

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES. UNITE!

The Workers' Advocate

Supplement



50¢

Vol. 5 #4

VOICE OF THE MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY, USA

April 15, 1989

The Whidbey Island anti-skinhead protest and the debate on how to fight racism

Recently, at the confrontations of the anti-racist movement with the skinheads, and of the pro-choice activists with the anti-abortion fanatics, the issue of militancy versus liberal tactics has become sharp. The Democratic Party politicians, the liberals, and their reformist hangers-on in the left, have opposed confrontation of the racists and the anti-abortion fanatics. The Workers' Advocate has reported on the attempts of NOW and similar forces to divert the pro-choice militants into legalism, cheering the police, and letting the abortion fanatics alone. Here we reprint the March 25 leaflet of the MLP-Seattle denouncing the liberal tactics of the trotskyist FSP in the anti-racist struggle.

Today, black people in America face increasing racial discrimination and police harassment. They have suffered setbacks in employment, education, housing, and in other spheres, as have other oppressed minorities. And now white supremacist hate movements such as the nazis and skinheads are receiving much promotion in the mass media.

These trends are not the product of some perverse "human nature," nor are they caused by the ignorance and backwardness of the poor and downtrodden elements in society. In part, they stem from the the large corporations' insatiable drive for profits, a drive that has been encouraged in every way during the Reagan years. Squeezing extra profits out of the oppressed minorities is part of this general anti-worker offensive.

The government is also bracing itself for future economic and political crises by strengthening racist reaction. For these reasons it seems clear that the racist offensive will only intensify in the coming period.

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Recently anti-racist protests have become more frequent. And activists are debating the best policies for building this movement.

On Dec. 10, 1988 a spirited picket of about 300 people took place against a nazi-skinhead gathering on Whidbey Island, Wash. This was a blow against the racists who

could only muster a dozen or so for their nearby ceremony despite large prior promotion of it for days in the Seattle daily press. They were gathering about a half-mile away in the same State Park.

At this action a dispute over tactics broke out. Many activists wished to march over and shout slogans at least within hearing range of the nazis. But the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) members that were leading the picket line disagreed. And FSP would not allow the issue to be discussed by the protest as a whole. They used a series of methods to block discussion, including drowning out the activists with bullhorns and physical restraint by a squad of Guardian Angels. Needless to say, this scandalous behavior by the FSP generated much indignation among the anti-racist activists.

Now, in an attempt to defend themselves, FSP has published an editorial in their paper, *Freedom Socialist*, of Jan-Mar. 1989. (Appended.) This editorial creates a fantasy world in which the FSP heroically defended the protesters from a grave threat of "adventurism" and "violent extremism." We wish to reply to FSP's editorial because the Whidbey events provide a small, yet graphic

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From the Third Congress of the MLP, USA: On the work among postal workers

Excerpted from a speech at the Third Congress, Fall 1988:

The postal workers are a large and important section of the American proletariat. There are some 800,000 postal employees across the country. Moreover, the postal system is a vital link in the entire capitalist economy. Today our Party is organizing among postal workers in various cities. This report will deal with work among postal workers in our city.

It should be noted, however, that our local experience is not being raised to promote it as a universal model. We have been at this work for just two years. And we have only begun the process of trying out various methods and forms and summing up their value. Nevertheless there have been some initial successes. As well, we have been fortunate to have comrades or long-time supporters at several different workplaces. This has given us the opportunity to organize among both clerks and carriers, and to make some ties with the mailhandlers as well.

Lessons from the Militant Struggles of the Postal Workers in the 1970's

Today unrest is brewing among the postal workers. As this unrest breaks out, the struggle will face a number of issues which are left over from the militant motion that developed among postal workers in the 1970's. The movement of the 1970's faded out. Nonetheless there are important lessons from that period. Therefore, before describing our present work, it is worth taking a brief glance at this history.

The largest action to date by postal workers was the strike of 1970. This involved some hundreds of thousands of workers and shut off mail service to about half the country. The basic issue was wages: postal workers at this time were paid so low that in New York City, for example--where the cost of living was higher than many other places in the country--many full-time workers were also receiving welfare benefits.

The strike sent the government into a panic. President Nixon declared a state of emergency and sent in the National Guard to move the mail in New York City, where the wildcat began. But the workers refused to bow down to the strikebreaking of the capitalist government.

The workers also defied the national trade union leadership which opposed the strike. Incidentally, it is this strike in which the present national leaders of the letter carriers' and clerks' unions, Sombrotto and Biller, first made a name for themselves as supposedly militant opponents of the old bureaucrats.

The Opportunists and the '78 Wildcat

The 1970 strike showed the potential power of the postal workers when they broke through the bounds imposed on them by the trade union bureaucracy. In order for the postal workers' struggle to develop, the strivings for independence from the union bureaucracy had to be pushed forward. In the early 1970's, several opportunist groups attempted to organize in the postal service. But they proved unequal to the task. The biggest test of these groups came in the 1978 wildcat strike.

The 1978 wildcat was another big attempt by the workers to break with the sellout union leadership. The wildcat broke out when workers got wind of a sellout contract just negotiated by the hacks. The struggle began at the New Jersey Bulk Mail Center (BMC) and it spread to the BMC outside San Francisco. Not many facilities followed suit, however, because the government came out with court orders against it and the union leaders were quick to comply. Nonetheless the wildcat managed to be effective for several days.

The opportunists were in the middle of the wildcat movement on both coasts. At the San Francisco BMC, the wildcat was organized by a coalition dominated by the opportunists. Among the most prominent were the Maoist revisionists of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS).

The opportunists had much rhetoric against the union hacks. They actually organized the wildcat and other actions which upset the hacks. There were also organizations like "Uprising" (organized by the Revolutionary Union, the predecessor of RCP) which were supposed to be militant rank-and-file organizations. The militant appearance of the opportunists attracted a section of workers who hated the bureaucrats and wanted a real fight against management.

But the overall perspective of the opportunists, despite shades of difference among them, was that nothing could advance without the union bureaucrats. Thus the wildcat was not called by the opportunists with the idea of developing a militant struggle, independent of the labor traitors. Just the opposite. The idea of the wildcat was to pressure the hacks, who, they thought, had to be the ones to spread it to other areas. The main illusion pushed was the idea that the bureaucrats, with some pressure, could be changed into defenders of the workers. In this way the opportunists kept the workers tied to the trade union bureaucracy, the same bureaucracy which was working with all its might to block the wildcat from spreading.

Within this general stand of the San Francisco coalition, there were different shades of views and disagreements. The LRS represented one of the more openly treacherous trends. The LRS was terrified by the prospects of a wildcat, although it appears they actually voted for it in

the coalition. In LRS's own summary of the 1978 strike they presented a whole list of reasons to oppose any action not sanctioned by the hacks, or at least the local hacks who postured as opposed to the sellout contract. The LRS cursed such actions as "premature" and "irresponsible." The LRS was most anxious to end the strike. And they considered the main lesson of the strike was the need to bring a few militant-sounding types into the trade union bureaucracy.

The RCP had a more militant approach, but to the same ends. They had more combative rhetoric against the bureaucrats and in favor of mass struggle. But RCP, and its predecessor, RU, had been mired in a narrow economist approach to the workers. They lacked faith in the revolutionary organization of the workers. [The remarks in the speech describe the RU/RCP of the 1970's. Since then, in the name of criticizing economism, the RCP has given up on the industrial workers and on the workers' economic struggle altogether. This has fully verified--what we had pointed out since the early 70's--its lack of faith in the revolutionary capacity of the working class.]

One manifestation of the weak stand of the RCP towards the union bureaucrats was their belief that the bulk of workers would not move unless ordered to by the hacks. Thus, in 1978 they were talking about "jam(ing) local union leadership around our key demands."

Here's an example of how RCP's views worked in practice. On the one hand, they cursed Moe Biller, who was then leader of the New York City APWU (American Postal Workers Union--the clerks' union). On the other hand, they assured the workers that Biller's local was certain to join in the strike, which would guarantee its success.

It seems no matter how loudly the opportunists shouted against the bureaucrats, they could not conceive of a truly independent struggle.

The stand of the opportunists hindered the 1978 wild-cat. Worse yet, they were not able to use the militant motion of the 70's to help consolidate a trend and organization truly independent of the labor traitors. Following the 1978 strike, the motion among the postal workers began a period of decline. Nevertheless, if the opportunists had followed a policy of independence from the trade union bureaucrats during the active period of the 70's, it might have been possible to maintain at least the core of a militant trend during the time of ebb. As it was, it would not be too long before the opportunists collapsed into complete liquidationism.

The lack of independent organization has meant that for much of the next decade, the postal workers have been left at the mercy of postal management. It has also left them at the mercy of the sellout bureaucrats like Biller and Sombrotto who feigned sympathy for the 1978 wild-cat and used this to propel themselves into national office.

As the postal workers' struggle picks up once again, undoubtedly new militant-sounding bureaucrats will step forward with rhetoric against the Billers and Sombrottos.

A crucial lesson of the 70's is that one cannot rely on such leaders; only independent organization based among the rank and file can organize and carry through the struggle.

Today it has fallen to our Party, the MLP, to help push the independent motion forward as part of building a revolutionary trend among the postal workers.

Now we will look at some aspects of the work in our area to build up the independent motion and organization among the postal workers.

Work Among Postal Workers

Today the situation among postal workers hasn't boiled over into any large-scale struggles. However, small-scale struggles often break out. In our city, the resistance to management's productivity drive has resulted in a fairly frequent number of small skirmishes breaking out. Our Party has paid attention to these initial stirrings of resistance and worked hard to find forms of mass action and organization to help advance the struggle.

In this speech, we will take up two examples of our work in these types of skirmishes: one example from a struggle of letter carriers, and the other from a struggle of postal workers at a big mail processing facility.

Carriers Fight Route Adjustment

We begin with the struggle of letter carriers at a postal station against route adjustment which occurred in the spring and summer of 1987. In order to speed up the workers, postal management sought to eliminate certain routes and lengthen others. Carriers became angry and wanted to fight back.

One of the forms that proved important in the course of this struggle were mass meetings held outside of work. The purpose of these meetings was to set the course of action for the struggle. The plan for a meeting was floated in a gathering of seven carriers during work where it was enthusiastically supported. A few of these carriers spread the word of the meeting and also took a leaflet around the station which provided direction on the route issue.

The first meeting outside of work attracted about 12 carriers (of about 30 on duty that day). Word of this meeting caused excitement among other carriers. The second meeting a week later drew 18 workers. All told, about two-thirds of the carriers attended one or the other meeting.

