

Chicago Workers' Voice

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*The Bolshevik Agrarian Program, Part I

*Revolutionary Struggle in Mexico

The Fight for Democratic Demands and the Socialist
Revolution in Mexico

From *El Machete*: Work to Form the Political Organ
of the Toilers

Book Review by Jack Hill:

El Otro Rostro de la Guerrilla by Arturo Miranda Ramírez

*Immigration: The Working Class has No Borders

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Editorial Guide to issue #12

by Jake

This issue of Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal initiates a new series by Barb on the Bolshevik Agrarian Program. Part I discusses serfdom, 19th century peasant movements and the Russian Social-Democratic agrarian programs up to 1903.

Continuing our coverage of Mexico we present three articles. Anita Jones de Sandoval presents the second article in her series analyzing the mass movements and politics in Mexico today. Here she discusses the relationship between democratic demands and the fight for socialism. This should help to rectify the mistakes of Joseph in Detroit, who just can't shake off the semi-anarchist monkey.

An editorial by *El Machete* discusses the need for working class organization, and Jack Hill reviews the interesting memoir of a guerilla fighter from Guerrero.

Immigration is often a hot political issue in the United States. It will certainly continue to be, and it is one that

some of the left and much of working class does not see in a proper perspective. Jack Hill's article discusses immigration from a revolutionary Marxist perspective, one that we need when opposing the frequent reactionary legal measures and attacks against immigrants typical of this point in time.

Sarah provides a review of the movie *Che*. This film was popular with activists in Chicago and presumably elsewhere, and it raises some important issues regarding Che and the Cuban revolution. Sarah takes the opportunity to speak to issues raised by the film, as well as some other matters of concern to revolutionaries.

Finally, LA Workers' Voice contributes a book review and commentary on Jay Gould's anti-nuclear, anti-chemical pollution expose, *The Enemy Within*. Jack Hill adds an introduction to our LA comrades' review. The graphic was supplied by *Los Angeles Workers' Voice*. <

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The Bolshevik Agrarian Program

Part I

by Barb, Chicago

“We have passed the world’s first law abolishing all private ownership of land.” (1)

“Voices are being raised here that the decree itself and the Mandate were drawn up by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. What of it? Does it matter who drew them up?” (2)

The Bolshevik agrarian program has been the subject of much controversy and, I think, misinterpretation. Rosa Luxemburg spoke for many other European socialists when she accused the Bolsheviks of betraying socialist economic principles. She regarded the Bolshevik land measures as a cop-out from their original conception, merely a tactical expediency to assure peasant support for the proletarian regime. Luxemburg voiced the widespread misconception that the peasants were granted to right to own “private property” and that this would “cut off” the way to socialism (3). The Bolshevik decree raised the questions: What, then, were the real differences between the (Left) Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks? How could the Bolsheviks adopt the agrarian program of its “much condemned” foes? For, after all, the S.-R.s soon left the government and opposed the Bolsheviks as a vicious counter-revolutionary force.

Much of this confusion resulted from viewing Russia from the standpoint of Western European capitalism. The alarmed European socialists were fairly ignorant of the actual agrarian conditions in Russia and poorly understood the nature of the Russian Revolution. To attempt to set the record straight, this article traces the evolution of the Bolshevik agrarian program which went through a rational evolution over several decades. I maintain that at every stage, including its final adaptation, it was based on the foundations established by Marx and Engels.

The Peasants Under Serfdom

“...do you call them people? I say they’re nothing but flies.” (4)

Most comrades probably have a pretty accurate picture of life under serfdom, but it is useful to review the matter since the S.-D. position was that *de facto* serfdom remained in Russia after the so-called Emancipation.

Serfs, or land-bound peasants, (5) were literally owned by the feudal master. In fact, the worth of a noble was judged less on the amount of land he owned than by the number of “souls” he owned, which could number into the tens of thousands. Gogol’s satiric novel, *Dead Souls*, gives a good picture of this. His character, Chichikov, a genial opportunist, goes about the countryside buying up deceased serfs in order to amass evidence of “property” to get a bank mortgage to impress an heiress -- although he owns no land at all.

Serf economy was called “natural economy.” That is, it was mainly based on non-monetary exchange and cottage industry. It was a kind of closed circle: production served chiefly to perpetuate the landlords (in splendid style) and the serfs (on subsistence level). Feudal agricultural production was notoriously low, being labor-intensive and technically archaic.

Through his “paternal graciousness,” the rural landlord (*boyar*) allotted the peasant (*muzhik*) a small, poor, parcel of land to sustain his family. In return, the serf worked the landlord’s vast lands with his own crude implements and livestock, as well as with his wife and children. Both sexes had to work a minimum of three days’ forced labor (*barshchina*), sometimes while the peasant’s own fields rotted and, moreover, had to pay the landlord in produce or handcrafted goods. This was called *corvee* or fee-in-kind labor.

The other means of compensating the landlord was called “quit-rent,” or money rent (*obruk*). This was obtained through the serf’s handicraft side-line, or sometimes he got the landlord’s permission to ply a trade in the town, work for a factory, or hire out to a neighboring latifundia for wages.

There were different kinds of bound peasants: crown serfs (the tsar was the biggest serf-owner), state peasants, church peasants (eventually merged with the state), monastery peasants, and private-landlord serfs, reputed to be the most mistreated. The crown and state peasants also paid “rent” in the form of *corvee* or *obrok*. While they might have had slightly larger allotments and were not under the landlord’s thumb, they formed the bulk of the military recruits, who served up to 25 years.

There were also vast numbers of landless, totally dependent servants called “courtyard people.” Some landlords educated such serfs, and a few even sent them abroad. There are intriguing accounts of serf architects,

playwrights, and opera singers who served to enrich the landlord's lifestyle. Later, there were "factory-bound" serfs who labored in mining, logging, and manufacturing. Small pockets of peasants had never been bound, or had been manumitted by individual owners. The most significant of these were the Cossacks along the border regions of the Don, Dnieper and Volga Rivers.

The rural landlord or state-official landlord had full control over his serfs' lives. Laws were gradually enacted to restrain his actions; for example, he was forbidden to kill, mutilate, or "reduce his serfs to ruin," i.e., fail to provide for them in times of famine. In reality, there was no redress for the mistreated serf since he was forbidden to make a legal complaint against a landlord and, besides, the authorities were his master's peers. The landlords could and did confine serfs, flog them to the point of death, buy and sell them, interfere in peasant land distribution, convert landed-serfs into household-serfs, send them to the military, banish them to hard labor in Siberia, expel the sick and elderly "non-workers," force marriages, split up families, and sexually abuse the women.

There was another outrageous aspect to serfdom. Not only did the serf pay the landlord "rent" for his poor plot, but had to pay the state a tax on his own head, called the "poll tax." Under the peculiar institution of serfdom, landlords were not taxed but serfs were! The landlord was merely obligated to collect and submit to the government the taxes on each head-of-serf-household he owned.

The serf huts which clustered around the landlord's property were called the village commune (*obshchina* or *mir*). The peasants elected members to a council which governed the land relations of the commune and kept order. The commune, which eventually became a bone of contention between the Bolsheviks and the S.-R.s, had a double function. While by no means the "primitive-communist" (pre-serfdom) institution so romanticized by the S.-R.s, it still had a definite collectivist nature in that it served as a means of peasant survival, ensuring mutual aid. Since the serfs commonly held isolated strips of land in several different fields, cooperation in plowing, seeding and harvesting was a necessity. Pastures, forests, and fishing grounds were generally shared by all, and some communes even withheld land to be farmed in common. Only a very few, however, equally divided up the total yield from individual plots. The commune had both a land-holding and a land-distributing function, for it periodically assessed its population and redistributed the allotment land in a more-or-less equal fashion. [Some communes had a system of hereditary instead of repartitional land tenure].

But the commune was also a coercive, controlling

instrument of the feudal landlord. The entire commune was held responsible for the taxes assessed against it as a unit, and so apportioned and collected the taxes due from each member. In addition, the commune was held liable for individual "misdeeds" such as non-payment of taxes, "laziness," running away, or rebellion.

The serfs, the "dark people," were helplessly bound to the land both through their allotments and through the commune. It was a form of chattel slavery, and Lenin drew many comparisons between the slave-holding U.S. South and Russia under serfdom. In fact, at the end of the serf era, some landowners merged village and manor fields into actual "plantations." Enforcing the serf-crushing patriarchal autocracy was the patriarchal church which kept the peasants in ignorant superstition, and the peasants, in turn, carried these patriarchal relations into the peasant household.

Despite the downtrodden existence of the serfs, there had been peasant rebellions from the late 16th C. on. The Cossack nomads had from the outset resisted this slavery, much like the American Indians, and subsequently led many peasant revolts. Certain Cossack leaders, such as Stenka Razin and Pugachev, became national heroes. The Cossacks were eventually "bought off," given land in exchange for forming the tsar's private border guard. The Cossack "armies" then formed self-governing communities and, in time, created their own serf-owning aristocracy. Then there were also sizeable persecuted religious groups, such as the "Old Believers," who resisted cooperation with the government.

As the 19th century opened, peasant disorder had become a nationwide problem. This commonly took the form of insubordination, refusal to work or pay taxes, sabotage, mass flight, or petitioning of authorities; but there were also violent rebellions of "the torch and pitchfork" with manor houses burned, and landlords and officials killed. Tsarist troops, often with Cossack aid, quelled these rebellions easily and cruelly. In the five years preceding the Emancipation, there were almost 500 major rebellions recorded, and this was but the tip of the iceberg (Robinson, p. 49).

At the end of the 18th C., there had been approximately 10 million private-serf and 7 1/4 m. state-peasant households (34 m. "souls"), out of a total population of 36 m. people. On the eve of the Emancipation, there were 10 1/2 m. private-serf and almost 13 m. state-peasant households (approx. 40 m. "souls") out of a total population of 74 m. (Robinson, pp. 33, 63). While numbers had risen, the percentage of serfs had greatly fallen, indicating that the old "natural economy" was on its way out. Moreover, existing peasant allotments were continually shrinking in

size and the misery of living conditions increasing -- with famine ever looming.

As the 19th C. progressed, many rural landlords, having fallen upon hard times, were anxious to get rid of their serfs. The influx of Western culture was largely responsible. Increasing taste for Western luxuries and the lure of urban centers had resulted in much absentee landlordism, and debt had forced many landlords to mortgage their serfs. The development of urban industry had created a market for manufactured goods and a demand for agricultural products that the archaic, feudal agriculture was incapable of meeting. Influenced by Western economists, Russian economists were promoting the changeover to wage labor. Moreover, the influence of Western liberal ideas was creating a section of younger, reform-minded landowners.

Thus from 1798 on, a few tentative reforms were enacted. For example, there were laws to redistribute land to some of the poorer peasants, and laws which forbade the buying or selling of serfs without land. Other laws authorized contractual arrangements between masters and serfs, meaning a serf could buy his "freedom" and even purchase land. However, few could afford either, and those who tried still remained bound by life-long debt to the landlord. In short, all these laws were more or less impotent. However, a more significant reform of 1840 gave factory owners the right to emancipate their serfs. Thus, more than half the factory-bound serfs had become free hired labor before 1861, a sure sign that capitalist relations were already predominant in industry.

The Emancipation of the Serfs

"The right of bondage over the peasants settled upon the landlords' estates, and over the courtyard people, is forever abolished." (6)

The Peasant Reform of 1861, enacted by Tsar Alexander II, is commonly referred to as the "Emancipation of the Serfs." This "emancipation" involved approximately 22.5 m. bound-peasants who with this act supposedly became masters of their own "souls." As indicated, the reform was impelled by two currents. First, the increasing rebellion of the peasants was obviously a threat to the landowning class. As Lenin stated: "The tsar himself admitted that the peasants had to be emancipated from above, lest they emancipate themselves from below" (CW, 1964, Vol. 4, "The Workers' Party and the Peasantry," p. 421). The underlying economic reason was that capitalism was rapidly expanding into the countryside so that the landlords (as well as the urban bourgeoisie) were

putting pressure on the government to free the serfs to prepare a section of contract wage labor necessary for capitalism's development.

Testifying to the backwardness of its economy, Russia was the last major European country to free its serfs (France in 1789, Germany and other countries in 1848). The Decree itself was a mass of confusion. Even government officials admitted that the peasant land laws were "incomplete, inexact, and in some instances even contradictory" (Robinson, p. 65). As such they allowed for much exploitive manipulation. In Lenin's view, the reform was "legalized robbery."

It was the first act of mass violence against the peasantry in the interests of nascent capitalism in agriculture. It was the "clearing of estates" for capitalism by the landlords (CW, 1972, Vol. 13, "Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy," p. 277).

Robinson maintains that:

In very much that it preserved, even in much that it created, the Emancipation of the 'sixties contributed powerfully to the making of the Revolution of 1917; the meaning of the Proclamation of 1861 did not become altogether clear until it was illuminated by the glare of that great conflagration (p. 65).

Lenin used the phrase "act of violence" because the reform in no way undercut landlord exploitation of the peasantry. Instead of the old master/serf relationship, there evolved a more advanced feudal structure of landowner/"temporarily-bound" peasant. The peasantry became the lowest "social estate," subject to special discriminatory laws and taxation. In reality, the peasant remained just as bound to the land and to the village commune as before, and just as dependent on the landlord's largess or lack of.

The liberal view was that the Emancipation was a generous act accompanied by a grant of land with state aid to the peasantry. The reality was quite different. With the Reform, peasant allotments reverted back to the landlords, who then redistributed the land. The peasant was not given land; he was required to purchase it and, moreover, was forced to accept whatever allotment was bestowed. The laws placed many obstacles in his way if he wished to refuse it, sell it or even give it away. If the landlord and peasant made a private agreement, the peasant was "temporarily bound" to him in labor service for 20 years. If the

peasant received a government loan, or if the commune itself received the loan (which was usually the case with hereditary tenure), the government paid the "landlord" for his land, and the purchaser then had 49 years to repay the government at 6% interest. Regardless, the price of the land was jacked up to three to four times its value, and so the government also made a tidy profit. Such agreements were called the "redemption payment."

The redemption payment was due yearly, and if the peasant could not pay it (and he usually couldn't), he had the option of working it off for the landlord in "labor service" or losing his land. "Labor service," then, was merely a new form of *corvee*: in Lenin's terms, a transition from *corvee* to capitalism. [The peasants continued to refer to it as *barshchina*.] Thus, unlike under serfdom, *corvee* was not preserved by force of law, but enforced by economic dependence. In essence, the peasants were paying for their freedom and "renting" themselves until they "redeemed" themselves!

The other major issue was that of the "cut-off lands." When allotments were redistributed, a minimum of subsistence land was determined, and landlords were allowed to hold back up to 1/2 of the peasants' land above this minimum. Thus, they secured possession of the best parts of the allotments, including forests, grazing grounds, water access, etc. This deprived the peasantry of from 1/5 to 2/5s of their original allotment land and, as Lenin sarcastically put it, "freed" them from the resources necessary for their existence. The peasants then had to pay rent to the landlords for the use of these necessary resources. This could also take the form of money (the old "quit-rent") or labor service.

Most private-landlord estates operated on a combination of labor service and wage labor. Only an insignificant amount of land was tilled solely by hired labor using the landlords' own implements in a true capitalist manner. By far, the greater part was tilled by peasants on a *corvee* or *metayer* basis. *Metayer*, or share-cropping, meant that the peasant worked the landlord's land with his own implements and animals, not for wages but for a certain percentage of the crop, plus worked *gratis* for a set number of weeks. As more and more landlords became "absentee squires," many latifundia were tilled entirely by peasants.

Moreover, usually the peasants' plots were still isolated strips, now wedged into the landlord's holding, so the peasants had to pay or work off additional "fines" for access through the landlord's property, or for straying cattle, etc. These fines could become as much of a financial burden as the redemption payment.

In addition to this, the peasants were always in debt to

the landlords for usurious loans which got them through hard times. A widespread practice called "winter hiring" was particularly exploitive and increased the "plunder of the peasantry" -- to use Lenin's favorite phrase. This meant that landlords hired the peasants for summer work during the winter months when they were starving and would desperately accept 1/2 to 1/3 the normal wage in exchange for an advance of money or grain.

There was some change in the status of the old village commune, but the peasant remained in even greater bondage to it. Now the allotments technically "belonged" to the members of each household in equal share, while the household had collective responsibility for its members. Still, all peasants were required to join a "village community" (*selskoe obshchestvo*), and freed-serfs formerly belonging to a particular landlord were forced to remain together. In some cases, there was confusion in legal status between the two forms, but for all practical purposes, the "village community" equalled the old "commune." It still maintained its land redistribution function, which now included authorizing the buying, selling, or transferring of all land. But the commune was also clearly an institution of the feudal government, mandated to collect the redemption payments and taxes. [In Robinson's terms, the communes were "engines of an over-priced redemption" (p. 80).] The commune also was responsible to guarantee that the peasants performed various services to the landlords and state, such as military service. And it was given the right to punish or banish offenders and to issue passports. In short, the commune took on many of the police functions of the old landlords.

