

OBREROS EN MARCHA

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EDITORIAL

ON U.S. - CUBA RELATIONS

Sixteen years after the U.S. Government severed diplomatic relations with Cuba, the Carter administration has come to an agreement with the Revolutionary Government of Cuba for an exchange of diplomats. Although this does not signify a complete normalization of relations between the two countries, it does mean a significant change which could lead to the eventual re-establishment of full diplomatic and economic relations. In this regard, the agreement marks a victory for the Cuban and Northamerican people.

The agreement, despite its limitations, highlights the failure of U.S. imperialism's attempts to undermine and destroy the Cuban Revolution and its leaders. In fact, neither its direct armed intervention (the Bay of Pigs invasion) nor the continuous subversive activities of the U.S. intelligence apparatus (CIA, etc.), as well as those of U.S. supported Cuban exiles, have been able to undermine or topple the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban Revolution survives and moves forward. Its banner is still held up high while the banner of U.S. imperialism is being battered and torn asunder by the progressive and revolutionary peoples of the world. Rather than have made Cuba an outcast in Latin America and the world, U.S. imperialism has become more and more an outcast in the eyes of the people of the world.

CUBA AND THE BLOCKADE

However, in spite of its present agreement with Cuba, the U.S. government has not abandoned its embargo and blockade on trade with Cuba. This embargo has imposed a heavy burden on the Cuban people and has deprived them access to many goods in this country that are needed in Cuba—such as medicines, spare parts for North-american made machinery and new technology. Nonetheless, this has not prevented the Cuban Revolution from improving significantly the life of the average Cuban—particularly the working class and peasants. In this regard, unemployment has been eliminated; housing has been upgraded; illiteracy has been eliminated; racism has been attacked systematically in all aspects of Cuban life; production has been diversified; medical care is free for all; daycare is free; and we could go on and on listing the achievements of the Cuban revolution in improving the material life of the people. Moreover, on the political level, the working masses, through Poder Popular (Peoples' Power) are directly being involved in addressing the key questions that affect their lives. Indeed the people are involved through their mass organizations (trade unions, women's federation, the Committees to Defend the Revolution, etc.) in all aspects of the revolution, that is to say, they actively participate in the ideological, political, economic and military consolidation of the Revolution.

Only 90 miles from U.S. imperialism, the Cuban Revolution has triumphed. This is an accomplishment unique among socialist revolutions. It has begun to build socialism on its own material and moral strength and with the concrete help of other socialist countries. In the process, the example of Cuba has inspired all anti-imperialists and revolutionaries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Today Cuba is the bastion for the revolutionary process in these ravaged regions. Moreover, the Cuban Revolution's concrete practice of Proletarian Internationalism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have won it the respect of all progressive and revolutionary countries and people throughout the world.

U.S. PRECONDITIONS FOR NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS

In order to establish full diplomatic and economic ties with Cuba, the Carter administration has raised a number of preconditions among them that Cuba cease to support the national liberation process in Puerto Rico as well as in hypocritical fashion demanding a "decrease in its military involvement in Africa and reinforce a commitment to human rights by releasing political prisoners." Cuba has unequivocally refused these preconditions. Fidel Castro has clearly said: "We will not make any concessions on matters of principle in order to improve relations with the U.S." On the other hand, Cuba has made clear that any further improvement in relations must be based on a lifting of the embargo and blockade.

As to be expected, the minimal moves that have been made towards the normalization of relations with Cuba have been met with condemnation by the spokesmen for the most reactionary circles of the ruling class. On the other hand, and as we have come to expect in recent years, sectors of the U.S. "left" have echoed the positions of these warmongers uniting with them in opposition to the Cuban Revolution and in particular its internationalist practice in Africa. These forces objectively create obstacles to the tasks of clarifying the lies of the bourgeoisie and prevent the development of a solidarity movement with Cuba. These efforts by the right and elements of the "left" were recently joined by our friends at the Guardian newspaper with its most irresponsible publication of a series of articles, which in a chauvinist manner, slandered and distorted the Cuban revolution. This leads us and others to question the publication of such a series, particularly in these historical moments.

Independently of all the attacks by the U.S. ruling class, and the objective collaboration of would-be revolutionaries, the Cuban Revolution will continue in its self critical and firm path towards the construction of socialism. On this upcoming July 26th, we will again salute the Cuban Revolution and call for an End to the Blockade!

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Human Rights-Carter's Smokescreen

During the first hundred days of Jimmy Carter's presidency, one of his main campaigns has been to establish a foreign policy based on "constant decency in its values" and a "defense of human rights." Carter is attempting to reintroduce morality into U.S. foreign policy. Over the past 7 years, the image of the United States as a "bastion



of democracy" and a leader of the "free world" has been tarnished, both within the U.S. and internationally.

Since the early 1970s, the hypocrisy, brutality and corruption behind the myth of American democracy—its constant fight on the side of the righteous and the underdog—has begun to be exposed. The lengthy U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, supporting first one, then another repressive dictatorship; the Watergate exposures of dishonesty, corruption, and violation of people's rights ordered by the highest levels of government and the interference of the U.S. in Chile, subverting the government of the freely-elected Marxist president, Salvador Allende. All these exposures helped to reveal the true nature of the U.S. government—that its fundamental role is to protect at any cost the interests of the banks and corporations, the ruling force in this society. They are the ones that benefited from Watergate, from Vietnam and from Chile.

To rebuild the image of the United States, Carter has launched his "human rights" crusade. In the past few months, the Carter administration released reports detailing and condemning violations of human rights and use of torture in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. Similar reports have been made about South Korea and Iran. Carter has strongly condemned South Africa's racist policy of apartheid. In addition, he has called for an end to white minority rule in Namibia (Southwest Africa).