At these gatherings, the *Workers' Voice*, the local Party paper, and the previously-mentioned leaflet were circulated. The agitation in favor of having action independent of the union hacks was popular.

The Role Played by the Meetings

There are several reasons these meetings were valuable:
**The meetings helped break down the extreme isolation among carriers who work alone all day and seldom

get to meet in any numbers during work. This helps explain why meetings outside of the workplace were so popular a form.

**The meetings functioned as a militant forum for voicing all the daily atrocities of the post office. This helped make individual outrages the common experience of all the workers and helped build unity.

**The meetings provided a means to debate the tactics of the struggle among a wide section of carriers. Thus the decisions of these meetings were decisions of a broad section of the workers and carried great authority.

**The meetings proved to the carriers that they could organize without relying on the trade union bureaucracy.

**The meetings were an excellent vehicle to allow the MLP supporter at the station to carry out Party agitation, distribute literature and make contacts.

These are among the reasons the form caught on.

The idea of holding a station-wide meeting outside of work has become an accepted form at the station. For example, when workloads were recently increased, the immediate response among many carriers was that it was time to hold another meeting. However, it is important to note that these meetings do not yet reflect an ongoing form of organization among the workers. The workers see the need for such meetings only when the anger over something reaches a high point. Being able to convene such meetings very much depends on the level of discontent among the workers.

Work Slowdown Organized

What course of action then did the carriers decide upon at the meetings? They decided to take up the demand for restoration of the eliminated routes. To back up this demand, a work slowdown was agreed upon. This involved having carriers take extra time to walk their now-longer routes.

This mass action, while still quite modest, represented a significant development in the workers' resistance. Prior to this, individual carriers would, from time to time, extend their work time to deal with heavy workloads. There is even a procedure set up by management which, theoretically at least, allows a carrier to extend their time on their route when necessary. Even the union sometimes pushed this individual and legal means of struggle as the solution to overwork. In practice, management harassment often prevented the isolated carrier from requesting extra time.

In contrast to these individual attempts of resistance, the work slowdown involved the simultaneous mobilization of most of the carriers. It was carried out every day for weeks, and not only where workloads were the heaviest. This, naturally, gave the struggle some force, and it rang up a costly overtime bill for management.

Of course this form of struggle is still just a beginning in terms of organizing collective resistance. But it definitely helped instill the idea of mass action among the

carriers. And we have also been able to use the example at this station to encourage the idea of independently organizing at other stations.

Besides the decision to have a job action, the meeting also approved the distribution of buttons produced by the Party saying "Restore the Routes." A number of carriers helped sell the button and virtually the whole station wore them, helping to build an atmosphere of solidarity.

Other Forms

In organizing among the letter carriers, the Party has also utilized various other forms. One of the problems in organizing letter carriers here and in other cities is that they are divided up into many small workplaces across the city. This makes it impossible for the Party to reach the vast bulk of carriers through direct distribution of agitation at the workplaces. Thus, we have tried to take advantage of any opportunity that comes our way to reach the other stations. In particular, agitation against the citywide attacks that have at various times been launched against the letter carriers allows our agitation to spread since it concerns issues common to large numbers of carriers.

One way of reaching the other stations has been through contacts at these stations. The contacts include people who know our comrades because they used to work at their station, carriers who rotate between several stations and know us from one of them, and friends of carriers at stations where our supporters presently work.

One way that we stayed in touch with these scattered contacts was by putting them on a mailing list for local leaflets. Through this method, some contacts were able to follow our postal work for the past year. This has helped put us in position to mobilize these contacts when things heat up.

These are mainly low-level contacts. But we have been able to circulate leaflets and buttons through them. In a recent struggle against a city-wide increase in workloads, for example, these methods enabled us to extend our literature and/or button distribution to four stations besides those where our comrades work. In fact when the increased workload issue came up at a station where a comrade used to work, a contact called up our comrade for literature, buttons and advice on organizing the struggle.

To reach other stations, we have also been able to utilize a union-organized "rap session," a meeting called to acquaint the newer employees with the bureaucrats. We carried out distribution outside and verbal agitation inside. With the Party helping expose the labor traitors, things actually got quite hot for the union hacks during this "rap session."

Recently we were even able to utilize the normally-boring monthly union meeting. A delegation of carriers and ex-carriers from one station were mobilized to this meeting to denounce the bureaucrats failure to fight increase workloads. The bureaucrats really took it on the chin and the meeting was a big exposure of the anti-

worker nature of the bureaucrats.

The Struggle of Keyers at a Big Mail Processing Facility

I would now like to mention one other example of our organizing efforts. This involves a mail processing facility, which is a big place where large numbers of workers are concentrated. The concentration of workers at the big facilities, and their vital role in the operation of the postal system, means they have an especially important role to play in the postal workers' struggle.

One struggle that developed at this facility was the struggle of parcel post keyers against job combination. Over a year ago, postal management nationwide converted a two-person keying job into a one-person keying job.

Since momentum was building up against one-man keying, it was decided to launch a plant-wide petition campaign to help unite and organize the workers in preparation for attempting a slowdown. The petition linked the issues of the speed-up to repetitive work injuries associated with one-man keying. It raised the demand for two-man keying or rotation to another job after four hours.

One of the ideas behind the petition was to spread the struggle to other crafts throughout the plant. We wanted to promote the idea of the whole workforce taking a stand against an attack on one section. This would help to break down the segregation that management and the union leaders try to foster between crafts.

To build up the workers' experience and organization, we tried to find ways to get workers actively involved in the campaign. Several took around copies of the petition, having discussions and collecting signatures. One passed it to a keyer on another shift who was highly effective in spreading the campaign to that shift. As well, keyers in different departments were organized to stand up and argue for the petition at the departmental safety talks.

In this way, we succeeded in spreading the petition widely throughout the plant. The isolation between crafts began to crumble as well. At first there were keyers who were skeptical about even discussing the issue with other crafts. But the overwhelming support of the other crafts for the keyers' struggle helped overcome this skepticism and develop a sense of solidarity.

We were unable, however, to develop the work slowdown for a variety of reasons. For one thing, the very success of the petition caused management to back off a bit. That, along with a decrease in mail volume, for the time being alleviated somewhat the problems faced by the keyers.

Confronting the Union Officials

In order to further mobilize the workers into the campaign, we decided to try and turn the presenting of the signed petition to the union into a mass confrontation.

A dozen clerks gathered at the end of the afternoon shift to present the petition to some APWU stewards and demand that they account for themselves. The experience was an eye-opener because the union representatives came out with all their anti-worker venom. The more inexperienced workers were really shocked. One worker had to go up later and ask a steward if she was in fact a union representative and not postal management!

Combining Party and Non-Party Agitation

A key issue in the petition campaign was the relation between the non-Party petition and the Party agitation.

While the petition was non-Party, we wanted to keep the closest possible connection between the keyers' struggle and the Party. Therefore, during the petition campaign we distributed three issues of the *Workers' Voice* carrying articles on the keyers' struggle. The articles promoted the petition campaign as well as broader questions in fighting the capitalist productivity drive. The result was that often when workers discussed the keyers' struggle, they would say: "Yes, I read the Marxist-Leninist sheet on that."

Another way the campaign allowed Party influence to spread was that it allowed us a chance to meet a number of militant workers in different departments and introduce them to Party literature. This helped develop the idea among the workers that if something is going on, they should bring it up to a Party contact.

For instance, during the campaign a mailhandler told us about job combination going on in his department. The *Workers' Voice* addressed it in the next issue, which was popular among the mailhandlers. Now when workers get mad at management, they ask when the next *Workers' Voice* is coming out.

Combining Economic Agitation with Political Work

So far we have focused on our efforts to organize the workplace struggle. However, for the workers to develop a revolutionary consciousness, they must not be confined to just the economic struggle. The workers must also get an all-round political education and be drawn into the mass movements in society.

From the beginning of our work among the postal workers, we have taken care to have all-sided economic and political agitation. The distribution of *Workers' Advocate* is regularly carried out at facilities where we have outside distribution. We also have included articles on a number of political questions in our local *Workers' Voice* postal agitation. This has included reprints of political material from the *Workers' Voice*, as well as articles on the anti-racist struggle, struggles of other sections of workers, appeals for local demonstrations, articles on Central America, etc.

We have tried to find ways to integrate political campaigns of the Party into the postal work. One example

was the campaign for the roof for a Nicaraguan workers' hall. Besides the agitation on this at several workplaces, at one facility we set up a table and photo display and raised some money in contributions from a couple of dozen workers.

Workers have shown a good deal of interest in the

political agitation. We are able to distribute *Workers' Advocate* in relatively high numbers where we do outside distribution.

This concludes our remarks on some aspects of the Party's work among postal workers in our city. ■

Discussion following the speech "On the Marxist-Leninist concept of socialism"

From the Third Congress of the MLP, USA
Fall 1988

Below is a summary of the discussion at the Congress following the speech on issues that arose in study groups (see the speech "On the party-wide study of the Marxist-Leninist concept of socialism" in the Jan. 15 Supplement).

Statements on the same subject have, as far as possible, been grouped together. Also, due to the unsatisfactory nature of the method of transcription, some statements could not be reproduced at all, while others had to be reconstructed from fragments. Nor did comrades have an opportunity to revise their statements for publications. The general range of issues raised in the discussion, which is its significance rather than the precise formulations, nevertheless comes through, and we extend our apologies to comrades whose comments have been inadvertently lost or mangled.

The discussion was chaired by two comrades, the comrade who gave the speech ("Ch3") and another comrade ("Ch4"). "Fl" refers to comments from the floor.

Ch4: We'll open the floor for discussion on the last speech. Since the speech covered various issues from the study groups and of theory as well as questions regarding the historical assessment of things in the Soviet Union, I would like to urge, if comrades have questions about the history of the Soviet Union per se, to leave those questions for the discussion on the next speech.

About wage equalization

Fl: I have a question about the different types of work. I think the comrade talked about time value. Maybe you could expand on it more. My question concerns, for instance, types of work that create more value, so that one does not have to work as long and yet creates the same value. So how much value do you produce for society.

Ch3: Let me reformulate the question just a bit. It question involves the difference between skilled and unskilled labor, and the question of how much each would be paid under socialism, considering the matter of hours worked.

I have a four-part reply on this.

