

What was the Marxist-Leninist Party?

by Jake

From 1969 to 1993, the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA (MLP) and its predecessors -- The Central Organization of US Marxist-Leninists and the American Communist Workers' Movement (Marxist-Leninist) -- attempted to build a revolutionary working class party. For 23 years they worked and struggled for the goal of socialist revolution and communism.

They organized public meetings and underground Congresses, spirited rallies and demonstrations.

They published and distributed a tremendous amount of revolutionary literature.

They organized and led struggles, bringing ordinary people into active political fights during strikes, anti-racist struggles, anti-war actions and abortion clinic defenses.

The MLP and its predecessors had guts too, at times it engaged cops, scabs and reactionaries in combat.

In Cleveland in July 1970, the American Communist Workers Movement smashed a reactionary "hard-hat" demonstration, puncturing the nascent fascist movement that Nixon had organized to attack the anti-war movement.

In 1978 the Central Organization of US Marxist-Leninists (COUSML) beat up the South Boston Marshalls, a racist gang opposed to school integration, when the racist thugs tried to break up a meeting mobilizing support for an international communist rally.

The MLP passed out over 1 million leaflets in Southeast Michigan opposing concessions to Chrysler, GM, and Ford, in 1979-1980, drawing attacks from company and trade union thugs.

In the early 1990's, the MLP helped stomp Operation Rescue at clinics in Chicago and Buffalo. During the "Spring of Life" in 1992, especially, the MLP not only mobilized activists to defend clinics but provided a militant backbone that, in practice, led several actions against the anti-abortion bigots in spite of the attempts of reformists and political opportunists to disarm and neutralize pro-choice activists.

MLP members withstood arrests, imprisonment and political persecutions, and in addition to these heroic sacrifices, most MLP members made tremendous personal sacrifices every day for many years: forsaking careers of any kind, suffering material hardships in order to provide financial support for their party, and risking the alienation of family, friends and community. These were and are the constant sacrifices that all serious communist



MLP May Day March, 1991

revolutionaries must make for the sake of the working class, for the dream of socialism, for socialist revolution.

What was the MLP, what were its politics, what kind of organization was it? More importantly, what significance did the MLP have? Is its history, its experience, of value to the working class?

Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal, a descendant of the MLP, an heir to its legacy, wants to answer these and other questions. We also feel strongly that other leftists would like answers to these questions and, most likely, they would like to speak to these questions.

Whatever anyone feels or felt about the MLP, its twenty-three years of experience organizing for communism in the United States is nothing to sneeze at. A study and assessment of the MLP will no doubt be of value to any organization that wants to overthrow capitalism, or anyone who wants to organize the working masses to fight the rich.

It is important to do this now before we lose contact with ex-MLP members. The MLP's death was largely a dissipation of its forces. Only three small organizations came out of the MLP's dissolution. The Chicago Branch continued on, and several of its former members and supporters publish this journal. Some members of the Detroit Branch worked with us for the first year after the MLP died but then split to put out their own journal *Communist Voice*. The *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* activists were members of the MLP and are still politically active. Here and there a few other former MLP members and supporters continue with left political work of one sort

or another, but it appears that most former members are out of politics.

As well, there are other organizations that came out of the MLP. Though the MLP didn't like to acknowledge it, the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization and the Workers Party are part of the MLP's history. While these obscure groups were not exactly splits from the MLP, they were founded by former members who, after a period of demoralization, found a new political purpose in opposing the MLP and sucking up to the international trend that the MLP had split from. The details of that painful and contorted story will have to wait, but for now I want to make the point that off-shoots of the MLP, even bastard ones, will have to be considered when making a summation of it.

The CWVTJ will lead the effort to make this assessment. We will write about the MLP. We will ask others to write; we will solicit opinions and information not only from former members and supporters of the MLP, but also from activists of other left trends, including opponents of the MLP. If it is possible to obtain it, we should even consider the opinion of our class enemies, what the capitalists we organized against thought of the MLP.

As an initial framework for this project, we suggest the following questions:

* Was the MLP qualitatively different from other left organizations that advocated socialist revolution? It thought it was, not only in ideology but in day to day practice and in its internal life.

* What is anti-revisionism? The MLP at its death described its 23 year effort as an "anti-revisionist experiment." In many other documents, it stresses the importance of the fight against revisionism. Certainly the MLP was founded as part of the struggle against revisionism, the struggle to affirm scientific socialism and negate the distortions of Marxism-Leninism by Stalin, Khrushchov, Mao and others who would "revise" Marxism into something non-revolutionary or non-working class. The question of anti-revisionism is central to answering the question: what trend was the MLP?

Note that answering this question will not only require careful study of MLP documents, but also a study of the international communist movement in the 1950's and 60's. What was the anti-revisionist struggle in the 50's and 60's? How do we assess the polemic China and Albania waged against "Khrushchovite revisionism"?

* Why wasn't the MLP able to recruit new members? It had a declining membership from the time of its first Congress in 1980 to its dissolution in 1993. Dwindling

membership was a major factor in its death. Of course the left in general did not recruit very well in this period. How did the MLP fare compared to other groups? For that matter, why did the left shrink so dramatically?

* Why wasn't the MLP able to resolve its ideological crisis? Although political organizations may die or split as the consequence of such a crisis, it is possible to resolve serious ideological differences without the death of the organization. In the MLP's case, it had difficulty addressing its crisis, and a majority of its Central Committee wanted to liquidate it in silence rather than attempt to resolve the ideological differences. This seems strange for an organization that repeatedly called on other Marxist-Leninist organizations to openly spell out their disagreements with other parties. The MLP opposed the suppression of debates in the international communist movement and in every mass movement it participated in. Why couldn't it practice in the 1990's what it had preached for over a decade?

* Was the MLP's press effective? What role did it play in the life of the working class and the left? What role did it play in the MLP? Note that the MLP had a prodigious press. Its national newspaper was the *Workers' Advocate*, a monthly. It also published the *Workers' Advocate Supplement*, which carried most of the MLP's research and political theoretical articles in its last decade. Additionally, its local organizations published a multitude of leaflets, newsletters and pamphlets.

There was some controversy about the party press and how it was organized. The *Workers' Advocate*, for example, was published by committee. Although some comrades were in favor of bylines and signed articles, there was strong opposition, and WA articles were rarely ever signed.

Among other things, WA's editorial procedure resulted in compromise formulations that prevented disagreements in the leadership from surfacing. While compromise formulations have their value, in the MLP they hid the thinking, both good and bad, of the individuals who created the MLP's policy.

* What was the fruit of the MLP's international work? From the "Internationalist Rally" in 1978, to our polemics against Hardial Bains (Communist Party of Canada M-L), to our solidarity work with MAP (ML) in Nicaragua, the MLP put a major effort into this. With its public polemics against the Party of Labor of Albania, the MLP itself became controversial internationally, even among parties that agreed with the MLP's critique of the PLA. The MLP tried to lead the fight against revisionism internationally and influence Marxist-Leninist organizations in the pro-Albania trend. What is the assessment of

this work?

* What were the MLP's organizational strengths and weaknesses? Externally the MLP seemed to have good skills in organizing the "masses," that is people on the shop floor and rank-and-file activists in the mass movements. Internally, the MLP may have lacked some worthwhile organizational features and may have suffered from some unhealthy practices. At the same time, the MLP's internal life seemed much healthier than other left organizations that I have seen.

A curious thing about the MLP is that in the huge body of literature that it produced, there is precious little about its organizational structure or its internal life. Even long-time supporters of the MLP knew very little about its internal workings or how things were carried out. Yet with 23 years of experience in organization-building, the history of the MLP should be of great value to revolutionaries everywhere. We need to study the MLP's structure and its organizational practices. We need to examine the good and bad of its internal life (its "culture" if you will). In this way, present and future revolutionaries will be able to benefit from this rich experience.

* What did the MLP accomplish? This is the major question. It did not succeed in building a working class political party, nor in rescuing communist theory from revisionism and opportunism. Did it have anything else to show for 23 years of work? Did it help to shape political events? Did it contribute to communist political theory? How do we assess its role in the mass movements?

The MLP certainly had a number of small victories and partial victories in struggles that it led. What effect did these have on the working class. Was the working class better off because the MLP fought for it? I think yes, but the answer must come from analysis of the facts.

These are some initial questions as formulated by the *Chicago Workers' Voice*. Undoubtedly, there are many more.

Let me begin the discussion with some general comments about the MLP's participation and intervention in the mass movements.

MLP and the mass movements

The MLP was an activist party. It participated vigorously, no joyously, in mass struggles whether they were led by the MLP or by others. Over time the MLP learned to work in a larger movement, pursuing a revolutionary agenda, criticizing whatever it thought were weaknesses in the official leaders and in the rank-and-file activists themselves.

The MLP pushed the mass movements, pressured



George Bush, American Capitalism and General Schwarzkopf in a May Day skit in Chicago, 1991

them to stay oppositional, to keep fighting, especially when opportunists pressured the movements to surrender or to dissolve into the Democratic Party. The MLP considered itself to be the protector of the mass movements, and that such a role was a vital one for a proletarian party.

The MLP promoted the mass movements and worked to bring new people into them. At times it made such concerted efforts to mobilize and organize that it was more effective and more visible than the official sponsors or organizers.

The MLP went into the mass movements to fight the bourgeoisie. It argued that the movements should be more oppositional; it pushed the issue of capitalism as the source or the main prop of the particular problem that the masses faced (imperialism and war, racism, layoffs and low wages, attacks on women, nuclear weapons, environmental poisoning, etc.).

For independent organization and action

After its death, one of the MLP's social-democratic opponents lamented its passing. While ridiculing its ideology, he nonetheless stated that the MLP would be missed if for no other reason than it always stressed to the masses that they had to take matters into their own hands. I think he made a good point. No matter if the MLP hailed "The Year of Stalin," or campaigned for a salute to Albania, "Red Beacon of Socialism," it was a party that unrepentantly urged the masses to be "troublemakers." The MLP, its members and its supporters, were the Human Resource managers' worst nightmare.

Even when the rest of the left "forgot" to mention it, the MLP always told the masses that they would win when they fought for themselves, for their own interests; they would lose when they left matters in the hands of politicians or opportunist trade union and movement lead-

ers.

For the MLP, pushing the mass movements to the left meant that activists should break with the Republicans and Democrats, the parties of the system, that the masses should build their own organization independent of the bourgeoisie, independent of existing organizations controlled by the bourgeoisie. The MLP never ran a voter registration campaign for the Democratic Party, nor a membership drive for NOW or the NAACP.

Nowhere was the MLP more distinctive on this point of independent organization than in the workplace. The MLP supported trade union organization but opposed capitalist trade unions and capitalist trade union bureaucrats. While some left trends took all the struggle issues to the union, the MLP tried to get the rank and file active, whether it was through an existing union apparatus or not. "Don't wait on the union," was a common verbal slogan of MLP activists in the organized factories. "Go Lower and Deeper" was the exhortation in our press to MLP supporters and movement activists alike.

Consequently, the MLP built small organizations on the shop floor (such as literature distribution networks, sticker campaigns, groups to secretly circulate petitions, study circles) that would fight or help the fight against the bosses. This was rank and file organization of the workers themselves and not necessarily owned by the trade union or even the Party.

The MLP wanted to win activists to revolutionary politics. It tried to involve them whenever possible in the work of the MLP, especially in direct work for the promotion of communism or socialist theory. It hoped to recruit them, but at the same time, the MLP learned that it would hurt the mass movement if it drained the best activists out of it and directed them towards other fronts.

