JUN.-JUL.

Forward Motion Forward Motion Forward Motion

1985

A MARXIST MAGAZINE

WORKING FOR SOCIALISM

coup in sudan

locomotion

Vol. IV, No. 3 June-July 1985

Contents

Dear Friends,

Is this a good time or a bad time to be working for socialism?

As FM goes to press, three items dominate the news

First, we have a President honoring German war dead. Prevailing wisdom writes off another one to staff blunder. Messy, but only a blunder. Yet in the end, Reagan found it more important to do right by fellow conservative Helmut Kohl than to do the right thing. And there is the growing shadow cast by White House communications director Patrick Buchanan, who has taken to shielding Nazi war criminals from deporation. Yes, in the right-wing rewrite of World War II, it is the emerging anti-communist alliance that matters. Most everything else could be counted as mistakes among friends

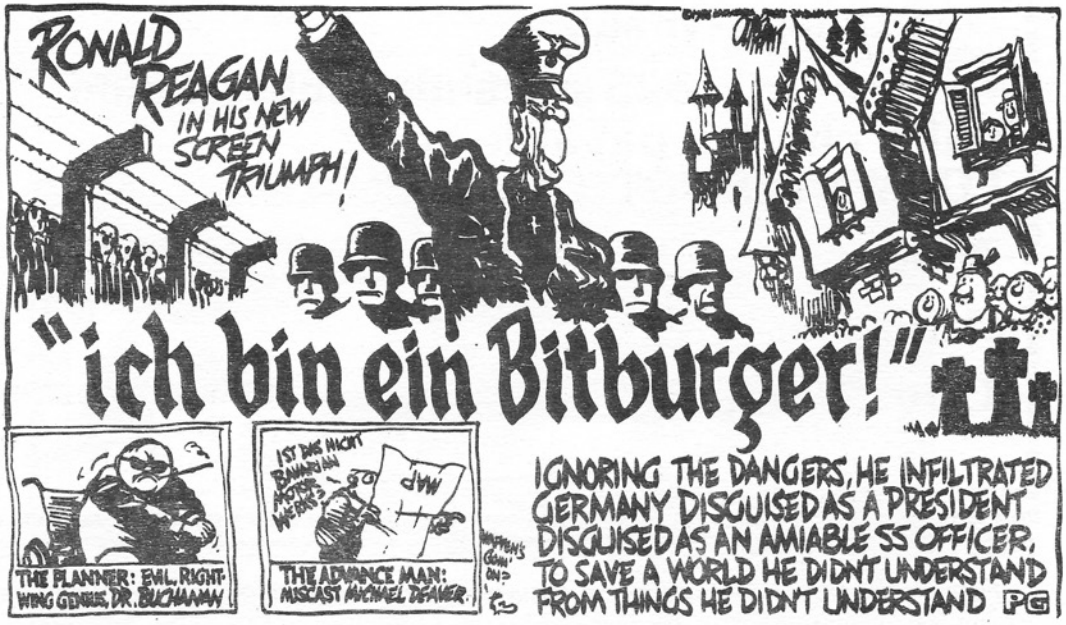
Then there is Central America. The House of Representatives' rejection of aid to the Contras was refreshing. But relief was momentary, soon followed by Reagan's trade embargo. Now new contra aid schemes are being hatched. Yes, "the war is on." (See Aug-Sept '84 FM.) And in this case, only a handful of political leaders are willing to step outside the "of course we all want to stop the communists" consensus. Yes, here we all are.

Now come the budget and tax battles. To date, the Reagan cuts have largely spared Social Security, farm supports, the economics of contemporary collective bargaining,

and some other New Deal cornerstones. Low income programs have borne the brunt of the cuts. One of the few lines of resistance open to advocates for these programs has been to link them to those older protections of middle class and small business groups. After the coming round, even the New Deal core of reform will be eroded, leaving left and progressive arguments even more exposed and our organizing tasks more difficult.

So these are hard times to be working for socialism.

But wait a minute. A US edging closer to reconciliation with Germany's World War II horror? A government doggedly trampling on the the independence and freedoms of its neighbors (while stubbornly resisting the international consensus on South African freedom and Palestinian rights)? A national leadership ever more blatant in its defense of corporate perogative over the rights of the people? To borrow an old slogan, in times like these, its hard not to be socialist.



In this spirit we offer a series of reflections by socialist activists of this generation on their personal path to Marxism and revolution. By and large, the histories focus on the sixties and early seventies, a different kind of times from the present. While there are a number of encouraging signs of renewal of struggle today, this is also a time when many activists are taking a rest or dropping out. To carry forward and renew radical traditions, it is important to set out for consideration accounts like these. We'd like to run further installments of "why I am a socialist": please send us yours.

Elsewhere in this issue we call your attention to a different perspective on socialist liberation—Christian radicalism.

An FM associate has pointed out that our introduction to the group of poems in our last issue should have referred to the author as a Native American friend of FM instead of an "American Indian friend." It is ironic to have made such a reference about a poem like "Welcome Indians" which highlights the encroachment of European "civilization" on Native American society—including the very name "Indian". We are self-critical for the association. ■

Forward Motion is a magazine of socialist opinion and advocacy. Editorial responsibility for *Forward Motion* is exercised by the FM collective.

Forward Motion welcomes letters and articles. All items submitted for publication must be typed, double-spaced, and signed as you want your name to appear. At this time, all correspondence should be addressed: Forward Motion, P.O. Box 1884, Boston, MA 02130.

The editors will read all materials sent to us and, to the extent possible, acknowledge them and let you know their disposition. We cannot, however, be responsible for the return of manuscripts unless you also send us a self-addressed stamped envelope. Letters may be edited for space.

Police Terrorism in Philadelphia

Editorial

On Sunday morning May 12 at the unusual hour of 6 AM, Philadelphia police began eviction of the radical Black group MOVE from a residential home and group headquarters. Within minutes gunfire erupted, and when the shooting stopped an hour and a half later, police had poured over 7000 rounds into the wood structure. This was only the beginning of a day-long siege leading up to the helicopter bombing of the house. A military-style "incendiary device" (at this writing, probably a concussion grenade) set the house ablaze. Before it was all over, more than ten people were dead, over 60 houses had burned and more than 300 people were homeless. Once again a virtual inconceivability for a white neighborhood in this country becomes a matter of course to Black America.

'Rest assured, you can always come work for us'

Reaction from the media and political officials around the country was one more of unease at a situation suddenly out of hand than shock at the unthinkable. The attack came on the heels of the tenth anniversary of the U.S.' defeat in Vietnam. Despite the hyped analysis of lessons learned, the old mentality of destroying the neighborhood to save it continues. Events like this one in Philadelphia give people a rare window into the array of police methods and strategies available to the U.S. government. In this light, the CIA training of a terror gang in Lebanon (responsible among other things for an assassination attempt which killed over eighty people) becomes another example of what is possible here.

Mayor Wilson Goode's defense of the police action is indefensible. When Frank Rizzo launched a similar attack on MOVE back in 1978, it helped unify the Black community and brought him one step closer to forced political retirement. Goode's approval of the bombing on the other hand hurts the cause of Black unity. Further, it highlights the differences in the Black movement between Goode and others arrayed with the white Democratic power structure and those following the more independent route dramatized by Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition.

As FM go to press, the full story from Philadelphia is not in, but what there is is sickening enough already. It gives new meaning to the line, "Here come the helicopters, second time today," from Bruce Coburn's recent hit "Rocket Launcher." It seems a new verse about Black America is needed. ■

Working for Socialism

I **MCL:**

Why am I socialist? The way I posed the question to myself was "How did a quiet, shy, typical middle class, intellectual Chinese girl become a communist?" I'm sure that's the same question my poor parents ask themselves everyday too.

Like everyone else I had a lot of internal conflicts and contradictions when I was growing up. The first one had to do with race. Between the ages of zero and five, the whole world around me was Chinese. My parents were Chinese, their friends were Chinese, and it was fine. But as soon as I hit the age of five. . . . We lived in a white community. I didn't grow up in a Chinatown. All of a sudden I was in conflict because everybody else around me was white. And I became aware that there was something different about me. Like my mother would come to school, and I would feel that she talked funny. And I was sort of ashamed of her and I didn't really want her to come to school. Or one time when I was in the auditorium, I was walking down the aisle with a lot of other kids, and some little kindergartner in the front row said, "Oh, look at the Chinaman!" And I wanted to drop through the floor.

I think as children we all want to be like everyone else. There's a real tendency toward conformity. Also when you're growing up you have a real clear sense of who's on top. I could see that the white kids were in the college preparatory classes. At that time they were the football heroes; (it's not so much true anymore). They were the homecoming queens. They were the cheerleaders. And while I was, because of my parents' emphasis on intellectual pursuits, kind of snobby, there was a part of me, as there probably is with all girls, which secretly admired the homecoming queen and wished that I had blond hair and blue eyes like she did. The way I resolved the contradiction earlier on was to try to become white. I tried to relate mostly to white people. I didn't want to have anything to do with Blacks, that's for sure, because they were even lower than me. And I didn't even want to hang out with other Chinese because I felt it would draw more attention to the fact that I was not white. So I felt a real tug, and there are many Asians who do—who try to out-white the whites.

Another sort of contradiction for me was about those above and those below. There always was a part of me that sympathized with the underdog. I was always rooting for the weaker teams and stuff like that. I also felt a contradiction between individualism and more group-type efforts. On the one hand, I was being pushed all the time towards more individual achievement. On the other hand, I missed having other people I could share things with. In some ways I was lonely. I had one good friend that I could talk with; but there was something missing and I wasn't quite sure what it was.

But for the most part I was a conformist. I think Chinese parents especially put so much pressure on their kids that you just don't question anything for a long, long time.

Working for Socialism

I **MCL:**

Why am I socialist? The way I posed the question to myself was "How did a quiet, shy, typical middle class, intellectual Chinese girl become a communist?" I'm sure that's the same question my poor parents ask themselves everyday too.

Like everyone else I had a lot of internal conflicts and contradictions when I was growing up. The first one had to do with race. Between the ages of zero and five, the whole world around me was Chinese. My parents were Chinese, their friends were Chinese, and it was fine. But as soon as I hit the age of five. . . . We lived in a white community. I didn't grow up in a Chinatown. All of a sudden I was in conflict because everybody else around me was white. And I became aware that there was something different about me. Like my mother would come to school, and I would feel that she talked funny. And I was sort of ashamed of her and I didn't really want her to come to school. Or one time when I was in the auditorium, I was walking down the aisle with a lot of other kids, and some little kindergartner in the front row said, "Oh, look at the Chinaman!" And I wanted to drop through the floor.

