

WORKSHOPTALKS

Obama and U.S. workers

by Htun Lin

When Barack Obama referred to "bitter American workers" who, frustrated with economic conditions, fall back on "guns and religion," he put the issue of the declining economy front and center in the presidential contest. Setting aside the controversy over Obama's elitism, how can we address economic problems in a meaningful way, recognizing that a failure risks demagoguery over "guns, marriage, and Jesus."

Obama's remarks, once revealed, opened up a valuable discussion over race, religion, immigration, trade, and the economy, in a refreshing way no other presidential campaign has. The problem is not where Obama stands on these issues, or his elitist air, but where we workers stand.

MARX AND RELIGION

The right-wing *New York Times* columnist, Bill Kristol claimed that Obama's now infamous "bitter" remarks sound like Karl Marx's "famous statement about religion." Marx's view of religion has been stereotyped in a single hackneyed phrase: "Religion is the opiate of the people." However, Marx was not "anti-religion." He had an empathy for poor workers who turn to religion as a refuge. Religion was "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions." That is the most sober and understanding perspective on religion by an intellectual who dedicated his theoretical and practical work to the liberation of workers and humanity from capitalism. The critical issue for Marx, whether in relation to the economy or religion, is human beings' alienation from their own essence.

Continued on page 3

BLACK/REDFIELD

The Philosophy of Dr. King

On the 40th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we reprint John Alan's column of April 1993.

by John Alan

This April 4th, 25 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was murdered on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. The nation has remembered that day; and there is no doubt that many eulogies have been given and an untold number of references made to Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and his philosophy of non-violence. But at this moment, is American civilization ready to recognize its own complicity in King's assassination by ending racism and poverty in this country? Obviously the answer is NO!...

Dr. King was the preeminent leader of the Civil Rights Movement that radically changed Black and white relations in this country. These changes were historic in scope. Venerable practices of racism, which reduced African Americans to the status of things, were uprooted. Jim Crow signs were torn down and segregation in public places was "abolished" by boycotts and mass sit-ins. The movement put American civilization on trial and pressured the courts to open up the ballot boxes to Southern Blacks, who had been disenfranchised since the post-Reconstruction period.

PHILOSOPHY OF NONVIOLENCE

King advocated and practiced a "philosophy" of non-violent direct action against the forces of segregation. For him, civil disobedience was an act of "self-emancipation." Indeed, this concept was pivotal to the Movement and was the original reason for its spontaneous beginning in Montgomery, Ala.

King, in his "Letter from a Birmingham jail," raises self-emancipation to the level of a principle, when he rejects the proposal of a group of white clergymen to confine the struggle to legalism. "We can never forget,"

Continued on page 8

ON THE INSIDE

WRITINGS OF RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA
New relationship of theory, practice • p. 4
ESSAY • Healthcare and Marx's view
of the future • p. 5
EDITORIAL • Crisis is in production • p. 10
ONLINE: www.newsandletters.org

Flames of revolt in China

by Bob McGuire

The widespread uprisings of Tibetans against Chinese control in March seemed to take Chinese authorities and exiled leaders by surprise. What began as demonstrations on the 49th anniversary of the 1959 revolt against rule from Beijing caused security forces to step back briefly before the army and militia led a bloodbath, maybe 400 dead, to begin to regain control of the capital city Lhasa.

But outbreaks ranged far beyond Lhasa throughout the Tibetan Autonomous Region and beyond its borders into Tibetan populations in Gansu and Qinghai provinces. The government in Beijing urged on suppression of the revolt by accusing Dalai Lama supporters not only of trying to "split Tibet from the motherland," but also of the equally treasonous charge, in 2008, of "undermining the Olympics."

Then similar charges were asserted in Xinjiang. Overwhelming the indigenous Uighur population by moving in ten million ethnic Chinese Han settlers has reduced Uighurs to less than half of their own autonomous region. Uighur opposition groups have been routinely tarred as separatists, Muslim extremists and terrorists, and the Bush administration includes them on Washington's Terrorist Watch List.

But now Beijing announced, without evidence, that they had uncovered an unlikely plot between al-Qaeda and the Uighur group ETIM to use suicide bombings to disrupt the upcoming Summer Olympics, which is intended as a showcase for the transformation of "the world's workshop."

Protesters abroad have already taken advantage of the run up to the Olympics to attack China over Tibet and/or its complicity in genocide in Darfur by disrupting the journey of the Olympic flame through the streets of London, Paris and San Francisco (see article page 10). Ironically, the idea of the Olympic flame was a fakery of grandiose pageantry concocted by Hitler for the 1936 "Nazi" Olympics, as it was called by groups as mainstream as the Amateur Athletic Union when attempting to organize a boycott.

What has come to an end is more than half a century of official disregard for the question of self-determination for Tibetans. Now the degree of opposition to China's policies has compelled Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to meet with the Dalai Lama in India, and Prime Minister Gordon Brown to announce that he will not attend the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics.

CHINA'S LABOR POWER

The development China will show off during the Olympics documents the fruit of the natural resource that drew foreign capital in ever greater quantity: China's labor power. China's rate of economic growth has averaged well over 9% for the last 25 years, and in 2007 was 11.5%, while in the U.S. we wonder how long a recession will last.

Attracting foreign capital to China's export processing zones depended from the beginning on extracting



China exploits its own children as well as Tibet. Protests include Chinese at the Great Wall in 2007 and Students for a Free Tibet on Mt. Everest last month.

Credits: truthout.org, Independent Media Center, boycott2008games.blogspot.com

the maximum labor power from their workers and paying them the minimum—and suppressing the resistance that would naturally occur. In 1986-87, when Shanghai workers joined with students and intellectuals in a series of demonstrations for democracy and freedom, they were bloodily suppressed.

Similarly it was immediately after workers formed autonomous trade unions in the midst of the ongoing occupation of Tiananmen Square in 1989, that tanks killed over 3,000 there and in Changsha. In the aftermath of these massacres, it was primarily workers who were targeted for execution.

This eight-fold growth in China's economy has pushed it ahead of Germany to become the third largest in the world, behind only the U.S. and Japan. Even more startling, China has just passed the U.S. as the global leader in terms of production alone. Where the rust belt economy in the U.S. seems to be challenged to maintain aging bridges, roads and rails, China will have built more miles of new rail lines in five years by 2010 than the rest of the world has built in over 20 years. The new rail line to Lhasa extends Beijing's ability to assert its position in Tibet and to the borders of South Asia.

WORKERS' CONDITIONS WORSEN

All this has come with a price tag—children bought or kidnapped to work as slaves in brick kilns, workers routinely locked in their dormitories behind factory doors. Workers in state-run enterprises lost the subsidized housing that came with the job, or found themselves out of work altogether as lifetime jobs—the "iron rice bowl" system—disappeared.

Likewise, peasants would routinely be evicted from their land as it was turned over to some entrepreneur well connected to local Communist Party officials. As a result security forces have confronted an average of over 70,000 job actions, blockades and even armed resistance each year.

The result is a growing rift between those who have created the wealth and foreign and Chinese capitalists

Continued on page 10

Bush's Iraq surge an utter failure

Supporters of the Bush administration's war in Iraq seized upon the relative quiet during the fifth anniversary of the start of the conflict to claim that the U.S. surge policy of sending thousands of new troops to secure Baghdad has been a resounding success. Their exuberance was short-lived, however, as not long after the anniversary, the Iraqi central government of Nouri al-Maliki launched a poorly-planned and executed military offensive to assert its authority over Basra, Iraq's southern port city. Basra has been under the control of Shiite militias and criminal gangs since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Maliki's action touched off a general uprising against the U.S. and the central government by the militia of Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, the most powerful rival to Maliki's own Shiite party and its allies. Sadr's forces had been observing a strategic ceasefire during the period of the surge, the primary cause behind the downturn in violence that the Bush administration points to as proof of its policy's success.

The Sadr militia routed the poorly-trained Iraqi army in Basra and other cities of the Shiite south and instances took place in which army soldiers even deserted to join the militia. The fighting in Baghdad

was fierce and the U.S. and the Iraqi armies resorted to cordoning off the entire Shiite neighborhood of Sadr City, trapping its residents inside with limited food and medical supplies.

The central government's humiliation was brought to an end only by a ceasefire ordered by Sadr. The outcome of the fighting is an enormous strengthening of Sadr's forces at the expense of the weak and unpopular central government, which will position the Sadrists well for parliamentary elections later this year. The U.S. loses most of all, however, as its claims of progress in Iraq have been revealed to the world to be entirely hollow.

By the time General Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker delivered their testimony to Congress in mid-April, Bush conceded that the reduction of the troop buildup underway had to be halted because of the deterioration of the situation. (See page 9 for anti-war demonstration reports.)

The President's only consolation is that a deepening economic crisis at home has focused attention away from his failure in Iraq. This shift serves the Democrats equally well, as it becomes increasingly difficult to pose options for exiting Iraq.

—Sympathizer

Review: Poetry and Commitment

by Terry Moon

Adrienne Rich's essay, "Poetry and Commitment," has been published by W.W. Norton & Company in a beautiful small booklet, just the right size to fit in your pocket. The essay, given in 2006 at Stirling University in Scotland at a conference on "Poetry and Politics," continues Rich's explication of the meaning of words, here concentrating on poetics and "the action of poetry in the world" (p. 9).

Rich does this by taking us on a journey through time, place, and poets—time and place of conflict, strife, revolution, and revolt; and poets who, like Shelley, saw "no contradiction among poetry, political philosophy, and active confrontation with the illegitimate authority" (p. 6).

She begins with "the great Scottish Marxist bard, Hugh MacDiarmid" who is explicit about "The Kind of Poem I Want": one that is "a stand made against intellectual apathy..." (p. 1). And in this small book we meet poet after poet who made no separation between art, life, and the transformation of our world. We learn what poetry is not. It is not "a healing lotion, an emotional massage, a kind of linguistic aromatherapy...a blueprint, nor an instruction manual, nor a billboard." She quotes the wonderful James Scully distinguishing between "conceptually shallow" protest poetry and "dissident poetry": "a poetry that talks back, that would act as part of the world, not simply a mirror of it" (p. 14).

WORDS CHANGE THE WORLD

What spoke most eloquently was her examples of the power of poetic language to change the world. She shows this to us in the words of David Zonsheine, the organizer of the Courage to Refuse, those Jewish soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces, who became known as "Refuseniks" for refusing to follow orders, refusing to be the means by which the Israeli government crushed the Palestinian drive for freedom and self-determination.

Zonsheine tells us not only how poetry broke through to him but, as well, how the youth of Israel became the instrument of the oppression of another people, how the concept of liberation, of "never again," when speaking of the Holocaust, was transformed into its opposite. Israel has become, not a homeland for the oppressed, but an oppressor nation, using all means to stamp out not alone the desire for freedom, but the very lives of the Palestinian population.

Rich, in quoting Zonsheine, shows us that it is a poem that unlocks his mind from his "sense of mission...based...on...the painfully simple message that we shall not allow the Holocaust of the Jews of Europe to repeat itself no matter what the cost, and when the moral price became more severe, the sense of mission only increased...I am a freedom fighter...not an occupier, not cruel, certainly not immoral." This was, he tells us, "the armor of the righteousness...in which they had dressed me years ago."

What breaks through this armor, he writes, was the "strong words" of the poet, Yitzhak Laor, "which echo in my ears: 'With such obedience? With such obedience? With such obedience?'" (p. 28-29)

WOMEN WORLDWIDE

by Mary Jo Grey

The Dean of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health recently removed a block to searches that include the word "abortion" in the school's database. Administrators at the Center for Communications Programs had blocked "abortion" searches after questions from the database funder, Bush's U.S. Agency for International Development.

Nairobi Women's Hospital, Kenya, reported the daily average of rapes has doubled in the increased violence following the disputed presidential election. Jeanne Ward, an international consultant on gender-based violence, said: "These sexual attacks may be crimes of opportunism, or in cases of war or ethnic violence, rapes may be targeted at one particular group of women and girls."

There is good news and bad news out of the state of Maryland. A court ruling forced the state to reinstate a \$7 million Medicaid program to help more than 4,000 pregnant immigrant women and children who have been in the U.S. less than five years, and they had eliminated in 2005. Unfortunately, a three judge panel of the Maryland Special Court of Appeals then showed their misogyny by reinforcing the provision of the state rape law stating that a woman who gives consent prior to intercourse cannot say NO during the act. So much for women's control of their own bodies.

—Information from *Feminist Daily News*

Hundreds of women marched in Johannesburg, South Africa, in March, protesting sexual assaults by taxi drivers who have targeted women in miniskirts. The attackers of one woman stripped and groped her, and poured alcohol over her head shouting that this is what she wanted. Nonhlanhla Mokeona, of People Opposing Women Abuse, said "We want to highlight that women have rights—they have the right to choose what to wear."

WOMAN AS REASON

Most important in our age of retrogression is Rich's discussion of what happens after revolution, with which she ends the essay. Its importance is at least twofold: First, because she makes revolution thinkable in a world whose rulers have tried to make it ridiculous; second, because she reveals the expansiveness of the possible answers to that question. Thus her last chapter begins by quoting the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci on what it means to "imagine a new socialist society." It is, she writes "to imagine a new kind of art that we can't foresee from where we now stand." Then Gramsci speaks for himself: "One must speak of a struggle for a new culture, that is, for a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing reality and, therefore, a world intimately ingrained in 'possible artists' and 'possible works of art'" (p.35).

ART AFTER REVOLUTION

The whole of the essay is not about what happens after revolution, but rather how the relationship of life and art—when art refuses to separate itself from the Idea and the struggle for freedom—impacts the world. At the end, Rich is making manifest how expansive our discussion of what happens after revolution must become. By expanding the discussion of what happens after revolution to include "a new kind of art," she is revealing an indispensable dimension of what Karl Marx saw implicit in the human being, the "quest for universality." And by giving this talk and publishing this book, she is letting us know that we can't put off that discussion, that it must begin now. Words, she has shown us, do not only describe this world, but have the power to help change it.

Million Signature Campaign in Iran

What is now known as the Million Signature Campaign (MSC) in Iran started about four years ago. A small group of women were concerned with the state of women's rights. The first demonstration of about 20-25, on March 8, 2004, talked about women's human rights being violated. Of course the police came and a number were detained, some were hurt by the police. They were ordered to disband, which they did.

That demonstration focused attention on what is March 8: International Women's Day. The next year there was a bombastic demonstration. There were a lot of student demonstrations in Iran and a lot of crossover between student and women's rights discussions.

The organizers focusing on women's issues tried to come up with a way to get a wide range of people involved, not let it be an "intellectual exercise." In the past such "movements" had a hard time connecting with working-class people. This time there was an explicit goal to have them articulate their needs and participate.

The MSC was chosen as a vehicle: collecting signatures on petitions to reform the family, workplace and criminal laws that target women, to open a dialogue on women's lives. They sponsored workshops in which 20 or so women would gather, usually in someone's house, and have a discussion on what their concerns are with an emphasis on making the discussion participatory. Most would sign the petition; some would organize their own meetings. It gradually grew to become a widespread movement in all provinces, especially in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.

