

Class Struggle Rages Over Button Day

March 27 was button day nationwide. From the Revolutionary Communist Party and the National May Day Committee, the call went out to wear a May Day button that day, to wear it in defense of Bob Avakian, the Chairman of the RCP and, as the leaflet said, the most consistent, determined and far-sighted revolutionary leader in the country today. That day, the appeals court in Washington, D.C. was reconsidering his case involving up to 241 years in jail. It was also a call to defy all the reactionary attacks on May Day and the May Day Brigades, including 200 arrests nationwide so far. This day was openly declared to be a test for

May 1st itself. 30,000 buttons in four days was the goal.

Button Day was a tremendous battle. By the time the dust had cleared on Thursday night, 10,000 buttons had been sold, and many were worn on that day. This was itself a significant gain; as was said last week in the *RW*, it represented a class-conscious force emerging in this country. But at the same time it was clearly only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the numbers of "those who hate this shit," and it was well short of the 30,000 goal.

Why did this happen? What was behind this result? It was certainly not the objective situation in this country today

that somehow put a limit of 10,000 on button sales—the experience of Button Day itself showed this. No, it was definitely a class struggle with the enemy to sell these buttons, to reach

and mobilize in this way a force of people, but the determining class struggle in this case was one raging within the ranks of those who are the core of ac-

Continued on page 18

"We must overcome two different kinds of ideological obstacles in building for May 1st: There are those people who don't clearly see the connection between the battle for May 1st and for revolution and are therefore held back from action; there is also the problem of some people who do see the connection and oppose May Day."

"Our purpose is welding all those who hate this shit into a class-conscious force. But there are some people who not only do not hate this shit themselves, but are afraid of those who hate it."

Button Day

Continued from page 1

tive organizers for May 1st, especially within the Party itself.

Even before Button Day, that was clear. America is in decline and headed toward war—world war. Any reasonable analysis of the conditions—the objective situation in this country today—means that certainly 2% or 3% of the industrial proletariat alone (the workers in basic industry, numbering 21 million) are revolutionary-minded—not fully class-conscious proletarian fighters, but those with basic revolutionary hatred for whom the message of May 1st is no stranger but instead a voice for their inner feelings. And we are talking about mobilizing a small percentage of *that* small percentage into the streets on May 1st. We are going to do it. The Party is firm on this, as is the new wave of revolutionary fighters stepping forward around the Party. The objective situation is ripe, the key is the subjective fac-



tor—that is the Party's firm grasp on the revolutionary line on May 1st. This was made very clear by the results of Button Day.

Even—and especially—in the face of reactionary attacks, the revolutionary-minded people among the masses stepped forward when given a chance and Button Day spread. Inside one plant in Atlanta, backward fools made a fire out of some copies of the leaflet announcing the 27th. In response to this and on the spot, a revolutionary on the