What are the concrete results of Carter's rhetoric? Minor cuts in aid to some repressive regimes (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay) have been made, but basically U.S. support of these dictatorships (militarily and financially) is being maintained. In some countries which Carter criticized, foreign aid allotments have been increased. State Department requests to Congress for foreign aid included a 78% increase in military aid to South Korea and a 24% increase to Indonesia (a country admitting to 50,000 political prisoners, but in fact is known to have

over 100,000). Despite condemnation of South Africa's racist rule, what determines U.S. policy there is not the denial of human rights to millions of African people through the violently repressive and dehumanizing apartheid system, but the billions in capital exported yearly by the major U.S.-based multi-national corporations such as General Motors, Ford, and Union Carbide. By protecting corporate interests and maintaining aid to military dictatorships, Carter's expressed "concern" for human rights is rendered worthless.

MANIFEST DESTINY

Carter's campaign is merely the latest manifestation of a foreign policy historically glorified by so-called "moral concerns." False "morality" has played a major role in the development of U.S. foreign policy from the earliest days of the nation. In particular, the concept of American superiority and righteousness was the justification for U.S. imperialist policies of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the early 1800s, American capitalism was growing by leaps and bounds. It needed to expand, to new lands, resources and raw materials. The newly-emerging capitalist class developed a conception of the nation that would answer the need for expansion—the concept of "Manifest Destiny." It was the "divine mission" of the United States to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Manifest Destiny justified the expropriation of Indian lands and the consequent genocide of American Indian culture and society. Manifest Destiny justified the ousting of Spain from Florida and the annexation of nearly one-third of Mexico's territory in the Mexican War of 1846.

When the continental territory was completely conquered by U.S. armies, overseas annexation began. Capitalism needed new markets for its products and new sources of raw materials for its factories and railroads. In 1898, the U.S. went to war with Spain, supposedly to liberate Cuba from Spanish domination. Not only did the U.S. claim proprietary rights over Cuba, but in the process it colonized Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

The material interests of the Rockefeller and the Morgans (to name 2 members of the emerging ruling class) were consistently hidden under a cloak of religious zeal: the United States was merely fulfilling its divine destiny; it had been given great world responsibilities "by the hand of God." In the same way, the U.S. entered World War I "to make the world safe for democracy."

In more recent times, having emerged as the major imperialist power after the Second World War, U.S. foreign policy has been based on the concept of containment: keep communism within the boundaries of the Soviet Union and fight it wherever it appeared to be growing. Understanding full well that the triumph of socialism in any new part of the world meant another blow to U.S. imperialist domination, the cold war of the 1950s was orchestrated as a war between the forces of good and evil, between the forces of democracy and totalitarianism. In the name of democracy, the U.S. in 1948 crushed a popular rebellion in Greece, led by communist guerrillas; in 1949, it went to war in Korea; the CIA overthrew the democratically-elected leftist government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954; ruthlessly suppressed the uprising of the Nationalists in Puerto Rico in the 1950's; it

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HUMAN RIGHTS CONT.



directed an abortive invasion against the newly-established socialist territory of Cuba in 1961; in 1964, it began to bomb North Vietnam; government troops landed on Dominican soil in 1965; by 1967, over 500,000 U.S. troops had been sent to South Vietnam. All of these military interventions were against the national liberation forces of countries fighting for their independence from foreign domination.

In terms of Cuba, aside from the loss of U.S. property, the thought of having a socialist country right in its own backyard sent shudders through the U.S. ruling class. When the 1961 invasion failed to overthrow the triumphant Cuban Revolution, the U.S. imposed its economic blockade and began a wave of terrorism through its CIA apparatus determined to destroy the developing revolution.

While externally during the 50's and early 60's U.S. imperialism was involved in numerous attacks on peoples and nations on the road to liberation, internally McCarthyism and its fallout led to the imprisonment of thousands and the violation of all semblance of human rights for countless northamericans.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Although Carter and his servants consistently raise the issue of human rights, they do not apply the same criteria to this country. Fundamentally, there is no discussion within the main bourgeois parties (the Republicans and the Democrats) over denial of human rights domestically. Despite the fact that there are hundreds of people in jail for political disagreement with the U.S. government, historically there is no such thing in the United States as a "political prisoner." People are in prison because they have committed a "crime (occupying government land, sitting-in at a restaurant, demonstrating in the street), not because they are protesting against U.S. policies and demanding their inalienable human rights to food, shelter, equality, independence, etc.

There are the Wilmington 10, a group of 9 Black men and one white woman, whose "crime" is fighting racism in the South. During a period when the Black community in Wilmington, North Carolina was under attack by white vigilantes due to efforts to integrate the local schools, these 10 people were accused of firebombing a grocery store. In 1972, they were sentenced to a total of 282 years in prison. Despite the fact that three prosecution

witnesses recanted their testimony in a recent appeal, on May 20, the judge denied the motion for a new trial.

There are the 5 Puerto Rican Nationalist Prisoners—Oscar Collazo, Lolita Lebron, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Rafael Cancel Miranda, and Irving Flores. These five heroic fighters for independence in Puerto Rico were convicted in the early 50s, in two acts of militant protest against U.S. imperialist policies in Puerto Rico. They have remained in prison for the last 23 years (27 for Collazo).

