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# ***FORWARD MOTION***

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A Marxist Newsletter  
organized by the  
Proletarian Unity League

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PUL just had a major decision-making conference. This conference came at the end of a year and a half of intense review of our past and debate about our future.

Our last such evaluation was almost four years ago, and a lot has happened since. The communist Left we were part of utterly collapsed, and the

cause of socialism is in a bigger mess than ever, though this crisis is lightened somewhat by recent European Socialist advances. And the situation worsened for the struggle against the Right and corporate power in the United States. The US Left, and certainly our corner of it, faces tremendous pressures today. A big part of the discussions we had was to reestablish to ourselves that our kind of socialist politics has a place on the American political scene.

We took on this discussion with a foundation of some good organizing, ideas and traditions of work. As a group we found we can still stand on this ground so long as we are determined to move ahead, and we are.

Your help will be important. We need this not just in our organizing but in building this group. This special Forward Motion includes a number of the general resolutions voted at our conference, and a statement by PUL's new Executive on where we stand now. We would like to know what you think about the issues discussed here. The organization has to get on with its business, and the main business will be better orienting our organizing to today's mass political struggles. But part of our business will be studying and discussing some major ideological issues. We want Forward Motion to be a forum for this discussion, and we include in this issue one member's point of view on "America's Democratic Traditions."

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This issue also includes an inspirational poem and a review of a new in-depth report from Poland. We hope you find both of interest.

The 1984 presidential election certainly figures as one of the major political focal points for all of us now. Though a year and a half away, it is really already upon us. Some states have already begun candidate reviews, and local elections, like those in Chicago and Philadelphia, are looked at in national terms. Harold Washington's victory raises the question, is 1984 the year for a Black presidential candidate? Could this be the year for a serious entry into the Democratic primaries (or an independent route), and with what aims? We put this question to Forward Motion readers. We haven't had great success with other inquiries to our readers, but in the new post-conference spirit, we invite you to write in and let us know where you stand on this important question. Responses in next issue.

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We like to hear from our readers. Write us, c/o PUL, PO Box 2394, Boston, MA 02107. Subscriptions are still \$10 per year. Back issues available at \$2 each.

## PUL's Recent Conference

PUL has just completed our fifth general conference. Since 1981 or so, and with the collapse of the 1970s communist movement, we face a major turn in our work. The conference decisions put in first place helping build a left-wing presence in the people's movements and establishing for ourselves a practical socialist identity. Above all, the conference affirmed that there is a place on the U.S. political scene for disciplined, revolutionary, democratic organization around our kind of socialist politics.

Our politics will continue to emphasize rank and file organization of the working class, an uncompromising battle against white supremacist national oppression and for the national rights due all oppressed nationalities, an active role in the struggle for women's emancipation, and fight all oppression of gays and lesbians, and opposition to both Soviet and U.S. imperialism. The conference affirmed the need to build ourselves as an organization of activists based in the people's struggles, especially in the labor and Afro-American movements. It resolved that we will continue as a democratic-centralist organization, one which could promote democracy and carry out a mass line while strengthening unity of action and an ability to survive repression. In general there was a spirit of revitalized commitment to practicing the mass line and criticism-self criticism.

Some members argued that the turn in our work must be a turn away from Marxist-Leninist organization and politics. The conference rejected this view and instead resolved that we will continue to base ourselves on what we have understood as Marxism-Leninism. In these ways, the conference drew a dividing line between those who believe there remains a need and a political basis for this type of revolutionary Marxist organization and those who do not.

This did not come without struggle or without losses. The conference brought to a close a year and a half of intense debate over questions fundamental to our continued existence: what is a realistic strategy for a communist group when the movement of which it was part has collapsed? How can such a group best contribute to a new class struggle leadership in the people's movements? How should we organize ourselves to carry out these goals? How can a group like ours grow, and grow in a more multinational and working class direction, at a time when most mass movements remain on the defensive, and Marxism itself is in crisis? How have our own ideological foundations been affected by this international crisis? These were not questions which any conference could bring to final resolution: they framed the struggle up to and at the conference, and they will continue as the backdrop to the group's implementation of the conference decisions.

A major theme in the discussions was the need to reexamine many basic

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issues of Marxist, and especially Marxist-Leninist, theory and practice, issues concerning democracy and dictatorship under socialism, forms of organization in the struggle for state power, and so on. The conference resolved to end our neglect of internal education and carry out a groupwide campaign of basic study around problems of socialism and the Marxist-Leninist tradition.

In this process of study and reevaluation, we will probably find that we want to reaffirm some of our basic concepts; we may well reject some too. We will certainly go through some changes. But the conference concluded that the best way to carry out such a reexamination is within our present framework as a Marxist-Leninist organization. It rejected arguments that we must suspend that framework in order to carry through this process of study and discussion.

In the conference decisions, and for oppressed nationality and working class comrades in particular, a big part of the turn we need to make has to be a turn toward the multinational working class and oppressed nationality struggles -- becoming part of them and bringing leaders of these struggles into our group. Ultimately it will be these leaders who determine the content of revolutionary Marxism for our country and our time. Since the Afro-American people's movement is the most consistently revolutionary movement, and since uniting the multinational working class itself and uniting the working class and national movements are socialist objectives, we will continue to work mainly in these two movements. In addition, we will give more centralized attention to work among women (both in the women's movement and in the workplace), to electoral politics and to the struggle for gay rights.

The conference discussions dealt sharply with continuing white chauvinism, male chauvinism and class bias in our group. A growth resolution targetting recruitment of oppressed nationality and white working class people expressed the will of the conference to move forward. But to actually grow in this direction in a lasting way, we will need a serious determination to struggle against the biases of our group's majority social base.

The discussion of nationalities work became very intense, especially for the oppressed nationality delegates. Oppressed nationality delegates' political frustration erupted during this session, catching many white delegates by surprise. Others were not surprised at all. The severity of this crisis got lost for many in the pre-conference struggles, even though Afro-American members offered plenty of help in seeing the magnitude of the problem of our national composition. An Asian comrade also raised serious criticisms for being treated as a white in her recruitment. It will take serious criticism and self-criticism for us to improve this situation: we should all look on the unexpected sharpness of the conference discussion as a long overdue prod to revitalize this struggle, particularly for white comrades.

Though not exactly the same, the situation in the group for working class comrades has not been so great either. If we are to grow more among workers we must strengthen our awareness of class bias and enact definite policies to overcome it.

The conference heard a moving account of what women members of the

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organization have accomplished but also the continuing cost of male chauvinism to women's leadership and to the organization generally. We need to make this, too, a long overdue new beginning of struggle to change our organization.

In electing new leadership, these internal contradictions mixed with the conference's overall theme -- making a turn toward building a base for socialist politics in our organizing. The new EC is larger, weighted toward the mass work. For the first time, a majority of its members are women, and for the first time, working class members are in leadership. The number of oppressed nationality EC members also increased. The changes were significant: they express the conference's determination to change the character of our work and our leadership.

