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July, 1982

Dear friend,

International events have almost constantly headlined US news this summer. This has been so despite continuing grim economic reports one year into the era of Reaganomics. The seriousness of world events themselves, including three major land and sea wars, have something to do with this international focus. But some of the attention has been to the first real testing of Reagan's approach on new world problems. The administration chose to ignore Latin American anti-colonialism in the Malvinas situation; has kept

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the United States as Israel's main rear-guard in its war to the death against Palestinian national rights; alienated rather than further unified its Western allies on Soviet initiatives, such as the pipeline project; and tilted further to the right in the Salvadorean civil war. A key theme of "The Ruling Class Debate on Foreign Policy," featured in this summer's Forward Motion is that the new conservative foreign policy's "blindness to any factors but Soviet/communist subversion behind particular crises is unlikely to yield much long term success for the US ruling class." As Reagan's policies have begun to come into their own these past few months, they have already begun to bear out this observation. What we can expect from the US ruling class and what the Left can do about it are carefully explored in this article. Originally presented at the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters' April international conference by a comrade from that group, we are happy to make an edited version available here.

How to assess trade union militance in the present worsening economic environment is taken up in another set of articles in this issue. Excerpts from two recent papers on two public sector strikes--the 1978 Postal wildcat and the hospital strike reported on in FM 1 and 2--discuss what unions need to do when, as the introduction puts it, "militance is not enough."

Rounding out this issue are two new and, from our point of view, very welcome kinds of contributions to Forward Motion. First a short story sketch, loosely based on a real incident this year in a New England suburb. Also, letters to FM. Interestingly, both deal in different ways with the organizational tactics of the Marxist Left today. We decided to open up one of these letters, on the contemporary CPUSA, for a little discussion here.

* * *

In passing, we wanted to thank readers who had received complementary copies of the first issues of FM and who have recently sent in subscription orders. But we would like to keep growing: if you would like to have us send a complementary copy to a friend, please let us know. Also, a reminder that FM readers are interested in your articles, short reports on organizing work, comments and letters. Subscriptions are great, but we would like to hear from you other times as well!

--FM staff

The Ruling Class Debate On Foreign Policy

Why Even Talk About It?

The U.S. left has generally paid little attention to foreign policy debates within the ruling class. In fact, most anti-imperialists consider analyses of such debates to be not only a waste of time but a sign of opportunism, a desertion of the masses as the makers of history. After all, the argument goes, imperialism is imperialism. Those who distinguish between competing ruling class views and even place different political values on them, will, it is said, end up coopted by reformist illusions.

There are, of course, leftists who do examine the complexities of the changing ways in which U.S. imperialism defends itself. But even most of these people shy away from drawing concrete political conclusions from their analyses. In fact, it is almost as if the left takes a "non-political" stance towards its own ruling class. We don't examine it to determine whether or how we can take advantage of divisions to develop concrete strategies, but only to explain that it's still the same, old bad imperialism. So what else is new? This is precisely the main weakness of the best work so far on the subject of new ruling class approaches, Trilateralism, edited by Holly Sklar.

Such a position is no longer a responsible one. Until the mid-1970's there wasn't much evidence of argument within U.S. capital on long range foreign policy approaches. Nor were most of us open to learning from the CPUSA's positive experience in using ruling class divisions before and during World War II.

But the last years of Vietnam also revealed the sprouting seeds of important changes: the overall weakening of American dominance, the extension and greater flexibility of multinational corporate power, the development of contradictions between the interests of multinationals and their home countries, Rockefeller-types writing articles questioning containment strategy, the increasing assertion of Third World power, Western Europe and Japan's growing independence from U.S. positions, and the obvious

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aggressiveness of the U.S.S.R. These trends have only intensified in recent years.

We now find important differences within the U.S. foreign policy establishment over how to cope with these changes. Today there is no coherent global strategy of U.S. imperialism, nor has there been one since Carter took office and the fall of the Shah, among other events, highlighted the bankruptcy of the Nixon-Kissinger approach.

As we will discuss below, in its early years the Carter administration represented a pole of what we shall term a "liberal" foreign policy approach. It represented the recently developed but still incomplete views of the most multinational sectors of U.S. capital. Politically, these views advocated a more conciliatory approach toward Third World demands and the Soviet Union.

But with Carter's domestic and foreign policy problems and Reagan's presidential victory, the sector of the U.S. bourgeoisie supporting the "liberal" approach had to adapt itself to a conservative Republican

administration elected at least in part through appeals to Cold War militarism. This is an administration, judged by its actions so far, strongly influenced by the views of an emerging right-wing seeking to fill the gap left by what they see as a "defeatist" policy of detente and concessions to the Third World. What has emerged is probably something like an uneasy co-existence between liberal and right-wing tendencies, with liberal sectors of the elite forced to adopt a wait and see attitude towards the new administration's Cold War policies, while seeking to modify those policies whenever possible.



The U.S. ruling class is thus in a very serious transition period. In analyzing this "interregnum," our primary role is certainly not one of engaging in the nuances of the liberal vs. conservative ideologies, of the relative strengths of the Kissinger vs. Haig approaches. As leftists in the belly of the American beast, however, we recognize that ruling class differences carry within them the basis of different foreign policy

alternatives. These policies can and often do encourage different political outcomes. To the extent that we can affect policy toward the Third World, to the extent that we can promote a policy coincidentally favorable to peace and independence, to the extent that we can assist in limiting Soviet aggressiveness, it is our responsibility to engage in this arena.

This last consideration (opposition to the Soviets), is an important reason mandating our involvement in this debate. We are in a period where the long range threat of expanding Soviet power is being overshadowed by a desperately militarist U.S. administration--an administration trying to keep a fading U.S. dominance alive by armed threats.

These threats are dangerous in several ways: they threaten to trigger a world war; they weaken Third World independence; and they permit the Soviets to pose as the "peace seekers." In so doing, they undercut and weaken any long range collective efforts against Soviet expansion. The most dangerous factor here is the anti-Third World core of Washington's policy: weakening the Third World means weakening the principal force against Soviet hegemonism. The irony of Reagan is precisely that he is pushing the Third World closer to the Soviet Union.

Our basic assumption is that under today's conditions, support for Third World independence from either superpower and opposition to Soviet hegemonism go hand-in-hand.

Growth of Foreign Policy Differences

Backed by Rockefeller-sponsored groups like the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission, a significant section of the U.S. foreign policy establishment began to see the Vietnamese handwriting on the wall in the early 1970's. People like Brezinski, Richard Holbrooke (later to be a Carter State Dept. official responsible for E. Asian and Pacific Affairs), Paul Warnke (later to be Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and SALT negotiator under Carter), and others began searching for methods of reconciling the needs of changing and expanding U.S. capital with the relative decline of U.S. national power. In 1974 the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), announced its 1980's Project. The Project's objective was to "analyze the characteristics of the kind of international system that would be suited to deal with the conditions and problems of the upcoming decade." Such an analysis was required by new conditions in the world:

Much has happened since the late 1940's and early 1950's, and many new demands have been put on the international system: scientific and economic developments have eroded the traditional insulators of time and space and given rise to interdependencies, population has soared, power has shifted, new states have proliferated, and the number and importance of non-state actors in international affairs have increased. The institutional components of the post-World War II era, such as GATT, the IMF and NATO, increasingly seem out of gear with changed conditions.

"Non-state actors" referred to in the above excerpt undoubtedly includes multinational or transnational corporations, and herein lies a crucial underpinning of the liberal foreign policy approach: recognition of the rapidly expanding power and scope of the multinationals. What some have called "transnationalized capital" has at its disposal financial resources, international flexibility, and control over advanced technology which can begin to replace physical coercion or threats as methods of ensuring capital accumulation.

This has come about as an integral part of a more basic development: the direct organization of production abroad by monopoly capital, especially in the Third World, has begun replacing what is known as "portfolio investments"--capital exports which financed mostly locally organized enterprises to produce raw materials for shipment to the center. Now with direct investment in production abroad, the multinationals can furnish themselves directly with raw materials and are able to penetrate foreign markets more effectively than was possible through the exports of finished goods.

This has meant a heightened emphasis on the Third World as the focus of capital accumulation, and along with the corresponding "transnationalization" (or "denationalization") of capital, has provoked a further change from Lenin's time: while the first half of the 20th century was twice marked by wars between national capitals, the 1970's and 1980's are witnessing "collusion, mutual market interpenetration, interlocking production, and financial ties at the world level among multinationals of different nationalities." The dynamic of the international capitalist order is therefore moving toward greater integration among capitalists and cooptation of Third World economic nationalism by the multinational corporations.

A more conciliatory approach to Western and Japanese allies as well as Third World demands by the more multinational sector of the U.S. bourgeoisie makes sense in this context. Neither does U.S. capital have the means to enforce a traditional Cold War domination, nor does it really see the necessity of doing so given other instruments at its disposal. An ever more sophisticated neo-colonialism is probably the best description of the liberal approach.

A strong right-wing perspective has emerged parallel and in some ways in reaction to the "liberal" proposals. Part of a larger neo-conservative tendency, the right-wing view has emphasized the necessity of reasserting American world dominance with special reliance on military solutions and appeals to anti-communist ideology. It is a position which draws inspiration from U.S. policies of the 1950's, and which has already dominated the outlook and policies of the Reagan administration.

Both Reject Kissinger Policies

Both liberals and right-wing proponents rejected the transitional approach of Nixon and Kissinger: the use of surrogates (the Shah), the establishment of a net of countervailing relations with friends, enemies, and neutrals, the emphasis on detente and balance of power between the U.S.,

Soviets and China.

The right dislikes both Kissinger's support for improved relations with the USSR and China, and his willingness to allocate some responsibility to imperialist junior partners like the Shah. They viewed his efforts as a gutless strategy of retreat. The liberals accused Kissinger of not going far enough in recognizing the "profound transformations" in the new world order, of neglecting both the Third World and traditional allies in his efforts at detente with the Soviets and Chinese. Finally, the more appeasement oriented liberals disapproved of Kissinger's efforts at playing off China against the Soviets.

