

# REVOLUTION

WINTER/SPRING 1985

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by Bob Avakian

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# The '60s-'70s Shift

by Bob Avakian

*What happened to the movement of the '60s? What accounted for the lull of the 1970s, and the different character of the struggles today from what has gone before? How should that entire period be summed up so as to serve and advance revolutionary practice now? Bob Avakian, in the following interview, elucidates the sources of the often disorienting twists and turns faced by revolutionaries and the masses over the past twenty years, tracing them to the shift in the relationships between the main contradictions in the world. This interview originally appeared in issues Nos. 148, 149, 150 and 154 of the Revolutionary Worker in early 1982. (Other interviews in that series were reprinted as If There Is To Be A Revolution, There Must Be A Revolutionary Party and Nothing Is More Revolutionary Than Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought.) The interview has obvious relevance to several articles in this and earlier issues of Revolution, but its importance extends far beyond that, and for that reason is here reprinted for the first time.*

## Chamber of Commerce Types vs. Revolutionary Nationalists

**Q:** In "Conquer the World . . ." you put forward the need to look at the '70s developments from a more international viewpoint. You raised Lin Biao's *Long Live the Victory of People's War* and the Chinese line of that time (the late '60s) and what it has in common with the "three worlds" theory of later on. Could you expand on your thinking on what happened in the '70s internationally, this whole ebb period in the movement?

**BA:** Take Lin Biao *Long Live the Victory of People's War* on the one hand and the "three worlds" theory on the other. First of all, I think the Lin Biao document is a much more revolutionary document. It has errors in it; especially with what we've learned since we can sum them up more clearly as errors. Whereas the "three worlds" theory, especially as it has been developed and put forward by Deng Xiaoping and in particular after the coup d'etat in '76, is a counterrevolutionary theory. If I were to describe the line of *Long Live the Victory of People's War* I would say that it is a document that contains both Marxist-Leninist analysis and also a lot of revolutionary nationalism. I think it is correct in identifying the third world as the storm center and focal point of revolutionary struggle at that time against imperialism and in particular U.S. imperialism. I think it is correct even in identifying the principal contradiction in the world at that time as the one between the oppressed nations and imperialism, especially U.S. imperialism. That's a basically correct position.

However I also think that there are some things that are clearly wrong in there. I pointed some of them out in that ex-

cerpt, "What's Wrong With Impatience..."\* that was reprinted in the *RW*. In particular there is a tendency to try to take the experience of Vietnam and mechanically project the reproduction of it throughout the third world as though it could be done everywhere there. On the one hand it says that Vietnam becomes sort of a concentration point or focal point of world contradictions, but on the other hand it doesn't apply that in the sense that it projects the idea that what's being done in Vietnam can be done everywhere in the third world. Things are more complex than that, and precisely because Vietnam became a kind of focal point and a concentration point, it's a little unusual. Not everything is, obviously, a concentration point at the same time. Similarly there is the idea of surrounding the cities by the countryside, which was taken from the experience of the Chinese struggle. In particular that whole essay hinges on extending the analogy of the anti-Japanese war in China to the world situation at that time with U.S. imperialism being cast in the role that Japan played in the struggle in China during the pivotal period in the Chinese revolution.

Now to put *Long Live the Victory of Peoples' War* in context, it was also written as part of a line struggle in the Chinese party and in opposition to the line of reliance on the Soviet Union. It was struggling against a line in the Chinese party at that time which was summing up historical experience in such a way as to erroneously project the idea that reliance on the Soviet Union and cooperation with the Soviet Union is essential and correct, in the conditions of the mid-'60s when the Soviet Union, as is pointed out in Lin Biao's essay, is betraying national liberation struggles everywhere and collaborating with U.S. imperialism in pursuit of its own developing and more strongly emerging imperialist interests. At that time the Soviet Union is collaborating with U.S. imperialism to suppress revolution and in particular to suppress national liberation struggles for fear that they will heighten contradictions and set things in motion which will disrupt and shatter the whole attempt and scheme of the Soviets at collaborating with U.S. imperialism in pursuit of the Soviet Union's own imperialist interests, and for fear that these struggles will cause the U.S. imperialists to come down on the Soviet Union, particularly at a time when the Soviet Union was unprepared for such a confrontation. So, *Long Live the Victory...* played that kind of role within the Chinese party and more broadly in the international movement in that struggle.

## 2, 3, Many Vietnams?

But at the same time, when *Long Live the Victory...* attempts to extend the analogy of the anti-Japanese war in China onto a world scale, it runs into some troubles. For one thing, it makes an absolute, almost a principle out of a fact

\* "What's Wrong With Impatience in the Service of the International Proletariat?" (*Revolutionary Worker*, April 24, 1981)

that it correctly cites, that for a number of reasons the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the advanced countries had been retarded, especially since World War 2. But one thing which is a problem in *Long Live the Victory...* and in fact was a general problem in all the documents that were mainly revolutionary and coming from the revolutionary camp in China was that they didn't really analyze the reasons for this retardation. And when some analysis was made, it didn't put enough emphasis on the objective situation and, ironically, it didn't see that the intensified plunder in the third world, and also certain changes that were made there to carry this out, were the underlying basis for the temporary lull and retarding of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the advanced countries. They didn't really get into analyzing some of the things that more recently, for example, we've been forced to analyze in order to be able to continue to advance on the revolutionary road in the context of the sharpening world situation. So the fact of that retardation is noted, but is not analyzed, and is basically absolutized, and along with this what was happening in Vietnam is presented almost as proof of the validity of this notion of repeating the Chinese experience in the anti-Japanese war, the idea that you can spread that throughout the third world.

Ironically in some ways it is somewhat similar to Che Guevara's concept of "two, three, many Vietnams." Che Guevara didn't just confine himself to Latin America. He went to the Congo at one point in the early '60s and so on. And there is some similarity with this Chinese line, although I wouldn't want to get into analyzing all the similarities and differences right now. But it's an interesting aside, somewhat ironic, because the Guevara line and the Chinese line would come sharply into conflict (maybe not so sharply then, but soon afterwards). And that was also complex because Guevara's line was incorrect, but so were some of the lines that in particular the revisionists in the Chinese party used to oppose Guevara and Guevara's influence. On the other hand there was a more correct opposition to Guevara coming from Mao and his revolutionary comrades, in opposition to the short-cut methods that Guevara tried to use which did contribute to his being isolated and cut down.

But in any case, *Long Live the Victory...* tries to take the idea that you can repeat or extend the Vietnam experience all throughout the third world. So while on the one hand it makes a principle out of and treats undialectically the lull, the ebb, the retreat and retarding of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the advanced countries, it also treats rather metaphysically the prospects for and the development of the revolutionary struggle in the third world, as though it's all uniform and there's all the same possibilities, and as if it's merely a question of the understanding and the will and determination to wage people's war. In fact, as I pointed out in "Conquer the World..." they even made the dividing line between genuine and sham Marxism whether you dare to and whether you do wage people's war and whether you support it.

This is a case where some of the more glaring errors did not show up right away because of the importance of the

Vietnam struggle at that time in particular and because of the fact that it was in the third world in general that the storm center of revolution against imperialism was concentrated. But especially with further developments since then, and by deepening our grasp of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought as an integral ideology, we can more clearly see some of the errors. The error of attempting to extend the experience and analogy of the anti-Japanese war in China onto a world scale, and to project the struggle in Vietnam throughout the third world and as the basis for encircling the imperialist citadels, in particular the U.S., begins to run up against its limitations and begins to turn into its opposite. One incorrect tendency that appears not just in *Long Live the Victory of People's War*, but in the General Line polemic\* and generally in the line put forward by the Chinese, including Mao at that point, is that the other imperialists besides the U.S. are treated unevenly. The other Western imperialist powers are sometimes treated as part of the enemy camp along with the U.S., but in other contexts, even in the context of talking about possible allies for the national liberation struggles, at least some of those imperialists are treated as possible allies, if vacillating and temporary allies. They are treated as possible allies of the national liberation struggles in that period against U.S. imperialism, or it is presented as if the contradiction between them and U.S. imperialism can be made use of in such a way as to neutralize or partially and temporarily win over some of these imperialist powers to support these national liberation struggles. And this in fact was not correct. Along with this is the idea that if the fires of national liberation wars are lit up throughout the third world this will literally consume U.S. imperialism. *Long Live the Victory*... says: "U.S. imperialism like a mad bull dashing from place to place, will finally be burned to ashes in the blazing fires of the people's wars it has provoked by its own actions."

### Correct Thrust – But "Left" and Right Errors

As that letter "What's Wrong With Impatience..." pointed out, I believe it's correct to overall uphold the revolutionary thrust of this kind of position in this time, because it was an attempt to make the most out of a revolutionary upsurge that was occurring in the national liberation movements in many parts of the third world. That's the correct thrust which should be upheld down to today and that attitude and the attempt to do that should be united with and learned from. But still there were these errors. And it's not simply that there was an overestimation of the situation, but along with that there were certain errors of line – both "left" and right. In a little bit we'll get around to what features this *Long Live the Victory*... line has in common with the Deng Xiaoping "three worlds" theory. But it might be possible to say in

certain ways that the errors involved in *Long Live the Victory of People's War* were "left" errors in the sense that I've just been talking about, that is, overestimating the possibilities of just spreading the experience of Vietnam, or extending the experiences of China in the anti-Japanese war uniformly, and overestimating the advances that could be made and attempting to push things further than they could actually go. If on the one hand you could say there was a "left" error of that kind, there were also some tendencies expressed in *Long Live the Victory*... which called for a very broad united front of forces, and this, as I said, even implied at least certain imperialist forces – states or sections of the imperialist ruling classes – other than the U.S. imperialists.

This, too, was an attempt to extend the anti-Japanese war analogy and in part at least the Vietnam experience where there was an enemy of the nation and the overwhelming majority of the nation could be, should be and was united against that national enemy, Japan in the case of China, and the U.S. in Vietnam. This kind of invasion by a foreign imperialist power, and a war of national resistance, makes possible a very broad united front in colonial and semi-colonial countries. But the accumulating of forces and the actual political preparation for revolution in the advanced countries – the imperialist countries – was not taken up. That merged with the oversimplified and metaphysical tendency to try to project uniformly the Vietnam experience or the anti-Japanese war experience in China onto a world scale. That interpenetrates with the error of generally calling for very broad united fronts without making all the necessary distinctions. Yes, in Vietnam it was correct, but in other parts of the world at the same time, or in other situations it may not be possible and may not be correct to try to establish such a broad united front.

The situation in China was not the same, for example, after the anti-Japanese war as it was during that war. It still was correct to try to build the united front of all forces that could be united against the enemies of the time but certainly it wasn't correct to try to continue a united front with Chiang Kai-shek as in the anti-Japanese war, because that was now the very force you had to concentrate your blows against. And, leaving aside the fact that the question of strategy for revolution in the imperialist countries wasn't even addressed, another problem was that the situation isn't uniform in the third world. There were and are different situations. In some situations, even though in these countries the domination by imperialism must be broken, nevertheless the form of the struggle may at a given point more closely approximate revolutionary civil war than the kind of national war of resistance with a very broad united front that correctly characterized the struggle in China during the anti-Japanese war. In other words, it might be more analogous to the war against Chiang Kai-shek afterward. (That war was in fact a national liberation war because it was U.S. imperialism that was the bulwark behind Chiang Kai-shek and without breaking its stranglehold on China no real social change was possible; but nevertheless it has been described often as a civil war and did take that form with the imperialists operating

\* "A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement," (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1963).

through Chiang Kai-shek and through supplying material and so on.) Plus in some countries in the third world half of the population, or nearly half, is in the urban areas — in some cases even more. While there still is a national liberation character to the struggle there, it is not the same as the situation in China before, during and after the anti-Japanese war, during the whole phase of the new democratic revolution and the national liberation struggle.

So, you get into problems when you try to project this internationally; and unfortunately this had some harmful effects, misleading influences on people in terms of thinking they could simply one-to-one reproduce the experience of the anti-Japanese war in China. This produced both "left" errors and also right errors. Promoting the idea that you ought to be able to unite a very broad array of forces when that might not be possible in a particular country and its situation within the web of world contradictions, which is a strong thrust through the Lin Biao *Long Live the Victory of People's War*, promotes errors to the right. Errors to the "left" come in the form of the tendency to overestimate the possibility to advance, to see a possibility for a uniform advance throughout the Third World.

I think that *Long Live the Victory* . . . , even though it was written by Lin Biao, was not just Lin Biao's document; it was a document of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party including Mao, though I think that it contained errors that reflected the influence of Lin Biao and I think the influence of Lin Biao was in an opportunist direction even then, in 1965. (I'm not going to try to get into dissecting whether or not he was mainly an opportunist at that point or not, but I think there were some definite opportunist tendencies in there that were his.) Had Mao taken on the task of writing this document and not had to unite with Lin Biao at that point, the document would have been better than *Long Live the Victory of People's War* was. It wouldn't have had some of the errors that are in there. But on the other hand, I do think that the general thrust of it was the position of the Chinese leadership including Mao, and there is a basically correct thrust in the sense that there is a basically revolutionary thrust. It is an attempt to figure out how to make the greatest advances against the main enemy on a world scale at that time. It does identify the most powerful reactionary force, the head of the imperialist camp at the time, it does identify where the main revolutionary storm center was and it does attempt to give impetus to the one against the other. In that sense and in that aspect it is correct. However, the way in which it attempts to do that, the line it puts forward, and the strategy it projects, contains a number of fairly significant errors.

### Revolutionary Nationalists

To make it a little more provocative and sharpen it up, the Lin Biao line is basically what the revolutionary nationalist position in China was; it is the position held at that time by the most radical of the bourgeois democrats in China. Lin

Biao had not really ruptured beyond being a radical bourgeois democrat. Nevertheless, given the situation at the time — a period of upsurge of national liberation struggles — and the concrete position of China in relationship both to the imperialists and to the revolutionary peoples, given the relationship of the different contradictions in the world, there was a section of this stratum in China that took a strong revolutionary position against imperialism, even if on a revolutionary nationalist basis and not a really thoroughly or fundamentally Marxist-Leninist one. That's different than Mao. But I think that it was possible for Marxist-Leninists to unite with these forces at that time, at least up to a point, and that included within China, even within the same party.

Despite all the Hoxha-ites and their erroneous ideas of pure, monolithic parties, and the purity of Marxism-Leninism and so on, things are not pure and monolithic and even within the party you will find yourself forced to unite with people whose position if not broken with will lead them in the future to be against the thrust of revolution, and against the Marxist-Leninist line. But for the time their position does not bring them into antagonism with the Marxist-Leninist line. That occurs broadly in society and also even within the party, though on a different basis and a different level because these people in the party uphold Marxism-Leninism in name and present their theories and political programs in terms of Marxism-Leninism. Maybe even in their own subjective understanding they think that they are Marxist-Leninists; that's impossible to gauge, but they present themselves as Marxist-Leninists and present their positions and arguments as Marxist-Leninist. This is different than people outside the party who either are openly not Marxist-Leninists or even sometimes opposed to Marxism-Leninism, but at various junctures take a revolutionary position from a nationalist or radical democratic position. You will find such people outside the party and you will find them of a different variety and in a different context inside the party.

At that point in the 1960s there was a good section of bourgeois democrats in China that was driven to take a radical democratic and even revolutionary position in the world. Such a position did not bring them into antagonism with the whole upsurge of national liberation struggle that was going on throughout various parts of the third world. You saw the same phenomenon in the U.S. People whose ideology was still ultimately bourgeois, who hadn't really ruptured with bourgeois democracy, still took a very revolutionary stance. I'm talking about forces that took a genuinely revolutionary stance, or a radical stance of opposition to the system, especially among the Black people and other oppressed nationalities in the U.S. itself during the height of the '60s movement; that was a very real and significant phenomenon. The same thing was true throughout the third world in general, and also was true in China. And those forces tended to group around Lin Biao.

I think that it was necessary for Mao to unite with them. And under the conditions, they influence you and you influence them. Principally, you influence them if you're on

the correct road and you maintain a principled position and fight for it — which Mao did. Mainly you influence them, but they also influence you, and the times and the conditions that drive you together influence you and pull you in certain directions. So Lin Biao is not in the camp of Mao, in the sense of being a Marxist-Leninist; still there's able to be unity there and Mao influences him, but secondarily, he and the conditions that make this unity possible temporarily also influence Mao.

On the other hand, Deng Xiaoping represents a wing of these bourgeois democrats which tends to come to the fore when there is not an upsurge but a lull and a reflux, an ebbing of the tide of the revolutionary movement. These kind of bourgeois democrats who are not so radical, who are much more openly reformist, capitulationist and pro-imperialist are the ones among that general stratum of bourgeois democrats who tend to come to the fore and have the upper hand. Not inevitably, not mechanically, not directly and one-to-one as a result of the change in the overall conditions, but the conditions tend to foster and support them. They did not triumph inevitably, but the way the contradictions were shaping up in the world as a whole in the mid-'70s tended to favor these forces. Much more than Lin Biao, they tended to be that section among the bourgeois democrats who came to the fore. Now they are not absolutely distinct, pure sections that are completely unrelated to each other. Some people may have been in one at one time and in another at another time.

### **Analogy to Black Liberation Struggle**

Just for a second let's put this phenomenon in terms of the U.S. situation, which people in the U.S. maybe are more familiar with (although we don't want to promote narrowness and nationalism and chauvinism), but just to put it in those terms for a second and use an analogy: In the Black liberation struggle, there were a lot of people whose ideology was still ultimately bourgeois and even whose politics were ultimately reformist, who were however extremely radical — it would even be correct to call them revolutionary in their stance. They were revolutionary nationalists during the upsurge of the '60s. Some of them were out championing the upsurges of the Black masses and seeking to give expression to them politically and organizationally. That was wrapped up, of course, with a great deal of what was called cultural nationalism at the time, openly bourgeois nationalism. But the types that came to the forefront roughly in the late '70s, were much more your three-piece suit types. You know, the ones with a briefcase who are "beating the man at his own game" or "hustling him" and who may or may not wear a Dashiki, but still basically the only thing they have in common with what was going on earlier is some of the rhetoric and some of the external forms. They may have some of the cultural trappings of the earlier period, but it no longer has the same content and thrust of "fuck you and fuck your

whole system and your racist oppression" and is much more an expression of upwardly mobile bourgeois aspirations. It's like Sister Sledge with her all-American girls theme. Even when Curtis Mayfield was singing, "we're moving on up," it divided very sharply into two. It had the bourgeois upwardly mobile character to it, but also was more speaking for what the masses were doing, even though it was certainly not the fullest or most radical expression of it. But now, "we're all-American girls" is an expression of that negative side in the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata.

It's not fair to take Andy Young as an example of this because he never was a radical; I don't imagine he even pretended to be a revolutionary, but he did pretend to be a so-called civil rights activist. He isn't really an example, but there are others who were active in that time, who even took a radical, revolutionary stance and have since gone the three-piece suit route. It's not just that the same people have changed their stance, there's also different strata who have come more to the fore. There were some people who put down their Molotov cocktails and picked up their briefcase. Some of them were sincere about what they were doing when they were throwing Molotov cocktails and that really was their stance. And some were only pimping off it at the time and maybe didn't throw them but assumed the posture after the danger was over. There were both kinds. And, of course, there were also some who didn't give in and capitulate, even if they became confused or temporarily demobilized, disoriented.

In the mid-to-late-'70s in the U.S. too, this was part of an overall world phenomenon; the U.S. had its own dialectic but it was in an overall sense part of this larger phenomenon, particularly part of the larger ebb in the revolutionary struggle. And this phenomenon of the bourgeois nationalists in the U.S. can in some ways be used as an analogy for what happened on a world scale and also for what happened in China. You had these different wings, or sectors within the general group of bourgeois democratic forces, some of whom were extremely radical, even revolutionary in their stance, and some others who were much more reformist and openly capitulationist. And it's the latter — whether the same people or others — but the latter as a social phenomenon that came much more to the fore from the mid-'70s on.

### **What's in Common?**

The "three worlds" theory has some things in common with the Lin Biao line in the sense that it also treats the prospect of revolution in the advanced countries as null and non-existent, and insofar as this "three worlds" theory makes an analysis of it, it attributes it entirely to the victory of the revisionist parties; that is, it just uses that as another example of how the Soviet international apparatus and the Soviet bloc and its extensions inside the West is holding back everything and has a strong, unbreakable hold — in other words, another reason why the Soviet Union is the main

danger. That's a subjective analysis of the reasons for the temporary (even if temporary means a few decades) retarding, temporary lull, and temporary setback in the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the advanced countries. And the *objective* basis for all this — and much more significantly than that, the contradictions within the objective basis for that and the changes, motion, development and the prospects for that to turn into its opposite, that is, for revolutionary prospects to develop and ripen at least in some of these countries for the first time in a long time — all that is ignored and thrown out the window. But there is that element of similarity between that Deng Xiaoping analysis and the Lin Biao line, even though the latter one is a radical expression.

Also, in the Lin Biao *Long Live the Victory of People's War* there is, as I pointed out, a tendency to project a very broad united front. In the "three worlds" theory what's preserved is the bourgeois forces part of that united front. Whereas Lin Biao said, "rely on the revolutionary masses" and did talk about the worker-peasant alliance as the backbone of the revolution — that basically correct, Marxist-Leninist thrust is all gone in the "three worlds" theory. And as for the whole idea of relying on the masses as a revolutionary force... well, the idea of making revolution itself is thrown out. If you're not going to make revolution, there's not too much point in relying on the masses either, because really that's all they're good for. They're not good for carrying out all this bourgeois stuff. The bourgeoisie is better for that.

To get at it another way, the "three worlds" theory is what "the third world will take the lead" is at a time when the forces in the third world who have the upper hand are much more the bourgeois forces and even the ones who are openly the props of imperialism. Temporarily in the late '70s that was more the character of things than in this tremendous revolutionary upsurge of the '60s, when even if a lot of the leadership was petty-bourgeois and not Marxist-Leninist, not representing the proletariat, nevertheless, it was a revolutionary expression. In the mid-to-late '70s, in this period of lull and ebb on a world scale, what you have coming to the fore temporarily is a lot more of these bourgeois forces and their "militant" activity, is the kind of things that are cited in the "three worlds" theory — all these sheiks and feudal princes, bourgeois comprador forces and all the rest of them trying to negotiate with the imperialists for a little bit better deal or use one imperialist bloc against the other. In the shifting of forces in the mid'70s, there was a little bit more opening than there was before or certainly than there is now for these forces to do this kind of thing. Not that there's no more maneuvering room now, but certainly there was a unique and temporary situation in the mid-'70s which gave some sustenance to this "three worlds" theory type of thing.

So, we get the Better Business Bureau expression of third world-ism; this is what the "three worlds" theory is. It's your Chamber of Commerce wing of the bourgeois democrats, instead of your radical democratic, revolutionary nationalist section. In general you can see the possibility of

unity, and sometimes even the real importance of unity with those latter kind of forces. Whereas those who are in fact the props and retainers of imperialism obviously must be targets of the revolution. It wasn't just in China, but it was throughout the Third World in general that these kind of forces got more initiative and had the upper hand more than they had during the period of revolutionary upsurge of the '60s. They came to the fore in China and they also sought out and projected theories as an extension of their attempts to unite (as bourgeois will unite, that is, unite with ME on top) with their kind who also were getting a little bit of initiative in other parts of the third world. Deng Xiaoping was seeking out his own types, both in terms of the bourgeois types in the imperialist countries who were the overlords of the third world, but also the lackeys and props of imperialism inside the third world countries themselves, as he was maneuvering to be inside China.

So analyzing what there is in common between Lin and Deng also brings out the differences in the kind of expression that Lin Biao represented in the '60s versus the political programmatic thrust that Deng Xiaoping represented in the mid-to-late-'70s — and he still represents it. But overall there is an ultimate similarity between the two in the fact that neither of them represents a rupture beyond bourgeois democracy. Bourgeois democracy is what they all have in common in terms of their ultimate framework and their ultimate point of view, but they are very sharply opposed in terms of the expression that takes, and also sharply opposed are the kinds of circumstances which tend to bring forward and give the initiative to the one and then the other.

## The '60s-'70s Shift

Why did Mao and Lin Biao come into such sharp conflict? Well, there were a lot of different reasons, having to do with the revisionist lines of Lin Biao and the fact that he refused to advance with the continuing advance of the revolution. But also there is the fact that on the international plane, his line ended up capitulationist to Soviet social-imperialism. If people have trouble understanding how Lin Biao could be anti-Soviet in the way that is reflected in *Long Live the Victory of People's War*, but not be a thoroughgoing anti-Soviet revisionist, they should look at people who in the '60s were against Soviet revisionism and now are apologists for Soviet revisionism. That phenomenon is significant in the movement in the U.S. and around the world. Some of the forces who were in leadership of national liberation struggles — whether in Palestine, Africa, Latin America, Asia, a number of places — with the changing expression of the contradictions in the world and the shifting forces, have gone over to being pro-Soviet and apologists for Soviet imperialism at a time when it's pushing out much more ag-

gressively in confrontation with the U.S. and its bloc in the world. In the "Basic Principles . . ." document we called attention to this type of force. And Lin Biao was a major exponent of this view – the view that the Soviet Union was bad, it was revisionist, but it was socialist, and a bad socialist country or a revisionist socialist country is better than an imperialist country.

Look at the CWP [Communist Workers Party] in the U.S. today. That's their position. If you want to understand this phenomenon, they are also people who in their best expression have been radical democrats and radical nationalists. I hesitate to call them revolutionary nationalists. Maybe some of them have revolutionary sentiments. They are bourgeois democrats in the final analysis. If you want to take the U.S. movement, again they're a good example of this phenomenon of Lin Biaoism, although at this point their line is not the same as Lin Biao's. And if Lin Biao had survived to this point, his line might not be the same either. Or if he did cling to that line he would be an insignificant figure because there's not the same kind of basis for that line as there was then.

Lin Biao and Mao came into conflict because already by the early '70s, even by '71, which is as long as Lin Biao hung around, that kind of line was already beginning to run up against its limitations. There was a shift going on. In retrospect you can see it a lot more clearly; U.S. imperialism, while it was still trying to win the war in Vietnam, was also moving toward a position of trying to get out of Vietnam on the least damaging basis to its international interests and position. There already was that kind of maneuvering beginning, which became tied up with the contradictions between China and the Soviet Union, China and the U.S., and the U.S. and the Soviet Union. All these different contradictions interpenetrated. Lin Biao basically thought that it was better to ally with the Soviets and on that basis "support" the Vietnamese than it was to enter into certain relations and even a certain kind of alliance with the U.S. to deal with the Soviet threat.

To this day, and looking back over these events, I still can't say that in principle the idea of entering into certain agreements with the U.S. to deal with the Soviet threat to China, especially agreements in a more limited tactical sense, was in and of itself wrong—or would be wrong as a matter of principle. In other words, when we analyze what China was doing and when we try to evaluate its policies, we have to actually analyze the necessity it was up against. Then we can determine whether it kept the larger picture in mind and whether it correctly dealt not only with the necessity that it faced but the objective conditions and the necessity facing the international proletariat as a whole. There were significant errors made, that's obvious. But there was a situation where I think it's very clear the Soviets were planning to

launch a major attack on China, very probably a nuclear attack to knock out China's developing nuclear installations, and very probably other facilities besides. It was a real threat and a real danger, and it was an immediate one. Nixon in his memoirs says that the Soviets were at the point of testing to see what would be the U.S. response if they went ahead and did this, and that means they were quite serious about it. So it's wrong to condemn the Chinese out of hand and state as a matter of principle in an absolute way that they should not have made certain temporary agreements with the U.S. and that this represented betrayal of principle and of revolution and of the interests of the international proletariat. Now that's one thing.

On the other hand, the line that developed was an attempt by Mao to apply the lessons of the anti-Japanese war in China in different circumstances and on a world scale. I was saying earlier that Mao influenced Lin Biao, and Lin Biao and the conditions that made unity with Lin Biao possible and necessary (at least up to a certain point) influenced Mao in turn. So here on the other side, unity of a sort and up to a point became possible with Zhou Enlai and the kind of forces he represented; and Mao fought to maintain the correct line in command and influence those people, or to impose certain conditions, limitations and necessity on them. But they also did the same with him, and you can't say there was no influence. I'm not talking about some sort of metaphysical process where things rub off on people because they have contact with each other and you have no freedom to influence to what degree and in what ways that happens, I'm just talking about a general tendency.

Here we see from a different angle that Mao was again attempting to apply the anti-Japanese war analogy, which was that they singled out one main enemy among the imperialists, not that Mao ever said the others *were*n't imperialists, or that Chiang Kai-shek wasn't ultimately a target of the revolution, that he was a long-term and permanent ally of the revolution. He never said those things. He said the opposite, and educated people to the opposite, and to the overall long-term picture of the struggle against all imperialism and reaction. But he did make a distinction, and he did develop the policy, which was correct under those conditions, of forging a united front with Chiang Kai-shek and ultimately that meant unity of a limited and conditional sort in China with the imperialists, particularly the British and U.S., who were behind Chiang Kai-shek. In the context of the anti-Japanese war in China, that was correct. I think that viewing it with the perspective of more experience since then, of historical development and of the work and struggle to sum that up, we can and should still say it's correct. It's not just correct because in the short run it won out, because that's opportunist and pragmatist if that's all you say. But looking at it overall, even with the deepening understanding that we're struggling to forge around some of these questions, and the criticisms that we make of certain aspects, even some important aspects, of Mao's policies as a secondary thing in terms of his overall role, certainly a very secondary thing in that context—still I don't think this anti-

\* "Basic Principles for the Unity of Marxist-Leninists and for the Line of the International Communist Movement", a draft position paper for discussion prepared by the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile and the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, Jan. 1, 1981.

Japanese united front was wrong as a basic policy and the way it was applied. It was necessary and correct.

But again, it was wrong for Mao to project that experience onto a world scale in such a way that it meant on a world scale singling out one imperialist power or one imperialist superpower and its bloc (that is, the Soviet Union) as the main enemy and the most dangerous source of war, and putting it in the role of Japan. If you want to extend the analogy, China was seen in an analogous position to the base areas within China during the anti-Japanese war, with the people of the world as a whole being like the people of China at that time. There was acknowledgement of differences regionally and within countries, but still overall it was seen as necessary to wage wars of national liberation converging against the Soviet Union with China being the base area.

### Mao No Capitulator

I think this kind of anti-Soviet united front in the way that I have described it, was the basic approach of Mao and defined the basic policies he attempted to implement by the early 1970s. This brought him into conflict with the Lin Biao forces, who were in fact taking a position that would have meant capitulation to the most immediate and direct enemy of China—the Soviet Union—and would have meant betrayal of the Chinese revolution as well as the people of the world by selling out to Soviet social-imperialism. But on the other hand Mao's approach brought him into unity with forces who wanted to use this anti-Soviet united front policy and the tactics associated with it to capitulate to U.S. imperialism. Mao's intentions, actions and policies during this period included the thrust of *not* capitulating. In other words, he was maintaining and carrying forward the same stand he had always had of not capitulating to imperialism and reaction from any quarter. That was made clear during the anti-Japanese war. They never would have had the Chinese revolution afterwards if Mao had not prepared for it, including doing ideological and political preparation and exposing even the imperialist and reactionary forces with whom they were temporarily allied. It's very clear that his actions and intentions were aimed at doing the same thing during this period of the early '70s up to his death, when he was trying to give leadership to a policy of the anti-Soviet united front internationally.

That's clear for example in the Henry Kissinger book. Kissinger tells the story about when they were initiating the U.S.-China official relationship, working with Zhou Enlai on a draft of what became the Shanghai communiqué. The U.S. drew up a draft which was basically a typical bourgeois diplomatic statement and Zhou Enlai approved it. Then Zhou came back later and had to give this whole rap about how Chairman Mao had said that we can't have this kind of statement and the differing and opposing positions of the two sides have to be clear as well as the points on which they agree. What was added was a whole dimension on the part of

the Chinese on their support for revolution in the world, which obviously was not mere rhetoric, but was Mao working to keep their independence and their independent line and making clear to the revolutionary forces and the oppressed masses of the world that revolution was still necessary and the Chinese were still supporting it. That could not be sold out, in Mao's view, because of the necessity as he saw it of certain agreements during that period of time with U.S. imperialism. But despite steps like these, and Mao's clearly revolutionary intentions, it was still not correct to extend that earlier (and correct) anti-Japanese united front policy onto a world scale and in the conditions which were beginning to sharpen up in the '70s. We cannot avoid saying that it was incorrect, and we cannot avoid the conclusion that Mao himself—and not just the revisionists in China—was seeking to implement this policy.

One thing as an aside here; it's absolutely ridiculous for anyone to on the one hand uphold the policy carried out by the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership before, during and after World War 2, and on the other hand turn around and criticize Mao for implementing a similar policy (and frankly, done in a better way) during the period of the early to mid-'70s. If you're going to criticize Mao, you certainly have to criticize the policy of the Soviet Union under Stalin, and I think that in fact you should, and in a much more thorough way, criticize it because it had the same weaknesses, the same erroneous basis, but *not* some of the same strengths and *not* some of the independence (as represented by that episode around the Shanghai communiqué, as related by Kissinger). But still with all that I think you would have to say this policy was incorrect and not only did it bring Mao into unity with forces like Zhou Enlai and even in a certain limited way at a certain point with Deng Xiaoping, but also by Mao's furthering this policy, even if in a way it was opposed to these revisionists, I believe it also gave them more ground, more initiative and strengthened them in their struggle to betray revolution internationally and, as a crucial part of that, to betray it in China, to restore capitalism there and to sell out to imperialism. It's very important to sum up this error; you can't avoid summing this up if we want to really draw the most profound lessons.

All this is not to say that if a basically correct line had been upheld and fought for, if Mao had not made the error of trying to project the lessons of China during the anti-Japanese war into a different situation and onto a world scale 30 years later, then the revolutionaries would have won in China in 1976. Even had they not made those errors, that's no guarantee they would have definitely succeeded in that there would not have been the temporary triumph of revisionism and the restoration of capitalism in China. Just having a correct line does not in the short run guarantee that. Mao himself pointed that out: sometimes you can have the correct line but the forces of reaction are temporarily stronger and gain a temporary victory. But still, in terms of the overall development of the revolutionary movement, we would be further ahead had a correct line been fought for and put forward not only around the crucial questions where that

was the case in terms of the class struggle within China itself, but specifically in terms of the international line.

Frankly, there's an irony here because the very last thrust that was made by the revolutionaries before they were defeated, right before and right after Mao's death, was an attempt to popularize the very important analysis of bourgeois-democrats becoming capitalist roaders. They were trying to point out the limitations of the bourgeois democratic outlook, but what was missing from their analysis was the expression of that outlook around the national question and around the international situation. On the one hand, here were the proletarian revolutionaries trying to fight bourgeois democrats and expose how they haven't made a radical rupture, how bourgeois democrats become capitalist roaders as the socialist revolution enters the socialist period and advances are made; on the other hand, here these same revolutionaries were taking a line which deviated in the direction of nationalism and reflects bourgeois democracy in that way. So they were undermining the very base on which they were attempting to fight these things.

That's not saying that having any kind of united front with any kind of reactionary force, even imperialism under certain conditions, having certain agreements or relations with them, is automatically betrayal or a reflection of bourgeois-democratic thinking. But concretely in those conditions it was an error in the direction of nationalism and ultimately an error in the direction of bourgeois democracy—not a thorough rupture with it in that regard. It went along with promoting bourgeois democracy, nationalism, even in fact chauvinism in the imperialist countries other than the two superpowers (this was even true in the U.S.). It promoted national defensism, social-chauvinism, defense of the fatherland in the name of the great anti-Soviet patriotic war, war against the Soviet main danger.

So even while the revolutionaries were fighting the bourgeois democrats who were turning or had turned into capitalist roaders, they were undermining some of that very ground by their international line—in which they found themselves to a significant degree in unity with these same bourgeois democrats. Of course, we don't know how the overall struggle that was being waged would have been carried out, what expression it would have taken in the field of international line had the revolutionaries won out. Maybe carrying through that struggle and what it would have taken to win would have caused them to call into question some of these very lines and policies and to change them, I don't know. But that's speculation; what we do know is that, while the revolutionaries were very clearly opposed to these capitalist roaders on the question of maintaining independence and not capitulating to imperialism and reaction, at the same time they had a common ground, that they should not have had under those conditions, with the policy of a united front against the Soviet Union internationally. That's on the one hand, Mao and his comrades made errors; but on the other hand, theirs was an entirely different class viewpoint than the viewpoint of counterrevolution, of

restoring capitalism and selling out to imperialism, on the part of those who were grouped around Zhou Enlai and particularly around Deng Xiaoping in the last period.

### Shifting of World Forces

It's also necessary to sum up some things about the objective situation in order to be able to most profoundly sum up the errors of the revolutionaries in China, and in order to be able to oppose the counterrevolutionary revisionists there, as well as to be able to oppose the other errors and the opposite pole of revisionist stupidity, as for example the line put forward by the Albanians in the last few years or any of those who would be soft on or even apologize for Soviet social-imperialism. To be able to analyze and deal with a very complex and sharpening situation, to be able to correctly assess friends and enemies, it's necessary to understand what was happening in the world in the late '60s and early '70s, in particular with regard to the role of the Soviet Union and some of the things that were favoring it then and which still have relevance and importance today. This gets us back again to the problems with Lin Biao and the *Long Live the Victory of People's War* analysis. While that analysis talks about the need for a Marxist-Leninist party to lead the struggle, one of the problems with the attempt to project a uniform extension of the Vietnam experience around the world, or the Chinese experience from earlier in the anti-Japanese war into the present-day, third-world-wide scale, is that in general the forces that had the initiative and were mainly the leadership of these national liberation struggles were, in one form or another, bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces. Under the conditions of the time, these forces might have been taking a genuinely anti-imperialist stand, even a revolutionary stand, but changes were taking place in the world. This had its effects whether you're talking about Cuba, Algeria, Palestine, a number of struggles in Africa, or ultimately whether you're talking about Vietnam itself. Because the Soviets were stabbing the Vietnamese struggle in the back and attempting to sell it out and suppress it in the mid-'60s, the more pro-revolutionary, anti-revisionist and pro-Chinese tendencies (and undoubtedly some forces) gained some ground within Vietnam—perhaps to no small degree on a pragmatic basis. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, because of the shifting relation of forces in the world and the changing expression of world contradictions, these were not the forces and tendencies that gained the upper hand in the Vietnamese party—to say nothing of a lot of these other parties.

On a world scale things were changing. U.S. imperialism was suffering defeat in Vietnam and had a need to try to extricate itself from that situation. Yes, the U.S. tried to win, but when it became clear that wasn't really possible without throwing everything in and literally risking everything, the U.S. imperialists tried to extricate themselves, pull back, maneuver and regroup on a world scale the best they could.

All that gave openings to the Soviets. This, together with the driving compulsion of Soviet social-imperialism itself to redivide the world and the things that it had to do, brought about a change increasingly through the late '60s and into the '70s. In particular there was a change in the whole Soviet stance and policy in the world vis-à-vis the U.S. and toward struggles opposed to U.S. imperialism. While of course the Soviet Union still sought to stab these struggles in the back, and use them for its own ends and suppress any genuine revolutionary struggle, the Soviet Union nevertheless would supply arms when before it wouldn't; it would in fact give backing to struggles that before it would openly oppose.

Under these conditions a lot of these petty-bourgeois forces and even the bourgeois forces who had the initiative and had a leadership role in many of these struggles tended to gravitate toward the Soviet Union because the Soviet Union offers a seeming short-cut to winning the struggle against U.S. imperialism—which is genuinely powerful. It's not easy to wage a struggle against U.S. imperialism. Even though we can say that it's been proved possible to puncture and batter U.S. imperialism, it's not easy. It's not without tremendous sacrifice, and the Soviets offer a way that seems easier to do that. And not only were some of these petty-bourgeois and bourgeois forces drawn toward that, but also, they're not a monolith either. There are different forces among them, and those who tended more to gravitate toward that illusory but seemingly easier course tended to be strengthened.

So, here's China in the early '70s in a difficult position where if you want to put it in crude, almost bourgeois, terms it can't compete with the Soviets on that level. And the Marxist-Leninists in China didn't want to, either. But nobody, neither them nor even the revisionists, could compete on that kind of a level. Even those who wanted to use these struggles for their own ends couldn't compete with the Soviets on that kind of level. The revolutionaries in China were fighting for a policy (and in a large part it was implemented) of extending genuine internationalist aid to these struggles, charging little or often nothing for the arms they were supplying, fighting for the line of sending Marxist-Leninist literature along with the technical equipment. They were waging ideological struggle on a principled basis among the forces within this movement, and attempting to build up the Marxist-Leninist forces. But there's a problem. And the problem, to put it provocatively, is you can't make people be Marxist-Leninists if they don't want to be. And you're dealing with the fact that a Marxist-Leninist line doesn't always win out. In fact, it's the line that demands—because reality demands, and as a reflection of that, the Marxist-Leninist line demands—that you take the most arduous path, and one that involves the most sacrifices. And so, in the short run, things don't always favor the Marxist-Leninist forces.

## Soviets in the '30s, China in the '70s

In a number of ways, the kind of line the Chinese revolutionaries were fighting for, and the forces, the tendencies that they were representing and seeking to help come to the fore, were suffering setbacks in the face of the changing conditions, and the changing stands and tactics of the Soviet social-imperialists. There's an analogy here to what happened in the Soviet Union in the '30s after some of its attempts to support revolutionary movements (including some of its errors) led to frustrating results, even crippling and devastating defeats such as in Germany. There was then a kind of retrenchment of forces and tendencies, both socially and also even within individual leaders such as Stalin. They tended to retrench and adopt a more nationalist position—a position of, "well, I guess we have to defend what we've got," which converges with defending the fatherland, or the "socialist fatherland." That comes to the center, and you lose sight of the fact that while there may be temporary defeats due to the developing and sharpening contradictions, the opportunities and the prospects for advance may actually ripen and increase exactly as everything comes to a head. This includes the need to figure out how to defend what you do have to the greatest degree on the best basis—that is, overall as a subordinate part of the international struggle and in a way that seeks to enhance the whole international movement.

It seems to me the same kind of phenomena occurred in China partly on the basis of some of the setbacks that were being suffered internationally. Not so much in Vietnam, ironically that struggle was not losing, in fact it was winning, but there were some other struggles that had run up against their limitations, were either getting bogged down, were suffering defeats, or weren't getting off the ground, depending on the concrete circumstances. Some even got drowned in blood and crushed—temporarily but in a fairly thorough, if temporary way. And beyond that, even within those struggles that weren't suffering such setbacks at the time, the Marxist-Leninist forces and line were suffering setbacks, in particular vis-à-vis the Soviet revisionists and their influence, their forces and allies. So in this kind of context, somewhat analogous to the Soviet Union in the early and mid-'30s, there was a retrenching in China. The political result was the uniting around the line of an anti-Soviet united front, analyzing the Soviet Union as the main danger on a world scale, and losing sight again of how the sharpening contradictions would also mean, not only more difficulty and more dangers in the period ahead, but also increasing opportunities and the prospects for revolution and for advance, taking the world as a whole.

And again, this related to some of the limitations of the Lin Biao line and of revolutionary nationalist upsurges with a Marxist-Leninist current of varying kinds, and of varying strength within them. The limitations of all that began to much more sharply assert themselves in this whole changing situation of the late '60s and particularly in the early '70s. And as that began to happen, the opposite pole of the Lin Biao-type errors, and the one which has no revolutionary ex-

pression, but has an openly capitulationist expression of the bourgeois-democratic outlook, began to assert itself much more strongly. Even the revolutionaries were pulled toward that because of some deviations toward nationalism and methodological limitations in how they tried to sum up and apply the lessons of the past struggles that they'd been a part of and, more broadly, some errors in summing up and applying the lessons of the international communist movement, particularly around World War 2. They had summed up basically that the Comintern line around World War 2 was correct, but the problem was that there was a capitulationist tendency within that which was to a large degree fostered and encouraged by Stalin and the Comintern, but which also had its expression within most of the parties that were a part of the Third International. The Chinese Marxist-Leninists summed up *that* was what was wrong but the overall line was correct. And they generally tried to apply the same line that was applied in World War 2, and in particular they tried to extend the experience that *they* specifically had in the anti-Japanese war onto a world scale. That's where their own errors interconnected with the openly capitulationist stand of the Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping-type forces—even though there was a qualitative difference, and ultimately an open antagonism between the forces grouped around Mao, who were overall upholding a revolutionary line while making significant errors of this kind, and the forces grouped around Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping and that whole counter-revolutionary farrago grouped around them, which unfortunately won a temporary victory and now are in power with various differing and conflicting tendencies.

There are real reasons why the Soviet Union was able to make headway and why sticking to and upholding a Marxist-Leninist line became more difficult in many instances within some of these revolutionary movements in the third world at that point. In the imperialist countries, too, there were difficulties of a not totally different nature: bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tendencies and forces, tendencies toward reformism and capitulation toward imperialism (often in the form of capitulation to Soviet social-imperialism with a socialist mask). These tendencies were temporarily strengthened — not uniformly, not without contradiction, not everywhere and all the time, but as a general phenomenon this was occurring. And this was a factor contributing to the erroneous position and errors taken up and made by Mao and those forces grouped around him.

We have to learn not only from the heroic contributions of these revolutionaries, but also from these errors, and we have to sum up very deeply both the objective and subjective aspects that contributed to these errors and to the defeats that were suffered. This is particularly important because today is not a time when there's been a tremendous revolutionary upsurge and now there's an ebb; instead we're in a period when the ebb is beginning to give way to something else. We are approaching an historic conjuncture on a world scale where all these contradictions are, as Stalin correctly described it, being gathered together into a single knot and thrown on the scales for resolution. This is an important

analysis as long as we don't understand it to mean (and Stalin didn't put that forward) they all literally become one contradiction, but they are much more closely interknit and interconnected with each other at this point, they are all brought to a head and thrown on the scale for resolution. And in that light it's all the more important and urgent that we sum up the objective and subjective factors leading to this temporary ebb, and also how that influenced the terrain on which the revolutionary leaders such as Mao were struggling. We can only sum this up correctly by looking at the overall development of the contradictions and the ways in which there was a shift in the situation and conditions. We can't do it by just ignoring the necessity that posed itself, nor of course can we do it by failing to recognize that given that, they still made errors. Not that they would have been guaranteed to win or not suffer any setbacks if they hadn't made those errors, but given the necessity, they still in some aspects (again, secondary but still important) responded to and incorrectly dealt with that necessity.

### Mao's Contributions, Our Tasks

To sum up the specific point of what there is in common with *Long Live the Victory of People's War* and the Deng Xiaoping "three worlds" theory, and how does Mao relate to the one and the other: you could say that there was some of Mao in each, but in a qualitative sense he was different from both. He was different in the sense that he was a Marxist-Leninist—whereas the Lin Biao line, even *Long Live the Victory of People's War*, had errors and deviations which reflect revolutionary nationalism and bourgeois-democratic thinking as opposed to Marxism-Leninism, and on the other hand, the "three worlds" theory is openly capitulationist and counter-revolutionary. So, you could say there is some of Mao and Mao's positions in each, but Mao is qualitatively different from both of them. Mao was a revolutionary and a Marxist-Leninist who advanced both Marxism-Leninism in the realm of theory and also the struggle of the international proletariat concretely—advanced them, in fact, to new and unprecedented heights.

Just one point that I think we should further add here: it's not so simple a question as the ideological question of whether you dare to make revolution or whether you become conservative and just simply try to hang on to what you have. I mean, Mao said a number of times after they had power, that we came from the caves of Yenan, we fought for years in the hills, and if we have to we'll go back to them. And he said it in the context where he was putting it on the line; it wasn't just empty bombast and rhetoric, he put it on the line. Mao said this in the context of inner-party struggles and in the face of threats of attack from the imperialists, so I think it clearly was his stand that for the interests of the revolution he'd be willing to take a temporary step back. He did that in a more limited but important way for example during the struggle against Chiang Kai-shek in 1947, when

they temporarily abandoned the center that they had in Yenan in order to lure in Chiang Kai-shek more deeply and to be able to annihilate his forces and win victory throughout the whole country. I think Mao was ready to do that again on a broader scale, even taking into account the possibility of imperialist attack on China, and also the class struggle against the bourgeoisie within China, particularly the revisionist forces within the party. In the face of the one or the other or both, he was ready to do that.

That basic stand is indispensable and without it you never could be a Marxist-Leninist and never could contribute to advancing the revolution. It's basic to any revolutionary, and to any revolutionary outlook, any revolutionary program. Nevertheless, it's not enough. There's still the question of what political line you have and there's also the question of correct versus incorrect methodology, even in someone like Mao. Mao made tremendous contributions in the area of philosophy, Marxist-Leninist methodology and outlook in general, but there were still some aspects of his methodology that were incorrect, and in political line, some tendencies toward nationalism, which were in some ways a significant (even though secondary) counter-current to his tremendous contributions. So it's not simply a question of do you have the interests of revolution at heart, or even more than that, are you willing to risk what you have in order to maintain principle and to continue fighting for revolution. There's also the question of methodology and especially the question of political line—the struggle around political line and what's your understanding and what the concrete actions flowing from that are in the realm of political line. Mao's errors, for example, their expression in terms of anti-Soviet united front, were not due to the fact that he was freaked out or panicked in the face of the Soviet threat or because he was afraid of a Soviet attack on China and afraid to risk what had already been gained. The mistakes stemmed from some errors in methodology and some erroneous political tendencies which found their expression in a sharp way in the '70s in terms of this united front against the Soviet Union policy. That's very important to sum up, because, again, clearly in Mao—and in a qualitatively different way I would even say than in Stalin—there was that willingness to risk what had already been won; there was the insistence on the necessity to do that rather than to give up principle and sacrifice the revolution. There was that ideological stand on Mao's part. But what that proves is that on the one hand that's indispensable, but on the other hand just that is not enough. And we have to learn and sum up more deeply than that.

## The '70s: The Appearance & the Essence

**Q:** Why don't we continue with this thing about coming out of the '60s into the '70s, and talk a little bit more about the '70s?

**BA:** In "Conquer the World . . ." the point is stressed with respect to some of these tendencies and line deviations, that we have to look first of all and most importantly to the international arena and in that context look at the situation inside any country, rather than the other way around, rather than ignoring the larger international arena. Some of the things we touched on before can perhaps be brought together here a little bit more. We talked about the U.S. in terms of some of the neo-colonial policies it carried out in much of the third world, or the equivalent of neo-colonialism that it practiced in Latin America, Africa and so on. And, on the other hand, we also talked about how Vietnam was both consciously and deliberately treated by the Kennedy administration and U.S. imperialism in general, as a test case in their attempts to suppress the national liberation struggles of the third world against imperialism—and how that turned into its opposite. Vietnam became the tail of the tiger that they couldn't let go of. And in the long run, it contributed to greatly weakening U.S. imperialism. But along with that we should more generally talk about the fact that in the aftermath of the last historic world conjuncture, around World War 2, there was a certain restructuring of capital internationally in that part of the world which was controlled by the imperialists and dominated in particular by U.S. imperialism, not only in the advanced countries, but, for a certain time and in particular as a concentrated expression of this, in the third world.

Specifically there were some changes in the late '50s, and, as a concentrated development, in the early '60s, with the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, the White Revolution in Iran, and similar programs and developments in a number of other countries—which both because of their position in world relations and because of their own situation domestically, their own particular features, were situated in a position where these changes could be brought about. There were some changes, not only in policies and in the superstructure of the imperialist domination of these countries, but there were also some significant changes in the economic base. While these changes, of course, did not change the relationship between imperialism and these countries, that is, did not in any way alter or, certainly, eliminate imperialist domination and distortion of these countries and the disarticulation of their economies, these reforms did, nonetheless, result in the introduction of some production relations more characteristic of capitalism including the further development of capitalist relations in the countryside in some of these countries, and also some infrastructural development such as roads, harbors, canals, things like that, to lay the basis for more investment in industry in these particular countries as well. Again, this was not an all-round, all-sided, harmonious, articulated development. Although that's never absolutely the case in any coun-

try, especially where there is the anarchy of capitalism, in the third world countries there was a lack of even that degree of articulation existing in an advanced capitalist country where finance capital is centered and controlled. Nevertheless, there were some transformations, under the domination and initiative of the imperialists, in certain third world countries which, again, because of their international position and internal features, made these sorts of changes both possible and necessary.

The imperialists faced the necessity of trying to break through certain obstacles that were already beginning to gather in the way of the accumulation process of capital internationally and the necessity of dealing with certain political developments, especially the national liberation struggles and the anti-colonial movements that were intensifying and spreading in large parts of the third world. U.S. imperialism carried out and orchestrated this in a specific context: that is, in light of its position relative to other imperialists, and in the world as a whole relative to the development of the Soviet bloc which had gone from a community headed by a *socialist* Soviet Union to an emerging and developing imperialist bloc; and also vis-à-vis China, which was emerging more strongly in the world, playing a stronger role in the world as a socialist country and a bastion of revolution, especially in relation to the national liberation struggles. In the context of and in the face of these different contradictions and their different expressions, and the contradictory position that the U.S. held coming out of the second imperialist world war and the re-ordering of the imperialist order in a world still dominated and under the baton of the U.S.—because of all that, the U.S. imperialists were able to and had a necessity to carry out certain changes of the kind I've been referring to in a number of these third world countries.

### Crisis—But Not Straight Down

A lot of this has been gone into much more deeply in the investigation that's been done and is being drawn together now for the book *America in Decline* and will be presented in this book in a concentrated and much more all-round way. I'm not going to even try to duplicate that here, but just to trace the developments confronting U.S. imperialism in the '60s and '70s. There were these changes that in turn gave a certain impetus to the accumulation process that was going on within the U.S. bloc, within the general sphere of its overall domination, and to which it gave overall direction (not without contradiction, not without opposition but as the overall principal aspect). But already, both politically and economically, there were the seeds and beginnings of this turning into its opposite. Vietnam was in a sense a focal point of that, too. Again it was a question of where they went in to make a test case out of it and then found themselves unable to let go of it. Initially after the fairly severe recession that struck not only the U.S. but more or less all the countries of the U.S. bloc in the late '50s—'57-'58 or so—after that, while there was a very partial sort of

downturn in 1960-61, there was, in any case, a very long period of expansion of the U.S. economy and many of the economies of the U.S. bloc.

