteeship while negotiating this contract, put meaningful language in that covered some of the things that led up to the strike — one of them was callback of strikers — we wouldn't even be talking about this problem. The boycott would have ended had there been a contract with meaningful language on the problem of callback.

This memorial was constructed by P-9 in memory of three newspeople covering the strike. The UFCW wants to destroy the monument, but has been enjoined from doing so.

Pete: They put a two-year limit on the callback and I think that's what raised everybody's dander up. Some people are still operating under the misconception that should the people call for an end of that boycott that they're going to get their jobs back. In essence what the International is saying is, 'Look, trust us one more time. We end the boycott, then everything's going to be well and fine,' and nobody's buying that.

North American Meat Packers Union

Mark: Let's move on to NAMPU. What are the plans for NAMPU right now? What do people think are some of the main obstacles that NAMPU is going to face in this period?

Kathy: I think NAMPU's facing the same obstacles as P-9 faced. You've got your maligning by the UFCW — you've got your UFCW trying to speak out against union democracy. In their latest *Unionist* that the UFCW people put out, they said that NAMPU almost guaranteed your right to go back out on strike again. NAMPU isn't saying that. There's a contract. Now that doesn't mean that people will be out of a job and out on strike

again. NAMPU is out to protect the individual democratic rights of the members, and the UFCW fails to acknowledge that, and their only means of attacking NAMPU is just by starting lies and falsehoods about the purpose and the goals of NAMPU.

Mark: What are some of the key points of NAMPU's strategy?

Larry: Trying to get across the point that it will be and is a union for democratic rights. These unions, these locals will run their own affairs.

Mark: Have certain chains been targeted? Are you looking at organized vs. unorganized workers?

Larry: No. Anybody who will listen. It doesn't make any difference whether they're organized or unorganized. NAMPU's going to go there and talk to them.

Merrill: NAMPU stands for, more than anything else, union democracy. North American is not gonna come and try to get you to do something you don't want to. The last thing they want to promote is the same kind of unionism we're trying to get away from. You know — they're not going to come in here and try to tell you what to do. They are willing to help you in your struggle to get what you want.

Lynn: If it weren't for the UFCW, there would not have been a North American Meat Packers. That as far as a recertification, we always had that option. I guess a lot of the people believed deep down that when the time came, the UFCW would do the right thing. But they put us into trusteeship, and we started to see the things that the UFCW was doing, that we no longer had a democratic union. The democratic union as we knew it would probably never exist again in our lifetime in Austin, Minnesota. Initially people said, 'Well, how bad could it be?' Now they see how bad it would be. As a result, they felt in order to have a democratic union it could not be with the UFCW. The people have no voice in Local 9 right now.

Let the rank and file make the decisions . . . If you put the union democracy back in the union, the union will run itself to the best of its membership.

Rebuilding the labor movement

Mark: What do you think would be key points to a program of struggle for meat packers at

this time? Are meat packers in a defensive or offensive position right now? What should we do to rebuild the labor movement?

Larry: I guess there's no doubt that the meat-packing industry is in a defensive mode. You can see what the top negotiators of the UFCW do when they go to ask for a contract. They don't ask for more. They ask what the company needs. And then they try to give away less than what the company is asking for. Everything is on a give-away mode. They're going down and down and down. It disgusts me that anybody would even try and go into negotiations this way. They just want to try and give away less. They know they're gonna have to give away things in order to get a contract here. But they don't even ask for any positive things.

Merrill: Let the rank and file make the decisions on what that union wants to do. If you put the union democracy back in the union, the union will run itself to the best of its membership. The trouble is with the unions in America today, they're run by a few to benefit a few at the very top. These guys are not worried about the rank and file.

Mark: Could you talk about what's happened in the last couple of days with the sandblasting of the P-9 mural?

Kathy: The union hall is owned by the Austin Labor Center. The Austin Labor Center membership or shareholders, as stated in the bylaws, are members of Local P-9 in good standing. Now the Austin Labor Center has, since the beginning, leased the building and land to Local P-9. Local P-9 was under trusteeship, so therefore the trustees are the tenants of the Austin Labor Center. We the members of Local P-9 still own that property. The UFCW decided that they were going to remove the mural that stands for union solidarity in the labor struggle all across the world. They decided it should come down because it was a detriment to the 'healing process' here in Austin. It was a reminder of the bitter struggle of the past year.

A lot of members and supporters were out protesting the destruction of the mural. I went across their so-called line — they were in the process of sandblasting — and I walked on the parking lot nowhere near where

the destruction was being done, but just on the parking lot and was asked to leave. I refused to leave under the premise that this was our land and I, as a landlord of this building, was just checking out what the tenant was doing, what kind of destruction was being done. I was threatened repeatedly with arrest and subsequently was arrested for trespassing on our own land. To erase the memory of this struggle would be one of the most devastating tragedies to happen.

Lynn: I guess one of the most disgusting things about that is that it was not a mural dedicated to Local 9. It was a mural dedicated to Nelson Mandela and the history of labor.

Kathy: Some guy from the International said he was kind of amazed how Nelson Mandela got involved in it, the mural. The guy said, 'I'm all for the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. I see no correlation between the struggle in Black South Africa with the all-white population in Austin, Minnesota.' First of all, Austin isn't all white, and secondly if this guy takes note on his membership list, we have Black members of Local

The UFCW International defiled the P-9 labor solidarity mural dedicated to Nelson Mandela. A portion of the damage is shown here.

P-9. Another thing that's wrong with that is I think Nelson Mandela and P-9 have a lot of the same similarities in what they're fighting. The only thing that's different is Nelson Mandela is fighting to get equality with the workers here in America, and we're fighting to maintain the quality that we have and not be dragged down to the wages and the conditions that are present in South Africa. A lot of anti-apartheid groups have seen the similarities between the P-9 struggle and what's happening here in the United States and have compared it with the anti-apartheid movement. It's sad that he is so uninformed that he doesn't realize what the apartheid movement is all about. Job equity and job protection and job safety are problems of workers all over the world, not just for P-9.

If the labor movement ever became unified like it once was, we could change and better the social structure for us.

Mark: ***One of the things about the struggle that's probably freaked him out has been that at every major event, outside struggles were brought in and people talked about everything from the farmers to South Africa, the miners to the American Indian. People were educated to the common points of people's struggles and that people had to support one another's struggles. Certainly it's not the way the union movement is used to functioning. They don't like to function that way. They don't like to have those kind of linkups.***

Merrill: That mural was sandblasted for one reason and one reason only, and that was the Hormel company wanted it off of the wall. The Hormel company really, and the UFCW once again is doing the bidding for the Hormel company and sandblasted a mural. Even a mural that depicts the very thing that unions supposedly stand for.

Kathy: I think it's ironic to note, too, that because they weren't skilled craftsmen in the trade, then they chose to do their own work rather than hire union people to take the mural off and do the sandblasting. They attempted to do it themselves. And seeing the futility and the long time it was going to take to complete the whole project, they focused on certain things within the mural that they were going to make sure that they got off, and these things were the apartheid, the solidarity, the farmer's tractor and the farmer, and the

injury to one is an injury to all, and the faces of the people, and P-9, and any wording that would promote the union solidarity, and the support for the anti-apartheid movement. The dedication to Nelson Mandela was the thing they concentrated on, and all these things that were the real important gist of the mural, they decided they would do away with them specifically.

Main lessons from the struggle

Mark: My last question is what is the main lesson that the labor movement could sum up in the struggle at Hormel?

Lynn: Well, I guess one thing is people don't realize it but they have all the power in the world. And as Pete said, 'One person can make all the difference in the world.' Can you imagine what would have happened if we would have had four P-9s out or only two, rather than just one? And they're all out there.

Jim: I think the main lesson is that democracy is a funny thing. When people know what it is, everybody wants it. And that . . . no, I don't think that's the main lesson. I think the main lesson is that we in the labor movement have been beating ourselves. We have allowed certain leaders to dictate where and when and how and by which tools fights are going to be fought. Quite frankly, I think that many of the people who are rhetorically fighting the best have forgotten how to *really* fight back. People themselves are going to have to take the initiative to fight back, and people themselves are going to have to understand that politics cannot dictate a fight or a struggle, that it's moral questions and moral issues that are at play and that people have a tremendous amount of economic buying power. They need to understand that that economic buying power has to be used to help others in situations. I think it has to be frightening to the bosses in the country to think that if the labor movement ever became unified like it once was that we could change the social structure that affects each and every one of us and better that social structure for us. □

Labor in Reagan's U.S.A.

Interview with Roberto Flores of the League of Revolutionary Struggle

What is happening with the working class in the U.S. today? How can labor improve its situation? And what about socialism and the labor movement?

These are some of the issues Roberto Flores addresses in this interview conducted by *Forward* in Los Angeles in December 1986.

Roberto Flores has been a member of the United Steelworkers union (USWA) for seven years. He was also a vice president of a local of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union. His parents were field and industrial workers and ran a small restaurant in the farm worker community of Oxnard, California. Roberto was one of 14 children. A farm worker himself for many years, he was a leader in the 1975 strawberry workers' strike in Oxnard and a member of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW). He is married and has six children.

What is your opinion of the present state of the labor movement?

The labor movement is facing a difficult and challenging situation. There have been many changes in the U.S. politically and economically, and the labor movement has to adjust with new approaches. The U.S. economy is very different today from what it was in the 1950s and 1960s, from being the most powerful economy in the world to one facing increasing problems. It is losing markets to foreign competitors, the military budget is devouring resources, the national debt keeps soaring, unemployment remains high, the farm

Labor rally in San Francisco, August 1986.

sector is depressed, productivity is declining, and fears of a major banking and stock market disaster continue.

I don't think the U.S. economy will ever regain its top position in the world. The ability of U.S. corporations to dominate world markets, take natural resources cheaply from third world countries and reap incredible superprofits has been seriously damaged. To keep up profits, the capitalists are viciously attacking the wages and the working and living conditions of the working class.

The social structure has also changed. The working class in the U.S. is increasingly polarized, with a small group of unionized and relatively high-paid workers on one end and the overwhelming majority of workers with low-paying, low-security and mainly non-unionized jobs on the other.

The labor movement has to confront the changing situation and develop more coherent and sharper strategies to fight these attacks. When Reagan signaled that he would openly side with big business and smashed the air traffic controllers' strike in the early days of his first administration, the labor movement was unprepared to deal with the offensive. This continued through the first half of the 1980s. Labor was off-balance and unable to mount an effective counterattack. Other major strikes, such as by the Greyhound, Continental, and Phelps-Dodge mine workers, among others, suffered defeats. Everywhere labor was assaulted with employer demands for concessions and "takeaways."

The offensive on labor is continuing, but recently I think there are signs that some sectors of labor are beginning to rally a more effective fight.

The offensive on labor is continuing, but recently I think there are signs that some sectors of labor are beginning to rally a more effective fight. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee won a contract from Campbell in Ohio, and the Farm Workers Organizing Committe (Comité Organizador de Trabajadores Agrícolas — COTA) won contracts in New Jersey. The hotel and restaurant workers won big victories in Las Vegas, Boston and San Francisco. Unionization drives were successful at Yale and Columbia. Delta Catfish workers in Mississippi won an NLRB election and are fighting for a contract now in a major victory for the "right-to-work" South. And Chinese garment workers won a precedent-setting settlement on a plant-closing issue in Boston.

The Hormel workers in Austin, Minnesota, continue

to fight to win their jobs. UAW workers at Delco won their recent strike, showing that even GM is not invincible when confronted with a strike which threatens to shut down all their plants. The Watsonville cannery workers are still striking after 15 months, and a victory still appears possible. The steel workers out against USX seem to be prepared to weather a long battle. This is the first time in many years that the United Steelworkers has decided to fight it out with the big steel companies.

These successes have some common ingredients which may give us some insight on organizing in this period. They are generally characterized by a more vigorous approach by the unions, active support from the community, especially from oppressed nationality movements, and strong rank and file participation, unity and militancy.

More workers are recognizing that concessions have not stopped layoffs and cuts of wages and benefits. It is also becoming clear that despite a better situation for big business, employers are still viciously attacking workers. I think more and more workers have just had

Puerto Rican and Mexicano farm workers on the East Coast recently won their first union contract.

enough and can see more ways to fight, all of which has stimulated a greater fighting spirit and resistance among workers.

What about the attitude of the top labor leaders now? What is going on with them? Are they taking up the fight against the right?

Most of the top labor leaders did not play a good role in the early 1980s when workers tried to resist the employer offensive. They not only didn't resist but pressured workers into concessions and surrendering to Reagan. This is what Douglas Fraser of the UAW did, for example. Jackie Presser of the Teamsters, of course, openly backed Reagan.

But I think that even some top leaders are now seeing that they better do something or else their unions are going to get completely squashed. It is pretty obvious that big business in many cases is out not just to reduce the power of labor, but in many cases *eliminate* some unions altogether. It's been made clear there isn't any room for labor in Reagan's USA. The international unions are also facing a lot of pressure from the locals and the rank and file.

For example, top leadership of the Teamsters Union has backed up the Watsonville strike. Not in the complete way they should, of course, but more than they have supported other strikes for a long time. The national leadership of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union in the Boston and San Francisco strikes also showed vigor and openness to innovation.

Of course, many top AFL-CIO leaders continue to cave in to employer demands for concessions and oppose the rank and file. They're obstructing progress in the labor movement. The main thrust for any change in the unions must continue to come from the rank and file.

Top labor leaders have gotten where they are by being better representatives of the company than of the union's members. But at present, with the onslaught of the right, even some leaders are finding that they have to wage more struggle with the employers. When

After seven years of struggle, farm workers of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee forced Campbell Soup to sign with the union.

that happens, workers can use it to their advantage.

It's interesting how this question is viewed on the left. One school of thought sees a united labor movement as the workers' first line of defense against the capitalists and holds that to criticize unions or attack their leaders, especially at a time like this, is divisive, irresponsible and plays into the enemy's hands. Those who uphold this view point out that even under left leadership it would be very hard for unions to win gains today, and we shouldn't take "cheap shots" at union leaders who have failed to do so unless we have concrete strategies of how we could do the work better.

The other tendency attributes the current weakness of the labor movement in large part to a corrupt, bureaucratic leadership which has abandoned the ideals of militant, democratic trade unionism. It places a big emphasis on encouraging rank and file union members to challenge the actions of their leaders.

I think there are merits and shortcomings to both positions. As for the first, I agree that we must take responsibility for the overall welfare of the union movement and assess each struggle's chances for victory

Now even some top labor leaders find they have to wage more struggle — workers can use this to their advantage.

with a realistic attitude before embarking on different courses of action, especially strikes. However, it is foolish and dangerous to ignore the contradictions between top union officials and rank and file workers. The actions of the United Food and Commercial Workers union leadership in the Hormel strike show all too clearly how serious these contradictions can become. In situations like this, the left has a responsibility to face the situation squarely and come down firmly on the side of the workers.

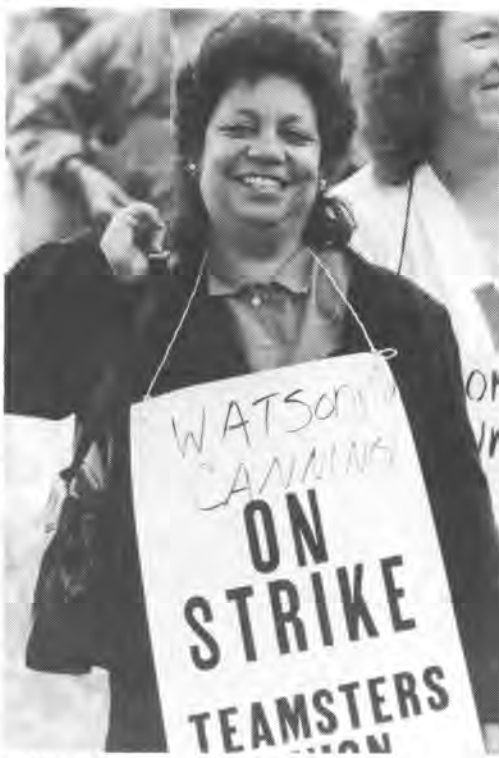
On the other hand, workers are obviously stronger when they are able to work with their union officials than when they must fight the union and the company at the same time, as the Hormel workers were forced to do. It is foolish to not work with the international when it is at all possible. This does not mean of course that the workers must give up any initiative while forging this united front with top officials.

What do you think is the significance of the Watsonville and Hormel struggles?

Both the Watsonville and Hormel struggles have

inspired the labor movement with their militancy, determination and political consciousness. The workers have faced hundreds of arrests, beatings and other tremendous obstacles. But still they fight on. The strikes are among the leading labor struggles in the U.S. today.

The Watsonville workers, who are mainly women and Mexicanas, have been out for a year and a half with not one worker scabbing. This is a remarkable testimony to their organization and determination. The Watsonville strikers are united and have maintained some level of initiative in their long struggle. They elected their own strike committee, forced recognition of this committee from the union and managed, despite some differences with their local union leadership at times, to forge a united effort with them, and with the Teamsters International.



The Watsonville strikers also see their struggle within the context of the struggle of the Chicano and Mexicano people in the U.S. for basic democracy. They understand that their battle for a decent wage and union representation will affect the lives of over 50,000 Chicano/Mexicano cannery workers throughout the valleys of California and will have a huge impact on the future of all Chicanos. They know and have expressed eloquently their understanding that becoming cannery workers is the first step out of the fields, enabling their children to attend school more regularly and improving their lives. Because of this the Watsonville strikers have reached out broadly into the Chicano Movement, drawing emotional and economic support and especially political support to them. This attention and concern by almost every elected Chicano/Mexicano politician in California for the outcome of the Watsonville strike has been an important additional pressure on the company and the Teamsters International.

This strike contains powerful lessons which the labor movement must recognize if it is to revitalize itself.

The Hormel strike is significant because for many workers it represented "drawing the line" against the bosses. The Hormel workers said you are not going to bleed another drop out of us. We are going to fight,

even if the International is not going to support us. They captured the spirit and feelings of millions of workers throughout the U.S. Even though the AFL-CIO and UFCW leadership refused to support the strike, hundreds of locals and tens of thousands of ordinary workers supported P-9. The Hormel workers are a great inspiration to workers throughout the country.

The strike is also significant because of the democratic way it was conducted. The rank and file was involved in all the major decisions of the strike. The struggle showed the capability of the rank and file worker and the power of union democracy. I think this is something many other workers will learn from.

The Hormel workers also linked their struggle with the broader movement for progress and justice in the world. Their dedication of the mural on their union hall to South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela is an outstanding example of this. You have to remember that P-9 is mainly white. At a time when the racists and fascists are trying to win over white workers, the stand of the Hormel workers against apartheid and in support of Native Americans, the Watsonville workers, and many others, is a strong reminder of the unity which the working class can achieve in the common struggle for a decent life.

What are the tasks of left forces in the labor movement at this time?

The left has the responsibility to try to present its ideas for how the working class can turn back employer attacks and gain some initiative on a national scale to fight to preserve the unions and to improve the lives of the majority of people in this country, who are workers. In our view the key thing which the labor movement must realize is that there is a powerful movement for democracy in this country, in particular by the African American and Chicano/Mexicano/Latino peoples. This struggle for democracy, centered primarily in the South and Southwest, has the potential to turn those areas, which are bastions of right-to-work laws, weak unions and conservative government, into progressive regions which can turn back the right-wing tide and bring a more progressive agenda onto the national political arena.

The left should encourage more active and *independent* participation by the labor movement in the political arena. We should help mobilize the workers and the unions to become the foremost champions of democracy. The labor movement should be known as a fighter for minority empowerment, immigrant rights and progressive foreign policy issues, such as opposition to U.S. policy in South Africa and Central America. We need to do much more extensive voter registration and education.

We want the unions to fight for such things as raising corporate taxes, cutting the military budget, creation of a national jobs program through the reconstruction of the nation's basic infrastructure — roads, bridges, dams, schools, increasing the minimum wage, etc. Given the economic direction of the country, labor will inevitably interject its own agenda into the political debate, and it is vital that the left participate in forming this agenda so that labor will not get swept into a demagogic direction.

The left has a special responsibility to organize, activate and develop the leadership of the workers themselves in this struggle. The left must help to build a strong, unified and militant and mass-based labor movement. We have to encourage and support workers in their struggle and help them organize. The working class movement will be as strong as the ability of the workers themselves to grapple with the problems of developing the right tactics, finding allies, knowing when to go forward and when to retreat, building multinational unity, and so on.

The League has put forth for some time the importance of the lower stratum of the working class for the future of the labor movement. Can you elaborate on that?