Many others are in jail for political acts, less known than the Wilmington 10 or the 5 Nationalists. There are many Black people, rotting in Southern jails, victims of racist attacks. There are the victims of grand jury repression, people jailed for refusing to testify before a grand jury committee. There are many Native Americans, convicted as a result of the trials following the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. (This historical hamlet on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota was taken over by 200 American Indians to protest the unjust and oppressive treatment which Native Americans are subjected to today.)

It is obvious from these few examples alone that Carter's crusade for human rights internationally is a mockery of the conditions workers and oppressed people face here within the United States.

If there is one individual that cannot honestly and sincerely speak in favor of human rights, it is the president of the United States.

Before Carter can even begin to consider the question of violation of human rights, he should: (1) change the laws that guarantee private ownership over the means of production and socialize the ownership of those means; (2) organize production to meet human needs; (3) guarantee a job for every able body, guarantee housing, health, education, recreation, culture, sports, etc., services to all human beings; (4) free all political prisoners; (5) end the colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of all oppressed nations; (6) end military, economic and any other forms of aid to repressive governments; (7) end the blockade on Cuba and all socialist countries (that only serves to undermine the human rights that exist in those countries) and (8) end all forms of aggression against socialist countries and against national liberation movements. Only then can any one speak about human rights. But we know that the president and the class in whose interest he governs will not do this. There is only one way that we can turn his rhetoric into action and guarantee that human rights are respected all over the world. That is by struggling to defeat U.S. imperialism.



Puerto Rico Informa MAY 1st ACTIVITIES REFLECT INACTIVITY OF LABOR MOVEMENT

In this edition Puerto Rico Informa is a contribution to OEM by El Militante, political organ of our fraternal organization the MSP of Puerto Rico.

On Sunday, May 1st, International Worker's Day was commemorated in Puerto Rico with a march which left from Santurce and ended in a rally in San Juan at Munoz Rivera Park. The activity was sponsored by the Comite Sindical Pro-Celebracion del 1ro de Mayo (the Trade Union Committee For The Commemoration of May 1st.) Besides the more than 30 unions which constituted this committee, various political organizations, including our own, Movimiento Socialista Popular (MSP), also participated.

This year the conditions were very favorable to extend beyond the quantitative objectives of previously successful mobilizations. Let us examine this.

The grave situation which the country, particularly the working class, is experiencing, characterized by wage freezes, massive unemployment, the progressive deterioration of transportation services, education, health and housing, is exposing the colonial government's myth that it is the defender of the working masses. Lacking any real responses to the masses' demands, the ascending financial crisis, the constrained market for bonds, and the astronomical public debt have made the government almost exclusively dependent upon the flow of federal funds. In the face of the crisis, the impotence of the colonial administrators has led them to consider as a "possibility" allowing imperialist companies to pillage our irreplaceable natural resources. The government of Romero Barcelo is negotiating with Mobil and Exxon in order to turn over petroleum and with Kennecott and Amaz in order to surrender our copper and nickel.

Also, with the coming to power of the colonial administration of the PNP (New Progressive Party) various groups and individuals have emerged, in the U.S. as well as on the island, who see statehood in a positive light and as a political alternative to the status issue and who will continue pushing it even though this is not the particular card that imperialism is considering playing in the near future.

The structural crisis of the colony has led to a boom in the struggles of the working class, increasing their receptivity, organization and combativity and therefore the possibility of mobilization. The real threat of the pillage of our natural resources by the imperialist businesses and the bombardment of annexation ideas are elements which unite wide sectors of our country. The political juncture which has characterized this May 1st is one defined by great possibilities for mobilizing large segments of the working class and other sectors, especially those most alert (the left). We should also point out that in recognizing this positive juncture, the Committee for Commemoration of May 1st, chose the following slogans, (among others), which would serve as a base for mobilization; the defense of natural resources; the right of our people to self-determination, unionization of public employees, and freedom for political prisoners.

Nevertheless, the attendance at the march was not as



high as had been expected. Nor were sectors of the left, who are usually mobilized to these activities, present in large numbers. As revolutionaries it is fundamental that we examine very carefully which elements or factors determined this situation so that it will be our concrete understanding of the reality that will guide our future actions rather than idealism.

WEAKNESSES AFFECTING MAY 1st

It is our understanding that there are three factors which adversely affected the mobilization to the May 1st activity. These can be summed up as: the weakness and lack of unity within the working class movement; the opportunist and sectarian politics of the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP); and the internal crisis within PSP. If we examine each of these, although briefly, we will immediately note the consequences of each one upon the activity.

First, our workers' movement is weak because it has attempted to negate its own weaknesses for a long time. It is weak and very fragmented even though many influenced by idealism and good intentions have promised us a "Central Unica" (Central Labor Federation) this very year.

We must recognize that militancy and organization have increased, particularly in the public sector and that a new leadership, dedicated to the interests of the working class has been developing. But we must also accept that there are still attitudes and practices within our worker's movement which lead to division and fragmentation. And in order not to confuse reality with our wishes, we must recognize that in this historic moment these last elements are predominant.

We can point to the influence of bureaucracy which has its roots in the lack of internal democracy; this has served

the leaders of the "left" as well as the right in order to maintain their privileges or positions controlling the unions. The opportunism and sectarianism which still corrodes a great number of leaders is reflected by the fact that in order not to affect their own party or organization, in many instances these leaders will immobilize many unions when mobilization is the needed response.

The perspectives of both the PIP and PSP of controlling the leaders in order to control a union has raised mistrust of revolutionaries on many occasions, increasing the ideological weakness of the workers' movement and hindering the unity among sectors of the working class. The zealotness for bureaucratic leadership pushed by PIP and the PSP confuses the unity of a given leadership with that of the base; this creates a false image of consolidation and power.