You can see how the Vietnam war figured into this and how that ultimately turned into its opposite also. In the short run, the spending associated with that war generated a temporary economic stimulus, not only for the U.S. but especially for the others, Japan and West Germany, which had sold quite a bit of materiel to the U.S. to carry on the war and were also able to ride that stimulus. But by the late '60s and going into the early '70s, this war was beginning, politically and economically, to turn into its opposite. This was a concentration point where politically U.S. imperialism was being battered, was being weakened and having a more difficult time holding its bloc together. France under DeGaulle, for instance, began to challenge the U.S. politically, even while accepting overall and in fact relying overall on the U.S. nuclear umbrella and its international strength, particularly in standing off the Soviets. Within that context and only within that context, France began to challenge the U.S. within its sphere, politically and economically. There were also challenges coming from other imperialist states within the U.S. bloc. And, by the late '60s and early '70s, there were the beginnings of what has now become very clear: an ongoing and deepening crisis, though it hasn't gone straight line down either. Even in this last decade which has been marked and characterized overall by crisis, it has not been a straight line down. It has gone in the motion of a spiral and through twists and turns because it is developing through contradiction and through the interpenetration of different contradictions. But, still, there is a clear motion which began to emerge by the late '60s and early '70s, which saw the turning into its opposite of a number of things: the running up against, in a much more profound way, the limitations of what had been done earlier; the limitations of some of the transformations that went on in a partial and distorted way in some of these third world countries, the turning into its opposite of that in a significant way; and the turning into its opposite in both the political and economic dimension of the whole Vietnam experience of U.S. imperialism. 1968, the year of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, was also the year that saw the first major assault on the dollar by other imperialists; the dollar's weakening was very much linked with the financing of the war.

As this was happening at that time in the late '60s and early '70s, it's not that surprising that there was a certain expectation, and in a certain way many of us who were active, and in far greater numbers than just those of us who were in and around the RU,\* tended to fall into this, despite maybe even knowing better in a theoretical sense, at least partially: we saw U.S. imperialism going much more straight down; and even if we saw the revolution being a ways off, we saw things developing, if not absolutely in a straight line, still generally heading in that direction. We didn't anticipate that there would be contradictory motion within that overall decline of U.S. imperialism in this period, including a significant lull and

\* RU—The Revolutionary Union, the organization which played the key role in the founding of the Revolutionary Communist Party.

even an ebb, a retreat, if you will, in the revolutionary movement—not only in the U.S. but generally internationally for a period. And it's not too surprising, I say, because a lot of things were coming together and being concentrated in an adverse way for U.S. imperialism and its bloc on the whole in those years. What seemed to be an impregnable bastion and citadel of reaction was really taking an ass kicking. And not only was that true in the military sphere, not only was it being politically exposed and being shown ideologically to be bankrupt and criminal even more profoundly and even more broadly than before, but also economically it was shown that it was, as Lenin once called imperialism, a colossus with feet of clay. There were very sharp contradictions and despite all the vaunted prosperity of the U.S., there was within that the clear signs of decay and stagnation and crisis, signs that U.S. imperialism had not conquered and overcome the laws that are inherent in its own motion, its own contradictions.

So this began to appear, but what was not so clear or perhaps to a significant degree was not so clear at the time, were the reserves it still had and the way in which it could maneuver. And eventually the leaders of U.S. imperialism made a conscious choice, and obviously through a great deal of struggle (the terms of which aren't entirely clear to us); but clearly such struggle was part of this whole process of trying to deal with changing relations in the world and the emergence of a spiraling motion of deeper crisis and things turning into their opposites and coming to a head in a way. For example, Nixon, who at one point was very strongly backed by the great bulk of the bourgeoisie, was thrown out by the bourgeoisie. This was just one manifestation, in the form of the whole Watergate scandal, but obviously this was about much more profound and significant things than a few tapes and so on. But on the other hand there were the reserves and there was some maneuvering room and, through a tremendous amount of struggle, there was a resolution to do certain things, to maneuver, regroup and try to recoup certain losses, to pull the bloc back together and, on the basis of and as part of tightening things up, to prepare for meeting the rising challenge that was coming from the Soviet Union.

### Soviet Challenge

Now this is a complex question, but this challenge from the Soviets was governed both by the greater necessity it faced and the greater freedom it enjoyed. Necessity because of its inner compulsion, its internal contradictions, contradictions of the imperialist system, which were determining the Soviet Union's motion, but also freedom because of what was happening with U.S. imperialism in the sphere of international relations, the way in which various elements, such as the revolutionary struggles in the third world and the contradictions within the U.S. bloc were interpenetrating. The Soviets on the basis of necessity were able to take advantage of both the weakened position of U.S. imperialism and

the internal contradictions of these revolutionary struggles in the third world, in terms of the class forces contending, and some of their weaknesses, in the sense of the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois forces and ideologies having the upper hand and having the initiative in a lot of them. All this provided openings to the Soviets and presented the U.S. with a much sharper challenge to draw together and regroup its own forces, to restructure and refortify its alliances on a new basis to meet this challenge, both because of the deeper crisis in which it was caught and also because of the rising Soviet challenge.

So, this was what was generally on the agenda in the '70s, although it was full of contradiction and had different phases within it. And there are certain things that are clear in this as we look back over that decade, for example, the whole phenomena of OPEC and the oil price rise in particular coming after the '73 war between the Arab states and Israel. This price rise was not from the beginning, and simply, a plot by or at the initiative of U.S. imperialism, but it was seized on by U.S. imperialism, which is much less dependent on the oil from the Middle East than its allies in Europe and Japan where this dependence is especially acute. This was seized on by U.S. imperialism which, after all, still had the upper hand in the bulk of these OPEC states, including some of the especially crucial ones like Saudi Arabia and Iran under the Shah. While on the one hand the price rise created difficulties for U.S. imperialism and for its bloc, on the other, it was seized on by U.S. imperialism to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the other imperialists within its own bloc—those who remained within the general framework of the bloc led by the U.S. but who, like all dog-eat-doggers, were pursuing their own interests, even stepping up their competition and rivalry with the U.S. in the context of the kind of ass kicking it was getting in Vietnam and of all the chickens that were coming home to roost for the U.S., as these things were, in a concentrated way, turning into their opposite in the late '60s and early '70s. So the U.S. struck back. It struck back with the oil price rise and even before that in '71 with the tariffs and then especially the dollar devaluation. Nixon's whole so-called "new economic policy" and so on was in significant measure aimed at doing certain things within the U.S. but was also, perhaps in an overall sense and in a more important way, aimed at the whole structure of international economic relations and particularly the relations within the U.S. bloc. With a larger view towards pulling the bloc together, there was a degree of far-sightedness on Nixon's part, from the imperialist standpoint. But it wasn't just pulling it back together more strongly, it also meant and means doing this on the basis of a firmer hand and the reassertion on a new basis, that is, under new conditions, but a reassertion, of U.S. dominance and leadership of that bloc. The U.S. imperialists still (for example with OPEC) had the reserves and the ability to do this even while the general motion was toward deeper and deeper crisis. They were more and more sharply facing the need to deal with the challenge coming from the Soviets and to prepare to take that challenge head on. And the other imperialists within the U.S. bloc were also, by the same mo-

tion and by the same contradictions, propelled toward seeking to refortify that bloc even as they were still trying to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the U.S.

## Vietnam and the Coming Conjunction

The fact is that U.S. imperialism, while it did come to a sort of crucial juncture in the late '60s and early '70s in which things were turning in a very powerful way into their opposite, particularly as focused up around Vietnam, was not in a situation in which it had to put everything on the line. If you want to make a certain analogy (in fact, we've made this before, in the last Central Committee report), as long as it's not applied mechanically or taken too far, but there is a certain analogy with the difference between the situation of Russia in the 1904-1905 war with Japan, on the one hand, which gave rise to a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary movement on a certain scale, but not one which succeeded, a situation which in fact found the ruling class in Russia with more room to maneuver and not with all of its reserves having to be brought into play and exhausted to a large degree, versus World War I, on the other hand, when their reserves were in fact exhausted and when Russia did, for a number of different reasons, become a focal point of world contradictions. In that sense, again as long as we don't treat this mechanically, Russia did become a, not by necessity the only, weak link of the imperialist system which was broken at that point—owing both to those objective conditions and to the subjective factor and the correct line, work and preparation that had been carried out under Lenin's leadership. So, there is a certain analogy: Vietnam was, again without being mechanical about these analogies, more like a 1904-1905 war with Japan; it was very important and in a certain sense signalled what was yet to come and what is in large part still to come in terms of the much more profound expression of the concentration of these contradictions. In and of itself, Vietnam revealed the internal contradictions and their sharpening up and the underlying weaknesses of U.S. imperialism, despite its remaining reserves and remaining strength. But it was not the case that U.S. imperialism was forced to throw all its reserves into that kind of situation. It was not forced to put everything on the line and do or die in a certain sense around Vietnam. It threw a tremendous amount in, but then it maneuvered its way out and began to pay attention to some of the other key aspects of its sphere of influence. It had the "Year of Europe" in 1973 and began to pay attention to shoring up, refortifying and regrouping its whole international sphere of influence and to dealing with both the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and also the rivalry and competition within its own bloc from the other imperialists, on the other hand. It was able to do that. That's not to metaphysically say that in some absolute sense and abstractly that the situation could not have become more serious at the time. Vietnam was a concentration point, but it was not the case that Vietnam became—and it was unlikely

to, given the way things were developing and had developed to that point—a concentration point which would in turn spark off a whole international confrontation.

In other words, something like Vietnam may be the particular thing that becomes a concentrated "flash point" (or whatever they call it) that may react back upon the whole of world relations as they're shaping up and be the thing that compels all the forces—in particular the two rival imperialist blocs—to throw everything on the line against each other, or virtually all their reserves. Of course, there'll be unevenness within that. U.S. imperialism didn't have to throw anything like all of its reserves into World War 1 or World War 2, but this time U.S. imperialism will. Now, whether there'll be other imperialists that will be able (undoubtedly in a more limited degree or almost certainly more limited degree) to keep some of their reserves "in reserve" and be able to maneuver to come out of the next world war stronger is something we can't predict now. It depends a lot on things which can't be certainly, fully foreseen, including the revolutionary struggles in the world, and even what we do will help influence that one way or another. But that is what is shaping up now. And this is calling forth various different forces: the imperialists are being forced into much more direct and sharp confrontation with each other, particularly the two blocs of imperialists, and the masses of people throughout the world are being called into motion, into action, and into deeper thinking by the heightening of these contradictions; there is again a rise of upheaval, of struggle and of revolutionary movement in various parts of the world.

## A Shifting in the '70s

I used the analogy before of war communism, talking about why some people, for example in the U.S., in a limited way made compromises or even up to a certain point made their peace, at least for a time, with the system because they became exhausted and saw that there was a question of having to go on living in a position of opposition to the established order for an extended and seemingly indefinite period without the prospect of revolution. That's not something the majority of people or anything like the majority can maintain all the time. People who "knew better," people who still believed in revolution and still hated and even today still hate the system and maybe even in their own thinking did not at all give up the idea of fighting against it if another opportunity presented itself—a lot of these people, maybe at least to some degree consciously, retreated. They were tired, they were exhausted, there was a shifting, they didn't understand consciously fully why. We didn't understand fully why either and our understanding of this is still being deepened and we're really, I think, only beginning to get a qualitatively deeper and more all-around understanding of it.

But there were these shifts in the world. On the one

hand, the Soviets were able to make their way into a lot of these revolutionary movements in a qualitatively greater way and turn them in a different kind of direction which produced contradictory results. Some forces gravitated more towards the Soviets as a result of that, other forces were repulsed by that because they had enough of an understanding of what the Soviet Union was to know that that was no good, but they became demoralized or disoriented by it. They didn't see an alternative to being under the domination of one or the other of the imperialist great powers or imperialist blocs, the West or the East. And, on the other hand, U.S. imperialism finally did extricate itself from Vietnam—on the basis of being defeated, but still not throwing everything in and being pulled down all the way.

If you remember, by the time that Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, was finally liberated (and Cambodia was also liberated at roughly the same time), we all sort of felt that feeling of joy, watching that in 1975, after U.S. imperialism had been forced out and was not even in a position to give the kind of support to its lackeys there that would enable them to hold on. But the world had shifted enough that it didn't, in a certain way, have the *same* significance, if you want to get sort of metaphysical about it, although it was significant, as it would have had if it happened in 1970, because already the shifting contradictions in the world were such that this was now no longer the focal point of world contradictions in the way that it had been. That's another reflection of the same kind of thing that I'm talking about.

So in large part, not just in the U.S. but throughout the world as a whole, there was a certain retreat or a feeling, at least to some degree, of disorientation and a certain exhaustion; and it even affected the conscious forces, including our own party certainly, and also those more broadly who had been a part of the movement of opposition, part of the struggle, even been conscious revolutionaries. Because people can fight heroically, and they can fight, like in the Chinese liberation war or in Vietnam for long periods of time with little rest, but everything still proceeds in spirals, even with all that, and people can't fight indefinitely on a very intense level, which is what the latter part of the '60s into the early '70s was in the U.S. in general, and much more generally than that throughout the world. They can't fight that way indefinitely. And if after a certain period of time there is a shift in the way the contradictions of the world are expressing themselves and interpenetrating, and a shift in the relation of the forces, understood in that kind of materialist dialectical way, then, there's a need for people to regroup—in fact, to varying degrees there's a consciousness of this—and with some people, it even takes a form that they temporarily retreat. In other words, some of the reserves, if you will, of the more conscious, revolutionary forces are themselves exhausted temporarily—and it takes the further development of the contradictions and their further sharpening before some of these reserves can be called back into motion and even some won back over from the camp of the enemy, where they may have temporarily been attracted at least in part, to the side of the revolutionary forces.

Generally this is what was going on, but it wasn't going on country by country, internally, with only secondary relationships between one country and the next. In an overall sense, it was going on on a world scale in terms of the way these contradictions of the imperialist system, and the forces of imperialism and the forces arrayed against it were expressing themselves, and the shifts in that during this period from the early '70s through the mid-'70s and toward the late '70s. I think it's extremely important to understand because it enables us to grasp and to draw the appropriate lessons from this very sharply contradictory phenomenon. Coming out of World War 2, imperialism had gotten a new spurt on the basis of the resolution, partial and temporary, of the contradictions going into that war, and then through some of the changes that were made in its aftermath. Despite the struggles and tremendous revolutionary upsurges in opposition to this, there was still this sort of temporary *surge* of imperialism with U.S. imperialism at the head. The '70s was a period, however, where the weaknesses of the imperialist system were much more sharply manifesting themselves, when a lot of the strengths it had gotten were turning into their opposite. And despite the fact that there was a tremendous setback for the international working class with the rise to power of a new bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s and its transformation into an imperialist superpower and the head of an imperialist bloc, by the '70s the contradictions within that were also beginning to manifest themselves. Some of the developments in Poland, even in certain ways the 1968 Czechoslovakia events, while they showed the ruthlessness, in a certain sense the strength of Soviet social-imperialism, also showed the sharp contradictions that were gripping it and that were already beginning to sharply manifest themselves—and which would further deepen.

So, the '70s were, on the one hand, a period when the weaknesses, the contradictions, the crisis of imperialism and the sharpening of its contradictions can be more clearly seen. On the other hand, it was a period in which some consolidation took place and some gains were made because of the way the rival imperialists, particularly the two rival imperialist blocs, were moving, the necessity they faced and the freedom they had and the maneuvering that they both carried out—the Soviets more by using revolutionary movements against U.S. imperialism (at least that was one extremely important form of what they were able to do and did more fully), and the U.S. imperialists by regrouping and reorganizing their bloc and reasserting their leadership in a firmer way and on a new basis. These two things, on the one hand, the growing weakness, crisis, the much sharper manifestation of the contradictions of the imperialist system and, on the other hand, the actual gains or at least maneuvers that the rival imperialists were able to carry out, even at the same time as they came more sharply and directly into profound confrontation with each other, were going on at the same time in the '70s. And as a result of it, there was also this sort of lull or overall ebb in the revolutionary struggle and the revolutionary movement for these different reasons.

## Prospects Sharpening Up

So, you had this period of the '70s which has been correctly described, for example in the preparatory material of *America in Decline*, as a period of crisis and development toward war, not as a period of great strength for imperialism. But at the same time as there is a much deeper crisis and things are sharpening up much more than they were, let's say in the '60s, even with all the tumultuous character of that decade, still the movement of opposition from the masses of people and the revolutionary struggles in the world are not as advanced and not as powerfully expressing themselves, not assuming such a powerful form as they were in the '60s. So this can lead spontaneously, and has led a number of people, to the conclusion that all there is about the '70s into the '80s is a very negative thing—namely, yes, the imperialists are in crisis, but they are getting ready to go to war and there's the whole danger of that, but there's not any real prospect of doing anything about it, that is, there's no real prospect of struggling against it and making revolution and fundamentally altering the world in that way either before, during or in the aftermath of world war. What's missed in that view, and what we've been stressing from different angles and giving more and more emphasis to as our own understanding of this has been deepened and developed, is precisely the need to grasp the ways in which the very same process which is heightening the contradictions between the imperialists and sharpening up the confrontation between them and leading them toward war is also sharpening up all the contradictions of this era, including the different expressions of the contradiction between the masses of people and the imperialists, and is sharpening up the revolutionary prospects and developments in the world. That is beginning to manifest itself again now, so that people, even spontaneously, are beginning to see more of that. But there is a need to make a leap and to begin to see the interconnection between these two different aspects, that is, the sharpening of the inter-imperialist contradictions, on the one hand, and the sharpening of the contradiction and struggle between the masses and the imperialists in its different forms and expressions on the other hand. There is precisely the need to grasp the spiral motion toward and the gathering together of the contradictions and the shaping up of an historic conjuncture which will influence the development of things in the world for decades to come and in turn upon which the conscious revolutionary forces—precisely by grasping this—can exert a tremendous influence, and influence things in the world for decades to come as well. That's what we have to continually and ever more deeply and from different angles and in a more all-around way, grasp, and also arm and educate broader and broader forces. And we also have an internationalist duty to put forth our understanding of that and to struggle with people over a correct understanding of this, as well as a need to carry this out within the U.S.

The more that's done, the more that people will recognize what we've been stressing over and over again: that at the same time that there is a sharpening up of con-

tradictions between the imperialists and the growing danger and the growing prospects of inter-imperialist war, with all the horror and destruction that really will entail—and we can't underestimate that or people will think and correctly so that we're not serious—ultimately more important, and where we can in fact exercise our initiative and freedom, is the real fact of the heightening and growing prospects and developments for revolution in the world which are part of the same process which is bringing all this to a head, to the conjuncture shaping up. The more that we enable people to grasp this, the more they'll see that this is not just sloganeering, but that this is a profound truth and that the very events which are, on the one hand, striking horror into people, and not without reason, are also calling into motion and will increasingly call into motion the forces that can ultimately put an end to this, if not through this particular conjuncture, at least can make real leaps toward that, and which in the final analysis, can, must, and will put an end to this. To understand this ebb is important, not just in and of itself, although it's important to do that. But precisely the most important aspect of understanding this ebb is understanding it in terms of what's shaping up now and in terms of the future, and how in fact that ebb was only a partial expression of the sharpening up and heightening of these contradictions with the growing prospects on the positive side, that is, for revolution and toward the final abolition of the system which in fact is now presenting in a concentrated way all the negative things which do strike real horror and repulsion into people.

## Class Polarization Among Black People

**Q:** I wanted to talk a little about the differences between the Black national question now and what happened in the '60s, particularly in regard to the point you were making that the imperialists had some reserves. One of the reserves was that out of the '60s and the Black liberation struggle a real class structure developed among the Black population. You see it in some of the larger cities where they have really large Black populations, like Atlanta, Detroit and Oakland, California, where the mayor is Black and a lot of the whole power structure in the city is Black—this whole rise of the Black petty bourgeoisie. I'd like to discuss what's that going to mean for things that are shaping up.

**BA:** Initially, the presence of the petty bourgeoisie was one of the things that marked the movement in the '60s, if you include the students who were at the forefront of the civil rights movement and if you take overall the forces that were active and at the forefront of the whole Black liberation struggle in the '60s. A significant part of the movement of

that time was an expression of the frustration, sometimes formulated into more concrete demands and sometimes a more general expression of frustration, of a lot of the petty bourgeoisie among the Black people—frustration at their basic conditions as a part of an oppressed nation and their resulting concrete position in society. On the one hand, there was a whole transformation of the Black nation going on and the Black masses were being liberated from the land—in the form of being thrown off of the land—but also from an historical standpoint being liberated from the land, being transformed from largely scattered peasants in semi-feudal relations to proletarians, although at the bottom layers of the proletariat, concentrated in the urban ghettos. But along with that whole transformation there were the rising expectations among a lot of the Black masses generally and particularly those out of the professional and intellectual strata. Even with all the discrimination that they suffered, there were rising expectations—and those expectations were largely frustrated. Relatively speaking for the society as a whole, including even for the Black masses, the '60s was not a period where from the strictly economic standpoint their position and their conditions were more backward and more difficult than they had been previously. If anything, somewhat the opposite was true. But precisely in the society as a whole the changes were better than for the oppressed nationalities, including Black people.

In other words, in society as a whole, the '60s was a period of expansion in the economy, not very much unemployment, wages going up, earnings going up, and in a certain sense because of that the lower level, and the depressed level, the discriminated situation of the Black people stood out. This was true for Black people in general and particularly in certain ways it was very sharply expressed among the Black petty bourgeoisie. A lot of the movement at that time sprang from that and was an expression of it.

### **The Slip in Status of the "Responsible Negro Leaders"**

And there were further developments especially as the Black masses on the other hand got more into motion and took their own direction—gave a slight "inkling" of how they felt; Eldridge Cleaver once said to Terry Francois, a Black bootlicker as he called him (and Cleaver was soon to know a lot better what *that* was) maybe Detroit and Watts gave you an inkling of how the Black masses felt. As they began to do that, there was a response on the part of the bourgeoisie. There was a lot of repression, but there was also the liberal line, as represented in the Kerner report, and specifically a very important tactic was to inject a lot of financial, political and ideological support into the Black petty bourgeoisie and build it up very rapidly—and in particular a lot of *new* Black petty bourgeoisie. Before that you remember your famous "Responsible Negro Leaders"; among them were never included people like Malcom X who really voic-

ed the aspirations and represented the interests of the Black masses in rising up; they were never included. "Responsible Negro Leaders today denounced Malcom X's call for a violent uprising on the part of Black people," etc. If you remember the Martin Luther Kings, the Roy Wilkinsons, and so on were always dragged out as Responsible Negro Leaders. Well, they were largely discredited through the upsurge of the '60s—even discredited among major sections of the Black petty bourgeoisie. A lot of those old leaders should be considered bourgeois anyway.

But it wasn't these old forces who were built up so much as new ones—even people who'd been active and militant but came out of the petty bourgeoisie; a lot of them were co-opted in various ways. There were the poverty programs, broadly speaking. I wouldn't say a tremendous amount, but relatively speaking a large amount of money was injected into the minority businesses through the Small Business Administration, and in other ways, you know, "openings for Black professionals" and so on. Some of these concessions are still around; for example to cite a couple of cities, in Atlanta and Oakland, there are Black mayors. And throughout the south there are hundreds of elected Black officials, whereas previously such a thing was very rare, in fact people got killed trying to vote and trying to elect and be elected in the south on even the local level. That was a concession made in the face of the struggle. Similarly, look at the media. It's true that they still don't like to have any significant, serious Black movie actors; they keep them downgraded even more so now than, say, ten years ago. But it's also true if you look on the news programs, for example, and in other areas of the media, you see a lot of Black faces, which you would never see before. Black faces in "High Places."

Those were some of the concessions they made and also in my opinion (and this is something that needs to be looked into much more deeply) they launched a real, very concerted cultural offensive; there was an ideological offensive, especially concentrated in the cultural arena, against a lot of the Black youth. This may not be literally how it began, but what marked it for me was *Shaft*, and then on to *Superfly* and all these sorts of things. They gave some room for "Black expression" in the cultural sphere, which wasn't really something coming from out of the uprising of the masses, nor certainly an expression of it; it was in fact aimed directly against the section that they were especially concerned about which was the extremely volatile Black youth, the basic proletarian Black youth. A lot of that was aimed specifically at confusing, disorienting them, and derailing their militancy, which had manifested itself in a very powerful way. It was aimed at derailing and misdirecting that militancy and rebelliousness into harmless channels, individualistic channels, and at promoting this whole line that goes along with the material promotion of the Black petty bourgeoisie that the way to get back at the system is to beat the man at his own game, to be slicker than he is at his own thing.

In all of this, both in the ideological sphere and culturally in particular, as well as in the material sphere, there were

some real concessions made and also some real steps taken to steer the offensive back at the masses, including by misdirecting their upsurge and rebelliousness and their volatility and channelling it into highly individualistic directions — making "me" the message. By the late '70s, the cultural expression of this was disco (and some other things). You have to be careful because the opposition to disco does divide sharply into two; there is some outright racist opposition to disco because it tends on a certain level to mix Black and white. But there is also the fact that disco was, I think, an extreme expression of the highly individualistic, even narcissistic, ideology that they were trying to promote among the youth generally and particularly the Black youth as well as the masses more broadly. It's extremely cynical and even somewhat consciously the expression of "we tried to change things before, we did all that political stuff, all that struggle stuff and now, get what you can out of life, good clothes, good cars; take shit all week and then go to the club on the weekend." That's the kind of mentality they've been able to promote in the late '70s to a certain degree. These are scattered ideas that I have that need to be looked into and synthesized to a higher level. But in the ideological expression they were very concerned to do what they were also very concerned to do in the material sphere, which was to build up petty-bourgeois forces among Black people, a petty-bourgeois social base and petty-bourgeois ideology and also more outright bourgeois forces, although they had to bring forward new ones; they had to bring forward Andy Young in place of Whitney Young. They had to have somebody who could say he was part of the '60s who could talk a little bit different, a little more militant line, a little bit more hip, up with the modern times.

All this is different expressions of the fact that through the '60s, through the '70s and moving into the '80s, there has been an increased class polarization among the Black people. Within the Black nation there are petty-bourgeois strata and forces, and more so now, even though they're being undermined and having a lot of their material concessions yanked away from them as the crisis is deepening. But still the bourgeoisie is not going to yank that away completely because it recognizes the important political and ideological role these forces play as a buffer. I don't think this is the *main* factor accounting for the ebb in the Black liberation struggle as well as the overall movement of the late '60s and early '70s. I think that a lot of the other things we talked about, especially on the international plane as well as things more broadly in the U.S. society itself, account *mainly* for that ebb. But within that, one important thing to recognize, which has implications for the future and the sharpening struggles of the period ahead, is the class polarization and the role of these Black petty-bourgeois forces and even bourgeois forces in acting as a social base for reformism and even for American patriotism. Look at the Muslims — Wallace Muhammed's World Community of Islam — with the American flag now. Some, like this organization, have gone from their earlier sharp denunciation (however much it may have been distorted by a religious and nationalist orienta-

tion) of U.S. society, to one of promoting patriotism and the flag—all that's personified by Muhammed Ali.

### Revolutionary Nationalist Trend

So this whole question of the sharper class polarization among the Black people has to be grasped and explained with a materialistic dialectical analysis to the Black masses and also more broadly to the masses of people—all that's true and important. But on the other hand it would be a mistake to think that there will be or can be no more revolutionary expression based among the Black petty bourgeoisie. It would be a mistake to think that no more revolutionary program or organization can arise out of, and be an expression of, the sentiments and in a certain way the interests and position of the Black petty bourgeoisie in the present period. In fact, already we've seen there have been various expressions of a radical opposition to U.S. imperialism of this sort; revolutionary nationalist sentiments, programs, organizations have even experienced a certain resurgence in the recent years. So it would be wrong to think that that kind of thing no longer can exist and that there can no longer be any positive role or any significant positive role for that. There already is and there will increasingly be radical petty-bourgeois, even revolutionary petty-bourgeois, revolutionary nationalist sentiments, programs and organizations, and their influence will grow, not diminish among the basic proletarian Black masses. In terms of the struggle for what line leads, it will be in struggle against the proletarian line, the revolutionary communist/proletarian internationalist line, among the Black masses. However, just because they'll be locked in struggle doesn't mean that there won't be any basis for unity. In fact, we've been pointing out that the revolutionary nationalist forces can be a powerful ally of the proletariat in the struggle for revolution against the imperialist system. But, on the other hand, there is a dialectic there. The more strongly and correctly the struggle is waged for leadership of the proletarian line, the revolutionary communist/proletarian internationalist trend, the more it will be possible to build unity with those kind of forces because the unity won't be possible without struggle. But an attitude of all struggle and no unity would be quite wrong. It would be depriving the proletariat of its allies; it also would lead in fact to the isolation of the proletarian forces, not to the isolation of the petty-bourgeois forces who have a great deal of spontaneity going for them. Spontaneously there are a lot of things that tend to favor those kinds of forces.

So there will be a radical and revolutionary expression and movement among the Black petty bourgeoisie in the coming period because of the fact that this is *not* the early '70s, this is a period when the crisis will hit with full force in society, in the imperialist system as a whole, and is now deepening; they're heading towards a situation of historic conjuncture where all these contradictions are coming to a head. What is on the agenda on a world scale is world war

and revolutionary developments and heightened prospects for revolution internationally including heightened possibilities for revolution in the U.S. And all this is going to bring more Black petty-bourgeois radicalism or revolutionary nationalism. But still that's occurring within a different context than it occurred in the '60s, a different world context, and as part of that a different context within the U.S. And specifically in terms of the point we've been touching on, it's occurring in terms of a deepened and a sharpened class polarization among the Black masses. This is something which in the long term is actually more favorable to the proletarian trend, to the revolutionary communist/proletarian internationalist line, as opposed to even a revolutionary nationalist and certainly to a reformist pro-imperialist patriotic trend—even though it now has more material base than before among Black people and will of course be given tremendous ideological and political support by the bourgeoisie. Given the overall world crisis and the overall situation not just among the Black people, but in U.S. society as a whole, this polarization will be favorable to the proletariat if it is correctly grasped and correctly explained to the masses and if the correct policies are employed in relation to it as well as of course overall.

### Class Analysis of Revolutionary Nationalism

I was looking at a short essay written by Lenin in the period between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions on the subject of the Russian author Tolstoy. And there's a certain analogy here, though it's certainly not very direct and there are differences. Lenin was making the point that some people want to hold up Tolstoy as the voice of the Russian people. That, he says, is a distortion. In fact, Tolstoy did give expression in a very vivid and sharp way to the sentiments of a broad section of the Russian people, but precisely that section which stood between the two major classes in modern society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (which were also the two major classes coming to the fore on the stage even of backward Russian society.)

In particular in Russia, Lenin says, Tolstoy gave expression to the broad peasant masses. And Lenin said in that sense there was much to be learned from Tolstoy, much that's positive in what he did, but precisely if you take Tolstoy's work as the voice of the Russian people as a whole, or the most advanced expression, or the line and orientation and outlook to follow, then it turns it from a good thing into a bad thing, it turns it into its opposite. At the same time as Tolstoy's work involves denunciation and exposure of the system, and the suffering of the people and their outrage, it also involves and gives expression to the limitations of those class forces that are precisely between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and which are potential allies of the proletariat but do not have the same interests nor the same outlook as a class.

The rough analogy that I'm making here is to these

revolutionary nationalist trends. In other words, it would be quite wrong not to see in them an important expression of the outrage in U.S. society, the outrage of an important section of the people, even if numerically relatively small, that is the Black petty bourgeoisie and those strata among the Black masses that tend to gravitate spontaneously toward the outlook and program put forward representing the Black petty bourgeoisie. But, on the other hand, if a clear distinction isn't drawn and if it's thought that some of this revolutionary nationalist expression is really an expression of the sentiments and still more so of the interests of the *proletarian* masses of the Black people, and of their class interests as part of the broader proletariat, broader in the U.S. but even more than that of the international proletariat, ultimately and most fundamentally — if that confusion is made, and the very clear class difference there is slurred over or not brought out clearly and sharply, not only in our own understanding but to the masses broadly, then in terms of our work, that will turn into its opposite. It will work against our ability to correctly unite with and to seek to divert and channel toward the cause of proletarian revolution, even the most revolutionary of the nationalist sentiments and expressions that ultimately represent Black petty-bourgeois strata, even if they attract sections of the Black proletarian masses at different times and to different degrees. That analogy may have limitations, but I think it's helpful to pose it in that kind of way.

### International Arena Primary

Well, on the other hand, having stressed the importance of the deepened and sharpened class polarization within the Black nation, it's necessary, however to recall and re-emphasize a point that was made sharply in the struggle against the Bundists, that is against the nationalist deviations of the Black Workers Congress, the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, and a few forces even within our own organization at that time, the Revolutionary Union, which was the forerunner of the party. In the polemics with those forces, we made the point that the main arena of class struggle, and the most basic class contradiction in which the masses of Black people were involved was not the class contradiction between the Black proletariat and the Black bourgeoisie. And the main enemy of the Black masses was not the Black bourgeoisie. The main bourgeois force they had to struggle against — the target of their struggle — was not the Black bourgeoisie. In fact, sections of it might be able to be won over or at least neutralized in an all-around revolutionary struggle. But the target of *that* struggle — the all-around revolutionary struggle — had in fact to be the *imperialist* bourgeoisie and those social forces which were allied with it. And the basic class force in opposition to them, of which the Black masses were a crucial part, and which had to be developed as the leader of the revolution, was the proletariat as a *class*, that is, the proletariat of all nationalities,

with of course its vanguard forces, in particular its party, at the head. Now, ironically, those forces such as the Black Workers Congress and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, the Bundists, because of their own nationalism (and this was something we stressed in polemicizing against their line at that time), because of their very nationalism, they tended to make the Black bourgeoisie, or bourgeois forces among the oppressed nationalities more generally in U.S. society, more of an enemy, saw them more as an obstacle than the imperialist bourgeoisie itself. Actually this was an expression of their narrow nationalist outlook.

There is an important lesson there which has to be drawn and applied particularly in today's situation where there is not only the deepened and sharpened class polarization that has gone on among Black people, but more importantly there is the deepening and sharpening crisis, sharpening class contradictions in society as a whole and more than that in the world as a whole. In that context particularly, it's important to recall and to develop much more fully an aspect or dimension to this that was not entirely left out at the time of those polemics with the Bundists, but which we've deepened our overall understanding of a great deal since, and that is that even more fundamentally than the class contradiction in U.S. society itself, the basic class contradiction that the proletarian masses, including as a very important part of that in the U.S. the Black proletarian masses, are involved in is ultimately the class contradiction on an *international* scale; that is, there are in fact particularities to different countries, there are different processes and dialectics to the revolution within different countries, and within different types of countries, but that does not negate the fact that all that is integrated into a single process which takes place overall on a world scale. The single process of the advance from the bourgeois epoch to the communist epoch on a world scale is made up of very diverse streams and currents and processes, but they are integrated on a higher level into that overall process on a world scale. And this is a point that is very important to bring out to the masses, the proletariat and its allies. In general it's extremely important, and also it's important to deepen that understanding among the Black masses in terms of winning those proletarian Black masses away from the nationalist orientation and ideology and nationalist perspective to an internationalist and to a proletarian outlook and political line.

As we've stressed, and recently for example in the response I wrote to a "Black nationalist with communistic inclinations," if the arena is presented as merely one of the nation, and if the class contradiction is treated as taking place within that arena, even if you say you're taking the standpoint of the proletariat ("I'm for the Black proletariat against

the Black bourgeoisie" or whatever it might be), that arena by itself is too narrow and favors the bourgeoisie. In particular it favors not only Black bourgeois forces, but ultimately the imperialist bourgeoisie. Precisely in order to win the masses of proletarians—and here in particular we are talking about Black proletarians—in order to win them to a proletarian stand, to an internationalist stand and programme, it is necessary to present the framework and the arena and the horizons as they really fundamentally and most importantly exist; that is, certainly not limited to just the Black nation nor even just limited to U.S. society, but first of all and fundamentally the world as a whole and the process and the revolutionary struggle taking place on *that* level with its various diverse currents and subordinate processes, but as an integral overall process itself. This in fact is the only way in which the proletarian masses—including again particularly we're talking about the Black proletarian masses—can be won to the proletarian line.

One of the forms of class struggle is "What is the arena?" Is the arena the nation or is the arena the international situation and the world situation and the world struggle? And if the arena is presented as just the oppressed nation—that is, Black people—or just the U.S. society, then that's ultimately favorable to the bourgeoisie. It is precisely a point of class struggle to fight for people to grasp that the arena objectively is, and must be reflected in their consciousness as being, first of all and fundamentally the world arena and that the basic contradiction that they are involved in, in class terms, is between the proletariat and its allies against the imperialists and their allies on a world scale through all its various different processes and streams and currents. Without doing that it's not possible to win people to and continue to lead them on the basis of the proletarian line and proletarian politics. And also importantly, if secondarily, it is the only way in which the possible allies among, for example, Black petty-bourgeois forces or even some Black bourgeois strata and forces can be won over or at least neutralized with the development of a strong proletarian revolutionary current, and especially with the development of an overall revolutionary situation, revolutionary movement, and the actual struggle for the seizure of power and the transformation of society. So even as we stress the importance of the deepened and sharpened class polarization that has gone on within the Black nation, among the Black people, yet this can only be correctly understood, and the understanding only correctly utilized and turned into a strong weapon for the proletariat and for its struggle, if in an overall sense it is presented in this light and in this framework and with this kind of orientation and those kinds of horizons are what people's sights are directed toward.



# ***The Disarmament Mirage***

by R. Ulin

Within the antiwar movement there are diverse views on the causes of war – some blame the existence of weapons themselves, others postulate various analyses of its social underpinnings. And there are differences over the tactics to prevent it – for instance, “direct action” versus working through the established political process. Yet for all the important diversity in today’s movement against nuclear weapons and war, most all – from more radical forces to those firmly wedded to the existing order – hold to one or another variant of the disarmament program: that reducing and ultimately abolishing weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, is the most direct and realistic means of preventing world war and achieving the avowed goal of much of the movement – peace. Indeed this premise appears to many so self-evident that it is rarely discussed in its own right.

Yet if any set of ideas needs critical examination today, it is this one. While it may seem realistic to attack war by attacking the weapons of war and to counter the threat of imperialist nuclear war with a program of peace, this is a superficial – and deadly wrong – analysis. The prospect of disarmament and a just peace under imperialism is a mirage, and like any mirage, belief in its reality can be fatal.

As long as the system of imperialism exists disarmament is impossible, and war is inevitable (and practically continuous). *World* war can be prevented only by the overthrow of imperialist powers, by revolution in large and/or strategic parts of the world. The politics of disarmament, however, glosses over the depth of imperialist barbarism, even as that barbarism is ever more evident. Further, the disarmament thesis is actually very conservative, accepting much of the outlook – and the continued existence – of the very order that has spawned the nuclear danger. Practically, this viewpoint and program leaves the masses vulnerable to ruling-class deceptions and actually hinders the struggle against war preparations and imperialist war. Finally, it is a diver-

sion from the only real hope for preventing a third world war: the forcible disarming of imperialist ruling classes through revolution.

Promoted as a "rational" response to the danger of nuclear war, the politics of disarmament reflects not abstract reason, but a craving for peace and stability, and a desperate hope that imperialism can somehow be persuaded to behave "sensibly." It is an outlook conditioned by forty years of peace (peace, in the sense of the absence of world war), an outlook reflecting a certain stake in the existing world order, one which, to paraphrase Marx, does not get beyond the ideological and political limits of that order. It relies on the bourgeoisie, and not the independent historic initiative of the masses, to end the threat of war.

This is not to say that we accept the cold cynicism of those defenders of the present political order – and of imperialist possession of nuclear weapons in particular – who tell us that the abolition of nuclear weapons is, for all practical purposes, a utopian fantasy. (See, for example, the Harvard Nuclear Study Group 1983.) Our difference with advocates of "disarmament" is not over the ultimate desirability of abolishing weapons and war, but over how, to put it bluntly, any such abolition is impossible without the revolutionary overthrow of the social relations that produce militarization and war. As Mao put it, "We are advocates of the abolition of war, we do not want war; but war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun" (Mao 1975, 2:225).

We do not, however, hold that opposition to war preparations is somehow meaningless or counterproductive, or that the millions protesting nuclear weapons and the danger of nuclear war are not an important force in preventing world war. In fact just the opposite is the case. Opposing imperialist war preparations now is essential in creating favorable conditions for a successful revolutionary attempt that could prevent the imperialists from launching a third world war; and the antiwar movement – or significant sections of it – has the potential to be an important component of such an attempt. Our argument is not with antiwar protest but over what politics guide much of that protest, including the view of disarmament as a strategic goal.

The stakes involved, literally the future of life on earth, make it crucial for all who are struggling to abolish nuclear weapons and war to rigorously examine the ideas guiding their actions and not cling to appearance or to what's comforting. Grappling with these questions is itself part of confronting – and resolutely opposing – nuclear war. It is in that spirit that we write the present article, which will examine the basic premises and program of the disarmament demand, its effect on the struggle to prevent world war, and the outlook and material conditions fostering it.

## THE IMPERIALIST LOGIC OF ARMS AND WAR

### The Disarmament Argument

The disarmament program today centers around the demand that the U.S. and the Soviet Union, in particular, reduce their nuclear arsenals. The means for accomplishing this: convincing and/or pressuring the governments, usually by building a mass movement so large they are "forced" to go along.\* Once the superpowers reduce their arsenals – particularly their most "destabilizing" weapons – and step back from the nuclear brink, it is further presumed that global tensions could then be eased and the threat of nuclear war lessened. This, some argue, could pave the way for yet further steps to reduce and eventually abolish nuclear weapons and convert military industries to peaceful and constructive uses.

All this is deemed possible without a revolution because, according to the disarmament view, world war is not endemic to either Western or Soviet society. Indeed, it is said that in the nuclear era, war is irrational and contrary to the interests of all humanity, even the ruling classes. Neither side could hope to win a nuclear war, which could only result in the destruction of civilization. Instead the ruling classes, along with everyone else, would lose all – economically and politically. Thus, goes the argument, Clausewitz's dictum that "war is a continuation of politics by other means" has been made moot, because weapons have eclipsed politics as the fundamental factor shaping world events, or have, by their very destructiveness, rendered any possible political gain through global war impossible.

According to the advocates of disarmament, the arms race does not arise from superpower war preparations but from causes such as an "action-reaction" dynamic, set into motion by the structure and ideology of the cold war and the bloc system, the momentum of technological development and the vested interests of the "military-industrial complex,"

\* While sometimes proponents of disarmament make declarations to the effect that the governments must be forced to disarm, such talk is divorced from any discussion of the concrete tasks of revolution and is not at all equivalent to a revolutionary position. The disarmament position is that disarmament can be accomplished short of revolution, i.e., with the existing governments still in power. For example, Randall Kehler, a leader of the nuclear freeze movement, declared before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee that "Perhaps it is true that governments are not capable of disarming themselves and that people must disarm governments." He then explained just what he and most of the mainstream disarmament movement mean by "the people disarming governments." The American people, he continued, are "now telling their elected representatives what that [arms] policy should be" (Testimony by Randall Kehler 1982, 1).

or just plain irrational calculation of national interest. War is a danger, in this view, because of the potential for accident or miscalculation during crisis, but it is not the inevitable product of imperialist politics and economics. All this is confirmed, it is often argued, by the existence of prominent establishment figures – nuclear doves if you will – who themselves have raised a hue and cry about the “irrationality” of the arms race and the “unwinnability” of nuclear war.

Alva Myrdal, in her book *The Game of Disarmament – How the United States and Russia Run the Arms Race*, lays out the essentials of the disarmament position:

Yet any rational person knows that “winning” such a war is an impossible undertaking. How can political leaders blind themselves to the true costs? No one has succeeded in making it remotely plausible that a war between the superpowers could be stopped once it became nuclear. . . .

The guiding principle in my criticism is rationality. The building up of the giant military establishments has gone, and is going, right against what would be rational from the point of view of the interests of every nation. This applies as well to the superpowers’ policy of increasing armaments. It is beyond all reason. . . .

Above all else, the two superpowers must be brought to want disarmament. . . . The superpowers must be pressured until they agree. (Myrdal 1982, xv, xxv, xxii)

In the past several years, there have been a number of radical and leftist books published on the question of nuclear war. Among the most notable are *Protest and Survive* (Thompson and Smith 1981), *Exterminism and Cold War* (New Left Review 1982), *Beyond the Cold War* (Thompson 1982), and *Beyond Survival* (Albert and Dellinger 1983). In addition, the Communist Workers Party, Line of March, the *Guardian*, and *Monthly Review*, among others, have written on the question of war and peace. These works attempt an analysis of the deeper causes of world war, and some link the question to other facets of imperialist society such as racism, interventionism, and male chauvinism.

None of them, however, challenge the politics of disarmament. In fact their analyses seem to share the basic disarmament premises that world war is “irrational,” not an inevitable consequence of imperialism, that the arms race doesn’t reflect a drive toward interimperialist world war, that rational elements in the ruling class are opposed to such a war, and so on. For instance, these analyses generally view the escalating tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union not as a sign of heightened interimperialist rivalry and a prelude to world war, but as the beginning of a “new cold war,” caused by a U.S. drive to restore its global hegemony and ability to intervene in the oppressed nations as during the ‘50s and early ‘60s. The huge U.S. military build-up is

seen as being designed to force the Soviet Union to back down in crisis or confrontation over U.S. aggression in the oppressed nations, à la the Cuban Missile Crisis. (In these “new cold war” analyses the Soviet Union is seen as at worst militaristic and repressive but not as an imperialist power, and at best as a bastion of socialism.) *Monthly Review* dubbed the new U.S. “policy,” “nuclear chicken,” Line of March calls it “nuclear blackmail.” Some also argue that the U.S.’s military build-up has been undertaken to boost up key sectors of a sagging and crisis-ridden U.S. economy. The danger of nuclear war in these assessments is also peripheral to the workings of the system, arising from the potential for miscalculation or accident.\*

\* In *Beyond the Cold War* E.P. Thompson argues that:

It’s become necessary, then, to see Western imperialism as a force which originated in a rational institutional and economic matrix, but which, at a certain point, assumed an autonomous self-generating thrust in its own right, which can no longer be reduced by analysis to the pursuit of rational interests – which indeed acted so irrationally as to threaten the very empires of its origin and to pull them down. (Thompson 1982, 65)

And in his “Letter to America – On Peace, Power and Parochialism,” he writes:

There are two possible ways back from the precipice to which a threatened and dying ideology is conducting us. One is simply a reassertion within the power elites of the United States and the Soviet Union of the claims of rational self-interest. (Thompson 1984, 244).

The title of the *Guardian*’s main editorial in their “Special Disarmament Issue” sums up their position: “Disarm and Survive” (*Guardian* 1982). In their journal *The Eighties*, CWP talks of the “struggle for peace” and argues that “there is a split within the ruling class in the U.S. today precisely over the question of ‘containment,’ which has served as the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy for forty years,” and that this split has “polarized the ruling class into two large factions” (Tung and Janken 1984, 1, 61).

*Line of March* No. 12 states:

. . . U.S. imperialism’s escalation of the nuclear arms race, its attempts to break parity and regain decisive superiority over the Soviet Union for the purpose of enabling it once again to use “nuclear blackmail” to shore up its sagging empire. Consequently the disarmament movement – independent of the subjective political confusion of many of its supporters – objectively serves as a significant deterrent to the aggressive militarism of U.S. imperialism. (*Line of March* 1982, 10)

And further:

. . . there is not complete unanimity within the bourgeoisie on this course of action . . . and a major ruling class debate on the subject [of the “blackmail” policy] is shaping up. . . the political cost to the U.S. in pursuing the course outlined by Reagan may be more than the system can presently sustain (p. 32); [and this division is] a contradiction within the ruling class which, properly understood and handled, can be a strategic reserve for the proletariat. (*Line of March* 1982, 35)

*Monthly Review* most openly expressed the politics of these "disarmament leftists":

Perhaps Ronald Reagan and a few of the ideological fanatics around him really believe in the possibility of "winning" a nuclear war. But surely this cannot be the accepted wisdom of the U.S. ruling class which, after all, includes the world's largest and most advanced cadre of scientific and technological experts. . . .

We simply cannot believe that this class as a whole has suddenly gone mad and would knowingly tolerate a regime which has deliberately set out on a course of self-destruction. There *must* be some other explanation. (*Monthly Review* 1982, 8)

One hardly knows what to say in response to such newfound faith in imperialism – and sheer panic – masquerading as "Marxism"!

### **Nuclear War and Imperialist Rationality**

The problem with all the above-mentioned views – whether "Marxist" or straight-up disarmament – isn't so much their assessment of the potential effects of nuclear war. The essential problem is that they all blur over the social roots of war. The mainstream disarmament movement often analyzes things from the standpoint of humanity as a whole. *But there is no single "humanity" at this time, at least when it comes to political reality.* There is only humanity polarized and split into oppressors and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, and these classes have conflicting outlooks and interests on all questions, including that of nuclear war. The various "leftist" versions of disarmament recognize class conflict, but like the "humanity as a whole" school of thought, they gloss over the contradictions propelling imperialism toward war. Both views rest on a faulty conception of what constitutes "rationality" for imperialism, for despite the real madness and irrationality involved in it all, there is an *imperialist logic* to the arms race and global nuclear war.

The notion that nuclear war is irrational for the ruling classes is often presented as a kind of Marxist realism, grounded in what is "profitable" and in their economic interests. It assumes that the bourgeoisie totals up the pluses and minuses of going to war in terms of quantities of factories destroyed and sales lost, as well as the potential for political upheaval, and simply decides that nuclear war would be too risky and unprofitable. But these theories fail to comprehend the real motion and dynamics of capital and capitalist crisis. The question confronting capital isn't incrementally adding to profit margins, much less grinding on business as usual. In Marx's words, capital must "expand . . . or die." Its expansion, however, runs up against self-generated barriers and it is periodically engulfed in crisis, when a violent rupturing and thorough restructuring of the

whole economic (and especially under imperialism, political and military) framework in which accumulation has hitherto gone on occurs. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels stressed the radical, violent character of crisis and its resolution: the "enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces . . . by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. . . ." They also remarked that crisis "put on its trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois society" (Marx and Engels 1968, 38). Today that trial is much more severe, the consequences more politically acute, and the measures taken by the bourgeoisie more desperate and destructive.

In the imperialist epoch this radical restructuring can be accomplished only through recasting global political relations. Yet as Bob Avakian pointed out in his recent book, *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, "both sides desperately need a qualitative change in the whole structure of world relations *and each stands as the direct barrier to the other in achieving this*" (Avakian 1984, 21). Thus, this kind of major restructuring can only occur – and in fact has only been accomplished since the transition to imperialism – through inter-imperialist world war. Raymond Lotta writes in *America in Decline*:

The violent recasting of the international framework through war represents a leap in the organization of internationalized capital: the structure and allocation of capital, within national formations and on a world scale, is transformed. Crisis is the real concentration and forcible adjustment of the contradictions of bourgeois economy. In the imperialist epoch *inter-imperialist war is the only substantial "adjustment" of these contradictions than can occur, that is, outside their worldwide revolutionary resolution.* (Lotta with Shannon 1984, 149)

And again, this "violent recasting" isn't an option but a necessity that asserts itself independently of the will of the imperialists. The rulers of the rival blocs don't have the choice of simply preserving what they have: ". . . not to risk war is to guarantee losing control over everything, since the contradictions can only grow more intense and the contagion of political and economic crisis will spread" (Lotta with Shannon 1984, 151). Life and death crisis – the need to recast global relations or perish – defines the parameters of "rationality" for imperialism. From the standpoint of imperialism in crisis, war is the only "rational" choice.

Although the disarmament demand predates the nuclear era, the existence of nuclear weapons has given added impetus to the disarmament premises that war is a disaster for imperialism and that the destructiveness of nuclear war now overshadows whatever "Clausewitzian" politics might have driven rival powers to war in the past. Indeed, the potential for climatic and ecological disaster after nuclear war, described by many scientists, and all the difficulties foreseen by various bourgeois strategists in controlling and surviving a nuclear war – command and control breakdowns, the

millions killed in even a "counterforce" strike, the possibility that any use of nuclear weapons would quickly lead to all-out exchanges – are all grounded in reality. Things could easily get out of control – in more ways than one – in the course of a nuclear war, bringing devastation and horror that even the imperialists do not reckon on. At the very least, as Bob Avakian recently put it, "The imperialist system – as it now exists, West and East – is through . . ." (Avakian 1984, 39).

But to argue that this will prevent world war confounds cause and effect; it assumes that the effect of nuclear war negates the profound forces impelling imperialism to war. It is like arguing that a sun could never go nova, because the resultant explosion would destroy the very processes that constituted the sun. Rather, the fact that the imperialists are forced to take the *desperate gamble* of war is itself an exposure of the depth and all-consuming character of imperialist crisis. They have no other way out!

The idea that the destructiveness of war will shock the rival powers to their senses and compel them to "live and let live" (*Monthly Review* 1982, 11) also ascribes to them a control of events they don't have. Not only is peace with the enemy against their respective interests, the rivalry between them is also, fundamentally, "bigger than both of them" and beyond their control. Neither can trust the other not to seize upon an opening or weakness to go for a decisive advantage; neither knows what the other is plotting or how it will react to unforeseen events or crises; neither can rely on the good will or common sense of the other side for the protection of its vital "national interests." Both are prisoners of their overall contention.

This relates to the often-raised fear that nuclear war could be sparked by accident or miscalculation. Indeed either could spark a nuclear war. Yet such a particular event would be part of a larger fabric. Any single incident could begin a war only because the larger forces of imperialist rivalry and crisis had already set the stage. Instead of compelling a triumph of reason and international cooperation, the nuclear era has given new – and more deeply horrific – meaning to the *Communist Manifesto's* description of the bourgeoisie as being "like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells"; and a class that has "forged the weapons that bring death to itself" (Marx and Engels 1968, 37, 39).

The notion that it's possible to talk the ruling classes out of war because it's against their interests is an updated version of the Kautskyite apology for capitalist society. Lenin castigated this illusion during World War 1 as a refusal to make "an analysis of imperialism and an exposure of the depths of its contradictions" (Lenin 1977, 22:288), and a "petty-bourgeois *exhortation* to the financiers that they should refrain from doing evil" (Lenin 1977, 21:229):

Now that the armed conflict for Great-Power privileges has become a fact, Kautsky wants to *persuade* the capitalists and the petty bourgeoisie to believe that war is horrible, while disarmament is beneficial, in exactly the same way and with exactly

the same results as the Christian churchman, speaking from the pulpit, would persuade the capitalist to believe that love of one's fellow-men is a Divine commandment, as well as the spiritual yearning and the moral law of civilization. . . .