The Nixon-Kissinger approach reflected an understanding that the 1950's containment framework no longer held water. But it was a failure because it wanted things both ways: U.S. hegemony and multipolarity. That inevitable failure cleared the way for a squaring off between the more juxtaposed liberal and right-wing views.

The Liberals: "Transnationalism" for Profit

The liberal approach proposes that U.S. policy recognize and develop constructive responses to forces besides Soviet expansionism, i.e. Third World nationalism. An important consequence of this understanding is the knowledge that the U.S. ruling class must view various crises in terms of their regional/local aspects and not simply as the fruits of communist or Soviet subversion. Thus, for example, we find articles stating that if Reagan wants the Cubans out of Angola, he should first look towards South Africa, not Moscow; that no white paper will persuade other countries that Angola doesn't have a right to seek foreign protection against Pretoria's attacks. In fact, the most sophisticated proponents of this view affirm that a real anti-Soviet approach demands a sophisticated method for dealing with North-South issues. This means, among other things, that military power cannot be relied upon as the principal means of settling disputes--political solutions and compromises must be sought.

This is nothing all that new. What is striking is the recognition that the rich capitalist countries, especially the U.S., are unable nor do they need to simply dictate to everyone in the Third World. For the Trilateralists, the poor as well as rich countries need to feel they have a stake in the international system. This means concessions. It also means a new kind of ideological flexibility--a rejection of anti-communism as the spiritual core of U.S. foreign policy. Instead, we hear the Rockefeller organizations talking about "social contract," "world order bargain," "global order," "trans-nationalism" and "collective management."

A recent version of "collective management," is "multilateral containment." This view takes more seriously the threat of the Soviet Union, and supports an "elite directorate" made up of the Trilateral countries. There would be coordination of Western and Japanese policies toward the Soviets and in varying degrees in support of the Third World. This would require not only a military division of labor, but also a U.S. willingness to take the advice of its allies on issues such as the Arab-Israeli dispute and political change

in Central America. While the liberals certainly don't propose any basic changes in the imperialist system's division of labor, they are willing to accept a degree of industrialization in some Third World countries, such as the OPEC states, which surpass the limits of light manufacturing to which the majority of Third World countries have been limited.

But while the overall liberal thrust is for greater flexibility toward and cooptation of Third World nationalism, there are differences among the liberals. The well-publicized disputes between Vance and Brezinski reflected divergent views among Trilateralists on a correct approach toward the Soviet Union and concessions to Third World independence. Often described as a battle between hard line "globalists" who saw things more in terms of the U.S.-Soviet struggle (Brezinski), and the "regionalists" who emphasized legitimate national/regional concerns (Vance), the dispute cast light on the very inadequacies of the liberal vision which were to play such a large role in Carter's failure.

The Right: America First Through Military Containment

When the right-wing explains the relative decline in American power, it faults the "isolationism," "lack of nerve," and "pacifism" of the liberal foreign policy establishment. Subjective failures by U.S. leaders and not material changes in world forces are the principal culprits. Consequently, little if any recognition is given to the growing importance of North-South issues.

Differences exist within the right wing, as within the liberals. Haig, for instance, tends to have a somewhat more sensible view of the world than Jean Kirkpatrick, Reagan's UN ambassador, who informed us in a 1979 COMMENTARY article that Khomeini is a "Soviet client." Ideological purity, an emphasis on anti-communism as the spiritual basis on which to mobilize America against Ivan or little Ivans is especially emphasized by the more intellectual proponents of a new conservatism.

Ideological purity of the right produces an interesting problem: anti-communism is in conflict with the anti-Soviet struggle the right defends as primary. This contradiction emerges most clearly in attitudes toward U.S. rapprochement with China--something many on the right oppose for three reasons: First, China is so weak that its contributions to the containment of Soviet imperialism are not significant. Second, by helping China we may strengthen and permit it to turn against us in the long run. But third and most importantly, China is a socialist country. Support for China would thus entail the "loss of political clarity." We thus find Ray Cline, a former Reagan advisor and Georgetown University "strategic thinker" proposing a core group of free world countries that would include Taiwan (as well as Israel) but not China.

If the liberals' perspective is backed by the more multinational sectors of U.S. capital, represented by elite planning groups such as the Trilateral Commission, what then is the social base of the new right wing? In the private sector it is at least partially composed of (1) capitalists whose activities are more locally or nationally based and who are thus more threatened by even

mild and superficial concessions to Third World economic nationalism and (2) industries connected to defense contracting such as rubber, steel, shipbuilding, etc. Within the government itself, opposition to a more "democratic" foreign policy is strong among a "group of policy planners devoted to preserving the Cold War mood...in the Pentagon, the armed services, the intelligence agencies, and other important bureaus. They had a self-interest in keeping the Cold War alive, to be sure, but they were also ideologues who genuinely believe in their anti-communism and were willing to pursue their passion whatever the economic consequences" (Trilateralism, p. 536).

Finally there is an increasingly important sector of the intelligentsia whose rejection of not only socialism but also recent American liberalism has led them backwards to a sophisticated reassertion of principles such as the free market and outright anti-communism. These people write in journals such as Commentary and The Public Interest, and work in think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute. The influence of this sector is still relatively limited. But to the extent that social and economic dislocation deepens in the U.S., and no coherent left perspective develops to fill the void created by an outmoded liberalism, I suspect that increasing numbers of academics and intellectuals will move toward a general conservatism that includes an "America first" position in world affairs.

What is striking about the conservative foreign policy view is how out of line it is with the long term needs of U.S. capital. It is truly a narrow perspective whose emphasis on U.S. world military hegemony does not accord with the changing needs and capacities of multinational U.S. capital. Its blindness to any factors but Soviet/communist subversion behind particular crises is unlikely to yield much long term success for the U.S. ruling class. Its anti-communism contrasts with the realities of the Sino-Soviet conflict and with the necessities of "doing business" with not only the Saudi elites but also Mugabe and the Sandinistas.

An important question remains: if the liberal perspective is so much more in tune with the real needs of the multinational, and therefore most powerful, sections of U.S. capital, why has that perspective not won out in terms of state policy? Why did Carter fail and right-wing policies become dominant?

Carter

The Carter administration was an attempt to put the emerging liberal foreign policy approach into practice. As has been well publicized, Carter was himself a member of the Trilateral Commission as were most of his top cabinet members and advisors. The new Democratic administration included, however, not one member of the right-wing Committee on the Present Danger. It should have been no great surprise, then, that Carter's early actions included strong support for the Panama Canal Treaty, insistence on at least a partial embargo of Rhodesia and eventual support for Britain's Zimbabwe plan, backing for SALT, improved relations with China along with detente with the USSR, restraint from sending in military support for Somoza (admittedly under heavy opposition from other Central American states), and even pressing the IMF to postpone a much needed \$20 million standby credit for Somoza.

Carter has, of course, been almost universally judged a failure in foreign policy. From an early willingness to compromise with Third World demands and downplay the danger of Soviet expansion, he moved considerably to the right by the end of his term: military aid for the El Salvadorean junta was approved, the Rapid Deployment Force was proposed (well before the Russians invaded Afghanistan), and a position of futile intransigence was adopted in the hostage situation. On the one hand he supported Mugabe's election, a Marxist-Leninist, while on the other he refused to consider reparations for Vietnam. He changed his mind on the neutron bomb. He talked about human rights but moved toward military support for El Salvador. He blew it in Iran, benefitting no one but the Soviet Union. He was "shocked" at the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. He abruptly switched votes in a UN criticism of Israel. He gave indications of more flexibility on the Mid-East, but fired Andy Young for talking to the PLO.

Two important questions arise concerning Carter's policies. First, acknowledging that his goal was a more effective system of imperialist operation, to what extent do we believe that there were positive elements in his policies, elements which objectively reduce restrictions on forces of progress, independence and peace?

There were, in fact, positive aspects, aspects of no little significance. Mugabe's election, for example, was an important precedent in the development of progressive forces independent of both superpowers. Carter's fight against strong right-wing opposition for Congressional approval of aid to the new Nicaraguan government was better than the trade embargo the U.S. would have slapped on a progressive government in the hemisphere 20 years ago, as in the case of Cuba.

The principal objection posed by most leftists to this view is that U.S. support is not "disinterested" but aimed at strengthening neo-colonial control. As Holly Sklar states in relation to Zimbabwe, for example...

By pulling the strings of aid and corporate investment, London, Washington and other trilateral states will attempt to ensure that whatever transformation of the status quo does occur, it remains within the bounds of neocolonialism. (Trilateralism)
Similarly, U.S. aid to Nicaragua went not to the government for public reconstruction efforts, but rather to the private business sector.

Undoubtedly these are valid and important issues, but they miss some concrete points. While the ideal is for U.S. funds to be channeled through an independent, multilateral agency concerned with the real needs of the people of Nicaragua and Zimbabwe, that is something for which we must fight. On the other hand, U.S. economic aid, whatever the motivation, is better than the policy of outright opposition or embargo we would have seen years ago and are beginning to see with Reagan. Furthermore, the financial needs of new revolutionary governments are real and immense. The fact is that new governments themselves have expressed a willingness to accept U.S. money, depending on the conditions.

This raises a further issue: there is in fact, a danger of Third World

countries becoming dependent on and subservient to the Soviet Union. Neo-colonialist relations established between the Soviet Union on the one hand, and Eastern Europe, Cuba, Vietnam and others are at least as burdensome to the recipients as the strings of Western imperialism.

Although the relative economic weakness of the USSR lessens the actual scope of its neo-colonial control, allusion to Soviet economic and political domination should not be poo-pooed as simply a cover by Washington for a reassertion of Western control. While it is often that, it is also an issue of real concern to Third World people and should also be to us. Opposition to Soviet domination constitutes an area of intersecting interest between U.S. imperialism and many Third World countries. This intersection should not be exaggerated, but neither should it be ignored.