One. Under capitalism, it is undoubtedly the case that skilled labor, compound labor, imparts more value to the commodity that it's embodied in, in the same amount of time, than unskilled labor does. It imparts more value to the commodity in the same amount of time. This is reflected in lots of different ways in society. Ideologically, it's reflected in this view that more-skilled people are better than unskilled people. That is an ideological reflection of the economic side of capitalism.

Now, under socialism, the idea is to not only reduce the disparity between skilled and unskilled labor, but to raise the unskilled to the level of skilled, and have the skilled participate in a certain amount of the necessary, unskilled, more drudgery-type work that has to be done. You want to equalize those phenomena. The other thing you want to strive for is the equalization of pay for both. That's the second point.

The third point is that in the transition period you have such phenomena as bribery of the more skilled and concessions from the principle of equality in various ways.

The fourth point I wanted to make is that even in socialism proper, though, it's probably the case that you can't eliminate differences totally between different fields of work. There's some types of work that are more arduous than others. Let's take an example like mining, and compare that to being a shipping clerk or something like that, where you're not necessarily busy all the time. Under these conditions, insofar as you haven't eliminated the differences between skilled and unskilled, between arduous and less arduous, it seems that you would have to pay them somewhat differently. Or, at least, one's hourly pay might be computed so that, if you work an hour, that's equivalent to 1.2 average hours. A shipping clerk, working an hour, that's maybe worth .8 average hours. It seems conceivable that you would have to have these sorts of differences. Otherwise, why would people want to work the more arduous job, and what would be the incentive to go into that line of work?

This is just a tentative-type reply.

Fl: One of the impressions I have from reading Marx on this point is that not only does it involve, as the comrade

points out, trying to get people to do both, to raise the level of the unskilled and to get the skilled to do some of the more unskilled stuff, but also it involves the question of mental and manual labor, the whole cultural question, raising the working class, the working population, for the purpose of state administration, for a whole variety of different jobs. Working people are able to do these things on a higher level, more able to do these things now, than they were in the Soviet Union at that time.

But it also has to do, I think, with something else Marx had in mind about labor--about what our idea is that I'm a machinist, that's my trade, my skill, my job--that people would be versed in a lot of different jobs, and I don't see why not. Or even just like they "talk" about in the post office, people get rotated out of the most arduous jobs to the easier jobs--sometimes more arduous, sometimes less arduous. So with all this mix of these types of work, there would be some kind of absolute standard, an hour of labor time. He says that's a fairly high level, this is really socialism. And there is the issue of things to get there ... that's another complication.

Fl: Yes, that was my question. When you're talking about the issue of the possible unequal accounting of the hours between the skilled, or the arduous and less arduous work, were you talking about socialism proper or during the transition period?

Ch4: During socialism proper. One of the formulations we've used is--all of these formulations are somewhat tentative--is that you strive toward an equalization of pay. But it's not like on a certain day you set that everything will be equal: a coal miner's hour of work will be at the same intensity and arduousness as somebody else's, and they'll be paid equally for the one labor hour. There's a certain level of abstraction here; it's something you strive towards. But even under socialism, where it's one of the things you are trying to achieve--whether you achieve full equality in one day or not is not so much the issue, because you're actually striving to get beyond that kind of equality altogether--even under socialism you would not have reached the stage where you could still say there was no more arduous and less arduous forms of labor. Marx raises the issue of intensity and duration; I think that has to be taken into account.

Fl: Isn't the question of inequality in wages between skilled and unskilled somewhat tempered in socialist society by self-sacrifice? It isn't just a question of things like dollar amounts that remind you of concepts of justice on scales. There would be a heavy promotion of self-sacrifice and socialist ethics, more and more all the time.

Fl: It is implied that in socialism there is equalizing pay, the same pay for the same hours of work. You mentioned cases of more pay for harder work. For most of the cases I can think of right now, the job is harder because the

capitalist makes it harder. When they put me to sweep up the floor by myself, it is a hard job, to do it all alone. They should make changes. ... So the only thing I can venture is that value is the total hours of work.

Ch4: I think that's in general where you want to head, but you can't be categorical about it because there is the issue of differences of intensity of labor in different kinds of occupations. You can't negate that completely by saying its just a question that the capitalists make certain jobs harder than others. I think there are certain issues which can't be ignored which make it very difficult to equate the labor hour of one worker to the labor hour of another worker. Of course it depends on the conditions of the productive capacity of the society and what the jobs entail and so forth. But the point we are trying to make is not to be categorical about these things.

Fl: The point is the difference (apparently two types of jobs are compared). One is skilled, and the other unskilled. I think that is where the complexity arises.

Ch4: No, the question we've been talking about is the question of intensity, of arduousness. Skilled and unskilled is a slightly different issue. The point on skilled and unskilled, the point that the comrade was raising earlier, is that one of the differences between capitalism and socialism is this issue that compound labor doesn't exist in socialism in the sense that a skill is no longer something you pay for acquiring. The state bears the expense for acquiring it, and from that angle a certain change takes place. Even there you can't be absolutely categorical because if a worker is working eight hours a day and then goes to night school and so forth to acquire a separate skill, you haven't reached a situation where the state completely takes care of it. You would have to take that into account.

But in general you can't make the distinction of skilled and unskilled. The other thing is you can't make the distinction that mental labor per se is worth more, is qualitatively an arduous labor, versus manual labor; I think you'd have to have separate categories of arduousness among each, among mental labor and among manual labor. The very issue of paying officials workmen's wages implies that Marx and Engels felt you could not make that distinction between production work and administrative work.

The significance of the demand for equality

Fl: Here's one thing that comes up in discussion with workers about this. They say, what happens when you have a family and are buying for a family. [Refers to the differences between two workers who get the same pay, but one is providing for many children, and to the relation of this to the differences between the principle of "to each according to his work," and the communist

principle "to each according to his needs."] So I was wondering, how do we argue on this question?

Fl: I think the point, comrades, is very important. This is one reason why the significance of the question of equalization of wages should not be overglorified. It is something important. It's been pointed out that it's a principle of socialism, and I agree; it's a principle of how the dictatorship of the proletariat functions. But to me it's one of the most graphic examples that socialism is not communism. You still have a long, long way to go. And it's one of the most graphic expressions of what the phrase "bourgeois right" is under socialism. That's why it's necessary to develop the productive forces in society till you really can have distribution according to need. So I think it's a very good point to balance the entire discussion of the significance of equalization of wages; it's quite limited in terms of bringing into being a just society, which is what we want, a society that accurately fulfills the needs of the masses.

Fl: There's a quote from Marx, he's talking about the Commune. He points to one of the central features, equalization. The point of which is to do away with careerism, with somebody seeking to have a privileged position. Equalization strikes at that to undercut it.

Fl: I think on this we are confusing various things. Somewhere Marx and Engels said that the only point to equality is the abolition of classes. To dream of perfect equality is not what our goal is. It is theoretically impossible.

The question of equalization is important, for all the reasons the speech pointed out. And it has the advantage that the masses have this very widely, deeply held idea that one of the things we want to do is this. And there is a certain liberation sense, you are no longer oppressed by people making 5,000 times what you make. But the issue of equalization also has a touch of [suppression]; as long as you're equalizing wages, you are equalizing against something. In the first period you're equalizing against the bourgeoisie which has high salaries, against this, against that. Even later on you're still equalizing against something you're against--bureaucrats, against the rising up of a new strata, etc.

It's not your total goal that you want to get exactly the same thing someone else gets. As the comrade pointed out [who talked about self-sacrifice], what about people who do well beyond what they have to do? For example, people who join the Party have to work, and beyond that carry out their political work and all sorts of things, etc. If your goal was only equalization, why would you do this? Its taking on inequality. The goal is liberation.

Equalization is a tool, one thing on the way to where you want to go. But by the time you get anywhere near absolute wage equalization you start to move off wages altogether and start a new, classless society. So again, I'm

not saying that wage equalization has no role; it's very important; but it's not the fundamental goal you're inspiring people with.

Fl: It's not that at a certain point we'll reach socialism and go on to the transition to communism, but these things are dynamic. Each time the state sector takes over a function that moves it out of the question of what your wages have to pay for. Even in capitalist society you have supposedly free education, well, forget it, let's say you have free education...(laughter). So if you have one child or ten children, education [is no longer dealt with in the sphere of] your wages, because its been taken over by society.

Now the question of usury and how you deal with that even during the transition and how the labor certificate can be used to steal [referring to a comment, which occurs later in this summary because of the way the comments are grouped, about the possibilities of someone accumulating his pay, loaning it out, and using it to collect interest]. . I have the bad luck where I'm working that I'm working right near the shop loanshark. I see people come in and borrow money, and in most cases it's not a question that they're drinking or playing the horses but because of some family tragedy and they really need the extra money. And then amazingly this guy has no enforcement; he has no strong-arm methods; he relies on people to pay him back these incredible amounts just out of their sense of obligation. You know, they have been brought up a certain way, and these are the terms of the contract. In socialist society, what he's doing falls in the category of what Lenin calls the thief on the street, the crowd surrounds him and then deals with him. To the extent this man will not be able to exist because everyone knows what he is and can deal with him.

Fl: I think I agree with the point that wage equalization should be viewed as a tool, as one tool, and obviously we are talking about a transition and its not just limited to the economic sphere. Take, for example, children. In socialist society you wouldn't have the attitude that, well, they're your kids, you take care of them. Certainly ... for society to take care of children in various ways. And there would be, I don't know if I can imagine what, other things that come up that might be part of that transition. So certainly we don't expect one economic measure to be the sole foundation of the transition from one epoch to another.

Fl: Yes. The point is really true about the transition from socialism to communism and the problems of bourgeois right. But I think it's also important to see in the practice of the socialist countries, none of them ever achieved bourgeois right in the whole society. They never could, so long as they had ... in agriculture. The speech mentioned that Stalin and Mao and others slurred over the differences between the capitalist transition, and actually

achieving basic socialism such as bourgeois right. .. And to me one of the supreme [hypocrisies] is that during the Cultural Revolution in China the left raises the issue of restricting bourgeois right, glossing over the glaring fact that among the peasants, the majority of the country, they never achieved bourgeois right in any sense.

On the relation of the labor voucher to money

Fl: I thought one of the main tasks that has to be carried out during the transition period of socialism is the gradual doing away with commodity production itself. It seems to be very important, to the extent that all the articles of consumption would be not commodities but use values. And to do that, and to do away with the commodity status of these use values, we would have to do away with exchange as a whole.