Using the party press to organize

The MLP published a large body of literature, including leaflets, posters, magazines, newspapers and even a songbook. With branches in from 8 to 11 cities during its lifetime, the MLP produced a huge number of leaflets on local and national struggles. Many activists around the MLP and even leftists who belonged to competing trends considered the MLP's best work to be its local agitations.

In many plants the only news workers had of what was going on in their workplace and even in their union was from the MLP leaflets passed out at the factory gate and secretly distributed inside.

One of the best things about a press apparatus is that it's a good organizing tool. You can always find something for people to do, no matter what their political experience,



skills or literacy level. The MLP published leaflets and local newsletters as agitations, as something that would spread the news and get people riled up, but it also used the process of publishing and distributing leaflets as a way to involve workers with the MLP.

In the 1980's in Chicago, we published the Chicago Anti-Imperialist Newsletter and later the Chicago Workers' Voice. Not all of the articles in these newsletters were written by MLP cadre. In fact, at one point, most of the articles in our Anti-Imperialism Newsletter were written by activists and sympathizers around the MLP. This is certainly not unique, but for the MLP it was a real goal to get workers to write articles against their employers, against racism, against war, against capitalism. If we couldn't get them to write articles, we tried to get them to help us write articles. If we couldn't involve them in writing, we tried to involve them in layout or printing or other technical work.

Finally, there was distribution. A lot of our work at some plants was aimed at building a network inside to distribute revolutionary literature. Usually, we would try to distribute outside the same day we brought leaflets inside. This gave a little bit of cover to the inside distributors. One MLP leader was fond of saying that the literature distribution networks that were only passing out flyers today would one day supply weapons to the proletariat. Unfortunately, we never got that far. Our success in this in Chicago was variable and peaked in the mid-1980's. We never gave up trying though.

Workers that participated in these networks got a

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CWVTJ welcomes comments and contributions on the history of the MLP, USA. Contact us at

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Mexico in the Aftermath of the Massacre at Acteal

By Anita Jones de Sandoval

It is probably not necessary to recount the details of the brutal massacre of 45 Indian peasants in Acteal, Chenelho, Chiapas on December 22 by government-sponsored paramilitary groups. Nor does it seem necessary in the pages of the *CWV* to work to convince readers of the obvious involvement of the PRI and that culpability for the massacre reaches the highest levels of the Mexican government. However, it is interesting to look at what has been happening in Mexico since December 22, and the positions and actions taken by some of the political forces involved.

Despite stupider than usual attempts by the PRI officials in Chiapas to cover up and downplay the murders, the public and international outcry has been such that the government has had to take some actions on the public relations front. So, President Zedillo reshuffled his cabinet, forcing the Secretary of the Interior (the most powerful cabinet position in Mexico) *Emilio Chauyffet* to resign. Chauyffet is a prominent member of the hard line faction of the PRI (the "dinosaurs"). He was replaced by Francisco Labastida Ochoa, who is a member of the technocrat "modern" faction of the PRI to which Zedillo belongs. Several PRI officials in Chiapas have been removed from their posts, including the governor of the state and the mayor of Acteal, who was arrested for involvement in the massacre. A few other arrests were made of participants in the massacre. As a "good will" gesture, the

PRI released 300 prisoners from jails in Chiapas; however, not a single EZLN prisoner was freed. Before jetting off to Europe to woo the European Economic Community, Zedillo made a speech in Yucatan promising vaguely to withdraw troops and to negotiate. He did not, however, promise to sign the San Andres agreement on the rights and culture of the indigenous people which was already negotiated, and no troop withdrawal has occurred.

Instead, the government has continued to carry out repression and a press campaign to weaken the political influence of the Zapatistas and other forces fighting in Chiapas. The government accused Bishop Samuel Ruiz and his human rights organization of being "frontmen" for the EZLN and of exaggerating the problems in Chiapas. Government press releases and interviews have painted



Indigenous women hold back troops trying to enter the town of X'Oyep in Chiapas on Jan. 3, 1998

the massacre as just a part of the continuing "fratricidal" conflict among peasants in Chiapas. The government has planted stories trying to link the EZLN to Raul Salinas (the brother of ex-president Carlos Salinas, who was a member of one of the more reformist Maoist groupings in Mexico in his student days). The EZLN is accused of creating a climate of violence and of being intransigent towards the "oh so reasonable" government. At the national level, the PRI is trying to paint itself as "neutral" and not responsible for the violence between the EZLN and other forces, (i.e. the PRI in Chiapas). With all of this, the PRI hopes to support the myth that the struggle in Chiapas, its issues and the demands of the masses, are something isolated from conditions in the rest of Mexico.

But, looking neutral and laying the blame on the EZLN is difficult to maintain, given the continuing repression in Chiapas by the federal army as well as by the state police and PRI paramilitary groups.

On January 12, a woman was murdered in Ocosingo during protests against the December 22 massacre. State police opened fire on demonstrators killing the woman, wounding her baby and wounding another adult. On January 28, Ruiz Gamboa, a leader of one of the independent peasant organizations in Chiapas, Aedpch (Democratic Assembly of the Chiapaneco People), was murdered. Gamboa was also active in the Chiapaneco PRD. Another PRD member and long time activist in Chiapas was murdered just a few days later.

The PRI's myth is also difficult to maintain, given the strength of the mass movement in Chiapas which continues to target the PRI both nationally and locally and to support the EZLN and other activist organizations.

The PRI

The PRI's goals in Chiapas (as summarized in a recent article in *El Machete*) have remained the same for the last year or more:

1. To force the EZLN to return to the "dialogue" with the PRI on the PRI's terms. (Remember, the EZLN broke off negotiations with the government when the government refused to sign the San Andres agreement).

2. To use the "Dialogue" on their terms to disarm the popular forces in Chiapas (which includes not only the EZLN combatants but also the numerous peasant militias and organized villages which have armed themselves to defend their struggles).

3. To destroy all the forms of autonomous organization which have developed in the villages and communities, and

4. To impose once again the old order (although with some cosmetic changes)...

The Pan

The right wing party, the PAN, has used the crises caused by the massacre to attempt to recapture some of the political momentum as an "opposition" party which it lost with the PRD surge in the 1997 elections and the PAN rapprochement with the PRI over the federal budget. (The PAN joined with the PRI in congress to insure passage of the budget.) The PAN has called for the reinterpretation and legal formulation of the San Andres agreement. It has denounced any legislation that would make Chiapas an exception or the EZLN zones an exception to the general law or constitution. This, in effect, of course, means that they oppose any agreements between the government particular to demands in Chiapas. It goes without saying, however, that they certainly

oppose the extension of those same demands to the rest of the country, as proposed by the EZLN and much of the mass movement. In fact, then, they support the PRI's refusal to sign the San Andres' agreement but are criticizing the fact that the PRI participated in any such dialogue. At the same time, in their press statements they are attempting to play the "truly neutral party" role, criticizing both the PRI and the PRD (whom they call Zapatista).

The PRD

The PRD spoke out against the massacre immediately and held a number of very small protests. It is not clear if the actions were small because they had difficulty in mobilizing their base or because they didn't want to mobilize massively. When some of the student base belonging to the Frente Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (FZLN) responded to the massacre by taking over (briefly) some radio stations in Mexico City, the newspaper *La Jornada* -- which normally reflects the view of the PRD -- condemned these actions because they were illegal and would give rise to more repression.

The PRD base was mobilized or mobilized itself to participate in a massive manner in later protests in Mexico City and other states in Mexico. The PRD leadership called on the Mexican government to return the federal troops to their barracks (not, however, to leave Chiapas), to honor the San Andres agreement, and to allow new elections in Chiapas (where fraud and violence and a no-vote call by the EZLN affected the PRD during last July's elections).

Mass Actions

The original mobilizations against the massacre were small by Mexican standards. This probably reflects the relative decline of the mass movements in the last year or so, some disillusionment with the EZLN and with the stalemate in Chiapas, the preoccupation of the PRD with being a successful ruling party in Mexico City, and the strains and demands placed on the independent organizations by their own struggles and fight against repression of the last 3 years. For example, the workers' movement is seeing an increase in struggle and has a number of strikes and other job actions going on. The CNOSI (National Coordinator of Independent Social Organizations) organizations mobilized 10,000 people on January 9 in support of the MPI - RUTA 100 and the *Francisco Villa Popular Front*. (Note: shortly after this march the FPFV leader Eli Homero Aguilar was released from jail after more than 1 year of imprisonment). The independent unions repre-

senting university workers and professors at the Metropolitana University were mobilizing for a strike set to begin on February 1. (Note: The contract was settled before the strike deadline), and local sections of the teachers' union have been mobilizing over wages and public education issues continuously since last spring.

Despite the problems, strains and weaknesses of the movement, however, the pace of the mobilizations picked up so that massive protests were held in Mexico City, and big mobilizations occurred in other cities and towns in Mexico. These mobilizations, especially in Mexico City, were strengthened by the mobilization of the independent social organizations on the left, such as the Francisco Villa Popular Front, Movimiento Independiente Proletario, left wing independent unions, etc. These forces support the basic demands of the EZLN related to Chiapas, but also call for the resignation of the Zedillo government as well as the state government of Chiapas. In addition, these organizations are continuing to tie the issues in Chiapas to the issues of the working class and poor throughout Mexico.

There have also been mass mobilizations in Europe and in Latin America. In Europe, Zedillo was hounded by demonstrations in Italy and Switzerland, and the massacre was made a major issue. These demonstrations reflect the outcry against the further brutalization of the repression against the masses and their movement in Chiapas. They also reflect the mobilization of the PRD in Mexico and its international contacts in social-democratic circles in Europe.

The EZLN

The EZLN has maintained the demands it made prior to the massacre and has added some related to the massacre. It demands that the government sign the San Andres agreement as a precondition to the EZLN considering a return to the dialogue; that the military withdraw from Chiapas and from Guerrero and Oaxaca; that the political violence against the campesinos stop immediately, and the top PRI officials resign for their part in the massacre and other violence. The EZLN has been able to maintain its organization among the campesinos. Despite the fact that it continues to suffer from a narrow political perspective and vacillations as to just what its political project is (democracy and justice for the poor indigenous peasantry or some project for "civil society"; alliance with the left wing of the mass movement or with the PRD leadership), and these vacillations have affected the support it receives, it still has support from the mass movement and from the organizations in Chiapas.

The Movement in Chiapas

In Chiapas there was a strong response to the massacre and strong resistance in the indigenous communities from the beginning. Indeed, the rising violence and use of the paramilitary is part of a desperate move on the part of the PRI to break the stubborn mass movement. Although the massacre reveals the weaknesses of the EZLN in not being able to physically defend its base communities outside the areas it still directly controls, events since the massacre have highlighted the depth of organization and commitment among the campesinos themselves. This is true of both EZLN supporters and those belonging to other organizations. Time after time, the indigenous campesinos, with the women playing a prominent role, have come out to physically fight the army, to organize protests and all kinds of mass actions. Even those who have become refugees forced out of their homes have not stopped fighting. In addition, the current crises has led to more joint action by the various campesino organizations, leading to some of the largest actions and protests in Chiapas itself since the 1994 uprising, such as the occupation of one of the most important Mayan ruins, marches on military headquarters, and others.

