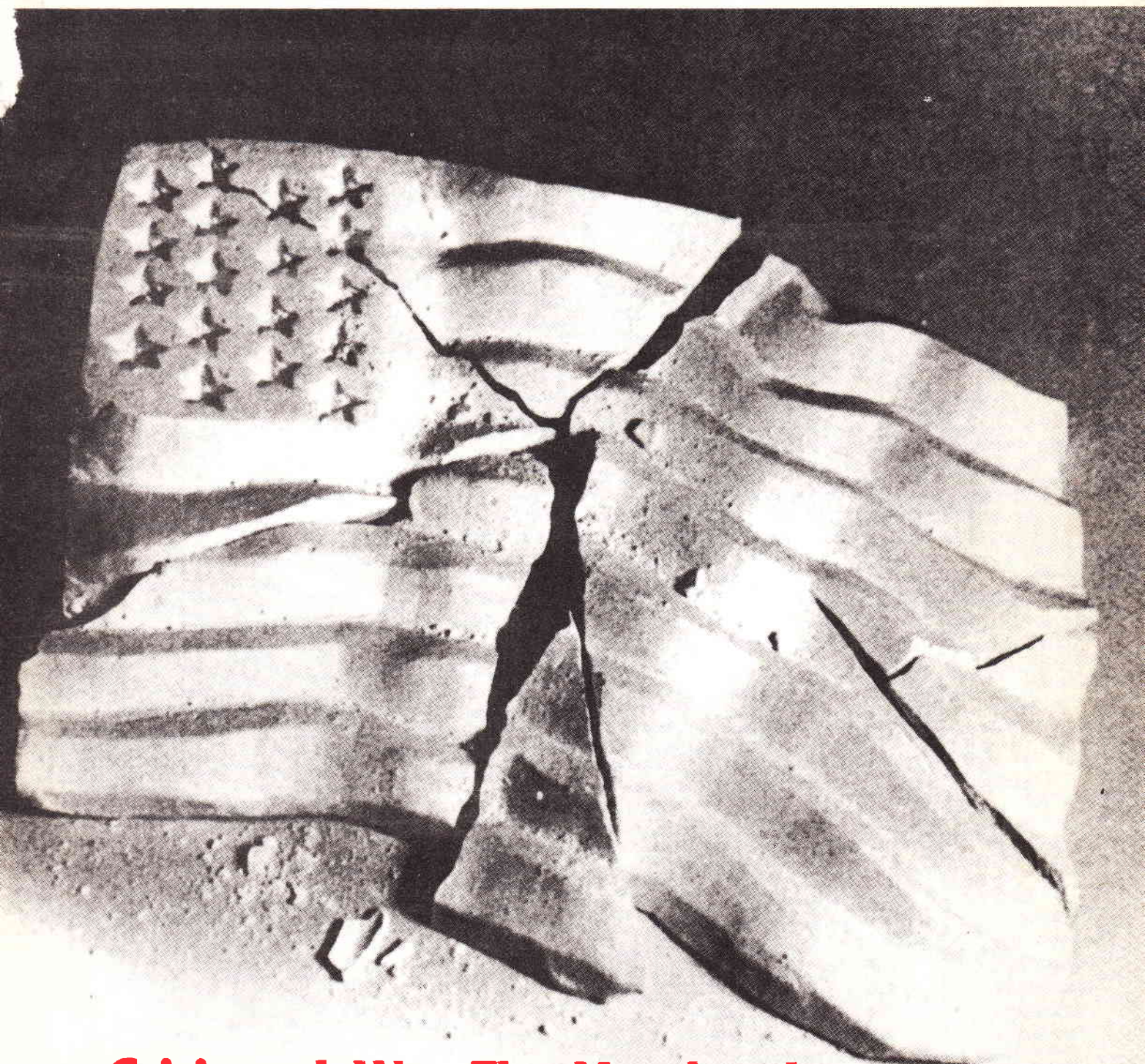


# REVOLUTION

\$1.25

Organ of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

Vol. 5, No. 23  
February/March



## **Crisis and War: The Mood and Conditions of the Masses**

**America  
in Decline**

"During the lifetime of great revolutionaries," Lenin wrote, "the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their teachings with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons . . . while at the same time emasculating the essence of the revolutionary teaching, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it." But it is not only at the hands of openly bourgeois propagandists that the science of revolution has suffered from attempts to emasculate and cut the revolutionary heart out of it. The legacy of betrayal, revisionism and chauvinism that has masqueraded as Marxism—from Bernstein, Kautsky and Trotsky to Khrushchev and Brezhnev, from the CPUSA to Liu Shiao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping—have thrown so much dirt on this science of revolution that it is necessary, as Lenin said, to "engage in excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the masses."

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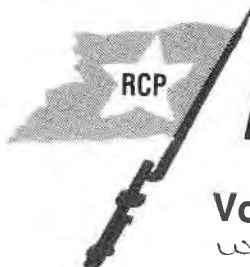
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# THE SCIENCE OF REVOLUTION

Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought  
and the Line of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.  
by Victor Wild

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# REVOLUTION

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The majority of the working class is living on the precipice: able to get by, but only by the skin of their teeth. This article analyzes why, given this condition (brought on by the recent downturn in the economy, especially the 1974-75 recession), the mood of the working class is decidedly non-revolutionary and its consciousness backward. Further, it paints a dramatic view of the future—political and economic crisis on a scale unseen in this country before—that along with or immediately preceding the outbreak of world war, could well give rise to a revolutionary storm led by this working class.

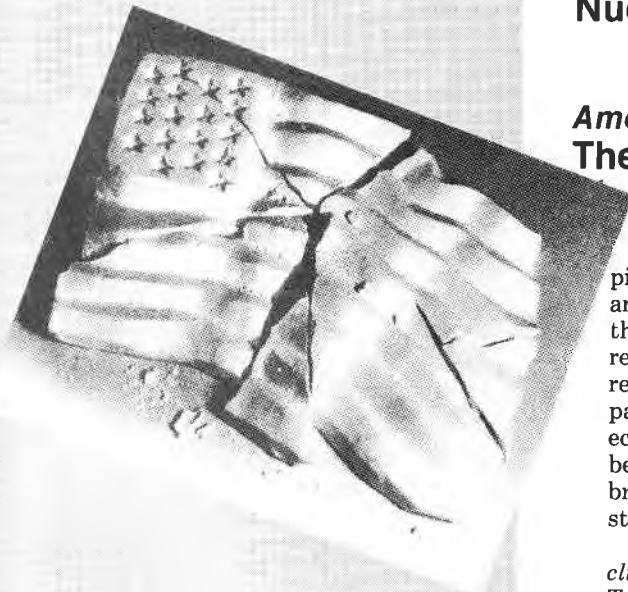
This article is a chapter from *America in Decline—Imperialism's Greatest Crisis, Developments Toward War and Revolution, in the U.S. and Worldwide, in the 1980s*, to be published soon by Banner Press.

### **Slipping Into Darkness: "Left" Economism, the CPUSA and the Trade Union Unity League (1929-1935) . . . . . 33**

The Depression which hit the capitalist world in 1929 moved through the U.S. like a hurricane, tearing up the economy and ripping the very fabric of society, shaking this country more deeply than anything had shaken it since the Civil War. The CPUSA, with the assistance of the Communist International, had just gone through a fierce struggle in its own ranks against those who were ready to give up on revolution. It threw itself totally into the work of preparing the workers for a revolutionary upsurge.

Yet a decade later there was not a trace of a mass revolutionary movement!

What happened? This article examines the particular role of "left" *economism* in laying the basis for later moves toward open revisionism, by analyzing the Communist Party's trade union work, especially the Trade Union Unity League (1929-1935).



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# A Call to Battle A Challenge to Dare

"Seize the day, seize the hour." These words of Mao Tsetung sum up and conclude the new Draft Programme of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. Together with a new Draft Constitution these documents hit the streets on March 8, 1980. They hit in a time of growing turmoil, a time of Afghanistan, Iran, of growing crisis and preparations for world war.

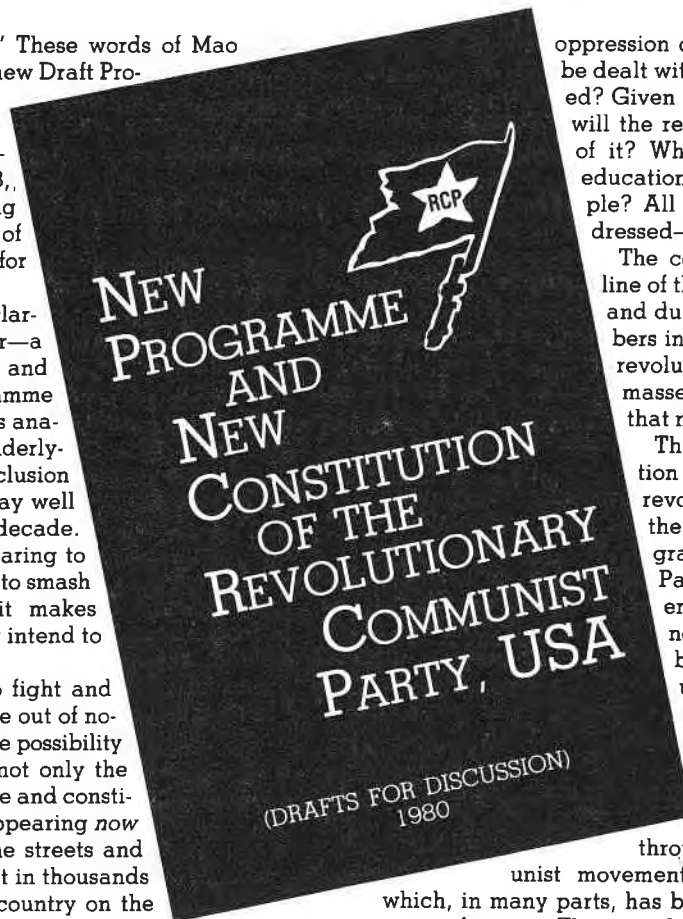
Piercing through all this is a declaration of war—revolutionary war—a battle plan for destroying the old and creating the new. This is the Programme and Constitution of a Party that has analysed today's situation and the underlying forces and come to the conclusion that the time when things ripen may well be very close—within the next decade. Our Party is now preparing—preparing to seize the time when the time is ripe to smash this rack of capitalism before it makes another torturing round. We do not intend to miss the opportunity.

Nor are we preparing simply to fight and then lose. Revolution does not come out of nowhere. Today we are battling out the possibility of winning in the future. That is not only the significance behind this programme and constitution, but behind why they are appearing *now*—as May Day Brigades take to the streets and the battle shapes up that will result in thousands of workers and others across the country on the streets on May 1st—International Workers Day. This May Day battle, the study and use of the Programme and Constitution, and all the actions of the advanced, will in no small part determine how far along we are and whether we are able to break through all the way when conditions fully ripen and the opportunity for revolution is there to seize.

In this light, the purpose and nature of this new Draft Programme stands out starkly. It urgently calls attention to and analyzes the immediate situation facing the working class and masses in this country, in the context of the world situation and world struggle. It sharply indicates the only road forward out of this—proletarian revolution—by making a clear and concrete summation of what such a revolution will mean. The programme spells out how the proletarian revolution, upon achieving success and winning power, will deal with the needs and demands of the masses of people and with the world situation we face.

Of course communists are not fortune tellers, and this Programme cannot and does not say precisely what *immediate* problems will have to be addressed, in what order and relation to each other, and every concrete and specific step that will be required to bring about a revolutionary resolution of a revolutionary crisis.

But it can—and does—address the basic questions that we can already see shaping up. How will unemployment be eliminated? Discrimination and national oppression? The



oppression of women? How will agriculture be dealt with? How will industry be organized? Given the likelihood of world war, how will the revolutionary government get out of it? What will be the policies toward education, culture, the rights of the people? All these urgent questions are addressed—their solutions are indicated.

The constitution deals with the basic line of the Party, its principles, the tasks and duties of the Party and Party members in relation to the historical task of revolution and communism and to the masses of people who must carry out that new task.

This new Programme and Constitution are themselves the product of a revolutionary process. They are not the first, but the second, programme and constitution of our Party in the 5 years of its existence. The previous ones, we can now see, had many shortcomings. but the need to change these documents should not be seen mainly negatively. Instead it is a real advance, breaking with not only our own past errors, but even more importantly with tendencies which have existed

throughout the history of the communist movement internationally—a movement which, in many parts, has been caked with a thick layer of crusty reformism. These tendencies, more like a gross disease in the case of the old C.P. in the USA, have prevented any serious preparation for revolution in this country.

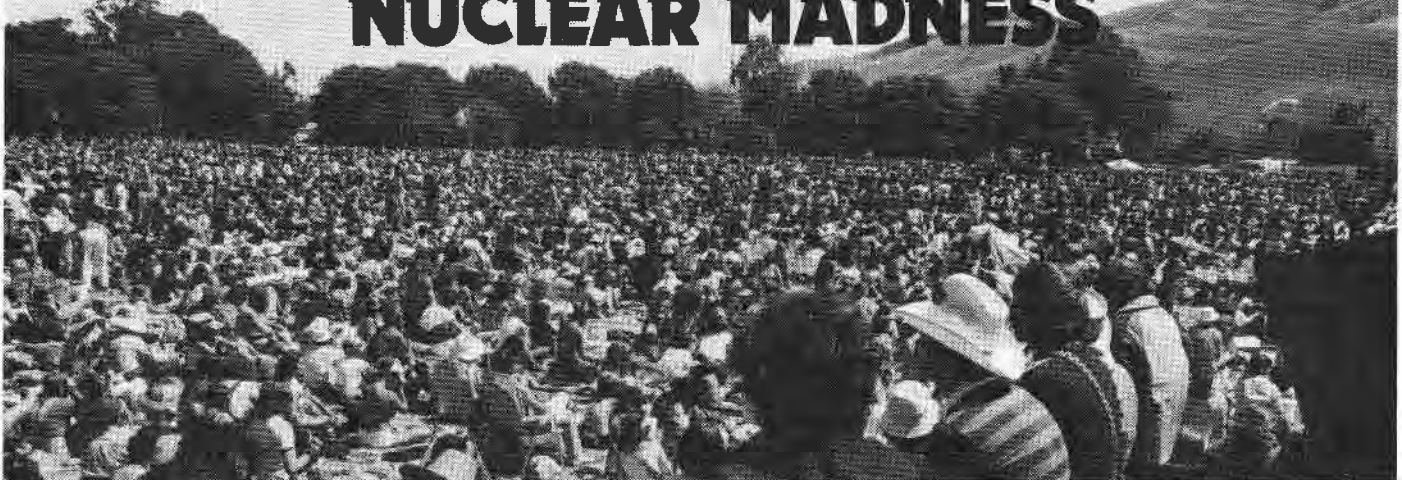
There have also been big changes in the world. Most importantly the world situation has sharpened greatly, underlining the urgency of a thoroughly revolutionary line and programme, one that will stand up through the storms.

Another of the great changes has been of the reversal of the revolution in China with the reactionary coup after the death of Mao Tsetung. This was a major setback, but it also put revolutionaries worldwide to the test—to go down the drain with the revisionists or to advance in another wave. As with all such tests, the revolutionary movement internationally and in this country has split—with part going each road. But our Party in particular, after much struggle, has emerged much stronger, more united around the revolutionary leadership of its Chairman, Bob Avakian, and much broader in its revolutionary influence. This is as it must be, because we must all race from behind to catch up.

These documents are drafts, weapons in preparation. We are spreading them widely and deeply so that many among the working class and others oppressed by this monster, imperialism, will seriously study them, take up and help sharpen them. By the beginning of April, the Spanish language drafts will be ready and the process of circulating these drafts will go on for a short time after May First.

Study these drafts, write us, meet with us to criticize and strengthen them—and unite with us to carry them out.

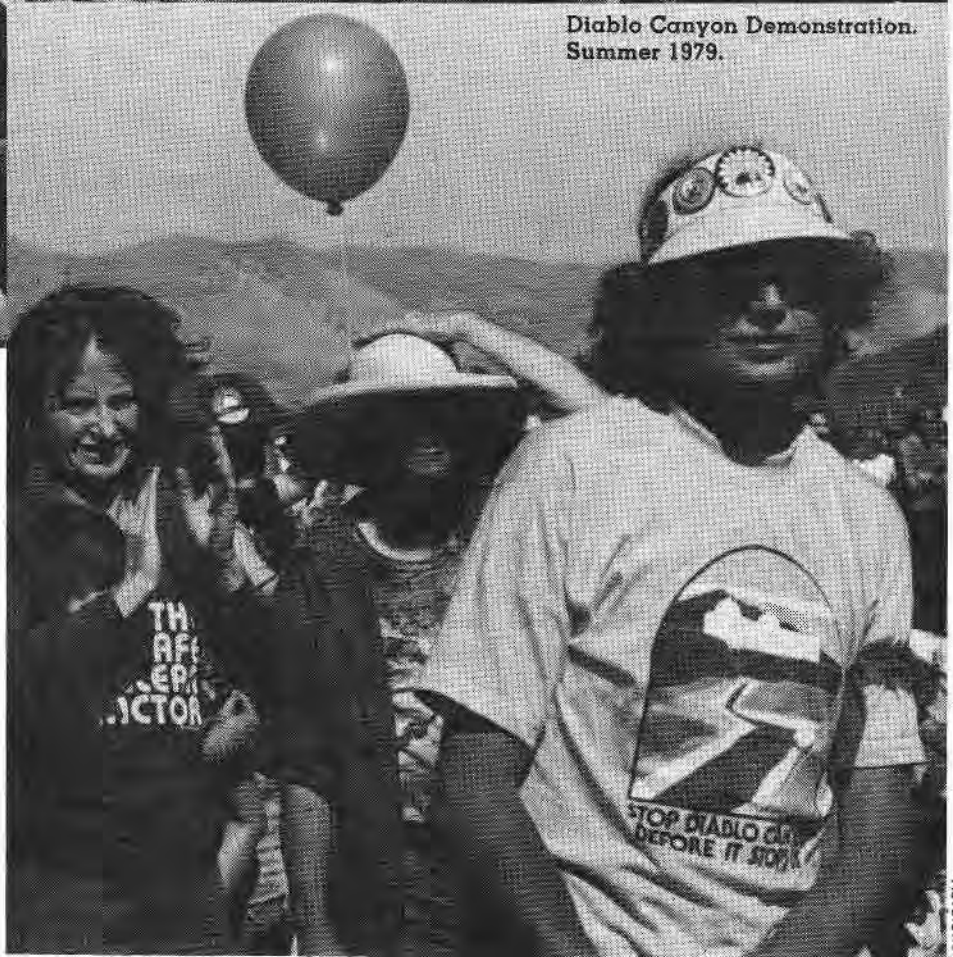
# Notes on **THE MOVEMENT AGAINST NUCLEAR MADNESS**



Diablo Canyon Demonstration.  
Summer 1979.

In the spring of 1977, when 1414 people were arrested in a protest at the Seabrook, New Hampshire nuclear power plant, the anti-nuke movement in this country took on a mass character unparalleled by any other during the late 1970s. For a whole section of people, the anti-nuke movement became *the* social movement, attracting tens of thousands to demonstrations, teach-ins and sit-ins, not only because these people were concerned about the danger of nuclear power in its own right, but also because this was the most powerful protest movement around. In this sense the anti-nuke movement became a lightning rod.

With 72 nuclear power plants already in operation in this country and 92 more under construction, from one corner of the country to the other, in the late '70s the issue of nukes came to focus many people's concern over and opposition to "putting property before life," to quote one anti-nuke group pamphlet. From Barnwell, South Carolina, where 2000 people demonstrated and 300 were arrested in May 1978, to Rocky Flats, Colorado, where thousands demonstrated and some blocked train tracks for five days in a cold pouring rain that same spring; from the rally of 25,000 in San Fran-



Revolution

cisco after Three Mile Island, to the 26-mile march of 4000 in the Black Hills of South Dakota—the anti-nuke movement has succeeded in uniting broad numbers of people to strike back at a glaring example of the criminal workings of capitalism.

But while the anti-nuke movement has united tens of thousands in hitting the capitalists on this important and

exposing outrage, including many who themselves had at one point or another even helped in the development of nuclear technology (such as the 2000 scientists who signed a letter of protest around nukes in 1975), still there have always been many divergent views within the anti-nuke movement as to the nature, causes and solution of nukes. These differences have come

out over questions related to the movement itself, such as the kind of organization that would be needed to build the anti-nuke movement (especially centering on the question of local vs. national organization) and the methods of struggle that should be used. And they come out around broader questions as well, on the links between the question of nuclear power and other issues in society, and the nature of society itself.

A demonstration at the Wall Street Stock Exchange last fall was significant in this light, for as one activist wrote afterward, "For the first time on a large scale the target was the 'power behind the power,' the corporations in the nuclear business and the financial institutions that bankroll them. All outreach work preceding the action emphasized the connections between nuclear technology and the exploitation of Native Americans, Black South Africans, and poor and working people everywhere."<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to this was the view put forward in an article summing up where the anti-nuke movement must head (and in a so-called "socialist" magazine, no less) which, after declaring that "stopping nuclear power without challenging the economic system that bred it would leave the underlying problem to create new 'irrational' symptoms," issues the stirring battle cry, "It would be a limited victory if it failed to help establish the organizational framework that could also challenge liquified natural gas, solar satellites, and similar technologies that represent the same trend."<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, many other less disguised appeals to the anti-nuke movement calling for it to focus narrowly and forever on narrow "energy issues."

But the worst—and most dangerous—trend is that represented by the bourgeois politicians, so well exemplified by Tom Hayden, who last September at the MUSE anti-nuke rally in lower Manhattan looked out over the crowd of 200,000 people and called upon them to take the anti-nuke movement "into the mainstream"—thereby spitting on the very dissatisfaction and outrage that had moved so many of the protestors out of the political "mainstream" and into action in the first place.

These are the questions and the very different paths that have been posed in the anti-nuke movement.

The purpose of this article is to examine the nature, make-up and impact of the anti-nuke movement and the diverse trends within it. While Iran, Afghanistan and draft registration have already begun to overshadow the

anti-nuke movement, the issue has animated a vast number of people and it is far from dead. More importantly, those who awoke to political life through the anti-nuke movement—and the social strata that formed its base—will continue to play a very important role in the even greater mass struggles which are brewing. Many of the same political and ideological questions posed by this movement will continue to be key ones for the revolutionary working class and its Party to deal with if they are to unite and struggle with broad sections of the people to build a united front to overthrow U.S. imperialism.

### Who Is the Anti-Nuke Movement?

Most of those active in the anti-nuke movement today are youth from the petty bourgeoisie, especially college and high school students, who usually are the main force at demonstrations. Most—both those who just come to demonstrations and the smaller number of "organizers"—have never been involved in any other political activity. Contrary to what some people have said, the anti-nuke movement is not just a hold-over or a rejuvenation of the anti-Vietnam war movement, although there are some forces within

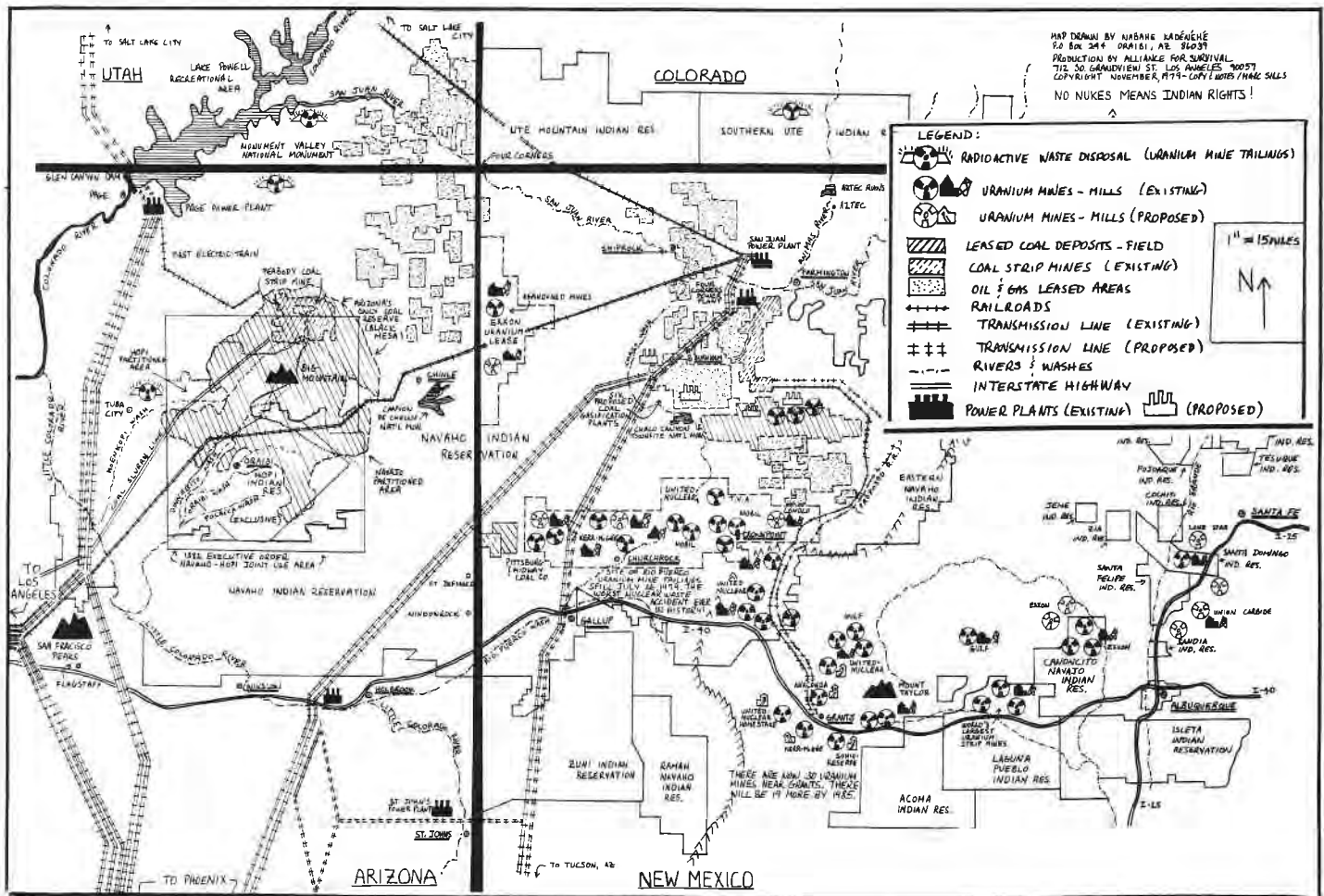
it who were active then, including pacifists (who have been active fighting nukes in some form or another since the late 1950s), as well as various CP-style revisionists and Trotskyites who see the anti-nuke movement as their big chance to regain the influence and opportunity to spread their poison that they enjoyed during the anti-war movement of the 1960s. In addition to the students and student-aged youth, there are many others from college communities and urban areas with high concentrations of intellectuals, such as Boston and San Francisco, including teachers and other professionals, scientists, artists and others from this strata. Even though the main struggle in New England, for example, has been around the Seabrook plant in New Hampshire, the main base of this activity is in Boston.

While the anti-nuke movement is mostly white, one important exception to this is the participation of Native Americans in many areas. Fifty-five percent of all U.S. uranium reserves are under Indian reservation land, and Native Americans make up a large percentage of all uranium miners in the U.S. today, suffering extremely high cancer rates because of the conditions they work under. In the Black Hills of South Dakota, for example, home of the Lakota Nation, the government, especially the Bureau of Indian Af-



Anti-Trident Demonstration, Bangor, Washington.

Revolution



**Map of the Four Corners area of the Southwest (the conjunction of Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico), a large concentration of Indian reservations—and nuclear mining. 75% of U.S. uranium reserves are on Indian land, where the U.S. imperialists' tradition of genocide against the Indian peoples has taken on a more modern form: slow death for those who work in the uranium mines and the many more poisoned by nuclear contaminants—accompanied by robbery on a mass scale by the oil companies and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.**

fairs, has been ruthlessly trying to crush Indian resistance to attempts to take from them the land promised the Indians in an 1868 treaty. For the ruling class, as former Energy/Defense Secretary James Schlesinger put it, the huge uranium reserves in the Black Hills are "America's energy ace-in-the-hole." These attacks on Indian land and the Indian movement have led to an important battle linking the anti-nuke forces and the Native American struggle against national oppression. The same has happened in the Southwest and elsewhere.

In addition, in some rural areas like Minnesota, small farmers have played a role in the movement, usually in conjunction with anti-nuke organizers. These farmers have come up with some new tactics for the anti-nuke movement, like dumping giant manure piles at appropriate spots to stop construction.

Finally, scientists and others who have played a significant role in expos-

ing the dangers of capitalist nuclear technology are widely respected in the anti-nuke movement of today. People like Dr. Helen Caldicott, a pediatrician and specialist in the biological effects of radiation; Dr. John Gofman, co-discoverer of uranium-233 and one of the first people working under the Atomic Energy Commission who turned in research exposing the hell out of the nuke industry and the government, which led to his dismissal as head of the Lawrence Radiation Lab in 1969; Sam Lovejoy, who toppled a weather observation tower needed to build a nearby nuke in 1974 (and then proceeded to turn himself in); and Karen Silkwood, the best known outside the anti-nuke movement, who was murdered by Kerr-McGee in 1974 for planning to expose the company's death-trap plutonium plant.

A very large number of the local coalitions sprang up after the first major civil disobedience anti-nuke action in the U.S., the attempt to nonviolent-

ly shut down the Seabrook plant in 1977. There are some national organizations which relate heavily to the anti-nuke movement, like Nader's "Public Interest Research Group" (PIRG), which was the main organizational force behind last May's demonstration of 100,000 in Washington, D.C., and Mobilization for Survival (MfS) out of Philadelphia; but at this point there is no national organization just dealing with nukes. The "grassroots" form of organization which is dominant in the movement is a reflection of the outlook which predominates within it (more on this later).

## Imperialism and Nukes

Before turning to the various political tendencies within the anti-nuke movement, it's necessary to go into one central fact that has turned a movement which in many cases has been a conscious demand for a simple reform into a head-on collision—the





Four thousand anti-nuke protestors staged a day-long march through the dusty ranchland of the Black Hills of South Dakota last July in opposition to the plans by the government and mining companies to turn this area into a glowing lunar landscape by ripping off and ripping up Indian land for uranium mining.

fact that the capitalist ruling class in this country cannot and will not give up their nukes.

From the first, nuclear weapons have been both a symbol of U.S. hegemony and a means to maintain it. It was in large part U.S. imperialism's economic might, unhurt by world war, that allowed the U.S. to be the first to develop the atomic bomb. Although the U.S. ruling class used the excuse that the A-bomb was needed to win the war in order to win over many scientists and others to the necessity of figuring out how to actually make such a ghastly weapon (German scientists were also exploring this avenue), the first use of this bomb, against Japan, was not directed primarily at winning the war (whose outcome had already been determined on the battlefields of Europe, Asia and the Pacific), but at bringing it to a conclusion on terms most favorable to U.S. domination in the post-war world. The American imperialists waved around the A-bomb to threaten the then-socialist USSR and the liberation movements already developing in Asia, and as part of their efforts to dominate their lesser imperialist allies as well.

So-called "peaceful" nuclear energy came into use in the U.S. to serve exactly the same masters and same interests as nuclear weapons—the maintenance and expansion of the U.S. monopoly capitalists' empire of profits.

At first, nuclear power reactors were developed to provide a good propaganda cover for the development of nuclear weapons, as much as anything else. In 1953, Eisenhower launched his "Atoms for Peace" slogan, which was really a glorified name for government-funded research and production in nuclear science. At the same time, however, some sections of the ruling class began looking into the construction of nuclear reactors as a means to "cheap, clean and inexhaustible energy"—and big bucks. The Price-Anderson Indemnity Act of 1957, in which the government agreed to insure the power companies for liability in the event of a massive nuclear disaster, cleared the way for commercial nuclear power plants.