Is not this a philistine attempt to persuade financiers to renounce imperialism? Any attempt to frighten capitalists with the prospect of bankruptcy is like advising against speculating in shares on the Stock Exchange because many fortunes have been lost in this way. *Capital gains from the bankruptcy of a rival capitalist or of a rival nation, because in this way capital becomes more concentrated.* (Lenin 1977, 21:229-30, our emphasis)

### The Ruling Classes: Capital Personified

The rulers of the imperialist states, East and West, are, to paraphrase Marx, nothing but "capital personified," whose outlook and politics are shaped by the exigencies of capital, in particular its need to forcibly resolve its current, deep-seated crisis through world war. These exigencies are continuously expressed in their policies, declarations, strategies, and actions. There are, obviously, Reagan's frequent musings about Armageddon and his bombing "joke." But lest this be written off as informal daydreaming, consider the "on the record" statement by one government official that the overall U.S. goal wasn't coexistence, but "turning back the Soviet Union, reversing the geographic expansion of Soviet political influence and military presence" (*New York Times*, June 17, 1982). Or the declaration of Richard Pipes, a former member of the Reagan administration, that "Soviet leaders would have to choose between peacefully changing their Communist system . . . or going to war" (Cited in Scheer 1983, 8). And Colin Gray (now a high government official) and Keith Payne wrote in *Foreign Policy* magazine that

The United States should plan to defeat the Soviet Union and to do so at a cost that would not prohibit U.S. recovery. Washington should identify war aims that in the last resort would contemplate the destruction of Soviet political authority and the emergence of a postwar world order compatible with Western values. (Cited in Sheer 1983, 12)

Their military strategy itself reflects an attempt to deal with – not run away from or back off of – this contradiction of *having* to wage and win a nuclear war against a nuclear-armed rival with the power to wipe it out. This is evident in the U.S. nuclear doctrine's emphasis on wiping out enemy nuclear weapons before they can be launched, its notion of gaining "dominance" early on and forcing the enemy to surrender short of all-out war (or else face total devastation) and its stress on preserving command and control in order to carefully control nuclear exchanges as well as maintain state

power in the aftermath of war. As the Defense Department's 1984-1988 Fiscal Guidance paper puts it, U.S. armed forces must be able to "prevail and be able to force the Soviet Union to seek earliest termination of hostilities on terms favorable to the United States" (Cited in *New York Times*, May 30, 1982).

This strategy hasn't been cooked up in the last couple of years by a few crazies or lower-level bureaucrats in the Reagan administration; it represents the latest in the evolution of U.S. military strategy, an evolution that has progressed under every administration - Democratic and Republican - since the U.S. was confronted with the need to wage war against a nuclear-armed rival. (In fact one of the first to grapple with these contradictions was the "born-again" dove, Robert McNamara, in a speech in 1962!)\*

The same outlook is reflected in the bourgeoisie's views on "surviving" nuclear war (though lately most have learned to be more circumspect on the topic). Robert Scheer's book, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush and Nuclear War*, contains interviews with a number of leading imperialist political figures on this question. Time and again what comes through is that those whose ideas are now determining policy consistently look at the question of survival from the standpoint of the survival of U.S. capital, or "Western civilization and values," as they often put it. The point isn't that they are oblivious to the effects of nuclear war or the potential danger for them, but rather that they are desperately twisting and turning, trying to figure out some way that imperialism *could* survive what has to be done. They don't mainly reflect on the devastation caused to Hiroshima, or the suffering of the people: they "praised the resilience of the Japanese, noting, '... in about thirty days after the blast, there were people in there, salvaging the rubble, rebuilding their houses'" (Scheer 1983, 21). Their views aren't determined by the possibility that a postnuclear plague (among other things) could wipe out humanity; they find it significant that Europe survived the Bubonic plagues of the Middle Ages - "It was horrifying at the time, and yet six or eight years later, not only had the English society rebounded... but, by God, those people went out on an expeditionary force to France" (Scheer 1983, 114). Or take George Bush's cold-blooded calculation of just what it would take to win a nuclear war:

You have a survivability of command and control, survivability of industrial potential, protection of a percentage of your citizens, and you have a capability that inflicts more damage on the opposition than it can inflict upon you. That's the way you can have a winner... (Cited in Scheer 1983, 29)

These statements by government officials, the evolution of U.S. military strategy, and the U.S. response to the danger of a "nuclear winter" exemplify the "rationality" of the bourgeoisie, the deadly seriousness of their war prepara-

\* For more on the evolution of U.S. military doctrine, see *Revolutionary Worker*, September 7, 1984.

tions. They have outraged and alarmed millions. But what has been the response of the proponents of disarmament? To deplore them certainly. But they also explain them away as the madness of merely a "lunatic fringe" of the ruling class, or an effort to bully the Soviets short of war. Alternately, some try even harder to convince the ruling classes that such policies are suicidal madness. Yet this so-called "lunatic fringe" speaks for imperialism as a whole, holds power, and is feverishly preparing to put these declarations into practice. Not to recognize this ultimately means running away from unpleasant reality and not fighting against it.\*

### Weapons - Pokerchips... or Weapons?

One might reasonably ask, as millions have, just what are the imperialist powers doing with arsenals totaling 50,000 nuclear warheads and growing every day if nuclear war is so insane that they would never countenance it? Here the disarmers come forth with a plethora of explanations which all boil down to the fantasy that these weapons are not for use in world war. They are supposedly for out-bluffing the Soviets in a "new cold war"; they spring not from "any formulation of well thought out operational requirements, but from the minds of enthusiastic technicians plying their trade in the weapons laboratories" (Zuckerman 1983, 75); or, as Myrdal argues, they are simply "beyond all reason." One writer even boiled down NATO's decision to deploy Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe to the economics and technology of the cruise missile: "the first motivation behind the Euromissiles seems to have been a military-industrial one. Pentagon planners wanted to use a new generation of weapon with new technology, new capabilities. The cruise missile lobby played a major role" (*In These Times* 1984, 13). And E.P. Thompson writes:

But the military confrontation between the blocs has less and less rational strategic function; nuclear missiles are becoming symbolic counters of political "posture" or "blackmail," and negotiations are about political "face." Both SS-20s and Euromissiles are superfluous to any sane armory. (Thompson 1984, 244)

While all these explanations touch on aspects of reality, essentially they miss the forest for some very small trees and ignore or cover over the imperialist logic behind the arms race. While military contractors are undoubtedly interested in boosting their profits and technical developments do impact weapons development, to see these phenomena as the primary forces guiding military procurement is a wrong analysis of the role of military spending in the imperialist

\* For an example of explaining away U.S. warfighting doctrines as an umbrella for interventionism, and one making the case for its "illogic," see American Friends Service Committee 1983.

economies. As Raymond Lotta pointed out:

Without a redivision of the world, militarization only aggravates the dynamic of crisis and actually accelerates the drive toward war precisely because it throws the economy even more off-balance and cannot be profitably sustained. (Lotta with Shannon 1984, 156)

They also ignore that in the era of finance capital no financial group is either wholly dependent upon, or for that matter unconnected with, those industries that do produce arms. Nor can they explain why the imperialists produce certain weapons (is there something particularly profitable about counterforce weapons?); why they won't produce others at particular points in time (was an ABM system unprofitable in the late 1960s – or weren't the technicians involved in such work in their labs?); or the overall trends in imperialist military spending (why wasn't it just as lucrative in the early '70s, when instead the trend in U.S. military expenditures was temporarily downward?).

And how can the profits/technology line explain why the imperialists have been willing to absorb such tremendous political costs in pushing ahead with the deployment of the Pershing IIs and cruise missiles in Europe, or the economic costs of running \$200 billion budget deficits – deficits that have "thrown the economy even more off-balance" and caused some of the more "narrow-minded" elements in the bourgeoisie to call for cuts in military spending. Certainly more, much more, is at stake here than the profits of one or two arms manufacturers.

More importantly, this view reduces bourgeois politics to the economic competition between individual capitals and negates the overall needs of capital. While technology and economics do impinge on weapons production, politics is what principally shapes the development of weapons and strategy. This is borne out by the whole history of U.S. and Soviet military strategies and, on that basis, the development of their arsenals. For example, in *White House Years*, Henry Kissinger discusses how the U.S. government, confronted with the new reality of Soviet parity and power, "undertook a reexamination of military doctrine. The purpose was to enable us in time to plan and defend our military programs according to reasoned criteria, to adjust our strategy to new realities, and to try to lead the public debate away from emotionalism." Following this, he writes, the "Nixon administration began essential new programs – the B-1, the Trident, the cruise missile – and laid a foundation on which it was possible to build when the Congressional mood changed after the mid-seventies" (Kissinger 1979, 215-18).

An examination of the strategic debate in this country demonstrates that the imperialists are certainly forthright about the *raison d'être* of the various counterforce weapons they are feverishly developing. They discuss the importance of having weapons with "prompt hard-target kill capabilities" that can be controlled during wartime. They argue the need for thousands of nuclear weapons to hit enemy military and

political targets (there are presently some 40,000 Soviet targets in the U.S.'s "Single Integrated Operational Plan") (Pringle and Arkin 1983, 15), and that they have enough to weather an enemy assault and emerge from a nuclear war with enough nuclear weapons to reassert their global power. And this is explicitly put in the context of being able to wage and win a protracted nuclear war with their Soviet adversaries. In short, politics and strategy are what mainly shape the U.S. and Soviet weapons build-up, not economics – narrowly conceived – or technology.

### And Now They Are Doves?

What about those ruling-class figures – the George Balls, Robert McNamaras and McGeorge Bundys – who have criticized Reagan administration arms control policy and strategic doctrine, downplayed the military value of nuclear weapons, and argued that nuclear war is unwinnable madness? Once rightly despised as war criminals, these figures are hailed by some in the antiwar movement as the "rational wing" of the bourgeoisie, potentially a "strategic reserve for the proletariat," as *Line of March* put it, and living proof that imperialism *isn't* compelled to go to war.

While a full discussion of the "nuclear doves" is beyond the scope of this article, a few points need to be made about their role and their fundamental unity with the so-called "lunatic fringe." For one thing, many of the differences between the Weinbergers and the McNamaras do not reflect deep-seated political differences so much as a division of labor within imperialist ranks. As we will examine more deeply in regard to the freeze campaign, the bourgeoisie needs various types of spokesmen in various movements in order to contain dissent within acceptable channels – a role that those now outside of government have more freedom to play. The current "clash" between the hawks and doves is more akin to a professional wrestling match than a political split: while participants may suffer some bumps and bruises in the contest, no one is seriously hurt and the outcome is decided well in advance by agreement between the two parties.

There are, it is true, *some* political differences between McNamara, Bundy, et al., and the Reagan administration. But what is the significance and nature of those differences? A close examination of just what these wolves in sheep's clothing are proposing reveals a program for trying to make U.S. imperialism stronger militarily and politically, and better able to survive this dangerous decade. This is the avowed purpose of their *Foreign Affairs* article, "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," for instance. Beneath a thin veneer of glib talk about peace and deterrence is a program for strengthening NATO politically, tagging the Soviet Union with the aggressor label, and rectifying NATO military strategy in light of the new realities of nuclear war – mainly by emphasizing flexibility, mobility, careful control of nuclear weapons, and the ability to defeat the Soviet Union

at any level of combat. (McNamara, et al. 1982, 753-68)\* It shouldn't be all that surprising – or disorienting – that there is much debate and thrashing about within ruling-class ranks over just how to win with nuclear weapons on the one hand and survive on the other. How could it be any other way? Certainly the strategy and policies of any class don't emerge automatically from the material world, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. And this is even more true for imperialism today, when it has no easy or safe options.

There are no doubt other bourgeois figures who are terrified by the prospect of nuclear war, or at least have "grave doubts" about the current orientation and don't grasp the necessity for going down with the Soviets. Yet the significance of this fact is wildly exaggerated by many in the antiwar movement, largely because of confusion about the role of the state (a confusion also related to other facets of the disarmament position). The policy of the imperialist bourgeoisie is ultimately decided and set, not by consensus among prominent figures in the establishment or in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, but by the state, the "executive committee" of the capitalist class, as Marx called it. Government policy is a concentration of the overall interests of imperialism and is enforced dictatorially. Often antiwar statements by prominent individuals, when not outright deception, reflect the fact that they never have been or are no longer personally charged with maintaining an imperialist empire (or not yet confronted with the immediate reality of defending it). There are no doubt dissenters in the ranks of government as well. But the bottom line is that once policy is set, those who don't go along are either overruled or thrown out of power. Consider the infamous A team/B team decision of the mid-1970s, which changed the CIA's estimate of Soviet military spending and, in effect, the evaluation of Soviet intentions and U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. At the time, the *New York Times*, certainly a pillar of the imperialist establishment, inveighed against it, and numerous other leading figures and experts also deplored the revised evaluation. But the revision was made, still stands, and is an important component of U.S. policy.

As a matter of fact, many within government oftentimes aren't even consulted about crucial decisions. Solly Zuckerman, in his book *Nuclear Illusion and Reality*, recounts how British Prime Minister Atlee and five members of his Cabinet ("the others being kept in the dark") "decided to proceed independently with the development of a British bomb. This highly secret decision . . . automatically committed the whole government" (Zuckerman 1983, 83). (He also describes how and why various "opponents" of nuclear war-fighting kept their mouths shut and went along with the program while in government, only to raise "doubts" when they were out.)

A final point on the imperialist doves. It is a measure of the depth and significance of their "opposition" to nuclear

\* For more on McNamara and Company's position and the significance of the doves, see *Revolutionary Worker*, February 24, 1984.

war that none have broken with imperialism and consistently and publicly exposed its war preparations. All have remained loyal opponents, which indicates where most of them are now and will be when the crunch of war comes. Clearly the rulers of the U.S. aren't deeply divided at present over what has to be done – witness Reagan's election landslide and "mandate"!

### The Impossibility of Disarmament Under Imperialism

There is then an imperialist logic, which flows from the basic character of imperialist production and social relations, that runs throughout and informs the political outlook, policy declarations, military strategy, weapons procurement policies, and even the differences within the imperialist bourgeoisie. That logic is the compulsion to forcibly recast global relations, through world war with the Soviet Union, or perish. And according to this logic, arms reductions, not to mention disarmament, is the epitome of "irrationality," now when they need their weapons more than ever.

The imperialists' own vision of the future is a chilling exposure of the impossibility of disarmament under their rule. They have made it clear that even the horror of nuclear war isn't going to make them see the error of their ways and peacefully lay down their arms. For instance, it is official U.S. government policy to have enough nuclear weapons "so that the United States would never emerge from a nuclear war without nuclear weapons while still being threatened by enemy nuclear weapons" (*New York Times*, May 30, 1982). And Thomas Powers, a defense analyst, painted the following grim picture of what life will be like after a third world war, if imperialism is not overthrown:

Strategic planners hesitate to say what the world would look like after a nuclear war. There are too many variables. But they agree – for planning purposes, at any rate – that both sides would "recover," and that the most probable result of a general nuclear war would be a race to prepare for a second general nuclear war. As a practical matter, then, a general nuclear war would not end the threat of nuclear war. That threat, in fact would be one of the very few things the pre-war and post-war worlds would have in common. (Powers 1982, 110)

All this, it must forcefully be said, is utter and barbaric madness. But it is madness that grows out of a specific set of social relations; it is a madness of an acute form that expresses the underlying contradiction between the organization of production on a global scale and the division of the world between rival imperialist blocs. The solution to it lies not in appeals to the sanity and good sense of those who worship and necessarily act on its compulsions, but instead in marshaling those whom it oppresses and exploits for revolu-

tionary struggle to overthrow such an insane social system. In the context of current world politics – i.e., of imperialism – the goals of “peace” or “disarmament” are mirages, illusions of oases that only reflect shifts in the sands and the dry air of the desert; they will not lead those who chase them anywhere but, at best, into futility.

Those who do genuinely want to prevent the war that seems to grow closer monthly, by jolts and snaps, need to look toward the millions on the bottom (in this country and around the world) whose interests stand in fundamental opposition to the continued existence of the system that generates this horror. Here is the force, the only force, that can possibly break the nightmare momentum of contemporary events, seize the political initiative, and move to turn society right-side up. *The New Programme of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA* points to this very real potential:

There is today not only the profound and deepening economic and political crisis and the imminent danger of world war, but there are, increasingly, minor political shocks that jolt society and awaken growing numbers to political life. These are but tremors before a gigantic earthquake.

In all these events the embryo of a revolutionary crisis can be discerned. When, for example, in the thunderous rebellions of Black people and other oppressed peoples that have erupted, the police and then the national guard are unable to enforce “law and order,” when even the power of the army units called in has been challenged, if only for a few days, a bright glimpse of the future can be seen where the authority and power of the ruling class is no longer capable of intimidating and bludgeoning the masses into submission and all the suppressed outrage not only explodes but is channeled and directed toward its source and toward the solution – the capitalist system and its overthrow. Or when coal miners massively strike and rebel, even defying the federal government and sending shockwaves throughout the country – such potential can also be seen even in militant economic struggle such as this. Or, when millions of people are suddenly engaged in active debate about world affairs, when they are urgently seeking answers to fundamental questions and open to new ideas even while still under the sway of the old, backward ones propagated by the bourgeoisie, here, too, is a taste of the future when the “normal routine” of life will be disrupted throughout society by political debate and struggle and the even more urgent search for answers and solutions, not only in theory but in practice.

Or, again, when in Vietnam the bourgeoisie’s main pillar – its own army units – began to crack and rebel, at times massively challenging the military authority to the point of battling other units sent to quell them – this too foreshadowed the future storm. All this gives a glimmer of what it will

look like when oppressed nationalities are in rebellion, when they are joined by significant sections of the proletariat of all nationalities, with the class-conscious proletariat able to march at the forefront of all the oppressed in revolt, when other workers go over from economic to political strikes, when big sections of the masses are not only engaging in large demonstrations, marches and street battles with the police but finally go over to various forms of armed struggle organized by various revolutionary forces and when all this is led by the Party into a coordinated uprising and revolutionary warfare, defeating and disintegrating the bourgeoisie’s armed forces and winning over large numbers of their rank and file soldiers in the process. (Revolutionary Communist Party 1980, 20)

There are those working today to transform this potential into reality; there are forces either preparing for or actually rising up in revolution. This movement is now at its sharpest in Peru, where the Communist Party of Peru (known in the media as Sendero Luminoso) today wages a people’s war, but it goes on in other ways all over the globe, and the recent *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* (signed by over a dozen parties and groups, including the Communist Party of Peru) represents a tremendously important step in the cohesiveness and power of the trend toward revolution. This path alone can prevent world war because this path alone strikes at the roots that continually regenerate these interimperialist bloodlettings (as well as the endless outrages and the misery and brutalization that characterize daily life under this system). It need hardly be said that more, many more, are needed to lend strength, sinew, and vision to this work; but certainly this dream is worthier of the hopes and efforts of many who to a lesser or greater degree find themselves influenced by the disarmament line.

Of course, there’s always the “yes, but” argument; i.e., “yes, you’re probably right, but the prospect for revolution in either the Soviet Union or the U.S. is so remote as to make such a program unrealistic.” To this, two things must be said: first, if surgery is required then the ways must be found to have that surgery – a simple aspirin or two is worse than nothing. Second, when looked at with a deeper understanding of the difficulties and compulsions faced by the various ruling classes now being driven to war, including the “hard choices” they face as well as the basically fragile underlying character of their respective social fabrics, when looked at with the understanding of the reverberatory effects of successful revolutions and revolutionary movements in other parts of the world upon the imperialist metropolises, and when viewed with an understanding of just what it would (and would *not*) take to get the ball rolling – then the contours of the revolutionary vision take on depth and sharpness and dimensionality, and the wisp-like character of the disarmament mirage stands all the more sharply revealed.

Our party’s summation of the ‘60s, and the significance of

those times for today, is worth returning to:

While this country has never seen a revolutionary struggle for power led by the proletariat, it has certainly witnessed revolutionary mass movements shaking the foundation of this country if not yet capable of overturning it. In particular in the '60s, the ruling class was on the defensive politically. The division of opinion in society on the cardinal questions of the day was not at all unfavorable to the revolutionary side, even within the proletariat, large sections of which were somewhat protected from the shocks of the time by the reserves of the ruling class and its conscious policies. Add to this " '60s alignment" a significant section of the proletariat actively in the fray and a lot could start happening. Precisely this possibility lies in the presently appearing conjuncture. (Revolutionary Communist Party 1980, 19-20)

Exactly what it *would* take to prevent the imperialists from launching the war they have been so feverishly planning and preparing for at least the past decade – i.e., how a revolution might actually happen in the U.S. (or other large and/or strategic areas of the globe) – is beyond the scope of this article. The theoretical foundations on this point have been laid, however, and we urge the reader to take up and study Bob Avakian's new book, *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, in which these questions as they apply to the U.S. are addressed in depth and detail. Illusions – even, indeed especially, those illusions which seem to rest on everyday "common sense" – need to be seen for what they are and broken with; the dream of revolution – the only answer to the crucifyingly urgent conundrum posed by the present situation – must be taken up, fought for, and transformed into reality. As Bob Avakian remarks in the above-mentioned book:

To put it another way, there is not going to be divine nor even interplanetary intervention to prevent such a war: no *Day the Earth Stood Still*. The approach of appealing to reason and the general (and classless) interests of humanity would, to be effective, have to be addressed to and rely on what does not exist: a rational will divorced from and standing above human social and world relations. But it seems that, instead of waiting for divine or interplanetary intervention, it is more realistic to address our appeals and our political efforts to mobilizing the masses of people throughout the world, including in the U.S. and other imperialist countries, to rise in revolution to sweep away the existing social and world relations and establish new ones that are not in fundamental conflict with the interests of the great majority of humanity and indeed of humanity as a whole. Which, after all then, is a more realistic prospect: "the day the earth stood still," or the time it

witnessed a new and radical, a truly unprecedented, revolution right here on earth? (Avakian 1984, 31-32)

## THE ROLE OF THE DISARMAMENT DEMAND

### Imperialist Arms Control Agreements

There is no better exposure of the impossibility of disarmament under imperialist rule and the role that "disarmament" talks play than the history of U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations. Alva Myrdal's *The Game of Disarmament* and the antinuclear newspaper *It's About Times* contain much insightful exposure of the disarmament fraud. It's not as if there haven't been plenty of meetings and a number of treaties – twenty since the late 1950s – signed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. But as *It's About Times* points out:

Between World War II and 1980, officials of the U.S. and the Soviet Union met over 6000 times to discuss arms control. Yet the superpowers have not been able to agree on eliminating a single existing weapon. The nuclear buildup has survived a Test Ban Treaty, an ABM Treaty, a SALT I and a SALT II. It has weathered storms of public protest almost as easily as it profited from the more common climate of apathy. Instead of reversing the arms race, these 6000 meetings have institutionalized it. (*It's About Times*, May-June 1982A)

Alva Myrdal sums up that over the past thirty years, general declarations about universal disarmament often went hand in hand with concrete proposals designed to *prevent* any arms reductions:

... both sides would present proposals for disarmament agreements, of often wholesale dimensions, but would be careful to see to it that these would contain conditions which the opposite side would not accept. This is the way disarmament was, and is, continually torpedoed. (Myrdal 1982, 77)

And she also exposes the Orwellian character of those agreements, such as SALT I and II, that have been signed:

The latest stage, called "detente," has, however, not stopped their fierce competition for world hegemony... Detente... has not led to a reversal or even a cessation of the arms race...

The SALT negotiations have concentrated on these strategic-weapons systems, especially the offensive types, but questions are not asked about possession, reduction, or elimination; rather there is only a haggling over marginal differences in their continued increase.

By no stretch of the imagination can this be called arms limitation. Instead it is a mutually agreed continuation of the arms race, regulated and institutionalized. (Myrdal 1982, 23, 103, 106)

Also, the SALT ceilings "were amazingly close to the numbers they had planned to deploy anyway," and "No limitations at all were placed on tactical or conventional weapons or on qualitative improvements of strategic missiles or warheads" (*It's About Times* May-June 1982A).

In all fairness, Myrdal does point out that one imperialist treaty *did* categorically ban some nuclear weapons. The 1972 "Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction on a Seabed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof" banned all nuclear weapons from these realms. Never mind that the imperialists weren't planning to deploy any weapons on the ocean floor anyway! (And they were talking about *stationary* weapons, not their precious submarines.)

*It's About Times* succinctly sums up the *political* role arms control talks play under imperialism:

The arms control ritual allows each superpower to hail its valiant efforts for peace, efforts (each one laments) that have been tragically foiled by the other side. The basic decency of each government is affirmed and support for its ever-escalating arms buildup – and its other policies – is assured. (*It's About Times* May-June 1982A)

All this is a reflection of the fact that imperialist arms control negotiations and agreements can't blunt, much less transform, imperialist contention – which is rooted in the basic character of imperialist production – or reverse the arms race it gives rise to. Instead, this rivalry takes place in and through these various arms control negotiations, as each side does its best to limit the most dangerous weapons of the other, preserve its most valued arms, and gain a leg up in the political contest for most sincere peacemaker (in order, of course, to build support for further war preparations, and war itself when the time comes).

Instead of altering the trajectory of rivalry, "arms control" negotiations have been conditioned by and reflected that rivalry. The SALT agreements, limited as they were, were possible because they served the interests of both the U.S. and Soviets at a time when war wasn't immediately on the horizon. As their overall rivalry intensified and war became more an immediate necessity, the SALT framework broke down, replaced by Reagan-style arms control – proposals never intended to be accepted and preparations for breaking

loose from the mild constraints of existing treaties. Nothing is more ridiculous in this situation than attempts by mainstream disarmament advocates to "convince" the government that there is strategic parity between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, obviating the need for a massive U.S. build-up and making possible the continuation of detente. Reagan and company *know* there is parity – they see it as a *problem* that must be overcome!

This evolution from SALT to START also illustrates the impossibility of arms control agreements cooling out global tensions, one of the basic premises of the disarmament program. If arms agreements set the tone for superpower relations, how could the present extreme tension follow on the heels of the most comprehensive arms control agreements signed to date? According to the disarmament view SALT should have paved the way for more comprehensive agreements and reduced hostility, not given way to the current hair-trigger confrontation.\*

### The Nuclear Freeze and The Politics of Patriotism

The problem with the disarmament program isn't only its impossibility or the ruling class's deceitful use of it. The truth of the matter is that ultimately the politics of disarmament plays into the hands of imperialism and in many ways facilitates its war preparations. This is contrary to the view promoted by many forces on the left, particularly those who share some of the underlying premises of the disarmament program. While "tactical" differences with the mainstream disarmament movement are often raised, it is generally viewed as "a good first step for reaching people about the dangers of nuclear war" (*Guardian* 1982, 27), or a movement that needs to be "broadened and

\* *It's About Times* correctly hits at the deceitful character of U.S.-Soviet arms control and points to their great power interests as the roots of the arms race. However, its summation of the failure of arms control negates the trajectory of the rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, positing instead a kind of permanent cold war, or reactionary stasis:

Thus legitimized, the superpowers are free to continue using the permanent nuclear showdown as they always have. Like the Cold War it complements, "arms control" is a device by which the superpowers control the governments of other countries, their allies, and their own populations. (*It's About Times* May-June 1982A, 8)

Again, a full analysis of the "new cold war" thesis is beyond the scope of this article. However, in terms of the history of arms negotiations, one thing is clear. This view does not explain the development and changes in the arms control posture of either the U.S. or the Soviet Union. For instance, the leap represented by Reagan's arms control agenda is not just "cold war" business as usual. And the "cold war" thesis also gives credence to the idea, fundamental to the disarmament position, that it is somehow possible to stabilize the international situation, when this is less possible than ever!

deepened" (Albert and Dellinger 1983, 6), and one that certainly isn't doing any harm.

But the disarmament program *isn't* necessarily a "first step" toward more resolute opposition to nuclear war; it is an impediment! An examination of the nuclear freeze campaign illustrates what role the disarmament demand actually plays.

Some argue that the freeze needs to be "politicized" or its politics "deepened." Broken with and repudiated is more like it. While a lack of analysis has been a hallmark of the freeze campaign, it isn't "apolitical"; it starts from the very political premise of protecting America's "national security." The freeze's "Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race," for example, begins with the declaration: "To improve national and international security, the United States and the Soviet Union should stop the nuclear arms race." The California bilateral freeze campaign states: "The safety and security of the United States must be paramount in the concerns of the American people." Add to this the constantly reiterated catchphrase of the freeze campaign — "mutual and verifiable" — and you have a politics whose only accomplishment can be the *political* disarmament of those tens of millions in the U.S. who are in one way or another genuinely revulsed at the prospect of interimperialist war.

To focus for a minute on this last point: after all, if the "other side" won't agree to the freeze (or whatever version of an arms control agreement that may be proposed) or won't allow its missile sites and arms production facilities to be "verified" to the satisfaction of the U.S. government, then the assumptions implicit in the freeze give a green light to the rulers of the U.S. to go full-speed ahead with *their* arsenal. People are being trained, in this way, in a politics that *predicates* opposition to the war moves of the U.S. on proof of Soviet peaceful intentions. Not only is such proof impossible (since those Soviet intentions are *not* "peaceful"), but the parameters of the freeze campaign specify that it must be proof to the satisfaction of the U.S. rulers! Not bloody likely! The tradition of leaders demonstrating that "they've walked the last mile" to make peace before unleashing their death machines is hardly unknown in the West, and the freeze campaign objectively fits this sort of political scenario quite symmetrically.\*

\* Everyone, of course, is familiar with the pacifist presidential campaigns of people like Woodrow Wilson and Lyndon Johnson. But Winston Churchill himself notes the utility of a pacifist campaign not so very dissimilar to the Freeze:

In the early months of 1935, there was organized a Peace Ballot for collective security and for upholding the Covenant of the League of Nations. This scheme received the blessing of the League of Nations Union, but was sponsored by a separate organization largely supported by the Labour and Liberal Parties. The following were the questions put:

#### THE PEACE BALLOT

1. Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations?
2. Are you in favor of an all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement?
3. Are you in favor of the all-round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement?

The freeze campaign takes the national interests of the U.S. as its *starting point*, and this sort of position can *only* lead to support for imperialist war when the actual thing goes down. We must ask the proponents of the freeze: what are they going to do when concretely faced with an immediate and quite real threat to the U.S., especially world war itself? What is the content of protecting "national security" then? It can and will only be fighting to defend the U.S. — whose interests and perhaps *existence* are indeed threatened by a rival bloc. This means participating in and supporting World War 3 and setting the masses up to do the same! Of course such a war will be presented as strictly defensive by the U.S. government. They may even engineer an 007 airliner-type incident — in which the Soviets commit some heinous act — to start it off. But none of that would change the imperialist and reactionary character of the war.

Preparations for such a war not only entail building more missiles, but also, importantly, mean politically preparing people to "defend their nation" before war breaks out. We have seen an abundance of such preparations lately, from the "USA, USA" furor of the summer Olympics to the recent presidential election, with its theme of making America stronger. Yet the disarmament view, which obscures what is guiding these politics and tries to combine patriotism with opposition to war (or at least doesn't make a resolute break with patriotism), has proven incapable of opposing these concrete war preparations.

Again the freeze movement provided an egregious example during last fall's 007 incident, a provocation engineered by the U.S. and utilized to whip up anti-USSR war fever. Opposition to imperialist war *demands* exposure of and opposition to such incidents. Yet when Randall Forsberg, a freeze movement founder, appeared on ABC's *Nightline* program on U.S.-Soviet relations in the wake of 007, she neither exposed the U.S.'s role in this prewar incident nor condemned the

4. Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement?

5. Do you consider that if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by: (a) economic and non-military measures, (b) if necessary military measures?

It was announced on June 27 that over eleven million persons had subscribed their names affirmatively to this. The Peace Ballot seemed at first to be misunderstood by Ministers. Its name overshadowed its purpose. It, of course, combined the contradictory propositions of reduction of armaments and forcible resistance to aggression. It was regarded in many quarters as a part of the pacifist campaign. On the contrary, clause 5 affirmed a positive and courageous policy which could, at this time, have been followed with an overwhelming measure of national support. Lord Cecil and other leaders of the League of Nations Union were, as this clause declared, and as events soon showed, willing, and indeed resolved, to go to war in a righteous cause, provided that all necessary action was taken under the auspices of the League of Nations. Their evaluation of the facts underwent considerable changes in the next few months. Indeed, within a year I was working with them in harmony upon the policy which I described as "Arms and the Covenant." (Churchill 1948, 169-70)

chauvinist hysteria being whipped up around it. Instead, she pleaded for calm, reason, and a continuation of arms control efforts, while spending most of her time reassuring the audience that freezers were patriotic, had no love for the Soviet Union, and could get just as tough with them as anyone else. Was she opposed to Reagan's war-like talk? "Well I think whether or not the President has gone too far in his rhetoric depends on the reality of what the Soviet Union did. As far as I'm concerned, the facts are just not in" (*Nightline* transcript September 8, 1983, 2). As for U.S. complicity, she condemned the Soviets for maintaining "that this plane was on a spy mission for the United States which is clearly absurd" (p. 3). She agreed with some U.S. actions taken against the Soviets: "I think that the response dealing with Soviet flying rights, Aeroflot rights and the response of other civilian airline pilots, is appropriate, and I'm not here to apologize in any sense for the Soviet Union" (p. 11). And as for her overall view of relations with the Soviets:

What I wanted to object to is that I don't think that we should keep talking – it's not my view that we should keep talking no matter what the Soviet Union does. I think for example that a far stronger, a strong international stance, not just a U.S. stance, should have been taken against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. I think it should still be taken. I think that we should impose very heavy sanctions for aggressive use of military force. So I'm not saying we should sort of sit back and talk about it, and twiddle our thumbs. (*Nightline* 1983, 8)

Ah, scratch a freeze leader and what do you get?

Some may object, as Forsberg herself did, that the facts weren't in when she appeared on *Nightline*. But the problem wasn't facts. Forsberg's shameful performance on *Nightline*, a golden opportunity to expose U.S. war preparations, resulted from her chauvinism, which made any resolute opposition to U.S. war preparations impossible. (This is underscored by the fact that the freeze certainly hasn't made a major issue out of the 007 incident, even now when information of U.S. complicity and intentions in the incident *have* become available.) Clearly, we aren't advocating an apology for Soviet actions in the 007 incident, actions which stemmed from their own imperialist interests. But in this situation, the principal duty of one genuinely opposed to imperialist war and living in the U.S. was to expose the intrigues of one's "own" bourgeoisie; to mainly (or exclusively) target the Soviets, as Forsberg did, objectively aided and abetted the U.S.'s 007 propaganda campaign and helped create public opinion for waging war.

In fact, there is much to be learned from the freeze campaign and in particular from Forsberg's *Nightline* performance, and that is the ultimate impossibility of combining patriotism with genuine opposition to interimperialist war. While there are some who consider themselves patriotic and who have acted against the war machine in powerful and valuable ways, often at great risk and sacrifice, these forces

betray their better selves when and to the extent that they try to frame these actions as a patriotic stand. Try as they might, they will *not* spirit the flag away from the Reagans (and Mondales), but they *will* train people in the notion that it's possible to simultaneously uphold the national interests of an imperialist nation (the U.S., in this case) *and* the interests of those who are chewed up and destroyed by it. This is because "what the U.S. stands for" (including its much-vaunted "democratic traditions") is inseparable from the dominant imperialist position it occupies on the globe, and to be frank about it the majority of people in this country at the very least *sense* that. Our point here, to be clear, is *not* to lump those more radical elements of the antiwar movement who still portray (and see) themselves as patriotic in with the freeze, but to sound a warning: the freeze campaign shows just how very badly wrong one can go in the attempt to reconcile patriotism with opposition to war.

The response of the freeze and much of the rest of the peace movement to the 007 incident also reveals how the whole disarmament mentality – with its myriad of explanations for war preparations, save what they actually are – blinds people to the dynamics and significance of current events and makes them unprepared to respond to the sudden turns and leaps that are the rule in a prewar period. Given a materialist understanding of the world situation, one didn't *need* all the facts to grasp the essentials of how the U.S. was using this incident. (Indeed, living in the U.S. – with its history of the *Maine*, the *Lusitania*, the Tonkin Gulf, the *Mayaguez*, ad nauseam – should prepare us to expect just these sorts of stunts.)

The idea that nuclear war is "irrational" and that the arms race is mainly a product of particular individual interests (arms manufacturers and the like) also continually leaves open the possibility – actually the hope – that given more "rational" leadership (perhaps sobered by economic cost and the danger of war), disarmament could be feasible. This is nothing but a formula for ensuring that people are constantly victimized by the promises spewed out by the bourgeoisie – in the vain hope that the latest one reflects the emergence of ruling-class "rationality." It is also a prescription for keeping protest within the framework of loyalty to the social compact, since that compact isn't presumed to be the source of the problem. (And we have already seen instances in Europe where some "peace organizers" were more interested in working with the police to preserve order than with militants to oppose war preparations.) (See, for example, *Revolutionary Worker*, June 15, 1984.)

Again, consider the freeze. The government, including Congress, has refused to halt the arms race despite overwhelming polls and various election victories in favor of a freeze. Indeed the hypocrisy of the "pro-freeze" Congressmen was never more blatant than when many voted for the freeze one day and the MX the next. But the freeze campaigners haven't concluded from this experience that one can't pressure the government into disarming. They have drawn the opposite conclusion – that they should try even harder to influence Congress, their goal now being the 1986

elections! (See *New York Times*, November 18, 1984.) While the politics of disarmament aren't the only source of the freeze's faith in bourgeois democracy, they certainly reinforce it.\*

The disarmament viewpoint doesn't only obscure imperialist political machinations, it can obscure the nature of their military preparations as well. While the bourgeoisie as a whole has rejected the freeze as a negotiating position (never mind actually implementing one), a number of ruling-class figures have used the freeze as a prod to push U.S. strategy in what they consider a militarily advantageous direction (generally speaking, emphasizing more careful control of nuclear weapons and strengthening conventional forces). Those noted peacemakers Clark Clifford, William Colby, Paul Warnke, and Averill Harriman argued:

The freeze would enhance nuclear stability, preventing years of further Soviet testing to perfect the operation, accuracy and reliability necessary before any Soviet leader could ever contemplate that a first strike against any part of our missile force might succeed. . . . (*New York Times*, October 31, 1982)

Senators Kennedy and Hatfield wrote in their book that a freeze "will also help to strengthen . . . other areas of our national defense. . . . The \$90 billion that a freeze alone could save in the next five years could be spent on conventional defenses and domestic priorities" (Kennedy and Hatfield 1982, 133). And Randall Forsberg wrote a polemic for the freeze in the November 1982 *Scientific American* that reads like a laundry list of all the missiles that the U.S. could keep under a freeze. As Marcy Darnovsky sardonically noted in an insightful editorial in *It's About Times*, "At the risk of seeming petty and picayune, what do we get if we get a Freeze? There's still that little matter of 25,000 American nuclear

\* It should be noted here that the hypocrisy lies in the contradiction between what such "pro-freeze" figures purport to be their peaceful, humanitarian intentions and sentiments and those clearly exhibited in voting for the MX than any major discrepancy in reality. These actions are not only consistent from the point of view of basing oneself in general on national security and "defense" of the U.S. as the highest priority (including supporting major efforts to win as many people as possible to identify with the national interests of U.S. imperialism), but in particular, from the point of view of "facing the necessity of building and maintaining a U.S. nuclear arsenal capable of defeating the Soviet Union." It might be surprising to more than a few people who feel they are in general sympathy with the proposal for a nuclear freeze as a disarmament proposal to read Randall Forsberg's polemic for the freeze in *Scientific American*, November 1982. It is true that the stage is set in the article by the familiar discussion of disarmament as the only reasonable solution to the threat of a nuclear holocaust, but the crux of her argument does not revolve around the freeze as the only way to save humanity from nuclear devastation, etc., but that the freeze is a rational and realistic proposal (economically, politically, and militarily) because it is possible for the U.S. to wage and win a nuclear war (that is, to defend itself) with the weapons that it has now (provided they are kept in good working order). This particular contradiction, it seems, can be easily solved for the Congressmen.

warheads. . . ." (*It's About Times*, May-June 1982B).

In the same editorial, Darnovsky also wryly notes, "I'm honored to be part of a movement that embraces ex-CIA directors, ex-members of the National Security Council, and retired rear admirals," and wonders aloud "just who's running this Freeze anyway?" Darnovsky has certainly raised an interesting and relevant question. Without delving into all the ins and outs of the freeze campaign, it is evident that the bourgeoisie has supported and been deeply involved in the freeze movement from the outset, even while in the main opposing the freeze proposal itself. The imperialists are well aware that the increasingly concrete specter of nuclear war will call forth mass revulsion and rebellion against them. They are doing their utmost now to guide and contain that growing protest into legitimate channels that either strengthen their rule, or at least don't seriously challenge it. They attempt to both head these movements and set the parameters of their politics. This is why it's very useful for the ruling class as a whole to have various imperialist figures touring the country, pontificating on the "irrationality" of nuclear war and gaining credibility in the antiwar movement (helped along by those who describe them as allies or strategic reserves), all the while working to keep the discussion within respectable bounds. And it is also quite helpful to have a movement that poses the question in terms of what's in the best interests of the U.S. This outweighs whatever differences the bourgeoisie has with the freeze proposal itself, or the problems its detente politics present for their overall efforts to whip up jingoism.\*

\* In addition to "ex-CIA directors, ex-members of the National Security Council, and retired rear admirals," a host of other bourgeois figures have supported and been involved in the freeze from the outset. This is documented, in part, in the Kennedy-Hatfield book. Chapter 7, "The People Speak and America Begins to Listen." In addition to the above-mentioned reasons for bourgeois support of the freeze, some in the ruling class, including elements opposed to the proposal per se, saw the freeze movement as a means of pressuring the Reagan administration to soften its warlike rhetoric and do better in the arms control "peace wars." A *New York Times* editorial "Against the Freeze Referendums" (October 24, 1982), which urged a vote against the freeze, spells some of this out:

For though the proposal as such is not particularly practical or diplomatically desirable, the popular movement from which it springs deserves encouragement. It has played a useful role in moving the Reagan Administration toward negotiations. A vote for the freeze could thus be justified as a further prod, or expression of impatience with the Reagan team's approach to arms control.

Interestingly enough, once Reagan toned down his rhetoric and advanced his START proposal, open support for the freeze and criticism of his handling of arms control was much less prevalent in the bourgeois press than during much of 1981 and 1982.

The usefulness of the freeze also helps explain why there has not been any sustained McCarthy-type assault on it, contrary to what some have claimed. While there have been a number of attacks on the freeze from various quarters in the ruling class, both the FBI and the House Select Committee on Intelligence downplayed speculation about Soviet influence in the freeze, with the F.B.I. reporting that the Soviet Union does not "directly control or manipulate the freeze." (*New York Times*, March 26, 1983, 1 and *New York Times*, December 9, 1982, 1.)

At the height of its popularity, some admirers of the freeze, evidently intoxicated by sheer numbers, argued that the freeze movement was "remarkable" and "an event without parallel in our history." Yet some of these same forces are now asking, "How is it that we had the largest peace demonstration in U.S. history in June '82 and about a year later saw the first popularly approved invasion since the Vietnam era in Grenada?"\* While the freeze has no doubt attracted the support of many genuine opponents of nuclear weapons and war, this "shift" is not all that surprising given the chauvinist underpinnings of the freeze and the mainstream disarmament movement and the actual response to 007, the Olympics, etc. The experience of World War I in Europe is worth pondering in this regard. Then too there was mass antiwar sentiment and various socialist and pacifist leaders solemnly declared that they would oppose war at all costs prior to 1914. But when war actually came, the bulk of the antiwar movement, built on the rotten foundation of chauvinism, crumbled into dust, literally replaced by dancing in the streets at the news of war.

The point in all this is that the essence of the disarmament approach – and if the freeze is an extreme example, it is nonetheless an example firmly on the disarmament continuum – is an appeal to the ruling classes; it is a petition to the Czar for an end to suppression, a delegation to the sheriff to plead for action against the lynchers. These are deadly. What is demanded now is the *independent historical action* of masses of people against the looming war and every significant preparatory step to it, action which brooks no references to national interests, the "preservation of democracy," the "proper channels," the patriotic sensibilities of the mainstream, or anything else. The constraints of bourgeois legitimacy must be broken with and the whole terms of debate in this country must be shifted from "how do we convince (or even force) the rulers to disarm, or reduce arms spending, or freeze weapons" to "how to stop and prevent these monsters from actually carrying out what they plan (and need) to do."

Our views are that it *will* take nothing short of revolutionary struggle to do that. And to our mind the moving of millions into direct opposition to the government's preparations for and execution of a third world war is an important link leading to that struggle. But the disarmament program not only fosters the illusion that such revolutionary struggle isn't necessary to end the nuclear horror, it imposes the role of supplicants upon the masses and induces them to direct their appeals to their enemies.

In fact, while most talk of disarmament today is aimed at the governments, a consistent disarmament program puts just revolutionary wars in the same camp as reactionary imperialist wars and means the disarmament of the revolutionary masses – in the face of a ruling class more heavily armed against the masses than ever, and determined to use those arms to defend its "right" to unleash nuclear war. Lenin

\*These three quotes are from Solomon 1984, Mobilization for Survival 1984A, and Mobilization for Survival 1984B respectively.

summed up the politics of disarmament as "tantamount to complete abandonment of the class-struggle point of view, to renunciation of all thought of revolution. Our slogan must be: arming of the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie" (Lenin 1977, 23:96).

Some argue that fighting for disarmament is a way to delay nuclear war and "buy time" to build broader opposition to nuclear war and for fundamental social change. Nixon's 1969 decision *not* to use nuclear weapons on North Vietnam, in part perhaps because of the mass antiwar movement in the U.S., is often cited as an example of how mass pressure can delay war. We certainly would *not* say that the sooner war breaks out the better! However, the world situation is qualitatively different today than in 1969. Then everything wasn't on the line for the U.S. and it could afford to hold back and to eventually pull out of Vietnam. Today that is no longer the case: their empire itself is at stake and there can be no turning back, or strategic moderating of their course, because of mass "pressure" or anything else short of their overthrow. The disarmament idea, then, is more a way of wasting time than buying time, time which is literally crucial to resist their war preparations.

Of course, there are many in the antiwar movement, including supporters of disarmament, who oppose the particularly backward aspects of the freeze, who have raised criticisms of it, and who would object that all the criticisms raised above can't be applied to the movement as a whole. Indeed, we don't equate the freeze and the antiwar movement and we do feel some of the criticisms raised of the freeze are valuable and insightful.

However, two things need to be noted here. While many of the criticisms of the freeze raised by these forces, such as those we have cited above, are important, they generally don't get to the political essence of the freeze or the role it plays, largely because they share some of the underlying disarmament premises guiding the freeze. For example, in Darnovsky's editorial she criticizes the freeze for not encouraging "some analysis and insight into the political and social institutions that are supported by the Bomb and that serve it so well," labels it "apolitical," and concludes that "the Freeze campaign makes no attempt to deal with their [nuclear weapons] causes or political underpinnings. It's still disarmament in a vacuum" (*It's About Times* May-June 1984B). While it is true that the freeze certainly doesn't condemn the political and social institutions responsible for the bomb, the problem with the freeze, as has been pointed out, isn't mainly a *lack* of politics: it's wrong politics. It isn't disarmament "in a vacuum"; its "environment" is an imperialist nation in which chauvinism is promoted in a thousand and one ways.

While all proponents of disarmament don't play the same role as the freeze, it is the disarmament viewpoint that basically shapes the actions of the freeze, not some other kind of politics. Indeed, the freeze is the *logical conclusion* of appealing to the reason and humanity of those who possess neither. And as the freeze so grotesquely demonstrates, this program isn't a waystation to more radical or revolutionary

consciousness, but a comfort station.

Disarmament is respectable; disarmament is safe; disarmament is comfortably legitimate. To the advocates of disarmament we ask this: how *unrespectable*, *unsafe* and *illegitimate* – how much of an outlaw – are you willing to be to stop nuclear war? How far will you go – or to put it another way, how far is *too far*? For the advocates of the freeze, compromising “national security” is evidently too far; other believers in disarmament apparently set different limits. All of those limits are nothing but harnesses and blinders that prevent those who do oppose and resist the war preparations of the imperialists from acting fully consistently on their very best principles and instincts. To do what we must, all such ideological hobbles and constraints have to be shucked. There is no other choice.

## THE DISARMAMENT OUTLOOK

Given all the evidence that the imperialists, both East and West, are deadly serious about their preparations for a third world war and not about to peacefully disarm, one is forced to wonder why the disarmament demand is so widespread. For all the talk of “reason” and “rationality” in the movement, it isn’t mainly sustained by faulty logic or ignorance of political economy. The disarmament program reflects an ideological outlook which is the product of certain material conditions and interests.

In critically discussing her experience in the movement for a test-ban treaty in the 1960s, Alva Myrdal reveals something of the mindset that fosters the belief in disarmament:

We took it for granted, as we were told, that it [the test-ban treaty] was the first step toward the discontinuance of all testing of nuclear weapons.

The preamble of the Moscow Partial Test-Ban Treaty explicitly spelled out the commitment of the parties to “seeking to achieve the discontinuance of all explosions of nuclear weapons for all time, determined to continue negotiations to this end.” This we took as solemn, honest promise which we believed would be fulfilled.

*Our credulity, or plain naivete, was such that we smaller nations did not see through the emptiness of the promise, evidently not meant to be binding, or perceive the lack of true willingness to proceed with nuclear disarmament. Evidently we did not listen closely enough.* The absence of this intention was stated in President Kennedy’s own words when he gave Senate leaders, and through them military interests, “un-

qualified and unequivocal assurances” that the underground testing would be “vigorously and diligently carried forward. . . .”

*Instead we paid attention to and believed what President Kennedy said in his television address to the American people on 26 July 1963. . . . He did not draw attention to the continuation of testing. . . . But in the main Kennedy held out a bright prospect. (Myrdal 1982, 94, emphasis ours)*

Here we have an honest characterization of the disarmament outlook: “credulity,” “plain naivete,” and simply hearing the “bright prospects” for peace and stability held out by imperialism and ignoring the rest! Isn’t this same outlook expressed today by those who hear the doves talk of the “irrationality of nuclear war,” but downplay the full significance of government talk of waging and winning nuclear war? And doesn’t it capture a key element in current efforts to explain away warlike declarations as posturing, strategies for winning World War 3 as aimed merely at facilitating U.S. intervention, and a spiraling arms race as the result of military contractors’ greed? This isn’t so much a serious analysis of current events as it is grasping for straws in a hurricane, and a *refusal* to come to terms with what is shaping up.

Myrdal gives us a clue about the roots of this outlook with her mention of “smaller nations.” Lenin described the disarmament program as a “social idea . . . that springs from . . . the peculiar ‘tranquil’ conditions prevailing, by way of exception, in certain small states which have for a fairly long time stood aside from the world’s path of war and bloodshed, and hope to remain that way,” and “the petty-bourgeois desire to keep as far away as possible from the great battles of world history, to take advantage of one’s relatively monopolistic position in order to remain in hidebound passivity. . . .” (Lenin 1977, 23:102).

The U.S. obviously isn’t one of the “small” states that Lenin described, nor can it “stand aside” from world events; on the contrary, it must take the lead in defending and expanding its far-flung empire. However, Lenin’s description of “tranquil” conditions, standing “aside from the world’s path of war and bloodshed,” and clinging to a “monopolistic position” does accurately describe life, particularly for the more privileged strata, in the U.S. and other Western-bloc countries over the past forty years. By virtue of its preeminent global position, the U.S. bourgeoisie has been able to temporarily smooth out the anarchic workings of capital and insulate significant sections of the American populace from its jolting ups and downs, as well as the misery that imperialist domination has meant for the vast majority of the world’s people. While 10.7 million people were killed between 1960 and 1980 in sixty-five wars that ravaged some forty-nine countries, none of this slaughter took place in an imperialist nation – although imperialist domination and rivalry were its main roots. (Figures cited in *S.F. Chronicle*, December 12, 1982.) And geography has played a role in the U.S. as well: it has been some 120 years since a major war has been fought on U.S. soil!

This tranquility is part of the material basis for the refusal to believe in the imminence of cataclysmic upheaval and war,

even as it looms larger, and the craving for stability and a return to the more "peaceful" era of detente that characterizes the disarmament mentality. Lenin noted that the striving for disarmament was "based entirely on illusions, for, in one way or another, imperialism draws the small states into the vortex of world economy and world politics" (Lenin 1977, 23:102). If anything, given the development of imperialist economy, and the existence of nuclear weapons, it is even more absurd to imagine that one can escape earthshaking world events today. (Perhaps the best example of this outlook – and its absurdity today – is the demand for "nuclear free" zones, cities, harbors, etc.)

Tranquility isn't, however, the only source of the outlook that fosters the disarmament illusion: it is also nurtured by a vested interest in preserving the status quo, an imperialist chauvinism, which comes from living in an imperialist country and benefiting, to one degree or another, from its dominant global position. This interest in the status quo is at the heart of the disarmament viewpoint's refusal to grasp the class roots of the nuclear danger, its obscuring of those roots with talk of "reason" and "humanity" in general, and its support for present society even while being terrified of the horrors which that society is conjuring up. The path traversed by Jonathan Schell in his works, *The Fate of the Earth* and *The Abolition*, illuminates where this outlook leads.

In *The Fate of the Earth* Schell soberly examined the effects of nuclear war and argued eloquently that this danger must be squarely and urgently faced. One gets the sense in *Fate of the Earth* that Schell is straining to break from the well-worn and reactionary path, trod by most bourgeois discussion of the nuclear question, of accepting the state of "deterrence" as an inescapable fact of life, thus legitimizing imperialist rivalry and possession of nuclear weapons. And he even seemed open to radical solutions, arguing that preventing nuclear war must take priority over all politics as usual, and that we must be prepared to "reinvent politics" to do so.

However, Schell approached the question from an "above-class" perspective; he saw the problem as humanity in general versus the bomb. So while he showed a somewhat greater awareness of the political roots of nuclear weapons and war than many disarmers – arguing that the choice was between some form of a "world government" and the present state of "deterrence," rather than disarmament pure and simple – this perspective, along with his attachment to the West, prevented him from getting to the heart of the matter: he never identifies imperialism as the source of the nuclear danger. And the solution he seemed to lean toward, "world government," was based on the same idealist, humanity-in-general outlook. Schell's "world government" was essentially a classless body reflecting and based on abstract reason. Again that is an impossibility in a world divided into antagonistic classes; without a program for abolishing those classes, it is simply a utopian dream. There can be no "world government" without an international revolution, no just peace short of civil war.