In the end, these incorrect practices and attitudes have only led to division and inaction. In the best of cases, the illusion of a strong and unified workers' movement has been strengthened, but when the historic moment has required action we have never gotten beyond a weak "threat" or a small bluff.

PIP: SECTARIAN POLITICS

Secondly, the PIP with its opportunistic and sectarian politics continues to attempt to hoodwink the workers, propagating the same fears which the enemies of the workers preach. They pursue the objective of assuming control of the unions and the arenas of working-class struggle in order to push the interests and aspirations of the conservative petty bourgeoisie represented in the PIP leadership. This is the source of those leaders within the unions who openly praise internal democracy but in reality are very strenuous opponents to real democratization. They put forth thousands of obstacles to its achievement in order to maintain their positions of control. During internal union elections, or when they see the need to defend their own positions in the hierarchy, these leaders open the doors of anti-communism in order to confront the argument of those of us who truly represent the real interests of the proletariat.

PIP criticizes PSP's practice of bureaucratic control of the unions but only with the hope of setting up their own bureaucrats as leaders of those unions. Besides this they also propose the narrow trade organization of the working class where each sector pursues its own interests without taking into consideration the well being and the struggle

of the working class as a whole. As a result of their opportunistic political perspective, the PIP initiated a boycott of MOU (United Workers Movement) and withdrew all its labor leaders from that formation. It boycotted the organization of the Committee for the Unionization of Public Employees and initiated the development of CUTE as a parallel organism. PIP falsely preaches unity but its practice is sectarian and has been self-serving everytime there has been the need for concerted unity of the Puerto Rican working class. In addition, there are also the examples of the struggle against the "Personnel Law," the struggle for the unionization of the public employee, the May 1st commemoration of previous years and particularly this year in which the PIP organized a separate commemoration in Caguas.

This opportunistic and sectarian policy of PIP in no way leads to strengthening and uniting the workers' movement, but rather deepens the division and fragmentation and makes common cause with the bosses and the government.

INTERNAL CRISIS

Lastly, we point out the internal crisis of PSP, which developed after the electoral debacle when the incorrect styles, attitudes and conceptions which have permeated PSP, and which we have severely criticized in the past, erupted into the open. It also culminated in their total inactivity, conditions which still exist within that organization. This May 1st was the most authentic proof of the paralyzation of PSP, its only tasks accomplished were limited to very few nuclei. Their involvement in the effort to achieve a wide mobilization left much to be desired. Indeed, they did not even mobilize their own membership.

In ending, we understand that although the political and economic conditions are favorable for the mobilization of the most advanced sectors of the working class, the weakness of the workers movement, the internal crisis in PSP and the opportunism and sectarianism of PIP were determinant factors in the poor demonstration which was held this May 1st. In order to deal successfully with the tasks we face in the present situation it is fundamental for revolutionaries to overcome the obstacles which favor weakness, inactivity and fragmentation of the working class and the left. Now more than ever the most resolute unity is needed, through an anti-imperialist front, in order to confront the pillage of our national homeland and to strengthen the struggle for independence and socialism.

TAXI DRIVERS ORGANIZE

CONTRIBUTION BY THE WSOC

In our last article, we discussed the history of organizing among CETA workers in New York City and the struggle to develop a mass line. In particular, we attempted to expose and criticize leftist errors made in that movement which block the building of mass workers' organizations capable of answering the needs of the rank and file while breaking away from class collaborationism and bourgeois politics.

But CETA is not the only place where activists in the workers' movement have made leftist errors. Our experience in organizing among New York City taxiworkers has exposed mistakes taking a different form from those tendencies in CETA but which tend to accomplish the same thing—inhibiting the development of broad rank-and-file organizations uniting advanced workers with middle forces.

A. Background

The New York City yellow taxi industry employs about 14,000 workers. Over half of these workers come from oppressed nationalities. Less than 2% are women. Taxiworkers are scattered throughout the city in about forty different garages or "fleets."

The job subjects drivers to brutal working conditions. Drivers work strictly on a commission basis—there is no guaranteed wage. They are forced to compete against one another for business and must constantly "hustle" to make a living. There is very little job security and little hope for advancement. This, coupled with the low level of skill needed to get the job, produces a high turnover rate. Almost half of the industry's workers are part-timers driving a cab two or three days a week to supplement the inadequate incomes of their "main" jobs. Especially in periods of high unemployment, the industry attracts large numbers of workers from depressed sectors of the economy. The fleetowners encourage massive recruitment of these marginal workers who have little commitment to the job and hence are usually reluctant to

struggle for better conditions. Nevertheless, there is a core of six to seven thousand workers who see taxidiving as a career and care about the struggle to obtain better working conditions.

Because of this high turnover rate and the individualistic nature of the work, taxi drivers have traditionally been difficult to organize. From 1910 to the 1950's, six unions attempted to organize taxiworkers. These drives failed because it was impossible to keep taxiworkers united in the face of sustained resistance from the fleetowners.

In 1965, an organizing drive successfully established a permanent taxi union in New York City. The success of this drive was due in part to the involvement of Harry Van Arsdale—a notorious labor racketeer who is president of the Central Labor Council and whose power base resides in the corrupt Local 3 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. What the other unions did not accomplish through mass struggle, Van Arsdale accomplished by importing his private army of IBEW goons. These "organizers" intimidated the fleetowners into offering little resistance to the union drive. As a result, there was a quick election and recognition of the union.