The conference took us over a hurdle: we still exist, we have a renewed commitment to building our work and organization, and we did not have a mass exodus from the group. Along the way, some very valuable comrades resigned their membership. In our opinion, some who left should not have: they still belong here and we still want their help in the work ahead.

In any case, all who are members now must work hard for the success of the majority decisions. Comrades with serious questions about our ideology remain as members and friends; having these types of differences within an overall framework of unity will be a new and healthy experience for our organization. Some of the pre-conference debate was clouded by confusion, misunderstandings, abstraction, and at times acrimony. Now we have a real opportunity to undertake together a wideranging and constructive process of study and renewal.

Now comes the job of centralizing our work, reorganizing ourselves, and studying to answer new political questions. This will take all of us putting our shoulders to the task -- not just our own tasks, but the tasks of the wider political struggle as we come to see them. We have a lot to do, and the conference couldn't resolve everything. It was unable to decide many outstanding questions on organizational policy, finances, our name, publications, and others. The conference focused mainly on setting an overall framework for our work; we will hold referendums in order to move forward in some of these other areas.

In this respect, the new EC was left with less specific policy guidance than the previous one, and this places a heavy burden on our committee. At this conference more than at others, there was an understanding that making the changes the group wants is not the responsibility of leadership alone. This is especially so since we are smaller than we thought we would be at this point. Members came away from the conference looking forward to working together to get beyond our crisis and develop our politics. Everyone will have to pitch in to better centralize our political work, to grow, to study, and to build our organization. For everyone the completion of the conference should be a time for rededication so that we can reach more people and better serve the struggle, now and in the future.

--the Executive Committee - April 1983

## Conference Resolutions

[Note: Four resolutions adopted by PUL's recent conference follow. Three are general statements on overall direction, the crisis of Marxism, and our organizing work. These provide a sense of where PUL is heading as a political organization. Several more specific resolutions passed -- for a trade union commission, on organizing work in the women's movement, on multinational unity, and on various organizational issues. The resolution on Nationalities Work was both controversial and possibly of wider interest and we include it here.]

### WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED

1. We are a revolutionary group based on Marxism. Since our foundation we have based our theory and practice on what we understood as Marxism-Leninism. In view of differences over the nature of Leninism, we shall continue the debate over what exactly that is, what remains correct and what is incorrect about Leninism, and so on. We continue to exist as originally founded unless a Conference decides otherwise.

2. We exist to organize for socialism. We stand for and defend independent trade union movements, an autonomous women's movement, and independent oppressed nationality movements, not only under capitalism, but under socialism as well. We support the efforts of socialist and democratic opposition movements in the Soviet Union and Soviet-dominated countries to rid themselves of Soviet imperialist domination and support the establishment of independent socialist and non-socialist democracies in those countries.

3. We are a revolutionary Marxist group, but with a particular heritage -- the Marxist-Leninist movement of the 1970s. That movement reasserted the place of rank-and-file working class organizing, and it sought to build multinational revolutionary organization. But it foundered on an ultra-left ideology and politics, and in its weakened state it has now been swept aside by the wider crisis of Marxist movements internationally. A political movement is a historical process: while it exists, you can try to influence it in one direction or another. Once it is gone, however, it is gone forever. We do not aim to revive the Marxist-Leninist movement.

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4. We are a Marxist group at a time when there is no coherent Marxist movement. For ultimate victory, the working class and national movements will need a revolutionary Marxist party -- one which can become a true mass party -- in order to lead the U.S. people to socialist revolution. In the somewhat shorter run (say, ten to twenty years), we work for the establishment of a nationwide organization based on revolutionary Marxism which can carry out political work at the national level.

5. Political consciousness has shifted among certain sections of the masses a bit, but overall the situation for socialist organizers remains an unfavorable one. During the first two years of the Reagan administration, the Right began to run into some trouble, but not because a strong progressive movement pressed it. Instead, the U.S. ruling class' economic and political crisis deepened, and this is not something we welcome. The people's struggles everywhere are still trying to escape their defensive position, but a large part of leading struggle today has come down to learning how to lead an orderly retreat. The U.S. political scene very much needs the presence of a left-wing politics, but the left-wings of the people's movements so far have little presence in those movements as a whole. No section of any mass movement is politically advanced enough at this time to generate and sustain a Marxist trend on a mass scale.

6. We are an activist group based in the people's struggles. Among the people's movements, the Afro-American people's liberation movement is the most consistently revolutionary, and the most powerful force for fundamental social change in this country is and has been the unity of the labor movement with the Afro-American movement. This is so because more than anything else, capitalist rule here has rested on white supremacist national oppression. In addition to opposing national oppression in general, we uphold the right of nations to self-determination, and in particular we uphold the Afro-American people's right to national self-determination and political power. We base ourselves first in those two movements (the Afro-American and the labor movements): we strive to become an integral part of them, and make their activities an integral part of us.

7. We support and take an active role in the struggle for women's liberation as a democratic rights struggle under capitalism and as an integral part of the right to win and build socialism. We uphold the struggle for lesbian and gay rights as both a democratic rights struggle and a part of the revolutionary struggle against male supremacy. While the oppression of women and gay people is rooted in class society and male supremacy, the struggle for full equality in all spheres of economics and politics will continue long into socialism.

8. As revolutionary activists, we organize ourselves to have the greatest possible effect on the political struggles in which we are involved and to practice the mass line in our work. We are organized on the basis of democratic centralism.

A) We fight for unity of action. This enables us to have a much greater effect than our small numbers would indicate; it also allows us to

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constantly summarize our practice in order to improve our political line. We strive to bring all our organizing under centralized direction. We base the organization on collectives geared to organizing the work. All committees of the organization practice criticism-self-criticism. While the authority of any particular committee is established by the Conference, our organization is structured with higher and lower bodies. As a democratic centralist organization, we must have a leading body, one which practices the mass line internally, and which bases its work on the views of the membership while maintaining the flexibility to respond to new situations.

B) We promote the greatest possible democracy in and around the group. We want full, open and organized discussion. Then, in making decisions, we subordinate the minority to the majority while allowing the minority as much freedom as possible. We struggle to overcome social relations among ourselves influenced by national chauvinism, the oppression of women, and petit-bourgeois bias.

9. The isolation of our group is in the first place a political isolation--the political isolation of Marxism in this country. Only Marxism's contribution to building the leadership of these movements will begin to overcome this isolation. For the next several years, our main task should be: to help build a left-wing presence in the people's movements and establish for ourselves a practical socialist identity.

We need to raise the political level of our organizing through analysis, program, and effective slogans. Our study and discussion and our centralized apparatus should mainly serve this end and draw on this work.