I think as children we all want to be like everyone else. There's a real tendency toward conformity. Also when you're growing up you have a real clear sense of who's on top. I could see that the white kids were in the college preparatory classes. At that time they were the football heroes; (it's not so much true anymore). They were the homecoming queens. They were the cheerleaders. And while I was, because of my parents' emphasis on intellectual pursuits, kind of snobby, there was a part of me, as there probably is with all girls, which secretly admired the homecoming queen and wished that I had blond hair and blue eyes like she did. The way I resolved the contradiction earlier on was to try to become white. I tried to relate mostly to white people. I didn't want to have anything to do with Blacks, that's for sure, because they were even lower than me. And I didn't even want to hang out with other Chinese because I felt it would draw more attention to the fact that I was not white. So I felt a real tug, and there are many Asians who do—who try to out-white the whites.

Another sort of contradiction for me was about those above and those below. There always was a part of me that sympathized with the underdog. I was always rooting for the weaker teams and stuff like that. I also felt a contradiction between individualism and more group-type efforts. On the one hand, I was being pushed all the time towards more individual achievement. On the other hand, I missed having other people I could share things with. In some ways I was lonely. I had one good friend that I could talk with; but there was something missing and I wasn't quite sure what it was.

But for the most part I was a conformist. I think Chinese parents especially put so much pressure on their kids that you just don't question anything for a long, long time.

So I went to college. I went to graduate school. I did a few things wrong. I got pregnant so I had to get married. That wasn't too pleasing to my parents! But generally I pretty much conformed to what they had planned. And because I was on this path and because I was married, the anti-war movement passed me by. I tried to go to one SDS meeting just because it was kind of popular but my mother wouldn't let me, so that killed that. The women's movement passed me by too, because I was already married and had a son and really all I learned about it was what the newspapers said—single women burning their bras. And I said, "What does this have to do with me?"

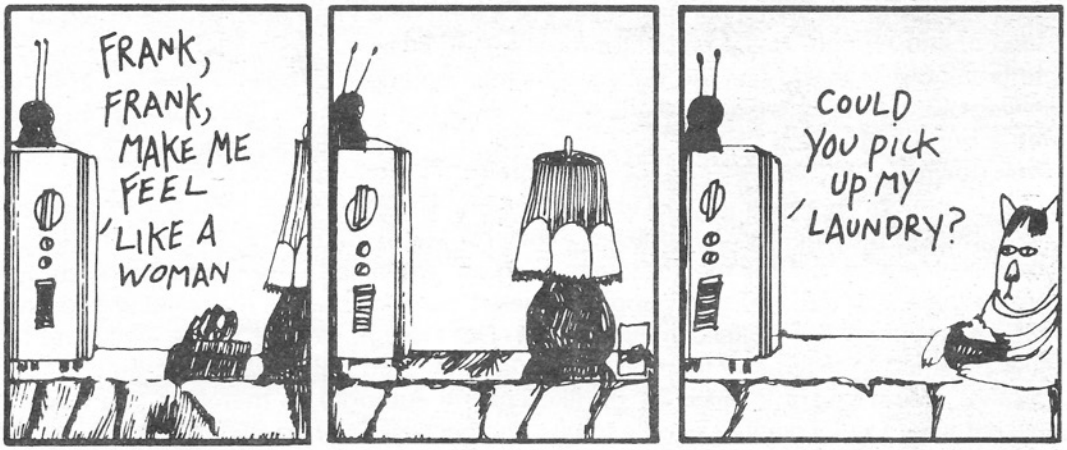
So how did I get political? First of all, it was through the breakdown of certain myths that I had believed. My father had always taught me that the university was an ivory tower where knowledge was important and teaching and students. When I was in graduate school, some other students and I tried to eliminate a useless requirement in the department I was in. We went through the proper channels to try to get a very simple thing changed, making reasonable arguments. We failed and I found that the university was more interested in *money* than in education. They changed the requirement when five of us quit the program after thousands of dollars in fellowship money had been spent on us.

Another thing that had an effect on me was the McGovern campaign. I remember I was at home and someone came door-to-door—another student. I was really struck by how interesting this person was and how much he had to say about politics. I admired it. And so I got involved in the McGovern campaign. And another myth got destroyed: the myth that "one person doesn't make any difference." I'd always believed that. There are so many millions of people, what difference could you make. But I could see that because so many people are inactive, one person can make a lot of difference. A few of us organized the whole precinct and got them all to vote for McGovern. It was really good.

As some of these myths started to get exposed, the myth about the family began to get to me. That was partly because the women's movement was gaining in influence. And a close friend was writing me letters about what a sucker I was. So I started to see things that were really wrong with my marriage. I had accepted the female role in a lot of ways. I thought if you wanted to do anything on your own, you had to first be a good wife and mother. So I started to struggle with my husband around this stuff. And I was not too successful to say the least. We were both going to school and he would close the door and study in the bedroom and I would study at the kitchen table so I could look after our kid and cook our dinner at the same time. Stuff like that got to me after a while.

The turning point for me was when I decided I wasn't going to accept the marriage anymore. I wasn't going to buy into male chauvinism anymore. That was the point that I feel like—as the Chinese call it—I really "fan shen." It means literally "turn over your body," like you make a break. So I packed up my son and my belongings, and with thirty dollars in my pocket and an old car, I headed east. And I left my husband and school behind.

Once I started to see the oppression of women and to understand it, and I started to talk to other women, it was really an eye-opener. While I was married I think that I (and other married women) would spend a lot of time pretending how great our marriages were. We wouldn't want to talk to anyone about problems because we assumed it was a problem with us and that we were somehow defective if we couldn't get this thing to work. But then I started talking to women neighbors and other acquaintances and they all had similar problems. And it was great: we felt a real collective sense. You know, "Maybe it's not me, it's men." Or whatever. It really felt good to be able to talk to other people and feel you didn't have to pretend that everything is O.K.



I also began to understand other things too. I think that once you begin to understand one oppression you begin to understand others. In terms of racism I could see that as a child I had been made to feel ashamed of the fact that I was Chinese. That was the form that racism took on me: that I had to deny who I was and feel ashamed of my parents and so on.

When I came east, I took a couple of different jobs. I worked as a cook in a boys home. And that really taught me a lot about class bias. Because at that point I was still in the frame of mind that I was going to go out and help people which is a real class chauvinist attitude. In this boys home, the social workers would come in and the kids didn't want to talk with them. Because there was a clear class difference. They would come in with their suits and ties, and here were these boys that were either orphans or who had "done bad things" and that's why they were there. And they didn't want to talk to these people. They would talk more to people like me or the maintenance man who they saw as more in their same sphere. I remember a kid who came in one day. A real sweet kid. He came in with a picture of his brother who had been arrested for the murder of some old guy. He was saying, "Hey, look. My brother is in the paper!" That was the only way that he could become famous. Or like kids were stealing cars and I said, "How would you like it if someone stole your car?" And they said, "We're never

going to have a car." So it just became real clear that there was another side to things and I was just looking at the world in a real middle-class way.

As I began to see these contradictions in myself, I began to see these same contradictions in other people. I see Americans as a very tragic people. On the one hand, they will try to cut you off in traffic and call you asshole out the window so that they can save thirty seconds and in the meantime they'll send in fifty dollars for Jamie Fiske's liver transplant. There are these two sides to them. I know a guy retiring from a factory job who said he was going to volunteer in a hospital afterwards because he had always wanted to help people. And this society doesn't give people any way to do that. And I guess I felt the same way about myself. For a long time I had been programmed to be kind of anti-human; just to be out for myself. And I was much happier when I was able to break out of that. I feel the same way about American people in general. You can always see points where their hearts will be visible but in general there's this facade built up around them. And I know I was the same way. And it took certain things to break that down.

So I think as far as being a socialist goes, some of the things we can do with people is to appeal to their hearts and to try to explain some of the contradictions in their own lives as Marxism did for me. Studying Marxism explained why capitalist society imposes these contradictions on people. I guess I see a socialist as really being a teacher which is something I always enjoyed doing. But I taught kids for a little while and felt like I wanted to teach *and* learn at the same time. And I also wanted to do it among equals. I didn't want it to be set up like I'm the authority so therefore you have to accept what I say. I wanted people to be there because they wanted to learn. I wanted them to tell me I was full of shit if they thought I was full of shit. That way you can be sure that you're right. You don't want to be teaching people and not have them tell you when you're wrong.

I think being a revolutionary is about the most exciting and rewarding thing you can be. I enjoy the work I do, because unlike most jobs in America, it is meaningful. It's not about looking out for number one. It is about working to make life better for everyone. Maybe someday as a result of our work, Chinese kids won't have to feel ashamed of their mothers' accents, or women won't have to be second-class citizens, or people won't feel like they have to be alone. But to be a revolutionary, you do need organization too. You can't just be off by yourself. You need to go where you're needed the most and feel that your efforts are put where they are most needed. And so that's why I am here today.

II

Ron Davis: I had a lot of trouble trying to answer why I am a socialist. It took me a long time to figure out why. When I think about why I am a socialist, the answers that come first are about why socialism, why Marxism is correct. Basically I am a socialist because I believe that Marxism-Leninism is correct. It answers a lot of the questions—of history and politics and even philosophy. We've all studied *On Contradiction*, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. All those things as I was learn-

ing about Marxism-Leninsim made sense. They just made sense. But I said to myself that that's not really why I am a socialist: I don't really want to talk about why socialism is correct or why Marxism is correct. And then finally I asked myself the question, "Well, why am I a dogmatist?" And everything became clear. There are lots of good reasons why I am a dogmatist.

The Roman Catholic church, that's where I first heard the term dogma. . . as a sort of set of unshakable, incontestable beliefs that all true Roman Catholics are supposed to accept as such, never question, and go out and convince the rest of the world of—or at the very least the backsliding brothers and sisters. That appealed to me even at age eleven or twelve, whenever it was that I first started learning about these things, and probably inspired me the most to want to become a priest. The attraction was not so much the blind acceptance of something that can't be proven or that flies in the face of reality, but the idea that you would take certain beliefs as strong beliefs and convince people of them. So at thirteen I headed off for the seminary. Two years later my best friend in the seminary basically shattered my belief in God which for a dogmatist was a very difficult thing to deal with. But it convinced me of two things: one, that I wasn't going to become a priest; and two, that if you're going to be dogmatic, you've got to be flexible about it!