Blogs now are full of appeals for the release of women arrested at recent demonstrations. A lot of women attorneys are involved, Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner, being the most prominent. They write very provocatively about the nuances of the laws.

In the past 30 years of Iranian history, this is the most widespread, most democratic movement I have seen. There are a lot of disagreements which are being discussed. For example, there was a discussion about an article and photo spread that some felt were highlighted too much. The criticism was that religion is a regressive element in our society. Some said we've made this mistake before—being drawn into populist actions which then took a movement in a different direction, and see where we ended up after the 1979 Revolution when our rights were taken away.

Any large movement is in danger of losing its clear principles. There are other aspects of the movement, which are regressive also, but not necessarily religious which need to be challenged. As in any growing movement, it is defused, but it is involving and educating a lot of people.

—Nazanin Afarin

Chiapas women meet

CHIAPAS, MEXICO—Several thousand women gathered in the Indigenous Zapatista community of La Garucha to participate in the first meeting of Zapatista women with the peoples of the world. At the heart of the meetings were more than 200 Zapatista women—*comandantas*, members of Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee; *insurgentas*; representatives of different regions of local governments; Good Government Councils; health and education promoters; agrarian agents; and others.

These grandmothers, who became Zapatistas two decades ago, told what life was for Indigenous women in the years before the 1994 rebellion and the subsequent formation of autonomous communities in resistance. They spoke of the slave-like conditions women faced and shared experiences of the first clandestine work with the Zapatistas.

Before the rebellion, they worked on the Revolutionary Laws of Women (RLW) to work out what they were fighting for. They included the right of all women to: participate in the revolutionary struggle, work and receive just pay, decide the number of children they will bear, education and primary medical care, choose their spouses, live free of violence, and that rapes and assaults will be severely punished. This meeting was a living resume of 14 years of struggle to make the RLW a living practice against the opposition of Mexican Federal, state, and local governments.

These women were joined at the meeting by young women and girls from the post-rebellion period to share the experience of this creative labor under a series of themes including: how Zapatista women lived before and how they live now, and how they organized themselves to achieve their rights and sustained themselves in the struggle.

They had rejected the government schools and set up their own which were bi-lingual, in the indigenous tongue and Spanish. Their education combined mental and manual labor—the theoretical and practical. They became their own teachers and taught a new generation of students. They set up their own government councils.

Of course, sexism has not disappeared. But it's the self-activity of the Zapatista women, not the practice of machismo, that has become the point of departure.

While the Zapatista women were the center of this three day meeting, hundreds of Indigenous women and men arranged housing and prepared the food. Men could not participate directly in the meeting, though they could listen.

Besides a number of international observers, other crucial groups were Mexican women from other parts of Mexico including the capital. I traveled with a busload from Mexico City, of all ages and occupations. With me, they saw the rich, creative participation of Indigenous women in Chiapas as an important moment, one to share with many *companeras*, friends and groups back home.

—Eugene Walker



Hana Abdi and Ronak Safarzadeh, 21-year-old Kurdish women, have been imprisoned since late last year for their activity with the MSC in Iran. Each has spent three months in solitary confinement. Safarzadeh faces a possible death penalty. Abdi's trial has not begun.

Sex Workers Rights Day

International Sex Workers Rights Day began in India on March 3, 2001, when over 25,000 sex workers attended a festival held by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, a Calcutta-based group of over 50,000 sex workers and members of their communities. Every year since, prostitutes and other sexual entertainers including strippers and phone sex operators have observed the day with worldwide demonstrations demanding their rights and dignity as workers.

Groups of self-organized sex workers in Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, Canada and the U.S. are demanding decriminalization of all sex work, not legalization, which leads to government regulations that disempower workers. They also oppose the Swedish model, which criminalizes only the customers and pimps.

Among the advantages of decriminalization are that prostitutes could go to the police when they are victims of violence; and they would have easier access to life-saving resources such as condoms, medical care, and drop-in centers, as well as programs that can help them if they want to leave prostitution.

International sex workers' rights activists as well as the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women are demanding that a human rights approach to sex trafficking replace the law enforcement approach. They say victims of trafficking should not be imprisoned or deported to countries from which they were trying to escape.

This year activists have been showing the 13-minute film, "Taking the Pledge," in which members of human rights groups working with sex workers tell of the devastating effects of the Bush administration's anti-prostitution pledge. Groups must sign a pledge stating that they have an official position against prostitution in order to receive funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. This has taken away resources that help sex workers and victims of sex trafficking.

Prominent sex workers rights organizations include the Sex Workers Activist Network (SWAN) in Asia and Europe, the Sex Workers Outreach Project in the U.S., and the Network of Sex Work Projects in all countries.

—Adele

Strike stops American Axle and GM

DETROIT—The strike by 3,650 workers at American Axle and Manufacturing, now eight weeks old, is marked by grim determination on the part of the workers to maintain a decent standard of living and protect hard-won benefits. Despite profits of \$37 million last year, American Axle is demanding a slash in wages from \$27 an hour to \$14 an hour, as well as other concessions.

When the strike started on Feb. 23, involving five plants in Michigan and two in New York, there were no negotiations scheduled between the company and union, the United Auto Workers, and none took place for four weeks. The company refused to provide the union with financial and other data concerning pension, healthcare and other benefit costs that the union demanded in order to analyze the company's economic condition. Finally, the company provided the information, and after a week negotiations were scheduled.

Since American Axle provides all of the axles for all of GM's light trucks and SUVs made in America, the thinking at first was that the strike would not last long because of the impact it would have on GM's auto production. However, because of poor auto market conditions and the ability to move axles among some plants, as well as the intransigence of the company, the strike continued. And it also helped draw down GM's auto inventory, which was very high due to the poor market conditions.

During this period, the company's CEO, Dick Dauch, launched a barrage of attacks against the striking workers, threatening to move the production of axles to other countries (he had closed a plant in New York in 2006 and moved the work to Mexico), recalling laid-off workers and advertising for jobs in the papers. But the strikers failed to be intimidated by these threats, and the laid-off workers refused to return—even though this meant they would lose their unemployment compensation.

The lengthening strike soon had its effect, and now 29 GM plants are either closed or have cut back production, affecting some of GM's best sellers. Some are now predicting that pressure from GM will help tip the

scales for a settlement.

On the picket lines at the plant, the workers are receiving much support, from the community in food and donations, from workers from other plants in Detroit and outlying areas who are joining them on the picket lines, and from drivers travelling by who honk their horns and give a thumbs up gesture. The strikers have been both surprised by and appreciative of this outpouring from the community, especially in light of the bad economic conditions in Detroit. And they are conscious of the importance of their struggle—they say that they are striking for all of labor and the historic need to reverse the concessionary attitude of labor leaders throughout the country.

The strikers are also demanding to get any proposed settlement between the company and union at least a week ahead of any contract ratification. They are very much aware of the union tactic of first presenting a contract at the ratification meeting, allowing the workers no time to study the provisions before they vote.

The workers are getting \$200 a week strike pay from the union, and the pickets are out in force at every plant entrance on a 24/7 basis, marching in solidarity in all kinds of weather. They are quick to make the point that while CEO Dauch is screaming about how important it is for the workers' wages to be cut in half, he hasn't offered to cut his salary of \$10.2 million last year, which increased by 9.5%.

In the meantime, the strikers are more than willing to take the battle to the company. As one picket declared when asked how long the workers would stay out on strike: "One day longer than the company."

—Andy Phillips

Unity at Sutter Health



California Nurses Association (CNA) celebrated the end of their 10-day strike on March 30 against healthcare conglomerate Sutter Health. Of the 4,000 nurses, 95% stayed out. This was the third of a wave of strikes (see February-March and December 2007-January 2008 *N&L*) over patient care, especially non-enforcement of legally mandated nurse-patient ratio, as well as Sutter's attempt to take away healthcare and retirement options.

Death in coal surge

DETROIT—The sharp spike in the price of coal this year to over \$90 a ton, from around \$40 a ton last year, has ominous implications for consumers, the environment and coal miners themselves.

This increase in the price of coal results from the growing needs of a power-hungry world, which is turning the U.S. into a major exporter of coal. The growing appetite for energy is escalating so rapidly that existing sources cannot meet the demand. This is true not only for China and India, whose growth has been spectacular, but also for Japan, Germany, England, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

The impact of these developments will soon be felt in the U.S. Since about half the electricity produced in the U.S. comes from coal-fired power plants, the price of electricity is certain to increase. Since electric utilities buy their coal a year or more in advance, the increases probably won't appear in electric bills until 2009, but will continue to go up in succeeding years.

The increase in the use of fossil fuel, of which America has the largest known reserves in the world, means that more pollutants will be spewed into the atmosphere, chief among which is carbon dioxide, the major contributor to global warming. In response to this threat, there has been a growing public outcry against coal-burning industries, which has resulted in regulations governing coal-burning emissions and a delay in the construction of coal-fired power plants. The corporate-friendly Bush administration has ceaselessly attempted to dilute and bypass emission regulations and has often succeeded in these efforts.

Coal miners will bear the brunt of these coal demands, as coal operators will increase pressures for more production. This means less concern for safety matters and the wear and tear on the miners themselves who will be forced to work overtime under hazardous conditions.

These market conditions also mean that more coal miners will be hired who will not receive the training they need to work safely underground. And since coal operators are notorious for their disregard for the safety of miners, this will certainly result in an increase in mine injuries and deaths.

—Ex-coal miner

St. Francis Hospital harasses union drive

MEMPHIS, TENN.—Hospital workers are organizing at St. Francis Hospital, a member of the Tenet Healthcare Corporation. Tenet Healthcare signed an agreement with the Service Employees International Unions (SEIU) to remain neutral during a union organizing drive across the country.

Despite this commitment, four St. Francis employees who are union supporters have been fired in recent weeks. By the end of March, SEIU filed a complaint with the arbitrator that lists over 200 violations of the neutrality agreement. While many of the stronger Nurses Associations like Massachusetts and California have been critical of the neutrality agreement, in the South, where right-to-work culture rules, the neutrality agreement is actually a step forward.

The Midsouth Interfaith Network for Economic Justice is organizing community support for the SEIU effort. At a public meeting at a neutral location, hospital workers like Sandra Write and Mary Davis spoke passionately about the need to change the culture of the hospital from one that is punitive to one that is committed to patient care.

Sandra Write, sterile processor in the Surgery Unit, said, "It's hard to take good care of our patients when the patient ratios are so high. We need a change for the better." Mary Davis, Certified Cardiology technician fired by St. Francis said, "Everyone should be treated equally. I want to see an end to retaliation for talking about problems on the job with your manager."

A wide range of employees is organizing, from registered nurses to certified nursing assistants (CNA), with the CNAs serving as the majority at this time. CNAs are the support staff whose labor forms the critical work needed for quality patient care. Three of the four organizers terminated were CNAs and the fourth is a licensed practical nurse (LPN). These are some of the most vulnerable workers in the hospital, yet they have bravely supported unionization as a way to improve patient care. Problems include short staffing, disrespectful treatment by supervisors, and lack of patient care input.

What is clear is that the hospital is actively organizing to scare workers away from signing a yes card for a union vote. Workers on one floor of the hospital were told that they would lose their jobs if they voted in the union. In the face of such intimidation, these courageous women are standing up for their rights as workers and as care providers for our community's sickest members.

This organizing drive could also be educational for a community that has been mis-educated for so long on the dangers of unionization. For the workers, patients and the community, this drive needs to succeed. The Memphis Local of News and Letters Committee will keep you updated on the unionization efforts.

—Red Al

Labor's battlefronts

DETROIT—The biennial Labor Notes Conference, "Rebuilding Labor's Power," held here April 11-13, was a refreshing experience amid the global gloom of continued outsourcing, downsizing and relentless reductions in wages and benefits for those still holding jobs.

Speakers could have ranted about unjust and greedy employers, but chose to concentrate on concrete struggles from Mexico to North Carolina as they identified specific impediments within the labor movement itself.

Maureen Taylor of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization welcomed one thousand union activists to Detroit by reminding everyone that there are "more of us than them," and that we have a lot in common with international workers: "only labor—employed and unemployed—can bring the world back from the brink."

"Social movement unionism" was a theme that resonated throughout the conference as speakers and participants discussed the necessity of linking workplace struggles with their communities, such as relating workplace health and safety to the pollution the company creates in the surrounding region.

Dinamichel Avila Gomez described the protracted struggle of the Cananea Mine Workers' Union in Mexico. Copper miners have been on strike since July against Grupo Mexico, which had been at war with Section 65 Mineworkers since they acquired the mine in 1990. Health and safety violations and cutbacks in social programs for mineworkers' families had prompted several strikes that the workers had ended only to confront further cuts.

On July 11 miners were attacked by goons, and women and children were threatened. Realizing that the government would do nothing, 1,100 miners' wives formed the Women's Support Committee (Frente Feminil Cananense). Their methods included protests in schools, supporting wives to encourage their husbands to stay strong, and requesting international support, for which they thanked U.S. United Steelworkers.

In North Carolina, a right-to-work state, the "Freightliner 5" were fired for union activity. Robert Whiteside of UAW Local 3520 explained that his was a new local, not under a master agreement. Nearly 99% of the membership voted to strike when a concessionary proposal was presented. But the union president countered the democratic decision to continue the strike by misinforming the membership. Whiteside stressed that American workers and workers of the world need to draw a line to say, "enough is enough!"

—Susan Van Gelder

WORKSHOPTALKS

Continued from page 1

Marx did not idealize workers. There are tendencies among workers that are ethnocentric, homophobic, racist and sexist. Bitter or not, it is certainly true that, as Obama said of workers in the rustbelt, "They are angry. They feel like they have been left behind. They feel like nobody is paying attention to what they're going through." For so long we workers have been preached to about lowering our expectations and managing our anger.

Whether it is small town Pennsylvania or the urban slums of New Delhi, the issue is alienation experienced by the working poor. This alienation comes from the fact that the only commodity workers have to sell under capitalism is their labor-power, which is used at will by the capitalist for the purpose of extracting value. In production, workers are alienated from their own labor even as they develop connections with other workers. Without a sense of connection to other workers in the shop and to workers everywhere, the feeling of isolation can be overwhelming and have serious health consequences.

ALIENATION AND HEALTH

A new socio-economic documentary on the state of healthcare in America, "Unnatural Causes—Is Inequality Making Us Sick?" spoke of the "Latino-Paradox": the fact that Mexican immigrants, in spite of extreme poverty, start out healthier than native U.S. workers because they bring a "culture, of tradition, of tight family social networks and community social networks that essentially form a shield around them....But that shield has an expiration date... As they are here longer, their health advantage erodes."

The key point is that isolation kills: "Isolation is on the rise in the U.S., not just among immigrants. One in four...say they have no one they can talk to about their problems." Union bureaucrats often capitulate to management over the issue of job security, as well as ignoring the cries of workers to improve working conditions, not just wages and benefits.

