

—forward motion—

May-June 1988

A Socialist Magazine

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Poetry of Working Women's Lives

*Sue Doro
Susan Eisenberg
Chris Llewellyn*

The African Freedom Struggle and Socialism

*Saths Cooper
Wamba-dia-Wamba*

Forward Motion

May-June 1988
Vol. 7, No. 3

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"Shirtwaist Strikers"
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FORWARD MOTION is a magazine of socialist opinion and advocacy. We say socialist opinion because each FM presents analyses of important organizing work and reviews of political and cultural trends. We say socialist advocacy because FM is dedicated to a new left-wing presence in U.S. politics and to making Marxism an essential component of that presence. We share these purposes with other journals, but we seek for FM a practical vantage point from within the unions, the Black and other freedom struggles, the women's movement, the student, anti-war, and gay liberation movements, and other struggles. We also emphasize building working people's unity as a political force for social change, particularly through challenging the historical pattern of white supremacy and national oppression in the capitalist domination of this country.

In This Issue

This FM features two very different commentaries on the complicated, uneasy relation of national liberation and socialism in Africa. First, an interview with Saths Cooper, former president of the Azanian Peoples Organization. This interview highlights what has been AZAPO's particular place in the South African liberation movement: growing out of its roots in South Africa's earlier Black Consciousness upsurge, AZAPO today stands firmly for Black self-determination in an anti-capitalist orientation. Second, we have a detailed report from Zairian Marxist Wamba-dia-Wamba on last fall's sad end to the radical Thomas Sankara government of Burkina Faso. More than other African regimes launched by military coup, the Sankara government sought continuing participation by the trade unions and Marxist parties whose organizing brought it to power.

The relation between national liberation and socialism has been complicated because of the particularly heavy weight of Africa's colonial past as well as the jarring transition to neo-colonialism and dependent capitalism in much of Africa. In the experience of some African revolutionaries, because national liberation has not yet been fully consummated, socialism appears a distraction. But for others, the oppressive presence of international capitalism on Africa pushes the national movement toward socialism.

This has happened in Africa in ways that combine socialist ideology with militarized regimes. Pressures for strong, authoritative leadership have favored military regimes and one party states to accumulate national strength. But socialist ideology alone doesn't work well as a vaccination or insurance policy against political reaction. Without the democratic mass movement also part of the socialist tradition, militarization of the regime or reappearance of the neocolonial state bureaucracy can undo the revolution. The big hope of the Thomas Sankara government was that, though it took the military coup path to power, it would preserve its democratic and radical Marxist links. With Sankara's death, this round at least has been lost.

The mainstream media world-wide has taken advantage of this conflict in a one-sided way. Again and again, the media points up the authoritarian side of African socialist regimes without reference to the equally authoritarian presence of international corporations and foreign governments. Only this past week, CBS' "Sixty Minutes" interviewed Ghanaian leader Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, another of a new generation of radical or socialist military leaders in power in Africa with whom Thomas Sankara was often compared. Sixty Minutes wanted to put the Ghanaian leader on the spot for the shortcomings of his regime, but the charismatic Rawlings defended his country's need

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...In This Issue

for firm measures to institutionalize radical principles.

Both Saths Cooper and Wamba-dia-Wamba are on the side of those who believe that socialism in African is a current and pressing question, even now in the ongoing national liberation movements. For them, as for governing leaders like Thomas Sankara, this has meant speaking out firmly and insistently, courageously facing risk, imprisonment, and, in Sankara's case, now death. The issues of socialism and national liberation, and of democracy and socialism, are part of the continuing crisis of socialism. Let us hope that through the ongoing work of African socialists, significant breakthroughs, with lessons for other movements, will be made in the years to come.

We also have included a selection of poems by three women poets dealing generally with the issues of women and work. In *Fragments from the Fire*, Chris Llewellyn reaches back to give us the voices of the anonymous young women who died—and survived—the famous shirtwaist factory fire of 1911, in whose honor International Women's Day is celebrated. By reaching back, Llewellyn brings forward some of the most enduring themes of working class women's lives: the small, common connections that women create for their families to survive even in the harshest circumstances (the darned stockings, the hair braided every morning). These are particularly moving as seen against the disaster of the fire and the horrifyingly glib dismissal of the tragedy of these young women's deaths by the jury of their all-male "peers." But here also is a sense of the passionate energy emerging out of those fiery deaths—a gathering force of women's rage against exploitation and oppression, a solidarity, and a new sense of power to be passed on.

These themes are echoed in the contemporary work world of the poets Sue Doro and Susan Eisenberg. Their poems are testimony that working women are still struggling against their own belittlement in a male-dominated world, still struggling to keep alive the loving but strained connections that sustain them—between family and work—and still glorying in the discovery of their own emerging power...The power to assert their dignity and their own place in the work world and ultimately to challenge "those people who are only moved by greed and profits."

Also in this issue, an account of a recent clear labor success—the unionization of the largely immigrant Hospital Laundry Association in Boston; a new set of photographs from Samantha McCormick of everyday life in Nicaragua; an engrossing look at the popularity and political progressivism of the modern mystery novel; a tribute to Boston activist Maxine Fennell; and two shorter footnotes on racial discrimination in the United States.

AZAPO and the Freedom Struggle in South Africa



Interview with Saths Cooper

It has been over ten years since the Black Consciousness upsurge helped usher in a new phase of the freedom struggle in South Africa. Along with an invigorated African National Congress (ANC), new union, community and student organizations emerged to dramatically broaden the mass movement in the 1980s. The best known remaining grouping from the Black Consciousness period is AZAPO, the Azanian People's Organization. AZAPO retains the Black Consciousness insistence on Black initiative in the freedom struggle and has worked to look beyond the immediate and crushing oppression of apartheid to a post-capitalist future for the country. Saths Cooper, a founding member and past president of AZAPO who served six years in jail for his beliefs, now lives in Boston, where we had the occasion to speak with him about the current situation in South Africa. The interview was conducted last year for FM by Bill Fletcher. Recently, Mr. Cooper also took part in a forum at Northeastern University on "The Legacy of Steve Biko," co-sponsored by FM

with the Black Union of South Africans, Northeastern Black Student Association and Radical America.

FM: How do you evaluate the situation in South Africa in the wake of the 1987 general elections?

Saths Cooper: We predicted that the Nationalist Party of P.W. Botha would come in with a greater majority and that the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) would face its most stringent test ever. Those things came to pass. What we weren't as clear about was the extent to which the far Right would extend its support. We predicted that the far Right would maintain or increase its strength slightly, but it did, in fact, increase its strength quite substantially. These overall changes reflect clear support for right-wing forces—from P.W. Botha right through to the Conservative Party—and are consistent with the election trends of previous years. They are nothing new.

The percentage of support for the Progressive Federal Party is slightly lower than it had been previously and

represents an extreme minority view in society. Its untenability is reflected in the fact that spokespeople for the PFP claim they are acting as watch dogs for Black interests, whereas they are actually centrists, more like "liberal Republicans" in the American sense. We see no difference between the PFP and other collaborationist forces like Gatsha Buthelezi of the KwaZulu and Inkatha movement, except that one group happens to have a fairer pigmentation than the other. Otherwise, their policies, their practices, their collaboration, their attempts to give credence to the system are the same. [The Inkatha movement is a Zulu nationalist organization which has been used by the State in vigilante attacks on AZAPO, UDF and COSATU—ed].

AZAPO's position has been consistent. We believe that any participation within the status quo is collaboration with the settler minority regime and gives it credibility which it doesn't deserve. For many years, they have been using this participation to show the rest of the world a pretense of democracy.

The repression that has been rampant for the last four years is likely to increase. We cannot see a let-up in it, especially since the far right-wing forces have become the official opposition in the parliamentary sector. Between now [May 1987] and the next election—about two years—very interesting things may happen. We foresee a period of immediate repression to stem the drift towards the far Right by Nationalist Party voters and constituencies. This could mean increasing the clamp-down on anti-apartheid activities and also on petty violations of race laws like the "Group Areas Act" (for example, the eviction of mixed couples who live in white areas). [The Group Areas Act outlaws any two population groups—white, "Colored," Black, or Indian—living in the same area—ed.] Also there will be a greater use of force by P.W. Botha to demonstrate clearly to his constituents and to those "doubting Thomases" who have moved away from his party that he is in control. That is why, for instance, almost on the eve of the elections he carried out a raid on Zambia. Such classic shows of force have always been intended to increase white voters' turnout in support of the ruling party.

We think that P.W. Botha will keep to his post-election promise to prevent aid to anti-apartheid groups inside the country. We can see a period where churches and other human rights groups inside the country are going to face a serious problem receiving money. For us, this is not a major problem because we don't receive the kind of money that other groups receive. We have been



Omar Bodshah/Afrapix

University students protesting Buthelezi's homelands policies attacked by Inkatha supporters in October 1983.

largely self-sufficient and are supported by our membership which comes largely from the unemployed or the poorly paid workers, and also from youth who have never been employed.

We believe there are two major classes in the South African equation. On the one side is the white settler bloc supported by certain Black forces which is committed to maintaining white rule. On the other side is a ruled-over, oppressed, exploited people who are largely Black and are economically, politically and socially discriminated against in this society. We see the necessity for the oppressed and exploited and their organizations to come to a serious recognition that unless they unite on a principled basis—and very soon—the only winners are going to be the right-wing forces: P.W. Botha, the Conservative Party and the West.

The West would have you believe—we haven't heard it yet from the State Department and White House but it will soon be on their lips—that downplaying "constructive engagement" created the results in the current election. They like to suggest that they have had leverage in the past and that now their leverage has been reduced because of various acts and constraints on their interventions with the dictatorial regime. This is nonsense because they have not been able to get anything done up to now with "constructive engagement."

FM: What do you make of the rise over the last few years in the number of openly fascist white groups?

Cooper: I think it is an inevitable consequence of the ruling party's declared intention to begin certain reforms. In such a situation—and this would apply to struggle anywhere in the world—Left groups increase their agita-

tion; the level of expectation of the oppressed and exploited rises; and the oppressed people's willingness to sacrifice increases. But along with that, you get the growth of fascism and an increase in right-wing militance. Such growth has been going on for some time inside our country, at least over the last fifteen years. But it has become even more visible over the last few years.

The right-wing forces are still very small. They have been given greater press than they actually deserve. Because they have been unable to gain the leverage inside the country that they would have liked, they have turned to the use of Black vigilante groups against anti-apartheid forces. This has been labelled by the bourgeois media as Black-on-Black violence. A situation where the white Right-wing is using Black people, paying them, and otherwise controlling them is much more frightening to me than actual white right-wing terror. There has been white terror against Black people in South Africa since the beginning of settlerdom, and particularly since the coming into being of South Africa as a political entity in 1910. This terror has accelerated over the last forty years under apartheid rule. Our community has been terrorized at different levels over the years, including the sort of institutionalized violence implicit in the fact that Black children are being denied the right to life even before they are born due to Black malnutrition and unemployment.

FM: Among the various political blocs among the whites, are there particular alignments that they have with one or another imperialist country?

Cooper: The Nationalist Party has a very close relationship with United States interests and with other European powers, particularly Germany, France, Israel and Britain. With regard to the far Right, I cannot say where it gets its sustenance, but there are people in high places in Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, France and the United States who support their positions even if their governments as such do not.

The Progressive Federal Party has a very clear link with American, British and European interests. They have a very good entree among these people. They are recognized as legitimate spokespersons by these governments while true representatives of the people are relegated to the back seat. The entire Western imperialist bloc would like to see some control by the PFP in any new set up and that is why a huge propaganda campaign has been initiated over the last few years to vaunt the benefits of the so-called free enterprise system. Various

Key to South African Political Groupings

Nationalist Party: the party of P.W. Botha; ruling Afrikaaners party which took power in 1948.

Progressive Federal Party (PFP): a white party opposed to some of the more blatant features of apartheid. They stand for a qualified Black franchise and are backed by the Anglo-American Corporation. Helen Suzman is a well-known representative of this party.

Conservative Party: to the right of the Nationalist Party, they believe in old-style apartheid—no cosmetic reforms. Led by Andris Treurnicht, the Conservative Party recently won a number of seats in Parliament.

New Republic Party (NRP): formerly the United Party. As the party of settlement after the Anglo-Boer War, the NRP ruled South Africa more or less from 1910 until after World War II. Today it has almost no parliamentary presence.

African National Congress (ANC): the Black national liberation organization formed in 1912.

Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC): a 1958 split-off from the ANC emphasizing Black leadership of the national liberation struggle.

Black Consciousness: refers to a political movement which developed between 1969 and 1971 emphasizing Black leadership of the movement and the necessity for all-Black formations. Steve Biko was the major and most well-known leader.

Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO): a Black Consciousness organization formed in 1979 and recently banned. Saths Cooper is one of its founders.

United Democratic Front (UDF): a coalition formed in August, 1983, which claims to have 600 affiliated organizations; recently banned.

National Forum Committee: a loose coalition of over 200 organizations. The National Forum does not have an affiliate structure but sees itself as non-sectarian.

Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU): largest federation of South African workers, formed in November, 1985, after several years of unity talks.

Council of Unions of South Africa and Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions, now merged as NACTU (National Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions): the Black Consciousness side of the trade union movement formed in October, 1986.

foundations, seminars and organizations to promote capitalism have been established. In August 1985, P.W. Botha himself announced an increase in the amount of money he was going to set aside for small business development among Black entrepreneurs. (I believe he set aside one billion Rand.) So you can see the whole interconnectedness between the capitalist system and what these various positions represent. None of the present white coalitions or parties represent politics that are to the left of a straight laissez-faire position which is essentially a racist position.