If many of Carter's policies toward the Third World were on the whole positive, his early attitude toward the Soviet Union was much more problematic. While his support for arms limitation was a useful step, his overall underestimation of Soviet intentions was counter-productive for two reasons: First, it did, in fact, give somewhat of a green light to the Soviet Union, and second, it did much to discredit the positive elements of Carter's approach to the Third World in the eyes of the U.S. people. For Carter to have admitted shock at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was to undermine belief in his overall understanding of world events and pave the way for what seemed to be a more "coherent" and "realistic" Reagan/Right wing.

But an unjustified softness on the Soviet Union was not primarily a consequence of Carter's ineptness. The roots of the problem are found rather in the Trilateral policy itself, a policy founded on a desire to peacefully do business with everybody, to integrate the USSR into a world economic order profitable to all, but especially to western multinationals. A principal assumption of this approach is that the USSR can be transformed into a peaceful member of the world system mainly through business links with the West. (See, for example, "East-West Trade: A European View," by Giovanni Agnelli, Chairman of Fiat, in Foreign Affairs, Summer 1980, pp 1016-33.)

A second question: if there were positive elements in Carter's policies, and if they were generally backed by the most "dynamic and dominant" sectors of U.S. capital, why did the approach fail? Besides Carter's personal shortcomings, the principal explanation has been the tenacious opposition of the right-oriented vested interests mentioned above. As will be discussed below, this did play a major role but does not suffice to explain Carter's fall. It leaves out the already stated inherent weakness in the Trilateral views: the failure to take a more realistic stance toward the USSR and integrate that stance with a peaceful, accommodationist approach to Third World demands.

Whether the inconsistencies of the liberal policies were more important than opposition from right-wing vested interests to Carter's efforts is difficult to say. But we can state that without the failures and openings created by the liberals' weaknesses, the Right would have had a much harder time.

The right-wing attack took various forms. In one instance a group of outside specialists with a decidedly right-wing tilt was called upon by the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to evaluate years of U.S. intelligence work on the Soviet Union during the Ford administration. A 1978 report of the Senate Select Committee on intelligence said of this outside evaluation that "the outcome of the exercise was predetermined....The intelligence agencies were cast inaccurately in the role of 'doves.'" Years of work by the intelligence agencies were challenged by the outside group's (known as Team B) insistence on a more "somber" approach to the Soviets, and the CIA was made to support a "worst case" approach toward the USSR.

In another instance, Carter's nominee as SALT negotiator and director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Paul Warnke, was the subject of a concerted attack by a right-wing coalition which included not only the Committee on the Present Danger, but the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, American Conservative Union, Conservative Caucus and the Committee for Survival of a Free Congress.

Right-wing forces were able to block the nomination of Ted Sorenson, Carter's first choice to head and reorganize the CIA. Dissenting cold warriors also tore apart an attempt by Carter people in the National Security Council to write a presumably liberal-oriented assessment of the U.S. global position (which finally emerged as PRM-10).

By the end of his administration, Carter had clearly failed to centralize the foreign policy apparatus and control cold war vested interests. The conflict between the long range interests of the ruling class vs. the immediate interests of specific capitalist and bureaucratic sectors was clearly being won by the latter.

Carter could have met the accommodationist needs of the dynamic sectors of U.S. capital while appealing to ordinary people's desire for peace and security as well as their sense of democracy. But this did not happen, in part because of weaknesses in the Democratic Party, Carter's own shortcomings, and the power of vested interests tied to Cold War militarism. But just as important was the central weakness of the Trilateral approach, the assumed conflict between accommodation to Second and Third World demands and opposition to Soviet expansion. Until such assumptions are shown to be false, only two unpalatable alternatives will exist: (1) a right-wing view that mobilizes vested interests through its overinflated estimates of the USSR, and (2) a bumbling liberal perspective that loses credibility through its incorrect assumptions of Soviet good intentions. Given the present set of forces and attitudes in U.S. society, it was inevitable that the right wing view dominated.

Reagan

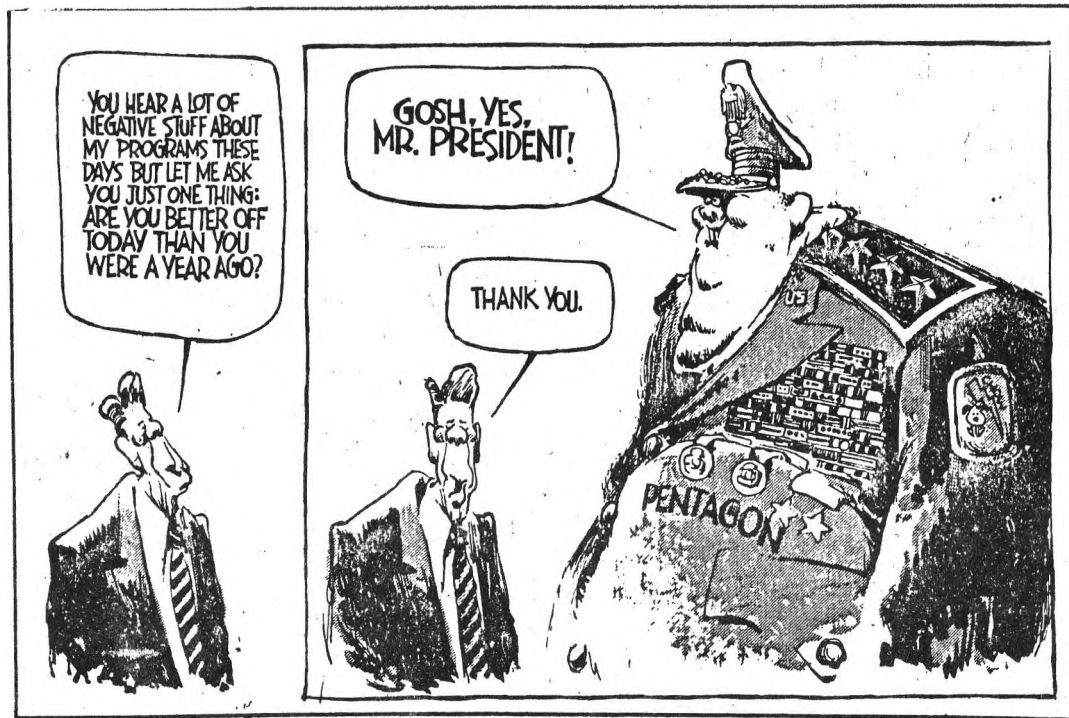
The Reagan administration represents the at least temporary victory of right-wing foreign policy views. The Trilateralists' approach to the Reagan candidacy was natural enough: after despairing of any chance of improvement in Carter fortunes, Rockefeller threw his early support to the Trilateralist, George Bush. When strong right opposition opposed Bush due to his membership

in the Eastern establishment, the liberals were forced to attempt a second option: co-opt the Reagan administration by getting Bush as the Vice Presidential nominee. Furthermore, many of Reagan's economic advisors are or were Trilateralists.

But the Trilateralists have not come close to victory in the foreign policy arena. At best, they are making an effort to stay in the ball park, to retain whatever modifying influence is possible in the administration, and to be in a position to pick up the pieces when the time comes.

The results of Reagan's efforts thus far have been much less than impressive. The anti-Third World characteristics of the administration reflected in U.S. stands on the Law of the Sea Conference and guidelines for baby formula sales to the Third World, have resulted not only in American isolation but also a series of measures at least as inconsistent and half-baked as Carter's.

After the grandstanding about stopping the Soviets in Central America, the administration was forced to back down on sending a U.S. military force, perhaps temporarily. This was in part due to strong opposition from other capitalist leaders (including Mexico), and in part because of the overwhelming public opposition to a military-interventionist policy. On the Middle East, Washington is clearly confused over how to handle Israeli aggression: Reagan wants to secure Arab oil sources while building a "strategic consensus" against the Soviets among states in the area. This is highly improbable since in Reagan's view, a "strategic consensus" involves denying Palestinian rights, ignoring the PLO, and assuming Israel is the mainstay of an anti-Russian front. There is confusion over whether to rescind the Clark amendment which



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The Miami News
Special Features

prohibits U.S. aid to Savimbi's opposition UNITA in Angola. Kirkpatrick and her South African friends, on the one hand, are pushing Washington to oppose the MPLA government. On the other hand, most Black African states have been joined by major American corporations in urging U.S. recognition of Angola and the MPLA. Oil companies such as Gulf, Texaco and Mobil rely on MPLA troops to guard their refineries. Others, such as Chase, Citibank, First Boston, Bankers Trust, Boeing, Lockheed and GE also fear that any type of military intervention would be disastrous for their business. Finally, the administration is uncertain on the correct approach to Western Europe's concerns, whether they be demands for disarmament talks or the construction of an natural gas pipeline from the Soviet Union. What we're seeing is a lot of tough talk but no conception of effective political action.

Already, however, Reagan has been forced to walk a line between the requirements of his supply side economics program on the one hand, and the needs of U.S. multinationals, the precarious conditions of international liquidity, and the views of people like Haig on the other. With U.S. exports to the Third World growing at close to 20% per year and constituting 35% of all U.S. exports, and with Third World defaults capable of threatening the stability of the dollar-based international credit system, Reagan is faced with a clear choice (in the words of a recent Far Eastern Economic Review article): conservatism of the "pragmatic-liberal kind founded on enlightened national self-interest, or...of an ideological cast akin to a California religion and determined, as has been urged in the Wall Street Journal, to transmit 'classical economic reforms to the rest of the world.'"