In addition, taxes on the peasantry increased tremendously in amount and scope. There were all sorts of new taxes now due this emancipated "social estate" which remained officially divided into about 30 feudal categories, e.g., former landlord serfs, former state peasants, former gift-land peasants, etc., each with a different tax status. The taxes levied on the nobility's land were only 1/10 per/dessiatine (1 dess. = 2.5 acres) as much as on peasant land (Robinson, p. 95). In addition, the peasants bore the burden of indirect taxation on articles of necessary consumption.

Contrary to official propaganda, the Peasant Reform actually forced peasants off the land. As an example, the less land or the worse land, the higher the rates of taxation, since the peasant himself became more valuable to both the state and the private landlord as he was forced to become a money-wage earner. Many peasants delayed their redemption payments as long as possible, preferring to remain legally "landless."

As the 19th C. progressed, more and more nobles

wished to get rid of some of their land which was becoming a burden. Therefore in 1883, a government Peasant Land Bank was set up, ostensibly to enable peasants to purchase additional plots. However, for the land purchased through the Bank, the average price was approximately 36.5% higher than through private purchase, and the interest rate was so exorbitant that it often accelerated the ruin of these peasants. Robinson maintains that, in reality, the Bank actually gave most aid to the landlords (pp. 101-02).

So much for "land grants" and "government aid!"

What was happening to the peasantry, of course, was that it was shaking off the archaic, feudal categories and beginning to sort itself out into capitalist economic classes. A great many peasants could not make a go of their pathetic plots or make the redemption payments, and either rented out their plots or even paid individuals or the commune to take them over, and hired themselves out as part or full-time wage labor. These were often the "gift-land peasants," e.g., former "courtyard peasants" and "factory peasants" who were compelled to accept what were termed "beggarly allotments," but had no farming experience.

It was not the poorest peasants, but the adequate peasants who worked the landlords' lands because implements and draft animals were necessary to do so; thus, they managed to hang on to their plots and survive. The more enterprising or lucky peasants (or those with large families) were able to acquire additional land, and began to prosper to the point of hiring wage-labor themselves. The former state-serfs, who emerged from the Reform with slightly more land and lesser taxes, formed a big percentage of this group. Thus, the peasantry was dividing into the "ruined peasants" (rural proletariat/poor peasant), the "middle peasant," and the "peasant bourgeois-capitalist" (later termed the *kulak*) (7), all groups, however, standing in opposition to the feudal-capitalist landlords.

As the 20th C. dawned, 10.5 m. peasant households (50 m. people) owned 75 m. dess., while only 30,000 landlord families (150,000 people) owned 70 m. dess. That averaged out to 2,333 dess. per landlord family, and only 7 + dess. per average peasant household (CW, 1973, Vol. 15, "The Agrarian Question in Russia Towards the Close of the Nineteenth Century," p. 80). [Radkey estimates the average as closer to 11 dess., but regardless, a huge number of peasants had only 1 or 2 dess. of land, a grossly insufficient subsistence level.] Moreover, it was estimated that the peasants were nearly 30% of their annual total assessment in arrears to the state (Radkey, p. 95). The situation was so critical that the government was forced once again to offer a few reforms such as reductions or even cancellation of redemption debts and the poll tax.

The government also began encouraging the colonization of Siberia and Asiatic Russia, offering state loans and aid, but this did little to relieve the land crisis. For example, Radkey states that during the peak years of immigration, 1897-1900, the population increase of rural Russia was nearly 14 times as great as the net loss from out-migration (p. 109) (8).

The land tenure system was a confused mess. For to whom did the land actually "belong"? Nominally to the peasants, but actually the terms "rented," "leased," and "mortgaged" are more appropriate. Or did the land "belong" to the commune, for it controlled the land until the peasants had paid off the redemption? Even then the titled householder was not freed from other ties to the commune; it was almost impossible to withdraw from the commune. Or did the land really "belong" to the government, the banks, and the old landlords? All the average peasant knew, or cared about, was that he did not have enough land to support his family, and he continued to practice in the old ways what Radkey calls "an economy of devastation."

In Lenin's summation, the Great Reform was feudal because it was carried out by the feudal landowners, but it was also a reform which had bourgeois "content." Politically, it was a step forward in the transformation of Russia into a bourgeois monarchy. Economically, it marked the transition from feudal to capitalist relations in the countryside. The peasant was caught between bondage to the old master and bondage to money.

The First Social-Democratic Agrarian Program

"...in that programme the inevitability of a 'radical revision' of the Peasant Reform was recognised twenty years before the Russian revolution." (9)

The first Russian Marxist Agrarian Program was drawn up by Plekanov for the Emancipation of Labor Group in 1883-85. While brief, its tenets underlay subsequent S.-D. programs. It called for:

A radical revision of our agrarian relationships, i.e., of the terms on which the land is to be redeemed and allotted to the peasant communities. The right to refuse their allotments and to leave the commune to be granted to those peasants who may find it advantageous to do so, etc (CW, 1972, Vol. 13, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First

Lenin judged that both its principles and its partial demands had been correct; the right to refuse allotments and leave the commune had been particularly foresighted. However, it was too abstract, not really a program but a Marxist declaration. Theoretically it was weak. It did not clarify the economic basis on which the program stood; it did not clarify the distinction between a radical revision and a reformist revision; and it did not differentiate the proletarian standpoint from the general democratic standpoint.

It was also weak practically: it did not take into account the experience of the peasantry. However, Lenin conceded that, at the time, it couldn't have been more concrete without a nation-wide peasant movement and the Marxists had had little contact with the peasantry. Moreover, there was not yet even a workers' party (p. 256) (10).

In other of Plekanov's statements, he had foreseen that an impending democratic revolution might give way to a "general redistribution" of land which would

give a powerful impetus to the development of capitalism, to the growth of the home market, to an improvement in the conditions of the peasantry, to the disintegration of the village commune, to the development of class contradictions in the countryside and to the eradication of all vestiges of the old, feudal bondage system in Russia (CW, 1972, Vol. 10, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party," p. 170).

In the idea of "general redistribution," Lenin saw the basis of the S.-D. theoretical formulation of the agrarian question. He isolated these conclusions from Plekanov's writings:

First. The agrarian revolution will necessarily be a part of the democratic revolution in Russia. The content of this revolution will be the liberation of the countryside from the relations of semi-feudal bondage.

Second. In its social and economic aspect, the impending agrarian revolution will be a bourgeois-democratic revolution; it will not weaken but stimulate the development of capitalism and capitalist class contradictions.

Third. The Social-Democrats have every reason to support this revolution most resolutely, setting themselves immediate tasks, but not

tying their hands by assuming commitments, and by no means refusing to support even a "general redistribution". (p. 170).

Narodism - "Peasant Socialism"

"...the Narodnik...[looks] with one face to the past and the other to the future." (11)

Lenin's chief task during this early period was to refute the Narodnik views which dominated the left. The Narodnik (Populist-"Going to the People") movement arose shortly after the Great Reform. Originally, it had a revolutionary content, the Narodniks representing the position of radical democracy against the feudal autocracy. They had been the first peasant allies and, moreover, the first to pose the problem of capitalism. Lenin had great respect for its early spokesmen, Herzen and, especially, Chernyshevsky.

Narodism had been an important precursor to Marxism in that establishing "communism" was its goal. It had shared a basic departure point with Social Democracy, namely a hatred of feudalism and the rising capitalist bourgeoisie. Lenin regarded the Narodniks as petty-bourgeois, utopian-communists who represented the view of the small producer. From the viewpoint of the 1860s-70s, they had considered capitalism to be an arbitrary path of development for Russia. There was at this time only the nucleus of an urban proletariat; therefore, they had viewed the peasantry as the chief revolutionary force in Russia. They believed that the peasants could be protected from capitalism's inroads through the village commune which they saw as a repository of "naive communism," operating on a basis of "natural economy and primitive equality." They saw the commune as the "embryo of socialism," the means by which Russia could "bypass capitalism," and "go over" directly to socialism. Due to the era of feebly-developed capitalism, and the fact that the petty-bourgeois nature of peasant economy had not yet been revealed, the Narodniks had only been able to see the village commune in its social and agricultural aspects, and not in its political and economic aspects.

Lenin listed the three main points of Narodism as:

- 1) Belief that capitalism in Russia represents a deterioration, a retrogression.
- 2) Belief in the exceptional character of the Russian economic system in general, and of the peasantry, with its village community, *artel*, etc., in particular.

3) Disregard of the connection between the "intelligentsia" and the country's legal and political institutions, on the one hand, and the material interests of definite social classes, on the other (CW, 1972, Vol. 2, "The Heritage We Renounce," pp. 513-14).

These beliefs had led the Narodniks to a theory of "bypassing" capitalism through the leadership of the peasantry by what they erroneously regarded as a "disinterested" (i.e., classless) intelligentsia. They had seen this as possible because they viewed the peasants as ready-made "socialists" who only needed a spur from the intelligentsia to rise up against the autocracy in social revolution. They had eschewed any kind of political struggle as only advantageous to the rising bourgeoisie; thus, they obviously had no interest in establishing a republic. The Narodniks represented a semi-anarchistic position based on a non-materialist, romantic view of history as determined by outstanding individuals.

By the later decades of the 19th C., the rousing of the peasantry through the "Going to the People" movement had proved an utter failure. The underground Narodnik organization, *Zemlya i Volya* ("Land and Liberty") was founded in 1876 but by 1879 had already split into two directions. On one hand, it spawned *Narodnaya Volya* ("The People's Will"), small groups of dedicated terrorists. [In fact they had assassinated the author of the Great Reform, Alexander II.] The *Narodnaya Volya* had actually adopted the political struggle against the autocracy, but had failed to connect it with socialism. Brave as these quixotic individuals were, they had only succeeded in alienating the masses because of the governmental repression their actions brought down.

The other branch of Narodism, and the more serious foe of Social-Democracy, had retreated into a bourgeois-liberal/Narodnik trend, called *Chorny Peredel* (General Redistribution). This group was mainly composed of ideologues who were prolific writers against the growing influence of scientific socialism. They had absorbed a little of Marx, only to assert that "orthodox" Marxism was not applicable to Russian circumstances. By this they meant that Russia was not necessarily destined to pass through the stage of capitalism on the way to socialism.

Lenin regarded these theorists as willfully and stupidly blind to the reality of rural capitalism which was by this time staring them in the face. These latter-day Narodniks persisted in upholding the idea that there was an "absence of the market" in the countryside. They refused to acknowledge the growing class differentiation in the countryside and other signs of capitalism's inroads.

The Narodnik theorists avoided real materialist economic analysis. Moreover, they distorted Marx to suit their ends, and Lenin even accused them of falsifying the results of their own statistics in order to back up their theories.

These "corrupted" Narodniks gushed over the Peasant Reform and clung to a highly idealized view of the peasant's tie to the land; thus, they even tended to view "labour service" in a rosy light. [Marx called this "soil mysticism!"] They imagined an egalitarian commune, based on its original premise of equalized land redistribution. The commune was in reality a mainstay of feudal exploitation. But the Narodniks ignored the social-estate seclusion and inequality of taxation, its tying of the peasant to his allotment, its coercive collective liability. They also did not see that the commune in no way prevented (and actually impelled) the differentiation of the peasantry into capitalist classes. The Narodniks persisted in viewing the peasantry as a heterogeneous group, such exploitation as took place being due to individual greed. Moreover, they did not consider the very important fact that the peasants themselves had no sentimental attachment to the commune.

The Narodnik horror of capitalism, whose rapaciousness was fully apparent in Europe, blinded them to its objective historical role. They did not see that it was the necessary force which would destroy feudalism, but viewed it only as a new kind of exploitation which they desperately hoped to avoid. And because they had little contact with the Russian urban proletariat, by this time a sizeable force, they did not grasp the integral connections between urban and rural capitalism which were already in place.

At the same time, the Narodniks demanded all sorts of governmental reforms to improve peasant life, such as civil freedoms and access to knowledge, and measures to bolster up the existing peasant economy and small production in general with credits, cooperatives, land improvement, enlargement of land holdings, etc. Essentially Narodism had deteriorated into left-liberalism, reflecting the typical approach of the petty-bourgeoisie which Lenin characterized as: "to battle against bourgeoisdom with the instruments of bourgeois society itself" (CW, 1972, Vol. 1, "The Economic Content of Narodism," p. 348).

Lenin's theoretical task during this period was to demonstrate, through materialist economic analysis, that capitalism had already thoroughly permeated rural Russia and that, therefore, there must be a new basis for revolution. His investigations culminated in a major work, mainly written while he was in exile in Siberia, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) (12). His analyses proved not only the dominance of the market system in the countryside, but the subsequent differentia-

tion of the peasantry into capitalist classes: the poor (40%), middle (40%) and *kulaks* (20%). Lenin's conclusions contained a significantly new observation: "The chief feature of the economy of the bottom group of peasants is the sale of their labour-power" (CW, 1972, Vol. 1, "New Economic Developments in Peasant Life," p. 51). A modern rural proletariat or semi-proletariat had been formed. The fact that human labor power had become a commodity proved that capitalism prevailed, and this had led to the beginnings of class conflict: "The fundamental cause of the struggle of economic interests arising among the peasantry is the existence of a system under which the market is the regulator of social production" (p. 73).

Arguing from Marx, Lenin affirmed that, objectively, capitalism was economically progressive and any attempt to "hold it back" was reactionary, because capitalism would get rid of feudalism, medievalism, serfdom: "Yes, Marxists do consider large-scale capitalism progressive...because it creates conditions for abolishing dependence" ("Economic Content of Narodism," pp. 379-80).

Lenin also demonstrated how the communes -- the "engines of over-priced redemption payments" -- were forcing the peasants into capitalist classes of landless proletarians and landed proprietors. The communes were, by now, pretty much controlled by this new peasant bourgeoisie who exploited labor. Moreover, they exacted exorbitant interest on usurious loans to their poorer neighbors. He also showed how the tendency of the peasantry was no longer really for "community," but that they were eager to become independent small farmers, or "homesteaders" in the western, and especially American, sense of the word. And in fact, there was no force on earth that could prevent this from happening.

Lenin's summation was that latter-day Narodism was reactionary insofar as it proposed measures to tie the peasant to the soil and to the old modes of production, insofar as it wanted to retard the development of money economy, and insofar as it expected a change of the path to be brought about by "society" and by the influence of "representatives of the bureaucracy." But it was objectively progressive in its demands for the improvement of peasant life and economy, measures which would accelerate Russia's economic development along the capitalist path -- despite Narodnik theory.

There was no way to derail capitalist development. To think otherwise was to bury one's head in the sand like an ostrich: "Our Narodniks are incapable of understanding how one can fight capitalism by speeding up its development, and not by 'holding it up,' not by pulling it back, but

by pushing it forward, not in reactionary, but in progressive fashion" (p. 353). Lenin's description of the Narodniks as facing both backwards and forwards characterized them as an impotent force.

The First Social-Democratic Agrarian Program

"Further the S.-D. Party proclaims that it will render support to all who rise up against the class of the privileged landed nobility." (13)

The program of the newly formed Russian Social-Democratic Party (The League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, 1895) was drafted by Lenin while in prison in 1896, and smuggled out in invisible ink. It stated its goal in clearly revolutionary terms: the overthrow of the feudal autocracy and the establishment of a bourgeois democratic republic. In its agrarian section, it spelled out Plekanov's vague "radical revision of our agrarian relationships." It demanded:

- 1. Abolition of land redemption payments and compensation to the peasants for payments made. Return to the peasants of excess payments made to the Treasury.**
- 2. Return to the peasants of their lands cut off in 1861.**
- 3) Complete equality of taxation of the peasants' and landlords' lands.**
- 4) Abolition of collective responsibility and of all laws that prevent peasants from doing as they will with their lands (CW, 1972, Vol. 2, "Draft and Explanation of Programme for the Social-Democratic Party," p. 98).**

These radical reforms would go a long way in freeing the peasant from the shackles of feudalism as embodied in the landlord and commune relationships, and enable him to progress as an independent capitalistic farmer. But they would not necessarily destroy feudal economic hegemony which could continue to exist under a less-than-democratic bourgeois government if that were, in fact, the result of the revolution. In other words, it was not clear at this time how far the revolution would go or what part the peasants would play in the overthrow of feudalism. Crippled by centuries of ignorance and exploitation, the peasants were almost totally non-political, as well as unorganized. Their chief cry was for MORE LAND. Steeped in religious superstition, they saw the land as "God's land" and individual landowners as usurping a

greedy share of what belonged to all of God's creatures. They wanted the right to do with the land as they pleased, but they did not yet see the feudal landowners as a class which must be overthrown. The Narodniks saw the peasants as "innate socialists;" the liberals saw them as an "inert, reactionary mass." Lenin's painstaking materialist analysis of peasant conditions revealed a revolutionary potential in the peasantry.