Still, as late as 1969, there were only 16 nuclear power plants licensed to operate—and many of them were not yet in actual operation. But 54 more were under construction and another 35 were on order.

This sudden appearance of nuclear plants on a broad scale across the U.S. during the years 1970-75 was not mainly due to some technological breakthrough that made this possible. Starting towards the end of the 1960s, the oil industry was hit by a falling rate of profit, partly as a result of worldwide overproduction of oil. (For more on the "energy crisis," see *Revolution*, Vol. 4, No. 4; on OPEC, see Vol. 4, No. 5.) This

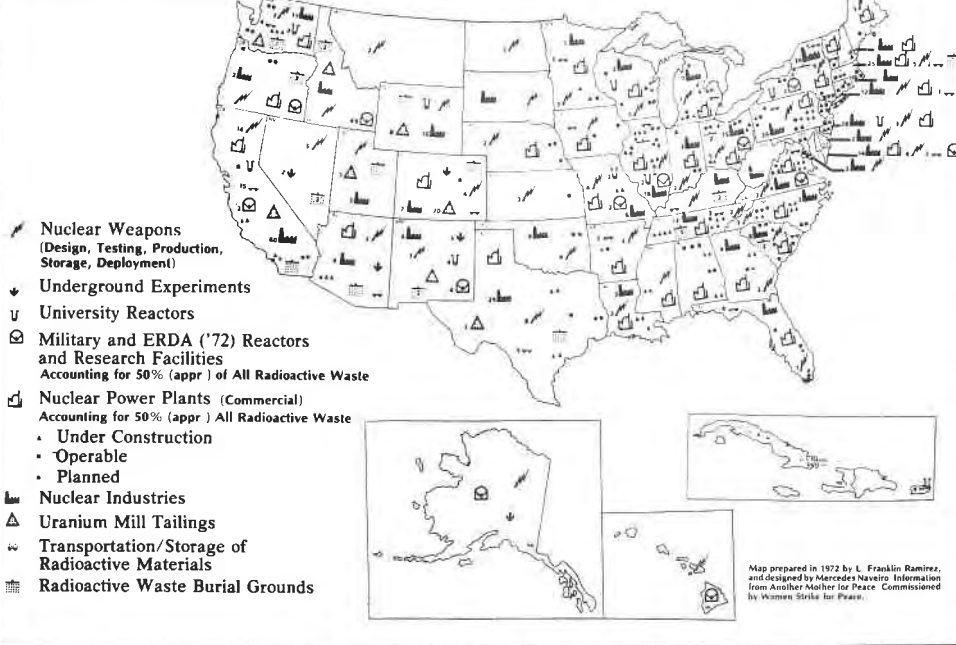
made nuclear power an attractive economic proposition to the oil companies, who were the main ones to invest in nuclear power.

More significantly, the question of energy increasingly became a political question. U.S. dependence on Mideast oil was becoming dangerous, and the huge balance of payments deficit the U.S. was running (oil imports alone jumped from \$5 billion in 1972 to \$45 billion in 1977) was a very serious problem in terms of holding the U.S.'s imperialist bloc together—and all this in the face of growing economic and political crisis and moves toward war with the Soviet Union. As Defense Secretary Harold Brown said before a congressional committee in May 1977, "In fact there is no more serious threat to the long-term security of the U.S. and its allies than that which stems from the growing deficiency of secure and assured energy resources." Of course, there is a bigger threat—the Soviet Union—but without those "secure and assured energy resources" the U.S. could hardly hope to deal with it. Carter put it even more strongly two years later, when he said, "Our national security is dangerously dependent on a thin line of oil tankers stretching half way around the earth."

The simple truth is that it's too late to do much about it. However much the U.S. imperialists might wish that they and their allies in Western Europe and Japan were less dependent on Mideast oil, there's not much they can do except defend that thin line of tankers and the land from which the oil was stolen in the first place. Nuclear power now supplies only 12% of electricity in the U.S. and a somewhat higher figure in Europe, and it takes 10 years to build a new plant from the ground up. The virtual lack of new nuclear power plants built during the last five years is due to two things. First, that rising capital costs have made nuclear power no more profitable than conventional power, and require tremendous outlays of capital (\$1-\$2 billion each), with many years between the first outlays and the day when they could even hope to make a profit, at a time when that kind of capital has been tight for all American industry. Second, the anti-nuke movement has thrown some real, if temporary, obstacles in the way of nuclear construction, by exposing the criminal dangers of these proposed power plants.

But exactly because the world is heading where it is heading, the U.S. imperialists cannot give up the nukes they already have, and they may build some new ones. Following the disaster

## Nukes Next Door.



and near catastrophe at Three Mile Island, Jimmy Carter appointed a blue-ribbon panel headed by Dartmouth College President John Kemeny, whose task was, Carter openly declared, "to make nuclear power even safer." The ruling class was not about to back off an inch. As expected, the Kemeny Commission came up with a report combining the most "serious investigation" with the conclusion that nukes are just fine. After the Three Mile Island furor died down, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on February 6 licensed another new nuke plant in Tennessee and reopened two more that had been temporarily shut down for safety violations—one in the New York City area and the other, with one of the worst safety records in the country, near Chicago.

Then, of course, there's the nukes that were meant to explode, destroy cities and kill people—these are the nukes the imperialists are *counting on*. Give up their nukes? Over their dead bodies.

### 1. The Forerunners

Two trends emerged in the struggle against nuclear weapons in the 1950s and early '60s. Revolutionaries opposed the U.S.'s nuclear weapons, demanded their destruction, but at the same time refused to be intimidated by the U.S. imperialists' nuclear blackmail (this stand was most clearly put forward by the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Tsetung). In contrast, there arose liberal and pacifist opposition (including within the U.S.), which took

positions against nuclear weapons not because they opposed U.S. imperialism but because these weapons threatened "the end of the world."

This liberal (such as the explicitly anti-communist Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy—SANE) and pacifist (such as the American Friends Service Committee) current also opposed the development of nuclear weapons by the USSR and China, weapons which were at that time (in the case of the USSR, until the mid-1950s) of an anti-imperialist and not imperialist character. With the signing of the above-ground nuclear test ban treaty by the U.S. and the Soviet revisionists in 1963 (which China refused to sign, pointing out this represented capitulation to U.S. imperialism), and the rise of other issues and mass movements in the U.S., this first anti-nuke movement faded out. At the same time, some claimed it had won. These same forces (including the two above-mentioned organizations) are active in the anti-nuke movement of today—and more importantly, the political questions raised then are still extremely relevant and likely to become even more so in the near future. Principally, this means whether to take the stand of pacifism, which sees all violence as the same and refuses to distinguish between revolutionary violence and counterrevolutionary violence, or to see that the answer to imperialism's violence must be revolutionary violence to overthrow imperialism.

### 2. "Survival"

Initially much of the impetus for the

present anti-nuke movement came from incredulity and indignation over the existence "right next door" of nuclear reactors. In fact, no matter where you lived, they *were* right next door—few places in the U.S. are very far from some kind of nuclear installation.

At the heart of a lot of anti-nuke movement literature today is the bottom-line problem which frightens and angers many: the potential danger a nuclear power reactor disaster presents to people's lives, their health, and their children. And the whole thing seems so out of control, beyond reach. There is an ominous feeling on the part of many that there are larger forces in society controlling, or at least greatly affecting, people's lives. One of the principal reasons that this issue is sharpest among the petty bourgeoisie, and that this class makes up the base of the anti-nuke movement, is that the awareness of the existence of nukes has hit some important illusions which are held by large sections of the petty bourgeoisie—who, because of their role and position in society, tend to see themselves as "free agents" able to control their own destiny far more than most workers do. The existence of nukes on a widespread scale throughout the country "threatening mass genocide at any moment" has had the effect of jarring these illusions with a heavy dose of reality.

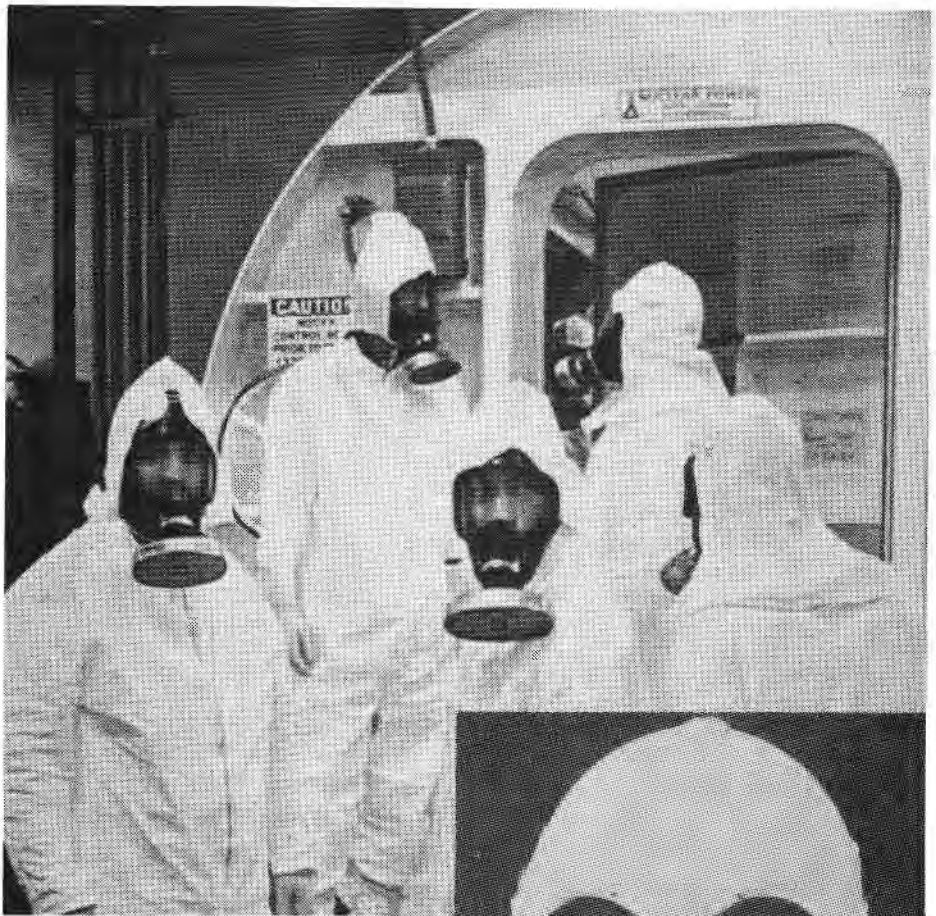
The working class has been conspicuous by its absence in this movement, principally due to the generally low level of political consciousness and motion among the workers. The bourgeoisie has repeatedly tried to take advantage of that fact, in relation to the anti-nuke movement, by whipping up some union hacks and backward workers (especially in the construction trades) around the grotesque slogan that nukes mean jobs—a ridiculous caricature of the interests of the proletariat. At the same time, however, for a great many workers life is already a horror. There is less of a feeling on the part of even the most backward workers that each individual in this society is able to determine his own destiny, to "do his own thing." Thus part of the reason workers have not become involved in the anti-nuke movement in a big way is that the nukes question has not astonished the workers as much as it has the petty bourgeoisie, nor has it concentrated their anger for this society to the same degree. It is significant, though, that some advanced members of the working class have been spontaneously drawn to the anti-nuke movement, not so much because of the issue itself, but

because they are drawn to this large political movement out of a desire to strike back at the system.

This is also true of the majority of youth who marched in Washington, D.C. last May 6, as well as the other large mobilizations against nukes—people came only in part out of concern around the nukes issue. The urge to just get down and demonstrate against something and to learn more about the world was a big motivating factor for tens of thousands. At the May 6 rally it was not at all unusual to hear youth say, "I came to the rally because I'm trying to figure out what to do with my life and I figured there would be people here who could help me decide." In the late 1970s the anti-nuke movement captured the imagination of millions of youth, both because the issue itself concentrated disgust for a society run by the quest for personal profit, but also because after a certain point, if you were looking for a way to strike back at the status quo—this was where it was at.

There is another section of society active in the anti-nuke movement since the early 1970s which shares a disgust for and frustration over capitalist society in general: the relatively large number of "ex-students" who live and work in university towns and major cities, and for whom political activity of one kind or another is the most important thing in their lives. This section of society was deeply affected by the mass movements of the 1960s, although not necessarily deeply involved in those movements. In the conditions of ebb of the 1970s, many have put the idea of radical change on the back burner and become active particularly in various local reform movements. While many of these forces consciously reject the most blatant goals that capitalism holds out to the petty bourgeoisie—a profession, home in the suburbs, etc.—they are nonetheless spontaneously pulled into various forms of reformism, from local rent control struggles, to co-op schemes, to the anti-nuke movement. In many ways they are typical of some important aspects of the entire decade of the 1970s, caught in limbo to some extent, rejecting certain bourgeois values, but more often than not replacing them with more subtle ones because they have not understood the essence of capitalist society and the road out of it.

Certainly the anti-nuke movement is far from the first social movement to be based in the petty bourgeoisie. The same can be said for the anti-Vietnam war movement and several other of the mass storms that shook America in the 1960s. But unlike these movements,



**What the well-dressed corpse will wear. Left, workers and technicians prepare to enter the air lock of the shut-down Rancho Seco nuke, sister plant to Three Mile Island. The sign over the door reads, "Nuclear Power—Safe, Clean, Economical." At right, special Air Force helmet and goggles for pilots who drop nukes. This clothing demonstrates very well the great lengths to which the ruling class has gone to make sure that nukes never hurt anybody.**



the anti-nuke movement has not taken on a broader character. In part, of course, this is due to the nature of the issue itself. But it also has quite a bit to do with the nature of the period in which this movement developed, which conditioned its development.

The fact that the anti-nuke movement developed around 1976-78, at a time when the bourgeoisie was trying to catch its breath during the lowest ebb of mass struggle in this country in nearly two decades, accounts a great deal for the kind of movement it became—a movement whose resurgence is testimony to the fact that the basic contradiction of capitalism constantly gives rise to struggle and rebellion

among all strata of people, but at the same time, a movement marked by isolation from both more broad and fundamental social issues and from the broader masses of people.

The very fact that "survival" became the watchword for so much of the anti-nuke movement demonstrates both its class outlook (trying to conserve an endangered position in society) and the ebb period in which it developed.

That survival often becomes in and of itself the primary objective of the anti-nuke movement is indicated by the names of more than one anti-nuke group ("Alliance for Survival" and "Mobilization for Survival," for exam-

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ple). The view is often offered that, "If we don't deal with the issue of nuclear power plants there won't be a natural world left to house the other problems we want to solve." This sentiment is dominant in most of the anti-nuke groups, stemming both from a rather rigid conception of what constitutes "the problems and the solutions to the problems," but also tied in with this a sense of desperation because of the potential horrors hanging over the world.

## 3. Nukes and Classes

There is tremendous uncertainty in the anti-nuke movement over "who's to blame" for unsafe nukes. Many chalk the whole situation up to individual madmen and individual carelessness on the part of those in control, or to the fact that those "on a power trip" are in power. Again, this is an analysis which sees the individual as central to the whole set-up, and specifically rejects and/or neglects an analysis which shows how the capitalist class is responsible for unsafe nukes. There is a distinct desire expressed in the anti-nuke movement to "raise" the nukes issue "above classes."

For example, a spokesman for the Mobilization for Survival made the following statement: "Key constituencies we need to work on in this effort (to dismantle all nukes) are of course labor and minorities, although there are successes happening in those areas. We don't want to leave out the middle and upper classes either. We think that this is an all peoples' movement and that rational, just beings anywhere and everywhere will agree with us when they have the information and they can free themselves of their prejudices."<sup>3</sup> Or as a local anti-nuke group in Wisconsin put it in summing up their coalition, "People of all political, religious, social, and economic positions have learned to work together. The issue transcends all differences."<sup>4</sup>

While some sections of the anti-nuke movement have been much clearer in identifying the monopoly capitalists as the source of at least the nukes problem, still running through much of the movement literature is a deep sense that America cannot afford to be divided over this one, that "if the big one goes, we all go." A group of people marched from Louisville, Kentucky to Washington, D.C., to protest nukes in 1977, and they issued a statement which included this: "... we want [the march] to further symbolize the sincere

desire to avoid the type of confrontation that in the past has divided the country. Prosperity and harmony for our country and world can only be achieved through a united effort of citizenry and government."<sup>5</sup> The above quotes—which illustrate the more backward trends in the anti-nuke movement—indicate both a deep desire to do something about the nukes, and at the same time a completely upside down view of society. It is a view which doesn't see America fundamentally divided by social classes (or if there are different classes, they are of little consequence when it comes to nukes), and seeks to work things out so that, at least on this question, everyone is pleased. The solution to the nukes problem is made biological instead of social: "We're all human beings."

At rock bottom the question comes down to this for many: does the fact that nuclear technology exists indicate that this basically seaworthy ship has a few leaks, some "impurities," "malfunctions," and so on—or are nukes just a slice of capitalism, a piece of a thoroughly rotten puzzle?

Still, many in the movement have a gut feeling that something is pretty wrong with this country. After all, many of them are youth of the "Watergate generation," as some bourgeois analysts nervously put it, people with little political experience (because they grew up during an ebb) who have seen enough to know that they don't like it.

Among some of the relatively more advanced in the anti-nuke movement, there is a general desire to do away with all monopolies, do away with a central government which plays a dominant role, etc., and to create a "decentralized" society. This is felt to be the best "solution" to the problem of individual freedoms getting encroached on under capitalism: break everything up into little pieces, then individuals will automatically get more of a say. The stress in the anti-nuke movement on "democratic" decision-making, where "responsibilities are shared, with no elected 'officers' or designated leadership," and where "sometimes a meeting will decide that everyone present must have a chance to speak on an issue before anyone can speak for the second time"<sup>6</sup> cannot be overestimated.

This understanding of democracy seeks to go backwards to a day when people mainly lived in rural areas and not cities, where, it is felt (incorrectly) that individual freedoms could be exercised by all through town meetings, etc. (A statement once made by Albert Einstein—known today in the anti-

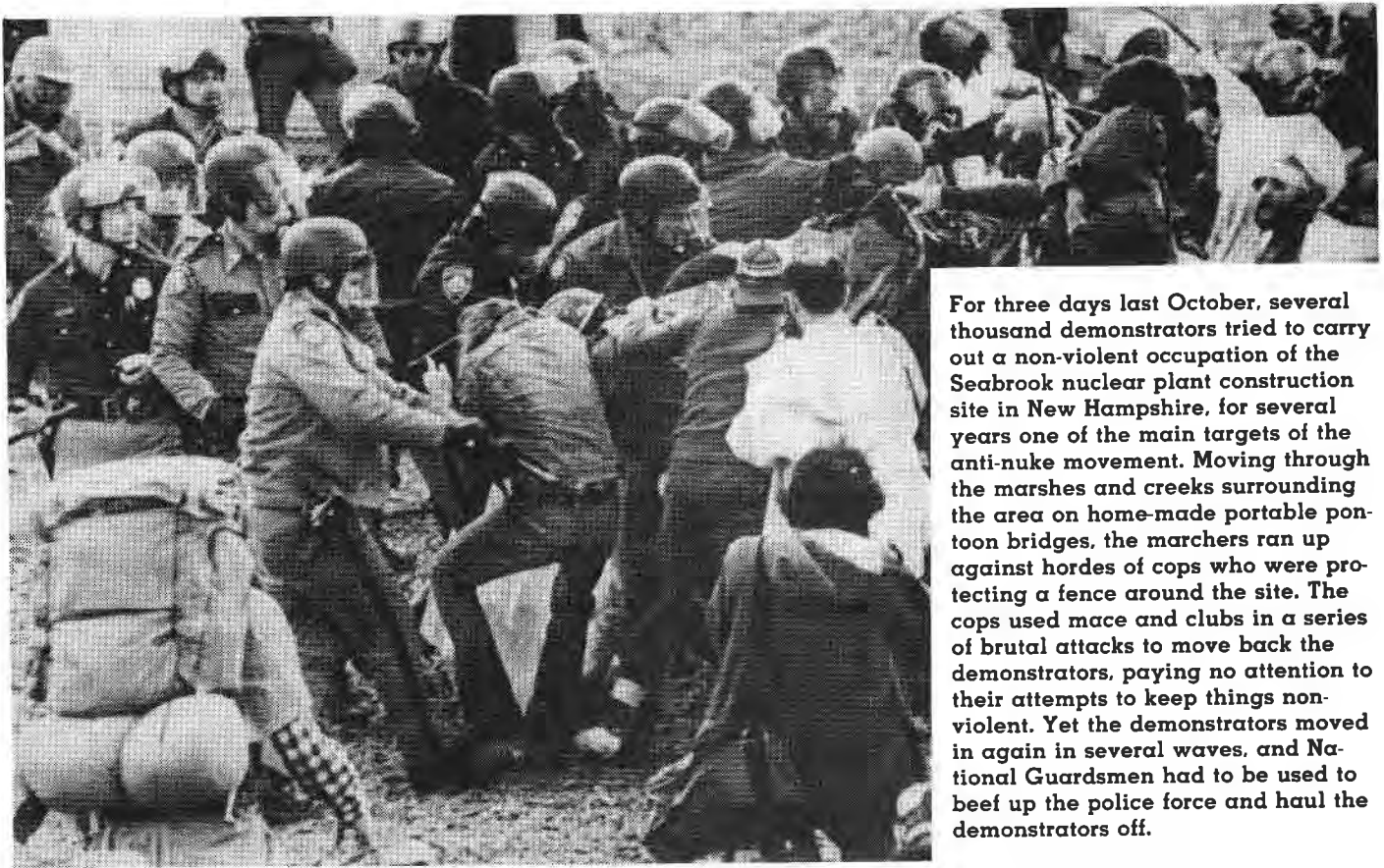
nuke movement as one of the most vociferous opponents of nukes "once he realized the monster he'd created"—is often quoted in the movement today: "To the village square we must carry the facts of atomic energy... from there must come America's voice.") But it also seeks to go forward to the day when society can and will be organized cooperatively, when there will not be a shortage of material needs for some while others are filthy rich, and where all can play an active role not only in production, but even more importantly in running the affairs of society. In terms of an organized political theory, much of this thinking consists of anarchism; but in the anti-nuke movement it exists largely as a kind of spontaneous anarchism on the part of those who dream of a better world, but end up with various (unworkable) utopian schemes to realize that better world. This anarchism is not in conscious consolidated opposition to Marxism-Leninism. It is a spontaneous resistance to the effects of capitalism and the domination of the bourgeoisie, a resistance which reflects the outlook and social base of much of the anti-nuke movement.

## 4. A "Practical" Cause

Because radiation does not discriminate between the cold and warm-blooded, then uniting all sections of society to destroy nukes seems like an idea whose time has come, an idea eminently capable of succeeding. The battle against nukes is therefore not only just, but it's *winnable*—so goes the logic of much of the anti-nuke movement. This "practicality" is really very utopian and subjective, of course—as is all pragmatism—because it loses sight of the bigger picture. However "practical" getting rid of nukes may seem, there are far more pressing reasons why, for the imperialists, there is nothing at all practical about this idea.

Two examples are often raised as "proof positive" of practical results achieved in the battle against nukes. First, a vote in Missouri in November 1976, involving the passage of an initiative barring utility companies from charging the public for CWIP (Construction Work in Progress). (In most states utility companies jack up utility bills to cover costs from nuclear reactors being constructed.)

The second is when a group of 250 sat in at the offices of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Washington, D.C. demanding that all construction be halted at the Seabrook plant in New Hampshire. The NRC hurriedly



For three days last October, several thousand demonstrators tried to carry out a non-violent occupation of the Seabrook nuclear plant construction site in New Hampshire, for several years one of the main targets of the anti-nuke movement. Moving through the marshes and creeks surrounding the area on home-made portable pontoon bridges, the marchers ran up against hordes of cops who were protecting a fence around the site. The cops used mace and clubs in a series of brutal attacks to move back the demonstrators, paying no attention to their attempts to keep things non-violent. Yet the demonstrators moved in again in several waves, and National Guardsmen had to be used to beef up the police force and haul the demonstrators off.

met and announced a complete and immediate cessation of construction at Seabrook. (Then, three weeks later, after the victory celebrations were finished and the summation of this "victory" had been spread through the country by not only the anti-nuke movement but also the bourgeois media, the NRC turned around and reversed its decision.)

But the final line of defense for many in the anti-nuke movement who are convinced of the capacity for this movement to succeed in its goal of dismantling all nuclear power plants and preventing the construction of new ones is the argument that nukes are no longer profitable.

"Rising capital costs have now become the dominant factor in the price of nuclear power; because these costs are increasing much faster than the capital costs of coal-fired plants, sometime in the next ten to fifteen years nuclear power will become more expensive than coal-fueled power. The entire nuclear-power program will then lose its only reason for existing—its present cost advantage over coal-fired power—and is then (or sooner) likely to collapse."<sup>7</sup>

And: "The dilemma facing the nuclear industry is clearly one of safety vs. costs. Safety hazards are an unavoidable by-product of the nuclear

technology. If these hazards are brought to light and modifications are required, capital costs can only go up."<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned earlier, part of the explanation for the 1975-80 moratorium on construction of new nuclear plants is the decreasing profitability to the monopoly capitalists involved in the energy industry. But this question cannot be looked at in a narrow or short-term sense. Very similar apparent roadblocks to the development of nuclear power plants have arisen before. This is why in 1957 Congress passed the Price-Anderson Act: the energy companies like General Electric, Westinghouse, etc. couldn't themselves make a profit on nukes (in this case because they couldn't profitably cover insurance costs) so they weren't going to build them. The government, acting for the ruling class as a whole, stepped in to do what was needed—giving them \$500 million worth of free insurance!

In 1970, just as certain matters like what to do with spent fuel with a life expectancy of 250,000 years were becoming more immediate problems, the U.S. government took over control of "waste storage" for all nuclear power reactors in the country.

All this on top of the better known fact that the U.S. government serves

today as it has for 35 years as the chief researcher, producer and purchaser of nuclear weapons.

What's at the heart of the incorrect analysis about the nukes fight being practical is one main thing: a lack of understanding of the desperation of the bourgeoisie, specifically how their energy problems are directly related to their overall drive towards world war. And coupled with this, in the case of the argument about profitability being down for nukes these days, is a mechanical understanding of the role of profit in the economics of capitalism, and of what's at stake for the ruling class today.

While the question of profits overall is central to the capitalists, and while each capitalist is most certainly out to save his chubby neck, when there are overriding needs of the capitalist class as a whole, then policies will be undertaken which may in a narrow sense be unprofitable, but in the long run, the capitalists hope, will serve to increase their wealth, power, and profits. We can see this by looking at the military budget, which, while it reaps large amounts for the arms industry, etc., is overall a tremendous drain on the economy in the short run, but in the long run is meant to guarantee continued world domination.



**A-bomb air raid drill in the 1950s. The nuns and the bowed heads are supposed to protect these school children—or at least reassure them. Today the ruling class is using only slightly more sophisticated methods to try to convince the people that nuclear war is not really madness.**

## 5. Methods of Struggle

A major debate within the anti-nuke movement for several years has been over the methods of struggle to employ in trying to shut down the nukes. While non-violence is up to this point very much the password throughout the movement, over the years there have been significant political developments within the movement.

In the early 1970s the main form for stopping nukes was called "intervening," and consisted of a legal process aimed at, at the least, postponing construction of a particular plant. It was, and still is, a process built into the legal books, and as much as anything else played mainly a role as a steam valve on the newly emerging anti-nuke movement. Tied in with this basic approach to "solving" the nukes problem was a whole string of electoral schemes attempted in the mid-70s, from coast to coast. As in all questions over what forms of struggle were correct, there was great controversy over how to sum up the resulting defeats on these initiatives and propositions. Some said that the issue was "too radical," and that the only road forward was one of *more* compromise and *less* "hard-line" politics, while others mainly learned from these defeats—in the face of multi-million dollar pro-nuke campaigns—that the electoral road was a waste of time, and that *action* of some sort was what was needed.

In the winter of 1975, 28,000 stu-

dents, farmers, and others occupied a nuclear plant site in Wyhl, West Germany. For those who were then in the anti-nuke movement, in this country as well as in Japan and in other parts of Europe, Wyhl had a big impact. While Ralph Nader the year before had called a mass meeting to plan lobbying tactics called "Critical Mass '74," over in Germany thousands were taking matters into their hands to a greater degree. The spring of 1977 brought the occupation at Seabrook.

But still there was sharp struggle over tactics, especially between some in the movement who sought civil disobedience with pre-planned busts, and others who sought to go back to lobbying, and still others who sought nuke site occupations without busts. In the summer of 1978, *after* the Seabrook occupation, a deal was struck between the Clamshell Alliance—albeit after much internal struggle—and the New Hampshire authorities to prevent any similar occupation. A rally was held far away from the nuke on land provided by the state, so that "the demonstrators could make their point, but there would be no repetition of before." This shows that even after the action which sparked the real growth of the anti-nuke movement nationally, there was deep vacillation within the movement—leading in this case to outright capitulation—over the road forward.

This past fall, after another failed occupation attempt at Seabrook on Oct. 6 and the "Wall Street Action" a few

weeks later designed to shut down the power brokers, the anti-nuke movement cautiously advanced what was for the movement itself a "new" form of struggle: "non-violent direct action." According to the handbook for the Oct. 6 action: "Ten years of fighting the nuke through the system and three years of rallies and civil disobedience have accomplished a great deal in terms of education and raising public sentiment against nuclear power, but have not succeeded in stopping construction of the plant. . . . The goal of this action is not to provoke a fight, nor is it to get arrested. . . . October 6 will be a departure from civil disobedience. Our success will not be measured in terms of symbolic value, nor media impact, nor numbers arrested. Our success depends on our effectiveness in directly blocking further construction, and our ability to do so in a collective and non-violent way." "

The anti-nuke movement up to this point has never broken in any way, including in its methods of struggle, with its basic line of "We're all human beings," and in its advocacy of non-violence has consistently preached a line of "Do no harm to our fellow humans." A few points are worth noting at this time, however. In an historical sense things have been developing in a forward direction, although slowly. Every single insight into the workings of capitalism—from the move on the part of some away from the courtrooms and electoral arena to demonstrations, and on down the line—has been realized only through great struggle among these forces, who had to combat both their own inexperience and ignorance and also the conscious attempts on the part of the bourgeoisie and its agents to steer the movement in the most innocuous direction possible.

In fact the group which sponsored the Oct. 6 action represented a partial split-off from the long established Clamshell Alliance. The split came down primarily over tactical differences, although the official terms of the debate put it more like the question was one of timing: direct action (non-violent) soon vs. waiting a while and finding other things to do. Also of some significance is another line from the pamphlet put out by the "Coalition for Direct Action at Seabrook," this one on the police. "While we respect those opposing us as human beings, we will steadfastly resist them in their institutional roles as agents of an impersonal repressive structure. Though in one sense police forces sent against us may only 'be doing their jobs,' they have also, by showing up that day for

duty chosen sides on the nuclear question before the world." Again, this statement is still in the same ballpark as before (that "they too are human")—but it does show signs of breaking with some of the past thinking by the explicit statement that if police play the role of pigs, then they shall be (non-violently) treated as being "on the other side."

These developments in the tactics used by the anti-nuke movement have in a certain sense been forced on it. For instance, at the most recent occupation attempt at Seabrook, there was a viciously organized and ruthlessly carried out police attack on the demonstrators who not only preached but practiced non-violence. Stories of this attack are now circulating throughout the country, and important lessons are being summed up. For the bourgeoisie had decided that even with non-violence, a point had been reached where enough was enough, and they sought to intimidate and brutalize the youth who showed up to the demonstration. For the demonstrators, more than a few feel very differently today about the question of non-violence, including many who have been involved in the movement for a while.

## 6. Solar "Solutions"

For the past five years or more a major tenet of the anti-nuke movement has been that "you can't criticize if you don't have a better idea," a solution to the energy problem which can replace nuclear power. Solar power has been the main solution proposed by those active in the anti-nuke movement. Various research studies have been done on solar power, both by the energy industry and more broadly (and probably more scientifically) by people involved in the anti-nuke movement. Companies have bought up patents to solar power ideas, and Jimmy Carter himself even has a few solar panels installed on the roof of *his* house.