We see the lower stratum of the working class playing a critical role in building the labor movement. By lower stratum, I am referring to low-paid, unskilled production workers in basic industry, manufacturing, service and agriculture. These workers are relatively more oppressed and, in many instances, suffer

national and women's oppression as well. They are also, relatively speaking, less influenced by the corrupted labor leaders and are more open to progressive and socialist ideas.

Over the last few years there has been a whole rash of struggles, many of them unpublicized, by oppressed nationality lower stratum workers. In many instances, they have come up against a powerful array of opponents — hard-line employers, the state, and non-supportive union leaders. Yet these have been some of the most militant and vibrant struggles in the labor movement. It is not an accident that most of the organizing and contract victories in the labor movement in this past period have been among these workers.

Struggles among lower stratum workers have been among the most militant and vibrant in the labor movement.

In many cases these struggles of the lower stratum workers have combined a fight for better wages, unionization and working conditions with demands for an end to racial and national discrimination and inequality. They have also often been in the South and Southwest, which as I mentioned earlier is not a coincidence and further demonstrates the significance of this sector of the working class on the future of this country.

14,000 New York hotel workers struck for better wages and working conditions in June 1985.

The connection of oppressed nationality workers to the struggle for political empowerment and basic democracy is a powerful source of strength for the entire labor movement. The failure of organized labor to deal with the national question, and the issue of thoroughgoing democracy in general, remains the single greatest obstacle to its progress. Labor is going to have to end its exclusion, even opposition, to the demands of workers traditionally excluded from labor, such as minority workers and women workers.

You mentioned the need for workers to get active in the political arena. Why is this important, and how should the labor movement relate to such things as the likely presidential bid by Jesse Jackson?

The labor movement must fight in the political arena because so much of what goes on there affects their interests. Union-busting got its biggest impetus when Ronald Reagan and a Republican Senate were elected into office in 1980. Workers cannot protect their basic interests by focusing exclusively on labor-management contract struggles.

At the same time, the labor movement should not simply rely on the mainstream of the Democratic Party. Look what happened in 1984 when the AFL-CIO handed Mondale a blank check. This strategy backfired horribly. Its impact was largely negative: it was unable to rally workers behind Mondale, and it also made it virtually impossible for other candidates like Jesse Jackson, who represented workers' interests and aspirations far better, to get union support.

Jesse Jackson speaking to steel workers in Pittsburgh.

The formal labor component of Jackson's support was minimal in 1984. Only a handful of union locals actually endorsed Jackson, despite the fact that thousands of workers, and many local union leaders, were not only open to Jackson's message, but were enthusiastically supporting it. However, a possible Jackson candidacy offers the labor movement a great opportunity. He has a strong progressive platform and has actively supported labor struggles such as the Hormel

and Watsonville strikes, and others. His movement is a genuine mass movement and the most progressive and consistently pro-labor in the country.

In the last year, Jackson has been talking to national labor leaders such as Kenneth Blaylock of the American Federation of Government Employees, Lynn Williams of the Steelworkers, Richard Trumka of the United Mine Workers, and William Winpisinger of the Machinists. We should do all we can to encourage this dialogue and for the unions to support Jackson. As in 1984, the Jackson campaign will be the main mass electoral challenge to the right. It will be the main mass electoral vehicle for building multinational unity and for asserting a progressive political platform. Jackson's campaign will force the Democratic Party to address issues important to labor and the minority communities and will help combat the right.

At this point, no candidate has emerged whom organized labor is courting. Democratic candidates may not even want an early endorsement, lest they be labeled as beholden to "special interests." The AFL-CIO would do best to refrain from handpicking labor's candidate and allow workers and unions on the local, regional and international level to support whom they please. As for the left, it should strengthen the Rainbow Coalition within the labor movement as part of the fight against the right.

Many on the left seem to have given up on the possibility of socialism ever being a mass movement and mass force in this country. What is the League's view on this matter?

Well, I'm a communist, I believe in building for a socialist society. I think a socialist U.S. will be more just and fair for the majority of the people. I know that a broad, mass socialist movement can be built. I know that a majority of the people in this country are potentially open to and can become socialists. If you think most people in the U.S. will never support it, there is no point in believing in socialism.

Boston hotel workers celebrate victory over management take-away attempts in December 1985.

I believe this because of my own personal experience but also because I know there are certain contradictions in this society which can't be resolved under capitalism. The U.S. and other advanced capitalist countries can't survive with a system which has such a few people controlling the wealth and the fields and the factories but relies on the broad majority, who have very little control or share in the wealth, to actually carry out the work. Right now many working people in this country are being forced into poverty, and the quality of life for all working people is deteriorating.

People will not suffer continuously without struggling for a better life. I think socialism represents that.

Most of my family have worked in the fields, packing sheds and factories of California. What we've been through is what millions of families in this country go through. When I learned about socialism, I knew that this is the direction society needs to move towards. The common experience of growing up as working class Chicanos/Mexicanos is leading other members of my family to the same conclusions as well.

Some people on the left seem surprised when mass

leaders and regular working people come out in support of socialist ideas. Recently, I was at a *Unity* newspaper program of several hundred people, with workers from Watsonville, janitors from Local 77 in San Jose and Commercial Club strikers from San Francisco. Many of these workers talked openly about the need for socialism and about capitalism as the source of their suffering. Last winter a Watsonville striker addressed a large labor gathering in New York and surprised many people by endorsing socialism herself and targeting the capitalist system. I've had this same experience in community and student work as well. In struggles around *migra* attacks, for bilingual education and the broader issue of educational rights — in all the thousands of ways that people struggle against their oppression in this society — I have found that people actively trying to change things are open to socialist ideas. After all, I became a socialist through a similar process.

August 1985 anti-apartheid rally, New York City.

There are many on the left today who are concerned about the relevancy of the left and are working very hard to gain more influence for themselves or their organizations in the mass movements, and in policy debates. That's fine, but we in the League believe that the left in this country will *never become more relevant unless there is a mass socialist movement, until a sizable portion of the masses of people in this country consider themselves "of the left."* We have tried to devote attention to this question: how do we win over more people to socialism?

We know this is difficult to do. There is a lot of anti-communism in this society, and being open about your ideas can lead to redbaiting. Nevertheless, we feel that we must be open about our ideas and what we believe in. Otherwise, how can people ever become acquainted with socialism and with socialists beyond all the anti-communism they hear all the time?

In my own experience and the experience of other people in the League, we feel that we have been able to break down people's misconceptions about leftists by showing *in practice, in real life,* that we socialists are the most dedicated fighters for people's interests. I believe that in the course of fighting every instance of injustice, many people will learn from their own experience that socialism is not only desirable but necessary. □

A majority of the people in this country are potentially open to socialism. If you think most people will never support it, there is no point in believing in socialism.

Problems facing the left in labor

Ed Ott

The current situation in the labor movement, I would say, is that we've got a situation where capital has, with very few exceptions, rejected any notion of tolerance of unions. There's a conscious effort to push unions out of every industry where that's possible. They are doing everything they can to reduce the workers' standard of living. Management has a very aggressive agenda, which has to do with capital's needs in a changing economic situation. U.S. capital finds it needs to accumulate new capital and get a free hand to deal with labor in any transitions they may make.

The labor movement is just beginning to understand that this period is different, that the last seven years were not a brief recession. I wouldn't say, though, that the leadership of the unions understands this. For instance, in my old union — Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) — the candidate who won two presidential elections ago took the position that even though the union had lost thousands of jobs, those jobs would come back with the economy. In 1979 the union had approximately 185,000 members. They now have approximately 90,000 members and there's no hope of any of the jobs coming back. This is a small example but typical of the total misunderstanding by labor leadership of capital's agenda.

Ed Ott has worked in the labor movement for 18 years. He is a former member of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Workers and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers. He is currently organizing a New York City-based independent political club and working in the Rainbow Coalition.

Some of the problem is that we're dealing with a generation of leadership that came in during the relatively stable period in the '50s and early '60s. In those years there was a tremendous upward pressure on wages and the leadership thought they had a comfortable relationship with their bosses. Now the bosses have changed their minds, but the leadership hasn't recognized it. In the '50s and '60s, the unions quietly accepted their role as an agent of labor discipline. In exchange for wages they guaranteed labor peace. But when the wages stopped coming, the leadership still found themselves in the same basic role. They are now often an agent of discipline and a mediator between the problems the workers have and the needs of capital.

AFL-CIO leadership

With some small exceptions, the mainstream AFL-CIO leaders probably will go down to their last 15 members before they even understand the situation, certainly before they decide to challenge the prerogatives of capital. The general strategy of the AFL-CIO seems to be that they will intensify their support for U.S. foreign policy to get capital to accept them. This is why the AFL-CIO is pumping more resources into their American Institute for Free Labor Development, which supports right-wing unions overseas. They're increasing their presence in southern Africa to promote "free trade unionism." Their basic appeal to capital is, "Look, we provide working class support for your worldwide agenda. In turn, you should be good to us." They used that strategy in the post-World War II period. They drove the left out of the unions and presented themselves to capital as positive agents of capitalism, advocates of American imperialism.

GM autoworkers.

Moreover, in the last presidential election, the top leadership also threw themselves lock, stock and barrel to Walter Mondale early and cut off all discussion and debate about the possibilities of Jesse Jackson and the issues he was talking about. They forced a lot of people who would have normally worked for Jackson out of the situation. They actually hurt themselves. They ended up increasing their political isolation at a time when

they thought that by getting in early, they would become a major political player. They may have in fact marginalized themselves on a national scale and increased the onslaught of capital because they demonstrated their own political impotence.

The Mondale endorsement had another effect too. It weakened the relationship of the labor leadership to their members. A lot of the white working class industrial workers had been won over by the right wing, as shown in their support for Reagan. He talked about issues that the AFL-CIO leadership itself had pushed in foreign affairs. The leadership also alienated itself from a lot of Black workers and other minorities who would have supported Jackson and worked around an agenda that spoke to their needs. The labor movement, however, came out with a conservative agenda Blacks could not support.

Ronald Reagan and Teamsters leader Presser.

So inside the labor movement there's this tremendous tension. And of course, there's a tension that comes from labor's decline in power. Workers don't understand why the union can't "deliver" and the union leadership doesn't understand why the union can't grow. It's beginning to trigger an internal discussion and real tension inside the labor movement.

For the rank and file worker, there's a basic disbelief that the union can do anything for them. Where we do see strikes, they are not where the workers are trying to demonstrate their power, where they're affirming an agenda of their own. Most of the strikes we're seeing right now are defensive. The bosses are forcing workers out on strike just to keep what they have, or negotiate over how much they're going to give back. One of the problems is that the labor movement is unable to put forward an aggressive, positive agenda that allows workers to feel confident or attracts new workers.

Position of progressives

Progressives are now stuck in a situation where our ideology tells us that we should fight, and yet the basic reality is that we don't have the troops to fight with. For the left, we've shared with the labor leadership

some of the problems of this decline. We have had two areas where we've let down our own guard. One, during this period of decline, too much of the left has been drawn into tailing the mainstream unions. And second, we don't have a progressive program that we're offering to people that seems to attract workers.

This poses two questions for us: One, within the confines of trade unionism, what do we do? And two, within the broader political arena, what do we do?

Where we have influence in our local unions, we can't just talk about fighting around a collective bargaining agreement. We have to go back to some very basic tools of organizing, like ongoing education in the unions, both formal and informal. We have to have lunchtime meetings, where we talk to workers about the reality of the situation. Where the workers have lost faith in the union because all it tells them is to file a grievance, and the grievance procedure is not arriving at anything like justice, progressives should lead the discussion about what to do. We have to go to workers and talk about the limits of the grievance procedure, and tell them there are things we can do to break out of this syndrome where the bosses will not settle grievances.

One of the difficulties in a period where unions are weak is that workers aren't willing to fight in the shops because they don't believe the union can protect their jobs. You have to trigger a discussion where people are willing to do something, whether that be a mass grievance — every worker in the shop filing the same grievance — or building up collective consciousness, a petition, or getting workers to step outside the shop and go to public meetings with other workers.

Organizing

One example. When I was organizing in the hospital industry, one of the things we learned is that if you take unionized workers out to organize the unorganized workers, there were two benefits. The union grew, but also the organized workers gained a better understanding of what the union does for them. When they were put in a situation where they had to go out and talk to unorganized workers, they realized the differences and it strengthened the union.

We must discuss with workers, "What can we do

differently?" An example is in Boston. A garment plant shut down and workers took the very profound position that "They owe us something." They fought for retraining education. If certain industries are going to decline, like in the steel industry, the left should take the lead in analyzing the situation. We should be prepared for the transition. Since the reality is that it's not going to be turned around, at least in the short term, where do we leave the workers? Do we abandon them like the mainstream unions do, or do we begin to try to organize them around political demands?

Laid-off Boston garment workers won retraining benefits.

The other thing is in certain situations we have to educate people honestly about what the situation is. Too many progressives put themselves in a corner where they always fight. They feel like if they don't go to the members and say, "We've got to strike," or "We've got to walk out of here," that they're somehow selling out. A sellout is when you could have won something and you didn't. A sellout is not when you don't have the troops to win. People should look at trade unionism the way other people look at guerrilla warfare. You make a fight when you have a real possibility of winning — when you don't, you retreat. But you retreat in an organized way, sharing the understanding of why you're making this retreat to try to keep the army together. And you don't pull people into situations where you know they cannot win. That is the height of dishonesty. You're going to lose everything, and that's not what we're supposed to be all about.

Honesty with workers

So there are times when you must go to local members, honestly share with them your evaluation of the situation, and make a clear recommendation. That's not always easy. You can look at some of these strikes where the workers go out on strike for eight, nine, ten weeks, then they go back in and the leadership gets overthrown. They get voted out. That's not always for the most progressive reasons. That's sometimes because workers felt they were misled. And a lot of good progressive

trade unionists can bite the dust in a strike. We've seen that happen all over the place in basic industry. Local leaderships are changing every couple of years. That's not good and it's not a healthy sign.

The left also does not want to function autocratically. There are times when workers are going to opt to strike where you feel it's not wise to strike. If that happens then our job changes. Our job at that point is to get the most out of the situation — maximize the benefits and minimize the losses.

For instance, when I was in OCAW in Waterbury, Connecticut, I helped negotiate a contract in a shop. It was when the real downward pressure on wages was beginning. We negotiated a two-year agreement that had wage increases of 4% the first year, and 5% the second. These workers had been used to substantially more in their contract settlements. We in the negotiating committee, however, assessed that we could not win a strike. The company had several other plants that could do our work, and we were not in a position financially or numerically to cripple the company.

What we ended up doing was meeting with all of the workers and laying out the entire agreement. We talked to them honestly about it. The contract was a pay cut, since inflation was running 8 or 9%. Since the money wasn't there, we threw a lot into improving shop conditions, such as work rules. We got a health and safety committee and other things. But while we recommended that the workers take the contract, they had to come to terms with it themselves. The president and myself, who at the time was vice-president, left the room.

The workers stayed there for about an hour and a half, probably slicing us up like baloney. But in the end, they decided to take the contract and make their fight elsewhere.

The point is there's still a union in that shop. They've negotiated several contracts since then. They've recouped a little bit on the money. They've still got an organization. But more importantly, they have a sense of themselves, and the local still has credibility in the eyes of these workers. It's very important for a local leader not to lie, because you're going to get caught. And it insults the dignity of the workers.

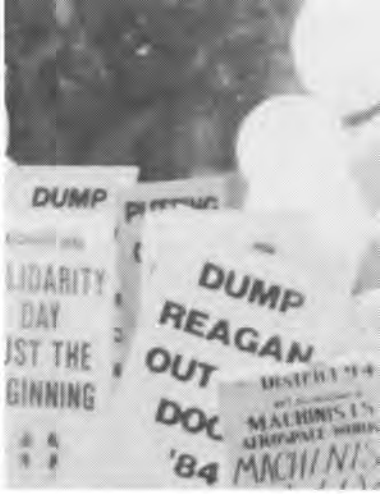
Future tactics

The unions, under the AFL-CIO's misleadership, will continue to decline. Eventually those unions that want to try different tactics and work out any political agenda will be forced out of the mainstream labor movement. If you develop a progressive program for labor and begin to win workers over, you're going to increase the tension inside labor organizations. Whether the splits take organizational form or not, there's going to be splits.

The left must try to move the mainstream around to our agenda, where we put forward demands that every labor person agrees to, but that the labor movement is not now pursuing. For instance, we can put forward demands that restrict the rights of capital, like restrictions on the closing of profitable plants, and implementing the "innocent until proven guilty" concept in the workplace. We should also increase the cost of going out of business by fighting for education, retraining, and income protection.

There are numerous labor people who want to broaden the way we work in politics, who want to have a more partisan agenda, partisan toward working people, partisan towards the poor. Take the Rainbow Coalition. Already at least six national union leaders have lent their names to the Rainbow Coalition, and on a local level many trade union folks find themselves working in or around a rainbow-type coalition. If you could line up more people who now work in the Democratic Party around the agenda of the Rainbow Coalition, you will increase the political tension that exists between the top of the AFL-CIO and the base.

The left should not push forward the notion of false unity with the AFL-CIO leadership. What we should be pushing very hard is a clear, progressive agenda that demands political independence from capital. We can't continue to group around a program that is total capitulation. We have to sharpen the issues that are out there, not blunt them. I also think that we have to sharpen the question of democratic rights, such as the fights over the rights of immigrant



workers and indiscriminate drug testing.

We should also be saying that we want to talk about who is the labor movement. Is it just the unions? Or is it unionized workers, non-unionized workers, unemployed people, housing activists, small farmers, the whole range. We should be fighting for a redefinition of the labor movement and not accept the AFL-CIO's exclusionary view: "You've got a card, you're in the labor movement. You don't have a card, you can't come to our meetings."

Signs of struggle

My assessment has changed in the last six months. I feel more optimistic that the left is beginning to find ways to lead people back towards a discussion of an offensive agenda. There are little signs. There are two things I would point to. I think that the Hormel workers of P-9 showed labor activists, if not the labor movement as a whole, that big national questions can be fought out in local struggles. They raised some of the things the left has talked about — militancy, sacrifice, the notion of winning becoming secondary to the notion of standing up around a set of demands and taking a long-term view. All those elements in some way or another were in the P-9 fight. Also, you can link it up with the struggles that were taking place at the same time in Watsonville and the TWA strike. One common denominator is that they were clearly rank and file, and they clearly ran counter to the wishes of the top labor leadership. And yet they were able to sustain themselves for a long period. That gives me some hope that we, the left, can in fact lead and sustain struggle.

The other thing that gives me hope is there seems to be a general discussion within the left around electoral politics. It's not a question of whether we do it or not, it's a question of how we do it and maintain our integrity as the left. Can we work in the Rainbow Coalition without capitulating to the Democratic Party, or becoming a conduit for more people on the left to end up in the Democratic Party. It is encouraging that people at least are willing to engage in real politics to try to influence events on a local and national level. □

Needed: A new U.S. farm policy

Mark Ritchie and Kevin Ristau

History of U.S. farm policy

From the earliest days of European colonization, America's commercial agriculture (meaning food production beyond immediate family needs) was dominated by large-scale agriculture. This included the slave plantations of the South, huge Spanish haciendas in the Southwest, and the bonanza wheat and cattle farms of the West. Most of our commercial agricultural production was in the hands of wealthy individuals or foreign investors. [1]

By the middle of the 1800s, this condition changed. The federal government intervened, establishing policies that altered the structure of commercial farming by putting family farmers on much of the land. The military defeat of slavery in the South and the opening up of the Middle West by the Homestead Act are examples of the way the federal government intervened to create

Mark Ritchie is a farm policy analyst for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. **Kevin Ristau** is a field staff director for the League of Rural Voters.

conditions favorable to a family farm-based system of agriculture.

But from the moment farm families took possession of land — whether they were freed slaves or immigrant families — they found themselves caught in a classic cost/price squeeze. Skyrocketing prices for the items they needed — like seeds, credit and transportation — could not be covered by the prices the grain monopolies were willing to pay for their crops. Freight rates were controlled by the railroads, while interest rates were set by the big city banks.

This squeeze between rising costs and falling prices caused a series of rural depressions and panics in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Seeing these economic crises as a threat to their survival, family farmers responded with political organizing. Many farmer-based political movements — such as the Farmers Alliance, Populist Party, Greenback Party and the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota — were efforts by desperate farmers to control state and local governments and protect themselves from the railroads, banks and grain monopolies.

Homesteading in Oklahoma territory, 1889.

Recruiting for the Farmer-Labor Party, California 1930. Farmer-laborism was a powerful third party movement for decades. It had both socialist and liberal currents.

as collateral against these loans. Once prices returned to normal levels, farmers repaid the loans with interest. By allowing farmers to control their marketing, the CCC made it possible for farmers to receive a fair price from the marketplace.