What is also revealed by the reaction in Chiapas to the massacre is the growth, since January 1, 1994, of different forms of autonomous alternative organization in the indigenous communities and municipalities of Chiapas. These modest forms of mass political action and power have served to mobilize and train activists, to allow them to organize self defense against the repression, and to continue to press their demands. These experiments by the poor peasantry and rural workers and their organizations are forming the backbone of a very tough mass movement, and for that reason the PRI at the national and local level is desperate to destroy them. ◇

Report on Trip to Cuba

by Barb

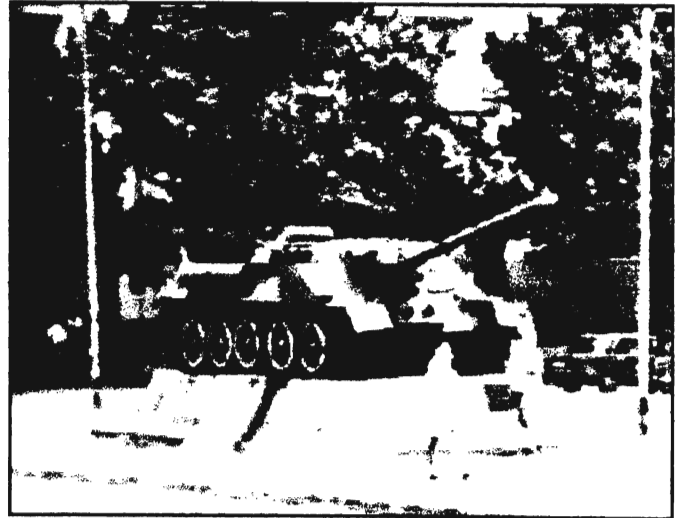
Having spent but a brief week in Cuba in November, I will merely give an anecdotal account of what I observed and what was told to me. While there, I also had access to a recently-published (in English) government handbook. Information from this source will be labelled (GH). Comrades can incorporate this material into whatever view they hold of Cuba's economic and political character.

Women's Conference

I visited Cuba under the auspices of an international conference called "Women on the Threshold of the 21st Century" held at the University of Havana. Even though the conference was only an excuse and an inexpensive way to go, I was hoping for more than was the case. It seemed little different from any other feminist university conference held anywhere. The conference was ambitious, offering about 90 workshops and short courses over a four-day period, which pretty much covered the spectrum of women's experience [schedule is available]. I ended up attending only one and a half days (15 workshops), but did read some additional papers presented and heard summaries of others. I particularly checked out the workshops relating to Cuban women under such catchwords as race, class, economics and power. However, the presentations tended to be short and, thus, superficial or general, and most often they were of an academic, historical or demographic nature. There was also the problem of distraction, in that one's attention was divided between the Spanish presentation and the English translation, given by university students sitting among groups of English speakers.

About 100 foreign participants attended, representing the U.S., Canada, Australia, England, Turkey, P. R., Mexico, Central and South America. The topics presented by the foreign guests seemed mostly old hat, tangential, or academically frivolous, such as women's impact on the internet, on the environment, their role in soap operas, the suffragette movement, migration patterns, the feminization of poverty, psychological issues, etc.

Interestingly enough, the word "socialism" was not to be found among the 90 presentation titles! The only important motive that I could discern behind these conferences (held every two years) was that of encouraging guests to carry on the struggle against the U.S. blockade;



Tank that the students used to hold off Batista's police during the Cuban Revolution.

and I suspect that is an underlying motive behind the many international conferences that the Cubans host. A special reception was held for Alice Walker, the Black-American novelist, who was honored for her work against the blockade.

The conference emphasized the gains women have made since the Revolution, and that cannot be denied. There is certainly legal equality in Cuba, and the (GH) gave these statistics: women comprise 40% of the civil sector workforce, 62% of technicians, 29% of executives, 60% of university graduates, and occupy 23% of the seats in the Communist Party and the parliament. In addition, women enjoy some social benefits that are rare even in developed capitalist countries, for example, state subsidies if they have to take time off from work, not only for childbirth, but to care for sick children or relatives. Abortion has been legal since the Revolution, and methods are comparable to those in the U.S. although women must furnish a supply of their own blood to cover any emergency. Currently, there is a strong family-planning and contraceptive campaign; one sees few pregnant women on the street. The government imports contraceptives and sells them below cost, but they are still relatively expensive.

The conference was held in conjunction with The Cuban Women's Federation, which was established immediately after the Revolution. It is very comprehensive and very respected. After researching the Bolshevik *Zhenotdel*, it struck me that the Cubans followed many of its guidelines, only did some things better [possibly a topic for a future research project]. One of the tasks of the

CWF is to keep alive in the people's memory the women heroes of the Revolution, such as Haydee Santamaria, Melba Hernandez, "Tanya", Celia Sanchez. It was emphasized how much Castro valued the role of women in the Revolution and trusted them to carry out the most dangerous and sensitive assignments. One thing I did learn was the considerable role women had played in the War for Independence. Today, women are still not conscripted into military service, but there is now a women's military academy. Vilma Espin, the wife of Raul Castro and head of the CWF, was to give the closing address, but was unable to make it. One U.S. conferee audibly interjected, "She's probably home making Raul's lunch!" Who else but an American feminist would publically demonstrate such gall? In her place, Graciela Pogolotti spoke. She is a famous old guerilla fighter after whom streets and parks are named, but I wasn't familiar with her.

The informal discussions were really more interesting than the formal presentations, although they were hard to follow. However, one dominant theme could not be missed. The Cuban women complained, although in good humor, that the men did not share equally in domestic duties. Housework is still considered "women's work. In contradiction to the historical ideal of women as guerrillas and the official propaganda of their promotion in society, there is still a prevalent concept of women as the "sweet and tender" sex. The men are very respectful, even gallant -- but the women do the cooking. At one point, a young Cuban man (there were a few men in attendance), cried out in mock anguish, "Hey, I'm NOT the enemy!" And it was at that point that I felt I could be at any "feminist" conference, anywhere in the world!

While the conference was well-organized, and the Cuban women were wonderfully gracious hosts, it was obvious that there was not a lot of money or resources behind it. This I concluded from talking to women who had attended other Cuban international conferences on science, technology or education, which had been much more elaborately provisioned, offering field trips, transportation, meals, and literature, which this conference did not.

Social Services

Many people we talked to pointed to the healthcare and educational systems as Cuba's proudest achievements. Despite the privations of recent years, healthcare is still almost totally free. According to (GH), before the Revolution there were only 6,000 physicians in a country of 11 million people, and 3000 of these fled. Now there are 284 hospitals, in addition to several hundred local

clinics, maternity centers, blood-donation centers, and dental clinics which cover 96% of the country. There is a ratio of one physician to every 195 citizens, and every year 5,000 new students enter medical schools and research institutes (entrance dependent on "revolutionary behavior"). The Cubans have eradicated many diseases entirely, and life expectancy and infant mortality rates still compare favorably with the most advanced countries. Evidently, however, a saturation point has been reached, and Cuba "exports" medical workers.

The new industry called "Health Tourism" [SERVIMED] comprises nine international clinics which specialize in the treatment of complicated conditions -- organ transplants, rare skin and eye diseases, etc. The Cubans manufacture many high-tech, specialized medicines for export -- interferon, medicines for hepatitis B, for meningitis -- as well as medical equipment. However, common "drug-store" medicines are in critically short supply. Visitors are asked to bring down aspirin, vitamins, cold and allergy medicines, and especially asthma inhalers, even though asthma is another medical specialty. On the other hand, we suspected a "scam" on the streets, where a young man was persuading tourists to buy asthma inhalers at the tourist pharmacies for his allegedly sick girlfriend.

The Cubans seem to be handling the problem of AIDS rather intelligently. At the onset of the epidemic in the early 80s, they threw out all their blood supply and began testing a large segment of the population: all military personnel, pregnant women, anyone who had travelled abroad. The (GH) estimates that currently there are only about 2,000 HIV and AIDS cases. Patients are mandatorily housed in a sanatorium in Havana, but are allowed home visits (the "warranter" program). Recently, an "ambulatory" or out-patient program has been started.

A shocking phenomenon occurred a few years ago. About 100 "roqueros" or punk-rocker youth (and their girlfriends and wives) deliberately injected themselves with the HIV virus as a protest against government restrictions on their lifestyle, which not only involved American-style dress and music but also refusal to work or comply with compulsory military service. In the sanatorium, they were allowed to practice their lifestyle and, as well, had access to better food. Now most are dead, but this sad occurrence evidently had some influence on government relaxation of restrictions on youth activities. [I have a most interesting article on this which is available.]

My travelling companion, who is a Social Worker, visited a huge mental hospital (4,000 patients) and talked

with both patients and workers. She was impressed by the kindness and caring of the healthcare workers, although the care-concept seemed to her to be paternalistic "warehousing," that is, no concept of community-based mental health or of integrating patients into the community. On the other hand, there are obviously not the resources to do so. The psychotropic medicines are mainly donated from abroad, e.g., from France, and are of the out-dated, heavy kind. All able patients are employed in such activities as assembling toys and manufacturing ceramics. This is considered an important part of their therapy, and supposedly they are paid standard wages. While she was there, a large musical entertainment was presented in which both guest artists and patients participated. She also pointed out to me that there are almost no public conveniences for the handicapped, and that the casts and apparatuses she saw on the streets are very old-fashioned. We witnessed a bad bicycle-car accident in the middle of the city. Although an ambulance was summoned, none came, and after a considerable wait, motorists carried the victim to a hospital. A nurse who was with our group tried to give instructions on how to properly handle the injured man, but to no avail.

As mentioned, the educational system, bright spot as it is, has over-produced professionals. The society simply cannot absorb them. The University's exterior is attractive, but its classroom resources are minimal; it is just beginning to computerize. The tank with which the students held off Batista's police occupies a prominent spot on the grounds! The public school buildings we saw were very shabby, and ordinary school supplies are still lacking. But the school children are a delight. Long lines of well-behaved, co-operative, happy, laughing kids are everywhere -- touring public attractions and doing outdoor exercise in the park. According to (GH), 95% of the high-school students volunteer one month of their summer vacation to helping the farmers with the crops and also teaching literacy. We were told, however, that there is now a shortage of pre-school slots and long waiting lists.

Che

Yes, Che is everywhere -- on the billboards, on the buildings, on the currency, in the bookstores, and in many museums. The Che t-shirts, posters, paintings and postcards seem geared toward the tourist trade. In fact, the Museum of the Revolution (the old Batista palace) is almost as much devoted to Che alone as it is to the total Revolution. Every scrap of his personal possessions -- bloodied, bullet-ridden clothing, utensils, guitar, radio, etc. -- has been preserved. Even the mules which carried his



Che's mules, stuffed and on display

asthmatic body through the mountains of Bolivia are stuffed and mounted. A holiday, "Heroic Guerilla Fighter's Day," is devoted to Che; and his bones have recently been returned to Cuba and reunited with his hands in a grand new monument and museum in Santa Clara.

In the U.S., the kids are encouraged to "want to be like Mike"; in Cuba, the kids are encouraged to "want to be like Che." In spite of the way Che may be manipulated these days, is that such a bad image to hold up? To be fair, Che has never not been the strongest revolutionary presence in Cuba -- along with Jose Marti. However, the current Cuban promotion campaign seems to have spawned "Che mania" among the youth worldwide. The youth I've talked to have little idea of what Che actually did or what he stood for. One young man from Honduras sporting a Che t-shirt answered: "Oh, well, you know. He's a cool revolution man." By the way, although there probably are some, I never saw a picture of Castro anywhere.