In *The Abolition* this classless perspective and the chauvinism that goes hand in hand with it led Schell into the abyss of putting the preservation of the imperialist status quo

first and foremost, above even preventing nuclear war. Lacking a scientific critique of the present social order, Schell's chauvinism takes command. After initially posing the choice as between world government and deterrence, he opts for imperialist "sovereignty" without even seriously arguing its merits. "But while some of us may be ready for radical steps the world as a whole, it is clear, is not, and demands that we preserve the sovereignty of states, even though it requires a risk to our survival" (Schell, 1984, 57, part 2); and, "The heart sinks at the thought of world government" (p. 73, part 1). He adds that "furthermore liberty in the world at large may depend on the political survival of a certain number of countries, including, above all, the democracies of the West" (p. 54, part 2).

For Schell the dilemma, then, is finding "a way of abolishing nuclear weapons that does not require us to found a world government" (p. 74, part 1). He finds his solution in the idealist supposition that nuclear weapons have already "spoiled" war and that the state of deterrence, which supposedly flows from this, has created a situation in which international disputes can be solved peacefully. He then poses the task at hand as converting "into a settlement in principle the settlement of political differences which we have achieved in fact under the pressure of the nuclear threat. We can, in a manner of speaking, adopt our present world, with all its injustices and other imperfections, as our ideal, and then seek the most sensible and moderate means of preserving it" (p. 56, part 2). After "freezing the status quo" has eliminated the potential for U.S.-Soviet conflict, Schell argues, the imperialist powers could be persuaded to abolish their arsenals. A state of "unarmed deterrence" would prevail, "enforced not by any world police force... but by each nation's knowledge that a breakdown of the agreement would be to no one's advantage" (p. 61, part 2).

Schell's methodology and chauvinism have led him to construct a reactionary and fantastic house of cards. He set out to break new ground in the nuclear debate; his thesis that nuclear weapons have "spoiled" war and made "unarmed" deterrence possible is nothing but a pathetic rehash of the same old "nuclear war is irrational" and "imperialism can be reasoned with" notions. He initially raised the need to "reinvent politics"; he ends up arguing for freezing the present status quo. He began by asking how the world could be rid of the specter of nuclear devastation; he ends up embracing the same reactionary order that gave birth to this monstrous specter. What an ignominious and irrelevant end to such a lofty and momentous quest.

Many in the antiwar movement were upset and disappointed by the conclusions Schell drew in *The Abolition*, but unfortunately few have broken with the methodology and the chauvinism that led him to those conclusions. Schell's "humanity in general" approach is fundamental to the whole disarmament program. And a similar chauvinism and desire to "freeze the status quo" is expressed in the movement's avowed goal of peace. As Lenin observed, there is no peace in the abstract, devoid of political content:

Bourgeois pacifists and their "Socialist" imitators, or followers, have always pictured, and now picture, peace as being something in principle distinct from war, for the pacifists of both shades have never understood that "war is the continuation of the politics of peace and peace is the continuation of the politics of war." (Lenin 1970, 95)

Peace under present conditions can only mean the peaceful acceptance of imperialist relations and imperialist domination of the world. It is clear what the "peace" of the past forty years – which was largely a continuation of the politics and outcome of the Second World War – has meant for millions of people throughout the world. Ushered in on August 6 and 9, 1945, in the skies above Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this period has been characterized by countless "minor" wars, hundreds of examples of the use of force by imperialism to preserve the status quo, including the threatened use of nuclear weapons, and economic and social conditions for the vast majority of humanity that have already made life a *horror* for them – the most notable example today being massive starvation in Ethiopia and much of the rest of Africa. Is our highest aspiration to preserve this? Such a goal constitutes nothing but the rankest imperialist chauvinism. And as we have emphasized throughout, it is impossible in any event. Our real choice isn't between war and peace; it is between world war and the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism.\*

That said, it is also true that the actual outbreak of interimperialist war, with the incredible death and suffering it will bring, constitutes a horrific leap from even the present conditions. Insofar as a fight for "peace" reflects this, it has a progressive side to it. But to even consistently fight for peace one must again break with the bourgeois-imposed notions of what is and is not acceptable in such a battle; Schell's bottom-line insistence on the "political survival of . . . the democracies of the West" makes him a rather curious if by no means atypical champion of peace. So another challenge, if you will, to those desirous of peace: have the courage to be consistent in your thinking and actions, grasp who it is who "threatens the peace," don't trust their empty promises, set no limits in what

\* There has been a lot of attention paid recently to the question of preventing imperialist intervention in the oppressed nations. This is mainly a righteous response to U.S. aggression in Central America and other parts of the world. But it is also motivated in part by concern that intervention in the oppressed nations could lead to a nuclear confrontation. While support is generally voiced for the struggle of the oppressed, this outlook could well lead to *opposition* to that struggle on the basis that it might spark a nuclear holocaust – an updated version of Khrushchev's chauvinist and capitulationist position. But again, the choice isn't between war and peace, but between imperialist war and revolution. And revolution in the oppressed (and the developed) nations is an essential component of causing the kind of shifts in the world balance of forces that could prevent world war, or rip more territory from the grasp of imperialism if war were launched.

you will do and support in your struggle to stop them. Schell should not (and cannot) be dismissed or ignored. He is, rather, an excellent teacher by negative example of the bankruptcy of the disarmament approach and where that program ultimately leads.

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There is an allure to the disarmament program. Faced with mounting U.S.-bloc and Soviet-bloc war preparations and the specter of unprecedented devastation and suffering, many have latched on to what seems to them the most obvious and immediate solution – attacking the weapons of war and convincing the powers-that-be to disarm. This allure is enhanced by the fact that prospects for a revolutionary way out seem on the surface to be distant, as well as the fact that many, conditioned by years of peace and prosperity, are hesitant to break with the existing order, even as its monstrous essence becomes more apparent.

Yet the allure of disarmament is a false one. The disarmament program is based on a wrong analysis of the source of nuclear weapons and war; it functions to inhibit, not strengthen, the struggle against them; and it reflects an outlook that stems from and supports the very social system that spawned the nuclear danger.

The disarmament demand, with its acceptance of existing society, leaves our fate in the hands of those very ruling classes responsible for the danger of nuclear war. It reflects a desire to stand aside from the "great battles of world history," at a time when the future of human society demands that the masses of people take their fate into their own hands and out of the hands of those who so criminally threaten it. Those who tail the disarmament program in the name of "broadening" the movement or as a "first step" toward deeper consciousness, whatever their intent, only help the bourgeoisie contain protest within legitimate – and relatively harmless – limits and impede the masses from rising to the challenges that history has placed before them.

The disarmament program is rooted in the outlook of the middle classes and the more privileged strata in the imperialist nations who generally feel some stake in the existing order. That they continue to support and hope for the preservation of the status quo, as war rapidly approaches, points to why they can not be the main force, or by themselves shoulder the responsibility of overthrowing imperialism. That role must be played by the proletarian millions, in the imperialist nations and around the world, with "nothing to lose but their chains."

But nonetheless, those in the middle strata who are today the backbone of the antiwar movement can and *must* be an important ally for the proletariat if revolution is to succeed and prevent world war. Breaking with the disarmament program and the outlook that fosters it is crucial for those millions who yearn to banish the nuclear horror from the face of the earth to play their fullest part in doing so.

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# ***Not in Our Genes and the Waging of the Ideological Counteroffensive***

by Ardea Skybreak

As I have had occasion to state elsewhere (Skybreak 1984), the recent publication of *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature* by R.C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin (Pantheon Books) constitutes an extremely welcome development in the scientific sphere. It provides a much-needed breath of fresh air for anyone who has felt weighted down by the veritable onslaught of biodeterminist theories emanating from scientific circles, roughly since the publication (in 1975) of E.O. Wilson's *Sociobiology*. Wilson's work in many ways signaled the end of "the '60s" in the scientific sphere and ushered in a new period in which biodeterminists would increasingly regain the offensive and be extensively promoted and hailed as the vanguard of legitimate science. Sociobiology – which purports to derive the characteristics of complex social behaviors and social formations (including human societies) from the supposed properties of genes and from hare-brained speculations concerning the supposed adaptive value of different genetic configurations in the course of our species' biological evolution – has become the most concentrated expression of the new biodeterminist offensive. It went from being a relatively marginal phenomenon in the biology departments of the early '70s to becoming an all-pervasive and often dominant influence in such fields as evolutionary biology, animal behavior, and anthropology. How this happened is no mystery: grant money started pouring in, new academic posts were created for sociobiologists, new professional journals were devoted to this subject, graduate students were expected to parrot the various sociobiological inanities, big conferences were organized, etc. Within a few short years sociobiology became *the* science of the day. Unprecedented promotion of basic sociobiological tenets through such organs of mass diffusion as the *New York Times Magazine* further legitimized this reactionary trend and assured broad popularization of its essential claims.

All this of course occurred in a particular social context,

in a period marked by a worldwide ebb of revolutionary movements and in a period in which imperialist ruling classes were increasingly working to clamp down the homefronts in preparation for defending and extending their position in the world vis-à-vis their imperialist rivals. All this required a new ideological offensive to ensure that the oppressed "know their place" and fall into line unquestioningly and to remove any doubts as to the legitimacy (or at least absolute necessity) of the present social order. Sociobiology, and biodeterminism generally, fit very conveniently into the new ideological arsenal for these times. *Not in Our Genes*, whose particularly broad-ranging and sweeping refutation of biodeterminism is an important addition and extension to the growing body of such critiques which have recently begun to establish a countercurrent to this offensive (see the works of Stephan L. Chorover and Stephen Jay Gould), is part of the opposing arsenal.

There are many exciting and rare aspects of *Not in Our Genes* which, in combination, make this book stand out: the fact that it was written as a collective effort by three eminent scientists in different fields (evolutionary genetics, neurobiology, and psychology) and in two different countries (the U.S. and Britain); the fact that, whatever their differences, all three share a commitment to working towards some form of socialist society and to the promotion of the dialectical materialist methodology and to combating bourgeois ideological offensives in the scientific sphere; the fact that they are popularizing their understanding that scientific exploration does not occur in a vacuum but in a social context, is conditioned by it, and in turn feeds back upon it; the fact that they represent a small but growing scientific trend seeking the development of an "emancipatory and liberatory science" which breaks out of the stifling confines of reductionist methodologies which at one and the same time grossly distort our understanding of material reality and act to legitimize the present social order and hinder social change. All this is good news indeed!

And then there are of course the hard hitting, meticulous exposures which serve as refutations of the principal biodeterminist theories (on IQ, male-female differences, mental health, and sociobiology). I will not here review the substance of these chapters save to reiterate the fact that they are, by and large, excellent and of great use to anyone wanting to confront the biodeterminists with some depth of argument. Anyone who thinks that they already know quite enough about these questions and controversies will almost certainly be proven wrong.

What I will attempt to do here is to speak to some of the questions raised by what in some ways is the most interesting and valuable aspect of this book: its attempt (in chapters 1 through 4 and then again in the concluding chapter) to draw out of all these particular instances of biodeterminism in various fields some general unifying principles – to probe and expose further the basic determinist and reductionist outlook which informs them all. Indeed if we were better trained to recognize determinism and reductionism and its broader political and philosophical implica-

tions we would be better able to counteract it whenever it surfaced anew, be it in slightly refashioned garb. And there can be no doubt that such a process of destruction is also an important part of the struggle to strengthen and develop the methodology of dialectical materialism, not only in the scientific sphere, but also in the broader struggle to interpret – and recast – the whole of human social relations. It is in the spirit of contributing to an ongoing process – that of collectively working to sharpen up our "ideological counterweapons," with an eye to the future, that I offer the following comments and criticisms.

As the authors of *Not in Our Genes* correctly stress, determinism per se is nothing new. As a basic philosophical orientation it refers to the view that the state of things and course of events at any one point have been necessarily determined – i.e., rigidly prescribed – by prior specific factors and events linked to one another by causative chains. "Fate is fixed," in the typical determinist worldview, because what we see before us is the necessary outcome, the predetermined product of what came before. Determinists can conceive of change, but only in strict accordance with the particular properties of the elements of an assumed rigid causative sequence; there is typically little room in determinist conceptions for accident, for deviation from the prescribed pathway, for the impingement of factors from outside a particular narrow framework under consideration. For the recognition of multiple, alternate pathways of potential change. In the view of determinists things are as they are because they really could not be any different given the existence of certain prior conditions. Radical departures from either a static state of things or from, at most, an orderly and preordained unfolding from present conditions is not to be expected. Thus it is not difficult to see why various forms of determinist worldviews would have been particularly appealing and useful to ruling classes, serving at one and the same time to legitimize the existence of their particular social orders and to discourage notions that it might be possible to fundamentally derail their hold on society. In fact I suspect that determinist philosophies have been espoused by sections of human beings ever since the first differential accumulations of material surpluses provided the basis for a division of labor to become exploitative and oppressive. In fact, as far as I know, all major social upheavals of subjugated sections of humanity have had to go up against one form or another of determinist ideology, whether the supposedly unshakable determinants of the existing social order were conceived to be disembodied spirits or elements of the material world.

Much of *Not in Our Genes* is dedicated to demonstrating the social function of determinism in modern science as a legitimizer of the existing social order and as a means to hinder fundamental social change. Indeed biodeterminism is but a particular form of determinism, its particularity being that it treats the characteristics of individuals or whole societies as the necessary outcome of events set in motion by bits of matter, such as genes, rather than by idealized concepts such as gods.

In seeking to understand the philosophical roots of determinism the authors of *Not in Our Genes* draw out its reductionist essence, stating that biological determinism is in a sense a "special case of reductionism." Reductionism seeks to understand the properties of complex wholes solely in terms of the properties of their component parts, which are themselves analyzed in isolation from the larger process. Such analytical reductionism typically fails to recognize the emergence of wholly new properties of matter at the level of the more complex whole and, conversely, does not recognize that even the component parts of a whole can manifest properties stemming from interactions within the whole which they simply do not have in isolation. As the authors point out, the formal definition of reductionism is that "the compositional units of a whole are ontologically prior to the whole that the units comprise. That is, the units and their properties exist before the whole and there is a chain of causation that runs from the units to the whole" (p. 6). What this leads to are such views as that the characteristics of all living organisms can be reduced to the properties of their constituent molecules, analyzed as independent, isolated units, or that the characteristics of society (e.g., why people go to war) can be reduced to the sum of the behaviors of the individuals in society, viewed as if they existed independently of society (we go to war because individuals are aggressive, etc., etc., ad nauseam). To the reductionist — and this is where the link to determinism is perhaps the clearest — only an imperfect knowledge of the smallest components stands in the way of a full understanding of a complex phenomenon or even of its likely future development.

Reductionism has been one of the distinguishing characteristics of the bulk of scientific endeavors and theories in the bourgeois era. In fact it is difficult to gain any meaningful insight into the conduct of science in the modern world without reference to the twin pillars of determinism and reductionism in historical context. While understandably not attempting a review of these philosophical concepts throughout all of history, the authors of *Not in Our Genes* argue convincingly that the determinism and general reductionism of modern science can be traced back to the rise and establishment of the bourgeoisie in opposition to the feudal order.

Under feudalism the prevailing ideology was an idealist form of determinism which conceived of the natural world and the social order as essentially static and set by the hand of god. The different positions of lords, kings, and serfs in the social hierarchy were explained in terms of the "grace of god" and "divine right." Even the inevitable occasional perturbations in the hierarchies were usually explained in terms of "falling out of grace" or "getting back into grace." Certainly no major changes in social relations were to be expected: "People knew their place, were born and lived in it; it was natural and, like nature itself, ever-changing on the mundane, quotidian level and yet basically immutable in the larger scheme." Interestingly, as the authors point out, such views did not require consistent explanations of the causes of particular phenomena (it was all part of the grand scheme preset by

god), nor even particularly stringent delimitations and compartmentalizations of material objects as discrete entities (which would be so important in the conceptions and activities of the later bourgeois): in the feudal worldview people could become wolves or lead transmute into gold. Thus the pervasive idealism of the feudal worldview could reconcile the notion of a social and natural order prescribed by the hand of god and essentially fixed "in the larger scheme" with the idea that individual people or objects were mutable! But the overall social relations, and the basic order of the natural world (seen as "static in the long run but capricious in the short"), were not to be tampered with.

Such a state of affairs was of course not propitious to the new bourgeois forces which began to emerge out of small-scale artisan and commercial strata. Their interests lay in the further development of manufacture and expansion of trade, but this was continually hampered by the social relations of feudalism with its system of hereditary titles, fixed social positions, and rigidly tying the laboring people to the land and to a particular lord or locale. The new bourgeois required much more fluid social relations which would correspond to the particularly dynamic character of their mode of production. The following passage from Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* perhaps best captures the development of this contrast:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. (Marx and Engels 1968, 34-35)

But all this could be accomplished only once the stifling confines of feudalism had been shattered: the bourgeoisie had to rise up and overthrow the political superstructure of feudalism (the alliance of lords and Church), and to do so it had to rally to its cause the "menu peuple" (literally the small or insignificant people!), i.e., the common populace of serfs, small farmers, etc. These forces could only be unleashed through the promotion of an anticlerical, emancipatory

ideology proclaiming new ideals of equality and justice for all; both for this reason, and because the strictures of feudal ideology had truly ceased to correspond to their own conceptions of the world based on their activities in society, the emerging bourgeois forces were compelled to forge a new ideology, one which favored more materialist interpretations of the workings of nature and society and which professed that men could, through their own efforts, alter their status in society and also transform and dominate the forces of nature as never before.

The coming to power of the bourgeoisie and the subsequent development of its mode of production did in fact greatly spur the development of scientific investigation and manipulation, and this in turn contributed to the revolutionizing of the productive forces. The workings of society and the forces of nature were now subject to much greater dissection to reveal their inner core and the causes of phenomena were urgently sought so that nature could be made to serve man rather than god.

Significantly, the mechanical device, or machine, became not only the tool with which to revolutionize production but the image or basic model which would serve as an analogy for the varied workings of the social order or the natural world. Much as one might take apart a mechanical device to examine its component parts, the new materialists rushed to dissect the most complex processes into their finest details. In the course of this, they of course learned a great deal of basic information about the constituents of bodies and processes, and even enough about the properties of isolated bits and pieces to sometimes deduce organizing principles and causal relations – an understanding of which greatly contributed to the as yet unprecedented transformation of the material world associated with the bourgeois era. But despite these advances the scope of science in the bourgeois era was, from the very beginning, severely restricted by the reductionism and mechanical materialist determinism which was fostered by the bourgeois social relations and which served to reinforce them.

As noted by the authors of *Not in Our Genes*, the fact that "the machine was taken as a model for the living organism and not the reverse" had a particularly nefarious effect on the further development of the natural sciences. In their constant search for ever more basic constituents of matter thought to hold the key to understanding the properties of the more complex wholes, bourgeois scientists repeatedly failed to realize the extent to which processes at a higher level of integration of matter could be relatively independent of processes at a lower level and that wholly new properties (stemming from interactions within complex systems) emerge at higher levels of organization; such properties simply cannot be derived from the properties of atomized components viewed in isolation. And yet, to this day, the hold of reductionism on bourgeois science is so great that more than a few scientists, unable to break with this methodology, are driven to absurd attempts to reconcile materialism with religion and mysticism when they find it difficult to follow their method to its logical conclusion and

reduce such things as human consciousness and actions to the properties of packages of molecules. Thus we are treated to a constant replay of the old Cartesian dualism\* in the bastions of twentieth-century science!

Machine-organisms are of course subject to being improved and perfected; in the worldview of the new bourgeois, the individual was typically conceived as the perfecting mechanism and the success or failure of individuals was deemed to depend on their capacity to engage in ruthless competition, seen as a basic law of nature and society. Such notions of course mirrored (and legitimized) the competitive productive relations of the newly emergent capitalism rather than any fundamental law of nature, and yet this tradition is continued to this day by the sociobiologists whose approach "derives cooperation and altruism, which it recognizes as overt characteristics of human social organization, from an underlying competitive mechanism" (p. 74). Such mechanical-determinist views are easily put forward by those who profess dissatisfaction with a given social order and claim in some sense to be "progressive": *Not in Our Genes* correctly points out that many of the sociobiologists are "liberals" rather than outright open reactionaries, and in the earlier bourgeois era rigidly biodeterminist views were put forward by the likes of Emile Zola (an antiaristocratic, anticlerical early socialist who was opposed to all forms of hereditary privilege), who was firmly convinced of the innateness and heritability of mental and moral traits such as depravity, alcoholism, violent behaviors, etc. Such views, fueled by reductionist science – then as now – of course provide convenient legitimizers for the social inequities and exploitative relations which so obviously characterize the bourgeois social order.

While I am in basic agreement with the authors' depiction of how the origins of modern biological determinism are tied to the rise of the bourgeoisie, I have two points of criticism here: (1) there is in their book a little too much suggestion that god-based determinisms went out with the feudal order and that science is now fairly exclusively the touchstone of modern determinism. While I agree that there has been a general shift from religion to science as the key domain of social legitimization in bourgeois society, I think it would be wrong to underestimate how much a well-ensconced bourgeoisie – which increasingly faces the necessity of smashing opposition to its rule and to rallying the masses to ever more desperate enterprises – can easily once again invoke obscurantist fundamentalist religious justifica-

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\*The French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650), who among other things invented analytical geometry, was firmly committed to a mechanistic worldview and had a tremendous influence (comparable to Newton's) on the thinking of the new materialists of the bourgeois era who often emulated his attempts to reduce everything to mechanical principles. Descartes, however, drew the line at human thought and action and therefore combined his mechanical scientific rationality with the notion that man had a soul which was not governed by the laws of nature and which remained distinct from his material body – hence the concept of Cartesian dualism which persists to this day.

tions for their social order: e.g., not only is it "in our genes," but we have "god on our side." Witness, for instance, the key role of religion in legitimizing the state of Israel or the electoral platforms of candidates for the U.S. presidency, the extensive promotion of fundamentalists such as Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, official resurrection of the prophecies of a coming Armageddon, etc.; and more importantly (2) I was bothered by the section depicting an essential (or perhaps even principal) contradiction in bourgeois society as being between "reality" and professed "ideology,"\* a theme which recurs a number of times throughout the book:

The problem in creating an ideological justification is that the principle may prove rather more sweeping than the practice demands. The founders of liberal democracy needed an ideology to justify and legitimate the victory of the bourgeoisie over the entrenched aristocracy, of one class over another, rather than an ideology that would eliminate classes and patriarchy. Yet they also needed the support of the *menu peuple*, the yeoman farmers, and the peasants in their struggle. One can hardly imagine making a revolution with the battle cry "Liberty and justice for some!" So the ideology outstrips the reality. The pamphleteers of the bourgeois revolution created, by necessity and no doubt in part by conviction, a set of philosophical principles in contradiction with the social reality they intended to build. The final victory of the bourgeoisie over the old order meant the ideas of freedom and equality that had been the subversive weapons of a revolutionary class now became the legitimating ideology of the class in power. The problem was and still is that the society created by the Revolution was in obvious contrast with the ideology from which it drew its claims of right. (pp. 65-66)

And further on: "The political ideology of freedom and, especially, equality that legitimated the overthrow of the aristocracy helped to produce a society in which the idea of equality is still as subversive as ever, if taken seriously" (pp. 67-68).

In the political sense I think that this treatment of the question of equality represents one of the main weaknesses of this book. It is true that many of the founding principles of bourgeois democracy (ideals of justice and liberty for all

\* Unfortunately the authors of *Not in our Genes* one-sidedly identify "ideology" only with the *ruling ideas* of a particular society at a particular time, which those in power promote in attempts to legitimize the existing social order. They quote Marx and Engels on this point (see footnote bottom page four in *Not in Our Genes*) but miss the fact that Marx and Engels also founded an ideology, one which I would hold is not only partisan but concentrates a correct worldview and methodology. Thus "ideology" is not the exclusive province of ruling classes — all ideologies are simply worldviews and methodologies; what differs is their degree of correspondence to the material world and their social role.

society) were "rather more sweeping than the practice demands," basically for the reasons outlined by the authors. In doing exposure of the bourgeois system one can certainly point out that "despite the idea of equality, some people have power over their own lives and the lives of others, while most do not" (p. 66), and that today "economic and social power remains extremely unequally distributed and shows no sign of being redistributed." Similarly it is worthwhile exposing how restrictive even some of the founding principles of bourgeois democracy really were, such as the U.S. *Declaration of Independence* which in fact denies the basic freedoms to women and slaves (and which describes Indians as "merciless savages"! ). In fact, as has been convincingly argued by Bob Avakian in his article "*Declaration of Independence, Equal Opportunity and Bourgeois Right*," as well as in his book *For a Harvest of Dragons*, a close examination of the writings of the founders and main ideologues of bourgeois democracy make clear that their very *conception* and definition of such terms as liberty, equality, and the "inalienable rights" of man were conditioned by their particular class position and were "giving expression to the outrage of classes... restricted in their accumulation of wealth and capital" (Avakian. 1983B, 17) by the existing social order. The superstructure of politics and ideology is generally in accord with the underlying economic base of a society; it corresponds essentially with the level of development of the productive forces and the economic and general social relations of that society. In recognizing the extent to which the founding principles of bourgeois democracy actually *did* correspond to the productive forces and relations characteristic of the bourgeois order that was coming into being, we can realize that the problem is not that the original principles have not been applied in practice but that "they have been, in the U.S. itself and generally in all bourgeois societies; and the time is long since past when *that* is the best and highest that humanity is capable of achieving" (Avakian. 1983B, 17).

This is why it is wrong to romanticize those old principles or to say that "the idea of equality is still as subversive as ever" (even with the qualifier "if taken seriously"! ). What the early bourgeois ideologues meant by the call for general equality was in fact a call for "equal opportunity for all" which, if applied consistently, could only recreate conditions of social inequality and exploitation (a point I am sure the authors of *Not in Our Genes* would agree with). In fact the very concept of equality (or lack of it) is contingent on the existence of a division of labor based on differential accumulations of material surpluses, on sets of social relations which set the framework within which questions of equality and inequality arise. So long as social divisions of labor continue to exist and to be based on differential accumulation, equality can only be extended — and then only relatively — to some sections of humanity, and always at the expense of others. Thus, calls for equality in this era essentially reflect a demand for "adjustments" in the relative social status or material wealth of strata with conflicting interests, rather than inspiring a fundamental recasting of social relations. Typically it will lead back to bandaid reformism and — in the

imperialist countries in particular – to chauvinist views since, short of a total overthrow of world imperialist relations, calls for social equality in such countries translate objectively as demands to be equal partners in the plunder of the oppressed nations. Of course the demand for equality can play an important part in the overall struggle against the existing social order. As Bob Avakian has also pointed out, a recognition of the historical limitations of equality

... does not mean that, before the achievement of communism, communists regard the question of equality as unimportant or fail to fight to eliminate social inequality of all kinds, including between peoples and nations. Quite the opposite – this fight is, as indicated, a crucial component part of the overall struggle to overthrow capitalism and uproot all the soil giving rise to it and nurturing class distinctions generally. But, if we set our sights no higher than the goal of "equality," if we failed to grasp that it is impossible to achieve in a society divided into classes and that it can only be a subordinate part of the world-historic battle for a much higher goal, then we would be incapable of actually advancing to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the replacement of the bourgeois epoch by the epoch of communism and therefore incapable of actually eliminating social inequality along with all the other evils characteristic of capitalism (and exploiting systems and backward societies in general). (Avakian 1981, 7-8)

Thus in today's world a truly subversive perspective must break out of this framework of equality vs. inequality and reach for something qualitatively higher than mere equality or democracy "made pure" in some sense. It is important to understand how all such ideological premises are based on, stem from, a material foundation of concrete social relations. What is called for is a complete recasting of these *social relations* on a world scale.

In a world where humanity is not constricted within a division of labor based on exploitation and differential accumulation, the concept of equality will itself become largely meaningless. People will still be different, engage in varying activities, struggle over different and conflicting ideas, but in the absence of any remnants of exploitative divisions of labor anywhere, they would probably stare quizzically at a visitor from the past asking them whether they were equal or unequal. The truly subversive perspective today must begin to call forth in the minds of the oppressed images of just such a society and not something short of it which fails to break out of the existing framework. Even the likely transitional stages which will precede the total emancipation of humanity from the old division of labor (i.e., socialist societies) should not put forward the struggle for equality as their revolutionary objective. The revolutions which are needed to topple the present world order cannot do so by resurrecting the manifestos of the bourgeois revolutions! In fact

many of the necessary revolutionary transformations of society – such as narrowing the differences between town and country, men and women, mental and manual labor, etc., and especially correcting the worldwide lopsidedness stemming from the differences between oppressor and oppressed nations – cannot begin to be corrected by making equality the highest and most essential goal, since such a process will require many to relinquish (through persuasion or coercion) some of their past privileges and bourgeois right. This can only be accomplished by calling forth some much loftier aspirations than those represented by the term equality. As Bob Avakian expressed it:

When communists speak of abolishing social inequality we mean first and as the foundation the abolition of classes. But beyond that we mean the abolition of social conditions where such concepts as equal opportunity for all and their reflection in law and politics – equality before the law and democracy generally – have lost their meaning, *because the individual struggle for existence will have been eliminated together with the abolition of class distinctions* and the members of society will consciously contribute what they can to society's overall advancement, taking back from it what they need in order to continue to develop in an all-around way and make a still greater contribution. It is this ideal whose time has now come – or rather the reverse, it is the development of the material conditions in society up to this point that have now brought forth this ideal and demand its realization. (Avakian, 1983B, 17)

This last sentence is, I feel, very important, representing a correct dialectical interpretation of the relationship between the economic base of society and the corresponding superstructure of politics and ideas. I think the authors of *Not in Our Genes* tend to reverse this relation, probably because they are intent on opposing the mechanical reductionism of the "vulgar Marxists" who typically flounder in a muck of economic determinism, who have exceedingly narrow conceptions of revolutionary struggles, and who generally deny the importance of the superstructural arena.

The struggle over ideas is crucial in the preparation of a revolution, and the revolution itself (the seizure of power) takes place in the superstructure. But a social system is ripe for revolution not because its superstructure does not essentially correspond to its economic base, but because contradictions heating up in the economic base are straining against the limits imposed by the existing superstructure. In other words conditions exist for new relations of production to come into being but these cannot establish themselves until the superstructural lid is exploded – and this calls forth a new ideology reflective of these relations attempting to become established – and not some adjustment or perfecting of the old.

A related criticism is that this book suffers from a lack of

analysis of the questions of fundamental and principal contradictions of the bourgeois social order.\* The most basic and fundamental contradiction of the bourgeois epoch, that which most defines its character and its basis for cohesion, is that between private appropriation and socialized production, which defines the essential tension within the system. This fundamental contradiction manifests itself through two forms of motion, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat on the one hand, and the contradiction between the anarchy and organization of production on the other. These two manifestations and the contradictions they in turn give rise to are constantly and forcefully interpenetrating. And since under imperialism capital accumulation occurs on a world scale in a globally integrated network, for the first time in history, it should be possible to determine the principal contradiction in the world at a particular moment. Bob Avakian in particular has recently struggled to develop this analysis (see, for example, *Revolutionary Worker*, November 27, 1981) and has argued that the principal contradiction in the world today is the contention between rival imperialist blocs which is leading at breakneck speed towards world war. That this kind of analysis is not mere academic exercise but absolutely essential for revolutionary advance is reflected in, among other things, the fact that a great many revolutionary forces around the world implicitly or explicitly reject such an analysis and continue to view things largely as if this were still the world of the 1960s – which continually leads to a downplaying of the danger of interimperialist world war and of the centrality of that question for revolutionaries.

I am not for a moment suggesting that the authors of *Not in Our Genes* should have launched into a full analysis of such questions in this book (nor do I intend to do so here; the reader is advised to consult other writings in this respect, particularly the controversial analyses developed by Avakian as well as the further elaboration and application of these basic views in *America in Decline*, Vol. 1, by Raymond Lotta with Frank Shannon). That I even raise this question here is because I repeatedly sensed in *Not in Our Genes* an underlying muddle (or disagreements) on these sorts of questions which I think are part of the reason for the great emphasis placed on describing as a "serious contradiction" in bourgeois society the supposed contradiction between "the ideology of freedom and equality and the actual social dynamic that generates powerlessness and inequality." And in relation to the question of worldwide integration of the imperialist system, I think that the ideological props and justifications of this system must reflect this difference relative to the early days of competitive capitalism: what is called for now is more than legitimizing social inequalities

\* The fundamental contradiction here refers to that contradiction which most characterizes the underlying essence of a process (and which must be resolved for an entirely new process to come into being); the principal contradiction refers to the main or most defining contradiction within the overall process at a particular point in its motion and development. (Compare Mao 1967, 1:311-47 and Avakian 1979, 131-97.)

between men and women, rich and poor, dominant and oppressed nationalities, etc., within one or another part of the world (country), although that need continues to exist. There is also a need to justify the *global* imperialist order, the lopsidedness of the world. For instance I am not sure that the "New Synthesis" of the sociobiologists should be described as "yet another scientific attempt to put a natural scientific foundation under Adam Smith" (p. 264), despite the fact that its main proponents (e.g., E.O. Wilson) may in fact consider that society is best served by individuals acting in a self-serving manner. Somehow the combination of a theory of a *universal* human nature with the reduction of individual humans to faceless *packages of genes* acting to preserve or generate the best possible conditions for their continued reproduction (even at the cost of sacrifice of individuals) seems particularly appropriate to legitimize a *global* order which is getting ready to call for mass slaughter and unprecedented human sacrifice in the defense of what is already a cutthroat way of life.

In any case, I do agree strongly with the authors' emphasis that biodeterminist theories originated, and continue to be fueled, in relation to a specific social function which is to justify the status quo and discourage social disorder and disruptions. This is made especially clear by the shared features of all biodeterminist theories which the authors distill as follows:

First, it is asserted that the inequalities in society are a direct and ineluctable consequence of the differences in intrinsic merit and ability among individuals. . . . Second, while liberal ideology has followed a cultural determinism emphasizing circumstance and education, biological determinism locates such processes and failures of the will and character as coded, in large part, in an individual's genes; merit and ability will be passed from generation to generation within families. Finally, it is claimed that the presence of such biological differences between individuals of necessity leads to the creation of hierarchical societies because it is part of biologically determined human nature to form hierarchies of status, wealth, and power. All three elements are necessary for a complete justification of present social arrangements. (p. 68)

Much of *Not in Our Genes* is concerned with a point-by-point refutation of these three claims, which have no scientific validity. An important argument of bourgeois determinism is that social inequalities "are both fair and inevitable because they are natural" (p. 70), supposedly stemming from differences in biologically determined abilities of individuals. The argument is made that "life is like a foot race. In the bad old days the aristocrats got a head start (or were declared winners by fiat), but now everyone starts together so that the best win – best being determined biologically" (p. 68). If you don't succeed, it's because you just don't have what it takes. But in fact there is no causal connection be-

tween intrinsic individual abilities and capacities and an individual's position in society (e.g., the number of doctors is not determined by the number of people capable of becoming doctors, but by larger economic considerations). There is no biological basis for Jensen's statement that "we have to face it, the assortment of persons into occupational roles simply is not 'fair' in any absolute sense. The best we can hope for is that true merit, given equality of opportunity, acts as a basis for the natural assorting power" (cited on p. 69); nor for E.O. Wilson's statement that differences between men and women are likely to be sufficiently grounded in genes "to cause a substantial division of labor in even the most free and egalitarian of future societies. . . . Even with identical education and equal access to all professions, men are likely to continue to play a disproportionate role in political life, business and science" (Wilson 1978).

And there is certainly no basis for believing that the rulers in contemporary society rule because they are biologically superior and better equipped to rule and therefore more resistant to being overthrown, as suggested in this amazing statement by Richard Herrnstein of Harvard: "The privileged classes of the past were probably not much superior biologically to the downtrodden, which is why revolution had a fair chance of success. By removing artificial barriers between classes, society has encouraged the creation of biological barriers. When people can take their natural level in society, the upper classes will, by definition, have greater capacity than the lower" (cited on p. 69).

In fact there is no validity to the notion that individual differences in what are termed abilities are determined by genes. For one thing all aspects of an individual reflect the constant interplay between its phenotype (i.e., the sum of the characteristics manifested by the individual, resulting from the interaction of its genes and its environment - the phenotype is not fixed, but in a constant state of change) and the external environment. It is this dynamic interplay which brings to the fore (or suppresses) the endless variety of individual human behaviors. The individual is not in a vacuum but in a social context from its earliest inception. The authors of *Not in Our Genes* therefore stress that one cannot treat "the individual as ontologically prior to the social," and yet this is exactly what the biodeterminists consistently do (more on this later). In fact all that is known today of the mechanisms of population genetics and biological evolutionary change argues against the existence of specific genes coding for complex social behaviors, whether expressed at the level of individuals or in society more broadly. Finally, there is no such thing as a rigidly predetermined, biologically based human nature, a collection of fixed individual and social traits which lead inevitably to particular forms of social organization and especially to various types of hierarchies. In fact what stands out in human evolution is the tremendous flexibility of individual humans who are typically capable of a wide range of behaviors in response to changing social circumstances; furthermore this flexibility and variability is qualitatively greater at the level of human society, which greatly amplifies individual human capabilities and whose organizing prin-

ciples cannot be understood solely (or even mainly) as collections of individual properties and acts. Thus it is not our biology which stands in the way of the emancipation of humanity from outdated social relations.

In their multifaceted discussions of the determinists' notions of "human nature," the authors of *Not in Our Genes* have particularly focused on the claims of those who echo the bourgeois tradition of Thomas Hobbes (who considered the state of nature to be "the war of all against all") or of the Social Darwinists, who attributed to nature the characteristics of the social relations of competitive capitalism and described nature as "red in tooth and claw" (this then made it appear that ruthless economic competition and exploitation, the domination of colonial peoples, etc., was somehow in keeping with the laws of nature). The modern sociobiologists are right in line with this kind of thinking: "In its most modern avatar, sociobiology, the Hobbesian ideology even derives cooperation and altruism, which it recognizes as overt characteristics of human social organization, from an underlying competitive mechanism" (p. 74). In this view both individual and collective human social behaviors and forms of organization are dictated essentially by the underlying genotypes which have been molded by natural selection in the course of human evolution. Present social arrangements are thus seen as based in biological nature and historically favored by natural selection - they are thus both inevitable and just. Since, as the authors of *Not in Our Genes* correctly point out, many of the sociobiologists are "liberal men," they often add to their arguments (objectively legitimizing and reinforcing the status quo) some phrase or two about how we may still be able to get rid of some of the social inequalities, but we should be prepared to pay a price for such tampering with mother nature, perhaps even losing our basic human nature in the process: "If the planned society - the creation of which seems inevitable in the coming century - were to deliberately steer its members past those stresses and conflicts that once gave the destructive phenotypes their Darwinian edge, the other phenotypes might dwindle with them. In this, the ultimate genetic sense, social control would rob man of his humanity" (cited on p. 75).

Chapter nine of *Not in Our Genes* is a thorough refutation of the main sociobiological arguments which constitute the leading edge and the most influential sector of the biodeterminist school of thought. The methods and arguments of the sociobiologists are so pervasive that they have crept into the thinking of many who are critical of existing social relations and of biodeterminism itself, as evidenced for instance by the existence of a "certain strand of feminist sociobiology" which rejects the blatant chauvinism of most sociobiologists but not their basic methodology and ends up presenting "merely the other side of the same false coin." (See *Not in Our Genes*, p. 161 and a further discussion of this problem in my recent text, *Of Primeval Steps and Future Leaps* [Chicago: Banner Press, 1985].)

While I will not attempt an overview of the critique of sociobiology here (see Skybreak 1984 for some brief notes on

the subject), I would like to make some comments about the authors' treatment of what they call "cultural reductionism," which they see as another form of reductionism often set up against the biodeterminist arguments, yet which also tends to metaphysically separate ("falsely dichotomize") the biological and the social, but from the other end of the spectrum so to speak. Distinguishing themselves from the "cultural determinist" critics of biological determinism they state that:

We must insist that a full understanding of the human condition demands an integration of the biological and the social in which neither is given primacy or ontological priority over the other but in which they are seen as being related in a dialectical manner, a manner that distinguishes epistemologically between levels of explanation relating to the individual and levels relating to the social without collapsing one into the other or denying the existence of either. (p. 75)

I am much in agreement with the thrust of the authors' critique of "cultural determinism" and with their analysis of the need to distinguish different levels of organization of matter as well as different levels of explanation of phenomena, as they argue towards the end of their book (more on all this later); but I feel that their attempt to counterpose a dialectical approach to the metaphysics of both types of reductionists is mired in a certain amount of eclecticism. This is particularly evident in the fact that they frequently describe contradictions in terms of the ceaseless interplay of the two aspects (which is correct) but never seem to want to recognize that one or the other aspect (of whatever contradiction) will be primary at any given point in defining the overall character of the contradiction and the relative identity of the matter in question. For instance, in the quote above, while I agree that we must view the biological and the social in dialectical integration, distinguish levels of explanation as well as organization, and not give ontological priority to the individual in isolation from the social, I feel that, for a specified level of organization and level of analysis, the two aspects of the contradiction are *not equally weighted* and it is therefore incorrect to insist that neither be viewed as primary over the other. In his analysis of factors governing the relative identity and constant struggle and interpenetration of the two aspects of contradictions, Mao stressed the role of unevenness both in defining the identity of a process and as an impetus for its transformation:

In any contradiction the development of the contradictory aspects is uneven. Sometimes they seem to be in equilibrium, which is however only temporary or relative, while unevenness is basic. Of the two contradictory aspects, one must be principal and the other secondary. The principal aspect is the one playing the leading role in the contradiction. The nature of a thing is determined mainly by the prin-

cipal aspect of a contradiction, the aspect which has gained the dominant position.

And Mao then added:

But this situation is not static; the principal and nonprincipal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other and the nature of the thing changes accordingly. (Mao 1967, 1:333)

Similarly, at a higher level of integration, the various contradictions which go into any given process in nature or society contribute in different degrees to both characterizing the process at a particular point in time and to promoting and channeling its subsequent motion and development. Hence the concept of fundamental contradiction (which defines the underlying essence of the process as a whole) and of principal contradiction (which is the main contradiction within the larger process at a particular point in its development). At different points different principal contradictions may come to characterize the larger process and serve as the "leading edge" of its development so to speak. But at all times the correct identification of the principal contradiction is crucial to an understanding of the particular phase of development the larger process is in at that time, and to its bearing on the subsequent development and eventual resolution of the larger process and emergence of a whole new process based on a different fundamental contradiction. As Mao put it:

There are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions.

... at every stage in the development of a process, there is only one principal contradiction which plays the leading role.

... Therefore, in studying any complex process in which there are two or more contradictions, we must devote every effort to finding its principal contradiction. Once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can be readily solved. (Mao 1967, 1:331-32)

I will return to this point a number of times in what follows, but first I want to indicate what I think is important in *Not in Our Genes's* critique of cultural reductionism. The authors point out that one type of cultural reductionism is a form of economic reductionism or "vulgar Marxism," which reduces all individual or social behaviors to the workings of economic laws in the most narrow sense ("discounts human consciousness as a mere epiphenomenon of the economy") and is in the tradition of the Social Darwinists, Kautskyites, and some Trotskyites. We are only too familiar with this sort of Menshevik drabness! While it is correct to criticize this kind of reductionism, it is in fact correct to say, as Marx

stressed, that "social being determines consciousness,"\* and that, in the general sense, prevailing social relations have everything to do with the way people think. It is not as if there were some automatic one-to-one relation between each individual's position in society and the way that individual will interpret things, seek or not seek change, etc., but there is no doubt that the dominant ideas of society (the ruling ideologies, etc.) tend to correspond to the dominant social relations, and that the thinking of individuals, while always very diverse and changing, will generally tend to correspond to these prevailing ideas to a greater or lesser degree depending on their various life experiences defined primarily in terms of social relations. The authors of *Not in Our Genes* invoke Mao, among others, to stress "the power of human consciousness in both interpreting and changing the world, a power based on an understanding of the essential dialectical unity of the biological and the social, not as two distinct spheres, or separable components of action, but as ontologically coterminous" (p. 76). I can only agree with the emphasis on human consciousness and its role in changing the world (a theme emphasized throughout the book) but again, there needs to be a stronger sense of the material basis for this consciousness – as there is in Mao – as well as a sharper understanding of the nature of contradiction as the unity of two aspects which are constantly changing and interpenetrating but which are not of equal weight at a given time, either within that contradiction or in relation to a larger process.

I nevertheless welcome the criticism of the mechanical materialist reductionist interpretations of human behaviors which metaphysically separate the biological from the social, whether at the level of individuals or of society more broadly. According to *Not in Our Genes*, such separations are very much in vogue among many sociologists and psychologists who have developed theories over the last two decades or so which suggest essentially that individual behaviors do not exist "except as a consequence of social labeling." While the authors recognize that societal labels do in fact help to shape social relations (as when teachers tend to give higher grades to pupils they have been told are more advanced), the authors stress, I think correctly, that individuals have a certain internal identity and are not merely passive respondents to their environments: all forms of mental illness for instance cannot simply be ascribed to a society's labeling of a person as "mad" or "ill" (although many of them can!).

Another form of cultural determinism which must be avoided is the approach which focuses on the individual, but which treats the individual as a "cultural tabula rasa," one "on which biology has no influence" and which is usually seen as molded primarily by early cultural experiences. This is the thinking underlying Skinnerian behaviorism and the various modification schools, as well as the thinking of those sociologists and anthropologists who concoct theories of national or class "subcultures" transmitted over the generations through cultural means, rather than through the genes. An

example of this is the notion of a "culture of poverty" defined in terms of supposed shared characteristics of the poor, such as demands for "immediate gratification, short-term planning, violence and unstable family structures," which are furthermore seen as passed along in families.

This section of *Not in Our Genes* is important because it exposes the fact that cultural determinism, which usually poses as more progressive than biodeterminism because of its "extreme environmentalism," is actually politically very harmful: in its more benign forms it situates social ills at the level of individuals and issues calls for greater education rather than any fundamental social change ("liberal cultural reductionism only requires that we change their heads, or the way others think about them"); and in its more blatant forms it is even consistent with eugenicist policies, as in the case of a British minister of education who recently argued for increased promotion of contraception among the poor on the basis that the poor were hopelessly caught in a "cycle of deprivation" through which their supposedly maladaptive characteristics become self-perpetuating, dooming their children to continued poverty!

While cultural determinism is today secondary to biological determinism in terms of reactionary social function (a point I feel confident the authors would agree with), I realized in reading *Not in Our Genes* that I had not been fully aware of the reactionary role played by many such theories in the realm of mental health, sociology, and cultural anthropology, and I am grateful to the authors for providing us with a sense of the need to challenge this more "liberal" version of determinism, both because it hinders the thorough refutation of biological determinism and because it is also harmful in its own right.

But how in fact should the relationship of organism and environment, of individual and social, be characterized in the human species? In struggling to answer this question the authors discuss the strength and weaknesses of an approach they call "interactionism," which they see as "the beginning of wisdom" but still short of a fully dialectical treatment of the question – which the authors feel requires an understanding of the constant interpenetration of organism and environment rather than a one-sided emphasis on how environments affect and mold organisms (more on this later). In contrast to the views of the determinists who act as if "causes of events in the life of an organism can be partitioned out into a biological proportion and a cultural proportion, so that biology and culture add up to 100 percent" (p. 268), interactionists more correctly understand that "it is neither the genes nor the environment that determines an organism but a unique interpenetration between them" (p. 268). Since they understand that organisms inherit their genes, but not their "traits" or phenotypic characteristics (which result from complex interactions between genes and variable environmental circumstances and which are therefore varied and changing for any given genotype), interactionists often focus on trying to understand how changes in external environmental variables affect the development of organisms. It is possible, for instance, to demonstrate experimentally how identical

\*A point developed in Marx 1976, 3.

genotypes (e.g., a series of genetically identical corn seeds) will give rise to vastly different phenotypic manifestations (e.g., different-sized seedlings) depending on the availability of external variables such as light, water, nutrients, etc. This doesn't mean however that we can predict the characteristics of any given individual from "a knowledge of some *average* of effects of genotype or environment taken separately" since, for instance, some corn genotypes grow better than some others under certain conditions, but worse than those same others under different conditions (see p. 269). In other words, to predict the characteristics (phenotype) manifested by a particular individual in a particular environment we would have to be able not only to specify very clearly the characteristics of that environment (which can get very complex outside of a laboratory-controlled experiment) but also to know a great deal of detail about the individual's genotype and the processes of development of the organism. All this is not theoretically impossible, but as the authors point out, "we do not have such knowledge, or anywhere near it, so that for the foreseeable future only empirical observation can reveal what norms of reaction look like" (p. 269). And if this weren't problematic enough for any species, consider the problem with human beings, where we can't even get empirical data on ranges of phenotypes which are possible for a given genotype because to do so would require cloning great numbers of the same individuals and rearing them in different, rigidly controlled environments – which is neither feasible nor desirable, for obvious reasons!

A more fundamental problem in the interactionist approach, however, is that it cannot serve to interpret social life. In fact it shares with the determinists two incorrect assumptions:

First, it supposes the alienation of organism and environment, drawing a clean line between them and supposing that environment makes organism, while forgetting that organism makes environment. Second, it accepts the ontological priority of the individual over the collectivity and therefore the epistemological sufficiency of the explanation of individual development for the explanation of social organization. Interactionism implies that if only we could know the norms of reaction of all living human genotypes and the environments in which they find themselves we would understand society. But in fact we would not. (p. 270)

This is a crucial point which is rarely understood or seriously taken into account by scientists, due in significant measure to the influence of reductionism in bourgeois science. Even many people who recognize the first point, that organisms (and human beings to the greatest degree) transform their environment, often do not recognize the second point and don't realize how much it is true that the individual is not on-

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\*The norm of reaction of a genotype is the range of phenotypes it can give rise to as it develops in different environments.

tologically prior to the social – individual humans do not develop (and *never have developed*) in a vacuum but in a social context. Our species was clearly a social species from the time of its earliest origins, as is evident, among other things, from the fact that human infants are completely incapable of living and developing on their own. And as the authors of *Not in Our Genes* repeatedly stress, the social context has properties of its own which are not simply the sum of the properties of the individuals within it.

Thus there are many ways in which even those who stress the interaction of organism and environment still continue to metaphysically separate the two aspects of this relation. The authors are correct in pointing out the pervasiveness of the view that "changes in organisms both within their lifetimes and across generations are understood as occurring against a background of an environment that has its own autonomous laws of change and that interacts with organisms to direct their change" while the organism merely "adapts and molds itself, or dies if it fails" (p. 272). (A criticism of such views in the fields of developmental biology and evolutionary biology can be found especially in the writings of Stephen Jay Gould and in Lewontin's other works against sociobiology and against the even more broadly held interpretations of all evolutionary change as occurring through natural selection, which itself is seen as a perfecting mechanism promoting unidirectional change and always favoring adaptation.)

In fact individual organisms are never simply "respondents" to the workings of the laws of development in the external environment. *Not in Our Genes* offers numerous examples of how organisms are constantly affecting – and changing – their external surroundings. I can only agree with the authors' critique of the view of internal development always following a smooth and predetermined pathway, "reserving for the environment only the role of triggering the process or of blocking its further progress at one stage or another" (p. 270). In real life each aspect can often provoke rather dramatic transformations in the development of the other.

In reading *Not in Our Genes*, and particularly this section arguing for the active role of the organism in its relation to environment, I felt that more should have been said about the question of historical developmental constraints (emphasized by Gould, for instance). While internal development does not occur along preordained pathways and is subject to being affected in all sorts of ways by external conditions (which are themselves subject to change in the course of this interaction), there are, at any given time, limits and constraints imposed by prior historical development (at both levels) which close off certain possibilities of change at that particular moment and which also delineate certain openings for change at that particular time. I believe that a correct assessment of these historical constraints and restrictions at any given time is key to understanding not only the current status of phenomena (in nature and in society) but also their motion and development, the bases for change – what "the options are," so to speak (although there is of course nothing

preordained or predetermined about subsequent pathways of change, nothing to guarantee that such openings will be taken). Somehow I felt that in their urge to combat the narrow determinist views of smooth, preordained developmental "unfoldings," the authors of *Not in Our Genes* may have been pulled a bit too much toward the idealist pole of discounting historical constraints. Hints of idealism also come up in their overall correct criticism of the mechanical view of organism as passive respondent to environmental change. I do not agree for instance that "we must make a clear distinction between an unstructured external world of physical forces and the environment (literally the surroundings) of an organism which is defined by the organism itself" (p. 273, my emphasis). This seems like a very narrow, very "local," and static view of an organism's external environment!

I don't mean to go overboard here, but this definition of environment as defined by organism has echoes of subjective idealism à la Berkeley, for whom the "mind defines" external reality! In any case, what the authors mean by "the organism defines its environment" is that the nature of the organism itself defines what aspects of the environment are relevant to its development and which are not. There is certainly a valid point here, which I interpret as the need to distinguish between different kinds of contradiction at any given point in time, since not all of them will have the same bearing on a process of development and change. In the authors' examples, for instance, the supposed "universal fact of nature" known as gravity is in fact irrelevant to tiny microorganisms which are unaffected by gravity, while conversely these are very affected by forces such as Brownian movement which is, on the other hand, irrelevant to something as large as human beings. This is an important point, and if this were all the authors meant by "the organism defines its environment" I would have little quarrel with the formulation. But I believe they are saying more than this. There is a tendency to treat organism and environment almost as if they could infinitely recreate each other, constantly molding and shaping each other with little apparent regard for the constraints set by the historical development of either the organism or its environment, which delineate both the limitations and the options for further change. And while it is wrong to one-sidedly emphasize the effects of environment in directing change in organisms with no regard for how organisms in fact constantly recreate their environments, both organism and environment undergo processes of development which are not fully encompassed solely by the dialectical relation between them. In that sense I am not sure I agree that it is wrong to say that the external environment has its own "autonomous laws of change" (p. 272). Every process, at each level of organization, has its own relatively distinct laws of motion and development, if these are understood to be defined by past historical development – a set of restrictions and options in relation to potential future change. Further change, at whatever level, cannot go off into just any old pathway or direction, any more than it has to follow a preordained and unidirectional pathway.