During the drive, many progressive forces did not oppose the use of these goons. They saw unionization as their primary task and united with anyone who would help them reach that goal. The error of this approach was quickly revealed as Van Arsdale proceeded to use his goons to consolidate his grip over the union and stifle any attempts to develop rank-and-file leadership and union democracy. (Van Arsdale held the presidency of the taxi workers union until March, 1977 when, because of his "pressing responsibilities" to the Rockefeller-initiated Labor-Management Commission, he turned the leadership over to his former hatchet-man Ben Goldberg.)

After the union was organized, some of the worst abuses committed by the bosses were eliminated. The

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blatant favoritism and hiring and firing practices of the fleetowners were regulated, pensions, vacations, and medical benefits were won, and a grievance procedure was introduced. But the union never dealt with the fundamental issues facing taxiworkers—the need for a guaranteed wage, safe cabs, freedom from police harassment, elimination of cut-throat competition on the streets, and ending the chronic practice of hiring more workers than the fleet could possibly use. Moreover, the union leadership from the very beginning pursued a racist policy, attempting to pit taxiworkers against each other and against other sectors of the transportation workforce. In a union with 50% Black and Latin membership, the leadership has always been overwhelmingly white—catering to the older white drivers with the most job security and the closest relationships with the bosses. They also consistently issued racist propaganda against the predominantly Black and Latin livery or “gypsy” cab drivers. Instead of seeking class unity and organizing this sector, the leadership points their finger at them (and not the fleetowners) as the main cause of taxiworkers’ economic problems.

While the union ignored the fundamental issues affecting taxiworkers’ lives, it also acquiesced to the deterioration of working conditions over the past several years. Money earnings have not, on the average, increased since 1972, while the cost of living has risen over 10%. In this period, two contracts have been negotiated, each conceding more to the bosses than ever.

Also important is the decline in the number of workers in the industry (at least 10,000 over the past ten years). This is due to the illegal practice of selling fleet cabs to individual owners. Cabs are licensed and regulated by the City. Each cab has a medallion which is worth up to \$35,000. The number of medallions is fixed by the same

law that states that 70% of all medallions must be fleet cabs, i.e., they must not be driven exclusively by their owners. Fleetowners get around this law by setting up fake “minifleets” to hide the fact that the cabs are actually privately owned and operated. The loss of over 40% of jobs in the industry has disastrous consequences for all taxiworkers. Job security is practically non-existent. Pensions are threatened. And heightened competition for jobs allows the fleetowners to increase the exploitation of all working drivers.

B. The Fight Back

Taxiworkers have not passively accepted twelve years of sellouts by their union leaders. While the iron rule of Van Arsdale’s machine (using rigged elections, physical intimidation of dissidents, racism, and red-baiting) has led to widespread discouragement and cynicism, there are hundreds of taxiworkers interested in fighting the bureaucrats and building a militant, democratic union.

Among these forces, there are many political tendencies, and little organizational consolidation. This has greatly weakened the struggle.

Today, two organizations are attempting to initiate and lead union-wide movements. The Watchdog Committee was started by Tom Landoli, a former union Vice-President who fell out of favor with the Van Arsdale machine. While somewhat more progressive than the present bureaucrats, Landoli represents no real break with the class collaborationist policies of the current administration. This is reflected in the propaganda of the Watchdog Committee which emphasizes abstract union democracy without dealing with concrete struggles which would put them in confrontation with the bosses. The activity of this group mainly revolves around union elections.

While the Watchdog Committee is not essentially different from the present leadership, the other force in the industry does represent a break with class collaborationism. This group is the Taxi Rank and File Coalition. Taxi Rank and File stresses class struggle unionism, advocates rank-and-file democracy, and attempts to develop struggles around the fundamental issues facing taxiworkers. However, Taxi Rank and File Coalition also considers itself a “non-authoritarian socialist organization.” They spend much of their energy engaging in propaganda for socialism and raising the demands of workers’ control and municipalization of the taxi industry. Their “New Left” style has alienated many older and Third World workers in the industry.

While both organizations have a strong base—in the last election, the Watchdog Committee received 35% and Taxi Rank and File 20% of the vote—neither one can effectively unite a majority of workers around a class struggle program. The Watchdog is ideologically incapable of developing one and Taxi Rank and File, by raising issues which go far beyond those of a class struggle program, excludes too many workers. Its political level of unity is such that it only attracts the most advanced elements, leaving the middle forces to fend for themselves. Taxiworkers need a mass coalition capable of uniting the advanced workers with the politically less developed forces around a program which pushes forward the class struggle and represents a decisive break with the bureaucrats.

Because of both the consistent participation of Marxist-Leninists and the intensification of the mass struggle, the seeds of such an alliance have recently begun to

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SALVADOR AGRON

-Victim Of Penal System

Some weeks ago there were sensational headlines in the commercial press about the escape from prison and the subsequent capture of the so-called Capeman-Salvatore Agron. At the time of his escape, Agron had 8 months to serve before becoming eligible for parole. Because of the notoriety of Agron and the circumstances of his case, his plight has dramatized and exposed the nature of the prison system in New York State and, indeed, across the country—a system designed to dehumanize men and women and not to form socially conscious human beings.

WHO IS SALVADOR AGRON

At 15 Salvador Agron killed two youths in a gang fight on the West Side of New York City. When he went to jail in 1960, he was a 16 year old illiterate. Over the years in prison, he learned to read and write through his own efforts and eventually he received a community college degree. At the time of his flight, Agron was an inmate at the Fishkill Correctional Facility and was part of its educational release program. In this program, he was attending the State University of New York at New Paltz, majoring in philosophy and sociology.

