

# URGENT TASKS

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Leninism and the Black national question

Angola, Zaire and Eritrea

White and male supremacy

"Unequal exchange"

The Soviet Union: continuing debate

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... not to serve the working class at each of its stages, but to represent the interests of the movement as a whole, to point out to this movement its ultimate aim and its political tasks, and to safeguard its political and ideological independence.

V.I. Lenin, *The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement*

From the Editors

Theses on the National Question and White Supremacy were adopted by the STO General Membership Meeting, May 15, 1977. The theoretical and practical importance of the Black national question in the U.S. is explored in Jasper Collins' reply to the Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee. Because the white left's understanding of the national question

(continued inside back cover)

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# theses on white supremacy and the national question

1. Nationalism is a crucial phenomenon in the world today. Rather than tending to dissolve into the general class struggle, as many Marxists have predicted it would do, it has gained in importance.

2. The theory of the national question current in the U.S. left is replete with inadequate, irrelevant and erroneous positions: the significance of nationalism among workers of oppressed nations is grossly underestimated when it is recognized at all; pursuit of economic self-interest is presented as the path to proletarian solidarity when in the case of white workers it is an imposing obstacle to such solidarity; the revolutionary potential of national liberation struggles, both in stimulating and transforming the class struggle and as direct challenges to capitalism, is consistently underestimated. The classical theory of Lenin and Stalin is stretched in application in order to deny the national character of the struggles of oppressed peoples within the U.S., while the most relevant aspects of their theory are ignored — particularly in their consequences for the role of workers and communists in oppressor nations.

3. Nationalism has two contradictory faces; it is both revolution and counter-revolution. On the one hand, nationalism among some workers is a deviation from proletarian internationalism. Counter-revolutionary nationalism exists among workers of oppressor nations in the routine acceptance or active promotion of the interests of "their" imperialism against the peoples it oppresses. Nationalism among workers of oppressor nations takes a variety of forms, but in the U.S. it must be placed in the context of white supremacy, an institution with deep roots in the pre-imperialist development of U.S. capitalism.

4. On the other hand, nationalism of oppressed peoples, manifested in revolutionary anti-imperialist struggles for national liberation, is the most widespread and visible example of "applied internationalism" in the world today. What is called "narrow nationalism" by sections of the U.S. left, insofar as it exists at all, consists merely of limitations in outlook and understanding within liberation struggles which can and will be dealt with by the most advanced components of those struggles.

5. White supremacy — the general oppression of people of color by whites — is the main pillar of bourgeois rule in the U.S. Beyond its overt manifestations among white workers, it deeply influences how capitalist culture

in general — male supremacy, individualism, reformism, etc. — infects the working class. White supremacist thinking and behavior is based on a system of white-skin privileges: the granting to white people throughout society of conditions of employment, housing, health, education, etc. superior to those available to people of color. The spontaneous struggle for equality, then, is a struggle against white supremacy.

While white supremacy is based on real privileges and has generated a pervasive tendency for white workers to identify themselves primarily as part of a group defined by skin color, it does not eliminate the class contradiction and class struggle. White privileges are not in the interests of white workers struggling to take their place as part of the revolutionary class, which regards victories in the reform movement as a by-product of revolutionary struggle. The task is to make this reality outweigh the reality of privilege. Unless this task is undertaken and a substantial number of white workers are won to a position of class solidarity, a successful challenge to capitalist power in the U.S. as a whole is extremely unlikely. The fight for equality is so central to the development of revolutionary class consciousness that it must never be subordinated to any considerations of unity in the reform struggle.

6. As U.S. capitalism evolved into the main center of world imperialism, white supremacy shaped, reinforced, and merged with oppressor nation nationalism. This process does not eliminate but accentuates the necessity for a concrete understanding of the historically specific character of white supremacy in the U.S. For example, although people of color in the U.S. have a higher "standard of living" than other Third World people elsewhere, due to the pre-eminent position of U.S. imperialism, this has minimal impact on their political consciousness because it is so minor compared to the disadvantages they incur from being non-white in a country based on white power.

The same observation applies, in reverse, to white workers. There can be no doubt that their political backwardness is determined to a much greater degree by white supremacy than by any great nation chauvinism apart from it. These points are not doctrinal hairsplitting. Their practical significance lies in refuting the view that a decline in the fortunes of U.S. imperialism on a world scale would lead to a decline in the significance and magnitude of white privileges — although it is axiomatic that it would reduce the advantages enjoyed, to one degree or another, by all U.S. workers. In fact, since white supremacy serves the function of suppressing and diverting class struggle, it will become even more central to the maintenance of bourgeois rule if economic options open to the ruling class are curtailed by a decline in U.S. imperialist strength.

7. It is essential to provide material support for anti-imperialist movements for national liberation, which are the main component of the revolutionary process in this period. They constitute a much more potent force for proletarian revolution than any aspect of the traditionally conceived class struggle. Just as white supremacy (the main element in oppressor nation nationalism) is the main bulwark of capitalist social domination, so the internal national liberation movements are the most advanced outposts of revolution, the main challenge to capitalist social domination. This is so for two separate reasons:

a. White supremacy institutionalizes the "competition between the laborers" on which, as Marx and Engels noted in the *Communist Manifesto*, "wage-labor rests exclusively." The struggle for equality within the working class, which is the main antidote to capitalist hegemony and the main issue around which genuine proletarian solidarity must be built and tested, is obviously led by the oppressed peoples. In addition, the spontaneous and conscious identification with the world-wide struggles against imperialism by the oppressed peoples in the U.S. raises the level of militancy and reduces the appeal of social democratic palliatives for workers among the oppressed peoples, thus augmenting their capacity to provide leadership for the entire working class.

b. The revolutionary potential of the movements for national liberation within the U.S. is due to more than the ability of the workers of oppressed nations to generate revolutionary currents in the class struggle as a whole. It also follows from the capacity of the internal national liberation struggles to strike major blows against the power of capital. This, of course, is true only to the extent that their struggles are aimed not only at equality and democratic rights, but are also struggles for full national liberation: that is, for the right of self-determination in the classical sense, the right to constitute a separate and independent state.

Oppressed nations have the right to set up an independent state on a definite territory. This basic right of self-determination cannot be separated from or posed against the right of oppressed nations and peoples to determine the form and content of their struggles for more limited objectives, struggles which we also support unconditionally.



The fact that many of the movements for national liberation in today's world regard themselves as socialist is of great positive significance, but there must be no mistaking our position: we support them whether or not this is the case.

8. Black people in the U.S., wherever they live and work, constitute part of an oppressed nation. The fact that they do not fulfill Stalin's familiar criteria of nationhood demonstrates only that the criteria are inadequate. Nationhood evolved out of centuries of common oppression and struggle, struggle that was systematically resisted by the U.S. ruling class and ignored (at best) by the bulk of the white working people.

While our recognition of the fact of Black nationhood in the U.S. does not depend on the existence of a clear population majority on an economically viable territory, the actual existence of such a phenomenon is of crucial significance in the struggle for land and sovereignty over a definite territory. Without the potential for such a struggle, the concept of self-determination loses much of its content. Our understanding of the history and actual conditions of the "Black Belt" South convinces us that it provides this potential. We share this recognition with major sections of conscious revolutionary Black nationalism.

9. There can be no doubt that Puerto Rico is an oppressed nation or that Puerto Ricans living in this country will play a crucial role in the liberation struggle of their homeland. We are aware of the debates among Puerto Rican revolutionaries over the proper attitude toward Puerto Ricans living in the fifty states. For our part, we oppose both the tendency to subordinate the struggles of Puerto Ricans in the continental U.S. to the general class struggle here, and the view that their only role is to support the struggles on the island. We call unequivocally for the independence of Puerto Rico, because the history of struggle and cultural development there have determined that the right of self-determination for that people must involve the separation of the island from the U.S.

10. We believe that the Mexican/Chicano people living in the U.S. constitute a nation. Whether the appropriate exercise of their right of self-determination is linkage with Mexico or establishment of an independent state in the current Southwest is a question that will be decided by the struggle of the people themselves.

11. While we do not believe that Native Americans at this time constitute a single nation, and while we recognize that efforts toward nation building on their part may give rise to certain conflicts over territory with the Black and Mexican/Chicano nations in the South and Southwest which will require further judgment, we nevertheless support the drive toward self-determination and territorial sovereignty of the Native American peoples, and expect that any potential conflicts will be resolved on the basis of internationalist solidarity in the struggle against U.S. imperialism.

12. We recognize the national minority status of the various Asian peoples within the continental U.S. and call for the granting to them of various forms of local control and cultural-educational autonomy in accordance with their demands, as well as the ending of all discrimination against them. We believe that in Hawaii the fact that Asian peoples together constitute a majority of the population raises real questions about the future relation of the Islands to the U.S.

13. We condemn the discrimination against the growing Arab-American minority, and point out that the malicious caricature of these people purveyed by the public media constitutes the most dangerous form of anti-semitism in the U.S. today.

14. We support the struggle of the Panamanian people to recover the Canal Zone. We call for the renunciation of all U.S. rights over the Virgin Islands, Guam, Samoa and all other U.S.-ruled lands in the Pacific: Trust Territory (Micronesia, including the Marshalls, Marianas, and Carolines) and all islands of disputed sovereignty.

15. The primary task of communists working among oppressed peoples is to assist in the development of the national liberation struggle; that is the most effective way for them to contribute to the class struggle and proletarian revolution. For communists working in the oppressor nation, Lenin provided adequate guidelines: wage an uncompromising struggle against any type of "great nation privilege" whatsoever, and provide concrete and effective support to the actual movements for self-determination directed against "their" imperialism.

It is highly important to put forward in precise terms the slogan of the *political self-determination* of all nationalities, in contrast to all hedging (such as *only* "equality").

V. I. Lenin, *Concerning Certain Speeches by Workers' Deputies*, 1912.  
[18:417\* Lenin's emphasis]

We want to end the oppression of national minorities and women and make equality a reality. . . .

Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee (1975)

Black people today . . . do not retain, nor do they need, the right to self-determination.

Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee (1976)

# Who's being dogmatic?

a response to the Philadelphia Workers'  
Organizing Committee on the national question

By Jasper Collins

## I

When V. I. Lenin wrote, in January 1917, that Negroes in the United States "should be classed as an oppressed nation" [23:275], he did not apply the criteria of nationhood set forth in J. V. Stalin's famous definition: "*A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture.*" [2:307 Stalin's emphasis]

Stalin's definition, written in 1913 in *Marxism and the National Question* [2:300-381] and warmly

embraced by Lenin at that time [19:539], was a rigid, dogmatic one: "it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation." [2:307] Lenin was not measuring Afro-Americans by this dogma in 1917. Instead he wrote, "They should be classed as an oppressed nation, for the equality won in the Civil War of 1861-65 and guaranteed by the Constitution of the republic was in many respects increasingly curtailed in the chief Negro areas (the South) in connection with the transition from the progressive, pre-monopoly capitalism of 1860-70 to the reactionary, monopoly capitalism (imperial-

ism) of the new era, which in America was especially sharply etched out by the Spanish-American imperialist war of 1898 (i.e., a war between two robbers over a division of the booty)." [23:275-276]

The white population, he added, despite widely varied origins, "smoothed out to form a single

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\*Citations in this article are to the 45-volume English edition of Lenin's *Collected Works* and the 13-volume English edition of Stalin's *Works* published in Moscow. The volume number precedes the colon and the page number(s) follow it.

'American' nation." [23:276] Lenin never finished this pamphlet, *Statistics and Sociology* [23:271-277], but it is clear from his outline for it [41:387-390] that he intended it to be a complete restatement of his position on the national question, reviewing the development of Marxist theory and debate, but casting it in the light of the new understanding of imperialism.

In 1915 he had written that "imperialism means that capital has outgrown the framework of national states; it means that national oppression has been extended and heightened on a new historical foundation." [21:408] He had argued for a sharper understanding of the national question in a number of letters, polemical articles, theses, and speeches from 1915 on [e.g., 35:240-241, 242-245, 246-247, 248-249, 250-255, 264-265, 266-269, 272-274 (letters); 21:407-414; 23:13-21, 22-27, 28-76 (articles); 22:143-156 (theses); 39:735-742; 41:426-427 (speeches)], but *Statistics and Sociology* was to be his popular exposition on the subject. It was cut short by the first wave of the revolution in 1917 and, like *State and Revolution* [25:381-492], was never completed.

During this period Stalin was either unaware of Lenin's new understanding or else he rejected it. Lecturing in April 1917 he said, "the closer the old landed aristocracy is to power, as was the case in old tsarist Russia, the more severe is the [national] oppression and the more monstrous are its forms." [3:53]

Though Stalin saw that imperialism also oppressed nations, he did not understand the essential connection between imperialism and national oppression, nor the qualitative increase in the latter. A month earlier he had written in *Pravda* that in "North America, where landlordism has never existed and the bourgeoisie enjoys undivided power, the nationalities develop more or less freely, and, generally

speaking, there is practically no soil for national oppression." [3:18]

Clearly Stalin was clinging to the rigid terms of his 1913 pamphlet. Since Lenin had described "the specific political features of imperialism" as "reaction everywhere and increased national oppression" [22:287] in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) [22:185-304], which Stalin must have read, it is quite likely that Stalin knowingly disagreed with Lenin on this point.

Lenin continued to press for his view that Negroes in the United States were an oppressed nation. In submitting his *Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* for the Second Congress of the Communist International, he specifically sought elaboration regarding this and several other specific instances of national oppression which he deemed "very

complex." [31:144] The draft theses explicitly required "that all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies." [31:148] It is especially ironic, then, that in 1928 and 1930, when Stalin and the Comintern finally addressed the Negro Question in the United States with the comprehensive consideration that Lenin had urged, it was done largely within the context of the 1913 theory that Lenin had transcended.

(The resolutions themselves do not contain the rigid language of the old Stalin pamphlet, but neither do they reflect Lenin's advanced understanding of the national question during the imperialist epoch. The 1928 resolution was so ambiguous that it gave rise to a number of



Members of the Altai minority as they lived under the tsars. Stalin's early theoretical work was not mainly concerned with peoples like this, but with the national question in Europe.





Petrograd, 1917: revolutionaries make bonfires of tsarist insignia. The imperialist war brought to the forefront the liberation of the colonies.

conflicting lines within the U.S. Communist Party. The 1930 resolution was an attempt to clarify the line and firmly express the view that "the Negro question in the United States must be viewed from the standpoint of its peculiarity, namely, as the question of an *oppressed nation*," and that in the South "the main Communist slogan must be: *The Right of Self-Determination of the Negroes in the Black Belt*." ["Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States," *The Communist*, February 1931, pages 153-154, emphasis in original] The debate on implementation revealed clearly the extent to which the Communists relied on the early Stalin understanding. [See, for example: Harry Haywood, "Against Bourgeois-Liberal Distortions of Leninism on the Negro Question in the United States,"

*The Communist*, August 1930, pages 694-712, especially page 706]

## II

"Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852.

Had Marx lived to witness the twentieth century, he might have added that third, fourth, and fifth reruns become increasingly farcical, particularly within the movement that bears his name. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the debate over the Black National Question in the United States. That debate has erupted again and again in

the U.S. communist movement — in 1946-1948; in 1956-1958; and, most recently, revived in the late sixties and continuing to the present.

Certain aspects of the debate predictably recur: The most persistent is the argument about whether Black people in the U.S. fit the 1913 definition of a nation. Black migration is examined in microscopic detail, and the outline of Afro-American history is retold. Rarely has the presence or absence of a nationalist movement among Blacks been central to the debate; in fact, paradoxically, those who argue most vigorously that a Black nation exists within the U.S. are usually the ones who are most hostile to existing nationalist movements. Never does the *development* of Leninist theory on the national question enter the debate; instead, every article is sprinkled with quotes from Lenin and Stalin without regard to their place in the unfolding of the theory — therefore generally presuming their validity as gospel, and thereby erecting a stout barrier to the method of Marx and Lenin.\*\*

The practice of every revolutionary group is sometimes better, sometimes worse, than its theory. The experience of predominantly white left groups in the United States shows that more often than not they have failed to measure up

\*\*This is not to say that all the writings produced in these debates are useless. Some are not, though one cannot read many of them without experiencing chronic *deja vu*, the redundancies are so numerous. More helpful, though, are two works that do not directly address the Black National Question. Horace B. Davis' book, *Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917* (1967) is best in its treatment of the early years. Moshe Lewin's book, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (1968) is helpful historically, particularly to show the

importance of national self-determination to Lenin, and his practical differences with Stalin. Unfortunately, Lewin tends to project a Trotskyist analysis: Stalin's errors were due to his alleged or implied intellectual mediocrity, rather than to an erroneous theory from which flowed a disastrous, chauvinistic practice.

Trotskyists, on the other hand, have paid more attention to the importance of subjective factors: See, for example, *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination* (1967), and the many

Trotskyist writings that rely heavily on the works of Malcolm X. Unfortunately, they tend to obscure the meaning of self-determination and the struggle for independence by applying these terms loosely to any demand for Black community control and to any all-Black political formations.

A recent article that is faithful to the method of Marx and Lenin as far as it goes is "Are Puerto Ricans a National Minority?" by James Blaut, in *Monthly Review*, May 1977.

to the challenge of Black liberation. Acceptance or denial of Black nationhood within the confines of the traditional debate doesn't seem to have much effect: those groups that adhere to the Black-Belt Nation theory have often used it as an excuse to refrain from an all-out attack on white chauvinism and oppressor-nation privilege; conversely, those who reject the Black nation tend to ignore or oppose independent revolutionary initiatives by Black people. In this respect, the two poles of the usual debate are intimately bound by links of chauvinism.

Since the test of any left group has to be its practice, a critique of its theoretical product will only crudely approximate the judgment that will ultimately be called for. That limitation should be borne in mind as the following argument is weighed by the reader. On the other hand, a test of the theoretical base of a political line is the only valid way either to predict or to generalize a particular political approach.

Within the framework outlined above, there can be only one excuse for attaching importance to a particular theory of Black liberation advanced by one current within today's left sufficient to justify a thorough critique — the estimate of the strength of the political current, rather than the particular presentation of the line. After all, there are a wide variety of groups, sects, and parties of the so-called "new communist movement," or "anti-revisionist left," or revisionism, or social-democracy, or Trotskyism. But among those who can make a passable claim to being revolutionary, only one political current — the one that calls itself "anti-dogmatist" — appears to be growing in influence. Others whose fortunes looked good just a few short years ago have fallen into decline.

The political center of the "anti-dogmatist" tendency is the *Guardian* newspaper and its more or less loyal periphery, including such

groups as the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Organization (DMLO), the Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee (PWOC), and others. Within this broad trend, PWOC's writings — both theoretical and agitational — present the most comprehensive analysis and explanation of Black liberation. For that reason alone, this essay appears justified.

### III

PWOC argues that Black people do not constitute a nation anywhere within the present boundaries of the U.S., because the Black nation that once existed — based on "a large Black peasantry" with the plantation economy as "the central unifying force in the national development of the Afro-American people" — has undergone an irreversible transformation due to geographic dispersal and a striking change in class composition. Because of these developments, says PWOC, Black

people are not entitled to self-determination; the most they may legitimately strive for is "equality" as a permanent minority within the U.S.; movements for independence are reactionary, and must be opposed.

As explained above, these arguments are familiar, and break little new ground. Another characteristic is similar to so much of the left's shameful past: the theoretical argument is a collection of citations from Lenin, Stalin, and the Comintern — often out of context — in order to justify a previously held position. PWOC's popular pamphlet, *Racism and the Workers' Movement*,\*\*\* appeared about a year before the theoretical exposition, *Black Liberation Today: Against Dogmatism on the National Question*.\*\*\*\* The most striking disappointment, however, is the extent to which the argument "a-

\*\*\*Cited as RWM.

\*\*\*\*Cited as BLT.



Some self-styled Marxist-Leninists refer to the race problem as a "contradiction among the people." Is this what they have in mind?





National oppression. Is this Africa or the United States?

gainst dogmatism" rests on the most rigid, doctrinaire — yes, dogmatic — adherence to Stalin's 1913 pamphlet, on the one hand, while quoting Lenin both before and after he developed the theory of imperialism — as though his ideas underwent no change — on the other.

To some extent PWOC's presentation along these lines flies in the face of some of its own theoretical understanding. The part of the first chapter of its pamphlet explaining the development of nations under feudalism is strictly doctrinaire Stalin, beginning with his definition of a nation and continuing through the traditional view that national persecution diverts attention from class struggle, bolstered with more Stalin. [BLT, pages 7-9] After reviewing the debates on the national question within the early Marxist movement, PWOC arrives at the present historical epoch, and says, quite correctly, "with the rise of Imperialism, the character of the national question is profoundly altered." [BLT, page 13] But the only text cited in this section is a quote from Lenin's writing in 1913, before he had developed his understanding of imperialism.

Finally, the first chapter concludes with a section on the historic tendency of capitalism to assimilate nations — an aspect, says PWOC, of

"the more advanced capitalist states." [BLT, page 14] Again the assertions are studded with quotes from 1913 gospel. This argument is the essential theoretical underpinning of PWOC's theory: "As capitalism matures and extends its market into wider spheres, it tends to break down national barriers and obliterate national distinctions." [BLT, page 14] "Lenin, in noting this feature of the national question, that is, the tendency of capitalism to assimilate nations, some sixty years ago spoke of 'a tendency which manifests itself more and more powerfully with every passing decade, and is one of the greatest driving forces transforming capitalism into socialism.'" [BLT, page 45] A longer version of this same Lenin quote is used in PWOC's summary argument. [BLT, page 49]

It cannot be stated too often that this is a view which was central to Lenin's understanding of the national question in his early years, but which was replaced by more significant insights after 1915: Imperialism "means that national oppression has been extended and heightened on a new historical foundation." [21:408] "Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers." [21:409] The Party must

focus on the "division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the *essence* of imperialism." [21:409 Lenin's emphasis] "The imperialism of our days has led to a situation in which the Great-Power oppression of nations has become general." [21:410] He refers to "Increased national oppression under imperialism." [22:146] "Imperialism is oppression of nations on a *new* historical basis." [39:736 Lenin's emphasis] It is this aspect of nationhood, not the tendency toward assimilation, which is "profoundly altered" under imperialism.

#### IV

Even within the framework of their chosen doctrine, the anti-dogmatists commit serious theoretical blunders. For example, they write, "The Marxist attitude toward the national movement and toward the question of self determination is not absolute and unconditional, so Marxists also only support those national movements which advance the general interests of democracy and the proletariat." [BLT, page 11] If this were so, it would be dif-



Gordon, a Mississippi slave, freed himself and fought to free his people. On his first escape attempt he was caught by patrolers, flogged, and returned to his master. The next time he ran, he successfully escaped to Union Army lines, where this picture was taken, and became a soldier.

difficult to account for the unconditional support extended by Marxists to Haile Selassie's Ethiopia when Mussolini's army invaded in 1935.

PWOC attributes to Lenin the view that "the aim of [national] independence was unobtainable short of a general revolutionary crisis." [BLT, page 12] Even in the writings on which PWOC relies so heavily, Lenin clearly rejected this view. He repeatedly referred to the secession of Norway from Sweden — by referendum — as an example of the practicality of self-determination:

the Norwegian parliament resolved that the Swedish king was no longer king of Norway, and in the referendum held later among the Norwegian people, the overwhelming majority (about 200,000 as against a few hundred) voted for complete separation from Sweden. After a short period of indecision, the Swedes resigned themselves to the fact of secession.

This example shows us on what grounds cases of the secession of nations are practicable, and actually occur, under modern economic and political relationships, and the form secession sometimes assumes under conditions of political freedom and democracy.