An even clearer example of the conflict Reagan faces is the issue of U.S. support for the U.S. Export-Import Bank, an independent agency which provides loans and insurance to foreign countries for the purchase of U.S. goods. When the administration's budget proposal first came out, OMB Director David Stockman backed a retroactive cut in EXIM's lending authority for fiscal 1981 and further reductions through 1982. This would have wiped out the bank's ability to take on new business for the next few years, and even render it unable to meet preliminary loan commitments already on the books for fiscal 1981-82. Stockman's reasoning, reflected in Reagan's early speeches on the new budget, stemmed from political savvy as well as free market principles. The budget cuts affecting poor people would have to be balanced by reductions viewed as mainly hurting big business if they were to be accepted by the public.

The proposed cuts therefore incited an intense lobbying effort by corporations like Westinghouse and Boeing who cited very aggressive export financing by the French (at lower interest rates) as a threat to U.S. exports and a crucial reason for an expanded EXIM role. The effort yielded fruit fairly quickly: Congress dropped the administration-supported cuts, and a Republican Senator (Heinz of Penn.), has proposed increasing the Bank's coffers by \$1 Billion, seemingly with administration support.

Altogether, the first period of Reagan foreign policy has been coherent only in its thundering pronouncements. The administration is still basically striving to apply its militarist approach, but finding itself forced to fudge on various particulars. How long this can go on depends partially on world

events, and partially on domestic opposition. In the short run Reagan could stay lucky, keep his cowboy image, and not create too much trouble. But in the long run he will have to go further to the right, or concede ground to the accomodationist view.

Indications are, moreover, that the liberal perspective still retains strong support within the ruling class. This is reflected not only in articles from major journals, but through phenomena like Mobil Oil running paid policy statements on the Middle East praising Mr. Arafat's statements as representing "new opportunities in the search for a just and lasting peace." Rumors that there is State Department opposition to Reagan's Cold Warism are reinforced by the "Dissent Paper on El Salvador" reputedly written by Foreign Service personnel, by the ouster of U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Robert White because of his criticism of the Salvadorean right-wing and opposition to U.S. military aid, and by the ouster/resignation of U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Neumann because of his opposition to Reagan's softness toward Begin.

Some Lessons for the Left

An analysis of elite foreign policy disputes tells us that the phrase "imperialism is imperialism" has its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand anything the ruling class does is aimed at stabilizing and improving its profit-making environment. However, imperialists can be extremely flexible and will try almost anything to achieve their economic goals. It should come as no surprise, especially after Roosevelt, to see an important section of the ruling class opt for a more accomodationist approach to international challenges, and meet the opposition of cold war, nationalistic interests in doing so.

The question is, then, not one of ruling class motivation but one of the actual consequences of imperialist policies. Obviously, my conviction is that some of Carter's approaches were positive and deserved support.

This is not the most popular view within the general Left. Opposition to it revolves usually around the issues of (1) what it means for a ruling class policy to be "positive" and (2) how progressives "support" such policies.

Evaluation of elite strategies must be situated in a concrete political context: is U.S. imperialism the only danger to the world's peoples? Obviously not. Are there growing limitations on the capacity of the U.S. to actually enforce its hegemony? Yes. In such a situation, there can be an overlapping of interests between U.S. imperialism and Third World independence: opposition to Soviet domination. In the same way there can be an intersection of interests between the Soviets and the Third World: both oppose U.S. hegemony, and no one would begrudge a liberation movement like SWAPO Soviet arms in its battle against U.S.-backed South Africa.

Policy evaluation must also look at questions of relative and concrete gains. Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega accuses Reagan of aggression against Nicaragua for suspending a \$7 Million loan and planning naval exercises with Honduras. Does this mean that it would be better for Nicaragua to get the loan and not have to face a U.S. fortified, hostile military on its northern

borders and Carribean shores? Obviously the Sandanistas think so. But one would never know it from most of the speeches at mass demonstrations.

Does allthis mean that we pack up our political identities and back everything that smacks of accomodationism? Obviously not. Without an independent political base and program we cannot force decisions which strengthen the forces of progress, independence and peace. But such a program, while revolutionary in outlook, must include a large dose of transitional/intermediate demands for this period. They must both consider the concrete well-being of the people and move the struggle forward. We must propose realistic alternatives.

It is ludicrous for us to snicker at food stamp programs as reformist buy-offs and then scream when Reagan scraps them. It does not widen our base when we reassure veryone that U.S. aid to Nicaragua is only neo-colonialism and then back the Sandinistas in their opposition to Reagan's loan cuts. In our political activity, we must develop positive demands that both move the struggle forward and take advantage of ruling class divisions when and were they exist. Instead of simply "U.S. Out of El Salvador," we should present ideas for concrete political solutions which can draw wider U.S. backing as well as support the revolutionaries in that country. Why not demand that the U.S. back a "Zimbabwe" type solution with elections and negotiations along the lines supported by the FDR in El Salvador? Why not push for restoration of loans to Nicaragua and demand an end to the strings in the interest of that country's genuine independence from both superpowers? Without such demands, we are doomed to our present isolation.

--Spring, 1982

(Submitted by a comrade from the Revolutioary Workers Headquarters.)

When Militance Is Not Enough

Forward Motion's two-part article, "Getting Out From Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Sum-Up of a Municipal Hospital Strike" opened up interesting discussion on an important topic. Today everyone is preoccupied with concessions being wrung out of workers in major industries--trucking, auto, and maybe all too soon, steel. But the drive for concessions really got its start in the public sector back in the mid-1970's. A wave of state and local governments with real (and not so real) fiscal crises began the job of teaching workers the need for sacrifice; a job that corporate leaders pleading real (and not so real) loss of profits are carrying on with today. It was public employees who were first confronted with massive lay-offs, nullification of wages and benefits guaranteed under existing contracts, widespread contracting out of union work and expansion of management rights and prerogatives. Prohibited by law from striking in most states and at the federal level, treated as junior partners by the building trades and industrial unions, plagued by their share of incompetent and unresponsive union leaders, and suffering from growing "image" problems in the eyes of the public they serve, the public employee unions have really taken it on the chin over the last decade--just after those unions had begun to make some major new gains.

Given the formidable odds against them, public sector unions have shown a surprising degree of militance in defense of their jobs, standard of living, and working conditions. Unfortunately militance is often not enough, especially in the politically sensitive public sector. There have been some heavy casualties. PATCO of course comes to mind at once. PATCO showed militance last year in its defiance of the government. Yet going back many years, the union lacked a clear vision of who they could count on politically and now have ended up decimated by Number One union-buster Ronald Reagan. But this get-tough attitude preceded Reagan. In 1978 some two hundred activists from the American Postal Workers Union and the Laborers International Union in New York City and Northern New Jersey were dismissed for their part in a four-day wildcat in the Post Office. Massive fines have been levied directly against wages of public employees who defied no-strike laws and injunctions:

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in 1980 against savvy New York transit workers who tied the city up in knots, against a number of teachers unions around the country, and others. Meanwhile those who have sat tight and "acted responsibly" have been repeatedly handed the short end of the stick. The independent federal workers union, NAGE, comes to mind. They waited patiently for the completion of a government study of their wages relative to private industry. When the study came out showing their wages uncompetitive, the Reagan administration simply chose to ignore the report.

"Getting Out From Between a Rock and a Hard Place" tried to talk about some of the unique challenges facing public workers in these dog days of the labor movement. The article showed serious appreciation of what labor is up against and what it will take to turn things around, discussing such issues as the labor-community alliance and sexual and racial divisions in the union. Forward Motion also printed a reply by a Revolutionary Workers Headquarters activist in the union. The reply, which was symptomatically signed "WILDCAT," focussed on the issue of "To strike or not to strike." Reading this comment, I came away with the distinct impression that WILDCAT would never see a time when leading activists would not push for a strike. WILDCAT seems to be following in a dubious tradition of trade union politics which calls for activists to constitute themselves as a militant pole of resistance, plunge headlong into the struggle, and hope that everyone else decides to come along. Sometimes this approach gets over in times of great unrest. But the victories tend to be short-lived because the trade union struggle cannot sustain a continuous wave of strikes, walk-outs, and shut-downs. It is a particularly losing proposition in these hard times when labor organizations are in many cases running scared. We need leaders able to lead an orderly retreat as well as signal the quick charge.

To continue this discussion, I put together excerpts from two papers dealing with strikes in the public sector. One is from a response to WILDCAT on the hospital strike reviewed earlier in FM. The other is from a paper looking back at the 1979 contract struggle and wildcat in the Post Office, where PUL and RWH activists also worked together. Each in their way tries to show militance is sometimes not enough.

--Susan C.,
PUL Trade Union Commission

* * * *

A Look Back At The 1978 Post Office Wildcat

Wildcat strikes are the inevitable and unavoidable flip side of a union leadership dominated by bureaucratic sell-out careerists. The 1970 strike in the post office was a wildcat; the coal fields have regularly been swept by wildcats. They represent the workers' dissatisfaction with their own working conditions, contracts, and their leaders. Wildcats represent the anger over the conditions and the workers' willingness and determination to resist in the face of overwhelming odds. In a sense a wildcat is like a ghetto rebellion; it is not usually a consciously planned and worked out action. It is an outpouring of rage and frustration which breaks out of the nice cage that bourgeois legality has built up around the workers movement and to which the misleaders of organized labor have offered no resistance worth mentioning.

On the other hand, wildcats often result in a high number of "casualties." Often it is the most militant and outspoken workers who are fired. These would-be leaders are thus isolated from the main body of workers leaving the sellouts in power and management only temporarily disturbed.

The four-day wildcat in the New York Metro Bulk facilities of the post office in 1978 was not planned. Once it began the rank and file leaders tried to limit it but soon they were caught up themselves in the momentum of the thing and sober assessment of the situation was replaced by hopes and miscommunications. The actions of the workers at the Bulk and the New Jersey Meadows and Richmond facilities sparked a nationwide contract rejection movement which NY local president Moe Biller rode into the APWU convention and National headquarters. In 1981 postal workers could look back and see how the rejection of the contract in 1978 resulted in thousands of COLA dollars they would otherwise have lost. But they also had the firing of 200 brothers and sisters to remember--a loss which management still holds like a bloody flag in postal workers' faces whenever they contemplate a strike.