The Countryside

We spent one day driving around the countryside in the direction of Pinar del Rio, west of Havana. While this area has some cane, banana and citrus groves, it is mainly tobacco country. We were told that 70% of the agricultural land is government-owned and 30% is private-owned. According to (GH), 58% of the state land has now been granted in free usufruct to people already working it. Most of these farmers have organized themselves into cooperatives. The private land is taxed heavily, but the (GH) noted that the cooperative farmers are not taxed, and that both sectors enjoy the full range of free services and benefits granted to all other citizens. The privately-farmed land is the best kept up and produces the highest yield, although we were told that only about a half of all arable land is presently under cultivation. Due to the



Che's image on the Ministry of Justice Building, Havana

overeducation of the people, and the fact that fuel shortage has arrested mechanization, Cuba is having trouble recruiting sugar cane workers. Supposedly, the government has been forced to double wages for cane-cutters. An interesting phenomenon is the considerable outmigration from the cities to the countryside of urbanites, including women, seeking employment on the private farms.

The *bohios*, which are thatched-roof, dirt-floor huts, are still a common sight in the rural areas. They are in use both as family dwellings and for tobacco storage and curing. The countryside is littered with unfinished construction projects: bridges that connect nothing, foundations for housing dug and then abandoned. A very disturbing sight was the hoards of people waiting by the roadside, often for hours and in the rain. They were carrying large bundles, and had come from the towns into the countryside to purchase food. They were hoping to catch a ride from motorists, as few buses are running in this area anymore. The rural police are now, more often than not, on horseback, and there were many horse-drawn wagons on the road. In addition, we saw many old trucks crammed to the limit with agricultural workers being transported to and from the fields. We did not happen to see any oxen used in fieldwork, although we were told of them. We saw no "state patrol" cars on the highways even though the many bicycles and animals on the road make driving conditions hazardous.

Transportation

There were actually more cars on the road than I

expected to find -- plenty of old American-model Dodges, Plymouths, Oldsmobiles and Buicks with fins. These cars are so prized that they have become an "icon" of Cuba: many artists specialize in "car paintings." On every block and by the side of the highway, one can see feet sticking out from under stalled vehicles, their owners valiantly trying to repair them. By necessity, the Cubans have become inventive fixers, and prizes are awarded in the neighborhoods for the most ingenious repairers. But there are also (old) Russian and Polish cars, and (new) Korean and Japanese cars. We were told that there is now no gas rationing *per se*, although only licensed car owners can purchase gas, which is about 4 times the price of gas in the U.S.. There are now many privately-owned taxis, and also many motorists earn extra cash by picking up passengers. With the fuel crisis, the government imported one million Chinese-made bicycles, and now there are many ingenious conveyances, pedi-cabs and bike-carts, as well as horse-drawn conveyances in the city. We happened upon two interesting events: a huge bicycle marathon race and a demonstration of racing cars.

The public transportation system looks nightmarish, although it still costs only a few centavos. Long lines of people are constantly waiting, and tourists are discouraged from using the buses. To cope with this, the Cubans have manufactured monstrously strange vehicles which look like they have been knocked together from old (Russian?) army trucks and tanks. The Cubans swear that these khaki-colored "camillos" (camels), as they are nicknamed, can hold 350 passengers.

The New "Liberalism"

While we were there, the country was gearing up high-speed for the Pope's visit. Conferences scheduled for that time had been cancelled. All the Catholic churches were ablaze with welcoming banners. I couldn't resist purchasing an amusing commemorative plate from one of the churches which portrays a pensive Pope, chin in hand, sitting under the Cuban flag, evidently pondering what to do! According to (GH), over a third of the population identifies as Catholic, and this includes a sizeable representation of younger people, unlike in Russia where the Orthodox Church supporters are mainly elderly women. However, few attend church regularly. Cuba's most famous cathedral in Plaza de Catedral was undergoing extensive renovation. There appear to be several motives behind this new tolerance toward religion (Castro recently said that "Catholics can be Communists!") As we all have seen on TV, Castro's bold (and risky) invitation to the Pope was obviously calculated to arouse

opposition to the blockade and to increase humanitarian aid. But these historical churches are also of tourist interest, and serve the needs of the new foreign residents. Incidentally, people seem to be very aware of and appreciative of the organization "Pastors for Peace" who recently got caught trying to smuggle computers into Cuba.

A few of us had the opportunity to attend a private *Santaria* ceremony (like Haitian *voudoun*). I don't know if, in the past, any effort was made to discourage *Santaria*; my impression is that it was pretty much left alone as it was a deeply ingrained relic of the African (Yoruba) cultural and religious heritage of Cuba's large and poor Black population (about 30%). Today, *Santaria* appears to be thriving -- almost "trendy." The large *Santaria* district in Havana, as well as *Santorian* towns, are now tourist attractions. In addition, there were "white" Cubans participating in the ceremony, and also we visited an alley-art gallery featuring many *Santarian* artists.

The film of a few years back, "Strawberry and Chocolate," which won wide acclaim worldwide and was very popular in Cuba, is said to have been partly responsible for a change of attitude toward homosexuality. The current Party position was expressed to me this way by our guide who, I assumed, is a Party youth-organization member: "We still see homosexuality as a social deviance, but they are human beings like everyone else and deserve the full rights of all other citizens." Homosexuality is attributed to deviant parenting or upbringing; there appears to be resistance to a genetic theory, but at least it's a start.

Popular culture seems fairly free. One now sees many posters and t-shirts advertising rock groups, and youth styles resemble those in the U.S. -- dreadlocks and braids, dyed hair, shaved heads, pony-tails -- although I didn't notice any tattooing or extreme piercing. The Cubans are big movie-goers; we saw constant lines (almost as long as bus lines) of people waiting to purchase tickets. The film industry is very small, and it is difficult to judge the amount of freedom currently given it. Both "Strawberry and Chocolate" and a current hit "Guantanamo" criticize government policies, but they seem to me to be criticizing "old" government policies, and to be supporting "new" government positions. Both films have been widely distributed. [A critique of these films will appear in the next issue.] The TV industry is still embryonic. There are only a couple of local stations, which air the requisite government meetings which nobody seems to watch, but plenty of Mexican soap operas which people love. Only the hotels can afford cable, on which a full range of mindless U.S. fare is available. The

locals often gather in the bars of the smaller hotels to watch American sports. All Cuban sporting events, by the way, are free. The video industry is gaining momentum, and a VCR is a prized possession. There are also foreign radio stations, including one English station. We also saw quite a bit of satirical art. A lot of it seemed to be directed against stupid bureaucratic practices or the worship of the dollar, or depicted the cruelty of the living conditions. Again, it was hard to tell just where it was coming from.

Economic Situation

During *el periodo especial*, the name given to the period from 1990-94 after Cuba got the rug pulled out from underneath her with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, according to (GH), she lost 85% of her markets, more than 1/2 of her fuel supply, and 70% of her imports. Between 1990 and 1995, the economic situation decreased by 34%. Special hardship was caused by the decline in oil delivery from the SU. During this period, as everyone knows, the people experienced acute shortages in basic foodstuffs, clothing, footwear, and hygienic articles, to the point where the government put out pamphlets on how to use local herbs to make soap and cure minor illnesses. Housing suffered and, as well, cutbacks in electrical power were imposed several times a week. The government emphasizes, however, that during this period, no schools, hospitals, or elderly facilities were closed. "Guantanamo," now playing in the U.S., gives a good picture of how people dealt with *el periodo especial* and the black market. The government insists that Cuba began to pull out of *el periodo especial* in 1995.

Not so long ago, Castro insisted that: "For us to adopt *perestroika* would be like living in our home with another man's wife." Cuba's new image certainly looks like "*perestroika*," but the government does definitely portray the current economic policy as Cuba's NEP -- a necessary retreat on the road to socialism. The (GH) lists the new economic measures as: increased crop diversification and food export; convertible currency (dollars); dispersion of state lands for private use; a new tax system to heavily tax private businesses; raising of prices for non-essential goods (not specified); abolition of certain gratuities (not specified); self-employment encouraged; free-market prices for agricultural and industrial goods; simplification of the central state apparatus (more autonomy given to local centers); foreign capital investment and joint ventures; and changes in laws accordingly.

These new laws state that foreign investment is possible in all areas except health, education and the

military. There are many types of foreign investment allowed but, in all, the foreign investors do not own the land nor, in my understanding, are they sold existing businesses or structures. They are "given" them to run and make a profit from. A recent *Granma* article featured Raul Castro in China learning how to set up free-enterprize zones and industrial parks, while flattering the Chinese that Cuba and China represent the last bastions of "socialism." The government has vowed to offer foreign investors a more attractive proposition than they can get elsewhere. The Germans and Italians seem to be in currently in the forefront.

According to (GH), as of the middle of 1996, more than 200,000 people are now engaged in 140 newly-allowed private enterprises. Most of these have to do with the food or service industry, such as restaurants, taxis, car and appliance repair, small craft retailers, etc. Anyone, even professionals, can engage in these occupations. We saw many hustlers on the streets, selling back issues of *Granma* and souvenirs of the Revolution, and proprietors operating food carts, used-book, fruit and flower stalls, and craft stands. But the situation is nothing like in Russia, for example, where the streets are crowded with *kiosks*, and people are lined up at the railway stations, selling off their pitiful household possessions and family heirlooms.

Because of the nature of our visit, we were limited to talking with university people, students and service workers. We did see a few factories, mainly old and decrepit, and were told that especially the cement factories had bad working conditions and that environmental illness was a serious problem in them.

Living Conditions

It was interesting to re-read Jim's article of 1993 and to compare it with the living conditions of the Cubans four years later. Today, the people appear to be well and fashionably dressed, still not so well shod, however. We were told it was no longer necessary to donate clothing. The citizens have a slim appearance, but are very energetic and healthy-looking, this despite continued rationing of basics. What isn't rationed is often beyond the means of ordinary workers, such as coffee, rum, even sugar -- chief among Cuba's exports! There is a shortage of vegetables and fruits for local consumption, although meat appears to be more plentiful. The Cubans are just beginning to develop their fishing industry and to encourage people to eat fish, formerly considered a "low" food. The terrible situation of a few years back where children were suffering from vitamin-deficiency eye disease appears to be under control now. Efforts are definitely

directed toward the children, who receive a special ration of milk and also soap and other baby products. The soap ration has evidently gone up to 2-3 bars per family per month, and the electricity blackouts cut back to one or two hours per week, staggered among the districts. Hotels are exempt.

At our very modest, state-run guest house [\$270 for 8 nights and 2 meals per day], we actually suffered food deprivation. We were served the same meal every day: for dinner, a choice of fried beef, pork or chicken, potatoes and rice in very small portions. We never saw a vegetable. For breakfast, when they ran out of eggs, a deep-fried ham and cheese sandwich which most guests found inedible. Milk and coffee also often ran out. The conference participants found it necessary to go searching the streets for fruit, not easy to find, or to resort to Chinese restaurants in Havana's small Chinatown or other private restaurants, where food was plentiful, tasty and inexpensive. Although there are "dollar specialty stores" and even "dollar supermarkets" now, travel books advise travellers to bring food with them, and it is a good idea. Out of curiosity, I checked out the University cafeteria, and was appalled to see that it offered only three dishes: brown rice with peas, plain white rice, and a kind of pastry.