FM: For quite some time most of the press in the United States, and even the left-wing press, has talked only of the United Democratic Front and the African National Congress when discussing the political situation in South Africa. Little attention has been given to the Pan-African Congress, AZAPO and CUSA/AZACTU (NACTU). I have noticed too that participants in the student movement often don't even know the names of those groups and think that only the ANC exists. Why do you think this is the case?

Cooper: The Western media has a definite agenda. They would like to see the Botha regime continue. They would like to see a capitalist system continue in South Africa. They cannot afford to ignore the ANC and the United Democratic Front because these organizations have a high visibility and are very significant groups. But they would like to totally ignore the other political groups that are in existence whose points of view are clearly socialist in orientation.

If you look back to the Civil Rights era and the post-Civil Rights era in the United States, you find that certain sections of the Black power movement never received the kind of coverage by the mainstream U.S. media that they deserved. If U.S. Black nationalist groups with socialist politics did not receive coverage and are not to this day receiving coverage why should we expect to see groups with these politics in South Africa getting coverage? The National Forum which has a Left, socialist platform—which is an alliance without any party or organizational framework—will never get coverage because its program is explicitly socialist. The forum is very clear about who the enemy is and what means are necessary to overcome that enemy. AZAPO now has a similar program. NACTU will share a similar fate since its rejection of the continued tutelage of white liberals in leadership.

The Left press also has denied coverage to certain sections of the Black movement. Much of the Left press

in the U.S. would like to impose its own wish fulfillments, its own solutions on our country; solutions that it has failed to even begin to adopt in its own country. It likes to suggest that its vision is the vision which is being followed by the masses and their most visible leaders in South Africa.

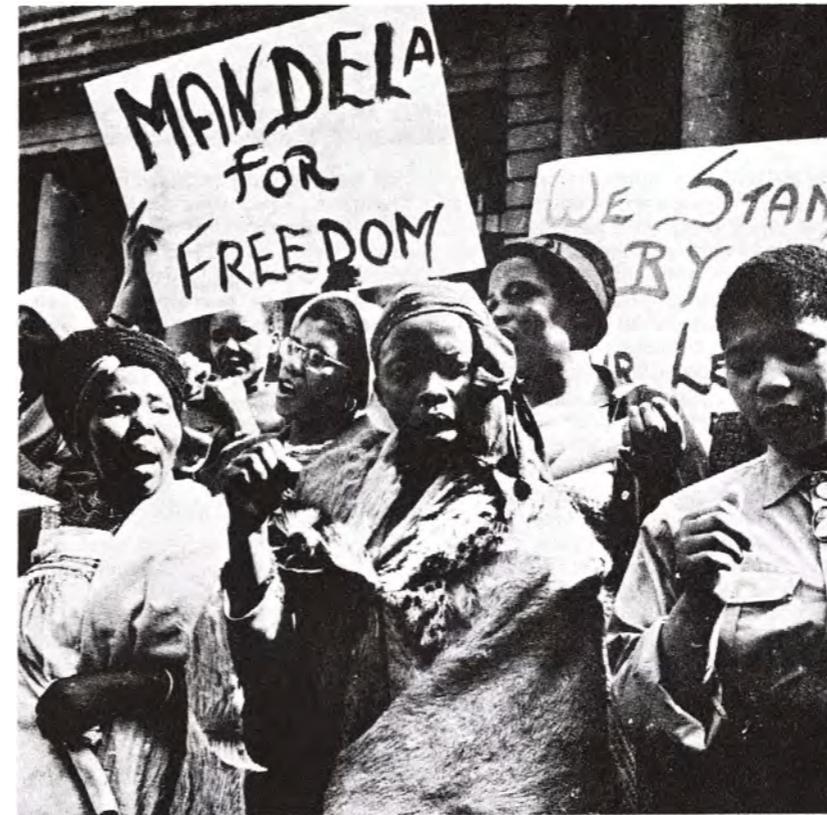
The struggle in South Africa is essentially a Black struggle. You cannot go to the Black people in any of our ghettos and say that the struggle is a multi-racial struggle. To fight apartheid you have to fight the people who represent apartheid and apartheid is represented by white people. Capitalism is represented by white people. The ruling class is white. Nobody can get away from this despite the attempts at cooptation of different sections of the Black community.

FM: We hear discussions coming out of South Africa about a multi-racial or non-racial approach versus a "Black consciousness" approach. Non-racialism has been explained to me to mean that there will be no discrimination, with the assumption that there would be Black majority control. For example, some of the unions that have taken a non-racial approach say, 'Yes, we will or can have white general secretaries in leadership, but these unions are Black-controlled and if this white general secretary gets out of hand, we will toss him.' So where exactly do the differences come down?

Cooper: Back in South Africa we make a very big distinction with regard to certain terminology. Multi-racialism is not synonymous with non-racialism. Actually we consider ourselves the true non-racialists in our society. But non-racialism is a term that has been so usurped by the racial supremacists that we tend to keep away from it and prefer to use the term "anti-racist."

Multi-racialism is based on accepting the so-called race groups by which colonialism, imperialism and various ruling classes have decided to classify people. This, despite the fact that scientists are finding it hard to say what race people belong to. There is a basic human race; it is just that people have different types of hair, different types of color to their skin, and so on. We are one species. Yet multi-racialists try to solve political problems of leadership, for example, by taking proportionately so many whites, so many percent so-called Colored, so many percent so-called Indian, so many percent so-called African.

Now you cannot be non-racial and still be for Colored only or Indian only or white only, which is what we



Freedom for Nelson Mandela is a unifying theme of all the anti-apartheid groups in South Africa.

have inside of South Africa. There are huge organizations which are race exclusive according to the South African government's classifications and yet they claim they are non-racial. The media would like to represent them as such because they are far more amenable to that viewpoint than they are to a clear anti-racist position. The anti-racist position is an anathema to ruling class interests in South Africa because it is also an anti-exploitative position which hits at the bedrock of capitalism.

So while claiming that they are non-racial, we have unions whose entire membership is Black only, meaning largely groups of Africans, then Coloreds and Indians. Yet you will have a white general secretary in leadership of this union. This makes the union more amenable to management because management can negotiate with this white man more easily than they would be able to negotiate with a Cyril Ramaphasa [Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers]. So management will try, for example, to thrust the National Union of Mine Workers into confusion, to instigate faction fights, to instigate little coups, to instigate rumor-mongering against

the leadership in order to get in a more acceptable leadership.

White leadership of a Black body is grafted on; it is not legitimate leadership coming up from the grass roots. The white leaders are able to get certain concessions and to appear to make progress because they are able to feed into the white status quo. But if that white leadership does not totally identify with Black working class interests and if that white leadership has not completely rejected its own particular bourgeois class background, there will be serious problems. As long as whites continue to struggle apart there will be serious problems. This has happened, for instance, in the garment industry in the country. [There was a conflict in the garment union when Blacks objected to the white union secretary in Natal. They removed him from office, and he went to court to challenge this. This issue has not been resolved in COSATU—ed.]

FM: What does this mean about the role that South African whites who are progressive or left-wing

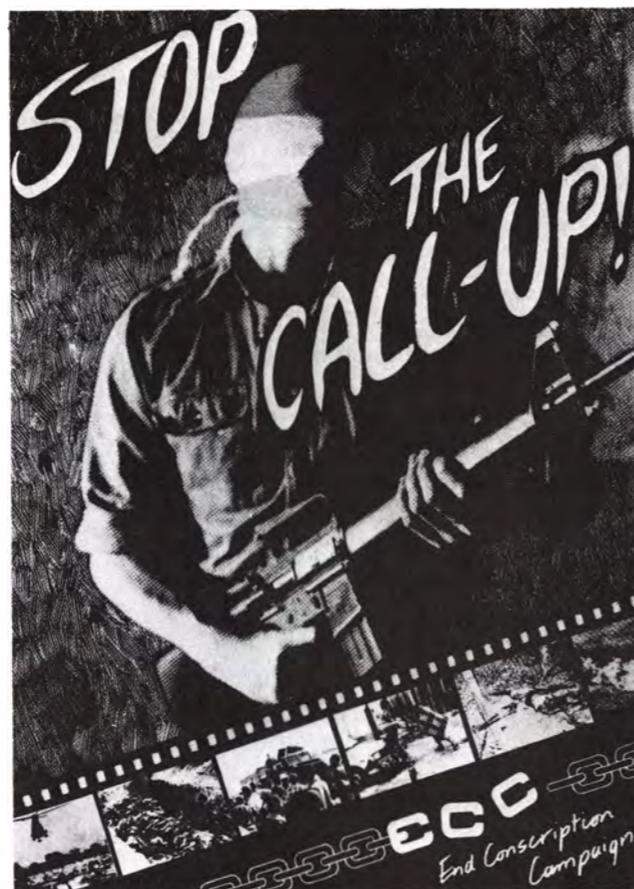
should or can play in the struggle?

Cooper: Large numbers of white people in South Africa are thoroughly immersed in the white supremacist and exploitative propaganda of the ruling class. The white Left in South Africa needs to address this. They cannot run away from their responsibilities. They cannot just stand up and shout "Amandla." We say that their role is definitely a supportive one, but they need to go beyond that supportive role. They need to address themselves to preparing white people in South Africa for the inevitability of what they claim to be standing for—which is eventual Black majority rule and national self-determination.

South Africa has a significant white population—about five million. At the moment of victory, the country cannot afford a large-scale exodus of skilled people which whites generally tend to be. Young progressive white people need to be preparing other whites for a future in South Africa under Black majority rule. Certain types of campaigns that the white Left is engaged in—like anti-conscription campaigns—aimed at resocializing and educating the white population can be very effective. This work is much more important than coming into the leadership of an already established Black organization.

The United Democratic Front has Black leadership. There are very few whites in leadership. AZAPO specifically says that if whites want to join, they should attempt to join at the grass roots. When we see white people joining at the grass roots rather than at the leadership level then we are not so suspicious. But when whites continue to insist "we must lead you" or do all sorts of things which denigrate or dilute our struggle and create divisive situations within the Black community, then our suspicions continue about their true interest in our cause.

FM: You clearly connect the struggle against apartheid to the struggle against capitalist exploitation in South Africa. AZAPO has been criticised for not making a distinction between the anti-apartheid phase of the struggle on the one hand and the struggle for socialism on the other. A graphic example often pointed to was AZAPO's demonstration against Senator Kennedy. Some people in the U.S. were confused about the demonstration. They know that Kennedy is a representative of the bourgeoisie, but he was speaking out against apartheid. Yet AZAPO criticized him and protested his visit. How do you respond?



For AZAPO, campaigns by the white Left to resocialize the white population are much more appropriate than coming into the leadership of established Black organizations.

Cooper: The U.S. State Department speaks out against apartheid. Ronald Reagan in his confused statements speaks out against apartheid. There are Nationalist Party people who speak out against apartheid. What does that mean?

Kennedy represents the imperialist forces which fuel the present South African system. Nobody can talk about the Kennedy legacy and not talk about imperialist interventions all over the world. We certainly do not want people like Kennedy creating further confusion about our struggle. Others in South Africa recognize this. Forces within the UDF recognize this and that is why they did not allow Kennedy to appear on the same platform as them.

Apartheid is a manifestation of the interpenetrating forces of racism and capitalism. I cannot see only apartheid being ended because apartheid is being kept in power by capitalism. It is a point of departure for the

struggle, but the end of apartheid will not mean the end of racism in South Africa. The end of apartheid will mean access mainly for the Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. To end racism in South Africa we have to address the unequal distribution of wealth in the country and the racist features of the political economy.

So what are we fighting for? We are fighting apartheid. We are fighting more than apartheid, however. Apartheid is a symbol of national oppression. When we are discussing the fight against apartheid, we are talking about the fight for self-determination.

We believe that the struggle goes through phases, but to make the distinction that first we must pass through an anti-apartheid phase and then a socialist phase is a mistake. All the constituencies within the National Forum hold the position that our struggle is against the twin system of racism and capitalism: race oppression and class exploitation.

When national self-determination is achieved, it will mean that land is restored to the majority of the population. It will mean political power is restored to the majority of the population. And then we will proceed with the social transformation of our country. But I can't see any of this happening simply by having apartheid removed from the statute books.

FM: What is your analysis of the differences within the Black trade union movement between COSATU and NACTU?

Cooper: There is, in fact, very little difference between these two trade union federations, and the mature leadership in both federations recognizes this. Sections of COSATU, for instance, attend the functions of the National Forum and actively support their programs. Sections of CUSA/AZACTU attend the United Democratic Front platforms. Unfortunately party politics and personalities have become involved and prevented the merging of these union federations into one giant federation. I would hope that the current wave of repression will put

an end to this interference.

FM: What do you personally, and AZAPO as an organization, look for from supporters here in the U.S.?

Cooper: We believe that people should support all sections of the liberation movement. They should support specific projects that need support whether they are projects of the ANC, or the PAC, or the UDF, or AZAPO or the National Forum. The tendency within the United States is to support a project that is already well-established. If somebody holds a fundraiser for a project organized by one section of the liberation movement, soon everybody is supporting that project. People need to support projects on their merits.

In a similar vein, I would mention that just as we would not be so arrogant as to tell people in the United States to support Jackson or Dukakis for president, we don't think supporters of our movement in the U.S. should spend their time telling us what we should be doing in our struggle for liberation.

Another weaknesses of the anti-apartheid movement in the United States is that it has not been involved enough in local struggles. People deal with the issue of racism at home vicariously by supporting South African liberation.

These criticisms are not an attack on the anti-apartheid movement as a whole but more a criticism of an approach. Some anti-apartheid forces attempt to choose the modality of struggle and favor one group over another within South Africa. But when a bullet is fired in Soweto, the bullet does not have "ANC" or "AZAPO" written on it. Taking the position of only supporting one group would be as wrong as if we in South Africa were to say that we will support your struggles here in North America if and only if you support Jesse Jackson.