For nearly ten years, leftists have tried to establish themselves in the post office as a force. In the NY Metro local they were known to most workers and supported by a considerable and growing minority. Now they have been reduced to invisibility. New stirrings are afoot and a new crop of rank and file leaders will no doubt emerge, but this will take time. If the same cycle repeats itself, no militant leadership will be able to get the experience and sink the roots necessary to challenge the entrenched misleaders.

In hindsight now it is plain to see that the strike should never have lasted more than one day. From documents obtained in our court case, we know that management made the decision to fire people on the morning of the second day when the Richmond BMC and the Meadows facility went out. PO bosses were

trying to stop the strike from spreading by quick repression. If we had held firm to our initial resolve of a short protest, we would indeed have "made our statement and shown our power." It is highly unlikely that management would have risked provoking the masses of postal workers and the consequent rejection of a contract so favorable to the bosses themselves. Remember that we are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars that postal management had to pay out once the cap on the COLA was knocked off. They would not have responded so drastically to a less threatening situation. Of course, it would have been a more limited protest but at least it would have been something when the rest of the union's leaders were in hiding. We would have shown our willingness to wage a struggle and we would have conserved our forces, realizing that this is but a skirmish in a war. Instead we plunged headlong into the unknown, caught up in the tide of anger and enthusiasm, hoping for the best. Mao Tsetung's words, "a single spark can light a prairie fire," were doubtlessly running through the minds of at least some of the leftists. The idea was, "we are definitely sparking; let's keep it up and see if the prairie catches." Of course no one used these words at the time, but I think at least some of us were thinking in this fashion. Finally at long last we were on the offensive, and workers like soldiers fight best when they are attacking. This theory of the offensive is a poor strategy for war and a poor strategy for building a left-wing in the workers' movement and forging a left-center alliance. We have shown that we can engage the enemy; the point is, however, to win. The Left will continue to get its head chopped off until it learns the tactics of limited engagement, organized retreat, and conservation of forces. An illustration of this would have been the one day protest instead of the

WANTED!

BY 500,000 U.S. POSTAL WORKERS FOR:



• **CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE**

in the death of P.O. worker Michael McDermott

• **DANGEROUS SAFETY CONDITIONS**

that have caused a 30% increase in lost time, accidents '72-'77

• **DISCIPLINE FOR ACCIDENTS**

the "safety" policy that blames the victims for the P.O.'s unsafe conditions

• **FIRING 200 POSTAL WORKERS**

at San Francisco and New York Bulk centers for protesting contract cutbacks

POSTMASTER GENERAL

William F. Bolger

drawn out four day wildcat.

Another example is provided by the case of the Canadian Postal Workers Union led by Jean Claude Parrot. In 1978 the union struck the Canadian post office. Initially they had the right to strike, unlike postal workers in the US, but the Canadian government intervened to smash the strike anyway by passing a special act of Parliament denying them the right to strike. The workers held out a while longer, but when the government moved to fire all the strikers and break the union, President Parrot conducted what could be called an orderly retreat and called off the strike. He was later imprisoned for three months for his role as leader of the strike. For the next three years, however, the union engaged in a massive agitational program laying the foundation for the next contract battle. In 1981 they regained their right to strike and used it successfully. One of their main demands which they won was paid maternity leave. Their victory was preceded by an orderly retreat, and they maintained their organization and leadership. The leadership was meticulous in maintaining ties with the rank and file, conducting affairs in an above board manner and keeping the members involved and informed in all phases of the struggle. This is an example of what workers can achieve with a union in the hands of the rank and file, but it is also a lesson on tactics for activists in the US to learn.

Particularly now when political conditions weigh ever more heavily against the workers, we must hold up a struggle alternative to bureaucratic do-nothingness, but we must do it in a way that conserves our forces for future battles, builds up strength step by step more in the manner of guerilla warfare than the theory of the offensive.

A Related Problem--Economism

Another shortcoming in our outlook at the time was a one-sided emphasis on the economic struggle and industrial action which led in practice to playing down political action as well as not educating and working to bring together a core of politically conscious workers. This error has classically been termed the anarcho-syndicalist deviation.

Workers have not and will not take the offensive unless they are organized on a class-wide basis, raising political as well as economic demands. The economic struggle is fundamentally a defensive one. This has been true with the postal workers: we were responding to a takeaway contract and deteriorating working conditions.

With the increasingly severe long term economic crisis that we live with today, the workers economic demands seem to come up against a brick wall. The threat of runaway shops, bankruptcies of large corporations, and curtailment of government at all levels has a chilling effect on the economic struggle. The union misleaders use this as a cover for capitulationism, and this we should oppose. It is only by its own struggle to defend its gains and living standards that the working class gains a sense of its power. But when workers cannot see an alternative to the present economic crisis, many will accede to demands for concessions because they see no other way. It is the task of Marxists to show another way, namely socialism. The successful defense of

workers' rights, living and working conditions depends on winning more workers to this other way. When the workers are organized for political struggle as well as economic struggle, they will no longer be stuck with the need for givebacks on the economic front. An objective basis for the narrowness of trade union action today and for anarcho-syndicalism on the left is the lack of revolutionary class wide organization at the present time. For us in the post office we were also faced by the incredible demands of the day to day struggle and the extremely defensive posture we had been in for three years as we skillfully played an endgame to avoid total disaster.

Another pitfall of economism is that it results in a virtual ignoring of the divisions within the working class, divisions which must be addressed if the working class is to get organized class wide. In the post office, many of the workers most enthusiastic for the economic struggle tended to be young male and white. Black workers played leading roles in the struggles which took place, but if you look at the proportion of involvement, there was a strong tendency for young white males to predominate.

For any worker, Black, white, male, female, a post office job is a stable, relatively decent paying position to be in. For Blacks it has been even more so given the historic exclusion of Blacks and other minority workers from other relatively well-paid working class occupations like construction and the skilled trades. Consequently, there is going to be somewhat more at stake for Black workers than for the young white males who may have other opportunities. Women workers, often single heads of households, bear greater family burdens. In addition to these factors outside the workplace, there is the discrimination faced on the job. For the most part, young white male workers do not yet see how these issues affect the state of the workers movement in their own plant or the working class as a whole. Left activists influenced by economism, however, tend to view as the most militant, those young, white males who gravitate toward the purely economic issues. This leads those leftists to narrow conceptions of the working class, a narrow conception of militancy which places inordinate stress on the economic sphere of the struggle almost to the exclusion of the political sphere. It should be said that we tried to break out of a narrow economist direction through agitation on political questions in the rank and file newspaper we put out, but the pressures of day to day work kept this very much on the sidelines.

The most famous of the anarcho-syndicalist trends in US labor, the IWW or Wobblies, used to say that no strike is ever lost. In one sense this is true, but only if we learn something from our mistakes in a way that allows us to regroup and work towards future successes.

--One of the fired 200
Spring, 1982

* * * *

Pinning Down Wildcat

FURTHER COMMENT ON A MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL STRIKE

We read with great interest Wildcat's paper, "Hospital Strike--Another View." Many of the disagreements between us over the 1980 strike are part of a longer discussion of trade union issues generally. Here the focus was our respective stance toward the possibility of a strike. You say in your paper that we had a preconceived notion not to strike. We felt we were fairly flexible in considering a number of tactics including striking. On the other hand, we felt that your pursuit of the "militant minority" led you to adopt an inflexible attitude toward striking.

We were cautious about issuing a strike call. We saw the stakes as being very high. A successful strike could (and did) greatly strengthen the union and spark militance by other public employees city-wide. Certainly this was a desirable outcome. However it had taken years to develop the level of left-leaning leadership we have at the hospital and to build up this influence at other places around the city. Our concern was that a premature strike would not be able to sustain itself (especially with several unions at the hospital). If people started going back in, the union would be in a very compromised position and the worker leadership would be in jeopardy of being fired. City Hall would have liked nothing more than a legal opportunity to eliminate the "troublemakers" in one fell swoop. The President would hardly object to having his main contenders for leadership eliminated.

We therefore established some definite criteria to be met before we could responsibly issue a strike call. These included: (1) a high level of support at the hospital (75%), (2) some measure of city-wide support, (3) some level of community support, and (4) an organizational structure of worker leadership and official strike sanction. While we didn't expect all of these conditions to get met, we looked for some combination of them.

It seemed your approach was to "raise a militant pole of struggle" by making general calls to strike. A militant example would supposedly galvanize everyone's fighting spirits. This came across as a "call to strike and see if anyone shows" approach. It left us wondering under what conditions you would not see striking. And what would have happened if people didn't answer the call? This didn't seem to be problematic to you. Did you think that by making such a call, all the advanced would gravitate towards you? That the union would recognize your true proletarian position, and veer its policies to the left? You accuse us of opposing such "general calls" as ultra-left. They are. We felt it amounted to just fomenting a strike, making premature calls without building the groundwork. We felt many people saw this as posturing on your part. This had negative consequences because it increased some feelings that

the union did not have its act together.

Our practice at this point really brings our differences into focus. You mention the polling only disparagingly and felt it was a waste of time to consider whether people were really for striking. You viewed getting the President's sanction as a wimpy consideration, and a 75% strike authorization as ridiculous. We on the other hand put a lot of priority on the polling and felt it was the context in which agitation necessary to pull off a successful strike took place. While polling did not have to be the only activity at the time, it was important to know whether it was a strong or weak strike sentiment. We did not care about the President's blessing for the strike, but we needed official strike sanction so there would be legal resources for fired workers and the possibility of the strike fund resources (remember PATCO). We were only able to get this authorization when we had proved to the other negotiators and the President that we were strong enough to go it alone. These were not faint-hearted considerations that "braked" a surging rank and file movement. They were sensible questions that we found most people asking. Even left-minded activists who have family and mortgage responsibilities want to see real evidence that there is a chance of winning before calling others out on strike. Answering all the little fears and questions isn't very glamorous or self-gratifying, but it is the patient agitation that produces more glamorous events.