Second, farm production was managed to balance supply with demand in order to prevent surpluses.* This feature was needed to reduce the cost to the federal government of purchasing and storing surpluses.

Third, a national grain reserve was created to prevent consumer prices from skyrocketing in times of drought or other natural disasters.

From 1933 to 1953 this legislation was extremely successful. Farmers received fair prices for their crops, production was managed to prevent costly surpluses, and consumer prices remained low and stable. At the same time the number of new farmers increased, soil and water conservation practices flourished, and overall

*This policy, often referred to as "supply management," could be implemented several ways, but the goal is to manage the production of selected agricultural goods to prevent surpluses or shortages.

The Non-Partisan League of North Dakota, for example, took over the state legislature in 1916 and established our nation's first and only government-owned bank to break the monopoly of the Minneapolis-controlled banks. The legislature passed laws to protect farmers from being exploited by the railroads and grain companies, including the establishment of a state-owned wheat mill. [2]

Although World War I brought some temporary relief to farms, it was followed immediately by one of our worst farm depressions, almost a full decade before the infamous crash of the stock market in 1929. Some economists argue that the 1920s farm depression was a major cause of the 1929 collapse, leading to the popular slogan, "Depressions are farm led, and farm fed." The 1920s and early 1930s posed a serious threat to the survival of family farm agriculture. There were extreme hardships, including hunger and bitter cold, especially in those regions without electricity, phones or other services.

The severity of this crisis again spawned a resurgence of militant farmer organizing.

Threshing wheat in Minnesota, 1908.

Farm organizing

In some states, like Minnesota, farmers united with urban workers to form Farmer-Labor Parties which took control of state legislatures during the Great Depression. Once in power, they passed laws designed to protect farmers, workers and small businesses from the worst effects of the crisis, including blanket moratoriums to prevent farm, home and business foreclosures. [3]

At the national level, farmers lobbied for emergency assistance and federal legislation to provide long-term relief from the recurring nightmare of farm depressions. This legislation, often referred to as the Parity Farm Programs, had three central features. [4]

First, the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) was created to set a minimum floor under farm prices. The CCC was authorized to make loans to farmers whenever the prices offered by the grain corporations fell below the cost of production. The farmer's crops were pledged

farm debt declined dramatically. Most important, these Parity Farm Programs were not a burden to the taxpayers. The Commodity Credit Corporation, by charging interest on the marketing loans made to farmers, actually made nearly $13 million between 1933 and 1952.[5]

The legislative victories by farmers in the 1930s prevented, for the time being, the elimination of family farm agriculture in the United States.

In a few states, farm organizing was subverted by banks and agribusiness corporations through the creation of neo-fascist groups like the Associated Farmers of California. The Associated Farmers received the lion's share of their funds from agribusiness corporations and multi-national farm lenders. One of the most effective tactics was to create conflicts between farmers and farm workers by using racism, anti-Semitism and provocateurs to spread hatred and violence.[6]

The Associated Farmers destroyed progressive farm organizations in California. Huge tracts of land came under the control of corporations, banks and wealthy families. This victory of corporation agribusiness over California's family farmers serves as a reminder of the threat facing family farmers today. The appointment of former California Secretary of Agriculture Dick Lyng as U.S. Agriculture Secretary is the most recent example of corporation agribusiness control over our farm and food policy.

A farm family displaced by agribusiness in California in 1939.
Photo: Dorothea Lange

Corporation reaction

The parity programs were real victories for farmers, small businesses and labor, and conflicted with the economic interests of some powerful corporations and banks. Farmers with a fair, secure income were not forced to borrow large amounts from banks; laws which stabilized grain prices hurt grain monopolies which profited greatly from huge swings in market prices; and effective supply management programs meant that fewer acres were planted, reducing sales of chemicals and fertilizer.

Near the end of World War II, powerful corporations

and banks, teaming up with economists and other academics, began political war against the supply management and price floor programs of the parity legislation. They used many of the same tactics later made popular by Joe McCarthy, including the labeling of soil conservation and supply management programs as "central-planning socialism" and "contrary to our free market way of life."

Their efforts to discredit this legislation led to a fierce national debate over the direction of farm policy. Grain companies argued that they needed lower prices in order to sell more overseas, while agri-chemical companies attacked the supply management provisions. Unfortunately for rural America, the corporations won.[7]

In 1953, President Eisenhower and his Agriculture Secretary, Ezra Taft Benson, defeated the Parity Farm Programs won by farmers in the 1930s. Price floors and supply management were replaced by "flexible parity." The Agriculture Secretary was given the discretionary power to lower farm prices to "market-clearing" levels in order to get "government out of agriculture." Rational supply management was replaced by instability. These lower prices forced farmers to produce even more in order to maintain their cash flow, creating even greater surpluses.

A number of corporation-controlled "think tanks" issued reports and recommendations on how to solve this "farm problem." One of these was the Committee for Economic Development (CED). Their 1962 report, "An Adaptive Program for Agriculture,"[8] asserted that there were only two solutions to agricultural depressions. Quoting directly from their report, "The Choices Before Us: (a) leakproof control of farm production or (b) a program, such as we are recommending here, to induce excess resources (primarily people) to move rapidly out of agriculture."

The first option recognized by the CED, "control of farm production," was rejected out of hand as too much "government in agriculture," and contrary to the so-called "free market."

Instead, the CED recommended the second option, the forced removal of a number of families from the land. Quoting again from their text, "Our program would

involve moving off the farm about two million of the present labor force, plus a number equal to a large part of the new entrants who would otherwise join the farm labor force in the next five years."

To accomplish this forced removal, CED recommended that "price supports for wheat, cotton, rice, feed grains and related crops now under price supports be reduced immediately."

The CED argued that the farmers who were liquidated could be more productively used in other sectors of the economy. In addition, employing them elsewhere would open the way for greater capital investment in agriculture. This would require an increased use of energy-intensive methods like more mechanization and greater reliance on chemicals.

In addition CED cited other "real benefits" of enforced lower prices: "The lower prices would induce some of the increased sales of these products both at home and abroad. Some of these crops are heavily dependent upon export markets."

The CED report proposed the elimination of approximately one-third of farm families — primarily moderate-sized operations. Their strategy was to replace family farmers with a small number of super-farms (both large corporate-owned and a few large family-managed operations), and several million "small farms" to be financed primarily by off-farm income or welfare. The large farms would identify and politically align themselves with lenders and corporations investing in agribusiness; the small farmers' dependency on government and on the non-farm economy would weaken them politically and tend to diminish their traditional affiliation with progressive movements.

Abandoned farm land, Texas 1938.

Groups ranging from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to the American Bankers Association all made recommendations similar to those of the CED. This is not surprising since many of the same people served as authors, researchers and advisors on a number of different reports. The result was that thousands of farmers were driven off the land.

Current farm policy

In the early 1970s, new federal farm legislation created a "deficiency payment" linked to a "target price" set by Congress. Along with the original Commodity Credit Corporation loan program these programs form current U.S. farm policy.

Here's how our current farm program works. A "target price" is a price level set by Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture. If prices fall below this level, participating farmers receive a check directly from the government to make up the difference. This check is called a "deficiency payment."

Let's look at corn. The CCC loan rate set by Agriculture Secretary John Block for 1986 was an extremely low $1.92 per bushel. The "target price" is now $3.03. Since the actual market price is always roughly the CCC loan rate, Washington will make "deficiency payments" for the difference between the "target price" and the loan rate — about $1.10 per bushel on corn. On over 7 billion bushels of corn crop, this will require almost $8 billion in subsidies. With 2.2 billion bushels of corn being exported, the total value of the exports being subsidized is only $4.4 billion. Since taxpayers will be spending nearly $8 billion to subsidize this $4.4 billion in sales, it amounts to an enormous net loss of $3.6 billion.

The entire cost of wheat and corn subsidies will be nearly $12 billion in 1986, more than the Gramm-Rudman budget reductions.

But it costs more than $3.03 per bushel to grow corn. In 1983 the USDA said it cost over $3.20 per bushel. This means that farmers are losing money on every bushel harvested, forcing them to borrow even more money to cover their losses. Over the past 15 years this has created a huge drain on the credit systems of our country, adding to the high bank interest rates.

The end result of this deficiency payment system is that grain corporations and foreign buyers are allowed to buy our grain at prices over $1.00 per bushel below the cost of production. We spend huge sums of taxpayers' money to compensate farmers for part of their loss caused by this subsidy to the grain trade; then we suffer the effects of forcing farmers to borrow enormous sums of money to cover the rest of their losses.

The entire cost of the wheat and corn subsidies will be nearly $12 billion in 1986, more than the total amount

of budget reductions advocated by Gramm-Rudman. Many farmers do not want and do not benefit from these subsidies.

The only argument used in recent years to justify this system is that the U.S. must lower prices and subsidize grain corporations to gain more export markets. Some economists and politicians still believe that more exports will be a solution to our farm crisis. For them, the concept of lowering farm prices in order to boost exports, which would eventually raise overall income, has some logic. But the logic has never been supported by economic facts. Volume has never risen enough to compensate for the lower prices. Export earnings have tended to fall with lower prices, even though volume may rise. For example, corn priced at $2.00 would boost exports to 2.2 billion bushels, valued at $4.4 billion. Corn priced at $3.60 would have sales of only 1.6 billion bushels, but valued at $5.76 billion — almost 25 percent more. This does not factor in the additional costs of imported fuel and fertilizer needed to produce extra bushels being sold at the lower prices.

Farmers have faced difficult times in the U.S. in the 1980s.

As the failure of the "lower prices to boost exports" strategy became apparent, politicians began to scramble. A new strategy was put forward — "more credit." Richard Nixon, in response to farmer protests, announced his intention to help farmers by a massive effort to "inject credit into the rural sector." [9]

With inflation speculation pushing up the "paper values" of farmland*, it was possible to continue loaning larger and larger amounts to farmers, year after year. Farmers and ranchers kept losing money on their crops and livestock, but continued to operate on borrowed money that was eagerly offered by private, cooperative and government lenders, who believed land values would continue to rise indefinitely.

In 1978 and 1979, protesting farmers came to Wash-

*During the 1970s, like urban housing, farmland prices skyrocketed, increasing the value of many family farms, at least on paper. For many farmers, the only impact of this increase in land value was that they could borrow more money, increasing their indebtedness.

ington with a prophetic message. They warned Congress that agriculture based on paper values for land could not be sustained, and that farm prices needed to be raised to avert a rural collapse. Predicting that over half of America's farmers would be forced out of business over the next five to ten years, they tried desperately to warn the American public of the coming farm crisis.

Farm protest near Jacksonville, Illinois, 1982.

In 1981, their worst fears began to come true. The high interest rates of Reaganomics began to force down land prices. Those farmers most vulnerable were forced into bankruptcy or foreclosure. As their land and machinery went to auction, values were forced down for everyone else. A downward spiral of falling values leading to insolvency for farmers and bankers throughout the nation is now in full swing. Since 1981 farmland prices have fallen over 50 percent, and over 10 percent of the farming population has already been liquidated. A recent credit survey by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture showed that 30 percent of Minnesota farmers — nearly 30,000 — will be liquidated within the next year or two.[10] We have farmland prices at levels lower than the worst years of the 1930s.

Implications of the farm crisis

The destruction of family farmers through enforced low prices has created numerous secondary effects on our entire society.

Impact on the national economy

Almost 21 percent of our entire work force is directly linked to agriculture, including 55,000 jobs in our steel mills.

Each time a farm is sold it means fewer customers for the products of our factories; it also means many used tractors, trucks and other equipment will be put on the market, further depressing these industries. Every farm liquidated means the loss of from five to seven jobs. Every three farms liquidated destroys another rural business.[11]

In addition to the millions of jobs at stake, agriculture

provides 70 percent of the nation's raw material wealth — new wealth that is needed to "fuel" our national economy. Every dollar earned by a farmer (or other raw material producer) circulates and multiplies throughout the economy, creating at least five additional dollars in goods and services.

Farmers and businesses losing money don't pay any taxes. Neither do unemployed workers. This sharp reduction in tax revenues is occurring at the very moment when the demands on government by bankrupt farmers, unemployed workers and failing banks and businesses are increasing.

Environmental impact

Low farm prices always force farmers to increase their production. Like any worker whose wages are cut in half, farmers faced with falling prices must work twice as hard and sell twice as much just to cover their bills. This has led to an abandonment of careful soil and water conservation practices and to the tilling of marginal, highly erodible land. In addition, the destruction of the cattle industry by cheap grain and corporate feedlots has virtually wiped out grazing on hillsides, leaving the farmer no choice but to put corn or soybeans on those fragile lands. After a few years the hills are deeply eroded, with all the topsoil destroyed.[12]

Washington, D.C., 1979.

The forcing of families off the land results in the control of a great deal of farmland passing into the hands of large corporations and absentee investors. They have generally treated the irreplaceable soil and water resources with the same narrow, short-term profit orientation that has characterized their treatment of other capital resources, like factories and railroads. The earth is used and abused as long as it can show a high enough profit or serve as a tax shelter for other profits. Once depleted, land is abandoned or covered over for "development" purposes. Groundwater is pumped dry and rivers diverted.

Social costs

The social costs of the crisis are also extremely high.

Alarming rates of spouse and child abuse, alcoholism and the highest suicide rate among all professions are examples of the social and personal crisis growing out of the economic crisis.[13]

The recent rash of murders by farmers and lenders who snapped under the extreme pressure is unfortunately only the tip of the iceberg.

Agribusiness in the Imperial Valley, California.

Impact on world hunger

Another devastating impact of our low grain prices is on the poor farmers of the third world. Since the U.S. is the dominant exporter of major grains and oilseeds — controlling over 70 percent of the world's corn and soybean exports — our prices set world prices. By forcing down U.S. prices, grain corporations can underprice local farmers in the domestic markets of many third world countries, robbing them of any chance to sell their products at a profit.[14]

Unable to earn a profit from farming, third world farmers are driven off their farms and forced into overcrowded urban slums or shantytowns. Their land will no longer be cared for; it may eventually erode or turn into desert — or it may end up being absorbed into ever larger estates of wealthy absentee landlords to produce cattle for export to the United States or Europe.

Some of these poor farmers may hold onto their land, but will be unable to make any profit competing against underpriced, subsidized imports from the U.S. With no chance of earning a profit, these farmers will be unable to afford soil erosion control, higher-yielding seeds, or better equipment needed to boost their productivity.

These local farmers will be replaced by an ever-growing dependence on food imports. In many countries, this amounts to a death sentence for millions of people. Governments will be forced to choose between importing food and importing medicine.

This has become a "deadly connection" in the 1980s. Debt and interest payments have absorbed almost all available foreign earnings of many poor countries, leav-

ing very little to import food, no matter how low the price. In order for these countries to service their expanded debts, cash crop production must be expanded at the expense of food production for local consumption — and the less land devoted to food means increased hunger, starvation and dependence on the U.S. for food aid. [15]

Political implications

The loss of 50 percent of our family farmers over the next few years has long-term political implications that are seldom considered. It would mean that assets worth up to $500 billion in farmland, livestock, machinery and buildings would be transferred from farm families to banks, insurance companies and wealthy individuals.

The struggle for justice against the enormous power concentrated in the hands of banks and corporations is difficult enough already. The replacement of historically progressive family farmers with corporate agribusiness could turn the political climate of the entire rural Midwest into something similar to the Imperial

U.S. agribusiness keeps third world farmers impoverished. Here, women in Mozambique till the land with hand tools.

Valley of California where agribusiness dominates.

Critical issues in farm policy debates

There are three central elements to our current farm policy debate. First and foremost, what prices should farmers ultimately receive for their crops and livestock? Second, what is the amount, if any, of public financial support that is necessary or appropriate? And third, what is the role of food exports and imports in creating and potentially solving the current rural economic crisis?

Two conflicting positions emerged during the 1985 Farm Bill debate. The first is often referred to as the "Modified Current Program" position.[16] In hopes of boosting exports, supporters wanted to modify the current program by lowering prices; but they would have increased subsidies a small amount to cover some of the losses farmers would suffer because of these lower prices.

The other position, sometimes referred to as the "Referendum" proposal, would have given the farmers the right to vote in a national referendum, as they did in the 1940s, to approve effective supply manage-

Farmers take their case to Washington, D.C., in tractorcade protest, 1979.

ment programs based on bushel quotas. Under this proposal, all deficiency payment subsidies would be eliminated, and Commodity Credit Corporation loan rates would be raised to fully cover production costs.[17] Let's take a closer look at the main points of agreement and disagreement between these two positions.

Both proposals agree that market prices for farmers are too low to cover costs, and that they have been too low for many of the past years as well. Second, they agree that market prices in the U.S. are closely tied to the Commodity Credit Corporation loan rate set by Congress for our major crops. Since farmers can collectively withhold their crops at the CCC floor level, they can force foreign and multi-national grain buyers to at least pay this minimum price for the commodities. Over the past 50 years there has been a close relationship between CCC loan rates and the market prices, with the only major exception being the period of the Russian wheat purchases in the early 1970s.[18]

Should farm prices be set below the cost of production to increase exports, or should farmers have a chance to vote for production controls?

A third area of agreement is that by dominating world agricultural trade, the U.S. sets world prices. The U.S. ships about 80 percent of the world's soybeans that are exported, 70 percent of the world's corn and nearly 40 percent of the world's wheat. By comparison, the Middle East produces only about 40 percent of the world's oil trade. If we deliberately lower our prices, all other producers will be forced to lower their price to at least a dime below the U.S. level — just to protect their tiny share of the world market.[19] Likewise, if the U.S. Congress forces up U.S. market prices by raising Commodity Credit Corporation loan rates, other producers would follow suit, continuing to set their price just under the U.S. price.

Fourth, many agree that the total farm debt, nearly $225 billion at this point, is simply not repayable. Cheaper money at longer term rates is a necessity, but there seems no solution to repaying the debt.

Another area of agreement was that farm programs are too costly; that these costs must be cut in order to reduce the deficit — a necessity if we are to bring interest rates and the value of the dollar under control. Many argued for abolishing the deficiency subsidy for corn and wheat, which would have freed up over $11 billion, more than enough to cover all

Gramm-Rudman cuts in 1986.

Finally, most agreed that the supply of farm commodities must be reduced, and that the federal government must take the responsibility for helping farmers manage their production. High government cost, dollar pressure on prices, and people starving while grain rots in storage bins are but a few of the arguments supporting the demand for federal action in this area.

But here agreement ends. *The real debate over farm policy comes down to this: Should farm prices be set below the cost of production in an effort to increase export sales, with the farmers' losses partially offset by taxpayer subsidies? Or should farmers be given the right to vote on a program that would combine higher CCC loan rates with effective production controls?*

Family farm in Illinois at dusk.

The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at Iowa State University and the University of Missouri have done the most comprehensive and accurate computer modeling for analyzing these federal farm policy proposals. In 1985 they compared the two approaches and showed the superiority of the production control program.[20] However the Modified Current approach eventually won out in the 1985 Farm Bill debate.

Former Agriculture Secretary John Block then chose to force down farm commodity prices to the lowest possible legal level, creating an enormous jump in the subsidy cost to the American taxpayers. Since the subsidies are determined by subtracting market prices from the target, the lowering of the CCC rate has automatically meant lower market prices and higher subsidies. The subsidy payments for corn and wheat alone, under the Reagan administration's proposals, will total almost $12 billion — larger than the entire amount needed to be cut under Gramm-Rudman. By raising the CCC loan rates above the target price, it would be possible to totally eliminate these subsidies.

One argument often made for keeping farm prices below the cost of production and supplementing farmers with tax dollars is that it keeps prices down for consumers. Some argue that at least the tax structure

is somewhat progressive, whereas the retail food system is regressive*; that higher farm prices would equal higher retail prices which would hurt poor people even more.

Unfortunately, this argument ignores the fact that most of our subsidized food products are shipped overseas to the Soviet Union, Europe, Japan and the Middle East — which means U.S. taxpayers are primarily subsidizing foreign buyers at the same time they are subsidizing all U.S. consumers, rich and poor.

Increase grain prices?