Therefore, the promise of the S.-D.s to support "all who rise up against the class of the privileged landed nobility." This not only clearly established the S.-D.s as the peasants' ally, but left the way open for whatever further aims the peasantry might develop, up to a peasant revolution against feudal property. In a later pamphlet directed to the peasantry, Lenin explained that restoring the cut-off lands

is not a barrier. It is a *door*. We must first pass through this door *in order to go farther*, to march along the wide and open road *to the very end*, to the complete emancipation of all working people in Russia (CW, 1974, Vol. 6, "To the Rural Poor," p. 418).

This early draft reveals the two underlying considerations of the Bolsheviks' agrarian approach taking form. The practical and realistic starting point was always: 1) What do the peasants demand? The ultimate objective, however, involved painstaking and continual analysis of changing historical conditions and the shift of forces: 2) How can peasant demands be met in a way that will prepare the way for socialism?

The Revised Program of 1899

"...the peasantry...may not have the strength to respond..." (14)

Lenin continued to shape the Party Program, and to wrestle with the problem of the role of the peasantry in the revolution. He posed the questions to be answered as:

1) how to elaborate demands in such a way that they *do not degenerate* into support of small property-owners in a capitalist society? and 2) is our peasantry capable, at least in part, of a *revolutionary struggle* against the remnants of serfdom and against absolutism? (CW, 1964, Vol. 4, "A Draft Programme of Our Party," p. 243).

There was no doubt that there were growing revolutionary elements among the peasantry, but he concluded that "it would be senseless to make the peasantry the *vehicle* of the revolutionary movement, that a party would be insane to *condition* the revolutionary character of its movement on the revolutionary mood of the peasantry" (pp. 244-45).

The resulting version of the agrarian program was rather tentative and considerably more garrulous than his earlier draft:

The Russian Social-Democratic working-class party, giving its support to every revolutionary movement against the present state and social system, declares that it will support the peasantry, insofar as it is capable of revolutionary struggle against the autocracy (my underline), as the class that suffers most from the Russian people's lack of rights and from the survivals of serfdom in Russian society.

Proceeding from this principle, the Russian Social-Democratic working-class party demands:

- 1) The abrogation of land redemption and quit-rent payments and of all duties at present obligatory for the peasantry as a tax-paying social-estate.
- 2) The return to the people of the sums of which the government and the landed proprietors have robbed the peasants in the form of redemption payments.
- 3) The abolition of collective liability and of all laws that hamper the peasant in disposing of his land.
- 4) The abolition of all remnants of the peasant's feudal dependence on the landlord, whether they are due to special laws and institutions (e.g., the position of the peasants and workers in the iron-foundry districts of the Urals) or to the fact that the land of the peasants and the landlords has not yet been demarcated (e.g., survivals of the law of easement in the western territory), or to the fact that the cutting-off of the peasant land by the landlords has left the peasants in what is in actual fact the hopeless position of former corvee peasants.
- 5) That peasants be granted the right to demand, in court, the reduction of excessively high rents and to prosecute for usury landlords and, in general, all persons who take advantage

of the necessitous condition of the peasants to conclude with them shackling agreements (p. 245).

The S.-D. objectives were established as: “1) to abolish all *pre-capitalist*, feudal institutions and relations in the countryside...; 2) to give the class struggle in the countryside a more open and conscious character” (p. 251). However, these objectives were not actually stated in the program. The strategic dilemma to be worked out was how to “support the first struggle *to the extent that it does not contradict* the interests of social development” (p. 251).

Lenin made a very interesting side-comment. Historical materialist as he invariably was, he conceded willingly that to the extent that Narodism was revolutionary, “Narodism had to be included, with relevant amendments, as a component part of the programme of Russian Social-Democracy” (p. 251).

The Completed Program of 1903

“...by demanding that the ‘free development of the class struggle in the countryside’ be ensured, we place ourselves in opposition...to all revolutionaries and socialists who are *not* Social-Democrats.” (15)

The year 1902 was to see an advance in peasant consciousness, especially in the Ukraine and parts of southern Russia. For the first time since the Reform, there appeared sporadic but mass actions of the peasantry against the landlords, the first hint of a desire to expropriate landlord land. These rebellions were quickly put down by the autocracy because, as Lenin later analyzed, the peasants had no real political aims, they were not organized, and there was no tie to the proletariat. To its credit, the new S.-D. agrarian program actually anticipated this upsurge in peasant consciousness.

In preparation for the 2nd Congress of the R.S.D.L.P., July, 1903, both Plekanov and Lenin composed draft programs, while a committee tried to reconcile the two versions. Plekanov’s draft was used as the basis while Lenin, in great frustration, tried to correct what he considered wrong formulations. Following is the agrarian section as ratified before the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks split, with Lenin’s strongly-urged deletion (which he could not get passed) underlined:

With a view to eradicating the remnants of the

old serf-owning system and for the purpose of facilitating the free development of the class struggle in the countryside, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party will work for:

1) abolition of land redemption and quit-rent payments, as well as of all services now imposed on the peasantry as a taxable social-estate;

2) annulment of collective liability and of all laws restricting the peasant in the free disposal of his land;

3) restitution to the people of all sums taken from them in the form of land redemption and quit-rent payments; confiscation for this purpose of monasterial property and of the royal demesnes, and imposition of a special land-tax on members of the big landed nobility who received land redemption loans, the revenue thus obtained to be credited to a special public fund for the cultural and charitable needs of the village communes;

4) establishment of peasant committees;

a) for the restitution to the village communes (by expropriation, or, when the land has changed hands, by redemption, etc.) of the land cut off from the peasants when serfdom was abolished and now used by the landlords as a means of keeping the peasants in bondage;

b) for the eradication of the remnants of the serf-owning system which still exist in the Urals, the Altai, the Western territory, and other regions of the country;

5) empowerment of courts to reduce exorbitant rents and declare null and void all contracts entailing bondage (CW, 1974, Vol. 6, “The Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy,” pp. 109-10) (14).

[The phrase which Lenin wanted struck out meant that landlords were to be paid for relinquishing the stolen cut-off lands they had subsequently purchased from the original thieves.]

When compared with the draft of 1899, this program reveals a leap forward in revolutionary theory. It also clarifies a practical strategy (as well as cuts out extrane-

ous detail). Most importantly, it recognized the role of the peasantry (as a whole) in the revolution. The logic was as follows: The expropriation of feudal property by the peasantry as a whole would result in the downfall of feudalism which would facilitate the development of capitalism which, in turn, would lead to the

free development of the class struggle in the countryside. This condition is the fundamental and focal point in the theory of revolutionary Marxism in the sphere of the agrarian question (p. 122).

Yet because the situation in the countryside involved an “extremely complex web” of feudal and capitalist forms, there was confusion about the nature of the revolution, and many objections to the program were expressed -- by the Menshevik faction, the European socialists, and also the Narodnik theorists.

Lenin explained that the revolution in Russia had a curious double nature involving dialectical contradictions. The revolution of the peasantry (as a whole) was against feudalism, while the workers’ revolution was ultimately against capitalism. It was the task of all democrats to establish a constitutional republic. However, the mere toppling of the tsarist autocracy -- which would be easy it was so rotten! -- would not eradicate feudalism which was rooted in rural property. Lenin defined the peasantry as a whole as the lowest “social-estate class” under feudalism, therefore, as the class which must overthrow feudalism:

The abolition of the social-estates requires a “dictatorship” of the lowest, oppressed social-estate, just as the abolition of classes in general, including the class of proletarians, requires the dictatorship of the proletariat (CW, 1974, Vol. 6, “Reply to Criticism of Our Draft Programme,” (p. 438).

However, against the bourgeoisie, the peasantry as a whole was not a revolutionary class; its petty-bourgeois nature made it a reactionary class.

Therefore, while both workers’ and peasants’ programs put forth immediate demands, the workers’ section contained “minimum” demands as against the bourgeoisie, while the peasant section contained both “minimum” and “maximum” demands -- “minimum” as against the bourgeoisie, but “maximum” as against the feudal-minded landlords. Both workers’ and peasants’ programs were “minimum” or reform, in the sense that they only de-

manded measures the bourgeoisie could (in principle) concede without losing its domination. The peasant demands, however, contained measures that the feudalists would never concede and could only be taken by force; they were therefore “maximum.” Neither the workers’ nor peasants’ program was “socialist” at this time since neither called for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. The peasants, however, were the radical democrats, the leading force in the task at hand -- the bourgeois revolution against feudalism.

Criticisms of the program predicted the cries of alarm in 1917. It was not “socialist.” It was not consistent with the basic principles of Marxism, since orthodox Marxism advocated large-scale production. Therefore, the restitution of the cut-off lands would delay the development of capitalism. It would fortify and multiply small property. Marxists had no business supporting small-scale farming and private property. Restitution of cut-off lands to the commune would be a gift to the rural bourgeoisie, etc.

Lenin answered that the fall of feudalism was in itself a “gift” to the bourgeoisie! He conceded that on one hand, yes, the S.-D.s were supporting small-scale farming, but supporting it against feudalism, not against bourgeois capitalism. He defended the program:

In a word, the contradictory position of the small peasant on the boundary between serf economy and capitalist economy fully justifies this exceptional and temporary support of small property by the Social-Democrats. We repeat: this is not a contradiction in the wording or in the formulation of our programme, but a contradiction in real life (“Agrarian Programme,” p. 133).

The cut-off lands pertained to all latifundia still farmed on feudal lines, and were to be returned to the peasants. At this time, it was proposed that only the crown and monastery lands be entirely confiscated, as they were considered to be an especially exploitive “means of keeping the peasants in bondage.” [On the other hand, cut-off lands which had since been transformed into true capitalist latifundia would not be touched.] There was then a problem of what to do with the confiscated lands. Lenin said that the S.-D.s would not be opposed to the sale of the expropriated lands because

In a police-controlled class state, even if it is a constitutional state, the class of property owners may not infrequently be a far stauncher pillar of democracy than the class of tenant

farmers dependent on that state ("Reply to Criticism," p. 437).

A chief objection was that if the S.-D.s really wanted to count on revolutionary support from the peasantry, they should go further than the cut-off lands, and offer them "maximum" demands. They should call for either a "general redistribution" of the land or a bourgeois "nationalization of the land." "General Redistribution," the Narodnik slogan, meant, in effect, to confiscate all landlord land and redistribute it in small parcels to all the peasants. Lenin regarded this as a reactionary, utopian idea of generalizing and perpetuating small-scale peasant production. Moreover, it conveyed the false idea that the peasantry could serve as the vehicle of the socialist revolution. It was looking at things from the "existing prejudices of the peasantry, and not from the *properly understood* interests of the proletariat" ("Agrarian Programme," p. 137). In plain terms:

We do not want the rural proletariat to help the rich peasant *more than is necessary*, more than is essential to the proletariat ("Reply to Criticism," p. 443).

Lenin's objection to nationalization of the land -- at this time -- was that this would put ownership of the land into reactionary hands -- the autocracy's if the revolution failed, or a "semi-constitutional" monarchy if it partially succeeded. This might lead to horrific experiments in the "hocus pocus of 'state socialism'." The S.-D.s would, however, also agree to "partial nationalization of the land" (crown and monastery) *if* rents went back to a peasant fund. The S.-D.s were not against nationalization of the land on principle, but they could advocate it *ONLY* under specific conditions: *if* all land, including the peasants, was nationalized and *if* there came into being a truly democratic bourgeois state. Lenin emphasized that mere nationalization of agricultural industry was in no way a "socialist" measure, for socialism would nationalize all industry.

Since at this point in history it was impossible to tell how far the revolution would go, restitution of the cut-off lands had to be the maximum demand. This, along with peasant committees and peasant courts, would facilitate the class struggle in the countryside. Lenin had previously characterized the restitution of the cut-off lands as a "door leading farther." Here, he clarified what he meant: First, the landlords would probably never agree to this, which would impel further peasant actions, or second, even if they did, a little land would hopefully whet the peasants'

appetite for all the land. It would "fan the embers of the peasants' class (social-estate) enmity for the feudal-minded landlords" ("Agrarian Programme," p. 132). After feudalism has been eradicated,

the proletariat in general and the rural proletariat in particular *will march alone*; not together with the "peasantry", not together with the rich peasant, but *against him* ("Reply to Criticism," p. 442).

Very important additions to the S.-D. program were the establishment of peasant committees and rural "industrial" courts. The peasant committees would replace the Committees of Nobles set up to handle the 1861 land redistribution. They would signify "*a democratic revision of the peasant reform*" ("Agrarian Programme," p. 124). The courts would be empowered to reduce rents, nullify contracts entailing bondage, and handle land disputes. An important corollary was that agricultural wage-workers and economically weak peasants should be given separate representation from prosperous peasants. This would sharpen the class struggle. In addition, other civil rights were demanded: freedom of movement (abolishment of passports), freedom to manage their own communal affairs and dispose of communal revenues, and the establishment of a *zemskysobor* (rural national congress).

Marx and Engels on the Commune

"...a special study...has convinced me that this village commune is the fulcrum for the social regeneration of Russia; but...," Marx, 1881 (17)

"Que les destinees s'accomplissent!" ("May Destiny Take Its Course"), Engels, 1893 (18)

As for the commune itself, Lenin stated that the S.-D.s will never "help anyone to 'destroy the village commune'," would support it against bourgeois attack, and would also support any truly democratic, collective peasant enterprise, but stood for the

complete abolition of the social-estate nature of the peasant commune, and, *consequently*, utter annulment of collective liability, and abolition of all laws restricting the peasant in the free disposal of his land ("Agrarian Programme," p. 144).

The pseudo-collectivism of the existing, corrupted commune was not in the interests of technical and social progress; therefore, the socialists must at this point support individualism over collectivity:

Thus, we take our stand -- by way of exception and by reason of the specific historical circumstances -- as defenders of small property; but we defend it only in its struggle against what has come down from the "old order...." (p. 147).

Lenin's analysis and conclusions were straight out of Marx and Engels. There are misconceptions still today around the idea that Marx and Engels believed that Russia's "exceptional circumstances" would make it possible for her to "go over" to socialism through the village commune. If that were really so, that would make Marx and Engels straight-up Narodniks! Engels said that up to 1882, he and Marx had still hoped that the Russian commune would be the "starting point for communist development." By 1894, however, he seriously doubted this could happen.

The point is that Marx and Engels allowed this as a "theoretical possibility" only if certain conditions obtained. Engels' key article, "On Social Relations in Russia" (1877, 1894), sums up the evolution of his and Marx's thought on this matter. In 1877, Marx quoted Chernyshevsky's posing of the question:

Must Russia start, as her liberal economists wish, by destroying the village community so as to go over to the capitalist system, or can she, without undergoing the torments of the system, secure all its fruits, while developing her own historical endowments? (SW, Vol. 2, "On Social Relations," p. 406).

Marx's answer was cautious:

If Russia continues to advance along the path she has followed since 1861, she will miss the best chance history has ever offered a people, and will have to undergo all the fatal vicissitudes of the capitalist system (p. 406).

Here is Marx and Engel's posing of the question and answer in 1882:

But in Russia, we find, face to face with the rapidly developing capitalist swindle and bour-

geois landed property, just beginning to develop, more than half the land owned in common by the peasants. How the question is: can the Russian *obshchina*, though greatly undermined, yet a form of the primeval common ownership of land, pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership? Or, on the contrary must it first pass through the same process of dissolution as constitutes the historical evolution of the West?

The only answer to that possible today is this: If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development (p. 404).

Engel's reasoning proceeded as follows: Russia's "exceptional circumstances" only meant she was very backward. The commune was not specific to Russia but a basic, while varied, form of association common to all primitive societies, but which inevitably underwent disintegration as feudalism and then capitalism superseded it. Feudalism had put the commune in bondage to the serf-owning landlords. The Great Reform had put the commune also in bondage to the state and to the bourgeois landlords. The inroads of capitalist relations within the commune had further corrupted and disintegrated its original primitive-communist form. The commune as it stood was a brake on agricultural production; the fact that it was so prevalent in Russia (almost half the land tilled) only demonstrated the backwardness of Russian agriculture.

There was actually little "collectivity" left in the present-day commune [He estimated only about 1/4 of its total functions!] (19). In no sense, then, was the present-day commune "nearer to socialism" than the propertyless workers of Western Europe. In no way could this commune -- in its present state -- make the leap over capitalism into socialized production:

The predominance of this form in Russia proves, it is true, the existence in the Russian people of a strong impulse to associate, but is far from proving their ability to jump, with the aid of this impulse, from the artel straight into the socialist order of society. For that, it is necessary above all that the artel itself should be capable of development, that it shed its primi-

tive form...and rise *at least* to the level of the West European cooperative societies (p. 392).

But could the commune “shed its primitive form” itself before it was too late? Even in 1881, Marx had admitted in a letter to the Russian S.-D. Vera Zasulich that

...economic factors...have revealed the secret that the *present condition of the commune is longer tenable...something new is required, and this new element which is being insinuated into the most various guises can always be reduced to the same thing: abolishing communal property, forming a rural middle class from the minority of more or less wealthy peasants and turning the vast majority simply into labourers* (SW, Vol. 3, pp. 160-61).