I was very religious and very immersed in Christian thinking. A lot of things that I've learned in Christianity really made sense at a gut level. I still believe in the old parable of the Good Samaritan and the idea that all men are brothers. . . and all women are brothers too! Things like that really just seem to me to be the basis for any kind of real belief in Christianity. And even after I lost my faith in the church and wasn't convinced there actually was a God, I still believed in a lot of those things.

Giving up the idea of God was enlightening in the sense that if God wasn't making the decisions, and if God wasn't determining the course of the world then someone or ones had to be. I didn't answer that question right away. It took me a couple of more years after that before I really started to get to the idea mentioned before: what are the answers? Is history just an indeterminate thing that just snakes along? Ends up wherever? What I found and what I learned when I first began to study Marxism—the second sort of dogma that I latched on to—was that the masses make history. I think I've done a little better with that one actually since I haven't lost my faith in it.

The idea that the masses make history was really enlightening to me. One of the biggest arguments I used to get into with people who really had a strong faith was the idea that God will take care of things, that you don't have to worry about things. I had some long arguments with a friend of mine in high school about what God was doing for Black people. What was God doing about the oppressive conditions that we live under? What was God doing about poor Black people who go to church religiously, who pray and believe, and who have their son shot down by the cops? Or get fired from their jobs. Those are some pretty difficult arguments to disagree with, and that's essentially why I decided that religion was not going to answer those kinds of questions.

But even after I started to study Marxism and accepted the idea that the masses make history, that we can play a role, I don't think I was a socialist until I decided that I had a role to play in making or helping the masses to make history. I knew about the communist movement and the debate going on at the time. But it was intellectual. It was things that I thought. Socialism made a certain amount of logical sense and answered questions. But for the most part I was heading into medicine. That's where I was going. I figured I could be a good doctor and I could help people and start to address at least one of the needs of my people.

What shook my belief in that was that when it came right down to it I realized that there were a lot of Black doctors, a lot of Black lawyers, and a lot of Black professionals, and a lot of Black people who went to school with me who went on to powerful careers, or prestigious careers or influential positions. But it really didn't speak to the concerns of the little people. And it really didn't, I felt, address the basic question of why were Black people oppressed? And how were we going to deal with that as a people? I recall lots of debates with people about how I was a college student and therefore had a responsibility to use that education to serve the people and a responsibility to become a professional because there weren't many of us Black folks there. The idea was to create a new class of Black people. That that was the answer. And I probably bought that for a long time. But when I thought about becoming a doctor and thought about what I could do as a doctor—one doctor in the health care industry—I realized that I could do less there than I could as an organizer. Fundamentally, if you believe that the masses make history then you have to believe that the masses need organization to do that. A good friend at the time basically convinced me that I could do a better job as an organizer than as a doctor or a lawyer. And I decided to do that. I decided to become a revolutionary.

What has bolstered and pushed me even more towards what some people might consider dogmatism—which I don't—is just that the more I do the kind of work I do, the more I believe there is nothing else for me to do. The condition—not only of Black people, but of people in general—the state of the United States, the state of the world, the state of liberation movements around the world more and more makes me believe that, in fact, we have a job to do. And we may not see tremendous results over the next few years—maybe even over our lifetimes—but there has got to be an answer to the problems that we face, and we are the only ones who are actually looking for those answers. I firmly believe that. I'm not saying only those of us in this room, but in fact, only revolutionaries are trying to solve the problems of the world's people.

Unless you're willing to accept the world we live in; unless you're willing to walk by people sleeping in the street; accept families of four and five living in one bedroom apartments; accept the fact that Black people are making substantially less on the same jobs as white people; unless you're willing to accept the fact that the Black infant mortality rate is almost as great as a lot of underdeveloped countries in the world—then there is no alternative but to fight. And fighting means not just getting mad. Because in fact for most of my life I don't think I've really been mad. (I think I first got mad really

when I got into the communist movement and I realized all the bullshit that was going on!) Fighting means learning to give a good blow, and learning to take a good blow. And fighting means fighting to win.

So I guess that's essentially why I am a socialist. You can come up with a whole list of why Marxism-Leninism is correct but essentially it comes down to feeling that if the masses make history—and I really believe that—then we have to organize the masses. You might say that God is why I'm here! But the fact is that the world needs revolutionaries.

III

Sam T. It's probably not possible to say in five minutes why anyone is a socialist. You're sort of tempted to sum up why socialism is the correct path and all the great things that other people have said about it over the years—whether or not it's actually turned out that way. But then there's always the question of why you personally are a socialist which is probably different for every person. So I picked a few things out of a hat, and that's what I'll go with.

I picked three reaons: first, that questions have answers; second, that the bad guys turned out to be the good guys, and third, that it matters what you do with your life.

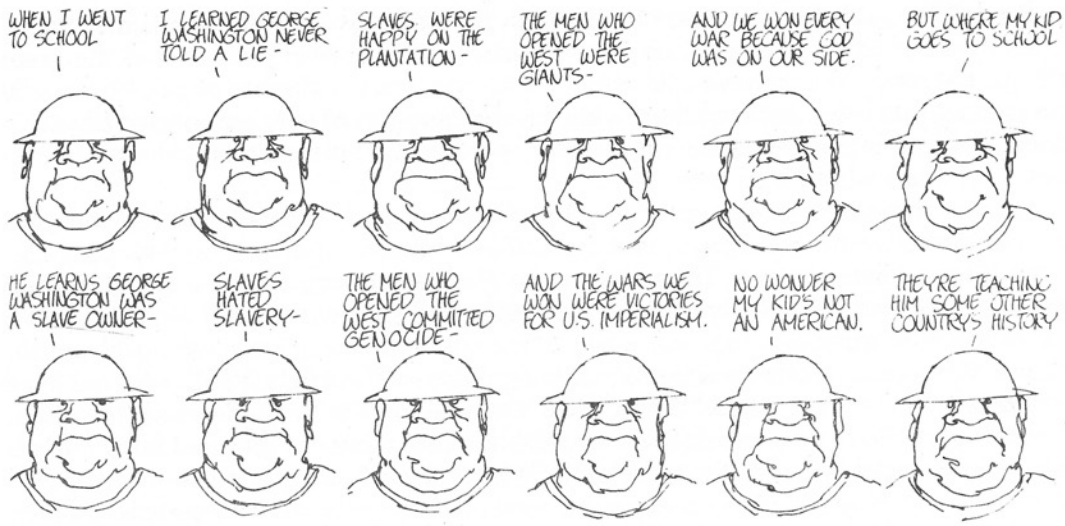
Questions have answers. To me this is the idea that history can be explained. That the big questions that people have about history and society have answers and that a lot of the little questions that you have when you're growing up have answers too. Some of my own questions were like: driving down to Florida in 1962, why did I see bathrooms that were marked "White" and "Colored"? Or in the hollows of New Zion, Kentucky in 1967, why did nearly every shack I visited have a retarded family member, usually rocking speechless in a chair? Or when I went to my first anti-war march, I think it was in May of 1967—and I was a total pacifist—why did I see people get their heads rammed into signposts by Chicago cops? And real little questions too. Like why did my high school principal make a federal case out of long sideburns? Why did my gym teacher throw me against the wall and call me "faggot"? To me these were all real questions although I knew some of them were bigger than others. Why is there racism? Why are some people rich while most are poor? Why is there war at all?

As a theory, Marxism starts with the idea that big dumb questions like these—questions about world history, about why society is the way it is—have answers. They are not easy answers but the reasons can be discovered. And it doesn't have anything to do with God's mysterious ways. And if you can find out why something is the way it is then you're taking the first step towards changing it. So that's the first reason.

The second reason for becoming a socialist is that the bad guys turned out to be the good guys, though there might be better ways to express it. As a Jew, I grew up believing that Adolph Hitler was the worst thing possible; the pure personification of evil. Whenever someone wanted to come up with an example of what was evil about human beings it was Hitler. And my idea of the whole conflict in Germany before World War II was simply Nazis against Jews. That's what I was raised to think World War II was all about. And being an anti-communist. . . I was raised as sort of a liberal

anti-communist. . . I was amazed to learn that everywhere it was precisely the communists who spearheaded resistance to fascism. And fascism existed first and foremost to stop so-called Bolshevism. When I found out a little about what was actually going on and where Hitler came from, that's what it had to do with.

It may have been that everyone but me knew this. I do remember telling my parents about this and they said, "Oh, yeah." But it seemed to me that if Nazism was the worst possible evil, then you'd find the greatest good in Nazism's worst enemy. And that was communism. So the fact that Hitler hated it so much was a pretty good recommendation. And that had a lot of influence on me.



Then it began to seem that everywhere in the world where there was resistance, any kind of resistance to oppression, starvation, torture—it was led by Marxists, or by people becoming Marxists. The great Vietnamese struggle was undoubtedly the biggest influence. But then all the most inspiring anti-imperialist struggles as well as the Black Power movement here in the United States—I'm thinking of the late sixties now—they all seemed to move inevitably towards one or another kind of Marxism. And they still do even despite the terrific problems socialism has.

Take El Salvador. I assume everyone has heard of the FMLN or at least knows that there is a guerrilla struggle—a liberation struggle—in El Salvador. The FMLN is the united front of five military organizations waging that struggle. FMLN stands for Farabundo Marti Frente por Liberacion Nacional. So who is Farabundo Marti? A national revolutionary hero, yes, definitely. A leader of the peasant rebellion. Yes. And as a matter of fact in 1932 he led an uprising which was put down by a massacre in which 30,000 people were murdered. That sounds like a lot, but in terms of the population of El Salvador it's incredible. I think it would be like killing about two million folks in this country. Two or three Bostons. So anyway, Marti was all that. And I'm sure that would

have been enough to name a liberation front after him. And there have been liberation fronts named after people who led peasant rebellions and were national revolutionary heroes.