In 1986, we will spend nearly $12 billion to subsidize corn and wheat. If prices for both these crops were raised to the levels adequate to meet farmers' current production costs, it would add only $10 billion to the $340 billion U.S. food bill — an increase of less than 2.8%, and less than a nickel on a dollar loaf of bread. This increase of $10 billion in retail costs would result in a savings of $12 billion in taxpayers' costs, creating a net savings of $2 billion — a savings that could be used to nearly double the food stamps available to poor people. In a letter to Congress from the AFL-CIO Legislative Director Ray Dennison during the last days of the 1985 Farm Bill debate, the unions spoke directly to the arguments for maintaining low farm prices in order to "help" consumers. Quoting directly from his letter:

> "In urging your support for the Harkin Farm Bill the AFL-CIO is aware of opponents' arguments that this program would result in higher prices and is therefore anti-consumer. While always concerned about the interests of consumers, millions of whom are union members, the AFL-CIO has painfully experienced the toll that an obsession for the lowest price can have on American industry and in turn the jobs of thousands of America's workers." [21]

Another argument for keeping farm prices below the cost of production is that if we raise prices to a decent

*The tax structure is "progressive" in the sense that people with more money are *supposed* to pay a greater percentage of their income in tax, though in reality this is often not true. Many times those with the most money pay the *least* in taxes. Food prices are "regressive" in that everyone pays the same prices, no matter what their income. Poor people have to spend a greater proportion of their income on food.

level, "it would price the U.S. out of world markets." Since we supply over 70% of the world's soybean and corn, this argument is, on its face, ludicrous. But it is worth taking a closer look at it to understand the role of imports and exports.

A number of major farm commodity organizations contracted with the Food and Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri to project grain exports sales under different price levels. Based on their calculations, there would only be a slight drop in volume of exports if farm commodity prices were raised to a break-even level here in the United States; due to the increased prices, however, actual export earnings would be much greater. Since what is important in balanced trade deficits is dollars, not bushels, any proposals which may increase volume but decrease earnings must be seen as dangerous to the economic health of the nation.[22]

For example, they project that corn set at current levels of around $2 per bushel would give the U.S. an export volume of 2.2 billion bushels with earnings of roughly $4.4 billion. However, if corn was set at $3.60, roughly the cost of production at this moment, it would generate total sales of 1.6 billion bushels and the new value of those bushels would be over $5.76 billion — nearly 25% higher exports under higher prices. In addition, the additional bushels sold at the lower price level, for lower export earnings, would also require imported fertilizers and fuels costing close to $1.6 billion, causing a net loss to our already badly damaged balance of trade of over $3 billion on just this one crop alone.

Why does it work out this way? First of all, the food demand is very inelastic.[23] This means that price changes induce little change in demand one way or the other. One obvious reason for this is the total U.S. dominance of many markets.

Secondly, the U.S. has a large portion of the world's grain storage facilities. Almost all major grain importers only have facilities to hold one month of grain at a time, which forces them to buy their import requirements on a month-to-month basis. Since most exporters, outside of the U.S. and Canada, lack major facilities for storage, they are forced at harvest to sell their entire crop. Once these crops are disposed of, the only major

source left is the United States. The U.S. is practically the only source that importing nations can turn to for up to six months of the year. The Soviet Union does not buy huge quantities of corn, wheat, and soybeans from the U.S. because it views the U.S. as its friend; the Soviets simply have no other place to turn.

Third, there are a number of places, like Taiwan, which have such enormous trade balances in the United States that they are committed to buying 100% of their grain imports from our country, regardless of the price, just to maintain good trading relations and access to U.S. markets.

Fourth, any U.S. price increase is simply met by a similar increase by all other supplying nations. Everyone is interested in getting grain prices back up to where they can break even or show a profit. Likewise, any attempt by the U.S. to lower its price below other exporters is simply met by equal drops in prices around the world. This causes great harm not only to U.S. export earnings, but to the export earnings of all these other nations as well. Since many of these other grain exporters owe enormous debts to New York banks, they

Farm auction, Iowa 1986.

Argentina and other third world countries are protesting their growing debt to U.S. and other foreign banks.

must continue to generate the same export earnings from their crops, no matter how low prices fall.

Impact on third world

If the United States goes through with its stated intention to lower world prices by up to 40%, the foreign earnings of Brazil and Argentina, in particular, will suffer heavily. Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín, in an interview with columnist Jack Anderson,[24] stated his nation's response to U.S. intentions to lower prices in an effort to put his country out of business. He repeated his earlier pledge to meet and exceed any U.S. price decreases in order to maintain their world market share. He has previously stated they would need to maintain their cash flow to keep making bank payments no matter what happens, and that they have 300 million acres of unplowed land to put under production if necessary. He says that if the U.S. cuts prices there will be no reduction in exports from other countries in a classic supply and demand response; that instead we will see what we have always seen in the past: countries will be forced to increase production and exports to main-

tain cash flows, thus actually reducing the number of bushels that can be sold by the United States.[25]

The final argument used against any increase in commodity prices is that only the big corporate farmers would benefit, allowing them to grow ever stronger and larger. This is clearly an important concern, and is addressed directly in almost every proposal brought by Democrats to Congress. Senator Tom Harkin, in his Farm Policy Reform Act, included targeting provisions that would require family farms up to a $200,000 gross income to set aside only a flat portion of their production, while farms over this size would face a "set-aside" rising directly with an increase in their gross income size. Targeting to benefit family farms is extremely important in any farm policy proposal, but must be carefully worded. Often these proposals pit small farmers against so-called "big farmers," damaging the coalition building needed in rural America if we are to pass good farm legislation. A thousand acres may be large in some states and small in another; but they are all probably in trouble, needing a change in the overall policy.

This struggle between those who believe we should raise farm prices and eliminate subsidies and those who believe we should lower farm prices to boost exports will be an important and interesting one in the next year. The latest farm polls are now becoming available on these issues, with some surprising results. In a recent Kansas poll, for example, 81% of those responding supported the rights of farmers to vote on a referendum, and over 75% supported the approach which would raise commodity prices and impose effective supply management controls.[26]

Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise that mandatory supply management has such strong support. A long list of crops — from peanuts and tobacco to almost all fresh fruits and vegetables — have used supply management as a cornerstone to maintain fair prices and low government costs. Furthermore, most of these commodities are marketed through producer-controlled cooperatives, capturing even more of the marketing dollar for the producer and reducing consumer costs.

Visions for the future

Part of the problem within the debate of these issues

is the lack of any vision — either for our emergency crisis, or for the long-term development of agriculture. What this means, however, is that we can go directly to people in the rural and urban communities; we can solicit their vision — a vision needed to give life and substance to the debate.

We have some stark choices to make. We can allow things to go on as they are now and watch the replacement of family farm agriculture with the absentee owner agribusiness we now have in the Central Valley of California.

Government policy helps keep many European farms family owned.

Or we can decide that policies that keep family farmers on the land are vitally important to our economy and to our environment. We could, for example, follow the lead of Holland, a country that has decided in favor of keeping profitable, healthy families on the land. Their country is nearly 14 times more densely populated than our own, much more industrialized and has a higher standard of living; yet nearly 4% of their population is still farming on very productive and highly efficient units.

In contrast, the U.S. has less than a half percent still farming, which will be cut in half again before 1990. Holland, along with the rest of Europe, has consistently set farm prices at levels adequate to cover all production costs and to begin equalizing the standard of living between urban and rural people. Beyond this, they have enacted policies designed to help lower-income and part-time producers improve their farming enterprises and bring their income up to average levels.

Dutch farm policy is also designed with major consideration for the environment. Last year, the Dutch minister of agriculture halted further expansion of hog and poultry farms because the rich manure being spread over the available acres had reached the maximum safe levels. Any further expansion of herds would have been a threat to the water table that sits so closely under the surface of the land. Although this was a difficult adjustment for farmers, there was widespread support from even the most conservative of them. Earning a decent income year after year has given many Euro-

pean farmers the cushion needed to soften tough blows like this.

Most important, however, is that Dutch and European farm policy includes consideration of the impact on the rest of the world, especially on people in third world nations. Since Europe has a dominant position in dairy exports, comparable to U.S. dominance in cereals and feed grains, their dairy policy provides an excellent comparison. Like the U.S., they set the world price and every other producer is forced to adjust their prices in response. And, like U.S. cereal exports, massive expansion of European dairy exports had come primarily at the expense of local farmers in the third world. Europe was expanding its dairy exports by shipping them at extremely low, subsidized prices, just as the U.S. is attempting to do in cereals. These subsidized exports competed directly with local producers, putting many of them out of business, while more and more scarce, hard currency was used to pay for cheap, but economically deadly, milk imports.

Once some European dairy farmers became aware of this situation, they began to look for other solutions.

Protest at Chicago's Board of Trade, 1985.

Iowans traveled to Washington, D.C., to oppose Reagan policies.

What they proposed was the imposition of strict production quotas on Europe's dairy farms, to insure that Europe would no longer be depressing milk prices around the world and displacing poor dairy farmers in the third world. They labored for producer quotas with small increases in milk prices to cover the impact these policies would have on dairy farmers, especially the younger and lower-income producers. In 1984, these policies were established by the European Parliament, calling for an 8% overall decrease through quotas. Although farmers did not win a price increase large enough to cover their full losses, there is wide support, due to their understanding of their responsibilities to the rest of the world.

There are many choices to make, but we need to be developing a vision. The key question is one of values; we need to ask what it is we are trying to preserve, to enhance, to promote. Caring for the soil, allowing hungry people the opportunity to feed themselves, and a fair return for the labor of farmers and workers clearly must be central to whatever policies and solutions we pursue.

Why bother?

The wheels are already greased and in motion to grind up and spit out up to one-third of America's family farmers before the 1988 elections. It would take an enormous effort to address these issues, so why bother? First of all, what's at stake is nearly $500 billion in food production resources which is about to be transferred out of the hands of working farm families and into the hands of corporations, banks and wealthy individuals.

Second, many bitter and desperate rural people, faced with losing everything they've worked for, may become involved in the right-wing organizing going on throughout the countryside. It is very important to see this danger as a threat to democracy as a whole and to take an aggressive position in dealing with the source of this problem — specifically, the destruction of our rural economy.[27]

Finally, rural people make up 30% of the electorate, and they were the majority in some of the crucial Senate races in 1986.[28] In a recent Harris poll survey, a majority of the people in farm states stated that given a choice between a Democratic candidate and a Republican candidate, they would choose a Democratic candidate by a margin of 54% to 41%.[29]

The recent shift in the Midwest toward the Democrats can be attributed mostly to the farm situation. It is only recently that the plight of the farmers has been so well publicized, and their situation is now associated with Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party. Midwesterners are turning on Republicans with a vengeance. In a number of states, Republican-elected officials are resigning their parties or switching to the Democrats in protest over Republican Party insensitivity to the farm crisis. In an Iowa poll taken in November 1985, disapproval of Reagan's handling of the economy was 53%, and 77% disapproved of his handling of the rural economic crisis.[30]

Finally, farmers and farm movements have become important elements in a broader political development in this country. Their economic analysis has helped to clarify other raw material and natural resource issues, and their political power, though damaged in this eco-

Midwesterners are turning on Republicans with a vengeance . . . farmers have become important elements in a broader political development.

nomic crisis, is still a potent force others can use to gain their objectives.

Ronald Reagan's proposal to "Export the Farmers" can no longer be written off as simply a cruel joke. What is at stake is not merely our weekly food bill or balanced budgets, but the kind of world we will leave our children. We can afford nothing less than our finest effort. □

Footnotes

[1] For an excellent history of U.S. agriculture since colonization, see L.C. Gray, "History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860," Carnegie Institution, 1933; Marshall Harris, "Origin of the Land Tenure System in the U.S.," ISU Press, 1953; Richard Morrisey, "Colonial Agriculture in New Spain," *Agricultural History* 31:24-29, July 1957.

[2] Robert L. Morlan, "Political Prairie Fire," University of Minnesota Press, 1955.

[3] John L. Shover, "The Cornbelt Rebellion," University of Illinois Press, 1965.

[4] Gilbert Fite, "George H. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity," University of Oklahoma Press, 1954.

[5] U.S. Representative Harold Cooley, "I Can See Farm Bankruptcy if Price Supports are Removed," *U.S. News and World Report*, August 30, 1957; also see Robert L. Toutz, "Legal Parity: Implementation of the Policy of Equality of Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 29:174-181, October 1955.

[6] A.V. Krebs, "The Corporate Reapers: Eradicating the Family Farm System in America," Center for Rural Studies, 1986.

[7] Mark Ritchie, "Loss of Family Farms," Center for Rural Studies, 1979.

[8] Committee for Economic Development, "An Adaptive Program for Agriculture," New York, 1962.

[9] Richard Nixon, "State of the Union" speech, 1973.

[10] Minnesota Department of Agriculture, "Farm Financial Survey," 1985.

[11] Doug Wertish, "The Effect of Losing 10 Percent of the Faribault Area Farmers," Faribault Area Vo-Tech Institute (Minnesota), 1985.

[12] For an excellent look at environmental impacts of farm policies see Joe Petulla, *American Environmental History*, Boyd and Fraser, 1977.

[13] No single author has yet compiled a comprehensive look at the full personal implications of the crisis, but a number of state mental health departments and the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, have developed important new studies which should become more widely available during the next year.

[14] Mark Ritchie, "U.S. Farm Policy Impact on World Hunger," League of Rural Voters, 1985.

[15] James Wessel, "Trading the Future," Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1983; and Mark Ritchie, "Disappearance of Family Farm Agriculture in the U.S.," Speech to World Food Assembly, Rome, 1984.

[16] The single best example of this approach was the legislation proposed by Congressman Foley in the 1985 Farm Bill debate, and approved by the U.S. House of Representatives Agricultural Subcommittee on Wheat, Soybeans, and Feed Grains on June 16, 1985.

[17] The best example of this approach was the legislation proposed by Congressman Alexander, HR 2383, in the 1985 Farm Bill debate and the amendment proposed by Congressman Bedell and passed by the full House Agriculture Committee.

[18] Historic records of market prices and CCC loan rates can be obtained on a state-by-state basis from the U.S.D.A.

[19] Dr. William Wilson, "Structural Characteristics of the International Wheat Market," University of North Dakota, 1985.

[20] Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (expansion of CAST Report No. 104), University of Missouri, 1985.

[21] Letter to Congress from AFL-CIO Legislative Director Ray Dennison, November 1985.

[22] Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute, "An Evaluation of Proposed Program Designs for the 1985 Farm Bill," University of Missouri, 1985.

[23] Several recent studies have looked at the issue of world grain price elasticity, including "The Impact of U.S. Wheat Prices on U.S. Exports," Chase Econometrics, and the study cited above by Dr. William Wilson.

[24] Jack Anderson interview with Argentine President Alfonsín, April 7, 1985.

[25] For another interesting look at this issue see the Heritage Foundation syndicated feature, "How a Strong Dollar Drives Farm Subsidies Up," by Warren Brookes, Richmond (Virginia) *Times Dispatch*, February 4, 1985.

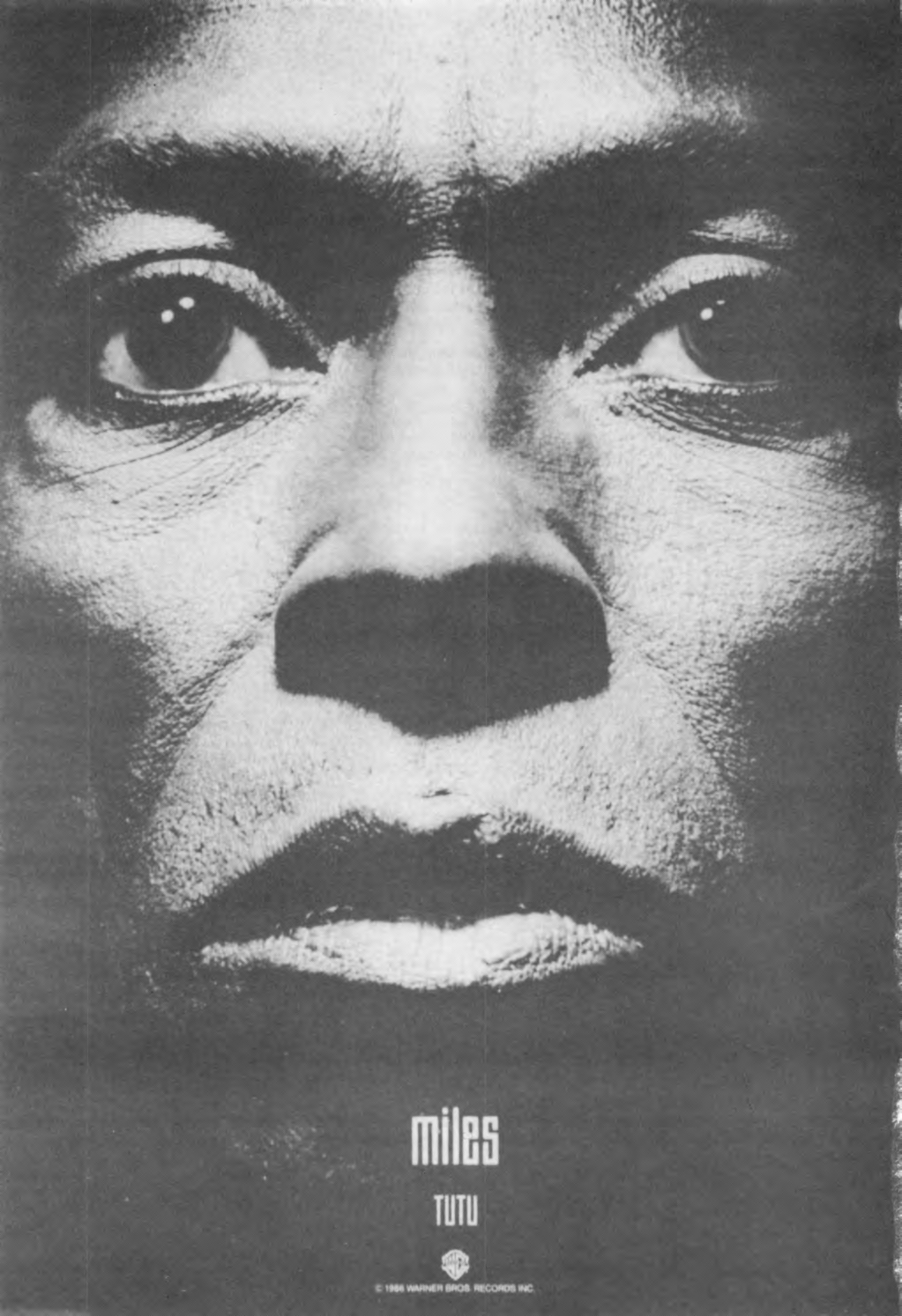
[26] Poll conducted by the *Kansas Farmer*, November 1985.

[27] An excellent series of articles looking at this problem was published by the Rochester (Minnesota) *Times Bulletin*, November 1984.

[28] Mark Ritchie, "Rural Voter Re-Alignment," non-published report, 1985.

[29] Harris Survey, October 21, 1985.

[30] Des Moines *Register* "Iowa Poll," November 3, 1985.



Miles Davis

"One Of The Great Mother Fuckers"

— Philly Joe Jones in conversation

Amiri Baraka

In interviewing Miles, the fundamental question at the bottom of my questions was: How did you get from there to here? Meaning how did you get from being the sideman of Charlie Parker and playing that transcendental music, to *The Man With The Horn*, *Star People* and the latest, *Decoy*?

To me, if I cd hear that path and motion, that change of priorities, I could say something useful about Miles' journey and perhaps we could all learn something.

This was not idle academic analysis. For many years of my life Miles Davis was my ultimate culture hero. Artist, cool man, bad dude, hipster (old meaning), clear as daylight and funky as revelation.

The prospect of finally doing a piece on Miles, of having to interview him, to meet him up close, was very important to me. I remembered one night when I was a little boy trying to be a jazz critic. I had gone w/o benefit of a sponsor to the Village Vanguard where Miles was playing.

I don't remember the exact group Miles had with him then. But Trane was gone, and Hank Mobley, one of my roadies of the period, who I'd met in Newark, was with Miles.

When I went into the back room which still passes as a dressing room, the musicians were spread around casually rapping, Miles all the way to the rear like a point.

I remember Hank was there, and none of the others. Only a male jazz groupie, called Freddie Freeloader. Miles even recorded a tune w/the same name on *Kind of Blue*.

To my rather timid request for an interview Miles waved it off, mumbling something, I guess, about how he didn't want to be bothered.

Amiri Baraka is the well-known revolutionary playwright, poet and cultural worker. He is editor of *The Black Nation* Magazine and a member of the Central Committee of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L).

(Left) Cover from Miles Davis' latest album, entitled Tutu.

With that youthful mixture of rejection dregs and crackpot daring I spat.

I can't remember Miles' reaction, because suddenly Freeloader was forward and talking loud, "Hey, goddamnit, the man say he don't want to be bothered."

"I wasn't talking to you."

"Hey, man, I'll throw yr ass out."

"Shit," the thing had gotten completely out, but I certainly cdn't back down. It looked like I was gonna have to bash this negro up side his empty knot. But at that moment, Hank intervened, telling Freddie to cool it, wrapping his arms around my shoulders, telling the assembled audience I was his homeboy.

I never got that interview. Ironically musician rumor has it that a few years later Miles got incensed at one of Freddie's freeloads and tossed him down a flight of stairs.