No Social-Democrat will deny — unless he would profess indifference to questions of political freedom and democracy (in which case he is naturally no longer a Social-Democrat) — that this example *virtually* proves that it is the *bounden duty* of class-conscious workers to conduct systematic propaganda and prepare the ground for the settlement of conflicts that may arise over the secession of nations, not in the 'Russian way', but *only in the way* they were settled in 1905 between Nor-

way and Sweden. This is exactly what is meant by the demand in the programme for the recognition of the right of nations to self-determination."

[20:427 Lenin's emphasis]

Though PWOC attempts to exonerate oppressor-nation workers from their share of the responsibility for national oppression, placing the entire blame on the bourgeoisie of the oppressor nation [BLT, page 9], Lenin did not concur in this either: "No one people has oppressed the Poles more than the Russian people, who served in the hands of the tsars as the executioner of Polish freedom." [24:297] He writes of "we Great Russians, who have been oppressing more nations than any other people." [24:298] When he wrote that "300-400 million out of 1,600 [million] are oppressors" [39:736], he was counting more than just a handful of imperialist bourgeoisie.

Finally, PWOC places great stress on the struggle against Black "bourgeois nationalism." [BLT, page 51] In discussing "the strategic task of Communists within the Black Liberation movement" they state that "much of the content of this work must necessarily consist of ideological struggle against the narrow na-

tionalism and reformism characteristic of the Black petty bourgeoisie." [BLT, page 53] Our disagreements with PWOC's characterization of contemporary Black nationalism will be dealt with below; here the contrast with Lenin's approach is important: "Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, *in favour*, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression." [20:411-412] "The bourgeois nationalism of *any* oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed *against* oppression, and it is this content that we *unconditionally* support." [20:412] [Lenin's emphasis]

These examples are not a complete catalog of PWOC's collision with Leninism on theoretical grounds, but they embrace the important points. There is a touch of irony in the fact that the Lenin and Stalin texts relied on by PWOC, and PWOC's interpretation of them, are similar to those offered by the groups from whom PWOC is striving so hard to differentiate.

We have attempted to demonstrate two essentials of Leninism on the national question: that Lenin



Does PWOC consider this "narrow nationalism"?

had a program which he advanced during his entire political career based on a single principle — the right of nations to self-determination; and that Lenin's understanding of national oppression and the importance of national liberation deepened as his theory of imperialism developed.

Was Lenin dogmatic? The answer must be both yes and no. No, if the questioner means a rigid commitment to a political line that is super-historical, that does not flow from concrete historical experience and change in accordance with the requirements of a new historical epoch. Yes, if the question refers to the rigid and unbending commitment to revolutionary principle:

It is therefore quite natural for Social-Democracy, as the party of the revolutionary proletariat, to be so concerned for its *programme*, to take such pains to establish well in advance its ultimate aim, the complete emancipation of the working people, and jealously to guard this aim against any attempts to whittle it down. For the same reasons Social-Democracy is so dogmatically strict and firmly doctrinaire in keeping its ultimate goal clear of all minor, immediate economic and political aims. He who goes *all out*, who fights for complete victory, must alert himself to the danger of having his hands tied by minor gains, of being led astray and made to forget that which is still comparatively remote, but without which all minor gains are hollow vanities. Such concern for the programme and the ever critical attitude towards small and gradual improvements are incomprehensible and foreign to a party of the bourgeoisie, however great its love for freedom and the people may be. [8:427]

This was the commitment of Lenin's life. Once he understood the modern era as the epoch of imperi-



For white workers, racism is more than a mistaken idea.

alism, the liberation of oppressed peoples became for him a central aspect of the emancipation of the working people.

## V

Besides the requisite list of quotes from Lenin, Stalin, and the Comintern, a nutshell history of Black people in the U.S. is obligatory in any self-respecting communist polemic on the national question. Again PWOC follows the tradition, cribbing as many errors as truths from its ideological forebears. There is not room here to refute in detail the history and analysis offered by PWOC; but the main points of difference will be shown. Readers who want to explore these matters in greater detail should read two pamphlets available from Sojourner Truth Organization: *Marx on American Slavery* by Ken Lawrence, and *White Supremacy: a collection*.

For an organization that has spent so much time concerned about racism, it is surprising that PWOC does not ever attempt to explain the origin of slavery or of white supremacy. For some unexplained reason, Africans were enslaved while Europeans were not. After that, "The ideas of white supremacy and black inferiority developed gradually to give moral and political sanction to the slave sys-

tem and the degradation of the Black people." [RWM, page 6] This is an astonishingly barren place to begin, considering that an understanding of the origin of white supremacy ought to shed important light on the practicality of various approaches to ending it. But PWOC is not deterred. (Part of the difficulty with PWOC's line is its overall imprecision, of which this is merely an example. One that is more glaring is the use of "racism" in a wide variety of contexts without carefully differentiating its meaning. At times, the term is intended to mean simply the ideology of white chauvinism [white racial superiority]; at other times, it is used to mean white supremacy [material privileges granted to those with white skin and denied to people of color]. these are important distinctions, because the former can, on occasion, be overcome through education, debate, or exhortation, while the latter can only be uprooted through victory in a conscious struggle that alters relations of power. Though these are necessarily intertwined, and one can lead to the other, they are not the same thing.)

PWOC definitely learned a few things — a very few — between the time its popular pamphlet appeared and the publication later on of its theoretical argument. In the former, although "Black People have waged a stubborn and heroic struggle against their oppression from the time the first slave ship docked in the New World" [RWM, page 23], not a single Black struggle against slavery merited mention. (Perhaps this is because "separatist" and "terrorist" paths are, to PWOC, "politically self defeating." [RWM, page 23])

Thus, "the class conflicts that led to the Civil War" did not include the slaves, according to PWOC's first attempt. Instead, the planters were opposed by the Northern capitalists, free workers, and farmers. [RWM, page 6] This scenario is reiterated in the later tract, but three sentences are added about



slave struggles: "The Black people themselves had never been passive observers of the struggle between other forces over the questions of slavery and freedom. Throughout the period of slavery the Black people had resisted their oppression by means of armed insurrection. Ex-slaves like Frederick Douglass had played leading roles in the abolition movement and the Black freedmen, though not numerous and subject to harsh political restrictions, had sought to organize to further the cause of Black freedom." Mention is made of freed slaves in the Union Army. [BLT, page 20] But PWOC claims these struggles were relatively insignificant, because "it is only with the Civil War and Emancipation that the Black People for the first time gain the requisites for forming a mass movement." [BLT, page 20]

As history this is a disaster. Nowhere were Black people important in PWOC's view. The planters, whom Marx viewed as capitalists, and slavery, which Marx considered "the pivot of bourgeois industry," are, for PWOC, enemies of capital, and feudalism, respectively. In Marx's view, the U.S. Civil War was a revolution from the standpoint of the slaves and free workers, a war for free soil and free trade from the standpoint of farmers and industrial capitalists, and a war for territorial conquest on the part of the planter-capitalists; in PWOC's view, it was a class struggle between planters and capitalists.

So much scholarship has documented the central role of the slaves in the fight against slavery that it is hard to believe anyone on the left would continue to spout this version of history. Those who have doubts on this score should compare PWOC's account to the writings of C. L. R. James, W. E. B. DuBois, Herbert Aptheker, Lerone Bennett, John Anthony Scott, George Rawick, and Peter Wood, to name only the best and most prominent. Even liberal historians like Kenneth Stampp and John Blas-



In liberated areas of the South, Black people openly celebrated the Emancipation Proclamation; in areas still controlled by Confederate forces, Loyal Leagues were organized to spread the word from plantation to plantation.

singame are more useful than PWOC. (As we shall see later on, however, PWOC's fake history is an important pillar of its strategy for today.)

PWOC's description of Reconstruction is as miserable as its treatment of slavery. Generally speaking, it follows James S. Allen's view in *Reconstruction, Battle for Democracy*: Reconstruction was a struggle for bourgeois democracy which failed when the Northern bourgeoisie betrayed the freedmen in the Hayes-Tilden compromise, which restored power to the planters and reduced the Black people to serfdom; as opposed to W. E. B. DuBois' account in *Black Reconstruction*, that the Black governments in the South were revolutionary dictatorships that failed primarily because white workers did not properly grasp their class interest — instead of fighting for the success of Reconstruction, they generally joined with the capitalists in "an alliance based on white supremacy, thus abandoning the best opportunity offered by the epoch for their own emancipation. [This discussion is elaborated in Noel Ignatin's *Reconstruction: A Study Guide*, which will appear in the next issue of *Urgent Tasks*.] But PWOC adds embellishments to Al-

len's theory that are unique among leftists.

In real history the Reconstruction governments were overthrown by secret, well-financed, armed conspirators commanded by former Confederate generals, identical in every respect to the fascist *coups d'état* in our own century. No mention is made of this; in PWOC's account, the Ku Klux Klan doesn't arrive until after white supremacy has been restored [BLT, page 22], and the role of the Klan as the armed forces of the Democratic Party gets no attention whatsoever.

Finally, PWOC leaves out completely the fights against the imposition of terror, perhaps because those struggles outline sharply the leading and revolutionary role of Black people, whether the goals were proletarian class power or national independence: In Mississippi a Black militia was organized by Charles Caldwell, a state senator and former slave, to suppress the white insurrection. In the Sea Islands, Blacks took up arms to defend the land they had taken over. The greatest post-Civil War strike in U.S. history was started by Black and white railroad workers in Martinsville, West Virginia, in 1877. After the terrorists had won in the South, Black leaders like Benjamin

"Pap" Singleton, Edwin P. McCabe, and Henry Adams led the largest single migration in U.S. history — the Black Exodus from the South to Kansas and Oklahoma in 1879 — revealing to the whole world the mass demand for land and self-government. Instead, PWOC's version follows the standard bourgeois account: the era was characterized by "gross corruption and profiteering." [BLT, page 21]

It is typical throughout the PWOC argument that Black people are never considered workers until the present period — instead, they are viewed as an "ally" of the (implicitly white) working class. [BLT, page 5] Under slavery, the class character of the Black population is never discussed. After emancipation but prior to the Great Migration to the North — the period in which PWOC confers nationhood on them — Black people are serfs, peons, or peasants. [BLT, pages 21, 22, and 27] The very people who, in our view, are the most thoroughly proletarian group in U.S. society,

for PWOC are latecomers to the working class. For a historical rebuttal to this view, refer to the pamphlets mentioned at the beginning of this section; for a political reply, see Noel Ignatin's *White Blindspot*.

PWOC's history teems with additional misrepresentations, but a couple of additional examples will have to suffice: Describing the era of Marcus Garvey's mass following, PWOC refers to "the absence of a strong national movement during this period." [BLT, page 23] While the Communist Party was agitating for a Negro Soviet Republic, PWOC says its struggle "was not centered on the demand for independence but for self determination." [BLT, page 23] This quote reveals the muddleheadedness that is characteristic of the PWOC document. Self-determination is properly defined as independence, secession (hence the *right* of self-determination is the *right* to secede), but PWOC cannot get this straight. In one case it refers to *self-determination* as "the

right of an oppressed nation to secede and form its own state." [BLT, page 10] On another occasion, *the right of self-determination* is "repudiating the imperialist annexations and frontiers." [BLT, page 12] These two examples would be correct if their terms were exchanged, but PWOC obviously doesn't grasp the distinction. One wonders whether they have read even those texts by Lenin and Stalin on which they rely so heavily.

## VI

Another feature common to polemics on the national question based on Stalin's criteria is a demographic argument accompanied by a sheaf of maps and charts; PWOC's is no exception. The purpose of the demographic discussion and the attendant attachments is always to establish whether or not the Black population meets Stalin's requirements of nationhood. PWOC argues that it does not. In addition, however, PWOC has ventured forth with what purports to be a class analysis of the Black population, so that it can attempt to locate its enemies and its friends among Black people. Once again there is not space here for a minute dissection of PWOC's presentation, so again a few samples will have to suffice for this review.

Along with others who have made similar arguments, PWOC seems to believe that unless "a contiguous territory with a Black majority could be constructed on the basis of these [Black majority] counties" [BLT, page 39], a nation does not exist. In actual fact, the Black-Belt nation of the twenties, thirties, and forties, which PWOC does accept as valid, *never* consisted of a contiguous territory with a Black majority.

PWOC attempts to show, by focusing on population percentages, that the decline in the Black population since the fifties has resulted in the dissolution of the Black

(continued on page 49)



Returning soldiers discharged at Little Rock, Arkansas.



# White women and revolutionary strategy

STO answers Prairie Fire:  
male supremacy is not  
equivalent to white supremacy

By Carole Travis

In the first issue of its journal, *Breakthrough*, Prairie Fire Organizing Committee published an article entitled "Women's Oppression and Liberation" which purports to contain an analysis of women's oppression and a strategy for revolution flowing from that analysis. We disagree with both their analysis and their strategy.

First, the authors of the article misunderstand the historical background and dynamic of both the woman question and the national question, confuse the relationship between the two, and incorrectly conclude that the two questions are of equal or similar importance to revolutionary strategy in the U.S. Their second problem is their strategy itself: namely, that women are the sector of the oppressor nation who will play the leading role in supporting the national movements of the oppressed nations.

We have other areas of disagreement but will merely list them for the record at this time: the role of the family in society, the significance of the threat posed by lesbianism and homosexuality to capitalism, and the role of trade unions in a revolutionary strategy.

Before getting to the substantial questions, I want to indicate several problems I had because of PFOC's imprecise and muddled thinking. One problem with the article is its ambiguity on its central point: are women the *actual* or *potential* leading force in the oppressor nation? The general import of the paper is that there is concrete reason to be-

lieve that women have been or are the leading force, yet most of the statements of the position concede that it is a theoretical estimate. So on the one hand we find:

The crisis of U.S. imperialism brought about by the victories of the national liberation struggles and socialism around the world has heightened the contradictions for women within the oppressor nation, opening *new potential* for the development of revolutionary consciousness and movement among white women. (my emphasis, page 39, *Breakthrough*, number One)

As the crisis of imperialism *deepens*, the realities of a male supremacist class society force changes in the lives of white working class women and open up *enormous possibilities* for revolutionary movement among women of the oppressor nation. (my emphasis, page 39)

Seeing white working class women as the *potentially leading force* among white women and the white working class, we must commit ourselves to work and struggle among *white* working class women around anti-imperialist politics. (my emphasis, page 45)

On the other hand, the general import of the historical sections is

that women have always been a leading force:

These different forms of male supremacist exploitation and oppression laid the basis for white women's leading roles in the social movements of the 19th century for abolition, women's rights and labor reform. (page 31)

Different arguments are required to substantiate a theory from those required to establish a fact. PFOC is not clear on which it is doing in this article. In fact, on very close reading it appears that PFOC simply states its theory and then presents a lot of history that does not substantiate it and a little inaccurate history that appears to substantiate it but doesn't. More on this later.

Another problem is that the article is loaded with confusion, imprecision, and sleight of hand, all of which render the ideas more obscure. For example, the last quote cited above says that exploitation in the 19th century U.S. was male supremacist. The Marxist term exploitation refers to the amount of the surplus value extracted from the worker over the wages paid to him or her; it expresses a class relationship. If PFOC wants to say something different about exploitation generally or specifically in regard to the 19th century U.S., they must spell out their arguments and ideas. Otherwise, it looks like they are trying to remove the class content from the traditional Marxist conception of class and class struggle and, by sleight of hand, weight their argument on the significance of women's oppression for unsophisticated readers.

That quote is an example of the liberal and varied use of the terms "leading force," "leading role," etc. — another attempt to weight their "leading force" argument in ways which will not stand up on close examination. That women led the early 19th century fight against their legal status as chattels and were part of later struggles does not mean that they are willing to side with Black struggles today, much less lead in that central strategic role.

Moreover, the article shifts back and forth between attributing the leading role to women of the oppressed and the oppressor nation. (For a white organization to view the history of national liberation movements from a perspective of sexual divisions is certain to be viewed with hostility by those movements. This should not be a deterrent to doing so if there is truth in the view. We think there is not. Women and men have participated in and led various national struggles.) But assuming that women are the/a (?) leading force in their own national struggles, that has nothing to do with women in the oppressor nation. In fact, women in the oppressor nation have not played the leading role in support of national liberation/against white supremacy.

Finally, there is no serious grappling with the privileges of white women, although the authors repeatedly recognize their existence:

At the same time unemployment increases, making it harder to get jobs and white women replace Black, Latino, Native American and Asian women. (page 37)

White women benefit from white supremacy in many ways. For example, although Third World and white women are situated in the same job areas the white women are more often promoted to supervisory positions and more



National liberation struggles bring communities together. Above: Mexican youth demonstrating in Chicago.

often given jobs with some prestige or security. (page 37)

The growth of the state apparatus has been accompanied by the proliferation of soft core police jobs, largely filled by white women. Welfare work, all types of social work, counselling and teaching are all jobs set up to control Third World people and women. They effectively pit white women against oppressed nation women and peoples by tying their privilege to the perpetuation of national and women's oppression. (page 38)

Yet PFOC never says that these facts pose a challenge to their theory that has to be answered by anything other than a series of exhortations that all resemble the one quoted below:

Only by developing an anti-imperialist, Marxist-Leninist

line on women's oppression and liberation and Communist women's leadership around that line can women build a solidly anti-white supremacist movement for women's liberation. (page 42)

### I. The Relationship of White and Male Supremacy

In Lenin's analysis of imperialism, national oppression is the central feature of this stage of capitalism. The extension of territorial possession and economic domination over primarily dark-skinned nations is the main activity of imperial powers. This national oppression finds ideological justification in the ideology of racism and therefore white supremacy develops as a philosophy that dominates the imperialist world social structure.

The oppression of women, on the other hand, although important to capitalism as one source of cheap labor, is not of central importance



White racist solidarity also overcomes sexual divisions.

to imperialism the way national oppression is. In fact capitalism tends to free women; certainly women in the U.S. today, particularly white women, are among the freest in the history of class society. This is not to say that women will be liberated without a revolution — the contrary is true. But women's oppression is not the same order of "pillar of imperialism" that national oppression is.

PFOC on the other hand argues that women are becoming increasingly more oppressed under imperialism in a way that singles them out for more advanced anti-imperialist consciousness than white working class men. They advance three arguments. One has no place here, for reasons already stated — the list of various predominantly women's struggles primarily involving Third World people, such as the Farah and Oncita strikes, anti-sterilization work, etc.

A second argument is that the crisis in imperialism created such an increased burden on women that they will understand the oppression of Third World peoples. Granting the uncertain assumption that there is a relationship between increased emigration and growth of political consciousness, PFOC's argument only holds up if imperialism's thrust is to intensify the relative misery of white women the way it

does for oppressed peoples. It doesn't; the crisis of imperialism affects both men and women. In fact to some degree the *relative* misery of white women is lessening. PFOC correctly observes that white women are taking the jobs of Third World women; they are also taking high-paying jobs from Third World men in heavy industry.

The third argument is that women under imperialism now experience the double shift, as if that increased women's oppression.

Imperialism shapes the character of women's labor in the home. The most important change in the nature of women's oppression brought about by imperialism is the development of the double shift. (page 32)

Although a woman's oppression is changed by her entrance into the labor force, it is not increased. Working class women have always worked all the time, whether at housework and child rearing or in home industry. Much of women's work in the home before her entry into the labor force was the production of things which are now bought as commodities at the market, like bread, clothes, etc. As Lenin said in "Capitalism and Female Labor,"

Slavery, feudalism and capitalism are identical in this respect. It is only the *form* of exploitation that changes; the exploitation itself remains the same. (*Collected Works*, 36: 230) [Lenin's emphasis]

The classical view expressed most extensively by Engels, but also by Marx, Lenin, and others, is that women's entrance into the labor force gives her a significant amount of economic independence and direct proletarian experience, both necessary for any social group to develop the capacity to struggle for liberation.

Furthermore, "women" is not a primary identity group like nations — Blacks, Puerto Ricans, etc. Women are dispersed throughout classes and nations and interact with the men in a significant fashion. We do not expect that to change. Sexual divisions do not determine the course of class struggle and class structure in this country, as national divisions do.

There is another way it is harmful to equate the questions of white and male supremacy. Male supremacy functions around the world in various capitalist centers in more or less the same way. On the other hand, white supremacy does not operate as the central internal division in any other advanced capitalist country (except perhaps South Africa) as it does in the U.S. Because of its special strategic significance internally in the U.S. and because of its essential relationship to imperialism, it is therefore proper to use the terms white supremacist and white chauvinist to *define* U.S. imperialism, U.S. capitalism, U.S. economism, U.S. reformism, in a way that it is not appropriate to use male supremacist and male chauvinist. The error is not unimportant. It reflects a bad position or muddled thinking which can easily lead to errors of white opportunism.

The difference in the significance of the issues can also be seen by



examining the social movements that have actually arisen out of them. White chauvinism draws battle lines in the women's movement today, often leading it to take stands that are essentially reactionary. PFOC claims (on page 34) that male privileges "impede the development of unified national liberation struggles." We know of no situation where male supremacy has played a divisive role comparable to that of white supremacy and chauvinism.

In sum, white and male supremacy are neither similar nor equally important to a strategy to fell U.S. capitalism.

## II. PFOC'S Strategy: Oppressor Nation Women as the Leading Force

Below is a quote that puts forth the main elements of PFOC's position. Much of my argument in this section will be a line-by-line examination of this quote. First here it is in its entirety:

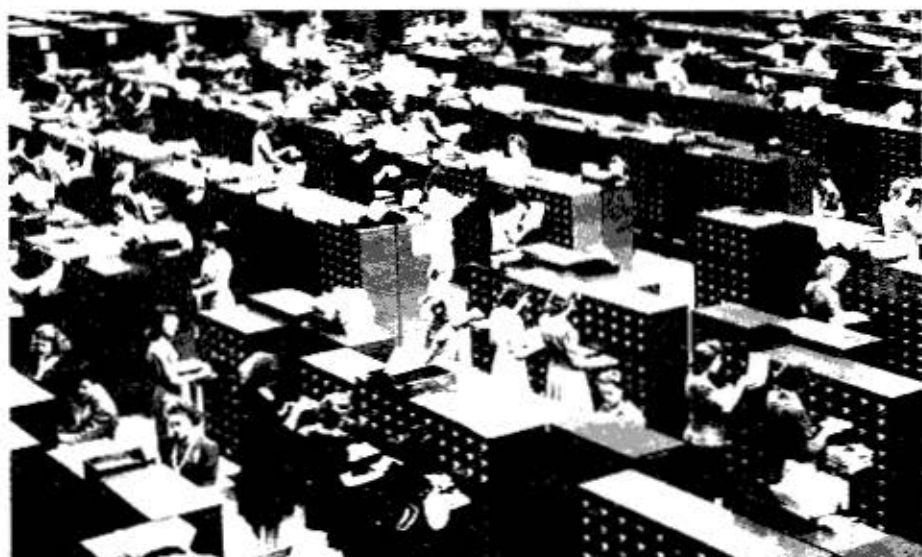
Within the oppressor nation white working class women benefit least from the privileges of white supremacy. This situation of white working class women under imperialism gives them the potential to lead in the fight against white supremacy and male supremacy. The common aspects of all women's oppression under imperialism as reproducers of the labor force, as participants in the reserve army of labor and as victims of male supremacist institutions and ideology provides a special basis for the development of solidarity between women of oppressor and oppressed nations. Based on a firm commitment to uphold self-determination for oppressed nations, white working class women can lead in the development of international solidarity and revolutionary movement with-

in the oppressor nation working class. (page 29)

### Sentence One

The first element of their argument is that white women benefit the least from privileges of white supremacy. The only way to interpret this is in a strictly economic sense, since white women have access to all the various non-economic privileges. I want to take a minute to explore what those are in a city like Chicago. In Chicago, neighborhoods are largely segregated (although not entirely). The west side of Chicago, approximately 20 square miles, is Black. There is also a similarly substantial south side ghetto, a Puerto Rican ghetto and

a Mexican ghetto. The streets in these areas are covered with garbage, reflecting the general lack of city services. The school windows are boarded from vandalism; the buildings are for the most part 40 years or more old. They are overcrowded, rat- and roach-infested, and cold in the winter. The grocery stores in these neighborhoods have older, lower-quality produce, and the worst meat around. The unemployment rate in these areas of the city is 40 percent at times. Young men hang around on the corners with nothing to do. Drugs, crime, and disease are everywhere. To be able to live in a cleaner, safer area, where your children might actually learn something in school or even have a pleasant time, where you can



buy decent food to the extent that you can afford, to be welcome in the mainstream of society, all because of the color of your skin, these are no small privileges.