But it turns out Farabundo Marti was something else as well. In 1932 when he led that uprising he was head of the Salvadoran Communist Party. And I never knew that until the other day. But for some reason I was amazed to find it out. One more confirmation. There he was, head of the Salvadoran Communist Party, leading this incredible rebellion, massacred, and today, when people are leading another struggle that hopefully will be successful this time, they turn to him. It made sense. And naturally many of today's Salvadoran heroes are also Marxists. So that's one more communist hero.

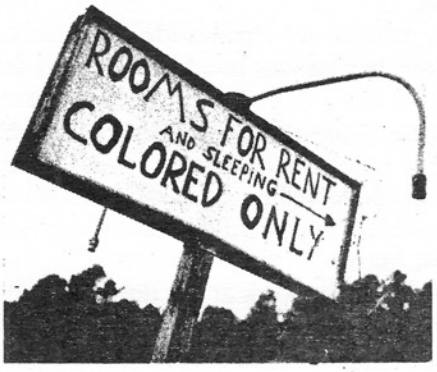
Finally, if you look at the right-wing in the U.S. today, what do they hate more than anything? What's the worst thing they can say about someone? And that's what I want to be. Whatever is the worst thing they can say about someone is what I want to be.

The third reason for being socialist I want to talk about is that it matters what you do with your life. And this may be a little silly but. . . I know it's not too popular these days to talk about commitment and ideals and all that stuff. You can read in any newspaper or magazine about how commitment and ideals have gone down the drain and how they were a passing phase. And everyone is supposed to be older and wiser which means they are supposed to be concentrating on survival or the pleasures of raising a family or making loads of money if they are able to. But the fact remains that you only live once. And a friend once pointed out to me that you basically face two choices: we can live for ourselves or we can try to change the world. And he said as long as we're alive we might as well fight imperialism. And I know that's a little simplistic. I know there are lots of in-betweens. I know some people live for God and some people live for art. Some people give over their lives to their families. All those things in a way I respect. And I'm sure there are loads of other types of possibilities within the limits of survival that are set by capitalism and by nature. But the choice to change the world, whatever the risk, and to dedicate your life to bringing into reality the most revolutionary vision that humankind has ever known—and I definitely think that Marxism presents the most revolutionary vision that humankind has ever known—I think that's the best choice a person can make.

IV

MM: I'm a socialist because I don't think I have a choice. For me the decision to become a socialist was one that took about half of my lifetime to get to.

I grew up in a rural part of the South. I grew up during the days of Jim Crow. I lived the experience that someone described of segregated restrooms. Of little white children calling my father by his first name. And a lot of racist namecalling by people who didn't know me. My first reaction to that was to follow in the tradition that my family had set before me—just to look to Christianity as a way out. As a way to bear the burdens and as a way to morally put oneself above it.



Then there was Martin Luther King and Fanny Lou Hamer and Rosa Parks in the Civil Rights movement who reinterpreted these things and said there should be organized resistance to these injustices—injustices that even as a child I took seriously. I had to. There were Klan rallies less than a mile from my house. My neighbor two doors down had his home shot in when he decided, on the basis of a fair amount of support from the Black community, to run for public office. He would be the first Black person to run for public office in a county that was sixty percent Black.

I also had one of my friends shot at by the father of a white child that he played with. The white boy used to wear a confederate army uniform. We would wear, maybe incorrectly, cowboy and Indian uniforms to play in. And he was a confederate one. But it really didn't mean a whole lot because we just played together. And then one day this kid's father claimed that one of us—a nine year old—tried to steal apples from his apple tree. So he took out his shotgun and shot at him. And my parents just said, "Don't play with him anymore."

So anyway, the Civil Rights movement was profound in saying that you really don't have to take this shit. And that was the starting point for me. And that was the basis for organizing our own minor protests in high school against confederate flags being flown there, against exclusion of Black cheerleaders, against Black students being—not forced to play but compelled to play roles of Rastus in school plays.

And then, as my anger grew, I found little support for anger in the Christian brand of Civil Rights. I became a nationalist. I found that Christianity didn't deal with issues directly of Black communities. It didn't deal directly with the active necessity of preserving Black culture. And it didn't explain a reason for the intransigence of white racism.

My first contact with whites directly was when I left an all Black elementary school and junior high to attend a then desegregated white high school. The Civil Rights movement had led me to believe the reason for the hatred that I had seen and experienced from people who didn't know me was, in fact, because they didn't know me.

And that once they knew me, and once I showed myself willing to be their friend, that the strength of my own character, as Martin Luther King always emphasized, would be enough to break it down. Well, it didn't break it down. So in a sense nationalism was also a reprieve. I could just sort of say, "These people don't count. These people don't have to affect my psyche." And this cultural affirmation came at a time when large-scale, so-called integration was happening and where the basis for unity was to be cultural assimilation. Nationalism stepped into that situation and gave us something to hold onto.

Then as I began to study the struggles of Black people outside of the U.S., and as I began to see the connections between our struggles and the struggles of Black people in the former Portuguese colonies, I found that my nationalist perspective didn't help me understand international struggles. It didn't help me understand why an institution like Harvard was so concerned about the war in Angola and why Harvard was on a particular side of that. It didn't explain what large-scale capital—on a scale I had never conceived of—had to do with who won or lost, with whether people ate or starved, with how many people were killed. And that brought me to socialism. But it was initially a very narrow view of socialism. But then, as I followed the course of struggles in southern Africa, I saw that governments that had held so much promise for us in the sixties were becoming oppressive in many cases, overseeing the destruction of their own people's culture and livelihood. I saw the deep-seated support that many of these governments gave to U.S. aggression and U.S. policies of exploitation both in their own countries and in countries around them.

I needed further explanation. I needed some analysis of classes. I also needed some analysis of classes to help me understand why people in this country who should be allies, were not. Why nationalist Black leaders were as vehemently opposed to Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party as some whites were. And then why other white working people, who had as much to gain from the effects of the Civil Rights movement in terms of job opportunities, educational development, why those people didn't unite with that movement in getting a better life for themselves. It took a socialist analysis of classes to make some sense of that.

So, in sum, I'm a socialist because I can't help it. I'm a socialist because my life depends on it. Because I'm convinced that the lives of all the people I care about depend on it. And it's not at all a lofty ideal. It's totally out of self-interest and because I don't feel that there's any other way out.

V

(Editor's note: This is the first part of a two part interview with Don Smith, an ex-member of the 1970's Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CPML). Although not part of the original workshop the other talks come from, we are including it here because of the similarity in subject matter. In this part of the interview he describes how he got involved. A second installment will take up experiences in the CPML in the years leading up to its demise.)

Don Smith: At the time, I guess you could say I was just doing my thing, rolling with the punches. Where I was working, there was every group you can think of in the place. I mean everybody. There were super-revolutionaries, ultra-lefts, ultra-rights; they were all there. At one time or another I had conversations with all these different people, members of the different groups, and, however reluctantly, I did have to start thinking. I was made to think, against my better judgement. I didn't want to: I used to always say "ignorance is bliss."

A guy from the CPML convinced me that I had what it took to become a revolutionary and to join an organization. Knowing I was a working class person and didn't have all that high an education, he didn't condescend to me. He pointed out to me that a lot of the ideas that I had were very sound. I was just convinced that he was really on the level, very sincere, and that what the CPML had to offer would benefit me as an individual, me as a Black person, me as a working person.

I had talked to some of the other people—like some guys from the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party—ed.), and they wanted me to go along with them on everything. The RCP had a line and that was it. And if I didn't agree with it, I was—what was the term—backwards; I was crazy or stupid. I wasn't too familiar with Marxism or Leninism, but these guys were accusing me with all these terms that were going around then, and I didn't even know what they were talking about. I was speaking from the heart, the way my life experience taught me. I didn't get any credit for that. I was expected to be converted to a code with the rest of them.

With the person from the CPML it wasn't like that at all. I was encouraged to go into it with my eyes open, to use my ideas, my understanding of the world, and to try to apply a little Marxism to my way of thinking. I was taught to understand, to see, that the problems weren't just problems that were there. I'd say: "Life is like that." Well, the person from the CPML would say, "Oh, no, no, no. Life isn't just like that. There's a reason life is like this." And when I'd question him on it: "Well, why?", I was always told: "Well, what do you think about this?" I was given hypothetical problems, questions to solve. And then I was always asked: "Well, how would you respond to this?" or "Why do you think this happened?"

I was very subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) made to realize that these problems exist for the benefit of a very small number of people in the country and the world. Then I actually got a little pissed off. I always used to say, "Hey, I'm doing my thing, I'm making it. Hey, I'm cool, I'm getting over." And I thought I was in control of my life. But I came to realize or to admit that I wasn't in control of my life. And that there were people benefitting from my labor, all the degradation and starvation, and all the drugs and everything else out there, all the racism. There were a very small number of people that were benefitting from that. And I got pissed off. But the main thing I'm trying to get across, I was taught without being told that I was using Marxism-Leninism. I was taught Marxism-Leninism before I was even given a book.

My recruitment lasted about a year. I was in a study group. We studied some October League pamphlets (The October League was the original organization that

founded the CPML-ed.), some CPML pamphlets, some Black history. But I was being educated from day one when this person started talking to me. I didn't realize it at the time. It was a process with this guy saying: "Hey, here's a progressive person, this guy's a revolutionary." He just brought it out in me.

Then I came into the organization in a very unique position. My unit had very beautiful people in it. So I judged the entire organization first by the person who recruited me, second by the rest of the members in my particular unit. As I got into the organization and started meeting other people, there were some people that I liked, some people that I didn't like, and some people that I thought were just ass-holes. And most of the ones that I thought were ass-holes, were ass-holes. But still we had this commonality of wanting to build a working class revolution. And if you're a revolutionary, you've got to understand you're not trying to make friends. We're not talking about loving everybody. We're talking about working together from the point of view of being working class people or middle class people on the verge of becoming working class people. You've got to understand that it's in your best interests to side with the majority of the people. So that's why—being a Black person—I said, "Hey, yeah!"

Now I had no love for white folks at any time in my life. But I started to realize that there are lots and lots of white folks that understand that we have a common interest, the class interest. I was still skeptical. So I put a question to this guy that recruited me, who was white. I said: "O.K. So now you get all these Black folks, all us niggers, right, and we pull off this revolution. Now, what's to say, given the percentage of Blacks to whites in this country or even all non-whites to whites in this country (we still only make up a fourth of the damn population or somewhere around that) so what's to say that after we pull off this revolution that you white folks aren't just going to say: "All right, nigger, you did a fine job. Here's your broom. Here's your fucking apron. Get back in the kitchen and start cleaning up."