The bourgeoisie has chosen a two-pronged approach to the question of solar power. First, because at this point the bourgeoisie has neither figured out how to make sizable enough profits from solar power, nor how there might feasibly be any military application for it, they have done practically nothing to bring solar power into being. If they could make a buck off it, or if solar power could help create explosives, no doubt the bourgeoisie would be on the front lines in the solar energy movement.

Second, the bourgeoisie has actively promoted the *idea* of solar power within the anti-nuke movement. While

various referendums used to be their best bet in trying to steer the movement down a dead end a few years ago, today solar power serves just such a function. With thousands actively and genuinely seeking to solve the energy crisis, here comes respected scientist (and closet "Marxist") Barry Commoner, promoting the sun as the only way out. Then there was "Sun Day '78." And along the way there have been other efforts like the joint electoral-solar campaign ringmastered by Tom Hayden called "Solar-Cal," which sought to have California "go solar" through a series of energy bills in the state legislature. There is not the slightest accident to the fact that those figures most associated with promoting solar power as an "alternative" to nuclear power are exactly the same forces most associated with electoral politics within the anti-nuke movement and most opposed to direct action.

The fact that for many people, opposing nukes today is synonymous with being pro-solar is mainly a testament to the fact that the question of nuclear power is still seen by many in the anti-nuke movement in isolation from what's happening overall in society. Not that those local coalitions which consciously and actively oppose both nuclear weapons and power automatically have a clear understanding of how nuclear technology overall ties into the question of U.S. domination around the world and the prospects for war in the near future. But generally, those groups who do take up both have not gotten as hung up in convincing the ruling class to "go solar" as have some of the other coalitions.

## 7. Nuclear Weapons

For most in the anti-nuke movement, the prospect of world war is not something that, until recently at least, has been staring them in the face. There has been a marked tendency within the anti-nuke movement nationally to pretend that either nuclear weapons don't exist, or at least that they are "a separate problem." In the main it has been the pacifist groups and a few local coalitions such as at the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Facility in Colorado, where components for H-bombs are made, which have paid any attention at all to nuclear weapons, in many ways the heart of the bourgeoisie's nuclear program.

Still, many anti-nuke forces have started to pay attention to this question. The rebirth of the August "Hiroshima Day" activities in 1977 in commemoration of the first mass nuclear murder committed by the U.S.

imperialists in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 stands in stark contrast to the solar power nonsense. The fact is, though, that some of these same people who do see nuclear weapons and nuclear war as a far more important issue still see anti-nuclear power plants as the thing to focus on—because of the "practicality" of this issue—in order to build the kind of movement they envision, even though they hope it will one day actually challenge "the system" which produces both.

A view promoted by the bourgeois forces is that since nuclear weapons are used for the "defense of the country," and since we can never tell what the Russians will do, then nuclear weapons are an unfortunate necessity. And besides, "defense of the nation" is a touchy subject and questioning it might cut down on anti-nuclear power support. The director of Ralph Nader's Critical Mass Energy Project spoke to this question in an interview: "With the nuclear weapons side of things, you get into such issues as the MX missile, the Backfire bomber and the Cruise missile, and I think they [nuclear power and nuclear weapons] are two entirely separate issues, although they share similar features." And then speaking to what Nader himself said about how opposing nukes is "the highest expression of patriotism for Americans," the director of Critical Mass continued, "If you're going to talk to the general public about these matters, it is very difficult to expect that people are going to have full awareness of both issues, let alone just one."<sup>14</sup> Given Nader's comment about opposing nukes and patriotism, it is clear that there are those in the anti-nuke movement who not only push the above nonsense about "one issue at a time" for pragmatic reasons, but also do so because they think that whereas opposing nuclear power is patriotic, *supporting* nuclear weapons is also patriotic.

While many in the anti-nuke movement raise the question of nuclear weapons to expose the imperialists' war drive, some who raise this question do more to confuse the issue at best, and promote national chauvinism at worst. The principles of unity of two groups on opposite ends of the country—the Abalone Alliance in California and the Potomac Alliance based in the Virginia, Maryland & Washington D.C. area—contain very similar sections on the questions of nuclear weapons. To choose one, in its "Declaration of Resistance to Nuclear Power," the Abalone Alliance states, "There is a direct relationship between

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nuclear powerplants and nuclear weapons. The export of nuclear reactors makes possible the spread of nuclear bombs to nations all over the world. The theft of nuclear materials and the sabotage of nuclear facilities pose further threats to our lives and our civil liberties."

This line of thinking, what the *Chicago Tribune* called "The Ultimate Fear" in a front-page article on nuclear terrorism, is very prominent in the anti-nuke movement. Boiled down to the bare bones, it comes down to: "We don't like nuclear weapons, but we feel safer knowing that the U.S. has got them than a crazy in some foreign land." (The main example used in the anti-nuke movement a couple of years ago to show how dangerous it could be if nuclear weapons got into "other people's" hands was Idi Amin.)

Regardless of the fact that some who oppose nuclear weapons for the same reasons as the Abalone Alliance also carry out exposure of nuclear weapons production and planned use by the U.S., still the reasons given for opposing these weapons amount to wiping the blood off the hands of the U.S. imperialists for them. By raising the spectre of "terrorists" from foreign lands who get their hands on a nuclear reactor, and alluding to home-grown "terrorists," they let the biggest terrorists and gangsters in the history of the world just walk right out the front door while everyone is watching.

## IV. Conclusion

The generally stagnant political life for masses of people in the 1970s has already been burst apart with the events shaking the world in the last few months. Iran, Afghanistan, the draft, the Carter Doctrine, boycott of the Summer Olympics—even the lies of "detente" which were only a propaganda cover for more subtle imperialist war preparations anyway have now been replaced with open jingoism, chauvinism and patriotism. The masses of people have been drawn into political life more in the past three months than they have in years, both by events themselves and by the bourgeoisie's open calls to arms which millions are coming to see are anything but empty words. In retrospect, looking back over the last four years or so, it is clear that the anti-nuke movement has represented a political harbinger of this gathering storm.

Where the anti-nuke movement is headed at this point and in the period

to come will be greatly determined by the larger and more significant events in the world, not necessarily unrelated to the question of nukes, but most certainly not to be reduced to this question. It is becoming clearer to millions who have grown to hate nukes that for the bourgeoisie, nuclear technology is just part of their larger scramble to maintain and expand their position in the world.

The anti-nuke issue has brought tens of thousands into motion, objectively and in many cases subjectively, against the capitalists and their government. With the rapidly accelerating war drive of the imperialists, many of those involved in the anti-nuke movement as well as millions of others will no doubt take a stand opposed to these war moves. But the stakes will be higher in the movement against imperialist war because the stakes for the bourgeoisie are higher—their whole empire is on the line, not just whether they face exposure around one particular outrage like nukes. A movement against imperialist war will go much more straight up against the capitalist system and the state.

Both because students as a strata come into motion quickly around many social questions, and because youth are of course the first to get drafted, after Carter's announced plans for "registration" for the draft many students who had been active in the anti-nuke movement quickly began to get involved in demonstrations and rallies opposed to the draft and war moves generally.

The threat of a reactor accident wiping out the population of whole cities is something that has propelled many into the anti-nuke movement. Today much of the sentiment against the draft is couched in similar terms, except more urgent because in the event of World War 3 there won't just be the *threat* of mass slaughter—it will become a *reality*.

While the anti-nuke movement as a movement in its own right will no doubt continue for a period of time, its character, role, and politics in the face of worldwide developments toward war cannot and will not continue to be the same for long. The issue of nukes (both power and weapons) directly relates to war for the imperialists. So to the extent that the issue of nukes is made a component part of an overall movement against imperialist war preparations, to that extent the nukes question will be relevant to the overall events in society and the direction things are headed. No doubt there will be those who try to perpetuate the narrow focus of much of the anti-nuke

movement, simply against nuclear power plants—or to drop the whole issue in the higher interests of patriotism, confining themselves to criticizing the nukes in Russia. Clearly a parting of the ways between the backward and the advanced forces is something that events themselves will require.

How should communists relate to the anti-nuke movement? There are two striking negative examples which help on this point. First is the Progressive Labor Party (an excellent teacher by negative example on many questions), who, in a recent issue of their magazine, made the startling "exposure" that the anti-nuke movement is reformist and not very working-class. They ended up calling it "a reactionary movement, organized by the bosses for their purposes. By diverting the masses from revolution, they have helped engage millions in a futile exercise." Finally they conclude, "It is wrong, a serious mistake to become involved in this reactionary movement. We call upon all the participants in the anti-nuclear movement to withdraw."

This classic Trotskyite call for revolutionary "purity" misses a few small facts—that the anti-nuke movement is a real response to a real crime of capitalism, a crime which needs to be related to the basic contradictions of capitalism which can only be resolved through proletarian revolution. For PLP, the reason they miss this is that despite their "left" nonsense, what they are really interested in building is the economic struggle of the working class. They cannot understand how the emancipation of the working class could involve broader questions which affect much more than the workers alone. Second, they miss the fact that under the actual conditions in this country in the mid to late 1970s, the rise of this movement signified a positive development, a sign of stirrings against the system, and in that sense a foretaste of much more serious storms.

The opposite error has been most amply illustrated by the Socialist Workers Party, another Trotskyite outfit, which has tried to adopt (and take over) the anti-nuke movement wholesale, painting it as a movement that in and of itself is "challenging capitalism and its government." They even call for building the anti-nuke movement into "a political force that can prevent wars and shut down all nuclear abominations once and for all." This is also very rightist, for it amounts to tailing the anti-nuke movement. It misses something quite big—that the only way to "prevent



wars and shut down all nuclear abominations once and for all"<sup>12</sup> is proletarian revolution, revolution that can only be built by diverting the spontaneous struggle among all strata (including both the working class and the petty bourgeoisie) so as to build a conscious revolutionary movement. (The pro-China revisionist CPML goes this opportunism one better—or worse. They've promoted the call for solar power as the solution, thereby tailing the worst aspects of the anti-nuclear movement.)

A lot of light is shed on this question by an article Lenin wrote in 1908, during the period of ebb of the revolutionary movement in Russia following the bloody defeat of the 1905 uprising. A movement arose on the campuses demanding university autonomy from the government. Some social democrats (as communists were called at the time) active among students wrote that they opposed this movement, because it was merely academic, and not "co-ordinated with general political action" to overthrow the Czar.

Lenin criticized this view, calling it "a lifeless dogma":

"One must be able to agitate for political action, *making use* of all possibilities, all conditions and, first and foremost, all mass conflicts between advanced elements, whatever they are, and the autocracy. It is not of course a question of us dividing every student movement beforehand into compulsory 'stages,' and making sure that each stage is properly gone through, out of fear of switching over to 'untimely' political actions, etc. Such a view would be the most harmful pedantry, and would lead only to an opportunist policy. But just as harmful is the opposite mistake, when people refuse to reckon with the actual situation that has arisen and the actual conditions of the particular mass movement....

"Conditions are possible when an academic movement lowers the level of a political movement, or divides it, or distracts from it—and in that case Social-Democratic students' groups would of course be bound to concentrate their agitation against such a movement. But anyone can see that the objective political conditions at the present time are different. The academic movement is expressing the *beginning* of a movement among the new 'generation' of students, who have more or less become accustomed to a narrow measure of autonomy; and this movement is beginning when other forms of mass struggle are lacking at the present time, when a lull has set in,

and the broad mass of the people, still silently, concentratedly and slowly are continuing to *digest* the experience of the three years of revolution.

"...The student youth who have entered the universities during the last two years have lived a life almost completely detached from politics... of course it is not for us socialists to guarantee the success of any bourgeois movement [this is the] beginning of a political conflict, whether those engaged in the fight realise it or not. Our job is to explain to the mass of 'academic' protesters the objective meaning of the conflict, to try and make it *consciously* political, to multiply tenfold the agitation carried on by the Social-Democratic groups of students, and to *direct all* this activity in such a way that revolutionary conclusions will be drawn from the history of the last three years, that the inevitability of a new revolutionary struggle is understood, and that our old—and still quite timely—slogans calling for the overthrow of the autocracy and the convocation of a constituent assembly should once again become a subject of discussion and the touchstone of political concentration for fresh generations of democrats."<sup>13</sup>

Lenin is talking about a democratic movement in a time and place where the democratic revolution to overthrow the Czar is still on the order of the day, a prerequisite for the socialist revolution. Further, this movement for university autonomy is a movement far more directly aimed at the government and its despotism than the anti-nuke movement could ever be, which is why Lenin's emphasis here on communists taking part in and leading the movement he is speaking about is not directly applicable to the anti-nuke movement. But as for uniting with this fresh outburst against the system and conducting broad political agitation in conjunction with it, so that those who fight only for university autonomy in a narrow way come to see the necessity and inevitability of revolution and take up that slogan and activity—this is exactly the point with things like the anti-nuke movement. This is how the working class and its Party builds the united front against imperialism, not by tailing or taking over the spontaneous movements, but by bringing out—through them and in conjunction with them as well as through agitation in general—the issue of proletarian revolution, and by building for this goal as the apex of its eye.

The lessons drawn by different sections of people in the anti-nuke movement will have some effect on their role initially in the turbulent times ahead.

For those who hold dastardly individuals in regulatory commissions, etc., responsible for the existence of dangerous nuclear power plants, who support the existence and use of nuclear weapons, and who firmly believe that America is a fine and free land with a few kinks to work out—for these people the recent developments represent mainly a call to pluck up one's patriotic spirit and march down to get fitted in khaki.

Large sections of the anti-nuke movement, in particular those who form the nuclei of many of the local coalitions, share politics that are heavily influenced by pacifism and the belief that all humans share common interests, and a commitment to non-violence that is as strong as their abhorrence of nukes. These people may well provide the initial bulwark of a significant pacifist wing of an anti-war movement, opposing all wars in general, regardless of whether they are fought to liberate or to enslave—but there is definitely a distinction between die-hard pacifists (like those who opposed the U.S. and the Vietnamese equally during the war) and those for whom this position is something in motion.

Still others—at this time the smallest section of the anti-nuke movement, but an extremely significant one nevertheless—will take an important leap coming off the recent events in the world. For them it won't simply be a question of learning some new things about the role of the U.S. imperialists around the world, and adding these to what they already know about the role of the monopolies and the government with nuclear technology. For these forces the potential exists to take a qualitative leap beyond the knowledge of a mere string of facts exposing the imperialists—a leap which brings everything into much clearer focus, including the nukes question.

For as the bourgeoisie heads towards war it raises basic questions and issues: "The masses of American people can make no greater sacrifice and contribution to humanity than to give themselves fully over to the service of the nation, the greatest on earth." So we are told. The bloodthirsty nature of the imperialist ruling class becomes easier to distinguish if your eyes are not clouded with a patriotic film. All these aspects of the developing situation will not be lost on those in the anti-nuke movement for whom the nukes question may have been the first political cause they became involved in, but who are determined not to get stuck there while the hurricane of war and revolution encircles the earth. ■

## Footnotes

1. Robin Read, "...to Wall Street," *Clamshell Alliance News*, Nov./Dec. 1979, p. 1.
2. Jeff Proctor, "The Nuclear Power Industry and the Anti-Nuclear Movement," *Socialist Review*, Nov./Dec. 1978, p. 32.
3. Herb Ettel, from interview in the *Guardian*, July 4, 1979, p. 5.
4. League Against Nuclear Dangers Statement, found in *No Nukes*, South End Press, 1979, p. 429.
5. "Citizens Statement," found in *ibid.*, p. 425.
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7. Barry Commoner, *The Poverty of Power*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, p. 213.
8. *op. cit.* *Socialist Review*, p. 18.
9. *Handbook for Oct. 6, 1979 Direct Action Occupation*, Coalition for Direct Action at Seabrook, 1979, pp. 4, 9.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
11. "The Bosses Build a Trojan Horse," editorial in *Progressive Labor Magazine*, Fall 1979, p. 12.
12. "Halt the nuclear danger," *Young Socialist*, March 1979, p. 8.
13. V.I. Lenin, "The Student Movement and the Present Situation," *Lenin on Youth*, Progress Publishers, 1974, pp. 100-101. Also in *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp. 213-19.

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Summer 1980

# America Imperialism's Greatest Crisis **in Decline**

An Analysis of the Developments Toward  
War and Revolution, in the U.S.  
and Worldwide,  
in the 1980s

by Sydney Stern

Sometimes books can be conspicuous by their absence. For years revolutionary minded people have recognized the need for a comprehensive and scientific analysis of the political economy of U.S. imperialism and its bloc. What is the significance of the crisis? How deep does it go? What reserves are left to the monopoly capitalists? Do they have a "way out" of this crisis other than war against their rivals in the Soviet Union? Why has the U.S. working class been so backward? What is the effect of the crisis on the conditions and mood of the masses? Based on actual material conditions, what are the prospects for revolution?

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It was written under the leadership of the  
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# Crisis and War: The Mood and Conditions of the Masses

*The following is a slightly edited section of a chapter from an extraordinary new book, AMERICA IN DECLINE—Imperialism's Greatest Crisis: An Analysis of the Developments Towards War and Revolution, in the U.S. and Worldwide, in the 1980s, to be published soon by Banner Press. This pathbreaking effort, written under the leadership of the RCP Central Committee and its Chairman Bob Avakian, analyzes the development and direction of the crisis of U.S. imperialism. It represents an important advance both in its thorough and all-sided application of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of the U.S. and in its theoretical development of the Marxist understanding of crisis and war. It will be invaluable for anyone who wants to know where this country is headed, and to understand the context for our Party's line that a revolutionary situation may arise in the U.S. in the coming few years. This particular chapter deals with the present condition of the masses in the U.S., its relation to their mood, and how this objective situation will develop in the future.*

At the present time, the majority of the working class does not find itself in circumstances corresponding to a revolutionary situation, nor is it in a revolutionary mood. For that to happen, the income and conditions of work, the stability of employment and other basic conditions must have deteriorated and, along with social relations and life in general, become intolerable in the context of a deep-going crisis, with all the social and political turmoil and upheaval that characterizes a revolutionary situation. But, the present crisis, which has not yet approached such dimensions, may well do so in the coming period, providing the objective basis for not only the minority of class-conscious workers, but tens of millions more, representing the majority, to act in a revolutionary way, at least out of the recognition that their immediate conditions will not change for the better except through the overthrow of the capitalist system.

How are we to understand the development and unfolding of such a situation? And what effect has the economic crisis of the past period had on the consciousness of the working class, broadly speaking? There are two sides to this question. The continuing strength of the bourgeoisie shows up mainly in the form of its political and ideological domination over the masses—in the general backwardness of the working class as a whole, in the strong influence of backward ideas among the masses of workers and the relative influence of backward forces in the working class. To put it another way, it has not mainly been the recourse to force and suppression by the bourgeoisie that accounts for the relative inactivity of and confusion within the working class, though this is obviously a factor of growing importance.

On the other hand, the material basis for this backwardness and passivity—the ability of the bourgeoisie to deliver the goods, so to speak—is being rapidly undercut. As we

will see, even this has its contradictory consequences in the willingness and capacity of the working class to raise its head and act as a class with its own interests. Yet there are some sections of the population whose backs are already to the wall, whose conditions of life are intolerable and whose potential for revolutionary activity right now is very great. There is, then, a process at work in which the bourgeoisification of the U.S. working class is breaking down—this is connected with the international situation and crisis of the past decade—and this in itself will give rise to another leap, in the form of a depression or war (whichever comes first) which will thrust people into an even more charged and radically different situation than has been faced in the last 10 years. The contradictory trends must be examined more closely.

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of rising expectations and rising living standards for the majority of the working class. This could only be a temporary phenomenon and had to give way eventually to a period characterized by sharpening attacks—economic as well as political—on the working class in its majority. But this bribery was real enough, since real income rose and stabilized into the early 1970s. Nevertheless, though this bourgeoisification was temporarily dominant, poverty and misery were accumulating during the 1950s and 1960s right along with it.

Mass rebellions among sections of the masses—especially the oppressed minority nationalities—shook the United States during the 1960s. The character of that movement and the relationship of the working class to it was rooted in the specific developments of the post-war period. The lives of Black people had changed enormously: they had come North, off the farms and into the cities, as the capitalists found it profitable to mechanize agriculture. These were very profound transformations resulting in the entry of Black people into the working class. But, as mentioned, Black people were not assimilated on an equal footing into the working class. They were herded into ghettos, subjected to violent police repression, daily squalor and degradation, and the sort of discrimination which has been analyzed. These material changes gave rise—along with the inspiration of anti-colonial struggles throughout the world—to the civil rights and then Black liberation struggles.

At the same time, the universities had opened up to large numbers of youth in the 1950s and 1960s, due to the technical changes in the U.S. economy and the potential danger posed by "sputnik." A whole generation of young people was affected by the experience of coming on to campuses and breathing the stench and hypocrisy of a society which promised them careers and rewarding lives; what they got was a demeaning and deadening education and the prospect of perhaps finding a slot in a man-eating and stultifying society. These were things being felt against the backdrop of the rebellions of Black people and the war being waged in Vietnam—and so there was rebellion among

the youth as well against the deprecation of the "abundant" society.

Yet, by and large, the working class remained on the sidelines of these struggles. As summarized in an analysis of this period by the Revolutionary Communist Party, "while millions of workers hated the war, and many took part in activities against it, this took place almost entirely on an individual basis, and the banner of the working class was mostly absent from that struggle."<sup>1</sup> So, while workers did come into this struggle, it was mainly students, young people and sections of the petty bourgeoisie that took up this fight in an organized way. And, by the same token, the Black liberation struggle—while it involved a much larger number of workers, especially young Black workers—was not marked by the organized and class conscious participation of the working class. This lack of a working class presence meant that petty bourgeois ideology and other harmful tendencies would be more difficult to combat in both these movements. But the overriding question is not so much the inherent limitations of these movements and struggles, but rather, what was it that relegated the working class to an indifferent or, at times, even hostile reaction to these upsurges? The answer runs through most of what has been said already. Apart, of course, from the treachery of the "Communist" Party, USA and, consequently the fact that there was no political vanguard to articulate the interests of the working class and galvanize it in revolutionary activity around these interests, it was the objective position of the U.S. imperialists that enabled them to muzzle the working class.

These mass movements, it is true, reached their heights during the late 1960s when the United States' uncontested power in the world was coming to an end. However, the U.S. imperialists were not powerless. They still had reserves, the remaining strength to maintain social peace, as far as the working class in its great majority was concerned. The ruling class—and not without a conscious awareness—was able to keep the one force, the working class, that could truly alter the character of these movements from coming into its own, from coming to the fore of these movements, from playing the central and decisive role it must historically play. In short, it was not the intrinsic backwardness of American workers that led to this situation, but the objective conditions that prevailed during the time. The fact is that the working class did not endure great hardships; things were not so bad that they were forced into action. The ruling class was able to make concessions, to throw some crumbs to the workers precisely at a time that U.S. society was in the midst of extraordinary political and social convulsions.

To sum up, these upsurges came at the *end* of a phase of U.S. imperialist strength and unprecedented prosperity that did trickle down to the working class. This was dialectically the beginning, or the harbinger, of a new period of crisis and war preparations, but the objective situation was one in which the U.S. imperialists could still maneuver, even to the extent of withdrawing from Vietnam and making these concessions at home. The ruling class could not only prevent the radicalization of the working class (which it certainly feared like the plague), but could also use its agents to organize the backward sections of the working class around reactionary positions and into reactionary activities exactly to demoralize others.

None of this denies the tremendously positive impact of these movements—they aroused the revolutionary sentiments of millions and did, in fact, penetrate into the working class, but they were not taken up and transformed by the working class. There were, however, some interesting signs of the times. It became increasingly common for

workers to seek out students; if only in a somewhat narrow sense of enlisting support on picket lines in economic struggles. There was a perceived identity of interests. Too much should not be made of this, because it was far less common for these workers to come out to anti-war marches, although this, too, began to happen by the early 1970s. Yet, coming at the same time as reactionary "hard hat" attacks on anti-war protesters, this indicated that the ice was being broken. The Richmond, California oil strike in 1969 and the national GE strike of 1969-70 saw this activity reach more organized and politically advanced dimensions. Statements in support of each others' struggles were drawn up in some cases, mass meetings in which the bigger questions of the day got discussed were held and there was a curiosity and almost grudging respect among many of these workers for the students.

The decade of the 1970s taken as a whole was one in which the optimism that many workers had in the future was shattered, especially by the middle of the decade. Up until then there was the increasing standard of living that has been mentioned and the conviction that children would have more opportunities than their parents did, and that even for the current generation of workers things would improve from one year to the next. But then, a definite stagnation in people's living standards set in. The average real take home pay of manufacturing workers with 3 dependents rose a meager 0.3% per year during the period of 1966-76 and this increase was virtually wiped out by higher local and state income taxes through the early 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Spendable earnings after taxes actually showed a decline in 1979 over the previous year. What is called discretionary income (this is money income left over after expenditures on food, shelter and other necessities) per worker has been falling since 1973. By the end of the decade, the average American was spending 36% of his disposable income for housing, about twice as much as 10 years prior.<sup>3</sup> In fact, according to federal surveys, only 15% of potential home buyers could meet typical monthly payments. The *New York Times* in its decade-end review of the 1970s could sum up that "virtually overnight, the American dream of owning a home became a mere fantasy for many."<sup>4</sup>

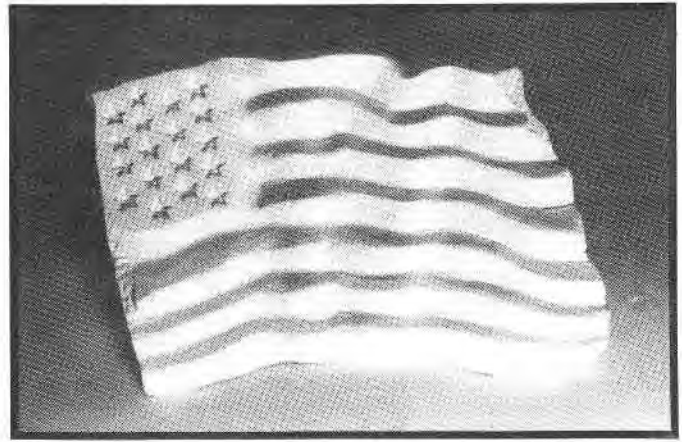
Expectations were changing along with—and on account of—changes in living habits. Consumption patterns began to reveal the breaking down of bourgeoisification, as non-essentials began to occupy a smaller and smaller portion of average family spending. The point is that workers could no longer count on steady and uninterrupted improvement. Now it was more a matter of keeping one's head above water. But, and this is very important, if the decade of the 1970s was marked by these real changes in living standards and by *declining expectations*, this was still largely *within the framework of continuing security and stability*, at least for the better paid sections of the working class. It was a fragile security and it was based on getting further entangled in credit, holding down more than one job, where it was possible, and having more than one wage-earner in the family. Table 2 shows 11.5 million families of production workers with both husband and wife working, and 8.5 million with only one worker.

The sledding was tougher, people were struggling to hold on, more desperately trying to maintain certain living standards, while some were losing out. The opportunities to get ahead were severely restricted. The children of workers could still go to college, though they were, in increasing numbers, shunted off to community colleges, many of these no more than high schools with ash trays. The majority of these students were programed for "failure"—tested and counselled right back into the working class—and the

lifetime income advantage of these students over high school graduates was hardly consequential.

The early 1970s witnessed a dramatic increase in strike activity. Postal workers struck for the first time and the federal government called out the National Guard. Longshoremen on the West Coast effectively shut down port activity there. A wave of public employees strikes paralyzed several cities. The strikes were of longer duration in succeeding years and reached their peak, in terms of the number of stoppages, in 1974. This was the high water mark in post-war strike activity. What brought this on was the interaction of the first real deterioration in living standards, particularly with the onset of inflation, and the spill-over effects of the turbulent social movements of the late 1960s and early '70s. This was registered in the infusion of oppressed minorities, youth and Vietnam veterans into the work force who brought with them a broader experience and hatred for the system and a general rebelliousness. (See Table 3) There was a more insurgent mood in the country—again not approaching that of a revolutionary situation, but the dislocations of the 1960s did shake things up a bit throughout society.

The situation was defined by increasing economic attacks by the capitalists; in stronger language than had been heard in decades, workers were being told that the pie was not getting any bigger. Productivity drives, various attacks on work rules, the beginnings of "take-aways," where certain customary benefits or conditions of work were subjected to renegotiation or withdrawal, became more frequent. Within the auto industry, some plans for reorganization and forced overtime touched off local strikes. Public workers—who through the decade of the 1960s had achieved unionization, in many cases, and made wage gains—were now being squeezed as the urban crisis (as part of the developing overall crisis) dictated layoffs and



changes in work rules.

These were the early warning signs of the impending downturn as the capitalists sought to compensate for falling profits. Following an extended period of real wage gains, this tapering off of real incomes coupled with productivity attacks (like forced overtime) propelled a militant reaction. Older workers responded along the lines of "how dare they" or "I've never seen things this bad before." For many younger workers and veterans it was more an angry and defiant "fuck this shit." In fact, it was in the early 1970s that the bourgeoisie took note of the phenomenon of the "new breed worker" in the coal fields or the auto plants, hateful and mistrusting of authority. There was something to it. At GM's Lordstown (a highly touted modern assembly plant), it took several years to impose labor discipline on the youthful work force. In Detroit, the problem of absenteeism and sabotage was commented upon widely. Young Black workers were regarded as a source of restiveness on the job. Foreman-employee relations, the

**Table 1 WEEKLY WAGES—PRODUCTION WORKERS**

	All non-government, non-supervisory workers		Spendable Weekly Wages (in 1967 dollars)	
	Current dollars	1967 dollars	Worker with 0 dependents	Worker with 3 dependents
1950	53.13	73.69	63.83	72.18
1960	80.67	90.95	73.95	82.25
1965	95.06	100.59	83.59	91.32
1970	119.46	102.72	82.49	89.95
1975	163.89	101.67	82.34	90.53
<b>Production workers in Manufacturing</b>				
1950	58.32	80.89	69.71	78.17
1960	89.72	101.15	81.82	90.32
1965	107.52	113.79	94.26	102.41
1970	133.73	114.99	91.86	99.66
1975	190.51	117.56	93.49	102.56

Table 1 source: Handbook of Labor Statistics, 1979, pp. 325-28, Table 98

**Table 2 MEDIAN AFTER-TAX EARNINGS OF PRODUCTION WORKERS 1973-77**

	Number (millions)	1973	1977	% Change in real earnings
<b>Couples</b>	11.5	\$10,805	\$14,538	-1.3%
Both working				
<b>Couples</b>	8.5	\$8,780	\$11,793	-1.5%
Husband working				
<b>Female family heads</b>	3.1	\$3,813	\$5,363	3.1%
<b>Male family heads</b>	.7	\$6,840	\$9,020	-3.3%
<b>Unrelated Individuals</b>	7.8	\$4,430	\$5,998	0.0%

Table 2 source: Monthly Labor Review, August 1979, pp. 43-44, Tables 1-3

"blue-collar blues," etc. occupied the attention of some sectors of the bourgeoisie.

This was a transitional situation. Workers' hands were being forced, but they regarded their current condition of holding down a job and making ends meet—even if this meant working overtime or a second job—as the principal aspect of their lives. It was strike activity, therefore, that was predicated on the experiences of the 1960s—that it was possible to secure more in the way of benefits and, at the very least, hold the line against these attacks. You could almost afford to be defiant—for the great majority of jobs could still be gotten (actually, it was not uncommon for young workers in auto plants to be fired one day and get hired on at another plant the next). To some degree the old-line union leadership was losing credibility. Within the mass unionized industries, these strikes resulted in some wage gains and expanded fringe benefits.