FM: Thank you very much.

Faces of the New Nicaragua

Photographs by Samantha McCormick





Samantha McCormick is a freelance photographer in New York City. She spent the summer of 1987 in Nicaragua. She worked with the Northern Virginia Committee on Central America and the NY-Nicaragua Construction Brigade building houses for farmers in Rio San Juan area of southern Nicaragua.



Between November 1980 and August 1983, three coups d'etat took place in Burkina Faso, an extremely poor, land-locked West African country known as Upper Volta until 1984. The last of these coups, on August 4, 1983, brought to power a radical military regime led by Captain Thomas Sankara. Unlike many other African military governments, this one came to power with the support of political parties and the trade unions. Once in power, Sankara sought participation in his government from the political parties of the Left, all of whom defined themselves as Marxist-Leninist. Sankara and some of his close associates were killed in a coup d'etat of October 15, 1987. Here, Professor Wamba-dia-Wamba assesses the Burkina Faso experience and draws some lessons for liberation and for socialism in Africa today. The article is based on a presentation to the October History Evening, October 23, 1987, at the University of Dar-Es Salaam, Tanzania, where he teaches. Originally from Zaire, Prof. Wamba is a long-time activist and theorist of the African revolution. He taught in the United States for a number of years and also was editor of *Ikwezi* magazine. In December, 1984, *FM* published an interview with Prof. Wamba entitled, "The Front Line in Africa Today."

Upheaval in Burkina Faso Building Socialism In Africa

by Wamba-dia-Wamba

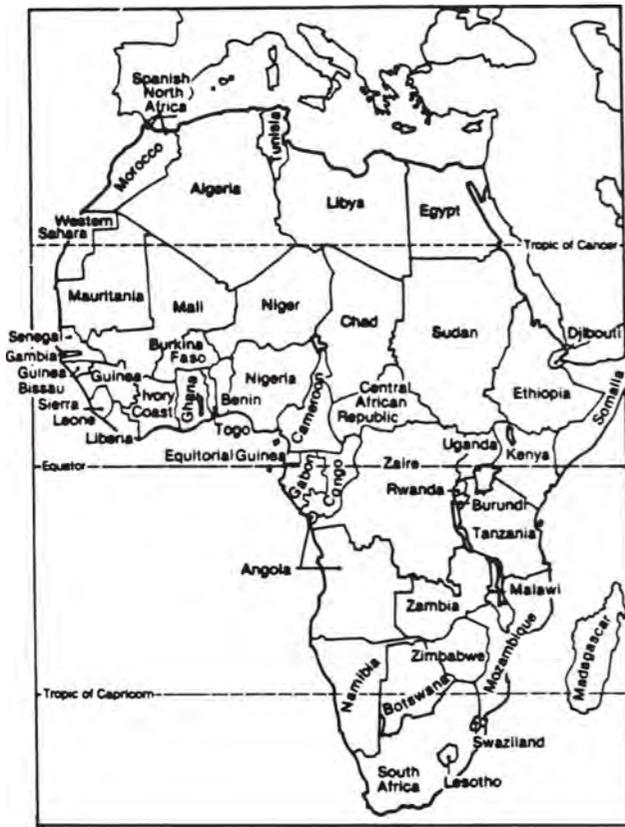
...Nevertheless, our tears should not hide the truth from us.... Treason, comrades, like loyalty, is the property of man. Treason, in Ghana, as in the Congo, as elsewhere in Africa, has a positive aspect: it reveals the real human dimension of the African man. —Amilcar Cabral

Captain President Thomas Sankara (38 years old), one of the most inspiring young leaders Africa has produced, was killed on the 15th of October, 1987 through a bloody—seemingly preemptive—coup d'etat led by his "deputy" and close associate Captain Blaise Compaore (35 years old). Details about the unfolding of the events on that day are not yet known. What is known is that this was a great loss, as great as that of Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice E. Lumumba, Samora Machel, or Amilcar Cabral—to mention only a few.

This very promising leader came from a small West African Sahalian country—half the size of France. The country was renamed Burkina Faso, or the "land of the dignified or incorruptible men," in August 1984 by Captain Thomas Sankara, its new revolutionary leader. Upper Volta, as the country had been called previously, was created twice by French imperialism. Carved first in 1919 out of the French territories of Niger, the Ivory Coast and Sudan (Mali), Upper Volta was administered separately until 1932. In that year, it was partitioned among the three other territories and ceased to exist as an independent entity. To satisfy its promising neocolonial "chiefly" forces [the traditional tribal hierarchy—ed.], the country was recreated a second time between 1947 and 1959.

Overcoming Neocolonialism

This small land-locked country, geographically and economically linked to the Ivory Coast, Benin and Niger, incarnates all the economic problems our African countries confront. With its soil generally poor



and a climate largely arid, the country has been badly affected by the on-going Sahelian drought. Being one of the world's least developed and poorest countries, Burkina Faso has about one million people working as laborers in neighboring countries, especially in the Ivory Coast.

The most important diagnosis of the country's economic problems was made by Thomas Sankara's National Revolutionary Council (CNR) after the coup d'état of August 4th, 1983. The country has been suffering from a perennial and massive deficit in foreign trade. Its agriculture is based on archaic structures and methods of production. Backward and regressing, agriculture today is unable to provide for even the 1960 level of consumption and contributes only about 45% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product). About 80% of the active population is occupied in this sector. The country's small industry faces very high costs of production and a high rate of enterprise bankruptcy due to the costs of importing working materials, a small internal market, savage competition linked to the black market, bad management, and a low average per capita income. The country is also

marked by serious regional disparities and cultural diversity. There are about sixty nationalities with the Mossi constituting the majority. The state budget is too small to intervene seriously in the transformation of the economy. The economy is thus very dependent on external forces.

Given the extremely weak potential of the country, any politics of self-mastery and people's self-emancipation in Burkina Faso faces the Herculean task of balancing the requirements for people's economic survival and preparing for a possible break with the dominant imperialist economic relations. Under the leadership of Captain Thomas Sankara, the CNR committed itself to this challenge.

Trade Unions and Dependent Capitalism

Unlike Sekou Toure's Guinea, Upper Volta voted, in 1958, to integrate into the French Commonwealth (*Communaute*). The country became a French neocolony, obtaining flag independence in 1960. Post-colonial politics have been dominated by struggles between two political blocs, the *pro-colonial camp* and the *anti-colonial/people's camp*. The first camp has been led by petty bourgeois elements allied with the chiefly class and organized through traditional chiefly structures and a "bourgeois" political party—the Voltaic Democratic Union. The UDV started as a regional section of the *Rassemblement Democratique Africain* (RDA). Other political formations arose, the most interesting one being the *Front Progressiste Voltaique* (FPV) led by the historian Ki-Zerbo which is affiliated to the Socialist International. The FPV's connection with a right-wing coup d'état of Col. Saye Zerbo makes its progressivism questionable. This camp has often used the reactionary section of the army to control power.

The dominant and persistent force in the anti-neocolonial camp has been the strong trade union movement. Unions organized major and repeated strikes against anti-people policies of the successive neocolonial regimes. Starting in the 1970s, radical and Marxist (first clandestine and gradually open) study groups and political organizations formed. The anti-neocolonial camp was radicalized, and starting in 1979 a section of the army that had organized itself into the *Rassemblement des Officiers Communistes* (Communist Officers Assembly—ROC) became increasingly involved.

To keep the rule of the pro-neocolonial allies going, the army has had to intervene many times against union-

led mass movements. Between 1960 and 1965, the reactionary civilian rule set in place by President Maurice Yameogo was incapable of curtailing the trade unions and was overthrown by a mass movement dominated by workers' strikes. The army, led by S. Lamizana, had to take over in 1966, initiating a long succession of military or semi-military regimes up to the October 15, 1987 coup d'état.

So far the country has had five coups d'état. It is a mark of the strength of the trade union movement that, despite the small size of the working class, it has persisted even through a series of military regimes. The work of Marxist organizations such as LIPAD-PAI (Patriotic League for Development—Party for African Independence) inside the union movement and the army have likely continued to play an important role in the shifts in the balance of forces between the antagonistic political camps.

The unstable and transitional character of Burkina Faso's political regimes is not an isolated case in African politics. It is indicative of a social formation in transition—i.e., in which the emerging dominant mode of production has not completely subordinated the former one. Such regimes are often subject to military interventions: interventions aimed at either strengthening the emerging dominant mode of production or temporarily supporting the dying one. The dilemma in Burkina Faso may be that the emerging dependent capitalist mode of production has been unable to satisfy even the basic needs of the large masses of people, and yet socio-economic conditions do not permit a revolutionary growth towards socialism. This may be the most fundamental cause of what appears to be severe political instability.

The November 7, 1982 coup d'état which brought Thomas Sankara briefly to the premiership was the first indication of a shift inside the army. Both reactionary and radical tendencies were represented: Major Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo (a French trained military surgeon) represented the reactionary camp as President and Thomas Sankara represented the radical one as Prime Minister.

The reactionaries sought more and more reliance on the West; the others would have relied on the masses of the people. Sankara's arrest on May 17, 1983 broke the unstable alliance. Organized demonstrations demanding Sankara's immediate release followed and gave momentum to the mass movement. Within the army, the radicalization continued, and on August 4th, 1983, supported by some 300 commandos, Thomas Sankara

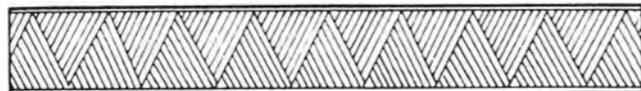
staged a military coup and seized power. Twelve people were killed. Later on, former leaders—including Col. Zerbo, Maurice Yameogo, General Lamizana and two ex-prime ministers were arrested and brought to trial for "various crimes they had committed against the people." Some people, including the historian Ki-Zerbo, had to go into exile, and "reactionary political organizations were proscribed." The accounts of the trials which I have seen indicate that these were relatively fair—for lack of evidence, Maurice Yameogo was even acquitted. (This may say *something* about Blaise Compaore who then was a Minister of Justice.)

Leadership for a New Society

In any case, once in power, the anti-neocolonial camp had difficulty developing greater political unity. After the August 4th, 1983 coup d'état, new organs of revolutionary power appeared. The *Conseil National of the Revolution* (CNR) was the supreme organ of the Democratic Revolution and included, at least at the initial stage, representatives of all but one of the radical organizations. Besides trade unions (*Confederation Syndicale Voltaique* (CSV), etc.), Marxist study circles and the *Organization Militaire Revolutionnaire* (OMR) led by Captains Sankara, Compaore, Zongo and Commandant L. Langai, there were about four known Marxist party formations.

The oldest is the *Party for African Independence* (PAI) and its mass organization, the *Patriotic League for Development* (LIPAD). Said to be pro-Soviet, it is the most structured and best rooted in mass movements. It is said to be close to the CSV trade union and orients its political work towards the trade union movement and sections of the army.

Another group was the *Voltaic Communist Organization* (OCV), which was founded in 1977 and then split in 1979 into the *Union of Communist Struggles* (ULC) and the *Revolutionary Communist Party of Upper Volta* (PRCV). The ULC, modified later as the *Union of Communist Struggles-Reconstructed* is said to have adopted Chinese revolutionary theses. The PRCV is said to be pro-Albanian and opposes military putschism. PRCV alone among the Marxist groups refused from the start to support the CNR and remained clandestine. Thomas Sankara, though rejecting the PRCV's thesis that the August 4th coup d'état was just a military putsch, expressed some respect for the group and agreed with some of its other analyses. It appears that PRCV itself split over the



position to take towards the CNR. A new group which became known as Burkinabe Communist Group emerged.

In addition to the governing CNR, committees for the defense of the Revolution (Comites de defense de la Revolution—CDR), sort of State-created structures of “poder popular” or popular power, were set up. These committees were said to be controlled by the military. The national general secretary of the CDRs was Captain Pierre Ouedraogo, a very close associate of Captain Thomas Sankara. The political status of these CDRs has not been made very clear: were they real structures of “poder popular,” were they simple mass organizations or were they pre-vanguard party elements? The CDRs were said to be centralized and provoked a climate of much suspicion. Their work was heavily oriented towards the rural areas, neglecting the urban workers who were seen as a privileged strata. At the workplaces, the CDRs often *competed*, if not *clashed*, with trade unions, leading Thomas Sankara to declare that trade unions and CDRs should be *complementary*. This did not necessarily lead to a good working relationship between them.

Conflicts Over Democracy

The relationship between the CDRs and various political formations led to some problems. Some organizations were penetrating the CDRs to orient them towards their own political objectives. But the military was determined to maintain control over the CDRs and suspected the activities of these civilian organizations. As Claude Meillassoux put it, “The army can only conceive power on the basis of the model of the military.” The LIPAD-PAI was very critical of the imprecise character of the political status of the CDRs and its military leadership and its constant interference with the trade unions. Of course, the military-controlled CDRs were very vocal in criticizing LIPAD-PAI. If the rumor is true that Blaise Compaore has pro-Soviet tendencies, one can already sense the possibility of conflict within the military revolutionary organization itself.

The political status of the trade union movement has also been an area of conflict. Working with the trade unions, LIPAD-PAI and perhaps PRCV were hostile to the regime’s treatment of trade unions and their leadership. Many cadres of the CSV labor federation were, on and off, being suspended as “obstacles to the Revolution.” Some who were arrested were freed only after the October 15th, 1987 coup d’etat. Trade unions were

sometimes labeled “anarcho-syndicalist.” (Of course, this also reflects the divergences over the whole issue of the revolutionary status of trade unionism in the present world revolutionary movement and in Africa in particular. In the imperialist epoch, trade unionism too has become a capitalist form of regulation of the relationship between capital and labor. What characterizes a combative trade unionism outside of its clear connection with a revolutionary political organization is often not clear.)