So when PFOC says "benefiting least" they must mean that the job, wage, and credit discrimination and the like which women suffer means white women have less economic resources than white men. To some extent this is true, but many women are not the sole source of their income; many white women are married to white men or receive alimony from them or money from their parents (father) and thereby do benefit from the greater mone-

nation communists, to put their organizing efforts into white women because they think they *will become* a leading force, not because they are one. But a similar *potential* exists for white working class men; at least there is no argument against them to be found or alluded to in this *Breakthrough* article. Isn't, then, PFOC's position on women at the same time — and more importantly — a position *against* the leading role of the working class itself — a thoroughly non-Marxist position? And all the more dangerous insofar as the authors dismiss the working class leading role without so much as an argu-

ence. The aims and composition of much of the women's movement reflect this. It is overwhelmingly white and mainly interested in women's issues, narrowly defined.

The second possible interpretation of this is that the oppression experienced by white women will make them better understand, identify with, and fight against any or all forms of oppression, and specifically national oppression. But the reader would search in vain for any logical argumentation for this assertion anywhere in the paper. The closest thing there is to support for it is the history section's mention of three times in U.S. history that

## Oppressed nation women have more in common with oppressed nation men than with white women

tary privilege of some white man. Does this mean that only single economically independent women are likely to be the leading force? It is true that when a woman is dependent on another for her support, she is not as free to spend her money as her own and that that is oppressive, but that is strictly a function of male supremacy, independent of the crisis of imperialism and not a link to fighting white supremacy. To expect white women to organize to *lessen* the privileges for white people generally because of the oppression they suffer is an expectation based neither on the logic of the facts put forward nor on reality. What is logical (and what is actually happening) is a large women's movement, overwhelmingly white, with much of its work implicitly aimed at getting *more* of the privileges imperialism has to offer for women without any significant consciousness about oppressed peoples.

### Sentence Two

The most significant word here is "potential." We have said something about this already. PFOC wants white communists, oppressor

ment on the point?!?! (see the first issue of *Urgent Tasks* for a more extensive critique of PFOC's position on class.)

### Sentence Three

PFOC's writers do offer an argument for the natural basis of solidarity between white and Third World women. First, they say that because women from the oppressor and oppressed nations both experience women's oppression, they have a basis for uniting. From a logical standpoint, that would be uniting against male supremacy, a "sisterhood is powerful" approach. If PFOC believes that this is so natural, it is incumbent on them to explain the mistaken paths that have aborted this alliance, for it certainly does not now exist — principally because the male supremacy and male chauvinism are not similarly experienced by white and Third World women. Oppressed nation women have more in common with oppressed nation men than with white women. White women identify primarily as white and to the extent they identify as women, it does not include Black, Latin, Native American, etc. women as part of their frame of refer-

women have struggled valiantly. But the key and decisive question is: how have women in these struggles come down on the issue of equality for peoples of color — and that is another not-so-valiant story.

Let us examine a little of the history put forward by PFOC. It is true that in the 1820's and '30's white women played a significant role in organizing some of the early trade union struggles of the U.S.; those women took no position on the question of slavery. PFOC very accurately recounts the unhappy tale of the white women who, at first, were very important in the abolition movement but later left the movement with bitter racist attacks during the battles to pass the 14th and 15th amendments. PFOC makes the following completely true and incisive statement about this movement and the suffrage movement:

After this defeat for international solidarity, white women, led in particular by the National Woman's Suffrage Association, waged a campaign for women's rights on the



grounds that white women needed the vote in order to keep oppressed peoples and immigrant working class people out of power. (page 40)

In fact, the section on history of women's struggles in the U.S. begins with the following paragraph:

In the history of the U.S., there has been strong, militant women's movement and leadership within the oppressor nation. Oppressed nation women have led struggles for women's rights and freedom in the course of their leading participation in national liberation struggles. When oppressor nation women have joined to support the struggles of oppressed nation women and peoples there has been unity. But (!!!!!)[our emphasis] white women have often opted for the privileges of white supremacy and abandoned the struggle for international women's solidarity by betraying the possibilities for a unified struggle by women of different nationalities.

So much meaning in a little word. What is "But" doing there? By PFOC's own recounting of history,



Shoemakers' strike, Lynn, Massachusetts. Trade union movement generally ignored the slavery question right up to outbreak of Civil War.



white women have consistently, as a group, taken a bad position on the most important political question in the U.S. When have they taken a good position? PFOC's answers: in the 1960's and '70's. Let us examine this history too.

They begin with the following section:

In the 1960's the movement of women in the oppressor nation once again became a leading social movement. This women's movement had two social origins. The first was the revival of the equal rights movement. . . . The Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement in the U.S. oppressor nation which developed into support for the national liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people stimulated and encouraged the second main political tendency of the new women's movement. Both of these sources built the women's movement as a force against imperialism. (page 41)

Two points about this: first, it is not a clarifying technique to use the term "leading social movement," for the general reasons argued at the beginning of this article.

Second, the women's movement was not anti-imperialist and has never been anti-imperialist. In Chicago, for example, exactly the op-

posite is true. The women who formed the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU) abandoned solidarity with Third World struggles explicitly. Chicago was a major center of the birth of that movement, and there women from SDS, the civil rights movement, and the anti-war movement broke off, saying that they had to fight male supremacy. A few women did so stating that they were not abandoning their "general" work, but they were not able to continue doing it in mixed groups because of male chauvinism. Most, however, stated that they were going to work solely on issues affecting their own oppression.

A series of test battles was rapidly fought. E.g., early in 1969, Fred Hampton was busted for taking over an ice cream truck and distributing all the ice cream to the children of a west side Chicago ghetto neighborhood. While he was in jail, massive doses of X-rays were being administered to his head in an effort to physically damage him. When the CWLU was asked to support the growing protest to protect



Harriet Tubman

Fred, they voted a resounding "No," saying that it was not a women's issue. The most conscious anti-imperialist women who had worked to form the union soon gave up. [Of course, many women left or never joined CWLU (rightly or wrongly) because they did not want to limit their work, but PFOC cannot claim they were in the women's movement simply because they were in the movement and were women.] In fact, they were *consciously* not in the women's movement PFOC heralds and, by the way, were often attacked by that movement as "male-dominated" women.

Nor was it white women who led the anti-war movement nor the civil rights movement, which was led by Blacks and included both white women and white men. The women's movement did grow out of these other movements and the student movement too; it did not lead them; it followed them and then largely abandoned the principles that PFOC correctly holds as most important — clarity on the necessity to fight white supremacy.

#### Sentence Four

This sentiment is found through the paper at places where difficult questions arise. It is of course true, but so what? For people with our politics, it is a given, a premise, not an exhortation. Very different organizing approaches flow from it even within this paper: from trade union work among clerical women to a white cross-class movement to a multi-national women's movement.

The central strategic question confronting the white U.S. left is how to build such consciousness in the oppressor nation. PFOC's position on women is supposed to be an answer to that question. Yet the way they argue is circular: women will lead in the oppressor nation against white supremacy by taking a firm position against white supremacy and for the right of self-determination. We are not any further than where we started.

#### A Final Note

This is not the first time we have seen a sector of the white population put forward as having special characteristics that would lead it to side with oppressed peoples against imperialism. Within not-too-distant memory it was youth who were foreseen in that role. Today it is women. An argument can actually be made that white men are more likely to take up revolutionary principles and struggles because their job situations integrate them

with Third World workers in heavy industry in a way which is not true for women either at work or in their communities.

Both men and women of the oppressor nation working class have qualities, insights, and positions of power necessary to the development and achievement of a general revolutionary struggle in the U.S. This searching for some "leading force" will end in failure. There can be no substitute for proletarian class interests in motivating white workers toward internationalism.

## Rapists Beware the W.A.S.P. Women Armed for Self Protection



Who are these white women aiming to kill? This illustration is from the front page of *Iconoclast*, a newspaper published in Dallas, Texas. This issue of the liberal weekly hailed W.A.S.P.'s arrival and published its October 30, 1974 declaration to the City of Dallas in full; it noted that self defense training for women is available at the local YWCA, and that the cops and the District Attorney are helping out. Is this the road to revolution?

# Idi Amin, the Notion of "Civilization" and United States Interest in Africa

By Kassahun Checole

*This article is the text of a speech delivered to the Solidarity Night organized by the African Students Association at the State University of New York at Binghamton, March 18, 1977.*

I propose to talk tonight, very briefly, on three crucial developments in Africa and of one vital issue. The three developments are: (1) the mini-dictator of Uganda, Idi Amin; (2) the popular uprising in Zaire; and (3) the volatile situation in Northeast Africa. The one very vital issue, however, is the continuous and consistent U.S. interest in Africa. For one reason or another, all these are inter-linked and can easily be grouped under the broad umbrella of Africa's struggle against imperialism.

## The "Civilized World" and Idi Amin

There is quite a humorous irony in the love-hate relationship between Idi Amin and the "Western World," in that the man who is now being strongly denounced as "inhuman," "barbaric," "lunatic," and a score of other generalized adjectives, is the same 200-pound-plus Idi Amin who in 1970 the "civilized Western World" installed in power so that he might save that tiny republic from the grips of communism.

The crux of the matter then is a very simple one indeed. Idi Amin is an ungrateful servant of the imperialists. Not only did he not accomplish his assigned task, that of making Uganda a safe banana republic (or in this case, a coffee republic), but he also, as an African proverb tells it, broke the pot from which

he fed. We need to make two points perfectly clear.

One, Idi Amin is no less a barbarian or inhuman than his counterparts in other imperialist-dominated countries: the Shah of Iran, the fascist-type dictator in Ethiopia, the Nazi regime in Chile, and the arch-barbarian in South Korea, to mention a few. All of these fellow travellers, however, are under the good graces of U.S. imperialism and its allies. Then the question to ask is: what is exceptionally sick or barbarian of Idi Amin Dada? Why, indeed, does he alone have to face all the vilification, and why is he considered unworthy of the graces

of Western civilization?

Second, we will not be defending Amin when we state that by definition the adjective barbarian does not fit Idi Amin. According to Webster, barbarian is defined as someone who is "uncivilized." And then if we look up the definition of the word civilized, we find that it is a word that relates "to peoples or nations in a state of civilization." The core word "civilization" is then defined variously as a state of high-level utilization of culture and technology and "a situation of urban comfort."

Idi Amin definitely exists within these definitions of civilization. But





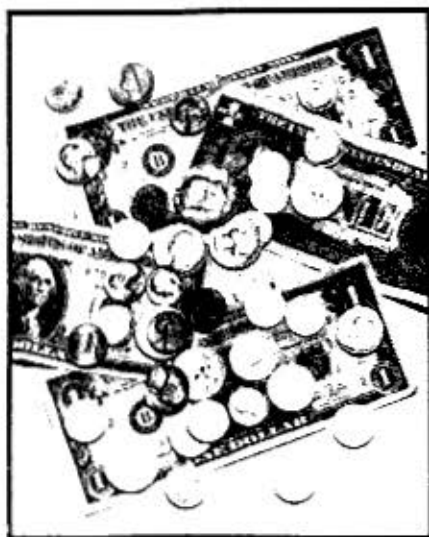
it makes him no less inhuman and oppressive. In actuality there is a contradiction here. The adjective barbarian or "uncivilized" as used by the Western media and by government leaders in the capitalist metropolises could not fully capture the severity of Amin's oppressive rule. This is not only a semantic problem, but also a historical one.

But addressing ourselves to the semantic problem first, it is clear that Webster's definition of the noun "civilized" is totally erroneous in our view, primarily because of its Euro-centric, and apologetically ruling-class, connotation. If we are to follow Webster's definition, the only civilized people in the world would be those classes of people who have attained (and it does not matter how) a high-level cultural and technological development. And as if this is not enough, Webster graciously extends the definition to include those who live in "urban comfort."

This is a counter-revolutionary and ahistorical definition of the noun "civilization." It indicates that when we settle terms with the Webster type of scholarship, which is not only Euro-centric, but ideologically biased for the ruling class and their lackeys, we will be struggling to wipe out a whole history of cultural domination that imperialism has imposed on our lives.

But, as we said above, the problem is not one of semantics alone. It is also a historical one. When you consider the fact that the so-called "civilized Western World" has totally ransacked our history, our culture, and ultimately our lives, beginning with the 16th century; when we consider the fact that the "civilized world" has imposed on us more than 600 years of colonial domination; when we consider the fact that this same "civilized world" has imposed upon us the most vile, barbarically oppressive ruling classes of its kind; indeed, when we consider the fact that this "civilized world" wrought an Age of Slaughter on the Indochinese

people, a reign of terror on the Latin American people, blood-thirsty Christian racists on our peoples in Southern Africa, not to mention the most animalistic lackeys in the rest of Africa: the Mobutus, the Emperor Bokassas, the Hassans, etc., we need not only correctly redefine the noun "civilization," but we need also throw back the adjectives — barbarian, inhuman, uncivilized, etc. — to their proper places: into the face of Western Imperialism, the makers of Idi Amin Dada and his likes.



Now, we are still saddled with the question of Idi Amin Dada, that ungratified imperialist and Zionist lackey. There is no doubt that he is an inhuman and oppressive, albeit benevolent, dictator of a sort. Amin has established a virtual reign of terror on the Ugandan people. In the meantime, despite the denunciations and vilifications of the Western media and the capitalist ruling classes, primarily because he threatens their interests, Idi Amin is not a real enemy of the imperialists. He is in fact a potential ally and good investment, if he could only straighten out his unruly behavior. The British and Americans have still millions of their investments in Uganda. The British in particular have a booming trade with the Ugandan dictator, especially in arming and training his secret service and his air force.

What then is the problem? Why

are they all making so much noise about Idi Amin's rule in Uganda? Have they suddenly been converted to humane thinking? This would be strange indeed. It is hardly in the nature of capitalism and imperialism to think in human terms. Capitalism's number one law in social relations is the production and exchange of commodities for profit. Human beings, in the form of real or potential sources of labor power, are also mere commodities in the capitalist market. This is the meaning of Western civilization! The real meaning of imperialism's refined cultural and technological development! Only an apologetic, opportunistic, and Euro-centric scholar would fall for such a barbarian world-view of civilization.

Incidentally, Idi Amin is also supported by the Soviet Union, itself a product of Western civilization, and also by pseudo-revolutionaries and reactionary nationalists in Africa. We will deal more specifically with these later, but we now again address ourselves to the question raised above: why so much noise about Amin? What is so distinguishable about Amin's oppressive rule from that of the Shah of Iran, Emperor Bokassa, the arch-lackey Mobutu Sese Seko, the dictator Pak in Korea, and the Nazi Pinochet in Chile? There are, indeed, distinguishable traits between the barbarity of Amin and the rest of the notorious bunch — mind you, not in their nature or character or their relations with their "subjects," but in their relationship to imperialism, Zionism, and reaction.

Idi Amin Dada is a renegade of a sort. He failed to bow to the will of the imperialists and Zionists. But no mind this, Idi Amin Dada serves an opportune need for imperialist ideology. He is that element that they are able to use as a smoke-screen against the rising revolutionary tide in Africa, particularly Southern Africa but not exclusively. For today, the whole ruling class of Africa, from South to the North,

from East to the West, are in deep turmoil. Be it in South Africa or Egypt, Morocco or Zaire, the African working people are waging a relentless struggle against their ruling classes and many imperialisms.

The high-sounding barbarity of Amin, therefore, is an opportune way of diverting the real issues from the eyes and feelings of the democratic peoples of the world. In the meantime, the imperialists are able to wage their secret wars against the popular resistance in each and every one of their puppet states and to try to arrest revolutionary uprisings from South Africa to Eritrea. Today, imperialism is wreaking more havoc and disaster in Africa than Amin did in his whole stock and short life.

Ultimately, the question of Amin and his oppressive rule will be addressed by the heroic Ugandan people, who despite the lack of a revolutionary vanguard, have hardly allowed the dictator a single sleepful night. He is reckoning with dissension and fear, and naturally he is lashing back with more repression. But repression, especially of the kind that Amin utilizes, is a mark of ultimate failure. There is no doubt that the Ugandan people will reward Idi Amin a judgment he so richly deserves. But the democratic forces in Uganda, the people of Uganda, will not stop there. They know that the true enemy of their nation and people is not the mortal Amin, but the seemingly immortal forces of international imperialism and Zionism. There could be no peace, no democracy, and no progress in Uganda without the elimination of these forces, not only in Uganda but also in the whole of Africa and the world.

#### Mobutu and the Uncivilized Congolese

Recently, the Western media has begun to inform us of a "new development" in that most coveted part of Africa, the former Congo — Lumumba's Congo. It is said that a

few hundred Katangese secessionists led by Cuban "mercenaries" and Soviet arms have invaded the Southern part of Mobutu's Zaire, and that this development poses a great threat to the copper mines in Katanga province and hence an unstable future for Mobutu's regime.

Be that as it may, we are confronted with a barrage of facts that do not sink in well with historical and objective realities. Although there is admittedly much to be learned about this "new development," it is hardly hasty to pose certain questions and pose also a hypothesis based on what we historically know of the Congo (Zaire). Much of this hypothesis is based on more than four years of communication and comradeship with Congolese progressive elements in and out of this country.

First, let us demystify one myth: the "new development" in Zaire is hardly new. Since he usurped power in 1965, Mobutu Sese Seko, the former Joseph Mobutu, has had to face a strident resistance from the Congolese people, not only due to the abject conditions of their social and economic reality, but also due to the fact that the Congolese people have always viewed Mobutu as the traitor who used Lumumba's name to sell the Congo back to

American, Belgian and French imperialism.

Mobutu utilized two tactics to arrest the growing resistance against his regime. One, which was an utter failure, was the "Africanization" propaganda. This basically focused on the changing of European names of rivers and individuals to so-called African names. But mind you, even the name Zaire is not African or Congolese. It is a name of a river that crosses the Congo and was named Zaire by the Portuguese, who mispronounced and bastardized the word from the original name of the river.

In his Africanization drive, Mobutu was not only trying to deal with the strong hatred that the Congolese people have for Western cultural imperialism and thus camouflage his relations with the imperialist countries, but also, in one and the same swipe, to develop a Congolese middle class who would be loyal to his rule. He tried to do this by expelling all the foreign retailers and small businessmen. However, there is ample evidence to show that Mobutu's indigenization program has failed, and he is now trying to make peace with his former "spiritual gurus" in the Catholic church. (The Catholic church, an ideological tool of the capitalist



Two wounded liberation fighters, captured by Zairean army



class, was hard hit by Mobutu's indigenization program.)

Mobutu's second tactic was much more sophisticated, and, we dare say, recognizing the limitations of a puppet state, realistic. Here, Mobutu tried to intensify his close relationship with the imperialist countries and to provide an artificial economic growth by opening his doors to imperialist investment with many inducements. The effects or the results of these attempts were equally disastrous. Instead of economic growth, Mobutu harvested a rich crop of Western economic and ideological hegemony. The imperialists definitely invested more, but they pumped his economy and his regime with so many loans and so much so-called aid that Mobutu's Zaire is in the midst of an ever-stronger quicksand of international loan sharks. It will take double or more of Mobutu's inglorious life-time for the Congo to rescue itself from its economic calamity.

As if this were not enough, Mobutu's total dependence on imperi-

rule that the Congolese people had to fight against. Unfailingly, Mobutu's total subservience to Western imperialism also meant intensified repression and a dismal economic situation at home. These habits that Mobutu got into cannot be supported without seasonal shots of loans and political and economic concessions from and to the imperialist world. Knowingly or unknowingly, Mobutu was and is faced with a vicious quicksand of popular resistance and imperialist domination.

In the early part of the decade, Mobutu was faced with one of the most difficult internal problems of his regime. A Marxist organization led by the Parti de la Revolution Populaire, under the leadership of Laurent D. Kabila, had begun an armed struggle in the Northeastern region of the Congo. The PRP had a political program to liberate the Congo of the puppet Mobutu and imperialist domination. The PRP clearly advocated that "the armed struggle remains the only means of arriving" at a democratic and socialist Congo.

Paris. Then there was the mostly non-politicized and often hostile population in the region, and these were compounded with the lack of a solid rear base. Among the two countries, Tanzania and Zambia, that border the Northeastern region of the Congo, the most viable one for a rear base was Tanzania. However, the Tanzanian regime, after providing initial support, hit an unexpected friendship pact with the Mobutu regime, and this forced upon the pseudo-revolutionary government of Nyerere the option of arresting PRP leadership residing in Tanzania and denying the militants of the PRP a place of refuge. Under such intense and complicated pressures the PRP have not been heard much of since late 1975, which might indicate that the PRP had to slow down its activities in order to consolidate its forces internally and build popular support and consciousness.

The situation in the Southern region of Zaire presents quite the opposite opportunities for a revolutionary and popular rising against

## Mobutu's Zaire is in the midst of an ever-stronger quicksand of international loansharks

alist investment to bolster his regime against internal resistance required that he become an ideological stalwart of U.S. imperialism. He utilized his anti-communist fervor to deny the Angolan people their hard-won independence and waged a war of subversion against them. Thus, Mobutu allowed the Congo to become the center of the reactionary FNLA forces of his brother-in-law, the notorious Holden Roberto. By extension, Zaire became one of the first African countries to shamelessly ally itself with the South African racists. Indeed, Zaire was the only viable buffer against the so-called communist expansion in central and Southern Africa.

These are the effects of Mobutu's

The PRP made headlines in the Western press with some kidnappings and daring confrontations with Mobutu's army. However, the PRP, faced with many internal and external problems, and perhaps some premature moves that might have backfired, never really blossomed to full force.

The hypothesis we draw to the present renewed development in the Southern part of the Congo, therefore, is from the failed experience of the PRP in the Northeastern region of the country. But first let us look at some of the problems that the PRP experienced: To begin with, there was the lack of a solid leadership within the organization. Most of the leadership was based in foreign capitals like Tanzania and

the puppet regime of Mobutu. In that region, a revolutionary force of the kind that is now giving Mobutu hell and had his masters in Washington jumping can utilize available historical and objective conditions in the region. First, the area has a relatively politicized and anti-government (this is, anti-the-central-government) population. Second, there is the terrain, which is very conducive to guerrilla warfare, being mountainous, highly vegetated, and largely isolated. And then there is the crucial factor necessary in most guerrilla wars, the rear base and support. This is available from the revolutionary government of the MPLA in Angola. In any case, the insurgents from the South can draw great lessons from

their experience in the Angolan revolution, and the fight against the South African racists and the imperialist tools, FNLA and UNITA.

It seems to me, then, that the question is how far the forces in Southern Congo — inasmuch as they are revolutionary and popular (their news releases clearly indicate that they are not secessionists) — can go without facing the full force of Mobutu's military might and a possible imperialist intervention. This is a very crucial question, because it will determine the degree and ability of the revolutionary forces to dig in and root themselves among the Congolese people, and more importantly, the time factor will determine the ability of the insurgents to link up with the PRP militants in the Northeast and central Congo.