There were some struggles which went beyond the conventional bounds of strike routine. The miners had engaged in a powerful strike movement beginning in the late 1960s, which persisted through much of the '70s. While they were subject to the same influences that have been described, particularly the introduction of Vietnam veterans into the work force, there were also some special conditions faced by miners. The '50s were not a period of boom for the coal industry. Thousands of jobs had been wiped out by mechanization, while pensioners, widows and disabled miners were living at barely subsistence levels. Black lung disease and unsafe working conditions grew worse with the spread of mechanization, and when the industry picked up in the 1960s the kettle boiled over—a strike and wildcat movement which cut deeply into coal operators' profits and became an inspiration to workers throughout the country. Yet and still, this was conducted within a trade unionist framework ("we miners vs. the coal bosses"). By the middle 1970s it began to run up against the limits of spontaneity that marked it from the beginning: knee-jerk resistance to economic attacks by the coal operators which, though powerful and significant in the militancy of the rank and file, could not sustain a movement as workers saw that what was won was being snatched back in other ways. This struggle, in itself, was not adequate to train and educate workers to their larger and more long-term interests in taking on oppression in all its forms, in making revolution.

As the crisis deepened and the capitalist class was more deeply torn by conflicting interests, a severe recession hit the coalfields, which had been sheltered somewhat from the mass unemployment of the downturn of 1974-75. There were a number of mine-closings and shutdowns; unemployment in the coalfields increased markedly, while the coal operators seized on the situation to tighten the clamps on those still working and intensify attempts to "boost productivity." The given orientation of fighting

from on the job and with the prospect of wage increases was even less able to sustain a movement.

Nevertheless, the experiences and the limitations of the miners' struggle were object lessons for the whole working class. The early 1970s also saw the upsurge of the farm-workers movement, which was conditioned by the savage exploitation in the fields and the general oppression of the Chicano people. This struggle, too, in its intensity and some of the broader questions it threw up about what was going on in society took on greater significance.

The downturn of 1974-75 hit the working class like a tornado. Specifically, the ranks of the industrial reserve army swelled to proportions unseen in the United States since the Great Depression of the 1930s. And while there was some recovery from the depths of the contradiction which hit in the early part of 1975, and some reduction in unemployment for some sections of the working class, there was no recovery at all for the masses of Black people and other oppressed nationalities. And overall the course of the crisis since 1974-75 has left its mark on the shifting mood of the masses.

By the first quarter of 1975, 2.3 million fewer persons were employed than in the third quarter of 1974. 8.2 million workers by mid-1975 were officially counted as unemployed, compared to 4.3 million workers during 1973. The unemployment rate shot up to a post-war high of 8.9% during the second quarter of 1975, and 8.5% for the year's average.<sup>5</sup> The massive layoffs spread across all industries as the crisis deepened, especially the manufacturing and goods-producing industries. Construction workers were the hardest hit. At one point, more than 1 out of 5 construction workers were on the unemployment lines—or at least out of a job. Manufacturing unemployment rose to a post-war high of 12.2% in the second quarter of 1975. By March, 13.2% of durable goods industrial workers were unemployed. "Blue collar" unemployment (manufacturing, construction, mining and transportation) more than doubled—from its 5.3% level in 1973 to 12.9% by the second quarter of 1975.<sup>6</sup>

It was the tremendous magnitude of unemployment, more than anything else, that unsettled people's lives dramatically. 21.1 million workers who either worked or looked for work in 1975 experienced some unemployment during that year. In other words, more than *one out of every five workers experienced a spell of unemployment in 1975.*<sup>7</sup> Of those who had worked during 1975, over 7.7 million were out of work for more than 15 weeks, while 3.4 million were on the unemployment lines for over half the year.<sup>8</sup> For the first time since 1957-58—and even that period pales in significance beside the 1974-75 downturn—the more stably employed, high seniority workers were facing unemployment. Nearly 20% of the 7.83 million unemployed in 1975 ("officially listed") were adult

Table 3 VIETNAM-ERA MALE VETS, 20-34 YEARS OLD, IN THE WORKING CLASS

	Number (thousands)	White	Black and other minorities*	As % of all 20-34 year olds in this occupation
Operatives and Laborers	1,486.0	1,297.2	190.1	28.7%
Craft	1,231.5	1,144.4	83.4	33.6%
Service	157.8	129.7	28.3	19.5%
Clerical and Sales	549.6	486.5	62.0	32.2%
Farmworkers	81.4	78.8	3.2	15.9%
Total Working Class	3,506.3	3,136.3	367.0	29.5%

Table 3 source: Monthly Labor Review, August 1974, pp. 23, Table 5

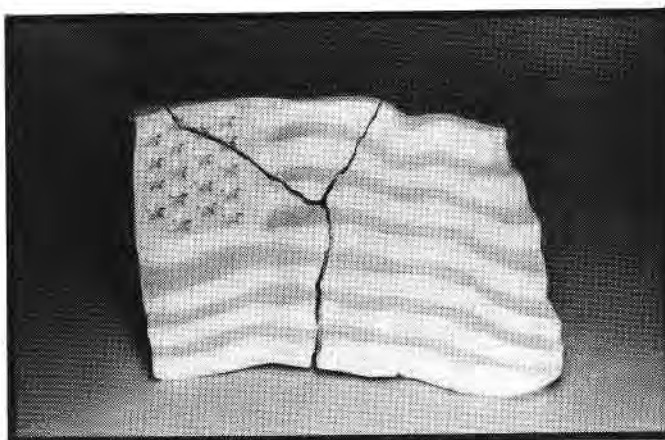
\*According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the category "Black and other minorities" includes 90% Blacks, the other 10% being Native Americans and Asian Americans. "Spanish surname" persons are included in the category "white."

men in the prime working ages of 25 to 44 years old—this was the highest percentage in the period since the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> At certain points virtually entire industries were at a standstill. Workers with 3, 5, 10 years seniority were given indefinite layoff slips, and as the crisis deepened through 1975, bankruptcies multiplied, leaving workers with 20, 30 years on the job completely jobless and often without pensions.

Cities like Detroit, where the pivotal automobile industry is concentrated, took the brunt of the swelling of the ranks of the unemployed. The level of unemployment in Detroit soared from a low point of 101,600 (or 5.4%) in November 1973, during the boom in car production, to 315,300, or over 15%, by March 1975, as inventories piled up and factories shut down.<sup>10</sup> The unemployed lined up inside and often outside the unemployment offices in numbers reminiscent of the Depression of the 1930s. In the inner cities, the rate of unemployment reached Depression levels.

These statistics indicate the two-fold impact of the crisis. On the one hand, many workers who thought they had "job security" and were counting on their seniority to carry them through thick and thin found it ripped out from under them. It was, it might be accurately said, a traumatic experience, and the initial reaction was intense bitterness and anger. The situation of many of these workers was perhaps encapsulated in the jobs demonstration organized by the AFL-CIO hacks in Washington, D.C. in 1975. Chartered buses ferried workers—among whom were many of the older workers with more time—from the East Coast and Midwest. The hacks had orchestrated the event both to cool out the workers and parade their favorite Democratic saviors and hopefuls along with their grab-bag of legislative reforms. They were met, however, by pandemonium and near-riot conditions from the crowd; the old "liberal-labor" warhorse himself, Hubert Humphrey, was shouted and booed down. In New York City, around the same time, 10,000 construction workers shut down city streets and bridges in protest over the loss of jobs. This scene would be repeated several times in other cities during this period. In short, the immediate response of those workers in the more highly paid and highly socialized industries (this latter condition in particular obviously doesn't apply to the construction workers) was an indignant and, occasionally, active one—or at least a receptivity to collective action.

At the same time, the situation worsened gravely for minorities and youth. The crisis of 1974-75 compounded the longer-term trends. The labor market prospects of many young Black men were so bleak by then that many permanently dropped out of the conventionally measured labor force. Government data reveals that the proportion of Black male teenagers with work experience over any given year fell from 67.3% in 1966 to 47.2% in 1977.<sup>11</sup> The trend was just as pronounced for those in the 20-24 age bracket. Many of those people who were working part-time jobs, who were coming in and out of the work force irregularly, mothers on welfare, disabled older workers, and the youth, were pressed hard. Widespread incidents of people freezing to death, of starvation, the further spread of prostitution and dope and so-called "survival crimes" were accompaniments to the downturn. This was most pronounced among the bottom layer of the unemployed, the urban poor who were concentrated in the ghettos. From among many of these people came the 30,000 persons who applied for many fewer jobs at the Plaza Hotel in the new Renaissance Center in Detroit, lining up by the thousands for several days running. Again in Detroit, 5000 unemployed showed up at a Cadillac plant one morning on the rumor that applications would be given out. Hundreds had slept there



overnight. In July of 1977 in Chicago 2000 unemployed surged into a new supermarket to apply for the 300 job openings. In New York City, thousands crowded into three application processing centers to apply for 2700 temporary C.E.T.A. slots in February 1977. Headlines everywhere told the story: "3000 Seek Jobs in Atlanta Melee," "Job Seekers Swamp City Hall," "Job Seekers Break Down Doors," etc.

Despite the jolts experienced by tens of millions of workers in the years 1974 and 1975 and the initial reactions of rage, there was no gathering storm of resistance to speak of. If anything a mood of conservatism set in, especially among some of the more stably employed. This was not across the board or uniform, but what characterized the ensuing years was a settling in, an adjustment to a new situation. There was not a sense among the basic sections of the proletariat that they had nothing to lose—although for some in fact this was quite immediately and materially the condition of their lives and they tended to look at things somewhat differently. Rather, among large sections of the working class it became a question of how to hold on to what you have, how to scramble through, how to put off paying bills, how to bend and gyrate to protect the little security and comfort that was left.

There were real things going on throughout society which reinforced this. First, there was the partial recovery. The nature of this recovery has been analyzed in the preceding chapter, but for now a few things must be said. Many of these laid-off workers in basic industry were cushioned by unemployment and supplementary unemployment benefits. 75% of the unemployed in 1975 claimed unemployment insurance—this reflected the higher proportion of layoffs relative to new entrants or re-entrants into the work force.<sup>12</sup> Supplemental benefits came perilously close to running out for great numbers of these workers, but by 1976-77 employment was picking up in the auto industry, for example. This was the "sluggish recovery" which would be a constant source of concern to the bourgeoisie. By 1977 1.6 million jobs had been recovered since the high point of the downturn—but still there were more than 500,000 more unemployed than in 1973. Due to a spurt in housing starts, construction employment increased by 9.4% in 1977 (the largest percentage gain of any of the major industry groups), but there were still 200,000 fewer construction workers by the end of 1977 than in the period preceding the downturn.<sup>13</sup> In other words, there was recovery, but not so much of a recovery. Between June 1977 and June 1978 the rate of unemployment decreased from about 7% to 6% and from then to the end of 1979, the rate has fluctuated between 5.7 and 5.9%.<sup>14</sup> Also, quite clearly in response to the initial outrage over unemploy-

ment and the political danger it posed, the bourgeoisie had embarked on an inflationary stimulus program which included the creation of federally funded jobs. These programs were employing upwards of 750,000 people.<sup>15</sup>

What was going on, then, was that people in basic industry were being re-called, but the continuing existence of fairly high unemployment acted as a reminder in effect to many that things could be worse. Some of the phenomena of the early 1970s that have been described were temporarily turned into their opposite. For example, where new hires came into basic industry (there was some stepped up hiring in auto and steel during the recovery years 1975-78) many of the young among them were practically grateful for a job. Overtime was something that people looked for—and quite obviously had no other choice if they were going to get by. Since there had been no large-scale social movement erupting out of the contraction of 1974-75 and since there were still some props left, some life rafts to cling to, there was a tendency to seek out “practical” and individual solutions to problems. This was reinforced by the general tack of the bourgeoisie, which was not to launch a full-scale assault on the living standards of the working class. There were the jobs programs, but also the credit expansion that underwrote the recovery. 1976 and 1977 were banner years for auto production. And people, including workers, continued to buy cars. Overall the rate of savings fell to about 3% of disposable income as the 1980s opened, and installment debt as a percent of disposable income rose to an unprecedented 18.4%.<sup>16</sup> Since the downturn, consumer debt has been growing at a rate 50% faster than the growth in personal income.<sup>17</sup> And so, while repossessions were more the order of the day, it was still possible to open new lines of credit. How tenuous all this is and where it may lead will be discussed later.

The bourgeoisie did not launch a new wage-price program in the wake of the downturn—in part summing up the reaction to the wage-price controls of 1971, which were a factor in the strike wave of 1973-74, but also because the effectiveness of these and other measures was questionable given the depths of the crisis. There were some heavy attacks levelled on workers, but they tended to be selective: in the rubber industry, construction, meatpacking. These did touch off some militant battles. It is not the case that things were peaches and cream elsewhere: accident rates showed an increase in many industries in these years of so-called recovery, for instance. But there was no concerted offensive to depress wages and working conditions. The partial recovery had the effect of increasing the stratification within the working class—between those who continued to work and eke out an existence and those on the margins of the labor force—the burgeoning welfare or “underclass”—and there were the differences in attitudes among sections of the young workers, trying to get started, and the older workers, trying to hang on.

Perhaps a microcosm of the degree to which the conditions of life of the more socialized and highly paid sections of the working class have been jostled and upended by the crisis, but where some margin—and an increasingly slim one at that—of readjustment remains, can be found in the situation of steelworkers in Youngstown, Ohio. Here is a city that has been devastated by two major shutdowns, the first costing some 4000 jobs in 1977 and the second an additional 3500 jobs. A steelworker after five years on the job might be earning more than \$16,000, depending on his or her position and amount of overtime. In addition, there were fringe benefits like life insurance, pension, dental plan, discount on prescription drugs and scholarships for part-time attendance at college. These were the things that at once made up for the dirty and dangerous work that was

life for a steelworker (not to mention the rotating shifts) and afforded workers a measure of security. In cities like Youngstown it was literally the case that generation upon generation would organize their lives around the mills—just about everybody who lived in the area worked there or had a relative who did. When the announcement of the first shutdown came down, a group of open-hearth workers who had only recently been awarded jackets for setting new tonnage records went out to the river that was oozing with the pollutants the mills dumped into it and threw their jackets in. It was a metaphor of how people felt: cheated and robbed, lied to and deceived. There was an initial flurry of activity—demonstrations and a few job actions. Much of this was channeled into dead-end and bogus schemes to buy the mill. Those still working in the other mills were equally stunned, and the question that hung over people's heads was, “Will it or will it not happen here?” The sense of permanence, that there would be a future in these steel mills, was shattered.

But what became of those who lost their jobs? Many initially qualified for federal import relief pay. Most creditors in the city temporarily extended and renegotiated various credit arrangements. A Youngstown State University study showed that among the former Sheet & Tube employees 1000 took early retirement, 1500 found jobs in other industries, services and trades in the district, 800 moved away, while another 800 or so were unemployed or in training for other jobs (which basically amounted to being unemployed).<sup>18</sup> While perhaps 30% of those laid off found other work, for most of them the change meant being underemployed and earning considerably less; for those who were working at all, the average pay was more in the range of \$10,000. The effects were different for different aged workers. Those with 20 or 30 years seniority, maybe in their mid-40s or early 50s and some with children still at home, would have a harder time picking up and leaving or getting another job. At the same time, not all of them were able to go onto social security or collect pensions. For many of the younger men it meant seeing wives go off to work, and it was mainly among these workers that houses were lost or sold. But selling a house was no easy matter, given the conditions in the area. Actually the loss of tax revenues from the mills forced cuts and belt-tightening in the schools in the small towns in which the mills were located. What principally characterized the experiences and reaction of those who lost their jobs was a recycling into lower-paying jobs, a kind of fateful resignation among the older workers—which prompted early retirement where possible—and yet among a section of them and the younger ones an anger that gave rise at times to militant action. But, in the main, people went their own way, seeking out individual solutions, some more successfully than others. The fact that a second major shutdown took place and unemployment in the area was approaching 10% made this less of an option at the beginning of 1980. This occurred as the economy was entering another recession and the room to maneuver and get by was contracting. That even these expectations were dashed to a greater degree probably accounted for the more militant mood of workers as evidenced in several demonstrations and job actions.

Overall in the U.S. 1974-75 was a watershed. It was possible to discern the outlines of a major social crisis in the massive layoffs and the shocks felt throughout society. For a brief period, routine and convention in the masses' lives, especially the more strategically situated in the working class, was no longer so certain or desirable. To many it became more dangerous not to act than to sit back and let things take their own course. That no real upsurge materia-

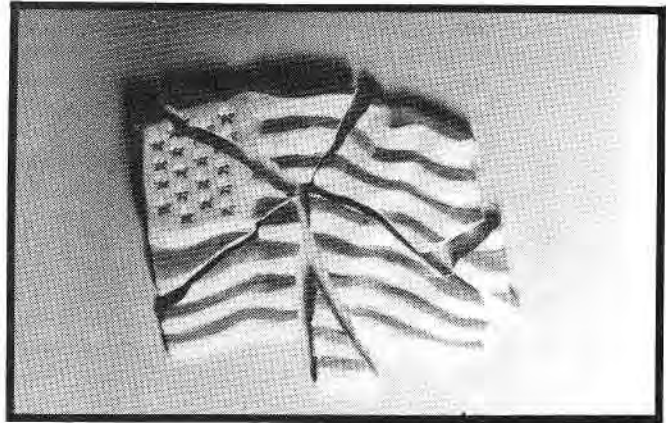


lized does not detract from the significance of what was happening to people and how they began to perceive things differently. No doubt many within the working class felt and feel that they have a lot of things, more than their parents, certainly more than people in other countries. But people also realized just how wobbly and fragile it all was.

Which brings us back to the question of impoverishment. People have not in their tens of millions been crushed and ground down. What really exists are ropes around people's necks, like credit, and if there is a real collapse—which, as explained in this book, is a distinct possibility—then the effect on people's lives could be more devastating than the Depression, since living standards in this country are anchored in credit, fringe benefits, government programs and assistance. Everything that has enabled people to hang on can become the hangman's rope. It becomes apparent how precarious it all is whenever workers go on strike and in a few months' time face the prospect of losing their homes. It becomes apparent when a job is lost and with it health insurance. It becomes a vicious cycle: a person may be overextended due to easy credit only to find himself or herself without any income to retire these debts, due to illness or loss of job. Or, reversing the situation, a person may begin to over-depend on easy credit after suffering a real hardship. One account of a typical bankruptcy in this period is worth reproducing:

"She hung her head and spoke so softly that her voice was barely audible in the dingy bankruptcy courtroom. . . . Yes she was still working as a telephone operator and earned \$13,000 a year. No, she had nothing of value aside from a few articles of clothing. The plumbing backup that flooded her apartment with sewage had left all her possessions unfit for use. Even before the accident, Estelle was living perilously beyond her means. Despite her modest salary, she owed a total of \$10,352 to 12 creditors, mostly department store and bank credit card accounts. . . . She owed more than \$4500 on just one of her Visa cards . . . and was behind on her rent and telephone bill. Nonetheless, Estelle had managed to stay one step ahead of the collection agency by nimbly juggling her meager resources. But her house of credit cards collapsed after the apartment flood. Her salary was attached by a creditor and—as have hundreds of thousands of other over-burdened consumers—Estelle filed for bankruptcy."<sup>19</sup>

By no means exceptional. This is New York. In Youngstown, a parking lot attendant says that before the mill shutdowns, the lot was always filled up. Now this is the case only on Mondays—when bankruptcy court is in session. It should be pointed out that new bankruptcy statutes allow for repayment over time as opposed to outright liquidation. This is the product of the continuing pyramiding of credit. But with consumers unable to pay their debts and lending institutions impaled between delinquent accounts and very thin profit margins (the difference between what they pay for money and charge for its use), this can only go on for so long. While there has been and will continue to be a gradual erosion of the living standards of the U.S. working class, it is the prospect of a collapse that will send things reeling. The various means by which the masses have been able to "hold on" are being pressed to the limit. As of 1977, more than 40% of all homebuyers were families in which a second wage owner contributed anywhere from 20% to 50% of total family income.<sup>20</sup> The ability of wives, however, to supplement the incomes of two-spouse families has more or less reached a plateau: earnings are not rising and these jobs, themselves, are quite insecure. Teen-age children can be sent into the work force, but that is another story in itself, what with unemployment rates among youth



at extraordinary levels.

The rising volume of credit obligations (bank credit card volume was triple what it was in 1974 by late 1979) puts tremendous pressures on consumers whose wage and salary increments are less than the credit they have taken on. The result has not only been a rise in delinquencies, the sort of thing described in the account of the young woman, but a tightening up: financial subsidiaries have begun to pare down the number of stores and purchases they finance, many department stores have raised minimum monthly payments, and savings banks and credit unions have periodically experienced disturbances such as big withdrawals, new cash reserve requirements, and an outflow of funds to other markets, all of which limits their lending capacity. The point is that already the debt which has propped up consumer spending is stretched thin, and tighter money supply policies and attempts by lending institutions to minimize losses have put a crimp on such spending and resulted in a tremendous increase in personal bankruptcies. But this, again, is nothing compared to what will happen when there is another precipitous downturn—with more thrown out of work than in 1974-75. There is an increasing vulnerability and sensitivity of the masses of people in this country to any radical change in the conditions in which they get by—tenuous as they are. Millions will be pushed into bankruptcy—and, yes, impoverishment.

Take the case of housing, again. If some international event, political or otherwise, touches off a round of banking failures and a massive scramble on the part of banks for cash and liquid assets, what will the average homeowner be faced with? With a demand to pay a higher rate of interest? Not likely. Rather, homeowners who default on payments (which is bound to become more frequent) will be confronted with demands for repayment of their entire mortgages. But housing prices will probably decline, and quite violently at that. So people who have been making \$400 monthly payments for years will find their home investment wiped out. It is a situation which has been prepared exactly by the artificial stimulation of home purchases through the extension of government-backed credit.

The very things that have enabled people to hold on and which were in some respects expanded during the '74-'75 decline will no longer provide the cushion they once did. It is an open secret that the Supplemental Unemployment Benefit funds for auto workers will not be able to sustain a large number of laid-off workers for any extended time—these funds are vastly inadequate. Exercising the option of early retirement when a plant shuts down will be less feasible when the investments into which these pension funds have collapsed. As it is, and this was pointed out in the section on banking, pension funds (which are managed by a relative handful of banks) now own between 20% and 25%

of all stocks, and about 40% of corporate bonds, hardly a low-risk preserve for what are supposed to be deferred wages. And, anyway, the Department of Labor estimates that less than half of those covered by these plans will ever see these benefits, because of certain stringent stipulations.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the financial foundation of the social security system is already quite unsteady. The mounting deficits of the government and the pressures on the dollar internationally, which had their origins partly in the stimulus of the last few years, will act to constrain the bourgeoisie from undertaking another such stimulus. Unemployment and welfare benefits cannot be maintained on the same scale, much less extended to provide for millions thrown out of work, when ballooning debt and inflation are pushing the economy inexorably toward such a breakdown. In other words, what the future holds out is not a mere contraction of credit, i.e., that it will be more difficult to finance or refinance purchases, but a disintegration and wrenching of the entire structure. The house of cards image is an apt one. Things don't just get progressively worse, they undergo qualitative change.

Being entangled and enmeshed in this debt cannot be reduced to the number of bad debts or the shrinking or expanding of the merchant-customer base. It takes a toll on how people scrape to live, on social relations. The truth of the matter is that people realize not only how precarious what they have is, but also how nightmarish and pressure-ridden it is to keep it. A woman's husband loses his job at an auto plant; they are up to their necks in debt; she drives her car, with her children inside, into a river—they are dead on arrival at a city hospital. It happened in Cleveland, but it is not unique. What happens to people? David Caplovitz in his highly original study<sup>22</sup> describes the daily degradation. Wages and salaries are garnished. Often employers put pressure on employees to settle their debts or face the imminent loss of their job. Job insecurity grows. In case studies of three cities, 20% of the employed lost at least one day of work because of the debt problem—absenteeism to resolve the accumulation of debt-related difficulties. Those who lose their jobs because of debt burdens must then weave their way through the unemployment and welfare bureaucracies—first of all, just in the attempt to qualify. And quite clearly the constant scrambling and jockeying has an impact on people's mental and physical health. Caplovitz conducted interviews concerning psychosomatic ailments like insomnia, stomach upsets, headaches, nervousness, and loss of appetite. Over half of the debtors interviewed acknowledged having at least two of these symptoms in the past month. One of those interviewed explained, and this is by no means exceptional:

"You know I live alone and I've been separated from my husband for 20 years and it's lonely so you buy something

here or there on credit. You have to brighten up your life a bit. There was one point there when all the bills and debts seemed to be closing in on me. I had no one to turn to, and I had a nervous breakdown."<sup>23</sup>

The threat to income that debt represents impairs not only health, but marriage and personal stability as well. Countless surveys show that debt troubles lead to marital quarrels and stress, and they have become a major factor in divorce:

"I've had debt problems with him ever since I married him. He never wanted to pay his bills. We fought like cats and dogs, day and night. I'd have to call him at work to tell him the lights were turned off. I'm so glad he's gone."<sup>24</sup>

The maze of debt obligations people enter into—monthly payments, late payment fees, hidden fees—all this presses against people's financial capabilities, and there is an undeniable cutting back: dental or medical care is put off, recreational activities (perhaps one of the few bright spots in someone's life) are curtailed, and even food expenditures are roped in.

In general, the quality of life deteriorates with the development of capitalism into its final stage—decadent, moribund imperialism. Vital activity gives way to stagnation and degeneracy. The experience of the "growth" industries cited in the chapter on accumulation are testament to this. But so are some of the more *sub rosa* enterprises: the booming child pornography industry, in addition to other similar degradation of adults, multi-billion dollar drug trafficking and widespread teenage prostitution.

Certain aspects of social life stand out in this period. The search for security in the face of economic uncertainty, frustrated aspirations, and social degradation has led to a discernible rise in religious activity. This is quite pronounced and takes more fanatical forms among sections of the petty bourgeoisie, with various cults, gurus and other assorted "saviors" who make a career out of turning many, especially the youth, into mindless zealots and robots. But within the working class, including those whose conditions of life are extremely desperate, religion has been sought out as an escape as well. This is not necessarily reflected in regular church attendance or affiliation with organized religious denominations, but in more widespread acceptance of "fate," attempts to explain current events by recourse to Biblical "prophesies," e.g., "the end of the world is near and has been pre-ordained," and the spread of mysticism, astrology and metaphysics in general. In the ghettos, storefront churches continue to proliferate, in the factories self-styled ministers and messengers distribute bible tracts, and on TV religious programming has grown as

Table 4

	1960	1970	1975
Divorces per 1000 population	2.2	3.5	4.8
Families headed by women (millions)	4.5	5.6	7.2
Black and other minority (excluding Hispanic) female head (%)	22.4	26.7	32.4
Births to unwed mothers (1000s)	224	399	448
Public expenditure for law enforcement (\$ billions)	3.3	8.6	17.2
"police protection" (\$ billions)	2.0	5.1	9.8
crimes (1000)	3,384	8,098	10,253
crimes per 100 people	1.9	4.0	5.3
homicides (1000)	9.1	16.0	20.5
police employees (1000)	303.8	449.7	556.8

Table 4 source: U.S. Bureau of Census, The Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1977, pp. xvii-xix

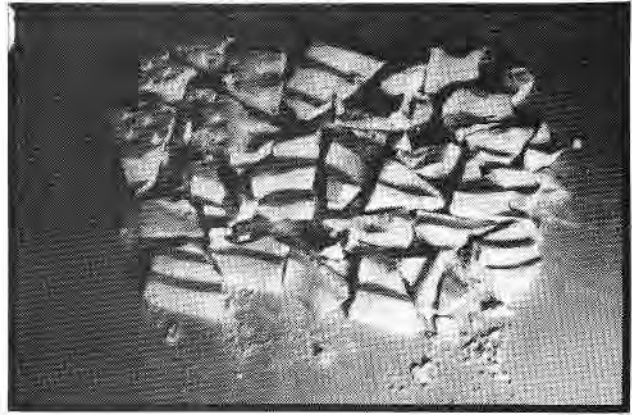
slick as it is pervasive. This points to the hand of the bourgeoisie, but the flight to religion, while definitely promoted by the bourgeoisie, is also a barometer of the conservative trend that set in during the 1970s.

Another trend, is the splitting up of the family delineated in Table 4. More than twice as many adults are divorced today as in 1960. Today there are 7.5 million female heads of households compared with 4.5 million in 1960. A full one-third of Black families are headed by women today. Twice as many births to unwed women take place today as compared with 1960. Among Black people this is related to the situation that drove them into the cities in the post-war period to face chronic unemployment and squalid living conditions which destabilized people's lives, a situation hardly mitigated by a welfare system that would make payments only if it could be established that there was no gainfully employed head of household.

A second marked trend which can be discerned from this table is the growth of "law enforcement" expenditures. They have increased 5½-fold since 1960, including police, judicial and "corrections." This reflects the mounting trend of police terror in the streets of the inner cities, especially directed against Blacks and other oppressed nationalities, as the bourgeoisie has moved to crush the anger and rebellion arising out of the urban poor. It is the reason that rebellions against police repression and the overall oppression that minority nationalities face continued through the 1970s—in Humboldt Park in Chicago, in Birmingham, and, even more significantly, in Houston where the Moody Park Rebellion of 1978 saw the Chicano community rise up in sustained and more politically conscious struggle against the police and courts.

The rise of crime is also a reflection of these conditions. The impoverished conditions in the minority communities have added to the ranks of the criminal strata, the broken and degraded elements of society who succumb to a life of degeneracy and crime. The ruling class both promotes this with its "look out for yourself, to hell with anyone else" outlook and seizes upon this crime and violence of which the masses are the chief victims as an excuse to send their marauding armies of police into the communities. At the same time, many of the young who have been locked out of the work force turn to crime, not so much as a parasitic way of life as these degraded strata do, but more out of anger, frustration and plain desperation. As indicated earlier, a great many ghetto youth will never enter the labor force—these are the shock troops of the permanent reserve army of unemployed in society. One study concluded in this connection that "more Black youths 18-24 years old are in local jails than in the Job Corps and other Federal Service programs put together. The number of idle on the streets increases."<sup>25</sup>

The situation facing the masses, then, is that the majority of the working class is living, as it were, on the precipice: able to get by, but only by the skin of their teeth. Illusions are stripped away as the opportunities to get ahead dry up and the effectiveness of seeking out individual solutions diminishes with the deepening of the crisis. This is what can be seen from the Youngstown example. True enough, some could get other jobs, go on pension or hang loose for a while. But it cannot last long—not with continual "shake-outs" of the steel industry. True enough, some could grab up overtime, but this cannot carry people through long periods of layoff. These are thin reeds to stand on. And, as has been emphasized, everything can come unglued with a major collapse—which is why the experience of 1974-75, when benefits and protections, like seniority, no longer afforded the same sense of security, was a bellwether. To



put it bluntly, the present existence of the masses is really quite untenable, based as it is on this partial recovery and the cushions, like debt. Moreover, the conditions for some are highly volatile right now, with intense and grinding poverty and very little in the way of temporary band-aids. For all, the quality of life is rapidly deteriorating, even if there is some tinsel and lace to cover it up. In a certain sense, just as the bourgeoisie is juggling to keep their system afloat, so too are people forced to do many things at once—holding down a job, putting off creditors, borrowing here and there, maybe selling a house, etc.—to stay afloat.

**B**ut it is not just an economic collapse which is on the horizon. It is not just a financial debacle that will make it impossible for the federal government to fund jobs programs and more decisively burst the credit balloon and result in far more serious material losses for the masses. Something else is looming on the horizon—and that is world war. The forces propelling war are gathering quickly. The superpowers can scarcely conceal it, and they less frequently make the pretense—beneath their pious talk of detente or human rights. Soviet airlifts make their way to Afghanistan, U.S. naval squadrons steam up the Persian Gulf. The preliminary moves can be seen, the opening shots can be heard. And the tempo is picking up daily. The superpowers do not go to war because they want to; it is not that they are driven by malevolence. They are driven by necessity. Who strikes first and where is of secondary importance, even to them—to the proletariat it is of no importance at all. But that there will be a first strike within the next few years is what lends urgency to the situation.