The question of the creation and building of a single vanguard party also brought to the fore opposing conceptions and practices between the various political formations. They could not all agree to dissolve and fuse or merge into a pre-vanguard party formation. This question is at the center of the crisis of the present historical forms of politics—parliamentarian versus one party-state forms. This question came to the fore in the mid-1960s, when the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution called for creating single parties of a new type that would not become bourgeois state organs. Despite its failure, tendencies (and temptations) favoring a one party-state system are very high in African self-styled socialist groups.

LIPAD-PAI, for example, has not been willing to dissolve into a larger organization with elements with whom they had strong differences. Those who preferred a large *front* of various organizations still could not agree on the leadership of the front. LIPAD-PAI is alleged to have been using the tactic of dividing the military element to push and impose its views. LIPAD-PAI left the CNR altogether by 1984.

Though the CNR proclaimed the aim of the revolutionary process to be the Democratic Popular Revolution, no political unity on the nature of democracy was in sight. Strengthening the fragile alliance between anti-imperialist junior officers and Marxist political formations depended on the real possibility of democracy. Civilian forces, for example, needed to be able to freely defend their views on how to organize power relations. Of course, until the revolutionary process is a little bit stabilized, there is bound to be a certain arbitrariness in differentiating clearly enemies from friends—especially when the leadership is prone to suspicion. But differences and contradictions among the people had to be resolved without resorting to arms.

Despite all the good intentions of the military revolutionary leadership, the military tendency in handling differences has prevailed. It is said that the regime’s

method of work has tended to be commandist: those who could not—in Thomas Sankara’s words—“cope with the tempo of the revolution” had to be put aside. Suspensions, arrests, detentions, interpellations of even former companions of the August 4th, 1983 coup d’etat have been the regime’s method of seeking clarity.

Class Conflict in the New Society

Trade union militants close to PRCV and CSB (Confederation Syndicale Burkinabe) who were defending democratic rights were in and out of detention the whole year of 1985. Soumane Toure, leader of the CSV federation and a critic of the regime, was detained in January 1985 and held without trial for a long time. Security services were entrusted in the hands of people with no history of respect for democratic rights. A marginalization of the trade union movement favored a growing militarization of the regime.

The working out of class alliance between workers and peasants, central to a revolutionary democratic program, was also an occasion for major conflicts. Does the fact that the peasantry constituted the majority of the imperialist-dominated Burkinabe people mean that the working class (despite its numerical weakness and relatively better position) ought to be marginalized? No, since fundamental political issues facing the revolution are tied to the relationship between the peasantry and the workers. A strategy needed to be worked out in which neither of the two class partners are marginalized.

In the case of Burkina Faso, this came down to some very specific issues of policy in relation to the working class. Was it appropriate to ask the salaried employees to contribute up to 12% of their salaries, without having discussed the issue with them, as a development levy, especially in the critical conditions they live in? Soumane Toure did express his reservations on this and said that although the workers supported the CNR’s policy, they resented the fact that they were not consulted. Revolutionary program, after all, is not something conceived by “representatives of the victims” for the victims. The task is to make the victims conceptualize and live their own program. Should the program of austerity be realized against workers’ interests? The real problem here is also one of revolutionary initiative. Divergence of views on this issue existed as well.

The question of democracy deals also with the question of whether or not the state should organize “voluntary work.” How to bring the masses of people to

do things for themselves—including to self-emancipate—without the threat of violence or more cultural imposition (indoctrination)?

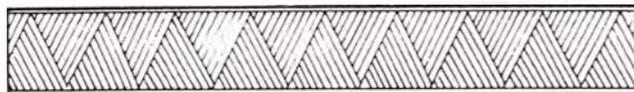
International Alliances

One of the most controversial domains of revolutionary politics in Africa revolves around external alignments. Given national consolidation along colonial borderlines (reproduced in the OAU Charter), how to pursue a foreign policy of *bon voisinage* [good neighborliness] that does not open the country to superpower world hegemonist conflicts—directly or by proxy? True national independence, in our epoch, requires that the leadership of the movement for national independence be organizationally, ideologically and politically independent from contending world centers. Otherwise, national independence is sacrificed or the country degenerates into an opportunist pragmatism.

Since independence, Upper Volta has been a pro-West neocolony with a budget often balanced by French aid. The country is surrounded by pro-West neighbors and its economic structure remains fundamentally tied to Western interests. Despite the new regime’s intentions and real attempts to change the situation, things have not yet changed fundamentally.

With the politico-military revolution on, should there be a one step back for two steps forwards in the economic field as a transitional tactic for the fundamental change needed? But, would not neighbors threatened by a possible revolution in their own countries and their imperialist allies use the country’s weakness to destroy the revolutionary attempts? Populist economic decisions—free housing, free education, etc.—are survival issues for the people. Still, they do not help alleviate the country’s external dependence.

The content of so-called proletarian internationalism, since the Sino-Soviet conflict has become somewhat ambiguous; does it also include the transfer of ready made state apparatuses? Trips to Cuba, the USSR, the People’s Republic of China, North Korea, Eastern Europe, Libya, etc., by both Thomas Sankara and Blaise Compaore—besides other Burkinabe officials—must have allowed some elements to throw more oil on an already fiery debate. Projected basic industrial and agricultural projects *did* require massive foreign investments to be realized. Socialists countries were not coming forth to take over the burden. Captain President Sankara had to enter into new agreements of cooperation with an in-



creasingly conservative France. That, of course, could not have helped resolve the three conflicting tendencies—anti-imperialist non-alignment; anti-imperialist alignment to the Socialist camp; or ideological anti-imperialism but economic alignment to the West in practice.

The country's economic structure and the type of internal social base almost seemed to impose *vacillation in foreign affairs*. The results in Burkina Faso raise the thorny question: is it possible to depend on the West or even the East and strictly win in the economic side of the revolution in Africa? Answering this in part depends on what lessons we as African people draw from Mozambique's Nkomati Accord.

Slipping Into Crisis

Those are some of the areas of conflict within the people's camp. A specifically democratic way of handling contradictions among the people is required to reach a consensus on at least some of them. The new regime, however, tended to increasingly marginalize the social forces that were instrumental to the success of the August 4th 1983 coup d'état. In particular, a lot was done to frustrate and marginalize the union movement. After just a year, the LIPAD-PAI forces had to leave the CNR; all their ministers, except one, were out of the government and some of them were arrested.

By 1986, remaining civilian forces within the regime lost influence in the leadership of the country. Under the leadership of Captain Pierre Ouedraogo, the CDRs—in charge of mass organization and mobilization—had become dominated by the military element. It was alleged for example, that Captain President Sankara wanted to force Marxist organizations to merge into an organization to work for a single vanguard party. The military element ceased being controlled by the masses of people (from below); it could not just continue being revolutionary on the basis of commitment to a "revolutionary ideology or morality." An organization arrived at through military persuasion is unlikely to be a competent leading core of the whole people.

Certain decisions were implemented without preliminary democratic consensus from the people involved: measures of austerity, reduction of allowances, development taxes ranging from 5% to 12% of salaries, etc. The arrest of union militants and political attacks against LIPAD-PAI led to a weakening of the regime's social basis. The resolution of the military conflict over the

borderline with Mali did not revitalize and consolidate national enthusiasm as the CNR had hoped.

The military element, unfortunately, became increasingly the core of the leadership of the revolution and conflicts within the leadership tended to be experienced as conflicts inside the military. I don't know for sure the organizational sympathies Blaise Compaore held outside of the military revolutionary organization. We don't know which Marxist-Leninist tendency he favors. The few statements of his which I have seen would make it appear that he holds a more dogmatic line, even if at *the same time* (or maybe because of it) objecting to Sankara's methods of handling contradictions among the people.

These are but a few elements for a background to understand the still not very clear circumstances which led to the assassination of one of Africa's most promising revolutionary leaders. A self-educated man, very gifted in oratory, this brave and charismatic leader will still be remembered for time to come.

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Union Victory In Boston

Hospitals Laundry Workers Organize

by Gene Bruskin

Between June 1 and November 12, 1987, Local 66 of the Laundry and Dry Cleaning International Union organized 200 workers at Boston's Hospitals Laundry Association (HLA). This is the largest private sector unit organized in the city in 5-10 years. HLA is the largest laundry in New England, processing 28,000,000 pounds of hospital linen in 1986. It is a non-profit business, cooperatively owned by 27 major Boston area hospitals.

HLA employees are overwhelmingly non-English speaking immigrant workers. Approximately 100 Cape Verdeans, whose primary language is Creole/Portuguese, make up the biggest group. There are also approximately 50 Puerto Ricans, 15 Dominicans, 15 Blacks, 10 whites (primarily in maintenance) and 10 workers of various other nationalities. A significant core of workers, about half, have five or more years of service.

July: Beginnings of the Drive

HLA's benefit package was adequate, comparable to that offered by local hospitals, and included a pension. The big issue was wages: starting pay was \$4.00 and ranged to \$7.00 for 15-25 year workers. Additionally, the work week was a compulsory 6 days and 54 hours. Fifty percent or more had second jobs. Other major issues included protection from unfair discipline and lack of respect.

The drive began as a result of an anonymous phone call received in late May, advising us that the original manager of HLA (25 years in control) had retired and that conditions were now ripe to organize. The caller left four names and phone numbers which, on follow-up, resulted in one contact, whom I'll call S. S. had been pushed out of HLA for union activities shortly before we met him. He and one currently employed worker, L., had collected close to 80 names on a

Gene Bruskin is an organizer for Local 66 of the Laundry and Dry Cleaning International Union. Formerly, he was a leader in USWA 8751, the Boston school bus drivers union (See April-May 1986 FM).





petition from people who signed an untitled company form, after having been told verbally that signing the form indicated interest in forming a union. S. gave me the only two pages of the petitions he could find, with approximately 40 names on them (no addresses or phone numbers). He also told me how to reach L., the HLA worker who had helped him. I made contact with her at HLA and then at her home.

During the month of June, I did research on HLA, got license plate numbers to obtain addresses and tried to set up a meeting through L. with a group of potential organizing committee leaders. L. was unable to set up the meeting for several consecutive Sundays for a variety of reasons, although she insisted that everyone wanted the union. Prior to June 27, when it looked like L. would be able to set up a meeting, the company called a meeting for all HLA workers. This was done to respond to the prior petition campaign, rather than my activities. At this meeting they gave a 30 cent raise, an added afternoon break and a tee shirt. (They also promised double time if people would work on July 4 and then didn't pay it.) As a result of this meeting, L. said that sentiment had shifted, people were scared and no one would come to a meeting. She appeared to be backing off as well.

The Cape Verdean Workers

I met some of the Black workers who hang outside the liquor store near HLA and found considerable union support. The clear message they gave, as did L., was that

the union would "never get the Portuguese" (referring to the Cape Verdeans). This statement was usually accompanied by prejudiced characterization of Cape Verdeans as scared workaholics. I decided to focus my work in July on house visits to Cape Verdeans based on my license plate lists and some addresses I got through the phone book, using names from the earlier petition campaign.

The Cape Verdeans were, by and large, interested but very scared. Language was an immediate problem, and initially I relied mostly on the family teenagers to translate. Occasionally I used my primitive Spanish. By and large the issue for them was money although "respect" seemed to strike a chord, along with job security. Many of the workers didn't know what a union was. For the most part family members were very supportive. There were quite a few HLA Cape Verdean workers who had night cleaning jobs at the John Hancock and who were members of SEIU Local 254, which generally created a pro-union feeling. Also, there were many positive connections to the Hotel Workers Union. There was a web of intricate family connections between HLA Cape Verdean workers that I was able to tap, despite extreme caution on the workers' part. I revisited leaders on several occasions. The entire HLA campaign in the Cape Verdean community benefited enormously from the geographical limits of the small Boston Cape Verdean community in which most of the Cape Verdean workers lived within a mile of each other.

During July, I made considerable effort to make connections in the Cape Verdean community, particularly



with the Church. Padre Pio, the Catholic priest of the Cape Verdean congregation, was very supportive and had a 30 year history with people in the community. He is held in very high regard. I also made favorable contacts with the local radio station, grocery store, Cape Verdean Civic Associations and progressive individuals. I drew heavily on these people for translations and support once the campaign got underway. I appealed to them basically on the principal of helping to raise the conditions of life for other Cape Verdeans.

August: Card Signing Blitz

In late July, I re-contacted L. to let her know that the Cape Verdeans were responsive. She gave me a list of 20 workers' addresses and phone numbers, mostly Latin. Eleven members of L.'s family worked at HLA.

On August 10, Local President David Brenner and I conferred with a number of union and community leaders and decided on our strategy—a variation of the blitz approach taught by Richard Bensinger, then of ACTWU and now with AFL-CIO in Washington. Basically, we would do intensive home visits for one week, culminating in an open meeting on Sunday, August 16 at the church at which we would ask people to sign cards for the first time. That evening we met with L., 2 Cape Verdeans, one Black worker and one of L.'s relatives to plan and discuss August 16.

For the week prior to the first meeting everyone we had met or had an address for was visited at home. The

house visits were done by Local 66 and supporters. Out of the 75 who were visited, over 40 people showed up at the first meeting. It was held at the church in the Cape Verdean community and announced both at the church service and in the church bulletins. This meeting, as every subsequent one, was conducted in English, Spanish and Creole. The meeting consisted of a short (15 minute) presentation by the union followed by extensive testimony by the workers on why they wanted a union. This proved exciting, and at the conclusion of the meeting, every worker present signed a card.

Each worker was asked to go back to their work place the next week to sign up the other workers. I met daily with selected people after work to collect their cards. Intensive home visits continued. The company appeared to be caught completely off guard and made no immediate response. Apparently they didn't take the activity seriously since over the past twenty-five years, all previous rumblings for a union had failed. Also, HLA had already made its move in July by giving a raise.