It seems, however, that the requisite period of stabilization might be available to the popular forces due to the economic bankruptcy of the Mobutu regime, its largely corrupt and ill-trained army, and its lack of popular support among the people. This holds true insofar as the war was being waged against the government of Mobutu Sese Seko alone. However, the Zaire regime is a puppet regime and the real force, which is international imperialism, will not stand by to see it dismantled by a possibly anti-imperialist and revolutionary force. The degree of imperialist intervention on the side of the Mobutu regime will, therefore, become an important factor.

The imperialists have huge investments in the Katanga (Shaba) region, where copper is one of the most widely available and precious metals. The region also threatens the strategic validity of the Zaire regime in relation to its neighboring state of the MPLA. It is certain that the imperialists will respond with huge military and economic support for their loyal servant. It is even conceivable that in the event that Mobutu cannot resist this force with mere material support, the im-

perialists, and U.S. imperialism in particular, will send in their commandos in a last-minute rescue effort.

Of course, the ground is now being prepared for all these eventualities. It is not mere empty talk that the imperialists are now shouting of Cuban involvement and communist aggression. This will be their *raison d'être* for eventual full-scale involvement. They risked too much in Angola and they will be less likely to risk another defeat in the Congo.

Let us say in short, then, that the Southern Congolese development is a crucial one for the future of U.S. imperialist hegemony in Africa. Of course, the "civilized world" is bracing itself for a condemnation and possibly war against those senseless, irresponsible, uncivilized natives in Zaire. On our part, however, there is no doubt that the vitality and timelessness of the revolutionary spirit in Africa will not be vanquished. Lumumba's Congo, united in a revolutionary socialist ideology, will triumph.

### Changing Realities in Northeast Africa

Finally we come to the question of Northeast Africa, which has increasingly proven to be a vital field of contention, and one more arena of imperialist aggression and popular resistance. We should here narrow our focus and deal with a specific geographic arena of contention and war. We would delimit this area with Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudan.

As you know, Ethiopia has been going through a revolutionary change since the popular uprisings against the Haile Selassie regime in 1974. In short, the Ethiopian revolution has been short-circuited by the emergence of a military junta of the fascist type. The junta has decidedly chosen to continue the war against the Eritrean people who, for more than 16 years, have been fighting a revolutionary war for na-



tional independence and socialism.

Ethiopia has historically been in confrontation with Somalia, which holds some serious claims in a long-standing border dispute. Furthermore, the possible development of an independent Djibouti state, which is now under the colonial rule of the French, creates another point of contention between the two military states for the control of the vital seaports of that territory. For Ethiopia, the question of who controls the port of Djibouti is a crucial one. For it is faced with a dismal future in the Eritrean war, where the revolutionary forces have liberated 95 percent of the land.

Another focus of conflict is that which exists between the Sudan and Ethiopia. The Sudan has accused Ethiopia of training Southern Sudanese secessionists as a pressure for closing the Sudan-Eritrean border to the two Eritrean liberation movements, the ELF and the EPLF.

Internally, Ethiopia is wracked with much dissension from its working and peasant classes and its various oppressed nationalities. The junta has resorted to extreme repression sweetened with revolutionary rhetoric, and has, it seems, succeeded in convincing the Eastern bloc states, the Soviet Union, and Cuba to provide political support and economic investment.

Ironically, the "socialist" junta is still dependent for economic and military goods from the U.S. imperialists. The Ethiopian economy (and military tradition and hardware) is closely linked with that of the U.S. Now it seems that the junta wants to have its cake and eat



it too. In the meantime it is trying to ally itself closely with the Soviet Union and Cuba as well as the Eastern bloc countries, but it has not broken its military links and dependency on the U.S.

Today there is much debate within the policy-making corridors of the U.S. government and the investment tycoons on how to relate to this confusing situation. However, the issues are not too confusing to the "versatile" U.S. imperialist planners. They have already picked up on two options. One is to take a wait-and-see attitude in regard to Ethiopia, develop moderate, pro-U.S. elements within the Eritrean revolution, and win back the Somali government to their side. The other option is closely linked with this but much more ambitious. It is to develop the Sudan as an imperialist buffer between what they call black Africa and Arab Africa by strengthening the unpopular Nimeiry regime with military and economic input.

These U.S. imperialist options seem to be supported by certain Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Of course, these Arab states have another thought in mind. They would like to make the Sudan, which is one of the largest and most fertile geographical entities in Africa, the "bread basket of the Middle East." For this reason, they are willing to invest much of their oil-dollars there. As investments go, much of the profits from the Arab-American venture will head back to the investors, and the Sudan will simply remain another vastly underdeveloped nation.

In any case, both the oil-rich Arab states and the U.S. have found a "likely" solution for the developing situation in Northeast Africa. They see this situation as that of Soviet expansionism in Somalia, Ethiopia, and possibly Eritrea.

The U.S. in particular has for some time now faced an obvious problem in Northeast Africa. With the Haile Selassie regime gone, it had no strong military ally and was



Two EPLF combatants conducting a dialogue with the residents of a village.

therefore facing definite strategic problems for its hegemonic presence in the region. It is also seriously concerned about the future of its ally, the Zionist state of Israel, which is facing increased isolation in the region.

It seems the likely heir for Haile Selassie's role in the region as U.S. ally and buffer against "communist expansion" would have been the Kenyatta regime. However, the Kenyan state has yet to weather the impending political upheaval which will follow the old man's death. The U.S., therefore, opted for the less likely "Arab" Sudan, with which it had broken diplomatic relationship since 1973. The reactionary regime of Nimeiry, faced with stringent internal resistance and economic bankruptcy, was more than happy to improve its relationship with the U.S. and the more conservative Arab states.

It is now a sure fact that the Nimeiry regime has replaced Haile Selassie's role as conduit of imperialist hegemony in the region. The U.S. is now promising to make the Sudan a showcase of economic growth and political stability. Khartoum, the capital of the Sudan, is crowded with both U.S. and Arab investors, bankers, engineers, and businessmen. It seems that both the U.S.

imperialists and the reactionary Arab states are about to keep their end of the bargain. But what is in it for Nimeiry and what is he meant to deliver in return?

With liberal investment legislation and the rich potential for quick capitalist turnover in cotton, peanut, and other agricultural products, the Sudan is an investor's paradise. Moreover, the political role that the conservative Nimeiry regime can play is not to be taken lightly. In the particular case of the Eritrean revolution, the Nimeiry regime will be the likely candidate to weed out the "moderate" and pro-American forces and deliver them to the imperialists. This possibility can only underscore the heightened ideological struggle within the Eritrean revolution itself.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the vanguard of the revolution, has been facing strenuous maneuvering and false propaganda by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) leadership, which shows every indication of supporting a reactionary clique led by the notorious Osman Saleh Sabbe. The former foreign-mission representative of the EPLF, Sabbe was expelled in March of 1976 for his reactionary and divisive stand on the Eritrean revolution. He is now





Women cadres of the EPLF in a training drill.

agitating, with the support of the ELF leadership, to form a so-called "Third Force."

In the event that such a formation is realized, the Eritrean people's struggle to unite the two forces in the revolution through a peaceful political and ideological dialog and struggle would have been hampered severely. In the meantime, the U.S. would like to succeed in isolating the vanguard of the Eritrean revolution, the EPLF (which it has for a long time been red-baiting as "Maoist"), from future negotiations for total independence. This is an important point because the U.S.'s primary concern in Northeast Africa is that it is increasingly being isolated by hostile states. The emergence of a revolutionary and anti-imperialist Eritrea would be a much greater blow to its slipping hegemony in the region. This fear is echoed in the various hearings in the U.S. Congress, where it seems the primary question is, "What will be the attitude of the Eritrean revolutionaries in the event they manage to establish an independent state?"

Thus the U.S., recognizing that it will risk too much by waiting to see events take their own course, is decidedly moving to prevent the appearance of yet another revolution-

ary and anti-imperialist state in Northeast Africa.

Lately, the reactionary Osman Saleh Sabbe, with known U.S. government contacts, has been spreading the news that the Cubans are sending soldiers to help out the beleaguered Ethiopian junta. There is, in fact, no hard evidence to challenge or support Sabbe's claim. At this time we can only relate other factors that solidly show that the Soviet Union and Cuba have, indeed, recognized the fascist-type Ethiopian junta, and are providing it with full diplomatic and economic support.

In the last few months the contacts, both economic and political, between the Ethiopian junta and the Eastern bloc states and Cuba have intensified. East European states are now replacing the Western imperialists as major investors in the Ethiopian economy. The junta's representatives have been trotting from one Eastern European capital to another on a shopping spree for military hardware. Furthermore, *Pravda* and *Granma*, the Communist Party papers of the USSR and Cuba, have been sending out a lot of revolutionary praise about the Ethiopian junta, and have been denouncing both the Eritrean revolution and the only viable

democratic opposition to the junta, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, as CIA-supported, reactionary, and petty-bourgeois.

These developments are not unexpected and are in no way uncharacteristic of the foreign policy position of various socialist countries, but they still have a disquieting effect and certainly bring much more fundamental questions to the head. These questions have to deal not solely with the foreign policies of the Cuban and Soviet states, but primarily with their internal contradictions and makeup. For we can not simply dismiss foreign policy of a given state as a political shortfall, but as a result of the intense class struggle of given societies and states.

For indeed, how can we understand the Soviet Union's unqualified support to the repressive Idi Amin regime — especially when this support manifests itself with concrete material and political aid aimed at restraining the class struggle within Uganda?

There are several crucial questions begging for answers, but they require more study and investigation beyond that of our present understanding of the concrete realities in the socialist countries. Theoretically and empirically, Africans need to make a concrete study and have a complete understanding of the history of the communist movement and the internal makeup and contradictions within the present-day socialist states. Of course, the one-sidedness that has pervaded the rhetoric of anti-Sovietism and anti-Maoism, based on the external reflection of particular states and their policies, have to be left behind. Rather, concrete historical understanding and analysis based on the universal science of Marxism will force us to anchor our study on the historical developments and the objective and subjective factors relating both to the so-called "socialist bloc," the "Third World," and the world capitalist system.

If we now go back to the current

development of Soviet and Cuban support to the Ethiopian junta, there are some puzzling problems that we have to deal with. It is apparent that by now both the Soviet Union and Cuba have relegated the Eritrean revolution to petty-bourgeois dismality, but what about Somalia? Have not they supported and praised the Somali government as a revolutionary one? What will be the position of these states on the very real conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia? Can they try to resolve it, and if so, can they succeed?

We don't think so. The Ethiopian-Somali contention is too historically rooted and too concrete as to easily evaporate. But even if it were to be patched up, how can the Soviets and the Cubans prevent the eventual independence of Eritrea, and hence Ethiopia's run for the Djibouti territory? For Ethiopia is a landlocked country that is unwilling to settle differences peacefully with even friendly neighbors who are willing to share their port facilities

in mutually beneficial ways. Especially, the ruling Ethiopian junta is insistent on fighting to the last man on what it calls the "integrity of Ethiopia," and therefore it is unwilling to face defeat in Eritrea without a last showdown. What then will be the position of the Soviet government and Cuba? Will they forestall the fascist-type government with their men and arms?

The situation in Northeast Africa is the most volatile and serious of all, and unlike the revolutionary struggle that our brothers and sisters are waging against the racists and the imperialists in Southern Africa, this sea is full of murky waters. We need to tread carefully in identifying our enemies and friends, and to consolidate the struggle accordingly.

### Conclusion

I have tried to show that the revolutionary situation in Africa has placed the imperialists on the defensive. But they have not yet lost

the war nor are they weak, and that resistance is equally strong and building up from day to day.

It would not be presumptuous to say that Western civilization as we know it today came to be on the backs and through the resources and labor-power of our peoples in Africa. The initial impetus for European capitalism, the making of industrialism, and the age of imperialism are products of the vital force of primitive accumulation which Europeans generated from Africa. Today, Western civilization is in deep crisis, but we have yet to see its dissolution and post-mortem, and it will hardly be a surprise if this occurs in Africa.

Western civilization is dead. Long live the civilization of the working people!

*Postscript: Since this speech was delivered, Djibouti has achieved independence and the Soviet-Cuban support of the Ethiopian junta has increased.*

— The editors.

## Review

*Unequal Exchange*  
by Arghiri Emmanuel

### Introduction

At least for the time being, "terzomondismo" (third worldism) appears to have run its course in the U.S. left. The factors which made it a gut political response for thousands of young people in the last decade — the revolutionary dimensions of the Black movement, the mass opposition to the imperialist war in S.E. Asia, and the image of People's China as a world center for anti-imperialist people's war and cultural revolution — no longer operate as they did.

The partial and, I think, temporary eclipse of anti-imperialist poli-

## The economics of national oppression on a world scale

tics occurred before its inevitable initial larding of liberalism and romanticism was cleaned away and a solid basis of Marxist theory developed for it. This is double unfortunate because the tools to put the position on a scientific basis are in the process of development, and the failure to bring them to bear on the debate over revolutionary strategy for the U.S. has been indirectly responsible for some of the increased credibility that ignorant "marxism-leninism" has gained through attacking anti-imperialist politics as non-, or anti-, Marxist.

The re-examination of imperialism as a stage of capitalism gained its basic impetus from the successes and problems of revolution in the "third world." Thus it is not sur-

prising that Marxists who view the world capitalist system from the perspective of its periphery, not its metropolitan center, are doing the most significant theoretical work. Their investigations share two basic premises which, in my view, are beyond challenge. First, the center of the world revolutionary process is, and has been for a generation, the anti-imperialist national liberation struggles of the periphery and the parallel struggles of oppressed peoples in the center of imperialism. Second, the political subordination and domination of oppressed peoples and nations is paralleled and underlain by the long-term worsening of their economic position relative to the "developed" centers of world im-

perialism. In fact, on this second point, the evidence indicates that beyond the worsening of its relative economic state, the absolute position of the periphery also has deteriorated. Imperialism has resulted in a very unequal distribution of the benefits of the capitalist development of the productive forces — benefits which are essentially flawed and dubious at the best, of course.

These two premises were not self-evident when Lenin wrote *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. In fact, the first one was not valid; at that point in history the class struggle in the developed capitalist states was the main focus of world revolution and Lenin clearly believed that the ability of the main capitalist states

majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity. . . . (33:500)

The de facto class alliance between workers and bourgeoisie in oppressor nations, be it social democratic or fascist, has been, and continues to be the major strategic problem of the revolution. The development of imperialism since Lenin has enlarged, rather than reduced, the problem.

It seems likely, though the evidence is not clear, that Lenin's earlier optimistic projections about the metropolitan working class rested on a misunderstanding of the

ly capital does not place such narrow limits on the potential for internal capital investment. It is equally obvious that imperialism has in fact resulted in a massive transfer of value from the oppressed nations to the oppressing nations. In short, the dominance of capitalist social relations in the periphery of the world capitalist system has not led to the "development" which capitalism has meant for Europe, North America, Oceania, and Japan. What does not apply in the era of imperialism is Marx's statement in the Preface to Volume I of *Capital*:

The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future. (Moscow edition, I: 19)

## Lenin thought imperialism would be characterized by a net export of capital from the center.

to divert and defuse the revolutionary struggle of their working classes was extremely limited. His writing of the period contains many political estimates which do not stand up well to the test of time, e.g.:

Opportunism cannot now be completely triumphant in the working class of one country for decades, as it was in Britain in the second half of the 19th century. . . . (Lenin, *Collected Works*, volume 22, page 285. [Hereafter cited as 22:285])

Only at the very end of his political life did Lenin begin to draw conclusions which implicitly questioned the revolutionary potential of the European and North American proletariat.

. . . in the long run capitalism itself is educating and training the vast majority of the population of the globe for the struggle.

In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming

economic dynamic of imperialism. To some degree Lenin adopted Hobson's economics while rejecting his liberal utopian and sentimental anti-imperialism. (See Lenin's *Notebooks on Imperialism*, 39:405-437.) Hobson's basic argument was that the development of monopoly in Britain had reduced the opportunity for the productive employment of capital, creating a capital surplus which sought privileged investment opportunity abroad. There is reason to believe that Lenin also thought imperialism would be characterized by a net export of capital from the center. His conception of the limited and temporary nature of the labor aristocracy seems to rest on such a position. However, other features could be interpreted differently, and there is no compelling reason to resolve the ambiguities here.

The issue itself was not that important to Lenin's concerns about the cause of World War I and the roots of opportunism and social chauvinism. However, it is important to be clear on today, and in my view it is obvious that monopo-

None of this detracts in the slightest from the permanent value of Lenin's work on imperialism. This value rests on his stress on the qualitative significance of the development of monopoly capitalism out of competitive capitalism, and on the conception that contemporary capitalism must be understood as a world system in which the key fact is the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations. (Those self-proclaimed Leninists who are completely unaware of this second contribution of Lenin and reject it implicitly should not be taken seriously.)

Arghiri Emmanuel's book *Unequal Exchange* is a basic text of current Marxist anti-imperialist theory. Emmanuel, a Greek Marxist economist, teaching in France, attempts to systematically elaborate the "imperialism of trade" which, he asserts, is the main mechanism for the transfer of value from the capitalist periphery to the capitalist center.

The central argument of *Unequal Exchange* can be summarized as



follows: The operation of the law of value in the world capitalist system forces poor (oppressed) nations into an international division of labor which compels a cumulative transfer of a significant portion of the value produced by their labor to the rich (oppressor) nations: The transfer of value occurs, not so much through the more classically Leninist forms of plunder and "superprofits," but through the mechanisms of price formation in the world capitalist market. The consequent "unequal exchange," according to Emmanuel, is the central factor blocking the economic and social development of the capitalist periphery.

Emmanuel's direct concern is a critique of the assumptions of economic theory, both bourgeois and Marxist, but his argument has clear political ramifications. Specifically, it gives the struggle for national liberation an even greater objective anti-capitalist significance, and it raises serious questions about the basis for internationalist politics within the working classes of oppressor nations. There is no doubt that it is such political positions from Emmanuel and his colleagues, e.g., Samir Amin, that are the primary motivation for the development of a counter-trend in the analysis of contemporary imperialism. This counter-trend cuts across the political spectrum, including Fourth International orthodoxy, both Euro- and Soviet Communism, some variants of Maoism, and Althusserian structuralism. It is hardly coincidental that interest in the subject in the U.S. has begun to develop along with renewed attempts to justify the international revolutionary centrality of the metropolitan proletariat. Any position that implies, as many of these do, that the spontaneous trade union demands of the workers in the west are in the direct interests of the world revolution, will always find lots of buyers in this country.

There are three reasons why *Unequal Exchange* might not be the

From Rocky Mountain News, Denver, 1998



By gum, I rather like your looks.

ideal place to initiate an investigation of current anti-imperialist theory. The book is addressed to professional economists and it is difficult. It deals with only an aspect of imperialism, albeit a central one, if Emmanuel's arguments are valid. Beyond this, Emmanuel's political conclusions are more exaggerated and extreme, more "anti-working class" some might say, than are those of other writers with a basically similar perspective.

On the other hand, these same points are also reasons to begin with this book. Since it is not a general theory, but a particular argument, its assumptions and categories are less susceptible to debates over definitions which are a major stock in trade of the Althusserian sector of the counter-tendency (see the recent issue of the *Insurgent Sociologist* for examples). The difficulty of the book is also not without its benefits. Understanding Emmanuel's closely reasoned and elaborately footnoted treatment is a good grounding for the understanding of the entire issue. Finally, this review will argue that it is quite possible to reject aspects of Emmanuel's politics on grounds which are largely independent of the validity of his analysis of unequal exchange.

#### Critique of the "Law" of Comparative Advantages

Emmanuel's starting point appears far removed from major controversies among Marxists. He advances a critique of the doctrine of "comparative advantages," a theory of foreign trade identified with David Ricardo. This doctrine purports to show that all nations would benefit from free trade through the consequent development of an optimal international division of labor. (Interestingly, the USSR advances a parallel position with respect to its trade relations with Eastern Europe.) The reality is very different from what the doctrine would lead one to expect. According to Emmanuel,

... [there are] differences in levels of development, and even the widening of this gap between rich and poor nations despite many centuries of exchange and free trade. (page xx)

The doctrine of comparative advantages reeks of the notion of underlying harmony of interests, an essential pillar of bourgeois ideology, and obviously no Marxist accepts such a premise.

Still, there are two reasons why Emmanuel's critique of that theory

is relevant to Marxists. The long-term deterioration of the terms of trade for poor countries is a fact. The decline in relative prices holds for these countries whether the particular commodities are raw materials or manufactured products, whether they are produced with pre-capitalist techniques or with the most modern technology. The doctrine of comparative advantages proposes one possible reason for this — the absence of free trade. If that doctrine is invalid, as Emmanuel conclusively demonstrates, then it cannot even indirectly be an explanation of the deterioration of the terms of trade and the ob-

Emmanuel makes two assumptions about international economic relations which break with the assumptions of the doctrine of comparative advantages. First, as has been said, he assumes that capital is mobile and competitive across national borders, and therefore that profit equalization occurs internationally. Second, he assumes that labor is not mobile and competitive across national borders and thus there is no parallel tendency towards the international equalization of wage rates.

Emmanuel regards the mobility of capital as obvious and spends little time justifying this assumption

Lassalleian "Iron Law of Wages" in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.) In Marx's view the social minimum wage had an historical and moral basis, not only a biological one. Thus nationally specific features of the development of particular working classes — historical accidents, such as the presence of free land and the political alignments and relationships of class forces — allow the actual social minimum wage to rise substantially and permanently above the biological minimum. In other words, in the absence of international mobility of labor which would create a wage equal-

## two assumptions: capital is mobile and competitive across national borders; labor is not mobile and competitive across national borders

viously non-optimal international division of labor that exists. Thus Emmanuel raises an unanswered question for Marxist economists in this section, a question which he attempts to answer, but which is real regardless of the validity of his proposed answer.

Second, when Emmanuel attacks the doctrine of comparative advantages for illegitimately assuming that capital is not mobile across national borders, he is dealing with a point where Marxists are unclear. This may appear paradoxical given Lenin's well-known position on the significance of the "export of capital," but the real issue is whether capital is subject to the same laws that operate within a national economy when it ventures outside of national borders. The specific issue on this point is whether Marx's conception of the formation of an average rate of profit through the equalization of the rates of return on capital invested in different spheres of production operates on the international level. Emmanuel maintains that it does; other Marxists, e.g., Paul Sweezy in *Theory of Capitalist Development*, maintain that it does not.

tion — perhaps too little in view of some of the criticisms which his conclusions have received. On the other hand he develops an elaborate explanation of his assumption about wages. Indeed the heart of Emmanuel's entire argument, not just his refutation of the law of comparative advantages, rests on the difference between the Marxist theory of wages and the theory advanced by Riccardo and most classical economists.

Riccardo assumed that wages would tend towards equality across national borders whether or not labor was mobile, because in his theory, wages were essentially determined by the biological requirements for the maintenance and reproduction of life, requirements which did not vary appreciably from country to country. Marx argued that this biological minimum was only a floor below which wages could not be depressed for any substantial period of time. This floor was normally lower than the social minimum wage towards which actual wage rates tended to gravitate. (Remember the debate with Weston in *Value, Price and Profit* and Marx's ridicule of the

izing competition, it was logical, and, indeed, inevitable, that quite different levels of wages would exist from nation to nation.