The ruling class in nurturing war fever presents people with the lesser-evil ultimatum: "sure things are messed up here, we have our slums and unemployment, but at least you have your freedom to travel around, to go out to eat, to have your own car and color TV and enjoy a high standard of living." Naturally, in the Soviet Union, the social-imperialists make a similar case: "sure we have our problems, shortages of some consumer goods and private housing, but at least people can retire with dignity, not worry about medical care and be more assured that their children will have a job and education." Such demagoguery has unlimited potential. It is the tired old refrain of slavemasters throughout history—"things could be a lot worse for you on some other plantation." But to accept this framework—and here it is no longer simply a matter of putting up with oppression, but fighting and dying for the furtherance of slavery—of whether workers in the United States get more crumbs off the table than do workers in the Soviet Union or whether Blacks are more or less oppressed than central Asian peoples in the Soviet Union is pure poison. It is the pathetic reasoning of a slave who will remain a slave. And,

beyond this, whether the case is made for the relative advantages on the Soviet or U.S. side, it is completely chauvinist because, in fact, these crumbs and bribes, be they higher wages or "socialized medicine," have been bled from the people of the world. Of course, if one chooses to approach things this way then maybe a Soviet victory would not be the unmitigated disaster that is portrayed by our rulers. After all, extending the argument of higher living standards to its logical conclusion, the Soviets might get enough productive forces and conquer enough of the world to throw a few more bones (in the way of social benefits) to American workers and, who knows, even allow them to shoot their mouths off. The point of this is not that the Soviet social-imperialists are any better—or worse—than the U.S. imperialists, but that both are intolerable and must be overthrown.

There is a great deal of confusion, much of which is sown by the bourgeoisie, among the masses on the question of war. Most people in this country have only experienced war indirectly—through a relative or friend who has served abroad or through those from abroad who have settled in this country. Several million, of course, have been in the armed forces and altogether have the direct experiences of two world wars, Korea and Vietnam. But these wars have always been fought somewhere else. The chauvinist song "Over There, the Yanks are Coming," at least has the merit of expressing the objective position of U.S. imperialism through the past two world wars: it was the U.S. armed forces that were going "over there" to clean up or to defend the spoils of wars fought abroad. The hardships suffered by people in the United States during these wars were real enough, but scarcely comparable to those who lived in countries which were turned into bloody battlegrounds or even testing grounds by the imperialists. World War 2 in this country was synonymous with rationing, victory gardens, longer working hours and, of course, reports from the battle lines; it was more an inconvenience than the dislocation and terror of war. The caskets came back, but the streets were not piled high with corpses from the ravages of war. Total U.S. casualties during World War 2 were just over one million, less than half of which were deaths.<sup>46</sup> In absolute and percentage terms this was a small fraction compared to the casualties in Europe and Asia.

The fact that these wars have been fought elsewhere, and that the United States had gained from them in its strength and position without suffering material damage, fuels the idea held by many among the masses that, maybe, a war is just what is needed to revive the economy. This divides into two. There is a recognition that wars and the economic system are interlocked, and that when things get bad the capitalists prepare for war. (However, of course, the capitalists do not go to war simply to rev up the economy: wars of aggression are launched to put down challenges to an empire, such as in Vietnam, and world wars are caused by inter-imperialist rivalry and the need to re-divide the world.) On the other hand, there is the illusion that things will necessarily get better for people with the economic stimulus of war. In the past there has been truth to this; but things will not be the same this time around. The kind of war shaping up will directly affect the lives of tens of millions in this country and it won't just be in the higher casualty figures.

A point which is made throughout this book is that the United States, having been the main beneficiary of the outcome of World War 2, of necessity became the policeman of the world. Pillaging and plundering the world, it became the target of revolutionary uprisings. Interventions, police actions, limited wars, counter-insurgency assistance—this was the stuff of 30 years of world domina-

tion. And now, with a rival in the Soviet Union challenging it throughout the world, the U.S. must play the decisive role in organizing and preparing its bloc for war. It cannot scuttle the preliminary skirmishes or let others do the fighting and wear themselves out; the reason is quite simple: it is U.S. imperialist interests which are directly at stake and which are threatened. And because it has built up a far-flung empire, losses tend to reverberate. The Soviets, if they are to build up an empire, must collide with the U.S. imperialists—which is what has been happening. If they are to succeed, they must thoroughly vanquish the U.S. imperialists, and this will require, ultimately, that the U.S. imperialists be defeated in their own backyard, even if the war begins and is fought elsewhere for a period.

The U.S. imperialists are no less compelled to trounce their rival in order to protect and expand their empire of plunder. The megatonnage is there, the monstrously accurate technologies have been developed, and the targets are pre-planned. The scenarios and contingency operations on both sides take as their point of departure destruction and attacks on each other's soil. The Department of Defense has undertaken several studies which coolly calculate how many millions of lives in the United States can be spared, how many can be evacuated, and in what space of time—for purposes of winning the war.

What will it mean for a third world war to take place and how will it affect the lives of the masses? First there is the question of the preparations for war—politically and economically. The ruling class will not be in as strong a position economically going into this war as in the previous two world wars (because of their international entanglements). The main reason for this is the high degree of integration of the U.S. economy with the rest of the bloc that it controls and the burden the U.S. has of shoring it up to avoid collapse. It is a two-way street: the United States is neither insulated from the disturbances that are multiplying throughout its bloc nor in a position to destabilize it further with expansive and inflationary policies. Concretely, this means that it will be harder for the U.S. ruling class to make concessions and accommodations to the working class as part of its drive to seal some sort of national unity.

To be sure, crumbs will still be thrown to a number of workers, but this will be in the context of a much tighter squeeze on the living and working conditions of the masses; these crumbs will be offered up much more directly and explicitly as rewards for loyalty and productivity. In addition, laying the economic foundations to prosecute a war of the dimensions that is shaping up requires more centralized control over labor and resources, and while there may not be a return in form to the wage/price boards and panels of the early 1970s, workers will be subject to control and coercion on a scale that will most certainly exceed that of the previous two world wars. The gas shortages of the last few years are but a faint prefiguring of what will be happening. Working and driving hours will only be one aspect of people's lives that will be strictly regulated. A war economy in a country which is not only in the grips of a major crisis but very much at center stage of the international contradictions propelling this war will force a rather sharp turn in the kind of life people have been accustomed to: from the further restrictions in availability and distribution of basic necessities to an imposed labor discipline which few have experienced.

Politically, the ruling class has already revealed the lengths to which it must go to rally public opinion and intimidate opposition to its war plans. The hysteria whipped up around Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were merely the opening shots. If people are to be press-

ganged into the most devastating war in history, then it is absolutely essential that the right climate be created. The imperatives of the ruling class were spelled out candidly in the somewhat infamous "Eisenstadt Memo" of 1979. This was the sage advice from an advisor to President Carter to quickly find some outlet for the frustration and anger of the masses, to seek out some scapegoat which was named and later invoked—the oil-producing countries. Here again, the enormity of the crimes to be committed by the U.S. imperialists in launching and attempting to win this war will require a stable home front—something which will be more difficult to secure both because of the experiences of the masses through the 1960s (of which more will be shortly said) and the hardships that millions will face, sooner and later. The level of class struggle so far preceding the outbreak of this war is lower than that which raged before the last two world wars. However, the potential for this is very great—and the ruling class is well aware of this and determined to snuff it out.

Despite the cloudburst of national chauvinism around Iran, Afghanistan and the 1980 Olympics, the ruling class was still skittish. The American people had to be primed further and one Marine commandant described the reaction to draft plans as "underwhelming." While the political struggle and consciousness of the working class, in particular, was not highly developed, the country was not "united" in a durable way. With so much on the line in this war for the imperialists, and with the American people having to sacrifice in fighting and directly experiencing this war, the political "work" of the bourgeoisie becomes very important. The level of repression directed at revolutionary forces began to pick up markedly as the 1980s opened—not so much because of the existing level of struggle but on account of what *could* happen.

By the same token, the ruling class is going into this war following a period of discord within its ranks—from Watergate and other scandals to the abbreviated political lives of presidents. This tended to undermine the cohesiveness of the U.S.-led bloc in the 1970s. The pap about how "America lacked resolve" to carry through on her commitments abroad and stand firm against the Russians, though mainly a crude attempt to stir up chauvinism and serve as a pretext for expanded defense expenditures and military activities abroad, did reflect reality: the U.S. imperialists had taken a drubbing in Vietnam, the ruling class was wracked with scandal, and the American people had indeed become cynical and distrustful of authority. Politically, the ruling class must close its ranks more firmly (this is not to suggest that there are any fundamental disagreements within the ruling class over the need to go to war—only over how to pull it off in the strongest possible position), both to weld the U.S. bloc together as firmly as possible and increase the initiative of the U.S. ruling class and to exact the submission of the American people. This is a war which will be accompanied by more savage repression than any before it in this country's history.

**W**hat kind of war are we talking about? Nuclear war? Perhaps, and most likely at some point in the course of this war. The presence of foreign troops on U.S. soil and the actual seizure of territory by them? A very real possibility. During World War 2 the general population in the U.S. was able, for the most part, to conduct their lives in an ordinary and routine manner. They were shielded from the war's destruction. But let's get back to some of these Pentagon studies. Here is one possible scenario that is envisioned:

"Suppose the USSR invaded Western Europe, and that the



U.S. conventional and tactical nuclear forces cannot stop them. At that point we should be prepared to use a strategic Limited Nuclear Option (LNO) by evacuating our cities. Hopefully the Soviets would be deterred by this action; but if they are not, the relocation would have made us ready to execute the LNO."<sup>27</sup>

With an equanimity that is as amazing as it is spooky, these planners are matter-of-factly talking about blowing away several Soviet cities. And in this scenario millions of people in this country would be gathered up and dispatched to this or that hide-out, for who knows how long, in order to strengthen the bargaining and logistical position of the U.S. imperialists—they could care less about people's lives. It is the old shell game. Come see if you can find us! Instead of taking your enemy's populace as hostage you turn large chunks of your own civilian population into poker chips. The other side can't kill enough of them to make it worthwhile; in the meantime the nuclear warheads are being readied. The Soviets have their own variations on the same theme: their "civil defense" system is more highly developed. How quickly cities can be evacuated and whether it is even feasible is not the point—what is, is the means that will be employed to protect and reinforce systems of exploitation in the United States and the Soviet Union. No technology and no fall-back plan is beyond adoption to win such a war. But all of this is couched in terms of protecting the country; in other words, cities are "protected" by anti-ballistic missile systems, a "counter-force strategy" (in which your adversary's potential to strike back is knocked out) is developed to "protect" against a lethal attack.

Now the actual effects of a nuclear war have been documented (Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and anticipated by the systems-planners. There are the prompt effects—blast damage and fire storms—and the delayed effects of radiation, disease, the despoliation of water, air, and soil.<sup>28</sup> But the imperialists have never predicated their thinking on the absolute end of the world. The Pentagon has commissioned the think tanks to "think through" possible nuclear exchanges. Two recent studies have considered targeting strategies which would be aimed at wiping out the Soviet leadership group and unleashing secessionist movements in the Soviet Union to effectively dismember the country. Said one Defense official in reference to these studies (and preparations), "We are trying to see in the ultimate nuclear exchange what should we be trying to do other than just flatten their industry." A consultant chimed in, "It's thinking the unthinkable. We don't want to bomb them into the stone age. We should have real objectives that make

sense."<sup>29</sup>

The new technology of war does not override the decisiveness of the human factor; even the imperialists recognize this. They need people in their armies and occupation hordes, they need their factories staffed. This would be a war to determine in the final analysis which of the great powers will enjoy the lion's share of territories, raw materials, markets—and labor power. Other systems-planners are busy at work figuring out what percentage of the industrial capacity will be destroyed, how quickly it can be rebuilt or salvaged—for the holy cause of profit, it goes without saying. In their worst-case prognostications, some 75 million Americans might die; how they approach all this is illustrated in their notion of "city-trading" with the other side—upping the ante in terms of retaliation for destroying this or that city. With the urban areas largely destroyed and the industrial base shattered (in both the United States and the Soviet Union production of key commodities is concentrated in a relatively limited number of facilities), the planners foresee a shift of the population to the countryside—as agricultural production will necessarily absorb a larger share of social labor, given the destruction of agricultural equipment and the factories that produce it along with support industries like fertilizer. And so the experts blithely conclude society will begin to recover starting at a level of development that approximates what existed in maybe 1890.

There is one basic element that is conveniently omitted from these calculations—the masses of people who have to endure all of this. Yes, there are the illusions that "things will eventually get better" and it is quite conceivable that some lift will be given the economy by expanded military expenditures—though even this possibility should not be exaggerated, because of the level from which things are starting, i.e. a persistent inflation and monetary instability. Doubtless, many will be swept up by the initial war hysteria, the specter of Russian hordes taking over, and standards of living going down the drain. But the fever and emotion, the flag-waving and demagogy cannot change the nature of imperialist war and the enormous suffering that it will lead to. The perorations about the American standard of living are going to wear thin with the economy lurching through crisis, even grinding to a standstill, with physical destruction being inflicted extensively.

Consider how some of this might play itself out. Following the destruction of key military and industrial centers in both countries, Soviet forces seize portions of the West Coast, Alaska and maybe parts of California. The U.S. imperialists retaliate and launch an invasion of Lithuania or Latvia (though the order of this entire chain of events could just as well be the reverse). But, whether you live in "occupied" Alaska or "free" New York, life is hell. In fact, those from "free" New York will be press-ganged to even the score—by invading Lithuania. Everywhere, people fed into the meat grinder, everywhere the equivalent of martial law, whether it be under Soviet or U.S. imperialist bayonets. The misery engendered by war will increase and with this a growing sense of unrest among the masses and an increasing capacity to put the blame where it belongs. The U.S. imperialists strike Moscow and level it to the ground. In response New York is reduced to rubble. Whose fault is it? The imperialists never cared about the ghettos and slums before—they created them, and they created the situation in which humanity is tossed into an incinerator.

While conventional armies will mainly be locking horns in other parts of the world, and even if the U.S. is not invaded (though there is scant possibility that the United States will be spared extensive material destruction), the lives of millions in this country are going to be completely and

totally disrupted. There will be no "individual solutions," not when whole cities are being evacuated or decimated. (Canada's actions in smuggling a few U.S. spies and flunkies out of Iran during the embassy crisis is a forewarning of this, as is the Canadian government's recent announcement that the country is "off limits" to would-be draft dodgers.) What will such a war do? Some, it is true, will be demoralized and ground down by the unprecedented horrors and misery. But millions of others will be roused to act, to put an end to this barbarity as a result of these intense experiences. Even one of these logistical experts must acknowledge the possibility:

"My concern is over the disruption to U.S. society and possible adverse impact on our government's decision making process. . . crisis relocation would cause a tremendous, serious domestic upheaval."<sup>30</sup>

That is just the point. Such a war, even if not immediately, will lead to a situation of unprecedented social chaos and tremendous upheaval, exactly because it will cause a sharp turn in the daily existence of the masses. The fact of the matter is that the economic crisis so far has not broken habit and routine, has not fundamentally left people with no choice but to act, not out of blind desperation, but out of the recognition that only the overthrow of the system can resolve the suffering and contradictions of their lives. The possibility exists that with crisis deepening and the outbreak of war, the social ferment and changing mood of the masses brought on by this carnage may well occur in conjunction with a severe weakening of the bourgeoisie's ability to rule and maintain order. It spells trouble for the capitalist class and opportunity for the working class.

On a small scale the experience of war and the impact that it can have on people was highlighted in Vietnam. People's eyes were opened. Hundreds of thousands who had swallowed the American dream and the glory of the stars and stripes coughed it up and threw it up on the battlefields in Vietnam and at home. Not only was there a process of a rude awakening—a lifetime of lies and deceit exploding in people's faces—there was a wholesale disintegration of the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam. Instances of fragging, attacks on officers, of refusal to go into the field and even consorting with "the enemy" grew. The most modern weapons could not stop it. This was a rage which was propelled by and transported back to burgeoning anger and protest in the U.S.

The kind of rapid changes that have been described and what this does to the consciousness of the broad masses, how their sentiments can just as rapidly and radically change—these are lessons of history which have been emphasized by Bob Avakian in his writings, building on the legacy of Lenin. As he wrote as early as 1976:

" . . . the development of the situation must not be viewed simply in *quantitative* terms—a series of small changes, added together over time, will somehow lead to a revolutionary mood among the masses. At a certain point, there must be and will be a *qualitative leap*, in the objective situation, in the mood, and—if we do our work right—in the consciousness of the masses. . . We cannot say now what will cause a similar qualitative leap in the development of our situation, whether a "crash" and major depression like the '30s, the outbreak of WW3, or a combination of severe economic crisis and war—a war which, over time at least, would add to the strains and hardships on the masses. Nor can we say when this will happen. But we do know just as surely as there is not now a revolutionary situation, one will just as certainly develop in the future."<sup>31</sup>

Is it possible that the same masses who would so eagerly give their blood for their imperialist masters would suddenly demand blood instead, would demand an end to the rule of a class of parasites? Again the lessons of history are relevant. In a short span of time during World War 1 large sections of the Russian workers, peasants and soldiers of all nationalities who had been swept up by chauvinist war fever turned against the war and the ruling governments. In the Czarist and German armies rebellious and mutinous troops inspired and ignited by the mass movement in society, particularly among the workers, in turn played a leading role in revolutionary upsurges. These were qualitative developments brought on by the agony of the first world war. In the case of Russia, the Bolshevik Party was able to influence these sentiments and organize these outpourings of resistance and hatred into a successful revolutionary assault on state power.

**T**here was a period of intense political turmoil in this country in the 1960s; it provided a glimpse of the social ferment that can grip millions. There was a period in the immediate wake of the 1974-75 downturn when sections of the more stably employed workers found the rug pulled out from under their previous conditions and illusions. The period we are entering into will much more dramatically affect people's lives. The system is much weaker economically, bordering on collapse, and a war of almost unimaginable proportions threatens to engulf the globe—unless it is prevented by revolution. Where today the question is still one of “getting by,” tomorrow it will be survival. The bourgeoisie will initially pose this question in terms of kill or be killed—fight the Russians or be overrun by them. But the question that will ultimately be posed to the masses will be—how to escape this madness—and the answer can only be one of collective struggle against the forces responsible. There will be no successful strategy of individual survival under these circumstances, because to live and to die will have become very immediately and directly social questions. This, of course, is always true in so far as people live within a society with specific social relations, but now the question of how people are living and have been living (since war and its attendant suffering are but the concentration of existence under regimes of exploitation) and what is worth dying for—to perpetuate the rule and dead hand of capital or get rid of it—comes into sharp relief. Revolution becomes no longer a perhaps attractive, but dangerous and impractical, alternative to gritting your teeth and living with exploitation. It becomes a practical necessity.

“It can't happen here.” It is a sentiment of many, including many who wish it could happen here. But one does not have to search too far for the ingredients of a revolutionary challenge, for the potential fracturing of a society which has by and large been stable for 30+ years. There is the economic crisis which will continue to propel sections of people into motion—from diverse quarters: small farmers, truckers, those cooped up in the ghettos and living right now under the gun (Soviet occupying troops will not make things all that much worse for those facing the onslaught of killer cops and the National Guard). Social movements erupt: in a matter of weeks hundreds of thousands take to the streets in protest of nuclear power. The same kinds of bolts of outrage to the draft. Even where the bourgeoisie can get over with a “hate Iran” crusade for a time, it is certainly not without its contradictions. Millions are dragged into political life and discussion, the atmosphere is more highly charged, as world events and people's futures are now topics for consideration. Yes, these social movements are still dominated by ideologies which are not revolu-

tionary and yes, there are reactionary currents among the masses, but the turbulence in society is growing—of which all this is a reflection—and it can only force a more profound questioning and awakening among millions. Nothing the bourgeoisie and its agents can say or do can reverse the trend of deeper crisis; their bellowings about Soviet aggressors will not make their war plans and what people will be forced to go through any less gruesome. And, in escalating fashion, the monstrous developments towards war will fill more with hatred for the system and a burning desire to act. The increasing hardships, along with a deeper understanding of what the imperialists have in store for people, will put the question before millions: why wait to do something about the situation until *after* they have launched such a war of destruction and terror? Only revolution can prevent the imperialists from carrying out their war plans, and it is by no means a settled issue that a revolution can only await the outbreak of World War 3. The imperialists will not have an easy time preparing for this war, and their preparations may very well precipitate, in conjunction with the economic crisis, a deep-going political and social crisis in this country which opens up opportunities to challenge their rule decisively.

Beneath the surface of calm lies this underlying instability. It is like a geological fault which in its imperceptible movement eventually jars things loose. This is not the 1960s. The struggle is not on as high a level. But these rivulets of struggle, these pockets of resistance, exist within a different context. And just as the tempo of world events leading to war is rapidly accelerating, so too will there be rapid shifts in the mood of the masses and the scope of their activity. Where there is oppression there is resistance. This is a basic law of history. But history does not mechanically repeat itself. For example, as a major component of this mass struggle in the period ahead, there will continue to be major struggles by Black people and other oppressed minorities against their national oppression, and no doubt they will intensify. But these and other struggles will not assume the same forms and pass through the same stages of development as they did in the 1950s and 1960s. Yes, many of the same lessons will have to be learned over again, but it will not be a replay, i.e., first a stage of civil rights and then breaking beyond these bounds. Experiences have been accumulated, the ruling class cannot make the same kind of concessions, and things have gotten worse for people.

The period ahead will be punctuated by outbursts and surges of resistance. These will still be largely scattered, but they will at once meet with more repression and exert more influence over others, exactly because the stakes are higher for both the ruling class and the masses. And what of the working class? When will it enter the fray? Actually, in the annals of revolution it is more the rule than the exception that the working class, particularly its better paid and socialized sections, tends to move later rather than sooner. The Iranian revolution stands as testimony to this. It was the youth, the intelligentsia and sections of the petty bourgeoisie that were engaged in the early and pitched battles with the Shah's regime. That one of the Shah's last desperation maneuvers was to offer striking oil workers a 100% wage increase was an indication of the fear the ruling class had of the working class entering the struggle as a political force and also the fact that up until then sections of the working class were mainly preoccupied with more narrow concerns. But the workers threw this bribe back in the Shah's face, they struck and paralyzed the oil fields in support of the revolutionary demands of the struggle and in doing so transformed the character of that struggle.

Today, as analyzed, there are real reasons that the U.S.

working class is mainly a sleeping giant. The backward elements put a lot of pressure on the more advanced. For many in the working class there has not been the experience of sustained and militant political struggle like that which others went through in the 1960s, and there are still some crumbs to grab hold of and protect, some straws to grasp at. This, however, is not the total picture, even today. There are tens, even hundreds of thousands right now within the working class, who not only wish for a drastic change in their lives but are convinced that this system has got to go; tens, hundreds of thousands who are open to the idea of revolution and who can be welded into a potent force which can activate the rest of the working class as the conditions ripen and can influence untold masses beyond their numbers. This is not the same working class of the 1950s. It contains significant elements with broader experiences: Vietnam veterans whose eyes were opened by a war of plunder, those among the youth who rebelled against the system, women who have arisen against their restricted and oppressed condition, and most of all large numbers of revolutionary-minded people from among the oppressed nationalities.

The ingredients of a mass movement in this country are these stirrings in the working class, the other movements and struggles which are like tributaries into the working class, and the convulsions that will rock this system with the aggravation of the economic crisis and the moves towards war. There is something else. That is the existence of a revolutionary vanguard, of a party which is armed with a correct understanding of the international and domestic situation and where developments are heading, which is capable of summing up the experiences of the masses and organizing and leading the armed onslaught against the bourgeoisie. A party cannot create a revolutionary situation; yet preparing for and utilizing the opportunities presented by such a situation requires this political leadership. When the contradictions accumulating reach such a point, then even the most minor flare-ups form part of a larger struggle. They take on an added significance when the system is vulnerable to a frontal assault, and because of this, and in conjunction with the leadership of the working class's vanguard, many such struggles will go over to the political realm—this is what happened in Iran among the oil workers.

But it would be wrong and naive to suppose that there will be a smooth development of things such that the working class and its vanguard will neatly gather the strength to take on the bourgeoisie as everything else falls in place. As the authority of the bourgeoisie breaks down, powerful forces will be unleashed throughout society. Uprisings and torrents of resistance involving different sections of the population and with dynamics of their own will be more the order of the day. Movements and struggles concentrated, perhaps, among some of the oppressed nationalities or in various regions of the country and in which other organized forces, with programs of their own, command the respect and allegiance of substantial numbers of people, will, no doubt, arise. Under these complicated conditions the working class and its vanguard must seek a basis of unity with such forces while maintaining its independence and without ceasing to fight resolutely for leadership in the overall struggle and without compromising the basic interests of the masses.

The decisive question for the future is whether the working class can raise its head above the petty and mundane and grasp its historic role. That there will be turmoil in society is undeniable; where it will go depends in large measure on the capacity of the working class to take independent action in the broadest interests of society, that

is, revolutionary action. The dialectic that has been etched out here is that already the conditions faced by people along with the social and political strains in society have sparked struggle and raised big questions in people's minds. Yet, what has been experienced is nothing compared with what lies ahead: war and a more cataclysmic decline in the economy. Is the situation, then, one of a waiting game? No, because the actions of the advanced sections of the working class can act as a lightning rod, as it were, to the rest of the working class and point the way forward to the diverse strata whose rumblings can be felt. The actions and stand taken by the advanced will right now call into question and sharpen the struggle within the ranks of the working class around the illusions and, yes, the rot and reaction which some still cling to. The class-conscious minority can accelerate—under the leadership of the Party—the tempo of development which will see millions awaken and thirst for change when a sharp and sudden turn in daily existence takes place. To go into the maelstrom of controversy and emotion around Iran, for example, to uphold the revolutionary interests of the international working class in support of that struggle, is not only to help make it possible for those who are confused and misled to break with such reaction and unleash those whom the ruling class would want to intimidate and demoralize, but to temper and train the advanced for a time when society will be rent by far more intense social conflict—and even then the majority may initially be “on the wrong side.”

The possibility of revolution in the United States cannot be ascertained from the existing level of struggle in this country—or the existing objective situation. It is based on what is developing throughout the world. The fragility of the imperialist bloc headed up by the United States and the extraordinary attempts to induce a war hysteria are an economic and political barometer of the objective weakness of the ruling class; it is far from being down and out, but it is extremely desperate. There are seeds of the future in the current battles of the working class and other sections of the people; more important is what the future holds in store and how to prepare through these battles for it.

The particular position of U.S. imperialism in the world, a source of unprecedented strength in the past, is now, in dialectical relation, pressing in on it. Here in the United States we are dealing with the prospect of mass unemployment, the possibility of territory being “seized” by the “enemy,” of the terror of war and the ruling class which must resort to vastly repressive means here at home to prosecute it. The ruling class must take a different road with respect to the masses than what it has taken in the post-war period and even since the downturn of 1974-75. All those things which were taken for granted, that there would be gas at a pump, that schools would be open to send children to—they are not so certain any more, and so there are riots and near-riots over such things as the gas shortage. The spreading insecurity of life, the bottom falling out for millions, with a shutdown here, a credit squeeze there, such that there is no longer even a job for millions (a lousy job, but a job nonetheless, and maybe a Superbowl as entertainment); the dislocations of war—all this will wrench people's lives and intensify the disorder in society. Right here in the United States. The ruling class has on more than one occasion referred to the cities with their huge concentrations of poor as “time bombs” ready to go off; not a few officials have worried just about what would happen if for some reason welfare checks were cut off. The same ruling class bent every effort to beat back and smooth over the contagion of anger among the more strategic sections of the industrial proletariat in 1974-75. They have expressed great concern over the response of the youth to the draft



and the influence of Vietnam-era veterans.

The United States may well turn out to be a place where the chain snaps in the coming conflagration, given the accumulation of all these contradictions. Whether it actually

turns out to be the case or not, it is this possibility which the class-conscious section of the working class and revolutionary fighters must prepare for. It is to prepare to scale the heights of history.

## Footnotes

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4. *Ibid.*
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# UNION CENTER FORMED!

## Picked at MOSLEM RULER or Judge's FEARS 60,000 Questions JOINING REVOLT

h Examination in Pro-British Chiefs Not  
ill Orders Speed-up Able to Stifle Rebels  
Through Colonies

ng Preventing De- 12 Battles Overnight  
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Exceptions, on which an

## ILITIA TO AID MARION EVICTION, JAR ALL PARADES

### Labor Defense Offers Help to Arrested

MARION, N. C., Sept. 2.—Today, celebrated by the most conservative ranks of labor as its holiday, and recognized as a legal day of rest and a class collaboration joy-fest by a nearly every county of state mills found four companies of state militia on guard here with fixed bayonets and machine guns with which to shoot down striking textile workers if they dared to stage a parade.

A hurriedly prohibited parade in the city, and while the county officials were busy doing the same for the country outside the Clinchfield mill where is located the strike town place, in which the strike took place, (Continued on Page Two)

## ZIONISTS PLAN TO ATTACK MEET

### Cleveland Communists Will Defy Them

CLEVELAND, Ohio, Sept. 1.—A vicious campaign rages here against the Jewish Communists in connection with a protest meeting on the front of Zionists and labor. On the last day, Carmichael, on the meeting was speakers Hall, where the meeting was to be held, was cancelled.

The Jewish world, a local paper, is openly inciting to violence. It is the Jewish "extermination of Communists, murderers and traitors."

The Zionists are mobilizing to break up the meeting scheduled for tonight, should it be held in any other place. Epstein is scheduled to be the principal speaker at tonight's meeting and another is in preparation.

## Gastonia Defense Greeted the 2nd Week of Trial

## India, Turkey, Persia, Egypt, Nejd, Restless

### BULLETIN

BEIRUT, Syria, Sept. 2.—Major Elliott, the British liaison officer in Syria, returned here by airplane after a conference with British officers on the Palestine border, and reports that the French and British commands have now a joint plan of action against Arabian revolutionaries and will try with their united forces to hold the border between the two mandates. There is thus a united front of imperialist powers to hold the Arabs in subjection.

JERUSALEM, Palestine, Sept. 2.—Battles raged during last night between towns and villages where Arabian insurgents fought British troops and the forces of the (Continued on Page Two)

## COAST WORKERS AID GASTONIA 16

### Coal Miners in Battle to Save Prisoners

Three thousand miles away, on the other side of the continent, workers are mobilizing themselves, steeled by the determination that the Gastonia strikers, now being tried for their lives at Charlotte, N. C., will not be legally murdered.

The following telegram, sent to Gastonia, coming from the Los Angeles local of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, is part of the intensive activities there, as reported by Mother Ella Beers who is building the International Labor Defense, and Gastonia Joint Labor Defense and Relief Committees on the Pacific Coast.

"We pledge our local support to you who courageously carry on the struggle of the working class. We greet you in your trial which shall become the (Continued on Page Two)

## Recover 35 Bodies of Italian Workers in Algiers House Wreck

ALGIERS, Sept. 2.—Thirty-five bodies have been recovered from the debris of a five-story apartment house which collapsed last week. Police said they believed probably 40 bodies are still buried in the ruins of the house, which was occupied by Italian workmen's families.

## Brothers: Tuesday, Sept. 3, has been set by the State Conference Board as the date on which another vote will be taken on the questions of either submitting our demands to arbitration or renewal of the old agreement. For the past week Wop- agreement. For the past week Wop- and the other officials, hand in have been doing re-

# Masses of Workers in Convention Launch Trade Union Unity League

CLEVELAND, Ohio, Sept. 2.—With the adoption of the platform and constitution and the election of officers and national committee the initial convention of the Trade Union Unity League closed this evening and the delegates started for their places of work to put into effect the decisions. The convention itself was a great success in every sense of the word, there was never for a moment any of that flippancy that characterized American Federation of Labor conventions.

The conferences of various industries took up much of the time of the convention. In these conferences the problems of various industries were taken up. The convention itself planned the campaigns for mobilizing and leading great mass struggles against rationalization, the speed-up, imperialist war, etc. But the completion of the work depends entirely on the action of the delegates when they return home, their ability to carry into the factories, mines, etc., the spirit of the Cleveland sessions. The convention burst into spontaneous demonstration when William Z. Foster was nominated secretary by Pat Toohy, president of the National Miners' Union.