The following Sunday a second meeting was held to complete the card signing. Over 40 people showed up, half new. Everyone signed up and on Monday, August 24 we filed for an election with approximately 110 cards. Card signing continued and eventually reached close to 150.

To dispel the fear of company reprisal and to bring public pressure to bear on HLA, we held an August 26 rally and press event at the plant gate at dismissal time, in the full view of company management. Close to 50

workers attended and stood behind the union banner. City councilors, other union leaders and workers' representatives spoke. The rally resulted in articles in the *Boston Globe*, *Bay State Banner* [a Black community weekly], some radio coverage and a spot on Cable Network News.

September: Battle Goes Public

The additional crucial element in the campaign, along with home visits, was the building of a strong organizing committee. There was a tremendous amount of fear and hesitancy, especially among the Cape Verdean workers. Those that gave me names and addresses generally made me promise not to tell people where I got their address. Workers visited at home generally did not speak with friends or relatives at work about the visit for fear people would go to the company with the information. The most outspoken and interested workers received multiple house visits. We encouraged their leadership and participation on the organizing committee and listened carefully to their doubts. This consistent encouragement and listening was crucial in changing people. Also, the organizing committee did not form until the first open meeting was held, which broke down a great deal of the fear.

The organizing committee met every Sunday at the church throughout the campaign. This required considerable commitment from people who work six days at HLA and in many cases have evening jobs. Over 40 people participated in the organizing committee meetings during the campaign with an average of 18 in attendance. The organizing committee make-up reflected the sex and nationality composition of the work force.

The major focus of the meetings was leadership development and training. Efforts were made to go around the room at every meeting and have each worker speak to a question like, "Why do you want to be a leader at HLA?" or "What is the union sentiment in your area of the laundry this week?" People's leadership was regularly praised and supported. Local 66 representatives tried to encourage confidence at all times. We also spent considerable time preparing the committee for what to expect from the company and how to talk to the other workers about it. The committee became bolder and more enthusiastic throughout.

In early September HLA hired Modern Management (MM—now called Positive Personal Practices) as their consultants for the campaign. The company's first move



was to try to stall the process at the NLRB hearing by questioning the maintenance workers' inclusion in the unit and by calling our petition premature due to HLA's plans to relocate to a more modern plant in Dorchester (three miles from the present location). This only bought them a couple of extra weeks since they admitted to the Board that the work force would move with them and perform essentially the same work.

The NLRB hearings aided the union since the company revealed details about their plans to spend \$5-\$10 million moving and modernizing the plant—a figure we used to show they could afford to pay better. Also at the hearing the company provided the union with a list of workers by department, as part of their NLRB case documentation.

Immediately after filing, rumors were spread throughout the laundry that specific benefits and privileges would be lost. This was a continuous theme from the company's side throughout. The closer we came to the election, the more the threats were tailored: pregnant women were told they would lose their pregnancy benefits, older workers their pensions, etc. In addition to the rumors, certain supervisors were fairly blatant with their threats; the company was not concerned about unfair labor practices.

Modern Management Arrives

MM attempted to work through the supervisors, but apparently met with some resistance and lack of enthusiasm. A number of the supervisors were sympathetic to the union and, in many cases, friends and family with the workers. Most of the supervisors were former workers, many of them Black. In addition, the Black supervi-



sors, in particular, were hindered by the language barrier from being very effective with the majority non-English speaking work force. The MM relied very heavily on one plant-wide Cape Verdean supervisor and one Cape Verdean worker. They circulated regularly, making one-on-one threats, such as "you'll lose your health care if the union comes in," etc. In some cases people were called into the office.

MM was unable to organize any functioning anti-union committee until the closing weeks of the campaign. Although there was considerable fear, there was very little anti-union sentiment. The people on the committee that the company eventually formed had never had very much credibility among the workers. All the natural leaders and popular workers had union sympathies.

MM letters to the workers were fairly standard, talking about the fact that the union couldn't guarantee any improvements, raising the issue of strikes and focusing people's attention on one of Local 66's weakest contracts. Near the end of the campaign the company brought back the well-respected former long-time head of the company to make a personal appeal. He also wrote a letter asking for a "no" vote.

MM made a serious error with the introduction of "Vote No" tee shirts in late October in response to our button campaign. They tried, mistakenly, to get people to pay \$6.00 for the tee shirts. Very few bit, so they dropped their price to \$2.00. They still couldn't sell, so they resorted to heavy pressure tactics from the supervisors to get people to buy them. Even when they succeeded for a day or so in getting as many as 50 people wearing shirts, the workers knew that many of the tee shirt wearers were union supporters who were wearing

the shirts to placate the company. Others bought the shirts because they were cheap, took them home and in some cases mailed them as gifts to family in Cape Verde.

October: Drive Gains Momentum

The union's response to Modern Management included a September plant rally to report on the NLRB hearing (40-50 attending), regular house visits and several leaflets. Also, we won a \$30,000 back pay settlement through the Department of Labor involving approximately 25 workers who were cheated out of their overtime, going back two years. This gave concrete evidence to the workers that learning their rights by unionizing paid off.

On October 6, shortly before the NLRB directed that an election be set, the company gave everyone a 5% raise. Some raise is given yearly in October and in this case included 20 cents immediately and the rest on each worker's anniversary date. The union had planned with the organizing committee to disrupt the meeting with a series of questions challenging the company. (The day before, 25 members of the organizing committee signed a leaflet). The lead disrupter didn't lead and the meeting wasn't disrupted, but the raise was seen by most as 20 cents only, not 5%, and didn't change people's sympathies. Also, due to a loss of business, overtime was reduced at this time so people's checks actually shrunk.

On October 5, Local 66 began a two week strike at Morgan, another union laundry, which resulted in a \$6.00 starting rate. This became an important aid to the union at HLA since the company had been flashing some of our poorer contracts, but the \$6.00 rate was \$2.00 more than new HLA workers received.

The company did try one more captive audience meeting in October which the committee disrupted by questioning why they hired a \$1,000.00 a day consultant (MM) and raising other issues that the workers applauded. HLA had no answers and called no more meetings during the campaign, although they did serve a very extravagant lunch one day, with no speeches.

House Visit Campaign

Once the election date was set we concentrated our major efforts on our house visits. We had from two to five teams (pairs) of house visitors (volunteers) out every night and on the weekends for the final 3-4 weeks. People were paired up according to language ability, union

experience and availability of cars. Teams were briefed and de-briefed daily on the particulars of the people they were visiting and the current controversies at the plant. Assignments were given with consideration of the match between the visitors and the worker.

One training workshop focusing on home visit techniques was given for ten volunteers by Richard Bensing of the AFL-CIO D.C. organizing department. We developed a home visit agenda and got more volunteers excited about the visits. Even where the teams were inexperienced, the visits brought a personal contact that was very valuable as a weight against the company's fear tactics. Also, the families of the workers were very much involved in discussions during the house visits and were generally very supportive to the workers.

November: "It Feels Like A Union"

For the week prior to the election we arranged for daily delegations of politicians, labor and community leaders and clergy to visit HLA unannounced to complain about their anti-union campaign. The intent of the delegations was to divert the company from their campaign in the closing days, tying up their time through meetings or at least creating some confusion. For the most part HLA was able to lock out the delegations, eventually installing a bell that prevented them from entering the office area. One delegation walked into the laundry production area and created a flurry of confusion among the supervisors. People recognized the head of the hotel union and it impressed them that the union had the strength to just walk in. On the whole, however, the delegations had no visible impact.

At an earlier point (September) we asked those unions with bargaining units in HLA-affiliated hospitals to write letters from their units. The letters were addressed to the hospitals' chief administrators, complaining about their collusion in the anti-union tactics and asking for a meeting. Only two letters got written, and they had no noticeable impact. The intent here had been to begin to put outside pressure on the company to rein in their anti-union campaign.

A turning point for Local 66 came at our last open meeting. We had held an open meeting two weeks before which brought out the extended organizing committee of 35-40 people—basically the broad leadership core. The final meeting turned out over 60 workers. Outreach for the meeting was intensive. For every organizing committee and open meeting prior to this, all

workers were called in their own language just prior to the meeting. This time they were also called earlier in the week. Rides were arranged. A mailing was done and house visits highlighted the upcoming meeting. The organizing committee was also responsible for providing rides.

The meeting was very successful on two levels—it created great spirit and enthusiasm ("it felt like a union") and we carefully explained and, in exact detail, role-played the election procedure. (We discovered that, in addition to widespread illiteracy, very few workers had ever voted in anything. This meeting supplemented the attention we paid to the problem in our home visits.)

Also at this meeting we had supporters from the respective communities of the workers address the meeting. Rhythmic clapping ("the unity clap"), taught at earlier meetings, broke out regularly. The high point came with the singing, in three languages, of "We Shall Not Be Moved," led by the women's union song group, *On the Line*. The meeting ended with a "why I want a union" speakout. Enthusiasm was very high.

The Final Week

The meeting gave us considerable momentum for the final days. We handed out something on each of the last four days: On Monday, two stickers, one with a "vote yes" box (a ballot facsimile) and one listing our issues: pay, job security and respect. On Tuesday, we handed out an "I'm voting union" leaflet with a group picture and over 60 signatures. On Wednesday (Veteran's Day—most were working), we reissued our "holiday 1 1/2 pay" leaflet and on Thursday we handed out "vote yes" palm cards.

In the final days the company escalated the threats, one-on-one, and brought in popular former managers to work on people.

The final vote was 93-58. The NLRB challenged 12 names, mostly because of spelling and prefixes (DePina was listed as Pina, etc.). The actual count (9 of the challenges were organizing committee people) would have been 102-61. Six to ten yes votes were on vacation or sick. 183 people were eligible to vote, with a dozen or more new hires ineligible. About ten workers were brought in by the union to vote from sick leave, pregnancy, etc.

Overall, the campaign required extensive volunteer support since the Local 66 staff and resources are very limited. Besides the organizer, we had one secretary, the

president (with seven contracts expiring in September and October) and one part-time business agent. At the same time, a "house visit" based campaign strategy for 200 largely non-English speaking workers requires considerable staffing.

Assessment: Volunteers and Support

Approximately 100 volunteers worked on the campaign. They broke down into the following categories (with some overlap): 25 house visitors, 33 translators, 21 community delegates, 25 who gave other assistance.

There were varied sources of volunteer help. Hotel and Restaurant Workers Local 26 actually assigned two staff organizers to our drive for the final two weeks. Several SEIU locals lent some personnel, as did ACTWU—especially for house visits. SEIU 254 and District 1199 wrote supporting letters and participated in community delegations.

Sources of volunteers included other unions, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, Massachusetts Labor Support Project, *The Labor Page* [a Boston area labor monthly], the Cape Verdean Community, Local 66 rank and file, community, religious and political leaders, and personal contacts.

We had one volunteer, a recent college graduate, who worked full time in the fall for only token wages in order to gain organizing experience. In effect, he became a second organizing staff person.

The primary appeal to volunteers was on the importance of this campaign for the workers involved as well as the significance of the campaign for the labor movement in the area. We attempted to convey the excitement and the progress of the drive, and people responded willingly.

Sources of Success

Several factors were critical to our victory. The company made mistakes. It moved too soon, in July, with a pay raise before Local 66 became involved, and then it relaxed. Consequently we were able to successfully blitz them and file with well over 100 cards before they could react.

After that our focus on house visits seemed to offset MM's focus on one-to-one intimidation in the plant. The success of the house visit campaign reflected the many volunteers we were able to recruit and carefully coordi-

nate.

The company focused heavily on some of our weak contracts in September. But by winning our October strike at Morgan's with less than a month to go in the campaign, we had the answer to their main attack. Local 66 had established a \$6.00 starting wage in Boston.

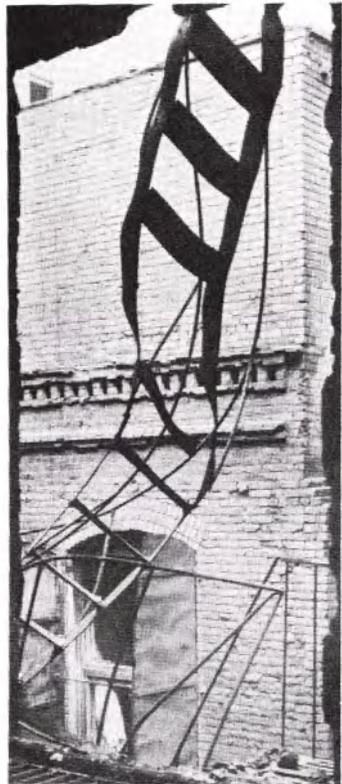
Modern Management made a tactical error in October by first trying to sell people "vote no" tee shirts for \$6.00 and, that failing, trying to intimidate workers into buying them. This signaled an increasingly negative and threatening approach by HLA for the remainder of the campaign, which made them sound like losers and bullies.

Another crucial factor in the campaign's success was the broad support we received from leaders in the Cape Verdean community, especially the Church. Padre Pio, most highly respected by the community, wrote a letter to the workers urging them to vote for the union just before the election. The continuing role of the Church as a meeting place was also very reassuring to people throughout.

Although the union made small errors along the way, we made no moves that significantly hurt us. For the most part our timing and judgement were on the mark.

The company did not appeal the election results: our margin of victory had been solid. Also, HLA wants to relocate and, to do so, needs additional resources from member hospitals. A tribute to our success in the drive, they feared that a drawn-out labor dispute, which we threatened to make very public, could endanger the laundry's future. Through the community delegation visits we had demonstrated that Local 66 had a considerable base of support among other unions, community leaders and politicians. A newly respectful HLA chose not to challenge the union's strength.