The housing situation does not appear to have improved. The shabbiness of the apartment buildings is shocking, and it is common to see people drawing water from outside pumps. Rent is still very cheap, but most people are buying their apartments. Some people, e.g., pensioners, are given living space, and it is also possible to inherit a deceased relative's apartment. The Cubans brag that they have no homelessness. We were invited for dinner at the home of our guide, whose mother is a divorced university teacher. University professors still make double the salary of an ordinary worker, although now it has gone up from a 150-300 peso ratio to 250-500. The apartment building was located in Milimar, formerly a rich section, its mansions now converted into foreign embassies or multiple dwellings. We were told that the former servants of these rich had been given first choice of apartments; this is similar to what the Bolsheviks did. Our hosts' ugly cinder-block apartment building, eerily located beside the Iraq embassy with a huge, scary picture of Saddam outside, was dark and in a state of disrepair. Inside, the living conditions were very depressing: five family members in a very small space, bathroom plumbing which did not work, an antiquated kitchen smaller than an average U.S. bathroom, cracked dishes, an ancient Russian-made TV -- but lots of books. We were served an elaborate meal, but felt guilty eating it

because we suspected that the family had blown their ration stamps for our benefit. We brought along wine, but had no idea what a rare treat it would be -- simply beyond the means of most people.

The streets of Havana are bustling with activity. Everyone seems to be hurrying to or from work. There is very little lounging about, although we did notice a few elderly drunks who seemed to be tolerated by the police. We were approached only a few times by people asking for money or goods. We brought down a lot of soap, shampoo, and toothpaste to give to helpful citizens or instead of tips. The saddest supplicants were the mothers asking for pencils or pens for their school children. One other rather sad phenomenon was the hundreds of scraggly stray dogs roaming Havana, surviving off tourist handouts. It seems that during *el periodo especial*, people couldn't afford to feed their pets and had to let them loose.

Havana, as well as the other towns we visited, is generally clean, tidy and well-ordered. I was admonished by a "park patrol" for indecorously sitting on a bench arm rest instead of on the seat, and a young Cuban man who did likewise received a sizeable ticket. I was constantly using a camcorder, and was stopped only once by a young policeman who very politely inquired if I were taking pictures of the police. When I explained that I was actually focusing on a monument but was afraid to cross the street (there are few traffic lights), he gallantly took my arm and led me across and back!

Tourism

Nicknamed "the chimneyless industry," tourism is going great guns. Underneath the shabbiness, the old Spanish colonial architecture is fascinating. The UN has designated "Old Havana" as a world historical heritage site. According to (GH), in 1995 tourism generated an income of one billion dollars, and Cuba currently averages about 3/4 million visitors yearly. The hotels appear to be booming with business, and some are quite splendid. They contain many luxury shops and special services, expensive restaurants, musical entertainment, foreign magazines and newspapers, etc. Although it was a bit disconcerting to see Cuban women dressed up like French maids, we were assured that their wages and tips compensate for this seemingly demeaning costume. Tipping was formerly not allowed. About the only construction we could see was the renovation of hotels and other tourist facilities and attractions. The wonderful stretch of white-sand beach east of Havana is now sprouting resorts, and trendy cafes, bars, and music clubs have sprung

up in the city. Will the Cubans next revive the gambling casinos?

I had forgotten that Cuba capitalizes so much on Hemingway, who resided there for many years and supposedly supported the Revolution. His old hotel room, favorite restaurants and bars, private marina, etc. have all been preserved and designated as tourist sites. Our guides couldn't understand why we were not at all interested. They were shocked when I volunteered that many regard Hemingway as having had reactionary politics and a chauvinistic attitude toward women!

Tourism has and is continually changing the society. As mentioned, the ease-up on religion, culture, homosexuality, etc. has a lot to do with encouraging tourism. But most important, tourism is taking up the slack in employment, especially for the over-educated professionals, many of whom are now working in the tourist industry. For example, our tourist agents, who worked for the University, had earned degrees in biology and law. Tourism is also responsible for the many people who have gone into the taxi industry. It is enabling many service workers to obtain not only dollars but foreign-made goods as well. Tourism has had a positive impact on attempts to control the black market; it is responsible for the new rules on foreign currency which now may be bought and sold. A new "tourist peso" bill which equals a US dollar has been circulated, and travellers' checks and credit cards are now accepted (not American Express, of course!).

With tourism has re-emerged some evils, mainly petty theft and purse-snatching (although, as yet, practically no violent crime). We were warned against youths on bicycles who would snatch bags and cameras, and prostitutes quite openly walking the streets with their clients were pointed out to us. We saw a very ugly scene at one of the beaches where 13-14 year old girls were skipping school to mingle with fat, prosperous German businessmen. Another lesser "evil" is the famed Tropicana Nightclub, one of Cuba's biggest tourist moneymakers. We couldn't resist checking it out. The place is huge, the price is exorbitant -- \$50 for a two-hour show, and the drinks are watered down -- but the show is fun and tasteful, no bare breasts like in Las Vegas. The Tropicana stayed open after the Revolution, amidst much criticism. I can't understand who frequented it besides the Russians? Certainly not the Cubans. A poll was taken of the audience, which was heavily German, French, Italian and Canadian, but a sprinkling of tourists from everywhere. It wasn't asked how many Americans, but they were there. Our flight from Cancun was full of vacationers who were bopping over for the weekend just to say they'd been to

Cuba.

The US-Cuba Connection

Maybe others are aware of these matters, but I learned some new things. For example, I was surprised to learn that the University of Havana has a "U.S. Studies Program" which regularly sends academics to the states for research. One professor's project had been Harold Washington, Chicago's former Black mayor! Another surprise to me was the huge, heavily-guarded U.S. "Cuba Special Interest Section" building in central Havana, which is an "embassy" but not an "embassy." I was told that it employs over 100 people. When I asked what they do there, the answer was: "They spy!" It is intriguing to speculate just how these "spys" integrate into Cuban society. I was also taken aback by billboards advertising American products, e.g., Lux soap and Pepsodent toothpaste. There must be some subsidiary arrangement through another country. And why is the tourist peso tied to the American dollar? Why not, e.g, to the deutschmark, or to the currency of some other heavy investor?

Despite the dire warnings and complications mentioned in most guidebooks, it is very easy to visit Cuba -- and quite cheap when you get there. One can go down officially under the auspices of a government conference or tour, with a U.S. Treasury Department license and visa, although this office is now swamped, and one should allow about 3 months for application processing. The government has an arrangement with an E. Coast travel agency through which flight arrangements can be made with Air Cubana. [I have the information on this, plus a long list of officially-sanctioned conferences.] Or one can merely hop over from Cancun, Nassau or Jamaica on nothing more than a \$20 tourist card. Although flight arrangements to Cuba cannot be made in the US, we easily made ours through Air Mexicana in Mexico City and were allowed to pay for our Cancun-Havana ticket in Cancun. Cuban customs does not stamp passports, and the only restriction is that one must have verification of a place to stay. It is now also possible to go down as a student for a six-week study tour, through a U.S. college [I also have this information]. It is easy to get past US customs, who assume you have been vacationing in Mexico or the Caribbean. Just be careful about bringing back Cuban cigars -- a red flag! And even though you can buy Cuban cigars in Mexico, Mexican customs also questioned us. I couldn't figure that out.

Postscript - or the end of anecdote

Yes, it is true. There are billboards all over Cuba which proclaim: "Tenemos socialismo, y tendremos socialismo" (We have socialism and we will (continue to) have socialism). And obviously, that is not the case. However, in my opinion, to make such statements as "the repressive society in Cuba has nothing in common with genuine socialism or communism" is not a very materialist or dialectical way of dealing with Cuba [re: DWV). For starters, no one on this earth has yet experienced "genuine socialism." One should perhaps review Lenin's analyses about "shoots of socialism" (or communism) which he regarded as any sincere volunteer or cooperative efforts by the people which undermined capitalist exploitation, individuality and selfishness. Despite the obvious fact that the Cuban workers do not control the society (as the Soviet workers did not under the Bolsheviks either), there are, in my opinion, certain "shoots" which took root in Cuba and remain today. For example, the extensive free services that Cubans enjoy, no matter how cut back, are considerably more than a "safety-net." Moreover, a lot of ideological training has been accomplished, which is not the ideology of capitalism: better race relations than I am aware of in any other country, the spirit of sharing out scarce goods which have been donated and other neighborhood cooperation, many forms of volunteerism, a certain honesty in interactions and, not the least, the respect shown to women in a Latin culture, all of which seem pretty impressive to me.

Furthermore, to even bring up "genuine communism" at this point in history seems to me to be irresponsible. Certainly, Castro's rhetoric is sloppy. Sometimes he talks about "creating socialism" or being on the "socialist road." Sometimes he speaks of Cuba as being "socialist": the 1977 Constitution states that "The Republic of Cuba is a socialist state formed by workers, peasants, and other manual and intellectual laborers." Perhaps I am mistaken, but I don't believe that he actually calls the society of Cuba "communist," although the government or the Party may be referred to as such. Lenin once defended the name of the USSR, which of course contains the word "socialist," by saying that it was validated by their "intentions." It is mainly the western capitalist press which has wildly hurled the epithet "communist" at any regime it is threatened by, so, in my opinion, to talk about "Cuba's phony communism" only confuses the very complex situation.

Castro may be incompetent, misguided, ideologically flawed, whatever you wish, but he is no Stalin, Mau or Ceausescu, who lives as a splendid potentate and lies to the people to maintain personal wealth and power. He is, after all, the man who brought about a most remarkable

Revolution and has stood his ground against incredible odds. I am not convinced that Castro consciously knows that he is NOT CREATING socialism! While there is plenty of grumbling against government blunders and the inevitable red tape, Castro himself seems remarkably exempt from criticism. (Obviously, I am not talking about the Cuban exiles: the "gusanos," the "Marielites," or the "barcos"). My impression is that he is neither hated nor feared by the majority of the population, and I believe that most regard him as a sincere advocate of the working masses. A common view, however, is that Castro cannot control those beneath him, as the military narcotraffickers' case of a few years back demonstrated. Our guide insisted that I take home a book (in English) which has reprinted the entire Ochoa, *et al.* affair, including a transcript of the trial. It was very interesting, but I had to send it back.

The Cuban masses certainly suffer from serious material deprivation, but I doubt that most feel they are living in a politically repressive society at this particular moment in history. -- and now the Catholics will be happier and some political prisoners will be released, etc., etc. The fact remains that Cuba can still blame the U.S. blockade (the "silent bomb") rightfully for much of their economic deprivation, and that undoubtedly clouds the internal situation. In addition, the current market reforms are going to improve the average Cuban's standard of living at least for the immediate future. Things have already improved in the last couple years, due to tourism and the controlled foreign investment, which Castro believes to be the only way out of the economic crisis. Like other Caribbean islands, Cuba has few mineral resources to exploit. And while agricultural certainly needs reorganizing, there has to be money to invest in any enterprise. What economic course should Cuba take?

It is a platitude that the situation in Cuba is not a carbon copy of the USSR or of Eastern Europe, but I personally feel that there is much more serious work to be done besides relying on bourgeois appraisals of Cuba, before one can "advise" the Cuban masses how to be "revolutionary." One intriguing thing: when we asked people where the "well-to-do" lived, we got nothing but blank responses. Perhaps a place to start would be to do some investigation on the strata of Cuban bourgeoisie:



"Juramos", circa 1980, from a Cuban postcard

who they are, how exactly do they maintain their lifestyle, by what means do they rob the people, what laws and loopholes allow them to do so, how is ideology manipulated to justify this?

The problem is, the 1959 Revolution is still very much alive in Cuba. Deprived as the Cuban masses are, the older generation still remember how much worse life was for them 40 years ago, and the younger generation is constantly reminded of it. As our young guide expressed it: "I'm a Black man. I received a free university education and now I have a law degree." Even though he cannot currently get enough work in his specialty, he is both grateful and hopeful -- and that counts for a lot. ◇

Some thoughts on the Left and Modern Philosophy, a review of Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

By Sarah

Activists in the left are discussing the crisis of current-day socialist politics. I was a member of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA, a revolutionary communist organization which dissolved in the face of an internal ideological crisis in 1993. The crisis facing the left was an issue which greatly concerned the MLP. An issue around at the demise of the MLP was the question of how to assess current-day philosophical thought and its meaning for socialist politics.