### THE CRISIS OF MARXISM

1. The crisis of Marxism is both political and theoretical. Marxism is in crisis because of political events. One of the most important is the development of the first country that attempted to construct socialism into a repressive, imperialist power and its domination of most other "actually existing" socialist countries. Another is the inability of any Marxist party or trend in the advanced capitalist countries to win the majority of the working class to its strategy for socialism, with the possible exception of the Communist Party of Italy. In the past ten years, Marxist parties and movements in these countries have lost ground. Every Marxist trend lives in the shadow of the failures of the Soviet experiment and of the Marxist parties in the advanced capitalist countries. That is why every Marxist trend is today in some form of crisis.

2. The crisis of Marxism is also theoretical. Political events have had

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theoretical repercussions. Marxists have not yet developed a Marxist analysis of the history of the Soviet Union and other countries in which communist parties came to power. Marxists also have so far not gotten very far in analyzing the weaknesses of Marxist movements in the advanced capitalist countries.

Political events have highlighted gaps, contradictions and inadequacies in Marxist theory itself. The weaknesses of Marxist theory have had political repercussions on Marxist parties attempting to present an alternative to advanced capitalism and to Soviet-style "socialism." The weaknesses of Marxist theory are part of the reason that in the middle of the worst crisis of capitalism since the Depression, many Marxists have lost confidence in the ability of Marxist movements to do much about it.

3. Marxism and the revolutionary organizations based on it have gone through crises before. In the middle of those earlier crises, it was not possible to predict exactly how and where Marxism would come out of them or what finally would provide the theoretical and political bases on which Marxism and revolutionary Marxist organizations would emerge from the crises.

In facing up to the crisis of Marxism today, we have to learn from the experience of earlier crises of Marxism. We also have to learn from the good and bad responses to earlier crises. In every crisis of Marxism, some Marxists have concluded that a crisis showed that Marx's analysis of capitalism had become irrelevant or that Marxist thinking about socialist revolution had become a sectarian dogma. Today it is common to hear that Marxism inevitably leads to highly repressive societies ruled by new elites.

A crisis of Marxism means a critical moment for Marxism, a turning point. The crisis of Marxism today does not spell the collapse of Marxism.

The crisis of Marxism has had a particularly devastating effect on the U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement because of that movement's social base.

4. The crisis of Marxism is not fine but it's not terrible either. There aren't adequate Marxist analyses of advanced capitalism or of the Soviet Union and other attempts at socialism. Today Marxists have not charted a clear strategy for socialism in the heartland of capitalism. It is good to face up to these facts. The crisis of Marxism is an opportunity for revolutionary Marxists to break out of their isolation. The crisis of Marxism is an opportunity for creative thinking and creative mass action.

5. As at other times in the history of Marxist movements, the crisis of Marxism today raises serious challenges to the work of Lenin and the traditions that claim his work. We believe that Lenin's name is rightly linked with that of Karl Marx to designate the body of theory that has helped guide the exploited and oppressed in our struggles to build a new world. Marxism-Leninism exists in many contradictory versions. To paraphrase Lenin, we do not regard Marx's theory or its developments by Lenin as something completed or inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that they and other Marxists have only laid some of the foundation stones of the science which revolutionary Marxists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep

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pace with life. Our task is to develop that science or to rediscover its foundation stones if need be. In the crisis of Marxism, issues concerning democracy under socialism as well as revolutionary organization in the struggle for socialism present the most serious challenges to those who consider themselves Marxist-Leninists.

6. Our identity as communists should not depend on the fortunes of any socialist country. One of the historical weaknesses of the communist movement in the U.S. has been an over-reliance on foreign Marxisms. Our identity depends on our ability to develop a revolutionary Marxist theory and practice that come to grips with the reality of our country. This will be a protracted task, given the low level of the revolutionary movement in the U.S. today.

7. In the coming period, we resolve to organize study of the crisis of Marxism, with a focus first on those aspects of the crisis of Marxism that most directly affect our political work and secondarily on the relevance of Lenin's work today. Among other questions, the study would examine:

What is our vision of a socialist society in the U.S.?

How will socialism come about in a country like the U.S.? Is a revolution necessary or possible, and can socialism come about in another, gradual way? Does a revolution necessarily involve violent confrontation?

What should a socialist society look like? What is democratic socialism? What is undemocratic socialism? What is the dictatorship of the proletariat and is it necessary?

What type of organization can make the greatest revolutionary contribution to the struggle for socialism in this country?

What is the relation of revolutionary nationalism to the struggle for socialism in the U.S.? What is the relation of socialist-feminism to that struggle?

### CONCENTRATING OUR EFFORTS IN THE MASS WORK

1. Our organizing priorities will be in the trade union movement, the Black Liberation movement, and the Women's movement, in that order.

**Trade Union:** The majority of our mass work is labor work. Our main orientation should be toward the relatively multinational workplaces with significant numbers of women. Our experience shows these sectors are favorable

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to the growth we need. Although it doesn't have for our group the same immediate potential for growth, we will continue to organize in traditional heavy industry, because of its political significance for the trade union movement, particularly in regards to building meaningful multinational working class unity, as well as building unity between men and women.

**Black Liberation Movement:** Our nationalities work will continue to be mainly Afro-American work, locally and nationally. Our best opportunity for developing a local base in the Black movement is in the work of the Afro-American collective in S. But throughout our work, we need to be more concerned with how our organizing can help us build ties with organizations and individuals in the Black Liberation movement. In the trade union work, the Trade Union Commission will encourage efforts to focus on issues of job training and retraining, fair hiring and firing, and economic development in the Black community. The other major route we see this happening through is building electoral campaigns and coalitions at the electoral level. Area leaderships will be responsible, with Nationalities Commission input.

**Women's Liberation Work:** We will build more on our strengths on our shop work among women, but there will be no political shift away from the Women's and Gay movements. This work will be centralized.

**Electoral Work:** Electoral work will be taken up in our main areas of work--in the trade unions, in the BLM work, in women's work. We must develop a solid agitational line for the 1984 elections. Our main practical initiatives in electoral organizing will be at the section level (or local level).

**Organizationally:** We will have a Trade Union Commission, a Nationalities Commission, and an Electoral Task Force. The EC will help organize a yearly conference on work among women and in the women's movement.

4. Our main orientation will be to build up local bases, to continue the process of politicizing our work and these bases, and to put our work in a national framework. As the degrees of national organization in the different mass movements varies, so will our participation in these organizations. We see a general proportion of 70% local, 30% national.

5. We will develop more of a program of struggle. On our own, we cannot work out an all-round people's program. Our approach will be to focus on one or two issues in areas where we can actually do something about them. The Electoral Task Force will give greater emphasis to developing an overall perspective on the struggle in the U.S.

6. Each unit and committee of the organization shall experiment with ways to establish our practical socialist identity in our mass work. This is a qualitative change for our mass work and will require innovative approaches to propaganda and agitation. Leadership shall prioritize sharing of these experiences, summarizing success and failures, and providing materials that will help members in fulfilling these tasks.