Furthermore, exactly because change is never complete-

ly restricted and predetermined in self-contained, narrow spheres, it is wrong to reduce the scope of external features which can interact with a given level of matter to the most temporally and spatially immediate and local "surroundings." It seems to me that this misses out on the basis for so much of the dramatic qualitative changes which mark processes in nature generally and in human society as well. Consider, for instance, some photosynthesizing algae floating about the oceans: if the organism defines its environments then we will examine how it is transformed, and what it transforms, only in the most immediate and local sense, such as the effect of algae mats on neighboring organisms, the effects of predation by different species of fish, etc. There is a tendency in the authors' reasoning which would lead to the conclusion that a distant volcano, or nuclear missile bases clear across the planet, could in no way be encompassed by the organism's definition of its environment, even though both are capable of injecting sufficient soot and other particulate matter into the atmosphere to significantly reduce levels of photosynthesis around the globe (by reducing levels of available sunlight), in one instance to such a degree that one can expect photosynthesizing organisms to be knocked back drastically enough that massive extinctions of species dependent on them would likely ensue (possibly including our own species). In what sense then are the volcanoes or missile bases outside the scope of the algae's environment and irrelevant to its potential processes of change? It is true that at any given time the algae/soot contradiction may not pose itself, or have any significant bearing on the development of either aspect of this contradiction between the algae and its local "self-defined" environment. A close analysis of this will reveal what factors (internal and external) are most defining of the algae at that particular moment, of its relative identity as algae in that context. It should also be possible to document present interactions between organism and local environment and perhaps make some predictions about future changes in either or both on that basis (if we weren't able in practice to distinguish between more or less defining contradictions and greater or lesser changes resulting from local impingements on the relation of organism and local environment we would be hard pressed to understand or make controlled changes in anything!). But such a temporally and spatially restricted slice of an organism/environment contradiction, while a necessary tool for analysis and experimentation on a certain scale, obviously does not encompass all potential features of this interaction or all possible pathways of change.

In particular I feel that the localistic definition of an organism's environment does not provide us with a framework with which to anticipate and explore effects on the basic organism/environment relation when some contradiction in the broader environment, which had until now remained so remote as to have essentially no effect on the local relation (or a very negligible effect), now (perhaps quite suddenly) enters into this relation 'from the outside' and becomes extremely relevant to the process of change and development of the organism and its environment in relation

to each other. Again, in practice you have to draw the line somewhere or you would just end up saying that everything connects to everything else in the universe, which is true but of little value for understanding what gives matter its particular forms and patterns of development. But what I am looking for, I think, is some sort of application to natural phenomena generally of Bob Avakian's novel analysis of the interpenetration of internal and external. In contrast to much of the 'left,' which continues to view the development of objective conditions and their interpenetration with the tasks of revolutionaries through the narrow prism of local (country or regional) analyses of social relations, Avakian argues that in the era of imperialism capital accumulation takes place on a world scale in a globally integrated network, and that a consequence of this is that developments at the world level are today more determinant of what happens in any given country than the local contradictions within that particular country per se. What has in fact happened is that *what is external in one context (at one level) has become internal in another.* In the political sphere such an understanding has very crucial implications, being essential for any thorough rupture with national chauvinism and other forms of nationalism and for making a correct analysis of the objective conditions in the world today in their motion and development – both for grasping the centrality of the question of impending imperialist world war and how rapidly things are moving in that direction, and the need and possibilities for concerted revolutionary breakthroughs which may yet derail this motion and restructure world relations on a whole new basis.

I believe that Avakian's unorthodox approach to the question of internal and external represents an extension and deepening of Mao's treatment of contradiction and that it has broad philosophical application, including for analyses of the bases of change in nature. This means, first of all, that in order to essentially characterize a process, at whatever level, we need to distinguish between different *types* of contradictions which confer motion to that process. At any one level of organization it should be possible to determine which is the underlying fundamental contradiction and the principal contradiction lending the matter in question its essential character or identity at any given stage of a process; to determine which contradictions impinging on the process are less pivotal in defining its motion; and finally, to dismiss others as essentially irrelevant to the identity and development of this level of integration. But this ranking of contradictions (which we continually attempt to do in the course of scientific practice whether we recognize it or not) cannot be treated as a static thing. We must repeatedly scan the broader horizon and take stock of changes in development of the "bigger context." In this way we might be able to observe and even anticipate shifts in relative degree of importance of different contradictions within a process (internally) or even how a previously remote "external" aspect can, perhaps suddenly, *enter into* this internal realm and perhaps even provoke some radical restructuring therein (i.e., shift the contradictions most defining the character of a process and its

patterns of change and development).

Often this dramatic impingement of one level into another cannot be readily predicted ahead of time and is itself influenced by many other developments and interactions which do not follow preordained pathways. For instance it would have been difficult to predict the effect of African honeybees released in Brazil on the relationship between the local stock of honeybees and "their" environment, since the African bees were introduced accidentally. Once recognized, however, it became possible to analyze how "what was previously external becoming internal" radically altered the defining characteristics of the local bees, of what could be considered their environment, and the interactions between them (e.g., the new colonizers began to supplant and genetically transform the local stocks, which soon evidenced characteristics such as frequent absconding – abandoning their hives – and low thresholds of disturbance previously found only in their African relatives; and honeybees previously fairly restricted to domesticated hives underwent an explosive dispersal throughout much of Latin America, becoming established in many new areas, etc.). Sometimes, by taking the broadest possible view of things, we can more readily pick up on a likely upcoming shift in prevailing relations and the relative importance of different contradictions in the process. For instance, in trying to understand patterns of succession in a tropical rain forest, one can study the relative distribution of different species, differential growth, reproduction, predation rates, etc., in a closed canopy plot and collect much valuable information for a particular set of circumstances which may even appear to be fairly typical of the tropical rain forest understory. And yet the creation of a light-gap by the fall of a major canopy tree – an event which would be very difficult to predict for any given tree in any one particular plot, but which can be predicted to occur at varying frequencies at the level of the overall forest – severely disrupts the cohesion of that particular locale and causes major shifts in what would be deemed its most defining contradictions (e.g., there will be a marked shift in the relative frequencies of shade-tolerant and shade-intolerant plants; the latter, which had existed in that patch as dormant seeds or as nonmaturing seedlings under the relatively shaded conditions, will suddenly be released, so to speak, and undergo phenomenally rapid growth and will soon essentially characterize the locale which had been previously dominated and characterized by relatively shade-tolerant species).

Thus, while I wholly agree with the authors' call for a more dialectical analysis and explanation of relations in nature which does not metaphysically alienate different aspects of a contradiction but recognizes their constant two-way interpenetration, I feel that to do so requires breaking with a certain amount of eclecticism which translates as not distinguishing primary and secondary aspects within a contradiction,\* or between sets of contradictions in a larger pro-

\* Where the primary aspect is the one which defines the essential character of the matter in question at any given point.

cess. And this includes having to grapple with the notion that what is external in one context can become internal in another, leading to radical shifts in which contradiction will be principal in characterizing the cohesion or relative identity of a given state of organization of matter. This is essential in order to break with a narrow focus or "localism," whether one is attempting to understand the dynamics of successional changes in a forest, the causes and development of a disease, or the essential contradictions lending cohesion to certain types of social relations or presenting the means and possibilities to overthrow this particular order of things.

In summary then: as pertains to the frequent "alienation of organism and environment in biological and social theory" I agree that only false interpretations of nature and society can be obtained from reductionist treatments which metaphysically isolate one aspect from another; I also agree that any "interactionist" approach which "takes the autonomous genotype and an autonomous physical world as its starting point and then describes the organism that will develop from this combination of genotype and environment" is still insufficient because of the constant interpenetration of the two aspects; and I agree that it is crucial in particular to recognize that "in the process that external world is reorganized and redefined in its relevant aspects by the developing organism." But I am bothered by the fact that there is no attempt to distinguish what aspect of a contradiction is primary at any given moment in defining the character of the contradiction as a whole. I was in fact surprised that there was no discussion whatever of this important aspect of the dialectical method. And while things are most often presented as if the two aspects of a contradiction were equally weighted and with neither aspect being more salient in their interpenetration, there actually seems to be a tendency in *Not in Our Genes* to ascribe greater weight to the effect of organism over environment, and of individual over social than vice versa, especially in discussions pertaining to organisms "defining" their environments or to the relation of individual perceptions and social behavior (e.g., "It is obvious to all of us that our behavior is in reaction to our own interpretation of reality, whatever that reality may be" [p. 276] and "...our behavior in response to that self-created mental world recreates the objective world that surrounds us" [p. 276], thereby changing it, etc.) While one can only appreciate the authors' desire to break with the view of individual organisms helplessly buffeted about by external objective conditions, and while it is in fact true that all organisms (and humans more than all others) actively transform their external world, this is only one part of the story and one which tends to neglect the role of the external objective conditions in setting the stage and delineating the limits and possibilities for changes effected by the subjective factor.

There are, for instance, objective environmental conditions under which an organism can fail to establish itself, despite the fact that it never ceases to "recreate" aspects of the external world in relation to itself in more minute ways (unsuccessful attempts by plants or animals to colonize new

habitats, drastic population reductions and even local extinctions come to mind); these are situations where the weight of the external objective conditions is overwhelming, and this despite the changes wrought by the organism(s) in question. Similarly, in human social relations, the failure or setback of revolutionary movements or of attempts to seize power cannot always be ascribed to weaknesses or errors on the side of the revolutionaries nor even to both sides of the contradiction evenhandedly: history is full of examples of objective conditions not being quite ripe for further revolutionary advance and old social relations being fundamentally preserved despite even heroic struggles of subjective forces struggling to break the established order, and perhaps even making significant advances in that direction which may provide fertile soil for future advances at some later time. Historically (including recently, in summations of the reversal in China or analyses of the post-'60s lull, etc.), there has been a marked tendency on the part of revolutionary forces to either focus one-sidedly on the weight of the objective forces ("we can't possibly go up against all that") or to flip to completely discounting their role in temporarily thwarting revolutionary advance and so blaming the subjective forces for any and all setbacks (leading to paralysis in the form of "if we didn't succeed we must have been all wrong" or "we can't possibly do anything until we have every last question figured out, every possible person recruited, etc."). A key element in revolutionary analysis must therefore be to recognize correctly the relative positions of the objective and subjective factors in a given set of circumstances and also to recognize shifts within each aspect (which can be brought into being by any number of other external conditions and events) which can impinge on the relation between these two aspects, perhaps impelling slight shifts in their relative positions or even creating possibilities for a radical upset or complete restructuring of the relation.

Again this applies not just to the political sphere: in the example of the contradiction between shade-intolerant and shade-tolerant species, the shade-tolerant plants may long maintain their position of dominance even though the other type of plant may be making periodic and gradual inroads into the area through establishment of some seedlings, accumulation of dormant seed stores in the soil, etc. Other contradictions involving the dominant shade-tolerant plants and the external world (diseases, predators, their own destruction of resources needed for their regeneration, etc.) may in time "tip the scale" of the objective conditions so that they become more favorable to the growth and development of the other type of plants. Or a more dramatic "external" event such as lightning felling a tree and creating a light gap – an event neither type of plant could directly affect or determine – may greatly speed up the process. In the sphere of human social relations, the contradiction between oppressor and oppressed classes in a given part of the world follows its own local dynamic (and is certainly never evenly balanced!) but it may be greatly affected by the impingement of seemingly rather remote contradictions, such as economic collapses or the outbreak of war in other parts of the world.

Which brings us to the question of levels. The authors of *Not in Our Genes* include an important section pointing out that there are objectively different levels of organization of matter and that our attempts to interpret the outside world often blur over these distinctions, attributing to one level characteristics and properties which are appropriate to another. For instance "a living organism – a human, say – is an assemblage of subatomic particles, an assemblage of molecules, an assemblage of tissues and organs. But it is not first a set of atoms, then molecules, then cells; it is all these at the same time. This is what is meant by saying that the atoms, etc., are not ontologically prior to the larger wholes that they compose" (pp. 277-78). And they go on: "What is not so easy is to provide the translation rules for moving from one language to another. This is because as one moves up a level the properties of each larger whole are given not merely by the units of which it is composed but of the organizing relations between them"; this means that "properties of matter relevant at one level are just inapplicable at other levels" (p. 278). This understanding is crucial for a refutation of determinism in general, and is especially important for the critique of modern sociobiology: "Genes cannot be selfish or angry or spiteful or homosexual, as these are attributes of wholes much more complex than genes: human organisms. Similarly, of course, it makes no sense to talk of human organisms showing base pairing or Van der Waal's forces, which are attributes of the molecules and atoms of which humans are composed. Yet this confusion over levels and the properties appropriate to them is one that determinism constantly gets involved in" (p. 278). The fact that such a clear, straightforward discussion of the question of levels is almost always completely absent from the thinking and writings of those doing science in society today (even of those who strive for broad, sweeping views of things) is dramatic testimony to the overriding influence of reductionism and mechanical materialism generally.

The authors of *Not in Our Genes* go on to point out that many different levels of explanation and analysis can be invoked to explain a given phenomenon. For instance, the twitch of a frog's muscle can be examined at one level in terms of the nerve impulse causing the twitch, at a lower level in terms of biochemical change in the muscle proteins, at a higher level in terms of the frog's behavioral response – jumping – when faced with a predator, etc. And it can also be analyzed in terms of historical events leading up to that point (e.g., the phylogeny and ontogeny of frogs). The authors argue that these different types of explanation are often mistakenly viewed as revealing different and incompatible causes of the phenomenon when they should in fact be viewed as complementary explanations which together can better provide a full description of the phenomenon, "but without giving primacy to any one" (although in practice we may focus on one level or type of explanation in the course of our investigations). It is this reasoning then that leads the authors of *Not in Our Genes* to insist that "all human phenomena are simultaneously social and biological" as "the biological and the social are neither separable, nor antithetical, nor alter-

natives but complementary" (p. 282).

Again, I believe there is a problem here. We must indeed distinguish between levels of organization of matter (and between levels of explanation) and sort out the different within-level and between-level contradictions, and we can neither simply catalog these interactions nor assume that they are all somehow antagonistic or mutually exclusive if we are to understand a given process. But the search for the constituents of any phenomenon – to understand what most essentially characterizes human beings, for instance – must not simply compile a hodgepodge of all the complementary contradictions but seek to reveal to what degree the different contradictions at a particular moment in history can be said to characterize that phenomenon, which contradiction is the most decisive (or principal) in determining the relative identity or cohesion of a given level or levels. And this is where all things (within- and between-level contradictions) are not equal.

This is more than just a question of subjective intent on the part of the observer: it is true that, depending on our purpose, we will choose to focus on different levels of organization and generate correspondingly different levels of explanation (e.g., the evolutionary biologist and the physiologist will have a different approach, emphasize different aspects in looking at frog muscle twitches). But there are objectively differences in the degree to which different contradictions, and different levels of contradictions, characterize a particular whole or process. This is hinted at in *Not in Our Genes* in such statements as "...as one moves up a level the properties of each larger whole are given not merely by the units of which it is composed but of the organizing relations between them," but it is never explicitly stated that some among those organizing relations are more defining of the particular whole than others.

What defines, characterizes, human beings? As individual living organisms they are characterized by a multiplicity of biological characteristics (and yes, "all of these at the same time"), some of which particularly distinguish them from all other species (e.g., full bipedality and general neotenic development and all which ensues from that). And they are also, even as individuals, characterized by the social relations which they engage in, the properties of which (as the authors would agree) cannot be simply reduced to any collection of their individual properties as living organisms. Clearly it is not possible to graft our various social relations onto any old biological base; even today our social forms must correspond to our biological base as human organisms which constrain (or release) our possibilities for social organization in very different ways than if we were ants, mice, or blue-green algae. But in the interpenetration between our social relations and our biological characteristics (distinct levels, but which do interpenetrate) I would hold that the properties derived from the whole of the social relations, which cannot be reduced to the social or biological characteristics of individuals, are more important (primary) in channeling the development and transformation of what we know as human beings (singly or collectively) than any

one, or the whole lot, of our characteristics as particular biological organisms. In fact I think it is the distinguishing characteristic of our species that our very biology provided the basis for characteristics outside the realm of biological integration to take precedence in characterizing its ongoing motion and development. Two different levels, but one of which is primary in defining our present character and potential for change.

There is much to agree with in the authors' treatment of the relation of individual and society, however. They point out that the constant confusion of levels of the various determinants has led them to paint themselves into a corner when their reductionist methods prove unsatisfying in dealing with human thought and consciousness for instance. They document a revival of basic Cartesian dualism and crude mysticism among reductionist neuroscientists who are absurdly looking for some localization of consciousness in a particular spot of the brain, rather than seeing that "the property of being a mind – of 'minding' – must be seen as the activity of the brain as a whole; the product of interactions of all its cellular processes with the external world" (p. 284). The sociobiologists fall into a similar dualist trap, postulating on the one hand that human behaviors are biologically determined in the most narrow fashion, and then invoking some quasi-mystical free will which can allow us to strain against the dictates of our genes (in attempts to remedy such unfortunate things as the domination of women by men for instance), albeit always at some great cost and "loss of efficiency"!

Perhaps the most striking way in which the biodeterminists (and undialectical "interactionists") confuse levels of organization is in their treatment of the relation of individual and society. They treat "social properties [as] a direct compositional sequence of the collection of individual properties" rather than recognizing that the interplay of individual and social generates wholly *new* properties, *both* at the level of the society and at the level of individuals (e.g., in the authors' examples, individuals can fly, or greatly expand their memories, thanks to their social relations; societies can acquire a class structure, etc.). In opposition to the sociobiologists, the authors of *Not in Our Genes* point out that many properties of social organization cannot be changed by changing the composition of populations (e.g., the number of doctors is determined by economic considerations and not by the availability of individual talent); that historical changes in social organization have occurred much too rapidly to be explained in terms of changes in proportions of different genotypes; and that rather than society being constrained "by individual properties that are translated into prohibitions on society," as in the view of sociobiologists, in reality individual limitations are often overcome by social organization.

The authors stress that society itself is not an "organism" or some idealized Platonic form "above and outside of individual people": it is created by individual humans and it is they who, as Marx stressed, "change the circumstances." Thus in calling for a dialectical treatment of individual and society (or organism/environment) they conclude that:

It is not only that society is the environment of the individual and therefore perturbs and is perturbed by the individual. Society is also hierarchically related to individuals. As a collection of individual lives, it possesses some structural properties, just as all collections have properties that are not properties of the individuals that make them up, while at the same time lacking certain properties of the individuals. Only an individual can think, but only a society can have a class structure. At the same time, what makes the relation between society and the individual dialectical is that individuals acquire from the society produced by them individual properties, like flying, that they did not possess in isolation. It is not just that wholes are greater than the sum of their parts; it is that parts become qualitatively new by being parts of the whole. (p. 287)

Again, I have to agree with much of this analysis of the interplay of individual and society, but I think it is important to bring out the primacy of the social over the individual. This in no way means that society exists in some kind of ethereal realm disconnected from the individual people who create and transform it (and are changed by it); but there are also changes which take place at the level of society, which flow out of the laws of motion, of the organizing relations, of that level – of a given form of social organization which has had a historical development and which cannot be reduced to the effects imparted by individuals (past or present). Individuals acted to bring into being the new social relations of capitalism, but they acted on a certain objective stage; and once established, these new relations took on a certain dynamic of their own. Today, the worldwide accumulation of capital under imperialism, and the punctuation of that process by wars, has its own dynamic and compulsion, in accordance with which even capitalists must act. It is this dynamic – and on the other hand revolutionary challenges to the existing order – which sets the framework within which particular classes and individuals operate. While society is not a living organism or some ethereal realm, it is a material process distinct from the processes of life and reproduction of individuals, and in a certain sense the "blind" operation of this material process had taken on a life of its own independently of the actions of individuals or even of ruling cliques – though of course it is not immune to the actions of human beings who, through conscious action and as part of larger social forces, maintain the potential to disrupt, radically transform, or even put an end to a given social order. Once again I think we need to distinguish between primary and secondary aspects of contradictions in the development of a process. While steering clear of an explicit discussion of this question, the authors of *Not in Our Genes*, in practice, seem to consistently emphasize the subjective over the objective, the organism over the environment, the internal over the external (defined rather narrowly), the individual over the social, etc.

This necessarily has some bearing on their discussion of

freedom, with which they close their thought-provoking book, not wanting to fall into some kind of "dialectical determination," as they put it. They begin by pointing out that for biological determinists, humans are not free since their choices and actions are rigidly prescribed (by their genes, or infant training, etc.). They find Hume's definition appealing (we are free when we can act according to our desires and wishes, and not free when we are prevented from doing so, as in the case of a prisoner in a jail cell) but recognize that this in itself does not rule out indirect programming by genes or past experiences. Turning to physical systems for inspiration, they argue that the relation of randomness and determination should be understood as arising from each other "as levels of organization are crossed." I agree with their basic argument here, i.e., that randomness is a relative term: one must specify randomness with respect to what, as what can be said to be random at one level is actually highly determined at another (e.g., the motion of gas molecules is said to be random but is actually the consequence of a large number of "deterministic collisions" which specify its path). However, "while the path is totally determined by the ensemble of causes, it is essentially independent of any one of them" and "this independence of one action from another" is what we really mean by randomness. Extrapolating to human beings, they then argue that our actions can be said to be free when they are relatively independent of any one single constraint (as opposed to being in a jail cell or enduring poverty, each of which constitutes a single overriding constraint on freedom of action). I must say that I do not find this conclusion all that inspiring. I find it hard to get worked up about what is clearly *individual* freedom, given the scale of human oppression in the world and the extent of social abuses most humans are subjected to (many of which this book documents). What is needed is a program to emancipate the whole of humanity, and while it is true that individuals make choices as individuals (even the prisoner must daily choose whether or not to keep struggling, whether to become a snitch, etc.), and while many of these choices are crucial in relation to the rest of humanity, I don't think any such individual choices – save perhaps for the most trivial and personal – are ever quite so independent, relative to one condition (or a small subset of conditions), as the authors would like. Nor should we expect them to be, since we as humans are all so closely intermeshed and interdependent.

And why should that bother anyone? As individuals we think, we make choices, we act. These choices are not rigidly predetermined, since our biology allows for wide ranges of behaviors, our social forms are never fixed, and there are broad complexes of contradictions exerting different and conflicting pulls on us. Individuals may act in accordance with their own individual interests, or those of society more broadly, or against one or the other or both, but individuals may not even be correctly interpreting the nature of their own choices. I prefer Engels's definition of freedom as the "recognition of necessity" – with Mao's insistence that this must be seen in an active sense, to mean the active and conscious transformation of necessity – rather than the "in-

dependence" definition suggested by the authors of *Not in Our Genes*. Freedom then, is the application of consciousness to the task of correctly interpreting objective reality in its motion and development in order to sort out from the panoply of historical constraints on developments the *possibilities* which lie before us – and which are constantly changing – which we can then consciously relate to in seeking to transform things. There is never any guarantee that the constraints and possibilities will be correctly identified, or that we will act accordingly, but this is the basis on which we do act. I wouldn't go so far as to say (as the authors of *Not in Our Genes* conclude) that "our biology makes us free." But it certainly doesn't stand in the way.

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# ***The Political Anatomy of the ERA: Bourgeois Feminism and Prewar Politics***

by Li Onesto

Throughout the 1970s tens of thousands fought to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment – an amendment to supposedly outlaw sexual discrimination and guarantee women's equality. For some this struggle has been *the* "touchstone" and "starting block" for women's liberation, while others only considered it "at least a small step in the right direction." Nevertheless, at the time of its defeat in June 1982 the ERA had become almost a movement in its own right and certainly one of the most broadly supported demands associated with the women's movement. Also because it has stirred the wrath of the most reactionary sections of society, becoming a focus of constant right-wing attack, the struggle for the ERA has been said by some to be a crucial "line of defense" against the "rise of the right's" attacks on women.

Although at this time the ERA is somewhat of a "dead letter" in terms of its passage, the *underlying* terms of the struggle for the ERA remain extremely important to understand and evaluate. Far beyond the ERA's significance as a mass effort to codify "sexual equality" into the Constitution, the ERA has actually come to concentrate some key questions concerning the struggle against women's oppression. The ERA, even if it were passed, would not knock down any significant barriers to women's inequality. *On paper*, especially with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, there is already much "formal" equality for women, which the ERA would duplicate. But politically, the ERA symbolizes a definite program – a road of openly conservative reformism and bourgeois feminism which is directly opposed to revolutionary struggle against women's oppression. Even though the main prong of bourgeois assault against women today is one of open reaction, it is not as if reformist dead ends exert no influence (note the Ferraro campaign). In one sense, Reagan-style reaction and the reformism concentrated in the ERA campaign complement each other. Hence the ERA's continued importance.

For more than a decade the ERA has been raised by bourgeois feminists in the United States as the centerpiece of political struggle for the women's movement and has prob-

ably been the most important "membership-building" issue for organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW). Frequently considered the "brainchild" of the burgeoning bourgeois-feminist movement of the middle '70s, the ERA has served as political baptismal water for thousands of middle-class women entering bourgeois politics. Also, while the ERA has never been a major issue among the more radical feminists, it has in some ways come to be a certain foundation or "bottom line" around which almost all sections of the women's movement have rallied to one degree or another.

It is important to understand, though, that the ERA has been *more* than just the major rallying cry for the most conservative wing of the women's movement in the U.S. This article will show, by dissecting the somewhat "curious" ERA story, that the main significance of the ERA has been not just in its utilization by bourgeois feminists, but even more in how it was consciously conceived, cultivated, and wielded by the *bourgeoisie* itself in order to build and "oversee" the development of a bourgeois-feminist movement and to more generally drag women into politics on bourgeois-democratic terms.

Further, by following the various phases of the "rise and fall" of the ERA, this article will show how from the early 1970s until the ERA's defeat in 1982, the various twists and turns in the ERA struggle were directly conditioned by a dramatically shifting international situation. These changes in the international arena placed a real urgency on the U.S. bourgeoisie to put an end to the stormy, rebellious period of the 1960s and in particular (because the tradition-challenging, sometimes openly revolutionary, character of the '60s women's movement posed a tremendous threat to the status quo) to undermine and counter the overall political and ideological effects of the women's movement on society.

On this score, the bourgeoisie employed a kind of two-pronged strategy coming out of the '60s. On the one hand they made an effort to discredit and undermine the more radical sections of the women's movement; concomitantly, and this was really the pivot of their strategy, they persistently worked to build up and closely guide a thoroughly reformist and patriotic bourgeois women's movement that could then be promoted as *the* women's movement.

As a *bourgeois reform*, the ERA has played a major role in the implementation of a two-track strategy for dealing with the question of women in the United States. While the bourgeoisie has worked to build up and oversee the development of a bourgeois-feminist movement, it has simultaneously created the conditions for the "rise of the right" and more blatant reactionary attacks on women. Given this, an important thread in the ERA story is that the ERA has been and remains a dangerous political trap – the very character of this bait has been shaped and reshaped in relation to, and because of, the increasing intensity and urgency of the bourgeoisie's preparations for war over the last decade.

An examination of this particular dialectic – between the changes in the overall determining international situation and the development of things inside the U.S., including

the formulation and execution by the bourgeoisie of political policy (such as the ERA) toward women – reveals two major things. First of all, the general questioning of traditional social relations and the growth of a radical women's movement in the '60s was considered extremely dangerous by the bourgeoisie. The "out of control" character of this movement and the fairly broad challenging of one of the most *fundamental* precepts of capitalist society – the subordination of women – had rippled throughout society. In response to this, the bourgeoisie sought to undermine the politics of the '60s radical women's movement, but they also realized that "the problem" of women being propelled into struggle against their oppression would have to be continually dealt with. The subsequent *offensive* posture adopted by the bourgeoisie during the '70s – of building a bourgeois women's movement as the *main* way of dealing with this problem among middle-class women – found its most concentrated expression in the line that entrance into legislative bourgeois politics is the essential springboard for any and all struggle in the women's movement.

Secondly, as things have developed throughout the '70s and into the '80s, the development of the bourgeois women's movement, especially cultivated around NOW and the struggle for the ERA, has emerged as a crucial element in the overall political and ideological war-preparations platform. The mobilization of thousands around reforms like the ERA, especially after the rebellious '60s, was a very important part of bringing people (particularly those in motion to the left) "back into the fold." This process of politically and ideologically convincing people they have a stake in the capitalist system in turn has been an important part of rallying people for war. While the exact expression and way this has operated has varied (for instance in relation to the bourgeoisie's simultaneous and presently more prominent support for up-front reactionary programs like those of Phyllis Schlafly), even more striking is how the actual politics of this trend (including the particular struggle for the ERA) have increasingly become openly *conservative* and all the more tailor-made to the bourgeoisie's reactionary political needs.

There is a dialectic at work in the ERA's history: that between the overall shifting political contradictions of the last twenty years and the crucial role within that of the struggle against women's oppression. And there is a lesson as well, concerning the dead-end character of "lowest common denominator" political strategy – how projects such as the ERA, instead of serving as conduits for people to come to revolutionary politics, actually tend to smother the more radical elements and ensnare people in the political framework and terms of the bourgeois order, i.e., an order founded on (among other things) the continued subordination of women in every sphere of life. In a period such as today, when the stakes are nothing less than the survival of humanity, and reformist, so-called "solutions" have even more deadly results, this lesson is all the more crucial to understand.

## THE '60s – EARLY 1970s

### Coming Out of the '50s – Initial Maneuvers

The idea of adding an "Equal Rights Amendment" to the U.S. Constitution has been around for quite some time. It was first proposed by the National Women's Party in 1923 (Freeman 1975, 209), it was introduced in every Congress since then (Freeman 1975, 211), and has been in every Democratic and Republican platform from 1944 until 1980 (when the Republicans dropped it). The ERA was not pulled out of its formaldehyde and given new life, though, until the early '70s, after a full decade of various other legal and bourgeois-democratic efforts to try and smooth over a growing discontent among women. It was introduced at this time not because these previous efforts had been unsuccessful, but because the political situation among women had actually *changed* by the end of the '60s.

The ERA was the opening shot in what was a new game – one where the rules were being determined by a combination of the impact of the '60s and the emerging contradictions of the '70s.

As early as 1961 the bourgeoisie was already paying quite a bit of attention to dealing with the "problem" of women "straying" from their more traditional roles and to the possible ideological and political effects this could have on society overall. They set up different government channels to deal with "women's gripes" which were tied to a recognition of the changes that took place *coming out of* the decade of the '50s and going into the '60s. These were begun before any kind of radical women's movement had developed.

By 1960, while shows like *Leave It To Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* were still being beamed into living rooms, it was becoming apparent that the "typical" family of the 1950s was coming to an end. Women were beginning to enter the labor force in significant numbers; in 1920 women had only constituted one-fifth of the labor force, but by 1960 they were a full third of the U.S. workforce (Freeman 1975, 20).

Still, the idea in society that a "woman's place is in the home" continued to drag behind the drastic changes in the lives of much of even middle-class women in America, and this had a deep effect on women's *attitudes* going into the 1960s. Gladys E. Harbeson noted in 1965 that

the decade following World War II . . . a century of growing discontent with a limited domestic role burst into open rebellion. . . . In the immediate post-war years educated women sensed as never before that they had capabilities far greater than were being entirely used in the traditional feminine role. The result during the 1950s was a decade of literature expressing futility. The American woman did not always understand why she felt so suddenly rebellious, and many who voiced the feminine pro-

test were afflicted with a sense of guilt that home, husband, and children did not satisfy their longings for complete self-realization. (Harbeson 1965, 8)

So even before the upsurges of the 1960s it was already becoming apparent to the bourgeoisie that adjustments had to be made in response to the fact that increasing numbers of women were not staying in the home. Economically this trend was not something the bourgeoisie was against. But the *sentiments* that came along with these demographic changes (such as the ones expressed in the quote above) made a good section of the female population ripe and ready for the turmoil of the '60s.

Another thing which profoundly affected the attitude of women at this time was the Civil Rights Movement. The fact that thousands of people were drawn into a struggle against the oppression of Black people had a profound effect on people's thinking, busting through notions of simply accepting the status quo and raising by analogy deep questions about the oppression of women in society.

With some sense of this, the forces that eventually led to the formation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 were set into motion as early as 1961, when President Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women. This committee wrote a report in 1963, *American Woman*, which documented the status of women in the United States and led to the establishment of fifty state commissions to do similar research on the state level. These commissions played a big role in laying some important groundwork. First of all, and most importantly, these commissions channeled a good amount of effort into work around women's inequality – *as defined by the government*. That is, while the investigations did reveal evidence of women's unequal status in society, this was clearly limited to the realm of legal and economic discrimination. Second, the commissions created a certain attitude, born of the very definition of "the problem," that women's oppression could be dealt with by working *within* the system's legal and political apparatus. After all, the government itself was initiating these studies, so surely this was a step toward greater government sensitivity to the needs of women and even to *leading* the way in solving women's problems. Thirdly, the commissions brought together and established a core of women (many of them already active at various levels of the government) that could become key figures and "movers" on issues of women's discrimination. This somewhat loose organization of "pro-women" women in the government was further welded together from 1963-1966 by the legislative fight to add sex to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination in employment. Jo Freeman points out in her book, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, that during this period,

There was a "pro-woman" coterie which argued that "sex" would be taken more seriously if there were "some sort of NAACP for women" to put pressure on the government. As government employees they

could not organize such a group, but they spoke privately with those whom they thought could do so. (Freeman 1975, 54)

Thus, by 1966 it was only a small step to formalize a broader organization for women – one that could lead the fight against the inequality of women straight into the hallowed halls of bourgeois-democratic politics and build a respectable and controllable women's movement.

### The '60s Women's Movement Poses New Contradictions

The bourgeoisie worked to lay a foundation upon which a mass, respectable women's movement would emerge, but this was generally an *uphill* and even losing fight. This was true especially toward the end of the '60s, when "work within the system" solutions to women's oppression came up for direct challenge by a growing radical women's movement.

The development and character of this new, mass women's movement was directly shaped by the tremendous upsurge of anti-imperialist struggles worldwide. Most notably, the Vietnam War aroused millions worldwide into protest, and in the U.S. the struggle against national oppression raged; at the same time, the Cultural Revolution in China had raised people's sights towards revolution with inspiring examples of the achievements as well as continuing class struggle in socialist society. Much of the women's movement in the United States during this period took on an anti-imperialist character, for example openly identifying with women revolutionaries from North Vietnam. While the women's movement was by no means monolithic, or politically and theoretically mature, it was not just a small section that saw imperialism as the enemy and as the immediate target in the fight against women's oppression and believed that some kind of revolution was needed.

All kinds of traditions and old ideas were questioned, and many were thrown out, as thousands of women entered into political struggle. At a time when especially the youth were rebelling against "the whole rotten system," the family, marriage, and traditional sex roles were increasingly seen as part of the whole oppressive structure of economic and social relations that had to be rejected and abolished. Women found they *had* to rebel against such traditional notions of "a woman's goal in life is marriage" and other such nonsense, even just in order to get involved in political activity. The specific issue of women's oppression was not only taken up by a large section of women but posed in a revolutionary framework, and an anti-imperialist women's movement emerged.

Even before the ERA was introduced as a "rallying point for women's liberation," the politics it embodied were already being given the cold shoulder by much of the new women's movement. Robin Morgan wrote in her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful*:

Speaking from my own experience, which is what we learned to be unashamed of doing in women's liberation, during the past year I twice survived the almost-dissolution of my marriage, was fired from my job (for trying to organize a union and for being in women's liberation), gave birth to a child, worked on a women's newspaper, marched and picketed, breast-fed the baby, was arrested on a militant women's liberation action, spent some time in jail, stopped wearing makeup and shaving my legs, started learning Karate, and changed my politics completely. That is, I became, somewhere along the way, a "feminist" committed to a Women's Revolution. (Morgan 1970, xiv)

This widespread tenor and the rejection of groups like NOW\* in much of the women's liberation movement continued to pose a very thorny problem for the bourgeoisie. A blue-ribbon presidential panel on the status of women was put together toward the end of the decade and produced a report, basically warning the government that women were getting angry and that unless something was done to alleviate this ferment a new "feminist movement that preaches revolution" could become a danger to the established order (Morgan 1970, xxx).

### ERA Introduced – From the Top

Thus in 1970, when the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee called hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment in early

\* Later in Morgan's introduction she says:

NOW's membership was mostly comprised of middle- and upper-middle-class women (*and men*; it is almost the only group in the women's movement that allows male members), professional, middle-aged, white women. The organization, which now has members in every state of the union, as well as about fifty chapters in twenty-four states, has been called (by some, affectionately; by others, pejoratively) "the NAACP of the women's movement" because it fights *within* the System, lobbying legislators, concentrating on job discrimination, etc. . . .

NOW is essentially an organization that wants reforms about the second-class citizenship of women – and this is where it differs drastically from the rest of the Women's Liberation Movement. Its composite membership (and remember the men) determines, of course, its politics, which are not radical. . . . such an organization is extremely valid and important; it reaches a certain constituency. . . . however, I fear for the women's movement's falling into precisely the same trap as did our foremothers, the suffragists: creating a bourgeois feminist movement that never quite dared enough, never questioned enough, never really reached out beyond its own class and race. For example, with a few courageous exceptions, most of the suffragists refused to examine the family as a structure oppressive to women. Because of this type of failure, they wound up having to settle for the vote. We now see what that got us. (Morgan 1970, xxii-xxiii)

May and the White House released the Task Force report which endorsed its passage, times were still generally unfavorable for bourgeois-feminist politics. Nevertheless, the ERA was catapulted to the "frontlines," exactly in order to begin to turn this "unfavorable" situation around. Later in June, the Secretary of Labor-designate, James D. Hodgson, added the support of the Labor Department and soon a National Ad Hoc Committee for the ERA was pulled together made up mainly of women politicians and lobbyists. By the end of the year a full-scale campaign had been launched to make the ERA *the* issue of women's liberation.

The other thing that happened in 1970, hardly unrelated to the reintroduction of the ERA, was what is referred to as the "Press Blitz." Toward the end of 1969 the major news media simultaneously began to do stories on the women's liberation movement. This continued for some six months and almost every major magazine and newspaper carried at least one feature article on "the women's movement." This publicity did help to make "women's liberation" even more of a mass question. But the press blitz mainly played a role in promoting a certain (bourgeois) view of women's liberation and certain bourgeois-feminist figures to go along with it. This press blitz included an effort to discredit the more radical forces, either by ridicule or by excluding their point of view in a piece that was supposedly about the "women's movement." At the same time, favorable and extensive coverage pushed out the emerging "respectable" women's movement for "reasonable" social change more broadly in society as the "acceptable" version of women's liberation. The acceptability of the ERA as a focal point for the women's movement, of course, directly benefited from this press blitz, and in the beginning years of the '70s an organized effort was made to establish a middle-class (housewives as well as career-oriented women) social base for the ERA campaign. At the same time, the scope for the organizing efforts was extremely broad – that is, everybody from the radicals to the Americans for Democratic Action to the National Republican Committee were drawn into work around the ERA (Freeman 1975, 216). The work was explicitly patterned after typical bourgeois-democratic lobbying. The Ad Hoc Committee sent out over 40,000 letters to presidents of various organizations asking them to write their congressmen (Freeman 1975, 217). Tens of thousands of phone calls were made by thousands of volunteers, and organizations like the "Business and Professional Women's Clubs" were solicited to get behind the ERA effort by writing letters and visiting assorted senators and congressmen. In all this NOW was clearly being built as the prime organization capable of mobilizing thousands of women behind such bourgeois-democratic politics. The ERA campaign was, in fact, an invitation to many women who had consciously *not* been in the more radical women's organizations to now find their calling in the ranks of more respectable organizations like NOW.

A host of other organizations were founded and/or boosted at this time, all aimed at channeling women into various bourgeois-democratic battles, conducted in the well-

worn and deadening "proper channels," and away from the more radical issues and struggle of the '60s women's liberation movement. The extent and seriousness of these efforts, it is important to grasp, indicates just how threatening the politics of the radical women's movement (and the effect of the '60s in general on women) were to the bourgeoisie, and how important this question still is to them overall.

## The Shift

By 1972-1973 changes in the international situation placed added necessity on the U.S. bourgeoisie to counter both the stormy political situation "at home" as well as the anti-American sentiment internationally. The U.S. pullout from Vietnam was not because a decision had been made to "accept defeat" but was exactly in order to regroup, regain strength, and better maneuver on a world scale. A shift in world contradictions had taken place, with the Soviet Union emerging as the U.S.'s main imperialist rival worldwide. This shift marked the beginning of an intense prewar period, and preparation for world war became the major concern of both the Soviet- and U.S.-led blocs. (See *'60s-'70s Shift* by Bob Avakian, in this issue.)

This international environment set the basic framework within which the bourgeoisie has dealt with the question of women throughout the '70s and up to today. While the political situation in the '60s had from the beginning been a major thorn in the bourgeoisie's side, with the shift in the international arena it became even more important to oppose and crush the kind of anti-authoritarian, anti-American tenor that had increasingly "infected" broad sections of the youth and society as a whole. The women's liberation movement during the '60s had undermined the bourgeois order and, as the '70s developed, the rebellion against women's traditional subservient role in the family and society were definitely *not* good building blocks for the ideological and political foundation necessary for world war.

Here, it is important to understand the intense and contradictory dynamic during the first few years of the shift, the period in which they first tried to catapult the ERA to prominence. This period, from about 1972 to around 1974, was a very critical time for the bourgeoisie – years still politically unfavorable for them and at the same time years in which it was crucial to politically go on the offensive and begin to divert the '60s trajectory.

As already gone into, a certain foundation for a broader bourgeois-feminist movement had been established. A core of "high-powered" women in government dedicated to promoting bourgeois-legislative politics, bourgeois-feminist "leaders" who had established a certain reputation, and growing organizations like NOW were all attaining a certain amount of political influence. But at the same time this was not adequate given the new exigencies, and it was no longer a situation where the bourgeoisie could tolerate "sharing" the women's movement with the more radical social base and

politics of the '60s. They also recognized that a qualitatively broader and more widely influential bourgeois-feminist movement was needed in order to continue to guide and direct social consciousness in society on this question.

Given this, the following years would see a highly concentrated effort by the bourgeoisie to do two things. First of all, they worked to completely disassociate the new bourgeois-feminist movement from the radical politics of the '60s, and secondly, they took measures to organizationally tighten up the middle-class/career-woman composition of this movement. In this, the ERA played a large role.

### The "No More Compromise" Period

The process of accomplishing these aims was multifaceted, involving the use of mass media, the promotion of major spokeswomen, as well as less evident methods such as COINTELPRO-type activity aimed at discrediting radical feminists and taking advantage of political differences within the women's movement. In terms of the role of the ERA during this period, what is significant is the way it was used to solidify those women wedded to reformist politics and pull them away from those with a more radical and anti-imperialist orientation. The ERA was also, during this short but critical period, a major political rallying point used to clearly define the guidelines for the stepped-up promotion and building of organizations like NOW.

The situation the U.S. bourgeoisie faced at this time, that of "sharing" the women's movement with the more radical feminists, can be seen in two ways. First, the radical women's movement retained influence and strength in a situation that remained highly characterized by the politics of the '60s. This meant that the building of a bourgeois-feminist movement *at that time* could only be done by directly challenging the influence of the radical women's movement. Second, even the organizations that the bourgeoisie had been part of building and promoting – like NOW – even these bore definite birthmarks, reflecting that their origin was in a time when the bourgeoisie was politically on the defensive.

During the '60s and early '70s, NOW always represented the more reformist and conservative section of the women's movement, but it was still continually influenced and "rocked about" from the outside. This can be seen in the fact that while NOW was considered by most women in the left to be reformist and more backward, even a good number of the most militant and anti-imperialist forces related to NOW and even joined it. Some of this had to do with a political line that saw NOW's politics as reaching more women and therefore that it was important to "work within it," even while mainly doing "more revolutionary" work outside of NOW. In the beginning years of NOW, the development of individual chapters was also fairly loose, so many chapters were made up of women who had little to do with the national organization or official leaders; frequently these

chapters reflected the politics of the individual women involved more than those of NOW's national leadership. Also, given the political climate of the '60s and early '70s, even the most conservative leaders of NOW had to speak to the "questions of the day," such as the more militant struggles against women's oppression, the antiwar movement, and the struggle of oppressed nationalities.

In an important sense this situation reflected the kind of defensive maneuvering that the bourgeoisie had to do during the '60s; their initial efforts to establish a bourgeois pole in the women's movement were made in a period when they did not have everything under their control and when they were forced to maneuver and compromise in relationship to the strength of the radical movements of the '60s and in an inter-nationally difficult situation. Confronting the new political needs of the '70s, a major obstacle the bourgeoisie faced in building a really mass bourgeois-feminist movement was this kind of compromised "sharing" of the women's movement, and this made it imperative that a virtual "purge" be conducted in organizations like NOW.

As mentioned earlier, the promotion of the ERA was an important factor in accomplishing this. On the one hand, the development of NOW into a qualitatively bigger and more influential bourgeois-feminist organization relied a lot on its ability to lead successful and concrete political battles like the struggle for the ERA. The more NOW "proved its leadership" by launching and leading explicitly reformist battles that were "getting results" (i.e., government recognition and progress on the legislative ladder), the more it became a voice for large numbers of middle-class women. Then, at the same time, the more NOW became an established and "respectable" women's organization with a large national membership, the less its advocacy of the ERA as *the* issue of women's liberation could be questioned.

It was in this way, for instance, that NOW delivered somewhat of a *fait accompli* to its "unwanted" members. Rather than wage a major up-front political battle, much of the "cleansing" during these years was done by just doggedly building NOW into an organization uncompromisingly reformist and increasingly disgusting to the younger radical feminists who had been a sizable and vocal section of NOW's general membership.

One example of this was how the ERA ratification efforts (and the emphasis on legislative work in general) resulted in a push within NOW to reorganize itself to be more in sync with this campaign. A specific proposal was made around 1972 that NOW be organized by state instead of region, in order to be more in line with lobbying efforts. And as one person described it, "all of a sudden, the NOW national conventions were run like the Democratic Party Conventions... they had never been like that before with official delegates and Robert's Rules of Orders and so forth..." These "structural changes" were met with resistance by some of the younger, more radical women who didn't like the way things were going and correctly sensed that the "new rules and structure" would be used to disarm the voice of the more radical women in NOW. But nevertheless, the new structure

was adopted and the victory of this organizational line, in turn, helped to seal the hegemony of the most conservative NOW leaders.

During this time a major struggle also erupted over the question of lesbianism. Many of the more radical members of NOW, whose roots were in the militant movements of the '60s, saw lesbianism as an important expression of radical feminism. Therefore the struggle in NOW over this question basically had the effect of drawing clear lines between those women who wanted to exert pressure on NOW to be more in alliance with the "left" and the more radical women's liberation movement, and those women who consciously wanted to *distance* NOW from the "left" and establish it as a respectable, "women's rights" organization based among middle-class, career-oriented women. The bourgeois-feminist leaders also felt that a pro-lesbian position would hurt NOW's ability to win broad support for the ERA, and this is at least one other reason that they fought to basically kick the pro-lesbians out of NOW. All this was in line with the pointed efforts by the bourgeois-feminist leaders of NOW to bend over backwards to establish an identity "untainted" by the '60s, and in fact it was around this time that the NOW leadership promoted the slogan "out of the movement and into the mainstream."

Thus, in a fairly short period the bourgeois feminist movement had taken some giant leaps in establishing a more aggressive and offensive political stance, simultaneously attacking the politics of the radical women's movement and claiming to be the leadership of the "real" women's movement in the U.S. In 1967 NOW had only some fourteen chapters and a membership of around one thousand. But by 1974 it was able to boast some seven hundred chapters and a national membership of forty thousand (Freeman 1975, 87). But more than just the growth in membership, what had occurred was a successful effort by the bourgeois-feminist leaders to make NOW not only the organizing center of a growing bourgeois-feminist movement, but an organization clearly and unquestionably devoted to bourgeois politics. They were now in a position to wield this new weapon in a much more powerful way.

It was not, however, as if the increased moderation in the women's movement resulted solely, or even mainly, from bourgeois political machinations – the problems associated with the shift in global political contradictions and their effect on the masses (and the left) were even more important.

### **The Shift, the Left, and the ERA**

Before going on to the next period, a few things should be said here about the left's positions on the ERA at the time of the shift. First of all, the "left" in the U.S., including the women's movement, was beginning to go into an ebb at this point that would characterize much of the '70s. This ebb in the movement was itself a product of the changing international situation and shift in the world forces, which had given rise to a certain political and ideological disorientation

among a lot of people. Much of this stemmed from an inability to completely and correctly analyze the changes in the international situation that had made it possible for the U.S. to "survive" the stormy '60s. The connection between this survival and the even deeper contradictions in the future were not immediately apparent, and the evident (if deceptive) resiliency of bourgeois society discouraged many. Because of this, there was a tremendous pull within the movement to kind of "settle in" and back off of more revolutionary politics. This was sometimes out of demoralization or in many cases was an effort to now concentrate on trying to achieve more "realistic" reforms rather than a revolution that no longer seemed possible in the immediate future.

It was also true that many who had participated in the upsurges of the '60s now found themselves having to somewhat "make peace" with the system they had rebelled against. While it's not the case (as the bourgeoisie likes to portray it) that people just "grew up and came to their senses," things had changed and it became increasingly difficult to indefinitely maintain an outlaw orientation. Even those activists who consciously chose professions in the hope of being able to continue to try to change the world found that as they went from being students (or dropouts) to becoming lawyers, doctors, and so forth, their status and thinking changed, and this and the overall conditions of the '70s exerted real pulls on their political outlook, understanding, and action.

The complexities of the '60-'70s shift also took its toll on the communist forces in the United States and was most sharply expressed in the widespread emergence of "workerism" and economism. This view, which reduced the role of communists to "militant trade unionists" and sought to raise revolutionary consciousness "through the spontaneous economic struggles of the workers," made it impossible to correctly evaluate the political significance of the ERA.

This, in fact, was the main problem with the line of the Revolutionary Union (the organization that played a major role in the forming of the Revolutionary Communist Party) on the ERA. The Revolutionary Union opposed the ERA as an attack, but it did so on the basis of an analysis that the ERA was an economic attack aimed at taking away protective legislation. This wrong analysis stemmed from a generally economist deviation that viewed the economic struggles of the workers as the most applicable for raising revolutionary consciousness (as the center of gravity for political work) and in turn liquidated the role of revolutionary political and ideological struggle against the bourgeoisie. This line was part of the economist baggage that the RU tended to inherit from the "good days" of the old CPUSA (i.e., before it became hopelessly revisionist), and from the heritage of the Comintern itself. In particular this line "blinded" the Revolutionary Union to the real significance of the ERA – i.e., that it was fundamentally a *political* and not an economic attack on the women's movement. This economism, reflected in the position on the ERA, basically liquidated the woman question, downplayed the importance of the women's movement in the '60s, and failed to recognize

what a threat it continued to be for the bourgeoisie given the new contradictions in the '70s.\*

For the more radical sections of the women's movement, opposition to the ERA was also somewhat contradictory during this time. As pointed out earlier, the ERA never received much active support from these forces in the '60s and early '70s and many radical feminists considered it as simply part of the efforts to co-opt the women's movement. In some instances the ERA was explicitly criticized because of its reformist thrust, but a major political confrontation over the ERA never erupted. This is largely because by the time organizations like NOW were going all out and insisting that the ERA be the focus of the "women's movement," the more radical sections of the women's movement had little to do with NOW anyway.

This, though, was not the problem with much of the radical women's movement's attitude toward the ERA. In fact, it was quite fine that by and large many of the radical feminists wanted nothing to do with organizations like NOW and did not put their efforts into trying to "move the bourgeois feminists to the left." The main problem here was that the radical feminists were not clear on the necessity to actively oppose the ERA as a bourgeois political attack. The "rejection" of the ERA among these forces stemmed from a conscious opposition to blatantly reformist politics and a general sense that the ERA "belonged to the bourgeois women's movement" and not to those who wanted more radical change. But because this opposition was not rooted in a Marxist-Leninist analysis of society and a political program to actually overthrow the system, many who honestly posed reformism against "revolution" found themselves falling into reformist politics. This became particularly true with the general ebb in the left during the '70s. And this is also a large part of the reason why many of the radical feminists who initially opposed the ERA never actively fought against it, even "conditionally" supported it and, in many cases, eventually changed their positions and actually ended up embracing the ERA (more on this later).

## THE PERIOD OF 1974-1979

### The Social Base for the ERA

By 1974 the national leadership of NOW had become somewhat of a central leading body for a broader bourgeois-feminist movement, and the overall composition of the NOW chapters themselves was more homogeneous. A 1974

\* See Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 1979, especially pages 20-21 and 23-24.

survey of five hundred NOW members showed a definite pattern. Of the 383 replies only 17 percent listed homemaker as their primary occupation, even though 55 percent were married. Sixty-three percent were employed full-time and another 15 percent worked part-time. Students made up only 14 percent of the membership, teachers were 11 percent, and 25 percent were professionally employed. The membership of NOW was also highly educated - 66 percent had bachelor's degrees and 30 percent also had advanced degrees. Ninety percent of the membership was white (Freeman 1975, 92).

The social base of NOW, as can be seen, was overwhelmingly middle-class, well-educated career women. In this sense the ERA was the perfect "issue" to bring these women into the bourgeois-feminist movement "en masse," because it was so reflective of their social and economic position. The '60s decade had witnessed a whole new generation of women in America. College-educated and profoundly influenced by the women's movement, there was a certain attitude among millions of women that "we can be whatever we want," and traditional job classifications were challenged as many of these women sought professional careers in male-dominated jobs. The real and widespread sex discrimination these women came up against, in turn, created a kind of common mentality; a spontaneous feminist, petty-bourgeois consciousness that demanded and almost "seemed to be waiting" for something like the ERA to galvanize it into an organized mass movement.

While forces like NOW had always been quite clear that they wanted to build their movement among "the mainstream" at least in part, this was frequently defined as both the "alienated suburban housewife" as well as the young, career-oriented, well-educated woman. NOW's politics of "getting a piece of the pie" had always appealed to both types of women. But as NOW grew and developed, its work became more specifically aimed at dealing with the social and economic contradictions raised by these millions of well-educated, middle-class women entering the labor force.

While the middle-class family was undergoing the practical change of the "two working parents" family, certain basic values were also being thrown up for grabs. Fewer women were getting married and those that were were doing it later - after establishing a career. Millions of middle-class women were also attempting to balance a career and family and coming up against the double burden of having to work full-time and then be expected to attend to all the chores of a "housewife."

A concentrated offensive began to reassert traditional male-supremacist values in this rapidly changing situation. Society was flooded with starkly misogynist pornography (reaching new depths), and beyond this degrading trash an "anything goes" mentality was promoted in regards to the portrayal of women. To an extent some of this stuff had been put on the defensive during the height of the struggles in the '60s but there was a conscious effort to reverse this. Even the liberals got into the act. Movies like *Kramer vs. Kramer* were

quick to point out that if women wanted to have a career they were going to have to "pay the price." It could certainly be understood if women wanted to get out of the house, even pursue a "serious career" – but certain things about a woman's responsibility in the home were not about to be conceded. And while women were indeed starting to "make it" in male-dominated jobs, here too, the fundamental tenets of male superiority were not about to be reversed.