Up until five days before the strike, our criteria had not been met. But then we felt we had 70% of the people. Other sections of the union supported us even while fearing to go out themselves. The President was forced to sanction a strike action.

Up to this point we had not taken strong steps towards building an organized second tier of leadership to lead the strike. We are critical of our short-sightedness here. We think it was some rightism in our view that got us locked into debating whether to strike or not but not actively building up a strike apparatus. Visible leadership and organization builds confidence. This should be developed prior to trying to get a strike vote, not after it. Still, we felt that we could pull this organization together even at this late date, so we agreed to go out. So while we both ended up supporting a strike call, we approached it with distinctly different expectations. You felt it had long been "clear" and that this dilly-dallying had cost us. We felt that things had fallen together in the final days but that the union was still in a precarious situation. We still hold by that estimation and feel that the facts of the strike tend to bear this out.

Despite the absolutely heroic support from the other union at the hospital that we hadn't banked on, we were forced to accept a mixed compromise after just four days. Four days is not much staying power and our ranks were on the verge of crumbling. Even you were pushing to accept the compromise and we don't see how this is consistent with the rosy estimates in your paper. Also, despite your claim that we were "braking" the strike sentiment and blocking with the President, we feel the rank and file forces at the hospital and around the city view us as among the major architects of the strike. Our leadership was greatly strengthened through the strike, enabling us to play a central role in pulling together a reform slate that successfully gained a

number of positions in the local. Our assessment of the membership's sentiments seem to be more consistent with reality, recognizing the views of both the left and the center in the union.

When Militance Is Not Enough

To strike or not to strike? That wasn't a question we felt we could answer alone. The people we tried to base ourselves on were people who not only were willing to go out themselves, but were willing to organize their co-workers to strike. They had a real sense of responsibility towards others and refused to lead people into a situation where they would get smashed. They wouldn't abandon the union because a strike wasn't in the cards, but would continue to organize the masses through whatever tactical maneuvers were necessary. We felt you had a commandist method of leadership with elements of class chauvinism. You decided yourselves to strike and your approach was more "from the revolutionaries, to the masses." Seemingly you mistook your own impatience for militance and then set out to find it in others.

It is interesting that you found this militance in the techs who you identified as the most left forces. We had caught the "clue" that the techs were raring to go. However, we didn't accept this at face value as a left perspective. In fact, we worked to get some techs not to wildcat, trying to get them to organize other departments. Because they were mostly white, young and with marketable skills, they knew they could easily get jobs (for more money) in other hospitals. They felt they had less to lose. This doesn't mean that those departments couldn't be organized. It just meant that we questioned the depth of their militance. We were less than confident that they would follow through and organize the lower-paid and more oppressed nationality departments. We saw them as unstable and we feel their role since then has borne this out. Many blamed the strike compromise on the clerks (with racial overtones), many have thought of decertifying, and a large majority have left or gone back to school.

Your fascination with this type of "militant" character and your tendency to equate this type of person with the most progressive activist has a long history. What comes immediately to mind is the way the old Revolutionary Union became infatuated with the militance and anti-government rhetoric of the anti-busing movement. We feel that some workeristic and (in some cases) macho concepts still endure in how you equate militant actions with left-progressive politics. This kind of confusion can have severe consequences including firings, burn-out and isolation.

To summarize, we feel that it was important to strike. But striking without determining that that course of action made sense would have been disastrous. Striking is serious business. An ill-conceived, hastily called, and poorly organized strike is usually irresponsible to the union membership and damaging of its interests.

--Wilma C.
Spring, 1982

Mrs. Call

"They're just BOYS, afterall," Mrs. Call was reminding the audience. "Barely in their teens," she emphasized. She spoke crisply into the microphone, enunciating syllables, pausing between phrases for effect, majestically scanning the faces in the crowd from over the tops of her trim-lined reading glasses-- as though her whole life had been spent rehearsing for this moment. Her hair had been freshly tinted and lacquered into place that very afternoon.

"Not HOODLUMS!" she continued, her ample body drawn up at the waist in the manner of a General receiving a routine decoration; her firm hands gripping the sides of the lectern, as though holding it in place against its will. "Not PUNKS!" she said, spitting out the syllable. "And not DEGENERATES! Not like those boys," she leaned forward, "in that homosexual ring they uncovered down in Waring last week. Now THERE's the kind of thing that disgraces a community!"

A titter of nervous recognition swept through the audience.

"But nice. Wholesome. Respectable. Popular boys. From decent Christian families!" The words shot out like a round of ammunition.

"Honor-roll students! . . . Class Officers! . . . School Patrol Captains!" She glanced down from the stage to where a small group of parents, clustered together in the center front rows of the crowded auditorium, were vigorously nodding their approval, while nervously peering about to assess the general reaction. From behind them came the buzz of dozens of whispered exchanges, then polite but strained silence.

"From the papers, though, you'd think they were MONSTERS!" she sputtered, puffing up her chest indignantly. "You'd think they'd committed some unspeakable crime!" From behind the lectern she produced a fistful of newspaper clippings, holding them up before the crowd like a rabbit just pulled from a hat, slapping them down, one by one, on the top of the lectern

as she read off the headlines:

"LOCAL BOYS ORGANIZE HATE CLUB," she snapped. SHADWELL RESIDENTS STUNNED". . . "ANTI-SEMITISM, RACISM HAUNT NEW ENGLAND SCHOOL" . . . "AFFLUENT SUBURB GRAPPLES WITH A PAINFUL ISSUE" . . . "SHADWELL PRINCIPAL VOWS INVESTIGATION AND REFORM."

"Last week, I'm told, we even made the national news on two different networks!" she snorted. "Not that it surprises me much-- considering the general bias of the media--and the kinds of things most of these reporters always seem so eager to publicize."

She paused to allow the thrust of this comment to sink in.

"What DOES surprise me," she continued at length, skillfully changing tacks, "what I find so distressing," she lamented, "is how YOU, Mr. Moody--and YOU, Mr. McGonigle--and some of you TEACHERS as well," she surveyed the crowd coolly, "have allowed the sensationalist slanders in the press, and the tactics of a few left-wingers," she challenged, "to affect your judgment-- to warp YOUR sensibilities," the crowd was dead silent, "to the point of joining in a WITCH HUNT against your own students!"

The parents in the front rows burst into eager applause. Mrs. Call leaned forward, palms pressed hard against the top of the lectern, elbows flared out fiercely at her sides.

"Just a few moments ago," she continued, "we heard Jack Cross deliver an emotional lecture on the importance of defending the rights of ethnic minorities." She paused like a cobra about to spring. "Well, what about the rights of the eight young boys whose innocent antics have been blown up into a national scandal to help sell newspapers?! What about the rights of the citizens of Shadwell who have had to stand by and watch their community slandered before the whole country!? Just WHO is being persecuted here, Mr. Cross!?" she thundered. Here and there throughout the auditorium, heads were nodding.

In bringing her remarks to a close, Mrs. Call took care to remind the audience of how, in her eight years since moving to Shadwell, she had always been an active, regular participant in the PTA and in community affairs in general, and had, for example, been one of the leaders in the mothers' campaign to keep video games out of town.

"I assure you," she said, "that I'm not up here speaking to you tonight simply because my own son happens to be one of the alleged 'organizers' of this so-called 'hate club.'"

"Obviously I'm disturbed by such cheap, sensationalist slander directed against a member of my immediate family," she confided. "But I'm JUST as disturbed by what I see happening to Shadwell."

"I CARE about this community!" she shrilled. "I don't want to see it dragged through the mud and divided against itself--and all on account of a

few silly T-shirts--a few harmless slogans on the blackboards at school--and a couple of trivial incidents in the halls between classes."

As Mrs. Call drove home from the meeting that night, she felt generally satisfied with the evening's accomplishments. Though she'd failed to convince the executive committee to withdraw its support from Mr. Moody's ludicrous new program of home-room "Brotherhood Workshops," she'd definitely had a positive effect on the membership.

Freida Bigelow came right over, pumped Mrs. Call's hand up and down in admiration and invited her over for tea "any afternoon next week, any afternoon at all." Mrs. Bigelow could tell you everything terrible there was to know about abortion or crime in the streets, or affirmative action. Mrs. Call had been a good listener these past years and her speech tonight had showed it.

Several parents from among the more neutral or undecided circles had quietly congratulated her on her speech at the end of the meeting as well. Even Rachel Whitcomb, who generally straddled the fence on every issue, had pulled her aside on their way out the back, to compliment her on her "oratory," and to ask her if she didn't agree that perhaps it was that Anne Frank book the kids were reading in their English class that had inspired the boys little club. And standing there, pretending to listen intently to Rachel's theories, she'd had the good fortune to overhear a snatch of conversation between Walter Craig and Reverend Sweeney.

"Henrietta's right," she'd heard Walter saying. "Afterall, no one's burning crosses on anyone's lawn. No one's goose-stepping up and down Broad Street." He smiled and drew on his pipe. "I think the whole thing's gotten a bit out of hand."

"It DOES seem as though the activities of Cross and his group are beginning to prove divisive," replied the Right Reverend cautiously.

Yes, all in all it had been a rather successful evening, she thought as she maneuvered her big Oldsmobile up the drive-way and into the garage. If she wasn't mistaken the tide was beginning to turn. She'd be willing to bet that the town selectmen would end up deciding next week to veto that ridiculous proposal for a formal apology to Shadwell's tiny handful of Black and Jewish families.

As Mrs. Call snapped on the lights in the study, her husband's voice, raised to out-shout the TV, came booming through the open door from the room beyond.

"Henrietta--that you?" he hollered. His large frame appeared in the doorway an instant later, one hand wrapped around the TV remote control device.

"How'd it go, hon?" he asked.