## NATIONALITIES WORK AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WHITE SUPREMACY

Introduction: In the 1980s all the popular classes face a worsening economic and political situation. But the situation of the oppressed nationality peoples is worsening at a greater rate. Gains struggled for and grudgingly granted in the 'sixties in democratic rights, job equality, equal and desegregated education, and fair housing are being taken away. Under a rhetoric of shared sacrifice and belt tightening, the bourgeoisie hides the unequal distribution of joblessness to oppressed nationalities, unfair cutbacks in necessary services to oppressed nationalities and political repression aimed at continuing the assault on the national liberation movements and preventing successful resistance.

The common yet unfairly apportioned political and economic crisis suggests the following:

1. The need for strong class conscious leadership of the oppressed nationality movements.
2. The need to promote and strengthen the natural alliance between the national movements and the multinational working class movement.
3. The need to make the multinational working class movement and all its organizations (from the trade unions to communist organizations) fighters against white supremacist national oppression and for national equality and national liberation.

In the coming years, the Nationalities Commission sees two related but distinct tasks as central to the nationalities work of the organization.

1. Work in the national movements to strengthen the Marxist current in the national movements and help fuse Marxism-Leninism with the national liberation struggles. (In the coming period, for practical reasons, a concentration in the Afro-American People's Liberation Movement.)
2. Internal work and mass work generally to carry the struggle against white supremacist national oppression and white chauvinism into all working class and popular struggles in a practical and effective way.

While the key emphasis of the Nationalities Commission's work will be on

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work in the national movements, the vast majority of our members will concentrate in an all-round struggle against white supremacist national oppression. If progress is not made on this second area, progress in our work in the national movements will be held back.

### I. WORK AMONG OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES

(A) Afro-American Work. The main task of the organization in the coming period will be to continue and expand our participation in the Afro-American People's Liberation Movement, and grow substantially among Black people so that we can develop a critical mass of Black members.

Without a bold increase in Black membership our efforts to contribute to strengthening the Afro-American People's Liberation Movement will be severely limited and the strain on our present Black members will be very great. In addition, our work in the multinational working class will have a one-sided character. While the NC has done theoretical and practical work which helped us form a basis to promote Afro-American recruitment, our group's record of recruiting Black members in the period since the last conference has been a significant weakness.

We must begin to remedy this problem in the coming two years.

While we need to see recruitment as the key task in our work among Afro-Americans, recruitment can only proceed on the basis of principled and successful theoretical and practical work.

#### (1) Theoretical Tasks

(a) Adopt the paper, "Preliminary Views on Revolutionary Work in the Afro-American People's Liberation Movement," as a working document. [Note: the political thrust of this paper is: There is an oppressed Afro-American nation. Afro-Americans have the right to national self-determination and political power. The Afro-American national question is fundamentally political. The US has failed to resolve this question.]

(b) The Nationalities Commission should oversee production of articles on questions of interest to the Afro-American People's Liberation Movement and the left in particular, such as: What kind of organizations do the Afro-American people need now? Black autonomy and multinational unity? Black trade union work? Afro-American struggles and the worldwide struggle against imperialism? Role of Black women? Work in the South?

#### (2) Practical Tasks.

(a) Start history circles, hold forums, etc., as need arises for Afro-American contacts, with shop folks as well as community activists in regards to recruitment).

(b) Concentrate on the work in the National Black United Front, while maintaining and strengthening friendly relations with the National Black Independent Party.

(c) In the past few years we have participated in and helped

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organize discussion meetings of the Black Left. These have included folks from the national Black United Front, the National Black Independent Political Party, the trade unions, and local national liberation organizations, as well as members of Marxist-Leninist organizations, independent Marxists, and revolutionary nationalists (of the national communist type). Such forces are spontaneously considering the question of "Which way forward for the Black Liberation Movement." [Practical tasks follow.]

(B) Latin Work. Our main task in the coming period will be to get started in adopting a Hemispheric perspective. Our current lack of knowledge of Latin American history and struggles is reflected in our distance from the Puerto Rican and Chicano movements. Too few people in the organization speak Spanish or intend to learn it. Too few know much about or think often of the Third World nations south of the US border. In the next few years this too must change. [Practical tasks follow.]

### II. INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND MASS WORK

Can the working class and its organizations, including communist organizations, forge multinational unity? Where does the responsibility lie? These will be the key questions for mass work on the part of the communist left (and the left in general for that matter) in the coming decade. Our group has an unambiguous line on this matter and it will be essential for all members to study it further and help deepen it. This matter is crucial for our group's future....There have been some definite gains in our Afro-American work, nationally and in some locales. At the same time, our multinational composition is not jumping by leaps and bounds. In frank terms, what our group is confronted with is not whether it will be a "basically white" group, but rather whether we will make some substantial breakthroughs and thus become more multinational. Work to forge real multinational unity, in the mass work as well as in the group, will fall on the shoulders of all members. It will not be something for the NC to take care of. Comrades: can our group be the type of group which oppressed nationality activists will want to join? We believe it can, if the following types of practices are implemented.

(A) Theoretical. ...The membership as a whole has a responsibility to study, and further develop our line on white supremacist national oppression. In order to do so, our present works must be studied, and in particular, we believe comrades should -- if they have not already -- study A HOUSE DIVIDED and the NC's draft paper, though study should not be limited to these works.

(B) Practical. (1) Participate in the national campaign to make Dr. King's birthday a national holiday. Take the struggle into every area of work.

(2) Participate in the Twentieth Anniversary March on Washington, DC August 27, 1983, called by the Coalition of Conscience and the Black Congressional Caucus -- on Jobs, Peace and Equality, and take part in related legislative work.

(3) Propaganda work. Here we are proposing events, forums, etc, which are particularly aimed at oppressed nationalities....



## The Awakening

I want to write a Commie  
poem that rhymes  
One full of sunshine  
in every line

To hum at work  
to help boredom fly  
But that's also appropriate  
for a lullaby.

A poem of heroines  
and smiling faces  
Of class victories at home  
and foreign places.

A poem of joy and  
of ordinary strength  
To celebrate our ancestors  
who went to great lengths.

Building toward a world  
where the average man,  
woman, child, elder  
and every racial clan

Can work, love, play  
and study the earth,  
Equals and comrades  
nurturing their new birth.

This poem unlike many others  
previously penned  
would make people happy  
and confident we can win.

Too long have red authors  
given to other classes  
the sole province to describe joys  
accessible now to the masses.

Let us be in the vanguard  
describing the earth's beauty,  
making culture our canvas  
on which to draw reality

And bring us closer to the people  
to whom must belong  
ownership of factories  
and houses and songs.