This demographic and political situation was the material basis for a middle-class feminist ferment that the bourgeoisie could not ignore or expect to subside. Their main concern here was not just that some corporations would have to change their management hiring practices or such; more to the point was the overall social and political impact that this trend could have. In other words, this middle-class ferment could not be allowed to become something which actually challenged the system, and these women could not be allowed to feel that their only recourse was to work "outside the system," as was frequently the more "common wisdom" during the '60s. Rather, this large and important section of society would have to be "weaned" of any such lingering '60s reference points and convinced that not only could their problems be solved by "working within the system" but even more, that they had an actual *stake* in the system.

On this score, what could be better than a political movement built around the demand that the *Constitution* be changed to "outlaw" sex discrimination? This struggle, by its very nature, would dictate a battle strictly along the lines of legislative, bourgeois-democratic politics. While the ERA was consciously promoted more widely as a kind of "catch-all" solution for all women, it's also true that the ERA campaign was meant to particularly address the frustrations of middle-class, professional women.

On this, the ERA also had a distinct back-handed slap. That is, the ERA was never meant to really challenge the relegation of women to the home and family, even for those women allowed a professional career, and thus the trade-off involved was a little bit of accommodation to the careers of middle-class women in exchange for a loyal balancing act between home and the office. Thus, recognition of the *oppression* of working and still being given the responsibility of home and children was quickly replaced with the rhetoric of "the *challenge* of women who can have a career and still be a good wife and mother." The new family of the '70s could not be "burdened" with the values of the '60s – the "dangerous" ideas that did not place the family at the center of a woman's life. Nor was it possible to impose the values of the '50s *Leave It to Beaver* family on a whole generation of women who had gone through the stormy decade of the '60s. The economic necessity of women expanding into different sectors of the economy was a factor. But more importantly, the political implications of such upheaval in the American family had to be taken into account and dealt with by the bourgeoisie.

## The Government's Role Changes

The middle '70s saw a qualitative leap in the bourgeoisie's efforts to establish the ERA and NOW as the organizational and political focus for a truly national bourgeois-feminist movement. Three national offices were added to NOW with a total of twelve to fifteen paid staff members – a legislative office in Washington, a public information office in New York, and an administrative office in Chicago. Regional divisions were created with regional directors. The budget, which had been some \$6,000 in 1967 and had grown to around \$99,000 in 1972, was now almost \$300,000 and would be over \$400,000 the following year. And by 1974 *over a quarter* of the budget, \$240,750, was earmarked as special funds for work to ratify the ERA.

The burst of activity that would characterize the middle '70s period would, to be sure, result in the quantitative growth of the ERA campaign and NOW. But what would change more significantly during this period was the government's role. In the years immediately prior to this, the role of the government had been more "behind the scenes"; that is, the bourgeois-feminist movement was initially built more *through* the government's promotion and support of figures like Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem. This again reflected the mainly defensive situation for the bourgeoisie at the time – they could not get over by orchestrating things openly from the top or without promoting (and even making concessions to) a number of bourgeois-feminist leaders. But after 1974, with a certain foundation established – and given both the ebb in the left and above all the increasing political exigency to more firmly control and direct things – the bourgeoisie started to play a more primary and open role in leading the bourgeois-feminist women's movement. The years after 1974 would be characterized by the bourgeois feminists' total subordination to the more "official" representatives of the government, and the "oppositional character" of the bourgeois-feminist movement (albeit "loyal opposition") gave way to the complete and overt groveling to gain entrance into "the system." Even the talk of "fighting the discrimination against women," including in relationship to the ERA, was more and more reframed as "the struggle to get rid of the barriers that prevent women from gaining positions of equal power in the system."

This more open role of the government would also appear in the ERA struggle. The middle '70s ERA campaign would still be led and directed mainly by NOW, but it was also during this period that it became more "in the hands" of the government apparatus itself. This was, first of all, due to an effort by the bourgeoisie to more directly and publicly be at the forefront of the ERA struggle (for instance, Carter's support of this). But secondarily, and neatly coinciding with this, was the fact that the struggle for the ERA was inherently a struggle to be waged on and in the various levels of the government. For instance, while it is true that "mass support" was an aim of the campaign, those masses were to be used as lobbying troops in the state and federal congressional arenas.

This more open role of the government did not mainly

result from more political *freedom* on the part of the bourgeoisie in relation to the women's movement, although without their success in the early '70s in establishing a solid bourgeois-feminist women's movement they would not have been in as good a position to come out more openly and conservatively. But *fundamentally* the need to do *this* was out of an increasing necessity and urgency the bourgeoisie faced by 1974-75. Their problem, we should remember, was not just that they needed to "put the '60s behind" but that they were entering a prewar period.

### The International Situation and the Necessity for IWY

The main bourgeois initiative during this time was the establishment of International Women's Year (IWY). This was a *major* undertaking. Billed as a part of the 1975-1985 "International Decade of Women" (to continue until 1985), plans were being made as early as 1972. While it would be erroneous to say that these events were done "in order to pass the ERA," the politics of IWY and the whole way it was organized were also part of the whole line *behind* the ERA and were aimed at further establishing that *this* type of politics is the way to achieve women's liberation. Also, the ERA was an explicitly stated (as well as unstated) focus throughout the IWY events *in the U.S.*

This IWY period was extremely intense for the bourgeoisie, particularly in terms of the dialectic between the political aims of the bourgeoisie in relationship to women *internationally* and the continuing situation of women they were trying to deal with in the United States. And as far as the development of the ERA in the midst of this, this period witnessed not only the "heyday" of the ERA, but also the beginning sounding of its death knell.

From the very beginning IWY was orchestrated from the highest levels of the U.S. government. In 1972 U.S. delegates to the UN Commission on the Status of Women helped initiate a resolution to proclaim 1975 International Women's Year. This resolution was quickly passed in the General Assembly and the summer of 1975 was targeted for a World IWY Conference to be held in Mexico City. President Ford named thirty-five men and women to serve as the U.S. Commission on the Observance of IWY – four were congressional members, two from the Senate and two from the House of Representatives – and the State Department established the office of the IWY Secretariat who was to be directly responsible to the Deputy Secretary. This office was to prepare materials for the U.S. delegation to Mexico City and act as the staff of the National Commission. Its composition, to say the least, was *governmental*. At least half of the thirty-five members were from organizations like the U.S. Information Agency, the Defense Supply Agency, the Civil Service Commission, the Labor Department, and the State Department. The first major task of the Commission was to hand pick a U.S. delegation for the Mexico City Conference

who would be given the task of projecting the U.S. bourgeois-feminist movement onto the international scene. This had to be done carefully, because at this point what was on the agenda was not only further building the bourgeois-feminist movement, but wielding it as an American political tool in the international arena. This would not be left in the hands of the Steinems and Abzugs (even though they continued to play an important role); rather the government found it imperative to step out also in an *international* way and take direct control and public leadership of the bourgeois-feminist movement.

The U.S. bourgeoisie did see IWY as yet another way to channel women in the U.S. into safe, bourgeois politics. But here it is important to note that there was an explicit effort to make IWY *international*, as opposed to just some sort of "U.S. celebration of women," and this was because they faced certain particularities in the situation of women around the world that had to be dealt with. For instance, in many Third World countries backward social relations were impeding capitalist economic development. Thus while the U.S. imperialists had never been opposed to the stark oppression of women under feudalism in the Third World, all of a sudden they became champions of Third World women's rights. In other Third World countries those same relations were being transformed and that transformation was ripping the social fabric of feudal-style patriarchy. "Women's rights" were promoted in these countries *insofar* as they aided the development of a proletarian and petty-bourgeois class in the service of U.S. imperialism, and a *reformist* women's movement was to be built to intercept and contain the resultant turmoil.

In countries like Iran, the U.S. began promoting a kind of "Western women's liberation model." This was meant to appeal to women in the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes, the class forces the U.S. needed to develop economically and also needed to rely on politically. Avon and designer jeans became the symbols of women's liberation, as the lifestyle of the "American Woman" was promoted as what every woman around the world should strive for. And so, for example, it was not surprising that the Shah's twin sister, Princess Pahlavi of Iran, was promoted as a key figure in the IWY Conference in Mexico City. The U.S. delegation to Mexico City was also given the task of promoting the bourgeois-feminist women's movement in the United States as the model for women's political action everywhere. Politically the U.S. saw this as part of its posture as the "leader of the democratic free world" and the building of its NATO war bloc, kind of like saying, "look what's possible if you just follow our lead." And it was also a pointed effort to reverse the kind of impact that the U.S. women's movement of the '60s had had *internationally*.

The anti-imperialist nature of the '60s women's movement had developed as an international phenomenon. This had a lot to do with the interpenetration there had been between the women's movement and the antiwar movement (which had also developed internationally), and that fundamentally it was the tumultuous events *internationally* that had propelled people into political activism. It was not

unusual, for instance, for women's conferences in the U.S. during the '60s to have a woman liberation fighter from Vietnam as the featured speaker and, as mentioned previously, the influence of the Cultural Revolution in China was something that pushed the sights of the women's movement around the world in a more lofty and international direction.

The U.S. women's movement principally played a progressive role internationally at this time, especially as a symbol of rebellion right inside the belly of the very beast that people around the world were condemning. The problem this posed "at home" for the U.S. bourgeoisie was therefore further complicated when the U.S. women's movement became influential in other countries. Thus, in the '70s, the bourgeois feminists in the U.S. found they had to combat this progressive and anti-imperialist reputation the women's movement of the '60s had established in order to project, instead, *itself* as the model of American feminism.

### Turmoil in Mexico City

The Mexico City IWY World Conference, held in the summer of 1975, drew 1,300 delegates from 130 different countries (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1976, 8).<sup>\*</sup> The U.S. Commission, of course, had a major role in planning the conference, but wielding their bourgeois-feminist movement as a political tool at the conference itself would not prove to be easy. The tool itself would be walking on stronger but still somewhat "new" legs, and more importantly, public opinion in the world scene was still very much shaped by the war in Vietnam and other anti-imperialist struggles around the world. Indeed, very vocal and organized anti-U.S. sentiment came out in the Mexico City Conference and so, for the U.S., promoting its version of women's liberation was extremely difficult. The U.S. delegation had seen Mexico City as one place to try to turn this situation around, but overall things did not end up going the way they wanted and the conference proved to be a stark microcosm of the contradictory and difficult world situation they still faced.

The sharpest way this came out was in the major debate that occurred at the conference over the proposal of a "New World Economic Order." The planned agenda, that is the agenda proposed by the U.S. delegation to focus on *women's struggle for political power*, was challenged by several of the delegations from Third World countries. These delegations instead wanted to focus the discussion on the gross inequality between the developed capitalist countries and the Third World and put forward that women's equality could not be achieved unless there was a redistribution of the world's wealth and power. They spoke out on the situation women faced in the Third World – the poverty, illiteracy, and lack of health care – and pointedly criticized the U.S. delegation's

<sup>\*</sup> Another 7,000 participated in the unofficial nongovernmental Tribune conference that took place across town at the same time.

views which failed to address the huge gap between the Third World and the developed capitalist countries.

The U.S. delegation found itself on the defensive in this situation. Press reports commented on the U.S. delegation's conspicuous lack of applause for the proposal that the conference call for a "New World Economic Order." Later, when the co-head of the U.S. delegation, Patricia Hutar, spoke, she was forced to give lip service to "women of both rich and poor nations working together," but then went on to stress that women must focus in on becoming part of the bourgeois political and legal apparatus. She stressed:

Though many general economic, political and social changes are modifying the basic situation of women throughout the world – both in those countries now undergoing arduous processes of development and those which have already experienced the impact of industrialization – these changes will not automatically redress the balance. . . .

But women cannot wait, with arms folded, for men to achieve a new order before women can achieve equality. On the contrary, women must continue their work, already begun, to achieve a truly equal partnership. Women must be in decisionmaking positions in the power structure along with men to build a more just world order. (Department of State Bulletin 1975, 234-35)

Not surprisingly the delegations from Britain and France backed the U.S. in this position, which was basically meant to undercut the anti-imperialist, anti-U.S. edge to the Third World delegates' argument and at the same time aggressively put the reformist path forward for women throughout the world. To say the least, the chauvinist position of the U.S. was unpopular at the conference, and the U.S. ended up losing political ground in this struggle. But the U.S. delegation refused to compromise on the "New World Economic Order" proposal, sacrificing some ground here in the short run in order to pursue its larger objective of getting America politically back on the offensive in the international arena.

The other problem that the U.S. delegation had in Mexico City came up around the question of Zionism. When Leah Rabin, wife of Israel's Prime Minister and head of the Israeli delegation, began to deliver a keynote address, more than half the delegates (from Arab, African, and other countries) walked out in protest. This sentiment was later translated into a proposal that the conference formally pass a resolution against Zionism. Of course, the U.S. delegation found itself in a position of fiercely defending Zionism, and again, this only served to highlight the U.S.'s "unpopularity" in a conference where anti-imperialist sentiments were very dominant.

The conference ended up issuing a Declaration which the U.S. voted against because it included the call for a "New International Economic Order" as well as a condemnation of Zionism. Thus, the U.S. intentions to use the conference as a kind of political showcase proved to be mainly unsuccessful.

But, it is important to note, in a much broader sense the U.S. delegation did accomplish its task of making an important thrust at beginning to overcome the U.S. isolationism and the internationally widespread anti-U.S. sentiments stemming from the Vietnam War period.\*

### Setting the Stage for Houston – Patriotism and Unleashing the Right

But while the Mexico City Conference ended up being a somewhat aborted effort to catapult the American bourgeois-feminist movement across the globe, there was a determined effort to make the best of the conference back in the U.S. It was even said by some that the real significance of Mexico City was that it had provided impetus for ratifying the ERA! With a somewhat "sour grapes" tone, there was talk that regardless of what had happened in Mexico City, the real value of the World Plan of Action adopted there would be in its implementation in the individual countries. In other words, IWY in the U.S. would be, in spite of Mexico City, what the U.S. bourgeoisie meant it to be – a celebration of bourgeois feminism and an orchestrated opportunity to further enshrine the ERA as the frontline battle for women's liberation.

The Houston IWY Conference held in 1977 concentrated these aims and was the "coup de grace" of their efforts to both consolidate a bourgeois-feminist movement as well as firmly assert their direct and continuing control over its politics. The conference was government-run from the beginning and organized with the ERA as the main political focus. Not a few writers commented afterwards that Houston was nothing more than a four-day-long pro-ERA rally. But as pointed out earlier, the politics at Houston also contained the seeds of the ERA's defeat.

Two things about the Houston Conference are striking. First there was the predominance of government control over the bourgeois-feminist leadership, and second there was the unprecedentedly prominent and highly visible role of the right-wing antifeminist forces – with the latter, especially, a real harbinger of the future.

In a sense, Houston was kind of like a "changing of the guard" in which bourgeois-feminist leaders like Abzug and Steinem were forced to play a clearly secondary role to the government's open leadership. These bourgeois-feminist leaders had proved to be instrumental in even getting to the point where such a thoroughly bourgeois event could be held under the guise of "women's liberation." But the very fact of their success, in a way, made them dispensable.

Coming out of the '60s, such figures with "semiradical" credentials had been necessary to unite with and unleash, but as the U.S. bourgeoisie began to "round the bend" and

\* Perhaps one of the most ironic or indicative things that happened at the conference was that a target date was set for the next meeting in 1980 in, of all places, Teheran, Iran!

create a more favorable situation – and as ideological and political preparation for world war became much more of an immediate and urgent question – such bourgeois feminists were more of a liability. This changing role of the government was discussed earlier, but it was at Houston that there was the first indication that this more open role of the government would be closely followed by a fairly blatant "dismissal" of the bourgeois-feminist leaders. This development is very important to understand because it was exactly within this dialectic that the ERA was both raised to its pinnacle and routed to its eventual demise.

The roster of the Commission that had been appointed by Carter read like a list of "who's who" of women in government positions. Women senators, congresswomen, governors, and several who had served on the Commission on the Status of Women were enlisted, Betty Ford among them. The editors of *Ladies Home Journal*, *Redbook* and *Good Housekeeping*(!) were there to keep Gloria Steinem (editor of *Ms.*) company. And although Abzug was appointed to chair the Commission, it was more reflective of "women in power" than of bourgeois feminists. The conference was opened with the grand introduction of the "Three First Ladies" – Rosalynn Carter, Betty Ford, and Lady Bird Johnson – all of whom spoke. This was obviously carefully planned in order to set the tone for the rest of the weekend. Banners that touted slogans like "Women's Rights – As American as Apple Pie" were hung up around the room and the political thrust of the speeches was a definite "we want in."

The government's direct role in planning and carrying out the Houston Conference can be better understood in the context of what the bourgeoisie was doing in general at this time in terms of ideological and political preparation for war. This was the period leading up to the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration – a major campaign to restore patriotism and "faith in America," and the first real step in the widespread patriotic prewar fever and celebration of "America No. 1" that now dominates the U.S. political scene.

In fact, when Bella Abzug proposed, right after Mexico City, a bill to establish an IWY National Conference, it was proposed as "part of the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration." This bill was passed by the House on the 10th of December, by the Senate on the 23rd, and signed by President Ford the following day. It stated that the "Bicentennial was a particularly appropriate time to evaluate the discrimination that American women face because of their sex." Thus, from its inception, the Houston Conference was to be a clear and further stamping of patriotism and loyal Americanism on the bourgeois-feminist movement.

The ERA provided some real specificity to this woman-tailored Bicentennial celebration. The Conference was built in such a way that it would be an exercise in what was being put forth as the very thing that made the Bicentennial worth celebrating – the bourgeois-democratic process. And so the ERA was just the right "key struggle" to place at the center of all this.

The Commission was to brag in its report to the President that more than 150,000 people took direct part in the process

leading up to the Houston Conference. Congress had appropriated some \$5 million to plan and carry out this exercise, with local and state meetings to discuss a proposed "Plan of Action" and elect state representatives to go to Houston. The aim of the meetings was to implement the democratic process of local and state-level discussion which would be finalized in a "National Plan of Action" in Houston. This would then be the mandate sent to Washington. The "Plan of Action" in outline form was, of course, drawn up by the Commission to begin with and while it contained many different planks, it clearly put forth the ERA as the main focus.

The "National Plan of Action," with twenty-six planks, took on everything from "Women and Credit" to the more controversial issues of Reproductive Freedom and Sexual Preference. But the major plank and the one that was most frequently focused on throughout the conference was, of course, the plank on the ERA. In general, the discussion of the National Plan of Action was a mere formality. Only 20 percent of the delegates opposed some or most of the planks and seventeen were adopted by a very large majority. But at the center of all this, the ERA was a running thread. As summed up in the official report: "At the heart of the consensus was the belief that final ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment is needed, as one speaker said, 'to put women in the Constitution' and to establish a framework of justice for their efforts to remove remaining barriers to equality" (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 11).

The indication that the ERA (and with it, the whole approach it symbolized) was being undermined came in the beginning stages of preparation for Houston, when special efforts were made to include the right-wing forces. For instance, in Missouri ("coincidentally" a state that had not ratified the ERA), one of the first local meetings was held at Washington University in St. Louis where Phyllis Schlafly, leader of the "Stop ERA Movement," was attending law school. She did not end up coming to that state meeting, but a special invitation was issued to her and other conservative right-wing women to serve on the Missouri Coordinating Committee. In the workshop on reproductive rights they made sure that films and materials representing the *antiabortion* views were available. And of course, this was all done in the name of the "democratic process" – or as the Chair of the Missouri meeting put it, "There is no intent to create a uniform pattern of thinking or speaking" (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 104).

In effect this constituted an open invitation to the Schlafly-type forces to launch a major offensive. Scores of conservative women were nominated for the thirty delegates to go to Houston and the stage was set for the right to gain dominance. The Official Report to the President contains the following description of what happened then:

Fewer than 400 people had registered for Friday evening ceremonies and discussions, but on Saturday morning, when the election was scheduled, a

coalition of anti-abortion and anti-ERA groups brought in more than 500 men and women who registered at the door. They brought along a handbill and a list of their own "New Suffragist" candidates printed on yellow paper. The sheets were offered to each registrant going to vote. After a total of 861 had voted, insuring election of the anti-change "New Suffragist" slate, the visitors went back to St. Louis in their chartered buses without attending any of the workshops or entering into any dialogue with the women whose views they opposed.

Sunday morning, only 369 accredited registrants remained. (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 104-05)

While this was perhaps the most blatant example of how the right-wing forces were unleashed, it was certainly not the exception in the state meetings. In fact, anti-ERA and anti-abortion groups, Schlafly's Eagle Forum, and women from the John Birch Society, among others, proved to be organized and present at almost every one of the early state meetings. The leader of the right-wing victory in Missouri, Ann O'Donnel, even went to some of the other state meetings to organize local conservatives.

In Ohio the "right to life" coalition elected 80 percent of the delegates. In Oklahoma (another state that had not ratified the ERA) a church-organized group elected a conservative slate and passed a resolution calling homemaking "the most vital and rewarding career for women" (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 109). And in Utah, a state with only a little more than one million people, the biggest showing of the right wing boosted attendance to 14,000, making it the largest (and probably most reactionary) state meeting. Many here had come at the call of leaders of the "Mormon Relief Society" to stand up for 'correct principles,' to oppose federal funding of child care, abortion, sex education in the schools, and employment 'quotas' to secure equal opportunity for women" (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 109). Similarly, in Washington, where Mormons were less than 2 percent of the population, they were nearly half of those registered to vote at the state meeting.

The official report to the President on Houston, again, was quite open about the depths of the right-wing's involvement, as if to brag that this proved how democratic the meetings had been:

At the Mississippi meeting July 8 and 9 the Ku Klux Klan was added to the anti-change forces, which now comprised Stop ERA, Right to Life, the Birch Society, the Eagle Forum, the Conservative Caucus, and many local groups sympathetic with their point of view, as well as members of some fundamentalist and other church groups. Joining them were dozens of anti-feminist women's groups: the three "W's" ("Women Who Want to Be Women"), the

FIGs ("Factually Informed Gals.") With the exception of one black woman, who later resigned, all the delegates elected from Mississippi were white.

In Kansas, "Operation Wichita" flyers listed 809 parliamentary points on how to disrupt meetings. In Illinois, Ohio, Mississippi, Alabama, Hawaii, and Indiana, men acted as floor leaders and instructed their charges how and when to vote, when to speak, and even handed them written notes. Whenever they could, they voted all the IWY suggested resolutions down en masse. Anti-feminists voted against aid to the handicapped in Connecticut, against reform of rape laws in Nebraska, and against world peace in Utah. (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 109-10)

The role of these right-wing forces was not meant to completely undermine the bourgeois feminists' leadership of the Houston Conference. But the unleashing of these right-wing forces in such an organized and forceful way helped to establish a certain framework for the overall politics and specifically the debate around the ERA at the Houston Conference. By putting the women's movement in a defensive position in relationship to the attacks by the right-wing, the politics at Houston were certain to be more determined by *this* rather than by any lingering tendency to tailor politics to the the "left."

The attacks of the openly neanderthal right allowed the conference leadership to make the entire terms of the struggle revolve around whether one was for or against (i.e., from the right) the government-drafted plan. Thus those women who were drawn into political life at this conference were largely relegated to the role of rubber stamps.

But for the Houston showcase to be effective it could not come off as just a forum for debate between the bourgeois feminists and the right-wingers. To be credible it had to at least have the appearance of mass, representative involvement. So, extraordinary efforts were made by the conference organizers to recruit bilingual women, nonwhite women, and women not already entrenched in electoral politics. By November close to 20,000 people were on their way to Houston, two thousand of whom were officially elected delegates. Almost 65 percent of the elected delegates were white (as opposed to 84.4 percent in the general female population at the time), and only 14.1 percent had incomes of more than \$20,000 (compared with 25.7 percent nationally). The Commission also used appointment mandate to achieve balance, such as appointing Blacks as delegates-at-large from states like Mississippi and Alabama where white reactionary anti-IWY groups had flooded the meetings and elected overwhelmingly white delegations (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 119).

## The ERA at Houston

It was appropriate that the ERA plank was introduced for discussion right after the plank on "Elective and Appointive Office" was passed by an overwhelming majority. This plank read in part:

The President, Governors, political parties, women's organizations and foundations should join in an effort to increase the number of women in office, including judgeships and policy-making positions, and women should seek elective and appointive office in larger numbers than at present on the Federal, State and local level.

Political parties should encourage and recruit women to run for office and adopt written plans to assure equal representation of women in all party activities, from the precinct to the national level, with special emphasis on equal representation on the delegations to all party conventions. . . . \* (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 38)

Needless to say, this was quite in line with the "we want in" direction of the conference and was actually part of an attempt to narrow the interpretation of the ERA. This narrowing of the ERA was quite stark in the plank itself. It did not even pretend that the ERA would address the "oppression of women." It was more a straight-up statement that "we want a piece of the pie" and in fact "our allegiance to the ERA is proof that we only want equality in order to be more loyal and subservient to the political and ideological status quo."

The most blatant way this came out in Houston was the way the pro-ERA forces took on the right-wingers who, led by Schlafly, had denounced the goals of the IWY Conference and the ERA in particular as "sick, immoral, ungodly, unpatriotic, and anti-family." Tailored to this, the plank on the ERA mainly focused in on what the ERA *would not* do. Among other things the plank ensured that the ERA would not "change or weaken family structure"; would not "require the states to permit homosexual marriage"; would not have any impact on abortion laws; would not require co-ed bathrooms (a specific charge made by the right-wing); and would not require that there be an equal number of women required to serve in combat roles in the military services (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 51).

Throughout the Conference, these type of concessions were made to the right wing who employed the tactic of linking the ERA with the whole specter of "women's lib," and thereby forced the bourgeois feminists to defensively try to conservatize the ERA even further. Their promotion of the

\* This promise, alone of the Plan's laundry list, has been put into practice, with not only the nomination of Geraldine Ferraro, but the 50 percent women's makeup of the delegation at the 1984 Republican Convention!

ERA at Houston ended up being an argument for how the ERA was now really quite harmless: that it was not about to question any fundamental tenets of the social relations between men and women, that its key word was "equality," and that all this meant was the equality of a small section of women to seek positions within the given power structure.

The whole Houston Conference was, as columnist Ellen Goodman said, "a political training ground" (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 205), and this included political training in the struggle between the bourgeois feminists and the right-wingers. And in this arena, the bourgeois feminists brought their biggest issue, the ERA, into the ring and ended up pedaling backwards double-time to prove its respectability and harmlessness.

Significantly, the right-wingers at Houston also saw the ERA as a major focus of attack. As early as 1973, national campaigns had surfaced like "Stop ERA" (headed by Schlafly) which were well financed and well organized. Schlafly herself remained unknown to any significant public until she mounted this crusade (Freeman 1975, 220). Also, although Schlafly denied that the campaign was financially backed by other right-wing organizations, groups like the John Birch Society, Pro-America Incorporated, the Christian Crusade, and the Young Americans for Freedom had openly contributed to her organization in order to stop the ERA. But Houston was a leap in all this.

Of course, this confrontation between the bourgeois feminists and the Schlafly-ites was played up big in the media. In many cases it was made central. One journalist commented on the two rallies held in Houston:

The head-to-head competition of the two rallies Saturday afternoon raised the obvious question: Which of the two assemblies was the more representative of American women. This correspondent is in doubt. (*National Review*, December 23, 1977, 1484)

The right argued that they were the "real representatives of American women" and fielded 10,000-12,000 for a pro-Schlafly rally across town from the Conference. The Ku Klux Klan also came. Robert Shelton, Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America, proclaimed, "I will be in the vicinity of the National IWY meeting in Houston. . . . Some of our women members and sympathizers will be in the meetings to oppose what is going on. Our men also will be there to protect our women from all the militant lesbians. It's not safe for a decent woman to be there." All this was, of course, well documented and flaunted in the press during the conference. The response of the bourgeois feminists was clearly in line with and further boosted the conciliatory strategy that governed the ERA campaign. They were not about to do anything that might tip the apple cart because the success of the Houston showcase was seen as crucial to the ERA ratification effort. Indeed, the Official Report makes much of the respect shown by the IWY delegates to the sensibilities of the antiabortion zealots.

The events in Houston revealed that in fact the bourgeois feminists had much in common, fundamentally, with the right-wingers. Frankly, when you peeled away the thin cover and looked at the actual program that the bourgeois feminists put forward, it was drenched in the same patriotism and, above all, the American way of a privileged lifestyle and the demand for a bigger piece of the pie, different only in style from the right-wingers. The bourgeois feminists found themselves increasingly on the defensive, trying to out-do the right-wingers on this yardstick, and in effect this not only emboldened the right wing further, but also cut ground out from underneath the bourgeois feminists.

Thus, given the aggressiveness of the right and the overall weak stance of the bourgeois feminists, the effect was to actually "double-edge" the message emanating out of Houston. In other words, yes, the Houston Conference, with all its talk about "women in high places," and equality, and sending a mandate to the President and Congress — all this would be zapped into living room TVs in an effort to further enlist more discontented women into the army of bourgeois feminism. But at the same time, this would not be the *only* expression of the "American woman." The middle-America, "what's wrong with being a housewife"-type woman along with all the more blatant ideological tenets of god, family, and country, were also bolstered and promoted, and the right-wing was prompted to take an increasingly more aggressive and political role around women's issues. The official report describes the end of the conference this way:

As delegates began to leave, Joan Gubbins, leader of the anti-change forces, tried to end the Conference on a note of protest. She marched out of the hall followed by delegates from Mississippi, Alabama, and Nebraska, singing "God Bless America." But many of her former supporters from Utah and unratified States like Georgia refused to join in, and rather than concede patriotism to the opposition, some feminists stood and sang "God Bless America" with them. (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year 1978, 170)

We should note here that, indeed, this was actually not the first time *God Bless America* had been sung at the conference. It had been sung at least once before . . . after the ERA plank was passed!

### The Draft and the ERA

Before moving on to the next period, it is important to look at the relationship of the ERA to another aspect of the bourgeoisie's preparations for war — the military and the draft. This was actually a very controversial part of the ERA, even among the bourgeoisie, and eventually this contributed

to the ERA's defeat. The growing controversy around this during the 1974-1979 period also points to the way that the handling of the ERA issue, and the bourgeois-feminist movement in general, was constantly being reevaluated by the bourgeoisie in terms of the larger question of preparation for war.

The Senate debate on October 4, 1978 on the resolution to extend the deadline for ratification of the ERA included a significant discussion of what effect the ERA would have on women and the military. Senator William L. Scott (a Republican from Virginia) had proposed three substitute amendments to the ERA that would explicitly exempt women from military combat duty. This prompted a revealing outpouring of sentiment to *increase* the participation of women in the military as well as the desire to "keep the door open" to including women in a new draft – thus a possible utilitarian purpose of the ERA in this regard.\*

Senator William Proxmire (Democrat from Wisconsin), in opposition to the Scott amendment, made this defense of the ERA's practical application of "equality":

Military service is one of the more onerous duties of citizenship. The call to defend and die, if necessary, the right to serve or to refuse to serve, is central to the concept of democracy. To deny women this most fundamental of rights, to assert by legislation that women should be less concerned with the affairs of the world or the protection of our Nation, to claim that they have less right to sacrifice their lives in defense of this Nation is to deprive women of a fundamental place in our society. (Cited in *National NOW Times*, March 1979, 6)

And lest anyone miss the practical implications of upholding "equality of the sexes" in the military – or the urgency and reality of the issue at hand – Proxmire then went on to elaborate:

My question is: "Are you any less dead if killed by a woman than a man?" Does it make any difference to the enemy if the hand that pushes the button belongs to a female rather than a male? Is the order to attack any less real when offered by a woman? Frankly, war had become so impersonal that distinctions of gender are no longer relevant. Capability, efficiency, numbers, weapons count – not gender. And that basic fact is the reason why this pending amendment must be defeated. (Cited in *National NOW Times*, March 1979, 6)

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\* This was not a new debate. In 1971 the House had voted (265 to 87) against exempting women from the draft. And in March 1972 exemption of women from compulsory military service was defeated in the Senate (73 to 18), along with another amendment to exempt women from combat duty (71 to 18).

The Scott Amendment was soundly defeated by a vote of 79 to 14.

Proxmire's comment reflected not just a desire to expand the use of women in the military, but the fact that this was already happening in a significant way. By 1978 there were over 100,000 women in the military – 5 percent of the total force. The Pentagon had plans to increase that number to over 200,000 (or 10 percent of the total force by 1983 (*National NOW Times*, July 1978, 9). In the army alone, there were 59,000 women in 1977 and the official plan was to increase this to 80,000 – 11 percent of the total – by September 31, 1978. One Defense Department official said: "The volunteer military simply needs more women because we're coming to the end of the baby boom. There will be a 15 percent drop in the supply of 18-year-old males by the mid-'80s and a 25 percent drop in the 1990s" (*National NOW Times*, July 1978, 9).

Two years after the above Senate debate on the military implications of the ERA, and after the certain death knell had already been sounded for the passage of the ERA, the question of the equality of women in the military was once again raised in a big way. In 1980 Carter sent two proposals to Congress, one asking for \$20.5 million to revitalize the Selective Service System to register men and the other asking for the authority to register women.

By this time the U.S. had a greater percentage of women in the military than any other country – 150,000 women in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps made up about 8 percent of the total U.S. military forces. In addition, Pentagon plans were to increase the number of women in the all-volunteer forces from 162,000 to 250,00 (including reserves) by 1985, a figure which would then comprise 12 percent of the military).\*

In addition to these "established facts," there was a certain amount of liberal public opinion also contributing to the argument in favor of drafting women. For instance, in 1981, the movie *Private Benjamin* came out. And along these lines, after Carter's proposal was announced, the ACLU reactivated a 1971 court case challenging the constitutionality of registration that does *not* include women. NOW and other women's organizations also supported this position and submitted amicus briefs to the ACLU's case! NOW's president at the time, Eleanor Smeal, stated, "We are full citizens. . . we should serve in every way." Other bourgeois feminists argued that the draft issue would only *help* the passage of the ERA – concurring with Carter's statement that "equal obligations deserve equal rights."

The question of actually drafting women and codifying their participation in combat roles, though, proved to be a controversial issue, despite the basic agreement among the bourgeoisie that women's roles in the military should be

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\* By the end of 1983 there were approximately 199,000 women in the military; slightly over 11 percent of the total active forces. Note, this does not include reserve forces. Source: *US New & World Report* 1984, 332.

greatly expanded. *Newsweek* commented:

If registration is approved and women are ultimately drafted, they will fill many more noncombat roles, freeing men to fight in case of war. But the nation should be under no delusions that this is an egalitarian system. It would be made so only if women take part in combat. The country could choose to move in that direction, but that would mean overcoming centuries of cultural tradition and accepting the very real physical limitations of women. For the time being at least, most Americans seem unwilling to take that ultimate step. (*Newsweek*, February 18, 1980)

A *Fortune* magazine column around this time by Daniel Seligman also made the observation that despite the public support of the Democrats for the ERA, such Democratic leaders as Tip O'Neil were "secretly against its passage." After noting that if the ERA were passed there would be no way that Congress could avoid drafting (or registering) women if it does so to men, Seligman then goes on to say about Tip O'Neil:

The Speaker's views on these matters are well known. When Jimmy Carter proposed draft registration applicable to all sexes, Tip immediately and categorically said that it wouldn't fly. The Democratic Congress, he said, was "overwhelmingly against registering women — which is why they were ultimately exempted." (*Fortune*, September 8, 1980)

The significance of such observations is that even while a clear course had been set (and implemented) to continue to increase the role of women in the military, the bourgeoisie was still worried about the public acceptance of a definite legal declaration of its plans to utilize female cannonfodder equally in World War 3. There is also the fact that there is a certain undermining of traditional social roles involved here. Instead, the tactic has been more, up to this point, to "set the stage" for possible qualitative leaps in the use of women in the military, especially in the event of world war breaking out. The fact that passage of the ERA would more or less present a "settled question" on the drafting of women, therefore, became a problem. And while not the main reason, this was definitely a factor in the ERA's eventual defeat.\*

One other thing to note here is the degree to which crass male chauvinism contributed to the ambivalence of the bourgeoisie in relationship to tactical questions of including women in the draft and in combat jobs. Even given their basic agreement on the need to utilize women in the military

\* When the Supreme Court eventually ruled in favor of women being exempted from the draft, NOW issued a statement that if the ERA had been ratified, such a "discriminatory ruling would not have been possible"!

(as well as the need to prepare for qualitative leaps in doing this in the event of world war), there were still "time-honored" social roles and ideas that seemed to work against this practical necessity. And this too was something that continued to plague the passage of the ERA. Barry Goldwater expressed this most clearly in his contribution to the 1978 debate over the ERA and the proposed combat exemption amendment when he said:

There are many positions women can fill in our forces that I am completely in favor of their filling, but I have always found it personally repugnant that one of my grandsons might have to fight alongside a woman in a war, or fly alongside a woman in a war. Not that they are not good; frankly I would rather fight against a man than a woman any day. But the thought is repugnant to me, and I think it is repugnant to most males anywhere in the world. (*National NOW Times*, March 1979, 6)

## THE 1978-'80s PERIOD

### The "Abzug Affair" Signals the End of the ERA Era

Houston had fulfilled its intended role, almost as if according to script, and figures like Abzug had been well-behaved actors in pulling it off in a legitimately "feminist" way. The bourgeois-feminist leaders had taken the women's movement "out of the movement into the mainstream"; they had built up, made respectable, politically guided, and delivered up a broad and bourgeois-feminist women's movement and had succeeded in drawing thousands of women into the democratic process of fighting to ratify the ERA. But the usefulness of the bourgeois feminists was no longer to be seen as the centerpiece of the bourgeoisie's strategy for dealing with women's issues.

Four months after Houston, the *Spirit of Houston* official report was submitted to Carter. This was to mark the end of the Commission's work but Carter had promised his "women's constituency" that he would replace the groups with a new committee on women's issues. In June a forty-member "National Advisory Committee for Women" was established and Carmen Delgado Votaw (a former IWY commissioner and President of the National Conference of Puerto Rican Women) and Abzug were appointed as co-chairs. This official government committee set out to monitor the implementation of the "National Plan of Action" from Houston and to marshal government support to ERA efforts. In fact, one of the first large-scale efforts of the

Committee was its work on a NOW demonstration that mobilized 100,000 women to march in Washington, D.C. in August on "Women's Equality Day" – aimed at pressuring the government to extend the deadline for ERA ratification.

The Committee carried out a role of "loyal and patriotic opposition." In the few months after the Committee was appointed, it voiced open criticism of the Carter administration, especially his "footdragging" on actively promoting the ERA. They also criticized the administration's proposed \$15 billion cutback in the domestic budget and its increased military spending.

The Committee formally asked for a meeting with Carter to present these criticisms and was granted fifteen minutes the day before Thanksgiving. This, the Committee felt, was more of a political "photo opportunity" session than a sincere response to their criticisms, and so they drafted up a letter to Carter canceling the meeting.

A new meeting date was then set for January 12, 1979 and the Committee drafted a statement of views to be presented. It reflected the emphasis proposed by NOW president Eleanor Smeal, saying that the ratification of the ERA should be the President's *number one* priority as far as women's rights went. This statement was then sent out with a press release with the heading: "President Carter Challenged On Social Priorities by National Advisory Committee for Women."

But as the Committee was busily planning their presentation to the President, White House aides worked up a little plan of their own. When Hamilton Jordon and Jody Powell saw the press release, they decided to fire Abzug when Carter finished meeting with the Committee. Then, reportedly in high humor, they alerted the White House press corps that a "fun" front-page story would be breaking late that afternoon (Abzug 1984, 70).

As planned, Carter met with the Committee, sat back, and nodded as they blew off steam about the government's lack of active support for the ERA, the lack of women in policy-making positions, domestic cutbacks, and increased military spending. After they finished he said he had "expected the women to be his allies and more supportive," and that the Committee was giving the public the impression that it was in conflict with the President. He particularly expressed dissatisfaction with the press release and said that a more "harmonious and regular working relationship" should be established between the Committee and the White House (Abzug 1984, 71).

The meeting then ended and Abzug was summoned to Powell's office and unceremoniously given the axe. The press was simultaneously given the news, and by morning Abzug's co-chair, along with the majority of the Committee, resigned in protest.

The White House had accomplished what they needed with a minimal political cost – in fact the slant of the press insured that the White House's position on the whole affair was reported sympathetically. And there was another constituency that hailed these turn of events. The right-wing press congratulated Carter on these actions and Schlafly

personally sent Carter an ecstatic telegram.

The President later issued a new executive order that reconstituted the Committee as the "President's Advisory Committee on Women" in place of the "National Advisory Committee for Women" – making it clear exactly who was to be the boss in these matters. Linda Johnson Robb (Lyndon Johnson's daughter) was named to head the Committee and its functions were severely restricted. It was even forbidden to lobby for women's programs on Capitol Hill – mockingly making even the celebrated "National Plan of Action" from Houston officially impotent.

The whole "Abzug Affair" reflected a certain turning point in terms of the bourgeoisie's increasing political necessity. While the question of war preparation had been pressing prior to 1978-1979, the end of the '70s brought about a further sharpening of the world situation and a subsequent consensus on the part of the bourgeoisie to step up war preparations.

The year 1979 was extremely intense. In January the Shah fled Iran. Deng Xiaoping's visit to the U.S. was soon after this, and by June, Somoza had fallen in Nicaragua. The Brussels decision to deploy the Euromissiles was made at the end of the year, and as the decade ended the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. The "Friday Night Massacre" (as the firing of Abzug was later called) was only one reflection of all this in domestic politics. During this time, there was also the whipped-up anti-Iran hysteria, the Greensboro massacre, the threat of 240 years imprisonment of Bob Avakian for leading a demonstration against Deng's visit, and Carter's famous malaise speech. This indicated that certain conscious decisions had been made by the bourgeoisie going into the '80s. At least one part of this was a decision that if they were going to go more with the Reagan/John Wayne social base in the '80s, then they would have to throw a few bones to the troglodytes. One of these "bones" was the masses of women and their aspirations for liberation, and even the most establishment-oriented wing of the women's movement felt the repercussions of this.

## The ERA Fizzle

Lenin once wrote:

For it is the great significance of all crises that they make manifest what has been hidden; they cast aside all that is relative, superficial, and trivial; they sweep away the political litter and reveal the real main-springs of the *class struggle*. (Lenin 1977, 24:213)

This is quite apropos in understanding the unity between the politics behind the ERA and the present wave of reactionary antiwomen ideas being spewed out of unofficial as well as official government mouthpieces. It is not the case of a more "liberal" bourgeoisie, more sensitive to women in the middle '70s versus a new "right-wing" bourgeoisie now taking an

"about-face" on women's rights. The openly reactionary flaunting is *fundamentally* no different from the basic precepts behind the line of the bourgeois feminists that the government promoted and cultivated in the middle '70s. The difference is the particular way the more intense nature of war preparations have developed. Ironic, but nevertheless true, preparation for world war can be said to have been the underlying impetus behind both the promotion *and* the defeat of the ERA.

In all objectivity, the "final battle" for the ERA (that is the intensified efforts by NOW forces from 1978 until its defeat in 1982) can be said to be the most boring chapter in the whole story. The ERA more or less "fizzled out" with a whimper, plagued by political sabotage at the legislative level and the reactionary atmosphere described earlier, which also gave more favorable ground to the concerted efforts of the "Stop-ERA" right-wing organizers. Here there are a few important things to note about the political terms of the ERA's actual legislative defeat.

The pro-ERA forces were visibly being shoved out of favor even before the Bella Abzug affair. Gone were the heady days of the early to middle '70s when thirty-five states had *very quickly* ratified the ERA. By the time *God Bless America* had been sung to close the Houston Conference, the job of getting just *three* more states to ratify seemed to have become a planned impossibility. One article summed up the legislative status of the ERA in May 1977, six months before Houston:

When Congress endorsed the measure in 1971, women's rights groups predicted that approval by thirty-eight states – the three-quarters needed for ratification – would swiftly be forthcoming. Six years later, however, ERA supporters are still three states short, and many now fear that these may not come through by March 1979. If three-quarters of the fifty states have not ratified the amendment by then, the entire process will have to begin anew – a prospect which feminists say will retard rights for women by another decade at least.

Until the Indiana vote to ratify in January, not a single state had approved the ERA since North Dakota's vote in favor in 1975. Eleven of the fifteen state legislatures which have not yet considered the amendment or have already rejected it are in the South, where support for the women's movement is weakest. Moreover, three states – Nebraska, Tennessee, and Idaho – have rescinded approval of the amendment and there is a proliferation of rescission efforts in other states. Although the legality of rescission is dubious, women's rights groups believe the stratagem of rescission is creating an unfavorable climate for the ratification campaigns in the remaining states. (*The Progressive*, May 1977)

On February 26, 1978 (one month before the official *Spirit of*

*Houston* report was submitted to Carter) NOW held a day-long session in Washington, D.C. to assess the status of the ERA. They voted unanimously to declare a state of emergency on the ERA and to commit almost all of the organization's resources to the state ratification campaigns as part of a national campaign to win a seven-year extension on the deadline for ratification (*National NOW Times*, March 1978, 1). At this time it was already becoming apparent to NOW leaders that the work to defeat the ERA was not just coming from Phyllis Schlafly's living room. NOW's paper reported:

Board members were told the tactics that emerged in the last 1977 campaigns – legislative trade-offs, last minute vote-switching, parliamentary delaying tactics, and backroom power brokering – have now hardened in 1978 into an obvious pattern.

... major political interests of our country have given lip service support to the ERA while sabotaging its ratification by political deals, trade-offs and do-nothingness. (*National NOW Times*, March 1978, 1)

The NOW "State of Emergency" called for an all-out effort to win an extension on the ratification deadline which would make the new deadline June 30, 1982. Organizers were sent to lobby in the various states where ratification vote dates were coming up and "marches on Washington" were organized. The proposed National Budget for fiscal year 1979 for NOW reported \$584,340 spent on the ERA alone (out of a total of \$2,324,640, this is more than a fifth of the budget) (*National NOW Times*, November, 1978, 22).

On October 6, 1978 the Senate passed the resolution to extend the ratification deadline. Looking back at this period in which the defeat of the ERA was already being widely predicted in various media coverage, the Senate decision to extend the deadline may seem a little out of sync. But in the transition after Houston, the "disposal" of the Abzug types and the beginning of more open promotion of the right-wing line on women was midstream. The Senate decision was still almost two months before the aborted "day-before-Thanksgiving" meeting and several months before Abzug was fired. In the midst of such "housecleaning" still going on, it probably did not seem politically wise to totally drop the axe on the ERA – that is, not quite yet.

Throughout 1979 and into 1980 NOW continued to make passage of the ERA the centerpiece of its work nationwide, but as early as January 1979 even their own headlines read, "Held Our Own In '78 Elections, No Dramatic Gains/Losses." They summed up that "in a conservative year with reactionary forces organizing to take over state houses and Congress, the ERA held its own and gained some ground and lost some ground in the unratified states." A lot of effort was spent defensively at this point trying to fight rescission efforts – at least one reflection of the fact that the pro-ERA forces were waging a losing battle. After the election of Reagan in 1980 (whose platform included, for the first time, a

Republican anti-ERA position), the fizzle became painfully drawn out until its defeat in June 1982.

### Prewar Politics and the ERA's Essence

The reformism of the bourgeois-feminist movement served the bourgeoisie well throughout the '70s, but as things turned out, at a certain point this became insufficient to deal with the continuing contradictions associated with women's oppression. The ascendancy of Reagan ushered in an openly right-wing reactionary period, and the predominance of bourgeois-feminist politics did not fit into the overall political and ideological climate being created. Thus the ERA was defeated, because in this period it cut against the present thrust of the bourgeoisie's political and ideological war preparations. With the approach of the '80s the Phyllis Schlafly, who had already begun to flex their muscles in Houston, now became, at the very least, equally celebrated representatives of the "American woman." It is also during this period that a virtual barrage of attacks have been launched against women's rights. For instance some of the concessions the bourgeoisie was forced to give in the '60s and early '70s, like the right to abortion and birth control, are now seriously under attack. And beyond this is the significance of a whole political and ideological line of reactionary ideas about women being pushed in a thousand and one ways. The unleashing of forces à la Phyllis Schlafly — who openly preach that a woman's role in life is to serve her husband and family — is meant to rally a certain section of people around pro-family, pro-country, two-fisted god-and-country patriotism. And it is meant to reverse any progressive ideas about women that came out of the '60s.

The compulsion behind this trend, though, is not because somehow the "right" has come to power as opposed to the more "liberal" reactionary democrats. But it is more the case that this particular right-wing expression of the bourgeoisie has come to power exactly because this is what is dictated at this time. Putting women clearly "back in their place," as mothers and wives, and raising the sanctity of the family goes right along with "God and Country," which are crucial elements in the prewar agenda. These are crucial components in unleashing and giving initiative to a reactionary social base to fight and die to protect the "American way of life" — which includes upholding the superiority of men over women. Prewar time is a time of reining in and laying down the law — certainly not a time to raise questions about the "American way of life." And to criticize the basic assumptions of "equality and justice for all" at a time when people may soon be called on to sacrifice their lives for such a "nation under God" — this certainly cannot be tolerated. Of course, as has been graphically portrayed in the 1984 elections, in the name of "progress for women" a woman vice-president could be elected who would "push the button" as easily as Reagan. And it would also be wrong to sum up that the bourgeoisie no longer has use for the bourgeois-feminist

version of patriotism as an important political and ideological pole in its own right, and even when the right-wing is more prominently used to create public opinion around women's issues.

As has been chronicled in this article, during the latter years of the 1970s and into the '80s the bourgeoisie's way of dealing with the question of women was mainly *not* (as before) to cooperate with and co-opt the bourgeois-feminist movement. Instead there has been a whole period of blatant reaction. It is within this framework that the eventual defeat of the ERA can be correctly understood.

From one angle, the actual passage of the ERA was never the complete issue at hand. Both pro- and anti-advocates frequently acknowledged that the concrete effects of passage would be minimal — both sides' campaigns more fundamentally concentrating on the ERA's political symbolism. The ERA mainly served as a key tool to mobilize women (or lead women who were already involved in women's rights issues) into a faithful, patriotic social base that would not only continue to provide an avenue for women (especially among the petty bourgeoisie) to address the issues of women's oppression in an "organized and controlled" way with responsible and accountable leaders, but would also have the purpose of influencing and setting an acceptable, nonthreatening tenor in society as a whole on the issue of women's rights, the relations between men and women, discrimination, the family, and so forth. First and foremost, its legislative defeat aside, the main significance of the ERA has been in its success in playing this kind of "Jesse Jackson for the women's movement" role. Another way of getting at this point is to consider the bourgeoisie going into an actual war situation and coming smack up against the contradiction of large sections of petty-bourgeois women not flocking wholeheartedly to the war calls and patriotism largely *because* their particular concerns around women's rights, etc., have been ignored or that there appears to be no way to remedy this within the acceptable channels of bourgeois democracy.

In this sense there is some similarity between the role of the suffrage movement prior to World War 1 and the struggle for the ERA in this present prewar period. The struggle for women to win the right to vote had the political and ideological edge of rallying women firmly behind the "system" and everything it stood for; the suffrage movement never questioned the precepts of bourgeois democracy, it just wanted to be part of it. And similarly, the fight for the ERA has always been essentially a fight for a bigger piece of, or a more controlling interest in, the "American Dream." This is only a few short steps away from joining the ranks of those who will march eyes-forward into a world war to ensure the privileged status of America.

The fact that the ERA was *defeated*, even given this political and ideological essence, points to the intensity of the bourgeoisie's war preparations in this period and the *stakes* this time around. It is not the case that the ERA path is no longer being offered up. *But*, mainly this is a period where an extensive and intense reactionary atmosphere needs to be, and has been, created. The thoroughly reactionary program

on women is an essential part of this. And the extremism of their propaganda reflects the *extreme demands* of imperialism at this time.

Given the political and ideological terms of the ERA struggle and the bourgeois-feminist movement in general, it's not surprising that these days there is a kind of "reconsidering" going on – answering the right wing with the assessment that perhaps the bourgeois-feminist movement hasn't paid enough attention to the issues of femininity, the home and the family, etc.

The present reactionary atmosphere has also put some of the more radical feminists on the defensive. For instance, during the final stages of the ERA's defeat and afterwards, there have been a number of feminists who have changed their assessment of the ERA – holding that the ERA is now an important frontline struggle against Reaganism.

This wrong evaluation of the ERA is not uncommon. Among the "left" in this country the ERA is seen as something that should be supported. Sometimes the defeat of the ERA is posed as proof that it was/remains a key fight against the right. Or there is the view that the ERA is good because it "can only help" and "it draws people into motion." But all these views dangerously fail to understand how the ERA has fit into the overall attempts by the bourgeoisie to chain the struggle of women to narrow reformism and ultimately turn the women's movement into a patriotic social base for war.

### The Importance of Exposing the ERA Today

If anything, the whole story of the rise and fall of the ERA shows just how important the question of women is to the bourgeoisie. Their intense efforts for over a decade to build a bourgeois women's movement (and in addition, their attempts to disperse and demoralize the more radical sections of the women's movement coming out of the '60s) certainly highlight how integral women's oppression is to the fabric of American society. And the particular terms of the defeat of the ERA speak to how these basic political and ideological tenets of women's oppression become even more crucial as part of preparation for war.

The story of the ERA is also a lesson on how *pitiful* such bourgeois reforms are in the face of the continuing depths of women's oppression under capitalism. On this point, it is quite interesting to look at how the ERA became both a focus and a tool for the bourgeoisie, but also a sore point. Mainly it served them well as a major political platform around which they built a bourgeois-feminist movement. But there was also much talk among the bourgeoisie at the time of the ERA's defeat about how the "vagueness" of the ERA left the door open to too much "interpretation" and that it was still too identified with other issues like abortion, lesbian rights, and birth control – let alone the whole "idea" of women struggling against their oppression as women. The point of the ERA, after all, was to woo women *into* the system, not against it. But even despite the successful designs for the ERA, the

*fact* of women's oppression continued to assert itself and find political expression. Thus you have the "problem" of even bourgeois feminists continuing to spark "unwanted" discussion that goes beyond the issue of "equality."