From the beginning, a question of concern to the socialist movement was its philosophical underpinnings. In the current crisis of socialist politics, I think it useful to investigate current issues in philosophy and how they might impact on the crisis. I have been doing some reading on these questions and would like to raise some of the issues for discussion.

Marx and Engels write that their views of scientific socialism were very much based on and a development of the views of the "utopian socialists" (Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owens), materialist and dialectical philosophy, and materialist conceptions of history and economics. The works of Marx and Engels are steeped in these and greatly developed their thought. Modern socialism, I think, also needs to take account of the developments in philosophical, economic and political thought and to sort out the relationship of them to revolutionary politics.

I have been doing some reading of modern philosophy, and I want to make a stab at presenting some of the major ideas of one of the more important authors, along with some thoughts on what these ideas may mean for left revolutionaries.

Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published in 1962. Kuhn wrote on how he thought scientific progress develops. His ideas have had a major impact on scientific fields. This discussion has been around for thirty years so it is not new. However, the issues raised by this writer were not directly discussed in the MLP, so they were new to me and I suspect new to many people in the left. He is the source of the now-trendy and somewhat overused term "paradigm shift," although current usage of this term often has very little to do with what Kuhn put forward.

Kuhn opposes the idea that scientific progress consists in the piecemeal addition of facts, knowledge, techniques and methods. He says this view of scientific progress sees the history of science as an accumulation of

various discoveries, development of laws, instruments and inventions and seeing this accumulation as opposed by various myths and theories that inhibit scientific progress. He does not see science as developing towards an ultimate goal of "truth."

Instead, Kuhn sees science as developing in a more revolutionary fashion. He says that the early development of most sciences is characterized by periods when many theories, explanations and techniques compete. Early fact-finding, in the period before a "paradigm" is established, is very random. Effective scientific research, what he calls "normal science," begins only when the scientists in a particular field acquire firm answers to basic questions of the field, at least the basic questions that are being asked at that time. He calls this the achievement of a paradigm.

When a paradigm is found and science is in a period of "normal science," this is when most progress takes place. Much of science depends on the ability to defend that paradigm. Normal science defines the maturity of a science. Normal science defines the problems that need to be addressed, it defines the rules and standards, it defines the types of measurements needed. It focuses the attention of scientists on a relatively small number of problems, and it facilitates the solving of those problems. The paradigm gives "form to scientific life" and is a "vehicle for scientific theory." The paradigm defines what questions are legitimate and defines the techniques necessary to solve them. Paradigms provide the puzzles that challenge most scientists. Most scientific progress consists of elaborating paradigms already found and solving the problems defined by that paradigm.

The paradigm turns a field into a profession. It brings a period when scientists no longer have to define their work to the world at large. It gives rise to the scientific journals in that field. The scientists of a field are able to talk to each other in their own language. The paradigm means that new generations of scientists in a field can be trained in the rules and methods and the problems of that field. This creates a certain insulation of the scientific community from the larger community. It allows scientists to concentrate on problems they think they can solve and which are defined by the paradigm.

He does not see scientific progress as either the methodological verification or falsification of theories. Theories confront counterinstances all the time. Even the

most stubborn are usually solved by normal science. He says that everything that can be seen as a counterinstance to a theory can also be seen as a puzzle of that theory. Indeed, much of scientific progress is in solving those puzzles. He says that once a paradigm is established, there is no such thing as research in the absence of a paradigm. And there is no such thing as rejection of a paradigm without another to take its place.

Normal science goes astray when it goes into crisis, when an anomaly is more than an anomaly. Kuhn talks about instances that make anomalies particularly pressing and notes that it usually takes several of these instances to provoke crisis. The anomalies become more recognized by the profession. The anomaly may exist on a key point of the theory and thus be recognized instantly. Anomalies build up. Crises are necessary for the emergence of new theories. Then efforts begin to get a new commitment. This period of paradigm shift has many similarities to the period before a paradigm is in place. Science in crisis generates many speculative theories. These speculations are often versions of the old paradigm. The period of paradigm shift looks similar to the pre-paradigm period in that there are many competing theories and methods of investigation. The development of a new paradigm requires the reevaluation and reconstruction of prior facts and theories. There is frequently a fairly long period when new paradigms compete with older paradigms until the new paradigms win. This victory may sometimes require that the adherents of the old paradigm die out. He portrays the development of a new paradigm as frequently taking a fairly long period and a fairly bitter struggle.

Kuhn says that his view of scientific progress applies to the natural sciences and he has not worked out how it would apply to the social sciences. He notes that fields like medicine, technology and law are different from the natural sciences. They are called upon to address problems which are urgent for the larger community without regard to whether or not there are the tools to actually address them. Social scientists frequently have to defend their choice of a research problem, while he says that natural scientists frequently do not. Kuhn says he is interested in pursuing how his ideas on scientific revolutions apply to social science.

I think that the ideas of Thomas Kuhn regarding progress in the natural sciences provoke thought on the nature of the crisis in the socialist movement. It is clear that great progress took place in the development of socialist thought with the advent of Marxism. But Marxism is currently in crisis. The countries and regimes which

took power under the banner of Marxism did not succeed. Each in its own way had severe problems with great differences in status between the leaders, the ruling party and the majority of the population. Each had its problems with the exploitation of the working classes. Each had problems with lack of democracy, with a lack of actual control by the working classes. And several, including the Soviet Union, China and Albania, had problems with severe repression of the masses under the guise of Marxism.

The "official" socialism and "Marxism" of the Soviet Union that was promoted at least since the 1930's, and its developments in various other regimes, I think, in many ways represents a paradigm. As rigid and one-sided as the interpretations of Marxism have been, nevertheless these have passed as official Marxism. Various trends from Trotskyism, to Maoism, to the trend from Albania, to dependency theorists, to the followers of Castro — all had some critiques of some of the "socialist" regimes in power, even including their own. All had some valid critiques. Activists in the struggles of the oppressed have adopted one or another of these theories.

The trend from which the late MLP emerged was opposed to revisionism. It took the stance of fighting to build an anti-revisionist trend. The early predecessors of the MLP saw the inherent reformism and the stifling of the independent motion of the working class and other political movements by the politics of the Communist Party USA and the main Trotskyist groups in the late 1960's. They attributed revisionism largely to a betrayal of Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union by Khrushchev and the Soviet leaders that took power after Stalin's death in the 1950's. One of the anti-revisionist paradigms (if you will) and certainly a set of ideas that shaped the MLP and its predecessor organizations, was the debate in the international communist movement between China and the Soviet Union.

"The polemic on the line for the international communist movement," as it was known by Marxist-Leninists of the late 60's and the 1970's, fingered Khrushchev as the source of revisionism and validated Stalin as a true communist revolutionary. From the late 60's through the early 1970's, our predecessors saw Mao Zedong Thought and the politics and policies of the People's Republic of China as the leaders of the struggle against revisionism and the best hope for revolutionary communism.

However as time went on, one ideological icon after another fell. Closer investigation revealed that Mao Zedong Thought and China were not the anti-revisionism that the MLP's predecessors wanted. So they looked to Enver Hoxha's Albania and Stalin's Soviet Union as the bastions

of communism and anti-revisionism. Even after the MLP was declared in 1980, they continued to hold that revisionism in the Soviet Union did not gain ascendance until Khrushchev. They held that Stalin was a true upholder of socialism throughout his life.

Being fairly honest, however, the MLP investigated Albania and Stalin and Dimitrov and others, and the icons fell one after another. Discovering that some of our most revered communist theoreticians were actually revisionists, that they conciliated social-democracy and imperialism, that they put the brakes on constructing socialism, was no doubt one of the factors that created the crisis for the MLP. With the loss of these ideological icons came a loss of innocence; the MLP no longer had so many pat answers for theoretical political questions. Perhaps most importantly, we had lost our model for socialist construction. Marx, Engels and Lenin survived the test of the MLP's theoretical work and investigations, but they never lived to see socialism. The MLP now had difficulty describing the system that was its goal.

The MLP was also unable to answer other basic questions of modern day socialist politics. In the first issue of this journal, its editors wrote that various ideological and theoretical disputes were at the heart of the dissolution of the MLP including "1) the assessment of imperialism, 2) analysis of the program of the capitalists and what the program of the working class should be in the post Cold War world, 3) assessment of the role of the working class as a base for revolutionary politics, 4) assessment of Leninism, 5) assessment of Soviet history, and 6) analysis for the role of a small revolutionary party or group in the present situation." These were and are serious issues which need attention.

The MLP was aware of these issues and made attempts to grapple with them. It was also one of the best of the left organizations in grasping how to participate in struggles and maintain a socialist orientation without either being sectarian or falling into the trap of tailing behind the trade union bureaucracy or various reformists. It, however, was unable to answer these questions — which I think in many ways are part of developing a new paradigm.

In my opinion, Thomas Kuhn's work provokes thought about how to address our crisis. Socialist theory needs to take into account various factors.

1. Whether what has passed for Marxism, including some issues of how the MLP interpreted Marxism, were simply rigid interpretations, or whether what we need is new insight, is a question. I think the paradigm will be new. It will take in and account for the monumental work of Marx, Engels, and Lenin but it will develop from there in

new ways. I think it will be a new way of looking at many things.

2. Socialism needs to stand with the poorest and most downtrodden in their struggles. It has to foster the shoots of independent political movement. It is often the case that groups and individuals who call themselves "socialist" base themselves on this or that contradiction within the trade union bureaucracy or the reformist politicians. This is itself a source of a lot of confusion and crisis among activists.

4. We have to continue to realize that socialism is a direct product of class antagonisms. We should study how the complex interaction of national, racial, ethnic, gender and other issues interplay with class contradictions in building a revolutionary movement. Many of the trends that say they adhere to Marxism and socialism have not dealt well with this interplay and have either tended to reduce everything to class or to overlook class issues.

5. We should come to grips with how such things as new technology and how the changes in class formation affect the class struggle. We also have to judge how the advances in the sciences such as anthropology, cultural anthropology and ecology impact on what we will build in the future and how we address issues of the movement. For instance, in my opinion, in the past, our trend would have come down very one-sidedly on the nurture side in the nature vs. nurture debate (and not studied the complex interplay). Some of the classics of Marxist literature, such as Plekhanov's "The Monist View of History," are heavily partisan to the "nurture" view while modern science is raising serious questions about this.

6. We need to study what were the similarities and differences among all the "socialist" regimes such as that of the Soviet Union, China, Albania, and Cuba, and for that matter their similarities and differences with other capitalist regimes where the state was a controlling or dominating force in the economy, such as that of Lazaro Cardenas in Mexico or the nationalist regimes in Africa.

I realize that these thoughts are very rough; but I hope they will provoke some thought as to how we in the socialist movement can address the troubling issues facing us. ◇

The UPS Strike, WPAEN's Intervention and Issues for Activists

By Jack Hill

The strike against UPS (United Parcel Service) by nearly 200,000 workers last August was the biggest national strike for several years in the U.S. It is certainly one of the major events in the development of the working class movement in the last couple of years. Nearly everyone, worker and capitalist, knows about it and has an opinion about it. I want to discuss some significant points on the history of this struggle and the relation of various political forces to it. In particular, I want to discuss how the Working People's Action and Education Network (WPAEN) in Chicago tried to help the UPS workers advance their struggle and get a better grasp of what was happening.