While the nations with higher wages are also generally the ones where the productivity of labor is greater, the latter is not the cause of the former. The Marxist theory of wages specifically rejects the position that productivity determines the value of labor-power. Higher labor productivity is essentially a function of increases in the organic composition of capital (the ratio of the capitalist's outlay on means of production to the outlay on wages). It normally results in a reduction in the value of a unit of output, a reduction which, in itself, has nothing to do with wages. Higher productivity neither "causes" higher wages nor is it a "justification" for higher wages. At best it creates only a potential for higher wages, the realization of which is contingent on class struggle. If higher productivity basically comes from the worker having more means of production at his or her disposal, then only if his or her or his or her progenitor's labor was the source of these means of produc-

tion, would there be any sort of plausible "claim" to higher wages. In truth, however, the means of production, which are heavily concentrated in a few areas of the world, are the collective product of labor all over the world.

### The Formation of International Value

Marx deliberately excluded the question of the formation of international value from his treatment of capital. Emmanuel's essential project is the development of a theory of international value based on the assumptions mentioned above and integrated with the price of production formulas developed in Volume II of *Capital*. In that sense he sees his theory as a completion of Marx's theory of capital.

Since it is unlikely that most readers are completely familiar with Marx's theory of prices of production, I will include some of the schematic tables which both Marx and Emmanuel use to illustrate their concepts and arguments. I am using only the most simple representations, ignoring the many complications introduced by Emmanuel to make the schemes correspond more closely to actual economic conditions.

The first table assumes that the rate of surplus value,  $m/c+v$ , is the same in both countries, while the organic composition of capital,  $c/c+v$ , is higher in Country A. The total value of the production in each country is  $c+v+m$ . The average rate of profit is total  $m$ /total  $c+v$ . In this case the profit rate is  $120/480$  or 25 percent. When this average rate of profit is used to determine the actual profit in each country, and this actual profit is added to  $c+v$  to obtain prices of production, it is clear that B, the country with the lower organic composition of capital, will lose 15 units of its labor and A will gain a corresponding amount. When the simple arithmetic is worked out, it will show that one hour of labor

Country	$c$ Constant capital	$v$ Variable capital	$m$ Surplus value	$V$ Value $c+v+m$	$T$ Rate of profit $\frac{\Sigma m}{\Sigma c + \Sigma v}$	$p$ Profit $T(c+v)$	$L$ Price of pro- duction $c+v+p$
A	240	60	60	360	25%	75	375
B	120	60	60	240		45	225
	360	120	120	600		120	600

of country B will exchange for only 7/9 of an hour of labor of country A.

Of course this diagram assumes the validity of part of Emmanuel's argument, namely that capital is mobile internationally and thus an average rate of profit is formed on the international scale. This assumption makes no real difference at this point, however, since the diagram only demonstrates the transfer of value occasioned by exchange between sectors of an economy with different organic compositions of capital. The example could just as well be based on two industries rather than two countries.

(When Marx developed his conception of prices of production, he clearly recognized that this theoretical framework entailed a transfer of value from sectors of a national economy with a lower organic composition of capital to those with a higher organic composition. Only such a transfer could insure that

What [the individual capitalists] secure is only as much surplus value, and hence profit, as falls, when uniformly distributed, to the share of every aliquot part of the total social capital. (III:158)

In other words, this transfer insures that an equal profit is realized on each unit of investment, irrespective of the relative proportions going to wages and to means of production. Without such a transfer, the labor theory of value would

entail a higher profit rate in areas of lower organic composition of capital . . . that is, in general, in less developed areas of the economy. We would then be forced to conclude that either capitalism could not be economically progressive or that the labor theory of value was mistaken.)

The application of prices of production to international exchange involves such a transfer of value, proceeding in this case from nations with lower organic compositions of capital to nations with higher ones. Emmanuel terms this process "unequal exchange in the broad sense" and specifically rejects it as an element in his theory. In general, he argues that this form of unequal exchange is not a distinctive feature of international trade, but is common to all capitalist exchange. Further it does not result in the poorer nation becoming still poorer. The arguments on this point are technical and not particularly relevant to either Emmanuel's thesis or this review. If the reader is interested, they can be found in Chapter 4 of his book.

Emmanuel's concern is with unequal exchange of a different type, with different consequences, both economically and politically. The source of this unequal exchange rests not in differences in the organic composition of capital, but in differences in wage rates and the rate of surplus value ( $m/v$  in the following diagram). To crudely illustrate the process consider the following example:



Country	$K$ Total capital invested	$c$ Constant capital consumed	$v$ Variable capital	$m$ Surplus value	$V$ Value $c + v + m$	$R$ Cost of pro- duction $c + v$	$T$ Rate of profit $\frac{m}{\Sigma K}$	$p$ Profit $TK$	$L$ Price of pro- duction $c + v + p$
A	240	50	100	20	170	150	33 1/3%	80	230
B	120	50	20	100	170	70		40	110
	360	100	120	120	340	220		120	340

Obviously a transfer of value takes place from the low wage nation to the high wage one in the same way as in the earlier example. This 'second form of unequal exchange, Emmanuel argues, is not inherent in capitalism. It is not a necessary consequence of the operation of capitalist economic laws, but a historical accident stemming from the geographical differentiation of the rewards of labor. This in turn is a political, not an economic fact, developing from the division of the world into separate state entities and the relations of domination and subordination between these entities. Unequal exchange of this type has none of the indirect benefits associated with unequal exchange in the broad sense. It is not essential to the development of capitalist productive forces, it does not lead to anything resembling an optimal international division of labor, it undermines the terms of trade for poor countries in a cumulative fashion.

### Some Questions

The main lines of argument of *Unequal Exchange* are very carefully drawn. (The same cannot be said of the political conclusions, as will be pointed out later.) I am extremely doubtful whether these arguments can be successfully challenged within the framework of the basic assumptions that Emmanuel makes. However, the two basic assumptions, the international mobility of capital and the immobility of labor across national borders, are open to challenge.

Emmanuel's assumption of the international mobility of capital

runs counter to popularized Leninism. He argues that the competition of capital entails equalization of profits on domestic and foreign investments while popular Leninism stresses "imperialist superprofits" obtained through the export of capital. There was a period when relations between metropolis and periphery were characterized by open robbery and plunder, supported by the threat, or the fact, of military intervention. This did mean gross superprofits for favored capitalist concerns. However, this process is essentially primitive accumulation and does not differ greatly from what occurred prior to the development of capitalism into imperialism. Such primitive accumulation is a minor factor in current relations between metropolis and periphery. Moreover, the combination of competition between imperialist centers, and, particularly, the political strength of the international movement for anti-imperialist national liberation militates against it. Consequently, it is necessary that the extraction of surplus value take place mainly through "normal" economic processes.

What is left of imperialist superprofits, then, are the profits derived from various monopoly advantages, particularly those advantages based on access to strategic resources via connections within client regimes. In fact, such extra profits are not different in kind from the extra profits derived from parallel monopoly advantages within imperialist countries. At issue is whether they are substantially greater in magnitude.

This is not a simple question of

fact. The available statistics are inherently unreliable. For example, foreign investment will undoubtedly mean a higher domestic profit rate than would have occurred if the total capital had been invested domestically. Then, no allowance for extra risk premiums is included in the statistics for foreign profit. Finally, much of foreign investment takes place within international capitalist firms which have unlimited ability to disguise relative profit rates through the use of transfer prices (more on this later).

Beyond these distorting factors, the available figures themselves are ambiguous. Emmanuel has statistics supporting the position that there is no great distinction in profit rates. Samir Amin, who agrees with Emmanuel on many points, challenges him on this one and introduces different and conflicting statistics. (*Accumulation On A World Scale*, Volume I, page 53) Other sources argue that while U.S. imperialism has a distinctly higher profit rate from foreign investment, British imperialism does not. (Michael Barratt Brown, *Studies In The Theory Of Imperialism*, page 55)

Of course, Emmanuel's thesis does not rest on the assumption of a unique international rate of profit, but only on the existence of a tendency towards profit equalization following from competition of capital. He realizes that differential risk factors and imperfect competition will both tend to establish a hierarchy of profit rates from foreign investment. In fact, Emmanuel attempts to calculate the impact on unequal exchange of a higher rate of profit in the capitalist periphery. He concludes that to prevent the transfer of value from the periphery to the center, assuming the rate of surplus value is less than unity, the ratio between wage rates in peripheral and metropolitan areas must be the same as, or less than, the ratio between profit rates in metropolitan and peripheral areas. However much greater the rate of profit in low wage areas may

**The vast (and growing) bulk of imperialist capital investment is to Canada and Europe, where the main conditions for imperialist superprofits do not exist.**

be, the ratio does not approach the 1:10 or 1:20 ratio between wage rates.

Though the evidence for equalization of profit rates is ambiguous, Emmanuel makes a good circumstantial argument for it beginning from facts which are not open to challenge. The vast (and growing) bulk of imperialist capital export is to Canada and Europe, where the main conditions for imperialist superprofits do not exist. Imperialist capital export results in a net repatriation of capital. Capital available in peripheral areas is commonly invested in the center although opportunity for local investment in imperialist firms is available (see Commerce Department Report, *U.S. Business Investments in Foreign Countries*).

Given the universally recognized fact that the motivation of the capitalist firm is to maximize profits, this behavior can hardly be reconciled with the premise of permanently and substantially higher rate of profit in the periphery. Such a differential would stimulate a flow of investment towards the periphery. It would lead to re-investment there, not repatriation of capital. Clearly, monopoly control of the investment opportunities would not necessarily prevent investment. In fact, there is evidence that these monopolies solicit local financing of their activities. Even if this were not true, they would have the ability to make investment decisions between their operations on the periphery and their operations elsewhere. In short, if the alleged

profit differential existed, the profit-maximizing course would be the maximum possible investment in the peripheral areas.

Emmanuel's economic model does not sufficiently take account of the impact of imperfect competition, except, of course, in terms of wages, where the absence of international competition is a basic assumption. Monopoly control of technology and markets and influence on government policy creates a situation in which the competition of capital does not lead to the formation of an average rate of profit, but to a structure of rates of profit dependent on a variety of factors specific to various sections of the economy. However, the competition still exists, and results in movements of capital which tend to equalize, not the average, but the marginal rate of profit (the return on the last unit of investment). It is conceivable that a situation could exist where the average rate of profit was higher in a certain industry in the metropolis than in an industry in the periphery, but that new investment would bring a greater return in the latter because in the former its impact would be to reduce the profitability of the existing investment. In such a case, capital would be exported in spite of, not because of, differences in the average rates of profit.

This amendment has only limited impact on Emmanuel's general argument. In my view it does not affect the basic process of transfer of value from poor nation to rich nation under the cover of trade.

This process depends on national differentials in rates of surplus values under conditions of international competition of capital, and these two factors are based in current political-economic reality. The amendment, however, does affect the *political* conclusions to be drawn from this process.

Emmanuel's rejection of any importance to imperialism in the competition of capital on the international level leads him to the conclusion that the great bulk of the transfer of value takes place through the pricing mechanisms and the terms of trade. That is, the labor of poor countries is drained away mainly through the underpricing of the products of that labor due to the relationship between national and international prices of production. To the degree that imperfections in the process of equalizing profits are recognized, the transfer of value, while proceeding in the same direction from poor to rich nations, becomes one in which monopoly profit as well as terms of trade are involved. Large imperialist firms, which by definition have some control over price, can act in ways which prevent the benefits of unequal exchange from being completely concentrated in the relatively favorable international prices of commodities produced in low-wage countries. If they are so concentrated, the benefits are more or less evenly dispersed throughout the consuming population of the high-wage country — Emmanuel's basic political conclusion.

(Continued on page 42)

**The transfer of value from poor nation to rich nation depends on national differentials in rates of surplus value under conditions of international competition of capital.**

# Continuing the debate on the

## Ignatin: Is this socialism?

### REVIEW:

Socialism in the Soviet Union  
by Jonathan Aurthur  
(Workers Press, Chicago, 1977)

The literature produced by the "new communist movement" on the USSR is a depressing sight. From the relatively ambitious studies prepared by the Revolutionary Communist Party (*How Capitalism Has Been Restored in the Soviet Union and What This Means For the World Struggle*) and the Octo-

ber League (*Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR*, by Martin Nicolaus) to the shorter statements which seem to be obligatory for all the small groups that make up the kaleidoscopic configuration known as the "anti-revisionist left," all the treatises on "social-imperialism" blend a reasoning process that starts with the desired result and a thundering ignorance of the realities of working class life.

In this field of unrelieved mediocrity, Jonathan Aurthur's book

*Socialism in the Soviet Union*, published by the press of the Communist Labor Party, stands out. It will undoubtedly be a success among fairly large numbers of people who have had the good sense to recoil from the full consequences of the pure Maoist position.

The author modestly comments, in the introduction, "Of all the revolutionary groupings in the United States of North America,"  
(Continued on page 38)

## Glaberman: Ignatin tosses out Leninist methodology

*Editor's Note: The following letter is reproduced from private correspondence earlier this year. Its writer, Martin Glaberman, has agreed to this publishing, which is designed to promote further discussion of issues addressed in Noel Ignatin's pamphlet No Condescending Saviors, an STO publication.*

March 1, 1977

These are some of the sketchy notes I have outlining some of my disagreements with Noel's pamphlet.

1. On page 3 of the pamphlet, Noel states: "The most dramatic accomplishment of the Bolshevik Revolution was the violent expropriation of the exploiters and the establishment of a state based on nationalized property." False. The revolution did not nationalize property, not until much later, much of it the result of the desertion or disappearance of the capitalists. The most dramatic accomplishment (remember Marx on the Commune) was the establishment of workers' power, a proletarian dictatorship. The formulation concedes the main

point to the opposition right at the start — that the revolution was about nationalized property rather than workers control and power.

Then, on page 18: "... the net effect on the world revolutionary movement would have been better had the Soviet leaders taken steps to broaden the base of participation in state affairs." They did take such steps (workers and peasants inspection, etc.) The working class was not up to it for a number of reasons, some of which Noel indicates.

The problem, in part, is a rather loose use of terminology. Noel says Russia never had socialism. Of course. But it did have, for a few years, workers power. What he does not face is that there was a counter-revolution, organized and led by Stalin, which overthrew that power by overwhelming force and violence, the killing and imprisonment of, literally, millions, including the entire top leadership of the Bolshevik party.

2. Noel says on page 22: "What I do not see is the existence of any objective, intrinsic, overpowering

compulsion to accumulate, with roots in the nature of Soviet society comparable to those which exist in the West." And again, on page 23, he states: "... the absence of any fundamental drive to accumulate has been predicated on the isolation of (page 24:) the Soviet Union from the world market owing to the state monopoly on foreign trade."

Can you not see the contradiction in that sentence? If there is foreign trade there is no isolation from the world market. The factory manager may be isolated from foreign trade (although in fact he is not) but the economy certainly is not. Why does the Soviet Union have a problem with western trade with eastern Europe (Poland, Rumania, etc.)? Why does the Soviet Union have to use military force to force trade concessions from satellite countries? Because it is in competition with other national blocks of capital. Military competition is part of that, and not for internal prestige, but from economic necessity.

Page 24: "And no one has yet demonstrated the existence of any



# nature of the Soviet Union

objective inherent force capable of compelling them to imperialistic behavior." That is applying new left confusion to the Soviet Union. There was no inherent force compelling the U.S. to intervene in Vietnam (after all, Britain and France had the good sense to stay out). It is totally contradicted by (page 26): "For those who live under the heel of the Soviet Union or face the threat of its might, the situation is different." Why is it different?

Then there is the whole question of how different the Soviet Union is to western imperialism in relation to colonial countries. There is a confusion here resulting from a loose use of terms: socialist revolution, national revolution, proletarian revolution, revolution, etc. Noel points out elsewhere that the revolutions in the third world are not proletarian, not socialist. That is why the Soviet Union can give them military support and why its role in eastern Europe is different.

But there is more to it than that. Germany moved to take over a share of the colonial world, helping to bring about World War I. Russia is in an equivalent position, cut off from colonies that are distant — but in a different period, a period of neo-colonialism, indirect economic control, rather than what Lenin described, direct, total political control of underdeveloped countries by industrial countries. Russia's military aid to colonial revolutionary movements can,

therefore, accomplish neo-colonialist control, partial or complete (why else would Castro endorse the Czech invasion?), and/or access to markets but especially raw materials, and/or exclusion of its imperialist rivals (U.S., etc.) from those same markets and raw materials or, at the least, forcing the western powers to share that access. The African movements (and Cuba) are fortunate that their distance limits the possibilities of Russian intervention against them.

Also, it is not true (or at least not the whole truth) that "Soviet policy is to a major extent aimed at weakening the system of private property capitalism." It is also aimed at weakening state property China, as a major thrust, and supports private property India, etc., vs. China — just as China supports private property Pakistan vs. India, and so on.

3. In view of Noel's point of view elaborated on page 26 and elsewhere, that the role of Russia is contradictory, it is difficult to understand the statement that it is the most dangerous enemy the working class movement has ever known. (Especially since they are responding not to objective necessity but to a vision.) It smacks too much of Shachtman's theory of bureaucratic collectivism in which in stage one it was more progressive than capitalism, in stage two it was equally reactionary, and in stage three it was more reactionary, leading him

to defend American imperialism as the lesser evil. I am not saying that is where Noel is heading (he also says that the main enemy is at home), but I am saying that that kind of ambiguity does not help anyone's thinking.

There is one additional main area that distorts the usefulness of the pamphlet. State capitalism is presented as a theory of the nature of the Soviet Union. For me it is a theory of the stage of world capitalism. Not to deal with it is to toss out Leninist methodology. Fifty years after Marx, Lenin defined a new stage. He defined it on the basis of where the most advanced countries had reached (just as Marx had done in the first place) but he applied it to the whole world. So that either you are dealing with a theory of Russian exceptionalism, or you are dealing with a theory (and a stage) which makes sense of the rise of fascist totalitarian dictatorships, British and French nationalized industry, and qualitatively more massive government intervention in the U.S. Noel may be leaving out the western world (although he refers to it, incorrectly, as private capitalism) in order not to prejudice the response of the rest of the left. Whether or not that is his purpose, it weakens the theoretical (and practical) argument and prevents us from dealing with the new stage of the proletariat in the western countries and the soviet bloc.

## : USSR is imperialist

To the editors:

I am writing in regard to Noel Ignatin's pamphlet *No Condescending Saviors* and to the letter by Marty Glaberman about it.

Noel argues that there is no compelling economic drive in the Soviet

Union to export capital, extract superprofits, etc. He says the Soviets are instead motivated on a world scale by political choice, a vision of "proletcult and new-speak". Within that framework, he argues we should analyze and un-

derstand the differences and similarities between Western imperialism and the Soviet Union. He goes on to argue that Soviet imperialism consists of direct looting, direct ownership of industry in foreign countries, and unequal trade agree-

ments. (pages 21-26)

Glaberman says that the Soviet Union is cut off from direct colonies, and engages in neo-colonial economic control of other countries; that the Soviets aim not only at weakening private property capitalism, but at weakening state capitalist China, promoting private property India, etc. In other words the USSR acts as one more bloc of state capital in a world stage of state capitalism.

I have some sympathy for Glaberman's position, and would argue the following: *If* the Soviet Union is state capitalist and *if* the Soviet Union is located within the world capitalist system, *then* it is faced with the problem of competition between capitals and hence it must accumulate. This drive for accumulation becomes the driving force of the Soviet economy, and in foreign affairs it assumes both a political and economic complexion. Further, British and French imperialism have been declining since World War II, and the subsequent redivision of the world has made the U.S. pre-eminent. The greatest challenge to U.S. hegemony comes not from another imperialist power (they all pale before the strength of the U.S.) but from the national liberation movements in the Third World. It is within this context that I think the differences and similarities between the Soviet Union and Western imperialism should be understood.

Ignatin's problem is that he is looking for a superfluity of capital, unable to be profitably invested in the Soviet Union. But a superfluity of capital is relative. A superfluity of capital could be invested in the well-being of the working class, a political choice Ignatin says the Soviets could make, but don't. But if they did, to paraphrase Lenin, then capitalism wouldn't be capitalism. One further remark before going to the crux of the matter. I agree that Soviet imperialism exhibits the three features mentioned above, but at least one of them, the



Soviet shoppers lining up to purchase scarce goods.

ownership of industry in foreign nations, requires the export of capital.

One of the major points of contention is whether there is an economic law that forces the Soviet Union to accumulate. Ignatin defines capitalism as requiring an independent class of wage-laborers and "some force which compels the exploiters to accumulate capital . . . it is competition among different capitals." While not agreeing that the above is an adequate definition of capitalism, it is true that competition between capitals forces accumulation. But in the USSR there is only one capital, the state capital. What then forces accumulation?

He cites the International Socialists' argument: that strategic and military competition between the Soviets and the West force the development of an arms economy, which in turn forces development of capital accumulation throughout the Soviet economy.

Ignatin disagrees with the I.S. and says the competition is mostly political . . . to show that "socialism" is superior to capitalism. But that is a political choice. If they wanted to cut back military spend-

ing and produce consumer goods, the Soviets have that option. He says there is no explanation of Soviet Union behavior that roots accumulation in objective law, irrespective of the wishes of men (pages 20-23). But the Soviet Union is still capitalist without this drive to accumulate. Moreover, he gives an example of this type of capitalist anomaly, the antebellum American South: "Just as in the case of the Soviets today, the drive to accumulate was not economic in the sense that Marx had traditionally considered it, but political: in the case of the South, the need to maintain parity with the North in political influence and, more generally, the need to provide some opportunity for advancement to poor whites. . . ." (page 23)

While I think the above remark is useful in understanding U.S. history, it's not the whole truth and I disagree that there was no economic law operative. I agree with Marx when he said, "Quite apart from the *economical law* which makes the diffusion of slavery a vital condition for its maintenance within its constitutional areas, the leaders of the South had never



deceived themselves as to the necessity for keeping up their *political* sway over the United States." (Marx, *The American Question in England*, italics in original. Also quoted by Ken Lawrence in *Karl Marx on American Slavery*.) Further, "A tight restriction of slavery within the old terrain was bound, therefore, according to economic law, to lead to its gradual extinction, to the annihilation, in the political sphere, of the hegemony that the slave states exercised through the Senate. . . ." (Marx, *The North American Civil War*) I too believe the Soviet Union is comparable to the antebellum South; it must expand or die by dint of economic law.

I believe the first period of Soviet accumulation, before World War II, was in many respects similar to the classic English primitive accumulation. It involved the destruction of the peasantry and the development of an industrial base (which in the USSR was steel, transportation, and utilities). This primitive accumulation was driven by the new state capitalist mode of production competing with and taking over the old pre-capitalist mode. The survival and expansion of state capitalism throughout the USSR was driven by economic compulsion the same as the earlier capitalism was in England, where the competition was between landholders and capitalholders. The fact that decisions were made in the Soviet Union by plan instead of anarchically doesn't erase that compulsion, it only covers it up.

Noel agrees that the Soviet Union is state capitalist. It seems that if you accept the logic of my first argument (which Noel does by stating on his own that competition of capitals forces accumulation) then the question has to be directed at the other axiom — the integration of the Soviet Union in the world capitalist system.

The holders of the theory of the "socialist world," the CPUSA, CLP, etc., say there is no integration of

the "socialist countries" into the world capitalist systems. They hold, similar to Noel, that the competition is political. A variant of that is the *Guardian's* position: "socialist countries are affected in varying degrees by the existence of a world capitalist system. . . . But it would be absurd to see (Vietnam) as a 'part' of that system. . . ." (*Guardian*, 6/1/77)

I'll agree that prior to World War II the integration of the state capitalist USSR into the world capitalist system was weak. But even so, by 1927 Ford had produced 85 per cent of all tractors in use in the USSR. During the first Five Year Plan, 1929-1933, Albert Kahn Construction from the U.S. designed nearly 600 plants throughout the Soviet Union. By 1931 the USSR was buying two thirds of all U.S. exports of farm equipment. And there was more, all requiring credit, money, and commodity exchanges.