On the other hand, Marx had felt that the commune might possibly be saved:

If the revolution takes place at the right time, if it concentrates all its forces to ensure the free development of the village commune, the latter will soon emerge as the regenerative force in Russian society and as something superior to those countries which are still enslaved by the capitalist regime (p. 161).

Marx’s optimism was based on the hope that Russia’s fatal involvement in the Crimean War would inspire a revolution against the autocracy. This had not happened, and in the years since Marx had written this, Russia had been rushing headlong into capitalism. Moreover, the bourgeoisie had shown itself to be a strong force for the overthrow of feudalism. In 1893-94, Engels re-analyzed the situation and formed new conclusions. His assessment of the commune was now much more negative:

The Russian community has been in existence for centuries without once producing within itself an impulse to transmute itself into a higher form of communal property...Nowhere has agrarian communism, come down from the tribal system, ever evolved anything out of itself except its own disintegration...How can it take over the vast productive forces of capitalist society, as communal property and social instrument, before capitalist society itself carries out this revolution?... How can the Russian community show the world how to manage

large-scale industry on social lines, when it has forgotten how to cultivate its own land on communal lines? (“On Social Relations,” pp. 401-02).

His conclusion:

And as Russia had no choice but this: either to develop the commune into a form of production from which it was separated by a number of historical stages, and for which not even in the West the conditions were then ripe -- evidently an impossible task -- or else to develop into Capitalism, what remained to her but the latter chance? (SW, Vol. 3, “Letter to Danielson,” p. 501).

Engels saw Russia to be on the verge of a bourgeois revolution, which he hoped would hasten the socialist revolution in Europe. This, in turn, could enable the Russians to go further. There was only one chance to save the commune: if the commune could hang on until 1) there were a proletarian revolution in Europe which would set up a new, higher form of socialized agricultural production as a model for Russia to emulate; and 2) if Europe give Russia the necessary technology to farm on a capitalist basis.

The Russian revolution will also give a fresh impulse to the labour movement in the West, creating for itself new and better conditions for struggle and, thereby advancing the victory of the modern industrial proletariat, a victory without which present-day Russia, whether on the basis of the community (the commune) or of capitalism, cannot achieve a socialist transformation of society (“On Social Relations,” p. 410).

But in fact (as Lenin also was to emphasize in 1902), events were moving so fast both from below and from above that Engels predicted that the growing bourgeois strength in the government would force the autocracy to deal a death blow to the commune -- which was indeed to happen with Stolypin’s “reform” of 1906. It was in that context that Engels said “May destiny take its course.”

The Socialist-Revolutionaries

“Populism as tempered in the heat of conflict with Marxism....” (20)

Lenin: “...a certain revival of senile Narodism.” (21)

Remnants of Narodism gathered new adherents and coalesced into the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in 1902. The S.-R. program was drawn up by its leading theoretician (and extreme foe of Lenin) Victor Chernov, but was not adopted until 1906. It was not a plan of revolutionary action, but more a statement of principles which were never revised from 1902 to 1917.

One of the few historians to do an in-depth study on Social-Revolutionism, Oliver Radkey states that the SRP was “only nominally a peasants’ party; in essence it was a party of doctrinaire intellectuals” and, in fact, did not become a mass party until 1917 (p. 20). This does not deny, however, the influence that the S.-R.s had on the peasantry, for they capitalized on the peasantry’s favorable sentiments toward their Narodnik predecessors, whose slogan had echoed the peasants’ cry for “Land and Freedom.” The S.-R.P. stated the goal of its “mimum program” thus:

In the interests of socialism and of the struggle against bourgeois-proprietary principles, to make use of the views, traditions, and modes of life of the Russian peasantry, both as toilers in general and as members of the village communes, particularly in its conception of the land as being the common property of all the toiling people (CW, 1974, Vol. 8, “From Narodism to Marxism,” p. 86).

Lenin characterized the S.-R. ideology as: “the Narodnik theories of old, embellished with modish European opportunism (revisionism, Bernsteinism, and criticism of Marx)” (CW, 1972, Vol. 9, “Petty-Bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism,” p. 439). Chernov’s point of view was that “Marx is our great common teacher in the realm of economics, but we do not feel constrained to make of him an idol” (Radkey, p. 45). The S.-R.s accepted Marx’s theory of labor value, and claimed they had incorporated the class struggle into their ideology. They had finally recognized the existence of the proletariat. However, they lumped the peasantry, the proletariat and the disenfranchised intellectuals into one “revolutionary” class as the “oppressed people.” They aggrandized the power of the

tsarist autocracy and minimized the growing power of the bourgeoisie, whom they continued to regard as totally dependent on the autocracy. They did not acknowledge the proletariat as the revolutionary force against bourgeois capitalism because they saw only the agrarian revolution as necessary to create socialism. In fact, they appeared to envision a conservative bourgeois government arising after the revolution which would exist for a long time.

Nonetheless, the peasantry would lead the way toward socialism in this manner: Under the leadership of the S.-R. intellectuals, the peasants would expropriate landlord and state lands (but not peasant lands), which would be divided among those who worked the land with their own hands according to “subsistence norms.” This was called the “General Redistribution.” The peasants would not own these plots as private property. Land could not be bought or sold; it was only for “use.” Collectivization of production was not envisioned at the outset. Land could be farmed on either a household or on a communal basis. However, because of their supposedly innate collectivist nature, the peasants would willingly join their plots together in a purged and regenerated commune relationship, as well as associate in all kinds of cooperatives. The land would belong to “all the people:” “We shall make it no one’s,” explained Chernov, “and precisely as no one’s does it become the belonging of all” (p. 26). [This formulation echoes that of the ignorant peasantry!] Radkey comments that the S.-R. objective seems to have been to make the land as “nearly like air as possible” (p. 26). This hazy, non-materialist concept was the heart of the S.-R. program. It was called “Socialization of the Land” and “Equalization of Use” [terms Lenin scorned as “pseudoscientific”]. The S.-R.s avoided the term “nationalization” for that implied centralized, i.e., state, control.

After the “General Distribution,” the peasantry (because they were innate egalitarians) would ensure that everyone remained a “middle” peasant by continuing “equalized land tenure.” Thus, the peasantry would remain a unified “class” which would hold off capitalism. The peasantry would gradually come to see the benefits of collective farming and proceed to “socialize” all the land. This, the S.-R.s called their “minimum program.” Included in this “minimum program” were also all sorts of political rights and reforms for the benefit of both urban workers and peasants.

Only then, when agriculture was fully “socialized,” and the peasantry matured enough to elect the S.-R.s to power, would the S.-R.s complete the collectivization of agriculture, turn to socializing industry, and eradicate all remnants of private property. By this time, obviously no proletarian class struggle against capitalist industry would

be necessary. This the S.-R.s called their “maximum program.” So it was a peculiar program in that its “minimum” demands were revolutionary while its “maximum” demands were reformist. Moreover, it posed a ludicrous picture of a society divided into halves: “socialization” in the country and capitalism in the cities!

No deep thought seemed to have been given to what the bourgeois government would do about this arrangement in the meantime, nor how “socialization” was actually to be carried out. The S.-R.s had a vague concept that it would be effected by a combination of both centralized (the conservative, therefore undemocratic, bourgeois government!) and democratic local agencies, although they very definitely emphasized “federalism” and “decentralization.” Radkey believes that their motive was that they thought they could assume control of local agencies. Even in this brief description, the fantasy nature of the S.-R. conception is evident and Lenin said, quite rightly, that “disputes with the Socialists-Revolutionaries should always be reduced to this very question of their conception of reality” (“From Narodism to Marxism,” p. 87).

Lenin recognized the “socialist good intentions” of the S.-R.s, but characterized their social nature as “bourgeois-democratic.” They were “the radical intelligentsia or intellectual democratic movement,” the “extreme Left group of our bourgeois democracy” (pp. 78, 83-84). In less generous moments, he called them “childishly naive anarchists.” Lenin isolated three major points in the S.-R. world outlook:

First, theoretical emendations of Marxism. Second, survivals of Narodism in their views of the laboring peasantry and the agrarian question. Third, the same Narodnik survivals in their view of the impending Russian revolution as non-bourgeois in character (p. 84).

The S.-R.s called themselves “socialist” and adopted Marxist rhetoric, but they really “floundered hopelessly” between Narodism and Marxism. Lenin regarded the S.-R.s as having lost the integrity of the old Narodnik views precisely because they constituted a historical stage in the transition from Narodism to Marxism. In confusing the democratic and the socialist revolutions, they falsely idealized the democratic revolution with their talk of “socialization.” Lenin summed up all Narodism, including the S.-R.s, thus:

In the presentation of immediate aims, the program... is not revolutionary. In its ultimate aims it is not socialist (CW, 1972, Vol. 9,

“Socialism and the Peasantry,” p. 314).

On the other hand, the S.-R.s and the Bolsheviks did have some specific common standpoints from which they could work together. For example, both advocated a constituent assembly and an armed people’s militia. In fact, Lenin considered the S.-R.s to be more revolutionary in certain areas than the Mensheviks. For example, both the S.-R.s and the Bolsheviks supported the expropriation of cut-off lands without compensation, and the right of nations to self-determination, while many Mensheviks did not. As for “General Redistribution,” while at this time it was reactionary and utopian because it would perpetuate small-scale peasant production, on the other hand, it was revolutionary in that it proposed a peasant revolt to crush the feudal system.

Lenin’s Assessment of the 1903 Program

“...it is not the proletariat’s business to ‘devise’ such a programme for bourgeois society....” (22)

In 1908, looking back from the vantage point of having passed through the first stage of the Revolution and the Stolypin Reform, Lenin evaluated the 1903 program as based on too much caution and “restraint.” He judged that attempts to be concrete were correct, but that the distinction made between cut-off lands that served for exploitation by means of serfdom and bondage (lands cut off in 1861, crown and monastery land), and lands which were exploited in a capitalist manner had been fallacious. What was not seen at the time was that “a peasant mass movement could not be directed against particular categories of landlord estates, but only against landlordism in general” (CW, 1972, Vol. 13, “The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy,” p. 257). Landlordism could not be “purged;” it must be abolished.

The 1903 Program had raised the correct question: the conflict of interests between peasants and landlords at the moment of the revision of agrarian relations. But the solution had not been correct. It did not (or could not) foresee that two types of capitalist evolution were possible: that enacted from “above,” i.e., the eventual Stolypin-“Junker”(23) type of reform of 1906, and revolution from “below” as led by the democratic peasantry. It set up something “intermediary.”

Lenin judged the fundamental mistake of this program to be

the absence of a clear idea of the issue around

which the agrarian struggle could and should develop in the process of the bourgeois revolution in Russia -- a clear idea of the *types* of capitalist agrarian evolution that were objectively possible as the result of the victory of one or other of the social forces engaged in this struggle (p. 258).

This was, however, inevitable because there still had not been an open mass movement of the peasantry. At this time, no one could judge to what extent disintegration among the peasantry had progressed as a result of the partial transition from "labour-service" to wage-labour. No one could estimate how large the stratum of agricultural labourers had become since the 1861 Reform or to what extent their interests had diverged from those of the general ruined peasant masses.

The mistakes of the 1903 S.-D. program were due to the fact that "while we correctly defined the *trend* of development, we did not correctly define the *moment* of that development" (p. 291). That is to say, the S.-D.s had overestimated the degree of capitalist development in Russian agriculture (in both landlord and peasant farming) which had given rise to a strong peasant bourgeoisie. They therefore had doubted that the peasantry (as a whole) was capable of bringing about an agrarian revolution. At that time, the survivals of serfdom had appeared to be a minor detail. The 1905 Revolution had exposed this mistake. The survivals of serfdom in the countryside had proved to be much stronger than thought: it had, in fact, given rise to a nationwide peasant movement and made that movement the "touchstone of the bourgeois revolution as a whole." Most significantly, it had shown that

hegemony in the bourgeois liberation movement, which revolutionary Social Democracy always assigned to the proletariat, had to be defined more precisely as leadership which rallied the peasantry behind it (p. 292).

[To be continued in next issue.]

NOTES

1. Lenin, CW, 1972, Vol. 26, "Speech at a Meeting of the Land Committee Congress and the Peasant Section of the Third Congress of Soviets, January 28 (February 10), 1918," p. 518.

2. Lenin, CW, 1972, Vol. 26, "Second All-Russia Con-

gress of Soviets: Report on Land, October 26 (November 8), 1917," p. 260.

3. See Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, Chpt. II, "The Bolshevik Land Policy." "...the short and precise slogan of Lenin and his friends -- "Go and take the land for yourselves" -- simply led to the sudden, chaotic conversion of large landownership into peasant landownership. What was created is not social property but a new form of private property....," p. 44.

4. Gogol, p. 117.

5. Technically, only private, landlord-bound peasants were called "serfs," but all bound peasants existed in a master/serf relationship. Most historians also refer to state and crown peasants, as well as landless peasants, as "serfs."

6. General Statute of Emancipation, Robinson, p. 65. The Peasant Reform was actually a series of decrees and amendments which went on up until the Stolypin Decree of 1906. There were continual adjustments for different kinds of peasants and different localities, etc. See Robinson, pp. 64-93.

7. The term *kulak* (fist) originally meant that section of rich peasants which lent money to poorer peasants in a usurious manner. It later designated all rich peasants, or the peasant bourgeoisie.

8. For an account of the horrors of colonization, see CW, Vol. 18, "The Problem of Resettlement."

9. CW, 1972, Vol. 13, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution 1905-1907," p. 256.

10. Lenin also felt that Plekanov's group was still somewhat under the influence of the Narodniks in underestimating the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry, and in overestimating the role of the liberal bourgeoisie. These mistakes were carried through to the Menshevik position. [Plekanov was one of the founders of *Zemlya i Volya*.]

11. CW, 1972, Vol. 1, "The Economic Content of Narodism," p. 503.

12. Other key works are "New Economic Developments in Peasant Life" (1893), "On the So-Called Market Ques-

tion" (1893) and "Capitalism in Agriculture" (1899). In these works Lenin relied on statistics from the *zemstvos*, which were local, all-class, self-governing bodies set up in 1864. Representation of landlords, peasant communes, and richer townsmen was on the basis of property owned. *Zemstvos* conducted censuses and collected statistics, as well as coordinated rural education, medical care, welfare, etc. Lenin had a high opinion of the accuracy and thoroughness of *zemstvo* statistics, but not of their conclusions, the *zemstvo* statisticians being of a liberal or Narodnik persuasion. Therefore, while using *zemstvo* data, he drew his own conclusions not on the bourgeois basis, i.e., on amount of land held, but rather on the basis of the productivity of the land and number of draft animals owned.

13. CW, 1972, Vol. 2, "Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party," p. 120.

14. CW, 1964, Vol. 4, "A Draft Programme of Our Party," p. 244.

15. CW, 1974, Vol. 6, "The Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy," p. 122.

16. Provisions regarding agricultural laborers were included in the workers' section of the program.

17. Marx: "To Vera Ivanovna Zasulich..., London, March 8, 1881," *Letters*, p. 336.

18. "Engels to N.F. Danielson in St. Petersburg, London, October 17, 1893," SW, Vol. 3, p. 501.

19. In answer to the claim that the Cossacks did have true communal cultivation of land and distribution of product, Engels countered that this was merely "barrack-room communism," safeguarded out of tsarist military considerations.

20. Radkey, p. 21.

21. CW, 1972, Vol. 9, "Petty-Bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism," p. 439.

22. CW, 1972, Vol. 13, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy," p. 257.

23. The Junkers represented the old Prussian aristocracy -- feudal landlords who evolved into the capitalist landowning class of Germany. "Junker economy" retained a certain degree of feudal dependence of the rural population. The Junkers controlled the government and also the military, since the younger sons of these landowners formed the officer corp.

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The Fight for Democratic Demands and the Socialist Revolution in Mexico

by Anita Jones de Sandoval

This is the second in a promised series of articles about the mass movement and the political movement in Mexico. The original plan for this article was to discuss the ideological confrontation between reformism and revolution in Mexico. However, a recent article in the Detroit based journal, *Communist Voice*¹, despite its author's polemical hyperbole about "would be socialists" and "petti-bourgeois nationalists," raises some interesting issues regarding the relationship of the fight for democratic demands and socialist revolution in Mexico and the role of the revolutionary left.

The *Communist Voice* author asserts that I and other authors in the CWV cannot accept that the possibility of change in Mexico is only for "some democratic changes" so we are painting the struggle of the peasantry, (i.e. the EZLN), as socialist. One doesn't have to be very astute to observe that the socialist revolution is not imminent in Mexico, and that the fight for democratic demands is not a fight for socialism, but those observations don't equal an analysis of Mexico. It seems that the CV author doesn't understand the indigenous peasant movement, nor the relationship between the fight for democratic demands and the process of gathering forces and building organization for a socialist revolution in Mexico.