The UPS strike started Aug. 4, 1997, and lasted for 15 days, except in Chicago where it lasted till the end of that week while a separate contract based on the national contract was worked out. UPS was demanding to take over the pension fund from the union. Further, UPS wanted to maintain and expand its use of part-time workers and subcontracting. The Teamsters Union was demanding 10,000 new full-time jobs, wage increases, limits on subcontracting, and was refusing to give up control of the pension fund.

The Teamsters Union had made some preparations for the strike among its members and was able to keep most of its people together throughout the strike. UPS was not able to get any massive scabbing by UPS workers, nor could the company get Clinton to invoke a Taft-Hartley injunction to force the strikers back to work. UPS also lost the public relations battle to the Teamsters. The Clinton administration did send a high powered mediator to force a settlement. UPS was forced to concede to the Teamsters' demands on most issues, at least if one doesn't examine the fine print too closely. The company did agree to create 10,000 new full-time jobs (with an escape clause), to pay raises, and to limit subcontracting. UPS did get a five year contract rather than four years. So, for the first time in many years, a major national strike has ended with the workers getting a lot of public sympathy and at least appearing to win a solid victory.

One of the major aftermaths of the strike has been that the federal government has forced Ron Carey, the head of the Teamsters, out of office and forbidden him to run as a candidate in a new election for Teamster President.

The UPS strike and the government's actions against Carey present a number of controversies among the political and trade union left. For one thing, on the strike itself, was it a simple case of a glorious victory, or a case of sellout of the workers, or something more complicated? If it was not pure victory or pure sellout, what was good and what was bad about the way the struggle was conducted? How about Ron Carey, is he a good, honest, trade union reformist who should be whole-heartedly supported, or is he a vile sellout who deserves nothing but condemnation? What are the actual complexities here?

In summary, I feel that the Teamsters did better in leading the UPS strike than many trade unions have done in leading national strikes. They held off the company and they won something. However, the tactics and strategy of the Teamsters had at least a couple of major weaknesses. One was their opposition to preparing workers to resist scabs breaking their line. Another was the uneven level of organization and unity they achieved among UPS workers at different facilities and cities across the country. On the question of Ron Carey, I feel that the Teamsters are better off with Ron Carey than with a mob-controlled President, but that is not saying much. Carey has done some very bad things, against the Staley workers and the Detroit newspaper strikers as two examples. A basic conclusion is that there is no getting around the need for Teamster rank and file members to build their own organizations, networks, communication links, etc., outside of the control of Ron Carey. That said, I want to get back to history and conditions in more detail.

Working conditions at UPS are horrendous. Over 60% of the UPS work force is part-time, making wages starting at \$8 per hour. Full-time drivers start at about \$20 per hour. UPS management enforces a killing pace of work. We have heard that new hires are required to sort 2000 packages per hour through their probationary period and are then required to maintain a pace of 1000 packages per hour. Every move that workers make is dictated by management in an attempt to squeeze every last drop of energy out of their workers. Not surprisingly, UPS workers suffer a very high rate of injury on the job.

In spite of this militaristic work environment, UPS has tried to sucker workers into support for management with various forms of "team concept" type meetings and committees. In the period before the contract expired,

workers got paid to come in early for a free breakfast and a meeting. In various places, *Labor Notes* reports, union activists were able to undercut this management mind game. Just think about this, you are being worked to death for chicken feed and can't even get 40 hours work a week, and then management wants to sit down with you and get you to understand their problems and how you might be able to work even harder. There are ways that workers who are alert can turn the tables on management in such a situation.

For decades the Teamsters Union was run in a dictatorial manner by a corrupt clique which was affiliated with organized crime. For most of the time the government looked the other way since the mobsters kept the Teamster workers under control. Some Teamster leaders did go to jail, particularly Jimmy Hoffa, but the basic structure of mob control stayed intact.

However, in 1989 the federal government took control of the Teamsters Union, perhaps to head off the growing reform movement inside the Teamsters. To this day the federal government retains extraordinary powers to oversee and dictate the internal workings of the union. Some of the corrupt leadership was forced from office. However, the "old guard" bureaucrats retain control of many Teamster locals even after all these years. In 1991 the federal government organized and supervised the first ever direct election for the national president of the Teamsters. Carey ran on a reform platform and won against two candidates who were tied to the "old guard". Since then Carey has been president of a deeply divided union, with a bitter "old guard" leadership in control of many locals fighting by every underhanded method they know to sabotage Carey. In 1996 Carey won re-election in a very close vote against Jimmy Hoffa, Jr., a corporate lawyer. After the UPS strike was over, the federal government decided that Carey's re-election was invalid. The basis for the government's action was that the Carey campaign funneled money from the Teamsters union treasury into their campaign. There is clear evidence that Carey's campaign managers did this, and there is no reason to doubt that Carey was involved in this. The only question is why the government decided to use this against Carey. (Huge financial "irregularities" seem to be standard practice in every major election, political or union, in the U.S.) Most observers believe (and I do, too) that Carey is being attacked as revenge for the Teamsters surviving the attack by UPS.

Inside the Teamsters Union an organization called Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) has been fighting the mob domination of the Teamsters and for democratic reforms of the union since 1976. TDU stood

up to the physical threats and the physical attacks of the mob-bureaucrats' goons. TDU became an important force for reform in the Teamsters. Members of leftist organizations have always been important as leaders and activists inside TDU. Currently, many of these activists are associated with the group Solidarity and the publication *Labor Notes*. In the government-run elections in the Teamsters in 1991 and 1996, TDU supported Carey, although he was not in TDU.

What is particularly controversial among union and political activists is how to evaluate Ron Carey. Even if you consider out of bounds the views of those Teamsters who think the "old guard" should be returned, you will find that opinions vary from almost unqualified support for Carey to unqualified denunciation. For example, our friend Neil from the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* is unqualified in his opposition to Carey, while at least one member of WPAEN tries to justify the actions or inaction of Carey against the Staley workers and the Detroit newspaper workers. *Labor Notes* criticizes Carey for his bourgeois political style, his reliance on capitalist-style, big money campaigning. However, if Carey had been able to stay on the ballot, TDU and *Labor Notes* would have backed him again.

In a situation such as this, neither blanket praise nor blanket condemnation will do.

In the Staley struggle and in the Detroit newspaper struggle, I believe Carey played a bad role and deserves criticism. In the Staley struggle Carey promised to help the workers, but stood back, did not take up the work he promised, and did not interfere with the UPIU leadership as they strangled this struggle. In the Detroit newspaper strike, Carey deserves even harsher criticism. In the first place he did not assist the strikers, the largest group of whom were Teamsters, in spreading their struggle. He participated in suppressing the militant resistance to the scabs at the plant gate which developed over Labor Day in 1996. Then, when the pressure to call a national march in Detroit in solidarity with the strikers became too strong to withstand, he ordered the strikers to surrender unconditionally (as did the other union heads involved), before agreeing to the march. (I wrote some on this question in the last issue of this Journal.)

In evaluating how Carey and the "New Teamsters" performed in the confrontation with UPS, I think the picture is also mixed. In the first place, it should be noted that it was under the "old guard" that UPS instituted the massive use of part-time workers at half the pay rate per hour of full-timers. The "New Teamsters" inherited this situation. The TDU and the *Labor Notes* people give Carey and the Teamster leadership a lot of credit for

fighting hard to turn things around for the UPS workers. I am skeptical of this broad praise, but it looks to me as if the "New Teamsters" have done some positive things. In 1994 UPS unilaterally doubled the weight of packages that one worker could be required to handle by him/herself from 75 lbs. to 150 lbs. UPS stonewalled Teamster efforts to negotiate on this, and Carey called an illegal wildcat strike against UPS. He folded the strike within a few days, however. *Labor Notes* says that he had to because the "old guard" leadership of many of the UPS locals refused to call their members out.

Both the Teamsters and UPS could see clearly that the contract expiration in August of 1997 would be a major battle. The Teamsters made at least some preparations of their membership at least a year ahead of time. All UPS workers were polled on what they thought the crucial issues were. This membership feedback is reported by Carey sympathizers to have been critical in picking the issues on which to fight UPS. In various places UPS workers carried out rallies and demonstrations in the months before the contract expired. A communications network was set up.

From what members of WPAEN observed during the strike, it is obvious that these preparations were spotty in Chicago. The UPS workers at the various UPS locations in the immediate Chicago area are members of Teamsters local 705. This is a huge amalgamated local whose Secretary-Treasurer for the last few years has been Gerry Zero, a supporter of Carey and an officer of the Chicago branch of the Labor Party. He won narrow victories over "old guard" opponents in each of the two local union elections held following Carey's two national wins. During the strike it became clear that support for the union position was not as strong and deep as it needed to be at all the UPS locations. In particular at a giant sorting facility called the CACH, WPAEN members witnessed 300-400 workers cross the picket lines on a Monday morning. The union picket captains at the site insisted that no one interfere with the scabs. This number of workers was not a full shift and it did not signal a general breakdown of the strike, but it was a very worrisome development. Discussions with some workers at the CACH indicated that the Teamsters union apparatus at the CACH was weak and disrespected by the workers.

In the general public relations side of the battle, the Teamsters came out pretty well. The Teamsters Union was able to develop a lot of public sympathy for the plight of part-time workers making a miserable wage. In most cases, and particularly during the first few days of the strike, UPS was not able to stampede its own workers to cross the picket lines, which it seemed they thought they

could do. At the picket lines that WPAEN members visited, UPS management made a big show of driving trucks back and forth through the picket lines with police protection. The UPS workers we talked with didn't seem that concerned about this, however.

The biggest tactical question where members of WPAEN felt that the Teamster leadership was wrong was on the question of how to deal with scabs crossing the picket line. The official Teamster line was not to interfere with them, but just to record their names for possible union disciplinary action later. At the very least we felt that the UPS workers should be warned that massive resistance to scabs might be called for depending on what the company tried. The use of scabs has defeated many strikes in recent years, and UPS workers know this as well as everybody else. If UPS had gone further in trying to break the strike with scabs, the necessity of massive physical opposition to scabs crossing the lines surely would have come up. The strike survived the limited number of scabs who crossed. Some workers tried to resist these scabs, but the Teamster leadership squashed this resistance.

WPAEN had two public meetings relating to the strike, one while it was still going on and one after it was over. Both got a small number of UPS workers to attend and participate. We distributed quite a few flyers to UPS workers and to other workers, calling on workers to shut the company down completely. We were developing proposals for advancing the struggle right up until the strike was settled.

In fact, one of the most enlightening political events relating to the strike took place on the Monday evening right before the strike settlement was announced. A meeting was called, mainly by members of ISO (International Socialist Organization), to form a support committee for the UPS strikers in the Chicago area. Over thirty union and political activists from several groups attended this meeting as well as a representative from Gerry Zero. In the course of this meeting it became clear that some of us at the meeting felt that solidarity with the strikers included giving our own views on issues of tactics which might be different from the policy of the Teamster leadership. In particular we felt we had to disagree with the Teamster policy of not interfering with scabs.

The proposal came up that perhaps the solidarity work could be done through the labor solidarity subcommittee of Jobs With Justice. However, upon direct questioning by a WPAEN member, it became clear that folding into Jobs With Justice meant giving up any right to publish views for general distribution which were not approved by the labor union officials who are on the executive board of

Jobs With Justice. At this point a member of Solidarity proposed that we fold into Jobs With Justice because the role of a support committee is just to mobilize support and accept the leadership of the trade union leaders. In his view, we shouldn't express views opposed to the union leadership. The ISO members who had initially wanted an independent committee changed their minds and supported working within Jobs With Justice. After a vigorous debate, the proposal to work inside Jobs With Justice passed 17 to 13.