Isolation wears down the human spirit, eroding essential human relations, distorting beyond recognition the fundamental human metabolism with nature and with one another. We must not let the question "is inequality making us sick?" be limited to material consumption, wages and benefits. Traditional political-economists tend to look exclusively at the consumption side, without asking as Marx did: how can workers overcome alienated labor, material production that produces value for the capitalist?

In the exuberant world of market exchange, the alienated laborer is rendered invisible. This "invisibility" is the real "unnatural cause" of American illness. Alienation cannot be quantified easily. The absolute opposite of alienation is conscious, direct human cooperation and social collectivity. The tenuous nature of one's connection to production today, as well as the way it dissolves human relationships, calls for new forms of social solidarity among workers. That is the only way worker cooperation can emerge from under the yoke of value production that is killing us.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF
RAYADUNAYEVSKAYA

Where to begin?

Theory and practice in a new relationship

EDITOR'S NOTE

In preparation for the Special Convention of News and Letters Committees, where we will confront the question of how to begin anew in today's situation, in which the needed new relationship between theory and practice is paramount, we print excerpts of Raya Dunayevskaya's presentation to the 1956 Founding Convention. The talk, titled "Theoretical and Practical Perspectives: Where to Begin," is included in the *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, microfilm # 2566.

Marxism isn't an heirloom to be handed down as a keepsake for your grandchildren. It is either a method to help us realize freedom in our day, or it is nothing at all.

Our point of departure must be in the concrete stage of capitalist production itself. The crisis is in production. If you see it there, you can understand it everywhere else. If you do not see it there, you can understand it nowhere.

The totality of the crises in production today is twofold: 1) First is the role of capitalism. Just as the State Plan came out of the collapse of private capitalism, in face of the crash in 1929, so automation came as the capitalistic answer to the struggle over productivity in the post-war years. However, the crisis in production is now so total and of such a world scope, that there is nothing from atomic energy to automation that is not simultaneously the property of every industrial country, and with America and Russia both having the H-bomb, the world has reached an impasse that is nearly breathless. There is very little time differential nowadays between **their** theory and practice too, but while they can only live by hiding and there is no chance to hide, the working class wants to be heard **and urges toward a unity with theory. The age of automation strives to be recorded in its proletarian impulse.**

2) Second and most important is the role of labor in this, the age of automation, where the worker not only refuses to be a mere cog in the machine, nor take unemployment as a "natural" phenomenon, but on the contrary, raises the very basic question of the relationship of labor to life itself....

Ever since the 1929 crash which split the American mind as well as the world mind into two opposite poles, on the one hand the Planners, and on the other hand the self-activity of the workers, finding their own forms of organization as the CIO, the movement from practice to theory has developed to where it has now reached such intensity that it will not brook any separation on the part of the theoreticians. This is different than it was in 1941, when the state-capitalist tendency first arose.¹

It was fine to write theses and to point out how the old parties were degenerating because they had neither correct theory nor were they based on their own rank and file.

But when it came to the simple question: what do we **do** now that we're independent; where do we **begin** now that nothing stands in the way of **our** meeting the proletariat on our grounds, how many different answers were blurred out? ...

The failure of Correspondence² is the failure to merge with the new impulses coming from automation although we were right there on the spot when it happened and could see even in the most concrete way where it all happened when the most automatized mine, the Consol, was precisely the first where workers began the great 1949-50 strike.

The theoreticians who thought they had prepared themselves sufficiently by the theory of state capitalism and workers revolt to receive new impulses **had not the slightest conception that these impulses at this stage in this age of absolutes were not mere instinct, but thought itself and not just random thought but theory.**

INDIVISIBILITY OF THE BOOK AND THE PAPER

The indivisibility of the book and the paper³ as the life of the organization, its foundation and its expression, is the answer to the question, where to begin. But this needs to be concretized. Take the book. How does it happen that we alone are doing it? What does the method in which we are doing it signify? That is to say, why did I feel inadequate to the task of doing it alone? Why did it have to become a **collective** venture, not only of our little group here, but of every worker and intellectual we could possibly reach? All of these questions can be answered simply by showing the significance of how much greater was the help of the workers than of the intellectuals, even our own intellectuals, in the accomplishment of this task. I repeat, the workers who had never read a word of Marxism, who had never even heard the name, gave more of themselves to this book than did our own intellectuals. It is a hard thing to grasp especially since we are all so well-meaning and so glibly repeat that Marxism is not in books but in the daily lives of people. What **do** we do after we say that? How many of us say the paper can't be "just" a forum for the workers and thereby once again introduce the division between Marxism and the worker.

On the other hand, follow one worker's reactions. When Pete says:

You know, I laid there this morning about quarter to six. I looked out the window. I said to myself, "You just got to get up there and go, whether you feel like it or not." I just said it to myself. I didn't even speak it to my wife. I just said to myself, "Now you call that a free man?"

He isn't saying I hate to get up and go to work, although that is a good enough thing to say—he is taking the word **freedom** from out of the clouds and making it the stuff of everyday life.

When Angela Terrano says work will have to be something entirely different, she is doing more than exuding a good working-class instinct. She is stating the philosophy and the concrete slogan, if you please, which must be the axis of a paper like *News & Letters*....

When Charles Denby writes about the changes in the shop which trace the evolution of the labor bureaucracy, and at the same time, says that the book will be the weapon in the class struggle, he is doing nothing less than what Marx himself did when he took political economy out of its intellectual sphere and made it both theory and weapon in the class struggle.

Compare this to the intellectual who **does** see the book as necessary, but fails to grasp the specific **contribution** that we **and we alone** are making in this restatement of Marxist fundamentals. The truth is, he has helped **less** in writing this book than the worker who is shy enough to think that only because he has never heard of Marx is the book new.

AGE OF ABSOLUTES

The truth is, the book is **new** and so are his feelings and aspirations because they are the feelings and thoughts and aspirations of the year 1956. Except in the most general sense, Marx could not have known them when he wrote.

We live in the age of absolutes. He did not.

The working class of today is far more advanced than the Parisian masses of 1871, although the latter established in the Paris Commune the first workers state in history and we have yet to establish the workers' state of our day....

The way to break down the division between worker and intellectual is to begin with the realization that in the book the intellectuals, even as the workers, have something new to learn. The intellectual can then spread the book far and wide in the full realization of the contribution we are making to fill the void in Marxism.

We are not elite, and we are not out to lead the masses. But we have a serious role to perform and no one else is doing it. Our point of departure is new. No one since Marx himself has done anything like it. We could not have been without Marx, but Marxism (I repeat) is not what Marx wrote in 1843 or 1883, but what it is today, 1956.

...The workers of this age will accept nothing less than a total view of every aspect before power, after power, and of every process on the way.

The young Marx said the task of the new journal should be to help the realization of the age. That is **our** task, with all the added complexities of the age of absolutes. **Yet it can all be summed up in a simple sentence—clarifying workers politics in the book and in the paper as inseparables.**

When Lenin, in 1900, wrote his article, "Where to Begin," and specified that beginning to be a newspaper, how many of his colleagues laughed and said, No, it should be an organization. Others said there should be only a newspaper, not an organization. Where others saw the two—newspaper and organization—as separates, Lenin saw them as inseparable.

It is easy to say today history has proven Lenin right. The point is what did you say as a contemporary of his when he said: This—a national newspaper—is where we begin.

...[T]hose of us who had worked out the significance of Stalin's death as the beginning of the end of totalitarianism, and were reinterpreting the movement of the Absolute Idea materialistically **as the movement from practice to theory** did have our fountain pens full and were ready to **hear** the new impulses and incorporate them immediately into the Marxism of our age, specifying that the two poles of the book would be Automation and the Absolute Idea....

The conviction that this is so does not arise from my telling you so. The inner conviction can arise only because of a certain attitude to the working people, the unshakeable confidence that there are workers struggling for a new society every day of their lives, that the world does not begin and end with you, but with **them**. That you have something to learn from them, does not mean that they do not have something to learn from **you**.

If you have this conviction, **then** you can engage in the struggle for the minds of men, and that is what our century is, the struggle for the minds of men. The struggle for the minds of men at the time when the tendency to the complete mechanization of men has reached its acutest point with automation. Just as it cannot be won with hollow slogans of democracy, **so** it cannot be won either with outworn concepts of vanguardism, or intellectual abdication.

It is precisely the totality of the world crisis that compels philosophy, a total outlook. The working class may not have created a new society yet, but they have undermined the old and smashed to smithereens all the old categories, believing neither in the rationality of the economic system, nor the political order.

The vanguard, on the other hand, has done nothing. It is stuck in the mud of old fixed categories, chief of which is the party to lead the masses. Where the worker **begins** with the question: what happens **after** the conquest of power? Are we always to be confronted with a new bureaucracy? Is it all to end in the one-party state, the so-called vanguard says: first do this, follow me. That workers have already heard from the capitalists who say: Look at the wonders of automation—tomorrow the new world, but now follow me.

Everyone is ready to lead. No one to listen. **Yet this age of automation demands to be recorded as proletarian impulse.** This is what *News & Letters* is doing. There is nothing but the intellectual sloth on the side of the vanguard parties.

What they all forget is that a new society is the

human endeavor or it is nothing at all. It cannot be brought into the world either behind the backs or outside the minds of the people. It is the people who will conceive it. It is the people who will build it. Or it will not be built....

Marxism is in the everyday life of the workers, in their struggles and aspirations, their thoughts and experiences. The American worker has one advantage over his European brother: he is unencumbered by old radical political parties that have become bureaucratized—whether as the totalitarianism of Russia or the democratic one of the British Labor Party, Bevanites included—is more free, beginning with production and ease of communication and association with his fellow men, than any other working class on earth.

All we have to do is to have our ears attuned, our paper ready as platform for them and columns for us. We also have something to say.

This is not intellectual abdication. The new impulses can come only from those on whose backs all the oppression weighs. But once the theoretician has taken the impulse from the worker, his work does not end. His work first then begins. It is no small task to work out a new unity of theory and practice. It took Marx his whole lifetime. We are more fortunate than he and do not have to begin from the beginning. We have Marx to build on. We have the great divide in Marxism to absorb. We have the experience of more than three decades of working-class struggles since Lenin's death. And we have the present rich day to day struggles of the Negro masses. The movement **from practice to theory** cannot fail to meet the movement from theory to practice if we live our lives with the working class and have our ears open.

If the history of the past means nothing to you, remember that today also is history... [A]ll that the knowledge of the past does is to lay the foundation for the present and infuse us with the confidence that this continuous thread from history is a sort of **wireless communication that will first be decoded in our age which will see to it that the idea of workers freedom is not so feeble that it will not actually come to be in our day.**

¹ The State-Capitalist Tendency was organized within the Workers Party by Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James and others to advance the position that Russia was a state capitalist society, rather than a workers state.

² From 1951 to 1955 the State-Capitalist Tendency became an independent organization, Correspondence Committees.

³ "The book" referred to throughout is Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 Until Today*, completed in 1957, see ad this page. "The paper" is *News & Letters*.

Marxism and Freedom from 1776 until Today

"It was the 'philosophic' moment that enabled Dunayevskaya, in *Marxism and Freedom*, to penetrate into the core of the revolutionary movement. And it is still this moment that enables us to find her relevance in the midst of counterrevolutionary times."

—Joel Kovel



Women of the Paris Commune seizing the cannons

"On March 18th, the soldiers were ordered by M. Thiers, the head of the reactionary government, to transport the cannon of Paris to Versailles. The milkmaids...surrounded the soldiers and prevented them from carrying out Thiers' orders... [A]lthough the women were not armed, they held their own. As in every real peoples' revolution, new strata of the population were awakened. This time it was the women who were to act first."

—from *Marxism and Freedom*

To order, see page 7

ESSAY

Healthcare and Marx's view of the future

by Htun Lin and Ron Kelch

...if...[industry] is regarded as the exoteric unfolding of human essential capacities, the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man can also be understood. Then natural science loses its abstract materialistic, or rather idealistic, direction and becomes the basis for human science. Today, it has already become—although in alienated form—the basis of actual human life. To have one basis for life and another for science is a priori a lie.

—Karl Marx, "Private Property and Communism"

In spite of all the overwhelming evidence that a universal single payer system is the most cost effective way for the U.S. to overcome the disgrace of now having 47 million uninsured, none of the candidates in the upcoming presidential election even challenge the wasteful and contradictory system based on insurance companies and pharmaceuticals as profit centers. Workers' concrete concerns on the frontlines of healthcare delivery (see "Workshop Talks," page 1) pose profound questions whose implications go way beyond their reflection in the more visible political struggle over healthcare.

For over a decade now healthcare workers, especially nurses such as the California Nurses Association (CNA), have fought to have a say in the quality of care they provide in their everyday working lives. Health workers have been pivotal in community struggles to save health facilities in poor areas. CNA nurses set up their own emergency Response Network (RNRN) after many volunteered to help New Orleans in the wake of Katrina.

They deemed the government's efforts totally worthless and, even worse, reported that they confronted a host of chronic problems that had nothing to do with Katrina. Other healthcare volunteers set up free rural health fairs in affected areas to deal with those chronic illnesses like diabetes and kidney failure, and have been overwhelmed with the number of people and range of basic, but unattended, health needs.

The model for RNRN is Doctors Without Borders, a prominent international human solidarity group. Direct solidarity is a response to healthcare as a business, which leaves the poor behind. Millions die in Africa from easily treatable diseases like malaria, which is only now barely getting some attention and needs relatively small resources to remedy. Millions more die from diseases controlled by patented and cheaply produced medicines, which are priced out of reach of most of humanity.

CAPITALISM, HEALTHCARE AND THE STATE

Our time's intense focus on healthcare signals a very different capitalist economy than the one Marx investigated as he mentions "health services" in his general view of a non-capitalist future in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program (CGP)*. For Marx, a new socialist reality emerges through the creative power of freely cooperating labor, and in *CGP* Marx briefly alludes to one measure for the birth and development of that reality as an instant surge, and then ongoing expansion, of production "intended for common satisfaction of needs" in areas like "schools" and "health services."^{*}

While a state-run single payer healthcare system shapes much discourse among healthcare advocates on what is needed today, for Marx, the political arena of the state is part of the alienation of workers from working out self-determination in their own everyday activity. If *CGP*'s concept of satisfying common needs, including universal healthcare, grows out of the direct communal cooperation of workers themselves, how does that perspective relate to today's new kind of labor struggle among service workers in the health field, their direct solidarity on the ground with those needing care? This requires a broader look at healthcare under capitalism and the vicissitudes of the state's role.

Healthcare is an industry where labor is immediately bound up with life. This immediate tie to life is social, directly involved with the care of another. The spread of disease is often bound up with social habits and, early on, resulted in social programs like sanitation and mass inoculation. When Marx wrote *CGP*, healthcare for individuals was mostly a privilege of the rich even in more developed countries. Generalized healthcare played a very small role and was on the margins of capitalist production—a social good, primarily undertaken by charitable and religious organizations. Things started to change in the 20th century.