The demonstration lasted for fifteen minutes. John Schmieles, of Detroit, an auto worker, is assistant secretary; Jack Johnstone is national organizer; James Ford is negro organizer. A national committee of approximately 55 was selected upon the basis of nominations from various industrial groups.

CLEVELAND, Ohio, Sept. 2.—The American working class has organized a militant trade union movement. In three crowded days, of convention in Slovenian Auditorium, over 700 delegates from the most basic industries of the country, delegates representing whole fighting national industrial unions and militant local unions in reactionary unions, others representing the masses of the unorganized who have gathered together in their shops to send one of their fellow workers to represent them, delegates from Trade Union Educational League groups in many cities, Negro workers' representatives, those who represent the working youth and the working women in industry, have organized themselves on a national scale for class war against the capitalist system and for a real fight under their own leadership against exploitation and discrimination.

The necessity of a new labor movement was entirely clear to the representatives of the American working class, assembled in this convention, after they had heard, and themselves reported on the steady offensive of the employers, centralized into larger and larger corporations and mergers of corporations, and in control of all state machinery.

Worker after worker reported on wage cuts, unemployment, increased profits for the bosses, going hand in hand with increased poverty of the masses. The present labor movement, A. F. of L. unions and the railroad brotherhoods and such "industrial unions" as the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, it was clearly seen proceeding on a totally wrong basis, limiting themselves to the shop and to sections only of these, corroded with craft spirit and sectional quarrels, and led by gangs, machines, of traitors to the movement like the Lewis and McPherson, who seek primarily to bleed the members financially for their own profit, who live lives of luxury and sell out the rank and file workers in exchange for schemes and spread out innumerable class collaboration schemes and spread out innumerable class collaboration schemes and spread out innumerable class collaboration schemes.

## "They're All Guilty," Is Cry of One Charlotte Venireman

### Sidelights on Great Trial Show How Mill Boss Press Has Roused Opinion Against Prisoners

By BENDER GARLIN  
CHARLOTTE, N. C., Sept. 1.—Dramatic voice of the lawyers retelling the same set of questions a hundred times. This is the third day of jury-picking in the Mecklenburg county court house, and the session was over Thursday at 5:30, a total of six jurors had been selected.

Court opens at 9:30. In fifteen minutes two jurors are placed in the box; J. G. Campbell, 40, a news vendor of Charlotte, and C. W. Martin, a carpenter who is a member of the American Federation of Labor. Campbell swears on the bible that he is a Baptist, and believes "in nothing but the law and the good God."

"I believe all the defendants are guilty." (Continued on Page Three)

## CALL FIGHT ON 'LAND OF SOVIETS' CAR SELL-OUT NEARING PACIFIC

### T.U.E.L. Expose N. J. On Last Leg of Siberia Fakers' Plans

FATHERSON, N. J., Sept. 1.—Fighting the crude attempt to sell the New Jersey traction workers by a fake arbitration scheme, the Trade Union Educational League yesterday issued a statement to all possible service employees of New Jersey. It is as follows:

Brothers: Tuesday, Sept. 3, has been set by the State Conference Board as the date on which another vote will be taken on the questions of either submitting our demands to arbitration or renewal of the old agreement. For the past week Wop-agreement. For the past week Wop-and the other officials, hand in have been doing re-

## BLAGOCESHENSK, Siberia, Sept. 2.—The Soviet airplane Land of Soviets, en route from Moscow to New York via Siberia and Alaska, arrived here today at 5:30 a. m. Eastern Moscow time (12:30 a. m. Eastern Standard) from Chita. The Land of the Soviets has nearly completed its crossing of Siberia, and will leave here for Khabarovsk, its next stop. The plane encountered bad weather on Saturday, and after leaving Irkutsk for Chita, met storms over Lake Baikal and fought backwinds for hours. It made a non-scheduled stop at Verkhin-Udinsk and then left for Chita. As part of the great expedition planned for the flyers of the Land of the Soviets, on their arrival in America workers will

## DEHLER, DUNNE AND DEFENDANTS GO TO CLEVELAND

### Third Delegation From Southern Textile Mills

CHARLOTTE, N. C. (By Mail).—The third group of delegates from the Southern District of the National Textile Workers Union to the Trade Union Unity Convention left August 30 by auto. This delegation, elected at the Bametown City Conference on July 28th, consisted of Daisy McDonald, Binny Green, Robert Lutz and Clarence Townsend. The last two are among the seven defendants in the Gastonia case charged with secret assault with intent to kill who are not in (Continued on Page Five)

## GERMAN YOUTH HOLDS RED DAY

BERLIN, Sept. 1.—International Youth Day proved very successful throughout Germany. The Berlin demonstration was particularly impressive, with tens of thousands of young workers participating.

Hundreds of young workers appeared in the numbers of the proposed Red Front Fighters League. The demonstration lasted five minutes in the main square of the city. The three days' May first holidays are in memory of the fallen workers who were shot in the fighting.

## Effigies of Gastonia Bosses Burned by British Workers

### National Protest Against Marville

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With the advent of the 7th U. S. E. program and the new union, the British workers, who are in the forefront of the fight against the capitalist system, have organized a national protest against Marville.

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## Effigies of Gastonia Bosses Burned by British Workers

### National Protest Against Marville

# Slipping Into Darkness

## “Left” Economism The CPUSA and the Trade Union Unity League (1929-1935)

### I. INTRODUCTION

August 1928—On the campaign trail, Herbert Hoover pompously announced, “We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poor house is vanishing from among us . . . We shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation.”<sup>1</sup> There were many who actually believed him. These were the heady days of a “chicken in every pot.” U.S. imperialism had come out of World War 1 as the only genuine victor. It got fatter and cockier as it elbowed older rivals out of the way and gorged itself on the peoples of the world. For the first time whole nations were in debt to the finance capitalists of Wall Street. The American economy revved its way through the 1920’s in explosive speculation and expansion. Politically American capitalism seemed invincible.

Despite exploitation, oppression and the fact that even during the boom years many millions lived in desperation, despite resurgent lynch terror meant to preserve the sharecropper system in the South and fierce repression against Black people in the North, no one could deny that capitalism was, at least, providing steady employment and allowing most people to put food on their tables. For a small upper crust of skilled workers, the expanding empire actually meant that they could win more privileges over the masses of workers. And their reactionary gratitude toward “Americanism” poisoned the political climate in the whole working class, especially the sec-

tion organized into the craft unions. Professors solemnly declared, “Ford has defeated Marx.”

Never before had illusions penetrated so deeply into the American working class.

October 1929—in a blinding flash, the bloated stock market collapsed, and world capitalism quickly sank into a chaotic depression unprecedented in its scope and severity. In three years of straight downward slide, whole branches of industry collapsed. 5,761 banks failed. By 1933, industrial production was cut in half.

For the millions of wage-slaves, the inability of capitalism to profitably exploit them meant that starvation itself stared them in the face. One third of the working class was turned out without hope of finding a job. Wages for those still working were slashed as each capitalist fought the gruesome battle to cut costs to survive. In the scramble for cheap production, work intensity climbed. In the cotton mills of the Carolinas, even young workers started dropping dead on the mill floors from overwork and heart failure.

This catastrophe was not confined to the industrial working class. Huge numbers of white collar workers found themselves with their hands thrust deep into their suit pockets in the soup kitchen lines. Hundreds of thousands of farmers went bankrupt and were driven from their land, migrating in great waves across the country (a process that actually began before the Depression hit the cities). Small businesses fell like dominoes. Students prolonged their schooling (especially in the free universities) because there were no jobs waiting at the end of it.

Black people were driven out of the first toeholds they had established in Northern industry. In Chicago, where Black people were 11% of the population, they made up a quarter of those on relief. In the West, Mexicans and suspected Mexicans were shipped out of the country in boxcars.

A river of men flowed through the railroad yards, the hobo jungles and along the endless rails, looking for work, looking for a way out, just looking. Every major city had its “Hoover-villes,” colonies of the displaced, driven to living in tarpaper and tin can shacks. Nothing seemed permanent any more, not for anyone. All of society, from top to bottom, had been hit by an earthquake.

The illusions built over decades were deeply shaken.

In the first years of the Depression the capitalists simply urged patience and faith. “Prosperity is right around the corner.” They made a hit song out of the ditty “Happy Days Are Here Again!” But now fewer and fewer believed them. Anger and desperation filled the workers. Never before had the religion of “Americanism” seemed so hollow and deceitful. Millions were looking for answers and radical ideas won a tremendous and growing audience.

Two years into the Depression, the bourgeoisie nervously sensed the political danger the crisis posed for their whole established order. President Hoover whined to Congress on Dec. 8, 1931, “Within two years, there have been revolutions or acute social disorders in 19 countries, embracing more than half the population of the world.”<sup>2</sup>

# TUUL

In 1932, two distinguished guests at Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration were overheard discussing their growing fears:

"Gentlemen," one of them began, "It's revolution. I'm telling you... I can see 'em now, howling up Fifth Avenue with blood in their eye, howling up Market Street and Beacon Street and Michigan Avenue!"

"Who?"

"Why, the birds that get hungry, that's who!"

In the crisis, the stench of capitalism became overpowering. There was no place to hide from the major questions of society and the future. Self-proclaimed "armies" of jobless workers converged on Washington, D.C. looking for help and relief. Populist "share-the-wealth" movements sprang up everywhere. In 1932, the Communist Party wrote, "The masses are beginning rightly to sense that Communism has an important message for the human race and they want to know what it is."

The CPUSA rushed into the 1930s determined to create a revolutionary movement. It declared "the Communist Party must raise before the toilers in the United States the revolutionary way out of the crisis," "only the destruction of the capitalist system, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of Soviet power, can free the millions of toilers."

In the decade that followed, millions took up the struggle against the effects of the crisis. Hundreds of thousands passed through the ranks of the Communist Party, and the whole working class—in fact the whole country—was influenced by its work.

When the smoke of the decade cleared, *there was no trace of a mass revolutionary movement among the American people!*

This article will dig into the roots of how this happened. And for that reason, it will most definitely not be a nostalgic trip through the past battles of the CPUSA's "better days." In fact, the lessons of the thirties are overwhelmingly *negative* lessons for revolutionaries today. Even in the period of 1929-1935, when the CP was clearly a revolutionary organization that upheld the goal of proletarian revolution, the line it held on how to do political work in the working class helped set the stage for the later move into open revisionism. Here we are not at-

tempting an overall summation of the CPUSA, its work in other major fields and all the factors that contributed to the rise of revisionism. We are focusing on the line, "*left*" *economism*, that led the work of the CP in the early Depression, and especially the way that line got carried out in the trade union work of the Party, the building of the Trade Union Unity League.

For years, the revolutionary movement that grew out of the 1960s has been plagued by the tendency to resurrect the lines of the thirties uncritically. Xerox machines and old documents have kept dogmatists busy all through the last decade. New and old revisionist parties promote now one, now another, of the "old" CPUSA's political lines and organizational plans. At times it seems like we are watching a competition over which group can most quickly re-enact the CP's slide down the road to hell.

Even among genuine revolutionaries, there still exists a tendency to swallow uncritically the revisionist CP's historical summation of its own past.

In the last years there have been a whole series of books published by the CP and its admirers to establish its organizational "lineage" to the "glory" of the past, and to spread its summation of the thirties: The works of William Z. Foster (*American Trade Unionism, History of the CPUSA, Pages From a Worker's Life*); John Williamson's *Dangerous Scot*; and *Labor's Untold Story*, by Morais & Boyer, among others. In addition there is a collection of memoirs by social-democrats formerly in the CP: Peggy Dennis' *The Autobiography of an American Communist*; Al Richmond's *Long View from the Left*, etc. Add to this *Black Bolshevik*, by ex-CP (and present CPML) figure Harry Haywood, who manages to uphold every wrong line the CP ever had on trade unionism, even when some of these conflict with each other. In all these upside-down accounts, the economic struggle the workers waged before World War 2 was the greatest heights the class could aspire to, and the CP's role in organizing that struggle the pinnacle of communist work.

All history is written to fight for a political line. The pro-revisionist histories present a certain (narrow) picture of the economic struggle of the '30s in order to glorify economism; the fanatical anti-communist social democrats (such as Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, and Theodore Draper, whose books are standard bourgeois texts on the period) paint a picture of some perfectly good trade unionism ruined

by "Stalinist" zealots who insisted on tainting it with politics on "orders from Moscow." The history we have written here is written to root out economism, not praise it.

Any nostalgic attachment to the *political lines* of this period, because of the breadth of the motion among the workers or because some of the leaders of the struggle called themselves communists, completely misses the point of studying history. It is not an accident that almost every opportunist line to emerge within the revolutionary movement today wrapped itself in the mantle of one period or another of the "old" CPUSA. This includes the Mensheviks who split from the RCP in January 1978. Of course, these particular opportunists consider the CP of 1929-1935 a little too "left"—they base themselves on the CP's more openly rightist periods. However, the "left" economism so characteristic of the CP in the early Depression has been taken up lock, stock and barrel by some today (the Communist Workers Party, for example<sup>7</sup>), and it remains a deviation quite suited to the present period, especially since it is so able to disguise itself with revolutionary phraseology.

The CP lost its bearings right at the moment of its greatest opportunity. For us, in the 1980s, the practical relevance of these historical lessons is obvious.

## II. CP's INTERNAL STRUGGLE, PREPARING FOR CRISIS

For a full year before the stock market crash, the Communist Party raced against time to shake up its own ranks and prepare to play a revolutionary role in the turmoil it knew was coming.

Seven years of "peaceful prosperity," with its accompanying reaction and repression, had cut away at the broad influence the Party had won in the post WW1 upsurge and the early 1920s. Its numbers shrank to a few thousand members, concentrated especially among foreign-born workers, who, because of their involvement in the revolutionary movements of Europe, tended to have a much higher political level than many native-born workers. These losses were inevitable, to one degree or another, during such a period of ebb. But within the Party there arose a strong rightist tendency that thrived on and in turn fed an intense demoralization.

By 1928, this more and more openly

revisionist trend became concentrated in the line of Jay Lovestone (Party head since 1927) and his supporters. Their consistent line had been to emphasize third party coalitions with various reformers, social democrats, farm populists and trade unionists. As these forces, one by one, merged into the political campaigns of bourgeois politicians, like Wisconsin Senator Robert LaFollette's presidential bid, the Lovestoneites fought within the Party to have Communists follow these "progressives" into the clammy waters of the American "mainstream."

"Our big demonstrations and mass meetings are altogether too much confined to events that appeal only to the revolutionary and more progressive worker who, after all, is the exception in the American working class. . . the practically unsophisticated masses of American workers cannot be reached by these mass meetings and mass demonstrations. They can only be reached by discussions of problems and issues which they understand and recognize. Capitalism, unfortunately, is not yet an issue with them, nor is it a problem of theirs."

But surrounded by the signs of rapidly approaching crisis, with the clear analysis of the Communist International that stabilization was coming to an end, the Lovestone leadership of the CP and all that they represented stood out more and more starkly as an obstacle to seizing the opportunities arising.

In 1928, the Communist International launched an international struggle against those determined to stick their heads in the sand and ignore what was coming. It wrote that the "present stabilization period is growing into a period of *gigantic cataclysms*."<sup>9</sup>

A political confrontation was brewing as the two lines sharpened up, driven by events. The three major Lovestoneites (Gitlow, Lovestone and Pepper) produced a thesis of "American Exceptionalism," a smug, agnostic rejection of Marxism-Leninism. They announced the "Hooverian Age," "an epoch of affluence and magnificence, of peace and prosperity. . ."<sup>10</sup> "A powerful technical revolution is taking place in the United States, a tremendous rationalization, an increase in the forces of production, which in its effects can be compared to a second industrial revolution."<sup>11</sup>

The struggle broke out and raged over the question of whether crisis was coming, and ultimately whether there was a possibility of revolution in the United States. When Lovestone and

his closest supporters were expelled,\* the Party had consolidated itself around a new line that touched every area of its work, on the Black national question, on the question of crisis and the laws of capitalism—and what concerns us in this article—a new view of political work in the working class and the trade unions, the line of "revolutionary unions."

Throughout 1929, this political two-line struggle within the Party was paralleled by a campaign to create a mass revolutionary organization to lead the upsurge of the masses that intensified crisis and impoverishment would bring. September 1, 1929, two months before the crash on Wall Street, the Trade Union Unity League, a federation of "revolutionary trade unions," was gavelled into existence at its Cleveland convention.

The very fact that this struggle took place, that communists anticipated the crisis and fought to prepare their own ranks, is testimony to the science of Marxism, and puts the lie to the scribbles of bourgeois economists and historians who declare that the crash was unforeseen and unforeseeable. At the same time, the new line of the Party showed the powerful weaknesses in understanding that accompanied its renewed revolutionary spirit. And these were weaknesses that were going to have a powerful influence on the ability of the CP to carry through with its plans to build a revolutionary movement.

### Changes in Trade Union Line—from TUEL to TUUL

Like every other aspect of the CP's political line, the trade union strategy of the Party was in sharp crisis as the Roaring '20s prosperity drew to a close. Since 1922, the Party had basically followed a policy of concentrating on the economic struggles involving the established trade unions,

\* Lovestone's expulsion in 1929 was preceded by the political struggle with a tiny clot of Trotskyites, whose dishonest intrigue scarcely took the form of a major line struggle. In any case, they are incidental to the events we are analyzing here.

In passing it is interesting to note that the Lovestoneites degenerated completely into renegades, stool pigeons, CIA agents and general professional anti-communists. After years of political intrigue within the American trade union movement, Lovestone became the CIA's favorite operative within the labor movement, especially internationally. He was involved in arranging union credentials for CIA agents bound for Latin America, and other unsavory service to imperialism.

seeking to build a national movement of left-wing caucuses—"the militant minority"—within them, to amalgamate them into industrial unions, and radicalize the working class by seizing the leadership of the unions and taking them to the left. This was the policy of "boring from within," closely associated with William Z. Foster, a leading member of the CP and the leader of its trade union work for years. Foster's policies were based on the assumption that winning leadership of the majority of workers by leading their economic struggles was the necessary step toward any political movement.

"It may be accepted as an axiom that whoever controls the trade unions is able to dictate the general policies, economic, political and otherwise of the whole working class."<sup>12</sup>

And further, according to Foster, this process had to go through established trade union channels because approaching the workers directly and politically would inevitably produce rejection. As Foster later explained it

"the old trade unions had the vital advantage of speaking the same language as the broad masses in respect of religion, patriotism and general American traditions while the dual unionist revolutionaries were usually anti-religious, anti-patriotic, and altogether scornful of American traditions in general.

"The basic advantage of boring from within as a method over dual unionism was that the militants, by being inside the old unions, negated altogether the adverse affects of several of the above strong mass opinions and predilections and greatly modified those of the rest; with the general result that the militants had a better approach to the workers and were thus enabled to win to their side large and ever decisive masses of them for policies of class struggle."<sup>13</sup>

The Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), founded by Foster before he joined the Party, was adopted by the new-born Communist Party in 1922 to be its major weapon in the triumphant march through the unions.

"Our main strategy was to revolutionize these [AFL craft] unions by giving them Communist leadership (through organized minorities, and such official posts as we could conquer), by amalgamating them into industrial unions, and aside from par-

# TUUL

tial support of existing independent [non-AFL] unions in unorganized industries, by organizing the unorganized masses into the old ones. The TUEL national center directed this general minority movement and challenged the AF of L bureaucrats for leadership of the masses."<sup>11</sup>

It didn't work that way. By 1923, the very "progressive" trade union officials that the Party planned to unite with in a "left-progressive bloc" were patching up their differences with the main body of the union bureaucracy and helping to launch a massive expulsion campaign against Communists. The union structure did not move to the left, but instead dove headlong into a frenzy of wheeling and dealing, bribetaking, "labor" banking and infamous new schemes to help speed-up the workers. Where the Party had successfully won some leadership of the economic struggle, in the coal mines and garment industry, the influence did not lead to secure positions within the union structure, but to massive and violent expulsion fights.

Most important of all, from a communist point of view, the policy did not lead to the political radicalization of the working class.

Although Foster bitterly fought the Lovestone faction for control of the Party, and ultimately opposed their rejection of the line of the Communist International, his line on trade union work was based on a similar view of straight, steady work around the day-to-day concerns of the masses. When the line was put into practice it met with failure, and when struggle broke out it did not follow the plan and lead to radicalization of the masses through union positions for the "militant minority." Conditions had changed, the economic struggle died down during the '20s, and with it the willingness of union officials to allow themselves to be dragged into confrontation with the employers evaporated.

Three industries did provide the Communists with a mass base: textiles, coal and the garment industry. All three of these industries missed the "golden glow" of prosperity. For various reasons, vicious price wars, layoffs and wage cutting swept them years before the overall Depression itself broke out. Because of the intensity of the oppression, the rapid impoverishment and the man-killing speedup, and because there was a large percentage of immigrant workers concentrated there, the Communists won

massive influence. But instead of seizing control from the well-entrenched hacks, they were expelled, often taking thousands of workers with them.

In 1928, under pressure from the Communist International and from stark reality, the CP broke with "bor-ing from within" and started to organize independent unions. In September, 1928, the National Miners Union (NMU) was formed out of the militants of the crushed 1927 miners' strike to "Save our union." With that defeat the AFL-affiliated United Mine Workers had been broken organizationally throughout the coalfields and its treachery had earned the hatred of the more active and advanced workers. The NMU vowed to replace it with militant "class struggle" industrial unionism. Similarly the National Textile Workers Union was formed at the same time, out of the ashes of the strike of 26,000 cotton mill workers in New Bedford, Mass. In December, 1928, the revolutionary fur workers, their organization intact after years of bitter and bloody struggle in the New York garment district (where the AFL hacks had driven out 12,000 members—the whole New York membership), united other expelled and militant garment workers around themselves and their Communist leaders to form the Needle Trades Industrial Union. These were the first results of the new line of the Communist Party in the trade unions, and the signs that the Communists were breaking with religious awe for the established labor institutions.

## Dual Unionism

Conventional wisdom among social democrats, revisionists, bourgeois historians and even some genuine communists is that the Communist Party, driven by frustration, flipped into an infantile, sterile and sectarian ultra-"left" binge in the late twenties, and recovered its senses barely in time to make its historic contribution to the American working class: the building of the industrial unions in basic industry and the passage of unemployment insurance.

By forming *dual* unions (unions apart from and sometimes paralleling the existing AFL craft unions), this story has it, the Communists violated sacred principles and cut themselves off from the "mainstream of American labor." Gloriously pure but inevitably rejected.

Foster, despite the fact that he led the Party's practical union work of this period, and even gave it critical en-

dorsements in his later histories,<sup>15</sup> is undoubtedly a major source of the "dual union" taboo. After all it was Foster himself whose main contribution to the theology of American revisionism was that dual unionism was the U.S. revolutionary movement's original sin: "Dual unionism has poisoned the very springs of progress in the American labor movement, and is largely responsible for its present sorry plight."<sup>16</sup>

In his view even the most hidebound craft unions restricted to skilled (and usually white) workers had, as Foster put it, an inherently "working class character under their veneer of bourgeois ideology and reactionary leadership..."<sup>17</sup> The very idea of forming "dual unions" conjures up the image of "splitting the working class" if you succeed, and sterile isolation if you don't.

This ignores the fact that the working class was (and is) already split, into a politically backward labor aristocracy, and the broader masses of ordinary workers, among whom it was (and is) extremely important to build up a revolutionary political pole, in opposition to the reactionary outlook actively promoted by the bourgeoisie's representatives in the unions whose social base comes from this labor aristocracy. This certainly does not mean that the task of communists was (or is) to smash the existing unions, or to set up special economic organizations for the most advanced workers. But the criticism of dual unionism leveled against the TUUL that has been standard gospel about this period really amounts to the viewpoint of the labor aristocracy and those like AFL head Samuel Gompers (the George Meany of his day) who claim that they are the "legitimate" spokesmen of the whole working class.

Any concrete analysis of the objective conditions in the working class at that time shows that by the time the crisis got going, the AFL was so isolated from the profound turmoil among the industrial workers that to try to center political work inside of it would violate the basic principle of uniting with the masses.

Throughout the '20s, the AFL shrank steadily, and was more and more exclusively based on the most skilled workers, and focused on the battle for privileges over the masses. The few industrial unions within the Federation were hardest hit. Some, like the brewery workers and the seaman's union, simply folded. The United Mine Workers, the largest and most influential union in the U.S., disintegrated under the combined assault of the pro-

found overproduction crisis in coal (starting in 1922) and the gruesomely reactionary policies of the John L. Lewis clique. In 1920, the AFL had encompassed 19.4% of the working class, and in major struggles was actually a vehicle for leading the broad masses, including the unskilled. By 1930, the AFL barely spoke for 10% of the workers, even by its own figures.

Great sections of American industry were virtually untouched by union organization, including most of steel, auto, electrical equipment, rubber, cement, textiles, chemicals, food, oil and non-ferrous mining. Where unions did exist they were usually so corrupt and conservative that they were worse than useless, even to the workers who belonged to them, and were propped up as an instrument of the employers. It is typical that the AFL opposed unemployment insurance far into the Depression on the grounds that the "dole" undermined the individual initiative that "made America great!"

*Fortune* magazine reported the obvious: "The Federation has been suffering from pernicious anaemia, sociological myopia, and hardening of the arteries. . . . Wherever struggle broke out, new unions sprang up, organized by those expelled from the AFL, including "non-political" unionists, socialists and various defeated bureaucrats, all competing for the leadership of the masses. Communists were not the only ones forced to give up neat little plans for "boring from within."

But in fact, there is a very serious error associated with dual unionism, and that is syndicalism, a tendency which has historically been deeply rooted in the U.S. revolutionary movement, including the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) at the beginning of the century. Syndicalism sees the task of transforming ownership of the means of production from the hands of the capitalists to the workers as principally an economic question, neglecting the key role of the state and state power, of political revolution, in this transformation. Usually this means organizing the working class to fight for socialism on an economic basis—shop by shop and industry by industry—and neglecting the political organization of the workers, their organization to carry out revolutionary political struggle and eventually political insurrection—a line that often involves underestimating or even denying the need for the political party of the working class as its highest form of organization. In the old IWW, it even took the form of a stand against such political

struggle as the fight against the first world war, and calling on the workers to concentrate instead on building up the battles against their employers.

For the CP in the period we are talking about here, this syndicalism shows itself clearly in the very idea of "revolutionary unionism," as though industrial unions which can only be organized on a shop-by-shop and industry-by-industry basis were the basic revolutionary organization of the working class. This is tied to the CP's economist line of unfolding political work mainly around the struggle over wages and working conditions. What was wrong with the CP's line was not so much the "dual" as the "unionism."

## Gastonia

In the spring of 1928, in the small North Carolina mill town of Gastonia, the new CP-led textile union got its baptism of fire. The struggle in Gastonia was a first glimpse of coming changes in the consciousness and activity of even the more backward sections of the working class. And it broke out at the climax of the two-line struggle with the Lovestoneites within the Party including the sharp internal debate over how to conduct political work in the working class upsurges.

The bourgeoisie was proud of the political backwardness of the Southern white workers. They were religious, racist, filled with the ignorant backwardness of rural life, and held up as examples of why revolution was only the un-American scheme of foreigners. When they rebelled under Communist leadership it was a political statement that electrified the whole country, and inevitably brought out the most determined hatred of the oppressors.

Year after year of intensifying exploitation, a workday of eleven and twelve hours, the nerve-racking work of tending several looms at once, and the constant "stretch-out" increasing the work load on each worker, all the effects of the intensified competition and crisis within the textile industry brought the workers to the limits of human endurance. Every institution in the company towns stood against them. Even the preachers were notorious for teaching that the Bible opposed bathing, in order to excuse the company housing without indoor plumbing. Within days of being contacted by the National Textile Workers Union, the workers felt they had what they had needed for years, a leading center with experience in fighting the oppressors, and the promise of outside relief to keep their families alive when

the wages stopped. Contact between the union and a few active workers, two speeches to crowds of workers from the Loray Mills, and the strike was on.

Right from the start, the bourgeoisie tried to rebait the strikers and divide the workers from the Communists. The *Gastonia Gazette* ran a full page ad "paid for by the Citizens of Gaston County," declaring:

"The strike at the Loray is something more than merely a few men striking for better wages. It was not inaugurated for that purpose. It was started simply for the purpose of overthrowing this Government and destroying property and to kill, kill, kill.""

A federal mediator at the scene announced that a settlement was inconceivable until "the workers divorce themselves from their communistic leaders." In its present form it was "not a strike, but a revolt."

The strike was a sharp challenge to the whole heavy hand of class rule in the South. Nominally the demands of the strikers were simply the means to life itself. They demanded a weekly wage of \$20, a forty-hour week, no more piece rate, better living conditions in the company housing, union recognition. The mill superintendent replied, "You realize that if we should comply with them, it would mean that we would virtually give you the plant." All the local pillars of society were mobilized against them: the press, the National Guard, sheriffs, the nightriders called "The Committee of 100," all aimed at stamping out the spark that threatened to ignite the Southern working class and spread throughout the country.

The strikers were almost immediately evicted from their company housing and forced to live in tents pitched in the mud. Facing beatings and gunfire almost constantly, they organized armed self-defense. When the lawmen and thugs fired, they fired back. When the local police chief led a drunken charge on the union hall, he was blown away. These strikers knew the odds they were up against, but they considered their lives intolerable and were determined to change things no matter what. This is what made their struggle a manifesto that threw cold fear into the hearts of the bourgeoisie and brought support for their fight from across the South and throughout the country.

Workers came from every Southern state. By foot, horse and ramshackle car they came to support the struggle.

The funeral of four men killed by Detroit police during a Hunger March of 3000 led by the TUUL and the Unemployed Council, demanding jobs or income from their former employer at the Ford River Rouge plant. There is a sharp contrast between the portrait of Lenin that hangs over the funeral—obviously symbolizing the cause for which these men gave their lives—and the DAILY WORKER's treatment of this struggle, which focuses solely on the immediate demands of the workers and in no way uses it to bring out the need for revolution.



# Unity of Employed and Unemployed Main Task -- This Is the Lesson of the Hunger March of Ford Workers

**JOHN SCHMIES**  
Organizer of the C. P.)  
workers participated in  
Hunger March during the  
it lasted. The march-  
gather at 1 p. m. and  
March at Midnight. In  
the march, the number  
is high as 15,000 work-  
the history, according  
of Detroit, have wit-  
a brutal and power-  
on the part of the  
company which owns  
entire cities. Many  
of workers in auto-  
trying to show their  
solidarity for the pro-  
te needs of Ford  
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## DEMANDS OF THE FORD WORKERS

1. Immediate cash relief of \$3 per week and \$2 for each dependent for all unemployed Ford workers and Trade School students laid off in the last three years.
2. \$3 a day minimum wage for Trade School students; admission of Negro boys to the Trade School.
3. No payment of relief when rehired at Ford's, cancellation of debts due the Ford company on the part of the Ford workers.
4. Abolition of the \$1 a day wage at the Ford plant.
5. A \$5 a day minimum wage and corresponding increases for higher paid workers.
6. Minimum of three days work, eight hours a day, or three days pay each week.
7. Free medical aid and hospital service to unemployed Ford workers and their families.
8. Abolition of the Service Department.
9. Slowing down of the inhuman speed-up, setting up of workers' committees to control the speed of conveyors and machines.
10. No discrimination against Negro workers.

But from now on the hourly union must be a much orientation to the employed workers the building of anti-wage committees, grievance committees, grievance committees against grievance committees, immediately, anti-off committees, committees against speed-up in the departments, And on this basis develop the struggle against wage-cuts, against relief program of Unemployment Insurance the expense of the bosses and the government.

The prestige of the Auto Workers Union developed as a result of the Ford Hunger March to a very high degree. Hundreds of workers expressed openly that this march has demonstrated the seriousness and honesty of the Auto Workers Union in their fight for relief for the auto workers—and not as the enemies of the union and

of workers re-  
the "new deal"  
the work-



In surrounding mill towns, every twist and turn of the strike was watched intensely. Advanced forces eagerly made contact with the union and the Party and repeated attempts were made to turn the strike into a general strike of the mills in the area.