The point is that there are activists and groups, considering themselves to be socialists, who are ideologically opposed to criticizing trade union leaderships, at least during a struggle. This is particularly striking because many of these activists realized that the Teamster policy of not resisting scabs was wrong and exposed the Teamsters to grave danger. As a WPAEN activist put it in an email debate after the strike, "If you saw friends walking into a dangerous building, wouldn't you warn them? Or would that be 'telling them what to do'? Maybe it would be nicer to wait for them to get hurt/killed and then tell them? That way, we could be oh, so respectful of their autonomy. And if our warnings were off base, then the others would note that and take it into account, just like most normal people do everyday." We in WPAEN were discussing how to develop our own independent work when we learned that the strike had been settled.

Personally I feel that Carey and the Teamster leadership was not in that strong of a position *vis a vis* UPS by the end of the strike. Yes, the Teamsters had strong public support, and, no, large numbers of Teamsters had not crossed the picket lines. However, the Teamsters Union was low on cash, and some cracks in the workers' ranks were beginning to appear (for example, the 300-400 workers who crossed the lines at the CACH in Chicago). Since the Teamster line was not to resist scabs crossing the lines, the Teamsters were very vulnerable to massive strikebreaking. It seems to me possible that if the strike had lasted much longer UPS might have been able to organize a massive return to work by UPS workers or they might have tried to hire large numbers of scabs. Of course this would have been a big gamble for UPS which they could have lost big, especially since they had little public support. In sum, I believe UPS was in desperate need of a settlement, but I don't think the Teamsters were all that strong either.

UPS agreed to pretty much what the Teamsters had been asking for all along. The attack on the pension fund was turned away. New full-time jobs were promised. Wage increases for all workers were negotiated. From the point of getting pretty much what was asked for, the

Teamsters won. However, looking more closely at the settlement, one can see some issues. One issue is that the Teamsters never asked for a very high percentage of new full time jobs in the first place. Another issue is that UPS has an escape clause to get out of granting new full-time jobs if they don't make a profit. The huge wage gap between part-time and full-time workers remains basically intact. Even the new full-time jobs are not going to pay as much as the current full-time jobs. Furthermore, nothing appears to have been done on the horrible health and safety conditions. Health and safety don't appear to have been on the table at all. Clearly this settlement makes a few improvements for the UPS workers but leaves them with many problems unresolved.

The general public perception of the UPS strike is that the Teamsters won a smashing victory. Many workers are feeling good that our side finally won one. Even though a look at the fine print of the agreement may call for a less rosy assessment, just the feeling that the tide may be turning a little in our favor is helpful. Workers feel somewhat more inclined to stand up and fight the outrages their employers are shoving down their throats.

The capitalists also feel that they lost one. Most activists are convinced that the Justice Department's decision to force a re-run of the last Teamster Presidential election and to disqualify Carey as a candidate is payback for this public humiliation of UPS. In the months since the UPS strike many political activists, including some WPAEN members, have been debating what stand to take in regard to Carey's disqualification and what the Teamster members who want further reform inside the Teamsters should do.

TDU held a convention in Cleveland in November at which Carey spoke. This was shortly after Carey was ruled off the ballot. Carey was still the hero to the TDU leadership and much of the rank and file. Two proposals for petitions were circulated at the convention. One, which was backed by the leadership, called on the government to investigate Hoffa, Jr. The other called on Carey to continue to lead the Teamsters and to fight the federal government's interference in Teamster affairs. This second one was not supported by the TDU leadership and apparently has gone nowhere. The fact that Carey is fighting only on the legal front to get back on the ballot and does not seem to be mobilizing any mass campaign has undercut any possibility for any big campaign such as this. The government has started investigating Hoffa, Jr., and the election is put off for 45 days at least from the supposed schedule of mid-February.

In the wake of TDU's rather weak response to the government's attack on the Teamsters, a WPAEN mem-

ber proposed a campaign to get the government out of Teamster affairs and to let Carey run. Others in WPAEN have agreed with the demand for the government to get out of Teamster affairs but wanted a more critical stance towards Carey. In fact, as a general principle I think that government, which is run by the capitalist class, should not have any say in how a union is run. At the same time, I share the reservations about promoting Carey. Only in the very limited sense that it is somewhat better for the Teamsters to have Carey as President than Hoffa could I see anything positive to say about Carey. The discussion of how such a campaign would be run has clarified some opposing political views, but I am not aware of any of these campaigns actually going very far among Teamster Union members.

Carey is basically in the mold of the mainstream of the trade union bureaucracy of this country, which is to say that he is part of the problem. He promotes the politics of the Democratic Party, at least the "liberal" wing of it. He limits workers role in running their union and their struggles to very narrow, safe (for the bureaucrats) channels. Within these channels he promotes workers activity more than the mobsters do. To develop the working class struggle to the point where it can challenge the social and economic structure of our country, workers have to break out of the box that Carey wants to keep them in.

Building a working class movement which is independent of the capitalist politicians and the trade union bureaucrats is a big key to advancing the struggle against

the capitalist system. The Teamsters strike against UPS provides another example of how difficult and complex this task is. At the very lowest level, I think it helps workers to feel that they won a major struggle. The UPS workers did not advance much in organizing themselves independently in any sense, nor did their understanding of this need advance much. WPAEN did put some effort into trying to help workers advance beyond the limitations imposed on their struggle by Carey and his apparatus. We certainly had some effect, but nothing major. We did help to sharpen the exposure of trends such as ISO and Solidarity as followers of the trade union bureaucracy. <

Here are some of the sources I used for this article:
Labor Notes, issues from Aug., 1997, through Jan., 1998.

DAN LABOTZ, speech at a forum in Chicago after the strike. Dan is a founding member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union and has written a book entitled, "Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union".

Email exchanges between WPAEN members and other trade union and other left-wing political activists. I can make this material available if someone is really interested.

For your reference, flyers produced by WPAEN on the UPS Strike are included on pages 48 and 49.

UPS STRIKE: A FIGHT FOR OUR FUTURE- WHAT'S AT STAKE & HOW WE CAN WIN

**Public Meeting with open discussion:
3-5 PM, Sat. Aug. 16th, UE Hall, 37 So. Ashland,
Chicago**

All working people have a stake in the UPS fight:

This strike is about part-timers getting a living wage and full-time work. As a striker said, "These companies all have the formula. They don't take you on full time. They don't pay benefits. Then their profits go through the roof." UPS owners made over \$1Billion last year in profits off these workers, yet the part-timers struggle to buy food! Unemployed, part- and full-timers, this is our fight! We can help make our future!

More and more corporate owners are replacing full-time jobs with part-timers, temps, contract workers and 'independent contractors'. Right now, 38,000,000 of us are part-timers- up triple since 1968. Sears, for example, went from 80% full-time to 80% part-time since 1982. Record profits and salaries for the owning class - less money and more hardship for us in the working class. We all have a stake here.

Most UPS workers (110,000) are part-time and average \$9/hr. Full-timers (70,000) get \$20/hr.; the owners pocket the difference. When this two-tier pay scale started in '82, the difference was \$4/hr. The part-timers haven't gone up since! If UPS can beat these workers, other employers will go on hiring part-timers and firing full-timers. If we help the strikers win, that'll encourage others to stand up and fight for:

JOBS FOR ALL AT A LIVING WAGE!

Sponsored by: Working People's Action & Education Network, 773-935-5255, c/o Box 578427, 60657

SHUT DOWN BIG BROWN- AND SPREAD IT AROUND!

Right now, the strike is pretty solid, but that can change fast. Strikers are hanging tough. Public support is high- especially around the part-timer issue. Business is way down. UPS looks like they may make a deal.

If this deal doesn't go down, UPS has a 2-part strategy: Get Clinton to sign a Taft-Hartley order to break the strike or UPS will bring in scabs. First, UPS paints the union as undemocratic and cries about the customers' hardships. If Clinton doesn't break the strike, they'll threaten to fire everyone, start a 'back-to-work' move with scared, broke workers, get injunctions to keep the gates open, and recruit outside scabs. Today that may seem unlikely, but do we want to just watch it happen? We say:

Shut Down Big Brown!

Stop all UPS shipments! No Scabs!

Right now, the union's policy is to sit back and let trucks and scabs go through the lines. That might look good today, but nothing stands still in a fight. Every minute, UPS prepares their next blows. We can't out-wait them. They've got deep pockets and the law. Standing still invites defeat. No trucks, no scabs!

Elect strike committees to make it happen!

To win this fight, more workers must get active. Elect the most dedicated strikers.

Hold regular union meetings-- to get information and to decide how to fight.

Mobilize Working Class Solidarity!

Spread the struggle for Living-Wage Jobs for All! The UPS strike is for all of us! UPS is just one part of the corporate attack on the working class, replacing full-time jobs with lower-paid part-timers. Sears, for example, went from 80% full-time to 80% part-time. Today there are 38 million part-timers, up triple since 1968. There's a lot of support -- union and non-union. Organize solidarity committees and marches. Let's rally that support on the picket lines to shut UPS down! Bring this fight to other workplaces and our communities.

Organize a National Teamsters' Strike and Workers' Day of Action

Over 1 million Teamsters have a stake in this fight. Tell the leaders to call and prepare for a national Teamsters' strike and rallies by all workers and unemployed to **SHUT DOWN BIG BROWN!**

If the union leaders take up this policy, the strike can be a victory
for UPS strikers and the whole working class.

If they don't -- they will be responsible for the defeat.

UPS strikers will have to organize to make the leaders take up this policy.

Working People's Action and Education Network 773-235-5257 or 773-955-4899 (espanol)

(24) Vol. 27, "5th All-Russia Congress of Soviets," 519.

(25) "Extraordinary 6th All-Russia Congress of Soviets," 141.

(26) Carr estimates that at this time, the Kulaks formed less than 10%, poor peasants 40% and middle peasants 50% (160). Lenin's calculations were quite different: out of a total of 15 mil. peasant families, 10 mil. poor peasants, 3 mil. middle peasants, 2 mil. rich peasants (Vol. 28, "Forward to the Last, Decisive Fight! 55). The Committees of Poor Peasants were retained in the Ukraine after it was returned to Soviet control, until NEP.

(27) i.e., the Mensheviks and also some Bolsheviks. For example, Zinoviev, seeking to discredit the Committees, reported that there was, in fact, no "genuine elective principle" about their appointments: "They were nominated by representatives of the executive committee [of the Soviet] or of the party organization coming together"

(Carr, II, p. 54).

(28) Vol. 27, "'Left-Wing' Childishness," 339.

(29) Two new parties, the *Narodnik* Communists and the Revolutionary Communists, separated from the Left-SRs after the insurrection. After vowing allegiance to the proletarian government, they were allowed to merge with the Bolsheviks.

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Carr, Edward H. *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vols. I & II. NY: Norton, 1952.

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MLP, Continued from page 27

chance to hit at their bosses in a small way and to gain some political experience. Invariably, people passing leaflets on to friends would wind up discussing the content. Since they also got to work closely with the MLP activists, it provided us with the opportunity to draw them further

into Party work. Study circles was one of the next steps. Bringing workers out to political demonstrations and meetings was another. Sometimes we were successful in organizing factory workers with no experience in the left to come out to demonstrations and rallies and distribute MLP literature along with us. [To Be Continued]◊