I thought that was the question that was really going to get him, the Black-white unity thing. I don't care what this white boy has to say, when push comes to shove, white folks are going to be white folks. But the guy laughed. He said, "Hey, Smittie, that's why I'm trying to get you involved. You have to insure that that doesn't happen." He said, "There's definitely a lot of chauvinism in the organization, some intentional and some not so intentional probably. But you have to come into the organization and you have to point out to the comrades that the things that they are doing are turning off your people, your friends. And you have to do it in no uncertain terms."

So, I was led to believe that I could come in, and I could speak out, and I could point out the problems, and they would be worked on. I was convinced that if I came into this organization and I pointed out to folks that what they were doing was not going to get over with Black folks, they they would try to correct it. The whole idea of a race war didn't sit too well with me anyway. By sheer numbers, I knew that was a losing cause. And I've never been suicidal. So I was convinced that we could work these problems out, maybe not tomorrow, but we could work at them, and they would sincerely be dealt with. And that probably was *the* thing that won me over. ■

Coup in the Sudan

(Author's Note: Late in March of this year, a coup overthrew the government of Sudan. This in turn has sparked interest in this country in the Sudan, and, as a recent visitor to that country, I find myself suddenly in demand. Unfortunately, I cannot give thorough answers to all of the questions I get asked, but I would like to offer some background and history here. I encourage readers to use this as a starting point for more critical analysis of goings-on in the Sudan, as well as other Third World countries.)

A glaring problem for Americans interested in Third World countries is a media that is notoriously imbalanced and often factually incorrect in its treatment of that part of the world. Consider how the news is collected. The big news agencies have correspondents, or stringers, stationed in various parts of the world who send reports in to the central office. These correspondents are usually white Americans or Europeans who may know the language. Barring that, they generally have no particular connection with the land and rely for information on a certain regular array of contacts. Those that stay in the major hotels, as many of them do, tend to depend on the nationals who frequent the hotel for their information.

Many of their first-hand sources are government officials, whose views are far from objective or unbiased. More telling, though, is the fact that these reporters have a decidedly pro-Western world view, and generally support Western world interests around the globe. At its best, then international news reporting is shallow, poorly informed, and lacking in objective perspective. I think the quote is, "believe half of what you see, none of what you read." Tough advice to take, but maybe the best way to avoid misinformation.

Reporting on recent events in the Sudan is no exception; in fact, there has been a blatant lack of objectivity. The *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times* blamed the coup on public displeasure with Islamic measures imposed by the extreme right wing. Then they claimed that the general who assumed power, Abdul Rahman Swar al-Dahab, had close ties to the radical right, and was also a close friend of the former ruler, General Nimeiri.

How were readers to interpret this contradiction? The papers had no explanation as to why such a close friend of Nimeiri's (al-Dahab) had staged the coup, or whether the political right was or was not in its favor. For several weeks, the papers could not decide whether the new regime had good or bad relations with the rebel leaders in Southern Sudan. The papers had no real explanation for why the coup took place the way it did, except to suggest that the military was attempting to restore the peace and preserve the country from elements "blind to the national interest."

The news was necessarily weak because there is little or no interest in the Third World except where Western interests are directly affected. We get little news about a

country like the Sudan until a drought is in progress or a coup has taken place. All of which means that Americans are usually in the dark about happenings in the rest of the world and have a difficult time just gathering facts.

So my answer to the most frequent question—what is going on in the Sudan?—is that I still don't really understand what is going on. I asked many questions while I was there and learned much, but two weeks and the U.S. press is not enough to speak with authority. Even so, a little history and some Marxist perspective should give us a head start in trying to gain a more focused picture.

Background to the Coup

A recent *Forward Motion* article (December-January issue, by Vivien Morris) gave a good introduction to the Sudan. In the interest of our new readers, I'll risk repeating some of the basic facts. Sudan is the largest African country, located in northeast Africa. Egypt lies to the north, Ethiopia to the east, Chad to the west, Libya to the northwest, and Uganda and Kenya to the south. Sudan borders the Red Sea to the northeast. The country is 70% Islamic, and the other 30% Christian or other.

The Sudanese do not seem to have strong political currents uniting large segments of the people at this time. But there are several significant political forces: the Sudanese Socialist Union (the party of the ousted General Nimeiri, the only legally recognized party); the Umma Party, led by the great grandson of el-Mahdi, Sadiq (who was in jail while the author was in the Sudan); the Democratic Union (which by most reports lacks leadership); the Moslem Brotherhood; the Republican Brothers; and the Communist Party. The Moslem Brotherhood was ostensibly behind Nimeiri's Islamization of the country and his imposition of *sharia* law (laws banning liquor and nightclubs and imposing amputations and hangings as legal punishment). This group is generally conservative on social issues, particularly with respect to women's role in society. The Republican Brothers is another religious grouping, but more progressive socially. It opposed publicly the Islamic social measures and favored the elevation of women to equal status in the society. Mohamed Taha, their leader, was recently hanged for religious heresy (his opposition to *sharia*), but it seems more likely that Nimeiri was threatened by Taha's growing influence. The Communists helped Nimeiri to power in the late sixties, but they have since declined signficantly in influence.

Overshadowing these differences is the current conflict between the rebels in the southern Sudan and the central government. The Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army is a diverse coalition of tribal groups and anti-Nimeiri forces. Their main objections have been Moslem and/or northern chauvinism in government policy and violations of the accord Nimeiri signed in 1972 to end the last outbreak of civil war. The south was promised regional autonomy, but Nimeiri later reneged and "re-districted" the south in early 1983 (which in part spurred the latest round of fighting). Nimeiri also promised to build an oil refinery in the south and then scrapped those plans. Other current issues are the building of the Jonglei Canal to re-route the Nile River, ignoring the needs of the local populace, and the failure of the university system to include more non-Moslem southerners, especially Juba University in the south.

Sudan in the Imperialist System

The land roughly equivalent to what is now Sudan was ruled by a succession of Ottoman, or Turkish and Egyptian rulers through 1880. In 1881, a popular leader called el-Mahdi led a popular insurrection against the Turks, the Egyptians, and the British. The British, not to be outdone in their zeal to sustain an empire, collaborated with the Egyptians and subjugated Sudan again in 1898. Sudan was jointly governed by the two countries until 1956, when Sudan was granted its independence by a 1953 pact between Egypt and Britain.

Some roots of the current economic crisis can be found in this early history. The British established a tremendous agricultural project (plantation is probably a more appropriate description) called the Gezira Scheme in the early 1920's: two hundred million acres of centrally administered farmland in central Sudan designed for the large-scale production of cotton. Additionally, the southern Sudan, because of the difficulties of swampland, over-abundant vegetation, and a multiplicity of languages and peoples, was largely ignored throughout most of this period, a stigma that the southern peoples have not seen removed despite the extreme fertility of the land and the potential for development. As in the rest of the Third World, the colonialists were not concerned with the stable, balanced economic growth of the Sudan; they were only interested in the amount of wealth that could be extracted at a minimum cost.

In any discussion of the current problems in Sudan or Africa, one has to consider the phenomenon of underdevelopment. Development has been stunted by the imperialists who stripped the resources and neglected the development of roads, trains, and even modern agricultural techniques. Currently, Sudan lacks even the infrastructure necessary to get food and water to great sections of the country, an adequate communication system, and, as elsewhere in the Third World, substantial health care resources. With an economy lashed to a cotton crop whose world market value is on the decline, and with cotton production 60% less than it was in the mid-1960's, Sudan's economy clearly needs restructuring. The national debt currently outstrips the gross national product. Despite its tremendous resources, Sudan cannot produce enough to pay for its needs.

The world economy is cleverly crafted. In many ways, it resembles the practice of sharecropping, variations of which existed in the United States as well as in Sudan. The notion is that I, the landowner, allow you, the sharecropper, to live on my land, and work the land. You then sell your products back to me, and I will give you an unreasonable price for them. I will also sell you everything you need to farm the land at prices which also ensure that you remain in considerable debt to me. This is fine with me, as long as you are loyal to the system, and recognize that the debts you create today will belong to your children, and to their children's children.

On a global scale, Third World countries are allowed to amass considerable debts to the United States and the International Monetary Fund, as long as they toe the U.S. line, stay away from the Soviets, provide us with a military way-station, and carry out our foreign policy in their part of the world. Except in rare circumstances, the country

cannot develop internally. Sudan is a perfect example of a country which survives only by way of considerable loans, predominantly from the U.S. There are very good reasons for our generosity.

Northeast Africa is being used as a staging ground by two superpowers. The U.S. is particularly concerned with maintaining an ally in the region; the notorious Libya and the pro-Soviet Ethiopia are two of the main reasons. The fact that it borders on another ally, Egypt, and on the Red Sea are two others.

Nimeiri's Problems

So the U.S. was willing to overlook a number of problems with the most recent Nimeiri regime. It did not matter that Sudan was officially a one-party state; it did not matter that in the recent period, Sudan engaged in some of the most blatant violations of human rights. It did not matter that the response of the Sudanese government to the drought has been rife with corruption and short-sightedness. It did not matter that much of our aid to Sudan has been used to support a failing attempt to quell a rebel movement in the south. As long as Nimeiri was willing to toe the line, Sudan would be our "friend."

After independence in 1956, Sudan alternated between military and civilian governments up until Nimeiri led a military coup in 1969. Nimeiri initially led the country to the left: he had been a socialist and allied with the communists to take power. When some members of the Communist Party attempted to stage a coup in 1971, he retaliated strongly. He arrested many Party leaders, outlawed the CP and other parties, and moved toward more right-wing fundamentalist Moslem elements. Although it is not clear why, Nimeiri has swung the political gamut, favoring first this group, then that group. A popular explanation is that he is a pure opportunist, seeking support from whoever offers the most lasting likelihood of preserving his power. This explanation would sustain the popular image he projects of being a survivor, outlasting numerous coup attempts and a disastrous economy.