"If you were INTERESTED, you would have BEEN there!" she snapped. But she was tired of these endless arguments. Her husband was an armchair activist,

and that was that. If the meeting had been televised, he might have watched it and shouted encouragements at the screen between sips from his beer. But by now she ought to KNOW better than to expect he'd ever leave his sports shows and his easy chair to go out and stand up for the principles he SAID he believed in. Even with his own son out there taking the heat, he still opted for the comfort and security of his den.

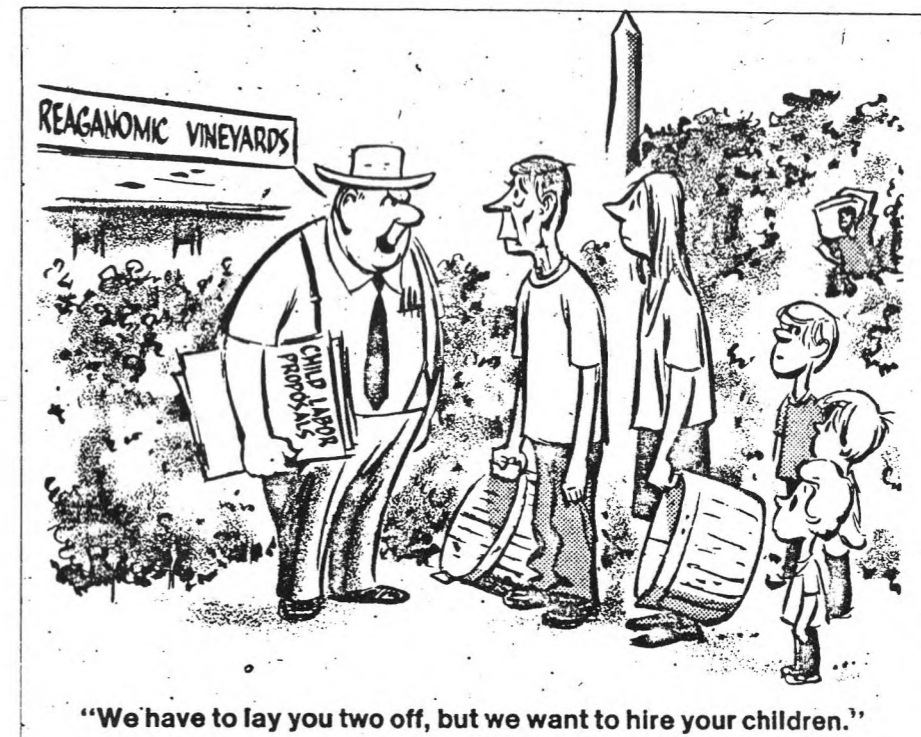
"Was that faggot, Cross, at the meeting?" he asked, ignoring his wife's remark.

"Of course!" Mrs. Call retorted sharply, as she paged through a pile of correspondence on top of her roll-top writing desk. "But I think," she said, more to herself than to her husband, "that people are getting a LIT-tle tired of all the warnings and lectures on the evils of Nazi Germany."

She pulled out the piece of paper she'd been searching for and reached across the desk for her checkbook. The evening's accomplishment had put her in an expansive mood. She felt a great need to share her success with others, and had happened to remember the latest fund-raising letter from her old friend and fellow organizer, Mae, at the Anti-Busing Center back home.

"Henrietta Call," she scrawled across the bottom of the check. Though she and her husband had moved up in the world, she never forgot her friends.

--Molly P.
Spring, 1982



Tom Flannery
The Baltimore Sun

Views On The News



Letters and Comment

July 10, 1982

Dear FM,

I found Ann B.'s presentation on the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) [See Forward Motion, March 1982] interesting and informative. For someone like me who used to be active in the women's movement, it was very encouraging to see how the work has developed. There seems to be a much more mature attitude toward building unity within the left-wing of the women's movement than there was when I was involved.

There was only one point where I had some questions, and that was on how R2N2 related to some of the larger more mainstream women's organizations. The article states that R2N2 has "never seriously considered" working within NOW, NARAL, or Planned Parenthood. It says that "...most members of the Network feel that groups like NOW are too mainstream, too tied to the Democratic Party, to warrant a strategy of changing from within." My question is whether R2N2 might be rejecting the option of working within one of these big organizations too quickly.

Ann gives four ways the politics of R2N2 differs from some of the other organizations. They are good points, but some of the weaknesses cited seem more true of a few organizations, not so true of all of them. And in any case, I'm not sure these weaknesses preclude the option of working inside them. Ann also points out that the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has tried the strategy of working in NOW without much success. But does the SWP make a good test case for R2N2? SWP has no real grounding in the women's movement comparable to R2N2, and what they're trying to do is probably pretty different from what Network women would be doing.

To get to the point: recently I've gotten more interested in what the Left might be able to do within NOW. Their ad campaigns are bolder and have a lot more mass appeal than in the past, their literature is well-thought out and sometimes honestly self-critical. Their ability to attract a growing number of dedicated active organizers (mainly but not only college students) for the last stages of the ERA campaign impressed me. So did their bounce-back after the ERA's defeat. That week I got a letter from NOW saying that they were resolved to do more grass-roots organizing in order to reach a wider range of women and men, that they had learned that they could not rely on polite appeals to legislators, and that they were going to focus on defeating the Right-to-Life Amendment. They also plan to target some of the most

die-hard anti-women legislators for defeat in the next elections. They have gotten to be strong fund-raisers and have enough money in their coffers to back up some of these projects. From this distance, the idea of working within NOW seems pretty attractive, and certainly not off-the-wall.

There are probably three options for a mainly left wing organization like R2N2 in relation to an organization like NOW. You could remain autonomous and work with them in coalitions when the chance comes up (like this summer's Cherry Hill, NJ demonstration). This in itself would be a lot better than in my days when most leftist women didn't want to get near NOW except to denounce it.) You could maintain your own organizational structure but direct a lot of attention into working within and trying to influence NOW. Or you could disband R2N2 and join up with NOW as individuals. I'm not advocating the third option, but I would be interested in the possibilities of the second.

Of course, this is part of a more general discussion: how should organizations that aim to pull together the left of a mass movement function? When does it make sense to remain entirely independent, when should they act as a "wing" or caucus within a larger, more mainstream organization? When should the independent form be put aside completely? The left has probably discussed this most fully in relation to the trade union movement. Here, in spite of many of the trade unions' rotten leadership, Marxists have generally opted for "working within." Different factors are obviously at work in the other mass movements like the Black movement or the women's movement, but I'm not sure they necessarily rule out working within the "mainstream" organizations like the NAACP or NOW. This might be a worthwhile discussion to pursue.

--Nadine M.

33 LETTERS

Dear friends,

I have just finished reading the first issue of Forward Motion. It contains many interesting ideas that need to be heard by everyone on the "left" in America. I, myself, find that I am in agreement with almost every opinion and analysis that is expressed in it. But I do have one major disagreement with PUL's basic strategy.

I have been a union activist ever since I got out of high school in 1967. I have worked in every major shop in New Bedford, my home town, and I have been involved in numerous union drives and rank and file struggles within these unions.

I have also been active in local left activities, like For the People and the PWOC and I have studied Marxism as well as participated in the "New Left" attempt to form many new parties. All of which, I might add, have produced ultra-left tendencies, including the PUL.

When I finally sat down and began to think about my experiences, I began to see an element of hypocrisy in the theoretical work of these "ultra-left" party builders. Although each and every one of these groups are opposed to the strategy of "dual unionism" in their trade union work, none of them seem to be able to see anything wrong with a "dual party" line in their Communist work.

To me, this "dual party" strategy has been the downfall of every "ultra-left" group since the SDS was formed. Since these groups are formed outside of the "mainstream" of Communism in the US (the CPUSA), they become minority opinions that are not subject to any democratic discipline (ie, "accepting the will of the majority of Marxists-Leninists in the US") and they can do and say anything they want. And if any one dares to tell them they are wrong, he or she is called all kinds of names and then they are kicked out of the "new party."

The idea of forming a "new party" is primarily a disrespect for any democratic procedure.

In the trade unions, it would be much easier to just go off and form my own union, rather than fight against class collaboration within these unions. But it would also weaken the entire trade union movement and the bargaining strength of the US working class. And in the end, only Capitalism would be strengthened by this action. The same is true of "dual partyism." The entire left is weakened by the many party approach and only capitalism's position is

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strengthened.

To me the only strategy that makes sense is to join the biggest US left party today (the CPUSA has the largest numbers of whites and minorities working together) and to fight from within for my minority opinions, and to adhere to a strict discipline and respect for the will of the majority of its members.

Rather than joining your "party" I would like to see all of you join me in a struggle within the CPUSA for our mutual goals for the US left.

In Solidarity,
Daniel M.

P.S. I do not wish to subscribe to Forward Motion at this time. Please remove my name from your mailing list. But you have my permission to print my letter in any of your publications, provided that you only print it in its entirety--no excerpts out of context, please!

* * * *

A REPLY FROM FM

We started Forward Motion last winter in part to get in better touch with people who have been interested in us and our work. Sometimes this has been a matter of getting back in touch, and sometimes it turns out that old friends have gone in new directions. We received the letter above in response to our first issue. Citing what he calls the "dual partyism" of the Marxist-Leninist groups, Daniel M. now believes a struggle to change the Communist Party, USA from within offers the best hope for left-wing politics in the United States. Without a doubt the craziness and frustration of communist Left politics over the last decade have led a number of activists to give the CPUSA a second look. Often leaving a trail of destruction behind them, Marxist-Leninist groups came and went, while the CPUSA managed to grow. Because the letter touches on some important issues for Marxists today, we thought it appropriate to offer some comments on it. We also have appended a different look at the CPUSA in 1982, from a friend in Milwaukee.