You're going initially to need a means of exchange. And to do away with money, this conception of the labor ticket, or the labor voucher based on the hours of work seems rational. My question is, is this labor ticket and labor value actually a form of money? It's money of a new type, of a transitional type, because you still have the conception of exchange and the articles of consumption are still like forms of commodities though of a different type.

Ch3: I don't believe that a labor voucher or certificate is a form of money. Money arises in the course of commodity exchange out of barter as a universal equivalent for value. As a means of exchange of commodities. Money then takes on logic of its own. And one of the things that Engels says about money, is that its true nature is when it becomes involved in usury. When someone can accumulate more than another and then loans it out for a percentage. I believe Engels refers to that as its true money function. The true money ethic.

The labor certificate doesn't have that function. Neither is it a universal equivalent. What it is, that I believe the individual worker receives, is a certificate which is only of use by him or her. And only exchangeable for articles of consumption. It's not exchangeable for means of production. It's not exchangeable to buy labor-power. And its not something that can be loaned out to accrue interest or profit on it. So in that sense it's quite different than money and plays a quite different role in the society. If you read Engels' polemic against Duhring on this question, Duhring tries to use money as the means of payment for his Duhringian commune. And Engels shows how the usage of money to pay for labor in that commune necessarily leads to the restoration of the profit system. And in that polemic he argues in favor of the conception of the labor certificate--it plays a quite different role.

Fl: A small clarification on features of that answer. The labor certificate retains certain features of money, but gets rid of others. It maintains the feature of being an equiva-

lent for the purpose of exchange, to measure equivalent values in different products. It keeps that portion of the role of money. What it loses is that money is essential for capitalist relations. There's no way the capitalist can accumulate without it, for example, usury. But it eliminates that by the fact that you can't buy any means of production and you can only get it by labor.

Fl: In a sense any one who works knows that a crude form of labor discipline parity exists in a social sense, and that's that workers come down very hard on their fellow workers if they don't feel they carry their fair share of the load. And they can be very hard against the guy next to you who is not doing his part.

On the abolition of commodity production and exchange, what does that mean in terms of distribution of consumer goods?

Ch3: I believe the shortest way to answer that would be something like this: consumer goods, the measurement of the amount of labor contained in them, is not the value or price form that we take for granted. The measurement of how much labor is embodied in a consumer article is simply average labor hours. And the way they're purchased is with this labor voucher which signifies how many hours of labor you've given to society minus the deductions that are done before you get the voucher for the social fund that was mentioned. You exchange a note certifying one hour's work for an article of consumption which has embodied in it one hour's labor. And I think that's the general conception of exchange of products.

Ch4: The underlying assumption being its done by the workers' state, not by individual producers, cooperatives, or black market.

Fl: ...the labor voucher is used by the worker for anything that he or she needs that is not provided free?

Fl: In my own thinking, I've had a lot of trouble with this question of labor certificate or money. And I'm not at all satisfied with the answer that labor certificate and money aren't the same in the sense that I think that, in the development of the transition towards socialism, money does lose many of the characteristics that money has under capitalism.

So, for example, in talking to some of the Iranian comrades [in circles around the Communist Party of Iran], they say "well, if there's money, that means the accumulation of capital. And the possibility of hiring wage-power and so on." At least in form, in a society such as Albania, you have the phenomenon that it's illegal to hire labor. Labor is not hired privately. It's illegal to buy or sell the means of production. Usury is eliminated from the economy. Now there's a certain sphere that I'm not dealing with, that is the cooperative sphere. This is something I can't deal with because I don't actually know how it

works.

The other thing is there is no private market; even the smallest marketing is done through state trade. So in that sense it seems to me that you have the phenomena that, in this case, money is losing the characteristics that it previously had. [There is a small gap in the transcript here.]

Now there is this question of exactly how much you get remunerated for your labor, of how that is calculated, and of how prices are calculated. It seems to me that there's a gray area during the transition. It's not simply as easy as saying "Well, money isn't abolished, hence there's nothing socialist about it; hence there's no control over market production, no sphere of restrictions."

It seems to me that actually there's a process taking place. It's not as simple as saying "Money is capitalism."

Ch3: Yes. I think what the comrade said is definitely true. The earlier remarks were on the issue that there is a distinction between money and labor certificates, and was trying to establish what some of those distinctions are. This is not to deny that in transition from capitalism to socialism there aren't transitional features to both commodity production, commodity exchange, and also money. Gradually losing first one feature and then another of the whole entity that they represent, until they're no longer that thing.

So I think the differences with the Iranian comrades on the question are probably of merit, that it's wrong to look at the thing too categorically and not to see that everything is in a state of flux. In the transition period you don't have huge leaps from one phenomenon to another; you have a series of minor leaps. The question of what money is has many different sides to it, and it's gradually losing one or another character of its money function.

On the question of money under socialism, I think, yes, you can pass laws forbidding usury, forbidding the buying of labor power, and so on and so forth, and these laws can be enforced in the main. There is an issue though of economic laws asserting themselves despite political and administrative rules. The rules aren't necessarily a complete guarantee that economic laws won't reassert themselves.

It also seems to me there's a difference between a socialist country surrounded by socialist countries, and a socialist country surrounded by a capitalist world market. Those external pressures of capitalism can manifest themselves internally in a country through those economic categories, those remnants of capitalism that exist. That's the most general thing.

Fl: I agree that in the case of a socialist country surrounded by capitalist countries it will be necessary to use money in terms of world trade. But we're talking of building socialism. As far as inside the country, I think that, first of all, Marx and Engels, when they wrote about the labor voucher, were writing in a period of scarcity under

capitalism. Now this is not the case today. Even though we are told there's scarcity, actually there's plenty to go around; it's just not being used; it's being hoarded by the capitalists and not going to the consumers, the working class. There's an abundance.

So, to me, when we're dealing with an abundant society, from the socialist perspective, to even deal with labor vouchers or money, internally, in the society, is to exercise a form of capitalist bourgeois ideology. And for this reason. In other words, as long as we all have enough to eat and a place to sleep and all of the things that we need--and I'm not suggesting we go into the communist ideology yet of "to each according to his needs," everyone will have to work, of course--but the thing of it is, we're all working approximately the same number of hours. As long as we have that card that says we work at such and such a place, or do such and such a job--however we're identified, maybe by occupation or whatever--that card itself should guarantee you, as a citizen of a socialist society, a certain amount. And it shouldn't be based on how much labor time you give.

As far as intensity of labor: those people who do harder types of work, like mine workers, there's a way of compensating them as opposed to a clerical worker who doesn't work as arduously, at a different type of job. How about reducing the hours of the mine worker? Take the two hours a day, as opposed to take the four hours a day, or the six hours a day, for the clerical worker. In other words, that is a form of compensation, not necessarily money, but you are admitting that there has to be some form of difference here., and ... only having a miner work two hours. To me, to get involved in this, how much you earn, and the differences, we're getting right back into the capitalist ideology of differences in pay.

Fl: I would like to point out that if the clerical worker can make enough to live on six hours, and the miner make enough to live on two hours, then whether you call it so or not, they are actually getting different returns for an hour of labor, one getting more, one getting less...

Fl: The basis of being able to introduce labor certificates is that the means of production are socialized and owned by society, and all distribution is controlled by society, collectively by the proletarian state. So that the only exchange that takes place is between individuals and the state, exchanging labor for means of life, which is carried out by means of labor certificates. As society reaches that point where we monopolize both means of production and distribution, money begins to lose its value, loses its role as money.

The point is that you have money, something Engels says "non olet", money does not smell, you can't tell where it came from. [Anti-Duhring, Part III. Socialism, Chapter IV. Distribution.] So Worker X can work and accumulate more money than he needs and then lend it out to Worker Y, who then uses it. The idea of a labor

certificate is that it can only be used by the individual who has done the work, and only to exchange with the state. [So this prevents the development of] a capitalist system underneath the socialist system.

Even labor certificates don't entirely rule that out. There's nothing to say you can't go down to the commissary and exchange your labor notes for something somebody else wants, and barter with it. The system of labor certificates make it a little more difficult. It's harder to carry around ten tons of food than money. So that's the basis of labor certificates; it makes it a little bit harder to re-establish capitalism.

The basic idea is [taking control of production and distribution and to] eliminate petty production and petty distribution. When the Iranian comrades say the Soviets didn't eliminate money, they're ignoring this huge problem that has to be solved: how in a peasant country, how in Soviet Russia do you eliminate money when you still have 80% of the population having petty capitalist production and distribution among themselves? There is no way you can do that [while that petty production and exchange still exists]. So to eliminate money and go to labor certificates, you have to solve this tremendous economic problem.

Fl: The speaker raised various things I would like to look into. Meanwhile I would like to put forward some things. They might be all wrong--the value of study is that it wipes out preconceived ideas.

But I share some of the questions about the relations of labor certificates and money. If labor certificates mean that the person using it directly receives so many hours of production of this or that, I have serious doubts whether that can really be done in any society whatsoever. It is necessary to average out the value, to get the social value, not that this tomato took so many hours to produce but that an average tomato, under average conditions, etc. etc. takes so many hours. And once you do that, don't you have money in some sense? It's no longer the direct number of hours. It's some average.

Now the issue was raised, it can no longer be used except for buying means of consumption from the state. So in Albania you're not supposed to be able to buy labor power, you're not supposed to be able to do this or that. But it was pointed out in reply, that what one supposedly can't do is one thing, it's another thing how economic laws assert themselves. I believe this answer is correct, that the economic laws assert themselves, only I think the same thing can take place with respect to labor certificates.

[The comment then goes into certain things which may make it hard to keep various restrictions on labor certificates. For example, labor certificates are to be restricted to only the personal use of the individual earning it to obtain goods from the state. But consider buying goods for a family which requires pooling labor certificates. This starts to indicate that it may be a hard bookkeeping task to keep track of use of labor certificates and restrict them

to individual use.

The comment also refers to the issue of the polemic in **Anti-Duhring** about how Duhring's commune that uses money gives rise to surplus value and capitalism again. He remarks that he hasn't read these passages for a long, long time. Doesn't recall whether it speaks of labor certificates or money, but wonders if the issue isn't that the exchange of commodities gives rise to surplus value.]

On one-person management

Fl: When this issue of individualism came up in the study groups, I was shocked. Maybe it is because back in '73 ... we all got pretty well inoculated against individual dictators by [the example of] Mr."R". [A former comrade, who had Bonapartist and anarchist methods of work which he refused to give up. The seriousness of the damage his methods and political stands did to the ACWM(ML) and COUSML during the period when he was a leading comrade--and factionalist--was matched by the enthusiasm of the bulk of comrades for the subsequent rectification and the strengthening of collective work, revolutionary activity, and party spirit at all levels.] Since then, in Party life, every body I've been in has stressed so much the collective, and the work has been so healthy. So when the conception of individual dictatorship as something legitimate is raised by Lenin, it sort of [violates a personal thing]...