Agron was sent to Fishkill after being granted possible “freedom-in-a-year” clemency from Governor Carey. He was then placed in the educational release program to be “rehabilitated.” But Agron soon learned that the educational release program was just another attempt to dehumanize and hinder any true process of rehabilitation. During the day the inmates attend college and are treated as human beings. At night they return to prison and are subjected to degradation and humiliation. There are constant harassments: for being late to the bus that returns the inmates to Fishkill; for oversleeping; for riding in an unauthorized vehicle; for returning late from furlough; for refusing to submit to a body frisk—a humiliating procedure where a guard probes your rectum with his finger—which guards engage in at whim; for refusing to submit to a strip search; for bringing food out of the mess hall; for walking too slow; for not making the bed; for having an unauthorized chair in your room; and for masturbating. Violation of any of these rules may result in an appearance before the adjustment committee which can result in being locked up for several days in a tiny room. There one gets enough food to keep alive and is subjected to constant harassment from the guards who



tell him he is a murderer with no right to be in school.

WHY DID AGRON LEAVE?

The question in the minds of many when Agron escaped was why did he run away just 8 months before he was due to receive parole. Why would an individual with such prospects for freedom in the near future risk the dangers of an escape and the obvious extension it would impose on his sentence?

In a statement which he made soon after being captured in Phoenix, Arizona, Agron himself addressed these questions. He wrote in his statement (and we quote only excerpts):

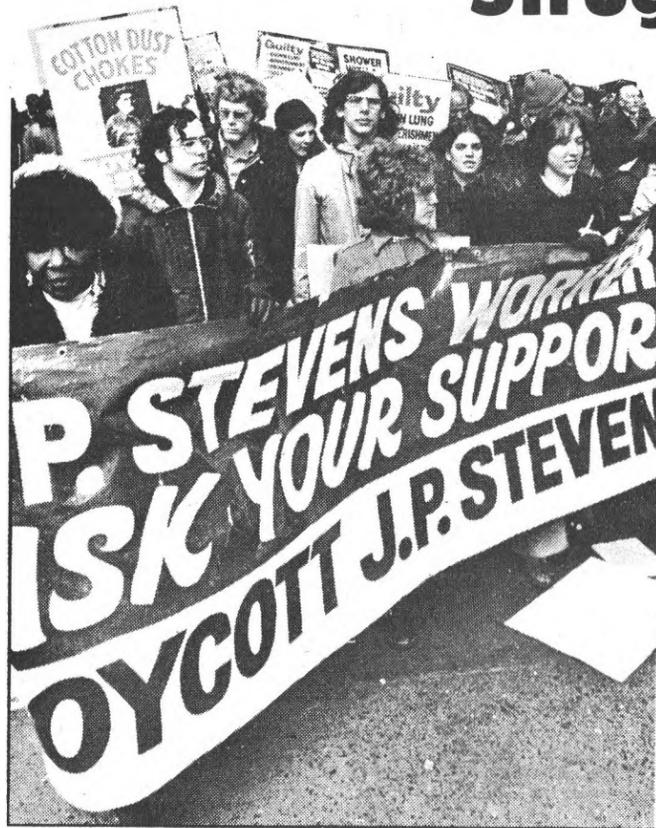
“Fishkill Correctional is nothing but a modern concentration camp in which all individual efforts at self-rehabilitation and resocialization is undermined through what is known as negative reinforcement of criminal values. Fishkill is about turning men who are already rehabilitated or that have made efforts to rehabilitate themselves into criminals in order to propagate the idea that prisoners cannot rehabilitate themselves and in order to keep the economy of the prison constantly on the upward swing.”

During his 18 years in prison, Salvador Agron has educated himself not only in the formal sense, of learning to read and write, but taught himself to understand and help change the conditions which led him and others to crime. He has concerned himself with defending the

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J.P. STEVENS -

Struggle For A Union



On March 1, 2000 union supporters picketed mid-Manhattan's Stevens Tower, headquarters of J.P. Stevens, the textile and manufacturing giant. The event taking place inside the building was the annual stockholders meeting which more than 200 demonstrators had invaded. When the demonstrators demanded that James D. Finley, the \$462,000 a year chairman of the board, answer accusations from the company's workers, he reacted: "This is my meeting. We do not follow Robert's Rules of Order. I sit here with a vast majority of the proxy votes and I can overrule anything I want." This attitude is reflective of the practice that has earned Stevens the title of "the number one labor law violator in the country."

J.P. Stevens, the second largest textile manufacturer in the country, is the most glaring example of union-busting and blatant worker exploitation here today. Originally based in New England, Stevens is a prime example of a runaway company. Before WW II, it fled down South in search of low wages and unorganized labor. Today Stevens has 90 of its plants in the largely non-unionized South. The factories are mostly situated in North and South Carolina, the two least-unionized states in the entire nation. But Stevens is only one example of the flight from unionization which has characterized a large sector of the manufacturing industry, particularly in the post-WW II period. In order to better understand the process which Stevens exemplifies and to gain a clearer picture of the implications which it holds for the working class as a whole, let us examine some history:

Why the Flight South

From the colonial period, the southern states have been agriculturally dominated, while the northeastern portion of the nation has been the industrial center. Physical characteristics of the regions, together with migration patterns, have mostly accounted for this division. Since WW II, however, the geographic pattern of capital accumulation has changed drastically.