On April 6, Hospitals Laundry workers ratified their union contract by 83 to 2. The contract raised the starting rate \$1.00 per hour, guaranteed all workers at least the equivalent of a fifty cents per hour raise, included a 100% coverage neighborhood-based medical plan as well as raises for more than \$2.00 per hour in some cases. The next steps will include electing and training stewards, translating the contract and seeking arrangements to bring a union-sponsored English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher into the laundry for daily classes. The union is on its way! ■



Survivor's Cento

All through the day rain ever and again.
 The quartet from the Elks Lodge sang "Abide with Me."
 They have lost both daughters, Sara and Sarafine.
 Last year I was one of the pickets arrested and fined.
 We were striking for open doors, better fire escapes.
 Freda Velakowski, Ignatzia Bellota, Celia Eisenberg.
 You knew the families from the flowers nailed to the doors.
 That's my mama. Her name's Julia Rosen.
 I know by her hair. I braid it every morning.
 Now the same police who clubbed the strikers
 keep the crowd from trampling on our bodies.
 Sadie Nausbaum, Gussie Bierman, Anna Cohen, Israel Rosen.
 I know that's my daughter, Sophie Salemi.
 See that darn in her knee? Mended her stockings, yesterday.
 Box one-twelve: female, black stockings, black shoes,
 part of a skirt, a white petticoat, hair ribbons.
 I would be a traitor to these poor burned bodies
 if I came to talk good fellowship: Jennie Franco,
 Julia Aberstein, Joseph Wilson, Nicolina Nicolese.
 I found a mouse on the ninth floor, took it home,
 kept it for a pet. At least it was still alive.
 Our children go to work in firetraps, come home and sleep
 in firetraps. Day and night they are condemned.
 Ninth floor looked like a kindergarten. We were eight,
 nine, ten. If the Inspector came, they hid us in bins.
 Rose Feibush, Clotild Terdanova, Mary Leventhal.
 That one's Catherine Maltese, and those, her daughters.
 Lucia, she's twenty. Rosalie--she'd be fourteen.
 Those two are sisters. Bettina and Frances Miale. M-I-A-L-E.
 We asked the Red Cross worker how to help
 and she said bring books--Tolstoy, Shakespeare in Yiddish.
 Benny Costello said he knew his sister Della by her new shoes.
 Anna Ardito, Gussie Rosenfield, Sara Kupla, Essie Bernstein,
 reminders to spend my life fighting these conditions. Antonia
 Colleti, Daisy Lopez Fitze, Surka Brenman, Margaret Schwartz.
 One coffin read: Becky Kessler, call for tomorrow.
 The eighth casket had neither name nor number. It contained
 fragments from the Fire, picked up but never claimed.

Cento is a Latin word for a garment made of patches.

Reprinted by permission from **Fragments From the Fire: The Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire of March 25, 1911**, by Chris Llewellyn (New York: Penguin, 1987). Chris Llewellyn identifies herself primarily as a "labor poet." Llewellyn received the 1986 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets.

Jury of Peers

Morris Baum, sales.
 Leo Abraham, real estate.
 Abraham Akerstrom, clerk.
 Arlington Boyce, management.
 H. Houston Hierst, importer.
 Harry Roeder, painter.
 William Ryan, sales.
 Victor Steinman, shirts.
 Anton Scheuerman, cigars.
 Charles Vetter, buyer.

Mister Hierst summarized:
 I've listened to the witnesses
 and my conscience is clear.
 Harris and Blanck are pretty
 good managers. We've reached
 the decision that the type
 of girl you have at Triangle
 is basically less intelligent.
 Hell, excuse me, Your Honor,

But most of em can't even read
 or speak English--and the way
 they live! They're lots
 less intelligent than the
 type of female you find
 in other walks of life. I mean
 that kinda worker is more--
 well--susceptible to panic.
 Emotional females can't

Keep a clear head they
 panicked and jumped my
 conscience is clearly
 Act of Almighty
 God they jumped
 conclusion Your
 Honor owners
 of Triangle
 not guilty.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Ninth Floor Reprise

Fifty-eight girls crowded into a cloakroom.

The glass blackens and shatters.
Who will come for us?

Up on Tenth, typists and bookkeepers leave
ledgers to ashes, machines to melt.
The packers and switchboard-lady gone
the phone cords and crate slats spurt
split into stars and meteors.

Up on Tenth, our finished shirtwaists unfold,
crack the crates, jump upright, join sleeves,
dance the hora and mazurka, spin like dreidels.
They call to us, their makers:
Stitcher, Presser, Cutter, Tucker.

"I saw them piled," testified Fireman Wohl,
"they pressed their faces toward a little window."

The Day When Mountains Moved

The mountain-moving day is coming.
I say so, yet others doubt.
Only awhile a mountain sleeps.
In the past
All mountains moved in fire
Yet you may not believe it.
Oh man, this alone believe
All sleeping women now will
awake and move.

--Yosano Akiko, 1911



Tradeswomen, Inc.

First Day on a New Jobsite

Never again a first day like the
First Day

that Very First one,
when only the sternest vigilance
kept the right foot following the left
following the right following the left,
each step a decision, a victory of
willpower over fear, future over past.
*Margaret's out there/Keep going/
She's been working a few
weeks already/She's managing/
Keep going/The legs buck
LA/Seattle/Detroit/women passing
through construction site gates for the
first time/Keep going/Right following
Go home if you want!/But
tomorrow/What'll you do for work
tomorrow?/left following right up to
the gate*

where a man hands me hardhat and
goggles and points me toward a trailer
where the conversation

stops
as I enter:

*Well, what'll we talk about now.
Can't talk about girls.*

And then Ronnie, the one with beady eyes
and a gimp leg, who knows for a fact--
one of the girl apprentices
is a stripper in the Zone--
says to my partner

Give me your apprentice
and I follow him, tripping over cinderblocks,
to a small room

where he points to the ceiling:
*I need some hangers 11 inches off the ceiling/
Here's the Hilti/
The rod and strut are in the corner/
The ceiling's marked where I want
holes drilled and leaves*

without
explaining
hanger
rod

Reprinted from *It's a Good Thing I'm Not Macho: a cycle of poems*, by Susan Eisenberg (Boston: Whetstone Press, 94 Green St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130; 1984). Susan Eisenberg is a poet, playwright, and electrician, living in Boston. In 1982, she graduated from IBEW 103's four-year Apprenticeship Program, in its first class to include women. Eisenberg has recently developed a touring performance piece of work poems by twenty-one worker poets called *Coffee Break Secrets*.

8:00 p.m.

monday through friday
she phones every night
on her 8 o'clock break
from the telephone
in the warehouse
that's the most quiet

then for ten minutes
she listens to her children
grow

says goodbye
hangs up

cries more
'til she cries less
and loves
like a lifetime
full of weekends

3:00 a.m.

second-shift lady
upside-down life
comes home to quiet

let the dog out
let the dog in

eat a little something
take a little bath
climb into a warmed-up bed
to snuggle with
her sleepy first-shift man

The drawings are part of a series available as a set of notecards for \$5.00 from Tradeswomen, Inc., Box 40664, San Francisco, CA 94140.

Muscle

Listen!
This is a muscle poem.
Its sounds are loud
and can be frightening
to untrained ears.'

It smells of oil
and sweaty T-shirts,
and steel shavings,
and cleaning compound
on concrete floors.

But for those
who understand,
this poem wears
safety glasses
and steel-toed boots
filled with pride and love.

As to those people
who are only moved
by greed and profits,
I want these words
to drop on them
like a load of steel bars
from a hundred feet
in the air!



The Gay Community Confronts the AIDS Crisis

by Steve Hamilton

It's news to no one that the gay community has been devastated by the AIDS epidemic. The numbers alone tell an agonizing story. As of June 30, 1987 there were 37,867 reported cases of AIDS in the U.S. and 21,776 deaths, and still more than 80% of these were gay and bisexual men. In San Francisco, 97% of the AIDS cases are gay and bisexual men.

However, recent trends also make clear that AIDS knows no "sexual preference." On the east coast, statistics reveal a sharpening increase in the spread of the epidemic among IV drug users, their sexual partners and—in some cases—the children of IV drug users. For instance, fifty percent of new cases in New York are now among IV drug users. And in San Francisco, 15-20% of the IV drug users are testing positive for the virus, which means many of them will be contracting AIDS within a couple of years.

Furthermore—largely because many IV drug users and their associates are Black or Latino—the percentage of racial minorities among AIDS cases nationally is also rising; it is now 40%, a figure which clearly indicates that

AIDS will be taking an increasingly devastating toll on minority communities over the next few years. Public health officials, who have finally recognized this problem, are belatedly targeting these communities for educational campaigns on avoiding risk, and testing and counseling programs. But—as minority gay activists have taken the lead in pointing out—this has been both too little and too late. And adding to the problem has been the reluctance on the part of most leaders in the minority communities (aside from a handful of gay minority activists) to deal with the issue seriously.

Up until now, AIDS infection has still largely been confined to four identified high risk groups: gay and bisexual men, IV drug users and to some extent their sexual partners and children, transfusion recipients (between 1978 and March 1985), and hemophiliacs. Less than 1% of cases in San Francisco and no more than 3% nationally have come from heterosexual contact. And these lopsided figures continue to create problems. Many people still find it too easy not to take the epidemic seriously because they are not at significant risk.

And many still openly scapegoat the victims, whom they assume are gays or drug addicts and thus deserving of their fate. Nonetheless, far greater numbers of heterosexuals are now taking the epidemic seriously, which in turn has led to increased funding (though not enough) for AIDS-associated health care and research.

But there are dangers to look out for here as well. This belated heterosexual concern about AIDS may create a backlash of even greater homophobia, fear and hysteria; and it could prompt increased pressure for punitive approaches against those who are infected, approaches that are uninformed and ineffective as well as mean-spirited.

A Social Epidemic

There is no question now that AIDS has become a full-scale epidemic. Estimates are that perhaps 1.5 million people in the U.S. (mostly gay men and IV drug users) have been infected. Also, current statistics indicate that many of those who test positive but do not yet show symptoms will eventually develop AIDS. The largest study, the City Clinic study in San Francisco, found that of those who had been positive an average of more than six years, 30% had AIDS, 48% had some AIDS-related symptoms and 22% were asymptomatic. It is not clear that everyone infected will get symptoms, nor that everyone with minor symptoms will progress to more serious symptoms, but this is the general direction.

Why has the virus spread so extensively among gay men but not the general population? Two reasons. Casual (and even anonymous) sex is a more accepted standard in the gay male community than anywhere else. (I'll return later to changes of attitude regarding this issue.) The second and more important reason is that the virus is a difficult one to pick up—one of the more difficult to transmit of the sexually transmitted diseases—and it so happens that anal intercourse is a particularly effective way of transmitting it, in both homosexual and heterosexual populations. (A recent study by a group of doctors at the University of California, Berkeley showed that a large number of the relatively few heterosexual transmissions were probably by way of anal intercourse.) Gay men who have oral, not anal, sex rarely test positive. It's that simple. It's not the vengeance of God, nor karma, nor does it even have much to do with "depleted immune systems" as some doctors were saying early on.

Obviously, the impact on the gay community has been enormous. Almost all gay men are either dealing



Ellen Shubb/Boston Aids Action Update

A member of the Cambridge Haitian-American Association counsels Haitians with AIDS.

with AIDS-related symptoms themselves or have several close friends who have died or are dealing with sickness and the prospect of death. The obituary page has become a prominent feature of the gay press. A large cadre of health and social service workers are enlisted in one or another facet of AIDS education, testing, support services, health care services, fundraising or mobilizing around related political issues. Depending on the area, many of these programs receive federal and some city and state support, but many rely primarily on private funding and, thereby, the ongoing mobilization of the gay community. (A 1987 survey done by Randy Shilts in the *San Francisco Chronicle* showed that most cities, including some with the greatest number of AIDS cases such as Chicago, Miami, and Houston have received almost no local or state funding and relied almost entirely on what could be organized from within the gay communities.)

Fighting the "Urge to Test"

Most programs that have been publicly funded grew out of the self-organization of the gay community. Not surprisingly, the resources of the gay—lesbian as well as gay male—communities have been devoted primarily, one might say almost exclusively, to this issue the last few years, and these resources and energies are getting

sorely taxed.

As though that were not enough, after having to fight initially for any serious recognition of the problem at all, now a major focus has become a rearguard defensive battle. Energies are being diverted to fend off punitive and regressive measures that threaten the civil rights of those infected and at risk while squandering resources that could be spent—that *desperately* need to be spent—in direct health care, research for a cure and public education to avoid further infection. The package of bills Senator Doolittle brought before the California state legislature in 1987 are a case in point. They include a bill that would require HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) positive tests be reported to county health officials so that contacts could be traced. The package would also generally relax disclosure laws, test prison and mental hospital patients (involuntarily if necessary), require stiff penalties for anyone knowingly donating infected blood or committing sex crimes and for prostitutes who worked after knowing they were infected. It would implement measures for convincing everyone applying for a marriage license to be tested. Most of these appear to have been temporarily defeated.

A few of these proposals, although not many, might be supportable, but the entire thrust of the legislation is to monitor and penalize AIDS victims as if the problem were people running around knowingly spreading the virus, people who have to be stopped. This has been the story sensationalized by the media (reckless, murderous individuals, who—if they are going to go—want to take a few with them), but this has not been the experience of AIDS-related public health providers. The great majority of people infected do *not* want to spread the virus.

Changing sex habits is not easy, and there *has* been a lag—as anyone would expect—between the gay male community's initial confrontation with AIDS and the development of widespread, effective and voluntary measures for protecting itself against this deadly disease. But there is no doubt: the gay community has been able to marshal a defense against AIDS. Studies in San Francisco, Seattle and Los Angeles show that the rate of infection has leveled off in the last two years in the male gay community. There is also no doubt that education, not harassment, has been the source of this effective change in the male gay community, and will be in other populations as well, even the "hard to reach" intravenous drug population. (Reports have been coming in that IV drug users are learning to use bleach to clean their needles.)