I think that there is a dual nature to revolution in Mexico. The current mass struggles in the countryside and in the cities (of workers, peasants, street vendors, indigenous peoples, et al.) are for democratic and often economic demands. It is an irrefutable fact that the workers' movement continues to be weak. Furthermore, there is not a party of the proletariat or even a strong Marxist-Leninist trend. Yet, it is capitalism itself which is not satisfying even the basic demands of the toilers in Mexico. In the countryside, the big landowners are a part of the Mexican bourgeoisie, not a separate feudal class, or remnant of a class. Even in southern Mexico where there exists near feudal exploitation of the indigenous peasantry, the oligarchy is integrated into the bourgeoisie class.

The duality of the Mexican revolution is similar to the duality which Lenin talked about in Russia in a number of his writings, but not identical. Lenin noted the duality of

the revolution in Russia in explaining the Bolshevik program in the countryside and for the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

".....There is no doubt that in Russia, too, the liberal bourgeoisie.....are betraying and will betray the peasantry, i.e., will confine themselves to a pseudo-reform and take the side of the landlords in the decisive battle between them and the peasantry. In this struggle only the proletariat is capable of supporting the peasantry to the end. There is no doubt, finally, that in Russia, too, the success of the peasants' struggle, i.e., the transfer of the whole of the land to the peasantry, will signify a complete democratic revolution, and constitute the social basis of the revolution carried through to its completion, but this will by no means be a socialist revolution,..... The success of the peasant insurrection, the victory of the democratic revolution will merely clear the way for a genuine and decisive struggle for socialism, on the basis of a democratic republic. In this struggle, the peasantry, as a landowning class, will play the same treacherous unstable part as is now being played by the bourgeoisie in the struggle for democracy. To forget this is to forget socialism, to deceive oneself and others, regarding the real interests and tasks of the proletariat..." (V.I. Lenin, June-July, 1905, *LCW*, v. 19, p. 136.)

Capitalist development and class differentiation in the countryside are considerably more advanced in Mexico than they were in the Russia of 1905 or even 1917. Furthermore, Mexico underwent a massive bourgeois democratic revolution from 1910 to 1925 in which the peasantry played a major role.

This revolution was incomplete due to the betrayal of the toilers by the emergent bourgeoisie; the struggle has continued with upsurges and retreats since then. It would be an error to apply Lenin's analysis of European peasantry in the 19th and early 20 century to Mexico now without noting these differences between the democratic struggle in Russia in 1905-1917 and Mexico now. Mexico is a capitalist country with capitalist relations in the city

1) *Communist Voice*, Dec. 15, 1996, "Mexico and Peasant Socialism." Available from P.O. Box 13261, Harper Station, Detroit, MI 48213.

and countryside, It is also a dependent capitalist country, exploited by imperialism. It is a country with a large superexploited indigenous population, and a significant peasantry who are mainly poor peasants and semi-proletarians. Much of the semi-proletariat in the countryside comes very close to being a rural proletariat -- they are workers on the plantations and ranches who also own individually or through the ejidos a tiny piece of land which they subsistence farm. In the countryside there are also latifundistas, minilatifundistas, and ranchers ("ganaderos" -- small and large). In Chiapas in southern Mexico, even the medium sized ranchers and landowners are tied securely to the PRI and form part of its local power elite. In the cities there is a large petty-bourgeoisie. This includes unemployed workers and dispossessed peasants who make up the poorest of the poor street vendors, numerous semi-proletariat, shopkeepers and professionals. There also exists an important proletariat working in heavy and light industry and in the service sector.

For some years the main contradiction around which political struggle has polarized is the struggle against the PRI regime---against its political machine, corruption, caciques, and the extreme forms of exploitation it has inflicted on the masses of working people. Struggle has broken out for democratization across a fairly broad spectrum of society, including some sectors of the bourgeoisie who want the PRI to share power with other political parties. For the poor toilers the struggle has centered on basic democratic and economic demands (jobs, wages, housing, education, social services, food, health care, land, political rights and end to repression, etc.). Part of the struggle of the toilers includes the fight being waged by the indigenous peoples for all those basic demands, plus the return of lands stolen from them and some form of autonomy. The indigenous peoples' fight for land, economic and political rights is a part of the peasant movement itself, especially in southern Mexico.

For many years, there has existed, in many forms, an alliance between the proletariat, the urban poor, and the poor peasantry around economic and democratic demands. This is another difference between the peasant movement in Mexico and in Russia in 1905. As the quote from Lenin notes, the Russian peasant movement centered on the demand of the transfer of all the land to the peasantry. The peasant movement in Mexico has raised a series of demands which go beyond land distribution, many of which are the same as the demands of the workers and urban poor, (e.g., healthcare, education, justice, democracy, etc.).

As well, not since the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1944) has there been a section of the bourgeoisie

who could actually claim the label "liberal" in the sense it is used by Lenin to discuss a democratic, nationalist bourgeoisie who supported the peasants' struggle for land. It has to be noted that Cardenas represented the section of the landowners and capitalists who were integrating into the PRI, (then called the Partido Nacional Revolucionario) and were still in conflict with remnants of the older landowning class and with U.S. and British imperialism.

Coming out of the Mexican Revolution, the original program of the PNR and then the PRI defined itself as a class alliance of the peasantry, the workers and the political class. The Cardenas reforms and nationalizations were aimed at allowing the Mexican bourgeoisie, through the PNR, to consolidate itself and to develop the capitalist economy. Step by step, as the bourgeoisie grew stronger, the interests of the toilers were betrayed. For the peasantry, this betrayal was codified by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari with the changes in the land reform article of the Mexican Constitution tied to the NAFTA negotiations.

In recent years, the PRD has claimed to support the peasants and the indigenous peoples in their struggles against the PRIista machine. The PRD politically represents a merger of petty-bourgeois social democracy (the Second International), reformist Marxism (the Partido Socialista Unificado de Mexico, and the liberal "political class" (i.e., bourgeois politicians such as Cuahutemoc Cardenas). The support it can give to the peasants is severely limited by the fact that the PRD leadership will fight with the PRI, but only to a point. It will not go against its own capitalist class, and it works to restrict and control the mass movement.

The EZLN and the Peasant Movement in Southern Mexico

The current crises of the PRI regime actually goes back into the 1980's when the PRI was first challenged seriously by bourgeois forces (PRD, PAN) of which the PRD, in particular, has a mass base among the petty-bourgeoisie, some peasantry and some workers. The independent mass movements of workers and urban poor remained active and strong in their areas, but nationally very fragmented and weak. Although the EZLN is not the only militant peasant organization in Chiapas, the uprising led by the EZLN marked the entrance into the arena of struggle of the poorest of the poor peasants, the indigenous peoples of southern Mexico. The mass base of the EZLN are the indigenous peasants whose families were peons on the plantations (fincas) of the Chiapan Priista oligarchy, and who live on ejidos in the Lacandona jungle. The

indigenous lands have been stolen repeatedly over the course of 500 years of subjugation, and the communities forced ever deeper into desperation.

The ejidos of the Lacandona are not the ejidos formed by the PRI as part of the land reforms of earlier epochs. These ejidos were created by indigenous peons who fled the fincas to the jungle, and cleared land for their ejidos. Sometimes their ejidos have been legally recognized and sometimes not. These ejidos are subsistence villages, whose residents are exploited as rural workers, as woodcutters, as cheap, indebted labor by the latifundistas, the ranchers and the rest of the oligarchy.

There are two issues: first, the EZLN is not a socialist organization and its demands are not socialist. Certainly the demands of the indigenous peoples for the return of their lands, for autonomy, and for economic assistance and more social services, etc., are theoretically possible through reforms. The EZLN in its program originally called for the satisfaction of the eleven basic demands of the "faceless, nameless" oppressed Indian masses, an end to the PRI government, a new coalition government (coalition of opposition, non-PRI forces), and a new constitution. In other words, for radical democratization perhaps even a democratic insurrection, but certainly not for socialism. Since the 1994 uprising, the EZLN has moved away from its more radical positions, shifting towards the reformist PRD, and even declaring themselves not to be in a struggle for "political power" according to Subcomandante Marcos. However, the EZLN has not completely given up its arms and organization. It continues to maintain strong support in Chiapas and to be able to hold out politically against the PRI. The EPR (Ejercito Popular Revolucionario) in Guerrero does have a program which calls for a fight for political power, however this is also within the framework of a democratic revolution).

So do I think the peasant movement in Southern Mexico, the EZLN, the EPR, are Socialist? Absolutely not. I do think that the existing struggle of the masses of peasants, indigenous peoples, workers and oppressed is where revolutionaries must fight to define a revolutionary proletarian trend, and to develop and deepen the revolutionary movement and gather forces under the leadership of that trend. The extent of class differentiation in the countryside and the extent of organization of the poor peasantry and semi-proletariat does mean that there is a real potential for the proletariat to pull this movement away from reformism, pushing the democratic demands to their revolutionary (not socialist but revolutionary) limits and clearing away obstacles to the socialist revolution. As to the future of the alliance between the proletariat and peasantry, I don't think it is inevitable (depending on how

the democratic struggle develops) that the poor peasantry, and semi-proletariat in the countryside will "betray the proletariat". The question of the ideology of the small proprietor is a serious one. It is possible that if the small peasantry and the indigenous peoples win some of their demands for land, they will be hostile to the demands of socialism for the abolition of private enterprise. It may also be possible, that given the reality of Mexico, the poor peasants and indigenous communities will remain poor and in struggle, that capitalism cannot satisfy their basic needs and that this will continue to push them toward the proletariat. It is worth noting that the problem of petty-bourgeois ideology, is not restricted to the peasantry. In Mexico, many workers have been so completely devastated economically, that in order to survive, they are engaging in "petty-bourgeois" economic activities. Neither is this problem restricted to the dependent or underdeveloped countries. In the developed capitalist countries, it's not unusual for industrial proletarians to own property and make income from rents, or to operate small businesses on the side and even to employ labor in those businesses. It may be that the poor peasants in Mexico who own a piece of land and a house, and are exploited by the plantation owners, ranchers, and local capitalists, have more interests in common with the workers (who may own their little house and garden but are exploited by the capitalists), than they have with the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois ranchers.

The Revolutionary Movement and Democratic Revolutions

".....But even if our revolution is bourgeois in its economic content (this cannot be doubted), the conclusion must not be drawn from it that the leading role in our revolution is played by the bourgeoisie, that the bourgeoisie is its motive force...The leader of the bourgeois revolution may be either the liberal landlord together with the factory-owner, merchant, lawyer, etc., or the proletariat together with the peasant masses. ...From this, the Bolsheviks deduce the basic tactics of the socialist proletariat in the bourgeois revolution -- to carry with them the democratic petty bourgeoisie, especially the peasant petty bourgeoisie, draw them away from the liberals, paralyze the instability of the liberal bourgeoisie, and develop the struggle of the masses for the complete abolition of all traces of serfdom, including landed proprietorship." (V.I.

Continued on page 25, see MEXICO

From *El Machete*:

Work to Form the Political Organ of the Toilers

(From the Mexican newspaper *El Machete*. Correspondence: Apartado Postal 14-339, Mexico 14 D.F., Mexico. E-mail: clea@mail.internet.com.mx. Translation by the Coordinadora Internacional de Apoyo al Pueblo de Mexico, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 120 Broadview Village #400, Chicago, IL 60153)

In Mexico the “mass movement” has now at least 3 decades of development. In this mass movement are entrenched those who do not accept the official gifts, baptized by the enemy as “Democratic Openings” or “Political Reforms”. Within these mass movements were generated the armed movements which have made their appearance in recent years, (the EZLN, EPR, ERIP.....), and also from these “mass movements” were born the Fronts and Coordinating Organizations [Coordinadoras] which have been able to confront the State since the decade of the 1970s, (CNTE, CONATIMSS, MPI, CNPA, FPFV, CONAMUP, CLETA,....)

It has been these coordinating organizations which put the brakes on the privatization of the IMSS, [Instituto Mexicana de Seguridad Social] and resisted the privatization of transportation, and of PEMEX; their action has postponed the destruction of the ejido or the annihilation of the communal forms of production. It has been these social organizations which have been able to force money for the construction of housing out of the State’s budget, and which have held back measures [of the government and others] with a tendency to provoke cultural genocide, such as those which would take back educational conquests or the often announced plan to privatize Chapultepec Park.

But the mass movement cannot by itself alone carry out the political struggle, rather this task responds to a political organization which gives it [the mass movement]

cohesion. In this moment it is strategic to work for the consolidation of this organization.

Will it be the Party of the Proletariat? Will it have another name? For now it is not important what we baptize the child, nor how its functioning will be structured or formed. To define these is part of the discussion that is going on in many sectors. What is certain is that those who propose to make a revolution cannot be subjected to participating in politics by asking to borrow the structure of the PRD [Partido Revolucionario Democrática] or the PT [Partido del Trabajo].. It is necessary to create one of our own.

The formation of this political structure is not to exclude nor substitute for the social organizations, on the contrary, it must be complementary to the action of the mass movement, and inclusive, finding links with the groupings which are laboring to form the peoples’ army.

This political organization should not (and cannot), supplant the unions nor the popular organizations. No, it must nourish itself with the more advanced cadre (open and closed) which have been produced by the mass movement over these 3 decades, who must carry out leadership and political organization tasks.

It is pertinent to clarify that this is not to negate the serious attempts at political organization which have occurred; on the contrary, we have to start from them and work to achieve the unity in theory and in practice of those whose struggle has demonstrated that they are, incorruptible, the most decided, and those who really want to make the revolution.

Of course, this can not be achieved with a meeting, nor in the short term, but it is the moment to begin, or better said, it is time to give another push in the process of structuring the political organization of the toilers. <

Book Review:

***El Otro Rostro de la Guerrilla*, by Arturo Miranda Ramírez**

Published by Editorial "El Machete", Feb. 2, 1996

Reviewed by Jack Hill, *Chicago Workers Voice*

For the benefit of those who can't read Spanish and to stimulate the interest of those who can, I would like to say a few things about this book. It is only available in Spanish, but I found it worth the effort to read it. It's a short book, but it helps you get a feeling for the politics and sentiments of those who participated in the guerrilla movements in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, in the 1970s. The book mixes together historical information about the political struggles in Guerrero focusing on the history of the guerrilla movements led by Genaro Vasquez and Lucio Cabañas with personal remembrances of the author and some discussion of political issues. One thing that makes the book a little hard to read is that the time frame jumps back and forth between various chapters, sometimes with little warning.

According to what he says of himself, the author was a participant in the movement lead by Genaro Vasquez. He was arrested, tortured and jailed twice. The book appears to me to be an honest attempt to document, for new revolutionaries coming up in the movement now, the experiences of the struggle the author was involved in. After enduring so much abstract arguing over intellectual b.s. on the internet Marxism lists, I found it refreshing to read this account of people who didn't try to make revolution from their armchairs or computer terminals.

Miranda does not give a systematic history of the

guerrilla organizations, but he does give the political background and history leading up to their formation. He knew both Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vasquez and participated in political struggles with them. I can't repeat all the information here that is in the book. However, I need to say a few words on the general history for those readers who may not be familiar with it.

Guerrero is a poor mountainous state in the south of Mexico with a long history of despotic political rule and of guerrilla struggle. In 1960 a mass movement against the dictatorial governor was met with a massacre of protesters in the capital city of Guerrero. After the massacre a new governor was put in place and the PRI made its typical attempts to placate and buy off the oppositional forces. Later in the decade there were more massacres, however; nothing really changed. Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vasquez were both important leaders in the movement. Lucio was a student leader and considered himself a Marxist. He became a teacher in a rural area, participated in the struggles of the poor peasants, and was a member of the Mexican Communist Party. Miranda gives a lot of detail about the movement among students at the teachers' colleges in Guerrero and among the rural teachers. The teachers' school of Ayotzinapa, where Miranda got a scholarship and where Lucio was a student leader, was a

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Mexico, continued from page 23

Lenin, "The Bolsheviks and the Petty Bourgeoisie", February 25, 1907. *LCW*, Vol 12, pp. 181-182.)

This brings us to the other basic question raised by the CV. What program does the revolutionary proletariat have? The mass struggle requires alliances with different class forces. The development of a socialist movement requires differentiation between the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie and the workers' organizations and interests. There is no "wall" between the democratic struggles and the socialist struggle. How far the revolutionary movement can go depends on what class force wins leadership of the movement -- on the strength of the proletariat in the

fight. The fact is, in Mexico in the midst of the mass upsurges and retreats, the repression and the political crises, tentative steps are being taken to forge this trend. The forces around El Machete are a part of this attempt. What is their program? To strengthen the unity of the most revolutionary elements and organizations in the mass movement, to develop a program to push the limits of the democratic struggles, and to begin the process to form an independent proletarian organization. This process is very fragile and under tremendous pressure, I believe that it should be supported by socialists, in word and in deed.