So what exactly did happen in late March and early April? Several factors probably contributed to the coup. Bowing to pressure from the IMF to diminish the government debt, Nimeiri removed government subsidies on food and clothing, causing those prices to skyrocket. One of the first measures taken by the new ruler, al-Dahab, was to restore the government subsidies, an indication of their importance in relieving the rioting. The Moslem Brotherhood had been responsible for a number of riots on the university campuses, and had been perceived as becoming more militant. Their growing public disfavor may have had something to do with the dissatisfaction with the government, since there were a number of their members in public office. Nimeiri had been identified with their group his last year or so in office. The drought is having a worsening effect: more than four million Sudanese may have been displaced, and another million refugees have come from neighboring countries. The government has been unable to respond effectively to the crisis which is crippling the country. The continuation of the war in the south in the midst of the drought crisis was not favored even by the military and may have lost Nimeiri some more points. And then there remains the

long-standing criticism of gross mismanagement in government that is leveled at every government since independence, not without a good portion of truth.

Nimeiri's time ran out.

Those are the seeds of discontent. Has the coup resolved the political problems? That remains to be seen. General Swar al-Dahab was Nimeiri's defense minister, a close friend; Nimeiri wrote the new leader a letter offering support in the effort to resolve the country's current crisis. John Garang, the leader of rebel forces in the south, suggests that the new government is no change from the previous one, and that al-Dahab is a proxy for Nimeiri, holding power for the same military interests. Some journalists suggest along those same lines that the military, rather than allow the varying opposition forces to coalesce (especially any grouping that included the southern rebel coalition) and form a more radical government, essentially upstaged the popular forces, and used their position to negotiate with the unions and professionals, who had taken the lead in the popular protest. The new government has clearly broken with past policy by seeking to normalize relations with Ethiopia and Libya, so it is fair to say that Nimeiri is not in the driver's seat. But the new government has not taken a new position on the war in the south, and has been reluctant to make any bold moves in the direction of new social or economic policy. Similarly, no criticism of the former

government has come from al-Dahab. It would seem that the popular forces are still in a position of negotiating strength, and that a new government is still taking shape. The move to establish ties with the neighboring countries is probably the best sign that maybe Sudan will continue to recognize their common interests with other African countries, and ally together to tackle the natural disaster and the disaster of an imperialist world economy.

—Peter Hardie

LocoMotion

"Crossover Artists" Storm the Charts

For my money, the big news in rock and roll the past year or so has been the commanding role played by Black artists whose music draws strongly from mainstream rock and roll. In **Rolling Stone's** year-end charts, three of 1984's four top selling records were Prince's **Purple Rain**, Lionel Richie's **Can't Slow Down** and Michael Jackson's **Thriller**. Tina Turner and the Pointer Sisters also made the top twenty. Current Black popular music is more evident on the major rock and roll radio stations than it has been at least since the height of the disco era, and more likely since the early '70s.

Even as this breakthrough provides an opportunity to investigate and reflect on the vastly complex relationship between Black and white elements in rock and roll, a dramatic boycott of Warner Brothers Records by three Black radio stations in the Los Angeles area has laid bare the white supremacy which still permeates the "music biz" and warps it far beyond what might be expected in the "normal" operation of capitalist commerce.

This edition of Locomotion will start with a few general points about the question of Black and white in rock and roll. Then it will look at some of the Black "crossover" musicians storming the charts these days. Finally, the Warner Brothers boycott will provide the obligatory moral.

The Gap in Popular Music

It goes without saying that rock and roll has its deepest roots in Afro-American music, the blues in particular. From its earliest days, rock has been multi-national and the clashes and cross-fertilization of Afro-American and white American (and since 1963, English) influences have been the main yeast that keeps rock and roll alive and fermenting. At certain times, like the mid-'50s and the height of the Motown era, the rock and roll mainstream has encompassed a good portion of contemporary Black pop —and had a large Black following. At other times, like the early '80s, even extremely popular Black performers have found themselves in front of overwhelmingly Black audiences and excluded from many of the rather substantial rewards that come with being a mainstream rock star. Whichever way the pendulum has swung, however, Black popular music has remained both an identifiable independent body of music and an inextricable part of the large, diverse whole that is rock and roll.

There are two main factors which contribute to the gap between Black popular music and the mainstream of rock and roll, and one of these is racism. Among many of the white kids and young adults who make up the central audience for the latter, there exists a tendency to downplay or reject Black artists or styles just because they are Black. A good example is the racist overtones in the "Disco Sucks" movement of a few

years back (which is not to say that the attacks on the disco boom were without merit or positive effect). More significant though is the role of capital in actively promulgating white chauvinism and divisions within the body politic of rock. The clearest recent case in point is the cable television channel MTV, which broadcasts rock videos just like a radio station plays songs. At its inception, MTV was lily white, and attempted to justify its apartheid by exaggerating the racism of its target audience. Once the color barrier was broken, thanks mainly to angry criticism and the hugely popular videos of Michael Jackson, it turned out that MTV's viewers were not as resistant to Black pop as they had been portrayed. Nor as white. Today, there are even videos of rap music on MTV, a development which would have been unthinkable as recent as a year or so back. (This shouldn't be interpreted as a clean bill of health for MTV, however. An editor at **Billboard**, the industry bible, watched 24 hours of MTV not long ago and calculated that just over ten percent featured Black artists.)

The other factor which contributes to the differentiation between Black popular music and the mainstream of rock and roll is often overlooked: Black music is the cultural expression of an oppressed nation, and a most important one. This means that it reflects the heritage, the life, the concerns and struggles of that nation and expresses them, not just in lyrics, but in melody, harmony and rhythm, in performance, and so on. Someone who has grown up outside of that national culture is not as likely as its core audience to find it immediate and accessible.

This said, it must be instantly qualified. It is precisely as a central component of Afro-American culture that Black popular music has long served as a window—an important point of access for whites—into life in Black America. Now nobody in this day and age is going to make much of a case that the power of rock and roll is sufficient to usher in some "ebony and ivory" utopia of racial harmony. But on the whole I would argue it has been—for all its shortcomings—a social force against prejudice and discrimination and for respect and equality.

These last few paragraphs only hint at the complex set of national/racial contradictions reverberating at the heart of rock and roll. They manifest themselves again and again, often in the form of peculiar and intricate paradoxes like Michael Jackson's nose.

Black "Crossover"

Michael Jackson is, of course, the first "biggest thing since the Beatles" in two decades of such claims to actually **be** the biggest thing since the Beatles. His 1982 album **Thriller** has sold around twenty million copies in the U.S. alone. There is no question that he is a gifted musician and performer, but his talent is hardly as titanic as his success would suggest. This is not the place for a full analysis of the Michael Jackson phenomenon, but part of it has to do with the theme of this piece. Jackson got a running start as a mainstream rock and roll star as the adorable prepubescent lead voice on the great Jackson 5 hits which wound up the golden age of Motown. Yet his first few solo albums found their greatest success in discos and on Black radio stations.

Musically, Jackson remains strongly based in contemporary soul and Black dance

music, but **Thriller** included some very calculated bids for portions of the white pop audience. His duet with schlockmeister Paul McCartney and the inclusion of some fierce guitar from heavy metal ace Eddie Van Halen on "Beat It" stand out in this regard. These musical moves were part of an overall strategy designed to position Jackson as being *above* Black and white. So were the "dates" his publicity people arranged with Brooke Shields for consumption by gossip columns and **People** magazine. Most glaring, and particularly resented by many Black youth, was the plastic surgery which gave the biggest Black star this country has ever seen a "white" nose!

Some of the grimmer results of this successful strategy were sadly evident in last year's "victory tour" by Michael and his brothers. They played mainly suburban arenas and tickets ran $30 a head. Relatively few of the young Black men and women whose loyalty sustained Michael and the Jacksons through the lean years were able to attend. Instead the crowds were overwhelmingly white and seemed dominated by yuppies who didn't even care much about music, just the prestige conferred by scoring tickets. The show itself was generally reviewed as a dud, although it was a hugely profitable one.

The first real challenge to Michael Jackson's post-**Thriller** hegemony came last year from another young Black man, Prince, whose ticket to the big time was the semi-autobiographical film **Purple Rain**. A quick listen to the album shows that Prince is entirely at home in the mainstream rock and roll tradition, which he mixes freely with funk and other recent Black styles. No doubt this is partly due to his growing up in Minneapolis, a city with a relatively tiny Black population and a jumping local rock and roll scene. An early hero of his was Jimi Hendrix, another Black artist who found his greatest success as an innovator and idol in the rock and roll mainstream (and who profoundly affected the development of Black pop in the process).

One of the advances Prince represents is commercial. While he is not as rich as Michael Jackson yet, he has managed to keep a high degree of control over his career and finances, something which has almost as a matter of course been denied Black musicians. (Of course, many white musicians have been victimized, but the pattern here richly merits the description super-exploitation.) Moreover, Prince has created a

mini-empire of other bands and musicians whose careers he has tried to guide—Apollonia, Sheila E., Time and others.

As part of controlling his career, Prince, too, has taken pains to project himself as something other than Black. Rather than above, he defines himself as caught *between* Black and white—anguished child of a Black father and white mother who fight savagely. His band Revolution is a real Rainbow coalition of a group—a white guy, two Black guys, and two white women—while both Apollonia and Sheila E. are Latinas. In the movie, the closest thing to a villain is the leader of a rival Black (though mainstream rock-flavored) band, played with comic flair by Morris Day as a slick hustler type. At the theater I saw it at, there were Black street youth audibly rooting for Day over Prince.

Sexual Imagery

This brings up a subject too often ducked when lefties talk about popular music and performers—sex. In this case, interracial sex—still a rather emotionally charged question in some quarters. One of the most noteworthy things about Michael Jackson and Prince is that they are both sexual idols/models/fantasy figures for young white girls and to some extent, boys, on a scale that Black performers have never before achieved. Certainly their efforts to evade the color line that runs through the center of American society have helped make this positive development possible. A big part of it, though, is that they display an androgenous and non-threatening sexuality. Despite his lyrics and knowing videos, Jackson really comes off as pre-sexual, not unlike Boy George. A Jehovah's Witness, he advocates chastity and abstention from dangerous drugs like coffee and alcohol, and he does so in a painfully shy and waif-like voice which makes him seem about as sexual as a Care Bear.