Mandatory testing has been the principal focus of punitive approaches. It gives the impression of doing something, of taking a no-nonsense approach, but it is a poor substitute for the real investment in resources that it will take to bear this epidemic. As an employee of a testing program, I do believe that testing has some useful purpose, *if* it is done voluntarily, *if* anonymity or the strictest safeguards of confidentiality are maintained and *if* it is done in conjunction with adequate counselling and education. Studies have shown that both those who test positive and negative become more careful around risk reduction (whether it is based on the knowledge of their test result or the accompanying counselling is not clear), those infected can take medical and health precautions in a more timely manner (this becomes increasingly important as the prospects for finding effective treatment become brighter, as they have in the last year) and those uninfected can be relieved of a great deal of anxiety. It is not a panacea, however. And testing cannot play even this limited function if people who are actually high risk avoid testing programs for fear of jeopardizing their job, housing, life insurance, health insurance or identifying themselves for a possible quarantine that—in the case of AIDS—would be cruel, totally unnecessary and ineffective. The discrimination already experienced by people with AIDS and ARCs (AIDS Related Condition) makes clear that this fear of reprisal is not the paranoia of a "politically powerful" gay community, as the right-wing likes to say.

But just as important as being punitive, the "urge to test" is also leading us on a detour away from the most crucial component of an effective approach to AIDS: warning those uninfected of the need for caution. Because the epidemic has, as yet, not moved much beyond the identified high risk groups, testing programs are finding the rate of infection for others to be almost zero. At this point, massive testing would be a waste of money. Educating the general population, especially young people who are becoming sexually active, would be a far better use of resources. Advocates of this approach, however, come up against the typical anti-sexual moralizing that still is a mainstay of conservative bourgeois culture. Reality aside, people are not supposed to have sex with different partners outside of marriage; especially young people are not supposed to. To teach young people how to use condoms at their "tender age" challenges the hypocritical sexual morality that birth control educators have always had to contend with.

AIDS and the Gay Political Agenda

So the political agenda of the gay community (lesbian and gay male) has been dominated then for the last five years by, first, the need to fight for increased funding to beat an epidemic that has not only been perceived as but *has* been in fact, largely a "gay disease" and, second, the rearguard fight against stigmatization and discrimination against those infected—largely gay men. We have been, quite literally, "fighting for our lives."

But this is not to deny that politics has continued within the gay community on many levels, much as it would have before. The change is that the AIDS epidemic has become the overwhelming focus for traditional political efforts like trying to get pro-gay officials elected. And I suspect the crisis has also provided a glue that has kept the gay community as a political entity as coherent as it is. But already there are indications that the political basis of unity of those who identify themselves as lesbian or gay has grown rather strained, and the dynamic is toward increased differences, at least over paths to take, if not over goals. Those with a distinctly left perspective in the Lesbian and Gay movement are a vocal but small minority. (In San Francisco the left minority is made up of the leadership of the Mobilization Against AIDS, the Committee for Medical Justice, the left wing of the Harvey Milk Club, and the Stonewall Club.) The dominant leadership has a generally progressive perspective, oriented to the "give and take" politics of electoral politics. This involves the whole spectrum from—at its best—coalition building around practical reforms, to scurrying for elected office or, failing that, relying on alignments with those in elected office.

Recent electoral politics in San Francisco provides an example of the best and the worst in gay politics. Harry Britt, a clearly progressive gay San Francisco Supervisor (member of Democratic Socialists of America) ran for Congress primarily with the support of the lesbian and gay community. He very nearly got the Democratic nomination (tantamount to being elected in San Francisco) against Nancy Pelosi, the mainstream Democratic Party candidate. Britt's campaign was—by and large—clearly left-oriented and (in my opinion) worthy of support. The liberal San Francisco Burton machine supported Pelosi. Assemblyman Art Agnos, also the more liberal candidate for Mayor, is allied with the Burton machine but probably would have stayed neutral in the Congressional race, except that Harry, in an effort to gain some more mainstream allies, struck up a mutual support pact with the more mainstream frontrunner for

mayor, Supervisor John Molinari.

Another odd twist was that *Coming Up!* newspaper, clearly the most left-progressive of the gay community papers (and the one with the strongest base of support among lesbians) supported Pelosi for a range of reasons including the desire to go with the winner, a history of personal animosity with Harry, and perhaps a preference for supporting a woman candidate. Then, when the Congressional race was over and the unity between lesbians and gay men was at a new low, the San Francisco gay community was further torn apart over the Molinari-Agnos mayoral race, in which both candidates strongly courted the gay vote. Such is the usual not-so-pretty terrain of electoral politics.

Many of us on the Left no longer feel that we can stay aloof from electoral politics, but these recent experiences highlight how—in the absence of a political movement with a clearly Left perspective—personal agendas can dominate electoral politics and lead to the disintegration of the sense of a movement. In large part it is the AIDS epidemic which at this point holds together at least the semblance, and to some extent the reality, of a gay movement with unified aims.

The Effect on Social Relationships

I have never liked people saying there is anything positive about the AIDS epidemic. Statements about the "positive side" of this unmitigated disaster are usually based on a critique of personal relationships and lifestyle in the male gay community which imply that gay men have the monopoly on promiscuity. Such statements neglect that there has been a significant loosening up of heterosexual attitudes toward monogamy and promiscuity as well since the 1960's. (Some have viewed this as the revolution in sexual ethics that was made possible by the advent of easily accessible birth control.)



Boston AIDS Action Committee

But stereotypes aside—it is true that, before the AIDS epidemic hit, there wasn't much respect for traditional sexual morality in the gay community. There was an unashamed enjoyment of sexuality among gay men generally, and most felt they had a more natural and accepting attitude toward sexuality than that in the straight community around them. Studies have shown that although about one out of two gay men was involved in a relationship prior to the advent of AIDS (about the same number as are today), a large percentage of those relationships were not entirely monogamous, and in some cases, not remotely monogamous. Furthermore, those who were in transition *between* monogamous relationships (like heterosexuals) were often involved in more casual sex.

But it is also true that prior to the AIDS epidemic, many gays were already experiencing a great deal of dissatisfaction with the loneliness that resulted from this de-emphasis on committed relationships and with values that seemed to support an individualistic self-involved lifestyle. Many had been hurt by others' single-minded preoccupations with sexual satisfaction and with questions about whether they did or did not measure up to valued standards; and they found themselves employing the same often superficial standards in the relationships they sought. Many were recognizing that sexual involvements could become an obsessive source of self-gratification (a way of feeling better amidst the anxieties of their lives). They were coming to terms with a problem common to most men—difficulty dealing with the issues of intimacy and commitment. Alternative rules and standards had not yet become clear; it was, however, becoming clear that some greater consideration for one's own emotional and physical health, as well as consideration for that of others, was in order.

Enter AIDS. An unmitigated disaster. But obviously it has had its effects on individuals' attitudes about them-

selves and their relationships. The effects have by no means been entirely positive. Some do blame themselves for their "trashy" excesses of years gone by and, amidst the public spotlight of blame for the AIDS epidemic, probably feel less ok about being gay than before.

Still, surprisingly few gay men have bought into the moralizing, and have reacted in a far more self-respecting and mature way. When gays review their past sexual history, there are often traces of self-reproach, half in jest, but generally there is an affirmation of the positive attitude about sexuality they have acquired and, especially now, a pride in how their community has been a source of support to each other amidst this crisis. For many there has also been a reevaluation of the need for greater quality and depth in relationships and more thoughtfulness regarding the priorities in their lives.

Conclusion

The gay community has been locked into a struggle literally for its life. It has taken hard work in organizing, educating, building supportive networks and structures and—in the multitude of mostly unseen ways—caring for, loving and helping. The community has united, perhaps in a more deep, personal and extensive way than ever before. It has brought about a re-evaluation of values that is largely positive and constructive. It has perhaps brought the gay community politically out of its adolescence of buoyant if somewhat self-centered and unrealistic optimism into a political maturity that recognizes its vulnerability and the not so pleasant reality of political power in this country. ■

Steve Hamilton works for the San Francisco AIDS Antibody Testing Program. He is a Marriage, Family and Child Counselor and is a member of Northstar Organization.



Mystery Writers Conference

The Hard-Boiled Detective Hits the Eighties

by Kathy Chamberlain

During the last decade, mystery fiction has come into a new Golden Age. According to a Gallup survey reported in the *Miami Herald*, sixty-two percent of Americans who read, read mysteries. And *Publishers Weekly* has reported that mystery fiction now surpasses all other genres. The last ten years have seen increases in the numbers of authors, books, sales, and mystery-related TV shows, conferences, organizations, journals and newsletters. This upsurge has surprised people in the field who were wringing their hands back in 1978, saying what a bad time it was for mystery writers.

Why did this happen? Some say mystery is the last refuge of a good story at a time when too much contemporary literature has forsaken plot. Others point to the popularity of TV programs like "Cagney and Lacey," "Murder, She Wrote," "Mike Hammer," "Hill St. Blues," "Spenser for Hire," "Magnum P.I.," and public television versions of works by Christie, Sayers, and Conan Doyle. They claim that television has renewed interest in books. Still others note perennial concern with issues of violence and justice.

In January of this year a conference in Key West, Florida, took advantage of this upsurge in interest, exploring "The Art and Tradition of Mystery Literature." Fans, scholars, critics, reviewers, teachers, students, and novelists attended. Among the writers present were Elmore Leonard, Mary Higgins Clark, James Crumley, James W. Hall, Donald Westlake, Nan Hamilton, Tony Hillerman, and John Ball. Participants discussed several types of mystery stories. Although boundaries are blurring and no one much cares, there are still discernible types. But of all these, the American hard-boiled detective novel provoked the most interest. The classic British whodunit, which continues to be extremely popular among readers and critics alike, drew little comment in comparison. These two subgenres of the detective story do not have much in common beyond an interest in mystery and murder; for the full

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shock of the difference, compare two excellent but wholly different books: P.D. James' *A Taste for Death* and Elmore Leonard's *La Brava*.

The Hard-boiled Detective

There can be little doubt that the hard-boiled detective story resonates still with something deep in the American psyche, at least in traditional male American longings, experiences, and perceptions of reality. It still touches a collective nerve. Since his inception, the hard-boiled detective hero has had a dual nature: good-guy rebel vs. gun-toting woman-hater.

From the time of Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op fighting the corrupt establishment of "Poisonville" in *Red Harvest*, the hard-boiled hero has exhibited the first characteristic: anti-establishment rebel, good guy (sort of) against the bad guys. This kind of hero has many predecessors in American life and literature: frontiersman, pioneer, hunter, tracker, cowboy. Mark Twain's name often comes up when literary forerunners are mentioned. At the conference, biographer and bibliographer Matthew Bruccoli said Twain was the first to use the term "hard-boiled" in this sense. And novelist James W. Hall said the hard-boiled hero was born into literature the moment Huck Finn cut himself off from Aunt Polly's apron strings, from her civilizing influence.

As Raymond Chandler famously described him, the hero moved from frontier to city following changes in American society: "Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything...He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job." (*The Simple Art of Murder*.)

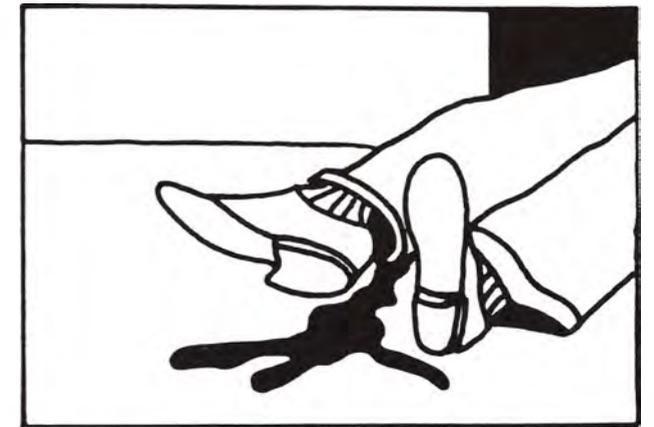
This hero, admired by generations of readers, is a fighter of power and corruption, a friend of the little guy, a righter of wrongs. Perhaps the best of today's hard-boiled writers is James Crumley, author of *The Last Good Kiss* and *Dancing Bear*. Without question, his detective maintains an anti-establishment stance, although at the conference Crumley quailed at the idea that his detective should be termed a hero—"he drinks too much and does too many drugs." He also felt that a moral vision is hard to come by in our society, with all its complexity and confusion; nevertheless, his detective is

a subversive, a rebel. "Actually," Crumley said to scattered applause, "I'm a communist agent."

But in addition to good-guy rebel, there is that other side of the hard-boiled detective's dual nature. The same tradition produced Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer. In case you have been lulled by the recent TV series, remember where it originated—in *I, the Jury*, a book so asinine, so macho, so fascistic, it makes Bernhard Goetz look like the model of restraint. Fortunately for us all, *I, the Jury* now seems quaint and out-of-date, and because of this leaves the consoling message that times have changed—at least somewhat. (It is a page turner, action punched out bambambam; like bad sex, you can't help noticing, but you won't go back to it.)

From its 1920's origins in *Black Mask* magazine, the hard-boiled detective story was misogynistic. This reflected more of the times, true, but the form contained its own extra zingers on the subject. As the novelist James W. Hall put it—he is a modern practitioner of the genre trying to update this "old-fashioned" view—the hard-boiled detective story is about "men willfully removing themselves from a female-dominated culture." The feminine "civilization" of the home (the world of Aunt Polly) is claustrophobic; but once free of the home, the hero finds that women who are not mothers or aunts are duplicitous, dangerous, crazy, evil; sex is a trap.