--MM November 7, 1982

## Poland: A State Of War

"A State of War" is the way American Journalist Lawrence Weschler describes Poland under martial law. Weschler's earlier book, Solidarity: Poland in the Season of Its Passion, provided a good first-hand look at events and political life at the high point of the recent uprisings. Now, he has continued his account of recent Polish class struggle into the period after Solidarity was banned and martial law imposed on December 13, 1981. Weschler's title, "A State of War," refers to the uncomfortable situation the Polish authorities found themselves in: Having no state of emergency in their constitution, they were forced to declare a "state of war" against their own people.

The article has been published in two parts in New Yorker magazine, and chances are it will come around again in book form. It is worth reading both for what it tells about the daily life of the Polish struggle (like Weschler's first book, it is full of stories and descriptions) and for the more general issues it touches on.

There is no question but that the coup of December 13 effectively shut down the "high good times" of Solidarity. In that sense, this is a story of defeat. Yet there appears to be more a mood of re-evaluation and sober reflection in Poland these days than one of despair. We get this impression from the questions Poles are discussing among themselves: Was the coup of December 13 inevitable? What lessons can we learn from it for "next time?" How can we preserve democracy while organizing to act decisively? Can and should Solidarity remain non-violent? These are the issues being debated in the still strong underground press.

Polish activists often talk about the struggle as one between "society and the regime," or the "occupation vs. the nation," emphasizing how broad and deeply rooted the resistance has been, how narrow and isolated the authorities are. And they definitely have a point. Even today, under martial law, the resistance crops in everything from illustrations for children's books, to the jokes people tell in the street, to the V for victory pins people all wear in

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spite of the ban against them. (The authorities banned the V with the excuse that "no such letter exists in the Polish language.") Polish culture and society are a culture still based on resistance, a whole society still charged with hatred for its ruling regime.

Weschler pays particular attention to what he calls the cult of symbolic dates -- dates Poles commemorate from the history of their national rebellions. The calendar is filled with them, and most Poles spend the year honoring one after another episode of Polish resistance. For the regime, this presents the increasingly difficult challenge of finding an empty spot on the calendar to launch its next repression, some day with no anniversary nearby to trigger fresh rebellion.

The closest comparison from history to this kind of widespread cultural and social resistance movement in Europe probably comes from the period of Nazi occupation during the Second World War. In fact, the current Polish freedom fighters are making this comparison themselves when they call themselves the "underground" and the regime the "occupation."

There is no doubt that Solidarity has achieved something immense. Unique in the recent history of the industrialized nations, Solidarity was able to forge powerful enough currents of solidarity among a working class, a peasantry, and an intelligentsia (people with professional jobs, in media, the schools, etc.) to unite what appeared to be a strong majority in social opposition to a ruling class. Trade unionists in this country have a tremendous amount to learn from the Polish movement. So do socialists, for the fact is a lot of Solidarity's leaders consider themselves socialists seeking a democratic socialism based on workers' control.

And yet the article points to some of the weaknesses of what one Polish freedom-fighter calls the "prepolitical" character of the Polish resistance. There is something more religious than political, for instance, Weschler says about many Poles' preoccupations with things like the cult of symbolic dates. Even leading activists tended to base conditions of victory less on political strategy and organizations than on the belief that "magic" or the right "moment" in history would mysteriously turn the tide in favor of their just cause.

Many of the leaders of the Polish resistance, looking back in self-criticism, observe that their movement gained its strength mainly in the numbers of people and widespread sympathy Solidarity gained, not from a tightly organized political shape or clear strategy and program. This also, many say, was Solidarity's most vulnerable point. Solidarity was massive and sprawling in its social base but without disciplined organization and unprepared to respond to violence. The enemy it faced seemed powerless by comparison, so isolated from society, so cringing, so subservient to a foreign power; and yet it proved swift and capable in suppression by decree and military might, something Solidarity had no way of stopping. Adam Michnik, a long-time KOR and Solidarity activist, writing from prison, described the confrontation on December 13 this way: "Solidarity was a giant with steel legs but hands of putty...The Communist regime was a giant with putty legs but hands of steel."

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The regime carried out its offensive during and after the coup with some very smart moves. It was not a question of unleashing its military clout. (Solidarity had no armed preparations at all.) Instead it was a struggle over the degree to which the regime could fracture the popular unity and dilute the resistance culture that seemed so close to drowning out the voice of the authorities altogether.

The regime's most brilliant perception, we read, was that a rebellion based on broad, decentralized cultural and social solidarity depends on people being able to get together and communicate freely. Its first move was on December 13 to swiftly shut down all sources of communication, to call a virtual blackout on society itself. No newspapers, no telephones, no transportation, harshly imposed bans on meetings, curfews... These measures effectively stopped the momentum of the Solidarity movement dead in its tracks.

Then the authorities launched a systematic campaign to breed distrust and disunity between the various forces in the Solidarity movement, to fracture Solidarity's solidarity. Without any strong organized means to cement the unity among the working class, peasantry, and intellectuals, Solidarity was vulnerable to these attacks. Once free and open association was cut off, connections quickly died out. (One intellectual confided to Weschler that he no longer had any idea what was going on in the factories, and Weschler, himself, it seems, faced similar difficulties: his piece is heavily weighted with the thoughts and sentiments of the intellectual strata.)

The regime was ready to take advantage of this. Instead of trying to discredit Solidarity as a whole, they chose the tactic of isolating the KOR intelligentsia (the Bad Solidarity) from what they began to depict as the honest but misled working class (the Good Solidarity.) Anti-semitic and anti-intellectual slurs (close to fascist demagoguery), preferential treatment for intellectuals during imprisonment are a few of the many measures used by the regime to drive a wedge of suspicion between social groups. (Of Rural Solidarity, unfortunately, the piece tells us next to nothing.)

Through hounding, internment, and random retaliation, the regime has carried out an escalating campaign to wear down the strength through solidarity that the independent union movement created. Two of the most effective things they did were forcing workers to sign "loyalty oaths" to keep their jobs and forming them to join government unions in order to gain access to items like children's shoes. Weschler quotes from an underground communique agitating for resistance to workplace loyalty oaths:

It is over this that the battle is being waged: functionaries want to squeeze out of us a declaration that we have abandoned hope... Those declarations are supposed to transform us into servile, base creatures.

And so where will this struggle lead? The picture of the martial law period does not offer a lot of optimism about a resurgence for Solidarity in the near future. From the very place where the battle lines are drawn (a battle against the abandonment of hope), we have to recognize the inability of

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Solidarity to seize the offensive again very soon. The moment of Solidarity's ascendance has already passed into history, one of the most dazzling of Poland's episodes of national rebellion. Speaking of the movement's enduring gains, one activist said sadly: "What we have left are the great gestures, lamps to sustain us through another dark time."



"Dammit, Walesa, be reasonable . . . show some fear!"

But it appears that there is more left than that. The recent May Day demonstrations show a collective courage to risk public confrontation with the authorities even in a period of weakness. And acts of courage continue to shore up the solidarity gained between the different groups in society. While some people have chosen to emigrate to avoid imprisonment, others like Jan-Jozef Lipski have decided to return home. He explained it this way:

I do not intend to become an emigre. I do not want to give the government propaganda machine the possibility of telling the workers that intellectuals will always get away, while the workers have to face the consequences of their actions alone. It is a question of Solidarity.