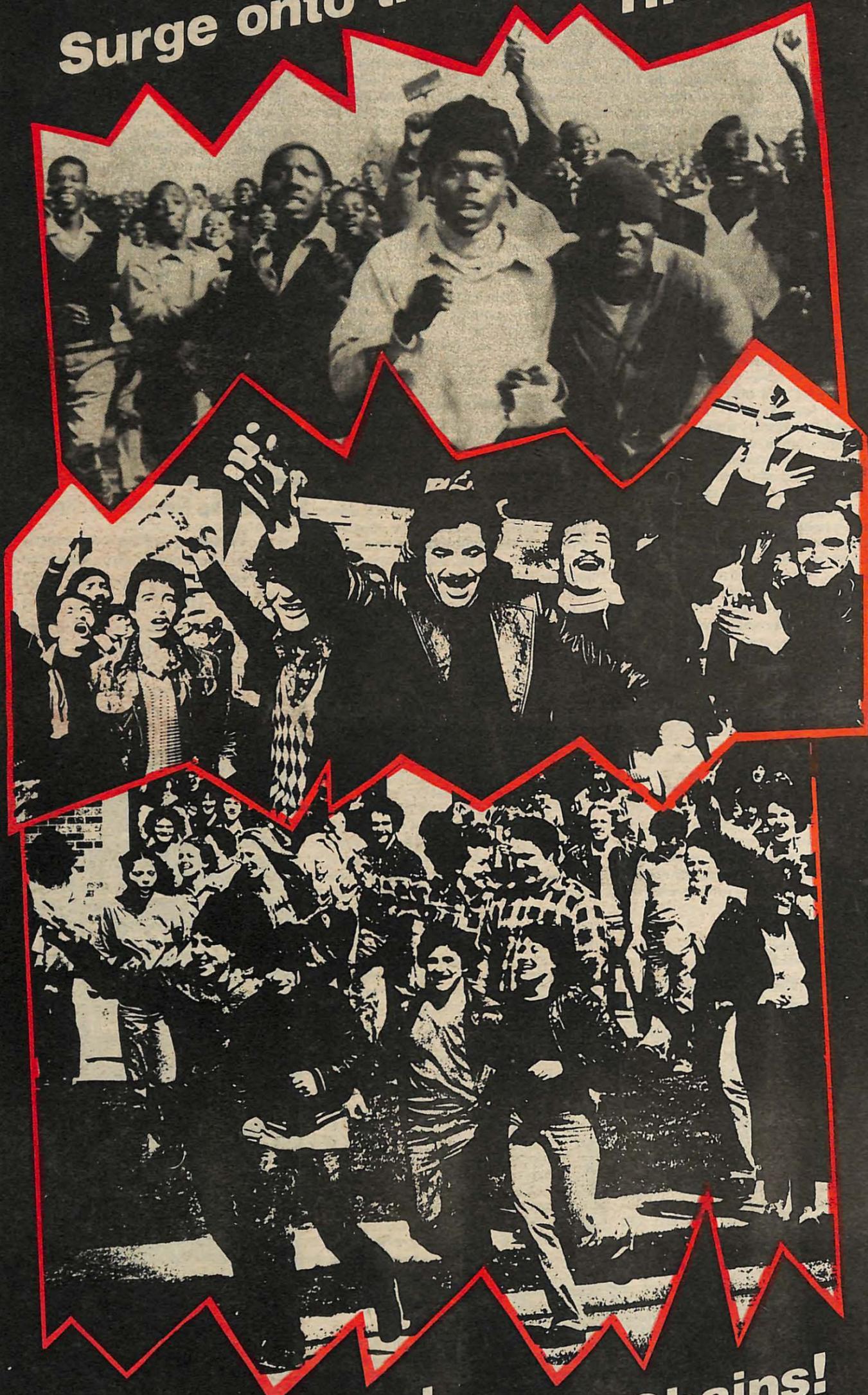
inside of the plant sold 27 buttons. It was all she had on her. Workers were buying the buttons in any language they could—whether they understood it or not. It didn't matter, they had to take a stand.

In many places, advanced revolutionary forces that had been suffocated by a deadly air of backwardness among the forces building Button Day broke through by the last day and showed some results. In Detroit, for example, more buttons (600) were sold on Thurs-

day than on the previous three days put together, and struggle raged all day in some plants about wearing them or not. Buttons in the pocket one minute came out the next onto shirts when struggle was raised over what this was all about. In Chicago, on Thursday, at one plant where many workers speak neither English nor Spanish, 50 buttons were sold in a couple of hours to one shift. A paddy wagon was there, a boss stood out front, the language barriers loomed; but it was clear that this was about

**May 1st
1980**

**Surge onto the Stage of
History!**



**Break Free and
Out of Your Chains!
Turn This Whole Country
Upside Down!**

international Workers Day. Some people who knew no language but English, and without leaflets, just broke into song—the *Internationale*, anthem of the international working class—and workers bought buttons, with a few short words like “This is good...right...international working class.”

There were wide gaps in sales, with a few people selling 30 or more buttons in an hour on a transit train, and almost the same number of *Revolutionary Worker* newspapers, while other people, in almost identical conditions, sold one or two. It was a matter of line.

Where Bob Avakian’s name or picture was brought out in some places, it sharpened up the revolutionary stakes involved in Button Day, and sales shot up. In one place, a banner with his picture went up and intense discussion broke out about his case and the meaning of this action.

In some places, this was completely or largely liquidated—substituting instead some much more narrow and non-revolutionary “concern.” In Battle Creek, Michigan, where there had been a sharp confrontation between cops and the Black community and May Day was becoming known and embraced, Button Day organizers got up a picket line at the police station on the 27th and the rap that was given did not even mention Bob Avakian or urge people to buy buttons.

These were not “accidents” in the main, but the products of a political line—a non-revolutionary political line that is ducking out and even jumping out in the face of the revolutionary potential for May 1st.

In area after area across the country, sharp struggle with the enemy is bringing forward the advanced, revolutionary comrades within the Party and the new advanced among the masses to do battle against the bourgeoisie, right over the heads of the backward if necessary. Those that have begun to come forward have sensed that there are those in the Party who grasp and uphold Chairman Bob Avakian’s revolutionary line, including on May Day, and that there are those who do not. These masses are correct in what they sense.

This Party is not going to allow the backward to suffocate the force of the advanced coming forward. It is high time to pull out all stops and ride over the bullshit and sabotage cluttering the path. The revolutionary line is there to grasp; the point is to *grasp* and not run away from it.