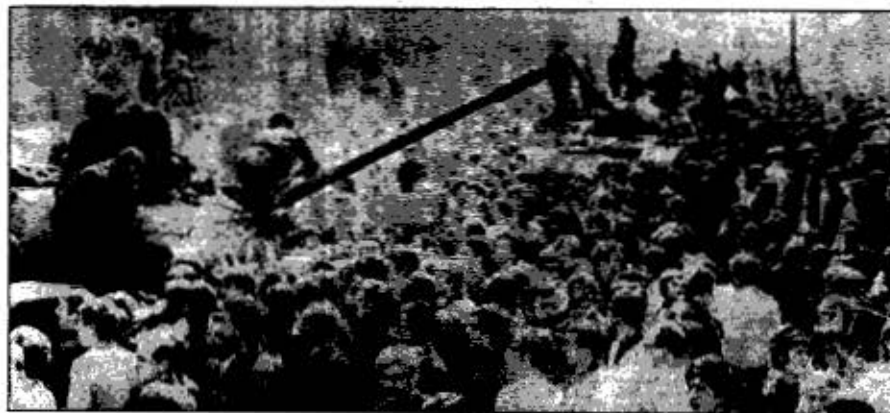
After World War II the USSR was faced with a direct threat by U.S. capital. Much of its economic base was destroyed (like France and Germany) and a massive influx of U.S. capital was taking over those weakened economies. It was no accident that the CPUSA, sycophant of the CPSU, directed much of its attention in those years to the Marshall Plan. Could it be that Eugene Dennis and William Z. Foster were worried about the sovereignty of French capital? It was in direct response to the Marshall Plan that the Soviets developed their

own sphere of influence in Europe, the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon).

What kind of imperialism is it, some ask, that builds self-sufficient economies with rising standards of living, like in Eastern Europe? Put another way, does the USSR disarticulate the local economies, cutting down the exchange between sectors, creating population surpluses in the low productivity sectors, and channeling all production to the Soviet Union as is the classic case in the Third World? Even with the increasing "socialist division of labor" and the development of trade based on "comparative advantage," the answer is no. But neither did the Marshall Plan do that to Western Europe. The form that Comecon took was a direct result of the economic threat from the West.

A classic Third World example would be Cuba, where efforts at economic diversification in the mid '60's were reversed and Russian "aid" led Cuba back to its one crop economy. Of course, Cuban distance from the USSR has prevented a total disarticulation of the Cuban economy, and more chickens and cattle are being raised than ever before.

Although the Soviets will put their foot in the Third World door wherever they can (Egypt, India), it is in Europe that the economic competition is fiercest. Fifty-five per cent of all Soviet foreign trade is with Eastern Europe, and 33 per



Soviet tanks in Czechoslovakia, 1968. No economic compulsion?



cent of all U.S. foreign trade is in Western Europe. Although I don't have the figures at my fingertips, the U.S. trade with the East has been growing (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania), and the Soviets have similarly increased their trade with the West (France). This is economic competition between capitals. It involves relative labor productivities, relative organic composition of capitals, and the ability to expand and accumulate or die.

Why don't the Soviets just pack up their capitalist baggage and go home? Because they are now firmly entrenched, driven by competition, in the world capitalist system. By 1971 outstanding USSR debts to the West, excluding the controversial lend lease, amounted to over *two billion* U.S. dollars. USSR trade in 1971, before the wheat deal, involved \$13,806 million in export and \$12,479 million in import. Their total GNP that year was only \$115,400 million.

This is hardly the picture of a capital formation in political but not economic competition and integration with other capitals.

To reiterate. Given that the Soviet Union is state capitalist, and now, I hope, given its integration into the world capitalist system, it is forced by law to compete and accumulate. Accumulation on a world scale equals *imperialism*. It is that framework that best explains Soviet behavior and leads to an understanding of modern imperialism and the world situation.



What would he say about the USSR today?

## Ignatin

(continued from page 34)

only the Communist Labor Party has been able to look objectively at the crisis in the world communist movement, of which the Sino-Soviet split is the main manifestation." It is this ability which has enabled the CLP, according to the writer, to oppose revisionism while refusing to accept that capitalism has been restored in the Soviet Union. The introduction makes clear that the question is of not mere theoretical interest, but is a matter of breaking up a developing world alliance aimed at the destruction of socialism with fascist war.

The book begins with a discussion of philosophy and history to show that the social retrogression is contrary to both dialectics and experience, that a higher form of social organization, once having taken root, cannot be overturned except by conquest.

It passes to a section on political economy, which begins with some definitions — of class, stratum, capitalism and socialism. The juiciest plum is a citation from Stalin about "the securing of the maximum satisfaction . . ." — a standard example of bourgeois utilitarian theory which Aurthur describes as "the basic law of socialism." (page 27)

Following this, the book takes up the economic development of the USSR. This is its strongest section. In a series of chapters making up Part I, it demonstrates that the foundation of state-owned property, established under Stalin, is unshakeable. A great deal of responsibility is laid on the backwardness and isolation of the USSR for the specific forms which arose, including low productivity and "a privileged stratum, an elite, at the very apex of the Party and state." It is this elite — which is not a class in the Leninist sense — that represents an anti-Marxist trend, and that is responsible for the introduction of a number of reforms which

are an attempt to counter the problem of low productivity. These reforms failed "because they came into contradiction . . . with an objective law of socialism, the law of balanced development of the economy."

The problem, according to Aurthur, is that the present leaders are attempting to deal with real problems, the heritage of tsarism, by revisionist means, and that this policy has given rise to a privileged elite, economic dislocations, a black market, etc.

The next section of the book takes up the favorite claims of the Maoists and refutes them, in its fashion. Thus, the question of whether labor power is a commodity is posed as follows: "Does [the worker] get paid according to his production or is he paid according to the market price of labor power — a market price that necessarily and at all times presupposes a reserve army of unemployed?" The fact that the Soviet economy is today characterized by a general shortage, rather than a surplus, of workers is taken to disprove the charge that labor power has become a commodity.

The charge that the Soviet Union exports capital, and is therefore imperialist, is refuted by pointing to the so-called "socialist division of labor" which exists among the Comecon countries, and which has led to the unprecedented situation in which the "colonies" of eastern Europe experience more rapid economic growth than the USSR itself. The writer also shows that Soviet relations with the underdeveloped countries, to whom it extends low-interest loans, are substantially different from those of typical imperialisms.

In another chapter, Aurthur considers whether the Soviet Union is "militarist" and concludes that it is not, that Soviet policy is defensive, not aggressive.

The last chapter of the book deals with political questions. In spite of bureaucratic distortions,

which have led to the separation, to some extent, of the state from the people and the demoralization of the masses, the Soviet state remains a dictatorship of the proletariat. This is proven by the continued existence of the soviets, bodies which combine executive and legislative functions, and the bringing in, every year, of large numbers of workers and peasants to the work of administering the state.

The preceding brief summary has not done justice to Aurther's book. In its seriousness and reasonableness of approach, it towers over the products of the "new communist movement" the way an anthill towers over a flat and barren plain. Skillfully exposing how the Maoists distort Marxism and the facts, it makes hash out of their contention that capitalism has been restored in the Soviet Union. It is all the more effective because it admits the existence of serious defects in Soviet society, something which the Communist Party apologists are unwilling to do.

The book looks good partly because it goes up against easy opponents, the restorationists, who share many of its basic assumptions. There is another view, which holds that the Soviet Union never reached socialism but instead halted at the stage of state capitalism shortly after the October Revolution. That view is not mentioned by Aurther, except for one brief reference to Trotsky, "that bagman of William Randolph Hearst and Adolf Hitler," as its "father."

In the first place it is inaccurate to ascribe the theory of the Soviet Union as state capitalist to Trotsky. As anyone who takes the trouble to read him will know, Trotsky to the end of his life regarded property relations in the USSR as socialist. He felt that the problem was the inability of Russia to resist the pressures of the world market, and the rise of a parasitic, bureaucratic stratum. Thus, he critically supported the USSR and called for a



Soldiers on guard during 1970 workers' rebellion in Poland.

change in the political sphere to safeguard the social achievements of the October Revolution. Aurther himself is much closer to Trotsky's views than are the theoreticians of state capitalism.

It was Lenin who developed the theory of state capitalism as a stage on the way to socialism. He repeated it a dozen times and it was the dominant view at the time of his death. So far as we know, no one even suggested before the 1930's that Russia was socialist. If Aurther wants to maintain that it is now, it is up to him to demonstrate the developments that brought about the change.

On the nature of capital: Marx refers to "the authority assumed by the capitalist by his personification of capital in the direct process of production" which he says "impresses itself upon the mass of direct producers as a strictly regulating authority and as a social mechanism of the labor process graduated into a complete hierarchy." (*Capital*, Kerr edition, Volume III, page 1027)

Is this not a perfect description of the Soviet Union today, where the separation of the workers from the means of production is more complete than even in the U.S.? In my pamphlet, *No Condescending Saviors*, I included an appendix describing piece-work in a Hungarian factory (Hungary being one of the "socialist" countries of eastern Europe). I challenge anyone who has ever worked at Ford to tell the difference. The Hungarian, and also the Soviet, workers fit perfectly Marx' description of "the detail-worker of today, crippled by lifelong repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to a mere fragment of a man. . . ."

What else is this but the relation of capital and labor? Aurther writes: "Socialist literature . . . uses the words 'capital,' 'wages,' and so on to apply to the socialist economy. Now how can 'capital' exist under a system which has abolished capital? Obviously it cannot be the same capital. How can wages exist under socialism if socialism is, as Marx points out, the abolition of



the wages system? Obviously it is a new kind of wages. Similarly with profit, rent, interest, etc."

This brings to mind the plea of the man arrested for burglary: "Yes, officer, I realize that you have discovered in my basement a large quantity of color TV's, stereos, cameras and wristwatches for which I have no sales slips and which match the serial numbers of items recently stolen from appliance stores. However, since I am an honest man and honest men do not steal, therefore, the presence of all these TV sets etc. in my basement must have some reasonable explanation, which I am sure will satisfy you, officer, since you received your training in Logic at the Academy of the CLP, under the instruction of Jonathan Aurthur."

On the export of capital: it is true that the Soviet Union does not export capital in the manner of traditional imperialist countries; neither does the U.S. The general movement of capital in the world today is from the less developed to the more developed countries, exactly the opposite of what Lenin described in *Imperialism*. The reasons for this have to do with the declining rate of profit and the

On the last point I wish to raise here, the nature of the Russian state, I can do no better than quote Max Shachtman, from a debate with Herbert Aptheker: "How can you call me anti-soviet? I'm pro-soviet! There just aren't any soviets in Russia!"

Aurthur's attempt to link the bodies that call themselves "soviets" in Russia today — bodies which are elected from a single list on a geographical rather than industrial basis, where the "delegates" come together for six weeks in every year and arrive at every single decision unanimously, and whose approval is not required even in cases of the most important personnel changes in government — with resulting *shortage* of capital (shortage only in relation to the scale required by the present level of technology) in the industrial world. Thus, there are two world centers, each striving to centralize and subordinate to itself an increasing mass of capital, including entire territories with their populations and raw materials. What is involved is not the sale of commodities, nor even the export of capital, but world domination. Is this imperialism?

the living, active councils of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies that overthrew the tsar in 1917... such a comparison makes one weep for the writing of history. As for the incorporation of workers and peasants into the administration: well, the United Automobile Workers union knows how to do that — and every one of the workers it incorporates becomes a functionary of an apparatus which is hostile, in its very being, to the class interests of those it purports to represent. The organization which calls itself the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has mastered the technique of ruling the workers by providing a staggering multitude of organizations which they are encouraged to join, and suppressing "with an iron hand" any the workers create on their own.

For all Aurthur's talk about the "class nature" of "soviet democracy," the fact remains that it is forbidden for a group of workers in a Russian factory to call a meeting and publish a newsletter aimed at the removal of an objectionable foreman, still less a union official. Is this socialism?

Noel Ignatin

## Correspondence

To the editors:

There are two works that STO has sent that a few of us have dealt with: (1) *Towards a Revolutionary Party*, and (2) *White Supremacy and the National Question*. There is a general consensus that the former needs to be redone. Some works can be reprinted, but others have to be revised in order to obtain the desired result. The introduction helps, but it is still hard to gain the continuity that is necessary.

On the latter work there are two positions: (1) That the paper is revisionist and negates "universal principles of Marxism-Leninism"

(specifically Stalin's formulation of a nation), which those of us who disagree with this position see as dogmatic, and a denial of Marxism-Leninism. (2) The other position stems from the realization that white supremacy is a reality, that the point of U.S. capital utilizing it for control on two fronts is valid. What is in error, we believe, is the emphasis on the ideology of white supremacy from an historical perspective, i.e., it seems that it is implied that the control mechanism existed before the material conditions, and primacy is given to the former.

The example of the English

working class being opposed to slavery, but not self-determination of Scots, etc., has to be dealt with in accord with the historical reality of these people, the ideology of control there, the cultural norms of the English as opposed to the Americans. [dealt with *Grundrisse* — have understanding of how it is presented.]

In conclusion it seems that while the paper has value, the formulations lead not to new realities on the "National Question"; more, STO has not really clarified its position, but has left that to Blacks, etc., which bows to the narrow nationalists who project nation-



building in isolation from the larger struggle.

i am a citizen of the Republic of New Afrika, yet i find myself at odds with the tactics utilized, and, in particular, the narrow outlook of many in leadership positions. Just as you must (We all must) deal with white supremacy — so, too, must We deal with the question of nations' right of self-determination. The reality of Blacks not only deals with the racism prevalent, but also the class question, and at this point in time We have to be a little more critical, opposed to generalizations. Racism is a cornerstone of the American cultural reality, and there does exist a need to attack it wherever it exists, as We attack all values, ideas, practices of the U.S. in particular.

The question of class still remains at the top — not because October League or anyone said it, but because even if you deal with the Black National Question, looking at the internal relationships — class reality is also reflected. We have to attack the enemy wherever it exists.

The majority of nationalist groupings today reflect the petty-bourgeoisie, or elements who adhere to petty bourgeois ideas. If they deal with the National Question, race is primary. STO needs a new perspective, for, although you deal with different issues, you incorporate views that you presented in the past to counteract positions that either liquidate or distort the National Question, yet without critically analyzing the validity of these positions in light of changes within the Black populus, and the oppressed masses.

Things (conditions) have changed and the need exists to struggle not only against white supremacy — but the whole realm of capitalist cultural manifestations — showing the relationship, and the need to adhere to Marxism-Leninism. In the main there is implied an over-emphasis of white supremacy in relation to the "National Question," which i don't think is a conscious act, but stems

from STO seeking to get people to deal with this reality. What you have presented contains: 1. National Question; 2. Black and white unity of the masses; 3. Role of white supremacy; 4. Multi-national party, from different perspectives; 5. as well as speaking to the necessity of tactics and strategy for dealing with these various issues.

The strength of the paper is that it makes note of a critical point: that class and race are intimately related in America, and the need for generating a cultural revolution representative of the new tasks that exist, and that will arise. The fear i have is that of opening the door to narrow nationalist trends. You must be critical of both.

Lastly the position of *Multi-National Party Now*, i believe to be correct; but qualified in that the struggle We speak of must be waged *inside the Party as well as the society as a whole*. The reality today is one that denotes irresponsibility on the part of Marxist-Leninist groups and organizations. The struggle of the pen, greater than thou, do what i want, and say what i want, is dominant. Those We say We struggle for and with are subordinated in practice to sectarian wishes, negating dialectical and historical materialism, and the fund of knowledge at our disposal. i don't believe We will gain what We need by more National Groupings in the abstract. Those that exist exemplify weaknesses that others (Marxist-Leninists) could aid them in dealing with and vice versa. That changes have taken place should be noted when We ask the question "What organization on a national level leads the Black masses?". There are local Black groups, and some serve the masses around them well, yet they are isolated from forces that could and must aid them. This is another historical reality We must not play past.

— Hodari Mwongeza  
(from prison)

#### A Response —

This letter is a complex one, so we have chosen to limit our reply to a central point which is made which bears on all the others — the writer's concern about "narrow nationalism." Our point will be that "narrow nationalism" is a contradiction in terms inapplicable to oppressed nations in the age of imperialism.

It is crucial to remember that capitalism is now a *world* system. While class struggle is waged within the frontiers of countries — workers vs. the bourgeoisie — it has another and *leading* dimension: the dimension of world class struggle. As imperialism developed it began to treat whole countries-full of people as reserve labor armies. It forced migration and caused populations to forge nations where none were before. Its march proletarianized these nations. It turned entire *countries* into banana plantations, rubber plantations, feedlots, and oilfields. It robbed and immiserated all but a few comprador bourgeoisie and bureaucrats. It forced the petit bourgeoisie down in the class structure, thus inclining it to ally with the workers. And it subjected the peasantry to direct imperial control, causing it to align with workers.

In the U.S. this process took the form of freezing Blacks at the bottom of the class ladder. Meanwhile, white workers were struggling for a bigger slice of the pie and striving to make gains at the expense of Black workers. White workers practiced narrow nationalism ("Buy American") while Black workers in Louisiana struck in sympathy with liberation struggles in Africa and engaged in continuous battles — demanding community control of schools, convulsing whole metropolitan centers, wreaking havoc in the auto plants. This, because imperialist oppression inevitably gives rise to movements for self-determination, here as in Vietnam. And these movements by their very nature take aim at the heart of

capitalism. Such movements cannot be considered narrow. In fact they are as broad as the world class struggle.

Nevertheless, we agree with our correspondent that misleadership in national liberation movements is problematic. Leadership can be elitist; can represent a vague hodge-podge of class interests with no clear vanguard to give it direction; can fail to ally with the working classes of other countries. But we don't think these are the most likely eventualities. Rather, it is more likely that misleadership, that which is not thoroughly anti-imperialist and internationalist, will fail to develop the mass base it needs to triumph. Since it is in the objective interest of the mass of workers in an oppressed nation to oppose imperialism, they will not rally behind leadership which does so poorly or not at all.

Admitting the possibility of misleadership, shall we then curb our

support for various national/class struggles which do not live up to "our" standards of Marxism? The answer must be no; let us examine why. Both Marx in his writings on the Irish question and Lenin in his views on the separation of Norway from Sweden (*Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*) advised that successful revolution is impossible if workers ally with "their own" bourgeoisie in the oppression of another nation. Both inveighed oppressor-nation workers to support the self-determination demands of the oppressed nationalities. (And Lenin did *not* reduce the meaning of "self-determination" to a synonym of "democratic rights"! ) Further, Lenin asserted that this support should be present whether or not the bourgeoisie, for its own historical reasons, was at the same time forwarding the same demand; and that one should not be over-critical of the national leadership but should examine most closely

the *objective* effect that the struggle would have on imperialism. Even partial or ambiguous blows to imperialism set the stage for further surges by the members of the oppressed nation and challenge workers in the oppressor nation to live up to their responsibility as members of the *international* working class.

We conclude that those who do not unequivocally support national liberation and its genuine leadership are pro-imperialist and in collaboration with their own bourgeoisie. The history of the U.S. is brim-full of such collaboration. White workers have been corrupted by the system of white skin privileges in housing, education, jobs — and have been repaid by a divided class army. Oughtn't we to oppose any tendency which offers oppressor-nation workers and "leftists" further excuse to collaborate?

C.H. for the Editorial Board

## Economics of national oppression

(continued from page 33.)

sion. If, however, as is the case, large international firms which are based in the imperialist centers can control prices to a substantial degree, a hunk of the benefits of unequal exchange will be appropriated in the form of excess profits which directly benefit only the dominant sectors of the imperialist ruling class. Since approximately 30 percent of international trade occurs within such large international firms, where so-called "transfer prices" can be set administratively with little regard to actual costs and productivities, it is clear that Emmanuel's assumption that "the difference in wages, being unable to react upon profits, reacts upon prices," is not completely valid. So long as equalization of profits is not perfect, and it cannot be so inside a country or externally, the differential between wages in different countries is not "unable to react upon profits."

### Immobility of Labor

Of course there can be no argument about Emmanuel's assumption of a tremendous gulf in wage rates between rich and poor countries. Even if the ratios of 20 to 1 or 30 to 1 which he uses are exaggerated, the differences are generally of this magnitude. The wage gap alone, however, is not sufficient to sustain Emmanuel's thesis. Emmanuel's model would not work if low wages were accompanied by equally low rates of surplus value in the poor countries. Workers from a high wage country can conceivably be more exploited (in the strict sense of the term) than workers from low wage countries, if a sufficiently greater amount of surplus value is extracted from the former. Emmanuel thinks this possibility is so remote that he does not even bother to argue against it in the

body of his book. However, just this point is at the root of a challenge to his position from Charles Bettelheim, a challenge which, along with Emmanuel's response, is helpfully included in a series of appendices to the book.

Bettelheim states bluntly:

In other words, *the more the productive forces are developed, the more the proletarians are exploited*, that is, the higher the proportion of surplus labor to necessary labor. This is one of the *fundamental laws of the capitalist mode of production*. (Reciprocally it means that, despite their low wages, the workers of the underdeveloped countries are *less exploited* than those of the advanced, and so dominant, countries.) (*Unequal Exchange*, page 302, Bettelheim's emphasis)

According to Bettelheim, the



lower money wages in poor countries is outweighed by the greater intensity of labor in the rich countries, where, in his view, workers are, "in general, more exploited." Since both the criticism and the response are contained in the book itself, I will only summarize Emmanuel's rebuttal. First, he agrees with Bettelheim that labor power is, in general, utilized more intensively in advanced capitalist countries, pointing out that his model allows for this by treating one hour of labor in a rich country as equivalent to two hours of labor in a poor country. However, he argues that the greater intensity of labor comes nowhere near to compensating for the differences in wage rates. What Bettelheim has done is to assume that the greater productivity of labor in rich countries — due largely

points out that, in general, the foreign trade of poor countries involves commodities in which their productivity is comparable with, or superior to, that of any other country.

Nevertheless, despite these empirical arguments, Bettelheim's position retains a certain formal coherence. It is true that in poor countries it may require an expenditure of 7 or 8 hours of labor to produce the commodities needed to sustain one worker for an 8 or 10 hour day. It is also true that in rich countries the necessary commodities to sustain a worker for an 8 hour day can be produced with an expenditure of only 4 or 5 hours of labor. (That the batch of use values is far larger in the latter case is irrelevant to this point.) Thus since the index of exploita-

is essentially right in charging that Bettelheim situates his argument in a pre-Leninist Marxism, since the essentially theoretical breakthrough accomplished in Lenin's work on imperialism is the conception of capitalism as a world system with distinctive contradictions and dominated by the reality of uneven development. When the relevant framework of investigation is not separate national capitalisms but a world capitalist system, the various conceptions of Marxist economics must be modified accordingly. Specifically, if the value of labor power is the socially necessary labor time needed to sustain and reproduce the laborer, it is crucial that "socially necessary labor time" be calculated according to the prevailing technique in the world capitalist system, not according to backward

### It is a specifically bourgeois theory which regards wages as determined by productivity.

to the greater amount of capital available to each worker in those countries — is evidence of a corresponding difference in level of exploitation. He introduces no other empirical support for his assertion. As I have pointed out earlier, it is a specifically bourgeois theory which regards wages as determined by productivity. Marx spent great effort, e.g., in his writings on "piece rates," to counter this theory or, more accurately, this illusion.