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And, underground, there are the beginnings of the kind of organization it will take for the "next time around." Right now a clandestine press operates that can produce and distribute over 40,000 papers on a regular basis in spite of almost equally regular confiscation of their equipment and supplies. The discussion going on in the pages of that press (a debate that includes imprisoned activists' views, somehow smuggled out) is especially encouraging. The honesty and urgency of the debate signals a determination on the part of the resistance underground not to give up entirely the gains of Solidarity nor to ignore its defeats.

Recent, Jacek Kuron, writing from prison, launched the most controversial round of the discussion so far. He calls for more centralized organization, and he has made a self-criticism about KOR's principle of complete non-violence.

We must organize ourselves around a main center, and display absolute discipline before it. Throughout the many years of my opposition activity I propagated the principle of avoiding all forms of violence. I therefore feel obliged to speak out, to say that present preparing ourselves for overthrowing the occupation in a collective action seems to me the least of all evils.

There is no way to predict the outcome of this discussion. Many other Solidarity activists urge non-violence, decentralized struggle as opposed to Kuron's call for a more tightly organized structure capable of responding to violence with armed resistance. Solidarity was a great experiment in worker's control, and what many of its own activists call democratic socialism.

Its members were passionately committed to democratic involvement of the rank and file and egalitarian relations. The next step may be to find a way of preserving that democracy in a form that will prove capable of withstanding attack. The Poles are extremely sensitive to the danger of allowing anything like the intensely undemocratic relations of the Soviet-style socialist regime they live under to invade their own movement. So it is quite possible that they will be in the forefront of creating new, innovative responses to the challenge of building both well-protected and egalitarian forms of organization.

The Poles know very well what great threats can lie in the way of a people struggling for their own liberation. Whatever strategy they choose will have to come to terms with the awesome problem of what the satirist Slawomir Mrozek calls:

That very large country which is also fraternal and which although quite independent of our country, is so close to us that one doesn't have to leave their country to be in ours, and one doesn't have to leave our country to be in theirs.

A Polish political theorist reflects on the future:

Next time, assuming we can keep the initial uprising from immediately descending into anarchy, we won't even

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bother dealing with the servants -- the Polish government or local Communist Party. We will demand to speak directly with the Lord. And who knows, perhaps the Russians will come and talk.

Of course this is a big "perhaps," but from this account, the Poles increasingly recognize a direct face-off with the Soviet Union as the unavoidable stakes of their own liberation.

--Nadine M.  
April 1983

# Views On The News

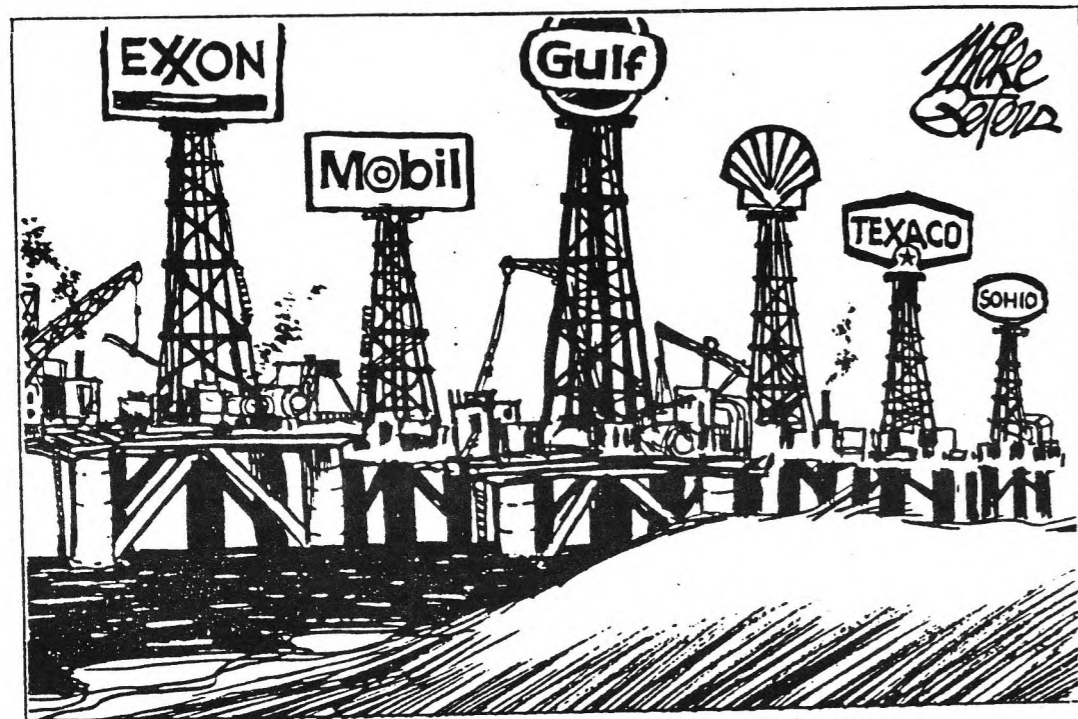
**BIG OIL MATH 101 EXAM:**

① GASOLINE IS \$1.00 AT THE PUMP. THE GOVERNMENT HAS JUST SLAPPED ON A 5¢ PER GALLON TAX. HOW MUCH WILL THE CONSUMER NOW PAY FOR GASOLINE?

**ANSWER:**

$$\$1.00 + .05 + \frac{\text{Easter Vac}}{\text{FEDERAL PAY FACTOR}} + \text{Summer Vac.} =$$

**PIG PIECE OF THE TT**  
 $\frac{E=mc^2}{E=mc^2} = \$1.20$



... and now, James Watt and the beach boys ...

# FEIFFER

## TWO GUYS FROM WASHINGTON

WE LIBERALS CAN WIN IN 1984-

ON THE ISSUES OF JOBS, POVERTY, CARE FOR THE AGED, A NUCLEAR FREEZE, LATIN AMERICAN INTERVENTION, CIVIL RIGHTS, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, REPRO-DUCTIVE RIGHTS, GAY RIGHTS, GUN CONTROL...

FEEL!

DAVE, DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE CONSERVATIVES WILL RUN ON?

FEDERAL INTERVENTION AND FEDERAL HANDOUTS, CRIME, ABORTION, SCHOOL PRAYER, SCHOOL BUSES, TEEN-AGE SEX, THE SOVIET MENACE. WE'RE DOOMED!

BUT JACK, OUR ISSUES ARE HUMANE!