In an era of strong unions and scarce labor during World War II, the ship builder Henry Kaiser started a pre-paid medical practice, which became a model for health maintenance organizations (HMOs), to keep labor time lost due to sickness to a minimum. The height of healthcare as a social good in the U.S. came in the post-WWII world when strong unions like the UAW gave up on control over production but did fight for and win comprehensive healthcare benefits for each worker as well as the worker's family. While this was no challenge to the rule of capital, it was part of what Marx calls the "historical and moral element" that determines the value of labor power within capitalism (BF, 275). It set a standard for what a reasonable job would have to offer while those not in the work force were to be covered by state-run programs like Medicaid and Medicare. Whether it was the U.S. or countries like England and fully state-capitalist Russia, both of which instituted a single state-run health service,

resources for healthcare were strictly limited by planning dictated by capital's need for accumulation.

By 1980 healthcare constituted 8.8% of the U.S. economy, and the state's role shifted as healthcare itself also became a center of capital accumulation. Today healthcare constitutes over 16% of the U.S. economy. A crucial turning point came with new laws like the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980. This allowed researchers, whose research was funded by the federal government in publicly funded universities and by agencies like the National Institutes of Health, to patent and personally gain from this research.



Medical students on World AIDS Day in 2007

Capitalistic "science" is a distorted science when human achievements, what Marx called "the exoteric unfolding of human essential capacities," become a means for personal gain. In practice, science, like all human endeavors, is an inherently cooperative or communal activity based on accumulated knowledge. The knowledge base shapes the discourse through which new ideas emerge. An actual patent is often a rather small endpoint for a long collective process. Today life forms and knowledge of the human genetic code can be patented and bring in potentially astronomical profits. The promise of personal financial gain impedes the free sharing of knowledge and techniques, through which science develops.

Capitalists turned to healthcare restructuring through the HMO model. They transformed the HMO concept into its opposite, using it to create incentives to retain revenue through rationing and limiting access to care. The HMO model became a way to rationalize work, as in any capitalistic venture, according to socially necessary labor time set across the industry.

Front line healthcare providers responded with a movement for quality care. A highpoint in this struggle came in the late 1990s when CNA nurses staged a wave of strikes at Kaiser. They won some first-ever contractual rights over their work as caregivers. In this job capital's dominance is still formal because health workers manage the tools used to deliver care under the despotic authority of the cost cutters and access deniers. When the life of a human being is at stake, this can and does amplify caregivers' alienation. Often health workers, on their own time, do what needs to be done in spite of their overlords. The state's latest gambit in the service of capital is to designate nurses as "managers," ineligible to join unions, in order to gut their cooperative interference with capital's plan for healthcare.

The U.S. healthcare system is one of rationing according to the needs of capital accumulation with some companies out to cut or eliminate their employee healthcare costs while other companies—manufacturers of medical technology and pharmaceuticals—are out to gouge the public and to get state assistance to become centers of capital accumulation in a global context. On the front lines of providing healthcare there is a new cooperative opposition to healthcare as a commodity and to science in the service of capital's reach for global profits. It is important to engage this new subjectivity from the vantage point of Marx's concept in *CGP* for post-capitalist reality and its immediate expansion of collective needs like healthcare.

MARX ON COOPERATION AND THE NEW SOCIETY

The new direction posed by Marx in *CGP* begins from cooperative, or directly social, labor, in contrast to capitalism with its indirect socialization of labor mediated by value in things, commodities and capital. The foundation for the new reality is a new distribution of the means of production, spelled out as freely associated producers cooperatively putting them to use. The distinctive feature of a non-capitalist reality for Marx is not a new property relation, collective or private, but whether the cooperative relation to the instruments of production prevails over any notion of property and is truly freely associated.

Marx saw indications of this non-capitalist future in the struggle of workers forced to cooperate under capital's "despotic" plan (BF, 450). Marx engaged the subject, the laborer, not from the perspective of capitalism's alienated labor, but rather from the perspective of a non-capitalist future. Alienated labor, as Marx put it in 1844, reduces the "life of the species into a means of individual life" (CW: 3,276). In *Capital*, Marx describes the new power arising in the "directly social or communal labor" (BF, 448) that emerges from within, and develops into a total antagonism with, the authority of capital: "When the worker co-operates in a planned

way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species" (BF, 447).

The context for Marx's positive concept of cooperative labor developing the "capabilities of the species" is the birth of industrial capitalism that brought large numbers of workers together in a single machine controlled process, a process which replaced manufacturing based on skilled handicrafts. Here all science goes into the machine, which as capital dominates laborers, not just formally, but in real life. The power of this cooperation is both taken for granted and constrained. Freely cooperating labor holds the possibility of real science that is one with life, where each one experiences their laboring inseparable from the "exoteric unfolding" and the ongoing confirmation "of human essential capacities."

Sweated labor and machine controlled labor continue as a foundation for global capital's manufacturing. However, cooperative labor, in the face of revolutions in production, creates the basis for the "totally developed individual" (BF, 618). Marx anticipated that today's faster pace of revolutionizing production would develop the individual's sense of her relation to species capacities unleashed through cooperation. Medical care is a thoroughly cooperative endeavor, engaging the talents of many different workers who constantly add new skills with each biotechnical change. But in its capitalistic form new technologies, developed collectively but turned into instruments for private interests, turn the species character of new knowledge "into a means of individual life."

There isn't a direct correlation between what Marx wrote on cooperation in manufacturing and service workers in healthcare today. Today's controversies in the health workplace point to the need to constantly recreate Marx's philosophy on the basis of new developments. The constant technological advances in medicine in a capitalist context have created a sharp contrast in the minds of front-line healthcare workers between the capabilities of the species and the concrete reality they face every day. What is new in the cooperative struggle of front-line healthcare workers over the last 15 years is not that there has been a workers' movement in the healthcare field, rather it has been the way that movement took up the issue of quality care in the face of healthcare restructuring, rationing, and neglect of great populations of the poor in this country and especially in the less developed countries of the world.

HEALTHCARE AND THE FUTURE

The drive for quality care by frontline caregivers and direct solidarity with those deprived of healthcare in society cuts much deeper than the political struggle over a state-run single payer system, which even many big capitalists now support. As many have stated, the U.S. spends almost twice as much per person on healthcare as nearly every other developed country and, by any objective measure, is at the bottom of delivering health to its citizens. But it is workers in the workplace who confront capital's overriding imperative, which is not delivering health but capital accumulation. As many can attest, state run universal healthcare can be starved of resources by capital and become a bureaucratic quagmire for those in need. For Marx, only in non-value producing cooperation in which the scarcity of resources is not distorted by the uncaring brutality of value production, does expanding areas like education and healthcare become a quantitative measure of the development of a new human society.

Today's economy, with its accelerated pace of revolutions in production, brings to life Marx's view that cooperating human beings, with each one embodying a variety of knowledge and talent, are the greatest productive force of all. That productive force falls into a deeper contradiction with the increasing presence of healthcare and knowledge in a capitalist economy. Expanding those two areas, in post-value production cooperation, can be directly a new form of distribution of the means of production. The front-line healthcare workers' movement for quality care, where women workers predominate, is a new passion that enlivens, with some actual content, what directly social labor can mean in a future shaped by Marx's concept of transcending alienated labor.

* Karl Marx Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (International Publishers: New York), Vol. 24, 85. Further references to Marx will have "CW" with the volume number and page number in the text, except for the commonly used Ben Fowkes translation of *Capital*, (London: Penguin, 1976) which will be referenced with "BF" followed by the page number.



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LIFE AND LABOR IN THE U.S. TODAY

The front page article by Ron Brokmeyer and Htun Lin, "Fears of Global Recession Haunt U.S. Election" (February-March *N&L*), was a good lesson in and summation of both economics and the objective situation of life and labor in the U.S. It cited the financial guru, George Soros, stating that the dollar is no longer the international reserve currency (for us non-economists that means different countries no longer want to keep a stash of dollars set aside because the dollar isn't strong). I saw George Soros on the Charlie Rose program on PBS saying his solution to the current crisis was to regulate financial markets to keep different financial bubbles from bursting. I thought we already had regulators called the Federal Reserve Bank, Securities and Exchange Commission, etc. Apparently we need a "Regulator Czar" to oversee the regulators.

I prefer the solutions Brokmeyer and Htun Lin worked out in their sections called "Labor creates value; Bubbles don't" and "Revolt in world's Workshop." Respectively, they explain that value is created by labor in production, not speculation—and how Chinese workers take matters into their own hands by revolting against sweatshop conditions.

**Roofing Contractor
Colorado**

I would like to express my appreciation for the article "Recession Haunts Election" in the February-March issue of *N&L*. I found the article both explanatory and accessible. I put it in the hands of a number of people who are trying to understand the current turbulence of capitalism. Thank you for your clarity and detail in explaining this complex and important development.

**Bob Patenaude
Oakland, California**

Membership in the Auto Workers Union fell below 500,000 this year, the first time this figure has been so low since the 1930s, when the union was first organizing. This is less than a third of the membership of 1.5 million it had at its peak in the 1970s. Most of the decline has been in recent years, since the auto companies stepped up the outsourcing of jobs to other countries, firing workers and enticing others to retire early so they could hire new workers at half the wages and reduced benefits. Last year alone, the union lost some 75,000 workers. In the contract last year, the companies agreed to keep a number of plants open during the length of the contract—but said nothing about how many would be working in them.

**Retiree
Detroit**

A recent report by the Labor Department's inspector general con-

firms our report in *News & Letters* last year indicating negligence by the Mine Health and Safety Administration in approving the mining method used in the Crandall Canyon mine in Utah, where nine miners lost their lives due to roof falls. The method is called retreat mining, where coal pillars supporting the roof are removed to get the most production from a mine. The mine was known to experience earth tremors, wherein the floor and top heave significantly and increase the dangers of roof falls. MSHA officials, of course, deny their negligence, but more reports on the deadly cave-ins are coming.

**Ex-miner
Detroit**



Nearly 300 union activists attending the Labor Notes Conference in Detroit in April joined the American Axle workers picket lines. Supporters represented labor nationally and internationally, with people from all over the U.S. and from Korea, China, Mexico, Germany and Canada. We represented a variety of workplaces: schools, libraries, hospitals, food processing and transportation, as well as auto factories and trucking. We were men, women, students, retirees of all races. Most important were the discussions as we picketed. Axle workers and former Delphi workers described their drastic cuts in pay and benefits. Before we returned to the conference we rallied, chanting, "one day longer is one day stronger."

**Susan Van Gelder
Detroit**

One more aspect of the Bush administration's war on labor on behalf of capital has been its relentless effort to impede any enforcement of health and safety regulations by the Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA). A new level of death and mutilation now stalks the workplace. The latest casualties were caught in an explosion in February at Imperial Sugar Co. in Georgia where 12 workers were killed and dozens critically injured. These deaths are directly attributable to OSHA's inaction. In 2006 the U.S. Chemical Safety Board had warned them about potential catastrophic consequences of combustible sugar dust at sugar factories.

**Outraged
California**

ON OUR MARXIST-HUMANIST PERSPECTIVES 2007-2008

Your Draft Perspectives nearly took my breath away with its eloquence, insight, and most especially its humanity. However, there is one section I take issue with. A few quotations: "The transcendence of alienation, inequality and exploitation are neither possible nor 'fair' as long as labor continues to be only indirectly social and when labor power continues to be a commodity and the law of value continues to compel producers to maximize production and minimize cost." Another, "It is an illusion...for total social transformation to believe that cooperative projects and autonomous zones can gradually be stitched together...shrinking the space within which capitalism operates." Another, "It is hard to envision total societal transformation, but there is no alternative to trying to do so."

These quotes suggest to me that the transition from capitalism to communism must be holistic rather than incremental... (that) the working classes of the world must unite in consciousness and political strength simultaneously to defeat the ruling class of finance capitalism at some finite time in the future...The problem I have with such

judgments is that they negate the struggles of Cubans and Venezuelans and others in every country of the world to work toward Socialism. If all of us must rise up as revolutionary socialists at the same time, these proto-socialist efforts may distance us from that goal.

My resistance to this kind of analysis is threefold: 1. It removes from our political horizon those countries that serve as models of inspiration... 2. A scientific approach to Socialism would suggest that we reach incrementally a condition where the 'law of value' has been entirely abandoned, and that currently impure forms of socialism would work toward improving their socio-political-economic systems. 3. It seems to defy our experience of reality to demand simultaneous global transformation rather than applauding partial success and working toward greater mastery.

Thanks for considering my comments,
**Rick Collier
Calgary, Alberta, Canada**

Editor's Note: For a copy of the Marxist-Humanist Perspectives send \$1 to News & Letters, 36 S. Wabash #1440, Chicago, IL 60603.

READERS' VIEWS

OLYMPIC TORCH PROTESTS

I was disturbed by language used during the Olympic torch relay in San Francisco. TV newscasts referred to ethnic Tibetans as "Tibetan separatists" and "anti-Chinese protestors." It was unconscionable to characterize one side that way. First, Tibetans are separate from Chinese by race, language, culture and history. They are not analogous to the white separatists found in the U.S. Second, the Tibetans were not in S.F. to bash Chinese people but to protest inhumane actions taken by the Chinese government. Even people on "my side" were not thoughtful with language. I could not join them when they shouted "Shame on China!" Immigrants and their descendants in the U.S. often become surrogates for the shamed nation. We see it played out with people today from any "Arab" nation or from Iran. President Roosevelt rightly denounced the "empire of Japan" for the attack on Pearl Harbor. But he followed that with Executive Order 9066 which classified all persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast as enemy aliens.

**Sansei
Oakland, Cal.**

CONGOLESE WARS

The liberal and mainstream press occasionally offer glimpses of real news. But nothing comes close to *N&L* when it comes to the meaning of events. HBO made an attempt with its powerful documentary "The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo." Documentarian Lisa F. Jackson interviewed some of the raped women, a few of the paramilitary rapists as well as one of the two doctors performing reconstructive surgery mentioned in Terry Moon's "Women as Reason" column, "Congo: Women's Obliteration." While the HBO puts a face on some of the participants of the Congolese wars and offers some powerful explanations and visualizations, it doesn't attain to the depth of meaning in the Editorial "Genocide in Congo" in the February/March *N&L* which concluded its analysis of the current Congolese wars by reciting Marx's statement of the rosy dawn of capitalist accumulation. This not only sums up the Congolese wars but the objective situation globally with capitalism's never-ending drive to return to its original contradictions.

**Longtime supporter
Colorado**

MARXIST-HUMANISM AS PHILOSOPHY AND AS ORGANIZATION

After 53 years, News and Letters Committees are still going strong and attracting new members because of its Marxist-Humanist philosophy of freedom and the committee form of organization that is attempting to embody it. Up against permanent war and the national security state, people are hungry for real expressions of freedom. Their everyday lives and the places they work are organized by the pyramid of the standard-issue organizational chart, with its top-down lines of authority. That pyramid is upside down. The committee-form, unlike the elitist Party of the failed revolutions of the past, stands it right-side up. Socialist democracy prevails where the cult of personality had been. The only authority NLC recognizes as final is the authority of its rank-and-file members meeting in Convention. The idea of freedom manifest in this genuine democracy is part of the secret behind its success. Every voice matters. Every voice counts. NLC is trying to help show that another world really is possible at a time when the impersonal domination of capital is choking the life out of all us.