I can grasp it in terms of an emergency. I can grasp it in terms of if you don't have enough capable people to participate in the collective, by way of exception, as something that can be tolerated for awhile. But when our Party stresses so much the role of Party meetings, collectives, units, branches,... Even on the question of responsibility--having individual dictatorship didn't make Mr."R" more responsible or accountable. And not having individual dictatorship for the last 14 years, in my opinion, has not been a problem for collective bodies acting responsibly, and they don't evade responsibility. So I have a little trouble grasping what is the proper role of these individual dictators; where is it a good thing; and isn't it something you want to strive to replace over a long period of time?

Fl: Two issues, offhand.

One is that the whole question of accountability seems to be very important. To give one person responsibility for a factory, it is very clear, if it's not running well, whose fault it is.

Secondly, there's a lot of cases of individual dictatorship in the tactical operations we carry out. Someone is in charge at demonstrations, for instance. If you have a committee in charge, you get into fumbling on the sidelines while you're wondering where to take the banner. We have someone in charge.

Fl: I have a question about the same point. When it was

raised in the speech, that the collective form could make mass participation more difficult, I had a question. I've seen in the mass movement where the social-democrats say we have a consensus leadership here, a collective leadership to make decisions, and how that's basically a screen for back-room dealings. How that would work under socialism in organizing the workers, and how that keeps mass participation down, I don't quite understand.

Ch4: Let's take a whole bunch of questions on this subject and then try to deal with the answers.

Fl: In our study... in the article Lenin talks about having a commissar of railroads. And he says that it's necessary to have him in charge because the problem of accounting and control had not been established. They had not been able to do that. He says that if workers' control had been carried out, then it wouldn't have been necessary to put dictators in charge of the railroads. So I thought what this meant was, yes, you have the dictators in charge of the railroad, when things are this way. If you had solved the problem of workers' control, this wouldn't have been necessary.

I also think he is talking of the violation of the elective principle, in other words, the state had appointed directors to run the railroad rather than have the workers elect them.

Fl: The only way in which I can see it, even in the case mentioned by comrade [referring to the example of Party activity in demonstrations] is the practical carrying out of the collective decisions we have made in our unit with respect to the demonstration...

Fl: Is there anything implied that the individual dictator would be a Party person, and therefore then part of collective bodies but in the individual instance a dictator?

Fl: I just wanted it brought out whether the individual dictator was in fact subject to the masses' control. That was in fact a key part of it. Whether by recall or other means, if they didn't approve of his actions,....

Ch4: There's a number of issues here. For instance there's the issue of formulation. Whether you want to use the "individual dictator" formulation in your writing--"We want to establish individual dictators as our method of factory management". I don't think you want to. Some of those formulations do reflect the conditions of the time. Lenin is not writing that the issue is, one of our goals is establishing individual dictatorship.

But there is a certain point why he uses very strong language in that very acute situation they faced. There's a question of the actual situation.

As far as I understand Lenin's views on the subject, there is an issue of the question of individual responsibility in general, and individual direction. That in manage-

ment, in running the railroads, in doing things both in emergencies--and not necessarily in emergencies, but in running a factory, or in running operations--you need individual direction. And there's no socialist principle that denies that.

And I think that the example, Party work at a demonstration, is a good one. In our units we do discuss the tactics and policy and so forth, but we also decide that one person is going to be in charge. We want to carry out those tactics, and that person is given the responsibility for carrying out the collective will on the subject. You don't hold--well, not necessarily all the time, but I'm not saying there's no time you might not hold a small committee or small group meeting at a demonstration, indeed you may very well do that--but in general there are times when one person is given the authority to direct the mass of comrades and the implementation of the policy.

And later on, if he screws up, we can disagree with him, we can have a meeting and debate that question. But on the spot, that person does exercise one-person management, direction.

So that's the general principle that's being talked about. Sometimes this direction may be carried out by a committee. Sometimes, many times it may be carried out by an individual. So that was the point raised in the speech.

It's not necessarily a distinction of principle [whether that direction is carried out by an individual or a committee]. The general principle is, we do recognize the necessity for authority, the necessity for direction, to carry out a single will.

Now, there are a number of issues about how you carry this out. One thing is, how that person in charge got to be in charge. Is that person elected or appointed? I think in general terms you want to go towards a situation of the election of directors, officials, and so forth, with the right to recall. But in certain cases, and for various conditions, you may very well have situations where you have to use the appointment method. If you do use the appointed principle, you do have to have some means of ensuring that the person who's appointed maintains or has the confidence of the people he or she is going to be able to direct.

Lenin discusses the dictator's relation to the masses. He repeatedly raises in the article we read and in other places the necessity of combining one-man dictatorship or one-man management with the mass democratic meetings of the workers, for instance. That is a principle. If you are going to have one-man management, it has to be combined with democratic forms that allow that person to be judged on his exercise of that will. And if you don't have that, and Lenin makes this very strongly, if you wipe that out, you give rise to bureaucrats, bureaucratic tendencies.

So I think those are some of the issues involved. As far as the particulars and the coloring of certain phrases, I think some of those phrases are colored by the times, when they faced an extremely acute situation. In the midst of a civil war, the beginnings of a civil war, the railroads

were not running.

Fl: ...In actuality, workers' control committees were established in the period where they expropriated the capitalists and actually began to run the factories. They had a lot of problems with establishing responsibility. Various bourgeois sabotaged. There were sharp terms; one-man dictatorship during working hours, and afterwards mass meetings. One of the things that came up in my study, what was the form of the mass meetings. It doesn't seem to be that you are going to build socialism by assuming that you're going to have all the time have this revolutionary fervor on the part of the masses to have mass meetings every night after work. [But one needs various forms] ... of mobilizing wider and wider sections of the masses into control. Otherwise one-man management becomes one-man dictatorship in the real sense of the word.

Ch4: The bad sense of the word.

Fl: First of all, I'd like to point out how the economic conditions, the situations, even unexpected ones, that are faced by revolutions, condition the policies. I don't think there's a principle enshrined in the program of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), 1919, 17 or 05.

The other thing, that does bother me a little bit. ... There are already forms set up. What's the relationship of the one-man dictatorship to the Soviets that already exist. What's the relationship of this one-man dictatorship to the party? There's a host of questions that hit me upon reading this that aren't answered, proposing measures to deal with a very difficult situation. Problems were answered, probably should have been answered, probably did get worked out.

It would have been nice to have seen in other years, later, what happened to the policy, what happened to the individual dictator? How long did this thing last? What were the results? A year later Lenin's writing *A Great Beginning*, in which the real step forward is the communist militants who come on Saturday to work voluntarily, for nothing. This has nothing to do with the individual dictator. This is the communist party which gives the call and says, "We've still got this damn crisis. We still have trouble moving food. The railway is still in disrepair." And the communists have to take charge and deal with it. It isn't the dictator that gets it done. This is the communist party, and a bunch of militants who started in Moscow, and it spreads all across the country. He hails this as the shoots of communism. So there's quite a dramatic leap from the individual dictator, and then a year later what seems to be quite a different thing, the subbotniks.

Ch4: Let me stop you there, because it's two different things. The stuff about factory management is one realm of things. The stuff about the subbotniks and the communist Saturdays is another.

A year later is the actual big debate in the Party. In 1920, at the 9th Congress, there's a continuing debate on the issue of one-man management. It's not just raised in 1918. Lenin repeats it and has to fight for it in a couple years. It doesn't go away. But it's a separate issue.

So I would not draw premature conclusions.

Fl: [Apparently says that the revisionists use any concession ever made by Lenin from wage equalization, any need of coercion, to justify any of their measures in any sphere, and the same thing is done with the issue of one-man management.

I assume, I may be wrong, that in actual fact Soviet factories were criss-crossed with different types of organizations, party, trade union, management.... It's not the whole factory subordinated to one man, but the one institution, and you still have appeals to the other collective bodies.

The second thing is, the issue isn't just one man versus a collegium. As one of the comrades pointed out, there is the issue of who appoints the leading group, whether a collegium or one man. The factories have to be subordinated as well to the interests of the entire society. It is not just that it decides what to produce. For example, the railroads. Otherwise it will be privileged in a sense against all of society. If the principle that the overall society decides is made absolute, you end up with no rights for [the plant workers] which is absurd. But nevertheless there has to be some part of the authority in the plant, railroad, etc. that represents the overall requirements, and the part elected by the workers has to carry out that overall requirement.

Hence the issue becomes combining democracy and centralism. Hence I think the point raised earlier, about combining these things, what Lenin talks about combining mass meetings and one-man dictatorship, becomes a crucial issue. One, the issue of combination. Two, exactly how you do that has to be checked every step of the way, to see what's really going on. Lenin stressed over and over and over in every article of this period, don't just give something a name, but check it, verify it, and then actually change various things according to how it works, you have to see how it works.

Finally, the use of terms like one-man dictatorship may partially be related to the violence of the language of the time. I had occasion five years ago or so to read material from the Italian left-wing movement of the time. [Denouncing the parliamentary form of bourgeois dictatorship] it doesn't speak of, say, down with bourgeois democracy, or contrast proletarian democracy with bourgeois democracy, but "Down with democracy, the horrible oppressor."

Fl: [One other thing. On one-man dictatorship and one-man responsibility, some people are looking at it in terms of factories, etc. I think it means more than that. ... Thinking back to the Paris Commune, and Marx's discussion of it. It had individual ministers assigned to responsi-

bilities such as defense. Marx saw it knew how to appoint its hired hands just as a capitalist does. ... It puts someone in charge of various particular functions. If they didn't work out or carry out their responsibilities, it took them out. ... There does seem to be a certain definite relationship between the elected bodies which govern the country and the delegated authorities of these bodies to carry out their policies.]

Fl: On this question of one-man management, it seems to me that there are two issues which come up on a series of these questions.

One is, the particular period of revolution. Things are

extremely difficult. There is the necessity of economic development to move forward. ... The question is, how is economic development going to be organized?