The next article in this series will discuss this process of consolidating and nurturing of the left wing of the mass movement, and of the socialist forces in the workers' movement. ◊

hotbed of political and social activism. Genaro was the leader of a mass organization fighting the PRI dictatorship called the Guerrero Civic Association. Both of them continued their political organizing throughout the 60s, and both were leading guerrilla organizations by the end of the decade.

Genaro was jailed in 1966 in an attempt to suppress the mass organization he led. It didn't work, of course, but it did lead to the formation of his guerrilla organization. In 1968 one of the first military actions of the "civicos" was to break him out of jail. Immediately after Genaro was liberated the organization was reformed as the National Revolutionary Civic Association (Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria). They organized and trained militarily and worked on their political links to all strands of the movement. Miranda doesn't list all of the actions taken by the ACNR, but gives lot of details of their most spectacular action which was to kidnap the rector of the Autonomous University of Guerrero, who was an important capitalist and politically powerful. This action was a big success, nine comrades were freed from jail (flown to Cuba) and a large ransom was paid. In 1972 Genaro Vasquez died. He was trapped in a car wreck and killed by the military when they caught him. This was very demoralizing to the organization. So much of it was centered on his personality. The organization did attempt to carry on, but it was on much more of a defensive basis. Many guerrillas were captured and jailed or killed.

In the meantime on a parallel course, Lucio Cabañas formed the Party of the Poor (Partido de los Pobres). He broke completely with the Communist Party. If I understand what Miranda says correctly, Lucio planned for years to form a guerrilla organization. He actually did it after a massacre in 1967 in Atoyac. Lucio had a strong base among the rural teachers of Guerrero who had participated in political struggles with him since his student days in the late 1950s. Miranda doesn't tell a lot about the activities of the PDLP, but he does mention that they kidnapped a university official from Acapulco. However, this did not turn out well; the police rescued him and captured the guerrillas who kidnapped him. Lucio died in combat in 1973, betrayed by police spies.

Miranda makes three political points that I would like to comment on briefly. He emphasizes the harm that sectarianism did to the movement, he opposes a militarist view of revolution that downplays the need for political work among the masses, and he stresses the need for revolutionary cadre to be totally dedicated and prepared for torture and death.

Miranda feels that sectarianism was one of the biggest downfalls of the guerrilla movement. Each group was

convinced that it and it alone had the complete answer and everyone should just join them. Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vasquez distrusted each other. Cabañas thought Vasquez was more of a nationalist than a Marxist revolutionary, while Vasquez was suspicious of how thoroughly Cabañas had broken with the old Mexican Communist Party (the PCM). (Miranda emphasizes that the PCM was bureaucratic, sectarian, reformist, and opposed to the development of armed struggle.) Eventually in 1975, after both leaders were dead, the two groups and some others were forced to ally in order to survive, but by then the best opportunity was past. Miranda gives a lot of examples of how sectarian attitudes prevented the two forces from cooperating for the benefit of the struggle.

I certainly see no reason to argue with Miranda's point that sectarianism was a major liability in the revolutionary political movement in Mexico and that this issue continues right to this day. I do, however, see another point in regard to sectarianism that Miranda doesn't deal with. The health of the movement does require a vigorous discussion of political and ideological differences. All of us who have been in the left political movement for any period of time have run into those who want to outlaw political discussion in the name of opposing sectarianism. Opposing sectarianism should not be the excuse for glossing over analysis of differences in political analysis and in strategy and tactics.

At this point I no longer believe that any one group has a monopoly on the one and only true path to revolution, so I am inclined to come down hard against those who are holding onto their sects and saying that they have the one true answer to all questions of revolutionary tactics, strategy, and ideology. I agree with Miranda that individuals and groups should strive to work together for the advancement in the practical movement of the oppressed despite their political and ideological differences. I would add a point that Miranda doesn't speak to — that we can't paper over the political and ideological differences but must continue to try to sort them out. From the time of Marx, the left has been plagued with groups that were more interested in building up themselves on a sectarian basis than in advancing the working class struggle. Mexico has had its share of such groups, as has the U.S.

On the second point, Miranda is very critical of some small guerrilla formations which came up who ridiculed political work among the masses as automatically reformist. They held that the only really revolutionary work was armed struggle. Miranda respects the dedication and heroism of some the people who took up such a line, but he is clear that the guerrilla struggle must be linked to the masses. The goal was to organize the masses of the

oppressed to take up the armed struggle. The revolution can not just be the work of a small group of dedicated individuals.

Miranda talks at length about some guerrilla activists he knew who followed such a militarist type line. They carried out some spectacular actions, but having weak ties to the masses meant that not much came of their actions. Both Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vasquez did have strong links to the masses in Guerrero due to their long involvement in the mass struggles in the period before they took up guerrilla struggle. There is some suggestion in the book that they had a problem maintaining the same high level of links to the masses once they started on the course of guerrilla struggle.

Here is a quote from Miranda on the relationship of the guerrilla organization and the masses.

“The guerrilla is simply and plainly the political expression of the vanguard of the masses; not understanding it thus is to fall into vanguardism or into romanticism and into a caricature of the reforming role which it should play; they must be conscious that they alone by themselves will never succeed in taking power; it (the guerrilla) is merely the seed of the future popular revolutionary army which, in the war of all the people against the governing oligarchy, will make possible the taking of power and the installation of a new order of life without exploiters and exploited. ...”(p. 94)

The point on linking the struggle to the masses and

mobilizing them I agree with. I don't agree that the guerrilla organization can take the place of a revolutionary political party. For one thing I think a guerrilla organization which tries to be the overall guide to revolutionary strategy is likely to lose its bearings and tend to lose its connections to the masses.

Miranda also makes a strong point about the personal strength and dedication necessary to be a serious revolutionary. Many dedicated revolutionaries were tortured and killed by the representatives of the old order in Mexico. Those who couldn't withstand the torture gave up their comrades to torture, imprisonment and death. Becoming a cadre in the underground guerrilla organizations in those days required a person to steel oneself for any sacrifice.

I think this point is important to keep in mind even today in the U.S. when the struggle is not so intense. Destroying the old system of capitalism and replacing it with a new system of socialism will require again many iron-willed activists prepared for any sacrifice. In fact if you look at the news today, activists fighting the atrocities of capitalism around the world are facing police attacks, firings, jail, torture and death. I found it refreshing that Miranda reminds us of the personal side of the struggle and not just the intellectual side.

To repeat my main points, I think Miranda has a good point about sectarianism, although I would add that opposing sectarianism should not prevent serious attempts to sort out differing political and ideological views. He is also correct in opposing a militarist politics and in emphasizing the steeling necessary for revolutionary cadres. ◇

What stand should working class revolutionaries take on the issue of immigration?

The Working Class Has No Borders!

By Jack Hill

(Article based on a presentation given at a forum at New World Resource Center in October 1996.)

Author's note: I have been involved in political struggles on the issue of immigration for many years and I believe my stands are consistent with Marxism-Leninism. However, I am not a Marxist scholar and this brief presentation is not an exhaustive review of Marxism on the immigration question.

Introduction

In the last few years there have been several serious attacks on immigrants and immigrants' rights, particularly in the period leading up to the 1996 Presidential campaign.

Proposition 187 in California was one of the first big blows of this campaign. Other attacks have included the anti-immigrant provisions of the new welfare legislation, major increases in the border patrols, more deportations, and streamlined kangaroo courts to deport people.

Simultaneously, there has been a flood of propaganda against immigrants in the mainstream press and anti-immigrant harangues from demagogical politicians. Perhaps the most ludicrous propaganda of this type is the hype surrounding the push for "English Only" laws. "English Only" propositions aim to create a deep resentment towards immigrants. [Among the long list of alleged crimes committed by immigrants is the denigration of the English language, chiefly by Spanish-speakers, *muy malo!*]

Both Democrats and Republicans are responsible for this dirty campaign. The bipartisan support for immigrant bashing and sanctions on the rights of even legal immigrants is quite striking considering the avowed platform of the Democratic Party.

Of course a variety of forces are opposing these attacks, in different ways. The political forces that claim to defend the rights of immigrants, at least paying lip service to them, include some figures in the Democratic and Republican Parties, most Latino politicians, and many liberal and left groups. Some trade unions have stands in favor of immigrants' rights, while others have very bad positions. Immigrants' rights groups have called protests of many sorts in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and other cities.

However, within the forces that supposedly are defending immigrants' rights, there are many who accept that immigration should be restricted and that immigrants should have limited rights. This is wrong.

In this talk I want to show that the only correct stand to advance the interests of the working class as a whole is to demand *full rights for all immigrants*, and also to demand an *end to all restrictions on immigration*.

The Class Divided

The immigration laws have divided the working class in this country into three categories according to how many legal rights they have: citizens, legal immigrants, and undocumented immigrants. This division is extremely harmful to the united struggle of the workers and poor. This is the central question for understanding what stand to take on immigration.

The fundamental situation is that, under capitalism, workers are placed in immediate competition with each other. Therefore, certain workers can get short term advantages if competition for the jobs they have is limited. However, this is poison for the overall struggle of the working class. This struggle can only advance if there is unity of all strata and nationalities of workers.

I want to re-emphasize the point that the other comrade made: defending the rights of immigrants must be taken up by the working class as a whole. This is vital to build a movement which can seriously oppose the current attacks. It is even more vital for building a revolutionary movement of the working class. My contention is that activists who want to build such a movement must put a lot of effort into fighting the chauvinist and opportunist views of those who claim to lead the working class. They must make a big effort to educate the whole working class in this country that the cause of the immigrant is an integral part of their struggle.

Views of Marx and Engels

Engels has a section on the Irish immigrants in England in his 1844 book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

"The rapid expansion of English industry could not have taken place if England had not

possessed in the numerous and impoverished population of Ireland a reserve at command.”

There are Irish quarters in all the major industrial cities. The Irish live under very degraded conditions, filth, drunkenness.

“With such a competitor the English working-man has to struggle, with a competitor upon the lowest plane possible in a civilized country, who for this very reason requires less wages than any other. Nothing else is therefore possible than that, a Carlyle says, the wages of English working-man should be forced down further and further in every branch in which the Irish compete with him.”

Workers in all the low skilled jobs are subject to this sort of competition.

“On the contrary, it is easy to understand how the degrading position of the English workers, engendered by our modern history, and its immediate consequences, has been still more degraded by the presence of Irish competition.”

Engels appears shocked at the horrible conditions of the Irish immigrant workers. He doesn't analyze much why they are living in such conditions, below the miserable standard of the English workers, but he does make a major point on the harm done to the working class by this division.

Over the next decades, Marx and Engels put a lot of effort into studying the history and struggles of the Irish people. It was a question of huge practical importance for the working class struggle in England where they were living and working. By 1869-70 Marx and Engels were emphasizing the crucial role of the Irish question in developing the working class movement in England.

For example, this is from a letter, Marx to L. Kugelmann, Nov. 29, 1869: (p. 502)

“Every one of its movements in England itself is crippled by the quarrel with the Irish, who even in England form a very important section of the working class. *The primary condition of emancipation here—the overthrow of the English landed oligarchy—remains impossible because its position here cannot be stormed so long as it maintains its strongly entrenched*

outpost in Ireland.” (From the Marx and Engels collection, *Ireland and the Irish Question*.)

Here is another quote from Marx along the same lines. Marx makes the point that England is the most advanced capitalist country, the country which is the key internationally to the revolution. And he further states that the key to the struggle in England is the Irish question.

“If England is the bulwark of landlordism and European capitalism, the only point where one can hit official England really hard is *Ireland*.

“In the first place, Ireland is the *bulwark* of English landlordism. If it fell in Ireland it would fall in England. ... On the other hand, by maintaining the power of the landlords in Ireland, the English proletariat makes them invulnerable in England itself.

“In the second place, the English bourgeoisie had not only exploited the Irish poverty to keep down the working class in England by *forced immigration* of poor Irishmen, but it has also divided the proletariat into two hostile camps. The revolutionary fire of the Celtic worker does not go well with the nature of the Anglo-Saxon worker, solid, but slow. On the contrary, in all *the big industrial centers in England* there is profound antagonism between the Irish proletariat and the English proletariat. The average English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers wages and the *standard of life*. He feels national and religious antipathies for him. He regards him somewhat like the *poor whites* of the Southern states of North America regard their black slaves. This antagonism among the proletarians of England is artificially nourished and supported by the bourgeoisie. It knows that this scission is the true secret of maintaining its power.

“This antagonism is reproduced on the other side of the Atlantic. The Irish, chased from their native soil by the *bulls* and the sheep, reassemble in North America where they constitute a huge, ever-growing section of the population. Their only thought, their only passion, is hatred for England. The English and American governments (or the classes they represent) play on these feelings in order to perpetuate the covert struggle between the

United States and England. They thereby prevent a sincere and lasting alliance between the workers on both sides of the Atlantic, and consequently, their emancipation.

“Furthermore, Ireland is the only pretext the English Government has for retaining a *big standing army*, which, if need be, as has happened before, can be used against the English workers after having done its military training in Ireland.

“Lastly, England today is seeing a repetition of what happened on a monstrous scale in Ancient Rome. Any nation that oppresses another forges its own chains.

“Thus, the attitude of the International Association to the Irish question is very clear. Its first need is to encourage the social revolution in England. To this end a great blow must be struck in Ireland.

“The General Council’s resolutions on the Irish amnesty serve only as an introduction to other resolutions which will affirm that, quite apart from international justice, it is a *precondition to the emancipation of the English working class* to transform the present *forced union* (i.e., the enslavement of Ireland) into *equal and free confederation* if possible, into *complete separation* if need be.” (From Karl Marx, Confidential Communications, written about March 28, 1870.)

Later the Irish movement subsided and was suppressed and the English working class did not as a whole break from support for the English bourgeoisie. In this letter that Engels wrote to K. Kautsky on Sept. 12, 1882, you can see the harm done to the working class cause by not breaking from the chauvinist politics of the English bourgeoisie.

“You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as the bourgeois think. There is no workers’ party here, you see, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England’s monopoly of the world market and the colonies.”

Also in regard to the U.S. Marx and Engels noticed the problems for the working class struggle caused by the divisions between immigrants and native-born.

This is from a letter from Engels to Schlueter, March 30, 1892.

“Your great obstacle in America, it seems to me, lies in the exceptional position of the native-born workers. Up to 1848 one could speak of a permanent native-born working class only as an exception. The small beginnings of one in the cities in the East still could always hope to become farmers or bourgeois. Now such a class has developed and has also organized itself on trade-union lines to a great extent. But it still occupies an aristocratic position and wherever possible leaves the ordinary badly paid occupations to the immigrants, only a small portion of whom enter the aristocratic trade unions. But these immigrants are divided into different nationalities, which understand neither one another nor, for the most part, the language of the country. And your bourgeoisie knows much better even than the Austrian government how to play *off one nationality against the other*: Jews, Italians, Bohemians, etc., against Germans and Irish, and each one against the other, so that differences in workers’ standards of living exist, I believe, in New York to an extent unheard of elsewhere. And added to this is the complete indifference of a society that has grown up on a purely capitalist basis, without any easygoing feudal background, toward the human lives that perish in the competitive struggle.”

Lenin

Lenin is very hard on the opportunist so-called “socialists” who want to restrict immigration. At the International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart in 1907, Lenin comments on the debate on the resolution in regard to immigration.

“A few words about the resolution on emigration and immigration. Here, too, in the Commission there was an attempt to defend narrow, craft interests, to ban the immigration of workers from backward countries (coolies from China, etc.). This is the same spirit of aristocratism that one finds among workers in some of the “civilized” countries, who derive certain advantages from their privileged positions, and are, therefore, inclined to forget the

need for international class solidarity. But no one at the Congress defended this craft and petty-bourgeois narrow-mindedness. The resolution fully meets the demands of revolutionary Social-Democracy.” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, 1972 edition, Vol. 13, p. 79)

In another article on the same congress, Lenin said,

“Further, on the question of emigration and immigration, a clear difference of opinion arose between the opportunists and the revolutionaries in the Commission of the Stuttgart Congress. The opportunists cherished the idea of *limiting* the right of migration of backward, undeveloped workers -- especially the Japanese and the Chinese. In the minds of these opportunists the spirit of narrow craft isolation, of trade-union exclusiveness, outweighed the consciousness of socialist tasks: the work of educating and organizing those strata of the proletariat which have not yet been drawn into the labor movement. The Congress rejected everything that smacked of this spirit.” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 89.)

Later, Lenin cited this struggle to illustrate the genuine internationalist stand on immigration.

“In our struggle for true internationalism and against ‘jingo-socialism’ we always quote in our press the example of the opportunist leaders of the S.P. in America, who are in favor of restrictions of the immigration of Chinese and Japanese workers (especially after the Congress of Stuttgart, 1907, and *against* the decisions of Stuttgart). We think that one can not be internationalist and be at the same time in favor of such restrictions. And we assert that Socialists in America, especially English Socialists, belonging to the ruling, and *oppressing* nation, who are not against any restrictions of immigration, against the possession of colonies (Hawaii) and for the entire freedom of colonies, that such Socialists are in reality jingoes.” (*Collected Works*, Vol. 21, 428, Letter to the Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League)

Lenin took a strong stand for equal rights for immigrants in Switzerland.