So the prospect of the present interview raised the spoor of that history. It also made me smile a little. And now, coming into the well appointed mirror sparkling bar at the UN Plaza Hotel where we met, I wondered wd he ever remember the incident. But I never raised it directly.

I was sitting for a short period, meditating on some Courvoisier, when a bright and bouncy brown skinned woman appeared, all energy and business, the waiter steering her towards the table. It was Sandra Da Costa, CBS' publicist, whom the *New York Times* people turned me onto in order to reach Miles. We talked Miles for a few minutes and after awhile, I heard some arrival and attention sounds, not much on such a low key weekday afternoon, but someone more than the many had shown.

When I turned my very first impression looking at the beautiful black man moving gracefully yet walking w/ a cane and talking to various of the waiters he seemed to know was that Miles Davis looked like a star, a real celebrity.

The way he dressed, lst, obviously set all the rest of himself off — probably as he meant it to. Miles Davis' deep black brown skin is still a marvel of the African aesthetic. There is no doubt, he is a black man. At once the old sobriquet he carried comes back *The Black Prince.* The gold topped cane, he handles like a casual guidon of elegance. The bone condition that makes it necessary, the prosthetic hip that he later told me had slipped out of place, are not what the cane makes us focus on. It is something Miles digs, we are convinced, not staring too directly as he glides into the slick Upper East Side bar booth.

We oldtime Miles worshippers have always dug Miles' "vines," whether the cap pulled down around his ears on the hot '50's *Dig* or the green button down shirt, sleeves rolled up, the impenetrable shades of *Milestones.* Miles was always "clean." Though, and this is instructive as to our perception of the whole aesthetic, that as he seemed to get more into what was later termed "fusion," Miles looked from various flicks, as if he had also began to hook up in some Sly and the Family Stone type wild threads we old time neo Ivy intellectuals thought of as frankly "out to lunch" and then some.

But what you get from Miles in conversation and from his manner is a Man always, as Richard Wright said the intellectual and artist must be, "at the top of his time." Aware of who he is and the nature of his time and

Miles Davis at home in New York City.

astride them both, his art therefore, "the state of" that doing, which his superior knowing and feeling has made possible.

Dizzy Gillespie told me recently at the Blue Note the night they celebrated his and the club's birthday, that Miles "was like a man who had made a pact with himself . . . to never repeat himself." It is like a "curse" Miles sd elsewhere, to constantly change.

But it is his deep sensitivity, the artist's throbbing antennae of consciousness — forever impressed with the real, and the real, for any late comers, is in constant motion.

Miles, this day, wore some unbelievably hip Fisherman's or Truck Driver's (depending on where you've been) cap, made of what looked like black raffia. A military type jacket, appropriately matched ballooning black pants, and black clogs, dutch wooden shoe lookalikes.

It all went together because he placed them on himself together. Along with the cane and some extremely expensive looking sunglasses.

The introductions were going round as Miles sat. We shook hands he said, "The mystery man"! Me, a mystery man — you never know how people perceive each other across the cloud of time and distance. What they look like to each other, from wherever. What they mean to each other.

I had said to Da Costa over the phone that I only needed an hour of interview. I guess because I know most people don't like drawn out interviews — I know I don't. Plus, I thought I knew so much over the years about Miles.

But being there with him, the herd of questions just his presence occasioned, was actually embarrassing. I knew I cdn't ask most of them. I cd not really be an interviewer in a certain sense. To probe in a cold way someone who had in one sense actually given you consciousness. Nothing happening.

Yet there was this basic interrogative in my present feeling for Miles and his music. How did you get to here, to playing *The Man With The Horn* and *Star People*, albums I did not care very much for? What brought you from the sublime heights of "Now's the Time" or "Ornithology" and "Venus De Milo" or "Move" or "Walkin'" or *Milestones* or *Kind of Blue* or the myriad other anthems of the deep hip, the smooth know, the cooly funky expository? Here to an over heavy back beat blocking the light whirring metal ideas and now less than there, and not quite sound.

But it was not only in the asking and the telling that something changed for me. The new album *Decoy* (particularly the title tune) is a clear return to a much hipper level of performance for Miles, more competent technically more emotionally rewarding aesthetically.

What it was is that from the conversation I had with "The Prince of Darkness," the *reasons* behind his development became clearer to me. It sent me back to his music to test and confirm the understanding his words compelled me toward. The "interview," a later presence at his most recent recording session and the many musicians I talked to about Miles allowed

me to penetrate and perhaps elaborate for myself a deeper rationale in reflection of a long career that has been (and is), by any knowledgeable measure, amazingly productive and destined, in all its phases, to be called classic and emulated until the planet itself "books."

The interview in truth was not much of an interview. But it was much more than that and much much longer than an hour. By liquid measure, it was a 4 cognac interview. Not question and answer, but a conversation that did give me the substance I wanted but also closer access than I had ever had to a superbly creative mind. One of the most consistently dazzling creators of our time. A fact that will only be more clearly ascertained as the society itself reaches higher and higher levels of democracy and the genius of black artists is finally dealt with in critical and institutional processes free of chauvinist distortion or commercial segregation.

Miles' influence and effect on the music called Jazz and its players is predictable to the knowledgeable but still somewhat astonishing. He has been at the center of one stream of African American music and its various variations and performers for 40 years. Since the time he first arrived in New York City (1944) from East St. Louis, Illinois to look for "Bird" (alto genius Charlie Parker) and enroll at Juilliard.

Charles "Yardbird" Parker and Miles Davis, late 1940s.

But like the music itself, Miles' influence has not been limited to jazz musicians. Black music has touched and influenced profoundly every wave of music coming out of America and Europe, and points in every which direction, from Debussy to Hawaiian guitar players. So too "Dewey," as some of the cognoscenti used to call Miles letting you know they knew his middle name, is almost as well known by contemporary European and Euro American classical composers and followers of that tradition world wide, as Jazz players.

Blues people, Rock folk, Reggae runners, Gospel chanters, serial structuralists, chance champions, neo classical or neo romantic revelers, and on out, know Miles, his music and the most sensitive have even been directly changed by it.

Miles Davis' music, like African American culture generally, originates as a specific reflection of African American life and perception in the still mostly segregated black communities of the society, but it, like Miles, reaches in all directions within the whole of that society and transforms them. So that African American culture (and indeed to varying degrees all the other minority cultures within the society) touches and changes and "darkens" any "objectively" American culture.

There is virtually no "American Music" that exists untouched and unshaped by black music of one kind or another. So it wd seem that there cd be almost no "pop" music in the US untouched by the Milesian perspective.

"What can you say about Miles?" Dizzy went on. "He's always changing

— you never know what he's going to do next. Plus he's got . . . a kind of . . ."

Another younger musician broke in, "an aura."

"Naw," sd Dizzy, "I don't know about that, it sounds too much like some other word."

"Mystique," the younger man rejoindered.

"Yeh," said Diz, "that's it. A mystique. Miles got a mystique about him. Plus he's at the top of his profession." Diz began his hoarse laughter. "And he's got way, way, way, way, way, way more money."

Diz cd sum it up as only the Diz cd do. Miles Davis constantly changing, possessor of a mystique, a presence that sometimes even threatened to obscure his music — but created in part by the deepness of that music, as well as by his legendary personality. Miles, now at the top of his profession, and even reputed to have snatched a few coins in tribute to his topness (and his longevity).

And Miles is perceived by a wide cross section of artists, in all disciplines, as a creative artist of the highest and most intense level. There are few artists of my generation, whether writers, painters, dancers who do not know his work, and who are not influenced in some ways by his work. Who have not, for instance, sculpted or painted while *Kind of Blue* intoned its modal hipness. Who have not used some of his pieces, whether from *Sketches of Spain* or *'Round About Midnight*, to create their dances. Who have not stayed up all night whacking away at the typewriter while *Walkin'* or *Steamin'* or *Cookin'* made the darkness give up its lonely aesthetic to art.

We could write a whole essay on what modern American painting or writing or dance owe to Miles Davis. Or perhaps the influence of Miles Davis on the personalities and creativity of American Artists and Intellectuals.

The music has always had that single vulnerable feeling, like a lone person beautiful and solitary, moving gracefully sometimes arrogantly through the night. Now, I was asking what he thought of his own music, from those 1st records and residence with Charlie Parker, and his later changes.

"Later on, when I was playing (w/ Bird) we were always playing way up there (referring to the tempi). It was all so fast, nobody knew what we was playing. Blam. It was over. I thought people needed a bottom. Something to refer to."

He was referring to the 1945-1949 tenure with Bird around 52nd St. where the revolutionary music of BeBop and the hottest of the Swing players congregated downtown after the initial uptown experimental developments. He also probably meant the recordings of the period that helped define the reconstruction and renovation of advanced black music in the '40's after the corporations and racist commercialism had tried to transform swing from a Dukish and Countly verb into a hundred bands with identical commercial arrangements.

Miles Davis was an advanced young middle class intellectual seeking high art. Cross referenced between the hottest new innovations in Western music and the conservativism of the small landowners and professional class from which he was spawned. He cld study at Juilliard by day and hang out with the artistically brilliant but socially incorrigible Bird the rest of the time. He and Bird are reputed to have lived for a hot minute on a weekly allowance sent by Miles' Dentist father.

"I thought everybody in NY was hip. I came to NYC expecting everybody was sounding like Dizzy!"

Miles began to draw it back through his mind, amused at his own youthful naiveté, which made me think of my own, in similar context.

"I played with John Kirby," called the Biggest Little Band in the Land. "The 1st records I was on was with the Savoy Sultans. I was on a Keynote record with Pres and Nat 'King' Cole." He mused rapidly, "Ya know, Bud comps like Nat Cole." I thought of Miles later championing of Ahmad Jamal and Red Garland, Wynton Kelly, Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, all of whom owe at least a spill of grog on the floor in tribute to His Majesty the boxcooker.

He was mentioning Ellington and Tatum as piano masters. "I found out you could get scores from the library. Cdn't do that in St. Louis."

The photographs of Miles during that period show a young blood swimming in NY drape suits, his hair gassed, running the hip thing, standing next to Bird, in the eye of the hurricane.

Miles' "flubs" and cracked notes from the period are legendary but also, along side of the awesomely articulate Parker, soaring through the musical waygonesphere. Davis, in striking contrast, anxious, young, archly lyrical, his sprouting musical voice as much a question as a statement.

Those records, and that time place Miles among the disciples and prophets of the new music which appeared from the experimental sessions uptown in the temples of Out, Mintons, Monroes Uptown. Miles, though younger, is forever linked to the ancient classicists of the Weird, the Frantic, the Groovy, to Bird and Diz and Monk and Klook and Max.

Miles went through the stretched out social ostracism of heroin, in deference to Bird's poisoning. For a minute, he even got a little greasy. But he came out on the other side, now well known sideman to genius and himself touched by the magic as well.

Those early efforts wd make Miles immortal by themselves. There is enough music in them and enough mystique surrounding them to provide for a world's lifetime. But a few minutes later Miles had hooked up w/ Gil Evans and Gerry Mulligan, and some of the young white players drawn by Evans' arranging and guidance to the Claude Thornhill orchestra.

These cool lush harmonies which Evans gave to Thornhill, and even the innovative use of brass and Dukish (reeds, winds) scoring had a heavy effect on Miles. A number of his major successes commercially and artistically make use of this orchestral approach and Evans' arrangements — *Miles Ahead, Sketches of Spain, Porgy and Bess,* even *Kind of Blue* to a certain extent, and others.

The 9 sides that the album later put together as *The Birth of the Cool* are the 1st important result of this collaboration. These records brought a kind of "symphonic" orchestra to the music even with a small group concept. For me "Venus De Milo," "Move," "Godchild," "Budo," "Darn That Dream" were the highest art I had ever contemplated. They are still estimable road signs of mastery.

I had asked Miles how he got to the Cool from the very hot. This music was a prototype and example that set a whole musical, social and commercial movement in motion. Though what the corporations finally came up with as "Cool" used the understated surfaces of Miles' sound to suggest

that Bop cd become mood music just as Swing had been distorted previously.

But this is the predictable devaluing of a black art form for reasons of profit and chauvinism that still go on. Sidney Finklestein in *Jazz: A People's Music* agreed that within the African American expression, even as art, is the fundamental cry for democracy. The music speaks for a people outside the city demanding entrance, while yet they are inside the walls struggling with the "double consciousness" DuBois spoke of, how to be black and an American at the same time.

Miles Davis worked closely with arranger Gil Evans in the 1950s.

The corporations water the music down so that it can be merchandised more easily, but the essence of this "modification" is to cool out what is too hot to handle. To flatten the offending rhythms that speak of an earlier freedom, to "whiten" the blues, as if it was just a mood or at worst the profitable whisper of some middle class alienation.

Miles' own view was that he was creating a "bottom." He said he was drawn to Thornhill's music because there was "something to relate to." Not just the flying fury of Bird's aerial wizardry. Aside from the reemphasized Africa of new Bop rhythms, the reassertion of the primacy of blues and improvisation in African American music. Miles wanted a music with more melodic access and a "cushion" of harmonies that made his own simple voice an elegant somewhat detached "personality" effortlessly perceiving and expressing.

It is this harmonic cushion or bottom, the Evans/Thornhill (quasi Dukish) music parallels; the "something to relate to" that Miles described that speaks to the kind of *lush* sensibility Miles has, essentially melodic floating in relief above shaded chromatic harmonies.

There is an element of pure "mood music" in Miles, and even when he is cracking at his hottest or coolest, this aspect of his sensibility provides a *distance*, actually, making his voice apparently more clearly perceived, but actually creating an aesthetic distance, a sensuous alienation, that makes us think we can circumscribe all of the player/composer with our feelings.

Miles' "coolness" for instance is in his need to balance the Hot Bird with the implications of *warmth* (love, affection, sensuality) not just the blue white Bop *fire*.

It is this melodic and harmonic insistence that makes us dig Miles as *Cool*. He does not step as gracefully as the hot Bird tracks, even in those collaborations, so well as he comments and indicates and implies and defines by contrast.

Miles is the filler, so to speak, the pointillistic "other" gorgeousness, which in one sense are just a "series" of *holes* in Bird's soaring design.

What seems *subdued* in Miles, as say his middle register light vibrato tone wd seem to confirm, shows up elsewhere however as *tension*. There is a tension in Miles that is *dramatic* and musically (rhythmically) very funky.

Miles' *downness* is that there is that undercurrent of tension as funk comes with the smallest sound of his horn. He can wail like craziness with

one or two notes placed, dropped, fired. drawled, sung, whispered, as light, reason, sweetness, regard, elation, because it does come. His solos are extensions of the rhythm, yet divide it, as time can be divided, even seemingly obliterated, but be as it is, as abstract and as unpredictable as our hearts.

The coolness in Miles is social and aesthetic. Art was a path to self realization that ultimately cd not be stopped even by the Police. The mocking intellectual can see the foulest and most repressive circumstances and the workings of his mind, never mind its content, itself is a verification of his "superiority." The young black intellectuals and artists of the '40's and '50's treasured the irony of their self understood superiority (intellectually, even morally) to the square US of A. It was an attitude they walked with. Later on this attitude would spill out of the personal and hook up with the mass assertion, which, a few minutes later, was the Civil Rights Movement!

I suggest that the coolness of Miles is the "dignified" even quietist stance of the black intellectual of the period. Yet even that coolness is a broil with not so hidden heat, and tension, because face it, finally, even the black bourgeoisie "are" niggers!

Miles and Ms. Da Costa speak of a date coming up where he will record his version, much acclaimed in concert, of punk queen Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time." Miles pulls out a small tape recorder, on it a cassette of a live date with Bob Berg on tenor, Newport Sunday. Both Lauper and Berg are white. Recently Miles has received some criticism from certain black circles for hiring so many white musicians, thereby depriving some black musicians of some well paying prestigious gig. In the present band, the one featured on the newest record *Decoy*, saxophonist, Bill Evans, guitarist, John Scofield, are white. In fact, in each of the recording and concert groups Miles has put together since he made his "comeback" in 1981, each group has gotten successively whiter (though certainly the music has not).

I remember doing a poetry-jazz gig in Philadelphia and hearing one aging enfant-terrible of the avant garde leaning on Miles very heavily for hiring so many white musicians. Though, interestingly enough, the speaker himself, has been married to a white woman for many years.

But interracial bands are nothing new to Miles. So talk of Miles' eye to the buck as being the principal reason for using white musicians doesn't really wash. Though, it is my own feeling that Miles knows always almost exactly what he is doing, around the music — form and content, image and substance.

There is something in the mix that Miles *wants* to hear. It might be commercial, to some extent, but it is also social and aesthetic.

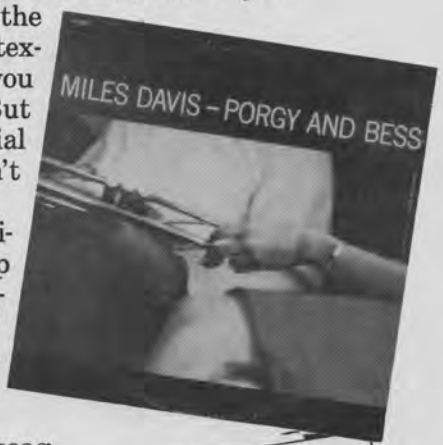
The Birth of the Cool sides featured many outstanding white musicians, Mulligan, Konitz, &c plus important arrangements.

Much of the most celebrated and popular of Miles' recording work has been in collaboration with Gil Evans and featured Evans' *distinctive* arrangements (*Miles Ahead*, '57, *Porgy and Bess*, '58, *Sketches of Spain*, '59).

Pianist, Bill Evans, was featured on some of the key classics Miles has made e.g., *Kind of Blue*. In a recent videotaped interview Miles spoke on the subject w/ his usual personal clarity and understated hilarity. He was explaining that what he wants to play is "Today Music" and how he has to tell many of the young musicians who have played with him over the

years, "Don't play what you know but what you hear."

"White musicians are over trained and black musicians are under trained. You got to mix the two. A black musician has his own sound, but if you want it played straight, mix in a white musician and the piece will still be straight, only you'll get feeling and texture — up, down, around, silly, wrong, slow, fast — you got more to work with. There's funky white musicians. But after classical training you have to learn to play social music. You have to learn to underplay. I tell 'em, 'Don't practice all the time or you'll sound like that.'"



After the Cool sides Miles was a fairly well known musician, but still his fame according to American white pop standards was modest. And he made no real money. Actually, this was the end of the second stage of Miles' career, but the growing recognition could not provide the life cushion Miles needed. He went off into drugs, and stayed hooked four or five years.

It is said that during his romance with the killer, scag, that Miles was backed into the worst kind of almost marginal ghetto existence. Including a little pimping.

At the same time he had become a popular sideman, whose horn was much in demand. He was recording w/ Prestige records and some of the classic names in the music. It was the early '50's and Miles was at the center again, as the music was changing.

A refreshing neo-boppian style was emerging, as almost the antidote to the commercially watered down "Cool," which made stars of mostly white musicians. It was the so called "West Coast Jazz" that gave us Chet Baker, Shorty Rogers, Bud Shank &c. Dave Brubeck rode in on that wave and a new popularity was achieved by estimable musicians like Gerry Mulligan, Lee Konitz, Lennie Tristano who were 1st rate jazz soloists and composers in their own right; whose cool was stylistic not commercial.

During this next period Miles did make another important record w/ Konitz (1951) including George Russell's jaggedly hip *Ezz-Thetic*. But his main thrust was the classic "hard bop" recordings w/ JJ Johnson, Walter Bishop Jr., Curly Russell, Art Blakey; a new record with Bird & Max, plus fantastic dates w/ Sonny Rollins, Bennie Green, Percy Heath, Roy Haynes, ("Morpheus," "Down," "Blue Room"); w/ Tommy Potter, Kenny Drew ("Half Nelson," "Tempus Fugit," "Move," and later Philly Joe Jones, Horace Silver ("Weirdo," "It Never Entered My Mind").

Lucky Thompson and Rollins were on the historic "Walkin'" session, combining the Pres tradition (Lucky) as well as the Hawkins tradition (Rollins). A contrast that spells out the musical symmetry of Miles' playing and composition. The melodic elaboration as well as the use of time/space as statement.

Miles' debt to Pres, Lester Young, must be acknowledged, laying back off the rhythm, commenting on it as well as riding or floating above it.

"Walkin'" was so marvelous, and a conceptual predecessor to the *Kind of Blue* music e.g. "So What," because it used bop accents to make exciting a very cool, insinuating even subdued melodic/rhythmic line. It carried a lyrical tension — as if we did go strolling up or across town, for instance, digging everything we could.