Since 1971-72, the CPUSA has emphasized developing a more open presence for itself and strengthening its trade union work in basic industry. In keeping with the first goal, it has placed a good deal more emphasis on electoral work. Back in 1968, it did run a Presidential candidate (Charlene Mitchell), but the CP was on the ballot only in a handful of states. In 1972, Gus Hall himself was the Presidential candidate. He ran in a larger number of

states, though still only received 25,000 votes. After the elections, Hall complained that members of the Central Committee had not voted for him. By 1976 and 1980, the Communist Party seemed more united around its Presidential campaigns, spent considerably more money, achieved ballot status in more states, and increased its vote. It also has entered more candidates in state and local elections. In its industrial union work, the CP has been fairly active in steel and played a big role in the Sadlowski campaign. It tried to keep the Steelworkers Fightback afloat after the election, but its narrow sectarian tactics contributed to that organization's demise. In a number of union situations, its organizers now identify themselves as CP members, though the CP does not openly lead any trade unions.

In sum, if the CPUSA has grown in recent years, and still is by far the largest organization of the socialist left, it has not grown at a very impressive rate and still remains a small party. It has not made spectacular organizational gains through this recent activity. Yet it has increased its ideological influence considerably. For those now attracted by the CPUSA's new political assertiveness, this needs to be examined carefully.

The CPUSA may count many good organizers among its ranks, but its visions of the road ahead and our socialist goal have not moved substantially beyond old and sterile slogans--the peaceful transition, the anti-monopoly coalition and so on. And the present Hall leadership has been the architect of many of these policies. Though, as our friend in Milwaukee reports, the CP is more multinational than most of the Left and seems to have other organizational advantages, it is hard to see the attraction of wading into such a morass today.

Unfortunately, the CPUSA's greater prestige today is due in good part to its close association with Cuban and Soviet activity in the Third World. The CPUSA has been openly hostile to the Eurocommunist developments and remains among the most fiercely pro-Soviet of the old-line communist parties. But there are places on the Left where the CPUSA's apologies for the Soviet Union discredited it six or seven years ago where today Soviet-sponsored aggressiveness in the Third World has evoked a positive response. Once again, the CPUSA has a pro-liberation struggle respectability. The CPUSA has also gained fresh respect for its identification with the unilateral disarmament trend in the peace movement and its renewed promotion of "conversion" of the US military budget. This new respect is largely restricted to the general Left and events in Poland, Afghanistan and elsewhere are bound to make it short-term, but respect for the CP's position has grown. Where once the CPUSA could not challenge the ALSC for leadership of African liberation support work (and sought instead to split the coalition to set up its own National Anti-Imperialist Coalition for African Liberation), its views today are respected in wider quarters.

The CPUSA's aggressive sectarianism in its pro-Soviet international alignment should give pause to anyone contemplating a general struggle to change the CPUSA from within. It is hard to imagine finding the internal atmosphere hospitable to the kind of commitment our comrade speaks of. A look at the pages of the Daily World or a few issues of Political Affairs should give some idea of the rubber stamp type of political discussion encouraged in

the CPUSA. And many trade union activists within the UE, the USWA, and elsewhere can speak of the divisive maneuvers of the CPUSA.

DM's letter, however, argues that it is undemocratic and ultra-left not to make just such a commitment, in analogy to the dangers of dual unionist trade union strategies. Trade unions are the basic mass organizations of the workers: they include various tendencies and groupings, political, religious and social which are found in the overall workers movement. To oversimplify a bit, dual unionism is the danger of splitting off rival unions when the masses of workers remain loyal and committed to existing ones. Revolutionary parties are different from unions in that they presume a much higher degree of internal cohesion and practical commitment. Differences remain and membership is voluntary, but such parties have to be able to ask of their members a political discipline a trade union could never consider. Because of the advantages of this kind of organization for the long-term struggle and the serious difficulties in building them, activists will stick with a given party despite setbacks and big divisions within. But a party can lose the loyalty of the political trend it sought to give voice to.

By the early 1960's, the CPUSA had lost the membership of and forfeited the loyalty of the thousands of trade union, Black liberation, and other activists who had been the party's lifeblood. This much has to be acknowledged despite the shortcomings and ineffectiveness of those on the Party's Left who split off back then. Little has changed in the twenty years since that would justify rallying to the CPUSA as the singular leader of the US struggle for socialism. And we do not think anyone should join in any revolutionary organization without a basic confidence in its political vision.

So we cannot accept the comrade's trade union analogy. We are sorry he is making this choice. We are also sorry he asks to be taken off our mailing list, because despite the disagreements it would be good to be able to talk again sometime down the road about how things worked out. One way or the other, we hope we will hear again from the comrade, in the spirit of the mutual goals the letter speaks of.

* * * *

CPUSA's "Take A Stand" Rally

A Note from Milwaukee, April 24, 1982

For years the only parties that would hold their national conventions in Milwaukee were the Socialist Party and the New American Movement, so when the Communist Party, USA announced that its "Extraordinary Party Conference" would

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come to the industrial heartland I decided it was too good to pass up. Donning my "Solidarnosc" and "Justice for Earnest Lacy" buttons, becoming slightly inebriated so I might stomach an expected dull monologue by Gus Hall, and after failing to recruit even one of my friends to accompany me, I departed on what proved to be an entertaining evening.

Perhaps most impressive of all was my first impression of the thousand-odd people sitting in the huge convention room of MECCA: young, old, Black, white and Puerto Rican (though still 60 to 80% white), people genuinely enthusiastic about what Gus Hall and Angela Davis were saying.

As I looked around to see what familiar faces might be nearby I noticed a camera man and reporter walking slowly down the aisle. Having an aisle seat I took a good look at these people trying to see what television station they were from. That's odd, I thought, no markings on the camera, and look at that large reel-to-reel tape recorder the reporter is using. Maybe it's from a station in New York City--they might not use the newest equipment there....

Still puzzled, I watched as the reporters set up their operations about six feet in front of me so that the man could give an on the spot report with Gus Hall speaking and the huge "Unite and Fight to Defeat Reaganism" banner in the background. Bending my ear, I tried to hear the reporter. I couldn't make out a word. That's odd again, I thought, and then I recognized the name of our city. And that is the only thing I recognized because the reporter was speaking Russian! I chuckled. Maybe this fifth column stuff is right.

Up on the stage the Central Committee looked old, but impressive. Huge banners accompanied the main ones voicing slogan after slogan--Nuclear Freeze Now * Create Jobs Now * Affirmative Action for Full Equality and Social Progress * Defeat Reaganism Politics in 1982--No Take Away Contracts, Fight for Jobs or Income. Incredible numbers of books were on sale from Import Publications and the CP's own publishing house.

Gus Hall said very little in his forty-five page speech, although he certainly summarized quite well many of the miseries brought on by the Reagan administration. He stressed work in the trade unions and to some extent anti-racist work. Work for women's rights got just a little plug (for the ERA). He called for an "All Peoples Fight Back Front," "All Peoples Ballot Box Coalitions," a counter-offensive, and at one point, unemployed councils like in the 1930's. He said nothing of reproductive rights, gay rights, El Salvador (though he did call for support of the revolutions in "Nicaragua, Angola, and South Africa"). He called for a nuclear freeze in terms of the US military budget, but not mutual disarmament. At one point he chastised the US media for having announced fifty times that Brezhnev had become seriously ill. He immediately countered, "No, Brezhnev has risen again!" and amidst thunderous applause, Gus proclaimed "and it's pretty close to Easter!" This rather disgusting comparison (even for an atheist) was soon to be outdone by Angela Davis, who in her opening remarks compared the 71-year old Hall to Moses and called him a "prophet."

Angela was better than Gus, but not really impressive. She did give strong play to the Lacy case [the death under police custody of a Milwaukee Black last year--ed. note] both by wearing a "Justice for Earnest Lacy"

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T-shirt and in what she said. She compared Lacy's case--a Black man being murdered for a rape he did not commit--to the case that the first extraordinary CPUSA conference took up, the Scottsboro case, and called on people to make it a national issue. She spoke mainly of racism and national oppression (she used the latter term once) and said "racism is the common thread which runs through all the cutbacks and it must be the central theme to our fight back." She called for support for affirmative action and for unions to support the demands of minorities. She called for the original Voting Rights Act to be renewed and for bilingual ballots to be used in every state. She called for the Ku Klux Klan to be banned, and encouraged white people particularly to raise that demand. She called on Blacks and other people of color to be conspicuously present in the anti-nuclear arms movement because of how the issues are linked: that every billion dollars spent for war puts 1300 Blacks out of work. She spoke of the attack by federal agents on Communist Party leaders Charlene Mitchell and Mike Faltz in Gainesville, Florida. (Sounded horrible.) She ended by saying that this was "the brightest moment the planet has ever known" and that people in the Communist Party should spring to action and those not in it should join immediately. (I didn't.)

What did I really get out of this? Why am I sitting here wearing out a perfectly good typewriter ribbon? Perhaps because despite everything, the rally did have some lessons that we need to be reminded of. First, despite the fact that many people just discount the CPUSA as "revisionist" (which it undoubtedly is), no other organization that I know of could pull out that big of a multi-national crowd to a national convention, and that was really nationwide in scope. Besides, a lot of independent leftists in our city went to it and liked it. The CP is capable of doing things on a national scale, and as the case of Angela Davis reminds us, even on an international scale.

Second, how we involve ourselves in the nuclear freeze/mutual disarmament movement is very important: the anti-Soviet Left must have an organized and conscious presence in that movement as soon as possible. Similarly, in what ways could our section of the Left make the Lacy case a national issue? Where this section of the Left had capabilities before, we have much less now. What steps can be taken so that our forces start to have that capability?

Third, revisionism still stinks even in such pompous trappings. The CP leadership was basically trying to mobilize its inert membership and the most concrete plan that was put forward was working on anti-Reagan candidates in this fall's elections. (Not necessarily a bad tactic, but a lousy strategy.) Lastly, who but me and a few others sitting there knows it stinks? Where are progressive, left-leaning people going to turn for leadership if this is the only type of force out there in the public eye? I am afraid many will turn to the CP for leadership, and get leadership--bad leadership.

--George