Unfortunately, the story of the ERA does not end with its defeat in 1982 or with the unsuccessful attempt to reintroduce it into active legislation in 1983.\* That is, the political movement and line behind the ERA is still very dangerously an important part of bourgeois politics in the U.S. And particularly in a period where the reactionary barrage of practical, political, and ideological attacks on women seem to have no end, the bourgeois-feminist line still has much appeal. As pointed to earlier, many people who initially considered the ERA a dead-end reform now find themselves supporting it from the point of view of "doing anything to defeat the rise of the right." And today the Democrats' choosing of a woman vice-presidential candidate has added fuel to the dangerous line of thinking that "even a reactionary Democrat is better than Reagan."\*\* These positions reflect a dangerously defensive political line that downplays the importance of revolutionary struggle and is paralyzed by the right's aggressiveness.

Some bourgeois feminists sum up that the ERA was defeated because there was not enough broad support for it, that "we did not make the issues clear enough," or that there was simply not enough pressure put on the politicians in positions of power to ensure its passage. This conclusion has of course neatly fallen into the latest rallying cry of the "gender gap." Interestingly, Abzug herself has anything but dropped out of bourgeois politics (in fact she has been, among other things, working on Mario Cuomo's campaigns) and has recently come out with a book entitled *Gender Gap – Bella Abzug's Guide to Political Power for American Women*. She notes in the closing chapter of this book that "In the last years of the ERA campaign, women began to realize that pressure from the outside was not enough." She concludes:

A rainbow coalition, as Jesse Jackson calls it, borrowing from our rainbow of women theme at the Houston National Women's Conference, could work together as a powerful, continuing bloc, organizing people around its priorities, picking and promoting the candidacies of both women and men, targeting elections, and involving more people in the early stages of the electoral process. This is the democratic approach we must take, stressing participation, pressure, and leadership at every level, not just sitting back and waiting for candidates to be thrust on us every two or four years. (Abzug 1984, 239)

\* It was reintroduced in August 1983 and failed to win a majority in the House in the fall of that year.

\*\* Both NOW and The National Women's Political Caucus, as well as other bourgeois-feminist groups, reported big increases in membership and contributions after Reagan was elected in 1980 (Abzug 1984, 86-87).

Obviously, some bourgeois mouthpieces will rise to the occasion time and time again, even after being kicked around and knocked down! Abzug would have us look at the hole that the ERA struggle has dug people into and tell us to dig the hole even deeper and pile more dirt on our heads in the process!

The story of the ERA should lead us to make a rupture with this latest version of bourgeois-feminist garbage. The line which would have us continue on the dead-end treadmill of seeking "women's power" through the electoral arena, which begs for a piece of the American pie and a few positions at the imperialist helm – this is a line which ends up competing to be the better reactionary defender of "God, country, and family," and which ultimately upholds the oppression of women. Particularly in these times such a line of capitulation can only serve as arsenal in the bourgeoisie's pro-war propaganda and therefore must be all the more vigorously exposed and refuted.

The ERA has survived for over a decade as an important and successful tool of the bourgeoisie and there is still much confusion about its role. People who took up the ERA struggle need to take a hard look at what they were fighting for and where it all ended up. The ERA was raised by the bourgeoisie, to begin with, in order to counter the tremendous rage that was bubbling up and over in society. The contradictions that led to the upsurge of women in the '60s have far from disappeared and if anything they have gotten even sharper. And today the stakes of political struggle is the very survival of the world itself.

But the resurgence of the right-wing's restoration of the "proper (subordinate) role of women" is only one aspect to the bourgeoisie's political attack on women. By necessity they must drag growing numbers of people into political life as they prepare for war. And in particular, the increasing number of women drawn into struggle against women's oppression means that the terms of this struggle may not always be ones the bourgeoisie has control over, or that are all that favorable for them. To a certain extent the bourgeoisie still finds that it needs to ride two horses – simultaneously and even faster – vainly attempting to jam the Schlafly motherhood call or the constricted bourgeois-feminist version of women's liberation down people's throats as an answer to the exploding contradictions of women's oppression. It is ever more apparent that extreme solutions are demanded for this running sore of imperialism. Only proletarian revolution can fundamentally deal with the question of women's oppression. The bourgeoisie's continuing effort to hide this could well blow up in their face.

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# **Guevara, Debray, and Armed Revisionism**

by Lenny Wolff

*"This revisionist deviation has taken on in the past both a "left" and an openly right-wing form. The modern revisionists preached, especially in the past, the "peaceful transition to socialism" and promoted the leadership of the bourgeoisie in the national liberation struggle. However this openly capitulationist, right-wing revisionism always corresponded with, and has become increasingly intermingled with, a kind of "left" armed revisionism, promoted at times by the Cuban leadership and others, which separated the armed struggle from the masses and preached a line of combining revolutionary stages into one single "socialist" revolution, which in fact meant appealing to the workers on the narrowest of bases and negating the necessity of the working class to lead the peasantry and others in thoroughly eliminating imperialism and the backward and distorted economic and social relations that foreign capital thrives on and reinforces. Today this form of revisionism is one of the major planks of the social-imperialist attempt to penetrate and control national liberation struggles." (Revolutionary Internationalist Movement [RIM] 1984, 33)*

Over 15 years after his murder by CIA-trained soldiers, the image of Che Guevara retains a certain power among the revolutionary-minded. To many he still seems the man of action who cut through the endless excuses and equivocations of the old-line revisionist parties in Latin America. More than a few profess to see important differences between Guevara and Fidel Castro, who, in the period after Guevara's death, steered Cuba ever more firmly into an open and passionate embrace of the Soviet Union. Others even liken Guevara to Mao Tsetung.\* And with Guevara's influence so

\* E.g., the almost routine characterization by bourgeois scholars of the 1966-70 period in Cuba as the "Mao-Guevara period," or the revolutionary writings of George Jackson which point to "men who read Mao, Che and Fanon" as the revolutionary element among prisoners.

too goes the influence of *focoism*, the military and political doctrine which he developed and attempted to implement, and which was systematized into the book *Revolution in the Revolution?* by Guevara's erstwhile acolyte Régis Debray.

Yet appearance and essence stand at odds in Che Guevara. Ever ready to criticize and denounce revisionism in public forums, he predicated his entire project on the support of the revisionist parties and the Soviet Union; constantly calling attention to the vulnerability of the U.S. to revolutionary initiatives, he resisted rallying forth the most massive and potentially powerful revolutionary forces on the Latin American continent. Indeed, in the end, Guevara set himself in opposition to revolution internationally.

Because Guevara is associated with the revolutionary upsurge of the 1960s, and because he fell from the bullets of agents of U.S. imperialism, such an assertion is bound to evoke emotion. Yet emotion and sentiment must be put aside. Guevarism retains influence as a political line, and while the Soviets (and Cubans) internationally often tend to rely more on elements *within* the armed forces to carry out their strategy of armed revisionism, they pay no small attention to the directions and activities of the neo-Guevarist groups. Particularly in situations of acute political crisis, efforts are made to both foster these neo-Guevarist forces and bring them more firmly on board the overall revisionist project. Because of all this, Guevarism (and Guevara himself) must be scientifically evaluated in terms of its objective social role. This article will examine the military and political line of Guevarism, its conception of revolution, and its social and material roots. Central to it will be unraveling the paradox of Che Guevara – the foe of revisionism who maligns it the better to rely on it.

## I

In early 1966 Castro and Guevara brought Régis Debray\* to Cuba for discussions on guerrilla war. The Cubans had asked Debray to prepare a polemic which would synthesize the experiences of the Cuban Revolution into a military doctrine and political line distinctively suited to Latin American conditions. The end product of these discussions – Debray's book, *Revolution in the Revolution?* – is the single most concentrated exposition of Guevarism. The central theses of Guevarism run something like this: (1) The revolution in Latin America has been delayed because the revolutionaries have

\* Debray, of course, no longer holds to the positions he set forth in his book. Nevertheless, since it is the most concentrated and influential exposition of Guevarism, much of this polemic will necessarily take up the arguments in his book, *Revolution in the Revolution?*, in particular. We note in passing that Mr. Debray currently serves as an important figure in the Mitterrand regime – having recently traveled to Nicaragua to "express concern at violations of the democratic process by the Sandinista government" on behalf of Mr. Mitterrand. Debray's latest book is a celebration of the progressive role of French nationalism in today's world.

remained in thrall to one or another wrong line, or "imported misconception"; (2) The Maoist model of a people's war – which in vast areas of the Third World includes as a crucial element relying on the masses of peasantry and utilizing base areas from which to wage the military struggle – simply does not apply in Latin America due to different objective conditions, principally the more developed state of the countryside and the sparser and allegedly more passive character of the peasantry; (3) At the same time, the views of the Moscow-influenced CPs (which only used armed struggle as an adjunct to their legalistic/parliamentary maneuvers) and the Trotskyites (who tailed an anarcho-syndicalist line of workers' self-defense) are no better, since after decades of their implementation they have not led to revolution; (4) The real key to revolution on the Latin American continent lay in studying the Cuban example, where a small band of men built an armed unit in the countryside independent of the peasantry and grew through engaging the regime's army in battle. These military *focos* could and had to be reproduced throughout Latin America. In the words of Debray, this line gave a "concrete answer to the question: How to overthrow the power of the capitalist state? . . . The Cuban Revolution offers an answer to fraternal Latin American countries which has still to be studied in its historical details: by means of the more or less slow building up, through guerrilla warfare carried out in suitably chosen rural zones, a mobile strategic force, a nucleus of a people's army and of a 'future socialist state'" (Debray 1967, 24).

*Revolution in the Revolution?* focused its main attack on military line against Mao Tsetung's conception of people's war, particularly Mao's stress on mobilizing the peasantry and building up base areas from which to wage the war. (At bottom lay a more fundamental difference concerning the role of the masses in revolutionary war altogether.) Let us begin by examining the main arguments made on this point.

### Role of the Peasantry

As noted, the foco line entailed a basic rejection of any orientation toward the peasantry as a crucial revolutionary force. Debray insisted on this. Rejected as well was the revolutionary experience in China and Vietnam. There, Debray wrote, "the high density of the peasant population, the overpopulation of the villages and towns, and the marked predominance of the peasantry over the urban population permit revolutionary propagandists to mingle easily with the people, like fish in the water."

In Latin America, on the other hand,

The guerrilla *focos*, when they first begin their activity, are located in regions of highly dispersed and relatively sparse population. Nobody, no new arrival, goes unnoticed in an Andean village, for example. Above all else, a stranger inspires distrust. The Quechua or Cakchiquel (Mayan) peasants have good

reason to distrust the "outsider," "the white man." They know very well that fine words cannot be eaten and will not protect them from bombardment. The poor peasant believes, first of all, in anyone who has a certain power, beginning with the power to do what he says. The system of oppression is subtle: it has existed from time immemorial, fixed, entrenched, and solid. The army, the *guardia rural*, the *latifundista's* private police, or nowadays the "Green Berets" and Rangers, enjoy a prestige all the greater for being subconscious. This prestige constitutes the principal form of oppression: it immobilizes the discontented, silences them, leads them to swallow affronts at the mere sight of a uniform. (Debray 1967, 50-51)

The contempt that drips from this passage is little short of incredible – contempt both for the peasantry and for history. From reading it you'd never know that there was a rich tradition of peasant rebellions in Latin America. Castro's own native province, the Oriente (which was also the stronghold of the rebel army) had seen over 20 peasant rebellions between 1900 and 1959. In Bolivia (where Guevara was directing his thoughts), the peasant revolt had constituted the main fighting force of the 1952-53 Revolution. Going back slightly further, of course, there had been the insurgency led by Sandino in Nicaragua in the '30s, the peasant rebellions in El Salvador in the same period (in which 30,000 peasants were murdered in the repression that followed), the series of revolutions in Mexico in the early part of the century predominantly fought by the peasantry, etc.\*

For Guevarism the peasantry's ill-fittedness for revolutionary struggle is no minor matter. It lays at the heart of its political line, and Debray returned to it repeatedly. Debray cites Guevara's "three golden rules" as "constant vigilance, constant mistrust, constant mobility" and goes on to say that

Various considerations of common sense necessitate wariness toward the civilian population and the maintenance of a certain aloofness. By their very situation civilians are exposed to repression and the constant presence and pressure of the enemy, who will attempt to buy them, corrupt them, or to extort from them by violence what cannot be bought. Not having undergone a process of selection or technical training, as have the guerrilla fighters, the civilians of a given zone of operations are more vulnerable to infiltration or moral corruption by the enemy. (Debray 1967, 43)

\* Elsewhere Debray notes in passing the military mobilization of the Colombian peasantry during "La Violencia," the bloody quasi-civil war of the late '40s and early '50s, and refers at another point to the original Indian uprising against the Spaniards in Peru, led by Túpac Amaru II. But even these lonely examples are one-sidedly dismissed as showing the inappropriateness of the peasant war to liberation in Latin America, since they did not, obviously, in themselves lead to emancipation.

Did Debray and Guevara, then, merely construct a slander of the peasantry with absolutely no basis in fact? Hardly. The pervasiveness of backward ideas, the terror unleashed against those who resist, the legacy and continued power of feudal relations, are all too real. But whether through tendentiousness or due to problems with mechanical and undialectical thinking, Guevara and Debray seized on one aspect of the truth only to erase what lies at the essence of the question – the revolutionary potential of the peasantry (recognition of which, incidentally, has historically been a point demarcating Leninism from social-democracy, Trotskyism and revisionism). Mao in particular utilized dialectics to distinguish between different strata in the countryside and to grasp their contradictory motion and potential. He developed the approach of relying on the poor peasants while fighting to win over the more middle elements and to neutralize (or in different settings to win over) the rich peasants. (And anyone who thinks Mao was a starry-eyed idealist with no understanding of the difficulties of arousing the peasantry and raising its political consciousness need only read his essays on the subject.)

The question was, and is, so crucial because of the persistence of feudal and semifeudal relations and survivals in Latin America, and the consequent importance of agrarian revolution to the revolution as a whole in the countries of that region. This is true despite the significant transformation of feudal agriculture that has gone on there since World War 2.\*

The crucial point to grasp here is that the societies in question are oppressed nations, integrated into a subordinate relation to the imperialist countries. Agriculture, in both its feudal/semifeudal and "capitalist" forms in the oppressed nations, is integrated (along with industry) into the matrix of international accumulation which is fundamentally controlled by finance capital rooted in the imperialist nations. From this results the grotesque distortion and disarticulation of the agricultural sectors of these countries, in which certain areas are developed by finance capital (either through direct investment, or more often through loans, state aid, etc., funneled through the local bureaucrat-capitalists in the state sector and/or the big feudal landowners), while others are left to stagnate and rot. And even in those areas which *are* integrated into finance capital's circuit of accumulation it is often the case

\* These transformations have led some – including some of today's neo-Guevarists – to claim that agriculture is now almost entirely capitalist in Latin America, and to adduce this as yet another argument against revolutionary war based in the peasantry. Neither Debray nor Guevara raised this particular argument, though traces of it can be seen in Debray's book. The rightist character of this line comes out in linking a denial of feudal and/or semifeudal relations to outright opposition to revolutionary war of the masses in the countryside *when they do wage it*; see for instance "Capitalist Democracy in Peru," by Petras, Morely and Havens in *New Left Review* No. 142, in which the authors attack the armed struggle led by the Communist Party of Peru for "curtailing the opportunities of the Left and [perhaps leading] to a military takeover regardless of popular disdain for the armed forces."

that feudal holdings are maintained and propped up, while the exploitation of the peasantry is intensified to satisfy the demands of the world market.

Thus the countrysides of Latin America often appear to be patchworks of different kinds of production relations: there are plantations depending on *minifundia*, old-style *latifundia*, kulak-type freeholders, corporate farms and farms producing for the international market but still held by old feudal lords. The peasantry is often subjugated in a manner little different from before. The feudal landholding classes typically retain their despotic hold over much of the countryside, terrorizing the peasantry with the rural *guardias* and local police; even where relations have been partially transformed toward capitalist ones this feudal tradition has been retained and often intensified so as to contain social unrest arising from the transformation that *has* occurred. The continued severe oppression of women in the countryside and the barbaric oppression visited against the Indian peoples sharply express the persistence of these feudal and semifeudal relations, in both base and superstructure (as does the continued power of the feudal classes in the key institutions of the state and political life, including the army).

Meanwhile a landless peasantry and rural proletariat arise side by side with the remaining tenant farmers and semi-independent subsistence farmers. Politically combustible material accumulates in the countryside, and the demand for land – even among the expropriated peasantry early in the process of proletarianization – can be explosive, as evidenced by the important squatters' movement in the relatively highly capitalist sugar districts of Cuba's Oriente province during the 1950s.

All this points to the continued importance of the agrarian revolution in almost all Latin American countries, and to the objective basis to rely on and unleash the rural masses as the main strategic ally (and in many cases the main fighting force) of the revolution. And it points as well to the inextricable link between the revolutionary struggle against the feudal and semifeudal relations and survivals, and the struggle for national liberation: the two are inseparable.

As to Debray's point on the low population density in many Latin American rural areas and on the high percentage – in some cases – of population located in the cities: while very important, with few exceptions this does not obviate the need for mobilizing the masses of peasantry and carrying forward the agrarian revolution. *The Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* notes in reference to this that

The relative weight of the cities in relation to the countryside, both politically and militarily, is an extremely important question that is posed by the increased capitalist development of some oppressed countries. In some of these countries it is correct to begin the armed struggle by launching insurrections in the city and not to follow the model of surrounding the cities by the countryside. Moreover, even in countries where the path of revolution is that of surrounding the city by the countryside, situations in which a

mass upheaval leads to uprisings and insurrections in the cities can occur and the party should be prepared to utilize such situations within its overall strategy. However in both these situations, the party's ability to mobilize the peasants to take part in the revolution under proletarian leadership is critical to its success. (RIM 1984, 36-37)

But this central truth on the importance of the peasantry was ignored and/or opposed by Guevara and Debray. Just how off-base and antirevolutionary their stand toward the peasantry really was comes out in their line on the Indian national question within Latin American society. Debray treats this more or less in passing but (as can be seen from his previously cited passage on the peasantry's backwardness) it is plain that he sees the presence of large and viciously suppressed Indian populations in the countrysides of (especially) Guatemala and the Andean nations as *obstacles* to revolution. (Guevara's practice in Bolivia, to be addressed later, reflected this same view.) This seems a reflection of, or at least an adaptation to, the outlook of the suppressed bourgeois forces in Latin America who at times resist the national oppression they suffer at the hands of the U.S. (and other imperialists), but attempt simultaneously to prevent the really oppressed masses from getting "out of control" and to maintain their own national privileges vis-à-vis these masses. (Indeed, they will utilize such national oppression if they succeed in replacing the compradors whom they fight.) Without portraying the Indians as some sort of ideal revolutionary force, it should be noted that in the majority of countries in Latin America which witnessed significant guerrilla uprisings during the 1960s – including Peru, Guatemala, and Colombia – the Indian question was extremely important and Indians often made up an important social base for and a big percentage of the fighting force. No genuine revolution against the prevailing social relations could negate this important question or afford to stand aloof from this important section of the masses and its struggles. Debray's view toward the Indians is a product and reflection of the whole Guevarist line, insofar as that line resists mobilizing the peasantry and opposes targeting the backward semifeudal relations (including national oppression within Latin American society).

To sum this up: the domination of imperialism is bound up with the disarticulated character of agriculture in the oppressed nations, including the persistence of various forms of feudal relations and survivals. By the same token, continued disarticulation, feudal survivals, etc., serve to reproduce and reinforce those relations of domination. On the other hand, this severe oppression inevitably generates resistance among the peasantry and the agricultural proletariat and semiproletariat – resistance which must be channeled and led towards revolution by the proletariat. To attempt to skip over arousing and leading the peasant masses to carry through an agrarian revolution means to leave that domination intact. Even if a new regime should come to power, the form may change – state bureaucrats and ex-guerrillas may replace those who formerly managed the more profitable farms – but

imperialism will continue to dominate. The less profitable sectors of agriculture will continue to stagnate, the masses will be squeezed and the patterns and structure of production, trade, etc., will remain the same. This is, with some variation, exactly what happened in Cuba, and later, Ethiopia, and Angola (more on this later). When those who want to shortcut mobilizing the masses, especially the peasantry, for people's war speak of revolution, in truth they can only mean their own ascent to power, and that alone; and this is so even if done in the name of more quickly carrying the insurgency through, as Debray and Guevara attempted to do it. The real transformation of the social relations, the "springing of society into the air," in Marx's phrase, is evidently irrelevant to their calculations.

There is a further implication to this entire line on the peasantry. If one posits an armed force in the countryside existing *without* the active support of the peasantry – indeed, if one is strenuously arguing against even daring to politically mobilize these masses – *who*, then, *is* to be relied upon? While Debray and Guevara never got around to explicitly spelling out their plans on this point, we shall argue later that they envisioned their *focos* marching at the head of a coalition of the revisionist parties and the radical bourgeois (and petty-bourgeois) democrats. These forces, Guevara reckoned, could be hammered together to defeat the old regimes, seize power, grant reforms in the name of the masses, and then proceed with political consolidation.

### Base Areas

Debray devotes a significant section of his book to a polemic against the strategic goal of constructing base areas for the revolutionary forces in the countryside, at least until the rebel forces are on the very verge of seizing nationwide political power. He attributed the failure of a number of attempts at rural guerrilla war in the early '60s in Latin America to premature building of base areas.

To begin with, while the forces evidently referred to by Debray may have attempted to actually mobilize the masses and may, perhaps, have been influenced by Mao, it is hardly correct to act as if they were Maoist forces trying to put Mao's concepts into practice. (Even if they had been, that alone would not necessarily prove the incorrectness of the line; as Mao himself wrote, "In social struggle, the forces representing the advanced class sometimes suffer defeat not because their ideas are incorrect but because, in the balance of forces engaged in struggle, they are not as powerful for the time being as the forces of reaction; they are therefore temporarily defeated, but they are bound to triumph sooner or later" [Mao 1971, 503]).

Base areas, as conceived and put into practice by the Chinese Communist Party under Mao's leadership, are intended to serve as "great military, political, economic and cultural bastions of the revolution from which to fight [the] vicious enemies who are using the cities for attacks on the rural

districts . . ." (Mao 1967, 2: 316-317). While the conditions and characteristics of such base areas have historically varied widely (even within the Chinese Revolution itself), their earmark is the establishment of the political power of the masses through armed struggle. On this political foundation the revolutionary forces then utilize these base areas as springboards for further annihilation of enemy troops, expansion of the liberated zones, and preparation for nationwide seizure of power. The establishment of the masses' political power (and the concomitant commencement of the agrarian revolution in both the economic sphere and the superstructure) distinguishes base areas as a strategic concept from the looser forms of support (and even land division, etc.) among the rural masses seen, for example, in the Mexican Revolution, Sandino's struggle in the '20s and '30s, and indeed in the Cuban Revolution itself. It marks the transformation of spontaneity into consciousness.

There is no doubt that this important concept of Mao's has to be fitted to the particular conditions and tasks of Latin America; as noted, even within China itself the kaleidoscopically shifting conditions of the revolution during its twenty-two years gave rise to a variety of expressions, and Mao himself urged Latin American revolutionaries during the 1960s to steer clear of attempts to mechanically transpose or copy what seemed to "work" elsewhere onto their own conditions. How to deal with the generally more developed infrastructure found in many Latin American countries, what is the character of the organs of power appropriate to liberated zones, how to handle the closer relationship to the urban struggle necessitated (and afforded) by the greater urbanization, how in today's conditions to take into account and deal with the looming threat of interimperialist war: all pose (and posed then) urgent challenges for both theory and practice on the continent.

And to be clear, the establishment of base areas should *not* be viewed as the absolute first step in people's war; still less should the ability to sustain one from the very start be seen as a prerequisite whose absence would preclude the launching of such a war. In many, perhaps most, cases it may be necessary for revolutionary forces to engage in a period of guerrilla warfare with enemy troops prior to establishing a base area; indeed, Mao paid great attention to "contested guerrilla zones," areas in which the rebel forces could not yet establish political power but in which there was enough support among the masses to enable them to operate against the enemy in guerrilla fashion. But Mao also thought it necessary to work to transform these zones into base areas as soon as conditions allowed. And such base areas are an important strategic goal of the armed struggle.

In fact, there would seem to be an important difference as to what exactly is *meant* by base areas. Some confusion seems evident in Debray when, for example, he concedes the value of base areas after the rebel forces have reached a certain point. He draws a cautionary lesson from the Cuban experience, describing Che's attempt in late 1957 to set up a base in the Sierra Maestra. "He set up a permanent encampment, constructed a bread oven, a shoe repair shop, and a

hospital. He had a mimeograph machine sent in, with which he published the first numbers of *El Cubano Libre*; and, according to his own words, he began making plans for a small electric plant on the river of the valley." But Guevara's plans were smashed when government forces attacked. Only later, writes Debray, could the guerrillas set up a base able to be secured, and did so in April 1958: "The small basic territory then cleared was the terrain on which were to be found the field hospital, small handicraft industries, military repair shops, a radio station, a training center for recruits, and the command post. This small base enabled the rebels to resist the 1958 general summer offensive from entrenched positions" (Debray 1967, 63-64).

What is stunning in Debray's discussion here is his fixation on the purely military functions of base areas (and even in this sphere his conception is narrow!). Where is the mobilization of the masses here? Where are the organs of political power? What *political* experience was accumulated in this regard? Leaving aside Debray's explanation for *why* the base area could be set up when it was – to which we will return – there is really nothing here connecting the conception of base areas to the red political power that must be developed by the revolutionary forces, the revolution which must be unleashed in the countryside, etc. *He seems in fact to have confounded the concept of base areas with the notion of a permanent base camp!*

In sum, Debray's aim in taking up the question of base areas at all was hardly to explore the real problems and challenges, but instead to deduce their supposed impossibility from a few scattered instances in Latin America, and to marshal this "impossibility" as one more argument against a war of the masses.

In light of Debray's arguments on the utter inapplicability of Mao's theory to Latin America, the practice today by the Communist Party of Peru is of more than passing interest. Its initial successes in applying the Maoist line and orientation are highly significant; as of this writing they have waged guerrilla war against the government for four years with increasing intensity, and bourgeois observers now are forced to concede both that the revolutionaries have significant support among the masses and that the crisis for the Peruvian regime is deepening.

The objective and subjective basis for this struggle should be noted. To begin with, the Peruvian party firmly consolidated around a correct political line, thus establishing the force capable of *leading* the revolutionary army. They then conducted intensive investigation and political work in and analysis of the areas in which they initiated the armed struggle. In addition, there are important divisions in the Peruvian ruling class today, particularly between pro-U.S. elements among the traditional ruling classes and pro-Soviet forces in parts of the military. This fissure, at the same time, has been greatly aggravated by the insurgency itself. Finally, Peru is in deep economic crisis, including bearing a crushing burden of debt to the imperialist countries, resulting in severe hardship for the masses and ongoing political instability. This kind of situation is hardly atypical or

anomalous in Latin America, nor is it a mere temporary rough spot likely to soon be passed through by the rulers of Peru. It is, rather, symptomatic of the sort of opportunities offered in the present period.

Unlike Guevara, the Communist Party of Peru bases itself on mobilizing the masses for people's war. And in further sharp contrast to Guevara's orientation – as we shall see – the Peruvian revolution is *not* attempting to link with and/or draw in the support of the Soviets or their local parties. Instead, while utilizing the interimperialist contradictions, they are advancing the independent struggle of the *proletariat* in leadership of the peasantry.

## II

It is not as if at least some of the previous points, in one form or another, were never raised against the Guevara/Debray line. But Debray felt that he could trump any objections with what he clearly believed to be the best argument of all for focoism: "it worked in Cuba." He begins the whole book by arguing against the phrase that "the Cuban Revolution can no longer be repeated in Latin America," and at key points buttresses his case with illustrations from the Cuban Revolution. It is certainly not wrong to examine new revolutionary practice and to draw new theory from it, and it's also true (and quite fine!) that the process usually leads to a reexamination of – indeed, often a break with – some of what may have become "conventional wisdom" in the Marxist movement. The question here is just *what* the practice of the Cuban Revolution really proves, and whether Debray and Guevara drew their conclusions correctly.

Debray and Guevara believed that the revolutionary army need not – indeed, *should* not – undertake political work among the masses. In polemicizing, for instance, against "armed propaganda" (the tactic of dividing armed forces into small units to temporarily seize villages, execute local tyrants, and hold brief political rallies), he first notes the greater political effect of decisive military engagements with the enemy armed forces: "The destruction of a troop transport truck or the public execution of a police torturer is more effective propaganda for the local population than a hundred speeches." He then delivers what he considers his clincher: "A significant detail: During two years of warfare, Fidel did not hold a single political rally in his zone of operations" (Debray 1967, 53-54).

The first thing you wonder on reading this is why Debray set up this dichotomy between military and political in such a loaded way. Those who've followed the Maoist line have carried out military action and political mobilization in close conjunction. It's true, of course, that when the revolutionary forces reach a point at which they can actually contest for power or even inflict some military defeats on the bourgeois army, many masses who had hitherto wavered or even refused to entertain the possibility of revolution will politically awaken. But it seems clear from the context that Debray had

in mind something in the nature of spectacular stunts, rather than the protracted process of annihilating enemy troops and building up areas of political power. Further, if any military success isn't put in the service of and led by a genuine revolutionary line and program, and if there is no party to raise the sights of the masses when they do flood into motion, then the Debrayist orientation will degenerate into a rationale for developing shock troops for one or another bourgeois faction or imperialist (including social-imperialist) patron – and this in fact has repeatedly happened.

As to the military point involved in dividing one's forces, it's true that the people's army should principally concentrate its forces for battles of annihilation against the enemy. However, Mao also points to the role (secondary, but important) of dividing forces at times to arouse the masses. This whole question is not an either/or proposition as Debray tries to make it, but one of dialectically grasping the relationship between principal and secondary aspects of contradictory relationships (between military and political work, concentrating forces and dividing them, etc.).

Debray, however, goes on to try to analyze the roots "of this concept which reduces the *guerrillero* to a mere armed agitator." What accounts for it?

A misreading of the Cuban Revolution – a revolution well known in its external detail but whose inner content has not yet been sufficiently studied – may also have played its part. . . . A hundred men incite the mountain population with speeches; the regime, terrified, collapses to the accompaniment of jeers; and the *barbudos* are acclaimed by the people. In this way one confuses a military *foco* – a motor force of a total war – with a *foco* of political agitation. It appears to have been simply forgotten that the "26th of July" Cubans first made a war without a single unilateral truce; that during only a few months of 1958, the Rebel Army engaged in more battles than have other American fronts during a year or two; that in two months the rebels broke Batista's last offensive; and that 300 *guerrilleros* repulsed and routed 10,000 men. A general counteroffensive followed. (Debray 1967, 57)

But Debray himself is here guilty of a "misreading," of a self-serving oversimplification. It's true, of course, that Castro's columns were the decisive military force in overthrowing Batista; but the crisis facing the Batista regime ran deeper than the challenge posed by the Castroist *foco* and its military activities. Batista had seized power in 1952 through a coup d'état and neither of Cuba's main political parties – the Orthodox or the Authentics – mounted any real resistance. After the coup, investment opportunities for the Cuban bourgeoisie drastically slowed while new U.S. investment on the island leaped ahead at a rapid clip. Sections of the aspiring Cuban bourgeoisie were crowded out, and the problem was even more exacerbated for the relatively large Cuban petty bourgeoisie. The pamphlet *Cuba: The Evaporation of a Myth*

outlines both their dilemma and their political stance:

By the 1950s the petty bourgeoisie had become the most volatile class in Cuba. The political groups that arose from it were the best organized to fight for their interests. Castro's 26th of July Movement came from the urban petty bourgeoisie, 25% of Cuba's population – the tens of thousands of businessmen with no business, salesmen with no sales, teachers with no one to teach, lawyers and doctors with few patients and clients, architects and engineers for whom there was little work, and so on. In its 1956 "Program Manifesto," it defined itself as "guided by the ideals of democracy, nationalism and social justice . . . [of] Jeffersonian democracy," and declared, "democracy cannot be the government of a race, class or religion, it must be a government of all the people."

. . . Its practical program aimed at restricting the U.S. and the landlords by ending the quota system under which the U.S. controlled Cuban sugar cane production, restricting the domination of the biggest landlords over the medium-sized growers, distributing unused and stolen farmland to the small peasants, and a profit-sharing scheme for urban workers to expand the market for domestic manufactures and new investment. (Revolutionary Communist Party 1983, 9)

The Batista coup had closed off any chance for these forces to move politically to gain concessions. Pressure mounted.

Castro first acted against Batista with his assault on the Moncada army barracks in July 1953, and he took the occasion of his trial to make his well-known "History Will Absolve Me" speech. In fact, the speech reads almost like a Christian-Democratic document, with little mention of the U.S. role in the Cuban situation and a heavy focus on Batista's corruption, the regime's illegitimacy, violations of legality and the Constitution, etc. But the Moncada incident, along with his speech, turned Castro into a national figure, and some months later he was released from prison and sent into exile in Mexico.

Similarly, his openly declared intention from Mexico to launch the revolution in 1956, while leading to a military disaster, made Castro even more of a political pole of attraction for the growing anti-Batista opposition that was beginning to develop. But this opposition, independent of Castro, was growing in any case: widespread student struggles raged in Havana in 1955 and 1956; an organization known as the Revolutionary Directorate militarily attacked the presidential palace in March 1957; other fronts were opened by different groups in the Escambray Mountains and Pinar del Rio; and an unsuccessful general strike was even attempted by a coalition of forces (including Castro's movement, although not the CP of Cuba). It was not, in other words, just 300 *guerrilleros* versus 10,000 of Batista's troops.

This is also important in understanding why Castro could set up a base area – or rather, to be accurate about it, a permanent campsite – a few months after Guevara had failed, a

point of Debray's referred to earlier. While Debray never explains this, he implies that the sheer weight of accumulated fighting was principally responsible. He leaves out the all-around crisis which by then had enveloped Cuban society and which increasingly denied Batista the freedom to concentrate his troops in the countryside (lest Havana erupt), or to even rely on them to engage the rebel forces at all.

Then too there's the character of the Oriente itself, where the main force of Castro's troops were located. Later in the book, when Debray wants to convince the reader that once the military struggle turns favorable the masses will more or less fall into the revolution's lap, he cites a 1956 letter in which Castro wrote:

Now I know who the people are: I see them in that invincible force that surrounds us everywhere, I see them in the bands of 30 or 40 men, lighting their way with lanterns, who descend the muddy slopes at two or three in the morning, with 30 kilos on their backs, in order to supply us with food. Who had organized them so wonderfully? Where did they acquire so much ability, astuteness, courage, self-sacrifice? No one knows. It is almost a mystery. (Debray 1967, 113)

In fact, it wasn't really as mysterious as all that. The peasants of the Oriente were some of the most politically experienced in the world. They had fought for and defended rural soviets in the '30s. By the late '50s, when Castro and his men made their way there, they were embroiled in a volatile squatters' struggle.

It's valuable to ponder for a moment the picture presented by the Oriente. The site of the bulk of the fighting and of the revolution's greatest support, it contained Cuba's largest sugarcane farms, cultivated by a rural proletariat and semiproletariat, as well as half of Cuba's small peasant holdings. But the peasants were insecure and often driven off their land, and there had been no less than twenty significant peasant uprisings between 1902 and 1958. One historian notes that

The Sierra Maestre squatters had for some time been organized in bands to protect themselves against landlords who tried to evict them. The social bandit, a mixture of outlaw and protester, was the form that peasant social and political organization had taken. When Castro's band appeared in the area, it was almost immediately joined by these peasant bands, who no doubt recognized the guerrillas as allies. (Dominguez 1978, 436-437)

Two other observers, writing in criticism of Debray in 1967 in Cuba, note that when Castro reached the Oriente there was already "direct peasant-army confrontation, in which the army upheld the big landowners (rule by machete, evictions, violence against the peasant masses)... The political confrontations had already taken the form of direct clashes between the army and the peasantry" (Huberman

and Sweezy 1967, 56). It would seem perhaps that one lesson of the Cuban Revolution lies in the potential political and military explosiveness of the peasantry of the oppressed nations, even in 1959 Cuba where large-scale capitalization of agriculture and urbanization of half the population had taken place – Debray and today's neo-Guevarists to the contrary.

Insofar as the Cuban Revolution proves anything, it is certainly not Debray's model of a *foco*, divorced from the peasantry, causing on its own a deep crisis and more or less single-handedly defeating the government. More what it seems to point to is the powerful role a revolutionary armed force can play in the presence of a political crisis and a peasantry (along with an agricultural proletariat and semiproletariat) eager to take up arms against their oppressors; or better yet, it indicates the dialectical interplay between what is subjective (the military force, in this case) and what is objective (the crisis of the regime and the sentiments and struggle of the masses). This is not to say that the revolutionary armed force has no role to play in sparking upsurge and deepening a political crisis; nor is it the case that one can or should only launch the armed struggle in the oppressed nations when such conditions are already fully present (although they generally must be for a victorious conclusion to be carried through). But Guevarism attempts to totally deny the importance of the objective situation to all phases of the armed struggle, and prefers instead to act as if the objective situation is "set" and all that is lacking is the courage and sound tactics of the revolutionaries.

*The Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* treats this question in the following way:

In the oppressed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America a continuous revolutionary situation generally exists. But it is important to understand this correctly: the revolutionary situation does not follow a straight line; it has its ebbs and flows. The communist parties should keep this dynamic in mind. They should not fall into one-sidedness in the form of asserting that the commencement and the final victory of people's war depends totally on the subjective factor (the communists), a view often associated with "Lin Piaoism". Although at all times some form of armed struggle is generally both desirable and necessary to carry out the tasks of class struggle in these countries, during certain periods armed struggle may be the principal form of struggle and at other times it may not be. (RIM 1984, 34)

What helps to make this particular problem so tricky – and what adds to the appeal of Che Guevara to those who really do burn to make a revolution – is that many a revolutionary sentiment and initiative has been smothered by conventional revisionism under the rubric of "objective conditions." It won't cut it, however, to oppose this by way of denying the crucial importance of the objective situation and essentially throwing materialism out the window. Instead, revolutionaries must oppose the mechanical-materialist

method utilized by revisionism with materialist *dialectics*. Lenin, in an essay on Karl Marx, made the distinction well:

Only an objective consideration of the sum-total of reciprocal relations of all the classes of a given society without exception, and, consequently, a consideration of the objective stage of development of that society and of the reciprocal relations between it and other societies, can serve as a basis for correct tactics of the advanced class. At the same time, all classes and all countries are regarded not statically, but dynamically, i.e., not in a state of immobility, but in motion (the laws of which are determined by the economic conditions of existence of each class). Motion, in its turn, is regarded not only from the standpoint of the past, but also from the standpoint of the future, and, at the same time, not in accordance with the vulgar conception of the "evolutionists," who see only slow changes, but dialectically: "in developments of such magnitude twenty years are no more than a day," Marx wrote to Engels, "although later there may come days in which twenty years are concentrated". (Lenin 1970, 40-41)

And based on just such an understanding Bob Avakian has, over the last several years, stressed the necessity for a vanguard party to ascertain, base itself on, and develop the "revolutionary elements" within any given situation. The dialectic involved is one of doing the utmost to prepare for revolutionary insurrection (or in the case of oppressed nations, where the armed struggle may already have been launched, for a full and decisive strategic offensive) while – as Mao put it – "hastening or awaiting changes in the international situation and the internal collapse of the enemy" (Mao 1967, 2:126).

The voluntarism undergirding Guevara and Debray's method, because it tries to refute mechanical materialism with subjective idealism,\* ends up eventually falling into some of the same errors of passivity typically associated with mechanical materialism. This comes out, for example, in Debray's examination of the ways in which Cuba's revolution was exceptional, or "never to be repeated." He notes, for example, that U.S. uncertainty and laxness regarding the intentions of the revolutionaries was highly unlikely to be repeated elsewhere in Latin America. But while the Cuban Revolution certainly made the U.S. much more wary, it is not the case that the U.S. could or can always do whatever it wishes to crush revolutions, even where the intentions of the revolutionaries are unmistakably clear – as they were in China and Vietnam! Even in Central America, the U.S.'s self-styled "backyard," constraints beyond even the strength of the masses operate;

\* Subjective idealism holds that the ideas or beliefs of the individual *give rise to* material reality, or in general more determine the character of that reality than vice versa. While ideas play a powerful role and can become transmuted into a powerful material force, this is based on the extent to which they reflect objective reality and elucidate the underlying laws determining its motion and development.

for example, Alexander Haig claims in his recent memoirs that Weinberger and others in the Reagan administration rebuffed his 1981 proposal to *decisively* intervene in El Salvador and Nicaragua, for fear that it would conflict with what they saw as the overriding priority: preparing the U.S. armed forces (and U.S. public opinion) for a global war with the Soviets. But Debray's voluntarism leads him not only to denial of the importance of objective conditions to revolutionaries, but to blindness to the real constraints they also put on the imperialists. This method will lead to losing sight of or ignoring important potential weaknesses in the enemy camp.

On the other hand, Debray does not take sufficient note of other factors. Batista, for instance, was forced by dint of the potential explosiveness of Havana as well as divisions among the Cuban bourgeoisie into an "enclave strategy," meaning that he concentrated his troops in a few secure locations rather than sending them on search-and-destroy missions. This allowed the rebel troops time to rest and train. But it would be very unwise for revolutionary forces to rely on such a situation developing in every case. It may happen, but it is far from automatic and one must prepare for intense and protracted fighting as a rule. Further, because the U.S. was, after all, unclear on the revolution's goals and because the leading group was *not* in fact committed to a thoroughgoing revolution (or even at that point to a break of any sorts with the U.S.), there was remarkably little destruction and no real civil war in the Cuban Revolution. This marks a sharp contrast with what occurred in Russia, China, and Vietnam and must be considered highly atypical (at least of revolutions which really do aim at rupturing with imperialism and transforming the social relations). Thus even the important lessons from the Cuban Revolution (e.g., the role of the peasantry and the agricultural proletariat, the political volatility of the urban petty bourgeoisie, etc.) must be carefully drawn regarding their possible universal significance.

Debray draws only those lessons which fit into the *foco* model he was pushing at the time, and then absolutizes their relevance. And again, what was that model? A small band relies on astute military tactics to defeat an imperialist-backed army, with the political mobilization of the masses presumed to follow in the wake of dramatic military success. The measures associated with people's war – including the mobilization and reliance upon the peasantry, the establishment of base areas as an important objective of the military struggle, the commencement of the agrarian revolution – are denied, even bitterly opposed, as inapplicable to Latin America. The peasantry is viewed not as a reservoir of forces for the revolution, but as a mass of potential informers. Base areas are seen as little more than permanent military campsites and then in effect dismissed as a dangerous diversion. The agrarian revolution is, quite simply, ignored and thus negated.

But let us, even for the sake of debate, grant Guevarism its central argument here: that a band of guerrillas, keeping aloof from the peasantry to the very end, can catalyze a revolutionary overthrow of the old regime. Even allowing for the exaggeration found in *Revolution in the Revolution?*, is

there not in fact some truth to this? Did not Castro essentially lead his initial handful of men to make a revolution in Cuba? Did not Guevarism *work* in Cuba?

That depends in the final analysis on what you mean by "working." It's true that Castro effected a seizure of power, that the Batista regime was overthrown, that major changes ensued in Cuban society. But as to the basic and underlying *problems of Cuban society* – and by this we mean its status in world relations as an oppressed, dependent nation with all the consequent ramifications – the change has been one of form rather than content. Specifically focusing on the land question, the Castro regime can be said to have basically finished the process begun by Batista: they transformed Cuban agriculture into a massive, proletarianized operation devoted to the production of sugar. The old farms, directly owned either by U.S. corporations or Cuban compradors, were put into the hands of the state, yes. But the role of the masses in agriculture as proletarians with no control over their labor, the monocultural structure of Cuban agricultural production (the bulk of production given over to the single export crop of sugar), and most of all (and setting the terms for the other conditions), the integration of Cuban sugar production into the exigencies and rhythms of imperialist (even if Soviet imperialist) capital – all these essentially remain the same. The difference lies in the beards and fatigues (initially) worn by the new crop of administrators and the language in which the new set of imperialist overlords give their orders.

The experience of Cuba (and here again we urge the reader to turn to *The Evaporation of a Myth* for a deeper analysis and further documentation) points again to the fact that in most oppressed nations imperialism cannot finally be ousted without mobilizing the peasantry (along with the rural proletarians and semiproletarians) to tear up the roots of the oppressive legacy in the countryside and to *step-by-step restructure* agriculture from bottom to top so as to break the chains of dependency and serve the world revolution. The land question in these countries is just too essential and *too integrated into the whole structure of imperialist domination* to be somehow finessed, or dealt with mainly through nationalizing the big farms.

Thus even if one concedes to all of Guevarism's (dubious) arguments, even if one ignores the potentially explosive role of the peasantry (in favor of allying with their would-be new bosses), even if important facets of what did happen in Cuba during 1953-59 are left out – the fact is that this road cannot lead to genuine emancipation.

There is a shortcut offered here. You need only screw up your courage, review military tactics and engage the enemy. This shortcut mentality extends as well to the other crucial component of Guevarism: its view of the role of the party in revolutionary war, of the *relationship between party and army*. Something else as well begins to emerge in studying that area: the real plan guiding Guevara, Castro, and Debray, their hidden answer to the question of: if not the peasantry led by the proletariat, then who?

### III

In examining the Guevarist line on the relationship of the party to the army, more questions arise while the basis for answering other ones begins to appear. Guevara and Debray held that the guerrilla *foco* must be entirely autonomous of party control. They argued that since the armed struggle takes place in the countryside, the leadership must also be based in the countryside, both to better guide that struggle and to elude capture by the police. They further insisted that ideological and political struggle and training within the ranks of the rebel army was at best an irrelevant distraction, at worst a fatal diversion. According to Debray, the necessary political unity will be forged in the furnace of battle, and the strategy and tactics necessary for victory drawn from the lessons afforded by each military engagement with the enemy.

Is Guevarism just arguing a variation on the classical spontaneist line here – downplaying the key and leading role of the party? While that is the form, and while some common elements exist, something a bit different is actually at work: a proposed *modus vivendi* with the established revisionist parties. To grasp this, however, it's first necessary to address Debray's main points on the party/army relationship in their own right.

Debray purports to sum up the experience of the failed guerrilla risings of the early '60s, and he traces many of the problems to the failure to allow the *foco* autonomy. For example, one sharp problem in these insurgencies was the capture and/or murder of the leaders. Debray points to the perilous journeys undertaken by these leaders to the cities for political instructions and aid. By contrast, according to Debray, so long as the guerrillas stay in the mountains, capture "is virtually impossible. . . . All that the police and their North American advisers can do is to wait on their home ground until the guerrilla leaders come to the city" (Debray 1967, 69).

Further, he argues that "the lack of political power [referring in this context to the power of the *foco* to determine its own political and military line] leads to logistical and military dependence of the mountain forces on the city. This dependence often leads to abandonment of the guerrilla force by the city leadership" (Debray, 69). Debray recounts the experience of one unnamed movement in Latin America which was given only \$200 a year by their urban-based leadership with which to purchase arms, supplies, etc. An oblique criticism of the Venezuelan CP, which in 1965 abandoned and renounced a guerrilla movement that they had been part of, may have been intended here. And Debray also criticized those parties which utilized their armed wings only in subordination to various parliamentary maneuvers. Again, one understands an implied criticism of the Latin American CPs which at that point were still involved in some sort of armed struggle.

In much of this argument Debray articulates the disgust of many honest revolutionary forces with the stultified revisionist parties, participating in the armed struggle (if at all), it often seemed, only to hold it back. This disgust for revisionism

– at least in its classical, suit-and-tie parliamentary incarnation – soon slides over, however, into an opposition to any political training whatsoever. Debray sharply opposes the presence of political commissars in military units and training schools for military cadre. He cites Castro: "To those who show military ability, also give political responsibility" (Debray 1967, 90).

A number of different contradictions have been mushed together here, including the contradiction between city and countryside during the period of war, the contradiction between the party and the army, and the contradiction between parliamentary and armed forms of struggle. Let's briefly try to untangle this mess.

First, where *should* the party be based during the period of guerrilla war? If it is based in the countryside, as it should be and as indeed it was during China's revolutionary war, then don't the Guevarist objections as to the drawbacks of the military arm being subordinate to the political – at least those concerning the safety of the military commanders, the inability of the city cadre to grasp "the importance of a pound of gun grease or square yard of nylon," etc. – begin to melt away? Debray basically argues that the party (assumed to be urban based) and the *foco* should each be allowed to do its own thing. Why is he so resistant to waging an ideological and political struggle as to what the real focus of the party's work should be – that is, waging, or preparing to wage, revolutionary war?

As to the contradiction between the party and army: Debray notes that he is arguing against "an entire international range of experience," including the Russian Revolution and the protracted people's wars of China and Vietnam, with his opposition to party leadership over the military. But he refuses to address the *reasons* why international Marxism reached that conclusion.

This has everything to do with how one conceives of the role of the party and the tasks of the proletariat in the revolution. The party must act as the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat in every sphere. This includes carrying through a basic analysis of the international situation and of the classes within the country in question, developing a program and strategy for revolution on that basis, educating the masses on the goal of the struggle and the path to victory, and *developing a correct military line and forging the military apparatus to actually lead the armed struggle*. But the latter task, crucial as it is in its own right, cannot really be done on a correct basis without doing that basic analysis of classes and the international situation, without developing a strategy and program. And unless the masses are mobilized through the course of the war, and unless, moreover, their consciousness is raised, then what will the war be fought over anyway? How will the masses have been prepared to wield political power? *The Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* sharply sums up the historical experience on these points, as it applies to oppressed nations:

The key to carrying out a new democratic revolution is the independent role of the proletariat and its abili-

ty, through its Marxist-Leninist party, to establish its hegemony in the revolutionary struggle. Experience has shown again and again that even when a section of the national bourgeoisie joins the revolutionary movement, it will not and cannot lead a new democratic revolution, to say nothing of carrying this revolution through to completion. Similarly, history demonstrates the bankruptcy of an "anti-imperialist front" (or similar "revolutionary front") which is not led by a Marxist-Leninist party, even when such a front or forces within it adopt a "Marxist" (actually pseudo-Marxist) colouration. While such revolutionary formations have led heroic struggles and even delivered powerful blows to the imperialists they have been proven to be ideologically and organisationally incapable of resisting imperialist and bourgeois influences. Even where such forces have seized power they have been incapable of carrying through a thoroughgoing revolutionary transformation of society and end up, sooner or later, being overthrown by the imperialists or themselves becoming a new reactionary ruling power in league with imperialists. . . .

The Marxist-Leninist party must arm the proletariat and the revolutionary masses not only with an understanding of the immediate task of carrying through the new democratic revolution and the role and conflicting interests of different class forces, friend and foe alike, but also of the need to prepare the transition to the socialist revolution and of the ultimate goal of worldwide communism. (RIM 1984, 32)

None of this at all implies downplaying the necessity for the party to stress military matters. One need only note the extensive military writings of Mao (who in fact developed the first really integral, really comprehensive Marxist military doctrine). Indeed the struggle over military line, finally won by Mao at the Tsunyi conference in 1935, concentrated the overall line struggles in the Chinese Communist Party at that point, and that was no accident: the gun was the principal weapon of struggle and in that situation military line becomes the concentrated expression of political line.

Debray, however, portrays the struggle over political line as a distraction, nothing more than an excuse to avoid the business at hand: launching an insurgency. No doubt more than a few revisionists provided the basis for that caricature. But Debray tries to cover over what Mao continually emphasized: if one line does not lead, then another surely will. And the proletarian line never leads without acute struggle. This was also stressed by Lenin, and lies at the very foundation of *What Is To Be Done?*, his work laying out the relationship of the party to the revolutionary movement and preparation for armed insurrection. There he wrote:

Since there can be no talk of an independent

ideology being developed by the masses of the workers themselves in the process of their movement the *only* choice is: either the bourgeois or the socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a "third" ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to *turn away from it in the slightest degree* means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. . . .

But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of the least resistance, lead to the domination of the bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that the bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than the socialist ideology; because it is more fully developed and because it possesses *immeasurably* more opportunities for being spread. (Lenin 1975, 48-51).

In passing, we must speak to Debray's dismissal of political training of soldiers. Is this not really a plan to use the masses as cannon fodder? The flip notion that the "masses will know what they are fighting for" ignores a bitter history of new bourgeois forces taking advantage for their own narrow interests of the eagerness of the masses to take up arms against oppression. Even Debray, at the time he was writing, would have argued this to be true of Algeria, for example, and history provides other examples as well – with Iran and Nicaragua being only the most recent. To intentionally keep vague the goals and stance of the revolution, to deny the masses the *theoretical tools necessary for their emancipation*, can only curtail their initiative and enhance that of those who aspire to be their saviors – and new (if "enlightened") rulers.

How does the emphasis given by Lenin and Mao to a centralized party relate to the need for local commanders to have a measure of autonomy? Guevara and Debray are not wrong to stress *that* aspect of autonomy, but it is not necessarily antagonistic to a strong party; Mao himself attached great importance to it. The initiative is key in war, and local commanders will hardly be able to seize it if they must check and recheck every plan. The question however is what the basis is for that autonomy. If such autonomy is to feed the overall military struggle, the commanders must be firmly united around the basic military line of the party, the principles of operation forged for the party, specific strategic concepts in various areas, etc. And all of this must ultimately be based on the political line and objectives of the party. Otherwise guerrilla actions become pointless, rivulets that lead to no stream and eventually dry up.

But Guevara and Debray addressed the *de-emphasis on military struggle* by demanding autonomy for the army, and in the process negated the importance of political leadership and consciousness altogether. Why did they not instead speak to the question of what *kind* of party had to be built to really lead the armed struggle?

Finally, there is the political question of the relation be-

tween parliamentary and military struggle. The revisionist CPs of Latin America, even when waging military struggle, usually saw it – at that point in history – as an adjunct to various parliamentary maneuvers.\* To this Debray and Guevara objected. Their solution (autonomy of the *foco*) is again wrong, however, and again we ask: why not a struggle within the revolutionary ranks on the correct road forward? Why just a "you do your thing and we'll do ours" type of orientation?

After all, if the parties of Latin America were seriously flawed – and the revisionist CPs by that point were not so much flawed as they were hopelessly corroded and counter-revolutionary – then why not carry out a thorough struggle and rupture in the spheres of ideology, politics, organization, and the military *and on that basis forge a new vanguard party*? As a matter of fact just such a struggle was being waged, internationally and within the Latin American continent, by the Marxist-Leninist forces who supported Mao. But Guevara and Debray bitterly opposed it. Why?