This was *urbane* music, precisely sophisticated. The coolness of the early '50's was giving way to a stomping sound, people marching, the assertion of gospel music and Africa expanded the music stylistically. These developments in the music coincided with a rising national consciousness among the African American people characterized by the Civil Rights Movement.

Miles thinks this music, more so than the Bird-Gillespie style is more a New York style. What we think of as the classic '40's BeBop, Miles says he thinks is a transported Oklahoma style. He mentions Ben Webster and Ben Pruitt, who "played like Monk. There was a St. Louis trumpet player (Little Dips?). I used to emulate Buddy (Anderson) in B's (Billy Eckstine) band, not just the Kansas City style. I used to dig Stoggie Gibson on trumpet. He had a round and fat sound but fat alone won't do it."

Horace Silver introduced contemporary gospel into post bop jazz. Its national identity called *Soulful*! DuBois pointed out in *Souls of Black Folk* the centrality of music to black worship, Christian or animist.

The *funk*, smell, essence, slavery, segregation and the dream of freedom! The real actual lowdown world. Roots, these are. The reestablishment of the primacy of the Blues, the feelings and lifestyle of black people! Africa, syncopation, Saints and Devils. The reemergence of the black vocal sound, the scream, the honk, the sound of abrasive reality. Consciousness in a black sector of the world.

Horace along with younger proteges like Bobby Timmons, plus the Max Roach-Clifford Brown-Sonny Rollins quintet; Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, the reemergence of Thelonious Monk. "Hippy," "The Preacher," "Moanin'," "Dat Dere," the simple bebop-gospel mixture. Plus the sophisticated music that Miles made "Take-Off" and "It Never Entered My Mind." "Blue Haze," "Solar," "Airegin," "Oleo," "Doxy," "But Not for Me," "Blue 'n' Boogie," "Bags' Groove" w/ Milt Jackson, Monk's "Bemsha Swing." These are the Philly/New York players, Brown from Delaware, the northeastern ghetto blues. The Black Experience was raised as a principal and unique social, historical and aesthetic experience. Which is where "Funky" comes from.

It was a quick funky music, with a sharper eye on arrangement, in response to the "cool" but there is a free screaming, rhythmic emphasis to this music, even whispered! Miles became its most sophisticated master.

Miles' life and times combined to have him be able to reassert his genius at a higher level. He was now a leader, not just a sideman. As well as an innovator and creator of a distinct trumpet and musical style. Whatever the context, his own voice was strengthening, growing more authoritative and self-referencing.

Miles here develops a new black post bop post cool ensemble and solo style. He's laid back yet hot. Reserved yet funky. Melodic yet tense and searching.

It is his ability to balance in aesthetic "perfection" the contrast, contradiction, struggle and unity of the Pres/Cool/ever lush harmonic bottom aspect of his music and the Bird shaped dazzling aggressive Fire and rhythmic dominance that makes the next few years of Miles' work a measure of *all* the music of that period!

The appearance of Red Garland, Philly Joe Jones, and most importantly, John Coltrane, shaped the heaviest elements of "The New Miles Davis Quintet," formed in 1955, the same year Bird died.

John Coltrane.

In this period of rising black political consciousness, *soul* (blackness, negritude, etc) and its expression *funk* (the heat, "odeur," of basic blues, and like jass also connected with *sex*) emerges Jass (Jassm and Jism) is literally ejaculation music. "Funk" is the "smell" that goes with it, a piano drawling with blues reclaims its ancient "frenzy," the hard bopper (funky bopper i.e. new and blue, and reemphasizing the rhythm almost at times to a back beat — you cd dance with a tambourine to it) is the Preacher, driving the music and the congregation with the music, into a mutual frenzy.

Blakey's Messengers were and remain a university of funk through which some of the hottest and bluesiest young musicians have passed. Especially people like Horace Silver, Bobby Timmons, Hank Mobley, Lee Morgan, Wayne Shorter. They were major influences. The incredible Brown-Rollins-Roach groups were perhaps the most sophisticated and heatedly lyrical of the bringers of the harder sound. This is a period of Rollins developing his long orderly logical extended improvisations and West Indian influences.

Miles' view that Hard Bop was the real NY music, the classic early Bop a Southwestern style identifies the Caribbean, West Indian, Latino contributions, and the gospel inflection as part of an authentic NY style that emerged w/ Rollins, Blakey, Roach and the rest.

Rollins' magnificent *Freedom Suite* reflected the stylistic and philosophical content of the times. Plus Max Roach's *Freedom Now Suite* w/ Abby and Max cooking at white heat intensity and celebrating the intensifying African Liberation struggles. Mingus' *Fables of Faubus* took dead journalistic aim at real stuff as the times themselves spoke to the struggle against American apartheid. By '54 Brown vs. the Board of Education supposedly ended 1897's "separate but equal" and by 1957 a new hero named Martin

Luther King had transformed Rosa Parks' personal resistance to Montgomery bus segregation into a national democratic movement!

Monk's *Brilliant Corners* w/ Monk in the red wagon behind the shades drew together the earlier more experimental BeBop w/ the funky later music (Trane and Hawkins on the same sides).

Miles mentions the fantastic groups he worked with during the period. One particular stretch he worked w/ Trane and Rollins. "We did a concert uptown for Paul Robeson. Doug Turner Ward (founder of Negro Ensemble) helped put it together.

"I used to tell them, the bass got the tonic. Don't play in the same register as the sax, lay out. Don't play."

These seem very appropriate stylistic caveats for the group that Miles put together now that took the finger poppin urban funk blues of the hard bop era and combined it w/ a harmonic placement conditioned by Miles' need for a cushion, plus his gorgeous melodic invention. It was called simply *The New Miles Davis Quintet.* It caused a sensation among jazz people.

It was funky and sophisticated, swung hard at the same time being wispily lyrical. During the '50's years, Miles in a Bop or hard bop context, and finally in his symmetrically exquisite quintets and sextets w/Trane, later w/ Trane and Cannonball ('57-'59) and in the fresh and lyrical Gil Evans collaborations created music at a level very few people ever approach, anywhere, any time.

It is this music, from the raw funky and exhilarant sides like *Dig* or the interracial experimentation of "Ezz-Thetic" or the street hip "Dr. Jekyll" to the exciting maturity of "Straight, No Chaser" or "Bye Bye Blackbird," to the moody symphonic lyricism of *Porgy and Bess* or the new music minimalism of *Kind of Blue,* Miles created at a level and on a scale that needs a Duke or Billie or Armstrong or Monk to equal for aesthetic influence, length and consistency.

This is also a period that Miles' own mystique gets somewhat reshaped. In the post cool period Miles had begun to live hard in the ghetto, a condition particularly depressing because he was also addicted to heroin.

From the drape suited gas haired "cat," the Harlem music, particularly *Dig* and "Walkin'" and "Dr. Jekyll," complete w/ Miles in pulled down "block boy" hat and better fitting italian and ivy threads gives Miles the "down" quality of the time. *Down* the current parallel word for hip. Like Robt Thompson has sd of Kongo culture, it prizes "getting down," bending the knees and elbows. It also favors "cool" as subtle fire.

But now, too, the political sweep of the times meant one had to be down with the people, to be in touch with one's roots. The gospels and the blues were part of these roots. The music of this period is superbly funky and bluesy.

Miles even had the unfortunate but spiritually "in tune" experience of being jumped on by racist policemen outside Birdland when he tried to take a "breather" in between sets. Black newspapers called it a "Georgia head whippin," placing it squarely (1957) shoulder to shoulder with the beatings black civil rights marchers were receiving marching against segregation and "Jim Crow."

In a sense Miles embodied a black attitude that had grown steadily more

ubiquitous in the '50's — defiance, a redefined, contemporary function of the culturally traditional *resistance* of blacks to slavery and then national oppression.

I stopped drummer, Steve McCall, one of the elder statesmen of the new music, a few days after I'd talked to Miles. "What's Miles make you think of," I asked.

"When I think of his influence, I think he's had a positive influence on black people in general. He transcended the slave mentality. I remember when he was setting all kinds of styles. The artist. He had class. Good taste. His music had a density."

Thinking of Miles' contemporary modes, Steve added, "I cd dig the whole electric thing — that's what they want now — but it's too loud!"

So Miles was not only the cool hipster of our BeBop youth but now we felt he embodied the social fire of the times. All the musician-hippy stories about Miles told us he was "bad," that people, including the po-lice didn't mess with Miles.

We knew Miles went to the gym all the time and boxed. We had even been close enough a couple of times when the Quintet opened at the Bohemia in the Village, to hear the hipster fog horn bass that was his voice. That was the way Miles was sposed to sound. It was hip — somewhat mysterious with a touch of street toughness.

John Coltrane's tenure with Miles Davis helped produce some of the finest music played by anyone. Just the torrid classic *Cookin'*, *Relaxin'*, *Steamin'*, *Workin'* sides and the amazing and beautiful *'Round About Midnight* all these albums done in one year! (Oct '55 to Oct '56) reveal Miles as a confident master having assembled a musical organization that was, during that period, without peers.

Trane, a rough toned saxophonist from North Carolina, grew up, especially musically, in Philadelphia. The son of a tailor-musician, Trane later worked in Phila factories and learned BeBop in a Navy band. He had a background not only of spirituals and musical religious frenzy, but a more recent history of honking rhythm and blues, often while walking the bartops of Philly. He had played w/ Big Maybelle, 3 Bips and a Bop, and later Jimmy Smith and the Dizzy Gillespie big band. There is a fantastic flick of Bird and Miles on the stage at Birdland, while in the background a very young and slightly nervous looking John Coltrane.

To Miles' darting blue flashes and sometimes limpid lyricism was now placed in tandem collaboration the big densely powerful song of Coltrane. If Trane's early efforts seemed crude and not quite articulate to some, the feelings and aesthetic bearing his playing carried caused quite a few hip

people to pick up on Trane very early.

It was Philly Joe Jones who urged Trane on Miles as a replacement for Rollins. A vibes playing roadie of mine in the early '50's had heard Trane somewhere and described him even pre-Miles as "a genius."

In some superficial ways Trane was similar to Rollins, except when Trane sounded most like Rollins he was just beginning to sound like his real musical self which came a little later. Both possessed of large dominating blues filled honking tones, but Trane tore into the bulk of his sound to investigate ceaselessly the fundamental elements of timbre and harmony, combining complex rhythmic insistence with seemingly endless melodic and harmonic invention. John Coltrane was not just a great tenor saxophonist, he was an *innovator.*

That is the real secret of the classic Quintet and Sextet music of Miles Davis in the '50's and '60's — not only is there the Davis direction and innovation but he carries with him as one part of his fantastic arsenal, a "straight out murderer," as we used to say, John Coltrane.

Trane gave Miles a balance that allowed his purple whispering lyricism to touch still the raw funky sidewalks. But Trane was not only "street," he was intense and searching. What Miles implied, the tension his silence and placement of notes created as an under feeling, Trane readily and openly proclaimed. Trane was a wailer — a throw back to Big Jay McNeely and Illinois Jacquet of the howling '50's. The sound of shouting and screaming, whooping and hollerin', crying and singing. Coon Hollers, yells, arwhoolies were all in there, and low down blues and gospel trembling. Plus, later, Trane carried it all back to its righteous source, the "East," Africa, the animist memory.

With the later addition of Cannonball Adderley, a florida funk merchant in the keening tradition of a more simplified Charlie Parker. Along with Trane and Cannonball, Paul Chambers, bass, Red Garland, piano and Philly Joe Jones make up the rest of the immortals, a band as heavy as Louis' Hot Fire.

Miles, when I asked about that band, talked of Cannonball's coming w/ the group and reacting to the music, "This ain't no blues. Trane took Cannonball in the back and showed him what he was doin'. Trane be around there suckin' his teeth. I told Trane to show him and stop him from accenting the 1st beat.

(From left) John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis. Randall Island, 1959.

"Bass got the tonic, Don't play in the same register as the sax. Lay out. Don't play." The Milesian aesthetic for the group. Miles talked about people playing too many notes. He said when he listened to his own music, "I always listen to what I can leave out."

Cannonball Adderley.

In one sense he is like Monk with his incisive blue pointillism, but Miles cd not dig Monk's comping behind him for the same reasons. "Monk don't give you no support." No cushion or easily related-to pattern, for sure.

The quintet and sextet were the most popular jazz group of their times. With them they carried the sound and image of the contemporary urban American intellectual and artist, one that was *Kind of Blue.* The *Milestones* and *'Round About Midnight* albums were great social events as well as artistic triumphs. They confirmed the astuteness of the listener. "Straight, No Chaser" was the state of (the) art — any art! *King of Blue* led us into new formal and intellectual vistas. (You remember "Green Dolphin Street"?)

For me what the Trane-Cannonball groups represented and set up was the direction(s) the music has been moving in for almost the last 30 years.

The two reed soloists each summed up certain stylistic tendencies in the music and revived these in more contemporary accents. The funky alto man had been a music teacher in Florida. And his expansive and rotund silhouette was the reason for his nickname (though a couple of "authorities" claim Adderley's *real* nickname was "Cannibal" in honor of his appetite).

Cannonball had the skyhighing piercing wail of Bird, but it was not the innovative rocket-sword "Yard" had. Ball's sound was stylistically like Bird, but not out of the deepest *understanding* of that aesthetic, it seemed to me, but a kind of appreciation.

It's what separates all the people who play "like" John Coltrane from really sounding like that. They pick up the style, the form, but the philosophical and aesthetic mandates which make that sound necessary they often miss.

So that I thought much of what Ball played, certainly in contrast to Coltrane, seemed cruelly superficial. But at other times, Trane's thunder and lightning contrasted perfectly with the finally less complex but lilting melodic improvisation of Cannonball.

What is so heavy is that Trane and Cannonball, themselves the two opposing weights of saxophone balance in the classic Davis groups, are also two musical schools coming into being, 1st as key parts of the whole Davis vision, but later as musical (and philosophical) tendencies in the whole music!

From the Cannonball side of the Davis groups, one got the *pop* aspect of the funk/gospel hard bop development. (A gospel nightclub opened briefly in New York during the same period!)

Ball's glibness and easy humor coupled w/ a kind of swinging formalism and miniaturism enabled him to create the kind of solos and compositions

that would be commercially significant. (Although the *Somethin' Else* album w/ Miles under Cannonball's leadership is one of the hippest albums released in the period. But It is Miles Davis-like music.)

Cannonball had several jazz hits w/his own bands. He had a stylized glib gospel/funk kind of tune that really got over. "Jive Samba," Bobby Timmons' "Dis Here" and "Dat Dere," Zawinul's "Mercy, Mercy." What is seminal in this is that it is Cannonball, and the characteristic music and musicians he developed that are the prototypes for the music later called *Fusion*! The combining of jazz lines w/ Rhythm + Blues rhythms, or tuneful melodies w/R & B bottoms.

Joe Zawinul, the major-domo of the most successful fusion group, Weather Report, was a Davis/Cannonball sideman — in fact, the majority of the key musicians who created the cool top blues bottom music called Fusion are alumni of one Davis group or another. Cannonball's bands were earlier practitioners of the form before it became a style.

The various funk miniatures Cannonball liked to play are one of the prototypes for what came to be known as Fusion, a largely commercial music. But it is Miles who is the real originator of the form. The cool top/R & B bottom sound, commercial version, is obviously given inspiration by Miles' general approach particularly as interpreted by Cannonball and his bands.

On the other side of the bandstand of that great band was the great John Coltrane. The music Trane made and wanted to make with Miles' band and after was almost the exact opposite of what Cannonball was doing.

Where Cannonball seemed to treasure the glib artifact, Trane seemed w/Miles always in the middle of creativity, sometimes driving Miles buggy because of the drawn out length of some of his solos. And in these solos Trane searched and thrashed and struggled, always it seemed, looking for higher and higher levels of understanding and expression. Trane was the ceaseless experimenter — Cannonball the pragmatic miniaturist, creator of funky ready-mades.

So that Miles had two guns at his disposal, Trane the expressionist and Cannonball the formalist. These two horns marked the breaking off of two schools of jazz conception. But so powerful and broadly expressive was this classic Miles group that it contained the elements for establishing or redefining two significant jazz styles that have dominated to one degree or another the music for the last 30 years!

Both these styles make use of the blues in very definite but very contrasting ways. Cannonball was bluesy as form, Trane bluesy as essence. Hence Cannon thinking, when he first got to Miles' band, that what the group was playing wasn't the blues. That is, he was looking for the standard 12 bar *form*. Miles on the other hand wanted the blues *expressed*, not just as form, but as feeling and color. It was in Miles' band that both players developed as much more mature and forceful soloists.

Miles talked about the two directions Trane and Cannonball represented. In 1959, they had done some 18 concerts for Norman Grantz in Europe. It was there that Coltrane had picked up the soprano saxophone, his later use of which beginning with the big hit *My Favorite Things*, revived the instrument among jazz players all over the world.

The chordal experimentation and chromatic lyricism Trane began to be identified with, even before he left Miles and which revolutionized the music, Miles casually accepts credit for laying on John. "I showed Trane all that," Miles averred. "Cannonball just played funk. But he could interpret any feeling."

What is important is that Trane's direction and legacy was to redefine avant garde, to spread the social upsurge in society of the time, which somehow affected *him*, into musical revolution.

Cannonball's direction and legacy was to take the *form* of the '50's be-bop now hard bop explosion, include the "new" *gospel* awareness as jazz soul music and new emphasis on funk and repeat the classic form of a blues somewhat gospelized. Yet the reason for the upsurge of the blues and funk was as flag for the popular *social* feeling of the time. Its redefinition, as of that day, had to yet identify the *meaning* of the blues, which is alive and still with us. The *Being* of the people, their minds and condition. The awful calamitous circumstance of their real lives.

Cannon's direction is more commercial because it freezes blues as blues form. This is the Fusion phenomenon. Miles' "bottom" is a desired connection w/ "America." It can be lush horns, strings, atmosphere. America will always dig *The Birth of The Cool, Miles Ahead, Porgy & Bess, Sketches of Spain*, and *Kind of Blue* (Black people and most intellectuals too). But the music that speaks most directly of the black urban experience are the '40's Bird sides, "Billie's Bounce," "Now's The Time," "Ornithology," "Anthropology," "Donna Lee," "Scrapple from the Apple," etc. Or the '50's hard bop gems and classic funk/cushion balancing standards "Morpheus," "Down," "Bluing," "Dig," "Tempus Fugit," "Weirdo," "Well You Needn't," "Walkin'," "Airegin," "Oleo," "Bags' Groove," "Green Haze," "Dr. Jekyll," "Ah-Leu-Cha," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "'Round Midnight," "It Never Entered My Mind," "If I Were a Bell," "Green Dolphin Street," "So What," "Straight, No Chaser," and *Kind of Blue.* But the hugely successful pieces w/Evans are symphonic tone poems, to a certain extent summing up mid century American concert music. *Miles Ahead* was the giant step, replaying yet extending even farther the Evans/Thornhill *The Birth of the Cool* concept.

Miles' special capacity and ability is to hold up and balance two musical (social) conceptions and express them as (two parts of) a single aesthetic. The "cushion" Miles speaks of is the luxury, ease, mood, of sensuous well being this society sports — its lushness and pretension. (How does access to all that sound?) Sometimes Miles' horn alone holds out for this warmth in the midst of fire, e.g. w/Bird or the hard boppers or the classic Coltrane/Cannonball sides. But by *Miles Ahead,* Miles understood enough about the entire American aesthetic so that he cd make the *cool* statements on a level that was truly *popular* and which had the accents of African America included not as contrasting anxiety or tension but as an equal sensuousness!

Sketches of Spain and *Porgy & Bess* are high American musical statements, their tension is between a functional impressionism, serious in its emotional detail vs mood w/o significance. It is the bluesiness of the Davis conception even submerged in all the lushness that gives these moods an intelligence and sensitivity. There is yet a searching quality in Miles' horn, above, beyond, below, inside, outside, within, locked out of the lushness, the

lovely American bottom. It is a searching, a probing like a dowser, used for searching out beauty. Miles' horn itself is so beautiful, except there is a feeling in us that maybe all of this is a dream. A film. An invisible pageant of feeling. *Miles Ahead*, *Sketches* and *Porgy* are great movie music. But add them as well to a native US impressionism brought here on Dukes' back that is linked as well to Debussy and Delius and Ravel.

Kind of Blue is the stripped down re-combining of the two musical tendencies in Miles (the American & the African American) to where they feed each other like electric charges. Here the mood, the lush, the bottom is also *sketched.* Miles has discovered chords and the implied modal approach that link up object and background as the same phrase and note. *Blue* is not contrapuntal it is pointillistic yet its dots and its background are the same lines flowing together.

The harmonic bottom of Miles is sometimes translated as Eastern drone, what Trane later made even further use of. The drone here is that the chords link up, continue each other like a single modal insistence.