And on one-man dictatorship, one issue, if someone says it shouldn't be that way, to find an effective form of economic organization that's more effective....And with respect to maintaining the working class in power. It becomes a very practical question, what forms can be used to accomplish those things? It's also a question of what actually works. Forms, like how we organize our demonstrations, there a question of trial and error over a time, and of sorting it out on that basis. ■

Discussion following the speech "The degeneration of Soviet socialism"

From the Third Congress of the MLP, USA
Fall 1988

Below is a summary of the discussion at the Congress following the speech on Soviet history (see "The degeneration of Soviet socialism and the turn of the mid-1930's" in the Jan. 15 issue of the Supplement.)

Statements on the same subject have been placed together. As well, the transcription apparatus was quite unsatisfactory, so only hints about the contents of many statements were available. This was particularly painful as this was a discussion of history where even details would have been of interest in themselves, but details especially may have been inadvertently distorted in this summary. We have done our best to provide a coherent account of the discussion that preserves the original meaning, but we extend our apologies to any comrade whose statements end up mangled too badly or omitted. And we note that comrades did not have an opportunity to polish their statements for publication.

However, this was a discussion whose value was raising issues for investigation, not providing final formulations. And the summary does provide a picture of this.

Below "Ch" refers to the comrade who gave the speech, and "Fl" refers to comments from the floor.

Abortion

Fl: It seems clear that many of these things could have taken place fairly subtly and been brought about inch by inch without really noticing it as it happened. But one of the things which you mentioned kind of hit me in the gut, that's the conservative line on women. The equality of women, the full participation of women in political life, is one of the bulwarks of Marxism-Leninism. How could they get away with openly giving a conservative line on the family, abortion, and these other things which you men-

tioned? How could they rationalize that?

Ch: Well, that's two separate questions: how they rationalized it, and how they got away with it. I can't answer the second.

I don't know a great deal on this, but one thing they did was to use again this trick of justifying things under the banner that the "victory of socialism" had put the Soviet Union at such a high level. For instance on abortion I believe that part of the justification was that now the Soviet Union had reached such a high level of economic development, ensuring the security of the masses, that there was no such thing as an unwanted child which couldn't be taken care of. And so if you don't have that issue any more, and the state can provide for the children, then there's no more issue of abortion. I know that's part of the justification.

I would like to point that, even if this justification is taken in itself, I think that it is wrong; the Soviet Union, for one thing, hadn't really reached that high a level. The conditions for bearing children had not become a non-issue. There was still a harsh, difficult time for the masses. I saw one account that there was some discussion in the late 30's, in some article in Pravda or someplace, described how certain women had to scour the shops throughout Moscow to look for infant clothes. They definitely faced shortages.

But again, that's not the complete story. There are other reasons why the right to abortion had originally been affirmed, in terms of people being able to make the choice of abortion in order to pursue other things they wanted to do.

I don't know if anybody else knows anything further on that; that's about as much as I know.

Fl: Just to mention that, during their considerations of this

question, part of their concern was while the birth rate in the rural areas remained more or less what it had been before, there was a drop off of the birth rate in the cities, and among professional women it had fallen to next to nothing. Why this became a concern for them I am uncertain, but I can say they were talking about these things.

Nationalism

Fl: In January 1934 Pravda had an editorial on the question of Soviet nationalism, which basically said that when they were ruled by the capitalists, of course, we could not be nationalists, because it was their nationalism. But now, we have the workers' Soviet Union; we want to defend it; we're proud of it; and therefore there is a new nationalism, a Soviet nationalism, a socialist nationalism. Which once they unfold it turns out to be Russian nationalism...

Fl: I'd like to return to the question on Russian nationalism. Was there an effect of the nationalism on other nationalities?

Ch: For instance, when they revived nationalism, their approach to history was revised. Certain czarist heroes were now declared Soviet heroes -- well, not Soviet heroes, but positive figures. Apparently the same concession was made towards certain of the local nationalisms. One fact I know is that Tamerlane was declared the national hero of the Uzbek people. I don't know all the details, but I always had the impression that Tamerlane was sort of a Genghis Khan.

Fl: General Suvorov was declared a hero. He was a Czarist general of the late 18th century, a contemporary of Napoleon Bonaparte. One of the main things he did was crush the Polish democratic revolution. So to make him a hero, in the 30's and especially in World War II, to put him forward as a great example of the Russian soldier, I'm sure the Poles loved this.

Religion and the Church

Fl: Besides nationalism, it seems there was another retreat on the church. It seems that the Russian Orthodox Church was reestablished and pushed as a force for national pride and combating fascism. I wanted to ask about that.

Ch: There is a definite change in the attitude toward religion and the church over the entire historical period.

Up to the early 30s, you can see signs of an attempt at an active campaign against religion, both by the government as well as by the Communist Youth, the Party, and so forth. Now I don't want to necessarily endorse every method they may have used in this struggle against religion; it's conceivable there were various problems in how this campaign may have been carried out.

The active struggle against religion appears to come to

an end with the mid-30s. After that it looks like there's a period of neutrality toward religion. And then in the middle of World War II there is a certain restoration of the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, to the extent that one of the institutions in the Soviet Union that very strongly defends Stalin is the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church. I think that indicates something.

General

Fl: I think one of the questions was: why didn't the working class rise up, and why wasn't there more struggle or protest against these dreadfully reactionary policies. I think one of the reasons why--this isn't the totality of the reasons, but one of the reasons--was that the government fostered a heavy campaign of nationalism at this time.

And the fear of attack from without by foreign counter-revolutionary capitalist forces was not a myth. There was a real danger. In fact, at this time during the 30s, militarist Japan actually organized military campaigns in north China, and had actually come to the Soviet border. [There were two large-scale armed clashes on Soviet territory between Japanese and Soviet troops at the end of the 30's.] And of course there was the Nazis who were building up their offensive might -- and they made no bones about their intention to destroy the Soviet Union. And so I think the government in the Soviet Union took advantage of the situation to use nationalism to get the masses to go along with the occasion. But at the same time there was a real threat from without, of fascist attack.

Fl: Apparently asks about the arrests in the latter 30s and asks whether this had anything to do with opposition among the workers or among the hostile strata.

Fl: One of the frustrating things is that it's not the case that you have a clearly defined struggle. There were arrests and repression--I'm not talking now, primarily, of the bourgeois or of the masses, but of a whole level of mid-level cadre. The difficulty is figuring out why, what's was going on behind it. It's not that you have a correct line versus an incorrect line, at least not as far as my knowledge of it goes. Or that you even have two lines. ... This whole situation must reflect what is going on in the party and in the society as a whole. But it is difficult to see what this relation is.

Fl: Based on your intense research on this, especially on economic questions, you've dealt quite a bit with the 30s. One thing I'd like to ask: We know that the capitalist world suffered in that period a tremendous world international depression. Is it your conclusion, based on the research that you've done on the economic situation, that the Soviet Union was free from any of the crises of the depression, like unemployment and things like that?

Ch: In general terms, there's no evidence of a depression being suffered by the Soviet Union at this time. There is an incredible amount of actual industrial development and growth that takes place. Nobody really disputes that. And one of the other features is, under the system of industrialization, and of actually setting up a planned economy, they are able to wipe out unemployment on any mass scale. Those two things don't seem to be disputed. I haven't looked into the question any further than that. As to other ways, since they were still functioning in the world, I'm sure they were impacted, but not in that sense of having an actual depression and collapse of the economy.

Ideology and the turn of the 30's

Fl: Most of the information in the speech is on the various manifestations of the turn. I would like to ask if there are any views as to what caused the change of policy. You seem to have implied that some things are due to the five-year plan. I wonder if also the ideological victory of Stalin over Bukharin, Zinoviev, Trotsky played any role?

Ch: I don't have any answers to that question. One of the reasons the speech was mainly on manifestations was because there has already been a certain amount of study on this.

As to the why question: the only thing about the first five-year plan period I wanted to indicate was that there were certain issues coming up in that period of time. This was both in terms of problems in the way they were operating, as well as certain social changes that were taking place due to the five-year plan itself, changes that provided a certain social fabric in which the turn in policy takes place. But as to what are the actual factors, I can't really give you an answer.

Fl: Comrades raised the question of what was the basis of the turn that took place during the 30s in the Soviet Union. We cannot answer that question, which shows how much work is still to be done. Probably when we find the answer, part of the answer will be implied by that question itself--the comrade actually asked about the effect of ideological policy on the larger turn--and this is at this low level of the transition from capitalism to socialism, policy and ideological questions play a key role. In my opinion, it is not so reasonable that in a highly developed socialism an error in policy is going to bring down the roof. But at this lower level, at this much lower level, these questions are crucial, and making mistakes on these questions will tend to [damage things] relatively quickly.

Nonetheless we're finding that the fall of the dictatorship of the proletariat is a little more difficult to portray than, yes, around 2:30 in 1934, exactly 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. It's a fairly complex question involving stages. There are several factors which are bound to be involved

one way or another, which comrades have delineated before, which at this point could be mentioned again.

Of course there are international pressures, though these operate mainly through their impact on the class struggle in society.

There is the question of the peasantry. It became a mainly semi-collectivized peasantry and continued to have a great weight on society. And this seems to be a major question. And in fact it seems to me that the reintroduction of Russian nationalism beginning in 1934 was probably a concession to the peasantry.

Another factor comrades pointed to was the fact that, in order to replace the old state bureaucracy, a new soviet organization was necessary, to bring hundreds of thousands of workers, of class conscious workers, into administrative posts. Then there is the problem of how to do this without creating a new bureaucracy.

Finally, there's also this question that industrialization implied a big growth in the size of the working class. At the same time, you take 500,000 class conscious workers out of production. Where does the growth come from, it's coming from the peasantry. You see a large section of workers that were peasants just a year or two earlier. And this too may have affected the issues of mobilization and activity of the working class itself.

So these are by no means the answer, but they are some of the factors underlying the turn.

On worker communists becoming white-collar

Fl: I believe it was, with respect to the first five-year plan, that you gave the example of hundreds of thousands of worker communists being raised up into white collar jobs. And I know you might have more to say on this. It seems this would be a very devastating thing for continuing to organize the working class and dealing with the problems that they have. I wonder, was there any evidence, in our investigation, of resistance to this, of the worker communists not wanting to do this?

Ch: I think, to the extent that any factor was raised in the speech, it is this issue, that you do have a large section of people becoming officials in this period from among the workers and communists. And they get bourgeoisified. The Soviet Union did face the necessity to raise people to carry out administration. But how to do that without turning them into a privileged strata, that's the task in the face of which they collapsed.

In terms of resistance, to the extent I've looked at anything, in the early 30s there is still a certain amount of discussion that still seems to go on among certain sections about the possibilities and the dangers of inequality.