For one, as pointed to earlier, they simply did not have in mind the sort of thoroughgoing revolution that necessitates a genuine Leninist vanguard. They were aiming to "get something going" – to be the "small motor that starts the large motor," Debray says at one point – and then to take it from there. The orientation is to cause a crisis within the ruling regime, attempt to strike a deal with other bourgeois forces, set loose – to a degree – mass upheaval and ride that either into power or to a role in a coalition government. This was the real "Cuban model" these forces had in mind. If you are not attempting to arouse the masses to really uproot the *old social relations and consciously transform society*, if you are not expecting the protracted war that almost surely will accompany such an orientation, then, really, what need have you for a Leninist party?

Second, and obviously related to that, the specific program and strategy they were pushing for, the way in which they saw the forces lining up in Latin America (and internationally), ruled out any attempt to forge a new party in opposition to the revisionist CPs. Yes, they would fight for autonomy, and even raise the question of hegemony at times, but they would have to be very careful not to risk upsetting the revisionist applecart altogether. And this becomes clearer in considering the international situation at the time and how Guevara and Debray (and of course Castro above all) viewed their options within it.

## IV

Guevarism arose in a specific international situation, and its content is conditioned by the dynamics of that situation. Throughout the 1960s the drive of imperialism (headed by the

\* Today, in Latin America, it is also seen by these revisionists as prelude to or positioning for negotiations over power-sharing with various neocolonial governments tied to the U.S.

U.S.) to more thoroughly exploit the oppressed nations of the Third World ran right up against the resistance of the masses of those countries, and this constituted the principal contradiction in the world at that time. It set the political terms of a decade. Exemplified by the indomitable resistance of the Vietnamese against U.S. aggression, this contradiction reached a breadth and intensity during that period that was quite literally unprecedented.

This was, however, not the only contradiction shaping world events. There was a particular character to U.S./Soviet rivalry during that period: the Soviets pursued their imperialist interests through a policy of (in the main) collusion with U.S. imperialism. Necessity imposed upon them the tactic of attempting to secure significant pockets of influence – even domination – in specific Third World governments, while avoiding a decisive confrontation with a U.S. whose military superiority was then unquestionable. All this was by way of preparation to more aggressively push out to confront the U.S. later on, when changing conditions would afford new opportunities (and a still greater necessity). But in the situation of the '60s this meant that oppositional and revolutionary forces of different classes were not so drawn in as today to Soviet revisionism, and tended to look either to socialist China or to their own devices (or both) to find the wherewithal to rise in arms against U.S. imperialism.

That in turn points to the important contradiction between then socialist China and each of the two imperialist blocs. The U.S. had continued its aggressively hostile stance toward China all through the '50s and early '60s, and China's refusal to buckle at all had inspired countless millions around the world. The Soviets had, throughout the late '50s and early '60s, also attempted to dominate China: this took the form of economic sabotage, sponsoring anti-Maoist forces within the Chinese leadership, and attempting to isolate China by claiming that its firm stance against the U.S. increased the dangers of world war. (In the late '60s the Soviets would actually launch military attacks against China's borders and float plans for a preemptive nuclear strike on its cities.) All this led to a situation in which China "competed" with the Soviets to aid the liberation struggles against (mainly U.S.) imperialism and tried to influence them in a genuinely Marxist-Leninist direction. These intertwining international contradictions – in which, again, the contradiction between the oppressed nations and imperialism, finding expression in the powerful wave of national liberation struggles, formed the principal factor – constituted the ground upon which Guevarism arose, as a specific political (and ideological) response of a particular class.

Analyzing Latin America in particular, where Guevarism both arose and enjoyed its greatest influence, one must understand the politically galvanic effect of the Cuban Revolution, both on the masses generally and in particular on the national bourgeoisies and petty bourgeoisies on the continent. The U.S. had responded to the Cuban Revolution with invasion, espionage, and attempts to diplomatically isolate the Castro regime, preparatory to military action. Pressure was brought to bear on all the Latin American governments to

break ties; the expulsion of Cuba from the Organization of American States was only the most dramatic (and politically explosive) case in point. But all this tended to generate widespread sympathy for Cuba among the masses and among a significant layer of the revolutionary bourgeois democrats on the continent. The groveling of the comprador regimes of Latin America to the U.S. demands to punish the one country that was standing up to the beast – which indeed had defeated it militarily – disgusted many of what could be considered revolutionary and/or radical bourgeois-democratic forces.\*

As things polarized, these forces launched revolutionary wars in a number of Latin American countries. Venezuela, for example, saw the birth in 1962 of a guerrilla movement led by the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), which had split off in disgust from the ruling party in 1960. Their ranks were further swollen by military men who rebelled in February 1963. Guatemala was also the site of a guerrilla movement, beginning in 1962, and this one had even more significant roots in the bourgeois military: two of its leading members, Yon Sosa and Luis Turcios, had taken part in the November 1960 revolt in the army against the presence of a CIA training base preparing Cuban exiles for the Bay of Pigs invasion. In Peru, guerrillas appeared a few years later, and the leaders mostly came from another organization called MIR, this one a breakaway from the ruling APRA party; in Colombia, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional drew its main strength from the dissident members of the bourgeois Liberal Party.

Simultaneously the revisionist parties of Latin America were undergoing great turmoil. On the one hand a number of these parties had been outlawed, or otherwise subjected to unusual repression, in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, including the parties of Venezuela and Colombia. On the other, the success of the Cuban Revolution against a backdrop of 40 years of CP impotence and reformism raised big questions among the masses and put tremendous pressure on the revisionists. The youth in particular demanded action. Finally, significant sections of these parties were influenced by the Chinese polemics against the Soviet stress on the "three peacefuls" (peaceful coexistence, peaceful transition to socialism in the capitalist countries, and the peaceful competitive victory of socialism over capitalism on a world scale). This severe internal stress occurred in a context where for a few years in the early to mid-1960s, especially during the initial phases of the uprisings in Venezuela and Guatemala, at least sections of the Soviet leadership felt that Cuban-type revolutions might happen in other Latin American countries. This line became more pronounced for a brief period after the fall of Khrushchev. So there were powerful pulls on these parties to get in on the armed struggles that were burgeoning in Latin America.

But by 1965 things took yet another turn on the continent. The U.S. launched a major and all-sided initiative, including not only the Alliance for Progress but also the large-scale train-

\* These forces were roughly parallel in position and outlook to the 26th of July Movement in Cuba, characterized earlier.

ing of military officers, the tremendous expansion of CIA activity, and the virtual direction of the Christian-Democratic movement. The 1964 coup in Brazil against Goulart (rather openly coordinated by the CIA) and the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic a year later made it brutally clear that the U.S. was ready to use its might against any even mildly nationalist initiative (let alone a full-blown revolutionary challenge).

Meanwhile, and linked to this, the guerrilla movements had begun to run into trouble. The insurgencies in Guatemala and Colombia stagnated; the Peruvian revolutionaries were brutally crushed; in Venezuela the movement made little headway. Fabricio Ojeda and Camilio Torres were assassinated, Luis de la Puente was caught and sentenced to 20 years in prison, other revolutionary-democratic leaders (e.g., Domingo Rangel, the most important leader of MIR in Venezuela) capitulated and abandoned the armed struggle.

The Soviets judged the times to be not so promising any more, and effected a shift in policy. They decided to pursue diplomatic and economic ties with the regimes on the continent, deeming it a form of penetration more promising than supporting revolutions which no longer seemed very likely to win and which, even if they did win, might have been prohibitively difficult (from the standpoint of Soviet *realpolitik*) to defend and support against a U.S. imperialism operating with renewed rapidity. It's also true that by this time the Soviet/Chinese split had become irrevocable, and many of the Latin American parties had also split; it may no longer have seemed so necessary to the Soviets to at least partially support some revolutionary struggles in hopes of holding together these parties, since the splits had already occurred.

All these factors – along, no doubt, with the new offers of amnesty for the revisionist CPs – led almost all those parties to renounce the armed struggle by 1965. This was most concentrated in Venezuela, where the struggle had been the most advanced and the role of the CP the largest. There the move by the leadership in April 1965 to withdraw from the guerrilla front and abandon the armed struggle led to a serious split, with CP leader Douglas Bravo leaving the party.

Throughout this period of 1961-65 Cuba played relatively little role in attempting to lead these struggles. Support and refuge were provided, advice was offered, some training even went on – but Cuba made no real attempt to form up a center for revolution on the continent. Guevara, who left Cuba in 1964, did not at first journey to another Latin American country but went instead to the Congo, where he attempted to link up with the guerrilla movement then going on.

But this too changed in 1965-66. When Guevara was called back to Havana, the object was to re-ignite the revolutionary brushfires in Latin America. In early 1966 Cuba held the first conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS). While revisionist parties of Latin America were invited, the Cubans more conceived of it as a center for the radical-democratic non-CP forces interested in launching armed struggle. (Almost all pro-Maoist parties and forces were screened out of the conference by Cuba – an exclusion that will become more comprehensible later.) At the same time,

Debray was brought to Havana to write his book, and Guevara undertook preparations for the Bolivian mission of 1966-67.

Why this shift? Castro also attached great importance to the events of 1965, from his own particular interests and angle. In particular, Cuba not only feared the heightened American aggression around the world (and especially in Latin America), but was also dismayed by the Soviet reluctance to confront the U.S. When the U.S. began bombing North Vietnam (in February 1965), Castro took a long hard look at the Soviet promises to treat Cuba as an "inviolable part of the socialist camp" should the U.S. land in Havana. After all, not only was North Vietnam just as inviolable, it was more than a little bit closer to the Soviet sphere of influence! Juan Bosch, himself a political casualty of the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, commented in his review of Debray's book that one must first understand the fact that

Fidel Castro is waiting for an attack by the United States. He waits for it day after day and fears that when it occurs Russia will not fight for Cuba. Fidel Castro does not hope to make fervent Cuban nationalists of world Communists, and perhaps does not entirely trust the nationalism of Cuban Communists. Fidel Castro, according to what can be deduced from what he says and does, seems to depend more on the nationalist youth of Latin America than on the Communist parties of the region. He sees that the Communist parties are withholding support from the guerrillas organizing all over the continent, and no doubt fears that these parties, formed during the Stalinist days of loyalty to Russia, may follow the Russian line of coexistence with the United States. If the North American attack occurs, they will make no serious effort to prevent a Cuban defeat. (Huberman and Sweezy 1967, 104)

This strategic view finds expression in Guevara's assessment of the international situation, ironically enough in his message containing the famous call for "two, three, many Vietnams." While Guevara correctly identified the principal contradiction as that between imperialism headed by the U.S. and the oppressed nations, and focused on the war in Vietnam within that, he did so in a peculiar way:

This is the sad reality: Vietnam – a nation representing the aspirations, the hopes of a whole world of forgotten peoples – is tragically alone. This nation must endure the furious attacks of U.S. technology with practically no possibility of reprisals in the South and only some of defense in the North – but always alone.

The solidarity of all progressive forces of the world with the people of Vietnam is today similar to the bitter agony of the plebians urging on the gladiators in the Roman arena. It is not a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to his death

or to victory.

When we analyze the lonely situation of the Vietnamese people, we are overcome by anguish at this illogical fix in which humanity finds itself. (Bonachea and Valdés 1969, 172)

While the struggle of the Vietnamese was certainly complicated and made more difficult, to wildly understate the case, by the reversal of socialism in the Soviet Union and its consequent policy of selling out the national liberation struggles, it was nevertheless wrong, and profoundly so, for Guevara to have seen Vietnam as "tragically isolated." For one thing, it was directly backed by China, which had pledged itself as a rear area; for another, there were perhaps a score of other liberation struggles raging in the world at that time (as well as a revolutionary reawakening beginning in the imperialist citadels, most notably in the rebellions of the Black people in the U.S.). If none of these struggles had yet reached (or ever did, in that spiral) the height of Vietnam, that certainly cannot negate the real blows that were struck against imperialism, and the real potential for even more serious blows had the revolutionary movement been in a stronger position – a shortcoming for which Guevara and Castro themselves bear no small measure of responsibility. Even when Guevara does take note of other struggles, he uses these in the service of his "tragically isolated" line of thinking: the "liberation struggle against the Portuguese should end victoriously," he writes, only to immediately dismiss its significance by adding, "but Portugal means nothing in the imperialist field" (Bonachea and Valdés 1969, 176).

Guevara's statement castigates both the Soviet Union and China for dereliction in their internationalist duties: the Soviets for not daring to confront the U.S. over the bombing of North Vietnam, and the Chinese for continuing their polemics against the Soviets (and hence supposedly dividing the "socialist camp"). In regard to the criticism of the Soviets, more than anything it reflected Cuban concern over the reliability of Soviet guarantees of Cuban sovereignty which the Soviets claimed to have extracted from Kennedy in exchange for their capitulation in the 1962 missile crisis. It is above all a plea for the Soviets to act more aggressively in pursuit of their imperialist interests (which is one reason why Castro welcomed the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia). We will deal with the motivation for the attacks on China shortly.

For the Cuban leadership, the question was urgent – in their view their survival might depend on the revival of the guerrilla movements. It's important to grasp that it was primarily this narrow nationalist framework which led them to foster the Guevara initiative.\* Were one of the movements

\* To be clear – we do not agree with the criticism of Guevara that the very fact that he was not Bolivian doomed and invalidated his attempt to launch an insurgency there. This criticism was unofficially voiced by some (rightist) elements in China who went so far as to accuse him of "exporting revolution"! The proletarian revolution is a world revolution. Revolutionaries must proceed in all cases from that perspective, and make their contribution wherever it will have the greatest impact and value internationally; there is surely nothing

to take power, then Cuba would have an ally on the continent, and even were it not to win immediately, if at least a credible threat could be mounted, the U.S. could be tied down, maybe in several places at once – thus taking some of the pressure off of Cuba. And then, too, the possibility existed of bargaining off these movements in return for U.S. security concessions to Cuba. (If this last possibility seems to ascribe too much cynicism to a movement which has constantly advertised its own idealism, we only note Castro's profound silence during the Mexican government's murder of several hundred students during the 1968 rebellions; Mexico was the only Latin American government with ties to Cuba at that time.)

Guevara envisioned building these movements out of the radical bourgeois-democratic forces and the supporters of the revisionist parties. These were the only forces which could possibly be mobilized in short order to take up this new continentally conceived and directed project. And short order was key from the Cuban perspective, for they felt the U.S. threat to them to be an immediate one.

How was this coalition to be hammered together? To appeal to the radical bourgeois democrats, a few things were necessary. First, some summation of the earlier period of guerrilla struggles had to be assayed. This was part of the task intended for Debray's book.\* Second, the radicals were well acquainted with CP treachery, and some sort of assurance that the revisionist parties would be kept on a tight rein was necessary. This did *not* mean a total break; indeed, these forces generally saw Soviet aid as ultimately necessary to any attempt to break from the U.S. (or to any attempt to gain a better bargaining position vis-à-vis the U.S.) and felt that if the revisionist CPs of Latin America could be drawn into an alliance such aid would be more likely. One must figure as well that the assurance that the experienced Cubans were now going to directly lead the military battle (including the personal command of Guevara) also had an affect on these forces.

As for the CPs, the Cubans hoped to generate enough pressure to at least neutralize them, and hopefully force them to provide logistical support on the guerrillas' terms. Thus Castro's vitriolic public attacks on the Venezuelan CP,

wrong with "exporting revolution" (as long as Bob Avakian has pointed out, as there is someone there to "import it"). The problem with Guevara's brand of ersatz internationalism (and what made it ultimately phony) lay in the underlying perspective which guided it: the national interest of the Cuban state.

\* Debray also attacks the notion, promoted by, among others, anarchists and Trotskyites, that the revolution can be made relying on the armed self-defense actions of the masses as the point of departure for the revolution. An example of these actions was the seizure of mines by Bolivian tin miners at the outset of the 1952 Bolivian Revolution (and periodically following the revolution and its betrayal). Debray correctly noted that this tailing of spontaneity could only lead to defeat, that an actual army had to be formed to make the revolution, and that what amounted to sending the workers up alone against the guns of the state generally resulted in profound demoralization. What Debray did not do, however, was to discuss how such upsurges might be utilized by a genuinely revolutionary movement. In any case this forms a secondary element in Debray's book and is not germane to the main points under discussion here.

the statements at the various OLAS conferences excoriating the old-line revisionist parties, and the fanfare afforded Debray's book itself were all designed to create a certain amount of havoc within the social base and the ranks of these parties. On the other hand, Castro hoped that offers of aid (\$25,000 was provided up front to the head of the Bolivian CP, for example) coupled with visions of quick victory might also, from the other side, help knock together this alliance.

All this makes it easier to understand why Guevara and Debray were not pushing for ideological struggle against the old parties, but instead preferred what amounted to the struggling out of a *quid pro quo* with them. Ideological struggle could mean definitive ruptures; yet that would make impossible what the Guevarists needed so badly from the old-line revisionists. Their hope, again, was not to shatter these parties, nor was it to make them change their orientation; what Guevara wanted from them was basically an urban network that could be relied upon by the guerrillas, and some ability to draw sections of their youth groups into the guerrilla troops (under *his* hegemony). (Guevara may also have hoped that the CP connections into the bourgeois governments could be useful in promoting a coup favorable to Cuban interests – in Bolivia, for example, one high-ranking CP leader had a brother high up in the air force and was routinely utilized by the government as something of a pivot man in a Washington-Moscow-La Paz connection. In any event, this particular aspect has gained more prominence in the years since, especially following the 1969 Peruvian coup which afforded greatly increased influence for the Soviets [and Cuba].)

There was an even more overriding reason, however, and that concerned the intricate relations between Cuba and the USSR. Castro's verbal denunciations of the Soviet Union during the 1965-67 period reflected some real underlying contradictions. Cuba, as noted, worried about the depth of the Soviet commitment to defending them in case of attack, and were willing to publicly embarrass the Soviets as a way to force them into affirming and carrying out such a commitment; Castro, for instance, refused to sign a joint communiqué with Kosygin when the latter stopped in Cuba after his visit with U.S. President Johnson in Glassboro, N.Y. in 1967. Nor did they like Moscow's turn toward seeking diplomatic, economic, and military ties with the established (and anti-Cuban) Latin regimes, and its concomitant "counsel" to its parties to withdraw from the armed struggle and carry out their parliamentary cretinist traditions and inclinations even more wholeheartedly than before. But with all these initiatives (centered in 1965-67) Cuba was *not* pursuing a basic break with the dependency on the Soviets engendered by their earlier policies, but only *better terms of the deal*.

The Soviets, for their part, would tolerate much from the Castro regime, and for several reasons. First, there was not all that much that they *could* do about it – at that point. Open Soviet replies to Cuban attacks and quasi-heresies would go against the Soviet efforts to patch up what remained of *their* international movement in the wake of the split with China, and would likely have the effect of driving Cuba further away

from the Soviet position and endangering their ties in unpredictable ways. Economic pressure, which would in fact later be brought to bear,\* was also seen as premature – better to wait until Cuba began to taste the results of Castro's harebrained schemes and the wild promises had turned to dust. In a word, the Soviets wanted and needed more leverage.

Second, as long as it was kept within limits, the highly publicized "revolutionary renaissance" in Havana benefited the Soviet Union more than it hurt it. For the Soviets, the principal question in regard to the international movement still focused on China and how to isolate it. Larger strategic concerns at that point dictated that the Soviets not challenge the U.S. through support of revolutionary movements in places of U.S. influence – but this then provided an opening for substantial Chinese influence in key arenas like Palestine, the Persian Gulf, parts of Africa, and almost all of Asia. Cuba's setting itself up as yet another revolutionary center, even posturing to the left of and rabidly attacking China, not only undercut the influence of Maoism but also provided the Soviets with an important conduit to these movements (and these strata) around the world. Part of the bargain – and as we shall see, the Cubans certainly more than upheld their end of it – whether arrived at tacitly or more explicitly, was that the Cubans direct their main fire against the Maoists and that the Guevarist project should attempt to isolate them totally. Thus Castro's exclusion of Maoist parties, though not pro-Soviet ones, from the OLAS and other similar conferences; the pledge made by Guevara not to work with Maoists in Bolivia; and Che's attack on the polemics in his statement to the Tricontinental. This carries into Debray's book, where the Maoist trend in Latin America is slandered as being made up of "scatterbrains and even renegades" – the point is clearly made that the revisionists have their problems, but *these* revolutionaries are beyond the pale.

We are not arguing that this antagonism toward the Maoists was something forced on the Cubans by the Soviets. Two opposed conceptions of revolution were at odds and struggling for hegemony. For Guevara to carry out *his* concept, struggle against the proletarian revolutionary line upheld by Maoism internationally would be necessary. At the same time, one cannot separate Guevara's notion of revolution from the role he envisioned for the Soviet Union, the actions he demanded of it, and the trade-offs he was willing to make with it.

The Soviets, then, bided their time. Rather than openly attack Guevara or reply to the insults of Castro, they opened their journals to the more orthodox revisionist parties in Latin America, which were more than willing to reply to Castro's attacks on them and to give back as good as they got

\* The Soviets did begin such pressure in 1968, when they lowered promised shipments of oil to Cuba at the same time as they raised shipments to Brazil and Chile. This period witnessed Castro beginning to be more fully brought to heel, a process essentially completed with the Soviet custodianship of the Cuban economy in the wake of the Ten Million Tons debacle and the transformation of Castro from self-styled heretic to established ecclesiarch of Soviet revisionism.

in the vitriol department.

For Guevara to have pumped for an open break with these parties along ideological lines was inconceivable for a number of reasons. In the first place, at bottom the *ideology* of Castro and the Soviets was not all that opposed: in the version of revolution and socialism they each propounded, there resided a common view of the masses as the objects to be manipulated by either a skilled elite or demagogues, depending on the case. This finds an echo in the Debray/Guevara strategy of revolution, in which all turns on the daring and skill of a small band of heroes. In addition to that fundamental reason, there was also the fact that such a break would have totally gone against Guevara's plan for revolution (in which the revisionists still had a large role to play) as well as the danger that *that* sort of initiative ran the risk of being the last straw that would have forced the Soviet Union to finally put its foot down, and hard. For the Soviets to allow the Cuban leadership, which they had so fully committed themselves to, to attempt to wreck the parties which had so faithfully served them – and for a "revolution" the Soviets deemed to be chimerical – would have hurt the Soviets with the forces they relied on in the international movement and in a whole host of tasks in pursuing strategic and tactical political maneuvers in various countries.

Finally, such a call for ideological combat could have eventually fed into the Maoist trend; once such combats are begun, it's not predetermined how they will end. Some of the forces at that point drawn to the Guevarist pole could, in the course of free-swinging ideological struggle, have been pulled towards genuine Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought.

At the same time, to have called for the formation of a new party on the basis of ideological unity would have made it impossible to unite with the radical democrats in the ways that Guevara had desired. These forces did not want CP domination of the liberation movements, but in most cases they were not even professedly Marxist and hence had no interest in a conflict with the CPs over the content of genuine Marxism. Many who could perhaps be united in the short term around picking up the gun may have been driven out by such a struggle. Indeed, part of the selling pitch to these forces was the possibility of a successful balancing act – of being able to utilize the CPs without getting swallowed up by them, thanks to the presumed hegemony of the Guevarists. Debray's attacks on the revisionist parties in frankly traditionally anticommunist terms – "imported conceptions," "not knowing the conditions of Latin America," etc. – was perhaps designed at least in part to further prove Guevara & Co.'s nationalist bona fides, and to win the trust of the radical democrats for what seemed a possibly dangerous and dubious alliance.

(It's important here to note that had, against all odds, the Guevarist insurgency caught fire, the Soviets would not necessarily have been unable to find a use for such a movement. What the ultimate fate of the Guevarists may have been even in this case, however, is open to question. A few years after the death of Guevara, Cayetano Carpio left the CP

of El Salvador to launch an insurgency in the hills. After some years of fighting and some important changes in the international situation and in Central America, a juncture emerged at which a similar alliance – between, in this case, the revisionists, reformists under a social-democratic banner, nationalists, and the neo-Guevarist Carpio forces – became real, and in which Carpio initially had the upper hand. However, Carpio's resistance to negotiations in the service of the Soviet historic-compromise strategy in El Salvador led to a concerted effort to undermine his leadership and, according to the official story coming out of Nicaragua, to Carpio's assassination of a leading pro-Soviet cadre in his organization and his own alleged subsequent suicide. If your hopes rest on getting something going so as to attract a powerful patron, don't be surprised when your patron decides that your enterprise will be best served by your absence.)

Debray's antitheoretical approach was a key link in uniting both elements of this hoped-for coalition – the revisionist CPs with the more traditionally nationalist bourgeois democrats. His refusal to polemicize for the leadership of *genuine* Marxist-Leninist parties served this alliance. But was it wrong to seek to unite with those bourgeois democrats? To answer this, one must first draw a distinction between *uniting with* and *relying on*. Such class forces do in fact have a serious contradiction with imperialism, and depending on the situation can often be united with in the effort to drive out imperialism. But if they are utterly relied on, as Guevara aimed to do, then the revolution will undoubtedly reflect *their* class interests, which are essentially the dreams of an oppressed and aspiring bourgeoisie to take over the national market, etc., and develop the country as an autonomous and integral capitalist country. Even when the party is able to rally the proletariat and forge the worker-peasant alliance as the backbone and basis for the revolutionary movement, the problems presented by the revolutionary sections of the national bourgeoisie – how to unite to the degree possible without sacrificing in any way the integrity of the communist party program, how to lay the basis for the future advance to socialism within the stage of a new-democratic revolution, how to garner the requisite independent strength (political and military) to more or less "force" these sections to "let" the proletariat lead – have been more than a little complex. Indeed, more often than not, this has been dealt with by tailing the national bourgeoisie. (With Debray and Guevara, despite the "left" phrase-mongering, that tailing went on, as we shall discuss shortly.) This, as noted earlier, all the more emphasizes the need for an ideologically sound party.

Guevara attempted to get around this with a two-into-one mushing together of the new-democratic and socialist stages of the revolution, and with a seemingly left attack on the national bourgeoisies. The revolution would have to be for socialism right from the start, Debray declared in his book, and would have to break with the notion that the national bourgeoisie had any role to play against imperialism.

But what view of socialism was being put forward here? Essentially the goulash socialism popularized by

Khrushchev, the appeal to the workers to support a regime that would provide them with – or at least promise to – provide them with certain economic benefits and social reforms in exchange for political passivity. The model was Cuba, where even in the heyday of "moral incentives" Guevara himself was promising a standard of living comparable to Sweden's by the late '60s – if only the masses would put in voluntary work now.

More principally, however, this view of socialism was designed to appeal to a section of the national and petty bourgeoisies, in which they were to become the controllers of a huge state sector. Again, such had happened in Cuba (especially during the period when the 26th of July veterans shared power with the CP apparatus; after the Ten Million Tons disaster the CP became fully dominant, and many of the so-called experiments of Cuba, in which the petty bourgeoisie was "given its head," were ended). (Debray, for his part, tried to redefine these forces out of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, at several points claiming that participation in the guerrilla war in and of itself dissolved class differences, etc.)

The rightism of this formula also comes out in the attempt to bypass the new-democratic stage of revolution, with its strong antifeudal component. In Cuba, the state sector took over and directly administered the great majority of big farms shortly after the revolution, and moved on to take over the majority of medium-sized ones shortly following that. This was proclaimed by admirers of Debray and Guevara as the most radical land program in history; in fact, the change in the content of Cuban agriculture was little more than formal: the farmworkers had a different boss telling them when and how they'd harvest the sugar, and the bulk of the harvest would henceforth be sent to the Soviet Union rather than the U.S. But the pattern of monoculture dependency, the chains of sugar, stayed the same. The rural proletariat and peasantry were *not* unleashed to step-by-step uproot, overcome, and transform the relations and legacy of imperialism, clearing the ground and fully restructuring agriculture; they were told, and later forced, only to work harder.

As touched on earlier, the legacy of imperialism in the oppressed nations cannot be reduced to something as simple (and as rooted in distribution) as unequal exchange. It extends to the very structure of agriculture, including what is produced, to the ways in which feudalism has been transformed (in the service of finance capital), and to the far from insignificant elements of feudalism which have been retained (again in the service of finance capital). In these situations it may well be necessary to take a step backward to really go forward, to go from big state or corporate farms to some (at first) smaller-scale holdings in the hands of the peasants and recently proletarianized farmworkers as part of an overall plan to rupture agriculture from the patterns and structure of imperialist domination and to lead the peasantry through the stages of cooperation, collectivization, and finally state ownership, on a qualitatively different basis. This can only be done, however, by a politically aroused peasant-

ry led by a strong and conscious proletariat with a strong vanguard. And this – the full restructuring of agriculture away from imperialist domination, the political awakening of the peasantry and, even more, the strengthening of the leadership of the proletariat and its party – this is anathema to the Guevarists.

So as to the question of uniting with the national bourgeoisie, the answer must be that while the basis exists due to the antagonism between sections of it and imperialism, this can only be really successfully done when the proletariat is clear that such unity carries with it struggle over many fundamental questions of the goals, direction, and strategy of the revolution, at every stage of the revolution.

In regard to the revisionists and the attempt to unite with them: this is a complex matter but there are clear revolutionary principles which Guevarism tramples in the interest of its unity with revisionism. The revisionist parties directly represent the interests of the imperialists (specifically social-imperialism) within the ranks of the revolutionary movement. This makes them (unlike the national bourgeoisie) *not* potentially part of the popular forces of the new-democratic stage of the revolution led by the proletariat, but rather part of the enemy of that stage. Thus they can in no way be regarded as strategic allies, and certainly the melding together envisioned by Debray is wrong in any case. Because, however, it is most often true that in the colonial and dependent countries the revolutionary struggle must be directed, in an immediate sense, against one imperialist power or bloc and its agents, a certain form of alliance may at times be necessary. This is spoken to in *Basic Principles For the Unity of Marxist-Leninists and For the Line of the International Communist Movement*:

In certain specific conditions, particularly for example where one imperialist power (or bloc) actually carries out an invasion and attempts to occupy a particular colonial or dependent country, it may be necessary and correct not only to direct the spearhead of the struggle against that particular power (or bloc) but even to ally with or at least seek to neutralize – "put to the side" – certain domestic reactionary forces who are dependent on and serve other imperialists (in particular the rival imperialist bloc).

But *Basic Principles* goes on immediately to stress that

... in such cases it is all the more important to expose the class nature and interests and imperialist connections of such forces; to resolutely combat and defeat their treachery in the struggle and particularly their attempts to suppress the masses; to insist on and establish through struggle the leading role of the proletariat and the independence and initiative of its party; to continue the policy of refusing to join with or support any imperialist power or bloc; and to keep

clearly in mind and lead the proletariat and popular masses toward the goal of victory not only in the immediate stage (or sub-stage) but in the anti-imperialist democratic revolution as a whole, and through that to the socialist revolution, in unity with the international proletariat and the worldwide struggle. (RCP of Chile and RCP, USA 1981, 43)

But these are the very questions – the character of the international situation, the class character of the Soviet Union, the tasks of the revolution in relation to imperialism, the class analysis of the nation, a roughing out of the relationship between the two stages of the revolution – that one must have a communist party with a clear and sound ideological foundation in order to deal with. The Guevarist line on the party, and in particular the stubborn opposition to struggle over basic principles – principles pitting revolutionary Marxism against revisionism – represented an attempt to abort the necessary process of hammering out answers to these questions. They had, of course, their own answers – specifically, their alliance of revisionist CPs and sections of the national bourgeoisie to shift the country, via armed struggle, into the Soviet camp – but they were not about to even put these out clearly, lest they spark the very ideological struggle they wished to avoid and drive some of the more naive and/or honest radical-democratic forces out of their camp.

Guevarism, in sum, was not and is not a different way of fighting people's war: it's a strategy opposed to people's war, and, moreover, opposed to the kind of revolution necessary in the oppressed nations.

*The Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* summarizes both the essence of this revolution and its relation to the strategy of people's war:

The target of the revolution in countries of this kind is foreign imperialism and the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie and feudals, which are classes closely linked to and dependent on imperialism. In these countries the revolution will pass through two stages: a first, new democratic revolution which leads directly to the second, socialist revolution. The character, target and tasks of the first stage of the revolution enables and requires the proletariat to form a broad united front of all classes and strata that can be won to support the new democratic programme. It must do so, however, on the basis of developing and strengthening the independent forces of the proletariat, including in the appropriate conditions its own armed forces and establishing the hegemony of the proletariat among the other sections of the revolutionary masses, especially the poor peasants. The cornerstone of this alliance is the worker-peasant alliance and the carrying out of the agrarian revolution (i.e. the struggle against semi-feudal exploitation in the countryside and/or the fulfillment of the slogan "land to the tiller") occupies

a central part of the new democratic programme.

In these countries the exploitation of the proletariat and the masses is severe, the outrages of imperialist domination constant, and the ruling classes usually exercise their dictatorship nakedly and brutally and even when they utilise the bourgeois-democratic or parliamentary form their dictatorship is only very thinly veiled. This situation leads to frequent revolutionary struggles on the part of the proletariat, the peasants and other sections of the masses which often take the form of armed struggle. For all these reasons, including the lopsided and distorted development in these countries which often makes it difficult for the reactionary classes to maintain stable rule and to consolidate their power throughout the state, it is often the case that the revolution takes the form of protracted revolutionary warfare in which the revolutionary forces are able to establish base areas of one type or another in the countryside and carry out the basic strategy of surrounding the city by the countryside (RIM 1984, 31)

Guevarism, however, makes a principle of turning away from mobilizing the peasantry, and looks with scorn on the fighting capacity of the proletariat. The class alliance that it seeks to knock together and rely on consists of those mobilized under the banner of the revisionists and the radical bourgeois democrats. The Guevarists neither carry through the agrarian revolution in the countryside nor do they draw the proletariat into the struggle over the cardinal questions of the day so as to develop them into the leading class; instead there is only the scheming to quickly climb to power and seize the reins of a rapidly expanded state (capitalist) sector, in the name of the people.

Its internationalism, when all is said and done, consists of appealing to the revolutionary aspirations of the masses only to utilize them as cannon fodder for the Soviet side in the interimperialist conflict between the two blocs. (In the case of Che himself, it was a matter of seeking to mold the revolutionary movement from the standpoint of narrow Cuban national interests.) The revolution it promises is not revolution at all – not, at least, in the sense of a fundamental change in the social relations – but is at most the institution of some reforms under Soviet aegis. And in line with all that, the tasks of the vanguard itself in leading the masses to consciously remake all of society, to not only overthrow the capitalists but move forward to the continued revolution under proletarian dictatorship and the transition to communism, are negated. In their place is put the will of a small handful, backed up by the sponsorship of a big imperialist power.

## Bolivian Epilogue

The theory of Debray, Guevara, and Castro found expression in Bolivia, shortly after publication of *Revolution Within the Revolution?*. A core of Bolivians, sympathetic to the Guevarist line, began in 1966 to set up a guerrilla base in the mountain region of the country, and in the fall of that year Guevara, along with a number of Central Committee members from the Cuban Communist Party, arrived in Bolivia. The plan was to both recruit Bolivians into the force and to train Argentines and Peruvians through the practice of the battle to form the cores of *focos* in their countries. The hope was to develop an insurgency in Bolivia and in more or less short order to move from there into the surrounding countries.

As is known the project was almost a total debacle. The guerrilla *foco* was defeated after six months in the field, pursued and hunted down by the CIA-trained and directed Bolivian Rangers, with hardly a single engagement. The *foco* was preoccupied with the sheer struggle for food and shelter, and by February Guevara was ruefully noting in his diary the fights over food in camp and the moral collapse of some of the prominent Cuban CP men. Meanwhile, Guevara's diary records almost no political discussion or education among the *foco* and nary a political thought of his own throughout the campaign.

In April Debray, who had been with the *foco*, judged it the better part of valor to leave the troops to go organize support in Europe. Captured almost immediately, he, who so blithely labelled revolutionaries as "renegades," revealed apparently useful information to the authorities about the nature of the *foco* ("the Frenchman talks more than he needs to" Guevara noted in his diary).

In June Bolivia was wracked by a political crisis. The tin miners struck, and on June 24 the army came in to occupy the mines. The resulting clash left an estimated 100 miners dead, and threw Bolivia into an uproar, especially in the cities and campuses. In a statement to the miners, Guevara called the army's action a "complete victory" and called on the miners to come to the *foco*. While it may not have been wrong to issue such a call (assuming, for a moment, that the guerrilla army was guided by a basically correct orientation and line in its struggle), what was missing was a grasp of how to utilize the political crisis gripping the Bolivian government, how to push forward and divert into the revolutionary movement *what had erupted among the masses*. In any event, despite widespread sympathy for the *foco*, the upsurge and the *foco* itself remained on two different tracks. No Bolivian came forward to join.

Throughout the summer the *foco* was riddled with disease, desertion, and death by both accident and enemy fire. In October Guevara was captured and then murdered in custody, with the apparent supervision of a CIA man.

This defeat cannot and does not, in and of itself, prove Guevara's line to have been fundamentally incorrect. No political theory can be made to rise or fall on the basis of a single practical experience, and besides it can plausibly be

argued that Bolivia does not represent the best case of Guevarism, that one must look to Cuba instead.

While that may be true, the Bolivian experience does, however, contain a few important lessons. First, it does show that Guevara's view of insurrectionary war did hinge on the tricky relationship he was trying to effect with the revisionist CP (and ultimately with the Soviet Union). The Cubans never informed the Bolivian CP that Guevara himself would be landing in Bolivia to command a national liberation movement. Instead, in early 1966 Castro met with its leader, Mario Monje, to sound him out on prospects for a national liberation struggle and gave him \$25,000 for the rather vague promise to begin preparations. Evidently the hope was to buy Monje's agreement to provide something of an urban support network and allow cadre to join with the guerrillas. When Monje was finally officially informed of Guevara's presence, at a New Year's meeting at the guerrilla camp in 1967, he refused to cooperate unless Guevara surrendered command to him, Monje. When such support was not forthcoming, Guevara literally had nowhere else to turn.\*

The second, and related, point concerns the Guevarist view toward the masses. Guevara slipped into Bolivia in November 1966 to begin direct preparations for the guerrilla war. But he conceived of this preparation solely in terms of learning the physical terrain, digging caves and preparing caches, going on long training marches, etc. No real study of Bolivia was carried on, nor was even the most rudimentary class analysis made. The masses were so utterly absent from his calculations that even the cursory course given the guerrillas in the Quechuan language was useless, since an entirely distinct non-Quechuan language was spoken by the Indians of the area! And while terrain is not without importance, the principal thing (as Mao often noted, and as the Cuban experience, in fact, bore witness to) is the political character of an area — the level of the masses' understanding and experience in struggle, the political stability of the local rulers, and other similar factors. As it turned out, even the physical terrain was ultimately militarily unfavorable to the guerrillas, *itself a bitter testimony to the problems of a purely military approach to revolution — even in military affairs.*

In this light, those analysts who trace the almost palpable

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\* The practice of the Bolivian CP during this affair is something of an exposure of the more orthodox-style revisionism. Monje himself is said to have intercepted some members of his youth group headed for the guerrilla troop at a bus station, and threatened to report them to the police should they board the bus. They stayed. Richard Harris, an author overall sympathetic to Guevara, alleged in his book *Death of a Revolutionary* that several middle-level CP members attempted to sell information about Guevara's presence to the CIA, and in fact provided valuable information about the guerrilla operation, including its true size, composition, strategy, and sources of support. Harris also gave some credence to reports that Jorge Kolle, a high-ranking CPer whose brother headed up the Bolivian Air Force at the time, served as the connecting link between the Bolivian regime and Washington on the one hand, and the orthodox Communists and Moscow on the other (Harris 1970, 162). The CP did not openly oppose the Guevarists, however, preferring to silently withhold support.

air of depression in Guevara's diaries to his failure to rally the masses are probably reading their own assumptions into things. In the diaries themselves the preoccupation is much more with the demoralization of the troops; the masses hardly figure into it. And, in my opinion, it is as Monje's success in withholding support becomes clear that the almost total lack of direction and élan begin to assert themselves in Guevara's writings.

Those points indicate a fundamental difference between the defeat of Guevara in Bolivia and the genuine attempts to launch people's war during that period, many of which also met with defeat. Unlike Guevara, these other forces were going straight up *against* revisionism – ideologically, politically, organizationally, and (often) militarily – and attempting to lead the masses to make a revolution which would oppose *both* imperialist blocs. Guevara, as noted earlier, attached importance to using the revolutionary movements to move the Soviets into a more "revolutionary" (read: more aggressively imperialist) stance; his differences with the Soviets were tactical, at most. The genuinely Marxist-Leninist forces who followed Mao, by contrast, took up arms to rid the world of *all* imperialism, no matter what its political wrappings.

Further – and again in marked contrast to Guevara – these other attempts genuinely mobilized the masses, raising their political consciousness and leading them to begin to root out the backward relations propped up and engendered by imperialist domination. The masses themselves, in other words, were rallied and marshaled to consciously take the political stage, guns in hand. For all these reasons, whatever their shortcomings, the Maoist attempts to wage people's war in that period fall into a qualitatively different camp than the Guevarist adventure in Bolivia. The *Declaration* notes that:

In a number of countries the Marxist-Leninist forces were able to rally considerable sections of the population to the revolutionary banner and maintain the Marxist-Leninist party and armed forces of the masses despite the savage counter-revolutionary repression. It was inevitable that these early attempts at building new, Marxist-Leninist parties and the launching of armed struggle would be marked by primitiveness and that ideological and political weaknesses would manifest themselves, and it is, of course, not surprising that the imperialists and revisionists would seize upon these errors and weaknesses to condemn the revolutionaries as "ultra-leftists" or worse. Nevertheless these experiences must, in general, be upheld as an important part of the legacy of the Marxist-Leninist movement which helped lay the basis for further advances. (RIM 1984, 34)

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The Soviets marked Guevara's defeat without comment, while unleashing the parties tightly under their domination to crow (the Hungarians, for instance, called the whole affair "pathetic"). For them, Guevara's death held a number of benefits. It strengthened the hand of the old-line revisionist parties, for one thing; in the wake of Bolivia, it should be noted, the Soviet strategy of "historic compromise" – briefly, the attempt to win a foothold in states in the U.S. sphere of influence through penetrating the ruling coalitions of the government as subordinate partners – came to the forefront in Latin America. The Peruvian coup of 1969, in which the Soviets gained influence through important ties in the military, and the election in Chile of Salvador Allende in 1970, marked as it was by the maneuverings of the Chilean CP within the new government, were promoted as new exemplars for Latin America, and by none other than Castro himself.

As for Castro, his real view toward Guevara's mission is open to question. Some maintain that he set Guevara up, and cite his failure to announce Guevara's presence in Bolivia despite what Guevara seemed to think (in his diaries) were prearranged plans to do so. It's also possible that Castro saw early on that Guevara's scheme was heading for failure and saw no point in opening Cuba to what he feared could be an OAS-backed U.S. military reprisal against Cuba. In any event, the defeat in Bolivia marked the beginning of the end of Castro's brief and phony mutiny against the Soviets. By 1968 he was welcoming the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, by 1969 Cuba was attending important Soviet anti-China conferences, and by 1971 – following the Ten Million Tons fiasco – the Soviets had put the Cuban economy and political apparatus into virtual receivership.

For the revolutionary masses, however, there can be but one ultimate conclusion: not the rejection of armed struggle (for the opportunities for such struggle are further opening up today and will do so on a truly unprecedented scale in the years to come), but the rupture with illusory shortcuts in league with revisionism. Such shortcuts – and this is the sharpest lesson of Guevarism – are shortcuts only to a renewed and recast, but essentially similar, imperialist domination.

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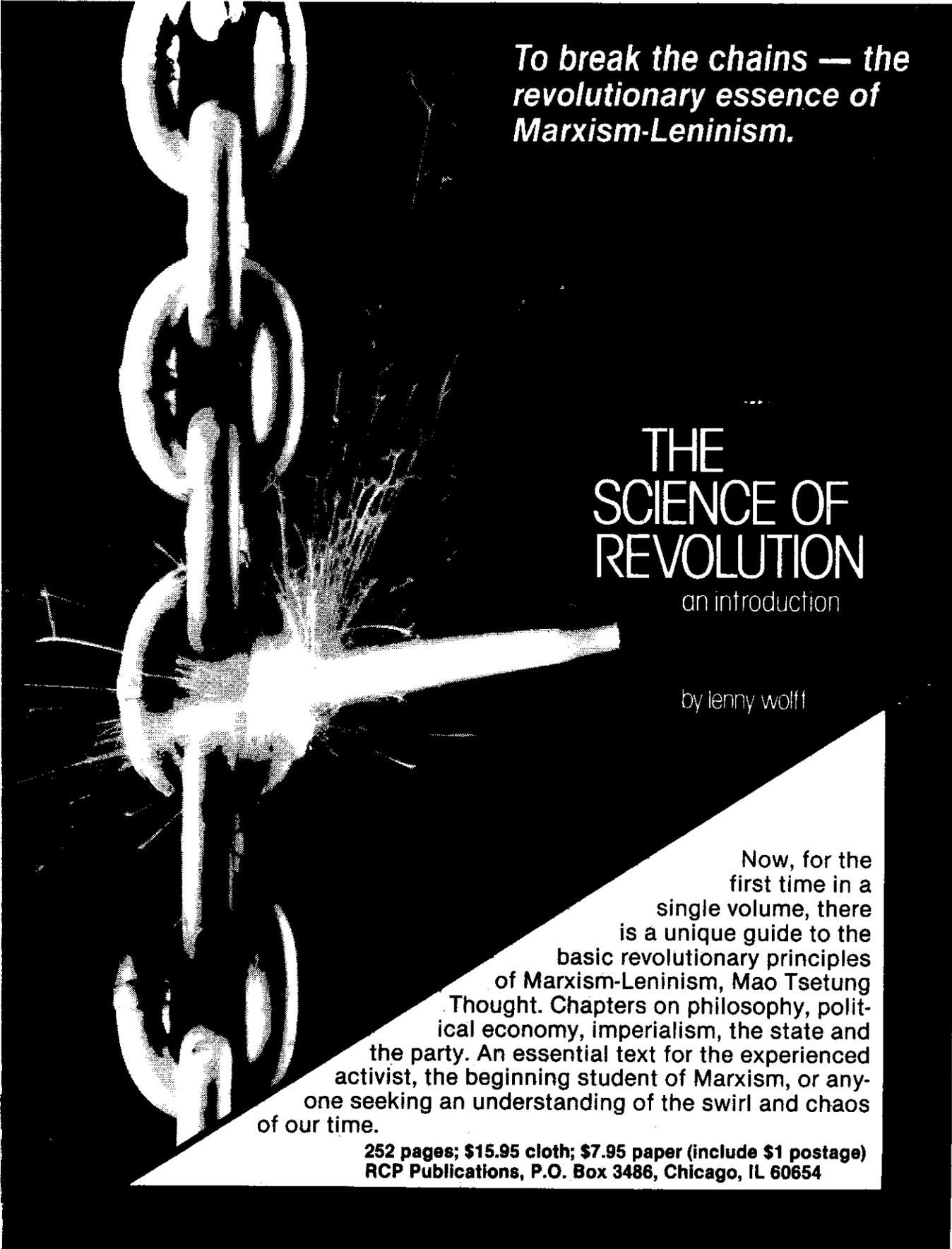
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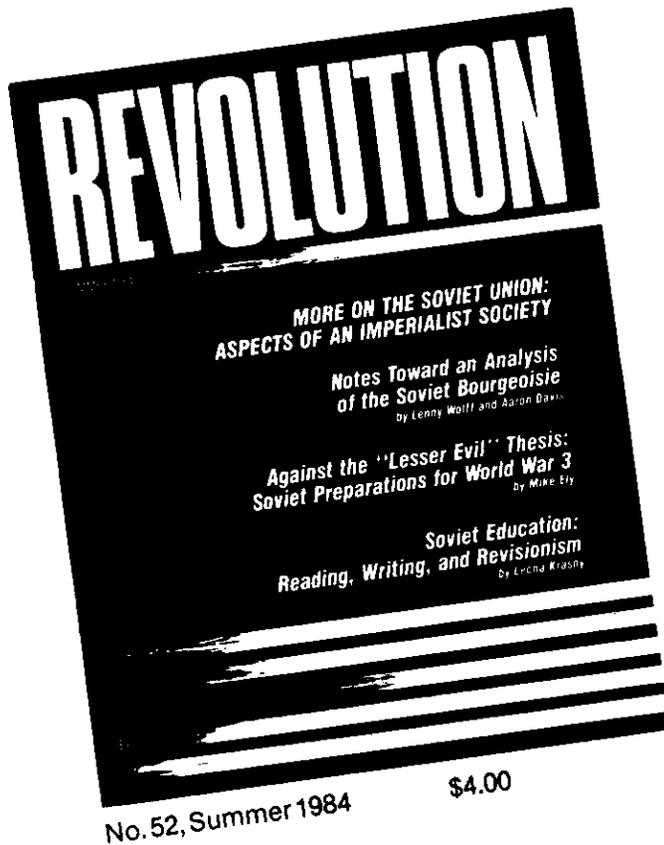
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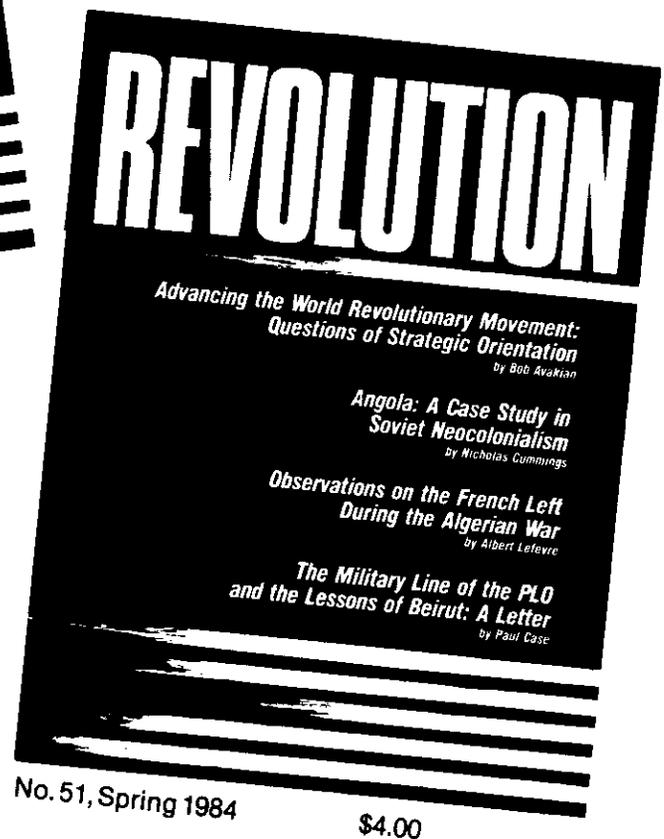
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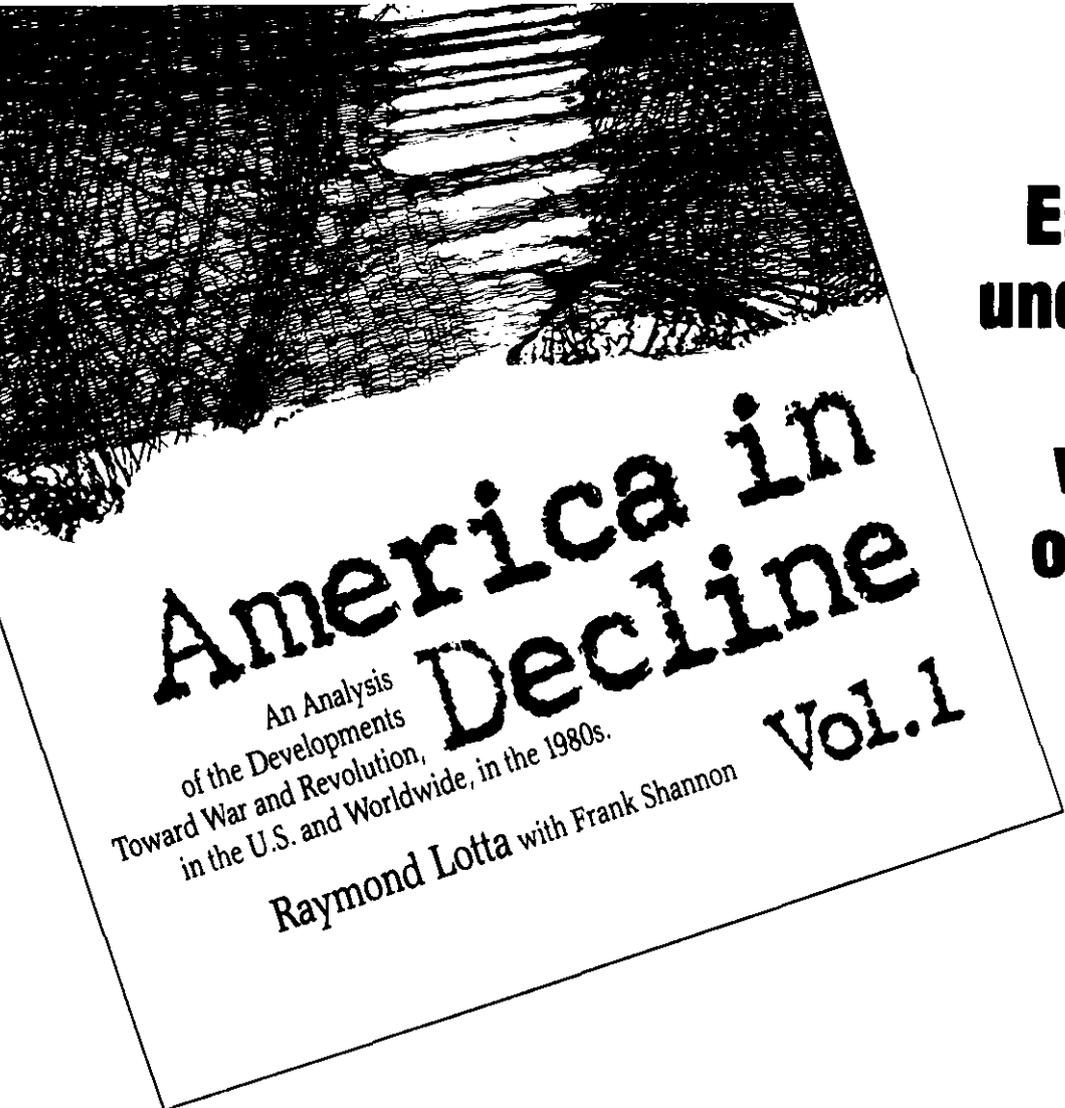
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