Miles' penchant for minimalism has gone back to his earliest music. It is the "fill-in" quality we remember with Bird. Only the essentials. Bird's ever-flowing elaboration must have consolidated in Miles the need to try to fill the "other" space Bird did not fill. So that throughout Miles' playing days he has always cautioned his sidemen against playing "too much."

Miles says when he listens to his music he is listening for "what can be cut out."

Max Roach was as young as Miles during the BeBop revolution. He was another of the genius teenagers to hook up w/ Charlie Parker to help create the explosion of BeBop. Max's seriousness and integrity over the long haul are unquestionable. And while it was rumored back in the '60's that Max was critical of Miles, the master drummer responds directly and with no diversion, "Miles just shows several aspects of being creative. If you're being creative, you can't be like you were yesterday. Miles exemplifies it. The record industry keeps reading us out —

"But Miles will step out. Lester Young did that . . . always looking. It's the law of everything. Miles is that way . . . Ella and Miles breathed new life into the record companies. I think what Miles is doing is in keeping w/our creative people today."

By 1960 Miles had created a body of music that could compare favorably with any in jazz. He had come in with BeBop, innovated with Cool, got down with Hard Bop and put together his symphonic excursions into contemporary American music w/ *Sketches*, *Miles Ahead*, and especially *Porgy & Bess.*

It is fitting that *Kind of Blue* closed out those intensely creative years, because it both sums up Miles' major musical tendencies as well as indicates what new roads exist not only for him, but for the music generally. Bass great, Reggie Workman calls Miles, "an important figure. He contributed alot to our music. More than just stylistic." Laughing, Reggie goes on, "a typical Gemini. He's got strong convictions. You can hear in his art forms. He's a great person. A real wonderful person."

Both Coltrane and Cannonball left the band at this point. In Trane's wake, inspired by him, a whole raging avant garde arose. People like Eric Dolphy, Pharoah Sanders, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, John Gilmore and

thousands more arrived all lit up by Trane's search for a new sound and a new direction. A search that went on openly in Miles' classic bands.

The musicians that followed, Trane, Cannonball, Chambers, Jones, Garland with the band reveal exactly in what direction the band, and Miles were moving. After a series of Trane "replacements" (e.g. George Coleman, Hank Mobley, Sam Rivers) Miles moved to the next more stable period w/Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Tony Williams and a music that while not at the overall level of the Trane-Cannonball-Philly Joe years is excellent music, the hip restatement of that classic period.

Just as Trane was identified w/and inspired the screaming revolutionary players of the '60's and beyond, Cannonball's direction, as noted, was also significant and also a Miles by-product. Cannon put together a fairly stable quartet during the '60's and made some of the biggest commercial hits in the music — his "Sack of Woe" and "Jive Samba." Joe Zawinul (an Austrian pianist, who later went on to head up the most successful fusion band in the business Weather Report), while with Cannon's band contributed "Mercy, Mercy" again in the formal soul/funk vein. It was one of the best-selling jazz records ever!

The Cannon/Zawinul approach was to take the surface or formal lines of the hard bop funk/soul renaissance and make popular miniatures out of them. To emphasize the ensemble arranged aspect of the music while de-emphasizing the free improvisation.

What is interesting is that the Shorter/Hancock etc. band that was 1st-noted for its further statements of the Miles classic '50's groups, by the late '60's became the vehicle for Miles' increasing use of the pop/commercial aspect of his own mind. But Miles' "cushion" or "bottom," the "handle" that he speaks of, was always a way for the music to be more accessible to himself as well as the people.

Miles went to Juilliard. Miles' father was a medium-sized land owner and dentist. All that is in his life and

to a certain general extent is in his art. But Miles is still tied to the blues, and that emotional aesthetic matrix.

Even in the American symphonic impressionism he created w/Gil Evans there is always an echo of the blues. At times, Miles' version of Duke.

After Trane and Cannonball left Miles in '61, the best Miles bands were a restatement of that music. But Miles' classic small group music of the '50's not only is the state of the art but a sign post of what is to come.

The late '50's civil rights era was marked not only by an increase of democratic struggle against American Apartheid but also with that, as a concommitant benefit of sharpened resistance to segregation, discrimination there was a rise of black national consciousness, witnessed in one aspect by the attention to "soul" and "funk" (a spiritual confirmation of national identity).

Another aspect of the period's reflection of the people's lives was in its gradually more popular expression of rage (i.e. militance). Much of what later came to be called avant garde meant particularly to express that rage.

The classic '50's Davis group expressed both the soul and the rage. The restatement Hancock-Shorter et al. does not carry the balance in the same way. Yet Miles says of this period that he was telling the younger musicians he worked with the same thing he had told others, telling them what not to play. What "not to do too much of." Miles in some senses did see the Hancock-Shorter band as a continuation of the classic groups. He says "Philly Joe liked Tony (Williams) more than any of the other drummers I tried to use. Philly wd scare the other drummers. He liked Tony."

Miles' music, by the end of the '60's, had begun to take on a somber (somewhat formal) tone. Expressing various linked moods, but no galloping in abandon. The music became more and more studied. There is some experimentation but the mood is introspective, even in open horned romps. Miles had begun the practice earlier of using the Harmon mute. But there was fire behind it. Albums like *Nefertiti* w/ the title track droning and grey gives an indication of a whole period of the sixties for Miles. *Sorcerer* is similar. Miles was still trying to move, as always. Trying to develop new forms, use different materials. There are more recently released albums from the period *Directions* ('68), *Circle in the Round* ('67) that do contain some swinging hip music. But there is also a "grey" quality, a kind of turning inside. At once creating the harmonic cushion new drone or modal form, the fusion like music Miles has made since then.

But also in the late '60's Miles' music was undergoing still another change. Simply put, it was the gradual rise in "prominence" of the Milesian bottom and the use of electrified instruments once thought to be the exclusive property of rhythm & blues. Also the bottom, or harmonic cushion, at times becomes the dramatic focus of the music. Sometimes the melodic line is a mere doodle or fragment stretched somewhat abstractly over a vamp or repeated chords ostinato line.

The title piece "Circle in the Round" is a case in point. The album *Miles In The Sky* ('68) brings in the electric piano, played by Herbie Hancock (on "Stuff"), who had a Cannonball Adderley-like hit, *Watermelon Man.* Hancock went on, after Miles, to become one of the most consistent stars of fusion. As a matter of fact, all the players in that Davis group of the late '60's became fusion super stars. Another fusion headliner, guitarist turned

vocalist, George Benson, was also on that album.

The new lighter, swifter, more pop-oriented R & B music had also risen to unprecedented popularity in the '60's. Motown's fabulous lineup, Smokey Robinson, The Supremes, The Tempts, Marvin Gaye et al. had to influence anyone in the period of any sensitivity.

By the time of *Filles De Kilimanjaro* ('68) Miles was moving to change his music, and one wd suppose, himself, once more. He was also changing the personnel in the band. White musicians now became more ubiquitous within the Davis lineup; not just for the more or less one-shot recordings Miles had done earlier but as regular personnel within the band. Pianist Chick Corea and English bassist Dave Holland replace Hancock and Carter on some of the recorded music of the period. Joe Zawinul, now leader of the hugely successful fusion group, Weather Report (of which Wayne Shorter is also a member), appears now and soon guitarist, John McLaughlin, who after his stint with Miles put together another well known fusion group, The Mahavishnu Orchestra. Corea also went on to become leader of another commercially successful fusion group, Return to Forever. At one point all these groups, plus Hancock's group with which he made *Headhunters*, were all making more money than Miles. The albums Miles made when he returned from "retirement" in 1980 (*The Man With The Horn*, *Star People* and his latest *Decoy*) changed all that! Actually most of the music Miles has made from the '70's has had a growing commercial success.

The album in *In A Silent Way* is in my own mind the beginning of the elaboration of what came to be known as fusion. It is the sound, the approach, the instruments. Miles has come up with a new direction neither more of what had become "mainstream," i.e., the restatement of the classic '50's hardbop, but also not the screaming energy music Trane had become the patron saint of.

The music was all rhythm and (harmonic) texture. Fragments of melody drawn out and abstracted over repeated rhythmic figures. In one sense, it is mood music, but one cannot quite fathom the mood. It is contradictory, subdued yet bright. Now the cushion has become both drone and soloist — background and foreground seemingly exchange places constantly.

The same year, Miles brought out *Bitches Brew*, which demonstrated not only had his music changed, but that he was ready to elaborate on the

changes. By now even the slowest folks were aware that Miles had made fundamental changes in the music. He had taken the cushion and began to make it less shifting and diaphanous. The rhythms implications now are clearly R&B derived.

Miles Davis' work at home.

The music was, like they say, controversial. Since it was no longer an isolated piece, or passage in a larger work, but the center focus. What we had glimpsed or speculated about in *Miles In The Sky, In A Silent Way,* and to a certain extent parts of *Filles de Kilimanjaro* becomes open and aggressive in *Bitches Brew.* That Miles Davis was using straight out R&B rhythms, a clear back beat, and growingly electrified instruments.

The long passage of the '60's had worked its magic on Miles. In one sense, he was of course moving forward, absorbing, being changed, changing. The Trane-Cannonball band was a kind of starting point as well as a culmination. Trane's fire spoke of revolution, but one other aspect of it led to a kind of black cultural nationalism, atavism, mysticism.

The straightforward rock songs Cannonball made money from signified another aspect of the '60's equation. Their "soulfulness" was their claim to and expression of the popular mood. It was almost like Miles had had a southern SCLC preacher at one saxophone (Cannonball) and a Dashiki-wearing Consciousness raising revolutionary (Trane) at the other.

But the mystic "ooomism" that characterized some of Trane's last efforts could not represent a real direction to the hip Miles. Just as it could not to the majority of political forces of the black movement.

Miles, throughout the '60's and '70's, repeatedly does make homage to Africa. But he is always firmly Black American in his approach. When Miles came out of his conservative neo-Ivy threads in the '70's, it was not for an *Agbada* or *Bubba,* it was for the leather fringed jacket that the Panther, hippy, flower child might wear. When Trane had given way (Dying in 1967) to Pharoah Sanders as the carrier of the big screaming saxophone tradition, we used to see the music Pharoah was making as the antithesis of say someone like Jimi Hendrix (even though Hendrix was an innovator, too.). But the white or "integrated" media-ubiquitous rebellion Hendrix represented was the other side of the social and musical equation. Miles was friendly with Hendrix; but given Miles' background and general experience, it was predictable, perhaps, that he could identify more completely with what finally

is the more secular, integrated, and ultimately more popular and commercial consciousness of R&B or Rock or fusion that led him even to the music he is making today.

But musically these sides seem less than dynamic or striking — it's like Miles had got to one of those places in his life and head where he was ready to change up again.

He stayed off the scene because he was recuperating physically (even though he still has health problems) and because, to paraphrase Miles, he just didn't feel like doing much musically. In reflection, Miles moves smoothly from one period to another in his life and music. Commenting on this personality, that music, various incidents some with social, some with aesthetic implications. But there is a sense that Miles has thought about it all, his own motion and even stature, in the music many times. And that he is constantly evaluating and summing up.

A quiet, softspoken, even gentle man with a bright and quick sense of humor, it seems hard to connect Miles to the overbearingly hip ogre some have made him out to be.

He banters with the various waiters at the UN Plaza, all who seem to know him well. One has been promoted to afternoon maitre d' and he glows proudly, saluting Miles for having predicted his ascension.

Miles is eating poached salmon and drinking Perrier. Wherever one goes in the Jazz world or the art world, one knows Miles. One could not be a contemporary intellectual and not.

Drummer, Billy Higgins, "I'm glad to see him."

Monk's tenor giant, Charlie Rouse, in response to a writer's casual question, "Miles has good tools. Nobody can say otherwise. Miles has very good taste. He's a stylist and a fantastic instrumentalist."

Pianist John Hicks, "Miles always been an inspiration. I heard him when I was in St. Louis. He always had

Miles Davis and Cicely Tyson celebrating his 60th birthday in May 1986.

strength as an instrumentalist. He can be churchy, but he's a lyricist."

Ahmed Abdullah and Butch Morris, two young trumpet players, are sitting with Hicks, at the Village's Sweet Basil, "Brilliant — a perfectionist," smiles Ahmed. "Unique," agrees Butch Morris. No young trumpet player could escape Miles' reach.

New star trumpeter Olu Dara tried to sum up Miles' concept and contributions. "Miles bridged the gap to both Americas. He's hip to the whole culture here. He is playing it in his music. Miles was dealing with all that America had to say. He makes you a true American. He's off the Mississippi River (A reference to Miles' birth place, Alton, Illinois near E. St. Louis). He's like the center of the pendulum. He goes where the history is. East, West, North, South. He's a consummate musical scientist."

Miles is talking about concerts he's played and how "You can't B.S. a black audience. You got to play the blues. I heard this black woman sitting in the first row saying, 'when is he gonna play the blues?' "

There is a sense to Miles both in print and in person of a person not only anxious to be appreciated and celebrated by blacks but sensitive to the tragedy of race in America, particularly as it relates to his musical and social life. His various run-ins with police, his bouts with the critics, mostly white, particularly their opinions over the years about his playing. (The music magazine, *Down Beat* once had to reprint their reviews of the Bird-Miles records because the original reviews were uniformly negative, therefore idiotic.)

Yet, in his approach to his own life-music, Miles is not nationalistic, though fiercely in search of democracy, "I don't pay no attention to these white critics about my music. Be like some body from Europe coming criticizing Chinese music. They don't know about that. I've lived what I play."

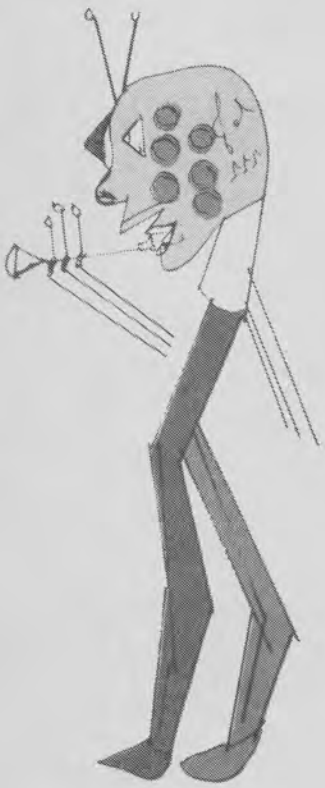
Miles Davis with one of his paintings.

"How come they don't let you write reviews about the music?" he was saying to me musing about the social-aesthetic contradictions of American life. He was offering me a small tape deck with a recent performance at Newport with saxophonist, Bob Berg. We talked some four hours at the UN Plaza.

Driving Miles to his midtown west destination, he spoke to my wife, Amina, and I about Cicely Tyson, the well known black actress (perhaps the best known black actress in the U.S.) who is also Miles' wife. Cicely was at their spot in California. Miles moves as easily back and forth across the country as he does through the years in his conversation.

Miles and Cicely go back a ways, as friends and confidantes. Though their marriage is more recent, "We were talking about Cicely doing more

scripts by black writers and people like James Baldwin." Though her presentation of Earnest Gaines' *Miss Jane Pittman* was extraordinarily popular in its TV production. "She looks at a lot of scripts. She gets a lot of scripts." Miles described a recent long distance phone conversation w/ Cicely one could hear an open funny relationship formed on the basis of deep feeling and respect — one cd imagine their words, hot and cool, sliding back and forth across the country. Miles himself was leaving for the coast in a few days.

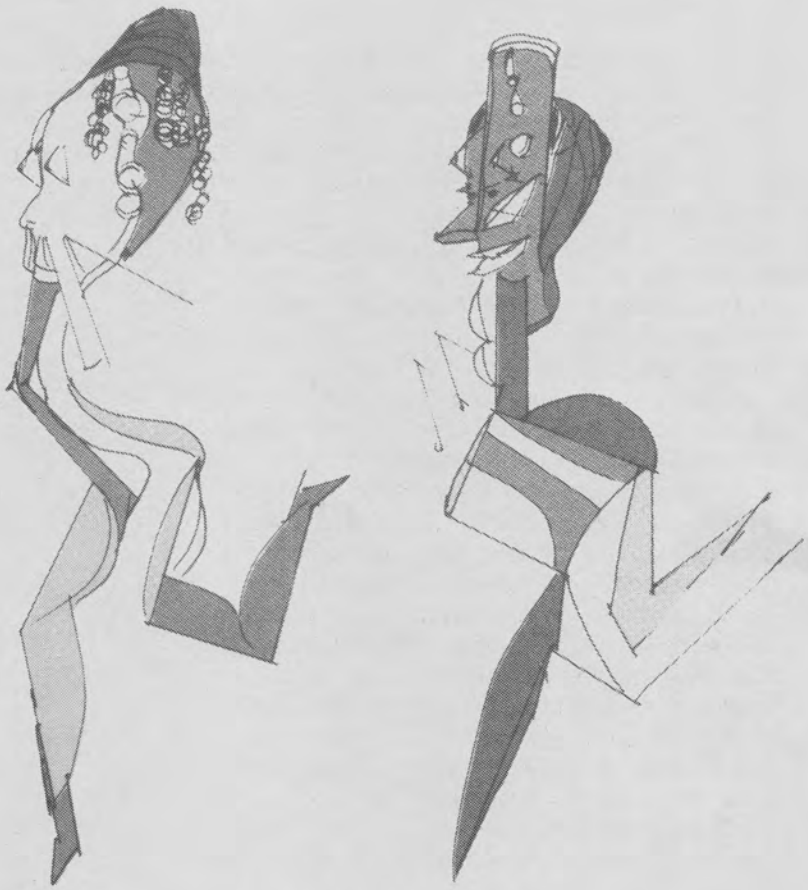


A week or so later I looked at a tape of Miles' new video *Decoy* and a TV interview. Both gave aspects of Miles' abiding passions and his most recent pursuits. "I'm doing a video, because I can," he said at one point on the tape. The video of *Decoy* was Miles as he is, when playing, somewhat exaggerated in his gestures, his tongue pushing out the way he does after playing sometimes, it seemed he was being whirled slowly in place w/ computer graphics much like his own spare drawings, bouncing out of his horn.

Miles' own original concept for the video had been more theatrical and dramatic. "I wanted to show what a Decoy really was." But a simple and probably less expensive company suggested video was put together. "It's ok," sd Miles.

The tv interview was sparkling and funny. Miles talked abt the difference between white and black musicians. How he "went with his feelings" in playing. How much he loved music. "I always play the blues . . . my body's full of rhythm. I like broken melody — strong melody — smooth voicings on the piano. Chords — I use the synthesizer DX 7 — whole other attitude. It's like sketching." And the camera showed us Miles pursuing another of his passions, drawing and painting. When we spoke earlier he mentioned how much he liked Anthony Quinn's work. Now Quinn wanted one of Miles' strange colored stick figures. Examples on cover of *Star People* and on the inside jacket of *Decoy.* A famous abstract expressionist living in East Hampton was putting on *Decoy* for me this summer and complained he thought Miles was not renaissance man. I wondered why he got so animated.

Miles spoke of playing "Today Music" and elsewhere of requiring his young musicians no matter "their training, to learn to play 'social music.'" Miles' *Bitches Brew* and *Live-Evil* made clear that that social music was



From Star People album cover, works by Miles Davis.

related in Miles' mind to blues, specifically rhythm and blues, and even rock (i.e. the white adaptations of r&b).