**Beverly and Tom
Spokane, WA**

Tom More's essay, "On concretizing a 'Philosophic Moment'" (February/March *N&L*), draws attention to the uniqueness of the Marxist-Humanist concept of

organization. The "philosophic moment" as determinant is so central to that concept of organization that the absolute opposite of the vanguard party turns out to be, not spontaneity, nor the committee-form, but philosophy. Thus, neither form of organization nor spontaneous action from below—as crucial as they are—can become our age's organizational concretization of Marx's Humanism, without the totally new relationship between theory and practice that needs to be built on the philosophic moment of Marxist-Humanism.

**Franklin Dmitryev
Memphis**



MALALAI JOYA

Your readers would want to know that Malalai Joya, whose story you have been following, was the winner of the International Human Rights Film Award 2008 at the "Cinema for Peace" gala on February 11, as part of the 2008 Berlin Film Festival. The award committee wrote to Joya "we believe your work in *Enemies of Happiness* makes a valuable contribution to the cause of peace and understanding." The award was given to her by two-time Oscar winner, Hilary Swank. The PBS documentary "A Winner among the Warlords" had followed in detail the courageous campaign Joya had fought last year to gain a seat in the Afghan Parliament and to expose the state of politics and women's human rights in Afghanistan.

**RAWA Supporter
Illinois**

FOR SHEILA GARDEN

Here is my tribute to Sheila Garden, who was a longtime member of News and Letters Committees and who died in early February.

Not only was she full of life, she was a fighter for what she believed in. She organized against racism when she was in college, before it was fashionable among white people. She was a union activist and representative on her job. She continued the struggle against capitalism and for socialism for all her adult life. Her spirit of struggle and revolution was inextricably connected with her warm and outgoing personality. Together with this was her disgust for and rejection of official hypocrisy in society. The word that best sums up her spirit is "enthusiasm." For me, she was the aunt that everybody should have. I feel fortunate and proud to have come from her family tree.

John Reimann

Editor's note: Our In Memoriam to Sheila in the February-March issue brought us many expressions of admiration for, and deep sorrow at the loss of our remarkable comrade.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The news of the polygamist cult in Eldorado, Texas, grows worse as it unfolds. The 16-year-old woman who first asked for help has yet to be found. There is a graveyard of children on the site. Yet there seems more concern for parental property rights over the children than for the rights of the children themselves. The news media are treating the abuse there as if it came out of nowhere. I see it as the most extreme form of the general condition of children in this society. It is time to begin thinking and acting on their deep abuse, which we have avoided doing.

**Malcolm
SF-Oakland Bay Area**

EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS



As a first-year bilingual kindergarten teacher, there are two phrases from Karl Marx that have repeatedly come to mind. The first is "the educators need to be educated." The second is "time is space for human development." These statements have come crashing into each other again and again, particularly on the question of Leave No Child Behind, which many teachers call "Leave No Child Untested." This is particularly the case for my bilingual kindergartners, as they will have been tested four times over nine months through standardized assessments. At one point in February, instruction totally stopped for two full weeks, so bilingual teachers could test five year olds on their English acquisition.

Research for bilingual kindergarten indicates that these students should receive 90% instruction in their native language and 10% in their second language. They need to have a solid foundation on which to build second language literacy skills. So, taking two weeks to test their abilities in English is ludicrous. They are just beginning to understand the alphabet, letter sounds, and how to use symbol systems (reading/writing). Spending huge amounts of time on testing, instead of learning and instruction, does not result in human development. It does provide a convenient way to minimize and label student potential.

**Bilingual K teacher
Chicago**

SAVING RENT CONTROL

Californians will vote this June on Proposition 98, the so-called California Property Owners and Farmland Protection Act, sponsored by the notorious Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

and supported by the California Republican Party. The proposition is written under the guise of reforming eminent domain by protecting homes and farms from being taken by government agencies. It actually prohibits state and local water agencies from using eminent domain to acquire land and farms for water storage and delivery systems, in today's climate of clean water supply shortages.

The principal deception is that the proposition as worded would affect hundreds of thousands of seniors, veterans, working class and unemployed renters. The large apartment and mobile home park owners are driven to expand their wealth, as capital constantly drives to self-expand at the workers' expense.

No to Proposition 98! Yes to Proposition 99—which is a legitimate Eminent Domain reform proposition that prohibits the government from using it to take a home and transfer it to a private developer.

**Basho
Los Angeles**

DETROIT'S MAYORAL MESS

The mayoral mess here has made the national news. But its importance is not the "sex, lies and text messages" which affect Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's personal life. Rather, the cover-up which cost the city \$8.4 million in an out-of-court settlement, is proving to be just one of many improper actions as the mayor played fast and loose with city funds. Detroit, with the highest foreclosure rate in the state and massive unemployment, didn't need this kind of notoriety.

At the end of his "State of the City" address, Kilpatrick shocked everyone by blaming the media for calling him the n-word, saying it aloud six months after he participated in the NAACP's "Bury the N-word" demonstration. He excoriated the City Council President Kenneth Cockrel, Jr., for not joining him on stage for the speech and decried the media. His spin that "they" are out to get him because he is a successful African-American male is belied by the fact that all those involved are African American. Although rallies in his support are given press attention, everywhere I go I hear people saying, "He's got to go."

**Disgusted
Detroit**

TO TELL THE TRUTH

A returning soldier recently told me of his experiences in Iraq. He said when he went into the army he believed what our government told him. He wanted to do something for the country. But when his daughter was born with spina bifida they said he had not been in long enough for his family to collect for her care. Now that his tour was over, he said he would not go back. "I have no respect for the government that sent me there, now that I'm home I'll burn my uniform and any medals I've received."

N&L came out immediately against the tragic wars both in Afghanistan and in Iraq. "Not in our name" became the cry that has rung out in many of the anti-war protests. Bush told us the wars were about "weapons of mass destruction" that were never found. Then it was about "we have to catch Saddam Hussein" and he was caught and the wars are still not over. Now it's about "we must build a nation." The real reason is power, oil, and a base in the region.

**Dan
Michigan**

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL' S FATE

I am outraged that late last month the Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled to not grant a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal, despite all of the evidence that presents reasonable doubt. The court is also calling a future date in May for a jury to decide whether Mumia will be executed or spend the rest of his life in prison.

**Justice for Mumia Supporter
Chicago**

It is time to organize a national conference to end human rights violations in U.S. prisons ...

**STOPMAX CAMPAIGN
CONFERENCE
MAY 30 - JUNE 1, 2008
AT TEMPLE UNIVERSITY,
PHILADELPHIA, PA.**

For information: *American Friends Service Committee*, 1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102-1403. 215/241-7000 www.afsc.org



VOICES FROM THE INSIDE

As an inmate in the Michigan Department of Corrections for the past five years, the article I identified with most in the last issue of N&L was the Reader's View from DT called "Louisiana: One Big Prison." The state of Michigan also has an unimaginable number of prisons.

When someone in this state is found guilty, whether of a minor or major crime, they are sent to prison under the justification widely known as "Rehabilitation." What most people who are not prisoners are unaware of is that this famous R word is harder to find than Osama Bin Laden. What most do not realize is that this "inner" society is built on a system that makes its "criminals" far more violent, unproductive, and destructive than the society they were taken away from, supposedly to "keep it safe."

**Prisoner
onia, Michigan**

If other prisons throughout the U.S. are at all like mine, this country is truly practicing "slave labor." We earn 25 cents an hour. The average income per month is \$15. Just buying ordinary hygiene products necessary for your general upkeep costs approximately \$20 a month. Then you have to pay \$5 per every doctor's or dentist's visit. And whatever they decide to fine people for discipline, even when you're not guilty, can be from \$5 to \$50 at a time.

It seems there is no support from outside these walls. Now that I have been here and have firsthand experience of the degrading treatment inmates receive I will be an advocate and I will make a difference. It is time to bring the destruction of our fellow brothers and sisters to the public's awareness. Thank you for helping us do that.

**Woman prisoner
South Dakota**

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Memphis sanitation workers 40 years later

MEMPHIS, TENN.—Beneath a sea of umbrellas, 3,000 marchers commemorated the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968.

The racially mixed, mostly Black crowd filled the streets between the AFSCME union hall, named after King, and the Lorraine Motel where he was killed, which is now the National Civil Rights Museum. The marchers, many of them workers, came from all across the country, including many from Memphis.

Dr. King was here in 1968 to support the striking sanitation workers, who won recognition after his death shamed the city's government, business, and media elite who had attacked both King and the workers viciously. Two days before the march, a group of sanitation workers and their supporters gathered in front of City Hall to get the word out that their struggle was far from over.

They were back again for the anniversary march. One told his story to News & Letters:

What brings me to this march commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr., 40 years after his death is respect, respect for Dr. King. We have not come far enough since his death. We're making progress, but it's small progress. If he could see where we are today, I don't think he'd be pleased. Instead of going forward when he died, it looks like we stopped any progress or movement. It's hard to get it back. We're not where he would expect us to be today.

We need to be standing together more, supporting and respecting each other. I'm a sanitation worker. Conditions have not changed all that much. We still don't get the respect that's due; we're still not making the money; and instead of the City improving conditions, they're trying to make them worse.

The City is taking away some of our basic rights, including on working conditions. They want us to do things that are hazardous, like climbing up into the back of garbage trucks and cleaning out hazardous waste with no equipment. They will fire you for not doing those types of things. The supervisor might say you did something, but not prove that you did it. They are firing people for little or nothing. It's wrong.

Conditions are just not right. We have no protective clothes for hazardous waste. Behind the blade in the garbage truck leaves a lot of mess. We just climb up there in our street clothes, or what you're working in everyday, and clean this mess out. All kinds of stuff is in there. That mess has been in the garbage trucks for months! You know, when you empty a waste can, you don't know what you're emptying from there. They

Foreclosures in real life

DETROIT, MICH.—Stories of families forced out of their homes due to mortgage foreclosures are everywhere, in newspapers, magazines, TV news reports, barber shops and in individual conversations. You know it's bad and tragic, but it has a different impact when it hits your own neighborhood.

I live in one of the better neighborhoods in Detroit, mostly two-story brick homes, with occasional bungalows, built mostly in the 1920s and 30s. It has been a stable neighborhood since it was first established, and is definitely a middle-class area that is evident from the general appearance of the well-maintained homes. A couple of years ago houses were selling in the \$150,000-\$200,000 range, and people lined up to buy them.

But no more. My shock came last month, when a truck driver hauling a large dumpster stopped me when I was taking a walk and asked if anyone lived in a house two doors away from mine. I told him that a man and his sister lived there, but that they weren't always around. This was on a Friday afternoon, and he said he was parking the dumpster there on the street and would be taking everything in the house away on Monday. The same thing had happened a week before to my next door neighbor, who had moved away a month earlier. A dumpster was filled with furniture taken from the house and hauled away.

I immediately went home, wrote on a sheet of paper of the impending calamity and put it on their front door. Unfortunately, no one returned to that house that weekend, and all of the furniture in the house was hauled away on Monday. Two days later, I saw a full dumpster pull out of a driveway across the street from me. I don't know what they do with the furniture, if they try to sell it or simply dump it somewhere. The dumpsters had thousands of dollars worth of furniture in them, and I don't know if the people who had lived in the houses knew what was happening to them.

I discovered that eight of 27 houses on my block were empty. There is another disturbing development as a result of the empty houses. People are breaking in and stealing everything. One empty house across the street from me was broken into and the people took all wiring, plumbing, appliances, sinks, faucets, kitchen cabinets—and even the furnace. As one neighbor said, "You can watch during the day, but they come and steal everything at night when you're asleep." For many in this area the so-called American dream has indeed turned into the worst nightmare.

In one respect, it is surprising that more houses around here haven't been looted, and it may well be just a matter of time before more are hit. The unemployment rate in Detroit is so horrendous, that many people are more than desperate. In some large areas of the city, the unemployment rate is as high as 50%—and it's going to get worse.

—Homeowner

relieved one of us from duty for not cleaning out a hazardous site. Because he wouldn't get up there and clean out the garbage behind that blade, they relieved him of duty, pending firing him.

We managed to get one guy back to work; another was suspended for a couple of days; they fired a woman who supposedly threatened some guy and even the guy himself said it was not true. But by them not liking her, they fired her anyway. We're working on trying to get her back to work. It's a mess.

And we still don't have a pension after all these years. Just about everybody in city government has a pension except sanitation and public works. And they don't think we should have one. That's wrong, we all deserve a pension. We've had people work here 20 years, retiring after 30, 35 years, with nothing but their savings. And as high as prices are today, you don't have time to be saving much. It's bad.

New Orleans fights back

Two and a half years after Hurricane Katrina, the struggle of Black and working-class New Orleans has intensified. Dozens were arrested in March in civil disobedience actions trying to stop the demolition of poor people's housing. More than 4,500 public housing units—many of them untouched by the storm—are to be destroyed and replaced by "mixed-income" developments with only 800 low-income units. Even if all the planned subsidized housing is built, the total units will be only one-third of what existed three years ago.

CITY TO POOR: DROP DEAD

All this is in a city where 40,000 affordable rental units were wiped out by the storm, rents are up 50% or even 100%, and homelessness has doubled to 12,000, that is, one in 25 people, the highest rate of any city in the U.S. The city's solution: a new ordinance allowing the arrest of people who sleep on the street.

Protesters, sometimes in the hundreds, have repeatedly packed City Council meetings to demand a halt to demolitions but have been met with police force.

Meanwhile, nearly 40,000 families from the Gulf Coast still live in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers. Hundreds have suffered from toxic effects of formaldehyde—from breathing difficulties to death. When scientists were writing a report on formaldehyde's health risks, FEMA told them to leave out references to cancer or other long-term dangers.

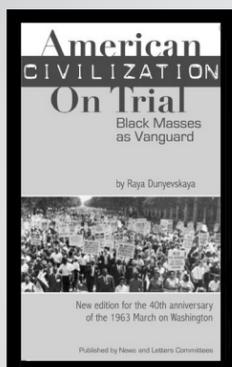
Housing is only one area transformed in the wake of the flood. Charity Hospital, the main facility for the poor and home of one of the country's top two trauma units, has been closed since the hurricane. Two-fifths of public schools are closed, dozens converted into charter schools, and all 4,900 teachers were laid off. Thousands of bus drivers were laid off and the buses destroyed in the flood have not been replaced. While politically connected corporations like Blackwater and Halliburton raked in billions from Katrina reconstruction contracts, the Bush administration refused emergency funds to pay for municipal workers, so 3,000 were fired.

CUTTING WORKERS, SERVICES

While hundreds of thousands of Black workers were being displaced, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were brought in to work long hours for low pay. Many immigrants, now tossed out of these jobs, have been deported, left the city or are homeless. While many have been intimidated into keeping quiet, 100 workers from India marched in Washington, D.C., on March 31, protesting being treated as slaves by Signal International after being brought to the U.S. to rebuild the Gulf Coast.