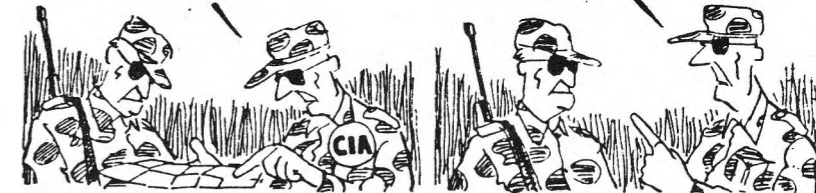
SO? THEIR ISSUES ARE MORAL.

SINCE WHEN ARE HUMANISM AND MORALITY IN OPPOSITION?

SINCE THE MIDDLE CLASS WENT BROKE.

THIS IS OUR MISSION - WE WILL RUN AN OPERATION AGAINST NICARAGUA THAT VIOLATES U.S. LAW

WE WILL KEEP THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IN THE DARK ABOUT OUR ACTIVITIES



WE WILL BRING TO THE NICARAGUAN PEOPLE THE NATIONAL GUARD THEY JUST THREW OUT

DO WE HAVE A CODE NAME?

PROJECT DEMOCRACY



## America's Democratic Traditions

I have recently heard in several different settings reference to America's democratic traditions.

From what i can figure, comrades may have several different ideas behind the usage of this term. America's democratic traditions can refer to the amount of political liberty perceived to exist in the US; it can refer to, on the other hand, something about the specifics of the US political system which makes it very different from those in other nation-states. Since no common definition exists, i would like to present some of my own views on the question.

I believe that there are two major issues about the US political system the discussion is hitting on. There is also a third issue which i will touch on regarding the issue of political liberty in the US. The state in the USA is and has been very different from that of other nations for some time. In the mid-nineteenth century, the French commentator on political affairs, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited the US and wrote Democracy in America. In this book Tocqueville arrived at a number of conclusions about the US political system still relevant today. Tocqueville noted that the US political system was much more decentralized than anything which existed in Europe at that time. He especially contrasted the US with France where he noted the centrality of Paris for the French nation. This centrality was not just cultural, but political and economic as well. It was for this reason that revolts in France centered so much around Paris and could succeed (at least so he thought, prior to the Paris Commune) with the seizure and holding of Paris. Tocqueville believed that this would not be possible in the US. He saw a proliferation of political institutions at many different levels. His conclusion was that a revolution on the order of the French Revolutions of 1789, 1890, and 1848 would not be possible in the US. (A second conclusion of relevance to us today -- to be discussed below -- was to the effect that as long as African-Americans were kept or remained in the US as slaves or in an oppressed condition, the US would have no internal peace.)

Tocqueville's observations are of importance to us because they touch on the way that State power exists in the US which is very different from many other states in the world. Municipal and state government office play much more of a role in people's everyday life in the US than they appear to in other places. While it is true that leftists run for local office in Europe and parts of the third world, national elections play a much more important part in Left politics. The centrality of the national political apparatus appears so much more obvious elsewhere than in the US.

I do not believe that this is because the Left and the masses elsewhere are so much more advanced than in the US (though the level of class consciousness is certainly higher), but that it has to do with the historic role which local political institutions have had in the US since the founding of Jamestown in Virginia and the Massachusetts Bay Colony by the Puritans. There has been a continued pattern of resistance to national politics and centralization in US history. This is not just true in the most obvious case of the South's resistance to northern industrial capitalism, but it has played a major role in the sectional/factional struggles which have divided so many political movements.

The development of the capitalist state in the United States occurred in such a way as to obscure the actual seats of power. In fact, the development of the capitalist state in the US has been done in such a manner that the "seizure of power" in a Paris Commune sense in Washington or the election of a Left president would probably mean much less than it would in France, Spain or even Britain.

### LIMITS ON DEMOCRACY

So, you must be asking by now, what does this have to do with America's democratic traditions? The decentralization of government (which at least in appearance existed until the FDR victory in 1932 and the New Deal) gave white men the impression that government was close to them. I should qualify the "white men" term to refer specifically to non-immigrant (again a qualification, those that came to the US prior to about 1890-1900) white men. Whether fact or fiction, the belief in local government has been an important thread in US political history. As a "political memory" it was important enough for Reagan and the Republican Right to repeatedly use in the 1980 election. I doubt that the French or British Right would use a similar theme (though i really don't know enough about their situation to say).

One thing which can be said is that the theme of local government has been recurrent in popular movements in the US, movements both on the Right and the Left. The proliferation of local political institutions, i might add, institutions which do have some power and can be accessible to many white men, is part of the US political memory and it influences the way people think and act. Insofar as these institutions accommodate the demands of oppressed nationalities and women for some expression of political power, the state appears to be more democratic. "If you want to make changes, young man/woman, run for alderman, city council, school committee, state legislator..."

These remarks should not be interpreted as an abstentionism regarding elections and electoral work, nor do i want to promote cynicism. In fact,

drawing the outlines of real state power in the USA will only happen insofar as we engage in local and national electoral politics. Local elections can be both a quagmire as well as an important means to influence masses of people. Local electoral work will teach us and the progressive masses more about how state power actually works and the role of the different apparatuses. At the same time this does not mean that the US political system is extremely democratic. The constant qualification which I have made regarding white men should say something. In addition, the property qualification which existed for so long in voting made the democracy more illusory than real. The closeness of government, though, reinforced this illusion especially when contrasted with the government structures in Europe.

Flowing from the above point is the issue of voting. What every school child learns about the early settlement by the Europeans in North America is there was voting when decisions had to be made for the "good of the community." This is part of the "democratic traditions" of the US. As I mentioned above, voting has always been subject to some very specific qualifications, including age, property, race/nationality, and sex.

In addition, the form of voting has been extremely important in the expression of political dissidence. The predominant electoral system in Europe is proportional representation (in contrast with the "winner take all" or "presidential" system in the US). Proportional representation exists in Cambridge, Massachusetts and a few other cities, and it existed in New York City in the 1940s. The basic idea is that a particular party would get a certain number of votes in the parliament (or city council, etc.) depending on the percentage of the vote they received.

The existence of this system at the national level in most European nation-states has made it possible for "minor" parties to get into parliament. In other words, it has made struggle at the national political level both more pressing as well as more real. Actual victories could be won on the national level. If such a system existed in the state of South Carolina or Mississippi, for example, there is a good chance that a predominantly Black political party could take control of the state or exercise a substantial amount of political influence and power within the bourgeois political system. The fact that the proportional representation system has been consistently opposed (and often sabotaged where there were attempts to introduce it) is one of the most important commentaries one could make on the state of political democracy in the USA.

The system of "winner take all" is an electoral system which encourages the peculiar two-party system we have in the US--the so-called non-ideological two party system (as opposed to the system which existed in Britain where the Conservatives and the Labor Party were the dominant parties and where each was fairly ideological). The difficult time which minor parties have in making a break into the national political scene and on the state and municipal level resulting from this voting system has encouraged the type of two party system we have.