**The Revolution is Being
Battled Out Now**

The heart of the revolutionary line and policy on May Day is clear. May Day is a major step in revolution, here and around the world. Revolution does not come out of nowhere. What we do today can be crucial. Lenin put it this way: “The revolution itself must not by any means be regarded as a single act...but as a series of more or less powerful outbreaks rapidly alternating with periods of more or less intense calm.” As Bob Avakian put it in his New Year’s article in the *RW*, “The work we do now, the battles, especially the major political battles, we wage now can be crucial not only at hitting back, politically, at the enemy, and not simply as general preparation, but beyond that perhaps in deciding the outcome whenever the conditions for revolution do ripen... This emphasizes, again, that all we are doing now is or must be, precisely preparation for when the conditions do ripen and that (in line with the statement by Lenin referred to just above) our actions are, in another sense, a *part*, a very important part, of the whole process of revolution and have a great deal to do with victory or defeat when there is a qualitative leap in the situation.”

This is why May 1st is crucial. It is a political action, but it is like a *major*

Continued on page 20

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Button Day

Continued from page 19

early campaign in a liberation war. There is no "back to normal" possible. May 1st will make a real difference.

Once most people from the basic masses really see this, they embrace May Day all the more firmly. But some people, a handful, even if they become puffed up for a time, understand this very well and are driven to wildly oppose May Day.

That is why one question that is before us now is, whose Party is this? Is this the Party of the revolutionary proletariat, or is it a resting place for those who feel they have something to save—some stake in keeping this section of the masses down? Today these two forces are struggling.

This is not a matter of some people's intentions, but of political line. It shows itself in a hundred ways, and did so in the struggle for Button Day. In one case in Atlanta, for example, a student called the May Day Committee to say that she had heard of Button Day, wanted to buy a button for herself, and that her friends wanted some too, but they wouldn't be able to afford them until Friday. The organizer, dragged back by the influence of a non-revolutionary political line, said only "OK"—get it together on Friday. Fortunately, another revolutionary heard of this and visited the woman, who took 25 buttons immediately on consignment to be paid back at the end of the week.

An even more stark example of this line struggle and the influence it can have on holding back the masses was in Youngstown, where the May Day Brigade has become a major social question. A May Day march was scheduled there for this Monday, but someone thought that not that many buttons would be sold. With the first hours, with much marching yet to go, all these buttons were sold, with marchers taking the buttons off their shirts to sell. 55 were sold, none were left. Potential revolutionary hands were left empty, allowed to drift away because of this gross underestimation of the people. Some of this was recouped later in the week as 115 buttons were sold there by Thursday. As it came out on Button Day, some people occasionally do militant actions and assume no one will come forward. According to this view, the revolutionaries are just—at best—lonely examples. These people don't believe there are many others who not only hate the system, but want—even demand—to be involved in political struggle against it. Button Day showed once again that this is so.

A Class-Conscious Section

The revolutionary line of our Party, the one that provided the key to May Day, recognizes that there is an advanced section of workers out there that needs to be welded into a revolutionary force. These workers, as Lenin once put it, have their own "interests and requirements." It is not the task of revolutionaries to provide them with some hatred which they supposedly lack—as if there were some empty wilderness out there. They do not lack this at all. It is the task of revolutionaries to fulfill their "interests and requirements"—to provide them with the ability to act, to go over from individual hatred for the system into an organized force, to sharpen their hatred with scientific, revolutionary understanding, and clearly aim it at the enemy.

One example of this took place on a public transit car in Chicago, where a May Day organizer began agitating against the red, white and blue bloody rag of the imperialist rulers of this country. At that point, up jumped a leading backward fool, and one or two others, and they began singing "God Bless America." Few could even believe it. Some youth in the back of the car started laughing at these patriotic dogs. One woman in the car jumped up herself and gave the finger right in the fools' singing faces.

Here indeed was a section of people that had some real "interests and requirements"—to be welded into a real force against all this. But unfortunately

this was not grasped clearly. Instead of turning to these advanced forces, making clear how before them was the opportunity and necessity to really take on all this backwardness of the system that they hated, the opportunity was lost, and one or two buttons at most were sold.

These questions and even sharper ones were the ones being battled out in one way or another during the week of Button Day. The fact they were only beginning to get clearly identified and that the backward held sway to no small degree held Button Day back to 10,000. Some people were getting clearer and clearer on the revolutionary line, and others were opposing it. There are even those in the Party who—in theory or practice or both—believe May 1st itself to be "idealistic," "unrealistic" and all sorts of other nonsense. This view, which they applied to Button Day, will not hold sway. It will be challenged. The revolutionaries in the Party, and those who are coming forward, are clearer than ever that such people, if left to their ways, would seek to undermine May Day—by sabotaging it or simply by "going through the motions"—and then jumping out later with "I told you so." These revolutionaries are firm that this will not be allowed, and that it is time, and past time, to deflate this puffed-up line.