Much of the Left is echoing Naomi Klein's analysis of "Disaster Capitalism" in her book *The Shock Doctrine*, showing how rulers have taken advantage of disasters like Katrina to implement a far-reaching program of neoliberal restructuring. While true, this analysis overlooks how these manifestations flow from capitalism's inherent law of motion—so that the proposed solution of "mixed economy," which leaves capitalism fundamentally intact, is no solution at all. There are only two alternatives—reconstruction capitalist style, which is what the workers, poor, African Americans and immigrants are fighting, or reconstruction on a new, human basis that is implicit in these struggles.

—Franklin Dmitryev



Fifth edition published on 40th Anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington

To order see p. 7

American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard
by Raya Dunayevskaya



Urszula Wisniewka/News & Letters

"Ban the Box" demonstrators rallied in Oakland, Cal., demanding that the city remove the "have you been convicted of a felony" box from job application forms. Mayor Dellums has promised action, but so far, nothing has happened. Other cities, like San Francisco and East Palo Alto, implemented such changes to allow former prisoners a more equal chance at city jobs.

BLACK/REVIEW

Continued from page 1

he wrote, "that everything Hitler did was... 'legal' and every thing that the Freedom Fighters did in Hungary was 'illegal'...this calls for confrontation with the power structure."

Many of us didn't realize at that time that Dr. King had broken with the past. Not just with the old dehumanizing Southern master/servant relationship, but with the method by which that relationship would be changed. Here King was not specifically speaking about "a philosophy of nonviolence," but a philosophy of human liberation, which he universalizes by joining it with the Hungarian mass uprising against state-capitalism.

After the battle was won over the legal manifestations of Southern racism, King began to urge the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and other civil rights groups to participate in demonstrations to "end-the-slums" in Chicago.

LESSONS OF CHICAGO

The lesson that King learned in Chicago was that it was easier to get the Federal government and many white people to support Black civil rights than it was to end Black poverty. He also discovered that there was a gulf between himself and a whole generation of Black youth living at the cutting edge of poverty in the Black community. He never understood the mind of that generation, or why it considered Malcolm X to be their leader. And yet it is these unemployed youth who revealed the contradiction in King's philosophy and the limits of civil rights. They exploded into revolt at the very moment he was engaged in his unsuccessful campaign to end poverty in the Black ghettos.

...We often forget that King's personal philosophy of nonviolence was an abstract concept of a "personal God" in each person as "the meaning of the ultimate reality" that can "synthesize opposites." Thus, he thought that the Watts and Detroit revolts were desperate and suicidal acts, the "voice of the unheard" and "powerless" who were "so fed up with (their) existence that (they would) rather be dead than ignored." He thought that the "irrationality" of the masses was a reaction to the "irrationality" of the state, i.e., its failure to act to end poverty and racism.

By reducing the African American urban revolts to an irrational opposite confronting an equally irrational opposite, the State, King literally takes Black subjectivity (the idea of freedom) out of American history, by giving power to an abstract moral force to resolve the problem of freedom.

What does King's personal philosophy have to do with Black freedom? The answer is: one's philosophy determines one's attitude toward actuality. When King carried his "end-the-slums" campaign to Chicago, he was not only confronting the machine politics of Mayor Richard J. Daley, but also the entrenched world of U.S. capitalism, which created the poverty in the Black urban ghettos.

Black masses living in urban ghettos have long developed their own attitude to that actuality; they wanted to rid themselves of that type of life and not just to better it by negotiations among "men of good will," as King was doing with Daley and the businessmen of Chicago.

The vision that Black masses have had of a new society has always conflicted with the practical political attitudes of their leaders. As we commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King's death, we should remember that while Dr. King didn't resolve this problem philosophically, his recognition of the power of the masses to change society could be a beginning towards resolving it philosophically and practically.

* The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was a spontaneous nationwide revolt sparked by students against the Stalinist government of Hungary. See "The Beginning of the End of Russian Totalitarianism" in *Marxism and Freedom*.

Anti-war demonstrations around the country

CHICAGO—On March 19, 3,000 of us rallied and marched on a cold overcast day in the heart of downtown, kicking off two days of protest, to show our determination to end this deadly and unconscionable war NOW! We were a diverse crowd. Along with different

While we lay on the pavement, two activists entered Corker's office, made our demands and arranged a 1:30 meeting with Corker's assistant. Corker's assistant relayed to D.C. our demands for a town hall meeting. The word came back "no." The reason was that such a

"Next time, don't go where you don't belong," one judge warned. Another judge admonished: "The hippie era is over." Apparently, people in power have much to learn from the civil rights era.

—Vietnam Veteran Against the War



Urszula Wislaska / News & Letters

Oakland, Cal.—On the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war, in addition to the major demonstrations of many thousands in San Francisco, Berkeley and San Jose, there were literally hundreds of smaller vigils of dozens in most neighborhoods, such as this one.

Left organizations were suburbanites who brought their children, high school and college students, and people getting off from work.

One group of local college students had a huge banner, looking beyond this atrocity. It was a collage of many depictions of society coming out of war into something different, to a world based in peace. Another group of four people stood on a pedestal in orange jumpsuits and black hoods, representing those tortured by the U.S. at Guantanamo.

Ending torture, as well as the obscene amount of money spent on death and destruction, were some of the themes raised by demonstrators in their rage against the Bush administration. Demands included ending funding for the war and bringing the troops home NOW.

After an hour-long rally with speeches and song, the march began at Dearborn and Adams streets, proceeded up Michigan Avenue, and ended at Washington Square Park. On the way we shut down major streets, Clark, Wacker, and Michigan Ave.

At the same time, people also gathered in Logan Square and read letters from military families and honored the more than 4,000 U.S. military men and women who have perished in Iraq. What is amazing is that at each demonstration, no one is discouraged, but only more determined to make our voices heard and to end the war now.

—Women's Liberationist Anti-War Activist

MEMPHIS—Several of us affiliated with the Mid-South Peace & Justice Center and the Memphis Chapter of Veterans for Peace, decided to hold a die-in on the sidewalk on Main Street to protest the war on Iraq.

We also wanted to encourage our U.S. Senator, Republican Bob Corker, to answer our request for a town meeting like ones he held in Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga. We'd been telephoning and emailing his office for months, with no response. It appeared that Memphis was too far from his Republican base.

On March 19, we were five men and two women all dressed in black and a dozen or more supporters carrying signs. Just after noon five of us lay down on the sidewalk in the rain, gusting 20-mile-per-hour wind, and temperatures in the low 40s, while our supporters paced around us. We shivered in the cold but felt vindicated when the *Commercial Appeal* at least ran a photo in the next morning's paper of the "dead" protesters with a sign that said "Enough Killing."

meeting "would be turned into a circus"; this despite the fact that we assured Corker that we would treat him with utmost respect. Why did their concern about "a circus" apply only to Memphis and not the state's other major cities?

We on the sidewalk joined two activists in Corker's office who were reading out loud the names of soldiers from Tennessee who had died in Iraq, along with several hundred Iraqi civilians. As closing hour neared, we told the building management that we weren't leaving until our demands were met and declined their offer to use another room.

At six p.m. the police gave us two warnings and then arrested us. We were handcuffed and led out into the street, where supporters greeted us with cameras, cheers and kisses.

I'd experienced similar sendoffs when shipping out to naval service off the coast of Vietnam. This felt more genuine—and patriotic. There were women with us this time. In Vietnam and on the ships offshore, we were men only, a single-sex effort which gave the proceedings the feeling of farce. It had always seemed to me that something as valuable as freedom and justice would merit an all-hands effort, and now here it was.

Kept all night, we were released in the early morning and all charges were unexpectedly dropped. The judges concurred, but not without having the last say.

Queer Notes

By Elise

This year's Day of Silence, on April 25, will be in honor of eighth grader Lawrence King, gunned down by homophobic classmate Brandon David McInerney. The Day of Silence is held each year to remind us of the silence many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth feel they must exercise to protect their safety and lives. Over the last year alone, over one third of gay students reported homophobically-based harassment at school and one in five experienced physical assault.

* * *

The Coalition of African Lesbians will hold a conference that aims to tell the Mozambiqueans that LGBT people—particularly lesbians—experience discrimination and injustice. It is courageous for these women to have this conference on a continent where homophobia runs rampant. Thirty-eight of 85 UN members who oppose LGBT rights are from Africa.

* * *

In 2007 the Nepal Supreme Court demanded the government recognize gays and lesbians as the third gender and end discrimination against them. Gays and lesbians ran for office in the national elections for the first time. However, attitudes in Nepal have not really changed. Because of homophobic pressure from neighbors, an AIDS hospice has been shut down and its patients thrown out. Run by Nepal's gay rights organization, Blue Diamond, and sponsored by the Elton John Foundation, the organization moved four times for similar reasons. Currently, Blue Diamond's main office has been converted to an emergency hospital.

* * *

Five men in Egypt were sentenced to three years in prison followed by three years of close police supervision, and five other men were indicted for the "habitual practice of debauchery," terminology for consensual gay sex. Originally, 12 men were detained, involuntarily bound to hospital beds and tested for HIV. In Egypt a man can also be arrested, indicted and imprisoned for the mere suspicion of being HIV positive. Human rights groups around the world are calling on people to condemn the Egyptian government's torture of people suspected of having HIV and AIDS and to overturn the indictments and convictions. The government's crack-down may keep people who have HIV and AIDS from being treated. The letter of condemnation is at hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/07/egypt18439_txt.htm.

—from Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International

LOS ANGELES—It was not disinterest which drew about 3,000 anti-war demonstrators on March 15—the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war—to the corner of Hollywood and Vine. This war will cost \$800 billion by the end of 2008, and will increase our national debt to \$9 trillion (a 12% increase). It contributes to the rise of oil prices by \$5 to \$10 a barrel.

While the economy deteriorates and the dollar sinks, higher prices for food, energy, and imported goods are raising the cost of living for all Americans. War expenditures are equivalent to guaranteeing Social Security for the next 75 years or to insuring all children in America for the same period. Therefore, the Iraq War has affected all of us. Yet, the number of participants in the anti-war protests is declining.

Participants seemed mainly concerned with the election. One marcher with the sign, "Corporate Media and Corporate Candidate = Big Lie," told me he did not believe in the presidential candidates since they are supported by the corporations. This march did not have the level of participation of common people that it had four years ago, and the majority of marchers were young.

It is not disinterest in the anti-war movement that explains the falling number of participants in anti-war marches. This year there was no ideological theme displayed. What seemed missing was a vision, a philosophy, a new way of relating, a concept of a new society to replace this crisis ridden social structure.

—Manel

Gina Ross in memoriam

Queer/Anarchist/Feminist activist Gina Ross passed away at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago Dec. 8 at the age of 33 due to complications from leukemia.



Ross worked as a canvasser for the Social Justice Organization during the last years of her life. She participated in the College of Lake County campus-based Amnesty International during the mid-1990s. She joined the Anti-Racist Action Chicagoland chapter in 1997 and the Loyola University campus chapter in 1999. Ross joined the Autonomous Zone, the anti-authoritarian infoshop/resource center collective, in 2001 and helped organize the Queer Zone activities and events in 2003 as well as feminist-oriented forums. Ross cared about the environment and was an artist. She co-founded the Pomegranate Radical Health Collective in 2003.

Activist and friend Darrell Gordon said, "Gina was interested in learning about the successes and failures of the Left, including the early Queer Movement when other upcoming activists don't want to know about past struggles."

There was a memorial gathering for Ross held last March at a local café. Her paintings will also be showcased in the near future.

—Darrell

Marxist-Humanism on War and Revolution:

Rosa Luxemburg,
Women's Liberation,
and Marx's
Philosophy of
Revolution

FOREWORD BY ADRIENNE RICH
Raya Dunayevskaya
SECOND EDITION

"So ingrained was the horror and shock produced by the events of 4 August 1914—when the Socialist Reichstag deputies voted war credits to the Kaiser, and with this betrayal of socialism unloosed World War I—that it became the Global Great Divide for Marxists. The trauma notwithstanding, Rosa Luxemburg, on the evening of that very day, met in her apartment with her closest colleagues to disassociate socialism from the ignominy of that event."

—From Chapter 5: "War, Prison, and Revolutions, 1914-1919," *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*

To order see p. 7

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Flames of revolt in China

Continued from page 1

who enjoy it. In the midst of this accumulation there are between 150 and 200 million workers and former peasants forced from the land, mostly unemployed, searching for even subsistence jobs in factories and construction.

Until this year, workers in the foreign-owned enterprises had no union rights—could form no autonomous unions and were ineligible to join the official All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) as full members. As of Jan. 1, a new labor contract law took effect. The proof that the new law provides more protection than no law at all would be the dire threats that China's competitive position on labor costs is in jeopardy.

Industrialists are publicly seeking to weaken provisions on job security and limits on overtime. Government spokesmen are issuing assurances that these newly covered workers are not getting an "iron rice bowl," and some companies are using labor goons to attack labor organizers spreading the word about the new law.

On the other hand, this law attempts to further centralize control of labor in the ACFTU. This is the state union that failed to fight for even the proper severance pay when state-run enterprises across the country shut down or were privatized. In several intense battles over severance in Liaoning in Manchuria in 2004, the union stood by while workers were jailed for protesting. Severance pay is a guarantee in the new labor law; why will they do better next time?

Half a century ago Charles Denby, the founding editor of *News & Letters*, spoke for many workers when, as he participated in the UAW as a Chrysler production worker, he said the labor bureaucracy is the last defense of capitalism. How much more is that true under state-capitalism, where the union represents the state, the boss of the state-run enterprises and the protector of the foreign-owned enterprises?

FEEDING THE BEAST

Much of the wealth produced in this extraordinary expansion is neither on display in brand new construction, nor hidden away in corporate coffers, but is continuing to feed the beast. There is an insatiable need for energy and raw materials to continue to expand.

Two-thirds of China's energy needs are satisfied by coal. In China's coal mines, that means production at any cost. That cost has been in miners' lives—as many as 10,000 coal miners reported killed each year, never less than 5,500. Whether state-run mines or wildcat operations, rules that are enforced are those for production, not safety.

The demand for energy and raw materials has driven Chinese diplomacy and its expanded international presence. State enterprises are running metal mines in Peru and Chile and coal mines in South Africa and above all oil.

In country after country, especially in Africa, wherever there is oil not locked up by the West, China is there. They have projects in Angola and \$50 billion on future projects. But their most notorious presence in Africa is in Sudan. There they are offering not merely money, but diplomatic protection to insulate Sudan's rulers from international consequences for the ongoing genocide in Darfur. In the UN Security Council, China will veto any demand for sanctions, and so, as defenders of Darfur have charged in demonstrations, China is complicit in the massacres.

China at the moment depends on imports for 40% of its petroleum needs. But as production continues to expand, its traditional oil fields like Daqing in Manchuria have already been surpassed by oil and gas production from Xinjiang.