Probably the single most important incentive for the mad rush of capital down south was the south's concentration of a cheap, unemployed workforce. The technological revolution in agriculture forced rural wage earners and small farmers alike off the land and into the market for industrial jobs. Between 1920 and 1960, agricultural employment in the South declined by 59%: from approximately 4.2 to 1.7 million people. Large numbers of farm laborers, mostly Black, and small white farmers who were unable to make the necessary capital investments to modernize their farms, began leaving the land and migrating to the urban centers. Although it is slower today, this migration has not stopped and still provides a steady supply of low-wage labor for industry. In many small southern towns a single factory may be the only source of employment. In fact, many companies have moved to the south with a guarantee from local government or Chamber of Commerce that no other firm will move in and compete for labor. Although manufacturing jobs pay wages 40% to 50% lower than those in the northeast, these jobs are coveted by Southern workers who will still be earning more than their unemployed peers.

Another important aspect which conditioned capital's decision to move South was the almost total lack of unionization in that part of the country. Because of the relative newness of industry in the South, there is not the strong union tradition that exists in most of the North. This antagonism has been further insured by the propaganda of the local governments, the companies themselves and the church, whose sermons ring of the "demon union." Under these conditions, the threat that one may be fired or even of closing down an entire plant is enough to dampen the spirit of militant workers.

Furthermore, the repercussions of the infamous Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 are still felt in the South. This reactionary bill was the crowning glory of big business' all-out war to destroy the growing industrial unionization spearheaded by the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) in the 30's and 40's. The infamous Section 14b of Taft-Hartley allows states to implement open-shop legislation which effectively combats unionization. As a result 20 states—11 of them in the South and the remainder in the west—have enacted right-to-work legislation which prohibits the union shop. In other words, even in plants where a majority of the workers have voted for union recognition and belong to a union, no employee can be required to join that union as a condition of employment. The intent of these right-to-work laws is to prohibit all types of "compulsory" union membership. In practice, they function as an effective obstacle to the development

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Agron cont.

rights of other prisoners, teaching them, setting up educational programs, and fighting for prison reform. This has gained him the respect and support of other prisoners and, in the process, has made Agron a sensitive and socially conscious individual.

Agron understands the transformation he has undergone as well as the purpose of the prison system in this society. In an interview at Fishkill in Jan. 1977, he said:

"I'm a different person than I was, believe me. At one time I used to get angry, but it was an anger that came from ignorance. I'd react to conditions. Now I study conditions and try to control the environment around me... I hate the guts of prison. They just store human flesh away without helping people. Prisons don't rehabili-

tate. What's released back into the community are desperate men... I was able to rehabilitate myself by fighting these conditions and becoming part of changing them. The guy who screams the loudest is the guy who has become rehabilitated. The guys who accept the dehumanizing conditions become dehumanized."

The case of Salvador Agron is not unique. There are other inmates who have made attempts at rehabilitation only to be frustrated, demoralized or destroyed by the prison system. We call for the freedom of Salvador Agron and all other prisoners like him who have become socially conscious and have rehabilitated themselves in the process of struggling against the prison system's oppressive conditions.

For more information write the Committee to Free Salvador Agron at 192 Broadway (room 407), New York, N.Y. 10038 or call at (212) 732-2440.

J.P. STEVENS cont.

of strong unions, leaving workers divided from each other in the same shop.

Besides anti-union legislation, the bosses, such as Stevens, have used racism to divide the workers and defeat unionization drives. Because of the history of racial prejudice and strife in the south, this instrument has proved very effective. The goal of Stevens and the other capitalists is to cloud the class issue and foment racial hatred and division. Stevens in particular has organized and financed anti-unionization workers' committees. These committees encourage white workers to resist unionization and proclaim the lie that only blacks will benefit under the union. This tactic has been particularly effective in killing unionization drives because black workers are so highly evident in early unionization and the mass base for its support.

These conditions allow industry to lengthen the working day, intensify the rate of work and ignore benefits such as sick days, pensions, health plans and even lunch hours. The profits to be made from this brutal exploitation are magnetic for capital. It is no wonder that in the last ten years at least 40 of the top industrial firms (as ranked by Fortune magazine) have relocated to the south. These include businesses dealing in rubber, auto, textiles, petro-chemicals and electrical parts among others.

This is the situation that the working class is faced with in the southern states, and this is the situation which the trade unions must face.

CONDITIONS AT J.P. STEVENS

With 44,000 workers and 85 plants in the South, Stevens heads the vicious Big Business, anti-union campaign in the South. In these shops, there are serious hazards to the health and safety of the workers.

At the Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina plants (Stevens' only unionized plants, still without a contract since 1974), noise levels in some departments reach 105 decibels—over 20 times the permissible level. Exposed saw blades, belt drives and steam pipes, among other things, are a common sight. Since the union election in 1972 there have been 400 injuries reported by the company in the Roanoke Rapids plants. But this is a misleading figure since injured workers are forced to return to work on "light duty" so that the company can avoid having injuries recorded as lost-time accidents. In this way, Stevens avoids paying worker compensation liability. But

probably the most crippling health hazard is the high incidence of "brown lung" (Byssinosis). After long exposure to excessive cotton dust levels the workers' lungs become congested to the point that practically any movement leaves them short of breath and unable to breathe, in effect, crippled for life.

At Stevens, the majority of workers are paid on a modified piece rate system. The company sets a production standard that the workers must meet to receive the going hourly wage. If this is not met they get paid less. If more is produced, a new time study is done and the company raises the production quotas. This is the vicious cycle of piece rate work; good work is rewarded with speed-ups.