Why This Struggle Now?

It is no surprise that this struggle would erupt now. The fact that it has is not just a matter of a few ideas that suddenly popped up in some people's heads, or that they just "hate May Day." There are reasons why this is so. This struggle is rooted in the objective conditions that exist today in this country and the world, and the questions that are posed by that. America—once on top of the world capitalist dung heap—is truly in decline. Some feel they have some stake in it, and wish to cling on to what will soon surely be a corpse in history's bone yard. Others, for whom life has been intolerable and is becoming more so, now see that they have no stake at all in this system, no "safe haven" in store, and they long for the coming opportunity to end this madness called American society.

These two roads are clashing in society, and—because of this—are sure to clash inside the revolutionary ranks. Just as the reactionary road is historically doomed in society, so too the Revolutionary Communist Party is firm and clear that it will flop inside its own ranks too, drowned out by the surging tide of those who are determined to see May 1st be a major step toward revolution here.

We are not playing a "game" or calling a calm "protest"—politely begging about our conditions—we are holding International Workers Day. Gone must be all remnants of "fail safe" thinking—holding back "so as not to lose so much." Instead, our orientation is that spelled out recently by the Chairman: "If you're afraid of losing what you've got—and this goes for state power too—then how can you be a revolutionary." This Party is prepared to risk a lot to win a lot. We will not emerge on the other side of May 1st with every aspect of the Party intact as it is now.

One of the new forces that we know of who came forward to be on the May Day Brigades came forward with the belief that "we will make revolution on May 1st." This, of course, is not what we are out to do, and our task now is not to aim to mobilize the sizeable section of the class that will be necessary to do that. But the basic spirit and attitude of that new person is infinitely preferable to the "we won't really do it" sentiment—spoken or unspoken—that lurks in the corners. The role of revolutionary science is then to temper and sharpen this basic spirit—not to douse it.

In the four weeks that remain until May Day, our orientation is the one set out back in the original May Day Manifesto "We must come from behind, catch up to the gathering momentum and march to the head of it, enabling the revolutionary movement and the conscious understanding of millions of people to take a leap forward, to keep pace with the rapidly changing times. And we must do this

now, for if we do not we may very well miss the tremendous possibilities that lie ahead."

One result of Button Day is that many more people much more consciously share that orientation. Revolutionary masses, it is true, face many difficulties. But it is their Party and their future. And what they have going for them—even more today—is that they dare to think and do, they dare to dauntlessly go forward, to break with the old. This is powerful indeed, and the Party is determined to lead it forward.

Part of leading this forward means carrying the struggle forward, to deflate and defeat those who insist on holding back the tide. A line like this has to be defeated in a struggle, it cannot be defeated in practice alone. But even more important now, it cannot really be defeated except through practice, and the struggle for May 1st must go ahead at a far faster rate. It must not be dragged back. The basis is there even more firmly than before to do this.

Red Flag—Internationale

As a major step to May 1st, the Party and the National May Day Committee are calling for Thursday, April 24, one week before May 1st, to be Red Flag—Internationale Day. This will be a day when all those who want May Day will come into action—50,000 red flags will fly as a declaration and a signal of what lies a week ahead. It will be a day when those same people will flex their muscle—and all rise together at 1:55 P.M. in

the East, 12:55 Central time, 11:55 A.M. Mountain time, 10:55 in the West, and 7:55 in Hawaii—and join their voices in defiant singing of the *Internationale*—the anthem of the international working class. It will be a day, and the beginning of a last week, in which things will begin to rip, when others—friend and foe alike—really begin to get the sense that "these people are serious!" about May 1st; and people will let this be known in a thousand ways.

It will not only be the Party that will begin making these red flags; garment workers must begin doing it. Rolls of cloth will be brought into the plants, housing projects and schools, as the masses themselves take a hand. This will really begin to set the stage for breaking out on May 1st.

The conditions are there. The Party's new *Draft Programme and Constitution* is there to help raise the sights of the revolutionary fighters. This newspaper, the *Revolutionary Worker*, is coming out every week full of fresh new ammunition in this May Day struggle against enemies of all kinds. Button Day has set off a new stage. There are four weeks left until May Day. This means both that the time is urgent, and yet there is plenty of time if we seize it. The revolutionary forces are rising and the forces of backwardness will not be allowed to take the day. May 1st will win out.

"The spring thunder resounds, urging me to march to the battle field." □

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