Samir Amin presents a compelling empirical argument against the view that labor is tremendously more exploited in the "developed" countries. Amin cites U.N. statistics comparing gross outputs in similar economic units in rich and poor countries employing comparable techniques. His conclusions roughly support Emmanuel's working assumption that labor is only about twice as intensive in the rich countries. (*Accumulation On A World Scale*, Volume I) Clearly this does not stack up well against wage differentials on the order of 10 to 1 or 20 to 1. Amin also

tion, the rate of surplus value, is simply the amount of time the worker works to produce a value equivalent to the amount of value commanded by his or her wages divided into the amount of hours of labor which go to produce surplus value, it appears to follow that the rate of surplus value would be much higher in the rich countries.

This is, according to Emmanuel, "Bettelheim's paradox." Emmanuel points out that a necessary consequence of such a disparity in levels of exploitation, given the mobility of capital internationally, would be that the rich countries would be the victims of unequal exchange. The tendency would be for a transfer of value from countries with higher wages to those with lower wages, a tendency which is certainly invisible in the real world.

The source of this position which entails so many paradoxical consequences is basically an error in methodology. Bettelheim argues from a framework of separate national economies rather than that of a world capitalist system. Amin

and outmoded techniques which may persist in some areas.

Bettelheim makes just this mistake. He calculates the rate of surplus value in poor countries in terms of the level of technique in the production of wage goods in those countries, ignoring the fact that labor expenditures in those areas are often far above what is socially necessary in the world capitalist system.

For example, a South Korean garment worker's bare subsistence may require the expenditure of 8 hours of labor time in order to maintain the ability to work ten hours at an intensity and with a productivity commensurate with similar work in the U.S. or some other rich country. This does not necessarily mean that the rate of surplus value is only 25 percent, however, because these 8 hours of labor may be only the equivalent of 2 hours of "socially necessary labor" under the prevailing technique in the world capitalist system. This would force the actual price (not value or price of produc-



tion) of wage goods in Korea down towards the price of production of the same (or substitutable) goods produced under the prevailing technique. Such a process commonly involves direct producers of wage goods in poor countries being forced into debt and thus to accept a payment for their labor which is less than its value. Ultimately this leads to bankruptcy, the destruction of pre-capitalist sectors of the economy, and the disruption of anything like an economic balance in the poor country. Not so coincidentally, it also creates a permanent surplus of wage laborers and thus helps hold the wage levels down. While this is occurring, the South Korean textile industry will be benefiting from the combination of "exotic wages" with modern productivity. Who will reap these benefits? Some will go to the owners of foreign capital, which in one way or another dominates the industry and, if Emmanuel is correct, more will go to the consumers, capitalists and workers alike, of the rich countries which engage Korea in trade.

If we leave aside Emmanuel's admittedly controversial position on who benefits from this process and how much, we are left with a dynamic of imperialist penetration which is almost universally recognized. How could Bettelheim have ignored this dynamic in his calculation of relative rates of surplus value? I believe that the explanation lies in Bettelheim's desire to refute Emmanuel's economics because of antagonism to his political conclusions concerning the revolutionary centrality and potential of the metropolitan proletariat.

While Emmanuel talks about the immobility of labor in sociological terms, it is clear that he means it economically. He certainly is aware that there is substantial international mobility of labor from Latin America into the U.S., from Algeria into France, from India into Britain, from Southern Europe into the Common Market, etc. However,

this movement of labor across national borders does not usually involve the direct competition with the central core of the metropolitan working classes out of which significant moves towards international equalization of wages might emerge. Instead, the monopolistic character of the labor market is expressed in the existence of relatively distinct second-class labor markets for foreign workers which, in the case of the U.S., overlap and merge with the dual labor market for Black, Chicano, and Native American workers. Capitalist political policy, narrow trade unionism, and national chauvinism within the metropolitan working classes all combine to prevent what labor mobility there is from leading to a process of wage equalization across national borders. Thus Emmanuel's assumption of permanent "institutionally different" rates of surplus value between high wage and low wage countries appears to be valid. (An interesting question is whether there is a parallel "unequal exchange" phenomenon generated in the U.S. by "institutionally different" rates of surplus value generated by white and nationally oppressed workers, these different rates of surplus value being rooted in the dual labor market.)



## Emmanuel's Politics

Emmanuel argues that the gap in wage levels and rates of surplus value between rich and poor countries cannot express itself in a higher rate of profit in the poor countries because of international profit equalization. Therefore, it is expressed in the relative prices of products involved in international trade, with the products of poor countries priced so that, beneath the appearance of the exchange of equals, a transfer of value from these countries to the rich ones occurs. Since the mechanism of value transfer is relative price rather than superprofits, the benefits for the rich countries are distributed among the entire consuming and producing population, not only among the bourgeoisie. This economic argument is the basis of Emmanuel's politics. According to Emmanuel, these general benefits, not political renegacy or revisionism among working class leaders, are at the root of what he terms a *de facto* solidarity of interests between workers and capitalists of oppressing nations. He set out this argument in the following passage:

This is what has happened between the end of the nineteenth century and our time. It is not the conservatism of the leaders that has held back the revolutionary elan of the masses, as has been believed in the Marxist-Leninist camp; it is the slow but steady growth in awareness by the masses that they belong to privileged exploiting nations that has obliged the leaders of their parties to revise their ideologies so as not to lose their clientele.

This does not mean that antagonisms have disappeared within the developed capitalist nations. Whether wages be high or low, whether the social product be large or small, the two shares, that of the working class and that of the re-

ceivers of surplus value, continue to be magnitudes that are inversely proportional to each other, and so the antagonism continues. When, however, the relative importance of the national exploitation from which a working class suffers through belonging to the proletariat diminishes continually as compared with that from which it benefits through belonging to a privileged nation, a moment comes when the aim of increasing the national income in absolute terms prevails over that of improving the relative share of one part of the nation over the other. From that point onward, the principle of national solidarity ceases to be challenged in principle, however violent and radical the struggle over the sharing of the cake may be. Thereafter a de facto united front of the workers and capitalists of the well-to-do countries, directed against the poor nations, coexists with an internal trade-union struggle over the sharing of the loot. Under these conditions this trade-union struggle necessarily becomes more and more a sort of settlement of accounts between partners, and it is no accident that in the richest countries, such as the U.S. — with similar tendencies already apparent in the other big capitalist countries — militant trade-union struggle is degenerating first into trade unionism of the classic British type, then into corporatism and finally into racketeering. (pages 180-181)

This passage and related statements and arguments advanced in *Unequal Exchange*, though they point to a certain political reality, are fundamentally wrong. This root error is a crude economism which, paradoxically, also characterizes the various pseudo-Leninist positions

which Emmanuel is challenging. Since the latter positions constitute the major obstacles to a workable revolutionary strategy, I will criticize them later in this section. First, however, it is necessary to expose the economism in Emmanuel's position.

When the cited passage is read carefully, it is evident that some important propositions remain merely assertions although they obviously require supporting arguments and evidence. For example, it may be a fact that there are "privileged exploiting nations"; I certainly think so. However, it does not necessarily follow that this fact alone entails a "slow but steady growth in awareness by the masses (in such countries) that they belong to privileged exploiting nations." Emmanuel's politics rest on the second proposition, not the first. Taking the U.S. as an example, we find a remarkably different "mass awareness." If anything, the popular view is that this country is exploited by various leeches and parasites which we support around the world, the opposite of Emmanuel's contention. Of course this view is not factual, but Emmanuel cannot assume without proof that it does not play a significant role in determining mass political attitudes and alignments.

An even more widespread notion in the U.S. is that "what we have, we deserve because we have earned it." This position, particularly widespread among white working people, plays an important political role though it has little to do with the actual process of primitive and imperialist accumulation in the U.S. Of course this view leads to reactionary politics just as certainly as a consciousness of being a part of a "privileged oppressor nation" does. However, since it has different roots and characteristics, it requires a different political approach to counter it, and for a number of reasons the prospects of doing this successfully are substantially greater than they would be if Emmanu-

el's description were valid.

To further illustrate this point, consider a parallel but much clearer case of working class privileges — white workers' relationship to the oppressed nations within the U.S. In this instance, the privileges are much more immediate. The differential is a definite and central part of social life in the U.S. Neither point could be made about imperial privileges in the sense which Emmanuel develops the concept. Nevertheless, few white workers consciously articulate their politics as a defense of white privileges, although this is what often dominates them. Instead they rationalize their position with arguments parallel to the ones laid out above. ("Blacks are privileged"; "we earned what we have.") This does not fit into Emmanuel's conception of the relationship between politics and economics at all, and demonstrates the rigidity and the essential inapplicability of his conception of this relationship.

The difficulty of predicting political behavior from economic facts is the greatest when the relevant economic processes are very complex and obscure. Needless to say, the process of unequal exchange is so hidden behind the surface mechanisms of international trade that the average U.S. worker under-





stands nothing at all about it. If this is the case, and if unequal exchange is the central mechanism of imperialist extraction of value, how have the metropolitan workers become aware that they are part of "privileged exploiting nations"?

In short, even if Emmanuel's economic analysis is accepted totally, his implicit assumption of a mechanical identity between economic facts and political behavior robs his political conclusions of their validity and utility. His undialectical determinism is nothing but the mode of analysis which Engels ridiculed in his famous letters to Bloch and Schmidt in 1890.

Emmanuel's economic determinism is even clearer in a sentence which is the heart of his political argument.

When, however, the relative importance of the national exploitation from which a working class suffers through belonging to the proletariat diminishes continually as compared with that from which it benefits through belonging to a privileged nation, a moment comes when the aim of increasing the national income in absolute terms prevails over that of improving the relative share of one part of the nation over the other.

Astonishingly, Emmanuel apparently believes that such a vital assertion does not require either empirical or logical support, because he offers none. However, the extent to which the metropolitan proletariat can play a revolutionary role — which is obviously involved in this point — is a central strategic issue which cannot be disposed of in such a flippant and facile fashion. Unless he can prove that the benefits of unequal exchange are roughly of the same magnitude as that of the internally extracted surplus value, Emmanuel's argument cannot be valid. He does not even attempt such a demonstration. However, Samir Amin, who is certainly not hostile to Emmanuel, does



make such a calculation of the magnitude of unequal exchange. He concludes that it is not even of the same *order of magnitude* as the surplus value extracted from the metropolitan workers. Thus, on the economic level, while unequal exchange is sufficient to be crippling for the nations on the periphery, it contributes insignificantly to the economic situation of the workers in the metropolitan center. (Amin, *Accumulation*, pages 23 and 58-59.)

Nevertheless, for purposes of argument let us accept the magnitude of unequal exchange which this sentence implies. Emmanuel's point still does not necessarily hold. For that to be the case, it is also necessary that these economic "facts" be understood by the working class of the metropolitan country. Demonstrating that a certain situation obtains does not demonstrate that there is a mass consciousness of it determining political behavior.

Emmanuel's entire orientation is strangely apolitical. Only those economic factors which play a central role in his schema are even considered as political determinants, while other economic and institutional factors and the historical development of political attitudes and alignments are disregarded as if they could have no independent significance.

This apoliticism is illustrated in the same sentence. While it is most

certainly true that the "aim of increasing national income" (or even the income of a given industry or firm) dominates U.S. trade unionism, this view has always been a major factor. There is no reason to believe that it is directly and uniquely linked to the benefits of unequal exchange, rather than a normal manifestation of the entire history of pervasive reformism and collaborationism within the U.S. working class — weaknesses which in my view cannot be reduced to Emmanuel's economic factors. Certainly Emmanuel's implied linkage cannot be discovered in any of the various rationalizations of collaborationism.

I realize that these criticisms of Emmanuel have focused on examples from the United States, while his book deals more with Europe. Nevertheless, a conception of the politics of imperialism and, by extension, the politics of anti-imperialism, which is not applicable to the U.S., the center of the world imperialist system, cannot be valid. And, in the U.S., it is a violent distortion of the facts to speak, as Emmanuel does, of the class struggle being contained within a "de facto united front of workers and capitalists . . . directed against the poor nations." There is, unfortunately, a "de facto united front" of capitalists and *some* workers. However, this united front is only incidentally directed against "poor nations" elsewhere in the world. Basically it is directed against the Black, Latin, and Native American peoples living within the current borders of the U.S. Beyond this, while Emmanuel believes that his pro-imperialist united front is in the reform interests of the working classes of the metropolitan nations, the white supremacist united front in the U.S. is demonstrably antithetical not just to the ultimate interests, but also to the immediate interests of the entire U.S. working class.

I suppose that my main point is that the politics of the U.S. work-





ing class can be much more fully understood, and thus influenced, in terms of the major internal contradictions revolving around national oppression and white supremacy — both essentially political phenomena although with obvious economic roots — rather than in terms of “united fronts” against poor nations, and struggles over the “sharing of the cake.” As an economic theory, unequal exchange is as compatible with this approach to the class struggle as it is with the political approach advanced by Emmanuel. Of course, then unequal exchange must lose its “cause of causes” character which Emmanuel is so concerned to establish.

The internal differentiation of metropolitan working classes — often along lines related to national oppression — is so striking a feature of contemporary capitalism that it is hard to see how Emmanuel can discount it so completely. Indeed, he does more than merely avoid the question. In his brief treatment of the significance of the struggle of Black people in the U.S. (page 181), Emmanuel passes off this struggle as nothing more than an attempt to get a larger share of the imperialist loot for Black people. The best that can be said for Emmanuel's cavalier dismissal of such a central strategic element in the center of world imperialism is that it is based

on profound ignorance. This is not the place to spell out an accurate picture of the revolutionary content of the Black national question and the revolutionary dimensions of the Black movement. However, in my view, this will immediately pose a challenge to Emmanuel's notion of a pro-imperialist class alliance.

Economism, Emmanuel's variant included, is a derivative phenomenon. In his case, as in most others, it rests on a misunderstanding of the fundamental Marxist conception of the revolutionary potential of the working class. Emmanuel locates this potential in an essentially economic conflict, the struggle over the surplus produced by labor.

Whether wages be high or low, whether the social product be large or small, the two shares, that of the working class and that of the receivers of surplus value, continue to be magnitudes that are inversely proportional to each other, and so the antagonism continues.

It is ironic that Emmanuel refers in passing to the famous paragraph in *Capital* where Marx spells out his conception of the revolutionary potential of the working class — “Whether wages be high or low...” For Emmanuel the phrase only introduces his idea that the struggle over the surplus will continue in the

imperialist countries although “more and more as a sort of settlement of accounts between partners. . . .” Marx meant much more:

. . . when analysing the production of relative surplus-value: within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. (*Capital I*: 604)

Clearly in Marx's view the revolutionary potential of the working class is not dependent on economic deprivation or on a tendency for this deprivation to increase, but follows from the totality of the production relations of capitalism which increasingly limit the produc-

tive development of labor — and thus of humanity. Althusserians may fume a bit about Humanism and the young Marx's alleged excesses in that direction, but this passage was written in Marx's maturity and its meaning appears quite clear. The proletariat is revolutionary, not because it is "miserable" just in the sense of being hungry, but because it is the focus of all the tensions and contradictions involved in capitalism's tendency to enlarge human potentiality while crippling humans.

While Emmanuel's politics must be rejected on the level of analysis and program, they point to important realities. Emmanuel's political virtue is the demonstration that the nature and dynamic of contemporary imperialism require a critique of the dominant left conventional wisdom about the class struggle, internationalism, and anti-imperialism. This conventional "wisdom" has far more currency in the Euro-American left than any variant of "third worldism," and it contains much more dangerous mistakes. "Third Worldism" may exaggerate the obstacles to a revolutionary mass movement within the center of imperialism, but the current orthodoxy essentially denies the necessity for a qualitative advance — a sharp political break — in working class consciousness and activity in order for that class to move from the most militant trade unionism to revolutionary internationalism. Consequently, it never tires of attempting to mechanically link reform (and usually reformist) struggles within the metropolitan working class with the revolutionary international movement for national liberation. In fact, in a criminally absurd reversal of reality, this position often refers to national liberation as a democratic struggle and trade unionism as class struggle, as if somehow the former were a lower stage than the latter. The almost inevitable consequence of these politics is a subordination of the revolutionary struggle against im-

perialism — that is, the contemporary world capitalist system — to both the backwardness of the metropolitan working class and to various piecemeal struggles for reforms — often "reforms" of dubious reform value.

The economic roots of the orthodox position always reduce to the position most ably advanced by Maurice Dobb, the well known and usually careful British communist economist. Dobb saw the impact of the export of capital as providing the material basis for internationalism within the metropolitan working class. He argued that the export of capital reduced the demand for labor internally, creating unemployment and weakening the general bargaining power of the trade unions. Thus, opposition to the export of capital would appear to be in the immediate trade unionist interest of the metropolitan working class. Since all Leninists agree that capital export does not benefit the peoples of the periphery, seemingly, opposition to it provides a neat material basis for a common struggle against a common enemy.

This position was argued in a slightly different form by Hobson and ridiculed by Lenin as petty bourgeois sentimentality. Its basic fallacy is that it assumes that capital export entails a *net* outflow of value. On the contrary, imperialism is characterized by a massive transfer of value to the center. Thus capital export ultimately increases, rather than reduces, the amount of capital available for internal investment. This fact eliminates any simple trade unionist basis for international solidarity. Except for efforts at direct support of national liberation movements, virtually all of the "anti-imperialist work" of the U.S. left assumes the existence of such a basis. This position is also economism, but unlike Emmanuel's economism it rests on mistaken economics — actually on economic prejudices and political wishes.

It would be unfair to imply that all of the opposition which Emman-

uel's book has aroused is based on crude mistakes. There is a much more fundamental reason why Emmanuel is attacked by western Marxists of all shades and hues, but is greeted sympathetically by Third World Marxists. The assumption that the ultimate and decisive battles of the world revolution will be fought in Europe and North America is deeply engrained in western Marxism. Of course, the corollary, usually unspoken, is that other aspects of the revolutionary process are essentially preliminary ground-preparing phenomena. Emmanuel directly challenges the assumption of revolutionary centrality of the metropolitan proletariat. (Indeed, he denies that it can have any revolutionary potential at all, but when this extreme exaggeration is corrected as I have indicated it





should be, a real question still remains about the role of the metropolitan proletariat.)

Without accepting the opposite dogma, as espoused by Emmanuel and others, I think that the revolutionary centrality of the metropolitan proletariat cannot be regarded as an ultimate given. Its role is problematical. Essentially the issue demands a weighing of two factors. First, the centrality of national liberation to the contemporary international class struggle must be fully appreciated. Every major gain for the revolution in our generation has resulted from this form of struggle, and many of the advances in consciousness and organization for metropolitan workers have been greatly influenced by these victories. Only blatant chauvinism or incredible myopia could place these historic victories on a par with the extremely sluggish, tentative, and equivocal movements of the metropolitan working class.

On the other hand, there is one outstanding weakness within these advances. Sixty years after the first working class seizure of state power, we have only the most ambiguous models of socialism/communism in its basic sense of a society based on the self-organization of the producers where "every cook" governs. It is increasingly difficult to retain any confidence that the most hopeful development of this generation, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, will develop such a model.

Though we must abandon any hint of the technological determinism which the Chinese correctly criticize as the "theory of the productive forces," the question remains whether the weaknesses of the various post-revolutionary societies do not have their source in the uneven development of the working classes which have made revolutions. This possibility is what leaves the issue of the role of the metropolitan working class in the revolution an open question.

By Don Hamerquist

## PWOC

(continued from page 12)

nation. [BLT, page 27] It is easy to place a different interpretation on these statistics, however. In the first place, it is necessary to point out the great inaccuracy of the census, particularly its count of the Black population. In the past, during slavery times and during the Jim Crow era, the Southern Black population was often exaggerated in order to increase Congressional representation for Southern whites. Now that Blacks have the franchise again, the tendency is to undercount Black people. The Census Bureau itself admitted a 7.7 percent undercount of the Black population in 1970 [Associated Press, 4/26/73], and some independent researchers have estimated an even higher amount of error.

Second, PWOC attempts to equate the situation of Black people in the U.S. today with that of the Jews in tsarist Russia. The comparison is not valid. Blacks are not historically a landless people. PWOC seems to assume, along with the bourgeoisie, that because whites hold possessory title to the land that Blacks have lived on and worked for centuries, it naturally belongs to them. The simple expedient of mechanizing agriculture, according to PWOC, permitted the planters to dissolve the Black nation by depriving it of its land. In the face of these odds, though, Black people have retained as much land as possible. In 1910 they owned more than 15 million acres of land. Since that time they have been robbed and cheated of most of it, but even today they retain almost 6 million acres, about 70 percent of it in the South, despite the fact that whites have used every available device, including terror and fraud, to expropriate Black landowners.

This is one reason why the migration to the North must be viewed as a forced evacuation; another is shown by government policy in the

South today. The state of Mississippi has actually published its intentions along these lines. In a book called *Mississippi's Changing Economy, 1973*, the state's planners have included a chart entitled "Mississippi Population Goals." [page 63] The chart indicates an intent to increase the white population to 2.4 million by the year 2000, while reducing the Black population to 750,000 during the same period. This is a relatively easy goal for them to pursue, since Black men and women are denied access to decent jobs while the state's welfare benefits — limited to Aid to Dependent Children and to the handicapped — are the lowest in the U.S.

Under these circumstances, it is rather amazing that Black people cling so stubbornly to their Southern homeland. PWOC's chart shows that the Black population decline in the South has been relatively small in absolute terms — less than ¼ of a million people in 30 years. [BLT, page 27] The real reason for the large percentage decline is the large influx of whites. And despite all the obstacles, news reports say that the out-migration trend has stopped, and there is now a "reverse migration" of Blacks returning to the South. [New York Times, 6/18/74; Washington Post-L.A. Times Service, 9/12/77]





The chart labeled "Class Composition of the Black People — 1972" is a wondrous PWOC creation. [BLT, page 44] Since the full source of the data is not given, it is impossible to make an independent check of the table's accuracy. That is relatively unimportant, however, because the purpose of the chart is to establish the existence of a Black ruling class. (PWOC needs this class in order to blame it as the source of nationalist ideas.) Who are the bourgeoisie? Industrialists? Bankers? No, says PWOC. These are the categories listed as bourgeoisie: self-employed managers, salaried managers, and public administration. (It really is difficult to take this group seriously sometimes.) White people who hold these positions are universally labeled petty bourgeois by Marxists. PWOC's categories do violence to real class analysis.

One need not leave the debate on that level, however. The answers to some fairly simple questions can firmly establish whether or not the strength of Black nationalism lies in the bourgeoisie: From what class did the thousands who flocked to Garvey's banner arise? What about the followers of Malcolm X? Or Malcolm himself? Why does nationalism have a large following in the prisons? Why are the nationalists — the provisional government of the Republic of New Africa, the African People's Party, The African People's Socialist Party, etc. — always so short on funds while the "assimilationists" — NAACP, Urban League, etc. — are always so flush? The answers to questions like these are much more convincing than all of PWOC's data.

## VII

Both PWOC pamphlets include data quantifying the discrimination against Blacks in income, employment, health care, housing, education, prices of food and other goods, social services, and so forth. [RWM, pages 11-12; BLT, page 43]

## A slight forgery

In addition to graphics copied from other publications, PWOC has created a few of its own, and these are among the most interesting. Apparently PWOC is aware that there are severe weaknesses in its arguments, because it has attempted to reinforce their underpinnings with four maps of Mississippi, three of which are forgeries. This is a very serious charge, so we will take the necessary space to document it fully, even though the arguments themselves do not merit such treatment.