Superficially, Prince is just the opposite. Before **Purple Rain**, he used to perform wearing nothing but a glittery jockstrap and sing songs about topics like playing hide-the-salami with his sister. What this really is is a kind of cartoon pansexuality, fundamentally adolescent; beneath it, he wants us to see a wounded, tender soul in need of mothering. (Beneath that, **Purple Rain** suggests, is a power freak with a lot of contempt for women.) In short, neither presents anything like the kind of male sexuality, whether macho or mature, that predominates in the Black community. To put it another way, if these guys were more like Howlin Wolf or Wilson Pickett or, say, Rick James,the leap to sexual identification would have been far more difficult for white kids.

Having opened this can of worms, I'm going to stick to the few observations above and leave to another time—and perhaps to a more capable commentator—the evaluation of the plusses and minuses of non-traditional approaches to sex roles, the debate in the Black community over models for youth, extreme sexual explicitness in music for teenagers, and so on. Instead let's move on to a quick look at a couple of the other stars who are considered part of the crossover phenomenon.

Tina Turner is in the midst of one of the most remarkable comebacks in the history of rock and roll, replete with commercial success, Grammy awards, magazine cover stories and the works. Her triumph comes as the result of well over a decade of consciously pitching herself at a predominantly white mainstream audience. This was a smart career move on her part—by the late '60s her kind of gutbucket delivery had fallen out of favor in the Black pop market. In essence, with her album **Private Dancer**, which was written, produced and played on by a bunch of English band members who weren't even born when Tina started touring with then-husband Ike in the '50s, she is a case of reverse crossover since it has helped kick her back to star status on the Black charts as well.

The Pointer Sisters are another case in point. Their recording career began as backup singers for folks like Dave Mason and Boz Scaggs. Their biggest hit was a cover of a number by rock deity Bruce Springsteen, "Fire," which was also really his first introduction to Black audiences and the dance floor scene. Their success owes a great deal to the danceability of their disco-oriented hits, but it remains music deeply influenced by their background in the mainstream.

Economics and Art

Lionel Richie is a little different story. He fills a musical niche which has increasingly belonged to Black singers since kids in the 1950s had impassioned arguments over who was better to make out to, Frank Sinatra or Johnny Mathis. Richie provides ballads and beautifully crafted soft rockers and he is the undeniable king of the heap in this field. Not only is he playing a time-tested role for Black singers, but with the likes of Barry Manilow and Christopher Cross as his principal competition, he'll probably stay there forever.

The enormous impact and profitability of these acts have created real turmoil in the world of Black music. Artists would hardly be human if they didn't want a big, fat

chunk of this pie and didn't think they deserved it at least as much as some of the musicians who have broken through. For their part, the record companies, especially giants like Columbia and Warner Brothers/Atlantic/Elektra are pressuring Black musicians they have under contract to get with the program and make some big crossover moves. Jeffrey Osborne knows; he was lead singer for the funk oriented LTD for years. Now he's trying to carve a solo career in Lionel Richie's neck of the woods, saying "The economy is so bad that you almost have to cross over to maintain any kind of a recording deal." This is true even though the experience of independent Black labels like Solar or Total Experience shows that a group like the Gap Band, which can consistently put songs and albums in the top of the Black charts, will easily sell as many records as a better known crossover artist Ike Deniece Williams.

Often the result is that the guts are ripped out of Black music. Osborne says, "I think I've regressed as a singer. I came out of the church where you take one note and sing it forever. But most white people can't walk down the street and sing like that, and they tend to buy records they can sing along to." Thus artists pull their music away from the context of the national culture that nourished it to make it more accessible.

Of course, this being rock and roll, things aren't quite that cut and dried. The corporate drive for crossover bucks can create some impressive and profitable art. Columbia records, for example, had English rock star Phil Collins put together singer Philip Bailey's new solo album **Chinese Wall**. Collins not only produced, but drummed, sang and co-wrote several tunes. Some Black executives at the firm griped about this intrusion by an alleged exploiter of Black music. The bottom line is that the two Phils turned out a number one single, "Easy Lover," and an album that's better than anything Bailey's done since his mid-'70s work with Earth, Wind and Fire. It is not, however, a giant seller.

In mid-March, KACE-FM, KJLH-FM (owned by Stevie Wonder) and KGFJ-AM, three radio stations in L.A., kicked off a storm of controversy by refusing to play any Warner Brothers records. The boycott was a direct, if ironic, product of the crossover explosion and was actually triggered when Prince's **Purple Rain** tour hit the L.A. area. Black stations which had played and supported Prince's music for years (dating back to the days when he was booed off a Los Angeles stage as an opening act for the Rolling Stones), got only a handful of tickets and other goodies to give away in promotional contests which boost listenership for the station and generate hype for the concerts. The biggest local "contemporary hit radio" station got scores of seats right up front to hand out.

This highlighted the fact that the music industry tends to treat Black radio stations as farm teams. Especially when the smell of money is as heavy in the air as it is now, artists with crossover potential are groomed there, and the stations are given resources to promote them until they break through. Then it's the big, mainstream, easy listening stations who get the concert sponsorship rights, the on-the-air interviews and the promo items like tickets, jackets, records and so forth.

The target could have been any of the other "majors." All of them habitually bleed

the Black community this way. Two especially ironic instances are those of Teena Marie and Madonna, both of them white singers who got their start on stations like KACE and only now—after more than five years in Teena Marie's case—are making a dent on the mainstream charts. Inverse crossovers, maybe?

The boycott was publicized in **Radio Hotline**, a newsletter run by two Black women. One of them, Christol Clay, explains, "It's been a serious problem for a long time, but until now it's always been assumed it was happening in smaller markets . . . . When they found out it was happening at Black stations in Chicago and New York, that's when programmers got together and said enough is enough." By themselves, the three L.A. stations are just a flea bite to Warner Brothers, but the outpouring of support and anger their action elicited from around the country scared the hell out of the company. After a welter of denials, promises and negotiations, a settlement has just been announced as Locomotion goes to press. Without the details, a full summation is impossible, but it looks like a notable victory has been won. The consequences for the future of rock and roll can only be positive.

—Dennis O'Neil

Review: For My People

Editors' Note: There is a great deal of public controversy over the true heritage of Christianity.

No doubt, more than a few historical atrocities have been committed in the name of Christianity. The West's Christian tradition served as rationale and direct instrument of colonial conquest of the Third World as well as African enslavement. Today, Christian fundamentalism is integral to the expansion of the Right.

Yet Christianity is also an ideological battleground, providing inspiration to the cause of freedom and justice in this country and throughout the hemisphere. Today it is crucial to acknowledge and embrace those currents of Christianity that have become a force for hope and resistance among the oppresed. It is one of the ironies of history that in the very same cultures where Christianity was prosletyzed in order to subdue and destroy indigenous cultures, it often has been reworked in the oppressed's own image. As some Christian radicals put it, it is through the opppressed that Jesus' original revolutionary teachings have been reclaimed.

The Afro-American struggle has reclaimed those teachings continually, from the earliest slave rebellions through the Civil Rights movement to the current Rainbow politics. In general, from the powerful example of Martin Luther King to the more anonymous workers for sanctuary for Latin exiles, Christianity has often been associated with great moral courage, a bedrock love for the people, and a willingness to make sacrifices even of one's life.

The following two contributions are offered as part of the discussion of progressive Christianity. First, a review of a new book by Black theologian, Rev. James Cone, and second, a sermon presenting one vision of Chrisitianity as an ideology of struggle against oppression. The two should be of interest both for the commentary they provide and as a spur to further assessment here of religion's role in society and in political struggle.

Book Review: For My People, by James H. Cone

Black activists are once again finding their way to the church. Some are joining and others are helping form alliances between Christian and secular activists. For many of us, the churches that taught us our first freedom songs during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s were viewed as too reformist and too "pie in the sky-ish" in the 1970s. Yet for all our valid criticisms of church practices, we owe a profound debt to the Black church for the unity and inspiration it provided to African American struggle. While some activists came to define themselves solely as nationalists, socialists, or communists, many other activists remained committed Christians despite their

criticisms of certain church policies and practices. These Christians continued to struggle on the inside for a vision of Christianity which put the struggle against discrimination and oppression at the core of their theology.

Rev. James H. Cone, a preacher and professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York has recently written *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church, Where Have We Been and Where are We Going?* This book chronicles the struggle in the Black church from the Civil Rights Movement to the present to relate the gospel of Christ to the experiences and needs of the Black community. Cone argues effectively for the need for the further development and propagation of Black theology, that is, a theology of liberation that is culturally specific to African Americans. This theology of liberation embraces the political values of socialism and the economic understanding of Marxism while maintaining its Christian beliefs. In overall outlook this approach to Christianity shared many of the social concerns of liberation theologians from Central and South America who speak of God being on the side of the poor and oppressed.

Black theology, as described by Cone, is not an entirely new phenomenon. It draws from the radical tradition of Black preachers like Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey who organized slave revolts in 1800 and 1831, respectively, "in the name of the gospel and black freedom." Black theology looks to Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church who declared in 1898 that "God is a Negro." From this century Black theology incorporated the socialist activism of Rev. George Washington Woodby, a Baptist pastor and delegate to the Socialist Party Conventions of 1904 and 1908. Of profound influence was the grass-roots organizing and leadership provided by Rev. Martin L. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. A Black nationalist influence was contributed by Rev. Albert Cleage concerning the psychological damage done by using white cultural images in Black churches. Contemporary theologians, including Reverends Gayraud Wilmore, Jerome Long, Charles Long and Cecil Cone, contributed research into the role of African religions in Black theology. Black women seminarians and professors, including among other Pauli Murray and Cheryl Gilkes, have added a feminist perspective to Black theology.

Black theology is currently being challenged by radical theologians and movements in the Third World, especially from Central America and South America, to incorporate more of a Marxist economic and class analysis of society. Unlike the typical sectarianism of many Black and white Marxists in the United States toward religious activists, non-Christian revolutionaries in Nicaragua, for example, reached out to build political unity with Christians as Christians. Because of this unity both the Church and revolutionary organizations deepened their ties to the poor and became dynamized by the process. Some African American theologians, including James Cone and Cornell West have pondered the history of the Black church and contemporary Latin American church developments and are taking on the challenge. In *For My People* Cone responds to it in the following way:

Building on the strengths of black leaders of the past, we must also look

beyond them and learn from the struggles of the oppressed throughout the world, as did our leaders in their lifetime. We need a vision that includes the whole of the inhabited earth and not just black North America, a vision enabling us to analyze the causes of world poverty and sickness, monopoly capitalism and anti-democratic socialism, opium in Christianity and other religions of the oppressed, racism and sexism, and the irresolute will to eliminate these evils. We must analyze these complex and deeply rooted evils in such a manner that the black struggle and faith can be seen expressing solidarity with the struggles and faiths of others who are fighting for the liberation of the wretched of the earth.