For instance, there's this book I picked up called *In Place of Profit*. It's by somebody who visited the Soviet Union during the first five-year plan. And one of the things it discusses is the campaign against leveling. And it points out that it was being noticed that there was a

certain problem with this. There were various justifications being given, for instance, "It doesn't matter, one can never become a capitalist," and these kinds of things.

But for instance this guy talked to, apparently, an Italian-American stone mason in an agricultural commune who had moved to the Soviet Union. (In fact a number of people had actually moved to the USSR--they talk about people voting with their feet, actually there was a certain phenomenon of people voting with their feet to get into the Soviet Union during this period of time.) He quotes, "Some of our leaders are now getting two pairs of boots, they could just as well make one last longer and give the other to someone else who doesn't have one. And it would make the others feel better. People are beginning to notice it."

So it was a phenomenon and people were beginning to notice it. Apparently there's a quote from a pamphlet around that time which says--I believe the pamphlet's called **Capitalist Slavery Versus Socialist Organization of Labor**--"All children see the inequality which still exists under Soviet rule, and the more glowingly a child absorbs the fundamental ideas of communism, the more sharply he feels the inequality."

Such things would indicate that there's a certain discussion, that "Yes, we're forced to have inequality, but there's certain problems with it." As far as resistance I don't know,

Fl: I just wanted to point one of the factors, regarding education. They did have a revolution in Russia, overthrew the old regime, and established workers' political power. They still had, as the comrade pointed out, the old intelligentsia around. And there is the educational system. In 1936, there is the new constitution, nineteen years after the revolution, that's a pretty short period of time to transform the entire social-cultural outlook of what administrators do.

In the old Russian outlook, getting an administrative position in Russia, even though a petty one, was a big step up. It meant all kinds of privileges. The people who were brought up in the old society--they were professors in the universities. These were the ones who were the old-fashioned bourgeois specialists, which the soviets had to learn from. You can't help passing certain corroding values, transferring certain role models as well. The workers came up under the the influence of the old elite and the idea of the old society when their parents perceived that if you got these white collar jobs, that was a way out. It seems to me this had a certain corrosive effect on the million workers who took white-collar jobs. And there may be a certain amount of conservatizing, down-playing the role of revolution, or of further revolutionization of society that may have been a reaction on their part, once they had made it, to protect it.

Fl: Do you have any statistics on the percentages of the party members in the the working class moving from the

factories to administrative jobs and the bureaucracy? What percentage of the party was left in the factories?

Ch: I don't have any figures for percentages, but at this time, just from looking at some overall figures, there would still be a large number left in non-administrative positions. But then as to what kinds of positions they were in and so forth.

I think that roughly speaking Party membership went up from one million something to three million something during the first five-year plan.

On what happened to soviet power

Fl: You made the point that in 1936 there was a new constitution which abandons soviet power. It appears that in order to be able to make a change like that soviet power must have been pretty much dead by that point. ... Could you go on a bit more about what happened to the soviet power in the 20s and first half of the 30s?

Ch: I would agree that it's definitely clear that if you're able to abandon soviet power officially, and there's not a big stink over it, the thing is pretty much dead. As to why, and the process by which it takes place, it's something that still needs to be investigated.

For instance, at various times, there is a high tide of mass activity, and there's times of ebb. How do you maintain soviet power or mass activity in different types of conditions is an issue. And so--what did they do in different periods of time? It's one of the things that needs to be investigated. But it's pretty clear there's a process of weakening. As to why and how that takes place, I can't speak to that.

Fl: There is a follow-up question on the issue of the constitution and soviet power, probably on the issue of what rationale was given for reorganizing the soviets on a territorial basis.

Ch: As far as I know, the few articles from Stalin on the subject, there is no discussion of that. There was a certain amount of discussion in society over it. I can't say if someone raised it or what sort of answers were given-- it's not one of the objections Stalin raises in one of his speeches on the question. [Stalin's *On the draft constitution of the U.S.S.R., Report delivered at the extraordinary Eighth Congress of Soviets of the U.S.S.R., November 25, 1936. Section V, "Amendments and addenda to the draft constitution"* deals with a number of proposals for changes in the constitution.] He tries to refute various proposed amendments to the constitution; it's not one of those.

Fl: About the Soviets. At the time of the revolution, they were mainly, as I recollect, a major urban phenomena. It wasn't that they were all over the countryside. After the revolution, were they expanded to a certain extent, and

then there's a point at which they stop introducing them in rural areas, and they just died down?

Ch: Originally they were heavily urban. But during the revolution, rural soviets were also coming up. And the two have to be taken more or less separately. They have their own historical evolution, somewhat different from each other.

Fl: What we don't know is what became of the rural soviets during the NEP period. It appears that, while it differs in different places, to a large extent the rural soviets came into the hands of the middle peasants. With the sharp class differentiation in the countryside in 1918-19, the Poor Peasants' Committees assumed the dominant role in the countryside. They actually held a poor peasants' congress and proposed the possibility of a separate (poor peasants) Soviet and the party proposed that they take over the rural soviets instead. ... What happened in the following decade we don't know. There are stories from different areas. In some cases it indicates the officers of the local soviets themselves prospered; in one case, a local kulak operated out of the soviet. But these are stories. We don't know how soviet power in the rural areas worked during the period of the 1920s, or what became of them. We also don't have a sufficient sense as to what took place in terms of mass organization among the peasantry or rural laborers in the period of collectivization.

Fl: On the conditions that the party faced in the countryside in the late 20s. These are some facts from Bettelheim, so I don't know how accurate they are. One point he made is that party cadre made up only 0.3% [three tenths of one percent] of the rural population, and half of them were not peasants. There is the existence, alongside the Soviets, of the Skhod, the traditional village assembly, which has only peasants and the other rural people are not allowed at its meetings. They are generally dominated by the kulaks, and they had communal ownership of certain small handicraft businesses operating in the villages. So they had an economic base and the Soviets generally did not have a tax base. Frequently they would end up dominating the soviets, and for example the Skhod might pay the salary of the secretary of the local soviet. This gives an idea of the problems that were faced.

[Bettelheim says that "the proportion of Party members belonging to village cells related to the total adult population showed that the percentage of Communists in rural areas had increased from 0.26 at the time of the Thirteenth Congress to 0.37% at the time of the Fourteenth" in 1925. He also gives the figures as "186,000 Party members in rural cells" in 1928 and 242,000 in 1929, which is something like .34% and .44% respectively. (*Class Struggles in the USSR*, vol. 2, 1923-1930, pp. 164-5.) This apparently is only the Party proper and may not include the Young Communist League.]

Fl: Half the rural membership of the party was outside Moscow and Petersburg, so in the rest of the country it was even smaller. They had enormous problems

Fl: [This comment apparently makes the point that while it was absurd to say that there was the victory of socialism by the mid-30s, there was a change. These changes make it very difficult to have a restoration of the old ruling class, of the Czarist times, of the old administration. This was not the way capitalist restoration went. Otherwise the comment cannot be made out.]

The Ukraine

Fl: Did you find any evidence for the claim of the bourgeoisie that there was a manufactured famine in the Ukraine in the 30s?

Ch: I haven't studied the question.

Fl: In our area the local newspapers have been running a series of articles on the Ukraine, as part of a campaign also declared in the U.S. Congress; Congress says it doesn't know how many people are hungry today in the U.S., but it has suddenly discovered a famine in the Ukraine years ago.

In terms of the Ukraine, in the early 1930s the struggle over collectivization was very, very intense. ... in some sense a war in the countryside. As well, for one or two years there was a crop failure in the Ukraine.

But the bourgeoisie promotes absurdities about this. This campaign goes that it has just been discovered that eight million Ukrainian peasants died in two years of famine. First this was given in articles as a supposition and now the figure is repeated over and over as a fact. Given the population of the Soviet Ukraine at that time, that means that a quarter of the Ukraine died of starvation in two years, yet the world didn't notice it! I find that a little bit hard to believe.

The campaign was pioneered by Robert Conquest, who has a book on the subject. Unfortunately, it was not available in the library when I was looking for it, and I was only able to get a symposium on this subject with Conquest as one of the participants. To give you some idea of this. To back up his figures, Conquest is forced to conclude that no more people died during the World War II years in the Soviet Union than die in any other year. I rather doubt that. He moves the death figures from World War II to the early 1930s. ... He claims that there is a special attempt to kill Ukrainians in particular. Faced however with the fact that the top revisionist ruling circles are not just Russian, but also Ukrainian, for example Khrushchov, he is forced to go into contortions that they aren't true Ukrainians because they are in the party. This is not to deny the later revisionist attempts at Russification in the Ukraine, but in general the Ukrainians are among the influential nationalities among the revisionists.

Fl: I'd like to make a more general point along these lines. It is already established that British intelligence has its connections with Conquest. [For example, J.A. Getty's doctoral thesis *The "Great Purges" Reconsidered: The Soviet Communist Party, 1933-1939* points out on page 48 that "Recent investigations of British intelligence activities (following in the wake of U.S. post-Watergate revelations), suggest that Robert Conquest ... accepted payment from British intelligence agencies for consciously falsifying information about the Soviet Union."] There is an entire stable of scholars working for years on this.

Moreover, with recent developments in the Soviet Union, they're now having a field day trotting out all these theories, not least of all because the Soviet revisionists are taking them up. I've had the pleasure of seeing some of the work of revisionist historians of the Soviet Union. I thought they might have some facts you couldn't get from some other sources. They don't have anything from the Soviet archives. All their footnotes are to works published at Oxford, Harvard, and in the West.

There is a promotion of philistinism about collectivization, about industrialization, and about certain other things in the Soviet Union. We do not subscribe to this. We have questions as to how, for example, collectivization was carried out, but we're not going to subscribe to horror stories about stealing the land from the peasants.

The petty peasant economy in the countryside was strangling the Soviet Union, and something had to be done about it. The low level of industry was a serious problem, and something had to be done about it. Which is not to say that all was fine with what was done.

Collectivization

Fl: ...Those who remember reading Mao may recall something he said about how they handled land reform in the Chinese Soviet areas in the countryside. Mao says that at first they took all the land, **all the land**, from the landlords, leaving them with nothing. Therefore they had no way to live. Therefore they became bandits. So, Mao says, they changed their policy, and gave the former landlords enough land to live on, and neutralized a stratum.

I had thought that this was just a wild assertion by Mao. But then I found the constitution of the first Chinese soviet areas in a Soviet book from that time. And sure enough, they take all the land.