Fig. 3

The first of these is Figure 3, which is adjacent to Figure 4. [BLT, page 19] Figure 4 is a soil map of Mississippi; though there may be questions about its accuracy, it is not a forgery. But Figure 3, which purports to be a map of the Black population distribution in 1890 is bogus in several respects. In the first place, it is drawn on a county outline map containing today's 82 counties instead of the 76 that existed in 1890. Second, of the counties that had the same boundaries then as today, the 1890 Black population percentages in six are misrepresented. Five majority-Black counties — Yalobusha, Chick-

asaw, Monroe, Lauderdale, and Clarke — are indicated as less than 50 percent Black, while Jefferson Davis County, which did not have a Black majority in 1890, is shown as having one. [See *Atlas of Mississippi* (1974), page 49]

PWOC's next fake is Figure 13 [BLT, page 36], purporting to be a map of the Mississippi Black Population in 1840. Like the previous one, it is drawn on an outline map showing today's 82 counties instead of the 59 that existed then. [See *Atlas*, page 40] Some of the counties that did not exist are shown as having Black populations that bear no relation to the surrounding counties of which they were then part — Benton, Calhoun, Montgomery, and Jefferson Davis are examples. In addition, several of the central Delta counties that are shown as having large slave populations had virtually none, because the land had been stolen from the Indians just a couple of years earlier and had not yet been cleared for planting.

PWOC's boldest move is Figure 14, its faked map of the 1970 Black population. [BLT, page 37] Since these census figures are widely available, PWOC took quite a gamble in guessing that no one would check its figures. On this one the Black population percentage reported in the census is inflated in six counties — Tunica, Claiborne, Wilkinson, Holmes, Noxubee, and Lawrence, and is underrepresented in two — Jefferson Davis and Chickasaw. (The result is a rather confusing visual effect, instead of a map similar to past population distributions but with an overall reduction in Black percentages which would have resulted if the census data had been used correctly.)

Now that we have called these errors to our readers' attention, perhaps PWOC will apologize for its "sloppiness" and express gratitude to us for the criticism, as it recently did after its distortion of the October League's position on busing was revealed. [The Organizer, September 1977, page 2]

Although PWOC insists that Black people are not a nation, it does state that this discrimination constitutes national oppression. [BLT, page 43] The corollary of national oppression is national privilege. Privilege in this instance is the difference between what the people (including the workers) of the oppressor nation get and what those of the oppressed nation [or national minority — for this purpose the distinction is unimportant] get.

Earlier, in the abstract and theoretical part of its argument, PWOC correctly stated the Leninist position that an "essential condition for the international unity of the working class is that the proletariat of the oppressor nation firmly oppose national privilege, particularly the privileges of its own nation." [BLT, page 10] But now that those privileges are actually on the table, PWOC shrinks back. "Who does this benefit? Obviously not the Black people. But not the mass of white working people either. The fact that a white worker has a better-paying job than a Black worker or gets higher wages for the same job a Black worker performs for less makes it appear that discrimination works on behalf of the white workers. But this is not the case." [RWM, page 13]

This is true in the ultimate sense, of course. But the main benefit that the bourgeoisie reaps is not "the super-exploitation of the Black worker," and the resulting "super-profits," as PWOC says. [BLT, page 43; RWM, page 9] Of course they get that, but they also get, in return for those privileges conferred upon white workers, a large measure of class collaboration. PWOC should have asked, if employers can get Black workers so much cheaper than whites, and there are so many available unemployed Black workers, why do they not get rid of the whites and hire the Blacks? The answer is that no amount of additional super-profits could buy what the bourgeoisie gets in return for

the oppressor-nation privileges granted to white workers — the unchallenged hegemony of capitalism within the United States.

For this reason PWOC's position that the main task of communists and of the workers' movement is to combat white chauvinist ideology [BLT, page 51] does not go far enough. [Even PWOC notes that to a certain extent racism will be countered automatically without a change in consciousness in the course of struggle: "Not all anti-racist demands deal directly with discrimination. Many demands around wages and working conditions are blows against racism to

the extent they aim at improving the conditions of minority workers and narrow the inequality between Black and white." RWM, page 36] It is really not so difficult, in the course of struggle, to get white workers to join with Black workers. That is because in the normal ritual of class struggle in the U.S., the national privilege of the whites is rarely challenged. But when Black workers on their own launch an attack on white privileges, it is much more difficult to get the whites to join in. In such a situation, a victory in the struggle against those oppressor-nation privileges will do far more to unify the

## JOHN HARTFIELD WILL BE LYNCHED BY ELLISVILLE MOB AT 5 O'CLOCK THIS AFTERNOON

Governor Bilbo Says He Is Powerless to Prevent It—  
Thousands of People Are Flocking Into Ellisville to  
Attend the Event—Sheriff and Authorities Are Power-  
less to Prevent It.

HATTIESBURG, June 26.—John Hartfield, the negro alleged to have assaulted an Ellisville, Miss., woman, has been taken to Ellisville and is guarded by officers in the office of Dr. Carter in that city. He is wounded in the shoulder but not seriously. The officers have agreed to turn him over to the people of the city at 4 o'clock this afternoon when it is expected he will be burned. The negro is said to have made a partial confession.

### GOV. BILBO SAYS HE IS POWERLESS

When Gov. Bilbo was shown the above dispatch and asked what action, if any, he intended to take to prevent the affair, he said: "I am powerless to prevent it. We take negroes to state prisons, but we make it impossible to send negroes to the penitentiary for the obvious reason, that we have no troops."

"Several days ago," anticipating a trouble of this sort in event of Hartfield's capture, he discussed the matter with Adj.-Gen. Peason and he agreed with me that nothing could be done, insofar as furnishing troops are concerned, that if the civil authorities cannot prevent a lynching, it cannot be prevented.

"As the public is well aware this man has been in progress since June 15. Thousands have joined in it, excitement is at a fever heat, and any attempt to frustrate a lynching would unquestionably result in hundreds being killed."

"By the way, it has happened again that the people of Mississippi elect Louisa as their governor, the family of John Hartfield can draw a pension from the state, and take the majority of the law with us vindicated."

NOTE: NOW FIRST  
FOR THE PEOPLE.

LAUREL, June 26.—(Special).—A view from Ellisville day that the hour

for the lynching has now been fixed for five p. m.

A committee of Ellisville citizens has been appointed to make the necessary arrangements for the event, and the mob is pledged to act in conformity with these arrangements.

Rev. L. G. Clark, pastor of the First Baptist church of Laurel, left here at one o'clock for Ellisville to extract the mob to see discretion.

THOUSANDS GOING TO  
SCENE OF LYNCHING.

LAUREL, June 26.—(Special).—A telephone message from Ellisville says that five thousand people have gathered there from all parts of the surrounding country to witness the lynching and burning at stake of John Hartfield, scheduled to take place at five o'clock this afternoon.

All roads leading to Ellisville are choked with automobiles, forming a steady stream that actually prevents traffic here in one direction.

All saw mills in Laurel, and throughout this territory, have closed down in order to permit employees to attend the lynching, and there is hardly an industry within a radius of fifty miles of here that is in operation.

The insurance rate running from Laurel to Ellisville are fixed at over \$100, and at the same hour the company's manager took some old rolling stock out of the car barn in order to handle the traffic.

Only Slightly Wounded.  
Hartfield was only slightly wounded.

(Continued on page two)

## JOHN HARTFIELD IS CAPTURED BY POSSE

(Continued from page one)

for the sawmill with the posse prior to his capture early this morning. The capture took place within miles south of Taylorville near Van Knight's store in the woods a short distance from the loggers' camp.

The trial of the captive was held by Will Colley and Thad Rogers. Several other shots were fired before the negro consented to surrender. When captured it was found that he was only slightly wounded in the shoulder. Hartfield spent the night within a few hundred yards of Knight's store. He had sent a small boy to the store to buy some canned goods late Wednesday afternoon, and through this it became known that he was lurking in the vicinity.

The story had in a short space near Knight's church, and shortly after daylight he emerged from the building and made a dash for the woods. Both Colley and Rogers fired upon him. A large crowd quickly gathered near the scene of the capture.

The authorities on Jones county realize that they are directly helped, that any attempt on their part to prevent the lynching of Hartfield would result in many persons being killed.

It is estimated that no less than 2,000 persons have joined in the hunt for the fugitive. He attempted to reach Miss Meek, day clerk at the Pinehurst Hotel, twelve days ago.

HARTFIELD HAS  
MADE CONFESSION.

LAUREL, June 26.—(Special).—Hartfield has made a full confession. He is now in the custody of the mob, citizens having informed Sheriff Postwell that any attempt at interference means trouble.

Several prisoners have been allowed to go into Mr. Carter's office and see the negro who is soon to die. To one of these visitors he said:

"Tell all young men and especially colored men to try to do right. Tell them I have done wrong. I did not see my mistake until too late, but I am ready and willing to die. Everybody pray for me."

Hartfield first wept when captured, wept, "I don't about any more, you've got me."

MONEY BEING RAISED  
FOR YOUNG WOMAN.

LAUREL, June 26.—(Special).—A subscription that was started here and at Ellisville this afternoon for Miss Meek, Hartfield's victim. Nearly a thousand dollars was raised at Ellisville, and fully that much more here.

When captured Hartfield had two pistols and twenty dollars in his pockets. Earnest appeals are being made to the mob not to burn the negro after he has been lynched.



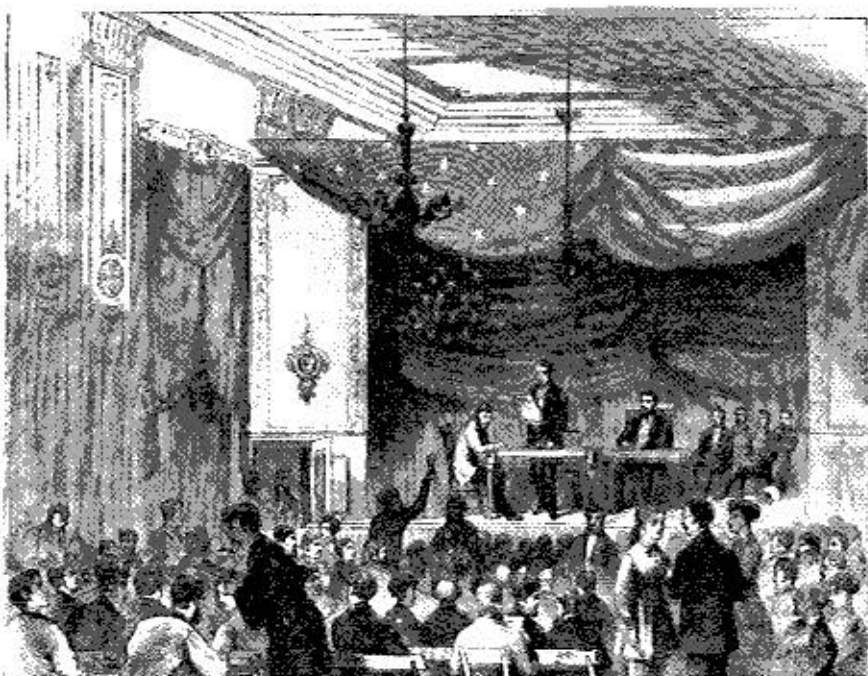
class than will the various prescriptions for Black-white unity proposed by PWOC. It takes more than an attack on chauvinism to bring masses of white workers into that struggle.

(PWOC also manages to misunderstand the way racist ideology functions, however: the white worker often "views the black worker, rather than the employer, as the cause of his problems. This blindspot is the product of years of conditioning and centuries of history." [RWM, page 15] This is really pretty rare; most white workers are thoroughly aware that the employers rule. The presence of Black workers serves as a reminder to the whites that they are *white*, i.e., privileged, and except for that they would be far worse off. That is the aspect which sharply prods white workers in the direction of class collaboration; the only answer to it is a thoroughgoing class consciousness, including the repudiation of all privilege. If xenophobic racism were the main problem, as PWOC suggests, the battle against it would have been won long ago.)

## VIII

Despite appearances to the contrary, PWOC's pamphlets are not really intended to persuade white workers or white communists to agree to fight racism. It does not take 100-plus pages of fine print on the national question to accomplish that. The real purpose of these pamphlets, taken together, is to pull the revolutionary teeth of the Black liberation movement and channel it into the reform struggles where PWOC feels most comfortable — particularly the trade union movement. [BLT, page 53; RWM, pages 30-37]

That is the common thread running through the PWOC argument. Each section has a role to play in attempting to persuade Black revolutionaries that "No matter how well organized, no matter how well led, no matter how politically con-



The National Labor Union's Philadelphia Congress, August 1869; the NLU voted to exclude black workers, and its leaders opposed the Reconstruction governments in the South. Black workers then organized their own National Labor Union, closely allied with Radical Reconstruction. The refusal of white workers to unite with blacks weakened the entire labor movement nationally. Engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper courtesy of Library of Congress.

scious the Black Movement is, it can only go to a certain point without the full force of the whole [i.e., *white* — j.c.] working class being brought solidly onto the side of Black Liberation." [RWM, page 26]

PWOC's arguments are subtle, but effective. The appeal to Lenin and Stalin provides the revolutionary cloak. The designation "anti-dogmatism" has a disarming effect; it implies that PWOC is reasonable while its opponents are not. The history of slavery and emancipation which denies the slaves an important role in their own liberation kicks off the argument that Blacks can only be free if whites decide to free them, and PWOC's version of Reconstruction and its overthrow fortifies this false picture. The lengthy argument about the creation and "dissolution" of the Black nation says that the nation only existed when it was too weak, in class terms, to win its independence; as the Black working class

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strip away any suggestion that Blacks rely on themselves for liberation; instead, they must join the white workers under the leadership of PWOC.

The real picture is quite different from the one painted by PWOC. The reason why Black workers have been the leadership of so many workers' struggles is precisely because of the power and potential of their national struggle. Conversely, the strength of the Black workers has immeasurably advanced the struggle for national liberation. Nearly all of the sharpest mass attacks on capital within the U.S. have been launched by independent Black or Third World groups, while only rarely have substantial numbers of white workers joined them in recent years. PWOC grudgingly admits that "under a variety of concrete circumstances, all-Black organizations are necessary," but argues that "Only multi-national organization can consistently and effectively carry out this struggle." [BLT, page 54]

Again, the purpose is not directly spelled out. PWOC is most concerned, it seems, with being able to discipline its own Black members to this line. In the "division of labor that obtains between white Communists and Communists of the oppressed nationalities" [BLT, page 55], the task of the latter is to combat nationalism. "At the same time, the party cannot tolerate caucuses along national lines within its own ranks. Forms of this sort encourage a separatist approach to the struggle against racism. . . . Any attempt of a particular group of party members to claim autonomy or special authority above and beyond the democratic centralist determination of the party as a whole on the basis of nationality (or sex for that matter) is simply Bundism and cannot be tolerated." [BLT, page 56]

PWOC's reference is to the Jewish Bund in the Russian Marxist movement. A very one-sided account of Lenin's struggle against

## BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM?

One indication of the class roots of Black nationalism can be examined in the Congressional testimony of Henry Adams, one of the leaders of the Exodus of 1879:

Q. What is your business, Mr. Adams? — A. I am a laborer. I was raised on a farm and have been at hard work all my life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Q. What did you call your committee? — A. We just called it a committee, that is all we called it, and it remained so; it increased to a large extent, and remained so. Some of the members of the committee was ordered by the committee to go into every State in the South where we had been slaves there, and post one another from time to time about the true condition of our race, and nothing but the truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

Q. Your council appealed first to the President and to Congress for protection and relief from this distressed condition in which you found yourselves, and to protect you in the enjoyment of your rights and privileges? — A. Yes, sir.

Q. Well, what other plan had you? — A. And if that failed our idea was then to ask them to set apart a territory in the United States for us, somewhere where we could go and live with our families.

Q. You preferred to go off somewhere by yourselves? — A. Yes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Q. Now, when you organized the council what kind of people were taken into it? — A. Nobody but laboring men.

Q. At the time you were doing that, was there anything political in your organization? — A. Nothing in the world.

Q. You were simply looking out for a better place in which you could get work and enjoy your freedom? — A. Yes, sir; that was all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Q. Was there any opposition to these meetings in which you talked about going away? — A. No, sir. There didn't nobody say anything to us against our having meetings, but I will tell you we had a terrible struggle with our own selves, our own people there; these ministers of these churches would not allow us to have any meeting of that kind, no way.

\* \* \* \* \*

Q. Your meetings were composed, then, of men in favor of going away? — A. Yes, and of the laboring class.

Q. Others didn't participate with you? — A. No, sir.

Q. Why didn't the politicians want you to go? — A. They were against it from the beginning.

Q. Why? — A. They thought if we went somewhere else they would not get our votes. That is what we thought.

Q. Why were the ministers opposed to it? — A. Well, because they would not get our support; that is what we thought of them.

\* \* \* \* \*

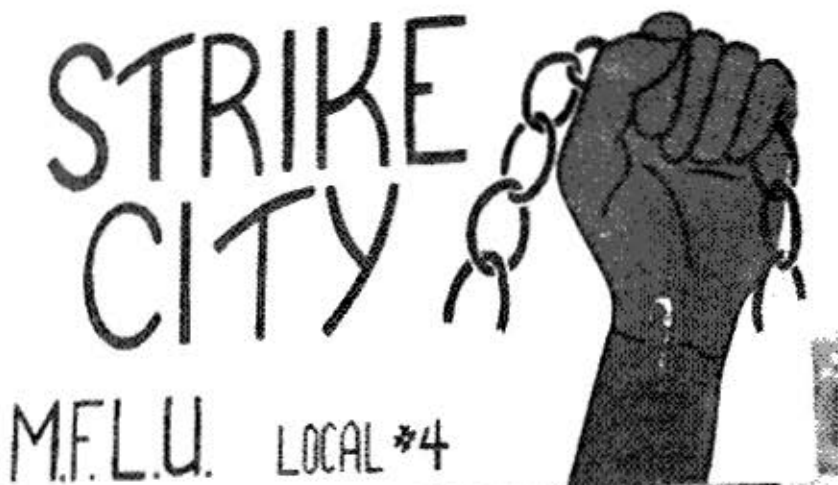
Q. What was the largest number reached by your colonization council, in your best judgment? — A. Well, it is not exactly five hundred men belonging to the council, that we have in our council, but they all agreed to go with us and enroll their names with us from time to time, so that they have now got at this time 98,000 names enrolled.

Q. Women and men? — A. Yes, sir; women and men, and none under twelve years old.

the Bund's desire for "cultural-national autonomy" within the Russian Party has been popularized in the U.S. left, resulting in the epithet "Bundist" — meaning anti-Leninist — being attached to any Communist group that provides autonomy in any form for its oppressed-nation members. PWOC is wrong on this also, not only in substance, but also in pretending that its practice follows Lenin.

At the 1906 Unity Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, Lenin specifically proposed special concessions to the Bund: "the Party must really ensure the satisfaction of all the Party interests and requirements of the Social-Democratic proletariat of each nationality, giving due consideration also to the specific features of its culture and way of life; and that this may be ensured by holding special conferences of Social-Democrats of the particular nationality, giving representation to the national minorities on the local, regional and central bodies of the Party, forming special groups of authors, publishers, agitators, etc.

"Note. The representation of a national minority on the Central Committee of the Party could, for example, be arranged in the following manner: the general Party congress may elect to the Central Committee a definite number of members from among candidates nominated by the regional congresses in those parts of Russia where at present separate Social-Democratic organisations exist." [10:160] Later he reported, "the Bolsheviks published a draft resolution proposing



Above: The Mississippi Freedom Labor Union struck cotton fields in the Delta in 1965.

a number of further concessions to all the national Social-Democratic parties, even to the extent of 'proportional representation in the local, regional and central bodies of the Party.'" [10:371-372 Lenin's emphasis] Clearly PWOC's treatment of its Black members is not based on this precedent from Lenin. (Today, when the revolutionary initiative is in the hands of the oppressed peoples, it is necessary for the revolutionary party to provide a great deal more autonomy for Third World members than Lenin proposed for the national parties in 1906; PWOC takes a giant step backward by returning to his 1903 argument.)

PWOC's insistence that its Black members combat nationalism as their responsibility under the "division of labor" is also contrary to Lenin's line on the national question in the epoch of imperialism:

"All national oppression calls forth the resistance of the *broad masses* of the people; and the resistance of a nationally oppressed population always *tends* to national revolt. Not infrequently (notably in Austria and Russia) we find the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations *talking* of national revolt, while in practice it enters into reactionary compacts with the bourgeoisie of the oppressor nation behind the backs of, and *against*, its own people. In such cases the criticism of revolutionary Marxists should be directed not against the national movement, but against its degradation, vulgarisation, against the tendency to reduce it to a petty squabble." [23:61 Lenin's emphasis]

In the final analysis, "anti-dogmatism" is the new cloak for left chauvinism in the United States.

## COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES:

- \*More Documents and Debate on the Puerto Rican Struggle
- \*Are White Workers in the U.S. Paid Above the Value of Their Labor Power?
- \*A Critique of "Socialist Feminism"
- \*Practical Experiences Applying STO's Strategic Line
- \*A Historical Examination of Revolutionary Alliances
- \*More Discussion on Africa
- \*More Debate on the Soviet Union
- \*A Study Guide to Reconstruction in the United States
- \*Reviews of Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* and Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*



# Literature from STO

- White Supremacy and the National Question:** An STO Discussion Paper. This paper provides a historical perspective on the development of white supremacy in the U.S. including the role of the U.S. left in that development. It explains why STO regards Black people in the U.S. as a nation, while rejecting the Stalinist criteria used by much of the left. The paper also responds to many of the criticisms that have been made of STO's position on white supremacy. \$.75 or \$.60 for 10 or more.
- **Understanding and Fighting White Supremacy: A Collection.** This collection includes historical articles by Ken Lawrence: "The Roots of Class Struggle in the South" and "Mississippi's First Labor Union." There are also two historical articles by Theodore Allen: "White Supremacy in U.S. history" and "Slavery and the Origins of Racism." Noel Ignatin's "Black Worker/White Worker," a popular treatment of the necessity and possibility of involving white workers in the struggle against white supremacy, is included. Ignatin and Allen's "White Blindspot" is an early formulation of STO's position on white supremacy. Finally we include remarks by Ignatin and David Ranney on "White Supremacy: Implications for Political Program." \$1.00 or \$.75 for 10 or more.
- **Rape, Racism and The White Women's Movement:** An Answer to Susan Brownmiller by Alison Edwards. This pamphlet is in two parts. The first is a review of Susan Brownmiller's book, *Against Our Will*. Edwards argues that the book is a "law-and-order" book with strong racist overtones. In the second part of her essay, Edwards goes on to argue for a new form of women's movement with a theoretical and programmatic approach. \$.75 or \$.60 for 10 or more.
- **Towards A Revolutionary Party.** First published in 1971, this pamphlet presents the strategic perspective of STO at that time, including an analysis and critique of many of the strategic conceptions then current in the U.S. left. This reprinting includes a new introduction which is critical of some of our earlier views as presented in the pamphlet. \$.75 or \$.60 for 10 or more.
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(continued from inside front cover)

is riddled with so many myths, Collins necessarily had to discuss at length the development of the Leninist position before attacking PWOC's distortions. The matter of autonomy for oppressed nationalities within communist organizations, touched on at the end of Collins' article, is currently being discussed in STO and will be elaborated in detail in a future issue of this journal.

Aspects of imperialism on a world scale are explored in Kassahun Checole's article on Africa, Don Hamerquist's review of Arghiri Emmanuel's book, *Unequal Exchange*, and the views of the Soviet Union expressed by Noel Ignatin, Martin Glaberman, and Lenny Zeskind. STO's strategic arguments are sharpened in Carole Travis' reply to Prairie Fire, and in the Correspondence section.

Forthcoming issues of *Urgent Tasks* will include more documents and debate on the Puerto Rican struggle; a discussion of whether white workers in the U.S. are paid above the value of their labor power; a critique of "socialist feminism"; articles discussing practical experiences applying STO's strategic line; reviews of Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* and Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*; more discussion on Africa; more debate on the Soviet Union; a historical examination of revolutionary alliances; and a study guide to Reconstruction in the United States.

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