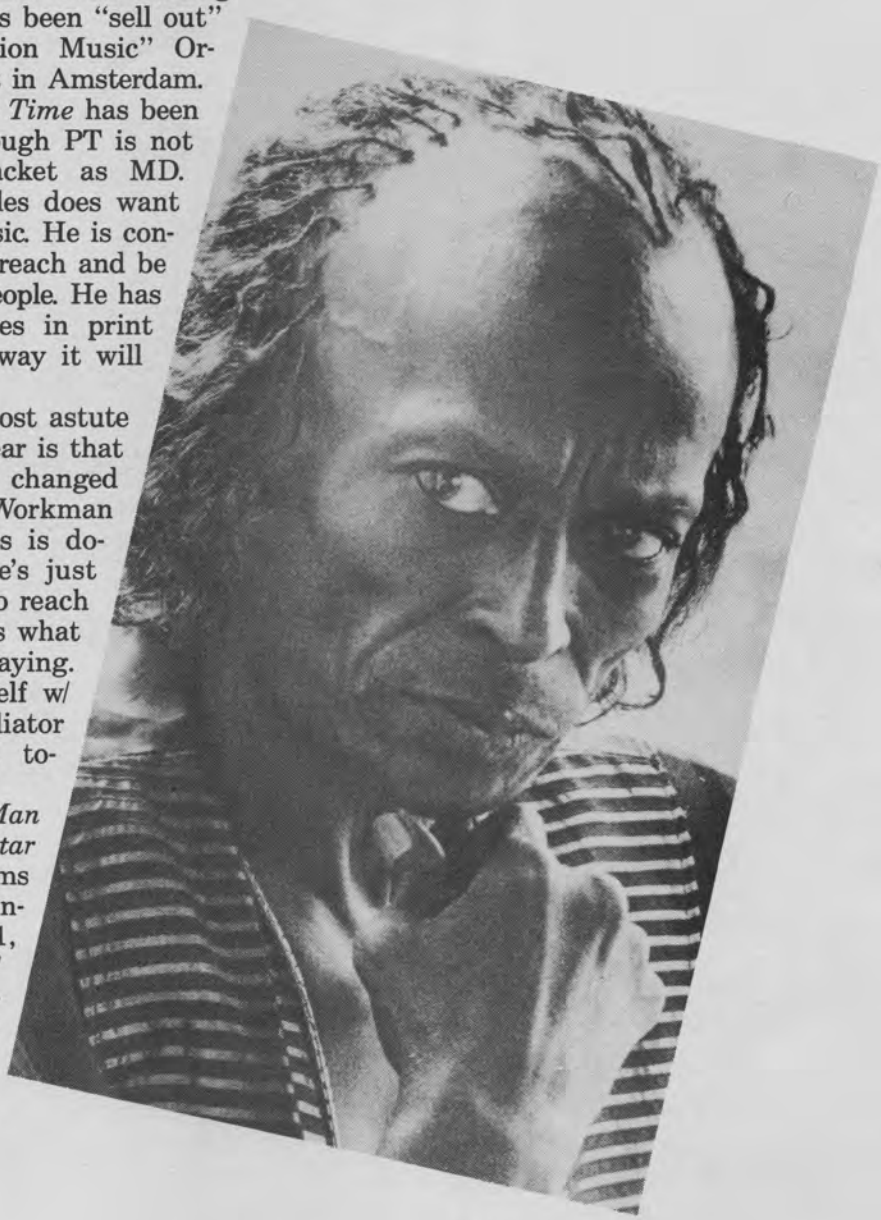
What is interesting is that Miles came into prominence just as the music was being "separated" as the musicians say. The Big jazz bands of the '20's and '30's always had blues singers. The KC blues shouters like Jimmy Rushing were identified w/ big bands, like Joe Williams w/ Count Basie. Even when Mr. B., Billy Eckstine, had his hippest bebop oriented big band, he would belt out blues anthems like "Jelly Jelly." But the Bop era saw blues, like rhythm and blues, go one way and the Jazz groups, though the best must always be blues oriented, use blues in the music rather than being "blues bands."

The reason for the seeming compartmentalization of African American music was that now there were more people playing the music, middle class blacks, whites, etc. who did not necessarily grasp the essential con-

tinuum and coat of many colors that the *whole* of the music is. Jazz *is* impossible w/o blues. Jazz is Blues' child, Langston Hughes told us.

But commerce "freezes" life into marketable categories. And an artificial separation is concretized by the demands of corporate marketing as well as the sharpening class divisions among the African American people.

Miles has been trying of late to reconnect Jazz, the most advanced black musical form, with its most popular and commercial forms blues and rhythm and blues. There has been a great deal of outcry from people who dug classical Miles, saying the music Miles has been making since *Bitches Brew* has been "sell out" commercialism. "Fashion Music" Ornette Coleman called it in Amsterdam. Though his own *Prime Time* has been similarly accused. Though PT is not in the same tax bracket as MD. There is no doubt Miles does want to make a popular music. He is concerned that his music reach and be appreciated by black people. He has said quite a few times in print that this is the only way it will last.



But one thing the most astute observers can see or hear is that Miles is not himself changed in essence. Reggie Workman pointed out that Miles is doing the same thing he's just using the electronics to reach people. "Miles' music is what he's always been playing. He's surrounded himself w/ electronics as a mediator between himself and today's market."

Miles says of *The Man With The Horn* and *Star People*, two of the albums released after his "unretirement" in 1981, "they're just records." But it's clear that *Decoy* represents something else again. What's also clear to many Miles watchers

Miles Davis recording for the album "Sun City" by Artists United Against Apartheid.

is that *Decoy* is so much better than those earlier versions of his most recent "social music" because Miles is getting his "chops" back.

The trumpet is a notoriously taxing instrument. As "pretty" as Miles is, he still has the characteristic big knot on his lip from years of wailing. One cannot lay off that horn and then just pop up crackling. *Decoy* is so much hipper than the lst two albums because Miles is playing stronger.

Listening to Miles' version of Lauper's tune, there was no way I cd connect it with the dizzy looking punk girl I was looking at on the cover of *New York* magazine.

But Jazz has always been able to do just that. Take any kind of anything and transform it via the Jazz concept and performances. So we can get a "My Favorite Things" from John Coltrane and never think of Julie Andrews. Miles' "Time" had mostly ditched Lauper as well.

Miles is overdubbing his solo against a tape of the rest of the band. He experiments w/ the mute, then w/ open horn. A playback and he winces at the fluffs and off intonations. The band tape is played once more with an "eternal" kind of "patness." Again Miles addresses it w/ his horn and the wizardry of technology.

When there is a short break Miles in cap and dark glasses, whacking on gum, "Stop it when I start fucking up . . . ok."

Open horn . . . sounds good . . . but . . . Miles' hand is raised, "Sounds sharp . . . Go where we left off." Miles fits right into the taped rhythm. His hand goes up again, "Go back." A few runs. Miles calls to the engineer, "Bob . . . you hear when I doubled the melody?" The engineer

answers in the affirmative. "It's nice," Miles responds. "I'll keep it."

Miles in suede skin "Guinea slippers," silk mixture pants, the gold headed cane, Jimmy Baldwin says Miles handles like an accoutrement of his cool, with not the slightest reference to his *needing* it to walk. "Miles is a very beautiful person," Jimmy added, "all the way deep down — no pretension."

Miles is waving his cane and gesturing now listening to a play back w/ some of his younger musicians who are in the studio as well. It is a sweet melody, this version of "Time After Time," repeated as a vamp (Suggests a modal ostinato flavor) with Miles' classic song quality. It definitely puts me in mind of a kind of hip "mood music" but now I can hear underneath a reggae beat. "ohhhhhhhhhhhhh shit" Miles drawls, at a fluff. "Go to the tag."

Young, electric bassist Darryl Jones is called on to dub in a stronger reggae flavor. Miles didn't think the tracks had enough of the reggae, so he gets Jones to boot it up a little as they had done live. Lauper's "Time" was a simple ballad, Miles has created a Milesian funk-ballad w/ a sly insinuating reggae float to it. There's no doubt in this listener's mind that the side will be a killer commercially and it is very lovely music.

George Butler explains to us that the record will be out in maybe ten days. Columbia is letting no moss grow on the concept.

Miles is standing in front of the young brother on bass with his cane, gesticulating, a bouncing conductor, demonstrating he wants still more reggae, a *sharper* reggae feeling as the music is dubbed. He bends deep, at the waist, to indicate the level of reggae funk he wants. When it's over, he slaps the bassist's hand. Real joy animates Miles' finely sculptured black face.

As Miles' chops get stronger his "rock" becomes more "legitimatized," because he sounds more like himself and the background, any background, simply a contemporary "cushion" to show off M.D.

Miles is pacing. He comes into the booth w/ Jones to listen to the playback and simulate the mix they will use on the record. But finally he decides to do another take. Miles

Painting by Miles Davis.

is playing a black trumpet. He also has a blue trumpet at the ready. "Try not to stop him, Bob," Miles calls to the engineer. The other track had been recorded 3 weeks ago. But whatever, listening again to the soft reggae soft rock blues ballad, it is the music Miles has always made.

As master drummer Art Blakey said to me (though he was quoted in some periodical saying some very negative things about Miles' latest musical sojourn), "Even if he was with Okiedoke and the Saltshakers, Miles can play. He doesn't have to prove anything, he's already proved it."

When he was told about Blakey's negative remarks in a magazine Miles blurted, "Blakey ain't said shit" and that was that. Like Craig Harris said "Miles is gonna do what Miles want to do. And everybody else can follow, if they feel like it."

I talked to another giant of the music, about Miles, one Philly Joe Jones, a stalwart of the classic small band of the '50's, who echoed most of the other musicians, but like Philly J's own personality, his answer was more emphatic, "Miles," Philly said, "Oh man, Miles is one of the great motherfuckers. One of the geniuses. I know what he's doing regardless of what he seems like he's doing." Philly Joe went on illuminating recent Miles, but actually, for me, Philly Joe had summed it up aptly and succinctly, "One of the Great Motherfuckers."

When Miles left the record session, my wife and I drove him midtown west where he was staying. He talkd to us on the sidewalk for a few minutes. "Go listen to the music," he was saying as he turned to split. "Yeh, check out the music." □

The political economy of the U.S. working class

Review by Kirk Johnson

PRISONERS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM
by Mike Davis
Verso (New Left Books)
London, 1986
320 pp., $7.95 paper

In recent years, a growing number of socialist-minded people have recognized the centrality of the alliance between the working class and oppressed nationalities in any struggle for progress. If the labor movement in the U.S. is ever to break out of the deadly grip of stagnancy and class collaboration, it must unite with the aspirations for democracy and national rights of blacks, Chicanos and other minority peoples.

William Gallegos' article in the last issue of *Forward* was a major breakthrough in clarifying the particular link between the struggles of the oppressed peoples and the geographic shift of U.S. capital to the southern half of the U.S. His article, "The 'Sunbelt Strategy' and Chicano liberation," pointed

Kirk Johnson is a writer and photographer who lives and works in Berkeley, California. He is currently active in support work for the Watsonville Canning strike.

out that, while U.S. capitalism hopes its shift toward the South and Southwest will solve its economic problems, the Sunbelt may very well become U.S. capitalism's graveyard. As the location of the homelands of the Afro-American and Chicano peoples, the region is bound to play a large, even decisive role, in the struggle for socialism in the U.S.

Many of the observations made by Mike Davis in *Prisoners of the American Dream* concur with these conclusions. Davis' book reviews the history of the political economy of the U.S. working class and concludes with pointed comments on the failure of much of labor to mount a powerful response to Reaganism. He shows that labor's weakness today can be traced to a tradition of subservience to liberalism and chauvinism toward blacks and other nationalities.

Davis starts with the 19th century to identify the origins of class disunity in the U.S. He links the disruptive nature of economic growth in America to divisions in the proletariat, and also shows that when labor began to build effective mass political action, deep-seated ethnic, religious and racial antagonisms emerged to mobilize "native" against immigrant, Protestant against Catholic, skilled against unskilled, and white against black.

A major chance to reverse this legacy came with the upsurge of labor militancy in the 1930s. But the CIO traded the shop-floor activism of its birth for a wartime strategy of dependence on the Democratic Party. The labor peace that followed in 1948-1950 legitimized collective bargaining and permitted the expansion of U.S. production by providing a wage base for a mass consumption economy. As Davis notes, corporate-union cooperation meant that many white union workers could participate in the "American Dream" of owning their own home, purchasing automobiles and sending their kids to college. But labor peace rested on the unions' acceptance of cold war politics, an acceptance enforced by the purge of leftists and a top-down union bureaucracy opposed to rank-and-file activism.

A crucial flaw in all this was that organized labor did not struggle for the rights of the unorganized. Davis stresses the exclusion of blacks as the bitterest failure of all. The disenfranchisement of Southern blacks kept congressional power concentrated in a corrupt bloc of Southern Democrats — these Dixiecrats vetoed or gutted virtually every piece of pro-union or progressive legislation backed by labor.

By the end of the 1960s, the post-war boom had run its course. U.S. capitalism began to adopt a new economic strategy based on geographic shifts, disindustrialization and ruthless attacks on both the organized and unorganized sectors of the working class. Capital began to move from the old industrial

Northeast to the "right-to-work" states of the Sunbelt.

Another major trend Davis identifies is a shift in corporate investment from industrial production to new high-profit "service" industries, such as health care, business services, banking, real estate and food. These fast-growing sectors are notable for their "split level" work force: on the bottom are minimum wage, largely non-union workers such as clerks, office staff and service employees. Above them are highly paid professionals, managers and technicians. All this has resulted either in a loss of union jobs or given corporations the leverage to replace old patterns of industrial relations with "ruthless downward spirals of wage cutting and de-unionization."

Davis suggests that Ronald Reagan rode to power on this realignment of the American electorate. Reagan's promise of prosperity through tax cuts appealed to a coalition of the rich, "haves" made up of the newly affluent middle strata, and a large number of the white working class bent on protecting their privileges.

The Reagan coalition held in 1984, but the most striking lesson of his victory was the bankruptcy of much of labor's political strategy. The AFL-CIO's move to the right and early selection of Walter Mondale as a "labor candidate" gained the unions nothing. Davis also criticizes much of the left for not recognizing the importance of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition. Davis states that Jackson was "arguably the first social-democratic alternative seriously offered to the American electorate in a presidential campaign." But many on the left ignored Jackson's genuinely progressive platform and strong showing in the primaries.

Throughout his book, Davis argues that labor defeats itself by refusing to unite with black liberation, to organize the South, and to end Southern reaction in the Democratic Party. He argues that these tasks must be carried out to defeat the attack on labor and the rightward shift in American politics. Davis urges that special attention be given to the struggles of the black and Hispanic working class.

Davis' book does not directly address the current Watsonville strike, but the inspiring and invigorating effect it has had on the labor movement validates his conclusions. A key lesson of Watsonville is the need to unite the struggles of oppressed nationalities with the battles of anti-concession locals and rank-and-file activists.

Prisoners of the American Dream is a helpful historical and theoretical perspective having practical implications.

The Palestinians

Review by
Laura Kurtzman

AFTER THE LAST SKY:
PALESTINIAN LIVES
by Edward W. Said,
with photographs by Jean Mohr
Pantheon Books,
New York, 1985
174 pp., $14.95 paper

After the Last Sky, by Edward Said with photographs by Jean Mohr, is a rich exploration of contemporary Palestinian political and social life. Said, a Palestinian, is the Parr Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. Subtitled "Palestinian Lives," the text is a provocative hybrid of the abstract and the personal, using political and historical analysis, literary criticism, autobiographical and journalistic anecdotes and deeply personal accounts of what it feels like to live as a Palestinian. The relationship between the textual and photographic essay is loose, with the photographs functioning as illustrations for Said's more abstract points or as jumping off points for his meditations on the themes of

Laura Kurtzman recently returned from a year of work and study in Israel, where she taught English in the Palestinian town of Jaffa.

Village of Senjel, near Ramallah, 1979. Rescued bird. p. 165.

Palestinian exile, dispersion, repeated expulsions, national awakening and national identity. The text in turn sets the photographic images — which have an informal, journalistic quality to them — within an overall narrative of the Palestinian people, sympathetically told by a Palestinian.

The dominant theme of Said's reflections is exile, which he describes as "a series of portraits without names, without contexts. Images that are largely unexplained, nameless, mute." (p. 12) On the most basic level, Said is writing to restore a sense of history, place, human wholeness and social context to the flat, stereotypic images of Palestinians that predominate in the Western press. At a more intimate level, it is to resist the crushing anonymity of exile by asserting a Palestinian presence and national identity that Said writes. And it is the narrative, formed of stories, history, personal revelations, and analysis, that for Said grants authenticity and social meaning to "Palestinian" as a national identity.

To an exile as distant as is Said from the land of Palestine, the assertion of identity is the chief comfort against the pain of exile, in his words of "how *abstract*, how very solitary and unique we tend to feel." (p. 35) And I think he is absolutely right to attempt to correct the deeply racist stereotypes most Americans have about Palestinians by supplying a larger political, social and personal context for Mohr's unpretentious and deeply humane photographs. But I wonder if in the transition from the particular to the abstract, the substance of the Palestinian struggle, daily life and mundane resistance, the places themselves aren't turned into something of a literary abstraction. A perhaps petty example of this is Said's discussion of the photograph he labels "ramparts near the Jaffa gate." He uses the photograph to illustrate a metaphor he constructs concerning the memory of a place from which one has been banished: "What existed in

the past for us — the *there* of our memories — is still there, but because it is irredeemable and inaccessible, it has acquired the complex, impersonal texture of an ancient wall: you can neither have it, nor penetrate it." (pp. 149-50)

The photograph is actually of the wall near Damascus gate.* A small point, admittedly, and not very important, except insofar as it highlights Said's own distance from the places and the people he is describing. And to be fair, he is conscious of this and discusses it openly at several points in the book. For example, in the chapter entitled "Emergence," Said writes, "The essence of the Palestinian identity has paradoxically been the experience of dispossession and loss, which everyone has lived through and which no one has fully been able to convey. Those of us who live in the West have been conditioned by education and culture to regard exile as a literary, entirely bourgeois state. . . . But it is the mass of Palestinians dispersed throughout the Near East who, I think, really set the conditions for life in exile, and these are almost by definition silent, indescribable, utterly poignant." (pp. 120-21)

If Said's tone is at times unnervingly detached from the reality he depicts, he more than makes up for it when he allows himself to tell a straight story and when he speaks intimately about the experience of being a Palestinian. Then Said's prose has an eloquence and honesty that can't but make us open up to, perhaps even identify with, the people and places Mohr so beautifully photographs.

*Kamal Boullata pointed this out to me.

Refugee camp outside Hebron, 1979. A family, the mother dressed in traditional costume. p. 82.

The Media Monopoly: They lie for imperialism

Review by Jim Woods

THE MEDIA MONOPOLY
by Ben H. Bagdikian
Beacon Press
Boston, 1983
282 pp., $8.95 paper

Who runs the media? Who owns it? Who decides what we can and cannot see and hear? In *The Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian studies the 50 corporations that control the major channels of information in the U.S.

Hollywood, the news chains, the publishing industry, and especially the powerful electronic networks — the media is owned and controlled by the wealthiest, most powerful and reactionary sectors of American society. Bagdikian writes, "By the 1980s, the majority of all major American media — newspapers, magazines, radio, television, books and movies — were controlled by fifty giant corporations. These corporations were interlocked in common financial interest with other massive industries and with a few dominant international banks." Bagdikian names the monopolies, describes the interlocking directorates, and gives telling examples of how — at key moments — executives exercised their power, killing stories and intimidating writers.

The Media Monopoly covers two major developments in the last 25

Jim Woods is an activist who follows developments in the media world.

years: the centralization of control of the media, and the impact of advertising on journalism. All of us have seen the degradation of U.S. journalism and culture in the last few years — the jingoism, anti-communist hype, violence, pornography (combined with piety), TV preachers praising white supremacy in South Africa, etc. It is difficult to find significant dissent on the networks, or in the mainstream press, nothing approaching the quality or quantity of reports that appeared during the Viet Nam War and Watergate period. This degeneration of the U.S. media is a direct result of the centralization of power into the hands of corporations having direct interest in U.S. imperialism.

Today, one percent of the owners own 34 percent of all daily papers. In 1900, 2,042 daily papers had 2,023 owners. With the centralization of capital, by 1980 there were 1,730 dailies and 760 owners.

Bagdikian writes, "More and more, both the news and the industries belong to the same parent corporations. Most of the fifty biggest firms have a direct stake in foreign investments and, therefore, in the foreign policy of the United States. There is almost no country in the world in which a subsidiary of the fifty media companies does not have a significant investment. One major media alone, CBS, has foreign subsidiaries headquartered in thirty-four countries, ranging from Argentina to South Africa."

Representatives of the major oil companies sit on the boards of the most powerful networks, and their picture of the Mideast, of Arabs, of nationalists and socialists, fits *their* view, *their* monopoly needs.

Since *The Media Monopoly* was published in 1983, the media situation has worsened. While Reagan-hype stresses "free enterprise" and "competition," his policies hasten the *elimination* of competition. Concentration of media power under Reagan exceeds all former administrations. Today 98 percent of the daily city newspapers have no competitors in their local region.

In December 1985, General Electric bought RCA for $6.3 billion, taking over the largest TV and radio network system in the world — NBC. Here is no minor matter. The takeover means that the world's largest network is owned by the U.S. government's second largest war supplier. GE produces nuclear subs, F-18 fighter aircraft engines, Minuteman missiles and UH-60 helicopter engines.

The Media Monopoly has weaknesses. It does not deal with the media as an instrument of *imperialism*. Bagdikian tends to reduce the issue to Bigness versus Little People. But the U.S. media lies for *imperialism*, and imperialism is more than just bigness.

Yet the research is sound, and *The Media Monopoly* is a good basis for further exposure of the U.S. media. A complete struggle for democratic rights, for peace, and for socialism inevitably includes a conscious struggle against the monopoly communications system of the United States.