Where did such ideas come from? A Soviet decree from 1930 divides up the kulaks into three classes. The first category and smallest is those who engage in counter-revolutionary acts, the second those who actively oppose collectivization, all the rest in the third. Measures are to be taken against all three classes, milder for the third category, those who didn't do anything but were exploiters, and very severe for the first category. ... [The comment was not saying that they all ended up without any land, but that repressive measures were taken not just against terrorists and those engaging in counter-

revolutionary acts but against all kulaks, including the third category.] I don't think such methods were used in any other country during collectivization. I wonder if this type of measure had something to do with the development of the sharpness of the clashes in the countryside.

However, Conquest and the bourgeoisie want to create a slaughterhouse atmosphere about these questions. To do these absurdities, he tries to explain why not only the world didn't know about these events, but even the Ukrainians themselves. Every family must have had two, three, four, five members dying by starvation according to his story, and yet he says they didn't tell their

Fl: Comrade, as far as what you were saying there about kulaks, it seems completely reasonable to me what they were doing. If you have revolution in the cities, and the bourgeoisie is expropriated in the cities, and you go out into the countryside, and there are counterrevolutionary elements making attacks against collectivization, you expropriate them, maybe make them work for a living, maybe give them a ticket to Berlin. I don't see anything wrong with that at all.

Fl: ... In actual fact, they wander around the country. And in general, having more education, and ... they created a lot of trouble. So there is some question about whether that's the best policy, rather than keeping them where everyone knows them and can keep an eye on them.

Fl: It was pointed out that it was generally necessary and correct to have industrialization and collectivization. But as to what lay the soil for later problems, we have to look into the question of how exactly it was carried out, the greater reliance on administrative methods and dropping off of initiative from below, etc.

I think this is generally true. To flesh out these questions, to determine why the turn takes place later, we're going to have to have more research in exactly what was the character of the path necessary for industrialization and collectivization, how they proceeded, etc. We can only go so far without the research.

As far as the question of repression, I think that one, obviously it's a different character of repression, or not even of repression, but of administrative measures in a period where they're generally carrying out necessary tasks of socialism, compared with in the 30s when they're trying to consolidate a new capitalist bureaucracy. It has a different character to it, a different edge. And I think that in each particular sphere -- agriculture, engineering, etc. -- how many mistakes were made is going to determine how much coercive measures is necessary, and how flawed the coercive measures were that were taken in this first period.

With respect to the kulaks, in my own view, I think it's relatively complex.

Fl: Firstly, on the question of collectivization. The expropriation of the kulaks was of course only one aspect of the

collectivization, and the question of the kulaks is probably itself a somewhat complex one. It appears that somewhat different policies may have been followed in different places.

The larger question was that the collectivization of the peasantry was a step toward bringing a backward rural population into modern society by engaging in cooperative labor. And this was a step not just in transforming the nature of agricultural production, but also creating an economic base for transforming the countryside, putting an end to rural idiocy, strengthening life and education in the countryside, and so forth.

The fact of the matter is that collectivization did not go very far. The first thing is that even collectivization itself is a step toward state ownership in agricultural production. It is not the whole thing. With collectivization the produce of the collective farm remains the property of the members collectively. They market that to the state, and they distribute the proceeds among themselves according to their work points. Which means on an impoverished collective farm, people can go hungry, while a well-to-do collective farm actually has the possibility of accumulating capital.

The aspect of it that Lenin emphasized as socialism was the introduction of cooperative labor. But you still have ...

And the fact of the matter was, in Soviet agriculture what was collectivized was grain production. Private production continued to play an extremely important role in most other aspects of agricultural production.

So you have a peasantry which still has one foot in the old world of petty production, and one foot in the modern world, but not as agricultural laborers, ... [There is still] state capitalism in agriculture. This is the class of which Stalin a few years later spoke of as "the other socialist class". And what was being said by this was very much removed from reality. And that's an important point, especially because the peasantry was the majority of the population, and this put extremely heavy pressure on the entire society.

On Khrushchev, the 20th Congress of the CPUSA, and other topics

Fl: In terms of the development of revisionism, if the 20th Congress doesn't mark as dramatic a turn of events, what was behind it?

Ch: It does mark a change. It is another shift. There are a number of things that take place.

There is the fact that now they make a break in the continuity of things with the anti-Stalin campaign. Elements of the new bureaucracy do say that now we want to get rid of this thing and carry out things in a different way. And certain changes are introduced.

For instance, as we have already noted, the 20th Congress of the CPSU didn't mark the first time they raised the issue of peaceful transition to socialism; but it did

start a big hullabaloo and a big campaign over it. And on a variety of other issues, there's a certain change in line that takes place in this period of time also, both domestically and in international policy.

But it doesn't mark the type of change in which you could say that before they had a revolutionary line, and now they have a revisionist line. That kind of change does not take place.

Fl: Does it mark the public announcement of changes that have been taking place?

Ch: Of the mid-30s turn?

Fl: Yes.

Ch: No. The speech was to show that actually the turn was manifested in the mid-30s in a series of ways. Through the mid-30s into the 50s there were also various changes and shifts that take place. All of them you can find public manifestations of.

Fl: One of the things Khrushchev did was, call for making a change similar to what Gorbachev's is talking about today. And in fact he ideologically arrived at that... one of the reasons that the Chinese and Albanians do something, is that he started to talk about market socialism.

Khrushchev called for a number of things, but there's a question of how much actually changed in practice under Khrushchev, and that has to be looked at. It seems like a lot of these changes didn't take place, because Gorbachev is talking about the same thing. When we first started looking into Gorbachev's program, we were surprised when we figured out what he was talking about, because we thought that these things had already been done.

Ch: Khrushchov actually initiated some calls. For instance, he's known for the two major things in the domestic field. With respect to the collective farms, there is the selling of the machine-tractor stations, that was one of his major deeds. And the other thing was the reorganization of the ministries. The economy was previously organized through certain ministries, and now they resorted to a system of various regional and national economic apparatuses.

Many things, that form the content of Gorbachev's market socialist reforms, were actually elaborated more by Kosygin in the early 60s, in the economic reform of '65. And that appears to have only gone so far also. It seems many of these things were stopped or halted. And the Gorbachev people complain about this bitterly. They talk about "We started changes, the reformers started changes in '57 and '65, but we couldn't take them very far."

Fl: On this point, RCP,USA raises in *Red Papers 7* that there was this major Soviet economist, Voznesensky, who was strongly advocating market socialism in the late 40's,

and was executed in 1949. And they say that Stalin's *Economic Problems of the USSR* was a polemic against this. Do you know anything more about that?

Ch: I don't. What I do know is that in the middle of World War II they apparently come out with an article on economics in '43. [It appeared as an unsigned article in a Soviet journal under the title "Some problems of the teaching of political economy."] It seems to mark some change in how the Soviet leadership looks at economics.

Apparently that article for the first time raises some issue concerning recognizing the law of value under socialism, and it apparently marks a shift away from earlier Soviet economic literature.

But there also are certain economic controversies that come up in the immediate period afterward, and that continue through this 1952 polemic (*Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*). There is some issue, some change of economic approach is taking place, but I don't know what exactly it is. ■

The Whidbey Island anti-skinhead protest and the debate on how to fight racism

Continued from the front page

example of the error of restricting the progressive mass struggles in order to please the liberals and other reformists.

What actually happened at the Whidbey events

In early November last year, a gang of racist skinheads brutally murdered a black, Ethiopian man in Portland, Oregon giving rise to protests there, in Seattle and elsewhere.

Later that month, the Seattle bourgeois press began a big promotion (in the guise of liberal hand-wringing) of plans by various nazi sects to hold a gathering on Whidbey Island. In response, various left-wing forces began to organize. A loose coalition came together, later to be given the name "United Front Against Fascism" ("UFAF"). A proposal for a counter-demonstration on Whidbey passed after some debate. Those who had argued for an action in Seattle on that date, instead called a march in the city for one week later.

As for the Whidbey action, all agreed on having a militant protest. Indeed, FSP'ers repeatedly stated that the purpose of going to Whidbey was to prevent the racists from holding a rally. This was eventually the general consensus in the coalition. As well, the participants were to be prepared for self-defense. When the 300 protesters began to arrive at the State Park on Dec. 10 they were directed into a parking lot by coalition marshals. As it later became known, this site was 1/2 mile away from, and out of view of, the small skinhead gathering. Several dozen police were there to protect the racists, while attempting to look like "neutral" keepers of the peace. The picket was fairly spirited, with lots of signs and shouting of anti-racist slogans. But many people wanted to march to at least be in view of the skinheads. At first it was promised that a march through the park would occur later. But later an FSP spokesperson, who may have been misinformed by the police, said there was no nazi rally and would not be one during the day. This meant there would be no need for a march. Some activists did not believe

this. Adding to their suspicions was a line of Guardian Angels with hands on their hips blocking the road toward the planned racist event in the park. So some activists went to investigate. They pushed their way through the "Angels" and found the pathetic skinhead gathering. A couple went back and tried to inform the rally and hold a discussion about whether to march over to the skinheads and confront them, shout slogans and so forth. (This was the original coalition plan.) Charlie James, a local black Democratic Party politician, refused to allow them to use a bullhorn. When the activists tried to speak to the crowd, several FSP'ers ran up and point-blank yelled with bullhorns. Many picketers loudly complained about this, forcing FSP to allow an MLP supporter to speak to the crowd, tell of the nazi rally and suggest marching to it and call for discussion. But no sooner did this speaker pause, when FSP and its supporters immediately ran some distance away from the picket (literally, ran), pulling along nearly half the crowd. They immediately started speeches. Needless to say, this split the rally. FSP also stacked the first 15 speakers at this "open mike". In this way, FSP blocked discussion among the crowd about a march through the park to confront the skinheads.

Clearly, FSP undemocratically suppressed discussion of the tactical issues facing the protesters. Whatever one's assessment of what tactics would be best suited to the concrete situation at the park that day, there is no justification for using high-handed bureaucratic dictate to impose those views. But as well, FSP's tactical views are wrong. In turn, these tactics rest on profoundly liberal, reformist and sectarian political positions.

1. FSP's liberal tactics

The issue was: for 300 protesters to march and confront a dozen skinheads or stay 1/2 mile away? At the picket, we attempted to argue in favor of a confrontation. In general, we stand for protest actions to be as militant as the conditions warrant. Do the masses hate the racist skinheads and would they support such a political stand? Of course. Was there a large number of protesters making success likely? Yes. How many police were there to pro-