Such words from a contemporary Black theologian represent a good sign for uniting Black community activists with the most significant independent institution in Black communities, the church. I encourage Black activists and others to read James Cone's *For My People* so that we might, in better understanding the dynamics of the Black church, grasp the hand of unity offered by our sisters and brothers working toward liberation within a Black theological context.

James H. Cone's **For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church — Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going.** *(Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984; $9.95 pb) can be ordered from: Afro-American Book Source, P.O. Box 861, Boston, MA 02120. "Your Black Bookstore By Mail."*

The Spirit of Justice

A Sermon by Elaine Hall

Being a Christian means doing justice. Not only preaching and hearing justice, but acting on that preaching—putting that preaching into practice.

When I came to De Colores a year ago, I came because I needed community with other lesbians who are Christians. Lesbians who are committed to fighting sexism, racism, classism, imperialism, and all other injustices.

I wanted to be in community with powerful women, healing women whose power and healing and love comes from God-with-us.

For many years I avoided commitment. I avoided commitment because I was confused and frightened, because I felt I couldn't handle the evil I saw in the world. The evil that starves children so rich people here in our own city can buy truffles at $800 a pound. The evil that consents to the deaths of 25 million people **every year** in poor countries who die of cholera because it isn't in the financial interests of drug companies to market a very inexpensive packet that consists of a solution made of salt, sugar, and purified water that would rehydrate people so that they could stay alive until the cholera bacteria dies—which only takes a few days.

I began to see this evil as being the same evil that kept my father working in his non-union factory job so that in September he retires with a bad heart and medical bills, no insurance, and no pension plans. The same evil that stole this country from its indigenous people, that brought African people here to be slaves, that raped the forests and polluted the oceans and the air we breathe every day.

The same evil that keeps people of color, white working-class people, lesbians, and gay men from employment and decent housing and medical care and from the exercise of basic civil rights. The same evil that intervenes in countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and forces people to live under cruel dictators so that United Fruit Company or the Nestle Company or ITT or Bank of America can pull in obscene profits. I began to recognize that evil by name—capitalism and imperialism. I began to see that my country, the United States, is directly responsible for these evils. And then, I saw the need to commit myself in struggle against our common oppressions.

At this point, I'd like to talk a little bit about who Jesus of Nazareth was. Jesus was a poor man, a carpenter by trade. His nation, Israel, was under foreign occupation. They were taxed to the point of poverty by the Roman Empire. Jewish women were raped by Roman soldiers. Jewish men were subjected to performing hard work for the troops for no wages. And when Jewish people rebelled or protested against Rome, they were killed.

The Jewish people were hungry, they lived in poor housing, they were plagued with diseases. Everywhere they turned, there was the presence of the foreign master. Even

within the Nation, there were those among the ruling class who collaborated with the Roman oppressors.

Jesus spent three years tirelessly preaching against Rome and the rich collaborators. He went throughout the country challenging the power structure, expressing his solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.

It was dangerous for Jesus to do this. Time and again, he escaped arrest for his actions. And all he was doing was speaking the truth. All he was doing was showing his love for his people. All he was doing was saying "No" to Rome, "No" to injustice.

Eventually, of course, as he became more and more popular, as more and more people listened to him and began to resist the authorities, he became a threat to them who had to be removed. So, one night, after having been betrayed by one of his close friends, he was arrested on trumped-up charges. He was put through a mock trial, found guilty of seditious acts against Rome, and then he was executed.

But the story doesn't end there. Scripture tells us that the Power of God raised Jesus from the dead, that he then appeared to his friends and followers and gave them the task of going on with his work of preaching the good news to the poor, declaring release to the captives, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, raising the dead, calling the rich and the powerful to account for their crimes against the people. He told his followers that they also would be empowered by God to do this work and that his own spirit would live on in them, in their community of purpose.

And so, the Church was born.

As the people of the early church carried out Jesus' mission, they met with constant harassment by the authorities. They were beaten, thrown into prison, starved, thrown to wild animals, crucified, burned to death. Because they were saying "No" with their entire lives to oppression.

But something happened to the Church. When the Romans saw that they couldn't shut these troublemakers up, no matter how persistently they persecuted them, the Emperor at the time, Constantine, decided that the best way to crush the Church's power was to make Christianity the official religion of the State. And that worked. Because bishops were paid good salaries, they began to have a vested interest in keeping the Church folks in line. "Christian" came to mean "law-abiding."

But you can't serve God and Profit. God and Profit are directly opposed to each other. Profit is the tool of corruption and injustice, the weapon of the State.

And who is God?

God is the Spirit of justice, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of liberation, the Spirit of creation, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of healing, the Spirit of community—**of having things in common**.

Jesus of Nazareth died the death of a criminal because he knew who God is. He knew that God hates oppression. And he knew that God takes the side of the oppressed.

But Rome said that Jesus was a troublemaker. A rebel. A criminal. Therefore, Rome said that Jesus had to die.

And, 2000 years later, Rome is saying the same thing to us, the Church. Those of us who are in communion with Christ. Those of us who affirm that we are working for a free and just society. We who have "things in common" with Jesus of Nazareth who lived so long ago. And who still lives among us.

Now, Rome is America. America that seeks to dictate its will to all the peoples of the world. America's god is money/power. America's god is death.

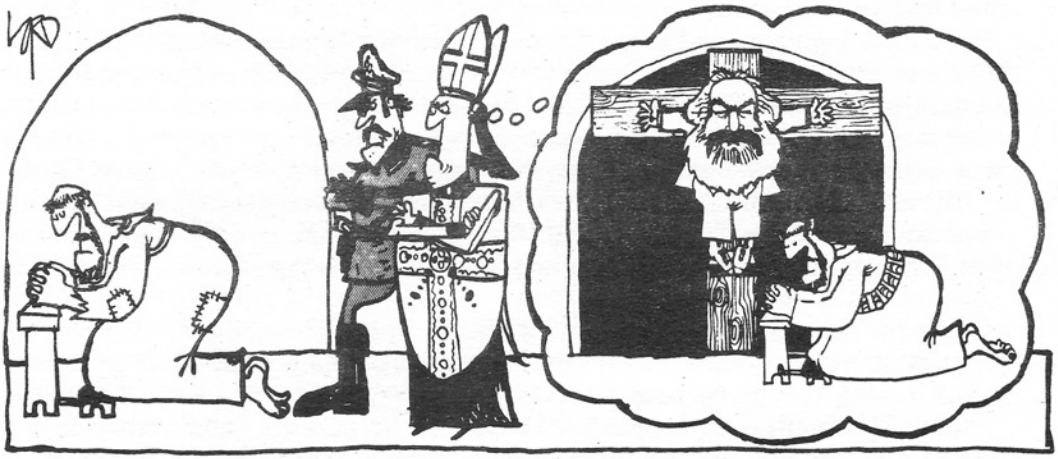
My friend, Ardena, once said, "You can't preach Christ without preaching Rome." We can't preach liberation without talking about oppression.

Maybe, at this time, we need to look at why we're using the terms "liberation" and "oppression," terms that we associate with politics, not religion.

When the Church became aligned with the State of Rome and operated as an arm of the power structure; instead of remaining in a prophetic relationship to Rome, calling the power structure to account; the terms "sin" and "salvation" came to be used in a purely individual, apolitical context.

As long as people were taught that the Society of God, the just society, was to be found in heaven after this life is over, they wouldn't be involved with changing things on earth. "Sin" came to mean individual actions, and even thoughts, that were not in the interests of the Church that had become virtually synonymous with the State. "Salvation" meant conforming to the image of the Christ that was taught by this Church, a Christ who was radically different from Jesus of Nazareth.

Christ was portrayed as a cosmic savior who counselled the poor to endure injustice for his sake so that they could be saved in heaven. To be faithful to Christ meant being faithful to the Church which meant being loyal to the State, serving the interests of the State.



But God is not the God of the oppressive state, whether that state is imperial Rome or imperial America. And Christ is not the Saviour and comfort of the rich and powerful. Christ is the Truth that sets us free from our oppressors. Christ is one of us. Christ

keeps faith with us.

And we, as Christians, are expected to keep faith with Christ. According to the Gospel, keeping faith with Christ means feeding the hungry, healing the sick, housing the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoners.

Today, keeping faith with Christ means doing everything in our power to see that all people everywhere live decent lives. Being committed to Christ means being committed to the overthrow of unjust governments that, in the words of the scripture, "devour God's people as they devour bread." Governments that are dedicated to the destruction of life. Governments that starve their own people in order to build more bombs.

It's time we redefined what "sin" and "salvation" really mean. "Sin" means being alienated, being separated from God. It is a sin that most women in this country make $.57 to the dollar made by most men. It is a sin that every minute, one woman is raped or battered. It is a sin that people starve in Africa, Asia, and Latin America while surplus butter, cheese and dried milk are kept in warehouses in this country to keep profits high. Those are a few of the things that "sin" means. "Salvation" means being reunited with the God of justice. Those who sin fight against God. Anyone who fights against justice is the enemy of God. They are our enemies.

To love God with our entire minds, hearts and strength means to be committed to God's struggle for justice for God's people in this world.

We have said that we are Christians. We have said that we know God. Therefore, we are absolutely committed to the struggle for a just society, for a liberated world. And no matter how difficult it is, we will not stop until the dream of community becomes reality. No matter how much hatred and repression is directed against us, we are committed to this struggle. To be a Christian means to be at war with oppression, no matter where it is happening.

Being in community, "having things in common" means that we have to be very serious about the work we have to do, recognizing it as God's work. And we have to support each other whenever we fall short and make mistakes. This world is in crisis and as Christians, as lesbians, we are not separated from that crisis. We need each other and we need to recognize that need and empower each other to do God's work. We need to heal each other and forgive each other. We need to criticize each other in a spirit of love and with the goal of mutual growth in mind, rather than mutual destruction. We have to claim our power and our unity.

Because it is up to us to build the common/wealth of God, here.

—Elaine Hall

Forward Motion Forward Motion Forwa

$2.50