Expanded exploitation of Xinjiang's energy resources, which Beijing is counting on for a full ten years' worth of national energy needs, accelerates the influx of the Han population, which has left Uighurs strangers in their own land. Oil field jobs have generally gone to Han workers, while Uighurs who are pushed off grazing lands lose their livelihood.

MARXISM AND CHINESE IMPERIALISM

In 1950 the newly-formed People's Republic of China moved troops into Tibet and claimed sovereignty as the successor to the old Chinese Empire. From that point on they have portrayed the army as liberating Tibetans from the theocratic rule of Buddhist lamas. Likewise, control of Xinjiang is framed as the alternative to rule by Muslim extremists.

Some who accept this, even some who consider themselves Marxists, are in danger of repeating their dangerously mistaken attitudes in the 1990s: lining up with Milosevic's pursuit of a Greater Serbia. They bought the premise that Serbia was "more socialist" than Bosnia and Kosova, whose people also were tarred as Muslim extremists, so that even their right of self-defense could be disregarded.

Compare that attitude to Lenin hailing the 1916 Easter Rising in priest-ridden Ireland. It was not an explicitly socialist revolution—among the leaders martyred by the British, only James Connolly was an avowed socialist. Yet in the tradition of Marx, Lenin looked to Ireland to spark revolution in England and across Europe.

Upon the Bolsheviks seizing power in Russia, Lenin chose not to defend the boundaries of the Tsar's empire, but insisted on self-determination for Finns and Poles.

The Beijing Olympics that Hu Jintao will reign over

as leader of the party, army and state, is intended as a showcase for the wealth and strength of this emerging state-capitalist economic and military power. Even production will be sacrificed—the worst polluting steel plants and other factories will be shut down in August for the duration.

But even as some dissidents are jailed at least through the Olympics, far more journalists will descend upon Beijing than in 1989 when, by chance, there were international reporters to witness the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. There might yet be a glimpse of the other China, at whose expense the showcase China has been built.

'Talk about freedom'



SAN FRANCISCO—The April 9 Olympic torch relay protest in San Francisco was no great confrontation between those who came to cheer and those speaking out against the Chinese government's human rights abuses. Throughout the multitude of 30,000, crimson Chinese national flags and multi-colored Tibetan national flags were more or less evenly distributed. Groups representing Burma and Darfur called on China to stop selling weapons to the respective military forces. There were animated debates here and there, but for the most part the various sides rubbed elbows peaceably.

Hours later it became apparent why the cops and the torch were not where the crowd had anticipated. The route had been altered so as to completely avoid detractors. The missing cops formed double flanks on either side of the torchbearers, with motorcycles and squad cars at the front and rear. The only public witnesses were a handful of delightfully surprised gentry through whose upscale neighborhoods the procession passed.

Once the torch was safely aboard an aircraft, the Mayor repeatedly gloated over his deft handling of the situation, pointing out that no one was hurt, the torch passed through the city with dignity, and free speech was protected. But it was "protected" in a designated free speech zone far away from the venue of significance because the venue had been surreptitiously moved.

A speaker addressing the Tibetan diaspora and their supporters declared victory inasmuch as the torch relay was driven underground and the gala closing ceremony at Justin Herman Plaza had to be canceled. A small closing ceremony was held at the airport attended by torchbearers, Olympic organizers from Beijing, and Mayor Newsom. One torchbearer not in attendance was Majora Carter, an African American woman whom police immediately ejected for pulling a Tibetan flag from her sleeve as she began her part of the relay.

The injunction against displaying Tibetan flags flows from Beijing's resolve to drive politics out of Olympic proceedings. A Chinese-American youth who joined a contingent of low-income Chinese immigrants carrying Chinese flags reported that several Tibetan flag bearers closed in on them. His worst fears were allayed when they started quiet conversations with the contingent. One of them told him, "We want to talk to you about freedom—not just for Tibetan people, but for Chinese people too."

What might be looked upon as a bust, a totally defused revolutionary moment, can just as well be seen as the beginning of a much-needed calm, rational dialogue on what it means to be free.

—David Mizuno'Oto

EDITORIAL Crisis is in production

The Labor Department's April 4 report announced that the U.S. economy lost 80,000 jobs in March, confirming what working people and most economists already knew: the U.S. is in a full blown recession. Furthermore, the January and February figures had to be revised to indicate that for the first quarter the U.S. economy declined by 232,000 jobs. Unemployment climbed from 4.8 to 5.1%. The number of U.S. citizens applying for food stamps rose to a record 28 million.

Today's gloomy economic statistics are only the latest omens in a protracted crisis triggered by the burst real estate bubble that left millions of workers losing their homes to foreclosure. The mid-March collapse of the giant investment bank Bear Stearns triggered a panic assessment that the global economy is now on the verge of a 1930s total collapse, which, according to Wall Street economist Ed Yardeni, calls for all-out measures to avoid a "Great Depression II."

Federal Reserve Bank chairman Ben Bernanke, with the blessing of the administration's Treasury Secretary Paulson, took unprecedented and, some say, extra-legal measures as he engineered a deal to save Bear Stearns using \$30 billion of public money. Then the Fed, which is chartered to lend to regulated banks, lent directly to securities firms whose books are loaded with unwanted mortgage-backed securities. Capitalist free market ideologues almost universally turned on a dime and lined up behind massive government intervention. For them the heavy hand of the state is always there to serve their interests when and where they need it.

SPECTERS OF CRISIS, REVOLUTION

A former chief economist of the U.S. Trade Commission, Peter Morici, had an apt reaction: "this is the kind of stuff that caused the French Revolution." He contrasted how expeditiously the Fed moved to rescue the firms of super wealthy bankers, who, even as they fail, earn golden parachutes, with real suffering experienced by millions losing their homes, their healthcare and their jobs. The Fed may rescue the U.S. system of finance capital from collapse but the real crisis, whether one speaks of the 1930s or today, is in production.

Finance capitalism, "uncoupled" from production, feeds the illusion that profit can come from speculative bubbles. At the moment of reckoning, the truth asserts itself: that profit only comes from extracting ever more surplus value or unpaid hours of labor from workers. The real vital function of the system of finance is divvying up the loot from all the sweated, alienated labor extracted in labor-intensive manufacturing locales like India, China and Vietnam, as well as what remains in the U.S.

One of the most unconscionable developments has been capital's raid on the world's food supply for energy, turning food into bio-fuel, and pushing untold numbers of the world's poor, who rely on cheap vegetable oils, to near starvation. Since world food prices rose over 40% in the last year, food riots have erupted throughout the world among the nearly three billion people who live on less than two dollars a day.

Even in the U.S., where a third of the corn crop now goes for ethanol, hunger stalks the poor as food pantries report a huge rise in requests just when supplies are drying up.

GROWING LABOR REVOLT

Labor in the U.S. is not quiescent. On April 1 independent truckers organized a "Fuel Price Protest" of slow-moving convoys and shutdowns on highways in various parts of the country. Their sentiment was to make this action not just about their own plight but all workers struggling under the impact of high energy costs. Truckers plan to renew their protests on May 1, International Workers' Day, including plans to shut down the Los Angeles-Long Beach Harbor. Longshoremen, a sector of workers with an even more strategic role in the global economy, also voted to stop work on the west coast docks for eight hours on May 1 to call for an end to the war. Immigrant workers plan to hold their own May Day marches and rallies.

Second-tier workers in the service sector are showing a new willingness to strike for their rights and organize. Nurses are among the most militant strikers over workplace issues and are in the forefront of the struggle for single payer universal healthcare.

This crisis, that has economists scurrying back to the 1930s for a precedent, comes after three decades of restructuring to reverse a falling rate of profit. Capital has been gutting the social safety net and gains that workers won after WWII and instituting new ways to extract value through labor-intensive manufacturing under barbaric conditions worldwide. In many countries peasants have become destitute migratory workers after being "set free" from their livelihood through competition from U.S.-subsidized agribusiness. Political remedies fashioned to ameliorate the plight of workers try to save the capital relations that brought humanity to this precipice in the first place. If history is any guide, capitalists will turn to more militarism and total war.

Needed more than ever is a philosophically grounded alternative to capitalism that includes the reach for a new reality through new human relations in contrast to the reality of what Marx called social relations between things and material relations between persons.

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YOUTH

Marxist-Humanism's revolutionary journalism

by Brown Douglas

At the founding Convention of News and Letters Committees, Raya Dunayevskaya described *News & Letters* newspaper as, "The recorder of the impulses from the deepest layers of the population, which is at the same time a new form of unity of theory and practice." The conception of journalism that flows from that statement is totally different from what most people think of as journalism.

The "mainstream media," is better termed the "bourgeois media." That is, because the ruling class is the capitalist bourgeoisie, and the media that reports news, world happenings, and entertainment is in the end a mouthpiece of that social class. Exposing the class-based media comes by way of a larger critique of the class-based nature of this society.

The "new form of unity of theory and practice" means that there can no longer be a separation between what the people—chewed up and spit out every day by this society—are doing and thinking, and what revolutionaries are doing and thinking. Forging a new relationship between those who under capitalism have no voice and are the last ones looked to for an opinion and revolutionaries who have decided that this society is rotten and needs to go, became not just a formal policy but a philosophic principle with *News & Letters*.

Karl Marx was thinking of how to create a new kind of revolutionary journalism when he was a young newspaper writer. He wrote to his friend: "We should develop new principles for the world out of its old principles. We must not say to the world: stop your quarrels, they are foolish, and listen to us...to sum up the credo of our journal in a single word: the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age." Instead of beating people over the head with what seemed like a new idea pulled out of thin air, Marx knew that the "struggles and wishes" of people under capitalism express thoughts worthy of being recorded. What Marx didn't explicitly say that we know in our times is that for "self-clarification" to be worked out, the voices from those fighting oppression must be unseparated from those articulating a full philosophy of freedom. That is the task of a revolutionary journal like *News & Letters*.

This revolutionary journalism stands in contrast to

Kids and learning

A teacher of 8th grade students in the school with the lowest state test scores in the City of Detroit receives a lot of sympathetic comments when announcing her profession, usually beginning with "These kids" or "Kids today" and describing some circumstance like rap music, crime, poverty or poor parenting, and concluding with "don't want to learn."

Children learn every day of their lives, no matter where they grow up. A more accurate conclusion would be, "Kids today don't listen to adults promoting middle-class values."

The reasons "kids today" are so much more alienated from older generations are complex: a capitalist society which doesn't need their labor, an alienating culture that capitalist society creates.

Although the educational model in which teachers know and give and students don't know and receive was discarded half a century ago, vestiges remain. Belief that the middle-class ways, values and speech are Good and the underclass ways, values and speech are Bad persists. Middle-class ways, values and speech can give people an opportunity to advance in a capitalist society, but children, especially poor children, realize that the myth of the American dream is not for them. Hard work does not get their families into better jobs or safer neighborhoods. Long-term goals are too often derailed by unemployment, poor health, inadequate transportation, dangerous neighborhoods, traditions of under-education. Why work and save money to enter college when family members spend their time and money partying? Why speak standard English when your mother gained respect in the neighborhood for cussing out the principal when you were suspended from school? Why practice job-ready behavior when there are no jobs that you can get to, or you're fired from a fast-food job because your manager stole from your cash drawer?

The controversial "No Child Left Behind" Act dominating K12 education should more correctly be called "No Middle-Class Child Left Behind." It is said that kindergartners raised in poverty will have heard 30 million fewer words than children of middle-class backgrounds by the time they are five years old. The gap in their speaking, writing, reading, and comprehension, measured on the standard tests, which determine life or death for all school systems, increases with age. Inner-city public school districts are unable to meet the increasingly stringent standards of the act, whose steps for "Remediation" actually lead to closing public schools and opening those same buildings as charter schools—with no unions to impede the profit motive.

It is hard to envision education that allows young people to grow into their full humanity in a society on new foundations, after capitalism has been uprooted. That is all the more reason for Marxist-Humanists to try to work out concrete ramifications for education of a society based on the human being and to look forward to the day when teachers and students together explore the best of the old and continue to work out the new.

—Susan Van Gelder

the bourgeois idea of journalism. Journalists pretend to have a neutral point of view and make supposedly "objective" reports. Even the best bourgeois journalists—who are not solely disciplined by their careers, reputation, and accolades—don't approach their trade with the idea of finding the contradictions within this society and overcoming them. The "philosophy" behind this journalism is the same philosophy of the ruling class of capitalist society.

What philosophy flows from a revolutionary journalism? In *Marxism and Freedom* Raya Dunayevskaya worked out what revolutionaries do when they unite with workers and others who are exploited by capitalism: "If, as a theoretician, one's ears are attuned to the

ESL teachers strike



SAN FRANCISCO—Our strike at San Francisco Institute of English (teaching English as Second Language) with its teaching staff of 11 people was about the lack of healthcare. Healthcare was taken away in 2004, because after 9/11 homeland security reduced the number of student visas they issued, thus reducing enrollment in the school. The management asked the workers to "share the suffering" which was going to be temporary.

People have not had any cost of living increases. One teacher, who had been there for 12 years, had only three raises which were in the first three years. There is no policy for any other raises, no allowance for seniority, no allowance for cost of living increases.

The school is run as a not-for-profit by a couple. During the whole year I worked there, I had not seen the executive director nor his girlfriend who was the assistant director until about a month before the strike. We found from the school's tax returns they each made over \$100,000 per year totaling between them a quarter million dollars. Additionally he got \$25,000 in benefits, she got \$16,000 in benefits. The teachers average about \$18,000 per year.

At a holiday party in December one of the teachers asked, jokingly, "when are we going to get our healthcare?" Our supervisor said "it ain't gonna happen." That was the catalyst for us starting to organize.

We drafted our demands: across the board 30% wage increase and fully paid healthcare benefits. Policy was completely arbitrary. We want clear policies, a grievance procedure, and job security. In our letter of demands signed by 7 of the 11 staff, we asked them to address all these issues.

We presented our letter of demands on Wednesday, March 13. Management said they would need a long time to think about it. We gave him until Friday. Thursday, they offered us a 3% per year raise based on the number of years we've been there. But it would apply only to about half the staff. There was no healthcare promise at all. On Friday, we all came from our second or third jobs to meet with them and they failed to show. We got to the school at 7:00 p.m. and it was closed.

Monday morning we decided to strike. We had a lot of community support from labor, teachers, and unions like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 2121 from City College of San Francisco. We had an overwhelming majority of the students with us. A lot of them are from poor Third World countries, who said they have better healthcare than we did. By Wednesday one student told us there were only seven students, when normally there would have been between 50 and 60 for the evening classes.

By Thursday, two teachers who felt the management was not going to budge, resigned. Up until then we had a majority, but with them resigning, others would either resign or stop striking. By the end of the day, to thank the students, we took our strike fund of \$600, and had a pizza party. It gave us a sense of closure, because the resignations really ended the strike.

We are calling a general meeting for ESL teachers in San Francisco. We have teachers from four schools. The various independent schools are merging (just like healthcare providers), becoming national chains. Kaplan, a national test-preparation service that also does ESL, merged with Aspect, another national chain. When they merged, they tried to lower every teacher's salary and benefits to the lowest level of any of the merging schools. Those ESL teachers are all angry and talking about striking. We would like to propose that we form an association and share information, create linkages that will allow the next strike to be won and stop the Walmartization of education.