Calls went out to the National Guard to mutiny and join the strikers:

"Workers in the National Guard: we, the striking workers, are your brothers. Our fight is your fight. Help us win the strike. . . . Refuse to shoot or bayonet your fathers or brothers. . . . Fight with your class, the striking workers."<sup>20</sup>

In the few short months the strike lasted, before it was crushed in a bloody wave of lynch-mob terror, a political battle raged among the Communists about how to conduct the strike. It paralleled the strike itself in intensity and bitterness.

The question was whether or not and how the strike should be "politicized," as it was then said, and one of the sharpest ways this came down was over the issue of whether or not the strikers should take up the "race question." All but a few of the workers were white, as a result of Jim Crow practices by the owners. The CP strike leaders opposed taking up the question of Jim Crow at all, fearing that it might divide the white strikers and undermine some of the support the strike was receiving from the community.

Fred Beal, the main CP strike organizer, recounts with scorn in his autobiography, how another comrade

"brought orders from the Comintern and from the Central Committee that I emphasize the Negro Question. I explained that there had been only two Negroes working in the mill and that they had fled when the strike started. But Weisbord argued that this situation involved other things than a mere strike.

"It's not just a skirmish. We must prepare the workers for the coming revolution. We must look ahead and smash all feelings of inequality," he insisted.

"I failed to understand how it was possible to bring into the strike the question of Negro rights when there were no Negroes involved."<sup>21</sup>

Beal's viewpoint was ridiculously narrow, since this strike was taking place in the heart of a region kept backward by a sharecropper system that could not survive without the semi-feudal oppression of Black people (even though many sharecroppers were

white). In fact, the huge supply of labor available to the mill owners, including the many sharecroppers who had worked in the mill at one time or another in the past, was a tremendous obstacle to the strikers. True, the strike *could* be waged without any reference to Black people at all—but it was a fantasy to say that the situation of the strikers had nothing to do with the oppression of Black people. Certainly there was a basis to "politicize" the strike in this sense.

In nearby Bessemer City, the line of trying to spread the struggle from Gastonia into a general strike in the Southern textile industry—a line also opposed by the open rightists within the Party—began to become a reality. The workers struck one of the few mills that employed both Black and white. At a union meeting, the whites requested that a Jim Crow wire be stretched between the workers. The Communist organizer of the meeting, George Pershing, strung it up. The Black workers left the meeting and never came back; and the strike crumbled until it consisted of just a few blacklisted workers picketing a humming factory.<sup>22</sup>

Even more telling was that when the national CP leadership sent a leading Party member, Otto Hall, to root out this betrayal of the new "Negro program of the Union, the RILU, the Party and the CI,\*" *he capitulated too!* To the disgust of the Party center, he suggested that the Black workers be organized into a separate organization so that the issue of the wire would not come up. Hall was Black and this was not a case of being infected with the prevalent racism. Rather it was a case of giving in to what seemed most "practical"—after all, if it's only a union that you're after, why go up against segregation, which wasn't even really an issue at stake in this immediate battle?<sup>23</sup>

Even after the strike was crushed, the two lines were carried right into the kangaroo courtroom where 15 strikers and leaders were railroaded on murder charges, in connection with the shooting of the police chief. Some Communists simply protested their innocence, even though the Party's line was to proclaim the fight of self-defense. One comrade, Edith Miller of the Young Communist League, spit in the face of the anti-communist hysteria, openly declaring that revolu-

\* The RILU was the Red International of Labor Unions, the international organization of revolutionary and communist-led unions, and the CI is the Communist International.

tion was the agenda of the working class, and when challenged on the question, boldly defended atheism from the witness stand.

The problem was that the two lines that were in contention within the CP over how to conduct this strike were both wrong, although one was clearly counter-revolutionary. The open rightists, including most of the on-the-spot leadership of the strike who were associated with the Lovestone faction (and who left the Party shortly after), fought tooth and nail for the line that "the struggle in Gastonia was to win the strike for its immediate benefits and not for forming Soviets," as Fred Beal, the main CP organizer, later wrote.<sup>24</sup>

Instead of seeing the strike as a "school of war," as Lenin had said, "a school in which the workers learn to make war on their enemies for the liberation of the whole people," the other line saw this strike as though it were the war itself, as though this struggle (or a spreading of it) could lead in a straight line to revolution.

CP strike leader Albert Weisbord declared at a strike meeting:

"This strike is the first shot in a battle which will be heard around the world. It will prove as important in transforming the social and political life of this country as the Civil War itself."<sup>25</sup>

Here Weisbord completely identifies the strike with insurrection, as though they were the same thing. But this blurring over of distinctions, which is, in the final analysis, rightist, was presented in a very "left" form. While Beal, the open rightist, was trying to talk the workers out of carrying guns (apparently he thought this strike was looking too much like an insurrection), the "left" line was claiming that because of the guns it already *was* an insurrection.

As a nationally distributed CP pamphlet summing up the Gastonia strike said:

"The struggle in Gastonia has reached a far higher stage—that of armed struggle. . . . [this] furnishes irrefutable proof of the process by which the inner contradictions of capitalism in the imperialist period bring on economic struggles which speedily take on a political character."<sup>26</sup>

True, especially because of conditions in Gastonia, the strike did raise sharp political issues—this is why it stood out so clearly that the openly rightist line was wrong. But the fact that the strikers took up guns against the law did not in and of itself mean

# TUUL

that they were acquiring a revolutionary Marxist outlook, that they were waging a consciously political struggle or a struggle over something more than the terms of the sale of their labor power.

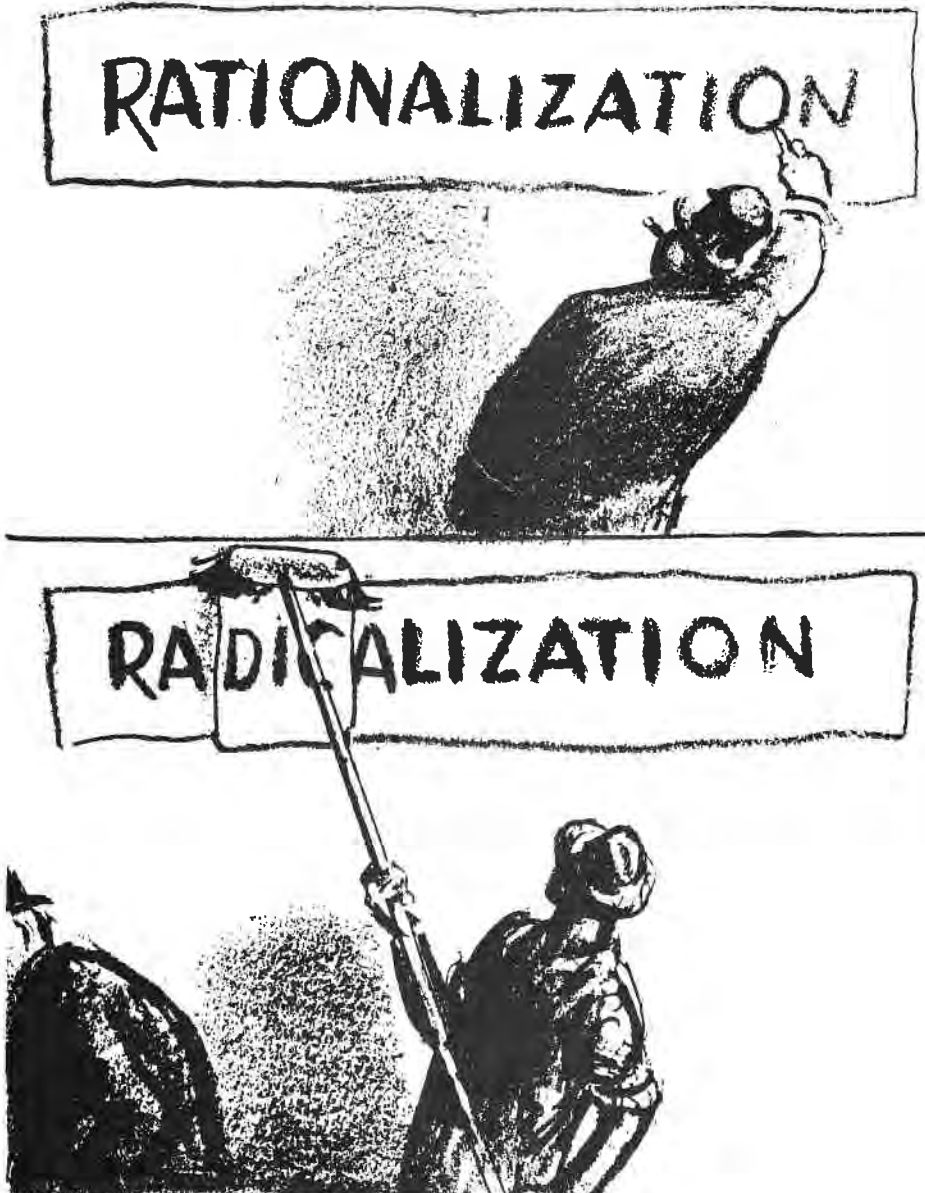
In fact, when the CP did try to bring Marxism to this strike, it was badly infected with the economism and syndicalism that appeared in such a "left" form in the Party's declarations. The Young Communist League was the main open face of the Party during the strike. In a speech that drove the open rightist Fred Beal up the wall, the YCL

representative gave the following announcement at a press conference when he arrived in Gastonia:

"I am here for the purpose of organizing the Young Communist Workers' League. The principle view of the Communists is control of the country by the workers. Under Communist control the Loray Mill and every other mill would be operated by a general committee made up of one representative worker from each department, and they would elect a manager who would be responsible to this general committee."<sup>27</sup>

## THE WORKERS' ANSWER!

By Fred Ellis



At this point, Beal cut the YCL representative off and told him that from now on only he, Beal, would speak to the press; he considered the speech a provocation. But the real problem is not that it upped the ante as far as the mill owners were concerned. The mill owners, faced with deadly competition, were of the opinion that if they gave in even around wages and working conditions they'd go broke, which was almost as bad as communist revolution. The real problem is that this speech is sucker-baiting—an attempt to "sell" socialism to the workers on the basis that this is how they can satisfy their economic demands. It reeks of syndicalism, and is at bottom a thoroughly reformist attempt to make the goal of revolution seem "concrete" to the workers, as though control of the Loray Mills was what they had been seeking all their lives.

The combination of open rightism by the CPers involved in the strike on a day-to-day level with the empty bombast heaped on from outside formed a unity—both aspects meant that the CP was doing little to actually divert this spontaneous battle into a conscious part of the revolutionary struggle. That's why the same man, George Pershing, who made the brash YCL statement quoted above on his first day in town, was also the man who later strung up the Jim Crow wire at Bessemer City. The general rhetoric about revolution quickly melted in the heat of practical work.

### III. "LEFT" ECONOMISM

At the Labor Day, 1929 convention in Cleveland that founded the TUUL, CP spokesman William Dunne declared:

"The main objective of the RILU, the overthrow of capitalism, requires for its attainment organization of the

**As it turned out, "rationalization" (speed-up, layoffs and other capitalist attempts to get out of the crisis) didn't automatically spread to revolutionary politics among the workers. Underestimation of the task of communists to transform the consciousness of the masses is what the CP's line during the early Depression had in common with all economism.**

workers in disciplined battalions around a program which meets the daily needs of the masses."<sup>28</sup>

For this purpose they set out to build an organization that would win widespread influence among the workers by focusing on the burning economic needs of the masses, unionize them, and then be the arena for increasing "the class consciousness of the masses on the basis of their experience in these struggles." This they saw as the first and central step to take on the road to revolution:

"The building of the TUUL, the development of the new unions into organizations of struggle for the daily demands of the workers, especially in the basic industries, is a prerequisite for turning our Party into a mass Party, capable of leading the workers in their struggles against capitalism."<sup>29</sup>

So naturally, following this line, the convention of the "revolutionary unions" spent the major part of the meeting broken down into 16 different industrial caucuses developing a program of immediate economic struggle for each branch of industry, and cementing the organizational ties that were hopefully to be the basis of massive unions that would soon sweep America.

Down to the smallest details, the new organization was built along union lines—local bodies were going to be Trade Union Unity Councils, patterned after the central labor bodies of the craft unions.

Here was a rival center of union organization that was going to fashion itself into the perfect vehicle for the coming upsurge of the workers. "The heart of the convention was the struggle against capitalist rationalization and all its evil consequences of speed-up, unemployment, accidents, occupational sickness, low wages, etc."<sup>30</sup> Any worker who accepted the "basic program of class struggle" was welcome. And the entire thrust of the organization made it clear that this "class struggle" was simply the opposite of traditional "class collaboration"; it meant "a militant strike policy"<sup>31</sup> plus a general orientation that the bosses and the workers had nothing in common—a notion that does not at all overstep the bounds of trade unionism.

At the end of the three-day convention, a rousing plenum "enthusiastically" passed a series of resolutions and slogans that were intended to inject revolutionary politics: "Build the Trade Union Unity League! Fight Against Imperialist War! Defend the

Soviet Union! Fight Against Capitalist Rationalization! Organize the Unorganized! For the 7-Hour Day, 5-Day Week! For Social Insurance! For Full Racial, Social and Political Equality for Negroes! Organize Youth and Women! Defeat the Misleaders of Labor! For World Trade Union Unity!"<sup>32</sup>

An eclectic mixture of slogans tacked onto the end of a convention overwhelmingly immersed in laying plans for massive unionization drives. This was what the CP saw as the first step in combining the immediate economic demands of the workers with the major political questions that faced the class.

On the one hand, the slogans took a stand against the oppression of Black people and called attention to the urgent political question of a new imperialist war aimed at the Soviet Union; on the other, the whole movement was so consumed with its central focus on alleviating the escalating impoverishment through militant unionization strikes, that even the most baldly utopian and reformist slogans like the "7-Hour Day" slipped in as a major "rallying cry."

What was the plan behind this "revolutionary unionism" and how was it going to enable the Communist Party to lead an uprising to overthrow the system and the government? In short, what was supposed to be "revolutionary" about this unionism?

To understand this, we have to get a picture of what the CP thought was going on in the world, and how they thought workers became revolutionary. In a nutshell, they thought that capitalism was so rotten ripe, that the Depression was going to be so profound and long lasting, that the masses were plunging into such profound impoverishment . . . that every demand for the very means of life would challenge the system itself. As the CP summed it up a few years later: "Fight For Bread Is A Fight Against Capitalism."<sup>33</sup>

From the struggles against the effects of the crisis, out of the crying needs of workers driven to starvation by unemployment and wage cuts, would come ever greater explosions and the approach of revolutionary consciousness and the revolution itself.

As the CP portrayed its smooth ride to power:

"The revolutionary way out of the crisis begins with the fight for unemployment insurance, against wage cuts, for wage increases, for relief to the farmers—through demonstrations, strikes, general strikes, leading up to the seizure of power, to the

destruction of capitalism by a revolutionary workers' government."<sup>34</sup>

There was one little problem with this theory. It was based on idealism, not on the actual laws of development of society. As we shall see in a moment, the result of this was that the CP got stuck, completely bogged down in a long fruitless battle to complete the first stage—winning the majority of the workers to its leadership in the economic struggle.

But first, we have to examine exactly what is wrong with this whole plan for revolution theoretically, their view of crisis, and their view of consciousness.

## Crisis and Consciousness

The CP's view of crisis was that capitalism, in the era of imperialism, was so moribund that it was impossible to maintain even the most temporary prosperity without constantly increasing the absolute impoverishment of the masses. The misery and desperation of the masses could only mount until they were driven to deliver the final blows to the system.

"Any recovery, therefore, that may be registered from the present economic crisis can, at most, be only *very* partial and temporary in character. It must soon be followed by another crash still more far-reaching and devastating to the capitalist system."<sup>35</sup>

Overall, the system was seen to be in a permanent tailspin. What they overlooked was exactly the possibility of a world war affecting capitalism the way World War 2 ultimately did. In his book *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin laid the basis for the understanding that imperialist war for redivision of the world plays the role under monopoly capitalism that economic crisis played during its earlier stage—that of purging and reorganizing capital so that it can once again reproduce itself profitably, until the next spiral of crisis and war.

Although hindsight makes it easy to criticize the CP's conception that a revolutionary situation would quickly develop in the U.S., such a development was not inconceivable at the time this analysis was made, and of course revolutionary situations did develop in other countries during this period of capitalist crisis. Nor was the CP's analysis based on the assumption that economic crisis alone would give rise to a revolutionary situation, since the CP specifically pointed out that the world was moving toward war, either among

Four

# 20 THOUSAND NEW READERS OF THE DAILY WORKER

## CENTRAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON CIRCULATION DRIVE OF THE DAILY WORKER. BRING THE DAILY WORKER TO THE DAILY WORKER!

### A GREATER CIRCULATION MEANS A GREATER PUNCH IN YOUR STRUGGLES!

The present circulation of the Daily Worker is far below its growing influence. One of the main reasons for the low circulation of the Daily is the lack of organization among the "Daily" available to workers who know of it daily and to the hundreds of thousands of workers who are looking for a paper which will mirror their lives and show them a way out of the present crisis. The Central Committee decided to organize a special campaign to increase the circulation of the Daily. Beginning with this month of May, up to September, the whole Party must be put behind this circulation drive. To build a popular mass Daily is to help break the isolation of the Party. The circulation drive of the Daily must be taken up by the entire Party as a major campaign. One of the main reasons why the circulation of the Daily is so low is because the Party does not pay attention to the circulation of the Daily; because the Daily is not intimately connected with the problems of the masses.

#### THE WORKERS DEFEND THEIR PAPER

The last financial drive of the Daily Worker was successful. The workers rushed to the defense of their paper. They willingly endured privation and added sacrifices in order that their paper might live. Thousands gave their last few pennies, thousands more endured hunger, that the Daily might not die. The last drive drove home how deeply felt is the loyalty of the masses for their own fighting newspaper.

#### THE MASSES NEED THE DAILY

The circulation of the Daily is still far behind its influence. The Daily is felt in places where the Negro croppers in the South are now in open conflict with the white planters in Pennsylvania.

The Daily Worker was the only paper that told the truth about the number of unemployed. It is the only paper that has never let the masses know about the



is not imbued with the Daily Worker. The Daily Worker is the only paper that has the strength to bring the masses together. The Daily Worker is the only paper that has the strength to bring the masses together. The Daily Worker is the only paper that has the strength to bring the masses together.

—BY BURCK

Soviet Union and mobilizes masses for the defense of the Soviet Union. The Daily is the paper that sounded the alarm. The Daily is the paper that sounded the alarm. The Daily is the paper that sounded the alarm.

**According to this cartoon and the Party document that accompanies it, the main task of a communist newspaper is to help build the struggles the workers are already waging. But as Lenin and the Russian Revolution had already**

**shown, a newspaper's main task to "train the masses in political consciousness and revolutionary activity" through drawing from these struggles and a thousand other examples to create a single compelling picture of a system that the workers must and will overthrow. This cartoon of a muscle-bound caricature of a worker degrades the task of training the workers in the outlook of Marxism.**

the imperialist powers or between the imperialist powers and socialism, or some combination of the two (which is in fact what happened), and that the revolutionary situation would most likely arise in conjunction with this development.

What the CP thought was most likely was revolution in Germany, combined with attacks on this revolution and the USSR and an inter-imperialist war between the U.S. and Britain. Again, this isn't how things developed, but it isn't so far off the mark—World War 2 did develop as a combination of inter-imperialist rivalry and a war to defend socialism, and did give rise to revolution in many countries. What is really insane about the CP's line is that they paid no attention to its practical consequences—here they correctly predicted that the world was about to enter a turbulent period of war and revolution,

and they still made the economic struggle the "center of gravity" of their work, as though the economic crisis and the economic struggle were the most revolutionary elements in the situation."

In the course of the struggle against Lovestone's "American exceptionalism," the CP had flipped from classic right economism to a new, "left" form of the same economism. Whereas before they held that the working class was too backward for communist politics and had to be spoon-fed through a long period of economic struggle where it would learn its precious "lessons" by summing up "the experience of hard knocks," now that severe crisis was coming, the CP simply assumed that the same idealist process was going to be telescoped into a few stormy years. *The same underlying theory of how the masses come to*

*grasp the need for revolution and socialism was preserved.*

It is extremely telling that the same month that the TUUL was founded, the *Daily Worker* reprinted prominently a theoretical article written by CP founder C.E. Ruthenberg in 1923, expounding the economist theory of consciousness:

"[The CP rejected the] 'method of propaganda,' that is, that we should present to the working class our indictment of the capitalist system, facts about the exploitation of the working class, the theory of surplus value, the class struggle and the materialist conception of history, and by publishing books, newspapers, pamphlets on the subject and through agitation at meetings, convert a majority of the working class to a belief in our analysis of the existing capitalist social order

and the way in which the evils of this system can be abolished."

To rely on that method would mean "we could wait for another million years and there would be no proletarian revolution nor a dictatorship of the working class," Ruthenberg wrote. The method the CP adopted was "quite a different method."

"The policy of the Communist Party is to associate itself with the workers in the everyday struggle. Communists fight with the wage workers and farmers in support of the demands which they make of the capitalists because it is in these struggles and through these struggles that the workers learn the character of the capitalist system, and there is developed the will to power of the workers, the determination to triumph over the enemy who exploits and oppresses them.

"The everyday struggles of the workers create the most favorable condition for establishing the influence and leadership of the Communist Party. The workers learn by experience the character of the capitalist system. They learn by their experience in the struggle that the government under the capitalist system is merely an agency of the capitalist for maintaining the system of exploitation. They learn this not through theoretical presentation and proof of the facts, but through the hard knocks of their experience with the capitalists, and with the government which supports the capitalist system."<sup>37</sup>

What Ruthenberg has written here is a direct attack on the teachings of V.I. Lenin. The line Ruthenberg opposes, although in a slightly vulgarized form, is the line put forward by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done*, and the line Ruthenberg puts forward is an almost word-for-word repetition of the line Lenin attacks.

Lenin made it unmistakably clear (to anyone who cared to read him), and the experience of the Russian Bolshevik Party certainly confirmed his line, that the task of communists is to divert the workers from the spontaneous struggle against the employers ("class against class," as the TUUL militantly put it), into an all-around struggle against the capitalist system—a struggle the workers cannot wage unless they are trained through agitation (as well as taking up struggles around questions that bring out the need for revolution). Lenin's view was what Ruthenberg was caricaturing—that the principal role of commu-

nists is to transform the consciousness of the workers and the masses, to "create public opinion," as Mao later put it, so that when the conditions for revolution are ripe, the working class can seize political power. Without diverting the workers' spontaneous struggle in this way, there can be no question of *ever* actually seizing power.

What Ruthenberg does distort is the central role of revolutionary agitation—especially exposures. This does not mean simply giving "facts about the exploitation of the working class, the theory of surplus value" etc., as though it amounted to passing out economic charts and free copies of *Capital* at factory gates. Speaking of the absolutely central importance of organizing political exposures (especially through a newspaper, not just "agitating at meetings"), Lenin rips up the economist theory of "raising the activity of the workers" through "political agitation on an economic basis" (exactly what Ruthenberg is calling for), and declares:

"The consciousness of the masses of the workers cannot be genuine class consciousness, unless the workers learn to observe from concrete, and above all from topical (current), political facts and events, *every* other social class and *all* the manifestations of the intellectual, ethical and political life of these classes; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of *all* aspects of the life and activity of *all* classes, strata and groups of the population. Those who concentrate the attention, observation and consciousness of the working class exclusively, or even mainly, upon itself alone are not Social-Democrats; for its self-realization is indissolubly bound up not only with a fully clear theoretical—it would be even more true to say not so much with a theoretical, as with a practical understanding, of the relationships between *all* the various classes of modern society, acquired through experience of political life. That is why the idea preached by our Economists, that the economic struggle is the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into the political movement, is so extremely harmful and extremely reactionary in its practical significance."<sup>38</sup>

This basic, underlying economist theory (that "economic struggle is the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into political movement") was never rooted out. Indeed, although it took a different form from before, it was the guiding line of the

CP's work during the whole period we are discussing (as well, of course, as after, although again in a different form).

Suddenly here, in 1929, was a crisis that promised an endless succession of hard knocks. What could an economist expect except a rapid, automatic and widespread "radicalization"? The masses were going directly into a revolutionary mood.

"A sure radicalization is being brought about by 30 to 40 cents a day wages for Kentucky miners, \$3.50 wages for a 70-hour week for Southern textile workers, and similar conditions in other industries. Starvation wages are *destroying* the capitalistic illusions of American workers and 25 cent wheat is making poor farmers their allies."<sup>39</sup>

Whereas before, revolutionary agitation was *premature* because the workers hadn't yet completed the stage of economic struggle, now it was *unnecessary* because the masses were already revolutionary. The role of the communists was now simply to race to catch up with the masses, win the leadership of the majority of workers in their inevitable resistance to the crisis, cement organizational control, and hold on tight through the storms leading to revolution itself.

## Social-Fascism

The very same theoretical error that made the CP think that it did not have to *divert* the economic struggle from its spontaneous course, led to tremendously overestimating the ease with which the Party would win the leadership of the struggle for unions and relief. After all, if capitalism is in such desperate straits that it cannot grant any concessions, and at every turn must answer struggle with "fascization," and if every struggle for reforms quickly reveals the struggle for revolution lurking right below the surface—what will the reformists do in the class struggle? The very fact that they are committed opponents of revolution will force them into the open camp of the bourgeoisie even before actual revolution erupts. *All* non-revolutionary forces would be forced by their very nature to attack *any* struggle the masses waged for unionization, or relief, or bread.

"It is no accident that whenever a big strike movement breaks out, the capitalist press shrieks that it is due to Communist influence, and the A.F. of L. and Socialist Party leaders wail that the masses have got beyond their control."

"It is true that all struggles for daily bread, for milk for children, against evictions, for unemployment relief and insurance, for wage increases, for the right to organize and strike, etc., are directly connected up with the question of revolution. Those who are against the revolution, who want to maintain the capitalist system, are prepared to sacrifice these struggles of the workers in order to help the capitalists preserve their profits.

"Only those can courageously lead and stubbornly organize the fight for the immediate interests of the toiling masses, who know that these things must be won even though it means the destruction of capitalist profits, and who draw the necessary conclusion that the workers and farmers must consciously prepare to overthrow capitalism."<sup>10</sup>

In other words, reformism is dead, the very profundity of the crisis killed it. The committed leaders of social democracy, frightened and repelled by the revolutionary nature of the fight for reforms, would flock to the defense of profits. Social democrats, in the U.S. and internationally, had become *social-fascists*, a wing of bourgeois terror. Only Communists could lead the militant fight for reforms, because only Communists stood for revolution. The working class had become a clear field.

To the extent that the CP in this period branded these reactionaries as agents of capitalism, we have no quarrel. And countless examples, like the bloody suppression of the workers of Berlin in 1929 by the "socialist" police chief Zörgiebel, prove that these right-wing socialists were certainly capable of viciously, even terroristically defending capitalism.

The problem is that the whole situation was far more complex than the CP's simple view of a downhill fall, where the choice is "either fascism or social revolution." Overall, there was still a role for social democrats to play as *reformists*, confusing the masses by spreading countless pipedreams and schemes about how to alter the system here or there and make things better. There was still plenty of room for the social democrats of many kinds to slither around among the oppressed spreading their poison. That was still their principal role.

In fact, the theory of "*social-fascism*" principally led the CP in a *rightist* direction, just like the whole "left" economist line did overall. If

reformists were going to expose themselves decisively through their fascist attacks on *reform* struggles, then little more was needed to win leadership from them than being the most militant and consistent defenders of the economic needs of the masses. What should have been a fierce political and ideological struggle over how capitalism works and what it takes to get rid of the system, simply became a competition between which political trend could best lead the everyday struggles. Contrary to economist gospel, reformists are often skilled at leading struggles tactically without "selling them out"—the problem is they leave things at that.

At the same time, communists, who represent the overall and long-range interests of the working class, fight for these interests in the day-to-day battles as well, which sometimes means that the fight for victory in these battles is subordinated to the working class's higher interests. Given this, the only way communists can successfully compete head to head with reformists within the limits of the trade-union struggle is by becoming reformists themselves—and even there, the old, original, proven reformists often have the advantage.

## IV. POLITICAL WORK

### Agitation and Propaganda

In practice, because the working-class movement was still in an overall ebb (1929-1933 saw a deep lull in strikes overall), despite very sharp outbreaks within it and a mood of tense anticipation on the part of the broad working class, the Party found itself in a position where the great volume of its work was agitation after all. But this was not strictly Marxist agitation

"which not only fans every spark of discontent and arouses indignation at every outrage, but knits together all these outrages into a coherent picture, tracing each to its source, and probes beneath the surface, scientifically analyzing the development of events by means of capitalism's inherent laws and arming the masses with an understanding of historic developments in terms of these laws and with a knowledge of the laws themselves."<sup>11</sup>

Instead, what the CP focused on, in its leaflets, the *Daily Worker* and its spoken agitation, was economic exposures combined with calls to action.

Since the line was that people learn only in the course of struggle and especially the day-to-day struggle, this agitation concentrated on sparking some action. The many thousands of CP'ers, locked into trade-union work, beat their heads against the walls trying to find just the right economic exposure and demands to unleash the fury of the masses and create the school of "hard knocks" for consciousness-raising.

This was tied to some of the most hackneyed and wooden "propaganda" imaginable. Actually, there was not all that much genuine communist propaganda—Marxist material (written or spoken) which examines things in an all-sided way and weaves various events and elements together to create an overall picture. Rather, the main thing was "propagation of the ultimate program of the Party," as it was said, which often sunk to the level of simply saying: it's bad here, it's not like that in Russia. Foster's book, *Toward a Soviet America*, written to serve as the main propaganda piece when Foster ran for President in the 1932 election, contains a long section on Soviet Russia which is unbearably boring, far more boring than a few quotes can capture.

This is because what it attempts to do is paint a pie-in-the-sky picture of the USSR, through a step-by-step comparison of conditions in the USSR and the U.S. on an economic basis. Endless statistics on the construction of railroads, tractors, hydroelectric plants and so on. Wages in the U.S. and the USSR. Health care in the U.S. and the USSR. Crisis here, uninterrupted prosperity there. Of course, these statistics did represent the tremendous advances the Soviet working class was making in socialist construction, and did paint a sharp contrast between conditions in the two systems. But really, what they amount to is an effort to say to the U.S. workers: look, the workers really have it good in Russia. There is no attempt to inspire the workers with the prospects of emancipation and the transformation of class society. In fact, according to this view, classes and class struggle did not exist in the USSR and everything was just a matter of higher and higher development. No wonder this seemed so strange and utopian to many who read it (and the many more who skipped the rest after the first few pages). In fact, this whole section is a typical example of an economist (and petty-bourgeois) view of socialism.

With this kind of "propaganda," no wonder it seemed like a distraction and



**Is this cartoon training the workers to be, as Lenin said, “a tribune of the people,” “able to explain to all and everyone the world-historic significance of the proletariat’s struggle for emancipation,” and put themselves at the head of the masses in the struggle to overthrow capitalism? Or is it training the workers in the point of view that what the Communist Party is all about is something for everybody, a coalition of self-interests, while the workers’ place is in the economic struggle?**

even an obstacle to the CP’sers doing the Party’s mass work. More and more the summation was that such work was a little “left,” but really there was nothing very left about it. It seemed “abstract” and “alien” because it was not connected to reality as only Marxism could connect it, and because it was done in the absence of communist agitation, which, as Lenin said, draws workers into the point of view of Marxism “from living examples and from exposures, following hot upon the heels of what is going on around us. These comprehensive political exposures are an essential and fundamental condition for training the masses in revolutionary activity.”<sup>12</sup> General, superficial dogma pasted onto economist work which leaves the workers untrained in politics doesn’t educate anybody.