[discussing militias] “We can demand popular election of officers, abolition of all military law, equal rights for foreign and native-born workers (a point particularly important for those imperialist states which, like Switzerland, are more and more blatantly exploiting larger numbers of foreign workers, while denying them all rights).” (*Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 85)

[platform for Swiss Left Zimmerwaldists] “18. Compulsory naturalization of all foreigners, free of charge. Every foreigner shall become a Swiss citizen after three months’ residence in the country, unless he, on very good grounds, applies for a postponement, which may be granted for not more than three months. It must be explained to the masses that such a reform is particularly urgent for Switzerland, not only from the general democratic standpoint, but also because, owing to its imperialist environment, Switzerland has a larger percentage of foreigners than any other European country. Nine-tenths’ of these foreigners speak one of the three languages used in Switzerland. The disfranchisement and alienation of foreign workers serve to increase political reaction, which is already mounting, and weaken international proletarian solidarity.” (*Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 142)

Overall Lenin makes two points on immigration. The first is that immigration is positive in the sense that it breaks down national barriers among the proletariat and promotes internationalism. For example, here is a section of the article, “Capitalism and workers’ immigration” written in 1913. (Vol. 19, p. 454)

“There can be no doubt that dire poverty alone compels people to abandon their native land, and that the capitalists exploit the immigrant workers in the most shameless manner. But only reactionaries can shut their eyes to the *progressive* significance of this modern migration of nations. Emancipation from the yoke of capital is impossible without the further development of capitalism, and without the class struggle that is based on it. And it [is] into this struggle that capitalism is drawing the masses of the working people of the *whole* world, breaking down the musty, fusty habits of local life, breaking down national barriers and preju-

dices, uniting workers from all countries in huge factories and mines in America, Germany, and so forth.”

Lenin’s second point is that immigration makes unification of the proletariat in the capitalist countries more difficult because the bourgeoisie divides the proletariat.

He also discusses the consequences of many of the most politically advanced workers leaving Russia after 1905.

“Workers who had participated in various strikes in Russia introduced into America the bolder and more aggressive spirit of the mass strike. Russia is lagging farther and farther behind, losing some of her best workers to foreign countries; America is advancing more and more rapidly, taking the most vigorous and able-bodied sections of the working population of the whole world.” (same article, Vol. 19, p. 456)

In this period also, workers are immigrating to the U.S. bringing experience of militant struggle. This is another reason for American workers to welcome immigrant workers. The downside is that losing this militant section retards the struggle in the country they leave.

Conclusions

Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries have to stand against any and all restrictions on immigration of working people. We have to stand for full and equal rights for all.

As slogans we should put forward, **“Full rights for all immigrants, the working class has no borders, no human being is illegal.”**

This is a simple stand, but it is not widely popular inside the U.S. working class. We have a lot of work to do in educating the workers here.

Even in the left this stand is controversial. Some who advocate full and equal rights for immigrants in general still allow that immigration quotas, i.e. immigration restrictions (and with them the border patrol and La Migra), are permissible.

I would also point out that the Labor Party is wrong to call just for an immigration policy that does not discriminate. (See issue no. 11 of the *CWVTJ* for more comments on the Labor Party and immigration.)

We must oppose and try to win the masses away from the Latino politicians (and any other political demagogues) who posture against abuses of immigrants, but

are not for ending restrictions on immigration.

Trade unions have a very mixed record on this. There is always the tendency to protect a section of workers at the expense of the whole class. The Farmworkers Union, for example, has supported the rights of legal immigrant farm workers at the same time that it campaigned against undocumented workers!

Many other unions have made trade protectionism a focus of their politics. “Blaming foreigners” in this way for allegedly “stealing American jobs” inevitably leads to targeting undocumented workers, who by the same logic are also “stealing” jobs.

In conclusion, for the success of the working class struggle, for the working class struggle to go all the way to socialist revolution, we must imbue the working class with the need to defend immigrants and oppose restrictions on immigration. ◇

CHE, Continued from page 35

Sandinista regime to accommodate the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie at precisely the time that the Nicaraguan toilers were pressuring the government to take measures against the rich, measures that would have strengthened Nicaragua’s hand in the contra war.

Today in Cuba, Che’s name is hailed as a beacon lighting the “socialist” path. Despite Che’s revolutionary aspirations, it appears that his writings are being used as a way to promote austerity for the masses in Cuba while a reopening to western capitalism takes place. It is important today to clarify the difference between state capitalism and socialism. Che had the desire to end exploitation and oppression. However, he did not know fully how to accomplish this. Invoking his name as a revolutionary beacon that leads to the establishment of socialism does not help activists to clarify this question. ◇

Movie Review:

CHE

Reviewed by Sarah, *Chicago Workers' Voice*

Political activists are following the uprising in Chiapas, the strikes and demonstrations in Korea, the demonstrations in the Dominican Republic with much interest. These dramatic mass struggles inspire activists not only to act, to organize and change the world, but also to think about the future. What will the next wave of struggles look like? What issues will inspire revolutionary action? What ideas will guide the mass struggle? What forms of organization are needed? How can we build a real socialism that will end exploitation once and for all?

In the 1990's the former Soviet Union disintegrated. Its autocratic state capitalist system went bankrupt and the giant country was replaced by several smaller states with the more typical market capitalist economy and bourgeois parliaments.

In the 1980's and 1990's there was another kind of disintegration. Many left wing and revolutionary organizations collapsed. Many have noted the general crisis and confusion that exists within the left. For organizations that followed the Soviet Union as a model of socialism this collapse was inevitable. However many other organizations also died in this period. The reason for this, I believe, is that much of the left drew their bearings from trends such as revisionism, trotskyism and anarchism: trends that are not capable of guiding a socialist revolutionary movement. Since the current situation finds many in the left without their former bearings, it opens up the possibility that activists will take stock of the history and experience of the revolutionary movement in this century. If they can come to grips with its mistakes and forge ahead with what is needed, they will be in a position to advance revolutionary theory and organize new revolutionary movements, movements more powerful than the old.

However, it is also possible to maintain the ideas, practices and types of organizations that led to the current crisis. In fact for some people, romanticizing about the heyday of the Comintern or the Fourth International (if it ever had a heyday) is not just a daydream but their life's work.

In the current situation, filled with confusion, uncertainty and the search for reliable bearings to guide revolutionaries, the life and legend of Che Guevarra has gained renewed interest.

Many activists saw the movie *Che* when it played in

Chicago. This movie documents Che Guevarra's days in Bolivia. It follows the path taken by Che and the guerilla group he led. The director interviewed several people who knew Che during those final days. He interviewed one of the participants in the guerilla group, several peasants who met Che, and one of the soldiers who captured him.

The movie provokes interest in some important issues. At the beginning of the movie the director shows that Che had some disagreements with Soviet politics at the time. The director says that Che liked neither the bureaucracy nor the high living of Soviet officials. The movie documents a speech given by Che in Algiers that criticized the idea of "peaceful coexistence." This was a key political idea put forward by Soviet leaders at the time. "Peaceful coexistence" certainly sounds like a fine and progressive idea, especially when one considers the super aggressive attitude of U.S. imperialism towards the Soviet Bloc countries. But it was not meant as a diplomatic stance. It was a key ideological ingredient of the Soviet Union's politics, a politics we refer to as "revisionism," the revising of revolutionary Marxism into sterile reformist politics that sounds like the original but has all the revolutionary working class content ripped out of it.

The politics behind the slogan "peaceful coexistence" downgraded the significance of the armed struggles against imperialism such as the Vietnamese war against U.S. imperialism and the armed liberation movements in Africa. But it didn't simply belittle armed conflict in favor of peaceful forms of activism. Soviet revisionism sometimes support "reformism with guns," that is, it sometimes supported an armed conflict so long as the toiling masses were not likely to gain power or generally get out of the control of the "national" bourgeoisie. The essential thing for revisionism is that the workers and peasants must tail behind the capitalists.

Immediately after Che returned to Cuba, there were several days of private meetings. Che then resigned his positions in the Cuban government. The movie provokes a question about what happened. Was Che cut out of his positions in Cuba because he criticized the Soviet Union? And if so, doesn't that make the current promotion of Che by the Cuban Communist Party and Cuban government somewhat cynical?

In the movie, Che's letter to the Cuban people was

read. Some of the activists in Chicago who viewed this movie thought that it sounded suicidal. Some feel that, if Che were indeed kicked out of politics in Cuba, perhaps the only path he saw was a path of militant action leading eventually to revolutionary martyrdom.

To speak to this argument we must first look at the issue of Soviet politics and the fight against this distortion of Marxism.

There is some debate over whether Che could have been more open in criticizing Soviet politics. However, the real issue is did Che want an open debate on Soviet politics. For example, he could have joined in the "Great Polemic on the Line of the International Communist Movement" as the Communist Parties of China and Albania called it. At the time that Che resigned from the Cuban government, a major debate criticizing Soviet politics was underway. China and Albania were publicly denouncing several Soviet theories, especially "peaceful coexistence," at large meetings attended by all the communist parties in the world. By the late sixties the debate was raging. The communist movement was suffering the largest split in its history with one side denouncing the "Khrushchovite revisionism" of the Soviet Union while the other deplored the ultra-leftism of Mao Zedong and his allies.

Flawed though it was with many revisionist problems of its own, the debate in the communist movement inspired many activists to fight revisionism. Che never spoke about this polemic, nor about the splits that were developing in many of the communist parties. Of course Che did not have to join the Chinese side to oppose Soviet revisionism; he had some criticism of his own and presumably could have developed it. I want to point out that there is no indication in any of his writings, nor in the movie, that Che wanted to develop an open fight in the revolutionary movement against Soviet politics.

It was important to wage a struggle against revisionism. Some activists have pointed out that Che would have faced enormous obstacles, including the virtual impossibility of waging such a fight from Cuba. (Of course, this shows the falseness of upholding Cuba as a defender of revolutionary politics against revisionism today.) If Che even had inklings of the bankruptcy of Soviet politics (and apparently he had some dissatisfactions), and if he were cut out of Cuban political life, then he undoubtedly felt himself to be in a difficult situation. He would not be the first one to choose a path that meant martyrdom when faced with unacceptable politics and an unclear path.

The movie brought out Che's isolation from the masses in Bolivia. Please note that the guerilla fight can be important for developing the revolutionary movement but

only if it is connected to the mass struggle and aims to develop that struggle. In Bolivia, at the time, miners were fighting important battles against the companies and the government. However, the guerilla struggle led by Che did not hook up with this fight. The guerilla fighters did not have and were not able to win the support of the Indian peasants. Clearly Che did not have an assessment of the conditions for a revolutionary movement in Bolivia.

Before he died, Che spoke to a young girl who was interviewed in the movie. His last words showed his revolutionary spirit. He talked of his desire for a new type of life without exploitation and oppression. This is what inspires revolutionary activists everywhere. If one is to honor his spirit and the lives of other revolutionary martyrs, one has to ask the hard questions of how to advance the revolutionary movement.

One question to ask is what inspires the renewed interest in Che?

Che's name is linked with the spirit of **internationalism** and revolutionary heroism. He was born in Argentina. He participated in the political struggles in Guatemala. He escaped to Mexico from Guatemala after the CIA coup. There he met Fidel Castro. In 1956 he was aboard the yacht Granma when it landed in Cuba. He participated in organizing the Cuban revolution. He was an important figure in leading the revolutionary armies that eventually captured power. After he resigned from the Cuban government, he went to the Congo (later Zaire) where he fought with the anti-imperialist movement. Finally, he led an expedition to Bolivia in hopes of helping to foment revolutionary struggle in Latin America. In close consultation with the U.S. military, Bolivian soldiers murdered him after his capture. Watching the horrors of nationalist strife in Bosnia, Rwanda and other countries, we see the importance of an internationalist perspective and the burning need to advance the worldwide revolutionary movement. Che lived and worked and died as an internationalist.

Che's name has some link with **anti-revisionism**. As previously mentioned, Che criticized the former Soviet Union regarding "peaceful coexistence," and in practice he pursued a line opposite to what the Soviet Union advocated. However Che was not an anti-revisionist *per se*.

Today, most leftists have some criticism of the politics and practices in the former Soviet Union and of the communist parties linked to the Soviets. However, the hard work of critiquing revisionism is not very popular. It means sorting out what went wrong, separating the good from the bad, figuring out what that experience means for the advance of the revolutionary movement. Most impor-

tantly, it means discarding some long-cherished views and changing some long-held practices. I think it is easier to rely on the old answers of Soviet style revisionism, or Trotskyism, or anarchism, or on vague populism than to answer hard, questions and to change. Unfortunately, the current promotion of Che goes along with this general mood. Che's critique of Soviet revisionism may be more a matter of the desires of current day activists than a reality in his own life.

Che's name is linked with **socialism**, especially "socialism" in Cuba. But what is "socialism" in Cuba?

The revolution freed Cuba from the abject subjugation to U.S. imperialism that was the Batista regime. After the revolution the working class, the peasantry and the oppressed attempted to put many measures in place that would further their interests, that would give them a new life. This is very important social experience. After the revolution, the many reforms that were carried out improved living conditions, increased the literacy and skills of the masses, and improved industrial and agricultural techniques. Many of these reforms were beneficial to the masses.

Because the Cuban revolution defeated U.S. imperialism and because it brought a better life for the masses, it is highly regarded. This revolution and the Cuban experience should be closely studied. I have read Tablada's book on Che's economic plans. (*Che Guevarra, Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism* by Carlos Tablada. Pathfinder/Pacific and Asia. 1989) In the main, the measures Che considered implementing sound like very reasonable things to do in a small country under imperialist blockade -- even in a small capitalist country -- if the leadership of that country does not want to go along with the dominant economic forces.

This is what gives Cuba its contradictory character. In reality it was a small country whose economy was always capitalist and which survived in its position largely because of the rivalry that existed between two imperialist powers. At the same time the masses and many activists from the leading political party were inspired by ideas of socialism and they attempted to put those ideas into practice -- this gives Cuban society features of a society in transition. And, true enough, those features are not and probably can not be maintained today in the current economic climate of globalization.

However, these measures do not constitute socialism. One of the questions not dealt with by Che, at least as reported by Tablada, is the impossibility of establishing socialism in a small country in the larger capitalist world. However, Che does view the Soviet bloc as socialist.

I think it is important to look at this experience critically. In the camp of those whose politics were and are heavily influenced by Soviet style communism, the older style communist party politics and by Trotskyism, many look at Cuba and say that the experience was just great, that any problems are just a result of the pressures of world imperialism, the U.S.-led blockades and embargos, etc. As far as they are concerned, Cuba is on the path to socialism.

Among those who came out of other politics, especially Maoism and supposed anti-revisionism, there has been a tendency to negate that experience altogether under the thought that the Cuban Revolution is just a variant of Soviet revisionism. I think some of this idea existed in the organizations we came out of -- the COUSML and MLP -- at least in the atmosphere, if not in the official documents. Neither of these organizations wrote much about Cuba although it's hard to say why. Certainly there were many other important issues that we had to deal with. But perhaps there was not so much interest in Cuba because we all knew that it was, after all, revisionist.

I think the Cuban experience needs to be studied just as does the Soviet or Chinese experience. We need to separate the good from the bad and concentrate the essence of this rich revolutionary experience. Not all the problems in Cuba, such as the current opening to Western imperialism, the way its economy was tied to the Soviet economy, the current austerity measures, etc., are due to objective conditions. Nor do all these problems stem from the ideological mistakes of the Cuban leaders.

Part of assessing the Cuban revolution involves appraising the role of the Cuban leaders. In my opinion, the Cuban leadership, while it stood at the head of many progressive measures in Cuba, has overall played a bad role -- and I think it has to be sorted out what was good and what was bad about its role. In particular, it has played a bad role in regard to revolutionary theory and what direction the various revolutionary movements should take. They have promoted reformism and in some cases have hamstrung the movements in various countries.

For example, it urged the revolutionary forces in Nicaragua not to "make the mistake we made" by being too socialist and driving the capitalists out of the country. Actually the capitalists and petty-capitalists fled Cuba after the revolution at the instigation and insistence of the C.I.A. Moreover, the Cuban leadership pressured the

Continued on page 32, See CHE

Book review:

Los Angeles Workers' Voice reviews

The Enemy Within by Jay Gould

Introduction by Jack Hill

The following article was sent to Chicago Workers' Voice by the Los Angeles Workers' Voice. As with every article, the views presented here are first and foremost the responsibility of the author. I would like to add a couple of additional comments.