STEVENS VS. "ORGANIZED LABOR"

The fight against Stevens today is being spearheaded by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), which arose out of a merger between the Textile Workers Union of America and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. The ACTWU and the AFL-CIO are pushing a 3-prong strategy in the Stevens' unionization drive: lobbying in Congress complimented by negotiations with Stevens and the National Labor Relations Board; a boycott of all Stevens products; organizing drives at the Southern plants themselves. While it is necessary to fight on all levels, the aspects of the struggle being emphasized are the lobbying and the boycott. Both are very limited in terms of putting pressure on Stevens and neither one hits Stevens where it hurts the most: at the point of production. Only the unity and the militancy of the workers themselves, through effective unionization, can win anything from Stevens. Yet over \$800,000 has been spent on lobbying efforts—enough to pay for 50 more organizers.

Another major weakness of "organized labor's" drive has been its conscious decision not to educate and mobilize the members of the various AFL-CIO unions on the Stevens campaign and the Southern unionization drive in general. This is because the growth in class-consciousness resulting from concrete and effective support to a fellow worker's struggle could undoubtedly generate a struggle within the union itself, challenging the bureaucrats that currently run the AFL-CIO unions.

The job of organizing the south, with its 25 million unorganized workers and 10,000 unorganized workplaces, beginning with J.P. Stevens, is a tremendous task. But nothing short of an all-out campaign based on intense organizing efforts in the south, together with extensive worker education in general, will prove successful.

TAXI DRIVERS(cont.)

germinate. During the last contract negotiations, fleet-owners took the offensive and demanded that the present commission system be replaced by one in which drivers would lease cabs directly from fleetowners. This would have reduced by 50% the number of workers in the industry and force the remaining drivers to work 12 to 14 hours a day to earn the same amount they currently make in 9 or 10 hours. The union leadership was prepared to capitulate.

At a special union meeting called to discuss the negotiations, Taxi Rank and File and independent forces succeeded in mobilizing hundreds of workers. The meeting gave a vote of no confidence to the union negotiating committee, forced the bureaucrats to leave the meeting, and appointed a militant shop steward to chair the meeting.

Out of this meeting came the formation of Taxi Workers for Decisive Action (TWDA). TWDA was concerned with concrete issues—fighting the bosses' leasing program, abolishing "minifleets," and a decent contract with improved working conditions. It stressed reliance on mass struggle, drew clear lines between itself and the bureaucrats, and emphasized that the only way we could effectively fight the bosses was through the democratization of the union. At its peak, TWDA had about 150 members, uniting Black, Latin, and white drivers for the first time. Taxi Rank and File participated in but did not dominate the coalition—they were in the minority both in general membership and on the co-ordinating committee.

TWDA initiated a number of militant actions throughout the early winter and successfully defeated the leasing program. However, the coalition began to lose steam and was not able to mobilize enough forces to defeat the present sell-out contract. This was because TWDA was organized out of spontaneous struggle and did not have enough time to sink deep roots to sustain itself after the immediate struggle was won. Although Marxist-Leninists played a leading role, they were unable to firmly ground the coalition.

Nonetheless, TWDA was a breakthrough for taxi-workers. First, the fleetowners and union bureaucrats were decisively defeated around leasing—their first defeat ever. Secondly, for a brief time a mass left-center alliance was forged. While objective conditions and subjective errors prevented that alliance from becoming permanent, the unity that did exist was important. It demonstrated to many people in Taxi Rank and File the necessity and practicality of such an alliance and convinced many taxiworkers who were not prepared to accept the socialist program and intellectualism of Taxi Rank and File that they could unite with them around common issues. It developed leadership outside of Taxi Rank and File, and it involved large numbers of Black and Latin workers. Finally, the roots sunk and the contacts made have provided the framework for building a long-term, fully developed alliance capable of seizing control of the union. That organization is in the progress of being built today.

C. Errors Which Block the Development of a Left-Center Alliance

From the very start of our participation in the taxi struggle, we anticipated resistance from the opportunists against any kind of alliance based on points of principle. Opportunists like landoli seek to use the workers' struggle to advance their own career goals. As long as it is in their interests to support that struggle, they will. As soon as they gain power, they turn their backs on it. The task of communists is to constantly expose these opportunists

and to win over the honest forces who have mistakenly allied with them.

But, within the mass struggle itself, we have found that the main danger frequently comes from the left. This leftism takes the concrete form of blocking the unity between advanced and middle forces and thus destroys the potential for any real mass struggle.

At the extreme left, there are those who deny the importance of the union as the primary focus for organizing. Their attitude is that the "structural limits of trade unionism make it an area best suited for the sellouts. [Their] responsibility, on the other hand, is to build an unconstrained, independent workers movement." In the process, of course, they leave the masses of workers in the hands of the sellouts.

While the majority of Taxi Rank and File rejects this extreme, in practice their program and ideology leads to the same results. By adopting an explicitly socialist program and taking up issues far beyond the scope of class struggle unionism, they cease to be a rank-and-file caucus and become, instead, a mere propaganda circle. In the process, they push many honest forces who are not advanced enough to understand the need for socialism into the arms of the opportunists.

The key to this error lies in the "anti-authoritarian socialism" of the Taxi Rank and File Coalition. Such "socialism" in essence is anti-Leninist and denies the necessity of a vanguard communist party. Because they refuse to recognize the need for a party, they seek to transform mass organizations into revolutionary organizations. In doing so, they destroy both their mass character and their revolutionary potential. Thus, leftism of this sort not only inhibits the development of mass struggle, but also, in the long run prevents the development of a revolutionary movement.

Our experience in taxi has taught us that the key force in building the left-center alliance must be organized Marxist-Leninists. Only they are capable of transcending the narrow bounds of both spontaneity and self-serving sectarianism. Only they can understand the historic necessity and practical implications of such an alliance. And only they can lead the struggle in such a way that it satisfies the immediate needs of the workers while bringing the workers' movement one step closer to revolution and the abolition of class exploitation.