### “Left” Economism Adjusted Rightward

The coal fields had long represented the great hope of the TUUL for a major breakthrough in basic industry. The miners were one section with a forty-year history of industrial unionism. By the late twenties, the capitalist crisis and the cynical betrayal by the Lewis machine had totally wrecked the once dominant UMWA.

Union membership had dropped from hundreds of thousands to tens of

thousands. And every step of retreat in the ‘20s had been a bloody battle, where miners, often led by Communists, fiercely fought for their very lives. John L. Lewis, president of the UMWA, was righteously hated by the veterans of the mine wars. And the chances were excellent for the emergence of a new union led by revolutionaries.

Miners were literally starving. Unemployment in the coal fields was tremendous, the result both of mechanization and of the overall slump. In 1923 there had been 704,800 miners working. A decade later only 406,300 were left. 300,000 families had been driven out.

In 1922, wages had been \$0.84 an hour. In the Depression, they dropped to an average of \$0.54 and as low as \$0.28 in Pennsylvania. The tons of coal were often measured in at 2,800 or even 3,000 pounds, further cutting the wages of the miners.

In 1931, 40,000 miners struck in the Pittsburgh coal fields under the leadership of the TUUL National Miners Union. A magnificent rank-and-file organization was built under brutal conditions. Midway into the strike, the national Party leadership summed up that the Communists directly involved were so engrossed in building the strike in and of itself that they had failed to build the Party organization among the workers, and actually had dissolved the local Party apparatus into the strike organization. They also

had failed to build the NMU, which, since it was known as a “red” union, was closely associated with the Party. After this criticism, miners were drawn into the Hunger Marches in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C., the struggle around the Scottsboro case, and “Red Day” marches warning the imperialists not to invade the Soviet Union. But after the strike was crushed, little lasting organization remained, most particularly little Party organization. This and similar disappointments throughout the Party’s work brought the whole line into question.

In many ways the struggle over how to sum up the 1931 miners’ strike paralleled the inner-Party struggle over Gastonia. But this time it was resolved in a more openly rightward direction. The official sum-up (actually written by the Executive Committee of the Communist International, but adopted by the U.S. Party) criticized the line of liquidating the Party, but, in contradiction to the line of building Party campaigns and the Party in its own right during the strike, put forward the following view of *how* to bring out and build the Party:

“It was not made clear that a separation and counterposing of these two tasks [i.e. winning the strike on the one hand, and building the Party on the other—RCP] or the emphasis of the one at the expense of the other, conceals within itself the danger of a political

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one-sidedness or deviation. A lack of clarity remained as to what was to be characterized as the *main object* that the Communists were to pursue in the strike struggle: that if one wants to state the main object in *one* word, and in doing so avoid the danger of one-sidedness, then neither the simple winning of the material results which are contained in the strike demands nor the mere utilization of the strike for the strengthening of the Party organization, should be designated as the main object, but that, on the contrary, the *revolutionization of the striking workers* should be the main object. The most important thing is that the Communists strive, through their agitation as well as through their entire participation in the strike, to give the broad masses of the strikers the experience and the firm conviction that *the Communists have advocated or carried through correct strike tactics and strike leadership*. It is, however, impossible to instill this conviction into the masses of striking workers if the Communists do not exert all their energy in the struggle against the employers so as to win the strike.<sup>11</sup>

Officially, "revolutionization" remains the object. *But what does it mean in practice?* It means subordinating everything, including the agitation of the Communists, to giving the tactical leadership that carries the immediate struggle through to victory. The economist understanding of the relationship between consciousness and struggle, step by step led to the subordination of politics to economics, while in name "combining" the two.

In practice, the Party conceded the obvious fact that revolution was not about to spring full blown from the unionization demands of the workers. But the resolution of the problem was not a determined struggle to find the ways to develop that revolutionary motion. Instead the Party went down that well known path of trailing whatever was springing from those struggles. If the upsurge was not coming as quickly as expected, more attention was needed to the "little questions."

Party shop papers, a major Communist activity in the working class, started to be replaced more and more by union shop papers. Even these dropped more and more of the political program of the TUUL and focused on the most particular questions possible. And those shop papers that remained nominally "Party" were bogged down with questions like oil on the shop

floor.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the working class was not a clear field for the Communists, and every struggle swarmed with forces eager to lead. It is not surprising that the very label of "red" became an obstacle in this competition to see who would lead the broadest masses. With economism in command, what the Communists summed up from their own school of hard knocks was wrong. The words "revolutionary" and "class struggle" became devalued and meant little more than "militant." And more importantly, the struggle over whether to hide the face of the Party was resolved by *changing* it—the CP more and more put itself forward as the home of the best fighters, the party of militant resistance.

Here you have the greatest crisis in world history grinding on, a time of intense political turmoil, class forces throughout the world colliding in events that are affecting the course of history: massive collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union, upheavals in Cuba and Nicaragua, red base areas fighting for their lives in China, whole strata of the American population ruined and thrown into turmoil as never before, as well as rising counter-revolution in Italy, Germany and so on—and in the middle of this, the mechanical view, the straight-line assumption about how people learn, leads the CP to bury itself ever deeper in the narrowest concerns of the workers.

In an article entitled "The Fight Against Sectarianism in the NMU," the CP wrote:

"Our local [TUUL] unions lead a life of their own entirely separate and apart from the life of the masses. They are so engrossed in their own internal problems and the general campaigns and problems of the revolutionary movement that they have no time to deal with the problems facing the miners with whom they are in contact. Mine local meetings, instead of discussing the burning needs and demands of the miners in *that particular mine* and the actual organization and leadership of a local struggle around such demands, are taken up with interminable discussions on the Communist Party election campaign, the campaign against the Dies Bill, the state of the local International Labor Defense organizations, etc., etc."

While claiming that the political campaigns *are* important, the author gets down to his basic point:

"The trouble is that they are wrongly introduced, they are not considered in

relation to the problems of the masses of miners in the midst of which the local works. Each campaign is treated as something separate and apart from other campaigns and is not used to further the central task of the local union—the organization of the miners in its mine for struggle against the coal operators' offensive. Miners join our union primarily to defeat wage cuts and win better conditions. When they find out that the local organization relegates such matters to second place they leave the union."<sup>12</sup>

There was partial truth to this—the workers recruited on an economic basis expected simple trade unionism. After all, that is what they signed up for.

Political campaigns and the workers were separated more and more, so as not to disrupt the trade union work with "abstract" questions from outside the direct experience of the masses. In the CPUSA internal journal *Party Organizer* there are instructions on how to intimately connect the political issues of the day to whatever is drifting around on the plant floor. Want to discuss the fascist seizure of power in Germany? Start with the way the boss pushes guys around in your department. Want to discuss the oppression of Black people under capitalism? Then talk about how workers in the same shop must stick together or else. What to explain how socialism represents a qualitatively higher form of human society? Then bone up on the comparison between how your shopmates live and the conditions within the same branch of industry in the USSR.<sup>16</sup>

Since economism, basically, assumes that workers don't care about anything that doesn't touch them personally, and don't aspire to anything more than a full belly and a secure, peaceful life, even the line of the CP in *this* period where it was expecting revolution any minute, led to political work that viewed the world through the grimy windows of the factory. And in the final analysis, these politics are politics that tail and reinforce the bourgeois view of "what's in it for me"—they are not filled with the revolutionary sweep of a class struggling for the emancipation of all.

Millions were awakening to struggle, lumbering into action based on a glimmer of the class antagonism in society, eagerly looking to understand more. And the revolutionary work of the Party among workers got more and more vulgarized to fighting the bosses, building the unions, following the Party, and someday we'll have it made like the Russian workers (i.e., lots of



goulash).

## Economism and Reformism

The sharp contradiction between "revolutionary" in the Party's line of finding a "revolutionary way out of the crisis" and the reformist content of this line shows itself in the 1932 Presidential campaign.

On the one hand you have the book *Toward a Soviet America*, which is a monument to the fiery tone the Party was capable of at that time. Certainly it is nothing like its later geritol-reformism. In this book Foster exposes and denounces capitalism. The church and religion are lambasted as the opiate of the people. The Boy Scouts are shown to be a training ground for militarism and fascism. There is even a section calling for "racial amalgamation"! This work targets "the idiocy of the capitalist system, its planlessness, its antiquated moral codes, its warp and woof of exploitation," and loudly proclaims the goal of a "United Soviet States of America."<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand there is the line the campaign actually took out across the country, as exemplified in Foster's Chicago speech, the high point of the campaign. Here the reformism that lies side by side with general phrases about revolution in Foster's book now stands naked. After listing the effects of the crisis, the oppression of the masses, and the prospects for more of the same, Foster gets down to his point: "Can the A.F. of L. leaders and the Socialist Party be relied on to obtain relief?" The answer, of course, is "No!" Only a "united struggle against starvation" can provide relief. "If the poor wish to have their voices heard... then they must elect their own direct representatives and go to Washington themselves." "Solidifying their ranks, building their committees everywhere, [the masses—RCP] can face Congress, the Senate, and the President with an irresistible force that will achieve results."

And what are these "results"? Foster runs down an extensive program that lists every concern of the oppressed people in the U.S.... an end to the attacks on wages... immediate relief... "All relief and insurance to be financed by taxes on wealth and capitalist income..." "Unconditional equality for Negroes"... "Against the new robber war. Stop the manufacture and shipment of munitions. All war funds for the unemployed."

And how far reaching will these results be?

"It is clear to us that the workers

will find ways and means of putting such a program into effect if [all the workers—RCP] will join together in common struggle irrespective to which political party they adhere, *they can win these demands.*" [!]

And what is the difference between the Communist Party and all the others? Communists believe in mass pressure from below to win reforms, these others want you to rely on the courts, elections and good will.

Revolution? Well, the speech has an awkward aside that quickly mentions that somehow these struggles will give the workers "organization, consciousness, power, to achieve the decisive way out of the misery of capitalism."<sup>18</sup> But after they win all these reforms through mass pressure, we can only ask Foster why they would want to.

On the one hand, fire and brimstone in the textbook, a broken capitalism compared inch by inch to a young vibrant Soviet Union, and the open call to destroy the old society. But on the other hand, on the campaign trail, the strict focus is on what is "winnable" under capitalism, through coalitions for mass pressure, coupled with the most grotesque reformist exaggeration of what capitalism in crisis can be forced to concede.

This is a stark example of why the RCP has characterized "left" economism as revolutionary propaganda loosely tacked onto the reformist politics arising out of the economic struggle.

(It is only one example among many. The struggle against unemployment centered not on exposing the nature of the capitalist system and unemployment as a built-in feature, but instead mobilizing millions to march for the Workers Unemployment and Social Insurance Bill [H.R. 7598] is also rich in examples, but is outside the scope of this article.)

In practice, because of its line on winnable struggles for palpable demands, the CP undermined all its own attempts to raise revolutionary consciousness by conducting political campaigns simply as the militant fight for reforms. Crisis was portrayed as simply a "policy" of the rich; unemployment as a trick for cutting wages which the capitalists could eliminate by "allocation of all war funds, a capital levy, increased taxes upon the rich, etc."<sup>19</sup> Throughout this period, the very hunger and misery that the Depression brought were "Hoover's wage-cut, starve-the-unemployed murderous policy."<sup>20</sup> The CP put a face on the enemy and in the

process obscured his true features. No wonder millions of workers (including many advanced, in fact, including many Communists) were not prepared to resist FDR's demagoguery!

## Training the Advanced

For hundreds of thousands the outrages of the Depression were the last straw. They stepped forward from the start into intense activity. The ranks of the radical workers inspired by and rallied around the flag of the Russian Revolution were joined by new forces awakened to political life by the desperate position of the class. Many thousands came forward who wanted to learn, eager to transform themselves, to become instruments of the struggle. And they rallied around the CPUSA, because it was the most revolutionary organization in the working class.

Most of the struggles the CPUSA led in the early thirties were actions of this advanced section of the class, preparing the conditions for massive upsurge. The movement they created called to the millions to awaken and struggle, and that movement was a *training ground*, an intense schooling for the advanced section of the workers. In a very real sense, the training given in that school would have a profound effect on the direction that the working class as a whole would travel.

What role did economism give the advanced to play?

The Party is going to couple up to the broadest masses by leading the economic struggle, like a locomotive backing into a train of cars. Once the ties are firm and tight, and once the movement is big enough and bad enough, the Party will lead its train on the road to its final goal of revolution and meat-and-potatoes communism. The consciousness of the masses is not the crucial thing, their motion is. The advanced? They are the couplings of the political train. Their role? Win the respect of the masses by leading them faithfully as the best fighters in the day-to-day struggle; and be unquestioningly loyal to the command structure of the Party.

The model for a communist worker was actually not even a trade union secretary. The Communist Party upheld the "Jimmy Higginses," the working class workhorses, basing their "effective" work on proletarian instinct, basic class hatred, and boundless loyalty for the cause and the Party. Untrained themselves, they were unable to struggle with the broad masses to spread genuine class con-

sciousness.

Since consciousness was to come from the hard knocks of the immediate struggle, and since Communist leadership would be won by leading that struggle to victory, political controversy that might alienate even the more backward was an *obstacle* to the political development of the working class. This passage from the semi-autobiographical novel *Home is the Sailor*, shows how the workers were trained to reduce their politics to whatever was palatable, even to the most backward:

"Hart had a lot of screwy ideas about Communists. As a Catholic, he thought they were against religion and he meant to fight for his faith.

"'Go to it, bud,' Billy told him. 'No one's trying to take the communion out of our mouth. I've been a member of the Communist Party for over a year now and no one has even asked me what church I belong to, if any. The only thing the Communists are against are preachers who use religion to cover up attacks on the people's rights. Like this guy Coughlin who shoots off his mouth up in Detroit. He's nothing but a would-be Hitler. It isn't against religion to fight him, it's just anti-fascist.'"<sup>51</sup>

There was never quite a view that it required a leap in understanding to become a genuine communist, a leap in grasping the laws of society, of dedicating one's life to the realization of classless society, of applying the science of revolution to the conditions of the present.

This is the image portrayed in *Home is the Sailor*, describing the end of the "left" economist period:

"Having joined the Party, Billy divided his time between the waterfront union hall and the Communist headquarters. Actually there was small difference then in the work of a party member and an active member of the MWIU [the TUUL seamen's union], except that as a Communist he found that he was expected to plunge into whatever work was at hand to do. A union member could take things a little easier occasionally avoiding assignments for street meetings, leaflet distribution and the like."<sup>52</sup>

It is natural that this line would produce a recruitment policy that was basically the old social-democratic method of "self-enrollment." A Party member was anyone who signed a card;

and there had to be periodic campaigns to figure out who all was actually in the Party, to get them to pay dues, to come to meetings, even campaigns to get Party members to subscribe to the *Daily Worker*!

Lenin, roasting the economists of his day in *What Is To Be Done?*, points out that the historic tasks that the working class faces demand that the advanced worker be trained, not as a trade union secretary, but as

"a *tribune of the people*, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it takes place, no matter what stratum or class of people it affects; he must be able to generalize all these manifestations to produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; he must be able to take advantage of every event, *however small*, in order to explain his Socialistic convictions and his democratic demands to *all*, in order to explain to *all* and everyone the world historic significance of the proletariat's struggle for emancipation."<sup>53</sup>

The CP in this period didn't train anyone to be such a tribune. It trained people to be hacks and reformists, it "trained" the life out of the revolutionary-minded workers who were attracted to it.

This produced a problem the CP itself often pointed to: despite huge numbers of workers flowing through it, the Party had trouble keeping these people. At the same time, because of the line in which it was training the advanced, including its own members, it was creating a social base for further moves rightward. Large sections of the Party had only the vaguest idea of *any* final goal. This created favorable conditions for those Party leaders who wanted to drop revolution.

## V. DROPPING THE "LEFT" IN "LEFT" ECONOMISM

In 1932-33, the lowest point of the Depression was reached. All the tensions in society strained at their limits. Something was giving way... the powerful forces that had kept the main body of employed workers relatively quiet, the fear, the hope that "prosperity is right around the corner," the lack of organization, were dissolving in a new determination to fight their way out. Every political force in the country sensed the workers were going to rise. And they prepared.

For four years, the TUUL had boldly and doggedly fanned any resistance

among the workers. On paper, they still expected the upsurge to challenge the system itself. In 1934, they still described themselves as working in "a time when the revolutionary crisis is ripening."<sup>54</sup>

At the very same time, in practice, the CP had already come far down the road of dropping their political work, to focus more on what *actually* arises spontaneously—simple trade unionism and reformism. In the economic struggle, the line of building "revolutionary unions" had given way to building "*independent* unions," i.e. industrial unions neither AFL nor TUUL, with no overt political content beyond militancy. In a sense, this itself evolved *spontaneously*, since it was definitely not the way the plan of the Party was supposed to unfold. Throughout the country, in auto, in steel, strong union locals formed under Party leadership; the very locals that communists built repeatedly voted not to affiliate with the openly pro-communist, openly revolutionary TUUL.

Given the mood of the majority of workers, and given, secondarily, that the CP had done so little to divert the workers' movement from its spontaneous course, there is nothing surprising about this. But for the CP, this is not how they had planned it; their idealist schemes simply did not correspond with the actual processes of society. Faced with this development, they themselves were diverted from the course they had set. Since they worshipped spontaneity, of course they bowed to it.

Together with the locals formed by social democrats and "non-political" unionists the new CP locals became a major "independent" trend that grew up parallel to the TUUL unions. Despite the intentions of the Party, despite the plan they laid out for the economic movement to give rise to revolutionary politics, the actual laws of development asserted themselves.

In 1933, the main body of the working class began to move. The number of strikers tripled over the previous year. Although the Party had not built any stable national unions, it had cores of organizers in every industry, trained through repeated struggles, ready and waiting for the ice to break.

But again the world refused to conform to the idealist "left" economist script. The working class was not a clear field where the masses moved smoothly from one level to the next. In fact, by 1933, the class was crawling with every imaginable stripe of reformist hustler. Several mass movements had already grown under anti-

communist leadership—the Bonus Army encampment of veterans in Washington whose naive flag-waving had been answered with sabres and gunfire, Coxey's Army of the unemployed, social-democratic leagues and unions, and so on. Above all, the bourgeoisie was far more flexible and resourceful than the CP had ever imagined. The capitalists were certainly more aware than the CP that the fight for bread was not, in and of itself, a fight for power, and they bent every effort to limit the struggle of the working class to every imaginable variation of the struggle for immediate relief. Franklin D. Roosevelt brought in a profound change in capitalist tactics. Systematic moves were afoot to co-opt the discontent of the masses, to trade concessions for control of the movement. Major anti-communist forces, especially the section of the AFL bureaucracy headed by Lewis, were marshalled to march at the head of the masses and to steer them into the waiting arms of the bourgeoisie. The crime of the reformists was not fundamentally, as imagined by the CP, that they always and everywhere were forced to “sell out” the masses, and crush their economic struggles, but to contain them *politically* within the confines of wage-slavery.

The CP found itself in a frantic competition over who could most quickly dominate the movement organizationally.

### The Disappearance of the National Miners Union and the Rebirth of John L. Lewis

In the spring of 1933 the dam finally broke in the coal fields. And this time the miners were able to consolidate their organization. They came forward in their thousands. A decade of retreat gave way to a charge. In mass meetings, in conventions, in strikes, the miners organized. Within months, 90% of the miners were unionized! Armies of armed workers swept up countless river valleys in the coalfields carrying the struggle to new camps and regions. 128,000 joined in Pennsylvania. 160,000 in West Virginia. The South organized quickly. Rallies were held as far away as Raton, New Mexico. UMW official John Brophy wrote: the miners “organized themselves.”

But the union that emerged with a national contract covering 340,000 bituminous miners was the United Mine Workers, notorious as one of the most politically reactionary and cor-

rupt unions of all.

The CP had been outflanked by a top-level decision of the bourgeoisie. Realizing that nothing could stop the movement, they had resolved to control it. UMW organizers fanned throughout the coalfields. Companies rushed to deal with the very union that they had mercilessly crushed only five years before. Article 7a of the National Recovery Act gave the bourgeoisie's qualified blessing to the organization of the workers in company unions and proven reactionary unions.

Even NMU organizers jumped on the UMW bandwagon. Finally, the CP recognized the obvious, and the NMU was officially dissolved.

The CPUSA, which had planned to win unchallenged leadership of the mass struggle by its proven militancy, found itself in stiff competition with non-revolutionary forces for the leadership of these struggles. And the logic of its economist line led it even further down the road toward shedding its revolutionary program.

The objective fact was that, with the working class as a whole not yet in a revolutionary mood and a revolutionary situation not on the horizon despite the Depression, there was no way that communists could expect to have decisive political leadership over the bulk of the trade unions, since these organizations, by definition, include advanced, intermediate and backward workers. But the CP didn't see it that way. Because they believed that leadership of the unions was a prerequisite for revolution, they judged the success or failure of their work by how well they had seized the leadership of the unions. This was also linked to their line that economic crisis would automatically revolutionize the workers. The question that posed itself especially starkly to them when the working class as a whole began to go into motion was—why weren't they leading it? And this question of leadership was vulgarized, so that instead of being a question of the Party's leadership of the advanced and their political training to put themselves at the head of millions when a revolutionary situation did emerge, and the broad influence of the Party in political life even though it might be controversial and not immediately followed by millions, it was reduced to—why wasn't the Party at the heads of the organization of the masses in their millions? This is why the line of “fighting sectarianism” came more and more to the center stage. The Party began to consider it a liability that they were directly leading only a section of the masses—those that tended

to be relatively advanced and most open to radical change—and began to speak of “breaking out” of this mass base by tailoring itself to the attitudes and prejudices of the working class in its majority.

In the summer of 1933 the Party called for an emergency meeting. Three hundred leading Party cadre gathered in New York for “an extraordinary Party Conference.” There was an acute crisis in the Party's whole work. The upsurge was starting and from the beginning it was obvious that the Party was not leading it. They surveyed the TUUL and summed up its obvious weaknesses.

This is how the CP appraised their influence in the 1933 miners' strike:

“[The Communist Party and the NMU] play an insignificant role in these mass strikes. We are almost completely isolated from the masses of miners and cannot even speak at their meetings, picket lines, and other gatherings.” [The NMU, flagship of the TUUL fleet, did not] “have one single well-functioning mass local of the employed. Since the 1931 strike the Party never appeared before the miners as a political organization... the *Daily Worker* and current literature were not known even to Party membership.”<sup>55</sup>

In the railroads, years of resolutions calling for an organizational breakthrough had yielded nothing, the industry “remains largely—well, we might call it ‘unexplored territory.’” The National Textile Workers Union had the same membership (1,000) that it had claimed in 1929, and was in 1933 “after a long period of passivity, beginning to participate again, to some extent, in strikes.” The Marine Workers Industrial Union was leading occasional struggles, here and there, did some considerable work among the unemployed on the waterfronts, but was basically still an organizing committee. Steel, supposedly a major concentration, was dead. And the TUUL Auto Workers Industrial Union had a *declining* membership in Detroit although there were some breakthroughs being made outside Motor City.

For the Party overall, the concentration on economic struggle had led to a drop in the circulation of the *Daily Worker*. The rapidity of the turnover among new recruits was shown by pointing out that several thousand members had been recruited in the first half of 1933, and in the *same* period the overall membership of the Party had declined.<sup>56</sup>

# TUUL

Given the whole logic of the CP's politics at this point, their motion, and the level of the political struggle within the Party, it is not surprising what the outcome of the "Extraordinary Conference" was. In an "Open Letter" to the membership they laid out the obvious situation and called for a renewed and intense struggle to seize the front of the economic struggle. War was declared on "political formalism" and "sectarianism"—meaning political work that might get in the way of being the best fighters and organizers of the day-to-day struggle and, related to that, there was to be a struggle against "right errors," meaning, in this case, mainly defeatism over whether the CP could really win leadership of the spontaneous struggle.

## The Upsurge and the CP's Capitulation— Or, Who Diverted Whom?

During World War 1, the centrists of the Second International justified their political capitulation to their own bourgeoisie with the words, "Hopes for a revolution have proven illusory, and it is not the business of a Marxist to fight for illusions." This same spirit now filled the CPUSA. For four years they had awaited the spontaneous revolutionary turn of the working class. They had fought to catch up and lead every spontaneous outbreak. And now as the storm broke, and struggle swept through American industry in 1934, '35, and '36, the CPUSA watched the struggle slip into the hands of their sworn enemies, those hidebound trade unions that "left" economism had sworn would never lead anything ever again. The CPUSA was by now far more solidly committed to tailing spontaneity and leading economic strikes than they were to their own political independence. From 1934 on, it was a greased slide to the right.

This is not the article to describe in detail the struggles of the upsurge itself. It is difficult to sketch them in a few quick lines. By 1934 about a million and a half workers were swept into the battle. Major strikes broke out in the trucking industry, in auto parts, in the mines and in textiles. The struggle of the longshoremen of San Francisco in 1934 mushroomed into a major General Strike as the entire working class of the west coast entered into a test of strength with the bourgeoisie. In the years that followed there were

the giant battles of rubber, steel—the stronghold of the open shop—auto (with the famous Flint sitdown strike), and countless other branches of industry. The pent up anger, the oppression, the repeated assaults that the Depression had created called into being the most extensive movement of the American working class.

From 1934 on the CPUSA was clearly engaged in a process of negotiating a merger of its TUUL forces with the other currents that were rising for industrial unionization. The major question was how much organizational influence the Party would have within that movement.

In 1934, the TUUL issued a call for creating a federation of independent unions which would be formed along industrial lines, and which the TUUL would merge into. It was an offer to completely drop any idea at all of combining economics and politics in exchange for basic leadership of the industrial union movement. There were no takers.

After years of equating the unionization of industry with the road to a new society, they were staring at a situation where they might be isolated or even kept out of the unions that were actually forming. Outflanked, politically unarmed, the CPUSA capitulated. In 1935, the TUUL was dissolved, and its active core rejoined the AFL as individuals.

Shortly after, the AFL bureaucracy split in two, and John L. Lewis led the formation of the Committee for Industrial Organization to serve as the center for the unionization of basic industry. Lewis had fifteen years of experience that proved there was nothing inherently anti-capitalist about industrial unionism. He set out to reproduce on a national scale his feat of leading and containing the miners struggle. With the obvious blessing of the top levels of the bourgeoisie, the CIO captured unquestionable control of the movement. Organizationally they needed to absorb the base that the CP had built, they needed the skilled and dedicated organizers, and they wanted to avoid a noisy fight with the Left that might disrupt the single-minded concentration of the workers on unionization. The CIO temporarily reversed the long-standing policy of simply expelling and isolating Communists. But politically they set the stiffest possible terms for the CP's participation, complete subordination.

In these swirling waters of this movement, the CPUSA got pulled down by the undertow. They were the foot soldiers of the war, its finest front line organizers. They were driven to

white-hot activity, and Communists were among the 88 workers murdered by the bourgeoisie in its frantic efforts to beat the movement down. But the bourgeoisie was using *dual* tactics—repress all you can and co-opt what you can't repress. The CP provided the organizers, but they did not lead. Lewis summed up the relationship coldly: "Who gets the bird, the hunter or the dog?" Politically, Lewis and the pro-capitalist forces he led were undoubtedly the hunter and history shows how completely they bagged the game.

In a sense, the CP summed itself up with its epitaph to the murdered Communist, Morris Langer. Langer, a worker since the age of 12, had become a Communist. He joined the revolutionary party of his class to dedicate his life to the destruction of class society. In 1932 he led several bloody battles to organize the cloth-dying sweatshops in New Jersey and was brutally assassinated by gangsters there who planted a bomb in his car. His funeral, attended by ten thousand workers, became a powerful demonstration of class hatred against this system. But his epitaph written at that time by his comrades showed the way the vision of the workers was narrowed by economism. Under Langer's picture in their hall they wrote, "We will remember Morris Langer by building a greater union."<sup>57</sup>

## VI. SUMMATION

The myth of the thirties as a "high point" turns reality completely upside down. The decade opens with tremendous possibilities, a section of the class eager to dive into revolutionary work and tear the system down. And it closes with the working class overwhelmingly, almost unanimously, cemented into the reactionary, imperialist "New Deal" coalition. Waves of revolutionary-minded workers were molded into little more than militant union organizers. A whole generation of workers saw the class struggle as little more than a fight to better the sale of their labor power.

Thousands who had yearned for revolution were left high and dry by events, disillusioned, frustrated and confused. A few, who clung to their union positions, became some of the most cynically dishonest demagogues of the "labor movement."

The 1930's left behind a working class that had been given a political lobotomy. Considering that, the concessions around unionization and social insurance were a cheap deal for

the capitalists. In fact, the unions, especially with the new and more favorable redivision of the world which U.S. imperialism achieved after World War 2, were less of a concession than they were the consolidation of a new and powerful political machine controlled by big hacks tied to the bourgeoisie's apron strings, with an apparatus extending through a key section of the working class. The unionization of basic industry in the U.S. certainly did take place on a political basis just as the CP once predicted—but instead of automatically revolutionary politics, it was on the basis of the surrendering and sinking of the revolutionary aspirations that at the beginning of the decade had burned so brightly among many workers.

The point of this is not to dismiss the importance of the economic struggle. Without a doubt it was a crucial arena of class struggle during this period, the early Depression. The outbursts were not just ho-hum affairs where the workers respectfully presented their demands, but violent upheavals where the workers protested the very conditions of their lives, risked almost certain defeat, for a chance to take a swing at the hated class enemy. It would have been criminal for communists to stand back, expecting the purity that never comes. But it was just as criminal, and far more seductive, to allow the political task of preparing for revolution to disappear in the flush of struggle. Here was something real, they said, as they allowed revolution to become unreal, distant and misty. The very reason to unite with the workers in their economic struggle is not to get lost in the struggles that the workers are quite capable of initiating and conducting (and in fact have been for a century and a half), but to lead them off the treadmill, to revolution.

In a recent report, the Central Committee of the RCP, USA wrote,

"in such work, as in all work, communists must not limit themselves to the confines of the trade unions or reduce their political line to the level of spontaneous trade-unionist struggle (nor still less to the explicitly bourgeois politics of the trade union hacks). Instead they must carry out strictly Marxist agitation and propaganda and all-around revolutionary work to raise the workers' sights to the broad and decisive questions in society and the fundamental political struggle for socialism, reaching its highest form in

the armed struggle for the seizure of power."<sup>25</sup>

For various reasons it is fairly unlikely that an actual revolutionary situation would have emerged in the 1930s even if there had been a thoroughly revolutionary Party. Events refuted the theories about a permanent economic decline, and the U.S. was able to emerge from World War 2 sufficiently strengthened to enjoy another period of stabilization, a period of "prosperity" and reaction. It did not develop that the bourgeoisie could no longer rule in the old way (the Depression never actually produced a sharp political crisis). And the illusions held by the workers never went from being shaken to being shattered, with millions ready to die rather than live in the old way any longer. However, it is not *inconceivable* that things could have gone otherwise, especially if they had gone differently in some other countries as well. The point is that the course events followed was very much influenced by the subjective factor—the line the CP followed and propagated among the masses.

A revolutionary section of the working class would have had a tremendous effect on the last several decades, especially the 1960s. Even if all that remained of the CP today were a revolutionary legacy—and not a revisionist one—the strength of the revolutionary movement would be quite different going into the 1980s.

It is exactly because the CP was not simply a thoroughly corrupted and revisionist organization from the beginning that gives the whole experience its urgent significance. A revolutionary Party, rooted among the workers, had a tremendous opportunity to transform the political landscape of the U.S., and they threw it away. The source of the problem, ultimately, did not lie in objective conditions outside the Party, including the overall trends in the international communist movement, but most fundamentally the inability of the Communist Party to thoroughly defeat the reformist and economist lines that it was born with and which were continuously recreated and enforced by the pressures of bourgeois society itself.

The CP began the decade as a revolutionary party which mainly carried out a wrong line, a line not based on the actual laws of society. It ended up being transformed, dropping its goal of revolution and eventually becoming thoroughly counterrevolutionary.

In the CP of the early Depression there is little to emulate, but much to learn from. These are mistakes which

we, the revolutionaries of the 1980s, cannot afford to repeat.

## Footnotes

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