Hall said that in his recent novel *Under Cover of Daylight*, he consciously tried to "modernize" the genre and "play fair." The women are strong; his hero cries; he doesn't love his gun. It's a well written book, with the Florida Keys serving as an exotic background. But is it "hard-boiled"? As Hall put it, he tries to have his detective "bring the guy to justice without killing anybody," but he finds this "real hard" and "can't do that indefinitely."



Crumley handles the woman question another way; men and women can be equally outrageous. In his humorous frontier, tall-tale style hyperbole, Crumley has his detective say: "Not that I mind strong, self-reliant women, but most of the women I knew were so tough they could chip flint hide-scrapers with their hearts." Many of Crumley's women characters are equally boozy, equally ballsy—a kind of mad equality (though you could argue about this).

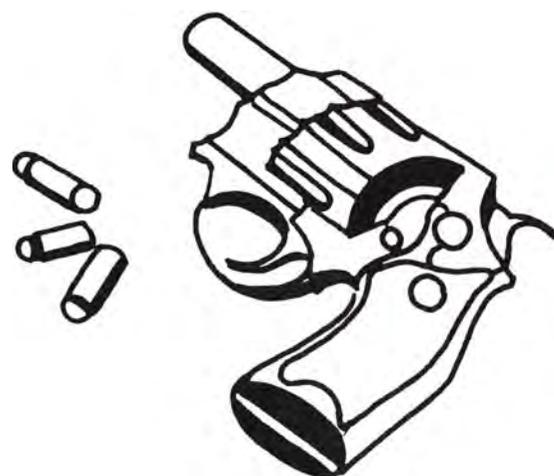
Something altogether new is the hard-boiled detective *heroine*. Sara Paretsky is the most interesting writer in this category. Although not at the conference, Paretsky was frequently mentioned. In her series which began with *Indemnity Only*, she created detective V.I. Warshawski and located her among the ethnic politics and big city problems of Chicago. V.I. is a woman; she is also tough and fairly believable. She is a pathbreaker and we are in new territory, yet at the same time it is a legitimate continuation of the hard-boiled tradition, the Hammett-Chandler-Ross Macdonald-Robert B. Parker tradition. Although the books are not always as marvelous as the detective, this is a very promising series.

Dramas for Social Justice

Both Hall and Paretsky—and Crumley too, in his way—are concerned with topical issues. Because this concern came up often at the conference, the discussion unexpectedly turned out to be rather more political than literary.

During the last decade something subversive happened, or happened again, in mystery fiction—by no means exclusively in hard-boiled literature, but in the genre more generally. Despite the Reagan era, quite a few mystery novels of social protest have been written. According to *L.A. Times* film critic Sheila Benson, the opposite was generally the case for mystery movies. It is as if something that no longer found expression in a widespread social movement went semi-underground and found expression between writer and reader.

Today you frequently hear generalizations like: "the mystery has evolved beyond simple entertainment into a genre with a purpose and a conscience" (from *Crime Times*, the promotional newsletter of Waldenbooks). At the Key West conference, reviewer Marilyn Stasio who writes a syndicated column, "Mystery Alley," addressed this trend. In a panel called "The Detective as Contemporary Hero," she defined the current mystery



novel hero or heroine as "a person who fixes things." Something is wrong with a piece of society; the detective rights that wrong; the reader is left satisfied that one small piece of the whole big mess has been taken care of. This, Stasio said, is what makes recent mystery fiction issue-oriented. She believes it also makes for better books because writers write best when they describe the corner of the world they know best, when their passion about the issues is real. More and more, mystery writers stake out a territory. K.C. Constantine, for example, does a fine job of portraying ethnic working-class life in central Pennsylvania.

At a 1986 conference Carolyn Heilbrun, who writes under the pen name Amanda Cross, said that because readers have different expectations of a popular genre like the mystery as opposed to mainstream literature, they will tolerate more, and this allows the writer more freedom to advocate certain positions—in Heilbrun's case feminism, as in *Death in a Tenured Position*. At the Key West conference, Nan Hamilton also spoke of the opportunity the genre presents; she very consciously uses it to promote ethnic understanding in the hope that this "will make a political difference."

In addition to offering different portrayals of women, recent mysteries are being written about issues like developers destroying the environment, the greed of big corporations, the bureaucratic stupidity of the F.B.I., discrimination against and stereotyping of Blacks and gays and people of all different ethnic groups. Issues are sometimes very specific—like the violence of right-to-life groups in Sara Paretsky's most recent novel, *Bitter Medicine*.

The conference's principal speaker, Tony Hillerman,

said the fundamental issue for him is different than it might seem to his fans. His series features Navajo detectives, and he is proud of the "Friends of the Navajos" award he won from the Navajo Tribe. But after his desire to tell a good story, his intention is not only to promote understanding of Native Americans and their culture. As can be seen in *Ghostway*, the key conflict for him is poor vs. affluent, rural vs. urban. This, he explained, is because of his background. He grew up as a country boy, wore bib overalls, rode a school bus, took his lunch in a sack; he thought of town boys as sophisticated and effete, yet he had a sense of inferiority. His feeling for the rural poor vs. the urban sophisticates drew him to the Navajos, and this is the underlying conflict that enlivens his work. Hillerman was asked why there are few minority mystery writers. The Native American writers he knows, he said, write mainstream literature, poetry and novels, often in a sorrowful, tragic vein. Portraying their history is their deepest concern, and by comparison mystery literature must seem frivolous. Yet Navajo school children like Hillerman's work: "you let our side win," they say.

Another topic of concern was whether the genre, in particular the more hard-boiled kind of mystery story, promotes the idea of Goetz-style vigilante justice. James Hall, a teacher as well as a writer, said the loss of faith in the judicial process and glorification of the loner doing battle that he finds among his students was the "scary side politically." Yet everyone agreed that a lone detective hero is more appealing than a group of sleuths. It is hard to convey the joys of collectivity in the detective story. Portraying the group at work (as the "police procedural" does) can dissipate energy, whereas the individual hero or heroine focuses a book, makes it stronger. But are writers of detective-hero fiction then—though perhaps inadvertently—encouraging vigilantism?

There are both strong regressive and progressive pulls on this flexible form of popular entertainment. The hard-boiled novel can still reflect its misogynistic, vigilante, origins. Yet in the eighties the mystery story, reflecting other aspects of the tradition, has turned out to be a surprisingly good vehicle for dramas of social justice. ■

Book Review

Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States, by the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, documents how the racism of the white power structure shows up in the very ground that people of color walk on. The study is the first to document nationally the connection between ethnic background and the location of toxic wastes.

Using ZIP code data from the 1980 United States Census, the authors found that more than half the total population in the United States lives in areas with one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites. An even higher percentage of minorities—more than three out of every five Black and Hispanic Americans—reside in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites. Race is the single best indicator of the location of toxic wastes, better than household income or value of one's home.

Uncontrolled toxic waste sites include "indiscriminately placed dumps, abandoned or closed disposal facilities, accidental spills, illegal discharges or closed factories and warehouses where hazardous materials have been produced, used or stored." It is estimated it would cost more than \$100 billion to clean up these sites.

The study contains extensive statistical charts as well as sound commentary on the history of the problem and developments under Reagan. Until the late 1970s little was done to police the dumping of hazardous wastes.

Little Known Rationales for the Color Line

Absence of Good Black Dancers in New York City

If you failed to get out of your chair at half-time during the last Superbowl, you may have noticed that the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes had a Black dancer. She was a very recent addition to the line-up. From their inception 62 years ago, the Rockettes have been all white. You might think this was racist, but the *New York Times* of December 26, 1987, described founder Russell Markert's policy in more dignified terms, as one of "rigid color uniformity." Near the end of his life, Markert admitted that he had even forbidden suntans for a white dancer because "it would make her look like a colored girl."

The *Times* article continues: "As recently as five years ago, the director of the Rockettes, Violet Holmes, defended the all-white line on artistic grounds. She said the

The Reagan administration has tried to cut back on environmental protection under the guise of reducing big government and "leaving it to the states."

On hazardous wastes and economically depressed minority communities, the study comments:

Racial and ethnic communities have been and continue to be beset by poverty, unemployment and problems related to poor housing, education and health. These communities cannot afford the luxury of being primarily concerned about the quality of their environment when confronted by a plethora of pressing problems related to their day-to-day survival. Within this context, racial and ethnic communities become particularly vulnerable to those who advocate the siting of a hazardous waste facility as an avenue for employment and economic development. Thus, proposals that economic incentives be offered to mitigate local opposition to the establishment of new hazardous waste facilities raise disturbing social policy questions.

The study does note that some minority communities have fought back against environmental pollution, although this has received little coverage in the media.

This 85 page study published in 1987 is well worth reading. It demonstrates that not only is racism institutionalized, it is "geographized" in ways too long neglected by the progressive and Left community. The book is available from the United Church of Christ, 105 Madison Avenue, NY, NY 10016, for \$17.50; maybe you can get your local library to order it.

dancers were supposed to be 'mirror images' of each other, and added: 'One or two black girls in the line would definitely distract. You would lose the whole look of precision, which is the hallmark of the Rockettes.' "

But times change or litigation piles up or something. By the end of last year, the Rockettes management claimed to have ended the whites-only policy. Then why no Black dancers through to December of 1987? The usual problem—the absence of qualified Black applicants. " 'We don't consider this to be an issue for the Rockettes—we're an equal opportunity employer,' Helene Greece, a spokeswoman for the company, said...Ms. Greece said, 'The only thing we want are the best dancers.' " --Charles Sarkis



Remembering Maxine Fennell

Maxine Fennell, Boston political activist, public health advocate, union steward, Black community leader, "womanist" as Alice Walker says, role model, spokesperson, mother, poet—passed away suddenly in March. Her poems push her audience to join the struggle against prejudice and oppression and celebrate the strength of common people. A good example is "Pleeeeeease," as in "Dump Reagan/Please," which FM published in October 1984 just before the elections. At her funeral, people from Maxine Fennell's church, from the Massachusetts Black Nurses' Association, from the American Cancer Society, and from her union, SEIU 285, all spoke of the boundless energy and contagious enthusiasm she brought to her work. This message was given by Celia Wcislo, President of SEIU 285, in Boston:

I want to remember Maxine for what she has given us. For what she has left behind. She has left behind a family. And a larger family of friends and acquaintances who grew through their relationship with her. Maxine believed with passion. She didn't just complain. When she was dissatisfied, she spoke out about the injustice.

That's what I remember best. And that's what I respected most about her.

She wanted to learn more, be more. She was a nurse, went back to school to get her degree, and then went back to school again to learn about the law. She pushed herself as well as she pushed others: to be the best they could be, to be the best she could be.

Maxine's dedication to the nursing profession got her active in the Black Nurses Association. She helped organize DH&H nurses into Local 285. And she pushed the union to have affirmative action contract language that gave credit to LPNs who became RNs.

She struggled to make Boston a city that treated communities of color with respect. She spoke out when Boston City Hospital was threatened with closure. We worked together to help Mel King's campaign. She organized to keep the sickle cell center open when federal cuts threatened it. And she argued before the health planning council to make the new BCH as good as the current one.

I respected Maxine for her willingness to argue with anyone if she disagreed. I remember her standing at the end of the planning council's hearing, speaking to a roomful of white, bureaucratic faces, arguing with pride and anger that BCH was vital for the health care of Boston's working class and communities of color. She wasn't afraid. She was angry that they might not listen. She made them listen.

I hope I will always hear, somewhere in the back of my head, the arguments she might have given me if she thought I was wrong.

FM Editors:

I am a reader and subscriber to FM magazine...I have been supporting and following the Jackson campaign, and it thrills me to see how he makes them sweat! But I do have some questions about reform work, electoral work and the Jackson/Rainbow campaign. I want to bring them up to you in the most supportive way possible, and very much look forward to some reply!

I am a blue collar worker, an artist, and have done some work with the Jackson campaign.

Some of the problems I see concern the claims made for progressive work in electoral politics. Many of the hopes for pushing a progressive platform are valid and valuable, but the possibility that these strategies won't work is also there, and goals are not the same as accomplishments. For example, in the article, "The Left and Jesse Jackson" in the November-December 1987 FM, the four goals of the leftists working in the Jackson/Rainbow coalition are commendable, but I question whether they are realistic. Under the best of circumstances, for example, working unity among the left could be achieved but under other circumstances, it could result in a disastrous split. The possible unity among other forces mentioned is so historically difficult and dependent on so many other forces that I feel our aspirations should be very scaled down.

The Democratic Party and the "corporate liberalism" it represents present a formidable challenge. They will certainly attempt to block any real progressive agenda, and the future of both Jackson and the Rainbow are very

tied up with these power brokers. The question of the future of the Rainbow is a touchy issue around Jackson campaigners, as is the question of whether he can really win, what he will do for the Democrats if he doesn't win, and what concessions will be forced on him if he does.

Does Jackson take the Black community's support for granted? Does he have a solid Southern strategy? What about other issues of Black empowerment? In terms of what he would do if elected, how consistent is his record? What's our stand on some of the charges against him that the press has covered (his alleged anti-semitism)? Is he anti-communist?

These are all questions that should be at least acknowledged in FM. The answers will vary but a sophisticated, principled stand on these 1988 elections will deal with them. I feel that in your attempt to support Jackson and the Rainbow you have tried too hard to look on the bright side, maybe understandably, but not a long-range strength for the movement.

—A West Coast reader

The questions raised in this letter are real ones, and we thank the West Coast reader for writing in. At this 1988 election year plays itself out, we hope to publish assessments and work sum-ups of the campaign. We want to encourage all FM readers to consider contributing your thoughts on and experiences in the campaign to this important discussion.

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