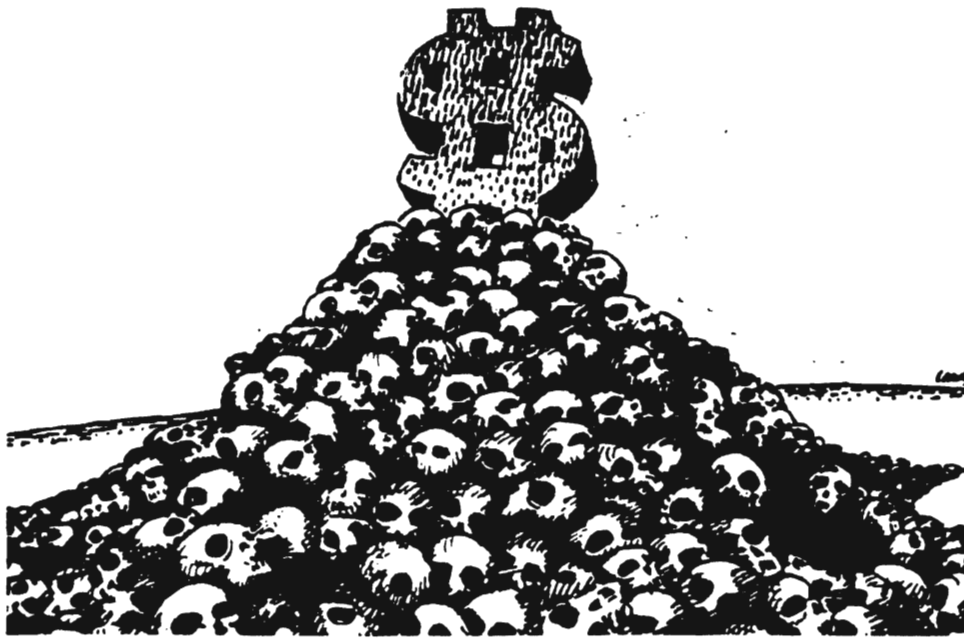
First of all, please note that the anti-capitalist conclusions are not necessarily those of Jay Gould but are the views of the article's author, an activist with LAWV. It is logical to draw such conclusions but Gould does not discuss such things in his writings. If one read this article quickly, one might miss the distinction between the conclusions that Gould draws on the relationship between exposure to nuclear radiation and toxic chemicals and breast cancer and other diseases, and the LA Workers' Voice conclusions about our economic and political system.

The second point is that we in the Chicago Workers' Voice group have not had the chance to study Gould's book and form our own opinion. However I did get a chance to look over a book written by Gould in 1990 which also deals with the health effects of low level exposure to nuclear radiation. (Jay M. Gould and Benjamin A. Goldman, *Deadly Deceit, Low Level Radiation, High Level Cover-Up, Four Walls Eight Windows*, New York, 1990.) My impression is that Gould has been doing public health statistical research on these questions for many years. He uses, as far as I can see, the same high powered statistical tools that are generally used in epidemiological studies. He is a strong partisan of a view that many mainstream scientists consider

extreme: that exposure to the low level radiation from nuclear reactors is having a serious and measurable negative impact on public health. That doesn't mean he is wrong. As a matter of fact, I bet he is right.

Those with more expertise than I will have to judge how strong Gould's science is. In his previous book Gould does as any reputable scientist does, he provides lots of details on his data and how he analyzed it. I am inclined to believe that Gould is doing reputable science, albeit with a strong bias against nuclear energy. The only qualification I would suggest that the reader keep in mind is the basic caution: correlation does not prove causation. Just because exposure to low level nuclear radiation and to toxic wastes coincides with higher rates of breast cancer, one can not automatically conclude that it is the cause. I'm sure that defenders of nuclear power are using this to argue their way around all of Gould's conclusions.

So you the reader will have to evaluate for yourself these conclusions. I cannot guarantee to you that Gould is right, but I do think he makes a serious case. For several years after the near-meltdown at Three Mile Island there was a strong anti-nuke mass movement in the U.S. We in Chicago Workers' Voice participated in this movement as part of the Marxist-Leninist Party. We thought this movement was just, that nuclear energy should be opposed (along with nuclear weapons), and that the culprits who imposed this horribly unsafe and unhealthy technology on the U.S. and the world were the monopoly capitalists. We were right.



NUCLEAR EMISSIONS, TOXIC CHEMICALS AND THE POISON PRESS:
SINISTER PARTNERS IN A LEGACY OF DEATH AND DECEIT

The assertion that "living near a nuclear plant engenders no greater risk than living elsewhere in Minnesota" (Minneapolis Star Tribune, 5/6/95), is not borne out by the facts, but is typical of the disingenuous, self-serving fabrications issued by the corporate media on behalf of the nuclear power/nuclear weapons industry.

Standing in stark contrast to the endless stream of similarly reassuring and tranquillizing propaganda is the recently released book titled, The Enemy Within, by Jay M. Gould. The book documents Gould's research which has succeeded in making the link between nuclear fallout and reactor emissions to what is unquestionably a health crisis of immense proportions. This crisis, which must appear even to the casual observer as having the nature of an epidemic, involves the alarming increasing rate of occurrence of cancers generally and of breast and childhood cancers more specifically. Today, for example, nearly 45,000 women in the United States (population 255M) die each year from breast cancer as compared to about half that number in 1950 (population 151M). More telling, though, is the fact that within that time period some areas of the country have experienced an increase in the rate of incidence for breast cancer that has nearly tripled. As for cancers in children, the statistics are just as disturbing. While childhood cancer mortality was at one time a medical rarity in the U.S. -- two deaths per 100,000 children in 1935, by 1955 the incidence had quadrupled to 8 deaths per 100,000. By 1950, of any disease, cancer had become the leading cause of death amongst children 5-14 years of age.

Gould began looking into this matter while serving on the Environmental Protection Agency Science Advisory Board in the early 80's. (Environmental Protection Agency? Hardly! EPA more honestly stands for Every Polluter's Assistant and/or Every Pesticide Approved). He became concerned that government epidemiologists, because of the important political and economic implications, were reluctant to pursue an investigation of what were to him very sharply delineated geographic variations in cancer mortality rates. In order to try and pinpoint the reason that would explain this variation, he had to conduct his own investigation, realizing that in the process he would indeed be treading on some sensitive political toes. By analyzing the available data he was able to show the existence of a correlation between those areas with high cancer rates and those areas known to contain high concentrations of chemical wastes. His research led him to believe that in addition to the known chemical culprits, other cofactors must also be involved. Eventually, he was led to consider the possibility that nuclear reactor emissions were playing an important supporting role in the process of carcinogenesis.

Using data culled from National Cancer Institute files, Gould was able to show that women living in so-called nuclear counties, i.e., those within a 100 mile radius of a reactor, are at the greatest risk of dying from breast cancer. It turns out that 1,319 of the 3,053 counties in the U.S. are "nuclear." These counties account for far more than half of all breast cancer deaths in the U.S. and tend to show the highest breast cancer mortality rates in the nation. Furthermore, the exacerbating effect of reactor emissions was most pronounced for women living in large metropolitan areas. These urbanized areas have also tended to be the centers for the most intensive industrial development. Consequently, the women in these regions have been compelled to suffer from the added exposure to the decades-long accumulation of toxic industrial wastes, air pollution, drinking water contamination from nuclear fallout since urban water supplies are likely to be obtained from above ground sources, and possible overexposure to radiologic exams such as fluoroscopy and mammography.

The largest source of nuclear fallout has been from the atmospheric tests conducted by, who else but our old friends, the U.S. Imperialists and the Soviet Imperialists. Although the atmospheric testing was stopped in 1963, it has been estimated that the total amount of radiation released was equivalent to 40,000 Hiroshima bombs. As a result, we are all downwinders, we have all been turned into guinea pigs.

In a rare moment of honesty coming from someone involved in the nuclear weapons industry, Dr. John Gofman, who was in charge of the biomedical division of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and also aided in the development of the atomic bomb made the following statement:

There is no way I can justify my failure to help sound an alarm over these activities many years sooner than I did. I feel that at least several hundred scientists trained in the biomedical aspect of atomic energy -- myself definitely included -- are candidates for Nuremberg-type trials for crimes against humanity for our gross negligence and irresponsibility. Now that we know the hazard of low-dose radiation, the crime is not experimentation -- it's murder.

As evidence of yet another government coverup, this statement appeared in a Washington Post article on April 14, 1979:

Officials involved in U.S. bomb tests feared in 1965 that disclosures of a secret study linking leukemia to radioactive fallout from the bombs could jeopardize further testing and result in costly damage claims... That study, as well as a proposal to examine thyroid cancer rates in Utah, touched off a series of top-level meetings within the old Atomic Energy Commission over how to influence or change the two studies. The document also indicates that the Public Health Service, which conducted the studies, joined the AEC in reassuring the public about any possible danger from fallout.

More than three decades ago, with the publication of her groundbreaking book, Silent Spring, Rachel Carson had cautioned that chemicals are the "sinister partners" of man-made fission products and together they would change the very nature of life in the world. For her efforts, Carson was soundly vilified and condemned as being little more than an hysterical fearmonger by agents of the government and chemical industry.

Today, for example, as a sort of vindication of Carson's warning, breast cancer mortality rates are 40% higher in New York metropolitan counties than in Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. Despite the fact that these southern states suffer from the nation's highest concentrations of petrochemical wastes, during the time of the study they did not have any operating nuclear reactors. On the other hand, Westchester and Long Island, which are in New York, have reported the nation's highest levels of per capita exposure to nuclear emissions which originate from the Indian Point, Millstone and Brookhaven nuclear reactors.

Suffolk County, which is home to the Brookhaven reactor, has one of the nation's highest rates of breast cancer mortality at 32.4 deaths per 100,000 women, as compared to the overall U.S. rate of 24.6. Equally significant is the fact that since 1950 this county has shown a rate of increase that is 40 times the corresponding rate of increase for breast cancer mortality for the nation as a whole: i.e., a 40% increase as compared to a 1% increase.

The Great Lakes region of the country is another area that has suffered the effects of long-term contamination from the "sinister partners" of radiation emissions and industrial chemicals. Since the turn of the century, industries have used the vast expanse of water in the lakes as dumping area for their wastes. Added to this are the radioactive effluents from the three dozen U.S. and Canadian civilian nuclear power reactors that have been discharged into the lakes since the 1970's.

Certainly one would think that vital information such as this that appears throughout The Enemy Within, would be a sufficient cause for concern that might even generate a news report or two. But alas, informing the working class about the important events that significantly affect their day-to-day lives does not even appear on the top 10 list of "things that corporate media do." Instead, once again, the "free press" and government agencies have exposed themselves as being the lackeys of industry that they have always been. On innumerable occasions they have been given the opportunity to prove their allegiance to the ruling class -- and they have not disappointed.

A case in point is their abysmal reporting on the environmental causes of disease such as pesticides, industrial wastes, air pollution and radiation. Their mandate is obviously, on the one hand, to minimize the environmental (i.e., industrial) origins of illness, while on the other to emphasize one's personal responsibility, up to and including one's genetic inheritance. Over the past few years the media have been conducting a big campaign, hyping the medical establishment's search for the latest gene that will explain, if not explain away, why people have heart disease or breast cancer, or whatever it is that ails them. Of course, some people will undoubtedly be shown to have a genetically determined susceptibility to this or that disease. Again, the point here is one of emphasis, because even if this proves to be the case, the condition or health of the environment will almost certainly play an important role in determining how or even if this gene will be expressed.

As an example of this unbalanced reporting, a November 1996 "newscast" on KCAL/Channel 9 in Los Angeles strongly emphasized the point that what is most determinative for a person's state of health is their personal life style choices, while at the same time completely downplaying (i.e., covering up) the potential impact that various recognized environmental insults, including pesticides and radiation, can have on a person's health. The essence of their message was that the public's anxiety about the environmental causes of cancer is way out of proportion to the actual risks. They ended their report by stressing that the health benefits gained by eating lots of fruits and vegetables far outweighs any concern about possible pesticide residues. This is the kind of message that must be, not coincidentally, sweet music to the ears of the agri-capitalists and their friends in the pesticide industry.

In these latter days of largely unregulated capitalist industrial development, it is not in the least surprising that the chickens are coming home to roost. Given that poisoning the environment and forcing working people to endure all kinds of unnecessary risks has always been a strong suit of the ruling class, this should come as no surprise whatsoever. In fact, almost daily, though I am not so sure about the word "almost," one scandal or another, environmental or otherwise, is uncovered that reveals the utter contempt and disregard that this system has show for any real human values.

The following are but a few examples that represent merely the tip of the iceberg:

* In 1932, the U.S. Public Health Service initiated a study of third stage syphilis using 400 poor Black men in Tuskegee, Alabama, never telling them of their illness and denying them treatment, allowing many of them to fester and suffer agonizing pain and even death.

* In 1945, the managers at the Hanford Nuclear Processing Complex in Richland, Washington, released 5050 curies of radioactive iodine into the air in their haste to provide the necessary plutonium for the first atom bombs. Documents obtained under the Freedom Of Information Act revealed that between 1944-1956, a whopping 530,000 curies of radioactive iodine were released into the air by the facility. 27,000 plaintiffs have filed suit against the facility after the Department of Energy acknowledged in 1991, that many thyroid cancers in the area resulted from the large releases of radioactive iodine.

* Between 1946-1958, U.S. exploded 66 nuclear bombs in the Marshall Islands, vaporizing entire islands and exposing indigenous people and U.S. service personnel to radiation to use them as guinea pigs.

* In 1948, Kerr-McGee (of Karen Silkwood infamy) became the first company to begin uranium mining on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. Attracted to this region by cheap labor and lax health and safety regulations, Kerr-McGee sent the Navajo workers into the mine without protective masks to breathe the dust-laden air. As late as 1966, three years prior to shutting down its mine, ventilation systems had not been installed. Since no provisions had been made for drinking water, the miners were allowed to drink from the puddles of "hot" water that accumulated on the mine floor. Within only a few years after the mine closure, nearly 20% of the miners had died of lung cancer, with many more either dead or dying from dust poisoning or pulmonary fibrosis.

* In 1979, Three Mile Island nuclear reactor near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, malfunctioned with the resultant release of a large quantity of radioactive iodine and other fission gases. The incident made the national headlines just long enough to allow for sufficient damage control -- then it was buried. What has remained largely unreported are the numerous lawsuits brought against the owner-operator of the facility. 300 cases have been privately settled, while a class action suit involving 2,500 plaintiffs is still pending. At the heart of these suits are the numerous claims of radiation-induced illnesses and disorders suffered by residents living near the stricken reactor. These health effects have included: still births, low birthweight, birth defects, spontaneous abortions, sterility, cancers, leukemia, bizarre sores that won't heal and a host of other illness that have affected adults, children, farm animals and the foliage around them.

* In 1989-1990 Los Angeles County and many other areas in the state were repeatedly bombarded by an armada of helicopters spraying the toxic pesticide, malathion to "save" California's agri-business from the Mediterranean fruit fly. Even Dr. Shirley Fannin, head of L.A. County Department of Health, joined in the chorus to give her stamp of approval for the use of this derivative of an immune and nervous system poison developed for chemical warfare by Nazi Germany during WWII. "Make sure you cover your cars, 'cause this stuff will eat the paint right off, but don't worry about possible health effects," the people were reassuringly told.

* In 1996 it was revealed that beginning in 1989, and without obtaining informed consent, 1,500 poor Black and Latino babies in Los Angeles were subjected to an experimental measles vaccine. The program had been initiated in Haiti, Mexico, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau in 1987. In Haiti and elsewhere the vaccine has been linked to the deaths and other serious medical problems amongst some of the children.

* The latest unresolved scandal involves the shameful, cold-hearted treatment of U.S., armed forces personnel who "served their country," i.e., the interests of U.S. Imperialism, in the Persian Gulf. Reminiscent of the vicious chemical warfare employed by the U.S. against the Vietnamese people, in which many U.S. troops were also "inadvertently" doused, many of the personnel returning from the Gulf have complained of experiencing numerous medical problems, some of them life threatening. Collectively these ailments have come to be known as Gulf War Syndrome (GWS). Many of those suffering are convinced that the disorders are a result of their exposure to toxic chemicals, including the experimental vaccinations they were forced to submit to. The Pentagon has tried to sweep this under the carpet by claiming that the complaints are simply due to "post traumatic stress." Whatever proves ultimately to be the source of GWS, the veterans, who thought they were doing the right thing by heeding Uncle Sam's call, and that they in turn would be taken care of in time of need, have had to swallow a very bitter reality pill. Namely, that old man Sam is anything but a benevolent uncle, in fact he's a rotten SOB.

The aforementioned crimes against humanity, and that is what they are, were carried out in spite of, what is at best, a rhetorical U.S. commitment to numerous lofty but worthless bourgeois covenants, such as the Nuremberg Principles, the Geneva Conventions, the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the U.N. Charter, and yes, even the Constitution. Any society that has sunk so low into the depths of barbarism that it would knowingly, with malice and forethought, jeopardize all life on the planet, has unmistakably forfeited any claim to legitimacy or right of existence.

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