—G.H.

new impulse from the workers, new 'categories' will be created, a new way of thinking, a new step forward in philosophic cognition." The idea of not stopping at "recording impulses" but developing modes of thought and action in relationship to these revolutionary impulses is exactly what we have in mind when we put "Theory/Practice" on the front page of *News & Letters*.

To encourage the broadest participation from everyone seeking to transform this society, every issue of *News & Letters* includes people speaking for themselves. Our task as journalists isn't only to "cover" a good story and provide analysis. It's also making sure that the deepest layers of the population are heard in their own words expressing their own ideas, hopes and aspirations. Without that relationship, a radical journal only represents the thought of a few radicals and becomes insular and irrelevant.

"Self-development" is integral to that concept of revolutionary journalism. We know that no one has all the answers to the problems facing us and that a development will be necessary to move forward in our struggles. We provide a space for this working out of ideas by members and non-members alike. The "Women as Reason" column, "Workshop Talks" column, "Black/Red View" column, and the "Youth" column can all be written by participants who are interested in the Marxist-Humanist project of practicing theory and practice as a unit. The "Philosophic Dialogue" essays are where ideas are not just recorded but debated including "From the Archives" column where we print an essay from the founder of Marxist-Humanism, Raya Dunayevskaya. This way of breaking down the barrier between people outside and inside the organization is what practicing revolutionary journalism is about for News and Letters Committees. We invite you to join us in this project and make it your own by participating and writing for *News & Letters*.

Philosophic dialogue

What is epochal?

Tom More's essay "On concretizing a 'Philosophic Moment'" (*News & Letters*, February-March, 2008) is a very helpful contribution to the question. While he touches upon a number of interesting points, I'd like to focus on his formulation: "The question Dunayevskaya was raising with such provocative urgency in her June 1 [1987] Presentation went far beyond the intramural affairs of News and Letters Committees, reaching up to a question of epoch-making world-historical importance, one that might strike us as even more urgent 20 years after 'the year of the book,' when the need to concretize a philosophically grounded alternative to capitalist society has grown even more desperate."

I think this is true. What Dunayevskaya says in that June 1 Presentation is both organizationally concrete and truly profound. One can see this by looking first at her sentence More quotes, "...because philosophy has not permeated the paper [*News & Letters*], THEREFORE, it didn't permeate the organization." She then raises the necessity for a new kind of newspaper—more generally, one might say, a new kind of philosophic projection.

She isn't bringing this up as an "ought," without having worked out ground for it. In fact, one could see that very sentence as a syllogistic summation of the contents of her 1953 letters on Hegel's Absolutes, that is, her own "philosophic moment." A syllogism of the dialectics of organization and philosophy. The very category of "philosophic moment" as it is laid out in 1987 thus becomes inseparable from that new concept of projection of Marxist-Humanism that is called for.

It is the newspaper, *News & Letters*, that becomes the term that brings together philosophy and organization. One way to think about this would be to see the way Dunayevskaya's 1953 discussion of the final syllogisms of Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, and the Self-Determination of the Idea as "We have entered the new society," stands behind her 1987 injunction that "...the context of each person's activity and special point of concentration...will be inseparable from the meaning of that activity."

The call for a new kind of newspaper is inseparable here from the effort to work out "what happens after" in the spirit of Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

As new as this seems to me (and perhaps still "untrod" by anyone, as More notes) it wouldn't be without precedent in Dunayevskaya's writings. I'm thinking especially of a question from Chapter 1 of her *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973) that has always intrigued me and never quite been explained to my satisfaction: "Is it just ontological Idealism's 'delusion' (to use an expression of Marx) that thinks it can 'absorb' the objective world into itself, or is it the ideal toward which man aims, and can it be both?"

Her concept of philosophic projection, as set out in the June 1, 1987, Presentation, is one possible answer to this question, I think. In concretizing her own philosophic moment in 1987, Dunayevskaya perhaps thus spoke to such lacunae in the work of Marx and Hegel. In itself, this is profound, but at least as important is the way it can open up new ways to think about the projection of revolutionary philosophy, and the invitation to all the writers for *News & Letters* to re-experience that philosophic moment. That could be epochal.

—Tim Finnigan

Mugabe's hold on Zimbabwe

As of this writing, the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) has yet to release the vote totals from the March 29 presidential election. The obvious assumption is that President Robert Mugabe lost outright to Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) candidate Morgan Tsvangirai. Mugabe's ZANU-PF party also lost in legislative voting.

Now Mugabe is pushing for a run-off vote amid a crackdown on opposition activists, local and international media, and even members of the ZEC who reported honest vote totals. On April 11 political rallies were banned outright. The MDC is considering boycotting any run-off, as it would be conducted in a climate of repression that would be inconsistent with a free election.

Southern African governments will be meeting in Zambia to discuss the situation. Mugabe representatives will take part, and Tsvangirai has said that he will be there.

In the midst of this impasse came reports that Mugabe supporters had occupied some of the few remaining white-owned farms. A sad, ironic coda to the memory of the revolution. While Mugabe accuses Tsvangirai and the MDC of being controlled by "Western imperialism," the truth is that he cemented his own position of power by looking out for just those interests. While Zimbabweans had expected that the overthrow of the racist colonial government would result in practical measures like the distribution of land, this didn't happen.

Instead Mugabe left the large white-owned farms intact or, later, passed them to his cronies. For decades he put the interests of outside business above those of the people who were left in poverty. As time passed, his rule has taken on more and more the character of what Tsvangirai termed "a war on the people." In the latest farm occupations, as often before, it is Black workers who have been beaten and dispossessed, now, for allegedly supporting the MDC.

The tragedy of Zimbabwe's revolution can be seen in the way the radical land reforms promised by ZANU-PF were never implemented. It was not only an economic but a social question. The hope for new social relations was later dismissed by Mugabe as "propaganda," but millions of rural Zimbabweans might have benefitted from such reforms. Women who received land would have received a new measure of freedom along with it.

Zimbabweans have clearly had enough. The collapse of the economy (except the stock market for a wealthy

few), inflation rates up to 66,000%, 80% unemployment rates, and millions forced into economic or political exile have seen to this. Mugabe dealt with the HIV/AIDS crisis by demonizing gays and with urban poverty by bulldozing the shantytowns of the destitute to drive them from the cities.



Opposition activists marched through streets of Harare

The opposition MDC began in 1999 as a movement largely based in Zimbabwe's Congress of Trade Unions and opposition civic groups. Tsvangirai himself was a labor activist. Its support has previously come heavily from urban areas. The broad support for the MDC in this election should be seen in terms of a fundamental change in Zimbabwe's politics.

Newer organizations like Women of Zimbabwe Arise are bringing long-simmering questions to the forefront of debate, such as access to energy resources, violence against women, and the HIV/AIDS crisis. These organizations would also challenge the MDC to deliver results in any post-Mugabe situation. What they are raising is the unfinished business of the revolution.

—Gerry Emmett

NATO's expansion

Bush's recent trip to Europe in connection with all things NATO demonstrated the relentless expansion of the military alliance within Europe and without, the continued friction with Russia, as well as the tensions, though not-yet-fractures, with European countries.

Even before the NATO summit meeting held in Romania, Bush journeyed to the Ukraine to indicate his strong support for the inclusion of the Ukraine and Georgia—countries directly on Russia's border—in his drive for the expansion of NATO across Europe. Despite the fact that France and Germany had already indicated they would not support such a move at present, Bush chose to lay down his markers for a greater NATO.

At the summit, what he **did** achieve was far more significant: an agreement to add troops to the 47,000 presently in Afghanistan under NATO. "NATO is no longer a static alliance focused on defending Europe," stated Bush. "It is now an expeditionary alliance that is sending its forces across the world." The European states accept this global military reach of NATO, presently focused on Afghanistan, as they question how much of nuclear-armed Russia should be bordered by NATO countries. The question of the "usefulness" of NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union, first answered in Kosovo, is now solidified in Afghanistan.

Bush won NATO's agreement for continuing to implement plans for a missile-defense system in Europe. He signed an agreement with the Czech Republic to build missile-defense radar for the system. Another part is to be constructed in Poland.

After the summit Bush traveled to Croatia to celebrate Albania's and Croatia's joining the 26-member military alliance. Then he met with Russia's President Putin on the Black Sea. Here, they could only paper over the deep disagreements on missile defense and expansion of NATO in Europe. The Cold War may be over, but the two foremost nuclear world powers have not buried the hatchet.

—Eugene Walker

After Colombian invasion of Ecuador

The March 1 calculated and bloody incursion of Colombian troops into Ecuador resulted in the bombing and massacre of 25 individuals, including FARC's number two leader, Raúl Reyes (aka Luis Edgar Devia), and Mexican youth who had attended a conference in Quito and had gone on to meet with the FARC leader in the Ecuadorian jungle.

This event calls attention to the "Iraq in our hemisphere" that is too often forgotten, and the destabilizing effect the U.S. interference has had on the region. Colombia is surrounded by Venezuela and Ecuador, both of which have elected governments that are intent upon challenging U.S. hegemony.

Colombian President and Bush lapdog, Uribe, almost certainly was able to locate Reyes with the aid of U.S. intelligence, perhaps making use of the U.S. military base on Ecuadorian soil, which it was granted in a near-secret treaty enacted by the now disgraced Mahuad government and which the current government is committed to seeing abolished when the treaty expires next year. Just as certain was his motivation to sabotage any chance of prisoner exchange or a possible negotiated end to the civil war that has raged in Colombia for over 40 years.

The divide between the Bush agenda of world domination and the aspirations of Latin Americans was brought into the open by the U.S./Colombian rejection of the otherwise unanimous condemnation by the Organization of American States (OAS) of the Colombian attack, on the grounds that it was a "defensive" action. The Orwellian Bush Doctrine that defines any opposition to its imperial goals as "terrorist" and justifies military action regardless of national boundaries, is a major impediment to peace and social change in the Andes region and all of Latin America.

Turning to Ecuador, we see the government of Rafael Correa, which refers to itself as revolutionary, winning a series of landslide election victories. The Constituent Assembly's first act was to suspend the Ecuadorian Congress, which has been dominated by corrupt and rightist political parties and is universally despised by the vast majority of Ecuadorians.

The Correa government and the Constituent Assembly, which in effect it controls, are openly allied with Chávez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia, in what I would characterize more as progressive nationalism than genuine socialism. Nonetheless, in the face of virulent attacks by the corporate media and the pundit class, Correa retains massive popular support.

The desperation of Bush and Uribe can be seen in their attempts to picture the governments of Venezuela and Ecuador as allies of FARC (and then presumably defined as "terrorist") based upon supposed evidence from a computer that allegedly belonged to Reyes.

Ecuadorian intelligence had not informed President Correa of information they had on the one Ecuadorian who was killed in the March 1 Colombian raid, and it was implied that the information was instead forwarded to the U.S. Correa made the accusation that Ecuadorian intelligence is widely infiltrated by the CIA, and that he would remedy this even if it costs him his presidency and his life. In the wake of this, his Minister of Defense resigned along with three of the four generals of the Joint Chiefs. They have all been replaced and swear loyalty to Correa. The new Minister of Defense, Javier Ponce, has indicated that he favors breaking ties with the U.S. with respect to training its military officers and its intelligence services.

—Ecuadorian observer

Egypt labor clash

Thousands of Egyptian workers and supporters fought riot police in the Egyptian town of Mahalla al-Kubra in early April. The clashes grew from a planned nationwide strike against rising prices and low wages.

The strike was to begin with a sit-in by 30,000 workers at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company plant in Mahalla. The plant has been a center of militant labor action in recent years, including factory occupations. Egyptian authorities tried to head off the action by arresting union leaders and telling workers that the strike had been cancelled. Meanwhile they forced production to continue at gunpoint.

When a few thousand workers rallied in front of the police station demanding the release of union leaders, they were attacked. This brought more people into the streets in support of the textile workers and resulted in hundreds arrested and injured, and at least five people killed. Authorities used this as an excuse to round up opposition party politicians and bloggers.

While the nationwide strike didn't take place in the end, events in Mahalla reflect a deep discontent in Egypt that will be reflected upon all over the country.

—G.E.

NEWS AND LETTERS COMMITTEES

Who We Are And What We Stand For

News and Letters Committees is an organization of Marxist-Humanists that since its birth has stood for the abolition of capitalism, both in its private property form as in the U.S., and its state property form, as it has historically appeared in state-capitalist regimes calling themselves Communist as in Russia and China. We stand for the development of new human relations, what Marx first called a new Humanism.

News & Letters was founded in 1955, the year of the Detroit wildcat strikes against Automation and the Montgomery Bus Boycott against segregation—activities which signaled a new movement from practice that was itself a form of theory. *News & Letters* was created so that the voices of revolt from below could be heard unseparated from the articulation of a philosophy of liberation.

Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-1987), founder of the body of ideas of Marxist-Humanism, became Chairwoman

of the National Editorial Board and National Chairwoman of the Committees from its founding to 1987. Charles Denby (1907 - 83), a Black production worker, author of *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*, became editor of the paper from 1955 to 1983. Dunayevskaya's works, *Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 until Today* (1958), *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao* (1973), and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1982) spell out the philosophic ground of Marx's Humanism internationally, as *American Civilization on Trial* concretizes it on the American scene and shows the two-way road between the U.S. and Africa.

This body of ideas challenges all those desiring freedom to transcend the limitations of post-Marx Marxism, beginning with Engels. In light of the crises of our nuclearly armed world, it becomes imperative not only to reject

what is, but to reveal and further develop the revolutionary Humanist future inherent in the present. The new visions of the future which Dunayevskaya left us in her work from the 1940s to the 1980s are rooted in her discovery of Marx's Marxism in its original form as a new Humanism and in her re-creation of that philosophy for our age as Marxist-Humanism. This is recorded in the documents on microfilm and open to all under the title *The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection—Marxist-Humanism: A Half-Century of Its World Development*.

Dunayevskaya's philosophic comprehension of her creation and development of Marxist-Humanism, especially as expressed in her 1980s writings, presents the vantage point for re-creating her ideas anew. Seeking to grasp that vantage point for ourselves and make it available to all who struggle for freedom, we have published Dunayevskaya's original 1953 philosophic breakthrough and her

final 1987 Presentation on the Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy in *The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism* (1989), and donated new supplementary volumes to the *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*. News and Letters Committees aims at developing and concretizing this body of ideas for our time.

In opposing this capitalistic, racist, sexist, heterosexist, class-ridden society, we have organized ourselves into a committee form of organization rather than any elitist party "to lead." We participate in all class and freedom struggles, nationally and internationally. As our *Constitution* states: "It is our aim...to promote the firmest unity among workers, Blacks and other minorities, women, youth and those intellectuals who have broken with the ruling bureaucracy of both capital and labor." We do not separate mass activities from the activity of thinking. Send for a copy of the *Constitution of News and Letters Committees*.