Engels' reference to the two party system as being two wings of the same bird of prey takes on a specific meaning in the US context. While both parties

are bourgeois parties, each wing has a place for different colored feathers, or at least so it appears. The non-ideological two party system is supposed to appeal to an American pragmatism and the lack of interest in abstract ideological questions. The rationale is that the two parties exist as coalitions of various interest groups. To some extent each party does have a place for various sections of the masses.

The pressure toward this form of coalition politics is immense in a winner take all system. In my opinion, Earl Browder (in the CPUSA's period from about 1936-45) recognized something about this situation, but went overboard in trying to become mainstream. The acceptable way to participate in national electoral politics is through the two party system. This is held out as democratic in that all points of view can supposedly work together within that overall framework. Yet while participation in the Democratic primary may be an acceptable form of electoral action, even bourgeois extremes can be shot down within their own party. The 1972 McGovern candidacy showed this. The "non-ideological" two party system holds out the promise of democracy and a sort of coalition politics, but the reality is generally more repressive (either because of financial considerations or the outright attempts by sections of that party to sabotage one's candidacy).

One additional issue related to voting concerns registration. Many of us accept the fact that in order to vote, one must register. In other nation-states, it is far more common to find automatic voter registration. Leaving it up to the individual to register is one more step to discourage the working class voter. As the history of Reconstruction shows, the process of voter registration was an effective means of denying African-Americans the right to participate in the political process.

So far what I have been trying to show is that taken in its best light, the notion of "America's democratic traditions" can refer to some of the peculiar US institutions (on the political level) which foster a belief that there is place for all points of view and that government can be close to the "common man." I do not believe that these institutions are particularly democratic, and in some cases pale in comparison with the political institutions in Europe, but they have left a lasting imprint on the political memory of the masses and they must be taken into account in our work.

#### THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL LIBERTY

There is no question that the US has many political liberties which are not found elsewhere. We can hold open communist, socialist, etc., events. We can stand on street corners and yell to high-heaven about our beliefs. There are many things which we can do which one could not do in Chile or Bulgaria. Yet there are a number of problems which come to mind each time that someone mentions America's democratic traditions, especially if they use this to write off things like the dictatorship of the proletariat or some form of Marxist-Leninist party or organization. I don't intend to defend these concepts dogmatically, but neither do I see throwing them out wholesale. My point here is this: some comrades argue that US workers don't believe in dictatorships and therefore won't go for a dictatorship of the proletariat. Or some comrades with widely different views on the type of organization we need

conclude that Lenin's ideas are too conspiratorial to fit US conditions.

At this point I am going to say a few things which some people may find particularly cynical. People are won over to false ideas every day! To say that people are not won over to something which is false leaves the struggle for people's hearts and minds simply in the realm of ideas. How could we explain the growth of the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammed? The Nation of Islam had an entirely anti-scientific rationale for the development of the national oppression of people of color in the world. The Nation of Islam not only won people over to one hell of a false ideology, but they also believed in a semi-religious dictatorship (something like the Ayatollah) and they also believed in conspiratorial organization (the Fruit of Islam, to some extent, and some other things which the Nation did not talk about). I consider the Nation of Islam to have been basically progressive, but it had the types of traits which could have been turned into something extremely reactionary if given State power.

I happen to think that there are better terms which can be used to influence the extent to which people will listen to you. At the same time, because one uses a particular term does not necessarily explain the alienation of people from one's organization or cause. We do not believe in personal, military, or cliquish dictatorships--we believe in a socialist democracy. Yet organizations which explicitly believe in one or another form of dictatorship (think about elements of the Religious Right) are able to find mass support. We can not attribute our problems simply to the realm of ideas.

To get back to the major point: US democracy is obviously very uneven. At the same time that comrades will refer to America's democratic traditions, they will generally acknowledge that the US has one of the bloodiest histories in the world. Not only does it have the bloodiest labor history of all the advanced capitalist nation-states, but it also has a history of near extinction of the native populations, the loss of millions of African lives in the slave trade and in the slavery period generally, the annexation of the Southwest, and the ruthless treatment of the Chinese when imported and sent into barbaric work conditions. Everyone knows this, which is why when someone refers to America's democratic traditions, there is usually a quick qualifier with regard, at least, to oppressed nationalities.

If the US has a tradition, it has a tradition of intolerance to opposition and to new national groupings. Not only were there the genocidal practices mentioned above, but there could be added the "Know-Nothing" movement of the mid-nineteenth century which vehemently opposed immigration. The KKK not only opposed oppressed nationalities, but also opposed Jews and Catholics. What are we to say about all this and how does it relate to democratic traditions?

In looking at US history, one can see a number of things. There are, of course, examples of democracy (at least in the usual bourgeois sense); there is also extreme violence used by all sides. The KKK used terror against African-Americans to try to overturn Reconstruction, and African-Americans met that terror with all forms of struggle including weapons. Secret societies have been formed among reactionaries, but also within the labor movement --

the Molly Maguires and the Knights of Labor for instance -- and the national movements. All of these things must be examined when we speak of traditions.

The most important point, however, is that the stench of the overseer still surrounds US democracy. National oppression is not just something which affects oppressed nationalities, although on those grounds alone one could reject a certain usage of the term, America's democratic traditions. Rather national oppression has destroyed or distorted US democracy for whites. It has clearly crippled the labor movement. It has meant that certain forms of political expression are not tolerated (especially at certain key political moments such as during the attack on Reconstruction). And if one looks at the South, especially prior to the Civil Rights movement, one can see how white workers allowed themselves to, at the minimum, acquiesce, to one of the worst dictatorships which has existed in recent times. Yes, a dictatorship which kept the South tied into a certain section of the Democratic Party for nearly one hundred years.

This may seem overly harsh, but I believe that many of us have gotten comfortable over the last ten or so years with the relative freedoms which we have. We are not hounded by the police so some comrades question whether that means that many of the old ideas have little value. I, for one, am interested in talking further about which ideas should stay and which ideas should go, but in that discussion I think that we should look at history. When we refer to America's democratic traditions, we should spell out just what we mean, and what the implications are for the struggle. I will tell you now that I will have to be convinced. I can remember all too well my father's reluctance for me to use the term "liberal" in a piece I wrote in junior high school...that's right, "liberal," because it sounded too far to the Left. My father is no coward, but his memory of the McCarthy era was too present. Those of us who had family members hounded by the FBI for their beliefs are well aware of this.

US political history is fascinating because it is so contradictory. It can appear so democratic, but be so repressive. It can hold out a future for the immigrant, and extermination for the native. This history will bring forward a great many lessons, and for that reason we must be careful not to be one-sided and miss key aspects.

As far as references to America's democratic traditions, I can unite with an effort to figure out some of the specifics about the US political system. I think that in order for Marxism to be further developed and take a deeper root in the US, this is a must. My concern is that we do not get taken in by an illusion which has affected the Left before and led, in my opinion, to some erroneous conclusions about what should and should not be done. We need to work together to figure out some of the implications of US political history for us now.

--February 1983  
R. T. Sims